



QUEEN'S
Gambit



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ERIN OSBORNE

Queen's Gamble

Grand Ridge University

Book 2

Erin Osborne

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Trigger Warning

Please note this book has dark moments throughout. There is going to be bullying, physical assault, and other violent acts from the main female character's bullies. She will also relive moments of trauma she suffered in her past. While I might not go into extreme detail with any of these past memories, please do not read if this will be any sort of trigger for you. Past memories will include being beaten by an adult, sexual assault, being locked in a closet, starved, locked outside no matter what the weather was, and being homeless for approximately six months with nowhere to hide from the monsters after her.

Other possible trigger warnings:

Please note this book may contain the following trigger warnings: sexual assault/rape, kidnapping, mental abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, swearing, sex, drinking, drug use, and other trauma. Please read knowing there's a chance you'll see these in this book.

*This does NOT mean you will find any or all of these possible triggers in this book. It is just a warning of any possibilities to see this in the pages as you read.

Dedication

To everyone who's working on bettering themselves and becoming who they truly want to be in life. Here's to becoming who you were always meant to be!

Queen's Gamble Blurp

A threat remains. My foster mother continues to send me ominous emails getting more graphic about what's going to happen to me with each new one sent. The guys are hardly around so I can't confide in them about what's happening. There's really no one to turn to these days because everyone is out living their best life.

My days are filled with class, being there for tutoring, work, and then being alone at the house. Oh, let's not forget making sure I'm available for every single appointment Mr. Vanderwalt has set up for me regarding our upcoming wedding.

Secrets are revealed. Things not a single one of us saw coming change up everything in our lives. Instead of finding peace and calmness, we're thrust in wars, new beginnings, and upheavals in the things we thought to be true. Will this tear us all apart or can we make it work to our advantage? Is there a secret ally out there we had no clue existed? Or will his plot for revenge take everyone I love out of my life permanently?

Note to the Readers

Hey everyone!

The Grand Ridge University is a new, darker trilogy from me. You might have read a different version of this story in an anthology that was released at the beginning of this year. If so, you'll find a lot of things have changed between the two versions of the story. Please, read the trigger warning before proceeding with this book.

Also, there will be a short Christmas story, entitled Oakliegh's First Christmas in an anthology called Once Upon A Christmas. King's Court will have to be read before reading that short story if you want to understand what's going on with the characters and why things are the way they are.

Thank you for everything and I hope you enjoy this new world and the characters taking it over!

Erin

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Prologue



Hendrix

NOW THAT WE'VE officially claimed Oakliegh, the guys in the frat all need to know things are changing around here. Especially when it concerns the guys moving out of the frat house and in with us. This shit has never been done before and I'm not sure if it's actually going to work out or not. I mean, putting six men who have their own opinions and ways of handling shit under the same roof is bound to cause issues. I don't see it not happening if I'm being honest. It doesn't mean I don't like the other guys. They simply aren't my brother and best friend. We're a unit and have a way of handling situations. It's why we're the fucking kings of Grand Ridge. These guys are just learning what their roles in the family are and it's going to be an adjustment period for sure. Though, we've already had a week or so to start learning to live with them and Harper.

Grabbing my keys in case I get called out when I'm at the frat house, I let the guys know where I'm going since they're off doing their own thing. Oakliegh's still asleep and I'm not about to wake her up for any reason. My baby girl needs her sleep and I know she's a light sleeper who will no doubt wake up if I send her a message or try to call her right now. The nightmares still plague Oakliegh and sleep is something she doesn't get enough of. Not when she's trying so damn hard to avoid falling asleep to have her past come back and haunt her when she can't defend herself.

Leaving the house, I run into Brody, Zeke, and Kayson. Good. They can come with me to the frat house so they know we approve of the changes that have been made in recent days.

We all need to stand as a united front and not let anyone know if there's any tension between us or anything. If it comes to that.

"You guys can come with me," I say, not giving anything away about where we're heading.

"What's up? Did something happen to Oakliegh?" Brody questions, concern filling his face.

"Nope. My girl is up there sleepin' still. At least I hope she is. Harper at practice?" I ask, trying to make them feel as if I want to know what's going on.

We are supposed to be getting close to them after all. I know they're good guys. Our dad's wouldn't have chosen them to take over after us if they weren't. However, I'm not the best at letting new people in like we have to living in the same house. It was cool over Christmas with us all hanging out, but our main focus was on making sure Oakliegh had the best holiday possible since she's never been allowed to celebrate Christmas. I'm sure her birthday, which is coming up, was celebrated much the same when she lived with her foster parents. Putting that thought in the back of my mind, I make a mental note to talk to the guys about doing something for our girl. We need to make the day all about her and show her how we feel about her.

The four of us walk up to the frat house. Walking inside, it reeks of stale alcohol, sex, and there's enough damage to let me know these guys have been partying full force since being on Christmas break. At least the guys who didn't head home for the rest of the year. I shake my head in annoyance at the mess in the fucking house. If Zander were the one to walk in here and see this shit, these guys would be in hell right now. Something else to fucking address with them.

"Get the fuckers up. I want them all down here in two fuckin' minutes," I bark out to the three guys with me.

Brody, Zeke, and Kayson all take off to wake the guys up. Zeke has a sinister smile on his face as he bolts up the stairs. Yeah, he's going to be fun to work with. I have a feeling

he's like me and will do well in the enforcer position of our family. He seems as if he's the type of guy to like creating chaos and getting information out of the sick fucks we deal with. I'm actually grateful I get to work with him based on the little bit I've witnessed since the beginning of the year.

Zeke didn't hesitate to jump into the fight at our house the night we didn't let TJ and the rest of the fucks with him into our party. He was honestly right behind me. That tells me he has no problem getting his hands dirty and will always be among the first to step up when shit hits the fan.

I walk around the house, taking in the mess that's been created here. These guys are going to clean it all the fuck up and not have any outside help in doing so. Yeah, I get they aren't the only ones who created this shitstorm, but it was their idea to host a party without letting us know about it. So, they can accept their punishment from me and be thankful Zander and Kendrik aren't here to witness this shit. If they think I'm bad with my punishments, my brother and best friend are a lot worse than me. They'll make these fuckers clean toilets with their fucking toothbrushes before getting down on their hands and knees to clean the floor with those same toothbrushes. I'm not that bad because I've been here and done the same shit they're doing now without us here on a constant basis.

It doesn't take long for me to hear the rushed stomps of the guys racing down the stairs here. Heading back to the main room, I watch them all scramble down the stairs to stop in front of me. Some of them are soaking wet while others are still more than half asleep. All of the guys standing in front of me are in nothing more than a pair of shorts or boxers. I'd laugh if I wasn't so pissed about the state of the frat house.

"It seems you guys have been partying it up over the last few days or so. You realize that this fuckin' frat house represents us? The kings of the school? By it lookin' like this, you're lettin' us know you don't really give a fuck if you're here or not. I can kick all your fuckin' asses to the curb and bring in a whole new group of guys. Guys who will fuckin' take care of the house like they want to be here," I begin,

glaring at all the men before me as Kayson, Brody, and Zeke come to stand at my back.

They're letting everyone here know they stand with me and will have no sympathy for those in trouble. They will back whatever decision I make here today and make sure it's enforced without fail. This is why these men were chosen to be our replacements when we graduate in a few months. The three of them already know what's expected of them and where their loyalties lie. Unlike the assholes standing before me.

"I came here this mornin' to let you all know of what's goin' on. Oakliegh has officially been claimed by Zander, Kendrik, and me. She's your fuckin' queen now. You're all expected to treat her as such and make sure you offer a helpin' hand if she ever needs anythin'. I don't give a fuck what it is either. You *will* all make sure she's your priority when you're not in class or practice of any kind. Especially if you know we're not around or busy with somethin' else," I bark out, making sure to look at each guy standing in front of me. They will all know there's no room for them to fuck off and have something happen to her. "You'll all have also noticed these three me are no longer livin' in the frat house with you. They've been moved into the house with us for safety reasons. There's still a threat against our girl even if the assholes who have been hurtin' her on campus are no longer around. I want eyes on her at all times and the schedule for followin' Oakliegh around campus, to work, and everythin' else still stands. Make sure you are there for your time slots and not fuckin' hung over or partyin'. No fuckin' distractions when it comes to her. Is that fuckin' understood?"

All the guys in front of me are quick to nod their heads in agreement of what I'm telling them. At least they're smart enough to realize I'm not playing games here. Not with Oakliegh and about this house.

"Now, if we're not on campus and any one of these three come to you with an order to do somethin', you fuckin' do it. I don't want any fuckin' disrespect toward them. If I hear about any happenin', you'll deal with me and then Kendrik. I

know none of you fuckers want to take him on,” I promise them, knowing they’ve all heard the stories about what my best friend is capable of. “That’s after whoever you’ve disrespected has dealt with you. They’re free to dole out punishments if the need arises. You’ll respect them the same way you do Zander, Kendrik, and me. They will be the next kings to rule over the school when we graduate.

“So, today, your goal is to get this fuckin’ house up to my standards. I want this place cleaned to the point you can eat off the fuckin’ floors. You’re not callin’ in any of the sororities or anyone else to help you either. You chose to throw the party and it’s up to you guys to make sure the house looks spotless at all times. You got lucky with me comin’ here this mornin’. It could have been Zander, Kendrik, or one of our fathers. Remember I’m not always a giant fuckin’ asshole. So, get the fuckin’ lead out and get this place fuckin’ cleaned. I think Zeke will come back in a little while to make sure it’s been taken care of. If you chose to party and not make sure your work was caught up, I’d get started on that shit too. Just because you’re in this frat doesn’t mean you can slack the fuck off when it comes to your grades. That’s not somethin’ we’ll tolerate.”

I watch on as all the guys scramble to find what they need to start cleaning up the fucking mess that’s been created here. Brody, Kayson, and Zeke all remain behind me as we watch them for a few minutes. Just one more way to intimidate them and make sure they realize I’m not fucking around about anything I’ve said here this morning. Especially about their grades. Yeah, we’re a frat house, but it doesn’t mean all we do is party and slack the fuck off. The three of us are almost the top three students of our class. Kendrik actually is the top of our class. He has been all four years here. Not a lot of people know that shit though.

“You want me to hang here and make sure they don’t fuck around?” Zeke asks me as I start walking away.

“Nope. They need to know we shouldn’t have to be here twenty-four hours a day to monitor them. These fuckers should make sure the house is always clean and doesn’t need

to be reminded to keep it up to par on where we want it. They aren't fuckin' toddlers or some shit. These are grown men who should know better than to let the house get this bad. It's not just from one party, that much is clear. So, now they can do this shit all alone and you can do what you need to until you come to check it out later on. Go spend time with Harper when she gets out of practice or somethin'," I tell him, knowing Zeke is going to make sure to follow orders because that's the kind of man he is.

"Got it. I'm gonna head to the gym if that's the case. As soon as I'm done with my workout I'll stop back by and make sure they got the house cleaned up," Zeke says, taking off at a jog toward the athletic house.

"I'm heading to the house so I can keep working on what Kendrick gave me to do," Kayson says, also taking off from our small group.

"What are you doin' until Harper gets out of practice?" I ask Brody as we walk through campus.

"I'll probably go back to the house and get ahead on the reading for the new semester. I've only got a class or two left to go and I'm about four chapters ahead in all of my classes," Brody answers me as he thinks about what he's got to do to get ahead of things.

"When are you goin' with Zander to check shit out?"

"I'm not sure. He let me know we'd be getting together soon, but I know he's been going to a lot of meetings with your dad. He's been busy as all of you have. We'll get to work together soon," he responds with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yeah. He's got to learn his role better while trying to teach you what he knows at the same time. Zander is the master of multitasking, but this might be too much for him. You'll get to work with him though. If it doesn't happen soon, say somethin' to him. He'd rather you speak up than build up anger because shit's not happenin' when you want it too. That's how we all are," I give him a piece of advice.

“Okay. I’ll also be followin’ Oakliegh if she leaves the house today. Not sure if she has a shift or not, but I’ll go and make sure no one gets close to her.”

Nodding my head, we make the rest of the way to our house in silence. The campus is very quiet with most everyone still gone for the holidays. They won’t return until after the new year. Honestly, this is my favorite time around here. No one to fuck around or try to get on our good side. Or try to find a way into our beds. There’s no chance of that shit happening now that we have Oakliegh, but the girls will still fucking try. It’s in their nature to want what they can’t have. With us, they see power, money, and protection. That’s the only reason they flock to us as if we’re fucking Gods or something. Oakliegh is the only one to ever see past all the bullshit and want to get to know us. Hell, she’s the only one Kendrik has even started to let in. She knows things about him only Zander and I knew before. It’s good to see him opening up to her because she opens up to him as well.

Chapter One



Kendrik

WITH CHRISTMAS OVER, I've been focusing my attention on digging into the Powers' once again. These two are sick fucks. Not only have they exploited the children they're supposed to be caring for in their home, but they've sold a few of them. That's the latest piece of information I've uncovered. I'm not sure how the fuck they spun that shit with the caseworkers who regularly check on them, but they've gotten away with it so far. While I'm digging into the assholes, I'm also running programs to see if I can find the kids they've sold off in order to get them out of the monster's hands who bought them. I know they're still close to Grand Ridge. Darren Powers is too paranoid to deal with those he doesn't know very well. Which means selling them off to someone on the other side of a computer isn't going to work for him. Now, it's just a matter of making sure I do everything in my power to save these kids and make sure they get the help they desperately need. The same help Oakliegh's just now getting because she made the choice to do so.

I've got a file already started on Darren and Kember Powers so I can turn over all the information to the proper authorities when I've completed my digging. I've also already started siphoning their money out of the offshore accounts they've been using for years. I do it a little every fucking day in case Darren is as anal about checking the accounts as he is with other aspects of his life. It seems Kember isn't allowed to do a damn thing without his approval. Every fucking move she makes is orchestrated by him. Right down to the clothes she wears and how the house is run. He even chooses which kids they foster. I'm not sure how he manages to do that shit when

he's rarely home. The only time I know he's there for a fact is on party night.

The parties the Powers' throw are filled with vile humans. All the guests attend in order to live out their most depraved fantasies. Drugs flow freely, men and women fuck who they want regardless of their marital status, and a few force their significant others to participate in events even if they don't want to. Nothing is off limits during these parties and over the last few months. I'm not sure of the extent just yet, but it's just a matter of time before I uncover what's being done to them during those late nights. We already know what happens when no one else is in the home.

Kayson is helping me dig into these fuckers. He's working more on the financial aspects of things because I don't want him seeing more of Oakliegh than what's already been shown at that fucking football game. While I dig for information, I'm also continuing to pull down the sites and pictures or videos of Oakliegh being posted to this day. She's not even living with the Powers and they still manage to post shit about her. Photographs and videos they've taken of her when she couldn't fight back for herself or the others being forced to do things no child their age should even know about.

So far, the kid is doing a really good job tracking down offshore accounts, more bank accounts I didn't find before him, and even a few accounts in Oakliegh's name. Kayson's currently looking into the accounts in her name to find out where the money's coming from, why the accounts are in her name, and how to get them without raising any red flags. He's really good with computer shit. Not quite as good as me, but almost where I'm at. I'm glad he's going to be the one taking over here in a few months when we graduate and leave. I'll feel a lot better with Oakliegh being on campus with the three of our replacements here with her. Especially Zeke who is more than following in Hendrix's footsteps.

Brody, Zeke, and Kayson each bring something to the table and have been consistently proving their worth to us since before we learned of them becoming our replacements. They have their strengths and flaws like the rest of us. The

best part is honestly how excited they are to learn their new roles in life and are eager to learn everything they can for us. Harper is also willing to accept her new role. She's ready to rule over the campus at Oakliegh's side for the next few months. They'll both be learning the ropes together because we don't have anyone else to teach them. As Oakliegh continues to come out of her shell, Harper will help her on the days that are simply too hard for her to stand up for herself the way she should.

While turning on a few other programs to run in the background, I let my mind wander to Oakliegh letting us claim her on Christmas day. It's the last thing I was expecting to happen, but I could see the determination in her eyes. She wasn't doing it to prove to us she was worthy of us or for any other reason than knowing it was her decision to make. Oakliegh, my sweet angel, made the conscious choice to give herself to the three of us willingly. Though, we haven't talked about it, I'm curious as to her reasons for doing so. I've just been too busy and locked in my room to have a proper conversation with her about things.

A large part of that is because it's been an adjustment to having four more people in the house with us. I mean, we have people here for parties and shit, but this is different. The guys and Harper live with us seven days a week and there is no leaving for them. Not unless they're at practice, the frat house, or class once they resume. We have our meals together, have sat in the living room together, decorated the house for Oakliegh as a group, and so much more. Since I'm such a private person, it's been a massive adjustment for me to get used to having others live in the space that's been ours for three years. For more than a few hours at a time. The parties I can get through because I focus on music. Now, I've forced myself to focus on digging up all the information I can find on Darren and Kember Powers.

The less time I have to spend with everyone else, the better and calmer I feel. I'm used to Zander and Hendrix being around me on a constant basis. I want to spend time with Oakliegh as well. Her being around doesn't bother me at all. In fact, I crave her being near me in any way she chooses to be

with me. Even if we just sit in silence and don't say a word to one another. It's Zeke, Brody, Kayson, and Harper that's throwing me off. While I've spent time with the guys through the frat house, I haven't really spent a ton of time with Harper. She's Oakliegh's best friend and I want to get to know her, things have just been too chaotic for me to wrap my mind around everything and process it all. That's why I tend to stick to myself and don't hang out in large groups. When I have to, I use my music as a way to escape and let it keep my head on straight.

With the way I've been digging up information on Darren and Kember, I've even pushed practicing for my upcoming performance. Oakliegh is going to sing with me and I'll also play guitar. I know she's nervous about standing in front of so many people to bare something so few have heard from her. I'm thrusting her into being the center of attention by singing. While I know she's nervous as hell about our performance, I'm just as nervous as she is. This is what I've been working toward for the last three years. It won't be my first time performing in front of a crowd, but it will definitely be the most important performance of my time here at GRU. There will be recruiters here from record labels and talent agents alike. We're keeping that information from Oakliegh because she'll lose her shit if she knows that part.

A large part of me doesn't want to go through with the performance because it's going to do nothing but cause another argument between my father and me. He just doesn't understand why I'm so completely passionate about music. For me, it's a way to escape reality for a little bit. To get lost in my head and forget about all the bullshit in the world we live in. Not the world as a whole, but the world of the family. Where all of our actions are monitored and deemed worthy or not. My father has always found me lacking because I'm not jumping to follow his life plan for me blindly. I have a mind and passions I want to follow while still working for the family and making sure I'm around when I need to be. I won't let music get in the way of my obligations, but it's not going to be all my life is about either. That's no way to live and I feel as if my father has forgotten it's okay not to follow the path that's

been chosen for you. It's okay to walk your own path and do what you truly want to be happy instead of being miserable for your entire life.

As I'm trying to work, I hear a soft knock on my bedroom door. There's only one person it can be with how soft the knock is. Oakliegh. My sweet angel. Turning off the monitors so she doesn't see anything I don't want her to, I make my way over to the door. Flinging it open, I find Oakliegh standing there wearing one of my tee-shirts and I'm not sure she has anything on under it. I let my gaze wander up and down her body before looking her in the eyes.

"To what do I owe the pleasure, sweet angel?" I ask her, not going to complain one bit about her being here to see me.

"Just wanted to check in and make sure you were okay. It's been a while since I've gotten to really spend time with any of you. Days if I'm being honest," she says, looking down at her feet as a blush stains her cheek and neck.

"All you have to do is knock on my door, sweet angel. It doesn't matter what I'm doing, I'll always be here for you," I tell her, stepping back so she enters my room.

Oakliegh sits on my bed and I join her. We sit up against the headboard as I take in her legs stretched out in front of us. Her pale skin is on display making me want to run my hands up and down to feel how smooth and silky it is. Though, I have a question I want to ask her first.

"Got a question for you, Oakliegh," I say, turning to look at her more directly. "What made you choose to let us claim you on Christmas? You had only been with Zander at that point and we all thought you'd want to be with us one-on-one before making a leap like the three of us at once."

Oakliegh doesn't say anything for a few minutes. I almost don't believe she's going to answer me when she lifts her head and turns to look at me.

"It was an easy decision to make. One I made after thinking about things from every vantage point. With my past,

I wasn't honestly sure if I could take that step with the three of you. However, I knew it needed to happen because of what Mr. Vanderwalt told us at the dinner we had with him. That's not why I chose to do that on Christmas night though. Erica and I have been doing a lot of talking about my body being mine to make decisions about. Who I let close to me, touch me, and who I chose to give myself to. I know even though I had only had sex with Zander and gave you a blow job, I could trust the three of you not to push me past my limits. That you'd see me giving myself to all of you as a gift and treat it as such. There wasn't a single ounce of fear in me when we were in the moment," she says, a soft smile on her face as she continues looking at me.

"You trust the three of us that much?" I question, elation filling me.

"Of course I do, Kendrik. You guys have shown me there's more to you than anyone else gets to see. I get to see the softer side of each of you. You've been there to lift me when I've been at my lowest and not joined in on everyone else bullying me. We've had our misunderstandings and gotten past them. If I didn't trust the three of you, you never would have been invited into the session with Erica and me. You wouldn't know what I've been through at all. Harper doesn't even really know the extent of it. I think I'm actually going to bring her and the three of you into another session with Erica if you'd do that for me," she says, her voice gaining confidence the longer she speaks.

"You know we'll be there for you whenever you want us there. All you have to do is say the word and we'll rearrange our schedules to accommodate you and what you need. You just don't say a whole lot if you need something," I state honestly.

Oakliegh could be in dire need of something and won't tell us about it. It's one of the things we need to keep working with her on. She's our girl and we want to take care of her. Provide her with anything she needs whether it's emotional support, something materialistic, holding her when she's having a bad day or nightmares, or anything she needs. Since

she's never had people do that for her with the exception of Harper when she could, it's not unreasonable to understand it's going to take some time for her to get used to us wanting to help her out and be there for her.

"I know, Kendrik. I just don't like depending on anyone for anything. In some ways, it makes me feel as if I owe the person something because they've done something to help me out. I'm not even sure if I'm explaining this right, but what I do know is I'll keep trying to get better at allowing you guys to help me and asking for help," she promises me while sliding her hand over to rest it on my leg.

"We get it, sweet angel. And we've all been busy as hell. I'm sure it's been a lot for you to get used to. With us not being around too much lately. With the guys and Harper moving in. We've gone from a house of four to a house of eight overnight. Still, it seems like you're the main one here while we all go out and do our things. When I am here, I'm locked up in here running programs, working on finding more information about your foster parents, and everything else I can to protect you. It doesn't leave a ton of time for me to simply hang out with you like this. Or practice for our upcoming performance. I'm sorry, Oakliegh. Things will get better. I mean, we have a ton of upcoming appointments for the wedding. I can't believe it's going to be so soon. Are you ready?"

"I don't know. You know I hate being the center of attention and I feel as if the claiming ceremony and wedding are only going to thrust me in an even bigger spotlight than the performance with you will," she tells me honestly as I twine our fingers together.

"It really is more of a show for the family than anything else. However, you know we'll do what we can to ensure we're with you at all times. At least one of us will be at your side while the other two work the room and network with whoever's in attendance. Plus, the wedding and reception will be a small affair because of everything going on with you right now. We don't want to draw a crowd or let a ton of people know what's going on. The less information the Powers can

get on you, the better off you'll be. It's one of the reasons you don't have a ring for the engagement yet. We don't want to draw attention to it," I inform her, not sure if she was even thinking about all that stuff.

"I don't need a ring, Kendrik. And I don't expect Zander to wear one either."

"Don't even. You've got a ring coming. It's already waiting for the ceremony so it can be slid on your finger. We picked out the engagement ring with a matching wedding band. Zander, Hendrix, and I will all be wearing rings as well. Everything has been locked up tight in Mr. Vanderwalt's safe so no one sees it before it's time. Not a single one of us will be taking our rings off for any reason either. We're yours as much as you're ours, sweet angel," I promise her, knowing we're all committing to her and no one will ever take it away from us. Not for any reason.

"Well, I'll let you get back to work," she says with a soft smile. "I'm going to make dinner soon. I'll let you know when it's ready if you want. Or I can bring you up a plate to eat in here."

"No, I'll eat down with everyone else. Just let me know when it's ready please," I tell her as we get out of bed and I walk her to the door.

Opening it up for her, I catch Oakliegh in my arms before she can skirt past me. Placing a hand on each side of her face, I lower my head to press my lips against hers. They're so fucking soft. Oakliegh opens her mouth to deepen the kiss and I'm not about to deny her anything she wants. We kiss for what feels like hours but is no longer than a few minutes. When she pulls away, I take in her swollen lips and the flushed appearance of her cheeks. Even her eyes are shining bright as I place one more soft kiss against her lips before pulling away. I made her look that way. I'm the one she'll be thinking about when she's cooking dinner for us. It fills me with pride to know I can get a reaction out of her when I wasn't sure in the beginning. Taking one last look at our girl, I close the door and get back to work. The sooner I'm

done with this shit, the more peaceful Oakleigh will be able to live her life.

Chapter Two



Oakliegh

THE GUYS HAVE been really busy. I thought we'd have more time to spend together once they were done with football. Quite the opposite is true though. Other than going to see Kendrick yesterday, I've seen Zander and Hendrix enough to say hello or goodbye, exchange a kiss, and not much more. Last night when I made dinner. It was literally Kendrick, Kayson, and me. Harper was out somewhere with some of the cheerleaders, Brody was working on something, and I'm not sure where the other three guys were. I guess I'll be eating leftovers for a while considering I made multiple pans of stuffed shells, a few loaves of garlic bread, and a salad. For dessert I even made chocolate chip brownies with peanut butter and chocolate frosting on them. Kendrick and Kayson seemed to love them and they're always my favorite. It just means I won't have to cook tonight because I'll be eating this food for a while. Unless the guys decide to eat it while I'm not home.

Today I'm going to the library. I don't have any particular reason for going there other than to get out of the house. I'm ahead on all of my classes, I've been keeping up with my emails on the laptop Kendrick got me, and other than reading, cleaning, or cooking there's not really much for me to do at the house. Though, I'm not going to the library alone. I've still got a shadow because nothing has been resolved with my foster parents. I'm honestly not sure what their problem is, but it's not for me to figure out. If I could figure anything out about them, it would have happened when I was living in their home. There truly is no rhyme or reason for their madness. It's so confusing and gives me a headache whenever I try to think

of them. Or figure out what they believe I could have possibly taken from them. The more I think about it, the easier it is to realize it's nothing more than a ruse to get me to go see them or something. To communicate in one form or another. Well, I'm not falling for their crap. I dealt with all I had to for eighteen years and I no longer have to listen to them.

There's another reason I don't want to sit in the house alone. It's my birthday and I don't want to make a big deal out of it. I've never celebrated a single birthday. It's just a part of me thought after Harper and the guys went all out for Christmas, they'd plan something for my birthday as well. Not anything major. I'd be fine with a simple text message saying happy birthday. It'd be more than I've ever gotten honestly. At least on the day of my birthday. Harper always makes sure to get something small because she knows the day doesn't really mean much to me. This year is the first year she hasn't said a word to me. Though it's not like I've really seen her lately. She's been so busy with the guys, cheerleading, and everything else she's got going on in her life. I'm truly excited for her and everything she's doing with her life.

As I walk across the campus, the freezing cold air surrounds me and makes me lose my breath. The sun does absolutely nothing to warm me up either. The freezing temperature is just too much for me to battle right now. Thankfully, the library is up ahead as I quicken my steps in that direction.

"Oakliegh!" I hear a female call out as I immediately come to a stop and look around.

Addie is making her way toward me with a smile on her face. It's not a genuine smile though. This one isn't reaching her eyes as she gets closer to me.

"Addie. How are you doing?" I ask her, taking in her appearance to see what's off with her.

"I'm doing better now that I'm back on campus. How was your Christmas?" she returns, a grimace on her face at the thought of her being home with her family.

“It was good. The first one I actually got to celebrate. Harper and the guys went all out for it. It was the most fun I’ve had in a long time. I wish you could have joined us,” I tell her honestly.

“Me too. I did the Christmas thing with my parents. It was the same boring thing. Them having a party for all their friends and forgetting I exist unless someone asked about me,” she informs me.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Um, are you going to want to start tutoring up again with the new year coming?” I ask her, needing to know if I have to start blocking out time slots for her again.

“Yes! I’m so behind on more than my math class now. I’ve had to take care of things with my family and it meant having to miss so many classes. I don’t know how I’m going to make up all the work honestly,” she answers, her voice wavering as emotion fills her.

“It’s okay. Figure out what you need to get done and we’ll get it taken care of. I’m not going to let you fail or not get caught up. This is a minor setback and we’ll get past it. If you text me what you need to get done, I can make up the answer keys so I know the material ahead of time. It will also give me a chance to learn how they’re teaching you so I’m not confusing you. We’ll work through it as slow as you need to,” I promise Addie, giving her a reassuring smile while wanting to pull her into my arms and comfort.

Addie doesn’t seem to have too many friends and I want her to know she can open up with me. I’ll keep her secrets locked up tight and no one will ever know a damn thing she tells me. However, I also know I can’t force her to tell me anything. The only thing that’s going to accomplish is making sure I push her farther away. Maybe enough that she doesn’t use me for tutoring any longer. That’s the last thing I want to happen. So, I’ll take this at her pace and start sharing some of my story with her so she knows she’s not the only one who’s been through something.

“Thank you, Oakliegh. You don’t know how much your help means to me. I’ve got your new number in my phone. I’ll send you a message later tonight so we can work out a game plan. If you’re not doing anything tomorrow maybe we can get together and go over some of the stuff,” she says, a hopeful note in her voice.

“My day’s wide open. I’m ahead in my classes and have to work later in the day tomorrow. So if you’re free late morning or early afternoon, that’d work out perfectly for me. Though, we’ll work around your schedule.”

“We can meet late in the morning. I’ll go through everything once I get unpacked and go through all my work. My professors have been emailing me the class notes. My father told them there was a family emergency and that’s why I wouldn’t be here. I’m not sure what the hell he was thinking considering we did absolutely nothing. I literally sat at my house with them and listened to them argue about everything,” Addie tells me, giving me a glimpse into her life.

“That sucks. Well, you go get your stuff taken care of and I’ll see you tomorrow. I’m glad we’ll be working together again. I’ve really missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Oakliegh. I’ll see you tomorrow morning,” she says, giving me a small wave and taking off toward her dorm room.

With a smile on my face, I continue making my way to the library. It’s empty when I walk inside. No one really uses it when classes are in session, but now it’s completely free of any other student. The only one here is the old librarian. She’s currently reading something as she sits behind the counter. Looking up as we enter, I offer her a smile as I make my way toward the back of the first floor. There’s a huge section of fiction and I need something new to read. I’ve already devoured the few books on my tablet and have been missing holding a physical book in my hands. It’s just so much different than reading on a screen. At least to me it is.

Looking through the section, I pick a few different books. Things I’ve never read before by authors I’ve never

heard of. I love finding new authors and genres to read. It's all the same for me; an escape from reality as the author takes you into a world they built from the ground up. Reading has always been my escape. Now, it's done more because I'm bored as hell and lonely. In a house of eight, who knew you could feel completely alone? I sure as hell didn't. The things you learn on a daily basis. Getting comfortable with my reading choices, I notice my shadow has taken up residence at one of the tables with a few textbooks in front of him. I'm glad he can study while I'm reading.

I've lost track of time as I got lost in a new series I started reading here at the library. While we've been in here, I've managed to read through two and a half books without batting an eye. A huge part of me feels horrible because the guy following me has been here for hours and hours while I read. I'm not even sure when he got done with his work as I look up to find him playing on his phone. Sitting up straighter in the chair I chose today, I stretch out my body while marking my spot in the book I'm currently on with a small piece of paper. I'll check this book and the last two in the series out to take back to the house with me.

"I'm sorry you've been stuck here this entire time," I tell the guy I'm not even sure of his name.

"Don't worry about it. I haven't been done all that long with my work. I had to get caught up on a few things I've been letting go slack. So, I have to thank you for coming here today. It's just what I needed to get back on track," he tells me, packing up his things while I go check out my books.

Before we can leave the library, I'm almost run into by Harper. She's out of breath as I wrap my arms around her so we don't go tumbling to the floor. The two of us start laughing hysterically at this. I'm not even sure why because we could have been hurt. However, this shit is the kind of thing we do find funny for some reason. I guess we have a warped sense of humor.

“Are you two okay?” my shadow asks, racing up to us and making sure we don’t have a single mark on us.

“We’re okay. I’m just in a rush as usual,” Harper answers, still laughing her ass off.

“Good. I’m not trying to get on Hendrix’s bad side even more than I already am. We all are at the frat house right now. So, let’s get you out of here before something happens,” he says, his voice filled with panic.

“Do I want to know why you’re in trouble with Hendrix?” I ask him, not sure what’s happened.

“We had a party and didn’t clean up. A few parties actually. The house was trashed and he didn’t like it. Can’t really blame him. The frat is supposed to represent the kings and we weren’t doing a good job,” he answers, a blush staining his cheeks.

“I see. Now, where’s the fire, Harper? You came in here like a woman possessed,” I ask my best friend.

“We have to get you home. There’s just enough time,” she answers without giving me a real answer.

“Okay,” I say, drawing the word out in confusion.

We race across campus. Harper’s dragging me along with her and I almost get tripped up more than once. I’m sure we’re giving my shadow of the day a heart attack with how often I almost face plant. Harper doesn’t seem to realize I can’t keep up with how fast she’s moving though. It’s kind of funny. Along with very confusing. I truly don’t understand what’s going on right now. Though my girl is wearing a smile larger than I’ve seen in a while. Not since Christmas.

“Do the guys need something for the New Year’s Eve party they’re throwing tonight? I thought I got everything done yesterday. I’m going to spend most of the night in my room and come down just before midnight,” I ask, trying to figure out what’s going on.

“Nope. The sooner we get your ass back to the house, the sooner you’ll find out what the hell’s going on, Oakliegh,” Harper says, not out of breath at all.

I can't say the same thing at this point. I'm not a runner by any stretch of the imagination and it's been a while since I've been to the gym to work out or attend the self-defense classes. We kind of put it off with the holidays and everything going on. I make a mental note to go back to the gym in a few days and make it a regular part of my routine so I can get in better shape.

We finally get to the house without either one of us falling on the slippery grass. I'm surprised we didn't both face plant at one point or another. My shadow literally breathes a sigh of relief once we're on the porch and heading for the door. It takes less than a second for Harper to push me through the door to find the guys all standing in the living room.

"Surprise!" everyone yells, wide smiles covering their faces.

"What's this?" I ask, looking around the room at each person standing before me and then at Harper who's at my back.

"We're not havin' a New Year's Eve party, baby girl. Did you not know we'd realize today's your birthday? That we'd want to celebrate the day you were born and make it special for you. To do somethin' to show how much we care?" Hendrix asks me, walking up and picking me up in his arms.

Hendrix spins me around a few times before setting me back down on my feet. Tears spill over my lashes and roll down my face in happiness. He kisses them away before placing his lips against mine and kissing me deeply. As soon as he releases me, Kendrik is there to take me in his arms. He spins me in a dance move before dipping me low to the floor and kissing me like I'm the air he needs to breathe. When he releases me, I'm panting and out of air. However, Zander isn't about to be denied getting a kiss from me either.

"Happy birthday, LeeLee. This is the first of many birthday's we'll celebrate together," he whispers against my lips before lifting me in his arms so I have to wrap my legs around his waist.

“I can’t believe you all did this for me,” I say when he’s finally done kissing me.

“Of course we did this for you, hooker,” Harper chimes in, wrapping her arms around me. “You’re my best friend, their woman, and you give so much to all of us in this house. To everyone around you. This is the first year we get to celebrate it on your birthday and not days later. So, let us do this for you.”

With a smile on my face, I let my happy tears continue falling down my face.

“We’ve got dinner waitin’ for you in the kitchen, baby girl. We all pitched in and cooked. I know we missed your amazin’ dinner last night and I’m sorry about that. However, we weren’t about to let you cook for us on your day,” Hendrix says, grabbing my hand and walking me into the kitchen.

There’s a full spread laid out on the island. Every single one of my favorite foods, including pizza from Sal’s. They made chicken ala king, mashed potatoes, rice, biscuits, peas, corn, and so many other dishes I can’t even take them in all as I let my eyes roam over the island containing various dishes. Everyone stands back and lets me get my food first. Once my plate is full of food, the guys and Harper move to make their own plates up. With the exception of Hendrix. He comes to sit next to me at the table with two overflowing plates of food. I smile up at him as he makes sure I don’t need anything else. Kendrick sets down a can of soda in front of me before taking his seat on the opposite side of me. Zander takes his seat at the head of the table with his own food.

We all eat in silence. The food is absolutely amazing. Everything they’ve cooked is perfect and it makes me love the guys even more than what I’ve already been feeling. As we all get done eating, Harper disappears only to return with her arms loaded down with gifts.

“You guys didn’t need to get me anything. This dinner is all I’d ever need,” I tell them, looking around at my guys before turning my attention to Harper and her guys.

“Not gonna fucking happen, LeeLee,” Zander growls out. “You’ve never had a birthday celebrated and we’re not about to let that shit continue. We’re going to celebrate every fucking year and make up for the last nineteen years of you not having anyone love you the way you should have been loved.”

Cue the happy tears once again. Harper sets the gifts down on the table in front of me as Hendrix clears my plate away and Kendrik moves my can of soda. I take the time to open up each thing and can’t believe what they’ve done for me. The guys have gotten me clothing, gift cards, pictures of all of us together, and so many other things. Harper gets me a gift certificate for a spa day with her. Letting me know I’ll need it with the wedding coming up. Harper’s guys got me books, a gift card to one of the big book stores in town, and a few other small things I’ve been eyeing online. Someone’s been spying on me once again.

“This is all too much guys. Thank you all so much for this,” I tell them all as I set the last gift down on the table in front of me.

“It’s not even close to being enough, sweet angel. Harper and the guys are gonna leave so we have the house to ourselves tonight. What we do with our time is up to you. Though I did just download a few movies I know you’ve been wanting to watch. We can start with that and see where the night takes us. And, there’s cake. We’ll save a piece for Harper and the guys when they get home tomorrow. Have you ever had an ice cream cake?” Kendrik asks me, placing his hand on my thigh.

“I’ve never even heard of it before,” I answer feeling as if I’ve missed out something else everyone’s had the joy of experiencing.

“That’s okay, LeeLee. We’ve got ice cream cake and regular cake. You can choose what you want to have. For now, let us clean this up while you go take a shower and get ready to lounge in bed. We’ll watch a movie or two and see where the night takes us. As always, nothing happens you don’t want

to,” Zander says, standing from his chair and making his way to stand behind my chair.

Zander leans over and presses a kiss against the top of my head as everyone begins to clean up dinner. Knowing they’re not going to let me help at all, I make my way up to the third floor of the house and my bedroom. I grab a tank top and pair of shorts before making my way into the bathroom. Turning on the water, I let it get hot before stripping and stepping under the spray. I take my time and wash everything before shaving and making sure I’m ready for tonight. I’m not going to pass up the opportunity to be with my guys no matter what we’re doing. Especially if it means I’m in bed with them again.

By the time I make it out of the bathroom, the guys are in there. They’ve all showered and changed into nothing more than a pair of boxers. It’s what they usually wear when they sleep with me. I know they prefer to sleep naked, but I’m not sure if I’m ready for that just yet. I mean we’ve all had sex, but sleeping naked next to someone feels more intimate to me in ways. And they aren’t pushing me to do so or even trying to sleep naked with me. For now, I appreciate the gesture. I’m sure it won’t always be like this though. One day I’ll get over all my hang ups and be a normal person.

Chapter Three



Oakliegh

“WAKE UP, BITCH!” Harper’s voice penetrates the dream I’m having. “Wakey, wakey, eggs and bakey.”

“Why the hell are you waking me up at the ass crack of dawn for when we don’t have classes?” I grumble, trying to put a pillow over my head.

“Oakliegh Burns, today is one of the most important days of your damn life. Now, I’ve been sent up here to wake your ass up so you don’t end up having sexy times with those men of yours. It’s a big day for all of you. If you don’t get your ass out of this bed right now, I’m going to get the coldest water I can find and dump it all over your ass,” Harper promises me.

Yeah, that’s definitely something she’d do. If you’re sleeping and it’s time to get your ass out of bed, Harper has no problems doing whatever the hell it takes to accomplish getting you up. I honestly feel sorry for her guys because if they haven’t yet experienced her wake up methods, it’s going to be an eye opening experience for them. One I kind of wish I could witness.

“Fine, bitch. I’m up. Now, what makes today so fucking important?” I ask my best friend, drawing a blank about what today is.

“We’re going to find your wedding dress, Oakliegh. Are you sure you’re ready to go through with this wedding? This is something you truly want and you’re not doing it just for an added layer of protection against the foster fucks?”

Harper questions me, worry filling her voice as she sits down next to me.

“This is what I want, Harper. My mind’s just been all over the place and I guess I forgot it was the day we’re doing that. I’ve been trying to help Addie get caught up before classes start again tomorrow and working extra shifts. I’m exhausted. I’ve been so tired and it doesn’t feel as if I’ll ever get caught up on my sleep,” I respond, tossing the covers back off me and getting out of bed finally.

“I get it. It seems we’ve all been extra busy and don’t have time to spend together. I’m sorry about that, Oak. You know I’d be here more if I could.”

“Nonsense. You’ve got cheerleading and doing things with the team. Everyone has their own lives and we all just keep missing one another. It’s not a big deal,” I tell her, pushing the loneliness I’ve been feeling down deep so she can’t see it on my face.

“Still, I want to be here more for you. So much shit is changing in your life and you need someone to vent to. Someone without a cock dangling between their legs.”

“Harper, will you do something for me?”

“I’d do anything for you, Oakliegh. You know this. Or at least you should by now.”

“Will you come to one of my counseling sessions with me? The guys have come once and I know they’re going to be coming to my next one. If you could make it there with us, I’d really appreciate it. I know you’ve already read the letter I wrote about the photos and videos. There’s still more I need to talk about though. Things I want to get out in the open before the wedding so I don’t feel as if I’m hiding anything from anyone,” I ask my best friend, knowing this is important to me.

When Harper read the letter I wrote about what happened to me as a little girl, I thought she was going to go on a killing spree. Her face was so red and anyone could feel the anger pulsing through her body. She pulled me into her

arms and held me as we both cried. I grieved for the little girl who was violated in a horrible manner while my best friend was upset she didn't know that's what was going on with me. She swore to be there for me on the days I couldn't pick myself up and make sure no one ever touched me unless it was my guys again. We spent the entire day together while locking the guys out of my room. It was something we desperately needed and gave to ourselves.

“Of course I will. Let me know when it is and I'll be there. Now, get your ass in the shower. Zeke and Kayson are making breakfast and I need to get back down there to make sure they don't burn the house down. Not sure they're too handy in the kitchen,” Harper informs me, a scared look covering her face at the thought of two of her guys burning our house down.

I watch her race out of the room before making my way to my bathroom. Turning on the shower, I let the water heat up while I take care of my morning routine. Excitement fills my stomach at the thought of going to try on wedding dresses. This is something I never thought I'd be doing. My focus has always been on getting out of Grand Ridge and away from the Powers'. Of starting my life over. I never really let myself think, or dream, about getting married. Now, not only do I get to pick out any wedding dress I want, but I'll be getting married to the one person I never believed I'd have back in my life.

When I made the decision to marry Zander, it wasn't because I feel less for Hendrix and Kendrik. I'm falling in love with them just like I am with Zander. The reason I chose Zander is because I know deep in my soul he's the man I'm supposed to be with. The little boy I loved who protected me from our foster parents and was there for me before things got even worse. Part of me has always loved Zander and that's why I made the decision to marry him. As long as I get to have Hendrix and Kendrik too, I really could have married any of the three and not really cared.

Finishing up my shower, I get out and dry off, wrapping a towel in my hair and around my body. I walk into

my closet and choose the easiest thing I can think of to wear to the dress shop. Pulling a black maxi dress down, I choose a strapless bra and panties in white so nothing's showing when I'm trying on wedding dresses. Strapless bras have never been something I wear. I have a deep fear of it falling down and my breasts bouncing all over the place because they're too much for a strapless bra to hold. Today I have no choice in the matter if I want to be prepared to try on any style of wedding dress.

Brushing out my long hair, I throw it up in a messy bun. There's no point in styling it when I have no clue the kind of dresses I'll be trying on today. It's just going to be in the way if I leave it down and will get messed up if I try to style it in a sleek ponytail or something. So, a messy bun is the easiest way for me to wear it. I also skip wearing any make-up because I'm not going to want to stain the dresses when they might not be the one I choose. I'd never risk something like that. Finally, I pull out a pair of wedged sandals so I have some sort of heel on. I know I'm going to have to wear them on my wedding day, so I may as well make sure I have height for the length of my dress now.

Walking downstairs, I hear the low hum of conversation between the guys and Harper. I'm not sure what they're talking about, but it's nice to see them all sitting down together and getting along. With so much testosterone flowing around this house, I honestly worry about fights breaking out and the guys butting heads more than anything else. So far, that hasn't been the case. Everything's been relatively calm and peaceful. Maybe it's because not everyone's here at the same time. Or the guys know they have to work together and play nice because of the family business.

“Good mornin’, baby girl,” Hendrix says, standing from his chair and making his way to me. “How are you feelin’ this mornin’?”

“I'm exhausted. Someone had to wake my ass up with the threat of the coldest water being dumped on me if I didn't get out of bed,” I grumble, not ready to be up.

Hendrix laughs while leading me to the chair between him and Kendrick. Kendrick leans over and presses a kiss against my temple as he slides over a plate of bacon and eggs with a glass of orange juice and bottle of water. Picking up a piece of bacon, I take a small bite. My stomach is rolling this morning and the smell of the eggs in front of me.

“What’s the matter, LeeLee?” Zander asks when he sees I’m not eating my eggs.

“I’m just not feeling the best this morning. I’ll eat some bacon and drink my juice, but I’m not going to attempt to eat the eggs. The smell of them is making me feel worse,” I tell him as everyone watches me.

Harper gives me a knowing look across the table. I’m not sure what the hell she thinks she knows, but Harper is looking at me as if I should realize why I feel so horrible this morning. Other than stress, I have no clue why my stomach would be off. Unless I’m about to start my monthly. Pausing with a piece of bacon halfway to my mouth, I try to think of the last time I did have my cycle. I’m honestly not sure when it was. Forcing the direction my thoughts are now taking down, I finish eating my bacon and drink my juice while avoiding Harper’s stare.

“What are you guys doing today?” I ask, trying to get the attention off me.

“Gotta go get measured for our tuxedos, sweet angel. Are you going anywhere other than trying to find a dress?” Kendrick asks me.

“Nope. I have some things to do here. So, I’ll be heading home as soon as I’m done.”

“Okay. We’ve got guys followin’ you again. They won’t go in the store or see anythin’. Just let them know if you change your mind about goin’ anywhere. I gotta work after we’re done,” Hendrix informs me, leaning over to give me a kiss before standing up and removing his dishes from the table.

“I’ve got meetings with my dad today too. I’m not sure how late I’ll be. If you need me, just call and I’ll answer as soon as I can. Have fun today,” Zander says, standing up with his dishes and giving me a kiss before he disappears as well.

Kendrik also gives me a kiss before disappearing with his dishes and mine. Harper is telling her guys goodbye as I leave the table. Heading up to my room, I grab my purse and phone so we can get this show on the road.

Harper and I have been at the dress shop for hours now. I’ve tried on so many different dresses I’m not sure I have it in me to try on anything else. However, I’ve got three more dresses hanging up waiting for me. I grab the next one and step into it with the help of Darla. She’s one of the owners of the dress shop and has spent her entire shift with me. Mr. Vanderwalt contacted her and made sure she knew price wasn’t an issue, he was paying for the dress, and to make sure I love what I end up getting. Zander and Hendrix’s dad is so nice. I was ready to pay for my dress with the meager savings I have, but he took it out of my hands. Tears fill my eyes at how kind he’s been to me when I barely know the man. He’s the kind of guy I wish I had in my life growing up. Unfortunately, I didn’t get lucky enough for that.

With the dress in place and the laces going up the back tightened and tied, I turn to look in the mirror. My eyes widen as I look at myself. The dress is strapless and goes way past my feet. It’s got a train trailing about fifteen feet behind me. The laces up the back are a deep navy color with navy roses adorning the very bottom of the dress. Lace covers the satin over the top giving the dress a more delicate look. There’s a skinny ribbon winding around the waist where the bottom flows out around my lower body. I’m in love. This is my dress.

Walking out of the changing room, I find Harper waiting in her seat with a glass of orange juice in her hand. Stepping up on the small pedestal in front of more mirrors, I turn to face my best friend. Her eyes bulge out of her head and a smile breaks out on her face.

“This is the dress, isn’t it?” she asks me, standing up and setting her glass down to make her way closer to me.

“This is the one. I love it Harper. Do you think the guys will like it?” I ask, a slight bit of uncertainty filling my voice.

“The guys are going to lose their minds when they see you wearing this dress. You are absolutely stunning, Oakliegh. Now imagine yourself with your hair done and make-up highlighting your eyes and lips. You’re going to be the most beautiful bride anyone’s ever seen,” she tells me honestly, stepping up to wrap me in a hug as a lone tear slides down my face.

“This is the dress you want?” Darla asks, a smile on her face.

“It is.”

“Perfect. As soon as I saw it when you walked in this morning, I knew you had to try it on. I just wanted to make sure you tried others on before this one. To make sure you really knew you were choosing the dress you want more than anything,” Darla tells me, excitement filling the air around the three of us.

Walking back in the dressing room, Darla helps me out of the dress and carefully hangs it back up before whisking it away so they can do their thing. I really don’t need many alterations to the dress at this point because of the laces going up the back. Maybe shortening it a small amount so I don’t end up face planting as I walk down the aisle. That shouldn’t be too hard to do though.

Once I’m dressed in my own dress again, I go to leave the dressing room. My stomach pitches and I know I’m about to lose what little breakfast I managed to eat. Looking around for a bathroom, I race toward the door I manage to spot. I barely make it to the toilet in time. Getting sick has always been something I hate doing. Today, it’s even worse as I get rid of the little food I managed to eat before dry heaving. This is the absolute worst. Tears slide down my face as strands of hair manage to fall out of the messy bun I threw it up in earlier.

When I finally manage to stop getting sick, I flush the toilet, wash my hands, and then splash some cold water on my face. I'm pale as hell and have that sickly appearance to me. I guess I'm not doing anything other than going home and heading back to bed. Hopefully this is one of those twenty-four hour things and I didn't manage to get the bug that I'm sure has been going around.

"Are you okay, Oakliegh?" Harper asks once I leave the bathroom as she hands me my coat to put on.

"Not really. I'm sorry," I apologize to her and Darla.

"It's okay sweetheart. I've got the dress all taken care of. Get some rest and I'll give you a call when it's time for you to come back in for the final fitting. Mr. Vanderwalt already has a card on file and told me to charge him as soon as you made your decision. Everything is taken care of. You don't worry about a thing. Get some rest and I'll talk to you soon," Darla says, walking Harper and I to the front door and holding it open for us.

Thanking her again, I let Harper link our arms together as we make our way back toward campus. Despite it being cold out, this walk is exactly what I need today. The chill in the air helps take away the sweat covering my body. I'm still shaking from getting sick and just want to slide in bed.

"What's going on with you, Oakliegh?" Harper finally asks me once the gates of the university fill my vision.

"I probably have a small bug or something. I'll be okay in a day or two," I answer her.

"Are you sure that's what's going on? When's the last time you had a period? Could you be pregnant?" she presses, not letting me get away from her when I try to pull my arm away.

"I don't know, Harper. It's a possibility. I've had sex with Zander and Hendrix and we didn't use anything. I'm not on birth control because it wasn't a top priority when I was living on the street. It's not like I was preparing to come here and start having sex with the guys. Or be with them at all."

“Okay. We’ll go back to the house in a few minutes. Let’s make a pit stop at the dorm room we started out with,” Harper says, turning us in that direction as soon as we’re through the gate.

I don’t say anything else as my mind spins with the possibility of being pregnant. This isn’t even something we’ve really talked about. I don’t know if the guys want kids. I mean, they know I’m not on anything, and have assured me we’ll handle the consequences of our actions, but that can mean so many different things. I’m just not sure if I’m ready to be a mom when my own life isn’t sorted yet. Hell, I’m not even out of school yet.

Harper unlocks the door of the dorm room we started out sharing and leads me straight to the bathroom. Opening one of the drawers under the sink, she pulls out a two-pack of pregnancy tests. Leaving me alone to do my thing, I carefully read the instructions before doing what I need to do. I unroll some toilet paper and place it on the counter before setting the tests down on it. Now, I just have to wait for a few minutes to see if our lives are about to change or if I really do have a stomach bug.

“Oakliegh, are you okay?” Harper asks through the door.

Walking over, I open it up and let my best friend in the room. She glances over at the tests and I know I’m not ready to look.

“So, how are things going with the guys and you?” I ask, needing to take my mind off what we’re waiting for.

“It’s going really good. Brody explained everything to me and it makes sense why he backed off in high school. Getting to know Kayson and Zeke has been really fun. Each of them are so different, yet they manage to balance one another out. It’s just hard because we’re all so busy with different things lately and haven’t been able to spend a lot of time together. Hopefully it’s not always like this,” she says, stealing another look at the test.

“You can go ahead and look if you want to,” I tell her as she practically bounces on her toes with the prospect of finding out first.

“Are you sure?”

“I can’t do it. I’m not ready to know,” I assure her, my voice almost a whisper.

Harper makes her way to the sink and looks down at the tests resting on the counter. She smiles up at me and I instantly know the answer. My best friend doesn’t have to say a single word to me. Oh boy! Let’s hope the guys are ready for this news. Because I know I’m not sure if I’m ready for it.

“Okay. Everything will be alright, Oakliegh. Let’s get out of here. Do you want to throw these away? Or are you going to keep them?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I’ll keep them until I can figure out how to tell the guys. I think I just need some time to process this for myself first. Don’t say anything to anyone?”

“Of course not. You’ll know when you’re ready to tell them. Or anyone else. For now, this is our secret and I’ll take it to the grave with me.

Harper and I don’t linger in our old dorm room. We don’t need my shadow telling the guys something is going on. They won’t let me have the time I need to process this new information because they’ll be worried something’s wrong with me. I mean, I’m sure today isn’t going to be the last time I get sick with the fact I’m carrying a baby now. A baby Zander or Hendrix fathered. Holy shit!

Chapter Four



Zander

WALKING IN THE shop where we get all of our suits tailored, a sense of peace fills me. I'm not sure of many other guys my age who would be excited to be getting married, but I sure as fuck am. I get to marry the one girl in the entire world who has always owned my heart and soul. Oakliegh is the perfect girl for the three of us and for her to choose me makes my chest puff out a little more and the ego I carry around with me a little bigger. She could have chosen any of the three of us, but I was her choice. No, I'm not holding it over the guys' heads. I know they mean as much to her as I do. There's just a history between the two of us they'll never have with her. They can hear the stories of our shared time in the Powers' home, but they'll never get to experience what we did. Something I'm immensely grateful for.

“Mr. Vanderwalt, it's good to see you again. As with you Mr. Montez and Mr. Vanderwalt,” Vincent greets us. “We're doing a fitting for three tuxedos today?”

“That's right, Vincent. I know we just got new ones, but these ones need to be for my wedding. For our commitment to the love of our lives,” I answer him, knowing I'm not lying when I say I love Oakliegh.

I wish she were ready to believe I love her. That we love her, but she's not there yet. And that's okay. She'll get there one day. I know she feels nothing but love for us, but I'm not sure if she actually recognizes what it is. It's hard to tell with her because there's still things she keeps locked up tight.

“Congratulations to all of you!” Vincent says, leading us to the back so we can pick out the colors and material we want for our tuxes. “I’ll give you some time to pick out what you’d like and double check your measurements really quick before you leave.”

Vincent walks away from us to greet a new customer as the three of us remain close and start browsing through the shelves of material. I have no clue what to even go with considering we don’t know if Oakliegh’s dress will have any color in it. Or if she’ll simply go with something that’s all white. I’d like to have matching colors with her if possible.

“Drix, you wanna text Harper? Find out if LeeLee’s dress has any color in it? I’d like to match her if it does,” I ask my brother as he pulls out his phone. “I mean, I don’t even know if she’s found something yet. I guess we should find that out first.”

Sliding my hand over the material of a few jackets in varying cuts and styles, I watch Hendrix type furiously away on his phone. He’s got it on silent so I have no clue if Harper’s responded to him or not. The only thing I’m sure of is we left a while after the girls did this morning. Kendrik got a hit on something regarding the Powers and wanted to see what they discovered now. So, we’re a few hours later than we believed we’d be. As long as I’m on time to meet my dad for the meeting this afternoon, I’ll be okay. It’s not like we had anything else to do today. Well, I mean, we’ve gotta work, but we can show up when we’re done here without it being a big deal.

“She’s just found her dress. Harper says the only detail she’s givin’ away is the color. She won’t be tellin’ us anythin’ else about the dress no matter how much we annoy the fuck outta her about it. There’s a deep navy blue in the dress. So, that’s the color we’ll have to get if we want to match her,” my brother informs us, a slight smile on his face.

“Okay. I guess Harper knows us better than we thought she did. I really wanna know what the fuck Oakliegh’s gonna be wearing,” Kendrik says, laughter filling his voice.

We walk around the room and choose the style of tuxedo we want along with the tie, cummerbund, and pocket square. It's all in a navy color I hope is close to what's in Oakliegh's dress.

"Are you ready for this, brother?" Hendrix asks me as we wait for Vincent to get done with the other customer.

"Ready to marry Oakliegh? Of course I am. I'm excited as fuck and our wedding day can't come soon enough if you ask me. Are you guys rethinking being with her? Or about claiming her?" I return, needing to know they're still on board with us sharing Oakliegh.

"There's no one else for me," Kendrik states emphatically. "My sweet angel is perfect for all of us. She gives us what we need, worries about us, doesn't question us when we're gone for entire days without checking in, and doesn't want anything to happen to us. She's not after our money, power, or what our names can give her. Oakliegh is all in because she's the sweetest girl this world will ever see. My sweet angel deserves so much more than we're giving her. We need to start being there for her more. Do you know she sought me out the other day? I was working in my room and she came to see me because it had been a while since we claimed her. None of us have really spent any time with her since then."

"Fuck!" Hendrix growls out. "We've all been so busy and it's not that I want to be away from her. It's just been workin', gettin' ready to start classes again, and trainin' the guys to take over for us. There really hasn't been time for us to be with her as much as we should be. But no, I'm not rethinkin' bein' with my baby girl. Kendrik's right about her in every way. We couldn't have chosen a better person to be ours. She'll give us everythin' we want without askin' for anythin' in return. That's just who she is. I just want to make sure you're ready to settle down with her. We've all been complete manwhores up to this point in our lives."

"I've known since getting to know her while we were in the foster home that Oakliegh was always meant to be mine. Now, I get to share her with the two of you. My only fear is

she's not ready to go through the wedding. Or be with us for life. She's never really experienced anything on her own or gotten to live her life. Are we pushing her into something she doesn't really want? Is this all about her being protected from the Powers?" I wonder out loud as fear fills me.

"No way, Zander. Oakliegh isn't going to use us so she's protected. She'd leave Grand Ridge and everyone she knows behind before ever using you or us that way. There's not a doubt in my mind about that shit. If you truly think about it, you're not doubting her motives either. Are you worried we're pushing her? Yeah. I think the three of us are all worried about that. However, at the end of the day, Oakliegh made her decision and she's getting stronger every damn day. She's going to let us know if this isn't truly what she wants. We can also talk to her about it in a few days. We've got the counseling session coming up," Kendrik says as Vincent starts to make his way back over to us.

"You're right. I'm just getting in my head about this."

Vincent marks down our choices and takes our measurements before letting us go. Hendrix and Kendrik take off in Hendrix's *Escalade*. They'll be heading to work while I go meet my dad for our meeting this afternoon. I'm actually getting to take the lead on this one and I'm a little intimidated if I'm being honest. We're not meeting with a client to go over business contracts or anything like that. I'll be negotiating opening up a new gambling house on the outskirts of town. We're expanding our business and it's time for me to start making decisions about the direction the business goes in. Yeah, I'm worried I'll make a mistake because it won't just impact me. Every decision I make impacts multiple people and families. It's a lot to carry on my shoulders.

Walking into the office building my dad owns, I bypass security and make my way to the elevators that will take me up to the top floor of the building. My father doesn't believe in taking meetings in our home or anywhere other than his office. He refuses to turn our home into a showplace for the people we work with. Not everyone is our friend or an ally of the

family. So, there's no reason for anyone to come in our home unless it's an emergency or we know without a doubt we'll have no reason to doubt the person entering our personal space. Plus, by meeting in the office, we can keep everyone out of our business. There's a strict security measure in place Kendrik set up and consistently updates to ensure no one bypasses the protocols we have in place.

With a smile on my face, I greet Nancy, my father's secretary. She lets me know to head into the office as I make my way past her desk. Opening my dad's door, I find him sitting behind his desk, completely focused on the computer screen in front of him.

"Dad," I greet him, taking a seat in front of him.

"Zander. Are you ready for this meeting with Mr. Grandville?" he asks, turning his full attention on me.

"I am. I've got the real estate numbers, an offer to put on the table, and they're waiting for me to submit the paperwork for permits already. I've also talked to the gambling commission and have the paperwork filled out to get our alcohol license. All that's waiting is for Mr. Grandville to accept the offer so we can get to work remodeling the space how we want it. I thought I'd take Brody with me once the deal goes through and have him see what it takes to turn a place into one of our gambling houses," I inform my father as I pull out the folder I've put together from hours of research, phone calls, and the statistics of our gambling houses currently open.

"You're very confident. I like that, Zander. You know what you want and you've already put in the hours to present a solid case to the potential business partner. Mr. Grandville isn't a normal business partner in the sense that we'll only want to buy the property from him and not have him involved. Though, I'm sure he'll make an appearance or two into the house once we get it done and open the doors. He needs to be on the list for all the big player nights. And the grand opening of the place," my dad says, a smile on his face.

“I want this to go as smoothly as possible. The sooner we buy this place, the sooner I can set everything in motion. Kendrik is busy with looking into the Powers’ still and Hendrix is busy at the gambling house. We’ll be starting to train the other guys more extensively in the next few days. Though, Kendrik already has Kayson helping him dig through the Powers’ information. He’s been finding a ton of offshore accounts and even a few in Oakliegh’s name. We’re not telling her about them yet because we don’t know where this money came from. Kayson’s been working on tracking down that information the last few days. Kendrik really has met his match with the kid,” I say, smiling at the thought of someone being almost as good as Kendrik at what he does. “Between the two of them, we’ll never have to worry about someone getting past our many defenses. Exactly how we want it.”

“That’s really good to hear. I want Brody in on every step of the process you go through when this deal gets finalized,” my dad tells me as his phone buzzes.

“Mr. Vanderwalt, Mr. Grandville is here for his appointment,” Nancy says, her voice sounding almost robotic through the phone line.

“Send him in Nancy.”

We both stand from our seats as Nancy leads Mr. Grandville in the office. She takes his jacket from him and offers him a drink before leaving us to our meeting.

“Antonio, Zander, it’s good to see you,” Mr. Grandville greets us.

“It’s good to see you, too,” I greet him, holding out my hand for him to shake. “Please, have a seat.”

I immediately take charge of the meeting so he knows I’m the one he’ll be conducting this business with.

“What can I do for you gentleman?” Mr. Grandville asks, looking between my father and me.

“I’m interested in buying your property located on the outskirts of town. We want to open another gambling house and it’s the perfect location for it. Not to mention, I believe I

can make it a total success,” I begin my speech, drawing Mr. Grandville’s attention straight to me. “I’ve gone through all the reports on the property from the real estate company and had my own person go out to check the place out. It’s a solid building and great piece of land. This is how I know you’re selling it for lower than what you should be asking. I’m prepared to offer you, and only you, the asking price plus seven percent above what you’re asking for it. I don’t want to go through your real estate agent so they reap the benefits of this deal. This will be between us and our lawyers.

“You’ll also be on the list for all of our big gaming nights, the grand opening of the house, and made a VIP member at all of our gambling houses. The property of yours I’m interested in will have a few rooms for VIP guests to stay overnight if they need to for any reason as well as a few cabins on the backside of the property. We will not be condoning just any type of behavior in those cabins or rooms. No prostitutes, illegal sex, drugs, or anything of that nature. Everything will be above board. I’ve got all of my research here from the statistics of our current houses to future projections of opening another gambling house with the added rooms and cabins to stay in,” I tell Mr. Grandville, handing over the folder I’ve put together for him to look through.

“You really know what you’re talking about,” he says as he thumbs through the pages and looks at everything I’ve put together. “Honestly, I didn’t realize the property was listed under the value of it. You’ve not only pointed that out to me, but you’ve also made sure to go slightly above the value of the property. I’d like to make this deal work for all of us. Give me a few days to have my lawyer go over this paperwork and I’ll get back to you.”

“Take the time you need,” I tell him. “I’ve got a contract here in case you’d like to go forward with the deal. The two of you can go over the contract and see if there’s anything else you’d like to have added or taken out. We can set up a meeting with our lawyers and us once you’ve made a decision. In the meantime, feel free to call me if you or your lawyer have any questions regarding any of the information I’ve given you today.”

“Antonio, you’ve got a shark on your hands here. He’s smart as fuck and knows what he wants to get. I like the kind of honesty and business ethics you’re showing me today, Zander. Your dad is leaving the business in very capable hands when he decides to step back. I’ll be in contact very soon,” Mr. Grandville says, standing from his chair with all the paperwork I’ve given him.

We all shake before I walk him out of the office. Excitement and hope fill me at the thought of sealing this deal on my own. Yeah, my dad sat in on the meeting. It’s because he’s still the one in charge and we have to present a united front. Neither one of us wants anyone to think or feel as if I’m doing this on my own behind my dad’s back. By him sitting in on the meeting with us, it shows he gives me his full support on this decision to open another gambling house and the offer I’ve made. Even if he didn’t know all the details before today.

“You handled that very well, Zander. I’ve never had a meeting go so smoothly with Mr. Grandville. I don’t see a problem with you getting your hands on his property sooner rather than later. Good work,” my dad praises me, a smile on his face. “Now, get to the gambling house and make sure everything’s going the way it should. And don’t forget we’ve got the party coming up in two weeks to announce the claiming of Oakliegh. We’re keeping the details of the wedding from everyone. They’ll know it’s been talked about, but that nothing’s been decided. No one has to know anything else other than that.”

“We won’t forget. Harper’s going to take Oakliegh out the day of the party to have a full spa day. It’s something she’s really never gotten to experience. So, we want to make sure she gets the works done and can relax before being pushed in the spotlight. I hate having to do this to her, but we know it’s necessary.”

“I don’t want her in the spotlight any more than you guys do. If we could get away without announcing this and presenting the four of you together, we would. I’ve got Judge and Kain working on adding extra security around the entire property at home for the night. We’ll also have Kendrick,

Kayson, and Jerome. Oakliegh will be safe at the house with all of us around her,” my dad informs me as I stand from my chair to head to the gambling house. “Let me know as soon as you hear back from Grandville.”

“I will, Dad. I’ll see you later,” I tell him, leaving the office and waving goodbye to Nancy on my way past her.

I’m ready to get things taken care of at the gambling house so I can head home and spend time with Oakliegh. Kendrik wasn’t lying when he said we haven’t been spending enough time with her. She’s the only one who’s been alone out of all of us. I know she doesn’t like spending a lot of time out and about around a ton of people she doesn’t know. However, we could do more to get back early to have dinner with her and then spend some time before bed just talking, watching movies, or whatever else she wants to do. Hell, Kendrik hasn’t even had the time to rehearse with her for their upcoming performance. None of this shit is going how we want it to. I’m just not sure how to change things just yet.

