

*You vowed
to be mine.*



OUR
SNOWY
NIGHT

ELLA GOODE

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It took one look for Rowan to fall for Charlee. He wifed her immediately—as in two weeks after their first meeting. Shocked by his own lack of self restraint and the dark thoughts of possession and ownership that filled him, Rowan fears his precious wife will leave him if she finds out how he really feels, how crazy in love with her he really is.

It took one look for Charlee to fall for Rowan. She said yes when he asked her to marry him—even though it was only two weeks after they met. It was her fairy tale in the making. Her happily ever after doesn't last long though. The ink is barely dry on their marriage certificate when her hard pursuing husband suddenly becomes cold and distant, off on business more than he's at home. Fed up, she hands him divorce papers.

Rowan knows he's in for a fight but he's not signing those divorce papers and he's not letting Charlee get away, even if it means kidnapping her to a small cabin in her home town in the dead of winter. If she's snowed in, she can't leave him. He knows he can never let her go and all the control he's barely held onto snaps. His wife is about to find out how truly obsessed he is with her.



one

“THIS IS A...” My gaze runs from the smoked stained exposed beams in the ceiling to the dirty oak floors that appear as if they haven’t been cleaned since the cabin was built twenty years ago, and I try to conjure up something complimentary about this ramshackle contraption called a home that realtor in town said was the only place available for the low price of eighty grand. “Place,” I finish.

This is Charlee’s hometown, and I convinced her to take this trip with me to hash out the details of our divorce. It was a stalling tactic. Besides, it’s Christmas Eve and we should be together. She’s still my wife.

I’ve been stalling successfully for the last two years of our four-year marriage. Every time my wife has turned her sad eyes in my direction and asked for us to talk, I’ve conveniently had a business meeting, a deal to close, a property to see.

For two years, over seven hundred days, I’ve spent more time away from my wife than with her for the sole purpose of saving my marriage. I think I’m losing my mind at this point. And now, in a last-ditch effort to convince her that divorce is the worst decision she could make, I bring her to what amounts to little more than a dilapidated shed in the middle of a snowstorm in her hometown. At least she’ll be trapped here for now. We barely made it in the snow already coming down so hard.

Rule number one in a business setting: never show weakness.

I take the bag from her slackened hand and march toward the bedroom. Charlee trudges behind me. Her childhood home is occupied by her brothers and sisters with all their kids. We'd never have a moment alone there.

“Only one bedroom.” Her tone is flat and resigned. It's the defeat in her voice, as if marriage to me has sucked the life out of her, and that cuts me to the core. She tried to move into the spare room in our main home. I couldn't have that. I moved my shit to the other room to not have an all-out fight with her. I still slip into the bed at night. As much as I try and give her space, it's damn hard, especially when we're under the same roof and I'm not traveling for work.

“We'll make the best of it.” The odd thing is that once we are in bed, our defenses down, our clothes off, I can make myself believe she's still in love with me. Or at least in lust. She's maddeningly responsive to every touch and caress and kiss. She's eager, too, willing to do anything I want and asking for more. If she only knew all the dark, fucked-up shit I've wanted to do. I'm always fighting for control in our bedroom. My Charlee is so sweet and pure. I'm not so sure she'd be so eager if she had any clue to the dark thoughts I have when it comes to her. She's the only one to ever draw them from me.

Outside of bed, we barely talk. She rarely smiles, rarely initiates a conversation, and when she does bring up a topic of conversation, it's change. She wants to move, she wants to get a job, she wants more friends. The message is clear: life with me is not satisfying. She's searching for something else. The same as when I'd met her. Though that stopped when we got married. She was happy and content. Until she wasn't. We can't seem to find our way back to that place.

I've tried to make myself absent. Leaving her alone seems like what she wants, but even that does not make her happy either. I'm at a loss as to what turned my beautiful, vivacious bride into this sullen, silent housewife. It's killing me.

“I don't understand why we had to come all the way to Winter Falls to discuss the divorce.” Her clear voice slices through the air.

I stiffen so she can't see how hard the blow lands. "You grew up here. I thought you might like the change of scenery. Besides, it didn't make sense to have it in the house. I still live there and plan to do so in the future."

"Of course you do." Derision drips from her words.

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing." She inspects the bathroom and then the kitchen. Her finger swipes along the side of the small stainless steel sink and comes up blackened. Even during all this, she still wears her wedding ring. Mine will never leave my finger.

"Sorry," I say stiffly.

She shrugs. "It's not bad. Dirty, but charming. At least it's got character."

I don't understand her. This shack is nothing but a few sticks and nails, while our home is a stately three-story mansion with a storied history. When she first moved into the home my grandmother passed down to me, I thought she loved it. She exclaimed over the garden in the back with its intricate hedges and beautiful fountains. She loved the third-floor attic with its vaulted ceilings and nooks tucked into the circular turret like structures at the corners of the old mansion. But somewhere along the line, her love for the home, much like her professed love for me, turned to distaste.

Now the home is old and drafty. The woodwork overwhelming. The patterns dated. I don't know how it can be dated. The entire place was overhauled by a famous decorator. The woman had won some prize one of my real estate firms sponsored. She designed the interior of the new headquarters, and it was wildly different than the steel and glass and leather that every other commercial enterprise has adopted. It felt warm and inviting and perfect for my grandmother's home built a century ago.

We'd had a dinner party, and I'd introduced Charlee to the decorator, thinking she would like to meet other women in the area, but Charlee took an instant dislike to the designer and demanded I stop working with her. I tried to explain to Charlee

that I'd never hired her in the first place—one of the subsidiaries I own did, and I didn't have jurisdiction over who they work with.

She was angry after that and accused me of not listening to her. I sent a message to the real estate firm to move on to another decorator, but they had a four-year contract with a fairly large penalty clause. Four years isn't a long time, I decided. I never had Arabella invited to another house party and never mentioned her again, but since then, Charlee has hated the house. I think she sees it as an extension of myself, and everything associated with me turns her stomach. She doesn't like my sports car, my motorcycle, my office. Frankly, she doesn't like me.

And I want nothing more than for her to be happy.

Suddenly, the door bursts open, causing the wood to bang sharply against the wall. Charlee jumps in surprise right into my arms. Instinctively, I wrap her tight against me. "It's just the wind."

"I know." Her heart's thudding fast. She looks up at me, delicate and vulnerable. Her pink lips part slightly as my cock, always at half-mast when she's around, hardens at the contact.

"Charlee," I groan. My hand sweeps up to the base of her neck and tugs her head back. I lower my mouth to hers. She might hate me, but she still loves this.



two

I SHOULD PUSH HIM AWAY. Instead I cling to him, allowing him to kiss me with all the passion he has for us when we're in the bedroom. The bedroom has never been a problem for us. It's the one place I know I have all of my husband's attention. It's also the one place I always feel desired when it comes to my husband.

"Charlee. Sweetheart," he groans my name as he lifts me. My feet leave the floor. He pins me to the nearest wall. "Get me out," he orders. A rush of excitement fills me. It always does when Rowan turns into his dominating self in the bedroom. My body falls under his control. There is no stopping it. I go for his belt, freeing his cock. Memories of our wedding night flash through my mind.

We were so desperate for each other that we'd barely made it back to the hotel suite that night. I'd still been in my wedding dress when he slid inside of me, making me his wife in every way. I'll never forget that.

Rowan was angry with himself for taking my virginity that way. I hadn't cared. The way his control shatters for me is one of the reasons I'd fallen in love with him so quickly. It's crazy how fast things can change. But I don't want to think about that now; I want to focus on this moment. This could be the last time I make love with my husband.

"Always ready for me," he says when his fingers dip into the front of my panties to grab a hold of them. I grip his shoulders as he yanks them from my body. A second later, he's thrusting inside of me.

“Rowan!” I gasp as my body tries to adjust to his massive size. My Rowan is big everywhere. He’s a force to be reckoned with.

“Fuck, you’re always so damn tight. Should have eaten you first.” I close my eyes, trying to fight back my emotions. My sex contracts around his cock, wanting him to move. He holds me pinned to the wall with his cock deep inside of me.

“That’s what happens when you’re not having sex on the regular.” I can’t stop the tart reply from slipping past my lips. Oh, we still have sex on occasion when Rowan slips into my room. I could never tell that man no when he got his hands on me, but it’s been a few months. Four very long months. My eyes fly open. “Fuck me or put me down,” I challenge.

My words shock both of us. I’m not a prude. Well, not so much anymore. A lot of my shyness slipped away during our first year of marriage. When your husband makes love to you like he can’t get enough, it helps with that. Rowan also tends to have a very dirty mouth. Or he had.

“Oh I’ll fuck you, *wife*.” He pulls almost all the way out of me.

“Don’t call me—” My words are cut off when he thrusts all the way back inside of me. A moan leaves me instead as he starts to pump in and out of me.

