



# RESISTING MR. GRANVILLE

*USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**SAM MARIANO**

*BLURRED LINES SERIES*

# Resisting Mr. Granville

a forbidden romance

By Sam Mariano

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## Trigger warning:

This book contains references to sexual assault, so if you think you will find that triggering, this book may not be the best fit for you.

Please also note, **this is not a dark romance**, it is a *forbidden romance with taboo elements*. It is also the found family trope. That is a crucial element of this story, even if it presents in a rather unconventional way.

There may be some lingering flavor of dark romance in here since that's what I usually write, but the real world was dark enough while I was writing this one. I needed to write something a bit healthier in my fictional world to cleanse my palate.

I made up for the lack of darkness with heaps of sexual tension and many, many orgasms, so get ready.

I hope you enjoy hanging out with the Granvilles! :)

# Dedication:

For the cycle breakers.

# Chapter one

Kennedy

*Please don't be the one to open the door. Please be at work.*

I hold my breath as a tall, dark, and handsome shadow grows larger on the other side of the frosted glass. A chill passes over me as I wait on the front porch, one that has nothing to do with the nippy fall weather.

I suck in a breath as the handle turns.

I had to muster every bit of courage to come here tonight, but whichever one is on the other side, I won't let him see my discomfort.

Still, I hope it's Jet.

Even Jonathan.

Just please, please, please don't be Milo.

When the door opens, my heart sinks down into the pit of my stomach.

Milo Granville.

My mom's ex-boyfriend.

The sexiest man I've ever encountered.

The man who nearly took my virginity before I came to my senses and kicked him out of the apartment.

I swear I can see the memory of that hot summer night reflected in his ice blue eyes as he gazes at me from the doorway, his pitch black hair carelessly swept aside in an effortlessly handsome style, a dimple in his cheek from that up-to-no-good smirk on his face.

"Well, isn't this a nice surprise."



*No.*

I pretend to be unaffected as I tip my chin up just a bit and tell him, "I'm here to see your son."

His lazy smirk doesn't leave his face. If he's bothered by it, I certainly can't tell. "Which one?"

His voice is dry and suggestive. I sense an implication that I'm so easy I could be here to sleep with either of them, even though I've never slept with anyone. Even though *he's* the one who came over when he knew my mom wasn't home, who offered to help me with my homework one night and started touching my thigh beneath the table.

Of course, I brushed it away.

That time.

He wore me down, though.

Movie nights with my mother right there on the couch on the other side of him, but he'd let a daring finger caress the outside of my bare thigh beneath my nightgown.

And then the night she worked late, and he came over early and caught me coming out of the shower.

The way he stopped in the hall and we locked eyes.

The heat that spread through me instantly as I stood there naked beneath the towel, my hair piled carelessly atop my head, my pussy damp from more than the remnants of shower water.

He walked toward me with sure steps. It was wrong what he was doing, but I couldn't muster the strength to stop him as he took the towel out of my hands and opened it up. As his gaze raked over me there in the dim hall lighting, appraising every glistening inch of my naked body.

*Beautiful*, he'd said.

I felt beautiful.

I felt fucking radiant.

I was also on fire, gripped by lust I'd never known before. When his massive palm covered my breast, I couldn't breathe. When he walked me back into the bedroom that belonged to my mother and shoved me back on the bed, I didn't ask him to stop.

I could have. I'm sure he would have.

But since I didn't, he knelt on the floor and spread my legs. His mouth latched onto my pussy and every last bit of decency fell off of me with the same ease as the towel we'd left behind on the hallway floor.

He ate my pussy with abandon, gripping my thighs so hard I had bruises the next day. I experienced pleasure I'd never felt when I touched myself in bed at night, and after he made me come on his face, when I was lying on my mom's bed with my heart pounding, my body weak from release, I didn't want it to stop.

When he unzipped his pants and took out his massive cock. When he stroked it and gazed down at my naked body. When he climbed on top of me and brought the tip of his cock to my pussy.

I didn't even think I needed it anymore after that orgasm, but as soon as I felt his flesh against mine, that fire ignited again. I wanted him to push it inside me. I wanted to feel every steely inch of him, feel myself gripping him tight. I wanted to know what it was like...

But I couldn't.

My mother and I had never been close. She'd gotten knocked up by accident and sent me to live with my dad for the first two years of my life. He sent me back to her when he met a woman he wanted to marry, someone who wasn't trashy like her and who didn't want the trash he'd created *with* her living in her shiny new home.

My mom had a revolving door of burnouts and losers. She mostly used them for whatever she could get out of them. I didn't know what she was getting from Milo, but I knew she didn't love him. I don't think she's even capable of love. She certainly never loved me.

I don't love her either, but I still couldn't go through with it. Milo wasn't her typical loser boyfriend. He had a nice house and a good job and two sons—one about my age, one a few years older. She believed she had some kind of future with him, so even if it wasn't love, I couldn't bring myself to do that to her.

I wanted the pleasure he offered me that night, if for no other reason to spend just a small pocket of time outside the lonely hell of my own life, but I knew it wasn't right.

I made him stop.

Made him leave.

I showered again to try to wash his masculine scent off of me, but I still smelled him all over my body. Still felt his bruising, passionate grip on my thighs as he devoured my pussy.

That night when I touched myself in bed, it was him I thought of. I imagined what it would have been like in my twin bed with my face pressed into the bedding, Milo on his knees behind me pounding his massive cock into my virgin pussy.

I wanted it.

God, how I wanted it.

Instead, I did the right thing—or the rightest thing I could do after what had already happened.

I told my mother.

I expected her to be upset even if she didn't love him. She has a tendency toward pettiness, so even if

she didn't especially care about him, she wouldn't want me to have him.

I guess some small part of me thought maybe she would even be a little horrified that a man she had brought into my life had put his hands on me.

Maybe it hadn't been an abusive, predatory kind of thing since I'm over the age of consent and I didn't say no, but he had been the aggressor. I never tried to get his attention; *he* was interested and he let me know it. Sometimes he even messed with me in front of her, and I know she hadn't been there when he touched my thigh under the table, and she didn't notice when he'd touched me during movie night even though she was sitting on the same couch, but she'd heard the comments he made about my skimpy sleep shorts, she'd seen the way his gaze lingered on my chest when I came out of the bathroom after a shower in my PJs without a bra on.

There were signs to see if she was paying any attention.

But maybe she wasn't.

She'd never paid attention to me before, why did I think she would start now?

Her response had been anger, all right—anger at me. She called me a slut, a whore, grabbed her purse off the ground and flung it at my head. I left the apartment before things got more physical and returned home late, once I knew she'd be asleep.

I was afraid to go home at all, but I was only 17 at the time. I didn't have anywhere else to go.

I'm 18 now, but I still have to finish up senior year of high school, so I'm stuck living with her until graduation. I have a part-time job, but I don't make enough for my own place. Even if I could afford rent, I wouldn't have any money to live on.

I just have to finish out the school year, and then I can get out of her house for good.

If I can finish the year strong, maybe I can even get a full ride to a state college. I'm close to qualifying for a merit scholarship, it's just chemistry I'm struggling with.

Which brings me here, to Milo Granville's front door.

His son Jet is brilliant. He's been building robots in his spare time since middle school. When he offered to help me study so I could bring my B in chemistry up to an A, I couldn't pass up the opportunity.

Now, standing on the front porch trying not to wither beneath the scorching gaze of Milo Granville, I'm not sure I made the right choice.

*Is it worth inviting this temptation into my life?*

College is a long shot, anyway. Even with scholarships, how will I make enough money to support myself? My mom can hardly support herself, she'll never help me. I could ask my dad, but we haven't talked in years. I can't imagine reaching out to him for the first time just to ask for money for school.

I want to give myself the best shot at success once I get out of this crappy town, though. I have to bet on myself, even if the odds are stacked against me.

Meeting Milo's gaze, I give a pretty convincing performance of someone unaffected by him, someone who hasn't cried out in rapture as his skillful tongue branded her pussy with a scorching, sensual heat.

"Can I come in?" I ask levelly.

Smirk still in place, Milo takes a step back and gestures for me to come inside.

I'm hit by a wall of invisible, cozy warmth as I step over the threshold into his house. As he closes the door behind me, I try to tamp down a wave of panic. Reasonably, I know I can leave anytime I want to, but

when the door closes and he engages the lock, it feels ominous.

I spin around and look at him, my brow furrowed.

In our neighborhood, we generally keep the door locked so junkies can't break in and steal our things. I mean, they still could, but they're not exactly go-getters. Mostly, if they come across a locked door, they just move on to an easier target unless they're truly desperate.

But Milo and his sons live in a nice part of town. The kind of neighborhood where every house has an expensive car parked in the driveway, where lawns are well-manicured by professional lawn services because the people who live here can't be bothered to mow their own grass.

We're standing in a foyer, after all. *A foyer*. Intricate wrought-iron bars line the stairs on either side of us. There's a *chandelier* hanging over my head, for Christ's sake.

This might be a nice neighborhood to steal from, but it's one where you'd definitely get caught. Every house has an alarm and one of those doorbells that has a camera lens, most even have security systems with multiple cameras. It's the type of place that probably has a neighborhood watch.

I don't think Milo is afraid of anyone breaking in and stealing what's his, but he still locks the door.

He doesn't explain, either.

Before I can say anything else, Jet walks out of the kitchen eating a bowl of cereal. He brightens a little when he sees me.

"Hey, Kennedy."

"Hi," I answer, a sudden wave of shyness coming over me.

I know he doesn't know what happened between me and his dad, but I feel his fingerprint bruises all over my body again. Surely the evidence of that hot summer night must be plain to see from the blush on my face, the tension in the air.

Jet doesn't seem to notice any of it. "You ready to get started?"

I nod, dropping my book bag from my back and hoisting it on one shoulder. "Yep."

"Great." Jet smiles. "Let me put this in the sink and we can head up to my room."

"Your room?" The words slip out before I can stop them. My blush deepens. I don't know why, but I figured we would study in the kitchen or something, somewhere less... private.

He doesn't seem to notice my reluctance. He comes back out of the kitchen a few seconds later and flashes me a smile before wordlessly heading up the stairs, clearly expecting me to follow.

*All right, then.*

I guess we're going to his room.

My steps are a bit slower than his, so he gets to the top of the stairs before me.

"Have fun," Milo calls up after me, his voice like a taunt.

I glance back at him.

Our gazes lock just like they did that night in the hall.

The amusement glittering in his brilliant blue eyes fades, and the glint hardens before he adds lower, maybe just for me to hear, "Not too much fun, though."

My heart sinks.

I nearly miss a step.

I grab onto the railing to catch myself, my face flushing after the near-fall.

“Careful,” Jet says, oblivious to his father’s hold on me.

I shake it off and hurry up the rest of the stairs.

I tell myself I won’t look back, but as we go around the rotunda at the top of the staircase, I glance down just to see if Milo’s watching me.

And he is.



## Chapter two

Kennedy

It's late by the time I'm leaving the Granville house.

Chemistry tutoring took longer than expected. I felt dumber than I wanted to, but Jet has such an effortless way of understanding all this stuff, I think it might be impossible not to feel dumb when you're doing schoolwork with him.

Jet and I never talked much in school, but tonight we got to know each other a little better. He slipped up and told me about his crush on Brylee White—an impossible conquest because everyone knows Brylee only goes for guys who are already taken.

It's a shame because the way he talks about her, I can tell he really, truly likes her. He notices things about her, little things that someone who wasn't infatuated would look right past.

As I'm gathering up my books, I say with a little smile on my face, "Hey, maybe you'll luck out and it'll get back to her that I was over at your house tonight. If she thinks I'm into you, you might actually have a chance."

I'm only joking, but his eyes widen and from the look on his face, you'd expect a glowing light bulb to flash over his head. "That's kind of brilliant, actually."

I glance back at him uncertainly as I swing my bag over my shoulder. "It is?"

He nods eagerly, already a step or two ahead as he stands and walks over to me. "You're not seeing anyone, are you?"

"Well, no..."

He grabs my forearm excitedly. “Would you tell people at school tomorrow that we hung out tonight? Don’t tell them I was tutoring you, just pretend we’re hanging out because maybe you like me or something.”

“Whoa, hold on...” I shake my head, not totally comfortable with the deception.

“I mean, most tutors would charge you for their time,” he adds, apparently noticing my reluctance.

I stiffen, but he’s not wrong, and I can’t pay him—not with dollars, anyway.

It’s a rude thing to say, so I frown at him in disapproval. He scratches the back of his neck, looking a bit sheepish about the light blackmail he just attempted.

But he’s not wrong, and that’s what I’m coming back to.

I may not always make the right choices in life, but I do try my best. I suppose if he’s going to tutor me and help *me* out, it wouldn’t kill me to return the favor.

“Are you sure about this?” I ask him. “Do you really want a girl who’s only interested in you if you’re unavailable?”

“It’s not her fault,” he says, causing my eyes to widen. He then proceeds to launch into a psychological evaluation of her behavior and the likely causes. I’m sure it’s interesting to a certain kind of person, but by the time he’s finished, my eyes are glazing over and I just want to go home.

“Fine.”

“Really?” he asks like a kid on Christmas.

I shrug. “I guess. If you want me to pretend date you so some skanky girl—”

“Hey.”

The way he scowls at me, I can see she's already the mother of his children in his vision of the future, so I don't bother reasoning with him.

I shrug again. "Yeah. Whatever. I'll do it."

His guard drops, and he grins at me. "Thanks, Kennedy. You're the best."

I head for his bedroom door. It's open now. It was shut when we first came in, but Milo popped in to ask Jet something while we were studying. His gaze drifted to me, and, with it, a tsunami of warmth I felt clear down to my toes. Then he left, taking the warmth with him and leaving the bedroom door wide open.

I wonder if he really wanted to talk to Jet or he just wanted to check in on us.

As I make my way out into the hall, I find myself watching for him, expecting him to come into view. I don't realize until I get to the front door without seeing him, I was kind of... hoping to.

Since I have no reason to stay, I hoist my drooping backpack and walk through the door out into the chilly late October evening. It's a bit windy. The leaves crunch beneath my shoes as I make my way to the car.

"Hey, Kennedy."

At the sound of Jet's voice, I turn and look back at him.

He's holding his phone up in front of him. He snaps a picture of me.

"Proof," he explains when I shoot him a funny look.

I roll my eyes, but good-naturedly. He's such a nerd. "Goodnight, Jet."

"Goodnight, Kennedy. I'll see you tomorrow at school."

---

I'm in my bedroom vibing to some music while I study when all of a sudden the headphones are ripped right off my head.

My heart rate kicks up and I instinctively lean away from the danger, but when I turn around, I see it's only my mother. "What the hell?" I demand.

Her eyes widen with annoyance as she holds my headphones hostage. "I asked you a fucking question."

"I obviously didn't hear you," I say, snatching the headphones back but not putting them on. "What do you want?"

"I asked if you've seen my red lipstick."

"No." Irritation cuts my tone short, but Jesus, she doesn't have to be such a pain in the ass.

"Are you sure? I thought I saw it in your room the other day."

"I don't wear red lipstick," I tell her.

Ignoring me, she walks over and starts knocking things over on top of my dresser, looking for the lipstick I never touched and muttering, "I know you have it."

I shake my head and slide my noise-cancelling headphones back on. I secure them over my ears to block out the noise and try to go back to researching for the paper I'm writing, but it's no use. My concentration is broken, and I won't be able to repair it as long as my mother is moving through the room like a fucking cyclone.

Tamping down rage as she tosses things out of my backpack and makes a complete mess of my room, I seek some kind of distraction so I don't absolutely lose it.

Social media is generally a good distraction, so I grab my phone and tap one of my apps.

There are more notifications than I normally have and I haven't even updated it recently. Confusion furrows my brow. I click one of the notifications, a pair of curious emoji eyeballs left as a comment on a photo I don't recognize from the tiny thumbnail.

The picture isn't mine. It's from an account I'm not immediately familiar with, but I'm tagged in it.

When I get a good look at the picture, I realize it must be Jet's. The picture is the one he snapped last night of me walking away and glancing back at him. He worked the filters very well, and the way the moonlight and streetlights are framing me, it's a really excellent shot. The caption reads, "And then she appeared" with a serene-looking emoji.

This picture has considerably more interest than most of his other posts, but giving them a look, I can see why. Jet is brilliant and I'm sure that will pay off for him someday, but not while he's in high school. Most of his posts are inventions or science projects, quotes from brilliant people, and just a lot of totally unrelatable shit.

I shake my head, in awe that this brainy nerd wants Brylee "the train wreck" White.

Well, I told him I would do my part, so I do, leaving a single red heart in a comment on his picture.

Maybe a minute later, a text message from Jet flashes across the top of my phone screen. I tap it and read his message. "Our post is getting a lot of traction. Even more than I expected."

I smile faintly and type back, "Yep. Brylee will be yours in no time."

"I wouldn't go that far," he types back. "It was a good start, but we'll need to work a little harder to sell it. Are you doing anything tonight? I feel like we should take

advantage of the interest and post again. I'm working on a project. Maybe you could help me out with it? That way I could get in some tutoring, as well. You can come for dinner."

My heart beats a little faster as I consider going over to Milo's house for dinner. "Just us, or will everyone be there?"

"My dad will be home, but my brother's out. I like the playful, intimate vibes for our post. We'll find another opportunity to take a shot like that tonight. It will appear organic. It will start to look like we're a couple even before we say anything about it."

*Sure, whatever you say, Jet.*

Honestly, the mood Mom's in tonight, I just want to get out of the house. Any excuse will do.

While she makes a mess of my room, I grab my charge cord and shove it in my oversized purse. The movement grabs Mom's attention, and she whips around to look at me sharply. "Where are you going?"

"Out."

"Where?"

"A friend's house. He needs help with a school project."

"Yeah, I bet he does," she says sarcastically, the implication being that I'm obviously heading out to eat a dick or something.

She'd probably really blow a gasket if she knew where I was actually going. I don't feel like dealing with it, so I'm definitely not going to tell her.

Since I'm leaving, it seems like ransacking my room isn't as fun anymore, so she goes back to the bathroom, complaining loudly about her missing lipstick.

I go to the kitchen to grab my keys off the ceramic strawberry dish where we keep the car keys. When I pick mine up, my gaze catches on a lipstick tube on the counter that seems to have rolled behind the cookie jar.

I grab it and uncap it.

Sure enough, it's red.

I lean back to glance down the hall and see my mother swearing and cursing, growing more and more annoyed as she looks for this lipstick.

My mouth opens, but my voice seems to be stuck in my throat. I could call out and end this fit of annoyance, but...

I don't.

Instead, I slip the lipstick in my handbag and head out of the apartment.

What I told her was true, I never wear red lipstick.

But when I get in my car and pull down my visor, I decide there's a first time for everything. I prime my lips with a nice moisturizing balm, then run the smooth stick of lip color over my full lips and blot.

I never wear red lipstick, but I like the way it looks. I like the way I feel wearing it right now.

I think I'll keep it.

Satisfaction washes over me as I drop the cheap lipstick I was accused of stealing right into my purse. Deepens as I start my car and back out, knowing I'm heading to Milo's house, and knowing how fucking mad my mom would be if she knew.

## Chapter three

Milo

When Jonathan told me this morning he thought there was something going on between Jet and Kennedy, I didn't believe him.

It seemed downright fucking absurd, in fact. I love my youngest son, but if it weren't for the strength of my genes causing him to physically resemble me, I'd be tempted to question whether or not he's even mine. We couldn't be less alike, and there's no way in hell a woman could be attracted to me *and* him.

I stand by that, but I can't deny the way he lit up when her car pulled in the drive tonight. The way she looked with her long curly hair a wild, unruly mess and her lips painted red. She looked like she'd just been fucked, but she was ready to go again.

I like it, but also, *I don't fucking like it.*

I'd like it if she looked like that because she was coming over to see *me*, but my son? Nope, don't like that one fucking bit.

I suppose it makes sense. They're the same age. That's why her lovely little tits are so pert, her ass so tight, her skin so fucking soft that I wake up in the middle of the night sometimes certain I can still feel it on my fingertips.

I knew it was fucking mental to go after her, especially when I only knew her because I'd gone out with her mom a couple of times. I only *kept* seeing her mom because it meant spending time with Kennedy, and her mom was happy to keep seeing me because I paid for everything. And I mean everything. She thought she was so slick whining and complaining about her utility bill



being past due and they were going to shut off the power. I handed over the money without complaint, but not because the thought of Tracey sweating her ass off in the summer heat bothered me.

It was Kennedy. Lovely, beautiful, fucking mouthwatering Kennedy. I wanted her tits in my mouth and her ass cradling my dick, but in the meantime I wanted her to be comfortable, so I made sure she was.

Well, as comfortable as she could be living with that woman, anyway.

Now, she's at my house in her ripped black jeans and her cranberry sweater, her hair wild and free and her lips painted red, and all I can think about is the candy apple ring they would leave around my cock if I could get her alone somehow.

It's a little more sordid now that my son might have a crush on her, but I'll upgrade his fucking robotics lab or something, make up for stealing his girlfriend. Jet wouldn't know what to do with Kennedy, anyway.

I got a taste of her, and it made me want more.

I want to taste her free from the constraints of guilt. I knew she felt bad encroaching on territory she thought of as belonging to someone else, but I'm no one else's territory, and damn sure not her lush mother's.

Jet is busy fine-tuning some solar-powered robot he's working on. I think it's for school, but it could be just for fun. I don't think Kennedy gives a single fuck about robotics, but she curls up on the floor with him and listens patiently as he explains things while he works. She leafs through his instruction booklet and consults the blueprint like she's helping, but I don't think she's contributed a single thing.

After a while, she grows bored of the tinkering and goes over to lie on the couch. Her long curly hair spills over the side and she makes a lovely silhouette as she

lies there with one knee bent, a swatch of her stomach exposed, and her head turned so she can watch Jet work while she tells him about some pop star she admires.

She's so fucking young. *Too* fucking young. I know it logically. It's reason enough to leave her alone even if Jet didn't like her, but I know myself well enough to know neither of those things will stop me.

I've never been shy about taking things I want, but I've never had to take from my own flesh and blood, either.

I had her first, but Jet doesn't know that.

"Kennedy."

Her gaze shoots to me at the sound of her name and she sits up, her body tentative as she remains on the couch, but one summons from abandoning it.

"Yeah?"

"Come in here."

I don't tell her why and she doesn't ask, just rises from the couch and saunters into the kitchen.

I'm standing at the counter, so she comes over and leans a hip on the counter a couple of feet away. "What do you need?"

"You want to help me with dinner?"

The invitation surprises her, but she nods her head. "Sure." She glances at the empty countertop, then back at me. "What are we making?"

"Grilled cheese."

She cocks a skeptical eyebrow. "For dinner?"

I nod, brushing close to her as I approach the refrigerator for some ingredients. "Breakfast for dinner grilled cheese, too. We're really saying 'fuck it' to all the rules."

Kennedy cracks a smile that makes me think she isn't talking about grilled cheese. "Sounds on-brand for you."

I tell her to grab the wheat bread out of the pantry and she does. When she comes back, she asks, "What do you need me to do?"

"You know how to make scrambled eggs?"

"Of course. I make pretty good ones, actually."

My lips quirk. "I bet you do."

Her lovely cheeks flush, but she pretends not to read into it.

Me, I'm not such a gentleman. As I bend down to grab her a skillet out of the bottom cupboard, I let her catch me looking at her legs on my way up.

She avoids my gaze and focuses harder than anyone needs to on untying the bread bag.

I come up behind her, feeling the heat from her body as I press closer than necessary to hand her the pan. "Here you go," I murmur.

"Thank you," she murmurs back, her tone a little uneven.

"Mm-hmm." I reach for that long, thick mass of unruly hair and pull it back over her shoulder. Her breath catches, but she doesn't try to move away. "When I pictured you making me eggs for the first time, I've gotta say, I never thought you'd be wearing all those clothes."

Her breath catches, then rushes out of her. I wait for a response, but she doesn't seem to have one. Instead, she drops the bread tie and opens the egg carton. "I need a fork," she says without looking at me.

I grab her hip and pull her aside just enough so I can open the silverware drawer. Pulling one out, I murmur, "Here you go."

“Thank you,” she murmurs back.

Picking up where I left off before she tried to change the subject, I tell her, “I pictured you bare-assed while you cooked for me. Wearing one of my shirts and my scent all over your body, but nothing else. When you walk toward me with the plates and the fabric moves, I catch a glimpse of your pussy.” I meet her gaze. “Sure gives me an appetite, but not for eggs.”

Flicking a nervous glance in Jet’s direction and a frown of censure in mine, she says, “Could you not?”

I move even closer behind her, sliding my hands around her small waist and pressing a palm to her belly.

“I’m serious,” she says, stealing another glance toward Jet. His back is to us, but she’s too afraid of getting caught to properly enjoy it as my hand slides up toward her tit.

“Didn’t imagine you keeping that shirt on for very long.”

She grabs my roaming hand and pulls it off her, then does her best to crack an egg and pretend to be unaffected. “Let me go before someone sees.”

“Jet?” I question.

She doesn’t answer, but he’s the only one she could mean.

“You’re not seriously starting something with him, are you?”

“So what if I am?” she flings back, glaring at me over her shoulder.

“It’s a little fucked up, don’t you think?”

Her eyes widen. “Are you serious? You used to date my *mom*, so I’m pretty sure who *I* date is none of your business.”

“Everything you do is my business.”

A short laugh escapes her and she shakes her head. "That's a crazy thing to say."

My lips tug up. "Maybe I'm a crazy man."

She glances back at me, a trace of warmth she doesn't want to show visible on her lovely features. "Maybe you are." More gently than the first time, she reaches for my arms and tugs them from around her waist to free herself from my grasp.

I let her go this time and lean back on the counter, watching her grab the milk and cheese and mix it all together.

As much as I'd like to keep touching her, I should probably do my part. I grab myself a skillet and the pack of bacon out of the fridge and stand beside her at the stovetop getting everything ready.

By the time the sandwiches are finally assembled and finished, we're moving around the kitchen in tandem. It reminds me a bit of how things were with me and my wife when we were young and had just moved into our first place. It was a shoebox-sized apartment with a tiny-ass kitchen. We didn't have as much room to work as we do here. But to be honest, even once we moved here and had the room, we still stayed close whenever we had the chance to.

I guess Kennedy reminds me of her a little bit.

Maybe it's just the feeling. I haven't been in love with anyone since my wife died. Haven't even been seriously interested in anybody. Not until her.

The boys were little back then. I guess Kennedy would have been, too.

That's where my mind is when Kennedy starts to reach past me for something on the other side of the counter. She stops when she sees my face. Softens, despite everything.

“Is everything okay?” she asks softly.

I nod. “Just thinking.”

“About what? You looked a little sad.”

My lips tug up, but not with real amusement this time. “I was thinking about Edie.” She frowns, her face showing no recognition. “My wife,” I explain.

“Oh.” Her gaze drifts a bit awkwardly toward the sink. I didn’t expect her to know what to say, but I don’t need her to say anything, I was just answering her question.

Absently, I take a lock of Kennedy’s long hair and wind it around my finger. “She had curly hair, kinda like yours. A little darker, but it felt the same sliding through my fingers.”

She swallows and doesn’t look at me. I can’t tell what she’s thinking. “How did she die?” she asks softly.

“Car accident. Drunk driver. She was on her way home from work.”

“Oh, wow. I’m sorry.”

I shrug. Probably an asshole thing to do, but I don’t particularly want Kennedy comforting me about my dead wife and I don’t even know why.

“That’s life,” I tell her. “Sometimes it’s fucking tragic.”

“Yeah,” she murmurs in quiet agreement.

I grab a serving plate out of the cupboard and take the last sandwich off the stove. “I guess that does it.”

She picks up a stray piece of cheddar from the counter and walks it over to the trash. “I’m going to wash up real quick before we eat. Which way’s the bathroom?”

I point her in the right direction. “Second door on the left.”

She murmurs a thank you, then takes off down the hall. I'm distracted watching the gentle sway of her hips.

An idea takes hold, but I know I shouldn't do it. I glance at Jet, but he's still entirely preoccupied with his robot.

Ignoring my better judgment, I take off down the hall after her.

I'm taller than she is, so my steps cover more ground. Just as she's about to close the door, I brace a palm against the wood and stop her.

Startled, Kennedy turns around to face me. "What are you doing?"

"You said you were going to wash up." I push the door open, letting myself inside with her. "I thought you might need a little help."

## Chapter four

Kennedy

My eyes widen and fixate on the crazy man who just forced his way into the bathroom with me. “You can’t be in here.”

Milo turns the lock on the door, then turns to face me, cocking a dark eyebrow at my assertion. “It’s *my* bathroom.”

I feel my face heat. I back away as he moves closer. “I—I know it’s your bathroom, but I’m using it right now. What if someone saw you come in?”

He cuts off my frantic thoughts, reaching out and grabbing my hips. “I’m already getting tired of your preoccupation with what *someone* might see.”

Just as he’s starting to draw me closer, I push his hand away and walk to the sink. I need to get away from him, but that’s impossible in the tight space of the narrow bathroom.

I’m facing away from him with my hands braced on the sink, but he doesn’t seem to mind. He walks up behind me and moves so close, I can feel his muscular front against my back. His heat seeps through my shirt and warms my skin.

I don’t know what I expect him to do next, but it’s not secure his arms around me and hug me from behind.

My heart skips a beat.

“You can’t be in here,” I repeat, my tone a little weaker as I fight the urge to sink into his embrace. “You can’t do... whatever you’re doing.”



“If you don’t even know what to call it, how do you know I’m not allowed to do it?” he teases.

Unamused, I meet his gaze in the mirror. “I’m serious, Milo.”

“Mm, I like the sound of my name on your lips.” He reaches up to caress my jaw, then runs a blunt fingertip over the seam of my mouth.

Goosebumps dance across my skin as his masculine taste hits my lips. I grab his hand and tug it away quickly. “Stop playing with me.”

“You never answered my question,” he says, causing my gaze to drop. I focus my attention on the spotless sink basin instead of him and try like hell to ignore the reassuring warmth of his embrace. “You and Jet—is that for real? Jonathan seems to think it is.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I tell him, and I mean it. I think I mean it. “There’s no way you and I can ever work. I don’t even know if you *wanted* that or you just wanted to fuck me, but either way... there’s no point.”

“If you think there’s no point in fucking if it doesn’t end in a happily ever after, I don’t think anyone’s ever fucked you properly,” he says, a wicked smirk on his perfect lips.

No one’s ever fucked me at all, but I don’t say that. I’m not embarrassed about it or anything. It was my choice not to sleep with anybody yet. Most of my friends think I’m an idiot for missing out on all the dick they seem to be enjoying, but... I don’t know. Call it naïve or whatever; I’m waiting for fireworks.

I don’t think he’d get it, though. He’d probably think I’m foolish waiting around on some fairy tale feeling before I spread my legs. Like he just said, plenty of people hook up with no desire to ever even see each other again.

Maybe it's just sex to him, but I want my first time to mean more.

I know he'd probably think that's stupid, though.

I don't care what he thinks. I don't care what anybody thinks. It's *my* life.

I know what kind of love I want to have, and I won't settle for less.

No matter how sexy his arms look wrapped around me right now...

Because they do look immensely sexy.

My stomach sinks a little, realizing how safe I feel wrapped in his powerful embrace. It's tempting to get lost in that feeling, especially when I recall the soul sucking pleasure I felt with his mouth on the most intimate part of me...

This is the most alone we've been since that night.

The night he spread my legs, looked into my eyes, and then licked my pussy until I saw stars.

I know we're not *totally* alone, though. Jet is down the hall and dinner is already on the counter.

*Dinner.*

"You have to get out of here," I tell him, pushing against his arms until he finally frees me. "I don't know what you were thinking following me in here, but dinner is waiting. Jet is waiting. We cannot do this right now."

I don't know what I've said that could have possibly caught his interest, but I see an unmistakable, mischievous glint in his beautiful blue eyes. "Right now?"

*Shit.*

"That's not what I meant." I shake my head. "At all. Obviously, we can't do this at all, but we *especially* can't do it now."

Milo smirks. "If it can't happen ever, the now is redundant, but you keep saying it."

I point at the door. "Out."

Rather than obey my command, he grabs my wrist, then my other forearm, and walks me back until I hit the wall.

My eyes widen. "What are you doing?"

Heat from his gaze makes my whole body feel warmer. "Since you first walked in tonight wearing that red lipstick, there's been one thing on my mind." He moves closer, caging me against the wall with his hard body. He releases my arm and brings his hand in to caress my face. His thumb catches my plump lower lip and pushes down so he can slip it into my mouth.

Fire spreads through my veins as his thumb moves past my lips and travels quickly to the spot he kissed between my legs. I want to do the decent thing and stop, but my body has different ideas.

*It's just his thumb*, I tell myself.

It shouldn't get me so hot, but it's the way he just expects me to suck, the way my body wants to obey.

*It's just his thumb*, I think as I take it into my mouth and seal my lips around it like it's his cock.

Molten heat travels from his eyes straight to my core. I suck, and my pussy throbs with need.

*Oh, lord.*

This is bad, but it feels so good. Instinctively, I start to move toward him, but his hand shoots out and slams me back against the wall so hard, I gasp.

Wide eyes rise to meet his. He drags his thumb out of my mouth and wipes it on my face, then he grabs my jaw in his iron grip and crushes his mouth against mine.

Heat combusts in my veins. Without thought, without even meaning to, I groan against his lips and reach for his cock, needing to feel if he's hard.

My hand rubs up against denim-clad steel. When I rub it through his jeans, he groans against my mouth and sends a carnal thrill straight through me.

I need more. My fingers are clumsy as they unbutton his jeans. His hot, hungry mouth devours mine and his hand slides up to palm my tit through my shirt. I try to arch against his hand, but he keeps me pinned helplessly against the wall so I can't move.

God, I need more of him. The more he won't let me, the more I need it. Now, faster. I can't get his pants undone fast enough.

I try to slip my hand down the front, but he swats it away.

My words come out in a slur like I'm drunk on something more than him. "No, please."

"You want it?"

"Mm-hmm."

"You need it?"

"I need it," I practically whine.

His voice is low and gravelly, a hint of fondness beneath the steel letting me know he's in charge. "Yeah? You want it bad, don't you, baby?"

*Oh God, yes.*

I can feel how wet I am already. I reach for his cock again and he grabs my wrist. This time his grip is like iron, tightening until it's almost painful, but the discomfort does nothing to dampen my desire.

His beautiful face is all cold, hard lines and precise curves. He's so handsome I could cry, and the harder he

is, the more I break down. “Manners,” he says, his voice all the reprimand I need.

“Please,” I whisper, leaning in and trying to kiss him.

He slams me back against the wall again. The heat in my body feels like it’ll incinerate my skin. I want to take my clothes off just to cool down, but then he grips me by the throat and says, “Good girl. Now, get on your knees.”

Desire pours straight through me. I’ve never sunk to my knees so fast.

His hand is in my hair, part caress, part threat that if he feels like it, he can take it away again, so I’d better behave.

I tug down his zipper and pull down his jeans. His cock springs free and I grab it gently, closing my fingers around the thick, veined column. God, it’s beautiful. I lick my lips and lean in to taste him, but before I can make contact, he fists a hand in my hair and yanks me back so I have to look up at him.

He looks larger than life from down here. A god among mortals with his cock out, mere inches from my face.

“You want me to use you, pretty girl?”

My pussy clenches with need. I didn’t think I wanted that, but I find myself nodding.

“Yeah?” His voice is gentle and taunting at the same time. “You want me to shove my cock in that pretty little mouth and use you so hard you cry, don’t you?”

I shift, feeling so much wetness between my legs, I’m afraid it’ll seep through the fabric of my jeans.

I’m about to tell him yes, but suddenly my pounding heart comes to a screeching halt when the door handle jiggles.

I stop breathing, my startled gaze darting to the door.

From the other side I hear a muffled, “Are you okay in there?”

*Jet.*

His voice is like a bucket of much-needed ice water dumped over my head. Scrambling to get to my feet, I look around, panicked. Milo’s mouth is about to open, so I quickly clap my hand over it to shut him up.

“Yep!” I call back, my voice a bit shrill.

“You sure?” Jet calls through the door. “I heard a noise. It sounded like somebody bumped into something.”

“Oh, yeah. That was me. I...” I look around. “I tripped! On the rug.”

Milo’s eyes sparkle with amusement as he peels my hand off his face and mouths, “You tripped on the rug?”

“Shut up,” I mouth back. Then to Jet I say, “I’m fine, though. Just a clumsy moment. Nothing to worry about. I’ll be right out.”

“Okay,” he murmurs, his voice lowering in a way that makes me think he doesn’t have much confidence in my story. “Have you seen my dad? I thought he was in the kitchen, but I can’t find him anywhere.”

Milo is silently laughing his ass off as I scramble red-faced for an answer. “I... No. He’s not in here!”

Jet pauses.

Milo leans against the wall and covers his face to muffle his quiet laughter.

“I didn’t think he was in there,” Jet finally says.

“Right. Of course you didn’t. That would be... Why would he be in here?” I slam my palm against my

forehead and close my eyes. "I'll be right out, okay?"

"All right. Sorry to bother you," he says.

Maddened, I brace my hands on top of my head and turn around to face Milo. "Stop laughing," I whisper furiously.

"I'm sorry," he lies, but his eyes sparkle with genuine amusement and make it hard as hell to stay mad at him. In a feminine tone I assume is a mockery of my voice, he says quietly, "He's not in here!"

"Shut up," I whisper, smacking his arm, then turning to look at the door. "How are we going to get out of here? What if he's in the hallway watching? I didn't exactly play that cool."

"No, you did not," he agrees a little too enthusiastically.

I glare at him. "Be helpful or be quiet."

Eyes still glinting with amusement, he grabs me around the waist and tugs me against him. "You weren't telling me to be quiet a minute ago," he says playfully.

Impossibly, my cheeks burn even hotter. Avoiding his gaze, I mutter, "That's because you clearly knocked something loose in my brain when you shoved me against the wall and turned me into a sex goblin. Everything's working right again, and we need to get out of here without Jet catching us or I will literally die."

"Relax," Milo says, not nearly concerned enough about getting caught.

"What are you doing?" I ask, since his gaze isn't even on me despite his arm around my waist. He's looking at his phone.

He holds it up as if to show me, then taps the screen.

The doorbell rings, and I hear footsteps in the hall as Jet calls out, "I'll get it."

Milo winks, then lets me go. He opens the door and slips out.

Just to make sure we haven't been spotted, I peek my head out, too.

The coast is clear. All I see is Milo's perfect ass as he walks down the hall.

Shaking my head to clear it of the last remnants of lust, I ease the door the rest of the way open, hit the light, and step out into the hall.

I'm at the mouth of the hall when Jet walks back from the door, frowning. "That's weird," he says.

Milo is in the kitchen with two plates. "What's weird?" he asks nonchalantly as he carries them to the table.

"The doorbell just went off but there's nobody there." Jet's intent gaze is on his phone screen. "The live view doesn't show anybody, either."

"Oh, that thing's been on the fritz lately," Milo says. "I think we need to power it all the way down and reboot it."

"Really? This is the first time it's happened to me." Jet is still trying to figure out the doorbell, but I'm watching his dad put the last of the food on the table and grab a carton of orange juice out of the fridge.

"You guys eat dinner at the table?"

Milo glances over at me, surprised by the question. "Of course. Where else would we eat it?"

At my house, we usually eat standing at the counter or maybe sitting on the couch. Most of the time, Mom and I don't even eat dinner at the same time, so no one has to think about where we're eating.

At first, I think he should know that since he dated her, but then I realize he saw the fake version of my



mom. We actually did eat take-out at the table a couple of times when he came over. She likes to pretend she's a better mom than she is when she has an audience. I think she even asked me how school was that first day.

I shake my head at the memory, but with it comes one of them standing at the kitchen counter, his back to me as my mom stood in front of him flirting and being gross.

It was gross then, and that was before.

It's so easy to forget how I met him when I'm here.

The doorbell goes off again, dragging me from my thoughts. Jet stomps toward the door and I frown at Milo, who frowns back and silently shakes his head in a gesture that wordlessly expresses, "Wasn't me that time."

When Jet comes back in, he has his brother with him.

"Forgot my keys," he says by way of explanation.

Jonathan Granville is a carbon copy of his father. He has the same pitch black hair, though he styles it a bit differently. The same sculpted cheekbones, and a jaw that could cut glass. His eyes are ice blue like his dad's and set beneath the same deviously curved, bushy black eyebrows.

Jet has a lot of the same features, but they all look softer on him. His hair's a little longer, and so is his nose. The blue of his eyes is a bit softer with the tiniest hint of green. He's gentler than the other two, and it's easy to see just looking at him.

I don't know if Jonathan clutches women by the throat or slams them into walls before he uses them for his pleasure, but he has enough of his dad's vibe that I bet even the normally sane ones would let him.

His gaze meets mine for a couple beats, and he nods in greeting. “Hey, Kennedy.”

I lower my gaze and shuffle my feet a bit awkwardly. “Hey.”

Since this is his house and he’s comfortable here, he looks around, gets the gist of what’s going on, and then jokes, “I see how it is. You guys are having family dinner with her now.”

He’s only joking, but my face heats a bit, anyway. “Actually, I should probably be getting home. You can have my sandwich if you want, I haven’t touched it.”

Milo frowns at me, but I don’t look at him too long because I don’t want him to change my mind. I go over to Jet’s robot station and grab my purse.

“Are you sure?” Jet asks.

“Yeah, you can totally stay,” Jonathan assures me, smiling faintly to let me know he meant no harm. “I was just joking around. I ate while I was out.”

“No, I know.” I shake my head as I slide the purse strap over my shoulder to let him know I didn’t take it that way. “It’s fine. Um... you’ll have leftovers then.”

Seeing I’m nervous, Jonathan smirks. “Kennedy. Stay and eat the damn sandwich.”

I waiver, but only for a fraction of a second, then I shake my head.

The last thing I need is *two of them* thinking they can boss me around.

“No. I’m gonna go,” I say, nodding more to reassure myself that I’m sure than to convince him.

Jet was about to sit down and start eating, but now that I’m fleeing before dinner, he follows me to the door. He already snapped a couple of photos of me relaxing

on his couch while he did robot crap, so he has the social media stuff he needs for his Brylee mission.

“He really was just joking,” Jet assures me.

“I know. I’m not offended, I promise.”

He seems relieved. “Okay, good. So you’ll come back?”

“Yeah, of course. Probably not tomorrow or anything. I need a break, and it’s natural for people not to see each other for a couple of days when they’re dating. We want her to think you like me, not that you’re obsessed with me.”

“That’s true.” He considers it for a moment, then nods decisively. “You’re right. We’ll take a couple of days off. How’s Friday night? You can come over and we can do a movie night or something.”

“Just the two of us?”

“Jonathan probably won’t be here, he’s always out on Friday nights.”

*But Milo will be here.*

He doesn’t say it, but it sounds that way.

I don’t ask this time. I don’t want to draw too much attention to my concern over whether or not his dad will be around when I come over.

Since I’ve experienced movie nights with Milo at our apartment when he was dating my mom, I’m not totally sure he’ll behave himself if I come over to watch a movie with him and Jet.

But I’m not totally sure I want him to, either.

“All right.” My heart speeds up a little when the words slip out of my mouth. “I guess I’ll see you Friday night then.”

Jet smiles, and my heart feels light and nervous at the same time.

## Chapter five

Kennedy

Movie night at the Granville house.

I've spent as much time dreading it as I have looking forward to it.

Of course, that's how I feel about most weekends. On one hand I don't have to get up early for school. On the other, I have to be at home the whole time with my mother, and my only refuge is the shift or two I work at the local fast-food chain—which isn't much of a refuge at all. It's a meat market in the kitchen and a pit of snakes up front. If someone isn't trying to fuck you, someone else is spreading bullshit rumors that you're fucking someone—or everyone—to explain why you got a customer compliment card and they didn't.

It's lunacy, and all for a few bucks an hour.

But it's the only way I can pay for my phone, and that's a necessity. I used to have a line on my mother's plan, but after the Milo thing over the summer, she decided to cancel my line without even telling me.

It was obnoxious and pissed me off at the time, but I was actually a lot happier once my phone was truly my own and she had nothing to do with it. Over the summer it wasn't even as big of a deal because I wasn't in school. I was able to work much more. I can't work as many shifts and keep up with my homework, so now I really only work enough to pay for the phone and gas, and sometimes there's not enough for both.

I could have picked up a shift tonight. Bethany tried calling off, but she calls off so much that the manager told her she could only have the night off if she found someone else to take her shift. Everyone knows I usually

say yes to an extra shift on the weekend, but when she texted me, I had to tell her I was sorry, but I already had plans.

“What are you doing?” she texted back, clinging to hope that maybe she could talk me into rearranging my plans so she wouldn’t have to cancel hers.

I didn’t bother answering her.

Now, I rush to gather my things to transfer over to my old purse. The strap broke on the one I’ve been using just as I was about to walk out the door, and I don’t know how much time I have. Not time before I’m supposed to meet Jet at his house, but time before my mom will get home from work.

There’s a knock at the door as I shove my cherry ChapStick into the inside pocket and zip it up.

No, that’s not right. It’s too lazy to be a knock. It’s a knock that gave up before knuckles even connected with wood.

I don’t know why Mom would knock unless she forgot her keys, but I would think she would’ve noticed that when she got to her car earlier. If she wanted to go anywhere, she would have had to come back in for them.

I grab my purse and sling it over my shoulder, then head to the front door to peek out the peephole.

A man is standing on the other side. A white T-shirt is stretched taut across his hairy beer gut. His whiskered double chin seems even bigger somehow through the peephole, and God help him, he thinks he can pull off a mustache.

My lip curls with disgust as I debate whether or not to let Mom’s new boyfriend in.

He isn’t looking at the door even though he almost knocked on it. His head is turned like he’s waiting for

someone.

A few seconds later, I see my mom's washed-out dye job and hair that desperately needs trimming. She's thin, unlike him, but a ragged kind of thin, not a glamorous, aspirational kind of thin.

I back up just as she opens the door.

She halts with her keys still in her hand and stares at me in surprise. "You're home."

"Just about to leave," I tell her.

"Why didn't you open the damn door? Larry knocked."

Larry follows her in, his gaze raking over me. Not in the sexy, scorching way that Milo's did, but in a greasy way that leaves me feeling the need for a hot shower.

I'm dressed casually and comfortably in layers. A thin black shirt underneath in case I get hot, but it shows a few inches of my stomach and Larry's gross gaze gets stuck there. Self-consciously, I shift so that my oversized, taupe cable knit sweater will drift over and cover a bit of skin.

I'm wearing a coat unzipped over my outfit, but it doesn't feel like enough coverage. I'm not sure there's enough coverage in the world, and I wonder how my mom can bear being touched by him.

*What a downgrade.*

Shuddering, I lean to the side and push past my mom, muttering, "I've gotta go or I'll be late."

She doesn't ask where I'm going. She doesn't care.

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Everything is different when the door to the Granville house opens.

Jet answers, and he's excited to see me. I'm sure it's only because my presence enables him to advance his pursuit of Brylee White, but that doesn't matter.

The next thing I notice as I cross the threshold into the cozy, warm home is that it smells incredible.

"I hope you didn't eat," Jet says.

I didn't. We had basically nothing in the house and Jet told me we would have popcorn while we watched the movie, so I figured I would fill up on that.

I sniff the air and follow Jet into the kitchen, where Milo is grabbing a plate of skewered meat and moving it to the island. He meets my gaze as I enter the room, but doesn't say a word.

He turns back to grab three smaller plates out of the cabinet. As he sets them down beside the skewers, he says, "I hope you're hungry."

"I am." I leave Jet's side and walk over to look at the delicious smelling meat.

"Appetizers," Milo explains before grabbing two heaping bowls of popcorn and carrying them to the living room. "Help yourself to the meat," he calls back.

I glance over at Jet, who grabs a plate for himself and one for me. "Thanks," I murmur.

He nods. "Since we're watching a movie, we'll eat these on the couch."

I grab a skewer and inspect it. "What are we watching?"

"*Daddy's Home*. It's this Mark Wahlberg movie we usually watch around Christmas time. Jonathan will probably be pissed we're watching it without him," he says, smiling faintly.

"We don't have to tell him," I say conspiratorially before biting off the top piece of meat on my skewer to



see how it tastes.

Instantly, my taste buds transform into tiny whores, sinking to their knees and begging for more please.

“Oh my god,” I say, covering my mouth as I’m still chewing.

Jet looks over at me, alert. “Are they not good? They’re usually really good.”

“Oh my god,” I repeat, before greedily taking another bite.

Jet’s smile widens. Seeing there’s no cause for concern, he moves a couple of skewers to his own plate. “I guess they’re really good.”

My empty stomach tempts me to make a pig of myself and grab every skewer on the plate, but I resist the urge and settle with grabbing three.

Milo walks in just as Jet is walking out. I’m just polishing off the first skewer I tried in the kitchen.

Milo grabs his plate and leans in toward me as he fills it. “I see you’re enjoying my meat.”

I’m so startled by the scandalous comment and the smirk on his devilishly handsome face, I nearly choke. The food goes down the wrong way, so I move quickly to grab a cup out of the cupboard and hit the water dispenser on their fancy-ass refrigerator.

I gulp some down and turn around, glaring at Milo. “Are you trying to kill me?”

Still smirking, he says, “What? You don’t enjoy choking on it like a good little slut? I’m surprised.”

I shake my head and grab my abandoned plate off the island. “You’re the worst.”

“Maybe you just need more practice,” he calls as I leave the kitchen and go to join Jet in the living room.

Jet looks up as I sink into the couch cushion beside him, still faintly shaking my head.

“Is my dad picking on you?” he asks as he reaches for a handful of popcorn.

“When isn’t he?” I mutter. My entire face feels warm, so I take a long sip of cold water to try to cool myself down a bit.

The worst part is, I’m not sure if I’m burning with embarrassment, annoyance, or something far less palatable.

*Choke on it like a good little slut.*

That fucking man, I swear.

But also I shift in my seat, trying not to recall memories of being locked in the bathroom with him the other day.

Since Jet is in the room with us, Milo behaves himself while we watch the movie. I haven’t seen this one before, but Jet’s right, it is funny.

After I polish off the last of my tasty meat skewers and shift my focus to munching on popcorn, Jet decides it’s time for a photo op. I let him do his thing while I watch the movie, but I feel Milo’s gaze on us as Jet grabs a fluffy blanket and wraps it around both of us. I move when he directs me to, and the end result is that we are snuggled up on the couch together with our legs underneath the blanket.

“What exactly are you two doing over there?” he asks when he also realizes that.

I snuggle into Jet’s side and lay my head on his shoulder. “Nothing, Mr. Granville,” I say innocently.

Milo’s eyes narrow to slits.

Jet is preoccupied setting up his photo shoot and shifts his camera so it’s at the right angle. He snaps a

shot while I have my head leaning on his shoulder, then says, “Grab a piece of popcorn and pop it into my mouth like we’re being flirty and playful while we watch the movie.”

“Bossy,” I joke, but I grab a piece of popcorn, anyway.

Milo’s gaze sears me as I bring the piece of popcorn to his son’s mouth. I can practically feel the heat radiating off him from across the room, but I avoid looking at him so I can pretend not to notice.

I push the piece of popcorn between Jet’s lips with a fond little smile gracing mine.

He snaps the picture, then lowers the phone so he can flip through the ones he just took. “These are perfect,” he says happily. “I’ll post both poses.”

I don’t care, but I nod in polite agreement and reach for more popcorn as I shift my gaze back to the big screen TV. Before I can get any, the bowl is ripped from my hand, then the blanket is yanked off me and Jet.

I stare, wide-eyed, at Milo as he looms over me.

Jet looks up too, more confused than I am, but also distracted posting the pictures to social media.

“This is too much privacy for two teenagers,” he states, tossing the blanket to the other side of the couch and handing back the popcorn.

I meet his gaze, mine a little challenging. “What exactly do you think we’re going to do under that blanket, Mr. Granville?”

“Stop calling me that,” he bites out, gazing down at me with a hard, steely look that turns my stomach upside down.

In my mind, I can envision how he would respond if we were alone. I picture him grabbing my throat and pushing me back against a wall. His already firm grip

tightening as he leans in, and I don't know if my dimming vision is from his hold on my throat, or the intoxicatingly masculine scent of him, but I can't think straight or breathe properly, and then his lips touch my face and I'm gone.

I have to break his gaze, afraid he can see my naughty imaginings reflected in my eyes somehow.

"Dad, you're being weird," Jet informs him, his focus now entirely on his phone. "We're just taking pictures. It's not like I'm feeling her up over here."

Pointing at me and then the other end of the couch, Milo says, "You, over there."

Jet rolls his eyes at his dad's overreaction, but given he has already gotten what he wanted from me, he doesn't bother arguing, either.

He's being ridiculous, and I shoot him a look to let him know I think so. Sighing heavily, I scoot down the couch until I'm curled up on the other side all by myself. "There. Better?"

"Much," he says, some of the tension in his broad shoulders seeming to ease.

Since apparently we have to keep a couch cushion between us or else face Milo's wrath, Jet and I have to pass the popcorn bowl back and forth while we watch the movie. Toward the end I start to get sleepy. I was up early today for school and I went to bed late last night.

Jet and Milo apparently aren't tired. When Jet suggests we watch the second one, too, Milo glances at me. "Can you stay a little later?"

My body is so relaxed, my head resting on the soft pillow I'm hugging against the arm of the couch. I don't even bother lifting my head as I murmur my assent.

I don't actually see much of the second movie. There's a flash of cool guy Mel Gibson, John Cena on a

motorcycle, and a bunch of people singing; I'm sure much more happened, but that is my take away from the whole movie.

I'm jostled awake when someone shakes my shoulder. I look up blearily and see Jet standing in front of me, a lock of dark hair covering one eye. He's hunched a bit so he can meet my gaze on my level. "Wake up, sleepyhead."

I grumble and squeeze my eyes closed, hugging the pillow tighter.

I hear Milo's voice, his tone thoroughly amused. "Which movie was your favorite, Kennedy?"

"Mm. First one," I mutter, still not opening my eyes.

"The one she actually watched," Jet says lightly.

"Rawr," I say, making no sense whatsoever.

Milo's deep chuckle warms my insides as Jet moves out of the way and his dad stops in front of me. "I think you need to go to sleep."

Logically, I know the drive home isn't that long, but oh, how I dread it. "Why don't you drive me home and then you can walk back?" I only half joke.

"Why don't you just stay here?" Milo counters.

My eyes open. "What?"

"You're too tired to drive," he says reasonably. "It wouldn't be safe. Just text your mom and tell her you're staying the night wherever you told her you'd be tonight."

I didn't bother, but I don't say that.

I sit up, still exhausted, but a little less asleep.

I could drive home. If I got up and got my blood circulating, if I walked out into the chilly night air and left the warm coziness of this house, I know I could stay awake long enough to get home and pass out in bed.

But thinking of going home, I have to think of what's waiting for me there. Mom and her boyfriend, maybe still awake in the living room so I'd have to walk past them, maybe already passed out in bed. Mom would be snide or obnoxious about something, Larry... I still don't know him well yet, but he makes me uneasy. The nights he sleeps over won't be nights I can relax and sleep easily. They'll be the nights I spend trying to sleep while also keeping my ears open to make sure my bedroom door doesn't creak open.

Not to mention, what if I have to hear them fucking through the thin wall that separates our bedrooms? God, the visuals alone...

Our apartment is cold in more ways than one, and Milo's house is exactly the opposite.

I probably shouldn't stay here, but...

"Where would I sleep?" I ask tentatively.

"My bed's a queen," Jet says immediately.

"I don't think so, pal." Milo side-eyes his son. "Nice try, though."

I crack a smile. Even I found Jet's response a bit too enthusiastic considering he has his sights firmly set on Brylee, but knowing him, he's just thinking about some way he could use the experience on social media to get her attention.

Of course, that's not where Milo's mind goes.

"I guess she could sleep in Jonathan's room, but if he actually comes home tonight..."

"No," Milo says firmly.

I imagine curling up and going to sleep in a bed that smells like Jonathan Granville and being a hell of a surprise when he stumbled through his room in the middle of the night and found me asleep in his bed.

“Yeah, no,” I agree, my face heating at the mere thought of it.

I’m about to stand up and stretch, tell them not to worry about it, I’m already feeling more awake, and I know I can get home safe.

But then, before I can do more than uncurl and reach one foot toward the ground, Milo speaks again.

“There’s only one bed that makes any sense for Kennedy to sleep in tonight.”

I suck in a breath, sure I know what he’s about to say, but equally sure that there’s no way in hell he’ll say it—not in front of Jet.

His gaze meets mine.

My eyes widen ever so slightly, a plea or a warning, I’m not even sure.

*Don’t say it. Don’t say what I think you’re going to say.*

And then he does.

“Mine.”

## Chapter six

Milo

Kennedy's big brown eyes are impossibly wide and locked on me as she sits forward, frozen in the act of preparing to stand up.

Her gaze lingers on me in disbelief for a couple more beats, then darts to Jet.

It rankles that the first thing she does is look to him to see his reaction, but I try to ignore that.

Jet's not thinking what she's thinking, anyway. To him, she's a kid like him and I'm a parent; there's no reason to think I would have any ulterior motive for inviting her to sleep in my bed other than making sure she's safe.

And if I weren't such a bastard, that would be true, but damn... it's a temptation I can't pass up, knowing the scent of her curly hair will linger on my pillow tomorrow, that her bare legs will brush the soft sheets I normally sleep on. Her scent may even cling to the bedding, and while none of that *should* excite me, given she's a teenage girl and possibly my son's new girlfriend...

It does.

Kennedy stammers a bit. "Uh, I—I don't want to intrude..."

"It's no problem whatsoever," I assure her. "You can sleep in my bed, and I'll take the couch tonight."

Relief settles across her features.

*Did she really think I meant we would sleep in the bed together?*



I can see by the flush of her cheeks and the way her gaze shifts guiltily away from mine that she did, and it makes me smirk.

*Disappointed?*

When she looks back at me, she can see the teasing question in my eyes and she rolls hers before heaving a sigh only teenagers are capable of.

Jet is nodding and not at all surprised because of course *he* assumed that I would be taking the couch. “You can borrow some of my clothes to sleep in if you want.”

“Thanks,” she says tentatively, finally rising from the couch to follow me.

I tell Jet to clean up down here while I take Kennedy upstairs and show her around. She has seen his bedroom when they were studying, of course, but she hasn’t seen mine.

No reason she ever should, but...

Her voice is uncertain as she trails behind me down the hall. “Are you sure you don’t mind me staying? I don’t want to kick you out of your own bed. I do have one to sleep in at home.”

I shake my head, pushing open my bedroom door and turning on the light. “You’re tired. I want you to be safe.”

Kennedy sidles up close to me, then squeezes past me to get into the room. “You know I’m not *your* kid, right?” she teases, looking over at me. “It’s not your responsibility to keep me safe.”

“I believe I’ve made it abundantly clear I don’t see you as a kid at all, least of all mine.”

Her lips curve up at the reminder, but she’s distracted looking around my bedroom and doesn’t blush the way she probably would have otherwise. “Hell, I *am*

my mom's kid and she doesn't even care that much." Seeming to remember she needs to text Tracey and let her know she won't be home, she reaches into her purse and draws out her phone. "You don't happen to have an extra charge cord, do you? I left in a hurry and forgot to bring mine."

I nod and walk over to my nightstand drawer. "Of course, we always have a few extra ones around somewhere." I open the drawer, pushing aside the stash of condoms that shouldn't make me think of her, and draw out the cord.

When I turn to walk it back to her, she's standing right there, her gaze flitting from her phone screen to the open drawer. Her eyes widen at the sight of the condoms and she looks up at me, startled.

I push the drawer closed without explanation and hand her the charger.

"Thanks," she murmurs shyly, unwinding it so she can plug it in by the bed. "Do you have a lot of overnight guests?"

I know she wouldn't have likely asked if she hadn't seen the condom stash. "No, I never bring women around the house unless it's serious, and it's never serious."

"That's true," she murmurs. "You didn't even bring us around when you were dating my mom."

I shrug. "Wasn't serious about her."

She drops my gaze as she plugs the charger into her phone. "Just wasting her time, huh?"

"I don't think I wasted it. I'm pretty sure she was well-compensated for the time she spent with me."

Kennedy smirks. "That makes her sound like a hooker."

"How are things between you two?" I ask seriously.

Before Tracey and I officially called it quits, it seemed like their relationship had taken a pretty big hit. My fault. I should have had more self-control, but when I saw Kennedy standing there in nothing but a bath towel, all bets were off. I had to know how she tasted, had to hear her moans of pleasure as she writhed beneath my ministrations and clawed at the sheets on her mother's bed.

Just thinking about that night causes my cock to stir, so I try to shift my thoughts elsewhere.

*What was I talking about again?*

Ah, right. The mess I made of her life.

I'm not sorry I did it, but I am sorry it made Kennedy's life harder.

As if unbothered by it, she says glibly, "Same old, same old."

"No, I mean it." I wait for her to meet my gaze so she can see I'm serious. "It seemed like things were bad over the summer."

"Hooking up with your mom's boyfriend tends not to bring you closer together," she states. "And it's not like we were close to begin with."

"I'm the one she should be mad at, not you."

"She had enough anger for both of us," she says, smiling faintly, but it's nothing to smile about.

I knew Tracey was a shit mother—I was able to piece that together in the brief time I spent with her, despite her half-assed attempts to make it seem like she wasn't—but I also know without a father in the picture, Kennedy doesn't have anywhere else to go even if things get bad at home.

"I hate to have made things worse for you," I tell her.

Shrugging it off, she says, “Don’t worry about it. I only have to put up with her for a few more months, then I’ll finally be done with high school and I can move out. I’d do it already, but I can’t manage a full-time work week and school on top of it, so...” She turns and glances toward the master bath. “Do you happen to have an extra toothbrush?”

I lean back against the wall. “What if I say no?”

“Then I’m using yours,” she threatens.

I crack a smile. “Of course I have extra toothbrushes.” I push off the wall and walk into the bathroom to get her one.

Kennedy follows me inside, looking around my master bathroom. I never have women in here, haven’t since Edie died. There’s something too intimate about sharing a space like this with just anyone.

Not that Kennedy is just anyone.

Still, it’s odd.

When she stops in front of the sink, she stops on Edie’s side.

It’s a “his and hers” sink with two basins, and I guess it’s easy to tell which side is mine. When Edie was alive, there were lotions and creams and fruity soaps lined up on her side. I didn’t want to get rid of them when she first died, but it got to a point that I couldn’t look at them anymore. It felt too much like all her stuff was just waiting for her to come back.

Kennedy glances back at me, uncertain. I can almost read “*Is this okay?*” written across her pretty face as she fills the space on the empty side of the sink.

I’m not sure if it is or not, but rather than decide, I open the linen closet and grab an unopened toothbrush. “Here you go,” I say, handing it to her.

“Thanks,” she murmurs before popping the package open.

I guess I should go through my own nightly ritual since I won't have access to my bathroom once she's in bed.

*My bed.*

“Do you need to shower?” I ask her.

She shakes her head, looking around before realizing there's no toothpaste on her side, so she reaches across the long sink and steals mine. “No, I'm okay. Maybe a T-shirt to sleep in if you have one to spare? But I can make do without. My undershirt is comfortable enough to sleep in.”

I glance at her jeans. “And those?”

Mischief sparks in her pretty brown eyes. “No. I'd just sleep in the undershirt and panties.” Smug about teasing me, she pops the toothbrush into her mouth and starts brushing with vigor.

*I see how it is.*

She's not the only one who can play.

Sucking air through my teeth and shaking my head apologetically, I tell her, “I'm afraid my bed is a panty-free zone. Sorry.”

She nearly chokes on a startled laugh, then she pulls her long hair aside and leans forward to spit. “I'm not surprised with all those condoms you have on hand.”

“Better safe than sorry,” I tell her.

“I bet.”

“You can sleep naked if you like.”

“Mm, kind of you to offer,” she shoots back.

“I'm nothing if not kind.”

“Yeah, right.” She rolls her eyes. “You’re trouble, that’s what you are.”

I smirk and finish brushing my teeth, then I head for my walk-in closet to grab her an old band Tee to sleep in.

When I walk back into the bathroom, she’s finished up at the sink. She’s in the middle of dragging her big taupe sweater off. The black shirt she wears underneath shows off a swatch of her toned belly.

Seeing her bare skin reminds me of the night I saw more of it. All of it. Every glorious inch.

She turns around and stops, drawing in a breath at the intense look on my face as I remember her naked. It makes her unsure of herself, as if she can tell exactly what I’m thinking. I can see it in the way her gaze drops, the way she licks her lips and avoids my gaze.

God, she’s beautiful.

I hold out the T-shirt for her.

“Thanks,” she says softly as she takes it.

For a moment, she stands there waiting for me to leave the bathroom so she can change.

I don’t.

Her gaze meets mine and she doesn’t say anything, but after a minute passes and I still don’t move to leave, she drops the T-shirt on the counter and begins to undress as if I’m not here.

My cock stirs to life as she wiggles out of her jeans and strips down to a pair of pale blue panties that just barely cover her perfect little ass. She adjusts the waistband, aware that I’m watching, then reaches for the hem of her black undershirt.

Tension gathers in every muscle in my body as I remain where I am instead of moving closer to her. She

tugs the top up, revealing more of her soft skin, then her bare tits spring free and she pulls it off over her head.

*Christ.*

My cock pushes against the denim cage it's locked in, begging to be let out. Begging to get closer to her.

A vision of her naked but for those little blue panties emblazons itself in my mind. I watch her reflection in the mirror like a man dying of dehydration gazing at a cool glass of water.

Kennedy grabs the black T-shirt I gave her and slips it on, then she pulls her hair out. Once her body is no longer completely visible to me, she turns to face me.

Then she reaches under the shirt and pulls down her panties. "Wouldn't want to break the rules," she teases as she steps out of them.

I want to break every goddamn rule of human decency there is. I want to pick her pretty little ass up, toss her down on the counter, and eat her pussy until she can't take anymore.

I know she sees the heat in my gaze, but she's determined to be a little tease tonight, apparently, because she leaves her clothes on the counter and heads back into my bedroom without another word.

Arousal makes my cock ache. I palm it, looking for a little relief, then readjust my pants before I walk back in the bedroom with her.

I walk in just in time to see her climbing on my bed, the edge of my T-shirt shifting to give me the briefest glimpse of her bare ass.

*This is going to be a long-ass night.*

I don't know how I'll sleep on the godforsaken couch knowing *this* is going on up here in my bed.

I'm tempted not to. The thought flits across my mind that I could just stay in here, too. Fuck it.

I can imagine it now. Her bare little ass snuggled up against my cock, my arms wrapped around her.

There's no way I wouldn't fuck her at least twice. No way.

My cock encourages me that this is a good plan, a great plan, the plan to end all plans.

The sliver of decency I seem to possess tells me that is not a fucking option.

*Fuck.*

Kennedy crawls under the covers and pulls them up over herself. I don't know how she manages to look so tempting and so innocent in alternating moments.

I would sell my whole soul to be inside her tonight, but I know I have to leave.

Once she's snuggled up under my blankets, she gazes over at me wordlessly.

I walk over to stand beside the bed. I can't resist reaching down and pushing my fingers through the thick mass of her soft curly hair.

"Do you have everything you need?" I ask thickly.

She nods, then says almost sweetly, "Thank you."

*Fuck, that makes it harder.*

I've never wanted to fuck someone so badly in my life. It's not right that she's in my bed with her little ass bare and I can't have her.

I remember how her pussy felt on my tongue. I consider how it would feel now if I ripped back the blankets, dragged her little ass to the edge of the bed, and devoured her.



I keep one hand in her hair, plant a knee on the bed, and lean down over her.

I swear to myself I'll just drop a chaste kiss on her forehead. That's all.

But when my lips touch her warm skin, I have to keep going.

I move slowly, brushing my lips across her skin. It can't even be called a kiss, I'm just making contact. Her forehead, her temple, her cheek, the corner of her mouth.

