

PRIMAL INSTINCTS

VOL. 4

A REVERSE HAREM LOVE STORY

NICOLE EDWARDS

NEW YORK TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR



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Volume 4

BY NICOLE EDWARDS

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**PRIMAL
INSTINCTS**

Volume 4

**NICOLE
EDWARDS**



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PRIMAL INSTINCTS

Volume 4

NICOLE EDWARDS

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BISAC: FICTION / LGBTQ

1

Monday...

Journey

WAS IT NORMAL TO FEEL LIKE AN entirely different person? As though the events of the last few days had changed you in a way that couldn't be undone?

That was how I felt after that roller coaster ride of a weekend. I wasn't sure if I attributed it to the time I spent with Hawk, Garrison, and Creed or if it was something else. Whatever it was, I was hoping the feeling stuck around for a little longer because, while it could've been a false sense of power, I liked it.

I kicked off my Monday with meetings, which I was beginning to realize was the status quo for the start of the week. Although it would've been nice to catch up on email and grab a coffee, this gave me a reprieve from having to talk to Wayne. Unfortunately, out of sight didn't necessarily mean out of mind because, for the duration of the meeting, I couldn't think of anything except Wayne's ultimatum and how I wanted to handle it. Because I'd been thoroughly distracted for the entire weekend, I hadn't given it any thought. It was a good thing, but it did little to make today easier.

Of course, when I returned to my office, Wayne was too caught up in himself to be bothered with me, relaying to Gem and Delaney the details of what he'd done over the weekend—which, based on what I overheard, involved cranberry vodka, body shots, and strippers.

A rather eventful weekend for a guy who called in sick on Friday, don't you think?

If their expressions were any indication, they were as grossed out by the story as I was imagining it, but either Wayne was clueless, or he didn't care. I was mentally raising my hand to vote for the clueless option. The guy was ridiculous.

On a positive note, he was acting as though we hadn't had words last week. Maybe he drank too much cranberry vodka to remember anything before that night.

Wishful thinking much?

As it was, pretending that nothing happened would only last so long. I was still vibrating with anxiety, the same way I had been last week whenever he was around. I just knew any second, he was going to launch a company-wide email with the footage of me flashing my boobs, or he was going to sell it to the tabloids. I guess I should be grateful he was clueless since, as I said before, if Wayne had any idea who my dads were, the choice would've been easy.

I ended the morning with a one-on-one huddle with Cheryl. She gave me a high level of her expectations for the coming week, allowing me to modify and adjust my to-do lists, both short-term and long-term. From what I gathered, my boss believed I had true potential, and she was very excited that I'd been tasked with the Reflect project because she was looking forward to seeing it roll out with me at the helm. I liked that she thought so, which didn't make me feel better about the decision I had to make.

"Have fun at lunch," she said as I was leaving her office.

Her tone was laced with something I didn't recognize. "I was gonna run down to the cafeteria. Would you like me to get you something while I'm down there?"

"Oh, no. I'm ... good," she said with a bobbing smile; one second, it was there, then it disappeared, returning instantly as though she was trying to control it.

Not sure what was going on with her face, I smiled back. "Okay, then."

I left her office, surprised and a little puzzled by all that weirdness. Cheryl was a typically happy person, but it felt a bit more so than usual.

I made my way through the building, taking the stairs down to the first floor rather than the elevator. I wanted to say it was so I could get my steps in, but I bypassed the elevator because I saw Wayne waiting for it. I didn't mind the trek. I had plenty to think about on the way. Namely, coming up with a plan on how to tell Wayne I would not give up the project. I

knew I wouldn't like the repercussions because he'd told me I wouldn't, but I refused to be bullied by that asshole. I simply needed to find a way to relay it so he thought he had won.

Wishful thinking again. The guy doesn't have a decent bone in his body.

My mental team meeting with myself was interrupted when I arrived at the cafeteria with a few dozen others seeking their midday nourishment. I forced a smile that lasted all of a few feet, right up until I encountered a man I'd never seen before. He was standing in the doorway to the serving area, back rigid, arms at his sides as he watched each person who entered like a TSA agent on the hunt for a suspect in the security line at the airport.

A couple of people said hello to him, but no one lingered when he gave them a dismissive chin nod, his eyes moving to the next person.

As I approached, I couldn't help wondering who he was or why people were reacting to him the way they were.

"Ms. Zeplyn," he greeted, his tone dry and businesslike.

Well, that answered the question of who the suspect was.

Me.

Yay.

He was a small man, probably only a few inches taller than me—the same height at the moment because I was wearing heels. He was skinny, with a thin neck and a strong jaw. He was dressed impeccably well in a three-piece suit that was definitely not one off the rack somewhere. His blond hair was curly and short, styled close to his head; his eyebrows were so light they were nearly invisible on his lean, smooth face. He appeared young by his features, but his light brown eyes told a different story. I would guess he was closer to Creed's age than mine.

"My name is Duke Mitchell," he explained. "I'm Mr. Granger's executive assistant, the man in charge of scheduling his every minute."

I couldn't hide my hesitance, but I replied in kind. "Nice to meet you."

Immediately, Duke's expression softened, but only a little, as he nodded. "It's a pleasure to meet you, too, Ms. Zeplyn. Now, if you would please follow me, I'll escort you to Mr. Granger's office."

Will this involve a pat down? Or a body cavity search? Or both?

I didn't think he'd take too kindly to my humor, so I kept the sarcasm to myself and mumbled, "Umm ... okay."

He didn't fill me in on why he was escorting me to Creed's office. I wanted to ask, but based on his strict demeanor, I wasn't sure it was allowed, so I followed. Each time I fell a step back, he slowed his gait and waited for me to catch up. If he caught on that I was doing it on purpose, he didn't react. He did, however, look like he was dancing when I got more dramatic with my pauses.

"I feel like I'm being whisked off to the principal's office," I said as he guided me into the elevator with a nod and a wave of his hand.

Duke didn't reply, nor did he smile. He stood board-straight with his eyes forward. Maybe he had never been in trouble before and couldn't relate. Who knows.

We reached the seventh floor in silence, then stepped out of the elevator to more silence, though it was getting heavier and more uncomfortable. Duke ushered me toward the double doors that led to the inner sanctum. Neither of the ladies looked up as we approached or when Duke led me past them.

The large glass door closed slowly behind me, sealing me in with Duke.

Unlike when I'd been here on Friday, the space felt cozier. A candle was burning on the desk, and the aroma of spearmint and eucalyptus filled the space. A lamp on the credenza behind the desk offered a soothing glow that barely reached past the desk. Overhead, soft music—something operatic—came from

speakers inset in the ceiling. It felt like the reception area at the spa my mother took me to when I was younger.

“If you ever need anything,” Duke noted, motioning toward the desk. “This is where I am.”

I raised my eyebrows, not at all sure what I was supposed to say to that. Why would I need anything?

“Please, follow me,” he said firmly.

This time he allowed me to walk behind him as he strolled toward Creed’s office.

“Mr. Weston’s office,” he informed me, motioning to the first door on the right, then to the door on the left. “That’s Mr. Walker’s office.”

We kept going.

He pointed to the next door on the right. “Conference room”—his arm swung to the opposite side—“and Mr. Hawkins’s office.”

Duke continued to the door at the very end.

“And this is Mr. Granger’s,” I said cheekily, not sure why he was so ridiculously formal. A prerequisite of the job? Or was that what happened after years of working for Creed?

Rather than knock, Duke opened the door and stepped aside so I could precede him. I realized as soon as I went inside that Creed wasn’t there.

“Mr. Granger will return from his meeting momentarily,” Duke informed me. “Please, have a seat. Make yourself comfortable. Can I get you anything while you wait?”

Maybe some pliers so I can get the stick out of your ass.

I shook my head.

“Very well. It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Ms. Zeplyn.”

I would’ve said likewise, but I wasn’t sure that was the case, so I offered a smile before turning to the solid wall of windows that overlooked the beach in the distance. The view

was impressive but not nearly as nice as the view Creed had from his house.

When Duke closed the door behind me, my gaze swept the room. There were no candles or music to add ambiance to the space, no flowers, and no new books on the bookshelf. With nothing to snoop, I went over to Creed's desk and took a seat in his chair. It must've been one of those big-and-tall ones because it dwarfed me, the leather cool against my legs, my feet dangling a few inches from the floor. I scooted forward until I could rest my forearms on the desk, and I stared at the chairs across from me, trying to imagine what Creed did in this space.

Considering he was a man of few words, it was difficult to envision him meeting with clients or vendors. How would a conversation with Creed even go if he spoke mostly with his eyes?

"Speak," I said sternly, then nodded as though people were talking. "Speak again," I said, this time using a deeper voice.

Clearly, I hadn't yet seen the stoic businessman in action because there was no way he'd made it this far in life without being able to charm people. And yes, I'd admit he had charmed me, but it certainly wasn't with a smile or his clever conversation skills.

I was smiling to myself when the door opened. Creed walked in, wearing a sharp black suit with an inky black tie. His dress shirt was brilliantly white, his leather shoes shiny. He was by far the most incredibly handsome man I'd ever seen, but the air of danger lurking behind that smirk did me in. My breath caught as it always did when I saw him.

His gaze immediately landed on me, and I swore the color shifted from glacial to thunderstorm.

"I was escorted up here," I told him as he made his way toward me. "Your assistant is a laugh-riot."

That made Creed smile. "Duke's one of a kind."

Hopefully, I thought to myself.

I watched as he took off his suit coat and hung it on a small hook mounted on the wall. He turned to face me, removing his cuff links and slowly rolling his sleeves up.

With every flex of his deft fingers, the tension in the room seemed to build until I swore the windows would be blown outward by an explosion.

When he approached, I turned and hopped to my feet, smiling at him as I did, praying I wasn't sweating. I was not expecting the kiss he delivered, the intimate press of his lips causing sparks to ignite in my belly. I hadn't heard from Creed since last night when I received a text message to say goodnight. Although I'd hoped, Creed didn't come to my apartment and have his wicked way with me. Instead, I went to bed alone, reliving the weekend in my thoughts until I drifted off.

“So why—”

Before I could get the question out, Creed's arm banded around my midsection, and he pulled me backward. I squeaked when I stumbled, but he held me securely in his embrace. My butt landed on his thighs when he sat in his chair.

“We're going to play a game.” The thunder in his tone matched the storm clouds in his eyes.

I was breathless from the surprise, but I managed to say, “Are we?”

“Yes. One that involves you doing only what I tell you to do.”

Those words kicked off an uproar in my belly, which triggered a shiver that slowly danced its way down my spine. I'd been thinking about the whole BDSM thing since Creed had brought it up on Saturday, curious about what it would be like to have him bend me to his will. Maybe I was going to find out.

“This is where I want you,” he whispered as he slid my hair over my shoulder, his chest pressed to my back. He pulled my hips back, positioning me so we were both more

comfortable. “Do not move from here unless I give you permission.”

Creed already spoke in an authoritative tone, so when he stated his expectations, it was wickedly hot. I didn't think I'd have any problem letting him boss me around.

When his lips glided over my neck, I shivered again, goose bumps breaking out over my flesh. My nipples pebbled tightly under the soft cotton of my dress, the sensation more powerful because I wasn't wearing a bra. I moaned when he sucked on the sensitive skin, tilting my head to give him more access.

Jesus. If I'd known this would happen, I would've come better prepared. Granted, I wasn't sure what I would've done differently, but holy shit, I was going up in flames, and I still wasn't sure why I'd been summoned.

“Creed...”

“I like the way you say my name,” he rasped against my skin.

As soon as I relaxed in his arms, Duke walked in, pushing a large cart weighed down with silverware, linen napkins, glasses of ice water, mugs for coffee, and a carafe beside them, as well as one large dish covered with a silver dome.

Instantly I went into self-preservation mode, attempting to launch myself off Creed's lap. He was faster and stronger, so he caught me before I could escape and pinned me against him with little effort. I tried to pull away, embarrassed that his assistant was witness to this, but his arm tightened, and his deep, ragged voice sounded in my ear.

“Don't move, hellcat. Next time you'll be punished.”

I was torn between being ashamed that Duke had caught me sitting on Creed's lap and the insane arousal that flooded my system from Creed's gruffly spoken command. He seemed oblivious to the audience, his lips gliding over my skin, making every inch of me tingle. My body decided for me as I remained perfectly still, trying to regulate my breathing as Creed continued to lick and suck my neck while Duke

transferred the items from the cart to Creed's desk, working like this was an everyday occurrence.

Just the thought of Creed bringing women in here to make out while Duke delivered his lunch dampened the heat like a cold, wet blanket tossed over a flame.

"As you requested, sir," Duke said primly, pretending not to notice the blond girl sitting on his boss's lap as he lifted the silver dome from the plate. "Filet mignon, baked potato, and cherry cobbler."

Okay. *That* couldn't be a coincidence.

"That'll be all," Creed told him, tugging the loose neck of my dress aside so his wicked mouth could reach more of my shoulder.

My insides twisted and coiled as heat coursed through my veins, despite my anxiety. It didn't seem to matter that Duke was still in Creed's office or that I was questioning how many women Creed had done this with, the mouth on my neck was the only thing I could think about.

When Duke reached the door, Creed said, "No interruptions."

"Yes, sir," he answered, pushing the cart out into the hall and closing the door behind him. Not once did he look back.

"Do you do this often?" I asked as soon as Duke was out of earshot.

"What's that?"

"Bring women in here so you can fondle them while your assistant brings food."

"Never happened before."

"Then why does Duke seem okay with it?"

"Because I pay him ridiculously well to ignore things."

That didn't make sense, but he was frying my brain with his warm lips on my skin.

"So what are we doing here?" I asked.

“Setting expectations,” he said simply, nipping my shoulder and making me moan.

“And the food?” I pointed to the plate on the desk. “That’s what I told Hawk I would have if we’d been on a date.”

Creed lifted his head. “I know.”

But *how* did he know, I wondered.

“Maybe I should take one of the other chairs,” I said, shifting my butt on his thighs. “So we can eat?” It came out as a question because there was only one meal, so I wasn’t sure what was happening.

“That’s not the way this works, kitten.”

I peered at him over my shoulder, studying his face. His eyes were dark and stormy, his expression hungry, and I didn’t think it had anything to do with the food sitting on his desk.

“How does it work?” I asked breathlessly.

“I’m going to give you a glimpse of *my* darker side.” He nipped my earlobe. “And kitten, I’m going to make your fantasies look like child’s play.”

“Hey, I think my fantasies are hot,” I argued, feeling defensive. “I didn’t hear you complaining when you jacked off on the phone.”

“It was your voice that got me off,” he rasped, licking the shell of my ear. “Now it’s your turn.”

“My turn for what?”

“Well, if you’re good, you’ll come. If not...”

He didn’t finish the sentence, and I couldn’t explain why the butterflies had gone haywire in my belly.

“We’re ... um ... we’re gonna do this here?”

“Yes,” he confirmed, turning his chair to the left and urging me to my feet. “Strip.”

He immediately turned back to his desk.

“You want me to...” I looked around the room, positive I had heard him wrong.

“I want you to strip. Everything comes off.”

“Right now?”

Creed turned in his chair to face me. His smile was gone, but he didn't look angry. At least, I didn't think he did. There was a good chance he only had one setting, so maybe this mask was a cover for all his emotions.

“Here?” I asked incredulously. “In your office?”

He canted his head to the side, studying me. “There's only one rule to this game.”

“Let me guess. You tell me what to do. I do it?”

His smile was slow and wicked. “You catch on quickly.”

“Are you sure there aren't any cameras?”

Finally, there was a spark of emotion in his eyes. “I assure you. No cameras, no listening devices.”

“You've checked?”

“I don't need to.”

“That's what I thought about *my* office,” I countered, unwilling to risk someone else getting a video to hold over my head.

“Journey, I assure you there are no cameras.”

I should've asked him how he knew for sure, but I trusted Creed. Based on how he had reacted when he learned about the hidden camera in my office, he wouldn't allow it to happen to me again.

“Now strip.”

I frowned, surprised by the brusque order. But even as I was trying to determine whether or not I was offended, I realized that here with him was the only place I wanted to be. And since he'd already warmed me up with the brief make-out session, I figured there wasn't any harm in finding out what was in store for me.

Creed turned back to his desk, retrieving a knife and fork, acting like I wasn't there, as though that command equated to

me obeying automatically. He began cutting the steak into small pieces while I stared at him. No one said my getting naked was a forgone conclusion, but he seemed to think it was.

He didn't look my way when he said, "Don't make me tell you again, hellcat."

Because he did seem convinced I'd simply do what he said, I was tempted to ask him what would happen if he had to, but I decided not to push him, choosing instead to see where this was going.

"Now," he snapped.

Oh, boy. I probably shouldn't like that he wasn't giving me an option. It was an order, not a request, and for whatever reason, it resonated with the sexual creature I'd always suspected was lurking within me.

Plus, you know, I didn't have a problem being naked. In fact, I preferred it.

Usually.

When I was alone.

At home.

Okay, fine, the thought of being naked in Creed's office in the middle of the workday was ridiculously hot.

I sighed and got to work before I learned what was in store for me if he had to tell me again.

Journey

IT TOOK ME A COUPLE OF MINUTES to disrobe, stepping out of my heels first. The light gray long-sleeve dress was made of stretchy cotton with a wide neck, allowing me to slip my arms out and slide it down my legs rather than lifting it over my head. Because it was form-fitting and the neckline was so wide, I had opted to go without a bra, so my panties were the last to go.

As I removed each piece, I folded it neatly and set it on the credenza behind him, thinking about all the romance novels I'd read where the submissive found herself doing exactly this. I'd always wondered whether I would do it if prompted. Evidently, I would, and though it was a bit awkward, it was insanely hot. Knowing a sexy, powerful man wanted me naked so he could do wicked, dirty things to me turned me on like nothing else.

Once I was naked, I had an unshakeable urge to cover myself as I thought about the windows at my back and the fact anyone could walk in that door at any moment. More alarming was how turned on I was by those very facts. The taboo aspect of this encounter made me hotter, and the air of danger made me wet.

"Take one step back so I can admire you properly," he said, continuing to focus on his task.

I frowned as I moved away from him. The longer he made me wait, the more vulnerable I felt.

When Creed completed his task, he set the knife and fork down before turning in his chair to face me. He had already seen me naked when we were in the hot tub at his house but based on the gleam in his eyes, you wouldn't know it. He didn't hide his approval as his gaze raked over me from head to toe and then slowly—ever so slowly—back up.

"So fucking beautiful," he rasped softly before meeting my gaze.

He got to his feet and stepped around me, his gaze caressing me as efficiently as his hands would. I tried not to fidget, feeling like a gem being scrutinized for authenticity.

“I have never seen a more stunning creature in my life,” he said, his words low and intimate in the otherwise silent room.

I flinched when he grazed my shoulder with his fingertip. I sighed when he dragged it down the center of my back, then around my hip. I sulked when his hand fell to his side.

Creed moved back to his chair, taking a seat as he crooked his finger and motioned me toward him.

I took one step, then another, until he put his hands on my hips and stopped me.

His fingertip grazed the inside of my left thigh.

“Birthmark,” I told him as he lightly caressed the darker patch of skin.

His fingers moved higher, gently rubbing the ring in my belly button. Today’s accessory was a small diamond-encrusted butterfly my mother bought me for my last birthday.

Creed patted his thighs.

I took it to mean he wanted me to sit on his lap, so I turned away from him. Before I could sit, his big fingers curled around the outside of my thighs, his thumbs pressing under my butt cheeks, halting me from sitting.

A whimper escaped, his touch lighting up all the nerve endings in my body.

“You have the most incredible ass.” His tone was rife with awe and wonder.

Was I supposed to say thank you?

His hands slowly inched higher, and I swore I felt the strength in his fingertips, the restraint he was using to keep from grabbing me.

“This is how I want you.” His breath fanned over my bare back.

Oh.

“Naked and eager to let me do whatever I want to this sinful body.”

My.

His thumbs pressed into my flesh, lightly kneading my ass as his lips skimmed higher.

God.

I inhaled sharply when he teased my ass cheeks apart. The sensation was so potent my knees wobbled. Creed noticed because his grip tightened, his hands sliding up to my waist before he guided me back onto his lap.

“Three things are going to happen,” he said against my ear when I leaned back against him.

I was a little tongue-tied, but I managed a small grunt to let him know I was eager to hear them. Whatever it took if he would simply touch me again.

“I’m going to feed you until I’m satisfied you’re full.”

Feed me, starve me; I don’t care.

I nodded when he paused.

“While I feed you, I’m going to finger your pussy.”

Yes. Oh, yes, please.

“You will not speak unless I ask you a question, and you will not come until I tell you to.”

Like it was a foregone conclusion that I would? Oh, who was I kidding? This man could make me come with the sound of his voice. Granted, coming on command was likely not in my repertoire of newly acquired sexual skills, but I figured he didn’t need me pointing that out. I was obviously a novice, and he was ... well, he was definitely not.

“And the third thing?” I whispered, aware that I was already breaking one of the rules.

“If you’re really good...” Creed pressed his lips to my ear. “I’m going to let you come.”

“Thank you,” I rasped, my breaths labored, my body hotter than it’d ever been. I wasn’t sure why I was thanking him, but it seemed like the right thing to do.

He chuckled softly.

I relaxed in his arms, eager to commence with the orgasms.

“Good girl.” Creed’s arms came around me. His fingertips lightly grazed my skin, his breath warm against my shoulder. “You please me, kitten.”

Oh, boy. I think it was the praise that was going to be my downfall. Often when I read about it in books, it seemed forced and awkward. I never understood how anyone could find it erotic. But hearing the praise from Creed’s mouth, with approval and appreciation in his tone ... yeah, this whole encounter was hot.

He pressed his mouth near my ear. “Do you understand the game?”

“Yes.”

“And your color?”

“Bright neon green,” I whispered.

“Good girl,” he said with a soft laugh before nipping my earlobe. “Now spread your legs.”

If it would earn me more praise, I would’ve dropped to my knees and licked his feet. I couldn’t explain what was so enticing about his approval, but I found I wanted to earn more.

I leaned into him as my knees widened as far as I could get them between the arms of the chair. As I did, my cardiovascular system kicked into hyperdrive, making it impossible to pretend this game didn’t turn me on.

Creed rested his cheek against the side of my face. I tilted my head so we could both watch as his hands slid over my chest before slowly venturing lower, forcing my arms to my sides. He took his time, caressing and kneading my breasts, tugging lightly on my nipples before moving lower. My chest began to rise and fall rapidly, the muscles in my stomach

tightening, my pussy clenching. I was a living, breathing dimmer switch, and he was turning the brightness up to 100%.

His hand spanned across my belly, then lower, over the top of my left thigh; the other covered my right thigh, his thumbs lightly teasing my mound. The sound of his deep, even breaths was loud in my ear, and it was an aphrodisiac in itself.

I was close to hyperventilating when his right hand slid between my legs, his middle finger dipping between my labia. He didn't tease, merely kept his finger positioned for maximum pleasure as he reached forward and picked up a piece of steak with his fingers. He brought it to my mouth at the same time he dipped his finger between my pussy lips. I opened with a gasp, and he placed the meat on my tongue. I closed my lips around the steak as he pushed his probing finger deep inside me.

I whimpered. I chewed. And my body temperature soared to dangerous levels.

All thoughts fled at that point. I didn't care about the game or the rules because my brain could only focus on the pleasure created by Creed's finger each time he thrust it inside me as he fed me directly from his hand. Like Pavlov's dog being trained through classical conditioning, each time Creed fingered my pussy, I opened my mouth. It was not easy to chew and swallow when he was teasing me, but I managed.

I was balancing on a razor-sharp edge, desperate for his touch when he picked up the fork. My skin suddenly felt too small, my pussy so wet, I worried I would stain Creed's expensive trousers. I moaned when he teased the sensitive flesh between my legs once more. I gasped when his finger slid through my slick seam. He put the fork on my lips, and as soon as I took a bite, he pushed his finger inside me. I trembled as my insides began to coil tightly, twisting and turning from the stirrings of an orgasm I wasn't permitted to have. I couldn't help it. The entire scene coalesced into one giant ball of energy that built in my core. The only thing that kept me from falling into the abyss was having to focus on eating. Otherwise, I would've succumbed to the sensation as he tormented me with his wicked fingers.

Creed added another finger, sliding them in deep, massaging my inner walls as though he knew how much I could handle, and he wouldn't let me shatter until he was ready for me to. He began forking baked potato into my mouth, a little at a time, his fingers continuing their steady thrust and retreat between my legs.

I had no idea how long this went on because time seemed of no importance, but somehow he managed to feed me half the baked potato before I found myself trying to ride his hand. He stopped me with a firm hand on my throat, pulling my head back. The move was so aggressive I heard the moan that escaped before I could stop it.

A soft chuckle sounded in my ear before Creed's fingers slid out of my pussy. I watched his hand as he brought his fingers to his mouth. I gasped when he sucked them clean, my pussy aching for him to finish me off.

"You taste so fucking good."

I reached my tipping point when his warm hands slid over my breasts. He lingered for a moment, teasing my nipples, plucking the painfully hard points until I was gasping from the sensations that sent electrical impulses right to my clit. I moaned and whimpered as the last of my inhibitions disappeared. I was past the point of caring because I was one giant ball of sensation.

Once Creed had teased my hypersensitive flesh to near-painful levels, he picked up the spoon in the cherry cobbler dish. If I were feeding myself, I would've declined dessert, but if it meant feeling his fingers inside me and possibly reaching orgasm, I'd eat every bite he wanted to give me.

Creed gently slid the spoon between my lips as he leaned around to watch my face. As soon as I closed my lips around it, he pushed one finger inside me. With the next spoonful, he pushed in two.

I would never be able to eat again without thinking about his fingers inside me each time I took a bite.

“Your pussy’s so wet,” he mumbled in my ear. “You like my fingers inside you.”

It wasn’t a question, but I nodded anyway, maintaining my silence since it was one of the rules.

I whimpered, swallowing the sweet dessert when he spooned more in my mouth.

“Imagine if it was my cock.”

I moaned, wishing I didn’t have to imagine.

Creed continued to feed me, making me moan as he fucked my pussy with two fingers. I was close to detonation when he stopped suddenly.

“No,” I pleaded. “Don’t stop.”

Yeah, I was aware I sounded like a starved harlot, but who gave a shit? I wanted to come. Like now.

“No talking,” he rumbled smoothly as he pushed to his feet, forcing me out of his lap.

I swayed, but Creed took care of that, picking me up with an arm beneath my wobbly knees and one behind my back. He carried me to the sofa and set me on my feet. I teetered again before he took a seat on the sofa and pulled me onto his lap, my back to his chest again.

“Are you ready to come?”

I nodded as I leaned into him, relaxing against his big body.

“Spread your legs wide,” he commanded. “Let me see that pretty pussy.”

Since he was behind me, his command confused me until I realized the wall across from us was mirrored. It was a good distance away, but our reflections were clearly visible. For some reason, watching him torment me was even hotter than feeling his hands on me.

“Wider,” he snapped.

I was surprised by the adamance in his tone. Enough that I hurried to do his bidding.

Creed hooked my knees over his thighs, spreading me impossibly wide. I was watching our reflection, so I saw the desire that tightened the lines on his face, and I suddenly wished he would put his mouth on me the way Hawk and Garrison had in the hot tub. I wanted to know what Creed's tongue felt like against my clit.

Creed pressed his hand on my throat, tilting my head back against his shoulder while pushing two fingers inside me. He began pumping his hand, making me gasp and moan. I kept my eyes on our reflection, saw that he was doing the same.

