



Rebel

TEMPTS  
— THE —

BEAST

MINK

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MINK



Rebel Tempts the Beast

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# CONTENTS

## Rebel Tempts the Beast

### Chapter 1

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 2

*Mei*

### Chapter 3

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 4

*Mei*

### Chapter 5

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 6

*Mei*

### Chapter 7

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 8

*Mei*

### Chapter 9

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 10

*Mei*

### Chapter 11

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 12

*Mei*

### Chapter 13

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 14

*Mei*

### Chapter 15

*Kazuo*

### Chapter 16

*Mei*

[Chapter 17](#)

*Kazuo*

[Chapter 18](#)

*Mei*

[Chapter 19](#)

*Kazuo*

[Chapter 20](#)

*Mei*

[Chapter 21](#)

*Kazuo*

[Chapter 22](#)

*Mei*

[Chapter 23](#)

*Kazuo*

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by MINK](#)

[About the Author](#)

# **REBEL TEMPTS THE BEAST**

## MINK

As one of the biggest players in the Yakuza, I do my duty and rule my syndicate with a hard but fair fist. I follow my own rules and adhere to my own sense of duty.

Until Mei.

When my mentor sends his daughter to live with me and instructs me to put her on the correct path, I try to use a strong hand to guide her. But that hand tends to gravitate to her rear end, especially when Mei runs her smart mouth. She's young, fiery, and looking for love.

Though I follow strict rules and enforce them in my life, Mei bucks them with ease. She's a little rebel, one I never want to break. In fact, I fall for her just the way she is. She's the one I never saw coming, and the one I can't live without.

When an enemy sees an opening and tries to use her against me, I'll burn his lineage to the ground and salt the earth behind me. For Mei. For our future. For our family.



“*I*’m sorry. I didn’t know the Itos had any idea we were using that dock for shipments.” My soldier shakes, blood dripping from his busted nose.

“I don’t think that’s true.” Toru shakes out his fingers, then slides on his brass knuckles. “I think you knew exactly what you were doing.” He swings, bone crunches, and my soldier screams.

“No one can hear you.” I sigh and lean against the doorframe to wait for the screaming to subside.

“Don’t lie to us, and I won’t have to hurt you.” Toru says it in a matter-of-fact tone as he wipes the blood from his knuckles. “I can make this quick, but that’s up to you.”

I massage my temples. The quiet war the Itos have been waging against me is finally starting to rub me raw. They want to control all Yakuza in this city, but that’s not how this works. The founding families share the reins, just like they do in Japan. But Isamu Ito has already destroyed the entire Yoshiko line, fracturing the families, and now he’s set his sights on my empire.

“What did he offer you? Money? Position?” Toru runs his hand along a table full of tools, all of them polished and clean ... for now. He’s meticulous with his implements just like he is with all things.

“Please,” the soldier blubbers. “I don’t know. I don’t know anything. I promise I-I-I would never—”

“Enough!” I snap and advance on him. “Your actions got seven people killed. Seven! Two women who won’t be returning home to their kids. Five men who had families waiting for them, who depended on them! They worked for me. I took care of them. They were my responsibility. And you killed them with your betrayal!” My roar seems to echo off the walls and magnify just like my rage.

He wails.

I snatch a blade from Toru’s tray and slam it down into the soldier’s thigh. “Tell me the fucking truth!”

He screams again, and I slap my palm over his bloody mouth, containing his pain and making him swallow it back down.

“Damn, Kaz.” Toru nods appreciatively. “That’s what I’m talking about.”

“I’m going to let you speak.” I glare into the soldier’s terrified eyes. “And the words that come from your mouth better be the fucking truth. Understand?”

He blinks, shock and agony in his eyes.

I release my hold on his mouth.

He gasps in a breath, then another.

“The next words from your lips better be the truth.” Toru bends over, his hands on his knees. “Because I’ve never seen Kaz this mad. I don’t know what he’s going to do to you if you lie again, but I’m dying to find out.”

The soldier whimpers. Then his entire demeanor changes, his body going limp as he snuffles pathetically.

Toru gives me a look, surprise and pride in his eyes.

“Yes.” The soldier lets his head fall forward, his cowardice apparent when he can’t meet my gaze. “Yes, Ito said if I gave him information, he’d put me in charge of your holdings once he killed you. He said I’d have everything. All I had to do was ...” He sighs. “Tell him about your business. The shipments. The money. Your movements.”

I back away and stare at the traitor, my anger boiling inside me.

Toru chooses a wide blade from his table. “How much did you tell him before we caught you?”

“I—I’m sorry.” He starts blubbering again, but when Toru waves the blade in front of his face, he spills. “I told him about the warehouse and the drugs. I ... I’m the reason they’re dead. I told him. I thought ... I thought he was going to kill you tonight. I thought ...” His words fade, and I can almost pity him when he finally realizes what a dupe he’s been. But I don’t have room for pity. Not when I have seven bodies to bury.

Toru looks at me, his eyebrows raised, his blade at the ready. I give him the nod, then turn and climb the stairs. “Send his head to Isamu. Let him see what his treachery got him.” I push through the door to the main house and stride toward my office.

My men don’t bat an eyelash despite the gore on my hands, the blood splattered on my shirt.

“Sir.” One of my men hurries along at my heels.

“What?” I bark.

“The package you were expecting from Mr. Nakamura is here.”

“Package?” I don’t recall expecting a package from my old mentor. “What the hell are you talking about?” I whirl on him.

He blanches. “At the front door,” he says meekly.

I bypass my office and storm down the hallway to the foyer.

When I get there, I stop. Dead.

A girl stands there, her wide eyes on me—more specifically, on the blood all over me. Her perfect pouty mouth drops open, and she shrinks back against the door. She’s beautiful yet out of place, like a flower blooming in the middle of a battlefield.

I stare.

She shivers.

I finally find my voice. “Who the hell are you?”

“Mei?” She says her name, but it’s more of a question. Then she tilts her chin up and tries again. “Mei Nakamura.”

“You’re ... you’re Hideo’s daughter?” What in the fuck is she doing here of all places?

“I was.” She crosses her arms over her chest. “But I disown him. He’s mean.” A faint meow comes from the luggage by her feet. She gasps and bends down to unzip a small carrying case. “I’m sorry, Kuzi. I just got distracted.”

She pulls a fluffy kitten from her bag, then stands there, kitten in hand. “So where’s my room?”

Fuck. Me.

I do my best to keep my face neutral. Kazuo caught me completely off guard and not because he's covered in blood. Sure, I'm not used to seeing people covered in it. My father tried to shield me from that part of his life to a degree.

He didn't exactly hide it, but he also didn't put it right in my face either. I knew what went on in the giant outbuilding in the back of our property, but Father never had blood on him when he came back inside. But if I had to guess, I highly doubt my father ever got his hands dirty.

I was more caught off guard by how damn hot Kazuo was when he came into view. I thought he was going to be my father's age, with graying hair and maybe a belly on him that he tried to hide with his expensive suit jackets. That's how a lot of the high-ranking men of other families my father deals with look. That was my experience. The soldiers were usually younger and in good shape. That's what Kazuo reminds me of. But yet he exudes power and confidence you don't usually see in someone his age.

The man is a giant, even by American standards. I bet I barely come to the center of his chest. A chest that is covered in thick muscles. I can't take my eyes off him. They continue to roam over every inch of him, stopping when I get to his large hands. Why can't I stop staring at his blood-covered hands? They're massive. They are also without a wedding ring.

I bet he could snap someone's neck with one of them. I guarantee it would be as easy as snapping a twig for him. My mind begins to drift like it usually does, wondering why my father never offered Kazuo to me as an option for marriage when he did it with a few of the other men in power. Maybe he did, and Kazuo said no. That thought sours my mood a bit.

"So?" I lick my lips when he doesn't respond. "I have a room, right? Maybe in the pool house?" That would be so cool. To get my own place. Somewhere that I don't have to worry that my every move is being watched.

"Shouldn't you be away at school or something?" Kazuo asks. Kuzi wiggles in my hands. I think he's scared of the big guy.

"I didn't want to go to university, and I got kicked out of my last boarding school." I roll my eyes. "I finished my classes online."

"Kicked out?"

"Yep." I smile proudly at myself. It takes a lot to be given the boot when you're the daughter of Hideo Nakamura.

The school was horrible. It was impossible to make friends. Everyone ignored me. I was finally able to get the reason why no one liked me out of my roommate one night when she found me in tears. She took pity on me. She explained that it wasn't that they didn't like me. Their parents told them to stay away from me. I couldn't blame them. Not with my last name. My father can be a scary man.

"Why?" he asks, taking a step forward, looking intrigued.

"Show me to the pool house, and I'll tell you." I swear his eyes widen in surprise, but he quickly hides it.

"You think you can barter with me, little girl?" *Whoa*. A thrill runs through my body at his stern tone.

I shrug my shoulders and try to play it cool.

"You're not staying in the pool house."

"Why not?" I huff. His eyes drop to my mouth. I thought they had before when I licked them. I think back to my stepmother and how she acts when she wants something from my father.

“What if I’m a good little girl?” I jut my bottom lip out. “Then can I stay in the pool house?”

“No.” He growls the one word.

“You sound like a shifter.” I laugh, but Kuzi shivers in my hand. “And don’t scare my baby, you big brute.” I tuck him under my chin. “You’re okay. He’s a giant teddy bear. He’s not going to hurt you,” I try to reassure him.

“A giant teddy bear?” Kazuo grumbles under his breath. He massages his temples like I’m giving him a headache. My stepmother always did that when she got frustrated with me.

“I’m telling him that so he’s not scared,” I whisper.

“Follow me,” he orders before he makes his way up one of the two curving staircases. It’s actually really neat. They both go up and meet in the middle at the top. I stand there. He doesn’t realize I’m not following him until he is halfway up.

“I’m not a dog,” I say tartly. I’m not sure what’s gotten into me. It might have been the whole little girl comment. Now I’m testing the boundaries.

“No, you certainly are not, but if you want a bedroom, you’d better move your little ass up the stairs.”

Thinking I’ve pushed enough, I go up the stairs but take the set on the other side. He grumbles something under his breath and meets me at the top.

“Get her things,” he tells the two men standing at attention at the front door.

“Thank you, Ritsu and Ken. You’re both gems,” I tell the two men.

Kazuo’s eyes cut to me. I think he’s about to tell me not to speak to his men. I wasn’t allowed to speak to my father’s men beyond asking a few questions. They all did their best to ignore me. With Ritsu and Ken, they’ve been polite to me while I waited for Kazuo and even told me their names when I’d asked.

I have to admit I was a bit giddy about having a conversation with them. I never get to talk with boys or men. The boarding

school I attended was all girls. Whenever I get the chance to speak to someone of the opposite sex, it's exciting to me. All my life I've wanted a boyfriend. My stepmother insists that I'm boy crazy. I can't help it. My best friends come from books, and I adore romance novels. So why not add a boyfriend into the mix, too?

As fun as it was to talk to the two men and the driver I met when my plane landed in the States, none of them checked off any of the boxes I required in a boyfriend. I have a very specific list. One I'll be adding to when I get to my new room. Giant hands are definitely going on it.

"This way." He motions for me to walk ahead of him. "To your left." The house is massive. I'm guessing one way leads to Kazuo's quarters and the other side is the wing for guests to stay in.

When we pulled up to the tall iron gates of the estate, there were five men manning it. From what I could tell, there's a giant stone wall that surrounds the whole property. This place is a fortress. I think it might be bigger than my father's.

"Is your bedroom on the other side of the house?" I peek down the hallway to the right. It looks the same as the left. The walls are lined with art and beautiful details.

"You stay on this side," he says, not answering my question. I walk down the long hallway, passing a few doors. At the end are two large double doors. I'm guessing they are to enter the master suite. "On your right. You'll take that room." It's the last door before the double doors.

"What about that room?" I point to the double doors. "I bet there is a giant soaking tub in that room."

"There is, but that's my room."

"Oh."

"I'm going to shower. You get settled in." He opens my door but steps back. "In you go, Mei."

The way my name rolls off his tongue has me nodding my head in agreement and stepping into my bedroom. The second I do, he grabs the handle and shuts the door behind me.



“Hey!” I grab it and try to open it, but the knob doesn’t budge. “What the hell? You bastard!” I shout through the door. When Kuzi wiggles in my arms, I stop shouting.

“I’ll return for you later,” he says through the door. I want to shout more, but I don’t because of Kuzi. I don’t want to frighten him any more than he already is.

I glare at the locked door. If Kazuo thinks he can keep me locked in my bedroom he’s going to learn, the same way my father did, how well that works for anyone.

The blood runs down the drain, coloring the white tile pink until it flows clear. I lean my forearm against the wall and rest my head against it.

To say I have questions is putting it lightly. Why the hell would Hideo send his daughter to me? And without warning? It doesn't make sense.

More than that, why is she so ... I can't put my finger on exactly what she is, but my cock certainly has an opinion. It's so hard I can feel my heartbeat pulsing through it.

I close my eyes and reach down, stroking myself slowly while I remember her face, the way she stared at me with her big, beautiful eyes. Her pink skirt. The white sweater hiding small, perfect breasts. She's like a flowery daydream, a soft cloud that I want to bury myself in.

It doesn't take long for me to come on a groan. I thought of her the entire time. Mei. Sweet and sassy Mei. What the hell is she doing here?

I need to figure this out. Soon. There's too much death and war going on here with the Itos. Hideo must not realize he sent his daughter straight into the tiger's mouth. I should send her back.

Lathering up, I think about her leaving. It shouldn't bother me. After all, she just got here. If anything, she's a burden. I don't need anything distracting me from serving up vengeance on the Ito family. But just the idea of her walking out the front

door and getting on a plane back to Japan rubs me wrong. Not because I want her. I mean, maybe I just came hard while moaning her name, but that's just a weird side effect of seeing her right after I committed violence. Has to be. I'm under a lot of stress.

But if I send her back, she'll be safe from the Itos and out of my way. I flip off the water and step from the shower. The thought of her leaving is still making me uneasy.

Maybe ... Maybe she's here because Nakamura knows she'd be safer with me. What if there's trouble in Tokyo? If that's the case, then she's probably better off here with me. Even with the Itos breathing down my neck, I have zero doubts that I can protect Mei. She won't have to worry.

I sigh at myself as I think about all the mental gymnastics I just performed. At least I stuck the landing—Mei stays.

Dressing quickly, I stop at the mirror and run a hand through my dark hair, then try to smooth it down a little. Not that I care how I look. I mean, I'm home. It doesn't matter. I'm surrounded by soldiers. But now ... Now Mei's here, too. I can't have her telling her father I'm slacking. So I keep smoothing my hair until it's presentable.

I have more business to transact today, including providing for the families who lost loved ones thanks to the traitor in our midst. Once I've spoken with them, I need to send reinforcements to my other operations and reassure my workers personally. After that, meetings with the other families. I have to bring them to my side. Ito has gone too far, and now it's time to put him down.

So I need to get Mei in line. I don't have time for any of her issues. She clearly has some, given her attitude and the fact she was kicked out of school. What did she do? Never mind. It doesn't matter. What matters is she's under my control now, and I intend to keep her safe for Hideo.

With new resolve, I open my bedroom door and stride to hers. I unlock it, then rap lightly on the wood. "Mei?"

No answer.

“Mei?” I call again.

Silence.

Shit. What if I was too harsh with her? What if she’s crying? That thought sends a chill swirling through me. What if I made her cry? No. I don’t like the idea of that at all.

“Look, maybe we got off on the wrong foot. The blood isn’t a common thing. It was just bad timing. We can talk about your stay here and make arrangements to get all the things your kitten needs.” I pause, and when there’s still no answer, I take a deep breath. “Look, I’m sorry I was gruff, okay? Can I please come in?” Thank God Toru isn’t up here listening to me grovel.

Right as I say that, he turns the corner at the top of the stairs, a smirk on his face.

Double shit. “What?” I bark.

“I heard you talking. What are you doing?”

I point at the door. “I’m talking to Mei.”

His smirk only grows. “Yeah?”

“Do you want something, Toru?” I let my irritation show. “I’m busy right now.”

“Busy talking to Mei?” He leans against the wall next to a priceless vase.

“Yes. What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Nothing’s wrong with me. You’re the one talking to a door.”

“Mei,” I correct. “I’m talking to *Mei*.”

“That’s interesting since Mei is out in the garden with Ritsu, Ken, and her cat.”

“The fuck?” I’m moving before I can even think it through. I pound down the stairs and hurry to the back garden. Past the pool, I find Mei sitting under a rose arbor with her kitten in her lap and my men hovering on either side.

My hands fist, and I can swear I feel my fucking blood pressure spike. “Ritsu, Ken!”

They snap to attention.

“Get to your posts!” I bark.

They exchange a glance, then beat feet toward the front lawn.

Mei looks up at me, her mouth drawing down into a frown.

“We were just talking.”

I go to her, staring down at her innocent face. God, does she have any clue how irresistible she looks? Of course those assholes want to be near her.

“If you need to talk, you talk to me. Got it?”

“But you were in the shower.” Her cheeks turn a bright scarlet.

“And you were really busy in the shower.”

Fuuuuuck. “You saw?”

She shrugs. “I heard.”

Why does that turn me on? I don’t know, but it does. I’m hard just thinking about her watching or listening to me stroke myself while thinking about her. “How did you get out of your room?”

She waggles her eyebrows. “I have a very particular set of skills.”

I look down at her and imagine fisting her hair in my hand and giving her smart mouth exactly what it needs. Leaning down, I meet her gaze, eye to eye.