Her breath rushes out and burns against my skin when my lips touch her mouth. I let my tongue dart out just to steal a little taste of her lips, and I want to kiss her so fucking bad.

If I kiss her, I won't be able to stop there. I'll have to touch her—more of her than I already am. I'll have to palm her breasts and touch her belly, and then she'll gasp and writhe and I'll have to touch more of her. Then my hand will be between her thighs and her maddening little sounds of pleasure will get under my skin, and I won't stop. I won't stop until my cock is buried deep inside her and...

I have to stop.

I have to go.

I pull back just enough to meet her gaze. See her big brown eyes shining with a potent mix of vulnerability and desire.

She wants it, too, but she's lost in the moment, just like I am.

There's too much I don't know about things between her and Jet, and things are already bad between her and her mom. There are things I don't even know about her level of experience, things I would need to know before I could take things that far.

I can't do it.

Not tonight.

I want to. I fucking want to.

But I won't.

"Goodnight, Kennedy."

A soft breath escapes her as I pull back and move my knee off the mattress. I don't wait for her to speak. I need to get out of this room before I lose my slippery hold on my convictions and fuck her senseless despite my best intentions.

It wouldn't take much at this point. My self-control is on a short leash.

Then I get to the door, and when I put my hand on the light switch, I hear her call out.

"Goodnight, Mr. Granville."

*That goddamn name.*

It feels like a taunt.

She wants me to turn around and ruin both our lives as much as I want to do it.

But of course she does.

She's 18 years old.

I have to have enough sense for both of us right now, so without giving in to my baser urges, I turn out the light and head for the couch.

# Chapter seven

Kennedy

I linger in bed longer than I typically would this morning. Partially because Milo's king bed is so comfortable, but mostly just because *I am lying in Milo Granville's bed.*

Somehow, this is more surreal than when he was kneeling on the floor, eating me out in my mom's bedroom. That's sex, and I doubt sex is sacred to him at this point. But this, letting me sleep in his bed... it's something almost nobody gets to do.

But here I am.

There's another reason I laze in his bed longer than I need to, one I'm more reluctant to admit.

If I stay up here long enough, maybe he'll come and get me. Maybe we'll get a quiet moment just the two of us before we head downstairs and... and what? Will we have breakfast with the guys like some big, happy family?

The thought appeals to me more than it should. That's stupid, so I brush it off and force myself to be realistic. Yeah, he's attracted to me. Yes, he would like to put his dick in my various orifices.

That does *not* mean he wants me to be remotely part of his family, and letting even a stray thought like that flit through my head is just asking for heartache.

Last night was nice, sure, but lazing in bed is clearly melting my brain, so I make myself get up and head to the bathroom so I can pee and brush my teeth.

As soon as I enter the bathroom, I catch sight of my own reflection in the mirror. My hair is a frizzy mess from

being slept on all night, but that's not the part that snags most of my attention.

It's the sight of me in Milo's T-shirt that does it.

I shake it off, tear my gaze away, and glance at his side of the sink. It looks exactly as it did last night, but when I catch sight of the shower behind me reflected in the mirror, it looks... wet.

It seemed like he thought about taking a shower last night before I brushed my teeth, but things escalated, he got distracted—no shower was taken.

Turning to investigate now, though, I can see that the shower is definitely wet.

*Did he take a shower in here this morning?*

I don't even know what time it is. I forgot to grab my phone off the charger before I came in the bathroom, and there's no clock in here.

Thinking about him coming into the room and me not even noticing opens up a whole new can of thoughts and fantasies. When I woke up, I was sprawled tummy-down across the bed, hugging a pillow on his side with my bare ass completely exposed. He probably could have seen a glimpse of pussy, too, depending on my position.

It's not like he hasn't seen me naked, but the idea of him looking at me like that when I wasn't even awake is different. It's... enticing?

No, what am I thinking? That's sick. I need my head examined.

He probably didn't see anything, anyway. He certainly didn't wake me up...

Then again, last night he left me here in his bed, my body aching for more of his touch, my idiot heart craving more of those tender face kisses.

I really need to get it together and get out of this bedroom. Being here feels too personal. It's getting in my head.

I grab the toothbrush he gave me last night and make quick work of brushing my teeth. I don't bother trying to finger comb my hair; I know from experience it'll be a mess until I shower, and if I mess with it while it's dry, all it will do is frizz out even more.

I change out of his band shirt reluctantly and make a mental note to check out Metallica. I've heard of them, of course, but I don't think I've ever heard any of their songs.

I check myself for the ridiculousness of wanting to check out a band just because I know he probably likes them, but I'm still gonna do it. I wish I knew what his favorite song was.

*Kennedy, seriously.*

Right, right. Being crazy. Behaving like a girl with some kind of crush.

Can't have that.

I get it together and get dressed in the clothes I came over in last night. I don't usually crash at friends' houses, so I'm not sure if Mom will actually believe I did. I grab my phone off Milo's nightstand and check to see if she ever messaged me back last night, but I see she didn't.

That's not too surprising.

I head downstairs, prepared to face Milo, but much to my disappointment, he isn't around.

"Did your dad go somewhere?" I ask Jet as I follow him through the kitchen, not seeing Milo anywhere.

He glances back at me. "Yeah, he had to work today."

“Oh,” I murmur.

I tell myself I wasn't hoping to see him, anyway. I wasn't looking forward to the playful gleam I would see in his eye or the woefully inappropriate remark he would make about me sleeping in his bed without panties last night.

But I can't shake the disappointment when I get into my car and drive away without ever laying eyes on Mr. Granville.

---

Jet and I didn't have plans for a fake date tonight, but when Mom brings Larry home to hang out, I start poking around for an invite.

I don't want to come out and ask if I can come over, and since it's the weekend, I can't tell him it's because I have chemistry homework I need help with.

I scroll through his social media, reviewing the responses to his latest posts, but I don't see anything from Brylee White.

I swipe the window away and pull up my text chain with Jet. “No word from Brylee yet, huh?”

Usually he responds right away, but he must be doing something because a few minutes pass before he answers. “No, not yet, but she wasn't following me. It might help if you post something. Different people follow you, so maybe then she'll see it.”

“Maybe,” I answer. I hesitate, waiting to see if he concocts a reason for me to come over, but a minute passes and no new text.

Chewing on my bottom lip, I debate for a moment, but decide not to text back. I would like to get out of the

house, but I don't want to feel like a clinger—I'm not even his real girlfriend!

Besides, I don't need saving. So what if I have to spend the evening locked in my room to hide out from my mom and her latest boyfriend? I've done it plenty of times before.

I put on my headphones and try to get some studying done while they yuck it up in the other room. While I'm studying, I pull up Metallica's Greatest Hits and listen to a few songs so I can get a feel for what kind of music Milo likes.

The second song on the album is called "The Day That Never Comes," and I like that one a lot. When it ends, I play it again. I end up listening to the entire rest of the album, bobbing my head while I do my homework.

I get so caught up in the music that I don't notice when my bedroom door opens.

Apparently deducing I'm ignoring her despite my focus not shifting in her direction and my obvious bobbing to music with *headphones on my ears*, my mother storms in. I hardly have time to register movement in my direction and she's ripping them off my head. A lock of hair gets stuck in the headband as she rips.

"Ouch!" I shout, coming up off the bed. Instinctively, I put out a hand to shove her away as she continues yanking on the headphones, and my hair with it.

"Oh yeah?" she says, smiling malevolently. "You want to fight with me, Kennedy?" She shoves my chest, knocking me back onto the bed.

"I'm not trying to fight you, you fucking psycho. You're pulling my hair."

She yanks harder, ripping those strands of hair out and freeing the headphones.

“Jesus.” I place a hand on my head, but tentatively, since I might need to block an attack. “What is *wrong* with you?”

“What’s wrong with me?” she echoes, nodding. “I’m not the one, honey. You don’t want to fuck with me.”

“Oh my god. Grow up, Mom. Seriously.”

Her eyebrows shoot up in utter disbelief. I register more movement from my peripherals and look to Larry standing in the doorway of my room, scratching his belly, a can of beer in his other hand.

“She is a little bitch, isn’t she?” he says.

“I’ll show her a bitch,” Mom says before digging her nails into the buttery leather ear pads on my expensive headphones and tearing them off.

“Mom, stop! Those were expensive—” I grab for them, but she pulls them out of reach, then backs up and starts slamming them against the top of my dresser. “Mom, stop!” Rage burns inside me, igniting a sting of tears behind my eyes, which pisses me off even more. “Stop!”

She claws my chest pushing me away as I try to reach for the headphones. Apparently seeing his damsel in distress, Larry puts down his beer long enough to come into the bedroom and bear hug me from behind to pull me away from her. My skin crawls as his meaty arms form bands over my boobs and he drags me back toward the hall.

“Get your hands off me,” I scream, bringing my elbow back into his fleshy side.

He doesn’t listen on purpose, but his grip on me slips. That seems to piss him off. He lets me go, then shoves me backward into the hall.

I catch the doorframe, panic clawing at my insides. All I want is to get out of here, but I can’t leave my things



here. I don't have much, and the most valuable thing I had was just ruined. I worked my ass off pulling extra shifts to buy really good headphones so I could block out the noise at home, and now they're just... in pieces.

My mom's a hothead, though, so I know further engaging just increases the chances of more of my stuff getting destroyed.

Larry grabs my bicep.

"Get your fucking hands off me," I spit, glaring at him. "Do not touch me."

"Don't tell me what to do, you little bitch. I'm not your last stepdaddy, you can't stroke my dick and get your way."

My mom smirks like he just rode up on a big white horse. She wraps her arm around his back and moves close to him, shooting me a look like I'm her rival instead of her daughter. "Yeah, that's right, hon. I got a good one this time."

Disgust contorts my features. I can't stop it.

I shake my head, turning and escaping into the bathroom since at least *that* door I can lock.

I lock it and back up, sitting on the closed toilet seat and staring at the door. There's a lock, but it's a cheap, flimsy one. I'm sure someone could get in here if they really wanted to.

Tears well up in my eyes. I ignore them now that I'm alone. I don't have to waste energy holding them back. No one will see me cry.

Once I've got it all out, I swipe away the tears and pull my cell phone out of my pants pocket. I'm hoping—praying—to see an invite from Jet, but there are no new notifications.

I'm not so proud to wait for an invitation now. I want to get the hell out of this apartment, and I don't have

anywhere else to go.

“You don’t want a fake girlfriend this evening, do you?” I ask with a smiling emoji that reeks of desperation and makes me cringe, but I don’t care. It’s just Jet.

He types back, “Lol no, you’re off the hook tonight. I’m staying the night at Stephen’s. We’re working on an astronomy project.”

My heart sinks. “Oh.” Claustrophobia closes in on me, but it’s not his responsibility to always be my place to go. “Well, that sounds fun. Have a good time.”

I don’t bother waiting for a return message. I slide my phone back in my pocket and debate leaving anyway, just so I don’t have to be here.

I don’t have anywhere to go, though.

I could just drive around, but I can’t afford to waste gas. Now that my headphones are busted, I’ll have to start saving up for a new pair. I literally cannot live without them. Not in this apartment. Not with that woman.

I listen at the door, but I don’t hear them in the hall, so I ease the door open. I peek out. Mom and Larry have wandered back to the kitchen, so I guess they’re done being assholes to me for the moment.

I slip into my room and close my door as quietly as possible so as not to attract attention, then I cross to my dresser and grab the broken pieces of my headphones. The speakers are bent, so I know even before I start messing with them, I won’t be able to save them. I’m no techie, but it seems like a lost cause. Maybe Jet could make them work, but I have my doubts. If the speakers are busted, what good are a pair of headphones?

Still, I gather up the broken pieces and collect them in the headphone case like a little leather coffin. I zip it up and shove it in my purse to take over to Jet’s next time, just in case there’s something he can do.

Since I want nothing more than for this night to be over, I decide to go to bed. I change into pajama pants and a t-shirt, then I plug my phone in and turn off my light.

I lie in bed for probably two hours, but I can't fall asleep.

First, Mom and Larry are being too noisy in the living room, then it gets a million times worse. The TV turns off and I hear the sounds of them fumbling and kissing their way down the hall. I hear her bedroom door open, and then I hear everything else—his grunting, her giggles, the wet, smacking sound of their lips as they kiss.

It's revolting. I try to block it out, to drag my blanket over my head to insulate my ears, but the walls are paper thin. When I start to hear the coils in the bed creaking in tandem with their grunts and groans, I can't take it anymore.

I throw back my blanket and quickly gather up my phone and charge cord. I don't even take the time to put it in my purse, just grab it and open my door as quietly as I can.

My heart races as I make my way through the dark apartment to grab my coat and my shoes. I know they're otherwise occupied, so they shouldn't bother me, but I won't feel like I'm free until I'm out of this building.

I slide my coat on while I'm walking and grab my keys off the ceramic strawberry. I don't know where I'm going, just... anywhere but here.

That's what I tell myself as I pull the apartment door closed and head for the stairs, but I know it's not true.

There's only one place I can go.

And, if I'm being honest, only one place I *want* to go.

The road is dark and eerily quiet as I make my way across town. I wish I could text first, but I don't have his

number.

I glance at the clock. It's late. Too late. I really shouldn't go over there. He's probably already in bed.

My tummy feels sick, whether from nerves or because I didn't have dinner, I'm not sure.

All I know is when I pull in the driveway tonight, I still feel a twinge of that sinking feeling like the first time I stood at this door and waited, agonizing about what would greet me on the other side, but I feel something else this time, too.

Eagerness.

This time, I'm hoping he *is* the one to answer the door.

And then I realize Jet said he was spending the night at his friend's house, and I don't see Jonathan's car in the driveway.

*Is he here alone?*

My tummy sinks just in time for a dark shadow to approach on the other side of the frosted glass.

My heart flutters.

The door opens, and there he is.

The house behind him is dark, all the lights already turned off for the night. His pitch black hair is a little mussed, his incredible body mostly visible as he stands in the door wearing nothing more than a pair of gray sweatpants slung low on his narrow hips.

My eyes desperately want to dart to those gloriously muscled pecs, to his strong arms and chiseled abs. With considerable effort, I manage to keep my gaze trained on his face, but since he looks like he may have been asleep, that stirs bedroom thoughts, too.

"I'm sorry if I woke you," I say softly.

His handsome face is etched with concern instead of smugness this time since it's the middle of the night and I'm standing on his front porch in my pajamas.

"Jet isn't home," he says slowly, unsure why I'm here.

"I know," I blurt. "I'm not here to see Jet."

His eyebrows rise with curious interest and he crosses his arms over his chest, probably chilly from the cool night breeze.

"I—I'm not here for sex or anything, either. I just... I couldn't sleep. I had to get out of that apartment, and... I didn't have anywhere else to go."

My heart speeds up saying all that. I shift my weight nervously, thinking he might turn me away.

It's late, and this isn't his problem.

He's home alone, and I really shouldn't be here.

Instead of turning me away, he takes a step back and gestures for me to follow him.

"Come inside," he says.

So I do.

## Chapter eight

Kennedy

Once I'm inside the house, I'm not sure what to do. I feel awkward, to say the least.

At this hour, there's only one reason to drive over to a guy's house, but it really wasn't mine.

I can feel his eyes on me, but I avoid his gaze. I'm afraid once I meet it, everything will come spilling out of me—complaints about my mother and the hell of living with her, all the tears I held back earlier when she and her new boyfriend ganged up on me in my bedroom.

I don't want to cry or complain, so I look around for a distraction.

"Is Jonathan out, too?"

"Mm-hmm," he murmurs.

"It's late," I remark. "Did I wake you up?"

"Yes."

The truth startles me so much I almost look at him, but I remember I'm avoiding his gaze just in time to stop mine at his mouth. "Oh. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it," he says.

"I would have texted you, but I don't have your number."

Since I'm looking right at them, I can't miss it when those full, perfect lips tug up with wry amusement. "Is that your way of asking for my number, Kennedy?"

I can feel my cheeks flush. "No. I was just saying."

His tone is light, playful. A relief. "I think it is." He uncrosses his arms and turns to walk toward the kitchen.

“Are you thirsty?”

“Yes,” I murmur, slowly following after him.

Since I’ve been trapped in my room all night, I couldn’t go to the kitchen for more water once I’d drained my cup, either. When he reaches into his well-stocked refrigerator and turns back to offer me a bottle of water, I barely take time to thank him before uncapping it and gulping down a quarter of the bottle.

Milo closes the fridge door and watches me.

Once my basest need is quenched, I feel a little self-conscious. I run the tips of my fingers over my lips to swipe away the moisture and screw the cap back on. “Thanks.”

I don’t think he intended to ask the next question, but seeing how thirsty I was, he asks, “Have you eaten?”

“No, but I’m fine.”

“Would you like a sandwich?”

I would, but I shake my head no.

He makes me one, anyway.

We’re quiet as I sit at the island and scarf down the food he made me. I eat it and drink my water too fast. It makes my tummy hurt, but I feel stupid eating alone in front of him, and then I feel even worse for eating like some kind of homeless street urchin.

I feel much better once my body has some energy, though. I’ve been dragging all night, but I wasn’t doing much, so it didn’t matter.

“Thank you,” I say as he rinses off my plate in the sink, then loads it into the dishwasher.

“You don’t have to keep thanking me,” he says, turning the faucet off and turning to face me. “Do you just need to hang out for a bit, or do you want to stay the night?”

“I’m kind of sleepy... but I can go home if you want me to. I really didn’t mean to wake you,” I say, tucking a thick lock of unruly hair behind my ear.

Without acknowledging my fumbling offers to get out of his way, Milo walks over and shuts off the kitchen light, then he heads upstairs, clearly expecting me to follow.

It reminds me of last night, following him up to his bedroom.

Only this time, the other bedrooms are empty. The whole house is.

It’s just us.

I thought he might put me in Jet’s room tonight since Jet isn’t home, but he doesn’t even ask if I want to sleep with him, he just hauls me straight to his room.

I’m so grateful for the respite he’s providing, I wouldn’t have slept anywhere else even given a choice.

It feels so intimate when we walk through the dark bedroom to his bathroom. He flips on the light and gestures for me to go in.

I feel kinda happy as I grab my toothbrush. It’s my toothbrush now. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> time I’m using it. I just need a little cup or something to put it in over here.

He gave me a fresh bottle of water to bring to bed after I finished the other one, so I use that to brush my teeth.

“Minty fresh,” I say as I turn back to face him.

He smiles faintly, then takes my hand and drags me out of the bathroom, shutting the light off as he passes through the doorway.

The bedroom is dark, so I have to light up my phone screen to see better so I can plug in my charger. As I do,



I remember the drawer right beside me where he kept his spare charger—the drawer with all the condoms.

My tummy sinks with nerves realizing we'll be right here, with condoms so near.

Is he going to fuck me tonight?

I won't say no if he wants to. I'm surprised at myself even thinking that, but I remember how much he made me want him last night, and how he's taken care of me tonight, and that was so nice of him.

I imagine us tangled up in bed together, his hot skin pressed against mine, his cock hard with desire just for me.

Arousal stirs between my thighs.

*I want it.*

Maybe it's not love, but maybe it doesn't matter. I've never *wanted* to have sex with anyone else.

Only him.

What will it be like? Will it hurt? What will *he* be like? Will he be rough, or tender? How will it feel when he's inside me?

How will I feel after?

I push back the blanket so I can climb underneath. He's already settled in on his side of the bed, lying on his side, watching me.

My lips are suddenly dry—somehow—so I grab my water and take another quick sip before I settle in next to him with my head on the pillow.

I'm facing him, and it's the most intimate feeling in the world.

We're in bed together. Really in bed together.

He doesn't say anything, and I'm nervous thinking about the condoms and sex. Wondering if I'll be any

good, or if he'll be disappointed.

He's used to women with experience, after all. I don't really know what I'm doing.

Self-consciousness has me tightly in its grip, but I get the playful urge to pull the blanket up and cover the bottom half of my face with it.

"What?" he asks, seeing my eyes flash with mischief.

"This is my first sleepover with a boy."

His deep chuckle reverberates in my chest and sinks right into my heart. "I am not a *boy*."

"I know," I answer, but my heart nearly stops because before I'm even finished with the last syllable, he reaches over and grabs my waist, dragging me closer to him.

My tummy does a somersault, but I grab his shoulder and spread my thighs so he can position me how he wants me.

He doesn't pull me on top of him, or even under him. He just pulls me close so my thighs wrap around his leg and we're tangled together.

That's nice. I relax a little, resting my head on his bicep on the pillow.

"I forgot about the rule," I whisper, since we're so close.

"What rule?"

"I'm wearing panties in your bed."

He chuckles at me again. "It's okay. I made the rule up."

"Just wanted to get me out of my panties?" I tease.

"Maybe."

Something thick and hot seems to twist through my chest. Summoning courage, I speak my next thought. "Do you want me out of them now?"

Desire thickens his voice as he murmurs, "Maybe."

I lick my lips. I'm wrapped around him wearing pajamas, but I shift my body off his so I can reach for the waistband of my pants.

I barely get them past my hips and he grabs my hand to stop me. "Don't."

My eyes widen. My heart sinks. Uncertainly, I bring my gaze to his. "You... don't want me to?"

"If you take off your panties and lie here like this in bed with me, I'll fuck you. There's no other way that can go."

"Oh." I pause, face flushing, but I know he can't see it. My cheeks burn as I whisper back, "Well, that's okay."

"That's okay?" he reiterates, a touch of disbelief in his tone.

I nod uncertainly.

"Why is that okay?"

"I... I don't know. Don't you want to?"

"Aren't you sort of dating my son?"

I shake my head no. "He likes another girl, he's just making it seem like we like each other to get her attention. I'm going along with it as payment for tutoring lessons."

*And I guess... so I can see more of you.*

Obviously, I don't say that part.

Shock registers on Milo's handsome face, then it shifts to amusement. Finally, a mix of indulgence and begrudging respect. "Maybe he's my son, after all," he jokes.

I smile faintly. “Yeah, he’s using me, but not for sex.”

That wipes the smile off his face. Quietly, he says, “That’s not what I meant.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m not sleeping with Jet, or in any way romantically involved with Jet, so if that was your hesitation...”

He doesn’t say anything, but he slowly releases my wrist.

I take that to mean he wants me to continue undressing, so I push down my pajama bottoms and drag them off. I don’t want to lose them in the bedding, so I toss them on the floor beside the bed.

Once they’re in a heap on the floor, I reach for the waistband of my panties, but Milo stops me again.

I raise my gaze to his, questioning.

“Have you ever had sex before, Kennedy?” he asks seriously.

Too seriously. It makes my stomach feel wonky. I swallow, then shake my head. “No. You’ll be my first.”

Some part of me hoped he would take that as a good thing, that maybe he’d be happy no one but him has ever managed to get between my thighs.

Instead of being pleased, though, he mutters, “Christ.”

It doesn’t sound like a good Christ.

My stomach sinks more. “Is that bad?”

“No,” he says, taking my hand and prying my fingers out of my panties. “Leave these on.”

The rejection stings. I didn’t even come here wanting sex, but I was willing to do it, and now he doesn’t want me because I’m a virgin?

What an asshole.

A pit opens up in my stomach. I feel terrible. I'd leave, but I don't have anywhere to go, so instead I just tug my hand free from his grasp and roll over so my back is to him.

"Kennedy..."

"It's fine. I know this might be hard to believe, but I didn't come here to fuck you."

I hear the bedding rustle, feel him draw nearer. I want to cling to my anger because I definitely still feel it, but then he pulls my hair away from my neck and leans in to place a soft kiss there.

My grip on my anger weakens as goosebumps rise all over my body.

He kisses me there again, then again. He kisses me like a lover, hungry and tender.

*Oh god, that feels like heaven.*

"You don't have to be defensive," he says gently. "I didn't mean it the way you took it. I would very much like to spread these lovely thighs," he says, one hand sliding down the outside of my thigh, then moving inward, his fingertips brushing my pussy just enough to send a thrill of arousal straight through me. "And sink my dick deep, deep inside that beautiful pussy. But when I opened my door tonight, you very specifically said you didn't come here for sex." He slides his hand higher, splaying it over my tummy, then sliding it up under my shirt so he can cup my bare breasts in his big palm. "And I believe you meant that. If you let me fuck you right now, I can't shake the certainty that some part of it is because I made you a sandwich, and that's just not a good reason to give your virginity away."

"It's not just the sandwich," I murmur, giving up the last of my angry position and rolling over so I'm more physically receptive to his embrace.

His hand slides across to my other tit and he palms it, sucking the breath right from my lungs. His rough fingertip grazes my nipple, and arousal ricochets around my insides.

He's playful now that I'm not mad. "I'm sorry. *And a water.*"

If I didn't feel so vulnerable, I'd tease him back, but I've been through so much tonight, I don't have it in me to bounce back like I normally do.

"You can fuck me, Milo," I say seriously, wanting it more with every touch of his hand. "It's not because you fed me. You don't have to think that."

"But I do." To take the sting out of the fact that he continues to reject me, he pushes up my T-shirt and bends to kiss his way across my tits. They thrill at having his attention. He stops at each tight peak, teasing my nipples with his tongue and sending bolts of arousal through my writhing, needy body.

"Milo, please," I say, wrapping my arms around his beautiful body, my fingers resting against his muscular back. It's mean to make me want him all the while telling me he's not going to fuck me.

He takes his fill of kissing and caressing my boobs. He even drops a little lower and kisses his way down my stomach, kissing every few inches like my whole body is sacred and precious to him.

But just when I'm hoping he'll move even lower and tease my pussy with his skillful tongue like he did that night over the summer, he stops altogether, lowering my shirt and straightening it.

He keeps a hand pressed against my bare stomach beneath the shirt, but then he settles back into his spot on the bed with me pulled close.

I don't want to stop. I want to keep going. So rather than settle for that, I return to the position he had me in

before, lying half on top of him. Then, I start running my hand across *his* chest, grazing *his* nipples with my fingertips the same way he did mine.

“Kennedy...”

The warning in his voice sends a thrill straight through me. Ignoring it, I dip my head and kiss my way across his chest the same way he kissed his way across mine. I don't know if it feels the same way to him as it felt to me, but when he did it to me, it felt like heaven.

When I get to his nipples, I look up at him mischievously, then let my tongue dart out. I circle and flick it until his fingers sink into my hair. When his grip tightens like his control is close to snapping, I double down, swirling my tongue over his nipples and then sucking.

Improvising, I murmur against his hot skin. “Do you want me to do that to your dick?”

“*Christ.*”

Now *that* was a good Christ.

“I will,” I say sweetly, before kissing my way down his chiseled abdomen the way he kissed a path down mine. I mimic everything about the way he did it—the reverence, the hunger. I kiss every inch of his skin like it brings me great pleasure, and... well, it does. I love kissing his body, so maybe he loved kissing mine.

“How far have you gone?” he asks roughly.

I look up, a little unsure what he means.

“Have you sucked a cock before?”

My eyes widen at his language, but I lick my lips with interest as I shake my head no.

He seems stunned. “You haven't?”

I shake my head. “No, but unless getting you off requires mixing ingredients in a beaker, I bet I can figure

it out.”

He smothers a laugh, his hand in my hair gentling. “I’m sure you can,” he says to humor me, but I can feel his intent to lift me up a second before he begins to move me. “Come here.”

I crawl up and lie half on top of him, looking into his eyes. “You don’t even want me to suck you?”

“Christ. Yes, of course I want that. But let’s slow down a little tonight, huh?” To reassure me that he’s not rejecting me, he pushes his fingers tenderly through my hair. “I haven’t even kissed you yet.”

I smirk. “Well, you have...”

“Your lips,” he says wryly, bringing a hand up and grazing my bottom lip with the pad of his thumb.

I don’t argue this time. It doesn’t sting like it did before, and I like lying on top of him like this... even if my body is already on fire, and he’s like sleeping on a space heater.

He’s a lovely, sexy space heater.

To relax me as I lie on top of him, he runs his fingertips over my body. He grazes the small of my back, lets his hand slide over my butt. He doesn’t linger long there—it’s too hard to keep it from turning sexual if he does—but he continues to caress my body until I’m so close to sleep, my body must feel like a ton of bricks on top of his.

My eyes drift closed for a while, but they open at the sound of his voice.

“How’s your first sleepover with a *boy* going?”

I smile sleepily. “I’m a fan. I’ll make sure to leave you a nice review.”

“Oh yeah? What’ll it say?”



I feign consideration, then say, “Slightly irksome, but makes good sandwiches.”

He squeezes my side and starts to tickle me. I shriek and pull away, rolling off him with a laugh.

His smile makes my heart happy, and *my* heart feels nice and light as I scoot back over and resume the position I was first in when I got in bed, on my side facing him, nice and close.

“What would my review say?” I ask playfully.

He doesn’t hesitate. “Perfect tits. Bitable nipples.” He catches my bottom lip with his thumb and drags it down, his hungry gaze locked on my mouth. “Impossible not to kiss.”

My heart flutters. “Why don’t you do it, then?” I challenge, my voice no more than a whisper.

He reaches over, cradling the back of my head in his palm. I don’t know if it’s to support me, or keep me from getting away as he leans in.

As if I want to go anywhere.

His lips brush mine softly at first, like the way he kissed my face last night.

My skin is flushed with heat that only seems to intensify as I close my eyes and kiss him back.

There’s something overpowering in the way he kisses me, something that has me melting back against the bed, wrapping my legs around him as he rolls me over and moves on top of me.

He’s moved by it, too. Moments ago he was determined not to fuck me, and now as he grasps the side of my neck and devours me like his favorite dessert, I feel his hard cock pressed against the scant fabric of my panties.

I moan against his lips as he butts it against me. He reaches a hand down and presses his palm against my pussy. It tingles for him, begging him to push that fabric aside and at least sink a finger into me.

As if he can feel how close we're getting to crossing the line he drew tonight, he brings down the intensity of the kiss from consuming to a more comfortable yearning.

Once we're in safer waters, he pulls back and looks down at me.

Tenderness glints in his eyes as he brushes a curly lock of hair out of my face. "We should get some sleep."

I'm feeling pretty fond of him. Pretty happy, too.

"If you insist," I tease.

His perfect lips tug up. "Don't tempt me," he grumbles, placing one last kiss on my forehead, then easing off and tugging me into his arms.

I go happily. My arms slide around him naturally, and I settle in against his strong chest with a sigh of contentment.

Before we commit to the quiet and fall asleep, he murmurs playfully, "I'm glad you're enjoying your first sleepover with a *man*."

I'm feeling pretty drowsy, but I still grin at the assertive way he says that last part. "Five stars, easy."

## Chapter nine

Milo

When I wake up, there's a slim thigh wrapped around my hip, a mass of thick curly hair spread out across my pillow, and a warm body pressed snugly against mine.

I can't remember the last time I woke up next to a woman.

Well, I guess I can, but suffice it to say, it's been a very long time.

Last night was nice. Well, falling asleep with her, anyway. There were definitely aspects of what came before that I didn't enjoy.

I knew she had a rough night as soon as I opened the door, but it just got worse and worse as she started talking.

Kennedy was needy and vulnerable last night, and I didn't like it.

Not because I'm not willing to tolerate her bad days—*I'm not that much of a fucking asshole*—but because I don't like her feeling that way. I had a hunch nothing sexual would be able to happen with the state of mind she was in, but then she made that remark about being used—*like it's acceptable, maybe even expected for a man to use her*—and really cinched it.

I don't mind if she feels used in a sexy way, when she's in a healthy state of mind, but I'd never do something to her I knew might make her lose self-esteem. She should *enjoy* being used, not feel bad about it.

I knew she didn't understand, but that's because she's young and inexperienced. At her age, you have sex when an opportunity presents itself.

At my age, I fuck when I *feel* like it.

As hard as it is to imagine not feeling like it with her pretty little ass in my bed, the timing just wasn't right—especially with it being her first time. If we'd already fucked a couple dozen times, fucking on an off-night would be no big deal, but her first time shouldn't be like that. She deserves better.

Today will be a better day.

Jet won't be home until later, and if Jonathan is home, he's probably sleeping in, so Kennedy and I should have the place to ourselves this morning.

I know she hasn't woken up beside a man before, and I'm happy to be her first, but I decide to make it a little more memorable for her than she might be expecting.

I slide my hand up under her shirt so I can touch her. I fucking love touching her anywhere I can—her side, her stomach, her back. My hand drifts down to the curve of her pert little ass and I give it a squeeze.

Kennedy makes a little mewling noise as I rub her ass. It's so fucking cute.

A smile tugs at my lips as I roll her over on her back—gently, so as not to wake her up. Moving carefully, I tug my arm out from under her so I can move from my spot on the bed. I move lower on the bed, carefully moving her legs so I can get between them.

I check her face to see if she's still sleeping, and she is. Her head is turned to the side, one hand dropped haphazardly beside her head on the pillow with her palm facing up. Her hair's a mess, and she looks so fucking beautiful.

I stare at her for a moment, just marveling at how fucking beautiful she is.

I can't help but touch her. I run my hand over her soft belly, run my palm over the panties I couldn't let her take off last night.

I take them off now. I drag them down slowly and toss them on the floor beside the bed.

I'm surprised she hasn't woken up through all this. She must not be a light sleeper.

My hands slide down her smooth legs as I reposition them, then I spread them and position myself between her thighs with an arm locked around one to keep her where I want her. I spread her pussy open with my fingers, then lean in to taste her for the first time in far too fucking long.

Her legs try to move, but I tighten my arm around her thigh to keep her anchored where I want her. I hear her inhale sharply as I run my tongue over her clit, just to tease her.

I take my time with her this morning, my tongue exploring her tight little hole before I focus my attention on her clit.

My pretty little bedmate grows impatient once I start teasing her there, her breaths coming in sharp, jagged bursts, her legs spread open so I have access to as much of her pussy as possible.

She cries out when I shift my attention to her clit, her hips trying to arch off the bed, but I tighten my grip on her and hold her down. She's only had her pussy licked once, so it's still a new sensation to her. Her cries are sharp and unrestrained as I feast on her pussy. Her body writhes and bucks and fights against me as I force her to stay down.

Her movements and little noises become more desperate as the pressure wells up inside her. Her hands

grab at the sheets and her body twists and bucks.

She's so fucking wild. I love it.

I can't wait to see her go over the edge, so I tongue her clit harder, faster. Her thighs tremble, her desperate little cries break before they're even out, and she clutches at the headboard.

When she comes, it's fast and hard. Her cries are high-pitched and short, and I give her clit a little bite to enhance the sensation.

I stay where she needs me while she's riding out her orgasm, but when her body goes limp, I move where she needs me next—beside her.

I reach out my arms for her and she rolls right into my embrace, burying her face in my chest and clinging to me. Her thigh wraps around me again, like even her pussy needs me close, and I can't help placing a tender kiss on the crown of her head.

*I could love this girl.*

I caress her head and give her the affection she's craving in the aftermath of the pleasure. She plants soft little kisses along my neck and chest.

My cock stirs, but it can just simmer down. She's a virgin. I can't do everything to her all at once.

Finally, she fully recovers and tips her head back to look up at me, her eyes glinting with fondness. "Good morning."

I smile at her. "Good morning, Kennedy."

"I don't know if you know this, but you're the best alarm clock in the world."

"I'm glad you enjoy my methods."

"I love your methods. You should come to my house and wake me up for school every morning."

I snort. “Yeah, your mom would love that.”

“Ugh.” The mention of her mom shrinks her smile.

I regret the words as soon as they’re out, but I meant them lightly. I didn’t mean to make her think of her stupid mother.

Kennedy rolls out of my arms, but at least she seems reluctant to go. She grabs her phone off the bedside table, then rolls on her back so she can check her notifications.

Teenagers.

While she’s doing that, I roll out of bed and head for the bathroom.

I consider waiting for her and showering together, but showering with her and not fucking her seems too difficult. I’ve given my self-control a good workout these past 12 hours or so. It deserves a break.

I shower alone, then head back to the bedroom once I’m dressed in a gray knitted sweater and black jeans.

Kennedy’s sitting up in bed with my blanket draped over her crossed legs. She looks up when I come in and flashes me a smile, her gaze drifting over my body.

“I should have probably planned better,” she tells me. “I don’t have any clothes to change into.”

“I can give you something to wear. What have you got going on today?”

“I have to work.”

“Oh.” Hearing that disappoints me. I was hoping to spend the day with her since she’s already here, and I’m home alone.

She nods, no more excited about it than I am. “Yeah. The manager’s annoying me, though. I texted him while you were in the shower because I don’t have my

uniform, and I really don't want to go home to get it. I know they keep extra shirts and hats there, and the money usually just comes out of your paycheck if you need to buy stuff for your uniform so I could get those, but I don't have the right pants or shoes, either. They don't have those there, you have to buy those at a store. There's no point buying a new shirt and hat if he's going to make me go home and get the rest of my uniform, and he's just not getting what I'm saying at all."

"The *right* pants and shoes?"

She nods. "You have to have black work pants and black non-slip shoes. It's a whole thing."

The manager must text her back, because she throws back the blankets and climbs off the bed, but her head is down, her thumbs flying across her phone screen as she walks.

When she stops texting, she pulls a black leather case out of her purse and hands it to me. "Will you give these to Jet when he gets home and see if he can fix them?"

I unzip the case and open it to find a pair of mangled headphones. "What the hell happened here?"

"My mother. She threw a fit and destroyed them. It took me ages to save up enough money to buy them. It'll probably take me a couple of months to get new ones, so if he can make them work before then, I would be immensely grateful."

"Your mother deliberately destroyed your headphones?"

She nods. "She's a bitch. It's not news. But I'll basically die without them. They're noise-canceling headphones, and I like to listen to music in my room when she's home, especially when she has her gross new boyfriend over. I can't properly escape without them."



That settles it. I zip the case back up and set the broken headphones on my dresser. “Tell your manager you can’t come in today.”

Her gaze jumps to mine. “I can’t. I need the money. Didn’t you hear? I have to buy new headphones.”

“I’ll buy you new headphones. It’s probably my fault those ones are broken. Order the new uniform so you have one to keep here in case of emergencies, and I’ll take you out to get new headphones and whatever else you need to complete your uniform. That way, if this happens again, you’ll have everything you need here. We’ll get you an outfit to keep here, too.”

Her eyes light up. “Are you serious? You’re going to get me out of work *and* take me on a shopping spree?”

“I’m the best,” I say dryly.

She grins and throws her arms around me, kissing me and murmuring against my mouth, “Yes, you are.”

I can’t help smiling as she kisses me a few more times, her arms wound tightly around my neck. Her gratitude is delicious, and it makes me happy to see her so excited as she heads into my bathroom to shower.

I don’t know how she’ll feel about it, but the only women’s clothes I have in the house are Edie’s. I donated most of her clothes after she died, but I kept a box of items that had special meaning to me. The sweater she was wearing when we got engaged, my favorite shirt, her favorite jeans, things like that.

I’m not sure if Edie’s clothes will even fit Kennedy, but they’re roughly the same size, so there should be something that will at least suffice until I can buy her a new outfit.

I’m in the bathroom with her when she steps out of the shower and wraps a fluffy bath towel around her wet body.

“What’s that?” she asks, peering into the box I have open on the counter.

“Some of Edie’s old clothes.” I check her face, but nothing unpleasant registers. “If you want, you can look through and see if anything fits you. Just something you can wear temporarily until we get to the store and get you something of your own to wear.”

Apparently, she isn’t weirded out at all, because she reaches in and grabs out the woven coral sweater Edie was wearing when we got engaged. I start to grab it and tell her not that, but before I can, she says, “I love this.” She peeks inside the box. “Are there any leggings in here?”

“Uh, no. Leggings would have been donated, but there should be some pants.”

“All right. Thank you,” she says, flashing me a smile. “You’re sure it won’t be weird if I wear your wife’s clothes?”

I’m not at all sure of that, but she’s already claimed the sweater, and it will probably be weirder if I refuse to let her wear it.

I shake my head. “Pick out what you like. I’ll go downstairs and make some breakfast so we can eat before we go.”

# Chapter ten

Milo

It's weekend, so the mall is bustling.

Kennedy is in her element. We get smoothies and she hauls me through the mall, showing me everything she wants at the various shops. I'm so glad she's not shy about stuff like that because I'm more than happy to buy her anything she needs.

When we go to the store where she says her work pants will be, she finds a couple of tops she likes, too. After that, we go to a clothing store I'm fairly certain I am too old to be in, but she finds a bunch of stuff she likes there. She gets a skimpy pair of sleep shorts and a matching top that will cover her tits but leave most of her skin visible, then she gets a sweater to wear over it in case she has to wear it around the boys.

She picks out a pair of snug jeans and a couple of necklaces.

"Can I get this?" she asks hopefully, holding up a little quilted faux-leather backpack or purse—I'm not sure what the hell it is. Looks too small to be practical, but it makes her happy, so I don't care. When I tell her yes, she throws her arms around me and kisses me and tells me I'm the best.

I'm glad she's having a good time, but I wish she had a few more experiences in her life where she simply got things she wanted.

She's far from spoiled, and it makes me want to spoil her.

I carry around her bags full of leggings and tops, cheap necklaces and purses I don't understand. I take

her to get new headphones and she's excited because they have them in rose gold now instead of "boring old black."

There are so many bags, I decide to take them out to the car, but once my hands are free, I take hers and haul her back inside.

"I thought we were done," she says.

"Nope. There's one more store I've been looking forward to taking you to all day."

She doesn't ask, but she smiles mischievously when I haul her little ass into Victoria's Secret.

"Ooh, I get new panties, too?"

"You can have whatever you want as long as you model it for me."

She grins and drags me over to the table of underwear so we can get started.

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Once Kennedy has picked out all the scraps of clothing she'd like to try on, we head toward the back of the store.

"Do you need a fitting room?" the saleslady asks brightly, grabbing the hangers of items people decided not to buy so she can go restock them.

As Kennedy tells her yes, the woman's gaze flickers to me. She does a double take, then looks back at Kennedy. Clearly, she's registering the difference in our ages, and the unlikelihood that I'm Kennedy's father given I've brought her to shop for sexy underwear.

Her disapproval might as well be audible, it's so fucking loud.

It amuses me to offend people like her, so I reach over and slip my hand into Kennedy's back pocket to eliminate any remaining doubt.

With a brittle smile on her face, the saleslady resolves to ignore me. She focuses her attention on Kennedy and says to follow her, then she leads her to the last fitting room on the left and unlocks it for her.

On her way back with the clothes she needs to put away, the lady flashes an extremely fake smile and walks past me as quickly as possible.

If we were in a better lingerie store, I'd take a seat in the sitting area outside and let Kennedy give me a show, but we're at the mall. There's no place for that here.

Taking in my surroundings and seeing no one else around, I walk down to the changing room Kennedy disappeared inside. Rapping my knuckles on the door, I lean close and murmur, "Let me in."

Kennedy opens the door a second later. Her brown eyes are wide as she peeks around the door, then looks down the hall.

"I don't think you're allowed in here."

I push the door open and walk in, anyway.

She shoots a worried look down the hall, but the saleslady isn't out there. No one is around to see me breaking the rules, so she quickly closes the door and turns back to me.

"I want to watch," I tell her, taking a seat on the chair in the corner and letting my thighs spread.

Kennedy looks a little uncertain, but she gets over it quick and peels off her top.

I enjoy the view as she touches her tits and meets my gaze in the mirror so I know she's doing it for my enjoyment. I have to shift in my seat already, which makes her feel all proud of herself.

That's the energy I like to see her exuding. Glowing with pride and happiness. This is the Kennedy she deserves to be, always. The Kennedy she *would* be if she didn't have worthless assholes like her mother trying to break her down all the damn time.

Despite her initial reluctance, she gets into it pretty quick. Kennedy's a natural tease, so she loves it when I groan as she pops out her pretty little ass and shows me a tantalizing glimpse of her pussy. She loves the heat in my gaze when she tugs a see-through negligee down to cover her perky tits.

She pulls her long hair out of the back of her sexy nightie and turns to face me. "Do you like this one?"

I crook my finger. "Come closer and let me see."

She comes closer, all right. She comes all the way over, grabbing my shoulders and climbing on my lap.

She straddles me, her hot pussy flush against the bulge of my cock in my pants. As innocent as ever, she leans in and starts kissing my jaw.

"What do you think, Mr. Granville?" she asks playfully, rocking her pussy against me. "Do you like this one?"

I tangle my hand in her mass of dark, curly hair and make a fist. "I think you're fucking lucky you're a virgin, or I'd take out my cock and push you onto it right now."

She grinds against it, tempting me to the brink of human decency. "Well, if you would've fucked me last night, I wouldn't be a virgin," she says coyly. "Then you could do what you want to me."

Christ, the things that come out of that pretty mouth. "You don't know what you're asking for, little girl."

"I think I do."

I push her off my lap before she tempts me to do something I'll regret later. "Take that off," I say gruffly.

“Whatever you say,” she teases, tugging the flimsy material over her head and standing naked in the middle of the changing room.

This stall isn't a big one, so there's not much space. The room seems to get smaller now that she's teasing me, and I'm aching with the need to plunge deep inside her.

Kennedy's in the mood to really try my patience, apparently. She drapes her hair over her tits, then runs her hand down her stomach and then lower until her hand moves between her thighs.

*Fuck me.*

She bites her bottom lip and exhales heavily as she grazes her pussy.

My cock can't take much more of her bullshit.

I point to the ground in front of me. “Get over here.”

She hesitates, dropping her hands.

“Now.”

Her eyes darken, but I know she likes to be bossed around when her clothes are off. She crosses the short distance and stops between my spread thighs.

“On your knees,” I tell her.

Her eyes widen. She looks back at the door, then at me. “Someone could... come into one of the other rooms.”

“Let them.” I grab her and yank her closer, pointing to the ground again. “Get on your knees, Kennedy, before I put you there myself.”

She licks her lips, her eyes flashing with heat, then she carefully drops to her knees on the cheap linoleum. Her tits jiggle as she drops and I can't resist reaching out to play with them.

“You like shopping with me?” I ask as I run my thumbs over her hard nipples.

She sucks in a breath, then nods jerkily.

“Yeah?” I ask smoothly. “You like teasing me and making my cock desperate for you?”

She nods again, something more emotional flashing across her face along with the desire.

I give her tender nipples a sharp pinch and she gasps, but she still leans into my embrace when I spread my palms over the soft mounds to soothe them afterward.

“Unzip me and take my cock out.”

She looks up at me, horrified that I would demand that here, in this mostly public place.

But turned on, too.

She’s a naughty little thing. She likes the idea of doing what she’s not supposed to, she’s just afraid of getting caught.

Her breath rushes out unsteadily as she obeys me despite her reservations. Her fingers tug at the buttons and my zipper. She casts me one last look of uncertainty before taking my cock out, like she’s giving me a chance to tell her I was just teasing, just seeing if she’d do it.

I’m not.

It wasn’t right last night, but today’s a different day. I’ve wanted to feel her lips wrapped around my cock since she walked into my house wearing that red lipstick, and I like the idea of making her do it here when any random shopper could walk by and hear us. I picture them pausing, imagining they hear the sounds of someone sucking cock in the next room, but shaking it off and going about their business.



Once my heavy cock is in her hand, Kennedy starts to stroke it. She doesn't have enough experience to know what to do, but that's all right. I'm happy to teach her.

I gather the thick mass of her hair in my hands and hold it like a ponytail so it doesn't get in her way.

She lowers her head, pushing her tongue out and running it over the crown of my cock. I sink down in the seat and let my head loll back, groaning low in my throat as her hand works me.

"Fuck, baby, just like that."

She pumps me with more confidence as I gather fallen strands and caress her hair. Without needing direction, she follows my lead and takes my cock into her mouth.

*Fuck.*

"Yes." I touch her face, petting her as she lowers herself onto my cock even more. She takes me deeper than I expect on her first try, but then she gags and pops off.

Her gaze flickers up to me for feedback.

"That's so good," I tell her, caressing her jaw. "You're fucking perfect. Now do it again, but relax your throat. You don't have to take me so deep. Just keep working me with your hand while you suck."

She nods, then lowers her head and does just what she's told.

Such a good fucking girl.

"Mm, that's right, just like that. Fuck, baby."

My cock hits the back of her throat and she starts to gag, but she pushes through it, keeping her throat muscles tight around my cock. She's eager to please, and her mouth is so fucking hot.

Once she figures out what she's doing, she picks up speed, pumping my cock and working her mouth up and down it.

The sloppy sounds of her mouth moving over my cock make me fucking crazy, but then she freezes, and I hear movement in the hall.

On the other side of the door, two women ponder whether they should have grabbed something in blue as the saleslady leads them to their fitting rooms. They thank her when she lets them in, then presumably walks away.

Kennedy looks up at me, her mouth still full of my cock, and Christ, the sight alone is nearly enough to make me come down her throat.

I don't, though, and I want to finish.

I like the idea of some random women listening to her suck me off, so I push down on her head, letting her know I want her to keep going.

She's really unsure about this, but she wants to obey, so she tries to keep quiet as she labors over my cock once more. Her grip on it tightens, probably because she's nervous.

To spare her nerves, I stop talking to her and try to muffle the noises she drags out of me. I'm getting close, so I push her head down, forcing more of myself into her throat. She chokes and struggles, letting go of my cock and planting her hands on my thighs. She tries desperately to pull back, but I grab her head, holding it still and forcing my cock where I need it. She cries out, but the noise is muffled around the obstruction lodged in her throat.

"Fucking take it, Kennedy."

Her face is flushed, her gaze hazy with desire. She doesn't know what she's doing, but she takes every inch I jam down her throat like a champ.

She's fucking magical.

A few stalls down, I hear one of the women whisper, "Did you hear that?"

"Was that a man?" the other one murmurs back.

I'm so fucking close. I hold Kennedy's face with one hand and grab my cock with the other. I pump and thrust into her, and finally utter a low, guttural groan as pleasure consumes me and cum shoots out of me and paints the back of Kennedy's perfect throat.

My skin is flushed, my body momentarily weak as I sink back against the chair.

Kennedy reacts on pure instinct, sucking me clean before popping off my cock.

She licks her lips like she wants every last drop, but as soon as she gets to her feet, she starts pulling her clothes on quickly enough that I figure she heard those ladies and wants to get out of here.

I'm pleasantly foggy, but I put my cock away and zip up. Kennedy didn't get to finish trying things on, but fuck it; I'll just buy her all of it.

She looks around, a bit frantic, like she wants to make sure she's not forgetting anything before we flee.

I grab the back of her neck and yank her close, leaning down to give her a quick, hot kiss.

Her cheeks flush pleasantly as she smiles up at me.

I smack her ass and grab her shopping basket, handing it back to her. "Let's go pay for all this."

Her eyes widen and she smashes her finger against her lips to shush me.

Those pretty little lips. I graze the bottom one with my thumb and have to resist the urge to kiss her again.

“Come on,” she whispers furiously, grabbing my wrist and hauling me out of the dressing room like the hounds of hell are on our heels.

# Chapter eleven

Kennedy

My face is hot as we stand in line waiting for a cashier to ring up our order so we can leave.

Milo is cool as can be, but I'm anxious as hell, cognizant of every little thing around me.

Thankfully, those two ladies from the dressing room didn't see us, so they can't point us out, but as soon as they emerged, they went and found the saleslady who let us into our changing rooms. Their mouths moved a million miles a minute and they exchanged looks as they filled her in on the scandalous happenings they're sure they overheard. My heart jumps when her gaze drifts straight over to us.

I'm so red and hot with guilt, I feel like a shoplifter.

I turn to look up at Milo standing in line beside me. "Maybe we should just go."

He looks down at me. "Why would we leave without getting your things?"

I don't want to say why with people in front of and behind us, but I'm scared we're going to get in trouble.

Mercifully, the woman in front of us grabs a little pink bag off the counter, and the cashier who rang her out looks at us as she walks away. "I can ring you up over here."

I rush forward, murmuring a polite greeting and putting the basket of stuff on the counter. I don't even need all this stuff, some of it I just picked out to try on for fun, but I was so flustered after what Milo made me do in the dressing room, I didn't want to take the time to pick through for only the items I actually wanted him to buy.

*God, that was hot.*

I've imagined my first blow job before, even imagined it with him, but I had no comprehension of how incredible it would be. His dominance and tenderness—such a potent mix. The way he gripped my head and made me take him even when I didn't think I could.

I need to stop thinking about this before I burst into flames right here in the middle of Victoria's Secret, but I'm feeling so utterly smitten, I can't resist squeezing his hand and looking up at him with a soft little smile.

I want him to fuck me so bad.

I've never wanted anything more.

Now that I've seen how huge his cock is, I'm worried it's going to be an uncomfortable experience, though. Some parts of sucking his dick were also wildly uncomfortable, but so hot that I couldn't be bothered to care.

I wish I could spend the night with him again. I know he'd probably never let me, but now that I've had a taste, I want more.

Plus, I have all these sexy nighties to wear for him.

The cashier finishes ringing up my stuff and utters a total that makes my stomach hurt.

My gaze shoots to Milo. "We can put some of it back."

He isn't fazed, shaking his head as he draws out his credit card and inserts it in the card reader.

I am horrified. I would have never asked him to spend this much money on underwear.

While he pays, I glance back and see the annoying saleslady storming in our direction, eyes narrowed like a schoolteacher preparing to reprimand an unruly pupil—and relishing the opportunity.

“Excuse me, sir.”

My insides feel like I just got an electric jolt shot through my body. I look up at Milo to gauge his reaction, but he doesn't have one. He ignores her, yanks his card out of the reader, and tucks it back in his wallet.

Since he has ignored her, she raises her voice.  
“Excuse me.”

Annoyance flickering across his face, Milo turns in her direction. “Are you talking to me?”

She settles back into her position of assumed authority now that she's successfully captured his attention. “Yes, I am talking to you. Can you come with me for a moment?”

“No.”

Her eyes bulge out. “Excuse me?”

I look at the cashier, who is confused as she hands the bag to Milo.

“Thank you,” he says to the cashier, grabbing the bag and turning around, lightly touching my butt to move me forward toward the exit.

I'm startled, torn between two different authorities, my instincts confused about which one we have to listen to. The saleslady works here, but Milo is a whole adult. Surely, if he had to listen to her, he would.

He doesn't. He murmurs, “Come on,” and pulls me toward the mouth of the store.

The saleslady chases after us. “There were other customers in the changing rooms who claim they heard the two of you inside the same room.”

“Clearly, they're mistaken,” Milo says, not bothering to slow down.

“They pointed out—and now I remember—you were *not* standing outside the dressing room when I led them

in.”

“Jesus Christ,” he mutters under his breath.

“Sir, I need you to come with me.”

Milo finally stops and turns around so fast, the woman has to fall back a step to stop from bumping into him. “If I were you, I’d stop harassing paying customers before *you* get in trouble,” he tells her firmly, raising his eyebrows. “You’re making my girlfriend feel very uncomfortable with the way you’re chasing us around, drawing attention like this when she’s trying to make an intimate purchase.”

The woman swallows her rage, her gaze flickering to me behind him.

“Now, I can tell the fact that she’s my girlfriend annoys you—even *though it’s absolutely none of your business*—and I imagine that’s why you’re coming at us like this. But I’d urge you to consider this: I just spent a good amount of money here, but with the way you’re chasing me around trying to embarrass me like I’m some kind of criminal, I might not be inclined to come back. If a manager gets involved, do you think I’ll be the one to get in trouble, or do you think you will?”

Her resentment bubbles just under the surface, but I can tell by the way she lifts her chin and her expression settles, she’s seeing the sense in what he’s saying.

Milo doesn’t bother talking to her anymore; he turns and grabs my hand, then hauls me out of the store.

My heart hammers in my chest as I let him haul me toward the food court exit where we parked. “I thought we were toast,” I tell him.

He looks back, smirking faintly as he drops my hand and slows to fall into step beside me. “Nah. I wouldn’t get you in trouble.”



That is so purely a lie, I can't hold back a laugh.  
"Yeah, right. You would *never* do that."

"Never. I'm an angel," he states.

I shake my head at him, still smiling as we escape the mall—mercifully, *without* being set upon by security.

Milo loads my last bag in the backseat of his SUV while I hop in the passenger side seat. While he's getting in and starting the car, I check my phone to see if I've missed anything important.

There's a text from my mom that reads simply,  
"Where are you?"

It was sent a while ago but I didn't notice. I text back, "At the store."

She responds right away. "I thought you worked today."

"Didn't have my uniform," I answer.

"Where did you sneak out to last night?"

"I didn't sneak out, I left," I text back, my annoyance levels rising.

"Where did you go?"

"To a friend's."

"You don't have friends," she states.

I narrow my eyes at the screen, then slide the phone back into my purse without responding. I'm not going to let her ruin my good day.

Milo glances over at me and registers the annoyance on my face. "Have you heard from your mom?"

I nod wordlessly as I look out the window, not wanting to talk about her.

I'd rather talk about how he referred to me as his girlfriend back at the store, but I'm sure he was just

saying it to the saleslady because it simplified things.

I've never actually had a real boyfriend. I was "seeing" a boy when I was 14, and of course I've gone on some dates, but nothing ever stuck.

"Have you had a lot of girlfriends since your wife died?"

He glances over at me. "No."

"Have you been in love again since her?"

He takes a moment before answering. "No."

"Think you ever will?"

Again, he's quiet for a moment. Probably weighing what he wants to say to the girl who just had his cock down her throat, but I just want him to be honest. I obviously like him whether I want to or not. I just want to know how likely it is he might ever feel the same way.

"You can be honest," I say when the silence gets to be too much. "I'm not trying to be clingy or anything, I was just wondering how you feel about it. Plenty of guys move on in the blink of an eye, but you obviously haven't. I was just wondering if it's something you're even open to."

"I was planning to answer, I was just trying to figure the answer out. I know what you mean about how a lot of men move on quickly. I've had friends over the years who got divorced, one whose wife died, and they did that. The one whose wife died remarried less than a year later. The divorced ones all got girlfriends who were polar opposites of the wives they had spent years of their lives with. And then there was me. I didn't feel like doing any of that. I was heartbroken and lost. Her death was so sudden, so entirely unexpected, I couldn't change my state of mind in a snap like that. We were married. We were supposed to grow old together. Of course I wasn't open to ever falling in love with anyone but her ever again. But then she was gone, and eventually, I had to

accept that. Moving on takes time, at least it did for me. I wasn't worried about feeling good again as quickly as possible. I think that's often the motivation when someone can't handle being alone. I let myself sink into it, and then I climbed out. I spent time with my boys, and we all grieved and got back to life when it felt like we were ready."

"Is that when you decided to start dating again?"

He shakes his head, watching the road. "Not really. It was a while longer. I had to get back to feeling single again. For a long time, I still felt married, just without a wife. Once I felt single again, that's when I started dating."

"But you never fell in love."

He shakes his head without saying a word.

"Have you ever been close?"

His gaze flickers to me, something I can't quite place in his eye. I may not be able to nail it down, but I take it to mean he's not enjoying this conversation.

Which I guess is fair.

I decide not to make him answer that one.

Instead, I dig my phone back out of my purse and plug his AV cord into it so my phone plays on his speakers.

"What are you doing?" he asks cautiously as he looks over at me.

"I'm going to play some good music for you."

"Oh, God," he says on a playful groan.

I grin. "You're gonna love it. Trust me."

"I'm too old to listen to anything you consider good music."

"Hey, give it a chance, you might like it."

“I wouldn’t count on it,” he says, but he’s smiling again, and that makes me happy.

I scroll to one of my favorite playlists, one packed full of current music he’s going to hate so much, but I have that Metallica song I liked on here, too. I want to see how surprised he is when it starts to play, but first, he must suffer through Olivia Rodrigo’s jilted wrath and aching heart.

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“Oh, whatever. You loved it.”

“Loved is a word. Not the one I would use, but it *is* a word.”

I grin and use Milo’s key to unlock the front door as he hauls all my bags toward the house. “She’s your new favorite singer. You’ll be belting her songs out in the shower when I’m not here, but you’ll never admit it.”

I’m barely inside the foyer when I hear the sound of bags dropping behind me.

I turn around, but before I can do more than gasp, Milo’s strong arm is locked around my back, pulling me tightly against his hard body. I grin, and his greedy lips crash into mine. His hands slide under my ass and he lifts me, moving forward until my back is pressed against a wall.

My fingers delve into the soft locks of his hair, my eyes closing as I kiss him back.

“Dad?”

My heart drops, and Milo puts me down immediately.

I’m on my own two feet when his son comes through the arch into the room, but we both probably look like people who just got caught kissing.

I expected it to be Jet, but my heart drops even more when I see Jonathan Granville standing there, regarding us both through a narrowed gaze. His focus drifts to the pile of shopping bags, lingers on the big one from Victoria's Secret.

"I didn't see your car," Milo says. "Didn't realize you were home."

Jonathan's gaze shoots to his father's, still skeptical. "Yeah, I can see that."

I consider my flushed face and guilty appearance, the bags of things Milo bought for me today. I know how this must look to a skeptical son, especially one who thinks I might be dating his brother.

"Is Jet here?" I ask.

Jonathan's gaze narrows on my face. I can see a spark of dislike that wasn't there before. "No."

I suppose it makes sense. It's harder to place blame on your own father. It's easy to blame me, someone he has no particular fondness for.

He's reading this totally wrong. I glance at Milo, unsure whether I should explain, or if he'll do it.

I expect him to fix this, or at least let me know it will be fixed, or at the *very* least haul me upstairs away from the judgmental looks of his eldest son so we can go through all the stuff he bought me. He joked earlier about wanting another fashion show when we got home, and I've been eagerly anticipating what fun we might have in the comfort of his house where we can't be caught.

But I guess we can be caught here, too.

It shouldn't matter. We weren't doing anything wrong. He's single, and so am I. All Milo has to do is explain to Jonathan that Jet and I aren't dating, so there's no reason we can't kiss or fuck or do whatever else we feel like doing with each other.

He doesn't.

He looks at me and says, "Didn't you say your mom was working tonight?"

It takes me a second to realize what she has to do with anything.

Then it hits me, and my stomach drops.

The only reason I can't go home—the only reason I have to be *here*—is my mom being home.

*He wants me to leave.*

That stings. I wish it didn't. I'm mad that it does, but it definitely hurts. "Oh. Yeah, I should probably be getting home," I say, even though home is the last place I want to go.

Milo nods. He looks relieved that I'm taking the hint, and my heart bends and twists.

I try to ignore the ache as he goes back to the bags and fishes out my headphones.

"Thanks," I murmur, tucking an unruly lock of hair behind my ear before taking the box from him. I try not to look betrayed as I gaze up at him, but his eyes have the faint glint of guilt, so I must not be too successful.

Logically, I know he doesn't owe me anything.

Hell, I don't even *want* to be somewhere I'm not wanted. I don't want to be home, either, but that's not his problem.

I imagine his guilt is because he's all but kicking me out when I thought we were spending the rest of the day together, but then he says reluctantly, "I need you to leave the outfit here."

I suck in a breath, looking down and realizing I'm still wearing his wife's old clothes.

"Of course."

He glances at the bags, then says, “You probably need your pajamas back, too. I’ll go get them.”

*He doesn’t even want me to come upstairs.*

Wow, I hate this a lot.

But I nod, faking as much of a smile as I’m able as he turns and heads up the stairs.

This is so much bullshit, I want to kick him in the balls.

Tamping down my irrational hurt and anger, I grab my phone out of my purse to see if I’ve heard from Mom again. I *didn’t* tell him she was working today. I have no idea if she’s home, and if she is, I need to find something else to do for a while.

Jonathan’s voice startles me, stealing my attention. “It’s been a long time since I’ve seen Jet as excited as he is when you’re around.”

I regard him carefully.

“This whole thing seemed a little weird to me, to be honest. You’re far from some hot, unattainable cheerleader, but you have a certain kind of coolness about you. You’re out of his league. Why would you bother with someone like him? Maybe now I’m getting it. Maybe he was never the one you wanted to be around.”

I swallow. “Jet and I aren’t—it’s not what you’re thinking. He likes someone else.”

A smirk tugs at his lips and he shakes his head. “No, he doesn’t.”

“Yes, he does. Her name is Brylee White. She only likes guys who are taken, so we decided to make it look like we were dating so she would notice him.”

Jonathan nods, but it’s condescending as hell. “What a nice story.”

“It’s the truth,” I say, growing mildly annoyed. “I get that you want to protect your little brother, but I’m not lying. You can ask him yourself.”

Jonathan shakes his head, a little smirk playing around his lips. “Are you a fucking idiot, Kennedy? I mean, I knew you weren’t as smart as Jet, but I didn’t think you were an idiot.”

I stare at him, my jaw inching open. “Excuse me?”

“He likes *you*.”

“No, he doesn’t.”

“Yes, he does, and if you think I’m gonna let you bust up his heart because you’re trying to get with our dad, you are very much mistaken.”

My heart flutters as he takes a step toward me. For some reason, I find myself taking a step back. He takes another step forward and I retreat another step, but as I do, I stumble over a shopping bag. My heart leaps as I start to fall, but Jonathan Granville’s hands shoot out. He grabs my waist, stopping me from falling.

My heart hammers because once I’m steady on my feet, he doesn’t let go.

I’m wildly uncomfortable and a little afraid, but I don’t get why. There’s no reason to be afraid of Jonathan Granville.

At least, that’s what I think until his gaze drops and he looks me over.

“Get your hands off me,” I say, flushing and pushing his hands away so I can back away from him.

“Keep *your* hands on the right Granville,” he warns me, meeting my gaze. “If you fuck around and hurt Jet, you won’t have a shot in hell with my dad. I’ll make damn sure of it.”



I swallow. He doesn't detail exactly how, but he doesn't have to. I believe him.

Before another word can be said, Milo comes back downstairs with my pajamas. I'm less mad about leaving now. I don't *want* to be here with Jonathan.

Without a word, I grab my pajamas and slip into the guest bathroom to change out of Edie's clothes.

When I emerge, I'm hoping Jonathan will have left the room so I can at least say goodbye to Milo in peace, but I should have known better. Jonathan is standing right beside his father, arms crossed—an angrier, younger carbon copy.

“Thanks for the headphones,” I mutter to Milo.

But I don't wait for his response before I slip out the front door.

## Chapter twelve

Kennedy

My stupid locker is jammed.

I jiggle the million year old latch and pull on the handle, trying to get the damn thing open, but it won't budge.

"Come on," I mutter, jiggling it more aggressively before slamming my palm against the door, not so much to open it as to vent my annoyance.

"Want me to give it a try?"

I gasp, turning around and slamming into the locker as Jet startles the hell out of me. "Jesus. Don't sneak up on people like that."

He cracks a smile, hoisting his bag on his shoulder. "Sorry." He nods at the locker. "May I?"

"Yeah, I guess," I murmur, taking a step back and tucking my hair behind my ear. "I've beaten the shit out of it, though. The stupid thing won't open."

He puts his bag down and places his palm against the metal door, lightly knocking against it with his hand in a few places, but I get the feeling he's listening more than trying to fix the jam. "Usually when they stick, there's something blocking the mechanism on the other side. Is your locker pretty full?"

I shrug. "I guess."

He nods, lightly smacking the locker door with his palm. "Might want to clean it out." He leans his knee against the locker down below and says, "Come over here and try the combination again."

I do, and like magic, it pops right open.

“I swear, I smack the shit out of it for ten minutes, and you come over and give it a light tap and the thing opens. Maybe I loosened it up for you,” I say lightly, reaching into my locker to pull out the books I need to take home.

“Sometimes it’s better to use careful, deliberate movements than to be blatantly forceful. Saves more of your energy that way, too.”

“Well, thank you.”

“No problem.” He picks up his bag and slings it over his shoulder. “So, what’s been going on with you lately? We haven’t talked much this week.”

“I’ve just been busy.”

“You’re not mad because I was hanging out with Stephen last weekend, are you?”

I frown, turning to look at him. “What?”

He shrugs, dropping my gaze. “It kinda seemed like you wanted to come over that one day, but I wasn’t home. And it kinda seems like you’ve been avoiding come over since then.”

*Does he not know I came over, anyway?*

“No, I’m not mad. I picked up a shift last night. I was working on homework and stuff Monday and Tuesday. Just busy.”