Chapter Five



Oakliegh

TODAY IS A huge day for me. I've got a counseling session and will be going with Harper, Hendrix, Zander, and Kendrick. I need to get the last of the abuse I've suffered at the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Powers before I can go through with the wedding. Leaving Harper out of the loop isn't an option any longer either. She's my best friend and I'm ready for her to know every single thing that's been done to me while in the so-called care of Kember and Darren. Of learning what other kids are more than likely going through. However, I've seen multiple police officers attend their parties and there's no way in hell I can go to them with the information I have without being made to look as if I'm the one in the wrong. Darren and Kember will find a way to turn everything that goes on in their home on me. To make everyone believe I'm the bad guy here when I'm just one of their many victims. It's taken me a lot to get to the realization that I am in fact a victim of their crimes and they'll do whatever it takes to protect themselves.

After getting dressed in a pair of jeans and one of Hendrix's shirts, I throw my hair up in a messy bun and make my way downstairs. This is going to be an exhausting session with Erica and I don't want to do anything once I get home. I'm more than likely going to have whoever drives today stop at Sal's so I can get something to eat and check my schedule. This way I can take a nap after the session. I already know the guys have to work once we're done and Harper has plans to meet up with the cheer team. It's the perfect time for me to eat something in bed while watching a movie and crashing.

“Baby girl, you ready to go?” Hendrix asks, stepping up to me before I can leave the last step.

“I’m ready to go. Not necessarily ready for the session though.”

“We know this shit’s hard on you. We’re so fuckin’ proud of how far you’ve come since startin’ to see Erica. You’re so much fuckin’ stronger than you realize and she’s offered you a safe space to get all this shit out. To learn how to deal with what’s been done to you and overcome what those fuckers have done over the years. I’m also so damn proud you’ve decided to include us in your sessions so we know what’s been done to you and what you need to continue healing and getting stronger every day,” he tells me, lifting me from the step and holding me in his arms as he makes his way to the door.

I’m wrapped around his body as he holds me close. Hendrix carries me outside to the garage. Everyone is already waiting in Zander’s black *Challenger*. There’s no way Hendrix is going to fit in the backseat with Kendrik and Harper. As he sets me on my feet, I go to get in the back, but he stops me.

“You don’t ride in the back, baby girl. The passenger seat in all of our vehicles is reserved for you. Unless there’s a reason you can’t ride up there, you won’t ever be pushed to the back again,” he says, causing tears to fill my eyes.

Damn pregnancy hormones!

I stand back as Hendrix forces his body into the backseat. He pulls the front seat back for me to get in. As soon as I do, I move it forward so he’s got more leg room. Zander starts the engine while placing his hand on my thigh. He drives his car with the finesse of a man who’s been driving years longer than his age. Zander’s got a confidence about him when he’s behind the wheel. Something I wish I had even a fraction of on a daily basis. One day at a time, I remind myself.

“You’re tense as hell, LeeLee,” Zander states as he pulls onto the road and heads for Erica’s office.

“Just worried about how you’ll all react to what I’m going to share today. It’s not quite as bad as the letter session, but it’s not pretty either. The things I’ve been through make what TJ and Misty did to me look like child’s play,” I tell everyone honestly. “My biggest fear is you’re all going to see me completely different than how you already do after the letter.”

“Girl, don’t even start that shit!” Harper practically yells, leaning forward from the middle of the backseat. “You’re Oakliegh fuckin’ Burns and have been the strongest person I know for as long as I’ve known you. Even when you don’t feel as if you can make it through the day, you manage to suck it up and deal by putting one foot in front of the other and doing what you gotta do. The only thing that’s going to come out of today’s session is us learning things we can do to help you get through each and every fucking day stronger than the last one. To cope on the bad days and realize everything is going to be okay and not a single one of us are leaving your side.”

“She’s right, sweet angel. We’ll push you when you need it, hold you when the day’s too hard, and make sure you never forget you’re more, so much fucking more, than what everyone to this point in your life has made you feel. You’re a damn warrior and none of us are leaving your side. We’ve got your back and always will,” Kendrik adds in as Zander rubs circles on my thigh with his hand and Hendrix kneads the knots out of my upper back and shoulders.

It doesn’t take us more than a few minutes to get through town and to Erica’s office. My nerves are through the roof as Zander parks and we all get out of his car. Hendrix and Zander immediately take my hands while Kendrik places his hand on my lower back. Harper walks beside Hendrix as we make our way inside. Erica’s already waiting for us at the door when we enter.

“I’ve already checked you in. I know you were planning on bringing everyone today so I wanted to make sure there was no waiting,” Erica says as we follow her through the door to her office.

Entering the office, I take a seat on the couch with Hendrix and Zander still at my side. Harper and Kendrick take the chairs and move them closer to the couch so they can be near me in their silent support as we get ready to begin the session.

“It’s good to see you guys here again. I’m afraid we’ve never met before,” Erica says, looking at Harper.

“I’m Harper. Oakliegh’s my best friend in the world and I want to tell you what an amazing job you’re doing with her. You’ve made such a big difference already and she’s starting to open up about things I know she’d rather keep buried deep inside,” my best friend introduces herself.

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Harper. Oakliegh, how much does she know? As much as the guys do?” Erica asks, turning to face me.

“She does. Just before Christmas I gave her the letter to read. We spent the entire day together just the two of us. It was something I think we both needed. And I got to finally grieve for the loss of my innocence since the four people closest to me finally know that part of what I’ve been hiding from the world,” I answer Erica with tears filling my eyes.

“That’s really good. I’m glad to hear you recognizing that it’s important to grieve things you’ve lost that were out of your control. It will make moving forward easier in all honesty. Now, are you still having nightmares?”

“I do. They aren’t as frequent as they were, but I’m still having them on a regular basis. I’ve noticed it’s easier to pull myself out of them now too. Hendrix still comes to my bed every night, but I don’t believe I’ve really woken him up with my screaming like I’ve done in the past. Or any of the other guys either.”

“No, you haven’t,” Hendrix adds.

“Good. Now, why don’t you tell us all why you wanted a group session today.”

Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes and reinforce the steel bar I imagine in my back to hold me straight as I get

through this.

“Well, Zander and I are getting married soon. No one knows because of things still going on. I trust you, Erica, and know you won’t say anything though. I want the rest of the abuse I’ve suffered out in the open before we get married. By having everyone here together with me, I won’t have to go over it more than once. I can say what’s been done to me and we can all process the information together. In a safe space with you to help us through it.”

“Good. Are you all ready to hear what Oakliegh has to say?” Erica asks, looking at everyone in the room but me.

“We’re ready when she is,” Zander says, placing his arm around my shoulders. “This is all at her pace and we’re not going to force her to talk before she’s ready.”

“That’s an amazing attitude to have with her. It’s important you guys all let her know everything is at her pace. That she’s controlling this situation and others she finds herself in. Control is a big thing for Oakliegh. I know we haven’t talked about it before in our sessions, but it really is. I can only imagine how little control you’ve had over your life for so long. Don’t be afraid to let these four know when you need to just take a break. The same goes with me,” Erica says, a gentle smile on her face.

“Okay. Well, Zander knows a little bit of what I’m going to talk about here today. He went through it with me. In fact, he took multiple punishments for me when he didn’t have to just so I wouldn’t get hurt or scared. Zander, I’ll never be able to thank you enough for everything you did for me while we were in foster hell together,” I begin, the tears already starting to fall down my face as I twine my fingers together. Hendrix reaches over and takes one of my hands to lace our fingers together as I take a deep breath and continue speaking. “For as long as I can remember, nothing I ever did in the house was good enough. By the time I was five years old, I was already cleaning and doing more chores than anyone else. If they weren’t up to Mrs. Powers’ standards, I’d get punished for it.

“My punishments included being locked in a closet for hours or days. There was no light, no food or water, and I couldn’t get out if I had to go to the bathroom. I had to go in my pants, which ultimately led to more punishments. When she didn’t want to punish me that way, I’d have to stand outside for hours and hours. A few times I was locked outside overnight. They didn’t care if it was freezing cold, snowing, raining, hot as hell, or what was going on. I had to suffer through whatever weather conditions were happening when I was locked outside. They also had a room down in the basement I was locked in. There was a constant dripping sound and if it was a windy night out, it played games with your mind. Made you feel as if you were being surrounded by ghosts or listening to the screams of someone in absolute pain.

“If none of those punishments worked, I would be starved for days on end. They would make sure I wasn’t allowed to eat at school. Mrs. Powers would call with some insane reason as to why I wasn’t allowed to have a meal or snack while I was there. The school never once picked up on her lies and just went along with whatever she said to do to me. I was forced to clean the house, cook, and watch the other kids have a ton more freedom than I did. My bedroom wasn’t even on the upper level of the house. I had a small room in the basement just big enough for a bed, a crate for a stand, and that’s about it. Everything I owned was handed down by someone else. Nothing ever fit me and my shoes were constantly falling apart. I was forced to wear them until something was said about their condition to Mrs. Powers. Only then would I get a used pair to start the process all over again.

“It wasn’t long after Zander left when I was forced to start cooking every single meal in the house I was home for. If it wasn’t right, undercooked, overcooked, or burnt, the food would be tossed at me and I’d end up with slashes on my skin from the plates or bowls making contact. That’s mainly all the physical and emotional punishments, or abuse, I was put through. It has nothing on the verbal aspects of things.”

I have to pause and take a few deep breaths. I’m crying so hard as I relive each and every single time I was ever punished at the hands of Mrs. Powers. Hendrix pulls me to sit

on his lap and moves us to the center of the couch so Kendrik can take his place. Harper moves to sit on the floor in front of me as they all wait patiently for me to get every single tear and sob out. No one pushes me to continue speaking or says a word. The room is filled with the tension and rage rolling through each and every person here. Including Erica.

“I’m sorry. This is very emotional to talk about. To relive things I’ve never told another person before,” I apologize to everyone.

“You have nothin’ to be sorry for, baby girl. If you need to cry, scream, hit me, or anythin’ else, you fuckin’ do it. We’re here for you. If you need more than one session to get this all out, we’ll come as many times as it takes. Today was another giant step forward in your recovery process and we’re here for it,” Hendrix says, kissing the top of my head while holding me tight to his chest.

I soak in the warmth of his body heat while regaining my composure. Kendrik and Zander are both holding my hands while Harper rests her hand against my leg so each one of them are touching me and offering their support in the only way they can at this point in time. Erica remains in her chair across from us, watching on at the support my friends are giving me.

“I’m ready to continue speaking now,” I finally manage to say while getting more comfortable in Hendrix’s lap. “The verbal abuse happened on a daily basis. Not so much when Zander was there because almost from day one he came into the house I remember potential adoptive parents were coming in to see him. It didn’t save him from the punishments, but I’m sure he was talked to by Mr. or Mrs. Powers about keeping his mouth shut. Anyway, I was told daily how worthless I am, how I’d never amount to anything in life, I wasn’t good enough for anyone to want to adopt. Mrs. Powers always made sure to tell me every single day that I wasn’t even good enough for my parents to want to keep. I’m nothing more than garbage and that’s why I was tossed in a dumpster. Then she’d rub in my face that no one even knew when my

true birthday was and how I'd always celebrate the day given to me by the staff of the hospital.

“Mr. Powers was less vocal and barely around for any punishments and abuse. The only time he was really around was what you guys read about in the letter. Everything that's happened to me, been said to me, has all been from Mrs. Powers. After Zander left, I was also physically abused once in a while. It didn't happen very often because Mr. Powers didn't want any signs of abuse that could be used against them. However, everything else was left wide open. To my knowledge I was the only one treated this horribly. I'm not even sure what I did so wrong on a daily basis either. I mean, the other kids were forced to do the whole video and photo thing, but I was the only one to get the punishments after Zander left, the verbal and emotional abuse, and everything else done to me. I'm honestly still waiting for these four to realize they made a huge mistake in wanting to be in my life and walk away without a backwards glance,” I admit, the sobs overtaking me once again.

“I'm not goin' anywhere, baby girl. We told you that shit on the way here. I know you can't help how you feel after all the shit you've been through. We all know it's going to take time, especially for the three of us, to prove to you we're in this with you. Harper has had your back for longer than we know. It will be easier for you to accept her staying with you than us. And that's okay. All you need to know is we're fuckin' here for you and will do whatever you need for us to show you how much we love you. Because, Oakliegh, I love you more than anythin' I've ever had in my life. I would fuckin' die without you at my side,” Hendrix says, his voice full of emotion as he turns me to look at him so I can see his truth.

“He's not wrong, LeeLee. I've loved you since before I knew what love was. You've always been on my mind and if I had known even an ounce of what you've been through, I would have stolen you from there. We could have run away and lived our lives together so you didn't have to deal with the bullshit,” Zander says, pulling me from his brother's arms to hold me against his hard chest. “I love you, Oakliegh Burns,

soon to be Vanderwalt. We're going to take away all of your horrible memories and replace them with nothing but good ones."

"I agree with both of them," Kendrick says, reaching across Hendrix to hold my hand in his. "I love you and I will do whatever it takes to show you daily how much I love you. That you're the strongest, bravest warrior I've ever met. You have been to hell and back and it's taken everything out of you. Well, we're going to start making sure you're filled back up with love, light, laughter, and a shit ton of good memories to completely erase the horrible ones."

"And you already know I'm not going anywhere," Harper says, wiping the tears from her face. "You've tried to push me away and get rid of me since the day I declared we'd be best friends for life. You're my ride or die and I'm yours. Where you go, I'll be right there with you. We'll lift you up on a daily basis just so you know Mrs. Powers was wrong about you. That everyone who has ever put you down, made fun of you, bullied you, or hurt you for any reason were wrong. You're the best person I've ever met in my life. So full of light and love. You give everything of yourself to everyone around you. Even when they don't deserve it. That's the mark of a truly amazing person and it's who you are."

"Oakliegh, you have an amazing support system surrounding you. These four will help you overcome all of this stuff. I don't doubt their words at all. Today has been huge for you. I can say without a doubt I'm so proud of what you've accomplished here in our sessions. You're making better progress than I had hoped for at this point of our sessions. And, I believe it's all because of these three men and the women here with you today. Don't let them go, Oakliegh. Let them help you on the hard days and back you up on the days when you're stronger than normal but need just a little bit more help.

"I want you to work on leaning on the four of them. Letting them in more when you're having bad days and can't see the light. If something's bothering you, tell them. Even if you need to have someone else around when you talk to them.

You need to focus on getting everything out and not letting it fester any longer. That's something I see you doing because you don't want to burden them with your problems. From what they've said here today, they want to hear your problems. To know what's going on in your head and what you're feeling. Take the leap and let them in. it's only going to make your relationships stronger," Erica says, her own voice breaking a few times as she talks.

"Should we be doing anything to encourage her to be more open? Push her out of her comfort levels? Because I am," Kendrick says, worry filling his voice.

"Yes, you should be pushing her a little bit out of her comfort zone. From what I understand, Oakliegh only works, attends class, and tutors. She doesn't do much else than that. The four of you need to start getting her out more. Let her see that not everyone's out to get her or put her down. Kendrick, how are you pushing her out of her comfort level?"

"Well, I'm a music major and graduate this year. I've got a performance coming up. Oakliegh is going to sing with me as I play the guitar," Kendrick says with a soft smile on his face. "Her voice is the most amazing thing I've ever heard in my life. Not many have heard her before now though. It's a true shame to hide how talented she is."

"That's really good. Oakliegh, are you comfortable getting up on stage with Kendrick to perform?" Erica asks me.

"Not really. However, I think it's something I need to do. I've always used music as a way to escape. Well, when I could listen to it. I'm finding so many new artists and songs now and I love discovering what I like and don't like. As long as I'm not on stage alone, I believe I might be okay," I answer honestly.

"Good. We all have ways to escape reality. I'm glad to see you're choosing positive outlets to have a sense of peace in your life, Oakliegh. Now, I know Harper's in here but I have to know if you've made any progress with physical intimacy. Of taking back your choice to have sex or any type of sexual

touches. Unless you don't want Harper to know this information."

"No, she knows what's happened between us. This isn't news to her," I answer, my face heating with the blush covering my skin. "Um, for Christmas, the four of us were all together at the same time. I gave them my body and they didn't take advantage and made sure I was comfortable with everything as it happened."

"Good. I'm glad to see you taking those steps in order to take back your body. It's another very important step in the road to recovery you're on. Just remember, at the end of the day, you're the one in control and no one can make you do anything you don't want to. Guys, it's important to make sure Oakliegh's comfortable every time you have an encounter of a sexual nature. Ask her if she does, or doesn't, like something. Again, push her outside her comfort levels to an extent but not so much she slides backward in her healing," Erica says, her voice gentle.

"We can do that," Hendrix says. "I've honestly been holdin' back with her and I don't have a problem doin' so. I would never dream of pushin' somethin' on her she didn't want to do. My tastes run, um, a little different than the other two in bed."

"Okay. Hendrix, I want you to sit down and have a conversation with Oakliegh about what you like and don't like. I'm going to guess she needs to give you a list of hard limits if I'm thinking correctly. Oakliegh, you need to be open and honest with Hendrix when this conversation takes place. Don't tell him what you think he wants to hear. Tell him honestly if you want to try something, don't want to do something, and you guys can ease into things slowly. If you want me there to help guide the discussion, we can have a session with just the two of you. Everything is up to you, Oakliegh," Erica re-emphasizes to us all. "Now, I think that's all the time we have today. Oakliegh, we're all so proud of you and the steps you've taken so far. Keep pushing yourself forward and remember to lean on the guys and Harper when you need to. If any of you have any questions or concerns,

don't hesitate to reach out and we can figure something out. This won't be done behind your back, Oakliegh."

"Okay. I'll schedule the next few sessions on our way out. Thank you, Erica for everything," I tell my counselor.

"Sounds good. You guys have a good day," Erica says, walking us out of her office and to the door leading into the waiting room.

I'm exhausted and ready for a nap. Hendrix doesn't let go of me as he laces our fingers together and walks over with me. Zander and Kendrik don't stray too far from my side either. Harper has her back to me and I know she's extremely upset with everything I've said in our session today. I just hope I didn't push her too far and she has to disappear for a little while. That she can get past this and heal with me.

"Stop those thoughts from runnin' through your head, baby girl. She ain't goin' anywhere. Just tryin' to hide how truly upset she is from you," Hendrix whispers as the receptionist hands me a card with multiple dates and times listed on the back.

"I hope so," I answer as we all leave the office behind and make our way to Zander's car.

The five of us stop at Sal's to get some food and so I can check my schedule to see when I work again. Harper gets something for herself to eat and lets me know she'll be at the house. She's decided not to go meet the cheer team tonight. Honestly, I can't blame her because I'm sure she's feeling a lot after today's session. We all are.

Chapter Six



Oakliegh

INSTEAD OF MEETING Addie for tutoring today, the guys and I are meeting with Maureen to start cake tasting and going over the finer details of our wedding. Everything is pretty much set in place from what Maureen's told me, she just wants to fill us in on the details so we know what to expect and who's going to be there. Mr. Vanderwalt isn't playing around and hardly wants anyone to know about the wedding until it's too late for anyone to do anything about it. In some ways, I'm happy he's taking my safety so seriously. A small part of me wishes we could have people there we want. Like I'd invite Addie to the ceremony and reception, but I can't even talk to her about it. I wouldn't even know what to say because other than being claimed by the kings, no one knows anything about our relationship. It's really weird.

I've also got reading of my own to do. My English professor sent out an email for some chapters he wants us to have done before our first class of the new semester tomorrow. It's not a ton, but enough I know it's going to take me a little bit to get done. Plus, I'm still working on the sheets for Addie. I'm almost done with them, but I want to make sure she's got study guides and other things to help her get caught back up. She's been working so damn hard and is so close to being back where she should be. The girl has a work ethic like mine and I admire her determination to do what she's gotta do for her and no one else.

Waking up, I take a shower and get ready to head out, not sure where anyone else is. The house is almost too quiet as I move around my room getting dressed and doing my hair.

It's kind of weird to know the house can be so silent with so many people living under the same roof. Though, I suppose with everyone living their own lives and having so much to do, it shouldn't be surprising. I guess it's just me. Growing up in the Powers' home there was always something going on and noise being made by someone. Even if I couldn't participate in anything, I could always listen in on the noise around me.

Grabbing my phone, I choose a playlist and *Wreckage* by Nate Smith comes on and I turn the volume up so I can hear it no matter where I am in the room or bathroom. I just found this song and love it. It fits me perfectly and the way the guys see me. I'm more than a little damaged, but they don't care about it. They want to walk this path with me and make sure I heal in the way I need to. I know they'll have my back and won't let me fight this battle alone. Harper won't either, but the song reminds me so much of the guys and the small ways they show me they don't care about my baggage and the demons haunting me on a daily basis.

Walking downstairs once I know I'm ready to head out and have grabbed my purse, I expect to find someone in the living room or kitchen. Instead, the house is completely empty. I'm the only one here it seems. Heading into the kitchen, I find a note on the counter and pick it up.

Baby girl,

We had to head out early this morning. Have a good day and we'll see you later.

Love,

Hendrix

Well, I guess they'll just meet me at the cake tasting. I mean, Hendrix didn't say anything about it, but we were talking about it last night. Harper was upset she couldn't go because she has practice. She's always down to eat cake no matter what time of the day it is. I can't say I'm adverse to eating cake and picking what we'll have at our reception. I'm sure the guys will have an opinion on what they want. Personally, I don't care what we have. I'm sure I'll be too nervous to even really eat or drink anything. While everything

is going to be small, there will be people around I don't know. People who will be watching me and judging me because I'm with the next heads of the family business. I honestly don't know how I'm going to be in front of so many people I don't know.

Grabbing a bottle of juice from the refrigerator, I twist the cap off and take a long sip of the chilled orange juice. It's my favorite and I really need something to wet my parched throat at the thought of the guys not showing up for our meeting today. With them being so absent these days, it's not a long shot to believe they're too busy to show up for this. Hopefully they prove me wrong. Before leaving the house, I grab a bowl of fruit to eat on my way to the small bakery where I'll be meeting Maureen. I need to eat something healthy until I can get into the doctor to make sure everything's okay with the baby.

I still can't believe I'm freaking pregnant. Yes, we knew we were taking a gamble. If I'm being honest, I really haven't let myself think about carrying a little one. There's just too much going on for me to sit and obsess over being pregnant. Or even try to wrap my head around the fact that I'm going to have a child at nineteen years old. Since I'm not really dealing with this yet, I have no clue how I'm going to tell the guys about it. Part of me is truly worried how they'll react to the news and I don't want to just spring this on them without actual confirmation from more than a plastic stick I peed on. I'll have to make a doctor's appointment once I'm done with this meeting. Hopefully the guys will have other things to do and I can make the appointment without them overhearing.

Walking off campus, I pull my coat around me tighter to block out the chill of the morning. There's a little bit of snow on the ground here and there. Winter still has a few months left, but I'm already over it. I want the warmth of spring and summer days where I don't have to worry about grabbing my coat or making sure I have my boots and extra shoes to wear when I'm at work or something. Winter makes me want to burrow under my blankets and not do anything more than hibernate until the warmth comes back. I've always

been this way because I'm always so cold to begin with. I'm not sure why, but my body temperature is definitely on the cold side no matter how many layers I'm wearing.

Thankfully, the bakery is close to campus. Everything in Grand Ridge is actually pretty close to the campus. It's one of the only perks of going to school here. Since I don't have my license and no money for a car if I did have it, everything is in walking distance. It's easy for me because I don't have to depend on anyone for a ride to get where I need to go.

"Oakliegh, is this the bakery you're going to?" one of the guys from the frat asks me, pulling me from my head.

"Oh, um, yeah. Sorry. I guess I got lost thinking about things," I tell him, a blush covering my face.

"It's okay. You head in. I'll wait right here where I can see you through the window," he tells me, giving me a small smile.

I really should learn their names so I'm not thinking of them as my shadows. They are people after all. A thought for another day.

Pulling the door open, I walk in and take a look around. Everything inside the bakery is white and a soft shade of pink. A few people sit at tables with various treats and cups of coffee in front of them. Some of them are working on things and a few are reading as they eat and drink. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming as I step further in the shop and look for Maureen. I'm not even sure who she is. We've only had a few conversations over the phone about the wedding and that's it. I don't have the first clue what she looks like. This would be so much easier with the guys here since I'm sure they know who she is.

"Oakliegh?" an older woman with dark blonde hair calls out from a booth in the back of the shop.

"Yeah. Maureen?" I return, starting to walk in her direction.

"Yes. It's so good to finally meet you," she says, standing from the booth as I get closer and holding out her

hand for me to shake.

“You too. Um, I’m not sure where the guys are. I was left a note about them having to head out for something early. They didn’t say they wouldn’t be here though. Do you mind if we wait a few minutes for them?” I ask, not sure what her schedule looks like.

“Of course. Those boys have been busy and I know they wanted to be here for this. It’s an important part of planning your wedding. I know you haven’t had a lot of input in the day and I’ve been taking care of it all for you. I’m hoping what I’ve come up with is perfect and you’ll love it. I’ve got the folder with all the information in it with me. As you’re trying the cakes, we can go over it all. I really want to know if you like or don’t like something,” Maureen informs me as an employee brings out a tray with several small slices of cake on it.

Two more employees follow her and they set out twenty different pieces of cake for us to try. I wasn’t really expecting this many choices and my stomach rolls with the thought of trying even the smallest bite of all of them. After asking for a bottle of water to drink and a small glass of milk, the employees take off and I settle in the booth to wait for the guys to arrive.

Maureen and I have been waiting for over a half hour and the guys aren’t here. I’ve tried to call and message them with no response from them at all. I’ve been holding back the tears at the knowledge that they’re not coming today. I’m going to be doing this all alone when they promised they’d be here with me. A large part of me honestly feels as if they’re pulling back now that they know my deepest, darkest secrets. I’ve trusted them enough to share what happened to me in foster care and now they’re not sure if I’m worth being with. This is exactly what I knew would happen once they found out. Don’t get me wrong, I know they’ve been really busy, but this is about our wedding and reception. All three of them promised they’d be here and it’s like I’m nothing more than an afterthought these days. That it doesn’t matter if I do all this

alone because everything they have going on is more important than something for us. Again, it could be those damn pregnancy hormones, but I don't feel it is this time.

"Honey, we should probably start tasting these cakes. I don't know where the guys are, but the shop is probably going to need this booth back soon," Maureen says gently.

"Yeah. I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. I'm sure they just forgot about it," I tell her, picking up the napkin my silverware's resting on and wiping the tears from my eyes.

I try a small bite of each cake. They all taste like sawdust as I try to choose one I know the guys will like. Each of them like different things and it's no different with their food. This is why I wanted them here with me. I'm never going to pick out something they'll like. So, I guess I need to just pick one I like and hope it's something they'll be able to tolerate. Harper should be here. She'd know just what to pick. That's pretty sad if I let myself think about it. This is supposed to be something exciting in my life that I can share with my best friend and the men I'm tying my life to. Instead, I'm with a woman I've known for a short amount of time and wanting to cry instead of picking out a cake.

"Do you like any of them?" Maureen asks once I've taken at least a bite of each sample in front of me.

"Um, I guess we can do the yellow cake with the white buttercream frosting. I'm sure it's something everyone will like. At least I hope they will," I answer as a few more tears slide down my face.

"Do you like it?" she presses, looking at me with sadness filling her eyes.

"It's okay," I shrug while trying to stop the tears from escaping.

"Okay. I'll mark that one down. Now, let's go over what else I've got here in the folder."

Maureen shows me everything she's been working on since Mr. Vanderwalt put her in charge of planning our ceremony and reception. We go over the menu for the

reception, I see the flowers I'll be carrying down the aisle, she lets me know the schedule of events. Everything for the day is timed out. Including when I'll have to be at Mr. Vanderwalt's house to get started on my hair and make-up. An entire team is coming in to work on me and help me get dressed. I guess I thought Harper would be there with me, but I guess not. Hopefully she can be in the room with me because I don't want to be around so many strangers without someone I know being there.

Maureen has every single detail planned out and I have to admit it all looks amazing. She's got samples of the linens we'll have on the tables, pictures of everything she can't have physical samples of here today, and a list of the people who will be working the wedding and reception. We've even got a photographer to take pictures of the day. So much has been put into the day and I hope it's not for nothing. If the guys have changed their mind about being with me, this is all going to blow up in Mr. Vanderwalt's face.

"I think that's all I have for you today, Oakliegh. I've seen the dress you chose and I have to say it's beautiful. Your flowers and a few other things will match the colors in it perfectly. Mr. Vanderwalt is the only other one who's seen the dress. He wanted to make sure everything was being handled properly so you don't get disappointed when you go in for your final fitting," she lets me know as we both stand from our seats. "If you have any questions or anything, call me and we'll go over it. Otherwise, I'll see you in a few days. I've got to put the final details together for the party where it will be announced the kings have claimed you. There's a dress that will be delivered to you tomorrow. We've also got a team coming in to make sure your hair and make-up are good for the event."

"Oh, um, Harper has us booked at a spa that day. I thought everything would be taken care of with them," I tell her hesitantly.

"That's fine. Give me the name of the spa so I can make sure it's a good one. I don't want the two of you to get taken advantage of."

Reaching in my purse, I pull out the gift certificate she gave me for my birthday. We're using the same place. Maureen looks it over and smiles widely.

"This is actually the team who were going to be working on you. This works out perfectly. They're a good place and will take care of you both for sure. Again, Oakliegh, if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call me and we'll talk it out."

"I won't forget. Thank you for everything, Maureen."

We part ways outside the bakery and I begin walking back to school. My shadow follows me and all thoughts of learning his name are forgotten as pain fills me. I don't want to be this girl. The one who can't do a thing by herself. Obviously I do a lot of shit on my own. I just thought the guys would mean something they promised me. The tears rolling down my face freeze as the air around me seems to have gotten colder in the time I've been in the bakery. I pull my coat up tighter around me and make sure my hood is covering me so the guy behind me can't tell I'm crying. I'm sure it's something he'd report to the guys and this doesn't need to be told to them.

When I get home, I let the guy know I'm not planning on going out again today. That I've got reading to finish and so I'll be staying in. Once I've locked the doors behind me, I still don't hear anything going on in the house. More than likely I'm still here alone and no one will be here all day long. Most of the night as well. That's okay. I've got work to do. Heading to my room, I make myself comfortable after pulling out my books. Taking a deep breath, I put on some music and try to get lost in my reading. It doesn't work, but at least I'll have the reading done and be ready for class when tomorrow gets here.

Chapter Seven



Hendrix

MY DAD HAS been pushing us harder than normal. I understand why since it's not going to be too much longer before we take over from them, but it's honestly bullshit. We've barely spent any time with Oakliegh. The longest I see her is when I climb into bed with her each night. I don't even sleep in my own bed any longer. If I'm not with her, I can't sleep at all. I love having her body wrapped around mine as she lays her head on my chest and runs her hand up and down my side. This woman is fucking ruining me and I'm here for it. I want her to ruin me and make me forget about my past and the girls I've been with. None of them matter and don't compare to my baby girl at all. No one will ever compare to her or even remotely come close to being good enough for us. Oakliegh is the only one who will ever complete us and give us what we want and need while we give back to her in return.

Pulling my *Escalade* into the parking lot of the gambling house, Zeke pulls in next to me. I pull out my phone to see if I have any messages or missed calls from Oakliegh. We've been missing one another more than ever with the start of classes again. This shit fucking sucks and something has to change before I lose my mind. I know we'll see her tonight for the party and the announcement of us claiming her, but that's not even close to being enough for me.

"Hendrix, how did the cake tasting go the other day?" Zeke asks as we walk up to the gambling house.

"What?" I ask him, not sure what he's talking about at first.

“You guys were supposed to meet Oakliegh for the cake tasting. Harper hasn’t said anything about it because she’s barely seen her girl since that session you all went to. Just wondering how things went,” he says and I stop dead in my tracks.

Are you fucking kidding me? We promised her we’d meet her at the bakery to meet with Maureen and taste cakes. I know I didn’t show up. I’m pretty sure Zander and Kendrick didn’t go either. We’ve all been so busy it slipped our minds. Hanging my head, I know we just fucked up monumentally and I’m not sure how we’re going to make this right for Oakliegh. With my phone still in hand, I send out a message to Zander and Kendrick letting them know we need to fucking talk immediately.

“I didn’t go. Fuckin’ forgot all about it,” I admit to Zeke as he stops and stares at me.

He doesn’t know all the shit Oakliegh’s been through, but it doesn’t take a genius to figure out she doesn’t hand out her trust easily and this is going to cause damage. Damage we might not be able to come back from.

“Fuck, man. Let’s get this shit taken care of you so you can spend the night with your girl. She’s gonna need it. I know I haven’t been around a lot, but from what I’ve heard at the frat house, she’s barely left the house if she doesn’t have to. The only time she does is to go to work, meet with that girl she tutors, and to class. If she’s not one of those four places, she’s at the house and they don’t see her moving around at all. It’s like she locks herself away in her room and doesn’t come out until it’s time to start the day once again,” Zeke informs me as my heart shatters in my chest.

The first person I see when we enter the gambling house is my dad. I make my way straight for him and don’t respond to anyone greeting me until I’m standing in front of him. I’ve got nothing but love and respect for my dad, but this shit ends. Now.

“Dad, need a minute,” I tell him, my voice hard as fuck as he looks at me.

“What’s wrong, Hendrix?” he questions, looking around.

“We’ve barely seen Oakliegh. She’s not leavin’ the house unless she fuckin’ has to. And, I just discovered not a single fuckin’ one of us didn’t show up for the cake tastin’ with her and Maureen. I know I didn’t go and I’m pretty sure the other two didn’t show up either. We’ve got class, trainin’ the guys, workin’ here or wherever we’re needed, and everythin’ else. Somethin’ has to fuckin’ change so we can be with Oakliegh more. I’m not gonna lose her because we’re ignorin’ her and she feels abandoned. Do you know she finally fuckin’ told us everythin’ she’s been through. And then admitted to feelin’ as if we were gonna leave her because of it? That’s exactly what it feels like to her, I can guarantee it,” I tell him, anger filling me to the point I’m ready to pound the first asshole who tests me today.

“You all knew what was coming, Hendrix. That you’d have to step up because you’re the youngest kings to take over. Nothing about this situation is normal. Oakliegh is stronger than you all give her credit for. Was she upset none of you showed up? Yeah, she was. Cried when she realized it was just gonna be her. However, she pushed through and did what she had to do. Maureen was highly impressed with her strength while simultaneously bitching about you three. It won’t be much longer and then you’ll get to spend all the time you want with Oakliegh. I wish I could make things easier, but we’re all adjusting to this new normal and moving forward the best we can. When you do have time with her, explain the situation and let her know what’s going on. Talk to her about things and don’t let them fester,” my dad advises.

“It’s kind of hard to do when she’s already fuckin’ sleepin’ by the time I get home. When we all get home. We’re not gonna fuckin’ wake her up when she barely gets enough sleep as it is. I’ll fuckin’ figure it out and make sure I’m the one spendin’ time with her. Cause I’m not lettin’ this shit continue.”

Walking away from my dad, Zeke follows me to the third floor where Cameron’s waiting for us. We’ve got a few

hours of work before I'll be heading out. The guys and I need to get ready for the party tonight. It's a formal affair which means wearing our tuxes and making sure we look our very best. We're used to it. Oakliegh isn't. I'm sure they have a plan in place for her, but I want to make sure I'm there if she has any questions. Or just wants someone with her.

Introducing Cameron and Zeke, we walk him through what has to be done in the game room tonight. He'll be taking my spot, but I'll be here for a little while to make sure he can handle things. If he's lucky, he won't have an issue like I did my first night here. A fight broke out and it took Cameron, me, and a few other guys to break it up. The girls working the room all ran out screaming and it was a giant clusterfuck. It's the one and only time I've ever had that situation happen because most of our players know I'm not the one to push. I love getting my hands dirty and won't ever back down from a fight. Hopefully they see the same thing in Zeke because he also doesn't have a problem getting dirty and making sure his shit is handled in any way necessary.

Getting to the house, I run into Zander and Kendrik as they park their cars and wait for me.

“What's up, Hendrix? Haven't heard from you since we got your message earlier,” Zander asks me.

“Did you both realize we never fuckin' made it to the cake tastin' with Oakliegh? That she went alone and fuckin' cried in front of Maureen because we didn't show the fuck up. You know, like we promised we would,” I question my brother and best friend.

“Fuck!” Kendrik roars, his face turning red as anger at himself fills him.

“I can't believe we didn't show up. I haven't seen her since then either. Have either one of you?”

“Other than when I climb in bed with her at night, no I haven't. Been told by Zeke she's barely leavin' the house unless she absolutely has to these days. I'm thinkin' this is all

fuckin' with her head and makin' her believe shit that's not true. I can see her viewin' this as us pullin' away from her because of everythin' we've learned about her past. It's not true, but there's no way for her to know that. Not when we haven't had a proper fuckin' conversation," I answer as Kendrik and Zander stare at me. "Dad won't pull us back either. I fuckin' talked to him when I got to the gamblin' house. Says we all have to adjust and talk to her about this shit. It's pretty fuckin' hard to talk to her when she's sleepin' by the time we get home and we don't see her durin' the day."

"We'll talk to her tonight," Zander announces as if it's going to be easy to get her to talk to us. It won't be.

The three of us head inside to get ready. We all walk up to the third floor and head directly for our own rooms. I hear music coming from Oakliegh's along with muffled talking. I'm sure the team Dad hired to help her get ready is in there right now. Or maybe Harper. I don't even know if she's already ready to go or not. Shaking my head in disgust at myself, I strip out of my clothes and jump in the shower before the water's even had a chance to warm up.

It doesn't take me long to get a shower and dress in my tuxedo. I brush my teeth once I'm dressed and make sure my tie is on correctly along with my platinum cufflinks. This shit makes me feel ridiculous. The only reason I'm wearing it is because I know this is our night and I'm not going to cause a scene because I'd rather be in a pair of jeans and tee-shirt instead of this get up. I'm definitely not a tuxedo or suit kind of guy as I look at myself in the mirror. Heading for my bed, I sit down to put on my boots and tie them up before heading out. I don't go anywhere other than Oakliegh's door. There's no sound from the other side as I knock.

It takes several minutes before the door opens and I get my first look at Oakliegh. She's fucking breathtaking. A black dress clings to her body. It has a low cut top, showing more of her tits than I've ever seen when she's dressed before. The dress tapers in at her waist to showcase her hourglass figure and is long enough to cover her heels. I can barely see the tips of her toes poking out from beneath the dress. A slit goes up

the left side of the dress and doesn't stop until it's past mid-thigh. Fuck!

"Hendrix? Are you okay?" her soft voice washes over me only making my cock harder than ever.

"Baby girl, you're fuckin' gorgeous," I tell her honestly, finally taking in her face and hair.

They've got her hair in some complicated looking updo. Her neck is fully exposed as only a few tendrils of hair frame her face. A delicate silver chain wraps around her neck and sits perfectly between her tits. The make-up on her face is barely there. It's just enough to highlight her amazing eyes and plump lips. I lean down to kiss her, but Oakliegh pulls back from me. It fucking stings, I'm not even going to lie about it.

"I'm sorry, baby girl. We've let you down and nothin' I say or do is gonna make up for not showin' at the cake tastin'," I apologize as Zander and Kendrik make their way over to us.

"You're right, it's not. It really hurt me to sit there all alone, feeling abandoned by the three of you. So, I'm just going to say this now and I don't want to talk about it again tonight. If you don't want to be with me, I'm strong enough to handle hearing it. I'd rather know now than be blindsided by something like that again. I've put my complete trust in the three of you and opened up in ways I never thought I would. Do you know how stupid I feel for telling any of you what happened to me now? I feel as if the trust and faith I've put in you is nothing more than a joke because you don't care about keeping promises to me," she says, a lone tear sliding down her cheek as she hastily reaches up to brush it away. "Now, we have somewhere to be. Honestly, I'm surprised you're all here and ready to go. Maureen let me know a car will take us to your dad's house. I'm heading down. You three can show up when you like. I'm not waiting again."

Oakliegh walks out of her bedroom, already holding a small purse in her hand. We turn and watch her stumble along the hallway before Kendrik races to her side and offers her his arm. She accepts it, but doesn't even look at him or offer him

one of her smiles. He looks back at us over his shoulder as the impact of our actions truly hit home. We've got to fix this with Oakliegh and make sure she knows she wasn't wrong to put her trust and faith in us. One way or another this shit has to be fixed and quickly.

"This is really fucking bad, Drix. Worse than I believed it would be," Zander admits as we finally get our asses in gear and follow the two of them downstairs.

Zeke, Kayson, Brody, and Harper are all waiting for us at the bottom of the stairs. Oakliegh allows Kendrik to help her into a long, black coat before moving away from him. Harper steps up to her side and whispers something in her ear. They move out of the house as we all follow behind them. I can't take my eyes off our girl as she climbs in the waiting car and disappears from sight.

The party has been in full swing for hours now. We've all danced with Oakliegh as a string quartet plays in the small ballroom at dad's house. She's putting on a smile and talking to people she's introduced to. Oakliegh's honestly playing her role as our queen perfectly. Whenever I'm with her, I can feel the way her body shakes in fear and anxiety though. There's too many fucking people here she doesn't know. It's different at school and when she's working. Oakliegh can focus on the job or classes she's in. Here, the four of us are on full display and there's nowhere to hide from the show we must put on. It's hard for her because this is honestly the first time she's had to deal with this shit. Zander, Kendrik, and me are fucking used to this and have attended many events over the years as members of the family.

"How's she holding up?" Zander asks me as Kendrik leads her back to the dance floor.

"She's nervous as fuck. Her entire body is shakin' with her nerves and it's just a matter of time before a panic attack hits her. However, she's fuckin' killin' it. Oakliegh can talk to anyone in this room about anythin' and fuckin' charm them. She even had Kendrik's dad laughin' at shit a few minutes

ago. You know how hard that fucker is to make laugh for any reason. And it wasn't his polite laughter either," I tell my brother as we both stare at Kendrik and Oakliegh on the dance floor.

"Good. She talking to you yet?"

"Nope. You?"

"No. We're all in her bed tonight. Every fucking night from here on out. She'll know we want her and will do what we can to make this shit better. Though, I feel she's hiding something more from us. She's made a quick escape twice already tonight and wouldn't let me follow her. Harper was at her side."

"We'll figure it out. If it's bad, Harper won't keep it from us. She knows we fucked up though and won't be easy on us either. Those two are ride or die for sure," I tell him with a small smile on my face as our dad captures my attention. "It's time, Z. Dad's callin' for us."

We make our way to the dance floor and grab Oakliegh and Kendrik. My baby girl immediately plasters a smile on her face as everyone turns to face us and the music cuts out. Dad is standing on the small stage as we make our way to his side.

"Thank you for coming tonight everyone," Dad says into the microphone, stopping any further conversation from happening. "Tonight is a big night for our family. The kings have taken one step closer to being ready to take over for Julio and myself. We're ready to retire and travel the world while backing our boys up when they need us. They've already shown such promise to do the job required of them without hesitation though. They've not only been going to their classes to graduate in a few months, but they've also been training the next group of kings, working within the businesses, and training harder than ever.

"Our first announcement of the night is introducing your next kings of Grand Ridge. Please welcome Brody Lockwood, Kayson BerBer, Zeke Marshall, and their intended Harper Whitlock. The guys will be training alongside our boys as they all step into their new roles in life. Harper and

Oakliegh will be working closely together as they also learn their new roles in life. Secondly, I'd like to let everyone here know that Kendrik Montez and my sons Zander and Hendrix Vanderwalt have officially claimed Oakliegh Burns as their intended. Now, I know you're all expecting invitations to their upcoming wedding. That's not going to be possible though. There's threats against Oakliegh and no one other than those invited will know anything about the wedding ceremony. It's not a way of shunning anyone in this room or the family at all. We simply have to put Oakliegh's safety first and I refuse to do anything to put her in jeopardy. I'm sorry if anyone here sees this as a slight, but it's what we've chosen to do."

Everyone in the room claps and shows the proper amount of respect as we all stand on display next to my father. Oakliegh leans her body into mine as I wrap an arm around her shoulders. Zander accepts the microphone from Dad while we remain standing behind him.

"Thank you everyone. It means the world to us that you've all accepted Oakliegh into the family and made her feel welcome. This is truly hard for her to do since she's never been one to stand in the spotlight. I've seen her talking and laughing with several of you in this room. The guys and I appreciate you making her comfortable enough to laugh among strangers. While we'd all love to have you at our wedding, we simply can't as my father stated. However, I'm sure we can arrange something after everything is taken care of and settles down. For the rest of the night, we're going to dance, talk, and enjoy the amazing food being passed around. Again, thank you to everyone," Zander says, handing the mic back to our dad and stepping back to place a gentle kiss against Oakliegh's lips.

I watch on as she doesn't push him away. Despite being upset with us, she's letting him do this because she knows we're all under a microscope tonight. One wrong move and things could all change. I'm not saying we'd ever give our girl up, but these people can be vicious. Oakliegh gives each of us a kiss before we lead her back down off the stage. True to Zander's words, the rest of the night is spent talking in small groups while forming new connections and ideas,

dancing, and eating. Oakliegh barely touches the food and doesn't drink anything other than bottled water one of us gets for her. One time a waiter brought her one, it was already opened and she refused to drink it. I can't say I blame her with the threat from the Powers' against her. So, one of us gets her a drink when she needs one and I'm more than happy to do so. I'll be even happier when we can get the hell home and in bed with our girl.

Chapter Eight



Oakliegh

GETTING THROUGH THE party at the Vanderwalt home was something I never thought I'd be able to do. The guys stayed with me as long as they possibly could. Throughout the entire evening, at least one of them was with me while the other two mingled, talked, and did some networking or whatever. While I loved seeing my guys, it hurt to know it wouldn't have happened if we weren't all required to attend. The few times I had to disappear to get sick, Harper was with me. She helped me fix my make-up and make sure no one knew what I was doing. No one else will know what's going on until the guys find out and we figure out how to handle the situation. It would be different if my ex foster parents weren't after me. With them still out there and the threats still coming from Mrs. Powers, there's no way I can be happy about this baby.

I mean, I'm honestly happy about becoming a mom. I've always wanted to have a large family with kids close in age. It was never supposed to be like this though. I wasn't supposed to have to hide my pregnancy from everyone because I've got psychos after me. The only thing I want to do is have the pregnancy confirmed, tell the guys, and celebrate bringing a new life into our family. Instead, I'm scared even more than ever and always looking over my shoulder for an attacker whenever I have to leave the house. It's one of the main reasons I haven't been going anywhere unless I have to. I even canceled my last session with Erica because I'm scared of being followed and hurt on the way there or back.

Today has already been busy as hell. I've had a full day of classes and now I'm getting ready to head to work at Sal's. He's been really understanding with my schedule and I'm thankful he hired me. And that I can still work for Marjorie. Though, she's cut my hours back a little bit allowing me to pick up more at Sal's. He can pay me a higher wage and I get tips. I'm sure the two of them have talked about this because the same week my hours started going down at the Book Stop, my hours at Slice of Heaven went up. I don't believe in coincidences. Those two are working together and keeping it from me. I'd laugh but I'm too exhausted to bother.

That's the one thing I hate about being pregnant besides getting sick. Whoever coined the phrase morning sickness has no clue what the hell they're talking about. I don't get sick in the morning. It's an all day long thing with me. It's kind of worrisome. Not only am I getting sick, but my appetite is almost nonexistent. Nothing tastes or sounds good these days. Anyway, the other part I hate is how exhausted I am. Even getting a full night of sleep, I feel as if I barely got any. I was more rested when I was having nightmares multiple times a night than I currently am. It's not like I've been alone in bed either. I wake up surrounded by the guys every single morning. No one's sleeping in their own bed any longer. I'm not complaining.

Walking downstairs of the house after I'm done getting ready for work, I find Zeke in the living room playing on his phone. It's been a long time since I've seen one of them in the house when I'm here. I'm not sure how to feel about this.

"Ready to go to work, Oakliegh?" he asks me, standing from the couch and walking up to help me into my coat.

"Um, I'm confused right now. I thought the other guy was on babysitting duty. Why are you here now?" I return, not sure what's going on at the moment.

"We're putting extra guys on you when you're at work. Especially at Sal's. There's a few guys already there getting something to eat. They'll swap out with a few different guys in a few hours, I'll be inside the entire time with you, and two guys will be outside. One in front and one out back. I know

you've been getting emails still and we're going to make sure no one can get to you when you're off campus," Zeke informs me.

Honestly, I'm okay with this change. So much happens when we're busy at the pizza shop. People become blurs and orders are just things I pick up and deliver to tables. I try to stay in the moment while I'm there, but it's so damn hard most days. It's not that it becomes monotonous, but everything is moving so fast there's no way to keep up with everyone coming in and out. Especially since not everyone is there to dine in the restaurant. We also have the customers coming in to pick up orders they've placed by phone. Honestly, one of the Powers' could have been in there at any time when we're busy and I wouldn't know it unless I was specifically the one helping them.

"Okay. Well, I'm ready to head out. I've got a long shift tonight. I'm closing."

"It's okay. I've got my work with me and everyone else knows what to do. The guys outside will be switching out as well. No one will get too cold or anything. You got nothing to worry about, Oakliegh," Zeke promises me.

Nodding my head, we make our way across campus at a fast pace to get out of the cold as soon as possible. Today's been freezing cold and the added wind chill is only making it worse. I can hardly feel my face by the time I get to the pizza shop. Zeke's cheeks are red and his eyes are watering with how cold and windy it is outside. We both rush inside and I look back at the guy standing out front. He's at least got his face covered with the exception of a small hole in his hat for his eyes. There's also a scarf tied around the lower portion of his face, his hands are covered by thick gloves, and his coat is really thick. Hopefully the guy out back is dressed just as warm as this one.

"I'll be in the guy's booth. If you need me, I'm here," Zeke says as I make my way in the back to put my stuff up and clock in.

“Oakliegh, it’s good to see you, sweetie,” Jasmine greets me. “You ready for tonight?”

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” I tell her as a strong whiff of pizza sauce hits me.

Dropping my stuff on the floor, I rush into the bathroom and barely make it over the toilet before getting sick. Great! I need this job and there’s no way I can lose hours or days because I’m getting sick. It doesn’t take me long to finish getting sick, wash my hands after flushing the toilet, and then swirling some water in my mouth for now. Taking a few deep breaths, I steel myself for the smells I’ll be dealing with here for the rest of the night.

“Are you okay?” Jasmine asks as I come out of the bathroom to find her holding my things.

“I’m okay. Not sick or contagious. I’ll let Sal know what’s going on so he knows,” I promise her.

“Okay. If you’re sure,” she says, not sure what to make of me getting sick at work. I should have known I’d get sick here.

Clocking in, I head in to tell Sal what’s going on with me. He promises me not to say anything to the guys or Jasmine as long as I let him know I’m okay throughout my shift. He’s worried about me and doesn’t quite understand why I haven’t told the guys I’m pregnant yet. Without seeing a doctor, I don’t want to say something false to them. So, I have an appointment coming up and then I can worry about telling them what’s going on.

Tonight has been rough. It’s busy as hell and I haven’t had a single second to myself. Sal has made sure I’m drinking plenty of water whenever I do hop behind the counter. He’s not calling me out specifically, but it’s enough to know he’s only going to get worse as the pregnancy progresses. Like a dad would be protective over his daughter and future grandchild. I want to cry at how he’s being with me, but I fight back the tears.

“New guy in your section,” Jasmine alerts me as I set my cup of water back under the counter.

“Thank you,” I tell her with a small smile as I grab my pad and make my way to the table in question. “Welcome to Slice of Heaven. I’m Oakliegh and I’ll be your waitress tonight. Can I start you off with something to drink?”

“I’d like a soda with very little ice and I’m ready to order if that’s okay,” the guy says, his deep voice washing over me and making me look up to find an extremely good looking man sitting at the table alone.

He’s got dirty blond hair slicked back out of his face in some style I barely see around here. His bright blue eyes are enough to make someone get lost in the deep pools of blue while his mouth is quirked up in a half smile most girls would find sexy. Even with a bulky hoodie on, I can tell the man sitting in front of me is fit. He definitely works out. However, he’s not Zander, Hendrix, or Kendrick so he doesn’t really rate on a scale of sexy to me. I can appreciate a good looking guy, but I’ll never see him as anything more. No one comes close to my guys and they never will.

“Of course, sir. I’m ready whenever you are,” I tell him, holding my pen over the pad.

“I’d like a cheeseburger sub with light lettuce, tomato, light mayonnaise, and American cheese. The bun toasted. I’d like French fries on the side and a small side of garlic bread,” he orders, making my mouth water at the thought of eating that food. I might have to order dinner before too long.

“I’ll get that order placed right away for you and bring your drink back in just a second,” I tell the man turning to leave him.

“Thank you, Oakliegh,” he calls out, something about my name coming out of his mouth sending chills through me. And not in a good way.

I just get a gut feeling this man isn’t as innocent as any of my other diners are. There’s nothing really making him stick out to me as I pour his drink after turning in the order to

Sal. I only hope he eats quickly and leaves. Looking over at Zeke, I find him watching me head back to the table. I'm guessing he heard the guy calling out after me a minute ago and wants to know what's going on.

Zeke didn't get up from his seat or attempt to make his way over to the table as I delivered the drink to the man. As I turned to leave, he reached out and grabbed my arm to stop me. Panic quickly fills me despite being in a crowded dining room. Turning to face him, he immediately lets my arm go to drop back at my side. Zeke is now on his feet about to make his way over to us as I barely shake my head no to stop him.

"Did you need something else?" I ask him, my voice shaking with fear.

"Oakliegh, did I hurt you?" he questions looking down at my arm. "I didn't mean to. I just wanted to talk to you. You're a beautiful woman and it's nice to talk to someone other than myself."

I can tell he's trying to lighten the mood or something, but it's not working. Not with me.

"Thank you," I practically whisper. "Um, I'll be back soon with your food."

"Do you have a man, Oakliegh?" he asks before I can fully escape him.

I don't bother answering him as I quickly head behind the counter and grab my cup of water. Taking a few deep gulps, I let it wash away the panic. This man isn't going to hurt me. Not with Zeke and more of the frat guys sitting in here or with the guys standing outside of Slice of Heaven.

Sal calls out for a pickup and I turn to find the guy's food sitting on the counter. Taking a few deep breaths, I pick up the plate and make my way back over to him. He's sitting there as if nothing just happened. That he didn't reach out and grab my arm or ask me if I had a man. Yeah, if I thought my gut was telling me something's wrong with him before, it's nothing compared to now. This man is dangerous, I just can't figure out why.

“If I can get you anything else, please let me know,” I tell him, setting his plate down in front of him and turning to leave again.

“Oakliegh, you didn’t answer me. Do you have a man?” he questions me before I can take a step away from him.

“That’s quite personal for someone coming in here for the first time,” I answer him without giving him an answer to his question.

“I’m a collector of fine things. I want to treasure beauty when I see it. You radiate pure beauty. I’d just like to get to know you. Spend some time together outside of you working. I’m guessing you go to college at the university here. What I want to know is if you have a man I have to worry about. Or when I’ll be able to catch you alone outside of here,” he informs me, causing a tremor to flow through my body.

Once again I walk away from the man. He’s definitely a creeper and I’m ready for him to eat and leave. I make my way to Zeke and pretend to check on him with the rest of my tables.

“Oakliegh, you good? Is he bothering you?” Zeke questions, looking at my arm the guy grabbed earlier.

“I’m okay. Just something off about that guy. He keeps asking if I have a man. It’s weird. I’m probably just overreacting,” I try to play it off so he doesn’t call or message the guys.

“If you feel something off about him, listen to your gut feeling. Don’t play it down or any stupid bullshit. If you want him out of here, tell Sal and he’ll make him leave. Sal’s also been watching the guy talk to you. He’s not happy,” Zeke informs me as I turn to look at my boss.

“I’ll talk to Sal if he becomes a problem.”

Without another word, I make my way through the rest of my tables. Cleaning up the ones diners have left while checking on the others to make sure they don’t need anything else. The frat guys don’t take their eyes off the man sitting

alone as I make sure they're good to go. Not a single one of them get ready to leave as I clear away their empty plates. Instead, they start talking amongst themselves while glaring at the guy. Yeah, he'll learn real quick not to mess with me if he hasn't already figured out I want nothing to do with him.

"Oakliegh," the guy calls out as I go to walk past him. "Since you won't answer my question, can I have your number?"

"I don't think so," I tell him, my hands starting to sweat as my heart rate kicks up a notch.

"Why not? How about you tell me what your major is in college?" he questions me as I turn to face him.

"Look, we're not on a date or anything like that. I'm your waitress. If you need something dealing with your food or drink order, I'm more than happy to get it for you. Other than that, I won't be answering any personal questions, giving you my number, or anything else. I don't know you and there's no need for me to tell you anything about myself," I manage to get out without my voice breaking.

"I'm new in town and just trying to get to know someone. I'm sorry if you find my questions intrusive, Oakliegh. How about the bill for now? I'm not done eating this amazing food, but you can bring the bill if you'd like," he says, never changing the tone of his voice or letting his carefully placed mask slip.

Yeah, I've gotten good at spotting those wearing a mask to hide what they're feeling. Mrs. Powers is a professional and taught me all I need to know. He doesn't want me, or anyone else close, to see if he's pissed off by what I've just said. I'm sure he is. Men like him don't really strike me as the type to accept 'no' as an answer to anything. I've just told him he's not getting what he wants from me. It's more than enough to make me terrified of him.

After taking him his bill, I make my way through my tables and continue cleaning while staying as far away from him as I possibly can. Sal checks in with me to make sure I'm okay more than once since the guy isn't leaving. He sits at the

table playing on his phone even after I clear away his plate and cup. The man pays his bill and gives me a generous tip, but still doesn't leave. In fact, he stays until it's time to lock the doors so we can finish closing up. Zeke follows him out the door while quietly letting me know he'll be outside waiting for me. Nodding in response, I get through closing up with Jasmine and Sal in record time. I'm more than ready to head home and fall into bed after taking a shower.

Chapter Nine



Oakliegh

I'M WAITING FOR Addie in our private room in the library. We've got a tutoring session today and she's already fifteen minutes late. I don't know if this means she's not going to make it and didn't get a chance to call or message me, or if she's just running late and will be here soon. Either way I'm not about to leave her. I've got all of my work set up to get started on as I pull out my phone to check my email really quick before I get to work. Honestly, being here is better than being at the house alone. I might be in a private room, but there are a ton of people out in the other room studying and working on their papers. All I need to do is move out there or open the door of this room and I won't feel so alone. Until I look down and spot another email from Mrs. Powers. Fuck my life!

Oakliegh,

You continue to ignore me. I thought you would have learned by now how much I hate being ignored. Mr. Powers hates it even more. We've given you one chance after another and you don't want to accept the olive branch we're holding out to you. Instead you have a bunch of innocent people arrested and thrown in prison. People who didn't deserve to suffer at your hands because you're a selfish little bitch.

We know someone's helping you. Maybe you should cut them loose now before they get hurt. We've already got our eyes set on Harper and it's just a matter of time before something happens to her. Do you really want her harm or worse on your conscience, Oakliegh? I mean, I'd find it pretty funny if something happened to her and you got the blame.

Thrown in prison with the same people you just got locked up. Wouldn't that be karma at its finest? I mean, I'd enjoy the outcome. You behind bars until someone takes you out permanently.

At the bottom of this email, you'll find a link. I suggest you take a look at it. Someone really doesn't like you. I thought we were the only ones who hated you. Well, I guess with the exception of the lives you just recently ruined. Now it seems as if you have an entire group out to bring all of your sins to light. Three men, Oakliegh? I thought you were better than that. Though, I suppose you've been with more boys than they've been with women in their lives. I wonder what they'll think of you if that little piece of information were to come to light.

We're done messing around, Oakliegh. Give us back our shit, the money you owe us, and maybe we'll leave you alone. Or maybe we'll continue to haunt you. To make you suffer as you deserve. I mean, soon, you'll be completely alone. No one truly wants the dumpster baby. You're nothing more than garbage and nothing will ever change that. You're just too stupid to realize the truth of the situation you're in.

Mrs. Powers

Looking at the bottom of the email, there's a link I can click on as she said. For several minutes I simply look down at the link and ponder whether I should open it or not. Though if more horrible things about me are coming out, I guess I should find out what's being said. It's the only way I'll be able to figure out who's behind whatever this is.

Finally, I press the link and I'm taken to a website. A picture of my face is the first thing you see. Instead of a regular nose, I've got a pig snout. There's garbage below my hovering head and a dumpster in the background. Someone really took the time to put all of my most common nicknames in this opening page. I spot several tabs at the top of the screen and read them. There are four in total; dumpster baby, three men?, prostitute, all of Oakliegh's secrets. Tears already fill my eyes. The first tab I click on is the dumpster baby one. It contains the news article I've seen more than once about being

found in a dumpster and being rushed to the hospital. Some of the staff were interviewed and they made sure to let the reporter know they didn't believe I'd make it through the night. Multiple comments are written and things highlighted throughout the article. At the very bottom of the page is another dumpster. This one's on fire and the caption says 'Someone should have set it on fire instead of calling the authorities'.

Taking a deep breath, I don't bother wiping away the tears as I click on the next tab. The page is filled with various pictures of me with Zander, Hendrix, and Kendrick. More horrible comments are written next to each picture. They're mainly about how much better the guys can do and the speculation of them actually claiming me. It's no surprise what their claiming means around campus and most every girl here wants to be the one they claim for life. At the very bottom of the page is a sound bite. I click it after making sure my volume's turned down. You can very distinctly hear moaning in the clip. I'm not sure where anyone would get this recording of us, but I know what I sound like when one of my guys gets me off. This is definitely me. More tears fall down my face as I realize someone else has violated my personal space and I'm going to have to look for more cameras and hidden microphones or something. I thought all of this shit was done with after Misty got arrested. Apparently she was just one person doing this to me.

Clicking on the next tab, I find a crudely made flyer with a list of prices for the sexual acts I'll perform. I don't even know what the fuck half of this list is talking about. The prices range from a penny up to a dollar. Apparently that's all I'm worth. It's good to know. There's even a picture of me tied to a bed. I know it's not real because that's one thing that's never happened to me. I'm surprised I can say that, but it's the truth. I quickly click out of that page and stop on the last tab.

This one is proclaiming to release all of my secrets. There's really nothing here though. Pictures of me working at Sal's and the Book Stop, of me sitting in the library studying or reading for fun, out with Harper, out with the guys as we walk into Erica's office, and several others. It's not until I get

to the bottom I realize the top is just more pictures and comments of me. The bottom is where all of my so-called secrets are. I drop my phone when I see several pictures of me from childhood when I was forced to pose for *those* photos. There's even one of the videos posted. I don't bother clicking on it because it's not something I need to relive through my phone. I do that enough in my nightmares. What really draws my attention is the writing under the pictures and video.

Oakliegh Burns claims to have been raped or sexually assaulted multiple times as a child. Yet, there aren't any police reports. Or any reports through the foster care system since that's where she was for the first eighteen years of her life. If she was supposedly raped, I know the Powers' would have made sure to have the perpetrator arrested and punished to the fullest extent of the law. I'm personal friends with Mr. and Mrs. Powers and these claims of Oakliegh's are nothing more than lies. She needs to be locked up in a mental institution but has managed to fool or manipulate every single counselor she's ever met with. The Powers' family has tried to get her help multiple times in the past to no avail. Now, it seems she's only manipulating another counselor and the men she's sucked into her lies and fucked-up tales of abuse that never occurred. This needs to stop. We need to put an end to her madness. Don't go near her or you'll be the next one accused of raping or sexually assaulting this fat, piece of shit because she can't accept the reality of being a slut!

Stay tuned. We have more evidence about her mental breakdowns and lies coming very soon. If you want all the dirt on this piece of shit, don't forget to check back here as we continue to add details of her secrets and expose her for the liar she is. Kings, you better get out of Oakliegh's clutches while you still can. I'd hate to see your lives ruined by more of her vicious lies.

I slam my phone down on the table in front of me not caring if I've broken it or not. I'm sobbing uncontrollably and on the verge of a panic attack. I imagine Hendrix being in the room with me. Placing his hands on either side of my face as he makes me stare into his eyes. He's telling me to breathe with him. To focus on bringing air into my body and holding it

before releasing the air out again. I do this several times, never once letting go of the image of Hendrix being with me. After what feels like hours, I can finally breathe normally again. I can focus on the words I've read and know this has come from one of two places; Misty or the Powers'. No one else would dare say I was lying about being raped.

My very first instinct is to call the guys and tell them about this shit. However, I know they're busy and I'm not going to bother them with this shit. This is for me to deal with. While I might know how to hack into things or find out where a website is coming from, I can keep this to myself until I figure out what to do about it. Maybe Erica will have some ideas about what I can do. Besides going to the cops. They aren't always helpful in these types of situations and I'm not even sure what they'd be able to do about it since I have no clue who's behind this.

"Oakliegh, are you okay?" Addie's voice startles me causing me to jump in my chair so hard I almost fall completely out of it.

She rushes to my side to make sure I'm okay before stepping back to give me some space.

"I'm okay. I was lost in my head I guess," I tell her, picking up my phone and quickly locking the screen so she can't see the website.

"I'm sorry I'm late. My last class of the day ran over and we weren't allowed to leave until our work was complete and turned in. I'm glad I didn't have another class to get to. Oh, um, I don't mean you're not as important as another class. You are," Addie rushes out, her voice wavering with nerves as she sets her bag on the table and takes her coat off.

The top of her shirt slips down her shoulder and upper arm revealing a large bruise. My eyes lock on it. I can clearly make out fingers as Addie realizes where I'm looking and quickly fixes her top before taking her seat.

"What happened, Addie? Are you okay?" I whisper the question to her, not sure how she's going to react to me seeing the evidence of someone abusing her.

“I’m okay. I was so stupid. I ran into someone and he gripped me a little too hard instead of letting me land on my ass. I’m ready to get started when you are,” she says, lying to me about what happened to her.

I really can’t blame her. Until the session with Erica, I’ve hidden my abuse at the hands of Mrs. Powers from everyone. If anyone knows how she’s feeling right now, it’s me. I’m just not sure she realizes how similar we actually are though. I’ve never opened up to her. However, I have a feeling I’m going to have to in order to get her to realize she can talk to me about what’s going on. I’ll help her in whatever ways she needs me to. Even if it’s just being here for her to talk while listening to her get it all out.

“Did you know I was raised in foster care?” I ask her as she opens her math book.

“I did. Everyone knows you were in with the Powers’ family. It’s not supposed to be a secret, is it?” she questions me, fear filling her face.

“Not at all,” I answer her, laughing a little. “Well, everything in that house is so messed up. As soon as I hit five years old, I was doing most of the cleaning around the place. If I didn’t get it right the first time, I was punished and then had to do the work all over again. My punishments were pretty harsh. The favorite one was locking me in a small closet with no light, water, or food. I wasn’t let out to go to the bathroom or anything. Not until it was deemed I had served my punishment. If I had messed my pants because I couldn’t hold it, I’d be punished for that.

“A few times I had plates thrown at me when the food I cooked wasn’t good enough. I mean, I was just learning how to cook, but it was expected I’d excel at it and know what I was doing at seven years old. This scar right here, is from a plate hitting me and shattering. I wasn’t taken to the doctor or anything. Just told to clean up the mess in the kitchen before taking care of myself. There was a short period of time I’d be physically punished, but it was stopped because physical evidence leads to investigations. And it’s no secret what happened at the football game months ago. All of that and

more has been done to me. Addie, if you need help or someone to listen, I'm here. No one will ever know what you tell me. I'm good at keeping secrets."