Her breath catches, and I glance at her lips as I say, “So do I.”

I don't know how he thinks his veiled threat could scare me with his mouth so close to mine. It's right there. If I leaned in just a little bit, we'd be kissing. I'd finally have my first. It's way too tempting for me to pass up. Who knows if I'll get another opportunity with him? So I close my eyes and press my mouth against his.

His whole body stills. I'm sure he's surprised that I did it, but what was I supposed to do? A girl needs to be kissed sometimes, and he's the one who put his mouth so close to mine. A mouth with full lips. Everything about this man really is big.

"You're supposed to kiss me back," I whisper after we stand there for a long moment with only our mouths pressed together.

"Mei—" He doesn't get a chance to finish whatever he's about to say 'cause I slip my tongue past his parted lips.

He groans, and his fingers slip into my hair, gripping a fistful. With a tug, he tilts my head back, taking over the kiss. His tongue thrusts into my mouth, tangling with mine. Holy crap. I quickly see I'm in way over my head. Not wanting to seem like a prude or like I have no idea what I'm doing, I sink my teeth into his bottom lip to take a small nibble of him.

A growl leaves him as he jerks back. "You bit me." He licks his bottom lip. I'm not sure if he's saying it like it's a bad or good thing.

“Well, no one feeds me around here.” I slide my sunglasses on and go back to petting Kuzi, trying to pretend my whole world didn’t just tilt on its side. No wonder people are always kissing. It’s amazing.

Kazuo stares down at me. His face is unreadable. Why did I bite him? It wasn’t a hard bite. A small nibble is all. I wanted to be all sexy and for him to think I was in his league. But my plan looks like it may have backfired on me. Now he’s not going to kiss me anymore.

“Grab your kitten, and I’ll feed you.”

“You cook?”

“Told you I have a very particular set of skills.”

I snort a laugh. “It’s cooking? I thought it was knives for sure, but I didn’t think for a second it was cooking knives.”

“One of many.”

I wiggle my nose, thinking it over. He’s being really nice now. Was it my kiss that changed his tune toward me? When my stepmom would get all flirty with my father, he’d do all kinds of things for her. I can’t believe I’m good at this seduction thing. He was touching himself while thinking about me. “Thinking about me cooking makes you blush, Mei?”

“No, it’s from the sun.” I stand with Kuzi in my hands. Women who seduce men don’t blush, so obviously I’m not blushing.

“I’ll have sunscreen ordered.” He brushes his knuckles down my cheek. His touch is gentle. “Such soft skin needs protection.”

I stare up at him, taken aback. I have to fight myself not to lean into his touch. Gone is the blood-covered warrior from earlier. He’s been replaced by this gentle giant now standing in front of me. “What else do you think you’ll need? Supplies for the kitten?” He drops his hand and starts to walk. I quickly follow after him.

“Yes, I’ll need everything. I only just got him.” I kiss the top of Kuzi’s head. “Father would never let me have one, so when

I left I got him.”

“About that.” Kazuo slows his steps when he sees I have to practically run to keep up with him. “Did you run away or did Hideo really send you here?”

“I suppose it depends who you ask.”

“I’m asking you.”

“You haven’t talked to him yet?” I pry, trying to see how much Kazuo knows.

“Not yet.”

“Too busy in the shower?” I tease.

“Something like that.” He opens the back door, holding it for me. “Sun’s getting to your skin again, Mei.”

I cut him a glare as I slip past him.

His lips twitch, a smile pulling at them. If I thought Kazuo was handsome before, when he smiles, he’s something else altogether. I’m not sure I’m equipped to deal with this new side of him.

“Everyone out,” he says when we enter the kitchen. They all scatter, leaving Kazuo and me alone once again. I skip over to the giant kitchen island and set Kuzi on top of it.

“Can I have one of these?” I eye one of the cupcakes that’s under a glass lid. “Sachi never kept sweets in the house. She said carbs are the devil. How could she say that when she married my father?” I deadpan.

Kazuo’s lips twitch again.

An excited flutter fills my belly.

My father isn’t the devil per se. I mean I’m pretty sure some would argue that he totally is. I just question if he really loves me. Or does he think I’m a burden he got stuck with? I’m his only heir. My real mother died in childbirth. Father didn’t remarry until I was around eight. I never seen real love between the two of them. They are friendly but it’s just odd to me. Not something I would want. She tried to mother me a few times but was terrible at it.



“Sachi? That’s your stepmother, right? I think I’ve met her.”

“If you met her, you’d remember her.”

He lifts the lid for me. Kuzi goes trotting across the counter, inspecting his new space. I expect Kazuo to tell me to put him on the floor, but he doesn’t. I snag the cupcake and peel off the paper.

He shrugs. “I remember thinking she could use a cupcake.”

“Everyone could use a cupcake,” I agree, sinking my teeth into the sugary heaven. I moan. It tastes delicious, but not as good as Kazuo. He stares at me. I lick my lips thinking maybe I have icing on my face or something. “Bite?” I offer.

“I’ll get my bite later,” he says, the intensity in his eyes making my whole body flood with heat. I really hope he’s talking about me. I also hope he gets the bite before he talks to my father. Because after that, he might want nothing to do with me.

*I* drop the udon noodles into the boiling chicken broth and pull out a pan to brown the kiri mochi.

“That already smells good. It reminds me of home.” She pets her kitten and watches me cook.

I can feel her gaze on my back, and for a brief second, I flex. When she gasps, I can’t help my smirk. Part of me says this has to stop. She’s Hideo’s daughter. She’s too young. Too innocent. There are so many reasons I shouldn’t be thinking of her as anything other than a ward for me to look after. But then she kissed me.

Fuck. That kiss. It was so unexpected. Bold. I thought what happened in the shower was just a simple pressure release. But what happened under the arbor? That was something much more.

I add some butter to my pan and drop in the kiri mochi squares to brown them up. “What did you study in school?”

“Umm, well, my school was sort of old-fashioned so I did the usual stuff plus calligraphy and all that.”

“College?” I pour her udon into a bowl and top it with the crispy mochi. Grabbing a small cutting board, I quickly chop her some green onion and thin-sliced radish.

“Wow, you are really good with a knife.” She watches me finish. “Like fluid.”

I slide the bowl in front of her with a set of chopsticks and a spoon. “Eat.”

“Thanks.” She sits, and her kitten trots over and sniffs. “Sorry, Kuzi. You can’t have this. It’s all for me.” She licks her lips.

I try not to stare. “So university?” I ask again.

She blows on the hot soup. “Well, Dad wanted me to do accounting stuff. But numbers and I aren’t on the best of terms. So I tried to do literature instead. He didn’t like that. And to be honest, I didn’t like college.”

“Why not?”

She tries a bite of noodles and mochi. The sound she makes goes right to my cock.

“This is amazing!” She slurps up the noodles, and I have to stifle a laugh at how cute she is when she’s hungry.

“I’m glad you enjoy my cooking. Now, continue. What kind of literature did you want to study?”

Her cheeks turn that cherry blossom pink again as I hand her a napkin. “Well, I like all different sorts of books.”

“Mmm-hmm?” I lean back and cross my arms.

She eats some more, then squirms in her seat.

I keep staring.

She cracks. “Romances, okay? I love a good romance! I feel like it’s a majorly underrated genre, mostly because it deals with female wish fulfillment and focuses on the female gaze. It’s subversive like that, challenging patriarchy.”

No wonder she and Hideo are at odds. He’s a strict traditionalist. Having a daughter who reads romance and embraces anything ‘subversive’ wouldn’t make him happy in the least.

“So you’re a rebel?” I ask.

“No.” She finishes her udon bowl and wipes her mouth with her napkin. “I just don’t like being told what to do all the time. What to wear. How to look. All that. And being surrounded by people who knew who my father was didn’t help either. Everyone was afraid of me. I had no friends. No nothing. And boys wouldn’t even look at me because they knew—”

“Good.” I put my palms on the island.

“What?” She arches a brow.

“I said it’s good boys didn’t look at you, Mei.” I hate the thought of some little twerps imagining they had a chance with this sassy slip of a woman.

“Why?”

“Because you don’t need a boy. You need a man.”

“Oh.” She licks her lips again.

I want her. There’s no point denying it now. Not after we kissed. But damn, this has struck me so hard and fast that I’m beginning to question my sanity. I’ve never felt like this, never wanted something so badly as I want her. No, not want—*need*.

Her lips part as I walk around the island to her, fully intending on tasting her mouth again.

“Boss?” Toru strides in. He stops when he sees the look on my face, and then he glances quickly between Mei and me.

Bad fucking timing.

“What?” I try not to snap the word, but it still rings with irritation.

“The Itos have called a meeting. All Yakuza families.”

“When?” I grit my teeth.

“Friday night. It looks like they’ve been planning this for a while. They’re throwing a huge ball at their place.”

“Nothing Isamu Ito does is an accident.” I crack my knuckles. “He planned the attack on us, then used it as a pretense to get the families together. He’s going to try to make a play for more power.”

Toru nods. “Sounds about right. He’ll use our losses as a pretense, say that he can provide protection for all the families. Even though he’s the one behind the attack.”

“Exactly.” I already knew Isamu was a crafty bastard, but this newest ploy is a piece of detail work I didn’t see coming. But it doesn’t matter. The Itos will soon be extinct.

“How should we play this?” Toru sends a longing glance toward the empty udon pot. “Is there more?”

“Sorry.” Mei shrugs and shows him her empty bowl. “It was so good I couldn’t help myself.”

“Don’t fall for Kaz’s cooking. At least not until you’ve tried his daifuku.”

“Sweet mochi balls?” Mei’s eyes widen. “I love those!”

“I’ll make them for you *after* you tell me more about why you’re here.” I arch a brow at her.

She wrinkles her nose and scoops up Kuzi. “I’ll be in my room.” She marches off, her hips swaying. Damn if she doesn’t turn me on just by walking away.

Toru turns and stares at me. Hard.

“What?” I shrug.

“You know what.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Is it? Because the way you two kissed in the garden says otherwise.”

Of course he saw. Nothing escapes Toru’s notice. “Sneaky bastard.”

“It’s my job to watch out for you.” He runs his finger around the udon pot and licks the broth. “Damn. Now I’m hungry.”

I sigh. “Mei is unexpected, all right? I don’t know what’s going on with her, but I’m going to find out.”

“You need to call Hideo.”

“I will as soon as it’s morning over there.” I put the pot and Mei’s bowl in the sink.

“What about Ito’s ball?”

I think it over for another minute. “Tell Ito I’ll be in attendance.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I want to watch him make his speech and put his plan into motion so I can smash it all to bits right in front of his face. It’ll be worth it.”

Toru smiles like a shark. “Sounds good to me.”

I head out of the kitchen, and Toru follows.

“You aren’t coming to the office?” he calls, his voice tinged with humor.

“I have some things to take care of in my room.”

“Mmm-hmm,” he calls to my retreating back.

But I’m already gone, up the stairs, and prowling toward Mei’s room.

“*W*hat do you have in here? Bricks?” Daisuke asks as he lugs another one of my boxes into my bedroom. Everyone here has been so kind. This is far from the way I thought it was going to be.

“Books.” I clap excitedly when he sits the box down. I rush over to check them.

At home, I kept them tucked away so my father wouldn’t see them. Since Kazuo was so open and accepting when I spoke of my love for romance books, I think here I’ll be able to set them out so I can gaze at them. Some people love to put up beautiful art in their homes to stare at. I choose to stare at books. Even if they are stacked in little piles all about the room.

I wasn’t able to pack up everything, but I’d managed to get some of my favorite things from my bedroom. It helps that I’d flown here on a private plane. It meant I could take more things than if I had been on a commercial flight. At least that’s my speculation. I’ve never been allowed to fly anything else but private. From what I’ve seen in movies, I think there is a bag limit of some sort.

I’m pretty sure my father thought if I got inside of a commercial airport I might be tempted to slip away. I tend to be quite good at that. Sure, the thought would have crossed my mind if given the chance, but I probably would have reeled it in knowing I didn’t have anywhere to go.

I know I'm naïve about a lot of things. Not the scary things in life, strangely, but normal things. I'm not too naïve to realize that. I could never tell you what a gallon of milk costs because I've never been in a grocery store. I've had a lot given to me. But I've also had a lot of other things denied. Books are just one of them.

"That's a lot of books." Daisuke peers over my shoulder into the box. All of the men are giants here in America, though Daisuke seems a bit younger than the rest of them I've seen.

It's said Kazuo and his men are some of the fiercest and most feared. No one dares to cross them. It's why I'm a bit surprised by how helpful they have been. Kazuo himself made me something to eat. It's very out of character for a man in his position. I know my father has never lifted a finger in our kitchen. Sure, he's always provided for me, but that comes in the form of hired help.

The door to my bedroom swings open, slamming against the wall. I jump, spinning around to see Kazuo looming in the doorway, a deadly expression on his handsome face. "What is going on in here?"

"I was helping Ms. Nakamura with the rest of her boxes," Daisuke rushes to explain.

"There is no reason the door should be shut when you are alone with Mei."

"I'm sorry, sir." Daisuke bows his head.

"I've got Mei from here. Go back to your post."

Daisuke scurries from the room.

"Thank you!" I shout after him, not wanting him to think I'm rude. I try to glare at Kazuo. "You're making it hard for me to make friends around here. It's not like I'm going to bite your men." I chomp my teeth together. "Or will I?" I give him my best smirk. It's good to keep a man like Kazuo on his toes.

"Careful how you tease me, Mei." Kazuo grabs the last two boxes outside my room and carries them in easily.



“Fine, I’ll only nibble on you,” I tease him again, not heeding his warning.

I’m like a kid testing my boundaries.

“Then we shouldn’t have any problems,” he responds, surprising me. Was he jealous? I find that hard to believe. I’m sure Kazuo has had many offers of marriage from tons of families. I watch him as he places my last two boxes by the others. “We need to speak.”

I inwardly cringe. Isn’t that what people say when they are about to break up with the other person? Are Kazuo and I dating now and I missed it? If you kiss someone, do they assume you’re dating? I hate how little I know about this because I want to know all of it. It’s why I wanted to come to America so badly. To break away from some of the traditions my father wanted to force on me.

“I thought you just said I could keep nibbling on you?” I hate how insecure I sound. I’m supposed to be bold and sexy. “I mean, it’s cool. Whatever.” I brush it off, taking a stack of my books to place on one of the nightstands.

When I turn back around, I run right into Kazuo. His hand grips my hips, keeping me from falling backwards.

“Why did your father send you here?”

“You still haven’t spoken to him?” I tilt my head back to stare up at his handsome face.

“I want to hear it from you.”

“Would it matter? You’ll believe whatever he says.”

“No, Mei. I won’t. I sense he might be a bit irrational when it comes to you. You’re not only a very beautiful girl, but you have a wild spirit that I’m sure has been hard for him to try to cage. Impossible in fact.”

“That’s kind of you to say.”

“I’m not a kind man, Mei. I’m fair and honest.”

I’ve heard that about him too. “Well, I think you’re kind.”

His brows pull together, and I’m not sure he enjoys the title.

I sigh. “I kept running away, and of course my father kept finding me. Said I was going to get myself killed.”

“Yet you kept sneaking out?”

“What’s the point of living if you’re stuck in a room all alone? He really lost it when I got kicked out for sneaking over to the boys’ university.” Kazuo’s fingers flex on my hips. I can sense his anger simmering under the surface even as he keeps his expression neutral. “He thinks I’m a whore.” I shrug. “I’m lonely. Do you know what it’s like to be surrounded by so many people and feel alone? Not just alone but invisible. No one sees me.”

“I promise you, Mei, you are not invisible.”

“Does it make me a whore to want to be touched? Loved?” I ask.

“Mei—”

“Sir,” Toru calls from the doorway. “Hideo Nakamura is calling in now to speak to you.”

Toru has the best timing. I’m not sure I’m ready to hear Kazuo’s answer.

*G*ive Mei one more look before joining Toru in the hall. “No one is allowed in her room except for me. Understand?” I jog down the stairs with Toru at my heels.

“Sure. Why? Was Daisuke being a problem?”

“No. I just don’t want any other men in her room. That’s all.”

“You do realize Daisuke is gay, right?” Toru follows me into the office.

“He is?” I sit at my desk.

“Yeah, he’s been married for about—I don’t know—ten years or something I think?” Toru smirks. “But he’s not allowed in Mei’s room?”

I shrug. “All right, maybe him. But only him. And not too frequently.”

I can tell Toru wants to burst with laughter, but he manages to keep a straight face. “Got it, boss.”

“Don’t be a dick,” I gripe.

“I’m just doing what you tell me. That’s all.” He closes my office door.

I don’t have time for his games. Not when my mentor wants to speak with me. Turning to the phone, I hit the button to put Hideo on speaker.

“Good evening,” he greets me, his tone sober as always. “I take it my daughter has arrived unharmed.”

“Yes. She’s settling in.” I pause, despite wanting to fire off several questions. Hideo isn’t a man who talks much. He’ll say what he needs to say, but I have to be patient.

Toru looks at me questioningly as the silence becomes longer. I just shake my head at him. I suppose he’ll have to learn patience, too. He didn’t study under a Yakuza kingpin the way I did. Even though he isn’t a Japanese mafia prince, which some people say I am, he’s still the greatest weapon in my arsenal. Loyalty is in his bones, his blood. I trust him with my life. All that said, he can also be a real pain in my ass. Like right now when he’s rolling his eyes and silently cursing at the phone.

Hideo clears his throat.