His thrusts are almost brutal, but I welcome every single one of them. The Rowan of our first year of marriage is coming through. The one I had fallen head over heels in love with. I’m getting a glimpse of that possessive man that could never get enough of me. But I know better than to hope that this side of him will stick around. Believing that will only lead to disappointment.

“Miss you,” he grits out between thrusts. My heart flutters in my chest. Why can’t he say those things to me when he’s not inside of me?

My orgasm is already building. It’s been too long. No matter how many times I try to get myself off, it’s never the

same as what Rowan can do to me. The man owns my body. I think he even will after the ink is dry on the divorce papers.

He grips my hips, lifting me and angling my hips to hit that sweet spot inside of me. “Rowan!” I cry out his name when the orgasm slams down on me. I cling to him as the pleasure rolls through my body in waves. He groans my name as he spills his own release deep inside of me.

He buries his face in my neck as he thrusts a few more times. More of his seed spills inside of me. Neither of us move as we try to catch our breath. Some of his release slips out, spilling down my thighs.

When he starts to kiss my neck, I begin to drift back down to reality. I release my hold on him. I was pretty much clinging to him. I let my legs drop. Rowan stiffens for a moment before he shifts, letting his cock slip free of me.

“Did I hurt you?” he asks, setting me back down on my feet. I hate the question.

“Does it matter?” His head jerks up, his eyes locking with mine. It’s a low blow. I know Rowan would never intentionally want to hurt me. Somehow, he still manages to though.

“Charlee. I’d never want to hurt you.”

I shake my head. “No, *that* didn’t hurt. In fact, that’s the best thing you’ve done to me in a while.” I smooth my hands down my dress, righting it the best I can.

“Charlee—”

“You didn’t use a condom,” I blurt out. It’s a ridiculous thing to say, and I know it, but I’m poking.

“When have I ever used a condom?”

“You know I’m not on the pill. It messes with me.” I’d told him that before we got married. He told me it didn’t matter. That he planned on knocking me up anyway. That never did happen. I should be happy about that since we’re now about to get divorced, but I’m not.

“You’re my wife. I don’t need a damn condom.”

“I don’t know what you’ve been up to. Or who you’ve been up to it with.” The second the words are out of my mouth I know I went too far. Rowan isn’t a cheater.

I’m poking again. I’m not sure why. It’s not my nature, but I can’t control it at this point. I’m always a pleaser when it comes to him. I adored dotting on him. I hate fighting, but for some reason I’m itching for one now. I shouldn’t be. I came here to get the papers signed.

Liar! My heart and brain scream together at me.

“You’re lucky I know you haven’t been with anyone.”

“How do you know that!?” There I go again. Poking the bear. Wanting him to snap. Then what? Then you get that darkness Rowan tries to hide from me. The darkness I see lurking in his eyes when we’re in bed.

“I know.” He steps into me, pressing me back until I hit the wall. “I’m a married man. My dick belongs to my wife. A wife I’ll never divorce.”

I gasp. “You lied. You said you’d sign the papers.”

“I said we’d talk. So I didn’t lie. You’re the liar.” I flinch. “You vowed to be mine. To love me in good times and bad. Until death do us part.” I fight back tears because he’s right. “I need some air.” He turns, stomping from the room. It’s not long before I hear the front door open and slam shut.

I see some things never change.



three

MY PARENTS NEVER FOUGHT. Their hatred was a silent but palpable thing. They stayed together because they had nowhere else to go. They were miserable people, and their unhappiness spread like a contagious disease until they lived on this island that no one else cared to visit. As their only son, I was trapped there, only escaping through a football scholarship to a small college with an excellent academic record. I played sports like it was my job and spent the rest of my days taking as many finance and economics classes as possible. I made connections, and with some savvy decisions and a fuckton of luck, I ended up with a fortune.

I bought my parents a new home, new cars, new everything, thinking that without the pressure of wondering where the next paycheck was coming from, they could close the distance between them. It didn't work. If anything, the money allowed them to retreat further into their solo spheres.

I vowed I wouldn't entangle myself with another person, and I was able to keep that promise until I met Charlee. All it took was one look at her. We arrived at the cash register at the small sundry shop on the first floor of my building. I was buying the newspaper like I do every morning. She was buying a package of mints before an interview for a job she didn't particularly want but needed so she could pay the rent. Her roommate had abruptly moved out, leaving Charlee with a two-bedroom apartment that she couldn't afford. She was younger and too trusting. I had an instant urge to protect her from the world. Growing up in a small town, she wasn't ready for a big city.

I rode up the elevator with her, babysat her purse while she was interviewed, and bought her lunch afterwards. I also took her home that night and slept on her sofa. I wanted to be in her bed but decided we would be married soon and would do it right. It was torture to be near her, to kiss her and hold her and not bury my cock inside her wet heat. I managed to make it until the vows were said but not much after.

Her virgin blood stained her wedding gown. I still feel like a dick about that.

I wasn't born into money. My dad was a laborer, making concrete forms for bridges until he hurt his back. I worked as a teen at a local gravel pit, shoveling rocks into dump trucks, and then as a part-time construction worker in college during the summers before football camp started. After graduation, I did as many odd jobs as possible during the nights and weekends to get enough money to start an investment fund. I have calluses on my hands, and my manners aren't as polished as the Wall Street boys who grew up on the coast and attend Hahvahd and Yale.

If I had had that upbringing, maybe I would've been able to control myself, to hold off long enough to get her dress off, lay her down on a bed of roses, and softly, gently take Charlee. But she doesn't inspire soft feelings in me. Instead, I'm filled with animalistic desires to hold, conquer, possess. I hate seeing her talk with other men, even the clerks at the convenience store or the gas attendant who fills her Land Rover.

I know it's wrong, but I still hate it.

I scrape a hand through my hair and then circle the house to see if I can find some wood for the fireplace. The wind is picking up, and there's a sharpness in the air that smells of snow. In a lean-to next to the cabin, there's a small stack of cut logs. I pile them into my arms and bring them inside.

Charlee is in the kitchen, elbow deep in the sink. She's done a lot of work in here while I've been mentally wanking myself outside.

"Looks good," I say as I walk past her toward the fireplace.

“This is a nice place. It just needed some cleaning. Mrs. Cunningham used to live here. When I was a little girl, the older kids told me she was a witch and would eat you if you walked in her yard.”

I set the wood down and arrange a few pieces of kindling on the iron grates. “Did you walk on her lawn to see?”

“No. I was a good girl.” She gives me a half smile. “And a chicken. I stayed away, but Hank Porter did on a dare. He walked across her lawn for an entire week and nothing happened to him.”

I try to keep my jaw from twitching at the name of some kid who poses zero threat to me. “So she wasn’t a witch.”

“Well, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that.” Her lips turn up a tick higher. “After that week of beating a path across Mrs. Cunningham’s back yard, Hank broke his arm falling off his bike when he was riding to school. He swore that the sidewalk rose up and bit his tire to pieces and that’s why he crashed. Anyway, after that, we all believed she was a witch and stayed away.” Her lips fall suddenly. “I guess, though, she must’ve been lonely. No kids. No husband, and everyone avoiding her. I should’ve brought her some cookies.”

“You were a kid, Charlee. It wasn’t your responsibility.” I light the fire.

“Still—”

“You were a kid,” I repeat. I throw two logs on. She takes too much responsibility on herself. She’s always overextending herself to help others and then getting run down because of it. Twice during the first six months of our marriage, I came home to find her nearly passed out from exhaustion, having covered the shifts of her coworkers, who always had more important things to do that they couldn’t work. She was going to end up in the hospital at the rate she was going, so I told her she couldn’t work anymore. I needed her at home.

At first, she resisted, but I could see how good it was for her. She was no longer falling asleep at the dinner table or

nodding off in the middle of a movie. She started gaining weight and generally looking a lot healthier.

For a while, it seemed like everything was going well, but somewhere along the road, our marriage got off track. And here we are with me trying to pull the locomotive back on to the rails and her trying to detach her car and go a different direction.

If I have to blow up the whole world to keep her with me, I'll do that.



four

I STARE OUT THE WINDOW, watching the snow start to come down more. My sister Marley texted me a bit ago and asked if we had enough supplies to last a few days because an unexpected storm is rolling in quickly. She became the deputy of Winter Falls about six months ago. It was a bit surprising. She'd gotten a degree in social work, but so far she's been enjoying it.

Everyone in town loves Marley. She's easy to love. Except for some new man that moved into town. He's always calling the police station with a reason to get her out to his place. He's really crushing on her. She claims he's a grump. I think he's a bit in love with her. Not that I told Marley that. She'll need to learn that on her own. She can't seem to see herself how everyone else does.

I'd been a bit surprised when Rowan asked for us to come out here to hash out some of the divorce details. I thought once we got everything situated that I'd be able to go spend Christmas with my family. I don't think that is going to happen now. Not only because of the snow either. Rowan is up to something.

As much as I love the town of Winter Falls, we never come here anymore. It's hard to make things work with Rowan's schedule. The man works so damn much. He's never home, and even when he is, it feels as if he's distracted.

