

SECRET BABIES

for the
Mafia Doctor

K.C. CROWNE

SECRET BABIES FOR THE
MAFIA DOCTOR

AN AGE GAP ROMANCE



K.C. CROWNE

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DESCRIPTION

**A dark and enticing invitation,
On a yacht overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.
I allowed a complete stranger to dominate me.
And he gave me a gift that'd change my world *forever*.**

The sexy older man gave me a taste of sweet submission for
one night.

Months later, I never could have imagined finding him in my
delivery room.

But that's **exactly** what happened.

Now it's becoming abundantly clear Alex has a few dark
secrets of his own,

Like his long history with the Greek mafia.

**Now our babies' lives are on the line and I'll do whatever it
takes to protect them,**

Including walking away from their possessive father.

**But the very sight of Alex holding our girls with such
tender love...**

Makes my ovaries want to explode.

How on earth do I get myself out of this colossal mess?!?

*A full-length standalone age-gap, secret babies, mafia
doctor romance from the Doctors of Denver series. Each book
can be read on its own. All books come with an oh so
satisfying happily ever after. No cheating or cliffhanger!*

CHAPTER 1

GEORGIA



“Mom, if only you could see what I’m seeing right now. You’d understand completely why I never want to come back.”

Mom laughed. She’d always had a good sense of when I was only messing around. Though in this case, I wasn’t so sure that I was.

“You say that Georgie,” she said, using the nickname I only allowed her and Dad to call me. “But part of me wonders if you’re being serious.” Mom spoke in the same Dallas twang that accented my own speech.

As I stared out onto the shimmering water of the Mediterranean from my hotel balcony just north of Corinth, I wondered the same thing. The view was spectacular—like nothing I’d ever seen before. I watched as the water crashed onto the golden sand, froth covering the shore before receding. The ocean itself was a clear blue—so clear that I could see beneath the water from where I stood. Off in the far distance, the outline of the city of Corinth appeared in the hazy, low light of dusk.

“Well, maybe a *little* serious. You’ve seen the pictures, haven’t you? Come on, you can’t tell me that those shots from the Loutraki waterfalls I sent you this morning didn’t have you wanting to grab Dad off the couch, jump on a plane, and fly over here.”

“You know your father,” she said. “It’s a miracle if I can get him to drive an extra fifteen minutes to go to the nice

grocery store instead of the crappy one down the street.”

I chuckled, steering my eyes away from the sweeping vista and back toward the small, two-bedroom apartment where I'd been living for the last month. The place was small but cozy, with enough space to where I didn't feel like I was constantly stepping on the toes of Colette, my French roommate. One of her many sundresses was draped over the back of the cream-colored couch, a deep blue dress that I was tempted to ask if I could wear to the party our class was having that evening celebrating our last night in Greece .

“I know you don't miss Texas,” Mom's voice snapped me out of my thoughts. “You're not coming back here after you leave Greece. You're going to Colorado instead, to... what's the name of that tiny-ass town you're moving to again?”

“Evergreen. And it's not that small—it's fifty-thousand people. Plus, it's only a couple hours from Denver. Just outside of the metro area, actually.”

“When you live in Dallas, anyplace with less than a million people seems small.” She chuckled, then sighed in a wistful sort of way. “I just can't believe it. You're almost done with your Masters, ready to start your career. Seems like a dang week ago that you packed up that Volvo of yours and drove off to UT.” She paused, and I could tell she was getting a little choked up.

“Mom,” I said with a smile. It wasn't a conversation with Mom without her squirting a few tears here and there.

“Oh, don't *Mom* me, my little girl's a grown woman now! How else am I supposed to react?”

“Now Mom, I hate to break it to you, but I've been a grown woman for almost a decade.”

“Not as far as I see it. To your father and me, you're always going to be our little girl.”

Although I'd heard those exact words from Mom countless times, it didn't lessen the affect it had on me. The phone cradled between my ear and chin, I turned my attention back to the sweeping view, wringing my hands together as I did so.

“Oh!” Mom said. “Dad wanted me to tell you that he finished your latest book.”

“You’re kidding! He did?”

I’d always been a writer, having had a knack for coming up with stories ever since I was a little girl. During high school, I’d started a novel as a little project. My classes and schoolwork came easy for me, so I had plenty of time to pursue my own hobbies. I’d worked on it a little bit here and there, finally finishing it during sophomore summer break when I was home from college.

