



*Dear Bexley.
Remember you're mine.
Pollux*

PENNNED PROMISES

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRYNN PAULIN

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Penned Promises

Criminally Yours

By Brynn Paulin

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Penned Promises

by

Brynn Paulin

Dear Pollux,

My sister was supposed to write you, but she flaked out, so I'm writing to say someone is thinking of you out here. I don't know what you did—or anything about you, to tell the truth. That's okay. We can still be pen pals. I hope this finds you well. Be safe.

Bexley

From the first letter she writes, Bexley is the only ray of light in Pollux's slate gray life. He hasn't seen her, but with every word they exchange, he knows. She is his, and somehow soon, he's going to have her in his arms and keep her there. Even the prison bars he's behind won't stop him. With every letter he writes her, he's penning promises between the lines. Promises he will keep, even if he has to die trying.

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Penned Promises

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I love hearing from readers! To keep in touch and follow my news, please visit me on my website at www.brynnpaulin.com.

One



Pollux

Dear ... You,

Okay, I'm not going to say this program is weird, but it is. They asked us to write to inmates, so you'll have some contact with someone who cares from the outside world, but we don't get to know your name. What? Are they just going to hand this letter to a random person and hope it hits?

That seems very impersonal. Pointless. But I'm still going to write you a letter.

My sister was supposed to write you, but she flaked out, so I'm sending a note to say someone is thinking of you out here. I don't know what you did—or anything about you, to tell the truth. Clearly. That's okay. We can still be pen pals. If you want. I'll understand if you think this is dumb. I might. If I got a letter from some rando person, that is.

No matter what, I hope this finds you well. Be safe.

Bexley

I read the letter for probably the fifty-seventh time with a small smile on my face. I knew nothing about this Bexley. I assumed it was a girl. And she still made me smile. The letter said little, yet my so-called criminal mind had deciphered plenty from it. She wasn't an only child. She was responsible, pragmatic, yet had a heart for other people. She had follow-

through, even cleaning up after other's mistakes and messes. She had a kind spirit. And she was damn funny, whether she realized it or not.

She also smelled like flowers. Fresh. Delicate. Pure. I couldn't figure out what kind of bloom, and the faint, unintentional scent had faded by now, but I'd recognize it again the instant I got near her.

For all those reasons, she should probably have zero contact or interaction with me. And for most of those reasons, I didn't give a fuck about "should". My full attention had locked on, and I'd damn well be writing her back.

I reclined back on my bunk and stared at the ceiling of my small cell that had been my so-called home for the last four years and six months. A place I'd been sentenced to for a crime I in no way regretted. And if I was supposed to develop remorse from this stint at the invitation of the state... Well, I hadn't. And I wouldn't. Even if this term were to be extended by years.

My mind drifted to Bexley as it had a million times since getting her letter a couple days ago. Maybe if I had a Bexley waiting for me at home... Maybe then I'd feel regret, but only for the time lost with her, not for the crime.

Harold Freely had deserved what he'd gotten. From me and from the person who'd killed him a few months after I'd been incarcerated. I didn't know who that had been, though I'd been questioned about it and even offered a deal for cooperation. Sadly, I had no name to give, though I knew better than to open my damn mouth. *Snitches get stitches* isn't just a cute rhyme. It's the damn truth.

A blaring buzzer went off, and not long after it, I heard the lock on my cell thud into place. In for the night. It was the only time I relaxed, even though the lights went out. I was sealed in. Safe. This wasn't a super max or anything. It wasn't even the highest security below that, but that didn't mean it wasn't fucking dangerous. I had to watch my back all the time—and I spent plenty of hours in the yard building up my muscle and stamina.

And aligning with allies, though I'd call none of them friends. I had people on the outside who got me shit—shit other guys wanted—and enough ties with the right people that key guards looked the other way with my “stock.” It wasn't anything particularly illegal, no drugs or weapons or the like, but it also wasn't exactly encouraged trade. Whatever kept me safe; I didn't give a shit about rules.

Which was probably why I'd worked well with the Kuznetsovs—the bratva I'd gotten entangled with a few years before landing in here. I was done with that life, though, not going back. Zoran, the head of the organization, understood that, too. I was a liability, but not one who'd be killed off—as long as I kept my damn mouth shut. I'd also done favors for that Russian mafia—favors that ensured my good health when I was free in six months. Again, I knew how that went. I'd get out of this joint and go as far away from here as possible. Because he owed me, Zoran had ensured me he'd help me back onto my feet. After all...the Harold Freely incident had occurred in the course of protecting the child of a member of the “family.” Predators weren't tolerated, even if the fucking state penalized you for taking action.

Thoughts about my future made me wonder where Bexley lived. Of course, the letter didn't say. Wherever she resided, I knew Zoran could get me settled there if Bexley and I got close. He had government ties—i.e. he could get whatever information he wanted. And once I was sprung, I could go wherever I damn well wanted, thanks to “friends.”

I just had to make it a few more months.

And I had to write Bexley back. The letter would go through the service that had matched us, but maybe, I'd give her my address in the message I sent. We could bypass the agency and she could write me directly...if she wanted to. And maybe then, I'd get her address, too.

Or maybe I wouldn't. From her letter, she seemed to be sharp. She wouldn't blithely tell me exactly how to get to her. All I needed was her last name, though. Just one little thing, and I'd take it from there.

The lights went out while I thought, but I started composing the letter in my head.

Dear Bexley,

What and intriguing name...

Two



Bexley

Dear Bexley,

What an intriguing name. I bet it belongs to an even more intriguing person. First of all, my name is Pollux and thank you for writing me. Look! Now we're not strangers anymore.

I'm probably going to be shit at this whole pen pal thing. I've never had one. I've never been much for letter writing at all—even when I was able to email people. But for you, I'll try.

I'm really glad you decided to take over for your sister and brighten my day. That was nice of you. I'm guessing you're a nice person, huh? Probably too nice to be writing me. I'm still gonna write you back though, and I hope to hear from you again.

You really did sent a ray of light to me, and I'm kind of jealous that your letter could have ended up in any old asshole's mail. You're not writing to other people, too, are you? Never mind. That's probably too possessive and presumptuous of me to ask.

Please write me back again. I appreciate the contact with someone outside of here. Tell me about you, what you like to do. Anything, actually.

Waiting impatiently,

Pollux Jones

I struggled for breath as I read Pollux's message. Not for a medical reason but because he stole my breath with his words. Was that silly? That an inmate could arrest the air in my lungs and make my heartbeat a gazillion miles a minute?

I reached up to fist the hair at the back of my head, something I often did while I thought, and came up against skin. Right. No hair. Like I could forget ninety-nine percent of the time? I couldn't. And every day, I mourned the loss of my waist-length wavy near-black tresses. Even now, my eyes stung with tears at the memory of losing it—first cutting it pixie-short in the hope of preserving it, then losing hunks of that at a time. Now, for months, I'd had none.

I didn't go out because of it. That and my bloated, pasty white skin and my absolute absence of an immune system. I stayed in, occasionally saw my family and had no contact with anyone else—except apparently Pollux, an inmate in some prison. And I wasn't sure which one since everything went through the agency my sister had hooked up with. She'd planned to write as a good deed, but as I'd said to Pollux, she'd flaked out. She had a good heart; she just was...flighty.

My phone rang as I considered what I'd write back to Pollux. There was really no question. The minute I'd read his words, I'd known I would. Even without him asking.

"Hello," I answered without looking at who'd called.

"Hey, Bex. Checking in. How're you doing?" My sister, Barlow. Yeah, she might be flighty about some things, but that didn't stop her from calling to see how I was every single day. I thought part of it might be guilt, since we were twins and I was the one who'd gotten sick.

"Same. No throwing up today."

"It's not that part of your chemo cycle. You should be feeling pretty good."

"Yeah, you caught me about to go out and run a marathon."

“You *should* get out,” Barlow said. “You could wear a mask. We could go to the park or someplace open-air. Come with me and Stace and Wynn to the Ren Faire this weekend. It’s mostly outdoors, and we can rest all you want or just sit and watch shows. And I’ll poke anyone with a sword who looks cross-eyed at you—”

“I think I’ll pass on that one. You guys can go have a great time.”

“But you love the Ren Faire. Hell, you write historical romances.”

“Not this year, Low.”

“Bex... You’ve got to get out of your apartment. Did you go to the wig place, at least?”

“Not yet.”

“Sis,” she chided. “I’m coming over in the morning and taking you.”

“You have to make an appointment.” I should know. I’d gone to their site then chickened out about reserving a time.

“I’m logging in to go out there and get it set up. You *will* go with me.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, I do. Get your head out of your ass and appreciate that you’re still alive. And you’re going to get better.”

“You don’t know that.”

“You’ll get better or I’ll come after you and kick your ass.” Her voice cracked on the last words, then I heard her sniffled, though a rustling sound told me she’d tried to hide it. Hell. I closed my eyes, mad at myself for making my sister cry.

“Fine. I’ll go. Just tell me when.”

Low didn’t say anything, and I didn’t hear a sound from her side though I knew we were still connected. Which meant she’d muted me. Darn it, I really had made her cry. That made me feel like shit. Low was a ray of sunshine, which was why the kindergarteners she taught loved her.

“Low-Low,” I murmured. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t,” she rasped back after a moment.

“Okay.” I hated talking about being sick anyway. “So…” I started, looking for a subject change. “I got a letter back today.”

“A fan letter?”

“No. From that program. You know the one you were going to do?”

“Operation Inmate?”

“Yeah. Stupid name. But anyway, I sent him a letter a little over a week ago, and he wrote me back.”

“What did he say?” she asked excitedly.

“Not a lot. He thinks my name is interesting. I’d say he doesn’t know what it’s like to live with an *interesting* name, but his is Pollux.”

“Pollux. I’ve always liked that name.”

“Since when?” I laughed.

“Since that movie, *Face/Off* with Nic Cage and John Travolta. That was one of the character’s names. I don’t remember which one.”

“Okay.” I didn’t even remember the movie, but now, I felt like I should watch it. I suspected it wasn’t really my thing, however. I was more likely to watch *Bridgerton* or *The Crown* or *Kate and Leopold*.

Low and I might be twins, but we had vastly different tastes.

She laughed. “I know you don’t even know the movie. So anyway, did he say why he’s in?”

“No. I think it would be rude to ask him, too. Don’t you?”

“Maybe. I guess. I don’t remember any guy named Pollux on any of my true crime pods, so… So far so good, huh?”

“Oh my God, Low,” I groaned.

“Read me his letter,” she demanded excitedly.

“No!”

“Oh...come on. I hooked you up. You owe me.”

“No.”

“Did he say something personal?” she pushed.

He hadn't, but it was my letter, and I didn't want to share it with her.

“He just said he hasn't done this pen pal thing before, but he's willing to try it. And he asked me to write him back. That's all.”

Mostly.

And now, with her questions, my mind was spinning for *what* to reply when I returned a letter. What *was* he in for? And could I ask?

Three



Pollux

Dear Pollux,

Thank you for telling me your name so I don't have to call you 'hey you.' Thanks for writing me back, too. I wasn't sure anyone would. To answer your question, no, I'm not writing to anyone else.

About me... I like to be outside. I especially like being by the water, which I guess sucks since there's not much in the way of water near here. Good thing I like being in just about any nature, then. I also love to read and to write—stories, specifically. And history. I love history. Just about anything about it, from the far past to learning the background on recent events. I could go on and on, but I won't. Most people get bored when I get on a kick about it.

Even my sister. She's my twin and the closest to me of all my siblings. I think I might have come off mean about her in my first letter to you when I said she was flaky—or however I said that. Don't get me wrong, okay? She's really sweet. People just love her. LOL, she wanted to know all about you. I wouldn't tell her anything—not that there would have been much to tell. I don't know much about you.

Is it okay for me to ask how long you've been in? Is that too nosy? My sister asked what you were in for and I told her I don't know. I also told her I was pretty sure that IS too nosy.

Which I guess is funny coming from me. As a writer, I love to know other people's business. It gives me ideas. Not that I'm looking for ideas from you!!!

Now, you're going to think I'm a weirdo.

Anyway, write me back if you feel like it.

Bexley

This girl... Reading her words brought the biggest grin to my face. God, she was sweet. Clearly. Too sweet for me. The stirring in my pants didn't give a fuck about that. I wanted a taste of the sweetness. I didn't know what she looked like, but I knew she smelled like wildflowers. And she cared about people. Evidently, she was smart, too.

History... Hmm...

I'd never had much of an urge to look into that part of the prison's library. Truthfully, I hadn't had much urge to go to *any* part of the library, despite the fact it had PCs to use for limited access on the internet. I knew this joint had a decent one, though, not something I thought a lot of places like this boasted. I wouldn't know. If I had my way, it was my first and last time in.