Though when I think back, it's hard to recall if he always worked that much or if it started about the time I began to push away. I don't know how the past two years have felt both painfully slow but are still a blur as if they'd gone by fast.

“Want me to make dinner?” Rowan asks after he gets the fire going.

“A storm is rolling in. They said we’ll be stuck here for a few days.”

“It’s Christmas. I wasn’t planning on going anywhere.”

“Maybe I was.” I fold my arms over my chest. It’s the only way I can try to maintain the wall between Rowan and me. I need to keep my guard up, or we’ll end up in bed together.

“I’m spending Christmas with my wife.”

“Stop calling me that.” I roll my eyes.

“No.”

“It hurts!” I snap. Rowan lifts his brows in surprise.

“What’s gotten into you?”

“What’s that supposed to mean? What, you care that I have a backbone all of a sudden?”

For so long I worried about making everyone happy but myself. Until one day, I decided that I was going to do what I thought was best for me. I was tired of waiting for Rowan to make me a priority in his life. I never knew if he’s coming or going. He can be so hot one second and cold the next.

“I care a fucking lot.” A slow smile pulls at his lips. “It’s sexy. I rather like it,” he says, surprising me. He walks over to stand in front of me. “I saw some Christmas decorations in the closet. How about I go get us a tree? If we’re going to be stuck here, we might as well do it up.”

“Rowan.” I close my eyes, dropping my head to his chest. It doesn’t matter how mad I might be, there is always this pull I have to him.

I’m starting to see what’s going on here. If I didn’t know any better I’d almost bet he set up this snowstorm. I know it’s impossible to control Mother Nature, but I don’t put anything past Rowan. Not when he’s a man on a mission. I’m not sure what his plan is, but I know he has something up his sleeve.

“Please.” That one word breaks my resolve.

I simply nod my head in agreement because I know I'm fighting a losing battle. If we are going to be stuck here with each other for the next few days, we might as well make the best of it. A pang of sadness hits me out of nowhere at the thought of this being our last Christmas together.

"I want to come with you. To pick out the tree."

"It's cold, and it's really coming down." His brows furrow together.

"I'm not asking, Rowan." I tilt my chin up. "I'm not a child."

"Trust me. I know you're far from a child, but I can't stop wanting to take care of you."

"I know." I shake my head. "It's one of the reasons I fell in love with you, Rowan. But taking care of me doesn't mean putting me in a box to pull out when you want to play with me." He opens his mouth to say something but closes it, seeming to think over his next words.

"I didn't know you felt that way."

"I do. That box gets lonely. Especially when I don't think you hear me."

"Charlee."

"No, that's not all on you. That's on me too."

"Okay. Bundle up. I'll go check the shed I saw out back for an ax."

"I'll hurry." Without thinking, I lean up and kiss him before I dart back toward the bedroom, where he put our bags. I quickly find something to wear and layer up. When I come out the front door, Rowan is stepping out of the shed with an ax over his shoulder.

My husband has always been hot. His suits are always sexy on him, but right now he's really pulling off that whole lumberjack thing. I swear he can pull any look off.

From the first day I met him, I've been a bit shocked how into me he was. He wasn't only out of my league in the looks

department but everywhere really. He was rich, educated and extremely successful. Rowan could do anything he put his mind to. I'd been more than lost and always thought of myself as a bit homely back then.

Except when I was in Rowan's arms. No matter how busy he might have been, whenever his eyes were on me, I felt like I was the sexiest woman in the world. That's the thing with Rowan. When he has all his attention on you, you'll never want to be anywhere else. But when it's gone, you'll never feel colder. I'd been a bit addicted to his obsession with me. I still am. In brief moments, I'll think I have it again, but as soon as I think I see it, he's gone.

"You got a hat?" he calls, making his way toward me.

"In the car." I hop off the porch. It's slicker than I expected, and I slip, falling a bit forward but catch myself on the fluffy snow with my hands.

"Charlee!" Rowan shouts.

I can hear the irritation in his voice. I'm sure it's really fear but still. I'm okay. He rushes over toward me. I grip a handful of the snow in my palm and pop up before he's halfway across the yard. I nail him right in the chest with a snowball.

He stops dead in his tracks, and his head drops to stare down at the snow stuck to the front of his very expensive coat. "You wanna play?" A smirk pulls at his lips. I lean down and pick up another ball of snow.

"I think I do," I say before I throw another one at him. He drops the ax, letting it fall into the snow. I watch as he bends down to grab his own handful of snow. I turn, taking off toward the woods.

"When will you learn, wife?" he calls after me. "You can run, but I will always chase."

I pray he catches me soon. I'm not sure how much more I can bear.



five

PUFFS of white trail behind Charlee as she screams with laughter. I pelt her with one snowball after another until she collapses on the ground, her hands covering her face. “Enough! I surrender!”

I drop the snow in my hands. “As you should.” But when I lean over to lift her to her feet, a giant block of snow is smashed into my face. She giggles with glee and wriggles out of my grip, slipping and sliding until I catch her again. I swing her into the air and then over my shoulder, giving her ass a solid thwack before moving swiftly toward the house.

The chase has raised my blood pressure, and my cock can’t handle much more teasing. It needs to be inside her, surrounded by her snug, hot cunt.

“Put me down,” she yells, batting her fists against my back.

“When I’m ready,” I reply.

“I don’t want to go inside,” she whines when she notices the direction of my feet.

“It’s too cold to make love out here.”

She goes still, and the air takes on a sudden chill that has nothing to do with the weather.

“What?” I ask even though I don’t want to know the answer.

“I thought we were having fun out here.” She kicks and wiggles until I lower her to the ground.

“We were, and now we’re going to have fun inside.” I take her hand and start up the steps to the front door. When she doesn’t move with me, I tense and look over my shoulder.

Her happy face has grown tight. “But we are more than sex, Rowan. I mean, we have to be more than sex, otherwise we won’t survive.”

I clench my jaw. What I’m hearing her say is she doesn’t want to have sex. Or maybe fucking is fine, but it’s me that’s the problem. “Are you seeing someone else?” I spit out. “All those nights that I’m working to provide for us, are you spending those with someone else?”

Her face grows blank and then hard with fury. “Are you serious right now?”

Why is she angry? I’m not the one who turned her down. I’m not the one who filed for divorce. “What else am I supposed to think when you’d rather sit out here freezing your tits off than go inside and lie down by the fire and make love?”

“It’s not even that cold out here, and I wanted to spend some time with you that didn’t involve us taking our clothes off! We can’t spend every minute we’re together naked. We have to learn how to talk to each other.”

I cross my arms. “So talk. Who are you sleeping with?”

She throws her hands in the air. “No one, including you!”

She spins on her heel and dashes into the house, slamming the door behind her. The little house shakes on impact. I could storm up the stairs and wrench the door open, which will end up in us making love, and then she’ll be angry, accusing me of only wanting her for sex. I force myself down the stairs and back to the chopping block. It takes me two hours to work out my frustration and sexual energy, and by that time, I have enough wood to last us an entire winter. I carry a load into the house. The kitchen is spotless, and the small living room is clean too.

I dump the firewood beside the fireplace and throw two more logs onto the dwindling flames.

“Charlee?” I call.

“In the bedroom,” comes the quiet response.

I find her tucking in a pretty quilt with colorful patchwork.

“Sorry,” she says without looking up. She tosses a pillow on top of the quilt and makes a show of plumping it until it looks like a stuffed turkey.

“What are you sorry for?”

“Shouting at you, I guess. I don’t want to fight.”

“I don’t like that either.” I reach across the bed and tilt her chin up. “What’s got you worked up?”

“Why did you accuse me of cheating on you? I would never do that.” There’s a real wounded look in her eyes.

My heart squeezes. “Sorry. The thought of you with another man makes me crazed. I can’t take it. You know how possessive I am. I don’t even like seeing the clerk talk to you at the convenience store on the first floor of the building.”

“I know.” One side of her lip whisks up only to fall again. “Are you having an affair?”

“No,” I reply swift and sharp. “Is that why you asked for a divorce? You were my first, and you’ll be my last, Charlee. It’s until death do us part for me. When I said my vows, I meant them.”

“You’re implying that I didn’t mean my vows?”

I rein in my temper. I know I have a fearsome one, and I need to keep it at bay. At least she’s talking to me, and that’s the whole point of us coming here. No divorce until we talked through the fine points. “I can only judge things by your actions. Telling me you want to end our marriage, going to a lawyer behind my back and getting papers drawn up says that you don’t believe in the things you swore to. What am I supposed to think?”

“Right.”

