



penitents

FINDERS KEEPERS

ALLIE STERN

Penniless
Finders Keepers
By Allie Stern

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Mom, you can stop looking for safe places to sleep. The 'just in case' won't happen. You did it. Fate led you to Dar and gave me two resilient mothers to raise me. Love won.

Playlist

- “This City” - Sam Fischer
- “Take on the World” - You Me At Six
- “Click Click Boom” - Saliva
- “Say When” - The Fray
- “You And Me” - Lifehouse
- “Dangerous Game” - Klergy & BEGINNERS
- “Fade” - Lewis Capaldi
- “Change (In the House of Flies)” - Deftones
- “Like a Drug” - Bryce Savage
- “Till Death Do Us Part” - Rosenfeld
- “I Will Follow You Into The Dark” - Death Cab For Cutie
- “Darkness in Me” - Fight The Fade
- “Faint” - Memphis May Fire
- “like you” - Rosenfeld
- “Deep End” - Ruelle
- “Devil Side” - Foxes
- “Landslide” - Fleetwood Mac
- “Anbu” - Iwildiehere, Akiaura
- “Brother - Acoustic” - NEEDTOBREATHE

Reader discretion

The turn of a page

A comma waiting for more

The semicolon telling you it's not done

A period ending the torment

The sentence that starts a new

Because it's not the end, just a new beginning.

This book contains, but not limited to: Graphic Sexual Intercourse, Violence, Graphic Language, Mental Health Topics, Physical Abuse, Non-Consensual Sexual Scenes, Dubious Consensual Sexual Scenes, Sex-Trafficking, Depression, Suicidal Ideation, Suicidal Actions, Addiction, Alcoholism, Degradation, Games & Lies, Abandonment, Child Abuse, Bullying, Death, Gore, Graphic Sexual Scenes.

The BDSM elements featured in *Penniless* are not a clear representation. If you are interested in exploring that community, I urge you to look elsewhere for education.

Prologue

Anonymous

The door to the house swung open, and the leathery smell of tobacco filled my senses. This family was a bunch of self-entitled dipshits, and it was my turn to take my rightful place at the top. A deck of cards lay on a folding table, surrounded by metal chairs, in the middle of the room.

“She’s downstairs,” Cormac greeted me while cutting off the butt of his cigar.

“Good. The others will be transported tomorrow. We will have them intercepted before they cross into Jersey. Did you shake your tail?” I pulled a chair out from the table, making the legs screech against the cement floors. Everything was lining up perfectly. Soon the twins’ heads would be at my feet, and Arthur would be vulnerable.

“I’m not a fucking amateur,” he snapped.

“You have been gone for a while and lost your edge, so calm yourself,” I barked, not wanting to put up with his insolence.

He was a means to an end and a necessary evil I had to endure. I was the one who was more screwed over, and my grasp on the throne was slipping away with each impulsive step he took. Anger fueled his motives, but I wasn’t stupid enough to let petty emotions guide me.

“I was raised in this lifestyle. You best not forget that,” he boasted.

He flicked his torch lighter on and lit his cigar. The cherry burned bright red in the dimly lit house, and smoke billowed around him.

“Use an ashtray this time,” I scolded.

The difference between him and me was that I wasn’t born into this life. I was prepared and ready for this. For years, I had been a faithful pawn in their enterprise. My rise to power began with the dismantlement of their enterprise, one slut at a

time. Beginning with the gray-eyed Penny downstairs. That prize was a little personal. Liam and Connor needed to pay.

Chapter 1

Liam

The beeping of the heart monitor was like nails on a chalkboard. Loose strands of my hair were stuck to my face as I paced the room. No matter how many times I pushed my flyaways back, they kept falling. My composure was slipping, and I had no control over anything, including my disarrayed state. I needed a shower.

Connor lay in the hospital bed. His face was pale, and his lips were dry. He was a mirrored reflection of how I felt on the inside. He looked sickly, and with all the sins I carried, I was a carbon copy. The same. Even dressed in plain overpriced t-shirts and leather jackets, the depravity I was could never be hidden. No matter how many times I tried to wash my hands, the sins of my life stuck within the cracks of my skin. I was forced to blend in, even when I was nothing like a normal person.

My palm ached from how tightly I clutched my phone. Emily was nowhere to be found, and I waited for an update from the people I had searching for her. She'd taken advantage of my brother at his weakest point and had made a run for it. To not look back was conniving. She'd left him for dead, and I bet she hadn't batted an eye.

Emily wasn't who I'd thought she was, and I was glad I hadn't broken my biggest rule for her. Fucking her would have been a mistake. The moments we shared were miscalculated. Anything I had started to feel was a mistake. My gut dropped as memories of her flickered in my mind. I shook my head, trying to chase them away and focus on my anger. I couldn't let myself remember her soft smile. I was going to make her pay. If—no, not if... when Connor woke up, I would look him in the eye and tell him of her downfall. She wouldn't know what hit her. I was going to leave her mindfucked and begging for someone to free her from her own sanity.

“Sir, visiting hours are over,” a nurse chimed from behind me, catching me off guard.

“Fuck off,” I grumbled.

She should have realized that I wasn't going to leave him. He'd had a severe heart attack and was placed in a medically induced sleep to heal. I needed to be by his side at all times. He was vulnerable without me.

“I can't let you stay here tonight. The best thing you can do for your brother is to get him set up with a rehabilitation center for when he is ready to go home.” She moved across the room, checking his vitals and straightening his sheets.

The best thing I could've done for him would've been to run away with him years ago. It was too late for that now. I'd destroyed his soul by not listening to him when we were kids. That was my jagged sword to carry.

“I'll do what's best for my brother,” I murmured, knowing that was only the truth moving forward. It was him and me until the brutal end.

The moment I'd stepped into the lobby and waited for him to get a room, I'd already had someone sent to his house to clean, ensuring all his drugs and bottles of whiskey were removed. When he finished here, he would have an in-home therapist coming to care for him. It's not like he could go to a facility, because if our father found out, he would end up bombing the area to take out his own son. I even had to sneak Connor into the hospital so our father wouldn't find out about his overdose.

Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out my wallet and grabbed a few hundred-dollar bills.

“This will be worth you looking the other way,” I stated, sticking out the money for the nurse.

She looked at me, then the money before snatching the bills from my hand.

“Just for tonight,” she said, stashing the money into her bra.

I ignored her, knowing that what she said and what I did had no correlation. She was delusional if she thought I would leave here before my brother woke up. The last time he was in the hospital haunted me, and I knew that should have been my last

straw to run away. If I'd found the courage to run then, Connor wouldn't be in the damned hospital bed again.

"Tell me where that damn instrument is," my dad screamed, shoving Connor against the wall.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Connor narrowed his eyes.

"You ungrateful little shit," he snapped, dropping my twin to the floor. "You want to remain stubborn?"

"Connor, just—"

"I told you already. I have nothing for you," Connor cut me off and raised his finger at me.

I jammed my hands into my pockets and hid my pained expression. Being cut off was something my father did to me. I understood his actions were for power, but Connor driving a wedge between us made my chest tighten.

A seething glare marred my dad's face, slicing through me. It wasn't even meant for me. He was focused solely on my twin. Connor was starting a war he couldn't win, which was over something I gave him.

A loud crunch echoed in my ears as Father's foot crashed into his chest. Connor was flung back on the wooden floor, clutching his gut, gasping for air.

"Tell me. Where is that damned guitar?"

"Up your ass and around the corner," Connor sneered, wheezing for air.

My father's fist flew down, smashing into my twin's jaw. Blood splattered on the floor, speckling the dark wood with crimson. Connor's glare didn't soften, and his determination to not back down made my heart slam against my ribcage at a menacing pace.

"You should be proud, Dad. Didn't you teach us to not back down?" Connor coughed and bloody spit spewed from his mouth.

“Very. Let’s see how long you can hold on for.” He inhaled a large breath as he pulled back his right fist while he clenched Connor’s shirt with his left.

The sound of bones snapping made my stomach twist, but I held steady, witnessing yet another brutal beat down.

The sound of the hospital’s heart monitor was barely audible compared to my brother’s screams, which had imprinted in my mind. I sat in Connor’s room next to his bed, forcing myself not to nervously rock. I couldn’t appear weak. Connor’s resilience was probably why my father had granted him this one mere mercy, but I was the real reason he was there. If I hadn’t gotten that guitar for him when we were younger...

“Take this and get out,” Father snapped at a nurse. He handed her a few twenties and loomed over her, waiting until her knees buckled.

I looked away from the exchange, focusing my attention back on Connor. His eyes were swollen shut, and his breathing was shallow. This wasn’t the first time he was this badly injured, but receiving medical treatment was new. We were forced to make a bullshit excuse that he fell down the stairs. The injuries would only line up if he’d fallen down twenty flights of stairs. It must’ve cost our loving father a pretty penny to not have it investigated.

“You need to get your brother under control,” Father snapped, forcing me to look up at him to show him respect. He didn’t deserve any, yet it was ingrained in my head that I had to.

“Yes, sir,” I answered, being the obedient son. I despised that I couldn’t stand up to him like Connor did. He was strong that way.

“You are the son I wanted when I had kids. I don’t know how I ended up with this disobedient piece of crap. He might as well be a bastard to me.” He turned around, closing the

blinds to the hospital room, and I saw Connor's fist ball from the corner of my eye.

My father may not have wanted to claim Connor as his flesh and blood, but I couldn't imagine my life without him. He was my anchor and my salvation from this world. I couldn't allow him to run away. I needed him.

Chapter 2

Emily

I'm tethered to bad luck, *literally*, and the chain was attached to a basement floor.

Drops of water dripped incessantly into a nearby puddle, and a stream of light flickered in through the barred window. My head fell back against the brick wall as I gazed at the dim light, searching for my will to survive.

I was more of a captive than I'd ever been with Connor and Liam, which made my gut sink with wishing I was back with them. The green trees and camper that helped drive me toward my future were slowly fading away, and it was replaced by the two wolves I'd left behind. I just didn't understand why, and the pressure billowing in my chest craved the answer.

The shackles that circled my bloody wrists and ankles itched, and I scratched at the tender flesh. Crimson blood and yellow pus oozed, seeping from the torn skin beneath my cuffs. If I lived, these wounds would scar and remain as a constant reminder of my—

“Move it!” one of my captors yelled, jarring me.

Steps reverberated on the concrete stairs, making me press back to be as small as possible. I wanted the darkness to hide me enough for them to forget I existed. No, that was impossible; that would have been good luck, and that wasn't something I was dealt.

Chains shook as multiple figures walked in, casting faint shadows against the wall. Their sniffles and sobs began to fill the small space, drowning out the incessant drip. The only reprieve I could've received from the broken pipe was replaced by more misfortune.

“Get on your knees, girls,” the man commanded.

I was familiarizing myself with the voices that came and went, since I didn't get a good look at them. He was the driver and the one who grabbed me off the street. I should have never

run from the police. If I could redo it, I would've tried harder to make Connor run away with me. I wanted both of the twins to run away with me. My two wolves. I must have been losing it to miss them this much. What was wrong with me?

Another familiar voice whined from across the room, "Please, I don't really know anything. I don't know who you are, so if you let me go, I wouldn't say anything."

"Shut up, tramp," the captor yelled. The flashlight in his hand pointed at the ground, casting him in an eerie glow.

He started to attach each girl to the mounts on the floor. Not wanting to be caught watching, I barely looked up while I counted each pair of feet in the dim light. Five other girls had been taken, and they were spaced out at least ten feet apart. The moment the last *click* of the chain locked us all in together, the man left, and everything fell silent except for their cries.

What felt like hours passed, and the incessant water drops had returned. Metal clanked, and the shadows moved as a soft voice talked to themselves.

"Not me. I was good. Please, someone, save me," a voice that was way too similar to be a coincidence whimpered.

"Candice?" I asked skeptically. My skin prickled with fear of the unknown. Her rambling stopped, and time froze while I waited for the response.

"Yeah," she whined.

Her chains rattled, and through the little light that flickered in, I could see she was attempting to move closer. The rattling metal clunked to a halt. She'd come as far as it would allow her to. Stripes of the setting sun streaked her face, highlighting her bloody neck and swollen eyes.

"Penny?"

"It's me. I'm here." I paused, leaning in closer to her. "Jesus, Candice, what happened to you?" I croaked, shifting forward as far as I could.

“They scanned me with some device like a dog, then cut me open to grab my tracker. They didn’t even give me any pain medicine. It hurt so bad. They didn’t do that to you?” She sobbed.

My chest stung as my hammering heartbeat slammed against it. At this rate, if I didn’t take deep breaths, I would have a heart attack. I remembered them scanning me, but it didn’t beep, so they moved me again to this location.

“I didn’t have a tracker,” I whispered.

I could have been saved from torment and told my kidnappers that. But they wouldn’t have listened. Even if I’d begged. They had rubbed the scanner against every inch of my skin.

“Lucky you. It was excruciating,” she replied, letting out a haggard sigh.

If one more person said I was lucky, I was going to snap. Nothing about me was streaked with good luck.

“You know each other?” someone spoke up, shifting forward as well.

“Not really,” Candice answered for me.

“If you don’t have a tracker, does that mean you weren’t being sold?” the same voice asked.

“Well—” I didn’t know what I should divulge. Were they working for Arthur? “I am still in training, so I guess I didn’t need one.”

“She was with Connor and Liam. I guess they got hit too,” Candice stated, raising her voice.

“Keep it down. Didn’t you get punished enough for running your mouth upstairs?” a different girl with brown curls sneered.

“Can it, Alex,” Candice snapped.

It fell silent except for the dripping water pooling on the floor.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

I wanted to put a piece of gum over that leaking pipe or something to just make it stop. My skin prickled, and I rocked slowly to shift my mind away from this hell. Fear was a constant thorn pressed deep into my skin. One I'd become accustomed to. What would my life be without it?

"How long have you been here?" someone with thin blonde hair asked.

Part of me wanted to get names, but I knew that meant I might form an attachment to them. I couldn't take any chances.

"One full day and night," I answered, looking out the barred window on the other side of the room.

My fingers shook as a breeze blew in. The sun was going to set again, and this damn dress left me exposed to the elements. The previous night had frozen me to the bone, and each chill shook off a layer of my hope.

"It's about to get really cold. Go back to the wall and start holding yourself to trap in your body heat." The defeat in my tone resonated in my soul, taunting and reminding me that I was running out of fumes.

Connor thought I was on my way to living the life I always wanted. Liam was probably nagging him about letting me go, while caring and looking out for his brother, like he always did. I wished I had someone in my corner like that.

"No, we need to try to get out of here. I may not know Cormac, but the tenured girls still talk about him to this day. They said he was brutal on them," Candice blurted, yanking on her chains.

"It isn't a rumor. I watched him with other girls before he disappeared. The more he hurt you, the harder his dick would get," Alex stated coldly.

Through the faint lighting, I could see her head leaning against the wall and her arms folded across her chest. Not only

did she appear cold, but she looked detached. She wasn't the kindest, but I think that was her front. Her coping mechanism.

"Then we need to start thinking of a way to get out of here!" the girl with thin blonde hair squeaked.

She and Candice began pulling at the chains, making them clang together and reverberate off the basement walls.

I already tried mine on the first day. The bloody wounds under my shackles were the consequence of my actions. At least I learned the name of my captor instead of just thinking of him as the twin's uncle. Identifying him would help me see him as a person, not just my tormentor.

I shifted back against the wall, zipping my jacket and pulling the dress over my shins. They needed to find out on their own that their struggle would be for nothing. I laid my head on my legs, exhaling my hot breaths into the dress to keep me warm for as long as possible. I'd endured many freezing nights, and my turning gut reminded me I probably had many more to come.

"I'm not saying to give up, but just know it is about to get really cold. You should start finding ways to keep warm," I said to the girls one last time.

The rattling continued for hours, and they started to nag Candice and the blonde to give it up. Candice was persistent, yelling at them that they shouldn't give up. Maybe that was true, or perhaps we all needed to accept defeat in our own ways. I wasn't going to be the voice to lead her there.

Ignoring the loud clunks and sobs for help, I started counting down from one hundred, hoping sleep would find me. Images of Bubbles warmed my thoughts. She brought me sanity while fate's cruelty kept finding it fit to take her from me. I sucked in a deep breath to ground myself. I would get her and my backpack from them.

Thick smoke filled the room, startling me awake. Sweet tobacco burned my nose, and my stomach turned. Cormac was here, and Connor was right. He did *always* smell like a cigar

shop. The billowing fumes rose to the ceiling and twirled around me, taking me back to when flames consumed my home.

Out-of-tune whistling reverberated, and my throat tightened. I slammed my eyes closed, hoping that he would leave me alone if he thought I was asleep. Candice's restraints continued to rattle. She needed to shut the fuck up like the other girls and I had.

"Let me go, please. I'll do anything you want, promise," she pleaded between her frantic breaths.

"Oh, is that right?" Cormac's voice dropped an octave.

I hadn't seen or heard Arthur, so I assumed whatever the twin's uncle was up to, he was acting alone. Connor wouldn't have let me go for me to be taken by someone else. At least, I hoped he wouldn't do that to me.

"I can spy for you. I am really good at listening," she continued, desperation clear in her voice.

"Already have a few of those. What else would you do for your master?" he asked from across the room. The room was dark, but the glow of his cigar and a small flashlight indicated that he was standing in front of Candice. Her wrists were dripping blood, matching mine.

"I-I..." she stuttered, then fell silent.

His low growl made my ears burn, and I swallowed, shutting my eyes again in case he turned around. *You can't see me. You can't see me.* Chains clashed together, and the banging metal made my breaths pick up. I needed to calm down. I couldn't have him see even the slightest movement from my side of the room.

"No, please, don't, please!" Candice shrieked, and the metal clanked together rapidly. "Stop!"

"Shut the fuck up," he demanded, and a heavy thud hit the wall.

Her cries for help fell silent, but it was replaced with the sound of a belt coming undone and a zipper being pulled

down. I held my breath, and my racing pulse hammered in my ears. The other girls didn't try to hide their cries and sobs, and my stomach dropped with relief and guilt. At least he would take them before noticing me. Bile pushed up in my throat. *Why would I think something like that?*

Heavy grunts and the shifting of two bodies filled the room. Testing fate, I opened my eyes. A lit cigar lay on the floor, illuminating Candice's bloody forehead as she was thrust up and up while Cormac raped her. His hips pistoned down into her, and her bloody wrists rocked.

Slamming my eyes shut again, I started to count down. The only salvation I had was in pretending I didn't exist.

Chapter 3

Liam

“He should wake up any time now,” the nurse informed me as she replaced his IV bag.

“Thank you.”

She turned around and examined me like I was her patient.

“You doing okay?” she asked, moving back to caring for Connor.

“Yes,” I answered. She didn’t need the actual truth.

Connor was only asleep for twenty-eight hours. I smelled like I hadn’t showered in two days, and my clothes were wrinkled from sitting in a wobbly hospital chair. It was turning my stomach into knots, and my obsessive need to wipe my clothes off was starting to be noticed.

“Sometimes when our loved ones are hurting, we tend to forget about ourselves.” She continued to tuck in the sheets around Connor as she spoke with me.

“He deserves more than what I have given him,” I muttered, shocking myself with how honest that reply was. She was worried about the wrong person. I wanted her attention back on Connor.

“Don’t blame yourself for someone’s actions. I know from experience that it will eat you alive. You do the best you can, and so does he. Mental health is what led your brother here. Not you.” She stopped tending to my brother and looked up at me.

She would have been right for a *normal* family, but our household was far from *normal*. I didn’t care what type of home we had. I only wanted a family my entire life. I worked with my father as often as possible in hopes that we could all come together one day. That was the only thing I’d ever wanted. When I realized it wasn’t working, I should have backed off, but I was already on a sinking ship and didn’t know how to get off it.

“Do you believe that people do bad things with good intentions?” My voice dropped down a few octaves as I looked up at her.

She tilted her head at me and took a few steps back. I don't know if it was the way I glared at her that made her step back or if she had been overhearing the conversations I'd had on the phone.

“I think if we do bad things, we have to answer for them and confess,” she replied shakily.

“I'm not Catholic. I don't get to repent. What's done is done.” I looked down at my feet.

I watched as she stepped forward and wiped her palms on her scrubs.

“You don't have to be religious to make things right.” The fear in her voice was gone.

A loud mechanical beeping started going off from the nursing station outside the room. She looked over her shoulder, then back at me.

“I have to go, but an apology is where you should start. Don't forget that you can say sorry one hundred times, but it won't mean anything if your actions don't match your words.” She started to leave the room but stopped and looked at me one last time. “This isn't your fault. Mental health is just as important as physical health; sometimes someone just needs help to feel better.” She left, and I sat in the chair, bent over with my hands over my face.

I didn't know if she was right. Fuck, I don't even know if I was reading her body language right. All of this was messing with my head, and I couldn't trust myself to even gauge her correctly.

My phone chimed, and my heart rate sped up. If I had flipped it around, it could be two things. Either it was an Emily update, which would make me happy, or my father breathing down my neck. I had a feeling it was door number two, so I gripped my phone and silenced it. The people I had

looking for Emily were utter failures, and at this point, they would probably call me to gloat if they found her.

To keep my brother hidden, I checked him in under a fake name and paid off whoever I needed. When my father texted to ask where Connor was, I lied about him catching a crazy bug. He was a persistent ass and wanted to know Emily's whereabouts, so I told him another lie and said I had her in extensive training separated from Connor. My father couldn't find out about Emily being gone. The backlash against us would be brutal, especially for my brother.

A low groan made my head snap up to see Connor shifting in the bed. My stomach lifted as I shot up to stand next to him.

"Hey, brother," I soothed, wanting him to know I never left his side.

"Yo," he croaked.

I fought the need to roll my eyes at his response. The rasp in his voice made guilt constrict my chest. I'd damned his soul by not putting him first. He had thrown in the towel because I had a weakness to obey the only parent we'd ever had instead of the brother who accepted me for what I was. The idea of a family blurred my mind. I'd had my family right in front of me the entire time. It was him.

"You are in the South Charles Hospital," I informed him and pushed the call button for a nurse to come back in.

"That's good," he murmured, flickering his eyelids open. "I'm sorry."

Connor was the only person in the world who could upset me so much and pull on my heartstrings just enough that all the anger didn't matter anymore.

"Don't be. We are in this together from here on out, okay?" I needed him to understand this. I was in his debt because I couldn't lose him.

"Sounds good. I have to tell you something." He broke into a coughing fit, and his face turned cherry red.

I placed my hand on his shoulder. “Take deep breaths. You can tell me later when you feel better.”

“I love you, brother,” he whispered as he closed his eyes again.

My chest filled with rocks, and I slammed my lids shut and pressed my forehead against his hair.

“I love you.”

His breathing slowly transformed into a calm rhythm. My words weren't enough to take away the pain he was feeling. What I wanted to ask him was on the tip of my tongue, but I kept swallowing the words. Asking him if this was an accident wouldn't change the past.

I sat back down on the chair beside him and pulled my phone from my pocket. It was heavy in my hands from the weight of the revenge I needed to seek. Emily needed to suffer for this. Slowly.

ME: The person to bring Penny to me will get a \$100,000 bonus.

I sent the text to my trusted associates and pocketed my phone again. I didn't want to see other missed messages. Instead, I focused on the only thing I could. Emily. She wouldn't know what hit her. Her mind and soul would belong to my games.

Chapter 4

Emily

The coldness was freezing my bones, and the smaller I curled into a ball, the more flakes of myself broke away. Was it hope that was floating away? If I had the energy, I would run my fingers through the air and grasp at the fragment of myself that was fleeing me. *Okay, I was officially losing it.*

I lay curled in a fetal position, staring at Candice, who was still knocked out cold from last night. The dried blood coating her face was blotchy, and the discarded cigar had long burned out. My eyes stung, and if I were to see a reflection of myself, I could guarantee prominent red veins were visible in the sclera.

Glimmers of sunlight started peering through the bars, and I welcomed the warmth with a desperate embrace. *Please be a warmer day, please be a warmer day.* It was a repeating mantra in my head. My shoulders relaxed the tiniest fraction. Desperation was the gas I needed to fuel my will to survive, and I craved the embers to wake me from the depths of my despair.

Candice's finger twitched, and I sat up, not wanting the other girls and her to think I was weak. They may be in the same position as me, but I had to take any upper hand I could find.

"Candice. Candice, can you hear me?" I called out to her.

I watched as her hand lifted to the dark blood on her face. Her fingers fumbled on the gash, and sobs shook her shoulders. I wanted to comfort her, but jealousy stopped me abruptly. Why should she have someone comfort her when I had no one? My stomach twisted, and bile burned my throat. I wanted to blame the twins for that thought, but a part of me knew—an obnoxious part I tried to shut up—knew I couldn't hide from myself. The selfishness was a conscious action I was taking, not them.

The sobs continued, and each one constricted a barbed wire tighter and tighter around my heart. I looked away from her, gazing out the window to find my own comfort. Since I couldn't find it within myself, the other girls could comfort her.

"Why didn't you try to stop him?" she wailed to no one directly, rocking back and forth.

No one answered, and her crying continued. They were going to come down here if she didn't stop, and I bit my tongue for as long as I could until nerves overtook me.

"What did you expect me to do? In case you didn't notice, I was and am chained down," I snapped and immediately regretted my tone. *What had gotten into me?*

"You're right. I'm sorry. Fuck, this is bad. I can't do this. I... uhm... shit. What are we going to do?" She sat up, brushing her hair away from her face.

"I don't know," I murmured, finally looking at her.

She took her ponytail out and pulled a bobby pin free, making her knotted blonde hair tumble down. The sight flooded me, and my chains rattled as I looked down at my bound wrists and ankles. All my limbs were shackled to the wall, which made slipping free nearly impossible. Was there a way to unlock them? If there was a key or *maybe* something else?

"Toss me your hairpin," I whispered through gritted teeth.

Blood rushed to my face, but it couldn't have been this easy. I wasn't an expert at lock picking, but I had to try.

"I don't have an extra hair tie to help you tie up your hair, though." She looked at me with furrowed brows and puckered lips.

The spark of hope was pinched between her fingers.

"No, you dimwit. She wants to try to pick the lock," the girl, I think named Alex, snapped.

What a bitch.

“Shh!” My eyes widened, and I pressed my index finger against my lips.

I rattled my chains at her to catch her attention, not knowing if cameras or the people upstairs could hear us. She tilted her head at me, making my chest burn hot.

“I don’t need a hair tie,” I murmured, repeatedly looking down at my restraints to hope she would realize the Alex girl—as bitchy as she was—was right.

It took her longer than it should have, but her mouth fell open, and she nodded her head in understanding. The hammering pulse in my ears made me greedily hold my hands out to catch it. She squatted, dipping her hand to toss it to me underhanded. The pin flew high in the air, and my heart sank as I watched the accessory land between us.

Everything went silent except the water droplets falling from the leaking pipe. It was only karma for not being able to save her from Arthur that we would suffer our end together.

“I’m so sorry,” she croaked.

Her shaky voice sliced through me. I wanted to be the person to comfort her, but everything hurt, and I couldn’t look at her.

It probably wouldn’t have worked, but now we will never know. I turned to the window, looking at the freedom I longed for. If I was never kidnapped, Bubbles and I would be on the road with our new home on wheels, but she slipped through my fingers again.

“We are doomed to be here forever,” the girl on the far right cried.

“Better to accept it now,” Alex mumbled before resting her head back against the wall.

With the dim light that came in through the far window, I took each girl in, one by one. The girl to the far left had long, thin blonde hair and frail shoulders. Her fingers were trembling against her pale skin. Candice was beside her, sitting with her legs folded. The dried blood coating Candice’s hair made it look almost black.

I continued to scan the line and locked eyes with Alex. Her brown curls still had a beautiful shine, and her nails were perfectly manicured. Tall black boots covered her legs, probably providing her warmth when the sun went down. My gut stung with wishing they were mine to wear. The next girl was curled into a small ball, hiding, with her back to me. Her hand was covering her ear, which I assumed blocked the noise. That was something I should do. The last girl was dramatically looking around the room, not settling on one place, and she fidgeted every few seconds. Her hazel eyes were bloodshot, telling me she must not be blinking enough.

Candice's sniffles continued for longer than I could keep track of, and the clanking of metal against the cement was a constant irritation. My eyes burned from staring at the shifting sunlight, and my neck ached from holding still. If only my heart would follow the cadence of my body and slow down.

The wooden door on the top of the steps slammed against the wall, and the clock ticking in my head turned to a high pitch ring.

"My dolls, I have something special for you," Cormac rasped.

My gut twisted, and I bowed my head, quickly shutting my eyes.

I don't exist. I don't exist. I'm not here.

Candice's hyperventilation grew louder, and the rattling bounced off the bare walls. My hopes lifted, knowing with each struggle she made, the more of a chance I had to go unnoticed. She would give him the fight he probably wanted while I was a ghost to the world.

"Hello, little one. Oh. What is this? Did I leave you with a little parting gift?"

Candice took a sharp breath, telling me he was next to her again. Maybe he had a thing for the struggle?

"Please, don't. I can be valuable to you," she pleaded.

It wouldn't matter what she offered. From his demonstrations last night, I knew he was only looking for two

things. Power and control. The two ingredients for any man who had no concern for anyone else, especially women. It helped me understand Connor more. He wasn't born the devil; instead, he was raised in hell, molded into who he was.

"You are so valuable. We had something special last night," he purred.

Candice's sniffles grew into sobs.

"Don't touch me," she cried while desperately trying to escape.

I was going to witness Candice be taken for the third time. Three times, and each time I couldn't help her. My gut twisted, and bile tickled my throat. I was on the peak of a sinking ship, watching as she begged for help and extended her hand. She wouldn't be going alone; sooner or later, I would follow her into the hollow embrace's cold hands. I would just be going without my soul intact.

"Shh," he tried to soothe, but it was like sandpaper.

I could count down to hide, which was what the voices inside my head were screaming for me to do, but my weakness tasted sour. I would rather go down with my soul than the remnants of nothing.

"Don't touch her," I shouted, surprising myself. "Let us go." I opened my eyes to see his pale hand running up Candice's bruised leg. I held firm on my choice, not backing down. I would at least make it hurt if he wanted to take me.

"She's awake after all." His demonic chuckle was the kind of laugh you only heard in horror movies.

"Connor and Liam speak highly of you," I bolstered, straightening my shoulders. I needed to find a way to appeal to his emotions. If he had any, that is.

My body trembled as he let out a bellowing laugh. I waited for regret to fill me, but it never came. At least I wasn't fully lost to my selfishness.

"That is a bunch of shit! They let me just disappear!" He held his thumb and forefinger in the air with only a small

space between them as if holding a speck of dust that was gone and never seen again. “They didn’t even care about my absence,” he snarled, slamming his foot down with dramatic emphasis.

Candice’s tear-filled eyes looked shakily at me, and I could see her relief. She wasn’t alone because we were in this together, and it was time I sacrificed myself for her. Maybe that would help us all unite.

Cormac stalked over to me without breaking his stare. His boot landed more vigorously in the middle of the puddle, causing the dirty water to splatter onto me. The bobby pin in the middle of the room remained untouched. It was a beacon of hope, taunting me.

“You think my nephews care that you are gone? If they didn’t care about me, why would they care about you?” he asked, squatting down to look me in the eyes. His shoulders were broad but not filled out like Connor or Liam’s.

I didn’t answer him while I leaned in closer to him. I wasn’t afraid of the wrath of a man anymore. What he was going to do was expected, and I had to hold on to this slight upper hand that my strength had granted me.

“Let me guess how your stay went with them,” he rasped, yanking down my jacket. “Liam was standoffish from you, and Connor lashed out at you with any opportunity he could. Am I getting warm?” His hand lingered on my arm, rolling the material between his fingers before focusing his gaze on me. “I think my accomplice was wrong about the twins caring about you. They probably stared at you with pity because you are a piece of trash.”

The person he worked with was at the dinner that night? My chest tightened because he had traces of being right, but what he described was only the armor they showed others. Cormac would never know about the nights I’d lain on the couch with them. When Connor would sweep the hair from my face while Liam rubbed his hand over my shin. He would never experience the creative side of Connor as he strummed his guitar for me or when Liam kissed me with desperation filled

with more than just lust. He could take a lot from me, but not my cherished memories of them. They were *mine*.

I raised my chin, poking the bear. He could get it over with because he had already taken me from everything I ever wanted.

He stopped messing with my jacket, rubbed his finger under my chin, and lifted it higher, forcing me to look into his eyes. “Oh, silly girl, you actually believed they loved you? How do you think I knew you would be outside at that moment?”

I jerked my head back, slamming it against the wall. I couldn’t bear his touch and needed to get away from him. He had to be trying to get a rise out of me. Connor let me go to save me from his father. I had to believe that.

“Lies,” I murmured, not knowing if I was reassuring myself or speaking the truth.

“You are a lucky girl to have me now. I will always be honest with you.” A cocky smirk played at the corner of his lips.

I lurched forward, slamming my bound hands against his chest. The chains clanged against my force, and the snap of tension tried to yank me back. My ragged breaths were hot, and I glared, waiting for him to hit back.

“Luck has nothing to do with this,” I seethed, wanting to strike that damn word from the dictionary.

His hand whipped out, crashing against my windpipe, and his knuckles curled, cutting off my airway. I succumbed to the burn in my lungs and the spinning in my head. He could take this from me because what was I but a puppet to fate.

The pressure billowed into my lungs, suffocating me, and I started seeing double sets of his brown eyes. I slammed my eyelids shut. Not to hide, but so I didn’t see a shit color brown as I plunged into the hell he planned for me. I would have rather imagined seeing Liam’s dark orbs with flecks of amber.

“Where did that fight go? Hm?” He hummed in satisfaction as he loosened his grasp.

Wet coughs shook my body while an involuntary impulse made me desperately gasp for air. My face had to be beet red, giving my oppressor the pleasure he craved.

“Unchain me, and we can find out,” I growled between breaths.

His eyes scanned me from head to toe, lingering on my breasts. My body was all I had, and if using it to accentuate my cleavage as I filled my lungs helped, I would pant until I couldn't anymore. He jammed his hand into the pocket of his slacks, and the rattling of keys made my blood run hot.

“Let's see what you got,” he purred as he stuck the key in the lock that bound my wrists to the floor.

The click of the key turning made me jerk my hands up, and I yanked the manacles around the back of his neck. His eyes bulged while I crossed my hands to cinch the rusted metal around his Adam's apple. The shackles cut into my wrist, and a low growl I barely recognized crawled from deep in my chest.

“This is what I got,” I chided, using all my strength to squeeze harder.

He kicked out his leg, swiping my feet out from under me. I crossed my arms, holding onto him as my back smashed against the floor, leaving me breathless. Before I could suck in air, his fist collided with my gut, and I groaned as I fought through the agony, but I didn't let go. I couldn't allow myself to give up, even while his knee continued to jam down and slam into me.

His fingers scrambled up my arms and to my face, and I started to beg for him to pass out before he could do anything. I was teetering on the brink of winning but needed a little more time. His digits jammed into my eyes, and the sting made me jerk away from him, loosening my hold. I shook my head, screaming while I fought through the pain. My eyes were going to explode if he didn't stop. He released his hold, and I jarred my lids open to see a blurry fist come crashing down to my face.

Everything went black.

Chapter 5

Liam

“I need you to organize his medical charts to be moved here immediately,” I ordered one of the nurses behind a desk.

“Sir, he should go to a rehab facility, not home. Plus, he shouldn’t be moved for another three days,” she recited for the tenth time, raising her eyebrows at me.

“That is none of your business, and as you can see, he signed the stupid AMA thing you asked for. You have no say.”

Her worry was wrongly placed, and I had little time to placate her. My father couldn’t get word that Connor was in the hospital, and the longer we stayed here with prying eyes, the more at risk he was.

“Look, please just send it. I have medical transport arranged for him, and I pledge I will have the best care for him at the place we are going,” I whispered, leaning over the counter. I inhaled a deep breath and looked up at her from under my lashes, laying on a thick, worried look. “He’s my twin,” I croaked.

She nodded and started clicking and clacking away on the keyboard. I turned away from her, heading back into Connor’s room. He lay in the bed, fast asleep, and the wires connected to him sent a perfect rhythm of beeps that were becoming relaxing. It was a reminder that he hadn’t left me. I was inches away from him doing just that, and now I had to make everything better. My phone buzzed, breaking the moment.

Doc: The transport is here. I’m on my way up.

ME: Got it.

I walked over to the bag I had someone bring me and threw it over my shoulder. My car was parked in the hospital lot, and as much as I wanted to ride with Connor, there wasn’t enough room. Plus, getting to his house before he arrived was important to ensure it was cleaned properly.

I placed my hand on my brother's shoulder and stood there for a few moments, hoping he would wake up so I could let him know I was leaving. He didn't move, and my gut sank, knowing I had to leave him. My feet were heavy as I strode out of the room, and I had to fight off the nagging voices to go back as I clicked the down button for the elevator.

The penthouse was quiet as I pushed open the front door, making the scent of cleaner fill my nose. The strong smell helped ease some of the aches in my chest, but the pain wouldn't go away until my twin was with me and Emily's mess was gone. I scrubbed my hand over my face as I tried to understand how we got here.

Images of Connor's lifeless body flashed before my eyes, and my palms became sweaty. A piece of myself almost died, and the thought of losing it again was sending me deeper into my obsessions.

I pulled open a drawer and shakily laid my car key down. I would've had my motorcycle if I hadn't picked up Emily's art supplies. If I'd had it, the burning desire to run from my demons would have had me pushing one hundred through Times Square. Which wouldn't have been good for the people on the streets who were mindlessly enjoying their lives like hamsters on a wheel.

I strode through the kitchen, heading toward the office. The knots coiled deep in my back slightly unwound when I stepped into the space. Once filled with alcohol, the shelves were empty and replaced with minimalistic black decor.

A haggard breath escaped my lips, and I went to his desk to carefully go through each drawer, ensuring drugs weren't hidden. I wanted to trust the cleaners I'd hired, but my ability to trust was severed. Before Emily, I could barely gather the courage to believe people. Post her, there was nothing to collect because all that was left was a hollow hole.

My limbs froze when the front door opened, and voices filled the house. *Shit*. Hastily, I pushed the chair back, and my

skin itched, making me quickly put the area back together perfectly.

“Welcome,” I greeted, turning the corner. The doctor that helped me save my twin’s life stood beside the private EMTs we’d hired, nosily looking around the house. “He will need to be carried upstairs to his room. It is the first one on the left.” I stood to the side and waved my arm at the tight spiral staircase.

The people transporting looked up the stairs and then back at each other. Exhaustion was already starting to etch their faces. Connor was on the gurney, fast asleep, and my brows furrowed, not understanding how he was still asleep. All my emotions of missing Emily moments prior were washed away as I stepped closer to him. He was so defenseless and weak. Seeing him this way was destroying parts of me I didn’t think I would ever get back.

“I gave him a sedative. Sometimes when we transport patients to a new location, their heart rate will pick up while they try to understand where they are. I didn’t want that to happen,” he informed me as I ran my finger over the rough sheets.

He was finally home, where he could lie in his bed and be surrounded by his belongings. I nodded at the doctor and turned away to lead the EMTs up the stairs.

Their steps thumped as they carried him up, and I closely watched, wondering when Connor would wake up. I didn’t understand why they would use so many drugs for an addict and expect him not to become hooked on them. When they reached the top, I showed them his room and watched as they carefully laid him on the bed.

“He should wake up in a couple hours,” the doc informed me from the doorway.

“You really drugged him up,” I muttered, hating that I was seeing him so defenseless.

“We didn’t give him that much, but his exhaustion from the heart attack and whatever led up to it amplifies the medicine.”

I didn't acknowledge him or say goodbye as he left the room. When my phone alarm chimed that the front door had closed, my shoulders relaxed, and I fell to my knees. Exhaustion swirled, and the heaviness of my lids made me lay my head on Connor's bed beside him. I should have moved and lay down somewhere, but the lure of sleep yanked me into its clutches before I could. This was a good place to rest my eyes.

Repeated vibrations jarred me awake, and the sinking sun lit the room with bright orange, making me squint. I shook my head and pulled my phone from my pocket, wanting to silence it so I could go back to sleep. Multiple text messages and missed calls filled my screen, and the name made me sit upright.

Dad: Call me

Dad: This absence is unacceptable

Dad: Pick up your fucking phone

I scrolled through countless more texts filled with profanity and multiple missed calls. Standing up, I hit the phone icon to call him back and went to the hallway. My neck and back were tight, and I stretched, trying to uncoil the knots from sleeping in an uncomfortable position. The ringing blared in my ear, and my lids slammed shut as a splitting headache cut through me.

"Where the fuck have you been?" my father's booming voice made me pull my phone back and rub my temples.

"What do you need?" I asked, knowing he hated explanations that could be seen as excuses.

"I need Penny in my house now," he snarled.

My chest tightened, and my mouth fell open while I tried to think of a way to deny him what he wanted.

"She is being punished at the moment. A reprieve will make me look weak," I lied, despite knowing that would never satisfy him.

He was a bloodhound, sniffing out the truth and getting what he wanted. What I couldn't understand was why he wanted her so much now. He had always trusted me to condition the girls.

“Get her here now. The feds may be going through everything. Thanks to your fucking brother.”

“What do you mean? What makes you think the feds are coming for us?” I snarled. Why was he blaming Connor for this?

“Candice and a few other girls were on transport to their new owner a day ago and never made it to their destination. I just got a call from him.”

Huh, he'd sold Candice?

“I see. I assume you checked their trackers?” I questioned.

It was why we installed trackers that were only detectable to our scanners. Only our software could locate them, and they kept the tracker for life, even after being sold. It was how we knew our buyers' locations.