His grip on my throat tightened. "Squeeze my fingers, hellcat."

My pussy spasmed around his fingers as I succumbed to the pleasure. I wasn't sure which turned me on more, the way he continued to finger me, the rough grip he had on my throat, or the fact that I could see myself while he was doing both.

"I could fuck this tight little pussy right now," Creed growled, shoving three fingers inside me.

Oh, God, yes. Pleeeaaaasssse.

I nodded, gasping as I was racked with a sense of euphoria I'd never felt before.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you? My cock sinking into the silky hot depths of your cunt?"

More than a Mercedes for Christmas.

I nodded again.

"What about my cock between your lips? Gliding over your tongue?"

My mouth watered from the thought. I bit back the words, nodding instead, trying to remain silent.

"I wouldn't stop there, kitten. I'd push my cock down your throat, watch as you try not to choke on it."

The threat in his words added a sense of fear to my arousal. That was new, but I liked it. More than I was willing to admit.

He was fingering me more insistently, alternating between two and three fingers inside me. My pussy spasmed as my orgasm threatened. I didn't think I could hold off, but he had to know that.

“Have you ever had your ass fucked?”

I shook my head.

“You will,” he growled. “I'm going to stretch you until you can take my cock, hellcat. You want me to fuck your ass?”

I whimpered loudly, nodding my head. I'd take anything he wanted to give me. I wasn't scared. I was too turned on to be scared.

“I will,” he barked roughly.

“Creed...” I rasped, my vocal cords constricted by his firm grip. I could still breathe, but it required effort and focus.

“I'll do it whenever I want, wherever I want because that's who I am, Journey. I might send you flowers because it makes you happy, but I'll fuck you on every available surface, in every orifice, as many times as I want because that makes *me* happy.”

The mental image that invoked had my thighs trembling and sparks igniting in my core.

My words were a jumbled mess as I tried to hold off the orgasm by sheer force of will. “Come ... please ... need...”

“Color?” Creed barked.

“Green!”

His hand tightened a little more on my throat as he pulled me back. I spread my legs, inviting him to finish me off. He took what I was offering, slamming his hand between my legs, three fingers driving pleasure through me as he tormented my clit with the rough grind of his thumb.

“Move your hair,” he commanded.

I grabbed a fistful and tugged it to the side, not sure what he was expecting.

“Now I want you to come for me, kitten,” he growled against my ear as the rhythm of his fingers matched the rhythm of his thumb on my clit. “Come all over my hand.”

The next few thrusts sent me soaring into the ether. I came, and the instant my pussy convulsed around his fingers, Creed sank his teeth into the back of my neck. I screamed, but it came out muffled when he slammed his hand over my mouth. The euphoria from moments ago multiplied tenfold, making my insides glow red-hot as I rode each glorious wave that crashed through me.

His hand instantly relaxed, sliding down to caress my neck as the fingers in my pussy slowed, gently pushing in, sliding out until he retreated completely. I gasped for air as I melted against him, smiling. I’d never felt anything quite like that before.

“This is only a taste of what I want,” he whispered in my ear, his voice dark and deadly. “Remember, being with all three of us is *your* rule. I will still take everything you’ve got to give and then some. Everything, Journey. And I’ll convince you to give me more.” He turned my head, forcing me to look at him. “Make no mistake; I’m the Alpha, kitten. My rules are law.”

I trembled, my pussy spasming again from aftershocks. Or maybe that was another orgasm. Who knew at this point?

He pressed two fingers to my chin, turning my head so I was looking at him.

“You want me?” Creed rasped. “This is who I am.”

I met his stare and held it steady, letting him see my submission. I’d never wanted anyone or anything as much as I wanted *this*.

“Who do you belong to, hellcat?”

“May I speak?” I whispered.

His eyes flashed hot. “Yes.”

I tilted my head so that I could see him better. “Right now, I belong to you.”

He fisted my hair tightly and pressed his lips to mine. His kiss was gentle, a sensation that warred with the pain lancing my scalp from his grip. I couldn’t explain why I liked it so much, but I did.

“Remember you said that.” His eyes bounced over my face. “Because there will come a time when you’ll wish you hadn’t.”

I knew he likely meant it as a warning, but I couldn’t help but hope it was a promise.

Half an hour later, after I had slipped into Creed’s private bathroom to put myself together and Duke had removed all evidence of our lunch, I left Creed’s office. With every step I took, I was floating above the clouds, my body and mind at peace in a way I’d never experienced before.

Unfortunately, it didn’t last long. As soon as I emerged from the hallway between their offices, the sensual haze I’d been drifting on vanished before I even reached the elevator.

“Wow. If he puts a smile like that on everyone who visits his office, I guess it will be a good day for me, huh?”

My eyes snapped toward the voice, and my confident stride slowed. Sitting in the small reception area across from Duke’s desk was Wayne, on his face a smug grin that made my skin crawl.

“What are you doing here?” I asked before I could think better of it.

“Mr. Granger will see you now,” Duke informed Wayne.

Wayne stood, his creepy smirk disappearing and something more vicious contorting his features. “I gave you a chance. You failed. Now I’ll talk to someone who’ll take me seriously.” He stepped toward me, lowering his voice. “I guess we’ll find out if he really gives a shit about you or if he’s only

after your pussy. My money's on the second, but you can keep dreaming for a little while."

"This way," Duke stated firmly, as though he was oblivious to the panic now consuming every fiber of my being.

Creed

“MR. PARSON IS HERE,” DUKE ANNOUNCED, STEPPING into my office.

I nodded, taking a seat in my desk chair. “Where’s Garrison?”

“He’s on his way up.”

“Send him in when he gets here.”

“Yes, sir.”

Duke slipped out, and Wayne stepped inside. I didn’t stand to greet him formally, nor did I acknowledge him verbally. He had requested this meeting, and I would give him the impression I was clueless as to his motives until it was time to school him properly.

I nodded toward the guest chairs across from me and curtly said, “Have a seat.”

His gaze skimmed the windows. “This is quite a view. I can see why Journey likes to spend her lunch hour up here.”

If he thought he would rile me with a passive-aggressive statement, he would have to try harder than that. I’d been taunted by better men than him and maintained my cool. It was a skill I’d acquired back when I was a teenager, angry at the world for the shitty hand I’d been dealt. Ray, the man who’d taken me in when I had nowhere to go, had taught me to harness that frustration and use it to my advantage, and he taught me that the first rule was never to let them see you sweat. It didn’t make sense to me then, but it became clearer as the years passed, and my opponents realized I let them see only what I wanted them to see. Everything else I kept locked down, invisible to the naked eye.

Wayne twisted at the hips, peering back at the door. “That was her, right?” He smiled, an oily smirk likely meant to put me on edge.

“It was, yes. Sit.”

A knock sounded at the door, and I looked over to see Garrison walking in. He closed the door behind him as he scanned the room, assessing the situation.

Wayne's cocky smirk slid off his face when he recognized Garrison.

"This was to be a private meeting," Wayne informed me.

"Only a select few get private meetings with me." I nodded toward the chair. "Now sit down."

He did. His uneasiness had spiked to radioactive levels, which caused him to fidget, his fingers drumming on the arms of the chair. His eyes bounced in his skull as he looked around the room as though something was going to pop out and snatch him at any second.

"What is it you need to talk to me about?" I prompted when Garrison shifted the other chair to the side before settling into it.

It took him a moment, but Wayne eventually composed himself. He reached into his shirt pocket and retrieved a USB drive, holding it up for me to see.

"I thought you'd like to know that I have Journey on video, flashing her tits"—he tilted his head toward Garrison—"at him."

I leaned back in my chair. "Do you?"

He waved the thumb drive. "It's right here."

"And where did you acquire this video?"

His tone was arrogant and entitled. "That's not important."

"Actually, it is. Without understanding how you came about the information, I'm not sure what use it would be to me."

Wayne's gaze flipped between Garrison and me. "It's useful because it shows your girlfriend flashing her tits."

I stared at him but didn't speak. Until he answered my question, I had nothing to add.

“So you don’t care?” he snapped, eyes narrowed, forehead furrowed.

“Should I?”

It was apparent he had intended to railroad me, and since it wasn’t working the way he’d hoped, he was already flailing.

“You don’t think I’ll post it on the internet?”

“Since it’s in your possession, that would be your prerogative, would it not?”

“Don’t think I won’t.”

I glanced at Garrison, purposely stalling. The longer I did, the more uneasy Wayne became. It also gave me a chance to gauge Garrison’s emotions. On the outside, he looked relaxed and calm. He wasn’t. By the way his nostrils flared and his eyes gleamed, his rage was threatening to boil over. He was seconds away from throwing Wayne through the plate-glass window, and Wayne was oblivious to it.

“I assure you, five minutes after I walk out of here, I’ll have it up on YouTube.”

Five minutes. That told me he needed enough time to return to his desk. It allowed me to assume that the flash drive in his hand was the only copy.

“Where did it come from, Mr. Parson?” I prompted when I looked at him again.

“A camera in her office,” he snapped.

I opened the top drawer of my desk, pulled out the camera he was referring to. “This one? The one you illegally planted?” I dropped it onto my desk. “You realize it’s a crime to plant hidden cameras.”

“Who said I planted it?”

“See the powder? That’s left over from the fingerprints that were pulled from it. Those prints belong to you.”

“California is a two-party consent state,” Garrison noted. “Did Journey give you permission to record her?”

“That’s irrelevant,” Wayne countered. “What’s done is done.”

“That is true,” I agreed. “It’s also true that Journey has the legal right to sue you.”

“She’s not the only one,” Garrison chimed in.

“You’re right. She’s not.” I held up a hand when Wayne started to argue. “Not only did you violate her privacy, you violated *my* rights by illegally recording confidential communications related to my business practices.” I glanced at Garrison. “What’s the penalty for illegally recording?”

“Up to five years in prison and a two hundred fifty thousand dollar fine,” he drawled without inflection, his gaze locked on Wayne. “And a civil suit.”

“Right.” I leaned forward, resting my forearms on my desk. “Remind me again why you wanted this meeting.”

Wayne’s face was pulled tight, his fury etched in the hard lines around his eyes and mouth. “You can’t prove I planted that camera. No one can tell where it was taken.” He smirked. “They *can* see Journey’s tits. What little she has anyway. But some people like ogling teenage boys.”

Garrison growled.

“Oh, that’s disturbing,” I admonished Wayne, curling my lip in distaste. “I don’t need to know about your perverse fetishes. In case you’re not aware, it’s illegal to have intimate relations with minors. Are you a pedophile, Mr. Parson? Should I have someone scan your computer for child pornography?”

“What?” Wayne’s forehead creased. “No. I don’t ogle teenage boys.”

“But you said you did.”

“No, I didn’t. I said...” He huffed. “If you don’t give a shit, I’ll just leak the video.”

“I guess if you feel you need to.” I pushed my chair back. “If that’ll be all...”

Realizing he didn't have control of the situation, Wayne sat up straight. "Wait. If she gives me the Reflect project, I won't need to leak it."

"Oh, is that all?" I settled in my chair.

"She didn't deserve it in the first place. I can do a better job."

"On a four-day workweek? It's my understanding you don't work on Fridays."

"I was sick."

"Two Fridays in a row?" I pretended to consider that.

Garrison chimed in. "The only two Fridays you've been employed here."

"That's not the point."

"I'm still not sure I understand what the point *is*," I countered, holding his stare.

He jumped to his feet abruptly, and the moment he did, Garrison was out of his chair. He shoved Wayne back in his seat, then leaned down and got right in his face.

"It's in your best interest to drop this shit right now," he snarled.

"I think that's called physical assault," Wayne said through clenched teeth.

"Trust me, when Garrison assaults you, there'll be no thinking on your part."

Wayne regarded Garrison as a wounded rabbit would a snarling wolf. "Touch me again, and I'll call the police."

"I can make that call if you'd like," I told Wayne, lifting the phone receiver. "I've got a few other things to discuss with them, anyway."

"No!" Wayne shifted. "It's not necessary." He smoothed out his shirt. It didn't help. It was still wrinkled.

"Give us a minute," I told Garrison.

He glared at me over his shoulder.

“I assure you I can hold my own.”

His jaw ticked, and he took a moment to glare at Wayne before he finally headed for the door. He slammed it behind him, clearly indicating what he thought of this situation.

“Tell me why you planted that video,” I said when we were alone.

Wayne’s countenance smoothed out. I suspected he thought negotiations would begin, so I decided to assuage him of the assumption.

“What were you looking for?” I continued. “Something specific? Or are you merely a pervert? Should I have the building swept for more cameras? Perhaps there are other women you’re stalking.”

“I’m not stalking her,” he said hotly. “I don’t give a shit about Journey. It wasn’t my idea to put—”

“Whose idea was it?” I barked, leaning forward again.

“No one’s,” he snapped.

“No one came up with the idea?”

“No.”

“It just magically appeared?”

“No. Yes.” Flustered, he huffed, “What?”

“How much did you get paid to plant that camera in her office?”

His eyes went dinner plate round. “One th—wait. Who said anyone paid me?”

The rapid-fire questions had done their job, effectively tripping him up. Although he’d caught himself, Wayne Parson had just confirmed my suspicion. He didn’t have a dog in this fight; he was merely a pawn. And evidently, he believed the information he had was valuable enough to blackmail.

“So you didn’t get paid?”

“No.” He exhaled heavily. “Look. I just want what’s due to me. If Journey gives up the project, I won’t make trouble for

her.”

I considered that for a moment. Although I could easily turn this over to the police and let my legal team deal with it, the problem wouldn't be resolved. Others would still see the video, and there was a good chance it would get leaked anyway. Based on Journey's reaction prior, I knew that was the last thing she wanted.

I don't want that video getting out, Creed. He's going to know that.

Then make him think otherwise.

Pretend I don't care? And how do you suggest I do that? Give him the link to a website he can upload it to? Maybe Whores Are Us? Or How-to-Seduce-Your-Boss-dot-com?

I glanced at Wayne's closed fist, where the thumb drive was concealed. “How do I know that's the only copy?”

His expression smoothed out once more, and I could see a sense of satisfaction in his smirk. “It is, I promise.”

“Your promises mean dick. I want to know whether you've given it to the person who paid you?”

“No, I didn't—wait,” he hissed. “I never said anyone paid me.”

Yes, you did, asshole. Twice now.

I glared at him for a moment, then decided I'd had enough of this shit.

“All right. I'll let you have the Reflect project, and you'll give me that video.”

“I want it in writing.”

I grinned. “Oh, there's going to be writing.” I pressed a button on the phone. “Duke, can you send Nick in?”

Wayne twisted in his chair, trying to peer toward the door. A moment later, Nick walked in carrying a manilla folder. Without preamble, he came over and set the folder on the desk. He opened it and held out a pen for Wayne.

“That’s a non-disclosure agreement,” I informed Wayne. “It’s ironclad. You couldn’t poke a hole in it with a silk pin.”

He sat forward, skimming the document.

“Should you leak that video to anyone, I will take everything you have, Mr. Parson.”

I leaned back in my chair and folded my hands, waiting until I had his full attention again.

“I’ll take every dollar you’ve made from the seventeen jobs you’ve held since you were sixteen. What’s that come to? Eighteen hundred and some change? That includes the eighty-seven dollars you have in your investment account, thirteen in savings, and the seventeen hundred dollar balance of your checking account. Which includes the one thousand dollar deposit you received eleven days ago as payment for placing the hidden camera.”

He swallowed, and I could see his brain working, likely trying to figure out how I knew all of this.

“Then I’ll have you evicted from the house you rent on Weigand Avenue. You won’t have anywhere to play the Xbox you bought three weeks ago, and you’ll have to stop your monthly orders to Adam & Eve since you won’t have an address for your fleshlights to be delivered. Then I’ll have your car repossessed. Not that the bank will want your seven-year-old Hyundai. It has a bad starter, doesn’t it?”

His eyes rounded even more.

“Once I take all your physical possessions, I’ll reach out to the woman you’ve been talking with on Bumble and the one you’ve been catfishing on OkCupid. I’ll ensure they’re both aware of your penchant for ogling teenage boys.”

“I never said that!”

“Actually, I’ll do you one better. I’ll directly notify the one hundred and three friends you have on Facebook, and I’ll start with your cousin Jim since he’s the last one you direct messaged. Then I’ll announce it to your eighty followers on Instagram and the forty-seven idiots who put up with your misogynistic ramblings on Twitter.”

“How do you know all this?”

“And if it goes viral... well, that’s just a bonus,” I continued as though he hadn’t spoken. “But I won’t stop there, Mr. Parson. Once you’re a laughing stock without a pot to piss in, I’ll take everything your parents have. I’ll do enough damage no one will trust your mother to do their taxes ever again, and your father won’t be able to loan anyone money when I have him investigated for embezzling from the bank he works at. I’ll take the house you grew up in, the one they still live in. Perhaps I’ll let them keep their Volvo. They did just put new tires on it. That way, they won’t have to live on the street. After that, I’ll go after your grandfather. The one who lives in the nursing home. Perhaps he can stay with your cousin Jim.”

I leaned forward, enjoying the look of pure terror on his face.

“Sign the NDA, Mr. Parson. Provided that video never sees the light of day and you don’t speak a word of this to anyone, I won’t level your entire world. However, if you violate that agreement, I will end you. Got it?”

Three minutes later, I had Wayne’s shaky signature on the paper and the flash drive in my hand.

Journey

AS SOON AS DUKE RETURNED TO HIS desk after escorting Wayne into Creed's office, I confronted him.

"Why is he here?" I demanded as though I had every right to do so.

Duke pulled out his chair and primly sat down, smoothing his shirt as he did. "He requested time on Mr. Granger's calendar."

I found it hard to believe anyone could be as unaffected as Duke, yet he showed no outward sign that he was plagued with silly emotions like the rest of us.

"To talk about what?"

"I'm not privy to that information." There was no inflection in his tone. He was merely relaying facts while I was in the process of a nervous breakdown.

The door behind me opened, and I spun on my heel to see Garrison walking in. His gaze softened when he spotted me.

"What's going on?" I asked before he could walk by without saying a word.

"I'll let you know when I know."

He dismissed me without so much as a smile, continuing down the hall to Creed's office.

I huffed as I paced back and forth, my heart in my throat.

"Can I get you something to drink while you wait?" Duke offered.

I spun around, glaring at him. He was standing, and if I wasn't seeing things, there could've been a glimmer of concern in his eyes. I couldn't be sure, though, because a red haze clouded my vision.

I didn't answer him, spinning around and pacing the small space. I considered strolling toward Creed's office door, but I couldn't be certain Duke wouldn't tackle me if I tried to.

Somehow I managed to harness a sliver of control. I spent the next ten minutes alternating between pacing the floor and sitting in one of the reception chairs. I was restless and anxious, and there was no outlet for any of it.

Finally, Creed's office door opened. I shot to my feet in time to see Garrison slam the door behind him.

"What happened?" I asked, marching toward him, half expecting the little blond man in the expensive suit to jump on my back. He didn't.

Garrison detoured into his office.

I was hot on his heels, pausing in the doorway when he began pacing the floor, his hands balled into fists. I silently stared, waiting for him to acknowledge me. When he did, he had his emotions under control once again.

"He's using Creed to blackmail me, isn't he? He wants that stupid project."

Garrison didn't respond. Not with words, anyway. He stopped directly in front of me, cupped my cheek, and leaned in. His lips pressed to mine, and for a few heartbeats, the chaos cleared, but it came crashing back all too quickly.

I pulled away, wanting answers.

"No," Garrison said firmly, guiding me backward until I was pinned between his big body and the wall. "Let me kiss you."

"But..." I needed to know what was going on in Creed's office.

"Let me," Garrison whispered, his lips hovering over mine. He wasn't forcing me, but I couldn't miss the aggressive encouragement as he pressed his weight against me.

I sighed. It was futile to argue when I was desperate for this man. Not only his dominating kiss but the distraction he provided.

He moaned softly when I went up on my toes to close the gap between our mouths. His tongue skated over my lips, and I opened, accepting his penetration. My body tingled, and a

flurry of excitement kicked those butterflies into a rampage. Within seconds, my arms were around his neck, and I was trying to climb him like a tree.

I was aware of his hands on my hips, the way they pulled me toward him and pushed me away almost simultaneously. As though he wasn't committing to what was happening. His indecision kept me from throwing caution to the wind.

I had no idea how long we remained like that, devouring one another, but someone clearing their throat in the hallway ended the make-out session abruptly.

Garrison turned away from me, walking toward his desk. I smoothed my hand over my hair and peered into the hall in time to see Nick going into Creed's office.

"It's bad, isn't it?" I asked Garrison, feeling ultimately defeated.

"Creed's takin' care of it."

I stepped toward Garrison's desk, peering down at the framed photos sitting on top. "Then why were you pissed when you came out?"

"Because I want to strangle that little fucker."

His words lacked some of the frustration I'd witnessed moments before.

"Are these your parents?"

Garrison glanced at the photo, his expression clearing. "Yeah. David and Elyza." He gestured toward the other picture. "Those are my brothers. Michael, Leif, and Lance."

I picked up the one of his brothers and scanned their features. I could see the resemblance. They had the same blue-gray eyes as Garrison, the same broad forehead, and chin. Even their smiles were similar.

I placed the frame back on the desk and took a seat. Neither of us spoke for the longest time. I wondered if Garrison had taken the mental trip to Creed's office the way I had.

“I should be in there,” I finally said.

“Trust me; you don’t wanna be.”

“Why’s that?”

Before Garrison could answer, Creed’s office door opened. I shot to my feet and headed for the hallway. I stopped inside Garrison’s office when Wayne stormed past me. I was still staring after him when Duke appeared.

“Mr. Granger would like you to join him.”

I glanced back at Garrison to see he was watching me, but I couldn’t decipher his thoughts. When he didn’t make a move to join me, I headed toward Creed’s office on my own, wondering if this was what it felt like to line up before a firing squad.

Creed

“YOU DID *WHAT* NOW?” JOURNEY BELLOWED, GLARING daggers, not only at me but also at Nick.

I’d spent the past ten minutes relaying the details of my meeting with Wayne. I was surprised Journey remained calm throughout most of the story, but when I mentioned I was assigning her to a special project, I witnessed the volcano erupt.

“I’m not repeating myself,” I informed her.

It was a wonder I didn’t kill Wayne Parson the moment he stepped into my office. The smug bastard came in with his chin up and left with his tail tucked between his legs. The dumbass thought he was holding all the cards, but I ensured he understood we weren’t even playing from the same deck. And while I was content with how it had played out, Journey wasn’t walking away from this completely unscathed, which I figured was the reason she was furious with me.

“It’s a temporary assignment,” Nick stated, his calm tone a direct contradiction to Journey’s outrage.

“Fuck you,” Journey hissed, turning her full attention to Nick. “You’re letting him get away with blackmail.”

“Our only other option is to leak the video ourselves,” I told her. “If we do that, he has no leverage.”

She looked ready to blast me, but she clamped her mouth shut.

It was hard to believe she was the sexy woman I had fingered to orgasm in this office less than two hours ago.

“Which would you prefer?” Nick asked as though there was an option. Since I’d already made a deal with Wayne, the question was merely a way to make her believe she had a choice.

We both knew Journey would not agree to let us leak the video of her flashing her tits at Garrison and me in her office.

Unfortunately, the recording looked as though she was purposely flashing the camera, not the cell phone I had been watching her from. To make matters worse, due to the camera angle, Garrison's face hadn't been captured, so his anonymity was safe, while Journey's face was clear as day.

"Neither," Journey hissed, waving her hand in my direction. "You have the video now. It doesn't matter."

"I won't go back on my word, Journey. You shouldn't want me to."

"I can't believe he's getting away with this. What am I supposed to tell Cheryl?"

"You could try telling her the truth," Nick said.

Her eyebrows launched skyward. "What? That I flashed my tits at Garrison and Creed, and Wayne recorded it? I'm sure she'll hold me in the highest esteem after that."

I knew Cheryl, and she wasn't the sort to judge. She was, however, a member of Primal, and because of strict rules and regulations, I was restricted from telling Journey why I felt she could be trusted.

Exhaling heavily, I waited until Journey looked at me.

"I need you to make a decision."

Her eyes narrowed, and she lurched to her feet. "Fuck you, Creed. Maybe this is easy for you, but I'm not about to sit back and let that ... that ... asshole screw with my life."

I looked at Nick. "Leak the video."

"No!" Journey snapped, pivoting on her heel and marching toward the door. "I'll take your stupid temporary job, but just know, I'm gonna suck at it."

When she stormed out, I looked at Nick and grinned.

"I think she's gonna be great at it," Nick said, mirroring my amusement. "And it's going to get her a lot of visibility within the company."

He was right. It would. And it'd be the kind that came with people wanting to be in her corner. Before long, there'd be an

entire company willing to fight her battles for her.

“In the meantime, I want to know who Wayne’s working with,” I told my friend.

“Any luck on tracing that deposit?”

“No. He was paid in bitcoin, then cashed it out.”

When I’d told Wayne I knew about the one thousand dollar deposit, I hadn’t been absolutely sure. The only information I had was that it came from the sale of bitcoin, so I’d gone with my gut. Although Wayne was a douchebag, I didn’t think he had the brains to pull this off, much less the motivation. He was not the sort of man who put in any effort unless he had to, and blackmailing someone required planning. If I had to guess, he was a pawn and an opportunist trying to milk it for all it was worth.

“Unfortunately, I think Wayne Parson is the least of our fucking worries,” I told Nick.

“You think this has to do with...?”

“Yes. And that means he’s been watching her for a while.”

“So the question is,” Nick mused, “is he targeting her fathers or you?”

“My guess is all three.”

“I was hoping you weren’t going to say that.”

Yeah, well, that particular thorn in my side had been sticking around far too long. Nothing about that situation had ever been easy. I didn’t anticipate it would improve until our heads were on the chopping block and he had severed them cleanly.

“When Journey leaves for the day, have her office transferred to the conference room up here.”

Nick’s eyebrows slowly rose.

I didn’t give him a chance to comment before tacking on, “I want a company-wide email to go out tomorrow informing people of your newest direct report and her role.”

“She’s going to hate you for this,” he said as he got to his feet, but there was a smile on his face.

“I can hold my own, I assure you.”

When Nick left, I hit the intercom button. “Duke, find Cheryl Mann. Have her come to my office as soon as possible.”

“Sir, you have a meeting at two.”

“Cancel it,” I informed him. “Clear the rest of my afternoon.”

“Yes, sir.”

I pulled up the report Hawk sent me the other day. It contained all the information I had used to threaten Wayne and a little more. I skimmed the notes from Wayne’s interview. Having encountered him more times than I cared to, I had difficulty understanding why anyone would’ve thought he was a good fit for Primal Instincts. Nothing spectacular stood out there, so I figured he was one of those people who interviewed well and played the political angle to cover the areas they were lacking.

Next, I reviewed the information Hawk had uncovered about Wayne’s online presence. The guy had as many dating site profiles as social media accounts. Hawk had gone above and beyond, retrieving the back-end data on those accounts. I hadn’t asked him how he’d acquired it because I didn’t want to know. Plausible deniability and all that.

Based on this, I was even more convinced that Wayne wasn’t the one I needed to worry about. He was a puppet, and someone else was pulling his strings. If it was who I thought it was, I needed to find a way to prove it. Unfortunately, it’d been damn near impossible to tie anything to him up to this point. Hence the ongoing legal battles.

My phone beeped, and Duke’s voice sounded. “Sir, Mrs. Mann is here to see you.”

I tapped the button to reply. “Send her in.”