Silence falls. I wait for her to say more, but her mouth seems zipped shut. My fingers clench and unclench at my side as I contemplate reaching across the mattress and throwing her

down on the bed. When she's nude and under me, there is never any talk of divorce or separation. There's only want and need. Is there any question as to why I'm constantly taking her clothes off, sliding inside her body, rutting into her until neither of us have energy to move? I raise my hand and she startles, skittering back until she's more than an arm's length away. I let my hand fall to my side. Sometimes in business, you have to take a risk to get a big reward. It feels like you're jumping off the top of a building with no safety net, but if you don't make the leap, you'll never get to the jackpot. I curl my fingers into my palm and jump.

“I'll give you a divorce on Christmas morning if you do everything I say until then. No questions asked.”



six

I STARE at Rowan in shock, trying to get my anger under control. How can I go from laughing and having the best time with him to wanting to scream and cry in rage? Only Rowan could ever draw all these different emotions from me.

I know it's because of how deeply I love him. With him, I always feel so much more. When it's great, there is nothing better in the world. When it's bad, I want to curl up in a ball and hide from the rest of the world.

This was the last thing I'd ever thought I'd hear him say. It's a double-edged sword. It hits me that I never actually thought I'd follow through with this divorce. That I figured Rowan would always sideline it.

I could push and say I was going to. That I am strong enough to go through with it. But I know I'm only lying to myself. I realize now that there was no real fear when I sought out a lawyer. I could pretend to myself that I was pushing forward. Give myself the illusion of control knowing he'd never let it happen. Now he's changing the game by offering me what I've been asking for.

I know getting a divorce would be like losing to him, and Rowan never loses. He'll fight for things till the bitter end. It's a quality I loved in him generally until recently. I hate the idea of him staying married to me because he thinks getting out is a failure.

I open and close my mouth as I try to wrap my head around everything. This has to be a trick. I must be missing

something. Or maybe I just don't want to face the fact that he is actually willing to let us go.

"I don't believe you," I challenge.

"When have I ever lied to you?"

"You just did." I call him out.

"You don't believe I'll follow through with this..." He pauses for a bit. "Divorce." If I wasn't so worked up, I might laugh at how much he doesn't want to say the word divorce. It's almost adorably sweet.

"I wasn't talking about that. I wasn't your first." I never asked Rowan about his past lovers. I didn't want to know. Not only is my husband handsome, but he's very successful too. I've seen the way other women look at him. How they try to get his attention whenever they can. I've always wondered how I held it so easily in the past. Until I started to question if I really did. I hate that.

"I might be a lot of things, but a liar isn't one of them."

"Rowan. I've met one of your past lovers." I glare at him. "You know what? It doesn't matter. Forget it. You have a deal." I throw up my hands, not wanting to talk about this anymore.

Truthfully, I never wanted to talk about that. About her. I just don't want him to think he got one over on me. I might be naïve in a lot of things. I know that. I even counted on Rowan to keep me a bit hidden at times from things, but he's not getting off on being some saint. Especially after he just accused me of cheating.

I gasp when Rowan all but leaps over the bed like some lumberjack ninja. The hell? He's on me, pinning me to the bed in the blink of an eye. My body immediately heats, the same way it always does when he's near.

"Don't move," he orders.

"I will—"

He covers my mouth with his hand. "You made your deal, wife. Nod if you understand." I glare at him but nod. "Don't

move.” I watch as he slips from the bed. He opens his suitcase. A moment later, he comes back with a few of his ties.

“Rowan?”

“I’ve always wanted to tie you to the bed. Did you know that?” I shake my head no. Rowan has always been a bit dominating in bed. I could sense that he was holding back, but I was unsure why. It was almost as though he was trying to hide a darker part of himself. “There are so many dirty things I’ve wanted to do to you but held back,” he says as he ties one hand and then the other. “But now I’m going to do every single one of them. I’m going to get my fill of you.” As mad as I am at him, his dirty words already have me growing wet between my thighs.

Once he’s got my wrists firmly tied, he grabs my shirt, ripping it right down the center. My bra is next to go. He’s pissed. Good, he’s letting go of all that control and doing what he wants.

“Rowan.” I lick my lips as my breathing grows heavy.

“Am I scaring you or turning you on?”

“I’m not scared of you, Rowan.”

“You should be. If you knew the dirty things I’ve wanted to do to you.” He goes for my pants next. “Only you,” he adds, stripping the rest of my clothes off until I’m naked. He trails his fingers up and down the inside of my thigh. I part my legs, inviting him to give me more. I whimper when his fingers stop right as they get to my sex then drift back down my leg.

“Don’t tease me.”

“You’ve been keeping things from me, and I don’t like it. I’m going to have to change how I get information from my wife. Now tell me. Who lied to you? I’ve only been with you, Charlee. Even if you leave me, there will only ever be you.” I want to call him a liar again, but the intensity of his stare stops me. “Don’t make me do it,” he warns as he grips my thighs and pushes them apart as he moves between my legs.

“Rowan,” I whimper when he brushes his mouth against my clit. He lifts his head. I can see the desire in his eyes, but

there's something else there too that I can't place.

"Charlee," he warns. I buck, trying to lift my hips. A yelp pops from my mouth when his hand slaps down on my sex.

"You did not just do that."

"I did," he says before he does it again. The loud smack would make you think it's painful. Truthfully, it's anything but that. My clit starts to throb with need and an intensity I've never felt before. "Someone lied to my wife, and I want to know who."

"It doesn't matter," I grit out between my teeth. "You're not going to do anything. I already told you once to get rid of her, but you didn't."

His eyes widen in realization of who I'm talking about.

Arabella Moore.

The woman was all too happy to tell me she'd been with my husband in the past and she'd be there again when I was gone. She went around spreading stories about us. When I tried to say something to Rowan, he waved it off as if my feelings about it didn't matter. He made sure we didn't run into her, but that wasn't enough. It started to mess with my head that maybe they did have something at one time. It didn't help that I felt like he was pulling away. That he was hiding something from me.

"I'll handle it," he vows.

I shake my head no. "She's not the point, Rowan. My request was silly to you. I'm silly to you. Your little wife you put away and bring out when it fits you best."

A darkness seems to fall over Rowan at my words.

"I told you not to move."

"Fuck me or untie me," I hiss, wondering if I've gone too far this time.



seven

“I’LL FUCK you on my own schedule. I want to hear more about this woman I’ve been sleeping with before you. While I’m preparing you, feel free to tell me all the details.” I rip my T-shirt into strips and then wrap one piece around her pretty ankle. Seeing her laid out for me like this is messing with my head. How many times have I dreamed of doing this to her? Only her. But I need to focus. So much is starting to become clear in my mind now. I had no idea it had gone this deep. What the fuck did Arabella Moore say to my wife? I will end her whole fucking career.

“Why would I have to tell you anything? You were there.” She tries to halfheartedly kick her way out of my grip, but it’s not happening.

“Remind me again because my memory is bad. When and where?” I fasten one leg to the bed. She writhes wildly with the other leg but can’t escape my grip. This is turning her on.

“How would I know the details?” She pants. “I wasn’t there.”

I slide my hands up her inner thighs until I reach her core. She’s wet. Very wet. I should’ve tied her up before. We would’ve never reached this point. “Neither was I, which is why I need some help remembering details.”

She averts her face. “I don’t want to talk about it. Why are you hurting me like this?”

I stop what I’m doing. “Are the ties cutting into you?”

“I’m talking about my heart! My heart is what hurts. I’ve tried to forget that you had another woman. It was before me, right? That’s all that mattered. It would be unreasonable of me to expect you to have waited. You’re hot and rich, and women are constantly throwing themselves at you. It’s normal for you to take up a few offers before you met me. I’m not mad about that. I just hate that she’s been in our home. Put her touches everywhere. Then you wouldn’t get rid of her.” The anguish on her face says something different than her words.

“It would be reasonable.” I reach down and quickly untie her legs and arms. Being bound turned her on—and me too—but now’s not the time for that. Or for ultimatums. She’s finally opening up to me. I pull her upright and sit down on the mattress, drawing her onto my lap. “I hate the idea of you with another man. I was fucking happy when I was your first. I have never touched another woman, never been inside another woman, never wanted another woman. You have my word against hers. Why are you believing her over me?” It’s the truth. Seeing my parents had me staying clear of anything romantic before Charlee. With her I knew I’d go through anything to have her. She changed everything for me.

Her eyes widen at my question. She’d never thought of it that way. “Oh, baby.” I cup her face. “Why are you so ready to believe stuff that hurts you? What’s going on?”

Tears slip down her cheeks. “I don’t know. I don’t really know. You’re hiding something from me. Holding back. I can feel it. Maybe not her but something!”

I thumb a few tears away, and when the waterworks continue, I start to kiss them away. “Charlee, there is never going to be another woman for me. If you leave me, it’s going to be a mess. I’ll sit outside your apartment, waiting for you to come out. The business will go to hell. People will lose their jobs. Families will be wrecked. The world will stop spinning.”

She chokes on a laugh, a watery hiccup escaping from her throat. “The world will stop spinning?”

“Yes, scientists have said that if one true love is thwarted, the world stops. I know you don’t want to be responsible for

that.”