“They were cut out and left in the gutter,” he snarled, and a loud crack of wood rang in my ear. “You are to not leave Penny's side. I am on my way to get our other girls and put them on complete lockdown with me. Don't trust anyone to move Penny for you. You hear me?” he demanded.

“We should split up our merchandise and have her stay with me. Maybe bring over a few other girls.” I paced the hall, needing to figure something out.

Emily was on the verge of being found with all the men I had searching for her, but with my father's building paranoia, I was on the brink of him sniffing out my lies.

“No. You have no say in this.”

“Fine, give me two days to finish my punishment. She needs to feel like she will never eat again and will never be free,” I demanded, hoping he would let this happen.

“Only because it'll take me time to situate these girls. Not a moment later, you hear me? Also, tell your deadbeat brother

he needs to call me back. Him ignoring my commands will have consequences.” He hung up at that.

The hallway was closing in on me, and my breath hitched as I ran through my solutions. I needed to handle one thing at a time, but my rapid heartbeat thrashed in my chest, forcing my thoughts to run faster.

The only thought droning louder was to leave and find Emily. The people I had assigned to look for her were failing. I had to rectify that now more than ever, especially before my father discovered we had lost her.

Chapter 6

Emily

My body shifted up and down as I started to come back to and crying echoed off the walls. I kept my eyes shut as I tried to put the pieces together. Was I crying? I bit my tongue until I tasted blood, trying to wake myself up. It couldn't have been me crying because my mouth was closed. My legs were pushed wider, driving my knee deeper into the water. Something to drink sounded nice. My throat was so dry. My lazy thoughts were fogged over, and regaining my surroundings was agonizingly slow.

Why is someone crying? I must be at the homeless women's shelter. Someone is always crying here.

I rocked my head to the side and tried to shift my legs together. I needed to ease the burn between my thighs. My heart slammed against my ribcage as I saw the chained girls looking away and sobbing. Ignorance was always bliss, and I forced my mind to continue to pretend.

I'm not here; I'm not here.

This was the homeless women's shelter. It had to be. Five rows over had to be someone finally leaving their abusive husband. We would run into each other, and I would tell her it would all be okay. This was only temporary. She wasn't like me, where the next chapter of her life would find her kidnapped and raped on a basement floor. My gut turned, and I shoved that train of thoughts to the side. I needed to count and pretend I was asleep.

One hundred and ninety-nine.

I couldn't handle counting higher than two hundred. My back dragged across the rough cement with each rough thrust. Small rocks cut into my tailbone, and my knee was numb from the frigid water.

"Fuck," he moaned, making my skin prickle.

I needed to accept that I had no control over the time it took for him to be done. Hope was a flickering bitch, and she was fleeing faster than I could run to it.

“You deserve this,” Cormac grunted, and I continued to pretend I wasn’t here.

I lay flaccid and wished he would mimic me. I had one sliver of power no one could understand, and it was sparkling embers of self-love while everything was stripped from me. My desire for the twins wasn’t because I was disgusting and enjoyed being taken and claimed. It was because they were meant for me.

“Please stop already,” Candice whined, and I wished *she* would stop.

She needed to let me take this one. I’d watched enough of her pain, and it was my turn to take the fall for her.

“I know you are awake.” He leaned down and licked up my neck to my ear. His hips picked up the pace, hammering into me.

My body tensed without my permission, selling me out. It didn’t matter if I was awake. I wasn’t going to open my eyes. I shifted my head away and moved my hand up to avoid touching his heated skin. Something hit the back of my hand. I stopped and moved my palm around, trying to understand what it was.

Ringling blared in my ears as blood rushed to them, dulling the sound of his escalating grunts. My head began to bounce as he thrust harder into me. I used the movement to clutch the only thing that could give me freedom. The bobby pin pressed into my palm as I held on for dear life.

Nothing faded to black, but my mind went somewhere safe, and I didn’t have to count for the first time to get there. Could I see getting hold of this pin as luck? Even while my thighs were stretched, and my dignity was taken from me? It didn’t matter anymore. The biggest piece of revenge would soon be served by my escape and feeling the sun on my face.

My legs were heavy, and my vagina burned in the worst way. My fingers were cramping from continuously picking at the lock. *Tik, tik, tik. Fuck.* A grunt from deep in my stomach passed my lips. I stared forward, trying to distract myself, then quickly looked away. Candice had wiggled out of her tight leather leggings to relieve herself to the right of where she slept. The girl beside her was grimacing. At least I had a dress I could lift to go when I had to and didn't have someone next to me.

It had been hours, and I still couldn't figure out how to pick one of the large locks that chained me down. I've already shaved off the plastic tip of the pin, and I scraped around the keyhole, trying to find the sweet spot. The deep cuts on my wrists stung as I wiggled around but seeing everyone's needy eyes drove me to persist. The sun had set hours ago, and I couldn't waste any time. Sneaking away under the guise of the moon was our best chance.

My muscles tightened, and my chest ached, knowing I would be leaving my bag and Bubbles behind. I wanted to keep telling myself she wouldn't want me to risk a dull-witted attempt to get her, but it wouldn't be for just her. It was for me because she was the only one to show me unconditional love.

I allowed my head to fall back as I continued to fumble with the lock and imagined her head resting on my lap, spurring me on, encouraging me to not give up. Warmth cocooned me, and I felt my muscles uncoil.

She always did that for me. Growing up without someone to believe in you or a home to call your own left me depleted. When she came into my life, I was forced to put my sadness aside so I could care for someone other than myself. Really, she cared for me better than I could have cared for myself.

Click

One of the cuffs fell off my wrist, and the cold breeze was a welcoming gift against my battered skin.

"You did it," Candice squealed, making my pulse pick up the pace.

“Shh, we aren’t there yet,” I whispered, trying and failing to hide the grin on my face.

Using the energy that had been unlocked inside me, I moved to the lock attaching me to the wall and wiggled the pin in the same spot as I did the other. *Twist to the right, push up, and slide to the left.*

Click

My pulse pounded in my ears, and I scurried to unclasp my feet. I jammed the pin in and went to work, knowing I had to do both of my feet. I looked up at the dark ceiling, followed the pipes to the window, and hoped each lock would be the same. Chains rattled as some girls sat up, trying to get closer to me. My breaths were turning into desperate gasps as I picked away. My muscles in my fingers ached, and I paused to take steadying breaths.

“Don’t stop. Please,” the girl who was always in the fetal position pleaded.

I locked eyes with her, and my blood ran hot with how frail she was. She looked barely of age. Her life had barely begun.

“What’s your name,” I whispered, needing her help to push on.

“Hope,” she replied.

My heart stopped, and my shoulders shook with a cynical laugh entangled with a sob. I let my head fall forward, and my lids closed. Life was a sardonic bitch. I jerked my hand back into action and picked away at the final lock. I wasn’t giving up on Hope.

Click

My head snapped up to look at the empty stairway and then back down to my other bound foot. The shackle was heavy on my ankle, and I took deep breaths to steady myself. I was almost there. I just needed to concentrate.

“You’re doing it, Penny,” Candice squealed.

“It’s Emily,” I responded, smiling up at her.

Her mouth fell open at the same time my shackles dropped to the floor with the last *click*. My throat tightened, and tears sprang free to cascade down my face. I jerked forward, crawling across the floor and through the puddle. I forced myself to stop and not crash into Hope as I frantically began to free her. Each cuff that fell off her was lifting me higher.

“Why did you leave one on you,” she questioned as her body began to thrum with energy.

“We can use it as a weapon.” I didn’t look up at her as I twisted the pin around to free her. “I will leave one on you. If they come at you, either use the chain to strangle them. Or hit them with it. You hear me?” I looked up at her, and my brows pulled together. She had to be the one I saved first. Candice had been through a lot, but what if this girl wasn’t even eighteen?

Click

“Hope, where are you going after this?” I wanted to say her name repeatedly, needing to hear it more than to gain her attention.

“Uhm.” She paused and bit at her lower lip.

I wanted to keep pace at picking the lock, but the energy in the room shifted, and I stopped to wipe away a tear that ran down her face.

“You can come with me. I will find a place for you,” I told her, knowing I wouldn’t take no as an answer.

She didn’t argue but instead allowed her shoulders to sag. Each click of the lock made my fingers tremble, and when I got to the last one, I sprang to my feet and ran to Candice. The pin was starting to bend, and I didn’t say it out loud, but I couldn’t save them all.

I kneeled at Candice’s feet and started picking away. Her heavy breaths fanned my heated skin, and my chest filled with a glow of hope.

“Thank you for last night,” Candice whispered. She laid her hand on mine to stop me. “I’ve never had anyone stand up for me before.”

I gave her a sad smile and continued pressing on. The floor above creaked, and I flinched, glancing over towards the stairs. My hand jerked in response, causing me to jam the pin hard against the metal.

CLICK

It was a different *click* from the ones before, and I bit down on the inside of my cheek. Tearing my focus away from the steps, I slowly looked back at Candice. Tears pooled in both of our eyes, and my trembling hand lifted the broken pin.

“No,” Candice sobbed.

“What happened?” Alex snapped.

“I-I... I’m sorry,” I stuttered.

I fumbled with the broken pin, knowing it wasn’t long enough to free anyone. I fell back and pulled my knees to my chest. Candice shook her head violently, and her lips ballooned as she held back her cries.

My vision began to blur, and I looked over at Hope as she crawled over to me. Her arms wrapped around me as I held back my own sobs.

“We have to go,” she whispered so low I could barely hear her.

My stomach sank with her words, and I held onto her arm, hiding from everyone’s penetrating glare. She lifted me up and wrapped her arm around my center.

“Wait, you can’t leave us here,” Alex snapped.

I tried to muster the energy to apologize again, but I just *couldn’t*. It was time to shove the guilt deep inside a box and never open it again. I only had one chance to get free, and I couldn’t fuck it up like I did for them.

“We won’t forget you. We will come back,” Hope replied innocently, reminding me of her age.

Was she lying? Could we even come back for them? I didn’t know, so I kept my lips pressed together. I couldn’t give them a broken promise. The cries and rattling chains behind us

stained my mind with a poison I didn't know if I could ever forget.

"Look at me," Hope demanded.

I did as I was told and took deep breaths.

"What is our plan," she asked, wiping my tears.

I looked at her pleading, young eyes and swallowed the last of my tears. She needed me at my best, not at my weakest.

"Follow behind me. We stay close to the walls until we know our surroundings. Stay out of the lights, and don't make a sound," I spoke with reassurance in my tone and looked deeply into her eyes as I felt my tears dry.

I didn't know if the doors had the same type of locks as Connor's, but from the condition of this place, I wanted to bet it didn't. We had to focus on not being caught.

I pulled the basement door open, and the hairs on my nape stood as the hinges creaked. I forced my lids to stay open, fighting the need to slam them closed and hide. Hope needed me to be strong.

No light shone through the crack, and I yanked the door open without letting it hit the wall to get the sound over with. Maybe with a quick sound, they would think it was the old house creaking or someone going down to rape one of us.

I gripped Hope's hand and slowly stepped forward. The dark area was lit with a small lantern on a folding table. Cards and beer bottles were splayed around the light. I pressed my back against the wall, and what felt like fist size holes in the plaster scraped against my back. The room felt empty, but my hammering pulse begged me not to let down my guard.

I squinted and examined the room, searching for any figure in the darkness. There was no movement. The grip on my hand tightened before it disappeared completely. Hope lurched forward, dashing for the door. I jerked my hand out to wrap it around her middle and yanked back, to no avail, as she sprinted for the front door.

"No," I whispered desperately.

My heart hammered, and I whipped my head around the corner to see if the other side of the room was empty. White noise flooded my ears when a man sprung off the couch and chased after her.

Shit, shit, shit.

I pressed tight against the wall. My stray hairs tickled my face as he sprinted past me without even a glance in my direction. His soul focus was on Hope.

My breath hitched, and I looked back around the corner to see a backdoor. I could run. I could leave her behind. My freedom was right within my reach. A high-pitched scream pierced my thoughts, and I ran to her without thinking. The man clutched Hope's frail shoulders, still unaware of my presence. Using the unclasped shackle, I jumped onto his back and wrapped the chain around his neck. The metal clanked as I cinched it closed and held on tight.

"Fucking bitch!" he bellowed and started to thrash.

His movements whipped my body around, and I grasped the end of my restraint harder, struggling to find leverage. Everything blurred around me with his jarring motion. I blinked repeatedly as I grappled to regain focus and control.

"Ems!" Hope screamed my name, and my head snapped up to see fear bright in her eyes.

I gasped in one last breath and yanked the chain. My knees slammed into the middle of his spine. The muscles in my biceps screamed as I jerked back. A loud *crunch* vibrated through me, and gravity wrenched us down.

My breath whooshed out as his lifeless body landed on top of me. I desperately tried to suck in air, but his weight trapped me. Hope looked down at me. Her hair haloed around her face. My blurry vision focused on her, and she grunted as she tried to yank the heavy man off me.

"He's too heavy," she huffed, and his weight crashed back onto me.

"Same time," I wheezed, pushing the top of his shoulder while she pulled.

We both grunted in unison. He rolled off me, and my arms fell like limp noodles to my sides.

“For a short man, he’s pretty heavy.” I chuckled sardonically.

My stomach was light, and bubbling laughs continued to pour out of me.

“What’s so funny?”

“Revenge feels good.” I couldn’t stop giggling.

I don’t know what had gotten into me. I killed a man, and I felt no remorse. Fuck, I wanted to do it again and again. Images flashed of everyone who’d wronged me. They were going to lie limp and bloody at my feet. At the very top of that pile was Cormac.

“Well, okay...” She reached down to grab my hand and pulled me up.

I dabbed at the corner of my eyes and smiled down at Hope.

“We aren’t out of the woods yet.” I snickered.

Okay, maybe I was losing it a little.

I patted down the dead guard’s pocket, searching for keys. They had to be here somewhere. A metal jingle made my heart leap, and I shoved my hand in to fish them out. The fabric was snug, and his body was still warm as I wiggled them free.

“Come here.” I motioned to Hope.

Her face was pale as she slowly came to me. I waved my hand faster to make her hurry it up. We had to get the other girls and make a run for it.

“We need to be fast.” I stared at her, trying to get her eye contact. “You hear me?” I asked her as I unclasped her lock.

She nodded her head violently while tears fell down her face.

“Good,” I responded as I unclasped my shackle and threw it to the side. “Let’s get the others.”

I spun around, my pulse hammer in my ears. Through the back glass sliding door, I spotted three men casually walking towards the house. *Fuck*. They were ignorant of what had just happened, but not for long. Unless we left. I blew out a breath, trying to expel the guilt that was eating me alive.

“We have to leave them,” I snapped at Hope, and tugged her arm around.

I twisted the latch to unlock the door and grasped the handle. The cold night air blew in as I yanked it open and stepped into the night’s embrace. City traffic lights danced below a long driveway, and trees lined our pathway.

“Let’s hug the tree line,” I stated, sprinting toward the foliage.

My legs wobbled, and my heart rate spiked as I heard yells from inside the house. We didn’t have long before they chased after us. I looked over my shoulder while my knotted hair blew around my face. The doorway remained empty, sending a rush of adrenaline through me. It was time. I was going to be free, and the only thing I wanted to do was run into the arms of the men who held me captive first.

The closer we got to a broken gate at the bottom of the drive, the faster I ran. We turned the corner and bolted in unison toward the major highway. I flung my hand into the middle of traffic, hoping we were close enough to the city for a taxi. My shoulders sagged as cars raced by me, no yellow cabs in sight.

“Busier traffic going one way usually means they are heading toward a city,” I yelled, sprinting alongside the road.

“I can’t run anymore,” Hope cried from behind me.

I screeched to a stop and turned around, looking down at her feet. She was barefoot and was brushing off the base of her heel.

“We need to get as far away as possible from here,” I reminded her and stuck out my hand.

Come on! I needed her to grab my hand. She needed to let me take us to safety. She limped toward me, and I pulled her

arm over my shoulder. Anyone passing by would probably think we were either drunk and doing the walk of shame or homeless. They'd leave us to fend for ourselves. Plus, I think I learned my lesson to not jump into strangers' cars. At least, I hoped I had.

Her arm was heavy, and my neck ached from her weight. A crowd of people surrounded us, covering their noses as they walked by. This was a sense of familiarity I didn't miss. Being viewed as garbage and vermin was demeaning, but it wasn't surprising. People always judged what they didn't understand. Heck, I had done the same before my life changed. I would be throwing stones if I didn't admit it.

City lights lit the streets, and the traffic was at a dead stop while they tried to get deeper into the city. My chest tightened when we walked by a panhandler, sitting on a milk crate, sticking out his hand for spare change. My mouth fell into a deep frown when our eyes connected, and I gave him a slow nod. Dirt was covering his holey jeans, and the bag that sat beside him was starting to tear at the bottom. I would never have left my bag so unprotected as he was doing. Usually, none of the homeless did. Was he giving up so much that he no longer cared for the few things he had left?

Hope grunted, reminding me that we needed to keep moving. We couldn't keep wandering the streets. It was late, and her feet were bleeding. I searched the area, needing to decide what we would do next. I could easily post up a box and hide in an alley, but I didn't want to risk being found. I only had one option.

"We need money. I need you to pretend like you dropped something," I whispered into Hope's ear.

She turned, looking at me with furrowed brows. I nudged my head at her and dropped my shoulder for her arm to fall off me.

"Trust me. We need money, and I have a plan," I hissed between my teeth.

My fingers trembled as I held my breath, preparing myself for the next moment. She did as she was told and bent over to search the ground. The man walking behind us, dressed in a fancy suit, stumbled into her, ramming right into her ass and pushing her forward.

“Excuse me, you just hit my friend!” I turned around and bellowed into his face.

He grimaced and covered his mouth with each step closer I took. I fought my eyes from rolling. I couldn’t have stunk that bad. I pushed him back into the crowd of intoxicated women dressed in high heels and short skirts too revealing for the weather.

“We are walking here!” They shrilled in unison and pulled their bedazzled purse straps over their shoulders.

He whipped around to face them and threw his hands in the air, apologizing profusely. An involuntary scoff passed my lips. Originally, I wanted to nab someone’s purse, but the bulge in the back of the man’s suit pants caught my eye. Only a tourist would be naïve enough to have a wallet in his back pocket in the city. *Jackpot*. I reached in and yanked it out, making his slacks lift. He whirled back around, and his face morphed into surprise and anger.

“Run,” I snapped at Hope.

I grasped her hand and launched us forward, dragging her behind me. Different shades of light streaked by me from the corner of my eyes. My shoulder smacked into anyone in my way.

“Ems, I can’t do it anymore, please,” Hope cried from behind me.

I gripped her hand harder, not afraid to cut her circulation off. People yelled and cursed as I shoved passed them. Our palms were beginning to sweat, but I couldn’t let go or give up.

“Stop them!” someone yelled from behind us.

A burly man turned around suddenly, and Hope and I crashed into him. Hope groaned, and her hand slipped from

mine.

“Fucking homeless,” the burly man snarled as he reached down.

In a split moment, I snapped my leg up and jammed my knee straight into his nutsack.

“You run, or you are going back to that hell. You choose!” I yelled at Hope, yanking her arm and shoving the wallet into my bra.

I wanted to continue to support her, but I was just as tired as she was. She needed to earn her freedom with me. We had to do this together. I lurched forward, my palm still gripping her bicep. Sweat made me lose my grasp, but I pushed on. Hoping and wishing she was behind me.

My legs ached, and the cold air blew across my sweat-slicked skin. My heavy breaths and the city in the distance were the only sounds. I whipped around to see if she was still behind me, and my heart sank. The sidewalk was empty. I had escaped, but I had left her. She was gone. My chin trembled as I sucked in my lower lip and bit down, holding back my tears.

I'm sorry.

My legs were like jelly, and my head hung low. I walked for what felt like miles until I stumbled upon a motel. Remembering how I'd lost Hope, I reached into my bra and pulled out the wallet I had stolen. My hands shook, and my vision was blurred with tears. What if I opened this wallet, and it had no cash? Credit cards needed an ID, and no one would believe me if I lied and said this was my friend's card. I inhaled a shaky breath and opened the wallet. A sob and a laugh sprung free as I stared down at what looked like hundreds of dollars. It was enough to get a motel room for a few nights and shower. But what I yearned for more was to return to my wolves. No matter how reckless it was. They were under my skin, and for some crazy reason, I needed to see them. I tilted my head back and stared up at the sky.

Bubbles, I did it.

Chapter 7

Liam

Wind whipped around me, and the vibrations from the motor soothed my aching chest. I only had six more hours to deliver Emily to my father. In the past two days, I had found nothing, and Connor was beginning to worry about where I was going every day. He was starting to feel better and was growing suspicious about why I was leaving him. I couldn't tell him I was looking for Emily, but he had to have wondered where she was. Maybe he wanted to pretend like nothing had happened?

I twisted the throttle back and shifted down a gear, allowing gravity to pull up the front end. The highway wasn't crowded, and I could finally go past twenty. I had spent hours combing through the busy streets, stopping at any homeless person I saw.

It was all a waste, and it was time I reluctantly admitted defeat. I *had* to tell my father Emily had escaped from *me*. That would at least save Connor from punishment. I brought my front tire down and whipped around, heading toward the freeway and my childhood home.

The cold air penetrated my leather jacket, which helped ease my racing thoughts. I went through an organized checklist I had made in my head of where to look for her. She wasn't at any homeless camps or shelters. I'd checked the street dividers where the panhandlers begged most, and she wasn't there. She wasn't even in any of the alleys, and I couldn't find her on the streets.

It was possible she was good at hiding or had taken a bus somewhere far away, but it didn't matter. I was out of time.

My chest tightened, and I let out a loud yell, throwing back my throttle. The speedometer read one hundred, and adrenaline raced through me. I didn't let off the gas. The vehicles I passed whirled by me, and I weaved between the lanes.

This was why I didn't get involved with women or let down my guard. I'd rarely tried to accept someone into my life. When I had, they either couldn't handle my obsessive needs or were only temporary. I didn't know if Emily could've fully handled me. I wouldn't ever find out either because she was dead to me.

My engine revved as I shifted down and got off the freeway. When I pulled onto the cobblestone driveway, I gave my motor one last roar, letting him know I was not hiding. He wouldn't see weakness in me when I accepted the blame.

I yanked off my helmet and carefully laid it on the seat. My steps were heavy on the pathway to the front door. Needing to appease an itch that ran along my skin, I pulled out my comb from my pocket and straightened my hair. Helmet hair was the worst.

One of the large front doors pulled open, and Robert, my father's butler, stepped out from behind the door. I gave him a small nod and pushed past him to the office, knowing that was where my father would be. He tended to sit angrily behind his desk, drinking a glass of whiskey and bitching about things that weren't going well. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. He was a lot more like Connor than he would like to admit. If our father wasn't such an ass, I would think that their similarities were why they didn't get along.

I knocked on the door with heavy thuds, but before he could respond, I shoved the door open. A federal agent we had in our pocket sat across from my father. He lazily looked over his shoulder, scowling.

"Why even knock?" my father grumbled, pulling stray papers back to a neat stack.

"Did something new come up?" I asked.

We tended not to consort with the feds in our pocket unless we absolutely needed to, especially in our own residences.

"Agent Broad was sharing his insight on our rat problem. It was an unexpected surprise." My father glared at him as he spoke.

“Our relationship is important to me, and as I was telling your father, I would like to help more with the business.”

I narrowed my eyes at him, then looked up at my father, needing more answers.

“What he really means is he needs more money,” Arthur corrected.

“I’ve been loyal for ten years now. It would benefit you to include me more,” Agent Broad confidently stated.

My father’s lip twitched, and I hid my laugh. Cocky men tended to get a bullet to the head.

“I’ll think about it. Get out.”

My lips puckered as I was caught off guard. That was nicer than I expected. I knew they had a good working relationship, but why would he waste the chance to reprimand him?

Agent Broad got to his feet and gave us both a curt nod as he left. The moment the door clicked shut, I became the center of my father’s attention.

“Where is she?” he snarled.

“She’s gone. I turned my back for one moment, and she disappeared,” I replied, leaving it vague for him to come up with his own conclusions.

His foot slammed against the base of his desk, and his chair quickly slid back.

“You are a fucking idiot!” he screamed, shooting to his feet.

A heavy thud crashed to the table, and I jerked back as I saw him clasp a gun.

“We were walking down the street, and someone grabbed her,” I replied, looking back up at him and not at his pistol.

“This is a fucking circus. I run a fucking show with clowns and tamed tigers,” he yelled, gripping his gun harder. His knuckles drained of color.

“Who do you think is coming after us?” I questioned, embracing a change of subject.

“Either the feds or someone who knows the feds are onto us and using it to their advantage. It’s why I allowed Agent Broad into my home.” He walked around the table and snarled, “Get on your knees, boy.”

My eye twitched, and the gun I was carrying became heavier by the moment. It was begging me to pull it out, cram it into his mouth, and shoot. I would be doing Connor a favor, but the thought of hurting my father made my gut sink. I could never kill my own blood. With that, I found myself on my knees, allowing him to belittle me. Catering to his god complex was good for business.

“What do you want,” I growled, not wanting to be down here long.

I knew this was dangerous. Taking the fall for my brother was the only way to keep him safe.

“I need to not fail. You should have listened. Now we are down another girl.”

“Did you get the girls rounded up and put somewhere they won’t be found?” I asked.

“Most of them, yes. They knew where we had our lower-class girls working. They were taken before I could get to them.”

My brows pulled together, and my head pulled back. *How was that possible?*

“We have to have an inside mole or someone who has been watching us like a hawk for years,” I stated, knowing that would be the only way they would have known where our girls were.

Was it possible Emily was actually taken? No, it wasn’t. Connor had his CCTV turned off, but the lobby cameras had her talking to the concierge. She left us freely.

“Are you the rat?” my father asked, raising the gun to my head.

It was a power grab, and I knew he wanted to see a sign of weakness. Always a game with him. That is where I learned it

all from. No one was too powerful to play a mind game with.

“Why would I destroy my own life? Of course, I’m not a fucking narc,” I answered his question and looked up at him.

The barrel of the gun pressed against my forehead, and I pressed against it to show him I wasn’t scared of his posturing. The faster he realized that, the faster I could get up off the floor.

“You covering for your brother? He hasn’t gotten back to me,” he continued to push while he cocked the hammer back.

“I told you he is really sick. He asked me to keep in contact with you. It is why I took over watching Penny. He told me to tell you I had her from the start, and I forgot. That is my fault,” I corrected, needing to shift any blame for this away from my twin.

“That is a bitch excuse from him and you. Especially since we are going to war,” he seethed.

“If it is a war we are entering, I can assure you, Connor and I will be your best soldiers,” I calmly replied.

The pressure of the metal against my forehead lessened, then he pulled the gun back. I got up from the floor and brushed my knees off. I knew he didn’t play this type of game with anyone but Connor and me. If I were an employee, he would pull his knife and draw blood no matter what. He never wanted to appear like he was all bark with no bite. He wanted his sons to know he was choosing to keep us alive. It just so happened that he raised me to play his games, and I was only getting better at them.

“We need to find out where our property is,” he demanded, walking back around his desk.

I sat in the small uncomfortable chair across from him and watched as he sat silently, thinking.

“Who have you reached out to?” I asked.

“I called our cousins in Ireland to see if they had a war going on that we didn’t know about. Of course, their answer was no. I also called the people we have a healthy relationship

with. The Kings of Rapture have been making runs for the Italians in Southern California, and they haven't heard shit. A few others keep telling me the feds are hot on our trail and demand we stop suspecting them. No one is innocent until we get all the answers we need," he explained, jamming his gun back into the top drawer.

"When was the last time we did a sweep for rats in our organization?" I asked.

"Too long, obviously," he muttered, sweeping his hair out of his face.

"Let's host a dinner then and have your employees join us." Maybe if he was distracted by setting up dinner, he would leave us alone long enough to figure out where Emily was.

"Not here. The girls are in the basement," he quickly replied.

"Who knows they're here?"

"I snuck them in at the dead of night. The people who helped me move them are dead. I couldn't risk them finding out." Arthur rubbed at his temples.

Of course, he killed them. He could barely trust his sons to be loyal. This was why we were in jeopardy. He showed no remorse for the lives of the people he hired to run his business. Their names meant nothing. He could blame whoever he wanted, but he was running the enterprise into the ground.

"Then let's host it here. If we do it anywhere else, we could be tipping off whoever is watching us. We will keep it simple. If anyone isn't fully relaxed, we take them in the back for questioning," I stated, readying myself for him to lash out.

"That isn't a bad idea, and if they don't show, we kill them." He twirled a pen in his hand as he thought about it.

It was a great idea. One day he would come to realize that I was becoming the better version of him. Too bad I wouldn't be sticking around if Connor wanted to leave.

"Then it's settled. Pick a day you want, Dad, and I will be there," I answered, then stood up to leave.

I didn't have any new bruises, so I didn't want to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"You and Connor will be there," he replied, making my shoulders tense.

I looked away and turned to leave, hiding my frown. This wasn't something I could get Connor out of right away. The only thing I could hope for was that he wouldn't schedule the dinner immediately.

"One more thing," he added, making me stop. "I am glad to have my sons on my side."

My chest tightened. He rarely showed this level of kindness when Connor was around. It happened so infrequently that I almost forgot he even had a paternal side. I nodded and left his office, claspng this moment tightly and reminding myself of all the other small hints of love I'd caught over the years.

When I turned the corner, Robert was waiting for me by the door to open it. He had worked for my father since we were babies and was loyal to him and him alone. Connor and I learned that at a young age. Whenever we brought a girl over or tried to sneak out, Robert would know and tell on us. Connor and I started to prank him for retribution. We would leave laxatives in his coffee or fish under his mattress. The old man was a fucking thorn in our side, and no matter what we did to him, he never quit. It made me respect him more for it.

"How are you?" I asked him when he pulled the door open for me.

"Good, sir," he answered.

"Has Dad been working you a lot?" I asked. I usually hated initiating small talk, but I needed one moment without my mind being consumed by our mess. It was selfish, but he could see it as kind if he wanted to.

He tightly smiled and replied, "Nothing out of the ordinary."

"Perfect. So working you like a dog, still, I see?" I laughed and patted him on the shoulder as I left.

The door shut behind me, and I walked over to my bike. I wanted to get as far away as possible from here and as fast as I could. If a war was coming, I wanted to be prepared. Connor wasn't ready for anything too extreme, and I was running out of excuses for him. It was time I was honest with him. My motor roared to life. I shifted into first gear and raced off. I knew the longer I took, the higher the chances were that I would change my mind.

Chapter 8

Connor

I rolled my head to the side and pulled the blanket over my eyes. Every movement felt as if I were underwater and attached to a cement block. If a photo was taken, it would probably be used in school programs, saying *Drugs are bad, kids!* in bold letters.

My chest and ribs ached from the heart attack, and the thumping rhythm under my sternum was different. The blood was moving through my body, which meant my heart was working, but my chest cavity was hollow. Lifeless.

I had let Emily go even while I knew she was starting to bring back pieces of myself. I should have said yes to running away with her. I should have never snorted those lines of cocaine.

A heavy pounding was repeating on a loop in my eardrums. It wasn't blood creating the hammering pulse. It was regret, and it was time I looked in the mirror and faced myself. Liam had made sure I was taken care of after my overdose, but a twisting feeling in my gut reminded me that I had to step up and take care of myself. Leaving things up to Liam or running away weren't viable options. My father would hunt me down and put a bullet in my head if I ran. I didn't want to look over my shoulder for the rest of my life.

My feet hit the cold floors, and a zap of electricity ran up my body. Once my father found out I had let Emily go, he would kill me. It was a risk I took when I accepted death, but it changed when I'd actually died. When Liam ripped me out of hell, it was eye-opening. I wasn't going to say I was raving about being reborn. I hadn't opened my eyes and decided to trade my life for polo shirts and a desire to play golf on the weekends. If that were the case, I would have seen the things I did in the past as wrong. I'd accepted I was a prick and had anger issues long before my death. When I opened my eyes again, I was reborn to take ownership of my life. One that my father couldn't control.

I braced my hands on the sink and flipped on the faucet to brush my teeth. The clatter of dishes from the kitchen told me Liam had just gotten home. I spit, rinsed, and left the bathroom. I hurried, holding my body as steady as possible to fuel me with confidence to show him I was better and walking more than I had in days.

“Welcome home,” I announced, bracing my hand on the railings as I walked down the stairs.

“Wait! Let me help you,” he blared, racing to the base of the steps.

I held my hand out to stop him and shook my head. “I got this.”

He didn’t respect my wishes, and the stairs shook from his haste to get to me.

“I said, I. Got. It,” I enunciated, pushing my palm against his chest to get him away from me. “My legs work fine, Nurse Liam. Curious, any chance I can exchange you for a nurse who wears garters and will finger my ass to ensure I am healthy?”

“That could probably be arranged.” He laughed while hovering beside me as we made our way down.

The sight of the empty couch made my stomach drop. Sooner or later, I would have to accept she was gone. Today wasn’t that day.

“Hungry?” Liam asked, pulling out the counter’s stool.

“Sure.” My voice was flat, making him inspect me to ensure I was okay.

Other than my ribs hurting and yearning over a woman I barely knew, I was just *fucking* peachy.

“Chinese?” he asked.

“No, I don’t need more memories right now of her.” My jaw dropped.

I didn’t mean to let that slip. Liam didn’t need the reminder of how I let Emily go. Because of it, he had to be trying to cover up messes and put out fires.

“So, you know she left you while you were overdosing, and you don’t want to kill her?” he interrogated. His brows pulled tightly together, and a vein bulged on his neck.

“Wait, you think she left me?” I shot back.

“What the fuck do you mean?”

“What is this, a thirty-question game? I ask you one thing. You ask me something back,” I rambled, feeling blood rush to my face.

“But—” He paused and started pacing the kitchen. “Where is Emily?”

“I let her go. See what I did there? I didn’t ask a question to your question.” I smiled at him, trying to deflect him, so he wouldn’t get extremely upset.

Liam looked at me, then stumbled to the countertop to grip it. His face was pale, and his eyes were glassed over.

“You let her go and didn’t—” He stopped abruptly and growled, shoving off the counter to pace. “You opened her cage door and didn’t think it was important to tell me before now?”

I bit my tongue instead of calling him out on questioning me again.

“I didn’t think it was important. You never asked,” I replied. It was a lie. I knew it was important.

“This can’t be happening.”

I sat there watching him. The heavy rock in my stomach grew, but I didn’t know how to stop it from getting bigger.

“Dad wanted her,” I murmured, trying to see if that would alleviate the agonizing weight in my gut.

He looked everywhere but at me, and I knew he was waiting for me to continue. I needed to explain how I understood her or how she saw me as more than the fuck up I was.

“He wanted her, and the thought of him having her made me throw up. She saw me, brother. She didn’t resent me after everything I put her through. I haven’t found someone who

didn't push and prod to know everything I was thinking. She just knew that I was fucked in the head and accepted me." I stumbled on my words, and the thrumming pulse of regret was back in my ears.

"If she had any feelings for you, she wouldn't have left," he stated, refusing to look at me.

Of course, he would only see the part of her leaving and not the rest of it. He had been burned too many times. It all started from the tramp we had shared in high school.

"She asked me to run away with her. Remember when I asked you to do that for me?" I snapped at him.

"It isn't the same."

"You are right. Your betrayal was worse. You are my brother. I counted on you to keep me in line and help me avoid taking things too far. But instead of being on my side, you ran to Daddy to narc on me for wanting to leave? I needed you!" I yelled, and my face went hot.

"We were teenagers! I didn't know any better. Plus, you weren't hiding your guitar. Either you had to give that up or tell him about the bag you had packed to leave." He gripped the counter again, and his knuckles turned white.

He was right. I hadn't hidden my guitar. He would have punished me and taken it.

"You left me!" I roared.

My stomach sank, and my chest stung from a mixture of my broken bones and an absent heart. "You became Dad's leashed bitch after that and didn't look back. I would've forgiven you if you'd come to me after and explained. Instead, you left me alone in the life I didn't want."

We were never the same after that, and he never tried to mend our relationship. He was the meticulous twin. He had always looked out for me, but he let me endure this life in pain.

"I fucked up," he whispered.

We fell silent, our breaths the only sounds in the kitchen. I should have said yes to Chinese food. Then we wouldn't have had this conversation. The rock in my stomach had become a boulder, and I felt lightheaded.

"I know I messed up, and I don't know how to make it right," he muttered, looking up at me.

"Be the brother you were to me growing up. I will always forgive you. We are family." I needed him to hear the sincerity in my tone.

I wanted to accept some blame for at least part of it, but his treachery was what started it all. Maybe one day, I could take some of the responsibility, but I wasn't reborn as a different man. I was reborn as the same man, but this time I wouldn't lie down and take it anymore, especially from my father.

He walked over to me and patted my arm. His eyes remained downcast, and his shoulders were slumped. Regret oozed off him, and the nagging voices in my head pleaded for me to tell him we shared this emotion. I should have told him, but I couldn't.

Instead, I changed the subject and said, "Where do you think Emily has been?"

"Well, I thought she was running, and considering the state of the enterprise right now, I guess it's a good thing. Someone stole a shipment of girls a couple days back. We have someone gunning for us," he informed me.

"Shit. What about their trackers?" I asked.

"They were cut out."

I rubbed my temples and contemplated my next words. I couldn't go on without checking the tracker I put in her neck. I had to tell him.

"Are we on the same page that Emily will not be harmed?" I asked while I glared at him.

His face fell, and his brows furrowed. I needed to find a way to trust him.

“Yeah, same page. I already passed it off with Dad that she had been taken from me. We can keep up that charade and leave her be.” He expelled a haggard sigh and wiped the creases down in his blue jeans.

He had taken the blame for me? I looked down at my feet, wondering why I couldn't fully forgive him. *I was a piece of shit.*

“I implanted a tracker only I have access to,” I announced, making the hairs on my nape stand.

I had to let go of my secrets. Trust wasn't a one-way street. I couldn't leave him in the dark any longer. If I wanted a relationship with Liam, I had to meet him halfway. I scoffed at myself. Realistically, he needed to go seventy-five percent of the way.

“You did what?” he challenged.

“Are we back to the thirty fucking questions?”

His head fell forward, and he rubbed his temples. I couldn't see why he'd gotten his panties in a knot over this. I was the one who'd taken her originally. She was mine to do with as I pleased.

“Have you checked where she is on it?” he asked.

“Why would I do that? It was just in case our loving father tried to go after her.”

“He may not be going after her, but we have someone after us. Can you at least make sure she is safe?” His voice hitched as he asked.

I wanted to ask why he had such a long face, but the way he avoided my stare told me he wanted his privacy.

“I can do that.”

I would have checked on her even if he hadn't asked me. Knowing someone was after us made my nagging voices rattle on and on. I needed to know she was safe.

I got up without saying anything and led the way to the office, walking faster than I had done in days. Liam was

behind me, and I felt his eyes on every movement I made like I was a fucking breakable doll. I turned the corner into the office and saw it perfectly cleaned and my shelves empty of all my whiskey.

The weight of the room quickly shifted, and my feet turned to lead. My brother's warm palm touched my back, and I shook it off, not wanting his pity. I took two deep breaths and took one step, then another. The air became scarce, but I forced myself to keep going. The office chair was perfectly aligned, and everything was in order. Still, an out-of-body experience was flashing in my mind. I could see myself snorting cocaine and slumping over until I hit the ground. My hands shook.

“We don't have—”

I raised my hand and took two large steps into the room.

“I made a stupid decision. I won't do it again,” I mumbled, knowing he wanted reassurance that I was okay.

Feeling the truth in my words was harder the farther I stepped into my office. The movie, in my mind, played like a bad reel that was cut and pasted back together. Flickers of Emily crying while I made her leave were entangled with reality. My hand was itching to brush away her imaginative tears. If she knew I wouldn't survive, would she have stayed? I shook my head, trying to clear the images, and pulled my laptop open.

“She is probably in the mountains,” I huffed.

Liam's corner of his brow lifted, and his shoulder pressed against mine while he inspected my system.

“Little nosey, don't you think?” I mocked, looking over at him.

“I saved your life.” He cocked his brow at me and crooked a smile at me.

“Is that going to become a thing?”

“Sure is.” He chuckled and continued to look at the screen.

I scoffed and continued to pull up the system that housed my hidden trackers. Only a few girls had been chipped before Emily. I used them as my test subjects, ensuring the device worked properly. I wanted a safety net in case anything ever happened. Emily's file popped up on the screen, and a red dot appeared in Times Square. My fists closed, and my nails dug into my palms. I held my breath and couldn't move as I watched the dot move north.

"Is that the right—"

"It is," I interrupted him and sent the link to my application on my phone.

I stormed out of the room, and Liam's steps were loud behind me.

"Are we—"

"Yes," I answered him again before he could finish.

I started to race to the door, and my bare feet slapped on the tiled floor. I grasped onto the doorknob, threw it open, and ran to the elevator. I hit the down button repeatedly, *click, click, click, click*, and bounced on the heels of my feet. My chest ached with the way my heart was pounding.

"Connor, what if it's a trap?" Liam's voice was barely audible.

My blood was pumping faster and faster, drowning out the sounds around me. The ding of the elevator arriving was muffled, and I raced into the small space. Liam jerked his foot into the entrance to stop the door from closing and yanked out his gun. He unlocked the magazine and inspected how many bullets he had.

"Get in, or get out," I growled.

His brows pulled together while he inspected me, but he stepped in. I moved around him and slammed down on the button for the lobby. This could have been a trap. It was all too perfect to be true, but with each chime of the elevator signaling we were passing a floor, I could be closer to her. Why was she here? Did she need something? The last ding rang in my ears, and I brought my phone back to life. I held it

in front of my eyes to find the street she was passing and started to sprint when the doors opened.