I closed the report and shut my laptop. A moment later, the door opened.

At fifty-two and some change, Cheryl Mann embraced her age the same way she embraced her dark desires. Not that you would know it by the way she was dressed. Today she was wearing one of her signature gray pantsuits and sensible shoes. The outfit, which disguised the curvy body beneath, was a far cry from the black leather she wore to the club, which I figured was her intention. At work, she looked like a matronly grandmother who spent her spare time knitting socks and crocheting blankets, while at Primal, she was the hard-hitting Domme whose skill with a bullwhip was unparalleled.

“No formalities,” I told her before she could get in one of her ass-kissing greetings.

She chuckled, closing the door behind her. “I thought this might be personal.”

“It is, and it isn’t,” I told her as I walked around to the seating area, gesturing for her to take a seat. “Can I get you anything to drink?”

Cheryl took a seat in one of the armchairs. “No, thank you.”

I turned the other so I could face her, then sat. “What I tell you stays between us.”

“Of course.”

It took only a few minutes for me to relay the high-level details of what had transpired between Journey and Wayne and the events that had gotten us to this point. By the time I was finished, Cheryl’s expression had hardened, and she was tapping one long burgundy fingernail on the arm of the chair.

“What are you doing about it?”

I glanced at my desk. “Wayne handed over the video in return for you assigning him the Reflect project.”

Her jaw ticked.

“He signed a non-disclosure agreement, so he’s legally bound to remain quiet. I know what you’re thinking, and

having him take over the project isn't ideal. However, it benefits us in two ways."

"He thinks he won," she acknowledged.

"Yes, which will allow us to keep an eye on him. I would've fired his ass on the spot if I thought this was his brainchild. Since I don't think he's working alone, I need to know who's behind this."

Her expression smoothed out. "You think—"

"I do," I confirmed, not wanting to go into details. "And if I'm right, this could be our chance to finish that shit once and for all."

"And the second way it benefits us?"

"By moving her up here, it'll be next to impossible for someone to set her up again. At the same time, the role she's taking will give her more visibility, which should lure him out. He'll have to work harder to get close to her."

"How do I fit into your plan?" she prompted.

"I need you to keep an eye on Wayne. Nick prepared an action plan. The next time he misses a day, it goes into effect."

"Does Journey know...?" Cheryl motioned a finger between us.

"She doesn't know about the club at all."

"So she's not aware of who you are? Or that you know her parents?"

"No."

Cheryl nodded.

I waited because I knew she was about to give me some advice I likely didn't care to have. However, because I respected Cheryl, I would listen.

Finally, she grinned. "I'm not going to tell you what you already know, Creed. I don't need to."

"No, you don't."

“But you know as well as I do that there are no upsides to keeping secrets in relationships. The information you’re keeping from her ... it’ll come back to bite you in the ass if you’re not careful.”

I had nothing to say, but I knew she wasn’t finished, so I waited.

“I’ve known you a long time, and it’s a rarity for someone to be important to you. This one’s important.”

“She is,” I confirmed, ready to move on. “Nick’s handling the legal matters where the company’s concerned, but if there’s anything you think I should know, I need you to bring it to my attention.”

“Of course.”

“If I’m not available, talk to Garrison or Hawk.”

Her eyes remained locked on my face, and I saw the questions that arose before she could ask them.

“Yes, she’s important to them, too,” I admitted. “Her choice.”

Cheryl’s gaze swept over my face. “Understood. And how does Journey feel about all of this? Since she stormed out of the building, I can only assume she’s not impressed with how you handled things.”

I wasn’t aware she’d left, but I kept my expression masked. “No. She thinks he’s getting away with blackmailing her.”

“Only to the naked eye,” Cheryl noted.

“Exactly.”

She shifted forward in her chair. “Thank you for telling me, and once you feel it’s appropriate to tell her about the club, I don’t have a problem with you telling her about my involvement. In the interim, ensure she knows I’m on her side, and I’ll help her any way I can.”

I got to my feet. “I appreciate that.”

“Anything for you, Alpha.”

As soon as she left my office, I grabbed my suit jacket and phone. I had an unruly submissive to visit. Since she wanted to be a part of my world, it was only fair she understood how it worked.

6

Journey

EVEN AS I WAS DRIVING TO MY apartment, I felt guilty for storming out the way I did.

I told myself it was the best for everyone involved since I wasn't sure how I would react to seeing Wayne. I might lose a fistfight against him, but that didn't mean I wasn't angry enough to instigate one. I didn't want to stoop to his level, but chances were I would if he so much as looked my way.

“Asshole, asshole, asshole,” I bit out, banging my fists on the steering wheel. “Asshole!”

My rage continued to fester even after I stopped at the store to grab a bottle of wine. I considered getting bourbon because it felt like the grownup thing to do. Plus, it would've gotten me drunk much faster. Unfortunately, I didn't like bourbon, and no amount of rage would magically change that.

Twenty minutes later, when I got into the elevator in my apartment building, I sent a quick text message to Cheryl, letting her know I needed to talk to her in the morning. I considered apologizing for leaving but changed my mind. I didn't have it in me to say I was sorry when I wasn't. It was for the good of my team and the good of the company that I didn't stick around to make matters worse.

“Like they can get much worse,” I mumbled as I unlocked my front door.

When I stepped into my apartment, I kicked off my shoes and dropped my keys in the bowl. I set my bag on one of the two chairs at my small breakfast table, then touched the edge of one of the flowers from the bushel of roses Creed, Hawk, and Garrison had sent me.

Instantly they made me feel better, if only for a minute.

“It's not their fault,” I reminded myself as I flipped through the mail I had picked up downstairs.

No one had forced me to change in front of Garrison or flash Creed. And it wasn't their fault that Wayne had hidden a camera. No one could've known.

No, my actions were my own. And as my mother told me when I was fifteen and I wanted to go to a party where there would be alcohol and drugs, every action had a consequence. I was responsible for both, which meant I had to make good decisions and not get myself into a situation I couldn't get out of. Unfortunately, I was trapped in this one, but I knew everything would work out as it was meant to eventually. Hopefully, without my tits becoming a meme for what not to do while at work.

In the meantime, I'd adjust because that was all life was—a series of adjustments spurred by fate.

“Stupid fate,” I muttered, tossing the bills on the table.

I frowned when I noticed the card that came with the flowers was crumpled. Like someone had squeezed it in their fist and straightened it back out. I picked it up and smoothed it between my fingers. I didn't remember doing that. Was I that pissed off that I wouldn't notice?

Shaking my head, I set it on the table and went to the kitchen to put the wine in the refrigerator. In the meantime, I would finish off the other bottle.

As I pulled it out, I glanced at the cabinet above the refrigerator. Would vodka be a better choice? Or maybe the half-full bottle of Jägermeister in the freezer. Both were far more tolerable than the bourbon I'd considered earlier.

How drunk did I want to get?

Perhaps I should have all three. That would certainly go a long way to obliterating all thoughts of that asshole from my mind. The bastard didn't deserve an ounce of my attention. Certainly not after he managed to suffocate all the joy from my encounter with Creed this afternoon.

I stared into the refrigerator. Maybe I should stick to water. My head and my stomach would likely be more appreciative come morning.

And just like that, I managed to talk myself into and out of all the choices in the span of a minute.

I closed the refrigerator at the same time someone knocked on my front door. It was so unexpected that I turned and stared at it, not sure my ears weren't playing tricks on me. I couldn't remember the last time anyone knocked on the door. Not without prior warning of them coming by, and that was only my dad's because they were considerate like that. Rhylee didn't even knock when she dropped by. She called to let me know she was standing outside my door.

The knock sounded again.

Nope. I didn't imagine it.

I went to the door and peered out through the security hole. My heart missed a beat when I saw Creed's face in the fishbowl viewer.

I quickly unlocked the deadbolt and pulled it open. I was smiling on the inside, but I didn't let him know that. "What do you want?"

His expression smoothed out as though my appearance settled him in some way. "I hope you don't mind me dropping by unannounced."

"And if I do?" I stepped back out of the way as he moved toward me. Apparently, he didn't need an invitation.

A little half-smile was on his face when he ducked through the doorway. He scanned the room, taking it all in. It was then I realized he hadn't been to my apartment. In fact, I hadn't told him where I lived, so how did he know?

"Your employee record," he said, tucking his hands in the pockets of his slacks.

"What?"

"That's how I got your address." His eyes locked on the flowers sitting on the table. "From your employee file."

I stared at him, confused. Had I said it out loud?

He stepped toward me, his hands falling to his sides. “I know you probably got enough of me today, but I needed to see you. And we need to talk.”

“I think I’ve had enough talking for one day.”

Creed stepped toward me, tilting my chin up and forcing me to look into his eyes. “Lose the attitude, kitten.”

My mouth opened as my brain prepared a retort, but before I could snap at him, Creed leaned down and pressed his lips to mine. They were soft and warm, and he smelled so good. How he could settle the chaos in my mind with such a simple action, I didn’t know.

I wanted him to kiss me longer, but he didn’t, keeping the gentle melding of mouths chaste and sweet.

When he stood tall, he continued his perusal of my apartment.

Because square footage came at a ridiculous price in California, my apartment wasn’t very big. Only a small kitchen, an even smaller dining space, a decent-sized living room, then the bedroom and bath. It was a far cry from my parents’ house, or Creed’s, for that matter, but I liked it. More importantly, I could afford it on my own, something I’d always insisted I would be able to do when I embarked on the world. My parents had offered to help me—a new car, a fancy apartment or a house, whatever I wanted—but I preferred this. I liked my independence. Even if I found myself in over my head once in a while and needed a boost from my parents, I wasn’t living above my means.

It took a moment, but I remembered my manners. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“Whatever you’re having.”

Wine, I decided, because I didn’t want to have another internal debate about my alcohol choices. *I’m having wine.*

While Creed ventured toward the living room, I went to the kitchen, letting him take stock of my things. I pulled the bottle out of the refrigerator and removed the silicone plug I used once it was opened. As I poured the drinks, I watched

him move through my space. He didn't linger before moving to the sofa and taking a seat, making the relatively decent-sized furniture look oddly small.

I returned to the living room, passing one of the glasses to Creed before I took a seat beside him.

His stormy gaze moved over my face, and I could tell something was on his mind, but he didn't clue me in. Nor did he give anything away as he tossed back the wine like it was a shot of whiskey, then set the glass aside. When he leaned back, his hands went to his sides. He was tense, and he wasn't trying to hide it.

“What's wrong?”

“I need you,” he stated firmly.

And just like that, every worry I had dissolved like grains of salt in the ocean, leaving only curiosity sparked by heat.

“That's what's *wrong*?” I clarified, confused by his answer.

He didn't look at me. “If you're me, it is.”

“You don't want to *need* me?”

Those stormy eyes met mine. “No.”

There was so much adamance in his tone, it scared me. The spark in my veins burned out instantly as I realized he didn't come over to see me; he had come over to tell me he wanted to end things. And I had opened the door and let him in.

My hand trembled, and I nearly dropped my wineglass. I set it on the coffee table.

“So you came over here to tell me you don't want me?” It was my turn to feel awkward, so I looked at my hands as I fidgeted. “I don't even know what to do with that.”

He brushed my knee briefly with his knuckle before retracting his hand. It was enough to have me looking up at him again.

“Earlier, in my office ... you said you were mine.” His eyes darkened with every word. “Did you mean that?”

“Of course I meant it. Why?”

Rather than answer, Creed held out his hand to me. I stared at it momentarily, then laid mine in his. He tugged gently, urging me toward him. When I stood, he repositioned himself on the couch, moving away from the arm, closer to the middle. He guided me onto his lap so that I was straddling him. The position had my dress riding up to the curve of my butt, barely covering the top of my thighs, revealing bare skin that drew his attention.

Strangely enough, it wasn't my body's natural reaction that made my breath catch. It was the way my heart squeezed painfully tight in my chest. The thought of losing him before I had him was not something I wanted to contemplate. That moment of uncertainty left me reeling, and I wasn't sure what to do with that.

Creed's Adam's apple bobbed in his throat as he tore his gaze away from my legs and looked me in the eye. I realized he was breathing heavily despite the fact we hadn't done anything.

“Why did you want to know ab—” I didn't get to finish the sentence because Creed pulled out his phone.

I frowned, wondering what could possibly be important enough to distract him from this conversation. He tapped the screen, swiped it a couple of times, then turned it to face me.

Startled, I leaned back a little as I glanced between his face and the phone. “What's this?”

I took the phone and skimmed the words.

“My blood test results. The date's on there.”

It was dated last week. “I don't understand.”

“That's proof that I'm clean. No STDs.”

My eyes snapped to his face.

He swallowed again, his face pinched. “I don't want to take this slow. I'm trying to, Journey. God knows I'm trying. And failing. Fucking you is the only thing I can think about. And I don't want anything between us.”

That he said *fuck* rather than *have sex* or *make love* wasn't lost on me. The strange thing was, I liked that he was being blunt about it. I knew that this chemistry we shared was potent, and I could admit that my fantasies of him involved some serious fucking, for lack of a better word. As for the test results, it seemed fitting for a man like him. He would want to get the preliminaries out of the way so there were no questions or concerns. That was likely a trait of a Type A personality.

“As long as I *don't* know how it feels to be buried to the hilt inside you, to have your tight pussy sheathing my cock, I can maintain this civilized demeanor.”

Someone should tell that to his erection because it was currently straining proudly against his fly.

“But once I do...” He exhaled slowly. “Once I've had the pleasure of being inside you, I won't be able to keep myself in check. I can't explain this, Journey. I can't explain what this obsession is that I have with you ... I'm just ... I'm tired of trying to keep my hands to myself.”

Since he'd had his hands all over me earlier, I wasn't sure what the opposite of that would be, but I didn't mention it.

“I need you,” he added, his voice rougher around the edges. “I need to touch you; I need to kiss you.” His eyes locked with mine. “I need to hold you while I fuck you. I need you beneath me. I need to feel you wrapped around me.”

My cheeks heated both from how good that made me feel and a hint of embarrassment from hearing him say the words aloud.

Creed sat forward, cupping my face in his big hands as he held my stare. “I need you in my bed. I need to wake up with you in my arms. I need to know that you're going to be there. That you won't run away, Journey.”

I swallowed past the lump in my throat.

“And that's just the beginning, hellcat.” He released my face and leaned back against the cushion. “So now it's up to you,” he said, his voice deepening. “Consider yourself warned.”

Journey

IT TOOK A MOMENT FOR ME TO unweave all those pretty words from my heart, but I managed to untangle them long enough to get clarity.

“Before ... um ...” I shrugged, not wanting to bring up that I’d had sex with Garrison but unable to ignore it completely. “Garrison used a condom. And before that ... I’d only had sex with one man. Back in high school,” I blurted, figuring it was best to get it all out on the table now. “I don’t have any STDs, but I don’t have test results to show you. None that would be recent if I did.”

“I trust you. What about birth control?”

I nodded. “I get a shot every three months. Have since I was sixteen. My mom always said it was better to be safe than sorry.”

Something hot flashed in his eyes. “Would you prefer I use a condom?”

Well, he was just getting it *all* out on the table, huh?

“You don’t want to?”

“I told you. No barriers.”

I wondered if he was speaking about more than merely physical ones. I wanted him to be. I wanted this conversation to be about more than condoms. More than sex. Unfortunately, as I’d learned with Garrison, I couldn’t be as complacent about sex as others could. I’d managed to keep my emotions under wraps, but Garrison’s distance since our night together had broken my heart. I feared I’d fallen in love with him already.

As for Creed ... I knew it was too soon for me to be entertaining the idea of falling in love with him, but the infatuation was undoubtedly real. As it was, I wanted to spend every waking moment with all three of them, and each time I got the opportunity, I wanted to know when the next would come around.

“Okay. No condoms,” I said in agreement.

His eyes narrowed just a little.

“I trust you, too, Creed.”

I was pretty sure his breath hitched, but he didn't move. I think I'd rendered him speechless, and I liked that I had that power. Considering all the power he had wielded over me since the day we met, it was a nice change of pace. It gave me the courage to reach for the top button on his dress shirt. He wasn't wearing a jacket or tie, so it was easy for me to free it. I held his stare as I unhooked another, then another.

“Journey...”

I kept my breaths even. “Today, when you ordered me to strip in your office ... I've never had anyone dominate me with words. Not like that.”

I could feel the reverberation from the rumble in his chest as I freed another button on his shirt, but it was the warmth from his hands as they slid over my thighs that sent a shiver down my spine.

“I've always suspected I was submissive, but today, I realized it's true.”

“Keep going.” His hands slid higher. “Just know, the more you tell me, the more clothes you'll lose.”

I inhaled sharply, my nipples becoming painfully tight at the thought of him undressing me while I told him how much I liked what he had done to me.

“The way you held me, forcing me to take the pleasure ... I never wanted it to end.”

“Keep going,” he rasped.

“When you told me I couldn't speak, and I couldn't come ... I wanted to obey. To please you.”

A small gasp passed his lips, his eyes like molten steel. My words were turning him on.

I tugged on his shirt, pulling it from his slacks so I could finally see the powerful body beneath once again. His stomach

muscles tightened, all those ridges moving beneath his skin.

“But it was the declaration that did me in,” I admitted, still staring at his torso. “When you said you’d take all I’m willing to give and convince me to give more...” I lifted my eyes and met his. “You don’t have to convince me, Creed. I already want to give you everything.”

His hands jerked on my legs, his fingertips slipping beneath the fabric of my dress.

His eyes lowered, and he growled softly. “I fucking love that you’re not wearing panties.”

“I *was*,” I said defensively, working free the links on his cuffs even as his thumbs grazed my inner thighs. “But you wouldn’t give them back.”

“Maybe I need to make that a rule,” he said, his hands roaming higher.

I leaned over, setting the cuff links on the end table. “I like your rules.”

He took advantage of my movement, his thumbs brushing my bare mound. I shuddered as I eased back onto his lap, keeping my legs spread to give him better access. It was hard to focus on anything other than how good it felt when he touched me.

“What else do you like?”

“The way your hand feels on my neck when you hold me still. I’ve never had anyone do that before,” I admitted, my words whisper-soft. “I like being vulnerable to you.”

“Fuck,” he growled, his hands shifting to my ass, jerking me forward, crushing me to him.

It happened so fast, I barely had time to gasp before his lips sealed over mine. I leaned into the kiss, rocking my hips, aching for more than he was giving me. He kissed me hard, his tongue thrusting into my mouth. I could taste his hunger and his need, and it spurred my own into high gear.

“Fuck, Journey,” he growled as he lapped at my tongue. “Do you know how hard it’s been to keep my hands off you?”

His words and the fierce need I felt wrapping around each one caused the air to explode from my lungs. I shoved at his shirt, trying to push it off his shoulders. He assisted, leaning forward at first, then dragging his arms free. He grabbed me, pulling me into him, his arms banding around me. Hot, hard muscles met my palms as I slid my hands down his back and met every thrust of his wicked tongue. He was kissing me so hard, I knew my lips would be bruised, but I didn't care. Nothing mattered except getting everything this man was willing to give me.

When I dragged my nails across his shoulders, Creed trembled, then pulled the hem of my dress up, lifting it higher. I had no choice but to tear my mouth from his so he could drag the dress over my head. He tossed it aside and kissed me again, cupping the back of my head as he fucked my mouth with his tongue. His other hand glided along my back, his palm blazing a heated trail over my spine.

He slowed things down, finally pulling back and staring at me as I sat astride his legs, naked and vulnerable to his hot, hungry gaze. I'd never felt as exposed as I did with him. It surpassed the physical and delved right into all-consuming. As though he could see directly into my soul, and he liked what he found. It was a feeling I loved more than I ever imagined I would. Especially since I could see the approval glittering in his eyes, tightening the lines of his face.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” he hissed. “I could look at you all goddamn day.”

His hands moved to my breasts, cupping them as he lightly grazed my pebbled nipples. His hands were so big, and my breasts were not, but that didn't seem to bother him. He teased me when he scissored his fingers over my nipples, plucking them as he watched my face. He was rough, and I loved every second of it because it was what I'd always wanted, a man whose desire for me was so strong he couldn't control himself.

I reached for his belt, freeing it from the buckle, then released the button on his slacks and eased the zipper down. He was not stopping me this time.

“When you get my pants off, hellcat, I *will* fuck you.”

“Consider myself warned, I know.” I smiled and tugged at the waistband, wanting them off now.

“Warned is an understatement. I’m going to fuck you so hard, I’m the only thing you’ll think about. Then I’ll suck your clit until you’re begging me to fuck you again.”

I shivered, sensing the threat in his tone. I wanted that. I wanted the pleasure that bordered on pain. I wanted to know what it felt like to be strung so tight I worried that I would snap in two.

“Is that what you want, kitten? You want to feel me inside you?”

I nodded, gasping from the pleasure his words sent through me.

He growled, then surged to his feet, holding me when he did. His hands cupped my ass, and he carried me toward the bedroom. I giggled when he tossed me to the bed, but my attention never strayed from the immaculate male specimen before me as he kicked off his shoes, then stripped off his slacks, underwear, and socks, leaving him gloriously naked. His cock bobbed proudly between his legs, and my breath hitched like it had when I first saw him naked before he got in the hot tub.

Like the rest of him, his cock was enormous. Long and thick, with a broad head and a deep reddish-purple hue from the blood filling it. I stared in awe. I couldn’t deny there was a hint of concern. But I didn’t have a problem with Garrison, and he was so thick ... Remembering how good he felt inside me made me shiver.

I didn’t get to ogle Creed for long because he came over me on the bed. His hand slid over my hair as he held my stare, his elbows propping on either side of my head, his legs pushing mine apart. I pulled my knees back and moaned softly when his steely erection pressed against my clit.

“I won’t hurt you, Journey,” he whispered, the dark thunder of his voice a seduction in itself. “Not this time.”

I shivered from the promise in those words. Oddly enough, I wanted him to hurt me, but I wasn't sure I *should* want that.

"Fuck me," I whispered, wreathing my arms around his neck to bring his mouth to mine.

When he kissed me, I could feel his restraint, the way his muscles vibrated. He was holding back for my benefit. I wished I could tell him not to, but I didn't dare. I knew when this man unleashed on me, I would shatter into a million pieces. For the time being, I preferred to remain in one piece.

His tongue danced with mine as he shifted his lower body. A second later, his fingers teased between my legs. I spread them wider, urging him closer to where I needed him. He dipped one finger inside before adding another, gently working me open.

"Are you sore?"

I shook my head, groaning, the pleasure all-consuming. I was so wet I could hear the slip and slide of his fingers as he stretched me. My body knew who he was and what he offered, and it was prepared for him, eager, even.

"You will be," he rasped, adding another finger, gently probing, pushing inside, retreating. "God, you're so fucking tight. I need inside you right now."

His fingers disappeared, and the blunt head of his cock nudged at my entrance. I moaned into his mouth, my body softening in anticipation of the sensual assault. He shifted, lifting my left leg and propping it over his forearm, opening me to his penetration. He went slow. Inch by inch, he pushed inside, and there wasn't an ounce of pain, only pure, mind-numbing pleasure. Creed controlled us both. He knew exactly what was necessary to make me feel good. He didn't try to ram inside me; he pushed in, retreated, in again, my slickness easing the way for him.

Then I felt the stretch. I lifted my head, wishing I could see how much more of him I had to take.

"Relax," he whispered. "You can take me."

I hoped he was right because the stretch morphed into a burn as he pushed in deeper each time. I dug my nails into his biceps, holding on for dear life.

“Tilt your hips back.”

I did, changing the angle, allowing him to slide in deeper.

“Creed... Oh, God...”

“Your pussy feels so ... fucking ... good,” he gritted out through clenched teeth, pushing in a little more with every word. “So fucking tight ... wet. So goddamn sweet.”

My body clutched at him, wanting more, seduced by his words and the delicious friction of his body inside of mine.

“Relax, baby. Feel me,” he whispered, his breath fanning my mouth. “Feel every inch as I split you open.”

My belly twisted with excitement. His words turned me on.

“That’s it, kitten.” He rocked his hips, sinking in, retreating. Inch by delicious inch, he filled me until I swore I would split in two.

His eyes remained locked on my face as though he was gauging my pleasure by my expression. I was gasping, but at some point in the past few seconds, I began welcoming the sensation. It wasn’t so much pain as discomfort that was being kept at bay by a pleasure that was so intense it was consuming me.

“More,” I told him, holding his stare. “Make me feel it, Creed.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. He rolled his hips, pushing in deeper.

I grunted, but the pain vanished almost instantly, pleasure crashing through me in waves.

“More,” I demanded.

He drove in harder that time.

“Oh, God ... yes.”

“Your first time ... did he...” Creed sank in all the way.

I threw my head back and cried out as my pussy spasmed around his cock. I could feel him in the deepest part of me. It didn't hurt, but I felt impossibly full now.

“Did he wear a condom?”

I nodded, wanting to assure him. “Please...”

“So I'm the only man who's been inside you bare?”

I should've known his question wasn't about safety but rather his need to be my first in some way.

“Yes. The only. Please, Creed...”

“Please what, kitten?”

“Fuck me,” I whimpered. “I need you to move.”

He growled, lightly pumping his hips as though he wanted to go deeper than physically possible. My inner muscles fluttered around the intrusion as pleasure made my skin tingle.

“Hold on to me, baby.”

My arms tightened around his neck, and he buried his face against my shoulder as he began to roll his hips, fucking me slow and deep. I felt the tension build instantly, and I knew I was going to come any second.

“That's it, kitten.” Creed blew out a hard breath, the warmth tickling my neck. “Squeeze my cock with that tight little cunt.”

I did as he asked, loving the way he groaned each time my pussy caressed him.

“You're perfect,” he whispered against my neck as his hips flexed. He increased the tempo, driving in deeper. “So fucking perfect. I need you, Journey. I need to feel you come on my cock.”

He continued to fuck me, and the tingling in my core radiated outward, like a balloon slowly filling until it was stretched and threatening to explode. On the outside, my skin tingled from electrical impulses that seemed to be directly

connected to my pussy. The tension increased until I could hardly breathe from the pleasure. I honestly didn't think it was possible to come from penetration alone, but his cock was sliding against erogenous zones I didn't even know I had.

"Come for me," he growled roughly, a command rather than a request. "Let go for me. I want to feel this tight pussy milk my dick, baby."

I loved how vulgar he was.

"You're strangling my cock," he groaned, punching his hips forward, his movements driving home his words. "Feels ... so ... fucking ... good."

I couldn't resist him, and even if I could have, I didn't want to. Those bands inside me stretched thin until they threatened to snap. When he slammed his cock inside me once more, I cried out his name as I came with an unrestrained cry of ecstasy. I didn't expect it, but my orgasm crashed through me, driven by those filthy words and the wicked urging of his body.

He stopped suddenly, pulling out and shifting down, shouldering my legs apart. He spread my pussy lips apart with his thumbs, licked my clit once, then drew it between his lips. He did exactly as he promised. He sucked the little nub, vigorously flicking the tip with his tongue until I was begging him just like he said I would.

Creed didn't let me come, though. He moved over me once more, shoving his cock inside me. My body welcomed him this time, already stretched to accommodate. He didn't hold back, propping himself on his hands as he banged away at me. I grabbed his arms to keep myself still so he could drive in deeper, harder. He was breathtaking in his masculine beauty, all those muscles flexing and bunching beneath his skin. I would never get enough of this man.

"Let go for me, Journey. Let me feel you."

He pounded into me as though his only objective was to make me come apart at the seams. It didn't take long before

another explosion ripped a scream up my throat, leaving me raw and untethered.