By any matter, the library just wasn't my thing. I preferred to just go to the kiosk and download my emails onto my tablet to read in my cell. Which again made me consider giving Bexley my email address here. We could communicate quicker that way.

Glancing at the time, I saw I had an hour before count. I'd already trucked my ass down the block to use the communal restroom this morning, gotten my instant coffee and warmed up my breakfast in the unit's kitchen area. I had time.

After stowing Bexley's letter with the other one, I left my cell for the small library.

"Lux," Jarvis said when I came in. He was from my block, and I guessed this was his job. "Never seen you down here."

I shrugged. "Change of scenery. Thought I might see if I could still read."

He laughed at my joke. “We all know you’re the Einstein of the Cave.” That was what we called our gray section of the prison, each one having it’s own nickname. “What are you looking for? I can point you toward it if it isn’t one of the books they’ve banned for prisoners.”

“History,” I grunted.

He rubbed the side of his nose. “Well, anything on warfare is out, but I think there are a few on what it was like to live in different times. You got a time period?”

Fuck if I knew. “Uh...middle ages?”

“*Time Travelers Guide to the Middle Ages.*” He walked to one of the shelves and pulled out the book before shoving it my way. “You know...” He looked around. “We have a few romances from that period. I think they snuck through the cracks, you know. Probably would have been banned if the powers-that-be had noticed them. Fuck if I’ll tell ‘em.”

Imagine...

“Here.” He shoved another book at me. A well-worn paperback titled, *Marian’s Knight* by Rebecca Laughton. “I’ll get these checked out for you. It’s a two week period.”

I jerked a chin lift at him, hoping Jarvis wouldn’t think we were going to be best friends now.

He eyed the ink showing beneath the sleeves of my T-shirt and I hoped he wasn’t getting other ideas, either.

“You get all your ink on the outside?”

“Yeah.”

“You want anything new, you let me know. I was... That was my job. Before.” Judging from the color showing all over him, getting them had also been his hobby.

“Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Taking the books he’d scanned into the system, I headed back to my cell. I could get in some “studying” before count. Then I’d go stand in line for my shower. Contrary to what was often

shown about prisons, it was a single stall, and it was the only damn ten minutes of alone time I truly had in this place.

“Five minutes to count!” blared over the PA system. “Be on your bunk and be visible!”

I sighed. How many more days in this place?

I hurried my steps to my cell, tossed one book on my desk then took the other along with my pen and paper to my bunk to wait for the second count of five today to be completed—however long that would take. I supposed I could use that time to write back to Bexley.

Four



Bexley

Dear Bexley,

Four and a half years. For first-degree assault with a deadly weapon—I didn't kill him, though. Never intended to, either.

Before you run away and vow never to write me again, I want to tell you the person was a known pedo, and he tried to hurt the kid of a close friend. My only regret is not being more careful. I hope that doesn't scare you off.

After getting your letter, I borrowed some books from the library on history. I haven't started reading them yet, but one is basically a non-fiction guide and the other one is—don't laugh—a romance novel. It's by someone called Rebecca Laughton. Have you heard of her? Judging by the beat-up condition of the book, I guess it must be pretty good.

Anyway, I thought, if you write again, we could talk history. I kind of hate that people wouldn't want to talk with you about it.

About your sister... Don't get me wrong. I'm glad she's flaky. That means I get to talk to you. Speaking of...I'm including my email for here on the bottom of this letter. If you want to write to me that way. It's through the jail system, but it

would be faster. If you want to keep mailing through the postal service, though, I'm fine with that.

You said you have other siblings. Do you have a lot? I have one brother, but he doesn't talk to me. I don't blame him, I guess. He's in college and building a new life away from my messed up family. I do miss him, though.

What do you do? You said you like to write. Do you do something with that? I was a mechanic. Good one, too. I'm hoping to go back to that when I'm out of here.

Hey, talk soon, okay? Like I said, I've included my facility email address. I get to download messages every day and should be able to reply to you by the next day. If you want. But again, if you prefer this way, that's okay too. I hope you do write back. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Pollux

Was he serious? Of all the books in all the world that he could have gotten to read, he'd gotten one of mine? Seriously? It was almost so much of a coincidence I thought it might be a joke.

Dropping the sheet of paper onto my couch, I stood from where I'd been curled into the corner and paced toward my bookshelf and the multiple copies of the twelve books by me shelved there, along with all the other paperbacks crammed in the space.

Had I heard of Rebecca Laughton? Heh! She paid my bills. In fact, I'd been typing away at my keyboard when the mail had arrived and I decided to take a break.

Pollux had gone and checked out history books for me. That wasn't the biggest revelation in the message from him, but I couldn't process that yet. Nor did I want to think too deeply about my feelings on it.

My hands went to my head and my bare scalp without even the hint of stubble, and I walked in a circle, thinking. This was...more than I'd expected, this conversation with Pollux, a convicted felon.

A convicted felon who'd landed in prison because of something...understandable. I *understood* the *why* of what he'd done, while disagreeing with *what* he'd done. And that conflicted me. Was I supposed to be horrified? I wasn't.

And I had his email address. I furrowed my brow wondering if I should message him through it. I could totally use a dummy address. I didn't have to use one he could trace back to me. Honestly, call me stupid, but I wasn't even that worried about it. Judging by what he'd revealed, he would be locked up for a bit, and frankly, I'd grown lonely since I got so sick then was diagnosed. I didn't go out and my friends had drifted away. Low was pretty much my sole connection to anything outside this apartment.

Going to my laptop, I opened my email program and created a new address, my hands shaking the whole time. I wasn't worried. It was excitement vibrating through me.

A knock sounded on my door just as I put Pollux's address into my brand-spanking-new contacts. I glanced at the digital clock on my entertainment console. *Shoot!*

Levering myself up off the couch, which admittedly took a lot more energy than ever before, I headed over to answer.

My sister's eyes scanned over me. "You're not ready."

"I..."

"Look, I know you don't want to go, but sis, you'll feel better when you feel more confident. This place has a great reputation. Stellar reviews. The wigs are so realistic."

"It'll probably itch."

"It might not."

"I don't like anyone touching my head. It's so...not okay," I finished in a whisper.

Leaning in and reaching up, Low splayed her fingertips on either side of my head and brought me forward to lean my forehead against hers.

"Stop making bullshit excuses," she said, without heat in her words.

“It’s not bullshit,” I muttered petulantly.

“You don’t mind when I touch you.”

“I’m used to it. You’ve been in my space since the egg split. Can’t get away from you.”

“Nope,” she agreed with an exaggerated pop of the P. “Now, get your ass in gear so we can go.”

“You’re a pain.”

“Someone has to be the bitch side to your weak-ass one.”

I shook my head. “I love you, Low.”

“I love you, too—and you’re still leaving this apartment with me.”

“Let me get a scarf.”

“You know, lots of women shave their heads. You could just be a badass.”

I sighed and raised an eyebrow at her—well, I would have if I had them. And I looked damned weird without the little rebel unibrow wannabees. “Most women don’t have this moon-face bloat happening.”

“You’re such a trendsetter.”

Shaking my head, I grabbed the scarf I’d left beside my laptop on my coffee table. I’d set it out earlier but gotten distracted.

“I got another letter today,” I said casually as I tied it into place.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. He told me what he did and why he’s in. I’m kinda not sure what to think.”

“Why not? Are you scared to write him back because of it?”

We headed slowly down the hallway to the elevator, Low easing her pace, so she didn’t leave me behind.

“No. I’m not, and that’s what confuses me. He’s in for assaulting a child molester. He didn’t kill the guy.”

“Too bad.” She jabbed the elevator button after we stepped in.
“I mean, not so he’s in longer. I don’t mean that. Whatever he got, it had to be less than a murder charge. It sucks when the bad people get off and the good ones are screwed.”

I chuckled, the sound rasping up my dry throat. “He never said he was good.”

“True. Look at you falling for the bad boys. Never would have thought it.”

“I didn’t fall for him.”

“Right. That’s why you sound so excited whenever you bring him up—which has been in every conversation.”

Dang it. I had to be more careful.

She put her arm around my waist and leaned her head on my shoulder. “And don’t you dare think of stopping. He’s bringing you life I haven’t seen in forever. Remember what the therapist said about mindset and positive outlooks and finding joy... If he’s bringing you joy, roll with it. Okay?”

I loved my sister so much. And she was right. The simple act of corresponding with Pollux *did* bring me joy. As soon as I got through this hell of having a wig fitted, I’d write him back and lose myself in his words.

Five



Pollux

I made a face when I saw that I had a new email from an address I didn't know. It was rare that I got anything weird. Strangely, the spam system here was top notch.

Was it Bexley? My heart raced, and I couldn't wait for my mail to finish downloading so I could get back to my cell to read it.

"Lux...how's the book?"

I glanced over at Jarvis. Fuck. Now, this guy thought we were besties. I'd make a smartass remark about braiding each other's hair and having a sleepover, but around here, that would be a fatal mistake. I wasn't inviting any of that shit. I was a short-timer with very specific tastes that didn't involve being gay for the stay.

I shrugged, noncommittal. "It's something to read. Kinda beat up."

"It's a favorite. Let me know if there's anything particular you want. I can hold it aside."

I gave a single nod. "Getting a coffee. Done here," I said, disconnecting from the kiosk. "All yours."

Not looking back, I headed over to the kitchenette shared by this part of the block. I pulled a packet of instant coffee from

my pocket, thankful Zoran kept me supplied with basics to help me get by. One of the emails I'd gotten was from him.

On the surface, I knew he would ask what I needed. Deeper, I knew he'd sent me a coded message, asking the same question but at a deeper level. Since we both knew that my mail was monitored, we didn't speak freely.

Once I had my hot water and stirred in my instant granules, I made my way back to my cell, avoiding people on the way. Hopefully, I could finish my drink before count check was called. I was Jonesing for my Bexley fix harder than one of the many junkies on the seediest side of Chicago.

Back in my cell, I looked around to ensure nothing was touched. I had it pretty easy here—most were somewhat scared of me and/or my connections to the Kuznetsov bratva—but I couldn't let down my guard for a minute. The moment I did, someone would have my back, and not in anyway I was interested in.

Everything appeared as I'd left it.

I set down my cup then opened my mail icon on my tablet. Despite what I was doing, I had no internet. The only connection to the outside world came when I connected through the kiosk, and it was limited at best.

I scanned the new mail. I had a message from Zoran, one from my lawyer and a surprising one from my brother. The fourth was from the unknown email.

I ignored everything but that one.

Dear Pollux,

Hey! It's Bexley. I hope I didn't mess this up and the message gets through to you. I got your letter today and I decided to write you right away...

I smiled as I took in her short note that she mostly wrote, just to try out the system.

About what you told me... It doesn't scare me. I have to admit, I get it. Is that bad? How could it be?

Honestly, I don't know what to think. It doesn't scare me, though, and I'm going to keep writing.

Bexley

Damn. This woman. Just reading her words stirred things in my pants that were better left dead for now. One negative tradeoff for email versus snail mail: I didn't get any of her arousing scent to momentarily cut away the stale air here.

Her sweet words would have to hold me over until I was able to be with her.

Yeah, I'd decided that. She was mine. I'd get out of this hell and find my heaven. With the information I had, I'd have Zoran track her down. There wasn't a lot to go by, but his bratva organization worked magic. I'd make it clear all I wanted was her location, not an iota more. Not her eye color, not her hair color, not the shape of her body. I wanted to discover that myself, and I didn't want any of those Russians putting their sights on her.

I just needed her location. I'd go to her in a few months, convince her of what I'd felt in my soul from the first letter, and never revisit my past. I'd never risk that. I'd never do anything to be pulled away from her.

As the count announcement came over the overhead intercom, I climbed onto my bunk, tablet on my lap, and started composing a letter back to her, so she knew her message had gotten through the new system okay. I shared my schedule with her so she knew when she'd get responses from me.

Dear Bexley,

Have I told you how much I love your name? Do you shorten it? Bex? Lee? Bexaroonie? Some people call me Lux, but I don't really like it.

Obviously, I got your message okay. Thanks for taking the chance to mail me that way. I get to check and download/upload my mail once a day in the morning, so expect a message back the day after you write me. Does that make sense?

I hope you won't get bored with my day-to-day. I have lots of thoughts in my head though, so I won't bore you with the humdrum in here. Maybe it's because none of us are considered dangerous and none of us are lifers, but for the most part we're just all trying to get through and get out. Things happen, yeah, but we don't have daily fights in the yard and it's been 326 days since the last shanking.

I'm joking. There hasn't been one in the time I've been here, but we're all still careful, you know? There are some guys who are...worrisome. Most of us steer clear, and they stay in their own group. That's not to say they don't cause problems. So I stay vigilant.