Addie doesn't say anything for several minutes. She looks down at her math book, but doesn't work on any of the problems. Hell, she's not even holding her pencil and her notebook is still closed. Part of me hopes she trusts me enough to open up and unburden herself to me, but I'm not sure she's ready for all that just yet. It took me eighteen years to talk to someone and start opening up to the people I'm the closest to. Addie might not see me as anything more than a tutor and not someone she would ever consider being her friend. That's okay. As long as she knows I'm here for her, that's all I care about.

"Thank you, Oakliegh. I really appreciate you telling me that stuff. I'm okay though. At least for now I am. If things change, I'll let you know," she says, and I have to trust that she means it.

"Okay. Now, let's get this math work conquered. Then we can work on some of the other stuff to make sure you're all caught up and ready to nail this semester," I tell her trying to make her forget what's going on outside of these four walls.

We get to work and I watch on as Addie completes her math problems. She's really getting the grasp of the work she's doing. All she needed was another perspective of how to get the right answer. Not all math teachers can explain the concepts they teach in simple enough details for students to pick up. The books usually aren't any better. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with the teachers at all. Some students just don't move as fast or get the terms they use in the classroom. Addie is one of those students. She does better with simple instructions and breaking the problems and steps down to the simplest form. If I outline everything for her, the girl has no issues picking it up. It didn't take me long to realize this about her at all.

When our time in the room is up, we pack up our belongings and walk out of the library together.

“You’re doing really good on your math now, Addie. I’m really proud of you,” I tell her honestly. “I don’t think it will be too much longer and you won’t need me for the extra help. You’re learning how to break everything down and do it step by step.”

“If it weren’t for you, Oakliegh, I don’t know where I’d be. Probably failing out of college and disappointing my parents once again,” she whispers, a lone tear sliding down her face.

“I’m sorry, Addie. However, you’re the one doing the work. Like I said earlier, I’m always here if you need me. And we can always keep our tutoring times going even if you don’t need my help. We can use the time to study together and just use the rooms in the library to get away from everyone else for a while,” I say as she gets ready to head to her dorm room.

“I’ll keep that in mind. I’d really appreciate studying with you, Oakliegh. You’re pretty much the only friend I have here on campus,” she admits, warming me from the inside out in the chilly night.

“You’re my friend too, Addie. When things calm down, I’ll have you over to the house and we can hang out there. It would be better than the library since we have TV and a fully stocked kitchen at our disposal,” I tell her, making her laugh at the thought of studying with food and TV.

I really don’t think we’d get a ton of studying done, but that’s okay. We can just hang out and have fun without homework getting in the way. It’s something to think about. Addie and I say our final goodbyes as I turn to head home. My shadow gets closer now that I’m not walking with Addie. They always tend to stay back a little farther if I’m with her or Harper. I guess they’re trying to give us privacy without losing sight of us. It’s something I appreciate them doing, so I’m not going to complain about it at all.

When I finally make it home, everything inside is dark. I guess I’m the first one home. Again. I stop in the kitchen long enough to grab something quick to eat and head up to my room. I’ve still got homework to finish while I eat something

light for dinner. However, I can't get that website out of my head. I'm not going to be able to work if that's all I can think about. I guess it's a good thing all of my work for tomorrow is already done. I'm more than likely going to eat my dinner, take a quick shower, and then try to get to bed early. Tomorrow is a new day and it will be better than today. That's my new saying.

Chapter Ten



Kendrik

WHILE EVERYONE ELSE is out at the gambling houses, going to meetings for various reasons, going to class, and following Oakliegh around to make sure the Powers' or one of their hired hands don't get her, I'm still locked up tight in my room. I can't even tell you the last time I left it other than to make my way to class. Most of the time, no one even knows I'm in here because I've been using my headphones to blast music because I don't want to disturb anyone else. I wouldn't hear a knock on my door or anything because I've got the best headphones around and I don't want to get lost in a moment when I'm breaking ground and digging up even more shit on these vile assholes than I ever thought possible. They're into so much shit and no one even has the slightest clue about what they've been up to behind the scenes. Well, that's all about to change if I have my way. And I will have my fucking way because they need to be taken the fuck out.

On top of the depraved parties the Powers' throw on a regular basis, they have been filming what happens at their little get togethers for years. They have video evidence of every vile act of the higher ups in our town. Have committed for years and years. I'm sure they've been using it for blackmail purposes. In fact, I know they have when it comes to at least one judge, a senator, a handful of police in Grand Ridge and the surrounding towns, and several other individuals. They've always thought there wasn't a way to tie them to the parties or anything else going on because they've been extremely careful not to get caught on their own cameras. Well, that's all about to change because I've gotten the floor plans of their house, located the positions of all the cameras,

hacked the feeds, and I now control everything. Emails have been sent out with a date and time to most of the usual participants so I know they're about to throw another party. I'm already set with the change in angles of the cameras, recording everything going on in the room, and I've also taken control of the cameras going in the room where they film the children doing horrendous things to one another.

See, the Powers believe if they aren't actually in the films they're creating, they won't be held accountable for them. However, they're the ones making child pornography and then distributing it. They have bids going on a daily basis. Men and women are able to watch various videos they've made and then vote on different polls. Some of them are about new things to have the children do, some are whether or not they'd want to buy time with the child in question, and so many other revolting polls I can't even begin to think of them because I'll get sick. I've already gotten sick a few times while combing through all the bullshit I see on a daily basis from them. This is the shit I don't let anyone else see. Not even Kayson.

Kayson has been helping me when it comes to digging up all the information on Mr. and Mrs. Powers. He's actually working on the financial aspects of the bullshit we're dealing with so it's one less thing I have to work on. It saves him from seeing all the stuff I am while still lending me a hand. Especially when it comes to finding anything regarding Oakliegh. I don't want him to see more than everyone already has of our girl. So, he's digging into all of the offshore accounts, the accounts in Oakliegh's name, and where all of this money is coming from. Kayson's been tracing the accounts and trying to figure out who's sending all this money to Darren and Kember. We know some of the money's coming from the photos and videos portion of the website. I have a feeling other sums of money are coming from the blackmail scheme they have going on, and the rest is something none of us know or understand. Especially the money in accounts with Oakliegh's name on them.

He's learned the accounts in Oakliegh's name have been opened since just after the Powers' took her into their

home. So, for eighteen years they were pocketing a hefty monthly sum of money. I'm not sure if it's from one of her birth parents or someone else who has an interest in Oakliegh for some reason. What I do know is the payments lasted for exactly eighteen years. The day Oakliegh turned eighteen, they stopped and there hasn't been another one in the last year. Kayson's discovered the payments hit the accounts on the first of every month and the Powers' aren't the ones who started the offshore accounts. Whoever sent the money is the person who set up everything. Kember and Darren have limited access to the account and can't withdraw money for any reason. Kayson did manage to find the paperwork for each account and has printed it out to start a file for Oakliegh. As soon as we know all the information, we'll be letting her know about these accounts. She does have access to withdraw the funds as often as she wants with no penalties against her. At this point, Oakliegh has millions of dollars to her name and doesn't have a single clue about it.

I've heard Oakliegh moving around this morning and wonder what she's doing in her room. She should have already left for her classes, but she's still here. Our girl isn't one to skip out on class for any reason. Oakliegh hates missing a single one for any reason. When she's been hurt in the past thanks to TJ and Misty, she was determined to go to class even with our doctor telling her she wasn't allowed to. The tears she cried in the middle of the night weren't for the pain or anger at being in bed or what had been done to her. It was because she couldn't go to class and would miss out on something her professors were teaching. She told us one night that it's not the same to go over the notes from each lesson online. Being in the lecture hall and taking her own notes while listening to whatever professor drone on and on is what she loves doing. Not my cup of tea, but I'm not about to put my sweet angel down for it either.

I'm just about to slide my headphones back on for the day when there's a soft knock on my door. With a smile on my face, I shut off all the monitors, and head over to the door to find my sweet angel standing there waiting for me.

“Hey, sweet angel. Everything okay?” I ask her, not standing in her way of coming in my room.

“Yeah. I just wanted to see you. I miss you, Kendrik. You’re all so busy and it’s been so damn long since I’ve seen any of you. With the exception of the party a few nights ago. Can we spend some time together today, Kendrik?” she asks, sitting down on the edge of my bed with tears in her eyes.

“Angel, if you want to spend the day with me, I’m more than okay with that. Are you skipping out on class in order to be here with me right now?” I ask her, a soft smile on my face as I make my way over to her and pull her into my arms before sitting on my bed with her in my lap.

“I am. I’m ahead in all of my classes and wanted to make sure I got to spend some time with you today. If it means skipping a class or two, then that’s what I’m going to do. You know how I feel about doing that, so you know this is important to me.”

“I know, sweet angel. Things won’t always be this fucking crazy and hectic. In a few months we’ll have so much time to spend with you, you’ll hate us. We’ll be so far up your ass you won’t have a second to yourself. It doesn’t make these next few months any easier though. Did you have anything in mind you wanted to do today?”

“Nope. I just wanted to spend time with you. I don’t care what we do, Kendrik.”

With a smile on my face, I slowly lay back on my bed so Oakliegh’s sitting on my upper thighs looking down at me. Her long red hair is falling around her face as I take in the freckles going across her nose and cheeks before disappearing into her hairline. Her mossy green eyes are mainly hidden because her pupils are blown. Reaching up, I grip Oakliegh’s hips and hold her against my hard cock. She grinds down on me letting a moan escape her as my eyes slide closed. It’s been way too long since I’ve felt her body against mine and I need her. Really fucking need her, but I’m not going to push for something she’s not ready for.

“Kendrik,” she moans out, continuing to grind down against me.

“Can I have you, Oakliegh. I want to bury my cock deep in your fucking pussy and make you scream my damn name,” I groan out, my hands gripping her hips even tighter.

“Yes, Kendrik.”

Sitting up, I slide my hands up to the hem of her shirt and slowly pushing it up her stomach. Oakliegh doesn't hide from me or try to stop me as I finally manage to lift her shirt over her head. In fact, she lifts her arms over her head for me to remove her shirt. When I go to move her so I can get her pants off, Oakliegh gets off my lap and stands before me. There isn't a second of hesitation as she pushes down her pants and lets them fall to the floor at her feet. She stands before me completely naked and doesn't try to cover her body or hide from me in any way. Right now, in this moment, Oakliegh is owning her body and letting me look as much as I want to.

“You're so fucking beautiful, sweet angel. Get on the bed so I can worship you,” I growl out, my voice husky and deeper than normal as I don't take my eyes off her.

Oakliegh gets on the bed as I stand up and strip out of my own clothing. What she doesn't know, no one does, is that I've added a piece of jewelry since Christmas. I had to get out and do something so I got my tongue pierced. It's not much considering I know Hendrix has his cock pierced. He's also got his tongue pierced, but I'm not sure he's actually had the chance to use it on Oakliegh yet. If I get to be the first of us to do this for her, it's going to make me feel better than ever before. I'll get to give her something the other two haven't been able to yet.

As soon as I'm naked, I climb back on my bed and settle myself between Oakliegh's legs. Opening my mouth I let my tongue slide through her wet folds. My tongue ring slides along her flesh causing a deep, guttural moan to escape. Making my way up to her clit, I press my tongue flat against her bundle of nerves so the metal ball can help stimulate her.

At the same time, I slide a finger into her channel. Oakliegh arches her body into my movements as I work her body the best ways I know how. I'm going to make her scream out my name as she cums around my fingers before sliding my cock in her tight pussy. The need to feel her wrapped around me is almost overwhelming as I add another finger and slide them in and out of her.

“Kendrik,” Oakliegh moans out my name as her body begins to tighten in response to my ministrations.

Her legs shake on either side of my head while I continue to work her body over with my mouth and fingers. She screams out my name as her entire body locks down and goes stiff under my touch. I don't stop flicking my tongue ring over her clit or sliding my fingers in and out of her pussy. Oakliegh tightens her legs around my shoulders as she reaches down to rake her fingers through my hair. Instead of releasing the strands, she tightens her fingers into a fist as if she's holding on for her life. The slight pull against my scalp sends a jolt of desire through me and straight to my cock currently pressed into my sheets.

When I finally pull my mouth away and slide my fingers from her pussy, I push myself up and let Oakliegh watch me suck her release from my skin. Her eyes slide closed as another moan escapes her.

“You ready for me, sweet angel?” I ask her, kissing my way up her body as she trembles under my touch.

Goosebumps break out over her skin following the path of my mouth and hands. Her silky skin slides smoothly under my calloused hands.

“Please, Kendrik. I need you,” Oakliegh says, reaching down to pull me up to her.

Oakliegh raises her head enough to press her lips against me. She doesn't hesitate to slide her tongue across the seam of my lips silently demanding me to open for her. I let her control the kiss as she slides her tongue in against mine once I open for her. Oakliegh brushes her tongue against my tongue ring as her hands slide over my shoulders and she digs

her nails into my skin. Sliding one hand between our bodies, I grip my cock and line myself up with her pussy.

“Ready, sweet angel?” I ask her, pulling away from her mouth.

“Yes,” she hisses out as I start to push inside her.

She’s so fucking tight and wet, I have to force myself to go slow so I don’t just slam into her body. This isn’t about my pleasure, it’s about hers and I’ll do what I have to in order for her to enjoy being with me like this. Oakliegh is giving her body to me and it’s something I’ll always treasure. After the hell she’s been through, every single time she’s with one of us, or all of us as a group, it means more than anything else in the world. She’s showing how much she trusts us and that’s a gift I’ll never take for granted.

“Kendrik, I’m not going to break. Fuck me,” she begs before I’m even fully seated inside her pussy. “I need you to take me as you want. Don’t hold back. I’ll tell you if it’s too much.”

Looking in her eyes, I see the truth of her words. Pulling my hips back, I start to slide out faster before pushing inside her pussy. I don’t hold myself back as I snap my hips forward and take a few seconds to savor feeling her wrapped tightly around me. This is the best feeling in the fucking world. Oakliegh wraps her legs around my hips and digs her heels into my lower back as she moves underneath me. Taking her cues, I pull back and start a steady pace of sliding in and out of her wet heat. My sweet angel meets every single one of my moves. It’s not long before I feel the telltale sign that I’m getting close to my release. The tingling starts in the base of my spine and I know I have to get my girl there before I even think about getting off.

Leaning down, I suck one of Oakliegh’s nipples into my mouth. I gently bite down on her sensitive peak before flattening my tongue on it to take away the sting. Her back arches off the mattress below her as she presses her tit further into my mouth. After paying attention to one nipple, I kiss and lick my way to her other tit and suck that nipple into my

mouth. I pay it the same attention as her other one while skating my fingers over her skin on my way down between our bodies. I'm bracing on one hand so I'm not crushing my girl. My arm trembles as I reach her clit and rub circles around the bundle of nerves.

"Kendrik. Please, Ken," Oakliegh begs me as I don't let go of her nipple.

Flicking my eyes up to her face, I watch as she pushes her head deeper into the pillow under her head. Her eyes are closed as her mouth falls open and she pants instead of breathing normally. Our bodies slam together as my movements become erratic. Twisting my hips as I push my way back into her body, my pelvis adds friction against her clit.

"So. Fucking. Close," I grit out between clenched teeth. "Get there, sweet angel. Fly for me."

Oakliegh opens her eyes and stares at me as her orgasm rushes through her body. She screams out my name as I continue to pound into her body. Oakliegh rakes her nails down my back as I prolong the waves of release rolling through her. Five more thrusts into her tight, wet pussy and I can't hold my own release back any longer. I push into her body and go still as my release pours into her.

"Oakliegh!" I roar out, tossing my head back and closing my eyes as I hold myself up from her body.

Without pulling my cock from her pussy, I lower myself and roll us so we're on our sides. Pulling Oakliegh against me, I want to feel her skin against mine. Her ample chest is crushed against mine as I entwine our legs together. Wrapping an arm over her body, I rub my hand up and down her back as we both breathe heavily.

"Thank you, sweet angel," I tell her when my breathing returns to something resembling normal again. I press a kiss to the top of her head as we remain laying together.

"Kendrik, thank you for not treating me as if I'm going to break. I might not be as experienced or know what I do and

don't like yet, but you don't have to be gentle and calm with me. This is one of the things I have to work on, remember?" she asks me, pulling her head back a little so she can look me in the eyes.

"I know, Oakliegh. I just don't want to do something that's going to set you back on everything you've accomplished so far," I tell her honestly.

"That's why you just need to listen to me. If I tell you something isn't how I want it, all I need you to do is stop so we can figure something else out. It's not going to set me back, I promise," she tells me, a small smile on her face. "When did you get your tongue pierced?"

"A day or two after Christmas. Just wanted to try something different and no one else was here. I was kind of bored. So, I went to our guy and had him pierce my tongue. Now, what do you say we grab a shower and then work on our performance? It's been a while since we practiced and we don't have much time left to work on this before it'll be the night of our performance," I return, not sure if she wants to practice today.

"That sounds good. Are we showering in here?"

"I'd like to join you for a shower. If you're okay with it, we can use mine," I tell her, knowing this is more than likely something she hasn't done with another guy. Or maybe only once or twice with Hendrix or Zander.

Oakliegh makes her way in my bathroom so she can take care of business before I go in there with her. While she's doing that, I make sure my programs are still running and haven't had a hit on anything new before turning off the monitors once again. I take my time washing Oakliegh from head to toe with my shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. She's going to smell like me for the rest of the day and I'm more than okay with that happening. Oakliegh returns the favor for me. She massages my tight muscles and I can't stop the moans at her loosening the knots I've gotten from spending way too much time at my desk in front of the computers.

Once we're out of the shower, I help her dry off and we both dress again before sitting down in my room. Grabbing my guitar, I play the song we'll be singing while Oakliegh begins singing. She hits every note perfectly. I sing when I'm supposed to, blending our voices perfectly as we run through the song more than once. After each run-through, we talk about what can be done to make it sound even better than the previous version we've done. Even changing a few of the words in the chorus to make the words more meaningful.

Today is very productive and I realize how much I miss hanging out with Oakliegh. It's not about the sex or anything other than spending time together. I don't really give a shit what we do as long as she lets me be a part of her world. Getting to play music with her and share our love for something so powerful is something I'll always treasure. These are the little things we share that mean the most to us. Our way to connect and become one. I'm never going to turn down anything with Oakliegh and I hope she understands how much I truly love her. It doesn't even matter that she hasn't said it back yet. We all know she loves us. It's in the little things she does to make our days better, the way she searches us out in sleep, and the way she looks at us. She'll say the words when she's ready and we'll continue telling her every damn day so she knows it's true.

Chapter Eleven



Oakliegh

KENDRIK HAS LOCKED himself in his room once more. It's been days since we spent the day together. I know he's working on finding every piece of dirt on my ex foster parents so we can finally take them out once and for all. Kayson has been helping him dig things up. I'm sure they've found stuff at this point, but they aren't telling me anything. I don't know if I'm relieved they haven't said anything to me about them or if I should be offended they don't believe I'm strong enough to handle what they have to say. I could also be overthinking this because they're not done yet. Maybe the plan is to talk to me once everything is discovered and they have a solid plan in place to make sure Mr. and Mrs. Powers can't weasel their way out of trouble. Again. It doesn't seem as if they've ever gotten caught with anything they've done. Not by the caseworkers or anyone else coming in the house for the inspections and stuff.

Today I have a few things to do in town and I know I'll have a shadow with me. It's nothing major. Mainly picking up my paychecks from Sal and Marjorie, cashing them, and then heading to my doctor's appointment this afternoon. I'm so damn nervous to know what the doctor's going to say at my checkup. Especially when I tell her the morning sickness doesn't seem to be getting any better. If anything, it's getting worse. I've tried looking up ways to combat the morning sickness and making it better, but nothing seems to help me. Not crackers, toast, ginger ale, or water.

After letting Kendrik know I'm heading out, I meet Kayson at the front door. Apparently he's going to be my

shadow of the day. This might not be a good thing if he has to go in the doctor's office with me.

"What's on the agenda today, Oakliegh?" he asks me, a smile on his face.

"I'm heading to both of my jobs to collect my paychecks. Then I've gotta go to the bank to cash them. After that I have a doctor's appointment. You don't have to go in with me. It's, um, just my yearly checkup and kind of embarrassing," I stammer out, not sure if he's going to believe me.

"Okay. Lead the way."

Kayson and I put on our coats before leaving the house. He walks next to me as we make our way across campus and head for the gate leading to Campus Row. I'm ready to get more proof of the pregnancy than just the tests I took with Harper. They're hidden in my room so I can figure out a way to tell the guys when I'm ready. Every day it becomes easier to wrap my head around the fact that I'm more than likely carrying Hendrix or Zander's baby. I'm not sure if they're going to be happy, upset, want to know who the father is, or anything else. All I know for sure is I'm going to keep this baby. Even if it means I have to do it alone.

I head straight for Sal's and grab my check from where our time cards are placed next to the time clock. It's the easiest way for Sal to hand them out because he's already busy as hell in the kitchen. Not only cooking for the shop, but making sure the pizzas are ready to go for the university. The man has more energy than most everyone I go to school with. Including me most days recently.

After telling Sal goodbye, I head straight for the Book Stop. Marjorie is behind the counter ringing someone out as I stand in line to wait for my paycheck. She's talking about some new authors we'll be displaying soon. I've never heard of them before so I'm hoping it means they're more independent authors. Once the customer is gone, I step forward.

“Oakliegh! It’s so good to see you. How have you been?” Marjorie asks me, reaching under the counter to grab my check.

“I’ve been okay. Working, tutoring, and going to class. Same as any other day,” I tell her with a soft smile for my boss.

“And how are those men of yours? Are you keeping them on their toes?” she asks, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

“I don’t know about all that. They’ve been busy with class and work. We keep missing one another. It won’t always be like this though. It’s just for now. So, if you’ve got any extra hours to hand out, I’ll take them,” I tell her.

“Not happening. You need time for studying and to just be on your own for a little bit. I won’t ever stop you from coming in here, but you really need to take more time for yourself, Oakliegh,” Marjorie advises me. “Get out there and enjoy life. You’re only going to be young once. Enjoy the time you have before you’re out on your own with more responsibilities than you can even begin to imagine.”

“I know. Still, I don’t like sitting idle with not a lot to do. You know how I am.”

“I do. Which is why I’m telling you to get out more. Experience things you haven’t gotten to enjoy yet. Don’t let yourself be too afraid to do things you don’t normally do. You’re so much stronger than you’ll ever realize, Oakliegh. Show yourself how strong you are. Live life, have fun, and don’t age before you should,” Marjorie says as she hands over my check and pushes me back out the door.

This woman. I swear she knows more about me than I do. I’m not sure how she does it, but Marjorie just always knows when I need to hear something, get told to do something, or simply given the space to figure out things on my own. She’s always been there for me and it’s why I’ll never turn my back on her. I’ll work as many hours as she’s willing to give me and always do what I can around the store to make her job easier.

Kayson and I make our way to the bank I use. I've got a small amount of money in an account just to keep it open so I don't have to pay to cash my checks. It's usually enough to ensure I don't have to come back a second time to withdraw the money after the checks clear. I don't like keeping a lot in here though because you never know what's going to happen. I've got a stash of cash in my room hidden from everyone in case I need it quickly.

As I'm entering the bank, I notice Mr. Montez coming out followed closely by a man wearing dark sunglasses. It must be one of his guards. He looks at me and gives me a small smile. I really don't like this man. He treats his son like shit and I know they argue about things more often than not. I'd like to see him take an active role in Kendrik's life like Mr. Vanderwalt does. He's just too damn stubborn to do so.

"Oakliegh, it's good to see you. Out running errands?" he asks, stepping aside so others can walk around us while his guard remains close to his side.

"I am. I don't have class today so I thought it would be the perfect time to get things done," I answer him.

"How's my wayward son? Is he still moving forward with this music shit?" he asks, the derisive tone grating on my nerves.

"Kendrik is doing amazing. Can I ask you a question, Mr. Montez?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever once heard your son play or sing anything? Gone to a football game? Shown him any kind of support a father should willingly give their child?"

"Excuse me?" he barks out, anger staining his cheeks red.

My eyes lock on his guard as he makes to step closer to me. Mr. Montez holds his hand out to show I'm not a threat to him and he doesn't need to step up to me. While I appreciate the gesture, I certainly don't need protection from Mr. Montez. I'm not about to physically harm Kendrik's dad even though

I'd like to for how he treats his son. Honestly, I'm not much of a threat no matter how you look at me.

“You heard me. Kendrik can play any instrument he gets his hands on and he writes amazing songs. Songs that will make whoever listens to them feel every ounce of emotion he wants them to. Do you even know that he's got a performance coming up?”

“Oakliegh, this doesn't concern you,” he says, looking around us to see if anyone's overhearing us.

“Yeah, it really does. I care about your son. More than care about him. I know you don't have a good relationship with one another and it's because of both of you. You're both too damn stubborn to get your head's out of your asses. You have the chance to repair the relationship you have with Kendrik. To show him it's okay not to follow in the path you want him to go down. He wants to make you proud and happy, but you refuse to listen to him. Say I'm overstepping or whatever you want. I really don't care.

“Kendrik should have you in his life and the two of you should have a better relationship than you currently do. Do you know if I could have a dad in my life, I'd want him to be happy with whatever path I take in life? Just because it made me happy. If you don't fix this with Kendrik soon, it's going to be too late. You won't have any relationship left to repair. That's just going to be sad because he is so truly amazing and filled with love to give. I don't want to see either one of you missing out on something because you couldn't set your pride aside to fix what's broken.

“I'm begging you to go watch him perform in a few weeks. Hear his music and see how talented he is. This is his passion whether you like it or not. Kendrik isn't cut out to be in a courtroom all day long. Or going over briefs and other shit when he's not in the courtroom. That's fine for you because you're really good at it. It's your passion. Even if it didn't start out that way, you're passionate about being a lawyer now. Don't take this from Kendrik. Go see him perform and you'll see what I'm talking about,’ I beg Mr. Montez with tears in my eyes.

“Oakliegh,” he begins, emotion clogging his voice.

For a few minutes, Mr. Montez simply looks at me. Finally, he gives me a nod before walking away. I stare after him as Kayson watches on.

“He needed to hear that, Oakliegh. Even if he does nothing about it, Kendrik will know you stood up for him and put it all on the line simply because you can’t stand how his father treats him. That will mean more than if Mr. Montez actually shows up to see his performance. Also noted you left out your own role in said performance,” Kayson tells me as he opens the door to the bank for me.

With a nod of my head, I make my way to the teller’s line. I get out my license and have everything ready to go by the time it’s my turn to cash my checks.

Kayson remains just outside the office door when we get to the doctor’s office. He doesn’t follow me in because it’s a female doctor and he knows I’m already embarrassed at having him here with me. I wouldn’t even let Harper come here with me because this is way too personal for me to have anyone with me. I’m not about to pass up having someone with me when I’m not on campus though. It’s a matter of safety and making sure Kember and Darren can’t get to me. I get it, and I’m really happy I’m not alone when I walk everywhere. It would honestly be the perfect place to catch me and take me where no one would know where I’m at.

“Can I help you?” the receptionist asks me as I step up to the front desk.

“I have an appointment. Oakliegh Burns,” I answer, handing over my license.

“And how will you be paying for today’s visit? Or do you have insurance?”

“I’ll be paying cash,” I answer, not sure how much of a dent this is going to make in my money.

“Okay. You’re all checked in. Fill out this paperwork and wait for someone to call you back,” she says without

looking up.

I'm handed back my license along with a clipboard full of papers I have to fill out. Sitting down away from everyone else, I take out the pen and begin filling in my information. If I'm pregnant, I'm really going to have to get some health insurance. These visits will get expensive and I'll need help covering them if I don't want to blow through all of my money. Something else to add to my list of things to do in the upcoming days.

Just as I finish filling out the paperwork, a nurse opens the door and calls my name. Standing up, I make my way to the door and follow the nurse back to the exam rooms. We stop at the end of the hallway so she can take my vitals before sending me to the bathroom. I'm so nervous she did mention my blood pressure being elevated slightly. If I'm pregnant, I know that's not a good thing.

"What brings you in today, Oakliegh?" the nurse asks me, a smile on her face.

"Well, I took a few pregnancy tests and they came out positive. I just wanted confirmation about it before I tell the possible fathers," I answer, not hiding that I've been with more than one man.

If the guys are happy about the baby, I'm sure they'll end up here with me at one point or another. I don't want it to be a surprise if a different guy comes in with me or if more than one shows up to the appointment. The nurse looks at me with no judgment in her eyes as she makes a note in my chart on her computer.

"Okay. So you know for a fact there's more than one possibility for a father of the baby if you are pregnant. That's good to know Oakliegh. Are they both your regular partners? Or were they one night stands?"

"They're both my current partners. I have three actually. We're in a relationship and there is no one else for me or them," I answer her, knowing this is all the information she needs to have if there's a baby involved.

“Okay. We’ll have to have the health information about the men who are the possible fathers. Just so we know if we have to keep an eye out for anything while you’re still pregnant. I see you’ve marked down all of your information. I’ll put that in your chart after I’m done asking you questions and making notes for the doctor. As soon as you can get us information on the guys, I’ll add it to your chart so we can figure out if we have to take any extra precautions.”

Nodding my head, I listen to her as she goes over what’s going to happen today and continues asking me questions. When she’s done with this part of my appointment, the nurse leaves after telling me to get undressed and put on the gown at the end of the exam table. The doctor should be in soon.

Doing as the nurse told me to, I strip down and put on the gown. I hate these paper gowns. They’re so itchy against my skin and make me colder than if I were walking outside in the chilly breeze. I’m not saying the exam room is cold, because it’s really not. It’s just always how I feel when I have to wear one of these things. I don’t really know a single woman who likes to wear a paper gown while she waits for the doctor to come in and start the exam that’s equally as horrible. I hate coming to the doctor for this stuff. And if I’m pregnant like I’m sure I am, I’ll have to come here on a monthly basis.

It doesn’t take long for the doctor to make her way into the room with me.

“Hello Oakliegh. I’m Doctor Gonzalez. It’s nice to meet you,” the doctor greets me, extending her hand for me to shake. “I hear you believe you’re pregnant and that’s the reason for your visit today.”

“Yes. I took more than one home test and they came back positive. I just wanted something more than one of them when I tell the possible father,” I answer the doctor as she goes over to wash her hands.

“Okay. We’ve run a test on the sample you left in the bathroom. You are definitely pregnant. Today I’m going to give you an internal exam to make sure everything’s okay. We

can do an ultrasound if you want one. It will have to be internal because I don't believe you're far enough along for the other one to work. How have you been feeling?"

"I'm sick on and off all day long. It doesn't matter where I am or what I'm doing. Certain smell definitely set me off. I also don't really have an appetite. I'm eating, but nothing tastes good and I'm not really hungry," I tell the doctor as she begins the exam.

"Okay. I can give you some medicine that's safe for the baby and will help with the nausea. You'll also have to start taking prenatal vitamins on a daily basis. We'll keep an eye on your morning sickness to make sure you're not losing too much weight. It's not good to be losing weight during your pregnancy. A few pounds in the beginning is one thing, but not a ton of weight throughout. Once we determine how far along you are, we'll hopefully be able to give you an idea of how much longer the morning sickness will continue. Though, every woman is different and some experience morning sickness throughout their entire pregnancy. Have you tried eating toast, crackers, drinking ginger ale?"

"I've tried it all. Nothing helps me with it."

"Okay. Let's finish this exam and I'll make sure you leave with the scripts for your medicine. As long as everything is okay, I'd like to see you back in one month. At that point, we'll do an ultrasound to determine how far along you are," Doctor Gonzalez informs me.

I get through the rest of the exam and the doctor leaves me to get dressed once again. As soon as I'm ready, I head out of the exam room and make my way to the front of the office. The receptionist hands me over a paper with the amount I owe for today's visit. I internally cringe at the cost of my appointment. This is going to make a huge dent in the money I have on me. But, it's something I need to take care of. Handing over the cash, the receptionist gives me a receipt and hands over the scripts I'll need to have filled.

I'm going to have to ask someone if I can borrow a little bit of money in order to get my scripts now. I wonder if I

can get Harper to pick them up for me and I'll give her the money back as soon as I get paid again. I just don't think I'll have enough left in my stash to get medicine. I'll talk to them when I drop the scripts off.

Heading outside, I find Kayson leaning against the wall. He stands up straight as soon as he sees me and I let him know we'll have to head to the pharmacy before going back to the campus. With a nod of acknowledgment, we make our way to the pharmacy on Campus Row. It's the closest place to us and I'll be able to pick the medicine up on my way to work or something.

Chapter Twelve



Oakliegh

THANKFULLY, I DIDN'T need to borrow any money to get my medicine. I had just enough to get the nausea medicine and prenatal vitamins. Harper's the only who knows my pregnancy has been confirmed by the doctor now. She's the only one who knows about it, period. It's kind of funny because she went out and bought a pregnancy book that she keeps hidden and has been reading. My best friend wants to make sure if anything goes wrong, she'll know what to do. Or be able to tell me something I'm feeling isn't as wrong as I believe it is. Especially with the guys not knowing about the baby. I'm not sure if they even know I've been getting sick. So far, I've been pretty good at keeping it a secret. When I'm with Harper, she helps me by being at my side in some 'girl's' thing or whatever she chooses to say to the guys so they don't follow me to the bathroom.

Today, I'm feeling particularly shitty. I've been sick so many times nothing is helping me. Not even the medicine Doctor Gonzalez has given me. I don't know if this is entirely part of my pregnancy or if I've gotten some sort of stomach bug going on too. All I know is I'm miserable and I'm not able to do much of anything. I've even called out of work because I'm not going to keep running to the bathroom during a shift serving people food. No one will want to eat if they think their server is sick and trying to pass it on to them. I know I wouldn't. So, I called to let Sal know I wasn't going to be able to work and he was more than happy to give me the day off. He knows I've been pushing through everything and it's bound to take a toll on me sooner or later. In fact, he gave me tomorrow off too.

I've tried to study for the classes I missed today and couldn't be at my desk long enough to read the text so I could take notes and answer the questions at the end of each chapter. It's not necessarily homework or something we have to do, I do it because it allows me to realize how much of the material I'm retaining and what I need to study more for any upcoming papers or tests.

As I lay in bed, burrowed under a ton of extra blankets and curled up in a ball, a knock sounds on my door. I didn't even stir when the guys got up this morning. I guess that's saying something because I've been awake before them the last few days.

"Come in," I call out, my voice cracking from not using it today and getting sick so often.

Kendrik pokes his head in the door and takes a look at me. He's immediately at my side.

"What's wrong, sweet angel?" he asks, concern filling him as he pulls out his phone.

"I don't feel good today. I've been getting sick since I opened my eyes," I answer him, groaning as my stomach rolls again.

"I'm sorry, angel," he says, pressing the back of his hand against my head. "You're burning up, Oakliegh. I'm going to call in the doctor to see what we need to do for you."

"I don't think I need a doctor, Kendrik," I try to tell him as he's already got his phone to his ear.

There's no telling these guys anything when something's wrong with me. If they want me to see a doctor, I'm going to see a doctor. I'm surprised I didn't end up in the hospital more when Misty and TJ were around. I fully believe Harper is the only reason I didn't end up in the emergency room every time I had the shit beat out of me. Sal was ready to cart me there himself at one point just after I started working for him.

"The doctor will be here as soon as he can. Our usual doctor is busy and we're taking her stand in. I'm not

impressed with this, but there's nothing I can do short of taking you to the hospital right now. I've also let the guys know you're sick and they'll be here soon. Why didn't you tell me sooner, sweet angel?" he questions me, his voice almost a whisper.

"Because it's not a big deal. People get sick, Kendrik," I snark out, my voice coming out harsher than I intended. "I'm sorry."

"There's no reason for you to apologize, sweet angel. For now, I'm going to run down and get you a bottle of juice. Do you want some crackers or anything? I don't even know what to give you right now. Maybe not juice. Water? Ginger ale?" Kendrik questions, his fear making his words almost slam into one another.

"I don't want anything, Kendrik. There's no point when I can't keep anything down."

Kendrik nods his head as the sound of boots racing up the stairs reaches me. Hendrix is home. He's the only one of my guys who wears boots on a daily basis. From what I've seen, the only time he doesn't wear them is if he's on his way to the gym. Then he wears sneakers and still manages to walk as if he's got his boots on.

"Baby girl, you should have called or sent me a message. I would have come home to be with you," Hendrix says, sitting down next to me on the bed opposite of Kendrik and running his hand down my cheek. "Ken isn't wrong. You're burnin' the fuck up. Doctor on his way?"

"He is. Doc wasn't available so we've got her second in command," Kendrik tells him as Zander enters the room.

"LeeLee, you look like shit. I don't mean to sound horrible, but you do. You've got sweat plastering your hair to your forehead, you're so pale I can almost see through your skin. I hate seeing you sick and this is more than sick. How long have you been feeling like this?" Zander asks, sitting next to Kendrik and placing his hand on my leg.

“I woke up feeling like this. I don’t know what happened. Yesterday I felt fine and didn’t realize anything was wrong.”

“It’s okay. Maybe you caught something when you were out with Kayson yesterday. It’s still cold as fuck out and you’ve been walking everywhere. I’m sorry we haven’t been here to help out with taking you where you need to go,” Zander tells me as Hendrix pushes the hair sticking to my forehead out of the way.

We all sit together until Kendrik’s phone goes off letting him know the doctor’s here to see me. He rushes down to let him in and bring him up to my room. Somehow, I’m going to need to have the doctor see me alone. I don’t want to do anything that will harm the baby, but I can’t exactly tell him about it with all the guys in the room. That’d be one hell of a way for them to find out. I just want to make sure I’ve got a cute way to tell them about the baby and I’m still trying to wrap my head around this whole situation.

Kendrik returns with an older man carrying a black medical bag with him.

“Oakliegh, this is Dr. Ogden. He’ll be seeing you today,” Kendrik says, walking further in the room as Zander and Hendrix stand from the bed but don’t move from my side.

“It’s nice to meet you, Oakliegh. I wish it were under better circumstances though. I’ve known these boys for a long time. Which means they already know I’m going to kick them out so I can find out what’s going on. You’ll be good on the other side of the door, boys,” Dr. Ogden says, a smile on his face as they all start grumbling like toddlers.

All three guys make their way out into the hall as Dr. Ogden closes the door behind them. He turns and makes his way to the bed where I’m still lying under a ton of blankets.

“What seems to be the problem, young lady?” he asks, his voice kind and gentle.

“I can’t stop throwing up. I’ve got some of the medicine to help with nausea and it’s not even touching this.

My entire body hurts and I can't concentrate on anything. All I want to do is sleep. I should also let you know I'm pregnant. I'm not sure how far along I am at this point, but it was confirmed a few days ago by Dr. Gonzalez," I tell him and plead with him to keep this to himself without saying a word.

"The boys don't know yet. I won't say a thing to them. For now, let's find out what's going on with you right now," Dr. Ogden says, his voice still soft.

I watch on as he pulls out a few things from his bag and turns to face me again. Dr. Ogden listens to my heart and lungs, takes my temperature, and a few other things before putting everything back in his bag. I can't even be worried about what's wrong with me at this point because I'm so completely exhausted. I'm ready to sleep the day away and it doesn't matter if the doctor is still in here with me or not.

"Is the baby okay?" I ask, needing to know if I've done something wrong all of a sudden.

"The baby is fine. This is more than morning sickness though. I'm afraid you've got the flu. Right now, we need to focus on getting your fever to break. It's not good to be overheating when you're pregnant. I'm going to suggest taking lukewarm showers and baths until the fever doesn't come back. Use a cool compress if you have to as well. Anything you can think of to get your body temperature down. I'm not going to suggest taking medicine for it because I feel Dr. Gonzalez should be the one to tell you what to take with the pregnancy," Dr. Ogden tells me as he turns to walk to the door again. "Let those boys know sooner rather than later Oakliegh. They're going to be upset if you're this sick and they don't know."

"I will. Thank you, Dr. Ogden."

Before he's even to the door, my eyes are already sliding closed. I don't even know if the guys come back in the room as exhaustion claims me and I don't bother fighting it.

The last week has been killer. I've been sick as hell and we've done everything to get my fever to break. Other than a few hours a day, nothing has taken it away completely until late last night. Kendrik hasn't left my side at all. Zander and Hendrix have had to take care of a few things and have been in and out. Even when they're sitting with me, Kendrik doesn't leave. The only thing he does is make sure he's got his laptop with him so he can continue working. Honestly, I've been sleeping more than anything over the last week. Something I've obviously needed.

I did call Dr. Gonzalez and she told me what I could take in order to get my fever to break. It was also a concern of hers. If it didn't break last night, I would've had to go in to see her today. That's not something I would have been able to explain to any of the guys. They haven't let me do anything all week long and I'm amazed I found the time to even call her without one of them overhearing the conversation. But I did manage it and they don't know anything yet. Soon, I'll tell them.

"How are you feeling today, sweet angel?" Kendrik asks when he notices me awake.

"I feel so much better. No fever since last night and I don't have the need to rush to the bathroom to lose the nothing in my stomach. I'm actually kind of hungry," I answer him.

"That's great news, sweet angel. I'll run down and make you some toast. Do you want some bottled water with that?"

"Yes, please."

Kendrik disappears as I make my way to the bathroom to take care of my morning routine. Even brushing my teeth. For the first time since I started having morning sickness, I don't get sick. I'm not sure if it's the flu I'm just getting over or if today is just starting out as a good one. I guess we'll find out as the day goes on. At least for today the guys will believe it's the lingering effects of the flu.

By the time I've gone through my routine in the bathroom and get back in bed, I realize two things. One, I

desperately need to change the sheets and blankets on my bed. Two, I'm also in desperate need of a shower. Sweating from the fever has turned everything into a mess. Thankfully, I have enough to change my bed up and take a shower before climbing back inside it. I really don't want to go anywhere since I feel better but I'm still a little achy. Maybe the shower will help with that.

"Sweet angel, I've got your toast and water. I just got a call from Kain too. Judge and him are going to be stopping over in a little bit. They want to meet you," Kendrik informs me as he sits down next to me and hands over the plate and bottle of water.

"Who are they?" I ask him, taking a small bite of the perfectly buttered toast.

"Kain is the head of my father's security and Judge is the head of Mr. Vanderwalt's security. They'll be adding some safety measures when you're at work. On top of the guys from the frat house, you'll have a few other guards watching over you. We don't want to take any chances with the wedding coming up in less than a month," Kendrik answers me, his voice distracted as he stares down at his phone and messages someone.

"Okay. I don't have to leave the house?"

"Not at all. They know you're just getting over the flu. You've got about an hour before they'll be here."

"Perfect. I'm going to change my bed and take a shower after I get done eating. If you have to leave, I'm okay here."

"I don't really have to leave the house. I just need to look at something on my other computer. It's got a program I haven't put on my laptop I need to access."

"I'll be fine, Ken. If you need to go to your room, then go. I told you what I'm doing and you can leave my door open so you can hear me if I need you."

"Okay, sweet angel. I'll be back before they get here to take you downstairs. Don't be surprised if one of them offers

to train you either. They know Hendrix has been working with you on self-defense moves. It's been a while, but it's something that needs to happen after everything that's happened."

"I might just take them up on the offer if it comes. Hendrix is so busy and doesn't have the time if I decide to go back to the gym."

"We'll always make time for you, sweet angel. I know it doesn't seem like it right now, but it's the truth. I love you, Oakliegh. Call out if you need anything at all."

Kendrik leaves the room as I finish eating my toast and take my vitamin. As soon as I'm done, I get out of bed and strip it down. Heading for my closet, I grab a new set of sheets and some blankets. Tossing the blankets on the stack of pillows, I begin making my bed as I sing the song I'll be performing with Kendrik in my head. It's not long before I'm singing out loud as I finish making the bed. Time to shower for me.

Since it's been a while, I wash my hair twice before conditioning it. While the conditioner is still in my hair, I scrub my body clean from the sweat and other crap from being so sick. Before rinsing off, I make sure to shave everything. I actually spend more time in the shower than what I was planning on as Kendrik comes to knock on the door, letting me know the guys are here. Shit!

I quickly finish up and rinse the conditioner and body wash off before turning off the water and getting out of the shower. Using the overly large towels I've got in here, I dry off and tie one around my hair to get the excess water out of the thick strands. Rushing to the closet, I grab the first things I see. A pair of leggings and one of Hendrix's tee-shirts. It will be long enough to cover anyone from seeing my butt or anything.

I meet Kendrik in the hallway as he smiles down at me and fingers the towel I've still got wrapped around my hair. Not exactly how I wanted to meet these two men, but I don't have time to brush it out without keeping them waiting even

longer. We make our way down the stairs to find two huge men standing there.

The shorter man has short blond hair with even more muscles than Hendrix. I can make out tattoos coming out the end of his long sleeves and above the neck of his shirt. He's wearing black pants with a million pockets in them and a tight black shirt over his chest. The man glares up at me as if I've pissed him off or seriously offended him in some way. I'm not sure what I've done other than making him wait though.

As I turn my attention to the taller man, I take in his bald head, the darkest blue eyes I've ever seen, and muscles. What the hell is it with these men having more muscles than any one man needs? He's also got tattoos and is dressed similar to the man standing next to him. Though, that's where the similarities end as far as I can tell. This man is looking at me with amusement filling his eyes.

"Kain, Judge, I'd like you to meet Oakliegh. Oakliegh meet Kain and Judge," Kendrik introduces us.

"It's nice to meet you both," I say, extending my hand to shake with them.

Judge, the bald man, accepts my hand with no question or hesitation. Kain on the other hand just stares at me.

"I've seen you before. Outside the bank," Kain growls out and I know why he's not too happy with me.

"Oh, I see. Yeah, wasn't planning on doing that," I tell him as Kendrik looks between the two of us.

"Did I miss something?" Kendrik finally asks.

"Nothing important," I tell him, turning to give him a small smile.

"Well, we just wanted to get over here to meet you officially. I'm sure Kendrik let you know we'll be adding in some extra guys when you're off campus. It might be one of us when Mr. Vanderwalt or Mr. Montez don't need us at their side. Or if the threat becomes even worse," Judge tells me. "I hear Hendrix was teaching you self-defense. I think we should work together to get you a more well rounded training. I can

work with you and go around your schedule. We'll work here at the house so you don't have to leave campus. I know the guys have a decent gym in the basement now and we can use that."

"I'd really like that. Um, there's just one thing I should talk to you about. Why don't you and I talk alone in the kitchen for a minute," I tell him, not wanting to say this in front of Kendrik or even Kain since he seems to hate me.

"Sure. Lead the way."

When Judge gets in the kitchen with me, I open my planner to make it look as if we're going over my schedule.

"I'm pregnant, Judge. I want to train and workout, but we've got to work around whatever my doctor says. The guys don't know yet. Please, don't say anything," I tell him, my voice a whisper as I keep looking over his shoulder to make sure Kendrik isn't close enough to hear me.

"Okay. Well, that certainly makes a difference. I'll give you my cell phone number and you can let me know what your doctor says. Once you do, I'll make up a plan to ensure we don't put you or them in jeopardy. Even if it's just some light workouts. I just want you to be prepared in case those foster fucks decide to come at you," Judge assures me as I close my planner.

"Everything set?" Kendrik asks, making his way into the kitchen without Kain.

"It is. I've got to get back. Oakliegh, here's my number call me when you're ready to set something up," Judge says, giving me a nod along with Kendrik before leaving us alone in the kitchen.

Kendrik stares at me for several minutes as I slide Judge's card into my planner and turn to face him. It's kind of unnerving to feel him staring at me when I'm not even facing him.

"Is everything okay, Oakliegh? I mean, other than just having the flu, is something else going on with you?"

“I’m okay, Kendrik. If something were horribly wrong with me, I’d tell you. I’m not hiding a horrible secret or anything. Just something I needed to talk to Judge about,” I tell him, not truly lying but not telling him the truth either.

“Okay. Just know I’m here for you to talk to whenever you need to,” he says. “Now, let’s get you back in bed. I don’t want you doing too much when you were still so sick yesterday. Another day or two in bed is what you need.”

“I’m not even going to argue that,” I tell him, grabbing another bottle of water from the refrigerator before we walk back upstairs.

Climbing back in bed with my fresh sheets and blankets, Kendrik takes a seat next to me and begins working on his lap top. I turn on a movie knowing I’m more than likely not going to stay awake for too long. I’m still kind of tired after being downstairs for just those few minutes. This flu is really kicking my ass and I can’t say I like it one bit.

Chapter Thirteen



Zander

I'M HEADING TO another meeting with my dad today. This one is more about me watching him work and seeing how he handles shipments we'll be handling. I'm supposed to sit back and take some mental notes while he does all the work. It's not my favorite way to spend hours on end, but it's a necessary evil until I'm able to fully take over. Plus, my dad is amazing at negotiations and it's something I've gotten better at, but I could still use some work in this area of my life. Especially considering I'll be doing it on a regular basis soon enough. Still, it's very mundane and boring.

Parking in the parking garage, I make my way to the elevator here that will carry me up to my dad's floor. Usually I'd go in through the main door, but I don't want to see a ton of people right now. I want to get inside and out again without the possibility of being stopped by someone to talk about something I don't want to talk about. It's only been a few days since Oakliegh got over the flu and I want to make sure she's okay. We've all been spending more time at home with her to keep a close watch on her getting better. Thankfully, the doctor didn't have to come back out and she got over the worst of things in about a week. Too long for my liking, but it's that time of year I guess.

Riding up in silence, I once again greet Nancy as soon as I step off the elevator.

"How are you doing today, Nancy? The old man isn't working you too hard is he?" I question her like normal.

“Not at all, Mr. Vanderwalt. Your father is a dear man to work for. He’s waiting for you right now. Go on in,” she says, a smile on her face as I walk past her desk and straight into my dad’s office.

“Dad. It’s good to see you again,” I say as he pushes away from his desk.

“You too, Zander. How’s Oakliegh feeling?” he inquires.

“Much better. Still a little more tired than normal, but she’s back to work and classes. I think she even went to the library to tutor Addie yesterday afternoon,” I answer him, taking a seat opposite him.

“That’s good to hear. The flu this year is really bad. I’m sorry she ended up catching it. Are you ready for today?”

“I am. I mean, I’m literally just going to sit here and watch on as you do your thing. It’s not like I have a ton to do in this meeting.”

“Have you heard back from Mr. Grandville?”

“I did. We got the land and building. Work is going to start tomorrow. His lawyers were very impressed with my contracts and didn’t add a single thing to them. He accepted the cash offer and made sure to fire his realtor in front of me. To say she was pissed off would be an understatement. However, she didn’t have his best interest in mind when trying to sell off that particular piece of property.”

“Good to hear. I look forward to seeing your plans for it. I’ll take a trip out there when I know you’ll be there. Are you planning on taking Brody out there?”

“I am. We’ll make a trip there after the wedding. He really wants to learn how to do everything and is a quick learner. I haven’t been able to spend a ton of time with him yet, but he has already proven himself more than once.”

“Good. What about Zeke and Kayson? Have the guys told you anything about them?”

“Kayson’s still helping Kendrik with digging up more information. Something about some accounts in Oakliegh’s name. I’m not sure what that’s all about just yet though. Zeke has been to the gambling house with Hendrix more than once. He’s been doing a good job and has a keen eye for details not many other would pick out. Especially when it comes to those counting cards and cheating,” I tell him as the phone on his desk buzzes from Nancy.

“Mr. Vanderwalt, there’s a Mr. Rumen here to see you. He’s got an appointment, sir,” Nancy announces.

“Thank you, Nancy. Please see him in now,” my dad responds, standing from his chair as I follow his lead.

Nancy brings Mr. Rumen in through the door as he rudely declines her offer of anything to drink. I already know I’m not going to like this particular client of ours just based on the second I’m seeing how he treats my dad’s secretary. The nicest woman I’ve ever met in my life. She doesn’t deserve his rudeness as I take her in before she hastily retreats.

“Mr. Rumen, please, have a seat,” my dad offers, not bothering to shake the man’s hand which tells me all I need to know about his feelings regarding the asshole walking toward me.

Instead of waiting for him to take a seat before I take mine, I sit down and move my chair further away from his. There is no way in hell I’m remaining in touching distance of the fucker as he plops his ass down in the chair and glares at me.

“I don’t know who this is, but there’s no reason for him to be sitting in on our meeting, Vanderwalt,” Mr. Rumen declares, blatantly disrespecting my father as my hands clench into fists at my side.

“This is my son and he’s here today because it won’t be long before he’s taking over for me. Mr. Montez and I are retiring early and letting our sons take over for us. They’re all learning the various aspects of what we do and how we run things. He’s not going anywhere today. Accept it or we can just cancel the meeting altogether. It seems you need my

services more than I need to take your money,” my dad says, leaning back in his chair while staring Mr. Rumen down.

“Whatever,” he grumbles in response. “This is what I’ll need for my next shipment. It’s going to be three shipping containers. They’ll be for the guns as we normally transport them. They’ll be hidden in crates of oranges and car parts. Coming from two different distributors on the paperwork but heading for the same location. The third container will be for a shipment of women we’re sending overseas. Nothing special has to be done for them. If they make it, they do. If not, it’s no skin off my back.”

“Ex-fucking-cuse me? You really think we’re going to let you transport women to a different country?” I bark out, standing from my chair and taking a step closer to the fucker, my mind instantly on Oakliegh and what could have been done to her by her foster parents.

“You don’t have a say in this young man. I suggest you sit the fuck down and let the adults handle business without opening your mouth,” Mr. Rumen returns, his voice hard and cold.

“No, I don’t think I will. We’re a shipping company and will *not* be letting you send women to their death because you simply don’t give a fuck. That’s not how we do business. Furthermore, we will *not* ship women you’ve more than likely taken, beaten, raped, and drugged for your own amusement simply because you think we owe you something. My father has built this shipping company from the ground up. It’s one thing to transport your guns and shit, but something else entirely to ship women. Dad, I’m sorry, but this is not happening. No matter how much money this sick fuck tosses our way,” I say, my voice calm and controlled despite the rage flowing through me.

“Are you seriously going to let your son, who doesn’t know how things are truly run around here, make you lose one of your biggest clients?” Mr. Rumen turns his attention to my dad.

“You have never brought this up before, Rumen. I’m not sure what you’ve gotten your hands into now, but my son is correct. We won’t be handling this shipment of women for you,” my dad backs me up without breaking eye contact with Rumen.

“Are you fucking kidding me right now? The first fucking time I let you know about this and you’re going to let your son tell me what I can and can’t do. Do you realize this won’t be the first shipment of women you’ve taken care of for me?” Rumen says, only adding fuel to my rage.

“You’re done here. We won’t be working with you any longer, Mr. Rumen. You can find another shipping company somewhere else to make sure your guns get to their destination. However, I will tell you now, I’ll let every fucking person I know in this business about what your true intentions are and what really happened here today. I have a long reach like my dad and Mr. Montez. In fact, I know people they don’t. So, our meeting here is done with. I’d say it was nice working with you, but we all know that’s a lie. And, if you *ever* fucking disrespect Nancy again, I’ll cut your fucking tongue out before making you choke on it,” I tell him, still not raising my voice.

“This is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever fucking heard in my life. Vanderwalt, is this truly how you’re willing to let our partnership go? Through the words of a child learning how to handle a man’s business?”

“First of all, my name is Mr. Vanderwalt. And yes, that’s exactly what’s going to happen. My son and I will be making all the calls we need to today in order to ensure you have a *very* difficult time finding someone to work with again. You’re a pompous ass who feels entitled to act and say what he wants with no consequences of those actions. I’ve only done business with you in the past because Mr. Montez and I decided to take a chance on you. Now, years later to find out you’ve been lying and disrespecting us and our family means we’re going to fucking ruin you,” my father states, his voice colder than I’ve ever heard it before.

Mr. Rumen doesn't say another word as he stands from his seat and rushes from the room. His face is bright red and several veins are protruding from his face and neck. I have no doubt he's going to retaliate somehow, but I'm sure it will backfire like everything else that's been brought our way.

"Son, I thought you were going to sit there and remain quiet?" my dad asks once his office door is closed again.

He's got a smirk on his face so I know he's not pissed at me.

"That was the plan. Hearing he wanted to ship women to another country fucking gutted me. All I could think about was the Powers' doing something like that to Oakliegh. Of them selling her off to the highest bidder because they felt they could. That's not something I'm going to tolerate being done or going through our business. I know he was a big client for you, and I'll do what you want in order to make this right. However, I feel the right decision was made about him. Mr. Rumen is a rude fuck and doesn't give a shit about anyone but himself. I was ready to take his ass out when he disrespected Nancy for doing her job," I tell him, sitting back down in my seat.

"I agree with you. And I had a feeling that's exactly where your head went as soon as he mentioned those women. I can tell you now, if we'd known about previous shipments of women being sent out, it wouldn't have happened. Not on my watch. Once Julio hears of this, I have no doubt he'll be agreeing with us as well. He's not going to like what happened here today at all. Head home now so I can fill him in on the details of this meeting. I'll see you guys later on," my dad says, standing and holding out his hand for me to shake. "I'm proud of you, Zander. You did a good job today. Stood by your morals and didn't let him make you change your mind because he's been a long-term client of ours."

"Thank you, Dad. Let me know when you need me again and I'll be here," I tell him before leaving his office.

I stop outside his office to check on Nancy before leaving. She's upset at her treatment by Mr. Rumen and I

assure her she'll never have to deal with him again. With a small smile on her face, she bids me goodbye. I only stop long enough to get her a bottle of water and a snack. Leaving it on her desk, I make my way to the elevator and head back to my car. Before I can go home to Oakliegh, I need to hit the gym. Or go see Judge. I'm not going to return home with all of this rage flowing through me. It's not her fault I had to deal with such a fucking asshole today and she won't ever know about this meeting. Once she's asleep tonight, I'll let Hendrix and Kendrik know what's going on. For now, I'll settle with making the calls I need to so no one we know does business with this prick.

Chapter Fourteen



Oakliegh

THE LAST FEW days I've been alone more since Christmas break. I've done everything I can think of to keep myself occupied, but it doesn't always work. Even reading can't keep my attention these days. Though, I've found myself thinking more and more about the baby. I can't believe I'm pregnant by one of the guys. We all knew this could happen, but I never truly believed it would happen because I've never gotten pregnant up to this point in my life. Yes, I was forced to have sex in that hellhole after I started having my monthly and never once got pregnant, thankfully. So, a small part of me believed I couldn't have children. Whenever I let myself think about it, my heart broke a little at the thought of never being a mom. Of never being able to give the guy I'm with a family. Well, it looks as if that's not a problem considering I haven't had sex that often since being with Zander the first time.

Other than that, I've been cleaning the house, doing homework, getting ahead in all of my classes, working at Sal's and the books store, and baking. I've baked a lot. All the people in the house devour whatever I make and leave out for them. Most of the time when I get up the next morning, most of whatever I've made has been consumed with nothing more than crumbs left in the container. The only other thing I've done to keep myself occupied is tutor Addie. No one else has taken me up on my offer of tutoring except for her. I guess whatever has happened up to this point means no one wants to be near me. And that's okay. I don't need anyone else in my life. When I'm with my guys, Harper, Addie, or her guys I have fun and we all get along really good. It's just everyone's

so damn busy and I can't seem to get myself into a rhythm where it doesn't matter if I'm here alone or not.

I can't even really say I'm completely alone either. I've still got a guard on me at all times. With Mrs. Powers still emailing me and sending threats, there's no way I'm to be left alone. No one trusts the Powers'. Especially me. There is no telling what they'll do in order to get what they want. I mean, all you have to do is look at the parties they throw to know these people have no morals. More than the parties, look at what they force children to do. These people are depraved and only worry about themselves. I mean, what did they honestly believe was going to happen when they kicked me out on my eighteenth birthday? And I honestly haven't said much of anything about what I've been through in their care to anyone. I talk about it a little bit in counseling, but nothing more than that. It's not something I'll freely talk about to anyone either.

I'm truly ashamed for what I've had done to me. And, yes, I can fully admit now that it was done to me. The pictures, videos, and all that stuff was nothing I had ever chosen for myself. It's not anything I'd have chosen to do. The Powers' took away everything from us. They've made us feel like shit and ensured it takes a lot for us to be in a functioning relationship where we're able to trust the person, or people, we're with. If it weren't for working with Erica, I wouldn't be where I am today. Especially with letting the guys and Harper know what's happened to me in the past.

Looking at my phone, I check the time to see I don't have that long before I have to leave to meet Addie at the library. She's doing remarkable and almost doesn't need my tutoring sessions any longer. Her math grade has improved so much and it's great to see her excited about her classes. I wasn't sure I'd ever see her excited about projects, papers, and things like that. Addie has surprised me, but more importantly, she's proving to herself she can do the work without as much help as she thought she needed. Literally, all I do is explain new concepts she learns in class in a slightly different way and she immediately picks up on it. Now if I could just get her to open up about other things, we'd be doing fantastic. Addie is as private as I am and I don't want to see her suffer the way I

have for so long. It's unnecessary when people are out there to help her learn to deal with what she's going through.

Before getting dressed, I decide to check my emails so I can make sure I'm not missing anything from the school or one of my professors. Instead, all I see is another email from Mrs. Powers. My heart races and I hesitate opening the new message up. However, I can't protect myself if I don't know what she has to say now.

Oakliegh,

This game has truly gone on more than long enough. It seems you don't really care about anyone in your life. You're leaving everyone out to get caught up in their own wrongdoings because you're a selfish bitch who can't return what you stole from us. I never really believed you'd be the selfish bitch you are. That we had broken you from all the horrible behavior you've displayed in the past. I guess we were wrong.

Now, this is me telling you we're done with your games. We have someone following you and watching your every move. We'll know every single person in your life and figure out how to go about systematically destroying you. It's not really that hard because no one really wants a pathetic slut like you in their lives. I'm surprised that little bitch Harper has made it as long as she has at your side. It's not like she'll be there for much longer though. I'll guarantee it. And make sure her parents know exactly who the hell they're letting their daughter associate with.

You won't ever know who the person is following you, we've made sure to pay for the very best. All you need to know is everything you deserve is going to come your way. Soon, you won't have a job, money, or that fancy ass education you crave. We'll destroy you until you have no choice but to come crawling back here looking for more handouts. Something we won't give you. We've already got plans in motion in how to deal with you. You'll never see it coming either. I hope you're happy because this is all happening thanks to your selfishness and for no other reason.

Mrs. Powers

This is absolute bullshit. I haven't taken anything from that house and have barely talked to a single soul about anything. Am I starting to open up? Yes, I am. Do I hope the Powers' get arrested and pay for the crimes they've committed? Yeah, I do. I hope they rot in prison and have to think about all the lives they've damaged because they're sick, twisted monsters. Most importantly, I hope to be there when they get the book thrown at them and realize this is a game they can't win. That their actions do have consequences and they aren't above the law because they believe they are. No one is above the law. Especially monsters who take advantage and hurt children the way they do.

Taking a deep breath and trying to center myself again, I force myself to get off the bed and get ready to head to the library. Every single time I get an email from Mrs. Powers, my entire attitude and demeanor changes. I become the shell of a person I was before starting to see Erica. It's like a few words from the vile woman sends me spiraling out of control and makes all the hard work I've been doing on myself fade away to nothing. I hate letting her have that kind of power and control over me. This is something I have to work on even harder because I refuse to let her win. To let them both win. I'm stronger than they give me credit for and they will not continue to drag me down any longer. I can't let them!

With my head held high, I get dressed in a pair of jeans and a sweater because it's still so damn cold out. Brushing my hair out, I toss it up in a messy bun, pull on a pair of boots after putting socks on, and grab what I need for the day. I'll have to leave my tutoring session with Addie and head for my counseling appointment with Erica. I just hope whoever is on babysitting duty today has nothing important to do. I've been telling them to leave me alone when I'm at the house because I really don't go out much unless I have something to do. There's no point for them to stand out in the cold when the guys won't allow them to come in the house. Not saying I blame them, but I'm not going to have anyone getting sick because I have to have a shadow.

Walking downstairs, the silence of the house is deafening. I'd say it's rare to have the house this quiet, but it's really not. Not with eight of us living here now. More noise should be filling the house. However, all I hear is the sound of my footsteps heading down the stairs. There's no music being played from Kendrik, no game on the TV in the living room, and Harper isn't talking about anything. Shaking my head to clear the thoughts, I head to the kitchen to grab a bottle of water and an apple to take with me. I'm not really hungry, but I know I need something in my stomach for the baby. This will hold me over until I'm done with Erica and can cook something back here. Or stop at Sal's to grab a slice of pizza.

Making sure the doors and windows are locked, I finally head out the door to find Zeke standing there waiting for me. Why wouldn't he wait inside? This is where he lives and is actually allowed inside when he's on guard duty.

"Zeke, I didn't think it would be one of you following me today. Why weren't you inside?" I ask him as I lock the door behind me and walk down the steps of the porch.

"Thought I heard somethin' out here. I've been checkin' it out and keepin' an eye on the perimeter. It's not too cold for me to be out here right now," he answers, a smile on his face. "Where are we headin' today?"

"I've got a tutoring session with Addie and then I have to head to counseling. I hate to say you'll be gone for a few hours with this. Not sure if you had anything else going on today or not," I inform him as we begin walking toward the library.

"Not a thing. Harper's got class and then practice. The guys are at class and then have somethin' to do with Zander and Kendrik. I've already had my classes for the day. Now, I'm with you for the rest of it. Anythin' else you have to do while we're out?"

"Nope. I might stop at Sal's to grab a slice or something, but that's it. Honestly, I think I'd just rather make some tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich."

“I’ll help. That sounds really good,” Zeke says, walking at my side instead of behind me like most others.

Zeke, Kayson, and Brody are the only ones who actually walk at my side instead of behind me. The man following me today walks more at my side than the other two though. It’s as if they feel they can’t walk beside me and still look out for any immediate dangers or threats coming my way. I don’t believe it’s true, but they do. Still, out of the corner of my eye, I watch Zeke keep his eyes constantly moving around to make sure he doesn’t miss anything.

We get to the library without any incident. I don’t even feel eyes on me at this point in time. It’s something that happens more and more as the days go on. Plus, I’ve seen the guy from Sal’s more often than I ever have in my life. I don’t know who he is or what he wants, but I’m not about to give him anything or play his game. Especially if he’s the one who’s following me around as Mrs. Powers told me.

Zeke leaves me in the room Addie and I always use. She’s already sitting at the table with her books laid out in front of her. I frown in response thinking I’m late to our session. I’m never late.

“Hey Addie. Am I late?” I ask her as I sit down in front of her and take out my own book.

“Hey Oakliegh. Not at all. I got here a little early because class got out early today. I haven’t been here that long honestly. How are you today, Oakliegh?” she returns a smile on her face despite the exhaustion filling her eyes.

“I’m okay I guess. How are you doing? How are your classes going?”

“I’ve definitely been better. My classes are about the only good thing for me right now. My father is making horrendous demands of me. Demands I have no desire fulfilling. He gets so angry when I defy him, Oakliegh. But, I’m not the perfect daughter he wants. The girl who will help him rise in life by marrying someone I hate. The guy he wants me to marry is almost twice my age and he is so abusive. I’ve been forced to spend time with him and he’s not a good man,

Oakliegh. The demands my father places on me are nothing compared to what this man does,” Addie answers, her eyes turning dark at the thoughts going through her head.

“You’re over eighteen, Addie. You don’t have to do anything your father demands of you. Does anyone else know what you’ve told me?”

“No. My mom knows, but she just goes along with whatever my father says and does. In public, they’re the perfect couple. He’s loving and attentive to her. the perfect father to his children. The reality of our home life is much different. Those, um, bruises you saw on my arms were from him. I refused to attend a function the man would be at. It was a business party or something like that. In his eyes, I embarrassed him in the worst possible way. My refusal to do anything he says always ends in a battle with him. I don’t know what I’m going to do, Oakliegh. He controls everything,” Addie says, breaking down in sobs as I stand and rush to her side.

“I’ll help you in any way I can, Addie. You’re a friend and I don’t want to see you hurting. We’ll figure something out. If you’re not comfortable talking to me, you can talk to this woman. Her name is Erica and she’s amazing. She’s the one helping me get over my past.”