“All right,” he says. “I just wanted to make sure.”

“We’re good,” I assure him.

He nods and adjusts the strap on his shoulder. “So, since you’re *not* mad and definitely not avoiding me,” he begins, playfully, “what would you say about going to a party with me tomorrow night?”

“A party?”

He nods. “Josh McClain’s having a party, and I guess my association with you has won me some cool points because he said we should come.”

I roll my eyes. “Josh McClain is a bag of dicks. Why would I ever want to go to his party?”

“We don’t have to hang out with him or anything. It’s a party, I’m sure plenty of people will be there. We can do our own thing. I’ve just never been to one.” He shrugs. “Might be cool.”

“It’s not, trust me. I *have* been to those parties and all they do is get drunk on Bud Light and cheap vodka while the jocks play beer pong. The highlights include rapey douches trying to corner you and shove their tongues down your throat, and some poor idiot crying because her drunk-ass boyfriend is being a dick. Occasionally, someone also makes Hot Pockets. Those parties are only fun if you’re trashed yourself, and I’m not really in the mood to get drunk this weekend.”

“We don’t have to get drunk to have fun.”

“There’s literally nothing else to do,” I tell him. “Why do you want to go so bad, anyway? Will Brylee be there?”

“I don’t know, but whether she is or not, I’m sure she’d hear about it. It would be a new place to be seen together and get a picture to add to the story of our relationship.”

“Well, I can’t go, anyway,” I tell him, slamming my locker door shut and hoisting my bag on my shoulder. “I have to work tomorrow night.”

He follows me down the hall. “Maybe you could come over after you get off. We could watch a movie or something.”

I force a faint smile and glance over at him. “That wouldn’t be a new setting for a photo op.”

“No, but at least we could post something. A lot of time has passed since the last post. We don’t want it to look like we’re losing enthusiasm.”

“Have you even talked to Brylee?” I ask, watching his face. “Are there any signs any of this might even be working?”

“Not yet,” he answers, his expression clear so I can’t tell what he’s thinking.

Not that I should need to, but his stupid brother got in my head. He seemed so sure of himself, so undeterred by my explanations. It was like nothing I said was new information, like he’d heard it all and just didn’t believe it.

*Not that he would even know.*

It’s none of his business, honestly. He should butt out.

“It’s not a sprint, though, it’s a marathon. It’s important that we become an established couple. Right now we’re just laying the groundwork.”

“I’m not sure I agreed to all that,” I tell him. “I thought we would hang out a few times and you could tell one of your friends you felt me up or something. I didn’t think we had to establish a whole relationship.”

Jet frowns, and it’s only at the flash of hurt across his features I realize how cold I’m being. “Do you not like hanging out with me?”

*Shit.*

I didn’t mean to be an asshole to Jet, so I walk back my attitude a bit. “No, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that. Of course, I’ve been having a great time hanging out with you. I’m just in a shitty mood, that’s all. It’s not your fault. I’m sorry for taking it out on you.”

His concern eases, and he flashes me a reassuring smile. “It’s all right. You can make it up to me tomorrow

night when you come over to my house after you get off work.”

I roll my eyes, smiling faintly. “Fine. Yes, I guess I can come over. Do you know if it’ll be just us? Will your brother be there?”

“Jonathan?” he asks, surprised. “I don’t know, probably not. He’s usually not home. That’s why he still lives with us while he’s in college. He’s basically never there, wouldn’t be worth it to get his own place right now.”

*Good.*

I definitely don’t want to spend any time with him, but I’m happy to hang out with Jet and Milo—though I am still a little leftover annoyed at him for last weekend.

We haven’t even had a chance to talk about it because while we made comments about exchanging numbers, we hadn’t done it yet. I figured we would after shopping when we were hanging out at the house, but then Jonathan was there and ruined everything.

*Jerk.*

---

Since I’m hanging out at Jet’s place after work, I take an oversized purse with a change of clothes, my new headphones, and some overnight items, just in case.

I know Milo bought me new clothes last weekend on our shopping spree, but he also got weird when Jonathan caught us. For all I know, he returned everything after I left.

Given my mixed feelings about even going over there tonight, I’m not sure how I’ll feel as my shift nears

its end, but I still find myself hustling to clean up so I can get out of here.

I guess the Granville house is way better than work, even if I'm unsure of the guest list.

On my way over, I turn on some music and do my best to shake off the last of my bad attitude. I definitely didn't pass the vibe check yesterday with Jet, but not having Milo's house as a sanctuary to get away to this week has been rough, and it's made me grumpy as hell. I don't know how I got along for so long *without* going to Milo's house for a break...

Oh, right. By being miserable all the time.

I crack a smile that doesn't last once I start thinking about the impermanence of it all. It's dangerous to invest so heavily in such an unsure thing. If Milo's house is my only respite, what will I do if I can't go there anymore?

I try to put that worry out of my head as I pull into the driveway.

I yank off my hat and take out my pony tail so I can shake my hair out. It's still flat from being trapped beneath a hat all evening, but it'll have to do.

I leave my hat, grab my purse, and lock up the car, then I head for the front door.

*Please be Jet or Milo, please be Jet or Milo, please be...*

I see a Granville man coming my way on the other side of the frosted glass.

I hold my breath.

The door opens.

It rushes out in a relieved huff as Jet opens the door.

*The harmless Granville.*

I smile at him and it's not even fake; I'm so relieved he isn't his dumb brother.

"Hey," I say brightly.

"Hey," he says, smiling as he takes a step back and opens the door for me. "You made it."

"I did." I still find myself peeking around corners like I'm waiting for someone to pop out at me, but no one does. We head to the kitchen where he grabs me a bottle of cold water, then the living room where I'm relieved as hell to find only Milo sitting on the couch.

I breathe another little sigh of relief.

It's going to be a good night, after all.

Milo's gaze hits me and I warm all over. The glint of interest in his blue eyes makes me feel even hotter.

His gaze roams over me. At first, I'm surprised to see him smirking like that while he checks me out in front of Jet, but then he says, "Nice outfit."

"Oh." I look down at my work uniform. "Yeah. It's probably really greasy and gross. I should probably change out of it before I sit on your couch..."

"Your emergency pajamas are upstairs in my bathroom on the counter. I left them out in case you decided to spend the night."

I love that he says that like it's a normal, totally okay thing I can do whether I'm too tired to drive home or not.

And yes, I want to.

I'm hoping he'll come with me so I can get a kiss, at least, but Jet walks over and sits down beside his dad, showing him something on his phone.

Guess I'm going up alone.

That's okay, though. He put my stuff in *his* bathroom, so that seems to suggest I'll stay the night in his room



again.

Anticipation brings a smile to my face as I make quick work of changing out of my work clothes and into the white knitted crop top and comfy shorts set. I'm not wearing a bra, but the material is thick enough that I don't think it will be too scandalous to wear around Jet.

It is a crop top, though, so I grab the big, baggy sweater I bought to wear over it until we get in bed.

I imagine Milo's strong hands running over my bare tummy before they slide down the front of my shorts when we're in bed later.

Sleepovers here are the best.

I'm so happy I'm all but skipping when I get back to the massive living room, but when I get there and realize the guest list has changed in the last five minutes, my excitement dies a swift, painful death.

Jonathan Granville sits sprawled on the same couch as Jet, but he takes up much more of it. Jet has a smaller build than his more muscular brother, but that's not the reason. Jet is just more considerate and doesn't take up more space than he needs to.

Jonathan Granville sits on the couch like douchebags with big trucks who park sideways in parking lots because they think they're so special that the rules of common courtesy don't apply to them.

"There's our little stray," he says, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips when he looks back at me. "Come here, sis," he adds, patting the cushion beside him. "Come sit between me and your boyfriend."

Oh. My. God.

I hate everything he just said.

My gaze shoots to Milo, but he isn't even looking at me. It's like he doesn't know his son is the worst person in the whole world and I need to be shielded from him!

Ugh, no.

*Suck it up, Kennedy.*

I sigh, refusing to acknowledge Jonathan as I walk around the couch. I don't want to sit beside him, either, but I usually sit next to Jet so it would be weird if I didn't.

I'm intensely aware of the elder Granville son as I take my seat on the empty couch cushion between them. Jet looks over at me with a little smile, blissfully unaware as he grabs the remote control. "You want a snack or anything before we get started?"

I shake my head no. "I'm fine, thanks."

I sink back against the cushion, doing my best to ignore how close Jonathan's thigh is to mine. My heart does a somersault when he leans over just enough to whisper in my ear, "Nice pajamas. What'd you have to do to earn them?"

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I pull the cardigan around my body to cover more of it and Jonathan chuckles.

*Asshole.*

While Jet gets the movie playing, I try to catch Milo's eye, but I swear it's like he's actively avoiding me. The movie is an action flick that seems okay, but I scarcely pay attention, too distracted by the times Jonathan's thigh brushes mine and I can't tell if it's an accident or he's messing with me.

I lean closer to Jet since at least I know he's harmless.

Somewhere around the middle of the movie, Jet realizes we need couple content, so he wraps his arm around me and leans close to snap a couple of photos.

When we're done and we shift back to our positions, Jonathan remarks, "What a cute couple."

I glare over at him, then look to Milo.

He *still* isn't looking at me, and honestly, it's pissing me off. He knows Jonathan made things weird last time I was here, and if he doesn't notice Jonathan is messing with me now... I mean, I don't even know.

I get so aggravated thinking about it and worrying about if there's enough distance between our thighs, I finally down the last of my water just so I have a reason to go to the kitchen.

"Want me to pause the movie?" Jet asks.

I shake my head, tucking a chunk of hair behind my ear. "No, it's fine. I'll only be a minute."

I don't look at Milo this time. I don't look at anybody, I just take my empty water bottle and throw it in the recycle bin, then I open the fridge to grab myself another.

I hear footsteps on the floor while I'm in the fridge. Dread slithers through me imagining another face-off with Jonathan, but when I shut the door and turn to face the intruder, it's Milo.

I'm not happy to see him.

I prop a hand on my hip and just stare at him.

"You seem angry," he observes.

"Why are you ignoring me?" I demand.

"I'm not ignoring you." His answer comes too easy. He didn't have to think about it. He's not surprised by my question, and he has already thought about it enough to prepare himself with those words.

*Because he damn well knows he's ignoring me.*

"I'm sorry if I've made you mad."

"Damn right, I'm mad," I say.

"Why?"

“You’re being weird. You’re being distant. You’re not paying attention to me or goofing off with me like you normally do, and I know it’s because Jonathan is here to ‘keep an eye on us’.”

Milo sighs, glancing back into the living room, then back at me. Keeping his voice low, he admits, “Jonathan expressed some concerns, yes.”

I fold my arms over my chest, hating Jonathan Granville more with every second that passes. “None of this is any of his business. Where am I sleeping tonight if I stay here?”

“You can sleep in my room.”

I can tell by his tone he won’t be joining me, but I ask, anyway. “Alone?”

“Of course, alone, Kennedy. That has nothing to do with Jonathan. We had the place to ourselves last time, so we had more freedom to do what we wanted. Tonight, both of my sons will be here. You want them to hear you crying out when I make you come?”

“I don’t care,” I snap. “Let them hear it. I’m not ashamed of what we’re doing. I like you, and I think you like me, and... I mean, what’s the problem?”

His gaze drops, and when it returns to me, I see there’s a bigger disturbance than just Jonathan being a nosy asshole. “He thinks Jet really likes you, Kennedy.”

“He’s wrong. Jet likes another girl.”

“He thinks that’s a cover story. That Jet’s... tricking you into spending time with him and getting close—”

“I don’t want to hear this,” I say, cutting him off and shaking my head.

“I didn’t want to hear it, either, but if it’s true, we have to move carefully here. Jet’s more sensitive than—”

“It’s not true! Jet doesn’t like me that way. Jonathan made a wrong assumption and now he’s trying to force us all into roles we never fit in to begin with. I have never been dating Jet. I never *will* be dating Jet. I like him as a friend, nothing more. Even if he did like me, I don’t like him that way, but he doesn’t. This is Jonathan getting in the way, not Jet.”

“I understand you’re not interested in Jet that way, but I need time to see if I can find out how deep his interest in you goes. If it’s just a passing interest or he really does like someone else, then great. But Jonathan doesn’t think—”

“I don’t care what Jonathan thinks,” I mutter. “I know Jet doesn’t like me that way, and it really feels like an excuse that you’re playing that card.”

“An excuse?”

I’m feeling a little emotional and I don’t want to talk about this anymore, so I take my water and try to brush past him on the way back to the living room.

“Kennedy.” His hand locks onto my bicep and he pulls me back, forcing me to face him. I meet his gaze and see genuine aggravation on his face. “You really think I’m looking for an excuse?”

“Yeah, I really do.”

“Why would I do that?”

“I don’t know.” I try to shrug his hand off, but his grip only tightens. “Maybe last weekend spooked you.”

“I’m a grown-ass man. I don’t get spooked,” he says, simply.

“If you’re a grown-ass man, don’t let your stupid son run things when it comes to *our* relationship.”

He drops his hand from my arm and takes a step back. I can see the frustration etched across his handsome face. “Kennedy, I am not looking for excuses

or letting Jonathan run anything, but you have to understand. I am a *father*. No, I don't have cute little toddlers that will color you pictures, but I still have children whose best interests matter. My kids might both be almost fully grown, but whatever relationship I'm in, it can't hurt them, and it is still absolutely essential that any woman I get serious with *likes* my sons."

My jaw drops open. I want *so badly* to be mad, but... he's right.

He's only being a good dad, and how can I fault him for that? If he had a four-year-old son and was happy to be with a woman who openly hated him, I would think he was an absolute piece of shit.

It's just that his son is older than *me*, so I don't naturally think about it from that perspective.

"Okay. You're right. I didn't mean to call him stupid, he's just frustrating, and... older than me, so it's hard to see myself as ever being any kind of authority over him."

He cracks a smile. "You don't have to be an authority over him, but I do need you two to get along, and that's not going to happen if he has it in his head we're sneaking around behind Jet's back. I know it's strange, and this is one of the problems with us. We're in completely different stages of life. Sexually, we might be completely compatible, but when you take it beyond that... It gets much more complicated."

I don't think that's entirely fair or accurate.

It's more than sex that draws me to Milo. Sure, that's part of it. He's immensely sexy and I'm incredibly attracted to him, but not just because his body is gorgeous and he has a way of turning me on like no one ever has.

He makes me feel... safe. Like I have somewhere to go in a cold, lonely world, and I've never had that before.

I like hanging out with him whether or not we have clothes on.

And I'm not going to let Jonathan ruin it just because he thinks he's some kind of gatekeeper of relationships in the Granville house.

But Milo is right. He can't have us at each other's throats if he's going to get serious about me.

*Is that even a thing he's considering?*

We haven't talked about it, but I hope he is.

I look down, unsure what else to say.

"I promise I'm not looking for an excuse, Kennedy. I do like you. I just need you to be patient."

I get a lump of nerves in my throat just asking, but it bubbles up inside and I have to. Raising my gaze to his, I ask, "Will you sleep with me tonight? Please."

I just want him to hold me. I want to feel his strong arms wrapped around me somewhere I can feel safe and assured that he won't let outside forces wreck this thing between us.

I can see the answer on his face before he even opens his beautiful, stupid mouth and says, "Kennedy..." in that trailing off way that means no.

I won't make him say it.

"Forget it."

I wish I could tell him I'll just go home, but the unfortunate truth is I would rather sleep sad and alone in his bed than go home to mine.

I storm back to the living room before he can say another word, then I drop onto the cushion between Jet and Jonathan.

Jet glances over at me, noticing my displeasure. "You okay?"

I force a mask of reassurance over my true feelings and give him a little nod. “Yeah, I’m good.”

Milo walks back in a moment later. Seeing him sit alone on the other couch gives me a twinge of sadness. I don’t want to be over here with his sons. I want to be over there, curled up with him. I want his hands on my legs, *his* thigh pressed against mine. I want to kiss and cuddle and act like lovers do.

I want *him*, and he’s never felt more out of reach.

Jonathan leans over. He whispers, but there’s malice in his tone. “Stop pining for him, stray. It’s pathetic.”

Fire ignites inside me and I glower at him with all the hatred I’m currently feeling. “Fuck off, Jonathan. Mind your own business.”

My anger doesn’t bother him. He smirks like he enjoys it. “My family *is* my business. You’re the outsider here, not me.”

I shake my head, crossing my arms over my chest and fixing my glare on the TV.

I hate him so much.

But, like with his father just a moment ago in the kitchen, I think what I hate the most is that he’s right.



# Chapter thirteen

Milo

The couch is fucking cold tonight.

Maybe it's because I can't stop picturing Kennedy snuggled up in the warmth of my bed. I hate passing up an opportunity to sleep with her as much as she does, but there was no way we could get away with it tonight. Not with Jonathan here.

Generally, Jonathan is preoccupied with his own life and doesn't butt into mine, but he's taken a special interest in making sure I'm not fucking his little brother's girlfriend.

Which I suppose is fair.

If I had Kennedy's goddamn phone number, this would all be a lot easier. I'm not looking for an excuse to push her away like she accused me of earlier tonight. If anything, I'm holding on when the decent thing is probably to let her go.

I don't know how we can have any kind of future together in real life, and I don't want to further damage her.

I still have every intention of fucking her, and the uncertainty of our future won't stop me any more than my son's potential interest in her, I just have to figure out how to navigate this situation with those obstacles in the way. They aren't small obstacles, and I don't want either of them to get hurt.

Jet is sensitive and hasn't even expressed much interest in girls before her.

Kennedy is resilient as hell, but her life up to this point has made it hard for her to trust anybody, and if

she continues to invest in people who end up disappointing her, eventually, she'll stop trusting anyone at all. Her heart is fragile, too. She's never given it to anybody before, and if I'm the first and I fuck her over, it'll be a hard thing for a girl like her to get past.

I don't want to fuck up her chances at future happiness.

Hell, I'd like to believe there exists a reality where I can be *part* of her future happiness, she just needs to relax a little and give me some time to find it.

I'm worried her self-protective instincts are going to fuck us over in the days to come. She won't realize she's self-sabotaging; she'll think she's protecting her heart from a potential break, pushing me away before I can do it to her.

Tonight, she showed signs of already losing trust in me just because I didn't flirt with her enough while we watched the movie. If she's being that hyper-vigilant about looking for trouble, she'll find it. She'll see distance where there isn't any, and she'll concoct issue after issue to obsess over until she's convinced herself the only thing she can do to protect herself is shut off from me.

She hasn't had successful outcomes from trusting people before, so I know she won't give me much leeway in that regard. The second the thread of her trust starts to slip through my fingers, it's on the fast track to being gone.

And that's already started.

I don't know how to hold on to her while also moving at the speed I need to move at. I'm older and far more secure than she is; I don't need to rush. I can take my time and still know I'm going to get where I want to be.

I believe she'll get there, especially with my guidance, but maybe not if she cuts me off. If that happens, I'll have no control over where she ends up.

I'm lying on the couch thinking of all the ways her future could so easily go off course when I hear a noise that sounds distinctly like the stairs creaking.

My heart thuds with anticipation. I sit up, knowing—maybe hoping—as I do that it's going to be her.

And then I see her in her skimpy little nightclothes, stepping softly so as not to wake anyone as she enters the kitchen.

The sight of her brings a smile to my face. Her long hair is loose, the curls springy and wild. The refrigerator door opens and I wish I could see her bending over to grab a drink.

I throw back the blanket and get off the couch. I hear her close the refrigerator door, but she doesn't move into my line of sight.

When I enter the kitchen, she's leaning back against the counter with a little smile on her pretty face. "Sorry. Did I wake you?"

I shake my head. "Couldn't sleep."

"Mm." She nods like she understands and uncaps her fresh bottle of water. "Probably because you're not snuggled up in bed with my naked body pressed against yours."

*Christ.*

"Yeah, that probably has something to do with it."

She shrugs as she takes a sip, then says, "Hey, that could have been your night, but you wanted to sleep alone on the couch."

I don't take her bait. I don't want to fight. She's down here when I was just thinking about her, and we have this moment alone. I don't want to waste it.

I walk over to her. She doesn't move as I approach, just holds my gaze, losing her smile when I stand

towering over her. I plant my hands on the counter on either side of her so she can't move.

"Looks like you caught me," she says softly.

"Mm-hmm."

She licks her lips, still holding my gaze. "What are you gonna do with me?"

*I want to do so many fucking things to her.*

The first thing that crosses my mind is her tits. I want to see them. I look down at that skimpy fucking top. I don't know who invented crop tops, but I need to send them a fucking thank-you letter.

Letting go of the counter, I reach for the hem of her top and fold it up so her tits are exposed. "So fucking perfect," I murmur, reaching for one and giving it a firm squeeze before I grab the other. Her nipples are already hard, and I know they'll still be super sensitive since they haven't been touched.

Unless, of course, *she's* been touching them.

I like that vision.

"Are you sleeping naked in my bed tonight, Kennedy?"

She shakes her head, looking up at me as I look at her body. "Do you want me to?"

"Yes. I want to smell your pussy on my blankets. I want to know these pretty little nipples have rubbed against the sheets I'll sleep on tomorrow night."

She gasps as I give her nipples a sharp squeeze. "Okay," she says a little breathlessly. "I'll take my clothes off when I go back upstairs. I would have if you were sleeping with me, I was just... afraid... someone else might come in."

Her words break as I squeeze and roll her nipples between my fingers while she talks. Her eyes drift shut,

her head lolling back as I keep her pinned here, playing with her tits.

Since her eyes are closed and she won't expect it, I grab the bottle of ice cold water she sat down on the counter when I came in. I press it against her warm skin and she jumps at the sudden chill.

"Sh." I lean in, pressing my lips against hers. I drag the cool bottle across her belly and around to her side. She sucks in a breath that I feel against my mouth as I lower the bottle, pushing it past the waistband of her sleep shorts.

She squirms, not knowing where I'll put it next, but probably suspecting.

I push it between her legs, catch her breath on my lips as the cold bottle rests against her inner thigh.

"Milo," she whines before kissing me a few times on my lips, on the corners of my mouth. They're needy kisses. She's begging without words for me to touch her where she needs it most.

I put the bottle back down on the counter. My hand is still cool where I was holding it, so I press that palm against her nipple. She gasps into my mouth, and I take her bottom lip between my teeth.

"Come to the couch," I say roughly as I kiss her.

She follows me, our mouths still connected as we make our way to the couch, our hands roaming one another's bodies.

I'm wearing black sweats and a T-shirt since I'm sleeping downstairs where it's cooler, but Kennedy grabs the hem and yanks it over my head.

I laugh as I fall back on the couch. She grins, yanking it off and throwing it, then straddling my lap, her pretty little ass pressed against my thighs.

Fuck, she is beautiful. I push her hair out of her face, then let my hand linger for a moment, caressing the curve of her jaw.

That feeling comes back, the one that feels eerily close to love.

I can't express it right now—*that would fuck her all up*—but the feeling lodges in my chest. I can feel it like a physical thing.

It expands as Kennedy bends to kiss my bare chest. She kisses as low as she can while she's on my lap, then she lifts back up and starts kissing her way across my shoulder and up my neck.

The whole time, she moves her hips and grinds her pussy on my rock-hard cock.

"I want you inside me," she whispers before nipping at my ear.

*Christ.*

I want that, too, but right now, while things are so up in the air, it doesn't seem right. I know sex isn't casual for her. She's holding out for love, and while I might be starting to feel it, I don't know where she's at. Lust, absolutely. Love, I don't know.

"Please," she whispers to entice me as she kisses her way along my hard jaw and pushes her pussy against my cock, only the thin material of my sweatpants in the way.

"Stand up," I tell her.

She drags her pussy against my cock on her way off my lap and I give her a playfully narrowed look.

"What?" she says innocently, touching her own tits since she noticed I liked that in the dressing room.

"Take your fucking clothes off."

Her eyes widen slightly, then she makes quick work of getting naked. Once every scrap of clothing is off her body, she's standing in front of me, fucking gorgeous with her tits out, her skin flushed...

*Fuck.*

"Now mine."

She glances at my lower body, then drops to her knees to kneel so prettily at my feet as she drags off my sweats, then my boxer briefs. Once I'm naked, she improvises a little, taking my cock in her hand and stroking it while she looks up at me.

"You're beautiful, you know that?"

Her eyes glint with pleasure and she smiles up at me. "I'm glad you think so."

I reach out to caress her face, but while it's there, I push my fingers into her hair to get a good grip on the back of her skull. "Suck," I say, guiding her down as I give the order.

She doesn't hesitate. She takes my cock into her mouth and worships it as my head lolls back against the couch.

I caress her head while she works me, murmuring curses and reassurances to let her know she's doing a good job, and her enthusiasm picks up. She starts to moan as she sucks me, her body moving restlessly. I can tell she's turned on, too, so I let her pop off and reposition.

I lie back on the couch and help her position herself so her pussy is right in my face. Her face is down by my cock, though I don't expect she'll be able to do much with it while I'm eating her pussy. I just want to feel the vibrations of her pleasure.

I wait until she bends and takes my cock in her mouth. We've never done this before, so she doesn't

know she won't be able to suck cock while I'm pleasuring her. She gets started and my eyes roll back, tempting me to just enjoy what she's doing, but I force myself to stay focused.

I place one hand on the back of her thigh and the other on her ass, then I push my tongue up into her pussy. She gasps and tries to lift up like I thought she might, so I use my hand on her ass to push her back down.

Still, she tries to lift off. I pull back so I can tell her, "Stop doing that."

She pops off my dick. "I don't want to smother you."

"You're not going to fucking smother me," I say on a laugh. "Don't be shy. Put your pussy in my face before I beat your little ass."

"Mm, I might be into that," she jokes before bending to take my cock back into her mouth and finally letting me pull her down so my face is buried in her pussy.

*That's more like it.*

As soon as I get to work, her dick-sucking practically stops. She tries, bless her heart, but ends up plastered against my body, moaning around my dick and writhing as I devour her pussy.

That's exactly what I wanted. It's sweet when she tries, when she wraps her tongue around the head of my cock and tries so hard to keep at it, but she comes apart, moaning helplessly and pushing her pussy against my face.

I can tell by her desperate gasps and cries when she's getting close, but she's being too noisy. Just moaning and whimpering, I doubt the boys can hear, but if I make her come, she might not think about it. She might cry out, and there's a far greater chance they'll hear her, then.



She moans as I lick her clit, grabbing desperately at my legs for purchase. I lick her a little more until I can feel the tension in her shaky thighs, then I let go.

She whines miserably around my cock. In case she's expecting me to start again, I tell her, "You can get off when you have a throat full of my cum—not a moment sooner."

I feel her belly rise and fall against mine as she tries to recover. After a couple seconds, she wraps her fingers around my cock and sucks me like her life fucking depends on it.

I grab the pillow and pull it over my face to muffle my own groan as my body goes rigid and cum shoots into her throat. She's ever attentive, swallowing and sucking her way off my cock to clean me up.

*Christ.*

I fucking love this girl.

My body is immobile as she pulls off my cock and shifts until she's lying face down on my chest, our bare bodies pressed together. I know she's still turned on, but she lies there while I recover, tracing shapes on my bare chest.

*I love you, Kennedy.*

I want to tell her so goddamn bad, but I don't.

I can't.

It wouldn't be fair.

She looks up at me, her head resting on her forearm.

"Come here."

She obeys, scooting up until our lips can touch.

I kiss her, and as I do, I shift our positions. I shift her until she's pinned beneath me on the couch, then I push

my hand between her thighs. She gasps as the first finger pushes into her, but does her best to spread her thighs to give me better access. It's hard for her to move at all the way I have her pinned here.

Once I can fit it, I push a second finger inside, pumping into her a few times before I turn my attention back to her clit. Her pussy is leaking juices all over my fucking hand. It's so fucking hot, I have to pull them out to lick it off my fingers, then she groans as I shove them back inside her.

She's so turned on and already primed from me eating her pussy, it takes less than a minute to make her come. Just before she gets there, I cover her mouth with my hand so when she groans and cries out in rapture, my palm muffles the sound.

When she quiets down, I let her go and sink back into the couch cushions, hauling her pretty little ass on top of me and just lying there with my arm settled around her small waist. She's affectionate post-orgasm, so she peppers my chest with little thank-you kisses that make me smile.

*God, I love that.*

I'm enjoying the quiet, but Kennedy finally breaks it, saying, "I did not expect that when I came downstairs for water."

I chuckle, my fingers moving lightly up and down her back. "No?"

She shakes her head and smiles, a wicked glint in her eyes. "No. I'm not complaining, though."

"Glad to hear it."

A few seconds pass before she adds, "I'm kind of relieved you *wanted* to play with me tonight."

"I always want to play with you, Kennedy. If I could spend every day with my face buried between your

thighs, I would. It just isn't practical."

She cracks a smile, but her gaze doesn't meet mine as she continues her chest drawings. "Yeah, I know," she says softly. "Earlier, it just seemed like... things were off with us."

"I told you that wasn't the case."

"I know you *said* that..."

She doesn't fill in the blanks, but I understand. Just because I said it doesn't mean she's going to believe it.

"I won't lie to you, Kennedy. I won't give you any reason to doubt that my word means something. When I tell you I just need you to be patient, I'm not dicking you around. It's not the single man's version of, 'I promise my wife and I are going to get divorced, you just need to wait a little longer.' We were complicated right from the start, and it seems like it's only getting *more* complicated the deeper we get into it."

"I guess I'm just worried that... it's too complicated. Eventually, you'll get fed up and decide it's not worth it."

I pick up her hand that's tracing shapes on my chest, link our fingers together, and bring them to my lips so I can kiss the back of her hand. "You are absolutely worth the trouble. It's only the circumstances that are complicated, not my feelings for you. I like you very much, and if there were no obstacles in the way, it would be a no-brainer."

"But it's not." She looks up at me. "There *are* obstacles in the way. What does it mean for us if... they won't move?"

"I don't know," I tell her honestly.

She's quiet for several beats, then she says softly, "I think... I'm afraid to lose you, and that's really scary."

"I'm not going anywhere," I promise her.

“Yeah, but if Jet likes me or I can’t get along with Jonathan...”

I don’t have the answers, so I can’t set her mind at ease by giving them to her, but I reiterate more firmly, “I will always be here for you, Kennedy. No matter what.”

I expect that to reassure her, but instead her gaze drops like I just verified her worst fears. “That just sounds like bullshit. An empty promise you make to someone when you know you won’t be sticking around.”

“Hey.” I lift her chin, forcing her gaze to mine. “That is not what this is. I don’t know what the future holds for us, but I promise I will never abandon you.”

Her eyes glint with so much vulnerability, it breaks my heart. “You’re the only good thing in my life,” she whispers, her eyes filling with tears.

A knot forms in my throat. I pull her close and wrap my arms around her tightly, wanting to protect her from that harsh reality. “Someday that won’t be true. Not because I won’t mean anything to you anymore, but because your life will be so full of so many good things.”

She laughs shortly without humor, her face buried in my chest. “Yeah, right.”

“It will. I guarantee it.”

I don’t think she believes me, but she doesn’t argue, either.

For the next few minutes, neither of us says anything. We just enjoy being wrapped in each other’s arms, the rest of our world quiet and uncomplicated, at least for these few moments.

It’s too quiet. Too peaceful. When I realize Kennedy is drifting off on my chest, as much as I hate to, I have to wake her up and tell her to go up to bed.

She pulls her clothes back on and gives me a kiss, then she heads for the stairs.

“Kennedy,” I call out softly.

She looks back, a flicker of hope in her eyes, almost like she expects me to say fuck it, I’ll join her.

I wish I could.

She knows I can’t.

“Don’t forget your water.”

“Oh.” Her face flushes prettily, then she rolls her eyes and goes back to the kitchen to retrieve her bottle of water off the counter.

“Sweet dreams,” I tell her as she starts up the stairs.

I hear the creak again, and I try to listen for her footsteps in the hall, maybe the sound of my bedroom door closing so I know she’s in bed. I’m so fucking tired, though. I got so relaxed with her lying on top of me, it’s hard to keep my eyes open.

I don’t hear the bedroom door close, but I’m sure she’s in there by now.

The couch doesn’t feel so cold anymore, but I still drift off to sleep thinking about the next time I can fall asleep in that bed with her.

## Chapter fourteen

Kennedy

Jonathan Granville blocks my path to the bedroom.

He's shirtless and barefoot, just a pair of blue sweats hanging so low on his slim hips, I can see the perfect V of his Adonis belt pointing down to the bulge in his pants.

My skin is still flushed from the pleasure I just experienced downstairs with his father, but the hallway is probably dark enough that he can't tell. I search his shadowed face for signs that he just woke up, but... he looks pretty awake.

*Oh my god, did he hear us?*

He must not have, right? He would have said something immediately. Hell, he might have come downstairs and interrupted. I believe he is that much of an asshole.

I don't know what to say, but I don't have to figure it out. He breaks the silence.

"What are you doing out of bed in the middle of the night?"

I'm hyperconscious of how much of my body is exposed. I didn't pull the sweater on to go downstairs, so I'm just wearing the skimpy crop top and my comfy sleep shorts.

I would've worn the sweater if I'd thought there was even a slim chance I'd run into him.

Still a little lost for words, I hold up the bottle of water I went downstairs for. "I—I was thirsty."

His lips curve up unkindly as he looks at the water bottle. "I bet you were."

I don't realize until after I've shown it as evidence that I didn't do anything wrong, the bottle of water sat on the counter for so long after Milo ran it over my warm skin, the outside is sweating. All the bottle proves is that I went downstairs and stayed for a while.

I lower the bottle, but keep my gaze trained on Jonathan's so I don't give off the impression of guilt. My heart skitters, tempting me to break his gaze and flee as he takes a purposeful step forward.

There's aggression in the set of his broad shoulders as he stalks toward me, shades of cruelty splashed across his handsome features.

My fight-or-flight instincts scream for me to act now before it's too late. I want to avoid a confrontation, so I step to the side and try to move past him down the hall.

I don't get far. He grabs my arm and pushes me back toward the wall. I stumble, catching myself against the hard surface as he lets go.

Jonathan closes in immediately, invading my personal space and leaning close in an effort to intimidate me.

His tone is hateful, his breath hot on my skin. "Did you just fuck my father, stray?"

"No," I say quickly, trying to slide down the wall so I can get away from him. His arm shoots out to stop me, his palm slamming against the wall beside my head and making me jump.

"No?" His tone a blend of skepticism and mockery, he leans even closer. "So, if I pushed a finger into your tight little cunt right now, you'd be dry?"

Dread trickles through me. My body is reacting strangely to the potent dose of fear sparked by his threat

and his filthy choice of words uttered in that low, gravelly tone. This isn't the first time in my life I've been cornered by a man and given attention I didn't want, but it *is* the first time I've felt anything but fear, anger, and utter revulsion.

I gasp as Jonathan roughly grabs my jaw, forcing my fearful gaze to his.

"Answer me," he demands.

Anger courses through me, and I glare at him. "If you pushed a finger into any part of my body right now, that would be assault, and I would scream."

His eyebrows rise with arrogant amusement. "Yeah? What do you think would happen if you did? My dad would call the police on his own son, they'd haul me away, and you two would live happily ever after?" He smirks, his grip on my jaw tightening. "No. I think you're shrewd enough to keep your mouth shut no matter what I do to you."

His gaze rakes over me as he utters the threat, emphasizing all the damage he could do. My heart hammers in my chest. "Get your hands off me, Jonathan."

"Why?" He leans closer, brushing my cheek with his in a mocking imitation of a nuzzle. "Am I ruining all your plans?"

I hate the way he talks about me, like I'm some kind of scheming opportunist. He's the asshole here, not me. All I'm doing is minding my own business and trying to have a relationship with a man I like who likes me back. What's so bad about that?

Meanwhile, he's putting his hands on me and cornering me in halls like some kind of rapey douchebag.

I know *he's* in the wrong and not me, but I'm *not* sure what will happen if he steps over the line and I have to call for help. What would his dad do if he walked in on



this? How would he feel? What if he couldn't even look at me the same way after seeing his son's hands all over me?

Milo said the deeper we get with this relationship, the more complicated things seem to get—*this* might complicate things too much for him. I know he said he would always be there for me, but... there are limits.

And he wants us to get along. How the *fuck* can we ever be expected to get along if this is how Jonathan insists on treating me?

I try to move, but he presses closer, keeping me caged against the wall. I try to push away from him, but I'm trapped with nowhere to go as he presses his hard, muscular body against mine.

“Jonathan...”

His hand is still on my jaw, but he loosens his grip. His thumb grazes my bottom lip, then pulls down on it like he's going to push his thumb into my mouth the way his father has before.

Before he can, I murmur, “If I were you, I wouldn't stick anything into my mouth that you don't want bitten off.”

He smirks down at me. “Yeah?”

I nod wordlessly, but meet his gaze with steel in mine so he knows I mean it.

His hand leaves my face. For a fraction of a second, I feel relief thinking he's backing off, but then he places his palm across my bare stomach. Before I even have a chance to react, he shoves his hand down the front of my shorts.

I gasp, trying to squeeze my thighs together, but I'm not fast enough; his hand is already between them.

Thank God I put my panties back on so there's a thin barrier between his skin and mine, but his hot palm

covers my pussy, and I know he can feel how wet I am.

“Jonathan!” I grab his arm, reaching down to pull his hand out of my sleep shorts as my heart races. “What the hell—?”

“Just as I suspected,” he says, sending bolts of humiliation straight through me. “Wet as fuck.”

*Oh my god.*

I could cry, I’m so embarrassed.

I brace my palms on his chest and give him a hard shove away from me. I catch him off guard, so he falls back a step, but he seems more amused by it than anything.

*Fucking asshole.*

“Stay the fuck away from me,” I tell him, turning and hurrying down the hall toward his father’s bedroom.

I’m terrified he’ll follow me, but I don’t want to give him the satisfaction of outright running.

Maybe I should have worried less about saving face and more about saving my ass because just as I get my hand on the knob, I feel his hot skin against my back. He grabs a fistful of my hair and shoves me against the door, trapping my body with his.

I freeze, not turning the doorknob to free myself because I don’t want him to follow me into Milo’s bedroom.

His hand slides around my front, and his palm catches the weight of one breast.

Tears spring to my eyes as he pushes his hips forward, forcing what is clearly an erection against my backside.

*He’s going to ruin everything.*

“Please leave me alone,” I whisper, my face turned, my cheek smashed against the wood.

He squeezes my tit, leaning close and murmuring in my ear. “What was that?”

“Get your hands off me.”

“Try again,” he says.

I swallow past the lump in my throat, then I say, “Please.”

His voice warms with approval that would remind me of his father, except even his approval carries a tinge of mockery. “There we go. That wasn’t so hard, was it?”

He says it like I said the magic word, but he doesn’t stop grinding his cock against me, doesn’t let go of my hair. His other hand slides down to my waist, but he stays close and doesn’t let up one bit.

Since he’s still touching me in so many places he shouldn’t be, I say, “Why are you doing this? I thought you wanted me with Jet.”

“That’s what Jet wants,” he says, his tone level. “Doesn’t seem to be what *you* want, though.”

“You don’t care what I want,” I mutter resentfully.

“That’s true. But I warned you what would happen if you couldn’t focus on my brother and stay off other Granville dicks, didn’t I? Your wet cunt tells me you haven’t listened. If you’re so determined to be the Granville family bicycle, I guess I’ll take a ride.”

“You’re disgusting.”

He chuckles, his breath hot on my skin as he pulls my hair over one shoulder. He skims the curve of that shoulder with one finger. It catches on the cream-colored crocheted strap of the top his father bought me. He pulls it aside, then shocks me by leaning down and licking my skin. “You’re one to talk, stray. Maybe some of that

wetness is from your little jaunt downstairs, but some of it's for me, too, isn't it?" Shame sends shivers down my spine as he slips the strap back into place. "Maybe I should fuck you right now. Make you scream. Let my dad hear it and come up to see what a filthy little slut you are."

It feels like he's tearing my heart into pieces with his awful words. Bleakness seeps in, filling all the cracks his father's affection had only moments ago. "I hate you," I whisper.

He presses his lips against the back of my neck. Gooseflesh erupts as he whispers, "I hate you, too."

I'm terrified he's going to rape me right here against the door of his father's bedroom. I'm not opening this goddamn door, not for anything. I won't let him invade the space that's mine and Milo's. I won't let him poison the only good thing in my life just for fucking kicks.

I make up my mind to be silent if he does. I've endured dark shit before. I can make it through that. He can't tell his dad. Maybe he's using that threat to hold over my head, but is he really depraved enough to tell his father something like *that*? It's hardly a fucking brag.

He's a monster, but not my first monster.

I'll be fine.

I just have to remove myself from this moment, that's all. Just... remove myself, and hope everything will be all right.

He's still pressed against my back like he was, but I've gone silent. No more asking him to leave me alone, no more biting jabs.

Maybe he feels like he's intimidated me enough for one night, or maybe he's just bored.

Whatever the reason, he takes a step back.

I can scarcely breathe. I don't move.

“Sleep tight, stray. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Relief expands inside me as I suck in breath after breath, stunned by my turn of luck.

I really thought...

I shake it off. It doesn’t matter what I thought. He’s gone now.

Isn’t he?

I glance back over my shoulder and see he really is walking down the hall toward his room. He’s far enough away that I quickly open Milo’s bedroom door and slip inside, then I turn the lock and take a step away, watching the door to make sure he doesn’t come back.

A few moments pass and nothing bad happens.

I leave the light off and finally walk over to Milo’s bed.

It feels so empty without him in it, especially now.

All I want is to curl up in his strong arms, to wrap myself around him and get the assurance I need that we’re okay and we’ll continue to be okay no matter what.

I don’t know what to do about Jonathan. I don’t know if I should tell Milo. I’m afraid telling him would make things worse instead of better. Would he really take my side against his own son? I know my mom sides with her romantic partners over me, but I don’t think that’s a thing good parents do.

I love that Milo is a good dad, I just...

I don’t know where that leaves us because his son is horrible.

I need to clear Jonathan Granville out of my head, so I look at the bed I’ve had such lovely moments in.

Milo wanted me to sleep naked in his bed tonight, but I’m a little afraid to. Yeah, I locked the bedroom door,

but for all I know, there's a key and Jonathan knows where it is.

I picture stripping off all my clothes and climbing naked into Milo's bed. Curling up under his blankets, the sheets twisted around my bare legs.

It doesn't feel safe, but I want to give Milo what he wants, so I do it anyway.

Once I'm naked and snuggled up beneath the covers, I try to close my eyes and fall asleep, but I can't. My body is still very much stimulated, and my nerves are a wreck.

I need to relax, and thinking about what Milo said when I was downstairs earlier about wanting to smell me on his sheets...

I close my eyes and let my hand slide down between my parted thighs. I grab his pillow and pull it close, the cool silk grazing my nipples and making them hard. A faint noise slips out of me as I push a finger into myself, rubbing my tits against his pillowcase and imagining Milo watching me.

I think about him watching me touch myself in the dressing room, and about kneeling at his feet and taking his cock down my throat. I think about how it felt when he pressed the cool water bottle against my skin, and when he covered my mouth and made me come.

My fingers move faster over my clit as I think about that last part, but some wire crosses in my brain, maybe interpreting the move that could have felt violent and illuminating the more recent act of sexual violence against me.

My heart hammers as Jonathan Granville springs to mind, grabbing a fistful of my hair and shoving me hard against the bedroom door.

*No!*

I try to push him out of my mind, summoning Milo as I roll on my side, using my legs to pull his pillow close to my pussy.

There.

Peace fills me, his handsome face in my mind. I picture him kissing his way up the inside of my thigh, his hands braced on either one as he spreads me open and devours my pussy. He's playing with my tits, too, and it feels incredible, his big palm covering one while he squeezes my nipple with the other.

*Wait, that's not right.*

Milo only has two hands, and they're both on my thighs.

My fantasy turns dark again as I imagine opening my eyes only to see Jonathan Granville is the one playing with my tits while his father eats me out.

*"You just love Granville dick, don't you, stray?"*

No.

*Fuck.*

It's too late. I try to stop it, but I'm too close. Pleasure rocks me as my body shudders in the wake of my orgasm, but it doesn't feel good like an orgasm should. It feels inky and guilty and a little sad.

I feel worse than when I climbed into bed by myself.

I just want Milo to be here with me.

*I should have gone home.*

Next time, I guess I will.

I had hoped Milo's place would continue to be a sanctuary for me, but maybe I should have known better.

Maybe everywhere stops being safe if you just hang around long enough.

# Chapter fifteen

Kennedy

It's raining when I wake up. That's why I linger in bed longer than I should.

Not because of the unsettling dreams I had.

Definitely not because I'm avoiding going downstairs and facing all the Granville men.

It's just the rain. I want to stay curled up in Milo's bed and listen to it for a while.

When I finally summon the courage to haul my ass out of bed and go downstairs, I make sure I'm dressed first. I wash up in the bathroom and change into one of the outfits Milo bought me when he took me shopping.

I make sure my bag is packed, too. Once I've put in an appearance to see Milo and let his shitty son see he hasn't scared me off, I need to get the hell out of here.

No lingering today, unfortunately.

Jet's is the first face I see as I enter the kitchen. He's sitting at the island with a notebook open, a pencil in his hand, and his phone out on the countertop. He must be working on something because he doesn't even seem to notice me come in.

"Good morning," I say anyway.

"Good morning," he answers distractedly before jotting something down.

The sound of my voice attracts the attention of the Granville standing with the refrigerator door open, grabbing a carton of orange juice.

My heart stalls as my gaze locks with Jonathan's. He's wearing black and gray basketball shorts with a



gray zip hoodie, but it's sleeveless, showcasing his bulging muscles as he rudely uncaps the carton and takes a swig from it.

His eyes glint with superior amusement as he swallows and swipes the back of his hand across his mouth just to be obnoxious. "Morning, Kennedy."

He says my name in a mocking way. I'm shocked he even knows it. Since he decided to start being a dick to me, he has exclusively used his degrading nickname to address me.

I see why when Milo walks around the other side of the fridge, his gaze warm until he sees I'm fully dressed. "You're not leaving already, are you?"

I don't know how to answer. Walking around the counter, I put my purse down to claim the spot by Jet. "Um, not right this second, but I can't stay long."

Milo moves around his son and grabs a carton of eggs. "You have time for breakfast?"

I nod. "Yeah."

Ordinarily, I would offer to help. I enjoy cooking with Milo.

Today, Jonathan is helping cook, though, so I remain seated at the center island and watch them work.

It occurs to me that they both look really alert, and they're wearing workout clothes. I glance over at Jet and see he's still in his pajamas.

"Have you been up for a while?"

I'm only really addressing Milo, but of course it's Jonathan who answers. "We sure have. Went for a run, did a little workout. Logged that father-son time, you know?"

Since I wasn't talking to him, I don't answer him.

But, since I ignore him, Jonathan pays attention to me even harder. “How’d you sleep?”

“Great,” I chirp, even though it’s not true.

“Yeah?” He sounds faintly surprised, and that makes me happy. Even if it’s bullshit, I’m happy to ruin his day with news of what a fantastic time I had not being at all bothered by his harassment.

“Yep. Milo’s bed is so comfy, I just love being there. And I had really nice dreams.”

“Oh yeah?” Jonathan turns around to face me, one eyebrow cocked as he leans back against the counter. “Were you being railed by a whole soccer team?”

“No. But it’s interesting to know that’s your idea of a good dream. Love is love, Jonathan. I support you.”

He smirks. “I don’t roll that way, stray. I’m pretty sure you know that after last night.”

My heart drops out of my body.

*He didn’t seriously just say that.*

His smirk grows, the evil glinting in his eyes as he acknowledges wordlessly that he won this round.

Desperate to change the subject before it registers with Milo what he just said, I turn to Jet. “What are you working on?”

“What did that mean?” Milo asks levelly.

Panic gathers in my chest. I raise my gaze to meet Jonathan’s as Jet distractedly relays to me the details of what he’s doing. I don’t understand any of it, but I’m only half paying attention, anyway. My gaze is fixed on his older brother.

Jonathan watches me, visibly debating how destructive he wants to be this morning.

*Please don’t.*

I don't know if he can see it in my eyes, but it feels like I'm screaming it, even though I don't say a word.

My mind torments me with thoughts of what he could say next. How easily he could collapse everything.

He doesn't *have* to take this battle any further.

Probably just telling his father about last night would be enough to ruin things between us. He could lie, too. Say I was into it. Say it went further than it did. He doesn't have to tell the truth about how it went down. I probably damaged my believability by not going to Milo immediately and telling him what happened. Sure, I could tell him after the fact that I was afraid to, but Jonathan would insist I'm full of shit and just trying to cover my ass. Who would Milo believe if it came down to me vs. Jonathan?

I feel sick.

Then Jonathan speaks, and it feels like a rug being pulled out from under me.

"Kennedy came downstairs for a drink of water last night," Jonathan says smoothly, glancing over at his father. "You were on the couch, weren't you? Maybe you heard her."

Milo remains silent, cracking an egg and discarding the shell.

"Anyway," Jonathan continues. "I thought I heard noise downstairs. Woke me right up."

He didn't tell me that part. Did he really hear us? I'll die.

"Must've been Kennedy getting herself a drink. When she came back up, I was awake, so, like any good brother-in-law, I popped out to say hi."

*Oh my god.*

Jonathan's gaze drifts back to me. "When I saw her with bedhead, wearing that slutty little sleep outfit, I guess I got a bit confused."

"Hey," Milo says, a warning in his tone as he looks over at his son.

For a split second, I feel happy that he's at least standing up for me when his son openly calls me a slut, but the feeling doesn't last long.

Jonathan smiles at his dad. "Hey, I'm just telling you how it looked to me at the time, half asleep and stumbling out into the hall. I saw a scantily dressed girl just outside my bedroom, and..."

Tension fills the room as Jonathan strategically falls silent.

Milo looks back at me, a look on his face I can't quite place. Is he concerned? Angry? His shoulders look tense as he looks back at his son. "And?" he demands.

Jonathan holds my gaze for a moment instead of his father's, torturing me with the dread of knowing what he's about to say.

He'll give an edited version of the story, of course. He already has. Whether we woke him up or not, he damn sure wasn't half-asleep when he "stumbled" out into the hall. He was so awake, I don't even know if he had been asleep yet.

A faint voice whispers that maybe I should take away his power and just cut in right now with the truth. Maybe Milo won't react how I'm afraid he will. Maybe he'll believe *me*, and Jonathan will be the one he punishes.

But what if that little voice is wrong?

How could I ever look at Milo the same way if I found out he wasn't willing to protect me from his own son?

That's probably the biggest fear I have about all this. It's not what Jonathan could do to me, it's losing Milo, or losing my respect for him because honestly, both have the same result.

He's the only man I've ever been able to count on in my whole life, and I'm not ready to lose that.

I wish I hadn't stayed for breakfast. I could've just told them I had to go, but like an idiot, I thought I could squeeze in a few more minutes here.

*I should have known better.*

Jonathan finally answers. "And my cock was a little confused, too. She caught me sporting a hard-on. Must've been embarrassing because she ran straight to your bedroom without so much as a 'goodnight, Jonathan'."

I let out a breath of relief. My ears buzz, I'm so fucking relieved.

"Sorry, little brother," Jonathan says to Jet. "Didn't mean to get all up on your girl."

Jet scoffs, sounding entirely uninterested in the whole thing. "Yeah, 'cause you'd never get up on someone's girl."

I frown, confused by Jet's inflection. For all that Jonathan is apparently wearing the mantle of Mr. Propriety when it comes to me, Jet, and Milo, it sure sounded like Jet was being sarcastic.

"I'm sorry, are you saying the unimpeachably wholesome Jonathan Granville has been inappropriate with a girl who wasn't his?"

Jet laughs shortly. "Yeah, right. Wholesome? Have you met him?" Jet shakes his head, turning his pencil over and erasing something on his notebook paper. "Jonathan *exclusively* fucks with other guys' girlfriends."

Jaw hanging open, I look back at Jonathan. “Are you *serious?*”

He is not amused that the tables have turned on him. “When he says it like that, it sounds bad.”

“Yeah, it sounds like you’re a fucking hypocrite,” I say without thought.

“I don’t fuck around behind anyone’s back. Only shitty people do that,” he says, trying to knock me back down a peg or two.

Jet shakes his head. “I didn’t mean he’s some cheating manwhore or anything like that. Jonathan’s just not into having his own girlfriends, so he tends to sleep with his friends’ girlfriends, but it’s not deceptive. His friends know and they’re cool with it. It’s usually a three-way situation, isn’t it?” he asks, flicking a gaze at Jonathan.

My mouth snaps shut.

Jonathan’s back to looking smug as hell, arms crossed, leaning against the counter with his gaze trained on me. “Yeah, usually. Once in a while I’m in the mood for solo action, so I haul her away and fuck her myself.”

Now my mouth is dry. “Like... it’s an arrangement you have with one friend and his girlfriend, or...?”

“I’ve done it with a few. Started out by accident. A buddy and I were out with his girl and her friends. We were all drunk as fuck and dancing together. The place was crowded, and we both ended up dancing up on her, her body squeezed between us.”

I swallow, imagining the scene. Loud music, club lighting, bodies pressed too close together on the dance floor.

“We both got turned on, her rubbing her ass on me while he was grinding on her from the front. We ended

up double-teaming her in a bathroom stall. She bent over and blew me while he fucked her from behind.”

“This is probably not an appropriate breakfast conversation,” Milo states.

Jonathan slaps his dad on the back. “What? Our little stray’s curious. I’m just satisfying her urge... for knowledge.”

*Oh my god.*

Jonathan smirks and looks back at me. “Anyway, once it happened that first time, it just kept happening until we were both fucking her on the regular. Sometimes together, sometimes I’d just show up at her dorm after a long night and have her to myself. After a while, they broke up, and he started dating a new girl. She was hot and liked the attention from both of us, so we started doing the same thing with her. I had other friends who knew about it, a couple that were curious and interested in spicing things up with their own girlfriends. They knew I hadn’t fucked anything up between Link and his girls, so they trusted I was a safe playmate to invite to play with theirs. Now, I know who’s cool with it and who isn’t, so if someone has a girlfriend I’m interested in fucking...” He pauses, holding my gaze. “I fuck her.”

My heart sinks.

I don’t know why.

Maybe I do.

I don’t know.

I just know I need to leave.

Dragging my purse closer and dropping Jonathan’s gaze, I murmur, “What an enlightening conversation.”

He shrugs. “You asked.”

“No, I know I did, I just...” I shake my head, still a bit floored. “Don’t they get jealous?”

“My friends?” He shakes his head. “Nah. I’m not interested in *stealing* their girl, only playing with her. There’s no threat. I’m there for the good time, not the messy emotional shit. If she catches feelings, I cut it off.”

His words leave me feeling hot and cold at the same time.

New questions bubble up in my mind, especially after last night.

I thought what happened in the hallway was purely about intimidating me. Even when I thought he might force himself on me, I didn’t think it had anything to do with desire—maybe a desire to hurt me or ruin me for his dad, but definitely not lust.

Now, I’m a little less sure.

If Jonathan Granville is accustomed to sampling the girlfriends of the men in his life, is it possible that instinct is rearing up now, the first time a woman is being brought into the Granville house? Milo said he hasn’t had any serious relationships since his wife died, and Jet hasn’t had any serious relationships yet, so it stands to reason I’m the first girl either of them have brought around him since he started banging his friends’ girlfriends.

Most people don’t look at the girlfriends of those close to them as fair game, but if that’s how he’s used to looking at things...

I don’t know.

It seems like that might be relevant to what’s happening ever since the moment he walked in on his dad kissing me.

After all, that’s what started it. When he thought I was hanging out with Jet, he was totally nice to me. When he realized I might be sleeping with his dad, that’s when things got weird.



Maybe it's because he thinks of Jet as his little brother who needs protecting, but he feels like he and his dad are on even footing.

It's immensely fucked up that he would think he should have the option of fucking someone who—regardless of age—could potentially be his *stepmother*, but... well, maybe Jonathan Granville is immensely fucked up.

I'm not sure what to believe anymore.

I do know he could have told his dad what happened last night, and he chose not to, so regardless of what he says, his motivation is *not* purely getting me out of the picture. Hell, if he really believed we were fucking around on Jet, he could have told *him* and put an end to all of it right away.

That is not the method he chose.

Whether it's something else or he just likes playing with his food and wants to fuck with me a little more first, Jonathan isn't in a rush to get rid of me.

I thought he was, but there was a lot I didn't know about him. There is still plenty I don't know, but...

Now, I know a bit more.

Now, his motivations feel much murkier to me.

I look at Milo to see how he's taking this news. *Is it even news?* Maybe he knew the sordid details of his eldest son's sex life already and it's only news to me.

Milo's handsome face is strained, his brow furrowed as he shoves scrambled eggs out of the pan and divides them among several plates. He finishes the third one, but before he can dirty the fourth, I call out, "You don't have to make a plate for me."

Milo stops and glances back at me.

“I didn’t realize how late it was. I have to go,” I tell him apologetically.

He nods, not looking a bit surprised.

Resigned, maybe.

Not surprised.

I wish I could go over and give him a kiss, but I can’t.

I say my goodbyes and head for the door.

I’m surprised when I hear footsteps behind me. My heart jumps. Thinking it must be Jonathan, I grab the door handle and twist.

He grabs my shoulder before I can get the door open. I gasp as he uses it to turn me around, forcing my back against the door.

The fear in my belly turns to confusion when I look up into *Milo’s* face, not Jonathan’s.

“What are you do—?”

Before I can finish asking my question, he traps me against the door, leaning in and crashing his lips to mine.

My tummy flutters with nervous excitement. I place a hand on his shoulder to anchor myself. His kiss is hungry, but brief.

When he pulls back, I’m a little dazed.

*I can’t believe he did that with Jet and Jonathan in the next room.*

He smiles at me fondly, his thumb stroking my jaw line. “You sure you can’t stay?”

I’m less sure now, but I nod anyway. I’ve already said I had to go, and I don’t want it to be obvious I was lying to get away from Jonathan.

“All right. Then I’ll see you soon.”

“Okay,” I say, still a little confused. I look behind him to make sure no one saw us, but he doesn’t seem to care, and I don’t know what to make of that.

The front door opens and closes, and then I’m safely on the other side.

A cold gust of wind blows and chills erupt across my skin, so I turn and hurry toward my car for shelter. I tug open the door, fighting a particularly strong gust that threatens to close it on me. When I get inside and yank the car door closed, I sit there for a moment, just looking at the big, white house.

*I’ll see you soon*, Milo said, and he sounded resolute.

I still want to be inside having breakfast with them instead of out here on my own with a rumbling tummy, but for the first time since Jonathan Granville started fucking everything up, I don’t have to leave wondering if I’ll ever even come back.

This time, I know I will.

## Chapter sixteen

Milo

Turns out, my son does want to fuck Kennedy.

Not Jet, though. He wasn't remotely fazed when Jonathan talked about encountering her in the hall that night. If Jet liked her, he would have reacted to that.

Jonathan is the one I have to keep an eye on.

By now, he has accepted that she's not really with Jet or he wouldn't have behaved the way he did at breakfast. He didn't let up once he realized he had no reason to go after her, though, and that's a little concerning.

He said those things at breakfast to get a rise out of *me*.

This epiphany doesn't *uncomplicate* things with Kennedy, but it does make things *less* complicated because while I backed off a little when it was Jet, I won't respond the same way to Jonathan encroaching upon my territory.

I may be his father, but I saw her first.

I can't blame him for wanting to fuck her, but I'm not too happy about his methods of pursuit. I suppose it's my own fault for letting it work, but he could have really fucked things up between me and Kennedy with this Jet bullshit.

I don't think he has yet, but tonight, I intend to make sure.

Tonight, I will make Kennedy mine.

"Hey, dad, have you seen...?"

Jonathan stops mid-question, his steps slowing as he approaches the open doorway of the master bathroom.

He takes in what I'm wearing—the shiny Italian loafers, black dress pants, and black dress shirt. His gaze lingers on the gray silk vest I'm buttoning.

“Someone looks snazzy,” he says.

I smirk because I can feel the curiosity in his tone. “Thanks,” I say flatly.

He leans against the doorframe. “Got a hot date?”

I glance over at him as I slip the last button through its hole. “I won't be home tonight, if that's what you're asking.”

His jaw tightens, but he nods and pretends not to care. “Got it.”

I hold his gaze a moment longer than I need to, then drop it and get back to getting ready.

“So, is it an age-appropriate date tonight, or will she get a kids' menu?”

“You have an awful lot of interest in my love life lately.”

“Is that what we're calling it now? You can be honest. If you just want to get your dick wet, I get it. Don't see why she has to keep coming around, though.”

“I don't see why it bothers you so much,” I state.

“You don't think she's a little young for you?”

“She's a lot young for me.” I shrug, adjusting the fit of my shirt and appraising myself in the mirror. “She's also perfectly capable of making her own choices.”

“If you say so. I think you're making a mistake.”

“Your opinion has been noted.”

I know if he keeps standing here, he'll just try to cause trouble, so I grab my wallet and phone, and tell him to order a pizza for dinner before I head out the door.

It's Saturday, so Kennedy worked the opening shift today. I only know because I had Jet text her and ask—*I have got to remember to exchange numbers with her tonight*—but she doesn't know he was asking for me. I wanted to surprise her.

I hope it doesn't backfire and she already made plans for after work. If she did, she'll have to cancel them. Her new plans are with me.

I wait in the parking lot by her car for her shift to end.

I smile when she finally comes walking out the doors. She pauses to hold the door for the other employee whose shift must be over.

I put my hand on the latch, preparing to get out and greet her, but she doesn't keep walking across the parking lot to come to her car. Instead, she sits down on the curb and pulls her jacket tightly around her frame as she huddles there in the cold. The guy she walked out with is sitting on the curb beside her. He's a young guy, but older than her. He lights up a cigarette and leans over, bumping his shoulder into hers.

Kennedy smiles faintly and rocks over to shoulder bump him back.

*What the fuck?*

Anger heats my blood. Not anger at her, but anger at this fucking kid clearly trying to flirt with her.

*Who the fuck is he?*

I don't know, but I don't like him.

She's talked to me about work before, but she hasn't mentioned this little fuck. Not that she would call him that, I suppose, but she hasn't mentioned a male

coworker at all. She talked about someone named Skylar, but that sounded like a girl's name.

She sits there with him until he finishes his cigarette, then they both stand. Another few seconds pass with them facing each other, talking, then she seems to say goodbye. I watch as she turns to look both ways before crossing the parking lot, then I watch him check out her ass as she walks away.

Biting back the unreasonable demand that she quit her job right now so she's never alone with this asshole again, I try to refocus my energy on the nice surprise I had planned for her tonight.

Her attention catches on my car a moment before I open the door and climb out. Shock touches her lovely features and her brown eyes widen.

"Milo. What are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd surprise you," I tell her, walking around to the front of the car. "I see I have," I add wryly.

A bit guiltily, she glances back at the guy she'd been sitting with. "I was just..." She trails off, unsure what to say. She knows I must have been watching her.

I don't make her explain herself. I'm not surprised some kid she works with likes to flirt with her. I'm a little surprised it annoys me so much.

Cognizant of the little asshole likely still watching her, I plant a hand on her waist and cradle the back of her head with the other, pulling her in and leaning down to kiss her in one fluid movement.

She sighs against my lips as she kisses me back, the tension easing out of her body as she winds her arms around my neck and leans against me.

*There we go.*

Her eyes sparkle beneath the streetlight as she pulls back to look up at me. "Well, this was a very nice

surprise.”

I smirk, stroking her cheek with the pad of my thumb. “This isn’t the surprise.” I nod toward her car. “Will that be okay to park here overnight, or should we drop it off at your place?”

“Um...” She looks back at her car, debating. “It will probably be okay. It’s not worth stealing or breaking into.” Looking back up at me, she asks, “Why don’t I just take it to your place like usual, though?”

“We can if you want to. We’re not spending the night there, but I suppose I can take you back to my house in the morning to get your car. I was just going to drop you off here on my way home, give you a night away from my place altogether.”

Her gaze drops to my chest. I’m wearing a wool coat, and she plays with the lapels absently, her lips a bit pouty. “I like being at your place, though.”

“And I like you being there,” I assure her. “But Jonathan is hanging around a lot right now. I figured we would have a more peaceful night without him.”

She doesn’t argue that or address him at all, she just looks up at me, her gaze so trusting, I stroke her jaw again to let her feel my approval. “So, where are we going?”

I like knowing she’ll follow me anywhere. I kiss her, then I say, “Let’s head to my house to drop off your car, and then you’ll find out.”

Kennedy beams me a smile, and I can’t resist kissing her one more time before I let her go to her car. Before I go back to the driver’s side of my Cadillac, I shoot a look at the kid still skulking on the walkway beside the building.

Logically, I know it’s probably not even worth our time, but something else tells me I should ask about him, anyway.



It might just be an irrational possessive urge.

I put it away for now.

Once we've dropped Kennedy's car off at my house, she joins me in the passenger seat. I can tell she's excited, but I don't tell her what we're doing until we get there.

"The mall?" she questions.

"This is just the first stop. I figured if I'm going to take you out to a nice dinner, you should probably have a new outfit to change into."

"A nice dinner, huh?" she teases before getting out of the car. "If I didn't know any better, I'd think that sounds like a date."

I walk over and take her hand. "That's because it *is* a date."

She looks over, surprised. "It is?"

I nod.

"Like... an official one?"

I crack a smile. "I didn't get paperwork notarized or anything, but yes, it's pretty official."

"But I thought... When you thought Jet liked me..."

My spine straightens at what she isn't saying.

We may be in the clear with Jet, but it's pretty clear now that Jonathan has sexual interest in her.

I know what she doesn't yet, though. She's young, gorgeous, fun, an all-around lovely person to spend time with. I'm well aware she will attract admirers who see the same things I saw in her from time to time. That's inevitable, and I'm a realist.

As I am no longer a young asshole with more testosterone than common sense, I'm not going to let that stand in my way.

Without acknowledging that my son wants to fuck her, I say, “Things were different then. I had to move carefully if I risked crippling the confidence of my sensitive, younger son going after the first girl he’s ever really shown an interest in. This isn’t that.”

She seems to take my meaning, even if neither of us wants to directly address it. She nods her understanding and gives my hand a squeeze. “Okay, good.”

She flashes me a smile, and we move on.

I brought her for a new dress, but Kennedy enjoys shopping and so rarely gets to do it, we end up off course, buying soaps and glittery hand sanitizers. Then her attention catches on a beachy-smelling rollerball perfume that boasts being eco-friendly, vegan, and cruelty-free.

I’m more aware of the difference in our ages seeing the things that appeal to her and why, but when she samples the scent and brings her wrist up for my approval, I get a whiff of that coconut scent on her skin and I’m immediately transported to the beach. I can hear the waves hitting the shore as the scorching sun beats down on us, feel her warm skin beneath my fingers as she scoots off my lap and grabs my hand to drag me off the beach and out into the ocean with her.

Her dark hair is wild and free. She’s wearing a bikini, of course.

If they were in season, I’d buy her one right now.

“We should go somewhere,” I tell her.

Unaware of the tropical vacation playing out in my mind, she sniffs her wrist to see if she likes the scent she dabbed there. “Hm?”

I’m sure she likes it, but she’s so used to only window shopping, she starts to walk away from the display.

I stop her, pointing at the stack of small boxes housing individual tubes of perfume. “Grab one of those.”

A smile tugs at her mouth. “I take it you liked it?”

“I do. Have you ever been to the beach?”

She shakes her head no, grabbing a perfume and then falling back into step beside me. “Nope.”

“We should go,” I tell her. “Maybe Bora Bora? It would be good to get away for a while. I could probably get a week or so off work next month.”

“That would be... really awesome, but even if I don’t get in trouble for missing that much school, I’m not sure how I would explain the absence to my mom.”

*Oh, that’s right.*

She has to check with people to do things.

“Maybe we could go during spring break,” she suggests. “I could tell her some friends from school invited me to come along. As long as she doesn’t have to pay for anything, I’m sure she wouldn’t care.”