He shuddered, holding himself still as my pussy fluttered around him. When I relaxed, he began to move again, his hips picking up speed as he fucked me deeper, harder, faster. I held on, loving how the sensations annihilated me, making my skin feel too small for my body and my heart too large for my chest. I was lost to this man.

Creed changed his pace and angle a few times, driving me higher and higher, pulling back a second before I went off again. He kept at it as though he knew exactly what I needed. When he lifted his upper body, I released my hold on him. He rose to his knees, spreading them wide, his hands curling under my ass, lifting me so that the angle was changed again. My back curved, and I could see his cock as it entered me. I was mesmerized by the sight of his thick shaft spearing into me, his stomach muscles flexing and contracting with every thrust of his hips. I'd never seen anything so erotic in my life.

“So fucking pretty,” he mumbled, his eyes glued to where our bodies were connected. “This sweet little pussy...” He was panting harder, the muscles in his shoulders tensing. “I’m going to come inside you. Mark you as mine.” His gaze leveled on my face. “*Mine*, Journey. You understand me?”

I nodded, my chest swelling with an emotion I refused to put a name to.

He drove into me several more times, his deep grunts sending chills skittering along my nerve endings as the waves of pleasure rose higher and higher until they crested and moved through me once more.

“Creed!” I exploded in a shower of light and heat.

He fell forward, his hips driving downward, fucking me ferociously. Every punishing thrust pushed me to new heights until I was hovering on the verge of another orgasm, this one more intense than the ones before.

“Come for me,” Creed growled in my ear. “Come all over my cock. Let me feel you one more time.”

My nails scored down his back as I let myself go. When I did, he buried his face in my neck and growled my name as he pumped his hips, taking pleasure from me.

Then he slammed into me one final time, and his teeth clamped down on my shoulder as his body went rigid. The pain combined with the sensation of his cock pulsing inside me was so intense it triggered another orgasm and left me completely wrecked, and I didn't just mean my body.

Creed

AS I LAY IN JOURNEY'S BEDROOM, THE lights off, her soft, warm body curled over me, I found that I was more relaxed than I'd ever been. Maybe even at peace for the first time.

It had more to do with her nearness than what we had done a short while ago, although I wouldn't deny that was the most intense thing I'd ever felt. I wasn't a saint by any stretch of the imagination. I'd lost count of the women I'd been with, but right here, right now, I couldn't remember a single one of them. Didn't want to.

This woman had somehow managed to ensnare the beast within me. There was an emotional connection. She had tapped into the whole of me, not only one aspect. That'd never been done before. I'd never wanted more than a physical joining. With Journey ... I wanted every part of her I could get. Mind, body, and soul. I didn't merely want her to submit to me; I wanted her complete surrender.

I'd always suspected my kink would ultimately destroy me, that it would keep me from having the one person I could call my own without having to be someone I wasn't. Journey seemed to accept me for me—the good and the bad. At least what she'd seen so far. However, the animal within needed more reassurance. I needed to know that she could handle everything about me because what she had glimpsed so far was merely the tip of the iceberg.

And that spurred questions I didn't particularly like. Or the answers I had for them.

But I was willing to take the risk because I was nothing before Journey Zeplyn came into my life, changing my existence from the first moment I saw her. I knew instantly that she was special, that she would change my life.

But never did I suspect she would single-handedly bring me to my knees.

Garrison

“WHERE’S HE AT?” I ASKED AS I walked through the main reception area at Primal.

The submissive on duty—a beautiful, curvy redhead with big blue eyes and pouty lips—looked up from the iPad lying flat on the desk.

“They have him in an aftercare room. The P-mod asked me to tell you that keeping him in there hasn’t been easy.”

PMoD was submissive speak, referring to either the Primal Master on duty or the play monitor on duty. I had long ago stopped trying to interpret their acronyms and shorthand, and tonight, I couldn’t care less. As for the level of difficulty required for corralling, much less restraining Hawk, it didn’t surprise me they had issues. Hawk was not the sort to listen to reason when he let his emotions get the best of him. And I had some idea of what had set him off tonight.

Unfortunately, he’d gone too far this time.

“Buzz me in,” I told her. “And before you leave in the morning, I want a full report sent to Creed. But not before two a.m. Understood?”

“Yes, Sir.”

The door buzzed, and the lock disengaged, allowing me entrance into the club proper.

Being that it was Monday night, the club was relatively empty, which I appreciated since I wasn’t there to socialize. I didn’t have the energy or the desire to make nice with the submissives looking for playtime, nor was I interested in chatting with those who pretended they hadn’t seen me in a month when I’d been here a couple of nights ago. Right now, I wanted to get Hawk and drag his ass out by his fucking ears. I wanted to get him back to the house, beat some sense into him, and then go to sleep. It had been a shit day from the start, and it continued to get worse.

I encountered two play monitors on my way through, both directed me toward my destination. I paused outside the aftercare room they had pointed me to and took a deep breath. I was sure walking in unhinged wouldn't do Hawk or me any good.

"Ah, Jesus, Hawk," I muttered when I opened the door and found him passed out on the floor, flat on his back, arm slung across his face.

He was wearing leather pants and biker boots, his shirt mysteriously absent. Even like that, the man had the ability to make my dick hard. He shouldn't have that power over me, and I still wasn't sure when it had started. Long before that kiss that had tripped me up and left me wondering what the hell I was doing with my life.

"What the fuck're you doin'?" I grumbled, kicking his foot with my boot.

"Not a goddamn thing," he replied, the words muffled by his arm, his speech not as slurred as I expected.

Evidently, he wasn't passed out after all.

"Get up," I instructed, unwilling to let him wallow in his pity for another second. He'd already violated the most important rule we had. Not only that, but half a dozen Dominants had witnessed his drunken tantrum. From the message I received requesting my presence down here, it had taken three to hog-tie him just to get him into this room.

"Leave me alone." He stretched his legs out but didn't uncover his face.

"Get. The. Fuck. Up," I snapped.

His arm slid down, his bloodshot eyes narrowed on me.

"I'm not playin' with you, Hawk. Get the fuck up. Right now." I pointed toward the door. "We're goin' home, and you're not gonna say a fuckin' word. Understand me?"

"I can't go home," he whispered. "I can't be around him right now."

"He's not home," I informed him.

“He’s still with her?” The incredulity in his tone was familiar. Probably because I’d been plagued by the same earlier when I realized Creed was spending the night with Journey.

I stepped toward him, grabbing his arm and yanking roughly. I didn’t give a fuck if I hurt him, which was part of the reason I needed him to pretend he was a fucking grownup and not a goddamn child. I was at the end of my rope for the same damn reason he was. I, however, knew how to internalize my pain. Hawk preferred to hang his from a pole and let others knock it around like it was a tetherball. Half the fucking club was already privy to shit they had no business knowing. All thanks to Hawk.

It took effort, but I finally got him to his feet. Every time he attempted to speak, I shut him up by shoving him forward. He had to focus so he didn’t faceplant on the floor. I doubted the silence would last, but for the moment, it kept me from punching him.

By the time we got to my truck, his shoulders were slumped, and I could see the defeat etched on his face.

“Is he gonna kick me out?”

I sighed. “He might not have a choice. What you did was stupid.”

“I wasn’t thinking,” he mumbled, his head resting on the window.

That was the damn truth. Primal had a rigid set of rules that the members had to follow. And besides discretion, the most important was that no one was allowed into the club when they’d been drinking. Some fetish clubs permitted a limited number of drinks, but at Primal, we had zero tolerance. Considering the degree of play we allowed, there was too much risk for even a two-drink maximum. Hell, I was curious how Hawk managed to get inside in his current state. He should’ve never been buzzed through. Knowing him, he had snowed some sweet submissive into believing he was stone-cold sober, probably with promises of playtime later.

“Did you play tonight?” I asked, steering the truck out onto the road.

“Nah. Tried. Couldn’t.”

If I had to guess, he had been too preoccupied with his hurt and anger to pay attention to anyone else. That was a damn good thing.

“He’s fucking her, you know.”

“Yeah. I know. You need to stop thinkin’ about it.” That was what I was trying to do.

We spent the next ten minutes in blessed silence. At one point, I thought I heard Hawk snoring softly, but when I looked over, I saw he was wide awake. Poor bastard.

Finally, we reached the neighborhood, and the main gate lifted when I approached the guard station. I waved to the guard on duty as I drove through.

“You fucked her, too,” Hawk said, no accusation in his tone, merely acceptance. “When will I get to spend a minute with her?”

“With her or with him, Hawk? I think you’ve got your priorities all screwed up.”

“So what if I do? No one said I couldn’t love more than one person.”

Oh, brother. He’d gone down that road already, huh?

I didn’t respond because I refused to have this conversation with Hawk. I’d already told him my viewpoint on the whole fucked up situation. I had warned him months ago that getting in deep with Creed wasn’t smart. The man didn’t do relationships. The few of us who were fortunate enough to befriend him knew that was the most he would ever offer. Friendship and loyalty, but never love. I wasn’t even sure Creed was capable of emotions that ran that deep, and I knew for damn sure that he wasn’t looking for it.

“I think I love her,” Hawk muttered.

I couldn't count the times he had been "in love" since I met him. It didn't matter that his version and true, soul-deep love were vastly different. Whenever he found himself intrigued by someone, he insisted it was love. That would usually last for forty-eight hours or so, right up until he slept with whatever woman had struck his fancy. He'd move on shortly after, claiming they had ended things. I knew better. Hawk was about as committed as Creed when it came to relationships.

However, Creed was the exception for Hawk. I believed he had fallen head over heels for the man against his better judgment. And perhaps Journey. But I wasn't sure Hawk had spent enough time with her to fall in love.

I huffed, not bothering to hide my exasperation. "You love everybody, Hawk."

"Not true," he said, sounding sober for the first time. He ticked off three fingers as he spoke. "Creed. Journey. You. I can count them on one hand."

My head snapped toward him. Surely my ears were playing tricks on me, right? That or Hawk was drunker than I thought.

I shook it off as I pulled the truck into the driveway. I parked close to the front door, turned off the engine, and hit the release for Hawk's seatbelt before unclipping my own.

"Get out," I ordered. "I want you to drink some water and take some ibuprofen. You're gonna hate yourself in the mornin'."

"I already hate myself," he mumbled, stumbling out of the truck.

He listed to the side as he was going up the steps to the front door, so I propped him up, helping him inside and toward the kitchen. I shoved him in the direction of a bar stool, then went to the fridge to get a bottle of water. I slid it across the island in his direction, not surprised when it hit him in the head because he was leaning over, his forehead resting on the granite.

I went to the pantry and grabbed the bottle of Advil, shaking out two pills. I took them to him, then lifted his head by grabbing his ear.

“Fuck,” he moaned. “That hurts.”

“It wasn’t supposed to feel good. Here.” I held out the pills.

Hawk glanced at my palm, then up at my face. “I need you to hurt me, G.”

Yeah. I needed that, too, but not like this. Not when he was too drunk to remember, much less participate. And not when we were both reeling from the events of the day.

“It’s not gonna happen.” I grabbed his hand, pressed the pills into his palm, and then closed his fist around them. “Take those. Drink the water. I’ll see you in the mornin’.”

I didn’t make it two steps when Hawk grabbed my arm. His aggressiveness triggered my inner Dominant, and I responded in kind, spinning around and slamming him against the center island. I leaned forward, forcing him back, his body bowed over the granite top. My hips pressed to his.

“Don’t fuck with me tonight,” I growled roughly. “I don’t have it in me.”

Usually, Hawk would give up, but he surprised me when he grabbed behind my neck and pulled me down. I stumbled forward, putting my full weight on him as his lips melded to mine.

A better man would’ve backed away, but I wasn’t that man. Not at that moment. No, I was selfish and as fucking needy as Hawk, which was the only excuse I had for why I kissed him back. Ever since that first kiss in my shower and the brief one that followed in the kitchen, I’d thought about him, about kissing him. I would find myself daydreaming, wondering if it had been as good as I remembered. I had convinced myself it was merely an illusion, an automatic response to the chaotic emotions I’d been buried under since I met Journey.

I was so fucking wrong. Those sensations he'd sparked ignited once again. I felt them throughout my entire body. I'd only kissed one other person who'd made me feel like this, and in my defense, I'd thought I had imagined that, too. Unfortunately, I had learned earlier that day that what I felt for Journey wasn't a figment of my imagination either. I'd kissed her in my office, and that too-brief moment had confirmed I was living in a state of denial where she was concerned.

Hawk's mouth moved against mine, his tongue lashing as I tried to control the kiss. I could feel him surrendering. It threatened to shatter my resolve. We couldn't do this. Not like this.

I bit his bottom lip with enough pressure to cause pain and held it between my teeth as I tried to catch my breath.

"Yes..." Hawk mumbled, his hands clutching at me. "Hurt me, G. I need you to hurt me."

His words were muddled because he couldn't use his bottom lip, but I understood them enough. They overrode my body's reaction, and I managed to force myself back, stumbling away from Hawk. He stood up, his eyes hooded, his lips swollen from that kiss. It would've been so easy to take what he was offering, to bend this man to my will right here, right now. But I'd never been the one to take the easy route.

"Take the pills," I repeated gruffly. "I'll see you in the mornin'."

It took everything in me to walk away from him.

10

Tuesday...

Journey

I CAME AWAKE BECAUSE THE BED SHIFTED, the warmth I'd been comforted by all night disappearing, fading like a dream. I opened my eyes to see Creed sitting at the side of the bed. He was arched forward, elbows on his knees, feet on the floor.

He was still here. Somewhere in my sleep-hazed mind, I realized that was a good sign. Unlike Garrison, he hadn't run away.

I couldn't resist reaching out to touch him, gliding my hand over the contoured muscles of his back.

He twisted, his hand caressing my arm lightly. "Go back to sleep, kitten. I've got an early meeting."

I met his eyes in the dimly lit room, offering a smile. "I'm glad you stayed last night."

I sighed when he brushed my hair back from my face, his thumb lingering on my cheek for a moment.

"I'll see you later today."

"Okay."

With that, I rolled over and succumbed to exhaustion and contentment.

Two hours later, I was staring at my reflection in the mirror with a huge grin on my face. When my alarm went off, I bounded out of bed, feeling like a new woman. Even through my shower and makeup routine, I found my smile set firmly in place as I replayed the events of last night over and over, my body tingling from the memory.

Admittedly, there were some aches to go along with the tingles. There was some tenderness between my legs which I felt every time I moved. Not that I cared. The discomfort reaffirmed that the pleasure had been real. Plus, there was a bruise in the shape of teeth marks on my neck. It didn't hurt, and if Creed wanted to do that a few dozen times every night,

I'd take every incredible second. Soreness be damned. The aches distracted me, keeping my smile firmly planted as I got ready for the day.

As my mother always taught me, I dressed for my mood. Or I planned to, but when I opened my closet, I found an outfit had already been selected. A piece of paper pierced by the hanger read: WEAR THIS TODAY. ONLY THIS.

I couldn't remember the last time I wore the dress, and to be honest, I didn't figure it for something Creed would've cared to see me in. It was more casual than sexy, more comfortable than revealing. But I was in a good mood, so I indulged him. The three-quarter sleeve, blue, cream, and tan plaid shirtdress was perfect for early spring. The polyester/spandex blend made it stretchy, so it felt nice against my bare skin. It came to mid-thigh, but with the tan suede over-the-knee boots sitting beneath it, there wouldn't be too much skin revealed.

I added a few gold bangles on my wrist and my favorite gold earrings. When I reached for the watch my parents bought me for college graduation, I realized it wasn't hanging on the hook where I kept it. I frowned, moving aside the boxes of shoes to see if it had fallen on the floor, but it wasn't there either. I spent a couple more minutes searching the drawer where I tossed things when I was too lazy to put them up. Nope. As a last-ditch effort, I looked in my nightstand. Not there, either.

Hmm. Maybe I left it at my parents'?

Figuring it would turn up at some point, I returned to the bathroom to take one last look at myself. The collar of the dress hid the bruise perfectly. As I admired the outfit, I wondered if I looked as different as I felt. Granted, I hoped I didn't look like I was naked beneath this dress because that could get sincerely awkward at the office.

Still, I smiled. I didn't know how to describe this shift, but I felt like the firm ground beneath my feet was now a fluffy cloud, and my head was submerged high into the heavens. I felt lighter, stronger, and more confident.

“Maybe it’s the orgasms.” I flashed one final smile before heading to the kitchen.

Or maybe it was the fact that Creed was there when I woke up. For some reason, that felt like a tremendous feat for him, and I didn’t want to take it for granted.

When I stepped out of my bedroom, I realized I was running ahead of schedule, which was in line with this new version of me that had emerged from my bed. Unstoppable was the word that came to mind as I grabbed my bag and headed for the door, snagging my keys from the bowl.

I took the elevator down, glancing at my cell phone. I had the urge to text Hawk to see if he wanted to get coffee before work. I wanted to see him, but I wasn’t sure he would want to see me. What if he found out I was with Creed last night? Would he be mad? I hadn’t seen him since I was at their house on Saturday, nor had I heard from him aside from the text on Sunday morning.

By the time I reached my car, I had talked myself out of texting him. Maybe I would run into him in the cafeteria today, and I could make it appear coincidental.

I clicked the key fob to unlock my car at the same time my cell phone rang. I hit the button to answer on speaker. “Hello?”

There was a hint of disappointment when I didn’t hear a male voice, but Avery’s chipper, “You will *never* guess what I just got!”

“A tattoo?” I joked. “A nose ring? No, wait. I know. A hood piercing!”

“No. No. And *hell no!*” she answered with a laugh.

I opened the door, tossed my bag in the passenger seat, and got in. “Hey, I read posts by women who swear by—”

“I just got an offer from Primal Instincts! I’m coming to work there.”

All my giddiness came to a screeching halt.

“What now?” I asked, my hands gripping the steering wheel tighter, my entire world shifting into slow motion.

“I couldn’t resist. I can’t let my best friend do all the work, now can I?”

“Uh...” I leaned back in my seat and stared out the windshield.

“You’re happy, right?”

“Of course I am.”

Maybe.

I *was* happy that Avery was coming to California, but I wasn’t sure now was a good time. Nor was I all that comfortable that she was coming to work at Primal Instincts. It was one thing for me to have started with an ulterior motive, but since I’d stopped worrying about the secret club that could be connected, I hadn’t considered how Creed would react when he learned about my deceit. If he was the Alpha—which I believed was the case based on his statement yesterday—I didn’t think he’d be pleased to know I came on board to unearth his secret.

“This way, we can finally figure out whether the club really exists.” Avery sighed. “Rhylee said you’re making progress, but we’ll figure this out twice as fast with the two of us.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “Twice as fast.”

“Come on, Journey. It’s the only thing you’ve talked about for so long. I figure it makes more sense to put our heads together. And with me at the company, too, there’s a much better chance to find out who belongs and who doesn’t. Unless you’ve figured it out already,” she said, a teasing hint in her voice.

“When would I have time to do that?” I choked out, praying she didn’t hear my reluctance to talk about this.

If she had called me last week, my reaction would’ve been entirely different. But now that I genuinely believed Creed was the not-so-mythical Alpha of Primal, I didn’t want to uncover the top-secret club. Not if it meant doing something he would disapprove of.

“When do you start?” I asked, forcing cheer into my tone because I knew it was what Avery expected.

“The Monday after Easter.”

I mentally calculated how much time I had before her arrival.

“That’s like a month away,” I declared, starting my car and putting it in *drive* so I would have something to focus on.

“I know. It gives me time to do what I need to do here. Moving from Florida to California’s kind of a big deal.”

Yes, I imagined it was.

“Well, I can help you apartment hunt if you need me to,” I offered, feeling a sense of relief that she wasn’t coming yet.

I was seriously thrilled, even more so because I had three weeks to figure out how to convince her that I’d moved on from figuring out who was behind the club. She was right that I’d been focused on it for so long, and I knew deterring her wouldn’t be easy, but at least I had some time.

“I might need help,” Avery stated. “Rhylee said I could stay with her for a bit if I need to. I’m hoping not to do that. You know how writers are. They’re all serious about their writing caves.”

I actually *didn’t* know since I wasn’t a writer, but I didn’t say that.

“She’s on a roll. That’s the only reason she’s not accosting you every day. We both know once she hits a lull, she’ll be drilling you for information.”

Or Nick Weston’s going to be drilling her.

The thought made me smile, but thankfully I managed to keep from laughing.

“Plus, if we can figure it out, that’ll be huge, Journey. That just might make us go viral.”

Which I knew was what they both wanted. Rhylee, because she was a full-time author and she’d had decent success with her erotic romance novels. Enough that she could

support herself that way. And since her sole focus was on BDSM, it made complete sense. Avery wanted the attention so she could launch her writing career. It'd been her dream. Up to this point, she had relied on social media to help her grow a fanbase, so she wouldn't be starting from scratch when she did publish her first book.

“Okay, I've gotta run,” Avery said, disrupting my thoughts. “I posted a new short last night—the first one in a week. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll find inspiration when I get to Cali. Based on your posts, I sure as hell don't think it'll hurt.”

I laughed it off as a joke, then disconnected after Avery promised to keep me in the loop on her move plans.

As I pulled into the parking lot of Primal Instincts, I couldn't help wondering whether or not I had time to get ahead of this before hurricane Avery came to town. And if I didn't, I wondered whether or not Creed would ever forgive me.

It wasn't until I got to the main lobby that I realized Creed's disappointment in my motives was the least of my worries.

“Ms. Zeplyn,” Duke greeted when I reached the elevator. “Mr. Granger asked me to show you to your new office.”

“My new what?”

Yeah, that good mood ... completely gone.

He responded as though I hadn't said anything. “This way, please.”

The elevator doors opened, and he led the way. I considered refusing, but I wasn't sure what good that'd do me.

Reluctant but willing, I followed him into the elevator. “What floor am I on this time? A storage closet on two?”

Duke pushed the button for the seventh floor.

“Maybe a storage closet on seven?” I muttered, irritated that he acted like I didn't exist.

When we arrived on seven, he walked out, leaving me to follow. As was the case every time I'd arrived, two women were seated at the desks outside the double doors.

"If you're the last one to leave," he explained once we stepped into the second reception area, "this button will close and lock all the doors. You'll have ten seconds to exit through these"—he gestured toward the outer doors—"before they also lock and the alarm engages."

Fancy.

"If you need to return and they're locked, a biometric scanner is mounted under each desk. Bree or Diane can let you in. If they're not there, you can do it yourself. Once we get your fingerprint added, of course."

Of course.

"This way," he continued, gesturing toward the wide hallway.

"I'm getting stuffed into the conference—"

I stopped my tirade abruptly when Duke opened the door to what had been a conference room yesterday. Today it was a replica of my previous office, only much larger. Someone even set everything up on my desk exactly as it was, and the height had been maintained. They even brought the vase of roses Hawk had sent me for Valentine's. They were a little worse for wear at this point, but I wasn't quite ready to throw them out.

"Your private bathroom is that way." He gestured toward the door on the right side of the room. "If there's anything you need, press one to reach me. I can have coffee brought up anytime, as well as lunch. Just let me know."

"Thank you, Duke," I said, still stunned by the relocation.

"Mr. Weston has asked to meet with you at nine. He wanted to give you some time to get acclimated."

I nodded, still skimming the room. The only thing missing was the bookshelf I had never used. The one that held the binder with the hidden camera. In here, there were two short

white bookshelves tucked beneath the windows overlooking the courtyard below.

My gaze locked on a crystal vase on the small, round conference table. Three roses protruded from it, and someone had taken the time to water them. If I wasn't mistaken, those were roses from the arrangement sitting on my dining room table, which meant Creed had taken them when he left this morning.

I wanted to be angry, and part of me was, but I couldn't help being relieved I wasn't stuck somewhere on another floor with people I didn't know. Granted, I wasn't sure how beneficial it would be to my reputation that I was now sitting with three men from whom I'd been accused of seeking favoritism. I could only imagine what Gem and Delaney would say when they figured it out.

As I made my way to my desk, I realized I didn't give a shit what they thought. Why should I? I didn't ask for this. In fact, I was disappointed that I wouldn't be working on the Reflect project anymore. I'd been looking forward to following it from beginning to end, and now I had to hope it would even make it that far with Wayne at the helm.

Just thinking about him put a frown on my face as I logged on to my computer and settled in for whatever the hell this new ride was.

Creed

BY THE TIME I ARRIVED AT THE office, the morning was in my rearview. The off-site meeting I attended ran longer than I anticipated, but it had been a necessary evil considering all that was going on.

That said, it couldn't have come at a worse time as far as my personal interactions were concerned. I would've preferred to be here when Journey arrived so I could've been the one to escort her to her new office. Since she likely thought I had moved her to the seventh floor for my convenience, it would've benefited me to assure her that wasn't true. Not entirely, anyway. It had factored into my decision, but it wasn't the main reason.

Thanks to one of many updates from Duke that morning, I learned she had been irritated when she arrived, as I expected, but by the time he left her in her new office, she had calmed down. Since then, Nick had kept her busy by walking her through his idea for the position that we'd created on a whim. I only hoped she was too focused to think I was avoiding her.

"Good morning, Mr. Granger," Duke greeted when I walked in.

He was seated behind his desk, cast in shadow by the lamp on the credenza behind him. The air was rich with eucalyptus and spearmint—a scent he claimed was meant to calm and soothe. As for why he thought it was necessary, I didn't know. Nor did I care.

He held up a stack of Post-its he insisted on using for my messages.

I took them as I glanced toward the hallway. "Is she in?"

"Yes. She's meeting with Nick now. Would you like me to have lunch brought up for you? You have a call at twelve-thirty with the finance director."

"Yes to lunch. I'll take a sandwich." I skimmed the stack of notes. "Is Hawk in his office?"

“I haven’t seen him yet today.”

“Find him and summon him here now. Tell him he’s got twenty minutes, or the punishment will be harsher.”

“Yes, sir,” he answered dutifully.

“When he arrives, lock it down. No one but you is permitted in my office.”

Duke’s eyes lowered, his submission prominent when he realized I was not speaking as his boss. “Yes, Alpha.”

I tended not to cross business dealings with personal ones, but based on the text message I received at two o’clock this morning, I didn’t have a choice but to address the situation with Hawk now. I knew what had triggered his tantrum, but his actions had violated more rules than I could count. If I didn’t tend to it now, it would only fester, and the last thing I wanted was to suspend Hawk’s membership, which, based on his actions, I should do regardless.

I headed to my office, leaving the door open before sitting at my desk to pull up my calendar. My twelve-thirty was a conference call, which wouldn’t impact what I had in store for Hawk. Part of me hoped he was late so I could make his punishment hurt even more. The man had pushed me this time, and I couldn’t let it go.

I got my wish half an hour later when Hawk sauntered through my door, looking like he didn’t have a care in the world despite the rumpled clothes and bloodshot eyes.

“Shut the door,” I rasped darkly, not bothering to hide my discontent.

His expression evened out as he pivoted back and did as I instructed. When he turned to face me, his don’t-give-a-shit attitude had disappeared; in its place, obedience but not remorse. I’d learned to read this man well over the years, and I knew he was aware of how he fucked up, but it usually took him a moment to admit to it.

“Look, Creed—”

“Stop,” I snapped. “Don’t give me your bullshit excuses. I want to know one thing and one thing only. Did you do what you’re being accused of doing?”

He swallowed, then nodded. “Yes, Alpha. I did.”

It was telling that he didn’t have to ask what the allegation was. Then again, Hawk wasn’t the type to pretend, and he never shirked responsibility.