Toru sinks onto the couch across from my desk and stares at the phone.

Hideo clears his throat again.

Toru throws up his hands.

I tamp down laughter. This is how Hideo works. I remember plenty of times when he was trying to teach me something. Waiting for him to speak took longer than the actual knowledge he imparted. He always told me that thinking before speaking is the mark of a strong leader.

“Mei is ...” he begins. “She is not what I expected in a daughter.”

My office door opens a sliver, and I get a glimpse of Mei’s dark hair. I should shoo her away, but I don’t. This concerns her. It’s only fair she knows what her father has to say about it.

“Mei has always been a sweet girl, of course. A lot like her mother with her mischief. But now that she’s older, I don’t know the best way to keep her in line.” He sighs. “She’s not like you, Kazuo. Nothing at all like you. You, I knew how to train. Her ...”

His silence draws out again, and Toru leans his head back on the sofa, feigning sleep.

“You sent her to me for a reason. What can I do for you, Hideo?” I don’t want to push too hard, but I have to admit I’m deeply curious about his plan.

“She needs ... She needs more discipline than I can give.” For the first time since I’ve known him, he sounds tired. “I’ve tried every way I can think of to get through to her, but I can’t do more. I won’t.”

I’m having a hard time believing what I’m hearing. Hideo had absolutely no problems disciplining me when he was training me up. Then again—I glance at the door—Mei is different. She’s not someone you can force into a box or a role. I, on the other hand, enjoy my role, and I’m grateful to Hideo for everything he’s done for me.

“Mei is special. But she’s special in a way I don’t understand. So I’ve sent her to you. You always followed the right path, Kazuo. You have discipline and strength. I want you to use those on Mei and impress upon her how important it is for her to be a proper daughter to me.” He clears his throat, then adds quickly, “But don’t hurt her.”

I scoff silently. Hideo had no problem punishing me—with words or with a cane—if I so much as thought of stepping out of line.

Mei opens the door a hair more, her gaze meeting mine. She seems as surprised as I am at her father’s words.

The thought of anyone hurting her sends a scalding rush of anger through my blood. I don’t care who it is—her father or someone else—no one is going to touch a hair on her head.

“Can you do this for me? I admit I sent her to you when I was particularly upset, and we parted ways on bad terms. She just doesn’t understand that our lives aren’t fairy tales or those silly books she likes to read. Mei must understand her future consists of marriage and creating heirs. Not romance.” His voice hardens. “I’ve tried to impress that upon her, but she’s

willful. Running away. Visiting places she has no business being.”

“Like the men’s university?” I ask.

“Exactly.” He groans. “When I found out that’s where she’d went, I had to pay off a dozen people to keep it quiet. Otherwise, her reputation would be ruined, and then I wouldn’t be able to secure her an advantageous match. All these things are really a mother’s place, but she and her stepmother aren’t on good terms. So I’ve done the best I can. It wasn’t good enough.”

I’m taken aback. Hideo’s said more in the past five minutes than he has in years. Mei clearly strikes a nerve for him. I can relate.

“She’s safe here.”

“I have no doubt of that, even with the Ito business. But I need you to take her firmly in hand and show her that her life of fantasy isn’t real. Put her feet firmly on the ground, Kaz. When that’s done, send her back to me. I have suitors already lining up to meet her.”

I grip the phone so tightly the plastic cracks. Hideo sent her to me to get her in line. I’ve already decided she’s perfect just the way she is. Her father’s been putting all these wrong ideas into her head. And marrying her off to some asshole suitor? Not on my fucking watch.

“Will you help me?” Hideo asks.

“Yes.” I smile and lean back in my chair. “I’ll educate her, Hideo. *Personally.*”

When I glance at the door, I see a flash of dark hair and then hear running footsteps. Mei is gone. But she can’t escape me, especially not now that I’ve been given free rein. I have plenty of plans in mind for her, though I doubt any of them are what Hideo envisions. *No, definitely not.*

Overhearing the conversation between my father and Kazuo had a flame of hope blooming in my chest. At first I thought that all this time I'd misunderstood my father and that he actually loves me but has his own way of showing it.

In the end, though, what mattered to him was the same as always: me serving my duty to the family. That would always matter more to him than anything else. I think I knew that, but I had this ridiculous feeling that his love for me might win in the end. I think his plan worked faster than he intended, because hearing those words took that last bit of hope I had when it came to him.

It didn't help that Kazuo went and agreed with him, stomping on any thoughts I had of him being independent or actually liking me. He seems more than willing to do my father's bidding. I shouldn't be surprised. Everyone always is. Except me. I'm probably the only one that my father hasn't been able to control.

When I make it back to my room, I know leaving in a fit right now isn't the best plan of action. I'd be caught before I made it ten feet out the door. I'll have to bide my time. Figure out where I'll go and how I'll survive. This is no longer a game. I won't be handed off as some virginal bride to a suitor of my father's choice.

I wasn't lying when I told Kazuo death was a fate I was willing to face to have my freedom. I will not marry a man I

do not love and have his children just so those little girls can one day face the same fate as me. I would never allow it.

“Mei.” I don’t turn at the sound of Kazuo’s voice, not wanting him to see my tears.

“What?” I ask.

I don’t hear him move from the door, but I feel the heat of his body come up behind me. I take a few steps forward before he can try to touch me. If he even does.

“I was sure I’d find you up here packing.”

“You don’t know me, Kazuo. I don’t know you either. It’s best we don’t make presumptions about each other.” It’s hard to keep the quiver out of my voice.

As badly as I wanted to be kissed, I’m angry I lost my first kiss to him. He’s going to do anything he can to break me to get me to fall into line so he could send me back to my father so another man can have me. It shouldn’t hurt as badly as it does, but my heart aches. It doesn’t matter that I’ve only known Kazuo a day. I want *him*. No one else.

“I think I know you very well, little rebel.”

“Well, I don’t want to know *you* any longer. You think you can trick me with your kisses and your culinary skills so that you can use me to please my father?” I spin around to face him, tilting my chin up to meet his gaze. “You can go fuck yourself.”

He starts to smile, but it falters as he takes in my face. I hate that I’m crying. I don’t know if it’s because I’m mad or sad. I suppose it’s all of it. “Oh, I’m a whore because I want to be kissed, right? No! Him trading me off to someone for some kind of gain is what *will* actually make me a whore.”

“Mei.” He lifts his hand to try to touch my face, but I swat at it, backing up to get away from him.

“Don’t touch me.” I can’t let him touch me. If he touches me, I’ll break. I’ll believe whatever it is he whispers into my ear. I’ll seal my fate.



“I think what you need, little rebel, is my touch. I think you need it *very* badly.”

“Father said you aren’t to hurt me.” I know he meant only physical violence, not the things Kazuo has done to me emotionally.

“This is *my* home. In my home I do as I please.”

I don’t get a chance to respond. He moves, lifting me, my feet leaving the floor as his mouth captures mine. He pins me to the bedroom door, shutting it in the process.

I expect the kiss to be hard to match the firm hold he has on me, but it’s not. It’s soft and slow, a sweetness and something else I can’t place laced to it. It makes me want to cry and cling to him all at the same time.

My father is right. Before that call I had all kinds of sweet fantasies in my head of who Kazuo might be. I was pining over him as my very own storybook hero. Even now I’m trying to cling to that still because of this one kiss.

“You won’t be anyone’s whore but mine, Mei,” he says when he lifts his mouth.

I gasp, the throb that has formed between my thighs intensifying. That should piss me off, but all it does is turn me on. The idea of being his little whore. One that he still kisses sweetly but also does very dirty things to.

“I don’t trust you,” I tell him, knowing it’s going to make him mad, but I want some kind of emotion out of him.

“I’m not sure I trust you either. Are you going to try to run, my little rebel?”

“No,” I lie.

“Liars get punished in my home.” He carries me over to the bed, tossing me down on it.

I turn to try to scramble to the other side but don’t make it far. One of his hands wraps around my ankle, pulling me down the bed until my legs dangle over the side. His other hand comes down on the center of my back before he releases my ankle to flip up my skirt, revealing my white cotton panties.

“Kazuo!” I wiggle, but it’s pointless. I don’t know why, out of everything, I’m thinking about my stupid lame panties.

“Your underwear doesn’t scream whore at all.”

I can’t seem to form words as he yanks them down to the middle of my thighs. “In fact, it screams something completely different.” He trails his fingers up the back of my thighs to my backside. “Lying is a hard limit for me, Mei. I will have to punish you for it.”

His hand comes down on my ass, smacking one cheek and then the other. I whimper, turning my face into the comforter as his hand rubs the spots he smacked. “Turn your head back. I want to hear you.” Before I get a chance to do as I’m told, he’s already spanking me again.

“Yes!” I lift my head to say. I’m not sure if I’m agreeing or wanting more. My head isn’t the only thing I lift. I raise my ass, pushing it higher off the bed.

“Good girl.” His hand dips down between my thighs. I close my eyes, knowing what he’s about to find. I’m soaked.

“You’re bare.” For the first time since he chased me to my room, I hear anger in his voice.

“I like the way it feels,” I admit.

His fingers slide along my slick skin. “Truth. For that I will reward you.” He presses down firmer, his fingers circling over my clit. I moan, already so close to going over the edge. I think I could have gotten off with him spanking me alone if I’d kept my thighs pressed together hard enough, especially with how much I was worked up already. “Will this be the first time a man makes you come, little rebel?”

“Yes.” I rock my hips.

“My good girl,” he praises. “Only a little whore for me.” He presses his fingers together, giving my clit a small pinch. I scream out his name as the orgasm explodes through my whole body. A tidal wave of pleasure rolls through me, washing away some of my sadness and anger in the process before my body collapses onto the bed.

When Kazuo removes his hand from between my thighs, I turn my head to look back at him and watch as he brings his fingers to his mouth, sucking them clean. His eyes stay locked with mine as he does it. A groan rumbles from him.

“I knew you’d be sweet.” He pulls my skirt back into place before he slips my panties the rest of the way down my legs. My eyes fight to stay open. The next thing I feel is him lifting me. I wrap around him as he carries me. A moment later, he lays me down in his bed. His smell is all around me, making me relax more.

“Sleep, little rebel,” he whispers in my ear. “You can try to escape, but know you’ll never be free of me.”

*K*uzi jumps on my bed and settles in at Mei's feet. He purrs softly as he kneads the comforter. I'm not keen on another man sharing Mei's bed, but I suppose I can make an exception for the fluffy kitten.

I stand and just watch Mei for a while. She's young and naïve, but she also has a backbone. Standing up to her father and disobeying his wishes—those are things even I would hesitate to do. Hideo isn't a kind man. He's had to be hard and unrelenting to maintain his position in the Yakuza. Though I can't help but feel amused at his inability to control the willful rebel who's sleeping soundly in my bed.

Footsteps in the hall call my attention away, and I ease out, closing the door behind me. Toru glances at the door.

"She's asleep." I try to say it as nonchalantly as possible.

"In your bed?" He smirks.

Of course he's on to me. He always is. "I assume you're up here for a reason?"

His smirk fades. "Yeah, there's more trouble."

"More?" I sigh and follow him downstairs, suddenly feeling extra tired of the Itos and their bullshit.

"One of our trucks got hit on the highway going into the city."

"Hit how?" I ask.

He pulls out his phone and scrolls through some messages, then shows me pictures. An 18-wheeler riddled with bullet holes, the driver hanging half out of the cab, his face a bloody ruin.

“The shipment?”

“Taken.” He puts his phone away.

“How much?”

“This was the cash bag delivery along with some unprocessed pharmaceuticals. So we’re looking at half a million in losses.” He glowers. “I handled the informant, but I think he gave them enough intel for a few more hits against us. I’m going to have to change up a few things to prevent it.”

“Do it.” I didn’t expect another strike against me so quickly after the first. Ito isn’t acting stealthily. In fact, if anything, he’s becoming reckless. “Ito is moving much faster than we anticipated. Why?”

“I suspect it’s Rai’s influence. He’s been pushing his father to expand, and he’s always been jealous of you.”

“Rai.” I nod. I’ve thought the same. Isamu raised him like a spoiled little prince, giving him the best of everything. The few times we’ve met, I’ve found him to be a manipulative little shit, a boy his father prized even though he never deserved it. Now he’s in his twenties and looking to make a name for himself in the Yakuza. “Rai’s been quiet, though. No more late-night clubbing and street racing his daddy’s Lambos. But I suppose that would make sense, especially if he’s putting pressure on Isamu from the inside. He’s keeping a low profile.”

Toru snorts. “Rai is a snake. I wouldn’t put it past him to push his father out onto the limb and watch as we saw it off. He wants to be head of the Itos.”

“I agree. He’s leading his father down the cherry blossom path.”

“Straight to ruin.” Toru shakes his head. “I can put out some feelers, test our assumption to see if Rai is behind it.”

“Do that. In the meantime, I can’t let this go unanswered.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” Toru cracks his knuckles. “I can gather a force and do a strike anywhere you want.”

“I’m coming. I can’t sit by and let my people get murdered.”

“I don’t like it.” Toru glowers. “You should stay here where—”

“No.” I shut that down. I’ve never been the sort of leader who could send his soldiers into battle and sit back to watch the carnage. I’d never ask them to do something I wouldn’t. It’s not in my nature, and it’s not how Hideo taught me to lead.

“Choose a dozen men, and at least two of them need to know how to pilot a boat.”

“We’re going fishing?” Toru rises and goes to the wide gun cabinet disguised behind my bookshelves.

“Something like that.” I glance at the ceiling. Mei should be out for the night. She came hard from nothing more than my fingers on her clit. My cock jumps at the memory. Her innocence is a goddamn beacon calling me to her. I want to wreck it, to fuck it right out of her. But with how sweet she is, I don’t think I ever will. Even so, I’m going to enjoy dirtying her up.

“Earth to Kaz?” Toru is standing in front of me.

I blink. “What?”

“Did Hideo tell you to break her in for her future husband? Some little boy with a trust fund and—”

Before I know what I’m doing, I grip his coat. “There isn’t going to be a future husband.” At least, not one who isn’t me.

He grins. “I knew it.”

“What?” I force myself to release him. I’ve never gone after Toru like this. *Get your shit together, Kaz.* Toru is like my brother, not an enemy.

“You’ve fallen for Hideo’s daughter.”

“I haven’t fallen.” I shrug it off.

“You sure? Then let me smell your fingers.”

I grip his coat again and shove him backwards. “Shut the fuck up.”

He doubles over, laughing. “Yeah, you’re done, Kaz.”

I flip him off. “You’re a dick, you know that?”

Straightening, he wipes at his eyes while still laughing. “You are so fucking done, boss. Had to happen sooner or later, I guess.”

I ignore him and choose my weapons, then march out to the garage. I don’t know why I’m irritated with him. After all, he’s right. I *have* fallen for the little rebel sleeping in my bed. It was so sudden that I barely even felt it, like a pin prick or a paper cut. But I can feel her now, residing in my heart, setting up shop and owning me more and more every second.

Maybe I can’t get a handle on all my feelings for her, but I can certainly commit various acts of vengeance to release the tension. I’ll start with Ito’s yacht, the one he bought for Rai’s twentieth birthday. It’ll be at the bottom of the bay before the night is through.

And then I’ll come home to Mei, to her sassy mouth and soft skin. To the warmth of her thighs and the heat between them. Mine. All mine.





What is this man up to? I hadn't been able to hear what was said between Kazuo and Toru, but I know they're leaving the house. When Kazuo picked me up and carried me to his bed, even letting Kuzi come, I thought it was sweet. I'd expected him to crawl in with me. I was hoping I might get a cuddle or something. Or that we might end up doing more, but nope. He'd left.

It shouldn't hurt my feelings. I mean, I'm planning on leaving, but still it stung. After the spanking that turned into something that felt like so much more, I was hoping things had changed between Kazuo and me. That he wasn't only doing what my father ordered. I quickly reminded myself of what my father had said about my head being filled with fantasies. I need to keep my feet firmly planted on the ground.

That had been the plan, but I'm currently lying flat at the moment because I'm stowed away in a trunk. One that is getting hotter by the second. I'm not sure why I thought this was a good idea, but here I am.

I'm still wearing my skirt and only had time to slip on some shoes before I had to make my move. I knew I only had a small window of time to get into the trunk before they all got out to the garage. I wasn't expecting there to be so many choices. It had been a gamble of which car to get into, but I'd picked right. I can hear Kazuo's voice but not make out a freaking thing that was said. I'd know that voice anywhere.

I've always been good with sneaking around. I'm not sure if it's a skill I got from my father or the fact that everyone was told to ignore me. It doesn't hurt that I learned all kinds of things about picking locks on YouTube. When you don't have a lot of friends and tons of time on your hands, there's a lot you can learn off the Internet if you're committed.

After a while, I feel the car slow down and start to take a few turns. The noise level has decreased outside, so I know we've gotten off the highway. A moment later, we hit a speed bump. My mind races to all the places we could possibly be going.

It's pretty late. I know sometimes there are meetings held at fancy restaurants or even night clubs. They have lots of strip clubs in the States. In movies you always see men doing business in them. Is that where he's going? It didn't slip past me that Kazuo hadn't gotten himself off after we'd fooled around. Not the way he had in the shower earlier in the day. I would have thought he would have needed it more after.

My mind starts to conjure up the worst ideas. What if he's not into me now that he got a better look at me? He'd even had a taste. I know I'm a bit on the curvy side compared to a lot of girls. I love carbs, but my stepmother hates them, and her body shows it. She fits the cultural standard, and I know she was always ashamed that I never could.