The book, titled *Mystery of the Minotaur*, was an historical romance fiction based on my love of ancient Greece. I hadn’t thought much of it at the time—I’d considered it a little too amateurish to be anything more than a bit of fun. That changed, however, when my roommate Maddie came back to our apartment to find it open on my laptop in the living room. Always the nosy one, she’d taken a peek and, as she’d later said, “got hooked from the first sentence.”

She’d convinced me to shop it around and get it published. To my surprise, historical romance was kind of a thing, and after a little looking, I’d found an agent with Penrose Publishing who’d been happy to get it out on the market. After some editing and other behind-the-scenes work, my first real, published book hit the stands during the second half of my junior year.

It’d been a smash, becoming one of the biggest-selling romance books of the year. I couldn’t believe it—I’d always dreamed of being a writer ever since I was a little girl staying up late reading Charles Dickens and Jane Austin. Knowing that thousands and thousands of people had bought my book and loved it was almost too much to wrap my head around.

I’d wanted to write it off, to consider it nothing more than a lucky break and get back to finishing school, but my agent told me there was a huge demand for a sequel. So, after taking some time to come up with an idea, I got to work on *The Minotaur Returns*, typing a few pages here and there during breaks and finally finishing it during the first quarter of my

master's program. The sequel had been released just a few months ago.

To my major surprise, *The Minotaur Returns* had been an even bigger smash than the first book. Not wanting to get too caught up in my success, I remained focused on school, only taking my attention away when my accountant got in touch to let me know just how much I'd be making in royalties... well, it was more money than I knew what to do with.

I didn't want to get too ahead of myself. All the same, I couldn't help but daydream about all the things I could do with the money I'd earned. Working with my advisor we came up with a way to finish my master's program online. Even more, my professors told me that if I wanted to, I could make my third book in the series my master's Thesis.

How the hell could I say no to that? I picked out a place to live—a gorgeous modern condo in small-town Colorado—and went abroad on a trip to Greece for another dose of inspiration. My plan was to come back to the States, move and get settled in my new place, then spend the rest of the year writing and finishing my degree. It all sounded so amazing that I could hardly believe it was my life.

“He did!” Mom said. “You're surprised that he'd take the time to read his little girl's book?”

“It's not that,” I replied, easing myself into one of the lounge chairs. “I didn't think he read any books that weren't about World War II. Well, aside from my first book.”

“Oh, he read it. And he'd never admit this to anyone but me, but he's already wondering what you've got planned for book three.”

“You're kidding. You're telling me Dad's hooked?”

“Don't sell yourself short, Georgie, you're a really good writer. Your father and I are both big fans of the author.”

I laughed. “Glad to have support from both of you. Seriously, there are tons of wannabe writers out there who have parents that wish they'd go get a job in tech like a normal person.”

“Not us. You’re brilliant, the kind of woman who can do anything she sets her mind to. Dad and I are here to cheer you on and see what kind of mark you end up making on the world.”

More tears formed. I couldn’t believe how lucky I was to have such amazing parents.

I opened my mouth to speak, but before I could get so much as a syllable out, the door to the apartment opened and closed. I turned in my seat to see Colette, slender and petite, dressed in nothing but a towel and a bikini top, her blue eyes flashing, and her black hair pulled up in such a way that she managed to look effortlessly chic despite having clearly been at the beach. She tapped her wrist, the international sign for “hurry up.”

“Alright Mom,” I said. “Gotta go. Colette’s here to crack the whip.”

“Alright, sweetheart,” she said. “Call again when you’re getting ready to leave for the airport tomorrow, I’d like to track your flight and make sure you get home safe.”

“Will do. Love you, Mom.”

“Love you, Georgie.”

I hung up, setting my phone on the side table and hopping up from my chair.

“Do not tell me you are going in *that*.” Colette gave my outfit a once-over, her eyebrows arched as if she couldn’t believe what I had on. Her words carried her heavy French accent that the Greek guys couldn’t seem to get enough of.

“Says the woman wearing nothing but a bikini.”

Colette laughed. “Hey, I am wearing a towel, too. Seriously though, it is our last night in Greece, and you are dressed as if you’re going to do your daytime shopping and cleaning the apartment.”

“We’ve got, like, two hours,” I said. “Plenty of time.”

She shook her head. “That is not true. *Pour commencer*, I need to shower and get ready. That will take no time at all.

However, what *will* take time is finding something appropriate for *you* to wear, something that will catch the eye of a handsome man and hopefully get him in your bed.”

I couldn't help but laugh whenever Colette talked about sex in such a way.