“Connor!” Liam’s yell was laced with worry.

My ribs screamed with pain, but I kept snapping my eyes up and down while I followed the signal, guiding me to my *Mo Cuishle*. The cold air blew in as the automatic doors slid open. Little rocks cut into my feet, and I ignored the sting. The dot was moving quicker, and I turned the corner, running faster. My muscles screamed at me for abusing them so soon, and my breaths were rapid. I grasped my phone, letting my hand drop down by my side. I didn’t need it anymore.

At the next corner, I turned. I knew I would see her. She would be there with her long curly hair and ghostly eyes. Cold air filled my lungs as I inhaled deeply and turned onto her street. I slid to a stop and looked through the swarm of people leaving Times Square. The sidewalk was thrumming with tourists, but everything changed. Tunnel vision narrowed in on her. She’d only seen fate as being cruel. But if that were true, she wouldn’t be here at this very moment.

She came to an abrupt stop, and her hair fell forward. Her chest was panting as fast as mine, and one hundred feet felt like it was a mile. She was too far. I took one large step, and so did she. Her eyes broke eye contact when Liam came up beside me, and a wide grin spread on her face. She leaped forward and began to sprint.

My ribs screamed with a stabbing jolt as she threw herself at me. I ignored the sting and wrapped my arms around her. She nuzzled her head into the crook of my neck, and I breathed her in. She didn’t smell like my tea tree soap anymore, but she still smelled like mine. She lifted her legs to straddle my waist, and her hand left my side. Liam’s shoulder pressed against me as Emily pulled away from my neck.

I followed her stare as she locked eyes with Liam. Their connection made a zap of electricity sting deep inside me. She shifted farther away from me as she rested her head on his shoulder. His forehead wrinkled as he looked down at her. He hesitantly placed his hand on the back of her head.

“My wolves,” she whispered.

Liam looked up at me, and in that split second, we communicated more than we could out loud. The confusion but desperation etched on his face mimicked my own. We didn’t know what we were doing or how to handle this, but this was the luck we needed. I didn’t know what we would do next, but we were in it together.

“Get a room,” a tourist yelled, snapping me out of my trance.

Before I could respond, Emily untwined her arm from me and flipped him the bird. An inflamed scab wrapped around her wrist. Blood rushed to my face, and my chest burned.

“What the fuck happened? Who did this to you?” I seethed.

I wasn’t a fucking idiot. I knew what would cause those marks.

“We have a lot to talk about, but I’m here now, and that is all I wanted. How are you here?” she questioned, trying to change the subject

“Don’t change the subject. How did this happen? *But wait*, how are you here?” Liam interjected.

“A lot happened, and I’m here because I was coming back. We will handle it together. Can we please go home? I promise I will tell you,” she pleaded, looking between the both of us.

“Now,” I pushed for more, not caring that she wanted to wait.

“Connor, she’s not going anywhere,” Liam stated.

She wouldn’t be allowed to go anywhere. My ribs stung as she wiggled, reminding me I had my own confession to make. One that I wasn’t ready to share yet either. I expelled a haggard breath, trying to remember I was an evolved man. Fuck that shit. That was no fun.

“Em&m, we will get you home,” Liam mumbled as he laid his lips on the top of her head.

What did he just call her?

She pressed her body tighter against us, then dropped her legs. I grimaced as my chest burned from the movement. Emily looked up at me with furrowed brows.

“I’ll tell you when we get you home,” I answered her, repeating the same sentiment she’d given me.

“Home,” she agreed with a coy smile.

I turned and led the way back to my penthouse. Questions were whirling through my mind. I couldn’t understand why she would come back. Was she coming back for us? Or did she need something from me? I looked over my shoulder to see her snake her arm through Liam’s arm. She pressed her cheek against him and didn’t say a word. The world around us started fading into reality, breaking the hazed bubble.

Chapter 9

Emily

Two nights of sleeping in a motel were enough to reassure me that I wanted to return. They needed to be warned, and I wanted to see them. Even if it was for one night. The motel's bed was lumpy, and the thin windows reminded me of a small studio I called home in what felt like a different life. When I'd done things that way, I was left with nothing. It was time to change my future and not listen to what was deemed right and wrong.

I still wanted to live out of the city and wake up with pine trees surrounding me, but I wanted something I probably couldn't have. I needed both of the men I used to fear. The line between love and hate blurred, and, sure, I resented the twins for what they did, but I feared them more. I wondered if fear could also easily transform into an emotion I couldn't understand. Maybe that was why I was here?

Liam and Connor stood beside me in the elevator, and I zoned out, looking down. Connor's feet were bare, which made me laugh internally, and Liam's fingers were incessantly moving.

"Are you working with them?" Liam randomly asked.

"Who's them? I'm not working with anyone," I answered, looking up at him.

He glared at me, then looked forward, studying the fingerprint smudges on the door. Why was he questioning me? Wanting to help relieve some of his anger, I pulled a napkin I had stuffed in my jacket pocket and stepped forward. I made small circles on the smudges, hoping the marks would disappear. When I lifted the napkin, I examined my handiwork, smiled, and stepped back to be surrounded by my wolves.

Liam stopped fidgeting, but his frown deepened. I quickly looked at Connor. His expression was determined as he stared at the double doors. Had I walked into a trap? The chime rang,

and Connor pushed on my lower back to lead me to the front door.

My heart pounded in my chest. Liam continued to look everywhere but at me, and I didn't know what to make of it. His sheep's clothing faded, and his stare had a devilish glint. My feet were becoming unsteady as I watched his darkening gaze.

Had I misread their moments with me on the street? His fists curled into balls, and the muscles in my legs tightened as I braced myself to run. Connor was the one to let me go. What if Liam had convinced him to turn me over to their father? Wait, how were they able to find me before I arrived?

My chest tightened, and I started to take small steps back as Connor pushed the door open. I gulped, and Connor turned to look at me. His expression morphed into something sinister as a small smile lifted the corner of his lips. I kicked myself for not doing a better job at hiding my fear. For God's sake, I was caught like a deer in headlights, and I had no control to change it.

"Well, don't you look sexy. I love it when you are afraid," Connor purred, stepping closer.

Liam's features were unreadable as he glanced at me. Just a small glint of darkness shined in his eyes. This was a mistake. Something inside me yearned for them, but what was I thinking? I was walking into the wolf's den.

"Tell me, *Mo Cuishle*, are you going to run?" Connor stuffed his hands into his pockets and lifted one of his brows.

Shit. Was I going to run? Was I acting crazy? Did Connor set this trap for me all along? Liam folded his arms over his chest but didn't say anything. The confines of captivity had put a haze in my mind and made me believe things that could never be. Yeah, I was going to run, all right.

I gasped as Connor jerked his shoulders forward. My muscles tightened, and I whirled around to bolt for the exit. The hallway was the same, and I had no clue where the fire

escape was in this stupid building. The elevator doors were sliding closed, and I leaped inside before they could.

My heart crashed against my ribs. Connor was inches away. I kicked my foot and slammed it into his thigh, hoping to push him back to allow the doors to finish shutting. His massive frame didn't budge. A low, animalistic growl reverberated in the small space. He slammed his hand down onto the red stop button, making a loud siren blare.

"That was too easy. You can do better." He stepped to the side and extended his arm to the exit to usher me back out.

Liam was leaning against the wall opposite us, watching me like the prey I had become. There had to be a fire escape in this God-forsaken penthouse. It's not like I'd gotten a full home tour before. Would it be locked?

I sprinted past Connor and Liam and scanned the walls for doors or hallways that I might have missed before. My breaths were choppy. With each slam of my foot onto the tile, my heart sunk lower in my gut. I only heard one set of steps behind me, which relieved some of the aches in my chest.

"Too slow. Almost got you," Connor taunted.

He should have already caught me, but his heavy breaths were not on top of me yet, which urged me to race up the stairs. The metal railing creaked as I jolted up each step. My long curls were starting to stick to my sweat-slicked skin. A door to escape had to be hidden somewhere. Maybe it was outside a window?

I slammed into a door I hadn't used before and desperately twisted at the knob. Silver metal gleamed outside the window, and I huffed as butterflies filled my stomach. There it was. I jolted forward and fumbled with the sash lock while repeatedly looking over my shoulder. My fingers were slick with perspiration, and my throat tightened as Connor turned the corner. I pleaded for the clasp to budge.

Come on, come on, come on!

"Keep struggling." He let out a raspy chuckle, making my spine tingle.

I didn't know what to believe. Was he just having fun with me? The walls closed in on me, making my digits go numb while I continued to try for my escape. I had given up my chance of freedom for an imagined future with my predators. My fate to die in that fire had caught up with me. It was blazing towards me, engulfing the last shreds of my right to live.

I spun around and placed my palms against the wall. Connor grasped the large bulge in his jeans and massaged his erect cock. Circling his thumb around the tip. My pussy clenched like the traitorous bitch she was, and I fought the desperate need to press my thighs together.

"From now on, whenever you run, I will always catch you," he rasped, then sucked his lower lip into his mouth.

My eyelids fluttered, and my skin grew hot.

"You can't keep me," I whispered.

Slow steps sounded in the hall, making my body feel light. Liam rounded the corner and towered in the doorway while he glared at me.

"Finders keepers," he murmured.

I was caged in. Connor dropped his hand from his cock and sauntered toward me. My lungs screamed as I held my breath. Should I count? My pulsing clit and heated skin begged me to live in the moment. I missed Connor's touch and desperately wanted to feel Liam. If I were honest with myself, I wanted him inside me. I desperately wanted to know how each barbell that lined his cock felt as he slowly slid into me until he was fully seated in my wet cunt. I wanted them to touch me everywhere, to wipe away what their uncle had done to me.

"Your face is flushed," Connor taunted, coming closer to me.

"It was the running," I blurted, trying to hide my emotions.

"Lying isn't a good way to start our reunion, Em&m," Liam announced.

His nickname for me amplified my turbulent emotions. My breaths came faster, and my breasts pushed against the V-neck top I'd purchased. Touch me. Take away the past. Connor watched my chest rise and fall, and my nipples pebbled against the fabric. I hadn't wanted to waste my time searching for a bra, and with his hooded stare, I was happy I hadn't.

Connor took large strides toward me, driving me to flatten my back against the wall. His tattooed palm pressed against my throat, and a malicious smile spread across his face.

"You look so good with the Kilbane crest claiming you." He leaned in and rubbed his stubbled jaw along my cheek.

My eyes pricked with tears as I replaced the image of Cormac licking up my cheek with this. It wasn't a permanent fix, but it was one I desperately needed.

"I'm going to mark you one day and make sure everyone knows who you belong to."

My head rocked back, which exposed my neck. It forced me to become more vulnerable. I wanted to be their prey, and for it to be my choice. Something that had been stripped from me time and time again. My pulse thrummed in my sex, and my arousal warmed my clit.

Connor squeezed my throat, robbing me of air. His other hand cupped my sex through my leggings and rocked back and forth. The fabric pulled against my clit, and I ground down onto him, needing more.

"Look at me," he growled.

My eyelids snapped open. I hadn't realized I'd even closed them. Euphoria was swirling higher and higher. He swiped away the stray tear that was sliding down my cheek. I noticed Liam standing behind Connor, and a strangled moan broke free. Connor released his hold on my throat, and I gulped down breaths.

"More," I pleaded before his grip tightened again.

Blood rushed to my face as I bounced onto Connor's fingers. I tried to get them inside me, even if it was only the tips.

“Liam, does she get more?”

“Maybe.” Liam cocked his head to the side. “I want her clothes off first before I decide if she deserves more,” he said with a husky tone.

I nodded rapidly. That was exactly what I—wanted—needed. Connor started to release his hold to help me, and I protested with a desperate whine. They had to keep their hands on me to take away my pain.

“Let me,” Liam demanded.

My breath was stolen as Connor pushed back into me. My toes curled, and if I could have breathed, I would have gasped from excitement. Liam came to my side, and he reached into his pocket. My mouth fell open, and I mouthed the words, *touch me*. He pulled out a silver switchblade and flicked it open.

“This way, he can keep rubbing your cunt,” he rasped.

The cold flat of the blade pressed against my wrist, and I watched as the metal slid and tore into my jacket. The rush of adrenaline was exactly what I needed.

“Don’t move,” Liam scolded as a shiver racked my body.

“Don’t spoil my fun, brother,” Connor goaded.

Liam smirked but continued to slice away at the fabric. Air tickled my skin as my sleeve fell off. Connor slapped my sex, making me jump and moan. He loosened his grip, and I sucked in a deep breath just as the blade sliced into me.

“Oh fuck,” I cried and looked down at the small cut.

Ruby droplets rolled down my side, trailing to my hips. I looked back up at the guys to see dark, hooded eyes glaring back at me.

“Now that isn’t playing nice.” Liam chuckled.

“When am I ever nice?” Connor growled as he cupped my sex and swiped up the blood.

His finger ran over my cut, and the sting made me suck in air between my teeth. I wanted to scream and beg for them to

keep inflicting this delicious pain, but I didn't want to explain why. So I remained silent. Connor looked over at his twin and wagged his eyebrows.

"Pull it down," he commanded.

Liam listened and grabbed my shirt, yanking the fabric. The burn of the cotton was like a matchstick striking against my skin, sending a wave of heat spiraling beneath my skin. The side he'd cut, tore, and my shirt fell to my side. Connor placed his bloody finger on the top of my breast and started to smear the crimson into my skin. Liam put his palm against my forehead and pushed my head back against the wall so I couldn't look.

"Your move," Connor murmured, stepping to my side.

"Are we playing chess now?" I chuckled, remembering our conversation.

"If we are, then you can be our queen," Connor purred, kissing my ear as he pressed against my side.

My heart galloped when I stared into his eyes. All I could see was the truth. I got lost in his gaze, and desire consumed me when Liam slid my leggings down my thighs. I smashed my lips against Connor's, and his tongue eagerly slid into my mouth. I savored him as I sucked, stealing anything and everything he gave me. I groaned as our tongues massaged each other. He was so soft compared to his personality, making it that much sweeter.

Slick wet heat swiped up my pussy, forcing me to pull away and look down. On my chest, in blood, was written: *OURS*. I wanted more. I wanted every inch of my body to be claimed by them. Liam looked up at me as he opened my legs wider to lap at my entire sex. I dropped my hand and grabbed the back of his head, shoving him harder against me.

"Greedy," Connor murmured while he pinched my nipple.

Liam didn't say anything as he continued his assault on my pussy. His teeth grazed over my bundle of nerves, and I screamed as my climax suddenly consumed me.

“That’s it. Come on my brother’s face,” Connor growled into my ear.

Liam groaned simultaneously, and the double vibrations made my euphoria peak even higher. My sex stretched as Liam shoved his fingers inside me and flicked at that perfect spot.

“Please,” I moaned between my teeth, not knowing what I was saying please to. Was it for them to continue to touch me, tease me, worship me, wipe away all the memories of the things I didn’t want or consent to? Or to just come over and over?

“I know. We’ve got you. Let us see you come undone.” Connor pushed me forward so he could slide behind me.

He grabbed my waist and lifted me from Liam’s mouth. My legs dangled as he carried me to the king-sized bed. My head fell back, and I watched Liam wipe my orgasm from his face. He winked and stuck his fingers inside his mouth. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked on them, then he pulled them free with a wet *pop*. My sex throbbed, pleading for more.

Connor placed me on the bed and stepped back to stand near his twin. They loomed over me, identical in appearance. The easiest way to tell them apart was their grooming. Connor had his thick intentional five o’clock shadow, while Liam was freshly shaved.

“Spread your legs,” Liam commanded as he unbuttoned his jeans.

I did as I was told and stretched my legs as far as they would go.

“That’s my good slut. Now tease your clit,” Connor demanded as he pulled his shirt off with one hand.

His muscles tensed, and I paused as I took him in. My heart dropped. His ribs were covered with dark purple and black bruises, and two fire-red rectangles were on his pec and side. He looked like hell under his shirt.

“What happened?” I asked as tears filled my eyes.

My throat tightened. *Who’d done this to him?*

Chapter 10

Liam

She was spread out on display, ready to fuck. Tears filled her eyes, and I gulped to restrain myself. I don't know what she was doing or what her game was. Was she even playing a game? I watched her come undone; she was raw and vulnerable. It was something I hadn't witnessed since high school.

The mood darkened as she carefully inspected Connor.

"You should see the other guy," Connor fibbed, lightly tracing over his bruises.

I'd broken two ribs when I'd performed CPR on him, and they'd had to use the defibrillator on him in the ambulance, which had left two burn marks. She tilted her head and frowned.

"It's your turn not to lie," she replied.

"How about this? Let me fuck that sweet pussy of yours, and after, I promise to tell you everything." His tone was serious, and I knew he meant it.

"Promise me," she demanded.

"I swear on my guitar."

Her chest rose and fell as she shakily took him in. Connor looked over at me pleadingly. He wanted this. I knew he did, because I did, too, even if I was torn on the reason. We needed to regain control of the situation. I unzipped my jeans and shoved my pants and boxers down. My cock sprung free, still hard as a rock, and I licked my lips, wanting to remember her taste. This was the only time I had ever wished I had a beard. I wanted to taste her on me for hours. I needed that, even if I didn't know how I felt about this situation. She was a stranger to our lifestyle, which was a danger to her and us. The war that was coming amplified this.

I slid my hand up my cock and pulled it up for her to see the barbells that lined underneath. She'd liked that before, and the

way her eyes dilated told me she still wanted it.

“Put your fingers in your mouth, taste yourself and get them nice and wet,” I demanded.

Her stare flickered between my cock and Connor’s bruised torso.

“If you don’t listen, I won’t let you come,” Connor chimed in while he pulled down his pants.

I released the grasp on my shaft and quickly unbuttoned my shirt. She did as she was told, sticking her fingers in her mouth. Her tongue darted out, licking, making them shine. My balls grew heavy from the sight, and I thought about everything I yearned to do with her. I wanted to take her ass and watch as she bounced up and down on my cock. Not having lube readily available, I would happily settle for her sweet cunt.

“Fuck yourself. Show me how you like it.” Connor stepped closer to her widespread legs.

I loved watching just as much as I loved being watched, so I stayed back. I cupped my balls and massaged the tip of my cock. Emily’s eyes flicked between us, never lingering on one of us too long.

“I want you in my mouth, Liam,” she begged as her chest rose and fell.

I lifted my brows and smiled. Didn’t have to ask me twice. I got to the mattress, grabbed her under her arms, and pulled her to the edge. Her head hung off the side of the bed, her mouth open and ready for me.

“Stick out your tongue,” I commanded.

The moment she obeyed, I leaned over and leisurely licked it. I relished her flavor and the way her taste buds rubbed against mine. Her moans sent vibrations to my cock. I needed to feel that warmth on my length. Standing upright, I gripped the base of my cock and pushed inside her mouth, not waiting for her to adjust to my girth.

“Fuck, you feel so good, Em&m,” I groaned, letting my chin fall to my chest, watching as she took me.

She lay diagonally across the bed, giving Connor access to her from the other end. He pulled her closer to the edge where he stood, making her mouth tighten around me as her muscles tensed.

“We got you,” I purred, selfishly wanting her to relax so I could shove my dick in deeper.

Connor thrust into her with one smooth motion, forcing my cock farther down her throat. I loved how rough he got when we were in this position. It always resulted in the best blow jobs. My balls slapped against her forehead, and I leaned over to twirl her right nipple between my fingertips.

“You feel me throbbing in you, *Mo Cuishle*? Do you like having us both in you at the same time?”

She bobbed harder on my cock in response and dipped her fingers between her legs to rub her clit. Connor brushed her hand away and grabbed his cell phone he’d tossed on the bed earlier. She whined from the loss of contact as I continued to pump in and out of her. She fought back her gags, making her throat clamp around the head of my cock. Connor’s phone started vibrating systematically as he repeatedly tapped on the screen.

Emily released my cock from her mouth and sat up. Her eyes widened as he placed the cell phone on her clit. He grunted as he slid his dick in and out of her. She pushed her hips down and ground harder. Her breaths quickened as she picked up the pace, making her tits bounce up and down.

I gripped her throat and pulled her back down, needing her mouth on me again. She swirled her tongue around the tip and then lapped up the bead of pre-cum from the slit. Her teeth lightly slid across my cock, and with every inch she took, the barbells clicked on her teeth. My dick twitched as she moaned around me.

“Fuck, are you on birth control?” Connor asked.

I stepped back to give her room to speak, and my dick released from her mouth with a pop. She gasped for air and wiped away the spit leaking down her face with the back of her hand.

“Yes, I have the IUD,” she croaked.

Her throat was probably sore from how well she took me. She would have made the perfect escort. My gut sank with that passing thought, and I had to stroke my shaft to pull me out of that headspace.

“Good. I don’t want to pull out. I want to fill you with my cum,” he growled, slamming back into her.

He tossed the phone to the side and gripped her hips. He looked up at me and nodded to that sweet pussy of hers. I nodded to answer yes to the unspoken question and leaned over her. He continued to thrust deep inside her as I slid my hand over her mound and started to rub her clit between my fingers quickly.

“Oh, shit,” she moaned and gripped my leg.

Her other hand fumbled as she tried to wrap her fingers around my dick. She was such a giver, and even as she was falling apart, she wanted to make sure I was pleased. I would have to show her just how much I loved watching one of these days.

“I’m going to come. Please don’t stop!” she yelled.

“You won’t come until I am throbbing inside you,” Connor hissed between his teeth.

His thrusts became erratic, and he lost his smooth rhythm, telling me how close he was. I applied more pressure to her clit, wanting her to disobey him. Her punishment would be fun to watch.

“Shit, shit, shit!”

Connor smirked as he realized what I was doing. It was a race now. Could I make her come in time and get what I wanted? Or would she be a good girl and hold out? Her face turned red, and she dug her teeth into her bottom lip.

“Don’t fight it,” I taunted her while beaming at Connor.

“Dick,” he muttered under his breath.

“Fuck! Connor, I want you to come inside me. Please, just give me all you have,” she whined, knowing she would probably not make it. “I am your pulse, your dirty slut, and I want it all,” she continued.

What a little vixen she was. She let my cock go and gripped her breasts, trying to give him a show to make him come first.

Connor groaned and slammed into her. She released her tits and moaned with him as they climaxed together. I watched as she came undone. When she was at the very peak before falling over the edge, she opened her eyes and stared into my eyes. Her jaw went slack, and her chest heaved. I had no words to describe how beautiful she looked. Our connection pulled on strings in my heart that I didn’t know existed.

Connor collapsed on top of her as he came down from his high, blocking my view of her. She held on to my thigh as she stroked the top of Connor’s head, twirling his hair between her fingers. Her lids started to close, then sprung back open as she fought against exhaustion.

“Liam,” she moaned my name, and I cupped her face.

“Shh, rest,” I responded.

“No, I want you,” her voice was thick with sleep.

My cock throbbed, and I wanted her. I wanted her so bad.

“I’ll take you when you wake up, promise,” I gently whispered.

She tapped on Connor’s shoulder, and he lazily rolled off her. She shook her head and opened her eyes. They widened as she licked her lips.

“I’m not done until I have both of you, fully,” she rasped, standing up from the bed.

Her breasts swayed with the movement, and I was instantly under her spell. She was the beacon I needed to pull me from my thoughts. I sat on the bed, and she climbed on top. Her

hips lifted, aligning my cock with her entrance. She grasped my shoulders and slowly sunk down on my length. Her pussy was soaked, and I pulled her in closer. The heat enveloped me. I gripped her ass and slowly started to rock, pushing deeper and deeper with each stroke.

“Your piercings feel so good,” she whispered into my ear.

Her lips brushed the side of my neck, and she lightly kissed me. Her warm breath sent electricity down my spine. She fit perfectly on my lap, like she was meant just for me. My fingers slid deeper into her crack and cupped her cheeks. My digit closest to her asshole circled and teased it. Her hot panting breaths tickled my ear. I pulled her closer, needing to feel her flush against me. She was becoming my addiction, and I couldn't get enough. I'd only just begun.

“I love how your finger is playing with my ass,” she moaned and whispered into my neck.

She licked over my cheek until she reached my mouth. Our lips crashed together, just like the first time. It consumed every inch of me. I picked up the pace as our teeth and tongues clashed together. Our groans intertwined, and I didn't care if I came fast. All I knew was that I wanted her. I wanted us to never part. If I could keep her attached to me, I always would. Blood was smeared across her chest. The *OURS* was smudged and fading, but it still screamed the truth. She was mine. She was ours. I would kill anyone who tried to take her from me.

Heavy pressure built in the base of my spine. I pushed deeper inside her, needing to bury myself in her.

“Em&m, I am going to come, baby,” I moaned into her mouth.

“Me too. Please come,” she groaned. “I want to come with you.”

That set me off. I plunged inside her with three quick thrusts and exploded. Lights danced under my eyelids, and I sucked her tongue into my mouth. Her cries of pleasure vibrated through every part of me and warmed my heart. Maybe she was it for me.

We collapsed to the side with her still perfectly molded to my body. Connor placed his hand on her hip and curled behind her. This was everything he needed. Everything I needed. I didn't deserve her, but I was selfish and wouldn't leave her side, no matter what.

"Why did you run earlier?" I whispered.

She made a low hum and rubbed her fingers over my spine.

"I was second-guessing myself. Then with your question and the look on your face, I thought I was walking into a trap," she answered in a soft voice.

"The look on my face?"

"You looked pissed." She lifted her face to look at me.

"I was pissed at myself. I thought you turned your back on us," I admitted.

"I kinda did. But things happened that changed my mind," she mumbled as her eyelids closed.

"We will talk about it in the morning." I kissed the top of her head and pulled her close to me.

She fell asleep instantly in my arms, and her relaxed breathing helped uncoil my tightly wound muscles. I expelled one last large breath before sleep took a grasp of me.

Chapter 11

Connor

I tossed back a few over-the-counter pain pills, swallowing the medicine and my desire for something stronger. My skin was heated, and my mouth salivated while I imagined the taste of whiskey and cocaine. If I had a sip, it would help dull some of the pain. I knew it.

Emily's palm brushed over my shoulder. She walked into the kitchen wearing Liam's shirt for the first time. I wanted to rip it off and put my clothing on her instead. At least she was a beautiful distraction from my chaotic addiction.

"You are awake early." She opened the fridge and took out the half-and-half.

"Yeah, it was a sauna in that room, and I didn't want to wake you," I lied.

I didn't know how to explain to her that it felt like ants were crawling over my skin and that the only thing to make it better was something that had almost killed me.

"Oh, I think your room is cooler. We will sleep there tonight, right? The three of us?" she asked, looking hesitantly at me, then the coffee machine.

"If you want my cock buried inside you again, all you have to do is ask," I taunted.

"You want to fuck me over this counter, huh?" she flirted as she rubbed the countertop with her palm seductively.

This was what I needed. She was going to be the one to help me get through this.

"Bend over and pull up that shirt. I'll show you what I want," I growled.

"Sounds like the perfect stress relief after you tell me what happened to your chest." She beamed with victory.

She wanted to dangle sex over my head to get something she wanted? *Silly girl.*

“You know. If I want something, I tend to not ask.” I wrapped my hand in her hair and pulled her head back.

Her lips parted, and she sucked in a sharp breath. She would be so easy to take again.

“But I tell you what. I’ll share my story if you share yours on where you have been and especially why you have those nasty cuts on your wrists. Did you get in a fight with a bracelet?” I joked to make fun of the situation.

I knew what she had to tell me wouldn’t be good. She gulped and looked away. I pulled harder on her hair, making her hiss.

“Tell me what happened,” I growled. The devastation painted across her face made my chest tighten.

“Sheesh, ouch. I’m going to tell you. But can you please go first?” Her voice was soft, and her eyes shone with a desperate plea.

I released her hair, kissed her forehead, and snatched the milk from her hands.

“Fine.” I narrowed my eyes and pointed at the stool.

She pursed her lips and spun around on her toes. Her hips swung with delicious sass, making me want to bend her over and spank her. I rearranged my growing bulge and swung around to make her latte. While I frothed the milk, I kept my back to her, scared that if I turned around, I would change my mind about telling her.

I didn’t know how or why I would share this part of myself. When she’d looked at me last night with tear-filled eyes, I’d wanted to give her all the answers she deserved.

I put her latte in the mug she liked to use and inhaled a deep breath through my nose. It was time to face her. I casually turned to see her watching me closely. She leaned forward, placing her elbows on the counter to hold herself up. Her gray eyes shone brightly, and I wished I had a camera to capture her beauty. Her hair was messy, just-fucked hair, and her small under-eye bags were raw and honest. How she wanted me to be.

I nodded to the couch and took her hand to lead the way. When she sat on the sofa, I handed her the latte and joined her, greedily pulling her close.

“I think I should start from ten years ago when I was twenty-three.” I expelled a haggard breath. “Liam and I were already at each other’s throats, but it was different. At that time, I only held animosity toward him for not running away with me. The asshole even took it a step too far and told our father of my plan when we were teens.”

“He did what?” she interrupted.

“Yeah, he thought I didn’t know until recently. He did it to protect me. I knew then that he’d given up my plans to run away to help me keep my guitar. It sounds stupid, but if I’d lost my guitar, I would have lost myself and done things I probably would regret. Didn’t change the fact that I was pissed at him, and when he refused to tell me the truth, I resented him more for it.” I paused to push Emily’s hair behind her ear.

I needed to feel her warmth and her strength. The more I got to know her, the more I saw her resilience.

“My father is a fucking douche, but it stung when he chose to love Liam and devote his time to him and not me. He always did it growing up, but seeing Liam glow more and more under his praise and then choosing to stay with my father stung. What made me different to not get his affection?” My chest burned, but exposing this part of me to her, my Mo Cuisle, alleviated my desire to drown myself in the amber liquid. “On my twenty-third birthday, I tried one last time to leave. I went to Liam, and he told me he couldn’t leave. He said he needed me. If I left, he knew my father would make him hunt me down. Maybe that was true, but he could have come with me. It was my choice to stay, but I blamed Liam for it. It wasn’t until you left that I realized how trapped I was. I blamed him for not having the balls to stand up to my father, but I was doing the same thing in my own way.” I shook my head and looked down.

“You are not trapped,” she whispered, cupping my cheek.

She took my face in her hands and lifted it to look at her.

“That night when I didn’t deliver you to my father.” I looked into her ghostly eyes. “It was a death sentence.”

“He did this to you,” she growled.

“No, I did this to me. I got too fucked up with booze and cocaine that I had convinced myself it was a good idea to kill myself. Before you say anything; I know I made a mistake. But the feeling of taking control back from him and into my own hands was liberating. I’m stopping the drugs and booze, and you being here is helping me. I’m doing this for you.” I inhaled a large breath and stared at her, wanting to look away but convinced I could find all my answers in her eyes.

“You setting me free even with it being a death sentence was stupid. We could have figured something out together. Connor, I am so glad you are still here. You have stripped me bare, literally, and opened my mind up to something I can’t understand. But I want you to know I can’t be tied to your sobriety that way. You need to get sober for yourself. I will be there for you and help in any way I can, but sobriety only works when it is for you, because if something ever happens to —”

“No one will ever fucking touch you,” I growled, cutting her off.

“But if something did, then your sobriety would be gone,” she said sternly.

I growled and pulled her onto my lap. I pressed my face into the crook of her neck and breathed her in. She wouldn’t leave my side, even if she wanted to.

“I won’t push you into opening up more, but I want you to know I am here when you are ready to talk about it.” She gripped my fingers with her free hand and squeezed.

I nodded and wrapped my arms tighter around her middle.

“Your turn,” I demanded.

I needed to know everything that had happened. She was supposed to drive into the mountains like she had always wanted.

“And where is your backpack?” I asked.

Chapter 12

Emily

Connor's eyes were wide, and his jaw was clenched tight as I stared at him from over my shoulder. Liam had stormed down the stairs when he heard me speaking about Cormac. I could taste the tension in the air. It was thick like smoke coiling around my throat and choking me.

I had told them everything. Well... almost everything. For whatever reason, I hadn't told them I killed a man yet or what their uncle did to me. It wasn't shame, compelling me to hide it. If I wanted to be really honest, I wanted to do something to satisfy my need, my hunger, for revenge for what they did to me, even with how much I was falling for them. Nothing that would kill them, but maybe a little bit of pain for what they'd done to me.

"Cormac, he... um..." I spoke softly, wanting to find the courage to tell them what their uncle did to me. The ugliest parts of me wanted to use my pain to harm them. It was an empty pit of agony that craved company. I knew what Connor had gone through and that he was sitting in his own pain. But did he know what mine was like? Could he understand, despite his upbringing?

Liam stepped forward, furrowing his brow and waiting for me to go on. My gut twisted, and tears pricked my eyes. It was my experience to share. Static filled my ears, and I turned to look at the wall.

"He seemed to really be mad at you guys. I think it's personal," I said, avoiding the truth. I knew it wasn't what I should have said, but I wanted to forget and pretend it never happened.

"Cormac has to have someone helping him," Connor stated, not noticing the pain radiating off me. His scowl deepened. When I started sharing my experience, I'd had to calm him down. It hadn't been easy, but the more I rubbed his thigh, the more he relaxed. I just wished I could express how I was

hurting. But I had to accept the consequences if I wanted to live in my pit of agony alone.

“Who has access to our scanners?” Connor asked while he pulled me closer to him. I was already sitting on his lap. I couldn’t get much closer. Did he sense I was hurting?

“Dad asked the same question. We are going to throw that party to see if anyone gets squirrely. Everyone will be forced to attend,” Liam added as he paced the living room.

“Maybe if I go, I can recognize someone?” I interjected.

It wasn’t my first choice to volunteer, but the faster I could help solve this mess, the more likely I was to have the opportunity to kill Cormac. Maybe I would get lucky enough to add Arthur to my body count. Butterflies filled my stomach at the thought.

“No!” the twins yelled at the same time.

“We told our father you were kidnapped. He can’t know you are alive,” Liam blurted.

“Good. So I am back to being a couch warmer,” I sassed.

If they thought they would keep me locked in a golden cage any longer, they had another thing coming.

“That bratty mouth would feel good wrapped around my cock,” Connor whispered into my ear, making chills race down my spine. That helped me forget. I wiggled on his lap, leaning into his touch.

“What did you say?” Liam snapped.

“That your shirt would look better on me.” Connor chuckled, and I looked over my shoulder to see a playful smirk on his face.

“We are identical twins. It would probably look the same, dipshit.”

“Identical in the face. I think my dick and muscles are bigger,” Connor continued to poke at Liam.

“Your need to work out may make your muscles large, but my dick is bigger.” Liam smiled, and simultaneously, both my

wolves looked at me.

“Do you really want to know your brother’s dick size?” I asked, pulling my head back and furrowing my brows.

I was surprised, considering how comfortable they were with fucking me together, that they hadn’t snuck a peek.

“Not asking his size, just asking who is bigger,” Connor replied.

“That is essentially the same question,” I deadpanned, then looked back and forth between them. “Sheesh, Connor, your dick is just a tad longer, but Liam, your girth is wider.”

They frowned. Obviously, they weren’t happy about my response. Should have lied and said they were identical. “Let’s move back to what is important. What are our plans?” I asked.

They both gave me a scrutinizing glare, and an exasperated huff fell from my lips. I hadn’t escaped just to be prisoned behind glass windows.

“Well, I guess you take us back to where you had escaped, so we see what we can find. Cormac isn’t working alone, and maybe we can get clues about who he is working with,” Connor announced as he started to play with my curls.

He would pull a strand until it was nearly straight, then let it go. It sprung back into a ringlet. I resisted the urge to slap his hand away. He wouldn’t want that, but I didn’t like my hair messed with. Well, unless he was pulling it from the scalp and fucking me from behind.

“What I don’t understand is how you got free.” Liam murmured.

I snapped my head around to glare at him.

“Do you think I am lying?” I roared, feeling blood rush to my face.

“Mm... I like it when you yell.” Connor groaned in my ear.

“That is not what I said. Didn’t they have a guard? If they stole women, they wouldn’t be cocky enough to not have

someone,” Liam added, keeping his arms folded across his chest.

There was one of *the* questions. The one I had to answer. Otherwise, I would be lying. It would, at least, give me more time to conceal what else happened. I closed my eyes and sighed. I didn’t want to hide things from them.

“There was a guard, and I killed him,” I answered.

I tried to hide the smile, but fighting the need to grin was like stopping an already-triggered avalanche. Revenge was my new favorite thing. Connor growled in my ear and moved his hand to cup my sex through the long shirt.

“You did what?” he asked.

His breath was hot against my ear, and my heart rate sped up. *Yes, distract me. Don’t stop.*

“I took the life of a man who helped to kidnap me,” I whispered.

Liam stared at my covered sex, and I watched how his jaw went slack.

“How did it feel?” Connor rasped while lifting my shirt.

“Vengeful,” I moaned, shifting my ass back so I could spread my legs wider.

He spread my lips and started rubbing teasing circles around my clit.

“Hear that, brother? We had a killer in our bed last night.” Connor groaned and nipped at my ear.

Liam nodded but didn’t say anything. His silence made me shift in Connor’s lap. The unease within me grew, and I started to close my legs.

“I didn’t say you could do that,” Connor growled and smacked my pussy.

The slap was quick and hard, leaving behind a sharp sting. I cried out, my legs falling open wider, exposing me for more of his assault.

“Tell me more about how you killed the man who hurt you,” Connor pushed.

He pressed three against my bundle of nerves and rubbed side to side. His pace was agonizingly slow.

“I first killed a man when I was twelve. It was a traitor who was talking to the feds. I put a bullet in his head. The blood splattered all around me and on me. It drenched my clothing,” Connor shared.

I allowed my head to fall back and started grinding my hips against his hand.

“He tried to stop us. I snuck up behind him.” My breath hitched as his hand sped up.

His fingers swiped back and forth. Left and right. Right and left. Faster. Faster.

“Stealthy little mouse, hmm?” Connor groaned.

Liam uncrossed his arms. He looked over my exposed sex as he walked over to us. I was flushed with heat. My nipples perked as he stared and fell to his knees.

“What did you do next?” Liam asked, then stuck two fingers into his mouth.

Electricity danced underneath my skin. Why was I even nervous about telling him this? These men were evil and cruel. But they were mine.

“I wrapped the chain that was attached to my wrist around his throat,” I rasped.

Liam’s eyes sparkled as he pulled his spit-covered digits from his mouth. He winked at me and then shoved two fingers inside me. I gasped, and my vision went fuzzy. Connor continued to rub circles around my clit, while Liam thrust in and out of me.

“What did you do next?” Liam asked with a husky tone.

“I was too small to just pull down. Oh, yes! Right there,” I groaned, unable to continue my sentence.

The whirling sensations abruptly stopped as both of the guys paused. Connor had one arm wrapped around my waist, holding me back from grinding down on them, and the other hovered over my sex.

“We didn’t say you could stop telling us what happened,” Connor snapped.

“It feels good. You can’t blame me for losing my train of thought,” I huffed.

“Yes, we can.” Liam chuckled as he started to withdraw his fingers.

“I knew I didn’t weigh enough, so I jumped onto him, and I—oh, fuck, rub my clit harder, please.” I paused to beg but quickly continued, “I pressed my knees against his back for leverage and pulled,” I desperately blurted, not wanting them to stop.

Connor rubbed faster while Liam flicked his fingers up. Two sets of hands on me. Fingering me. They were quickly starting to push me over the edge.

“How did you feel when he died?” Connor asked, then licked up my sweat-slicked neck.

“I felt good. I laughed, and I wanted to do it again. I wished Cormac was there so I could have killed him too,” I blurted out my thoughts.

Regret quickly filled my stomach. Did they want to kill Cormac?

“We will do that one together,” Liam announced.

“Always together. Now come for us,” Connor demanded, picking up his pace.

Liam followed his movements, and I quickly fell over the edge. Warmth burst through me, and my muscles tightened. My head fell forward so I could continue to watch as their hands fucked me in unison.

“You are so wet,” Liam purred, slowing down his rhythm but shoving deeper inside me.

My channel clamped down on him. I let out a desperate moan as my orgasm continued to roll through me. They stopped at the same time, just before it became too much. My head fell back, and I inhaled large breaths to come back down. These men were perfect. If only I weren't keeping a secret from them.

A treacherous tear fell from my eye and rolled down my cheek onto Connor's hand. I held my breath, wishing I could take it back, but another fell instead. Liam's eyes widened, and he lifted me from Connor's lap. My bare legs wrapped around his waist, and it was like a dam broke. Sobs overtook me, and I stuffed my head into the crook of Liam's neck, wanting it to stop.

He didn't say anything, just let me cry. Connor's warmth pushed against my back, and they enveloped me in their embrace.

"Tell me," Connor demanded, not being as patient.

I shook my head, not understanding why my pain wouldn't remain locked away. It wasn't fair that it couldn't remain in the depths of my mind. It was a plague attacking a good moment, coming up when I didn't want it to.

"What is hurting you?" Liam whispered, rubbing his hand up and down my back.

My mind, body, and soul hurt. Why did it hurt more now than when it had happened? The internal safe, where I stored all my pain, had fractured, and the memories were clawing out like a raptor, desperate for its next meal.

"Your uncle knocked me out, and I woke to him—" I croaked, unable to say the word. This wasn't to hurt them. It wasn't to make them feel sympathy for me. It was a purging of the poison that had seeped into my bloodstream. "He did things."

"I'll kill him," Connor growled.

"He's dead," Liam said as if it were law and written into the Bill of Rights.

Their eyes darkened, making my chest burn. They didn't need me to say it aloud, and I couldn't express how grateful I was for it. In their line of work, I thought they would've been numb to rape. But the way they stared at me made me feel protected, as if their possessiveness would keep me safe.