By the time the car finally comes to a stop, I've gotten myself all kinds of worked up. I want to pop out of the trunk and yell '*Busted, jerkoff!*' but is he really busted? Kazuo isn't mine. I'm not even his. I have no idea who I'm going to belong to if my father has his way.

As much as it kills me, I remain patient and wait as I hear more vehicles pull up. I can hear the doors opening and closing. Then the hum of people talking. I wait until it grows quiet before I finally pull the release on the trunk and pop it open. Carefully I slip out to see we're at a dock. A handful of other blacked-out cars are parked next to Kazuo's.

I spin around to see where they've all gone. A beautiful white yacht stands in the distance. It's all lit up. I instantly know what this is. It's one of those party boat things. Don't rich men

hire supermodels and stuff to come party with them? They take them to these rooms below deck and do unspeakable things.

I clench my fists, thinking about my Kazuo spanking another girl. If I thought I was mad at my father, that was nothing in comparison. I don't give a crap if I have a claim to Kazuo or not. He shouldn't be so much as looking at anyone else. I don't care if it's illogical and foolish.

I should make a run for it. This is my chance. Instead, I make my way toward the yacht. My anger is in full control of me now. The dock is empty, Kazuo and his men already on the boat, probably starting the party.

I tell myself that I'll just go have a look. See what kind of man Kazuo is. Once I do, then maybe these feelings will go away. Then I can be rid of the fantasies in my head and start making a plan for a real escape.

I slip on the boat easily enough, then head toward the back to try to find some kind of stairs. I should probably look for somewhere to hide until this party gets going. I quickly spot the stairs and make my way down them. I get distracted a few times at the beauty of the yacht. Everything's so new and clean.

Why didn't he ask me to go on the yacht with him? I could be a good time. I mean, I'd much rather go in the daytime when we could swim and he could feed me grapes. Maybe even spot a dolphin or something. That sounds amazing. I could dance on a table too if that's what he wanted.

Hearing someone coming, I slip into one of the bedrooms. All I hear is men, though. No giggling women or music playing so far. I sniff when the smell of gasoline starts to fill the air. The hell? Maybe they're putting gas in before they take off, but damn, it's strong. The smell starts to become overpowering, and something about this doesn't seem right. But what do I know about yachts? No one invites me on them.

"Oh God." I gasp when I see smoke seeping under the door, and an alarm starts to sound. I open the door, trying to escape. Smoke fills the hallway, making it impossible to see and

causing me to quickly become disoriented. I do the only thing  
I can think to do.

I scream for Kazuo.



“*W*hat was that?” Toru asks as he slings the last gas canister onto the blazing yacht.

My heart has already leapt into my throat as I stop dead. “Mei?”

I turn. The cry comes again.

The yacht is already floating away from the dock, its moorings thrown off so it can burn in the middle of the bay for everyone to see.

I have to go. Now. If I don't ...

I back up to the rear edge of the dock, then run full force.

“Kaz, don't!” Toru yells as I leap over the dark water and barely manage to snag the lower railing of the blazing yacht.

Something inside explodes, and the ship lists so violently it almost throws me off. But I don't let go. Not when Mei needs me.

I pull myself up and stay low, black smoke billowing all around me and flames consuming the bridge. “Mei!”

I hear her faint cry. It's coming from below deck. Flames lick up the stairs as I rush down them. Hitting my knees, I whip my jacket off and wrap it around my head to fend off the choking smoke. I feel my way along, crawling until I reach a door. But when I press my hand to it, it burns. She's not in there. Can't be.

“Mei, where are you?” I call.

“Kazuo! I can’t breathe.” She’s close.

I turn to the sound of her voice and get to my feet, rushing headlong through the heat and smoke.

“Here, I’m here!” She coughs.

I grab her, another explosion rocking the yacht as I pull her into my arms and drape my coat over her face.

There’s no time to waste. I run back the way I came, flames creeping along the ceiling overhead as pieces of timber and twisted fiberglass fall around us. I lunge up the stairs, my eyes teary, my throat burning.

When I get back to the deck, the entire ship starts to list hard starboard, taking on water as the flames devour everything above the surface.

If we stay here, we die. Hugging Mei tightly against me, I dash across the deck, then jump the railing and fall into the cold, dark waters below. Right as we hit, another explosion shatters a piece of the yacht, and chunks of flaming lumber fly overhead. We submerge, the water shockingly frigid despite the raging inferno overhead.

Mei starts to flail, but I hold her tightly and kick to the surface. When we breach the water, we both gasp in air. Smoke still swirls around us, but it’s not the same choking thickness like it was on the boat.

I strike out with one arm, swimming toward the dock where Toru is already throwing out a line for us. I take it, and he pulls us in as the yacht creaks and whines, half of it submerged.

Mei coughs as I hand her up to Toru. Then I climb up behind her and sit heavily on the dock as Toru looks us over.

“Holy shit.” He’s pale, as if he’s seen his own goddamn ghost.  
“Holy fucking shit, Kaz.”

I lean over Mei and put a hand to her soot-smudged cheek.  
“Are you okay?”

She coughs some more and nods. “I—I think so.”

“Are you sure?” I pull her into my lap and look her over, examining every bit of her I can see. “Are you burned or hurt at all?”

She shakes her head. “No.” Her eyes water. “But I’m sorry. I didn’t know.” She bursts into tears and buries her face in my chest. “I’m so sorry.”

I want to be angry with her. And I am, to a point. Because she scared the fucking life out of me. If she’d been hurt, I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself.

Hugging her close, I rock her gently as my men return to their cars and leave. Sirens sound in the distance as I get to my feet and carry her, still crying, to my car. I sit in the backseat and hold her as Toru drives.

I’ve never been so scared in my life. That’s saying something after the things I’ve done, the things I’ve been through. But when I heard her terrified scream—screaming for *me*—a shiver runs down my spine as I remember how it sounded.

“Why, little rebel?” I wipe her wet hair from her forehead. “Why did you do that?”

She snuffles, her tears still flowing as I stroke her cheeks. “I thought you were—I thought...” She coughs.

I snap my gaze to Toru in the rearview. “Get my physician to the house now. I want him to check her out immediately. Pay double, triple, whatever it takes.”

“Got it.” Toru nods and pulls out his phone.

Turning back to Mei, I press a kiss to her cool forehead. “Now explain. I need to know what just happened so it will *never* happen again.”

“I wanted you to come to bed, but you didn’t, so I listened in a little to you and Toru, but I couldn’t really tell what you were talking about. I knew you were going somewhere, so I stowed away in your trunk.” Her voice rises, and she’s talking fast.

I kiss her forehead again. “You’re safe. It’s okay. Go slow, little rebel. Take your time.”



She nods and snuffles again. “I thought you were going to a party on the yacht. I-I thought there would be strippers and stuff, and I got mad and—”

I can’t contain the snort that escapes me. “You thought I was going to some other woman when I had you in my bed?”

Her brows draw together. “I mean, I guess ... Yeah. That’s what I thought.”

I laugh so hard it makes me cough, my lungs singed from all the hot smoke, but damn if she isn’t funny. “You think there’s any woman in the world who could tempt me now that I’ve had you, Mei?”

Her frown turns into a small smile. “You mean it?”

“Of course.” I press my forehead to hers. “Don’t doubt that, Mei. Ever.”

“Okay.”

I tighten my grip on her. “And don’t *ever* put yourself into danger like that. Got it?”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“But you did. If you want to ask me something, ask. If you want to know where I’m going, ask. But do *not* put yourself in harm’s way. I could’ve lost you.” My voice cracks at that thought, at the pain of voicing it out loud. “Don’t do that to me, Mei.” I whisper and stroke her cheek. “Please don’t.”

She buries her face in my neck and nods. “I won’t. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, little rebel. We’re going to be okay.” I hold her close, and I seriously debate ever letting her outside the safety of my two arms ever again.



*K*azuo stands at the end of the bed with his arms folded over his chest. He is practically glaring at the doctor as he checks me over. Dr. Hunt fights a smile, not seeming bothered by Kazuo. That makes one of us. I, myself, am starting to grow annoyed.

It's been almost three days since that terrible night. I didn't think Kazuo was mad at me at first. Not with the way he held me close like I would disappear if he let me go for even a second. He'd brought me back to the house, where he barked growly orders at everyone but me before taking me upstairs to his bedroom. He stripped me out of my clothes, pulling me into the shower with him. He'd done the same with his own clothes but left his stupid boxer briefs on.

Even with my head pounding and my lungs feeling like they were on fire, all I could pay attention to was how Kazuo's hands felt on my body as he washed away the smoke from my hair and then my skin before doing the same to his own. I saw the outline of his erection, but he made no move to do anything about it. He never does.

Once he was satisfied that every bit of soot was cleaned off me, he brought me back to bed, where the doctor came and checked me over. By then I felt a million times better, but the doc said I needed to take it easy. Now this bed has been my prison for the past 72 hours.

At first I was loving it. Kazuo gave me lots of cuddles, and we lay in bed with Kuzi beside us. But every time I tried to take

things further, Kazuo would put his hand inside my panties and make me orgasm. I thought I was in paradise. Except now I'm realizing I'm on bed arrest with only lame orgasms.

Okay, they aren't lame. They're mind blowing. So much so that I forget about being on bedrest when Kazuo starts kissing me and giving me his sweet touches. But I'm realizing I need more. A lot more. Kazuo is keeping me at an arm's length while still managing to hold me close. It sounds insane, but it's true. I'm growing more impatient with each day that passes.

"Your lungs sound good. I think you can let her out of the bed now," Dr. Hunt says as he lowers his stethoscope from my back.

"Are you sure?" Kazuo's frown deepens.

"I'm sure. She's a healthy young woman. There's no further need for her to remain on bedrest."

I want to stick my tongue out at Kazuo, but I manage to control myself. Before Dr. Hunt came, Kazuo was talking about me staying in this bed for a week. There is no way I'll ever be able to sit still for that long. I'll go insane.

"Can we speak?" Kazuo motions for the doctor to follow him out of the bedroom. I know he's going to try to convince the doctor to change his mind. I roll my eyes. I would call Kazuo on it, but I don't, knowing the second he is out of this room means I'm out of this bed.

"We can," Dr. Hunt agrees. "But her health isn't going to change outside in the hallway."

I fight a giggle, not wanting to poke my Kazuo bear, or maybe I should. I watch as they both leave the bedroom to have their little talk. My thoughts wander to that spanking I'd gotten for lying.

After the last stunt I pulled, I should be in major trouble. I guess I *am* on bed arrest, but there have been no spankings or anything like what he gave me that day. An ache starts to form between my thighs when I remember how intense that orgasm was. How his hand had given me both pain and pleasure at the same time.

As nutty as it sounds, when Kazuo had me bent over the side of the bed giving me my punishment, I felt seen and truly taken care of. I loved every second of it until he'd slipped from the room. I haven't seen that side of him since then. Ever since the night of the yacht fire, he's been treating me like I'm made of glass.

What I did was stupid, and I'd never do it again, but I need some of the Kazuo from the other day back. I don't want to be sitting on a shelf like I'm too delicate to handle. I want to sit on his lap—or be draped across it. That sounds even better.

“Dr. Hunt agreed that two more days of bed rest will do your body good,” Kazuo says, breaking me from my thoughts.

I glare up at him, knowing either the doctor didn't really say that or he somehow bullied the man into it. “Is that so?” I raise an eyebrow at him, calling him on his bullcrap. “Where did the good Dr. Hunt go? I'd love to ask him why he changed his mind.” Two can play at this game. There is no way I'm staying in this bed for two more days. The only way that's happening is if Kazuo finally gives in.

“He had some other patients to see so he left.” Before I can try to push back more, he kisses me senseless. His hand, as always, slips into my panties. Those magic fingers of his get me to come for him. “Rest,” he orders, kissing me sweetly. “I'll be back after you nap. Going to my office.”

“Mmkay.” I yawn as he slips for the room. It almost works until Kuzi taps his little paw against my face, waking me up before I can slip into a deep sleep. “You want to play?” I give him a kiss on his nose. “Let me get dressed.” I hop from the bed, forming a plan that's going to get me in trouble, but this time the good kind.

I've been wanting to make it up to Kazuo's men for turning him into a grumpy beast. I'm sure he's taking his frustration out on everyone else when I should be the one he's really mad at. So I'm going to bake the guys my famous sesame cookies, and I have the perfect little outfit to wear while I complete the task.

Hopefully this time when Kazuo brings me back to this bed,  
I'll get the punishment I deserve.



“We only have two days before the party.” Toru stares at his laptop as I sit behind my desk. He sighs. “It’s just a logistical nightmare to do all the things you want done.”

“I have faith in you.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” He looks at me over his screen.

“Yes. This has been a long time coming. And now that the Itos have decided to openly attack, they have to go.”

He smirks. “I heard Rai lost his shit in front of all his men when he saw what was left of his yacht.”

“Good.” I want to be glad about torching that motherfucker’s boat, but I’m not. It was too close of a call for Mei. She shouldn’t have been there in the first place. But that doesn’t erase the fact that my actions put her in danger. That’s the last thing I ever want to do.

“Stop beating yourself up, Kaz. You didn’t know she was there.”

“I should have.” I stand and stretch. “I should know where she is at all times.”

“Now you do.”

“That’s right.” I exhale fully then take a breath. I pause and look around. “What’s that?”

“What?” Toru keeps typing.



“That smell.” I sniff again. “It smells like ...”

He lifts his head and inhales. “Like almond something. Or maybe it’s—”

“Sesame cookies.” I’d know that smell anywhere. It’s my favorite treat and not something particularly common in the States.

“My grandma used to make those. Black sesame. They’re fucking addictive.” He closes his laptop and rises. “I could go for a snack.”

Laughter reaches my ears. It’s deep and masculine, and I can hear a higher-pitched giggle in there as well. That’s when my spine pops straight and my fists clench.

“Whoa, what’s wrong?” Toru opens the door to the hall, letting more of that amazing smell waft into my office.

“She’s supposed to be in bed.”

Toru’s eyebrows pop to his hairline. “Oh, fuck.”

“Mei!” I storm past him and down the hall toward the kitchen. The door is open, some of my men spilling out, each of them with a cookie in their hand.

“Get the fuck to work!” I roar.

They turn, take one look at me, then scatter like rats on a sinking ship.

I barrel into the kitchen and find Mei handing a plate to Ken.

“I love this recipe.” She smiles at him. “Don’t you?”

I don’t give him a chance to reply. Grabbing him by the scruff of his neck, I yank him from the kitchen and shove him into the hallway. He doesn’t drop his cookie, but he does take off with a “*Sorry, boss*” over his shoulder as he disappears toward the foyer.

Slamming the door behind him, I whirl on Mei. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” I try to keep my tone even, but I can’t. Not when she’s in here with her hair down and wearing nothing more than one of my button-down shirts. I can see her nipples pointing against the fabric. My cock is

already hard, and I stalk to her, pinning her between the counter and me. “Answer me, Mei.”

She bats her lashes and shrugs innocently. “I was just baking cookies. Everyone here has been so nice, I thought I’d return the favor by—”

“Wearing this?” I press against her, letting her feel just how hard I am for her.

Her breath hitches.

“Well, I um, I didn’t want to have to dig through my clothes. This was the easiest thing to throw on.”

“You’re supposed to be in bed.”

She tilts her chin up. “I don’t want to be in bed if you aren’t there with me.”

“Don’t taunt me, Mei.” I press my thigh between her legs and feel the heat she’s giving off. Then a thought hits me like a bullet between the eyes. “Are you wearing panties?”

She reaches behind her and grabs a cookie, then offers it to my lips. “Does it matter if I am?”

The cookie smells amazing. I realize she’s trying to distract me from the fact she showed up down here where all my men could openly ogle her. It makes my blood boil just thinking about it. Goddamn.

“Mei—”

She shoves the cookie in my mouth before I can say more. It practically melts on my tongue. Nutty, just the right amount of sweet, and still warm. I chew and glare at her.

Her cheeks are pink, her lips parted. “Do you like it?”

I swallow. “No.”

“Oh.” Her face falls.

“I love it.” I kiss her hard, then back off. She’s still delicate from the fire, I remind myself.

When I pull away, she smacks at my chest.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m not made of glass! I’m fine. Stop treating me like I’m some invalid in a nursing home!” She puts her hands on her hips, staring me down like she’s ready to go to war.

“You almost died!” I grab the front of her shirt and yank her to me. “I almost lost you.” My voice quiets.

She wraps her hands around mine. “But you didn’t. I’m fine.” She licks her lips. “And I know it was wrong of me to follow you. And now...” She glances at my mouth. “I seem to have gone and made you mad again.” A devilish smile hints at her lips. “Oops.”

I twist the hold on her shirt, pulling her closer to me. “I’m beginning to think you want to be punished, Mei. Is that it?”

“What?” she stammers. “N-n-no. That’s crazy.”

I whip her around before she can protest, then drape her over the kitchen counter right next to her pan of delicious cookies. Yanking up the back of the shirt, I see my suspicions were correct. “No panties, my little rebel. You’re going to pay for it.”

“Please,” she whines. She’s wet for me, her pussy glistening from the back. Just the sight of her pressed beneath my palm, her ass on full display—it breaks me. I can’t hold back.

I bring my hand down hard on her ass. She yelps. I slap her again and again, reddening her skin as her cries turn more feral, deeper. And then she begins to moan, pain and pleasure mixing as I punish her sweet little ass.

When I stop, my heart pounding, my cock fighting my zipper, all I can do is stare down at her beauty, at the hand marks on her skin. *My* marks.