Charlee laughs again, swipes her cheeks, and rests her head against my chest. “You’re right. I don’t want to be the one responsible for ending the world.”

I stroke a comforting hand down her back. “I don’t want the divorce, Charlee. I think you know that by now. I came here and put all these conditions on you because I wanted to make the divorce as hard as possible, so hard that you gave up. I love you. I want to stay married. Can’t we do that? If you want things to change, if you don’t like the house, if you don’t want me to work so hard, I can change those things. We’ll move. I’ll cut back. Tell me what you want, and I’ll make it happen.”

She stops breathing for a second. I can feel her still under my hand. Then she lets out a deep sigh. “All right, Rowan. You win.” She lifts her head and cups my face. “I’ll set aside the divorce.”

I win? That’s not what I want, though. But she fits her mouth to mine, and I can’t think anymore. This is the first time in a while that she’s initiated lovemaking. Words and explanations and questions can come later. I kiss her back, angling her head so I can dive deeper into her mouth.

She swings around on my lap so that her sex is pressed against my hard cock. Her hands go to work on my zipper. I cup her ass and rise up so she can pull my jeans down far enough to extract my shaft. Her warm soft hands around my dick make me groan.

I’m feverish with want and need. “Put me inside you.” It’s an order. A plea.

She positions herself above the shaft head and slides down slowly, enveloping me in a hot, wet vise. My eyeballs roll back in my head. She begins to ride me slowly. I let her set the pace, letting my hands rove all over her bare skin, kissing her deeply, trying to show her with my body that I’m following her lead.

Her back tightens under my hold, and her thighs quiver around mine. Pleasure sinks into every pore, wiping away my doubts and filling me with an overload of sensations. The friction she's creating with every clutch and slide of her cunt around my erection makes me dizzy. I dig my hands into her ass and pull her close.

She grows frantic; her movements become fractured, wild. She can't control her reaction, and I don't want her to. Her pussy convulses, and her cum covers my cock and spreads along my thighs. I pull her off and toss her onto the bed.

"What—?" she starts to ask, but I answer her with my mouth on her sex. When our clothes are off and our defenses are down, when all we are doing is feeling, we are one. I can't give that up. Not yet.

I flatten my tongue and drink down her essence. Her core is wicked hot and sticky. I eat it all, filling my lungs with her scent and flavor until she's thrashing on the bed. Mouth and heart full, I strip off all my clothes and plunge into her. She throws her head back and screams as her third orgasm catapults her back into the plane of ecstasy. I let myself go this time.

"You'll never leave me," I vow, thrusting so deep into her that I can feel her womb against my cockhead. "I'll never let you go."



eight

“LET ME.”

“Sit.” I bat Rowan’s hand away from trying to help me. He doesn’t look like he wants to listen to me. He’s fighting himself. He does that far too much for my liking, and it’s time for that to change if he wants to do more than put the divorce papers away. “Sit,” I say again with more force this time. “I enjoy taking care of you, Rowan. I’ve missed doing it,” I admit. He relaxes, taking a step back.

“If you didn’t, you’d tell me, right?” he asks, putting those kid gloves back on. I enjoy them at times. Especially when he’s trying to protect me from the world. But I don’t want him to do them in every aspect of our lives. I do know he enjoys taking care of me, the same way I do doting on him.

“Yes. I’ve learned my lesson. I need to be clearer in the things I say and want. I need to speak up more.” I finish putting the cookies onto the plate. “Start us a fire.”

“We never got a tree,” he points out as he goes over and does as I ask him.

“Tomorrow. It might be fun to put the tree up on Christmas.” The last holiday season hadn’t been our best one, so the thought of us having this one together gives me hope for our future.

“It’s nice being disconnected from the world,” Rowan says.

“It is.” I bring the plate over to the coffee table. “Hot chocolate?”

“If you’re having some.”

I return to the kitchen and make us both a cup. He comes to take them over to the sofa for me. I grab a throw blanket for us. Even after my orgasm induced nap, I’m still a bit worn out. Cuddling in front of the fire sounds perfect. Especially with the snowstorm raging outside.

“I want to get everything out in the open, Rowan. I don’t want there to be these unspoken things between us anymore.”

“I want that too.” He pulls me to sit in his lap. “This last year has been hell.”

“I know. I’m sorry. It just really hurt when I told you I didn’t want anything to do with that girl, and well...” I take a deep breath. “You didn’t do anything about it.” I let the words I’ve wanted to say for so long slip past my lips.

“Sweetheart—”

“Rowan.” I cut him off. The last thing I want to hear is excuses.

I get it. I might have been a bit extreme, but I’d felt as though he was disregarding my feelings. He didn’t get it because he knew he wanted nothing to do with the woman. He didn’t return her feelings in any way. But I know if it had been a man who had come on to me, he would have been long gone. It wouldn’t have mattered if they were under someone else’s contract or not. “Please don’t—”

“She’s gone. I should have made it happen then. I get it now. You never ask for anything really. Before this I can’t remember a time where you were so upset. I vowed to take care of you, and I fucked up. I made a mistake. I underestimated how much it hurt you, and it was stupid on my part. Like I said, you never ask for much. I should have known.” I’ve waited so long for him to say those words to me.

My eyes fill with tears. “I’m sorry too. I know it’s my past. When I met you, I felt heard for the first time in my life. You never dismissed me, and I think in that moment when that happened I freaked out. It’s not all on you.”

If I'm being honest with myself, I have to admit that I bear some of the blame. I could have easily spoken up and told him how I felt instead of holding all of those feelings inside. That him not doing more made me feel second in his life. But once I went down that path, I couldn't seem to find my way back. Then he was giving me space like I'd asked, and I hated it. It let my insecurities grow in my mind.

"You're being too kind. You always are. One of the million reasons I fell in love with you." He pulls me in closer to him. "I'll do better, but know I've never stopped loving you, Charlee, and I never will. But we're not going to make it if we can't be honest with one another."

"Or if we hold back," I add with a challenge.

"I never want to hurt or scare you."

"You don't scare me." I shift to straddle him. "What scares me is when you pull away. That didn't help with any of this. I honestly thought if I pulled back from you and threatened you with a lawyer, you'd come bulldozing your way back to me. It shocked me when you gave me space." He closes his eyes for a long second.

"It scared me. The things I wanted to do when you told me you wanted a divorce. Hell, some of the fantasies I'd had even before then I was worried would send you running."

"What did you want to do?" I can already feel Rowan's cock thickening under my ass.

"Kidnap you away. Tie you to my bed. Hell, those nights I've been sneaking into your bedroom and seducing you to be with me I've been praying to get you pregnant. I know it's crazy, but I knew you'd never be free of me then." His possessive words have an ache forming between my thighs.

"I've fantasized about that." I lick my lips. "It's why I was so shocked when you'd asked for that deal in the bedroom. I kept thinking you'd snap. Tell me I wasn't going anywhere. When you asked me to come here I thought maybe..."

"I was going to take back what is mine." He grips my hips. "Did you like being tied to the bed? Or how about when I

smacked your pussy?” I nod my head yes.

“I’ve always loved when you take control, Rowan. I rather enjoy the bubble you put me in to protect me and keep me all to yourself. I like being there,” I admit. I’m sure a therapist would tell me it’s unhealthy, but I don’t give a crap. I know what I want, and I have a pretty good idea of what my husband wants. It’s one and the same.

“You might want to be careful what you ask for, wife,” he warns. That only turns me on even more.

“I’ll be happy where you put me as long as I’m always number one to you. That you don’t hold back when it comes to us. I want all of it. When you hold back, I feel it here.” I put my hand over his heart.

“You are number one to me, Charlee. Always. None of this other shit matters without you. You want all of me, you’ll have all of it.”

He stands with me in his arms, carrying me toward the bedroom, where he strips us both down to nothing.

“There will never be anything between us again,” he vows. “Now get on the bed, wife. I’m going to give you everything you asked for and so much more.”



nine

“ON YOUR KNEES.”

Immediately she moves into position. I don't even need to ask her to put her hands behind her back. She places them, back of the hand to palm, right at the base of her spine. Blood rushes downward as I stare at her bent head, her folded legs, the prim positioning of her hands. She wants this as much as I do.

“Head up, babe. I want you to see what I'm doing.” I snap the hemp rope between my hands. “I'm going to tie your wrists because when you get aroused, you can't keep your hands to yourself. The rope will loop around your waist and between your ass cheeks. When you shift, the rope will tighten and rub against your pussy. Once you're bound, you will sit on my lap while I suck your tits, but you can't come.”

“Why can't I come?” She shakes her ass, bouncing her unbound hands lightly.

“Because the longer you can last, the sweeter the release will be.” I wrap the rope around her wrists and then her waist. She moans when the hemp makes contact with her sex. Her lips are swollen, and the rope grows damp. I pull the binding tight until it's slightly uncomfortable so that Charlee is forced to squirm and wriggle to find relief, but each movement only intensifies her ache. I draw her onto my lap and onto my shaft so that the rope and her pussy are in direct contact with my sensitive skin.