Actually, I'm kinda a counselor of sorts around here. Whenever a new guy comes in and they're worried about his frame of mind, putting him on a suicide watch, they pull me in—inconveniently, that's usually in the middle of the night. But I get woken and taken to his holding cell. Talk him down. Tell him what to expect and how to be safe. Breaks my fucking heart when it's a scared eighteen year old kid, who didn't have the damn sense to heed all the warnings they got.

I'm one to talk. Look where I am. But I didn't have warnings—just an anger issue when it comes to molesters, I guess. Not looking for sympathy. It is what it is and I did what I did. I do think my crime earned me some cred and respect here though—not because I can use my fists and weapons but because no one has mercy on those guys—and if there was a shanking, that's who it'd be.

But enough of that. I'm thinking of deleting it. I won't. You know, so you have an idea of what I do and who I am. It's a far cry from my old job. Like I said before, I was a mechanic. That's what I intend to go back to. I was on my way to opening my own place and that's my plan for after...

So about this history stuff? Is there a particular era you like? Both the books I got are medieval. Seems so far off, but some of the stuff...

We haven't changed at all in all these centuries, have we? There's always the powerful guy ruling the lives of the

little guy, and the little guy having no way out, but trying to find a way. Still wars and injustice and backward thinking; still those who helped others, those who clawed their way up, and tried to make the world a better place through whatever their skill was.

I see myself in all of it I think, though I'm tired of being another peon. You know?

I hope this finds you well. Tell me more about Bexaroonie.

Always,

Pollux

Six



Bexley

I'd like to meet you.

Dismayed, I stared at the words while the drip of chemo flowed into my vein. Talking to Pollux had been going so well. It had been six weeks since I sent him the first email; almost eight since I mailed the first letter. We'd discussed so much, including that I'd never call him Lux, if he never called me Bexaroonie.

He'd told me it would almost be worth it.

Shit-stirrer.

We talked about everything *except* my real last name, my real job, where I lived, my cancer—Hodgkin's lymphoma that he didn't know about—and when he was getting out. So...a lot of things had been off the table. We still found a million other things to correspond about. Which was good since I sent him at least a short note every day, and he always wrote back.

I knew he was getting out sometime within the year, though. He'd alluded to it, to his future life, but we hadn't shared specifics. I hadn't asked, and apparently, he'd taken his cue from that.

It wasn't that I didn't want to know, but I knew this back and forth with my new friend would end when he was released, and I dreaded it—which made me feel selfish and guilty since

I should only feel happy for him. I couldn't help it; I'd be a little heartbroken when he got on with his life. God knew, he wouldn't need the contact with the outside world anymore—he'd be part of that outside world again.

My thoughts caught up in him, I carefully folded his letter I'd printed out and stuck it into the small tote I brought with me to my several hours of chemo.

I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to push away the weakness that weighed me down today and the headache that had plagued me for days. It was par for the course, and part of what I'd come to expect.

When I'd first started this, I'd been terrified. That wasn't to say I wasn't still scared.

Lots of things frightened me. Sickness, side effects, these treatments not working.

That I'd never get past this and move on with my life. There was a heavy probability that these treatments would kill my fertility, too. Specialists could have harvested eggs, but my doctors had all agreed I shouldn't delay the weeks required to do that.

All of these things weighed on me. I didn't feel the terror of the treatment anymore, though.

“You okay, hon?”

I glanced over at Glenna, fellow patient and the unofficial hospital mom. “Yeah, just thinking.”

Truly, it had been one of the few moments I wasn't thinking of my prison pen pal. Pollux was never far from my mind these days. I'd even named a new character after him.

Glenna shook her head, the tails of her bright geometric-patterned scarf brushing her shoulders. She set down the water bottle she'd been holding, careful not to knock her IV line.

“No, you're white as a sheet. And shaking. You're... Are you sweating? It's cool in here.”

“I... No...” Oh, God. I did feel clammy. Woozy. Almost as if Glenna had spoken it into existence, my vision started to shift

and gray.

Vaguely, I heard her yell out. A ringing filled my ears. An alarm? The blood rushing through my head?

I felt hands on me, then nothing as the darkness pulled me under.

* * *

Beeping pierced my consciousness as I blinked my eyes open in the too bright room. I knew immediately, I was in a hospital bed—not my first of the year, though last time was when I’d found out my diagnosis. Was I worse?

Was that why I was here?

The beeping of the monitor increased while panic rifled through me. Oh God! All this and...

“Hey! Hey...hey...” Low leaned over me, her mouth and nose masked up. “It’s okay. God, Bexley, you’re finally awake. We were so scared.”

“What happened?” I asked in a raspy whisper.

“You got sick, baby,” she said, her cool fingers smoothing along my cheek. “Really, really sick. I was so scared. I’ve been here almost every minute I haven’t been at school.”

My eyes hurt as I stared at her. They seemed so dry, begging me to close them again just to protect them from the light and the air. I squeezed my lids shut then blinked a few times. Meanwhile, her words started to settle in.

Every minute she wasn’t at the school?

“How long?” I asked. Each word scraped like sandpaper in my throat, almost too difficult to speak.

“Three weeks.” Her hand cupped my cheek. “You were in and out. They told us, you might not remember us being here. They’ve been treating you still, pumping you with so many drugs to help fight the infection since your immune system is shit right now. Sometimes, you couldn’t breathe. Other times your blood pressure was so low. I was terrified. Bex...”

Her voice cracked, but even without the audible clue, I'd been able to feel her pain from the moment I'd woken. Twin thing, maybe.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't," she chided, her eyes glassy with unshed tears. "I'm just glad you're doing better. When you were...stable..." She rolled her lips together, and I tried to move my hand to touch her, to comfort her. "The doctors ran some tests. A bunch. You'd probably understand what they are and what they're for. Most of it was gibberish to me, even though I know I've been there for some of your appointments before. They should be able to give you results today."

"Mmm 'kay." My eyes shifted around the room, taking in the bright, stark white space.

A board with the list of my care staff and who was on duty for each. Some flowers—probably from Low since they were fresh. I doubted my brothers had come up, and knowing my parents, they'd have only come in and out for a few minutes at a time. It wasn't that they didn't care; they just...didn't have the mental capacity to deal with a life-threatening disease. They dumped everything on Low.

Near the flowers there was a plethora of construction paper cards with colorful drawings on the white paper pasted to them.

"Your kids?" I asked her, scanning them.

"Yeah...they were all worried about you. They know you're sick. In the hospital. Just not the why of it. They wanted to make you feel better."

"That's sweet," I said, the gesture taking my thoughts on an odd tangent to the possibility I might not have kids ever. Not that I had a man—

Oh, God. Pollux.

He was gonna think...

Shoot! He'd think I'd ghosted him because he'd said he wanted to meet me. No!

No...

My heart broke. And until I got home, there was nothing I could do. How long would I be here? I still felt weak. Cold. Tired. I needed to tell him, but I had no way. And would he even believe why I'd disappeared? Probably not.

Seven



Pollux

The first day, I thought there must be a glitch in the system or our emails and my download times had just not crossed. The next day, low-key panic had started to bubble through me, the hand of fate squeezing my heart.

Had I asked too much? I had, hadn't I? I'd asked too much.

By a week and a half later, I paced like a crazed animal. Keeping it together, despite my release date coming, was impossible. What the fuck did I care about getting out, anyway. Bexley had rejected me.

I was already looking for a fight, practically daring someone to start something with me, when I stomped into the library. I was so up in my head, I almost didn't recognize what was in front of me when I walked in.

Oh...fuck to the no.

A pair of guys had Jarvis pinned to the wall between two shelves while he fought to get free from the muscle-bound assholes. Thugs from that group we all avoided. The outcasts who didn't mesh with the rest of us. They'd caught Jarvis unaware and come in a group, knowing he'd have to be overpowered. Jar wasn't a tiny or weak guy.

"Go ahead and wear yourself out," the bald one of them, with tattoos along the sides of his head, said to him. "It'll make it

easier by the time I get my turn.”

Jarvis bellowed, and his struggles increased. A red flush crawled up his neck while he fought. His wild eyes met mine as he twisted and caught a glimpse of me, but my attention quickly turned to the guy behind him, who was unfastening his pants. My eyes narrowed on the asshole, a wannabe who didn't know who he dealt with in here—like a guy who'd done jobs for the Russian mafia.

I didn't even think, muscle memory leading me before my brain engaged. Though an enraged bellow roared inside me, I didn't make a sound as I grasped the back of Jarvis' circulation-desk chair, heaved it into the air, and clocked it across the would-be rapist's face.

I was on him before either of the others reacted. He screamed when I broke his arm then pivot on his balls to face baldy, who'd decided he was the one who'd fight me.

“That really what you want to do?” I taunted.

“Your ass is mine.”

“You wish. You're also gonna wish you weren't such a dumbass by the time I'm done—but there's no helping that, is there, stupid fuck?”

Honestly, these guys had picked the best time to attack my friend—not friend. The *librarian*. My librarian. I had frustration and rage pent up inside me from Bexley ghosting me. Their bodies would be suitable punching bags.

From my peripheral vision, I saw Jarvis whaling on the remaining inmate who'd pinned him. Good. Let him get in his licks. I'd do this guy—but not in the way he deserved.

I'd called it right on him being stupid. He didn't even expect the heel of my palm jamming into his nose when he advanced. What? He'd thought I'd just stand there? That I wouldn't deliver a blow? It took nothing to sweep his legs from under him. He flew through the air like King Kong falling off the Empire State Building, tumbling with the momentum and landing hard atop the ringleader I'd taken down first. The man screamed, the impact likely jarring his broken arm.

Jarvis slammed his attacker's head into the brick wall. He let him slide to the floor, just as guards came running in. I hadn't heard an alarm, but someone had to have alerted them.

"Cameras," Jarvis muttered while we both raised our arm and knelt. The guards were yelling, but I didn't even understand their garble of words. At least, the video feed should show what had happened. I hoped.

"You okay?" I muttered to Jarvis.

"Yeah... 'cept my pride."

We were both yanked up and marched out of the library, and once again, I had zero remorse for the beating I'd doled out.

* * *

I sat against the cell wall with my knees drawn up and my arms resting on them, while I stared at the light green brick across from me. Landing in solitary wasn't my idea of a good time. I was used to having the roam of our block as long as I followed the rules. Always had. In almost five years, I'd never been a problem.

Now, I'd likely be in this shithole even longer.

"Doesn't fucking matter," I muttered to myself. "Do you really think she wrote you while you were in here? You asked too much. Now, you lost her."

My head rolled back on the surface behind me, and I stared at the ceiling.

"Doesn't matter, though, does it? Z found her."

Yeah, I knew where Bexley Laughton lived. His man had had zero problem hacking into the pen pal program, Operation Inmate. Before their system could have even detected there was an intruder, he'd had her full name and address. Z had offered to get a full dossier on her, but I'd told him no. I had what I needed.

When I got out of here, no matter if it was still in a couple weeks or longer due to this altercation, I would go to her. I'd get her to listen to me. I'd get her to fall in love with me as much as I was in love with her.

“I love her.” I closed my eyes, wishing she were in front of me —no...wishing she was in my arms. “I love you, Bexley Laughton. I’m not letting you get away.”

Eight



Bexley

Bexley,

Baby, I'm hoping our emails just crossed. I'll hear from you tomorrow, yes? I hope so. It's been 24 hours without a message from you, and I already miss you. Someday, when I get out of here, I won't let a morning go by without talking to you. Breakfasts... I'm a breakfast gourmet. It might take some remembering to get back in the saddle, but I'll make you the best breakfasts. What's your favorite?

Pollux

My eyes burned as I read the oldest unread message from him. His need for connection was palpable and... It was more than that of a friend. It was from the heart. Like each of my letters had been.

All said, I'd been in the hospital for almost a month and a half. I'd just gotten home a couple hours ago. This was the first I was able to log into my mail, since I'd had to convince Low that I was fine on my own. In the end, I kind of gave her a hug then bluntly told her I loved her but to get the hell out.

Guilt over that might come later, but for almost a month and a half she'd been like glue, only leaving to go to work. She needed to have some down time, too. Away from her sick sister.

Almost six weeks...

Could I write to Pollux? Would he understand? I'd for sure have to tell him about the cancer, something I hadn't wanted to share. People always thought different of me when they knew. There had been freedom in Pollux knowing me as healthy Bex.

But I had good news about that, right? My test results showed the cancer was gone, for all intents. Starting next week, I'd start several weeks of radiation, with the team using data collected before my chemo, to pinpoint where to aim.

Despite the coming treatments, I felt as if I could breathe again for the first time in six months. Now to just stay healthy and not get any more infections to land me in the hospital, again.

I clicked another email, and my eyes stung immediately at the opening words. God, I'd hurt him so bad.

Please, baby. I'm sorry if I pushed you too hard. Talk to me, please. I hope you're at least opening my messages.