That’s when I drop to my knees and worship her wet cunt. Once I taste her, I might never stop.



“*K*azuo!” I scream his name when he buries his face between my thighs from behind.

It doesn't take much for me. The first brush of his tongue against my clit is all I need. I've been on edge since I hatched my little plan to get him to discipline me. My clit was begging to be stroked. He's delivering.

Each time his hand comes down on my ass, the pain quickly morphs into pleasure that shoots straight between my thighs. Kazuo drinks down my orgasm and goes for more. His hands grip my ass, lifting me off the counter a few inches and spreading me further apart. His tongue thrusts in and out of me, mimicking sex.

With each new thrust, all I can think about is replacing his tongue with his cock. To know what it feels like to be filled with Kazuo. In all my boy craziness, I've never craved *sex*. I wanted to know what a kiss might feel like, but I never actually saw one of the boys at the campus next door and imagined being with them. Even when I touched myself, I always imagined a faceless man—but not anymore. Now that face is crystal clear.

Kazuo.

I push back, trying to meet each of his thrusts. “Greedy,” he growls against my ass right before he spanks me again.

I whimper. “Please,” I beg. “I need more.”

“My little whore wants to get off again.” Another whimper leaves me at his tone. Why does thinking about being his whore turn me on so much? He said that the last time he spanked me too. My mind kept playing it over and over in my head.

“Yes, Kazuo. I want to be your whore.” As soon as I speak those words, his mouth stops. “Kazuo.” I panic, not wanting this moment to be over. My body is buzzing with the need for another orgasm already. The ache has returned worse than before. I can’t even think straight at this point.

I try to glance over my shoulder to look back at him, but he moves before I can. In a flash, he has me flipped over and his shirt ripped from my body. I lie across the counter on full display for him. My legs dangle over the side with him standing between them. I’m thankful for the chill of the countertop. My whole body is on fire with need.

“You’re going to be mine.” His rough fingers run up my thighs. My back arches, my body wanting to be even closer to him, but he’s still too far away. I want every hard inch of his body to be pressed against me. To be pinned under him for his taking.

“Please,” I beg.

One of his hands slips further up to cover my sex while his other goes for the belt of his pants.

Oh, shit. I really did push him further this time. Is he going to take me right here on the kitchen counter? It’s not how I pictured my first time being, but right now, I couldn’t care less. I ache to be filled with him.

I watch as he frees his cock from his slacks, taking himself into his hand to stroke himself. His other hand that is still cupping my sex slips up my mound, his fingers spreading my folds apart to reveal the small bundle of nerves that is already begging for his attention.

My eyes zero in on his cock. I swallow when I see the size of him. I’m a small girl. Sure, I’ve got some curves, but I’m not

sure I can take him. That doesn't stop me from letting my legs fall open more. I'm willing to give it a try.

I lick my lips when a small bead of precum forms on the angry red tip. He must ache the same way I do. How has he been able to hold back all this time? I know he wants me, which makes me realize that Kazuo has been putting my needs first. He's been pushing away his own desires to make sure I've been getting what I need. I latch on to the hope of that being true. Men in this life never put their women first. Could my Kazuo be different? Maybe that's why I'm so drawn to him.

"Kazuo." I push down as he grazes his dick against my sex, smearing his cum into my skin. More starts to leak from the head of his cock.

"Need to mark you," he grits out.

"What does—" I gasp when he drags the head across my clit as he starts to pump his hips. His cock thrusts in and out of his hand. With each thrust, it slides along my clit, causing me to moan out his name.

"Touch your tits, little rebel," he orders. I cup my breasts. My hands don't compare to his, but they'll have to do since both of his are busy. "Do it like I do it."

I pull at my nipples the same as he always does. "You're such a good little girl when I'm playing with your pussy."

"Yes," I moan in agreement.

"Bad girls don't get their pussies played with."

"Kazuo!" I hiss. His dirty talk is too much. Who am I kidding? All of it is.

"Come for me. Show me how much you like it." He smacks the head of his cock against my clit, triggering my orgasm. Black spots dance in my eyes as I start to come undone. I scream his name as pleasure unlike any I've ever felt before takes over my body.

I hear Kazuo groan my name as his release sprays across my sex and thighs before he slips the head of his cock through my

folds. My sex contracts around the tip of his cock as it kisses the entrance but doesn't push inside.

I lift my head to see him still jacking his cock. He lets out another groan, his eyes locking with mine as he releases more, only this time it spills inside of me.

Kazuo suddenly stumbles back a foot, his cock slipping free and a dazed expression on his face. Some of his release falls out of me. I sink my teeth into my bottom lip, wondering what this means but too scared to ask.

So I do what I do best. I flee, only this time back to my bedroom instead.





*I* chase after her, catching her in the hallway before dragging her into my office. She's panting, her body so warm and malleable in my hands. Whirling her around, I pin her to the door.

"Where do you think you're going, Mei?"

Her eyes are wide, like a deer in the sights of a predator. "I was going to, um—"

"You were going to flaunt this beautiful body in front of my men? Was that what you planned on doing?" I lean down, our lips close.

"I mean ..."

She reaches down and snatches my shirt closed. "I wasn't going to flaunt."

"You still have my cum in your wet cunt, and you were going to put those perfect tits on display for someone else?" I can't help the murderous rage in my veins. The thought of my men looking at her, much less taking cookies from her—I could murder them all right now.

"Hey." She reaches up and presses her palms to my cheeks. "Kazuo." Her voice is so sweet, so inviting. "It's okay. I'm okay." She presses her lips to mine, then pulls back. "I don't want them. I've never wanted anyone the way I want you."

How does she know just what to say to soothe the beast inside me? I don't know. But she does it. I let out a breath and release her, though I still reach out and pull her shirt together.

“I’ll take you wherever you want to go.” I scoop her into my arms, holding her close to me, hiding her beauty from any prying eyes. “Just tell me where.”

“My room. I want to take a bath and get some fresh clothes.”

“Maybe you should go back to bed like the doc—”

“No.” She sets her little chin in defiance. “Hard pass.”

I kiss the tip of her nose. There’s no way I can deny her. I can’t even imagine trying to tell her no. Besides, she’s a little rebel. She’ll do what she wants no matter what I say. Just the thought makes me smile.

“You must be cooking up some dastardly plan to be grinning like that.” She arches a brow.

“Perhaps.” I leave the office, careful to keep her close to me as I carry her upstairs.

“Your men have been perfect gentlemen. You really don’t have to worry about them. They’re not like my father’s men at all.”

I stiffen as I reach my bedroom. “Hideo’s men mistreated you?”

She looks up. “No. I mean, not really. They would whisper about me, I guess. But they never touched me. Dad would’ve killed them.”

I would kill them now. If she gave me so much as a name of anyone who ever harmed her, they’d be dead by morning. But as it is, I put her on her feet, then lean over and start a bath for her.

“I said I wanted to go to my room.” She tangles her fingers together. “Remember?”

I shrug. “My bathtub is bigger.”

“I see that.” She smiles when I pull a rainbow bath bomb from a drawer and toss it in for her.

“I didn’t take you as the bath bomb type.”

“I’m not. But I know you are.” I pull the drawer open all the way to show her. “I have all your favorite things.”

“Oh my gosh.” She squeals. “You even got my favorite face masks! They only sell those in Japan.”

“I know.” I turn back to her and take her shoulders, then slide my shirt off her. It falls to the floor in a puddle as her cheeks turn a sweet pink. I have the urge to taste her again, to lick her until she screams. She does that to me—turns me feral. I can only see her. Even if I’m in a room by myself, she’s always dancing at the edges of my vision. My own personal mirage.

She turns and puts one foot in the tub, then sinks down as bubbles fizz all around her. “This feels amazing.”

“Have a nice soak, little rebel. You’ve earned it.” I kiss the top of her head. “I’ll be back later. I need to work on a few things.”

“What things?” She waggles her fingers through the bubbles. “You know, I never asked my father questions like that. I think maybe because I didn’t want to know the answers. But with you ... I want to know everything about you.”

I should lie to her, tell her I’m doing some sort of legitimate business. But I don’t. I tell her the truth. “The Itos have been making moves against me. The yacht—” I force the flashback of Mei screaming for me to the back of my mind. “The yacht was an act of retaliation. It was just the opening salvo. There’s much, much more that needs to be set in motion before Friday.”

“Why? What happens on Friday?” She leans back, the tips of her nipples flirting with the surface of the rippling water. She looks like some sort of water spirit, here to lure unsuspecting men to their graves. For Mei, I’d happily go beneath the waves forever if it meant I got to stay with her. “Kaz?”

I blink, remembering myself, and meet her gaze. “You called me Kaz.”

She shrugs. “I’ve heard Toru call you that. I think it’s cute.”

I snort. “Cute, eh?”

“Very. I figure if your best friend calls you Kaz, then so can I.”

“You’re correct.” I sit on the edge of the tub and turn off the water. “Warm enough?”

“Perfect.” She sighs and sinks lower, her dark strands of hair floating on the surface. “So what’s Friday?”

“Tenacious, aren’t you?”

“Very.” She nods.

“The Itos have called a meeting of the major Yakuza families, mine included. It’s going to be a big party, though I’ll be there for business only.”

“A party?” She sits up and hugs her knees. “Can I go?”

“I wasn’t going to take you—”

Her face falls instantly.

“But now that you’re feeling better...”

Her eyes brighten. “I can go?”

“I have a seamstress coming tomorrow so you can choose your gown. Anything you want, Mei.” I still want to leave her here under lock and key, but I’d be fooling myself to do that. She’s safest when she’s with me. She belongs by my side.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so excited!” She claps, sending water splashing onto me.

“Oops, sorry.” She settles down.

I grip her hair and pull her to me, kissing her hard before standing. “Enjoy your bath, little rebel. I’ll be back soon.”

“Okay.” She nibbles her bottom lip.

“But no more baking for my men.” I waggle a finger at her. “Got it?”

“Aww, but I like making them happy.” She gives me the big doe eyes.

I groan. “Fine. You can bake. But only if I’m in the kitchen with you and you’re dressed from head to toe.”

“Deal.” She disappears beneath the surface, my sweet little water spirit, one I’d happily follow into the depths of hell and

back.



“*T*his is the one,” I tell Brigitte. I’m smiling so much that my cheeks are starting to ache.

I can’t wait to see what Kazuo thinks of my dress. I’ve spent all afternoon getting ready for the party. It might be pathetic to admit, but this is actually the first time I’m going to an event like this.

I never got to go to the ones my father and stepmother threw over the years, and I’m not counting the ones at boarding school. Boys weren’t even allowed at those, and no one was hanging out with me, that’s for sure. My father is so scary that not only did the boys avoid me, but so did other girls. It’s one of the reasons why I’ve learned to entertain myself, or as my father likes to put it—get into trouble.

“I had a feeling this would be the one. That’s why I saved it for last.” She winks at me in the mirror.

I talked to Brigitte on the phone yesterday, answering all of her questions about what style of dress, along with what color I preferred. I sent her a picture of myself so she could see my shape and pick out what she thought would look the best on me. All the dresses she brought are beautiful, but this one is perfect. It accentuates all my best features.

“I didn’t even know what ‘sexy but not too sexy’ was until this dress.”

I laugh. That’s what I asked for. I wanted it to be a soft white of some kind as well. Brigitte is clearly good at her job



because she pulled it off flawlessly. The soft petal pink dress is both flirty but innocent at the same time.

I turn when I hear the bedroom door open. Kazuo freezes when his eyes land right on me. They always do. Whenever he enters a room, he's always searching for me. I think he might be becoming obsessed with me. That's my plan at least. I need Kazuo to fall in love with me. Too bad I know nothing about the art of seduction, but going off the heated look in Kazuo's eyes right now, I'm not failing at it. At least that's a start.

"Out," he orders before stepping into the room. He continues to hold the door open. "Everyone." His eyes never leave me. The hairstylist and makeup artist who were packing up already grab their things and do as they're told, rushing from the room.

Butterflies fill my stomach, and heat forms between my thighs. I love when he loses control when it comes to me. He's been doing it a lot lately. His mouth has kissed every inch of my skin.

"My job here is done." Brigitte smirks as she follows the other two women out. Kazuo shuts the door behind them. The lock clicking loudly into place is the only sound in the room.

"You're very handsome in your tux," I tell him, licking my lips. Too handsome, actually.

I bet women throw themselves at him all the time at these kinds of events. I've heard in passing that Kazuo doesn't take offers of marriage from families, but I bet people still send them. They probably offer him astronomical dowries to marry their daughters.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea."

"What?" I ask, confused. My heart sinks. "I can't go?" I sink my teeth into my bottom lip when it starts to tremble. I want to seem strong to Kazuo. A woman that is worthy to stand at his side. In three swift steps, Kazuo closes the space between us.

"You're going to get me into trouble, little rebel." He pulls my bottom lip out from my teeth with his thumb.

"You? I'm the one who gets into trouble around here," I try to tease. His fingers trail across my jaw and down my neck. I

love how rough his fingers feel against my skin.

“People are going to look at you.” His touch feathers across my breasts, making them grow heavy with need.

“You’re the one that’s unmissable. I bet the women all clamor for your attention. How many offers of marriage have you gotten?” I raise my chin, trying to pretend jealousy isn’t eating me alive.

“I don’t entertain marriage offers,” he grumbles.

“That’s not what I asked, and you know it.”

“It doesn’t matter.” He makes a grab for me. I let out a small squeal of surprise. His hold on me is tight, almost to the point of being painful. His eyes have turned a bit wild. I’ve noticed that happening a lot lately.

My Kazuo has a problem with his control. Especially when it comes to me. I’ve noticed he can be a bit irrational at times. That should worry me. Maybe even scare me, but it doesn’t. What it does do is give me hope, and more than that, it makes me feel needed by him. I pray that he needs me more than anything else in this world. He’ll have to if he plans on us being together forever.

He carries me over to the bed, placing me down onto it. “My dress.”

“Pull it up,” he orders. He goes for his belt. “Now!” he snaps, spurring me into action. I’m not one to be bossed around easily, but when Kazuo uses that tone, my body falls under his control. The need to please him rides me hard.

I grab the bottom of my dress, pulling it all the way up to bunch around my waist, revealing my silk panties to him. A deep, sexy rumble comes from him when he sees them.

“Kazuo,” I whimper, needing him.

“Pull them to the side. If you want to go tonight, it will be with my mark all over you. You’ll smell of me. It’s the only way I’ll make it through this night, knowing all eyes will be on what’s mine.”

Holy crap. I pull my panties to the side as I watch Kazuo begin to stroke himself. His eyes eat up every inch of me as he angrily jacks his cock off. The sight is the hottest thing I've ever seen in my life.

"Please." I beg for relief, my clit throbbing for attention.

"Mei." He groans my name as he starts to come.

It sprays across my sex and thighs before he starts to rub it into my skin. His fingers play with my clit in the process. It doesn't take me much to go off. I cry out his name as he marks me.

As much as I love it, the ache doesn't fully go away. I adore his mark on me and wear it proudly, but no one can truly see it. I want him to claim me for all to see and know.

He still hasn't taken my virginity. Each day, that fact fills me with more and more doubt about what it means for us. Does he fear my father or not care for the idea of me as a wife? He's made it clear he doesn't want marriage. It's likely a mix of it all. I can't help but have those things creep into my mind.

I try to tell myself that can't be true. Not with how he holds me close and keeps me all to himself. Still, he's holding something back from me. I think I should start to do the same. Maybe I should give my Kazuo a taste of what it feels like—even if it kills me—to hold my heart back from him.

It might be the only way to claim his or the very least, protect mine.



Security is tight. I expected that to be the case, and oddly, it actually makes me feel better about bringing Mei. She has to be protected.

Isamu Ito has started a war against me, which is profoundly ill-advised, but even he is not foolish enough to attack the ruling underworld families on neutral ground. That would awaken the sleeping dragon in Japan, and the full force of the Yakuza would be brought to bear against the Itos.

“It’s beautiful.” Mei’s eyes are wide as our car pulls to the front of the house. The large trees at the front of the house have been draped with white lights that cascade in strings to the ground that’s littered with flower petals. It evokes the spring, the dance of the cherry blossoms and the promise of renewal.

“Not so beautiful as you, little rebel.” I kiss her softly, tasting her lips as she smiles.

“You’re a smooth talker.”

“Am I?” I stroke my hand down her side, feeling the silky fabric of the dress that can’t begin to compare to the soft skin underneath.

“When you want to be.”

“Ready?” Toru asks from the driver’s seat.

“Yes.” I give Mei one more kiss, then step out and help her from the car.

“You know the plan. Don’t let Mei out of your sight, no matter what happens.”

“I know.” Toru shakes his head. “You’ve only told me a million times in two different languages. I think I’ve got it.”

“Don’t worry.” Mei squeezes my hand. “I’m with you.”

Damn. Her confidence in me is like a shot of pure adrenaline. It’s exactly what I need.

I lean down and whisper in her ear, “Come on. I’m going to show you off.”

She smiles beautifully as I lead her up the stairs to the open front doors. Music swirls through the air as we enter, and I get nods from several ruling members of the Yakuza.

A server walks past with a tray of champagne. I snag one for Mei and hand it to her.

“Oh, bubbles.” She sips it as I lead her out of the foyer and into the sparkling ballroom. The music is louder here with people filling the dance floor. Most of them are likely hired or perhaps the older children of the bosses. They’re certainly enjoying themselves, all of them moving to the music as servers pass along the edges with trays of food and drink.