“Oh, that’s not something I can do. My parents would never pay for me to see a counselor. They don’t believe in that kind of thing. My father would fear what I’d say to her. The only thing he truly cares about is his reputation. He’s spent his entire life cultivating the relationships he’s formed and won’t let anything tarnish him. Or take away all of the hard work he’s put into everything he’s gained over the years,” Addie admits, her voice a whisper compared to anything I’ve ever heard from her before.

“We’ll figure it out, Addie. I’m here whenever you need me. It doesn’t matter what time it is or what I’m doing. I won’t ever block you out or make you feel as if I’m not here for you. I know what that feels like more than you know. Especially these days. Now, let’s get some of this work done so we can get out of here and on with our day.

Addie and I work quietly. She asks questions when she gets stuck, but that's about all the talking we have between us. I work on some reading for my classes while Addie works through an entire chapter of math. That's how good she's gotten at it with my help. During our sessions in the library, she's able to work through an entire chapter with very little help. I'm so proud of her.

After making sure we're set up for the rest of the week, we make our way outside. Zeke follows us until Addie heads to her destination and I head toward the gate to leave campus. He begins walking at my side once again as we leave the gate and campus behind. It's honestly not long before I see a glimpse of the man who's been all around before. I don't want to pull his attention to Zeke who will tell the guys, so I quickly turn my head in the opposite direction and pretend I've seen nothing.

"How have you been, Oakliegh?" Erica asks once we get in her office and the door's closed behind us.

"I've been better," I answer as I take my seat and make sure I have my bottle of water next to me.

"What do you mean? Are you still getting emails from Mrs. Powers?" she questions, giving me all of her attention.

"I am getting emails from her still. Actually, I just got one today. I'm apparently being followed around now and her plan is to destroy me and take everything from me. That's not what has me not doing good though," I answer her, taking a deep breath before continuing on. "I thought things would be different with the guys. They're so busy and are rarely home. I'm usually asleep before they get home and it's a miracle if I see them once a week or so. They weren't this busy when they were playing football. It's probably just me being a needy bitch, but I miss them. Miss the way they make me feel.

"And, I've learned I'm pregnant. They don't even know about the baby because we're never together in the same place. I get they're taking classes and working on top of their classes, but this is crazy. I've been told it's not going to be like

this forever, but I really doubt that. Soon, they might not have classes, but then they'll be working in place of their fathers. I'll still be in college. We really won't see one another when we're not living in the same house. At this point, they can't hardly make the appointments we have for the wedding things. I do most of them myself despite their promises to meet me there. I just feel as if I'm in this alone and it's not what I want when we have a wedding coming up."

"I'm sorry to hear this, Oakliegh. From what I've seen of the guys when they're here with you, I know they completely adore you. They want nothing more than to make you happy and prove how much they love you. Those three men want to love and support you in any way you need. Right now, you're going through a rough patch and it's normal in relationships to have them. I'm sure you're feeling needy as you say because of your past. And the continued emails from your old foster mother. She's definitely not going to help how you feel. Add in the pregnancy and you're going to be feeling a ton more than you normally would," Erica says, ever the sensible person. "Have you talked to the guys about how you're feeling? Tried to wait up for them to have a conversation?"

"I've tried multiple times. I'm just so exhausted all the time that I can't make it. I don't even know what time they get home most of the time. Plus, there's a man who's been following me around. They don't even know because I haven't seen them. I don't know what to do and I feel so alone in the world. I haven't felt this alone since I was with that family," I answer her, my voice wavering with emotion.

"If you need to, let them know you need them to come to another session with you. They always make time to come here and talk about whatever you need to. It's not ideal, but at least you'd see them and be able to have any conversation you want with them," Erica suggests.

"I won't do that just yet. If I can't see them soon, I will though. It might be the only way to tell them about the baby and everything else going on," I tell her, thinking about everything I want to say to the guys.

The rest of the session, Erica and I talk about the man I've been seeing all over the place. I have no clue who he is or what he's doing here. Other than to follow me around. If he's the man the Powers' hired to follow me around, he's sure not making himself hidden the way I suspected a person would do. This guy is in my face and all over the place. Multiple people have seen him around me too. Including Zeke. I don't know what to believe about this man and the story he's giving me about being new in town and just wanting to make friends and get to know people.

We end my session with me feeling worse than when I walked through the door. It seems as if so many secrets are being kept between the four of us and that's not anything I want to have happen. Though, if I'm being honest, I'm keeping the biggest secret of all. Carrying a baby is something the guys should know so they are aware it's not just myself I have to worry about and protect any longer. There's a little boy or girl we need to factor into the equation and they aren't currently a part of things to know this.

Chapter Fifteen



Oakliegh

IT'S ANOTHER IMPORTANT day in the whole wedding preparation process. Today is the day of my final fitting with my wedding dress. Harper is busy as hell and I haven't even seen her to ask her to go with me to make sure everything is good with the dress. It's not like I have a mom I can ask to go with me and share in this day with me. There's Addie, but she's got classes all day long and I won't ask her to skip them for me. Not after the little bit she shared about her home life. Her dad would most assuredly find out about her missing class and demand to know why. If I can prevent her from getting hurt in any way again, I will. So, I'll go alone and get through this day on my own. It's not like I'm not used to my own company.

After showering and getting ready to head out, I make sure I have all of my stuff for the day. I'm thinking I might make a full day out of it because I don't have to work and there's no reason for me to remain alone on campus. I'd just be feeling completely alone and cry as I do most days. I'm tired of crying and feeling completely alone in the world. So, if I can remain off campus and doing something I want to do, maybe I won't have a shitty day today. The house is too empty and it's nothing but a stark reminder of how busy everyone in my life is.

Once I'm sure I have everything I'll need to stay off campus for a few hours, I go through making sure everything is locked up tight before leaving the house. At first, I don't see anyone waiting for me to leave. As I walk down the steps, the feeling in my stomach intensifies to the point I feel as if I'm

going to be sick. Suddenly one of the guys from the frat house appears from around the side of the house. I jump and scream before placing a hand over my chest as my heart races.

“I’m sorry, Oakliegh. I didn’t realize you’d be out here so soon. I was walking the perimeter of the house to make sure no one was hiding anywhere,” the guy says, his voice gentle as if he’s talking to a scared animal instead of me.

“It’s okay. I just didn’t see anyone at first and then you just suddenly appeared. I guess I’m a little jumpy these days,” I state with a slight chuckle to let him know I’m okay.

“Again, I’m sorry, Oakliegh. Are you ready to go?”

“I’m ready. We have to go to the dress shop for my wedding dress. I’m not sure how long I’ll be there. I apologize for you getting stuck on this detail today.”

“It’s okay. I’ll make sure no one gets close to you and you can do what you need to,” he responds as we take off.

Like most of the other guys, this kid doesn’t walk beside me. He follows behind and watches over me and anything coming at me from the front or sides. It kind of unnerves me to have someone following me when I’ve been feeling eyes on me lately. However, nothing I ever say will get any of the guys on guard duty to walk next to me. So, I’ve gotten as used to it as I can even though it doesn’t help with the feeling of being watched.

As we leave campus, I literally run into a hard body. Looking up, the breath stalls in my lungs and my heart begins pounding faster than ever before.

“I’m so sorry. I wasn’t watching where I was going,” I apologize to the man who’s been essentially stalking me.

“It’s okay, Oakliegh. It’s an honor to have you run into me. Where are you off to in such a hurry?” the guy asks, his voice smooth as he smirks down at me.

“Just off to run some errands. I’ll see you around, I’m sure,” I mutter as I move to step around him and leave.

Every single time I see this guy or know he's anywhere close by, the feeling in my gut gets worse and worse. It's telling me this man isn't a good person and I need to stay as far from him as possible. However, right now, my only goal is to make sure my guard for the day and this man in front of me don't get into a fight of any kind.

"Don't be like that, Oakliegh. I'm sure you can send your guy away and I can take you anywhere you need to go. I do have a car," he taunts me, his voice lowering with insinuation.

"No, thank you. I've really got to get going."

"Oakliegh, are you okay?" the guy following me asks, his voice coming out hard as fuck as he walks up to stand at my back in preparation of defending me.

"I'm okay. We're leaving right now," I state, not looking at the guy in front of me again.

I really need to learn the names of the guys guarding over me. It's not right to call them 'guy' or never mention any of them by name. I'm honestly no better than Misty, TJ, and all of their so-called friends. They always looked down on everyone and only took what they could gain from everyone around them. I don't ever want to feel the same as they are. However, by not knowing the names of these men, that's exactly how I feel these days.

"Can I ask you something?" I question once we get past the creeper and are back to heading down the sidewalk.

"You can ask me anything, Oakliegh?" the guy answers, his voice soft instead of hard like it was seconds ago.

"What's your name? You follow me around and guard me, but I don't even know your name. I don't know anyone's name if I'm being honest."

He begins laughing a little before answering. "My name is Adam. I don't mind if you don't know my name, Oakliegh. It's not your job to know our names. It's our job to protect you and help you with whatever you need."

“I’d prefer to know your names when you’re with me. You might have to tell me again, but I assure you, I’ll do my best to remember it,” I promise him, a small smile on my face as I turn to look at him.

With my head turned, I see the guy following behind us. He’s trying not to make it obvious that’s what he’s doing, but anyone can see he’s clearly following me to find out where I’m going. Before he can realize I’ve spotted him and realize what he’s doing, I veer off the sidewalk and head down a short alley which will bring us out at the back of the wedding dress shop. There’s an entrance there and we’ll reach it before this guy knows what store we went into.

“Adam, just follow my lead. I need you to come inside the shop with me,” I tell him as we almost reach the door to the dress shop.

“What’s going on, Oakliegh?” Adam questions, looking around to spot what I’ve seen.

“That guy is following us. I don’t want him to know what we’re doing or what store we’re in. So, for today, you’ll have to wait inside with me. Is that okay?”

“It’s more than okay. If that’s how you feel best protected, that’s what I’ll do. It’s not going to be fun for me, but that doesn’t matter. You’re all that matters and I’m not about to go up against your kings for not making you feel safe when you’re not in the house,” Adam assures me as we make our way inside the dress shop.

He takes a seat close to the front of the store while the saleswoman helps me get in my dress in one of the fitting rooms. As she does up the back of the dress, I look in the mirror. It’s a little tighter than what I’d normally wear, but I love the dress. It’s the first time I’ve looked in a mirror and felt even the slightest bit sexy. When the guys look at me certain ways, I always feel sexy because that’s how they make me feel. It’s honestly a heady feeling to know these three, sexy, powerful men look at me as if I’m the sexiest woman they’ve ever laid eyes on.

“You look stunning,” the saleswoman gushes as she finishes tying up the dress and stepping back away from me.

“Thank you. I’d like to see in the other mirror on the floor if that’s okay. And is the veil ready?” I question her, knowing I’ll be in trouble if I don’t have the veil as well.

“Of course it is. Let me grab it and I’ll put it on out on the floor. That’s not your groom on the sales floor is it?”

“No, it’s not. He’s with me today, but not my fiancé,” I assure her with a small smile.

Walking out of the fitting room, I make my way to the small platform that’s in front of the mirrors where I can see every angle of my dress and how it fits. As soon as I’m looking in the mirror, the small baby bump I’ve started to have is more pronounced. It’s barely noticeable, but I can see where it is. Where our child rests inside my body. Somehow, it makes the need to tell the guys I’m pregnant even more of an urgent matter. I don’t want them to find out any other way except for telling them myself.

The saleswoman returns with my veil in her hands. She helps me get it in place before stepping back. I can see Adam in the mirror and he’s not even looking at me. He’s staring out the windows of the shop to make sure no one’s waiting for us when we leave. I’m glad he’s not looking at me because no one needs to see the dress I’ll be getting married in. Honestly, I’m surprised the guys are allowed to follow me here considering how quiet they want to keep the wedding until it’s actually done. It’s not for me to say anything about though. Nothing is because the guys and their dad’s know what they’re doing and I have to just go with whatever they want when it comes to this type of thing.

After several minutes of looking at myself from every angle, and knowing I shouldn’t get too much larger before the wedding, I let the saleswoman know everything is perfect. She assures me the dress will be cleaned and ready for pickup in a few day’s time. With nothing more to do than get out of this dress and into my other clothes, I head back to the fitting room for help getting out of the dress so it can be taken care of. It

takes much longer to get out of the dress than it took to get into the damn thing. I can't help but laugh at the thought of the guys getting frustrated when it comes time to consummate my wedding to Zander.

Once I'm dressed in my regular clothing again and the dress has been removed to be cleaned and whatever else they do to it before it gets picked up, I head out to meet Adam at the front of the shop. I'm worried the guy from earlier is still around and will see us coming out of here. We might have to head out the back once again in order to ensure no one sees us heading out of here. If this man has been sent by the Powers', we don't want them to know anything about the upcoming wedding. I'm sure they'll do whatever they can in order to ruin our day and make sure the wedding doesn't happen. It's not something we're going to allow them to do. So, everything will be kept a secret.

"Is he still out there?" I question Adam as I make my way up to him.

"No. He took off about five minutes ago. If we get out of here quick, we should be okay. It's a good thing this stoop has two doors so no one will know which one we came out of," Adam states as he looks around while standing from the chair he's been sitting in. "If anyone asks, we'll pretend we came out of the coffee shop after sitting down to enjoy a hot cup of coffee or whatever you drink."

"I'll go with whatever you want to do, Adam. You know more about all of this than I do. If we need to pretend to have had some coffee or whatever, that's what we'll do."

We leave the shop and don't run into anyone. I don't see the guy standing around as Adam angles my body around so it does appear as if we've come out of the small café instead of the dress shop. It's kind of exhausting to have to do all of this cloak and dagger shit just to get to and from the house. Now, I'm not even in the mood to stay out of the house and off campus for longer than it takes to get back there. I can study after making dinner or something. As long as I'm not out in the open, I don't care where I am.

“Are we headin back to campus?” Adam asks as we make our way there.

“Yeah. After that guy following us, I don’t want to be out here longer than necessary,” I answer him as we move faster on the way home than we did getting here.

“I can’t blame you there. You don’t have to work today?”

“Not today. I do have a shift at Sal’s tomorrow. Will you be following me then?”

“No. I have classes tomorrow. I’m not sure who will be following you. I only pay attention to the days and times I’m with you. That way I don’t make any other plans or anything else when I’m supposed to be here with you,” Adam answers me, his voice almost a whisper as he doesn’t leave as much space between us.

Nodding my head, we make our way toward campus with dread filling me every step I take toward the house that feels empty and hollow with me being the only one there.

My stomach growls as I put my books up. I’ve spent the last two hours since being home studying for the upcoming week. All the material I needed to go over and be ready for class has already been read at least once before this so it didn’t take me very long. When you have time on your hands, it’s easy to get ahead of your work in case something happens. I don’t want to get sick and not be able to do my classwork, getting behind on what we’re doing in class. It’s almost impossible to get caught back up with so much work. I’m so paranoid about it, I’ve gotten all of my papers approved and written for the rest of the semester. They’re not turned in yet, but every paper is written and ready for me to go through one more time before I do hand it in for a grade.

Heading down to the kitchen, I stretch out my back and other muscles in my body while carefully moving down the steps. Everything seems to hurt and I’m honestly ready to take a hot shower and relax all of my muscles before climbing into

bed and reading a good book. It's been a long time since I was able to get lost in a world someone has created. Of seeing characters fall in love, fight for their love, and go through all the trials and rewards of being with the person their soul calls to. It used to be the one thing I could do to forget the hell I was living in. Now, I just want to escape feeling so damn lonely.

Entering the kitchen, I look through the refrigerator to find out what I can make for dinner. Despite being the only one home, I decide to make a full dinner for everyone in the house. They usually eat it once they walk through the door if I've made something. Pulling out everything I need to make tacos, nachos, and some fruit I can cut up for myself, I turn on some music on my phone and get to work cooking. As *Control* by Zoe Wees plays from my phone, I move around the kitchen without a thought in the world. If the guys were here, they'd be sitting at the island watching me work or lending a hand.

Hendrix would be standing behind me with his arms wrapped around my body as he told me all of the dirty things he wanted to do to me. Kendrik would be cutting up anything I needed so I didn't accidentally cut myself. Yeah, it might have happened once or twice while we were cooking together. Zander, he'd be doing all the heavy lifting and standing at the stove so I didn't accidentally get burned or anything. They all try to step in and make sure I don't do anything to hurt myself when I'm in the kitchen. It's a sweet gesture on all their parts. One I love doing with my guys and miss terribly right now.

It doesn't take me long to make the nachos and tacos for everyone's dinner. This isn't something I've made before so I'm hoping they all like it. Making myself a plate, I eat at the island before getting up to clean everything up. I make sure all the leftovers are put away with a note on it for anyone who looks in the refrigerator when they get home. It's what I usually do for everyone. We all take to leaving notes for one another around the house when we're going to be out and leave something for someone else.

Once the kitchen is put back together and cleaned up, I make my way upstairs with a few snacks and bottles of water. Setting everything up on my nightstands, I head for my

shower. It's not that I need another one today, I just want to get warm and relax all of my muscles after the day I've had. It's been long and scary with the guy following me and Adam earlier. Though, he promised me he wasn't going to leave until one of the guys got home. Harper isn't enough to be here alone with me.

As soon as I'm done in the shower and dressed in a comfortable pair of pajamas, I climb in bed and open my reading application on the tablet Kendrick got me. Looking through all the books I have downloaded, I finally choose one to read. It's a paranormal, rejected mates book I've been wanting to read. Opening it up, I cover up and get comfortable in bed reading while hopefully losing track of time and the fact that I'm here alone. I'm not sure when I started crying, but tears slide down my face as I read the story and slink down further in bed. My eyes become heavy the longer I lay here and read. Before I know it, sleep is claiming me and my tablet falls out of my hand to rest on the bed next to me.

Chapter Sixteen



Hendrix

ZEKE AND I are doing a walkthrough of the gambling house today. Zander and Brody have been overseeing the construction of the new gambling house we'll be opening up and Kendrik has been doing his thing on the computer with Kayson helping him out. They're digging up all the dirt they can find on Mr. and Mrs. Powers to ensure they get a lengthy prison sentence for the crimes they've committed against the children in their care over the years. It's what we all want. Death would be too damn easy for them. These assholes need to suffer and spend the rest of their days knowing they didn't win and will never be able to hurt another child again for the rest of their days. That Oakliegh will be living her life safe, loved, and free instead of in the hell they want her to suffer in. None of us have any doubts about her suffering if they get their hands on her. I have a strong feeling they'll sell her off to the highest bidder to get rid of her and make her suffer even more than what she's already been through at their hands.

With Zeke in the passenger seat, I pull into the gambling house parking lot and park where we're supposed to. Usually I'd walk over here, but Zeke needs to learn everything and I'm the one to teach him. I'll still be teaching him once we take over, but we want to get most of it done while we're still in school. We won't have the time to spend days on end with them going through everything they'll have to do and worry about when we're trying to make deals and do everything else our father's currently do. Plus spend time with Oakliegh. Something we haven't been doing a whole lot of recently.

I miss our girl more than I'll ever be able to say. We're lucky if we see her once a week for a few brief minutes in time. When we get home, she's usually in bed already asleep and none of us are willing to wake her up. I think the last one of us to spend any time with her was Kendrik. That wasn't all that long ago, but it's been more than enough to make her feel some type of way about things. Usually when she's sleeping and I slide in bed with her, she rolls over and cuddles up next to me. Lately, she rolls away from me and doesn't let me hardly hold her until she falls back under a deep sleep. It breaks my heart to know we're doing this to her. That we're ignoring our girl as we work, go to class, and train the guys on their upcoming duties. None of us have even had a conversation with her to make sure nothing else has been happening in her life we need to worry about.

I haven't even had the chance to talk to the guys in the frat about anything they've seen happening with her. It's something I definitely need to rectify as soon as possible. The less we know about anything going on with our girl, the more out of touch we are with the best way to protect her. If something happens to her, I'll never forgive myself. I know Zander and Kendrik won't either. We've all just kind of put our all into getting this training done and things so we can have more time to spend with Oakliegh sooner rather than later. I'm sure it doesn't feel that way to her though. If I had to guess, I'd say she more than likely feels abandoned and as if this is how things are always going to be.

"You good, Hendrix?" Zeke asks as we get out of my SUV and head for the gambling house.

"Yeah. Just thinkin' about all the shit I need to do and how we've been neglectin' Oakliegh. My baby girl has to be so fuckin' upset with us," I answer him honestly because he's spent more time with her lately than I have.

"She's been really quiet lately. Hardly leaves the house unless she's got class, tutorin', or has to go to work. She's had some appointments some of the guys have followed her to, but that's about all I know," Zeke informs me as he pulls the door open for me to enter.

“She’s sick? Somethin’ is wrong with Oakliegh?” I question Zeke, pulling my phone out to call my baby girl.

“I don’t think so. She said it was some annual checkup or somethin’ like that. I can’t remember what the guy said it was. The few times I’ve been with her, she’s barely said a word to me. Though, I know she’s really jumpy. I walked around the corner of the house the last time I was with her and she jumped a foot in the air because I scared her. I’m not sure what’s going on to make her respond that way, but something definitely is,” Zeke informs me as I file that information away for later and put my phone away.

Nodding my head, we walk through the first floor of the house and I say hello to a few customers who are here on a regular basis. Lance and Cameron are standing just inside the entrance of the gambling house. I’m sure Zeke has already met them, but tonight is a big night and I want to make sure the kid knows exactly what’s expected of him. Not when we’ve got new high rollers coming in for our huge game night. This isn’t anything we’ve ever hosted before and no one knows how it’s truly going to go. However, Zander and our dad want to bring in new faces with the new gambling house we’ll be opening up. Plus, I know Kendrik has some new ventures in the works he’s being very tight lipped about. I’m sure we can guess what they are though.

“Cameron, Lance, it’s good to see you both tonight. You both know Zeke, yeah?” I ask the men standing in front of me.

“Of course,” Lance answer, holding out his hand for us to shake. “It’s good to see you again, Zeke. Are you ready for tonight?”

“I am. I’ve been to one of the high roller nights, but I’m lookin’ forward to tonight. I hope to be of some help if anythin’ does happen. I’ve been workin’ with Judge and Kain as well as Hendrix with everythin’. If you need anythin’ just let me know,” Zeke answers, letting us know he’s ready and willing to do whatever is necessary when it comes to the family and his job with us.

“You’ll be starting your training with me very soon,” Cameron adds in, shaking Zeke’s hand. “You’ve done good so far, but some nights are pretty fucking rough. Tonight might be one of those nights because we’ll have new players on the field. Hendrix and you might have to sit in for a few hands. I’m not sure what’s going to happen in that room. None of us are. I know Brody and Kayson won’t be here tonight. Neither will Kendrik and Zander. Everything is up to the three of us.”

“We’re ready for it,” I assure Cameron, as the three of us leave Lance to do his work and we make our way to the third floor for the game.

As usual, we’ll have to get everything set up, make sure the waitresses have everything they need, and are dressed properly. We’ll have to make sure multiple decks of brand new cards are ready to go as well. We’re not about to let anyone say we somehow cheated the losers out of their money. So everything in here will be new and unopened when the games start. Walking around the room, I take in the large table and ensure we have enough seats for everyone. The last thing we want is to make someone feel as if they aren’t supposed to be here.

Zeke and I prepare the table for everyone and set out trays of poker chips along with two new decks of cards. Moving on to the bar, we make sure there’s more than enough glasses, ice, alcohol, and snacks in case anyone needs something to eat while they’re playing. Anything to make our guests happy and playing for as long as possible. The longer we keep them playing, the more money we make. Yes, the gambling house gets a large cut of all the money that will be spent in this room tonight. Not to mention all of the other games going on downstairs. This isn’t the only high rollers game we have going on tonight. Lance and Judge will be overseeing the other room on the second floor of the house.

It’s not something Lance usually handles since he’s down in the basement watching over the cameras to make sure nothing horrible is going on we can’t see because we’re not in a particular room or floor of the house. I’m not even sure who’s going to be on camera duty tonight. That’s not

something I have to worry about though. It's up to Lance to ensure someone is there with him being in a room. My dad will be on the first floor making sure nothing happens down there. This is all his plan and I'm sure my dad has made sure there are backup plans in place in case something does happen tonight.

"Are you in or out, Hendrix?" one of our new guests asks as Zeke and I play a few hands of cards with the group we're overseeing tonight.

"I'm all in," I say, cocky with the hand I've got.

I've been told by more than one person I have a stellar poker face and no one ever wins against me. Not when I'm playing for money and I don't really care about the others I'm playing with. Zander and Kendrik know the slight tells I have for really good or horrible hands during a game, but they're about the only ones who do. No one else will ever learn my secrets and that's how I like it. Zeke also has a really good poker face. Though he's got more than a few tells I've learned over the last hour we've been playing.

"All in?" another man asks, his voice incredulous as I look around the table and push all of my poker chips to the center of the table.

As we go around the table, most of the men I'm playing with fold and toss their cards down in front of them. Zeke looks from his cards to me a few times before he joins the men folding. I smirk at him. Before we sat down to play, Zeke was boasting about his skills as we stood and watched over the room. So, we joined the game to make it more interesting and the guys were all over us playing with them. We can do our job from the table as well as standing in the corner of the room. Not to mention, Cameron is still in here and we're depending on him to catch something we might miss at the table. Especially one of the men cheating. It's something I have a feeling is happening by one of our older guests in the gambling house. We've been unable to catch this

man up to this point, but I'm sure it's only a matter of time before we do catch him.

Three men decide to go all in as well. I'm not sure what hands they have, but I know at least two of them should have folded. These men are old and letting their pride rule their decisions. They don't want me to beat them or make them fold a hand against me. One of the men is the one we believe cheats during games. Looking at Cameron, I know he's keeping a close eye on the man in question.

When the time comes for me to lay my cards down, I press them to the table with a smirk on my face. I can already hear the grumbling and groans coming from the men around me. No one can beat my hand as I watch the rest of the men around me lay their cards down in front of them. Just as our suspected cheater goes to lay his cards down, Cameron steps up behind him and places a hand on his shoulder.

"You might want to rethink that move, sir," Cameron says, his voice low and lethal as the man startles at our guy being so close to him.

"What are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. I believe you're done for the night."

"No, I don't believe I am," he says, turning to face Cameron as several cards fall from the sleeve of his shirt.

"Like I said, you're done here tonight. In fact, I believe you're done here permanently," Cameron promises him as the men surrounding me voice their outrage.

Zeke stands from the table and helps Cameron remove the man from the table and room without any winnings he collected here tonight. There is no way we're letting him walk away with money he's essentially stolen from the men surrounding me here tonight.

"We're goin' to take a break until they come back in the room. I'm not goin' to have anyone else playin' games and I'm the only one at the table. I'm goin' to stop playin' now as well. I appreciate you lettin' us sittin' in tonight with you

gentlemen. Please do accept our apologies for what took place here tonight,” I tell everyone surrounding me as they all nod and I collect my winnings to place in my pocket.

With a nod of my head, the waitresses make their way around the table and hand out complimentary drinks to the men. Usually they'd have any drinks put on tabs they pay at the end of the night. That's not going to happen tonight though. Walking around the table, I collect the money of the cheat and pile it up to see what my dad wants to do with it. More than likely he's going to divide it up amongst the remaining men to ensure no hard feelings about what took place here tonight. However, it's his call and I'm not about to make it on my own.

Within minutes, my dad comes in the room with a smile on his face. It's fake as hell for all the men still here playing. He wants them to see him as a gentle host who will do everything in his power to make sure these men don't leave our gambling house with doubts in their mind about how we run things here.

“I'm sorry about what just took place here tonight. To make amends, your tab will be fully covered by us here at the gambling house tonight. We'll also split the money the cheat won from you all evenly among those of you who remain. I hope you realize this is not a common occurrence at one of our houses. We don't condone cheating and it will never happen again as long as we catch it,” my dad assures the men sitting around the table.

Heading to the bar, I count out the money and make sure the piles of them are even for the number of men sitting around the table still. Some have already left, losing their money early on in the night. Since they aren't here, they'll be compensated in other ways. My dad will contact them and make arrangements for them to be compensated for what took place tonight since we can't be sure the cheater didn't take money from them.

Zeke and Cameron return, Zeke collecting his winnings from sitting in on the games tonight. He stands with me at the bar and we watch the men sit back down around the

table. I already know our night is about to come to an end. These men are ready to head home with their wins and losses after hours spent playing poker here tonight. I'm ready to head home. It's late and I know my baby girl is already sleeping. Still, I want to shower the night off and slide into bed next to her. To hold her in my arms and make sure her ghosts don't haunt her tonight.

Oakliegh's nightmares have gotten better over time working with Erica. She still has them, but is able to pull herself out of them for the most part. I can't even tell you the last time our girl woke us up with her screams. It's only when she's truly stressed out that everything she's been working so hard on disappears and we have to help her through the pain filling her head. Those are the nights I'm barely able to sleep because I want to make sure I keep her as safe as possible. Things need to change in order to ensure Oakliegh is safe and we're at our best for her. That's not something we're doing right now. We're all so focused on everything else we have going on. It's not fair to our girl and I intend to make sure the guys realize what we've been doing.

"I'm ready to call tonight's game," my father says, looking around the room. "If you'll all settle up, we can make arrangements to have a game like this when the new house opens up. It shouldn't be long and we'd be honored if you'd all be among the first to grace the gambling house with your presence."

The men agree and begin to stand with their winnings in hand. I watch on as they all follow my dad from the room. Zeke and I make sure the waitresses begin cleaning up the room we've been in tonight. As soon as we know they'll do their job, we take our leave. Zeke and I make our way through the house and find multiple games still going on. The alcohol is flowing, laughter and grumbles are heard in the background as cards are dealt, chips tossed to the table in bets, and everything else you typically find in a gambling house.

Zeke and I don't stop or hesitate for any reason. We're both ready to head home. I make the short trip to the house and park in the garage. Our house is almost completely dark as

we leave the garage and make our way to the porch to head inside. My first stop is the kitchen. Opening the refrigerator, I find the food Oakliegh made tonight. She must have been in the mood for tacos. Though, I also find a platter of nachos to heat up as well. Making a plate of food, I heat it up and take it to my room to eat while I wait for the shower to heat up. It doesn't really need the time to do so, but I want to eat the food Oakliegh took time out to prepare for us. I know I won't be the only one either as I take a large bite of my taco. The flavor bursts on my tongue and I moan at the delicious food our girl never hesitates to make if we're home or not.

As soon as I finish eating and shower, I make my way toward Oakliegh's room. There's no sound coming from our floor and I'm not sure if Zander and Kendrik are home yet. It wouldn't surprise me if they were still out doing their work. They've been pulling late nights with me getting home first more often than not. Opening up Oakliegh's door, the light from the hallway spills in to add to the bathroom light she still leaves on. I carefully make my way to her large bed and pull the blankets back on my side. The light barely covers Oakliegh's face as I slide in next to her. My heart breaks as I take in her features. Our girl has cried herself to sleep. Again.

Oakliegh's face has red splotches and her eyes are swollen despite them being closed in sleep. I find her tablet on the bed as if she fell asleep while reading or something. Tonight, it doesn't even bring a smile to my face at her doing something I'd never think to do. Reading in bed is something that's completely Oakliegh. She loves to read and I know she hasn't been able to do so in a long time. Her mind has been occupied by other things like us being gone from the house and her life on a daily basis.

I reach out and pull Oakliegh into my arms. She doesn't fight me or turn away from me tonight. Instead, my baby girl rolls into me, putting her head on my shoulder as she usually does when we sleep together. Holding her in my arms, I cherish the feeling of her body against mine and half on top of me. Oakliegh throws her leg over one of mine and raises it slightly. She almost gets my cock as she slides her leg up mine. I don't move a muscle in fear of Oakliegh moving off

me. It's what she usually does and the last thing I want to happen in this moment. Still, I don't let sleep claim me so I can savor this moment between the two of us.

Chapter Seventeen



Oakliegh

NERVES IMMEDIATELY GET the better of me as soon as I wake up this morning. Today is a big day. An important day. It's the day I marry Zander and cement myself in his life along with Hendrix and Zander. We won't have a proper honeymoon just yet because of school and everything else going on. It's something I took a stand on and refuse to back down on. This isn't going to be in name only by any means. I just don't believe anything is going to happen even after we get married. I'm sure we'll have a reception for the family and everything else one would normally have at a wedding. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about us consummating the marriage because the guys will have so much to do still. While I know Hendrix is in my bed every single night. It's in the heat of the blankets and sheets, the smell he leaves behind, and the feeling of being wrapped up in his arms still fresh on my body.

Getting up, I make my way to the shower. It's the one thing I'm going to do here at the house on campus. Everything else will happen at Mr. Vanderwalt's home where our wedding ceremony and reception will take place. He's got a grand house with a large yard. We won't be having an outdoor ceremony today. It's too cold out and not something we want to happen. So, everyone has been working over the last several days to ensure the house is ready and decorated to Maureen's exact specifications. She is a stubborn lady who terrifies me when she's on about something not being right. I haven't seen that side of her too much, but it has been a few times that something was wrong with the wedding.

I take my time in the shower, making sure to wash my hair thoroughly before conditioning it. Leaving the conditioner in my hair, I take the time to shave everything that needs to be shaved. Washing my body, I finally begin rinsing all the conditioner out of my hair and the soap from myself. Grabbing a towel that's hanging up next to the shower, I wrap my hair up in it to dry. With another towel, I dry my body off and wrap it around my body to head back into my room. I don't stop moving until I'm standing in my closet. There's no point in dressing up today or anything since I'll be putting my dress on sooner rather than later. So, I grab a pair of sweats in one of the drawers with one of Hendrix's hoodies. I'm not able to wear a bra with my dress unfortunately. There's one built into it, but it doesn't give very much support.

Hopefully the guys will like the dress because I'm absolutely in love with it. I love the way it fits my body and it allows me to feel sexy without any of the guys being around. Or Harper there as my hype girl. For the first time in my life, I was completely alone while trying on a dress and felt sexier than I've ever felt in my life. Plus, it's kind of too late to worry about what the guys will think of the dress at this point in time. It's currently sitting at Mr. Vanderwalt's house. Maureen picked it up from the shop and made sure everything was taken care of so all I have to do is put it on and have someone tie the back up for me.

Once I'm dressed, I turn around and make my bed. I don't typically have time to make it in the morning. My preference is to stay in bed for as long as possible most days because I don't get a ton of sleep. Today, there's no way I can go back to sleep, read, or do much of anything else. As I said, my nerves are getting the better of me and I need to remain busy or I'm afraid I'll have a panic attack. Making my bed, I don't stop until it's perfect. Something I would never really consider doing otherwise. After making my bed, I look around the room to see what else I can do to clean things up. I'm really good at making sure nothing is left out and shit. Something I learned really quick living with the Powers'. So, I don't just leave anything out and laying around any longer.

With nothing more to do, I head downstairs to see about making breakfast for those still at the house. Though, when I get in the kitchen, Kendrik is already there and breakfast is almost done.

“Morning, sweet angel,” he greet me, leaning away from the stove to give me a kiss. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Kendrik. We’ve all spent too much time apart,” I say as Harper comes in the room behind me.

“You’re not supposed to see the bride before the wedding,” she harps on us as Kendrik pulls me into his arms.

“Well, considering I’m not the actual one marrying our girl, I believe I’m okay to see her before we all head over to Mr. Vanderwalt’s house. Besides, I haven’t seen her in forever. None of us have,” he returns, giving Harper a pointed look.

“I know. What are you doing here this morning? I thought you were all leaving at the same time,” she asks, knowing more about the situation than I do at this point.

“I volunteered to stay behind. Can’t leave my sweet angel alone and today is too important for her to be left in the hands of the frat boys,” Kendrik answers, his voice a whisper against my lips as he kisses me once more.

The three of us eat breakfast together. Harper and Kendrik try to keep my mind busy so I’m not thinking about what’s to take place in a matter of hours. It doesn’t really work, but I’m thankful at their attempts to keep me busy. And I won’t ever tell them it’s not working either. That would hurt them more than keeping it to myself.

“Are you ready for today?” Kendrik asks as we work together to clean up the kitchen.

“As ready as I can be. I’m so damn nervous and don’t want to be in front of people I don’t know. People who at the end of the day have more say over my life than I do at this point,” I answer honestly.

“They don’t have any say in your life, Oakliegh. Whatever you choose to do is something we’ll support. Unless

it has to do with you putting yourself in harm's way or doing something rash. Anything else and we'll support you to the best of our ability, sweet angel," Kendrik promises me, his voice washing over me as a sense of peace fills my body. Not something I ever thought I'd feel after the years spent with the Powers'. "Now, let's head to the house so you can get ready."

The three of us work together to make sure the house is locked up while we're away. It's something everyone has gotten into the habit of doing with me inside the doors. The only other thing we do is make sure whoever is watching over me on guard duty makes a few passes around the house in order to ensure no one is lingering outside to cause any harm to me or anyone else here. Especially with Harper in residence as well. There is more to protect than just myself. Especially when Mrs. Powers has already threatened to hurt Harper because of her friendship with me. It's something no one can tell me she won't follow through on either. Mr. and Mrs. Powers are completely unhinged and there's no telling how far they'll take this shit.

Kendrik leads us out to the garage to get in his *Land Rover*. He opens the doors on the passenger side for us and when I go to climb in the backseat, Kendrik gently grabs my arm and steers me to the front seat. Harper laughs while climbing in the back. I'm not used to riding shotgun because I leave it for one of the guys. Their legs are longer and they need more room than I do. My legs are shorter and I don't need the room as they do. Harper is taller than me, but she can still easily fit in the back with room to move around.

I look out the window as Kendrik maneuvers us out of the garage and away from the house. The passing scenery seems to be moving in slow motion as we head toward the mansion I'll be married in. I've only been here a few times in the past and today it seems as if the drive takes forever instead of the few minutes it normally does. I'm not about to say I feel as if I'm heading to my doom, but in a way that's what it feels like. Though I believe it's more because of the fact the men will be tied to me. Zander through marriage. Hendrix and Kendrik just by committing to me. They're the ones who will

lose out in this deal. I feel as if I bring nothing but trouble and pain to them.

By the time we pull up, I'm completely lost in my head. The thought of these men being tied to me for the rest of our lives is almost enough to make me want to throw up.

"Sweet angel, what's going on in that head of yours?" Kendrick asks as the back door shuts letting me know Harper is no longer with us.

"The thought of you three being tied to me for the rest of our lives means I'm going to bring you nothing but trouble. That you'll all end up resenting me for everything going on in our lives. If it weren't for me, you wouldn't have to have the guys from the frat on babysitting duty around the clock, pulling these hidden stunts so no one knows what's going on in our lives, and none of the shit with Misty and TJ would have affected you the way it did. I've brought pain and trouble to your door and it's not something I can continue doing. This was a mistake. One I can't go through," I tell him honestly, knowing it's what's needed in this moment as the panic fills me and begins to take over.

"Not fucking happening, sweet angel. You. Are. Ours. We're not going to let you back out of this because you feel you've brought nothing but shit to our lives. It's not fucking true, Oakliegh. For the first time, Zander is at peace. You might not see it, but Hendrix and I do. Hendrix is also changing his ways. He's a better man because you're a part of our life. Personally, you make me see the music I write and play on a daily basis. Is it fucking hard as hell right now? Yeah, it is. At the end of the day, none of us would choose to be away from you if we could help it. I know it doesn't seem that way at the moment because we're not around, but it's the truth.

"Oakliegh, you can't let your panic and nerves overrule your heart and mind. This is nothing more than fear speaking right now. Do you want me to call Erica? Is she someone you need to talk to right now?"

“No, I don’t believe she can help me with this. It’s something I have to work through on my own. The fear of something happening to one of you is almost crippling though. If Mr. or Mrs. Powers were to do something to hurt one of you, I’d never forgive myself.”

Tears roll down my face at the thoughts running through my head. This is something I’ve been pushing to the back of my mind and not allowing myself to think about for the last week or so. Kendrik gets out of the *Land Rover* and makes his way to my side. He opens my door and helps me out before holding me close to his body. For a few minutes he simply lets me cry and get all this shit out. Something not many would want to deal with. When I finally am able to calm myself down, I take a deep breath and lift my head from Kendrik’s chest.

“Thank you, Kendrik. I just got in my head for a little bit. Something I haven’t been allowing myself to do up to this point. I’m ready to get today moving forward. Besides, if we don’t get in there I’m sure Zander and Hendrix will be out here and he can’t see me before we get ready.”

“You’re right about that,” Kendrik laughs as he leads me into the house and up to the second floor.

Harper is already in the room I’ll be getting ready in. Along with a few other women who are all standing around waiting for me to get to work.

“I’ll see you soon, sweet angel. No more getting lost in your head,” Kendrik says, pressing a soft kiss against my lips before turning and leaving me behind.

“You look absolutely beautiful, Oakliegh. I’ve never seen a more stunning bride in my life,” Harper says, tears filling her eyes as she helps me with the finishing touches of my dress.

There really wasn’t much for her to do since Maureen brought in a team to do my hair, make-up, and nails. Harper

got ready right alongside me with the women working on her as well.

“Will the guys like it?” I ask, my nerves starting to raise once again.

“They’ll love it, bitch. You know you look smoking hot in that dress. With your hair up and curly there’s nothing they aren’t going to love. Are you ready for this, Oakliegh? You don’t feel pressured to marry Zander or one of the others?” Harper asks, turning serious. “I know I haven’t been there to help you through this, but it’s not because I didn’t want to be. Things are crazy for all of us now. It will calm down at some point, but I should have been there more.”

“No, you’re busy and I get it. I really do,” I tell her, the familiar loneliness creeping in once again.

“How are you feeling?” she asks looking at me because I really didn’t answer her question at all.

“I’m not really sick much anymore. That’s a plus of this pregnancy. I’ll admit I’m lonely as hell at the house all alone every single day. But, I know all of you have things going on and they don’t include me. That’s okay. I’ve been trying to figure out ways to not feel so alone, but I know the guys don’t want me out more than I have to be. Not with everything going on these days. So, I sit at home and am lonely as hell while you’re all out living your lives. I don’t blame any of you at all. Please don’t think that, Harper,” I tell her honestly.

“The guys haven’t been around?” she asks, confusion filling her.

“Not really. I mean, I know Hendrix is in bed with me every night. I’m not even sure what time he gets home though. I’m always asleep when he shows up. Other than this morning, I can’t tell you the last time I saw Kendrick and I won’t see Zander until I walk down the aisle to him. I honestly see your guys more than I see my own. It’s just not how I thought things were going to go,” I say, a lone tear sliding down my face as I hastily wipe it away.

“We’re gonna ruin our make-up, bitch. None of that on the day you get married,” Harper says, shedding a few tears of her own as she stands up to hug me for a few minutes.

When my best friend, my ride or die, pulls back, she fixes my hair and make-up. The women really did an amazing job making my make-up appear as if I’m not wearing any. Then my nails are done to match my dress. Once I’m put back together, there’s a knock on the door. Harper rushes to open it up, making sure it’s not one of the guys considering I’m now in my dress and ready to get married. Mr. Vanderwalt steps in the room and stares at me for a few minutes.

“You are beautiful, Oakliegh,” Mr. Vanderwalt says, taking a few steps more in the room. “I have something for you from the guys. They send their love to you as well.”

“Thank you, Mr. Vanderwalt,” I say, my voice catching as I take the box he’s holding out to me.

Opening up the lid, I find a pair of diamond earrings. They’re small and not over the top. I don’t like jewelry that’s over the top and will shine brighter than anything else. Harper looks over my shoulder to see what I’ve been given.

“They are beautiful, Oakliegh. I’ll help you put them in before we have to head down,” my best friend says, her voice soft as Mr. Vanderwalt remains in the room with us.

“Oakliegh, there’s one thing Maureen wasn’t sure of. You don’t have anyone to walk you down the aisle to Zander. If you don’t mind, it would be my honor to escort you to Zander,” he says, his voice choked up with emotion.

“Are you sure?” I ask him, not sure he’d want to walk me down the aisle.

“I’m more than sure. This is a good thing, Oakliegh. You are becoming my daughter today. You’re marrying a man you love and continuing to cement your relationship with your other two men. Things are rough right now, but they will get better. You won’t always be away from the guys the way you are currently,” he says, stepping up as Harper finishes putting the earrings in my ears.

“Thank you, Mr. Vanderwalt. I’d love for you to walk me down the aisle.”

The three of us make our way to the first floor of the Vanderwalt mansion. There, we’re met with the photographer who insists on taking multiple pictures of me. Not just me though. She wants some with Mr. Vanderwalt and Harper as well. We go through each pose she wants before Maureen lets us know it’s time to get things under way. Taking a deep breath, I steady my nerves and place my hand on Mr. Vanderwalt’s arm. Ready or not, it’s time for me to marry Zander.

Chapter Eighteen



Zander

STANDING IN FRONT of the people here for my wedding to Oakliegh, I'm nervous for one of the few times in my life. Kendrik told us about his conversation with her as they got here to get ready this morning and I can honestly say my heart broke with the realization our girl believes we're going to regret being with her because of everything going on in our lives right now. It's not her fault the Powers' are assholes who can't stand someone living their life and not being held down where they believe they belong. I will *never* resent being with my LeeLee or having her in my life. It doesn't matter what's going on in our lives because the three of us will do everything in our power to make her happy. Oakliegh will feel loved, sexy, and get everything she deserves to have moving through the rest of our lives. She deserves the fucking world and we're going to give it to her.

The music begins playing as Harper walks down the short aisle in our dad's house. Maureen truly changed the appearance of the place to make this a special day for our girl. We're getting married in the front room of the house. It's always been a formal living room where my dad would host any men who came over here for a function we held at the house. Today, it's been completely transformed to resemble a giant snow globe. White and navy streamers fill the room, the chairs for the few people in attendance are covered with white or navy covers and ribbon of the opposite color wrapped around them. The aisle Oakliegh will walk down has a white runner down the middle with hearts in navy placed sporadically all over it. Flowers cover every surface and hang down over the mantel of the fireplace I'm currently standing in

front of. My hope is Oakliegh loves this because I've never seen this room look as good as it does right now.

When Harper takes her spot at the end of the aisle across from us, I don't look at her. My attention is on the doorway my soon-to-be wife will be walking through. I've been dying to see the dress she chose. We all have. Part of me has always imagined what Oakliegh will look like on her wedding day. I never let myself believe I'd be the lucky fucker standing at the end of the aisle to marry her. However, seeing her all made up for her special day is something I've longed to witness. Even if I had to do it from afar. Today, I get to see her up close and personal knowing in a few short minutes Oakliegh will have my last name, our ring on her finger, and soon we'll be putting our baby in her belly. She will be ours in every way possible and I'm ready to move forward with our lives as one.

The music changes and the members of the family who are in attendance today stand and turn to watch Oakliegh walk down the aisle. My heart races and the breath catches when she comes into view. Oakliegh's dress is strapless with navy accents on the very bottom. A ribbon ties around her waist and the dress trails out behind her. Covering her face is a thin lace veil blocking out her features from sight. I'm not sure I like not being able to see my LeeLee's face, but I know it's all part of the wedding process. Her hand is placed on our dad's arm as he escorts her down the aisle. A smile covers his face as he takes his time with our girl. I don't pull my eyes from Oakliegh as they get closer. When they stop just in front of us, I take in the lace covering the top of her dress making it look even more delicate than just the plain satin I'm sure the dress is made of. She looks sexy as fuck and I haven't even seen her face yet. The veil is just thick enough to block her out while allowing her to still see where she's walking.

My father turns to face Oakliegh when they come to a stop. After she removes her arm from his, he gently lifts the veil from her face. With the way he's standing, I still can't see her. Impatience fills me as Hendrix places a hand on my shoulder to calm me down. I've been pacing like a caged lion all morning long wanting to get to this portion of the day. The

need to make Oakliegh my wife has been consuming me and I want it done with. To ensure her safety and prove to her we're all in when it comes to her. Especially after her telling Kendrick she couldn't go through with the wedding. My heart has broken for our girl for the last fucking time. Starting today we're going to do everything in our power to make sure she knows she's ours and we mean it when we say it's for a lifetime.

Dad finally steps out of the way after placing a kiss against Oakliegh's cheek. I barely stop myself from growling at the man who took me in and gave me a loving childhood after losing my parents. Again, Hendrix places a hand on my shoulder to stop me from moving and calm down. My eyes widen when they finally land on Oakliegh. Her hair is pinned up at the back of her head with loose curls hanging down her back and framing her face in an elegant, sexy manner. Barely any make-up covers her skin as her mossy green eyes stare up at me. They shimmer with tears filling them she's trying not to let spill over. My own eyes fill with tears as I stare at my girl. I'm not the only one either. Kendrick and Hendrix are more than likely staring at her as well. There's no way they're not with how beautiful she is.

Hendrix nudges me once again. "Z, take our girl's hand and lead her the few steps to begin the ceremony."

Snapping out of my stupor, I reach out and grab Oakliegh's soft, small hand in mine. Her hand is trembling as I pull her close to my body and we turn to take the two necessary steps to stand in front of the reverend who will marry us today. I can't take my eyes off her as we're told to face one another. Hendrix and Kendrick move closer to us as I feel their body heat at my back.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to witness the marriage of Zander Vanderwalt and Oakliegh Burns," the reverend begins as his words fade away. The only thing I can pay attention to is my girl standing in front of me with her hands in mine. "Zander and Oakliegh have chosen to say their own vows today. Whenever you're ready, Zander."

Clearing my throat, I keep my attention focus on my girl. “Oakliegh, my LeeLee, you mean the absolute world to me. There hasn’t been a single day since I met you so long ago that hasn’t been consumed by thoughts of you. Even when we weren’t together, you were on my mind from the second my eyes opened until I closed them once again. My dreams were filled with you as well. Here and now, I’m getting all of my wishes filled and granted. You are becoming my wife and we’ll continue building our life together the way we choose to. Oakliegh, I vow to love, honor, and cherish you for the rest of our days. To ensure you’re safety comes before everything else. You’re the center of our entire world and we’re going to spend the rest of our days loving you and proving to you just how special and wonderful you are. No one will ever feel as loved as you do. I love you, LeeLee. You’re the only woman I’ll ever love and I’ll prove it to you on a daily basis.”

A lone tear slides down Oakliegh’s cheek as I swipe it away with my thumb.

“Zander, you have always been the man I loved. Even when I was upset and angry with you, I still loved you. You make me feel things no one else ever has or will. I vow here today to love, honor, and cherish you for the rest of our days. I’ll support you, have your back, and make sure you know how loved you are on the hard days you aren’t sure how to get through. I’ll do everything in my power to continue making strides in overcoming my past to allow you guys in to my life so we can share everything. There’s nothing I won’t do for you. I love you, Zander and always have. You saved a little girl when she needed someone the most and now you’re giving me everything I’ve ever wanted.

“Hendrix and Harper, the rings please,” the reverend says, his voice barely registering in my mind as I stare at Oakliegh.

My brother and Oakliegh’s best friend pass us the rings and we turn back to face one another again. Holding Oakliegh’s delicate hand in mine, I slide the ring we got her on her finger. Repeating the words the reverend tells me to say, I

hold out my hand for Oakliegh to do the same. She repeats the words, her voice almost a whisper as we stare at one another.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m pleased to pronounce Zander and Oakliegh husband and wife. You may now kiss your bride,” the reverend says as I pull Oakliegh’s body up against my own.

Pressing my lips against Oakliegh’s she doesn’t hesitate to open her mouth to deepen the kiss. She wraps her arms around my neck and presses her body fully into mine. I can’t stop the groan from escaping into her mouth as we continue to kiss, the world around us fading into nothing more than the two of us. It’s not until Hendrix taps me on the shoulder that I pull back from my wife. The woman who owns my heart and soul.

“I love you, Oakliegh,” I whisper against her lips pressing one more chaste kiss against her full lips before pulling back.

“I love you too, Zander.”

The reception has been going for a few hours now. Oakliegh is sitting between Hendrix and Kendrik at our table as I make the rounds and say a few words to the men in attendance today. It’s not what I want to be doing when my wife is sitting mere feet from me. I continuously look at her as she laughs and talks with my brother and best friend. Where they sit is where I want to be. Unfortunately, duty calls and it’s time for me to do this one part before I can take my bride back home so we can have the wedding night we all want.

We’ve eaten the sit down dinner Maureen had catered and drank our fill. Oakliegh has had nothing but water, but that’s not strange for her. My wife has never been a drinker and it’s just one of the many things I like about her. She doesn’t let anyone pressure her into doing something she’s not comfortable doing. Drinking being one of those. There’s only three more things we have to do before we can get the fuck out of here. I’ve got to make the rounds with everyone in the family, our first dance, and eating cake. I’m not really up for

cake, but it's part of the reception and I'm not going to take a single part of today away from Oakliegh. This is the only wedding she'll ever have and we want her to experience it for as long as she wants to.

"Zander, how is the new gambling house coming?" Mr. Watson asks me, excitement filling his eyes at somewhere new to play cards.

"It's coming along great. We're right on schedule to open and have the grand opening as scheduled. I hope you'll be in attendance," I answer him, knowing I'd rather be doing anything but talking about the new gambling house.

"Son, I hate to break up this conversation, but it's time for you to have your first dance with Oakliegh so you guys can leave," my dad interrupts our conversation as happiness fills me. Finally, I can be done with this bullshit.

After shaking Mr. Watson's hand, I head over to my wife and lean over her body.

"Wife, it's time for our first dance as husband and wife. Are you ready?" I ask her as Hendrix moves back to allow her to get out of her seat.

As we step on the makeshift dance floor, one of Oakliegh's favorite songs plays over the speakers. *Beauty in the Struggle* by Bryan Martin is the song Kendrik chose for our wedding song. He asked our girl to let him choose what we'd dance with her to and she accepted. I hold my wife close as we slowly spin around in a circle with everyone's eyes on us. Hendrix and Kendrik will also dance with our girl because this day belongs to them as much as it does the two of us. The four of us are one family and moving forward there's no difference between the three of us when it comes to Oakliegh. She might have my last name and we're the ones legally married. However, she's just as equally committed to Hendrix and Kendrik as she is me. They're just as committed to her as I am. It's going to be the four of us against the world moving forward.

After a minute, Hendrix taps me on the shoulder to take his turn dancing with our girl. I step back to stand with

Kendrik as we watch our girl and Hendrix dance together in the middle of the floor with everyone watching them. It's not long before Kendrik is stepping forward to take his turn with her. My brother joins me on the sidelines as we watch them spin in a slow circle. Oakliegh has her face buried in Kendrik's neck while he holds her close to his body. His eyes are closed as he savors this moment between the two of them. Kendrik won't stop dancing with Oakliegh until he absolutely has to. No one is going to get between the two of them in this moment.

We're finally out of my dad's house and on our way home. I'm not sure where everyone else is staying tonight, but it won't be in the house we all share on campus. The guys and Harper are giving us the night to be with Oakliegh without them being around us. Something to make my wife feel more comfortable on her wedding night.

"I'm going to get out of this dress and into something more comfortable. I'll be right back," Oakliegh tells us as soon as we step foot in her room at home.

"Take your time, baby girl. We're not goin' anywhere," my brother informs her, his voice low and filled with desire for our girl. "Do you need any help?"

"If you could just undo the laces at the back before I head in the bathroom that's all the help I'll need," she answers, a blush covering her face and neck.

My brother lets me step up to her back. I take my time untying the ribbon before removing it from each loop going down her back. As I move my hand, my fingers brush against her soft skin causing goosebumps to break out along her back. Anticipation fills me at the thought of claiming Oakliegh as my wife in our bed shortly. I want to be buried so fucking deep inside her neither one of us knows where she ends and I begin. Hendrix and Kendrik watch on as Oakliegh holds up the front of her dress. Seeing her back completely bare, knowing she spent the entire day not wearing a bra makes my cock even harder. I wonder if she's wearing panties under this beautiful

dress. Honestly, it's the only reason I'm not just ripping it off of her right now. This is her dress and I'm going to make sure we preserve it for any children we'll have in the future to wear on their wedding day.

"I'll be right back," Oakliegh promises us, walking into the bathroom and closing the door behind her.

It doesn't take long before Hendrix is stripping out of his clothing as Kendrik and I follow suit.

"Guys, we have a problem," Hendrix says, keeping his eyes locked on the bathroom door where our girl is. "We need to cut back on work and spend more time with Oakliegh. When I climbed into bed with her, she had cried herself to sleep. We've all been so busy trainin' the guys and workin' on top of classes that we've been ignorin' our girl. Somethin' we're not supposed to be doin'. She is to be our top priority and we've failed her. Hell, I don't even know what the fuck is goin' on in her life. Do you?"

"No, I don't. I've been so fucking busy with the gambling house it hasn't been on my mind. We'll do better, Hendrix. She's ours in every way now and we're not going to allow her to feel as if we're taking her for granted. Starting right now we'll be here when she needs us and no more overworking to ensure the family moves ahead. Let's see if the guys have been taking in what we've been teaching them," I answer, guilt filling me at the thought of Oakliegh crying herself to sleep because we've been too busy to be here with her.

"I haven't even been able to practice with her for our upcoming performance. I've been so busy trying to dig up all the information we can get our hands on that I've not been thinking of anything other than that. I know we all want the Powers' to suffer, but we need to change this shit and make sure she's not feeling alone as I'm sure she has been," Kendrik adds in just before the bathroom door opens up.

Oakliegh steps out wearing nothing more than a flimsy, see through, white nighty. It barely covers her tits and I can see her pussy already wet from where I stand a few feet in

front of her. She's taken down her hair, letting the curls cascade down her back. It's brighter than ever as it stands out against her pale skin and the white lace material covering her body.

"Fuckin' beautiful," Hendrix breathes out, reaching down to run his hand up and down his cock as Oakliegh steps up closer to us.

I step up to Oakliegh and lift her in my arms. She automatically wraps her legs around my hips as I carry her to the bed. Laying her down gently on the bed, I lean over her to press my lips against hers. Oakliegh wraps her arms around my neck and holds me close to her body. Sliding my tongue along her lips, my wife opens her mouth for me to deepen the kiss. It's not long before Hendrix and Kendrik join us on the bed. They're on either side of her body. The three of us work together to make Oakliegh squirm under my body and moan into my mouth.

"Please," Oakliegh begs as I rip my mouth from hers and suck in a deep lungful of air.

"What do you want, sweet angel?" Kendrik asks, leaning down over our girl to suck a nipple into his mouth.

"I want all of you. Please, I need to feel you inside me," she moans out, continuing to squirm and arch her back off the bed.

Moving down her body, Hendrix rips the flimsy material from her body and tosses it to the side so we can get to all of her skin. I kiss and nip my way down her body until my breath is fanning out over her pussy. A tremor runs through my wife as the guys hold her down and play with her nipples and kiss along her neck. I don't hesitate to slide my tongue through the folds of her pussy until I suck her clit into my mouth. Sliding two fingers into her pussy, she clamps down around me, trying to keep me inside. I begin sliding them in and out of her channel while sucking her clit and biting down just enough to give her a bite of pain. Not enough to hurt her, but enough to send more pleasure through her.

It doesn't take long for us to work Oakliegh into her first orgasm. She moans out our names as her release covers my face. I don't stop licking her until her body trembles slow down and I know she's not riding the high of her orgasm any longer.

"How are we doin' this tonight, baby girl?" Hendrix asks her as we all wait to hear where she wants us.

"I want Zander in my pussy, Kendrik in my ass, and you in my mouth," she answers, her voice trembling with pent-up emotion.

I lay down on the bed and wait for Oakliegh to slide her tight pussy down over my cock. She slides up and down a few times before Kendrik places a hand on her and pushes her to lay flat against my chest. Her tits pressing up against my hard body with her nipples poking into my skin. Hendrix tosses Kendrik a condom and bottle of lube. I feel the exact moment he begins working a finger in and out of her tight back hole. He only pulls back once he's ready to work his cock over with the lube. None of us want to hurt our girl and we're going to do everything we can to make this as pleasurable as possible for her.

"Ready, sweet angel?" Kendrik asks, his voice almost a moan as he lines himself up with Oakliegh's ass.

"Ready, Kendrik."

I run my hands up and down Oakliegh's back while kissing her deeply so she doesn't tense up for Kendrik. Hendrix runs his fingers through Oakliegh's long hair as he waits for Kendrik to work his way in Oakliegh's ass. Once we have our rhythm going, he'll slide in her mouth so she can suck his cock. We don't want to overwhelm her. Or make her feel as if we're pushing her past what she can handle with the three of us.

"I'm in," Kendrik grits out, his voice strained from holding back fucking her.

My best friend pulls out of her ass after a minute and I remain in place. As he pushes back in, I slide from her pussy.

Hendrix moves to the side of my body and Oakliegh angles her head so she can take him in her mouth. I can't pay attention to what the two of them are doing as I focus on the feeling of her pussy wrapped around me. It's tight and wet, hot and feels fucking amazing wrapped around me. It's been so long since I've been with my wife that I know already I'm not going to last long tonight.

The three of us move in tandem, Hendrix reeling himself in so he doesn't fuck Oakliegh's mouth like I know he wants to. He definitely likes a little bit of pain with his pleasure and doesn't hold back no matter who he's with. Our girl is the only one he's ever held back with. She's not ready for all he wants to do to her body. However, he knows they need to have that talk before he even takes a step in that direction with her.

Oakliegh moans around Hendrix's cock as Kendrik and I move faster in and out of her body. Sliding my hand between our bodies, I rub circles around her clit. This first time between us might be faster than we'd like, but we've got all night long to make sure Oakliegh is satisfied.

"Your mouth feels like fuckin' heaven," Hendrix grits out between clenched teeth. "I'm not gonna last long."

"I'm not either. I'm right fucking there," Kendrik admits, moving slightly faster as he slides in and out of her ass.

Oakliegh rips her mouth from Hendrix's cock as a scream erupts from her. Her pussy clenches down on my cock as I continue to slide in and out of her. Hendrix slides his hand up and down his cock before Oakliegh takes him back in her mouth, sliding up and down as much of his length as she can. Kendrik is the next one to find his release as he slams into Oakliegh's ass one more time and becomes still. I follow him over the edge just before Hendrix shoots his release down her throat. We all roar out her name as our girl moans around Hendrix's cock.

None of us move a muscle as we all come down from the high we just rode. Oakliegh slumps down against my

chest, her breathing sawing in and out of her as Hendrix drops to the bed at my side. Kendrik slowly pulls out of her ass and flops down on the bed next to us. Wrapping my arms around her body, I hold my wife to me while running my fingers through her tangled hair.

“Guys, um, I’ve got something to tell you,” Oakliegh says when we can breathe again.

“What’s goin’ on, baby girl? Are you okay?” Hendrix asks, leaning up to face her better.

“Well, I’m pregnant. I’ve known for a little bit now, but I haven’t seen anyone to tell you about the baby. You have to know this wasn’t planned and I understand if this changes things for any of you,” she tells us as excitement fills me.

“Are you fuckin’ kiddin’ me? None of us are gonna be pissed or upset about you carryin’ our baby,” Hendrix says as I stare up at our girl. “I love you so fuckin’ much. Words will never express what you mean to me, Oakliegh.”

“I agree with him. we’re not going to be mad at all. We all knew this could happen when we were together. How are you feeling about it?” I ask her, not sure if she needs more time to process this news or not.

“I’m okay with it. I’ve had time to think about it and realize that I’m happy about the baby. It’s not ideal timing, but we’ll figure it out. Kendrik? Are you okay?”

“I’m good, sweet angel. Happiest fucking day of my life. I love you too, sweet angel. You make every fucking day worth getting up and fighting through. Thank you for the best gift you could ever give us.”

We surround our girl and make sure she knows we love her. The rest of the night is spent loving her, making sure she’s satisfied, looking at the small changes already taking place with her body, and making sure she’s got enough to eat and drink. The day I married the best woman I know is the day I learn I’m going to be a dad. No one can take away the happiness and love flowing through me right now.

Chapter Nineteen



Oakliegh

JUDGE IS COMING over today to train me. We really can't do much of anything other than workout at this point in time because of the pregnancy. However, I don't feel comfortable going to the gym with that guy who's suddenly appeared in town. If he's following me everywhere else, who's to say he won't follow me there too. I'm not about to let him stop me from doing everything I can to remain healthy and learn some moves to protect myself when things get out of control. I need to know how to make sure I protect myself and my unborn child at all costs. I'm hoping Judge can at least show me some moves in order to ensure I know what to do if Mrs. Powers or someone else gets close to me. I'll do everything in my power to make sure I'm safe at any given time.

I'm sure the guys know he's coming over today, but they aren't home. They've been spending more time with me over the last week since the wedding. I love being with them no matter what we do. Even just hanging out at the house so no one gets close to us is better than being here alone with nothing to occupy my time. The guys realizing I was lonely has done more for me in the last few days than anything else could have. We've spent most of our time talking about the baby and what we'll have to do in order to get ready for his or her arrival. The guys have also let me know they don't want to know who the biological father is. As far as they're concerned the baby is ours and he or she will have three dads. It's a plan I'm completely on board with because it means none of them will treat our kids any different than others we may have in the future.

They've all demanded to go to the doctor's appointments with me for the rest of the pregnancy. It's something I'll definitely give them because they have the right to be there with me. This isn't just my child and I'm not about to deny their request to be there every step of the way. Kendrick has already started looking up everything he needs to know about pregnancy and what I can and can't do throughout the rest of the time I carry our baby. Hendrix has made sure to have plenty of fruits and vegetables in the house for me along with protein. Zander is up my ass when he's home. He wants to make sure I'm resting and not overdoing anything. If I need something, he helps me get it or just does it for me. While I appreciate the attentiveness the guys are giving me and the baby I'm carrying, it's not necessary for them to put me in a bubble. I can still do things I've been doing before they knew I was pregnant.

I have to work at Sal's today so Judge is coming over early in order to get a full workout in. I'm not ready to work because I have a feeling already that the strange man will be at the pizza place and won't leave until we close the doors again. He's been in for several of my shifts and always stays until the very last second. As usual, the guy asks me personal questions and tries to get my number when I have told him I'm not giving it to him. Thankfully, Zeke has only been there once since it's happened. I don't need him getting in trouble for beating the shit out of the guy or tell my guys because it's becoming routine to see this man. No matter where I am, he seems to have the ability to show up. Even if he doesn't talk to me, he makes sure I know he's around.

After getting ready for my workout, I head downstairs to the kitchen so I can grab something for breakfast. That's one thing the guys are insistent I do is eat multiple times a day. They want to make sure I'm eating enough and getting as much rest as I possibly can. If they had their way, I wouldn't be working or doing much more than going to class and returning home. That's just not how life works though. It's one of the things I've fought for against my guys and they're trying to respect my wishes to continue working as long as it's safe for the baby.

I grab out the eggs and some fresh fruit. While cooking my eggs, I put a piece of toast in to cook. It doesn't take me long to have my breakfast ready to eat as I sit down at the island and wait for Judge to get here. I'm honestly glad I'm not struggling with morning sickness any longer. That's the worst thing ever. I talked to the guys about it because they wanted to know everything I've been through so far. I've told them everything about the pregnancy. The only thing I've kept from them are the website of hate toward me and the weird guy following me around. It's a can of worms I'm not ready to open just yet. One where I know my movement will become even more restricted once the guys know about what's going on. So, for now, I've kept it to myself and will tell them as soon as I know more information about things.

As I clean up my mess from breakfast there's a knock on the door. I don't hesitate to go there and open it to reveal Judge standing there waiting for me.

"Hey Judge. I just finished breakfast. Should we go out back?" I ask him, stepping aside so he can enter the house.

"Oakliegh. Out back sounds good. There's plenty of room to move around and workout," he responds, his voice all business. "Your doctor has approved you workin' out?"

"She has. As long as I don't overdo things and keep it a light workout, I'm good to go. She just wants me to listen to my body and stop when I have to. I also have to remain hydrated and let her know if anything happens that's not normal," I tell him as we make our way through the house and out the back doors in the kitchen.