I grip her breasts, taking one into my mouth and massaging the other. I kiss her skin and lick her nipples, bringing her to

the edge and then pulling her back. She arches toward me but I tip her backward, making sure that she doesn't have any balance. Her only stability is my hand on the rope, my mouth on her body.

Her cunt convulses over my cock, firing my need. I'm hungry for her. I devour her tits, her shoulders, her neck, her ears. I eat at her lips, then shower kisses on her eyes and cheeks and jaw. I pull at that rope, rocking her back and forth, and when it feels like she's about to explode, I stop.

I bring her to the edge again and again until her cheeks are wet with her desire, and my cock is soaked with her need.

“You want my cock? Nod if you want me.”

Her head bobs.

I tug on the knot, and the rope falls away. Surprise colors her face. “How?”

“Years of calving, darling.”

“I want to tie you up,” she declares.

I laugh softly. “We'll see.” I swing her around, ass up, elbows down. Her forbidden pink hole flares exotically. I lick my thumb and circle the puckered skin. She shudders under my touch. “One of these days, I'm going to take you here.”

Her response is to wiggle her ass. “I hear a lot of talk back there, but I don't feel any action.”

That earns her a whack across one round cheek. She yelps and tries to scoot away. I haul her back. “Brace yourself,” I warn and then drive my cock into her sopping pussy in one swift, hard motion.

She comes immediately. Her pussy convulses, tiny tremors sending shockwaves against my sensitive tissues. Her swollen lips stretch to their limit as she is forced to accommodate my girth. I hammer into her, slapping her ass, squeezing her tits. She keeps orgasming, one after the other, floods of her pleasure drenching my groin and thighs. I grab her hair and twist her up and around so I can claim her mouth. Our tongues parry in an exotic duel. My cock is a column of steel, driving

into her fast and hard. I am hardly more than an animal at this moment, reduced to chasing down that fiery sensation of total oblivion.

I wrench my mouth away. “Say you’re mine, Charlee. I can’t come until you say you’re mine.”

“I’m yours,” she cries.

“Say you belong to me,” I demand.

“I belong to you. I love you, Rowan. I’m yours. Always.”

Always. The climax hits me like a fist to the head. My vision blurs, and a dull roar fills my head. I come, spurting streams of fluid inside her cunt. Her back bows as my hot fluid pours out and sets off another climactic response. This is a new beginning. The first day of an adventure for the two of us. She’s not afraid of me. There’s nothing I want that will scare her.

“I love you, Charlee. I love you.” I chant those words over and over even after I’m spent, after her shudders turn to small shudders. I slip out of her and draw her into my arms, stroking my hands over her shoulders and down her slender back. She gulps at the air, trying to find her breath. Her forehead burrows into my neck as she allows me to soothe her.

“I think we should keep this place,” I say after a while when we’re both settled under the covers. The snow is falling outside, the bright moonlight making the flakes sparkle like tiny crystals.

“And build a new house?”

“No. I want to keep it like this. Uncluttered and simple. When things are going crazy, we can escape here—just the two of us. I can tie you up and tease you for hours. No one out here can hear you scream.” A sadistic grin spreads across my face. “I have things I want to do to you that need proper planning.”

She giggles. “I think I’m up to it.”

“I know you are, baby. That’s why this is going to work for us. We were meant to be together. There was a small speed

bump, but we're over that."

"Smooth sailing from here on out?"

"Nothing we can't solve together." I tilt her head up. "We're partners, you and me. As long as we stick to each other, our waters won't capsize us."

"I appreciate you adopting the ocean metaphor."

"Always happy to oblige you."

Her giggles turn to laughter, and I know it's more than just her finding me funny but her being filled with joy. I know because I'm feeling the same awesome sensation. Inside this cabin, we let ourselves go and found our true love once again.



ten

I SIT up holding the blanket to my chest, wondering where Rowan went. Hell, I'm not even sure what day it is at this point. It should be Christmas, but who knows? Everything has been a bit of a sexy blur.

We made love, then we snuggled in bed and talked for hours. Now that everything was out in the open between us, we had so much to catch up on. The only time we left was to get food, which we brought back to the bed.

I feel closer to Rowan than I've ever felt, including before everything went to hell. There is nothing between us now. No hidden desires or need to walk on eggshells. Rowan was worried that he might be too much for me to handle. But now that he knows that's not the case, he has an ease about him.

It's silly really to think we could have had this all along but we'd both let things from our past cloud our minds. We might not have had past lovers, but we still had baggage. We know now that we both need to be clear in the things we want because the reality is we both have deep needs to please the other. Not to mention I crave every dirty thing my husband wants to do to me. Even his over-the-top jealousy.

I kind of understand a bit better why he was so confused about Arabella. To him it's crazy for me or anyone else to think he wants another. In fact, he worries more over how much he wants me. His fear is that he'll scare me away with his intensity. My fear is being lost or forgotten.

Having grown up in such a large family, I understand how that can easily happen. It's crazy how you might not have past

lovers, but things from your childhood can still drag over to mess with you.

When I hear the front door open, I jump from the bed, laughing when I see that Rowan put socks on my feet. It's the only thing I actually have on. My toes always get cold. I snatch his shirt from off the floor and slip it on to go find out what he's up to.

"Sorry, sweetheart," Rowan says as he kicks the door shut behind him. A Christmas tree lays at his feet. "I know you wanted to come get it with me, but the storm was rough, and it was getting late. I pretty much grabbed the first one I found. I didn't want you to not have a tree on Christmas."

"I love it, Rowan. It's perfect." I walk over, helping him out of his coat. "You want some coffee?"

"I was going to bring you breakfast in bed."

"You're a terrible cook." I laugh. "Leave the cooking to me." He slips his cold hand under my shirt, grabbing my ass. I try to wiggle away but get nowhere.

"Watch it." He gives my ass a squeeze before he releases me. "I'll put the tree up then. Make me some food, woman." I laugh, scurrying off toward the kitchen to get breakfast going. With how the sun seems to be setting, I'm wondering if dinner would be more fitting.

I put on some coffee and decide to make a French toast casserole. I slip it into the oven. It should give us time to decorate the tree.

"I miss doing these small things together. I don't think I could bear you going back to work so much."

"I won't be." He hands me an ornament to put on the tree. "I worked to give you space even in the beginning. I recall you telling me I better get back to work. I thought I was too overbearing. I made you quit your jobs."

"I hated my jobs, and you knew it."

"I wanted you home."

“I loved being home, Rowan. Don’t have yourself believing anything other than that. It was nice being taken care of.”

“I felt like you were taking care of me.”

“We take care of each other in our own ways. People might think it’s old school but—”

“Fuck ’em,” Rowan finishes for me.

“Yeah, fuck ’em,” I agree, walking over to him. I grab his hand and pull him to the sofa, dropping down into his lap. “Rowan, I remember that. Me telling you that you better get back to work. I thought you were staying home so much because you worried over me after you had me quit work. I didn’t want you staying around because you felt like you had to.”

“I wanted to be there.” He strokes my jaw with this thumb. I’ve always loved the feel of his rough fingers on my skin.

“We’re so stupid.” I laugh.

“What we are is madly in love. Our problems are fixable and are only problems because we love each other so much.”

“I do love you. More than anything in this whole world.”

“That’s good because there’s no getting rid of me. It’s you and me for eternity.”

“And maybe a few little ones added in there,” I add. Rowan brushes a few hairs out of my face. “You still want that, right? To have a family?”

“Pretty sure I admitted that I was hoping I knocked you up so you’d be stuck with me.” He smirks, not the least bit ashamed of that anymore.

“As if that mattered.” I laugh. His face grows serious.

“I want it all with you. A little girl with your eyes and heart.” This man melts my insides.

“I think I’m pregnant,” I blurt out. “I haven’t had a period since the last time you snuck into my room.”

“That was four months ago.” I nod. My period comes like clockwork usually.

I’ve always kept track of my periods because I don’t take birth control. It makes me sick. Since the day we got married, I’ve kept track of them knowing it was only a matter of time. I didn’t think it would take this long, but really the timing couldn’t be more perfect.

Happiness lights up his handsome face. “Fuck, I’ve been rough with you.”

“Don’t even start. You’ve been perfect with me, Rowan. I don’t think we have to worry about your kinks until I’m further along, but we’ll check with a doctor when we get back to town.”

“They’re your kinks too.”

“Don’t put that on me. I’m an innocent little angel here.”

“Your wet cunt betrays you.” He slips his hand between my thighs. “I’ll have to keep track of how many spankings I’ll owe you next Christmas.” I let out a squeak when he gives my sex a light smack. “Look how soaked you are for me.”

“Not my fault. You’ve made my body crave these dirty things.”

“To crave *me*.” His finger slips through my folds, playing with my clit.

“I’ve always done that, husband,” I say with a moan, my head dropping back.