“This is way more fun than I expected.” Mei’s eyes widen as a DJ starts playing something with a heavier beat. Her hips move to the rhythm, and I can’t stop myself from grabbing her and pulling her to me. She sways against me, then turns so her back is to me. When her ass presses against my erection, she grins at me over her shoulder.

“Oh, my little rebel. You’re begging for some discipline.” I grip her hips harder and grind my cock against her. “And you’ll have it tonight.”

She shivers but keeps moving to the music. I’m lost in her, in the scent of her skin and the softness of her dark hair. She’s a gift, one I don’t deserve. Hideo never should have sent her to me, but I’m so fucking glad he did. Perhaps he knew what she would mean to me. That’s when it hits me—Hideo planned this all along. He knows me better than anyone, and though he doesn’t understand Mei, he certainly knows her, too. This is

what he wanted. The two of us. I was a fool to not see it before.

“What?” She turns in my arms and looks up at me. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Not a single thing.” I kiss her hard and pull her tightly to me. I know it will send whispers rustling through the other families, but I don’t care. I want them to know she’s mine. All fucking mine.

She clutches my tux and gets on her tiptoes in her heels. When I swipe my tongue against hers, she moans into my mouth. I want her right here, right now. But I can’t have her.

Breaking away, I rest my hand at her throat. “Soon, little rebel, I’m going to give you every inch of me, and I’ll never stop. I’m going to fuck you so well it’ll ruin you.”

“And then I’ll be your whore forever? Is that right?” She bats her lashes innocently.

“Forever,” I agree.

I feel a tap on my shoulder, and I know it has to be Toru. No one else would dare touch me.

“Meeting’s about to start.” He stands at my elbow.

I tilt Mei’s chin up. “Stay with Toru, but don’t shake that perfect ass for anyone but me. Understand?”

Her lips curve into a smile. “Yes. Besides, I saw a big food table at the side of the foyer I need to investigate.”

“You do that. And I’ll fill you up with something much sweeter after the party.”

Toru groans and rolls his eyes as Mei blushes.

“Stay with her.” I turn to Toru.

“I know.” He leans closer. “The plan is already underway. The Ito warehouses are already burning, and their vacation homes are about to go up in flames too.”

“Good.” I smile at the destruction my soldiers are bringing to the Itos tonight. Isamu may think he’s cornered me at this

party, but when he figures out I've struck him, he'll fall apart. I'm counting on it.

"Back soon." I kiss Mei's forehead, then stride away to take the stairs to the business meeting. Ito stands on the landing, watching me approach. When his eyes flick to Mei, I force myself to mask the fury that rises in my gut. I don't want him to even breathe the same air she does. He doesn't fucking deserve it.

"Kazuo." He stares as I stride past him. "I'm glad you accepted my invitation."

His son Rai stands just outside the door of the meeting room, his beady eyes on me.

"Done any good sailing lately?" I ask.

Rai's hands curl into fists. "Bastard."

I smirk. "Let's get this over with. I'm a busy man."

Isamu snorts. "I'm sure you have much to do with Hideo's daughter, Mei. I've heard she's as fresh as a ripe plum. Or at least she was ..." He lets the innuendo hang in the air.

I stop but don't give him the satisfaction of turning around. "Keep her name out of your mouth, and I'll allow you to keep breathing." With that, I continue down the hall and into the meeting room. The sooner I get this done, the sooner I can give Mei what she's been begging for from the moment we met.





“*Y*ou can eat and guard me at the same time,” I tell Toru as I thrust a plate full of food into his hands. He reluctantly takes it from me so I can make one of my own. “You could grow faint and pass out without nourishment,” I tease, making him crack a small smile. Kazuo’s men are so different from my father’s. They’re always warm and respectful toward me.

I know Kazuo can get a bit jealous when I give them attention, but I enjoy making them treats. It’s my way of showing them that I respect them, too. Not only that; they keep my Kazuo safe. Feeding them at times is the least I can do in return.

Plus, I want them to like me because they genuinely do, not because Kazuo orders them to. I want their respect for me to be real. I see how much loyalty both my father’s men and Kazuo’s have for them. I want that. I just have a different way of going about getting it. I suppose I’ve got some of my father in me after all.

“Thank you,” Toru says and follows me down the table as I pile a little bit of this and that onto my plate. I want to try everything and experience it all. Not many others are enjoying the food. The table looks more like a decoration than anything.

My stepmother would throw parties with servers walking around with trays of food that were never really touched. I would always sneak into the kitchen and steal the finger foods. It was the only time that amount of carbs were ever allowed in the house at one time.

“Shall we sit?” I nod toward an empty table.

“If you wish.” Toru walks over and pulls out a chair for me. I take it. He sets his plate down next to mine. “Drink?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’m going to be right over there.” He points to the bar that is twenty feet away. “You need to stay at the table.”

“Promise,” I reassure him. I can tell he’s not really sure if he should leave me. Even if it’s only twenty feet away with a clear view to where I’m sitting. “I know tonight is important. I’ll keep my booty in this chair until you return. I’m not looking to cause you or Kazuo any more stress. I’ll save that for when we’re home.”

“Thank you.” He gives me a soft smile before he hurries over to the bar.

I hate how much he doubts me, but I get it after the whole yacht incident. And I do happen to have a reputation of doing the opposite of what everyone tells me. I mean, Kazuo doesn’t call me little rebel for no reason. Honestly, I’m not sure if the men worry over my safety because they generally care for me or they fear what Kazuo would do if harm were to come to me.

I snack on my food for a while, though every time I look up, Toru is staring in my direction. I finally scoot my chair around a little so I can get more of a dance floor view than a bodyguard view. I wonder what Kazuo is doing right now. Probably locked up in a room with a bunch of old Japanese gangsters talking business. Yuck. I much prefer my little plate of goodies, though it would be better if Kaz was hand-feeding me. I start to daydream about it, about how he’d pop the food into my mouth then kiss me with—

“And who do we have here?”

I pull my attention away from my plate to see two women standing on the other side of the round table.

The one in the gold dress pulls out a chair and drops into it. The other stays standing with her eyes trained on me. I’m not sure the skin-tight red dress she’s wearing even allows for sitting. I’d noticed both of them on the dance floor earlier.

They were hard to miss with their shiny blond hair and their height. They would easily tower over me even without their heels on. That said, I bet I still weigh more than them.

“I’m Mei,” I say, leaving my last name out.

“You came with Kazuo,” the one standing says without even bothering to offer me her name.

“I did.” I pick up one of the little cream puffs from my plate and pop it into my mouth.

Both of them scrunch their noses.

“Are you dating?” the one in red asks when she realizes I’m not going to offer more information.

Oh, don’t get me wrong, I want to tell them Kazuo is mine and to stay the hell away, but I’m trying to be a good girl. Plus, I don’t know what Kazuo and I are at this point. The way he holds me close and his acts of possessiveness along with his jealousy make me think he’s going to keep me forever, but he’s never said that. I don’t want to assume anything because I know what they say about people who do.

There is no way my father would let Kazuo keep me without some promise of marriage—which Kazuo has made clear he doesn’t want. Even if he did have some change of heart and wanted to marry me, he’d have to ask my father for permission. What if he told him no? Kazuo has such respect for my father he’d likely let me go. As much as that breaks my heart to think about, it might be the best outcome if Kazuo doesn’t truly want me. Him not standing up to my father for us would help me in walking away from him. I push my plate away suddenly, not so hungry anymore.

“We came together,” I point out, hating that I’m having to be vague. I want to call Kazuo mine.

“That doesn’t mean anything.” The one wearing the gold dress finally speaks. “I’ve *come* with Kazuo too.” She smirks, igniting an anger I’ve never felt before inside me. Her words feel like a smack to my face.

“Are you saying my Kazuo fucked you?” I stand from my seat, not wanting to hear any more about Kazuo’s past with

other women.

My anger is not only with her disrespect but with Kazuo's as well. It might be irrational, but he won't even have sex with me, but then he brings me to a place where there are other woman he's been with?

I don't care that it might be his past and he thought he might never get married, so it didn't matter to shit where he ate. Maybe Kazuo doesn't need to ask my father for anything, because I won't spend my life dealing with his past women who are so bold to disrespect other women.

She scrambles to her feet, her eyes wide in surprise at my outburst. I'm sure she thought I'd run away crying or something. Quickly, she gets it together and shoots a glare at me. I'm sure it's in hopes to get me to back down. Not this time. Not when it comes to Kazuo.

"As I was saying—"

"It's a yes or no question." I cut her off. My hands ball into fists at my sides. I don't think I've ever felt this level of anger before in my life.

"You must not know who I am," she fires back, tilting her nose up at me.

"And you *clearly* have no idea who *I* am." I smirk.

"Oh, I know who you are." Her eyes run up and down me. "You're not his normal type, but maybe he's mixing it up this time. Either way, you're just a random addition to his count. I'm not worried. He'll ditch you the same way he did all the others. He'll come back to me. He always does." She licks her lips.

I swear my vision blurs for a second with how angry I am. "Clare." The girl in red steps back as she reaches for her friend's elbow to try to pull her away, but Clare shakes her off.

"Mei, is there a problem?" Toru asks, coming to my side with our drinks in his hands.

"No problem, Toru. Well, not one I can't handle myself at least," I reassure him with a smile as I slip around the table

past him.

Clare takes a step back as I move closer to her. It's not far enough. She stupidly opens that mouth of hers again. This time she doesn't get the chance to speak. I lunge for her. My hands wrap around her neck as my vision turns red. The Nakamura in me has come out to play.



*I*to has been speaking for five minutes straight. Talking about unity, about how the families should work together to ensure a profitable future for all.

I watch him, never taking my eyes from the snake as he tries to sell his bullshit. His gaze lands on me often, but I give no indication of my feelings about the ridiculous lies falling from his lips. I can see right through him, but so can everyone else in this room. We didn't rise to the top of the Yakuza ranks by being fools.

“And this is the reason I believe Rai will become the leader we all need. He can bring the families together and maintain order and fairness among us. He's young, smart, and as my successor, he will inherit the entirety of my operation.” He looks at me pointedly. “It would be wise for all of you to respect him and to understand that it is my wish for him to become the leader of the organization in the States. He's ready.”

Rai, sitting behind his father, puffs out his chest.

When Isamu takes his seat, he looks around as if he expects applause or perhaps some sort of congratulations. What he receives is flat silence. Until Rai begins clapping. That quickly dies off as I stand.

“I feel as though I speak for the rest of the families when I say, with all due respect, that Rai Ito will never be anything more than a sniveling whelp, propped up by his father because he



was too weak to stand on his own.” I see several smirks around the table and a few nods of agreement.

“You dare insult my son?” Isamu rises and reaches inside his suit coat.

But of course, there are no weapons allowed here. It’s neutral ground. We were all searched before entering this room, including him. Even so, the fact that he reached isn’t something that goes unnoticed. We are the heads of the organization. While we regularly engage in violence, we don’t do it out in the open and certainly not among ourselves. I can already imagine Hideo dressing down Isamu for daring to breach etiquette in this fashion and bringing dishonor to his own name.

“I certainly do dare. Though you are avoiding the obvious elephant in the room, everyone here knows you’ve struck me without justification or provocation. You killed my people and cost me money—those are two things I will never abide. If you were half the leader you claim to be, you’d know that. But—” I glance at Rai and then back to his father. “As you are less than half a man, and your son is less than half of you, did you really believe I’d ever allow him a seat at this table?” I scoff as I back from the table.

Ito sputters as Rai’s face turns a violent shade of crimson.

“Thank you for the party, Isamu. It’s truly a lovely event. Like a thoughtful present to all of us here. In return, I’ve given *you* several gifts.” Rai’s phone buzzes, then Ito’s begins to vibrate on the table. “Enjoy them.” With that, I turn and stride for the door.

The guard opens it for me, and I immediately make my way downstairs. As far as I’m concerned, my business here is over. Given the chilly reception Isamu’s speech received from the other families, I’m certain they aren’t far behind, leaving Ito and Rai to stew. Good.

When I enter the ballroom, I zero in on Mei in a matter of moments. I suppose the fact that she’s throwing another woman to the ground and trying to jump on top of her is just par for the course with my little rebel.

The woman screams and tries to hold her hands up to keep Mei from attacking. Mei doesn't let up even though Toru is trying to step between her and her prey.

I run forward and scoop her into my arms before she can go after the woman at her feet.

Mei yelps and starts swinging before she realizes it's me holding her. Then she gets a sheepish look on her angelic face.

"What are you doing, Mei?" I can't hide the amusement in my voice.

"Lady, this girl's violent." Toru shakes his head and helps the other woman up rather roughly. "Stay away from her and Kazuo."

"Not a problem." The woman from the floor stumbles away into the crowd.

"Let's go." I jerk my chin toward the exit.

"Hey! I'm not violent!" Mei swipes at Toru but can't reach him.

"Sure you aren't." He drains his drink, tosses the glass on the table, then leads us from the party.

"Are you going to explain yourself?" I carry her down the stairs, several onlookers whispering and staring. I don't give two shits if they want to gossip their faces off about us. Tonight is my night. The Itos are going down, and Mei is in my arms. That's all I care about.

I sit her in the car and slide in beside her as Toru starts the engine. Pulling her into my lap, I slide one hand up her thigh and run my thumb along the edge of her panties. "Mei?"

Her lips part, a light sigh coming from her, but she doesn't talk.

"Mei, I need you to tell me what just happened." I slide my thumb higher and delve beneath her panties, feeling the heat of her wet cunt.

She wriggles, her breathing speeding up. "I'm mad at you."

"Oh?" I slowly stroke my thumb across her clit. "Why's that?"

“Because you—mmp.” She bites her lip as I move more fingers beneath her panties and slide one inside her. “Because you—” Her head drops back, and I fasten my lips to her throat.

“Yes?” I murmur against her skin as Toru grabs the rearview mirror and yanks it sideways so he can’t see us as he drives. “What did I do, little rebel? What made you so mad?”

She gasps when I add another finger inside and cup her breast with my other hand. I squeeze it, then grip the top of her dress and pull it down so I can feel her smooth skin and the hard peak of her tit.

“She, uh, she said ...”

I lean down and bite her nipple, then suck it into my mouth as I return my fingers to her clit. “What did she say?”

Her legs open more, giving me better access, and I take it and run my fingers up and down her slit. “So wet for me, little rebel. I could spread you right now and lower you onto my cock. I bet I’d stretch you perfectly.”

She moans, then stiffens and pushes at me. “No!”

“No?” I press two fingers inside her again.

She moves her hips, riding my fingers, but then stops again. “No, Kazuo.”

“Why no?” I pull out and circle her clit. “Why say no when I can feel how much you want this?”

“Because that girl said you fucked her!” she yells.

Toru snorts a laugh.

I pull my fingers from Mei’s panties and lick them clean as she watches. I’m smiling, enjoying her little bout of jealousy.

“Why are you smiling?” She huffs and tries to pull away. She gets nowhere.

“Because you taste like heaven.”

“Stop laughing! You were with that girl!” She wrinkles her nose. “You’re a player.”

“A player?” I laugh, the amusement rolling from me as Mei frowns. “Mei, I’ve never seen that girl before in my life. Whatever she said to you was a lie, little rebel. When I told you I wasn’t interested in marriage proposals from other families, I meant it. That includes being trapped by any woman with an eye to use me to get pregnant or gain clout among the Yakuza.”

She turns her head, her gaze quizzical. “You mean ...”

“I mean you’re the only one I’ve ever wanted, Mei. You’re the only one I’ve ever dreamed of starting a family with. You’re the only woman I’ve ever hoped to marry.”

She blinks hard. “So you mean you never—”

“I mean I love you, Mei. I want you to be with me always.” I kiss her hard, showing her just how much I believe in us. I want her to believe it, too. Because now I know—more than I’ve known anything in my entire life—that we belong together. Forever.



*H*e loves me? I stare into Kazuo's handsome face and wonder if I'm dreaming. I reach up, pressing my hands to his cheeks. "You love me?"

"Are you really so surprised, my little rebel? I've barely let you out of my sight since I first laid eyes on you. I lose my fucking mind whenever I even think of something happening to you. I never want to experience a world that doesn't have you in it, Mei. What do you think all of that means?"

"That you love me!" I squeal, my excitement uncontrollable. "My plan worked. I got you." I sit up straighter. I'm sure my face is full of smugness, as it should be. All these bitches that have been trying to get their hooks into Kazuo, and *I'm* the one that caught him.

"Mei," Kazuo warns, his hands going to my hip. "Watch it."

"Or what? You're in love with me. Your threats mean nothing now."

"That so?" He releases his hold on my hips but only for a second before he grabs them again and starts to tickle me.

"Kazuo!" I screech, almost falling backwards in my attempt to get away from him. He makes sure I don't get far as he continues to tickle me. "I'm sorry!"

"Going to need more than that." He pulls me flush against him. "Give it to me, little rebel."

"I love you too, Kazuo. So much so that it scared me at first."

“But not anymore?”

“Nope.” I shake my head. “I’m not scared anymore.”

It’s crazy how three little words can change your whole world. All my fears and doubts are now gone. He’s picking me.

“We’ll need to get married soon.”

“Wait, don’t tell me I have to be a virgin bride.” I gasp. “We’ve been waiting long enough.”

“It’s been a week.” He chuckles.

“Five days actually, but that’s forever.” I groan, letting myself fall backwards again, my body going limp as I pretend to faint. Well, I try to fall back but get nowhere.