"To start with, I want to see how you warm up. If you need any corrections or anythin', I'll help. Let me know immediately if you feel any pain or anythin', Oakliegh. I'm not playin' games here. I'll help you learn the basics to defend yourself, but not at the risk of you or the baby. Do the guys know yet?"

"They do. I told them the night of our wedding. I'm just not sure how they're going to feel about me working out. They haven't been to the doctor with me yet. I'm sure I don't

have to tell you they're a little crazy with their demands on what I do and don't do," I say, laughing a little at the end because I do find it kind of funny.

"They love you, Oakliegh. It's really no surprise they want to make sure you're safe and nothin' happens to the baby you carry," Judge says as if I don't know and understand this.

"I know they do. But, they can't stop me from everything I have to do just because they aren't sure it's safe for me. I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't already talk to the doctor about it. I don't want to worry them, but some things I need to do on my own. What if I'm out at work or one of my appointments and they aren't with me? I'll need to know how to defend myself safely so nothing happens to our son or daughter. Can you blame me for wanting to learn this?"

"No, I can't. What I can do is make sure your moves are safe and you know what the hell you're doin'. That's the most important part of this entire thing. It's why I want to train you. After you have the baby and get cleared to resume normal activity, you're training will really pick up. For now, we're just goin' to go through some simple workouts and make sure you stay limber while you're pregnant. I've read up on some stretches and things you can do so we don't go overboard with anythin'," Judge informs me, his voice still all business.

"Thank you, Judge. I'm afraid Kain hates me because I went off on his boss. Hendrix wouldn't have a problem training me, but he won't now."

"I know he won't. It's goin' to take a lot to convince him to let you do this now. We'll handle it as it comes up. Now, let's see how you warm up so I know what I'm workin' with," Judge says as I begin to work through my warm up routine.

It's really the most basic of moves to loosen up my muscles and make sure I don't pull anything when we do get to the workout. Judge corrects my form a few times but stands watching me the rest of the time. I'm glad he's here so I don't do something wrong inadvertently and hurt the baby I carry. Once I'm done stretching, Judge has me move through a series

of exercises I can do at home and don't have to worry about weights or anything else. I'm not ready to work with weights while I'm pregnant.

As I'm working out with Judge next to me, I feel eyes on me. These ones make me feel safe and loved. Not like when I'm away from the house and feel creeped out. I really need to talk to the guys about being followed and the email from Mrs. Powers telling me someone's following me around.

"What the fuck is goin' on here, baby girl?" Hendrix barks out when I'm done with a set of something Judge has me working on.

"I'm working out with Judge. He's going to be training me here at the house so I don't have to go to the gym or anything right now," I answer him, accepting the towel Judge holds out to wipe the sweat from my face.

"You're fucking pregnant, LeeLee. You don't need to be working out or anything else right now," Zander adds in his two cents.

"Yeah, I do. Judge is going to show me some basic moves to protect myself if something happens when no one's near me. He's not going to make contact with me at all. I've already talked to the doctor and she's approved me working out with him. I'm listening to my body and I honestly feel great right now. Almost energized instead of run down and exhausted," I tell all three men. "I love that you worry about me and the baby, but I wouldn't be doing this if it weren't safe. Not to mention Judge has done his research and knows what I can and can't do."

"Guys, I've been reading and she's not wrong. As long as she's not in pain and takes it easy, Oakliegh and the baby will be fine," Kendrik says, backing me up against his best friends.

"She's fuckin' covered in sweat and her face is bright red. There's no way she's takin' it easy. And what the fuck do you mean you've been doin' your research, Judge? What are you researchin'?"

“I’ve read up on what exercises she can safely do. I won’t let her push herself or do anythin’ to hurt the baby. If you’re more comfortable, we’ll take everythin’ easier until you talk to her doctor herself. Oakliegh wants to do this and I believe she can do it safely until further along in her pregnancy. At the very least, she’ll learn how to defend herself against those psycho ex foster parents after her. I know you’re doin’ everythin’ in your power to make sure nothin’ touches her, but it’s not realistic. None of you can be with her at all times. The guys from the frat can’t be with her at all times. Not to mention, things happen and there’s no way we can guarantee her safety unless you literally lock her up in this house. Even then it’s not a guarantee no one will get close to her,” Judge says, his face turning a light shade of red as he admits to reading up on a pregnant woman and what she can or can’t do.

“One of us will be here when you’re training her,” Zander demands. “I want to make sure one of us can rush her to the hospital if something happens. Can you deal with that?”

“I never said none of you could be here when we train. It’s only going to get more intense after Oakliegh has the baby. So, I know you’ll want to be here for that. I’m not about to get gutted because I touch her in a way none of you three like. So, one of you will be helpin’ when it comes time for her to truly work on her self-defense moves. I don’t care who’s here as long as you take this shit seriously and put the fuckin’ work in,” Judge says before turning his attention back to me. “Go through your cool down and make sure your muscles don’t get too tight. Immediately after finishing up, I want you to take a *warm* shower. Not hot because it’s not good for the baby. If your muscles tighten up, have the guys massage the areas botherin’ you.”

“She’s gettin’ a fuckin’ massage no matter what. And how is warm water gonna help her. Won’t she need the hot water?” Hendrix questions.

“No. you don’t want to raise her body temperature a lot. So, she needs a warm shower. Oakliegh, I’ll be here again in two days. That’s the next day you have the time for me to

meet with you. Guys, keep an eye on her and make sure we didn't push too hard today."

Without another word, Judge takes off and leaves us alone. Hendrix watches me through my cool down, taking up Judge's position in correcting anything I need to have fixed. The second I'm done, he leads me up to my bathroom and adjusts the water so it's warm and not too hot. I go through a full shower since I have to work in a few hours. There's just enough time to take a short nap before I'm on my feet the rest of the night.

"You okay, baby girl?" Hendrix asks as I step in the shower while he takes up leaning against the counter across from me.

"I'm okay. I promise, Hendrix, I'm not going to do anything to hurt the baby. We'll be okay."

"I know you won't. It was just a shock to know you were trainin' with Judge. I wasn't aware you were goin' to be workin' with him."

"Shouldn't I work with him? I mean, you guys are all so busy and I'd rather workout here than at the gym right now. There's more I have to tell you guys, but not one at a time. Today I can't do it because I have to work in a few hours. There's just enough time for a nap before I have to get ready to head out."

"If it's somethin' important, you should tell me and I'll make sure the guys know."

"It can wait. I'm sure we'll find time in the next few days to sit down and talk about things," I promise him, making sure I wash my body from head to toe.

The second I'm done, Hendrix ushers me to bed. He covers me up and slides in next to me, pulling my naked body against his as I close my eyes and rest against the big guy. I wasn't lying when I said I felt pretty good after the workout. Now that I'm not constantly moving, I am pretty tired. Sleep doesn't take long to claim me as my eyes slide closed and I press my body further into Hendrix's.

Chapter Twenty



Oakliegh

THE PAST FEW days have been brutal. While I'm not overworking anything with Judge, my body definitely feels as if I'm putting it through hell. Hendrix and Zander are pissed because of how sore I am and don't want me working, training, and doing everything else I do on a daily basis. There's really no choice in the matter though. I'm not about to quit either one of my jobs, bail on Addie, or stop going to classes. What I'm going to do is make sure my doctor is still okay with me training and working out so I don't do anything harmful. I've already called her and I'm just waiting to hear back from her. If she doesn't want me to workout anymore with Judge, I won't be. He already knows I've called her. Dr. Gonzalez is pretty prompt in returning phone calls, but I know she's busy as hell. So, I'm patiently waiting to hear back.

I'm still lying in bed when Harper comes bursting in my room. She doesn't knock or stop coming at me until she's bouncing at my side on the bed.

"What are you doing in here?" I grumble, wanting to go back to sleep and not bounce around in bed.

"We're going out today. Just the two of us. Well, and your babysitter of the day. I think it's Brody today. Get the hell up and let's get the fuck outta here," my best friend says, excitement filling her voice.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm tired and want to sleep. Why are you so bubbly first thing this morning?"

"Because I've got a free day and nothing is going to stop us from getting out of the house. We're going shopping

and you can look at all the baby shit you want to. I know you want to see all that cute, small shit you're gonna be elbows deep in soon," she tries to taunt me into a shopping trip with her.

"I'm not going to the damn mall with you again. I hate that place. There's too many people and everyone bumping into one another," I deadpan, trying to pull up the blankets despite Harper plopping down on the blankets to hold them hostage from me.

"We won't go to the mall. There are a ton of cute shops we haven't been to yet. They all surround the dress shop you got your wedding dress at. We can shop and then get something to eat. Now, get the hell outta this bed and take a shower. Hendrix left you breakfast and it will be too cold to eat if you don't get your ass downstairs soon," Harper demands, finally getting off the bed, but pulling down the blankets with her.

Groaning, I get out of bed and make my way to the bathroom. I'm wearing one of Hendrix's tee-shirts and a pair of panties but nothing else. Honestly, they don't let me wear much to bed if we all get in at the same time. When I'm in bed before they're home, I wear whatever I want. They don't complain if I'm covered from head to toe while they're not in bed with me. The difference between them being here and not is they put me in a shirt they've worn that day so I can smell like them through the night. Or they just like seeing me in their clothing. It's a toss-up between the two honestly. And I'm not going to fight with them about it.

Taking a quick shower, I dress in a long maxi dress and pair it with a pair of boots. It's still cold out, but my jeans aren't comfortable to wear anymore. And I don't go out of the house in leggings unless I have no choice in the matter. So, for today, I'll brave the cold weather with a dress. Hopefully Harper doesn't keep me outside for too long. With my hair thrown up in a messy bun, I grab a sweater to wear over my dress and my coat before making sure I have my phone and wallet with me. As soon as I'm ready to head out, I make my way downstairs and find Harper pulling a plate of food from

the oven. It smells amazing and I can't wait to eat as my stomach grumbles in response.

Brody has been following us all over Grand Ridge for hours now. We go in stores and do more browsing than actual shopping. I kind of feel bad for the guy as he watches us from a distance without getting too close. The only time he's gotten close to us all day long is when Harper dragged me into a lingerie store. He had to give his girl input on what to get. Not that Harper really needs any input. She knows what her guys like and has made sure to get everything they want to see her in without them giving her any input in the matter.

I can't help but laugh at the two of them as we leave the shop with Brody carrying Harper's bags. He doesn't complain or make a single noise as she hands one after another off to him. My laughter only dies down when I find the last person I want to see following us once again. I can feel my heart starting to race in my chest as he crosses the road to remain behind us when we enter a baby shop. My eyes continue shooting to the door of the store to see if he's willing to come inside. I can't relax despite the man not stepping foot inside the store.

"Come on, bitch. Let's look at this baby shit. It won't be long before one of your guys have your ass knocked up. This is all the shit you need to have in mind when you start preparing a nursery," Harper says, making sure not to let Brody know I'm actually pregnant right now. "What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost or something."

"There's a guy. He's been following me around anytime I'm off campus. While I'm on campus, it always feels as if someone's watching me. I don't ever see anyone, but it doesn't mean they're not there. The ex foster mother said I'd be getting tailed by someone too. I'm not sure if this is the same person she's talking about or not though. I can't turn around or go out anywhere without this guy showing up, Harper. The guys don't even know yet because I haven't seen all of them at the same time," I tell her as Brody listens to my panic filled voice.

“That him right out there?” Brody questions me, his voice filled with rage.

“It is. Please, don’t do a damn thing right now, Brody. I’ll talk to the guys about it and find out what they want to do about this situation. Just let’s get through the rest of the day and get back home. I’m getting hungry,” I plead with Brody as he continues staring at the man outside.

“How long has this fucker been following you, Oakliegh?” Brody returns, not saying he won’t go outside and beat this guy’s ass.

“A little while. He came in to Sal’s one night and started asking some really personal questions about me. I wouldn’t answer him. He didn’t leave until we were getting ready to lock the door. Zeke kept an eye on him the entire time to make sure he didn’t get too close to me or follow me when I went to the bathroom. I’ve seen him several other times since then. And, he comes in to Sal’s whenever I’m working. I don’t know if he’s there when I’m not working though. I haven’t asked anyone.

“The guy says he’s new to town and just wants to make friends or something like that. I’m not exactly sure what his game plan is. Whenever he’s in Sal’s I’m his sole focus. It doesn’t matter who else is working or how many people I have in my section. He’s waited before to get a table so I’m his waitress. At first I thought he was harmless, but my gut is telling me something else completely now. I’ve been waiting to tell the guys. It’s part of the reason I haven’t been leaving campus unless it’s absolutely necessary,” I tell my best friend and Brody with tears welling up in my eyes.

“I don’t like this shit, Oakliegh. The guys need to know about this fucker. Now,” Brody says, pulling his phone from his pocket.

“Let them know then. I don’t want to make them stop whatever they’re doing. You’ve all been so busy and I didn’t want to bother anyone with this,” I tell him, starting to walk through the store looking at baby stuff.

Harper and I walk up and down the aisles looking at everything on display. There are so many cute as hell things we gush over. Even the cribs. Some in here with things carved into the wood. My heart melts at absolutely everything my eyes land on. Though, Harper saves the best stuff for last. The blankets and clothing. I've never really seen clothes so tiny to fit a baby. They're so fucking adorable and I want to buy them all. It doesn't even matter if I'm not having the gender I buy things for.

“Oakliegh, look at this!” Harper gushes, holding up a blanket covered in cartoon characters.

The blanket has every prince and princess I've ever read about on the blanket. It's honestly something a boy or girl can use. Grabbing it from my best friend, I gasp at how soft the material of this blanket is. My heart immediately swells and I know I'm walking out of here today with this. It should be the theme of our nursery. I mean it's only fitting considering I'm with the Kings of Grand Ridge.

“How did I know you'd buy it?” Harper laughs as we continue making our way through the store, staring and touching everything along the way.

It doesn't take me long to pick out everything I want for our baby's nursery. The crib, changing table, a rocking chair, and everything else we could ever need. Probably more than what we'd need for our little one. However, the only thing stopping me from buying the entire place out is I haven't discussed this with the guys. Maybe they have family heirlooms they want to have for our baby. I'm not about to turn anything down if it's something they really want our little one to have in his or her room.

I don't buy anything other than the blanket. For now. After having it bagged up and stuffing it in Harper's large purse, we make our way back to Brody. He's not happy based on the look covering his face right now.

“Are we done here? Heading home now?” he questions us as we stop in front of him.

“I’m really hungry. Can we stop at Sal’s to grab something?” I ask, not sure if the guys will let me stop anywhere on the way home.

“A quick stop. I’ve already talked to one of the saleswomen here. There’s a back entrance we can leave out of. The guy is still fucking standing out there. Hendrix wants you home within the next half hour. That’s when he’ll be home. He’s not happy you’ve been withholding this information from everyone, Oakliegh. You might be in trouble with him,” Brody informs us as we all head to the back of the store.

I have no clue where we are once we’re outside. Brody leads us down a small alley behind all the buildings. I didn’t even know this existed despite living on the streets for six months. I guess I was never brave enough to explore much of anything when I was on my own. It was always a matter of staying alone and hiding when anyone got too close to me. There are no words for the amount of times I was cornered by some guy wanting something I wasn’t willing to give him. So, I got really good at becoming invisible and staying hidden in the shadows. Now, it seems, I’m back to doing the same thing to avoid an asshole stalking me for some reason.

The three of us remain quiet as we make our way behind all the store fronts and come out a short distance from Sal’s. It doesn’t take us long to get in the small restaurant to find it absolutely packed. Jasmine is running around like crazy with one of the new girls Sal hired recently. She has no clue what she’s doing as Jasmine spots me and gives me a shaky smile.

“Are you here to stay or get something to go?” she asks, rushing over to us.

“We’re leaving,” Brody speaks up, anger still filling him.

We make our way to the counter and order our food to take back. I make sure to grab enough for my guys, Kayson, and Zeke too. I’m not about to let them go hungry because we ate while we were out. And after today, I feel too damn

exhausted to cook something tonight for dinner. If we put this in the refrigerator, we can save it for them later on.

The three of us sit down at the counter when people leave their seats. Sal offers me up a smile as he slaves away in the kitchen. He never stops moving as he cooks up one meal after another while making pizzas in between them. Still, none of us talk as we each look around the dining room. Part of me wants to get up and work the tables to help Jasmine out. We work really well together and I hate seeing her so damn busy and there's nothing I can do to help her. I soon become frozen to my seat as the door once again opens to reveal my stalker walk through the door. This was not supposed to happen. How the hell does he know where we are right now?

I look at Brody who's already on his phone. There's no doubt he's letting Hendrix or one of the other guys know the man showed up where I am. Again. This is getting ridiculous and needs to end. Instead of avoiding me as usual, the guy walks straight up to us and stops behind me. I don't bother turning around to face him as I keep my attention on Sal where he's busy with making food.

"Oakliegh, it's good to see you again. You're not working today?" the guy says as Brody turns to face him.

"She's not interested," Brody says, his voice more lethal than I've ever heard from him before.

"I wasn't talking to you. Oakliegh? Are you okay?" he presses on, stepping up close enough for me to feel his body heat at my back.

"And I don't give a fuck. She won't even look at you. Do you not understand when you're not wanted? Leave Oakliegh alone or suffer the consequences when her man gets here. He's not going to let you anywhere near his girl. Especially when you seem to be following her around town. What's up with that?" Brody says, standing up and getting in the guy's face so he has no choice but to back away from me.

"Oakliegh's man isn't gonna do shit to me. And I believe you're wrong in her having only one. As far as I can tell, she has three of them. Or are you hoping to get your cock

wet by her too? I mean why else would you be here with her and her so-called man isn't?"

"I'm here because I'm her fucking friend and because of twatwaffles like you she needs someone with her because you can't get a fucking clue and leave her alone. My girl also won't have a damn problem kicking your ass either," Brody assures the asshole as Harper stands up to further protect me from anything happening to me.

"We got a problem here?" Sal asks, his booming voice making me jump just a little since I wasn't expecting him to leave the kitchen for any reason with how busy they are.

"No problem, Sal. This asshole was just leaving."

"I believe your right," Sal returns, looking over my head.

No one moves from around me until I hear the door open and close once again. Sal places multiple bags in front of me on the counter before leaning down to look me in the eye.

"No charge, Oakliegh. Get back to campus and don't leave again. I don't like that ass. He's always in here when you are. I'll see you tomorrow for your shift. He won't be allowed in here at all. Brody, you make sure the guys know I won't let him back in my place. Not after all the shit," Sal says, getting us out of here as I thank him for the food.

We make our way back to campus still in silence. By the time we enter the house, everyone's there. The three of us lay all the food out and everyone makes a plate. No one says anything about the guy following me around or me keeping it a secret. I'm sure the guys are gonna want to talk to Brody about today before they say anything to me. For now, I'm content to eat with everyone in the house so I can head up to bed and relax. Harper follows my lead as we take our food up to my room, giving the guys a chance to talk without us around.

Chapter Twenty-One



Kendrik

OAKLIEGH IS IN so much trouble. None of us have had a chance to talk to her in the last two days about her having a stalker and not saying a word about it to us. To anyone really. I guess that's what happens when you have so many different people tailing you. No one has really talked about what happens when Oakliegh leaves campus so we didn't know about anything. We'll have to change things up, make sure there's clear communication going on about what's happened with our girl, our fucking queen, on a daily basis. It's the only way we're going to know if something is happening since we all seem to be so damn busy these days. Oakliegh is the one suffering and paying for our lapse in judgment in regard to her.

Plus, it's not just Oakliegh we need to watch out for anymore. She's carrying our son or daughter in her. A large part of me is scared to death about being a dad. I don't have a good role model in my own. The only guy I've ever seen truly care about his children is Mr. Vanderwalt. If I can be half as good as he is, our son or daughter will have an amazing life. He showers his boys with love, support, and life lessons. He's truly who I want to be like when I grow up. Too bad I can't say the same thing about my own father. Anyway, if something were to happen to our child, none of us would be the same again. We'd all lose our shit and I know blood would spill. Lots of blood. No one would survive what the three of us are willing to do when it comes to our girl and any children we have. No one will be able to hold us back if something happens to the center of our universe.

“You okay, Kendrik? You seem lost in your head today,” Kayson asks me, pulling me from my thoughts of Oakliegh and our baby.

That’s something else we need to talk to Oakliegh about. The guys watching over her need to know she’s carrying precious cargo. They all need to be even more aware than they already are when it comes to her. On top of whoever hurts our girl and child, the guy guarding her will also pay for her being hurt on their watch.

“I’m good. Just trying to figure all this shit out. How are you coming over there?” I return, Kayson looking from his computer screen to me again.

Today we’re in the library at the house working. Since I don’t let anyone in my room, Kayson isn’t allowed in there. Oakliegh is the only person who can come in whenever she wants. The only one allowed in my space because she’s mine. Kayson can be considered a friend, but that’s about all. I’m definitely not as close to him as I am Zander and Hendrix. They’re not allowed in there so I’m not about to have Kayson in my space.

“These people are fucked in the head. Kendrik, how the hell did Oakliegh last so long with them? She’s so damn sweet and wouldn’t hurt another person willingly. That’s not how the Powers’ are at all. They go out of their way to hurt anyone they come in contact with.”

“That’s just who Oakliegh is. She’s a fucking warrior and no one will ever make her change. If those fuckers didn’t change her, and TJ and Misty couldn’t make her change how she is as a person, there isn’t anyone alive who will make her hurt someone who doesn’t deserve it. Even then I don’t believe she can honestly follow through with anything. We’ll gladly handle it for her so she doesn’t have to get her hands dirty. *Ever*,” I state, knowing I’d gut a fucker without hesitation for looking at my girl wrong.

“Have you seen this stalker fuck? Do we know anything about him yet?”

“No. I’m about to run the surveillance at Sal’s. He’s already given me permission to go through his footage. If he doesn’t like the asshole, you know it’s bad. That man likes everyone and there isn’t a single person he turns away unless they’re being an ass in the shop. While my other programs are working, I’ll start going through all that shit. I’ll also be checking Oakliegh’s email. She just gave me her password and shit today so I can see if there’s anything Mrs. Powers has said she didn’t understand,” I inform him, my voice filling with rage at the thought of the many secrets our girl has been keeping from us.

I know exactly why she’s keeping them to herself too. Oakliegh doesn’t want to be a burden to anyone. Especially us. Her saying we were going to end up resenting being with her because of all this shit just before she married Zander shows me how much she truly feels this. With all this new shit piling on top of her and us barely being around for her, there’s no way she’d want to come to us when we are here about this kind of thing. It doesn’t matter how many times we tell her we want to know or anything else, in Oakliegh’s mind she’s going to be a burden to us. To Harper and her guys. Anyone she talks to. Erica might be the only exception to that, but I’m not sure she even knows what’s been going on with my sweet angel.

We spend countless hours working at our computers. Kayson brought snacks in for us so we wouldn’t have to leave the room and get lost into a conversation with anyone else in the house. This shit is too important and the sooner we comb through everything, the quicker we can end the foster parents for Oakliegh. She won’t have to fear them or continue looking over her shoulder at them coming for her. This also means more time I can spend with Oakliegh. She’s going to need the help once our little one is born. We graduate this year and will be more open to spending time with her as we settle into our roles in life. Oakliegh will still be taking classes on top of being a mom to our son or daughter. None of us are going to let her do this alone.

As all of my programs run in the background digging up even more dirt on the pieces of shit who hurt our girl so fucking bad, I begin searching through her emails. What I see has my vision turning red. I can hardly read the words in front of my face as each one gets worse and worse. It's when I pull up the one with a link in it that my rage almost consumes me. Someone has made a fucking website filled with all sorts of horrendous things about Oakliegh. As I look through it all, the latest update was a few hours ago. There's no doubt in my mind she's already seen this shit. Another thing she hasn't told us about. This girl is gonna feel my hand on her ass. I've never been into physical pain on a female, but this shit is dangerous and has undoubtedly hurt Oakliegh in ways I can't even begin to imagine.

Grabbing my laptop, I make my way out of the library. Kayson doesn't say a word as he continues working on his own information about the Powers'. I find Oakliegh, Hendrix, and Zander curled up on the couch with a movie playing in the background. I'm not sure any of them are even paying attention to what's on the screen in front of them.

"Done already, Kendrik?" Zander asks, drawing their attention to me.

"Not really. Just came across something and I think it's time we had that fucking talk with Oakliegh about everything. Seems the stalker isn't the only thing she was hiding from us," I state, my voice a low growl as Oakliegh sinks back into the couch.

"The fuck are you talkin' about, Kendrik?" Hendrix barks out, sitting up straight while placing a hand on Oakliegh's thigh.

"Do you want to tell them, sweet angel? Or do you want me to? Because I'm ready to spank your ass I'm so angry right now," I ask our girl as I hold my laptop close so the guys don't get a sneak peek of what I'm talking about.

"You saw it, didn't you?" Oakliegh returns, her voice so low I'm surprised Zander and Hendrix can hear her.

"I did see it. When were you planning on telling us?"

“Someone needs to fucking start talking right now,” Zander demands, his voice hard as he stares at his wife with an unreadable expression on his face. This is the Zander who’s all business and won’t allow his wife to hide from this.

“In one of the emails I got from Mrs. Powers, there was a link to a website. When I clicked on it, not sure of what I was going to find. Someone made a website filled with nothing but hate for me. I can’t even remember everything I saw on there. I’ve only looked at it once and I’m not even sure if it’s been updated or anything since I looked at it,” Oakliegh says, her voice slightly louder this time.

“So, someone made a website about you filled with horrible bullshit, there’s a stalker you didn’t tell us about immediately, and you also hid the pregnancy from us. I don’t want to be pissed as fuck at you right now, but you’re makin’ it really hard, Oakliegh. Is there anythin’ else you’re not tellin’ us?” Hendrix barks out, jumping from the couch and putting distance between him and Oakliegh.

I might feel like an ass for outing her like this, but this is serious business. We need to know who’s behind this website and if there’s other people we have to worry about coming after our girl.

“This is not the time to be hiding things and not believing it’s important. We want to know every-fucking-thing going on in your life. No matter how big or small it is,” Zander tells her, his voice harsh for talking to her.

It just shows how pissed we all are at her for keeping this website a secret.

“I was going to tell you. All of you. I even told Hendrix there were things I needed to talk to you all about. Everyone is so busy and hardly ever home with me, there’s been no time to talk about it. Since the wedding, I believe today is the first day we’ve all been home and not working despite being here. With the exception of you, Kendrik. I’ve tried to stay awake, waiting up for you guys to get home and I couldn’t. I’m not sure if it’s just me or the pregnancy keeping me so exhausted. When I am with you, since it’s so rare, the

last thing I want to do is talk about this shit. I live it every damn day and just want a break. I don't want to think about it. Talk about it. Or fucking dream about it," Oakliegh yells, raising her voice for the first time at us.

Anger consumes her as she looks between the three of us. Zander is the only one still sitting with her and when he reaches out to touch her, she quickly moves away as tears fill her eyes. My heart breaks for our girl. Yes, I'm angry as fuck she kept this from us. However, I never took a second to think about how she was feeling regarding all this shit. It's really not good for her to be stressed out either. Not with the baby. The root of the problem, though, is we haven't been here for her. We've been so consumed with work, classes, and training the guys all this shit is on us as much as it's on her.

"Baby girl, it doesn't matter if we're here or not. You have guys with you at all times. All you had to do was tell them what's goin' on and they would have made sure to let us know," Hendrix says, his voice softer now than before.

"You don't get it. None of you do," Oakliegh begins sitting in the recliner so none of us can sit with her. "It's bad enough I have four people knowing my deepest, darkest, most painful secrets. To wonder every damn day if it makes you think less of me or how long it is before this all becomes too much for you to handle. My emotions are all over the place right now. The last thing I want to be is a burden to anyone.

"The guys who watch over me when you're not around or follow me all over the place don't need every single detail of my life like that. I'm barely comfortable with you knowing. Have they seen my stalker, yeah they did. When Brody said something about telling you about it, I didn't stop him. The only thing I told him was not to beat his ass before talking to you guys and figuring out what you wanted to do about the situation. This is my life and I'm not in control of any aspect of it. Again. Do any of you even realize I barely leave the house unless I absolutely need to? Or how often I'm here completely alone? There's a guy outside watching over me, but even when I'm home, they aren't exactly here. I won't allow them to stand out in the cold freezing their asses off. So,

no, I didn't tell anyone what's been going on. I'm sorry about it, but you know now."

I want to pull her into my arms and hold her close. Right now, she won't allow us to do that though. She's in full protection mode and that's when she won't let anyone close to her. If Harper were to come in here right now, she wouldn't even let her close. It's one of her protection modes and I can't really blame her for it. So much shit has been tossed her way and I'm sure it's so hard to wade through when this is all she knows. Our girl hasn't ever had anyone in her corner with the exception of Zander for a short period of time. While Harper would have been there for her, there's really nothing she could have done to help her when they were younger.

"Fuck!" Zander growls out, his voice rough and filled with emotion.

"Several things need to change around here," Hendrix growls out, his own voice back to being hard as fuck.

"You're right. The main one being everyone who is with Oakliegh needs to talk to whoever is taking over for him. That's one of the reasons we didn't know about the stalker sooner. If Zeke and the others had talked to one another, or us, we'd have learned about the situation before Brody filled us in. We have more than Oakliegh to think about now. Which is another thing we need to talk about. I'm not sure when you want to tell anyone about the baby, but we need to think about telling the guys who watch over you. They won't say a word to anyone, sweet angel. For now, they need to know it's not just you they're protecting," I point out the two things we need to think about.

"You're right. I agree with Kendrik, Oakliegh. We also need to have one of us home more often with you. We can figure out our schedules and make sure you spend time with one of us on a daily basis. We'll do our best to rotate so it's not the same one all the time. Hendrix and you still need to have the meeting with Erica as well. He's got things to say to you and I know you're going to want her around when he does. She can help you understand what things mean," Zander adds in his opinion getting up from the couch and walking over to

his wife. Without hesitation, he lifts her in his arms and sits down before pulling her onto his lap.

“If we tell the guys watching over me about the baby, I don’t want everyone in the frat to know. I’m still worried about the baby and if something happens with everyone knowing, they’ll know I’m a failure and can’t even give you guys a baby. Just more rumors to add to that stupid website,” Oakliegh finally says, slinking back into Zander’s body as he holds her close to him.

“Baby girl, the day you married my brother, Kendrik and I committed to you. We’re all in this together. Yeah, things have been crazy as fuck and we’re all realizin’ that right now. You *are* important to us. We want to be here with you. Not at any of the businesses or other bullshit. I know we keep sayin’ this shit won’t last forever, and it won’t. Right now, we’re not showin’ you that shit though. We’ll figure somethin’ out to make this easy on all of us. To blend our lives together more fully,” Hendrix says, pulling our girl from Zander and holding her close to him.

Oakliegh wraps her body around him, holding on tight to him as if he’s going to set her down and walk away.

“If we need another session to talk about this shit, we’ll go with you, sweet angel. For now, I’m going to let my programs continue running while Kayson keeps working. We’re going to make dinner together and feed our baby. Then we’re going to spend the rest of the night in bed. I don’t give a fuck what we do, but it’s going to be all about you and nothing less than that. Sound good?”

“I’d love to do that,” Oakliegh says, lifting her head from Hendrix’s shoulder. “I’m sorry I didn’t find a way to tell you guys everything sooner. It’s all my insecurities coming out again. Being alone so much isn’t helping the situation either.”

“We’ll figure it all out, baby girl. Now, let’s get in the kitchen so you can figure out what you want to eat for dinner.”

The rest of the night, the three of us keep our entire focus on Oakliegh. We all take a bath with her, watch movies, and worship her body. Even without sex, we worship her and

show her how much she means to us. Each of us give her a massage, working on various parts of her body we know are bothering her. Then we take the time to track all of the changes to her body. She's got the slightest baby bump going on and I can't wait to feel our little one moving around inside her. None of us can. I'm not sure when we all drift off to sleep, but we're all touching our girl in some way. I personally fall into a deep sleep and don't wake up to work once in the middle of the night. I guess there's really a first time for everything.

Chapter Twenty-Two



Oakliegh

I'VE BEEN OPENING up more with the guys in the last week since Kendrik brough the information to everyone about the hate website and the other emails I've gotten from Mrs. Powers. They've also done their very best to make sure one of them are home when I am. It's been really nice because I'm not alone and I get to spend time with the guys unlike what's been happening since Christmas break got over with. We all go to our classes, train, and work, but we're also trying to spend more time together as a family. It's not realistic to believe we can all be here at the same time with everything going on right now. Everyone is still busy as hell and we're just trying to juggle everything. I definitely feel a lot better about things and realize the guys truly are trying their best to spend more time with me. Something I don't always feel on a daily basis.

Harper has also been around more lately. Not as much as the guys, but she's been trying to be here more if one of the guys can't. I'm not even sure how she knew what was going on. I mean, we did have that small conversation the day of my wedding, but I didn't expect her to change anything because of it. Honestly, my hormones are all over the place and I'm kind of embarrassed of how I reacted to being so alone while everyone was busy. There's nothing for me to be so upset about. Still, I appreciate how everyone is trying to be there for me and spend more time at home.

Right now, I'm sitting in bed, my books spread out all around me as I study. I was emailed this morning about my first class being canceled because my professor is sick and

won't be there. So, while everyone has left for their class, I'm sitting home getting some more time to study and get ahead on my work. It's something I'm obsessive about because at any time I could get sick or something happens during my pregnancy. I don't want to get behind and I'm going to do everything in my power to ensure everything is done and ready to hand in well before the due dates we've been given.

"Baby girl, you still home?" Hendrix calls out for me as I read over some notes I took in yesterday's class.

"I'm in my room," I return, not taking my eyes off the papers in front of me.

"Why aren't you in class?"

"It got canceled. My professor is sick today. I thought I could get in some more studying until my next class."

"Okay. Well, my class got out early. Tonight we're takin' you out. Harper and her guys are goin' with us too. We're takin' you to King's Kourt. It's our nightclub and we all need some down time with all the shit goin' on," Hendrix informs me, sitting on my bed and leaning over to give me a kiss.

"Really? We don't have to go out."

"Yeah, we do. It's not gonna be much longer before we don't get to take your sexy ass out. So, we're all gonna go dance, have a few drinks, and get away from the house. I mean you're not drinkin', but you're gonna get the fuck outta the house and away from your books for a while," he states with a smirk on his face as he rubs his hand on my stomach.

All the guys have taken to rubbing my stomach or touching it in some way when we're together. Zander likes talking to my belly, making plans with our little one despite not knowing if it's a girl or boy yet. He tells them about us and the crazy things the guys have gotten up to in the past. It's adorable. Kendrik usually rests his head on my belly and sings songs as he writes them. Or he just makes up new ones for the baby no one else will ever hear. Hendrix doesn't hold back anything. He's told our baby if he's a boy he'll be the first of

many to protect any little girls we have. To look after me and tells them how they'll make sure he knows how to treat a woman like a queen and nothing less will be acceptable. If we have a little girl, he makes sure to talk about her learning to protect herself and how they'll all protect her. Let's not forget her not being allowed to date until he's gone and can no longer see what she's doing. I don't think that's gonna happen, but it's cute to see him think he's going to stop any girl we have from dating.

I've heard women say they have a feeling it's a boy or girl. I really haven't gotten a feeling one way or the other. The only thing I truly care about is he or she is healthy and grows up knowing nothing but love and getting all the support they could ever want. I won't ever stop any of our children from following their dreams or being who they are for any reason. That's not love. I'm not going to control every aspect of our child's life either. They will learn what it means to work for what they want, to treat people with respect while still defending themselves, and that we'll always be there for them no matter what's going on. Everything I wish I had growing up.

Hendrix remains with me as I study. He doesn't say anything as I work on a paper. While I work, he lays with his head in my lap and presses the side of his face against my stomach. I'm sure he's not comfortable, but he doesn't move. It's as if he can't be close enough to where our little one rests safely inside me. The only time he leaves is to get me something to eat or drink. Yeah, they make me eat more than normal stating the baby is hungry and they're just making sure they have the food they want when they want it.

Harper and I got ready to go out tonight together. She helped me pick out a dress that's sexy yet understated so my guys don't lose their shit. My best friend has done my make-up and hair as well. Our guys have been getting ready as we keep them out of my room. Not so much her guys, but mine have been trying to come in since Harper kicked them out as I got in the shower. They all had to get ready to go out so I'm

not sure why it's so important for them to get in my room. All I know is Harper wants to do some big reveal about me walking downstairs and them turning to see me. It's almost like she wants me to live out some movie scene and I can't help but laugh at my sister from another mister's antics.

"You ready to make your guys drool?" Harper asks me, stepping back and letting me look in the mirror.

I can't believe what I'm seeing. She's done my make-up much like it was on my wedding day. The only exception is my eyes are done in a smokey color with eye liner and mascara to make them stand out. She's painted my lips with a nude color before applying a glossy top coat. The dress I'm wearing is black and goes down to my ankles with a long slit up my left leg. If it were up any higher, I wouldn't be able to wear panties and the guys wouldn't like that. The top of my dress molds to my chest but still makes it look sexy and covered instead of being pointed out so everyone's attention will be drawn to my tits. Harper's done my hair in loose curls with it flowing down my back. I don't look like myself if I'm being honest.

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be. I'll have to give one of the guys my phone to hold. I don't want to take a bag or anything," I tell her as I slide my feet in a pair of ballet slippers so I'm not trying to walk in a pair of heels tonight.

Walking downstairs, I hear the murmur of conversation between the guys as they stand around waiting for us. It gives me the chance to check out my guys before they see me. Kendrick is wearing a pair of dark blue jeans with a white button-down shirt. He's left the top few buttons undone to show some of his ink off. His hair looks as if he's been running his fingers through the dark strands. Zander is standing next to him wearing a black button-down shirt and a pair of black dress pants. Like Kendrick he's left a few buttons open at the top and rolled his sleeves up to his forearms. The muscles flex and bunch as he moves making my mouth water. My eyes drift to Hendrix. He's wearing his standard blue jeans, molded to his body showing off his thick, muscled thighs. Instead of wearing a button-down shirt, Hendrix has a

black tee-shirt on. It fits tight across his chest and arms. The tattoos he's got on his body are on display beneath the edges of his shirt. These men are sexy as hell and I get to call them mine.

Harper clears her throat. There's an immediate reaction from the guys as they stop talking and turn to face us. My guys don't even look toward Harper as their full attention is locked on me. Hendrix is the first one to step toward me, his eyes looking up and down my body multiple times.

"I'm really thinkin' about stayin' in tonight, baby girl. You look sexy as fuck and I'm not sure I want anyone seein' you lookin' this good," he growls out, reaching me and pulling me into his arms.

"Not happening," Zander says moving up to stand next to his brother. "We told her we're taking her out and that's what we're doing. Plus, I want her to see our club. She's never been inside and my wife deserves to be there with us. To know it's somewhere safe she can go to relax and hang out with Harper if we're busy working or something."

Zander pulls me from Hendrix's arms and presses a kiss against my lips. He doesn't worry about my lipstick covering him or anything as he deepens the kiss and presses his body up against mine. It's not long before he's pulled away from me and Kendrick steps up into my space.

"Sweet angel, you got a little bit of devil inside you. You're too fucking tempting for words. Every eye in the Kourt will be on you all fucking night long," Kendrick says, his voice coming out as a growl.

It's not often I get to see this side of Kendrick. The side that's possessive and almost on par with Hendrix. He's told me in the past he's got a monster buried deep inside he never wants to unleash because he loses control. Honestly, he doesn't scare me when he's like this. If anything, it turns me on. To see him come out of his shell and not hold himself back is not something I ever want to miss. These are my thoughts as Kendrick gives me a deep kiss, tangling his tongue with mine. It's slow, deep, and passionate.

“Are we heading out? Or are the three of you gonna stand there and eye fuck your girl before dragging her back upstairs like cavemen?” Harper asks, laughter filling her voice as I pull away from Kendrik.

Harper’s men surround her as we all step away from one another and finish walking down the steps.

“Why you gotta be a fuckin’ cock blocker?” Hendrix grumbles out, his voice a low rumble.

“That’s my job as the best friend. Besides, I’m ready to get my girl out on the dance floor so she can shake her ass and let go of all the shit she’s been dealing with. Now, let’s fucking go!” she says, walking straight to the door and outside as we all follow her.

We all head to the garage and pile into two vehicles. Hendrix leads me to his *Escalade* and helps me into the front passenger seat. Zander and Kendrik climb in the backseat as Hendrix closes me in the seat and I place my seatbelt on. Harper and her guys get in one of the guy’s trucks. Like me, my best friend is placed in the front seat while Zeke and Brody get in the back. Hendrix climbs in the driver’s seat and starts his SUV before backing out of the garage. None of us talk as he makes the short drive to the club. There really is no parking on Campus Row, but he drives across the very end and pulls around the back of the club. Kayson follows him and parks just behind Hendrix.

“Stay in here until we let you out,” Zander says, leaning between the seats and pressing a kiss against my cheek. “It’s cold outside and we don’t want you out until we’re ready to head inside.”

Nodding my head, he gets out and closes his door behind him. The guys meet between the vehicles and talk for a few minutes before my door is opened by Kendrik. He helps me out of the SUV and wraps his arm around me while everyone else surrounds me. No one is going to take any chances and let me walk on the outside of our group or in the back of everyone. Not with everything going on.

We walk around the club and bypass the long line of students from the school waiting to get inside. I'm sure there's other people waiting to get inside as well, but I'm sure it's a popular spot for GRU students to hang out when there's nothing else going on around campus. Everyone grumbles as we stop at the bouncer guarding over the door.

"Kings, it's good to see you tonight. I'm sure everything is already set up and ready for you inside," the large man says, a smile on his face.

"Barney, this is our girl Oakliegh. If she shows up at any point in time, you're to let her in. No fuckin' questions asked," Hendrix states, pulling me in front of his body to show me to the bouncer.

"Oakliegh, it's nice to meet you. If you ever need anything while here, just let me know," Barney says, the smile never leaving his face.

"It's nice to meet you too, Barney. Thank you," I say, ducking my eyes as he pulls the door open and steps aside to let us in.

A blast of heat washes over us as we step inside followed by the vibrations from the bass of the song playing through the speakers. The narrow hallway we walk down is dark with dark gray painted walls and a thick black carpet under our feet. A door is closed at the end of the hall and I'm sure it's the only reason we're not hearing the music full blast at this point in time. Zander reaches the door first and pulls it open without stopping. Now, the music is pumping through the club and it's deafening.

Bodies already fill the dance floor, writhing against one another to the beat of the music. Flashing lights dart around the club, highlighting the dancers and waitresses moving around the room with trays filled with drinks. I can hardly hear my own heart beating with the loud music and people singing along to the song. Hendrix tightens his hand around mine while Kendrick doesn't remove his arm from my shoulders. The two men walk me through the club as I try to take in every detail of the club they own.

The walls are painted black and lead down to a polished hardwood floor. Purple and blue lights are on the wall giving just enough light so people aren't bumping into one another. Around the outer edges of the club, tables and booths rest along the wall. People fill them as they talk, laugh, and drink while watching the other dancers on the floor. The dance floor takes up the majority of the club. A large chrome bar is on the right side of the club. It stretches almost the entire length of the club. Mirrors line the shelves behind the bottles of alcohol. Three women move seamlessly around one another behind the bar as they pour drinks and pass them to the waiting customers.

"We're over in the VIP area, baby girl," Hendrix says in my ear so I can hear his words.

I let the guys lead me to the far side of the club. The booths there have walls between them and curtains people can close around each booth for privacy. Each curtain is either black or a dark blue. There's a few still open around the booths and they flutter as people walk by or brush against them. While they appear to be see through, they're not. Once they're closed, no one can see inside to the occupants and what they're doing.

Each table has a small candle to light the area for occupants at each table in the VIP section. A set of stairs is set up next to the DJ currently blasting music in the club. It leads up to a second floor. A balcony wraps around the entire club. Tables are set up for people to look out over the dance floor as they talk and drink upstairs. On each side at the back of the club, a hallway leads further back. I can barely make out several doors along each hall. They're all closed. I wonder what happens behind those doors up there. Maybe I'll work up the courage to ask one of the guys at some point.

We all slide in the booth. Harper and I end up in the middle of the circular bench with the guys sitting on the outside of us. In seconds a waitress appears. She's barely wearing any clothing. Just a bralette and the tiniest pair of shorts I've ever seen a woman wear outside of the house. She

openly flirts with Zander, Hendrix, and Kendrik as I sit right next to Zander, our entwined hands resting on top of the table.

“What can I get you sexy men tonight?” she purrs, her voice loud to be heard over the music.

“Excuse me!” Harper barks out, her voice raising several octaves to be heard. “I know you’re not hitting on my girl’s men with her sitting right the fuck here.”

“And who are you?” the waitress says, her tone dripping ice as she still doesn’t take her eyes off my men.

“Who she is isn’t your fuckin’ concern, Marley. What matters is our wife is here and you’re not bein’ professional. So, I suggest you go clear out your locker, clock the fuck out, and don’t bother comin’ back here. Our girl will *not* get fuckin’ disrespected in our own club because you want what she has,” Hendrix says, not raising his voice or moving a muscle. He doesn’t even look at Marley.

“What? You can’t do that!” Marley shrieks, her voice heard by everyone as the song ends and another one hasn’t started yet.

Hendrix looks at the DJ and shakes his head. I watch on as he stands from his seat and Kendrik lets him out of the booth.

“Listen the fuck up!” he yells out, gaining everyone’s attention. “This is our fuckin’ woman and she’s the queen of this fuckin’ club. Anythin’ she wants, she fuckin’ gets. Anyone caught disrespectin’ her will get fired quicker than shit. Marley, you’ve been tryin’ to get on our cocks since we hired you. So, as I said, you’re done here. Get the fuck outta our sight, clean out your locker, and clock out. You. No. Longer. Work. Here.”

My face is a deep red as the heat of a blush consumes me. Hendrix sure as hell didn’t need to make such a grand announcement in order to make sure this doesn’t happen. Marley stomps away as she continues to screech and shout obscenities the entire time. Harper starts laughing her ass off at the girl as Hendrix takes his seat once again and nods for the

DJ to start playing music once again. Another waitress approaches the table and takes our drink order. I'm the only one ordering water and a soda. Everyone else has some kind of beer or mixed drink as Harper stares out at the dance floor.

"Get the fuck out there if you wanna dance," Kayson says, noticing where his girl's attention is focused.

Harper managed to lead me to the dance floor a while ago. I'm not much of a dancer by any means. If I dance at all, it's in the privacy of our home when I know no one's home to see me. My best friend isn't about to let me hide in the booth though. So, I'm on the dance floor, dancing with her. The guys don't take their attention off us the entire time we're not right next to them. Even with my back to them, I can feel their eyes drilling into my back. Harper helps me dance and have some sort of rhythm as one song bleeds into another.

My eyes drift over the floor and over toward the bar. I'm not sure why I have a sudden urge to look there when I haven't since we left the booth. Hell, I didn't give it more than a cursory glance since walking in the club with our small group. I let my gaze travel the length of the bar. At first everything is normal. People standing and waiting for a bartender to get their drink order or waiting for their drinks to be made. It's not until I get to the end of the bar closest to the back of the club, that I see the one person I didn't want to lay eyes on today. The man who's been showing up no matter where I am is sitting at the end of the bar, his eyes locked on me as he holds a glass halfway to his mouth. A smirk covers his face as soon as he realizes I'm looking in his direction.

I can't stop my body from trembling and my heart racing. The only sounds I can hear are the muffled music playing in the club and the blood rushing through my veins at the knowledge he once again discovered where I am and followed me here. Harper manages to snap me out of my fog by getting in my face and placing her hands on either side of my face.

“What’s wrong, Oakliegh? You’re pale as fuck and look as if you’ve seen a ghost,” she questions me, concern filling her eyes as she stares at me.

“He’s here,” I whisper, not able to raise my voice.

“Who’s here? The guy that’s been fucking following you?”

I don’t take my eyes off the guy as Harper moves to the side slightly. She’s moving around, but I’m not sure what she’s doing. Everything in me is locked on this man and fear is filling me rapidly.

“Baby girl,” Hendrix’s voice suddenly surrounds me, pulling my eyes away from the guy.

Looking up in Hendrix’s eyes, I can tell it’s not the first time he’s called my name. He’s staring down at me with fear filling his own eyes.

“He’s here, Hendrix. The guy that’s been following me around is here. Right now,” I manage to get out as Zander and Kendrik come up to surround me at my back.

“The fuck? He’s here right fuckin’ now?” Hendrix questions me. “Where is he, baby girl?”

“The end of the bar closest to the back of the club. He’s sitting alone and drinking,” I answer him as Kendrik pulls me into his arms and doesn’t let me go.

“Kendrik, you stay with the girls. Zander let’s get this fucker once and for all. I wanna know what his fuckin’ interest is in Oakliegh. Kayson, you stay with Kendrik. Make sure he doesn’t lose his fuckin’ shit right now. Girls, don’t leave their fuckin’ side. I don’t want to come back in here and find you’ve so much as gone to the bathroom. Kendrik, take them up to the office if they have to use the bathroom. We’ll be fuckin’ back.”

I watch on as the four guys leave us. They don’t hesitate to make their way directly over to the man who’s been following me around. Kendrik tries to pull me away from watching Hendrix work, but I refuse. Placing my hands on Kendrik’s I don’t take my eyes off the group of men. I wish I

could hear what was being said as Hendrix gets in the man's face. When my man reaches out and grabs the asshole around his neck Kendrick tries to turn me around so I'm not witnessing anything. Still, I don't let him turn me away from the action.

"Sweet angel, you really don't wanna see this shit," he says in my ear.

"Yeah, I do. I need to see this guy bein' dealt with," I inform him, knowing there's no way in hell I can just take anyone's word for it right now.

"We'll go back to the booth as soon as they disappear. You need to get off your feet," he cautions me, his voice making sure I know he's being serious.

Hendrix pushes the man from the club by his throat, his fingers flexing around the man as the guy struggles against his hold. No one steps in or tries to stop my man from doing what he is right now. It doesn't take long for them to disappear from sight and Kendrick to lead us back to the booth that they've claimed as theirs in the club. Perks of being the owners. None of us talk about anything as I take a few small sips of my water with my eyes locked on the hallway where everyone just disappeared.

Chapter Twenty-Three



Hendrix

THIS MOTHERFUCKER IS about to get his ass fucking kicked from one end of the parking lot to the other. My hand continues to flex around this fucker's throat as he smirks at me while struggling against my hold. He's dressed in a ratty pair of jeans, stained tee-shirt, and dirty pair of boots. This isn't a man who cares about his appearance or how others view him. If he did, he'd be dressed up to go out to a nightclub in college town. Especially our fucking night club. Zeke rushes ahead of us to open the back door leading to where our SUVs are parked. He holds it until everyone's through the door and lets it shut behind us. I slam the fucker against the harsh, dirty bricks of the nightclub and press my hand tighter against his throat.

Rage consumes me as I look at the bitch who's been following our girl around. I'm sure he's been on campus despite her not seeing him. If he's showing up everywhere she is, there's no way he hasn't learned her schedule, followed her on campus, off campus, and anywhere else she goes. I know for a fact he hasn't been close to the house because Kendrik would have found him and we'd have known about this shit sooner than we did. As I simply stare at the twatwaffle in front of us, he suddenly starts laughing hysterically.

"Somethin' fuckin' funny here?" I bark out, rage almost overflowing within my body as Zander steps up next to me.

"Yeah. You have no fucking clue what you're dealing with. Or who you're dealing with. You can't fucking touch

me,” he says, confidence filling him as I loosen my hand just enough for him to be able to talk.

“You think that shit matters to me? Do you have any fuckin’ idea who I am? Who my brother and best friend are? Are you sure you’re willin’ to go the fuck up against us?” I return, still not finding any humor in this fucking situation.

“Why the fuck are you following our girl around? She’s seen you all over the damn place. You also seem to have a penchant for going into her job and sitting there when no one wants you there. Do you know how hard it is to get kicked outta Sal’s? Pretty fucking hard,” Zander adds in, his own rage simmering just below the surface.

“Ain’t telling you pussies shit. I know who you are and everything about you. Think your fucking badasses because you’re the so-called kings of Grand Ridge. Fucking pathetic!” the guy barks out, laughter once again filling his voice as I tighten my hand around his neck effectively cutting off his air supply.

The guy makes a choked sound and his eyes dart up to mine. There’s just a hint of fear filling him now. The sick and twisted part of me relishes in his fear. I want to make him piss his pants before beating the fuck outta him. Make him feel every ounce of terror our girl has felt since the day she fucking first saw him.

“Then you know you’re a lucky bitch right now, don’t ya?” I ask him, my own smirk filling my face. “You want me to get our best friend out here? Let him loose on your ass? Compared to him, we’re all fuckin’ angels.”

“He doesn’t fucking scare me,” the guy grunts out, his voice raspy from the pressure I’ve been putting on his throat.

Zander and I start laughing our asses off. This stupid fuck has no clue who Kendrik is or what the fuck happens when he loses control. If he did, the guy wouldn’t be standing before us saying he’s not scared of Kendrik. Not many know what happens when he loses control because he does everything in his power to keep a tight leash on his control so

his beast never gets loose. Not unless it's completely necessary for him to lose control.

Adjusting my grip on the fucker's throat, I slam his head against the brick wall. His eyes roll back in head and I worry I might hurt him before we can get the answers we need. Zander places his hand on my arm for just a few seconds to pull me back so I don't lose my own shit. Brody steps forward and hands me over a knife. I don't release my hand as I take hold of the knife and press it against his throat just above my hand.

"Not gonna fuckin' repeat ourselves. Why have you been fuckin' followin' our girl around?" I bark out, getting right in this fucker's face.

When he still doesn't say anything, Zander steps forward and starts going through his pockets. We'll take any advantage we can get over this asshole. All we need is one reason to break him. One thing or person who actually means something to this guy to threaten and he'll sing like a fucking canary. It's how all these dumbasses are. They're all tough and ready to remain silent until you threaten to take away the one thing they love more than themselves.

I don't move or make a sound as Zander empties his pockets onto the cement at our feet. He's certainly not gentle or careful as cigarettes, a lighter, two phones, and a knife crash against the cement. Thankfully the phones don't break. They light up and I look down briefly to see a picture on one of the phones.

"Give me that phone," I bark out, needing to know what the picture is.

Zeke moves forward to pick the phone up from the ground at our feet. I keep my eyes on this asshole's legs to make sure he doesn't attempt to kick Zeke when he's bent forward. This douche canoe is dumb as fuck. He goes to kick or knee my friend as I lift my own leg and press my boot against the asshole's knee. A slight whimper escapes him as I put pressure on the joint. I'm not playing the fuck around. Finally, I have the phone in hand. Pressing the button on the

side of it, a picture of a baby fills the screen. My eyes lift to the ass that in front of me.

“This your kid?” I ask him, staring at the phone and barely looking at the fucker still being held by my hand. “Fuckin’ answer me!”

“Y-Y-Yes,” he stammers out as I tighten my fingers around his throat.

“Zander, this fucker’s got a kid. I think we need to pay a little visit to where this kid is and make sure he doesn’t see his dad ever again,” I threaten, my voice going lethal as I say the words.

I would never fucking touch a kid. I don’t care what the fuck is going on or what’s being done. That’s a line none of us will fucking cross. However, the ass that in front of me doesn’t know that. He has no clue what boundaries we will and won’t cross. I don’t give a shit what information he’s been given on us or what research has been done on his part. He will never know anything about us other than what we want the world to see and know.

“That sounds like a real good idea. I mean, I’m sure we can give that kid a real good home. Make sure this fucker never sees him again, pay off the mom so she disappears, and call it a fucking day,” Zander agrees with me, knowing we’re full of shit.

“No!” the guys yells out, his voice breaking and wheezing with the hold I have on him. “Leave my boy alone. He didn’t do shit to you. He’s fucking innocent!”

“Really? That’s how you’re gonna fuckin’ play this?” I question him, more rage filling me. “You can follow our girl around for whatever fuckin’ reasons yet she’s more innocent than anyone I’ve ever met. She hasn’t done shit to you or anyone else. Our girl wants to get her degree and help kids. That’s the woman you’re fuckin’ followin’ around and scarin’ the fuck out of.”

“It’s just a job. I was paid to follow her around, get close to her. They wanted me to tell them who she’s close to

and any other information I could find out about the girl. It wasn't fucking personal," he says, tears filling his eyes as I release his throat and press my hand against his chest to continue holding him in place.

"Who fucking paid you to follow her around? Why did they want this information?" Zander questions dumping the last of his shit on the ground.

"Kember Powers paid me. She's not the one I'm in contact with though. I was originally approached by a man and he's my go to now. I don't know his name. All I know is he's the contact I have. Anything I find out is to be sent to him and he'll let Kember know so she's not really involved," he answers as I slam my fist into his stomach. It's not really necessary but still fun for me. "He never told me why they wanted the information. All I know is the man was my contact, Kember was getting the information, and I'd be paid the rest of the money once they determined the job was done."

"It wasn't Darren Powers?" I question him, needing to know his role in this entire situation.

"No. I was told he wasn't to know anything about what was going on. I don't even know why he couldn't be involved. Honestly, I don't even know the Darren guy. Not even sure who the fuck Kember is either."

"How much information did you give your contact?" Zander questions getting in the asshole's face now.

"There really wasn't much to tell. Other than seeing her at work, she leads a boring as hell life. And always managed to evade me if she was out," he says without answering the question in any detail. That's not going to work for me.

"What. Did. You. Fuckin'. Tell. Them?" I growl out again, slamming my fist in his stomach once again.

"I told them she's seeing a doctor regularly, she goes to another building with a ton of offices in it, and that she works both of her jobs on a regular basis. Mentioned the tutoring she

does and that she goes to all of her classes,” he answers as Zander gets a hit in as soon as he’s done talking.

“That’s all you told them? Nothing else?” I question again.

We need to know if anyone on the outside knows about the wedding. For now, we still want to keep it under wraps because it’s something the Powers’ can use against Oakliegh. It hasn’t been mentioned in the emails sent to Oakliegh. I’m counting on them not learning of the wedding yet. The longer we can keep that to ourselves, the better I’ll feel about it.

“That’s it. I mean, I mentioned following her and a few others as they were out in town. Those are the times she mainly lost me. Honestly, I really didn’t hide myself from her when I did follow her around. I’d rather be up front and be in plain side versus hiding in the shadows. Others would rather hide and gain their information like that. Maybe a part of me wanted her to know so she would lose me. I don’t fucking know,” he says, staring me straight in the eyes so I can see the truth of his words.

“Why ask her all the personal questions when she’s been at work? Or tell her your new in town and just want to make some friends? I want to fucking know every detail of what you had planned for our girl. What was your fucking end game with her?”

“I’m not saying another word,” he grunts out.

Wrong fucking answer.

I don’t hesitate to let my fists fucking fly. There is no holding him against the wall or not giving him a chance to fight back. Zander, Zeke, and Brody step back and let me take out my rage against this fucker. For some reason, he doesn’t fight back. The guy simply lets me pound away at his body. Even when I land a solid punch to his nose, breaking it as I listen to the crunch of it. He grunts and groans with every hit I land. I don’t stop until Zander pulls me back. At first I believe he’s ready for me to stop pounding this asshole into the ground. That’s not the case at all.

The second I'm away from Oakliegh's stalker, Zander begins to pound his own fists into his body repeatedly. Zander doesn't really lose himself when it comes to this kind of shit. He lets me do my own thing and pound the shit out of whoever we're interrogating for any reason. This situation is personal for us though. In front of us is a man who stalked our girl and made her afraid to leave campus for any reason. Even going to work. Oakliegh didn't have to say anything to us about not wanting to go to work. It was written all over her actions. She'd leave as late as possible to go to work. Wouldn't stop for any reason once she left the campus. Was constantly looking over her shoulder if she was off campus for any reason.

I stand back and let Zander get his pound of flesh from this fucker. He doesn't pull his punches or hold back any of the rage he's feeling. Zander is letting all his shit go. He's going to make sure this asshole feels every hit and ounce of pain we can dish out to him. I've still got the knife in hand as Zander steps back several minutes later. Stepping back up to him, I bring the knife down the dirty shirt he's wearing. It slices easily beneath the blade of the knife Brody gave me a while ago.

"I answered your questions," he groans out as I press the blade of the knife to his abdomen.

"You did. After not answerin' us. This isn't a fuckin' game to us. Oakliegh is the center of our entire fuckin' world and you scared her. You took more from her than what's already been taken from her. She doesn't deserve to feel the way you made her feel for fuckin' weeks as you creeped along behind her. If you knew what's been done to her, you'd gut yourself for puttin' this shit on her. I mean, if you were a decent human you would. Though, I'm suspectin' you're not considerin' you fuckin' did it to begin with," I tell him as I slice several cuts into his body.

He squirms and groans around each fucking cut I place on his body. My goal here tonight isn't to kill this fucker. I want him to go back to his contact or whoever and make sure they know we got to him. That we fucked him up and it's just

a matter of time before we come for them. There's several possibilities about who we can point the contact being. Until we're sure who it is, we'll make sure to let this asshole live.

“Here's what's gonna happen. You're gonna leave Grand Ridge. Go back to whatever fuckin' hole you crawled out of. Let your contact know what we did here tonight. I really don't give a fuck. However, what you're not gonna do is collect any further money to stalk our girl and harass her. I *ever* fuckin' see your face here again, I'll gut you and not think twice about doin' so. Then, I'll let Kendrick fuck your ass up. You really don't want to see him when he's in a fit of rage. This right here is nothin' compared to what he'll do to you,” I promise the fucker as I hand Brody back the knife and pick up the burner phone still on the ground.

Kendrik and Kayson are going need both of these phones to pull any information they can about who this male contact is. The sooner we find him, the quicker we know who's helping the Powers'. That's a clue we need so we can make sure to take all the fuckers down at one time. Oakliegh won't ever have to worry about another damn person coming for her for any reason.

Brody and Zeke take the asshole from me and pull him away without a word from Zander or me. He's dragging his feet as he's pulled from behind King's Kourt and taken to a car we keep close by. The guys know it's here because it's one we don't use all the time. This is a car we use when there's a need to get rid of someone. It will be used to get this asshat out of Grand Ridge, cleaned so there's no evidence of him left behind, and parked back in the same parking lot. We don't have to worry about blood being on the seats or anything because there's already plastic laid out and waiting for anything we need to put in a backseat of this car.

“Man, you're covered in fucking blood,” Zander says as we remain out behind the club.

“Yeah. Go get our girl, Kendrick, Harper, and Kayson so we can get the fuck outta here. I'm not worried about Oakliegh seein' this shit. She'll have to get used to it one way or another. This ain't the last time we'll be down this road and

show up home covered in blood,” I tell him, getting in my *Escalade* to wait for everyone else.

Just because I’m not worried about Oakliegh or Harper seeing me this way doesn’t mean I want anyone else to see me covered in blood. Yeah, I’m wearing dark clothing, but my skin will show the blood clearly. The less who know what goes on here is better for us all. Starting the engine I turn on the heat for our girl so she’s not cold and continue waiting. Tonight didn’t go how we planned it out. We’ll have to figure out another night to bring our girl here so she can truly relax and have a good time. One where she doesn’t have to worry about someone showing up and ruining her night out with us.

Chapter Twenty-Four



Oakliegh

TWO WEEKS HAVE passed since the guys took us to King's Kourt. Seeing Hendrix covered in blood and the blood splattered on Zander showed me another side of the life they lead. I'm not scared of them or angry they beat the guy for following me around. Especially when they told me what he said. Following me because of some guy he doesn't even know on the orders of Mrs. Powers? That's just insane. She wasn't lying when she told me I was being followed then. That's good to know. However, it doesn't make me feel any better because there's no reason not to believe there aren't others out there following me around and reporting back to the same contact or Mrs. Powers herself. There's honestly no way to be completely sure about anything in knowing this. Hell, it could be someone in the frat or close to the guys if I'm being honest. Most people can be bought for any reason. I don't trust anyone but the guys, Harper, and her guys.

Addie is someone I trust as well because we don't spend time together outside of tutoring. She wouldn't know anything to say about me to anyone questioning her. I'm still not showing to the point someone would immediately know I'm pregnant and I wear baggy shirts more often than not when I'm at a tutoring session. She doesn't know about the wedding, the pregnancy, or anything else other than I study as she works on her math and other subjects. I honestly lead a pretty damn boring life and don't do anything other than tutor, go to class, and work. If I'm home, that's a different story when the guys are home.

My doctor has given me permission to continue working out with Judge. She's assured me the pain I feel after a workout is from using muscles I wouldn't normally use. I've told her everything I do when I'm working out with him and go over the very slight self-defense portion of our workout. Typically we don't move through the motions as if I'm being attacked. Judge simply walks me through the motions and explains why I need to make certain moves and why. There's nothing strenuous or anything as we go through the motions. The guys aren't typically on board with my workouts, but they're there for every single one to make sure nothing happens. Usually it's Hendrix because he's more up my ass about this stuff than anyone else. Not to say Zander and Kendrick don't care about something happening to me. Hendrix simply doesn't take my shit and has more freedom with his time than the other two.

Zander is still gone more than the others. They're so close to being done with the renovations to the new casino house and it's been one problem after another. Brody and him spend countless hours there to make sure everything gets done and is up to their standards. Mr. Vanderwalt is there every now and then, choosing to leave this project as Zander's baby. Every single detail about this gambling house has been made between Zander and Brody. They talk over everything and have picked out every single thing that will be going inside this new business. I'm so proud of him and what he's doing so far as he slowly takes the steps to take over the business from his dad. There's nothing he can do that would make me prouder of him at this point. I have a feeling it will get better as the days go on and he embraces being the head of the family.

Hendrix has been doing more training with Judge and Kain when he has a chance to be away from the house. I know he's got a fight coming up soon so he'll be training even harder. When he can't get away from the house because Kendrick and Zander are busy, Judge comes over and they spends hours in the basement working out and sparring. I usually find myself down there for a while watching them. To see Hendrix move is something magical. His movements are

sleek and always thought out. It doesn't matter if he's only got a second to make a decision about what he's going to do, Hendrix seems to always be several steps ahead of his opponent. At least when it comes to Judge. Though, I suppose that has more to do with them knowing one another for a while and this not being the only time they've trained together. This is something that's happened for a long time now.

Kendrik and I spend our time working on the song we'll be performing for his class. He plays the guitar as I sing the words he wrote. When we perform together in his room, we don't bother shutting the door. No one comes in the room, but more than once over the last few weeks Harper and the guys have been out in the hall multiple times listening to us rehearse. They'll be going to watch the performance, but it's nice to hear them clapping and praising us for the song each time they hear us run through it. We've changed a few things as far as what key he plays in, but nothing else. The song Kendrik wrote is perfect and never needs anything changed about it. I've honestly loved my time with Kendrik because it's us getting lost in our own world only being jerked back to reality when the final cords fade into nothing. It's completely different from what my time is like when I'm alone with Zander and Hendrix.

We're still going through several changes as a family and household of eight. The one I'm the most nervous about takes place in a matter of hours. I've asked everyone that we have one night every month where it's a family night. Not just with the eight of us in the house, but their families as well. I want to get to know everyone better and the easiest way to do this is to spend time with them. These people are the ones who will be in my life moving forward and it's important to get to know them and want to spend time with them. So, I'm looking forward to it, but I'm also not because it means Harper's parents will be in attendance as well. I can't honestly say I want to get to know them after hearing how horrible they believe I am without fully knowing me.

Heading down to the kitchen, to start preparing dinner, I pull up a playlist to have playing as I cook. Everyone knows I get lost in my head when I'm cooking or baking. Today I'll

be doing both. I'm making stuffed shells with homemade garlic bread and a fresh salad. For our dessert tonight they'll have a choice of homemade cheesecake and an apple pie. I'm not sure it's the best choices for everyone else, but it's what I'm craving today. So, they're going to have to deal with what I want to eat. Moving forward, I'll take requests, but not today. Since it's the first time we're doing this and I don't know what's going to happen, everyone can deal with my comfort foods and what I'm craving.