I pulled back, needing to be heard. My face was wet, and I felt the blood flowing into my cheeks. I sucked in a breath and slowly exhaled.

"He's mine to kill." I looked at each of them. "We will go back to that house tonight before he is gone. I will free the women who were held captive with me, then I will kill him slowly," I stated, scaring myself with the venom and ice that laced my tone.

"Done," Connor replied.

"I'll help you get your pound of flesh," Liam added.

They didn't bat an eye at how easily they were swayed to kill a family member. I didn't know their past, but I knew Connor and Liam had adored and looked up to their uncle at one point. Now, when I looked into their faces, all I saw was murder.

Chapter 13

Liam

Emily sat in the passenger seat, picking at her bandaged wrists. It had been days since she'd escaped. We weren't going to wait to take a hit on Cormac; Emily was right to want her revenge now, and I wanted to be the one to help her get it. He was probably sitting high and mighty on his throne, waiting for us. Cockiness was a family trait.

My chest hurt, and my temples were throbbing. Being forced to bring Emily was dangerous for her, but she deserved to heal, and leaving her behind could make her a sitting duck. We didn't know what our uncle had planned for us. Christ, we'd thought he was dead. My father never missed his targets.

We were going to take him out. He'd fucked with what belonged to us. A bolt of electricity struck my gut. He had hurt Emily. I didn't know how to understand my emotions for her. And now wasn't the right time to organize that mess in my mind. My brother hadn't fully recovered, and I was distracted by the girl sitting innocently next to me. This was a shit show.

She, at least, remembered the cross street from when she had escaped. That made finding him easier. It was the three of us going in, making everything harder. I had taken my father's advice about not trusting anyone besides us, which left us at a disadvantage. Connor didn't see it as a weakness. He had inherited more of the cocky gene.

Emily reached over and skipped to the next song on my playlist. "Change (In the House of Flies)" by Deftones started to play, making her smile and lean back. I watched from the corner of my eye as she mouthed the words and stared out the window. Her left foot was pulled up on the seat. I would have been worried about it getting dirty, but her Converse were brand new. Connor had a thing for girls in skinny jeans and high tops. She had been excited when he'd given her the shoes but ignored his request to wear a deep V-neck and wore a black hoodie instead. I was starting to learn that it didn't

matter what she wore; she was remarkably stunning in everything she put on.

I ran through our plan over and over in my head.

Park out front. Ascertain how many were there or if they stuck around. Go through the back door. Kill anyone in our way.

Those thoughts played in an endless loop in my head. They sounded simple, but having things in a clear order tended to disperse the negative thoughts that crept in.

“Remember when we were kids, and Dad made us do that tactical training?” Connor laughed, breaking the silence.

“Yes, I remember how you got high as fuck, and I had to hit your targets for you so you wouldn’t get in trouble,” I replied.

“Wait, there’s actually a tactical program for young kids?” Emily asked.

“Our father made it happen. Shooting scarecrows when your hands are numb from smoking all day is a lot of fun,” Connor continued as he pulled out a cloth to wipe down his hatchet.

“Our lives were very different.” Emily chuckled.

I looked over at her, then back at the road. We needed to stay concentrated on the target. We were twenty minutes out, and getting on a tangent and talking about the past wouldn’t help.

“You grew up in foster care? Is that right, babe?” Connor asked.

He was obviously comfortable with small talk. The timing was shit, but I couldn’t help my own curiosity.

“Yeah. My entire life. I didn’t have a family,” she answered as if that wasn’t something to be sad about.

“Fathers suck, but I am sorry you didn’t have a brother. Mine has his moments, but I wouldn’t trade him in,” Connor rambled, then leaned forward, hatchet in hand. “Hear that, baby brother?”

“You were born ten minutes before me,” I replied, then pointed at his filthy hatchet. “Why are you even cleaning that?”

The tool had paint chips and aging metal that was starting to rust. He had probably been cleaning it by sticking it in a bucket of water and leaving it there for days.

“I just finished sharpening it before we left. Have to make sure it looks pretty for our new friends. Emily, would you like to take a swing with it?” He tilted the tool toward her.

She looked over it, pursing her lips. Was she really contemplating that nasty thing?

“Looking at that thing will give you tetanus. Open the dashboard console,” I interjected before she came up with any stupid ideas.

She popped open the dash, reached in, and pulled out the small Glock G42. She inspected it like a foreign object and then quickly put it away.

“Don’t tell me you have never held a gun before,” I muttered.

“Of course, I haven’t. I kept a bat and a bottle of pepper spray beside my bed. It’s not like I had money to buy one; if I did, I wouldn’t know how to shoot. So, yeah, I have never held a gun,” she responded and then looked over her shoulder.

She eyed Connor’s hatchet as if it were a briefcase filled with money.

“If I take it, does that mean you won’t have a weapon?” she hesitantly asked.

“I can use the gun this time, and then I’ll buy you your own weapon,” he responded matter-of-factly.

“I’ll teach you how to shoot,” I interjected.

“Do you guys have a chain?” she asked as I stepped on the gas.

“We have a thin one for strapping down the ammo,” Connor answered, sitting back in the seat.

“I’ll take that,” she stated, smiling brightly.

“You are remaining in the truck to be the lookout,” I hissed.

I couldn’t have her getting hurt. I had already thought she’d betrayed us when that hadn’t been the case at all. The guilt of my actions was already too much to bear.

“No,” she snapped at me and glared.

A sparkle of light shone in her eyes, begging me to challenge her.

“I’ll keep her by my side. Keeping her outside could make her bait for Uncle Zombie.” Connor reached forward and rubbed his finger along her cheek.

“It is settled. I am coming in with you. Also, it’s the next left,” she spoke up, leaning into his touch.

The energy in the truck changed. It was charged with electricity. My heart rate sped up, and the darkness swirling around in Connor’s eyes told me he was feeling the shift. I drove past the house, and we craned our necks to see if there was any movement. The tree coverage hid everything. Our vantage point was obscured, and we needed more information.

“Connor, look up the address,” I barked.

Movement in the rearview reassured me he was on it. The truck’s motor rumbled as I continued down the street. The sidewalks were empty, and each house was spaced far apart.

“Em&m, I can’t get a clear view of the house. How far up is it?” I asked as I flipped a bitch.

“I-I—” she stuttered. Her mouth fell open until she looked at me. “I’m sorry. I don’t know. It was late, and I was only focused on escaping.”

“As you should have been,” I quickly responded.

I grabbed her leg and rubbed circles on the inside of her thigh. This wasn’t part of my plan. Things weren’t adding up. When that happened, objectives failed, and when those failed, things got messy. My grasp tightened, making Emily flinch.

“We will just walk up the driveway. It’ll be fun.” Connor beamed.

“Shut up. That is not how things are going to work,” I fumed.

Emily placed her hand over mine and held it, giving my fingers a reassuring squeeze. It did nothing to alleviate the ache in my chest.

“Let’s make a new plan while we do one more pass of the house,” she said soothingly.

A new plan was wrong. It wasn’t right. My palms began to sweat profusely. I snatched my hands off her and gripped the steering wheel before Emily noticed. New decisions made in haste tended to not go as planned. Someone could get shot and killed if we went up the front like that. My throat tightened, and I gulped down air, trying to clear the golf ball in my esophagus.

“Liam is right. The driveway is risky. But when I escaped, I hugged the tree line without a problem. We can do that. Slowly creep along the tree line. When we get to the top, we can see if there’s any movement. What would you do after that?” She reached over and placed her hand on my thigh and squeezed.

“Are there trees close to the back door?” I hastily asked.

“I don’t know what’s in the back. I escaped out the front, but there are bushes in front of the house we can slide behind.”

“We don’t know enough.” I slammed my hand on the steering wheel.

“We can chop down the door,” Connor exulted.

Emily spun around in her seat and shot daggers at my brother. She didn’t need to do that. I was used to my brother’s impulsiveness. When I turned down the music, the cab went silent, and Emily and Connor were still deep in a staring match. If I were to bet, Connor didn’t want to be the one to blink first.

The ball in my throat started to shrink as I ran through the steps in my head, creating a new order of attack.

Go up the tree line and keep Em in the middle. Shimmy along the house until we reach the back. Once there, we breach and prepare for heavy gunfire.

I rattled the steps off in my head a few more times. It was still simple, and the risk was about the same.

“Let’s park the truck a little down the street. Not too far, where we can’t make a run for it, but far enough to not draw attention,” I stated.

“Sounds good to me,” Connor announced, still staring at Emily.

“Children,” I murmured under my breath.

“Hey! I turn thirty soon,” Emily murmured.

“When is your birthday?” Connor asked.

“October.”

“October....” he said slowly.

“10th.” She chuckled.

“Focus!” I roared and pounded on the dash.

My heart slammed against my chest, and my knuckles turned white from clutching the steering wheel. They weren’t focusing, and the longer we were in the open, the more dangerous this was. I pulled over on the side of the road and threw the truck into the park. We rocked slightly from the force, and I took repetitive deep breaths.

No one said anything, and the silence was agonizingly long. I threw the door open but was careful not to slam it closed. It took everything in me not to.

The things we needed were in the bed of the truck, chained down to the back of the cab. I placed my foot on the tire and lifted myself up. Carefully, I unlocked it and pulled off the metal, keeping the sound minimal. When I popped open the trunk, I scanned the equipment for my belt. It was filled with my guns, ammo, and a single scalpel. The chain securing

everything was easy to detach. I slowly picked it up, not wanting to make a sound, and handed it to Emily.

Connor patiently waited on the other side of the truck bed for his belt, but when I looked it over, I decided to pull out one gun for Emily.

“Look, I know you don’t know how to shoot, but this one doesn’t have a safety. It has thirteen rounds ready to go. All you have to do is pull the trigger. If we get separated, I need you to run. Don’t look back. Don’t wait. Just take the truck and leave. Promise me,” I demanded.

Her fingers grasped the gun, but I didn’t let go. She bit her lower lip as she looked up at me. Her long curly hair fell down her back and over her shoulders.

“Promise, but don’t make me do that, okay?” she asked in a quiet, breathy voice.

I nodded, letting go of the Glock and grabbing a rubber band from the trunk.

“Tie your hair back,” I said and tossed her the tie.

It was time to torment the men who had taken her from us. If my uncle was there, he was going to wish that my father was the one who had killed him.

Chapter 14

Connor

The streetlights were faintly lit, which was perfect for hiding the outline of my hatchet under my hoodie. Cold air blew across my face as I narrowed my eyes on my girl. She was such a little thing for a killer. I couldn't wait to watch her take someone's life right in front of me. My cock swelled with anticipation.

An owl flew over our heads. Its large wings spread wide. We all paused to watch it soar smoothly through the darkness with lethal grace. I didn't believe in fate and luck. Not like *my* Emily, but that would have been a good omen if I did.

Liam handed over my belt, and I wrapped it around my waist. If I had it my way, I would have gone in with just three hatchets. One to throw, the other to chop into someone, and the last for good luck. *Maybe she was rubbing off on me.*

A stray lock of hair spiraled next to Emily's face as she walked up to me. I rubbed my palm down her cheek.

"Stay in front of me," I ordered while I pulled her black hood up.

The black fabric surrounding her face accentuated her gray eyes. They lured me in and filled my chest with warmth. Liam cleared his throat, forcing a possessive growl from deep in my stomach.

"I'll stay in front of you." She smiled, pulling away.

Emily's chain faintly rattled in the pocket of her hoodie, and I smirked, knowing it was grating on Liam's nerves. The gun Liam gave her was tucked into a holster fastened to her side. Her hips swayed, and her hoodie lifted just enough to see the barrel of the gun with each step she took. I had to adjust my dick because *fuck, that was hot.*

We approached a black iron gate that was broken and hanging off the hinges, making us crouch. Our steps were methodical as we raced across the clearing to the tree line. The

foliage was thick, and branches hung low. Spiderwebs weaved and stuck to whatever part of the tree they could. Liam snapped his gun out and slowly waved it into the air to clear the path.

“I hate spiders,” I quietly muttered.

“Really?” Emily whispered skeptically.

“You aren’t?” I whispered too loudly, making Liam shush me.

“They play an important part in the world.”

Shivers racked up my body as I thought of their beady eyes and fangs. Irrational fear, but yeah, I really hated spiders.

A twig snapped. Emily dropped her hands to the ground, hiding herself. My muscles tightened as I scanned the area with my finger over the trigger.

“Clear,” Liam hissed.

Emily slowly rose back up, and we hurriedly toward the single-story house with white paneling and peeling paint. It was lit with one porch light, but the windows were pitch black. Before we raced across the front yard, Liam pulled out a sleek pair of binoculars and scanned the front side of the home. His head shook, and he stuffed them back into his belt.

“We are clear. Let’s head to the back,” he whispered while he looked over his shoulder.

Emily placed her hand on his lower back. I grasped my black Magnum and held it toward the door while they sprinted across the thick grass. Their steps were quick while my eyes remained steady on a potential target.

They launched themselves through the bush and flattened their backs against the wall. Liam aimed his pistol at the door while I darted across. When I got to them, I winked at Emily and pulled her hood back up. She needed to remain hidden.

My heart rate was erratic as we slid through webs. My skin itched as my brain provided a horrific image of hundreds of legs scurrying over my exposed flesh. *Fucking spiders.*

When we made it to the back side of the house, I fought the rising urge to smack my skin and dance to get the bugs off me. The glass back door and windows were just as dark as the front.

“On the count of three. Emily, stay behind us but have your gun ready,” Liam announced.

“Don’t shoot me, baby,” I taunted, wiggling my butt as I stepped in front of her.

“Can I count?” she asked.

Liam and I furrowed our brows, not knowing why she would want to, but we shrugged. *Why the hell not?*

“One. Two.” She paused for a split second, then yelled, “Three!”

We kicked in the door at the same time. Glass shattered on the ground with a loud crash. We lunged inside, clutching our guns and scanning the area. My skin vibrated with energy. I desperately wanted to kill in front of Emily. Our steps crunched on the glass as we moved farther into the dark space. The sound of emptiness made the hairs on the back of my neck stand. Liam flicked on his flashlight and scanned the abyss.

“Clear the rooms. Em&m, stay on our heels.” Liam barked out orders like we were something official.

Emily placed her hand on my tailbone and followed us in. A dirty folding table was flipped, with playing cards splayed across the floor. Folding chairs were broken and dented, lying next to the cracked and damaged walls. Fragments of plaster lay next to the chairs, as if someone had thrown them. Only someone in our family could have had a temper tantrum like that. It had Cormac written all over with pretty pink letters.

We moved into each bedroom until it was cleared, then headed back to what used to be the dining area.

“The basement is locked. That is where they kept us,” Emily whispered, pointing to the latch.

“Since it’s locked, let’s gather what we can up here. If the girls are still down there, I don’t want to start gathering them

until we are ready to leave,” Liam replied and then looked around the dark space. “Connor, you check the kitchen. Emily, stay with him. I’ll see if I can find anything in the rooms. Put on your gloves, both of you.” He pulled out his phone and handed it to Emily. “Use the flashlight on it. Just tap the bottom left corner for it to come on.”

He lingered after he gave her the phone, examining her intently. She gave him a small smile, and I had to fight the urge to roll my eyes. Were they having silent little conversations now? I thought that was just a *her-and-me* thing.

I yanked and shook my flashlight from the tactical belt. Stupid piece of shit. I clicked the light on and searched the floor for anything left behind. A large yellow stain was on the carpet near the door, smelling like piss.

“Did you kill the guy here?” I asked her, pointing at the mark.

She nodded her head at me, then moved into the kitchen. The guy must have really needed to pee, because that was a lot of piss. The empty bottles of beer everywhere would explain that. He had to have been on a liquid diet because there wasn’t a pile of shit.

I pulled open each drawer in the kitchen, searching for anything that could be useful, but all I found were dollar store utensils and roaches. Emily ran her hand over the counter and kept her stare downward. Her shoulders were slumped. The energy that had been holding her head high was diminished. I blinked a few times, wondering if she would snap back into the killer she was. Nothing happened. Nagging voices urged me to ask if she wanted to talk about it, but with how she avoided my stare, I had a feeling she didn’t want to.

On my way to the living room, I slid my hand across her back and kissed the top of her head. There. That was affection. That might help. I didn’t speak the language of a loving and caring boyfriend, but something odd inside me wanted to learn.

Nothing but stale Cheetos and beer bottles littered the space. The T.V. was something from the nineties and would have

been worth only a fraction of a newer one. My uncle must have been really slumming it nowadays.

“Connor! Emily! You should really come to look at this,” Liam yelled from the other room.

I grabbed her hand, and we raced into the room he’d yelled from. A dented metal desk was in the center of the room with paperwork and photos splayed across it. Liam’s lip was lifted in a snarl while he held a photograph. Emily approached him and inspected what he was holding. Her mouth fell open, and her eyes bulged.

“What the fuck are you looking at,” I barked.

I stormed across the room and snatched it from his grasp. My gut sank, and my chest filled with fire. I looked at the image of Emily moaning as I fucked her from behind in *my* home. The shot was taken from a significant distance, but the camera was obviously more than the fuckwad who’d furnished this house could afford.

I kicked at the desk, forcing the rest of the photos to fall to the floor. Blood rushed to my face as I started to pace the room. They were spying on me in my own home. My living room. My kitchen! I clenched my fist and pounded into the ancient plaster. Dust filled the air as I growled and hammered into the wall.

“Connor!” Emily yelled.

I backed away from the wall. My scalp burned as I gripped my short strands with my fingertips and pulled. They saw her coming undone and deserved to be punished. The angelic expressions belonged to us and us alone. They were mine first! I kicked at the wall one last time before I spun around.

“Don’t leave one single fucking photo behind. I want them all!” I snarled.

I raced to search the room, needing to keep busy. My palms were sweaty, and my heart rate was erratic. I jerked open the closet door, slamming the handle against the wall. My feet stuttered to a stop, and my heart sank. A tattered black

backpack leaned against the wall. I carefully picked it up. *My Mo Cuishle's*.

I turned around to look at her as she gathered the photos into a pile. I gently cradled the bag that meant so much to her in my arms.

“Emily,” I called her name.

She looked up at me and dropped everything she was holding. Her eyes filled with tears.

“Is she in there,” she croaked.

Her hands trembled along with her vocal cords. I shrugged my response and looked down.

“Do you want me to check for you?” I asked.

She nodded rapidly and covered her mouth with shaky palms. I kneeled on the floor, scared I would accidentally drop it if I unzipped it while standing.

The bag opened slightly, and I placed my fingers inside, searching for the small wooden box. A lock jingled under my touch, and I snapped my head up to smile at her as I wrapped my hand around the thing she missed most.

She raced across the room and dropped to her knees, holding out her palms. Tears streamed down her face, and she sniffled repeatedly.

“I thought I had lost her.” She held her in her arms and pulled her close.

I didn't know how much I wanted this for her. Seeing her happy was cooling the fire that burned deep inside me. Liam walked up beside her but respected her space and didn't touch her. She held Bubbles in her arms, rocking back and forth.

To be loved by Emily was to be loved fiercely and unconditionally. It was something I'd always wanted. I had Liam, but that was a twin type of love that only we could understand. A father's love should be like how Emily loved, but it wasn't like that for me. I knew then that it would be my goal to be worthy of that love from her.

Chapter 15

Emily

Fate was cruel, cold, and corrupt. Three c-words surrounded me like a poisonous fog. When I least expected it, it surprised me with a tenderness I'd only dreamed of. It gave me luck. Good luck. Two men stood beside me as I gently placed Bubbles into my bag. They showed affection, caring, and understanding as I cried about being reunited with the one thing that had held me together as the rain poured down on me.

"We should gather everything up and go downstairs." I sniffled and looked up at them.

They placed their palms down on each of my shoulders and gave me a reassuring smile. My wolves were becoming my protectors and not my predators. I was no longer their prey.

We quickly gathered all the photos into a large pile and placed them in my bag. That was how Cormac must have known I was leaving that day. He had been spying on our every movement.

Connor tugged my hand and led me to the hallway and the basement. Liam was close behind us. When we got to the large wooden door that was bolted closed from the outside, I inhaled a large breath.

Hope wasn't here with me to say we'd come back for them like she had promised, and that made my heart burn. Connor twisted the latch, and the *click* started to bring back memories I wasn't ready for. My skin was clammy as I remembered Cormac thrusting into me.

Move forward. Don't look back. Move forward. Don't look back. I repeated that in my head to force the images away.

The door swung open, and a vile smell of feces, urine, and mold assaulted my nose. Liam started to gag over and over, and his eyes watered.

"Maybe you should stay up here," I consoled.

“I can handle it,” he deflected.

I stepped toward him and placed my hand on his chest. His heart rate was erratic, and his shirt was becoming slick.

“You can, but you don’t have to. We are a team, and I am here for you, just like I know you are for me.”

I didn’t tell him of my fear, but it was minuscule compared to the agony he would be in if he saw the disarray downstairs. The trauma that flowed inside me was a haunting hum I had become accustomed to. I wasn’t comparing the challenges that plagued us, but the desire to endure something for someone I cared for was strong.

His heaving chest slowed, and he took a few small steps back. He nodded slowly and pulled his crisp jacket over his mouth and nose to filter the smell. I gave him a small smile, placed my bag by his feet, and turned around. I fought the need to suck in a breath and grabbed Connor’s hand to lead him into the depths of my hell.

The incessant drips of water accompanied our descent. The steps shook and creaked beneath our weight, and the darkness surrounded me in its cold embrace. Our flashlights lit the floor, revealing the pooling puddles of defecation, but the smell was more putrid than *just* that. We slowly panned the room, exposing the empty shackles, except for one set. A figure was twisted and spread across the cement at the far end, across from where I used to be.

“No,” I whispered as tears returned.

Lifeless blonde hair was crusted to the floor. I lunged forward, hoping it wasn’t her. Connor’s arm snaked around my middle and pulled me back.

“Let me go,” I wailed, pushing at him.

He huffed as I accidentally hit a tender spot, but I took the opportunity to go to her. I crashed to my knees on the wet, disgusting floor, and the putrid smell made me heave. My gut burned with bile and grief as I looked over Candice’s lifeless body.

“No, no, no.” My trembling hands hovered over her, not wanting to know what a decomposing body felt like. Her skin was swollen with bloat, and black blood crusted over her indented forehead. “She saved me. It was her bobby pin that gave me freedom, and I—” I rocked on my toes, trying to stop my racing heart. “I should have come back for her faster. This is my fault.”

Drip, drip, drip. The water continued to fall from the pipes, and each time it plopped, a screech rang in my ears. It needed to stop. The rollercoaster I was on needed to end. My moment of happiness was once again consumed by the flames that stalked me.

I shot to my feet and raced toward Connor. I grasped the hatchet he had hidden and jerked it free.

“Emily, what are you doing?”

I spun around and curled the ax over my shoulder. My breaths came fast as I slammed the tool into the brick support beam. Dust filled the air surrounding me. The wall cracked, and I continued to hack.

“Stop.” Connor’s voice was muffled.

Blood rushed to my face. Four bricks fell to the floor, and I stepped onto them. I gasped and leaped into the air. The chipped blade collided with the leaking pipe, slicing it open. *Snap.* Water sprayed down onto me. My hair stuck to my face as I raced to the metal tubing lining the wall. I chopped into it, wishing I could hack into fate like this rusted metal. The house groaned from my assault. If only it was Cormac, instead.

“Enough,” Connor growled, attempting to snatch the ax from my grasp.

Copper piping lined the wall in the corner. I grinned, knowing what I wanted to do. Without a moment of hesitation, I threw the weapon at the gasoline. The ax clattered to the floor, followed by a sharp *hiss*. The smell of rotten eggs accompanied my decomposing friend.

“What the fuck!” Liam snarled from the top of the stairs, drawing my attention.

His face was pale and sweat beaded his forehead. Water continued to cascade into the basement. Debris swirled in the flooding room. I gasped, realizing what I had done.

“We need to get her,” I cried, not understanding what had gotten into me.

Fate did this, and I needed to defeat the odds. I raced toward Candice, wading through the water. Connor growled as he wrapped his arm around my middle. He gasped in a deep breath, flipped me around, and threw me over his shoulder.

“That is enough!” he yelled and grabbed my thighs. “The more you move, the more pain you put me in. Just hold on to me.”

Tears mixed with the water saturating every inch of me. The steps creaked as he walked up.

“I can walk,” I wailed, knowing I had fucked everything up.

Fate was real, but I succumbed to the depths of its pull. My actions were mine to claim and mine alone. My muscles ached, and my throat was tight. I was leaving her behind again. *This was my fault.*

Connor leaned over, sliding me down his body. He grunted as he straightened. Liam only allowed me to stand for a moment before he scooped me up. He cradled me in his arms and handed my black bag to Connor.

“I can walk,” I muttered as burning shame filled my chest.

“You can, but you don’t have to. We are a team, and I am here for you,” he replied with the same words I had told him.

My body bounced as he ran outside. Connor was beside him, continually scanning the area. We were halfway down the drive when Liam set me down.

“We are going to burn it to the ground. This place, your agony. Live in it, feel it, and then set it on fire, and watch it dissipate into the sky,” Liam said as he hastily screwed a silencer onto his gun.

“What do you mean?” I whispered.

“It’s time for shooting lessons. Aim for the glass window and shoot.” He stuck the gun in my hand and stood behind me, holding my arms up.

My finger trembled over the trigger.

“Don’t bottle this up. It will eat you alive like it did me.” Connor stepped beside me and placed his palm on my shoulder.

My biceps felt small compared to the pistol and looking down the barrel made my chest tighten. I exhaled a small breath. With a squeeze, the gun coiled, jerking my arms back. The bullet hit the side of the building with a thunk.

“I missed,” I mumbled.

“Again,” they said.

I looked over the barrel, lined it with my shot, and fired multiple rounds. The glass shattered, and fire erupted from inside. My knees buckled as the explosion shook the ground. One of them plucked the gun from my hand while the other pulled my hoodie back over my face. They jerked me around and tugged me as we sprinted down the drive and around the corner. The rear lights flashed, signaling it was unlocked.

Connor yanked open the backdoor and ushered me in. He slid in beside me while Liam turned the key over. The truck rumbled, and we sped off down the street, away from the hate I held. I turned around to watch the black smoke billowing into the air. It didn’t expel all the trauma in my heart, but as I turned back around and leaned into Connor, I felt a part of myself begin to heal.

Those who say *violence is never the answer* have never lived a hard life.

My steps were sluggish, and my thoughts traveled far from my body. I drifted high enough away that I could see Connor, Liam, and I lazily stride into the entry hall and kick off our shoes. This wasn’t the life I saw for myself, but it was one I could see myself growing old in. They were who I envisioned.

Before them, I was a wanderer, never staying in one place long. The normal way of living left me without anything.

Liam placed his hand on my lower back and kissed the top of my head. He grounded me back to reality.

“We should shower,” he stated.

He led the way while Connor and I followed. When we reached the top of the stairs, Connor grabbed Liam’s hand.

“Can I have this time alone with her,” he asked, gently holding onto Liam.

Amber flecks of light shone in Liam’s eyes as he looked between Connor and me.

“Yeah, sure. I’ll shower in the other room,” he answered.

He walked down the hall slowly before looking back to examine me. I gave a reassuring nod, giving him the answer to a question I knew he didn’t want to ask. Connor gently grabbed my hand and pulled me into his bedroom. The room was the same, with black decor and messy bedsheets. Nothing had changed but me.

We stepped into the bathroom, where I had awoken the day he’d kidnapped me. The reflection looking back at me was a striking similarity to when I had been homeless. I lightly touched the bags under my eyes and felt along the creases that lined my forehead. My hair was stringy and knotted from the downpour, and when I lifted a clump of my hair, the entire side came up with it.

The shower flipped on, and Connor moved to stand behind me. He ran his hand down the side of my head and arm.

“I am back to the trash you found on the side of the road,” I mumbled.

“You are beautiful. You were then, and you are now,” he replied and lifted my black hoodie over my head.

He removed my shirt and unclasped my bra. My breasts bounced a little without the support, and my dark nipples perked. He leaned over and placed his chin in the crook of my

neck while his large hands rubbed up my stomach to cup my boobs.

“Perfection,” he whispered.

I pushed my head back, brushing my forehead against him. He dipped his hands back down and unclasped my jeans. His calloused fingers slid down my pants as his lips pressed soft kisses down my spine. The steam billowed in the bathroom, embracing me like the affection he was giving me. His actions were something I never expected from my snarling wolf. His bite was powerful, but his kiss was intense.

A soft smile pulled on my lips as his rough beard slid back up my back. I stepped out of my jeans and spun to look at him. His normally dark eyes were light, with gold flecks, and his facial features were glowing. My stomach fluttered as I caressed the side of his cheek. The tough texture of his beard sent jolts of electricity through me. I copied his soothing attention and slowly pulled off his jacket and shirt.

Muscles lined his stomach, and the dark bruises were slightly lighter than the day before. I pressed my lips gently against the marks and then down his predominant v-taper. His moan sent gooseflesh across my skin, reassuring me that I was making him happy.

I unclasped his button and wiggled his jeans and boxers down. His cock bobbed free. I bit my lower lip, longing to lick the glistening tip. He kicked his jeans off his ankles while I held onto his thighs. I looked up at him and stared into his hooded eyes as I licked the tip of him.

“Don’t tease me,” he rasped under his breath.

I wrapped my lips around his head and rolled my tongue over him, needing to taste the saltiness again. Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t break our eye contact. Watching him come undone was sending delightful waves of pleasure over my sex.

I sucked him into my mouth, slowly and gently letting the tops of my teeth graze his length. He was long, and I was forced to open wide and relax my throat to try to take in every inch of him.

“You have me, *Mo Cuishle*.” He groaned as he reached down to pet my face with his thumb.

I leaned into his touch as I pulled back and pushed back down, occasionally swirling my tongue around his dick. His heavy breathing fanned over my heated skin while I greedily watched his chest rise and fall. I moaned around him and shoved him back down my throat, pushing as far as I could. A small gag lurched me forward, making my throat clench around his cock and my eyes water.

“Shit,” he growled softly.

His hands cupped under my armpits, and he quickly lifted me up. He grimaced from his injuries for a short moment, then grabbed my head to pull me close. Our mouths collided, and our tongues explored each other’s taste. I moaned into his mouth just as he groaned, and we desperately licked inside each other’s mouths.

He wrapped his arms around me and backed me into the shower. Warm water cascaded around us, saturating our bare skin. I lifted my leg around his waist as he lowered himself. Our eyes opened at the same time, and our mouths pulled apart. Every inch of my body vibrated with desire, and my clit throbbed with a steady pulse of need.

He reached down and grasped his cock, aligning it with my entrance. His head sat right outside me, and he slowly moved forward, teasing me with just the tip. I needed him. I craved every part of his soul.

“*A chuisle mo chroí*,” he purred as he slammed into me.

Electricity danced behind my eyelids, and I cried out from the force. His affection could never be pain free. But it was a pain that was laced with pleasure. His cock rocked into me as the shower’s stream continued to rain down on us. Our slick foreheads pressed together.

“Connor, fuck, I’m going to come,” I whined, not understanding how I was able to so quickly.

“I know. It feels so good. I’m right there with you.” His breath and lips brushed against my face while his hips sped up.

I ground my hips up and down as he pulled out and in, slamming into me on every other thrust. Gradually, warmth built in my lower spine, and I curled my fingers into his back. A sudden wave of electricity jolted through me as I came undone. His moans and pants echoed against the black-tiled walls until he shoved deep inside me. His cock pulsed and twitched. Heat shot inside me as he filled me with his cum and pressed harder inside me.

“One day, I’m going to take out that damned birth control and fill you with my cum, over and over again. I’ll do it every night until you cannot walk due to carrying our child.”

My mouth fell open and then closed while my sex clenched around him. Warmth swirled around my ovaries, and I fought the urge to bulge my eyes. Why did I like the sound of that so much? My breaths picked up as he pulled out of me.

He grabbed the loofah and soap, not caring that he’d just told me he wanted to knock me up. The textured cloth brushed over my skin, and I looked up at the shower head, letting the water wash over me.

We dried off, and per my nightly usual, I dressed in one of the guys’ oversized shirts. With how possessive Connor got when I wore Liam’s shirt, I chose to wear his this time. His scent lingered on the fabric, and I breathed it in.

The T.V. blared downstairs, and I raced down to unwind with them. Liam was in the kitchen, wiping the counters. His brows were furrowed in concentration, and I swear I could see the tip of his tongue sticking out as he repeatedly scrubbed at one spot. I chuckled and then looked over at the windows. My breath caught, remembering the photos that were taken of me in this room. Were they taking some right now?

My skin went clammy, and I nervously pulled down my shirt. The need to see how Cormac had gotten the photos pulled at me, and before I knew it, I was looking over the city. Lights lit up rooms in buildings across from us, but their roofs were a story down. How could he have gotten clear photos of us? My chest tightened, and I spun around, crashing into Liam’s chest.

He wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me close. My heart fluttered for a whole different reason, and I bit on my lower lip as I looked up at him.

“We will be staying at my place tomorrow and moving forward.” His fingers massaged into my lower back, making a groan slip from my lips.

His eyes became hooded, and my sex clenched. Their ability to control my libido was unhealthy.

Down, kitty, I mentally scolded her.

“Why aren’t we there tonight?” I asked, looking over my shoulder. The hairs on the back of my neck stood as if someone was taking a picture of us.

“Because we aren’t little bitches who immediately run and hide,” Connor yelled from the couch.

Liam rolled his eyes but nodded, letting me know that was the true reason.

“If appearance means so much to you, then why leave at all?” I asked, not putting two and two together.

“Because of you. My father doesn’t know you are back yet, and the last thing we want is a photo being sent to him.” He looked over his shoulder. “And that is why we should have gone straight to my place,” Liam chastised.

“I’m over tiptoeing around Dad. She’s not leaving our side,” Connor yelled over the T.V.

The doorbell rang, and both of them looked at the door as if it was haunted. Connor paused his show and stood up.

“Who the fuck?” His eyes darkened as he sneered.

Liam stepped to the side, blocking me from the door. Connor pulled out his phone, and everything went silent for a few long, agonizing seconds. I wrapped my arms around myself and rubbed my palms up and down, needing to banish the feeling of being watched. This was the point. He must have wanted for someone to find those photos. Why else would he have left them?

Connor growled and rushed to the door, grabbing a gun from the drawer.

“Wait!” Liam yelled, walking backward to push me against the opposing wall.

The door slammed against the wall as Connor ignored his brother. My heart rate spiked, and everything went deadly silent. The back of Liam’s shoulder blocked my view as I stood on my toes, trying to look over him to see what was happening.

Steps quickly pounded on the floor, and Liam pushed me harder against the drywall.

“They are on floor six and going down,” Connor yelled, slamming the front door again.

Liam lunged after him and followed him into the office. I raced after them, not understanding where they were going or what was happening. Connor’s palm banged against the bookshelf, and it sprang open, exposing a stairwell.

There were the freaking stairs.

“Stay,” Liam snarled over his shoulder as he grabbed a gun from Connor’s desk.

“I’m not a dog,” I yelled back.

“*Goddamnit, Emily! Can you just stay behind this once, please?*” The desperation in his tone made me come to a screeching stop.

They raced down, not looking back. My hands coiled in my hair, and I started to pace.

What the fuck happened? None of this made any sense. Cool air from the stairwell swept into the room, and I yanked my stupid long shirt down to cover my knees. What the heck was I thinking wearing this when someone was freaking stalking our every step? They even had a photo of us from when we’d gone to lunch. Connor and Liam had been looking at me like I was the only person in that restaurant. If it wasn’t so creepy how it had been taken, I would have framed it.

My heart raced, and even though only seconds had passed, it felt like hours. I rounded the desk and jerked a few drawers open. Stacks of paper were neatly organized as if Liam had done it, but it was all useless trash if I couldn't find a gun. A sharp letter opener on top of a stack of envelopes caught my eye, and I snatched it up. My muscles tightened as I sprinted for the stairwell.

Small light fixtures lined the walls, and yellow-and-black striped paint was on the edge of each step. When I went down a few flights, other doors were there for other residents. Had Connor created a hidden door for a freaking fire stairwell?

My lungs burned, and my chest tightened as I saw no end in sight. The stairs led down in a perfect square, leaving the middle open where one of them could have tumbled down if they had fought someone. All I could hear was my frantic wheezing and the slaps of my bare feet on the metal. I rounded a dark corner that led the way to another floor, readying myself to go down another level. An arm cinched around my stomach and yanked me back.

A scream tore through me, and I kicked, lashing out. My still healing wrists burned as they slammed into a thick wall of muscle. His scent wrapped around me before I could call for help.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” Connor snarled in my ear. “And with that stupid fucking thing.” He slapped the letter opener out of my hand, sending it tumbling down the open middle of the stairwell.

“I was worried,” I blurted out.

His tone grated on my nerves, and I threw my elbow back, careful to hit his stomach and not his broken ribs. He let out a huff and dropped me to my feet.

“We had everything under control,” he wheezed.

“If that is so, then where the heck is Liam?”

“He went down to the exit while I checked the floor that doesn't have a lot of surveillance.” He grabbed my forearm and yanked me back up the stairs to his penthouse.

“I can walk,” I snapped, jerking my arm back. “You need to go to Liam.”

“He can take care of himself. I need to get you back to where it is safe. We don’t know who the fuck came to the door. But it had to be Cormac. He was smart enough to disable the CCTV in my outside hallway.” He walked behind me as he spoke, pressing his chest against my back. “Move,” he snarled in my ear.

I reluctantly obeyed but still looked over my shoulder, hoping to see Liam. My heart sank at the emptiness, but Connor didn’t stop urging me forward. When we made it to the office, I anxiously started pacing.

“He will be fine,” he grumbled.

I narrowed my eyes on him and then moved into the kitchen, needing a moment to myself. None of this made sense. Why would someone play ding dong ditch? It wasn’t like we were up against a toddler. We were facing a man who fucked women against their will for sport and killed for no reason. I may not have been there when Candice had died, but I knew she hadn’t done anything to deserve it.

My chest tightened, and my feet stumbled to a stop.

“Uh, Connor!” I yelled from the kitchen. My skin was clammy, and worry laced my tone. A perfectly wrapped red box sat on the counter.

“What?” Connor asked, running into the room.

“Did you leave that there earlier?” I asked, pointing at it.

I knew it wasn’t there. It was too obvious to miss, and Liam wouldn’t have left something out of place like that without showing it to me.

“No,” he muttered, rushing to the island.

“Wait! What if it’s a bomb?” I hastily asked, shooting my arm out to stop him.

He pressed against me and rolled his eyes. It wasn’t an unreasonable thing to think. We had blown up their house.

“Bombs that are wireless like that usually wouldn’t be that small. Unless he magically learned a new skill or came into millions of dollars. From the look of that house, my uncle is dirt poor,” Connor stated, pushing against my arm, attempting to get me out of the way.

“No. At least wait for Liam,” I muttered.

“Wait for me for what?”

I whipped around, and the chaos in my mind instantly settled. Liam carefully pulled his hair back and brushed his palms down his shirt.

“Anything?” Connor asked.

Liam shook his head, walking up next to me and running his hand up and down my back. His eyes narrowed on the red box, then skeptically over at his brother.

“Shit,” Connor snapped.

“See, it is a bomb!” I interjected, throwing my hands into the air. We needed to get out of the penthouse.

“It isn’t a bomb,” the twins replied simultaneously.

I scoffed and leaned into Liam, needing to soak up some of his composure. Connor moved to the box and slowly pulled the ribbon.

“How did they get in here?” Liam asked in a flat tone.

“Emily chased after us.”

Liam looked down at me. The anger in his stare made me duck away, not wanting to accept that my need to be with them could have cost us. At the same time—What if I had been here when they came up? I didn’t want to say that out loud, but when I looked back up at Liam, worry lined his forehead. He was thinking the same thing.

Connor pulled off the lid and immediately slammed it down onto the counter.

“*Fuck this,*” he yelled, kicking the stools.

I jumped as they crashed to the floor. Liam rushed to the counter and examined whatever was inside the box. My pulse pounded in my ears as I slowly joined them.

A high-pitch noise rang in my ears, and tears pricked at my eyes. Pictures of Connor, Liam, and me from the last couple of days filled the box. The one that made bile burn my throat was a polaroid of me racing down the stairwell. What the twins probably didn't see was something that was left for me. Something only I would recognize. A broken bobby pin.

I gulped as the memories of leaving Candice behind flooded me. The tears of defeat and agony that fell down her cheeks as I left her. She gave me what I needed to escape, and I had chosen someone over her. *Hope*. I even left her behind.

I was supposed to leave the pain of my past behind when I blew up the house. But how was I going to do that when it was right here? A small note card-sized envelope lay in the box. I reached through the guys and plucked it out, watching as the pin slid off it.

Connor reached to take it from me, and I glared at him. The box was meant for me. He may not know that, but I did. It was light in my hand but heavy in my soul. I slid my finger under the lip and tore it open.

Emily, I mean Penny, do you like my gift? A reminder of what you did. I even left a photo of Candice in here, just for you. I bet Liam and Connor think they know what is coming for them. But I have been lurking in the shadows of this darkened world for too long.

Everything is mapped out perfectly to kill you all and take what I deserve.

Are you ready?

Sincerely,

Your Death

Chapter 16

Connor

The letter lay on the counter as if it were a dark object. Embers crackled and popped in my chest as I replayed how this had happened. My uncle had come into my home. After Emily had her fun with him, I was going to rip him in two. He was a dead man walking; more so now than he was before. Why was he even coming after Liam and me like this? I could understand my father, but we had been close. Hadn't we?