I closed my computer and gave him my full attention.

The role of Alpha was not merely a title that I had obtained when I took over Primal from Ryder and Roman ten years ago. Although acquiring the position was part of the game—it involved physically dominating and defeating the current Alpha—it came with significant responsibilities similar to those in my role as CEO of Primal Instincts. As Alpha, I was responsible for setting and enforcing the organization’s vision, values, and culture, driving profitability, enforcing the code of conduct, and communicating with the board.

Primal was a private, member-owned establishment. All Dominant members contributed equally by paying a set buy-in and a yearly membership fee. Both were exorbitant due to the nature of the club, as we’d learned a higher fee had a direct correlation to loyalty. Submissives could not be paying members; instead, they were sponsored by a Dominant or the club. They paid their dues by handling the day-to-day menial tasks needed to keep things in order. We had a board of directors, and the seven members who sat on the panel were voted in every two years and served specified terms not to exceed six years. We also had an in-house legal team that oversaw any legal issues we encountered.

In theory, it was a business, although concealed under various shell companies, a necessity to maintain the anonymity of our members. Thanks to the prominent names on that list, and the need for it to remain out of the public eye, we had a way of operating beneath the government’s radar.

It certainly wasn’t a part-time endeavor, but for the most part, it ran smoothly. Provided everyone abided by the rules and didn’t pull asinine stunts like Hawk had last night. It was

my duty to determine and deliver the punishment when those instances occurred. The only saving grace for Hawk was that he wasn't a submissive member. It afforded him a little leniency where the club was concerned.

I, however, had no intention of going easy on him. This shit had to stop, and it had to stop now.

“You understand I could dissolve your membership for this transgression, don't you?”

Hawk nodded, his eyes firmly on my face, every ounce of defiance gone from his countenance.

I couldn't deny that I appreciated Hawk's obedience when he did what came naturally to him. Other times, he pissed me off to no end because he didn't take into account the repercussions of his actions. This time, he'd gone too far, and he knew it, which was why I was punishing him rather than having Garrison do it for me. I'd been complacent in recent months where Hawk's behavior was concerned, leaving it to someone else because of what happened between us. It was easier that way.

“Why?” I prompted.

Hawk swallowed, his eyes hard. “You spent the night with her.”

“And you thought acting out would somehow change the outcome?”

“No.” His jaw clenched. “I didn't *think* about the outcome. I purposely didn't think at all.”

“That's obvious.” I held his stare. “It's okay to be jealous, Hawk. It's not okay to violate the rules because of that jealousy.”

“Are *you* jealous?”

I decided to be as truthful as he was. “Yes. It's not in my nature to share.”

“So you were pissed when you found out Journey fucked Garrison?”

I didn't respond. It was an ignorant question.

"You can't control him, though, can you? But me ... you can punish me when it suits you. Fuck with my head. You're not jealous of me because you can control it. Control *me*."

"If the time comes—"

"*When*," Hawk corrected. "*When* the time comes."

I exhaled, letting him hear my frustration. "When the time comes that you and Journey..." I swallowed because I couldn't finish that sentence. The thought of the two of them together ... it was painful in more ways than one. I wasn't merely sharing Journey as had been the case when she was with Garrison. I was also sharing Hawk, something I'd never considered could be an issue. Nor was it something I intended to discuss with him now.

"When that time comes, I assure you, I'll know how to handle myself, Hawk. That's where you and I differ."

I gave him a moment to see if he had anything to add. When he didn't speak, I got to my feet, then stepped around my desk. He remained where he was, back ramrod straight, hands at his sides.

"One hour," I informed him. "I do not want to hear a sound out of you. Understood?"

He nodded, his acceptance of the inevitable thickening the air around him.

I moved past him to the opposite end of my office. I tapped the small black button discreetly built into the bookshelf that served no purpose other than to hide the room behind it. The button triggered a mechanism that retracted the two halves of the shelf to reveal a large steel cage inset in a room four feet deep and six feet wide. Using the biometric reader, I pressed my thumb on the screen and unlocked the cage door. I let it swing wide, then stepped back to allow Hawk to see what I had in store for him.

I was impressed when he didn't wince, although this particular torture device was one I knew he wasn't fond of. Not many submissives were.

However, it wasn't the only thing he'd endure for the next hour.

"Strip," I commanded, moving back to my desk while he undressed.

I sat and finished the email I was working on while he disrobed, neatly storing his clothes on one of the empty shelves. When he had completed his task, he stepped in front of the cage, hands clasped behind his back, legs spread, head tilted down.

I could've let him stand there and think about what he'd done, but my afternoon was too busy to put this off, so I closed my laptop, sliding it out of the way as I got to my feet.

"Hands and knees, right here," I instructed, pointing to the glossy top of my desk.

He didn't hide his surprise in time, but I pretended not to notice while I slipped into the bathroom and grabbed a hand towel, the bottle of lubricant, and the torture device I had placed there earlier.

When I returned, he was exactly as I instructed him to be, palms flat on the desk, back straight, head hanging down. As I said, his obedience was humbling. At times.

"I'm going to talk. You're going to listen. Not a sound," I reminded him. "While you were intoxicated and galavanting around the club last night, you obviously know where I was."

He didn't comment. He was listening. Good.

"Lean forward, forearms flat, ass up, knees wide."

I gave him a moment to get into position, admiring his muscular form. It was difficult not to. Hawk was impressively built, and he kept himself in shape by spending so much time training others. I wouldn't pretend I wasn't attracted to him. I always had been. Not only physically, either. In my thirty-nine years, I'd only been attracted to a handful of men, and most of those were superficial physical attractions. While I was bisexual, my intrigue tended to be with the female form, but there was something unique about this man that had grabbed

me by the throat many years ago, and it hadn't let up despite me willing it into submission.

"You already know I was with Journey," I said because I knew that telling him this would be as brutal as the physical punishment he was about to endure. "I was balls deep inside her, making her beg me to let her come."

In this position, I could see his cock harden impressively between his legs. He pretended the subservient action didn't turn him on, but I knew better. As for the humiliation, it wasn't Hawk's thing. Right now, I didn't give a fuck. I wanted him to face this head-on, and the only way I knew to do that was to make him live vicariously through me.

While he made it look easy, I knew it wasn't. From the outside looking in, it might appear that submission was a reaction to domination. That wasn't the case. Submission was a choice; the only way someone could truly give themselves to another was by embracing what came naturally to them. Hawk liked to tell people he was neither dominant nor submissive. That was true to a degree because putting a label on Hawk would be the equivalent of keeping him in a box. He was unique in every way. From my perspective, Hawk was far more dominant than he was submissive. Except when it came to me and, perhaps, Garrison. Bowing to my authority wasn't easy for Hawk. It was even more difficult for the Dominants at Primal because their instinct was to be in control. Still, the club by-laws specifically stated that any member could be disciplined at any given time by the Alpha. It didn't matter whether they were a Primal, a Switch, a Sadist, or a submissive, they were held to the same standards and received a punishment suited for the crime.

For the record, punishing a Dominant was not my favorite thing, although it was a high like no other.

"Her tight little cunt was stroking me ... it was fucking heaven," I continued as though talking about my sexual conquests was an everyday occurrence. I didn't particularly care to reveal what had happened between Journey and me because it was private and deserved to be kept between us. But Hawk needed to hear it. He needed to understand that his

outbursts would not sway me. I wanted her. Nothing would change that.

I opened the top left drawer of my desk and retrieved a latex glove from the box I kept there. Hawk's head didn't turn, but I knew he was aware of what I was about to do.

As I pulled on the glove, I walked around behind him. I placed the hand towel on the desk between his legs, spreading it out to catch any lubricant that dripped down from his balls as I squirted a generous amount directly on his asshole. He didn't flinch. His body was stone still, more so when I roughly massaged the lube inside him, pressing one, then two fingers deep to get him nice and greasy so his body would accept the toy.

His only reaction was a slight twinge of his back muscles when I grazed his prostate.

"If I'd seen the text last night ... if it had interrupted my time with her, the punishment would be so severe, you wouldn't move for a week."

I thrust my fingers in deep, stimulating his prostate. Not for pleasure but to override his defiance and give him something else to think about.

His shoulders tensed, his breaths growing more labored by the second. I couldn't tell if it was a reaction to having his ass fingered or the fury of hearing what I had done to Journey last night. With him, it was anyone's guess.

I slid my fingers out, watching his asshole close slowly. It was the work of a moment to push the prostate vibrator inside him, positioning it where it would provide optimum pleasure. Or pain, as would be the case here. It would push Hawk to the breaking point, but if he succumbed to it, he'd only be hurting himself.

I pulled off the glove and tossed it in the trash bin at the end of the desk. "You'll be confined to the cage for one hour. Inside, now. Don't walk. Crawl."

He barely contained his sigh of defeat as he got down from the desk. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he lowered

himself to his hands and knees and crawled across my office and into the cage—more humiliation to drive home my point—making his way around the CBT pillory in the center. Cock and ball torture was one of Hawk’s least favorite punishments, hence the reason I used to utilize it so often.

“Stand and face me.”

Hawk stepped up to the pillory, planting both feet on the metal plate on the floor, his shoulders rigid, back straight. He kept his eyes downcast as I dropped to one knee and quickly adjusted the pole to be the correct height. He leaned his hips forward, resting his balls on the horizontal metal bar at the top of the pole while I attached the large ankle cuffs to each of his legs and adjusted them so they allowed him no movement in either direction.

Once that was complete, I shifted my attention to his cock, taking him firmly in my hand and stroking. Once, twice ... I stopped when he shuddered. He might not realize it, but this was torture for both of us because of our history. At the same time, inflicting as much pain as possible was my ultimate goal, and if that meant giving him my touch and taking it away, so be it.

Gripping his cock firmly, I took a single metal bar and pressed it to the top of his shaft, aligning it with the one beneath his scrotum, then slid in the eyelet bolts on each end. His cock began to soften almost instantly. Attaching a wing nut to each bolt, I tightened the two bars until they squeezed his cock and balls between them. I kept tightening until Hawk grunted in pain. Since his cock was semi-hard, he would get relief soon enough, but I was prepared to correct that when it came time.

As I was standing, my office door opened. Duke came in, delivering my lunch. He didn’t acknowledge Hawk or me. This was nothing compared to what he had witnessed over the years, although most of the time, it was at the club. Since Duke was a submissive and his husband was his Dom, he had endured punishment very similar to this throughout their relationship.

“What do you say to me?” I asked Hawk. “Speak.”

“Thank you, Alpha,” he said through gritted teeth as I took his wrists and secured them to the cuffs attached to the pole.

In this position, he couldn't move, and if he tried to, if he tensed up, his cock and balls would be pulled away from his body as they were squeezed between the two metal bars keeping him in place. With his body weight keeping the metal plate on the floor, if he swayed, he would cause himself more pain. His entire focus would be on remaining upright and motionless. Once the massager in his ass began to vibrate, it would be infinitely more difficult for him to remain still. As designed.

“Three turns,” I informed him. “One every fifteen minutes. That's the punishment for violating club rules. And for being late, you'll wear a cock cage until I leave the office.”

He made no sound at all.

“Do not let me hear you so much as breathe.”

With Hawk secured, I returned to my desk and pulled up the app on my phone. I set the toy to intermediate vibrate and left it open on the screen so I could press the button to increase the speed as needed.

While he endured, I spent the next hour enjoying his torture while scarfing down my sandwich and talking numbers with our finance team. I found pleasure in watching his face turn red and his jaw tense when the vibrator overwhelmed him. I held my breath when he cried out at one point, the pain overwhelming him when he listed to one side. He managed to remain upright, but barely. After that, I set the vibrator on high, ensuring any pleasure he might've experienced resulted in pain. Every muscle in his body went rigid, but he remained still so as not to increase the pressure on his dick.

As he always did, Hawk persevered. He survived sixty minutes of his cock and balls being crushed without begging for mercy, accepting his punishment by embracing his hatred for me.

When I finally released him from his shackles, I was torn between pride and frustration. Something told me this was merely the beginning because no matter how much pain I inflicted, Hawk always came back for more.

Journey

MY FIRST DAY ON MY NEW ASSIGNMENT wasn't as bad as I expected.

I wasn't entirely on board with the change in my responsibilities, mostly because I disagreed with letting Wayne get away with blackmailing me, but I didn't hate it as much as I thought I would. Granted, I didn't do much of anything besides listen to Nick talk about the vast array of charities that Primal Instincts, LLC, supported and the various fundraisers they'd put together over the years to raise money. Evidently, that would be my responsibility in this role—I was, in theory, an event planner.

It pained me to think of the degrees I'd earned and the fact they were going by the wayside, even if it was temporary. I'd only just begun to enjoy my role as a project manager, and now I was forced to do something different because Creed had put his foot down.

I had to admit the man's manipulations weren't easy to deal with. And no amount of fantastic orgasms were going to make it so.

I mean, it might help. Might make it tolerable.

Oh, who was I kidding? I could survive on the euphoria of epic orgasms regardless of my job.

Although Nick wanted to meet with his entire team to outline the shift in responsibility, today turned out to be a bad day for organizing one. I waited around for as long as I could, hoping to see Hawk, Garrison, or Creed pass by my office. It didn't take me long to figure out that Hawk and Garrison didn't spend much time on the seventh floor. For the most part, Creed, Nick, and Duke occupied the space, but Creed had been in and out of meetings all day, and Duke ... well, Duke was being his regular corncob-up-the-ass self. Since I would rather talk to the hardwood floors in my apartment than try to have a conversation with him, I decided to slip out a few minutes early.

I packed up my things and took my time as I trekked through the building. Unfortunately, I didn't encounter any of them, although I took the elevator to the main floor, hoping to force a chance meeting. Through the atrium, past the cafeteria. No Creed or Hawk or Garrison. Past the coffee shop, into the employee lobby.

Nope.

"Good night, Journey," Kurt called out as I passed his security desk. "Congratulations on the promotion."

I waved and smiled. "It's temporary, but thanks."

Not wanting to risk having to explain the circumstances around the temporary project, I kept my eyes on the exit. I was inches from hitting the security bar that would release the door when a man stepped in front of me.

"Here. Let me get that for you."

His approach was a little too aggressive, but I paused and waited for him to open the door.

"Thanks."

"You're more than welcome." He walked outside with me. "My name's John."

"Nice to meet you," I replied, frowning when I realized he was walking with me.

I slowed my stride, not keen on him following me to my car. I mean, I didn't make a habit of allowing strange men to escort me through relatively empty parking lots.

Plus, there was something off about him. It could've been that he was wearing a ball cap pulled low on his forehead, which hid a good portion of his face. There was a logo on the cap, so I figured he was with a delivery company since he wasn't wearing a Primal Instincts badge.

"Sorry, I didn't get your name," he said, still smiling, the rest of his face concealed by the shadow from the hat.

I stopped and turned toward him, figuring that was the only way to keep him from following me.

“Journey,” I said, forcing a smile. “I don’t mean to be rude. It’s been a long day.” I gestured toward the parking lot as though he might understand my need to get out of there.

“Pretty name.” He canted his head to the side as though he was studying me beneath the brim of his hat. “You look familiar. Do I know you from somewhere?”

I glanced at his face, what I could see of it. “I don’t think so.”

“Huh. Small world, I guess.”

“I guess.” I hitched my bag higher on my shoulder. “I should get going.”

“Would you like to grab some dinner?”

“I ... uh... I actually have plans. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah. No, problem. I understand. Maybe next time. Why don’t you give me your num—”

“Hey, Journey!”

I turned at the sound of my name and saw Gem walking toward me. When I turned back, John was walking away at a pretty fast clip. I stared after him, wondering if that whole encounter was as weird as it seemed or if it really had been a long day.

“How’s the new gig?” Gem asked as they approached. “I heard you’ve got a new title.”

I met their stare, wondering if they were setting me up for something. “Yeah. It’s temporary.”

They nodded, studying me. “Wayne took over your project.”

“That’s what they tell me.” I didn’t mean to be short with them, but I knew Gem wasn’t fond of me, so this was likely a fishing expedition. One I had no desire to be hooked by. “I should go.”

“Hey, Journey,” they said softly when I started to walk away.

I paused and slowly turned back, raising my eyebrow in question.

“Look. I think we got off on the wrong foot.”

“That’s one way of looking at it,” I said snidely, no longer able to hide the hurt they had caused with their accusations. I remembered overhearing their conversation with Delaney in the cafeteria like it was yesterday.

“I want to apologize. I made assumptions I had no business making.”

I hadn’t expected them to say that, so I was unable to hide my surprise. Nor did I know how to respond.

“If it’s any consolation, I think Wayne’ll screw up the Reflect rollout, and they’ll have to scrap it until you can come back. He doesn’t know his ass from a hole in the ground.”

I choked a laugh which caused Gem’s grin to widen.

“Seriously. I’m sorry. Don’t be a stranger, ’kay?”

I nodded, swallowing past the lump in my throat. I wasn’t sure why their apology hit me the way it did, but it left me feeling raw and untethered.

Gem tipped their head and walked away, clearly not picking up on my precarious emotional state.

I took a deep breath and headed for my car, the past few minutes replaying in my head repeatedly. I chalked up my confusion and uneasiness to the strangeness of the entire day, starting when I had woken up with Creed still in my bed.

Maybe this was a sign that I needed to go home, have a glass of wine, and get in some me time. I could deal with work and the men plaguing my every thought tomorrow. When I was better equipped to deal with the chaos that had become my life.

Hawk

WHEN I GOT HOME FROM WORK, I went to my bedroom first. I took off the fucking cock cage Creed had forced me to wear, then took a shower and pulled on a pair of jeans before heading for the kitchen in search of food. I didn't find a home-cooked meal, but the next best thing—Garrison sitting at the kitchen island, a glass of clear liquid in front of him. Instead of drinking it, he was staring into it like it was the almighty crystal ball that might give him the answers to all his questions.

“Bad day?” I prompted, moving to the refrigerator to scrounge for dinner.

Garrison grunted.

“I don't think you'll see images in the vodka,” I said, opening the freezer to check my options. “Not without drinking half the bottle first. Then maybe.”

Another grunt.

I closed the freezer and grabbed the gallon of milk from the fridge, setting it on the island. I retrieved a bowl, a spoon, and a box of Cheerios from the pantry.

Garrison never moved, never drank, never spoke.

I proceeded to fill the bowl, add the milk, eat my dinner.

Garrison remained silent.

Once I ate all the little O's from the bowl, I drank what was left of the milk, then rinsed the bowl in the sink before tucking it and the spoon into the dishwasher.

“You're a sparkling conversationalist, G. I don't think I can keep up with you.”

When he didn't even look up, I turned to leave, figuring he preferred solitude.

“I like kissin' you.”

I stopped and peered back. I wasn't sure I'd heard him correctly, and there was a good chance he hadn't said anything since he was still staring into his vodka.

“What was that?”

“I like kissin' you.”

Maybe he was drunk, and what little was in that glass was all that was left from the fifth he'd downed already. Of all the things Garrison Walker could've said, that was the absolute last thing I would ever expect to come out of his mouth. The only person who was more emotionally closed off than Garrison was Creed. Neither of them generally issued statements that reflected their innermost desires. Not unless it was worded as a command and resulted in a powerful, violent scene or getting their dick sucked. Or both.

“You *like* kissing me. Meaning what, exactly? You want to do more of it? Or you didn't realize kissing could be enjoyable?”

Yeah, I was feeling ornery. So what. I'd spent a fucking hour with my dick and balls in a vise. I didn't feel the need to be overly accommodating.

“Did you mean what you said last night?”

Garrison's question prompted me to run through the mental images of last night. Most of them were foggy, thanks to the alcohol, but the layout was clear. Getting an Uber. Being dropped off at the club. Stumbling inside and sweet-talking the pretty redhead with the pouty lips so she'd let me in. Wandering through the club, looking for trouble. Finding it when I pissed off a Primal Dom by intruding on his scene. Ending up on the floor of the aftercare room. Garrison. The drive home. Mumbling incoherently. Thinking about Journey and Creed. Getting inside. Asking Garrison to hurt me. Going to bed alone.

That summed up the shitty night pretty nicely.

However, I couldn't recall anything I might've said that would've prompted Garrison to have a crystal-gazing session with his vodka.

I decided to play along. “Probably. Remind me what I said again?”

He exhaled slowly and turned the glass tumbler between his finger and thumb. “You said you loved me, Creed, and Journey.”

Hooboy. That was not something I remembered. I skimmed the memories again but came up empty. Didn’t matter. Maybe I couldn’t remember, but I didn’t doubt for a second that I had said it. After all, it was the truth. Not that I was thrilled that I’d unleashed that particular beast on Garrison. Thank God I hadn’t had the mindset to text Creed or Journey with the shocking, not to mention inappropriate, revelation.

“I’m sure it was the alcohol talking,” I told him. “Don’t worry. I won’t make it weird for you. Promise.”

Garrison picked up his glass and downed it in one gulp. He set it back down gently, his head turning as he looked at me for the first time since I came down.

My feet were rooted to the floor even as my brain told me I should make a hasty exit. I didn’t. Couldn’t. Not even when Garrison got to his feet. Or when he stalked toward me.

I stared, waiting for him to say or do something. Anything.

I swallowed when he gripped my chin, leaning in. His mouth settled on mine. I didn’t move, didn’t pucker my lips. I accepted the soft press of his, waiting to see what he would do next. I never knew with Garrison. He was a stealthy predator, the kind that stalked his prey until he was on top of it.

“Kiss me back,” he mumbled against my lips.

“We shouldn’t do this. Not like this.”

It wasn’t that I didn’t want to kiss this man. I did. I wanted so much more than he’d ever given me, but we both knew what I said last night was true. I had a penchant for getting in too deep and letting my emotions lead me around by my dick. I confused intimacy with love. I saw relationships when there weren’t any. I was a needy fuck, and I would be the first to admit it. I couldn’t change who I was, but I had no desire to

find myself being cast aside again. I'd made the mistake once and put a rift between Creed and me because of it. I didn't want to risk the same happening with Garrison.

"How should we do it?" he asked, his grip tightening on my jaw.

It would be so easy to give in. I could instigate the scene that would smother the emotional turmoil we'd endured when Creed spent the night with Journey. We could distract each other for a few minutes, maybe an hour, while we scened together. I would fight, he would dominate, we would explode. It would be phenomenal, as always.

But it wouldn't change a damn thing.

"Don't do this, Garrison. Please."

His fingers released my jaw, and I took a step back. I didn't realize I was panting, my body primed for whatever he wanted to give me. I ignored it. Or pretended to, anyway. Our eyes met and held for long moments. It took effort to break the hold he seemed to have on me, but I managed to turn away, making a break for the stairs.

I could use a few minutes to myself.

Unfortunately, my desire for solitude was quashed when Garrison followed me. I managed to break the tension in the kitchen, but it appeared he wasn't done with me yet. I wasn't sure what more he expected me to say. If he wanted me to drop to my knees and confess my undying love for him, he could get fucked. I was needy, not a fucking idiot.

I kept an even pace as I headed down the hall to my room. He was right behind me.

To test my theory, I tried to close the door in his ridiculously handsome face, but Garrison stopped it with a palm on the wood.

"What do you want, Garrison? I don't think—*oomph*." The air was knocked from my lungs when Garrison grabbed my shirt and jerked me toward him. When I was off balance, he slammed me into the wall. Before I could tell him I wasn't in

the mood to be manhandled—a complete and total lie—his mouth crushed mine.

I was stunned for a moment. At least, that was my excuse as I kissed him back, grabbing handfuls of his shirt and pulling him into me. The instant my sanity returned, I tried to shove him away, but he came back at me each time. We wrestled like that until he bulldozed me down onto the bed. He was on me in a second, covering my body with his, his lips finding mine. I kissed him as though my life depended on it, even as I tried to shove him off. I wasn't using my full strength, so he didn't budge, but I wasn't above giving him the illusion that I didn't want this.

Truth was, I fucking wanted him. I wanted to feel him on top of me, inside me. I fucking missed this. The feeling of being wanted. I craved it, and it had eluded me for too damn long. Not since Creed, back when we succumbed to the overwhelming urges whenever they arose, our only objective to sate them. It didn't matter whether we fucked ten times a day; it was never enough. I wasn't sure it ever would be, and that scared the shit out of me. I wanted someone to fucking want me. Someone to put me first. I thought I had found that with Journey, but now I wasn't sure. I had no idea when I'd become so goddamn needy.

“You know what Creed was doin' with her last night?” Garrison whispered against my mouth. “He had his cock buried inside her.”

I grunted, trying to shove Garrison off me. I didn't want to hear this shit. I'd heard enough from Creed earlier.

Garrison pressed his hips down, the ridge of his cock rubbing along mine. I moaned, hating that I was fucking hard.

“He was in her bed. All fuckin' night.”

“Fuck off,” I growled, turning my head so he couldn't kiss me.

He chuckled, his body shifting.

I thought I was about to get a reprieve, but his hands jerked at the button on my jeans, and I realized he was only getting

started.

“Have you fucked her yet?”

I didn't answer him. He knew I hadn't. He fucking knew that Creed had put a whole fucking country between her and me as soon as he had the chance. I hadn't seen or talked to her since Saturday after that too-brief moment I had with her in the hot tub.

Garrison tugged on my jeans, jerking them down my legs, freeing my cock. There was no way to hide my arousal when the damn thing sprang skyward.

“You happy now?” I snapped, not sure what his angle was.

Garrison looked at me, meeting my gaze, and I saw something I hadn't seen in a long damn time. A fiery need very similar to what burned inside of me.

“No, but I'm about to be,” he said gruffly.

When he took my cock between his lips, I grunted, my hips thrusting upward in an attempt to bury the damn thing deep in his throat.

“Don't fucking move,” he growled, planting a firm hand on my stomach. “You do, and I stop.”

I gritted my teeth, but I remained motionless, letting the sensation of his wicked tongue take over while every muscle in my body vibrated with tension. It felt so fucking good. He knew exactly what to do to drive me out of my fucking head. Which he was doing now.

Garrison wrapped his fist around the base of my cock and stroked firmly, mirroring the slide and retreat of his mouth.

“Goddamn you,” I gritted out, fisting the blankets to keep from reaching for him. “It's too fucking good ... your mouth ... Garrison...” I was panting in earnest, unable to hold back. “Ah, hell ... I'm gonna come, G. I'm ... oh, fuck.” I threw my head back and groaned until my throat was sore as I came so fucking hard it was a wonder I was still in one piece.

“Now it's your turn,” Garrison said as he climbed up my body, straddling my chest. “I want to feel that sweet fucking

mouth on my dick.”

“I—”

“It’s not a request,” he growled roughly, grabbing onto the headboard.

And just like that, I was hard again.

I did as Garrison demanded. I sucked his cock. With him hovering over me, I worshipped every thick inch, taking him to the root. And when he fucked my face and came deep in my throat, I swallowed him down.

When all was said and done, I felt ... I don’t know, relieved maybe. I wasn’t sure that was a good thing.

As I lay there beside Garrison, attempting to catch my breath, I closed my eyes, listened to his raspy breathing, and skimmed the checklist in my head.

Physically sated? Check.

Eager for more? Check.

Mentally fucked up? Check.

Glutton for punishment? Check.

More confused than fucking ever? Check. Check. Check.

14

Wednesday...

Creed

I SPENT THE ENTIRE MORNING IN MEETINGS, reviewing budgets and earnings reports, listening to the endless drone of statistics and forecasts. It was the least favorite part of any day but a necessary evil. Today it worked in my favor because it allowed me to focus on my priorities and not on the fact that Journey had been MIA since she left the office yesterday.