Pushed me too hard? Yeah, it had kind of startled me when he'd said he wanted to see me. And...that was on me, not him. I just looked so bad from my treatments. No hair. Pale, pale dry skin. Puffy features from medications I'd been given. An otherwise gaunt body from often being unable to eat.

In my eyes, I was a hot mess. So, yeah, I didn't want him to see that.

I'm sorry I didn't write you for a week. I was in solitary. One of the guys—I guess he's a friend—was getting ganged up on. I intervened. Jar and I won the fight, but we both ended up in trouble. Kind of. It wasn't our fault, and the guards and warden knew it. They locked us up as an example, but it didn't extend my sentence. Not his, either.

Please write me back. I miss you...

My head dropped forward when I saw how many weeks ago that was. Three. There were two more messages, and when I read them, they said close to the same. Pleas to please write him back.

Then nothing.

But the last one, two weeks ago...

My Bexley,

I suppose, I have to take this as my answer. Your silence guts me. Your absence from my life makes the hours unbearable. I miss you.

I guess... I guess this is goodbye. For now. If our paths are to ever cross, I hope you will let me thank you for everything you gave me while I was in here. You were everything, even if you don't know it.

I'm getting out today. Yeah. This guy is finally going to be free again. When I walk outside and breathe the clean, FREE air, I'll think of you and wish you were out there greeting me.

Goodbye love,

Pollux

My fist crushed to my lips as a loud sob wailed through my apartment. No! Not only did he think I deserted him, but now, I couldn't contact him.

Maybe I could find him? Track him down? His last name was Jones, but it was so common. Maybe not the Pollux part, though. But would he even want to be found? Should I try... even just to tell him I was sorry and I'd never meant to hurt him.

That I loved him.

Falling sideways onto the couch, I cried. I'd lost him. This was just another thing that cancer had managed to steal from me.

* * *

"Isn't it gorgeous?" Low gushed beside me, the next day, as we walked through the park not far from my apartment. I'd told her to go away yesterday, but she'd lasted until dinnertime when she'd showed up with my favorite chicken sandwiches and fries.

"It is. Warm for spring, too," I agreed, though I tugged my sweater tighter around me. "You know, you don't have to

babysit me.” It was a half-hearted chide. She’d been such a rock for me, and I didn’t want to hurt her feelings. “I know you have your own life—one you put on hold for six months for me. And I appreciate it, but... You can’t sacrifice yourself for me. I know you have David—”

“Had,” she interrupted. “He broke up with me.”

I pressed my lips together and drew in a deep breath through my nose.

“Because of me?”

“No. Because he’s an asshole. If *his* sister was sick, I would have stuck by him.” She waved a hand, as if she hadn’t just, in not so many words, said *yes, that was why*.

“I’m sorry.”

She blew out an annoyed sound. “Don’t be. If nothing else, you saved me from years of boring sex with a cold-hearted snake. Someday, I’ll meet a good guy. It wasn’t David. But speaking off guys—”

I shook my head, tears burning in my eyes. God, I cried so easily lately. I hated it. Last night, I’d tried to jot down notes about two of my characters having an argument, and I’d started bawling—from notes!

“That’s over,” I managed.

“Over? Why?”

“He thinks I ghosted him.”

“Just write him a letter. Tell him what happened. I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

“He’s out. He was released. He sent me a goodbye message while I was in the hospital. I don’t have a way to write him, now. I mean, maybe, if I hadn’t been in the hospital and we’d still been talking, maybe, he would have sent me his address or the address of a place where he could go collect mail. But we weren’t talking because—well, you know why.”

I stared over the sparkling pond in the center of the park, yards away from the asphalt track where we strolled. It looked so

pretty in the bright spring sunlight. Too pretty for my dark, morose mood.

“It was just a chapter of my life that’s over now,” I said and forced a smile. “I gave him a distraction, some light from the outside, a friendly voice. And now, it’s time for us both to move on. Heck, maybe, I’ll ask Operation Inmate if they have someone else I can write.”

I wouldn’t. I was too raw from my feelings for Pollux. I’d been silly and gotten too attached.

Closing my eyes, I turned my face up to the sun, absorbing the warmth on my skin.

Pollux, wherever you are, I wish you the very best life. I miss you.

“Maybe, I should,” Low said.

“Should what?”

“Get a name and write to an inmate. You liked it.”

I shrugged, not wishing my sister any pain. She was actually far more soft-hearted than me. “Until I didn’t. That sucked.”

“That wasn’t your fault. And it wasn’t his fault, either. It was just...a fluke. Bad luck.”

“Yeah. Bad luck,” I agreed. My arms wrapped around my waist while we continued our walk.

Bad luck...

It had been good, our connection, but now, it was over, and I needed to get on with living my life. That’s what Pollux would want; I knew it.

Nine



Pollux

Breathing in, I inhaled the scent of oil and rubber in my shiny, new garage. New to me, anyway. It had been here in this location for fifty years, actually, before the owner had put it up for sale eighteen months ago, so he could retire.

The location was in neither a good nor a bad neighborhood. But it was on a busy street in an older section of the city, with other shops that had grown up around the garage. Grand Street Motors had been one of the original businesses in the area. It was a staple to the neighborhood, and several people had already stopped by while I'd been setting up to tell me how happy they were that the garage was reopening.

And it was a short walk to Bexley's apartment from here.

My hands smoothed over my crisp, white button-down shirt with rolled up sleeves and jeans. I hadn't been working today, not on anything that would get me dirty, anyway. I'd been in the office dealing with paperwork and final orders before our grand opening next week.

Zoran had done me a solid and taken care of just about everything. The final thank you before we parted ways for good.

Since I'd served my whole sentence, I didn't have to check in with anyone and I was free to go wherever I wanted. I wanted

to be nowhere but near Bexley, and Zoran had known that.

And today was finally the time to claim my Bexley. I'd barely been able to contain my agitation long enough to work today. I had a plan, though. A difficult plan since all I wanted to do was run to her.

But no, I'd vowed to get things up and running, to get solid ground beneath me, and then make her mine, make her understand I wasn't giving her up. She might be scared, but I'd make her see how right we were together.

She had a know. She had to.

"Heading out, boss?"

I glanced over at my employee, Harv, the first one I'd hired of my three mechanics. Though I'd been tempted to do everything myself, in a busy area like this, there was no way that I could efficiently run the auto repair business without some help. Especially while pursuing Bexley at the same time.

I had to be successful for her. I had to be the man she deserved. And maybe, I really couldn't be. She deserves way better than me. But I wouldn't give her up. So instead, I'd give her the best version of myself that was possible.

"Yeah, let's close down. Call it a day, call it a week. Monday will be busy." Hopefully.

Fifteen minutes later, everything was locked up, and I was pounding the pavement on my way to my girl. I didn't get butterflies—I was a fucking man—but nerves battered my insides, knowing I would see her in minutes. Hopefully, she'd open the door for me and I wouldn't have to camp out.

Her building was nice. I'd seen it at least a hundred times by now. Cased the joint. Yeah, I'd been giving her time while I set up my place, but that didn't mean I wasn't stalking the hell out of her. Not that I had actually set eyes on my girl yet.

That changed today.

Standing outside, I eyed the six story, white brick building. I was about to cross the street when two women exited the front

doors. Riveted in place, I stared. Both women were beautiful, but one was clearly ill or recovering. They looked similar, obviously sisters—maybe even twins—the healthier girl having long, dark hair and almost luminescent skin. But she wasn't the one who held my attention.

Like a kick to the gut, I knew the other female was my Bexley. I couldn't explain how I knew. I just did. It was as if something, someone, had reached out and grabbed me around the dick.

My feet were moving before I even had the thought to put myself into motion. The pair were walking down the street, and I followed, needing to know where they were going. needing to get closer.

My gaze glued to her, I watched how she walked, strong, but yet not. Before me was a woman determined to get better. A fighter. A warrior. I stared at the blue scarf on her head. Cancer? Was that it? Why hasn't she told me?

It didn't matter. Fuck, yes, it did. Of course, it did. Everything in me wanted her to be whole and healthy. But as far as me claiming her, as far as making her mine, as far as standing next to her and helping her to get to that place, I was her man.

The farmers market where we ended up was busy. Never letting her stray from my sight, I watched as she and her sister—that had to be her sister, Low—browsed through the booths. It was way too busy in here for my liking, with way, way too many men in proximity to my woman.

A few times, she looked around as if searching someone out. Did she feel me staring? Did she sense I was so close, that her man was here to claim her?

A bolt of awareness sliced through me when her green eyes locked on me.

Fuck... She was so damn beautiful. Yeah, whatever ailment she had, and the treatment for it, had been brutal, but her beauty remained. I could see it. It captivated me. she enraptured me.

She jumped as if realizing she'd been gaping at me and quickly shifted her gaze away. I edged closer while she stared at the soap display before her.

“Oh, crap,” I heard Low say, reminding me she still stood beside Bex. Jesus, everything else faded away when I stared at my woman. She would be dangerous to my wellbeing.

Low's phone was in her hand, and she stared down at it.

“What?” Bex asked.

“There's a stupid emergency at the school, and security needs me to go in to deal with it. I'm the person on call for this weekend.”

My girl turned worried eyes on her sister. “Will you be okay?”

“Oh...yeah. Sure. They just need an authority figure or something to be there. I *am* the authorized lucky bitch. So I have to go tell security how to do their job or something stupid like that. I just feel bad that we have to cut our evening short.”

“Oh gosh. It's no big deal.”

“Do you want me to walk you home?”

Bex placed a fragile hand on her sister's arm. “I'm fine, Low-Low. I'm a big girl, and can take care of myself.”

Low looked uncertain until Bexley gave her a hard stare, and Low nodded, conceding the point, though she clearly didn't agree.

My heart squeezed at the conversation. Not because of the sisterly bond and how much Bex was loved. No, it was because it confirmed what I'd known in my soul. The ethereal woman who'd captivated me really was my Bexley. I'd found her, and now, she was mine.

As Low walked away, it was time for me to make my move.

Ten



Bexley

I felt him a moment before his dark, alluring scent wafted to me. Clean with notes of leather and smoke, it meshed with the danger that rolled off him, but I wasn't scared. Why wasn't I scared? I should be running for help. Right?

Warmth emanated from him into me where our arms touched. God, it felt good. I wanted to lean into him, beg him to wrap me in those powerful arms. Guilt niggled at me, but I couldn't help reminding myself Pollux was in the past, and this guy... He reminded me of how I'd imagined Pollux would be. Big, dark hair and eyes, tattoos I wanted to trace and explore with my fingers.

I felt tiny beside him, but somehow, not frail, which was a nice change from my normal situation.

The side of his hand, just the pinky finger, *only* the pinky finger, brushed against mine sending shivers cascading through me. My core, that I'd feared was long dead, tingled then clenched waking up from its over a half-year slumber.

"Hi," he said, the low rumble almost making me moan.
Dear...God...

"Hi," I breathed in a strangled gasp, my voice tremulous with my arousal. Had I ever been this attracted to a man? No. I knew it was how he looked, how he smelled, coupled with the

image of Pollux I carried in my heart. It was a disservice to this guy to mesh him with another, but I couldn't walk away. I couldn't shut him down.

"You like..." He glanced at the wares before us. "Goat's milk soap?"

"The lotion is nice, but really, I'm just browsing. I haven't been out much lately."

"No?"

I raised a brow at him, then a hot flush prickled up my neck when I remembered there was no brow to raise. I hoped now that chemo was finished my hair would start growing back.

His bottom lip rolled between his teeth as he studied me, the intensity in his eyes never waning. "Would you go out with me?"

He couldn't have stunned me more if he'd told me he was Jason Momoa in disguise.

I gaped at him, something I'd found myself doing a lot since first meeting his steady perusal.

"I..." Damn it. This was so not fair. My head shook. "I-I can't. I, um, I'm just out of a relationship, and, um, I'm still getting over it."

That didn't set him back at all. His steady stare still seemed to probe inside me to find my secrets. If he knew, he'd probably think I was a fool to have fallen for a prison pen pal. And I probably was an idiot to turn down the first hot guy to be interested in me. Ever. Before *or* after me getting sick.

"Because of the cancer?" he asked bluntly.

"Sort of, but no. Actually, he didn't know about it. He didn't know I landed in the hospital for over a month. It was a...a communication problem. Then...it was too late."

And why the hell was I telling him this? Was his heady scent some sort of truth serum? Suddenly, I couldn't seem to shut up.

His eyes lit up, and a small smile transformed his face—still dangerous yet... He stole my breath. Had I told him no to a date? I wanted to pull him down and kiss him until I forgot the world existed, forgot all the shit storm that had taken over my life, forgot anything but his body against mine. Over mine. In mine.

Holy hell.

“It’s never too late,” he argued, his chin dipped in a nod as if to confirm his statement. His near black eyes remained ever trained on me, so full of intent that should terrify me but didn’t. “I’m sure this guy would be a fool to dump you.”