“Always such a good girl.” He thrusts a finger inside of me. “Good girls do get rewards, you know.” He nips at my neck.

“I’ve got everything I could ever want. As long as you never let me go.”

“Never,” he vows.

The last two years might have been rough, but I know we’ll last forever. We both are willing to fight for each other. Being young and in love comes with challenges. But I know

now, no matter what life may throw our way, Rowan and I will handle it together. Nothing will ever stand in our way again. Not even us.

I don't care what anyone says. Love is always enough.



epilogue

CHARLEE

A FEW YEARS LATER

ROWAN HOLDS me close as we stroll down Main Street. It's Christmas Eve and Liam, our oldest and my baby girl Ava are spending the afternoon at my sister's house. They are making cookies for us to put out for Santa tonight.

I love how close her kids and mine are. While Marley and I both want a somewhat big family we know there's a fine line of having the perfect size. Growing up with all the brothers and sisters we had, we knew how easy it could be to get lost in the shuffle. Our parents did their best but we'd always wanted more attention from them but there is only so much to go around.

Marley and I have always been the closest out of all of our siblings. I know that will never change. We decided together that we would have around three kids each. Making sure our kids were all close so we could have a big family when we were together but a smaller one on our own. It might sound silly to some but it works for us.

I also love that our husbands get along so well. They've even ventured into a few small tech companies together. They both tend to be a lot alike. Especially when it comes to their women. My Rowan isn't as much of a recluse as Saint but they are both very possessive and loving husbands. It was easy for them to bond when they quickly realized how they could be each other's allies. Most times that works in mine and Marley's favor, so neither one of us is complaining.

"There is something I wanted to show." Rowan says when we pass the last shop on main street and don't turn back around. Instead we stay on the sidewalk heading into the older section of Winter Falls which has the most beautiful historical homes.

It's one of my favorite spots in town. All the homes are decorated for Christmas. They even do inside tours of some of

them. To tell the truth, it can get a bit competitive around here this time of year. Especially because while all the homes might be older they are all grand and very expensive. I love the history they are all filled with.

“Oh? A surprise?” I smile up at him. I love surprises. Doesn’t matter how small or big. Rowan knows that too and tries to do it pretty often. I swear one of my husbands’ kinks is getting my face to light up at a surprise.

It’s amazing how much things have changed. And how much Rowan and I have grown as a couple. Looking at us now, no one would ever believe that a few years ago we were fighting to hold onto our marriage.

“I thought about waiting but I can’t. A few things still need to be handled but it’s a done deal.”

“You’ve got all my attention.”

“I better always have your attention.” He grumbles. I elbow him in the side.

“You know you do.” He stops walking to lean down and presses a kiss to my mouth.

“Liam is going to start kindergarten next year.”

“Why do you have to remind me?” I huff. My baby isn’t a baby anymore. Not only is he leaving me for school he’s built like his father and looks like he should be in the second grade at this point.

“You’ve got a new baby on the way.” He rests his hand on my stomach. This will be our last one. Pregnancy has been relatively easy for me. It might have taken a moment for me to get pregnant that first time but my body took to being pregnant. Even labor had been a breeze.

“Charlee! How have you been?” I turn my attention away from my husband to see Ben. His family owns one of the biggest real estate agencies in Winter Falls. He strolls down the stone walkway from The Nottoway Mansion. It’s my favorite. It reminds me of a small castle. “I swear you don’t age.”

“Do you want an ass beating?” Roman growls.

“Oh stop!” I laugh, elbowing him in the side. “I’m not his type. Trust me.”

“You’re everyone’s type. Trust me.”

“You are a beautiful woman, Charlee.” Ben agrees with Rowan.

“Don’t rile him up.” I say to Ben as I wrap myself around my husband’s arm. “He’s poking you. He wants to get you all worked up. You are his type.” Ben winks at Rowan.

“I’m married.” Rowan keeps on growling.

“I know. I’m your real estate agent.”

“Wait. What?” I ask. My heart starts to race.

“I told you, when it was time to start school we should move back to Winter Falls.”

“I thought you meant the cabin. You’ve done all that construction.” He’d recently did a bunch of updates.

“I love our cabin but that’s not practical for every day. We need more room. We’ll still go there for Christmas but this will be our family home.” He’s right. It’s a bit off the beaten path out in the mountains. As much as I love it I’m not sure I could live there year round. “This is your dream home.”

I told Rowan about this place. Even had him drive by it a few times. As a little girl I dreamed it would one day be mine. That I’d find my king and we’d live out our fairy tale happy ever after there.

“Rowan.” Tears start to spill down my cheeks.

“But your work and-”

“Trust me. It’s all handled.” He wipes the tears from my cheeks. “Work isn’t my life. My family is. We’ll keep the penthouse in the city but your heart is here.”

“I’ll leave you guys to it.” Ben hands me over the keys. “Welcome back, Charlee.”

I hand the keys over to my husband. “Show me.” He tangles his fingers with mine, leading me towards the front doors.

“This place is incredible.”

“I have good taste as you can see.”

“I was the lucky one, Charlee.” He opens the door for me.

When I’d left Winter Falls all those years ago I knew I was searching for something out in the world. I’d started to doubt that after I’d graduated college having felt more lost than ever. That was until Rowan found me.

“No, it was you that gave me everything I ever dreamed of, Rowan.”

“And you made me dream.” My heart melts. Even after all these years he can still leave me speechless. I yank him down for a kiss.

“Why don’t we act out some of those dirty dreams I know you always come up with in our new home?”

“Careful what you ask for wife.” He warns.

I don’t need a warning. Not from my husband. I know every second of whatever he plans to do to me will be pure heaven.



epilogue

ROMAN

MANY YEARS LATER

“THE SNOW IS COMING DOWN FAST.” Liam, my oldest, presses his 10 year old nose to the glass.

“Is Santa going to see our cabin?” asks Olivia, our littlest one.

“He sees better in the snow,” says Ava. The eight year old always has the right answers.

“Come over here and put your coats and boots on,” calls my wife. She shakes Olivia’s purple puffer coat to get the kids’ attentions.

The little girl toddles over and shoves her arms into the coat. “Can I make angels.”

“Yes.”

“Can I throw a snowball in Liam’s face?” Asks Ava.

“No.”

“Can I?” Olivia says.

“No. Not you either.” Charlee glances over the kids’ heads, pressing her lips together to suppress a laugh.

I cross my ankles and lean back against the counter and watch as the family gets bundled up. Charlee is taking the crew out to play while I finish filling the stockings with candy, small toys, and video games.

Liam rolls his eyes and gives a long suffering sigh. He knows, as we all do, the minute the three are outside the two girls will gang up on him and even though he could run away or overpower them physically, he will allow himself to be taken to the ground and smeared with snow. He’s a good brother.

I set down my coffee mug and walk over to ruffle his hair. “Don’t let them be too hard on you, son.”

“Nah. It’s fine. How are they going to have fun otherwise?” He dons his snow pants and shoves his feet into his boots. I bend down to tie them. Once I’m finished, I tuck a heat warmer into his pocket, give the girls kisses and then wave as they troop outside.

As I hang and fill the stockings, the sound of screaming laughter echoes outside the large picture window. Little bodies zoom by. A snowball strikes the front door. My mouth curves into a smile. When I first saw Charlee at the newsstand outside my office, I knew instantly I wanted her in my life. I didn’t have a full idea of what the future with her would look like but it didn’t include a small cabin in the woods of Winter Falls. In the years since I first trapped Charlee here, we’ve done some improvements. The exposed rafters have all been clean of the smoke damage. Two new bedrooms and bathrooms were added. The kitchen has been upgraded but it’s still a small space compared to what everyone is used to. Even so, I feel like the family is closer when we’re here. Maybe it’s partly due to the holidays, maybe it’s the coziness of Winter Falls where the town is full of kind and friendly people, or maybe it’s the memories of how we almost fell apart and if it wasn’t for this town, this cabin, this space, we wouldn’t have made it this far.

The family spills in, a pile of snow, laughter and gusts of cold.

Olivia rushes over, nearly falling on her face when she reaches me. “Daddy, Liam hit me with a snowball.”

I catch the little girl up in my arms and rub her cheek against mine to warm her up. “I’ll take him out behind the shed later.”

Olivia rears back. “No! Don’t hurt Liam!” Her fists come up. “I’ll fight you.”

Liam laughs and pulls Olivia into his arms. “He’s just joking. Aren’t you dad?”

There’s a slight quaver in his voice as if he’s not sure. I wink. “Since it’s Christmas, I’ll let it go.”

“Come on, Little Liv. Let’s go get washed up for dinner so we can open presents.”

“I’m not little!” She squeaks but tucks her hand into her brother’s and hops down the hall. Ava follows sedately behind as if she’s eighteen and not eight. The three are my pride and joy. I feel so fucking lucky I could explode.

Charlee comes over and tucks herself under my arm. Her fingers burrow under my shirt, the cold digits sending chills along my spine.