"Never start a war you can't win," my uncle informed us.

Liam scooped his mashed potatoes up while he stared at our uncle, drinking in every scrap of knowledge. We had just gotten back from one of the training programs Dad was putting us through. I wanted to go straight to bed with a bag of fast food, but Uncle Cormac was set on us eating as a family. Our father was gone for the night, so he was staying over.

"How do you know you will win?" Liam asked.

"Prepare," he answered, with a no-shit kind of expression.

I rolled my eyes and scoffed under my breath. That was really enlightening. I could have been playing my guitar instead of listening to this.

"So when you prepare, you know you will win?" Liam hesitantly asked.

"Educate us, dear old wise one," I said with a condescending tone.

My uncle tossed his head back as a loud laugh burst from his lips.

Cormac stopped laughing and looked at me. "No wonder you are always on your dad's shit list."

It wasn't that funny. I slouched down in my seat. His stare cut through me, making me pick at my cuticles under the table until they stung.

He pointed his fork at me as he said, "Know your enemy, and once you truly know them, you can take them down."

I broke free of the memory, and my chest tightened. He knew us from the inside out. We were family, but these attacks were calculated and personal. He knew we would chase after him and leave the house vulnerable. Maybe he even knew Emily would be distraught enough to chase after us.

I shook my head at the box filled with photos. He had captured the moments of us reuniting in Time Square, heading to the house where he'd kept Emily hostage, and a polaroid of her running after us in the stairwell. He wasn't just following us. He was stalking us and anticipating every move we were making. Our uncle wasn't an amateur playing childish games. He was an elite, strategically jabbing at our weakness. *Emily.*

Liam stared at Emily like she was going to lose it again. All I saw was the small twitch in the corner of her eye with the need to shed blood and regain control. My fist clenched. Had I rubbed off on her?

"This letter isn't from Cormac. It isn't his handwriting," Liam said on an exhale.

"Of course it fucking is," I sneered, furrowing my brows.

Emily frowned and rubbed her palms up and down her arms.

"You really think some pawn our uncle is working with wrote us a letter?" I scoffed and snatched the letter to throw it back into the stupid box.

"Could your dad be working with him?" Emily asked.

"He wouldn't be trying so hard to hide the other girls if that were the case," Liam answered.

Not enough blood was shed for it to be my father. He was ruthless and already had everything he always wanted. Money, power, and a son. An heir who wasn't me.

"None of this is making any sense." I rubbed at the back of my neck.

Whoever was going after my father hated us as well, and we didn't have many common enemies. I usually befriended the people who hated my father. We had something in common.

Emily wiped her eyes with her forearm and turned away from the box. The anguish in her eyes resonated in her stare. She didn't choose this life; yet she was here and with us. I wanted to move forward to comfort her but didn't know what I should say. Telling her that I would turn their corpse into ash only went so far.

Liam glanced at me, furrowing his brows. I knew he could sense my unease, but this situation didn't need me. We both knew she needed him. He went to her, and her eyes shone as she looked up at him. I watched as his palm rubbed up and down her spine, and he rested his chin on her head. He took deep breaths, and she started to mimic him. My chest ached, wishing I could be that person for her.

"We shouldn't stay here any longer," Emily stated under her breath.

"We won't. Just tonight. They may be waiting for us to run," Liam replied, wrapping his arms around her.

"How did he have my real name?"

"A number of different ways. We said it at the house, and he could have looked you up with your photo," Liam answered.

"Can we at least go to the room and close the curtains," she shuddered. "I'm not scared of him coming up here, but I really don't want more photos of me taken right now."

I gave her a curt nod, not knowing what to say. We made our way to the room, and I grabbed the remote for the blinds. The moment they closed, Emily exhaled a large breath. This whole situation with the photos was to get under our skin, and it was working. The more on edge she became, the more my chest burned to slaughter Cormac and his bitches. She pulled back the cover, crawling into bed. When she looked up at us, I resolved that I'd spend the rest of my life making sure she never felt this way again.

Tendrils of need to cover this pain with a bottle of alcohol or a line of cocaine wrapped around my chest. She didn't want me using her as my motivation to stay sober. But I couldn't think of any other reason. This life we lived encased me in a cement block with no escape. If it weren't for her, who would be the one to bring me a scrap of happiness?

I moved to grab the one thing I could rely on for my sobriety without guilt, my guitar. The wood was smooth, and the strings would absorb the embers growing in my chest without protest.

She sat up in the bed to watch me while Liam climbed in next to her. He wrapped her in his arms, and she laid her head against his chest, keeping her eyes on me. I pulled out my phone and copied the lyrics I had written. A whoosh sounded from my phone when I hit send, and Liam's chimed shortly after. Choosing not to use my pick, I started to strum my guitar to the chords I had composed.

I could see the light of recognition flicker behind his eyes as he realized what I was doing. He looked down at his cell and then back at me. Singing wasn't my strong suit. I would do it for her, but the lyrics were written with him in mind. He needed to feel them as much as she did.

The strings vibrated under the tips of my fingers as I strummed harder. My soul melded into the song, hoping he would sing it for me—sing it for her. We were in this together, and I wanted her to know that.

"We tune it out. It's all we've ever done," he began to sing as I started the chords for the first verse again.

My chest lit up for different reasons, and I watched Emily's shocked reaction. Her lips parted, and his palm rubbed gentle strokes up and down her arm.

"Letting the darkness swallow us whole."

Her gaze softened, and she sat up to give him room.

"It's been so cold / It's been so cold / Let it be different." He sang the last part louder. *"You say bad luck harms you / But I say we found you / I can't let this feeling end."*

I strummed harder on my guitar.

“All of my moments led me to here / But I keep finding myself lost in this hell.”

The bed rocked as my foot stomped on the floor in place of a kick drum.

“Let us be free / Let it not hurt anymore.” His voice was raspy and smooth at the same time.

“You say bad luck haunts you / I say we need you.” He stared at me as he sang those lyrics, and I looked away, needing him to continue.

“You say bad luck haunts you / But I say we keep you / We tuned it out until we couldn’t / I’m stuck in hell / Lost in the darkness / But I see you.”

We played for hours, and I almost forgot that I ever needed a drink. I knew it wouldn’t be permanent, but it was enough. I wasn’t alone in this. Emily lay curled in the blankets, staring up at us. Her gaze swam with astonishment and something else I didn’t recognize. *Tranquility? Admiration?* Whatever it was, it cinched around my heart and set a fire within me. It was a feeling I never wanted to let go of.

When Liam’s voice began to crack, and my fingers became numb from strumming and pressing the strings, I joined them in bed. Wrapped in contentment, her soft breaths were my final melody as we all fell asleep.

Chapter 17

Liam

Emily's long legs were intertwined with mine as the rising sun highlighted her delicate features. Connor was on the other side of her, on his back, with his hand on her chest. Singing with my twin reminded me of a time when life was easier. Singing for Emily had taught me who I wanted to become.

I slowly reached to the nightstand, careful not to wake her, and grabbed my phone. Text messages filled the screen from the manager overseeing my porn studio, begging me to come in and review the new set list for next week.

I ran through the list of things I needed to do today in my head. The top of the list was to start moving us out of this penthouse and into mine. Get Emily somewhere safe. Connor had a therapist who would be here later today. I could change the appointment to a different day, but seeing his agony last night when he'd played made it more important for him to not wait. He would need to take the session in his office to avoid prying eyes.

I rolled over to watch Emily sleep. Mornings used to be our time together. For her to draw while I caught up on my work. My breath hitched as I fought the pull to make small movements to wake her. She needed her sleep, but I wanted to watch her sketch. I had stashed all the supplies I had bought her in my closet. I could either give it to her now or have it sent to my home. Had she ever had her own art room?

I carefully slid out of bed, choosing to not wake her. The floor was cold and soothing on my warm skin. I wasn't used to having another body pressed against me at night. I hadn't slept with anyone overnight before, but I could see its appeal.

The bathroom lighting made me squint. A wet towel from Connor and Emily's shower was left on the tile. My stomach tightened, forcing me to hurriedly snatch it off the floor. I methodically folded the towel and placed it into the half-full basket that needed to be laundered. It had to be done now.

I rushed through brushing my teeth and showering. Ants crawled under my skin as I thought about the basket not being in the washer. I barely pulled on my shorts as I raced out of the bathroom with the basket. My steps thudded down the hall as I hurried to the laundry room. The metal clanked as I threw the lid open and placed the clothes and towels into the washer. I poured in the antibacterial laundry soap and fragrances I'd purchased for the house. The top slammed, and the machine chimed.

My shoulders relaxed, and an exasperated sigh expelled from deep in my soul. I gripped the corner of the washer and took deep breaths. It was done.

"Would you like coffee?" Emily asked as she rounded the corner.

Her steps faltered, and her forehead wrinkled with worry. I quickly stood straight, walked to her, and pressed my lips on her head.

"I would love coffee," I mumbled into her hair, then leisurely breathed her in.

She grabbed my arm and looked up at me.

"I will do better about not leaving a mess."

I shook my head and stepped back. She shouldn't have to say that. I bit at my lower lip and rolled it between my teeth, not knowing if I should give her an explanation. Did I have to provide one? My chest tightened, and I braced myself for being forced to explain how I needed things in life. She patted my arm and smiled.

"I'm kinda hungry too. Maybe we can cook something," she said as she turned and walked away.

Instantly, a weight lifted off my shoulders, and my lungs filled with air. I'd always had to explain myself when I got too close to someone. Forced to make an explanation for something that haunted me. She hadn't needed me to do that. The little things she had done for me, like wiping smudges away in an elevator, were her way of showing acceptance. I shook off the remaining weight pressing me down and chased

after her, wanting to be there with her as we resumed our morning routine together.

Emily's brows were pulled together, and she narrowed her eyes as she sketched in her old spiral notebook. I only had a mechanical pencil for her, or so I told her, but she didn't care. I sneakily looked over and caught glimpses of her sketching two wolves. Their features were identical, except for their eyes. The shape of them and darkness were opposites.

"Are you drawing us?" I asked.

She nodded and then blocked my line of sight.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have looked," I quickly added.

My stomach twisted, and I took a few steps toward the kitchen to grab another coffee. I shouldn't have intruded on her space.

"I usually like something to be finished before someone sees it. But I actually do want to share this with you," she said as she flipped the notebook around.

I smiled and leaned forward. The wolves were stunning and stood in front of a girl sleeping on a bench.

"You did this all in an hour?" I asked, wishing I could hold it. "It looks complete to me. It's amazing."

She chuckled and shook her head as she pulled it back to her. Her cheeks turned rosy as she continued to draw.

"Why do you call us wolves?"

She grinned and chuckled.

"Because you two are predators. Even as you pretended to be kind, you were just a wolf in sheep's clothing." She flipped the notebook closed and scooted back in her chair as if she was going to put it in her old hiding spot.

"You don't need to hide it unless you want to," I said quickly. "Unless you don't want Connor to snoop, then I totally get that."

She dramatically rolled her eyes, turned away, and went to the couch.

“I’m a little confused about how I am okay with all of this,” she said as she lifted the couch cushion.

“About hiding your drawing?”

“No, with everything. I don’t understand how I was your prey a month ago, and now, I can’t seem to imagine my life without you guys.”

My chest constricted.

“You are still our prey,” Connor taunted as he came down the steps. “If you run, I will hunt you down to the ends of the earth. If that isn’t prey, then I don’t know what is. Oh, and good morning.” He kissed the top of her head, then bent over and bit her shoulder.

“Ouch!” she squealed.

“You liked it.” He beamed.

I sipped my coffee and promised myself to circle back to the conversation with her. The situation we found ourselves in had me just as confused, but we shared similar feelings. I couldn’t imagine my life without her, which was odd. The hatred I had when I thought she betrayed me when we deserved it was real. If I had found her before Connor told me what had happened, I would have done unforgivable things.

“What’s the plan for today?” Connor asked.

“The therapist should be here in thirty minutes. I need to go down to the studio to approve our filming schedule, especially since we are short-staffed on girls there,” I announced.

“You didn’t close temporarily?” Emily questioned.

“No, that would draw too much attention,” I replied.

“Oh. Well, I guess I’ll hang out in the bedroom to give Connor privacy.”

She held the coffee cup between both hands and pulled it close to her lips. She closed her eyes and moaned as she took a sip. My cock twitched, and when I looked at Connor, he was

just as desperately watching her. She opened her eyes and then repeatedly looked between us.

“Don’t be dogs. You know how much I love my lattes,” she noted, hiding her smile.

“Wolves,” I corrected and winked. “But I was actually going to take you with me,” I told her, knowing I couldn’t leave her without eyes on her. It wasn’t fully planned, but she was the safest with us.

“You were?” Connor snapped.

“Yeah, some people are coming over to move some stuff to my house. It would be better if you didn’t stay in this glass house long,” I replied, waving my hand at the floor-to-ceiling windows that lined his entire wall.

“I would love to go,” Emily sang.

“Go get dressed in jeans and grab a leather jacket. We are taking my bike.” I smiled at her and nodded to the stairs.

As she left, Connor glared at me like a pissed-off toddler. I replied by sticking my tongue out at him.

“No,” he snapped.

“You won’t be able to watch her while you are in therapy,” I replied without a hint of compromise.

“She can be in the room with me.”

“Those sessions are for you to be able to open up. You can’t do that fully with anyone in the room.”

He muttered something under his breath and then gulped down the rest of the coffee that Emily had left behind. My stomach fluttered with the thought of doing something last minute. It wasn’t my first time, but it made my palms sweat. She would be with me, and that did help to ease some of my unease.

The wind whipped around us while her hands were tightly wrapped around me. The RPMs peaked as I threw back the throttle, making her hips shift back slightly. Vibrations rolled

up my spine, and her squeals of laughter egged me on. Car horns blared as I switched lanes and cut them off. It was reckless, dangerous, and freeing. Behind the handlebars was the only place I could open up and let loose. Emily lifted her hand from my waist and flipped her middle finger in the air.

“Faster,” she screamed over the roar.

A grin curled my lips, and I shifted up a gear to pick up speed. The braid I’d twisted into her hair before we’d left flew in the air behind us. She placed her helmet-covered head against my shoulder and leaned in with me. We moved into the fast lane and flew through the rest of the traffic.

We’d passed the studio ten minutes ago, but I couldn’t convince myself to take the off-ramp. Having her wrapped around me while I said goodbye to my obsessive needs was addicting. Adrenaline pumped through me as fast as the piston pumping in the cylinder.

Red and blue lights flashed behind us, making me look over my shoulder.

“Hold on tight,” I roared over the engine.

I hurriedly dipped my shoulder and zoomed us across the highway to the off-ramp. The center divider surrounding the exit was barreling toward us, and she squealed and gripped me tighter. I leaned harder, and we missed the cement barrier by a few feet.

I snapped my head to the left and watched the cop car zoom past, unable to make the ramp on time. Emily’s chest started to bounce with loud laughter, and I joined her.

We took the back roads all the way back to the studio, and when we pulled up to the drive, I hit the button to open the gate to let us in. Deep Flics’s logo was proudly presented on the front of the building. I turned the engine off and threw the kickstand down for her to slide off. She yanked her helmet off, and stray hairs fell around her face.

“Okay, that was fun!” She grinned.

I pulled off my helmet and weaved the straps together to lay it on the seat. Emily copied and did the same.

“Glad you liked it. You were good on the back and didn’t fight me when I leaned,” I praised.

“It was exhilarating. Can you teach me to ride?”

“If I did that, then I wouldn’t get to have you wrapped around me, tensing your thighs,” I teased.

“You can have that while you fuck me.”

I smiled more today than I had in months, and the grin that continued to pull at my lips felt like it was never going away.

“I’ll teach you to ride.”

It was never under debate. Watching her and helping her accomplish something she wanted would be a gift. I gripped her hand and led her to the studio’s front door. Before I could grab my keys, the door flew open, and my manager Clair ran out.

“Finally! I heard your bike pull—” She stopped and stumbled back slightly. “Who is she? Are you having us audition a new girl today?” she exclaimed.

I pushed past her, holding Emily’s hand. She followed hot on our heels, and her high stilettos clicked on the floor.

“Liam! Hello, I’m talking to you,” she continued, her nasally voice echoing down the long hallway.

We made it to the studio room, and I continued to ignore her as Emily looked at the expansive space. Claire was loud and bossy, but I trusted her. I couldn’t say that about many people. My entire crew worked for me and me alone. It wasn’t something my father had any part of.

“Is that?” Emily pointed to one of the propped rooms we had set up.

We had six different stages. Each had three thin walls to block the view into the next one. The front of the stage had no wall so we could film. When we recorded a BDSM scene, you had no clue that right on the other side was a mock teenage girl’s bedroom with pink walls.

“Yes, that is a glory hole,” I laughed as I followed her finger. “We can change the decorations of the room. The only one that doesn’t get changed is our dungeon room,” I answered, pointing to the BDSM stage.

“What happens when one room is being used? Can’t you hear them while recording another?” she questioned.

“We only film one at a time, and often back-to-back. We set them up this way for faster recording sessions. When one scene finishes, the other is prepped and ready for the next. If we did it in fully enclosed areas, lighting would suffer with shadows. This way, the warehouse’s lighting lights it from multiple angles,” I explained, leading her to see all the rooms.

“Are you replacing me?” Claire asked.

I looked over my shoulder, wrapped my arm around Emily, and turned us around. She should know she wasn’t replaceable. I couldn’t stand her railing into me the moment I walked through the door.

“Apologies, you know I don’t like it when you are frantic. Claire, this is Penny, my girlfriend.” I looked at Emily as I introduced them, wanting to see if labeling us would make her smile.

When her lips curled up at me, I knew I’d made a good choice.

“Pleasure to meet you,” Emily greeted and stuck out her hand. “Oh, I am really sorry. I’m not usually this crazy, promise. It’s just a little short-staffed here, and I am running on coffee, Red Bull, and Adderall. Probably not the best choice, but it does the job,” Claire replied, shaking her hand.

“I get it. How can I help? Put me to work,” Emily responded and looked over the studio again.

“Oh, do you act?” Claire questioned.

“No,” I growled, wrapping my arm tighter around Emily.

This place could be at rock bottom, and that still wouldn’t happen. Emily looked up at me, and heat flashed in her eyes. She would look hot behind the lens of a camera, but Connor

would kill me if that was ever posted on the Internet. My cock swelled as I looked at Emily. The stages were lit behind her, and thoughts of fucking her while the camera crew watched made my skin heat.

“When does the first set go live today?” I asked Claire without looking at her.

“In four hours, why?” she asked.

“Is the camera crew here?”

“Yes, because you need to fill them in on their schedule. Which we should get to work on,” she nagged, making my skin prickle.

“I’ll be in the office in a few. Meet me there.” I didn’t look at her, but I could feel her stare burning into the side of my cheek. “I will meet you there. Please leave,” I barked.

She huffed, and I listened to her steps as she made her way to the office. I continued staring at Emily, wondering what she would say next.

“I’m going to fuck you,” I murmured, running my hand down her chest. “When I fuck you, I’m going to have everyone watching, including the cameramen.”

“Are we making a porno?”

I nodded. “For us and us alone, but I want everyone here to watch you come undone while they film.”

This wasn’t planned, and the suddenness of it made zaps of electricity shoot up my spine. Why was I doing this? I repeated the question in my head, over and over, trying to fill an organized list. Each time I tried to find a reason, I could only come up with one: because I wanted to. It was impulsive, something my twin did, but it didn’t matter.

I pushed my hand down and rubbed her pussy through her jeans, wanting to help persuade her with arousal. Force was Connor’s thing. Manipulation was mine.

“Yes, you don’t even have to butter me up.” She beamed, grinding harder against my palm. “I’m starting to learn to take

any opportunity in life to bring happiness, and this”—she waved at the studio—“is exciting.”

“I’m going to do what I came here to do. I want you waiting and ready for me when I come back.”

“How do I do that?” she asked in a husky tone.

“Lingerie is in the room over there.” I pointed to the closed room to the left of the stages. “Wear something that will make Connor extra pissed.”

I was playing with fire with my twin, and I couldn’t wait for his reaction. It was his turn to see what impulsiveness looked like.

I jerked my hand away from her pussy and grabbed her face to pull her close. Her mouth collided with mine, but I pulled back before it could get too heated.

“Save it for the show.” I winked and made my way to the office, adjusting my cock.

I approved almost everything as quickly as I could. My employees sat around the table, shooting me questioning glances, but I didn’t care. My mind was on my girl waiting outside in lingerie. I filled them in about my plan, making Claire almost lose her shit, but it was my studio. I could do with it as I pleased.

I pushed the office door open and scanned the warehouse, looking for Em&m. She sat on a studio chair in a black satin robe with her legs crossed. A seductive smile played on her lips, but her expression shifted when the others followed me. Her cheeks heated, and she shakily took in each person as they made their way to the equipment. I rushed to her, my steps loud on the gray-tiled floor.

“Nervous?” I asked as I approached her.

“Yes. I have never done anything even remotely like this before,” she replied, looking everywhere but me.

Yeah, you did, when you performed for Connor.

I grabbed her chin lightly and made her focus on me. Her eyes had more flecks of blue in this lighting, and her pink cheeks made her look younger than she was. She had undone the braid I'd done for her, and her long black curls cascaded down her back.

“That is what makes being watched and watching so fun. It forces you out of your comfort zone, making you think of every movement you make. But when your need and arousal mix together. You start to feel their heated eyes on you in a different type of way. A pleasurable one.” I rubbed my palm down the center of her chest and moved the robe to the side to massage her tit.

She pressed into me, and I took the opportunity to get a sneak peek of her black lace lingerie. My brows lifted, and I licked my lips. A low hum pulled from deep in my stomach. She was coming out of her shell and a far cry from the girl Connor took off the streets.

Stage lights flicked on, and cords slapped on the ground as they set up and moved the equipment. The room I chose for her was a personal favorite of mine. My dick twitched, anticipating my plan for her.

“Em&m, are you ready to know the stage I picked?” I asked, smirking.

She nodded and looked around. Her head tilted as she looked at all the options, and she tracked the crew with a quizzical stare. I grabbed her hand and helped her off the stool. She looked down at her robe, running her fingers over the silk. Her chest expanded as she straightened her spine and pulled the bow undone. The sheer fabric fell apart, exposing her golden beige skin and full breasts. Her cheeks still had a pink hue, but she was slowly becoming less shaky. She shimmied her shoulders, and the fabric fell to the floor in a delicate pile.

“Oops, I'll get that,” she said innocently.

My eyes scanned the garters that hugged her thighs and the heels that made her ass perk up as she turned and bent over. Her bare cheeks, accentuated by a G-string, rubbed over my cock as she retrieved the robe.

“You are such a tease,” I groaned as I palmed her soft skin.

She pushed back and slowly rocked her hips, rubbing her ass along my zipper. I bit down on my lower lip and let my head fall back. She was tempting me to shove my dick inside her right now, but that was one plan I didn’t want to change. I wanted to surprise her and have every moment of her reaction recorded.

She slowly rose, seducing me. I shot my arm out and wrapped it around her, making her jump. Her back slammed against my chest as I yanked her into me.

“Keep doing that, and I’ll make you come over and over again until you are pleading for me to stop,” I growled against her neck.

She shivered, making my balls grow heavy. Her fingers intertwined with mine as she pulled my hand off her and tugged me toward the stage. Her hips swayed, and her head was held high. My Em&m worked hard to portray confidence, but I knew her dirty little secret. I could tell by the sweat that coated her palm. She was nervous, and that made me want to fuck her harder. When we passed the crew, she looked back at me expectantly.

“Claire, is everything set up?” I called out, wanting to ensure the camera was recording before I proceeded.

“Almost,” she yelled back.

Emily started to rock on her feet, arms slowly folding over her body. She was getting too nervous, and as much as it turned me on, I couldn’t let it grow.

“Claire, turn on the music. Let’s listen to ‘Like a Drug’ by Bryce Savage.” I kept my stare on Emily as I treated my manager like my personal Alexa.

“Ready to go,” my manager instructed just as the music started to flow from the speakers.

I stepped in front of my girl and ran my palms over her shoulder. Gooseflesh covered her arms, driving me to rub my hard cock against her. A small moan slipped from her lips, and I forced my need back. Her reaction did things to me, and it

wasn't just the blood racing to my shaft. She made my heart beat harder, as if it was a stampede running toward her.

"Remember when you acted for that camera in Connor's bed?" I asked.

Her eyes widened, and her jaw went slack. *Yeah, baby, I knew.* I lifted my brows at her, waiting for her to acknowledge me. She slowly nodded. *Good girl.*

"Pretend it is something like that, but this time I will make it so you don't have to act," I rasped.

I pulled the blindfold that I'd grabbed from the office earlier from my pocket. My mouth pulled into a smirk while I twirled my finger, signaling for her to turn around. Pleasure moved through my body as she spun for me. The corset she chose accentuated her curves, making me stare longer than I should before I secured the blindfold.

She looked good with her eyes covered and dressed for my use. I lured her into the room I had chosen for her. My palms cupped her hips as she took each step, and I teased her with each movement by running my tongue over her shoulder. She tasted clean, and the tea tree that lingered on her skin was hypnotizing.

"You have no idea how many times I am going to jerk off to you. I am going to watch you come on my screens over and over again," I rasped slowly and nipped at her skin.

A needy moan slipped from her lips, and she paused to rub her ass harder against my dick.

"You want to watch me stroke my cock to you, babe?" I asked, whispering into her ear.

My hot breath circled around the crook of her neck. I slowly helped her step onto the stage and grabbed her hand to trace the edge of the glory hole.

"Feel that?" I purred.

She nodded.

"Good, I want you on your knees and waiting for what is to come from the other side," I explained and walked around to

take my spot.

Her breaths were loud on the other side of the wall, and my heart raced with the idea of playing with her mind. Reluctantly, I grabbed the dildo from the basket and aimed it toward the hole in the wall. I wanted my dick shoved through that hole and her plump lips wrapped around it, but I wanted to tease her more. Her desperate pleas would make my balls ache more than they already did.

“Open your mouth, you filthy little whore,” I commanded.

I eased the rubber dick through the opening, pressing my ear against the wall for her reaction.

Chapter 18

Emily

The blindfold was snug against my face, but I still lifted my head to try to find a way to see what was coming. My skin was thrumming with energy, and I panted as I tried to center myself. Being used like this frightened me and exhilarated me. It was a whirl of emotions I was racing to keep up with. My nipples rubbed against the wall as he instructed me to keep my palms pressed against it. I couldn't see the eyes and camera lens watching me, but their presence seared my skin. And that heat was heading right to my core.

“Open your mouth, you filthy little whore,” Liam ordered from the other side of the wall.

A fervor raced to my sex, and I shivered, making my nipples press harder against the textured wall. A smooth silicone object pressed against my lips, and I jerked back, not understanding what was happening.

“That wasn't very good of you,” Liam scolded.

My stomach dropped, and I quickly opened my mouth and placed my palms against the wall as I remembered what he had asked of me. *Shit*. Before I could wrap my lips around the object, it disappeared.

“Again,” I pleaded, wanting to do better.

A low, muffled growl came from the other side, and I leaned in closer, trying to hear what was happening. Thuds and movement sounded, but I couldn't decipher what was happening. Unexpectedly, a larger silicone object was shoved against my cheek, and I squeaked and drew back to let it slide into me. My mouth stretched, and the corners of my lips burned as the hard object forced its way in. It slammed onto the back of my throat, causing a violent gag. I bit down and screamed, not knowing how I should react.

It was quickly yanked back, and I gasped for breath. My tears made the blindfold stick to my face.

“When I say open, are you going to listen next time?” Liam questioned.

I nodded my head, then remembered he couldn't see me. “Yes.”

“How is my little whore doing? And don't lie,” he continued to question.

How am I? I frantically scoured my mind, trying to explain how I was. My laced panties were soaked. Flames danced under my skin with the idea of the crowd watching as the large dildo was forced down my throat.

“Good. More,” I replied huskily.

“Tell me, what kind of girl likes to get fucked through a hole?”

“A girl who is a filthy little whore,” I answered.

My clit hummed with need, and I clenched my thighs together, trying to relieve some of the ache. The teasing had just begun, and I already wanted him inside me.

“Open,” he commanded.

I quickly obeyed, and when I did, Liam's pierced cock slid into my mouth. The hard metal made his skin feel softer. The corners of my lips only tingled from his girth. I licked around his length and sucked, loving the salty taste of his pre-cum.

“Fuck, you feel so good, babe,” he purred.

His praise made me moan on his dick, making him grunt and shove deeper inside of me. I welcomed him by relaxing my throat, wanting everyone to see how well I could please my wolf. His cock pulsed in and out of me as I sucked greedily.

“Stand up,” he ordered.

His length slipped out of my mouth, and I gradually rose from my knees. The pressure from kneeling and my arousal made my legs quiver.

“Turn around, and line that perfect ass to this hole,” he rasped.

I moved my hands in the air, feeling for a wall. My muscles tensed like I was going to step off a cliff. I shuffled my feet, scared to lift them. The opposing wall wasn't far from the hole, but the darkness surrounding me made me second guess myself.

I slapped down in the air, and my palm landed with a thud. My stomach lifted as butterflies filled it. I kept one palm on the wall while I reached back with the other to find the circular cut-out.

"That's it. Good girl. Come here," Liam praised.

I leaned my hips back and lifted my leg to prop my pussy where the cool breeze blew.

"Move to the right a little. Yeah, right there. Look at that pretty little pussy, and that tight ass." Liam rewarded me with a gentle swipe along my heated cunt.

My lingerie got yanked down, and a rip echoed as he tore the bottom of my panties off. Cold, thick liquid landed on my asshole, and a shiver flitted up my spine. I drove back harder against the wall, needing him to touch me. The sound of the camera on a cart rolled closer to me, reminding me of the crowd surrounding us. How close were they? Why did I wish they were right next to me to see everything? Heat flooded my sex as Liam massaged the lube in circles around my asshole.

"I told you I would fuck this ass one day." He slowly inched a finger into my tight entrance. "I'm going to prepare you for that day."

"Wait, you aren't going to, right now?" I asked, glancing around as if I could see him through the blindfold and wall.

"I'm going to stretch you for when you need to take Connor and me," he purred as his finger slid all the way into my ass.

I groaned and tried to grind against the unmoving wall. A loud buzz rang in the air.

Was that a—?

A vibrator pushed against my clit while he started rocking his finger in and out of me. My head threw back, and bolts of

lightning flashed in the darkness. I wished I could see my ass pressed against the wall as he pleased me.

A small force spread me wide. The lube made it easy to pump in and out of me. The vibrating sensation was pulled off me, and I whined, needing it back. I jerked forward as his cock slammed into my pussy. The bars lining his dick a direct contrast to the softness of his skin as he thrust in and out of me.

“Keep that pussy right there,” he bellowed, slamming into me.

The wall shook, and I braced myself with both hands as he plowed relentlessly into me. My hip strained to hold up my leg, but I didn’t want to lower it and displease him. I wanted everyone here to see how good I was for him. We were fucking made for this.

Warmth and pressure started to build in my spine. His fingers stroked in and out of my ass in alternating movements with his cock.

“Is this how it’ll feel when you and Connor fuck me at the same time?” I moaned, biting down on my lip.

“Better, because I’ll be deep in this ass.”

My puckered hole was stretched wider. He must have added a third finger.

More lube was poured onto my sex, and his movement grew more frenzied. A spring was being drawn back within me, ready to release.

“I’m so close,” I cried.

“Come on my cock, and I’ll reward you for it,” he commanded.

The spring released, and heat raced up my spine. My toes curled tightly, and I dug my nails into the wall. Explosions of light flashed in the darkness as I called out his name repeatedly.

My knees collapsed as he withdrew from me. Spasms continued to roll through me, and I panted heavily as I came

back down to earth.

“I’m going to take off this blindfold,” he spoke softly, making me jump.

He had gotten to me in moments. Or was I recovering from the earth-shattering orgasm for longer than I thought?

Bright studio lighting blinded me as he removed the material from my face. The darkness in his eyes was lit up with amber flecks. I lunged forward, and our mouths crashed together. He pushed my shoulders back down as he continued to kiss me. The taste of him balanced my racing thoughts and whirling doubts. Everything was pulled together and presented in a neat package. That was what he did to me. He brought order to a world filled with chaos.

His chest pressed against mine, and he plunged back inside me with one shove. The hard floor rubbed against my back while his soft skin slid across my front. The addicting balance of rough and smooth. Pain and pleasure. Liam and Connor. It was all similar, yet so very different.

I bit down on his tongue as he reached down to rub my clit. His dick hit the top of my channel, and I cried out, breaking our kiss.

“Fuck, you look so beautiful,” he groaned.

I stared into his eyes as he stared into mine. Passion burning brightly between us as he fucked me roughly. My thighs were stretched apart, but I wanted them wider, desperate to know if I could get more of him.

“Come again. This time with me,” he commanded as he rubbed my clit harder.

“Deeper,” I grunted.

He leaned back and lifted my hips with his free arm. The pressure of my orgasm started to build, and my pussy clenched over and over.

“I’m going to come inside you, and I want you to hold it in while you walk. My cum is to be in you as long as possible. Got it?” he ordered.

His panting breaths were heavy, and his voice was tight, like it required all of his considerable restraint to keep himself contained. He slid one of his fingers into my pussy while his dick pounded into me.

The stretch did it. I came instantly. He thrust into me one last time as he roared his release.

I bounced on one foot while I pulled on my high-top Converse. Liam was still carefully putting his clothes on. He ensured each layer of clothing was perfectly in place, while I hastily pulled it on and sloppily tied my shoe.

“You look perfect.” I smiled up at him.

He looked up at me from fidgeting with his shirt and grinned. A strand of his hair was out of place, and it fell over his forehead. I walked up, grabbed his comb, and brushed it back. We lingered there while his heat spiraled around me. The little moments with him were my favorite thing. I wondered if he knew how much he helped to calm my mind.

A thundering crash and a loud herd of steps echoed in the studio. I latched onto Liam’s arm, whipping my head to the door.

“Everyone, get down,” a loud voice roared outside the door.

“We have a warrant for search and seizure! Where are Liam or Claire?” another voice yelled.

Liam grabbed my shoulders and spun me around.

“We can’t have my father knowing you have been found. We have a lot of cops on our payroll who will report this to him. Get in here and hide.” He pushed me toward the large closet and ushered me in. “I’m sorry for doing this,” he muttered as he slammed the door shut.

The moving of furniture echoed on the other side of the door. I placed my hand and ear on the wood, wishing I could hear and see what was happening. Whatever he was moving crashed on the other side, shaking and trapping me in the small space.

My breath was fast, and my skin was clammy. Small spaces didn't scare me, but the darkness spiraling around me when I didn't know what was happening did. I fought the urge to pound on the door as I started to pace the small, confined space.

Chapter 19

Liam

I moved all of the clothing racks in front of the closet and then shifted the piles of boxes housing shoes to block that. My heart ached with the thought of leaving her vulnerable. But out here would be more dangerous. This was a mistake. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

The officers in the next room were starting the search, and I had to hurry to make this space look like it had nothing of importance. This was bad. We had no reason for a search and seizure unless they had reliable information showing probable cause. Agent Broad stepped out of my office, and I snarled.

What was he doing here?

I straightened my shirt and looked back at the closet. “I’m sorry, *Emily*,” I exhaled under my breath and turned the knob into the warehouse. I searched the men again, looking for Agent Broad to explain what was happening. Federal agents stormed the studio, removing all of the paperwork and computers from the office. But he was nowhere in sight. Did he just leave?

“What in the world do you think you will find here? I want a copy of the warrant and your boss’s phone number. You assholes just want to take any shot against the porn industry that you can,” Claire screamed at an agent, catching my attention.

“This goes beyond that, ma’am,” he replied.

“You think I don’t know that?” She stepped forward and stood on her tiptoes. Her mouth got close to his ear, and I watched as she whispered something into his ear. I narrowed my eyes and raced up to them. When I got close enough for them to hear my steps, she quickly back away, not looking me in the eye.

“Sir, how can I help you?” I asked the officer.

He turned and stuck out his hand.

“Liam, glad you are here. We are conducting a search and seizure due to information we have received,” he stated.

I folded my arms and cocked an eyebrow at him. He hesitantly retracted his handshake.

“What information and what type of documents do you have to give you the right to seize?” I questioned.

“All your electronics and printed documents. What type of work do you do here?” He pulled out his pen and notepad.

“Actors have sex, and we record them. Thought that was obvious. I know it is for your colleague who is currently looking at the blow-up doll,” I explained as I pointed to a wire-haired agent.

He was standing in front of the doll, like he wanted to deflate it and take it home. The man I was speaking to cleared his throat. I looked back at him and noted his name on the Velcro tag. *A. Drag*. What a terrible name. Connor would have had fun with that one.

“Officer, I’m sure you can see this is a legal business, so I hope you are careful with our property and return it promptly. Who was working with you to authorize this search?” I asked, needing to know if our paid feds had flipped.

“No one you know personally,” he growled. “You may think you can get away with selling women, but your time is coming to an end.”

I stopped paying attention as he continued to ramble on with his self-righteous speech. Two men entered the dressing room, speeding my heart rate up.

“How long will this take?” I asked in a bored tone.

My palms were slick, and I scanned the room, searching if any of the men were on our payroll. The more I looked, the more my chest tightened. Not one agent was in our pocket. Someone close to us had to be a rat. The wire-haired agent strode to the computer we used today to house the recorded footage. A ringing started to blare inside my mind as he yanked the USB from it and slipped it inside his pocket.

I lunged forward, and a hand shot out to stop me. My fist clenched, and I whirled around.

“Don’t do anything you will regret,” Officer A. Drag warned.

My pulse hammered in my ears. I slowed down my breath and waited for the thief to turn around. The moment he did, I memorized the name on his vest: K. Beckett.

“You will be coming down to the station to answer a few questions,” A. Drag advised.

“I don’t mean to be *a drag*, but am I under arrest?” I asked, not breaking my glare from Beckett.

“Not yet, but we have it in the warrant,” he stated with a hint of annoyance.

“Lawyer will meet us there then. I’ll text him.” I pulled my phone from my pocket and tapped on Connor’s name.

Me: Feds raided the building. All the precious cargo was taken, but my M&Ms were left behind.

“We will have to confiscate your phone as well,” A. Drag ordered.

“Is the warrant for the business or for me? Because this is my personal phone. My work one was in the office.” I glared at him and took a step forward.

“You think you can scare me?”

“No, I’m just wondering what side of the line you are working on? The works-too-hard side that bends just a few rules to get promotions? Or the self-righteous type where laws don’t count because you wear a uniform?” I chastised.

His lip lifted, but he turned around, waving his arm to the exit.

“After you,” he instructed.

“Good. I’ll take my bike and meet you there.”

“You make a run for it, and the warrant will be rewritten,” he muttered behind my back.

“Bet that would be a lot of paperwork.” I rolled my eyes.

No, I would go with him. Then I was going to hunt down that wire-haired shit who took my drive. My chest tightened as I saw the two agents in the dressing room talking away like they were teenagers. I was leaving her defenseless, but the faster I went, the faster the feds would leave.

Chapter 20

Emily

My heart pounded in my chest. The room was pitch black, and the air began to suffocate me. I pressed my back against the wall and slid down to the floor.

I'm okay. This is okay. The mantra repeated over and over until two voices filled the room.

"I was this close to making a breakthrough with that man," a person huffed.

"Can you give it a break? They don't blame you for the guy's disappearance," another responded.

I clapped my hand over my mouth to stifle my heavy breathing.

"They better not. But really, the prick was starting to work with me, and then his wife up and died."

The sound of a box opening outside the room made my heart slam in my chest.

I'm not here. I'm not here. I'm not here.

Two-hundred and ninety-nine.

"You are an insensitive ass, Matt."

"He gave me the trafficking organization outside the state. Just didn't help me since it's out of jurisdiction," Matt replied.

The box slid across the room. I scurried farther back into the darkness.

"You saved a lot of girls. You should be proud of that."

"I'll be more proud when my paycheck reflects it. The tip we received about the brothers laundering money... I'm telling you, it had to have come from Cormac. He has had it out for his family."

Another box opened.

Two hundred twenty-one.

“If that were the case, he would have given you more.”

“Don’t you see?” he hissed. “He wanted to make sure he wasn’t working with paid-off feds,” Matt yelled.

“Keep your voice down and get your shit under control. It’s time for you to drop it. We tracked down Cormac enough to know he was working with someone from the Kilbane Brothers. He’s getting sloppy. He will go to prison, and soon, so will Arthur and his sons. Just do your job and stop obsessing.”

“Hey, I am sorry to interrupt. Did you find anything?” a feminine-sounding voice asked.

An object slid across the room and slammed into the door, making my chest tighten.

One hundred.

“Nothing but a bunch of lingerie and heels,” Matt muttered.

“Okay,” they slowly said. “We need your help in the other room. We need to carry out the rest of the paperwork.” The kind voice drifted away, as if they were leaving the room.

“See, at this rate, we will become pencil pushers.”

The closet was silent, and I dropped my hand from my mouth, inhaling shaky breaths. I slid my jacket off as sweat started to slide down my back. How long could I stay here? What if Liam got arrested? My pulse thumped, and I pressed my forehead on my knees to try to stifle the growing headache. Trapped and alone in my own thoughts was a dangerous place for me. A flickering image flashed in my mind: the fire consuming my home. I took small gasps of air. My gut twisted with the thought of running out of oxygen.

Stay calm. Liam will be here soon. I repeated to myself.

Five hundred and ninety-nine.

I started my count over again. It was going to be a long day in the heat. I hated the heat.

Sweat dripped off me as the sun beat down on me. The humidity was relentless, even as I ran and hid behind a tree

underneath an overpass. It'd been two weeks since I'd left the hospital with nothing but my bag. Nights were cooler, but the still air made my odor drift, enveloping me. I lay down on my back, pulling my bag on top of me.