“I don’t love having to clear my vacation plans with your mother,” I remark.

She cracks a smile. “Same.”

We stop at Victoria’s Secret next. Our favorite judgmental saleslady is there, so Kennedy gives her a little wave. I laugh and pull her closer as we head over to pick out some underwear.

While Kennedy is perusing the panty table, I wander over to look at the sexy nighties. There are sexier ones I’m tempted to grab, but then I see a white one that feels perfect for tonight. It’s sheer on top with a strategic design to offer some coverage. From the waist down, it’s flowy and soft. Feels like satin.

Yep, we’re getting this. I take a hanger off the rack in Kennedy’s size, then go over to join her and see if she’s

picked out panties yet. Since we haven't bought the dress yet, I'm not even sure she'll need a bra, but we get one anyway, just in case.

She hugs me as we stand in line waiting to check out. With her arms still wrapped snugly around my waist, she looks up at me. "Shopping with you is so much fun."

I lean down and kiss the top of her head. Shopping has never been my favorite thing, but I enjoy seeing how happy it makes her. "The feeling is mutual."

Our next stop is finally to get a dress. We're running a little behind schedule, and she can't decide between two, so I buy her both of them. She fell in love with a pair of red wine heels with an ankle strap, so we're almost set.

The last stop we make is the jewelry store. Kennedy changed into the new dress and shoes I bought her in the changing room at the store we bought them from so she'd be ready for dinner, so it will be easy to pick something that goes with what she's wearing.

"What are we doing here?" she asks warily.

"I'm buying you a gift," I tell her simply. "I thought a nice diamond necklace to complete your outfit."

"A *diamond* necklace?"

It's a mall jewelry store, not Cartier. Her eyes are wide like she doesn't understand the difference, but I suppose any jewelry she can't buy at Walmart is probably a step up from what she's used to.

She ends up picking out a diamond choker that looks sexy as fuck around her slender throat.

I'm tempted to rip it off her already as she stands there with her hair pulled up, the delicate string of diamonds drawing my eyes all over her exposed skin down to the gentle swell of cleavage.

My cock stirs. I tear my gaze away from her tits since this is not the time.

“That’s the one,” I murmur.

She smiles, dropping her hair and admiring her new necklace in a mirror as I move to the cash register to pay.

Kennedy is light and happy as we leave the mall. I’m glad because that’s how I always want to make her feel when I take her out.

In the bedroom, it’s a different story. There, she’s free to be dominated and used primarily for my pleasure, but she only enjoys that so much because she never has to doubt how much I care for her. I’ll cherish her now so I can dig deep and take from her later.

Tonight, I’ll take more than I have before. Tonight, I’ll have all of her.

*I can’t fucking wait.*

Finally, we head to dinner. I picked out a nice French place near the hotel. The meal is delicious, and once we’re finished, it’s only a short drive to where we’ll be for the rest of the night.

We go to the suite first so we can drop off Kennedy’s shopping bags and change into the terry cloth robes the hotel provides before we head down to the spa.

Lifting her hair, Kennedy turns her back to me. “Can you help me with the clasp?”

“Mm-hmm.”

My dinner jacket is off, but I’m still wearing the slacks, shirt, and vest. Kennedy stepped out of her heels, but she’s still wearing her sexy little black dress. It hugs her body like a glove, and as I move closer, it’s impossible to keep my hands off her.

She breathes in as I plant my hands on her hips, pulling her back against me. She keeps her hair up and tilts her neck just as I lean in to press my lips against her fragrant skin.

“You smell incredible.”

She sighs with pleasure as I pepper kisses along the curve of her shoulder. I let go of her hips so I can unclasp the necklace, and she catches it as it falls. The moment her neck is bare, I press my lips against her soft skin.

“God, I can’t get enough of you,” I murmur.

“We can skip the massages if you want,” she says breathlessly.

I smile against her neck. The offer is sweet—*and damned tempting*—but I want to pamper her tonight. I want to make it special for her.

“No,” I say regretfully, pulling away since my resolve may weaken if I keep kissing her.

The fact that she doesn’t tease and tempt me into reconsidering lets me know she *wants* to go to the spa, she’s just willing to give it up if I’d rather get straight to fucking her.

Of course she is.

She’s so fucking sweet.

*Too* fucking sweet.

I want to yank up her dress and devour every delicious inch of her here and now, but knowing I can feast on her later, I settle for just a taste.

Grabbing her jaw, I move around her body and plant a hard, hungry kiss on her perfect lips before I let go.

“Go,” I murmur, giving her a light push toward the bathroom. “Change into your robe so we can get out of here before I change my mind.”



## Chapter seventeen

Kennedy

Water sloshes over the edge of the tub as my body writhes, Milo's hand sliding between my thighs to make trouble.

"What are you doing?" I whisper, leaning back against his chest, my head lolling back to rest on his shoulder.

He presses a finger into me, his other hand coming up out of the water to caress my tit as I lie stretched across him.

Nothing feels as good as his hands on my body.

I moan as his blunt finger brushes my clit at the same moment his other thumb brushes my nipple, sending a sharp burst of pleasure straight through me. "This is the best bath I've ever had."

I feel him smirk as he kisses the side of my face. "I assure you, the feeling is mutual."

When he first told me about this couples bath spa treatment he signed us up for tonight, I wasn't so sure.

But then we came in to a luxurious bath surrounded by hot rocks in a room lit only by candles. Red rose petals were sprinkled along the water's surface, and a tub of champagne was chilling beside it. On a plate next to the champagne, there were four chocolate-covered strawberries.

While I undressed, Milo poured us champagne, then I had some while I watched him undress. As soon as we got in, we fed each other strawberries, but there's still one left.



He kneads my tit, his fingertip glancing over the stiff peak and teasing my nipple. Back and forth, back and forth. He kisses my face and rubs my clit. More water sloshes over the edge.

I can't keep from moving, sighing, writhing against him. "Milo," I whisper, turning my head so he can reach to kiss me.

He breaks away from my lips, releasing my tit but keeping his finger moving against my sensitive clit. My body shifts when his moves under me as he reaches for something. I think maybe the champagne, but then he brings the last chocolate-covered strawberry to my lips.

I'm so close, I can't focus on food.

"Open your mouth," he commands. "Take it between your lips, Kennedy."

"Milo." I just need to come.

"Take a bite, or no orgasm for you."

*Mean.*

I pout, but I open my mouth, too. The chocolate melts against my tongue, the fresh juices from the strawberry coating my lips, and Milo's expert finger between my legs.

This is paradise.

When I come, I cry out sharply, throwing my head back against his shoulder and arching up out of the water. He wraps one strong arm around my body, pulling me down and back against him.

I sigh with pleasure, submerged in the water up to my neck, my whole body melting against his.

"I'll never be able to eat another strawberry without thinking of you," I murmur.

He chuckles deeply. "Good."

Milo wraps both arms around me and holds me close. It's intense how tightly he holds me, but I absolutely love it. I can feel his cock hard and insistent against my ass. I should at least rub it, but I'm so sated, I can't move.

To keep him interested while he waits for me to recover, I move my ass against him. A thrill shoots through me when I hear him groan in my ear. "Christ, Kennedy."

I smile drowsily. "I'll make it the best bath ever for you, too, just give me a minute."

He chuckles, his arms tightening around my waist. "I'll get mine when we go upstairs. I want to make sure you come three or four times tonight, so I figured I might as well get started."

"Mm, I love an ambitious man."

He chuckles again, kissing the damp curve of my neck.

"Orgasms make me so happy," I tell him dreamily.

He laughs like I've said something funny, but come on, they're great.

There's a soft rap at the door before it cracks open. I'm startled, but no one comes in. The lady lets us know through the door that our time is up in five minutes so we can get out and start getting dressed.

"That half hour went fast," I murmur as I climb out of the pool of water and roses.

I grab the plush bath towel and wrap it around myself, sneaking a peek at Milo's magnificent body as he climbs out. He's built like a god, and I want to drop to my knees and worship him.

Water drips down his well-defined chest and abdominal muscles and my lusty gaze follows. I bite my

lip when I get to his hard cock jutting out, wanting to be inside me.

*I want that, too.*

I feel bad he didn't get relief, and mildly panicked when I realize we're going to get massages next, and some other woman will have her hands all over him.

*I hope this isn't the kind of place that gives happy endings...*

It's super classy, so I guess it probably isn't, but what do I know about it? Nothing, that's what.

"Are you sure you don't want me to suck you?" I ask him. "I'll be as aggressive as I can so you come before the lady comes back."

"Jesus, Kennedy."

"I don't want this massage lady thinking that's for her," I mutter.

Milo laughs at my possessiveness as he grabs his own towel, but doesn't take me up on my offer.

When we head into the next room for massages, Milo gets a pretty blonde I tell myself I'm gonna keep a close eye on, but then the rubs start and my body gets so relaxed, I forget I'm supposed to care.

By the time we're done, my insides feel like a pillow and either I'm levitating a little, or I'm somehow standing an inch or so taller. I want to wrap myself around Milo and feel him inside me.

I am so ready to go back upstairs and make love to this man.

In the elevator on the way up to the room, we hold hands and I lean on him, laying my head against his arm. "Thank you so much for bringing me here. Tonight has been incredible."

"You deserve incredible," he assures me.

I smile because he's the first person who has ever believed that.

I feel something thick and funny in my chest. It feels like love, but I tell myself it's way too soon. He hasn't even fucked me yet. If I tell him I love him, I might freak him out so much that he doesn't go through with it.

*Do I love him?*

Maybe I'm just swept up. Tonight *is* more romantic than anything I could have possibly dreamed up.

Either way, my lips are sealed.

Well, not literally. We're barely inside the hotel room and Milo is grabbing me, sliding a hand through my hair and cradling my head as he backs me up against the wall. I want to drop to my knees and suck him, but he keeps me upright, slamming me against the wall and pinning me there.

As he kisses me, his greedy fingers claw at the terry cloth belt around my waist. He gets it off and yanks my robe open, reaching inside and palming my bare tit.

My body is so hypersensitive, I cry out, throwing my head back and breaking the kiss. His lips move hungrily across my jaw and down my neck. His five o'clock shadow grazes my tender skin, and his hand slides the soft material off my left shoulder, dragging it down so half of my body is naked.

He grabs my thigh and hikes it up, positioning himself between my legs. I gasp as his cock presses against me through the material of his robe.

"I cannot wait to fuck you," he rumbles, nipping gently at my neck.

"Oh, God, same."

He laughs, startled.

I don't know what I said that was so funny, but I don't care. "I want you inside me. God, I want it so much."

His grip tightens almost painfully on my thigh when I say that. He growls, shoving against my pussy through the material again.

It's such exquisite torture. I just want him to move the material and shove it inside me. "Milo, please."

"Fuck, Kennedy." With some effort, he pulls away. "I am not going to fuck you against a wall for your first time. Get your little ass over here."

I grin, taking his hand and letting him drag me over to the bed. My heart flutters. I should feel nervous, but I'm not. I'm just excited—in every sense of the word.

We didn't even take the time to turn the light on when we got back from our massages, so when my phone lights up on the bedside table, the whole room brightens, making it impossible to ignore.

A frown flickers across my face as I glance at it. I haven't checked it in a while. I left my phone on charge while we went downstairs for our spa treatments. Didn't make much sense to me to take it.

Milo sees me looking at the phone. "Do you need to check it?"

I shake my head, not wanting to interrupt our sexy vibe when he put so much effort into making this night perfect for me. "No way." I push the other side of my robe off so the whole heavy thing pools on the floor behind me.

My heart expands as I catch the lust flash across Milo's face at the sight of me naked. The phone screen dims again. There's still moonlight streaming in through the cracked curtains, but the room is darker now.

"Come here," he says, firmly but gently.

I could never not obey him. I walk over, feeling submissive and powerful at the same time as he grabs my hips and pulls me between his spread thighs. He's sat on the edge of the bed with his robe still on and tied, but he yanks me close and leans in so he can wrap his arms around me and rest his face against my bare belly.

My heart flutters as he gives me this unexpected, deeply intimate hug.

I don't know if it happened in the elevator or if it's just happening now, but it hits me *hard*.

I am so in love with this man.

Tenderness overflows inside me. I slide my fingers through his thick black hair and bend to kiss his head.

I've never imagined a moment so intimate, so loving. I could almost cry, but I'd feel stupid crying when I'm so happy.

*I love you.*

Now the words are so hard to keep in, but I don't want anything to ruin this. I don't want him to stop and freak out about me being clingy or taking things too seriously. I just want to feel him inside me, joined as close together as two people can be.

*I'm ready.*

I'm so ready.

My phone lights up again.

"Goddammit," I whisper.

I don't mean to, but it's so fucking annoying because Milo lets go of me and I was enjoying that embrace so much. It felt like pure love, and I've never known that feeling before.

"I'm going to turn it off," I tell him.

I'm so irritated as I grab the phone, I almost don't bother looking to see what the notification was, but my gaze catches on an all-caps message from my mom that reads, "YOU BETTER FUCKING ANSWER ME."

My stomach drops. There are 19 notifications layered beneath it. Why is she sending me so many texts?

I swipe it open just to make sure nothing is seriously wrong.

I scroll up to the first message and scan through them quickly. She sounds drunk or sad, maybe both. She started off bitching about Larry because they were in a fight, then she spiraled quickly to "fuck him then he can leave I don't give a fuck," which led to "I should just fucking die, nobody cares about me," and "my own fucking daughter doesn't even answer my texts."

I feel a knot of dread lodge in my gut. I read more quickly through the rest of her emotional tirade. When she went long enough without a response, she started getting pissed, and that's where we are now.

I type back quickly, "I wasn't ignoring you, I didn't have my phone on me. Are you okay?"

When I sigh, Milo asks seriously, "Is everything okay?"

*No, no, no.*

I can feel myself about to ruin it.

It's not with those three little words like I was afraid to.

I'm already apologetic when I look at him. "It's my mom. She's being..."

Fuck. I don't know what to do.

I can't just leave her like that, but I can't interrupt our night to talk my mom through an emotional meltdown,

either.

“I’m sorry, I’ll... I can probably still... I just have to see what she says.”

He sighs, too.

He knows this isn’t going to happen.

That makes me feel even worse.

Regret swallows me up even though I just stepped into it. I tell myself I’m not in as deep as it feels, that I can get back out.

“I promise, we’ll still do it, I just have to make sure she texts me back first. She was saying some really messed up stuff.”

If we were still going to do it before, I killed it by saying that. I can see it on his face.

“I’m so sorry,” I blurt, feeling like the biggest disappointment in the world. “You did all of this for me, and I’m fucking it up.”

His voice is reassuring as he stands. “Don’t worry about it, Kennedy. It’s all right.”

“No, it isn’t,” I say, horrified at the tears burning behind my eyes.

I wish I could be like her. If she got text messages like this from me while she was out, she would just ignore them and keep having a good time.

My phone lights up and I look down, tears blurring my vision. I blink them away just to read another enraged text from my mother who can’t believe I was away from my phone that long and accuses me of deliberately ignoring her.

I’m totally crushed as Milo strips off his robe and puts his clothes back on.



Fighting tears as I pull on my pretty new dress and the heels he bought me.

Milo tells me he'll just give me a ride home, that he'll pick me up in the morning to get my car.

I'm so afraid he'll never want to hang out with me again that I don't even talk to him on the ride home, I just hold back tears and text my emotional mother with resentment burning in my heart.

I'm never happy to see our apartment building, but I've never been as *unhappy* to see it as I am tonight.

Distraught, I look over at Milo as he parks in front of the entrance to let me out. "I'm so sorry."

"Stop apologizing."

Easy for him to say. He's amazing and any woman in the world would—and *will*—happily lap up what I'm squandering. He won't always be so patient with me. He'll get fed up with all my bullshit and date someone his own age who won't have stupid drama pulling her away from the amazing dates he goes out of his way to plan for her.

I'm so fucking sad, I open the door and flee without so much as an apologetic hug, barely even saying goodbye to him.

I'm on a self-sabotage spiral. I can feel it all falling apart, so I start pulling at threads.

*What is wrong with me?*

Tears sneak down my cheeks as I make my way to the apartment door. I start to grab my keys, but then remember Mom is home so the door probably isn't locked.

I turn the doorknob and stench fills the air. I smell BO, so I think Larry must be here, and it smells like a brewery, so I was clearly right about them drinking.

“Mom?” I enter the living room and find her lying on the couch, a bottle in her hand hanging down toward the ground, her shirt riding up her stomach.

I panic for a second because she isn’t moving, but I only take a couple of hurried steps toward her before she starts to sit up.

My relief is short-lived. I feel immensely guilty for it, but for a split second... I thought about what life would look like if I were free of her.

Shoving that down, I ask, “Are you all right?”

She’s scowling at me. It doesn’t occur to me the way I’m dressed until I see her sneering, her gaze raking up and down my body. “What the hell are you dressed like that for?”

I glance down at myself. I don’t have an explanation, so I don’t answer. “Did Larry leave?”

I no more than ask and I hear a door open down the hall. I look left and see Larry emerging from the bathroom, tugging his jeans up the rest of the way and zipping his fly.

*Ew, ew, ew.*

There is literally no way he washed his hands. I can still hear the toilet running and he couldn’t even be bothered to pull up his pants before he left the room.

I’m grimacing, but his expression is much grosser as he looks me up and down in the pretty dress Milo bought me. “Well, look at you all fancy.”

Revulsion moves down my spine but I look away from him and back to Mom.

Unfortunately, seeing her boyfriend checking me out seems to have brought back bad memories because now she’s looking at me like we’re mortal enemies again.

“Are you hooking?”

I'm so startled, my jaw falls open. "What?"

"Don't play dumb with me. I'm not stupid. You got those new headphones after I broke the other ones and now you're wearing shit like this. Meeting strange men in hotels downtown late at night."

"What?"

"I checked your iPad when you weren't answering. I saw where you were. So, what? Are you hooking?"

"Escort," Larry chimes in. "They're called escorts when they dress like this and look as pretty as her."

"Oh," Mom says, launching up off the couch. "My daughter's a fancy hooker. What a proud day!"

"I am not... hooking." I can't believe I just had to say that.

She nods, walking over to me, her eyes on my face. I can tell by her stance and the look in her eyes, she's spoiling for a fight.

*I cannot believe I left Milo for this.*

"How much you make?" she asks, lifting her chin at me, then looking me over. "Gotta make good money in a dress like that."

"I told you, I am not a hooker. I am not an escort, either."

"You some rich guy's sugar baby?" Larry asks, smiling in a manner that turns my stomach. "Not technically hooking if you only have one client, is it?"

That makes my stomach drop because it's a little too close to home, but I recover quickly because there is nothing remotely cheap about the way Milo treats me.

"You know, I left a *really* nice night to come here, to be here for you because you were upset—"

“Oh, you want a—” Mom looks past me at Larry. “She wants an award for acting like a daughter for once in her life. Come on, baby, let’s give her a round of applause.”

Larry laughs and starts clapping his big, stupid hands.

I wish this didn’t still have the power to hurt. I should be used to her shit by now. How can she still get to me like this?

“I think you need to start paying rent,” she tells me. “You’re 18 now, got yourself a big girl job, maybe a man. You got a man, baby?”

I look away, my insides seeming to shrink as she asks the question.

“Who is he? When am I gonna meet him?”

*She can never meet him.*

“I mean, if you’re not hooking and he’s not some old fart with a lot of money, you must have a serious boyfriend, huh? One who can afford to buy you fancy clothes and take you on nice dates. No high school boy, that’s for sure.” She stops in front of me, her eyes purely malicious, and grabs a handful of my hair. “Where’d you find one of those, huh?”

“Let go,” I say, grabbing the chunk of hair she’s holding onto and trying to pry her fingers off.

“What’s his name?” she asks, more manic than before. “Surely you can tell me that much.”

I’m beginning to get an overwhelming feeling of panic that she *knows* who I was with. She said she knew where I was. She’s done crazy shit in the past—stalked exes when they were out on dates with new girls, driven past their houses to see what they’re up to if she thinks they’re trying to pull one over on her.

“Maybe I already met him,” she says, yanking my hair so hard she turns me around. “Huh?” She grabs my arm, pinning it behind me. Then, viciously, she says in my ear, “He never bought *me* pretty fucking clothes like that.”

*She knows.*

I walked into a trap.

“Let me go,” I cry, reaching the only arm I can move back to try to push her off me.

“Help me,” she barks at Larry. “Grab her.”

“Don’t touch me,” I shout, but too late.

Larry grabs the material covering my breasts and rips so hard, I hear the threads tear. “Your dress ain’t so pretty now, is it, you little slut?”

Mom laughs as he drags the material down and exposes my bra, fucking delighted.

My skin crawls as her disgusting boyfriend uses the excuse to touch my boobs.

“Get him off me,” I scream. “What the hell is wrong with you?” I fight her grip, but she just grabs my other wrist and pins it, too. Then she lets go and shoves me, knocking me to the ground on my hands and knees.

My hands touch filth because the carpet hasn’t been cleaned in God knows how long. I try to push myself up and Larry grabs the material bunched up around my thighs, tearing it and ripping it up to my waist.

My butt is showing now, the sexy panties Milo bought me. Larry’s grody fingers move across my skin toward the edge of my panties like he’s going to push beneath them, and I punch him right in the fucking nuts.

He screams like I shot him in the face and dramatically falls back, clutching his pathetic sac and banging into the wall.

I shove myself up off the floor and grab my purse that I dropped, heading for the hallway.

Mom catches me by the hair, pulling me back and slamming my head against the wall.

“Why are you such a fucking whore, huh?”

“Get off me,” I say, swatting her hand away.

She shoves me back against the wall as I stumble down the hall. I turn to face her and my heart stops a second before she punches me in the face.

I’m so stunned, I stop fighting back for a couple of seconds. She slaps me, shoves me, and brings her knee up to jam into my ribs.

I finally recover from the shock and give her a hard shove away from me. She’s drunk and not expecting it, so she stumbles back a few steps.

It’s enough for me to race down the hall and hurl myself into the bathroom, but when I turn around to slam the door, my heart nearly stops because she’s so close, I’m not sure I’ll be able to get it secured.

Her hands come up to shove at the door the moment I get it slammed shut. My hands shake as I quickly turn the knob mere milliseconds before she starts violently turning and yanking on it.

“Open up the door, you little slut!”

I draw a series of shuddering breaths that sound like the start of hyperventilation.

Larry must have recovered from the low blow because he’s at the door with her now, banging on it with his fist and screaming at me to open the fucking door if I know what’s good for me.

Terrified and crying almost too hard to breathe, I fumble with my purse and dig out my cell phone.

I want to call Milo, but I realize I don't have his phone number.

Jet's is the only number I have, so I hurry up and find the option to make an audio call to him while stealing panicked looks at the flimsy-ass door, buckling and giving with every pound from the other side.

Thankfully, Jet answers right away. "Hello?"

"Jet, I need you to call your dad. Please, it's an emergency and I don't have his number. Please call him right now, please, I'm so scared."

"Kennedy?" His voice changes abruptly. "What's wrong?"

"I'm at my apartment locked in the bathroom. My mom and her boyfriend were attacking me. They're trying to get in and I don't even have anything I can use to defend myself. Your dad just left, he shouldn't be too far. Please hurry, call him and tell him to come back."

"Open the goddamn door," Larry booms, slamming into it and making me shake.

"Jet, did you hear me?" I ask because I'm so upset, I'm not sure he can understand me.

"Yeah. Shit, I don't want to hang up, but— Jonathan, do you have your—"

"Open this fucking door, you little bitch. If I have to break it down, I'm gonna hurt you real bad," Larry threatens.

The door bows.

"Jet, hurry."

"I'll call him right now, Kennedy."

The line disconnects.

The door makes a sickening noise as they both bang into it.

I don't know what else to do, so I hide behind it so at least if they get the door open, I'll have a few seconds before they get their hands on me.



# Chapter eighteen

Jonathan

Growing up, I was not taught in black and white generalities like, “always treat others how you want to be treated,” or “violence is never the answer.”

Maybe someone is an asshole and doesn't deserve any kindness from you. Maybe violence is all that'll get your point across.

My parents always understood that people and situations were complex, and what might be the good or right thing to do in one scenario might be the wrong thing in another. Because of that, rather than recite idiotic Target pillow philosophy, they taught me how to actually fucking think.

I was taught to be practical, to be prepared, and not to be a fucking idiot.

I am 0 for 3 when I shove open the door of the apartment Jet told me Kennedy lived in. I've never been here before, so I'm not even positive it's the right place until I see her mother slouched over on the couch with a joint between her fingers and an open beer bottle in her hand.

I was aware of the possibility that I was walking into danger when Kennedy was crying on the phone to Jet. I was also aware of the possibility I was escalating it when I grabbed Dad's gun out of the safe before I jumped in the car and hurried over here.

Now, I'm a little less worried. Kennedy's mom is so high, I don't think she could react if I gave her five minutes to, but I don't.

She looks up at me, her eyes cloudy and bloodshot. She smiles and points at me. “I know who you are.”

We’ve never met, but I bear a strong enough resemblance to my father that I’m not surprised. “Where is Kennedy?”

She looks at the gun hanging casually at my side, then looks me over. “You look like your daddy. Bet you fuck like him, too.”

*Gross.*

“I wouldn’t let you lap my cum up off a sidewalk, you filthy fucking hick. Now, where the fuck is Kennedy?”

*Fuck this.*

I don’t wait for her to answer. The apartment is small, so I raise my gun and walk down the hall to look for her.

The bathroom door is open. That makes me sick to my stomach because I know it’s where Kennedy was hiding out. Her mom on the couch and no boyfriend in sight leads me to some pretty horrifying possibilities.

She’d better fucking be okay.

I shove open the first bedroom door and flick on the light. It must be her room. It looks like hers, but there’s no one inside.

Then I hear smothered cries, sounds of struggle, and a distinctly male grunt from the next room. The door is closed, but not latched. I kick it open. The room is dark, so I flick this light on, too.

My heart sinks when I see Kennedy on the bed pinned beneath a large, disgusting-looking man, arms and legs thrashing as she fights to get him off her.

I snarl, crossing the room in a split second. The light turning on got his attention so he stops pawing at her to look and see what’s going on.

Kennedy looks over too, and is understandably stunned to see me.

I place the barrel of the gun against the fuck's temple and grab the back of his shirt. He puts his hands up like I'm the fucking police, and I yank him off her, throwing him on the ground with a loud crash and stepping on his ugly face. He cries out as I angle my foot and stomp, then there's a sickening crack and he starts howling.

Kennedy is breathing hard, her dress torn to fucking shreds. Her panties are ripped and falling off her, and her tits are completely exposed.

*Fuck.*

I bring my heel down on the fucker's broken nose again just for fun and he cries out, hitting my leg. That annoys me, so I move my foot off his face and kick him in the ribs.

"Keep pissing me off, buddy."

He boo-fucking-hoos while I grab Kennedy's arm, pulling her off the side of the bed. "Come on, let's get you out of here."

I pick her up and put her down on the other side of the guy's body so she doesn't have to climb over him.

"Thank you," she says, her voice cracking.

I point the gun at the asshole on the floor. "I don't care how much pain you're in. Move again before we're out of this apartment and I pull the fucking trigger."

He still holds his nose and curls up like a little bitch, but he stops moving.

I drag Kennedy out of the room.

"Are you all right?" I ask her.

She nods.

“Your panties are ripped. Did he...?”

She shakes her head. “You got here in time.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. “All right. Good.” I push her into her room. “Get your shit. Whatever you need for the weekend. You’re not coming back here.”

Her mom is up off the couch now, looking worriedly down the hall. “Where’s Larry?”

I point at her. “You’re scum of the fucking earth. Don’t address me.”

Her eyes widen.

She frowns, then carefully moves around me to go check on the asshole in her bedroom.

“Hurry up,” I tell Kennedy. She’s dazed as she turns around her bedroom holding her school backpack but not seeming to know what she’s looking for.

“Oh my god!” her mom cries, so I guess she’s found her lousy boyfriend.

Kennedy starts grabbing things seemingly at random off her dresser.

Since she’s so scattered, I list things I can think of that I would need. “Do you have your phone, laptop, iPad, shit for school?”

She nods and spins around again, then she pulls open her closet and grabs a sweater, seeming to realize her tits are out. She pulls it around her, casting me a look of utter mortification.

“I didn’t look,” I tell her.

She swallows and drops her gaze, then she grabs a second bag and fills it quickly as her mom shrieks about calling the cops.

Once Kennedy has her stuff, I grab her arm to keep her close on our way out. She hurries back into the

bathroom and grabs her hairbrush, then she lets me drag her down the hall.

I push her in front of me once we're in the living room since we're alone there. She hurries to the door and opens it, hurling herself outside and looking back to make sure no one is following us.

She doesn't have shoes on. She doesn't even seem to notice.

Fuck, she's a mess.

No time to go back and get them. I'm sure Dad has shoes for her in all those bags of shit he bought her. If not, we can get her some.

"Come on," I say, holding onto her arm and escorting her to the car. I open the door and put her in, then I hurry around to my side and drop in. I didn't park in a spot, just stopped at the door and got out because I didn't want to waste any time.

I fire up the engine and peel out, in a hurry to get away from the building just in case her twat mom *did* call the cops.

Once we're clear of the shitty neighborhood she lives in and no red and blue lights are following us, I figure we're probably in the clear.

Kennedy hasn't spoken. She sits there with her arms curled around her body, her gaze distant as she looks out the window.

"Are you sure you're all right?" I ask her. "You don't need me to take you to the hospital or anything?"

She shakes her head wordlessly, but my question pulls her out of her trance. She tugs at the ripped hem of her dress, trying to pull it down.

"I didn't expect you to come," she says quietly.

“My dad didn’t answer when Jet called him. There wasn’t time to wait.”

She nods just a little, then she looks over at me. “Well, thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” I say, looking out ahead at the road. “Your mom’s a piece of fucking shit. She just sat on the couch and let him fucking attack you? Has that shit happened before?”

“Not with him,” she murmurs, but she looks away from me and I get the distinct impression she doesn’t want to talk about it.

“Well, I maintain your mom’s a cunt.”

She cracks a sad little smile. “Yeah, she is.”

No wonder she’s willing to fuck my dad to get away from her.

Speaking of my dad, I need to call him and let him know what’s going on. I tap his name in my recent calls log and put the phone to my ear.

“Yeah?” he answers on the second ring.

“Hey, don’t go to her apartment. I’ve got her. Just meet us at home.”

“Is she all right? Jet said her mom and her boyfriend attacked her and she was barricaded in the bathroom.”

“Yeah,” I murmur grimly, but try to keep it vague since I know she’s listening and probably isn’t ready to be reminded of all of it. “She wasn’t by the time I got there, but she’s safe now.”

“*Fuck*,” he says, tearing away from the phone. He comes back. “How bad is she hurt?”

I glance over at her. Her head is down. She’s absently messing with her fingernails.

Her lip is busted, and there's a scratch across her skin. I can't tell from here, but back in the apartment, I could tell she'd been hit.

"I'm not sure yet," I answer.

"Is she talking to you? What condition was she in when you found her?"

"Rough."

"Were they still attacking her?"

"One wasn't."

"Which one?" he asks sharply.

"The cunt," I answer.

"The boyfriend was?"

"Yeah," I say tersely, still trying to keep my answers vague. "In another room."

"A bedroom?" he asks sharply.

"Yes."

I hear him draw in a jagged breath and let it out. It takes him a minute before he can ask. "Was she raped?"

"I don't think so. Came close. I'm sure you'll have more luck than I would getting an answer." I clear my throat. "We'll be there in a few minutes, all right?"

"All right. I'll see you soon."

I end the call and drop my phone into the cup holder. My gaze doesn't shift away from the road, but out of the corner of my eye, I can feel her looking at me.

"What did he say?" she asks quietly.

"Just wanted to make sure you were okay."

She nods, still fidgeting. "What did he ask?"

I don't want to tell her that, so I repeat, "He was just making sure you were okay."

“Did he ask if Larry touched me?”

It takes a lot to make me uncomfortable. Far more than the average person. But I’ll admit, I’m a little fucking uncomfortable right now.

I don’t answer right away, and that seems to grow her anxiety. It must fester because after a minute she snaps, “I told you he didn’t. Why didn’t you just tell him that?”

“Because I don’t know if you’re telling the fucking truth,” I state. “I saw his open fly, I know you were mostly undressed. I don’t know what happened.”

“I told you what happened,” she mutters resentfully.

I don’t know why she’s so mad at me about it. Only thing I can figure is she thinks somehow my dad will take issue with it if she *was* touched against her will. And he would, of course, but his issue would be 1000% with the asshole who did the touching, not her for not being able to stop him.

My words the other night skate across my mind.

Guilt is another thing I don’t feel often, but I recall saying something to her like that, like if I touched her, I’d let my dad know what a filthy little slut she was.

“If more happened than you want to admit to me, don’t think my dad would judge you for it. He’s not a dick. He would know it’s not your fault. He wouldn’t look at you any differently.”

“That’s not what you said the other night.”

*Bingo.*

“I was being an asshole the other night,” I state. “I *am* an asshole at times, and you probably think I’m no fucking better than the pig that had his hands on you tonight, but regardless of what I said, you know my dad. He’s not a piece of shit. He’d never punish you for something that wasn’t your fault.”



She looks down at her hands. Shifts her legs and pulls at the tattered dress again. Finally, she shakes her head. "I should have just stayed at the hotel."

"It's not your fault," I tell her.

I have no idea what she and my dad did tonight, or why she left. I don't know how she even ended up in the situation she was in because my dad hadn't been home yet. I figured they were together.

I do know there's no point in her blaming herself when she's not the one who did something wrong.

I don't know if she believes me or not because she stops talking and starts looking out the window again.

Before long, we're back at my house.

Kennedy buttons her sweater and grabs her bags. I grab my phone and the gun and make sure the car is locked up even though it's in the garage.

Since we come in through the garage, she's not sure where to go when we first get inside. She hangs back and looks to me for direction. I point, but still move around her so I can take the lead.

Jet's in the kitchen when we get there. His gaze jumps to her, his concern clear. His worry seems to grow when he takes in the state of her.

Obviously, I wasn't thinking about it when we left her place, but her legs and thighs are pretty much completely bare and the sweater only reaches her hips. The tattered fabric covers her pussy, but the one side is torn clear up her side and she's not wearing panties so you can see a lot of skin.

Probably more skin than Jet's ever seen on a live woman, frankly. This is probably pretty confusing for him.

He clears his throat and shifts, awkwardly hopping off the island stool and drifting close, unsure what to say and trying to keep his eyes from wandering.

Kennedy keeps her head down.

I hear footsteps on the stairs, and a few seconds later, my dad comes around the corner. His gaze shoots to Kennedy, and she walks straight into his arms.

He doesn't try to hide his affection for her at all as he wraps his arms around her, pulling her into the protective shelter of his chest. He kisses the top of her head and pets her wild curls, murmuring reassurances and holding her tightly against him.

Jet glances over at me.

He can probably tell I'm not surprised, but I can tell he is.

Not very socially perceptive for such a little fucking genius, that Jet.

Kennedy holds Dad tight and sniffles a little, but she keeps her face buried in his chest. After a little while, he pulls her back and leans down to ask if she wants to go upstairs and take a hot shower.

She nods, and he wraps an arm around her, leading her out of the room. Before he disappears around the corner, he looks back at me. "Don't go far. When I get her in the shower, I'll be back down. I want to talk to you."

I nod, walking to the fridge to grab myself a beer. After the night I've had, I need one.

Dad's up there with her for a while. When he comes back down, Jet has gone upstairs to work out his awkward feelings about Kennedy, and I'm sitting at the island about halfway finished with my beer.

My gaze flickers to him as he walks over and sits down next to me. He hangs his head and sighs.

"How's she doing?" I ask.

“She swears she’s okay. I took some pictures of her before she got in the shower, just in case. She insists she didn’t need to go to the hospital to be checked out.”

I nod. “She was fighting him when I came in, but he was a big fucker, and she’s a little thing.”

Dad’s fists flex on the countertop. “You shouldn’t have gone over there yourself. That was stupid and dangerous.”

“I know.”

Despite his previous statement, he adds, “I’m proud of you.”

I crack a smile and tip back my beer. “The swamp creature Kennedy somehow came out of said she was going to call the cops. She might’ve. I broke her boyfriend’s nose.”

He nods. “She’s a lot of talk. I doubt she’ll actually do it, but if the cops *do* show up for you, don’t say a word. I’ll call the lawyer. I have the pictures, and I’ll keep Kennedy’s clothes in a bag in case we need to show evidence of the attack. Did her mom even know who you were?”

I nod. “She recognized the resemblance. I cannot believe you ever fucked that woman.”

“Who, Tracey?”

I nod.

He makes a face and shakes his head. “I never fucked her. The night I met her, I was drunk and she seemed fun. She sang bad karaoke and sucked my dick in the parking lot because I paid for her drinks. I happened to see her at the bar again a second time. I was pretty drunk, so when she invited me to go home with her, I went. But she was wasted, couldn’t even walk without falling over laughing. By the time I got her to the bedroom, I knew I was going to leave, but she asked me

to grab her a bottle of water before I left. I went to the fridge to grab her one, and when I got to the kitchen, I saw Kennedy. I took one look at her and... well, you've seen her."

I crack a smile.

"Those eyes of hers, I just..." He shakes his head. "I knew I wanted to come back to see *her*, but she was cagey. Probably because I had her alone in the dark in her apartment and she'd had bad experiences before, but I didn't know that at the time, I just knew there wasn't a shot in hell she'd want to see me again when I met her like that. So, I took a detour. When I went back to the bedroom, I woke Tracey up so I could give her my number. Then I started seeing her so I had a reason to go over there, but I never fucked her. I didn't want to fuck her. I wanted to fuck Kennedy, but it took her some time to warm up to me. Then, when she did, I was dating her mom, so my detour became a roadblock."

"Well, seems like you found your way back to her," I remark.

"Yeah," he murmurs, looking pensive.

I take another swig of beer, then set the bottle down and focus my gaze on it as I address this next thing. "In the car, Kennedy seemed to have some concerns about how you would feel if that guy had done anything to her. Obviously, I told her you're not an asshole and wouldn't blame her for shit like that happening to her. That you're not such a fucking fossil that you hold some fucked up, archaic belief that a woman loses value if another man touches her."

Dad cracks a small smile, shaking his head. "No, I'm not such a fossil."

"Good."

He looks over at me. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you're coming off a little protective of her."

I shoot him a look. "I am not protective of her. Just verifying the accuracy of information I gave someone."

"Ah." He nods knowingly as he stands up. "That makes sense. I know how important accuracy is to you."

I roll my eyes at him and grab my beer. "Whatever. Go comfort fuck your jailbait."

He smirks, shaking his head. "The only one of us who might go to jail tonight is you. Make sure everything is locked up before you go to bed. If the doorbell rings, don't answer it until you know who's there."

I drain what's left of my beer and lean back to call after him, "Make sure you use a condom. I don't need any more siblings."

# Chapter nineteen

Kennedy

I let the scalding hot water beat down on my flushed skin until there's none left in the pipes. I scrubbed at my flesh until it was red and agitated, and then I scrubbed some more.

The water is cold when I step out of the shower. I feel cold, too, right down to my bones.

I'm torn between wanting to get out of the bathroom as quickly as I can so I can climb under the soft, warm covers in Milo's bed, and knowing that as soon as I open this door, I'm no longer in control of things.

Milo will want to talk about it, and I don't. Milo will have his own idea of how I should be taken care of, and I bet I won't agree with him.

Once he makes up his mind about what constitutes the right thing to do, he can be pretty stubborn, and I just don't know if I can deal with it tonight. The last thing I want right now is to be treated like a child.

I don't want to mess things up with Milo either, though.

I just feel too emotionally drained to look out for us. All the energy I have left tonight has to be spent on taking care of myself.

I'm not sure he'll understand.

I don't pull any clothes on, but I wrap a silk robe around myself.

I feel destructive, but I try to shake it off.

My insides feel hollow as I flick off the bathroom light and open the door.

The bedroom is dark, the door out to the hallway closed. It wasn't closed before, so I'm guessing Milo is in here.

I think about keeping the robe on, but then I hear him move. Knowing he's there waiting for me, I change my mind, pushing it off before climbing into bed with him.

I don't want to talk, so I scoot across the bed until I feel his warmth. Determined to skip straight to not using our words, I feel beneath the covers hoping he's naked, too.

He's shirtless but wearing sleep pants.

Not what I was hoping for, but at least he's half undressed.

I pull my hair back over my shoulder and bend to kiss his muscular chest. He sucks in a breath, surprised, but lets me kiss my way over each firm pec, straining when I tease each nipple with the tip of my tongue.

Positioning my body on top of his and straddling his hips, I bend and kiss my way lower. I kiss my way down his cut abdomen and thrill when I feel his cock harden against me.

"Kennedy."

Normally, I love the sound of his voice, but I don't want to hear it now because I know he'll only say something I won't like.

I ignore him and slide my hand down to cup his hard-on through his sleep pants. He groans as I wrap my fingers around him, grabbing my hip.

I wish he was grabbing it to force me tighter against his cock or to roll me over and climb on top of me, but I know better. We've been here before, and when Milo has determined me not in a state to make my own decisions, he's always shut it down.

It's not happening tonight.

I won't be shut down.

He *will* fuck me; I won't take no for an answer.

Boldly, I grip his cock tighter and tug the way I know he likes. I can feel how much he wants me. I'll make him lose control. I'll make him want me too much to care about his stubborn sense of decency.

I stroke him, bending to tease his nipples again.

"Kennedy," he says again, more softly.

*No.*

He's in control. He's not even close to losing it.

*Goddammit.*

Ignoring the roadblock, I slide my hand down the front of his sleep pants, grabbing his bare cock. The breath hisses through his teeth as he strains to ignore the sensation of my soft hand wrapped around his hot flesh, but I won't fucking let him. I lower myself, dragging down the pants and bending to take his cock into my mouth.

"Kennedy," he says again more firmly, stopping me before I can get my mouth around him.

The firmness in his tone jolts me. I still don't want to listen, but it's harder to ignore him when he uses that authoritative tone on me.

"I want to suck you," I say, trying again to lower my face and take him in my mouth.

"No."

His rejection makes my stomach drop.

I look up at him, but my eyes haven't adjusted to the dark yet. He's just a silhouette on the bed, and I fight the irrational urge to burst into tears.

He feels far away from me. I think it's my fault. I'm not myself right now, I'm the shadow of a lost girl whose



own mother doesn't give a fuck about her.

Maybe he doesn't want this version of me, especially for our first time together, but right now I *need* to be worn out and depleted. Maybe then my body will let me rest so that tomorrow I can find my way back.

But Milo is a good man at the end of the day, and that shouldn't make me so angry—*normally, I love that about him*—but right now, it does.

I never fight him for control because I love how it makes me feel when he wields it, but tonight we don't want the same thing, and I'm not interested in backing down.

I'm not *going* to back down, and since he isn't used to that, I don't know how he'll react. I don't know what my refusal to accept his decisions will cost me.

"We need to talk about what happened, sweetheart," he says gently.

"No, we don't," I snap. "Maybe *you* need to talk about what happened. *I* don't. Nothing happened. It's done. It's over. I'm not talking about it—not with you, not with anyone. Not now, and not ever. It *doesn't matter*."

He's relentlessly gentle with me despite my unrestrained anger. He pulls me down so that I'm lying on his chest. "The last thing I want to do is upset you further, but I also don't want you to do something right now you will regret later."

I don't say it because I *don't want to talk about it*, but I find it absolutely insane that of all the shit that's happened tonight, he thinks *this* is what I'd regret.

"You've expressed to me before that you wanted your first time to be special, and I would hate for you to lose out on having that experience the way you want it just because you're hurt and scared and probably a little traumatized. You won't feel the way you're feeling for long. It's all fresh right now. It just happened. I am happy

to lie in this bed and hold you all night. You can cry, you can rage, you can feel however you need to feel without fear of scaring me off, but please don't ask me to take something from you that I can't give back once this pain has passed. I love you, and I don't want to do that to you."

His words feel like salted whips lashing my skin. Tears well up in my eyes.

He's right, and that makes me angry. I don't want to hear it, but it's also the kindest, most loving thing anyone has ever said to me. I don't know how to process it, where to put it. Maybe I don't know how to be loved.

Maybe I'm unlovable.

Irrationally, I'm even a little angry that he just told me he loved me and it doesn't get to be romantic and beautiful. It's not like I wanted it, like earlier tonight when everything was perfect, when he was hugging my tummy and that blissful feeling welled up inside me.

Right now, I'm bursting with anger, pain, and maybe a little desperation. This isn't how I wanted to feel when we finally got to be together.

A little voice of reason tries to whisper that if I feel that way about him saying he loves me, then he's probably right about the rest of it, too.

But I don't want to hear it.

I can't.

It's not a truth I can handle right now.

I need what I need tonight, and if I regret it a little bit later, so be it. I can't regret it more than all the shit I already regret that led to this moment.

Somehow, I don't think that's an argument that would convince him.

*I'm going to ruin everything.*

“Sometimes things don’t get to be beautiful,” I tell him.

He holds me tighter. “If he hurt you, it isn’t your fault. It doesn’t have to count.”

“I already told you, he didn’t rape me. But I almost lost my chance to do this on my own terms. I won’t risk that happening again.”

“That’s a bad reason, Kennedy,” he tells me softly, caressing the side of my face.

His words chafe like judgment, but they do nothing to change the gaping wound inside of me that needs tending to.

“I don’t care. It’s mine.”

“You’re not in the right frame of mind to make a decision like this, sweetheart. We don’t have to rush anything. We don’t have to talk if you don’t want to. Just lay here and let me hold you.”

“Stop telling me what to do,” I say, pulling away from him and sitting up. “I don’t want you to just hold me. We were going to have sex tonight anyway. You literally booked us a hotel room and planned out the whole night. It was *going* to happen and then it didn’t because I was a fucking moron.” The last word breaks over a sob I can’t hold in. “I just want to rewind, I just want to go back to the hotel and be fucking selfish. I want to shut my phone off and say fuck her like she would’ve said fuck me, and I want—I just—I want it all back, and I can’t have it.”

I can’t breathe by the end of that.

I draw a shuddering breath and Milo reaches for me, but I’m so full of rage and remorse, I can’t be touched. Not by someone who loves me, at least.

“Don’t touch me unless you’re going to touch me the way I want you to.”

His hand stops, and my heart plummets.

“Kennedy,” he says, trying to cut through my hysteria, but I don’t want to hear him. “I know it might feel like I’m full of shit right now, but we’ll have so many other nights like that. I’ll plan it all over again if you want me to. I’ll *give you* tonight back. I’ll do whatever you need me to do to fix this for you.”

“Then fuck me,” I whisper.

He swallows. “Not that.”

His rejection is painful and embarrassing. It cuts to the quick and makes me want to lash out at him.

I hate how immovable he is. So staid and fucking reliable, so committed to doing what he thinks is the right thing for me.

Tears stream down my face. I nod and climb off of him. “All right.”

He lies there as I climb off the bed and snatch my robe off the floor. My mind and heart race as I pull it on and shove my arms through the sleeves. I’m angry at them for being so soft and lovely. I want to scrape barbed wire across my skin, not feel their suffocating softness.

“Where are you going?” Milo finally asks as I walk around the foot of the bed.

“To find someone who will.”

As soon as the words are out, my stomach rocks. It feels final, like a step I can’t come back from.

Milo rips the blankets back. “Like hell you are.”

I don’t have to go far, and we both know it.

I rip open the bedroom door. Fear crawls up my spine when I hear Milo’s heavy footsteps behind me, but I know he won’t hurt me. It’s just an instinct to feel fear.

Maybe even a hope.

I want him to be angry at me for saying that. I want him to grab me and throw me up against the wall, to grab my throat and close in on me so I can't move away from him, then nudge my robe open so he can look at my body. I want to be completely fucking helpless, and then I want him to shove his cock in me right here in the hallway and show me who I belong to.

*Stop me. Hurt me. Punish me.*

But, deep down, I know he won't.

"Kennedy."

His tone is harsh as he grabs my arm and turns me around. There's fire in his ice-blue eyes and it lights a match, kindling hope inside me. Maybe I *can* push him, make him lose that control he holds onto so tight.

I do, literally. I reach out and push at his bare chest to shove him away from me. "What's wrong, Milo? Don't want to fuck me, but don't want anyone else to, either?"

"You are not leaving this goddamn house in that robe or in this state of mind. I don't care if I have to lock your little ass in a fucking closet to keep you safe, you're not—"

"I don't have to leave the house," I interrupt, backing toward Jonathan's closed bedroom door.

His eyes widen as my threat clicks in his mind.

I thought he knew what I meant when he launched out of bed and came after me, but I can see he just got it.

He stiffens, the fear going out of his eyes, replaced by something closer to dread. "Kennedy, get back in my fucking bedroom right now. We will work this out between us."

"Make me," I challenge.

His hands curl into fists at his sides. “Do you know how fucked up it is to ask me to be rough with you after what you’ve just been through tonight?”

“Yes,” I say, tears stinging behind my eyes.

*Yes, I know how fucked up it is. I don’t need to be told. I don’t need to be judged.*

The door behind me cracks open.

My stomach rocks, and a hot tear runs down my face.

“Kennedy, don’t do this,” Milo says, but the bastard doesn’t take a single step toward me.

Jonathan does. He moves to stand next to me, then he looks me directly in the eye. Mine are red and swollen, my face still wet with tears.

A decent man would probably take one look at me and make the same judgment Milo has—I’m a mess, and I should be left alone.

That’s why tonight, I need the Granville without so much fucking decency.

“Can I stay in your room tonight?” I ask him.

“Kennedy,” Milo says, his tone threatening, but I don’t look at him. I can’t.

Jonathan does. His gaze flickers to his father and, for a horrifying moment, I realize he could say no. I don’t know if I could stand that humiliation tonight after everything else. But I don’t know where else I could go, either.

My heart is already broken, beaten down and stepped on, a pile of rubble beneath all our feet. I don’t really have anything left to lose, so when Jonathan grabs my hip and pulls me back into his bedroom, all I feel is relief.

That’s not true.

I feel sadness and a deep sense of loss, but it's buried underneath too much trauma, too many other lost things.

## Chapter twenty

Kennedy

Alone with Jonathan in his bedroom, my tears fall like raindrops on a violent, stormy night, drenching my face in evidence of all the pain I'm feeling.

The light is on, so Jonathan can clearly see it.

He closes the bedroom door and locks it.

I'm crushed beneath the weight of too many feelings, suffocated by them. I can't find my way out.

I need to feel nothing.

I need to be numb.

Jonathan turns off the light.

I can breathe again when the room is dark.

He lets me catch my breath, then he asks simply, "What do you need?"

Relief hits me so hard, my knees nearly buckle. A cool tear skips over the hollow beneath my eye and rolls fast down my cheek.

"Use me," I whisper.

He wraps his fingers around my throat and pushes me back against the wall, pressing his hard body against mine. "Yeah?"

Relief flutters through me.

I nod, swallowing the lump of regret in my throat.

*This* is what I needed.

It feels so good to be touched like I'm not some fragile, breakable thing.



At the same time, he's almost tender. Pushing me against the wall with his strong body, but bringing his other hand up and stroking my jawline with his thumb. "You sure?" he murmurs, dipping his head to kiss my jaw, gripping my head and moving it, moving *me* so he can kiss wherever he wants to.

I *wasn't* sure, but I am now. "Yes."

He forces me back against the wall again and pins me there. The pressure of his hard body against mine is so reassuring.

He lets go of my face and neck, backing up just enough to grab the satin belt around my waist and untie it. He grabs the flimsy robe and shoves it down past my shoulders. The material drops and pools on the floor by my feet, and now I'm standing in front of him completely naked.

It's dark, but I can still feel his savage gaze rake over me. My face heats and I look down as he moves close again.

While he still has me against the wall, he presses into me again, palming my tit and squeezing it like he has a right to. "Any rules?" he asks.

"I might fight you." My heart thuds as I say the words aloud.

"Do you want me to stop if you do?"

"No."

He nods like he understands and bends to kiss my neck. His kiss starts gently like his touch did, but then his grip on my throat tightens until I almost can't breathe and he bites down so hard, I cry out.

My heart pounds as his hand slides down my stomach. "You want it rough?" he murmurs against my neck as his palm slides down to cup my pussy.

I guess he was just giving me a sample to see what I'd be signing up for if I said yes.

I swallow. It feels dangerous, but it also feels... perfect.

"Yes," I whisper.

"Yeah?" He skims the slit between my thighs, but finding it mostly dry, brings his fingers back up and shoves them in my mouth. "Lick my fucking fingers so they're nice and wet when I shove them in your cunt."

My pussy throbs at his harsh command, my mouth opening obediently. He's rough with my mouth, pushing two fingers deep and gagging me.

"Christ, you're such a good little slut," he says, grabbing me roughly, kissing the side of my face as he gags me with his fingers. "You want to gag on my cock, too, pretty girl?"

I can't answer until he takes his fingers out of my mouth, but as he makes good on his promise and shoves his fingers into me, I breathe, "I want whatever you want."

"Mm, such a good girl," he murmurs approvingly.

Despite his reassuring words, his fingers move inside me violently. It feels fucking amazing. There's no issue with dryness now. My pussy makes wet noises as he rams his fingers in and out of me. I think I should be embarrassed, but the way he makes me feel... I don't. I feel like I'm exactly as broken as he wants me to be in this moment, like he wouldn't change one single thing.

The intensity of the pleasure as he batters my pussy makes my whole body feel weak. My head falls back against the wall, and he nips at my exposed neck while he roughly finger fucks me. Horrifyingly, I feel close to coming already. My eyes roll back when he grazes my skin with his teeth, then sucks hard, shoving his fingers into me harder, making it harder to breathe.

“Look at that,” he says as he pulls his fingers out of me and appraises them. “Dripping wet for me already.”

He grabs my face and crushes his lips to mine. I gasp at the brutality, grabbing onto his sides. It’s not really a kiss because kisses are nice. It’s an attack, but his roughness feels so good.

When he breaks away from me, my heart is pounding. He grabs my wrist and drags me over to his bed.

Once we’re close enough, he shoves me hard. I land on the mattress, scooting back as he unbuttons and unzips his jeans.

I anticipate him climbing on top of me, pushing me down into the mattress and jamming his cock inside me, fucking me roughly like he wants to break me.

I told him to use me, and I know he will.

I lick my lips in anticipation, listening for him since it’s too dark to see much.

He was still dressed when I came in, but I hear him draw his T-shirt off. When all that’s left on his body is his underwear, he climbs on the bed with me.

“Spread your thighs. I want to taste your pussy.”

For some reason, my legs won’t open.

Jonathan watches me for a second, but when I don’t move to do as he commanded, he grabs my thighs and wrenches them apart himself. “I *said* spread your *fucking* legs.”

My pussy pulses at his harsh words.

I gasp as he jerks me down the bed, forcing me closer to his face. I grab at the mattress, trying to pull myself back up away from him, but his grip is too firm.

*I don’t want this.*

“Jonathan—”

His mouth latches onto my pussy and I cry out, shoving at his head to push him away. He grabs my hands, pinning them together and holding them at the wrists with one hand, spreading my pussy open with the other and lapping at it with his tongue more hungrily as if to taunt me.

My tummy muscles contract and a sick thrill shoots through me as he holds me captive and runs his tongue over my clit.

This wasn't what I wanted. I didn't want pleasure, I just wanted to be used, but I can't fight the thrilling sensations as his tongue moves methodically over my clit again and again, teasing and sucking on it while he holds my hands down so I can't fight him. My thighs tremble and I gasp, the pleasure of it almost too much to bear.

“Jonathan,” I whisper cry, trying to free my hands and claw at the bedding, but I can't.

He sucks on me harder.

My thighs shake violently, and I groan, feeling like I'm going out of my mind.

“Please,” I cry. “Please, Jonathan.”

He pulls away from my pussy just long enough to growl, “Shut the fuck up, Kennedy. I'll use your pussy any way I see fit.”

A sick thrill shivers down my spine and heat spikes between my thighs at his words, then his mouth is on my pussy again, and I'm lost in a shaky mess of writhing ecstasy.

I try hard to keep my shameful cries quiet as he feasts on me like a beast with its favorite meal, but when I can't hold on anymore and he makes me come, I lose

all control, twisting my body and trying like hell to roll over so I can smother my cries in his pillow.

“Let me go, please,” I cry desperately.

He doesn't. He keeps me there and laps at my pussy until the last tremor is wrung from my body, the last cry pulled from my throat.

Finally, he stops devouring my pussy and releases my hands, but only because he has already had his way—and so he can grab the satin belt from my robe off the floor.

*What is he going to do with that?*

I'm a little hesitant, but still utterly unable to move from the force and longevity of that soul-breaking orgasm.

His cock hangs heavy between his thighs as he climbs back up on the bed, then crawls over and collects my hands, pulling them together and winding the length of purple silk around them.

“You want that, hm?” he murmurs, seeing my gaze on his cock. “Don't worry, baby. I'm going to stick it in at least two of your holes before we're done tonight.”

I swallow, tearing my gaze from his thick cock and looking at my hands as he wraps the silky belt around my wrists. “What are you doing?”

He smiles and caresses my jaw. “Whatever the fuck I want to do. You're my property tonight. You'll take what I give you.”

I lick my lips, looking up at him. It shouldn't be possible to feel arousal stirring when I just came, but there's a telltale tension low in my tummy. Everything he says is perfect.

“Such a good little slut,” he murmurs almost lovingly, caressing my face, then grabbing my hair and using it to lift me to my knees. “Now, you look up at me as you take

my cock. I want your eyes on me the whole time. You look away, I take your ass.”

My heart stalls. “I... I didn’t say you could do that.”

“Didn’t say I couldn’t, either. The rules have already been set, so I guess you’d better be a good girl and do as you’re told.”

I swallow as he drags my face closer to his cock. He tells me to lick it, so I do. He tells me to kiss it, so I do that, too.

Then he yanks me onto my back and climbs on top of me, trapping me beneath his weight and bringing his cock to my mouth. “Remember, eyes on me. I won’t remind you.”

My heart pounds crazily as he fists his cock and pushes it into my mouth. Instinctively, I pull at the binding around my wrists, but he wrapped the belt around them and he’s holding the ends tightly in one fist, so I can’t get free.

“That’s it,” he says, easing his hips forward and pushing more of his cock into my mouth. “Wrap your tongue around it, baby. Tease it. Suck on it like you want to please me. You fucking better if you don’t want me to destroy that pussy once I get inside it. Make me want to be nice to you, baby.”

I’ve never been trapped against a mattress and choked with a cock before. I’m not sure I like it, but not sure I don’t, either.

I like his pleasantly mean words. They make me feel a lot of things, but purely sexual things, nothing scary. I like pleasing him, that comes natural to me, so even though the rest of this is new to me, I use my mouth to make love to his cock, and I can tell he enjoys it by the praise he murmurs to reward me.

“Relax your throat,” he says when he pushes too deep and I start to gag.

Having to hold his gaze as he fucks my throat is intense, but there's something thrilling about my complete helplessness. My wrists are bound and the way he has me pinned down with his impressive body, my legs are irrelevant. He's dominating me entirely—his cock moving in and out of my throat determines when I'll breathe, my bound hands ensure I can't use those unless he lets me, and if I even dare to look away from him, he'll punish me for it.

I start to feel comfortable with the powerlessness, the insistent invasion of his cock in my body. My throat learns to relax, and I keep my gaze trained on his even as I moan around him, enjoying myself more and more as I watch his face, see *his* pleasure as he uses my mouth.

"Such a perfect mouth," he says, looking deeply into my eyes. He moves deep into my throat and stays there for a moment, letting me struggle around him, then pulling out right before I feel like I'm going to pass out.

I gasp as I'm able to breathe again. He lets go of the belt and caresses the side of my face, easing his cock out of my mouth.

"You did so good, baby," he tells me, leaning down to kiss my lips as a reward.

He unwraps the silky belt from around my wrists, and on instinct I murmur, "Thank you."

He strokes my cheek again, a silent *you're welcome*, then he rolls me over on my tummy and pulls me up so my ass is in the air.

"Lean down on your forearms. I've gotta have a look at this pretty pussy before I fuck it."

I sink down on my forearms, popping my ass up for him. I feel self-conscious as I position myself so my pussy is on display for him, but his words quickly ease it.

“Good girl.” He sucks his fingers into his mouth, then pushes two into my pussy. I’m a little tender, but he shoves deep, all the way to the knuckle. “That is a perfect fucking pussy.”

I swallow, trying to ignore the swell of pleasure as he uses his fingers to explore.

When he’s touched every part of me, he withdraws his wet fingers and wipes them on my ass.

Foil tears and I know he’s opening a condom.

My stomach drops.

I know this is the last chance I have to object, but I also know I told him to ignore me if I did. It’s too late, anyway. He has already had his hands, mouth, and cock all over my body. He’s held me down and made me come so hard, I nearly cried.

There’s no going back now.

He fits his cock up against my entrance, and I try not to tense too much. He grabs my hips tight and pushes into me. Just the tip at first, but then he pushes deeper. I breathe through it, inch by inch. My pussy is tight and his cock is thick, so even with the lubrication, he has to force his way between my walls.

He stills when he finally gets all the way inside me. He grunts, his fingers digging into my skin, then manages, “Are you all right?”

“Yes,” I say softly.

“You’re so fucking tight. I’ve never fucked a pussy this tight before.”

*I’m a virgin.*

I don’t say it. The thought makes my eyes sting, and as moisture gathers on the surface, Jonathan draws back, then pushes into me again.



“Harder,” I say, needing to get back to my numb place, a place that’s just sex and domination, no love, no hurt. No feelings, just my body being taken by someone who doesn’t make me want to puke.

Mercifully, Jonathan obliges.

Once he recovers from the surprise of how tight I am, he gets rough with me again, slapping my ass, fucking me harder, grabbing at my tits like he’s trying to leave bruises on my body. When he slams his cock inside me, my pussy contracts around him, taking every bit of the abuse and begging for more.

The building pleasure scares me because it’s not what I wanted. I didn’t come to Jonathan for pleasure, I came to be used. I don’t want him to make me come, I want him to *use me* to make himself come.

His brutality makes it nearly impossible to hold back, though. I’m losing the battle against ecstasy, my legs shaking as he drives his cock deep into my pussy and I feel him in my guts.

So I’m relieved as hell when he finally blows his load and I’ve felt all the tension of building release, but none of the relief.

My heart pounds in my chest as I lay with my ass still up, my face smashed against mattress, my well-used pussy leaking juices all over his bed. Jonathan smooths a hand over my ass, a wordless gesture of appreciation for the pleasure I gave him.

When he pulls out of my pussy and collapses on the bed beside me, he grabs me and yanks me half on top of him.

I don’t want to cuddle with him, so I pull away, roll over, and curl up on my side.

I feel him looking over at me, but he doesn’t accept my wordless request not to be touched.

He rolls over, locks an arm around my waist, and hauls me back against him.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” he tells me.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I whisper.

I don’t want to be held, either, but when I try to move out of his embrace again, he doesn’t let me. It makes me angry—so angry I claw at his arms trying to pull them off me so I can be left alone, but my scratches don’t faze him.

“Let me go!”

His grip only tightens. “No.”

He’s squeezing me too hard, but the more I fight him, the harder he holds me.

Finally, he grows tired of the struggle. He rolls me onto my stomach and moves his whole body on top of mine, pinning me down.

“Stop fucking moving.”

My body listens to his command like it did when he was fucking me.

I wait for him to roll off me so I can fight him again, but he remains on top of me, holding my hands down against the mattress.

The pressure of his body on top of mine feels oddly comforting, and after a moment passes and I stop fighting it, I realize I don’t want him to move. I like being crushed under his weight. He’s not holding me, but he’s making me feel calm. It’s like being forcefully hugged, but I wouldn’t let him hug me right now if he tried.

He lies on top of me until he feels my body completely relax. My eyes grow heavier and my brain slows to a crawl.

I’m comfortable here, pressed into his blue striped sheets. They’re not the sheets I want my naked body to

be pressed against, and he's not the Granville I want on top of me, but tonight, he's the one I needed.

When he finally moves off me, I'm too tranquil to put up a fight.

He moves back to his side of the bed and curls up beside me, resting an arm around my waist.

I'm too comfy to move, so I let him.

"Goodnight, Kennedy," he murmurs.

It's rude not to say it back when I'm still awake, but I don't want to. My peace feels so fragile, something as small as saying goodnight to him could shatter it.

He doesn't seem to care.

I couldn't balance the weight of any expectations on me tonight and still manage to keep myself from sinking, so I'm glad he doesn't care.

My heart still feels heavy in my chest, but I ignore it.

Peace was too hard to come by tonight. I can't let anything take it away now that I've found it.

I close my eyes and clear my mind.

I let the strong arm wrapped around my waist be the right one, and finally, I drift off to sleep.

## Chapter twenty-one

Kennedy

It's raining again.

I'm honest enough with myself to admit that's not why I'm still in bed this time.

The moment my eyes opened and I had to think about emerging from Jonathan Granville's bedroom, I felt too sick to move.

The rain pelts the window and I wish it was pelting my bare skin, washing away every touch my body has ever felt so I could start over fresh.

Misery envelops me, so I draw the blankets closer and burrow in.

Jonathan is still on the other side of the bed. He drifted away from me while we slept. I got my wish and I'm alone, but my chest still feels like caving in the more I wake up. I'm still suffocating. I didn't escape anything.

Today, there's a new layer of weight pressing down on me, and this one is almost too much to bear.

*What have I done?*

I close my eyes and try to breathe through the panic.

Jonathan's sheets are coarse, not soft like Milo's.

*Milo.*

I close my eyes and try to clear out the thoughts, the names, everything. I need to be blank, and I can't stop my mind from running.

I manage to get my breathing under control again, but the calm is fleeting. The moment I let my guard down, thoughts and fears rush in.

Milo will never be able to look at me again.

He won't touch me or kiss me or hold me.

He may never speak to me again.

I let his son fuck me last night. He'll probably want me to leave and never come back.

*What have I done?*

I'm fighting tears when Jonathan finally makes a noise and starts moving around. He stretches, but I keep my back to him. I don't need to know what he looks like waking up in the morning. I don't want to memorize him the way I did Milo.

A broken heart shouldn't still ache. When will the damn thing give up and stop feeling anything?

Jonathan gets out of bed and walks into his bathroom. He comes back a couple of minutes later.

"You awake over there?"

I nod.

"Are you hungry?"

I shake my head no.

"Thirsty?"

I nod.

"I'm gonna run downstairs. I'll grab you a bottle of water. You want anything else?"

I swallow, trying to clear the lump out of my throat. "Will you bring my things? Milo took them to his room last night, and I can't... I can't go in there."

He misses a beat, then says, "Yeah. I'll go get them."

"Thank you," I whisper.

He takes a few steps toward the door, but he pauses before going through it. "Are you okay?"

I nod again.

He doesn't sound like he believes me, but he says, "All right," and leaves the room.

I close my eyes, clutching my aching tummy, and try like hell to keep my mind empty.

It's impossible, though.

I've ruined everything, and in the stark light of day, I can't look away from that awful reality.

All Milo wanted was to be there for me in the only way he knew how, and I... I pushed him away. Shoved him. Literally.

*I ruined everything.*

Tears well up in my eyes. I bury my face in Jonathan Granville's blankets and try not to let them fall.

Jonathan is downstairs for a while. When he comes back up, I'm sitting up in bed with the blankets wrapped around me. I had to pee, so I grabbed the robe to put on, but as soon as I remembered him wrapping the belt around my wrists last night, I couldn't touch it. I dropped the robe and used the blankets to cover myself instead.

Jonathan hands me the water and notices my hands are trembling. I don't even know why. I don't know if I'm hungry and I just don't feel it, if it's nerves or my emotional state.

"Why don't you come downstairs and make me some breakfast," Jonathan says.

He's such an ass, but his words seem to communicate more than the expectation of me waiting on him. "Just you?"

He nods, understanding the question. "No one else is here right now."