“You’re an evil woman,” I say, pulling her hands out from under my clothes and bringing them up to my mouth so I can blow some hot air onto them.

“Everything all taken care of?” she asks.

I kiss her fingers and then her cheek and then her mouth, her cold lips parting under mine. My tongue slips inside, sweeping around the warm cavern to tangle with her tongue. I place her warm hands back under my shirt and pull her closer.

“The kids,” she whispers against my mouth.

“I know.” I kiss her again and then lean back to stare at her rosy mouth. “Damn, but how are you more gorgeous today than when I first saw you?”

“It’s the snow and cold. My cheeks are pink.”

“No. It’s just you.” I press my lips against her forehead. “Aging is better than wine. Can’t wait to bend you over the sink tonight and fuck you until you’re breathless.”

“You sweet talker, you,” Charlee teases.

“I’ll let you wear my Christmas gift.”

“I don’t know whether to be excited or scared.”

“Both? It’ll make your orgasm better.” I grab a blue velvet box and hand it to her. “First gift of the season.”

She arches her eyebrows and opens the lid. Her eyes pop wide and she gasps. Inside is a delicate choker of diamonds, shaped like snowflakes falling off thin chains to look like snowfall. “What is this?”

I pluck the necklace out and toss the box aside. “I told you, first gift of the season.”

The necklace looks even more beautiful draped around her neck.

“Mommy, you look like you’re wearing snow!” shouts Olivia as she runs down the hall and launches herself into Charlene’s arms.

“It’s so pretty,” Ava remarks.

Liam pretends he isn’t interested and gives only a nod but his eyes fall to her neck more than once.

“I bought it because your mom and I renewed our vows here about eleven years ago during a big snow storm,” I share. “Snow is like love falling down.”

“Daddy, that’s so pretty,” says Ava in a surprised tone.

“Hey, I can say nice words now and again.”

All four look at me like I’ve sprouted horns.

“Not really. No offense,” Liam add. “You’re just not that type.”

“I saw I love you all the time.” I protest.

Charlee smothers a laugh and then drags me over to the dinner table. “Let’s eat and open presents.”

“I’m practically a poet!” I take my seat.

“Of course you are,” she soothes.

I pick up my fork. “Maybe I’m better with gestures.”

Charlee pats her neck. “You’re very good with the gestures.”

“We know you love us,” Ava adds.

The other two chime in and then they all fall over themselves to declare that it doesn’t matter what words I use, that it’s the thought that counts. I guess I’m not ever going to be one who is overly effusive or full of words but as long as my family knows I love them that’s what is important. All year long we spend time in our busy lives, rushing from school to

work to sporting event to ballet lessons. It's good to come here and unwind, throw snowballs at each other, chase one another down the ski slopes and come home to a hot drink and even hotter love making. All it took to make us realize this was one night snowed in.

* * *

Want Marley's story? Check out Their Snowy Night by Lucy Darling

*their snowy night by
lucy darling*

Law enforcement has never really been my cup of tea—especially since I hacked the FBI when I was only a teenager. That all changes the moment I see Marley. She's the deputy in the small snowy town I just moved to, and I can't get enough of her. So much so that I lure her out to my place every chance I get.

This time though I do it a ahead of a monster snowstorm. In a very mysterious and has-nothing-to-do-with-me turn of events, her tires end up slashed, so now she has to ride out the storm in my warm, cozy house. I have all her favorite things, and I intend to tempt her right into my bed. But when she finds out the lengths I've gone to just to get her in my grasp, will she decide I deserve coal in my stocking instead of the gift of her love?

*other ella goode holiday
books*

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[Snowed Inn for Christmas](#)

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oh snow night by ella goode

“THEY SAY there’s gonna be about a foot of snow dropping on us. You might want to get some bread. We’re running low.”

“Henry, Conn makes his own bread.” Henry’s wife nudges the old man aside to grab my milk. She waves it in my face. “Conn, you want this in a bag?”

“I’ll carry it.”

“It looks like you’ve got the fixin’s for a good stew. I don’t see any meat here, though. You going to use venison? Heard you caught a nice buck the other day. A ten-pointer?”

“There ain’t no ten-pointers around here,” mutters Henry. He’s sitting down on a stool behind the register with a piece of jerky stuck in the side of his mouth.

“Just because you don’t have any luck doesn’t mean that Conn hasn’t. You tell him, Conn.” Old Karen peers up through her round framed eyeglasses.

Behind Karen’s back, Henry gives me a sharp warning glance. This is the reason why I don’t come into town much. It’s too easy to step in shit even if you’re watching where you’re going. I ruffle the shorn hair on top of my head and search for an answer that makes them both happy. “Can’t say that I’ve seen any bucks that size around.”

Henry hoots. “I told you so.”

“That doesn’t mean none exist,” I add hurriedly.

“That’s right.” Karen thumps the bag of flour with a little too much force. I wince. “Just because you don’t see them, doesn’t mean they aren’t out there.”

“If they did exist, I’d have seen ‘em and since I haven’t and neither has Conn, who lives in the freaking woods, they don’t. That’s—what do you call it?”

“It’s not anything,” Karen insists and jams a candy cane toward me. “Here. Put this on one of your pines. I know you aren’t decorating a Christmas tree.”

“Yes, ma’am.” I slide my card into the reader.

“Leave the boy alone. If he don’t want to celebrate Christmas, he shouldn’t have to.”

“It’s because he’s not married,” Karen replies, ripping off the receipt. “You should get married, Conn. Your wife can put up a tree. You’ll like this time more with decorations. They always cheer me up.”

“I don’t like ‘em. You’ve got too much damned stuff, Karen. We don’t need indoor and outdoor shit.”

I grab my two sacks, heft a bag of dog food onto my shoulder and run out of there like my tail’s on fire. Bear greets me with a rough bark when I step out of the store. I jerk my head. “Let’s go.”

The husky lumbers to his feet and races to the truck. I toss the food in the back and then open the front door for him to climb in. “Remind me when I get low again so I don’t have to come into town,” I tell my boy. His tongue hangs out and he nods excitedly. I give him a rough scratch around his ears before climbing into the driver’s seat.

When I moved here to Pine Hollow five years ago, I thought I’d enjoy the small town atmosphere, but just a little exposure made me realize that small town people were missing as many acorns on the tree as the big city people. All I need in life is a computer, a mailbox, my dog, and a stove. Contact with other people is unnecessary.

The wind starts to pick up as I drive toward my lodge located thirty minutes north of Pine Hollow. There isn’t anything up by me but a few cabins that stand empty during the winter and three hundred acres of trees and trails. I cut some of those trails myself and some nature provided.

It's a sanctuary and one I don't want disturbed, so when I come across another car moving slowly on the road, I scowl and pass it. The roads up here should be empty. Snow starts to fall and daylight is slowly fading away. I press the gas pedal. It's nice to be home while the sun's setting over the lake.

I'm going to throw a couple of brats on the grill and pop open a beer. Later, I'll do some work but the good thing about being self-employed is you do shit when you want and right now, I want to relax on the sun porch with Bear at my side while the sun takes a dip in the water.

"How's that sound?" I ask my boy.

He barks in agreement. Dogs really are a man's best friend. You don't have to say a word, but they're on your side. A true ride or die. I give Bear another scratch as I make a left turn down my road. The sight that greets me makes me scowl.

"Scoot back, Bear," I order. He does so immediately. I reach over and grab the handgun out of my glove compartment. The chain that hangs about four feet off the ground across my road is lying on the pea gravel. There are tire tracks that don't match my truck pressed into the sand and rock. I set the gun in my lap and drive across the chain. The road to my house is swervy. I made it that way so it wouldn't be easy to get to my place. I'd see people coming and have time to prepare but it also means people ahead of me can hide and prepare an ambush. I keep a finger on the trigger of my gun as I roll down the road.

No one appears around the first bend or the second. It's not until the roofline of my lodge breaks through the trees that I spot the intruder—or the intruder's car. It's a late model Honda—gray and so plain it looks like it could've been dragged off a military lot. I rifle through my mental rolodex and try to match up any of my former comrades with this car but come up blank.

"Stay," I tell Bear. He nods and watches me silently as I pull the truck to a stop and slide out of it. The gray car is idling, exhaust from the engine spiraling into the air. Except for a small figure in the driver's seat, the car appears to be

empty. Appearances can be deceiving. I slide off the safety and sidle up to the car. No one shoots at me. No windows are rolled down. The person in the vehicle doesn't appear to be moving.

I slam my hand against the glass once. The figure jolts upright, long hair flying as the driver turns to face me. Wide, brilliant blue eyes meet my dark brown ones.

“Fuck.”

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Three of Us (Twins #1) and Belong Together (Twins #2)

I wrote a few motorcycle romances when I first started out.

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His Bold Heart (Chelsea & Wrecker)

Her Secret Pleasure

Captive Ride

The Last Christmas Present: Billionaire Holiday Romance (a Daddy story)

My one and only LGBTQ romance.

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