My mouth turned dry, all the moisture escaping to the south. I couldn’t walk away. I was incapable. Helpless to just go home and forget this meeting had ever happened.

“Maybe...” I drew in a fortifying breath. “Maybe, I *will* have that drink—as two people who just want to talk.” I couldn’t agree to more than that. Something told me my agreement was all the opening he needed.

“Fair enough,” he conceded. “The woman you were with...? Do you need to find her?”

He glanced around, not fooling me for a moment. He knew Low as gone. He knew I was at his mercy—thought so anyway. I was stronger than he knew. Usually, anyway. Right now, I kind of wanted to do whatever he wanted. I wouldn’t, of course. I wasn’t so far under his spell that I’d lost my mental facilities. Said brain, however, really, really wanted him. More of me than my brain desired him. Far more.

I smirked. “Maybe I shouldn’t tell you, but she got called away. Emergency. She was going to take me home, but I insisted I stay.”

“Thank you for trusting me.” His fisted, tattooed hand tapped over his heart. “I vow you’ll never be safer than you are with me.”

God help me, but I believed him.

He nodded to the row of buildings across the street. “We can just go to that little pub restaurant over there. Very close. Very

public.”

“I love that place, actually.” Graydon’s was a quint mix of Irish pub and classic Americana. Guinness stew and a pint or burgers and Pabst Blue Ribbon. It was loud and busy, the mood always full of cheer.

That single nod again. His arm circled my waist as he guided me out of the market then across the street, his gaze going left and right as if he expected a car to come from nowhere and damage me.

Moments later, we stepped into the dim interior of the restaurant, and as expected, the Friday night merriment already rang through the establishment. It was the sort of place where you found your own seat, and once we did, we sat across from each other in the dark wood booth, again just staring at each other.

Was I crazy to do this?

He grabbed one of the menus propped up by the condiments against the wall. “How about an appetizer? We probably shouldn’t drink on an empty stomach. Can you drink?” he asked suddenly, as if aghast he hadn’t thought of that.

“Yeah, but I don’t. I’ll just have a Coke. The sampler platter is good, if you’re really hungry, or the pretzel bites or nachos. Depends on what you feel like.”

“What do you feel like?”

Taking you home.

The tip of my tongue dampened my lips. Shoot, I was in trouble here. “The pretzels settle well.”

As if by magic, the waitress appeared, and he gave our order, ignoring her flirting. However, I wanted to kick her. Geez, I was sitting right here.

“I’d think that wouldn’t be an issue,” I said. “Drinking on an empty stomach.”

“Because of my size?” He shrugged. “Lately, I’m a lightweight. Haven’t had a beer in about five and a half years.”

My lips parted, and I stared at him, taking in everything about him. That was...strange. "And you're having one with me?"

"Why not?" he asked as if it were nothing.

"Why now? After...five...years?" The words strangled in my throat, my chest squeezing. It couldn't be. I was projecting. Trying to transmute my hope into reality. "You..." I broke off in a gasp that cracked my voice. My respiration galloped. I stared at the tattooed, slightly flexed hands resting on the table before him, then to the eyes alert for any danger even while he stared at me. "You...you never told me your name."

The pause stretched into eternity while he regarded me. His throat convulsed when he swallowed, the rest of his body otherwise unmoving. "I get called many things. A lot of people call me...Lux."

The blood that gushed through me, so fast and hard, deafened me to anything in the bar but his harsh breathing. Blinded me to everything but his piercing dark eyes that saw all of me. Even the hope that sprouted tears in my eyes.

"But you don't like it." My words were almost a sob, though barely a whisper.

"No."

Those eyes. Those unrelenting eyes.

I slid out of my seat, and Pollux's hand shot out, his huge paw closing around my tiny wrist. His grasp was gentle if unescapable.

"Don't go," he begged.

I did the only thing I could. I flung myself against his chest and cried, clinging to him as if I'd never let him go. His powerful arms wrapped around me, and he brought me flush to him, so gently yet so possessively. It was everything. His careful care of me. His claim.

"I can't believe you're here!"

His hand came up, the fingers caressing the back of my neck and sending shivers through me. "There's nowhere else I ever want to be."

“But...how? How did you find me?”

“Don’t be upset, baby girl, but it was one of my ex-associates, a friend who’s now in my past, but who owed me a debt of gratitude. He has a man who didn’t mind doing a little snooping around for me and is quite adept at discovering a wealth of information—even when the person in question uses a dummy email ID.”

“I thought... I thought it would be safer,” I said, pulling back to look into his eyes. They had seemed black, but they weren’t. Maybe they were brown, but they looked like the deepest, darkest violet. Pollux was so incredibly, breathtakingly handsome.

He cupped my cheek. “I’m glad, baby. I always want you to be safe.”

I reached up to absently push a strand of hair behind my ear, a nervous habit, then froze and dropped the hand like a rock. No hair. He could see the scarf. I didn’t need to remind him of my reality.

“Um, you knew about me? Stuff about me?”

“Just your address. I wouldn’t even let him give me a picture. You didn’t know anything about me besides what was in our letters. It seemed only fair to be on a level field.”

He hugged me tighter but shifted so I was on the bench beside him as the waitress returned and placed our drinks and appetizer in front of us, along with two small plates and two settings of rolled tableware.

“Do you need anything else?” she asked, ignoring me to again look over at Pollux. I stared at the table, annoyed and embarrassed—an odd combo of emotions, but none of my feelings made sense lately.

“Baby,” he said, pulling my gaze to him. “Do you want to order food? Dinner?”

“A burger? The veggie burger,” I said.

He nodded. “My girl wants a veggie burger and fries.” He flipped the menu and glanced at the sandwich section. “I’ll

take the Graydon House burger. Also with fries. Medium.”

Dismissing her, he reached to the other side of the table where I had been sitting and grabbed my Coke from where she'd put it. He placed one of the plates in front of me and offered me the basket of doughy pretzel knots and beer cheese. When I took one, he shook his head and placed a second on my plate then placed the container of cheese near it.

Seeming satisfied, he took a draw of his pint of beer then piled several of the appetizers on his plate, grabbed the bottle of mustard from the condiments and squeeze some next to his food.

“Eat, Bexaroonie,” he said when he caught me staring at his long-fingered hands.

I giggled, unable to hold it back even though I should be pretending to be mad. “I told you not to call me that.”

He smiled, his violet eyes growing hooded while he watched me. “God, your laugh, baby. I've never heard a sweeter sound. And I hope it doesn't scare you, but...”

Pollux shook his head, seeming to second guess what he'd been about to say.

“But...?” I prompted.

“You make me so fucking hard it almost *scares* me. Someday, you're going to let me between those sweet thighs, let me bury myself deep, and I'll never be the same.”

Holy...God. After that statement, I'd never be the same, either.

Eleven



Pollux

Turning on my side, I watched Bex sleep while sunlight started to filter into the room through the thin drapes. Years of waking early had me alert at least an hour ago, but I hadn't dared move a muscle, not wanting to disturb her.

"It might be crazy," she'd said last night after dinner. "But do you want to come back to my place to talk?"

"Are you sure?"

She'd nodded. "Just...talk. I trust you."

Maybe, she shouldn't have, but I vowed to be on my best behavior. I wouldn't do anything to chase her away from me.

Watching her sleep now, I was glad for that decision. But I hoped she wouldn't be mad when she woke and found me here. She'd fallen asleep on me last night, and I'd barely debated myself before lifting her into my arms and carrying her to what was obviously her bedroom, the other room being an office.

Then another debate—lay her down and leave or climb in with her. Again, the mental argument had been brief. Still holding her, I'd climbed right in and slept the best of my life with Bexley cradled in my arms.

“You’re still here,” she murmured, against my chest that was still covered in my damned uncomfortable button-down. I hadn’t dared take off a stitch.

She didn’t seem upset. In fact, her thin arms tightened around me.

“I am.”

“I’m glad.” Her head tipped, and she looked up at me with a soft smile

God, you’re so beautiful.

She sucked in a breath, her green eyes widening and her hand came up, first to her face and then to her head where she found the scarf still in place. Her almost panicked stare told me I’d said that aloud.

“It’s true. I didn’t mean to say that out loud, but it’s true—must be if I thought I said it in my head. I don’t know what bill of sale you’ve been buying, but I’ll consider myself so fortunate if you would consider yourself mine.”

“Yours? Like... A girlfriend?”

I nodded, locking down my need to rush far beyond that term and into forever. “To start.”

It was a concession when I really wanted to say *As my wife. As my everything.*

“Girlfriend,” she repeated, trying it on for size. “And you’d be my boyfriend.” Not a question, and her little pleased smile told me she liked the idea.

“With pride. You okay with an ex-con grease monkey?”

“I have no reservations about who you are. You should know that by now. And I think it’s awesome you can fix cars. You own your own place, too. That’s amazing. Why would I have a problem with any of that?”

I shrugged, well aware of the black marks on me. No amount of medicine would erase what I’d done and where I’d been.

“Lots of reasons. There are plenty of women who’d say no way to my background. I’m not blind to that.”

“I’m not those women.”

“Thank God for that. You’re my sunshine, baby. Even before I saw your beautiful face, you were.”

“Pollux,” she whispered, pink coloring her cheeks. It looked good on her.

My lips brushed her forehead. “Only truths between us,” I whispered. “Especially here.”

Her hand cupped my cheek, brushing over the morning stubble that I knew would be darkening my jaw. “Only truth.”

I cleared my throat and continued before I got lost in her. God, how I wanted to sink into her bright green eyes. More, I wanted to get lost in them while I *sank* into her and brought us both the sensual pleasure that would bind us together.

“But at the garage...” I rasped. “I hired a crew. I considered just doing everything myself, but there’s too much for one person. And shit’s changed the last five years. Some things never change, and other things, five years might as well be a decade.”

“That’s a good plan, Pollux.”

“You’ll come by our grand opening on Monday?”

“I...”

The words didn’t even have to come out of her mouth for me to know the poison she had rolling around in her head. I sat up and grasped her shoulders and made her look at me.

“Bexley Laughton, you’re an amazing, strong woman. I won’t have you denigrating yourself because of the marks you bear from the battle you’ve fought.”

When we’d talked last night, finally discussing her cancer and what she’d been through, I didn’t think I’d breathed until she’d revealed she had started radiation but even beforehand, the traces of the cancer had been gone. She was only getting the radiation as a precaution.

“I will be so damn proud to have my girlfriend stop in during our special day at Grand Street Motors.”

“Okay.” I could tell she still had reservations. Those would take a lot of work to erase. If any man was up for that task, it was me.

Drawing her back into my arms, I settled us against the pillows.

A knock on the front door interrupted us before we could talk more—right before I was about to tell her I loved her. Saved by the metaphorical bell. It would have been way too soon.

Bex groaned and dropped her head against my chest. “It’s my sister.”

“You’re sure? It’s not your other boyfriend?” I teased. Truth be told another man might drive me right over the edge. I’d been jealous of the possibility before we’d met face to face. Now? I had to be real careful. There was no way I was going back to prison and leaving her alone and vulnerable to all the dicks who had to be after her.

She smacked my arm and wiggled away.

“Guess I better go find out.”

“Bexley,” I growled in warning, but she just giggled at me. She slid out of bed, grabbed a scarf from a hanging contraption in her closet that held at least a dozen colorful lengths of cloth. Quickly, she shucked the one she’d had on and expertly tied the new one into place, barely giving me a glimpse of her bare head as she headed for the front door.

I was immediately on her heels.

“You didn’t check the peephole?” I demanded when she just swung open the door.

She looked over her shoulder at me. “Why? It’s my sister.”

“You didn’t know that for sure.”

“He’s right,” Low said, slipping around her and coming into the apartment. Her long hair was in two braids, and she wore athletic clothes as if she’d come from the gym.

Her eyebrow raised as she crossed her arms and stared at me. I couldn’t help notice how much she and Bexley looked alike.

Twins but not identical was what Bex had told me once.

“And you are?”

“Pollux Jones,” I replied without hesitation. “Bexley’s boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend,” she echoed under her breath and glanced over at Bex. “Last I knew, you didn’t have any man in your life, except—” Her attention whipped back to me so fast she should have stumbled. “Pollux?” And her look was back on her sister. “*The* Pollux?”

“The one and only,” Bex confirmed.

“Holy fuck.” She shook her head. “Holy. Fuck.”

That was all it took for her to clear her head, apparently. She advanced on me.

“Barlow,” Bex warned.

Low ignored her and poked me in the middle of the chest.

“You’d better never hurt her.”

“Never. I’d rather die. Besides, you know...it’s your fault we met.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Well, I never thought you’d come here. Actually show up here. And *how*?”

“You don’t want to know,” Bex cut in.

Low’s lips pressed together as if she may have guessed. Her arms slowly crossed, and I couldn’t help but see her with her own pen pal. And I knew just the guy. I’d deal with that later.