"Can I shower first?"

“Sure. I need one, too.”

“Oh. I didn’t mean...”

He doesn’t wait to hear me finish my sentence, just walks his ass into the bathroom and leaves the door open.

I sit there and stare at the door for a moment, too startled to feel much at all.

I listen for him to see if he’s waiting for me. The shower turns on and I ease off the bed, walking slowly into the room.

My heart is in my stomach. Jonathan is naked, his cock hanging between his thighs, his well-sculpted ass flexing as he walks. He grabs two towels out of the closet and puts them on the counter, then he looks back at me over his well-muscled shoulder.

He doesn’t say anything, just steps into the shower stall and leaves that door open for me, too.

My tummy is a mess of jumbled nerves, but I gently close the bathroom door and walk across the cool tiled floor. My hairbrush is on his counter. I don’t know why that makes my stomach sink, but I could throw up.

I shake my head, forcing all the thoughts out of it, and climb into the shower behind Jonathan.

He’s already washing up, but he nods at a second washcloth he must have grabbed for me.

I’ve never showered with a man before. I don’t have any of my own soaps or shampoos in here, so I use his, but as the aromas fill the steamy shower, I realize I’m going to smell like him.

*What have I even gotten myself into?*

I have no idea. I wasn’t thinking at all last night, so I certainly wasn’t thinking ahead. I know Jonathan

Granville is, according to all who know him, *not* a girlfriend guy. We don't even *like* each other.

"You're pale," he states, drawing me out of my thoughts.

"What?"

He continues to watch me as he soaps up his pecs. "You feel okay?"

If perpetually feeling certain I'm about to throw up is feeling okay, I'm great.

I don't say that. I just nod.

His eyes narrow, but he doesn't ask again.

I get lost in my thoughts while he rinses off, but before I've managed to shampoo, Jonathan grabs my arm, turning me around and pushing me closer to the wall.

My heart stalls and I look back at him—or I start to, but he stops me, grabbing my jaw and forcing my gaze back to the wall.

"Don't look at me. Don't turn around."

My heart thuds.

"Plant your hands on the wall and spread your legs."

I don't want to, but I do anyway.

I want to tell him last night was a one-time thing, but I can't find the words.

I also know there's no chance in hell he snuck a condom into this shower and I didn't notice. When he pushes his cock into me, it feels a little different. It pulls at my skin as he pushes deeper, makes the tender spots hurt a little more.

He's not using protection.

My heart slams in my chest. I know I should tell him to stop, but I told him last night to ignore me if I tried to



stop him, and—

I gasp, losing track of my train of thought as he slams into me. I reposition my shaky hand on the slippery wall. I close my eyes and try not to think as he pounds into me, try not to feel deeply afraid when he shoves in and groans, and I know he's coming.

Inside me.

What the hell is he thinking?

I'm relieved and terrified at the same time.

I didn't invite him to use me a second time. Didn't want him to.

But now that he has, he's blurred a line for me, a line I hadn't even thought about blurring.

My legs are a little shaky when I step out of the shower, him right behind me. We both rinsed off again after he fucked me, but we ran out of hot water before I could wash my hair.

Once we're both dressed, we head downstairs. Jonathan messes around on his phone while I silently move around the kitchen, preparing a breakfast for two.

I don't want to eat so I don't make as much for myself, but I need to eat *something*. I'll need strength to get through today, and honestly, I don't know when I'll eat again.

When Jonathan told me to make sure I had all the electronics I needed in my bedroom, I reminded myself I needed to go back to the bathroom for my purse before we left.

But by the time I got into the bathroom, I forgot. Holding thoughts in my head was like trying to hold water in a hair net.

Since I don't have my purse, I don't have my phone or my wallet. I don't even have my car keys.

*Shit.*

I was thinking I could leave by myself because I had my car, but I don't have my keys.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

I sigh, irritated with myself for forgetting such an important fucking thing.

What am I supposed to do now? I have nothing. I don't even have pocket change. How will I make it to my next paycheck? How will I buy myself food? I was going to use my credit card to pay for a hotel tonight, but I don't have one of those, either.

*Is there anything I don't fuck up?*

Well, there's one extremely important thing I have to ask for and now I'm grateful Jonathan decided to fuck me in the shower because I won't feel like such an asshole asking him to pay for it.

Clearing my throat and avoiding his gaze as I set his plate down in front of him, I say, "Um, I hate to ask, but I didn't bring my purse last night. It was in the bathroom and I meant to grab it, but I... I forgot. Your dad had me drop my car off here last night after I got off work, but my keys are in my purse. Um, do you think you could give me a ride to the pharmacy?"

I feel his gaze flicker to me, but I stab my scrambled eggs to avoid meeting it. "For what?"

My face heats. My palms feel sticky. "I need to get Plan B just to be safe." My stomach drops saying it and I flash him a faintly guilty look. "You didn't use a condom in the shower."

He watches me for a moment, but then he nods and scoops up some eggs. "Sure."

"Thank you," I say, before adding awkwardly, "I don't have any money. My wallet was in my purse, too."

“Don’t worry about it.”

I should thank him, but I feel too stressed.

Is this my life now? At the mercy of the men I let fuck me? I’ve never felt more like my mother, and it’s revolting.

My stomach seems to hurt more with every bite of food I put into it, but Jonathan seems to remember something that dissolves my ability to even stomach food after a moment. “Your car’s not here, by the way.”

“What?”

“Your mom came and got it in the middle of the night.”

Of course she did.

Hopelessness threatens to swallow me up. For a moment, I feel like I’m in the middle of a vast void, and my life will never not be as empty as it is right now.

I have no money and no car. I have a shitty part-time job I won’t get a paycheck from for almost two more weeks. How am I supposed to take care of myself?

*Life isn’t supposed to be this hard.*

I don’t even want to be here anymore.

I get up and dump my eggs in the garbage, then I head upstairs to quickly catalog my things and see what items I actually have to my name.

The iPad is old. I guess I can sell it, but I won’t get much. I can sell my headphones. They’re basically new and a limited edition model, so maybe I could get a couple hundred dollars from them. My laptop is old and shitty, but I can’t sell it. It wouldn’t be worth much, and it’s probably worth a lot more to me since I don’t even have a phone anymore.

I have to remember to cancel my service. I’m sure as hell not going back to the apartment to get it.

I can't really be without a phone. Maybe I can get one of those prepaid garbage phones drug dealers use. Maybe I should *become* a drug dealer. Surely then I can make some money.

The door creaks as Jonathan opens it.

"What are you doing?" he asks, seeing me sitting in a pile of all my things.

"Contemplating a life of crime."

He nods like that checks out. "Well, if you need contacts, I know some people. You ready to go to the store?"

I nod, setting aside the crap on my lap and following him downstairs.

Unfortunately, once we get to the front door, I realize I don't have shoes or a coat to put on.

When I left work last night, I was wearing my uniform and a jacket, but I left all of that in the hotel room. Milo said he would bring it and leave it in my car for me when I had to go home early.

I don't know if he did.

If he did, it's gone.

Either way, I don't have any shoes to go anywhere, and it's cold outside.

"Did I... not have shoes on when I left the apartment?"

Jonathan shakes his head. "Do you have shoes in my dad's room?"

I nod. "He bought me a backup pair of work shoes."

"All right, I'll go grab them."

"Thank you," I say, standing awkwardly by the door as he heads up the stairs.

I didn't ask him to grab me a sweater, but he comes back with one for me, anyway.

It's chilly outside, but the sweater is better than nothing. At least there's a break in the rain so my clothes won't get soaked through.

Since the only time I've ever been in Jonathan's car was last night, I don't like being in it today. It brings back bad memories and I can't stop wringing my hands.

I asked him to take me to the drug store, so I'm surprised when he pulls into Target. I guess they do have a pharmacy, but I was hoping to go somewhere less busy where there was less chance of anyone seeing what I'm buying.

Jonathan grabs a basket once we're through the automatic doors. He leads me over to the pharmacy, then hangs back as I get what we came for.

I place it in the bottom of the basket and look up at him.

"You need anything else while we're over here?"

"I... I don't think so."

"You sure?" He nods at the box. "Isn't that supposed to trigger a cycle or something?"

"Oh. I'm not sure."

"Do you have what you need if it does?"

I shake my head, wanting to crawl into the floor.

He doesn't make a big deal about it, though. "Well, let's go get it then."

Buying feminine products at Target with Jonathan Granville wasn't something I ever expected to do in my life, but apparently, that's where I am now.

I follow along awkwardly once his basket is full of all my things. I hate asking him to buy me all this stuff when

we're not even friends. I was hesitant about Milo buying me stuff, but at least we were close. Asking Jonathan to do it feels bad, but I don't have an alternative way of getting the things I need.

I follow him through the store wordlessly, no idea where we're going. It's weird to be out shopping with him, nothing like when Milo takes me.

I figured he needed to grab something while we were here and that's where he was leading me, but he stops in the women's department by the displays of purses and looks at me expectantly.

"Grab what you need."

"What?"

"You said you left behind your purse and wallet, right? So, pick out new ones. We can try to get your shit back, but it's probably best to proceed as if you were mugged and just replace it."

I glance at the purses, but I'm reluctant. "You're already buying all this stuff for me."

"Yeah, I'm gonna buy some more, too, so pick out a fucking purse so we can get on with it."

The things he said after Milo bought me stuff runs through my mind and I don't know how to address it. He made comments about me "earning" that stuff on my back, basically. I don't know how to say, "Thanks for being willing to buy all this stuff for me, but I don't want to keep sleeping with you" without sounding like a complete asshole.

I also *need* this stuff and have no way of buying it myself.

I tell myself I'll pay him back for all of it later. Somehow. Once I drop out of school and get a full-time job, sometime after I've made enough to pay rent and my first month's utilities. I'll treat it like a loan and pay it

back in chunks as I can. He probably isn't hurting for the money, anyway. He lives at home and his home is safe, so if worst came to worst and he didn't have money, he has a father to ask.

Hopefully.

When I asked Jonathan if I could stay in his room last night, I wasn't even thinking of the damage I could do to their relationship.

I want to ask Jonathan if he has talked to his dad or if he even knows where he is, but I would also rather die than ask him about Milo this morning.

Dying doesn't sound so bad today, honestly. I'm heavily leaning toward it as I try to get a grip on my life with literally none of the tools or energy I need to do it.

I walk over to the purses, but it's not fun like it has been when Milo brought me shopping. It's not Jonathan's fault, it just *isn't fucking fun* to replace lost things in a situation like this. I grab the cheapest purse I can find that will suit my needs, then pick out a wallet from the clearance rack.

If I had a phone, I would keep track of what it all costs, but since every item in the basket is for me, I suppose I can just ask for the receipt when we leave.

Since I know I'm going to insist on paying him back, my stress only grows when he hauls me over to pick out socks and some new panties. Being in this section with him is awkward even before I have to say, "I don't need panties. Your dad bought me some."

"He probably bought stuff that made him want to fuck you. Do you feel like dressing sexy right now?"

Looking down at the ground, I shake my head no.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see him nod. "Exactly. You need practical shit. So, pick out some underwear,

and then we'll grab you an outfit that won't make anyone feel like fucking you."

There's a lump in my throat. Compassion is the last thing I expected from Jonathan Granville. "Thank you."

He nods, but I don't think he likes being forced to acknowledge he's not being an asshole right now. It almost seems to annoy him.

"I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable, I just really appreciate you wanting to do all this for me."

"Keep wasting time and you can name our kid after me to show your appreciation."

My eyes widen, but the stark reminder that I need to take my medicine kicks my ass into gear and I get to picking out the least sexy panties I can find on the racks.

Once I've picked out literally everything I need to feel comfortable today, we head to the register. Jonathan unloads the stuff on the conveyor belt, but he does it like a man—utterly without shame. Since my Plan B was the very first thing to go into the basket, it's right on top now.

I grab the leg of the pair of leggings I picked out and drape it over the box so I don't die of embarrassment. I automatically look around to make sure no one saw it and catch the sandy-haired older lady in line behind us shooting me a pinched-face look.

Mortified, I turn around so my back is to her and move forward toward the payment area.

The cashier flashes me a bland smile. Her gaze lingers on Jonathan a little longer and she smiles more convincingly for him. "Did you find everything you need today?"

"Sure did," he answers. "I hope that new purse brings out my eyes."

She grins like an idiot, and I roll my eyes, hard.



Hasn't anyone ever told him it's rude to flirt with the cashier when you're taking your dad's almost-girlfriend to buy Plan B after you fucked her in the shower and didn't bother to use a condom?

Actually, probably not. That's pretty damned specific.

I'm close to smiling at the sheer absurdity as the cashier pauses the flirty eyes she keeps shooting him to ring up my Plan B. Literally the weirdest moment of my whole life.

"Excuse me, young lady?"

My gaze jumps to the lady behind us in line. Since she's calling out to me, I think I must have dropped something so I look around for what it was, but I realize belatedly I don't have a purse or any belongings to drop.

I feel dread deep in my gut, but I swallow it down and answer her anyway. "Yes?"

She gazes at me solemnly, then says, "Babies are a miracle."

My stomach bottoms out.

My whole body does, actually. I feel like my stomach, my soul, and everything else has been scooped out and I'm just an empty husk standing here.

I can't keep the stricken look off my face—I'm too stunned, too floored to pretend to feel anything other than utterly attacked.

Jonathan is not in the same boat. Scowling like she just hurled her opinion where it didn't belong—*which she did*—he says, "Hey, lady? Go fuck yourself."

She gasps, drawing back and clutching her chest. If she could find words, I bet they'd be, "Why, I never!" but she's completely aghast that her unsolicited advice wasn't appreciated.

Jonathan shakes his head, pulling out his wallet and jamming his credit card into the reader.

The cashier presses a button on the register and quickly gathers up our bags. Jonathan grabs them without another word, then puts a hand on the small of my back and gently nudges me forward.

“You want a coffee or anything?” he asks, flicking a glance toward the Starbucks at the front of the store.

I shake my head. “No. We should probably just go before Karen finds a manager.”

He smirks. “Let her, I’ll tell them the same fucking thing.”

A faint smile tugs at my lips. “Jonathan Granville, defender of women.”

“Fuck the patriarchy and all that,” he jokes.

I laugh, and it feels so fucking good. For the better part of the day, I’ve felt sure I’d never laugh again.

My laughter doesn’t last for long, though.

When we walk through the exit doors and the cool air hits me, it feels like walking back into reality. That lady’s words—and worse, the look on her face when she looked at me like I was the worst person she had ever encountered—wash back over me.

Maybe I *am* a terrible person.

Milo flashes to mind, that heartbreaking look on his handsome face last night when I went into Jonathan’s bedroom. He looked so sad, and it was all because of me.

He’s the last person I would ever want to hurt, he just... wouldn’t give me what I needed.

I made the choice I felt I had to make, but it’s going to cost me. One impulsive decision... it’s going to cost me everything.

A memory surfaces of just last night, Milo's strong arms wrapped around me in the bathtub.

It feels like a lifetime ago already.

All those magical, blissful nights I could have had with him, gone. I threw them away.

Tears sting behind my eyes, blurring my vision. I try to swallow the lump in my throat, but it's stubborn and won't go down.

Jonathan grabs my arm and yanks me back when I step off the curb and inadvertently almost walk in front of a white SUV that's rolling past.

"Sorry," I say awkwardly when he scowls at me, and I tuck a thick chunk of hair behind my ear.

Once we're safely in the car, I grab the receipt listing the first of many debts I can't afford and shove it into my new purse. Jonathan grabbed me a bottled water from the coolers by the registers. I uncap it so I can swallow the pill in the parking lot before we leave.

On the drive back, I see a text message flash across the screen of Jonathan's phone. I can see it's from Milo, but not what it says.

As soon as I see it, it's all I can concentrate on. I want to ask if he's talked to him or this is the first time he's reaching out. I want to know what he said, if he seems okay.

My stomach hurts so bad I think about asking him to pull over, but I don't want to be a pest.

Seeming to notice my discomfort and want to get rid of it, Jonathan asks, "You want to listen to some music?"

I nod, thankful for the distraction.

He nods too, hitting the brake as we stop at a red light. "What do you want to listen to?" he asks, grabbing his phone.

“I could really go for some Taylor Swift right now.”

“I got you.” He taps the screen a few times, then suddenly “Shake it Off” starts playing. He drops the phone back in the cupholder, then starts tapping the steering wheel in time with the beat and I can’t stop a grin from transforming my face.

“Jonathan Granville, are you a secret Swifty?”

“Secret? Fuck that, this is my jam,” he says playfully, causing me to burst into laughter.

He starts dancing and I double over, and then we’re singing along and dancing in the car as we drive down the road.

I never thought I’d have fun with Jonathan, and definitely not *today*, but that two minutes of him goofing off and teasing me as we listen to Taylor Swift makes me feel so much better, my aching stomach dissipates for the first time since I woke up in his bed this morning.

Like the other breaks today, unfortunately, it doesn’t last.

Because when we pull in the driveway, Milo has just gotten home, too.

My heart stops beating, then races as he looks back at the car. I shrink down in the seat, wishing I could slide into the floor so he can’t see me.

In Jonathan’s car, with Jonathan.

It feels like rubbing salt in the wound and I’m so uncomfortable, I want to crawl out of my skin.

Jonathan puts the car in park, his gaze trained on his father.

“Get your things and go inside.”

I swallow. He sounds unsure how this is going to go, too.

My stomachache comes back, full force.

I don't want to move from this spot. I want to hide here until Milo can't see me anymore. I want to turn invisible.

"I can't just... walk past him."

"Sure, you can," he says levelly. "He's a big boy, he'll be fine."

"This is *his* house. It feels so rude."

"You can talk to him later, but I need to talk to him first."

I suppose that's fair. It's *his* father, after all.

Jonathan gets out first and walks up to his dad. I wring my hands and try to steal glimpses to see what's happening without looking up and making eye contact.

Jonathan walks around him and stops in front of the garage so Milo's back is to me.

I breathe a sigh of relief, grab my bags and my new purse, and make a beeline to the front door, the buzzing in my ears too loud for me to hear anything they're saying, thankfully.

I stop in the kitchen and grab a bottle of water so I don't have to come back down, then I hurry up the stairs before Milo and Jonathan come inside.

My heart races as I close the bedroom door and lean back against it.

All the relief I felt just a few minutes ago feels like a daydream.

Reality crashes down around me.

I look at the bed where Jonathan fucked me last night and remember all the filthy things he said to me.

Yeah, it was what I needed in that moment.

But I don't know how I'll ever look Milo in the eye again.

## Chapter twenty-two

Milo

The house is somber and still when I hear the sound of footsteps on the stairs and instantly become alert.

It doesn't feel like her, but I hope it is, anyway. I haven't gotten a good look at Kennedy since last night. All the bullshit aside, I need to see for myself how she's doing.

I'm sitting at the kitchen island trying to get some work done—work I don't technically need to do right now, but I need to keep my mind occupied, and this seemed the best way. I couldn't sleep for shit last night, and the dull ache behind my eyes isn't helping matters.

I hold my breath as I wait for someone to round the corner. I know how much water Kennedy drinks and how long she has been upstairs; she should be thirsty by now.

I'm disappointed when it's my son who saunters into the kitchen.

My fists curl up unconsciously and I have to make an effort to unclench them.

I guess she is thirsty, so she sent *him* down to get her a drink.

The knowledge sends a blast of heat through my veins, but I try to ignore it.

I'm not used to feeling this adversarial toward my own son, but it's hard not to after last night.

I watch as Jonathan takes two bottles of water out of the refrigerator, then focus my attention back on my

open laptop so I don't have to look at him when he turns around.

"We should probably have dinner at some point," I state.

"Can it wait until I get back? I don't really trust you down here with her alone."

"You don't trust me with her," I echo in disbelief.

Jonathan cuts me a look. He's not sorry, the little bastard, and I'd punch him in the face if he were anyone else. "The last thing she needs right now is fucking relationship drama."

"Where are you going?" I ask, not bothering to respond to his comment.

"I have an appointment," he says vaguely. "Kennedy is afraid to see you. She's hiding out in my room, but I need you to keep an ear out while I'm gone. Maybe walk up there and listen at the door just to make sure you hear her moving around inside. I don't know how long I'll be, and her mental state is like a fucking Yo-Yo today. All it'll take is one bad moment for everything to go to shit, so I need to know you're going to be fucking nice if you see her, and I would really prefer that you didn't—at least not until I'm back and you guys won't be alone together. There's too much hurt there and she can't cope with that right now."

Hearing that pushes aside a lot of the feelings I've been wrestling with and brings my focus to her base level of well-being. My brow furrows with concern. "How is she doing?"

He shrugs. "I don't fucking know. She's taking a tour of all her emotions today. Right now, she's lying in my bed listening to Metallica and sobbing into a pillow. I didn't ask why, but it's certainly not because I like them. I need to go out, but I can't fucking leave unless I have



your word that if you do see her, you won't be mean to her. She can't handle that today."

"Where do you have to go?" I ask again since he didn't answer the first time.

"I need to get tested."

My heart stops and plummets down the empty shaft of my stomach. "What? Why?"

He cocks an eyebrow. "You really want to talk about this? Your face is saying no."

Seething anger mixes with hot adrenaline and rages like a housefire through my veins. "Did you fuck her without protection?" I bite out.

"Yes," he states unapologetically. "Not the first time, but after that I decided to so I could get myself tested. She's still saying she wasn't raped, and I still don't believe her. I think for whatever reason, that's what she wants us to believe. Maybe she thinks we'll look at her differently. Maybe she just can't bring herself to admit it. I don't know. But I don't believe I got there in time, and I sure didn't see a condom wrapper anywhere when I entered that bedroom. She wouldn't let me take her to the hospital, so I figured this way I'll find out for myself. If I have anything, it's safe to say she does because I always wrap it up, so then we'll have to reason with her and get her some treatment, but... one step at a time."

I'm too fucking stunned to speak.

"Don't look at me like that," he says, pointing at me.

"Have you lost your fucking mind?" I ask.

He shrugs. "It was the best way I could think of to check with her avoiding the hospital."

"Forget fucking... diseases. You could have gotten her pregnant!"

“I took her and got her Plan B this morning. She already took it, we should be fine.”

“That doesn’t always fucking work,” I explode, launching up from the counter.

“Well, I did what I could with the tools I had. Fingers crossed, I guess.”

*Fingers crossed?*

Is he fucking kidding me right now?

“Look, I don’t know the exact right way to deal with all this, all right? I’m doing the best I can,” he states.

“Maybe your dick isn’t your most useful fucking tool, Jonathan.”

He shoots me a look as he turns around. “While I’m gone, maybe you should think about how you feel about her—how you *really* feel. I know we haven’t talked about this yet, and I know you’re pissed at me. I fucking get it, but this isn’t about you or me, and this isn’t the time for it. I’m truly fucking sorry if I hurt you. I’m not trying to hurt anybody, but she needed something you couldn’t give her last night, so I gave it to her. I had about three seconds to make a decision, and you know me, I’m pretty fucking decisive. I believe I made the right call. I’m sorry if you don’t like it. We didn’t have some fucking romantic night, she was just trying to work through some shit and she needed help. I was willing to be the replacement bad guy for her, and you weren’t. I know for a fact if you would have been willing to do it for her, she wouldn’t have turned up outside my bedroom door, so honestly, it’s on you.”

That’s a bold fucking statement, but he doesn’t stop there.

“Whatever her reasons, it happened. It’s done. Decide if that’s a deal-breaker for you because if you’re not on the team, I don’t have time to deal with you right now. Kennedy needs support. I think some of the shit I

said to her before may have made all this worse for her, and I'm trying to... make up for the damage I inflicted. If you love her, great—fucking prove it. Set aside your bruised ego and help me take care of her in her time of need. Love isn't always easy, isn't that what Mom always said? If you love her, then help me. If she was just a hot lay you enjoyed for a while and now you're done with her, so be it. Just stay out of the way and let me try to get her over this."

My brow furrows for a lot of reasons. Reasons I don't even expect, like, when the fuck did my son become such a grown man? I'm reluctantly impressed with him for standing up for her the way he is, even if it's me he's standing up to.

But mainly it's the fact that he still seems to think I fucked Kennedy.

Kennedy was a virgin. If he slept with her last night, he should know I didn't.

He looks at his watch. "I've gotta leave. Can you play nice?"

"Of course I can play nice," I mutter, mildly aggravated by the question. "I don't need you to police my interactions with Kennedy."

"And I don't need you pushing her over the fucking edge with some possessive bullshit she doesn't need right now," he says, heading for the stairs. "I'm running this up to her and then I'm leaving. Make sure you keep an ear out for her."

I sit back down at the island and mull over the shit he said. It's not all new information or thoughts that haven't already passed through my own head, but some of it is.

It's irritating that Jonathan seems to think he was 100% right, and I was 100% wrong because my way would have protected her much more effectively. His way

indulged her most destructive instincts. He did nothing to insulate her from the damage she'll do to herself if she's left to her own devices in an apparently compromised mental state.

Left alone together with her self-destructive tendencies and his fucking cockiness, these two are going to create a colossal mess even I might not be able to clean up—if they haven't already.

*Plan B as fucking birth control.*

This is why the inmates can't run the fucking asylum.

I try to focus on getting some work done while he's gone, but my mind won't stop traveling down roads I don't want us all to go down. I'm picturing Kennedy pregnant with my son's baby and all the ways that can be a fucking disaster. I consider her coming out of this on the other side but with him because he's the only one she could see being there for her when she needed someone the most.

If she's already pregnant, there's not much I can do, but I can damn well make sure he doesn't get any more chances.

Jet comes home before Jonathan does. I ask him to check in on Kennedy when he goes upstairs.

I've gone up there a few times and stood in the hall outside his bedroom until I heard her.

I don't like the implications that he's worried enough to insist on wellness checks on her. Jonathan isn't an overly protective person; he would only worry about that if he's seen a reason to.

I wait for him to get back to start dinner. Not because he told me to, but because I finally get in a groove with work and don't even realize how much time has passed until he walks through the door.

When he comes in, he's carrying a pregnancy test, and even though I know it's only a precaution and he's just preparing for the worst-case scenario, my stomach hollows out.

"I'm gonna go get her," he says, watching me.

I nod wordlessly and he disappears around the corner.

Jet is sitting at the other end of the island. I feel his gaze on me, so I turn my head and look over at him.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

I nod, but I can't speak. My stomach is roiling and I think I might be sick.

"It'll never work between them," Jet says, trying to make me feel better. "They're not romantically compatible. The sex is probably great because they feed on one another's toxicity, but in a relationship, that same toxicity will tear them apart. All they have right now is a trauma bond at best. Believe me, they'll fall apart."

His words only make me feel sicker. "They're not together," I say more shortly than I mean to. Especially because I don't even fucking know if what I'm saying is true. I have no idea what has been going on behind those closed doors other than what Jonathan has told me.

"Jonathan's not really father material, anyway. He's more of a fun uncle. If she's pregnant, you should be the father. I'll help with babysitting if she still wants to go to college. I can teach him or her about science. I think I'd prefer a girl, we have enough boys in the house."

"Jet, please."

"I'm just trying to make you feel better," he says. "It can be easy to see all the problems in the way, but I tend to see solutions. You have enough of the same physical characteristics, the baby would even look like yours. I'm

sure it's not your preference, but I'm just saying. If he got her pregnant, it's not the end of the world."

I scrub my hands down my face. "I don't even know if the baby would be his. That's the least horrifying of the two terrible possibilities."

"Oh."

I probably shouldn't have said that.

"I'm sure she isn't pregnant, and I *really* don't want to talk about this." It probably goes without saying, but I never know with Jet, so I add, "Do not mention any of this in front of her when she comes down."

"I won't."

I hear footsteps on the stairs again, and this time, it's Jonathan *and* Kennedy.

My heart stalls at the sight of her.

She's wearing a pair of black leggings and a sweater that's at least two sizes too big for her. It hangs off her slight frame and completely swallows her. Her hair is down, her face clean of makeup. She looks pale and sad and in desperate need of a meal.

I close my laptop and set it aside so I can get dinner started.

"Hey, Kennedy," Jet says.

"Hey, Jet," she says softly.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm... I'm okay," she answers.

I clear my throat, gathering ingredients on the counter. "Someone can chop up the onion and bell peppers," I say to no one in particular as I grab the meat and haul it to the other side of the counter to prep it.

"I will," Kennedy says, also to no one in particular as she comes over to the counter.

I don't look over at her, but I can feel her awkwardly hovering as she sets aside the ingredients she won't need and grabs a cutting board out of the cupboard. She grabs a knife out of the block and wordlessly chops up the onion first.

Before she starts on the peppers, she walks to the sink to rinse the blade of her knife. I glance over at the sink, then frown when I see a skillet and two plates and forks in the basin.

"Why are there dishes in the sink?" I ask without thought since I wasn't home for breakfast and neither of the boys ever cook when left to their own devices. If I'm not here, they usually have cereal for breakfast.

Kennedy freezes in the act of turning off the water.

She doesn't speak or move. Her horror compels my gaze to move over the dishes again.

Two place settings.

Jonathan doesn't cook.

She made Jonathan breakfast this morning.

*How fucking thoughtful.*

I season the steak a little more aggressively, but I feel sick to my fucking stomach picturing it in my head.

*Morning-after breakfast.*

Why does that feel worse than everything I've already heard?

Maybe it's just the straw on top of a shitty fucking stack.

Maybe because he specifically told me there was nothing romantic about what happened between them, and the idea of her making him breakfast after feels... romantic.

*What else am I imagining wrong?*

In my head, Kennedy was curled up by herself realizing she'd made a horrible fucking mistake after sleeping with Jonathan, but now thoughts surface of Jonathan mentioning there was a second time without a condom, and Jet positing that sex between them would be fucking incredible.

*Was it?*

Did she enjoy it? Did she want more?

*Is she interested in my fucking son now?*

My heart races as my brain barrels down this track I very much did not want to go down. I feel sick without answers, but sicker at the thought of getting the wrong ones.

Without answering me, Kennedy goes back to the chopping board and resumes silently cutting the bell peppers. I can feel her distress even though she doesn't say anything. I wonder if she can feel mine.

I try to shake off my feelings about it. Whatever he was wrong about, Jonathan was right that she doesn't need any relationship drama right now.

I still feel fucking sick, but I have to suck it up.

I'm a little noisier than I probably need to be as I grab the skillet out of the cupboard and pour in some olive oil to heat. Kennedy jumps a little as the skillet hits the stovetop. I look over and see her face pale, her grip on the knife so tight her knuckles are white.

"Am I cutting these right?" she asks, her voice a little shaky.

My gaze flickers to the strips she's making. Since she's so nervous, I make an effort to keep my tone calm, but it comes out a little short. "Yes."

With a brittle nod, she resumes cutting the rest of the pepper.



I work on my side of the counter until I no longer hear chopping, then I figure I better venture over to grab the veggies she chopped up.

When I turn and start to reach for the cutting board full of ingredients, I notice Kennedy is still holding the knife. Her gaze is locked on her wrist like she's in a trance, and my heart fucking stops when I can all but hear what she's thinking about in my own head.

"Put the knife down," I bark.

She jumps, dropping the knife on the counter. Her guilty gaze darts to mine, then she turns and flees like a scared little mouse.

Jonathan looks up from his phone, having missed what just happened. "Kennedy." He turns as she runs to the stairs, then he cuts an accusing look at me. "What the fuck did you do?"

I turn the sink on and quickly rinse my hands. "Turn the stove off," I tell him before hustling after Kennedy.

My stomach is in knots as I race up the stairs after her. She's already out of sight. I don't know whose room she went into, but when I try Jonathan's, the door is locked.

"Kennedy, open the door," I call through it, my hand on the knob.

"I'm not hungry, just eat without me," she calls back.

"Open the goddamn door," I say calmly, even though I feel anything but.

"Please leave me alone."

"No. Open the door and let me in, or I'll rip the damn thing off the hinges."

"I can't," she says. "I can't."

"Yes, you can." I keep my voice calm to reassure her even as my heart pounds wildly in my chest. "Just open

the door and let me in. Please. I just want to talk.”

“I can’t. I’m too embarrassed.”

I keep my tone firm but reassuring. “You don’t have to be embarrassed, sweetheart. Just open the door for me.”

I wait a few beats without saying anything and finally there’s a mechanical click. I turn the knob, and the door opens.

I walk inside my son’s room, refusing to think about what happened in here last night. I’m relieved to see Kennedy sitting on the floor, seemingly okay, just upset. She’s sitting against the wall with her legs pulled up to her chest, trying to be as small as she can.

I sit down on the floor next to her. She’s been struggling to keep her composure since the moment I entered the room, but when I settle in beside her, she bursts into tears.

“I’m so sorry,” she says without looking at me.

I sigh, grabbing her and pulling her into my arms.

“I’m so sorry I hurt you,” she says tearfully as she wraps her arms around me. “You were so good to me and I messed everything up.”

“No, honey,” I murmur, my grip on her tightening protectively. “You didn’t mess anything up.”

“Yes, I did. I hurt you, and I hurt me, too. I ruined everything.”

I close my eyes, holding her tight and letting her cry. This is fucking torture. “I’m so sorry you’re hurting, sweetheart. But you didn’t ruin anything.”

“Yes, I did. You hate me now.”

Hearing she thinks that is like a knife in the gut.

“I do *not* hate you,” I say fiercely. “I could never hate you, Kennedy. I fucking adore you. I love you. I will always love you. Nothing could ever change that.”

She shakes her head like she doesn't believe me, crying a little more and then sniffing. There's a break in the tears and she says softly, sadly, “I'm not a virgin anymore.”

“I don't care. I mean, I'm sorry if you regret that fact, but it doesn't matter to me. You haven't done anything wrong, okay?”

“I've done *everything* wrong,” she whispers.

“No.” I kiss the top of her head. “None of this is your fault, and I'm so fucking sorry you've gone through it. If I would've just answered the goddamn phone—I was right there, but I don't look at my phone when I'm driving, and it was on silent so I didn't hear it ringing.”

She shakes her head, looking up at me with tears in her big brown eyes. “It's not your fault.”

I look down at her, bringing a hand in to caress her face. “I'm so sorry for all the pain you're feeling, but you'll get through this, Kennedy. I promise. Your well-being is all that matters right now, okay? Nothing else. I'm sorry if I made things worse. I didn't mean to, I just...”

I was hurting, too, but it doesn't matter right now. Her pain is worse, and hers has to take priority.

She takes a shuddering breath and burrows deeper into my chest, her arms wrapping around me tighter.

I hold her for as long as she needs me to, the words dying when we've said all we can right now.

I think she knows there are things not being said, but given her fragile emotional state, there's no way in hell I'm saying any of it. Jonathan was right. She can't handle that right now.

The thought of Jonathan when I'm holding her draws tension to my upper back despite knowing it can't matter right now. I'm in uncharted territories, and I don't know how to navigate them.

"Can I ask you a question without upsetting you?"

She snuffles and looks up. "Probably not," she says with a watery smile. "But go ahead."

"It's about Jonathan."

The light goes out of her eyes, and she looks down.

Shame.

I pull her in and hug her, gently petting her hair because the last thing I want to do is make her feel worse. "I'm not angry at you. I just want an honest answer."

"Okay," she says cautiously.

"Why was he able to give you what you needed, and I wasn't?"

She's quiet for a long time, so long that I think she might not answer me, but finally she does. "You told me what I needed and gave it to me whether or not I wanted you to. He asked, and then gave me what I needed, no questions asked. He trusted me more than you did."

That fucking stings to hear.

I'm also not sure it's entirely fair. Jonathan doesn't *know* Kennedy the way I do. If he knew she had self-destructive tendencies that he needed to look out for...

Actually, he probably wouldn't have done anything differently. He and I aren't built the same way.

I guess it doesn't matter, but I don't think I was entirely wrong. If Kennedy had spent last night in my bed instead of his, her grief wouldn't be compounded the way it is now. If she still needed the same thing from me when her mental state wasn't so fragile, I could have

given it to her, but I wouldn't have done the damage he has done.

I know Jonathan doesn't see it, and she clearly doesn't either, but if she had let me take care of her, I think there might be just a little less pain for her to carry today. A lot less regret.

There's no advantage in saying any of that. Even if she saw it the way I do, her regret doesn't need to be any heavier. She feels bad enough.

We need to focus on getting her past it. Jonathan was right about that.

"Do you have feelings for him?" I ask, despising the question, but I need to know.

"No," she whispers, shaking her head and looking up at me pleadingly. "It wasn't about that. I just..." She shifts her gaze to my chest and I can see her wheels turning. When she finally speaks, it's so carefully, I think she must be navigating minefields in her own brain. "It had to be last night. You wouldn't do it. I know you, you're too stubborn. I knew even before I came out of the bathroom you wouldn't fuck me, but I thought maybe I could change your mind, tempt you to it, but it's not like I was even on my A-game trying to tempt you. I was clumsy and desperate. But it had to be last night. When I looked back on the night I lost—lost it, I had to... it had to be someone I chose, even if it was the wrong person."

My heart cracks in half. I grab her and pull her in, Jonathan's theories echoing in my head.

He's right.

He didn't get there in time.

I feel a stinging behind my eyes, but ignore it until it dissipates. "I'm so fucking sorry, Kennedy," I murmur thickly. "I wish I could have... I should have just done what you asked me to do."

“I wanted it to be you,” she says, her voice wobbly with a new round of tears.

I nod my understanding, but I don't want her to go down that road, so I cut her off before she gets too far. “I know you did, sweetheart. It will be,” I assure her. “Right now, we need to focus on getting you back to feeling good again, get your head right, but I meant what I said. You haven't lost anything. Every single thing you had a day ago is still there, it's just on pause. It will all wait for you. You can have it all back. This is just a hard time you have to get through, and we will make sure you have everything you need to get through it. Just please, get through it. You can't hurt yourself, you can't do that because I can't survive losing another person I love. I just can't.”

She holds me tighter. “I won't,” she promises. “I wasn't going to, I just... I won't. I'm sorry.”

We hold each other for a while, mourning and comforting simultaneously. When I pull back and she looks up at me, her gaze is so trusting, I want to kiss her, but I don't. I caress her face instead.

“I would like for you not to sleep in Jonathan's room anymore. You can't be with him in my room, but I would like for you to sleep there. If you still need to... be with him while you're working through this, you can come in here for that, but please use protection.”

Her eyes wide with horror, she shakes her head. “No, I don't... it's not like that. I don't want to keep sleeping with him. I only needed that last night. It was a one-time thing.” As soon as she says that, she hesitates. “Well... He actually... he did take me a second time this morning. I'm so sorry, I hate telling you this. I just want to be honest. But I didn't *want* him to.”

My heart slams to a screeching halt.

“He didn’t know,” she adds quickly. “I didn’t tell him. I didn’t know how. He didn’t force himself on me or anything, but I *really* didn’t want him to. I felt shaky and terrible after.”

*Christ.*

I push her face into my chest, wrapping my arms tightly around her body.

“I’m sorry. I should have just told him no, but I was afraid, and... I didn’t have anywhere else to go.”

“Oh, Kennedy.” This is just getting fucking worse. “You always have somewhere to go.”

“I can’t go back there,” she says, shaking her head. “I never want to go back to that apartment or see that woman again.”

“You never have to,” I assure her.

“I’m going to drop out of school,” she says.

“No, you’re not.”

She looks up. “Yes, I am. I have to. I need to get a full-time job so I can get my own place.”

“You don’t need your own place; you need to finish high school. This is your home now. If you want to, you can even quit the job you already have. Your time would be better spent focusing on school than working at some shitty fast-food restaurant.”

“I have to make money, Milo.”

“No, you don’t. Not right now. Finish up school, you can make money later. I’ll get you a credit card, a new phone, whatever you need or want. Whatever you weren’t able to fit in those bags you brought over last night. You don’t have to worry about it. I can replace anything you left behind.”

Kennedy shakes her head. “I don’t deserve you.”

I grab her chin and tilt it up so she has to look at me. “Yes, you do,” I say seriously. “What you don’t deserve is all the bad shit that’s happened to you. That’s over now. You will always have a safe place here, and I will always take care of you—and that is not tied to a sexual relationship with anyone in this house. You do not have to let men touch you to secure shelter or anything else you need, all right? No men, ever. Not me, not anybody. This is your home now. We are your family. No conditions.”



## Chapter twenty-three

Kennedy

It's late and I'm exhausted, but when Jonathan glances over at me questioningly, I nod, and he starts another episode of the show we're currently binge-watching.

I don't even like the show, honestly, I'm just afraid to go to bed.

It felt like an enormous weight being lifted off my shoulders earlier when I finally spoke to Milo and he promised he didn't hate me. I was so fucking happy to move my stuff back to his room, but I'm nervous, too.

I don't know how things will be, but I'm afraid it won't be like before, and I feel like it could crush me.

I was even a tad uncertain if it would be awkward with Jonathan, but Jonathan is the least awkward person I've ever met. Nothing seems to bother him—at least, this certainly hasn't. If he minds at all that I vacated his room like a thief in the night, I can't tell.

Right now, I'm sitting on the couch between them. Jet went to bed a while ago, so it's just the three of us. Jonathan is on my left, Milo on my right.

When we first sat down together, I felt intensely awkward because of all that's happened, but the awkwardness faded by the end of the first episode.

Jonathan has put a hand on my thigh a couple of times. Milo held my hand and kissed it. I was terrified at first, but they both seem calm, so I chilled out, too.

Jonathan puts down the remote and takes a sip of water, then he replaces the bottle on the side table and looks over at me.

I feel him looking at me, but I don't look back. I'm too conscious of Milo sitting beside me, too worried about him reading into a shared glance and being hurt by it.

Jonathan isn't so considerate. He plants his hand on my thigh again, but this time, more aggressively. The touch isn't soft and casual, it's not a touch from the Jonathan I rocked out to Taylor Swift with in the car earlier—it's the one who dominated my body last night, and as soon as he squeezes my flesh like it's his to squeeze, I feel a confusing stirring of sexual arousal.

My heart starts to beat harder. I lick my lips, my nerves coming back tenfold. I want to tell him to stop because his dad is right here, but I don't want to draw attention to it. I also want to know how he's making my pussy throb by literally just squeezing my thigh.

*I don't know what to do.*

He knows I moved my stuff to Milo's room, and we haven't been avoiding each other this evening, so I thought he got the message.

I try to glimpse Milo out of the corner of my eye to see if he's noticing, but I don't want to turn my head and accidentally draw his attention.

Maybe he feels my anxiety, or maybe he's noticing I'm starting to breathe a little harder, but Milo looks over at me and his gaze drops right to Jonathan's hand wrapped around my inner thigh.

I open my mouth to explain, but Jonathan leans over and grabs my mouth before I can utter a word. I gasp, my gaze fearful as it darts to his.

"Keep that beautiful mouth closed," he tells me, leaning close and tightening the tension in my gut.

My heart hammers because Milo is sitting forward, unsure what's happening, if he needs to intervene.

My stomach flutters like crazy. I don't know what to do.

"Sh," Jonathan says, nuzzling my jaw and sliding his hand up under my shirt.

"What are you doing?" I whisper, my voice a little tremulous as he grabs my tit.

"Showing you off." His gaze flickers past me to Milo. "Isn't she fucking beautiful when she starts getting turned on? The way she breathes, the way her tits move. I want to see them. Don't you?"

I'm frozen, my body obeying his commands, my heart flipping the fuck out, and my brain apparently in standby mode because it's not helping me navigate this situation at all.

Jonathan pulls up my shirt. I'm not wearing a bra because the sweater is huge and baggy and I didn't *feel* like wearing a bra today. I have to resist the urge to yank it back down when Jonathan lifts the material, as if showing my breasts to his father for his approval.

"Fucking perfect," Jonathan says, palming my tit and tweaking the hardened nipple. His voice is gravelly and thick like he loves what he's seeing. Despite myself, I feel a little thrill at the praise.

My eyes drift closed as Jonathan plays with me, but I fight to keep them open because I'm still afraid this is really bad. Milo won't like seeing me turned on by what Jonathan is doing to me and I don't want to do anything that would hurt him.

I look helplessly to Milo. He's frowning, but not glowering. He's not mad, just as unsure as I am what his son is doing.

He's not mad at me, though, and he doesn't look hurt. I was afraid he would be.

Milo's gaze drops to my exposed tits and the interest in his hot blue eyes sets my blood on fire. He enjoys looking at me, even if Jonathan is touching me and making my body respond to him.

Jonathan tweaks my nipple and I gasp.

"So fucking responsive," Jonathan groans, nuzzling my neck and running his thumb over my sensitive nipple. "Such a good fucking girl."

*Oh, I like that so much.*

My eyes drift shut again.

I force them open because I need to keep an eye on things, but I'm so tempted to just feel good, my head lolls back against the couch. My gaze connects with Milo's as Jonathan kisses my neck and roughly fondles my tits.

I'm not sure what this is, but I wish he'd join in.

Milo shifts and I notice him adjust his pants. I can't bite back a little smile.

*Is he thinking about it?*

Jonathan moves so he's on his knees facing me, then he grabs my shirt and tugs it up over my head. I'm not even sure *that's* a good idea, but then he pushes his hand down the front of my leggings and sinks a finger into my pussy. It's sore from the pounding he gave it last night and this morning, but the ache feels good. I gasp at the invasion, arching off the couch, but Jonathan only slides his finger deeper inside me.

Milo tenses and I open my mouth to put a stop to it, but Jonathan speaks before I can.

"Tell her," he says to his dad as he fingers me. "Tell her how fucking beautiful she looks when she feels good. How fucking flawless she is."

My heart drops. I look to Milo uncertainly, but he doesn't say anything.

“Do you want to see her come?” Jonathan asks. “You want to see this perfect fucking girl writhing in pleasure?”

Milo nods slowly and my heart takes flight. His hot gaze is locked on me. He reaches for me and palms my tit the way Jonathan did a moment ago, then he gently grabs me and pulls me down so my head is lying across his lap.

Jonathan follows his lead, pulling off my leggings and dragging my legs up on the couch so I’m lying completely on it, Milo’s lap my pillow.

I like lying here because I can watch him and make sure this is all right with him. Then I like it more because while Jonathan fingers my pussy, Milo plays with my tits and pets my curls.

“Is this okay?” I ask him softly.

Milo nods, bringing his hand in to caress my face. “I want you to feel good. No shame. I never want you to feel that.”

“Spread your legs, pretty girl,” Jonathan commands. “Show me that perfect pussy.”

I’m shy about it, but I look to Milo for permission, and when he nods, I part my thighs.

“So fucking tempting. How am I supposed to resist having a taste?” Jonathan bends to kiss the inside of my thigh, peering up at me with his piercing blue eyes. “Your pussy is perfect, do you know that? Every part of you is fucking perfect. There’s not a single thing either one of us would change.”

I look up at Milo, my heart feeling strangely full. Milo smiles a gentle, reassuring smile and starts playing with my lips.

*Oh, I’m so happy.*

I don't even really know why. I don't have time to process it.

Jonathan alternates between tenderness and greedy roughness as he kisses the insides of my thighs, and Milo sinks a finger into my mouth. My lips seal around him gratefully. I suck, wishing he'd let me have his cock, but I'm still not sure he's convinced I'm not breakable. Jonathan is, obviously. Maybe now he'll see.

Jonathan's mouth latches onto my pussy and I gasp, starting to pull away, but he tightens his arms around my thighs, keeping me anchored there. "Don't you fucking move. I'm enjoying myself."

My tummy thrills, then drops. His tongue moves inside me, and I look up at Milo, sucking on his finger harder as my body arches.

"Fuck, Kennedy," he grumbles, pulling his finger out of my mouth and sliding it down to touch my tits.

I love his hands on me, but I need to do something for him. "Give it back. Please."

His fist tightens in my hair. I can feel the tension building in his body as he wraps my wild curls around his knuckles.

"Please, Milo," I say softly, gasping as Jonathan flicks my clit with his tongue. "Or your cock, just please, I need to—" I gasp, my body arching as Jonathan hits a particularly sensitive spot again and again, sending jolts of pleasure straight through me. "Please."

Milo shakes his head slowly, licking his lips, but his will is made of fucking steel. "This is for you," he says, gently squeezing my tit. "This is about your pleasure, not mine."

He caresses the side of my face next and I nuzzle into his big, perfect hand. "But I want to please you."

“You do please me,” he assures me, stroking my face. “You please me every day just by being you. You please me right now by letting yourself feel pleasure. Letting me watch you.” His massive hand closes over my tit and I thrill at the friction of my nipple against his palm. “Christ, Kennedy, you’re so fucking beautiful.”

Jonathan’s words filled me up, but Milo’s single, solitary sentence uttered so meaningfully pushes me over the edge. Between that and Jonathan’s skillful tongue teasing my clit, searing pleasure bursts open inside of me, wiping my mind completely clear of thoughts. I grab onto Milo as pleasure ripples through me, my body shuddering in the wake of that orgasm.

I wait for Jonathan to rise up or Milo to tug me off the couch and take me upstairs, but instead, Jonathan tells me what a good girl I am, then he pushes two fingers into me.

My hazy gaze drifts to Milo and I see the fire in his eyes. He’s turned on, and when he grabs my tit, he’s a little less gentle.

“We’re not done with you yet, pretty girl,” Jonathan says. I’ve barely recovered from the last orgasm, but he latches onto my pussy again, and instantly, pleasure swirls around me.

I’m lost adrift in a sea of pleasure as they play with me, but not just physical pleasure. My whole being is happy.

Last night, Jonathan accessed sexual parts of me, but Milo has access to each and every part. It’s up to him which parts are open for business, or how I’m feeling about what’s happening. He’s the master of my body and my heart, and I’d rather die than hurt him.

But he’s not hurt. He touches me, caressing and teasing me as my body writhes beneath Jonathan’s ministrations. I want Milo to fuck me more than I’ve ever

wanted anything in my life. I've been so sick with fear that I ruined any chance of that ever happening since last night, but I feel free of that fear right now. He still loves me, and he still wants me, and he's not mad at me. He thinks I'm beautiful and perfect, even though I know I'm not.

*I love him so much.*

I don't tell him that now as I writhe and twist on his lap while his son feasts on my pussy. I'd do anything for him, and this makes me feel like he'd do anything for me, too.

When I come again, the orgasm is even more intense and shudders through my whole body. Milo holds me close, petting me and watching me with a hot, appreciative gaze as I recover from all that stimulation.

Bone deep vulnerability washes over me in the aftermath. I look up at him, stripped completely bare.

He could cripple me with a single second of coldness, but he's all warmth and love, bending to kiss me, caressing my face, and bathing me in unconditional acceptance. I nuzzle close, but I can't get close enough to him.

Jonathan moves from between my legs and sits back down on the couch. My bones have melted, but he moves me, repositioning me so that my legs are draped across his lap. He grabs a white blanket off the back of the couch and drapes it over me, then I lie there across both their laps, Milo still playing with my hair.

Sheer bliss envelops me and my eyes drift closed.

When my eyes open again, the room is dark. The TV has been turned off. I guess I fell asleep, but I felt so boneless and satisfied, it would have been impossible not to.

"Come on, baby," Milo murmurs, touching my shoulder gently. "Let's go to bed."



I sit up with some effort, still bleary. I'm still naked, but no one else is down here, so I don't bother getting dressed, I just ignore the chill in the air and follow him upstairs.

I pop in the bathroom to pee first, then we quickly brush our teeth. When we climb into bed, I forget how anxious I've been about this all day and curl up beside him.

A small part of me wants to get even closer. To slide my hand down and play with his cock until he's hot and hard and he has to have me.

But I don't know if he would, and I don't want to risk ruining this perfect night.

I'm still relaxed and sleepy, anyway, so as soon as his strong arm locks around me, I close my eyes and drift right back to sleep.

## Chapter twenty-four

Kennedy

Sunshine through the window wakes me up.

I'm in bed alone, and I don't want to be.

I reach for my phone to check the time on instinct, but then I remember I don't have a phone anymore, so I roll back over.

I have to work today and I have no clue how late I've slept, so I don't dawdle in bed.

I don't want to waste much time, and the whole house has seen me looking a total hot mess at this point, so I'm not too worried about my frizzy hair or puffy face. I splash some cold water on my face and brush my teeth, then I grab my robe and put it on.

I didn't want to touch it yesterday, but it doesn't feel as much like an accomplice in ruining my life today. It's just a soft, pretty scrap of silk that feels good against my skin.

All the guys are in the kitchen, the three of them sitting at the island.

Jet is in the middle hunched over and peering intently at something on his open laptop.

Milo is on one end drinking a cup of coffee and looking fine as hell, if I do say so myself.

Jonathan is at the other end in his workout clothes, but it appears he went for a run by himself today because Milo is still wearing sleep clothes.

I feel so happy just seeing him, but my heart has doubts.

Last night was incredible, but it feels even crazier now that I've slept on it. Milo doesn't strike me as a man willing to share his woman, but... I guess I'm not his woman right now.

Am I?

I don't know.

Probably not, but I don't let it get me down. It's my own fault, and he said everything I had before was just on pause, so I believe we'll get to the end together somehow. If he wants to play with me in the meantime, he's more than welcome to.

"Good morning, boys," I say cheerfully.

Milo looks up and I feel his gaze first, of course. Contentment flickers through his ice-blue gaze as he watches me walk through his kitchen. "Good morning."

"Hey, Kennedy," Jet says, but he doesn't look away from his screen.

Finally, my gaze hits Jonathan. There's no malice in his tone, but he uses my nickname for the first time since all the shit hit the fan. "Our little stray is looking content this morning. Must've had a good night's sleep," he says with a wink.

Blushing, I roll my eyes at him and turn around to check the sink. No dishes, nothing on the counter. "Did you guys have breakfast yet?"

"We were waiting for our favorite cook," Jonathan informs me.

"I thought I was your favorite cook," Milo says lightly.

"Nah, it's more fun to watch this one bend over."

"Oh my god, why are you the worst?" I ask, but it feels like the first bit of normalcy in a million years, and I'm grateful for it.

He points at a bottom cabinet. “Pans are down there. Make me some French toast.”

I roll my eyes, but I don’t have a problem cooking for them—especially with Milo letting me live here and not expecting anything in return. “Would you like anything with it?”

“Fruit. Bacon. Make me a feast; I’m a hungry man.”

*He sure is.*

The thought flits through my mind and turns my cheeks redder recalling the two times he’s gone down on me, the ravenous way he still eats my pussy even as I’m crying out and coming on his face.

I feel a little hot and a smidge guilty, so I walk over and get close to Milo. “You want French toast?”

He nods. “Sure. You want some help?”

I smile and shake my head. “It’s okay. I got it. Let me serve you,” I add a touch playfully, but it’s barely playful. I’m feeling insecure with Jonathan’s casual flirting, and I need to know if he has an issue with it now that things have actually been physical between us.

*Can I have a kiss?*

I stop short of asking, too unsure if he’d say yes or if that’s a thing I’m even allowed to ask for. I’m still not altogether sure where we stand.

He seems to sense my need, though. He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me in close, meeting my gaze and then softly kissing my lips. I’m too needy to be satisfied with softness right now, so I wrap my arms around his neck and deepen the kiss, thrilling when his grip on my waist tightens and he yanks me against him.

My heart pounds when I pull back and he cups my face in his hand, giving me a little smile to reassure me. I can’t stop wanting to make everything up to him, so I

impulsively turn my head and give his hand a little kiss, too.

Once I'm reassured, I go back to the counter and begin making breakfast.

While I'm dipping bread into the egg mixture, Milo asks, "Do you feel up to an outing today?"

I glance back at him over my shoulder. "An outing?"

He nods, glancing up from his phone screen. "We need to get you a new cell phone before you go back to school. If you're not up to it, I can go myself, but I thought you might enjoy getting out of the house for a bit. Plus, this way you can pick out your own phone case. We should get a set of keys made for you, too." Belatedly, he realizes he hasn't told the boys about that, so he glances over at them. "Kennedy is moving in, by the way."

Jet shakes his head, smiling faintly. "I need to train a spy bot just to keep up with you guys."

"I'd love to go with you, but I have to work tonight. I don't think I'll have time to do both."

"Well, you can't go to school without a phone," Milo states. "That's entirely out of the question."

"I'll go with you if Kennedy's too busy," Jet pipes in. "I know what she likes, and I need to get some new equipment, anyway."

I've monopolized so much time and attention with all my drama, I think it would be good for Milo and Jet to spend a little time together. "There you go. I trust Jet to pick out my phone case."

I glance back at Milo to make sure he doesn't look disappointed. I think he might be, but I also just genuinely don't feel like I have the energy to go out in the world and go shopping right now.

Working my shift tonight might be rough, but I'm so used to working at my not remotely challenging job, I can essentially go on autopilot and coast through the whole night.

Going out with Milo for the first time since that night... it'll be different. The contrast of the last time he took me shopping, the beautiful dress and shoes he bought me.

The shoes. I felt so sexy on his arm in those shoes. I was so excited to get them and wear them for him that night, and then it wasn't him I have to remember taking them off me.

My stomach turns over and I shove those dark thoughts down. I focus on making French toast, and try not to feel sick as I plate it.

Unfortunately, my mind has already taken me down a path I didn't want to go down and all I can think about now is showering.

I eat as quickly as I can, only a single slice of French toast since my appetite is so small right now, then I tell everyone I'm going upstairs to shower.

I shower in Milo's bathroom, but when I look at the walls, they might as well be Jonathan's, and he might as well be in here with me. His body trapping mine against the wall, the hot steam making the surface slippery as I tried to hold on...

I feel a little panicky by the time I emerge from the shower. My energy has dropped like a rock, and I can scarcely make myself finish drying off.

I climb back in bed even though I'm wet and wrapped in a bath towel. I need to feel safe, and I feel safest in Milo's bed.

Well, I feel safest in his arms, but this bed that smells like him is a solid second place.

I didn't plan to fall asleep, but when the bed sinks beneath a man's weight and my eyes reluctantly open, it's definitely evening. It's dark outside the window, and I'm momentarily disoriented.

Frowning, I roll over, but my heart lightens when I remember where I am and see Milo lying on the bed with me.

"Hey, you," I murmur sleepily, scooting over and cuddling up close.

He kisses my forehead, then eases back into his spot. "Did you have a good nap?"

"I did. What time is it?"

"A little after seven."

I gasp. "What? Oh my god, I slept all day! I was supposed to be at work hours ago."

He grabs my waist, stopping me from rolling off the bed in a panic. "You aren't working tonight. I went there earlier while I was out with Jet and let them know you wouldn't be back."

I blink. "You mean I wouldn't be in tonight."

"No," he says simply. "I said what I meant."

"You quit my job for me?"

"I did."

My jaw falls open. "You can't quit my job for me."

"And yet, I did."

"Milo."

He sighs. "I'm not comfortable with you working there, Kennedy. Your mom knows you work there, and right now I just want you to focus on feeling better. If you need to nap for most of the day, go for it. If you need to take three showers and just lie in the dark, do that. You'll have enough responsibilities with school and just..."

coping. There's no reason to waste your energy at a job you don't need. It's done now, so there's no point arguing with me about it."

I sigh. I'm not really annoyed I don't have to keep working at a job I hated, but God, is he bossy. "Are you grumpy?" I ask, peering up at him.

"Probably. I haven't slept well the past couple of nights."

*That's obviously my fault.*

"I'm sorry." I pull closer to him, looking up at his handsome face. I feel immense guilt for the stress I've put him through. I want to ease it, so I reach up to caress his face, then I try to pull him in for a kiss.

He must feel me pulling, but he doesn't lean in and kiss me.

My stomach twists up.

*He doesn't want to kiss me?*

He hasn't said a single thing to make me doubt he still wants to be with me, but this silence is teeming with doubt. Maybe they're all mine, but there's no way to tell.

The silence feels dangerous.

Our relationship right now is like a damaged ship on choppy waters, and I know he has been assuring me we'd get to shore, but what if that's just what people say when they don't want you to give up? He was afraid I was going to hurt myself. Can I really trust what he said? Even last night, it was so nice to connect sexually with him again, but Jonathan pushed him into that. It wasn't Milo's idea.

Am I pushing myself on him?

What if he doesn't really want me anymore, he's just too afraid to say that because he thinks I'm too fragile to handle it?



I replay some of the things he's said about how he'll always love me and he'll always be there for me no matter what, how they're my family now, and my security here will never be tied to a sexual relationship with a man—not even him.

I thought he was just being really amazing and supportive, but what if he was trying to inch out of this relationship?

My stomach feels sick again. I let my hand fall, not wanting to touch him when I feel like maybe it isn't what he wants.

I roll on my back and look up at the ceiling, trying not to feel choked with fear that his reassurances are just him being gentle with me.

It feels like my heart has been shot through and riddled with holes. I know that's not his fault. The firing commenced the moment I stepped into my mother's apartment after I left that hotel, and we've all taken shots at it since.

But the death blow, the loss I'm not sure I can survive...

It's losing him.

But I can't tell him that. He's too good a man to leave me if he thinks...

God, I'm such a mess.

Who could ever want a mess like me?

I cover my face with my hands. The room is dark, but not dark enough. I need to disappear completely.

"Kennedy?"

The concern in his voice is like a knife through my stomach. I lower my hands and try to act like I'm not aching as much as I am.

I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I can keep going just because he wants me to.

"Kennedy," he says more insistently, rolling over and wrapping an arm around my waist, pulling me close.

It doesn't feel good like it always has before. It feels like I'm emotionally blackmailing him into loving me, and that's the last thing I would ever want.

"I don't know if I should live here," I say, my voice thick with emotion.

"Why?"

"I don't feel the way I did before."

Those words hurt on their way out of my mouth.

Milo is silent for the longest time. This silence feels dangerous, too. This silence *is* dangerous.

"Toward me?" he finally says.

That's a lie I can't quite get out. I want to. I love him, and I want to give him a way out of this if it's what he truly wants, but I can't get the words past my lips.

Tears I didn't even notice welling up slide down my face. I'm so used to crying at this point, I don't even feel it coming on anymore.

"Toward anything," I whisper.

It's not what I meant to say. It's much closer to the truth. Another hot tear slides down my face.

Milo pulls me closer, forcing me into his chest even though I don't want to go right now. "If you need to talk to someone, we can make an appointment."

"I don't want to talk."

I just want the hurting to stop.

"I know," he says, petting my hair. "But maybe you need to."

The tears are still hot as they roll down my cheeks, but my insides feel cold. "My life was perfect two days ago," I whisper. "Now, I just want it to be over."

His grip on me tightens.

I didn't mean to say that. I wish I hadn't, but his tight grip feels good in a sick way. It feels desperate. I want him desperate to hold onto me, I just don't want it to be because of what I said, and I know it is.

I want it to be because he really, truly loves me. Because he *wants* me.

But he doesn't even want to *kiss* me.

"Tell me what you need to feel better," he says, his voice hoarse. "Tell me any goddamn thing in the world and I'll make it happen."

I wish it was that easy.

Maybe it could have been the other night. We'll never know.

I don't say that. I don't want to make him feel worse than he does about it.

It kills me that there's a Granville under this roof ready, willing, and somehow equipped to give me exactly what I need, but it's not the one I'm in love with.

Maybe that's not even fair. I felt like I was suffocating replaying Jonathan taking me in the shower.

But that was because of the guilt, not the way Jonathan treated me.

If I didn't have Milo, I don't think I would have felt that way about it.

Jonathan has done everything I needed him to do, every step of the way.

I think Jonathan could give me what I need in a sexual capacity, just not emotionally. I want the

domination, I want to be used and controlled by a man I can trust to be in charge. I want to be completely removed from my own power by someone who won't really hurt me. I just want it from the man who won't give it to me—not because he's not interested in it, either. Milo has played rough with me before, but that was when he didn't think I was fucking fragile.

I guess he's not wrong; I *am* fragile in some ways, but I know what I can handle. I know what I want, what I need. My power has already been stripped from me, and he won't help me take it back because he doesn't think it's right.

It doesn't matter if he thinks it's right. It's not *his* fucking healing; it's mine.

I love him to death, but right now...

I don't want to comfort him or reassure him.

I'm exhausted, and I just want to go back to sleep.

Pulling out of his embrace makes me feel so cold. I roll over and pull the blankets up around me, but somehow, I don't feel any warmer. "I'm tired," I murmur, burrowing in.

"Do you want me to lie here with you?"

*No.*

The thought brings tears to my tired eyes. I'm glad he can't see them, glad he can't hear them when I say, "No, it's okay. I just want to go to sleep."

He doesn't say a word, but I can feel his helplessness. It kills me. I know Milo isn't used to feeling that way and he must hate it, I just don't have the energy to fix it right now.

I hope it doesn't kill his love for me, but I don't even know how much he has left. He said he'd love me no matter what, but nobody ever really means that.

I'll love you until it gets hard, that's what they mean, and I know this is hard.

It's hard for me, too, but I don't have the option of walking away from it.

He does.

He's a good man, so, sure, he'd feel bad for a while, but it would pass, and then he could move on with his life.

Right now, it doesn't feel like I ever will. The clouds may break for a little while, but there will always be something just around the corner to sink me back into this pit of loneliness and despair.

I tell myself that maybe he's right and this *will* pass, but it doesn't stop the feeling of quicksand beneath my feet. One wrong step and I sink.

I know how much he wants to be there for me, but I feel like I'm walking alone.

I close my eyes, pushing out more tears.

Milo doesn't know I'm crying, so he rolls over and climbs off the bed.

*Don't go.*

But he needs to. He's just making me feel worse right now, and I need a break.

"I'm just downstairs if you need anything," he tells me.

I need something, all right. Just nothing he wants to give me.

## Chapter twenty-five

Milo

Bacon grease sizzles in the pan as I reach down to turn off the heat. I transfer the cooked meat to the plate lined with paper towels beside the stove and hear the telltale squeak of cross trainers on the kitchen floor behind me.

“Damn, it smells good in here for a Monday morning.”

My gaze flickers to Jonathan as he enters the kitchen in his workout clothes. “I made Jet a sandwich before he left for school. Figured I’d make you one, too. Going for a run?”

He nods, looking at the breakfast sandwich I’m assembling for him. “I was going to, but I can wait. You eating with me?”

I shake my head, laying the hot bacon across the top of the sandwich and closing it. “Kennedy is still asleep, so I’ll wait to eat with her.”

“Her sleep schedule’s all fucked up, might not be anytime soon. Will you still be home when she wakes up?”

I nod, moving the egg skillet to the sink and rinsing it. “I took a sick day. Jet’s at school and you have classes today. I can’t leave her here all by herself.”

He goes to the fridge and grabs the orange juice. “I take it last night wasn’t a good night.”

I sigh, not wanting to relive any part of last night. “No, it sure wasn’t.”

He grabs a glass out of the cupboard and glances over at me. “You didn’t fuck her, did you?”

I wouldn’t appreciate him asking about my sex life if he *hadn’t* fucked the woman in question, but I damn sure don’t appreciate it now.

Taking my silence as an answer, he shakes his head, pouring juice into his glass. “You have *got* to get out of your own way, old man.”

“I am not a fucking old man.”

“You’re acting like one. Clinging to outdated fucking bullshit ideas that don’t work anymore—if they ever did in the first place.” He puts the juice carton back in the fridge and walks to the counter. “Why are you not fucking this gorgeous, sexy girl who was literally *begging* for your cock the other night? I don’t understand.”

This is the last thing I want to talk about with him, but on the heels of what he just said, I stop holding back. “I wouldn’t expect you to, Jonathan. You fucked her when she didn’t even *want* you to.”

He shrugs, taking a bite of the sandwich I just made him. “That’s what she needed. Not my place to judge.”

“I’m not talking about that fucking night. In the shower the next morning. She didn’t want it, and she was too afraid to tell you.”

His brow furrows briefly, but he’s not too bothered by the information. “That may be true. It’s an imperfect science when you’re playing with consent without a safe word, but see? I did something she didn’t even want me to do, and she’s fine. She knew she asked for it. Maybe it didn’t go exactly the way she wanted, but she didn’t fall apart. I didn’t devastate her. I didn’t even do as much damage as *you’ve* done, and I did what you’re so afraid of doing.”

“So, you’re fine with forcing yourself on her when she’s fucking recovering from actually being raped?”