Pulling out everything I need to make the stuffed shells, I begin browning the meat while putting the water on to boil for the shells. I've got several pans lined up on the island to fill with the sauce and shells. We're feeding a lot of people today and I'm almost quadrupling the recipe just to feed everyone and make sure there's a few leftovers for the guys for tomorrow. It's a good thing we've got more than one oven in this house so I can make everything at the same time. My plan is to make the stuffed shells. When they're baking, I'll make the garlic bread so it's ready to go in as soon as I remove the shells. I made the cheesecake earlier today and it's currently in the refrigerator setting. As soon as the garlic bread is in, I'll start the apple pie.

I've already been told I'm not allowed to put the pans in the oven, or remove them when they're ready to be pulled out. One of the guys will do that part for me. They don't even want me down here cooking on my own as it is. There's nothing I can do about it though because Brody and Zeke are the only ones home right now. My guys are working so they can all get here for family dinner. Harper is putting in a last minute cheer team practice because they have an important competition coming up. While I like Brody and Zeke, they are absolutely useless in the kitchen. Neither man can cook to save their lives. Even when one of us help them, the food is inedible. I don't know how they manage to ruin everything. We've honestly had to replace the pots and pans more than once when they've been in the kitchen. That's how bad they are.

Everything is ready for dinner. I've got the shells and garlic bread warming in the ovens. My apple pie is cooling on a cooling rack. I've had enough time to take a shower and get dressed in something appropriate for a family dinner. Everyone is also home. Now we're just waiting on their families to show up so we can sit down to dinner. We're all sitting in the living room when the first knock sounds on the door. I get up to answer the door and immediately wish someone else had gotten it instead. Harper's parents are standing on the porch, the smile immediately turning fake as they take in my appearance.

"Oakliegh, I didn't know you'd be here tonight," Mrs. Whitlock says, her voice shrill and grating on my nerves.

"Why wouldn't I be here. This is my husband's house and I live here. I know Harper's told you I live here so it shouldn't be a surprise. Just like I know she also told you this was my idea," I inform her as politely as I can.

"You're married? But you're not out of school yet?" Mr. Whitlock questions me, his voice full of disapproval.

"She is married. We got married not too long ago. Not many people know and I'd appreciate it if you keep your mouths shut. You know how the family is about these things," Zander threatens, not keeping his disdain from his own voice as he steps up and pulls me into his arms.

"Please, come inside. I'll take your coats and hang them up in the closet. Harper is just in the living room. I'm sure she'd like to see you," I state, ushering them inside so we can shut the door behind them.

The couple enters our home and remove their coats. I don't leave their sight as I hang up the coats on the back of the closet door. I'm sure they want to make sure I don't steal anything from them. Mrs. Whitlock keeps her purse close to her body and lets Zander lead her into the living room. I listen on as she gushes up at Zander on their way in. Yeah, they're going to suck up to my husband in an attempt to get in with the family even better. It's not going to work, but they can try.

Before I can leave for the living room, there's another knock on the door. Turning around, I open it up and find several people standing there. Mr. Vanderwalt is the first person I see though. He stands tall at the front of everyone, a smile covering his face as he looks at me.

"Oakliegh, it's so good to see you again. How are you doing?" he greets me, stepping inside and off to the side with me so everyone else can come inside.

Brody and Kendrik make their way out to us to greet everyone who's here now.

"I'm doing good Mr. Vanderwalt. How are you doing?" I return as he turns to hang his own coat up in the closet on a hanger with the rest of our coats.

"I can't complain. It smells really good in here. Did you make dinner tonight?"

"I did. I'm sorry it's not something better, but I'm craving some stuffed shells, garlic bread, and I made a salad to go with it. There's also cheesecake and an apple pie for dessert," I inform him, not looking him in the eyes.

"Whatever it is, it smells amazing," a woman praises me as I turn to face the rest of the parent's standing in our home.

"Oakliegh, this is my mom, Martha Lockwood. My dad, Calvin Lockwood. Mom, dad, this is Oakliegh Vanderwalt," Brody introduces me to his parents.

"Thank you, Mrs. Lockwood. It's a pleasure to meet you," I greet her before turning to Mr. Lockwood. "You as well, Mr. Lockwood."

"Please, call us Calvin and Martha. It's a pleasure to meet you, Oakliegh. My wife is right, this smells amazing and I can't wait to eat," Mr. Lockwood says, reaching out his hand to shake mine.

I get introduced to Kayson and Zeke's parents as well as seeing Mr. Montez walk in the house again. It's been a while since he's been here. Honestly, I was hoping he didn't show up. Kendrik stares at his dad and doesn't say anything at

first. I know he's waiting for his dad to say something so he knows how tonight is going to go. We'll either have a good night with his dad, or it will end in a fight because of Kendrik's choice not to go for his law degree.

"Kendrik, it's good to see you, son. Oakliegh," Mr. Montez greets us as he removes his coat and hangs it up in the closet. "Am I the last one here?"

"You are, Dad. The others all just got here. Oakliegh, is dinner ready to be pulled out?" Kendrik asks me, not quite turning his back on his father.

"It is. It's just been in there to stay hot."

The two of us walk in the kitchen after making sure Mr. Montez gets to the living room with everyone else. Kendrik lets everyone else know they can head into the dining room and we'll bring everything in to them. As soon as we're in the kitchen alone, Kendrik pulls me into his arms and simply holds me for a few minutes. Neither one of us says a word or moves during that time. We just hold one another and gather all the strength we can in this small moment.

"Are you ready for this?" Kendrik asks me, his voice almost a whisper.

"Not at all. I just hope it all goes okay. I've already been put down by Harper's parents. Let's see how much worse they make it," I say with a small smile on my face.

"They're not going to make it any worse. I hear them say a fucking wrong word to you and they'll be out on their asses and not allowed back here again," Kendrik promises me.

Pressing a kiss against his lips, we turn so he can pull out the pans of shells while I remove the garlic bread. With the garlic bread on the island for me to cut up, I pull out the salad and several different salad dressings for everyone to choose from. Every bottle is new and unopened. Zander walks into the kitchen and helps Kendrik carry pans of stuffed shells into the dining room where everyone is sitting around the large table I've set. My guys put the pans down on either end of the table before going back to get two more pans for the middle of the

table. I head back to cut the garlic bread and place it on platters for everyone to take from various seats at the table.

“Who did you have cater this dinner?” Mrs. Whitlock questions Zander as he pulls out my chair and waits for me to sit so he can push me in.

“No one catered dinner tonight. Everything you’ll be eating was made by me,” I answer her before Zander or Kendrik can open their mouths. Mrs. Whitlock scoffs as if I’m lying to her in front of everyone here. “I’ve been friends with your daughter since we were little girls. I’ve never done anything wrong to you or her. Yet, I’m not good enough for her to be friends with or live in the same house with. Well, I hate to tell you this, but I was in this house first. Not to mention I have tried walking away from my friendship with your daughter. Several times. She won’t let me.

“I work two jobs, go to class, cook meals here at the house for your daughter and everyone else under this roof, tutor other students here, and don’t ever get in any trouble. Not with the school or the police. I stick to myself and try to keep my head down. I’m not sure what I’ve ever done wrong to you, but apparently it’s something so horrible you choose to ignore me in my own home. I’ve bit my tongue for years and let you say whatever you wanted to about me. I can’t change who I am or my circumstances in life. You can change how you treat those around you and never have. Was I found in a dumpster when I was an infant? Yes, I was. Was I raised in foster care? Absolutely. Did I do things no child should have to do? Yes, because I was forced to do them. You have no clue about the life I’ve led or what I do. That’s on you because the two of you have chosen to judge me without getting to know who I am as a person. That speaks more about you than it does me. I’m sorry everyone. I’ll let you all eat dinner and bring out your dessert whenever you’re ready for it.”

“Sit down, Oakliegh,” Mr. Montez speaks up as he remains seated by Kendrik at the opposite end of the table from Mr. Vanderwalt. “I must admit, I wasn’t sure about Oakliegh when Kendrik started seeing her. However, what little I know about this young woman has proven to me how

wrong I've been about her. It's the main reason I'm here tonight. I want to get to know you better, Oakliegh. To be a proper father-in-law. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock, if you don't want to get to know Oakliegh and choose to keep your opinion as it is because of what you've heard from others, that's on you as Oakliegh just stated. If that's the case, I suggest you leave their home right now and don't bother coming back for a family night. There will also be other consequences of your actions as well. Harper, you will not suffer for your parents, but they will know how far I'm willing to take this."

I'm honestly speechless as I look across the table at Kendrik. He's staring at his dad with his mouth hanging open in disbelief. Neither one of us knows what to say right now. I honestly believed Mr. Montez hated me after I went off on him about Kendrik. Now, I'm not so sure.

"I didn't mean anything by asking who catered this dinner tonight," Mrs. Whitlock tries to back pedal her words. "I just didn't know Oakliegh could cook. It's not something a girl like her would be taught."

"That's it!" Kendrik explodes. "Both of you can leave whenever you're ready to go. A fucking girl like Oakliegh? What the fuck does that mean?"

"Mom, you need to stop. Oakliegh is my best friend and there's nothing you can say or do to make me leave her side. Mr. Montez and Kendrik are right. You have no clue what the fuck Oakliegh has been through because you don't give a shit about anyone but yourselves. You've pushed me and gave me no choice on what I do in my life. That shit stops now. Oakliegh has more power than you do. Yet she'll never use that power for negative reasons. Do you know what her goal in life is? To become a damn social worker so she can help children people like you judge and abuse for no fucking reason at all. Simply because you believe you can. My best friend has more class in her pinky finger than you'll ever have in your life. There is no leaving when you're ready. You're ready now. We want to enjoy a family dinner with people who want to be here and are going to be polite and kind. Not fake

people who want to raise their position in life. You're done doing that shit through me!" Harper speaks up as Brody wraps an arm around her shoulders.

"I've never," Mrs. Whitlock begins to say as her husband stands from his seat and pulls her out of hers. "This isn't right. You're all here accepting this junkie and pushing us away. Harper, you're no longer our daughter. You have twenty-four hours to collect all of your belongings from the house. Other than your inheritance, you will never see another dime from us."

Harper's parents leave the room, slamming the door on their way out as Hendrix follows them to ensure they leave the house without doing anything. My face is on fire at what a disaster our first family dinner turned out to be. Tears fill my eyes as Zander wraps his arm around me and pulls me in close to his body. After a minute, I compose myself and look around the table.

"I'm so sorry for this everyone. If anyone else would like to leave, I don't blame you," I say, my voice barely coming out.

"No. We're not leaving," Mrs. Marshall, Zeke's mom, speaks up for everyone. "There is no reason to treat you less than you are, sweetheart. I'm ready to dig into this amazing food and see what a wonderful cook you really are."

There's mumbles of agreement as my eyes land on Harper. My best friend is staring at me with a smile on her face. Tears also fill her eyes as she tries to stop them from falling down her face. Brody still hasn't let go of her as we stare at one another. I mouth 'thank you' to her knowing how hard this is going to hit her once she's alone and everyone has gone home. My best friend has had my back from day one and I'll never be able to thank her enough for it.

We all put food on our plates and dig in to the food I spent hours making today. Not a single person hesitates to begin eating once we've all served ourselves. They all praise my cooking and tell me how good it is. Most everyone at the

table has seconds as the rest of us sit and talk amongst our guests.

Thankfully, the rest of the night goes smoothly and no one has anything bad to say about anything. The men all talk about things I don't pay attention to while Harper and I bring the other women into conversations about various topics. We keep my pregnancy to ourselves for now because we don't want Mrs. Powers to find out anything. When the men retire to the living room for a drink to let their food finish settling before having dessert, I begin clearing off the table. When the boy's mothers try to help me, I politely decline their offer. I prefer to do this stuff on my own. It's essentially my mess and I don't want anyone else to clean up something I've done.

I'm standing in the kitchen all alone after bringing in more dishes when my phone goes off from where I left it on the island. Picking it up, I see I've gotten a new email. Opening my email, I see it's another email from Mrs. Powers. Honestly, I'm not shocked to get one. The guys took away her source for information on me. Taking a deep breath, I open the email to find out what she has to say this time to me. With Mr. Vanderwalt and Mr. Montez here, it might be the perfect time to see her words because they won't get the information secondhand from their sons.

Oakliegh,

You have fucked with my plans for you for the last time. Your little fuck toys thought it would be a good idea to cross me now. They're not as powerful as you seem to think they are. To think they could take out the person I've had following you without any consequences for their actions is absolutely ridiculous. They won't suffer. Not yet, Oakliegh. You'll be the one to pay for what they've done to me.

You're lucky Mr. Powers doesn't know anything about this situation. I did this without his approval and he has no say in what happens to you now. I guess he has been kind of soft when it comes to you. I'm sure you seduced him with your gross pussy while you were living under our roof. Something else you'll suffer for. I'm done playing this game with you. You

truly have no clue who the fuck you're up against, Oakliegh. No one can save you from him.

See, I've made a new friend. One who is more powerful than your men. Men you no doubt seduced into believing your lies. That's the only way anyone would be with a fucking pathetic whale like you. You're nothing more than a useless piece of shit who will never get the chance to be happy. My new friend is more than willing to help me take you out and make it so no one ever finds you again.

I'm coming for you, Oakliegh. Whether or not Mr. Powers supports this decision or not has yet to be seen. Though, I'm sure I can talk him around to my way of thinking. It probably won't take much. I do know what my husband likes and how to work him for my own gain. You don't have much time left, Oakliegh. Better tell everyone goodbye now and make sure you settle all of your affairs right now. You won't get another chance.

Mrs. Powers

My entire body is shaking uncontrollably as Harper steps up to my side. She reads the email over my shoulder as she holds me close to her. Harper is trying to comfort and protect me all at the same time. I can feel her own body starting to shake. When I manage to pull my eyes from my phone screen, I see nothing but pure rage filling her eyes.

“Are you fucking kidding me, Oakliegh? Did you just get this?” she questions me, her voice a whisper so no one else hears her.

“Yeah. I don't want everyone to know. Maybe you can say something to get Mr. Vanderwalt and Mr. Montez to stay after everyone else leaves here for the night. They can know what the email has to say so the guys don't have to go to them afterwards,” I tell her as I begin moving around the kitchen to finish cleaning everything up again.

“I'm gonna send in Hendrix. He's the one to calm you down the best when you have a panic attack. Do what you need to do and I'll take care of everything else,” Harper informs me, never raising her voice.

“I want to apologize to you, Harper. Tonight wasn’t supposed to turn into a shitshow the way it did. I didn’t mean to make your parents leave here. I really wanted them to get to know me for who I am and not what they’ve heard over the years about me,” I apologize to my best friend.

“That’s not on you, it’s on them. My parents came here with one goal in mind tonight. To make you uncomfortable and looking like a fool in front of everyone else here. I’m not going to sit back and hold my tongue any longer. I’ll get my shit out of the house with my guy’s help tomorrow morning and that’s the last I’ll have to do with them,” she says, giving me a smile and hug before leaving the kitchen.

It’s not long before Hendrix shows up in the kitchen and helps me finish cleaning everything up before getting things around for dessert. He reads over the email from Mrs. Powers, rage instantly filling him. This is the worst email from her yet. I honestly don’t know what the hell her problem is. I’ve never done anything to this woman or her husband. They’ve done nothing but try to ruin my life in every possible way there is to ruin another person. That’s on them and has nothing to do with me.

“I’m not even gonna ask if you’re okay, baby girl. That’s some fucked up shit. Let’s get through dessert and we’ll have a talk with our dads in order to figure out what they want done now. We need to step somethin’ up so no one gets you,” he says, holding me in his arms after I set the cheesecake on the island.

“I just want this all over, Hendrix. I don’t want to have to look over my shoulder anymore. Or worry about who’s going to come after me next. Why can’t they just leave me alone?” I cry, letting a few tears out to slide down my face.

“I know, baby girl. We’ll figure this shit out and soon it will be all over. We’re goin’ to make sure we end this for you,” he promises me, kissing the top of my head.

The rest of our night is pleasant and filled with good conversation. Everyone’s parents share embarrassing stories about their sons making all of us laugh hysterically to learn the

shit they've gotten up to so far in their lives. I'm praised multiple times for the food I've made and everyone lets me know they can't wait for our next family dinner night. This is something they all want to continue doing. Other than the email and blow-up with Harper's emails earlier in the evening, I'd say it was a success and I can't wait for the next one either.

As soon as everyone leaves, we sit down and Hendrix shares the details of the email from Mrs. Powers. Mr. Vanderwalt lets us know we'll have more guards at the house and other guys will be following me no matter where I go. It will no longer be just guys from the frat house. Not with everything that's been happening since Christmas. Mr. Montez also adds in some of his own guards to help with guarding me.

With a plan in place, Mr. Vanderwalt and Mr. Montez leave. Instead of hanging out down in the living room with everyone, I head straight up to bed. I'm exhausted and just want to go to sleep. After changing into one of Hendrix's shirts and a pair of shorts, I climb into bed and pull my blankets up over my head. I do everything in my power to stop the tears from spilling over my lashes. The last thing I want to do right now is give anyone else out to get me my tears. They don't deserve them. It's not long before my men enter my room, surrounding me in bed as I fall asleep with their arms wrapped around me tight.

Chapter Twenty-Five



Kendrik

TONIGHT IS OUR performance. Oakliegh and I have been putting in as much time as we can into rehearsing the song I wrote for her to sing. She's nervous as hell and there's nothing I can say to make her less nervous to perform in front of a crowd. It's something that's going to push her out of her comfort zone and just do. I can give her all the sweet words and encouragement filling me, but it won't be enough to make her nerves go away. Still, she's willing to do this. For me. There's no other reason for Oakliegh to get up on stage other than because she wants to do this with me. I'm not taking it for granted either. I love her even more for her willingness to go above for the three of us. It's not something we'll find with anyone else. Ever. No one else is Oakliegh Vanderwalt, the best person I know.

Kayson and I are working even harder to find everything possible on the Powers'. Honestly, there's not much more we can dig up on them. Between the two of us, we've pretty much gotten everything there is to find on these sick, twisted individuals. The only thing we're having a hard time figuring out are the accounts in Oakliegh's name we've found. I've been running so many programs and tracers on them it's not funny. No matter what I do, I constantly hit a dead end when it comes to them. To say I'm frustrated would be an understatement. However, Kayson and I have agreed that we're ready to go over all the information with the guys and turn it over to someone we trust so they can be put behind bars where they belong. There's no way either of them are going to get their hands on Oakliegh. So the sooner we get this done, the better we'll all feel.

I've been working for a little bit today, but now it's time for us to get ready to go. Shutting down my computers, I head over to Oakliegh's room. Knocking on the door, I wait for my girl to call me in before just entering her space. With the last few days she's had, none of us are pushing our luck with her. The only time we ever go in her room without her permission is at night. We all climb in bed with her every night now. It's no longer just Hendrix sleeping with our girl. Every night we all spend the night touching Oakliegh in one way or another. She's either wrapped in our arms or whoever isn't right next to her is touching her with their hand somewhere on her body. Something small to us means more to Oakliegh than she could ever tell us.

"Come in," Oakliegh calls out, her voice muffled behind the door of her room.

Opening the door, I make my way in her room to find Oakliegh standing holding two different dresses up. She looks to me, pleading for me to help her make a decision about what to wear tonight.

"They're both gorgeous dresses, sweet angel. I think the black one will make you feel more comfortable though. It will hide your bump in the lights on the stage and I know you favor black when you're going to be the center of attention," I say walking over and pulling her into my arms.

"Thank you, Kendrik," she says, her voice coming out a whisper as she leans up to press her lips against mine.

I don't deepen the kiss, knowing we don't have a ton of time to get ready. Pulling away from my girl, I calm myself down before looking down at her. "Let's get in the shower. I'll wash your back and you can wash mine."

Oakliegh leads me to the bathroom with a small laugh escaping at my comment. I turn on the shower to let the water heat up while Oakliegh and I strip out of her clothes and leave them in piles on the bathroom floor. As soon as I make sure it's not too hot for my girl and our baby, we step inside. Gently, I maneuver my sweet angel under the water to get her hair wet. I'm going to do more than just wash her back. I'm

going to make this shower all about Oakliegh. I really want to sink my hard cock into her pussy, but that will wait until after tonight's performance. It will be our celebration for doing such an amazing job. For now, I'll just stick to pampering our queen and making her feel good.

Harper will help with her make-up and hair as she normally does for an event. She makes our girl look stunning without going overboard. It always looks as if Oakliegh isn't wearing make-up at all. When it comes to her curly hair, Harper always seems to know exactly what to do to make her look even better than normal. I'm not saying our girl can't do this same stuff to herself because we all know she can. She'd just rather have her best friend in on the process and feeling as if she's a part of whatever is going on in her life.

After washing Oakliegh and making sure everything is rinsed from her body, she returns the favor to me. She massages my shampoo into my hair in her attempt to relax me. It definitely works to relax me and make every thought disappear from my mind. The only thing I can focus on are the way Oakliegh's nails feel scraping against my head as she makes sure every strand of hair is thoroughly washed. Once she's done with my hair, Oakliegh moves on to wash my body. I keep my eyes closed as she runs the sponge down me. Our girl is thorough in everything she does and doesn't skip a single inch of my body. Especially when she gets to my hard cock. I groan out as soon as her hand wraps around my length.

"Sweet angel, if you don't want me to pin you against the fucking wall in here, I suggest you move on from my cock. I'm ready to explode and already want to be buried deep in your pussy. That's not something we have time for right now," I warn her, my voice strained as I close my eyes even tighter than before.

"I'm sorry, Kendrik," she says a hint of laughter filling her voice. She's not sorry at all!

As soon as I'm fully washed, Oakliegh stands back to rinse her hands and other places my soap got on her body. Once she's out of my way, I get under the water to rinse the shampoo and body wash from myself. Oakliegh's already out

of the shower by the time I'm done with a towel wrapped around her hair to start the tedious drying process as she dries the rest of her body off. There's already a towel ready for me as I step out of the shower and grab it to dry myself off. I don't linger in her bathroom as I press a kiss against her lips and disappear back into my own room to get ready for tonight.

Oakliegh and I were the last performers of the night. I wasn't expecting to go last and it took everything in me to keep her calm and not running from the building. Especially once she got a glimpse of the crowd filling the small auditorium we're in. We wait, not so patiently, for our turn to perform while I talk about everything under the sun I can think of. Oakliegh doesn't go into a panic attack or anything as we wait and I'm so proud of her for keeping herself as calm as possible. Honestly, she makes me laugh a few times when she can see I'm getting frustrated or aggravated with having to wait for so long.

When we finally got on stage, it was as if all of Oakliegh's nerves simply disappeared. She kept her eyes locked on Hendrix and Zander in the front row of the auditorium. Her voice was clear and loud as her smokey, haunting tone filled the room. Not a single person moved, coughed, or did anything during our song. I played along with my girl and nothing was about to take the smile from my face. I'm so damn proud of her. Tonight, Oakliegh conquered one of her fears of being the center of attention. And she looks damn amazing as she performs.

The black dress I told her would be better between the two dresses she was holding up molded to her body while looking classy and sexy without being revealing. There isn't a single inch of skin exposed that shouldn't be as she slightly sways to the music while singing. It's honestly as if she's singing straight to her husband and other man. With the lights on stage, it would be almost impossible for her to see me since we're both under a spotlight. Her hair has been left down, her natural curls laying against her back. It doesn't even look like Harper put any make-up on her face at all. Well, other than

that stuff girls put on their eyelashes. Like normal, my sweet angel looks stunning as she performs.

When the song is done and our last note fades into nothing, the crowd goes wild. I feel a bead of sweat sliding down my back from my own bout of nerves and the heat from the spotlight shining on me. Reaching out, I grab my girl's hand and press a kiss against her delicate skin. Turning to face the crowd once again, we take a bow and leave the stage. Oakliegh's face is redder than a fire hydrant as she comes to a stop out of the way of anyone else moving around backstage. My smile grows as I take her in. She's laughing and happier than I thought she'd be in this moment. If I had to make a guess on how Oakliegh would be after our performance, I'd tell you she'd be in the bathroom losing what little bit she managed to eat for dinner. Instead, she's confident, radiant, and laughing with excitement.

"You were amazing, sweet angel. I have no words for how you sounded out there," I tell her, pressing my lips against hers before she can respond.

Oakliegh doesn't let me keep this kiss chaste as she opens her mouth and slides her tongue against my lips to open up for her. I don't bother trying to stop her from kissing me however she wants. We're lost in our own world, everything else fading into the background. At least until I get a tap on my shoulder. Breaking away from Oakliegh, I turn to rip into whoever just interrupted us. Since it's Hendrix and Zander, I'll give them a pass. I'm sure they are eager to make sure she's okay.

"You two were so fuckin' good. Baby girl, you're gonna be scooped up by some talent scout or some shit before you can blink," Hendrix says, pulling her into his arms and kissing her as if his life depends on it.

"He's not wrong. Kendrik, I've never heard you play so damn passionately before. This was definitely your best performance yet. I can only think it has to do with our girl being on stage right next to you," Zander offers his opinion as he stares at his wife.

Zander doesn't wait a second once Hendrix pulls back. He doesn't give her sweet words or anything else as he pulls her body close to his and kisses her deeply. It's like their kiss on their wedding day all over again. Neither one comes up for air for several minutes as Hendrix lets me know others are coming back to see us. We tap Zander on his shoulder so Oakliegh isn't embarrassed by someone catching her making out with her husband backstage.

"So fucking beautiful, LeeLee. I could listen to you sing every second of the day and never get tired of hearing your voice," he finally praises her as she beams at his words.

"Thank you," she replies in a small voice just as Harper, the guys, Mr. Vanderwalt, and my dad walk up to us.

Shock fills me because my father has never once showed up to anything I've done. Not a performance, football game, or anything that he didn't absolutely have to attend. I'd ask someone to pinch me to make sure I'm not dreaming, but it's kind of pointless. I want to run from here and hide until he heads home because the last thing I need to do is be berated in front of everyone still lingering back here.

"That was the best thing I've ever heard in my life. Girl, your voice is pure sin," Harper gushes as my father steps up to me.

"Dad, what are you doing here?" I question, not sure what else to say.

"Someone very wise made me see the error of my ways. She told me how amazing you were when it comes to music and that if I ever hope to have a relationship with my son, I had better pull my head out of my ass before it was too late," he responds, staring directly at Oakliegh as she dips her head down and a blush stains her cheeks and neck. "Son, your path in life is not the same as mine. It's easy for anyone to see how passionate you are when it comes to music. You'd never have this same feeling practicing law. I'm truly sorry for being so hard on you. For trying to force you into something you aren't meant to do. I believe we need to sit down and have a

serious conversation about where you want to take this. What your long term goals are.”

“I’d like that,” I say, turning my full attention on Oakliegh.

I can’t even say I’m surprised to learn she went against my father for me. Oakliegh may come off as timid and sweet, someone who won’t stick up for any reason at all because all she knows is pain, that’s not the truth though. When it comes to someone she truly loves and considers a part of her world, Oakliegh is scarier than a mama bear protecting her cubs.

“Oakliegh, thank you,” my dad says, stepping up and pulling her in for a hug as we all stand back and watch with open mouth. He isn’t someone who passes out hugs to anyone. “You are a truly amazing talent and I’m glad to witness your first ever performance. Keep Kendrik in line and don’t let him ever push this passion to the side for any reason. You’re his guiding light and he’ll listen to you more than anyone else.”

My dad hands over a large bouquet of flowers to Oakliegh I didn’t even notice him holding. She’s actually got an armful of flowers from everyone in our circle. We get more kind words of praise from Mr. Vanderwalt and the others before they leave us to talk to the few scouts waiting behind them. Oakliegh tries to hide behind me because she has no desire or interest to continue performing. Still, she answers questions she’s asked and doesn’t turn anyone away before politely declining their offer to study. Hell, she’s even offered a deal with a record label. There’s no hesitation as she turns them down in favor of turning the attention toward me.

I accept several business cards from scouts, a record label, and a few agents here for artists. That’s not what I want to do though. I’ve already got a plan in mind and I hope to present it to my dad and Mr. Vanderwalt before too long. Oakliegh and the guys know what I want to do, but no one else does. That’s something I’ll talk to my dad about when we have this upcoming talk. Something I think I’m actually looking forward to for the first time in my life.

When everyone is gone, I turn my full attention on this beautiful, selfless, amazing, sweet angel standing at my side.

“I love you so fucking much, Oakliegh. You have no idea what my dad showing up here means to me. If it weren’t for you, it wouldn’t have happened. Man, I wish I were there to see the look on his face when you went off on him. Is that why you got a less than cool reception from Kain?”

“It might have something to do with it. I just know how much you were hurting from his treatment of you and the demand for you to follow in his footsteps. It’s not what you were meant to do. I don’t have a dad to have a relationship with and I see how you look at the way Mr. Vanderwalt interacts with Zander and Hendrix. It’s something you’re desperate to have of your own. If a few words from me made a difference, then I’m glad I confronted him,” she returns, pressing her lips against mine. “Now, let’s get out of here. Take me home, Kendrik. I love you so much too. Forever and always.”

“Forever and always,” I repeat, my voice a whisper as I turn to put my guitar away before taking Oakliegh’s hand.

We meet everyone out front and head to the vehicles. Heading home, I hold Oakliegh’s hand as we make the short trip. Pulling in the garage, I don’t waste any time shutting the engine off and getting out from behind the wheel. Oakliegh remains in her seat until I open her door. Helping her from my SUV, we race inside and straight up to her room. Oakliegh laughs the entire time. Zander and Hendrix are right on our heels as they enter the room and the door slams shut before the lock clicks in place. We all help our girl strip out of her dress, stepping back to stare at her in nothing more than a thong. Fucking delectable! The rest of the night we worship her body and show her how we feel about her. A perfect ending to a wonderful performance and the best night I’ve had in a really long time when my dad was around.

Chapter Twenty-Six



Oakliegh

THE PERFORMANCE WITH Kendrik was just over a week ago. That night was the best and worst night of my life. I was so nervous I thought I was going to be sick so many times. Kendrik did his absolute best to keep my mind off what we were about to do. I tried to do the same thing with him because he was nervous as well. My sweet guy was trying to act as if he wasn't nervous in order to make me feel better and be there for me. I think it's honestly almost impossible for anyone to go on stage in front of a crowd without feeling even the slightest bit nervous. There's just so many things that can go wrong or happen while you're singing or playing an instrument for an audience. Though, during our rehearsals I was nervous as well. Kendrik's presence can only do so much to help me combat my nerves.

In my personal opinion, the best part of the performance was after when everyone came backstage to see us. To see Kendrik's dad admit he was wrong and understand his son's passion for music. I hope the talk they have is a good one. That Kendrik can admit what he wants to do moving forward and have the help he needs to make his dreams a reality. Only time will tell, but I hope the night of the performance was a true turning point in Kendrik's relationship with his father. As someone who doesn't have a father and has never had one in my life, I feel it's important to have a good relationship with your parents. Before, there was no way my man could have a good relationship with his dad because he wanted his son to do something he has no interest in. That's no way to have a good relationship with your child. Not when

you're placing demands on him and making him feel less than he is because he's not following the path you want him to.

Kendrik has been on the phone more often than not since our performance. So many scouts want him to work with them. They recognize his talent and want to be named as one of the people who found him or helped him come into his full potential. Kendrik isn't going to let anyone force him to take his career in a way he doesn't want to. He's got a very clear plan in his mind of what he wants to do and how he wants things to go. None of the people he's been on the phone with are going to sway him with offers of money or promises of a grand future. Kendrik will do what he needs to do in order to make his dreams a reality. Everyone he's talking to is still a contact and way to network with others he needs to in order to help with what he wants to do moving forward.

We've all been spending more time together. Even if it's the guys following me to work and hanging out until my shift is over with. There's a few times Hendrix has almost been asked to leave by me because he doesn't want me to carry the heavier plates or anything to the tables. Sal laughs his ass off every time Hendrix becomes over the top and wants to do my job for me. Or when he tries to force me to sit down with him and eat something. Or have more water to drink. Zander is even worse than Hendrix is though. I've told him he's no longer allowed to follow me to work if he can't ease up and let me earn my own money. So, he uses the times I'm working to be at the new gambling house to do what he has to do there. Brody goes with him every single time he's there because he wants to learn what it takes to open a gambling house and have some input into the decisions being made. Zander definitely appreciates the help and teaching someone what he's doing.

Harper has been throwing herself into her cheer team. Their competition is this weekend and she wants to win so bad. They all do, but my best friend is trying to prove she's a good addition to the team and doesn't want to feel as if she's letting anyone down. It doesn't hurt that they just changed her role within the team. She's now a flyer and is put up in mounts. She gets tossed in the air and then caught. Harper has

been practicing as much as she possibly can and working out when she's not at a practice session. Her goal is to strengthen her core muscles so she can hold herself tight and control her movements when she's getting tossed around.

Despite the last email from Mrs. Powers, I don't feel the need to look over my shoulder as much as I did before they ran my stalker out of town. I might still be getting followed but I'm not feeling as if I'm being watched or anything when I'm out of the house. Maybe it has something to do with the increase in the guards surrounding me. I've got the guys from the frat house still tailing me along with men from Mr. Vanderwalt and Mr. Montez. They do their best to blend in, but you can tell they aren't college students. Some of my professors are having a fit about them being in class with me, but they can't do anything about it. Mr. Vanderwalt has gone to the Dean and informed her of the situation. Dean Taylor is on board with me remaining safe no matter what we have to do.

Hendrix called a meeting with the frat members who watch over me. I was invited to attend and we had a long talk about what changes needed to be made moving forward. Starting with letting them know I'm pregnant so it's even more important now they don't let anyone get too close to me or hurt me in any way. He also told them they need to start communicating with one another. If they see something they don't like, they need to tell the next person watching over me and one of the guys. They also need to call the guys if they see anyone following me around or begins making a regular appearance showing up wherever I am. I've added in my own stipulations as well. The main one being if I have a doctor's appointment, they will not be going inside the building or office with me. From now on I'll have at least one of my guys there so it's not a big deal. It's kind of exhausting but I'm hoping it's not long before I don't have to worry about all this shit any longer. That we can simply live our lives without me having to worry about someone out to get me.

Today is an important day for our small family. I've got a doctor's appointment and the guys are going with me. With everything going on I haven't been able to have an

ultrasound yet. That changes today. We get to see our little one and hear the heartbeat. I've heard it before but none of my guys have. They were pissed when they found out I had doctor's appointments and didn't tell them about them so they could go with me. Now they have to know every time I have an appointment so they can go with me. I want them there with me. It's not a hardship for me to let them know when there's an appointment in order for them to change up their schedules to go with me. This isn't something they're going to push off or only have one of the guys show up with me if it's at all possible for them to go with me.

Putting the finishing touches on my hair, I stand from my chair to find Zander standing just inside my door. I'm not scared to find him in here as I stare at him.

"LeeLee, what's going on? I called your name a few times and you were lost in your head or something," he asks me, stepping up into my space and leaning down to give me a kiss.

The feel of Zander's lips on my own is something I spent so long dreaming about. Now I can say the reality of the situation is better than anything I could ever dream up on my own. Kissing each of my men is better than anything my imagination could conjure up. Not that I have much in the way of kissing guys before them.

"I was just thinking of everything. Waiting for the day this isn't our life. When I can leave the house without someone following me around as if I'm the damn President or something. I mean, I know you guys will always want me to take someone when I leave the house or anything, but not like I am now," I answer him, not holding back anything because that's what we've been doing and it hurts to not share or be honest with the men in my life.

"Yes, you'll always have someone with you if one of us can't be out with you. It comes with the family business. People will use you to get to us. Oakliegh, you're my wife and we all love you more than we can ever put in words. Everything we do is for your safety. Now, are you ready to go see our baby?"

“I am. I’m excited. And glad we all get to do this together. Are the guys ready?”

“They are. They’re waiting downstairs for us. I swear Hendrix is ready to come up here and throw you over his shoulder to get out the door. He’s excited. We all are,” Zander tells me, laughing at his brother’s expense.

We’ve been in the waiting room of the doctor’s office for almost a half hour now. I keep getting dirty looks from the other women surrounding us. I’m not sure if it’s because I’m surrounded by my men or what their issue is. It’s not like I truly care. It just reminds me of all the looks I get from people who know me. Something that hurts because these women don’t know me, yet they’re judging me based on what they see.

“Don’t let these bitches bother you, baby girl. They don’t know you, our situation, or anythin’ else. Let them fuckin’ judge because we know who you are and love you,” Hendrix tells me, talking loud enough for everyone to hear him.

All the women turn their heads after scoffing and letting us know they’re not happy with Hendrix’s words. Oh well. I guess they shouldn’t look at me like I’m a piece of shit or something if they don’t want one of my men to speak up and let them know they don’t need to look in our direction for any reason.

“Oakliegh,” a nurse calls my name as I turn to see her standing in the doorway.

We all get up and follow the nurse back so she can get my vitals taken. During the process she asks me if I’ve had anything going on I’m concerned about. This is where Zander and Hendrix speak up. Goodness!

“Should she be workin’, carryin’ heavy dishes to tables and on her feet so long on a regular basis?” Hendrix asks the nurse, turning his glare on me.

“As long as she’s not in pain or feeling off in any way, it’s okay for Oakliegh to work and carry things to a certain point. She knows her body. As long as she listens to it, the baby and her should be just fine,” the nurse answers, an indulgent smile on her face as Hendrix shakes his head at her.

“It’s okay for her to be working out? She works out multiple times a week and is always so sore afterwards. More than a person should feel after a workout. Especially since she’s been doing the routine for a little bit now,” Zander questions, not glaring at me, but still giving me his version of a stink eye.

“Again, as long as she listens to her body and doesn’t push herself past the point she does damage to herself, working out is just fine. It might change as she gets further along in her pregnancy, but at this point she’s okay to continue working out. Oakliegh has talked to Dr. Gonzalez multiple times about this to ensure she does everything correctly and doesn’t hurt the baby,” the nurse answers as she makes notes in my chart on her tablet about my blood pressure and weight. “You can’t go to the bathroom yet because you’ll be getting an ultrasound done today. The technician will let you know when you can go. It’s going to be uncomfortable and I’m sorry for that.”

The nurse leads us to the ultrasound room and leaves us alone as I get up on the exam table while the guys pull their chairs up to the side of my bed. We all look around the room at the various posters and things hanging on the wall. Hendrix’s eyes are drawn to a poster showing the baby at each stage of the pregnancy. Kendrik is looking at a poster showing what happens when a woman goes into labor. I watch as his face pales with the thought of a human coming out of my body. Zander lets his gaze wander, never lingering on a poster for very long.

Before anyone can say a word about what they’re looking at, there’s a knock on the door and another woman enters the room.

“Good afternoon. My name is Andrea and I’ll be your technician today. Are we all ready to see your baby?” she asks,

a smile on her face as she keeps her attention on me and not the guys.

“Yes!” I say, excitement filling me.

Hendrix pulls his phone from his pocket and does something I can't see as the technician gets me ready to perform the ultrasound. She pulls my shirt up over my stomach and just below my boobs while sliding my leggings down a little bit. Andrea places a towel over the edge of my pants so none of the gel stuff gets on my clothing.

“Let's get started,” Andrea says, grabbing the gel to squirt on my stomach.

I wince a little at the cool touch against my skin. Zander takes my hand and places a kiss against my temple as Andrea pulls the wand, or whatever it's called, to place against my stomach. In a matter of seconds, the sound of our son or daughter's heart beating away fills the small room we're in. Tears fill my eyes as I listen to the noise. Looking at my guys, awe fills all of their faces. Hendrix is holding his phone up, recording the sound causing those pesky tears to spill over my lashes.

“Are you ready to see your little one?” Andrea asks, pressing some buttons on the machine. “If you're far enough along, are you wanting to find out the gender today?”

I don't bother looking at the guys. We've already discussed what we wanted to do in this situation. “No. We'd like to wait until he or she is born.”

Andrea pushes some more buttons and the sound of our baby's heartbeat fades away. The screen fills with the image of our little one. I can't pull my eyes away as I take in every detail I can see from the image as Andrea moves the wand thing around. All three guys move closer and place their hands on me to get closer looks at our baby.

We also don't care who the father is. All three of my men will raise any children we have and they'll all act as if our children are theirs no matter whose blood runs through their

veins. The decision was made between my guys and I stand by it.

Our technician points out various things as she looks at our baby to make sure everything is okay.

“You look to be about twenty-one weeks pregnant, Oakliegh. You’re just over the halfway point. Dr. Gonzalez will go over any findings at your next appointment. Does anyone have any questions for me?” Andrea asks, a smile on her face as she continues to look between the screen and us. When no one says anything, she goes on. “I’m going to print out some pictures for you. Once I’m done, you can go to the bathroom. The door just over there is where you’ll go.”

We all thank Andrea as she prints out several pictures and hands them over. After helping me wipe most of the gel off my stomach, Andrea leaves us in the room alone. Hendrix helps me off the table and rushes me to the bathroom because I’m about to make a mess all over the place. I’m going to say now it sucks when you have to go to the bathroom and can’t while you’re pregnant.

Once I’m back in the room with my guys, I catch them all staring down at pictures of our little one. They all have smiles on their faces and my heart fills with love at the scene I walk into. Zander is the first one to notice me back with them. He gives me a panty melting smile while pulling out his wallet and placing the picture inside before replacing it in his pocket. Hendrix and Kendrick do the same with their pictures before handing me over my own copy of our little girl or boy. I don’t bother looking down at the picture right now because I know if I do, I won’t stop looking at it and we’ll be here all day long.

“Let’s go home. I want to climb in bed with you and thank you for giving us the best gift we’ll ever receive,” Kendrick says, his voice loaded with emotion as he walks up to me and kisses me as if I’m his reason for breathing.

The four of us leave the room and make sure I don’t need to make another appointment before leaving the office. Zander drives us back home where we hole up in my room for the rest of the day. The only time one of us leaves is to get

food and something to drink. There's no studying, watching movies, or anything else. My guys worship me multiple times until I can't take anymore. When we weren't having sex, all talk was about the baby. How we wanted the nursery and everything else the guys could think of. Including picking out names. I've never felt so loved or laughed so much in my entire life.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



Zander

I'M FINALLY TAKING a break from the gambling house. Oakliegh has expressed an interest in learning to drive. I completely understand because it will give her a deep sense of freedom and independence she doesn't currently have. If she needs to go somewhere, she can get in a car and go without waiting for someone to take her or walking everywhere. Soon, she won't be able to walk everywhere because of her pregnancy. The sooner I can teach her how to drive, the quicker she can go for her permit and then license. The first step in doing this is borrowing a car from someone. Our SUVs are too big for her to get behind the wheel in to start off with. Kayson has a car but I already know she won't get in it. Not to drive. His car is expensive as fuck and she'll worry about damaging it. It's understandable and I can't say I blame her. So, Judge let me know he's got a beater he doesn't really drive we can use for Oakliegh to practice in.

After picking up the car from Judge with him letting me know if anything happens to it, it doesn't matter, I make my way toward home. This car is fucking old. It was made before I was born if that tells you anything. However, the entire car is in pristine condition. There's nothing ticking in the engine, no lights filling up the dash, or anything else. Hell, Judge has a kickass sound system in this car. The man takes care of it as well as we take care of our new cars and SUVs.

Oakliegh doesn't know today is her first lesson in driving. I didn't say anything to her because I want to do something special for her. Our girl has been dealing with a ton of shit, mainly on her own, while we do our work, classes, and

everything else we've got going on as we prepare to take over for our fathers. Kendrik and Hendrix know what I'm doing today because the guards around our girl have to know every move she makes before she makes it so they can be as prepared as possible to protect her with everything in them.

Once a week we meet with everyone from the frat and the guards who will be watching over my wife. We discuss who's going to be working which shift, where Oakliegh will be on a daily basis, and what her work schedule is so we can get extra eyes in there before she even steps foot through the door. Judge is the main one putting together guards from my dad and Mr. Montez into rotation to guard our most precious gift. Not the baby, Oakliegh herself. She hates all the men watching over her, but there's really nothing we can do about it. None of us will ever forgive ourselves if something happens to her.

The only time someone won't be with her is during the monthly meeting the guards have for our dads and the family. Judge and Kain hold monthly meetings to ensure everyone is on the same page and to go over anything important that may be coming up. Parties, fundraisers, trips either man have to take for business or other reasons. It's also used as an opportunity for the men to spend an hour or so training together. To let Judge and Kain see how much work needs to be done, which men need extra sessions with them, and anything else that stands out to them. This also allows the two men in charge of security for the family to spend time with the men entrusted to guard our dads or anyone else in the family we feel need it. If anything is going on, those two men will be the first to bring it up to our dads to deal with the situation.

When I left the house this morning, my wife was still sleeping. She's been sleeping a little bit more these days. From what Kendrik says, it's going to happen more the further along her pregnancy gets. It's normal and not something we need to worry about because her body is doing what it needs to in order to grow another human. I'll always worry about my LeeLee, but I'll also listen to Hendrix and Kendrik if they know something about what's going on that I don't. I haven't had the time to read the books Kendrik got us all about

pregnancy. It's something I really need to get my ass in gear on.

Pulling up to the house, no one's outside. At least not from what I can see. Men are guarding our property, hiding anywhere they can. We don't want to let anyone know how many men Oakliegh has on her at all times. The less the Powers' know, the easier it will be to catch them when they fuck up. These two are so arrogant and in their own fucking heads that we will catch them. It's just a matter of time before we find them sending someone to the house or at the house themselves. Especially Mrs. Powers after her latest email to my wife.

I don't pull into the garage because we'll be leaving as soon as Oakliegh is ready to head out. If she's still sleeping, we'll have to make sure she eats something before leaving the house. I know that's the most important thing for her right now. She needs to fuel her body and make sure our son or daughter is getting the nutrition they need through her. I can't even believe we're going to be parents. It's amazing to know we created a new life. Someone who will depend on us for everything as they grow and learn. We'll be responsible for everything they learn and do as they get older and start to figure out what they want in their life. Thankfully, I've had some truly remarkable role models in my life to show me how to guide and love a child unconditionally.

Walking around the house, I make a note of everything. Especially the cameras to make sure nothing has been done to them. Kendrik is amazing when it comes to all this security shit. However, it just takes one person to figure out how to hack into his system to override everything he's done to protect our girl. From the outside, nothing appears to be wrong. There's no debris or anything else covering them and there's clear points they're covering. Kendrik constantly monitors them so he'll know if something is going on with them.

I don't stop once entering the house, I make my way directly up to Oakliegh's room. Yes, she still has her own room even though we're married because we want her to know

she'll always have her own space while living with us. It doesn't stop us from spending every single night with her. If at any point in time she ever tells us she wants to have a night on her own, we'll let her have it. Even in our new home we'll make sure she has her own space. We'll all have our own space because at certain points in time we'll all need it. Just somewhere we can go to get away from everything and everyone in our lives.

Knocking on Oakliegh's closed door, I wait for her to call out for me to come in. If I don't hear from her, I'll go in to wake her up or see if she's in the shower.

"Come in," I hear my wife call out to me through the door.

Opening the door, I find Oakliegh sitting up in bed still wearing nothing but one of my shirts. That's what she slept in last night. We all love seeing her in our clothing. There's just something about our girl wearing something of ours that makes us all feel as if we're fucking untouchable. Like nothing in the world can do a damn thing to bring us down. All because of a piece of clothing. It's really nothing significant in the grand scheme of things, but it means the world to us.

"Hey LeeLee," I greet her, not sure what she's doing. "Got any plans today?"

"Nope. I was going to study in a little bit and probably take a nap. What's going on?" she returns, looking up at me as if I'm the best man in the world.

"Well, you mentioned wanting to learn to drive. So, today is your first lesson. I went and borrowed a car for you to use and thought we could go to an empty parking lot so you can get behind the wheel," I casually tell her as if it's not a big deal.

"Are you serious! You're taking me driving today?" she shrieks in her excitement while bouncing around on the bed.

"I'm serious. Judge let us borrow an old car of his. We're going to an abandoned parking lot. There won't be any

other cars or anything for you to worry about. Today is all about getting you behind the wheel and learning how everything works. What you do to make the car move, stop, where everything is. You'll drive a little bit so you can get used to it, but that's all we're going to focus on today," I let her know with a smile on my face.

When Oakliegh is excited about something, it extends to everyone around her. Every single emotion she's feeling is felt by those closest to her. If she's having a horrible day, we all feel her pain and do everything in our power to help her through it. Today is a day she's excited and I'm the reason for it. I've put the largest smile ever on her face and no one can take that from either one of us.

Oakliegh jumps from her bed straight into my arms. She wraps herself around my body. I hold her close as she vibrates with excitement against my body. My wife nuzzles her face into my neck and presses kisses against my skin. Instantly my cock is rock hard. I try to think of anything else I can to get it to go down instead of pressing against Oakliegh's core.

"Can we go now?" Oakliegh asks, not letting go of me or moving her face from my neck.

"We can go whenever you're ready, LeeLee. Think you might want to wear more than just one of my shirts outside though," I tell her, trying to keep my voice light as a flash of jealousy courses through me at the thought of anyone seeing Oakliegh's exposed skin.

Oakliegh wiggles to get down and I let her go as she races to her closet. In a matter of minutes she's back dressed in a pair of my leggings while not removing my shirt from her body. I watch on as Oakliegh runs a brush through her hair and tosses it up in a messy bun. She grabs her coat from the end of her bed and races from the bedroom, leaving me alone. Shaking my head and laughing, I head out and follow her down the stairs. I find my wife at the closet putting her shoes on and tying them as quick as she possibly can.

Together we head out and I lead her to Judge's car. Right now, I'll do the driving until we're in an empty lot I know she won't do any damage in. Well, I'm hoping she won't do any damage. I guess there's always a possibility for something to happen, but I really hope not.

We've been in this parking lot for a while now and I swear to everything holy I've died about a million times already. Oakliegh can do a lot of shit. Driving is not one of them. The very first thing I did when we got here was point out where everything is. Especially the brake and gas pedal. When my wife got in the driver's seat, we went over adjusting the seat and mirrors so they were set for her to use before she even started the car. I told her to only use her right foot to push the pedals. Oakliegh asked a ton of questions and I answered each one the best I could. That was the easy part.

The second my wife got the engine started, she gunned it past the red line. I had to pull her leg so she released the pedal. Oakliegh essentially froze the second she heard the noise of the engine increasing at a steady level. Once the engine was done being revved, we tried again. I instructed her how to put the car in gear and then to slowly press down on the gas. Yeah, my wife and I have two very different views of what slow means. Her foot jammed down on the gas pedal and we were both thrown back in the seats. I wasn't planning on using my seatbelt, despite demanding she wear hers, but that decision was soon changed.

I made sure to choose a completely empty parking lot where not even a building remained standing. All the light posts had been removed and it's a literal empty space perfect to teach someone how to operate a vehicle. Oakliegh still managed to find something to ding up Judge's car. And dent it. I'm not even sure what the hell she hit to cause the dings and dent. There's literally nothing there to do any damage.

She also uses both of her feet to drive. So, if we weren't being thrown back into our seats from her taking off too damn fast, she was slamming on the breaks testing the strength of our seatbelts. Those videos you see of the driving

instructor pressing the brake on their side of the car? Yeah, I wish I fucking had those damn things in this car. Unfortunately, I was along for the ride and there was nothing I could do but hold on.

Oakliegh didn't get any better the longer we were in the parking lot either. Somehow she managed to get worse. I'm sure frustration played a large part in everything. However, I'm not sure I'll be able to get back in the car with her again. Not after she managed to put the car on three wheels when she went flying over a pothole or something. Hell, it might have been on two wheels, I'm just trying to figure out what to say to my wife.

Oh, and let's not forget the horn. Oakliegh leaned forward in her seat as she was driving and rested her body against it for minutes on end. Judge has a really loud, annoying horn that plays some sort of tune instead of sounding normal. I'm not sure why she didn't move once we were both startled by the sound, but she didn't. I literally had to pull her body away from the wheel in order for me to get it to stop. Oakliegh laughed so hard once it stopped that she closed her eyes while still driving. Yeah, I can't do this shit again. I'll be dead the next time. Talk about making sure my heart still works!

"Zander, this isn't working. I don't know why I can't do this, but I can't," Oakliegh cries out, putting the car in park before it's even come to a full stop.

Again we jerk to an immediate stop and this time my seatbelt doesn't hold me back. My forehead slams into the dash in front of me causing an instant headache.

"Maybe you just need more practice," I tell her, my voice shaking with the adrenaline coursing through me while rubbing my head where it hit the dash.

"Are you alright?" she questions, her voice rising to almost shrieking levels.

"I'll be okay, LeeLee. Why don't we head back to the house and figure out what to do to help you get on the right

path. There's gotta be a way we can get you driving," I tell her, my voice strained as I unfasten my belt with shaking hands.

She nods her head as she unfastens herself and gets out of the driver's seat. We meet in front of the car and I pull her into my arms. Oakliegh cries into my chest, letting her frustration out. There's really nothing I can say because I don't know why learning how to drive is so difficult for her to get the hang of. Maybe Hendrix or Kendrik would be better teachers for her. At the very least, they should have the privilege of experiencing our girl driving just like I got to.

Getting back in the driver's seat, my knees immediately slam into the dash since Oakliegh is so much shorter than I am. I can't hold in the grunt of pain as she gets in the passenger seat. Oakleigh just looks at me trying to hide the smile covering her beautiful face. I make the short drive home once I've adjusted the seat for myself and moved the mirrors to where I could see. My mind races with everything that could have happened today if I had chosen to take my wife anywhere else to practice her driving skills.

"Zander, do you think I'll ever learn to drive?" Oakliegh suddenly asks me, her voice small and weak instead of normal.

"Yeah. We just have to figure out what goes through your mind when you're behind the wheel. Once we do, we'll be able to put a plan in place to ensure you can focus on what you're doing. It's okay, LeeLee. We'll make sure we figure it all out," I tell her, still not sure I'll ever be able to get back in a car with her again. At least until she learns how to drive.

"Okay. Can we, um, maybe not tell the guys about this?" she questions, her voice a whisper as I pull into our driveway.

"I'm not promising anything, LeeLee. They knew where I was taking you today. If they ask me, I'll tell them to go talk to you. One way or another you might have to tell them what happened."

"Damn it," she mutters as I park and shut the engine off.

Getting out of the car, I walk around for a minute inspecting the damage that's been done to the car. Yeah, there are definitely some dings to the sides of the car. In the front bumper is a dent and in the back passenger side door is another dent. I truly don't know what the hell happened to put those marks there. I'll have to go back and find out what's in the parking lot that I missed. I'm not gonna lie, part of the time, I believe my eyes might have been shut because I was afraid for my life with her behind the wheel.

Together we walk inside and Oakliegh sneaks upstairs since it sounds as if everyone is in the living room. I'm not in the mood to deal with anyone right now. I just need a little bit of time for my heart to stop racing and the adrenaline to stop coursing through me. So, like my wife, I head upstairs and head straight for my room. I'll go join my wife once I take a shower and calm myself down a little bit. She doesn't need to see me all worked up more than she already has.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



Hendrix

TRAINING HAS BEEN all I've been doing for the last week. When I'm not in class or at the gambling house working, I'm with Judge and Kain busting my ass to train for a fight. A new underground fight ring opened up and it's not too far from Grand Ridge. Right now it's invite only for fighters and somehow the owner has heard about me. I'm not sure how because I really don't put my name out there. At the same time, I'm not about to turn down a fight. Not when I have so much fucking rage filling me and desperately need a release. This isn't the kind of shit I can take out using Oakliegh's body. It would be different if we'd already had the talk we need to, but that's not the case. So, I'll train my ass off and step in the cage to beat the fuck out of my opponent to find the release of the rage filling me.

There's only so much I can do when it comes to Oakliegh and everything going on with her. Getting my hands bloody on the fucker who was stalking her barely satisfied my thirst for revenge. At this point in time, the only thing that's going to fully satisfy my thirst is taking out Mr. and Mrs. Powers. Of making that stupid bitch watching me take her husband's life knowing there's not a fucking thing she can do about it. Even if we let her live, there's too much we know to ensure she'll spend life in prison with no chance of ever seeing the light of day as a free woman ever again. So, if she snitches on me, she'll be condoning herself to prison where her days will be filled with torture. Torture I've set up by contacting someone in the same prison as her.

I miss the fuck out of Oakliegh since I train for so long. Even though I'm in the same house as her, we don't talk or spend any time together. Oakliegh will come down to the gym in the basement of our house to watch me, but it's not the same as hanging out with her or something. She's far away from me and I'm focused on sparring and working out. It's better than training somewhere else though. At least at home I know Oakliegh is safe and okay. That she's interested in watching me work and see what I do. Yeah, I might put on a show for her while sparring with Judge, but that's just my cocky ass wanting to impress my girl.

Kain only works at the house with us when he knows Oakliegh isn't around. The fucker owes her an apology for being a rude asshole to her when they met and doesn't want to make it. I'm tempted to force him to his knees in front of her before giving her the apology she deserves. I get why he was rude. If I were in his position I'd have been pissed at her too. However, our girl did what she needed to in order to help Kendrik. Kain was there the day she went off on Mr. Montez and listened to every word she had to say to the man. The result of that shit is Mr. Montez finally showing up to support his son and realizing what horrible mistakes he's been making when it comes to Kendrik. Something Oakliegh pointed out with some harsh words and forcing him to face the truth of his actions.

Taking a deep breath, I force all the thoughts from my mind as I continue wrapping my hands in preparation for the fight. I'm facing some guy named Dante Peterson tonight. I've never faced him before. Everything I've heard of the guy proves he's a beast and will put up a good fight. Exactly what I need. Apparently this entire setup is the brain child of Dante. He's built this from the ground up with his bare hands to give himself somewhere to fight whenever he wants. He's tired of trying to find fights on his own or waiting to be invited to other underground fights. Only a man passionate about doing this would sink a shit ton of money into something like this. I appreciate what he's done and can't wait to get into the ring with him. Facing him is going to require all of my focus

despite knowing Oakliegh is in the crowd watching me tonight.

When she learned I was going to be in the cage fighting, my baby girl demanded I bring her with me. She wants to see me doing something I love and I'm not about to stop her. I want her to know every part of who I am so I don't have to feel as if I'm holding anything back from her. Thankfully there are seats for anyone coming with the fighters here so she won't be on the floor close to the cage with the crowd. Zander and Kendrik are with her and will make sure no one gets close. Not to mention we have several guards and guys from the frat here to surround her as well. Harper is also here so she doesn't have to go to the bathroom alone. We're not taking any chances.

A tap sounds on the door before Judge steps inside the room. I remove my shirt as normal while he walks up to me. I'm dressed only in a pair of shorts now which is what I fight in. Judge doesn't say a word as he checks my hands and makes sure I'm ready to go. This is the same routine we go through every fight I have. Not a word is exchanged, he simply makes sure I'm ready and lends me silent support so he doesn't break my concentration. Judge has been in my position and knows how easy it is to get lost in bullshit thoughts when you need to focus on the fight you're about to enter.

"Let's go. You're up," he finally barks out, his voice barely breaking the focus I have.

Judge walks me out from the locker room I'm not sharing with another person and toward the large cage set up in the middle of the room. My eyes instantly fall on Oakliegh where she sits between Zander and Kendrik. A bright smile lights up her face when she sees me. I don't react to her and she doesn't flinch or stop smiling. I've already warned her I'll be in my head and completely focused on the task at hand no matter what she does. The only thing that will break it is something happening to her.

Walking into the cage, I find the man I'll be facing relaxing in the corner opposite where I'm not standing. To everyone surrounding the cage, he appears completely at ease

and not ready to be in a fight. However, I see the signs and know how focused he really is right now. Dante's entire body is rigid despite him trying to appear relaxed. A muscle ticks in his jaw as he takes me in from head to toe. His fists clench and unclench repeatedly and he begins lightly bouncing on his toes. Stepping in the opposite corner, I don't take my eyes off Dante as he stares me down. Neither one of us are giving the other an inch as we try to size one another up. It's not going to happen until we actually square up against one another though. For now, we're both content to try and get in one another's head.

The door of the cage slams shut as the shouts of the crowd ramp up in excitement for the upcoming battle they're about to witness. I block all the shit out as Dante and I step to the middle of the ring. There is no referee here to tell us the rules and all that bullshit. The rules here are simple; no shots to the nuts, don't kill your opponent, and no weapons. A guy stands between us, giving the crowd our stats and hyping them up even more as Dante and I remain in a stare off. Again, it's all about trying to get in your opponent's head and psyching them out.

"Fucking fight!" I hear the two words I've been waiting for as Dante and I begin to circle one another.

My eyes are glued to every single movement of Dante's body. Every muscle twitch, step he takes, and the way he confidently circles the mat with me. I don't make a move to land a blow to him, wanting Dante to take the first shot. It's what I do with every new fighter I step in the ring with. It's the only way to find out if they're going to pull any punches or not. If Dante holds back, I'll know he's sizing me up and it's going to take a lot for him to truly fight me. On the other hand, if he doesn't pull his punch, I'll know he's a cocky fuck who believes he's already won the fight. Those are my favorite fuckers to step in the ring with because it's easy for me to toy with them and make them lose their damn minds in frustration when I don't feed into their bullshit.

Finally, Dante throws the first punch of our fight. It barely catches my shoulder as I duck the hit. He's definitely

pulling his punches. Dante wants a real fight and I have no problem giving him one. Watching his feet, I wait for him to fake a step forward with his left foot before landing a punch to his side as he spins in the opposite direction to try and throw me off so he can land a punch. I'm not holding back when my fist meets his ribs. Dante grunts out in pain but doesn't stop moving as he throws a punch of his own. We go for what feels like hours trading blow for blow, evenly matched in everything but size. I'm slightly bigger than Dante is but it doesn't bother him in the least.

I don't hear the crowd or see anyone surrounding the cage as we trade hits and move around the cage. The only person I see or hear is Dante. He's getting tired. His movements are starting to slow down a little bit from the punches I've already landed. Pain clouds his judgment as he tries to get me to back off. I manage to get in a combination of hits on Dante that he can't block. Wrapping my arms around his middle, I toss him to the mat at our feet and follow him down. I grab his arm, ready to be done with this fight, and put him in an arm bar. Pulling tight, I'm not prepared to maim him or hurt him, I just want to make it hurt enough he taps the fuck out. My other option is to knock his ass out and I'm not ready to do that either. Not yet.

Dante struggles to get out of the arm bar I have him in. I have to give it to him because he puts up a good fight. Instead of letting up, I pull his arm tighter. Not enough to do any damage, but enough to make him feel the strain. No matter how much Dante struggles to get free, he can't. I've got him locked in tight and there's nowhere for him to go. Finally, after several long minutes, Dante taps out and the bell sounds. I immediately release his arm and get back to my feet. Reaching out, I pull Dante to his feet by the arm I didn't have in an arm bar. We shake hands in the middle of the cage and I make my way out without getting my hand raised or anything else. I'm ready to see my girl.

I'm sitting in the locker room alone getting ready to jump in the shower before going out to meet Oakliegh and the

guys. My head snaps up when the door opens. Oakliegh steps in the room, a smile on her face.

“You did so good, Hendrix. Thank you for letting me come see you fight,” she says, running over to me and wrapping her arms around my neck.

I’m covered in sweat and it doesn’t bother my girl one bit. She kisses along my jaw until she reaches my lips. I immediately deepen the kiss and wrap my arms around her body, pulling her in tight to me. My hard cock presses into her stomach. I’m ready to fuck her right here in this locker room, but I don’t want to be that guy. Oakliegh deserves better than a rough fuck in a locker room where anyone can walk in.

“I locked the door so no one can get in,” she says after pulling away from my lips as if she’s reading my mind. “Fuck me, Hendrix.”

Oakliegh usually isn’t so vocal about sex. I can honestly say this is the first time she’s ever told one of us to fuck her. Pre cum leaks from the head of my cock at her words.

“Baby girl, I’m not gonna fuck you right now. If I do, it’s not gonna be gentle. I’m gonna fuck you up against a wall. I can’t be gentle after a fight and we haven’t had that talk,” I tell her, my voice strained with my effort to hold back.

“I didn’t ask you to be gentle, Hendrix. Fuck. Me,” she demands, placing her hands on each side of my face as she stares into my eyes.

I pull Oakliegh’s lips back to mine and devour her mouth. Standing from the bench I’ve been sitting on, I lift my girl in my arms as she wraps her legs around my waist. Moving to the closest wall, I push into it so her back is plastered to it. She’s wearing a skirt today as I reach under the fabric to find her panties. Instead of sliding them down her legs that are wrapped around me, I pull the side of the material until it snaps in my hand. Repeating the process, I do the same to the other side. Oakliegh gasps into my mouth as I don’t hesitate to slide my shorts down. It’s hard as fuck since I’m only using one hand and her body is pressed tight against

mine. Still, I manage to push my shorts down just enough to release my cock.

“Are you sure about this, baby girl?” I ask, ripping my lips from hers as I try to get air back in my lungs.

“I’m sure, Hendrix,” she says, leaning down to press her lips against my neck where she kisses, sucks, and nips at the skin up to my ear.

I don’t hesitate for another second as I line my cock up with her wet pussy and push inside. There’s no pausing for her to get comfortable or anything as I immediately slide back out before slamming inside her body again. I’ve got one hand behind Oakliegh’s head so it doesn’t slam against the wall and my other arm under her ass to give her more support. Oakliegh’s arms are draped over my shoulders as she digs her nails into the skin of my back. It only adds fuel to the fire already raging through me. I do like some pain with my pleasure, something Oakliegh doesn’t know yet.

“Fuck, baby girl,” I grind out, my voice harsh as I pant out the words. “You’re so fuckin’ tight.”

Oakliegh wraps her legs even tighter around me, her heels digging just above my ass as she begins to move with me. My thrusts get faster and harder as I lose my mind with her tight pussy wrapped around my cock. She slides one of her hands between our bodies and begins rubbing her fingers around her clit. I can feel her slick channel rippling around me as her release builds tighter and tighter in her body. I’m close to losing my shit as well.

“Fuckin’ get there, baby girl,” I grind out with force as I grind my pelvis against her fingers to push more pressure against her clit.

“Hendrix!” she screams out, shattering into a million pieces as her orgasm rolls through her body.

Her pussy clamps down on my cock as I continue thrusting in and out of her body. In four more powerful thrusts, I slam into Oakliegh’s pussy one final time and become still as my cum shoots into her.

“Oakliegh!” I groan out, my voice echoing off the walls of the locker room.

We don't move for several minutes as I hold her close and my cock remains in her pussy. When I finally lift my head from her chest where it landed, I find her with a look of pure bliss on her face as her eyes slowly open. Oakliegh gazes at me as if I'm the greatest thing in her life. It makes my heart stall in my chest to know I've given her a reason to look at me this way.

“Did I hurt you?” I ask her, pulling her body from against the wall as I make my way back over to the bench I was sitting on.

“No, you didn't. I feel great, Hendrix,” she tells me, pressing a gentle kiss against my lips as I sit down still inside her.

Oakliegh and I remain as we are, holding one another, for a few minutes before she gets up. I grab a clean towel from my bag and lift her skirt to clean her up. Seeing my cum leak from her pussy does something to me as I wipe it away with careful movements. I'm not sure if she's sore and I don't want to add to it if she is.

“This will have to do until we get home. I'm gonna jump in the shower. Don't leave here,” I tell her, not knowing where the guys are. I rip the tape from my hands on my way to the shower and toss it in the garbage can just outside the shower stall.

“I'll wait right here for you,” she assures me, her voice soft as she smiles up at me.

Heading for the single shower stall, I turn on the water and push my shorts the rest of the way off my body. Oakliegh brings over my body wash and a washcloth since I forgot it when I came to the shower. My mind was firmly still on fucking Oakliegh against the wall of the locker room. Instead of leaving once she hands it off to me, she remains just outside the shower watching me shower. I give her a show as I wash my body so we can get the fuck out of here.