“Baby,” I said, holding out my arm, and I almost groaned when Bex walked right into me and curled in against my chest. I kissed the top of her head. “I have to go to work to do some paperwork. I’ll be back tonight. For our date.”

“Date?”

“Yeah. Date. I’m taking my girl out.” I eyed Low and knew Bex followed my gaze. “Don’t let anyone talk you out of it.” I leaned in to brush my lips over her ear. “No matter what

anyone says, you're mine and I'm all in for us. You're my treasure."

She stared up into my eyes, and we stood transfixed, lost in the stars.

Low gagged dramatically. "I thought you were leaving."

I chuckled. "Okay. Take care of my girl."

"I always take care of her." Low's fierce tone left no room for questions.

I gave her a side hug as I passed. "Thank you."

And I meant that with all my heart.

Twelve



Bexley

Low hung out with me most of the morning, and despite her being hard on Pollux before he'd left, she was totally in his corner. She'd practically done a little hop and clapped her hands as soon as the door closed behind him.

"He came and found you?" she'd whisper-yelled. "That's so ___"

"Stalkery," I'd said.

"Are you not okay with it?" she'd asked, growing serious.

"Actually, I am. I never felt uncomfortable. There's something about him. He's not..."

"A *Lifetime* movie psychopath?"

"Am I being dumb?"

"I don't think so. Clearly, judging by the wrinkled condition of both of you, he stayed here last night."

I'd nodded.

"And he didn't try anything?"

I'd huffed a laugh through my nose. "We started a movie, and I basically passed out on him. He carried me to bed and held me all night."

“That’s kind of...like something you’d write in one of your books.”

“I write historicals.”

“Does he know?”

“I don’t think so. It didn’t come up. I’m sure he’ll be fine with it.”

“I have no doubt he will. You accept him as is. From the way he looks at you, I think he believes the sun rises and sets over you. That guy looked besotted.”

“Besotted? Are you sure you don’t write historicals?”

I couldn’t get that out of my head all morning, though. Was Pollux in love with me? In real love and not just affectionate and protective *like*? In love with me like I was in love with him?

When my sister left, I pulled out the wig she’d taken me to have made. They’d matched the color to Low, whose hair was identical to what mine used to look like. The waves fell around my shoulders, the bangs a fluff of fringe over what I’d always considered a too big forehead. I looked...pretty. Something about it motivated me to do light makeup then put on a loose springy dress with a matching sweater.

I stared into the mirror. I looked...good. And I wanted to see Pollux’s reaction. Strangely, I kind of craved it.

Before I could second guess myself, I found my car keys and headed to the parking garage beneath my building. The vehicle hadn’t been driven in forever, but I knew Low made sure to start it and take it for a short spin at least once a week. .

I was heading over to Grand Street before the first nerves set in. My hands felt clammy, but not in the way they had before I got sick and landed in the hospital. This was pure anxiety. Jitters.

One of the garage bays was open when I pulled up, and I could see the bottom half of a man leaning in to look at the engine of a vintage Mustang. So much for paperwork.

Parking in the front lot, I gave myself a final look in the mirror and then climbed out of the car and headed over to distract my man and remind him it was his day off. To my surprise, I saw a beautiful blonde woman, in slim jeans and a chic leather jacket leaning against the workbench to the side of the bay.

“Hello,” she said. “Do you need a car fixed, too?”

“Um...”

“We’re not actually open,” Pollux grunted from where he was.

“I had to beg him to please, please, please take a look. I’m just passing through and thought I might get stranded on the side of the road. He said he would peek as long as he could be done quick.”

“Got a date with my girl,” he grumbled, accompanied by a clang. “Nothing’s more important than that.”

“Isn’t that the sweetest?” the blonde said. “Wish I could find one like him.”

“Trust me, they turn up in the strangest places.”

“Bexley?” Pollux asked in surprise, popping out from behind the hood. His eyes turned dark as he surveyed me, eating me up. “Baby, you’re breathtaking. Wow.” He gravitated toward me, and I took a step back, shaking my head.

“Don’t touch me with those hands.” Actually, if we were alone and I was naked, I’d want those dirty hands smearing all over me. Another time...

His brow furrowed, then he looked down at his fingers. “Oh, right.”

“Are you just about done?” I asked. “I don’t want to interrupt. I thought you’d be in your office.”

“That was the plan.” He glanced at the blonde. “Ms. Jacobs, just give me five more minutes, and we’ll be all set. It was just a dire need for an oil change and new air filter. You gotta stay on top of that.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. I just picked it up from my ex. Considering the amount of time he spent practically fucking it,

you'd think it was in prime condition. Excuse my language. Like I said," she glanced at me. "You're lucky. Wish I could find a good one like him."

"I am lucky," I said. In so many ways. Not just with Pollux.

"Baby, do you want to wait in my office where it's comfortable?" he asked, moving back around to finish the work he'd been doing.

I glanced at Ms. Jacobs, and she held up her hand. "He safe from me; I promise. I don't do cheaters and I'm not the other woman type."

"That's not... I just didn't want to be rude."

She waved her hand. "Nah, you go take a load off. Prince Charming can finish saving my day here, then I'll be out of your hair and on to my big adventure. Beverly Hills, that is. Swimming pools, movie stars."

I chuckled, recognizing the line from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. "You strike gold?"

"No, but I'm hoping to find some out there, if you know what I mean. There are a few pretty statues that will have my name on them someday."

"I hope they do," I said sincerely. "Good luck. I hope you get a star on the Walk of Fame, too."

"You're the sweetest. Even if I'd had designs on your man—which I didn't—I wouldn't now. Mr. Jones, you've got a good one here."

"The best," he agreed, not emerging. I grinned, realizing he hadn't given her his first name. Why did that erupt warm fuzzies inside me? I wasn't sure, but it did.

"I'm going to be in your office," I called, taking the door into the waiting area. Behind the counter there was another door marked *office*, and I headed that way.

What I found surprised me. A couch with a sleeping bag on it. A large duffel with some clothes strewn out. A couple books—one of them mine. And, yeah, the requisite office desk.

Pollux was staying here?

Not anymore. I didn't even think before I marched over and started shoving his things into the duffel. I grabbed the novels and placed them on top.

"What are you doing?" he asked behind me, apparently having finished up quickly out in the garage.

I stood and turned to face him. "Packing."

He stared at me. Finally, he asked, "Why?"

"You can't live here."

"I just haven't got a place...yet. I... Actually, it's kind of difficult with the housing market right now. I might have the money, but most of them run credit and background checks, you know. I'm the last guy places would lease to. Once I get up and running, I'll buy a house."

I crossed my arms. "And how long will that be? A year? Two years? You can't live here that long."

"There's a shower. I can sleep there." He nodded to indicate the couch. "I can microwave crap in the breakroom kitchenette."

"No."

"Trust me; this is almost paradise."

I took a breath, knowing I was about to win this argument by throwing out an idea I'd been thinking from the start. "Then my place will be a step above heaven, then. Don't you think?"

"Are you...asking me to move in with you?" Hesitant hope filled his features.

"No."

His face fell, the hope departing as fast as it had come.

I took off my sweater and placed it over the top of his bag. This might be his office, but this whole place was a garage with oil residue all over.

Taking a deep breath and knowing I would be revealing what I was so self-conscious about, besides my lack of hair, I pulled

my dress carefully over my head. I dropped it over my sweater, ignoring his gasp at me disrobing. He didn't protest, though. I took confidence in that.

Standing before him in only lacy lingerie, I faced him. My nerves were a boulder in my throat, but the fire in his eyes burned them away.

“Actually...” I said. “I’m not asking because I’m telling you. You’re moving in with me. Now touch me with those hands.”

Thirteen



Bexley

“Fuck...” Pollux breathed. He stepped toward me, his hands out and practically shaking with desire. He hesitated and looked down at his fingers.

“Touch me, Pollux. I swear to you, I have never wanted anything more.”

“Take off your bra. I’m sure I’ll be buying you lots of pretty lingerie over the years, but I don’t want to ruin that one this way.”

Which meant someday, he *did* intend to ruin one. Or more.

My hands trembled as I reached behind me to release the clasp. I let it drop to the pile I’d started then stood straight before him, my nipples tight and aching. My chest rapidly rising and falling with my need.

I prayed he still wanted me. My curves had faded, and bones protruded more than they should. My skin seemed so thin sometimes that my veins were clearly visible—as were the bruises I got way too easily.

Pollux didn’t seem to notice any of that as he moved forward. His hands lifted and traced down my sides, leaving smudges along my ribs and down to my hipbones. One fingertip trailed just above the elastic of my panties before making a trail up my middle.

“You look pretty with my marks on you,” he rasped. “So fucking pretty. These are the only marks you’ll ever get from me.”

I pouted. “No nips? No suck marks on my neck...breasts? No fingertip bruises on my hips from where you held me so hard while you fucked me? Darn.”

“Fuck...baby. You want that? I’ll give you anything you want. You want me to cover myself in honey and stand naked on a fire ant hill? Whatever you want.”

“Let’s not go that far...” I nibbled on my bottom lip. How did he make me feel so special? “I kind of want your assets intact.”

“My assets?” he chuckled.

He was so close I barely had to move more than a few inches to stop his amusement mid-laugh. My hand cupped his erection through his jeans, feeling the rock-hard length against my palm. His groan vibrated against my over-aroused breasts where they pressed against him.

“Yeah,” I whispered and leaned in to kiss his chin. “Your cock. Your filthy hands I want all over me. Your mouth.”

Pollux lost it. One hand came up to cup the back of my neck, dragging me in to him and sealing his mouth over mine. I moaned while he plundered, taking everything and leaving no part untouched by him. His other hand grasped my breast, just hard enough to pull my sharp cry. My hips rocked into him, my back arching while he tugged and twisted the nipple, erupting slick heat in my core.

He ripped his mouth away, and both of us panted, the sounds harsh in the room.

“Take off your panties. Take them off, or I’ll tear them off. I’m on the edge, baby.”

I lifted a shoulder, stepping back while my fingers hooked in my waistband. “I don’t care if you ruin them, but I’d rather you took off your own clothes.”

The sound of his shirt rending as he yanked it off filled the air before I even finished speaking. His hands went to his pants while I wiggled out of my tiny underwear with a shimmy.

He stared at my bare pussy, his throat convulsing as he swallowed hard. “Fuck, you’re like a wet dream.”

“Not on purpose,” I admitted with chagrin. “Let’s not go there right now.”

“Oh, I wanna go there,” he said, palming me and leaving a smear of gray on my skin from the heel of his hand. “I wanna be buried so deep here that you forget what it’s like not to be filled by me.”

“Yes, Pollux. Yes!”

Taking his hand off me, he kicked away his pants. Giving me no time to gape at the long, thick cock that popped out, he lifted me into his arms and carried me the two steps to the couch.

When he placed me on it, the sleeping bag was slippery and strangely sensual against my back. I moved my shoulders, enjoying the feel. My legs slid together, restless for all he promised, and I held out my arms.

“Come make good on those vows,” I invited. Months ago, a week ago, hell, even a day ago, I never would have believed I could feel this way. I wouldn’t have fathomed a man—my man—could make me feel beautiful again. Loved. But Pollux did. He’d appeared at my side and started sweeping away my fears.

“Baby,” he breathed, kneeling over me, one knee between mine. The other wedged in, and I wrapped my legs around his thighs, the movement so natural it felt as if I’d been accepting him into the cradle of my body for years.

“You feel so good,” I sighed, closing my eyes and absorbing the sensation of his large, hard frame over mine, his body hair rasping against my inner thighs and my sensitive nipples.

“That’s nothing yet,” he promised, leaning in for a kiss.

My eyes popped open, and I flattened my hand against his chest to stop him. “Wait.”

“What?” He started to pull back, but I grasped his arm.

“No, don’t go. I just... Before we... I love you. I wanted to tell you that first, before we go further.” I rushed out the words, needing to say them before we fucked. Made love. For me, that’s what it would be, no matter how hard we came together.

“Fuck, baby. I love you, too. I love you so fucking much.”

This time, I didn’t stop him as his mouth crashed wildly over mine. I writhed beneath him, touching him everywhere I could. Our tongues dueled, chasing each other, while our teeth clashed and I clawed at his shoulders, desperately trying to get closer.

My cry filled the room when he suddenly released my mouth and sealed his lips over one of my beaded nipples. Threads of fire lit through me and tore down to my core, electrifying me and remaking me, molding me to him. His tongue lashed over the tip, circling, teeth nipping, mouth drawing hard. I knew he’d leave one of those marks I’d begged for.

When he moved to the other breast, renewed fire burned through me. My pussy was on fire, so wet, I knew we’d leave a sticky mess on the sleeping bag. Good thing he’d be in my—our—bed tonight and wouldn’t need it anymore.