To be fair, she wasn't exactly missing. I knew where she was last night, but her avoidance had cut deeper than I'd expected. According to her brief text message, she was going to chill and preferred to do it alone. After that, I didn't hear a peep from her, nor did she respond to the two texts I sent after that.

I respected her privacy and her need to be alone, even though I didn't fucking like it. I'd wanted nothing more than to go to her apartment, strip us both down, and spend the entire night worshipping her delectable body. Instead, I went to bed alone.

But today was a new day, and though I hadn't seen her yet, I intended to change that. By force if necessary.

Returning from a meeting with the head of facilities management, I stopped at Duke's desk to get an update on my afternoon. Before I left, I had instructed him to realign my calendar so I could have half an hour to myself before the end of the day.

"I've moved your four o'clock conference call with the Reflect team to three and shifted your three o'clock meeting with Nick and his team to four. The Reflect team call is only thirty minutes, which gives you the half hour you sought before the one hour with Nick."

I considered that for a moment. The conference call I could take in my office. It wouldn't require much effort on my part since Cheryl would be announcing the shift in leadership from Journey to Wayne. I was attending only to hear what was being said. It didn't require my participation. And Nick would

have to get over the fact that the Reflect team would learn of the change before his team. I was sure he could soothe any ruffled feathers afterward.

“Perfect,” I told Duke. “Send an invite to Journey. I want her in my office at three.”

At two o’clock, I headed out for a meeting and returned five minutes till three to find Journey sitting on the sofa in my office, her legs crossed primly as she waited for me. Her eyes lit up as soon as she saw me, but then the glimmer faded, as though she remembered she wasn’t happy with me. Since I didn’t have Duke explain my reason for summoning her, I could only imagine what was running through her pretty little head. That or she was still upset that I’d given in to Wayne’s demands and taken the Reflect project away from her.

“I’ve got a conference call in three minutes,” I explained as I closed the door behind me.

Because I couldn’t resist, I walked over, leaned down, and pressed my lips lightly to hers. I heard her sigh, and it went right to my head.

“You look beautiful today,” I said as I stood tall. “But you’ll be even more beautiful when you strip.”

“I don’t have time for this, Creed,” she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. “Plus, I’m not in the mood.”

I smiled to myself as I walked to my desk, shrugging out of my jacket and hanging it on the hook.

“Not in the mood, huh?”

“Nope.”

“Liar.”

I waited for her to lay out her argument. Surely she had one. She’d had enough time to come up with a dozen reasons why she should keep me at arm’s length. If I were any other man, I would probably concede to her need to be ornery. I wasn’t, though. And I never backed down.

I masked my amusement as I took a seat in my chair. I opened my laptop, typed in my password, and pulled up the

presentation for my next meeting. Once it was on the screen, I moved the laptop to the side of the desk and leaned back to look at her.

“Stand up, Journey.”

“I told—”

“Stand. Up.”

Her eyes flashed wide, clearly surprised by my adamance. Getting stern with her was risky since I hadn't learned all her base desires, but I knew she wanted to be dominated. She had already told me so. Now I wanted her to prove it.

It took a few seconds, but she finally got to her feet.

“Strip. Do it slowly so I can admire you.”

She stood there studying me for a moment longer than I cared for, but when she reached for the top button on her silky black blouse, my cock swelled. I'd spent most of my adult life around submissives of all calibers, many of whom had undergone strict training. I could honestly say natural submissives were rare, and I sensed Journey was one of the few.

She freed each button slowly, watching me while I openly ogled her.

I couldn't remember the last time I had played with an untrained submissive. Most of those I'd engaged with had been at the club, so they knew what they were walking into. With Journey, each moment was new. She had no idea what to expect from me, nor was she weighed down by rules and etiquette, so she was unaware of the right or wrong way to do things. I happened to prefer her like this. Uncertain, yet eager. Curious, yet cautious.

Considering she had gotten her basic knowledge about BDSM from fictional romance, I had no idea what her expectations were. If I had to guess, she was dwelling on words like high protocol and rules of conduct. I had neither. I didn't live by formalities, and I didn't play by them either. When I wanted something, I demanded it. I figured, at some point, she would learn that.

However, I was quite fond of seeing her naked in my office. Perhaps I should consider implementing some of those high protocols.

She untucked her blouse from her slacks, then freed the last button before shrugging the silk off her shoulders. Journey didn't let it fall to the floor. No, she elegantly draped it over the arm of the sofa before slipping off her heels and finally unbuttoning her slacks.

I noticed her chest was rising and falling more rapidly, her lips were parted, and her eyes glittered. She was turned on even if she was pretending to be irritated with me. Or perhaps she wasn't pretending. I could do that to people. As long as she wasn't running from the room, refusing to talk to me again, I knew we would work through this.

We had to because the night I spent with Journey was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I mentally snapshotted every second, and I'd been reliving it for two days now, unable to help myself. I'd had sex with plenty of women, not to mention a few men, but never had any of those encounters even remotely compared to fucking Journey. It had taken every ounce of self-control I possessed not to fuck her all night. God knows I'd wanted to, but those few times I woke to her soft body pressed against me, I'd resisted for Journey's benefit. I was a demanding man, and she'd soon learn that I was insatiable.

Her panties and bra were the last to go, but she slipped out of them as though it was commonplace to undress in my office.

She was absolutely magnificent as far as I was concerned. Her beauty, her wit, her intelligence. And yes, her vulnerability. Combined, they made up the perfection that stood before me.

"Come here." I couldn't hide the demand in my tone because it came naturally, but I held her gaze so she could see how much she pleased me.

She walked with the same hint of confusion and curiosity that a kitten would. Wanting to check out what was on the

other end of that dangling string, but not sure what might jump out.

I sat up straight and gripped her hips as I met her stare. My gaze snagged on the darkened skin on her neck. I looked closer and noticed it was a bite mark. My cock swelled instantly, throbbing at the realization others had likely seen my mark on her. *My mark.*

I swiped my finger over the tender skin. “Does it hurt?”

“No.”

I met her gaze. “The other night was incredible.”

“It was.” Her smile was sweet, her expression wary.

“The next time’ll be even better.”

Her shoulders relaxed as I rubbed my thumbs over her hip bones. “I’m not sure you can top the other night, but I certainly won’t stop you if you want to try.”

There was my sassy hellcat.

“While I take this call, you’ll be sucking my cock.”

Her eyebrows snapped upward.

“I see no reason to mince words, do you?”

She shook her head, and her breath hitched. “Do you want me under your desk?”

“No, kitten. When I want you caged, you’ll be caged. Right now, I want you on your knees right here.” I pointed to the floor at my feet.

Journey held my gaze as she eased down to the floor. I wished I’d thought to bring her a pillow. As soon as that thought processed, I realized how fucking far gone I truly was for this girl. I’d used many submissives for my own pleasure but never had I cared enough to worry about their comfort.

Then again, none of them had been Journey.

“Don’t move,” I instructed as I dialed the phone to join the call. I watched her as I did, waiting until Cheryl came on to begin, and each person on the phone introduced themselves.

Once the pleasantries were out of the way, I hit the button to mute the call, then stood up.

With my eyes on Journey, I slowly undid my pants, freeing my cock. She watched every move I made, her eyes widening as I stroked myself once, twice, before returning to my seat. She assisted in dragging my pants down past my knees as I spread my legs to allow her to move between them.

The phone call continued, the voices droning in the background. I was listening with half an ear to ensure I didn't miss a cue for my response, should there be one.

"Now it's your turn to take care of me," I told Journey, angling my cock toward her. I tapped her chin with my other hand. "Your focus should be on me at all times."

Her eyes narrowed, and I saw a question there. She must've found a suitable answer because she leaned in and pressed a featherlight kiss to the head of my dick.

Jesus. Fucking. Christ.

Just her breath on my dick lit me up like a pyrotechnics encore.

"Journey..." Her name was nothing more than a rumble from my throat as my entire body hardened.

I reached for her head, but she tilted away from my hand. "You said it's my turn. Let it be *my* turn." She smirked. "Respectfully."

I couldn't stop her if I wanted to, and for the love of fuck, I didn't want to.

Dropping my hand to my thigh, I stared at her, harnessing my patience as best I could.

She pressed another kiss to the head, her little tongue lightly lapping at the slit. Watching her lips part to take me into her mouth was the most sensual thing I'd ever witnessed. I had to put my hands on the arms of the chair to keep from grabbing her head and driving deep into her throat.

Somehow I remained completely still while she explored me with her lips and tongue. She was hesitant, her tongue

caressing every inch of me as though—

“You’ve never done this before,” I whispered as realization dawned.

“Only once.” There was a smile in her eyes. “With Garrison.”

My cock twitched. If I wasn’t mistaken, that was a dare in her glittering gaze. Did she want me to be jealous? Because I was. Insanely. I wanted to grab her head and fuck her face. I wanted to replace every thought she had of another man and replace it with me. I had agreed to this because I sensed it was what Journey needed, but that didn’t mean I was happy with the situation.

No sooner did she take me deep in her mouth did Wayne’s voice come through the phone.

She stopped.

“Me,” I reminded her sharply. “You focus on me.”

She swallowed, her tongue haphazardly sliding over the swollen head.

“Do not think about anyone or anything else,” I said firmly. “Your objective is to please *me*, Journey. Nothing else matters.”

Her eyes softened as she looked at me, her fingers curling around my shaft, stroking slowly.

“Good girl,” I crooned, softening my tone. “When you’re with me, I should be your only focus. You don’t have to worry about anyone else. It’s my responsibility to keep you safe, to ease your stress.”

I watched her eyes glaze over as she began to lick and lave my dick once more. Wayne’s voice continued to come through the speaker, but she wasn’t reacting.

“You don’t even know how fucking hot you are. How sweet your lips are. How good your tongue feels.” To know there’d only been Garrison before me ... it awakened the animal that lurked within and made him pace.

She pulled back, then dragged my dick along the flat of her tongue as she licked me like an ice cream cone. She was giving herself to the moment, her focus where it belonged, everything else shut out. The woman was sex personified, and she had no fucking idea.

I heard my name, and I mentally rewound to hear the question. I un-muted the phone and answered, my gaze on Journey as my cock tunneled in and out of her mouth. She didn't rush, didn't attempt to get me off. She seemed completely satisfied with pleasuring me.

I muted the phone again, grunting softly as she took me as deep as she could. It wasn't nearly deep enough, but that would come in time. I would teach her exactly what I liked. For now, this sweet mouth suited me just fine.

Journey teased me for several more minutes, and the call winded down. I un-muted the phone long enough to thank the others for joining and to tell Cheryl I would meet with her later.

Once I ended the call, Journey released my cock from between her lips, her small hand still curled around the base as she looked up at me. "Show me what you like, Creed."

"Ask nicely."

"Please? Please show me how to pleasure you."

"I won't be gentle," I warned.

"I don't need gentle."

There was determination sparking in her teal-blue eyes, and it spurred me on. I stood, pushing my chair back as I braced my feet wide. I nudged her hand away, gripping the base of my cock with my left hand, and slid my right behind her head, pulling her toward me.

"Open all the way. Do not suck or lick. Just open wide."

She did, those pretty pink lips parting into the perfect fucking O.

I slid my cock over her lips, her tongue, then continued as deep as I could without gagging her. Slowly, gently, I filled her

mouth and throat with the iron-hard length of my cock, watching as her lips stretched wide around me. I retreated, aware of the light scrape of her teeth along my shaft, the warmth of her mouth enveloping me. It reminded me of the other night when I sank into the heat of her, inch by inch. She was so tight, her body's natural resistance attempting to keep me out. I'd let her soft sighs and muted grunts guide me until I was lodged to the hilt.

My cock throbbed from the memory.

"This is how I'll use your mouth when it pleases me to do so." I pushed in deeper this time. "You'll take everything I give you and be grateful."

She moaned softly.

"This time, suck hard," I urged, then pushed in again.

Her mouth suctioned around me, sparking electricity in my spine.

I rolled my hips, fucking her mouth, trying my best not to gag her, but she seemed determined. Each time I pushed my hips forward, she leaned in, taking more of me until the head bumped the back of her throat. I did it repeatedly, and when she settled into a routine, I stopped her from retreating by tightening my grip on her head. Her eyes flashed wide when I pushed deep into her throat, stripping her of her control.

"Swallow," I growled softly.

She did.

"Later, I'll teach you how to take me so I can fuck your throat."

Her eyes flashed hot.

"For now, take me as deep as you can."

I tightened my hold on her hair and pulled her toward me. She swallowed without instruction, her eyes tearing up.

"Breathe through your nose," I commanded, reminding her she wasn't completely helpless here.

She gasped when I pulled out, but I didn't give her time to recover. I shoved my cock right back in. I tightened my grip on her hair.

"Breathe," I growled roughly, holding myself still, filling her mouth, and forcing her to focus.

She inhaled slowly, exhaled. Her eyes remained locked on me as she calmed herself.

"You wanted me to show you what I like." I loosened my grip and caressed her head before gathering her hair in my fist one more time. "This is a taste of that."

She nodded, and the movement caused her throat to tighten around the head of my cock.

"Fuck." I pulled out quickly, pushed back in, pacing myself as the pleasure intensified. "Just like that. Suck me, kitten. Take all of me." I grunted as her throat muscles contracted around the head. "That's it, baby. Take my dick down your throat."

Her eyes glazed over the more I talked, and I realized she needed verbal encouragement. She got off on it.

"I've wanted to do this since the day I met you," I hissed, holding her head with both hands and roughly driving deeper. I felt her nails digging into my thighs. She was taunting the beast now, threatening my control. "To feel those sweet lips wrapped around me. Suck, baby."

She did.

"Fuck." I tightened my grip on her head as I fucked her face. "You want me to come down your throat?"

She couldn't speak, but she managed a nod, and the tethers I had on the beast came unhooked. I gave us both what we needed, fucking her face faster as I chased my release. I didn't drag it out because it was too much, it felt too fucking good, and I wanted to watch as she drank me down.

"Journey ... ah, fuck, baby ... too good. Swallow." I grunted and groaned as the electricity arced, the pleasure

assaulting me. “Oh, fuck, yes!” I came with my cock buried in her throat, and those beautiful blue eyes locked on my face.

As she peered up at me, something that looked a hell of a lot like worship shining brightly in her eyes, I knew with absolute certainty that wherever this went, however it played out, I would make every effort to convince her I was worth all the chaos she would be introduced to.

Even if I was the epicenter of that fucking mayhem.

Journey

I COULDN'T HIDE MY SATISFIED SMILE AS Creed tucked his spent cock away and righted his clothes.

I remained on my knees, waiting for him to tell me it was okay to stand. I couldn't explain how I knew my obedience was important to him, but I did. Plus, resting there like that allowed me to have an excuse not to return to reality. By insisting I focused solely on him, Creed effectively eliminated—temporarily, at least—all my worries and doubts. I didn't have to think about what was going on outside that door. I only had to give myself to him, and he would take care of the rest.

Perhaps I hadn't been keen on the idea initially, but I needed the reprieve.

Once he was put back together, Creed held out his hand for me, helping me to my feet. I expected him to send me to get dressed, but he didn't. He closed his laptop, then relocated it to the credenza behind him before patting the top of his desk.

I tried not to show my surprise, having expected him to send me on my way. Wasn't that how it went? The Dominant took his pleasure because he felt it was owed to him. Did I not satisfy him enough? Did he need to fuck me, too?

Uncertain but curious, I got on the desk with his assistance. He instructed me to lay back before positioning my feet on the arms of his chair.

I hissed when he dragged a finger through my slick folds. I was so wet, it was a wonder I wasn't making a mess on the desk. I couldn't help it. I'd only given one blowjob before, but *that*... When I'd been with Garrison, he had given me free rein to explore. With Creed, he maintained control, showing me what he liked. I found both encounters absurdly satisfying but in different ways. I loved watching Creed's eyes glaze over, listening to his vulgar words as he took his pleasure from me. I had doubts that I could satisfy him, but based on his rough growls and how he came with a fierce, satisfied groan, I was calling it a win.

I sighed as he lightly teased me with his finger, never giving enough attention to my clit or filling me the way I wanted him to. I considered telling him I had a meeting I needed to get to but decided against it. Who was I to tell the company's CEO that there was anything more important than him? At the moment, I couldn't think of anything that was.

Creed's chair shifted closer, and my knees bent more, falling open as he stroked and teased. When he paused, it was to adjust my feet so my heels were on the desk. His palms moved to the inside of my thighs, pushing them wider almost to the point of discomfort. But the moment his mouth fused to my pussy, the pain disappeared, replaced by pleasure so profound it was all I could do not to cry out.

"I fucking love how you taste," Creed mumbled against my flesh.

He licked and sucked, lightly at first. As the seconds ticked by, his actions became more forceful. He speared his tongue inside me, his thumb pressing firmly, circling my clit.

My insides coiled tightly as I reached over my head to grip the edge of the desk, holding myself still to increase the pressure.

"Not yet, kitten." His words sent vibrations through me. "You come when I say you can."

I truly believed those words were meant to trigger an orgasm because each time he said them, my first instinct was to let the explosion consume me. I had no idea how people could control when they orgasmed, but I did my best to abide by his rule as I huffed and panted, the pleasure morphing into pain as I mentally wrangled my orgasm into a tiny box and tried desperately to keep it closed.

I lost the battle when Creed shoved two fingers inside me while he wrapped his lips around my clit and sucked.

I screamed, bucking beneath the onslaught, relishing the waves of ecstasy that crashed over me.

"Ah, hellcat," Creed said, licking me one more time from my entrance to my clit before he adjusted my legs so they

were dangling over the edge of the desk.

I knew I had violated his rule, but I couldn't bring myself to care. I needed that.

He stood up, stepping between my legs and leaning over. I was panting uncontrollably, but I met his gaze and smiled, hoping he'd be lenient considering what I had done for him earlier.

His eyes glittered with the same promise I heard in his voice when he said, "I'm going to punish you for that."

"Promise?"

I saw the storm brewing in his eyes even as they crinkled at the corners. "I more than promise, hellcat. You'll be lucky if you can walk when I'm done with you." He took my hand, then helped me sit up. "In the meantime, you've got a meeting to get to."

"How do you know?" I slid my hand over my hair, wondering how I was going to tame it to be presentable for my meeting.

"Because I'm in it, too." Creed cupped my face with both hands, tilting my head back. He leaned down, his lips close to mine. "And when you look at me, or when I'm asking you questions, I dare you not to think about how you just came all over my face."

I shivered, unable to hold back my grin. This man...

Thankfully, Creed gave me a minute to use the bathroom attached to his office. I managed to put myself back together enough that I was presentable. As long as no one knew where I'd been, I doubt they'd think I'd spent the past hour pleasuring and being pleased by the sinful CEO. Since I had too much to think about, I didn't dwell on it for long. I stopped in my private bathroom and smoothed out my hair, swiped the mascara from beneath my eyes, then grabbed my laptop from my office, and made my way down to the third-floor conference room where Nick would be making the official announcement of my new role as Director of Corporate Social

Responsibility. It was a fancy title, but I was still clueless about what it actually meant.

When I got there, I found Creed sitting front and center, Nick on one side of him, Cheryl on the other. Hawk was on the far side of the room, intently focused on Creed. I couldn't tell if he was angry or relieved, but he didn't meet my gaze as I made my way to the seat beside Nick.

When I glanced over, I met Creed's gaze again. His eyes twinkled, and I'd be damned if I didn't think about his wicked tongue teasing me, his perfect lips coaxing pleasure from my body, and the mind-blowing orgasm he just gave me.

Despite that, I made it through the next hour without breaking a sweat.

There might've been a little bead that trickled down my spine when Creed instructed me to wait for him after work, the promise of punishment glittering hotly in his eyes.

When the meeting concluded, I slipped out as soon as I could and made my way back to the seventh floor. Unfortunately, I accidentally detoured to the sixth, my finger automatically pushing the button before I remembered I didn't work on that floor anymore. I had done the same thing that morning, the routine from the past few weeks difficult to overcome.

It wasn't until the elevator doors had closed behind me and the car was heading back down that I realized my mistake. With a sigh for my blunder, I tapped the button to call it back. The unfortunate part of my mishap occurred when I came face to face with Wayne while waiting for the elevator to return.

I hadn't seen him since Monday, when he was on the seventh floor for his meeting with Creed. If I had, I probably wouldn't have noticed the subtle differences in his appearance. He'd gotten a haircut and shaved. His shirt and slacks were ones he'd worn many times before, but they were ironed, still holding creases although the workday was almost over.

“Well, well, well. If it’s not the boss’s pet.” Wayne’s smile was disturbing. “Did he let you out of your pen? Or did you burrow under the fence?”

I glared at him, stabbing the button as though that’d make the elevator arrive sooner.

I exhaled my relief when the bell chimed, and the doors began to open. I stepped back so as not to block anyone coming off.

As soon as I saw Garrison and Hawk standing inside, my insides clenched with fear. Not for my sake, but for Wayne’s. The guy was too stupid to keep his mouth shut, and I figured it was only a matter—

“This is priceless,” Wayne said with a roaring laugh. “Did you plan this? Or do you keep one or two tucked away for when the big guy’s not looking? Or can you take them all at the same time? Shit. I’d *pay* to see that.”

I stepped on the elevator and immediately put my hand on Garrison’s chest when he lunged toward Wayne. Of course, I underestimated Hawk since his demeanor hadn’t changed. At least, not until he slipped past me. The man was fast. Too fast. One second he was on the elevator; the next, he had Wayne on the floor. Wayne never stood a chance, immediately pinned as Hawk whaled on him.

“Son of a bitch!” Garrison shouted, shoving me aside to get to Hawk. “Off. Now!”

“Fuck this little prick,” Hawk hissed.

His brief distraction with Garrison allowed Wayne to get a blow in. He hit Hawk with a closed fist on the side of the head. The impact threw him off balance, and then they were rolling on the floor, trading punches. Hawk was far more dominant, getting control within seconds, but his fury radiated from him, his punches more violent.

“Call Nick,” Garrison snapped at me. “Now.”

I grabbed my phone and fumbled for the number I had keyed in earlier this morning. I stared in shock as Garrison wrestled Hawk off of Wayne, shoving him back a few steps.

“Hey, Journey. What’s up? Something—”

“Hawk and Wayne ... they’re fighting. Oh, God,” I cried when Hawk launched himself at Wayne again.

“Where?” Nick shouted in my ear.

“Sixth floor.”

Nick hung up on me, and I realized we’d drawn an audience.

Garrison dragged Hawk back by his shirt and shoved him to the floor. He spun around and stabbed his finger toward his face. “Don’t fuckin’ move.”

Hawk was snarling, but he got to his feet and kept his distance.

“I’m pressing charges, you asshole,” Wayne grunted, swiping at the blood dripping down his face. From where I stood, it looked like his nose was bleeding, but there was also a cut over his right eye, so the blood could’ve been coming from more than one place.

When Hawk moved toward him again, I took matters into my own hands, lunging at Hawk to hold him back.

“Please don’t,” I begged, staring up at him as I used my full body weight to keep him in place. It didn’t do any good, but at least he acknowledged my presence, a fierce look in his eyes when he glanced down at me.

“Please,” I repeated, clenching the front of his shirt in my fist.

A door slammed against a wall at the same time Cheryl said, “Get back to work or go home. All of you.”

I glanced over my shoulder, stunned by the adamance in her voice. Her usual sotto voce utterances were gone, in their place a sharp and powerful tone leaving no room for argument.

“I’m calling the cops,” Wayne hissed.

Nick appeared, racing out of the stairwell like the building was on fire. “What the hell is going on?”

Wayne thrust a finger in Hawk's direction. "This mother fucker hit me for no reason. I want his ass thrown in jail."

Hawk moved against me, but I kept my hand on his chest.

"Take Hawk upstairs," Nick told Garrison before he rounded on Wayne. "You—goddammit. We've got to get you cleaned up."

"Come on," Garrison grumbled, shoving Hawk backward toward the elevators.

I went with them, keeping close to Hawk. Not because I thought I could stop him if he wanted another go at Wayne. He could pick me up and move me if he wanted it badly enough. But he seemed to be calmer with me there.

"Is he going to press charges?" I asked Garrison as though he might actually know.

"Not if Nick has anything to say about it."

When we arrived on the seventh floor, Duke was waiting by the elevators.

"Mr. Granger wants all of you in his office."

"He can wait a minute," I told Duke.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"I really don't give a damn." And I didn't. It was one thing for Creed to dominate me sexually, but something else entirely to think he was in command of my every move. He could go screw himself if he didn't like it.

"It's okay," Hawk said.

"No, it's not." I grabbed him by the arm as we walked through the double doors. "Tell *Mr. Granger* we'll be there in a minute."

I hurried to get in front of Hawk, then urged him into his office before he could march into Creed's. At the very least, he needed a minute. Or maybe I was the one who needed the minute. I didn't know, but I was not in the mood to listen to Creed bark orders.

“Journey...” Hawk said smoothly when I closed the door, sealing myself inside with him while forcing Garrison to remain in the hall.

Before I could think of anything to say, I walked right into him, slamming my body into his as I threw my arms around his waist and held on tightly.

Yeah, I was the one who needed a minute. I couldn't explain why that scene bothered me so much, but it had.

Hawk's arms came around me, and I relaxed against him, trying to pull myself together.

“Damn, girl. I'm so fucking sorry.”

I shook my head, refusing to let go. I was having a minor anxiety attack, which didn't make a lick of sense. I wasn't the one who'd been throwing punches and getting hit.

Hawk soothed me, repeatedly running his hand over my hair from my scalp to my waist. I soaked up his warmth and the tobacco and vanilla scent I missed so much. Within a few minutes, the chaos had ceased, but I held onto him because it felt good to be in his arms.

A knock on the door interrupted the moment.

A second later, the door opened. I didn't let go of Hawk, and I didn't look to see who it was. I didn't care. The only thing I wanted was to remain like that, with Hawk surrounding me, filling my senses with his presence.

“Are the police coming?” I asked, hoping whoever it was could answer.

“No.”

Creed.

Great.

“Let me guess, you're giving Wayne the company to shut him up,” I said snidely.

“Journey.”

The sharpness of his tone had me pulling away from Hawk as I spun around. “What?”

“Lose the attitude, kitten,” he snapped.

I managed to snap my lips shut before I said something I couldn’t take back. I had no intention of losing the attitude, but I was also not trying to make the situation worse. I was, however, pissed because I already knew this was going to work out in Wayne’s favor. For whatever reason, Creed didn’t seem to give a shit that he talked to me like I was a whore.

“Nick needs to talk to you,” Creed said to Hawk.

“If you fire him, then I quit,” I snapped at Creed.

There was a spark of what looked like amusement in Creed’s eyes, but it faded when Garrison walked into the office.

“Why don’t you walk her out,” Creed told Garrison.

I ignored him, turning back to Hawk. “I’m sorry you had to hear that.”

“Don’t apologize, smokeshow.” He smiled, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“When you’re done here, maybe you could come by my apartment,” I suggested. “I’ll text you the address.”

This time the smile did reach his beautiful blue eyes. “I’ll text you when I’m on my way.”

I nodded, then stood tall and walked around Creed, purposely giving him a wide berth.

“Journey,” he called after me.

“I don’t want to talk to you,” I called back as I marched across the hall to my office.

Garrison

“I’VE GOT HER,” I TOLD CREED BEFORE he could go after Journey.

He opened his mouth, presumably to bark an order at me, but I glared at him. I was not one of his submissives, nor did I intend to do his bidding. This situation didn’t necessarily need his intervention, yet he was putting himself right in the middle like he always did.