Once I'm done and dressed in a pair of jeans and my tee-shirt again, I grab my bag and Oakliegh's hand to lead her from the locker room. Zander and Hendrix are leaning against the wall just opposite the door we exit. Zander's smirking at me as he moves to Oakliegh's other side and we make our way out of the warehouse today's fight was in. I'm ready to get home and make sure I didn't hurt Oakliegh. We'll worship her body for the rest of the day and make sure she gets everything done she needs to before our week starts again on Monday.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



Kendrik

HENDRIX'S FIGHT WAS a few days ago. He's riding high from not only winning against a new opponent but because he fucked Oakliegh in the locker room directly after his win. My best friend is walking around with his chest puffed out and his head held high as he walks from one class to the next or works. It's good to see him so fucking happy and relaxed. The usual rage and aggression filling him isn't present to the degree it normally is right now. Don't get me wrong, he's still pissed as fuck about everything going on with Oakliegh and will be until we put an end to it. However, he's going to remember his fight and our girl riding his cock for a long time. It used to be he'd fuck a random girl at the fights right after a match and then leave without thinking about it again. Now, our entire situation is different and if Oakliegh goes to all of his fights, he'll be riding that high for days on end like he is now. She's truly making a difference in our lives for the better by doing the smallest things.

I've been working on several things over the last few weeks when I'm not in class, digging up information on the Powers', or working at the gambling hall. The main thing I've been working on is figuring out who the fuck made the damn hate website against Oakliegh. It turns out Mrs. Powers is the one who created it. She really has no clue what to do to hide evidence of her crimes when it comes to online shit. Not only does she send threatening emails to Oakliegh, but she made this website and put pictures on it her husband took of a minor. Stupid fucking bitch! So, I've made sure to save all the evidence we need about the website and pictures before taking down the website. I'll be alerted if another one is created and

put up since we know this is something the bitch will do now. My feeling is she figured Oakliegh would think some student here on campus made the site and wouldn't do anything about it. Not that my sweet angel would have done something if she knew Mrs. Powers did it instead.

I've also been working on putting trackers in several things Oakliegh can wear or have on her at all times. That's on top of making sure we can track her phone at all times. Oakliegh knows I have a tracker on her phone and doesn't mind with everything going on. I'm not about to keep this shit to myself or just between the guys. Oakliegh deserves to know if we're tracking her. We've all been getting better about being open about everything we're doing. It's just taken some time in order for us to get our shit in order and realize we have an amazing girl who deserves to know shit. At least the stuff we can tell her. She understands we can't always share parts of the family business with her and is okay with knowing we might have to keep things between us.

Setting up my computers to work while I'm at the gambling house tonight, I shut the monitors down and head to the bathroom to take a quick shower. We've got a very large game going on at the house tonight and it's all hands on deck. Not a single family member is allowed to miss tonight's game. Once a year we put on a huge night where every room in the house is filled to capacity with players. The lower level games are on the first floor and as you make your way up to the third floor, the higher the stakes become. In the biggest room of the night, the players will be competing for millions of dollars. Tonight, none of us are allowed to sit in and play. We're to keep our eyes peeled and watch every single person in the room we're in. Mr. Vanderwalt and my dad don't play around when it comes to tonight's event.

Kayson and I will be in the basement all night long. Yes, we'll be gone overnight. Since the guards are required to be at the gambling house tonight as well, every member of the frat will be surrounding the house in shifts. Harper also knows we'll be gone all night long and has cancelled anything she had going on in order to be home with Oakliegh. They're planning on watching movies, eating junk food, and talking

shit about us while we're not here. Typical shit girls do I guess. Who knows. All I know is our girl won't be alone and we're doing the best we can when everyone will be busy as fuck tonight.

It's so bad we've got two different catering companies coming in to provide all the food and snacks everyone will have tonight. Judge and Kain have made three trips to get alcohol for the event as well. We make sure nothing runs out during the long hours of play. Zander will be in a room with his dad, my dad will be in another room, Hendrix will be in a room with Zeke, Judge and Kain will each have a room, Cameron will have a room, and the rest of the guys will spread out among the house in case they're needed. Lance and Jerome will be moving throughout the house to give breaks or help where needed. Like I said, it's all hands on deck and no one can get out of being there tonight no matter what's going on in their lives. It's grounds for removal from the family if you don't show up and remain there until we're all dismissed once the games are done.

Even though I'll be in front of computers, I'm not allowed to do anything but watch the monitors in the various rooms and floors. Kayson will be at my side because two sets of eyes are better than one. In previous years, Lance and I would be in the basement watching the monitors. This year is the first time he'll be up on the floors walking around since I'll have Kayson with me. Between the two of us, we'll split up the gambling house and monitor certain floors and rooms. Halfway through the night, we'll switch what we're watching. This way we have the potential to find something the other guy misses. Tonight is such a big night it's going to draw out any player who hasn't been banned from our house. If anyone gets caught cheating, they'll be out on their ass quicker than they can blink.

Getting out of the shower, I dry off and wrap my towel around my waist before walking back in my room to get dressed. My clothes are already laid out on my bed so I can just put them on. Stepping up to my desk, I make sure the piece I'm giving Oakliegh before leaving is ready to go. I've already check my program to make sure it's tracker is

working. Zander took it on his run around campus this morning. It didn't cut out at all so I know it's ready to give to our girl in case anything happens when we're not here.

Putting on my dress pants after my boxers, I pick up my button-down shirt and slide it over my arms while leaving it unbuttoned for now. Heading back in the bathroom, I brush my teeth and run a comb through my hair before slicking it back as I normally do when we have family business to attend to. Once I'm done with all the small shit I do to get ready, I button up my shirt, grab my jacket and slide it on my body. After putting on my socks and shoes, I grab the hair clip and make my way to Oakliegh's room. She's cleaning up the room even though it's not a mess when I knock on the door frame to let her know I'm there. We all take measures to ensure we don't scare her if we move to enter her space.

"Are you getting ready to leave?" she asks me, making her way over to me and wrapping her arms around my body.

"Yeah. Zander and Hendrix are already there. Kayson is waiting for me because we have a meeting before we put the finishing touches on everything and open the doors. Is Harper here?" I ask, not seeing her in the room.

"She just ran to her room to change into comfy clothes so we can veg out," Oakliegh tells me, getting on her tiptoes to press a kiss against my lips.

I let myself linger for a few minutes since I won't see my girl the rest of the day. I'm sure Zander and Hendrix spent some time with her before they had to head out too. When I finally pull back, Oakliegh's face is flushed and her breaths are coming out in heavy pants. I smile down at her while running my knuckles down the side of her face. Her skin is always so soft and smooth.

"Can you do me a favor, sweet angel?" I ask her, pulling the hair clip from my pocket and holding it out to her.

"What's that?" she questions, picking it up out of my hand.

“It’s got a tracker in it. If something happens and you drop your phone, we’ll still be able to track your movements. Zander tested it out on his run so I know it works. Can you wear this on a daily basis? We don’t want to take any chances,” I explain to her as she looks over the normal looking clip in her hand.

“Of course,” she responds, immediately clipping it in the side of her hair where the smaller strands of hair usually escapes her messy bun or however she has her hair styled for the day.

“Thank you, sweet angel. I’ve gotta go. I’ll see you in the morning,” I tell her, leaning down and taking one more kiss from her soft, full lips.

I’m so fucking tired it’s a chore to keep my eyes open and focused on the screens in front of me. I’ve got the beginnings of a headache building behind my eyes and I know this last hour is going to drag by the slowest out of all of them. It always does. Kayson has been doing everything in his power to remain awake and alert based on the amount of energy drinks littering the desk in front of him. I’ve been drinking coffee and alternating standing and sitting in front of the monitors all night long. I can’t even imagine how the rest of the guys feel at this point.

The screens I’m watching show the men playing their hands and trying to win the jackpot. I watch on as my dad pays close attention to a player I pointed out to him earlier in the night. It looked to me as if he was cheating, but so far my dad hasn’t found anything to call out in the middle of the game. Kain is in the room with my dad and they’re each standing on either side of the man in question. I’m not sure if it’s the threat of being tossed out or Kain’s presence in the room now, but the player I’ve been watching since Kayson pointed him out has stopped acting suspicious. Can’t say I blame him with the threat of Kain at my back. Though, I wouldn’t be attempting to cheat other men out of their money either.

Kayson calls me over to point out another guy who's cheating at one of the poker tables. Zander and Cameron are currently in this room as the asshole blatantly pulls cards from under the table and slides them on the table with the rest of his cards. The cards he's replacing goes under the table from wherever he pulls the new ones from. Picking up my phone, I call Zander. He's got an ear piece in so he doesn't have to pull his phone from his pocket. A way we can ensure communication between us without having anyone else know what's going on. I watch the monitor as Zander presses the button to answer the call without making it look obvious. He doesn't say a word.

"Guy just in front of the bar directly in the middle of the table is cheating. He's got cards under the table somewhere and is replacing the ones on the table with them," I say, watching as Zander's eyes zoom in directly on the asshole cheating.

Kayson is on the phone with Mr. Vanderwalt to let him know what's going on and in which room. He calls Mr. Vanderwalt for any issues we discover while I call my dad. They'll assist Zander and Cameron if they need it. I leave Kayson to continue watching the monitors while I go back to watching my own. Now is the time people are going to cheat because it's getting close to someone winning the jackpot. Less than an hour now and a ton of money will be given to one person who wins the tournament we've been hosting tonight.

The men and a few women playing here tonight come from all over the place. They want to play an honest game of cards throughout the night to see who's going to win the ultimate prize. This is why we only host this event once a year. The prize money is the biggest jackpot in the area which is going to draw a large crowd in. We end up having a waiting list on a yearly basis for people who want to play the tournament and have a chance at winning the money we offer up.

Even the men and women playing in the lower levels have a chance to win more money than they typically play for. We want everything to be fair at this event so it's why we also

offer a jackpot to those men and women who can't necessarily play the high stakes games. It keeps everyone coming back along with how we run the gambling house. There is no way in hell we want to lose any of our clients, but if they choose to cheat and cause a scene, they're going to get banned from ever returning again. The man about to get booted this morning isn't one of our regulars. However, everyone entering the door knows our policy and has to sign a contract agreeing to our terms. This fuck knows he's going to forfeit all of his winnings to be split among the other players at the table and will no longer be allowed to attend our games. He'll also be put on a list for anyone we know running a gambling house and be banned from there as well.

Thankfully there's nothing shady going on in the rooms I'm currently monitoring. I watch over everything very carefully as the minutes wind down and the last hands of the tournament are being played out. There's about to be one very happy person in each room or table along with several upset men and women as they lose out on the money being offered in the jackpot. No fighting will take place though. That's why we have every damn guard here for tonight's event. Right now, a guard steps in each room and begins walking around the floors. Their presence is being made as the seconds tick down to the last plays being made. It's kind of exciting even if I'm exhausted and ready to sleep for the rest of the day. I won't be going to class or working on anything other than falling into bed and closing my eyes to sleep the day away.

As the games wind down and money is handed over to the winners, I begin to shut monitors down once everyone other than staff clears out of the room. My dad and Mr. Vanderwalt doesn't expect us to monitor the rooms once the players are no longer inside. It gives my eyes a chance to rest as I have two monitors left one while Kayson is down to one. Exhaustion fills the man sitting next to me since this is his first time working the event. When he turns his last screen off, Kayson turns to face my monitor as we watch the players file out of the rooms. Just when I go to turn off the remaining monitors, a fight breaks out in the biggest room of the night. Pressing a button for the silent alarms, I send every guard and

available member of the family to the room the fight has broken out in.

Kayson is relaying information through a walkie talkie we can now use with no games running. I watch on as Zander, Hendrix, Cameron, Jerome, my dad, and a few other men rush the room to break the fights up. The waitresses who were working the room are hiding anywhere they can find as I turn on the sound for the room. Shouting is heard so loud you can't make out the words being said. Zander goes to step forward and comes to a sudden halt when one of the men pulls a gun from the waist band of his dress pants. I'm not sure how the fuck he managed to get that in here since everyone is patted down upon entering the gambling house.

Judge and Kain enter the room placing themselves in front of Zander, Hendrix, and my father. They'll put their lives on the line so none of us get hurt. It's why they get paid huge amounts of money for their positions. Mr. Vanderwalt remains just outside the door so he's not in the line of fire or bringing attention when the asshole begins waving the gun around like crazy. Both of the men currently in the room are going home with the winnings they got from each hand played. Neither one of them won the jackpot so I'm not sure what the damn issue is here.

"You cheated the entire fucking night," the man with the gun begins yelling, much clearer as Judge and Kain make subtle moves toward him.

"I didn't cheat a single hand at this table. I know what happens when people are caught cheating and I'm not about to fucking be banned from all the surrounding houses for a yearly jackpot. One I've won in the past. I don't need to cheat when playing cards," the second man defends himself.

He's actually a regular and has never cheated a single time he's been here. We keep a close eye on the games no matter what's going on or where the game is being played. Lance and I have never once had to keep an eye on this guy for cheating or anything else. He never reaches below the table or anything else we typically find the men and women cheating doing. I believe him about not cheating tonight too.

The man isn't lying when he says he's won the jackpots in the past. This man has won more than once. If I remember correctly, he's won enough in just the jackpots he doesn't need to work again for the rest of his life. Hell, I'm sure his kids are set for college as well.

I watch on as my two best friends remain in the room while Judge and Kain continue to subtly move toward the man brandishing the gun. Fear fills me at the knowledge of it not taking much for it go off. Especially with the way he's waving it around like a madman. Hendrix isn't one to stand back and just let a situation happen. He moves right along with Judge and Kain and I want to be in that room so I can fucking throttle him. If anything happens to him, Oakliegh will kill us all. He's her giant teddy bear and she'll be lost without him. We'll all be lost if something happens to Hendrix.

Zander remains standing at my father's side when the man with the gun starts yelling again before aiming the gun at our regular client.

"I know you fucking cheated. How could you win so many fucking games when the rest of us fucking lost our shit," he bellows out, getting closer to the asshole in front of him.

Before he can fire the gun, Hendrix lunges at the stupid fuck and wrestles him for the gun. He pretty much tackles him to the floor just as the gun goes off. I hold my breath when everything is telling me to race to the room they're in. To make sure Hendrix is okay and didn't just get shot with the gun by a crazy fuck. I continue watching on, my face practically pressed against the monitor. I'm looking for any sign of movement by Hendrix as my father and now Mr. Vanderwalt hold Zander back from getting any closer to his brother. Kayson places a hand on my shoulder as we both watch a few off duty police officers who were playing at our tables rush to the room.

The cops don't hesitate to make their way to Hendrix's side. I watch on with my heart racing as they move Hendrix's body. Looking down at one of my best friends, I see his dress shirt covered with blood. From where I'm sitting, I can't tell if it's his blood or not.

“Fuck!” I roar as Hendrix still doesn’t move a muscle.

His eyes are closed, body completely still, and the only thing I can see is his chest rising and falling. It’s not shallow or anything as if he’d been shot. My gaze briefly lands on the man who pulled the gun to begin with. His eyes are wide open and darting around the room in panic. The gun is no longer in his hands as I see a bullet hole in the shirt he’s wearing by his shoulder. My heart barely slows since Hendrix still isn’t moving and he hasn’t opened his eyes yet. I’m not sure what the fuck is going on with him right now.

“I’ll stay here and monitor everything, make sure it’s still recording,” Kayson urges me on. “Go to Hendrix and Zander.”

With a nod of my head, I race from the room in the basement and make my way to the room everyone’s in on the second floor. I don’t bother with the elevators because they’re too damn slow for me. Rushing in the room, I find Hendrix sitting up now with his eyes open and glaring down at the man who had the gun. Rage fills his face as he gets up from the floor with help from Zander and his dad.

“The fuck you thinkin’ bringin’ a gun into one our houses? How did you even get it the fuck past security and the pat down?” Hendrix barks out, his voice almost echoing off the walls of the large room.

“I paid off the man who gave me the pat down. I knew this fucker would cheat. He always does,” the man grunts out as the police begin to move his body around.

“That’s a fuckin’ lie. He’s one of our regulars and has never once been suspected of cheatin’ in the years he’s played here. We watch every single table during games and this man plays above board. Don’t blame him because you don’t know what the fuck you’re doin’ and lost your ass here tonight. Get him the fuck outta my sight. I’m pressin’ full charges against the stupid fuck,” Hendrix says, looking at the cops as they lift the man from the floor.

I’d like to say I’m surprised but I’m really not when the guy stands and a ton of cards fall from inside his coat. The

inner pocket was ripped in the struggle with Hendrix.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I yell out, my voice lowering in anger. “You’re going to accuse an innocent man of cheating when you’re the one who cheated? Put his name on the banned list. I’ll make sure to personally make the calls to everyone we know so he can never fucking play at another gaming house. That’s when he gets out of prison for attempted murder or whatever else you choose to charge him with.”

Hendrix leans on Zander and me as our dads tells us to get out of here. I notice the bruising near his temple which makes sense of why he wasn’t awake when he was first rolled off the asshole the police are now struggling with. This stupid fucker is bound and determined not to go to jail or accept any of the charges which will be pressed against him. I don’t give a fuck about him right now. The only thing I care about is getting Hendrix the fuck out of here and checked out so we can make sure he doesn’t have to make a trip to the hospital.

“Call Doc and get him to the damn house. I want him to make sure we don’t have to make a trip to the hospital,” Zander barks out to Brody as if he’s reading my mind. “Call Harper and give her a heads up too. I don’t want Oakliegh to be at the house when we get my brother back there. He needs to rest and she doesn’t need to be upset with the baby and everything.”

Brody does as Zander requests as he follows behind us. Zeke and Kayson will follow us when everything is shut down. Usually we’re the last ones to leave the gambling house with our dads. This morning, that’s not about to happen because everyone’s main concern is Hendrix and making sure he’s okay after taking a hit near his temple from a fucking gun.

“Find out who the fuck patted that dumb fuck down. I want five minutes with the asshole and I’m sure Hendrix is going to want his ounce of flesh from him as well,” I tell Lance as he comes up to hold the doors open for us.

We manage to get Hendrix to the house and up to his room without Oakliegh seeing him. Harper apparently talked her into going out for breakfast despite our girl wanting to see

us before going to classes for the day. I'm not sure how Harper managed to talk her into leaving the house, but I'm grateful we have a little bit of time to come up with something to tell her so she doesn't get as upset. We're not going to lie to her, but we need to have something to tell her so she remains calm for the baby. Both of them are the most important to us and we have to make sure they're both okay.

Chapter Thirty



Oakliegh

IT'S BEEN AN exhausting day. I didn't sleep very well last night since the guys were at the gambling house. I knew it was going to happen and Harper did her best to keep me busy so I wouldn't focus on the fact that my men weren't home and in bed with me. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling in my gut that something was going to happen. Something bad. While I'd believe it was about me with everything the Powers' want to do to me, but I have a feeling it's more about the guys and less about me this time. When I told Harper about my feeling, she didn't discount it but there really wasn't much we could do because none of the guys would have answered their phones. Not on a night so huge for the gambling house. Everyone's focus had to be on their jobs and the task at hand instead of staring at their phones. So, we didn't bother checking in with anyone and just tried to focus on watching movies and having girl time. Something we don't get a chance to do much.

When we woke up this morning after Harper slept in my bed with me, she scurried off once her phone started ringing. I can't blame her if it's one of her men because neither one of us have talked to our guys in so long. It feels like forever instead of the twelve plus hours they've been gone. Once we were both ready to head out for the day, I planned on going down to make a large breakfast in order to feed the guys before they crashed for the day. Harper insisted we go out to eat because the guys would be too exhausted to eat anything and the food I made would just go to waste. So, we went to the dining hall for a quick breakfast before heading to our classes for the day.

Now, instead of going home to bed for a nap like I want to, I'm heading to the library to meet with Addie. She's got a tutoring session today and I'm not about to let her down. I can wait one more hour to go home and take a nap before studying and making dinner for everyone. Then I have a feeling I'll be back in bed as soon as I'm done studying. It's almost to the point I can't keep my eyes open. Thankfully, I don't have to work tonight because I wouldn't make it. Sal would end up sending me home because I'd be sleep walking while taking plates and drinks to my various tables. I almost laugh at the image of me doing that in my head, but I'm too tired.

When I walk in the room Addie and I use at the library, Addie is already sitting in her seat with her books spread out in front of her. A large smile fills her face and there's a lightness to her I haven't seen before. It's as if something has shifted and instead of being the meek and nervous girl I've spent months working with, she's got a little more confidence to her.

"Oakliegh, you're here," she says excitedly, her voice still almost a whisper. "I've been waiting for you. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. Just really tired today. I didn't sleep so good last night. You're here early," I state casually.

"My last class got out a few minutes early instead of running late as normal today. I came right here because I have something to tell you. Something really important," she says, forgetting her books for the minute and putting her full attention on me.

"What's going on? Are you okay?" I question her, looking for any signs of more bruising or anything on her exposed skin.

"I'm perfect," she gushes, the smile on her face only growing larger. "So, I've been looking into my inheritance from my grandparents. It seems my parents have been lying to me for years about it. Since I'm in college and attending Grand Ridge University, I am allowed to access a certain

amount of money in order to ensure my education is paid for and cover any living expenses I may incur while attending college here. This includes getting my own apartment off campus and making sure I have everything I need for it and to cover the bills on a monthly basis.”

“Really? That’s great news. Do you want me to go look at apartments with you or something?” I ask, wondering how everyone will feel about me wandering around town with Addie so she can find her own place.

“Really. No, that’s the best part. I’ve already got a place. Someone left school early and their apartment was vacant. It’s in a small apartment complex just off campus and full of other students attending school here. I’ve already moved in. I took everything from my parent’s house I wanted and cut all ties with them. I even went out and got a new cell phone and they don’t have the phone number for it. My father is not happy with me at all. He can’t hurt me anymore or hold anything over my head. If anything, I hope my mom gets away from him now. That she can learn to stand on her own two feet instead of continuing to depend on him,” she says, the slight tinge of sadness filling her eyes. “However, she’s been with him so long now and he’s never been abusive toward her so I doubt she’ll go anywhere. Though, if that changes I’ll make sure I do what I can to help her get away from him.”

“I have no doubt you will, Addie. I’m so proud of you. Standing up for yourself and doing what you have to in order to get away from a toxic fuck. If you ever need to talk or just want to hang out, let me know and we’ll figure something out,” I promise her, knowing I mean the words more than anything I’ve ever said before in my life. This girl needs a friend and I have no problem being there for her.

“Well, I was kind of hoping you’d give me the name of the woman you talk to. The one you told me about before I was ready to accept help. I think I’m ready to talk to someone about everything my father has been putting me through over the years so I can deal with it,” Addie admits, making me even more proud of her than I was a few seconds ago.

“Absolutely. I’ll give you her name and the number for the office before we leave here today. Now, let’s get to work so we can head out. Do you need help with today’s lesson?”

“Nope. I think I’ve got it down pretty good. I was working on the homework assigned. Once I’m done with it, can you look over it to make sure I’m doing it right?”

“Of course. That’s what I’m here for,” I tell her with a smile as I open my bag and begin pulling my own work out.

Addie and I work for her scheduled tutoring time. It didn’t take her long to get her math problems done and show me the work she’s done. Other than a few small issues, she did the work really good. I help her fix the issues she’s having, which is nothing more than just skipping a step of solving some word problems. When it comes to the problems being laid out for her straight on, Addie has the work down no questions asked. Word problems are her downfall though she’s getting better at figuring out which information to use and what to ignore when she’s working through them.

“Um, Oakliegh, when I make my first appointment with Erica would you come with me? I’m not so good at talking about things with people I don’t know. Especially when it’s about my past and everything. It’s hard enough opening up to you,” Addie asks me with her eyes downcast.

“I’ll go with you. I completely understand where you’re coming from. I barely talked to Erica when I first started seeing her. Now, I have no problem opening up or having the guys and Harper come in with me so it’s easier for us to talk about the hard things. Anytime you need me to go just let me know and I’m there,” I assure her as we stop just outside of the library.

“Thank you, Oakliegh. You don’t know what this means to me. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have done anything to change my situation. And I wouldn’t be making an appointment to talk to someone so I can learn how to move forward. You’re such a good friend,” Addie gushes as she finally lifts her eyes from the ground at our feet. “I’ll let you

know when my appointment is and we can figure it out from there.”

Before we separate to go our own ways, I make sure to give her Erica’s name and the number of the office she’s in. Addie gives me a hug as we leave the room and I’m soon surrounded by the men guarding over me. The guys from the frat can use the time I tutor to study and get some of their homework out of the way. It’s the guys from Mr. Vanderwalt and Mr. Montez I feel sorry for. They have nothing to do but stand around doing nothing while I study and tutor. Maybe Addie and I can start having our sessions somewhere else instead of the library so they don’t have to stand around awkwardly. I’ll have to run this idea by the guys before I bring it up to Addie. She might not be able to go anywhere else to study. Though now that she’s on her own, I don’t see why it would be a problem.

I head across campus and make my way home. It’s still cold out, but there’s a warmth in the air as the months pass by and spring starts to get closer to us. It’s still too cold for me to want to spend more time than necessary outside though. I want to be able to spend time outside, even if it’s just at the house. For now, I’ll settle for enjoying the weather when I’m walking around campus or to work.

When I get home, the frat guys head to their house while I make my way inside. Brody and Zeke are sitting in the living room, eating sandwiches as they have a movie playing. It looks as if they both just got up based on their rumpled clothing and how their hair is sticking up all over the place. They both grunt at me in greeting as I take off my shoes and head upstairs. I want to see if any of my guys are up yet. The need to lay eyes on them is overwhelming since I haven’t seen them since yesterday and that hasn’t been happening since they promised me to spend more time at home as often as they could.

Kendrik’s door is open but Hendrix and Zander’s are still closed. Stopping just outside his room, I find him sitting in bed looking a mess. He’s still wearing the clothes he left in yesterday and they’re completely wrinkled. His shirt is half

unbuttoned as he lifts his head and looks at me with a soft smile.

“Did you get any sleep?” I ask him, not raising my voice too loud as I remain outside the door of his room.

“A little bit. Zander is still sleeping but wants to get up in a few minutes. Um, why don’t we go do that now,” he says, his voice sounding weird as he doesn’t mention Hendrix.

“Where’s Hendrix?” I question him as nerves fill me and that horrible feeling fills my gut again.

“Let’s wake Zander up and then you can see Hendrix,” he hedges, still not answering my question.

“If something is wrong, I need to know, Kendrik. Is he okay?” I ask, panic setting in as strong arms wrap around me from behind.

Twisting my neck, I find Zander standing behind me. He’s clearly just woken up as red lines fill his face from his sheets and pillow. He’s not wearing a shirt and is only covered by a pair of sweatpants resting low on his hips. I can’t even appreciate his looks right not because worry over Hendrix is taking over completely. My heart races and it’s getting hard to breathe as I look between Kendrik and Zander. Someone needs to start talking to me and letting me know what’s going on.

“Calm down, LeeLee. Hendrix is here. He’s got a horrible headache but will be okay. We had an incident just before leaving this morning,” Zander tells me, not giving me any details.

“What happened?” I question as I turn in his arms to face him fully.

“One of the players became a sore loser and pulled a gun when he was arguing with one of our regular players. Judge and Kain were moving slowly toward him when the asshole pointed the gun at the other man. Hendrix just reacted. He started fighting with the guy to get the gun away from him and protect the other man. It went off, clipping the owner’s shoulder. During the struggle, Hendrix got hit just below his temple with some part of the gun though. He wasn’t out for

very long and Doc came out to see him as soon as we were home. Hendrix is resting right now, but you can go see him,” Zander tells me and I know he didn’t want to give me that information, but knew I wasn’t about to let him not tell me what happened to one of my men.

I don’t hesitate to pull out of Zander’s arms and make my way to Hendrix’s room.

“He’s not in there, sweet angel,” Kendrik speaks up, heading out to grab my hand and lace my fingers with his. “That’s why my door was open. He insisted on being in your room after Doc left here.”

Entering my room, it’s darker than normal. The curtains are pulled tight over my windows blocking out as much of the sunlight as possible. I can barely make out Hendrix’s shape on my massive bed as I walk closer to him. It’s not until Zander opens the bathroom door letting in some light, that I finally see my injured man. Hendrix is laying on his back with no shirt on. The blankets of my bed cover him to his waist and I’m honestly not sure if he’s even wearing pants right now or not.

With the limited light from the bathroom, I see the bruise already marring his skin. It takes up almost half his face. My heart breaks as I take in his injury. Hendrix’s eyes pop open and he looks directly at me.

“It’s worse than it looks, baby girl,” he croaks out, his voice gravelly and laced with sleep. “Get up here with me. I’m sure you’re just as tired as I am.”

Hendrix pulls the blankets back for me to climb in bed with him. I climb over his body to get in the middle and away from the injured side of his face. Once I’m settled under the blankets and pressed up tight against his body, Hendrix kisses the top of my head. We don’t say anything as Zander and Kendrik leave us alone in my bedroom. They only stop long enough to assure us they’ll order from Sal’s for dinner and bring us plates in a little while.

“Are you sure you’re okay? Do you want to go to the hospital? I’ll go with you,” I question him, running my hand

up and down his hard chest.

“I don’t need to go to the hospital, baby girl. All I need is already in my arms,” he answers, turning to lay on his side while keeping my head pillowed on his bicep. “I’ll be okay. Promise. I’ll have a headache for a few days. Doc gave me some mild pain killers to take if I need them. I’ve already taken one. It knocked my ass out for a few hours. I’m just goin’ to lay in our bed the rest of the day and see how I feel in the mornin’. If my head still hurts too bad then I’ll stay home again. Maybe talk you into playin’ hooky for the day and skippin’ your classes to stay here and take care of me.”

Hendrix starts laughing as I look up at him with shock filling my face. I’d smack his chest, but I don’t want to hurt him or cause him an ounce of pain he’s not currently feeling. So, I settle for turning a glare on one of the men I love before turning my face so I’m not looking directly up at him still. Hendrix pulls me in even closer to his body and just holds me. It’s not long before his breathing once again evens out and little snores start escaping him. He’s fallen back asleep and I have no desire to get out of his arms or bed. So, I close my eyes and let his heartbeat lull me to sleep.

Chapter Thirty-One



Oakliegh

BEING ALMOST TWENTY-FIVE weeks pregnant is no joke. I'm exhausted, my stomach is getting bigger on a daily basis, and nothing fits me any longer. The guys haven't been able to feel our son or daughter moving inside me just yet, but I have. It's the craziest sensation I've ever felt in my entire life. Still, every single day, the guys spend time placing their hands on my stomach and try to feel our little moving around. It should happen soon based on what we've been reading in the books Kendrik got us all. The range, depending on which book or article you read, says it could happen anywhere from twenty to thirty weeks before the guys will be able to start feeling the baby move. They're chomping at the bit to experience the next step of the pregnancy.

I'm also spending more time in bed. I've got aches every now and then as my body continues changing with our baby. Plus, I'm just tired more often than not. Hendrix has been spending more time home with me in order to make sure I'm resting, eating enough, and getting enough fluids in my body. When I'm feeling achy, he runs me a warm bath making sure it's not too hot for me or the baby. Then, once I'm out of the bath, he gives me a massage and eases all of the aches away as much as he can. Zander and Kendrik also do all the same things. Reading up as much as possible on anything that can help me. Feeding me is becoming their favorite pastime though. I swear, my plates are piled high enough to rival what Hendrix eats when he's training for a fight. I've never once finished a plate they've brought me, but I do eat as much as I possibly can so they don't bitch at me.

I've also been on a cleaning kick lately. Nothing is ever clean enough. Part of me feels as if I'm living back in the Powers' home, but I'm no longer with them. I'm in the house with my husband and men. With Harper and her men. There's no one here to punish me if I don't finish something or get something perfect the first time I do it. No one is here telling me I have to clean and make sure there isn't even a speck of dirt anywhere to be found. That's how I'm acting though. It's insane. Kendrik has told me I act as if I'm nesting, but I feel it's too early for that to happen. Though, he's been the main one reading up on everything so he would know. The guys and Harper are on my ass and forcing me to rest when I get on one of my cleaning kicks. Harper is the only one finding it funny whenever she catches me.

Addie has also agreed to start having our tutoring sessions at the house. When I went to the guys about meeting with her somewhere other than the library because of the guys guarding over me who don't attend GRU. I feel horrible for them standing around doing nothing so I want to make it easier on them so they aren't bored to death while watching a bunch of students studying and horsing around in the library. We're going to start working here at the house at her next session. She won't ever know how much I appreciate her changing up the location the way she did with no hesitation or fight about doing it.

Today, though, I'm taking a day to go out shopping. No one other than my guards will be going with me this time. Harper has some sort of competition or something and Addie doesn't know about the baby just yet. It won't be long before she knows, but for now I've still been able to hide the pregnancy from most everyone. So, with my guards following along with me, Judge takes me to the same baby shop we went to where I got that most adorable blanket. He's driving me because it's raining out and no one wants me to walk in the rain and risk getting sick. So, I'm sitting in the back of a bullet proof SUV with Judge driving.

"So, have you been out drivin' again?" Judge asks me, his voice full of laughter at the one time Zander took me out driving.

“Nope. I’ve just admitted to myself that I’m not meant to drive and we’re gonna leave it at that. I’m really sorry about your car, Judge,” I tell him as he finds a spot close to the store to park.

“No worries. That car has been in worse shape than that from me being behind the wheel. Though, I have to tell ya, I’ve been to the parkin’ lot Zander took you to and I have no clue how you managed to dent the damn thing. That’s some talent right there, girl,” he laughs while shutting the engine off. “I’m waitin’ for you to go out with Kendrik and Hendrix. It would do those boys good to get in a car with you. Equal opportunity and all that shit.”

I can’t help but laugh at his words because I’ve heard Zander mutter something along the same lines since taking me out that day. It’s really not a stretch to believe I won’t have a ton of opportunities to drive anywhere on my own. If I’m with the guys, one of them always drive. There is no getting out of having one of them behind the wheel of whatever vehicle we’re in. Usually it’s Hendrix, but if he wants to sit in the back with me or something, he doesn’t drive and willingly gives up his time behind the wheel.

Judge walks in the baby store with me while everyone else remains outside. I grab a cart and push it along the thick carpeting under our feet. He doesn’t complain one bit as I move slowly through the store looking at everything. Other than one or two outfits for our little one in each gender, I don’t really get much of any clothing. Since we don’t know what we’re having yet, I don’t see the point in getting a ton of things. I do, however, get onesies, pajamas, and other gender neutral clothing items we can use until making it back to a store or ordering things in to the house once our little one is here.

Moving through the store, I grab a bedding set to match the blanket I’ve already got at the house. Everything is so damn soft and adorable in here. Even Judge gets into shopping for the baby, holding various blankets and curtains up to show me. The only time he disappears is when I get to the breast pumps. He doesn’t want to think about me using one

knowing the guys will lose their shit if they find out he was looking at something that attaches to any part of my body for any reason.

I've thought long and hard about the entire breastfeeding thing and I want to try it. From what I've read, it's not easy for all new mothers to breastfeed. Some babies don't take to latching on or something so it makes breastfeeding difficult. The guys and I all agree trying it would be best for the baby and they'll help me any way they can. There's not much they can do since my breasts can't be removed and put on their bodies. The thought of them being up with us is nice though. So, we'll see what happens when I have the baby. Choosing a pump I've read good things about, I add it to the towering cart as Judge brings me a new one and takes the overflowing cart to place by the counter for me. I don't miss him covering the pump up with some blankets or something either. The man cracks me up more than I thought possible.

Zander and the guys gave me a credit card to use on today's shopping excursion. They don't care how much I spend or what I get. The only thing they asked me not to do is pick out any furniture for the nursery. It's something they want us to do together or something and I'm not going to take it away from them. So, for today, I'll look at everything except for the furniture. I already know what set I like anyway. I picked it out the day Harper and I stopped in here. When I've filled another cart with things the baby will need once he or she is born, I meet Judge at the counter as the sales woman begins ringing everything up. Zeke and two other security guards make their way inside to start carrying bags out as soon as the card goes through. I've definitely made a dent in their credit limit today. If I were shopping for myself, I wouldn't be doing this. Since it's for our baby, I'm trying hard not to put most of what I chose back on the shelves and racks. It helps when Judge glares at me every single time I tried to put something back.

If you want to see a bunch of grown ass men uncomfortable as fuck, have them carry some bags from a baby store. Zeke and I were laughing our asses off at everyone moving from the store to the SUV and back again. Having a baby is a natural part of life but based on the looks of the men with me today, you'd think I was having an alien or something. Or that they've never had someone in their lives who's had a baby. I'm sure these men have nieces and nephews. Maybe friends who've had kids. Yet, they hold the bags as if some kind of hazardous material is filling everything they carry. Best moment of the day.

As I get settled in the back of the SUV with Judge, my phone vibrates in the pocket of my coat. Pulling it out a small smile covers my face as I see Kendrick's name on the screen. He's sent me a message in the group chat he recently started for the four of us.

Kendrik: How's the shopping going. Are you on your way back yet?

Me: I'm on my way back now. I think you guys might have made a mistake giving me a credit card for this shopping trip.

Yeah, I'm still not allowing myself to think about how much I spent today. Way more than I anticipated using. The money isn't mine and yet I burned through it as if it were nothing. I'll have to give them some back from my savings.

Hendrix: Don't even start that shit, baby girl. This is our baby and anything you spend on him or her won't even put a dent in the money we've got saved up. I know what you're thinking already and it's not happening.

Me: How do you know what I'm thinking?

Hendrix: You're thinking about giving us money back for however much you spent today. It's not gonna happen. We'll meet you at the door to help bring things inside the house so you can show it all off to us.

Keeping the smile on my face, I relax for a few minutes on the way back to the house. I can't wait for the guys

to see everything I got today. It's too cute and I hope they like it all. Just in case they don't, I made sure we could return things they didn't want to use. With the exception of a few things, everything can be returned as long as I have the receipt and keep the tags attached.

Judge pulls around the front of the house in the grass, not giving a shit about damaging the wet grass or getting the SUV stuck in the yard. Shaking my head at him, I unfasten my seatbelt and move to the passenger side door to get out. Hendrix opens it up for me and pulls me into his arms, not allowing my feet to touch the ground as he walks up the steps of the porch and inside the house. Zander and Kendrik make their way outside to help unload the SUV as I'm set on the couch.

All the bags are brought inside and left at the bottom of the stairs. No one is going to go up to my room. My guys will carry them up for us to look through everything. For now, I'm content to remain on the couch as Hendrix removes my shoes and begins rubbing my sore feet. I don't stop the moan from escaping as he glares at me for making that noise when other men are in the house. It's his fault though. At least in my mind it's his fault.

Once everyone leaves us in the house alone, Hendrix picks me back up as Zander and Kendrik grab most of the bags from the floor and head upstairs. Instead of going to the third floor, we make our way to the second. Hendrix turns to walk down the hall opposite from where Harper and her guys have their bedrooms. Zander moves ahead of us and opens the last door of the hallway. Walking inside with me in his arms, Hendrix finally puts me down and turns me around. Tears instantly slide down my face as I take in what these men have been doing. They made a nursery for us. In the exact colors we picked out together. The furniture I pointed out to Harper is also inside already.

“What is this?” I ask, looking between my men.

“It's the nursery, sweet angel. We figured we'd make it on the second floor of the house because when you come back for your sophomore year, this is where you'll be living. No

dorm rooms for you. We want eyes on you at all times. So, you'll move down to this floor and the guys and Harper will move up to the third. We'll be here almost every single day depending on what's going on with the businesses," Kendrick says, pushing Hendrix out of the way after setting the bags in his hands on the floor to wrap his arms around me from behind as I look around the room.

Three of the walls are painted a soft yellow with the wall directly opposite the door of the room painted a light gray. The crib is already put together and has a mattress inside resting against the gray wall. There's a changing table set up to the left of the crib and what looks like the rocking chair I fell in love with on the right near the windows of the room. Zander sets the bags down in front of a closed door next to where Kendrick placed the other ones. There's no pictures or anything on the walls yet, but I see a stack of frames leaning against the wall.

Walking over to the frames, I carefully go through the pictures one by one. More tears fall from my eyes as I look through them. The pictures are of all of us. Some from when the guys were younger, some of me with the guys since we got together. There's one of me alone outside somewhere on campus. I'm not sure what I'm doing, but the picture has the sun shining down on me, lighting up my hair as I tilt my face up toward the sun. I'm not someone who likes seeing pictures of myself. This one right here will honestly be the exception to that rule. I truly look at peace and calm for the first time in my life. Even if it's just for that split second someone chose to take this photo, it's more than enough for me. I love seeing the guys in all stages of their lives. Especially the ones where they're all together smiling at whoever is taking the pictures of them. They all look so innocent and sweet in the pictures. Every single picture is in black and white and I can't wait to see them once they're put up on the walls of the nursery.

"What do you think so far, baby girl?" Hendrix asks me, his voice coming from right behind me.

"I love it. It's going to look amazing once it's done and everything is in it where it goes," I answer him, standing up

and turning to face all my men.

“Everythin’ in here has been done by the three of us. Harper told us what you liked the day you went to the baby store and made sure to take pictures of it so we got the right ones. She didn’t want us to fuck anythin’ up when it comes to this,” Hendrix tells me, a note of laughter in his voice.

“Do you want to show us what you got today while you were out with Judge?” Zander asks, as he steps closer to the bags and tries to look inside them.

“Yes. Why don’t you guys go down and bring the rest of the bags up here and I’ll start sorting everything out,” I respond, moving closer to the bags and sitting on the floor with Zander’s help.

The guys make one trip downstairs and manage to gather all the bags. They set them out around me. I go through each bag and pull things out, showing them to the guys, and setting them down in specific piles. None of the guys question anything I do as I organize as much of the baby’s stuff as possible. There isn’t a single thing I bought today my guys don’t like as much as I do. Though, I have to say, Hendrix is really intrigued with the breast pump I bought to help feed the baby if I do have problems nursing him or her.

Once we’re done going through all the baby’s things, I remain on the floor as the guys work on finishing putting the recliner together. There’s plenty of grunts, groans, and swearing from each of my men. I can’t help but laugh as they try to put the rocking chair together with minimal use of the directions provided to them. I have no clue how I’m not laughing hysterically right now at the guys. This shit is funny regardless of them not thinking it is. I’m getting glared at repeatedly from them as I remain sitting by the baby things.

We end up spending most of the night in the nursery. Once the recliner is put together and Hendrix sits in it to ensure it won’t fall apart with one of us as we hold our little one and rock him or her to sleep. He rocks back and forth for several minutes. It’s cute as hell as I imagine him holding our little one against his chest while talking to him or her. I’m lost

in my head at the images of my guys holding our baby in the middle of the night and comforting them. I'm only broken out of my thoughts when we begin talking about where everything will go for final placement and where I'd like to see the pictures hung up. One of the best nights of my life by far.

Chapter Thirty-Two



Zander

EVERYTHING BRODY AND I have been working toward for months now is finally finished. Brody has been at my side every step of the construction and planning of the new gambling house. While my dad and Mr. Montez showed up occasionally to check on the progress of the work being done, every single detail is mine and Brody's. My dad and Mr. Montez didn't put a single idea into this gambling house. They want to see what we can do when we take over so I've been busting my ass to make them proud. To put my own stamp on the new gambling house so everyone knows this is mine. When we take over, everyone is going to expect us to keep things similar to how our dad's ran things and that's not the case when it comes to every single detail of how they run the family business. Hendrix, Kendrik, and I will be putting our own spin on things and run the day-to-day operations as we see fit.

Brody had a lot of good ideas as we worked through every step of the process to get this house ready to open. We implemented most of his ideas while combining others with the vision I saw in my head. Where Brody truly shined was when we were working on the cabins our clients will be able to stay in if they want a few days away, have had too much to drink and can't drive home, and other things regarding our guests being able to stay here. The cabins are far enough away people can stay without even making an appearance at the gambling tables. Brody suggested we add an area with a pool, hot tub, and a few other amenities our guests could use if they simply want a few days away by themselves or with a significant other.

I've walked through the property a hundred times, gone through every single room from top to bottom, and have paid attention to the smallest details which will separate the gambling house from the few others we have up and running already. I have to say I'm impressed with the work we've put into this place. It turned out better than I ever dreamed it would and makes the countless hours spent away from my wife worth it. To a certain extent the time away from Oakliegh is worth it.

Every floor in the main gambling house is wood. We've cleaned and polished them until they shine under the lights we've had installed. The walls are painted a light gray on the first floor with a few decorations placed throughout the various rooms. I've actually stepped up from just card games at this gambling house. While I do have more than a few rooms for cards, the main room is filled with some slot machines. We're not a huge casino or anything, but there are slots for those who like to spend their time playing them available now. I'm hoping the wives of our current clients will find this a place to come and spend some money pushing buttons under the flashing lights now adorning the main room of the gambling house.

There are several rooms on the first floor. We've laid down carpeting in these rooms, added small bars in the corners of the rooms, and have large card tables in the center of the room. We've left plenty of room for clients to walk around and stretch out after hours spent sitting at a table playing cards. The chairs we got with the tables are padded and designed for people spending hours in them. Hopefully they don't wear down after a few weeks or something because we want these for as long as possible. Brody and I sat in numerous chairs when we were picking them out to find the perfect chair for the rooms.

On the second floor, we made the rooms larger to accommodate larger tables for more players. These rooms will be reserved for the higher stake game nights or private parties. Like the rooms on the first floor, we've installed carpeting and a slightly larger bar for each room. Bathrooms are off to the side of each room as well. These men and women don't want

to leave the table for too long when they're in the middle of a game. The easiest way to accommodate that is to have bathrooms in each room we have on the second floor. These rooms have large windows we've covered with heavy curtains and added plenty of light to ensure everyone can see the table and their cards without having to squint or have glares bouncing off everything.

The third floor of our new gambling house is reserved strictly for the large night we'll host twice a year. This will be exactly like the ones my dad hosts in his gambling house. Every hand will be on deck and the only thing we'll close down is the room with the slot machines. There won't be enough guards and men to keep an eye on the card rooms along with the women and men playing slots. My thought is hosting the huge night toward the beginning of the year and then one closer to the holiday season. I also want to ensure a portion of the proceeds from the night to go to local charities. Especially during the holidays.

These rooms are the exact same as what we've done on the second floor. The only difference are the colors we used on the walls and for the carpets. I chose to go with slightly darker colors up here since they won't be used quite as often as the other rooms. And we have large fireplaces in the rooms to have going as the games are being played. Small touches we hope the men appreciate as they play for large sums of money and have a good time.

Kendrik and Kayson have gone through the entire house setting up a state of the art security system. We've got cameras in every single room with video and audio recording. They also have cameras set up on the rest of the property and surrounding the cabins and pool area. We'll have constant surveillance to make sure nothing horrible happens here we don't know about. Plus, we'll be able to ensure we have backups in case something does go wrong here. Those two thought of absolutely everything and didn't leave anything untouched by the cameras.

We have half the basement set up with all the equipment to record and monitor the cameras around the

clock. Whoever we have filling the role will have everything they need in one room and won't have to leave for any reason. Unless there's an incident and they're needed on one of the floors. One entire wall of the basement we've had completely redone is nothing but monitors. A large desk sits below the monitors for any other equipment needed. I honestly know nothing about it, but Kendrik has made sure everything is installed and ready to go.

The other half of the room is fitted out to be a sort of break room combined with a small kitchen. We've got a refrigerator, stove, sink, and small dishwasher set up for them to have their meals while working a shift. There's also a table, chairs, small TV, and two couches. There are nights we'll have to have more than a few men on staff. As they rotate their shifts watching the monitors, they'll have space to relax or take a nap for overnight shifts. We want them comfortable and wanting to come to work here. Not hating their job and barely doing what they need to in order to keep everyone safe in the gambling house.

The last thing we installed was a gate all around the property and a guard shack at the end of the driveway. If someone has been banned at one of our other properties, they sure as fuck won't be getting in here to continue cheating and playing their fucking games. A list will be posted for every guard to see and no one will get in here we don't want. I'm honestly kind of hoping Mr. and Mrs. Powers attempt to show their asshole faces here. I want to feel the true joy of making it known they are not allowed on our property for any reason. Of knocking them down a peg or two so maybe their egos will deflate and they'll fuck up when it comes to Oakliegh so we can nail their asses to the wall with more charges.

"Zander, are you okay?" Oakliegh's soft voice comes from behind me as she runs her hand down my back.

"I'm good, LeeLee. Just thinking about the gambling house and hoping tonight goes well. I've got a ton riding on the line and will need opening night to go off without a hitch," I answer her, turning around to face my wife. "You're fucking stunning!"

Oakliegh's wearing a black dress. You can barely see where our son or daughter rests in her belly. She's got her hair done in some sophisticated updo with curling strands of hair framing her face and hanging down her back. If she's wearing any make-up tonight, it's so light you can't even tell she's wearing any. Her eyes are covered in some of that smokey eye junk and her lips are painted the same nude color I love seeing on her. Everything about my wife is understated which only makes her look ever more stunning than any other day I get to open my eyes and see her.

"Thank you. Let's get you dressed so we can head out. Kendrik and Hendrix are waiting downstairs. Harper and the guys have already left so Brody and Kayson can go over a few last minute details before you show up," Oakliegh informs me as she picks up my jacket and slides it over my shoulders.

I've got a black business suit on tonight with a crisp white shirt and dark blue tie. I stand still as my wife gets my jacket on and fixes my tie. She hands me my watch and wallet before moving to my closet to grab my shoes for me. This isn't anything we've asked her to do, but it's Oakliegh's way of feeling as if she's taking care of us. Or she's truly in a hurry to get out of the house and see what all the fuss has been about. Though, she's been helping us each get ready more and more as she gets further into her pregnancy.

Once I'm fully ready, I pull Oakliegh into my arms and hold her close for a minute. leaning down, I press a chaste kiss to her lips as we head out of the room with our fingers laced together. My nerves are ramping up the closer it gets to opening the gates for everyone to enter. It will honestly be the first time my dad sees the gambling house since it got finished.

I've walked through both open floors of the gambling house since we opened the gates and people started arriving for our grand opening. I greeted everyone in the front hall with Brody at my side. As they entered the gambling house, everyone was offered a glass of champagne from a line of waitresses standing just inside the door. Each guest was handed a small map with everything we offer here so they

could make their way to the games of their choosing. Oakliegh was at my side every second until the last guest was inside and moving throughout the rooms to find what they were looking for.

The main room is filled with women and a few men playing slots and taking their chance on winning jackpots from the machines. Talking and laughter fills the room as I search for Oakliegh. She disappeared a little while ago and I haven't seen her. Hendrix is also missing so I'm hoping they're together. Kendrick is downstairs making sure the men we've employed to monitor the house and grounds has everything running properly. My best friend becomes completely focused when computers and security are on the line. He'll more than likely remain downstairs the rest of the night until we leave to go home.

"Zander, you've got a great turnout here tonight," my dad says as I make my way through the main floor and head off toward the card rooms. "Everyone loves the layout and the way you've set up the gaming rooms. I'm very impressed."

"Thanks, Dad. Have you sat in on any games?" I ask him, still looking for my wife.

"Not yet. I've been thoroughly enjoying watching your wife clean house," he tells me as I snap my head to look at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"Oakliegh is in one of the rooms on the first floor. She's sitting in on a game with some of our regular clients. Your wife is kicking their asses and taking all of their money as she charms them and makes it so they can't even be pissed they're losing to her," my dad informs me with laughter filling his voice.

"Really? I didn't know she could play," I tell him, wondering when she had the time to learn how to play cards.

We tried to play cards with her when we were all on Christmas break. She couldn't seem to get the concept of the game and lost really quick. To hear she's now cleaning house

is a shock to say the least. My dad turns to head to the rooms again and I follow him to find Oakliegh and find out what's going on.

We step into the second room on the first floor. Oakliegh is the only female sitting at a table full of men. She's laughing as she holds her cards close to her body while searching the faces of the men seated around her. Hendrix is standing in a corner of the room as he would if he were working here tonight. My brother's eyes are firmly locked on our woman as she lays down her cards and groans are heard from around the table. Oakliegh's laughter fills the room as the poker chips are pushed toward her. She's got quite the stack lined up in front of her already.

"I told you she was taking these men for all their worth," my dad whispers to me as he moves to stand next to Hendrix.

I look around the table to find several familiar faces staring at my wife with wonder filling their faces. Not a single man here is pissed to be losing to her as they stare on with smiles covering their faces. Including the chief of police who's right next to Oakliegh.

"My dear, where did you learn to play poker? I've never seen you in one of the houses before," the chief questions Oakliegh.

"Well, some people tried to teach me a while ago and it completely stumped me. So, I read up on the game, watched some videos, and started playing in some free rooms where you don't bet with real money. After a few times playing, I realized the game is much easier than I thought it was. So, I guess you could say I taught myself how to play," she answers as I look at Hendrix who's smiling like a lovesick fool at her.

"I just might have to follow your example and learn a few new tricks here," the chief responds, laughter filling the room as several men nod their heads in agreement.

The tinkling laughter belonging to Oakliegh sounds, causing my heart to flutter in my chest. I've honestly never seen her in public so open and relaxed. She's not thinking of

the shit going on in her life or anything bad happening to her right now. For the first time, she's letting herself be free and just live in the moment. It's a sight to see and I want to make sure this is how she spends the rest of her days.

“Well, gentlemen, I believe I'll leave you to your game. Thank you very much for letting me sit in with you,” Oakliegh says, trying to figure out how she's going to carry all of her poker chips.

Stepping up to her chair, I place my hand on her shoulder so she knows I'm here and I don't scare her. Oakliegh turns her attention to me and smiles when she sees me. Again, I'm blown away by the pure joy and excitement radiating from her.

“Are you having fun, LeeLee?” I ask her as Hendrix steps up to her other side.

“I am. These fine gentlemen let me sit in on a few hands of cards with them. I think I did okay,” she says, a blush covering her face as she looks at all the poker chips in front of her.

“I'd say you did more than okay, baby girl. Let's get your chips and take you on a tour of the rest of the house,” Hendrix says, laughter filling his voice.

The three of us gather Oakliegh's chips as she bids the men she played poker with goodbye once again. My dad follows us from the room as we head to the cashiers booth at the back of the house. We turned one room into nothing more than a place for our guests to exchange their money to chips and then the chips they end the night with back to cash. The amount of money my wife has won tonight is more than I thought at first once we hand over all of her poker chips. She waits patiently for her money as I turn to face my brother with a 'what the fuck' look on my face. He simply shrugs his shoulders in response as we wait for her.

Feeling my phone vibrate in my pocket, I pull it out to make sure everything is okay and Kendrick isn't trying to get ahold of me for some reason. Every single one of our employees is wearing an ear piece so the men in the basement

can communicate with them. However, it's not Kendrick trying to get ahold of me. I've got an email. Usually, I'd just ignore it until I'm back home or something, but the notification on my phone looks weird and I'm not sure if it's important or some kind of spam bullshit.

Opening up my email, I click on the new mail and wait to see what pops up.

Mr. Vanderwalt,

I'm not sure if you're aware of what you've gotten yourself into or not, so I thought I would send you this email to inform you. It's come to my attention that you've aligned yourself with a young woman who has a troubling background to say the least. She was tossed into a dumpster at birth, addicted to drugs from the second she was born, and has since been involved in multiple horrendous decisions on her part. I will be attaching a file for you to look through with a few of her bad decisions.

While you don't know me, I do know you. I've known your family and every aspect of your business for quite some time. I'd hate to see you lose something due to lack of proper knowledge on your part. So, I've taken the time to outline multiple instances when this young woman has played you for a fool. She's going to try and take every dime you have before disappearing without a trace. I believe she knows someone who is currently working on getting her brand new identification and everything she'd need to disappear and start over somewhere new with everything you own. She will leave you destitute and in pain if you don't heed my warning.

I've also been informed you, Hendrix Vanderwalt, and Kendrick Montez are in danger. Not just from the young woman you've all let into your life, but from outside sources as well. These people will hurt, torture, and eventually kill you in order to get what they want. Ultimately, they want Mrs. Oakliegh Vanderwalt to pay for her sins and repent for all the damage she has caused. Again, I have evidence of this in the attached file.

I might not be a friend, or foe, to you. Hell, for all you know, I might be the one coming for you. All I know is at the end of the day, every single person you love will know immense pain and suffering. See, I'll fill you in on a secret, I personally know every person wanting your heads on a plate. You will pay for the sins of your father regardless of if his blood runs through your veins or not. You've all taken what doesn't belong to you.

Plans are being set in motion and none of you will escape unharmed. There is no way you can determine who I am, when I'll come for you, or anything else. I guess I just outed myself, didn't I? Though, I suppose that's okay because as I stated, you'll never know who I am until I'm ready to expose myself to you. I might be the mastermind, but again, I might just be a person who enjoys to follow orders and play with my assignment before bringing them a painfully slow end. No one will recognize a single one of you by the time we're done playing. And your beloved wife will be so far out of touch no one will ever find her.

Oakliegh will be beaten, raped, and tortured for the rest of her miserable life. She'll beg for death on a daily basis. It won't come to her. See, Oakliegh has already been sold off to the highest bidder and he's not a patient man. So far, I've managed to hold him off. Just know he's coming for her. It will be sooner than anyone thinks. Enjoy your time with the slut and make the most of her time left a free woman.

Anonymously Your Faithful Enemy

Rage fills me as I re-read the email multiple times. I've come to a complete stop in the middle of the hallway just outside the cashier's room. Hendrix runs into the back of me as him and Oakliegh make their way out with her money.

"What the fuck, Z?" Hendrix barks out, his hand on my shoulder to keep me from falling while his eyes are locked on Oakliegh to make sure she's okay.

"We got a problem. A big one," I tell him, looking up from my phone at my brother with wide eyes.

“What’s goin’ on?” he questions me, completely alert as he begins looking around the house as much as he can see in the hallway we’re in.

I don’t say another a word as we make our way to the basement where Kendrik is. Handing him my phone, Hendrix and him read through the email and I can see the instant the rage begins filling them. I mean, it happens as soon as they started reading it. Oakliegh stands next to me as I wrap her up in my arms and hold her to my body. The need to keep her close is overwhelming after reading those words from someone I don’t even know. Do we have a new fucking threat coming for us? Or is this someone we already know about who’s trying to play games with us? So many fucking questions race through my mind as I stand with Oakliegh in my arms.

“Can you find out who the fuck sent this bullshit?” Hendrix barks out, startling Oakliegh as she jumps in my arms.

“No one is truly anonymous online. There’s way I can track this and find out where it came from. Then, I can narrow it down to the specific person. We *will* figure out who sent this to you and what they hope to gain from it. Leave your phone with me so I can work some magic and go back upstairs. Tonight isn’t over with for you and you need to make the rounds, Zander. I know it’s the last thing you want to do, but it’s what has to be done. Since we don’t know who the fuck this is, they could be here right now,” Kendrik says, staring down at my phone as he makes his way over to his laptop. One that’s not hooked up to the gambling house.

Oakliegh looks between all of us, confusion filling her. We will tell her what’s going on. I don’t want to keep anything from her. Right here, right now, is not the time to tell her about the email though. We have a ton of people here and anyone could be the fucker who sent the email to me. For now, we have to keep up appearances and pretend everything is okay. That nothing horrible is going on.

“Baby girl, we’ll fill you in on everythin’ once we’re home. Let’s go see if we can find Harper,” Hendrix suggests,

taking our girl from my arms. “Calm yourself down before makin’ your way upstairs, Z. No one needs to know our business. I’ll let Dad know to come down and take a look at the email for himself. They need to be filled in on what’s goin on.”

With a nod of my head in response, I watch on as Hendrix and Oakliegh disappear from sight. Kendrik is doing something on his laptop as I begin staring off into space. It’s one fucking thing to threaten the three of us for something. Oakliegh is *never* to be threatened, touched, or talked about in any fucking manner. Once we know who this pussy is, he’ll learn that damn lesson. Hendrix won’t be the one teaching it either. This fucker will get up close and personal with my hands before I begin using all of my brother’s fun torture devices. Thoughts of what I’ll be doing to this twatwaffle fill my head instead of trying to calm myself down. Taking a few deep breaths, I push all rage filled thoughts aside and try to calm down.

Chapter Thirty-Three



Oakliegh

THE GRAND OPENING of Zander's gambling house was about a week ago. Since then, I've had more guards on me, I'm not allowed to leave the house if I don't absolutely have to, and I've taken a small leave of absence from the Book Stop. Sal has cut my hours down some too. He hasn't been given all the details of what's going on, but understands the need to have me protected. He's also not willing to take my job away from me. Other than Jasmine, I'm his hardest working employee and have picked up shifts because someone called off or just didn't feel like going in to work. It's not a big deal to me, but he sees it differently. Anyway, knowing some vile fuckers have supposedly sold me off to the highest bidder has put me in a funk. A large part of me has a feeling the Powers' are behind selling me off to the highest bidder. It wouldn't surprise me to learn of them making even more money off me any way they could.

Zander has a late class today to make up for one of his professors having an appointment. Kendrik is in the music room with his professor in order to go over a few things regarding the last performance he'll have for class of the year. It's right before graduation and will make up most of his grade for the year. He's been really stressed about the piece he's writing for it. Hendrix is in a meeting with Judge, Kain, and the rest of the guards. It's their normal meeting for everyone working for the family. The only guards I have on me today are the guys from the frat house. They're currently stationed around the outside of the house to make sure no one gets close to the house and me.

Since the email Zander received, the guards at home aren't ever pulled off duty. They switch out so multiple guys are here at all times. No chances are being taken when it comes to the safety of any of us. While the guys are worried about my safety, I'm worried about their safety. They're away from the house more than I am lately and take one or two guys with them. It's not enough if you ask me. When I suggest adding more men to follow them around, they just give me that look to tell me I'm crazy for suggesting they need more help. It's not crazy of me when we have no clue how many people are coming for us. And that they've been threatened as I have this time.

To keep my mind off everything, I've already gotten my homework done and have taken a shower to ease the tense muscles I can't seem to get to loosen up in the last few days since learning of everything Zander was told. Not even Hendrix's massages are helping me keep the knots at bay. I've also cleaned my entire room even though it didn't really need it before moving on to do the same in my bathroom. With nothing more to do, I've made my way downstairs to the kitchen to cook dinner and possibly bake something because I need something to do.

Pulling out what I need to make meatballs for subs tonight, I gather the ingredients before the pans I'll need. Usually I'd simmer them in a crockpot all day long after baking the meatballs, but there wasn't time to do it today. This is really a spur of the moment decision to make meatball subs tonight for dinner. I guess I'm craving them. Picking up my phone, I try to find a playlist to sing along to while I cook. Kendrick has made me several on a music app he put on my phone. It's something we all share and songs are added constantly to the playlists Kendrick makes me.

Before I can even pick a song, several things happen simultaneously. The doors leading out back are slammed open, glass shattering all over the place. At the same time, the front door is repeatedly slammed until it opens up and slams into the wall behind it. Wood splitting fills the air as fear and panic consume me to the point I freeze where I'm standing at the island of the kitchen. My head is almost on a swivel as I watch

men swarm inside the house. They're all wearing black clothing much like Judge and Kain wear. I think I heard Hendrix call it tactical gear or something at one point. Their faces are completely covered with the bare minimum of the skin around their eyes showing. I couldn't point out who any of these men are if I absolutely had to and my life depended on it.

Not a single word is said between the men as they move through the house and straight to me. In seconds I'm surrounded and the only thing I can hear are the boots they wear slamming against the floors of the house. At least that's what it sounds like to me as I stand completely frozen in shock. My heart races as I try to suck in a breath of air. Nothing is working too well right now.

Still without a word, two men reach out to grab me. This is when my fight or flight response kicks in. I'm not the only life at stake here any longer. I have to think of my unborn child and make sure I do everything in my power to ensure nothing happens to him or her. I lash out with my hands and feet, trying to land hits anywhere I can on the men attempting to get their hands on me to drag me out of the house. I'd like to say I think of everything Judge and the guys have been teaching me in this moment, but I don't. My mind is completely blank as I continue to fight these men. They simply outnumber me and I have no reason to believe I'm going to escape here today.

I'm suddenly backhanded across the face in someone's attempt to get me to quit fighting. While I'm momentarily stunned and stop attacking, three men grab me. One on each arm and the third behind me with his forearm wrapped around my throat. It's enough to limit my ability to breathe, but not quite enough to completely rob me of the air I desperately need. If I continue fighting, I know this asshole will choke me out. So, I stop fighting. For now. I'll regroup and figure out a way to escape once I know where I am. Plus, I have my secret weapon. Something no one will ever think about checking me for.

My phone is stepped on as I look down as if it's going to be able to save me or something. The less attention these fuckers have on me and whatever I'm wearing means I'll keep my secret weapon on my body and not be searched as thoroughly for a tracker or something. At least that's my hope. Even though I'm still having a hard time breathing and my heart is pounding in my chest, the only thing I can think of is my baby. Of protecting him or her at all costs. This is the only reason I'm not fighting any longer. I know I have to do everything in my power to let no harm come to the child I carry.

Before leaving the house, the assholes sent to pick me up bound my hands and ankles with some kind of rope. It's not an abrasive rope, cutting into my skin right now. But, I'm still not fighting against anything they're doing to me. I would be if they were groping me or doing anything more than tying me up. The last thing they did was place a bag of some sort over my head so I couldn't see where I was going, who was with me, or anything else. I won't even be able to identify their voices because not a single man has still said a single word. I'm not sure how they're communicating with one another, but they obviously are.

When the bag the asshole's placed on my head is ripped away, I find myself in the one place I never wanted to be again. I'm standing inside the Powers' home surrounded by Mrs. Powers, Mr. Powers, more men in the same black clothing with their faces hidden from view, and nothing but silence. Mrs. Powers is glaring at me with disgust filling her face. I look down at my body to find my clothing ripped and bruises already covering my skin. This isn't good. At all.

“Oakliegh,” Mr. Powers grits out between clenched teeth as he stares at my body. “When will you ever fucking learn? We will always win and no one can stop us. Especially not some little slut like you. From what I hear, you've been busy giving it up to half the fucking campus and gotten innocent people in trouble for things you've done.”

I don't bother responding. He's not looking for one anyway. The only thing I want is to get away from his wandering eyes as they continue to take in my body and fill me with disgust.

"I thought you were smart. Smarter than this shit," Mrs. Powers says, her voice full of menace. "Did you forget how to read since all you seem to do is fuck your way through college. Can't even go to class or get the education your scholarship is allowing you to gain. And then to learn you fought back instead of coming calmly? This deserves a punishment. I'd beat the hell out of you with a belt, but I don't want to add any injuries to what you've already gotten. Your new owner won't like seeing marks on your skin which aren't put there by him."

Before I can blink, Mrs. Powers lunges forward and grabs onto my arm. Her grip is tight and painful as she yanks me from between the men who took me from the house. My bare feet slip and slide on the overly waxed floors. It's always been this way in the house of horrors. Especially if you're in socks. There isn't a single way to gain traction and fight against being led somewhere you don't want to go. Still, I don't utter a single word even as Mrs. Powers leads me to the closet I'm so very familiar with. The one I've been locked in more times than I can count. Despite the fear and panic coursing through me now, I don't let myself utter a single noise. I press my lips together so hard it hurts to ensure not even a whimper to give this bitch the satisfaction of scaring the hell out of me.

True terror fills me. This closet is dark, small, and filled with dirt and secrets. The one room in the entire house that's never cleaned because it would mean someone might find out one of the many secrets this house holds. Even when I was cleaning, I was never once allowed to clean this closet. Every other one in the house got cleaned though. I'm sure it's because this is where all my punishments took place when it comes to being locked in a closet.