The traffic that rushed by called to me. It sent a rush of air with demonic voices, begging me to step into the middle of the lane and give up. Bubbles was the only one that could stop the ache, so I was forced to lay her on top of me to center me.

Breathe in and breathe out. One day at a time. My begging had become poisonously suicidal. I pleaded that someone accidentally lost control of their vehicle, crashing into me. If that happened, I wouldn't be the one cast as weak. How could you be when someone killed you? If you say something enough, I heard it could make it true.

Voices sounded in the distance, making me snap up, clutching my bag. Fear rolled through me like knives cutting into my skin. The possibility of being physically hurt didn't cause my hands to tremble. It was the stares and the disgust in people's eyes when they saw me that ripped what little confidence I had left into shreds.

Two men were walking on the sidewalk, wearing business casual attire, probably enjoying their lunch break. Acid burned my stomach as it growled, reminding me that I hadn't eaten since yesterday morning. Did a thrown-away half-eaten granola bar count as a meal?

"Charlotte straight up begged me to fuck her," one of the men proclaimed as he laughed.

I shuffled behind the tree a little farther, wanting to be invisible. My breaths were picking up, and my heart rate spiked. I was shrinking down to a shell of a person.

"Did you?" the other man asked.

"I'm horny, not desperate. I wouldn't fuck someone like her."

I popped my head out from behind the tree to get a good look at them. She should count herself lucky. He seemed like a real ass. Any man who wore long sleeves in the middle of

summer obviously cared more about his appearance than anyone around him.

“Woah, look at that,” he pointed at me, causing me to jerk back behind the palm tree.

Small strings of spiderwebs and dust clung to the wood, sticking to my hands uncomfortably. My eyes closed as I sent a wish to wake up far away from here.

“Please go away. Please go away,” I whispered to myself.

“Are you hungry?” the other called out to me.

My gut turned, and my mouth watered. Yes, I was so hungry. I’d walked five miles today, trying to find somewhere other unhoused individuals didn’t gather. Someone told me theft was big in those areas, and they could take my bag. I couldn’t have that happen. Smothering the insecure voice in me, I popped my head out, examining them.

The man reached his hand out, holding a lunch box, and gave me a genuine smile. I lifted my bag and pulled it over my shoulders. Maybe he had a sandwich or pasta. Man, I really missed pasta. I shouldn’t go to them, but the ache for something to eat made every part of me hurt.

I stood to my feet, shaking, feeling my exhaustion. My hands were firmly folded, and I squeezed my elbows to hide my stench. I didn’t have deodorant, and it was embarrassing when people grimaced around me. I slowly walked, ignoring the dried bushes scraping against my legs.

They were handsome, standing waiting for me at the base of the small slope. Their hair was perfectly styled back, and their clothes were snug against their bodies, as if they spent hours in the gym each day.

“Thank you,” I said, trying not to seem nervous.

“You want something to snack on?” he asked, pulling the bag back to him and unzipping the bag.

“Yes, please,” I continued, shifting on my feet.

Begging was embarrassing. I wanted to be independent and successful, not asking for someone’s scraps. He slowly

unzipped the bag and then stopped to look up at me. Venom swirled in his glare, and I took a few steps back.

“How about you dance for it?” he sneered.

The other laughed, holding his stomach as if it was the funniest thing he’d ever witnessed. How was that even funny?

“Or better yet, get a job and stop using drugs,” the other said between laughing.

“I—I do-don’t do drugs,” I stuttered as I retreated.

Tears pricked my eyes, and a lump formed in my throat. The one who’d offered his food stepped forward, sniffing at the air.

“Fuck, did you piss on yourself?” He grimaced.

“No!” I yelled.

I stumbled back, tripping on a rock and falling to my butt. Sharp stones and thorns cut into my palms, and I hissed in a breath between my teeth. My heart quickened as I tried to not cry. I was not weak. They shouldn’t get to me like this.

“Do us a favor and don’t bring your homeless trash into our neighborhood. Keep the infestation to the other side of town.”

My heart dropped. I was not trash to be cast aside or a problem that needed to be swept under the rug. I was a person. Tears rolled down my cheek as I ran off. I would like to say this was the first time someone had spoken to me like this, but it wasn’t, and I knew it wouldn’t be the last.

Chapter 21

Connor

“Betrayal was the only emotion I felt for a long time,” I explained as I propped my feet up on the arm of the couch.

“But not anymore?” the therapist asked.

We had been going in circles for an hour now. It was annoying to tiptoe around the truth of our business. I didn’t think therapy was meant for people in my line of work.

“Yeah, I’m starting to forgive him. He left me alone in the media empire we run. You may not know this, but there are a lot of cutthroat things in the industry. People feel like they are chained down. I even hear that women feel their choices have been stripped from them. You know, no free will, because the media controls everything. Well, the master of that is my father.” I let out an exasperated sigh. “I used to want to run away, and Liam said he would help me. Then he didn’t, so he betrayed me,” I rambled while I stared up at the ceiling.

“Do you think that maybe your brother liked working for the business?” he questioned.

This was another game of thirty questions and a waste of my time. If I told him the truth, what would happen?

“How much more time do we have to go in circles?” I muttered, looking over at his wrinkling face.

“One last question. When are you signing up for A.A. or N.A.?”

“I’m not,” I mumbled, rolling my eyes.

“You should,” he persisted.

It wasn’t that I didn’t want to. But I couldn’t be open and honest when I did. So, what was the point? I propped my head on my arm and stared at the Keltic ink that ran up my biceps.

“No, I can’t share the media secrets I have. It’s in my contracts,” I rebutted, smiling at my quick thinking.

“You don’t need to share anything at first. You also don’t need to talk about your work here. Just express the emotions you have. It is the end of our time, but I will see you next week.”

If it weren’t for Liam, I wouldn’t have anything to do with it.

I watched as he packed up his shit and left. My body was heavy, and my brain hurt. Not my head. That would be relieved with an over-the-counter. The emotions that raced through my mind were playing hopscotch, jumbling up what was right and wrong.

The movers packing made a loud bang upstairs. Only a few things were being moved, and they probably had a good ol’ time packaging all my sex toys.

I pulled out my cell, needing to know when they would return. My cheesy grin morphed into a deep frown as I read a message sent an hour prior.

Liam: Feds raided the building. All the precious cargo was taken, but my M&Ms were left behind.

My heart slammed against my chest, and I raced out the door. If she was found, my father would try to keep her. She would be interrogated and tortured until he got answers about who was betraying him. My keys clinked together as I ran into the elevator, and I bounced on the balls of my feet.

Fuck, an all-out war would start. My scalp burned as I ran my hands through my hair and pulled. Paranoia raced through me as my pounding heart banged against my sternum. He would see us not telling him about Cormac as an act of betrayal. I slammed my fist into the metal. The bang echoed in the space but didn’t move the elevator faster. I palmed my chest and rubbed circles, needing to relieve the building pressure.

Come on, come on, come on!

The last chime rang in my ears, and my breaths were loud as I raced to my truck. The parking garage was long, and I cursed as my body tried to protest the abrupt use. I leaped into the

driver's seat and twisted the key. Before the motor could fully come to life, I yanked the gearstick into reverse. My tires squealed with my urgency and need to protect what was mine. I just hoped I made it in time.

The door behind me slammed shut, and my steps slapped down on the tile. It was a forty-five-minute drive. Fucking forty-five agonizingly long minutes. The building was empty, and I whipped my head around the studio, searching for her.

“Mo Cuishle,” I yelled.

Silence.

“Anyone here?”

My pulse hammered in my ears.

“Fuck,” I cursed as I ran through each empty room.

She was gone. I was too late. Bringing her here was a stupid decision, and for the first time, it wasn't mine. I braced myself on a wall and inhaled deep breaths. My chest ached, forcing me to rub circles to try to relieve some of the tightness again. I had to get to the police station. If she was there, maybe I could take her before my father did.

I shoved off the wall and turned to head to the door. A loud thud sounded in the studio, making my steps falter. My lungs burned as I held my breath, hoping to not miss another noise. Another thud pounded against something. I hurriedly headed toward the noise, crossing the space toward the dressing room.

“Connor!” Emily screamed from behind a wall of shoes and clothing racks. “I'm in here!”

The boxes crashed to the floor as I flung them out of the way. My ribs ached as I twisted and lifted. I hurled the clothing racks across the room, sending them crashing to the floor. The closet door busted open. Emily came running out, sweat dripping down her flushed face and body. She gasped for air and braced her hand on my shoulder.

“Breathe,” I soothed, rubbing my trembling hand down her damp back.

Our heavy breaths filled the room. Her glossy eyes looked up at me, cutting into me. She didn't deserve this life. She wanted to escape, live in the woods, not be trapped in a closet and hiding from my father.

"Let's get you some water." I lightly tugged her hand and led her to the office.

She didn't say anything as she lazily walked beside me. Her head hung low, making a rock form in my gut. I sat her down in an office chair, then rushed to grab her water.

Should I ask if she wants to talk about it? Or did I just stand here like a doorman?

"Here," I whispered, handing her the cold bottle.

She nodded and gave me a sad smile. I wanted to punch Liam in the face for not planning better. His idiocy had left her in harm's way. My fist clenched and unclenched repeatedly.

I sounded like my twin.

"I'm fine. I just got a little hot and claustrophobic," she muttered.

I exhaled a large breath but didn't reply. What was I supposed to say? I'm sorry you are fucking two crazy brothers who work dangerous jobs? That would have been stupid. She wasn't ignorant about the life she'd returned to, and I was a selfish son of a bitch.

"Let me know when you are ready, and we can head home," I told her.

"Yeah, I am ready. I just wanna get out of here," she mumbled.

I helped her up, then walked to the door. Her footsteps weren't sounding behind me, making me look over my shoulder. She just stood there, unmoving.

"Coming?" I asked.

I wanted to go home. She wanted to go, and that was what we were doing. Her shoulders fell, and she finally shifted forward. I waited until she passed me, then followed behind

her. She had shrunken down to the girl I'd originally taken, which made the fire burn hot in my chest. She was quiet and stuck in her head. Her stoic expression held her emotions under lock and key.

We hopped into the truck, and I turned the key. The engine roared to life, and she turned away from me, fixing her gaze out the window. I stomped on the gas and watched as her head whipped back. Tendrils of need spiraled around me, tempting me to drown myself in a bottle. I shook my head as I tried to claw my way out of my addiction. That couldn't happen. I wanted to have power over myself, not be suffocated by my need anymore.

But maybe one sip?

My foot was heavy on the pedal as I sped the entire way to Liam's. When we arrived, I unlocked the door and kicked it open with my foot, smiling at the dirty spot it left. I dropped my keys carelessly on his brown wooden table. Emily's steps were slow, and I watched as she took in Liam's organized space. It was a lot larger than mine since he chose to live farther away from Times Square, and his decor was lighter in color.

She picked at her cuticles and looked everywhere but at me. Embers smoldered in my chest and muscles, and I needed to find a way to put it out. Her hiding behind a mask was frustrating, and I wanted to punish her the way she was punishing me.

"Where is the bathroom?" she finally asked.

My heart hammered in my chest. Of course, the first thing out of her mouth would be a *fucking* question.

"I'll show you," I grumbled.

She walked behind me as I ran my fingers along the walls. Her breaths were barely audible, and I had to hammer down the need to throw her against the wall and scream for her to tell me what was going through her head. I pushed the bathroom door open with my foot. *Oops*, I made a smudge on the surface. *Pity*.

I folded my arms across my chest and leaned in the doorway. She stared at me but didn't bat an eye as she walked in. I didn't move, and she didn't bother to ask why for agonizingly long minutes. She stood in front of the toilet, and I remained in the doorway. We looked at one another.

"Are you here to watch me pee?" she asked, keeping her reaction controlled.

I nodded. It was a power grab, and I wanted to know how we were going to play this little game. Was she going to scream and throw a fit? That would at least be exposing some type of emotion.

"Okay then," she replied, and unbuttoned her jeans.

I arched my brow at her while she wiggled free of her pants and sat down on the toilet. This time, she didn't break eye contact with me. Her determined, stubborn stare was the most emotion I had gotten since we left Deep Flics. I bit back an exhausted sigh and continued to watch her relieve herself.

"What do you want, Connor?" she finally asked as she pulled the toilet paper free.

"Life is unfair. Isn't it?" I questioned her.

"Mhm." She nodded as she pulled out the toilet paper. "I found out that Cormac was in witness protection all this time. Oh, I also found out that he had escaped and the police couldn't find him. So, the likelihood of us finding him is probably slim to none. Now, isn't that unfair?" she snapped, stood up, and flushed.

"How do you know that?" I snarled.

"The officers were talking outside the closet. I was locked inside." She looked at me from the mirror.

Her jaw was tense, and I could see her fighting back her emotions to keep them from spilling out. I wanted her to let them out. For her to leave herself bare for me like I did for her. I flexed my folded arms, trying to be the better man. But doing that wasn't something I knew how to do.

I rushed to the sink and yanked her back to press her ass against my cock. Her heat radiated through me, making the embers inside my chest turn into a blazing inferno.

“You were locked in a closet. I will punish Liam for that. But get one thing clear, you are not to hide behind your pretty little eyes, you hear me?” I growled against her neck as my palm moved up her stomach.

She blinked at me but didn’t say anything. Her gray eyes, which stared back at me through the reflection, were ghostly. I rubbed my hardening dick back and forth on her, wanting her to see what she did to me. Even as she concealed parts of herself from me, I wanted her.

“What else did the feds say?” I murmured against her throat.

“That Cormac sold out other, umm...” She tilted her head, trying to think of what to say. “He sold out other sex trafficking organizations, but not yours. He was starting to give more information, but then his wife died, and that is when he went missing.”

My brows pulled together. It wasn’t adding up. My uncle wasn’t someone to work with the feds, but I obviously didn’t know him. He did love his wife, so maybe she convinced him to work with them? I let out a deep breath. This was a shit show.

“What is going on in here?” I growled, placing my hand over her chest.

I didn’t care about my uncle, my racing pulse needed to be soothed. He would be my focus later.

“Nothing,” she dismissed.

“No,” I growled, clenching her breast.

She grimaced, making a small smirk spread across my face.

“I give you and Liam time to think and give you space. Can I have the same courtesy in return?” she hissed between her teeth.

“I never asked for that.”

“Well, sometimes people need it. Otherwise, you will get answers you don’t want to hear because they haven’t been thought out.” She tried to pull away, but I tightened my grip on her. “Fine! I’m scared that I am not cut out for your world. Sure, I crave revenge, and the thought of killing the people who hurt me excites me. But the day you have to start trafficking women in front of me makes me sick.”

My heart dropped, and my breath was stolen from me.

“You knew the life you came running back to,” I snarled, trying to hide my hurt.

“Of course, I did. I just didn’t think that part through,” she said quietly.

The corners of her mouth turned down, and I could see the agony swimming in her eyes. The tug of war between right and wrong. I didn’t thrive in this world. She knew that, but I had too many things that bound me to it. I didn’t know if I could get away now.

“Are you wanting out?” I muttered, immediately wishing I could take the question back. I wanted to stitch my mouth closed. Why would I even go that route? I wouldn’t let her go, even if she begged me.

“Yes and no,” she croaked.

I dropped my hand from her chest and spun around. She had to make her own choice, and I had to make mine. Would I force her to live this way of life and torment her the way my family had done to me? Or would I let her go again?

I moved to the couch and flipped on the T.V. If I didn’t distract myself, the nagging need to numb this pain with drugs would overwhelm me. She hesitantly walked into the room. Her shoulders were slumped and pity wafted off her in waves. I patted the couch beside me, needing to have something to soothe the burn in my chest.

She slowly sat down, and I impatiently yanked her onto my lap. I breathed in her scent. It spiraled around inside me, uncoiling tension from deep within.

“What do you want to watch?” I asked, wanting to give her a choice.

She stared off and didn’t answer me. I nudged her, trying to get her attention.

“I asked you a question,” I growled.

“*The Vampire Diaries.*”

What the fuck was that?

I searched for it on the smart T.V. and hit play. The show immediately began with dialogue about living in secret and how he was alone. I could relate to that, but not the vampire part. I did like blood, though.

An exasperated sigh left my lips when I heard “Dear Diary.”

Great.

We were watching a chick flick.

Emily looked over her shoulder and scoffed at me. I rolled my eyes back at her.

“We can change it,” she stated, and then looked back at the show.

No. I wanted to give her a choice to watch what she wanted. I didn’t reply and started gently rubbing my fingers up and down her arm, loving how she fit in my lap. The show continued for a few hours or so, and when I looked over her shoulder to watch her facial expressions, she was smiling.

“You really like this show, don’t you?” I asked.

“Yeah. When I could afford the internet, I would stream it and its spin-off. I am a big fan of Klaus and Elijah,” she answered while not looking away from the T.V.

There was another one? *Shocker.*

Liam walked in through the front door at the same time Damon snuck into Elena’s house while she was asleep. I tapped on Emily’s shoulder repeatedly, trying to get her to move. Liam rushed into the room, and I shot to my feet, making Emily fall to the floor.

“Thank Go—”

Smack.

My first crunched into Liam’s face, making him stumble back.

“What the fuck?” he yelled as he straightened his shirt and rubbed his jaw.

I rushed him and tackled him to the floor. He kicked and lashed out while his fist flew up and hit me on the nose. I groaned but continued my assault.

“What the fuck were you thinking, leaving her trapped in a fucking closet?” I roared.

He bucked his hips, flinging me off him. I crashed down on my side, making me grimace. He rolled on top of me and pinned me down.

“It was out of my control,” he yelled in my face, making spittle land on my face.

“I trusted you with her!”

I thrashed under him. Searing, sharp nails stabbed into my ribs, and I wheezed for air.

“Knock it off!” Emily screamed.

Her voice was muffled by my racing pulse. I wrapped my leg around his and jerked him back, knocking him off balance. He crashed on top of me with a huff, and I quickly flipped us back over.

“Connor, stop it! Just because you are mad at me doesn’t mean you can take it out on him. My choice will stay the same even if I wasn’t locked in a closet,” Emily seethed.

I flinched and stuttered to a stop. The burning ache in my ribs migrated to my heart. I took a small breath of air as my chest constricted. She thought that my rage was only based on that? I got off Liam and walked past her to the freezer. My pulse was hammering in my ears. I jerked open the fridge, grabbed an ice pack, and turned around.

“You could have been taken. That is what I’m pissed about,” I murmured, placing the ice pack on my ribs.

“But I wasn’t,” she persisted.

Her eyes were a dark gray, and her complexion had paled.

“But if you were, our father doesn’t know you are free. It could have been bad.” I glared at Liam.

“He could have caught us on our way to the house we blew up. It held the same risk.” She walked up to me and laid her hand over mine.

The freezing pack stung my broken ribs, but her warmth helped make it bearable.

“She is right,” Liam chimed in.

I slam my eyelids shut, trying not to lash out. He didn’t understand how she had been when she’d left that closet.

“We need to keep her here then,” I muttered, pinching the bridge of my nose.

Heat boiled in my chest, stinging my throat.

“No!” she demanded, slamming her foot down.

I looked down at her darkened glare and locked jaw. She thought that was going to make me budge? *Silly girl*. She should know she was at my mercy.

I coiled her hair in my hand and pulled. Heat radiated off her as I rubbed my jaw along her exposed throat. My knees pressed against her with each forceful step I took. She let out a cute umph as I pressed her flat against the wall.

“What did you just say?” I breathed into her ear.

Her breath hitched. “I said no. I can say it in another language if you’d like.”

I ran the ice pack over her shoulder blade. Her shiver vibrated against my swelling cock. She didn’t deserve that right now.

“I will lock you away and use you for my own needs,” I rasped while gliding the ice pack across her skin to her chest.

“Do it. I dare you....” She narrowed her stare at me. “See what happens.”

My skin thrummed with energy as footsteps slowly walked up behind me. I gritted my teeth, forcing myself to not turn around and tell Liam to fuck off. This was between Emily and me.

“If we tell him now that she escaped and returned to us, it could demonstrate her loyalty,” Liam interjected.

I huffed out a breath. My father could not be reasoned with.

“Either fuck me in this position or back up. I’m done being pushed around,” she snarled.

Tempting.

I shoved off the wall and paced the room. Embers burned inside me. We needed to keep her safe and lock her up until we were clear of the dangers we faced.

“Listen, I’ll highlight how she brought us information about Cormac returning. Without her loyalty to you and me, we wouldn’t know,” Liam explained.

“He would keep her for himself,” I rebutted. “That loyalty is something he likes to own.”

“He can’t own me,” Emily huffs.

“He can’t own you because we already do.” I narrowed my gaze at her.

Her jaw went slack, and her chest rose and fell. *Yes, little deer in headlights, you are ours.*

“We can’t keep her hidden for long, and you know that.” Liam walked up to stand beside Emily like he was trying to demonstrate some kind of united front.

I scoffed and pulled out a chair from the table. The screech of the legs against the tile reverberated off the clean walls. They had points, but they weren’t fully thinking. Father would demand her, and I would die before I gave him anything ever again.

“Your plan is fucked up. If—and that is a strong *if*—we tell him, and he comes for her, then what?” I snapped while I clenched and unclenched my fist.

Liam glared at me while Emily looked between us with wide eyes.

“We run,” Liam answered, stepping toward me.

My lip lifted in a disbelieving snarl. Been there and done that. Spoiler alert, he never ran.

“Living a life looking over my shoulder won’t happen,” I answered, knowing it didn’t matter what he said in return.

We weren’t going anywhere if Liam said we would run away. If Emily ran, I would chase her and not care about the consequences.

“Then we could kill him.” His eyes darkened, and the corner of his lips pulled down.

“Bullshit,” I snapped, shooting to my feet.

“First, let’s kill Cormac and whoever is working with him. We don’t want him coming for us later. Then we handle whatever we have to after.” Liam stepped closer to me, not dropping eye contact.

“When he comes after Emily, it won’t be on our terms. He could try before we kill Cormac,” I reasoned.

Wait, I was reasoning now? I must have been reborn, after all.

“We will push back on that as much as possible. But, by the end of the week, they will all be dead.” He looked over at Emily with a frown and then back at me. “Including one more person who we need to track down tonight.”

“Who?” Emily chimed in.

“A cop who stole the video I made with Emily at the studio,” Liam answered quickly.

My pulse hammered in my ears. He’d better not tell me what I thought he would tell me.

“He did what?” Emily squeaked.

My skin grew hot.

“What video?” I snarled.

“I made a video having sex with Emily. When the cops raided our studio, I watched someone pocket the dri—”

Smack.

My fist collided with his face before he could finish. Emily ran between us, holding her palms up to stop us. Thorny vines slid into me and constricted my heart. The burn of knowing someone saw her come undone was heavy. It was an act of betrayal. Liam knew I couldn’t share her with anyone else besides him, and he did it anyway.

“Stop!” she demanded, pushing her hands against me to try to push me back.

“What were you fucking thinking? You fucked her in front of people?” I yelled.

I barely accepted that we would share. She belonged to me—I mean *us*. My breaths were heavy, and my vision became blurry with rage. Emily needed to move.

“See what it’s like to clean up after a brother? Watching impulsive actions that have consequences. Feel it. Let it seep in, brother. Because *that* is what I have had to deal with daily.” Liam dramatically threw his hands into the air.

“Do not belittle what we did, Liam.” She stared at him and then looked at me. “I wanted to fuck him in front of everyone. That was my choice. We just need to focus on getting that drive back,” Emily interjected.

“We will focus—correction—I’ll focus on tearing his fucking spine out,” I seethed.

It was the only way I could escape the clutches of my anger. To hack away at his vertebrae and drown myself in his blood. I was going to trade alcohol for blood.

Maybe I was a vampire.

Chapter 22

Liam

My lip stung as I licked the copper taste away before it could drip on my shirt. I brushed over my clothing, trying to straighten the material out before it could form wrinkles. I'd deserved that punch. A lump formed in my throat, forcing me to swallow. I'd done something impulsive, and it could have ended a lot worse. What had gotten into me?

Emily filled me in about what she'd overheard after I had hastily locked her in the closet like an uncared-for mistress. Everything she relayed to me made my head throb. I felt like I didn't know my own uncle. We used to be so close. When we were kids, he used to take us out to get a short reprieve from our father's training methods.

Connor glared at me expectantly, waiting for me to call our father and get it over with. Emily's forehead was wrinkled, and her foot tapped on the floor. The call would determine our next steps. If we were going to be able to partner and work with our father or if we had go to war with him.

I hit the call button and placed Connor's phone on the counter with the speaker on. My heartbeat spiked as I stared down at the swirls in the granite. I'd allowed the feds to confiscate my burner phone today because it had been recently wiped.

The sharp trill of the ring cut through me. The lines surrounding Emily's gray eyes pierced through my chest. Swirls of emotions rolled off her in waves and slapped against me. Something was wrong, and it was more than my father or uncle.

"Connor," my father picked up.

"It's me. I am getting a new burner," I replied.

"I was just about to call you."

"Well, I saved you some time."

“We must go over the dinner I planned for tomorrow night. The associates that know the business will be joining us for dinner.” He listed off his plans like a grocery list.

In the background, I could hear him moving chairs and shuffling things around. Emily’s frown deepened, but she didn’t budge.

“I have found out things as well.” I took a breath, knowing he would want me to continue. “Penny returned. She escaped the person who’s been taking the girls. The information she relayed to me was a surprise. I had thought you had taken care of this problem years ago.” I sharpened my tone, needing to make a power grab.

Whatever he was doing stopped, and the line was silent for a long second. I would have to tell him about the raid when I saw him later. Going over that while I told him about his brother returning from the dead wasn’t wise. His anger would turn to paranoia and then from paranoia to murderous.

“Watch your tone,” a low growl reverberated from the phone.

“Cormac has the girls, and he is working with someone on the inside. He also worked for the feds up until recently. They said he escaped from witness protection,” I quickly explained, not wanting him to chime in while I was speaking.

I looked between Connor and Emily as we eagerly waited for my father’s reaction. Connor wore a smug face. His arms were folded like he knew what was coming next.

“Impossible. She’s lying, and can’t be trusted. Bring her here at once,” my father commanded.

Connor’s eyes darkened, and his fingers dug into his arms. The taste of bloodlust was palpable in the air. I bit down on my tongue, needing to remain calm and not lash out. A list. I should’ve made a list of the things I needed to talk about to keep the conversation moving.

“She isn’t. I overheard a fed mention that he was in WITSEC,” I lied, needing him to know the information was viable and to think it was from me.

A large crash came down the line, making me roll my eyes. He and Connor were too similar. Of course, he was either throwing something or punching a wall.

“He wants revenge,” Arthur growled.

“No shit, Sherlock,” Connor muttered under his breath.

Emily kicked his leg and glared at him. I had to bite my lip to hide my laugh as he mocked pain by limping. Leave it to Connor to be pissed and still able to make a joke.

“Put your brother on,” my father snapped.

Connor looked at both of us and then mouthed the word *busted*.

“Yep,” he greeted my father as he walked over to the phone.

“You knew the consequences of not bringing me Penny that day,” Arthur stated in a low tone.

I pounded my finger on the mute button.

“I took her from you and said I would deliver her. You didn’t know,” I quickly snapped.

Connor shook his head and scoffed.

“Not a chance,” he replied to me and then unmuted the phone. “If I did what you wanted, we wouldn’t have had more information about who’s been coming after us. It was your short-sided temper that almost cost us this time. Penny being taken only ended up helping us,” he reprimanded.

Emily’s mouth fell open, and Connor snatched her arm and pulled her close to him. He picked up the phone, muted it, and smelled the device.

“Mm, it still smells like your sweet pussy,” he groaned. “I will burn down the world to help you get your revenge for what happened. What I am saying isn’t true, you hear me?” He placed his forehead against hers as my father continuously repeated Connor’s name to gain his attention. “Sorry, I went through a tunnel,” he said when he unmuted the call.

“I don’t know why you always want to make everything so difficult,” our father seethed.

“I can’t help the way you made and raised me,” Connor snapped with a deep frown.

“Always making excuses instead of owning up to how pathetic you act. Typical.” Arthur scoffed.

Emily’s fists clenched, and her stare became ice cold. I connected with that rage. Well, I used to despise it more before I’d become numb to it all. But now, my gut turned at how accustomed I’d become to my father’s abuse of my twin. I needed to do better and not accept something just because it had always been that way. Change needed to happen.

“I’ll send you a list of everything we have uncovered. You can do with it as you wish,” I interjected, before things spiraled out of control.

A loud sigh sounded over the line, and I inhaled slowly, needing to regain some control.

“The dinner is tomorrow. Be there and bring Penny. I want to know what she heard firsthand,” Arthur demanded.

“She is with us now,” Connor snarled.

“I don’t know what the fuck that means, but you don’t make demands.”

The line disconnected, and the following silence was daunting. I looked up to stare at my twin. Our expressions were identical. Jaws locked, lips pursed, and eyebrows pulled low in a deep scowl.

“I need to kill someone,” he murmured.

“Agreed.” I nodded back at him.

We pulled up to the house of the cop who pocketed the drive. Beckett was easily traceable, thanks to the feds in our pocket. Emily sat in the back seat, inspecting the gun, and Connor gripped some type of box. The truck’s rumble cut off, and I spun around in my chair, needing to check on her. We needed to continue our conversation about how she felt about our lifestyle. Waiting for it was lingering over me, but now wasn’t the right time.

“You ready?” I asked, placing my palm over her thigh.

She gave me a curt nod, and her expression changed to determination. Her long curls were pulled into a high ponytail with two strands pulled free to frame her face. Her diamond-shaped face was more pronounced when her jaw was tight from the adrenaline that was likely racing through her body. She was perfection.

“I got you something.” Connor turned and knocked my hand away from her.

Ass.

She chuckled and grabbed the matte black box, pulling the ribbon off. Her eyes widened, and I looked over at Connor, brows raised. His eyes shone brightly, and his lips were curled in an eager smile. His boyish expression warmed my chest and twisted my gut all at once. He would have had this happiness his entire life if things had been different. The darkness he had become drenched in wouldn't have touched him.

“Is this a wolf mask?” she asked as she ran her fingers over the masquerade-style design.

It was shaped like a black wolf with spikes covering it. She pulled on the elastic that would strap it to her head and looked up at him with raised brows and glowing skin.

“Our faces are well known in the line of work. Even before we spoke today, I wanted you to have a future where you're not forced to live in the shadows. So when we do more public things, I don't want you to rely on a hoodie. The mask will help keep your identity hidden,” he explained.

My throat tightened, wanting to know what they'd spoken about earlier. Connor's foot bounced, eagerly awaiting her response. She pulled the snarling wolf mask over her face, and her gray eyes glimmered through the exposed holes. Darkness and turquoise swirled together, making the spikes look minimal compared to her haunting stare.

“And, of course, you look hot as sin,” Connor rasped, tracing his thumb over her exposed jawline. “Ready to get a little revenge, *Mo Cuishle?*”

“Definitely.” She looked up from under her lashes, nibbling on her lip.

Connor swung the door open, and I followed. He twirled his hatchet in circles, sending shadows dancing under the bright streetlights. I dropped the tailgate and grabbed the chain I’d brought for her.

“Put it in your hoodie pocket again,” I told her.

“I’m spoiled.” She grinned and shoved her weapon of choice into her jacket pouch, making it droop.

We snuck up the side of the house, staying low to see inside his living room. We were far out of the city, and the house had a small wooden porch with a light illuminating the front door. When we reached a window, Connor twisted and looked in.

“Fuck no,” he growled.

My face scrunched, not understanding what he was doing as he raced to the front door.

“Connor,” I snapped, trying to keep my voice low.

He swung his hatchet back and slammed it into the wood where the lock was. A crack rang through the night, making heat race through my blood. As he leaned back to kick the door, I jumped behind him and snapped my gun out. Splinters flew as it flung open. Connor’s breaths were heavy as he sprinted into the house, and Emily’s chain rattled behind me as we followed. He didn’t look back as he plowed his way into the living room. The sound of Emily’s moans made knives cut into my flesh. I miscalculated, and now my impulsive behaviors had a penalty to pay.

“Get out!” Officer Beckett yelled before we burst into the room.

Connor threw his ax and ducked as a shot rang out. A bullet whizzed by and pounded into the wall, making drywall dust into the air. The cop wailed, and a thud landed on the wooden floor. I spun and pushed Emily against the hallway wall.

“Stay here,” I yelled, feeling my blood rush to my face.

This was supposed to be an easy take-down, not a macho-man fight. Connor yelled in fury as he charged into the living room. I sprinted after him to watch Beckett fly into an unlit fireplace. My brother snarled and then went back to pick up his hatchet. I inspected the room to see the officer's gun on the floor. Blood droplets covered the wood and beige couch, evidence that Connor had hit his target. Blood dripped down the sticky-fingered officer's leg.

I jerked my gun toward the T.V. and fired, silencing Emily's moans. Connor mangled the thief's shirt in his hand, coiling it tight to lift him to his face.

"Do you know what you did?" Connor snarled, making the officer's face turn pale with fear.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think you would miss it. I had no clue it had your brother on it." The officer quivered.

Emily stepped beside me, and the lights shone off her spiked mask. She tilted her head at him, biting at her lower lip.

"Oh, you can look at my brother's dick all day long, and I wouldn't give a fuck. But the woman on the screen is *ours*. Stroking your chode ass dick to her will be the last thing you ever do," he seethed, wrapping his palm around the officer's fragile airway.

I walked to the curtains and pulled them closed, knowing we wouldn't have much time now since he'd fired his gun. The hooks screeched against the rod as I covered the window.

"What do you know about Cormac?" I asked before Connor shredded him limb to limb.

"Who?" he squealed.

"May I?" Emily asked, stepping closer to Connor.

A lethal grin spread across his face as he stepped back and uncoiled the shirt from his hands. He lifted the tetanus-covered hatchet, pressing it against Beckett's sweaty neck. He sucked in air through his chattering teeth. His lips pressed tightly together as he swallowed his sobs and cries for help.

Emily pulled her chain out, link by link, cocking her head at her prey. Her expression was cold with undercurrents of a brewing storm. It was a transformation, a rebirth of someone who had lost so much. She ran the end of the chain over the officer, making his brows furrow. What was she up to?

“You want to know what Cormac did to me?” she softly asked.

My fists clenched, not wanting to be tortured along with him. Her hips swayed as she dipped lower to look him in his eyes, pressing the spikes on her mask against his face.

“Information now,” she commanded, followed by a cute growl.

“I really don’t know anything,” he responded as his trembling started to slow.

She looked up at Connor, nodding her head to his hatchet. He moved it at the same time her hands shot out, spinning the chain around his neck and cinching it closed.

“Feel that pressure,” she yelled while his face turned cherry red. “I prefer chains because they were what bound me. Physically and emotionally. I have been chained to bad luck, my past, fear, and to a basement floor.”

My gut ached, and it was all I could do to not douse the world in gasoline and light it on fire for her. But I would need to step into the blaze to destroy everything and everyone who had harmed her. That would never happen, because I needed to be by her and Connor’s sides.

“You want to protect a man who raped me on a floor covered in shit?” she snapped through gritted teeth. Her face was turning red, and her knuckles were white from clutching the chain. “I don’t like being watched without my consent.” She tugged tighter with no remorse.

Daggers were cast from her menacing glare. The need for revenge was tightly wrapped around her, just like the chain wrapped around Beckett’s neck. She loosened her grasp, allowing a few links to droop for him to suck in deep breaths.

“I only know things that were said in the precinct,” he sputtered, frothy drool spilling down his chin.

“We don’t have all day,” Connor said lazily, looking at him like he was nothing.

We were running out of time. At any moment, blue and red lights would light up the window.

“I’ll tell you if you don’t kill me,” he whimpered. His lips trembled with fear.

“Done,” Emily snapped.

I cocked my head at her, not understanding. We couldn’t leave him alive. He knew too much.

“He’s been meeting with an older man. I don’t know who it is, though. They said he’s been working with your organization for years. But I promise that is all I know. I think that is all they know, too. They couldn’t get a clear shot of him. He is really stealthy. Now, please. Let me go,” he pleaded.

“Someone who steals to survive is one thing. But someone who steals for his own pleasure is untrustworthy.” Emily nodded at Connor, and he shot her a wink. She looked over at me with darkness swirling in her eyes. I walked up to them and snatched Beckett’s hands.

“What are you doing?” he squealed, thrashing.

She stepped onto the fireplace’s ledge and thrust her hands up, cinching the chain around his airway. I jerked his hands down, making his elbows and shoulders pop. His face morphed into a tight grimace, and blood vessels burst, staining the whites of his eyes. A crunch vibrated his limbs as Emily twisted her body, cracking his neck.

The metal rattled as she pulled it free, and a small giggle fell from her lips. I looked at her to see a devilish smile spread across her face. Connor held his hand out and helped her off the ledge. I took her other hand, wanting to be by her side as she freed another piece of her soul held captive by our world’s underbelly.

I pulled the drive from the television and pocketed it. My impulsive act was cleaned. Not following a clear plan resulted in a mess, but we came out better on the other side. Maybe everything being perfectly organized all the time wasn't always necessary? My heart stung at that thought.

Yes, it was. But this was a step in the right direction.

Chapter 23

Emily

I pressed my palm against the cold window, watching the city fly by. The truck's engine was a smooth rumble. My muscles loosened and then stiffened again as I remembered what was to come. Arthur needed everyone to attend a dinner; things hadn't end well the last time that had happened.

The sting of knowing I would be subjected to watching women being trafficked lingered in my mind. I should have known falling for them came with hellish ties. The devilish side of the twins was more than shedding blood. It was conditioning women to be bought and sold. But leaving them would be like ripping my insides out, splaying the ugly parts of me for the world to see. My soul was changing, and I didn't fear it.

"What are you thinking about?" Connor asked, sliding closer to me in the backseat.

I looked over at him and traced my cold fingers along his heated jawline. Electricity buzzed under my skin, and his hooded lids screamed desire, lust, and endearment. His gaze told me he would accept me for whoever I was. Would he understand if I couldn't live this life?

I swung my leg over his lap and straddled him. The headlights from the cars behind us on the freeway shone through the tinted windows, illuminating my skin. He ran his hand over my chest, gripping and squeezing my breasts through my hoodie. My captor had become my freedom. He coaxed the low burning embers within me into a raging inferno. Liam turned down the music, and I could feel eyes on me through the rearview mirror.

I ground down on Connor, hating the clothes that separated us. His length taunted me. My whole body filled with need, and I flung off the thick hoodie to expose my black sports bra. Connor shifted to the side, grabbed the spiked mask, and slid it over my face.

“Let your revenge continue,” he rasped.

Desire cut into me, pleading to make him pay. I urgently zipped down his jacket and flung it open. His soft cotton shirt blocked my view of the ink that lined his chest. I grabbed the collar of his shirt and yanked. The fabric strained and ripped apart, giving me what I needed. His jaw clenched, and his chest rose as he inhaled a deep breath through his nose. I searched his expression, seeing his desperation for me. My heart burned, and I held his stare as I unclasped his pants.

“I’m not sorry for taking you,” he murmured.

I jerked down his pants and boxers and let his cock spring up to slap against his abs.

“I would do it again,” he continued.

A low growl rumbled up from deep in my belly, where a dark pit festered inside me. My trauma and pleas to give up thrived in abundance there. His hands cupped my face, luring me closer to his mouth.

“If I wasn’t who I was, you wouldn’t be by my side, and I would live a thousand lives trapped in the hell I was born into just to be with you.” The sincerity in his words shook me to my core and dropped a lit match into my pit of sorrow.

I shimmied my pants down and kicked off my Converse, yearning to feel him pressed against me. His cock twitched when he eyed my exposed sex, and I lifted myself to hover over him. Grasping his cock, I lined him up at my entrance. His large head pressed against me, stretching me, and I gritted my teeth and pulled back up.

“You took me without permission,” I panted, wanting him to understand at least one-hundredth of a fraction of how that pain felt. “You hid Bubbles from me,” I growled, pressing down, then immediately lifting back up.

The truck slowed, and the click of the turn signal echoed in the cab. Conner’s pupils were huge, making his eyes inky black, and I schooled my expression, not wanting him to see how much restraint it took to not slam down on him and take what I desired.

“I know you want to fuck my pussy and claim me,” I taunted and slid my wet center up and down his length. “You won’t understand the hell you put me through. Just like I don’t understand why I need you so bad.”

The tip of him pushed past my tight entrance, and heat enveloped me. I jerked back up, and he popped out of my needy sex. He groaned, shifting his hips up to try to shove inside me.

“You won’t come,” I growled. “I will do everything in my power to get you close, to just take it away from you. That is the only revenge my heart can allow me to give you.” I placed my palm over his heart and rubbed circles with my thumb. “Because I could never physically harm you.”

He frowned, and the lines in his forehead grew more pronounced. The button on Liam’s garage key clicked, and light illuminated the cab.

“I will push both of you to the edge without release,” I scolded, turning to look at Liam.

The hurt in his expression softened my will to push on. His eyes shifted, and I tilted back, leaning closer to him and his pained eyes. He was cut deeply already, but that was his own doing. My desire for vengeance would hopefully allow him to forgive himself for the harm he’d caused me, freeing us both from the chains of our past.

I swung my leg off Connor and pushed the truck door open. I looked over my shoulder, summoning him with my gaze as I slid out. Stairs led up into the house from Liam’s private garage, and I walked up them, not looking back. The twin’s footsteps were heavy as they ascended behind me, raising gooseflesh on my skin. Liam’s house had a fresh scent that cleared my mind and helped me to prepare for what I had in store for my wolves. It was my turn to take control.