“If that’s what she needs, abso-fucking-lutely. This is why she came to me instead of you. I’m not in love with her. I don’t need to be her hero. If she wants me to grab her by the throat and slam her up against the wall—”

“Do not say another fucking word,” I say carefully.

Jonathan shrugs, taking another bite of his sandwich. “Keep treating her like you’ll break her, and you’re gonna fucking lose her. I’m calling it now.”

Visualizing them together that night is something I’ve tried hard not to do. I left my own house and went to spend the night in a hotel because I couldn’t lie there listening for noises down the hall.

On the couch, it was different. Not something I would have ever initiated myself, but once I saw how Kennedy responded, I stopped thinking about all the reasons I didn’t want any part of it and just enjoyed playing with her.

But I do not want to think about anyone else’s hands on her that night, least of all my son’s when he was doing things to her I couldn’t bring myself to do. The mere fucking thought makes me want to hit him.

I turn the faucet off and roll out my shoulders subtly, trying to fend off the aggression and remember he’s my son, not a fucking rival.

“Look,” he says, his tone a little calmer than a moment ago when he was being a fucking asshole. “I get that this is hard for you. You’re a protector at your core. A provider. A fucking family man. And I’m sure she loves that because her attraction to you in the first place—and what I’ve seen of her mother—probably indicates she has a fuckload of daddy issues. But right now, she doesn’t need you to protect her from damage. The damage has been done. There’s no going back from that. All you can do is go forward, and that means giving her what she needs right now so she can move on. Stop



looking at it as some fucked up, mean thing you're doing to her. It's not wrong if it's what she wants. I know you would never truly force yourself on her, and I get that you might be afraid of making a wrong step and inadvertently doing more harm than good because of her mental state right now, but you *won't*. You can't. That girl fucking adores you. She'd let you do anything you want to her."

"That's exactly it. You're right, she would, but I don't *want* to hurt her. She wants sex, but our dynamic in the bedroom—" I stop short and shake my head. "I am terrified of hurting her, and I have no idea how to make sure I don't."

"I get that, and you *could* do something she doesn't want, just like I did. But if you do, you can fix it. She doesn't love me, and I didn't even provide her with aftercare—*which I would have, if I'd known she didn't want it*—and she's still fine because she chose me, she *chose* to be in that situation with me. You're not him, that's the point. She picked you. You would never hurt her deliberately, and she knows that. If you hurt her by accident, you can take care of her—kiss it and make it better, and she will recover like it's a skinned knee. *Nothing* you could do to her will hurt her like he has, I promise you that. But you've gotta let her get her feet back under her. You have to trust her to know her own limits and stop trying to impose them for her. Maybe that's how you guys play in the bedroom when she's in a healthy headspace, but she's not right now, and she needs to find her own way back. You are not helping her right now, you're infantilizing her. Whether you mean to or not, you are telling her you do not trust her to make her own decisions. Kennedy doesn't need you to tell her what she needs right now. She'll tell you what she needs, you go out and fucking get it for her."

I shake my head. "Why do you know all of this?"

He cracks a smile. "Honestly? I've dated more girls than you. You met Mom and skipped out on most of the

high school and all of the college dating scenes. I... did not miss out.”

I roll my eyes, but I can't bite back a small smile.

“Honestly, the simple reason I'm navigating this bumpy fucking road better than you is I'm more open-minded in my approach,” he tells me. “You're set in your ways; I'll try different things and see what works best. I'll tear her down and rebuild her if that's what she wants. It's not my place to question whether it's the right thing for her; it's her project, I'm just the company she's hiring to do the work. And I would be happy to do it for her. I wish I could because it's obviously easier for me, but she doesn't want to give me her business, she wants to give it to you. I can give her what she needs, but I can't be what she wants. We might bear a strong fucking resemblance, but I can't *be* you.”

Hearing that straight from his mouth does a lot to ease the sting of seeing those fucking dishes in the sink.

We all know she only went to him that night because I shut her down, but it's uncomfortable that he's so much better at navigating what she needs right now. Typically, that's *our* dynamic. *I'm* the one who gives her what she needs, and she's never had a problem with me deciding these things for her.

Jonathan takes a swig of orange juice. “It'll only take one time and you'll see. Healing sex can be hot as hell. Especially with Kennedy. She's got big sub energy. I don't know your deal in bed, and I don't really need to, but if you can't have fun with *her* in the bedroom, you might as well cut your dick off and throw it away. You don't need it anymore.”

I laugh, and he smirks before taking another big bite of his sandwich. “Lack of fun was never the issue,” I say vaguely, even though my son already knows far more about my sex life than I ever wanted him to.

“I fucking bet it wasn’t,” he says, shaking his head. “I’ll hand it to you, you might be a stubborn son of a bitch, but you’ve got fortitude of fucking steel. I don’t know how you let her sexy little ass sleep naked in your bed, craving your dick, and you can keep your hands off her. All I’d be thinking about is being inside her again after a break like this one. But you’ve gotta look at it from her perspective. She doesn’t see admirable restraint, she sees blatant rejection. Of course she feels like you think she’s dirty and damaged now if you won’t touch her like you did before.”

“Well, that’s the other thing. Before, it was important to Kennedy that it be special. It wasn’t what I told her she should want, it’s what *she* wanted. It feels really fucking shitty to let that be one more thing that was taken from her, and she’s not exactly in a mental state right now for some romantic do-over evening. I’m afraid if I went ahead and booked one, going through the same motions we went through that night might trigger a bad reaction.”

He frowns. “What, like she wanted flowers and candy every time you fucked her?”

“No.” I don’t like admitting this knowing he has, but I say, “Kennedy and I haven’t actually had sex yet. She was a virgin, and she wanted her first time to be special. That night, it was supposed to be the night. I reserved the hotel room, did everything she wanted, but then her fucking mother wanted her to come home, and we got interrupted.”

His jaw hangs open. “You haven’t fucked her?”

I shake my head grimly. “Nope.”

He scowls. “But I *heard* you with her when you slept on the couch.”

“That was foreplay. She was a virgin when she left the hotel that night.”

“Then I was her first,” he realizes.

Still don't fucking like that. "Yep. But that's what makes it harder. She wanted it to be special, and if the first time I fuck her is like this... It couldn't be further from what she wanted."

"Well, that may be. And that's fucking unfortunate, but that's not where she is anymore. You can't give her back everything she lost. All you can do is keep moving forward."

My gaze drifts, an image of Kennedy skating across my mind. "I told her I would."

"Well, then you lied to her. Amend your position and move on. Do what you *can* do."

"I don't know."

He cocks a dark eyebrow. "You better fucking know."

"I know you think I'm too careful with her and you're probably right, but *you're* not careful enough. You think you haven't inflicted any real damage, and I don't agree with that assessment."

"Kennedy didn't want me to be careful," he states. "I specifically asked what she wanted. Careful was not in the job description."

"But what if you're both wrong? What if I do something that fucks her up and sends her on a spiral? What if I can't reel her back in before she does something she can't take back? You weren't kidding about her mental state. One minute she's smiling and it feels like things are okay, a minute later I don't even know what fucking happened and she's talking about how she doesn't even want to be alive anymore. Maybe going slow isn't what she wants, but—"

"Whoa, when was this?" he demands, scowling. "She *said* that? She hasn't said anything like that to me."

I frown. "You told me to do wellness checks on her."

“Yeah, but it was just a feeling. When I took her to Target, she didn’t even bother looking when she crossed the street, nearly walked in front of a fucking car. She never *said* she was feeling that way. Is it getting worse instead of better? Seems like if she’s admitting it, the feelings are getting worse.”

Thinking about this makes me feel so fucking helpless. “I don’t know. All I know is she said it last night, and I’ve been fucking terrified to let her out of my sight since. But it didn’t feel like she wanted me around, either.”

His gaze is fixed on me, a thunderous scowl on his face. “What exactly was happening?”

“Nothing was happening. We were lying in bed talking. I told her I had quit her job for her, she asked if I was grumpy. I admitted I was because I haven’t been sleeping well, and she hugged me. Then she rolled away and got all upset out of nowhere, said she wasn’t sure she should live here and... it just fucking spiraled.”

“You were holding her and then she got upset.”

“Essentially, yes.”

“Did you word it in a way that may have made her feel like it was her fault you weren’t sleeping? Maybe you sent her on a guilt trip by accident.”

I shake my head. I can’t remember exactly what I said, but I don’t think it was that. “No, it wasn’t like that. She knew it was because of all this shit I wasn’t sleeping, but she didn’t take it that way. I think she just wanted to... I don’t know, comfort me or cuddle to apologize for the headache, but her mood swing wasn’t about that.”

“So, she’s in your arms. Did it seem like she was trying to escalate things?”

Suddenly, I don’t want to troubleshoot this problem with him anymore. Running through the play-by-play of

my time with Kennedy so he can figure out what I did wrong is not something I need or want, but my silence seems to answer his question, and there's no denying his protective instincts this time; he gets pissed.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" he demands. "Every time I bring her forward a couple of steps, you push her back."

"I did *not* push her back."

"Maybe not physically, but she felt like you were rejecting her and pushing her away. She can't handle that. I fucking told you she couldn't deal with your relationship drama."

"I didn't—"

He doesn't let me finish.

He pushes back his seat and stands. "You know what? I'm gonna make it real fucking easy for you. I *like* playing with Kennedy. And I've only played with her during the worst shit of her life, so I can only *imagine* how fun she can be when she has her head on right. If you keep holding onto this stubborn bullshit and doing more damage to her every time I make progress, I'm gonna stop playing nice. I've been respectful up to this point. I've been operating under the understanding that she belongs to you."

I meet his gaze with a hard one of my own as he stops in front of me, squaring up like he's about to throw a punch.

Then he does—a verbal hook with a surprising amount of violence behind it. "We may not be in love right now, but that could change. Trauma bonds people, and I can give her *exactly* what she needs in bed. A skill like that can go a long fucking way in making a girl crave you." He looks me up and down with a smirk that makes me want to knock his ass out, then looks me dead in the eye and says, "You may be the one she loves right now,

but I haven't tried to change her mind yet. You better take ownership of that pussy, or I fucking will."

## Chapter twenty-six

Kennedy

Normally, when Milo comes into the bedroom right now, he moves quietly so as not to wake me up.

He must be preoccupied today because when he comes in this morning—*is it still morning?*—he's not quiet at all. I don't think he means to wake me, but he does. When I squeeze a tired eye open and peek at him, he's not even looking at me.

He must have been working out. He's wearing his gym clothes, and his skin is flushed, a sheen of perspiration trailing down his corded neck and disappearing into his shirt.

*Yum.*

I allow myself a moment to admire the view as he pulls the sweaty shirt off, flexing his muscles and making me sigh to myself. He wads the material up, then looks over at me.

I'm momentarily startled because I didn't think he knew I was awake. He doesn't say good morning or come give me gentle words.

Clearly, he's still grumpy because all he says is, "Come in here."

He sounds very no-nonsense. It jars me and I push back the blankets, following him into the bathroom.

I stop in the doorway and lean against the frame, watching him shove down his black workout pants. My gaze gets stuck on his well-sculpted ass in the black boxer-briefs he's wearing.

"Get undressed."



My heart stops and my gaze darts to his.

I nearly say, “Me?” but of course he means me; there’s no one else in the room.

My eyes widen, but I quickly do as I’m told. While I’m getting naked, he walks over and turns on the shower, still in his underwear.

*Are we taking a shower together?*

That seems to be where this is heading.

I’m not complaining, but I am confused. I don’t risk asking because what if he changes his mind?

Once I’m naked, I stand awkwardly by the shower and wait. He disappears into his closet to grab clothes, then grabs two clean towels out of the linen closet.

Once everything we need is on the counter, he shucks his underwear, opens the glass door, and steps into the shower area.

He left the door open for me and seems to expect me to follow him, so I do, my tummy tumbling as I cross the threshold and gently close the glass door behind me.

Memories of the last time I followed a Granville into a shower stall creep in and fill me with insecurity. It doesn’t help that Milo apparently wants me in the shower with him, but he isn’t speaking. It doesn’t really *feel* like he wants me here.

“You’re not mad at me, are you?” I ask tentatively.

He turns, his gaze softening as he looks at my anxious face. He shakes his head, reaching for me. “No, of course I’m not mad at you. Come here.”

I go into his embrace, wrapping my arms around his middle and pressing my bare body against his. My eyes close and I rest my head on his firm, muscled chest. It feels so good to be here, but I’m afraid to trust it. Lately,

we've felt like a plank bridge that's half-rotted so every step you take, you risk plummeting to your doom.

"I'm sorry I haven't been dealing with this well, Kennedy," he rumbles. "I know you've needed stability, and you've always been able to count on me for that before, but this whole thing... I haven't coped as well as I've wanted to."

His words loosen a tightness I've carried in my chest for days now.

"You don't have to be sorry," I tell him. "There's no manual, and you've never been through it before. It's not an easy thing to navigate."

"I've been paralyzed with fear, afraid I'm going to make a wrong move with massive repercussions. That's not how I normally handle things, but this feeling of losing you... it's stirring shit up. Long-buried shit, shit I never wanted to feel again."

I want to tell him he'll never lose me, that I'm his for as long as he wants me to be, but it also feels like he isn't finished and I don't want to interrupt.

"When Edie died, it was sudden and unexpected. There was no warning, no possible chance to stop it. After it happened, I would lay awake nights thinking of all the things I could have done differently. Her car needed an oil change—why wasn't that the day I scheduled it for? I could have rearranged my schedule, given her a ride to work and picked her up. Hell, I made enough money that she didn't *need* to work. If she wouldn't have had a job, she wouldn't have been on the road that day. Any fucking thing I could think of to avert disaster, but it was all after the fact. I would have given literally anything to be able to rewind time and go back to before it happened and do things differently, to be able to stop it, to save her."

I swallow, my grip on him tightening protectively. I can't stand the idea that I've reminded him of that painful time in his life before me. "I'm sorry this has stirred all that up for you. I shouldn't have said that last night, I just..."

"No, you should say whatever you feel. I don't want you wasting energy censoring yourself for me. I'll be fine, I can handle it. I'm just trying to explain that, even though the crisis was different, all I can fucking think about is why wasn't I able to stop this from happening to you? Why did I let you leave that goddamn hotel room? Why didn't I notice the phone lit up on the seat beside me? But since I know there's nothing I can do to change what has already happened, my focus shifts to, 'how can I stop it from getting worse?' How can I protect you *now* to ensure it stops here and things don't spiral out of my control? That I don't lose you, too. I want to put you in a fucking bubble, Kennedy, because I'm terrified of anything else hurting you—whether that's you, or me, or Jonathan. My instinct is to control and protect you right now, and that isn't what you need, but it's the only place my mind will go."

"You can control and protect me all you want," I murmur, my face flushing. "I just don't want you to treat me like a leper."

He catches my chin and tilts it up gently to make me meet his gaze. "I am so fucking sorry if I made you think for one second I didn't want to touch you. That has never been the issue."

I want to look away, but he doesn't want me to, so I hold his gaze even though I'm deeply uncomfortable looking him in the eye as I say this next thing. "I thought maybe it was because of what I did with Jonathan."

He shakes his head meaningfully, so I see he's sincere. "No."

“I haven’t started my period yet,” I blurt, voicing a concern that makes my stomach drop. “I looked it up online. Usually after three days, people do, but I haven’t. And I read that if the sex happened during ovulation, um... the pill won’t work. I don’t know if that means...”

He nods, understanding what I’m saying even though I can’t finish the sentence. I feel horrible for the light dimming in his beautiful blue eyes, so I hug him.

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper. “I should have said something. I shouldn’t have let him...”

He tightens his arms around me, holding me as the hot water beats down on my back. “It isn’t your fault. It doesn’t matter. We’ll figure it out.” He pauses, then says carefully, “I don’t know the details of what happened, Kennedy. If you had to make an educated guess, do you think there’s a better chance Jonathan would be the father, or...?”

“Only Jonathan came inside me,” I say, even though the words make me want to die. “No one else finished, but there was contact. I just wanted to be abundantly safe.”

I don’t want to say more, and he doesn’t make me. I feel him nod over my head, then he murmurs, “All right. Well, we’ll deal with that if we have to.”

My stomach feels a bit sick thinking about it. He probably doesn’t want to think about it, either, so he lets me go and grabs the washcloth.

Once my stomach stops hurting, the shower is nice. It’s tender and intimate. Milo washes my hair for me, then pulls me back against him and soaps up my tits. Excitement courses through me as he drags the soapy cloth down my belly, and my eyes drift closed as he runs it across my inner thighs.

It’s impossible not to get turned on with him touching my naked body like this, even if he’s only cleaning me.

The evidence of his arousal prods me, too. I want to touch him and give him relief, but I'm too afraid he doesn't want me to.

After the shower, we dry off and head back to the bedroom. We should probably eat, but I'm not hungry. Not for food, anyway.

I'm hungry for the closeness he offers when we lie naked in his bed and he reaches for me. I scoot closer, settling in with one of his arms wrapped around me, one hand lying absently on his chiseled abdomen.

I love his hands so my gaze drifts to it, but I frown seeing how red his knuckles are.

"What happened here?" I ask, gently lifting his hand to look at it.

He flexes his knuckles and I bring them to my lips to kiss the red, angry-looking skin. "Nothing. Just went a little harder than usual in the gym."

My lips turn down and I peer up at him. "Were you angry?"

"Yes. Not at you. I just needed to punch something I didn't help create," he says wryly.

My eyebrows rise momentarily in surprise, but that could only mean one thing. "Jonathan?"

"Mm-hmm," he murmurs, his hand moving to cover mine. "He pissed me off at breakfast."

"Was he taunting you?"

"Little bit."

I sigh. "I'm sorry."

"You don't have to apologize for him."

"It feels like my fault there's anything to taunt you with."

He shakes his head. “Doesn’t matter. I just couldn’t hit *him*, so I hit the bag instead. Really, I should thank him. Got a good workout in,” he says with a little smile, bringing my hand up so he can give it a soft kiss.

“Was it about before, or the other night on the couch?”

“It doesn’t matter what it was about.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t have done that,” I suggest, watching anxiously for any telltale sign that it bothers him. “I thought it was a bad idea, but I couldn’t tell right away if you liked it... And I didn’t know what to do.”

“Kennedy, it’s fine. I’m not upset about it, I promise.”

I plod on, anyway. “I was afraid that seeing me with Jonathan might change things for you. Knowing what happened behind closed doors is one thing, but actually seeing it...”

He shakes his head. “I was hesitant at first because it’s not really my thing, but I knew it would be good for you. As long as you and I are together, you’ll always have to be around Jonathan. Since your last experience with him wasn’t entirely consensual, I wanted you to have a better taste in your mouth. He doesn’t seem to think it was a big deal, but I know you didn’t feel good about it. I always want you to have what you need, Kennedy, even if I’m not the one giving it to you. It’s just frustrating,” he says, and I can feel the tension in him. “I’ve never been in that position before.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, rubbing his firm chest to show my support, wishing I could help.

“It isn’t your fault. It’s me I’m frustrated with. It wasn’t even my idea, it was his. I should have been the one to give you what you needed.”

“You were. Jonathan may have been the one between my legs, but I wouldn’t have gone along with it if you didn’t let me. I could’ve been seconds from coming

and if you didn't want me to, I would've told him to stop. Whether or not he would've listened is beyond my control," I add dryly. "I told him to ignore me if I said no, and I don't know how to tell him that coupon has expired, but I would have tried because I would never do anything to hurt you, or anything you didn't want. You are the most impressive man in the world to me. There are none better. I adore you. I would do anything for you. I love you, and I know you love me. We would never do anything to hurt each other—not on purpose, anyway."

His arm tightens around me and he pulls me against him. I snuggle into his chest and softly kiss the skin my mouth finds. "No, we would never hurt each other," he agrees. "Not on purpose."

I shake my head, letting a daring hand slide down his flat abdomen. I take my time, letting my fingers trace the ridges of his abdominal muscles, dragging my fingertip in a circle around his belly button.

As many times as he has rejected me lately, I'm afraid to go for it, but I want to ease his tension and connect with him again, so I let my hand slide down to caress his cock.

"I need you to understand something," I tell him.

"What's that?" he murmurs gruffly as I stroke him.

"I belong to you entirely. I trust you to take good care of me. I am yours to do with as you please. You could never hurt me by using me. I *love* when you use me. I want you to use me more."

He doesn't pull back or push me away this time. He closes his eyes, his arm behind me moving so he can push his fingers through my hair.

I palm his hard cock, rubbing it and then wrapping my hand around his thick length. My pussy throbs with need as his grip tightens. I can feel how much he wants me; he just needs to let himself have me.

“I love pleasing you,” I tell him, kissing his firm chest as I stroke him. “It feels so good. It’s like fire in my veins. You’re the only man I want to please. You always will be.”

“I better be,” he grumbles.

I smile, kissing lower and making my way toward his abdomen. My tummy is fraught with nerves and tension, but I’m hopeful, too.

I look up at him as I slide down between his muscular thighs. His cock is like steel in my hand. Just looking at it stirs tension between my thighs, but I don’t stop at looking.

Bringing him close, I kiss the soft head of his cock. I run my tongue over it, earning a groan that sends a wave of heat through my veins, then I kiss my way along each side.

“Christ, Kennedy.”

The pleasure in his voice sends another sharp spike of pleasure through me. He pushes his fingers through my hair, gently cradling my skull. Then he uses his grip on my hair to lift my head.

I look up at him, full of hope and trust.

He looks back at me, a tender smile tugging at his perfect lips. “Open that pretty mouth for me.”

I do as he says and feel my whole body lighten with relief when he lets me take his cock into my mouth.

My eyes close and my tongue comes out to caress the vein along the underside of his erection. He sighs, and it makes me hungrier to please him.

My pussy starts throbbing harder just from sucking him, but the sensation intensifies when he starts talking in a low, gravelly rumble.



“That’s it, baby,” he encourages me. “You’re such a good girl.”

I moan as I move in to take more of his cock, the sound vibrating along his length.

He groans. “Fuck, Kennedy. That’s it, sweetheart. Relax your throat. Take me deep.”

His hands are on the back of my head, gently guiding me, urging me to take him deeper, to let him fuck my mouth.

I love when he takes control and I’m relieved that he believes I can handle it, so I let him have it now.

He controls my movements, forcing me down over his cock and filling my throat until I’m gasping for air. He pulls out long enough to let me catch my breath and caresses my face to let me know I’m doing a good job, then he slides his thick length back in.

He starts off slowly, thrusting in and out of my mouth but not with too much force, easing me back in and letting me lick and suck him. Then his cock fills my throat again, his head hitting the back and making me gag, and I feel a shift in the way he holds my head.

I moan at the uncomfortable stretch of my throat and take a careful breath, but I don’t want him to stop, so I try my best to accommodate him.

“That’s it, baby. Take it all.”

I try, but I gag on it until my eyes water and I can’t breathe.

For a split second, I panic, thinking he’ll stop because he thinks I can’t handle it, but his grip remains firm, and he pushes his cock more insistently into my throat.

“Relax,” he orders, his tone firm and unyielding. The sureness of his tone alone makes me relax. “Take a breath. You know what to do, pretty girl.”

My heart pounds but I try to do as he says. He pulls back and reminds me to breathe, then he pushes deep again, edging toward the back of my throat.

It feels incredible to have my throat so full of his cock, it's just hard not to panic.

But then he pets my hair and the side of my face as he stretches my throat. He tells me what a good girl I am to be so full of his cock, and the panic gives way to pleasure.

He holds himself at the back of my throat that's given up resisting him and gazes down at me like I really am his perfect girl. "Breathe through your nose. That's it. You're so fucking beautiful, Kennedy."

My heart fills up. I breathe through my nose and manage not to tense up even when he moves faster in my throat. He draws his hips back, then thrusts deep with more force. His firm grip doesn't relent, and he stops being so careful with me, guiding himself in and out of my throat harder and faster as his pleasure builds.

"Fuck, Kennedy."

I love his voice raspy with pleasure, his powerful hips working as he fucks my mouth.

He groans when he hits the back of my throat, holding my head in an iron grip and thrusting harder, faster, fucking my throat as if it's my pussy, completely without mercy.

My clit throbs and my pussy clenches at how roughly he's using me. My breathing grows ragged. Even without physical friction between my thighs, I feel my own pleasure building, but I also feel needy and empty because I'm clenching around nothing.

God, I want this man to fuck me.

"You want to come, don't you, baby?" he asks, his voice strained.

I can't answer with his cock in my throat so I just moan around him.

"Reach down and touch your pussy. Feel how wet it is for me. Plunge your finger in deep, then play with your clit. I want to feel your little moans and cries around my cock as you come."

*Oh, God.*

I like all of those directions. My heart pounds wildly as I reach between my legs and slide a finger into my pussy. I'm so wet, my finger sinks deep and I moan around his cock. He stopped moving for a moment to let me get situated, but now he starts again.

He begins slowly to let me find my footing again, but quickly escalates things, fucking my throat faster and faster as his need for relief grows more urgent. I finger my clit and moan around his cock as my pleasure builds at lightning speed.

"That's it, baby. Work that pretty pussy for me."

Desperate pleasure builds within me. I don't know if it's okay to be so noisy, but I can't help it. It's hard to breathe around his cock when my building pleasure has me panting. I'm afraid I won't be able to and try to pull back, but Milo's grip on my head stops me.

"I don't think so, sweetheart."

I cry out and moan helplessly around his cock. My heart pounds and my body writhes. I want to obey him, but it's hard not to fight him and I keep pulling back.

Suddenly, Milo pulls out of my throat and throws me back on the bed. I'm so startled, I stop touching myself, but he puts his hand over mine between my legs. "Did I say you could stop?"

I shake my head and start fingering myself again because I don't want to disobey him. The tension in my body picks up where it left off, but it's somehow tauter for

being teased and then briefly abandoned. I was so close to coming when I stopped, it's like my body is afraid I'll stop again so it wants to hurry up and capture the fleeting pleasure it was promised.

Milo lets go of my hand now that I'm back on track and repositions himself on top of me, shoving his cock in my throat much the way Jonathan did the other night. On my back, I have far less control. I can't keep pulling off him. I'm forced to take what he gives me.

Helpless. Used.

But also, on the road to being properly satisfied as he makes me pleasure myself alongside him.

It feels like my racing heart is lodged in my throat, but it must not be because Milo slides his cock deep into that tight passage. I close my eyes and moan softly as he pushes deeper, my belly feeling fluttery as I get closer and closer to coming.

When my orgasm hits, it hits with startling intensity. I'm trapped beneath his weight so I try to arch off the bed, but I can't move. The feeling of being ensnared makes the high that much more thrilling and I cry out sharply around Milo's cock, my throat muscles working and vibrating around him as ecstatic pleasure erupts and flows over me like lava, singeing everything it touches and leaving my nerves a trembling mess.

"Christ," Milo groans, shoving deep and gripping my hair tight in his fist. A thick stream of hot cum shoots down my throat. I take every bit of it, hungry for more. I don't stop moaning. It's raw and primal. It just feels so good to have him inside me, dominating me, using my body for his pleasure.

Milo pulls his cock out of my throat and wraps his hand around it, pumping the rest of his cum into my mouth. I open wide to catch all of it on my tongue, swallowing greedily when the last drop hits my lips.

His head lolls back and his body relaxes. He moves off me and collapses beside me on the mattress.

I lick my lips, wanting every last salty drop of his release, then I cuddle up close to him to bask in the post-orgasm high. "That was amazing. You're amazing," I tell him.

He cradles my head and pulls me in so he can kiss me on the forehead, then he locks his arms around my body and holds me snugly against him.

"I love you, Kennedy. I love you so fucking much it scares me."

My muscles are still weak from coming, but I tighten my grip on him protectively. "I love you, too. You don't have to be scared. I'm not going anywhere."

"You promise?"

I nod, feeling so sleepy my eyes can't stay open. "I promise."

## Chapter twenty-seven

Kennedy

Normal is a state that has felt so far out of reach, I feared I would never touch it again at certain points over these last few days. But when I wake up from my nap and head downstairs in time to help out with dinner, things feel normal again.

I love these meal times with the guys. It's nice when everyone is gathered and comfortable, and I'm so grateful for the lack of tension in the air.

It seems like there are a lot of reasons tension *could* rob me of the comfort these meal time gatherings provide, but unlike me—about as sturdy and reliable as a wet noodle right now—the Granville men are pillars, setting aside petty squabbles and behaving like a family when it's called for.

That's so nice. I guess it's probably nothing to them; it's what they're used to.

My mother has never set aside a petty grievance for anything once in her whole life, so it's alien behavior to me, but I love it. I want to relocate to their planet.

Milo and I make dinner while Jet plays on his laptop at the island. Jonathan sits at the other side, messing around on his phone and periodically taking a break to make good-naturedly antagonistic comments about my bedhead or how well serving him suits me.

I don't feel threatened by it today, though. I check in with Milo after the first comment, but he seems much more relaxed after our encounter upstairs.

I don't know if it was messing around or just opening up and talking to each other that helped so much, but

this thing between us feels less fragile than it has lately. He's even flirting with me again which makes me immensely happy.

The sideways smiles, the sparkle that returns to his blue eyes. I'm happy again, let's just see how long it lasts.

It makes me a bit fearful thinking about my intense mood swings. I hadn't put much thought into it because I've been entirely preoccupied just keeping my head above water lately, but since I haven't started my period yet, I am a bit worried there could be more contributing to my mood swings than just reacting to a trauma.

What if I'm pregnant with Jonathan's baby?

I don't know how soon pregnancy hormones start messing everything up.

I know Milo said we would deal with that if we had to, but God, I don't want to put him through that. It's bad enough he has to swallow me going to his son and letting him—actually *asking him to*—be my first. Jonathan fathering a baby he would have to raise is just too much to ask.

It's reassuring that he's even open to dealing with all that just to have me, but I've never prayed so hard for a period in my life.

Milo's firm hand on my waist jolts me from my thoughts and weakens all the muscles in my legs. I don't immediately know why he's touching me, but he merely pulls me aside so he can reach into the drawer I'm blocking.

I feel a bit shaky, but in the good way.

*God, I'm so wildly attracted to him.*

His hand is still on my waist. He looks me in the eye and I feel a knot of emotion lodged in my chest.

He must feel me craving him because he leans in and gives me a tender little kiss on the corner of my mouth. “Thank you for making dinner with me tonight.”

*Thank you for turning my insides to complete mush.*

I smile, but definitely keep those words trapped firmly inside my head.

“Anytime,” I say lightly.

“Now that you’re living here, I imagine we’ll be making dinner together a lot.”

*Living here.*

That’s still crazy.

“Is Kennedy coming back to school tomorrow?” Jet asks. “We can carpool if she is.”

Milo nods, glancing over at me. “Think you’re up to it?”

I nod, tucking a chunk of hair behind my ear. “Yeah, of course. I meant to go back today, I just... couldn’t.”

“That’s all right.”

The way he says it makes me feel like it is. “It will be good to go back, though. I think the routine will help snap me out of... my funk or whatever.”

“You’ll need to go to the office and have your records updated to reflect this address. We don’t want anything being sent to your mother’s place.”

I shake my head wordlessly. Anything that gets mailed there for me may as well disappear into a black hole because I’ll never go back for it.

After a moment I don’t realize is heavily silent until he speaks, Milo asks, “Have you given any thought to reporting what happened, Kennedy?”

My insides shrivel at the thought. Avoiding his gaze, I walk over to the sink so I can wash my hands since I



touched my hair. "I don't want to talk about this."

"I understand that, sweetheart, but I hate to think of them getting away with this."

"And I hate to think of them at all, which is completely unavoidable if I go to the police. I didn't go to the hospital that night, so I don't even have evidence. It's literally my word against theirs, and then my mom's going to tell them I've gone after her boyfriends before," I state, indicating him. "And they'll take one look at me literally living with one of her exes and sleeping in his bed, and it will look like she's telling the truth. I'm the troubled teenager lashing out at my mother, making 'false' accusations to get attention. I don't want any part of that, Milo. No fucking thank you."

"She's right," Jet says, surprising me. I didn't even think he was still paying attention to this conversation, but I certainly didn't expect him to join in. "The evidence isn't on her side. If she reports it, she'll have to go through more than he will."

"So, the fucker should just get away with it?" Jonathan says, disbelief clear in his tone. "That's your stance?"

"No." Jet glances at me, then to his dad and brother. "But this is already a terrible experience for Kennedy. If she'll suffer more than he will, is that really the best solution?"

"No," Jonathan snaps, "but it's superior to the one where I go back to the apartment and finish what I started, and then I have to go to prison."

"I saved her clothes from that night and took pictures," Milo states. "We may not have as much evidence as we would have if Kennedy had gone to the hospital, but we *do* have evidence. I understand that your entanglement with me could cause some doubt, but

at the risk of sounding like an asshole, Kennedy, look at him and look at me. There's a clear difference in appeal."

Jonathan smirks. "Exactly. I don't buy that we can't win this fight."

"I'm not saying we can't win it," Jet states. "But, in my opinion, the likelihood of an ideal result isn't great enough to make putting Kennedy through it worthwhile. I know you two have your need to conquer, but Kennedy's the one who will get beat up, not you guys. Some fights are better won with patience and finesse than brute force. They'll get what's coming to them, but I prefer a method that doesn't put Kennedy through more hell than she has already been through. And, regardless of what either of you wants, this isn't up to you. It's up to Kennedy. If she says no, the conversation is over. No one is reporting anything."

I smile, feeling warmed by his support even if his dad and brother can't entirely understand it. "Thanks, Jet."

I do not expect Jet to wrest control of this conversation from his dad *and* brother, but that's exactly what he does, hopping off his seat and waving me over. "I got you something at the store last night. Want to see it?"

I want to escape this conversation, so I nod eagerly and follow him to the foyer.

"It's just something little," he says, glancing back at me. "But I saw it and thought it would make you smile."

Just hearing that makes me smile. "Thanks, Jet."

He grabs a Nordstrom bag from the floor beside the wall beneath the staircase and holds it out to me.

I take the bag and peek inside. I see sleek, shiny purse straps, so I grab them and pull it out.

It is a purse, an adorable, glittery one with cat ears and sleeping cat eyes over a background of pink, purple, and teal. It's a fun, nonsense purse, but I absolutely love it and he's right—it makes me grin.

“This is awesome, Jet. Thank you.”

He shrugs, tucking his hands into the pockets of his jeans. “I thought you'd like it.”

Impulsively, I grab him and give him a hug. He's awkward about it, but after a second he wraps his arms around me to give me a light hug back.

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Hours later, I lie on the couch with Milo watching a movie while he plays with my hair. He's stretched out across the couch, relaxed. I'm lying on top of him, my face pressed against his firm chest, one of his arms curled around my waist to keep me in place.

It's nice.

Jet and Jonathan have both gone upstairs to do homework since we all have school tomorrow, but since I'm being such a slacker queen, I don't have any homework to do tonight.

My stomach aches a little, which somewhat ruins my enjoyment of this intimate cuddle time.

“Hey, Milo?”

“Hm?”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

The words don't want to come out of my throat, but I drag them out, anyway. “Do you *want* to have any more kids?”

His hand in my hair stills.

My heart drops into my stomach, but the question is out there now. There's no taking it back.

"I hadn't planned on having more children," he says carefully.

I look down at his chest to avoid his gaze. "I don't even just mean if I'm..." It's too unpleasant to repeat, so I don't bother. He knows what I'm thinking. "But in the future, if we live happily ever after or whatever."

Milo smirks. "Happily ever after or whatever?"

I roll my eyes. "I never got the impression you were eager to get married again since you don't even have serious relationships. And it's *fine* if you don't want to get married again, I don't care about that. But suppose we did want to spend our lives together. What would that look like?"

At least he doesn't sound like he wants to throw me off him and run away because I'm asking big scary questions. His tone remains calm, and he resumes playing with my hair. "Well, I imagine it would look however we wanted it to look. If we *did* have a child, I would prefer to wait a little while. You're young, and I know you come from a long line of young mothers, but when you have a baby very young, there are a lot of experiences you miss out on. I had my first baby very young, and there's plenty Edie and I didn't get to do because of it. I don't regret it, obviously, but now that my boys are old enough to take care of themselves, I'd like to enjoy some alone time with you for a while before we have dirty diapers and sleep schedules to contend with."

I grin. "So you *would* have a baby with me."

"If that's what we decide together, yes. But I would prefer you be at least a high school graduate first," he adds dryly.

"Cradle robber," I tease.

“Hey,” he says, giving me a playful squeeze.

I grin up at him and give him a kiss. I circle back, though, because there’s still more we need to talk about. “What if the worst-case scenario happened and I *am* pregnant now?”

“Then it’s up to you how you want to proceed.”

“But...” I look down, unsure how to word it. “If it’s Jonathan’s, then it isn’t *yours*. I mean, I know I can be a single mom, but—”

“You’re not going to be a single mom,” he interrupts, sounding annoyed by the notion. “Obviously, it wouldn’t be ideal, but if you’re having my son’s baby, that’s still my family. I will be right there beside you every step of the way as if it were my baby. The situation would be a little more complicated because we would have to talk to Jonathan about it and figure things out with him, but as far as I’m concerned, it wouldn’t change anything between us.”

“Really?”

He nods, stroking my jaw as he gazes into my eyes. “Really.”

My heart fills up and I lean in, needing to kiss him and show my gratitude. Both of his strong arms slide around my waist to hold me tight against him, and I slide a hand around his neck.

“You two really need to get a room.”

I break away from Milo’s mouth to look over at my potential baby daddy as he saunters into the room and drops onto the other couch facing the television.

“Oh, sure. Just have a seat. We weren’t busy or anything,” I mutter.

Jonathan cocks an eyebrow. “This is communal space,” he informs me. “If you don’t want an audience, take your shit to the bedroom.”

“I thought you were doing homework.”

“Finished.”

I frown. “You seem grumpy.”

He stares at me. “Why the fuck do you care?”

“Jonathan,” Milo says, scowling at his son. “What the hell is your problem?”

He shakes his head, shifting his gaze to the television. “Nothing. I’m just tired.”

“Then why don’t you go to sleep?” I say, not to be bitchy, but because... I mean, if you’re fucking tired, then go to bed instead of crashing our night. It’s so easy.

I feel him wanting to be mean to me as he slides me a narrowed, sideways look, but he holds back, probably on account of my overall delicacy.

He totally killed the vibe, though.

Milo gently pushes me off his lap and sits up. He still pulls me back against him and holds me while we watch the end of the movie, but it’s far less enjoyable with the grumpy Granville sitting there sulking for no apparent reason.

When the movie ends, I go to the kitchen for a cold bottle of water and Milo follows. He seems eager to go to bed. I figure it’s because Jonathan is in a mood and I’ve had a good day, so he doesn’t want anything to derail it.

I appreciate that, but as I glance back at Jonathan sitting alone on the couch, I feel a guilty pull in that direction.

I look up at Milo uncertainly, fiddling with the label on my cold water bottle. “Can I meet you upstairs in a couple of minutes?”

Milo stares at me for a moment, uncomprehending. “Why?”

I glance in the living room.

Milo's eyes widen slightly as he follows it. "Oh."

A week ago, I wouldn't have felt weird hanging back to talk to his son, but obviously, I feel a lot weirder about it now. "If it's okay with you." I lower my voice to a whisper. "I just feel like he was there for me when I was having a bad time, so I should return the favor."

He nods, but he's frowning. "I don't have a good argument against that."

I crack a smile. "You don't need one. If it makes you uncomfortable, just tell me."

"His bad mood isn't your responsibility, Kennedy, and your state of mind has been so fragile lately. I know he has stepped it up for you since everything happened. He has, and I give him credit for that, but that is not his usual disposition. I don't even know why he's in a shitty mood. What if it has something to do with you? You don't need that on your plate. It just seems like a bad idea."

I frown. "Why would his bad mood have anything to do with me?"

"I'm sure it doesn't, but I'd rather not risk it. Bad nights happen. He'll survive."

I look back in the living room. The TV is still on since Jonathan is sitting on the couch, but he's not watching it. My gaze drifts over the back of his head, his mussed dark hair, the few inches of his bare neck before the neckline of the navy-blue T-shirt. Even just sitting there alone, he looks tense.

If I hadn't fucked everything up by sleeping with him, I would be free to go in there and be his friend. Now, rubbing the tension out of his shoulders would feel sexual. Even sitting alone talking to him in the dark would feel like something I shouldn't be doing.

My stomach starts to ache again and I don't know why.

I'm used to that right now, though.

The ache turns to nausea and I place a hand over my tummy, overcome with a new wave of dread as I consider it might be more than nerves unsettling my stomach.

I want to go offer an ear, but I don't think I can.

"Come on," Milo says, taking my hand.

I guess going upstairs is the right thing to do, but it doesn't feel like the right thing.

If we're all going to be a family, I can't always be stepping so carefully around Jonathan that I have to keep a safe distance, can I? I guess he won't be living here much longer, but it still seems wrong.

Maybe that awkwardness will fade once we're all on solid ground again.

Maybe it won't always be like this.

Maybe my prayers will be answered and my period will finally come, and then with the threat of this permanent tether between us lifted, everyone can relax.

Milo hauls me with him toward the stairs, but just before I leave the room, I glance back.

And my heart drops when I see Jonathan looking back at me, too.



## Chapter twenty-eight

Kennedy

Even though I only missed one single day of school, it feels like an entire lifetime has passed since I last walked these halls.

I skip lunch and go to the office to change my address and emergency contact information.

The secretary gives me a stern look when I tell her I need to change the emergency contact person and remove my mother. I give her Milo's information to replace it and she asks, "Is this your father?"

*Nope, sure isn't, lady. Mind your business.*

I'm 18, so I'm a legal adult. I should be able to change it on my own, but the lady flat out refuses.

"Your mother is still legally responsible for you as far as the school is concerned," she tells me, her tone unbearably condescending.

"My mother hasn't been responsible for me a day in her whole life," I snap. "I don't live with her anymore, so if anything I need for school goes to her, I will never see it."

"I can change your mailing address if you'd like, but your mom will still be contacted about any issues regarding attendance or anything else your guardian should be told about."

That is utter bullshit.

I change the address, but I'm not happy. As I leave the office, I text Milo on my new phone to bitch about the secretary. He tells me he'll come in tomorrow and take care of it.

When the school day finally ends, my limbs are so heavy and I'm so damn tired I drag ass on the way to Jet's car. I nearly doze off a couple of times and my head hits the window.

"You okay?" he asks, glancing over at me.

I nod, but I'm worried. I don't know if I'm so tired because my mental state hasn't snapped back yet so just going through the motions of a normal day is still significantly harder, or it's an early pregnancy symptom. Rather than paying attention in class, I spent most of the day anxiously scouring the internet for answers.

I didn't get any.

Apparently, women unsure whether or not they're pregnant tend to be an anxious, vigilant bunch. Go figure.

Despite my exhaustion, I'm so happy when we pull into Milo's driveway.

*Home.*

It feels like home. All the people I like live here.

I'm not used to that. Home has always been a place that inspired fear or dread, or at the very least casual anxiety. I never even looked forward to weekends because I enjoyed the break school gave me. Now, I can't wait for it to be Friday.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, I dig out my phone to text Milo real quick. "Thank you for letting me move in with you. I really appreciate it."

I grab my backpack out of Jet's car and follow him into the house. Dropping the heavy thing by the stairs, I feel a vibration and check my phone. "I wouldn't want you anywhere else."

I smile and text back, "I can't wait until you're home, too."

I drop my phone in my cat purse and head for the kitchen to get a fresh bottle of water. I took one to school with me earlier, but I finished it hours ago.

I'm also freaking starving. By the time I left the office, lunch was nearly over and it didn't seem worth it to go. I went through the line and grabbed a granola bar and an apple to eat before class, but I'm famished.

"Do you want anything to snack on before dinner?" I ask Jet since he's going through his backpack at the center island.

"I could eat."

"So could I," Jonathan calls from the living room.

I didn't even know he was in there.

I also don't know what the boys like to eat. "Now that I'm living here, you guys are going to have to give me a rundown on which foods you like and don't like."

"We're not terribly picky," Jet says. "Meatloaf is a resounding no and we aren't big on Brussels sprouts, but I think that's about it."

"No allergies?"

"Nope."

"Eggplant's gross, and I'm not a fan of cantaloupe," Jonathan adds, sauntering into the room and glancing at me. "What are you making me?"

"You should learn to cook," I tell him. "What will you do if you ever have to take care of yourself?"

"I know how. I just choose not to."

"How about toasted Italian sliders?"

"Mm, yes," Jet says.

"I'm sure glad we took in a stray that can cook."

I go to the pantry for some Hawaiian rolls, then hit the refrigerator for lunch meat and provolone cheese.

Jonathan watches me ready the sandwiches to go into the oven. I feel his gaze, but I don't look up since he's not saying anything.

"How was school?" he finally asks.

"Long. Stupid. Annoying. Exhausting."  
Remembering he also had school today, I flick a glance at him and return, "How were your classes?"

"Better than that," he says with a smirk. "This Kimberly girl in my first class of the day has a massive crush on me, so she tends to bring me goodies. Today, she brought me coffee and a breakfast sandwich."

I can't tell if he's looking for a reaction out of me or not bringing up some girl that likes him. "Did you tell Kimberly if she wants your attention, she better get herself a boyfriend first?"

He smirks. "No. That could easily be misinterpreted."

I smile faintly, looking down the island at his younger brother. "Jet knows all about that. How *are* things with Brylee? I haven't asked lately."

"You've been a little preoccupied," he acknowledges. "I don't think it's going to work out with Brylee. I'm focused on another project right now, and she wasn't really biting. I'm also reevaluating the long-term ramifications of getting her attention this way. Even if I *got* her attention, could I keep it? I'm not sure we're compatible, and that's vital for a happy, enduring relationship."

I nod, slathering garlic butter over the tops of the sandwiches. "I think that's a mature way of looking at it. I never really understood what you saw in her, anyway."

"I approached it pretty simply. I haven't had much exposure to serious romantic relationships since I was young. I'm embarrassed to say I thought attraction was enough, and if I manipulated the circumstances to

capture her interest, the rest would fall into place. This weekend has been an eye-opener.”

I pause with my brush suspended over the last slider. It’s hard not to feel like my life is a sample in his Petri dish when he words it that way.

“Glad I could be of service, I guess.”

“You’ve certainly awoken my interest in the behavioral sciences. I had a cursory knowledge before, of course, but I want to do a thorough analysis and learn more about the dynamics. If you wouldn’t mind, I’d love to ask you a few personal questions when you’re feeling up to it.”

“What kind of questions?” I ask warily.

Seeing where this is going and apparently not approving of the destination, Jonathan cuts in. “I don’t think that’s a good idea, Jet.”

Jet doesn’t pay his brother a bit of attention. Gaze locked on me, he answers, “A few things. First, I’m wondering about your stance on forgiveness.”

My hackles rise. “Forgiveness?” He nods. “Unless you’re looking to have your sliders poisoned, I would be very careful about who you’re about to tell me I need to forgive.”

Jet cracks a smile. “No, that’s not what I meant. I’m not trying to influence you one way or another. I just want your opinion. Parent-child relationships are complex and often endure far past the point of toxicity. It’s illogical, but people are emotional creatures before they learn to be rational, and many never develop that far. Do you think you’d ever forgive your mom or want to fix your relationship with her?”

My skin heats. “Absolutely not.”

“Jet,” Jonathan says, warning in his tone.

“That’s the only one about that,” he assures him since we’re both testy about it. “I also wanted to ask whether pregnancy would influence you to be more interested in attempting a relationship with Jonathan, despite your clear incompatibilities.”

My mouth drops open.

“That’s enough, Jet,” Jonathan snaps.

Jet’s gaze flickers to his brother. “It was just a question.”

“It’s a rude fucking question. Our lives are not one of your science experiments.”

“I was just—”

“Get the fuck out of here before I forget you’re my brother and dunk your head in a goddamn toilet,” Jonathan says irritably.

“But Kennedy’s making food.”

“I’ll let you know when it’s done,” Jonathan says immovably.

“You’re really kicking me out of the kitchen?”

“I really fucking am,” Jonathan states.

Jet shakes his head and gathers his things, muttering about how he needs to get started on his homework, anyway.

Even though Jet was treating me like a test subject, I felt a little better when he was in the room. Especially after what he just said and who he said it in front of.

God, how awkward.

“He’s a pain in the ass sometimes,” Jonathan says by way of apology.

I shrug, cracking a smile. “All the Granville men are, just in different ways.” I cut him a sideways look as I take the tray to the oven. “I’m used to it at this point.”

I expect him to lob back an asshole comment or at least say something extremely inappropriate, but his mind must be elsewhere because he misses the chance.

When I close the oven and turn back to face him, I see his brow furrowed and a troubled glint in his eye. “What he said about the whole pregnancy thing... Have you still not...?”

*Kill me now.*

“It’s only been four days,” I say. “I’ve been looking it up online and experiences seem to vary. Experiences seem to vary when it comes to *all* aspects of the feminine reproductive experience, actually. Literally everything could mean literally anything—or exactly the opposite of that thing. We might as well be reading a crystal ball; the chances of clarity would be just as good.”

He nods, but he doesn’t look remotely reassured by my non-answer.

“There’s no point worrying about it,” I add. “I’m sure everything is fine. We just have to wait for time to pass so we know for sure.”

“I’m sorry. It sounds like being a woman sucks.”

He startles a laugh out of me. “It has its pros and cons. Being a woman in this house is a lot better than all the other places I’ve been one, so at least there’s that.”

He smirks. “The Granville men are known for their exceptional hospitality.”

I roll my eyes. “I bet they are.”

“I was implying we’re good in bed in case that wasn’t clear. But you already know about that, don’t you?”

I cut him a dry look. “Are *you* trying to get kicked out of the kitchen, too?”

His smirk reappears. “I’d like to see you try to kick me out of my own kitchen.”

“It’s my kitchen now, too,” I remind him.

“Go ahead and try it, then. See what happens,” he challenges, amusement glinting in his pretty blue eyes.

He’s so much trouble, I can’t even with him.

I shake my head, turning back to the refrigerator to put away the meat and cheese. “You want anything to drink while I’m in here?”

Rather than answer my question, he asks, “Is my dad fucking you yet?”

I’m so startled, I drop the bag of cheese on the floor. My face heats as I bend over to grab it. “I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

“That sounds like a no.”

“I don’t care what it sounds like.” Awkwardly, I drop the cheese in the drawer and close the refrigerator. I don’t understand why he’s asking.

“Get me a bottle of water.”

Without thought, I open the refrigerator door to grab him one, but it hits me that he waited for me to close the door first just to be an asshole. I still snatch a bottle out of the fridge and walk it over to him, but I’m much less friendly about it than I would have been when I initially offered.

“Thank you,” he says smugly, his gaze locked on mine.

“You’re going to make some lucky woman completely fucking crazy one of these days.”

He grins and cracks open his water. “Hey, play your cards right, and it could be you.”

“I’ll pass,” I tell him, grabbing my phone and setting the timer since he had me so distracted, I completely forgot to set the one on the oven.



“You sure?” he calls as I head back to the foyer for my backpack.

“Pretty sure,” I call back

“What are we sure about?”

I gasp, my heart lifting at the sight of Milo standing just inside the door. “You’re home!” I’m so happy to see him that I run and jump at him, locking my arms around his neck.

Startled, he stumbles back a step, laughing, but he locks his arm around my waist to keep me close. “I guess you’re happy to see me,” he rumbles tenderly.

“I sure am,” I say, kissing him all over his face. “You’re early. I thought you wouldn’t be home until after five.”

He leans in to kiss me on the lips. “I wanted to surprise you.” Bringing the hand that isn’t around my waist up, he reveals a bouquet of flowers I didn’t even notice him carrying.

“You’re wonderful,” I inform him.

“Take them.”

I grab the bouquet.

As soon as his hands are free, he plants them under my ass and lifts me. I lock my legs around his waist and proceed to kiss his neck.

“We should probably put these in some water,” he says, then carries me to the kitchen.

“Do you have a vase?” I ask.

“We should have some around here somewhere.”

He continues to carry me over to the island, then gently lets me down so he can scour the cabinets for a vase.

I bring the bouquet close and breathe in the lovely floral scent. “They smell amazing.” Jonathan is still sitting at the island, so my gaze flickers to him. “Your dad’s home early.”

“I noticed,” he says dryly.

“He brought me flowers.”

“What a swell guy,” he deadpans.

I smile and thrust the roses toward his nose. “Don’t they smell good?”

He does not humor me and take a whiff. He just shoots me a dead look like I’m annoying the everloving fuck out of him.

It only makes me smile wider.

Pointedly and without dropping my gaze, he uncaps the water I just brought him a moment ago and takes a good long sip.

I turn away from him, smelling my flowers and wandering over to Milo, who is filling a crystal vase at the sink. “Thank you so much for the roses. I love them.”

He puts the vase full of water on the counter, then takes the bouquet from me, but he doesn’t open the tissue paper they’re bundled in so he can put them in the water. Instead, he puts the bouquet on the counter and pushes his hands into the back pockets of my jeans, then leans in to give me a slow, intensely thorough kiss that makes my insides warm and my heart fluttery.

I feel a little dazed when he pulls back and gazes down at me. “Let’s go upstairs.”

My heart soars. “Upstairs?”

He nods, and I can see in the sureness of his gaze he means to get me out of my clothes as soon as we get up there.

“I have sandwiches in the oven,” I say stupidly, but it’s the first thought to pop into my head. “They have to come out in like ten minutes.”

Milo smirks. “I think Jonathan can handle pulling a pan out of the oven.” He takes my hand to pull me around the island and back toward the foyer. Glancing at his son almost as an afterthought as we pass, he tells him casually, “Put her flowers in the vase, too, will you?”

Jonathan does not say a single goddamn word, and although my whole body warms with mild embarrassment at how brazenly Milo is flaunting what he’s about to do, I’m far too excited to care.

## Chapter twenty-nine

Milo

Kennedy plays at shyness as I push her into the bedroom and close the door behind us.

I don't need to turn the light on since it's still daytime. Clouds obscure the sun, so it's dreary outside, but still daylight.

Slowly, Kennedy moves backward as I move toward her. It's a dance, the choreography of a hunt, but she yearns to be captured so she doesn't work too hard to dance away from me, even in play.

My fault.

I've made her worry about slipping away from me if she wandered too far.

I catch her now, cradling her face in one hand and sliding the other into her wild curly hair and cradling her skull. "Come here, you," I murmur, and she does.

She lets me pull her in, and her arms wrap around me. I kiss her forehead as the distance between us disappears, then the corners of her eyebrows. There's not an inch of her body I don't want to kiss, so I even drop one on the tip of her nose and make her smile.

"I know we've talked about all this and both explained our reasons, but I want to touch on it one last time before we close this chapter and move on."

Her smile fades, but she's not disappointed or frustrated. She's just giving me the attention I've asked for.

"Okay."

I keep her close, keep my fingers in her hair and my lips touching her skin wherever they can. “I know we’ve had a rough few days. I’m sorry for making it worse instead of better. You put your trust in me, and I let you down.”

“You didn’t—”

I kiss her pretty lips to shut her up. “Yes, I did,” I say flatly. “My reasons don’t change that fact, but I want you to know that I’m aware of it because, obviously, I hope it never happens again. I’m not a perfect man, but I am yours, and I will always do my best to take care of you.”

Her hand comes up to caress my jaw. “You did, Milo. It wasn’t the way I asked you to take care of me, but even letting me go to Jonathan when you didn’t want to do what I asked...” She drops my gaze, but only for a moment. “I know it wasn’t easy, and the thought that I hurt you makes me feel sick, but you did let me have what I needed without regard for yourself. You could have grabbed me and hauled me back to your bedroom. You could have pounded on his bedroom door and refused to let it happen, but you didn’t. It irked me in the moment because I really wanted it to be you, and your stubbornness made me so mad, but even then, you made sure I was taken care of. You were ready to raise hell and lock me in a closet when you thought I meant to leave the house and potentially put myself in danger, but you knew Jonathan would take care of me.”

I’m glad she sees it that way. I know it complicated everything and I know it’s selfish as hell, but I’d much prefer she gets everything she needs under my roof than go anywhere else for it. As crazy as this past weekend was, I don’t know how I would have handled a complete separation.

“This is your home. We’re your family now. I want you to be comfortable here—around all of us,” I add.

“I am,” she assures me. “I know it’s new, but I’m very much enjoying living here so far. I love your family.”

I crack a smile and stroke her face. “Good. I want you to know you can always count on me to hold on to you, Kennedy. Ideally, we should never have to navigate something like this again, but life is bound to have bumps in the road. I don’t want you worrying we’ll come apart at the seams every time we go over one. We weren’t well-established when this happened, so it was a rougher ride than it probably needed to be. Things didn’t go the way either of us wanted, and I got caught up in the idea that I could hold tight to an old reality for you, but the unavoidable reality is, we can’t always get back lost things.”

Her gaze drops, but I immediately tip her chin up and bring her gaze back to mine.

“But you don’t need to. We’re here now, and that’s what matters. In a world full of people, we found each other; *that’s* special. Every morning the sun rises and you’re in my arms. Every night I get to kiss you before I fall asleep. It’s all special, Kennedy, and I’ll never lose sight of that. I know the pain of irrevocable loss. I never thought I would love someone again. I thought I had my one love and that part of my life was over because she left too soon. But I love you, Kennedy. I want to walk through life with you, the good times and the bad ones, too. As long as we never let go, we can get through anything, and I never intend to let you go.”

She smiles up at me, her big brown eyes full of love and trust. “I don’t, either.”

I caress her jaw. “Good.” I kiss her lips, then tell her, “Now, if you don’t have anything to add, why don’t you take your pretty little ass to the closet and change into something you want me to take off you.”

She grins, then turns and scampers off to the bathroom.

Peeling off the suit jacket I wore to work, I feel lighter than I have in a while. I loosen my tie before pulling it off altogether, then kick off my shoes since I didn't have time to when I walked through the door.

When Kennedy comes back in, she's wearing the pretty white nightie I bought her Friday night and took to the hotel. She never got a chance to put it on that night, but she sure looks incredible in it now.

The sight of her so hopeful yet unsure as she stands there in what she wanted to wear for me that night puts a knot in my chest.

"Come here," I murmur.

She walks closer, the flirty white skirt fanning out and bouncing as she moves.

*God, she's beautiful.*

The fabric covering her tits is sheer enough that I can see the pink outline of her nipples through the material. My cock wakes right up at the sight, pushing at the fabric of my slacks, demanding its freedom.

Kennedy sinks to her knees like an angel without even being told. She sees my cock straining against my fly and wants to relieve my discomfort, so she unbuckles my belt and undoes my pants, then makes quick work of tugging them down.

She doesn't wait for direction this time. Her soft hand closes around the base of my cock and she pumps it, running her lips along the side and leaving little kisses. Tenderness grips me, and I reach down to caress her face.

It's not just the sight of her lovely tits pressed against the soft material or the way the skirt flirts, leaving some of her thighs exposed for my viewing pleasure yet hiding the most tantalizing parts of her. It's the adoring look in her eyes when she gazes up at me. Her desire for me as her tongue darts out and she licks her way

from base to tip. When she gets to the head, she wraps her tongue around it, licking it like an ice cream cone.

My hand fists in her hair and my head tips back, but I enjoy looking at her too much to stay that way for long.

She hasn't done this enough to be well-versed in what she's doing, so she licks me like an amateur, but an eager one, and that makes all the difference. A skilled tongue performing the act because it's an expected part of the routine could never match the pleasure she gives me as she bobs eagerly, licking and sucking on my cock without being entirely sure what to do with it.

She makes me smile, but then her tongue finds a sensitive spot and my smile fades.

*Fuck, that mouth.*

Gently grabbing the back of her skull, I keep my palm firm against her head and guide her to take me deeper. She gags, but remembers to breathe and keeps going until my cock hits the back of her throat. Her brown eyes dart up to mine to see how she's doing.

"You're perfect," I tell her.

Pleasure dances in her eyes and she doubles her efforts.

I guide her and let her suck me for another minute or so, but I can't stop thinking about getting her pretty little ass on the bed. I want her panties off and my tongue in her cunt. I want her clutching desperately at the sheets and twisting all over the mattress as I wring orgasm after orgasm from her lovely body.

I want to finally know what it feels like to sink my cock inside her.

I use her hair to tug her off my cock. My gaze is hot when I look down at her, my voice hoarser than usual. "On the bed."



She licks her lips with anticipation, then gets to her feet and goes over to the bed like she was told.

*Such a good girl.*

Before I can join her, a knock sounds at the door.

*Are you fucking kidding me?*

“The goddamn house had better be on fire,” I call without opening it.

Then I hear my son’s voice, and my hands clench into fists at my sides. “Tell Kennedy her sandwiches are ready.”

“Go the fuck away, Jonathan.”

Kennedy turns and hides her face in the mattress.

“Kennedy’s hungry. Wanted to make sure all her needs were being met,” he calls back.

*That little fucker.*

“My needs are being met very well,” she assures him. “You and Jet can split the sandwiches.”

“You sure? You might be eating for two. I can bring a couple of sandwiches up for you—serve you for a change.”

I shove my cock away but don’t bother buttoning my pants. Cracking open the door just enough to glare, I tell him, “Go away.”

“I had a nightmare,” he says mockingly, pulling a pout.

I shoot him a narrowed look and then shut the door in his face.

“Guess I’m on my own, huh?” he says dryly.

*Christ.*

I’m irritated as I walk away from the door and toward the bed, but I don’t let him interrupt any further.

I approach the bed and see Kennedy poised to apologize for him—again—but I stop her before she can. “Don’t say it.”

She snaps her mouth shut, but I can see she’s still worried.

I don’t let her see that I am, too.

I made my intentions pretty clear downstairs, and he knows I wanted our first time together to be special for her, so deliberately interrupting it is pretty fucking selfish.

It’s alarming, but if he’s developed a little crush on her, he’ll have to get over it. I don’t give a fuck who was inside her first. Kennedy is mine, not his.

I’m also concerned about the way she anxiously gnaws on her bottom lip, her gaze flickering to the door.

I don’t know if he’s still on the other side, but I don’t care—and she shouldn’t, either.

Kennedy gasps as I reach beneath her delicate nightie and yank her white lacy panties down her smooth thighs. I drag them to her knees, then bend to kiss the inside of each one before I tug them the rest of the way off.

“You worried he’s listening?” I ask, causing her eyes to widen guiltily. “Let him fucking listen.”

Her teeth sink into her fleshy bottom lip, but she won’t dare argue with me—not about him. “I—I wasn’t worried,” she insists.

It’s not good enough.

“Who do you belong to, Kennedy?” I ask, idly tracing the curve of her knee.

“You,” she answers promptly.

“That’s right. Me. I’ve let him touch you because I wanted you to have what you needed to heal, but the only person you belong to—the only man you *answer to*

—is *me*. Jonathan is getting much too comfortable with the idea that he has some kind of claim to you, and that'll have to be corrected. He can look at you and want you all he wants, but he is not welcome to touch you anymore. Understand?"

She swallows and nods, her eyes big and worried.

"The only man allowed access to your body from now on is me."

She nods again.

"You were mine the moment I first saw you, Kennedy." I trail my fingers along the outside of her thigh. "Neither of us knew it yet, but you were."

The worry eases and her face melts into a soft little smile.

I grab her legs and pull her down so she's closer to me on the mattress. Once I'm between her thighs where I want to be, I lean down and brace my forearms on the bed on either side of her.

I watch her face as I guide us into uncharted waters. My map isn't marked for territory like this so I'm not positive it's the right move, but I know we've talked this to death and I still don't entirely feel I've gotten through to her.

So, I'll try something different.

"Mine means mine to me, Kennedy. I'm not Jonathan. Maybe he's happy to share, but I'm not. It fucking shattered me that you went to him that night."

Her face falls, but I stay the course.

She couldn't have handled this a few nights ago, but she's already getting stronger. I think she can take it now—and I know I can fix it if I'm wrong.

"You are the only woman I want, and I know it wasn't about wanting him, but..." I look down and clear my

throat. "I love my son, Kennedy, but I won't lose you to him."

Kennedy gently grabs my face and pulls me close. "That will never happen. I'm so sorry I even made a thought like that pass through your mind," she whispers, kissing my face. "I'm so sorry, Milo. I love you so much."

"I know," I tell her, enjoying each and every apologetic kiss she presses against my skin.

"You're the *only* man I want, I swear. The only man I've ever wanted. If I've ever made you doubt that for a single second, I am so, so sorry."

"I know." I catch her hand and kiss it. "But talk is cheap, sweetheart. You need to show me."

I swear to God, she sighs with relief. Her slim arms lock around me and she holds me as close as she can. "I will," she promises. "I'll show you every single day if you need me to."

Kennedy has told me she's sorry, and I know she is.

I've told her that I understand and forgive her for any hurt she inflicted while she was trying to find her way through the pain, and I meant it.

But, at the end of the day, words can only take us so far.

Kennedy's hand slides down between our bodies. She reaches into my pants and gently tugs me free. Her soft hand wraps tightly around my shaft and my eyes drift closed.

As she works me, my body gets so hot I feel like I'm boiling in my own skin. I need to get out of these clothes, so I reach down to push her hand away, then sit back on my legs and go to pull off my shirt.

When I do, I'm startled by the sight of a red stain on the bottom of my white dress shirt.

*What the hell is that?*

Kennedy gasps, pushing up on her elbows. Her eyes widen and jump to my face, alarmed. “Oh, my god. Are you... bleeding?”

My confusion deepens, but then I remember I was just between her thighs.

My gaze drops, and five fucking tons of stress falls off my shoulders.

“No, baby. You are.”

She gasps again, yanking up her skirt and looking between her thighs, but then she covers herself and her cheeks flush. “Oh, my god. Oh, my god!”

There’s blood on the sheets, but I don’t care.

I fall back on the bed beside her, a helpless grin splitting my face. Before I know it, I’m laughing. What the fuck else can I do?

Poor Kennedy is flustered, but she’s so giddy, she’s practically dancing as she hops off the bed. “I’m not pregnant. This means I’m not pregnant,” she enthuses, turning this way and that, too scattered and excited to think clearly. “Do you have a change of sheets? I need to put these in the laundry. I need to take a shower. Oh! My pretty nightie,” she says with a gasp, quickly peeling it off and checking it for blood.

“Kennedy, fuck the nightie.”

“But I love this nightie,” she says so earnestly, I want to squeeze her.

“Get your pretty little ass over here.”

She hesitates, but she’s too obedient in the bedroom to defy me, so she climbs back on the bed naked. “I’ll ruin your clothes.”

“Fuck my clothes,” I say, grabbing her around the waist and yanking her on top of me.

Her wild curls tumble over my face and tickle my mouth. I'm still grinning like a fucking idiot. I thread my fingers through her hair and pull her down to kiss me.

"I'm so sorry my body chose this moment to give us this glorious news."

"This news is better than a thousand orgasms. I don't care." I pull her close and kiss the fuck out of her pretty little mouth.

"I knew you didn't want me to be pregnant," she says, lightly accusing, but still so joyful she can't even playfully convince me she's offended I bent the truth for her.

"Of course I didn't want you to be pregnant," I state, biting lightly on her bottom lip. "If anyone's going to saddle you with a baby and ruin your life, it oughta be me."

She grins against my mouth. "Mr. Granville," she teases. "What a scandalous thing to—" She squeals with delight as I roll her onto her back, then lean in so I can kiss her with her curls spread out across my bed sheet.

Kennedy smiles tenderly, reaching up and threading her fingers through my hair. I turn my head and kiss her hand, her wrist, her arm—anything I can reach.

"I'm happy you're happy," she says softly.

"I'm fucking thrilled. I would've dealt with it, of course, but it's a relief to know Jonathan has interrupted us for the last time."

Kennedy nods solemnly. "Unless he brings up those sandwiches."

I laugh, and she smiles. I lean down and kiss her one more time before I roll off her, then off the bed. "All right, let's get you into the shower."

"I feel so bad that my body has cockblocked you again. I'm going to give you a *savage* blowjob once I'm

clean and the bed sheets are changed.”