“I want my mouth on you. I want to lap all that sweet juice I feel all over my thigh while you’re grinding against it. You want me inside you, though, don’t you? You want my cock splitting you wide?”

“Yes! Yes, Pollux, I want you.”

“I can’t wait until the day I see your pretty lips wrapped around my dick, so you can show me how much you want it, how you crave me claiming you.”

I whimpered, crazy turned on by the picture he painted. I wanted to be on my knees, letting him feed me that length, submitting to his needs. Hell, to *our* needs. Maybe tonight. Later when we were home. Some women hated that, giving

blowjobs. I loved giving that way. There was nothing that felt more powerful than making your man shake from the pleasure you controlled.

“I need to feel you inside me. Bringing me alive again. Please, Pollux. Make me feel all of it. Make me yours.”

Pushing up on one straight arm, he fisted his cock, and dragged the crown through my labia, bumping my clit and teasing me. He didn't tease for long. We were both too needy for games.

“No going back. Once I take you, I'm not ever giving you up.”

I grinned up at him. “You weren't giving me up, anyway.”

“No, never. You're mine forever. Because our future will be perfect. Everything will be...*perfect*.” He surged forward. It was no easy entry, him carefully working himself inside. No, he punched forward, right to his hilt, forcing open my tight walls. I screamed out, arching. My pussy clenched frantically around him, adjusting and throbbing, a mini-climax bursting over me.

He didn't pause. Pulling back, he gave me no time to catch my breath. He started a hard rhythm and fucked me with all the intensity I wanted, that we both wanted. Driving and driving until my voice was hoarse from my cries, and he'd pulled countless orgasms from me.

It had never been like this.

I knew it was because it had never been Pollux. All this time... I'd been in hibernation for him.

Reaching up, I looped an arm behind his neck and pulled his mouth to mine while he kept pumping his hips, pounding into me. Not treating me like something fragile. Letting me live.

“I love you,” he gasped in time with his drives. “I love you. I love you. I love you.”

I hugged him, clinging to him and riding the waves. This was my forever. This was my man. I knew he'd keep all his promises to me. Every single one.

“I love you, too,” I breathed. “I’ll love you, every part of you and who you are. Always.”

Fourteen



Pollux

With my heavy duffle slung across my body, I carried Bexley up to our apartment.

I couldn't believe she'd asked me to move in with her. Even more, I couldn't believe she'd asked me to fuck her.

Both things had always been on the table for our future. I'd known they would happen—that I would claim her and we would live together. Just not yet. It was as if all the fantasies that had gotten me through the past few months were coming true.

Her arms wrapped around me, and her face snuggled into my neck while I carried her inside. She barely weighed more than my bag, and that concerned me. I'd take care of her, though. Get her healthy and confident again.

I knew the cancer was gone but that she still had two weeks of radiation as a precaution. But I'd take it from there, making sure she had everything she needed. Food, exercise, fresh air, every bit of my love. Fuck, I'd give her my lifeblood if I thought it would rejuvenate her.

In the bathroom, I set her on her feet then reached to start the shower.

“You're showering with me, right?” she asked, running her fingertip along the front of my shirt.

“Try to stop me.” If I had my way, we’d be together, skin-to-skin, until Monday morning when I had to leave for my grand opening.

Stepping back, I slung my bag over my head and dropped it with a heavy thud to the floor. I cringed at the noise, realizing I might have disturbed her neighbors downstairs.

Any worry disappeared when Bexley skimmed off her dress. I stared at her naked curves, mouth dry. So fragile, yet so beautiful with a will of iron and a fearless determination for what she wanted—at least when it came to me. Being with her earlier had been a revelation.

But those angular curves were covered with my oily prints.

“Christ, I got you filthy,” I muttered, tracing my fingers along one streak. Bex shivered under the touch. A slow smile curled her lips.

“I love it. I haven’t felt this sexy in—I don’t think I ever have, actually. Not like this.”

“But now, I’m gonna have to get my dirty girl all clean.” And my cock was rock hard at the idea. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, I’d have her pinned to the shower’s tile wall, my dick so far up her she’d be breathing for me.

My hands skimmed over her as steam started to fill the small room. “Ready to get in the shower?”

For the first time since she’d first gotten undressed at the shop, nerves visibly seemed to overtake her. Her bottom lip pulled between her lip, and her fingers opened and closed a few times before she fisted them. It killed me I couldn’t see into her downcast eyes. Unable to take her anxiety, I lifted her chin to bring her gaze to mine.

“What’s wrong?” I asked. Her sudden change confused me. We’d been on the same page, then we weren’t. “Do you want to shower alone? I don’t want to push you.”

I mean I’d fucked her until her voice had gotten hoarse from the pleased screams, but maybe, it didn’t mean as much to her as it did me.

“It’s...not that.” Her hands hesitantly lifted, and I understood. She had to remove the wig to shower.

I grasped her wrists and brought them to my chest, holding them there while I stared hard into her eyes. “I love you. I don’t care about your hair. Fuck. That’s not true. I care about it a lot—but *only* because it hurts you so much to have lost it. I love *you*. You’re so beautiful to me, and when you take off that wig, you still will be.”

Bex gave a small shake of her head, uncertainty in her eyes. I carefully kept my face impassive while I watched her steel herself then reach up. I hadn’t lied, but I didn’t want her to misread any expression on my face, either.

She fiddled with the edges of the wig before she peeled it back. Beneath, a flesh colored band circled her scalp. To hold the wig in place, I supposed. She peeled that away, too, and set both items on the counter before turning toward me with her chin lifted. She couldn’t hide the fear in her eyes, however.

Moving closer, I prayed I could say the right words, that the truth from my heart would be enough.

My hands cupped her face, and I pressed my forehead to hers. “I love you. You’re so beautiful, Bexley. So fucking beautiful. I’m so proud of you, baby, for how strong you are, for what a fighter you are.”

Slowly, my hands moved up toward her bare scalp, feeling the smooth skin beneath my palms, somehow knowing she needed me to show her this didn’t repel me in the least. Standing to my full height, a good eight to ten inches taller than my angel, I pressed my lips to the top of her head.

Bexley shuddered, a small cry escaping her as she clutched my shirt. I didn’t stop. I kissed all over, desperate to show her. It wasn’t long before she was tearing at my clothes, trying to get them off.

“I need you, Pollux. I need you so much.”

“I’m here. I’m yours.”

I stripped quickly then carried her into the steamy shower. We both groaned as the biting spray sluiced over our bodies.

Grabbing the body wash, I started washing away the grime I'd left on her fair skin. And if I spent extra time on her breasts while I molded the flesh and teased her nipples, sue me.

Bexley grasped my wrists, her head thrown back while I played. She shuddered, trembling under my hands, and I pushed her back to the wall. Without pause, I dropped to my knees to do what I'd desperately wanted earlier, and would have if I hadn't been covered in grease. There were just parts of her, I wouldn't sully that way.

Her sweet, musky flavor flooded my mouth when I pushed my face into her pussy. Hungrily, I devoured, lapping up her cream and searching for more.

"Pollux," she moaned. "Oh...God."

Her hands knotted in my hair while I ate, my fingers clasping her hips and likely leaving the ten small bruises where I held her, just as she craved. This turned her on; there was no denying it. Moving up and down her slit, I sucked at her throbbing nubbin of a clit as it peeked from its hood then taunted her opening with the tip of my tongue before I trust it in. Determined, I kept on, back and forth, lingering longer and longer at her clit, until Bex cried out, her release coating my tongue and covering my chin.

Perfection.

"You taste so good," I growled into her folds. "I could eat you for hours. Make you come, over and over."

"Yes..."

"Can't, though. The water will get cold, and I won't let you get chilled. I have other plans for you," I said, rising. My hands cupped her face and I kissed her wildly, sharing her tangy flavor.

"What plans?" she gasped when we came up for air.

"This." My hands returned to her hips, lifting her up and onto my cock. My knees almost buckled as her hot, slippery walls squeezed around me. We were one, just as the universe must have intended. There was no way this was anything other than ordained.

“I like this plan,” she breathed. “Fuck, Pollux, you feel so big.”

“I am going to fuck you...with this great...” Thrust. “Big...” Thrust. “Cock. Hold on tight, baby.”

Bex wrapped her arms around my neck, and I braced her against the wall, plowing in and out her and planting myself there, sowing our forever. She was mine, bound to me.

“Oh...yes!” she cried into my ear while she kissed up my neck, bit my shoulder, clawed at my back. Her hips rolled into mine, taking everything I gave and giving back just as much.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck. This damn tight pussy...” I swore. “I’m gonna come. Gonna fill you up.”

“Yes...yes... Give it all to me. Now. Now...”

“Everything.” My hips plowed harder, forcing through her walls as they closed around me, her body going wild with her climax, milking mine from me, taking it all. Which was fine, since all of me was hers and always would be.

Fifteen



Bexley

I had never been so happy as I'd been the past couple months since Pollux showed up in town. That was saying something, considering my current circumstances. But Pollux had brought sunshine into my existence. Everything was just...so good.

I think that made Low a little jealous, since she'd always been closest to me, but she knew I loved her beyond reason, too. Pollux and I had talked about her, how she'd at first intended to write him—and he was still really glad she hadn't. He'd spoken about his friend, Jarvis, and slipped me his contact information.

“For Low,” he'd said with a rumbling growl in his voice as ominous as a coming storm. “All *your* letters are for me.”

At which, I'd dragged him down to the couch and knelt between his knees. He'd tried to pull me onto his lap, but when he realized why I was there, he was all in. My mouth on his dick might be one of his favorite things ever...next to my throat kissing his crown.

By the time I was done, he understood I wasn't writing anyone but him. The next day, almost six weeks ago, I'd slipped Low the address. Whether she did anything with it was up to her. I'd facilitated, but I couldn't lead her there.

“Baby? Did you want to go to Graydon’s tonight for our date? They’re supposed to have that Irish band,” Pollux asked, coming out of the bedroom where he’d just finished changing after coming home from work.

I stood before the mirror in the bathroom across the hallway, running my hands over my head. He beelined for me, stopping behind me. The view distracted me, his big body dwarfing my much smaller one. A small smile curled his lips as I grinned at him in the mirror.

Holding my gaze, he pressed his lips to my crown. I closed my eyes, sighing happily as a tremor fluttered through me. After all these weeks, my reactions to him hadn’t waned.

“Look at this,” he said, that familiar rumble seeming to skim over me in a velvet stroke of invisible fingers. “All this peachy fuzz growing in.”

“I was beginning to think it never would. I thought it would start within a few weeks of finishing chemo. Then it didn’t.” We didn’t talk much about that time, though the outward effects were unavoidable. Under Pollux’s constant care, my body was returning to my normal shape, filled out more than it had been at the end of my treatments. My clothes fit well, the marks from my procedures were basically gone, I got stronger every day...but my hair hadn’t come back.

“You can’t force your body to be on any timeline but it’s own. Remember what your oncologist said. Focus on being healthy and living.”

Turning, I wrapped my arms around his waist and beamed up at him. “I have been. Can’t help but be with my boyfriend, the amateur nutritionist and personal trainer.”

I swore, my man spent so much time researching and taking care of me. I told him he didn’t have to, but he insisted, claiming it was his job. He sure hadn’t liked it when I’d pointed out his *job* was running his garage. I’d found myself bent over the bed while he clarified my belief with his cock.

Thankfully, Grand Street Motors was thriving, with the appointment books full, so I didn’t have to feel guilty.

“Are you glad it’s the weekend?” I asked. “Must feel weird to have tomorrow off since you’ve been working six days a week.”

“Like you don’t work seven days a week on your books,” he teased.

“I have a lot of words to make up for.”

“But you’re not working this weekend, either, right? You’re all mine.”

“All yours.”

He caught my chin, lifting an eyebrow. “No cheating and writing on your phone.”

Well, dang. He was on to me. “I might need to take notes.”

Pollux slowly shook his head.

“But...”

“Workaholic,” he murmured in my ear. “If I catch you, I’m going to spank you.”

“Ha,” I chuckled. “That’s not much of a deterrent.”

Pollux would never, ever hurt me, but we were adventurous in bed.

“Than I won’t let you come.”

“Beast!” I protested. I wasn’t really mad, though. This was the first full weekend we’d had together since the shop’s grand opening. It had been his idea that we’d spend time just focusing on each other. I knew he had some surprises planned, and I wouldn’t ruin them.

Pulling me hard to his body, Pollux growled playfully in response. There was nothing playful about the way his lips took mine. He lifted me, and my ass hit the countertop. Immediately, I wrapped my legs around him. My dress hiked up high on my thighs, and Pollux took advantage, his fingers stroking over the damp gusset of my panties.

I might wear pants all day long while I worked and he was at the garage, but I always changed before he got home—exactly

for this reason. Sex... We loved it and couldn't get enough of one another.