I walked into Liam’s room and fully took it in for the first time. Sleek dark wood ran vertically behind the bed as an accent wall, and lights lit up the bed, making it the focal point. The tops of his nightstands were bare, except for a digital

alarm clock with pictures of sunsets as the screensaver. I ran my hand over the comforter and almost moaned at its softness.

I looked up, and my mouth parted at how they towered in the doorway, arms folded, waiting for a command like I was their puppeteer. Nervous energy buzzed through me, begged for me to fall to the bed and ask them to just fuck me, but I needed this. We needed this.

Connor still had his pants unbuttoned, and his shirt was off. His inked muscles were on full display for me and only me. Liam was fully clothed, perfectly tucked, but his coat was removed. His relaxed stance expressed his trust and acceptance of what I had to do. Two strong and powerful men would be at my mercy, unable to achieve climax as I did what I wanted with them. My clit ached for my own friction and release.

“Liam, come here,” I asked lightly, internally kicking myself for not sounding more forceful.

He sauntered up to me, standing directly in front of me so I was forced to crane my head back to see him. It reminded me of the mask I still wore. The fabric lining his lean figure made my breaths heavy. I carefully lifted his shirt over his head, needing him to bend over for me to fully strip it off.

“Em&m, you are fucking perfect,” he rasped, looking me up and down.

I’d chosen not to wear panties today, hopeful that they would, at some point, end up buried deep inside me. Liam let out a soft groan as he saw me eyeing him. He was temptation, luring me in, and I kissed up and down his chest, wanting to take my time. Something the guys would have never done.

I wrapped my hand around the back of his head and pulled him down, exposing my throat, wanting his lips on me. My chin rested on his shoulder as his soft lips caressed my neck, giving me the perfect view of my snarling wolf. His fists were clenched, his knuckles white. I could tell from his seething stare that holding back wasn’t easy for him. In truth, it wasn’t for me either. I wanted his wrath as he slammed into me and hit all the best spots.

I could have said that. I could have. But I didn't. Instead, I said, "Kneel."

My stare narrowed in on him as his lip lifted, unwavering. I needed him on his knees, praying to the gods for release, if he wanted me to seek vengeance.

Liam started to sink down, and I grabbed a handful of his hair, giving it a sharp tug.

"Not you," I demanded. "You continue to kiss every inch of my neck, and then you can move down until I tell you to stop."

A soft groan escaped his lips, shocking me and making my pussy clench. His lips and tongue moved down to my collarbone, devouring me. Connor stepped forward, and I held my power stance, readying my reaction if he didn't comply.

He came to my side, and I glared, lifting my chin, refusing to allow his height to shift the mood. I would not cower. Not this time. Not ever again. That woman died in the basement.

Connor fell to his knees with a thump, and a rush of pinpricks raced over my skin. My pulse spiked, and my heart slammed against its tight confines. I fought the tears that threatened to escape and cleanse my soul. It wasn't a position I wanted to see him in again, but to have the man I used to fear and now love—

Shit.

Did I love my wolves? It was too much to digest at that moment, and I needed a different type of release.

"Pull your cock out, Connor," I quietly commanded, afraid that my voice would crack if I spoke too loudly.

The mask bolstered my confidence that maybe they couldn't see my reaction. Connor didn't hesitate to obey, and he pulled out his long length, decorated by his wolf tattoo.

"Spit on your hand, then grip it and thrust up and down, slowly," I demanded as I moved Liam down to my covered breasts.

The sound of him spitting into his palm and his wet hand moving up and down made my legs weak. My head fell back

with a low groan, absorbing the pleasure that surrounded me. Liam nipped at my hardened nipples through the fabric, and I grunted, pressing my chest harder against his mouth.

“Right there. Take off my top,” I pleaded, trying not to whimper.

He yanked my sports bra up, pulling my hair off my sweat-slicked skin momentarily. A rush of confidence flooded me. This was my time to get whatever I yearned for. Without hesitating, he resumed nipping, sucking, and kissing my breasts. I wanted my sex to receive the same attention, and I didn’t want to wait, so I shoved him down. I didn’t have to wait for anything. I was in control. His hot mouth parted my lips, and his tongue eagerly swiped at my wetness. My knees weakened, and I used it to my advantage, grinding against his face. He moaned, vibrating against my clit, and I sank down harder, smothering him.

I looked over at Connor, watching as he gripped himself tightly, dragging his fist up, covering his head, and then tugging down to his balls.

“Cup your balls, and watch me climax on your brother’s face,” I rasped, enjoying how Connor’s eyes were becoming hooded.

His other hand reached down, lifting his balls snugly against his hard cock. I watched, making sure he maintained that same slow pace. Warmth billowed in my core, and I desperately wanted my channel to be filled. I lifted and bounced on Liam, making sure his tongue to shoved deep inside me. The warmth pushed past the entrance, and I continued to lift up and sink down, using his nose for friction. I slumped forward, digging my nails into Liam’s perfectly styled hair. His eyes darkened, and he moaned hard and loud. Electricity shot up my spine, and my orgasm spread through me like wildfire.

“Yes,” I screamed, twitching on his soaked face.

“Jesus Christ, you look so beautiful,” Connor groaned.

I stumbled off Liam’s face, not wanting to come again. Wetness dripped down his face and neck. I swiped up as much

as possible and held it to Connor's lips.

"Suck," I stated, looking down at him.

He snarled, but he leaned forward and took four of my fingers into his mouth, rolling his tongue over each one to get every drop of my arousal.

Shit, that was hot.

I ran my palm along his soft skin, circling him. What should I do next to him? When I was in front of him again, Liam pressed against my back.

"He likes his ass played with," he whispered into my ear.

Blood pulsed in my clit. Every nerve in my body was lit up, wanting to explore something I hadn't before.

"Bend over the bed," I spoke quickly before becoming too nervous.

The bed dipped as he moved and did what I asked, looking at me with a brow raised. Pretty sure I should have punished him for hesitating, but the way he pushed the constraints of my control was spiking my heart rate.

"I don't know what you are doing, spikey, but if your face gets near my asshole with that spiked mask, this stunt is over and I will fuck you raw," he growled.

I smacked his ass and tore the mask off my face. The mattress squeaked as he shifted forward, sputtering unintelligible curse words. A chuckle burst from my lips, and I tucked my hair behind my ears.

His cock and balls dangled between his legs, and his muscular ass was perfectly parted for me. My mouth watered, and I hastily licked from his scrotum to his puckered hole, licking around the rim.

"Fuck me," I groaned, loving how Connor softly cursed.

"Don't have to ask me twice." Liam smirked, stepping behind me.

It wasn't what I meant, but the feeling of his wide head pressing against my slick entrance cut off my protests. Liam

rocked his head into me, then pulled out.

“Slam into me. Stretch me. Stuff me,” I begged, dragging the flat of my tongue over Connor’s ass.

The burn of him pounding into me made my nails dig into Connor’s backside, marking him and claiming him as mine. Liam pounded into me, keeping his dick fully seated. The force made my tongue slip into Connor’s hole, and he moaned and grasped at the sheets. Wanting to give him more, I reached around his waist and wrapped my shaky fingers around his rock-hard dick.

“Your pussy is so goddamn tight, Em&m,” Liam cursed as he shoved deeper and deeper inside me.

His thrusts hit so deep. It kept my mouth firmly planted between Connor’s cheeks. My breathy moans were muffled in the tight space, and the heat of my breath warmed my face. Connor growled, rocking back on me, accepting his role as euphoria consumed him. I released his cock when I felt the veins lining his length become more prominent.

“Don’t you dare stop.” His growl was primal and raw and desperate.

“Liam, you promised to fuck me with Conner. Together. I want that. I want to know what it feels like to have you together,” I rasped, then tried to slow my heaving breaths.

“I’ll need to stretch you out before we start,” he answered, remaining fully seated inside me. His hand ran down my back. “I’ll have to take some control for that.”

“Yes,” I whispered.

Connor instantly flipped around and yanked me off Liam and down on top of him. My knees pressed into the comforter, and his fingers raked over my back. His desire to touch pooled in his dark eyes, and his chest pressed against mine as we sat.

“I didn’t say you could take control,” I panted, grinding on top of his length.

“Shut the fuck up and be my good little slut,” he growled, biting my shoulder to mark me like I had done him.

His teeth sank into me, and the pain shot down to my sex. He lifted me as if I were his personal rag doll and slammed me down on his long length. I huffed as he hit against my deepest parts.

“You can’t come,” I hissed, letting him bounce me up and down on him.

“I’ll give you that,” he grunted and slammed his mouth against mine.

Our teeth clashed, and his tongue greedily took mine. Needing some of my power back, I nipped at his bottom lip. He sucked in a deep breath, stealing my own.

“You always have control over me, *Mo Cuishle*.” He broke our kiss and pressed his sweaty forehead against mine. “You are the only thing that could break me. It’s in your name. You are my pulse, my heartbeat. You could destroy me.” He slowed his pace inside of me. “And I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

He tangled his hand in my hair and jerked me back. Liam leaned down and licked up my exposed throat. The room was hazy with everything I felt. My heart was going to explode.

“You are ours, Em&m. You complete our broken souls.”

Tears pricked my eyes. Liam’s hair was messy, yet his expression was relaxed, and his lips were slightly curled in an honest smile. He was a wolf disguised in sheep’s clothing, but it wasn’t to only hide the savage parts of him. It was to cloak the broken pieces that held his guilt and need to change.

Connor’s desperate and needy stare pulled at the string that tethered us together. His snarls and bites were real, because if anyone got close to him, they would see his self-loathing. I had crawled under their disguises and didn’t want to be anywhere else.

Fate and bad luck were my shields, because if I admitted that I had a part to play in my shortcomings, it would destroy me. I couldn’t control everything, and sometimes the cards dealt to me were traumatic, but I could master my reactions. Create a ripple that could change my life moving forward.

Luck was a bitch, but my destiny was always meant to end here.

Liam nudged me forward, making my chest press against Connor's. He fell back onto the bed, making my hair cascade around him. Thick lube slid between my cheeks and down to where Connor remained buried inside me.

"I'm going to start with a toy," Liam murmured.

"I didn't bring any small toys," Connor interjects, pushing my hair to one side.

"Why the fuck would it matter what you brought?" Liam snapped, rubbing the tip of the toy around the rim of my hole.

"You're telling me sex toys organize well in your perfectly put-together drawers?"

Liam scoffed and then slowly inserted the object into my ass. "You tell him, Em&m. How does my toy feel inside you?"

"Oh shit," I groaned as the burn slowly morphed into pleasure.

"Use your words," Liam rasped.

"Shit is a word." I chuckled, and he pushed it deeper into me, stretching me faster as punishment. "Good. Damn, I can't wait to feel you both pumping into me."

Connor's chest bounced as he laughed, moving his dick, which was still fully seated inside me. He remained still, watching my expression as I muttered unintelligible curses. The movement of the toy pumping into me made my holes feel like one. It was a stinging stretch that was transforming into pure euphoria. The thought that they would both fuck me, and the pleasure would meld together like that, was incredible.

Connor started pushing his hips up, sliding my breasts up and down his hard chest. His thrusts were steady and patient while I came undone, sucking in air as if there was an oxygen shortage.

Liam slowly pulled the toy out of my tight hole, then asked, "You want my dick inside you, Em&m?"

I groaned and pushed back, desperate for him to fill me. *Yes! I want it.*

“Say it,” Liam commanded.

Heat raced through me, and I dug my nails into Connor’s shoulders. He hissed in a sharp breath, but his dark stare, filled with desire, told me he liked it.

“Yes, fuck me, Liam,” I pleaded, forgetting I’d ever had control of our little scene. These men *fucking* owned me.

“You want me to fuck you here?” he asked as he pressed the tip of his cock against my pussy, pushing up against Connor.

A sharp sting made me shriek, but the thought of having them both in my pussy excited me. However, I didn’t know how I could take that.

“My ass. Fuck my ass,” I hissed through my teeth.

“One day, we will stretch that slutty little pussy out,” Connor told me, wrapping his arm around my back to press me harder against him.

My movements were restricted while Liam slid his head back to the other hole. He pushed his girth against my ass, waiting for me to open up for him. My muscles slowly relaxed, and the tip of him popped inside me.

Oh, yes!

I had it all: the burn, the stretch, the pleasure, and cursed unintelligible words, begging for more. Connor groaned beneath me, and Liam hissed in a quick breath. I sent a mental thanks to the universe for being placed in this position. My muscles quivered, and my limbs were limp as Liam inched into me.

Summoning all my strength, I craned my head to look over my shoulder. Liam stood tall and proud, perfectly positioned to fuck me. His long legs were between Connor’s spread thighs. He winked at me as he sunk all the way in.

”*Fuck*, I need to move,” Connor grunted between clenched teeth.

His chest rose and fell rapidly as he started to come apart. My ass spread apart as he gripped my cheeks to stretch me open for Liam. Static filled my ears as Liam pushed balls-deep into me, and Connor pounded me from beneath. He lifted me a little so he could feverishly impale me. The bed creaked from our weight.

When they started to alternate thrusts, an orgasm overtook me. My back arched, and I pushed back on them. They changed pace, slamming into me at the same time.

“Yes!” I screamed, clawing up Connor’s shoulders.

Warmth shot through my bloodstream, warming every part of me. My throat dried from my heavy pants. Liam yanked me off Connor, lifting me in the air and pressing my back against his chest. His fingers curled underneath my thighs, shoving them against my stomach. My asshole stretched wide in this position, but I needed more, even with my two orgasms. Connor rose to his knees on the bed, stroking his wet dick. My pussy ached for him to fill me again. He bent his knees and shoved inside me with a fast thrust.

“That’s my good girl, take us,” he snarled and bit my lip.

Liam gripped me harder, and I pulled away from Connor, then twisted my head back. His teeth grazed my lips as he hurriedly kissed me. Lifted in the air, like I was their puppet, they bounced me on their cocks. My clit slid across Connor’s pelvis, and my head fell to the side, overcome with sensations. Their bodies sandwiched me in, and their moans were primal.

“My dirty little whore is going to come again,” Liam panted.

My breasts bounced and slapped against my sweat-slicked skin.

“I want to feel your legs shake,” Connor ordered between his heavy breaths.

Liam kissed my neck like I was the only thing he ever wanted to taste. My snarling wolf stared at me like I was the only thing that mattered. Heat slowly billowed in my core, and my muscles tightened.

“There it is. Come on, baby,” Connor groaned.

“Give us what we want,” Liam breathed into my ear.

I shuddered, feeling my climax build. Connor let go of one of my ass cheeks and strummed my clit. My head slammed back, and my legs stiffened as my orgasm swallowed me. Heat swirled around me, and I cried out. My muscles tightened around my guys’ cocks.

Holy fucking shit!

Chapter 24

Connor

My balls hurt. They were passing the shade of blue and going straight to dark purple. Emily lay sprawled out on the bed between us, and all I wanted to do was jerk off to her naked body. Fuck, that USB with Liam and Emily's porno would do. I wonder what they filmed. Liam didn't seem to mind being deprived because he was smiling like a schoolboy, watching her.

"You didn't have those piercings in high school," I announced, trying to kill my hard-on. "They got a little too close for comfort."

"What?" His face fell as his brows pulled together.

"I could, you know, feel them," I told him, shrugging.

He chuckled, rubbing his fingers over her shoulder. My dick lost a little of the throbbing blood flow but not enough to not want to fuck her while she slept. That was a tempting thought.

"Think she will stay, brother?" he asked, desperation and fear lacing his tone.

My chest squeezed, and my mouth fell open and then closed. I wanted to forget about our earlier conversation, but I couldn't.

"No." My face fell, and the gentle squeeze in my chest turned into a deadly grip. "She can't handle this lifestyle for long."

"You will chase after her, right? Like you say you will?" He looked up at me with hope in his eyes.

I lingered on that question longer than I should have. My impulsive side was screaming at the top of its lungs, *yes*. She wouldn't make it down the block before that side of me would chase after her and drag her back, kicking and screaming. But, when I died, I think a sliver of him did as well.

“I can’t put her through the life I always wanted to run away from,” I replied, making nails hammer through my heart.

“Then we will run with her,” he replied with finality.

My lip twitched in an involuntary snarl at that. He’d run for her, but not for me all those years ago. My past haunted me, and my need to let it go and leave it in the past was crippling. It was wearing down the defenses I was trying to build to continue on.

“If we run with her, she would be in danger. Dad would never let us live in peace. And before you say some shit about killing him”—I glared at him—“just don’t. Your loyalty would never let you do that. No matter how much you resented him. It’s not in your nature, even if you want it to be.”

I wanted it to be true. That he would end our father’s life. Every fiber of my being and inch of my soul craved it. Liam looked down, and his face scrunched as he fought back his obvious resentment of himself. I didn’t want that for him because that love and loyalty he had was what got me through. He was my shelter.

“I’m sorry,” he croaked, rolling to his back.

“Don’t be. We will help her defeat her demons, then let her decide what she wants. Taking down our uncle will help heal her, and maybe, just maybe, it will help you build strength for us to end it with Dad.”

It was hopeful thinking, but it was my desperate plea. With time, I hoped my brother would come around, and when that day happened, I would hunt her down.

“How about this one?” Emily asked, stepping out of the closet.

Her long legs were exposed from a high slit that ran to her hip. If she made one wrong move, her sweet pussy would be exposed. For our home, it was perfect, but not for my father’s. My steps toward her were slow and methodical, making her eyes widen. Taunting and stalking her like prey would be my revenge for her not letting me come.

“Turn around.” I arched my eyebrow at her and gave her a half smile, wanting her to get her hopes up.

She slowly spun, and I was forced to swallow a lump in my throat from how great she did look in the emerald-green dress. The straps were thin, and the neckline hung low. It was something I would’ve had her wear when we first met, wanting to show her off for gloating rights. But this time, I desired to put her in a cage and pound my chest like I was the king of the jungle.

When she faced forward again, I leisurely looked up and down her body. Her bare feet nervously shifted on the wooden floor, and she sucked in her lower lip.

“You look.” I grabbed her hips and yanked her flush against my body.

She stifled a squeak as she crashed into me, and I ground my hardening cock against her, yearning for her as her eyes became hooded.

“You look—” I gripped her face, making her lips push out. “Like you need to change.”

I pushed her face away from me and toward the closet. She stumbled back, shooting me a glare. It was cute how tough she thought she was now.

“Let me watch you undress again,” I ordered.

She rolled her eyes as she tried to hide her smile and pulled the spaghetti straps down.

“I thought you would have had enough of suffering from blue balls from last night,” she sassed, smirking.

“I’m good. I jerked off on Liam’s pillow as I thought about you bouncing on my cock.” I winked.

“What the fuck?” Liam snarled in the doorway.

“Busted.” Emily snickered under her breath.

Her smile lit up her face, and her skin glowed as she walked back into the closet. The lace black underwear she wore

pushed into her ass, tempting me to bend her over to leave teeth marks.

“I don’t see cum on my pillow,” Liam interjected, obviously too preoccupied to notice how utterly beautiful Emily was right now.

“I’m not cold-hearted enough to leave it as it was.” I craned my head over my shoulder to shoot him a toothy smile. “I turned the pillow around, so your face wasn’t on the spot.”

His face went red, and his fists clenched. I was kidding, but he didn’t need to know that. I’d jerked off in the shower. Liam snatched the pillow up and flipped it around. His brows furrowed as he snarled, realizing I was fucking with him. I wouldn’t be a good brother if I didn’t piss him off from time to time.

“Pick a color, at least,” Emily called out from inside the closet.

“Black.”

“Blue,” Liam said at the same time as me.

“Black to match my outfit,” I yelled, glaring at Liam.

“Blue compliments your eyes.”

“Black will make you blend in more with the others,” I added.

Liam smirked at me, and a glint flashed in his eyes, as if he was going to piss me off for fun.

“The blue is less provocative, and I want to keep prying eyes off what belongs to us,” Liam announced.

Checkmate.

Chapter 25

Liam

I tossed my pillowcase into the hamper for the sake of it and returned to the room just as Emily walked out of the closet. My heart hammered in my chest as I drank her in. Her long black curls ran alongside her breasts, which were perfectly exposed. The dark sea blue brought out the flecks of color in her gray eyes. She looked between us, and her cheeks blushed a beautiful light shade of pink.

“Perfect,” Connor rasped. “Now turn around.”

She scoffed but slowly spun. Her curves and demeanor would make a priest sway from his vows. She was my temptress, even without showing a lot of skin.

“I have something I would like to show you,” I said, drinking her in.

She smiled as I extended my hand. Connor grumbled something under his breath, but he didn’t stop me from leading her away. We only had a couple hours before we had to be at our father’s house for dinner, and I had a gut-wrenching feeling she would want to leave after that. Maybe this would show her that staying with us would be more than sex trafficking? I would hide that part from her forever to keep her here longer. It wasn’t something I’d ever been ashamed of before her.

“Where are we going?” she asked as I tugged her into the hallway.

“You’ll see,” I replied, pulling her across the living room to where I wanted her.

We came to the closed door of the room I’d set up for her. She looked up at me, biting the inside of her lips. Flutters filled my stomach, and I held my breath from nerves. What if I’d purchased all the wrong things?

Not wanting to take another moment thinking about it, I turned the knob and pushed. The smell of the canvases rushed

out of the room. Her gasp bounced off the empty wall and hardwood floor, with the clear tarp neatly laid under the tall easel.

“I can change things around if you would like it different, and if I didn’t—”

“It’s perfect,” she interrupted, placing her palm on my arm.

I’d left the walls bare for her so she could do as she pleased with her space. Once we’d gotten rid of Cormac, I knew we would be returning to Connor’s. A room there would be made into a studio as well. She ran her hand over the shelves that housed the different types of charcoal, all perfectly organized.

“In the drawers are drawing pads and random things the associate at the art store recommended,” I informed her, shifting on my feet.

“You went and picked all of this up?” She looked back at me with wide eyes.

“I got most of it the day Connor let you go,” I confessed.

Her lips curled up, and her eyes shone. I looked away from her to hide the blood racing to my face. My cheeks were warm, and I didn’t want her to see my shyness. I’d never given anyone besides my brother a gift before. I exhaled a breath and walked across the room.

“It’s perfect,” she said from behind me.

I nodded and then spun around.

“Do you really want to leave?” I asked impulsively.

My heart rate spiked upon seeing her shocked expression. Her mouth parted, but she didn’t shake her head to refute my question. I wanted to play with her mind and make her think she was choosing to stay here. It wouldn’t be that hard. A lump in my throat formed, stopping me from doing just that.

“The thought of leaving you guys doesn’t sit right with me. But seeing you guys capture women and sell them off like you were going to do to me would kill off parts of me.” She shifted on her feet. “I chose to return to you guys, so I won’t just leave. Just give me time to make my choice or adapt. Okay?”

I slowly nodded, not wanting to try to trick her and play games. That was all I knew, and acting against my nature tormented me.

“At my dad’s today, don’t leave our sides, and make sure to say as little as possible,” I told her, resorting to a plan to keep my mind at bay.

“I won’t leave your side. Promise,” she replied with a strained smile.

My heart leaped and galloped but then quickly froze over, remembering we were only talking about tonight.

She spent the next hour rearranging her art room to how she wanted it, and I had to bite my lip to not control the order. Some of the drawers weren’t aligned perfectly next to each other. Oddly, it didn’t flood me with anxiety like it normally would. It was her space, and I wanted her to organize it how she saw fit. Connor popped into the room from time to time, probably to make sure I hadn’t bent her over the drawers to fuck her without him. *Horny bastard.*

“We should get ready to leave,” I told her, checking the time on my phone.

“Can I get some clips to mount to the wall to hang my art on the walls?”

“Yes. I’ll give you a computer to order whatever you need,” I answered, hoping that gifts could convince her stay. Even if that meant holes in my walls.

I extended my hand, and she placed hers in mine. We walked into my kitchen, where Connor had his dirty hatchet on my counter. My chest tightened, and I narrowed my eyes at him.

“Take that thing off my counter,” I snapped.

“It’s clean...ish.” He shrugged, pulling it off.

I released Emily’s hand and grabbed the cleaner to wipe down the counter as Connor moved away.

“Do we have our story down for how Emily got taken?” I asked, scrubbing the counter.

“Yes, I strayed too far from you while we were on the street, and someone grabbed me,” she answered.

“Good, everything else will stay the same. Fewer lies mean fewer holes and chances to be caught,” I advised, as I put the paper towel I used in the trash and the cleaner back under the sink.

“Why are you bringing your hatchet?” Emily asked, quirking her eyebrow up.

“Never know when you may need to chop down a tree.” Connor shrugged, with an evil glint in his eyes.

Emily let out a few cute belly laughs, appeasing Connor and making him smile.

“We should get going,” I interjected, killing the room’s mood.

Connor threw his arm around Emily’s shoulder and pulled her in close. I followed behind them, grabbing the truck keys. It was going to be a long night.

We pulled into the cobblestone drive, and the music cut off, leaving the cab eerily silent. Luxury cars and trucks lined the drive. Robert, our butler, stood in the doorway, propping it open, waiting to greet whoever came in. A few bikes roared in beside us, the riders wearing Kings of Rapture cuts. I cocked my eyebrow up at them behind my tinted window. Usually, they didn’t partake in meetings like this, so for them to be here meant my father had widened his reach. The Raptures usually only handled our money shipments or gun deliveries on the west coast.

“Ready?” I asked.

“Born ready,” Connor chimed.

“Let’s get this over with already,” Emily murmured.

I pushed the door open and hopped out to get Em&m’s door, bracing myself to call her Penny for the rest of the night. Cormac and his mole may know her real name, but I still didn’t want my father to have it.

“After you, Penny.” I smiled, holding out my palm to help her down.

Her soft hand grasped mine as she slid down from the cab. The clink of her heels reverberated off the driveway, breaking the night’s silence. When Connor came around, we simultaneously inhaled a deep breath of air, gathering strength. Together, we made our way in.

“Hey, scroogey,” Connor greeted Robert.

“Good evening, sir,” he replied curtly.

“A good evening would be if we weren’t here.” Connor threw his hands into the air and did a twirl as we stepped inside. “*Oh, so good to be home.*”

“You haven’t lost one bit of your charm,” our second cousin, Jeremy, chimed as he walked into the foyer.

“And you still have a mullet,” Connor retorted.

“The ladies love it.” Jeremy’s eyes leisurely coasted up and down Emily’s body.

Connor glared at Jeremy, and I pulled her close, narrowing my eyes.

“Got it. Girl with the haunting stare is off limits. Shame. I bet she looks good with her mouth wrapped around—”

A whoosh of air expelled from his lungs as Connor punched him in the gut.

“What was that?” Connor growled, leaning his ear closer to Jeremy’s mouth.

“Off limits. Got it,” he wheezed with his thumb sticking up in the air.

Emily shrugged and placed her hand on Connor’s back to lead us inside the dining room.

“Who was that?” she whispered.

“That’s Jeremy, our second cousin. He mostly works in Ireland for our overseas shipments,” I answered quietly, not wanting the others to hear our conversation.

The table was extended to seat roughly thirty, and most seats were already filled with employees and partners. My head cocked as I saw Claire, my manager, and Agent Broad sitting side by side. He had been at my porn studio the day of the raid and then disappeared. Claire gave me a tight smile, and I returned it, not understanding why she was here. Was there more that I didn't know? And why was a fed here?

I pulled a chair out for Emily, choosing to sit across from the Kings of Rapture bikers. Their patches read Colorado Chapter, which made a little more sense since the others were mainly in California.

"You are a little far from home," Connor blurted.

He was never the one for guessing games or wanting to be left in the dark about anything. I examined their cuts more to see Prez. 8-Ball stitched to one vest and VP. Crow on the other. At least I didn't need to ask their names. They all came with name tags.

"A day and a half ride," Crow replied, pulling his long black hair from his face. Various inked crows lined his arms, making his road name unsurprising.

"Could have made it faster if we didn't need so many naps," Prez grumbled, rubbing his hand through his white beard.

"Not my fault that I wasn't expecting a long ride to a rat-infested city," Crow snapped in a low voice.

"And Agent Bro-ski didn't think I would see you around here," Connor taunted.

"I have worked with you for over ten years," he snapped, anger flashing in his eyes.

"You have worked *for* us, Bro-ski." Connor laughed.

Agent Broad's lip lifted, but he remained silent.

Emily chuckled and pulled her glass of water to her lips, trying to hide it. I placed my hand on her thigh under the table, and Connor's knuckles rubbed against mine as he did the same to her other thigh.

“Oh, I bet that is fun.” Crow smirked, noticing the exchange.

“Very,” Emily proudly announced, shooting Connor and me a sexy glare.

My chest tightened, and I snatched my hand away. We wanted it to be known she was ours, but too much of a display could make her seem like our weakness. Which she was.

Jeremy pulled up a seat next to the Rapture bikers and gave us a cocky smile. Soon, the table filled with everyone but my father. Everyone was quiet, and the suspense of the night filled the air, leaving a bitter taste.

“I guess I don’t need to introduce you to Santa 8-ball and Gothic Crow man. They have name tags,” Connor said under his breath to Emily, making her choke on her water.

I narrowed my stare, fueling him on.

“We should have stickers that say, *Hello, My Name Is*. Your name would be Buzz Kill,” he blurted for everyone to hear.

“That’s not true,” Claire chimed. “You are such a spoiled brat.”

“Why are you even here?” Connor replied to my manager but didn’t give her a second glance.

“Connor, your name tag would say, Least Favorite,” Jeremy inserted, confidently raising his brows and beer.

Connor clutched his steak knife, then the door to the kitchen flew open. My father sauntered in, stealing everyone’s attention but Connor’s. I cleared my throat, needing him to snap back into reality. Emily placed her hand over his and rubbed her thumb over his. Arthur scanned the room until his gaze struck ours. The corner of his lip curled up in a victorious grin.

“Aren’t we lucky to have a perfect Penny at our table tonight?” he chided through clenched teeth.

Chapter 26

Perfect Penny

The smell of dinner lingered in the air, casting an illusion of warmth. It slithered its way into my throat, smothering me from the inside. Arthur's glare cut through me and remained steady for a few too many appalling moments.

"Aren't we lucky to have a perfect Penny at our dinner table?" he taunted.

I forced down a gulp of the bile that was burning my throat. He would never accept me as anything but a quick buck. A pawn to be fucked, then moved in his chess game.

"Well, then." Arthur clapped his hands and pulled out his chair with an ear-piercing screech. Wood against wood, splintering with reluctance. "We have matters to discuss. Robert, have the food brought in," he said with an arrogant wave of his hand.

Connor pulled his hand away from my hold. The absence of our connection sent a chill down my spine. Was he going to isolate me in front of his father? My heart rate spiked, and I clung to the knife he'd left behind. Making sure no one was watching, I slid it off the table and placed it on my lap.

"We have a rat," Arthur announced as the dinner plates covered with silver cloches were set down.

He pulled the top off his dish, revealing a decadent fillet paired with fingerling potatoes. My hand hovered over my lid, watching as Arthur's eyes darkened and gleamed with a menacing flicker. Everyone uncovered their meals, sending a ripple of either gasps or growls of annoyance. A dead rat lay on everyone's plates.

Their bulging eyes stared up at the dinner party. Grasping the handle, I quickly revealed what Arthur had prepared for me. A foul stench of rotting decay hit me in the face. Bile surged from my stomach and filled my mouth, making my eyes water. A brand of a penny was burned into the vermin's

flesh, leaving the coat charred and raw as if it'd been done moments ago.

Liam grasped my thigh and tried to rub soothing circles into my numb skin.

"I think we found the rats," Connor murmured under his breath, making his dad send a hateful glare his way.

"This is no game. And this is no joke," he seethed. "At least one of you in this room has betrayed me." He glared at the Kings of Raptures first, then Jeremy, and then the next. "Until someone confesses, we will not be leaving this room."

His chest rose and fell as if he'd been holding his breath for days. All for this moment. I fought the need to slink away as his expression continued to morph. The blood in his body inched its way up his neck and face, turning his cheeks a dark shade of red. He was a bomb, ready to explode. Connor's anger was nothing compared to what Arthur was about to unleash.

The room remained silent until a loud *BANG* rang out. Arthur had shot to his feet. His chair had crashed to the floor. With one solid movement, he jerked a gun from his pocket.

"No one has anything to say?" he roared.

I glanced at Liam. He ground his jaw, and his fist was clenching and unclenching. My muscles tensed, and my lungs screamed with my held breath. Arthur's eyes were frantically looking around. Paranoia had fully taken root. His steps pounded on the floor one by one as he made his way around the table. *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

"Anyone?" he remarked, waving his gun in the air.

The barrel momentarily aimed my way, and with a blink, it was on to another. Connor's knuckles went white as he squeezed the table, trying to withhold his rage. He couldn't lash out. The thought of losing him sliced through me. I wrapped my arm around his and pulled him close, hoping my touch would calm him.

"Let's play a game then," Arthur chimed. "You will all know it." He grinned, showing his perfectly aligned white

teeth. “Duck.” He jammed the barrel of the gun to the back of Jeremy’s head. “Duck.” He moved to the next person, doing the same and smiling maliciously. My pulse thudded in my ears. “Duck.” He pressed harder, pushing a man with red hair down to the rat. The man’s hands trembled, and his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed.

Arthur yanked his gun back and stepped to the next person. A man who had to be in his late fifties. The cynical chuckle that left Arthur’s mouth turned my stomach.

“Rat,” he roared.

BANG.

Blood splattered over the table and covered Arthur’s black jacket. Gasps rang out, and my breath hitched. Tears pricked my eyes as the old man with a hole in his head plopped down with a thud. The rat lay on the silver platter next to his open, vacant eyes.

“Has any new information come to light?” Arthur asked as he pulled a cloth napkin from under the dead man’s arm. “The game can come to an end if someone comes forward.” He wiped the linen over his face, smearing some of the blood into his skin.

The room remained silent. He slowly shook his head and tsked as he moved to the right. “Duck.”

My heart rate spiked as he made it across from me. “Duck.” He rubbed the barrel along the head of someone with pale blonde hair. “Anderson, you have been such a good transporter for me. You had to have seen something,” Arthur stated.

“No, sir. I know nothing,” he replied, not showing an ounce of fear on his face.

“Hmm.” Arthur rolled his eyes, boredom now shielding his manic behaviors.

He stepped to the side, grinning as his gun pushed against Jeremy’s head. Jeremy remained stoic, but I watched as his hand trembled slightly on the table.

BANG.

Fragments of his skull and crimson blood sprayed across the table, covering my face. Jeremy's lifeless expression stared back at me, and he fell forward with a thump. I slammed my eyelids shut, unable to take another moment. Both of my men placed their hands on my thighs, becoming the only thing that held my screams at bay.

"Father, a word in the kitchen," Liam announced.

My lungs ached as I tried to hold back my frantic breaths. I pried my eyelids open to see Connor looking forward with a dark glare. One with more hate than his father's.

"I only need a moment of your time," Liam persisted.

Arthur spun on his heels and quickly strode toward the kitchen. "Penny and Connor will come with you."

My mouth fell open, and I hesitantly looked between my wolves. Connor was snarling while Liam was fully composed. Liam stood and carefully held a palm out to help me up. My hand robotically clasped in his, and my knees creaked as I stood. Connor shot back, and his chair slid across the room, crashing into the wall.

"Now isn't the time to let your emotions get the best of you," Liam muttered under his breath to his twin.

"Well then, you first, brother," Connor chimed, waving to the door.

I walked between them, feeling a wave of heaviness press down on me. There were only a few things I needed to say. I could do this. *It wasn't like I was walking into a room with someone plagued with paranoia.* A silent, cynical chuckle left me, and my eyes rolled.

We entered the kitchen to see Robert, the butler, carefully putting pans away and Arthur pacing.

"Tell me, Penny. How did Cormac look? Was he bruised up? Was he healthy?" The look in his eyes belied desperation, and my heart sank, not in fear but in pity. Pain hid behind his dark brown eyes, just like his sons. His breath was heavy, and I wanted so badly to know what had happened to make him

who he was. The man that raised, tortured, and groomed my wolves.

“He seemed healthy and just hell-bent on revenge,” I answered him, making sure my eye contact didn’t falter.

“How did he even get to you?” he asked.

Connor stiffened beside me, and I carefully stepped forward to show my willingness to continue the conversation. We knew a line of questioning was coming. I didn’t need two Kilbanes blinded by their rage.

“I strayed too far from Liam when we were outside, and he grabbed me off the street. It was fast,” I stated, like I was relaying true facts.

“I shouldn’t have let that happen. But I have a plan,” Liam interjected and then looked at Robert. “You can go.”

The butler wiped his hands on a kitchen towel and strode out of the room, not looking back. When the door clicked closed, Liam brought his attention back to his father.

“We need to lay a trap. Tell them the girls are going to be moved somewhere and be ready for them to intercept,” Liam explained, holding his father’s attention.

“He just shot people in there. If the rat is still alive there, he will know it’s a trap,” Connor grumbled.

I looked between the twins and then at Arthur. He cast a scornful gaze over at me like I was a piece of gum on his shoe.

“She needs to get the fuck out,” Arthur snapped.

“No. She’s with us.” Connor stepped forward, blocking me from his dad’s line of sight.

Tension filled the air, and I took deep breaths in and out through my nose, not wanting to taste the foul energy.

“This is priceless. The captive is now the captor.” Arthur placed his hand on the counter as he laughed. “Both of you are so whipped you have forgotten who you are. And you...” He seethed, pointing his finger at me. “Are you ready to help them kidnap pieces of trash like you?”

Connor lunged forward, just to be yanked back by Liam.

“Stop,” Liam ordered through gritted teeth.

Connor’s face was red, and his veins bulged in his neck. Arthur stepped forward until he was only inches from his son’s forehead.

“Look at how upset you are over a few lousy insults. It’s pathetic. I need my sons to be focused. I can’t trust anyone else.” He turned around as if bored of the situation.

My heart rate spiked, and my own anger bloomed in my chest, threatening to claw its way out. The need to lash out thrummed under my skin. I uncurled my clenched fists and stretched my cramping fingers.

“The need for something or someone to heal whatever is dead inside is crippling you. One day, it will hit you.” I glared at him, not backing down. “I’ll wait in the dining room with the corpses,” I exclaimed, standing tall and not letting anger and fear control me.

I heard his dramatic scoff when I spun around and left the room. Connor really *was* like him.

Chapter 27

Connor

“We have found the rat,” my father announced as he stepped over the pooling puddles of blood. “But we must act now. We got word he wants to take a hit on us tomorrow, using the feds.”

No shit, Sherlock. You’d put them all over the table.

Heat radiated off Emily as I stood behind her chair. I leaned in closer, needing her warmth to fill the vast emptiness where my soul used to be. She was filling me with life, but being in this house reminded me of who I was and who she was. The captor and the captive.

“In two hours, we will move the girls I have kept here to a new location. A warehouse in the Bronx,” my father continued with the plan Liam put together as if it were his own.

It wasn’t a bad idea, but it was dangerous. I had a strong feeling that Emily would fight to come with us. Her stubborn, fearless nature was hot as sin, but I would never let that happen.

“Come with me to my office, and we will continue the plan,” he commanded as he left the dining room without looking back.

“Don’t move, *Mo Cuishle*,” I whispered in her ear.

Liam waited behind, but I knew he would have to follow after them shortly. He was the mastermind, after all.

“Penny, we have to leave here soon. I want you to take the truck home,” I whispered.

She spun around in her seat, slamming her palm down on the back of the chair as she stared up at me. Her gray eyes were lit with determination.

“Don’t start.” I bent over to get my face closer to hers.

She looked away, blinking up at Liam with big doe eyes. This time, she was trying to play games and turn us against

each other.

“Please,” Liam implored.

My lip twitched, and I watched as her chest rose and fell.

“No. We are stronger together,” she pressed.

“I can’t go into a planned attack, knowing you are there and unsafe,” he continued.

“How will you know I am safe if I’m not with you, especially if I have to drive alone back to your house?” she snapped, standing to her feet.

“It is my turn for a plan.” I grinned, bending over and swooping her up and over my shoulder.

“Connor, knock it off and set me down,” she commanded.

My healing ribs ached and screamed in agony, but I continued on my path. I climbed the stairs with her dangling over my arm like the toy she used to be. Liam’s steps followed behind me. When I reached the top, I walked down the hall and kicked open the door to the room that had started it all. She slid off me as I bent over, and she plopped onto my bed. I sucked in a heavy breath and released it.

“This is my childhood room,” I announced, waving my hand around.

“Your room?” She looked around.

I knew she was looking for answers about my past, but the room was dull. Lifeless. Over the years, things had been stripped from it. Taken from me. When I left, the only thing I had remaining was a bottle of whiskey and my guitar hidden in the floorboards. Now, I returned with no whiskey and someone who healed me more than I could ever understand.

“I love you, Emily,” I told her, searching her eyes. Her mouth parted, and she sucked in a breath. “And I hope you can forgive me for this, but this is the safest place for you.”

She rose to her feet, not understanding what I was going to do.

I looked over at Liam, making sure he understood my plan. He took Emily's hand and kissed it while I slowly walked backwards toward the door. The moment his lips left her, we raced to make our exit.

"Don't you dare!" she screamed, chasing after us.

The wood slammed closed with a bang, and I twisted the lock my father had installed outside, trapping her inside.

"Damnit," she wailed, pounding on the door like she would be trapped there for days, not hours.

"Forgive me," I whispered, placing my palm on the solid oak before I left to put an end to my uncle.

The box truck shook as we hit a pothole. Rain pelted against the window, obscuring the view of the Bronx. Graffiti was sprayed on buildings, and we passed a burnt out, boarded-up apartment complex. *Good riddance*. I bet it was a piece of shit.