“I thought you were my little whore,” Kazuo whispers into my ear before his mouth travels down my neck. His teeth scrape gently and erotically against my skin.

“Yes,” I moan, grinding myself down on his cock. “I am.” I want to be Kazuo’s everything. I can be all the things he needs.

“You’ll wait till we’re alone.” He nips at my neck. “You’re only *my* whore. For my eyes only.” I let my head fall forward to meet his gaze. I love seeing how hungry he is for me. Now that I know he loves me it means so much more.

“My father.” This is probably the last thing I should be bringing up right now, but I want to know how Kazuo plans on handling this.

“Has nothing to do with you and me.”

“Really?” I’m not totally surprised after what Kazuo admitted to me but still. I know how much respect Kazuo has for my father. Not only that, my father could start a war over this. “Would you start a war over me, Kazuo?” I lick my lips. I don’t want there to be one over me. I want my father to accept this. For him to be happy for us, but damn, is it hot thinking Kazuo would go to war for me.

“I’m offended you even have to ask me that question.” His hands grip my ass. “You’ll be my queen. Anyone who tries to

say otherwise will regret those words.”

“Why does this turn me on?” I wiggle, trying to grind down on his hard cock.

“I think my little rebel is bloodthirsty.”

“A week ago, I would have laughed at someone calling me that, but since I met you, I find I am.”

“You found your passion and figured out what was worth fighting for,” he says with pride in his voice.

“I hope it doesn’t come to that, though. Not with my father.”

“It won’t. I think your father knew what he was doing when he sent you to me.”

I ponder his words for a moment. “Oh my God.” It hits me that Kazuo is right.

I have a feeling my father knew how Kazuo was about women. It makes so much freaking sense now. It’s not completely unheard of for some warriors to be celibate. They choose it so as not to let such things distract them. Father knew I was either safe with Kazuo or more likely, that I’d lure him into marriage.

“He knew I’d never be able to say no to you. That I’d want you more than anything else.”

He believed in me. My father has always spoken so highly of Kazuo. Even said it would be hard for Kazuo to find a wife that could be what he needed. All along he thought I was the perfect match.

“No more waiting.” I go for the button of his shirt.

“Mei,” Kazuo growls at me, but I ignore him, wanting us to be skin to skin. “Drive faster,” he orders Toru before he claims my mouth. I get lost in his kisses. I’m barely aware of Kazuo getting us out of the car and carrying me inside.

The rest of the world fades away as I keep on pulling at his clothes. I’m only brought back to reality when he drops me onto the bed and rips my dress from my body. Kazuo strips the



rest of his clothes away before he drops to his knees beside the bed.

He yanks me down until my ass is almost falling off the edge and buries his face between my thighs. I'm already so worked up from the drive home that I go off at the first brush of his tongue against my clit.

That doesn't stop Kazuo. He pumps two fingers in and out of me as he drinks down my pleasure and demands I give him more. His tongue is relentless as he pushes me toward another orgasm, working a third finger inside of me.

Still my body wants more. I'm stuffed full, but it's not enough. I need all of him. "Kazuo," I whimper, about to come again, but I want him inside of me first. But if Kazuo wants me to come, I'm going to come.

I gasp as the orgasm starts to go off, but Kazuo slips his fingers out of me suddenly, rising to his feet. His thumb replaces his tongue on my clit. He firmly rubs circles there as he guides the head of his cock to my entrance. He presses inside of me an inch, giving a shallow thrust.

"You think you can take all of my cock like a good little whore?" he asks, using words he knows will ramp up my need for him.

"I know I can." I push down, making him sink into me a little more.

"Bad girl." He lifts his hand off my clit, only to bring it right back down with a pop. I gasp at the sensation.

"Did you just—"

He does it again, smacking my clit before his thumb starts to rub firm circles there again.

"Kazuo," I whimper.

"Go on. Give it to me." He adds another quick slap, then grinds his palm into my clit.

"Kazuo!" I scream as the orgasm is yanked from me. It shoots through my body as Kazuo thrusts fully inside me, breaking through my virginity. I cry out his name again as pain and

pleasure morph together. In my wildest dreams, I never imagined it would feel like this.

Kazuo groans my name as he holds still with his cock still planted deep inside of me. I feel warmth spill into me. He grips my hips, making sure I stay fully planted on his cock as he continues to come.

“Mei.” He hisses my name.

I watch him fight himself for control as any pain I felt melts away. Only the feeling of fullness remains. He might have just come, but I know he wants to move. I can see it written all over his face. He wants to let go and rut inside me and claim more of me. I love that I’m the only one that will ever get to see this side of him. My sex flutters around his cock, wanting that too. I want to feel Kazuo with every step I take tomorrow. I lift my legs and wrap them around him.

“Give it to me, Kazuo.” I lift my hips to show him that I’m ready for more. I can take it. “Let go.”

He sucks in a deep breath, his nose flaring. “I love you,” he growls before he lets go and gives us both what we need. He claims me all through the night, and I claim him right back.



“*H*ow many casualties?” I stroke Mei’s thigh as she sits in my lap.

Toru yawns from his spot on the sofa in my office. He’s had a rough few days overseeing my revenge on the Itos.

“Let’s see. They lost a dozen soldiers on their container ship before it came to port. Then we destroyed every last bit of their cargo onboard. Isamu’s homes in Cabo, Florence, Tokyo, and Lisbon are nothing but ash, but I don’t know if any soldiers were killed there. I’m waiting on more reports back from our guys.”

“You told them only soldiers, yes?”

“Yes.” He lies back and drapes a forearm over his eyes. “We’ve been very careful about whose blood we spilled. We aren’t assholes like the Itos.”

“Good.”

Mei leans down and starts nibbling at my neck. I’ve already had her twice today, but if she keeps this up, we’re going to have to add a third. I can’t get enough of her. She’s everything I thought I’d never have.

“Boss!” Ken rushes in through the office door.

Toru bolts upright on the couch. “What? What is it?”

“There’s a problem out back!” Ken turns and rushes out before we can ask any questions.

I rise and put Mei on her feet. “Stay here.”

“No way.” She grabs my hand and squeezes my fingers tight. Just like I knew she would.

“A problem out back?” Toru says somewhat stiffly. His acting needs a little work, but Mei doesn’t seem to notice.

“Are we in danger?” She looks up at me, her eyes wide.

“You’re never in danger when you’re with me, little rebel.”

“Big problem! Wow, boss, we really need you right now!” Ken calls from down the hall as he opens the door into the early twilight that’s falling outside.

“I’ve got you covered.” Toru makes a show of pulling his pistol as we walk to the backyard by the pool. The rose arch is still in beautiful bloom, and Kuzi sits on the bench beneath it, a floral collar around his fluffy neck.

“What’s Kuzi doing here?” Mei hurries to him. “Oh my gosh, you should be inside! It could be dangerous!”

He purrs when she scoops him into her arms and kisses his crown. “Sweet baby.”

I drop to one knee, and when Mei turns around, she almost trips over me. Laughing, I steady her, and when she realizes what I’m doing, she gasps, her eyes welling up with tears.

My men are lined up along the back of the house, and Toru holsters his pistol before taking Kuzi from Mei. “Little furry monster.” He backs away with the purring cat in his arms.

“Is this really happening?” Mei covers her face with her hands.

I reach up and pull them away, then kiss each one. “This is real. You and I—we’re the realest thing I’ve ever known.”

“I can’t believe it.” She wipes away a tear as I take the ring from my pocket. “Mei Nakamura, will you be my wife?”

“Of course!” She lunges forward, her momentum carrying us to the grass as my men laugh and clap. She peppers my face with kisses as I hold on to her and slide one hand down to make sure she isn’t showing anyone too much skin. This beautiful body is all mine, and *only* mine. “I love you!” She kisses my mouth, lingering there.

I deepen it, tonguing her as she moans lightly.

Toru whistles high and sharp. “Okay, guys, back into the house. Our work here is done.”

Once we’re alone, I flip her onto her back. “Are you happy?”

“So happy.” She spreads her legs and welcomes me between her thighs. “Never been happier.”

That’s exactly what I wanted to hear.

“Though there’s one thing that might make me even happier.” She moves her hips, rubbing herself against my hard cock.

“Then you shall have it. But first—” I get to my knees and take her hand, then slide the ring onto her finger.

She stares at it as I free my cock and pull her panties off. “It’s so big and sparkly. Wow. And I love the opals along the sides. They’re my favorite.”

“I know.” I run the tip of my cock along her entrance, then slide into her. Pleasure rockets through me, and when she yanks me down for another kiss, I know the bond between us is something that will last for all time.

“I love you, Kaz.” She rocks against me, showing me how much she needs me as I start a hard, steady rhythm. “I’m yours.”

“I’ve been yours before we ever met.” I kiss her, sealing my heart to her with a kiss. She’s everything to me. And soon, she’ll be my bride.

Just the thought of her in a traditional uchikake makes me warm all over. God, what a beautiful bride she’ll be.

“I can’t wait to be your wife.” She kisses me, and we spend the next hour on the lawn making love, making plans, and planning our new life together.



“You’ve been engaged a week, not even married yet, and I already can’t seem to get you to focus.” Toru groans and rubs

the bridge of his nose.

“I’m focused.” I shrug, then finish tying my kimono. “Do you think Mei will like the black or the gray better?”

He rolls his eyes. “She’ll love anything you choose. How’s her shopping? I get constant texts from Ritsu, Ken, and the other six you sent to guard her. I think they’re bored out of their minds hanging around a dress shop.” His phone pings right on cue.

“She’s at the final fitting. She has a traditional kimono for the wedding and then a Western dress for the reception. Where are we on the planning?”

“Everything’s ready. Hideo’s flight is on time. Our car will pick him up in about half an hour. The florist is doing flower stuff, and the caterers have taken over the kitchen. Tomorrow morning, this place is going to be completely full of food and flowers.”

“Those are two of Mei’s favorite things.” I smile as I decide to go with the traditional gray. I’ll wear a black tux for the reception.

“Yeah, the gray.” Toru nods as I set my selection aside and change back into my regular clothes.

“How are our friends the Itos?” I stride from my closet with Toru at my heels.

“In total disarray. Several of their remaining soldiers are jumping ship and looking to worm their way into the other families. We’ve even had a couple ask to join us.”

“Take them.” I shrug.

“What?”

“Keep them at a low level and have our seasoned men watch them, but why not? It will only burn Isamu more when he realizes I’ve stolen them out from under him.”

Toru nods. “That’s actually a pretty good idea. Done. Oh, and the other families have all accepted your invitations to the wedding. They’ll be here.”

I figured they would. After what I've done to Ito, I doubt any of them want to so much as hint that they could be against me. "Good. We'll have peace among the families. That's what we all want. Now that Ito has fallen from his perch, we'll be able to expand and fill that space."

"When are you going to end him?" Toru asks as we stride into my office.

"I haven't decided." I text Mei a quick "*I love you and miss you.*" She responds with a smiling cat face and then a heart.

"Might want to make it soon and put him out of his misery." Toru snorts a laugh.

I pour two drinks. "After the wedding, we'll handle business. Until then, let's celebrate." I hand him a glass. "To my bride."

"To you finally settling down and starting a family." He gives a wry smile then drains his glass.

"You better watch your tone." I clap him on the shoulder. "Or Cupid might hear you and come after you next."

"Never." He pours himself another drink as I sit and text Mei again. "*Done yet?*"

"*On the way back. And I got some extra fun things for under my kimono.*"

I groan and sit back in my chair. My little rebel. I can't wait to see what she's cooked up for our wedding night. All I know for sure is that I'm a lucky, lucky man.





“Thank you for everything.” I give Brigitte a hug and kiss on the cheek. When I called her in a panic to find out what I needed for our last-second wedding, she told me not to worry. That she would have it handled. I wasn’t sure she’d be able to pull it off, but she more than came through. I couldn’t be happier.

“It was my pleasure. I’ll be there first thing in the morning to help you get into the dresses.”

“You’ll stay for the wedding and reception?” I ask. I’ve enjoyed hanging out with Brigitte and could see us easily becoming friends. That’s not something I’ve ever had before. It’s nice to finally experience it. My life here is going to be so different. I can already see that.

“I would love to.” She kisses me on the cheek before I head out of the dress shop. Three blacked-out SUVs are waiting for me. One of Kazuo’s men opens the back door to the one in the middle for me to slide into before we take off toward home.

My Kazuo is not messing around when it comes to security. I don’t leave the estate without a fleet of armed guards around me. It seems a bit like overkill, but I’m not going to question it for now. Not with everything that’s going on with the Itos. I know having me protected puts Kazuo at ease. Besides, my mind is on a bigger issue at the moment. My father. He should be landing at any moment. That means I won’t have too much time with my fiancé before my father is here.

I wonder how Kazuo will be in his presence. He usually can't keep his hands off me even when his men are around. I'm curious to see if he will be different when my father is in the room. I'm sure my father isn't going to love that Kazuo and I are sharing a bedroom before being wed, but maybe I'm wrong. He was the one that sent me to Kazuo, so his old school ways might be changing.

As soon as the SUV rolls to a stop at the front of the house, I leap out. I can't wait another second to see my Kazuo. I'm not used to being away from him for long periods of time, though I had to put my foot down about him seeing me in my wedding kimono before the ceremony.

"Mei, wait!" One of the guards calls after me.

"We're inside the gate!" I shout back before I fling open the front door, almost hitting Kazuo on in the process. He was coming to meet me. Of course he was.

"Are you giving them a hard time, little rebel?"

"Never." I jump into Kazuo's arms. He catches me easily, his hands gripping my ass. "I only give you a hard time," I say before I kiss him. "Take me upstairs," I demand. "We don't have much time."

"You think you're in charge?" He nips at my bottom lip.

"When it comes to getting my way, I do." I smirk, but he doesn't take me upstairs. Instead, he carries me toward his office.

"Out," he orders Toru, who shakes his head at us, but I see him hiding his smile. Kazuo kicks the door closed behind us, carrying me over to the sofa. He sets me down. I scramble to my knees and go for his belt. "Greedy. Does shopping for dresses turn you on?"

"Thinking about our wedding night does." I reach into his slacks and pull his cock out.

"Little rebel," he warns.

"What?" I huff. "You never let me. I want to." I peek up at him through my lashes. He runs his fingers through my hair before

he grips a fistful.

“Open your mouth,” he orders.

I do as I’m told, opening wide for him. Slowly he guides his cock to my lips. He never lets me do this, always wanting inside of me more than anything. But this time, I want to taste him.

He groans when I wrap my mouth around him and start to suck. His hold on my hair tightens as he keeps me in place while he thrusts in and out of my mouth. I hollow out my cheeks and suck as hard as I can.

I grow so wet that my panties start to stick to me. I press my thighs together, needing something to help ease the ache there. I can’t help getting turned on by the sounds coming from Kazuo and the lust all over his face.

“No!” I cry out when he suddenly yanks back, taking his cock from me. I try to protest, but Kazuo is too quick. The next thing, I know he has me pinned down to the sofa. The sound of my panties being ripped from my body is loud in the room before he thrusts his cock all the way inside me.

I come instantly, my sex locking down around his cock. He groans my name as he comes with me. His seed spills deep inside of me.

“I come inside of you. You got that, little rebel?”

I nod. “Yes.” I smile up at him, quite pleased with myself. I love that I get him so worked up that he can’t control himself.

“Good girl.” He gives me a sweet kiss that ends way too soon when a knock sounds at the door.

“We have a problem, sir,” Toru calls. Kazuo pulls out of me, some of his cum spilling in the process. As he always does, he leans back and watches. “Sir?” Toru calls again.

Kazuo grunts but stands from the sofa. He rights his clothes before he pulls my dress down and picks up my torn panties from the floor. He stuffs them into his pocket. I sit up and smooth my hair down to make myself look a little more put together.

“Come in,” he calls. “What is it? Has Hideo landed?”

“Yes, he did, but there was an ambush.”

“What!?” I gasp, jumping up from my seat. “Where is my father? Is he...” I can’t even finish. Kazuo wraps his arm around me, pulling me into his side.

“Answer her,” Kazuo demands. I can feel his rage even as he holds me gently.

“He was taken, but he is still alive,” Toru says. “I’m sure we’ll be getting a call soon.”

“We’re not waiting for a call. I want everyone ready to leave in five minutes, except for Mei’s normal guards.”

“I’m coming with you!” I screech.

“No.”

I try to protest, but Kazuo tosses me over his shoulder. “Don’t you dare!” I scream as he carries me up the stairs. “Kazuo! Put me down.” I wiggle, trying to fight my way free, but it’s useless. He doesn’t stop until we’re in the bedroom. He sets me on the bed.

I try to jump up, but he’s faster, as always. Before I know what is happening, a cuff is around my wrist while another latches to the bed frame.

“I know door locks don’t typically stop you. I don’t have a choice, little rebel. This is the only way I can keep you safe.”

“Kazuo, unlock me right this second.” I seethe at him. “It’s *my* father!”

“I love you.” He grips my face with both hands and lays a hard kiss on me. I try to fight it at first, but soon I’m kissing him back.

“Don’t do this,” I say when he breaks the kiss.

“It’s for your own good.”

“Kazuo!” I shout as he takes a few steps backwards out of my reach.

“I’ll be back soon.”

Kuzi jumps up onto the bed, plopping down next to me.

“I love you,” he says again.

“I love you too, asshole!” I scream after him when the door shuts. The lock clicks into place. My eyes drop to the cuff on my wrist. I know getting out of this thing won’t be the only hurdle I have to overcome. I’m sure Kazuo has his men outside the door too. I sigh, knowing this is going to take longer than I was hoping.