“Oh, yeah?” I ask, amused.

She nods enthusiastically, reaching back for my hand as we walk into the bathroom together. “I don’t suppose you’re secretly really into period sex, are you?”

I shake my head. “Afraid not.”

She nods grimly. “That’s what I figured. Damn body.”

“It’s mad at me for all the teasing. Now it’s decided to play hard to get.”

“It’s usually such a fan of yours, too.”

“It’s gotten cocky,” I tease, locking an arm around her waist and tugging her back against me. “Once this rebellion is over, I’ll have to spend some time reminding it who’s boss.”

Kennedy grins and tilts her face up so she can look back at me. “Mm, please do.”

I break away from her to peel my clothes off, and Kennedy turns on the shower.

I steal a glimpse of her as she grabs her girly soaps and shampoos off the counter to bring into the shower.

There’s enough room on the shower shelf for her things and mine, but she still behaves like a visitor and keeps hers separate, as if she might need to pack up and go at any given moment.

“You can keep those in there, you know.”

She looks back at me, startled, clutching the bottles against her chest. “I just didn’t want to hog all your shower space.”

“It’s our shower now, not mine,” I remind her.

“I guess that’s true,” she murmurs, looking at the shelf before stepping inside and arranging her things on it.

It's a small thing to fixate on, but I feel better once her toiletries live on the shelf next to mine.

Kennedy's quiet as I follow her into the shower and pass her a washcloth since her hands were full with the soaps. Turning around to face me, I can see she has something to say, but she's hesitant.

"Everything all right?"

She nods, then looks up at me, a glint of vulnerability in her eyes. "It's just funny that you addressed that. I know it seems unimportant, but it's the little things, you know? And you notice them, too. That's one of the things that almost made me cry when I spent the night in Jonathan's room."

Her gaze flickers to me uncertainly. I know she's probably not sure about bringing that up, but I let her see it doesn't bother me.

It *can't* bother me.

Making him off-limits would only foster distance between us, not closeness. For things to get back to normal, Jonathan has to become a non-issue, not a subject she's careful to avoid.

Not least of all because he lives here and would be *impossible* to avoid.

She's also a teenage girl, at the end of the day, and while I know she loves me and she'll be much happier with me than she would be with him, I am a realist. I'm aware of the age gap between us, and that in a sense, I have taken on the guardian's role in Kennedy's life.

The absolute worst thing I could do is make Jonathan a forbidden fruit—especially if he was serious about trying to tempt her away from me. I didn't think he was, but Jonathan can be volatile, and his recent actions make me wonder if he does have a little crush on Kennedy.



I trust her, of course, but I've also witnessed the dynamic between them and the dynamic between us. Jonathan is right that Kennedy is sexually submissive at her core. She responds to a dominant man who exhibits the confidence to lead her. She prefers me, but I'm sure she responded to him, too.

Ultimately fine if he bows out now and stays out of the way.

Less fine if he decides to actively try to change her mind.

Since I let him not only establish a sexual dynamic with her, but also be her first, I've given him all the tools he needs to confuse her.

I only hope he won't be that selfish.

I've never seen Jonathan serious about a girl before, and I don't think he's truly serious about Kennedy, either.

At best, maybe it's the unfamiliarity of feeling protective over a girl and not knowing where to put her. Kennedy isn't actually family, so why does he feel protective toward her? Perhaps he has misinterpreted that affection as something romantic—an easy mistake given their sexual experience and the way she triggered a new response from him that no other girl has before. Perhaps there was even a biological element to it when he thought she might be carrying his child. That's a big fucking deal, whether you're with the girl or not.

At worst, it's a pissing contest and he just wants to compete for a prize and emerge the victor. If he succeeded, it wouldn't be long before they both realized it was a massive mistake. She would end up right back where she was before—crying over me alone in his bedroom.

I love her to death, but I can't do all that again.

And I won't have to because I know better than to make a big deal out of it and leave that door open to

begin with.

Playing on her submissive tendencies in the bedroom is a different thing. Right now, Kennedy is learning the boundaries of our relationship and her relationship with him, too. They'll always have one. He's my son and will always be a part of her life. I want them to have a good relationship, just like I want her to have a good relationship with Jet.

As long as she looks to me to set the boundaries for her, I never have to worry about her going off track.

Part of loving her is protecting her, knowing how to guide her around the potential pitfalls she's likely to trip and fall into.

Jonathan wasn't good at that, but I am.

It feels good to take care of her again.

I pull her hair back and tenderly kiss the side of her face to let her know it doesn't bother me when she talks about him. "What almost made you cry?"

"When I saw my hairbrush on his sink. It felt so irreversible. Like ownership had been transferred and you didn't want me anymore. I was so sure I'd messed everything up and you'd never even be able to look at me again, let alone touch me."

I slide my arms around her waist, pulling her back against me and kissing the ball of her shoulder. "I love you too much to ever keep my gaze or my hands off you for very long."

She sighs and hugs my arms around her midsection. "You make me feel so loved," she says softly. "I've never felt that before you."

"You are very loved," I assure her, sliding a hand over and caressing her tit.

Turning in my arms and sliding her arms around my neck, she teases, "Oh yeah? How loved?"

I smirk, pushing her pretty little ass back against the shower wall. I wrap a hand around her throat, feeling the beat of her heart pulsing beneath my fingers. “Completely fucking loved,” I grumble before crashing my lips to hers.

# Chapter thirty

Kennedy

My hair is still wet when I make my way downstairs, but my heart is full.

A goofy smile plays around my lips and I sigh softly as I replay Milo kissing and teasing me in the shower.

My smile fades a bit when I hit the last step, though. I know all the guys are home now, and I'll admit, I'm a little anxious after Jonathan interrupted the way he did upstairs.

He made that joke about how if I played my cards right, maybe I could land him, but he was only joking... right?

Milo came downstairs before me, so I wait to see what kind of mood everyone is in when I enter the main living areas.

It's early for dinner, but Milo said he was going to start making it, anyway. My tummy rumbled when we got out of the shower and he knew I hadn't eaten the sandwiches I made after school. He didn't want me to be hungry.

The boys just finished their sandwiches, so they probably won't be hungry yet. Then again, who knows with guys their ages? They're bottomless pits.

My gaze instinctively searches the kitchen area as I walk in, but it's just Milo in the kitchen. I glance into the living room and see Jonathan sitting on the couch with a textbook open on his lap.

"Where's Jet?" I ask Milo.

"Upstairs. He'll come down when dinner's ready."

“You need any help?”

He glances back at me, his gaze absently traveling down my body. His lips tug up a bit and his blue eyes glint with affection. “Nah, I’ve got it.”

Lured by the promise of affection, I wander over and wrap my arms around him from behind. “You sure?”

“You already made my brats sandwiches today,” he jokes. “I don’t want you to feel like I moved you in just to do chores.”

“Well, not *just* to do chores,” I tease, letting my hand slide around his hips and move down to caress his cock through the stiff material of his jeans.

“Fuck, Kennedy.” His voice is strained and it makes me feel damn proud of myself, but I let my hand fall away since I already made enough trouble upstairs.

Thinking about upstairs doesn’t do much to sate my hunger for him, though.

Sucking him off in the shower, looking up at his gorgeous, chiseled body as the water streamed down on me. When he reached a hand down to touch my face and gazed at me like he loved me more than words could ever say.

I sigh and smile like a fool again, kissing his muscled back through his clothing. “Anyway, I wouldn’t think that. I love cooking with you.”

“I love cooking with you, too,” he assures me as I let go of him and take a step back. “But for now, you can relax.”

Since I know Jonathan is nearby, I lower my voice so I’m not overheard. “Have you updated him about the pregnancy thing yet?”

“I have not. I figured that was your news to share, but I can tell him if you don’t want to.”

It's tempting to let him do it, but I'm no coward. "No, it's okay. I'll go do it now." Stopping at the refrigerator for a cold beer, I take a deep breath and tell myself it won't be weird.

It probably will, though. I've never had to tell a guy I *am* seeing I'm not having his baby, after all, let alone one whose dad I'm dating instead.

So. Awkward.

Once I've taken the cap off the bottle, I paste a smile on my face and head to the living room.

Jonathan glances up when I come into view.

I drop onto the couch cushion beside him.

He looks over at me as if I must be lost, then his gaze flickers to the beer in my hand and his eyebrows rise. "Hard day?"

I thrust the bottle toward him. "I brought it for you."

His eyes narrow with suspicion, but he takes it, anyway. "Thanks." When I only nod wordlessly in response, he studies me more closely before concluding why I'm here. "Does someone have a guilty conscience?" he taunts.

"What?"

His guess makes my stomach twist up in knots.

He smirks, tipping back the bottle and taking a swig. "You finally let my dad pound that sweet pussy so you brought me a beer to make up for it."

"Ew. Don't say things like that."

His blue eyes glitter with amusement. "I appreciate the gesture. If you really want to make it up to me, I have some much dirtier ideas."

Huffing with annoyance, I say, "This is not an apology beer, and there will be no further 'making it up to

you.”

“Further, she says.”

My cheeks flush and I can’t help feeling a little defensive. “I would not feel the need to apologize for sleeping with your dad.”

He laughs. “That sounds pretty fucked up when you say it that way.”

Flustered, I mutter, “Just drink your beer and be quiet.”

He grins and takes another sip. “Yes, dear.”

*Why is he making this so much harder than it needs to be?*

I feel sick to my stomach, and I don’t know why.

I guess I do. I don’t *dislike* Jonathan anymore. I may tease him and give him a hard time sometimes, but it’s all good-natured. I don’t want to be *mean* to him.

But it’s not being mean. I’m sharing great news.

It only *feels* like being mean because the big jerk won’t stop flirting with me and playing with my emotions. I can never tell if he’s serious or not.

“I really like you,” I blurt.

His smile drops.

“I mean, not like...” My heart races. I’m going to die of awkwardness right here and now. “I want us to be— I don’t want...”

His tone isn’t as teasing as before, but he tries for reassuring since I’m being a whole wreck. “Relax, stray. You’ll have a fucking coronary. It’s not that serious.”

Tell that to my fluttery heart and sweating palms. “I know you like to be mean to me for fun sometimes, but I don’t want to be mean or really hurt you in any way—not that I even *can*, but I just... I appreciate all you’ve done

for me, and I genuinely like you. I enjoy this playful relationship between us, and I don't want anything to mess it up."

"I'm a pretty sturdy guy," he assures me. "It'll take more than a little thing like you to shake me."

"I wasn't suggesting... I just wanted to tell you in this immensely awkward way, apparently..."

He smirks again, his blue eyes glinting with amusement. "That you like me."

I roll my eyes, annoyed at the fact. "Yes."

"You should've jotted down 'do you like me? Check yes or no' on a piece of notebook paper and slid it to me. Would've been easier."

He may not be rattled, but I certainly am. I don't know if it's because he genuinely doesn't care, or he's not getting what I'm saying because I'm saying it so clumsily.

"I'm also super in love with your dad," I blurt, watching his face with my stomach aching to see how he takes it.

Nothing seems to change. He nods wordlessly, but doesn't appear to be surprised.

"And I'm not pregnant," I add, though I feel like I buried the lead.

I still can't tell what he's thinking.

Tears burn behind my eyes, completely horrifying me. I'm always a little emotional at the start of a cycle, and I've been incredibly emotional over the past few days. My emotional state is not entirely back to where it should be, and even if it were, I wouldn't know how to handle a situation like this.

Jonathan sees the tears shining on the surface of my eyes and drops his devil-may-care fucking around



attitude. “Hey. Don’t cry.” He sets his book and the beer down on the end table, then reaches his arms out for me. “Come here.”

I feel relieved when he pulls me into his strong arms, pushing my face into his chest and holding me tight.

“We’re fine,” he rumbles in my ear. “We’re not breaking up or anything. There’s no reason to get upset.”

“This feels like a weird gray area and I’ve never... been here before.”

He strokes my hair. “I have. Don’t stress about it, okay? We’re good. I’m not mad. I’m not hurt. You don’t have to feel bad about anything.”

I feel stupid admitting it, but I might as well. “I wasn’t sure if maybe you liked me a little bit, and I didn’t want to hurt your feelings if you did.”

He laughs lightly, giving me a squeeze, then pulls me back to look down at me. “You’re so goddamn inexperienced. I oughta beat my dad’s cradle-robbing ass.”

Startled laughter bursts out of me. It’s a teary laugh, my eyes still wet with tears, but at least none fell down my face. “No ass-beating allowed. You guys have an in-home gym for that.”

“You like me and I like you,” he says, shrugging. “What’s the problem?”

“I just wasn’t sure...”

He knows what I wasn’t sure of, so he doesn’t make me finish.

“I knew you were invested in my dad, Kennedy. I knew that from the moment I walked in on you two making out like teenagers in the foyer. I’m not generally a jealous guy, and I knew where your loyalties were when I let you into my bedroom that night.”

*Generally.*

A frown flickers across my face, but before I can overthink that word that stands out a bit more than the rest, he continues.

“If I let any wires get crossed, then that was on me. Not saying they did, of course.”

“Of course,” I murmur dryly since his tone seems to invite me to agree with his unwavering impenetrability.

He smiles. “If my dad were open to sharing, I think we’d have a damn good time playing tug of war with you, but I take it from you feeling the need to have this conversation with me, he’s not.”

I shake my head.

Jonathan nods. “All right. No big deal. At least we got to have a little fun, right?” he adds with a wink.

My cheeks warm and I have to look away, but I can’t suppress a small smile despite my embarrassment.

“I’m glad I got to be a couple of your firsts.”

“A couple?”

“First fuck. First pregnancy scare.” He sighs and spreads his arms out across the back of the couch in an exaggerated show of male pride.

“Ugh, you’re the worst,” I tell him, but I can’t stop smiling.

“And hey, you never know. Once my dad stops worrying I’m trying to steal you from him, maybe he’ll ease up on the restrictions and gift me a night with you for my birthday or something,” he continues. “I’m a Sagittarius, so I do have a birthday coming up soon. And then there’s Christmas... I’m just saying, the guy could save a lot of money.”

I sigh heavily with exasperation. “Why do I like you?”

“My good looks? My charm? My natural athleticism?”

“Must be your humility,” I deadpan.

He grabs the beer I brought him and takes a swig.  
“Nah, can’t be that.”

I feel so much lighter than I did when I came in here.

I’m still not 100 percent sure how to juggle my dynamics with both of them without stepping on any toes, but when Jonathan grabs me around the waist and pulls me against his side right as his dad comes into the room, I look to Milo rather than scramble away to see what he thinks.

“Am I interrupting?” Milo asks dryly.

“Nah, have a seat,” Jonathan says, flicking a glance at his dad as if it’s all perfectly natural. “We’re just enjoying a little family time. Kennedy needed a cuddle. Wanna watch something?” he asks without preamble.

Milo’s gaze moves between us, studying our energy before taking a seat beside me. “I suppose we can start something while we wait for dinner.”

Magnanimously, Jonathan gestures to me with his beer. “You want to take over?”

“If you don’t mind,” Milo says dryly.

“Nah, I was just filling the void while she waited for you. Story of my life.”

“Oh, my god,” I say, burying my face in my hands.

Milo reaches around my waist and drags me closer to him. I curl my legs up on the couch behind me so my feet are close to Jonathan’s legs and lean into Milo’s solid warmth.

Even though he doesn’t seem bothered that I was cuddling with Jonathan, I feel the need to make sure. When he said Jonathan’s access to my body had to be

cut off, I assumed he meant only sexually, not harmless affection.

Peering up at him, I pepper his strong jaw with tiny kisses to get his attention.

He knows what I'm doing, but he makes me work for it for a minute before he gives me what he knows I want. When he does, he smirks, finally deigning to meet my gaze. "You have the tendencies of a kitten when you aren't sure if I'm mad at you."

"Meow," I tease, nuzzling him.

He reaches over with his big hand to stroke my face. I hadn't thought of it that way, but I do love when he pets me. I bask in his attention now that I've earned it, lapping up the affection he doles out like a hungry kitten at mealtime.

Maybe Jonathan's nickname *does* suit me.

All my life, I've lacked the security of a safe home, a loving, reliable family, even the consistent expectation of a hot meal to fill my belly.

Now, I have all of that and more.

My new family may be a bit unconventional, but they love me and prioritize taking care of me, even when it's hard. Even when I scratch them.

I wasn't looking for a home when I showed up on the Granville doorstep that first day, but they took me in and gave me one, anyway.

Maybe I was a stray, but I don't feel like one anymore.

I'm more loved and much safer than I've ever been in my whole life.

I don't know how it could get better than this. I don't know how I could possibly ask for more.



## Chapter thirty-one

Kennedy

“Enjoy your stay, Mr. and Mrs. Granville,” says the friendly hotel worker as they pass our room key to Milo.

“Thank you,” he says, not bothering to correct them.

The erroneous assumption makes me smile.

*Mrs. Granville.* I like the sound of that.

I don't say that, of course.

Even though I feel like a permanent fixture in Milo's life and I'd marry him tomorrow if he asked me to, we haven't really been dating for long and we're certainly not married.

We haven't even had sex yet.

But that's why we're here.

I mean, the official story is that he just wanted to bring me on vacation for a mental reset now that the dust has settled back home, but I know Milo was determined to give me a special, romantic first time. I know he tried to talk himself out of it a time or two, but between my body's rebellion and his stubbornness, it never happened.

Booking this trip is doing things his way, and I'm more than happy to come along wherever he wants to take me.

I've never even been on a real vacation before, so to be on one like this is crazy to me.

Our resort is right on the ocean. When we walk through the immaculate lobby to an open-air walkway, I can smell the salty ocean breeze.

I reach down and take Milo's free hand with mine as we wheel our luggage behind us. "I can't believe we're really here."

He gives my hand a squeeze, looking over and smiling faintly at my excitement. Nodding his head to the right, he indicates a path lined with tropical plants. "That's where we'll come to get our massages tomorrow."

"I can't wait. And we have to check out that bar right on the beach. And the pool! And the restaurant. I want that steak dish with the pineapple that we saw on the website. That looked incredible."

"Well, we have all week. There's plenty of time to check every item off your vacation to-do list."

Since I'm the only one who has been rattling off all the things I want to do while we're here, I look over at him. "What's on yours?"

He smirks. "You."

I roll my eyes indulgently. "Well, yeah, obviously. What else?"

"You again. And again. And again. You get the idea."

I sigh happily. "I love vacation."

When we get to the room, I'm so excited to check it out. Milo didn't show me any pictures of it because he wanted me to be surprised by at least some of the things on this trip, and boy, am I.

This is nothing like any hotel room I've ever seen before. It's like a *house*.

When we walk through the front door, there's a gleaming marble floor with plush rugs under the furniture, white columns, and posh lighting fixtures. It's open floor plan with a kitchen to our right, a dining area across from it, and a living room right in front of us with

windows that stretch all the way down to the floor so that whole wall is gorgeous ocean views.

“Holy crap.”

Milo chuckles, lightly grabbing my waist and hauling me toward the hallway between the kitchen and dining room.

The bedroom and bathroom are this way.

He pushes open a gleaming door to reveal a lovely bedroom dressed in creams and golds. It's on the left side, so the far wall is floor-to-ceiling windows with an ocean view like the main living area. I can see through the sliding door that we also have a balcony with a table and two chairs, perfect for an intimate breakfast with a breathtaking view of the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea.

“Milo, this place is amazing,” I say, marveling as I walk over and brush my hand across the bedding. Feels soft. I need to check out the bed, too, so I dive on.

I smile, pressing my cheek against the sheets and sinking into the pillowy softness. “Yep. We can just live here now. We never have to leave.”

“I'm inclined to agree,” Milo murmurs, abandoning his suitcase and climbing on the bed behind me.

My body warms with anticipation. I don't know if he'll touch me and kiss me, or curl up beside me and cuddle me. Maybe now that we're here, all bets are off, and he doesn't want to spend another minute not being inside me.

Shivers dance up my spine as his strong hands settle on the bare backs of my thighs. He slides his hands upward, pushing up the material of my sundress and palming my ass through the scant fabric of my panties.



My eyes close as his strong hands knead my flesh. Need pools between my thighs as the massage continues, his confident, possessive grip turning my blood to liquid heat.

He knows exactly what he's doing to me.

When he has me throbbing with need, hoping and praying he'll push his hand beneath my panties and touch me where I need it most, he leans down and presses his perfect lips against my skin. I gasp softly when he makes contact at the small of my back, the ache inside me worsening as he kisses lower, kissing his way down my ass and slowly pulling my thighs apart.

*Oh, God.*

I spread my thighs wider, craving his touch, his mouth, his cock—anything. I just need him. I'll take whatever he gives me.

"Milo," I moan, utterly miserable with pleasurable tension.

"You like that, pretty girl?" he rumbles, lightly dragging his fingers across the damp crotch of my panties.

"Yes," I breathe.

"Yeah, you do," he murmurs with satisfaction. "You want more, don't you?"

Yes.

His tongue darts out and he trails it along the outside of my pussy, teasing me as he slowly pulls the material aside.

*Oh, God, yes, please.*

His tongue teases my slit and I cry out, nearly coming apart right there.

I want him to eat me so bad, but the dastardly man kisses my pussy deeply like it's my mouth, then pulls

back and gives me a light smack on the ass.

“Then you’ll want it even more when we come to bed later.”

“No,” I groan, rolling over and looking up at him. If I could reach him, I’d yank him on top of me and pull his shirt off. I’d grab his cock and *make* him want me too much to stop...

Then again, that’s never worked before.

Damn the man and his steely control.

I pout at him, but he’s not even slightly sympathetic.

Smirking at my lustful misery, he says, “Now, get your pretty little ass in the bathroom and change into a bikini so we can hit the beach.”

“Why are you like this?” I complain, dragging myself off the bed, my body a jumbled mess of want and need.

Since Milo is being an evil tease, I grab my carry-on and head for the bathroom to change. I toss a dramatic pout over my shoulder just in case I can convince him to change his mind, but he just leans against the wall and smirks, his eyes roving over my body as he watches me disappear inside the bathroom.

I was paranoid about our luggage getting lost, so I made sure to pack a sundress, a cute pair of sandals, and a blue bikini with a matching sarong in my carryon bag. The sundress is wrinkled now, so I pull it out and hang it over a towel rack. I know Milo said this suite would have a washer and dryer in case we needed to do laundry while we were here. I’ll have to pop it in the dryer for a few minutes.

It’s snowing back home, so I’m especially excited to wear all the beachy outfits Milo bought me for our trip. I have three different bathing suits, countless crop tops and shorts, and more sundresses than I could wear if I changed into a different one every day we were here.

I wanted to be prepared, though. This is our first vacation as a couple, and I want to look cute for him.

Since we're hitting the beach and the bar on the way to the beach, I put on the bikini Milo liked best to torture him a little since he teased me like that on the bed, then I tie the sarong around my hips so I have a little coverage. I bought a ridiculous sunhat, so I don that and a pair of huge sunglasses before I'm ready to leave.

Milo changed out of his travel clothes and into a pair of black swim trunks and an airy blue button-down shirt. His hot gaze rakes over me with approval when I emerge from the bathroom in my beach clothes.

"We match," I say, smiling as I grab my purse.

We head downstairs to the hotel gift shop before we go to the beach because TSA said our carefully selected bottle of reef-friendly sunscreen was too big and made us toss it before we boarded the plane. Naturally, the hotel has some in their shop, just at a marked up price that bothers me, but Milo doesn't even blink at.

"See anything else you want while we're here?" He points at the wall where some bathing suits and clothing items are hanging up. "What about that?"

I laugh. "I do *not* need *another* bathing suit."

"I disagree."

I shake my head at him, wandering over to a display of beaded bracelets. "These are cute, though."

"Pick one you like."

I slide a few off so I can get to a pretty pink one with cloudy beads. "We need to get the boys something, too."

"Getting them souvenirs at the hotel gift shop is an excellent way to make them think we never left the resort."

I grin, grabbing a squeezable rubber toy—like a rubber duck, but it’s a turtle instead. “This is adorable.”

“If they were five,” he agrees.

I gasp, reaching for a shark sand bucket full of sand toys on the bottom shelf. Holding it up with a grin, I joke, “I found the perfect gift for Jonathan.”

Locking his arms around my waist from behind, he kisses my exposed shoulder and murmurs, “I don’t believe that’s on his wish list.”

The way he says it makes me think Jonathan made the same “joke” to him that he made to me. “His wish list is rather unobtainable,” I say lightly. “Surely a shark-themed sand pail is almost as good.”

He takes my hand, leading me away from the display. “We’ll get the boys something before we leave. Right now, I want to slather suntan lotion on your beautiful body and have drinks by the ocean.”

“Mm, that does sound nice.”

He nods, taking the sand pail away from me and replacing it on the bottom shelf.

“Can I get the squeaky turtle, though? He’s adorable.”

“You can get whatever you want. You don’t have to ask.”

I look back at the hat wall. “I also want to see you in a hat.”

Milo shakes his head, hauling me toward the register to pay.

“Come on, you’ll be so sexy in a hat. We can be hat buddies.”

He hauls me to the register hatless, then we hold hands as we leave the air-conditioned gift shop and walk out into the balmy early evening.

A burst of excitement blooms in my chest when Milo and I head down to the beach together. I've always wanted to go to the beach, and being here with Milo feels surreal.

It wasn't long ago I wasn't even sure he would be open to being my boyfriend, let alone being such a couple that we live together and casually travel together.

What even is this life?

When we approach the pool, Milo stops at the bar to get us a couple of drinks. The bartender flicks a glance at me, then he looks a little longer, a flirty smile curling his lips.

Milo rests a possessive hand around my waist. The guy takes the hint, moving down the bar to make me a piña colada.

"I think he likes me," I whisper teasingly to Milo.

His hand slides lower and he grabs my ass possessively. "Of course he does," he murmurs, kissing the side of my face.

My pussy throbs at the firm way he squeezes and rubs my ass here, where anyone could see us. I swallow, trying to ignore the rising heat in my body.

As if to drive home my point, the bartender looks back at me over his shoulder while he works on his drink and smiles again.

Biting down on my bottom lip, I look up at Milo. "He's looking again."

He grabs the back of my neck, pulling me in and claiming my lips in a soft but intensely thorough kiss that completely wipes my mind. When I pull back, I'm a little dazed and can't remember what I was teasing him about, so I'm momentarily thrown when he says, "He can look all he wants. Only I get to touch."

Warmth envelops me and I wrap my arms around his waist, leaning against him and gazing up at his handsome face. “I love you.”

His expression softens and he reaches down to tenderly caress my cheek. “I love you, too.”

Once we both have drinks, we head down to the beach.

The resort has cabanas you can rent out along the beach, or loungers guests can relax on in the sun or beneath the shade of an umbrella. Milo picks out a pair of loungers with some shade, but he still insists on putting sunscreen on me.

“It’ll be dark soon,” I point out.

He pushes my curly hair over one shoulder so he can slather lotion over the other one and down my back. “Can’t risk you getting burned in the meantime.”

I smile, taking a sip of my drink. “You’re such a dad.”

“Hey, now.”

I look back at him and smirk. “I wasn’t complaining.”

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Milo and I play in the ocean, splashing and kissing. We swim a little, and he watches me make shapes with my toe in the sand.

When night falls, we hold hands and walk along the water’s edge, letting the baby waves lap at our ankles.

Before it gets too late, we stop at the hotel restaurant nearest the beach and have some dinner and another round of drinks.

I’m pleasantly tipsy, so on the way back to the hotel, I try to make trouble. As soon as we’re alone together in

the elevator, I peel off my sarong so I'm wearing just the bikini.

"We should shower together and wash all the sand off us when we get back to the room."

Milo's smoldering gaze follows my fingers as I trail them over my breasts, teasing the edges of the scanty triangles of fabric keeping me covered.

He clears his throat, but his tone is still deep with burgeoning arousal when he speaks. "We can do that." With some effort, he lifts his gaze to my face. "Did you have a good first day?"

"I had an amazing first day," I tell him, dropping my hand and eliminating the distance between us. I don't know why he stood so far away from me in the elevator, but I throw my arms around his neck and lean up on my tiptoes so I can kiss him. "Thank you for bringing me here." I pepper his face with a couple of kisses. "Thank you for making this so special for me. You're the best man I've ever met, and I'm so happy you're mine."

Milo's arm locks around my waist. Smiling against my lips, he teases, "Is that the alcohol talking?" but he knows it isn't. He knows he's my favorite person in the world, and I'll keep telling him for as long as he lets me.

The elevator doors open.

I stumble back a step, giggle about it, then make my way out of the elevator.

Milo grabs my hand, holding it tightly in his.

Once more, we head to our hotel room after a romantic evening I never knew I deserved.

But this time, there will be no interruptions.

## Chapter thirty-two

Kennedy

We stumble through the doorway of the hotel room drunk on alcohol and each other. I'm eager to get to the bedroom, but Milo doesn't wait until we're there to start tormenting me.

As soon as we're through the door, he walks me backward until I'm pressed against the wall. He cradles my face in one big hand, the other sliding down to squeeze my tit.

I moan as he kisses his way along my jawline, then sends shivers down my spine when he moves his attention to my neck.

As he's kissing my neck, he peels up one side of my bikini top. My tit springs free and I moan softly as his hand covers my bare flesh, his thumb teasing the stiff, sensitive peak.

Dimly, I remember something about a shower we were going to take, but then he cages me in against the wall and bends to tease my pert nipple with his skilled tongue.

I would fuck him in a pit of quicksand, so a few granules on our skin aren't likely to bother me.

My body arches away from the wall as he feasts on my breasts. He's ravenous, tearing off my flimsy bikini top and tossing it behind us on the floor.

His wicked mouth on my tits makes me crazy, then his strong hand skims my side and sends shivers dancing across my flushed skin.

It's too much to feel all at once. I need a breather, but when I try to pull away, he refuses me, taking my



hands and pinning them over my head.

I sigh as he moves in on me, the heat from his body seeping into mine as he continues to kiss me.

“I fucking love the way you taste.”

The roughness of his voice excites a swarm of butterflies in my tummy.

My tummy thrills again as his teeth lightly graze my skin. His lips wrap around my nipple and he sucks, wringing a gasp from my body as I arch toward him.

He releases one of my pinned arms to grab my hip. Taking advantage of the freedom, I slide my fingers through his dark hair, cradling his head as he teases and sucks my nipples, wrenching the tension in my core tighter and tighter with every hot lick.

When he releases my nipple, I moan plaintively. His lips find their way down my bare belly. He stops to kiss every few inches of skin, intensifying the tension as I wait to see where he’s going. I think I know. I *hope* I know. But the man is such a damn tease, I won’t *really* know until he gets there.

I hold my breath as he kisses my hip bone and his fingers graze the waistband of my bikini bottoms.

I’m so turned on that when he slides just his fingers into the band and pulls it away from my skin, I cry out.

With a knowing smirk, he looks up as he leans in to kiss my belly. “You want something, baby?”

I lick my lips. He knows what I want. The same thing I wanted last summer when he walked into the apartment and caught me coming out of the shower, naked beneath a white fluffy towel. When he called me beautiful.

He tugs my bikini bottoms lower, exposing more skin that’s usually covered, but not quite revealing my pussy.

When he leans in and kisses the skin just above my pussy, my knees nearly buckle.

He looks up at me with a mischievous glint in his eye, then, still holding my gaze, brushes his fingers over the fabric covering my entrance.

A breath rushes out of me. He teases me until I'm dancing on my tiptoes, arching away from the wall and touching my own tits, desperate for relief.

"Milo," I whine.

He grabs my wrist, pulling me away from the wall. I'm languid, but I pull myself from the lust fog long enough to follow him to the bedroom.

"On the bed."

His voice is hard and commanding and sends excitement shooting down my spine.

I'm a good girl, so I prance my ass over to the bed and climb on, making sure to give him a nice view as I do.

He must like it because he growls and comes over, grabbing the flimsy strings holding my bikini bottoms on and yanking them down. I gasp at the force, my heart doing a somersault when he places a firm hand on my back and pushes me down where he wants me, my tits against the bed but my ass in the air.

"Fucking perfect," he says, dragging the bikini bottoms down to my thighs. My pussy leaks arousal as he grabs my ass, his grip firm and possessive as he inspects his property. "This ass belongs to me, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I answer without hesitation, a fresh wave of arousal lancing through me.

His hand smooths over my ass and he slides a single finger along the slit of my pussy. "This, too," he murmurs thickly.

I'm so aroused and needy, the light touch makes me shiver.

"Kennedy," he says firmly when I don't verbalize my agreement. I'm caught off guard when he smacks my ass, hard. "Who does this pussy belong to?"

"You," I say quickly, my ass stinging and my pussy pulsing with need.

"You don't sound sure," he says silkily. The faint menace in his tone sends a jolt of fear to my heart even as my body aches for him.

"I'm sure—" I begin, but he interrupts with another hard slap to the ass.

I gasp and clutch the bedding in two tight fists as I shift, the sting from the spanking exciting me, but his words making my heart quicken with fear.

"Who does this pussy belong to?" he demands.

"You!" I repeat, louder.

"Again," he demands, smacking my ass even harder.

*Fuck.*

"You!" I shout, but my voice gets caught and comes out as a half-groan.

"Who—" Smack "—does—" Smack "—this—" Smack "—beautiful—" Smack "—fucking—" Smack "—ass—" Smack "—belong—" Smack "—to?"

"You," I howl in agony, my ass throbbing from the series of hard slaps, my pussy so needy for his attention, it's fucking torturous. "You, you, you. Milo, every part of me belongs to you. Please."

His hand is gentle now as it smooths over my stinging flesh. I sink against the mattress with relief, but the throbbing between my legs is so intense, I'm ready to start rubbing myself against the bed.

“Please, Milo. Please, I need you so bad.”

He pushes a finger into my pussy and I cry out, close to coming on the spot given how warmed up my body is.

“Oh, God, yes,” I cry shamelessly, sinking back against his hand. I ride his hand, desperate for friction. Desperate to please him. To take him into my body. My pride is in ribbons on the floor. I’ll throw myself down on the floor with it and beg him to fuck me if he wants me to.

I hear rustling fabric and nearly die with anticipation. I swallow, trying to calm my racing heart.

He pulls his finger out of me but I think it’s just to finish undressing.

*Oh, thank God.*

My pussy throbs with need I’ve never felt before. I’m miserable with it. Fucking miserable. “Please,” I mewl, the empty space desperately inside me needing him to fill it.

“On your tummy.”

I flatten myself against the bed.

My body heats as he drags the bikini bottoms the rest of the way off me.

“You’ve been a bad girl, Kennedy.”

“No,” I say softly, my heart contracting at the accusation.

“Mm-hmm. Are you going to be my good girl tonight?”

“I’ll be your good girl forever,” I promise.

He chuckles warmly and his approval causes relief to trickle through me as if from a tap. “Even better.”

My heart expands as he climbs on the bed behind me. His weight presses down on me as he straddles me.

I sigh. Despite the aching empty feeling between my legs and the utterly agonizing lust, I'm at peace with him on top of me.

He pulls my hair aside and tenderly kisses my bare shoulder. "You're so fucking beautiful, Kennedy."

My whole being overflows with pleasure.

"You could make a man crazy, you know that?"

I lick my lips, wishing he would stick his finger or his cock in my mouth so I can suck on him, but not wanting to make demands. He already accused me of being bad, and I'd rather die than ever hear those words on his lips again.

His greedy lips trail over my shoulder to the extremely sensitive back of my neck. "You make *me* crazy, you know that?"

"I only ever want to please you," I breathe.

"Yeah?"

I nod.

"You do please me, Kennedy. Immensely."

My *relief* is immense. "Good. That makes me happy."

He kisses the nape of my neck and sends shivers down my spine, then he sucks the breath from my lungs when he rumbles, "You want to get fucked, pretty girl?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Please."

I'm not above begging at this point, but his hot kisses on the side of my face tell me he's satisfied with my answer. "Then spread those perfect thighs and show me that pretty pussy. I want it on display for me."

As soon as he moves off me, I do as he says, spreading my thighs wide and showing him my pussy.

Somewhere in the back of my mind whispers the thought that I should feel self-conscious being so exposed, but I'm not. All I feel is anticipation and excitement when I feel his hands on my ass and sliding down my thighs. He makes me wait while he looks at me, then he licks his finger and presses just the tip against my clit.

My legs shake and I nearly launch myself off the bed.

"Stay still," he orders.

Oh, god. How?

I swallow, digging my fingers into the bedding and clutching tighter, trying with all my might not to move as he presses against my clit again.

All the muscles in my thighs have turned to jelly. He has me so needy and desperate, just the touch of his finger is like pressing on the orgasm button and my god, I want to come.

He teases it with his fingertip and I cry out, gasping and moving against his finger as tremors of pleasure ripple through me.

He slaps my ass hard, even harder than before.

I yelp with surprise. "I'm sorry," I say quickly.

"You get pleasure when I say you can have it, not when you feel like taking it," he states.

My skin is already on fire, but my cheeks burn even hotter at the reprimand. "Yes. I understand. I'm sorry."

"I can see how much you want me." His breath is warm on my flesh as he softly kisses my thigh, then darts his tongue out to collect a trickle of arousal. "It's dripping down your legs," he murmurs roughly. "Fucking delicious."

God, I could die with mortification or arousal, I'm not sure which one will get me first.

The bed creaks and a moment later, I feel him lying on the bed beneath my pussy. He grips my thighs hard, pulling me down until my pussy is sitting on his face.

I cry out at the shock of his scruff on my sensitive, aroused flesh, then I cry out more sharply as he runs his tongue over my slit, flicking my clit with the tip of his tongue, then quickly moving back to kiss my entrance.

I'm left gasping for air, clutching for purchase, and afraid I'm going to smother him. I try to lift myself up, but his iron grip on my thighs makes it impossible.

"You sit your pretty little ass on my face and let me enjoy your pussy."

"Milo..."

"You're a good girl, aren't you?" he reminds me.

I miss a beat. "Yes," I say reluctantly. "But—"

"No buts. Good girls do as they're told."

He delves into my wetness and I cry out at the intense pleasure of his tongue inside me. It's almost embarrassing how soaked I am, but my initial instinct of embarrassment quickly melts away when he groans with pleasure, pulling my pussy even closer so he can take more of me into his mouth.

Oh my god.

I grab aimlessly at the bedding as his greedy tongue laps at my pussy. My whole body shudders.

He knows how badly I need to come, but he still tortures me with his slow exploration.

I know better than to try to control the movement. It kills me, but I let him lick and suck at his leisure. I don't complain when his scruff brushes my sensitive inner

thighs or when I need to come so desperately I think I might implode.

I let him do things his way and just enjoy the ride.

He devours me, then, once he's had his fill, he does what he could have done at any time to give me relief.

I cry out sharply when his tongue hits my clit. That's almost all it takes, I want him so fucking bad. Before I can explode, he sucks on my clit, sending an almost violent shudder of pleasure coursing through my body.

"Oh my god," I cry, feeling a little lightheaded. "Milo!"

My thighs tremor and I try to hold on but I can't. I cry out, an electric shock of tingly pleasure bursting open inside me as I ride his face, thrusting against his skilled tongue and crying out again and again as the sensations rock me.

The orgasm lasts longer than I expect it to. My whole body is weak in the aftermath. I can't move. I can't breathe properly.

"Oh my god," I cry softly as he climbs behind me on the bed and wrenches my thighs apart.

That orgasm hit so hard my head aches a little. I'm practically seeing stars, and then I feel the swollen head of his cock lined up at my entrance. Even though it feels impossible to take more stimulation right now, I desperately want him inside me.

If only my legs would change from their liquid form back into muscles.

Mercifully, he doesn't wait for me to recover. He lifts my ass back up, then pushes the tip of his cock into my drenched pussy.

"You ready, baby?"

"Yes. God, yes."



He eases in just an inch or so. Even though I'm almost embarrassingly wet, his cock is thick and it's a tight fit. It feels foreign, but not painful. Not for me, at least. From the way his fingers dig into my hips and his groan as he pushes into me, I'm wondering if it's uncomfortable for him.

"Am I too tight?" I ask, concerned.

"Christ, Kennedy. Don't say things like that."

He pushes deeper, stretching me, and that's when the discomfort starts. I try not to tense up, breathing through it as he shoves his cock deeper into my tight passage.

"Fucking Christ," he growls, holding my hips and forcing himself deeper inside me. "You are so fucking tight. Fuck."

"Does it feel good?"

"Fuck, yes. It feels like heaven."

That makes me happy.

"Jesus Christ. No wonder he started being such an asshole."

"What?"

"Nothing."

I'm vaguely worried about what he said, but more than that, I'm finally full of him.

When he eases back, I feel a twinge of resistance. I want to tempt him to stay inside me forever, so when he thrusts forward, I rock back, taking him even deeper than he was before.

*Fuck.*

I welcome the discomfort, though. It's a tight fit, but Milo is *inside me*. A little smile tugs at the corners of my

mouth just before he shoves all the way in and causes me to wince.

He's big. I was well-prepared, but the pressure of having him all the way inside me is still intense.

"You okay?" His voice is strained with the effort of keeping still.

I nod, wanting him to do what feels good for him. "I'm good. You don't have to stop."

He laughs a little. "Trust me, baby, I'm not fucking stopping. You're just so tight, and I don't want to hurt you."

I rock my hips, forcing the friction I know he must want. I want it, too. I don't care if it's not comfortable.

His hand slides over my ass affectionately. "I see I'm going to have to teach my pretty girl some patience."

My insides warm at being called his pretty girl, but my skin is hot and my pussy is desperate for the friction he's denying me as he remains still inside me.

It's harder than usual not to fight him because even now, there's some part of me that's so afraid to lose him. Even with him impaling me with his cock, as deep inside me as humanly possible.

I need him closer.

I need to know he's not going anywhere.

But I have to let him control the pace.

There's a word that's bubbled up inside me a couple of times tonight but I haven't uttered it because we haven't used it before and I don't know if he'll like it. It feels natural, though, so I decide to try it out.

Resting my forehead against the mattress and forcing my hips to remain still even though I want to rock against his cock so fucking bad, I say, "Yes, sir."

His fingers bite into my thighs. For a fleeting moment, I feel a flash of fear that maybe he didn't like it, but then he rumbles, "Oh, you *are* a good girl," and reaches around to toy with my clit.

I gasp at the sensation of being so full of his cock and letting him play with me. I try not to move since that's what he wants, and I want him to keep rewarding me.

It's dizzying, the pleasure he makes me feel. He's so good with his hands, he has me moaning and smothering cries in the mattress faster than feels possible, but just when the tension is tightest and I'm panting for the release, he stops.

My heart hammers in my chest. It's all I can hear.

I groan my misery into the bedding as Milo reclaims his previous position, grasping my hips. He pulls almost all the way out, then drives into me all at once. I cry out at the invasion, but this time he doesn't ask if I'm okay. He knows I am.

We're so connected when he moves inside me that I breathe a sigh of relief as he fucks me. He's so hard and thick, dominating my pussy, marking my flesh. His fingers dig into my hips so firmly, I think I might bruise, but I welcome those, too. I welcome any mark he wants to make on me.

I moan and whine, taking his cock with more enthusiasm every time he pounds into me. I come to love the sound of his flesh hitting mine. When I hear it, it means he's filling me up, giving me every inch of him.

I don't care if it's uncomfortable, I don't even care if it hurts a little; I want every inch. I want him to make me sore, and then I want him to fuck me some more. I want to be fully and completely possessed by him.

Pleasure vibrates through my body as he drives into me with so much force, his balls slap against me and the

bed moves. Fuck, I like that.

Clutching desperately at the bedding, I try to hold on, but the tension is mounting. The friction of his thick cock moving against my walls makes it hard to draw a breath.

Then he reaches around and presses a finger to my clit again while he fucks me.

My willpower shatters in an instant.

Blissful abandon claims me as I fly over the edge, tingling pleasure from the pressure on my clit sweeping over me. He pulls his finger away too soon—or that's what I think at first, but he quickly replaces it with his palm, pressing hard and rubbing against my clit.

I groan and grind into his palm. A desperate cry is wrenched from me at the constant, skillful pressure he puts on me. I can't breathe or think, I can only rub myself against his firm palm, desperate to extend the dizzying pleasure.

I feel something building deeper inside me, but I'm too focused on riding his palm to think about it.

Until it hits.

I scream, wanton and utterly incapable of controlling myself as my pussy convulses around his thick cock, squeezing him between my walls as an orgasm rocks me while I'm still tingling and shaking from the first orgasm. It's too much to take, but my god, it's magnificent.

Lightheaded, I sink against the bed, gasping and moaning through the most intense sensation I've ever felt in my life. It's not fleeting like orgasms I've had before. It lingers and rolls over me like ocean waves hitting the shore and washing it away.

I'm spent and lightheaded, but my body still moves with the force of Milo's frantic thrusts as he says, "Fuck,"

and drives deep for a few more strokes. I know my pussy was squeezing him, and he said I was already tight. Peace washes over me as he drives deep and gives me every drop of his cum.

“Thank you,” I murmur softly, or I try to, but my body is struggling to do anything but lie here like a mess of flesh and bones.

He destroyed me with that orgasm.

My god.

He pulls his cock out of me and collapses on the bed beside me. Moving is impossible, but I still try to scoot toward him.

Seeing my struggle, he smirks and grabs me with his strong arms, yanking me against him.

“That was... I don’t even have words,” I tell him. “You’re a god.”

He laughs, and the sound makes me so happy.

Even though we’re as close as we can be when our bodies aren’t sexually connected, I want to be closer to him. I kiss his body wherever my lips will reach. I want to worship him.

“Whatever we have planned for the rest of the trip, cancel it,” I murmur. “All I want to do is have sex with you.”

Smirking, he says, “Thought you were excited to head over to the island.”

“Nope. Fuck the island. I’m excited to have you inside me again. That’s all I’m excited about.”

He laughs, pulling me in so he can kiss my neck. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” I tell him, nuzzling close. “So fucking much.”



## Chapter thirty-three

Milo

Sunlight streams in through the bedroom window. Beside me, the loveliest woman in the entire fucking universe lies tangled up in our bed sheets, her perfect tits pressed against my bare side.

I'm in paradise, all right, but it has little to do with the beach vacation.

It's her. This angel lying here beside me. I can't believe she's mine.

But she is.

And since I'm a greedy bastard, I have to make sure she's mine to love and protect for the rest of my life.

Careful not to wake her, I ease out from under her and climb off the bed. Piles of wrinkled clothing lay crumpled on the floor all around me.

I need to get clean clothes out of the suitcase so I'm not walking around with my dick out when room service brings up breakfast, but I don't want to risk waking her up, either. Maybe I'll just grab the robe out of the bathroom.

I look down at Kennedy sleeping alone in the bed and feel a twinge of regret at leaving her.

I want to stay in bed and soak up every moment I have with her, but I know we have the rest of the day to laze around.

All we have booked is a massage, so besides eating and hydrating, I can fuck her pretty little ass until neither of us can possibly go another round.

Then I can hold her. Kiss her. Touch her. Talk to her. Just generally enjoy her company.

It's going to be a hell of a day.

I grab my cell phone off the night stand and see a bunch of missed notifications on the screen. I'm on vacation, so I ignore all of them except the one from my son.

He sent it sometime in the middle of the night. As a father, I wonder what had him up so late.

I suppose I wonder that not in a fatherly capacity, too.

Jonathan's text could be harmless, just checking in, but when I read his, "Having fun?" especially noting the time he sent it, I can't help but detect a note of jealousy. Probably salty because he can't barge in and stop me from fucking her when we're in another goddamn country.

Hell, that's half the reason we're *in* another country right now.

I type back, "Sure am," but before I press send, my gaze flickers to Kennedy.

My eyes rove over her bare back and messy hair. She got some sun yesterday at the beach, so the contrast between her sun-kissed skin and the stark white bedding makes her look even sexier. She's clearly naked, but enough of the sheet is draped over her body. Nothing is showing that shouldn't be.

On impulse, I snap a photo of her lying there, well-fucked and sleeping peacefully with the ocean visible through the window behind her. I attach the photo and erase my first message, typing instead, "We're having a lovely time. Thank you for asking."

Even though he was up late, he must be awake already because he responds immediately. "She looks



happy. Must be dreaming about me.”

I laugh a little despite myself. “Yeah, I’m sure that’s it,” I text back. “She wanted to buy you a toy in the gift shop yesterday.”

“I like toys,” he answers.

“It was a sand pail,” I inform him.

“Not the kind of toy I’d like to use on her, but give me a minute to get creative. I’m sure I could figure out a way to make it fun.”

I roll my eyes, shifting the conversation away from Kennedy. “Everything okay at home?”

“Yeah, all good,” he answers, but I can feel his disinterest. “I appreciate you sharing that picture, but why don’t you move the sheet and send me a few more.”

I shake my head, swiping the text screen away now that I’ve checked in and bragged a bit.

I plug my phone back in on the charger since I don’t really need it, then I head to the bathroom to take a piss before I order us some breakfast.

Since we have a suite, the bedroom is separate from the living area. Kennedy doesn’t stir even when room service brings a breakfast cart to the room.

Once the guy is gone, I take the food off the cart and quietly move everything out to the table on our private balcony.

The weather is perfect and our view out here is fucking stunning.

Not better than my view in the bed, but magnificent all the same.

I like to let Kennedy sleep so she gets all the rest she needs, but I’m eager as hell to wake her up, too.

Before I do, I make the last stop at my carryon bag.

Kennedy asked if I was an anxious traveler when we went through security and fucking TSA decided to pull us aside to open our bags. I was sweating bullets when the guy carelessly flung my case open. He only pulled out the sunscreen Kennedy had packed in my bag because she was out of room in hers, but all I could focus on was the ring box that was clearly visible right on top.

I was sure Kennedy would see it, but she was too focused on arguing with the TSA agent about the sunscreen.

Thankfully, she didn't notice the jewelry box.

I watched her closely for a few minutes to make sure she wasn't just being nice. I knew she wouldn't be able to play it cool if she had seen the ring box, if she actually knew what it was.

She didn't, so the surprise isn't ruined.

I had room service send up an extra small domed plate, the ones they use for desserts.

I lift the top now and put the ring box under it, then I replace the lid.

I know it's fast, and I know she's young, but I don't care.

I'm not willing to give Kennedy up, and if I'm being honest, I want to make my intentions clear as soon as possible given Jonathan's interest in her. Clearly, it hasn't fizzled out yet. Once he realizes how serious I am about her, I'm hoping it will start fizzling a little faster.

After last night, though, I can't blame him. Kennedy's body is fucking incredible. Now I know why he didn't want to let me into it once he learned I hadn't fucked her yet. He probably figured there was no chance I'd give her up once I experienced the paradise between her lovely thighs.

Not that I would have, anyway.

I fucking adore Kennedy. Every single cell of her. I'd love her even if I never got to fuck her.

Sex with her last night certainly sweetened an already irresistible pot, though.

Fuck, her body.

My cock stirs at the memory of her dripping cunt, the way the muscles in her thighs tensed when I licked her, the way she cried out and pushed herself against my face, her agonized cries of pleasure as I drove into her and drove her over the edge again and again.

The way her sweet fucking pussy choked the life out of my cock.

*Fuck.*

I try to shake it off, but my cock aches with the need to get inside her.

I can't fuck her right now. Her goddamn breakfast will get cold.

She's still asleep when I get back to the bedroom. I sit down on the edge of the bed, shifting to accommodate my hard-on. Then I reach over, lightly grazing her back with just my fingertips.

Her eyes flutter open, but she's still sleepy.

I smile fondly, grazing her bottom lip with my thumb. "Good morning, beautiful."

"Mm," she murmurs, her countenance brightening with pleasure as she looks up at me, rolling onto her back so I can see her pretty little tits. "Good morning, Mr. Granville."

Fuck, that teasing tone of hers.

That body I can't get enough of.

It's hard enough not to fuck her, and then she has to go and do that.

I lean down to kiss her pretty lips, absently caressing a tit as I do. “How did you sleep?”

She wraps her arms around my neck, pulling me down on top of her. “Best sleep ever. You?”

My gaze drifts down to her lovely tits on full display for me. “You make it really fucking hard to surprise you with breakfast, you know that?”

She giggles and pulls me closer, practically offering herself to me on a silver platter.

I know I can have her if I want her. She’ll happily spread those lovely thighs and take me into her body. I can kiss her neck and her tits, I can devour her mouth and possess every inch of her sweet body, pump her full of my cum and have her begging me for seconds.

It’s tempting as hell, but I think of the breakfast.

I think of the ring.

I don’t want to wait. I need to see the look on her face when she sees it. I need to know if she really wants forever with me.

*What if she says no?*

She won’t say no.

I shove the thought away, but it doesn’t go far.

My phone lights up on the bedside table and her gaze flickers to it.

I grab her chin, dragging her gaze back to me.

“Come on,” I tell her, leaning in to give her one more brief kiss on the lips. “Let’s eat.”

“Should you check that?” she murmurs, glancing at the phone.

I take her hand and haul her off the bed, pausing to kiss those tempting tits a few times and make her laugh

before I swat her on the ass and send her to the bathroom.

When she comes back out, she's wearing a white terrycloth robe and fuzzy slippers. Her wild curls are frizzy this morning. They were last night, too, after we played at the beach.

I like her hair in its natural state. I like her messy and happy. As long as she's happy, nothing else matters.

Out on the balcony, I decide not to let her sit on her side of the table and eat. I sit down and pull her on my lap, then we take turns eating off the same plate.

She likes being close to me, so she doesn't mind. She rests her head on my shoulder and kisses my neck between bites. She wiggles her ass and deliberately makes trouble, smirking as she leans forward to grab some fresh fruit. Her eyes dance as she pops it into her mouth, meeting my gaze as she licks the juice from her lips.

It wasn't the plan. I wanted to wait until we were done and tell her to take the dome off the dessert plate. The ring was supposed to be what she looked at when I uttered the words, and I was supposed to make a romantic speech I've been running through in my head on and off since I pulled the trigger and bought the ring.

But I can't wait.

"Marry me."

Her face falls—not with disappointment, but shock. Her brown eyes widen, the glint of playful mischievousness disappearing as she stares at me in shock. "What?"

She's not sure I'm serious.

I hold onto her waist to keep her stable on my lap, then I drag the dome off the plate and pass her the ring box.

She takes it. Gapes at it. Doesn't even open it.

She looks back at me and breathes, "What?"

"I know it's fast," I tell her. "But I want you forever. I don't need the next year together to know that, and since I already know, I figured I'd ask."

She shakes her head, then presses a hand against her chest. "My God, you're serious."

I nod at the ring box. "Open it."

Her fingers shake as she opens the box, then she draws in a breath looking down at the ring. "It's beautiful, Milo," she whispers.

It's an Asscher cut diamond in a platinum setting, has an art deco look I thought she'd like.

Her gaze darts to mine. "Can I put it on?"

Her question surprises a chuckle out of me. "Of course, you can put it on. It's yours. If you want it, that is." I say it teasingly, but I'm a little tense that she hasn't answered me yet.

"Of course I want it." She sounds nervous but excited. Her teeth sink into her bottom lip as she slides the band on her left ring finger. It sparkles as she moves her hand, gazing at it wistfully.

Like something you want, not something you have.

She swallows and looks up at me. "Are you sure you want to marry me?"

My eyebrows rise. "Yes, I'm sure."

"Like, really, really sure? You're not asking to be nice?"

I laugh, pulling her close and cradling her face in my hand. "I wouldn't propose marriage to be nice, Kennedy. If you're not ready, you can just say that. I won't be mad."

“No, it’s not that. *Of course* my answer is yes. I absolutely want to marry you. I want to keep you forever. I just... I’m afraid that you might be caught up or something, and what if you change your mind? I’d die if we got engaged and *then* you broke up with me.”

I shake my head. “Not going to happen. I’d marry you on this trip if you were game, but I imagine you want a wedding.”

Her brow furrows ever so slightly for just a moment, then it clears and she smiles. It’s a slow smile at first, but it widens as she starts to think about it. “I *would* like to see you in a dashing suit. And I do kinda want a dress. Plus, the boys should be there,” she says, her gaze darting to mine uncertainly.

I nod. “Of course the boys should be there.”

She looks back down at the ring. “My god, you *proposed* to me.”

“I did.” A smile tugs at my lips. “And you still haven’t given me a clear answer.”

Her doubts seem to have cleared, making way for an unstoppable smile that seems to take up more and more of her pretty face until she’s practically glowing. “Yes! Are you kidding me? Yes, yes, yes. Of course I’ll marry you.”

Relief sweeps through me, but I don’t show it as I smirk at her. “That’s much better.”

She grins and shifts positions so she’s straddling me. She’s naked beneath the robe, so when she sits on my lap, her bare ass rests on my thighs, her pussy right over my cock. She shifts her hips deliberately, trying to wake it up.

She doesn’t have to work very hard.

She smiles at the new shiny piece of jewelry on her slim finger, then she reaches down with the same hand

and grabs my cock. She lifts herself a bit, guiding me to her entrance, then she eases down, taking me inch by inch into her tight little pussy.

*Fuck me.*

My fingers dig into her hips as I sink into paradise.

I put her on the pill as soon as we were sure she wasn't pregnant, and I'm grateful now. I filled that beautiful pussy full of my cum twice last night, and I plan to do it again this morning.

I feel fucking enormous inside her. She's just so fucking tight. Even though I know she took me last night, I'm still worried about hurting her, so I try to restrain myself for the first few strokes, letting her body adjust to me.

Kennedy runs her fingers through my hair, leaving tender kisses all over my face as she rides me.

I love this woman so fucking much. My grip on her hair tightens and I thrust into her harder. She gasps, meeting my thrusts and riding me in perfect rhythm.

When she comes, she muffles her cries in my shoulder.

When I come, I groan shamelessly, thrusting deep into her pussy and filling her up.

I stay inside her, both of us catching our breath as we hold each other tight.

When she recovers, she leans back to look at me. Then she smiles. "My future husband."

A helpless smile tugs at my lips and I caress the side of her face. "My future wife."

"I love the sound of that."

I kiss her lips softly. "Good."



She sighs and looks at her ring again, then she wraps her arms around my neck, still with my cock inside her. She locks her legs around me to keep us locked together, sighing with contentment as she rests her head on my shoulder again. “Thank you,” she says softly.

“For what? The ring?”

She shakes her head. “That, too. It’s unbelievably beautiful. But just... thank you for making me so happy.”

My grip on her tightens almost protectively. “You never have to thank me for that. It’s my job. If I ever stop making you happy, you kick my ass.”

She laughs. “Okay.”

A moment passes. A perfect fucking moment.

I’m hesitant to break the silence because it’s so peaceful, holding her like this, still inside her body that I never want to leave. I don’t want the moment to ever end. “Thank you, too.”

“For what?” she murmurs without moving.

“For being mine.”

## Chapter thirty-four

Kennedy

After a perfect week in Mexico, it's time to go home.

I had an amazing time on vacation. Truly the most romantic week of my life.

But I won't lie, I'm happy to go home.

I've never had a family I missed being away from before, so it's a foreign feeling, but one I could definitely get used to.

Jet's home when we get in, but Jonathan isn't.

The refrigerator is pretty empty, so I go to the grocery store while Milo catches up on some work emails ahead of going back to work tomorrow.

Just walking through the grocery store, it's impossible not to think about how different my life is now. When I went grocery shopping before, it was stressful. There was only so much money, and I never knew when Mom would actually be home. I tried to buy cheap stuff that stretched. Cooking was never really fun.

It's nothing like that now. I have Milo's credit card in my purse, so I don't have to look at the sale ad. Hell, I don't even have to look at *price tags*. I can just pick out whatever I want and put it in my cart and be completely confident knowing when I get to the register, I'll be able to pay for it.

Christmas is right around the corner, so I even grab extra stuff to make Christmas cookies for the guys. I don't know which ones they like yet, but I figure I can't go wrong with a classic chocolate chip.

I grab a yellow bag of chocolate chips and go to drop it in the cart when my gaze drifts casually to movement at the other end of the aisle.

My heart stops beating and the blood freezes in my veins when I see the faded denim hugging familiar hips; the straggly, frizzy blonde hair of the woman I never wanted to see again.

My mother's moving at a brisk pace and doesn't notice me until she's halfway down the aisle.

I'm frozen in place, all the breath sucked from my lungs, still clutching a bag of chocolate chips.

I think I'm going to be sick.

"Wow, guess you're alive. Sure haven't been talking to your momma, have you? Guess you don't need me anymore."

Her hateful gaze rakes over me. She takes in the nice cashmere sweater Milo bought me, the \$300 purse sitting in the seat of the cart, then her gaze locks on the diamond ring on my finger and her eyes go wide.

She grabs my wrist. I drop the chocolate chips into the cart and lack the power to yank my hand away as she brings it closer. "Is that a ring?" she asks, her voice low and hateful. "Is that a fucking *engagement* ring?"

She looks to me for an answer, but I can't speak.

"You're *engaged*?" she demands, her voice rising.

A woman at the other end of the aisle looks our way, then hastily leaves the aisle to avoid us.

*Let go of me.*

I tell my throat to work, to let the words out and get her hands off me, but I can't find a single syllable. The thought surfaces that she might not be here alone. That *he* could be with her. But he's not in this aisle, and I can't really imagine them grocery shopping together.

The thought of him turns my stomach and I finally yank my hand out of her grip.

I look down at the cart, my thoughts discombobulated. Do I have everything I need? I think the chocolate chips were the last thing.

I need to get the fuck out of here.

“You were sleeping with him the whole fucking time, weren’t you?” she demands furiously.

I shake my head, but then I stop myself.

I don’t owe her any explanations.

I need to get away from her.

“You expect me to believe you’re engaged now and you weren’t screwing him all along? I bet you were sleeping with him while we were together. That’s why he never wanted to sleep with me, he’d just go over to the next room and fuck my slut daughter instead.”

Bile rises at the thought of him with her.

*Fuck it.*

I grab my purse and abandon the cart, turning and practically running away from her. I’m panicked about her following me, but we’re in a public place. She won’t do that in public, will she?

I’m not sure. I fumble around in my purse for my phone as I make a beeline for the exit and fly out the door on shaky legs that can hardly do the job of carrying me.

I have Milo’s SUV since I don’t have a car of my own to replace the one my mother took out of the driveway. Milo has been looking at them, but we haven’t made a purchase yet.

I look behind me before I open the car door to make sure she isn’t following, then I fling myself into the

automobile, pulling the door closed and quickly locking them.

My hands shake as I try to text. I get aggravated, so I push the microphone button and say, "Is Jet there? Could he bring you up here to drive me home? I just ran into my stupid mother at the store and right now my muscles are the consistency of jelly. I don't trust myself to drive."

The message registers as read and then my phone is ringing a second later.

"Where are you? Are you okay?" Milo demands.

"I'm fine. I'm in the car. I just... I think I forgot—no, not I think." I shake my head, frustrated with myself for being so out of sorts. "I *did* forget all the groceries. They're in a cart in the baking aisle. I should go back in, but I don't want to run into her."

"No, don't go back in there. Jet and I will be there in a few minutes. Just stay in the car. If she comes up to the car and starts harassing you, call the police."

I feel like an idiot hiding in the car.

I also have no peace.

The balloon of dread doesn't go down until movement registers and I look up to see Milo standing outside my door.

Immediately, my stomach starts to feel less nauseous. I start to feel safe again.

The look on his handsome face is dark and thunderous, and it fills me with an even greater sense of safety.

I unlock the doors and he rips mine open, grabbing me and pulling me out of the car.

I go into his arms, sliding mine around him and holding on tight.

“Are you okay?” he rumbles, absently grabbing a handful of my hair and pulling me even tighter against his chest.

I nod. “Yeah. I’m sorry, I feel stupid, I just...”

He doesn’t let me finish. “You have nothing to feel stupid for.”

A chilly gust of wind blows past us, but I’m warm in Milo’s embrace. I feel him turn his head above me, then he asks Jet if he can run in and get the groceries I left behind.

“Of course,” Jet says. “Baking aisle?”

I peek out from the shelter of Milo’s chest and nod. “Thanks, Jet.”

“Come on,” Milo says, walking me back toward the car. “Let’s get you home.”

I feel Milo looking over at me as we drive down the road, but I’m quiet and unresponsive. My head is full, my heart is heavy, and I don’t feel like talking. All the energy I had as I thought about making Christmas cookies for the guys while dinner cooked is gone. My mother’s thorny words stick in the soft parts of my brain to haunt me later.

At the root of it is just the simple yet incomprehensible fact that she doesn’t care about me the way mothers are supposed to. That she never has. Even though logically I know it’s her that something is wrong with, I can’t quiet the faint voice at the back of my mind that whispers maybe it’s me. I must be unlovable if my own mother can’t even love me.

But I know it’s not true because I am loved, just not by her.

It makes sense that some people just aren’t cut out to love me.

But she's the one person in my whole life who was *supposed* to.

I found love where I wasn't supposed to find it.

I can imagine the things she says about me to her friends. How she bashes me and makes up things that never happened about me tempting her boyfriends, and how I'm living with the one that gave in to the temptation. I can imagine the sympathetic headshakes. Poor her. What a backstabbing slut of a daughter she raised.

I wish it didn't sting knowing the way she sees me. I know it shouldn't. Most of the time it doesn't, it's just right now and only because I saw her...

Will I have moments like this all my life? Breaks in the happiness when her poison seeps in through a crack and reaches me. We live in the same damn town. We're bound to cross paths every once in a while, and even if we don't, just knowing I *might* see her... I'll be looking over my shoulder, on my guard every time I go somewhere I know she goes, too.

The thought makes me sick.

I wish she'd just go away.

I wish I never had to see her again.

She can take her bullshit narratives and her complete ineptitude as a parent and fuck off right out of my life.

She's *already* out of my life, I remind myself.

Today was just a ghost sighting. Maybe I won't be haunted forever.

Maybe someday she'll leave, or maybe we will. We could get a house on the beach. I loved being at the beach.

"Do you think we'd ever move?"

Since my question comes seemingly out of the blue, Milo looks over at me. “Move?”

I nod, looking out the window instead of at him. “The boys are both old enough that they’ll be moving out on their own eventually, right? Jonathan graduates this summer, and Jet will head to Massachusetts for college in the fall. It’ll just be us in this big house.”

“Do you not like the house?” he asks lightly.

“I love the house, I just...” I trail off, realizing I’m being ridiculous. He isn’t going to sell the house he’s raised his family in and move just so I don’t have to see my mother on occasion. “Never mind. I was just wondering if it’s something you ever thought about.”

He considers it for a moment, then says, “Well, my work is here, but we have offices all over. I didn’t *plan* to move when the boys did, but plans can change. If this isn’t where you want to live, then we’ll talk about it, look at the places you’d rather be, see if we can make it work.”

Finally, I look over at him. “Really?”

His gaze locks with mine. “Of course. You’ll be my wife, Kennedy. Why would we stay somewhere that doesn’t make both of us happy?”

He sounds so genuine when he asks that, like it would never cross his mind to stay somewhere I didn’t want to be, even if it’s a place he’s attached to.

I really hit the jackpot with him.

“I love you,” I tell him, shaking my head in disbelief at my luck.

He glances over, startled by the sudden profession of love when a moment ago I didn’t even want to look at him. A slow smirk claims his lips and his blue eyes glint with amusement. “I love you, too.”



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When we get home, Milo helps me unpack the groceries and offers to help get dinner cooking, but I need the busywork so I tell him I don't need any help.

I'm feeling much better now that we're home. I just want to focus on following a new recipe for a bit to banish her even farther from my mind.

I can tell Jet's a bit worried about me because he sticks around and helps me unpack groceries, too. I love Jet, but he lives in his own world. Before today, I don't think it has ever once occurred to him to help someone unpack groceries without being asked to.

He does so he can keep an eye on me. Once he's sure I'm fine, he heads upstairs to tinker for a bit before Jonathan gets home and we summon him back down for family time.

I'm checking the dinner recipe I have open on my phone to make sure I measured out the right amount of seasoning when I see Milo has airdropped me something.

I glance up with a mild frown, but he merely nods at my phone.