Mrs. Powers opens the door one handed and turns to face me for a few seconds. The sneer on her face lets me know

she's pissed and disgusted by me. It's a look I'm all too familiar with. One letting me know I'm going to be in here for a while with no hope of getting out for any reason. I can scream, cry, beat on the door, and everything else. It will all be ignored with no regard for my fear or going through a panic attack alone. Part of the punishment I deserve for whatever fucked up reasons Mrs. Powers believes needs to be corrected.

When she's done staring me down, waiting for me to make some sort of noise or cry out to not being shoved in the close, Mrs. Powers shoves me roughly into the small room. My stomach slams off the edge of the door and pain fills me. Fear also fills me even more with the thought of something happening to my son or daughter. Of not being able to save them because of someone else's behavior and actions against me.

"You'll be in here to think of everything you've done until you're new owner shows up to collect you. I suggest you take the time to reflect on everything you've done to cause this. This is *all* your fault Oakliegh and could have been prevented if you were never found in that dumpster. Thinking you would amount to anything in this world," she grinds out, her voice more lethal than I've ever heard it before in the time I've known her.

The door is slammed shut and I listen as the lock clicks shut so I can't get out. Darkness consumes me and the panic I typically feel at being locked in a small room takes over every other ounce of fear I've been feeling up to this moment. The memories of all the times I've been locked in here assault me and play on a constant loop. I can't breathe and my heart is about to burst out of my chest with how fast it's beating. Tears slide down my cheeks, dripping onto my chest. They slide through all the small cuts on my face from being backhanded at the house before getting the bag put over my head. My feet are also screaming in pain from being walked over the shards of glass from the patio doors. Still, I haven't made a noise or complaint about anything done to me.

When I can't stand being in this small space, I let fucking loose. Opening my mouth, I scream as loud as I

possibly can. In the cramped space, the scream is loud enough to make my own ears ring. I don't expect the door to open or anything to be done because it's never happened in the past. Along with screaming at the top of my lungs, I begin hitting the door with closed fists. The need to get out and bring all of everyone's attention to this closet is the only thing on my mind. I can't allow myself to pass out or be deprived of oxygen because it could harm the baby.

After what feels like hours but is no longer than minutes, the door opens to show Mrs. Powers standing there. Her face is redder than I've ever seen it before and her eyes are glaring down at me.

"What the fuck is your problem?" she growls out, losing any sense of calm and in control she had before. "Are you trying to get hurt worse than you already are?"

"Not at all you fucking coward," I return, my voice barely above a whisper as pain fills my throat from screaming. "Why don't you try getting locked in here and see how you fucking react. I've never done a fucking thing to you in the entire time I've been in this hell house. I've done everything you asked, gone without everything, barely eaten, and have been punished because you're a vile human being. I can't wait for the day you're finally ended. I hope I'm there to watch it happen. You're not fucking invincible and no one is above the law."

"You're not smart enough to do anything to me. You'll never be smart enough to get any sort of revenge for what you've been punished for," Mrs. Powers shrieks, her voice taking on a level of crazy I didn't know existed.

"I'm definitely smarter than you. You've given more evidence of your crimes away to outsiders than I ever thought of doing. If you hadn't, none of it would have been displayed at the university. Or posted on that stupid fucking website you created. Yeah, I already know it was you. I've got the proof of it too. I wonder if Darren knows what you've done. How you've jeopardized his freedom because you're batshit crazy," I taunt her, knowing something is going to make her break and pull me out of this closet to shut me up. "Or let's talk about all

the abuse I've suffered at your hands. While I don't have physical evidence of it, once I tell my story to anyone who will listen, it won't be hard to dig up everything you've already put up online. That will lead to you being arrested and everyone believing me because of the stupid shit you've done. I guess you didn't think about all that, did you?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," she says, doubt beginning to fill her face as she continues to glare down at me.

"I do know what I'm talking about. I've already had other sadistic fucks put in prison because of what they've done to me. You and your husband are the worst monsters I've ever come across in my life and have left a trail of your crimes a mile long. Kind of like the emails you sent me over the last several months. Knowing I didn't steal a damn thing from this house. I remember the day I left here. You kicked me out before I even went to school. I had my bag filled with school supplies I had, two changes of clothing, and nothing more. Everything has been a ruse to get the scared little girl you thought I still was to react to your messages. It's a pity I've grown a backbone, have people in my corner to help put your pathetic ass away for good, and I've been seeing a counselor to show me you've been the monster all along. There was never anything I did to result in punishments or anything else over the years.

"Maybe once you're in prison you'll have someone to treat you the same way your husband and you have treated so many kids who have come through this house. Kids who have to live with the torture and awful things you've done to them for the rest of their lives. I can only hope they get the help they need to become stronger and be better than you'll ever be. You're nothing more than a pathetic, used-up, piece of shit who is a doormat for her husband and can't have a single thought of her own. Everything you do is spurned on by Darren. He doesn't give the okay then you don't do it. Not to mention you knowing how often he cheats on you. It's not just at the parties you host here either.

“You two might think you’ve won, but it’s not the truth. Darren and you will both end up in prison and there’s no way around that. Everything you do only adds more charges to the crimes you’re already facing. And that’s just with my story of what’s been done to me at your hands. How many others do you think will step forward once someone else does first? I can bet probably a ton of kids you’ve treated like shit and abused will come forward with their own stories of the torture you inflicted on them. And you can think you have the cops in your pocket because some of them attend your disgusting parties, but that’s not true at all. I sat at a table with multiple cops just a few days ago and I have a feeling they’ll arrest you with smiles on their faces.”

My voice is almost non-existent as I finish speaking to Mrs. Powers. It’s not everything I’d want to say to her, but the majority of it is now out there. I’ve gotten things I’ve wanted to say for years off my chest. If I weren’t with my guys and didn’t have Erica to talk to about things, I wouldn’t have said a damn word right now. I’d still be locked in the damn closet crying. Not saying anything and letting these fuckers get away with having me kidnapped and selling me off to the highest bidder.

Mrs. Powers bends down and yanks on my arm once again. Her eyes are crazy as she stares at me with her mouth hanging open and her breathing coming so fast I’m surprised she’s not hyperventilating. She drags me out of the closet and to the kitchen. Darren and several men are standing around the kitchen as I’m shoved hard to the ground. A cry escapes as pain floods through my wrist and hand.

“What the fuck is going on? I thought you were keeping her in the closet until he gets here,” Darren questions his wife, anger lacing his voice at the change of plans without his permission proving my point.

“She won’t shut the fuck up. Said the most horrible things to me just a second ago. So, I’m going to shut her up. Bring me a chair,” Mrs. Powers returns, pointing to one of the kitchen chairs.

One of the masked men brings it over and just miss my fingers when he slams it down against the floor. Yanking my hand back, I cradle it to my chest. My hair is completely askew from being dragged around, but I can still feel the hair clip in my hair from Kendrik. They'll know where I am and come to get me. That's the only thought going through my head as I get yanked off the floor and thrown onto the chair so hard it almost tips over. Someone produces duct tape and rope, handing them off to Mrs. Powers.

I'm tied to the chair with my arms behind my back. I guess it's a good thing they got one of the chairs without arms. My ankles are tied to the legs of the chair. This rope is definitely not the same as what was used at the house. It rubs against my skin and I know I'll have marks to remind me of today's events for a while. Marks that my guys will see to remember what happened to me. I don't know what happens when I start thinking of my guys. Suddenly, I can't stop the laughter from exploding from me.

"What the fuck is wrong with her?" Darren questions his wife as he stares at me with confusion filling his face.

"I don't know," she grinds out, getting ready to put a piece of duct tape over my mouth.

"I'm laughing at the fact that you truly have no idea how fucking screwed you are. Do you know who my fucking husband is? Of the lengths he'll go to get me back and make sure you pay for every fucking injury I have?" I question my greatest tormentors.

"You're not married!" Mrs. Powers yells out, her eyes widening even more at the thought of her not knowing something about me.

"I assure you, I am married. My name is Oakliegh Vanderwalt. Married to Zander Vanderwalt. Son of Antonio Vanderwalt. Want to believe you're not truly fucked now?"

Mr. and Mrs. Powers' face both lose all color. Darren begins shaking with rage as he storms up to his wife. I watch on as he grabs a handful of hair and pulls her around to face him.

“Are you fucking kidding me with this shit, Kember. You were supposed to make sure the bitch was alone and didn’t have permanent ties to anyone. Now, she tells us she’s fucking married. And not just married to some random fuck, but Zander Vanderwalt. The man about to take over for his father. It also means she’s with Hendrix Vanderwalt and Kendrik Montez. That’s how things work in their world. You’ve brought all this shit down on our heads because you chose not to fucking listen to me and leave her alone. You had to start working with that shady fucker,” Darren yells, causing his wife to tremble at his rage and the thought of what’s going to happen to them.

Personally, I hope they get everything they deserve. I sit back and watch the show as Darren and Kember yell and scream at one another. There’s nothing else for me to do since I’m tied to this damn chair. I just hope someone gets home soon and realizes I’m not there. That they see the mess that was made of our house and Kendrik tracks me here to my own personal hell.

Chapter Thirty-Four



Hendrix

SITTING AT THE meeting with all the guards for the family is the most boring thing I've ever done in my life. Kain and Judge go over all the changes, what has to be done to accommodate our dads and everything going on with Oakliegh. We started the meeting off with Oakliegh so the guys from the frat could be here and learn what was going on. Not every member of the frat was here so Oakliegh still had guys on her at home. As soon as they left the meeting, the guys who were here made their way to the house for extra coverage. I hate leaving her with even a portion of the guys we did from the frat. And having none of the guards there to watch over her while she's home alone. Zeke is with me and remained even when the other guys took off. He's part of the family and will have to attend the meetings just like the rest of us. I'm not sure where Kayson and Brody are today. I just know they had something going on and couldn't get out of it. As long as it's approved by my dad or Mr. Montez, they won't get in trouble.

I've got a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach as Kain continues droning on and on about stupid shit we don't need to worry about right now. He's talking about something happening next year with our dads. They won't even be in power any longer and their security detail will be cut down drastically. Guards will still be with them around the clock, but we'll have more at our disposal than they'll have. I'm ready to snap when Judge stops the meeting.

"Kain, that's not anythin' on our radar. I don't know why the fuck you feel the need to go over somethin' next year.

Guys, get the fuck outta here. Those of you headin' to the house for Oakliegh, get there now. She's been alone for far too long and I don't want her alone any longer," Judge snaps, his voice cutting off Kain midsentence.

"I'm out," I say without looking back or talking to anyone. The need to get home is so overwhelming I can't ignore it.

Running from the room we've been cooped up in, I force my way through the doors and out to my SUV. Getting in the driver's seat, I barely have the engine started before I'm putting it in gear and racing out of the parking lot. I ignore all the traffic rules in my haste to get home and put my eyes on Oakliegh. Of holding her in my arms and seeing for myself she's okay and safe behind the doors of our house. It's not long before there's a line of trucks and SUVs following behind me.

Pulling into the driveway of the house on campus, my eyes dart around for the frat guys who are supposed to be watching over the house. Usually at least one of them would be by the driveway to make sure no one got in the garage to tamper with our vehicles. There's no one here. The feeling I've had for hours now has progressively gotten worse.

Parking my SUV in the middle of the driveway and not bothering to shut the engine off, I race around the house, looking for anyone who's supposed to be here right now. Not a single person is around. The silence surrounding the house is deafening as I jump up on the porch and stop dead in my tracks. I pull my phone from my pocket as I take in the shattered door frame and our front door standing wide open.

"Kendrik, where the fuck are you?" I bark out in the phone as soon as he answers.

"I'm in the music room working on my piece with my professor. Told you about it yesterday and this morning," he responds, his voice letting me know how annoyed he is right now.

"Get to the fuckin' house! Someone has broken in and none of the frat guys are here. I don't know where the fuck they are," I inform him, hanging up and calling Zander.

Zander's phone goes to voicemail. I'm not surprised considering he's in class right now. So, I hang up and call him back repeatedly. I don't stop calling him until he finally answers the phone. Giving him the same amount of information I've given Kendrik, I hang up the phone to find the guards following me walking around looking for any clues. I get out of my head and make my way inside. The living room is empty along with the kitchen. Everything is left untouched in the living room meaning this wasn't some random break-in. The kitchen shows me Oakliegh was getting ready to make dinner. There's food on the counters and glass shattered everywhere. Her phone is smashed on the floor too. Our patio doors have been shattered and sit wide open as I continue looking around.

I spot drops of blood closer to the patio doors. It leads outside and into the grass where I eventually lose the trail. My heart shatters knowing in my heart this blood belongs to Oakliegh. Someone has hurt my baby girl and taken her from our home.

"Hendrix!" Zander yells my name, racing out the patio doors to find me. "What the fuck is going on here?"

"I just got home when I called you and Kendrik. This is how I found it. Someone fuckin' took our girl. She's not here. There's blood leadin' out this way," I tell my brother as he drops to the ground.

Part of me wants to go to my brother and offer him comfort. I can't. Rage, pain, and anger fill me as I think of our girl being taken and hurt when we weren't here to put a stop to it. We didn't fucking protect her. Again. How is she ever going to forgive us for this happening to her.

"Guys!" Kendrik calls out, his voice winded and hoarse as he enters the backyard.

At the same time, the guards now surround the three of us. Judge steps forward with a grim look on his face. We're not about to like what he has to say.

"Found the frat guys. They're all piled up in the woods. Someone knocked them out and put them out of the

way. Even the ones at the meeting have been knocked out. They won't have any information for us," Judge says, his voice laced with anger and confusion at how this happened here today.

"I'm tracking her now," Kendrik says, staring at his phone as we all head back inside. "You've got to be fucking kidding me!"

"What"? Zander asks, speaking after barely getting up to follow us back inside.

"They took her to the fucking Powers' house. The tracker is still blinking to let me know it's working and hasn't been destroyed. These fuckers aren't smart enough to disable it or take the tracker there and send Oakliegh somewhere else. That's where we're gonna find our girl. Judge, get the guys ready to head out. Hendrix, I know you're gonna wanna take some of your toys with us there. Two minutes and we're heading the fuck out," Kendrik barks out orders, something he rarely does.

I race up to my room and enter the closet. I've got a spot in the back of my closet where I store a small bag loaded up with all of my tools. When we do an interrogation, I don't leave my tools behind for anyone else to touch. It doesn't matter if we use the same place or not. My tools go there with me and come home with me. I clean them, put them back in their cases, and store them for the next time they're needed.

After making sure I've got everything I want to take with me, I race back downstairs to find Kendrik and Zander at my SUV where I parked it in the driveway. The guards are standing with Judge as they all wait for their orders.

"Judge, follow us. We know where their house is and I'm going to keep tracking Oakliegh. Call in anyone else who's not already here. Someone stay here with the frat guys and make sure Doc is called to check them out. I don't want anyone to go to the hospital unless it's absolutely necessary. We need to keep this situation under the radar until it's time for the cops to come in and get the pieces of shit who are

trying to destroy our girl,” Kendrik once again speaks up, his voice ringing out for everyone to hear.

Zander is on the phone and I know he’s telling our dad what we discovered when I got home today. This was a major oversight on all of our parts and it won’t fucking happen again. Oakliegh will never be left alone again. The three of us pile into my vehicle and I take off. Judge and his guys are quick enough to catch up to me before we get too far away from them. If they weren’t, they wouldn’t be working for us.

We all surround the Powers’ house. I can’t see inside since every fucking curtain in the place is pulled shut. Kendrik has given us all ear pieces to use if we have to communicate with one another for any reason. Though, we all want it radio silent so no one knows we’re here until it’s time to break the fucking doors down. The only reason we aren’t already doing so is because Oakliegh has eyes on her and she’s not currently in danger while we wait for more guards to show up. Whoever can see in the house at the back has reported multiple men standing or walking around inside. We don’t have eyes on the second floor so I’m not sure if anyone’s up there. At last count I think we were up to fifteen men, Mr. Powers, and Mrs. Powers are inside with Oakliegh. We have enough men here with us now to take them all on, but we’re not taking any chances with getting our girl out of there with as few injuries as possible.

I can hear yelling and screaming coming from inside. It’s so shrill and loud, no words can be understood through the windows. Darren and Kember aren’t in the kitchen with Oakliegh according to the guard feeding us details, but they’ve still got her in their line of sight. They’re the ones yelling and screaming at one another about something. I can only guess something isn’t going according to their plans. Or our girl has said something to pit them against one another. Maybe she let a few secrets out since they took her.

“How much longer do we gotta fuckin’ wait?” I growl out my annoyance at not being able to get to our girl when she’s so damn close to us.

“Less than two minutes. Your dad is leading another team of guards here as we speak,” Kendrik informs me, his voice coming over the ear piece.

“Zander, you got your head in this shit?” I ask my brother as he stares at nothing through the closed off window in front of us.

“Of course I’m ready for this. My wife is in there. Your woman is inside this house. What the fuck are these assholes thinking?” he questions me, fear and anger warring for dominance in his eyes.

“They weren’t thinkin’. That much is obvious. In less than two minutes we’ll be inside and layin’ eyes on our girl. Then, we’ll take out every fucker who hurt her and tried to take her from us.”

“Kember, you’re fucking ridiculous. Once the buyer realizes who her husband is, he’s going to want his fucking money back. No one will go up against the Vanderwalt and Montez family. Everyone knows they won’t live to tell the tale if they do. Now, you had this fucking bitch brought to our home for her to tell us she’s married to Zander. The next head of the fucking family. What the fuck were you thinking?” Darren yells, his voice shaking with the anger lacing it.

I can’t hear what Kember says in response to her husband. Her voice is muffled as she finally stops shrieking like a banshee. A smile covers my face. Our girl is smarter than she realizes. By telling them about her marriage, she’s taken all attention away from her and got the assholes arguing with one another. They aren’t paying attention to anything but their anger and fear about what to do next. While I may not know what the other men inside the house are doing, I have a strong feeling they won’t touch Oakliegh unless Darren or Kember tell them to do something.

“Kember, this mess is all your fucking fault! I don’t give a shit how you try to spin the fucking shit to get it in your favor, but if you hadn’t tried to pull your shit because your so fucking useless, none of this would be happening. Now, we’re gonna have the damn Vanderwalt’s and Montez’ on our asses.

How are you gonna get us the fuck out of that shit? Is your new fucking friend gonna help with that? I don't even know who this man is and you just blindly trust him. Did you even think you were being used for his agenda? To get someone out of the way for his own selfish gain. No, you fucking didn't because you're too fucking stupid to think for yourself," Darren shouts once again, something shattering as he finishes speaking.

The man in me wants to make sure he's not hurting his wife. No man should ever take their anger out on a woman for any reason. However, this is the woman who's responsible for every single ounce of pain Oakliegh has felt in her life. Every nightmare she's had because of the demons chasing her thanks to these fucking people. Mrs. Powers is the one who forced her to play dress up and pose for photos no child should ever have taken of them. She's tortured our girl in the worst ways possible and has no fucking remorse for anything she's done. If anything, she blames Oakliegh for everything.

"They're pulling in now," Kendrik alerts us through the ear pieces as we remain crouched down outside the Powers' home.

Taking a deep breath, I count down the seconds until we're bursting through the door to get our girl back. Zander immediately readies himself to enter the house and see Oakliegh. All three of us are unhinged with the thought of Oakliegh being hurt and taken. This isn't anything we believed would happen. Not with so many people watching over the house. However, they got the jump on us by bringing in a small army of men to take out the frat guys and get our girl out of the house. Next time, we'll be prepared for anything like this happening again.

Chapter Thirty-Five



Kendrik

STANDING AT THE side of the house, I watch as Mr. Vanderwalt and my dad get out of the SUV that just pulled up. Several more guards get out of other vehicles and they all surround the house. My dad walks up to me and we don't say a word as Judge begins the countdown to move inside the home. I walk to the back corner of the house with my dad following me. Guards will remain outside the home to ensure no one gets away from here today. I won't be left outside though. My girl is inside and that's where I intend on being. The need to set eyes on her and make sure she's okay is consuming me. It's the only thing I can think about. All I've thought about since the second Hendrix called and interrupted my appointment with my professor.

To say I was shaken and going out of my mind when Hendrix called me and then hung up with giving me as little information as possible would be a complete understatement. My heart was beating out of my chest and I could barely suck in air as I raced from the music department for home. I didn't stop to talk to anyone, look around, or anything until I was at the house and trying to process what the fuck I was seeing. Our front door had been slammed in. That's not something easy to do when it's locked. Oakliegh always locks the door when she's home alone. We've all got keys and there's no reason for anything to be left unlocked if it's what she needs to feel safe in the place she'll call home for the next three years.

Today, Oakliegh was taken from our home and I know she'll have a hard time feeling safe there ever again. It won't be her home after we get her back because I know it will be

hard for her to stay there. We're going to have to make other arrangements for when we move out. We'll keep the nursery and shit at the house on campus in case she needs to stay there for some reason. Other than that, there's no reason we can't move up everything regarding our new home so it's done sooner rather than later. I'm not about to make her stay in a house she was kidnapped from because we've got nowhere else to go.

Judge gets down to one and everyone bursts through the front and back doors of the Powers' home. Hendrix, Zander, and I all make our way inside at the same time. It's not hard to spot Oakliegh as she sits in the middle of the kitchen. She's tied to a chair with her arms behind her and her ankles tied to each front leg. I can already see blood around the rope where it digs into her skin and has rubbed against it. A red haze fills my vision. Letting my eyes travel from the top of Oakliegh's head to her feet, I take in every mark on her body. Her clothing is ripped in several places exposing her pale skin to everyone in the room. There's a bruise forming on her cheek along with small cuts on her face. There's also a large bruise forming just under her tits and leading down the side of her stomach. Someone not only hurt our girl, but they could have hurt our baby too.

"What the fuck are you doing in my home?" Mr. Powers demands as he exits whatever room his wife and him were in.

"You took something that doesn't belong to you. My wife," Zander grits out, his teeth clenched as his hands clench and unclench into fists at his side. He's struggling to hold himself back.

Hendrix is standing next to his brother, staring down the couple as Mrs. Powers cowers behind her husband. I wonder if this is how my sweet angel felt when she was taken from her home.

"That skank isn't worth marrying. Get a fucking annulment and forget all about her," Mr. Powers spits out, shoving his way past Zander as Hendrix holds him back.

Right now we don't want to put our hands on the couple. We want them to get some sort of sense that we're only here to get our girl and then we'll leave them alone. It's not the truth, but they don't need to know that.

“Big words for a man who was just screamin' at his wife about havin' to deal with the family, how she was a fuck-up for doin' this, and that your buyer was goin' to back out of the deal for buyin' our girl. Or is this some sort of reverse psychology bullshit. Pretend you're not about to shit your pants with all of us standin' in this fuckin' horror house so we do your biddin' without even realizin' it?” Hendrix says, his voice almost a whisper he's so pissed off.

I stand back and watch on as Mr. Powers makes his way over toward Oakliegh. My eyes don't leave him as I track his movements through the kitchen. He doesn't grab any weapons or anything as he comes to stand behind our girl. It's not going to help him considering we have guards behind him as well. So far none of the men have been taken out. Our guards are standing with the men filling the Powers' home to stop them from doing anything stupid. Kids are still going to be in this house until we can get a caseworker in here to remove them. None of us want them to come in and see a horrendous mess.

Everything changes in a split second. Mr. Powers reaches out and grabs Oakliegh by her hair. He yanks her head back and goes to press a knife against her throat. I'm moving before I can blink an eye or think about what I'm doing. My hand catches Mr. Powers before he can get the knife close to Oakliegh. He turns his head to look back at me. I'm not sure what he sees on my face, but his instantly drains of all color. Pulling his arm back even more, I don't stop even after hearing the loud snap of his bone coming out of the joint or breaking. I'm not really sure which has happened to him at this point. And I don't fucking care either. This man was about to press a knife against the throat of my sweet angel. To threaten her more than he's already done. I fucking snap.

Pushing Darren back, I follow him as the men in the room move to either side. I barely register anything going on if

it's not him moving around. Trying to get away from me. He's not going to get away. Not when he's touched our girl. I don't say a word as I stalk the twatwaffle in front of me. The stench of piss soon fills the kitchen as I continue stalking him like the prey he is. I'm nothing more than a predator protecting my woman in this moment. When Mr. Powers' back hits the wall of the kitchen, I don't stop until we're literally nose to nose. I don't say a word or blink as I wait for him to make a move or do something. When it becomes evident he's not going to, I let my inner beast out. He wants to play and I'm not going to stop him. Not when he was about to hurt Oakliegh more than he already has and right in front of us.

I land blow after blow to the fucker standing in front of me. No one else is in the room with us as he becomes my sole focus. Darren grunts and whimpers as I don't stop my assault on him. Still, I don't let up as the red haze only grows as I think of everything this man had a hand in doing to Oakliegh from the time she was a little girl. He's robbed her of so fucking much and treated her as nothing more than some kind of pawn in the sick and twisted games his wife and him play. No matter how much counselling she goes to or how often we talk about everything, she'll live the rest of her days with reminders of what they've done to her. There's nothing we can do to take the pain from her.

Grabbing a knife from the fucker's hand, I stab him repeatedly. I don't even care where the blade lands as it slices through his skin. I still don't recognize anyone else in the room with us as I refuse to stop attacking this asshole. If we were in the warehouse, I'd take my time. Make him truly feel every ounce of pain I can dish out. I'd actually let Hendrix and Zander get a piece of him. Instead, this man will feel the pain I want him to feel and he'll realize you don't fuck with someone I love. The woman who is the center of my entire world.

“Kendrik!” Hendrix's voice penetrates the fog filling me as he rips me away from Darren.

When my gaze finally clears and the kitchen comes back into focus, I'm appalled at the scene in front of me. Blood covers the wall Darren was leaning against along with

the man in question. He's slumped down on the floor at my feet with blood pooling around his body. Screams fill the room along with a struggle as I turn to find Mrs. Powers being held back by Kain so she can't get to her husband. She's not the one I'm worried about though. My gaze instantly goes to Oakliegh. She's no longer tied to the chair she was in as Zander holds her close to his body. He's trying to turn her face away from the sight in front of her, but she doesn't let him.

Oakliegh leaves Zander's arms and makes her way over to me. There's no disgust on her face or anything. She doesn't stop walking until her body is pressed up against mine and her arms are wrapped tightly around my body. I want to hold her back, to reassure her I won't ever hurt her, but I don't want to get more blood on her than what she's getting herself by holding me. Looking down at my sweet angel, I stare into her eyes as she looks up at me.

"Thank you, Kendrik. You slayed one of my beasts and I'll sleep better knowing he's not going to hurt anyone else ever again," she tells me, her voice strong and sure as she continues staring at me.

I look for any signs of repulsion or fear in her eyes and there is none. Oakliegh's truly thankful for what I've done today. The sad truth is, I don't even remember doing most of it. Especially taking the knife and stabbing so violently. A small part of me knows I did, but I don't remember doing it. It's what happens when I let my inner beast out. I black out and can't remember everything I've done. The things I do remember are like little snippets here and there. That's the reason I don't let myself lose control. I'm violent and can't remember what I've done. Even when the guys tell me what happened, I still don't remember.

"Baby girl, get back from here," Hendrix tells her as she lets go of my body. "You need to sit down until we can get you to the hospital to be looked at. We're not takin' any chances these fuckers did somethin' to hurt you or the baby."

"What have you fucking done!" Mrs. Powers shrieks causing everyone to turn their attention to her. "This is all your fault, you little fucking bitch. If you hadn't been here, none of

this would have happened. Why can't you do anything right in your fucking life?"

"Are you fucking delirious?" I question her, stepping closer to the crazy bitch. "You caused all this shit to happen. You're the one who sent men into our home to kidnap Oakliegh and bring her to your home. You've sent threatening emails to her for months. Lied about her stealing something from your husband when we all know she didn't. I know you're working with someone else who's after us. You've displayed pictures showing evidence of the crimes you committed against Oakliegh and countless other children who were put in your care. And, you've sold her off to the highest bidder. I have evidence of every crime your husband and you have committed and now it looks as if you'll be the one to pay for the crimes alone."

"It's all her fucking fault. If she hadn't been put in our care, I wouldn't have had to do any of this," Kember cries out her pain as she stares at her husband's lifeless body on the floor.

"No. This is your fault. If Oakliegh hadn't been here, you'd have done the same shit to another helpless child who was put in your care," Zander states, stepping over to Oakliegh. "If you want to blame anyone for all this shit happening, look in a fucking mirror. Get her out of my sight. I want her taken to the jail. Ask for the chief. Kendrik has already forwarded all of the evidence of her crimes to him. He's expecting her."

"You can't fucking do this!" Kember screams out, rage contorting her face as she struggles against Kain's hold.

We all watch on as Kain drags her from the kitchen. Several guards follow him out and leave us standing in the kitchen.

"Kendrik, son, are you okay?" my dad asks, concern filling his voice. He's never seen me black out before.

"I'm good. Sorry about the mess we now have to clean up. I just lost my control when I saw him going to press a

knife against my sweet angel's neck," I admit, not feeling bad at all for the mess I've caused.

"Don't worry about that shit. You three get Oakliegh to the hospital. I want them to look her over thoroughly. And congratulations on the baby," Mr. Vanderwalt says, looking at us with a smile on his face. "I'll check in to see where you're at when we get this taken care of. Oakliegh, you're so brave. Thank you for holding on long enough for us to get here and save you."

The four of us leave the Powers' home for the last time. We will never step foot in this house again. Oakliegh will know one of her monsters has been slaughtered and the other one is going to spend the rest of her days in prison. Neither one of them will be able to hurt her any longer. With the shit Mrs. Powers has been pulling since Oakliegh left their house, I'll do everything in my power to ensure she has no access to a phone or any electronic devices while she's locked up behind bars.

Hendrix puts Oakliegh in the back seat so she can stretch out along the seat of his SUV. I climb in with her and she lays her head down in my lap so I don't have to touch her. The need to run my fingers through Oakliegh's hair is overwhelming. It's not enough she's touching me with her head on my leg or her hand resting on my thigh under her cheek. I *need* to be touching her in some form. However, I'm not about to taint her with that fucker's blood. She's been tainted enough by the fucker and I refuse to add to it for any reason. Once I clean up, I'll get my chance to touch our girl.

Zander doesn't take his eyes off her from the passenger seat. He's turned around so he can watch her for any signs of breaking down or needing immediate medical attention. Oakliegh shows no signs of either. Yeah, she's got cuts and bruises on her body, but she's not complaining about any pain in her stomach or anything else. I know my best friend wants to be holding his wife, but he chose to give this to me. I'm not sure if it's because I lost my shit or what his reasoning is, but I'm not going to refuse having Oakliegh in this seat with me. Not for a second.

Hendrix also watches Oakliegh as much as he can. He stares at her through the rearview mirror while also trying to keep his eyes on the road in front of us. Pain fills his eyes and I know he's carrying the guilt of her being taken from our home on his shoulders. We all are. Hendrix is going to feel this aspect of today's events harder than the rest of us though. He takes security seriously and will be the enforcer for Zander and Oakliegh. I know already he's feeling as if he let her down and there's nothing we can say that will stop him from carrying this load. Oakliegh is the only one who has a possibility of getting him out of his head and being with her in this moment.

The guilt I feel comes in the form of not knowing how these fuckers got past my cameras and bypassed all of the alerts I've set up at the house to prevent this type of shit from happening. Once I get home I'll comb through my system and find out exactly how they bypassed my shit. Then, I'll beef up the security around the house and make sure no one can ever do this shit again. Plus, I'll do the same at our home so nothing like this happens there.

Hendrix pulls into the hospital and parks the SUV right in front of the emergency room doors. He races inside while Zander and I get out of the passenger side. When Oakliegh attempts to get out, we stop her. The less she moves around and does on her own, the better for now. We're not going to let her do a damn thing until we know with complete satisfaction that she's okay. That our son or daughter is okay and nothing has been done to him or her. I'm sure it's one of the big questions on Oakliegh's mind as she rests one of her hands on her stomach. None of us will rest until we know what's going on.

My best friend rushes out followed by a team of nurses as they get to the passenger side of the SUV. The nurses help Oakliegh out of Hendrix's vehicle and onto the gurney. We all stand back so Oakliegh can get the help she needs without delay. As soon as they start wheeling her inside the hospital, all three of us move as one to get inside and be at her side. The only thing we can do is wait to get news and be there for our girl as the doctors and nurses do their job and make sure

Oakliegh and our baby is okay. Frustration fills us all because there is nothing we can do to help our girl or comfort her while we wait on any news of how her and the baby are doing.

Chapter Thirty-Six



Oakliegh

THREE WEEKS HAVE passed since I was kidnapped from the house and taken to the Powers' house once again. I'm having nightmares again and it's hard for me to be in the kitchen alone for any reason. If I'm being honest, my love of cooking and baking has all but disappeared since the kidnapping. That's the room I was in when I was taken and what I was preparing to do. My guys are not leaving the house unless they absolutely have to as their dads step up to take over everything they've been working on for the time being. They understand how much I need them. here with me as I process what happened to me and what it's going to take for me to move forward once again with my life. Harper and her guys have also been here because they want to be close to help the four of us with whatever we need while at home.

Everything was fixed at the house later the same night. The doors have all been replaced, all the glass swept from the floor and trashed, and there is literally nothing left from the day of the attack. That night we spent in a hotel close to campus so I wouldn't have to come back to the house while everything was being taken care of and so soon after being taken from there. Harper and her guys stayed at the house and Kayson spent the night on the phone with Kendrik as they worked to make sure all the cameras were working and they had some sort of protection in place so nothing happened to them. Just because Mrs. Powers is currently in jail and Mr. Powers is no longer with us doesn't mean we're in the clear. There's someone out there still coming for us. At least one of them is the enemy of the family. I have yet to meet him or learn too much about the man or his family.

I'm still going to school and tutoring Addie. She still comes to the house to work with me and hasn't said a single word about what happened. If we talk about anything other than homework or her math, it's about her appointments with Erica and how much she's helping my friend work through her trauma. I did go to her very first appointment with her just because I know Erica and she didn't want to go alone. Like me, she's nervous about talking to someone and giving them personal details of her life to a person she doesn't know. Addie didn't go into too many details when I was with her, and that's okay. I'm just happy I could be there with her and help her through a step in her recovery process in some small way.

When we were at the hospital as soon as they got me out of the house of hell, I was given a thorough exam, blood work was taken, and I had another ultrasound done. Everything with the baby is okay and I've been told to take it easy and to call my obstetrician if I notice any signs of something going wrong with the baby. I've also been seen by Dr. Gonzalez for reassurance everything is okay. All my guys have been with me at every appointment since the kidnapping. They aren't going to let me go through anything alone in case something does happen.

My guys have been giving me as much comfort as they can. Kendrik has been at my side for the most part, but he's definitely pulling back from me. I'm not sure if it's because of what happened at the Powers' home or because of some other reason. I'm going to have to talk to him when it's just the two of us. If something is going on between the two of us, we don't need to figure it out in front of Hendrix and Zander. Maybe I'm doing something wrong or he can't handle the nightmares and stuff I'm having once again.

I've also been seeing Erica more often. She's been trying to help me work through the kidnapping and deal with the claims made by Mrs. Powers about all this being my fault. It's something I have taken to heart and believe deep in my soul. If there wasn't something wrong with me then they wouldn't have done everything to me they have in the years I was with them. Erica is extremely patient with me as I often find myself taking breaks as I try to work through everything

in my head. She doesn't push me or ask me questions when I'm trying to sort through my thoughts. Eventually I'll be able to work through everything, but I'm not sure how long it's going to take me to get it all out.

The guys have offered to go with me to see Erica, but I've refused at this point. One of them are usually out in the waiting room when I'm in a session. I just don't want to have them sitting there listening to the details of what happened when they've already watched the security feed from Kendrik's cameras all over the house. I wasn't with them when they locked themselves in the office at the house to go through the footage. While the assholes who came in the house to kidnap me didn't actually cut out the security feed, they did make it so Kendrik wouldn't have gotten any alerts about anything happening. I didn't even know that was possible. Though, I don't know anything regarding the system he's put in place or electronics at all.

I'm currently lying in bed. I don't want to get up and there's no reason for me to do so. It's Saturday and I'm going to spend as much time in bed relaxing as I can. The guys are here with me, but they've gotten out of bed and are doing various things in the house. This would be the perfect time to talk to Kendrik alone, but I'm actually very comfortable and don't want to move.

"Oakliegh, can I come in?" Kendrik asks through my door as if he knows I'm thinking about him right now.

"Of course," I reply, moving around so he can climb in bed with me.

Kendrik walks in the room and walks up to the bed. He hesitates at the side until I pull back the blankets for him to get in bed with me. For several minutes, we don't talk and he hardly looks at me. We simply lay together in bed with the blankets covering almost all of us. Taking a deep breath, I look at him knowing this is the time to have our talk.

"Kendrik, can I ask you something?" I begin, my voice trembling with emotion and fear about what's going on between us.

“You can ask me anything, my sweet angel,” he replies, his voice soft as he finally reaches out to run his fingers through my loose curls.

“What’s going on? You’ve been kind of distant since we got home from the hospital after everything. If I’ve done something wrong, you need to tell me. I can’t fix it if I don’t know what I’ve done,” I tell him, my voice coming out as a whisper now.

“Sweet angel, you haven’t done anything wrong. If anything, I’ve failed you. Not only were these fuckers able to disable my alarm so we’d know something was wrong, but you were taken and hurt because I didn’t think to put some sort of bypass on the security system. They’ve managed to do something I didn’t realize could be done. Or was thinking about being done because I let my confidence overrule my common sense,” Kendrik says, pressing a soft kiss against my lips before pulling back and looking at me with shame in his eyes. “I let you see a part of me I didn’t ever want you to witness. You saw the man I become when I lose control. I completely blacked out and don’t remember everything I did in that moment to Darren. How can you even look at me with love in your eyes?”

“Oakliegh, when I lose control, I don’t ever remember all of what happens. Hendrix or Zander have to tell me what I’ve done and I still don’t remember. I know deep in my heart and soul I won’t ever hurt you or get close to you if I’ve lost control. It’s a matter of not wanting you to see me when I’m like that too. Instead, you just walked right up to me and wrapped your arms around me as if I didn’t just severely hurt Darren. I’m a fucking monster. No better than they were to you, Oakliegh.”

“You’re not a monster. Am I scared of you because of what I witnessed in the Powers’ kitchen that day? No, I’m not. What I saw was a man out of his mind with worry because I was kidnapped from our home. A place I should have been safe because you’ve put every safety precaution in place you could think of. Hendrix and Judge have been training me to fight off any attackers coming at me as well. In the moment, I

simply froze. I couldn't think of anything I was supposed to do. I know you guys saw me fighting and that wasn't easy for you. However, at the time, you didn't know if I had put up a fight or anything. All you saw was some blood left behind and the doors of our home blown in with glass shattered all over the place.

“Then, on top of that, you saw the man who has been a part of my nightmares for so long put a knife to my throat. Or attempt to put a knife to my throat. You snapped and lost it. I can assure you I'd do the same thing if I were in your position and saw what you had seen. Kendrik, I've seen you control yourself and know you do everything in your power to keep your inner beast locked up tight. The day in their house was emotional, filled with tension, and there was nothing you could do. Hendrix and Zander don't blame you either. They know the rigid control you keep on yourself. It's honestly one of the things I love about you. So, no, I'm not going to look at you as anything other than one of the men I love and being there for you when you need me. I don't want distance between us for any reason. I love you, Kendrik. Every single fucking part of you,” I promise him, sealing my words with my lips pressed against his in a deep, slow kiss.

“I love you, my sweet angel. You are fucking everything to me. I'll work on getting my shit together and stop putting distance between us. I guess a huge part of me believed you'd never look at me the same again after thinking of everything and not being in the moment. That you'd want me to leave you alone. I was pulling away before you had the chance to tell me you were done with me. No one has ever hung around for too long after actually witnessing my beast come out for any reason. Hendrix and Zander have always been the exception to that. They've been at my side through everything and have done their best to help me keep my beast locked up.

“Oakliegh you are the only one who has ever stayed by my side no matter what was going on. You don't know what it means to me to have you with us. You're the light we all want to surround ourselves with and be near every second we can. You make it easier to breathe when you're around me. I don't

know what I'd do if you didn't decide to take a chance on us. Take a chance on me. Man, no one has ever gone up against my dad the way you have. All because you didn't like how they treated me. I love you seems so insignificant to tell you with the way you make me feel," he tells me, pulling me into his arms.

Kendrik holds me for a while before my stomach starts growling to let me know I'm hungry.

"Let's go get our baby something to eat. Then we can come lay back down if you want," Kendrik says, pulling me up after he gets out of bed.

We head downstairs and I spot Zander in the living room with the TV on as he reads one of his textbooks. He looks up and smiles at us as Kendrik leads me into the kitchen. My heart rate accelerates slightly as we enter the room I was kidnapped from. Kendrik doesn't let my hand go as we head to the counter where a ton of food has been set out. Together we make plates and microwave them for a few seconds before joining Zander in the living room.

"What the fuck are you doin' here?" Hendrix yells out, his voice startling me as Kendrik whips his head toward the front of the house.

Someone says something but I can't make out the words being said. It's definitely a male based on the deep voice I can hear. Kendrik doesn't move from my side as Hendrix continues to go off. I can't stand here and do nothing as I make my way toward the front door. Kendrik doesn't follow me.

"I don't give a fuck what you think you need to fuckin' tell us, but you don't belong in the same house where our woman is. She's been through enough and you're a fuckin' enemy, Callahan. What the fuck are you even doin' in our territory? Does your fucked-up daddy know you're here?" Hendrix growls out as I place my hand on his back and step to the side of him.

"Hendrix, he doesn't know I'm here and I couldn't give a fuck what he thinks or feels right now. I've got a lot to

tell you guys and it's only goin' to help you fuckin' defeat him. I wouldn't come here if I didn't have a good fuckin' reason and you know it. I'm not here to cause you harm or bring anythin' to your door. Call your dad and Mr. Montez to come here and they can listen in as I tell you everythin' I'm about to," this man says, never once looking at me as he talks to Hendrix.

"Kendrik and Zander, get our dad's here. Now. Callahan's on our doorstep and I'm not lettin' him in until they get here. Make sure Judge and Kain are here with them," Hendrix barks out as he wraps his arm around me and pulls me into his side while kissing the top of my head. "Baby girl, why don't you go eat your food and sit with the guys. I'll be right here until dad gets here. I'm not goin' anywhere."

With a nod of my head, I make my way back into the living room where Kendrik is setting my plate down on the table for me to eat. Zander sits on the couch with his phone to his ear as he calls his dad. Kendrik is also on the phone with his dad. They're letting them know some man is here and they need to get here with Judge and Kain immediately. Sitting down next to my husband, I begin eating the cheeseburger and fries on my plate. There's also a cup of fresh fruit on the table for me. The guys always make sure I have vegetables or fruit with my meals to get something healthy in my body for our little one.

When the guys get off their phones, they go back to what they were doing without saying a word. I'm so confused about what's going on right now. Not only with the man who's a supposed enemy at the door and Hendrix not letting him inside the house or kicking him off the porch, but the guys not saying anything to me about the situation we currently find ourselves in. In fact, they barely even look at me as I eat my meal.

It doesn't take me long to eat the fries, burger, and fruit. By the time I'm setting my dishes back on the table in front of me, there's a commotion at the door. Kendrik comes to sit on my other side and takes my hand in his, lacing our fingers together. Zander places his arm over my shoulder and

moves so he's leaning into my body. In minutes, Mr. Vanderwalt, Mr. Montez, Hendrix, and the man at the door are in the living room with us. The guys' dads sit in the chairs across from the couch with Judge and Kain behind them. Hendrix comes to a stop behind me and places a hand on the back of my neck as his fingers begin to knead the area. This leaves the guy that's their enemy to stand at the end of the couch between the couch and chairs.

"You had shit to say so fuckin' talk," Hendrix barks out as the guy rolls his eyes at him.

"I did. First of all, I've been figurin' out this shit for a while now. I've been puttin' all the pieces together and runnin' tests to verify everythin' I'm about to tell you today. Well, there's still one test to be done, but it's not my decision to make," the guy starts, looking directly at me when he says something about one more test. "Gregor Marsden has never been a father to me. He's beaten me, humiliated me, and tried to groom me to be exactly like he is. A vile, disgustin', piece of shit who has no morals and believes there are no lines to cross when it comes to gettin' what he wants.

"I know the three of you were close and were sharin' a woman. My mom. What you don't know is he fuckin' kidnapped her from you. He's been holdin' her and keepin' her drugged out of her mind for as long as I can remember. She's not doin' good. At all. My mom doesn't speak, barely gets out of bed, and is in no shape to fight against her captor. He's raped her, hurt her, and let his men have her anytime they want. That's what he calls real love. She's not why I'm here though.

"I'm not Gregor Marsden's son. He might have raised me and tried to beat me into bein' his protégé, but it never worked. However, my true dad is in this very room. My mom was pregnant with me when he took her from you. Mr. Montez, you're my biological father. I've run my DNA up against fuckin' Gregor's and yours. I'm not proud of how I got yours, but I did. That's not to say Gregor doesn't have a child because he certainly does. On top of all the shit he's done to my mom over the years, he's also never been faithful to her a

day in his life. Not even when the three of you were together. He's been fuckin' prostitutes and livin' out his sick, twisted fantasies with them because they won't say a word about it to anyone.

"I believe Oakliegh is his daughter. If everythin' I've learned about her in the last few months is accurate, then I know a lot more than my so-called father does at this point. Her mom was a crack whore who pimped herself out for drugs. One of the men she fucked was Gregor. When she showed back up a month or two later to tell him she was pregnant, he threw some money her way and told her to get rid of it. She didn't. She used the money to buy her drugs and continued on with the pregnancy.

"When the baby was born, she was alone in a dingy motel room. My father showed up and took the baby from her before killin' her and havin' her body left in a ditch on the outskirts of town. The baby was tossed into a dumpster to die and forgotten. I fully believe that baby is Oakliegh. All it will take is a simple DNA test and I've already got a sample of his in the car. Took some hair from his brush and put it in baggy for safekeepin'. It doesn't matter if she's his daughter or not. He's got plans for her. Gregor has already facilitated in sellin' her off to the highest bidder by workin' with some woman named Kember. He's bankin' on the money he'll get from the sale to further his plans against you," the guy says as he looks between everyone in the room.

My heart races and I'm having a hard time sucking air into my lungs. My men wrap themselves around me and it doesn't take long for Hendrix to get in my face and remind to take in slow, deep breaths. In a matter of minutes, he's once again helped me calm down and come back to the moment we're in.

"How do I know you're not lying about being my son, Callahan?" Mr. Montez speaks up, his voice hard as fuck.

"I've got the proof right here," he responds, handing over a piece of paper he pulls from his pocket.

Mr. Montez looks over the paper for several minutes before handing it over to Mr. Vanderwalt. The two men share a look and Mr. Vanderwalt pockets the paper in his suit jacket.

“I’m going to want my own test run so I know you’re not trying to pull some sort of fast one on us. Once we have the results from my test, we’ll figure out how to proceed. Again, you could be lying in order to get in with us and feed information back to Gregor. That’s not about to happen. And Oakliegh will make her own decision about DNA testing when she’s ready to do so. I can assure you now, she’s not being shipped off to anyone who’s bought her. The sale is as good as dead considering the Powers’ have already been dealt with,” Mr. Montez states, his tone leaving no room to argue.

“I completely understand. And to prove to you I’m not on Gregor’s side at all, I’ve downloaded everythin’ I could access from his computer. I have no clue what’s on this, but I’m sure you can sort it all out,” he says, looking at Kendrik as he hands over a flash drive.

Kendrik takes it and carefully sets it on the table in front of him as if he’s holding a bomb or something.

“We’ll go over everything you’ve given us today and be in touch about the DNA test you’ll be taking. Leave a number where you can be reached. I swear to everything holy, if I find out you’re lying about anything, I’ll let Kendrik loose on you. That will be followed up by Hendrix, Zander, and anyone else who wants to get a few solid hits in on our enemy. Do you fucking understand me, Callahan?” Mr. Vanderwalt questions him, his voice hard and lethal as he stares at the guy.

“I understand. Here’s my number. I’m stayin’ at a hotel here in Grand Ridge and will be completin’ my senior year here come the new semester. With everythin’ I’ve discovered I’m not stayin’ anywhere near Gregor and will have no contact with him. I look forward to hearin’ from you soon,” he says, turning to leave the house as Hendrix follows him out.

The rest of us sit here in stunned silence. I have no words for anything this guy, Callahan, said here today. Do I really want to know if this asshole is my biological father?

Can I live with knowing a monster's blood runs through my veins? I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to answer those questions. Not without a ton of thought and talking to my guys, Harper, and Erica. Hendrix makes his way back in the living room after a few minutes and kneels down in front of me.

"You don't have to do anythin' you don't want to, baby girl. If you'd rather not know, we'll go with that. I'm gonna back whatever decision you make and I know Kendrik and Zander will too," he assures me, leaning forward to press a soft kiss against my lips.

"Kendrik, I want you to go through everything on the flash drive. See if Callahan gave us anything useful. I'm going to have Judge and Kain put a solid group of men on Callahan until we know what's really going on here. We're not going to have another situation like what happened at the gambling house. I'm tired of losing men," Mr. Vanderwalt says, his voice still hard as he thinks of everything that has to be done now. "Julio, figure out what you want to do if this all turns out to be true. The ball is in your court and we'll support you however you need us to. Oakliegh, there is no pressure to take any sort of test to confirm if Gregor is your father. You don't need him in your life and I have a feeling he's going to be focusing on you since you won't be getting him the huge payday he's expecting. Full coverage on her moving forward."

The guys talk for a while longer before the guys leave, Kendrik goes to lock himself in his room to work, and I head up to bed. It's been a long as fuck day and I'm ready to sleep the rest of it away. I don't want to think about anything said here today, worry about deciding if I should take a DNA test, or anything else. My only focus is going to be school and remaining calm for our little one. It's the only thing I can control right now.

Chapter Thirty-Seven



Zander

Four months later

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN insane over the last four months. Callahan was telling us the truth. He's not Gregor's son and is, in fact, Kendrik's brother. They're literally two months apart with Kendrik being younger than Callahan. None of us could believe the shit when we got the results of the test back. Kendrik has been locked in his room combing through everything on the flash drive from Gregor's computer. There's a ton of shit on there. Including a ton of communication between him and Mrs. Powers. Hendrix hasn't been away from Oakliegh's side unless he's had to go to class. He's taken it so far as to sit at her jobs with her when she's working, bringing her to training sessions of having them at the house with Judge, and bringing her to the gambling house when he has to work there. She sits in on a few hands every now and then or sits in the basement with Lance as he monitors the rooms. My brother is obsessed with making sure we know where our girl is at all times so nothing happens to her or the baby.

Oakliegh has been doing so much better since everything happened. She's spent as much time as needed with Erica to get help working through everything and did decide to get the DNA testing done. Gregor is her fucking sperm donor. She's not happy about it, but wanted to know in case something happens with our child. Like some hereditary disease or something. It took her a while to process the information and be okay with it. On one hand she knows who her father is even though she wants nothing to do with him. On

the other one, she's worried we'll look at her differently because of who her father is. It's not ever going to happen because he's never been in her life. He's nothing more than a sperm donor who doesn't belong near my wife. Not for any reason.

When it comes to the house, she's not afraid to walk in the kitchen or cook and bake in there alone anymore. She spends more time in there now than ever before. I don't know if it's part of the whole nesting thing or just my wife. There are frozen meals filling two freezers, baked goods to last a month at least, and so many other things she's been doing in there. Including arranging the cupboards and pantry to how she wants them. It's been amazing to see her find her way again in the kitchen. To have a homecooked meal we know was made with all the love she feels for us.

Her pregnancy has been progressing very nicely over the last four months. Though if you ask Oakliegh, she'll grumble and tell you she's as big as a whale and never going to have our child. She's overdue by a little over a week right now. The doctor has been hesitant to induce Oakliegh since she's not showing any signs of the distress and the baby isn't either. Every week we go in for an ultrasound to see our little one. Our little one is being stubborn and not ready to enter the world yet. I guess he or she gets that from all of us because we can all be stubborn as fuck. However, she could go into labor at any time now.

Feeling our son or daughter moving around in Oakliegh's stomach has become one of our favorite things to do. It's the most amazing thing to watch Oakliegh's stomach move and shift with the movements of our little one. The first time I saw it happen, I was freaked the fuck out. I'm not even going to lie about it. Once I realized what was happening, I couldn't believe the miracle I was able to witness. Hendrix, Kendrik, and I are the lucky ones who get to go through every step of this with Oakliegh and then become daddy's to a son or daughter who will learn nothing but love and compassion from their mother while learning all sorts of bad things from the three of us. I can't wait for it!

Harper has also been spending more time with Oakliegh. She gets down on the floor with my wife when she's cleaning with a toothbrush to get everything sparkling clean. It's definitely worse now than it was a few months ago. I swear, everything in the nursery has been washed at least fifty times at this point and rearranged on a weekly basis. A few days ago I actually caught her trying to move the changing table. To say she was in trouble would be an understatement. Anyway, Harper has been there for Oakliegh like she's always wanted to be. They truly are ride or die friends and I know Harper would do anything for Oakliegh.

Addie has been coming around more as well. Not just for tutoring, but to hang out and spend time with Oakliegh too. They've formed a bond and it's almost as strong as the friendship Oakliegh has with Harper. Eventually it will get there. For now, I'm glad the two girls have someone to depend on and share secrets with. Though, I have a feeling Addie also wants to spend time with Callahan since he's been hanging out every now and then as well.

We still don't trust Callahan completely. It's going to take a long time before we can fully trust the guy when he's been pitted against us for so long. So far, he seems to be blending in with us nicely. He doesn't even get pissed or frustrated when we refuse to talk about certain things in front of him. Oakliegh doesn't trust him, but she's starting to let him in as well. If I find out he's out to hurt her for any reason, I'll gut him where he stands and not think twice about doing so.

Today is our big day though. We're graduating college and walking the stage for the final time in our lives. We've already attended the sports ceremony where Hendrix, Kendrick and I were awarded multiple awards for our time spent playing football. Oakliegh smiled so large that night and was absolutely radiant as she sat with us and cheered us on every single time we were called up on stage. I can't wait to see how she is for the ceremony today when we graduate. She's already been taking a million pictures of us. None of us even mind her taking them. Including the few she may have gotten of certain body parts no one else needs to see. Who knew she could want those pictures.

“Zander, where are you?” Oakliegh calls out from our bedroom.

We’ve all moved into her room for the last few weeks we’ll be here. Stepping out of the bathroom after putting the finishing touches on my hair, I find Oakliegh trying to get out of bed. It’s almost impossible for her to get out of bed or the couch without help lately.

“I’m right here, LeeLee. Did you have a good nap?” I ask her, knowing she’s going to want to get in the shower now. Hendrix will be getting in with her because he doesn’t trust she won’t get dizzy and fall or something.

“I did. Now, we’re running late. Can you help me up?” she asks, trying to throw the tangled blankets off her.

Stepping up to the bed, I remove the blankets from her and help her out of bed. She holds me as close as she can for a few seconds before letting me go. Hendrix must have heard her as he enters our room and helps her into the bathroom. Walking to the closet, I grab her dress, a bra, panties, and flip flops. Her feet have been swelling a little bit so it’s easier for her to wear them than anything else. With everything laid out on the bed for her, I head down to find out where everyone else is. Oakliegh will be sitting with Harper, Brody, Zeke, Kayson, and our dads today. They’ll be surrounded by guards.

We’ve been through the entire ceremony as far as the speeches and everything goes. All that’s left is for us to walk across the stage now. Excitement courses through me at the thought of all of this being over with. We no longer have to go to class, take exams, or anything else. Our dads can finally step back from the business and we can add other ones we truly want to do. I know Kendrik is chomping at the bit with a project he’s been working on. We can spend more time with Oakliegh and our son or daughter when they finally get here too. That’s what I’m most looking forward to.

As our row of students stand so we can make our way to the stage, I hear a small commotion in the audience. At first I don’t pay attention because I know the guards are with

Oakliegh and our dads. It lasts all of a second as Oakliegh's scream is heard throughout the stadium. Hendrix and I both turn in the direction of our girl to find her bent over with everyone here for us surrounding her. Without missing a beat, we rush from line and straight for Oakliegh. Kendrick joins us after tripping over half his row of students.

"What's wrong?" I rush out as I stop just in front of Oakliegh.

"She's in labor. Her water broke and her contractions are pretty close together I'm guessing she's been having them and hasn't said anything because this is an important day for the three of you," Harper answers, her voice a whisper so we can hear but not everyone around us.

"Fuck that. Baby girl, let's get you to the hospital," Hendrix grits out, moving to lift her in his arms before leaving the stadium.

Every time Oakliegh tries to argue with him, he kisses her and tells her how strong she is and how proud of her we are. Right now isn't about us. We'll get our diploma either way. The only important thing right now is getting Oakliegh to the hospital and helping her as much as we can to deliver our baby.

"I'm calling Dr. Gonzalez right now," Kendrick states as we make our way to the parking lot.

"Already got chief waiting out by the SUVs for an escort to the hospital," my dad informs us as he slides his phone back in his pocket.

Harper and her guys race to keep up with us. There's no way she's missing the birth of our child. Well, she won't be in the room with us, but I can guarantee she'll be the first in the room once Oakliegh is ready for visitors. We're the only ones who will be with our girl when she's in such a vulnerable state.

"Dr. Gonzalez is already at the hospital and will be waiting for us when we get there," Kendrick says just as Oakliegh lets out another scream as a contraction hits her.

“Guys, they’re getting even closer,” Harper states as we get to the SUV and I open the back door for my brother.

Hendrix slides in without letting Oakliegh go. Kendrik jumps in the passenger seat after shutting their door and I race to the driver’s side. Grabbing the keys from Kendrik, I start the engine and take off following the chief of police. He’s got sirens and lights going as we make the trip to the hospital getting us there even quicker than normal. It’s a good thing too since Oakliegh is saying something about feeling pressure and needing to push. I didn’t really think labor would be this fast. Especially for a first child. Our girl continues to prove she doesn’t do anything how everyone else does. She’s gotta be different at all times.

By the time we get to the hospital, there’s a team waiting outside for us. Oakliegh is unloaded from the SUV and we’re all out of it with her. Judge gets in the driver’s seat so he can move it for us as we run behind our girl. She’s trying to answer the questions being asked of her, but it’s not really working. Too much pain fills her voice and I’m ready to get these assholes away from her if they try to keep her talking.

Oakliegh is fucking amazing. There’s no other way to say anything about what she just went through. Our girl was in labor for another four hours with no pain medicine or anything to deliver our baby. She screamed through the pain, laughed when she wasn’t having a contraction, and didn’t once yell at us though I know she wanted to a million times. After four hours of intense pain and pushing, she finally delivered our daughter. Our baby girl is healthy, big, and has a head full of red hair. We’re going to be in such fucking trouble when she gets older.

Hendrix has left the room to get some food and flowers for our girls since Oakliegh is finally getting some sleep. She’s exhausted and didn’t want to sleep because of our daughter. After assuring her no one would get close, we finally got her to close her eyes for a little while. Kendrik is also using the time to update our dads and Harper. They’ll be able to come in once Oakliegh is up and has fed our daughter. I’m sitting in a

recliner with my shirt off as I hold our little angel. The nurse told us about skin-to-skin contact and that's what we're going to do. I've got her covered with a blanket so she doesn't get cold in the hospital room.

“Angel, I'm only one of your daddies. I know you're going to be loved, protected, and taught all sorts of things. You'll look just like your mama and have a heart of pure gold. Just like she does. Huxley Rose, we already love you so damn much and you just got here,” I say, pressing a soft kiss against the top of her head. “You won't be allowed to date until you're well into your fifties though, Huxley. I can guarantee Daddy Hendrix will make sure to chase off any boy looking in your direction. He's a little overprotective, but you already mean the world to him and he doesn't ever want to see you hurt. Daddy Kendrick will teach you how to do all sorts of things on the computer too. And about music. He's so talented and can play any instrument. If you share in his love of music, I know you'll find all the best bands before anyone else your age. Me, I'm going to teach you the meaning of hard work and putting in the effort to get what you want in life. The same as your Papa Antonio taught me and Hendrix. We'll love and support you no matter what you want in life.

“It's your mama who you really want to take after though. She's so strong. Much stronger than anyone gives her credit for. She stole my heart when I was eight years old and I never took it back. I've loved her for so long and she didn't even know it. Not only is your mama strong, but she's one hell of a cook, can bake anything you'd ever want to eat, can sing better than anyone I've ever heard before, and is a true angel. If you have to take after one of us, I hope it's her because she's so much better than we'll ever be.”

“I love you, Zander,” Oakliegh says, her voice a whisper as tears slide down her face. “You took my heart at the same time and I never got it back either.”

Standing from the recliner, I make my way over to Oakliegh's bed. She's sore and slowly inches her way over to the side so I have more room to sit with her. Huxley doesn't stir as I sit down by my wife and we each stare down at the

most beautiful little girl I've ever seen. Within minutes, Hendrix is back in the room with a cart filled to capacity with flowers. Oakliegh laughs at him when he tries to figure out where to put them all. Including the balloons floating high above his head proudly proclaiming it's a girl. Kendrik follows him in the room and takes a few pictures of us before asking if our family can come in. Oakliegh nods her head without taking her eyes off our daughter.

We're soon surrounded by our dads, Harper, and her men. Not a single one of them ask to hold the baby as they stare down at her. My dad smiles and places a hand on my shoulder as he looks over his granddaughter.

"You guys make beautiful babies," he says, his voice full of emotion. "Oakliegh, I'm so proud of you. She's beautiful and I can't wait to watch her grow up into an amazing woman just like her mom."

"What name did you guys finally settle on?" Harper asks from Oakliegh's side of the bed.

"Huxley Rose Vanderwalt," Kendrik announces, proud as I've ever seen him as he steps up to take our daughter in his arms.

He's already stripped his shirt off and holds Huxley against his chest. When she stirs, he hums a song he's been working on for her. Huxley immediately settles back down and curls into his body. Harper takes some pictures on Oakliegh's phone before handing it back to her. We all talk and spend time together until Huxley wakes up and lets us know she's hungry. Our girl has a set of lungs on her when she's upset. Oakliegh nurses her like she's been doing it for years. There's no frustration or her being upset because our girl doesn't want to breastfeed. It's a sight to see as we all watch our daughter eat before Hendrix takes her to change her little diaper.

We spend the rest of the day as a family of five. If Oakliegh thought we weren't going to be hands-on dads to our children, she's learning really quick that's not the case. The three of us take turns changing her diaper, holding her against our chest, and sitting next to them as Oakliegh feeds her.

Today is the best day of my life with only two others coming close; the day I met Oakliegh for the first time and the day she became my wife. We have the rest of our lives and I plan on making as many memories with her as I can. I'll give her anything she wants and I know Hendrix and Kendrik will too.

King's Court Playlist

Wasting All These Tears – Austin Snell

Saviour II – Black Veil Brides

Without You – My Darkest Days

Monster Made of Memories – Citizen Soldier

Popular Monster – Falling In Reverse

I'm Not Okay – Citizen Soldier

Snuff – Slipknot

Beauty in the Struggle – Bryan Martin

I'll Find You - Lecrae feat. Tori Kelly

Would Anyone Care - Citizen Soldier

If I Surrender - Citizen Soldier

Never Ending Nightmare - Citizen Soldier, Kellin

Quinn

Wreckage - Nate Smith

In the End - Black Veil Brides

Just Pretend - Bad Omens

Devil - Black Veil Brides

Eternally Yours - Motionless in White

Days are Numbered - Black Veil Brides

Haunted - Britton

Lovely - Billie Eilish, Khalid

Polaroid - Phix

Your Daughter - Chase McDaniel

Another Life - Motionless in White

Ride - SoMo

Alone Again - Asking Alexandria

Without You - Breaking Benjamin

About the Author

Growing up, I was constantly reading anything I could get my hands on. Even if that meant I was reading my grandma's books that weren't so age appropriate. I started out reading Judy Blume, then graduated to romance, mainly historical romance, and last year I found an amazing group of Indie authors that wrote MC books. Instantly I fell in love with these books.

For a long time, I've wanted to write. I just never had the courage to go through with actually doing it. During a book release party, I mentioned that I wanted to write and I received encouragement from an amazing author. So, I took a leap and wrote my first book. Even though this amazing journey is just starting for me, I wouldn't have even started if it weren't for a wonderful group of authors and others that I've met along the way.

I am a mother of three children. Only one girl in the bunch! My family and friends mean the world to me and I'd be lost without them. Including new friends that I've met along the way. I've lived in New York my whole life, either in Upstate or the Southern Tier. I love it during the summer, spring, and fall. But, not so much during the winter. I hate driving in snow with a passion!

When I'm not hanging out with my family/friends, reading, or writing, you can find me listening to music. I love almost all music! Or, I'm watching a NASCAR race.

I look forward to meeting new friends, even if I'm extremely shy!

Here are some links to connect with me:

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/ErinOsborneAuthor/>

Twitter:

https://twitter.com/author_osborne

My website:

<http://erinosborne1013.wix.com/authorerinosborne>

Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/user/emgriff07>

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Jenni. Thank you for editing this book for me. You were among the first to know anything about this one and listened when I needed to read some of it out loud. Thank you for everything!

To Kari, thank you so much! Your input has been a great help for making this book better than I dreamed possible. I can't wait for your comments about the books in the future.

Melissa. Thank you for everything! I can't wait to see where these characters take us all next.

Darlene. Thank you for everything. You've been here since the very beginning, and I don't know what I'd do without you. Our talks mean more than you'll ever know.

Liberty. Thank you for the amazing covers for this trilogy. They are amazing and I absolutely love them! You rock!

To the readers. Thank you so much for allowing me to create worlds for you to get lost in. Without you, none of us would be able to do what we love to do.

If I forgot anyone, I'm truly sorry. This journey has been amazing, and I can't see what the future holds.

Other Books

Wicked Angels:

Knight's Unforeseen Change

Knight's Rebellion MC:

Lash's Claim

Talon's Haven

Jaelyn's Impulse

Tattered and Torn MC:

Letters from Home/War

Letters Between Us

Letters of Healing

Letters from Mom

Letters to Heaven

Letters with Love

Letters from Nanny

Letters of Wisdom

Her Keeper

Her One

Her Absolution

Fallen Brethren MC:

Touch Me

Wild Kings MC: Cedar Bay.

Moving On

Tortured

Broken

Pained

Grand Ridge University: (Why Choose)

King's Court

Completed Series and Anthologies

Wild Kings MC: Clifton Falls

Skylar's Saviors

Bailey's Saving Grace

Tank's Salvation

Melody's Temptation

Blade's Awakening

Irish's Destiny

Rage's Redemption

Pops

Wild Kings MC: Dander Falls

Darcy's Downfall

Riley's Rescue

Harley's Surrender

Shadow's Dilemma

Tech's Change

Phantom Bastards MC

Jennifer's Choice

Slim's Second Chance

Shy's Last Stand

Sam's Playboy

Killer's Obsession

Fox's Fury

Stryker's Fight

Satan's Anarchy MC

Satan's Revenge

Hadleigh's Desire
Cassidy's Resurgence

Renegade's Choice

Grave's Claim

Phoebe's Independence

Smokey's Turmoil

Old Ladies Club

Book 1: Wild Kings MC

Book 2: Soul Shifterz MC

Book 3: Rebel Guardians MC

Book 4: Rage Ryders MC

Legacies

Desire

Sky

Ember

Goldie

Willow

Blazing Outlaws MC:

Raine's Fall

Capone's Misery

Our Secrets

Torch's Treat

Grinder's Impasse

Layne's Capture

Rock's Secret

Romeo's Chains

Wrath's Deceit

Mackay Brothers Trilogy:

Flynn

Lachlan

Hunter

Anthologies:

Bad to the Bone

Heart of an Alpha

Twisted Steel

Guns Blazing

Twisted Steel 2.0

Dark Desires – Reverse Harem story

Once Upon A Christmas – Oakliegh's First Christmas