My father sat in the driver's seat like a proud king. I scoffed, rolling my eyes to the back of my head. The higher the totem pole he saw himself on, the higher the fall. It would be fun to watch him hit the ground with a *splat*.

Liam was glued to his phone, ensuring the vehicles behind and ahead of us stayed close. I could almost hear the gears in his head clicking as he made sure everything was perfectly in place. Everything that needed to happen was surely typed out in his head in an unimaginative Times New Roman font, anticipating check marks to signify completion.

A scream echoed in the back of the truck, cutting through the road noise. Arthur snapped his head over to glare at Liam.

"You said they wouldn't actually be in here," he seethed.

The cat had been let out of the bag. Someone had escaped their gag.

"If we didn't have them and faked it that much, we wouldn't be trapping anyone," Liam replied, returning his glare.

I bit my lip to hide my chuckle. Dad had ignored the preparation so much that he'd missed thirty girls being loaded into a box truck. His reign would quickly be coming to an end if he remained this short-sighted.

"We could lose it all." My father's knuckles lost all blood flow as he clenched the steering wheel.

"That is going to happen, no matter what. Flushing them out now would give us control."

"Impulsiveness?" He grimaced. "This plan reeks of something your brother concocted."

"Fuck off," I muttered under my breath, unable to put up with him.

I grabbed my hatchet off the small bench seat I was sitting on, needing to feel its weight. The muscles in my legs were cramping. The small space was made for someone with shorter legs.

"It's a good plan. The other times the girls were taken, we didn't know it. Cormac had the element of surprise. He won't have it this time," Liam methodically explained.

"*Fuck!*" my father roared, smacking the dashboard. "I'll kill both of you if we lose any product tonight."

I was starting to recognize the emptiness in his threats. He was backed into a corner and flopped around like a caught fish.

We turned onto the street where our cargo was loaded. Once it had been packed up, it never returned with the same captain. It was the only position that received payment with a bullet to the head.

The Bronx River was our port, and it was in an area surrounded by other shipping facilities. Box trucks lined the streets, and it was always under construction. Eager businesses wanting to expand into New York were constantly trying to build here, but very few succeeded. If you weren't willing to get your hands dirty, it would quickly come to an end. Someone would run you out one way or another. It was a coin flip. Either building fees slammed you with debt, or a crime

syndicate would send you scurrying back to your cushioned life.

“So far, so clear. I assume we will actually load the fucking girls now. Who will be on the ship with them?” my father asked, keeping his eyes peeled.

“We aren’t going to. If they don’t come, we will pretend something came up, take them back, and kill the captain,” Liam answered.

I clutched my weapon, readying myself for whatever was going to happen. As long as I got out of this box truck, I couldn’t care less what happened. The faster this went down, the better.

Arthur jerked up the gear shifter and killed the engine. He picked one of the guns from the middle console and cocked it back. Liam did the same and flung the door open.

I stepped down from the cab, stretching my legs while twirling my hatchet around. The gun I had was already in my waistband, but I was aching to hack away at someone. Preferably, Cormac. I’d stolen this revenge from Emily, and my heart sunk thinking about that. I would have to cut off a few pieces of him as a gift.

The night was silent, and the other men who had helped us hopped out of their trucks to help us unload the girls. Their expressions were hardened, knowing they were here for a job. If only they knew we were laying out a trap for one of them to be caught red-handed. My money was on the Raptures being the ones to betray us. We hadn’t worked with them long, and anyone who wore a nametag, even with a fake name, seemed cocky.

“Gregory, you watch the front,” Liam ordered one of the men. “Raptures, you get the back.”

A streetlight flickered, and I snapped my head up, scanning the rooftops. Nothing. The metal door that trapped the girls inside creaked open, and I rushed to stand guard as they were taken out. The line was cast, and the bait dangled. Now, we

had to wait to see if we caught anything good. *Here, fishy, fishy, fishy.*

“I don’t see anyone,” Arthur snapped through gritted teeth to Liam. “Let’s have the girls moved to—”

“Wait,” Liam reprimanded, cutting him off. “Take the girls to the blue shipping container.” He turned away from Dad, pointing in the direction he wanted the girls.

My nose wrinkled as I got a whiff of their odor. I turned to watch them, and for the first time, my gut sank. Their frail legs wobbled as they obeyed, not looking up so they wouldn’t accidentally catch someone’s attention. For years I’d been cold to this lifestyle. But seeing them was a sucker punch to the gut, reminding me of what Emily had gone through. *Was I regaining my soul?*

Nah, I would still let them die to save my *Mo Cuishle*. I would do that without blinking an eye. No one with a soul would do that.

“It’s awfully quiet,” I said under my breath to Liam as we led the way to the shipping container.

“They must not have had time to prepare. Maybe he isn’t quick on his feet like he used to be,” he replied.

Liam pulled out a set of keys and started to undo the lock. I swung my hatchet around, needing to do something with my energy. The metal container creaked, and I looked up, furrowing my brows. Liam pulled down on the long handle to yank the door open. It shouldn’t have made a sound by just unlocking it. At least not yet.

My heart rate spiked. Liam started to pull the door open, and I dove, tackling him to the ground. The latch was free, and the metal crashed as it opened. Gunfire erupted from inside, and I rolled to avoid the stampede of men racing out of the container.

“We caught a big one,” I yelled, jerking my gun from my waistband.

I pushed my feet against the asphalt, sliding my back against the rough surface to further my distance. My pistol

smoked as I fired off multiple rounds. Blood sprayed as my bullets slammed into a few of my target's skulls.

"Get up," Liam yelled, hauling me up by my armpit as I continued to fire off rounds.

Before the gun clicked empty, I dropped the magazine and reloaded it. Liam released me and started to fire. Using his cover, I switched out my weapon for my hatchet and dove into the battle.

"Connor, don't," Liam roared as I charged, swinging my ax across one of the men's stomachs.

Guts fell to the ground, and my lips curled up at the gore. I heard nothing but the screams of chaos. It soothed the lingering, burning need in my chest to always lash out. I only had one focus. Find Cormac. Anyone else in my way was just target practice. He needed to die, and I needed to be the one to bring him back in pieces to Emily. Mayhem was my melody, and screams were my therapy.

Chapter 28

Liam

Connor swung into the crowd ruthlessly, and I fired shots at anyone who started to aim at him. His bloodlust was reckless, but it was paying off.

“Oh, Uncle!” he yelled, blood covering his face. “Your war came to you,” he continued to taunt with a menacing grin.

Men from both sides scurried to grab cover, and I backed up just as quickly to get out of the open.

“Connor,” I yelled. “We need to find him.”

My biceps tensed from the recoil as I continued to fire. Arthur stood behind the box truck’s door, and the girls who’d survived screamed as they cowered on the ground. They covered the back of their heads and lay in fetal positions, plugging their ears.

Cormac’s men were tactical, like they were hired mercenaries. Of course, he’d purchased an army. My chest tightened as I remembered the plans I’d drafted hadn’t accounted for that. It was impulsive, but I couldn’t let the havoc destroy my carefully laid plans. The possibility of losing more than the girls loomed over me. I could feel the Grim Reaper’s cloaked figure weaving through the battle. He was rearing his scythe back, eager to reap his damned souls.

Car tires screeched around the corner, and headlights came barreling toward us.

“Connor!” I roared, needing him to retreat.

I couldn’t keep covering him. He needed to pull back. One of the men aimed a gun at Connor at the same time someone else did. I couldn’t stop both. I squeezed the trigger, shooting one of them while another rang out. My gut turned, and I snapped my gaze to see the other shooter fall to the ground. I looked around. Arthur shot his gun, covering Connor as he continued to hack at anyone within reaching distance. *Our father had saved him.*

My twin turned and ran to take cover with me. The blood of our enemies dripped from his face and clothing. He looked possessed with a lust to kill, as if Grim was his puppeteer. I picked up my pace while our father covered us to get clear.

The car abruptly stopped in the middle, roaring its engine. The windows shattered as the bullets continued to fly. Men fled out of the cab, firing with semi-automatics. We ducked behind a small metal crate. Bullets ricocheted off our barrier with dings and high-pitched whistles.

“What the fuck?” I snapped, glancing at Connor.

“That was fun. Where is our dearest uncle?” He laughed maniacally as he pulled his gun out and spun around to fire. He popped up and shot a handful of rounds.

“He has to be somewhere.” I looked around the yard.

Sweat beaded down my forehead, and my heart rate was frantic. This was all out of place. We had to take control of this. Men were dying on both sides faster than I could count.

“You go left, and I’ll go right,” Connor blurted.

“No, we shouldn’t—”

He ran off.

Split up, was what I was going to say.

My eyes rolled while I darted left, sprinting and staying as low as possible. My jeans tore, and gravel cut into my skin as I slid behind our box truck. The need to fix my clothing tormented me, but the desire to get home to my Em&m was stronger.

“Dad! Can you make it back here?” I yelled, firing off a few rounds over the hood.

He whipped his head over his shoulder, giving me a quick nod. Screams of pain from the men behind him made my ears ring. I repeatedly squeezed the trigger. We couldn’t lose ground as he maneuvered around. My father’s shoulder pressed against mine, and his breath was heavy and rapid.

“We could come up on the left flank and take out that side,” he said between pants.

“Connor is going the opposite route. We need to be able to hold his cover.” I switched out my magazine as I spoke, and my gut twisted. I only had two more clips.

“8-Ball!” my father yelled, trying to get one of the Raptures’ attention. The Prez raised his hand slightly to acknowledge us. “Cover my other son.”

My breath hitched as shock washed over me. He’d strategically ensured Connor was covered and had referred to him as his son. I watched as the Rapture switched his aim to cover my twin. Crow stood beside him, firing in the other direction, acting as his shield.

“Let’s go,” my father commanded.

We sprinted left, taking the back route to stay behind large piles of discarded debris and pulled-up cement. Dust sprayed into the air as bullets pelted into the mounds. We needed to gain an upper hand here as fast as possible. I scanned the area, searching for other ways to control the chaos.

“Let’s get on top of the container,” I yelled over the commotion, pointing to a place with a clear vantage point.

“Done, you lead. I’ll watch our backs,” my father agreed.

His willingness to stand together shone in his eyes. A bond I’d never seen. One that was never nourished. In any other situation, I would’ve thought it was a guise for a game or lesson.

We sprinted. The breeze cooled my heated skin as beads of sweat fell down my face. I couldn’t see my twin, but my heart beat with his as one, telling me he was out there and okay. Metal banged against the sidewall, and I slid my back along the shipping container. A loud click made my blood run cold. The cocking of a hammer was iconic and not easily replicated.

A haggard breath left me as I slowly turned my head toward the sound. Cormac’s stare cut through me. The long barrel of his black pistol was aimed at me. My pulse hammered in my ears as I saw the particles of gunpowder left behind from his

last shot. He held a Glock pointed right at my father in his left hand.

“*Deartháir,*” Cormac snarled, glaring at his brother. “My traitorous blood.”

Arthur’s lip lifted, and his stare darkened. We were positioned behind a crate, hiding us from the others.

“Rat,” my father muttered, stepping closer.

“Not another step or I’ll blow off either your son’s head or yours.”

My uncle had our lives in his grasp. Our fate was his to end with a light squeeze of his finger.

My blood ran cold, and my thoughts of the chaos slowed. I wanted to organize a plan to escape his clutches, but I couldn’t. All I could see and think about was my Em&m and how I didn’t say goodbye.

“You are destroying everything we have built! Does our name and legacy mean nothing to you?” Spit landed on my father’s chin as he screamed at my uncle.

Cormac thrust his gun in the air as if he was going to shoot it, making my father stumble back a few steps. His demonic laughter cut through the air.

“All of this meant nothing to me when you tried to put a bullet in my head.” For a moment, I thought I saw a tear glisten in his eye. “And you!” He snapped, frantically looking at me for a split second. “You and Connor let me go without looking back. I gave you everything growing up. Who was the person who helped you escape this prick? Hmm?”

My gut sank. *I had thought he was dead.*

“If all of this means nothing, then why try to take what belongs to me? Why would you work with pigs to rat out our competition?” my father asked.

“To torment you. To take everything away from you. This business is all you have ever cared about. You chose it over me, time and time again.” Cormac slammed his foot down on the gravel. “You’re my brother, and all I wanted was to live

peacefully with my wife.” His lips pressed together. A tear fell down his face.

“She was weak, Cormac.”

“She was the mother to your fucking sons!” he roared.

My heart stopped. Chills raced up my spine, and clouds filled my mind. I thought he’d impregnated a girl and sold her after giving birth. None of this made sense. I had met my uncle’s wife once. That was my mother?

“If she is so special. Where is she now?” Arthur chided.

“Dead from cancer. You drained my bank accounts and took everything from us.” My uncle glared at me from the corner of his eye. “Liam, if you had attempted to find me, you could have given us money. It could have saved her! But healthcare, when you don’t have a dime to your name, is a pile of shit and healthcare providers don’t give a fuck how sick you are.”

I looked beyond my uncle and father to see Connor standing like a ghost in the distance. His brows were pulled together, and his arms were limp with a gun in hand. I wanted to console the kid I saw in his eyes. He’d always wanted to know who and where our mother was when we had been young. She was right there this entire time.

“So an eye for an eye, then? You want to take what matters to me since you lost Dahlia?” my father asked.

Her name was Dahlia?

From what I knew, Cormac had fallen in love with one of his captives like I had fallen for Emily. A beacon of light lit my chest with realization. I loved Emily.

“I didn’t care about your business. I want you to feel a morsel of the pain I had felt when I lost the only thing that mattered to me,” Cormac growled.

Connor’s lip snarled as he lifted his shoulders and stalked toward us. His eyes were dark and bloodlust swirled in his features. I didn’t move, not wanting to give away my brother’s position.

“You kept our mother away from us this entire time?” Connor asked.

My breath quickened as Connor walked up beside our uncle, pointing his gun at our father.

“He did, and she begged to see both of you. Eventually, she couldn’t handle it anymore, and that is the true reason we left. Being near you but unable to see you or tell you was destroying her,” Cormac informed, his lip twitching with delight.

My blood was cold as I stared down at the weapon still pointed at me. I could feel the rage that was coming off my twin in waves. The sheer agony blinded him.

“She wasn’t your mother. When I took her, she knew all I wanted her for was a child. She’s lucky I let her live then.” My father leaned forward as he spoke, showing he wasn’t scared to die.

“I had to beg you not to kill her then,” Cormac roared.

The rage between brother and brother was so familiar but so different. I would never want my twin harmed. No matter what he did. A life without Connor by my side wasn’t a life I wanted to live. The very thought made me feel like a bullet had already pierced my chest.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Connor looked over at our uncle.

“It would have been a death sentence,” he responded, not taking his gun off his own brother.

“You going to kill me, son?” The question was robotic, but I could see regret in my father’s eyes.

The thought of things changing and not having my father made me ache. Would I beg to keep my father alive? I stood tall, not showing the war that raged inside me.

“Who would miss you?” Connor cocked his head to the side.

Me, and I don’t know why.

“Pull the trigger. Think of all the pain he has caused you. End it,” Cormac pushed.

Connor looked over at me. His stare was cold, and I could see the determination etched in his brow. I knew that look. He was decided. My shoulders slumped, but I nodded my head to give him permission. My father looked at me, and for the first time in my life, I watched a tear fall down his cheek.

“Sons, I am sor—”

BANG.

My shoulders jerked, and my eyes slammed shut as warm blood coated me. The direction of the splatter made my head spin, and I forced myself to lift my eyelids.

Thump.

Cormac’s lifeless body fell to the ground, and my twin had his gun aimed back on our father.

“We are out. Done with this fucking life,” Connor roared, walking forward to press his gun against Dad’s chest.

“What would you do?” he asked.

“None of your concern. But we are done.”

I watched the exchange, wondering if I needed to pinch myself.

“Both of you want this?” My father shifted his gaze to me, searching my eyes for sincerity.

“Yes. We do,” I answered, stepping forward to stand beside my brother.

Blood dripped down my face, and I pulled a tissue from my pocket. I dabbed at my eyes to remove the sting of hot, sticky liquid clouding my vision.

“You need to understand, I did the best I could,” Arthur explained.

We were silent, not caring what apologies he made. I didn’t want him to die, but I was ready to start my life with Emily.

“We did everything for you. Now, it is our turn to live our life how we want to,” Connor replied.

Could it be that easy?

Chapter 29

Anonymous

My phone was held in my grasp as I paced the room. Cormac never listened, which was precisely why I worked with him. His impulsivity was a mirror image of his family. The shield he created for me was worth every headache. It was my turn to sweep in and take what was mine while he waged war with his own blood.

I stormed down the steps to the basement while I used my cell to freeze the cameras in a loop to hide my identity. The files exposing the Kilbane family were uploaded to my computer, which was in my car. With just a click, the entire federal office would have their identity.

I punched in the code to the keypad to unlock the basement door and jerked the handle down. I pulled back, and the heavy wood groaned with protest. The girls and I had a relationship built on fake trust, not force, so I knew they would be happy to see me.

“Girls, it’s time you all see the—” I stopped speaking.

My heart hammered as I saw the empty space. This couldn’t be. Arthur told me they would be leaving the girls behind. I roared and spun out of the room. Did he know? He couldn’t have. Arthur’s ability to contain a secret that big was nonexistent. Just like fairy tales. Hopes and dreams of a prince coming to your rescue didn’t come true, just like our wish for Arthur to control his temper.

I raced back up the stairs, knowing I at least had one girl in this bloody house. She would come with me. It would make the twins lash out in anger and help keep my guise as I sunk their enterprise. Soon, all their business contacts would come to me, and I would sit on the throne.

That little bitch upstairs was mine.

Chapter 30

Emily

My palms were slick, and my heart hammered in my chest. I shut my eyes and took deep breaths, trying to pretend that they hadn't just locked me in Connor's room. My hands coiled in my hair, and I leaned back to look at the ceiling.

I needed to kill Cormac, or at least help. The cords of revenge were wrapped around me so tightly I could barely catch my breath. Connor and Liam helped fuel the need for this and then trapped me in a room that had no hint of them. Trying to keep myself busy, I started to yank drawers open. Dust gathered in the empty corners, making embers begin to grow in my chest.

This wasn't happening. I needed to escape. They couldn't hold me back like this, especially after everything we'd been through. I raced to the window, pulling at the ridge in hopes it would open. No budge. Were they always locked inside their rooms? Was Liam's room like this? The door was locked from the outside, and the bedroom window was sealed shut. My hair whipped around me as I looked for another way out. Nothing. My hands were trembling and dirty from the dust. The room was ghostly, as if no one had ever lived in it. It would've been a prison for a child or teenager.

My steps were loud as I stomped to the bathroom. I flipped the faucet on and placed my shaking hands under the stream.

Breathe, Emily. It is only temporary. I repeated the mantra to myself as I dried my hands off.

Part of me wanted them to *not* find Cormac. Then I could be the one to take his life from him. It was an overly confident desire, though, because I didn't even know if I could do that. The simmering rage inside me screamed that I could, so nothing else mattered. The other part of me just wanted it all to end. For Connor and Liam to rip him into shreds, piece by piece. *Jesus*. When had I become this person?

A light flicked in a small bathroom window over the toilet, and my lips twitched up. It was too small for a man to crawl through, but maybe I could. I pulled the toilet seat lid down, and the porcelain *banged* shut. My feet wobbled as I stepped up, and I bit my lip, trying to balance myself. The window slid open easily, and I punched at the screen. My knuckles burned as they crashed against the mesh. I pulled my arm back and slammed my fist against it, over and over, until the screen tumbled down.

“Take that,” I yelled.

I threw my head back and snorted in laughter. Being trapped in rooms was clearly making me lose my mind. I leaned forward and stuck my head out the window. My gut tightened, seeing the steep fall to some bushes. Lattice with a green plant climbed the walls and surrounded me. Could I get to that? It didn't matter. I was going to try.

I lifted myself up, and the metal window seal cut into my palms. The sting made me crash down, and I looked at my hands. There were deep red lines from my weight.

I could either destroy my palms and hurry or devise a new plan. I nibbled on my lip as I looked around and tried a few times to see if I could bear the pain of lifting myself up. With no luck, I jumped off the toilet and paced the bathroom. I rubbed my bruised palms, trying to think of something—anything.

If I got out, what would I even do? An exasperated sigh left me, and I went back into the bedroom to see the door wide open. I froze, and my heart rate spiked. *Someone was here.* Frantically, I looked around the room. It was empty, just like it had been.

The floor creaked as I slowly started making my way to the hall. My pulse thudded in my ears. I watched Connor and Liam drive away from the window. They couldn't be back already. *Could they?*

I pressed my lips together and tiptoed. The wood creaked, and I paused. My muscles in my legs tensed.

One step.

They had to be back if the door was open. Why else would it be open?

Another step.

This is ridiculous. I was acting crazy. Connor and Liam wouldn't lock me up somewhere I wasn't safe.

Step into the hallway.

The smell of oak and wood polish burned my nose. I looked right, and my shoulders slumped. No one was here. I expelled a sigh.

The wooden floor creaked from behind me.

I went to jerk around, but a hand with a rag was clasped over my mouth. The smell of toxins burned my nose. I screamed and thrashed, making a sweet taste touch the tip of my tongue. Bile burned my throat. My elbow made contact with the person behind me, but my limbs moved slower, as if I were swimming through a thick substance. Everything felt light, and numbness tickled my skin. I blinked rapidly, trying to clear the haze. The room spun around me, and fog raced in to cloud my vision.

Darkness surrounded me.

Chapter 31

Connor

My gun pressed against my father's chest. Blood pooled under my shoes from already killing one family member, and I felt no remorse. What was killing one more? *Nothing*. All I had to do was pull the trigger.

"Was she our mother?" I demanded.

"Yes." He didn't flinch away from my gun. After all these years, his secret was out, and I didn't think he gave a shit.

"Why couldn't you have just told us?" Liam asked softly.

"Since we are in the middle of a shit show, I'll give you the short version. She chose Cormac over me. I gave her an ultimatum out of pure desperation to keep her. If she chose him, I would raise you alone. If she chose me, I would love her until my last breath, and we would be a family." His chest rose and fell rapidly, and his brows furrowed. "I think you can figure out who she chose."

We stood in silence. I didn't know what to say. Could I even believe him?

"Did you ever regret that choice?" Liam stepped forward.

"Yes." My father's stern tone dropped, and his hands started to fidget.

I looked over at Liam, and I could see the internal war he was battling. It was similar to my own. Except, I didn't care anymore. All I wanted was my freedom. They were all dead to me.

"We have done everything you have wanted from us. Now it is our turn to live our life how we want to," I demanded.

The life I wanted away from all of this was in my grasp. I could end it now. But Liam's conflicted emotions were palpable. His heart was beating out of tune with mine. I knew he wanted out, but at what length would he let me go? Did he forgive our father even after everything?

“Put the gun down.” My father stepped forward, making the barrel press harder against him.

I scoffed. He whipped his own gun out and pointed it between my eyes.

“I didn’t have my gun out earlier because Cormac had one on Liam, too. I’m not going to shoot you. But I’m not going to cave to a threat. Put it down,” he growled.

“No. We can see who pulls the trigger first.”

“I’m not going to fucking shoot my son!” he roared.

“You’ve threatened to before. More times than I can count. What would stop you now?” I yelled back.

“If I wanted you dead, I would have killed you long ago.” His gun fell to his side as he stepped back. “You want your freedom. Take it. I’m not stopping you. Just know that women come and go. She’s not any different from the rest of them.”

“He saved you earlier from being shot,” Liam spoke up.

I whipped around to face my brother. Was he siding with him?

“I won’t chase after you, just like I never chased after or put a kill order on my own brother. He still worked beside me when I knew he was going home to the woman I loved!” His voice broke, and he quickly cleared his throat. “Whoever was coming after him had nothing to do with me. He was a rat who got scared and went to the cops.” For once, I could see the sincerity in his eyes. “Of course, I let people believe it was me. Good business.” He shrugged and looked up at the night sky. “I’m not going to stand here and say I was a good father. I wasn’t. But if you want your freedom away from me, take it. It always belonged to you.”

My mind spun in circles. I looked over at Liam as I tried to decide if I should believe our father. My twin’s features were soft, but his brows were slightly pulled together.

“Swear on our crest,” Liam announced.

It was the only thing that truly mattered to our father. I’d never understood why a family crest was sacred to him. But

my gut twisted at seeing the way his eyes shone.

“I swear it,” our father vowed, and confidence radiated off him. “But I do need one thing.”

Of course, he did. It wouldn't be that easy.

“Help me clean this fucking shit storm up so we can go home. I have blood drying in places where it shouldn't be.” He laughed and walked up to clap Liam on the back.

My eyes were wide as he walked away, showing us his back. I could have shot him right then and there. It would've been a sucker punch, but I could've. With my father's shoulders high, I think he knew his position was vulnerable.

“Do you believe him?” I muttered to my brother.

“I don't know,” he replied. “But if he does come after us, you could always kill him then.”

“You were always the logical one,” my father yelled as he turned the corner.

“Fuck you,” I scoffed before he was out of earshot.

“Let's get back to Emily.” Liam sighed and followed after our father.

I chased them, ready to finish off the men the others hadn't killed yet. My feet slid to a stop as bullets started firing around us out of nowhere. I looked up at Liam as I ran for cover, and my heart stopped. A gun fired, and blood sprayed from him. He crashed to the floor, and his face turned bright red as he screamed in pain.

My father ducked behind something and started rapidly firing at whoever had joined the fight. I shot up, getting ready to run to drag my twin to safety. A bullet pinged off the small metal container I was behind, pinning me down.

My father's eyes were frantic as I looked over at him. My pulse pounded in my ears. We were trapped.

Chapter 32

Emily

The depths of unconsciousness clung to me. My head and eyelids were heavy. When I forced my eyelids open, I was in complete darkness. The ringing in my ears slowly started to clear, and the sound of the road replaced it.

I gasped, remembering what happened, and shot up. My head banged on metal immediately, and tears from the force burned in my eyes.

“Ow,” I cried and rolled to my side in the tight space, noticing my hands and feet were bound with rope.

I grumbled, and my palm struck my face as I tried to soothe my throbbing headache. I was in the trunk of a car. Tears streamed down my face, and I pulled my knees to my chest. The road was rough, and the vibrations made me shake harder than I already was. I kept blinking to try to clear the heavy feeling of drugs.

Faint red lights lit up the space a little. I felt around, knowing there would be a latch somewhere. Something dangled from the lid, and butterflies filled me. I yanked, but nothing happened. *Come on.* I pulled again with no success and then kicked down.

“Shut up back there,” a muffled voice yelled.

“I’m going to fucking kill you!” I roared, thrashing harder.

The asshole didn’t reply, but the harder I kicked, the more I started to come to. My knees cut into the metal, and blood dripped onto the carpet below me. Fate would not take me down this way. I’d had enough of this bullshit. I bit at the rope that bound my hands, trying to fray it.

“Connor and Liam are going to find me, and they are going to hold you down as I rip you limb from limb.”

A fire ignited my soul, and I embraced it, not wanting to give in to the tears that continued to slide down my face. Under the anger, I could feel the weight in my chest. The

agonizing fear of never getting to be in the mountains away from everyone. Never seeing my wolves again.

A laugh, probably induced by the drugs lingering in my system, fell from my lips. They were going to find me, all right. I had a tracker. My laugh continued, and it must've annoyed him because jazz music started to blare from the speakers.

We continued down the road, and I continued to nibble away at the rope like a mouse. My front teeth started to ache, but I didn't give up.

Bite. Pull. Bite. Grind. Pull.

I would get free, and I would kill him when I did. My gums started to bleed, leaving behind a metallic taste. It wouldn't slow me down. The music was silenced, and a voice came over the speakers.

"They are all dead," someone boomed.

"Anything that can be traced back to us?"

"No."

"Okay. I will contact you when we get into Connecticut."

My heart rate spiked. Who was dead? Were my wolves dead? I rolled over to face the seats and pressed my ear against them. A saxophone began to play again, and the loudness of it made me shoot back. My breath became rapid, and I jolted my wrists up and placed them against the metal bar that controlled the trunk.

I started to jerk up and down, rubbing the rope against the metal. Hopefully, the road would hide my rough movements, and he wouldn't stop. A lump formed in my throat as I imagined the worst. I had to get out of here. Not knowing if he was talking about my wolves killed me.

"Who is dead?" I yelled, hoping he could hear me over the music.

I pulled the restraints back to my teeth. My tender skin burned as I bit down as far as possible and yanked back. My

jaw popped and cracked as I continued my assault. Fragments of strings stuck to my tongue, and I spit them out.

I lifted my feet as high as possible and scooted back against the edge of the trunk. Placing the rope that wrapped around my wrists between my bound feet, I slowly started to pull up. Pain radiated through my thumb as it lost blood flow. My teeth ground together, and I grunted as the binds cut into me. I exhaled and blinked away the tears in my eyes.

Ninety-nine.

I counted to get through the pain, needing my safety net to get through this. Fears of never hearing Connor play his guitar or Liam sing again plagued me. My right thumb throbbed as it shifted downward.

Eighty-two.

I jerked my feet down, forcing a sob to wrench through me. My teeth bit into my lip as I tried to stifle my crying. Blood rushed to my face.

Seventy-eight.

Time moved slowly, and I sucked in a breath. If the men I loved weren't with me anymore, it didn't matter what happened to me. I slammed my feet down, and my right thumb popped down and out of place. My eyelids slammed shut, making me see bursts of light. Pain shot through my hand as if my thumb had been torn off.

Forty-five.

My chest rapidly rose and fell, and my body trembled with agony. I lifted my hand to see the damage. I bit my lip, and my chin quivered at the sight. My thumb was dangling, and with the faint red taillights illuminating the space, I could see black and blue marks forming.

Fifteen.

I would give myself until the count of one to cry. My plan, if it worked, would only be good if the music remained loud and we were on the road. If I wanted to make it back to my

wolves, if they were alive, I needed to push on. My heart dropped with all the ifs that repeatedly played in my head.

One.

With my good fingers, I quickly unknotted my other hand and then my feet. I frantically patted down the side of the trunk until I found the cables to the passenger brake light and pulled. The area got darker, and adrenaline filled me, helping to soothe some of my throbbing pain. If I relied on luck in my life, I would wait back here, hoping a police officer would pull him over for having a taillight out. But fate was a cruel bitch. I would never wait on her.

I grabbed the longest rope, held onto it, and propped the flats of my feet against the back seat. My chest curled up, and my back pressed into the cold metal. Sweat covered my face; it felt like I was breathing recycled air.

Sucking in a large breath, I pushed my legs down. Blood rushed to my face again, and metal dug into my spine as I tried to stretch my body. Digging deep, I pushed past the pain, needing the clasp that held the seats up to break. I sucked in another breath and blew out, making spit cover my chin.

A loud *SNAP* sounded, and I shot up and forward into the cab. I dove into the backseat and got to my knees.

“What the fuck?” my kidnapper yelled.

My mouth fell open for a split second as I realized who it was, but I didn't hesitate as I lassoed Robert's throat. My mangled thumb screamed as I twisted the rope around my hands and jerked back. In any other situation, I would've laughed that the butler had done it.

The tires screeched as he flailed his arms. I leaned back as he flung and thrashed. He clutched his neck, his fingers clawing at the rope, as he tried to free himself. The car began to swerve, and I fell to my butt on the broken seat. Not letting go, I brought my hands together and held the ends with one hand.

We were going to crash. My heart rate spiked, but I didn't give up. He wheezed, and the car began to wobble harder. We

tilted left and then right. I let go and grabbed hold of the seatbelt, knowing I had no way to latch it.

I sucked in a breath as everything went upside down. My head slammed against the top of the cab. Glass shattered around me, cutting into my face and arms. I couldn't hold on, and gravity grabbed me, flailing me around like a doll.

My vision went fuzzy, and a speck of light shone in the distance. Bubbles stood inside the beam, and I smiled as she raced toward me.

Hi, baby.

Chapter 33

Liam

The engine roared as we flew down the highway, following the tracker. We had gotten home, and she was gone. My heart pounded against my sternum, and my knuckles were white as I clenched my fists. Blood dripped down my arm from the last group of men who were sent in. A bullet had grazed me; it needed stitches, but nothing mattered except for her. We were free to leave, but that meant nothing without her.

We'd barely escaped with our lives. If it wasn't for the Raptures coming from behind and taking out the men, I didn't think we would've made it.

"Do you think she ran away?" Connor finally asked, sounding defeated.

It was the elephant in the cab that we both wanted to ask for quite some time. He clutched the steering wheel, and his chest rose and fell. His stare was locked on the road, determination in his furrowed brows.

"I don't know. The door was unlocked from the outside. We still don't know who was working with Cormac," I responded, wanting to believe she wouldn't leave us like that.

We were raised to never trust women, and they've never given us a reason to believe differently. Besides her. Knowing we had a mother who could have taken us or even secretly tried to make contact with us and never had, added to my burning fear.

Connor growled and slammed down on the gas harder. We flew by cars on the road, and I hoped a cop wasn't near to pull us over. If they tried, Connor wouldn't pull over even if they got the bird out. I tugged my belt off my pants and wrapped it around my arm. The leather stretched as I synched it tight to stop the blood flow. I hissed in a breath as the sting shot through me.

“The tracker says she is four miles up,” I blurted as I quickly glanced down at my phone.

Her dot was no longer moving, and I hoped she was safe. We rounded a curve in the road, and my heart dropped. Connor sucked in a heavy breath.

No, no, no.

I looked at my phone and then back at the road, where blue and red lights flashed. From our distance, I could see the traffic cones and caution tape blocking off the area. Highway patrol surrounded a crash, and cars were being slowly led around the area.

She was stuck in the traffic. That was why her dot wasn't moving. It couldn't be her in the crash. Fate wasn't so cruel. I repeated those reassurances in my head over and over again, but they tasted bitter. My time with Emily had taught me that fate was a bitch.

“Tell me her dot has moved,” Connor snapped.

“I can't do that,” I whispered.

He cranked the wheel to the side and took us into the dirt that surrounded the highway. We flew past the slow-moving traffic. The frame and shocks groaned as we hit the bumps and holes. Connor didn't let off the gas, making the front end of the vehicle slap down on rough terrain. The truck's back end fishtailed as we hit softer sand, but our only care was getting to the scene. *It couldn't be her.*

He slammed the car into park, and dust blew around the truck as we threw our doors open. Leaping from the cab, we sprinted to the scene.

“What are you doing?” one officer demanded.

“You need to stay back,” another yelled.

We pushed up the caution tape surrounding the incident, ignoring the commands. Everything was in slow motion as I looked around, trying to find the answers we needed. Connor sprinted past me to where the paramedics were. They

surrounded someone on the ground next to the mangled car. Another set of medics ran over with a gurney.

“Sir, you need to stay back,” one of the men yelled as he noticed Connor.

“She’s mine,” he wailed, falling to his knees beside them.

I sucked in a gasp and ran to them, looking over the scene, hoping it wasn’t real.

“*No!*” Connor screamed, hovering his shaky hands over her bruised figure.

Emily lay on the ground, a brace fixed around her neck. Her eyes were swollen shut, and her limbs were limply splayed out.

“You need to get back,” a medic yelled, pushing Connor.

He started to dive forward to attack him, but I wrapped my arms around his chest to stop him.

“Stop, brother, they need to work,” I muttered as tears fell down my face.

His chest shook, and he screamed, thrashing in my arms.

“Listen, we are taking her to North Eastern Medical.” He looked at me and his brows furrowed. “Are you bleeding, sir?”

“No, it’s a costume prop,” I quickly muttered.

His mouth opened and closed before he continued, “Are either of you her spouse or family?”

“Yes,” we both lied at the same time.

“One of you can ride in the ambulance. I will be honest. Her injuries are severe. We don’t know if she will make the ride over,” he explained, looking at us with sympathy.

Connor went limp in my arms and looked back at me. His eyes were red, and wetness coated his cheeks.

“I don’t know if I can handle this,” he croaked.

“Can you drive?” I asked, trying to remain calm as my heart shattered in my chest.

He nodded and leaned into my hold.

“We will get through this. Okay?” I told him those words, but I truly didn’t know if I could be that person if she wasn’t around.

I watched as she was loaded into the ambulance, remembering the time we’d spent together. Connor was stronger and on the road to sobriety. For me, I had not only fallen in love, but rebuilt the relationship I had with my twin. She had a big part in all of that. The thought of her not making it made my stomach twist.

“You can get in,” the medic said.

I raced to the back of the ambulance to hop in. Before jumping in, something on the pavement caught my eye. A small copper reflection. I quickly swooped down, realizing what it was. A heads-up penny. I shoved it in my pocket and jumped into the back of the ambulance.

Pick up a penny, heads, I’ll have good luck.

Epilogue

Emily

“Let’s count.” A single tear fell from my face. They were all I’d ever wanted and having them by my side was worth everything I faced. Every penny tails-up on the floor that I’d picked up because I had nothing to my name. The fate that hunted me down, like I was the plague it needed to get rid of.

A river flowed beside me, and the smell of pine filled my senses. The sun’s heat felt so close, but the breeze cooled my skin, so I didn’t sweat. Bubbles was with me right now. My chest tightened, but it was filled with more love than I had ever felt. I was home.

“We should all count.”

I hummed at the sound of that. Their merciless need to hate and build walls had changed. Connor would always be impulsive, and Liam would always be calculated. What I loved about that was I would always be theirs.

“Do you need more time? You know we don’t have to do it now.” Liam stepped up, and his palm pressed against my lower back.

“We have been traveling for a year now, and this would be the place she would have wanted. She loved streams like this, and it so happens to be the place with the tallest pine trees.” I smiled and sniffled. We were also on a really tall mountain.

“Then we will count together,” Connor said, leaning against my shoulder.

When I’d woken up at the hospital with them by my side, they’d told me the good news that we were free. I hadn’t believed it. The doctors had said I was lucky to have survived. It was a first for me to hear someone say I was lucky and not want to gauge their eyeballs out.

It had been a whirlwind of emotions. We’d done it. Robert was dead. Cormac was dead, and Arthur had sworn our freedom. At first, I thought he wouldn’t let us actually be free.

But he had and continued to. We had tried to search for Hope, but even with all their connections, she was nowhere to be found. Was she a figment of my imagination? Something I'd needed to cling to in order to leave the others behind? At least the others had been found by the police before Arthur could take them back.

"On three," I breathed, holding onto Bubble's ashes.

I didn't need to count down from high numbers anymore. We traveled together, and Liam and Connor created the band they'd always wanted. Granted, they played at local bars and small festivals, but they were happier than I'd ever seen them.

"One," Connor said, looking at me like I was the only woman in the world.

"Two." Liam placed his hand on my lower back, rubbing circles with his thumb.

I took a step into the creek with my bare feet. The cold water flowed around me. It was time that she got to travel on her own. But I knew she would always be with me. My guardian angel. My good luck charm.

"Three," I croaked as tears fell down my face.

I lifted the box into the air, letting the breeze take her. Her ashes twirled in the wind and sprinkled into the bright blue creek. A sob shook my chest. It wasn't just sorrow but happiness. She danced in the water as it took her away.

Connor's and Liam's arms wrapped around mine on each side. Excited barks filled the air, and Liam's hand was yanked forward as Fate, our new dog, tried to run.

"Fate, no pulling," I told her.

Our dog's sweet face looked back at me but she continued to tug.

"Maybe tonight she won't pee in the trailer if we walk her longer," Liam muttered under his breath.

He sometimes pretended that she was too much of a mess for him. But he looked at her with so much kindness and love. He only looked at one other that way, and that was me.

“Yeah, that was our fault,” I replied, taking the leash from him.

“Mhm, and I wouldn’t change last night for anything,” Connor rasped.

He wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me against him. His hand dropped down, and his thumb outlined the scars that covered my chest. It was something he did a lot. He’d confessed to me once that he did it to remind himself of how lucky he was. Lucky to have me. At night, he and Liam both kissed and traced the outline of the scars that lined my chest and back.

The road to a happy ending wasn’t always paved with yellow bricks. Mine meandered through a few back alleys, basements, and a car wreck.

“I’ll add taking Fate out every night to my list,” Liam said, placing his hand on my back.

Liam still wanted to have everything completely organized. It made traveling in our motorhome a lot easier. Connor had picked out the largest traveling home we could possibly have bought. We talked about one day buying a house in the mountains and giving up traveling, but it didn’t seem likely to happen any time soon. We were free. Together, we could do whatever we wanted.

Connor pulled open the door to our motorhome, and Fate ran in. I unbuckled her leash and placed it on the entryway table. The guys followed our dog to the couch while I looked at our framed memories. My chest tightened, seeing a photo of Bubbles’s smiling face. I traced my finger over the copper metal frame next to it. Liam had the penny he found before getting in the ambulance that fateful night on display.

“Do we have to watch that *Vampire Diaries* show again?” Connor protested.

“We’re watching *The Originals*. We finished that show last week,” Liam replied.

Connor expelled a haggard sigh and kicked his feet up. I looked over my shoulder at my wolves, smiling. I really had

found my lucky charm.

The End.

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To Bubbles, Paisley and I miss you every day.

About Allie Stern

Allie Stern spends her days reading and writing dark and smutty romances. You can find her too close to the computer or Kindle screen because she refuses to wear her glasses.

Discovering dark romance changed her life for the better. It gave her an escape that helped mend wounds she was struggling to heal. Allie's first written words were in the journal she tucked away next to her bed to write down bad dreams. She then ventured into writing poetry on random scraps of paper.

She is an avid pet rescuer and believes that a furry companion is the best medicine. She will go red in the face begging you to adopt, not shop.

You can keep up with her latest work on [TikTok](#), [Instagram](#), [and, very inconsistently, on Facebook](#), but she's working on the last part.