He'd just pushed aside the fabric and stroked his fingers along my wet, needy folds when there was a banging at the front door.

"Ignore it," I moaned when he started to pull away.

But whoever it was wouldn't be ignored. The pounding came again, and I knew my neighbors would complain if we didn't take care of it.

I groaned, dropping my forehead to the base of his neck. "I swear to God, if that's Low, I'm gonna kill her."

He snorted while he helped me off the counter onto my feet.

His hands smoothed over my skirt to put it into place.

"Right... She just walks on it, like she owns the place."

"Not anymore. Not after what she walked in on last time. If I hear one more time about her needing bleach for her eyes—"

The knocking came a third time.

"Shit," Pollux swore, running his hands through his hair.

Pivoting away, he stomped toward the noise—as if *that* wouldn't annoy our downstairs neighbors.

I trailed after him, watching as he whipped open the door.

"Lux," the guy said, a wide grin stretching over his face. "Hey, man, I need your help."

I stared at the stranger, danger rolling off him. Someone who called my boyfriend *Lux*. Someone who wanted his help. Ice and dread ran through my veins. No one had to tell me who this was. This person was a visitor from Pollux's past.

Sixteen



Pollux

Bexley didn't say a word, but I heard her retreat, then a door shut behind her.

"Jarvis," I said by way of greeting, barely reacting when he pulled me into a hug.

"It's good to see you, man." His arms tightened briefly. He'd always been the more demonstrative of us. And we hadn't really been friends, so it surprised me he was here. I hadn't even known he was out.

Fuck. Was this what I got for going to the library? For saving his ass? I didn't really regret either thing, though. I just didn't want anything fucked up with Bexley, and I couldn't alleviate the fear that right now, this, Jarvis showing up, was definitely going to screw me over with her.

"I'm out of the life," I grunted, stepping back from him.

"Gone straight. And never going back. How the fuck did you even know where I am?"

"Mighta hacked your mail. I'm all about the ink, but hacking was what landing me in hot water."

My arms crossed my chest, and I glared at him. "Clearly, you didn't learn your lesson. I don't want any part of whatever you've gotten mixed up in."

“Nah, man.” He waved his hand, shooing away my concerns. “Nothing like that. I’m going straight. Following your good example. Gonna open my own shop with fundage I had stashed away good and secret. Right down the block from you. We’re gonna be neighbors.”

Yay.

“That’s great. I still don’t understand...”

And maybe, that was because my head was in the back of the apartment with Bexley.

“Barlow,” he bit out. “I need to find her. And since you gave her my contact, I know you know where she is.”

“Of course, I do. She’s my girl’s sister. Wait. What happened? I’m not throwing Low under the bus if you—”

“I didn’t do shit, man. That girl turned me inside out. Gave me fucking hope that I hadn’t felt for a long time. Wrote shit to me that I had to only read when I was alone. Then poof! Nothing. She disappeared. I ain’t lettin’ that happen. I know she’s in this city. I’ll find her, even if you don’t tell me what I want to know.”

I looked away from him, staring at the pictures of her and Bex on the wall nearby. “You don’t know that.”

He followed my gaze. Shouldering past me, a man on a mission, he went right to the eight by ten of the girls.

“She said she was a twin. This is her,” he said, correctly pointing to Low. And thank fuck for that, or I would have had to figure out how to hide a body and not get myself locked up again.

One of the few differences between the two women was that Low’s eyes were a whiskey brown color, rather than green like Bexley’s.

“It is.”

“She’s your girl’s twin sister? Fucking A, we’ll be like brothers.”

“I wouldn’t count your eggs...”

He patted my shoulder. “I got this. You just get her into the arena with me, and I’ll take it from there.”

* * *

Once I got rid of Jarvis, I searched out Bex. I found her sitting on the end of our bed, staring at her hands.

“Are you leaving?” she asked, not looking up at me.

“What the fuck?” I gasped, staggered. Leaving her would kill me. “No. No!” I dropped to my knees in front of her, hugging her waist and burying my face in her belly. “I love you.”

“Do you love me enough, though?” she whispered.

I pulled back to look in her face, to make her see how serious I was with every word I uttered. I was *not* losing her because fucking Jarvis had shown up. They might as well throw me back in a tiny cell and lose the keys if that happened.

“You’re the air I breathe. I’m not fucking going anywhere, and I’m *not* letting you go. You’re going to marry me. In fact, that’s what we’ll do this damn weekend. We’ll get on a damn plane, fly to Vegas, and you’re going to be my wife. Locked in. *Mine*. Mrs. Pollux Jones. Fuck anything else.”

She shook her head, tears brimming in her eyes. “But...”

I leaned in. “*Fuck*. Anything. Else,” I repeated. “There are no buts. You’re mine. I’ll burn down this world for you—only for you.”

Her head shook harder. “You can’t go back to what you... did...before. I...” She gulped in air. “I can’t be with you if... you...if you’re going to...”

Then I understood. This was tough love. She thought she had to give me this, be hard, and it ripped her apart. She was trying, with all she had, to do what she thought was right, to keep me on the straight and narrow, even though she didn’t have to.

“Baby,” I murmured, cupping her face, my thumbs sweeping away the tears that had started to fall.

“I love you,” she half-sobbed. “And I don’t want to end... things, but I will. I can’t... Pollux, I can’t stand back and—”

“You don’t have to,” I interrupted, my voice hard with vehemence. “I’m never going back to that life, baby. I promise you. Before I even came here, I told Zoran, I was out. No more jobs for him.”

She knew who he was, knew he’d helped me set up here in return for the favor that had landed me in prison. I’d also told her he was the one who’d helped me find her—which she hadn’t been happy about at all, not wanting her name in front of the Russian mafia for any reason. But she couldn’t argue the result, especially when I took her to the mattress and loved her into oblivion.

“They made me do anger management in the pen,” I continued. “And I’ve been talking to a guy twice a week on my lunch breaks. Online therapy, you know? It’s kinda—I don’t know—fuck, embarrassing, so I didn’t tell you. But, baby, after all of it... I’m not that guy anymore. I don’t want to be that man anymore, either.”

“But...” Her gaze drifted to the door. I knew she wondered about the person who’d come knocking at our door.

Cupping her face, I brought her gaze back to me. “That was Jarvis.”

Her eyes widened in recognition. “Jarvis? The Jarvis? The *here’s his address, have your sister write to him* Jarvis?”

“Yeah, he looked me up and came looking for your sister. Seems she started writing him—did you know that?”

She shook her head, a slow, watery smile starting. “No. She never told me if she did or didn’t.”

“I guess things got hot and heavy, and she ghosted him.” I raised a brow. “Like sister; like sister.”

She smacked my shoulder, chuckling. “Stop it. I didn’t ghost you. I was in the hospital. You know that.”

Leaning in, I brushed my lips over hers. She pushed her fingers into my hair, holding me to her and opening her mouth

to invite me in. I couldn't help but take her invitation, deep relief practically making me lightheaded.

We were both breathing hard minutes later when I pulled back, in danger of pressing her back onto the mattress and forgetting all about the night's plans.

"He's coming out to dinner with us," I told her. "I texted Low from your phone. She's coming, too."

Her eyes widened, then she snorted a laugh.

"But you didn't tell her Jarvis will be there?" she guessed. "When she gets pissed, it'll be on you."

"I'll take the heat. Now...about tonight? You'll fly out to Vegas with me?"

"I suppose. I don't have other plans." Her naughty fingers trailed down my shirt to my waistband. I captured them and brought them to my lips.

"I love you, Bex. I love you so much."

She grinned, flopping back and pulling me over her. "Prove it."

"We're gonna be late," I warned, crawling over her and pushing up her skirt.

Giggling, she shook her head, lifting her hips into me, helping me peel off her panties. "I have faith in you. You'll get it done, and get us where we need to be."

She moaned as I stroked her, taking us back to where we'd been before getting interrupted.

"Tell me what I need to know," I growled.

"I love you! I'll marry you. I'll..."

"Be mine forever," I supplied when she got lost in the sensations I delivered while I circled and pinched her clit.

"Yes, yes!"

I sealed my lips over hers, and there was nothing else to say for a long time after. Nothing else mattered, right now. We had forever. I knew that with all my heart.

Epilogue



Bexley

Ten Years Later

Dear Bex,

Happy anniversary, baby. Didn't I tell you everything would be perfect? I love you so much. For old times, I thought I'd write you a letter. Of course, you have ten now. One for each anniversary. Thank you for these years. I thank the universe every day for bringing you to me, for keeping you healthy, helping us to grow closer and closer.

I love our life together. I love that we get to be the best dog parents, the best—favorite—aunt and uncle ever.

These years with you have been the greatest of my life. I demand at least forty more. Fifty or sixty would be better.

I love you. Can't wait to give you your present tonight.

Your Pollux

I put down the letter and smiled at my husband, who sat across the breakfast table from me. My husband. My world.

It was just the two of us, my body unable to give us kids. That was alright. We doted on our nieces and nephews. And we had built an incredible life with each other.

Pollux had thrived, his garage expanding. He'd opened two other locations, too. As a man who'd found life after prison, he was determined to help people get a second chance—with the hard warning that there would be no third. He'd only been burned once in ten years, but he'd given hope to so many. My pride for him overflowed my heart. I would do just about anything for my man—the only thing I held back was any approval for anything illegal. Not that he'd ever consider that.

“I left you a letter, too,” I told him. “It’s in the bedroom. Got you something else, too. For you to see while you follow the directions in my note.”

Pushing back my chair, the white silk of the robe I wore gliding along my body, I stood. My dark hair was piled high on my head, pinned in place so he’d have a clear view of my *gift*. It had been hard as hell hiding it from him, and I wondered if he’d been suspicious at all. If he had, he’d played along well.

With my back to him, I unfastened the belt and let my robe drop. When I stood naked, Pollux’s gasp was everything.

I glanced over my shoulder at him while he stared at my new tattoo. Small horizontal letters declared *Property of*, while larger vertical letters down my spine said *POLLUX*.

“I’ll be waiting in the bedroom.”

His chair clattered back while I sprinted down the hallway.

“You better be bent over the bed, so I can see that while I fuck you. Who did that?” Oh that rumbly growl... It never failed to make me wet.

I heard his belt hitting the floor, and I shivered, knowing he was stripping while he came after me.

“Jarvis inked me.”

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” Pollux grated, his hand going to the back of my neck while he pushed me down. His other gripped my hip, angling me to him. I moaned at the feel of his body covering mine. He kicked my feet father apart while he notched his glans to my pussy, knowing I’d be drenched for him. Times like this, neither of us needed foreplay.

“You don’t like it?” I pouted. Pollux’s rock-hard cock surged into me, giving his answer.

“I love it,” he rasped. His hips pumped hard, fast, slapping into me. “But he touched you.”

“Harder,” I moaned. “Oh, God... Dirty me up and make my mark the truth.”

“It’s always been the truth. You are mine.” His fingers knotted in my hair, dragging back my head, and he kissed me, ravaging my mouth while he fucked me. My walls clenched around him, my legs trembling, electric waves thrilling over me.

“Pollux,” I gasped, clawing the bedspread.

He thrust harder. “I hope you don’t have plans today.”

I smiled into the blankets, so in love with this man. Oh, I did have plans. And they were all right here in our bed. With Pollux making me scream while he once again kept his all promises to me.

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One for the Team

Briar's Cowboys

Roped by the Team
His Old Kentucky Home
Eye of Her Storm
Santa Secret
Mad About Her Cowboys

Passing Through

Tradition Bound

On Your Knees
In His Chains
Chain Me Up

Hers to Obey

Circle of Three

Boy Toys
Tempting Tamera
Halloween Pleasure
Forgotten Forever

Cruentus Dragons

Dragons Blood
Blood Bought
Blood Mates

Taboo Wishes

Punished

Kidnap and Kink

Yuletide Greetings

Mr. Smith's Whip

Dick Does Jane

Sybil Disobedience

Malloy Brothers (with Dakota Rebel)

Billionaire's Christmas Cruise

Billionaire's Beautiful Runaway

Billionaire's Best Frienemy

North Springs

Stocking Full of Cole

Love Notes

Standalone Books

Gifted

Broken Perfection

Shirtless in New York

Farmer Takes a Wife

Line of Duty

Quarantined With My Ex

Romero and Julian, a m/m romance

Holiday Bound, a m/m romance

Forbidden Reunion, a m/m romance

(includes the bonus short story All In)

The Orgasmatron

Special Force

Wedding Jitters

Truth or Dare

Buried Secrets

Grave Destiny

His Goddess

Fallen for Her

Heart of Ice

Ménage

Two Plus One

Behind Sin's Door

Pride

Snows

Lynxed

Historical

Twice an Eternity (Dual time period story)

Knight Time Kiss (Time Travel)

In the Dark

Brynn Dark

Mine Every Night
Forbidden Obsession
Swapped