I stepped out into the hall at the same time Journey came barreling out of her office, a woman on a mission.

“Hold up.”

She didn’t look at me as she marched toward the exit. “I don’t need a babysitter, Garrison.”

Yeah, well. She was about to get one. I’d had just about enough of this shit. From all of them.

Before she could reach the doors, I grabbed her, lifting her off her feet with my arms banded around her middle. She squirmed as I spun back around and headed to my office. I slammed the door behind me, then set her on her feet. She immediately lunged for the door knob.

“If you open that door, I’ll paddle your pretty little ass.”

That drew her up short.

Journey’s gaze slammed into me, her eyes wide. “I’ve talked to you for five minutes in four days, and *that’s* what you say to me?”

“And whose fault is that?” I bit back, surprising both of us.

“Mine, based on the ass reaming you’re giving me. What do you want from me, Garrison?”

What did I want? What did I *fucking* want? Goddamn her.

“A minute of your time would be fucking nice. In case you haven’t noticed, your dance card’s been full, darlin’.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you’re spendin’ all your time with Creed.”

Her eyebrows dropped low. “Because he’s the one making an effort.”

I nodded as though understanding. “So that’s how you want this to go? The three of us can fight each other for your time? You don’t want a say in the matter at all, huh?”

Journey stood tall, her forehead creased in concentration. “I didn’t say that.”

“You don’t have to. Clearly, it’s first come, first served with you.”

Her eyes widened, and horror replaced her confusion.

Oh, but I wasn’t done fucking up an already bad situation. I had more, and my rage was blinding me.

“I went into this with my eyes wide open, Journey. I’m not expectin’ anything. I figure I’ll be your sexual entertainment whenever Creed needs someone to console you when he’s outta town. Or when he deems it necessary to fulfill your greatest fantasy. Otherwise, I’ll just take scraps if and when you wanna toss me some.”

Journey gasped as though I had just slapped her upside the head.

Then the words that had escaped unfiltered ran through my gray matter, replayed back like a soundtrack from a bad movie.

I was overwhelmed with shame.

“Fuck me,” I grumbled, turning away from her. I didn’t mean to say those words aloud, but everything I’d bottled up for the past few days was boring a hole in my chest, and to relieve the pressure, it was all I could do. It had been a week since I spent the night with Journey. And though I hadn’t handled it well at all, being with her had changed something inside me. Since then, I’d been floundering like a fish out of water. Nothing made sense to me anymore. Not my feelings

for Journey or what was happening between Hawk and me. I needed clarity, but I wasn't sure how to get it.

Unfortunately, I'd chosen a piss-poor time to let it all out. Journey deserved better than that.

"I think I..." Journey swallowed. "I think I want to go home now."

I spun around and reached for her before she could open the door. "Wait."

Her eyes were so wide and so blue as she stared up at me. I cupped her face, brushing my thumbs over her cheeks. Touching her caused the dark fog inside me to clear somewhat, broken up by a ray of light that filtered in on hope. I couldn't stand the thought of hurting this woman, yet my callous words had done just that.

"I need to start over," I said softly, tilting her head as I leaned down. "What I should've said is I miss you."

I pressed my lips to hers as I cupped the back of her head, holding her close. I didn't kiss her the way I wanted because I didn't deserve it.

Journey didn't kiss me back, pulling away instead.

I released her, my gut churning and the sinkhole in my chest widening.

"I'm not sure I can do this, Garrison."

"Do what?"

She stepped back, frowning. "All of this. Clearly I'm not doing my part. There are three of you and only one of me. I can't..."

"Can't what?"

"I can't be everything to everyone, Garrison. I don't know how to date more than one person, much less how to—" Her eyes filled with tears, and she sobbed.

I barely had time to process what she said when she lunged for the door.

I stared after her, too shocked by the abrupt turn to stop her when she ran out.

Journey

IT WAS ALL I COULD DO NOT to fall apart as I walked out of the building, sending Hawk a text with my address because I told him I would. Thankfully, Garrison didn't come after me. I wasn't sure I had the emotional strength to deal with him. As it was, I was having a difficult time catching my breath. His words kept replaying over and over in my head, and for whatever reason, they summed up these past few days in a way that terrified me.

I went into this with my eyes wide open, Journey. I'm not expectin' anything. I figure I'll be your sexual entertainment whenever Creed needs someone to console you when he's outta town. Or when he deems it necessary to fulfill your greatest fantasy. Otherwise, I'll just take scraps if and when you wanna toss me some.

Two weeks.

I'd known the three of them for two weeks, and already everything was falling apart. It felt like it was doomed to fail because it was too difficult. Me and Hawk, me and Creed, me and Garrison ... for the most part, I felt as though Creed was the one I was spending all my time with. But it wasn't by design. Not on my part, anyway. Creed could be manipulating things to ensure I was available to him when he wanted me to be. I wouldn't put it past him. That was what he did.

I honestly hadn't thought much about it because when I was with one of them, they were my main focus. I didn't spend time with Creed and think about Hawk. When I was with Garrison, I didn't think about Creed or vice versa. It hadn't dawned on me that there was even a problem.

Then I saw Hawk and Garrison on the elevator, and I realized how much I missed them. I hadn't seen them since Saturday. Four days had passed, and I thought about them when I was alone, but I hadn't even thought to reach out to see either of them.

How could I possibly think about dating all three of them at the same time? It was impossible. How did one person divide themselves into multiple parts?

I exhaled heavily as I stopped at a red light.

There was one person who could answer those questions.

I grabbed my phone and called my mom, putting it on speaker and setting the phone in the center console.

“Hey, honey. How—”

The sound of my mother’s voice caused tears to form. “Can I come over?”

“Of course you can. You never have to ask.”

I sniffled, hoping she didn’t realize I was on the verge of a breakdown.

“Journey? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I lied. “I’m leaving work now. It’ll take me about an hour to get there with traffic, but I’m on my way.”

“I’ll have a glass of wine waiting. Sounds like you could use it.”

I giggle-sobbed. “Thanks, Mominator.”

I couldn’t stop thinking about the entire fucked up day as I headed for my parents’ house. By the time I got there, I had calmed down enough to look at things rationally. Well, that might’ve been a stretch, but I wasn’t on the verge of tears as I walked inside, overwhelmed by the scent of fresh-baked cookies.

I found my mother in the kitchen, using a spatula to remove chocolate chip cookies from a baking sheet. Without missing a beat, she set the spatula down, strolled to the refrigerator, and pulled a wineglass out. It was three-quarters full of red liquid, and it warmed my heart that she had been prepared for my arrival.

“Sit down,” she said, urging me toward the table in the breakfast nook. “I won’t ask questions until half of that is gone.”

I chuckled, bringing the glass to my lips as I took a seat. Snowflake appeared on the bench beside me, rubbing against my elbow. I felt more of the tension fade away as I relaxed, sipping wine and petting the cat.

True to her word, my mother didn’t ask any questions until I’d drained half the glass, which I did slowly, taking advantage of the comfort of being with my mom. She was hard at work at the kitchen island, creating a variety of desserts. It usually meant she was dealing with a patient who was tugging at her heartstrings. My mother was the strongest woman I knew, but deep down, she was a big ol’ softy. Just like my dads.

“Okay,” I finally said. “You can ask.”

She grinned, flattening the dough with a long, narrow rolling pin. “Does it have something to do with whoever sent you flowers?”

As a matter of fact... I thought to myself but maintained a neutral expression. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to tell my mother about Creed, Hawk, and Garrison. We’d always had a great relationship, one where I felt like I could tell her almost anything. The problem was, I wasn’t sure *how* to tell her about them. Was I supposed to admit that I was having sex with multiple men? Or that I’d been intimate with all three of them together? Or that I didn’t know how to balance a life where I was divided three ways? I wanted her expertise, but I wasn’t sure it was wise to reveal my concerns this early in my relationship with them. Maybe it would get better on its own. Work itself out. Perhaps I was thinking too hard.

“Talk to me, dollface,” she said, using the nickname my dads gave me when I was little. I used to be embarrassed by it, but I had long since grown out of that. I never would’ve survived childhood if I’d succumbed to the awkwardness considering their public displays of affection still had the power to make my face flame.

I decided to come at the topic from a different angle.

“When you started dating the dads, was it weird for you?”

“How so?” she asked, pulling on an oven mitt to get another baking sheet out of the second oven.

“I don’t know.” I set Snowflake on the floor. “I mean, had you ever dated two guys at the same time before that?”

Her all-seeing, all-knowing gaze settled on my face. If she was wondering what my reasoning was for the question, she didn’t mention it.

Yet.

“Not quite like that, no.” She lifted a row of triple chocolate chip cookies off the pan with a spatula and placed them on a cooling rack. “I dated more than one guy at the same time when things weren’t serious with one or the other.”

“Did they know about each other?”

“I didn’t tell them in so many words, no. But I always ensured they knew I was playing the field, keeping my options open.”

“And when you met the dads?” I prompted. “Was it weird for you? Or did they just not give you a choice?”

She chuckled, wiping her hands with a towel before returning her attention to the flattened dough. “First of all, there’s always a choice.”

I didn’t miss how she met my eyes when she said this.

“Always, Journey. Even when there’s the illusion of no choice, you should always have one.”

I nodded so she knew I understood. “What does that mean, anyway? The illusion?”

She half-shrugged. “Certain kinks dictate a level of ... authority. They play out in a manner that gives the impression one partner doesn’t have a say in the matter.”

I’d been there for half an hour, and my ears were starting to heat. My mother had never been the kind to beat around the bush about anything. Especially when she felt there was a lesson to be learned. And when it came to sex, she felt that

being honest and straightforward was the only way to discuss it.

I cleared my throat and looked at the table. “Are you talking about BDSM?”

“Maybe. Okay, yes.” She laughed, rolling the dough into little balls. “But regardless of it being a kink or not, you always have a choice in who you spend your time with. And what you do with that person.” She turned to face me. “Why? Is someone pressuring you?”

“Oh, God, no,” I huffed a laugh. “Not at all.”

“Then what’s this about?”

Although I didn’t come over to share the minutia of my time with Creed, Hawk, or Garrison with her, I needed someone to talk to about it. I was more confused than ever after my conversation with Garrison. He’d been hurt and angry, and even though I hated how he worded it, I understood where he was coming from. When you saw someone and your chest inflated like a balloon or your belly twisted with anticipation, they were important enough to pay attention to. And I hadn’t been paying nearly enough attention to Hawk or Garrison.

My mom wiped her hands, leaving her sweet treats so she could join me at the table. “Journey, talk to me.”

I decided to go for it. “Fine. I might be dating ... three men.”

Her eyebrows launched skyward. “Three?” A garbled laugh came next. “Wow. That’s ... brave of you. I can hardly handle two on a good day. I don’t suppose they’re triplets?”

I choked on a laugh. “God, no. That would be weird.”

She appeared to ponder it, smiling. “Would it?”

“No,” I repeated. “They’re not triplets. They are friends, though. Really good friends. Almost like brothers.” For some reason, I couldn’t stop rambling. “Business partners. They went to college together.”

My mother chuckled. “Where’d you meet them?”

“Work.” I left it at that, not wanting her to know that they happened to own the company I worked for.

“Tell me more.”

“Like what?”

“Something about them. About their personalities.”

I considered that for a moment. Not an easy feat when your mother was scrutinizing you like a test subject in a drug trial, waiting for the side effects to appear.

“Okay,” I finally said. “One of them is super smart. He’s a biochemical engineer. When I’m with him, I feel safe.”

“Sounds like a keeper.”

“Another one is fun to be around. He’s not too serious, and he’s always making me laugh. He makes me feel like I’m the only woman in the world when we’re together.”

“I like him already. And the other one?”

“He’s bossy and hot and ... bossy.”

My mother laughed.

“When he looks at me, I feel like he can see into my soul. He makes me feel sexy.”

“And they know you’re dating all of them?”

I couldn’t look at her because I could feel the blush rising on my face when I nodded. “Yes. I told them. While we were all hanging out.”

“Are they seeing other people?”

“Only me.” After all, that was the agreement. As I thought about it, I realized how selfish that was. I’d insisted they couldn’t date other people, yet I wasn’t putting forth the effort to see them.

This was turning out to be so much more complicated than I expected.

My mom seemed to be formulating her thoughts, and I fought the urge to fidget.

“I’m going to assume since you’re twenty-four years old and you’re smart and *safe*...” She paused for effect, as though needing my reassurance. “That you’re intimate with all of them?”

I twirled one thumb around the other nervously. “It’s heading that direction, yeah.”

“And they know about that, too?”

I nodded again, and now I felt like I was admitting that I spent my spare time stealing cars and driving them across the border into Tijuana.

“Is it a separate thing?”

I looked up, not sure what she meant.

“Or is it together, like your dads and me?”

I shrugged, looked away. “Separate. Mostly.” I forced myself to look at her. “We’ve had dinner. All of us.” I purposely left off the encounter in the hot tub. I still wasn’t sure how I felt about that. And I certainly didn’t have the mental capacity to let my mother theorize about what it meant.

“It sounds to me like you’re enjoying spending time with them.”

“That’s the problem ... I’m not,” I blurted out, dropping my head in my hands. “It’s confusing. I’ve never done anything like this before, and I feel like I’m letting them down. There’s only one of me. Every time I see them, I want to see more of them. Individually. Together. But then I get so caught up in one, the other two get swept aside.” I barked a laugh, feeling like an idiot. “It’s been two weeks, Mominator. Two. Freaking. Weeks. And I’m already doing it wrong.”

“You feel something for them.”

I looked up at her again, and I saw so much understanding on my mother’s face that it made my chest tighten. “Yes.”

“That’s understandable. I went through the same thing with Ryder and Roman at first. I would spend more time with one than the other and think I knew exactly what I wanted. Then

I'd go out with the other one and..." She smiled. "It's a vicious cycle."

"So, how'd you balance it?"

"I didn't. They did."

I frowned. "How?"

"I was honest with them. I sat them both down together and told them if they wanted my time, they had to take it." She smiled wistfully. "You can't divide yourself into three parts, Journey. You're one person. And by design, one person can fulfill all your needs. If they want to be that person, they have to step up."

"There are only so many hours in a day," I said defeatedly.

"Maybe. But someone who's determined will do what's necessary to be with the person who makes them happy. Even if they have to share her."

"What do you do when one of them wants to monopolize all your time?"

"You don't let him. He needs to understand there are limits to your time."

"What if he's not willing to do that?"

"Then you'll have to make a decision. They sound like they are very different. Personality-wise, I mean. You have to consider that when you tell them what you need."

"When did you know you cared about the dads equally?"

"The moment I decided choosing between them wasn't an option. I didn't want to let one of them go. I couldn't. I fell in love with both of them individually. And I fell in love with the idea of being with them both at the same time."

I snorted. "You make it sound so simple."

She laughed softly. "There's nothing simple about it, honey. But that doesn't mean it has to be complicated, either. The only thing you need to do is enjoy the moment. Whatever moment that is, whoever you're with, enjoy it. Everything before or after isn't important *during*. Talk to them. Tell them

what you need and return the favor. You're not the only one in this relationship." She reached over and touched my arm. "The most important thing to remember is that you have to take care of *you*, Journey. Once they realize you want to make this work, they'll figure out how to take care of you as well."

I couldn't help it; I flung myself at my mom, throwing my arms around her, smiling into her hair. "Do you know how much I love you, Momtastic?"

She patted my arm. "I have some idea, yes."

I ended up staying at my parents' house for dinner. My mother had the dads pick up a pizza on their way home, and we ate it in the living room while they told us about the upcoming movie they would be working on.

Before I left, I went through my old bedroom to see if I'd left my watch. I couldn't find it anywhere, but I asked my mom to keep an eye out for it. It would turn up sooner or later, I was sure.

By the time I got back to my apartment, I was feeling a little better, but that ended when I stepped out of the elevator to find Hawk sitting on the floor in front of my door.

"Oh, shit," I whispered, hurrying toward him. "I'm so sorry. I stopped by to talk to my mom and got distracted."

He looked up, and I swore that was relief I saw on his handsome face. "Don't be sorry, smokeshow. I would've waited all night."

I unlocked the door when he got to his feet and stepped aside. "My dads got a pizza, so I stayed for dinner."

"What you're saying is you forgot about me?"

There was no animosity in his tone, but I did detect a hint of insecurity.

"I'm sor—"

He effectively silenced me by pressing his mouth to mine. Instantly, the guilt vanished, and a sense of warmth filled me.

It was a familiar feeling, one I'd gotten used to when I met Hawk. All the butterflies he stirred returned with a vengeance as I slid my fingers over his neck, soaking up his warmth.

I didn't even notice when he pulled me into the apartment or when he closed the door behind us. I was lost in his kiss, inhaling him right into my soul.

"Damn, I've missed you, smokeshow," he whispered against my lips, brushing my hair back from my face.

I peered up into those intense blue eyes. It was then I noticed the darkness beneath his right eye. I lightly brushed my thumb over the swollen skin.

"You should see the other guy," he said with a smile.

"I wish I never had to see him again."

Hawk frowned as he stepped back, regarding me closely.

I shook off the memory of earlier, refusing to give Wayne an ounce of brainpower.

"Can I get you something to drink?" I offered, setting my purse on the table beside the flowers standing tall and proud in their vase.

"Water'd be great."

While I retrieved two glasses and filled them with ice, then poured water from the Brita pitcher in the refrigerator, Hawk walked around my living room. He looked at a few knickknacks I had on shelves, then thumbed through my record collection.

When I joined him, he moved to the sofa and waited for me to take a seat. Rather than sit beside me, he perched on the wooden coffee table, taking the glass from my hand.

He took a sip and started to set the glass on the end table but stopped. I looked over and noticed Creed's cuff links were sitting there. He obviously forgot them. I considered picking them up but figured that would only draw more attention to them.

Hawk exhaled heavily and set the glass down. “What is it that we’re doing, Journey?”

I should’ve expected the question considering I hadn’t heard from him in four days. Not since the brief text message he sent on Sunday morning.

I fought the urge to look at my hands, keeping my eyes level with his. “I think that’s for you to decide.”

Hawk’s eyes lingered on my face as though he was trying to memorize my features.

“What is it that you want us to be doing?” I asked when he didn’t speak.

“Creed spent the night with you.”

If he expected me to deny it, he wasn’t getting it. “So?”

His eyes narrowed.

“I’ve been honest from the beginning,” I told him, feeling some of my frustration from earlier returning. “Honest with all three of you, Hawk. I like you. I haven’t pretended otherwise.”

“No, you haven’t.”

“And I like Creed. Garrison, too.” I took a deep breath. “I’ve never done this before. Never dated more than one person.” I laughed, but it lacked amusement. “I haven’t dated anyone. Not since I was in high school. I won’t even pretend I’m versed in your lifestyle or that I know what any of you want from me.”

“I can’t speak for them, but I don’t expect anything from you,” he said softly.

“That’s the same thing Garrison said. How’s this supposed to work? If no one has any expectations, what’s the point?”

His eyebrows slammed downward.

“I want it to work,” I clarified. “I like spending time with you. I haven’t spent enough, if I’m being honest. But if you have no expectations, then we’re not going anywhere.”

Hawk didn't speak, and I felt the need to forge through the fire that was about to burn down any hope of this relationship lasting past this conversation.

"What I'm trying to say is that I'm right here, Hawk. If you don't want me spending the night with Creed, you're going to be disappointed. The same goes for him if he thinks he's the only one who'll be in my bed."

I wasn't sure where this brazenness was coming from, but I couldn't stop myself. I kept hearing my mother's voice in my head.

The most important thing to remember is that you have to take care of you, Journey. Once they realize you want to make this work, they'll figure out how to take care of you as well.

She was right. I was the only person I could take care of.

"You know where I stand," I continued. "If you want to be in my life, be in it. Otherwise..." I shrugged.

Hawk moved forward, lowering to his knees before me. I spread my legs to accommodate his hips, inhaling sharply when he slid his hand under my hair, cupping the back of my head.

"I want to be in your life," he whispered, his breath fanning my mouth, his eyes meeting mine in the small gap between our faces. "From the moment I met you, that's all I've wanted."

I ran my hands up his arms. "Then stop letting Creed dictate whether you will be or not."

"Easier said than done."

"Maybe. But if you want something bad enough..."

"Oh, I want you, smokeshow."

The hunger in his voice turned me to mush. As did his mouth when he settled it over mine.

Hawk

I WANTED HER MORE THAN MY NEXT breath. More than my next fight.

At the moment, I wanted her more than anything or anyone, including Creed. Her kiss brought my entire world into focus. It breathed life into my veins, sparked flames in my chest. She spoke to the deepest, darkest parts of me and somehow managed to light those spaces up. It was unlike anything I'd ever felt before. I could practically taste her need. I thought it was because she never tried to hide it. She didn't try to mask it as something else. I'd never been with anyone so open and honest about their feelings, and I'd never realized how much I needed it until her.

“What do you suppose we should do about this?” Journey mumbled against my mouth. “If you're on the fence, you should go.”

I wished I could explain to her the complexity of the situation. I couldn't, though. She wouldn't understand. Half the time, *I* didn't understand. Was it possible to be in love with more than one person? Did I even know what love was? Did she? Did anyone?

“Jacob.”

There I was, contemplating whether love was real, and this woman went and used my given name. No one called me Jacob. Everyone knew me as Hawk. Those who interacted with me on a daily basis used it because it was familiar, and those who wanted to know me used it because it fascinated them. Not since I became a household name had anyone thought of me as Jacob.

I caressed her face with my fingers, pulling back enough to meet her gaze. Her eyes were heavy-lidded, her lips puffy and pink from my kiss. She sighed when I dragged her hair back over her shoulder. I was aware of the bite mark on her neck, the one Creed had put there. The first time I saw it, I'd been consumed by a jealous rage. Now, the only thing I wanted to

do was claim Journey in a way that made her forget about him. If not forever, at least for tonight.

“Say my name again.”

She didn't hesitate. “Jacob.”

“I want to stay,” I admitted, although I wasn't sure what that meant for us.

She pressed her forehead to mine. “There's something you should know.”

I closed my eyes and waited for her to speak, fearing the worst but hoping for the best.

“I'm going to fall in love with you, Jacob Hawkins,” she said, her words only loud enough for me to hear. “It's inevitable. I don't expect that in return. Just thought you should know.”

I opened my eyes when she shifted back. I met her glittering blue gaze as I brushed my knuckles over her smooth cheek. “I'm already there, Journey Zeplyn. So you won't be alone.”

Her soft gasp sent a shockwave through me.

I slid one arm behind her hips, pulling her to the edge of the cushion. Her legs went around my waist when I gripped the back of her head and crushed my mouth to hers. All the sweetness and gentleness I possessed went up in a flash fire, leaving only lust and a deep-seated ache. I couldn't wait any longer. I *needed* this woman. I needed to be buried inside her, skin to skin, heart to heart. I wanted to experience the connection I'd felt with her since the day I met her. This time I wanted to feel it while I was inside her.

She tangled her arms around my neck, her fingernails scraping against my scalp as she held on when I stood. Her tongue thrashed against mine, her soft whimpers causing my dick to swell impossibly, strangled by my jeans.

It wasn't until the other night when Creed didn't come home that I realized I'd been wasting time. I'd been clinging to the remnants of the past and not focusing on my future. If I

had, I would've been the one in Journey's bed. Not Creed. Now that I was here, I didn't want to leave. I wanted to worship at her feet, to shower her with affection, and I wanted to sate the devastating ache that was boring holes inside me.

"Please," Journey whimpered as I moved toward her bedroom.

"Please what, baby?"

"I need you."

Every cell in my body sparked to life—every fiber of my being reached out to this woman. I'd known there was something between us when I met her. Maybe I couldn't give her the same things Creed could, but what I had to offer was mine and hers alone.

I carried her to her bedroom. A lamp cast a soft glow over her bed. I didn't have time to take it all in, to admire Journey's personal space, to see where she laid her head at night because I was too caught up in her to do so.

I planted one knee on the bed and lowered her to it, moving over her because her arms were wound tightly around my neck.

"Don't stop kissing me," she whispered. "I love the way you taste."

Her body moved against mine as I settled over her, pressing my hips to hers, letting her feel how fucking hard she made me. I didn't come here with the intention of taking her to bed, but by God, I couldn't resist her even if I wanted to. From my very first taste of her sweet lips, I was addicted. Somehow I'd refrained from feeding that craving, but I couldn't anymore. I wouldn't. Screw Creed. Fuck Garrison. They weren't here with us tonight.

I didn't stop kissing her until I was forced to when she tugged my shirt up and off. I lifted my head and my arms—one at a time—so she could remove it, then watched her face as her eyes skimmed down my neck, my chest. I propped myself up on one hand, reaching for the top button on her

blouse. I flicked it free, then met her gaze when she looked at me.

“Take it off,” I urged.

Journey took over unbuttoning the shirt, freeing each tiny disc one at a time. The fabric remained in place, covering her completely until I pulled the sides apart, unveiling the silky satin bra that concealed her. I flipped the little hook in the front, and it peeled away, revealing the softly rounded mounds tipped with pretty pink nipples.

I stole a moment to admire her, to memorize every delectable curve. I trailed one fingertip over her breast, admiring the way her nipple pebbled tightly under my touch. Her breaths became ragged the longer I teased, her eyes locked on my face as though she wanted to see herself through my eyes.

There were so many things I wanted to say, but no words formed. My brain was frozen, shocked into submission by her beauty.

When I leaned down to taste her, Journey’s hands curled around my head. She gasped softly when I licked her little pink nipple, the taut tip teasing my tongue. I moaned against her flesh as I sucked her into my mouth, savoring her.

“Jacob...”

I licked my way to her other nipple, teasing her flesh, loving how her fingernails dug into my scalp and her back arched in an attempt to get closer.

When I moaned against her flesh, Journey’s arms fell away, but it was only so she could move her shirt out of my way, uncovering more of her beautiful body. I could spend a whole day licking my way across every inch of her and still not get enough. The way she tasted, the way she smelled ... it went right to my head. She was created for me, her body destined to mate with mine.

I licked a path down her belly, pausing to tease the gem in her belly button before venturing lower. I backed off the bed, getting to my feet so I could unveil the rest of her. I skimmed

her face, her neck, her chest. Admiring, soaking up her beauty while I unfastened her slacks. I parted them slowly, revealing the lacy edge of her black panties. Her hips raised, urging me to continue. I slowly peeled her pants off while she shifted out of her shirt and bra. When she was wearing only her panties, I took another moment to admire her, holding her ankles against my hips.

Her knees widened, drawing my attention to the heart of her. I could still recall my first taste, the sweet moans that filled the air when I tasted the nectar of the gods for the first time. That single moment in the hot tub will forever be implanted in my brain, but it felt like a lifetime ago.

I eased down to my knees beside the bed, draping her legs over my forearms so I could free my hands. She watched me, her gaze logging every move I made as I shifted her panties aside, revealing the silky pink flesh beneath.

“So pretty,” I muttered, no longer caring what came out of my mouth. I wasn’t trying to seduce her with words. It wasn’t my specialty, but there was one thing I was damn good at.

I caressed her with one finger, dragging the tip along the silky smooth flesh as I drank in the sight of her.

“Jacob...”

I leaned in, letting my breath fan her delicate skin.