He should have just taken me with him. I think he forgets it’s not only locks that I’m good at escaping.



“*D*esperately foolish.” I grit my teeth as I speed toward the outskirts of the city. “This is Rai’s doing. Isamu would never move against Hideo.”

“I agree.” Toru finishes loading shells into his semi-automatic shotgun, then checks the magazines on his pistols. “But people do foolish things when they’re backed into a corner.”

“I should’ve finished them off. My mercy is what’s led to this. Allowing them to live was a mistake.”

“I don’t think of it like that.” Toru glances at the column of vehicles behind us.

“How so?” I take a hard right and skirt some warehouses along an industrial complex.

“By taking Hideo, the Itos have sealed their fates. If anyone in the families felt a little squeamish about your strikes against them, that squeamishness is gone. They’ll see the Itos as a threat, now more than ever. A wild card, popping off half-cocked and doing damage to the power structure.”

Toru’s right. This is the nail in the coffin for the Itos. Even so, I never would’ve used Hideo as bait. Especially not now that he’s going to be my father-in-law.

“We have to bring him back alive. I won’t let Mei down.”

Toru shrugs. “You know how Hideo is. He might’ve killed them all already.”



That brings a wry smile to my lips. “Like grabbing a tiger by the tail.”

“Pretty much.”

We roll up to a chain link fence with a single guard shack. As soon as the Ito security personnel file out, the soldiers behind me start firing. I hit the gas, busting the gate down as I speed forward. Only one of the large storage and unloading facilities has cars around it. The Itos always were a bunch of obvious motherfuckers.

“There.” I jerk my chin, then screech to a halt by one of the loading docks. “Let’s go.” I grab my pistols and make sure my knives are concealed but ready.

The line of SUVs behind me spread out, blocking the road for anyone coming or going.

Toru and I get out, the heat of battle already warming our veins. I motion for him to move around to the right with a contingent of soldiers while I enter through the open loading bays.

The gunfire is immediate, shots shattering the glass in our vehicles and whizzing past. Plastering myself to the side of the building, I motion for my soldiers to throw grenades. The first round is flash bangs, so I close my eyes. Once they explode, the shooting from inside stops, and then I toss two percussion grenades in at once.

“Down!” I yell to my men. We all hit the deck as the explosions destroy whatever resistance remains.

As soon as the debris stops flying, I’m on my feet and leading them inside. I fire two rounds into each enemy soldier I see, dead or alive, to ensure they don’t rise again. My men fan out, checking rooms and behind crates for more soldiers. A few shots tell me they found some. But I’m not interested in cleanup. I have to get to Hideo.

A staircase to my right leads to the upper level. Right as I reach it, someone yells as gunshots rain down on us.

“Back up!” I sling one of my men against a crate, saving him from the onslaught as slugs embed into the concrete at our

feet. The rest of my soldiers dive for cover and return fire.

“He’s up top.” Once again, I have Ito cornered. He’s got nowhere to go. I just have to get past his goons at the top of the stairs.

I fire around the corner, doing my best to take them out from below. But I can’t get a good angle. Given the never-ending return fire, I can tell my men can’t either. Fuck.

Just as I’m considering more grenades, I hear screams and even more shots. I peek around the corner to see Toru and his guys busting out the windows along the top of the building and mowing down Ito’s guards.

Fucking hell, it’s a beautiful sight.

“Now!” I rush the stairs, my men right behind me as I dodge a falling body and then shoot my way through a few more.

Once I get to the landing, Toru jumps from one of the windows and tackles a soldier, then pistol whips him with a fucking vengeance. I’d stop to admire his work, but I have bigger concerns.

There’s only one door up here that leads to the offices. Rearing back, I kick it down, then hit the deck as gunshots roar past. On my back, I aim up, dropping man after man. My soldiers pour in, finishing the work as I get to my feet and push all the way through to the back. When I get there, only Hideo, Isamu, and Rai remain at a long conference table.

I wipe the blood splatter from my eyes and give Hideo a bow. “Sensei.”

“About time.” He glances at Rai, who’s holding a gun to his head. “These idiots didn’t even offer me tea.”

Isamu, looking far more tired than I’ve ever seen him, sinks down into one of the leather chairs. “Rai, it’s over.”

“It’s not over. I have what he wants.” He shakes his gun at Hideo.

“You intend to marry my daughter, and this is the welcome I get?” Hideo completely ignores Rai as he upbraids me. “I expected better.”

“My apologies, Hideo. I didn’t intend for this detour. After all, who would be foolish enough to kidnap you?”

He nods slowly. “This is true. I suppose you have a point there. This was rather unexpected, though I admit, seeing all this bloodshed reminds me of my old days.”

I meet Rai’s gaze. “Do you even know who you’re pointing your gun at?”

“I know he’s a dead man if you don’t back the fuck up.”

Hideo sighs heavily, boredom written all over his face.

“Hideo has killed more men like you than he can count. I once saw him end a man with nothing more than a chopstick. He’s the reason the Yakuza is feared the world over. He’s the reason no one fucks with us—not the Russians, not the Italians, not even the Triad. But you think you’re going to kill him like this? With this sort of dishonor?” I might actually laugh at Rai’s foolishness, if not for the gun he’s pointing at my soon-to-be father-in-law.

“Rai, please. We ... we made a mistake. All of this—” Isamu waves a hand. “Pride. Pride before the fall.” He looks up at his son. “You’ve led this family to ruin.”

“Me?” Rai shakes his head. “I’ve started a new era for the Itos! Once I kill these two, we’ll be able to—”

“I brought cookies!” Mei’s voice cuts through Rai’s nonsense, and she even pushes through the hardened men at my back. “They’re leftover from this morning, but I promise they’re so good. Sesame seed!”

I grit my teeth. I’m going to kill her personal guard when I get out of here.

Rai’s mouth drops open, his gun wobbling. “What the fuck is a woma—”

My knife is in his throat before he can finish his question. Then I spin and yank Mei into my arms, shielding her from what I know is coming.

Rai drops to his knees as Hideo calmly relieves him of his gun, presses it to Isamu’s head, and pulls the trigger.

Hideo stands, brushes himself off, and says, “I’ll take a cookie, daughter. I didn’t know you could bake. Your new husband will appreciate that skill, I’m certain.”

## **EPILOGUE**

“Sakura!” My husband’s voice bellows throughout the house. A giggle comes from under the sink, making me smile.

I open the cabinet to see Kuzi’s yellow eyes peering through the darkness as he hides with Sakura. I slip a cookie inside. A tiny hand with purple painted nails slips out a few inches to take it. I quickly close the cabinet back as Kazuo comes waltzing into the kitchen.

“This is your fault,” he grumbles and reaches for me. His fingers sink into my hair, tilting my head back to lay a deep, possessive kiss on me. His other hand rubs my baby bump that popped out a few days ago. With Sakura, it took forever to show, but this time I’m only four months along and already showing. This baby boy is going to be as big as his daddy. “You’ve taught her your rebellious ways.”

“You’re welcome.” I smirk. “No one will ever keep our baby girl locked away.”

“This is true.” A smile pulls at his lips. He’s full of it. He loves that Sakura is crafty. The girl can pop out of nowhere and get out of anything. Her crib was a joke. She mastered getting out of that thing in no time. The timer for my next batch of cookies starts to go off, distracting me from my thoughts.

Kazuo grabs one of the mitts and opens the oven for me as I finish setting up my tea tray. “Boo!” Sakura screeches before jumping out with Kuzi in her arms. Her little face is covered in

cookie crumbs. I'm pretty sure I see a few little crumbs on Kuzi's face as well.

"That's it." Kazuo drops the tray of cookies onto the counter. Sakura lets out a squeal and takes off running. Kazuo chases after her. A few of the guards have to jump out of their way. The sounds of Sakura's laughter ring through the house, making my heart happy.

My Kazuo is a wonderful husband, but he's something else altogether when it comes to our baby girl. He is the absolute best dad. As much as I love my father, I didn't always love how he raised me. Kazuo is more hands-on. He's willing to show our daughter affection and love. He truly lets her be herself. I didn't think I could love him any more, but seeing him with our daughter proved me wrong.

I use the spatula to place some of the fresh cookies onto my tray before I add the kettle of hot water and carry the tray out to the back patio where my father is sitting in the warm sun.

"I've got fresh sesame cookies," I say, setting the tray on the table.

While I might not love some of the ways my father raised me, things have changed over the years. I'm not sure if it's because he's older or if Sakura has had some effect on him. All I know is that he's different with her than he was with me. I'm so thankful for that. I love how close they are.

"I get all the carbs while I'm here." He snags one of the sesame cookies off the tray while I make his tea.

"You know you can have carbs at home too if you wish." I'll never understand the control my stepmother has over that house.

I suppose the kitchen is really the only place she has it. I haven't seen her since I left home. She never comes with my father on his visits. I'm surprised since he seems to be becoming more frequent. Honestly, I don't understand their relationship at all.

"Probably for the best this way." He snags another cookie off the tray.

“Why did you marry her?” I ask. I’m curious how he ended up with my stepmother. It doesn’t make sense that he was so good at pairing Kazuo and me together but not when it came to his own relationship. My father somehow knew Kazuo and I would be a perfect fit without us ever meeting. It doesn’t make sense that he put himself into a loveless marriage.

“Sachi’s life wasn’t easy. She needed protection, and I needed a mother for my daughter.” I stare at him. Sachi doesn’t have an affectionate bone in her body.

“I know she was terrible at it.” He sighs. “I thought she’d be better at it than I am, but I was wrong.”

“You were wrong?” I repeat. Did he just say that?

“Grief does that to you. I knew I’d never love Sachi. My heart was safe, but she was more broken than I realized back then. I was drawing on my own guilt.”

“Over Mom?” He never speaks of her, though pictures of her still hang in the house.

“I can fight many things, but cancer isn’t one of them.”

I reach over to take his hand. The sorrow in his eyes breaks my heart for him. I don’t want to think of a world without my Kazuo. “Kazuo gives you what I could not.”

“He was your way of making it up to me?”

He nods.

“Thank you for sending me here.” I give his hand a squeeze.

“He’s gonna catch me!” Sakura screams, running out of the house. In the blink of an eye, my father moves, sweeping Sakura up into his arms and into his lap. Kazuo comes strolling out of the back door with Kuzi beside him. It’s not long before Kuzi jumps onto the table.

“I’ve caught you now.” Dad starts to tickle Sakura. She bursts into a fit of giggles, stealing a cookie in the process. My heart melts seeing them together.

“I see you’re not quick enough,” I tease my husband.



“That’s where you’re wrong, little rebel.” He plucks me right out of my chair into his arms. “You’re babysitting,” he shouts over his shoulder to my dad.

“I’m not a baby!” Sakura shouts back.

“She’s growing up fast.” I wrap my arms around Kazuo’s neck as he carries me up the stairs to our bedroom.

“Don’t worry. There will be more.” He drops me onto the bed.

“You’re going to keep me knocked up for years, aren’t you?” I go for his belt.

“You know you want it. Always greedy for more.” I lick my lips.

“For you I am.”

“Only for me.” He grips my chin. “Pregnant or not, I’ll still spank your little ass.”

“Good.” I smirk, making him smile.

I love this man with everything I am. I wouldn’t change a single thing that put me on the path to him. All of my rebellious ways led me straight to my perfect match.



More MINK is coming soon!

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## ALSO BY MINK

### Treasured

He's an art thief. She's a mafia man's daughter. She's also kinda clumsy ... With broken ancient vases and a grumpy hero turned mushy for his woman, these two are a perfect match.

### Christmas Crush & Christmas Grump

This Christmas in Reindeer Valley is sure to steam up your Kindle. A second chance romance plus a grumpy/sunshine romance all set in the same small town?

Sign me up!

### Married to My Stalker

I've watched her every move from the moment I first saw her. She was irresistible. Still is. Quinn is the one I never saw coming. She's so trusting—running into my arms as soon as I get home. Now she's my wife, and I haven't stopped watching her. I can't. My line of work makes it dangerous to be involved with me, much less married to me.

But she doesn't know that part of my life, and I never intend to show her my ugly side. The problem is, no matter how carefully I treat her, my dark side tries to come out. It's not enough to watch her anymore. I have to control her, to put my hands on her, to make her whimper and call my name.

I stop myself. At least, I try to. Until she pushes for more. More of me, more of the darkness that I've been concealing from her. It's like she wants all of me, not just the parts I've let her see.

When danger comes knocking at our door, I can't hide my true self any longer. But when she sees what I'm capable of, will she still run into my open arms?

MINK's Note: Get your kitty and your cocoa for this sweet tale of unconditional love.

### Plump

My city is at peace, the war between the bosses put to rest. I'm on top, but I still have to keep my eyes open for trouble. Trouble comes in the form of a runaway who takes a job dancing at my club. Thing is, she isn't meant for the stage. Diamond is meant *just* for me. She's got curves I want to sink my teeth into, and she's as innocent as she is sexy.

I love that about her, but I hate the men in her life who told her she wasn't beautiful, who told her she wasn't the right size or the right shape. **Everything** about my Diamond is perfect, and I'll spend the rest of my life proving it to her.

When I find out who she really is, that's when things get even more dangerous. But it doesn't matter, because Diamond is all mine. I'll go to war for her, and I'll happily destroy anyone who tries to take her from me—even her own father.

### Obsessed Love

He's fresh out of prison. She pulls him over. So, naturally, he puts her in his trunk and takes her home to make her the queen of his illegal empire. Nice.

### Crazy Love

He has a screw loose because of a head injury a while back. But he still knows his true love when he sees her. If only her mouthy cat—whom he can hear—would stop distracting him with all its sassy comebacks!

### Claiming His Kitten

He wants her father's fortune and will go to any lengths to steal it out from under her. But, let's be honest, he's kidding himself. What he really wants is *her*.

### Vetting His Kitten

A bad man who goes all warm and cuddly for his one true love. Gaaaahhhh, I love this one!

### Wrecked

He knows how to fight, but can he learn to protect the one woman who's ever made him feel hope?

### Nanny Tempts the Beast

She needs a job. He needs a nanny. And then he needs only *her*.

### Unforgettable

Amnesia romance with a sassy kitty and a tantalizing mystery? What's more MINK than that?

### Bodyguard's Obsession

He's supposed to protect her, but he ends up needing to stay *very* close to her. For, ya know, *safety*. \*wink wink\*

### His Clever Kitten

She takes him hostage to save her kitty cat shop. It just so happens he's a mafia boss who'll do anything to stay locked up tight just for her.

### His to Keep

A bodyguard's work is never done, especially when he can't keep his eyes off his client.

### 119 Kitty Lane

*MINK takes a trip to Cherry Falls in this sweet romance.*

### Santa Material

A big bear of a Santa and the handy woman he loves. Spoiler Alert: He's going to stuff her full of Christmas cheer.

### Taming His Bride

Book 4 of the Blushing Brides Series.

### Stealing His Bride

Book 3 of the Blushing Brides Series.

### Claiming His Bride

Book 2 of the Blushing Brides Series.

### Knocking Up His Bride

Book 1 of the Blushing Brides Series.

Four brides, four rough men with a soft spot for the women they love.

### Under His Spell

A haunted house, a ghost story of lost love, and a brand new love blooming under a full moon. This spooky sweet story is sure to get your blood racing for all the right

reasons.

**Beauty Tempts the Beast**

Revenge is his life's work, but when he finds his Beauty in the heart of an enemy, will he be up for a career change?

**Loan Shark's Obsession**

He knows priceless objects when he sees them. So when he sees her, he *knows*.

**His Stolen Bride**

Her first husband never touched her. He's dead. Now she belongs to Santino, and there will be much, *much* touching.

**His Stolen Princess**

They were meant to be ... until they weren't. So, he steals her. Logical. Also, there's a cat.

**Stalking Her Sweetly**

Who's stalking whom?

**Hitman's Heart**

He's a badass who kills without remorse. She's a good girl who gets caught in the crosshairs. He saves her, but can he keep her?

**His Secret Treasure**

He says artifacts belong in a museum. She says he stole an ancient box that belongs to her. Can they come to terms over her box?

**My Hero's Secret Baby**

He's a hero to her, the boogeyman to everyone else. Can they have a future together?

**His Tiger Queen**

She's a princess in a heavily guarded tower. He's the prince next door. Did I mention there's also a pet tiger?

**His Virgin Heiress**

She's a thief. He keeps her safe. But can she give up jewel heists for love?

**Cuffed Love**

MINK's personal favorite. Seriously. I love this book.

**Stuffed**

Stuffies, hitmen, true love, and accidental homicide? MINK at her finest.

**His Sweetest Sin**

He's a priest, not a sinner ... Until he sees her.

**Locking Her Down**

She broke into an animal shelter. He's the only one who can help her, but this attorney knows what he wants in return (hint: it's not justice.)

**Marco's Girl**

Marco is the bad boy prince of a mafia empire, but his heart is set on a darling good girl.

**Pop-up Love**

Mobsters, mayhem, a Hallmark movie, and a pop-up shop full of love? Yes.

**Beauty and the Boss**

She wants to bring her cat to work. He wants to bend her over his desk. Win-win.

**His Virgin Queen**

He killed her husband and took her for himself.

**His Deadly Darling**

She's spicy. He's determined. Together, they're unstoppable.

**Hitman's Prey**

He always seemed so nice ... (and hot).

**Snow Angel**

She wants to beat him in the lights competition; he just wants her. This Christmas is lit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MINK writes sweet and salty romances that always satisfy with a happily ever after.

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