I tap the screen to accept whatever he's dropping me. My phone opens up to a video of a beautiful house in Worcester, Massachusetts. It has a bold red front door and aged brick exterior. It's nestled in the woods like a storybook home. I watch the video tour. The interior is gorgeous, but it's huge with more bedrooms than we need.

Then I see the price listed in the description and I nearly choke.

"Why?" I look up at Milo accusingly. "Why would you show me this beautiful house we can't afford?"

He smirks. “Who says we can’t afford it?”

“Um, the price tag.”

I don’t actually know how much money Milo makes, but I know “over budget” when I see it.

“This house is paid off,” he tells me. “If we sell it, I’ll have a hell of a down payment on the next one. That means we can up the budget a bit. What do you think of it?”

“I mean, it’s gorgeous. If those windows open up and cute little birds in kerchiefs perch on the window sill and sing every morning, I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“It’s in the same city as Jet’s school, so he could even live there with us and commute if he wanted to. There are a few colleges there. Maybe one you’d like.”

I cock an eyebrow at him as another airdrop appears on my screen. “Really?”

He shrugs, looking down at his phone. “Thought you might like a challenge. Or you can be a trophy wife who shops and visits spas during the days while I work. Whatever you want to do.”

I shake my head, but I scroll down to get a look at the campus, anyway. It’s nice, and a couple of the spotlighted classes do look interesting.

“I thought you were over there working,” I state.

“I was. Working on making my wife happy.”

I shoot him a look. He grins and winks at me.

Before I can say any more, I hear the front door close and my gaze jerks up. I know who it will be before anyone enters the room, but I still feel relieved when it’s Jonathan who comes sauntering in and not someone even more uninvited.

Glancing from me to his dad, he says, “You could hear a fucking pin drop in here. Are you two already out

of shit to talk about, or did I interrupt something?”

“We were just debating whether I should contribute something to society or live a luxurious life as a kept woman.”

“Got it. Well, if you want my two cents—”

“I don’t.”

Jonathan goes on as if I haven’t spoken. “—Why not both?”

“Of course that’s your answer,” Milo says dryly.

He shrugs unapologetically. “She won’t be hot forever. When her physical charms fade, she’ll need to have a well-exercised brain or you’ll get bored.” He glances at me. “Take advantage of having a sugar daddy to pay for it and take some classes. Get a degree. Maybe you’ll use it later, maybe you won’t, but at least you’ll have it. I’m an advocate that after high school, everyone should spend some time in college or a similarly educational setting, regardless of what they do in life. Why waste your potential? Plus, life’s too short to spend it being a dumbass.”

“Such wisdom,” I say dryly. “Maybe I’ll skip college and you can be my teacher.”

“Sure. You can have all my old textbooks. But I don’t work for free,” he says with a wink. “We can talk about your payment plan later.”

“Ugh.” I turn to drop my measuring cup in the sink. “That’s no way to talk to your future stepmother.”

“Ew, don’t be gross,” he says.

When I look back and see him grimacing, I realize he doesn’t know we’re engaged.

I don’t know why I feel a little queasy at the thought, or why I feel so uneasy searching for the words.

He won't care. We went over this. He's totally fine with me and his dad...

I still find myself speechless for the second time today as I hold up my left hand to let the sparkly diamond do the talking for me.

I watch his face as his gaze catches on it, but other than a slight widening of his eyes, I can't read his reaction. His dark eyebrows rise and he nods slowly as he processes, but I can't tell what he's thinking.

His gaze flickers to his dad who is also watching him closely. "Huh. I guess congratulations are in order."

Milo clears his throat. "We were going to tell you at dinner."

"Right. Sorry," I murmur. We were going to tell "the boys," but I didn't think we would have to tell Jonathan separately. I guess we didn't *have to*, I just *did*.

My chest feels fluttery and tight at the same time. The cavity seems to shrink as Jonathan walks closer. My eyes widen as he grabs my wrist, but he's just taking a closer look at the ring.

He's so close, though.

Too close.

I can smell his cologne and it reminds me of his bed sheets.

Cotton, like the inside of my mouth right now.

He looks up at me and smiles. It's a half smile, laced with mischief. "Nice rock."

I will disintegrate into a pile of dust right here in the kitchen if I don't get a drink immediately. I tug my hand free from his firm grip and turn around, momentarily abandoning the remnants of dinner prep to grab a bottle of water. "Anyone else want a drink?"

"You know I'm always thirsty," Jonathan says lazily.

My cheeks heat. I grab two bottles of water.

I feel his gaze on me the whole time and it's mildly irksome.

"Thank you," he says condescendingly as I pass him a bottle.

The kitchen feels too small sometimes when he's in it. This is one of those times.

He's in my space now because he came over to look at the ring. I don't want to walk over and stand right by him, but I need to clean up and he's in my way.

He can sense my reluctance to stand close to him. A decent person might move to spare me the discomfort, but he leans against the counter and crosses his arms, waiting to see what I'll do.

God, he's such a jerk.

I sigh and roll my eyes at him, then walk over and hip bump him out of my way. "Move, you brat."

His smirk transforms into a grin. "I'm older than you, stray. You can marry my dad and live your best trophy wife life all you want, but you're never gonna be my stepmom."

"That's what you think," I say saucily, grabbing the knife and cutting board off the counter and moving them to the sink. "Until I ground you."

"You can try," he says smoothly, looking over at me and letting his eyes travel down my body. "We'll see who ends up grounded."

I feel my face warming, but before I have to respond, Milo cuts in. "Why don't you go get your brother and tell him it's time to come downstairs for the night."

Jonathan's gaze flickers over his shoulder to look back at his father. He doesn't appear to appreciate being shooed, but he turns and heads for the stairs, anyway.

“Good call,” I say, nodding now that Jonathan is out of earshot. “Get rid of the troublemaker.”

Milo smirks, moving off his seat and walking over to me. I’m still in the process of cleaning up the mess I made preparing dinner, but when he catches me around the waist and pulls me against him, I leave it and wrap my arms around him instead.

“I’ll finish cleaning up,” he tells me. “Why don’t you go upstairs, too. Change out of those clothes and into something you can relax in for the rest of the night.”

“Mm,” I murmur as he leans down to steal a kiss. “Any requests?”

“Something sexy. No panties.”

Awareness tingles down my spine and dances over my nerve endings. “But we won’t be alone. The boys will be down here.”

“So wear a robe over it,” he says simply, letting his hand slide down to the small of my back, then lower to grab my ass before his fingers push between my thighs. Even with the stiff denim between us, heat gathers low in my belly. “I just want to know this pretty pussy is bare and within reach,” he rumbles, stealing another kiss on the lips.

I sigh against his mouth, then nip gently at his lips. “Why are you so sexy?”

He chuckles, gently tugging me away so he can finish cleaning up. When I turn to go, he smacks me on the ass.

I toss a flirty look at him over my shoulder, and I’m still a bit flushed when I start up the stairs.

So I’m still a bit flushed when I encounter Jonathan in the hallway outside Jet’s room. He’s on his way back down, but he stops when he sees me coming up.

“Miss me?”

I roll my eyes. “Yes. I couldn’t bear to be away from you for 65 seconds.”

He nods like that’s what he expected. The hall is wide enough so I just keep walking, but he turns and follows me toward his dad’s room.

Not too long ago, that would have worried me, but I’m a lot more comfortable with him now.

I still don’t want him following me into Milo’s room, though.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“Changing clothes.”

“What’s wrong with those ones?”

I smile cheekily as I stop outside the bedroom door. “Your dad wants me out of them.”

His eyebrows rise with interest. “You always do what he tells you to?”

“Of course I do.”

“What a good little slut,” he says almost affectionately. “Need some help?”

“I think I can manage,” I assure him.

“You sure? I can help you with that zipper.”

Since I’m wearing a cashmere sweater and jeans and not a dress with a zipper down the back, I cock an eyebrow at him. Then his gaze drops to the zipper of my jeans and my cheeks heat.

“Wow, really?”

He smirks. “I’m just saying.”

“I’m an engaged woman,” I remind him, opening the door and backing into the bedroom.

“Not a dealbreaker for me,” he says, but thankfully doesn’t try to follow me in.

“Engaged to *your dad*.”

“Still not hearing anything that gets in the way of me giving you a quick orgasm before we head back downstairs.”

I crack a smile and close the door in his face.  
“You’re crazy.”

“I’m also good with my hands,” he calls through the door.

I laugh a little to myself since he can’t see me, then I head for the closet to change into something sexier for Milo.



## Chapter thirty-five

Kennedy

I strip off all my clothes and change into a sexy set of lingerie—a black lace cami top that stops at my waist so my belly shows and a little pair of matching black lace and pink silk shorts that barely cover my ass.

I turn in the mirror and smile faintly with approval. He wanted sexy. This definitely fits the bill.

Since I can't be seen this way by anyone who hasn't fucked me, I pull on my little satin robe and tie it around my waist.

The shorts might be more coverage than Milo technically wanted, but they're not really panties, and I'm not wearing panties underneath.

If I didn't wear *anything* like he wanted, I'd risk bending over to grab something and showing all my business to anyone who happened to be behind me. Even *sitting* comfortably when we watch a movie later, I'd be risking flashing somebody.

If only Milo and Jonathan were downstairs, I might not have been as worried about it. They've both seen me in nothing. But I don't want to risk flashing Jet. I would be mortified.

When I get back downstairs, Jet is setting up what appears to be a board game at one end of the dining room table. Milo is in the kitchen filling two glasses with ice water, and Jonathan is collecting pens.

“Are we playing a game?”

I don't mean to sound so surprised, I just haven't played a board game since I was a little kid. My mother wasn't that type of parent. When I was about 12, she

dated this guy who liked Yahtzee! so we would play that when he came over, but she didn't play board games with just me.

I had a couple of board games I got as gifts that I would play with friends when they came over, but I doubt the guys are playing Pretty Pretty Princess.

I can't help smiling at the thought.

"What are you smirking about? Are you a pro at Clue and anticipating your victory?"

I glance over at Jonathan as he stops beside me. "No. I was picturing you in dangly purple earrings and a princess crown."

He cocks an eyebrow. "Not really my color, but I'm sure I could pull it off." His gaze flickers to Jet covertly, as if checking to make sure he's not listening. Then he leans in and murmurs, "Fair warning, Jet's not fun to play board games with. He's too fucking smart. Depending on the luck of the draw, the little bastard will usually have you beat in just a couple of rounds."

"It'll be a short game, then," I remark.

"We usually have to play a few games or it wouldn't even be worth setting up. It can be fun to fuck with him, though. You're fresh meat so he probably thinks you'll be an easy mark. Keep track of what you reveal to him and then deliberately throw him off by guessing your own cards that you know he hasn't seen. Otherwise, he'll just use you for information right out of the gate and then beat all our asses in five minutes flat."

"That sounds like Jet's play style."

I hear ice clinking against glass and look up to see Milo approaching. "What are you two commiserating about over here?"

"Jonathan was giving me the scoop on playing games with Jet."

“Ah, yeah.” Milo nods knowingly. “I hope you like five minute rounds.”

I smirk at him suggestively. “You know I don’t.”

He smirks back, then leans in to give me a kiss. He hands me one of the glasses of water and I thank him, then he grabs my waist with his free hand and leads me over to the table.

“Would this be a bad time to tell you I have no idea how to play Clue?” I ask as we approach.

He glances over at me as he pulls back his chair, then puts his drink on the table and pulls his phone out of his pocket before he sits down. “Ever play Clue Jr. when you were a kid?”

I smile and shake my head. “No. We didn’t have family game nights growing up.”

“Right. Well—” Before he can say more, Milo’s phone lights up on the table. An airdrop notification pops up from Jet’s phone.

“Watch that,” Jet says. “It’s only two minutes long. It will give you a rundown of the rules and how to play.”

Milo takes a seat at the table and pats his thigh expectantly.

My brain totally misinterprets why he’s slapping his thigh and my belly fills with warmth as I imagine lying over his lap so he can spank me.

When Milo looks at me, I must be flushed because a slow smile tugs at his perfect lips. Chuckling, he says warmly, “Have a seat, Kennedy.”

“Right,” I murmur, embarrassed, before sitting on his lap.

I get comfy while he pushes play on the video. We watch it, then he gives me a few pointers and answers my remaining questions while Jonathan saunters over to

his seat across from us. He eyes me in his dad's lap before sitting down, but doesn't say anything.

Everybody picks their characters—Jet choosing the only doctor as his token, Jonathan playing as Mr. Green, and Milo playing as Professor Plum and stirring naughty thoughts of teacher/student role-play we could totally do since I am still in school.

I get Miss Scarlet, which means I get to go first.

“Oh, sure, make the one person at this table who has no idea what she's doing go first.”

Jonathan smirks. “You're a quick learner. I'm sure you'll catch on.”

My posture stiffens suddenly as Milo's warm hand slides over my thigh. I lean into it as I lean forward to grab the dice, and his hand slides higher.

My tummy flutters as I lean back against him and jostle the dice in my closed hand. He pulls my hair aside to bare my shoulder, then presses his lips against my skin. “Didn't I tell you not to wear panties?”

Heat suffuses my cheeks. We're all gathered around this table with no background noise or anything. There's literally no chance I'm the only one who heard that.

I swallow and drop the dice on the table. They seem exceptionally noisy, but probably just because I'm intensely aware of noise levels at the moment.

I rolled a four, but I'm so distracted I don't even pay attention as I drag my token across the board four spaces. “Um, maybe we should put on some music while we...”

“Play?” Jonathan provides, clearly amused by my embarrassment.

That only *intensifies* the embarrassment. I nod and Jonathan reaches for his phone.

“My turn?” Milo asks, locking an arm around me to keep me stable as he leans forward to grab the dice.

His roll gets him near a doorway, but not inside a room.

Jonathan is next. He makes it inside a room, then has to make a suggestion. “I think it was Miss Scarlet in the kitchen with the candlestick.”

I shake my head at him. “Of course you think I did it.”

He smirks.

Jet grabs a card and shows it to Jonathan. Jonathan makes a note on his detective journal page and then it's Jet's turn.

I know I'm supposed to pay close attention to Jet's turns since apparently he is so good at this game, but Milo breaks my concentration when he moves his palm to my belly, then slides it lower, the blunt end of his fingertip teasing the waistband of my shorts.

Turning my head so I can look back at him, I whisper, “They're not panties, by the way. They're sleep shorts.”

“I told you I wanted you in nothing.”

My cheeks warm, but the music is adequately noisy so no one else should be able to hear us. “I didn't want to accidentally flash Jet.”

His lips tug up at the corners. “Just Jet, huh?”

My stomach drops. “I mean, anyone but you, obviously.” When it's done dropping, my stomach churns. Why did I say that? “This is a short robe. If I don't wear anything under it, someone's going to see the goods.”

Dimly, I hear Jet accuse someone of doing something with a revolver. The rules are still new to me,

so I don't realize it's on me to disprove his suggestion until Jonathan says, "Hey, Scarlet. You're up."

The heat in this room is stifling, but I know it's probably just me—or, more accurately, the man whose lap I'm sitting on. He knows I can't handle displeasing him, but surely he understands why I disobeyed.

No one else sitting around the table seems to be red-faced and ready to melt, so I grab my glass of water and take a long sip to cool myself down.

Since revolver is the only thing I heard, I check my cards quickly and am relieved to see I have that one. I put it at the front of my deck, then flash it to Jet.

It's my turn again. I make it into the lounge this time, then I look at my cards. Jonathan told me to mislead Jet so even though I have the rope card, I say, "Maybe Mr. Green used the rope in the lounge."

I cock a playfully haughty eyebrow at Jonathan across the table.

Shrugging indolently, he says, "I had to tie up Miss Scarlet. Again."

My soul drops out of my body as Milo casually reaches for his cards as if his son *isn't* dropping hints about the night we spent together. I fight the urge to let Jonathan see he's getting to me and wait for Milo to show me a card from his hand, but I'm starting to sweat.

He has Mr. Green.

It's not Jonathan, so I grab my pen and cross his name off, but I completely forget to cover my sheet. I'm too distracted worrying about what Jonathan said.

I glance at Jet and he smirks, lifting his pen and likely scratching off Mr. Green on his card.

"Great job, noob," Jonathan says.

I huff at him. "It's your fault."

He cocks an eyebrow with interest. "Is it? Why?"

"Because—" As soon as I open my mouth, I realize I can't even say anything without making it worse.

The amusement in his pretty blue eyes intensifies.

"I hate you," I tell him.

"No, you don't."

Milo grabs the dice and brings his hand to my mouth. "Blow."

I glance back at him uncertainly.

His gaze is warm like he's not irritated which settles my nerves a bit. "For luck," he explains.

I swallow, then I blow on his dice.

He drops them on the table, then moves a few spaces into a room. He makes a suggestion, and Jonathan shows him a card, then he marks something off on his paper. I could look since I'm on his lap, but I don't.

Jonathan rolls next, and while he does, Milo's hand returns to my tummy. My insides are already a jumbled mess from hopscotching through various humiliations while we play this game, so his warm, steady palm against my skin feels extra reassuring.

This game has been stressful so far. Maybe not the game itself, but playing with the Granvilles.

He knows it, so he soothes my anxiety, tenderly rubbing my tummy until my body is relaxed. Once I am, he slides his hand down inside my sleep shorts and palms my pussy.

I sigh softly, but try to remember where I am and keep a straight face despite the temptation to sink back against him and just let him make me feel good.

It's Jet's turn again when I turn my attention back to the gameplay. I completely missed Jonathan's turn.

"I'm so bad at this game," I whisper to Milo.

He chuckles and kisses my shoulder as he teases my entrance. "It's your first time."

I suck my bottom lip into my mouth and let my teeth sink into it as his finger pushes into me just a little. "Is playing games with you guys usually this stressful?"

"I'm not sure," he murmurs idly. "We've never played with a girl a couple of us have slept with before, so I don't have a frame of reference."

Well, *that's* embarrassing.

I start to cover my face with my hands, but Milo murmurs a noise of mild censure and pulls me close so he can kiss the side of my head. "No hiding. No shame, remember? It's just a thing that happened. It doesn't matter."

"Can our next game have fewer objects that could be used as sex toys? I feel like that would be less embarrassing."

He chuckles. "Maybe we'll play Scattergories or Scrabble next family game night."

I can still envision Jonathan spelling or writing naughty things to embarrass me. "Maybe we just won't invite Jonathan," I say, only half-kidding.

"Do you usually talk about me when my dad touches you, stray?"

My eyes widen and I look at Jonathan across the table.

He cocks an eyebrow. "You didn't think I'd hear my own name?"

*I didn't think he'd call me out on it.*



On reflection, I don't know why, though. He's such a jerk.

"You guys are going to be exceptionally easy to beat tonight," Jet remarks. "No one has their eye on the prize."

"Sure we do," Jonathan murmurs, gazing across the table at me.

It's official. I'm wearing blindfolds and ice packs to future game nights.

On my next turn, I get to make another suggestion. This time, I decide to accuse my beloved of slaughtering some fool with a dagger.

"You think I'm a murderer, huh?" he murmurs.

"Baby, I'm not mad. I'm sure he deserved it. I'll even help you roll up that ugly old carpet and get rid of the body if you need me to."

Milo smirks, then says, "Well, I'm glad you feel that way because I can't disprove your suggestion."

"Interesting," Jonathan says, sliding his front card to the back, then showing me his dagger.

Even *that* sounds sexual and I only thought it in my head.

This game is so pervy.

Jet's turn is next, but he doesn't reach for the dice. "Professor Plum used the lead pipe in the billiard room."

My jaw drops open. "What? How...?"

He leans forward and grabs the cards to check, then he lays them out face up and, sure enough, he's right.

Milo and Jonathan both toss their cards over to Jet. "Told you it'd be quick."

"But how could he possibly know that?"

“You want to play another round?” Jet asks me instead of his dad or brother.

“Can we not?” I glance around to make sure no one is offended. “I love the family game night thing, but I need to be better prepared before we play again.”

Jet smirks. “Maybe I can tutor you.”

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After the stress of that game, I’m more than happy to settle in on the couch and watch a movie together while dinner cooks.

I ditched the robe to lie on the couch with Milo, but I’m still warm. In fact, I get even toastier with Milo holding me between his legs.

Cuddling with him is like cuddling with a space heater, but he still grabs a blanket to throw over us.

I’m sleepy and relaxed cradled against his muscular body, surrounded by warmth that tempts my eyes to close. Milo loves touching me as much as I love touching him, so he absently traces shapes on my bare tummy under the cover of the blanket and further relaxes me.

I expect his touch to remain casual since we’re not alone in this living room, but then his hand slides up to cup one of my breasts through the delicate lace. Awareness shudders through me as he squeezes it possessively. Instantly, my nipple hardens against his palm and I let out a tiny shuddering breath.

His other hand tilts my face and he kisses where his lips can reach. “Such a good girl,” he rumbles softly. “So responsive.”

We’re the only two on this couch, but the boys are both in the room so my tummy thrills at being spoken to as if we’re alone in our bedroom.

“Behave yourself, Mr. Granville,” I whisper teasingly.

“I make the rules around here,” he reminds me, kissing the side of my head then sliding his hand over my jaw and pushing a finger into my mouth. “I think those pretty lips need something to do.”

I love licking and sucking any part of him. I’m not normally quiet when I do, though.

I slide a covert look at the boys to make sure they’re not paying attention before I start sucking on his finger like it’s his cock.

Sucking on him gets me going. Tension and yearning join together in my lower tummy as I suck softly on his finger so as not to draw attention.

Milo is a little more devious. He must know I’m trying to keep things low-key so we don’t get caught, but he pushes a second finger into my mouth and shoves deep enough to gag me.

*Thank God for surround sound.*

I’m trying to keep quiet, but it’s so hard when I want so desperately to moan.

Especially after he gags me and reminds me of the hot night in Mexico when I was on my knees for him out on the balcony. He gagged me with his massive cock and used my mouth for his pleasure, but I had to keep quiet because another couple was out on their balcony on the floor above us. If I drew their attention, they might look down to see what was going on.

Not that the thought of getting caught pleasuring Milo isn’t just a tiny bit exciting.

Thinking about it now makes it that much harder to refrain from moving my head up and down the length of his finger, kissing and running my tongue along the underside like it’s his cock.

I want it to be his cock.

I'm so hungry for him. I want to climb beneath the blankets and lick the part of him I *really* want in my mouth, but there's no way we could do *that* without being noticed.

Milo can tell I'm getting needy so he slides the hand that isn't in my mouth down to touch my breasts. I arch into his palm, grateful for his attention.

He pushes the flimsy lace down so he can graze my sensitive nipple with his calloused fingers. I moan softly at the contact. I try not to, but it's so difficult. He gives my pebbled nipple a sharp pinch and I suck in a breath.

I'm not sure if it was a rebuke because I made noise, but I think it was, and my heart races, my tummy rocking at the idea of having displeased him.

*I'll do better*, I think as I suck his finger deep into my mouth. I take him clear to the knuckle, then I wrap my tongue around him like I would his cock as I pull back.

After a minute of allowing me to work for his forgiveness, he smoothly pulls his finger out of my mouth and slides his hand back beneath the blanket. It moves down my stomach, then into the waistband of my shorts.

My waistband is slack now that I'm lying here on my back against him so he has majorly easy access.

I stifle another moan as his big palm covers my pussy.

I spread my legs as subtly as I can to make room for him, then sigh and close my eyes as he begins to tease my entrance. His touch is so light, he sends shivers of delight whispering across every nerve ending.

God, his touch feels so incredible.

A pinch of neediness hits me and I turn so I can give him a soft kiss. "I love you," I whisper, reaching up to caress his jaw before giving it another kiss.

His lips quirk and my heart fills with peace and joy. “I love you, too. More than you can imagine.”

“Same,” I whisper back.

His chest rumbles as he chuckles and I flash him a tender little smile, then I gasp, caught off guard when he pushes the blunt end of his finger into me.

I dart a look at the boys, slapping a hand over my own mouth. I’m nervous about getting caught and don’t want any sudden movements to draw their attention, so I force my hand away from my mouth and try to pretend nothing sinful is going on over here.

My heart beats faster but I try to keep my breathing steady. Obviously, if I start panting shamelessly, I’m bound to attract some attention.

His finger curls up and tingles travel up my spine and buzz through my head. My eyes drift closed and a soft breath escapes me.

God, it’s hard not to moan his name.

Maybe we can blow off the movie and go upstairs. I’d rather get fucked before dinner than watch a movie any night of the week.

This feels great, but I don’t just want him to finger me beneath the blanket. I want to suck him and not have to worry about anyone hearing. I want to feel the delicious invasion of his cock driving deep inside my body.

Between his touch and my thoughts, I’m getting more excited than I mean to. My breath starts to hitch. Milo must think I’m being too loud because he pulls his finger out of me.

*Dammit.*

I take a deep breath and do my best to ignore the stirrings of desire. He might be willing to play with me and tease me, but of course he’s not going to get me off

in the living room with people around. What was I thinking?

Jeeze, Kennedy, get it together.

Besides, I know the man is a damn tease. He'll probably have me twisted in knots of lust, unable to even taste my food or think about anything clearly until we're upstairs in bed and his cock is pounding into me.

His body shifts beneath mine as he reaches back for his glass of water on the end table. I hear the ice cubes slosh in the water, then he takes a sip. He replaces the glass on the table and eases back into the relaxed position we were in before.

Only then I hear a noise like he's taking something out of his mouth. I turn my head to look.

I can't see anything in his hand, but when he slides it back beneath the blanket, a sudden chill sweeps over me as he presses an ice cube against my stomach.

The chill makes me stiffen, but it makes my nerve endings sing.

"Close your eyes," Milo whispers.

I lick my lips, then do as he says.

He runs the ice cube up my belly, dragging it over my breasts and just barely touching it to my rock hard nipples.

Chills dance all over my skin as he tilts his head and kisses the side of my neck with his warm mouth, at odds with the ice gliding over my skin.

*Oh, god.*

It's hard to keep my breathing steady. Almost impossible.

He runs it over my tits again following a different path across my heated skin, then he teases my nipples and I nearly cry out.

His hand bites into my hip when I do. My heart slams in my chest at the bite of censure. I work harder to control myself as he drags the slippery ice cube back down my tummy, around my belly button, and then slips his hand beneath my shorts.

I grip the couch cushion and fail to entirely stop a moan from escaping my throat as he drags the chilly cube along my inner thigh then teases the seam of my pussy.

He kisses the shell of my ear, then rumbles quietly, "When we're in bed later, I'll run my tongue over every inch of skin this ice cube touches. I wish I could lick it off you right now."

*Oh, god. I wish that, too.*

My whole body trembles but not from the cold.

Icy cold water drips down my pussy. He uses his long middle finger to spread me open so it goes inside me.

*Fuck.*

I writhe against him as he drags the ice cube lower, pushing it between my pussy lips for just a second, then teasing the outside again. My pussy pulses with need as he teases me, clenching around nothing.

"Milo, please," I whisper.

I don't really know what I'm begging for since I can't have what I want right now. Not here. Not in the living room where we're not alone.

He slides the ice cube back up over my hip bone and tummy, glances over my nipples just enough to tease me. Then, he brings it higher to the base of my neck. I sigh as he drags it up the same side he kissed, then puts his mouth there and licks up the path of water dripping down my neck.

I moan softly a mere second before his hand covers my mouth. The ice cube is in his palm. He pushes it into my mouth.

I suck on it for a minute, unsure whether he means to take it back after I've cleaned it, but he appears to be done with it. His hot palm roams my body, touching all the wet places the ice cube touched.

When he gets to my inner thighs, I tense.

Then he spreads my pussy and pushes a finger into me.

I sigh with relief to be filled by him, even if it's only his finger. He pushes deep, all the way to the knuckle. A second finger joins the first and his thrusting picks up speed.

I gasp and clutch at the couch cushion desperately as pressure builds inside me. It feels like when we're in bed and he's fucking me right before I come apart like a crazy person, moaning and crying out as the orgasm goes on for much longer than the ones I have when he only plays with my clit.

My heart hammers in my chest. I won't be able to be quiet if he makes me come that hard. It's impossible.

Panic claws at my insides, but my body must be confused because the panic only seems to intensify the building pleasure.

"Milo," I whisper.

He clamps a firm hand over my mouth.

My face is on fire, my thighs quaking as he thrusts his fingers in and out of my pussy.

*Oh god, oh god, please...*

I try like hell not to cry out when pleasure explodes inside me but a tiny scream builds up in my throat.



Milo's voice in my ear is hard and unforgiving. "Don't you dare."

My whole body shudders as my pussy squeezes his fingers. My senses are overloaded and with the stress of trying to stay quiet, I think I might die.

When the wave of pleasure ends, I sink back against him like a puddle pooling in sunken earth.

His grip on my mouth eases, then he caresses my face and gives me a soft kiss.

Bliss swells up inside me. I need to cuddle so badly, I give up on pretending to watch the movie. I roll over, still beneath the blanket, and lie on top of him so I can touch him, hug him, kiss him. I rest my head on his chest and close my eyes. I slide my hands beneath his sweater so I can touch his skin and just feel him beneath my fingers.

His solid, reliable form.

God, I love him.

I'm so relaxed and so warm snuggled up against him, I fall asleep.

I hear his voice again when he murmurs, "Baby, wake up."

Bleary-eyed, I look up at him. He smiles and leans in to kiss my lips.

"I don't want to move," I groan.

The satisfaction in his smile deepens. "I know, but dinner's ready."

"I want your cock for dinner," I mumble.

That startles a laugh out of him. "How 'bout dessert?" he teases before giving me one more kiss and a light smack on the ass. "Come on, pretty girl."

Reluctantly, I drag myself off him. I sit up, rubbing at my eyes and stretching. I forget what I'm wearing until I catch Jet's curious gaze lingering in places it shouldn't.

I snatch my robe off the back of the couch and stand so I can slide it on and tie it before we head back to the kitchen.

Milo lightly squeezes the small of my back and tells me, "I'll be right back. I'm going to hit the bathroom. You can get started, you don't have to wait for me."

I watch him walk away, then I go over to grab a plate Jonathan has already gotten out of the cupboard for me.

I put my hand out expectantly, but he doesn't give it to me, so I cock an eyebrow and look up at him. "Is there a secret phrase I'm supposed to know or something?"

He smirks and shakes his head. "Nah." He hands me the plate, then grabs one for himself.

"Thank you."

I walk over to the Crockpot first, but I can feel him standing far too close behind me. Awareness prickles along the back of my neck as I remove the lid and set it aside.

"I guess Jet got it wrong," Jonathan says.

Frowning, I glance back at him. "Got what wrong?"

He smirks. "Guess it was Professor Plum with the ice cube in the living room."

# Epilogue

Kennedy

“Stop fucking moving.”

I sigh heavily as Jonathan stands behind me on the beach, untangling the veil comb from my unruly curls. “You’re pulling my hair,” I complain.

“I’ll pull it harder if you don’t keep still and shut that pretty mouth.”

His words make my cheeks warm. I huff at him. “You’re so mean to me.”

I’m not being serious, though, and he knows it.

Not that he would care if I were.

Jerk.

Finally, he gets the veil comb untangled. He gently works it back into my hair and secures it so the veil doesn’t try to blow away again.

“There. It should stay on this time.”

I wish I had a mirror so I could check. Since I don’t, I turn around to face him. “Do I look pretty?”

His lips tug up and he looks me over with warmth and far too much familiarity. “Gorgeous.”

I grin. “Thanks. So do you,” I say mostly to be polite, but he *does* look very handsome in his tan suit and white dress shirt.

Our wedding is intimate and beach-casual, so there’s no vest or tie. His snowy white dress shirt is open at the throat with an extra button undone below it because he’s Jonathan and he has to show off his excessive hotness.

On the way down the beach, literally walking beside me *in a wedding gown and veil*, two girls in bikinis slowed down to giggle and make eyes at him.

His appeal cannot be stopped, apparently.

“You ready for this?” he asks.

I nod confidently. “Absolutely.”

He nods, offering his arm.

I take it, my hand curling around his muscular bicep as I stay close and continue the rest of the way down the beach to where the wedding ceremony is set up.

Butterflies fill my tummy and warmth fills me to bursting.

*I can't believe this is really happening.*

Growing up, I was never the little girl who dreamed about her wedding day. My dad's wedding spelled the end of our parent-child relationship, and my mom had never married. None of my mom's married friends seemed especially aspirational. They had husbands or wives they cheated on or referred to like chains wrapped around their necks, choking the life out of them and draining all their joy. My mom's best friend was the only one who loved her husband, but that was after he got sent to prison for kidnapping her—actually, threatening to kill her and stuffing her into a trunk after they had a fight and she stormed out of the house, but kidnapping was the charge that stuck.

I was only a kid, but I was smart enough to know that probably wasn't what love should look like.

I also wasn't a kid who followed in the footsteps of a woman I could hardly stand.

I've never been able to understand that. Watching my mom was a good way to take notes on how *not* to live my life, but I was capable of seeing her faults and avoiding that path myself. I wasn't blinded because she

was my mom, wasn't doomed to be like her just because she raised me.

Maybe I'm lucky to be that way. I don't know.

All I know is the love stories I imagined for myself weren't about puffy white dresses and a wedding celebration full of friends and family members who don't give a fuck about me.

I just wanted a man who would love me deeply and never turn his back on me.

Someone to feel safe with for once in my life.

I knew someday I'd find it.

Someday, there would be a man relentlessly in my corner, someone who would fight for me, die for me, rip demons apart for me with his bare teeth. Someone fiercely protective of me who would never let me feel the ache of abandonment, who would never let me feel alone in the world ever again.

And now, I've found him, and I have more than I ever could have hoped for. Not just one incredible man, but a whole family that has my back without question when push comes to shove.

I know I can't lose them, too.

They love me when I'm ugly and impossible to love.

When I'm hurting and fight their unyielding embrace, they hold me down and force me to accept the support I need.

Even when I do everything in my power to destroy the good thing I've found, they just... don't let me.

Even as a kid, I was always cognizant that my mother's version of love was unreliable. If I made a wrong move, I might lose it. She might not want me anymore.

Now, I have a love I'm not afraid to lose. We've been through hard times already, but nothing has made him love me any less.

Finally, something solid and reliable. A love and a family I can truly belong to and thrive in.

Unconditional love and acceptance.

I sigh with a warm surge of contentment that wells up in my chest.

Normally, I'd roll my eyes at myself for feeling so sappy, but it's my wedding day, for Christ's sake. I'm allowed a little sap.

In the distance, the sun hovers just above the ocean.

A beach wedding at sunset. Perfect.

A pergola is set up on the beach with sheer white fabric strategically draped to look incredibly romantic and also to shield us from the wind a bit while we exchange vows.

Excitement surges up inside me and I grip Jonathan's arm a little tighter.

One of the reasons I didn't want a traditional wedding and reception is that I don't really have anyone to invite. I don't have any close extended family, and I haven't spoken to the woman who gave birth to me since I ran into her at the grocery store that day.

Milo told me she raised a stink at the school about him taking me out for a week to go on vacation. It was after the run-in at the grocery store, so she was probably feeling vengeful after seeing me happy and engaged.

But, while he told me about it to keep me in the loop, he only told me *after* he had already handled it so I wouldn't have to worry. Since then, I haven't had to see or speak to her again.

I don't know how she's doing.

I don't care, either.

I know she certainly doesn't belong at my wedding.

Only my favorite people are at this wedding.

Milo and Jet are already waiting at the ceremony site with the officiant. Since we're out in the open on the beach, there's nothing to stop Milo from seeing me when he turns around.

Even from a distance, I can see his breath catch.

A helpless grin splits my face. I clutch my bouquet in one hand, Jonathan's arm in the other.

It seemed right to ask Jonathan to walk me down the aisle.

He and Jet will be the only witnesses.

After the ceremony, we'll have an intimate family dinner instead of a big reception full of people I don't know or care about.

It's my perfect wedding.

I wouldn't want any wedding day but this one.

I wouldn't want any *family* but this one.

After today, I'll be a Granville, too.

The thought fills me with so much happiness, I could burst.

Red rose petals sit atop the stretch of sand that constitutes the aisle. Jonathan and I stop where the rose petals begin. Jet steps back out of the pergola so it's just Milo and the officiant waiting for me at the end.

Milo smiles, his warmth and confidence filling my tummy with even more butterflies.

Jet gets out his phone and snaps a picture of Jonathan and me at the end of the aisle.

Then the wedding march begins to play. I've always loved the wedding march.

"Ready?" Jonathan asks one more time.

I nod, and we start our walk down the aisle.

Walk. More like float. I'm so fucking happy, I can hardly feel the sand give beneath my feet as I make my way toward Milo.

Once I get there, Jonathan releases me and takes a step back.

Milo offers his hand, and I move to stand across from him with a big dumb grin on my face.

"Hi," he says softly.

My face hurts from smiling. "Hi."

The sun is about to set so the officiant begins his spiel, but I'm hardly even paying attention to his words. I tell myself to focus, that this moment only happens once and I don't want to miss it, but I'm lost in Milo's loving gaze. Who cares about some stranger's rehearsed script, anyway?

We get through it, but the whole time I'm just waiting for him to kiss me.

He doesn't disappoint.

He pulls me in and cradles the back of my head, crushing my veil and my windswept curls in his hand as he drags me close. He kisses me like we have no audience, like we have all the time in the world.

And we do now.

I'm his.

He's mine.

Forever.



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After the ceremony, we get some pictures and have a round of drinks.

There's a bar on the beach that has a beautiful outdoor patio. There are fairy lights strung up beneath the canopy of the dark night sky and an area that's perfect for dancing.

We have a table set for four on the far side of the dance floor. We picked this place so we could still have our first dance, and Milo slipped the DJ some cash so he'll play us some slow songs whenever we need them.

It's the ideal wedding reception, in my opinion.

We're close enough to the beach that you can hear the waves rolling in and hitting the shore, but it still has a lively vibe since the place is open and other people are eating out here, too.

"How does it feel to officially be a Granville?" Jet asks as we all take our seats at the table. He sits across from Milo, and Jonathan takes his seat across from me.

"Like it's about damn time," I say lightly.

The sea breeze blows my hair in my face as Milo passes me a menu. I ditched the veil but I'm still wearing my dress. It's not super tight, so I can comfortably sit and I'll be able to dance in it.

The server brings over a chilled bottle of champagne and Milo orders an appetizer for the table. Once we all have drinks, we toast to "the newest Granville" and then we all drink.

I've felt like one of them for a long time now, but I'm happy it's official.

My mom never married and she gave me her last name, not my dad's.

Kennedy Landers is the name *she* gave me.

Kennedy Granville is who I am now, an identity I get to carve out for myself.

In a sense, it feels like I've severed the last tie she had to me. Like I'm no longer hers in any respect.

That's a great feeling.

I always knew I would gain my independence from my mother as soon as I possibly could, but Milo has made that a whole lot easier for me and shaved a few months off when I could finally escape.

I always thought it would feel like it was about escaping her, too, but I'm happy that this doesn't.

I'm not doing anything to spite her or because of her. All of my decisions from here on out are all mine and she will have nothing to do with them.

I pour myself another glass of champagne when the first one is empty and have a little private toast with myself.

*To freedom.*

When my glass is empty again, Milo stands up and takes my hand to lead me out on the dance floor for our very first dance as husband and wife.

Nobody else is dancing, so it's perfect.

A moment that is entirely ours.

I picked our song: Skylar Grey's rendition of Stand by Me. Milo gave me some grief for not using the original, but I just love her voice, and the song reminds me of us.

As we sway beneath the stars with my arms wrapped around his neck, Milo looks down at me. "Was our wedding everything you hoped it would be?"

I nod happily. "It was perfect. Thank you."

He smirks, his blue eyes dancing with amusement. "You don't have to *thank me*."

"I plan to, anyway. Rather exuberantly."

His eyebrows rise with interest. "Never mind. You can thank me."

I laugh and rest my face against his firm chest. I know I'll tell him a million more times, but I can't help telling him now. "I love you so much."

His arms tighten around my waist. "I love you, too."

When the song ends, we head back to the table, but I frown realizing Jonathan isn't there.

"Did Jonathan go to the bathroom?" I ask Jet.

His lips pressed together in a firm line, he shakes his head.

I frown. He has that look like he's holding something back. "Where is he?"

Jet points and my gaze follows until it hits Jonathan's back. He's descending the steps of the back patio, heading toward the beach with two girls, his arms slung around their waists.

"Where is he going?"

"Back to their room," Jet says apologetically.

My jaw drops. "He's *ditching* us?"

I can only see the girls from behind, but there's something familiar about them.

Then I realize I recognize the bikini top one of them is wearing, and the bouncy brown pony tail of the other one.

They're the girls we passed on the beach a little bit ago. The ones who saw us wearing bride and groom attire and still made googly eyes at Jonathan.

"This is bullshit," I state.

Milo has already sat back down, but I'm still standing and I'm pissed.

"I'm going to get him."

Since no one objects, I pick up the bottom of my long dress so I can hustle to catch up before they disappear down the dark beach and I can't find them again.

"Hey!" I call out as they hit the beach.

My "hey" isn't specific, but Jonathan knows it's for him and turns to look over his shoulder.

His steps slow. The girls look back curiously. I ignore them and narrow my eyes at him, but as I approach, I hear the blonde one ask, "That's not your wife, is it?"

Planting my hands on my hips, I storm up to Jonathan. He releases the girls and they scamper back a few steps in case I *am* his wife and I'm here to slap him silly, I guess.

"Are you seriously leaving?" I demand.

"That was the plan," Jonathan says.

"No, it wasn't," I state. "We all agreed to have a celebratory dinner together. This is basically our wedding reception. That's why your dad *flew you here*, remember? To celebrate with us. Not to hook up with some bimbos."

"Hey," says the blonde one with a frown.

"You had to ask if I was his wife," I snap right back. "You don't get to be offended."

"He's not wearing a ring," the brunette points out.

I'm not sure my anger is entirely justified, but I want to grab both girls by the hair and smack their heads together.

Before I explode with rage at their daring to talk back to me, Jonathan glances between them and tells them to give him a minute.

I'm grateful because being in their presence infuriates me.

Once they're several yards away from us on the beach, my blood stops boiling.

"You're not being very friendly," Jonathan teases, his eyes dancing with amusement.

I am not amused. "You're *really* going to leave our reception dinner to go hook up with some random girls you won't even remember a few weeks from now?"

"When you phrase it like that, it sounds like you don't want me to."

I shake my head, looking out at the ocean instead of at him. I *don't* want him to. I want him to stay and enjoy the rest of our dinner like we had planned.

When I don't immediately respond, he says deliberately, "If you don't want me to go, Kennedy, all you have to do is ask me to stay."

*Ask me to stay.*

That makes me feel even more frustrated with him.

I don't feel right asking, and it irks me that he's toying with me on my wedding night of all nights, so I shake my head. "Whatever, Jonathan. If you want to go bang the two girls who thought you and I were getting married earlier and still shot bedroom eyes at you, have a great time."

I pick up my skirt and turn to head back to the table.

"I don't think you mean that," he calls back lightly.

I don't acknowledge his remark.

When I get back to the table, I'm happier than ever to return to my loyal, devoted sexy-as-hell husband. Milo looks up as I approach, and I lean down to give him a kiss.

*My husband.*

How freaking crazy is that?

His blue eyes glint with affection, his achingly handsome face alight with the glow of the candles and the string of lights overhead. "What are you smiling at?"

"I just called you my husband for the first time in my head. I'm a *wife*," I state, carefully taking my seat so I don't trap my dress.

Milo's hand slides around my waist and he pulls me closer. "You sure are." He leans in. "*My wife.*"

I sigh happily. "That's just the best. Say it again."

He laughs, then leans in to kiss my neck and rumbles, "My wife. My wife. My beautiful fucking wife."

God, he's so sexy.

Shivers dance down my spine.

Jet grabs an appetizer off the plate and tells me I should try one, and before long, I'm enjoying the two Granvilles who wanted to be here and not missing the one who didn't.

Dinner is delicious. I was too busy getting ready earlier so I didn't eat much. I inhale the food and drink a little too much, so before they bring out the little wedding cake Milo brought, I make a quick, wobbly detour to the bathroom.

I realize I'm tipsy when I make my way back to the table, but it feels nice. I'm pleasantly buzzed, and it's a great night, so I don't have any bad feelings to get lost in.

When I try to step over the bench, however, my dress trips me up and I lose my balance. I have to grab Milo's shoulder to steady myself so I don't fall.

Rough hands pull at my waist. I fall, but not on the ground.

When Milo pulls me down on his lap, I grin and wrap my arms around his neck. "My hero," I tease.

He smirks. A shiver of warmth trails down my spine as he slides a devious hand up under my dress, resting his palm on my bare inner thigh. "Time to feed my bride some cake."

Memories of Mexico resurface. The hotel balcony where he fingered me one morning while I ate breakfast in his lap. Maybe Mexico has the best fruit in the whole world, or maybe it was only so good because it was served up with a side of orgasms.

He wouldn't do that here, though. Not with Jet sitting across from us at the table.

Maybe he would with Jonathan at the table.

I feel another tug of regret that he's not here. I would banish it, but there's no time.

As if summoned by my thoughts, the man in question comes sauntering over to our table, hands shoved in his pockets.

Feeling me tense in surprise, Milo turns to see what has caught my attention.

"Would you look at that? The prodigal son returns," he says dryly.

Since Jonathan is on our side of the table and I'm currently sideways on Milo's lap, his gaze drifts to his dad's hand beneath my dress and he smirks. Milo had to pull up my floor-length gown to get under it, so a lot of my legs and thighs are showing.

I expect Milo to pull the material down to cover me since Jonathan is clearly looking.

Instead, he slides his hand higher and palms my pussy.

*Mine*, he declares without words.

I gasp at the possessiveness of his touch, heat and tension gathering instantaneously in my lower belly.

Absently rubbing my pussy through my white bridal panties, Milo keeps his gaze trained on Jonathan. “Back for dessert?”

He pushes a thumb into me and I fight a groan. Beset by wickedness, apparently, he moves it, rubbing my clit and making it nearly impossible to sit still or keep quiet.

I shift, trying to regulate my breathing, but it’s too hard. “Milo,” I whisper, gripping his shoulder.

I want him to stop, but I want him to keep going, too.

He *has* to stop, though. Doing that to me when we’re alone having breakfast or even at home on the couch is one thing, but doing it *here*, in public, with *so many people* around? He can’t.

I reach down and gently pull his hand away.

He cocks a dark eyebrow, then casually sticks his thumb in my mouth. “Suck.”

My face burns doing it in public, but I wrap my lips around his thumb and suck off my own arousal.

Approval glints in his beautiful blue eyes and makes my tummy flutter. “Good girl,” he rumbles, leaning in to give me a soft kiss on the cheek.

Finished making trouble for the moment, apparently, he shifts his attention back to his son. “Are you gonna sit down?”



Jonathan's gaze flickers to me. "Actually, I was hoping for a dance."

My tummy flutters. "There's no music."

He smirks and jerks his thumb back in the direction of the DJ Milo's been paying off when we needed a dance. "There will be when we head out on the floor."

I look at Milo. "Do you mind?"

He glances at his son, then meets my gaze. I search for some sign he *doesn't* want me to dance with Jonathan, but he smiles faintly and shakes his head. "Of course not," he says rather convincingly. "Go ahead."

"You sure?"

He nods and kisses me on the top of the head.

I turn my body so I can climb off his lap, but before I can, Jonathan startles the hell out of me by kneeling down on the floor in front of me. I'm too startled to react as he firmly grabs one leg and pushes my dress up when it starts to fall.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

He smirks, sliding his hands down my leg and sending chills up my spine, then he fingers the buckle on my pretty white sandals. "You came undone. Didn't want you to trip."

I feel more wobbly than when I was walking as he slips the strap back through the little silver piece and buckles my heeled sandal.

"Thank you," I murmur, though my gratitude doesn't sound sincere even to my own ears.

I'm sure he did that more to annoy Milo and unsettle me than to be nice, anyway. It's Jonathan.

Once my shoe is secure, he stands and offers his hand. I take it and he pulls me off his father's lap, then leads me out onto the dance floor.

The DJ must have been watching for us because like Jonathan said it would, the music starts when we're ready for it. The beginning of the song sounds a bit like an erratic heartbeat. Familiar, but I don't place it until I hear Taylor Swift's voice.

Jonathan settles his arms around my waist. I keep my hands on his shoulders in an attempt at propriety, but I can't bite back a smile. "Had to be a Swifty song, didn't it?"

He smirks. "You know it. I heard this one day while I was..." He pauses, then just to aggravate me, says with exaggerated care, "spending entirely platonic time with a member of the opposite sex."

I roll my eyes. "Sure you were."

His eyes twinkle with mischief. "I tried to word that as carefully as possible. Didn't want you to have another jealous meltdown."

My jaw drops. "I did *not* have—"

He doesn't let me finish my denial. "But I heard this song playing. I always think of you when I hear Taylor Swift now, and a few of the lyrics caught my attention. Reminded me of you."

His words take me off guard. A good portion of the time he's trying to crawl under my skin and aggravate me, but then there are the moments when he's open and unguarded by his playful barriers.

This feels like one of those rarer moments.

It does something to my stomach. I don't know what it is. The dynamics in this family are like an emotional rollercoaster designed just for me. I've all but given up on always identifying what I'm feeling—or why I'm feeling it—when I'm being messed with.

It feels like an intimate thing to tell someone a song reminds them of you.

More so as I listen to the words of the song I've heard dozens of times before but never really listened to.

Sometimes my relationship with Jonathan feels settled, but more often than not it feels indefinable and maybe a little broken.

Most of the time, things are good, but occasionally one of us will get scraped by a jagged edge.

I know that whatever relationship we might have had if my introduction to him would have been as his father's girlfriend is nothing like the one we have now. There would have been boundaries in place to protect all our places and none of the crap that's come up would have even been an issue.

But we didn't have a normal introduction, or a traditionally established relationship. Nothing can change that, and most days I don't feel the need to. Most days, our relationship works for us.

But some days, I'm not so sure.

Like today.

My wedding day.

As I started drinking and occasionally found myself stewing in anger at him for leaving our reception, it occurred to me exactly when he left.

We had all agreed to the dinner. The only thing that changed was I went out on the dance floor with his father and we had a romantic first dance.

It feels vain to think Jonathan would care. Maybe he doesn't. It could have just been a coincidence that the girls approached him at the table while we were dancing.

All I know is that sometime in the two and a half minutes Milo and I spent on that dance floor, Jonathan decided to bail on the whole evening.

Now, we're dancing to a song he requested, a song he says reminds him of me.

A song about lovers who weren't built to last, but the plea is there: don't forget me.

I feel really stupid when my eyes well up with a few tears. It's probably the alcohol and the emotional day I've had, but there's other stuff, too.

Even though I'm happy about most of it, everything is changing.

We bought the house in Massachusetts. We're moving there with Jet this summer, but Jonathan won't be going with us.

After our wedding weekend, he's taking off to China for a couple of weeks with some friends. When he comes back, he's moving in with his friend Lincoln, and even though it makes sense that he's moving out now that he's graduated college, I can't help wondering if it's a little bit because of me, too.

Because of the blurry nature of our relationship in the past, I haven't felt right saying it, but man, I'm gonna miss him.

I sniffle, then nearly die of horror.

Jonathan looks down at me with a frown and misses a step. "Are you crying?"

"No." It's a stupid thing to say, easily disproven by the stray tear that full-on betrays me as it goes barreling down my cheek.

Well, that's embarrassing.

"Hey, what's this? There's no crying on your wedding night. Well... there might be, but not while you're dancing."

I smile faintly and shake my head. "I had too much to drink. I'm being stupid."

His grip on me tightens. I know it's a protective instinct. I also know he would never admit that. "Get in here," he says, tugging me closer.

I'm too close now for my hands on his shoulder to feel natural, so I slide my arms around his neck, but not as snugly as when I danced with Milo.

"Why are you upset?"

I shake my head. I still don't love the vulnerability with him, but I'm too raw at the moment to lie. "I'll just miss you, that's all."

He could be understanding. He could be sweet. Instead, he smirks. "I know."

A burst of laughter shoots out of me, my cheeks still damp from the few tears that slipped out. "You're the worst."

He grins at me, keeping me close as we sway. "Nah, I'm just playing with you. I'll miss you, too, you know."

"I feel like you're leaving because of me. It makes me feel terrible, like I came between you guys."

His smile falls and a mild frown replaces it. "No. Don't think that. I'm not leaving because of you, I promise. I'm a big boy now, that's all," he says lightly, watching my face and smiling faintly. "It's time to leave daddy's house and go out on my own."

I nod, but I don't feel any better.

"I'll visit," he assures me. "I'll be home for all the holidays. I'll be there so much, you'll hardly notice I left."

I smile faintly. "I don't think so. You have a presence about you. Your absence will be noticed."

A few seconds pass, then he says, "Tell you what, why don't we do one last thing together, just the three of us? You'll have to do your part and talk my dad into it, but when I get back from China, I'm planning to head up

to Canada, spend a week in Banff. My dad's paying for it, anyway. You guys might as well come."

"Really?"

He nods. "He prefers the tropical locales to the snowcapped mountains, but you have your ways of persuading him," he teases.

I smile. "That's true."

"It'll be fun. We always have fun together," he adds with a wink.

"You mean me and you, or you, me, and your dad?" I ask lightly.

He shrugs. "I've had fun both ways."

I shake my head, heat in my cheeks rising as I recall the night they both played with me on the couch. Not wanting to go any further down that road, I try to playfully shift us away. "You sure you don't want to bring your beach bimbos?"

He smirks. "Nah, I ditched them outside their hotel. I don't think they're too eager to see me again."

"I was surprised you were able to finish banging two girls and get back in time for dessert."

He shakes his head. "They were talking shit about a certain unhinged bride I'm pretty fond of. Wasn't cute. Killed my interest. Besides, I had somewhere better to be."

I smile up at him. "Well, I'm glad you came back."

He smiles down at me. "Me, too."

When our dance ends, we head back to the table. Milo is waiting to reclaim his bride. His hand finds my waist immediately and he pulls me back onto his lap.

I'm happy to go. I slide an arm around his neck and watch as he cuts into the little round wedding cake. He

lifts a whole piece and moves it to our plate, but then he puts the knife down and grabs part of it with his bare hand.

I smile warily as he brings the cake closer with frosting on his fingers. "You had better not smash that in my face," I warn him.

He smirks. "Don't worry, I won't ruin your makeup."

"Good. I've never found that very amusing. You can feed me cake in a civilized manner."

"Now, I didn't say that..."

He pushes the cake between my lips, but since he grabbed it like a caveman, there's frosting on his thumb and two fingers. He paints my bottom lip with the thick, creamy frosting, then leans in and kisses it off my mouth.

My pussy throbs with need and my heart rate kicks up a bit. He kisses me so thoroughly, it's difficult to keep my hands from roaming his body, pulling him closer...

"Fucking delicious," he murmurs, and I know he's not talking about the frosting.

When my eyes drift open, I know he can see the need he put there because his twinkle with satisfaction.

Before I can speak or reach for the cake to feed him, he pushes his thumb into my mouth. I lick it off obediently, then his other two fingers in turn.

Once his fingers are clean, he pushes them into my hair and pulls me in, leaning his forehead against mine. "Like the cake?"

"Love the cake," I murmur, lust fogging my ability to think clearly.

Jet surprises me by being the one to interrupt. "Um, before you two consume one another, can I have a minute with Kennedy?"

I glance across the table and see Jonathan hiking up an eyebrow. “You want to dance with her, too?”

Jet shakes his head. “I don’t want to dance. I just want to give her my wedding present.”

“You—you got me a wedding present?” I ask, surprised.

He nods, looking rather proud of himself.

“That was thoughtful.” Reluctantly, I pull myself away from Milo. “I’ll be right back.”

Carefully moving off the bench so I don’t trip this time, I leave Milo and Jonathan to cut and distribute the cake while I follow Jet down the beach.

I’ve never been quite as close to Jet as I have his father and brother, but I suppose that’s to be expected given the boundaries of our relationship were never as murky. Even when we were pretending to date so he could get Brylee’s attention, there wasn’t any *real* sexual or romantic interest.

In any case, I’ve always been fond of Jet and had a friendly—if a little more distanced—relationship with him.

I’ve noticed changes in him lately. It may be because I’ve spent more time with him since moving in, or even just because he’s getting older. Maturing a bit more. Jet studies everything and everyone in his own way, too, so he’s always learning.

He’s still often tactless, like he just forgets to consider how ordinary people might respond to the more unconventional things he says. It could come off as indifference—maybe he just doesn’t *care* if he makes people uncomfortable—but I’ve gotten used to his sharp edges and analytical mind. I’ve come to understand he doesn’t mean any offense.

To me, Jet seems harmless.



So even though he leads me farther away from the restaurant than I expect him to, I don't think anything of it. I guess he *really* wants privacy. I wonder what this gift is.

Especially because he's not carrying anything, so it must be small.

I can still hear the music faintly at the restaurant behind us, but there are no restaurants or businesses over here. It's dark and I didn't bring my phone.

"Um, Jet, if we go much farther, I won't be able to see my gift."

He glances back at me over his shoulder, then glances back at the restaurant as if determining if there's enough distance.

That makes me frown, but I'm only confused, not worried.

We walk a few more steps, then he turns around to face me. He looks down at the sand briefly, then reaches into his jacket pocket and draws out a small box. It looks like the type of box gift cards come in at Christmastime.

"Open it."

My gaze flickers up at him. I give him a tiny smile, then I take the lid off his present.

There's a cottony cushion underneath a couple of scraps of paper. That explains why the box is so light. There's hardly anything in it.

The paper is folded in half. I glance up at him, still with a faint smile, but now a little confused. I'm hoping for an explanation.

He doesn't give one, just waits for me to unfold the paper.

A gust of wind blows by, sucking my dress between my legs and blowing my hair in my face. I push it back,

then unfold the paper and look at the one on top. It looks like a newspaper clipping.

My confusion deepens.

Jet turns on his phone's flashlight feature and all the air is instantly sucked from my lungs.

It's a picture of Larry. I drop it and the box it came in like they're both on fire.

"What the fuck is this?"

He bends to grab the papers before they blow away, then he offers one back to me.

I don't know what the hell it is or why the fuck he's giving me a picture of that pig on my wedding night, but I don't find it the least bit amusing.

"Read it," he prods, still holding out the paper.

I glare at him, but snatch the paper out of his hand, anyway.

My stomach churns. I don't like this at all, but he's adamant, so I try to ignore the buzzing, oozy feeling in my brain and just read the article since seeing that worm's face makes my skin crawl.

My eyes move across the first lines so fast, I miss what they're saying and have to start over.

*In loving memory...*

Wait.

That's what they say when people die.

Did he *die*? I'm hardly sad about it, but I am surprised. I don't know exactly how old Larry was, but he was hardly an old man. Middle-aged.

Though I guess he didn't live a healthy lifestyle. He and my mom partied a lot. Maybe he overdosed.

Less ragey about this still strange "gift" he's giving me, I look up at Jet with a mild frown. "He died?"

The smile on his face is... odd.

A little spooky.

It's probably just because we're over on this abandoned part of the beach in the dark and he's showing me an obituary. Even for Jet, that's extremely weird.

"I wanted something a bit more fitting to his crime, a bit more draconian, but I couldn't make it *look* like a murder. I know my dad or brother would have inflicted physical injury and left evidence behind like testosterone-driven idiots," he says with a roll of his eyes, "but my way was smarter. Nobody murders anybody with necrotizing fasciitis."

He says it like it's an academic joke I should get and join in laughing at. Even on a normal day, I usually don't get those, but it certainly goes over my head right now. My jaw is practically on the beach. "What...?"

"It's not reliable enough," he explains, realizing he's talking to a person of only average intelligence and below average scientific expertise. "It's difficult to deliberately give someone, and it doesn't always kill a person even if they do get infected. I had back-up plans, of course, but it was my first choice of death for him—well, of the safe ones, anyway. I would've preferred something more gruesome, perhaps spreading peanut butter around his flaccid dick and then locking him in a trunk full of hungry rats. I had to play it safe, though. Obviously, that would be investigated as foul play. No one accidentally dips their dick in peanut butter and feeds it to rodents."

Is he... saying what...?

I mean, yes, he's definitely saying that...

Is he joking? This is an insane and strangely detailed joke...

“It wasn’t even hard, honestly. I had to drug him so he’d be out when I broke into his house—” He stops himself, shaking his head. “Anyway, you probably don’t care to hear the gory details. Do you?”

Feeling the blood drain from my face, I shake my head, unable to muster a single syllable.

He nods like that’s what he figured. “Suffice it to say, I got the job done. I did that one months ago. I wanted to tell you right away so you’d know he wasn’t out there anymore, but I decided to wait. I wanted to get you the set, and that would have ruined the surprise.”

“The... set?”

He holds up the other clipping that I dropped.

A sick feeling rocks my stomach.

*Oh no. Jet, what did you do?*

I grab the newspaper clipping with shaky hands and unfold it to see my mother’s picture. I feel a bit faint as I start to read it.

*Tracey Marie Landers, 36, passed away in her home the evening of May 27...*

Oh. My. God.

I want to look up at him, but I’m a little afraid to.

Logically, I tell myself this is the same guy who bought me a cat purse to make me smile and I definitely shouldn’t be worried, but he *did* haul me pretty far away from the restaurant to give me this “gift.”

Jet’s a smart guy. It’s not impossible that was so no one would hear me scream if I reacted poorly.

I feel crazy even thinking that, but how can I not when he’s standing here telling me he killed two people?

Clearly, there is a *lot* I don’t know about Jet Granville.

Chills dance down my spine. I force myself to meet his gaze, fearful of what I might see there.

He doesn't look any different, really. If he looks scary, it's only because I'm noticing things I haven't before. But overall, he looks pleasant, like a proud puppy who has just brought a dead cat to its owner and is awaiting appreciative pets and to be told what a good boy he is for bringing such a nice gift.

I swallow.

I force my lips up to form a ghost of a smile. "You... did this? For me?"

He nods. "I went more traditional with her. She was going through a lot of heroin after Larry died, so when I gave her a hot shot, it just looked like a run-of-the-mill OD."

I can picture that. Mom didn't always do hard drugs, but she often turned to them after a breakup.

When I was 11, I came home from school one day and found her on the couch. She should have been at work so I was confused at first, but when I walked over to her, she was unresponsive. I had to call 911, and I was scared to death waiting for them to get there, then watching them load her on a stretcher and race her out to an ambulance.

But you can only be scared for people so many times before the intensity of that feeling drops off and resentment begins to grow in its place.

Any feelings I had for my mother crumbled the night she not only let her sick, disgusting boyfriend touch me, but fucking encouraged it.

There are no loving, familial feelings left inside me for that woman, but still, to know she's dead... to know she's dead because someone killed her *for me* is fucking wild.

“I... I don’t know what to say,” I tell him honestly.

“You said you had no desire to repair your relationship,” he reminds me.

“No... I didn’t.”

“That’s why I didn’t want you to report what happened. I didn’t want anyone knowing we had motives. I hadn’t determined how I would do it yet. I guess I assumed murder would be harder than it is, but it really wasn’t a big deal. The hunting part was fun.”

“Okay. Um... Jet, you’re not supposed to... murder people,” I say feeling so awkward I could die.

He shrugs. “You’re not supposed to betray your own daughter or rape people, either.”

“That’s true. But...”

“Look, I’m not an idiot, Kennedy. I know murder is considered wrong.”

“Yes.”

“But so are a lot of other things people do, and in this case, I was comfortable being judge, jury, and executioner. At least I made sure justice was served.”

I don’t know how to process everything he’s saying and also find my way to what I’m supposed to say in response.

Sure, there have been dark moments when I wished them both dead, but I would have never acted on it.

I think it’s within normal range to have thoughts like that in dark moments, but it’s decidedly not normal to act on them.

I don’t know what the responsible thing to do here is. We all know I’m not really a stepmother to the boys. I’m Jet’s age, and Jonathan is older than I am. I’m part of the family, but not in a maternal capacity. From Jet’s perspective, I probably look like the family fuck doll at

this point—not that he’s ever respected me any less for it.

Milo is the only parent in our household, so maybe it’s not up to me to lecture Jet for what he’s done, but... I feel like I should say *something*.

I swallow, then clear my throat. I look down at the beach, back up at Jet, then around at the remote area of the beach he brought us to.

Still not completely sure I’m safe if I don’t accept this “gift” of his, and don’t really want to put my neck on the line for two creeps.

I look back at Jet. “This isn’t something you plan to make a habit of, right?”

He shakes his head.

I’m still lost, but trying to find my way. “Okay. So, that’s good. While you obviously got away with it this time, there’s no guarantee you always would, and... I think we should discuss the... moral ramifications of taking lives at some point, but tonight probably isn’t that night.”

He cracks a roguish smile, the first one I can ever remember seeing on him that resembles one of his dad’s or brother’s. “No, obviously not.”

“My wedding night and all.”

He nods again, shoving his hands into his pockets. So casual.

“Um... So... I guess, thank you? I don’t know how I feel about this present, but it was very thoughtful.”

“I’m glad you think so.”

A shiver goes down my back at those words, at the sensation of proximity to someone so cavalier about committing cold-blooded murder. Who says the hunt was the fun part...

I really, really just want to get off this part of the beach and get back to Milo and Jonathan. “We should probably head back.”

He nods, watching me.

I turn around first and start back toward the restaurant. I’m uncomfortable until he falls into step beside me.

In a sense, it feels like my whole view of Jet has irreversibly shifted, but then we rejoin the guys at the dinner table and it feels like any other night we’ve all had dinner together as a family.

Milo glances at the little gift box on my side of the table. “What did he give you?”

“Oh, we’ll talk about that later.”

*Much later.*

Whether they meant to or not, both of his sons have given me difficult conversations as wedding gifts tonight.

I’m not sure if I’m less eager to break it to Milo that one of his sons has committed a couple of murders or suggest an intimate vacation with the one who has fucked me.

Milo passes me a plate.

“Thank you,” I murmur, leaning in to give him a little kiss.

He smiles, and even though everything is completely crazy, I feel... happy.

Every family has their stuff, I guess. Maybe ours is a bit weirder than average, but hey, who knows what kind of skeletons other families shove into their closets?

“Hey, her piece is bigger than mine,” Jonathan complains.



“She’s going to burn a lot of calories tonight,” Milo remarks. “She needs the sustenance.”

“Generally speaking, men actually burn more calories than women during sex,” Jet chimes in.

“Maybe not the way she does it,” Jonathan says with an irreverent smirk.

I stick my fork into the soft, yummy-smelling cake. “Okay, that’s enough talk about my sexual performance at the dinner table.”

“Did she ask you about Banff yet?”

My eyes widen and I shoot eye daggers at Jonathan across the table. He knows I haven’t had a chance.

“Banff?” Milo questions, looking over at me.

“Yeah, our little stray hasn’t done much traveling. She wants to go with me.”

“Both of you!” I blurt. “It was his idea, but it sounded like fun. It was also something we were going to discuss *later*,” I add, glaring at Jonathan.

“Oops. Guess I have a big mouth.” He shoves some cake into the mouth in question and his eyes twinkle at me, wordlessly reminding me of times he’s eaten other things.

I sigh. “Someone should have warned me about you Granvilles.”

“Like that would have kept you away,” Jonathan says with a smirk.

I smile and shake my head because he’s probably right. They’re several handfuls, but I wouldn’t trade them for anything.

My new family might be crazy, but my old one was, too.

At least this family loves me.

And I love them.

Even if they are all deviants.

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## About the Author

Sam Mariano has a soft spot for the bad guys (in fiction, anyway). She loves to write edgy, twisty reads with complicated characters you're left thinking about long after you turn the last page. Her favorite thing about indie publishing is the ability to play by your own rules! If she isn't writing her next book, playing with her mischievous pup, or hanging out with her lovely daughter... actually, that's about all she has time for these days.

Feel free to find Sam on Facebook ([Sam Mariano's General Reader Group](#)), Goodreads, Instagram, or her blog—she loves hearing from readers! She's also available on TikTok now @sammarianobooks, and you can sign up for her totally-not-spammy newsletter [HERE](#)

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