She whimpered, and then her back arched when I licked along the seam of her pussy lips, parting the smooth flesh. I didn’t rush, wanting to savor every second. I didn’t miss an inch, licking along the crease where her torso met her thighs, inching inward. I sucked on her puffy lips, then teased her inner labia. I dipped my tongue inside her, getting drunk on the rich flavor of her cunt. But I was just getting started. I wanted to learn the taste and texture of her entire body. I wanted to know what made her sigh, what made her moan. I circled her clit with the tip of my tongue, my cock now iron-hard and throbbing against my zipper. I was desperate to feel her wrapped around me, but I wasn’t sure I could stop feasting if someone ordered me to.

“Oh, God ... oh, yes.” Journey rolled her hips, increasing the friction of my tongue on her clit.

I licked lower, thrusting my tongue into her tight entrance, seeking more of her rich, sharp flavor as I watched her body writhe against the bed.

“Please, Jacob ... I want to feel you inside me.”

I growled roughly against her flesh, every muscle in my body tightening at the thought of her body sheathing me.

I thrust my tongue into her again, then flicked her clit and filled her with one finger.

She cried out, her pussy contracting as I watched her. Journey hummed and moaned, her hips rocking as she attempted to get herself off. I wanted her to come, but I didn't want to rush this. I felt like I'd been waiting for this woman for a lifetime. The thought of this moment breezing by like all the others was unbearable. I had to savor her.

“God, you're so beautiful,” I rasped as she tried to ride my finger.

I blew air across her clit as I pushed two fingers inside her. Her pussy stretched to accommodate even as the muscles clutched at my hand.

She was fucking perfection. That was the only way to describe it.

“More ... please...”

I gave her more, pushing my fingers deeper, flicking her clit with my tongue. I let the moment drag out while she panted and moaned. Her juices drenched my hand. I didn't stop, letting her overwhelm my senses. I was high on her taste, her scent, her sound. I circled my lips around the tiny nub and thrashed her clit with my tongue until she was crying out my name over and over. I didn't stop until her body tensed and her back arched, her shout of pleasure causing my cock to throb harder.

When her body returned to a relaxed state, her chest rising and falling from her exertion, I reluctantly slid my fingers

from the blistering hot depths of her cunt, kissing my way up her body.

“Taste yourself on my tongue,” I whispered before crushing my mouth to hers.

Journey’s arms wreathed my neck, her leg hooked around my thigh as I fucked her mouth with my tongue.

“Please ... inside me,” she pleaded, her hands clutching my shoulders, attempting to pull me on top of her. “Now.”

I chuckled softly, then reluctantly released her mouth. I stared at her in awe as I stripped off my clothes, leaving them where they fell. I took a moment to slide her panties down her legs, tossing them aside. It took only a minute before I moved over her again, this time skin-to-skin. She was so soft. So damn soft.

My intention was to drag this out longer, to worship her body with my tongue until she couldn’t take it anymore, but my resolve crumbled when she curled her small fingers around my shaft, guiding me to her slick entrance.

“Condom,” I mumbled against her mouth, surprised I had enough brain cells to think of her safety when I wanted nothing more than to feel her pussy sheathe me.

“I’m clean,” she gasped against my mouth, her arm curling over my shoulder as she pulled me closer. “On birth control.”

I lifted my head to meet her gaze. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“I want to feel you.”

Oh, Jesus.

“I’ve never...” Hell, I couldn’t even finish that sentence.

“I trust you, Jacob.”

I held her stare as my brain went fuzzy. The only thing I could hear was the rush of blood in my ears as I dragged the head of my cock against the slick seam of her pussy. Her legs fell open as her fingers caressed my face. I pressed against the tight entrance of her body, pushing in slowly while I held her

stare. She was so fucking beautiful, it hurt to look at her, but I didn't look away. Couldn't.

Nothing had ever felt this good. I'd never had sex without a condom. I'd never realized the sensations the latex blocked until now as I penetrated her tight, wet cunt. I sank in one inch, two ... I didn't stop until her jaw tightened and the first glint of discomfort clouded her brilliant blue eyes. I paused, then retreated before pushing in again. Inch by inch, I slipped inside, then retreated again and again until her body stretched enough to take all of me. At that point, I held my breath as pleasure danced along my neural pathways.

My cock pulsed inside her. Journey moaned.

I rolled my hips, forcing my cock deeper as I adjusted her leg over my forearm. I wanted to be so deep inside her that we were one, if only for a moment. When she relaxed against the pillow, her fingers curling around my biceps, I began to move, fucking her slow and deep. Deeper than I ever imagined possible.

Her pussy gripped me, clenching around me each time I sank inside. I chased that exquisite friction, my pace picking up to quench the insatiable urge building inside me.

"Journey ... fuck, baby..." I wouldn't last. I couldn't. It was too fucking good.

I pressed my groin to hers, filling her as I rocked against her, adding friction to her clit until her nails dug into my skin.

"Hold on," I warned before I retreated and slammed home.

Over and over, I drove us both to the pinnacle, letting the sweat dampen my skin as I relished the haven of her body until I was nothing more than sensation.

"Jacob..."

Her pussy spasmed around my dick.

"Oh, God. Oh..." She gritted her teeth and threw her head back, her pussy contracting as her orgasm claimed her.

I didn't stop. Fucking her through the orgasm, attempting to drive her toward another. Only when she was trembling and

mumbling incoherently did I let myself go, ramming in one final time and groaning as the release barreled through me like a freight train.

When I dropped my head to her shoulder, Journey curled her arms around me, holding me tight.

Only then did I realize she was everything I never knew I needed.

Thursday...

Journey

I WOKE WITH WARM BREATH FANNING OVER my shoulder. When the fuzz from sleep disappeared, I realized my body had reacted to the man in my bed long before my brain had come online. I wasn't even sure Hawk was awake. He had one arm draped over my middle, and I was partially on my side and partially on my back as I leaned against him. I figured at one point he was spooned behind me, but I had taken over the bed, as I was prone to do.

“Are you awake?” I whispered, figuring I would let him sleep if he was.

He didn't respond. Not with words. His lips, however, proved that he was very much awake as they brushed over my shoulder, moving toward my neck.

I sighed and leaned against him.

“What time do you have to be at work?” he asked, making my body warm one degree at a time until I could feel the heat moving through me.

“Eight. What time is it?”

“Six.”

If I got up now, I would have plenty of time to get ready. If I succumbed to this wicked heat he was kindling in my veins, I would likely be late. It was good to be late every once in a while, right?

“It takes me an hour to get ready. Forty minutes to get there if traffic isn't horrible.”

“I don't want you to be late,” he said, sliding his lips along my jaw as he urged me to lean back more.

When I did, Hawk shifted, kissing his way down my chest. I inhaled sharply when he sucked my nipple roughly.

“Maybe we should move this to the shower,” he said, releasing my nipple. “Two birds, one stone.”

“Maybe we should.” I’d never taken a shower with a man. Or anyone, for that matter. So the idea of showering with Hawk whipped those sparks into an inferno.

He lifted his head and smiled down at me. “What’re you waiting for, smokeshow?”

I giggled, slipping out of bed and padding naked across the room. I could feel his eyes on me, but I didn’t hear him move. I turned on the water, twisting the knobs in the hopes of getting that delicate balance between hot and scalding. And because Hawk hadn’t joined me, I quickly shut the door so I could pee with some privacy. No way could I hold it now that I was vertical.

By the time I was finished, the bathroom was filling with steam. I opened the door, signaling Hawk that it was all right to join me. I stepped into the shower and pulled the curtain closed as his footsteps sounded on the tile floor.

I leaned my head back and let the water soak my hair. As I did, I realized he had the same idea I had. I giggled like a schoolgirl when I heard him peeing. I wasn’t sure why it was amusing, but it was.

He joined me a minute later, not pretending his presence wasn’t for more than merely getting clean.

Hawk wasted no time, his hooded gaze sliding over me as he moved closer. The water poured over us as he sealed his lips to mine. I slid my hands over his chest, then lower so I could feel all those rippling muscles beneath my fingertips. The man was built like a rock. Hard everywhere. I purposely grazed his cock with the side of my hand. His erection, which was trapped between us, pressing against my belly, twitched and swelled. The longer he kissed me, the more my resolve faded until my hand wandered. And then I was stroking him from root to tip, grazing the slit on the tip with my thumb. The more I did, the louder his grunts and groans became until kissing was pointless.

Hawk pulled back, his focus on my hand moving along his shaft. I joined him in the viewing party, watching raptly as my fingers curled around his beautiful erection. He was long and

thick but not ridiculously so like Creed. Nor was he as thick as Garrison. I had no idea why I was comparing the size of their penises, but as soon as I did, I felt guilty. Enough that I wanted to prove to myself and Hawk that I was right here in this moment, not with anyone else.

I went to my knees before him.

“Journey ... baby...” He threw his head back when I wrapped my lips around the head of his cock. “Fuck.”

I stroked and sucked in tandem, watching as he pressed his palms to the tile in an effort to hold himself up. His head finally tilted down, his eyes so hot I expected the water to warm a few degrees. He watched me, sucking air deep into his lungs as he began pumping his hips.

“Damn, your mouth feels good. Don’t make me come,” he gasped. “I want to be inside you when I do.”

How was a girl supposed to resist that?

I pulled his cock from between my lips and grinned. I definitely wasn’t going to argue with that plan.

Hawk took my hand and tugged, bringing me to my feet like a man who couldn’t wait another second. Once I was standing, he pushed me up against the wall opposite the shower head. He didn’t hesitate, curling his fingers under my thigh and lifting my leg as he pressed his cock against my center. He rutted for a moment, sliding against my clit, making my lungs work overtime as sensation flooded my entire body. Not wanting to come until he was inside me, I had to reach down to assist with alignment, but when I guided him home, Hawk took over.

Thankfully he was keeping me upright because it was all I could do to balance on my toes while he filled me. My body sang like a tune coming from within. Every nerve ending danced as he fucked me, grunting with each plunge of his cock. I could get used to this. Being ravaged first thing in the morning. Certainly something that belonged on my daily to-do list.

“Yes ... ahhhh.”

The pleasure surged through my entire body, lighting me up from the inside. I was perched inside the catapult, ready to plummet into the ether. Any second now, the rope would be cut, and I would be vaulted into ecstasy. I hung on for as long as possible, not wanting the pleasure to end. It felt so good.

“Please...” I whimpered. I had no idea what I was pleading for. I never wanted him to stop. I wanted to remain trapped in this vortex of exquisite pleasure with this man. “Oh, God, Jacob...”

He fucked me harder, and I had a feeling it had to do with me using his name. Last night, I noticed a subtle shift in him whenever I had.

“Journey ... fuck, baby. You’re so tight.”

I dug my nails into his shoulders, trying to hold on. “Make me come. Yes ... yes ... harder.”

He drilled me, his fingertips digging into the flesh of my thigh as he held my leg, his hips pumping faster, his cock surging deeper. And when the base of his cock pressed against my clit, I lost the fragile grip I had on my control. My orgasm detonated. It felt as if every pleasure receptor was dragged deep within my body, churned into a violent storm in my core, then shot back out on a wave of energy. The sensation was so powerful I screamed.

Hawk grunted, driving into me one last time as his body twitched, his hips punching forward as he came.

When he lifted his head, he was smiling. I was, too.

“Best shower ever,” he whispered before pressing his lips to mine.

Yes, it most definitely was.

Two hours later, as I was sitting at my desk in my new fancy office, I still had a smile on my face. The orgasm had prompted it, and it had remained steady throughout the morning when Hawk waited for me to get ready, then when he insisted on buying me coffee at my favorite coffee shop near

my apartment. It didn't falter when he followed me to work, then walked me to the main entrance. He didn't come inside, insisting he had to go home and change first, which warmed me even more.

I hadn't realized until we parted ways that the only real dates I'd had recently were with Hawk. Well, unless the pizza place counted, but seeing as it had turned into a group outing, I wasn't sure it did. Garrison and I had shared a meal twice, but one of those times had been a manipulation on Creed's part. The other was the trip to the beach when Garrison had come to soothe my frazzled nerves after I found that stupid video camera in my office. He hadn't actually taken me on a date because he wanted to, something he had pointed out during his outburst yesterday.

But Hawk had gone out of his way to spend a few extra minutes with me. I wasn't sure he realized how much that meant to me. I'd never considered myself a contemporary girl, but that didn't mean I didn't want to experience conventional dating.

Lucky for me, Duke was the only person on the seventh floor when I arrived this morning. Creed hadn't arrived, nor had Nick or Garrison. Not even the ladies in the other reception area had been there. I had offered a cheerful good morning to Duke, and to my surprise, he had returned it. With a genuine smile on his face.

Maybe it was contagious, or perhaps he got lucky last night, too.

The thought made me laugh.

I remained focused until shortly after ten when Duke appeared in my doorway holding an enormous orange vase of the most beautiful flowers I'd ever seen.

"These came for you, Ms. Zeplyn."

"Oh, my God." I lurched to my feet and walked to the small reception table where he placed them. "Wow."

"My sentiments exactly," he said, staring at them beside me.

It was an eclectic combination of colors: hot pink mini carnations, lavender daisies, and larger fuchsia carnations to go with giant orange lilies. All set in a beautiful orange vase. Against the white backdrop of my office, they popped.

“Those lilies are stunning.”

“They are.” He grinned, then gestured toward the arrangement. “There’s a card.”

I snatched up the little envelope and opened it:

CAN’T STOP THINKING ABOUT YOU.

~HAWK

My heart turned over because the card wasn’t typed; it was handwritten with Hawk’s signature. Which meant he hadn’t called in the order. He had gone down to the florist to pick them out. The man certainly knew how to lay on the charm.

Since Duke was still standing beside me, I assumed he was curious about who they were from. I clipped the card between two fingers and angled it toward him, curious to see whether he would sneak a peek. He did, and for whatever reason, it felt like we were making progress.

“Lucky girl,” he muttered. He had a genuine smile on his face when he left my office a minute later.

The high I’d been riding since I woke up remained for the remainder of the morning and into the afternoon. It began to wane shortly around one when I realized I was still the only person on the seventh floor except for Duke. Creed had never arrived, nor had Nick. I knew Garrison preferred a different floor, so his absence didn’t affect me the same. Or maybe it did, but in a different way since our conversation yesterday afternoon had left us on shaky ground.

A soft knock sounded outside my door. I looked up to see Duke standing there, back to his awkward self.

“I was going down to the cafeteria,” he said politely. “Can I bring you anything?”

As though prompted by his suggestion, my stomach rumbled like a herd of elephants. I glanced at my computer

screen and saw that I didn't have a meeting for another hour, so I still had time to eat.

"Would you mind if I went with you?" I asked, not moving so as not to startle him. I didn't want him to think I would force conversation or anything.

His expression reflected his uncertainty even as he said, "Not at all."

I huffed a laugh. "It's okay if you'd don't want me to, but you'll have to speak up, Duke. I'm not a mind reader. Although, wouldn't that be cool if I were?"

Duke smoothed out his facial muscles—probably by sheer force of will—and another genuine smile appeared. "I would be honored if you'd join me."

That time I believed him, so I got to my feet. We made it to the elevator without a word spoken. Down was also done in silence, but at that point, I couldn't take it anymore.

"Are you scared of me?" I asked.

His eyes rounded. "Of course not."

"You sure? Because you look like a rabbit ready to run."

"I always look uptight. Or so I've been told."

"Uptight? Ehh." I tilted my head side to side, glancing over at him as we walked. "Yeah." I nodded and grinned. "That's a good word for it."

Duke laughed, and there was a good possibility he had surprised himself when he did.

"But now that I know it's normal, I won't take offense." I laughed when his forehead creased. "What? I thought you didn't like me."

He gestured for me to walk in front of him when we reached the cafeteria doors. "Why wouldn't I like you?"

"You *should* like me," I chirped. "I'm fun."

Duke didn't respond, but he didn't run away from me either. We went into the food service area and went our

separate ways. I opted for a flatbread pizza and an energy drink, figuring those would go a long way to getting me through the afternoon of meetings. I found Duke waiting by the door to the dining room.

“I thought for sure you’d be back upstairs by now,” I teased.

“Would you like to eat down here?”

I was shocked by the suggestion, but I wasn’t about to pass up an opportunity to get Duke to loosen up a bit.

“Fair warning, I’m going to get nosy,” I said as we walked to one of the tables near the back of the space.

“I think I can handle you for thirty minutes.”

We spent that half hour getting to know one another. I kept my questions about him, not about his bosses. I was surprised when he began asking me questions, some the same as I asked him. I learned that Duke was thirty-two, born and raised in L.A. The only time he had ever left California was the one trip he took to visit his sister, who lived in Montana with her husband and two sons. He actually curled his lip when he mentioned the state. His parents had both passed away, though he didn’t say when or how. His husband’s name was Rick, and they’d been married for eight years. They had a daughter, Julia, who was the light of their lives.

Anytime I brought up Creed, Hawk, or Garrison, he somehow managed to change the subject, an art form I realized I admired. I did learn that Garrison was away on business and wouldn’t be back for a week. It bummed me out because I’d been hoping we would have a chance to clear the air. I didn’t like the way we’d left things yesterday. By the time we were finished, I felt better for having the opportunity to get to know him.

When we arrived on the seventh floor, I was smiling. That lasted until I saw Creed standing with his arms crossed over his chest, glaring.

I should’ve known my good mood was going to come to an end.

Creed

WHEN JOURNEY NOTICED ME AS SHE STEPPED off the elevator, I saw her disappointment first. It was followed by frustration and, after that, indifference. She was the only woman I knew who could go through a myriad of emotions in the span of a few seconds, and she did it without trying to hide her reaction. I liked that she didn't, even though I wasn't sure I understood her half the time.

Being astute, I summed up the whole of those reactions to determine she was not happy with me.

The question was: why?

Sure, my stance was aggressive. That was normal for me, regardless of my mood. And no, I wasn't angry. Concerned was a better word for it. I'd been trying to get a hold of her since last night when I left the office, but the calls were going right to voicemail, and she wasn't responding to text messages.

Of course, my presence didn't faze Journey in the least, but Duke all but saluted when he walked toward me, his back straight, shoulders square. I couldn't fathom why he would think I was upset with him, but I had long ago stopped trying to figure him out. He was good at his job, which was all that mattered.

Journey strolled past me as though I wasn't even there.

I raised my eyebrow at Duke. His response to my silent question was a shrug of his shoulders. I didn't expect the guy to gossip, but a heads-up would've been nice. Unfortunately, he offered neither, so I decided to confront Journey myself.

"I have a meeting in ten minutes," she said when I walked into her office. "I don't have time for you right now, Creed."

My dick probably shouldn't get hard at the sardonic tone of her voice, but it did.

"Tough shit." I closed the door behind me.

Journey undocked her computer and walked around her desk, avoiding eye contact. “I really don’t have time.”

“Make time,” I growled roughly, blocking her exit.

She sighed, placing one hand on her hip. Her eyes lifted, narrowed. “What do you need?”

“Any reason you’re not answering my calls?”

“You haven’t called me, Creed. But nice try.”

My eyebrows lifted toward my hairline. “I’ve left you half a dozen messages.”

I didn’t bother telling her I had also stopped by her apartment last night. However, when I saw Hawk’s motorcycle parked outside, I wasn’t sure what to do. I considered using my cuff links as an excuse since I realized yesterday that I’d left them at her apartment. Since the excuse was weak, I’d done the noble thing and left, although it damn near killed me to do so.

Journey frowned, then pulled her phone from her pocket. She glanced at the screen, and the crease in her forehead deepened. “The battery died.”

Well, at least I had my reason.

She shoved the phone back into her pocket. “It wasn’t intentional, but if it’s all the same to you, we’ll have to talk about this later.”

I stepped forward.

She stepped back. “Don’t do this, Creed. This is my job. You can’t interfere with that.”

“Fair enough.” I tucked my hands in my pockets to keep from reaching for her. “We’ll talk after.”

“I’ve got meetings until four.”

“Come to my office when you’re finished.”

She sighed. “Fine.”

I stepped out of her way, shocked when she moved past me as though I was just another obstacle in her path.

I couldn't deny her casual indifference burned.

At four o'clock on the dot, Journey rapped her knuckles on my office door. She took one step inside as though waiting for a formal invitation.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Cut the shit, kitten," I growled roughly as I got to my feet. "Shut the door." I gestured toward the sofa. "Have a seat."

She closed the door, her movements prim and graceful. It was another indication that she was pissed off at me. For what, I had no idea. It didn't take much for me to piss people off, so it could've been a number of things.

In another attempt to slight me, she sat in one of the armchairs rather than on the sofa where I'd suggested. She folded her hands in her lap, crossed her ankles, and stared at me, waiting.

I could tell she wasn't as apathetic as she was pretending to be, but I had to give her props for making an effort.

"Since you spent the night with Hawk last night, I figured you might want to know he's been suspended for a few days."

Her eyes widened, her aloofness morphing into concern in an instant. "What? Why?"

Or maybe that was rage. I couldn't tell.

"His actions yesterday required it."

"Because he *defended* me?" she bit out. "How could you do that?"

"It was that, or Wayne was pressing charges. I chose the lesser of two evils."

"Fuck Wayne," she hissed, flopping back in her chair. "I'm so tired of him. He gets away with calling me a whore and taunting me anytime he sees me. And the only man who seems to give a shit gets punished for standing up for me. I don't understand you, Creed."

“Perhaps if you’d been an adult yesterday, we could’ve resolved this differently. Instead, you stormed out of here like a petulant child.”

“You don’t get to dictate how I react to things, Creed.”

I remained casual, pretending not to be irked by her outburst. “I do get to dictate how you react when you’re here. As you mentioned earlier, this is your place of business. I happen to *own* this business.”

“Screw you.”

To her credit, she didn’t get up and storm out. I had expected her to.

“You could give me your side of the story.”

“Too late for that. You’ve already made your decision. What happens now? Is Hawk under house arrest? Do you plan to keep him away from me this time, too?”

“He went with Garrison to Texas. They’ll be checking in with the gyms.”

She snorted. “And you say you aren’t keeping him away from me. Right.”

I could see why she thought that. “That wasn’t my intention.”

“Next, you’ll tell me Wayne’s my new boss.” With each word she spoke, her ire rose. “Wouldn’t that be great? He could call me a slut more often. Or maybe he’ll start making hand motions when he tells me he’d pay to watch me get fucked by all three of you at the same time.”

I growled.

Journey laughed, but it rang with incredulity. “You didn’t know that, huh? Hawk didn’t tell you? Or you didn’t listen?”

I didn’t respond. I couldn’t.

“That was what Wayne said when he saw Hawk and Garrison on the elevator. He asked if my boss let me out of my pen or if I burrowed out. Then he saw them and said he’d pay to watch me get fucked by all three of you.” She huffed and

shot to her feet. “Hawk was defending me, Creed, because that’s what he does. I didn’t ask him to, and I definitely didn’t want him to, but he stood up for me. That’s more than I can say for you.”

When she turned toward the door, I got to my feet. I was on her before she could reach the knob. No way would I let her storm out and avoid me again. Last night had been fucking hell. I wouldn’t go through it again.

“Stop,” she hissed, wiggling when I banded my arms around her. “Leave me alone.”

“Never,” I growled in her ear as I held her against me, lifting her feet off the floor.

“I can’t do this with you, Creed! I can’t.”

She beat on my arms and tried to kick me in the shins. I held firm, returning to the sofa. I sat, pulling her into my lap and holding her until she stopped moving.

“I can’t do this,” she repeated, a sob escaping.

I brushed her hair back over her shoulder, moving it out of my way, and then pressed my cheek to hers as I kept my arms banded around her.

“Relax, Journey.”

“I don’t want to relax.” Her actions belied her words because she leaned into me. “I want some semblance of normal.”

“What does normal look like to you?” I prompted.

“I don’t even know anymore, but it’s not this.”

I ignored the fire in my gut as her words filleted me.

“I can’t fight you all the time, Creed. And I can’t split myself into three to make all of you happy. It won’t work.”

“Who said we’re not happy?”

She huffed again. “Apparently, you haven’t talked to Garrison.”

I hadn't. Not about anything worthwhile. Last night he relayed his version of events, then informed me he would be making a trip to Texas to make the rounds at some of our Dallas locations and to stop in to see his folks. He said he would be back sometime next week. I hadn't questioned him.

"What happened with Garrison?"

"You'll have to talk to him. I won't repeat what he said."

I took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and relaxed my arms. I kept them around her but not to keep her in place. I merely wanted to relish this moment. They didn't happen often.

"I don't think I can do this, Creed," she said, sounding defeated. "I want to, but it's too hard. I can't make all three of you happy. When something goes right with one of you, it goes wrong with another. That's not fair to any of us."

She was right.

"What are you saying?"

"I don't know." Her voice grew more confident. "I think I need some time to myself."

I let my arms drop, the fire in my gut producing smoke so thick it was suffocating me. "How much time?"

The moment I let go, she got to her feet and smoothed out her clothes. Before my eyes, she pulled herself together.

"I don't know that either," she said, not looking at me.

She walked toward the door, not bothering to make eye contact. She wasn't even pretending I had a say in this. Or that I fucking mattered at all.

"Please just give me some space, Creed. I'll let you know when I'm ready to see you again."

"I won't sit around and wait," I barked, filled with a rage I'd never experienced before.

Journey looked back, her hand on the doorknob. "I never expected you would."

With that, she walked out, her shoulders square, her head held high.

I remained where I was, trying to process what happened, to make sense of it. I couldn't. All my life, people had walked away from me. My parents—whoever they were—when they abandoned me on a church doorstep. My adoptive parents when they were killed. Social workers every time they placed me in another foster home, assuring me it would get better. Foster parents when they realized they couldn't handle me. Teachers who didn't want to invest because I wasn't docile and meek. Friends who aged out of the system, leaving me behind to find someone else who could temporarily fill that void. Even Ray, when he decided to move to Florida to be near his daughter after I had won the gym from him fair and square.

The only people who had stuck around were Garrison, Nick, and Hawk. They had never walked away.

It didn't mean I wasn't expecting it. Every time I argued with one of them, I wondered if that would be the last time. If I would be left with a memory of their back when they decided I wasn't worth the effort.

I'd gotten good at pretending the abandonment didn't hurt. That I wasn't affected by the dismissals. It was the reason I controlled the variables in my life. I was at the top of the food chain at the club. I was the most powerful man in *this* building. The people I kept in my orbit couldn't walk away from me because there was too much to lose. I'd designed it that way.

But Journey was different. *This* was different. I didn't want to pretend her actions didn't cut to the bone. They did. They sliced me clean down the middle.

As I stared at my office door, I knew I had to handle this another way. I couldn't shrug my shoulders and move on like she didn't matter. I had to wait. I had to give her the space she requested. For as long as it took.

What other choice did I have? I was fairly certain I was in love with Journey Zeplyn. Yes, it was complicated, and it was fucking messy, but that didn't change the fact.

And loving someone ... I'd never done that before.
For the first time in my adult life, I needed someone.
Need. Not want.
I *needed* her.

There is more to come for Journey, Creed, Garrison, and Hawk. Each volume will be released 2 - 3 weeks apart. And each book will be on sale for \$0.99 the first week it is out; after that, it will return to its regular price. And the Primal Instincts series will be in Kindle Unlimited for a limited time.

Volume 5 will release on March 31, 2023

If you would like to be notified of each release, [sign up for Nic News](#) to get an email on release day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT NICOLE EDWARDS

New York Times and *USA Today* bestselling author Nicole Edwards lives in the suburbs of Austin, Texas, with her husband, their three fur babies, and the youngest of their three children, who has threatened never to leave home. When Nicole is not writing about sexy alpha males and sassy, independent women, she can often be found with a book in hand or attempting to keep the dogs happy. You can find her hanging out on social media and interacting with her readers - even when she's supposed to be writing.

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