“You know, how frank you are about sex used to surprise me. Then, it occurred to me that you're French, so it'd only make sense for you to be *frank*.” I grinned, pleased as hell with my pun.

Colette smiled, shaking her head. “I am not sure where you got your knack for puns, but let us, ah, keep it stored away for the night, *oui*? There are things men like, and what you Americans call ‘dad jokes’ are not one of them.”

“What if I want to find a guy who likes my dad jokes?”

“There are many traits that you will want in a man before a liking of such jokes. Namely, handsome, tall, a good dresser, and so on. Oh, and most importantly, that he has money.” Colette, pretty and charming as she was, had no problem getting men. And that meant she had very high standards.

I, on the other hand, was looking for something else, something that I couldn't quite put my finger on. I'd had no trouble getting attention from the guys in Greece. However, I was more inclined to chalk that up to the fact that I was an American, and thus an easy target in the eyes of the men there.

“Anyway, *bouge ton cul*! We have our work cut out for us!”



“Your dress, it is... something else.” Stavros, the Greek man who I couldn't quite seem to get away from, moved his eyes up and down my body in a way that made it clear he wanted me to know he was checking me out.

Nice, Colette... you put me in a dress so tight that I'm going to have to peel every guy in the bar's eyes off me just to get back to the table.

“Thanks. Honestly, I didn’t think I’d ever wear it. But, uh, here I am.” I offered him a weak smile as I averted my eyes and sipped my drink.

He chuckled, either not noticing or not caring that I wanted to be anywhere but there.

Stavros leaned in, his eyes flicking to my tits one more time.

“It looks gorgeous on you,” he said. “But all I can think about is what it would look like on the floor next to my bed.”

“Alright!” I said, throwing up my arms. “I’m done here. I can handle being leered at, but low-rent pickup lines are where I draw the line. Excuse me.”

Without another word, I slipped away from Stavros and started back toward the table.

“Hey, come on, American princess!” he said. “Give me another chance!”

The men might’ve been crappy, but the bar was perfect. The place was south of where we were staying, a town called Loutraki equidistant between the resort and Corinth. The bar was outdoors, lights strung over top of us that blended with the stars above, the hush of the waves on the sand, gentle music playing that mingled with the low din of conversation. The food was wonderful—dates and spanakopita and meze platters. And, just like everywhere else in Greece, it seemed, the view was magical. Corinth was to the south, its lights glittering on the water creating a mesmerizing glow.

My group was seated at a table on the other side of the bar, about a dozen of us in total, all from different parts of the globe. Colette was among them, of course, her eyes on me as I approached. The rest of the group was in the middle of a conversation about our studies.

“What is going on?” Colette asked as I slid into my seat and quickly took a sip of my cocktail. “Why did you stop talking to him?”

“Because he was staring at my tits like it was no big deal and totally grossing me out.”

Colette laughed. “That is the point of a dress like that, you know. And when a man stares at you, that means he’s interested.”

“Maybe so. The question is whether I’m interested back.”

Colette, a knowing smile on her face, sat back and glanced over my shoulder.

“Either way, I do not think he is going to be drowning his sorrows over your rejection.”

She nodded, and I looked back to see that Stavros hadn’t wasted any time moving on to the next unattached woman—a young blonde who appeared to be even less interested in his come-ons than I had been.

“That is the thing about Greek men,” Colette said. “They are not, ahh...” she glanced aside, trying to find the right word, “...*dissuaded* from the pursuit.”

I laughed. “You’re right about that. Sometimes I think that American men can be a little too over sensitive when it comes to stuff like this. But the alternative doesn’t seem too much better.”

Colette raised an eyebrow. “American men are timid with women?”

“They can be. Then again, the guys in my school’s classic department aren’t exactly the epitome of masculinity. I swear, they’re either staring at you from across the room or drunk and all over you like a puppy.”

Colette laughed. “Can you blame them? You are *tres belle*, Georgia. And you are also very successful. That can intimidate men who are not man enough to go after what they want.”

“Is that what I’m looking for?” I asked. “A guy who goes after whatever catches his eye?” I shook my head, realizing the answer. “No, that’s what D-bags like Stavros are, and that’s not exactly a turn-on. Hm, or maybe it’s a guy who’s *kind of* shy but who also doesn’t need five shots of Wild Turkey just to get the nerve to come talk to me.”

Another laugh from Colette. “You know, sometimes I think that you are, as they say, well, there is a French expression... ‘*ton intelligence te perdra*’.”

I tried to remember the little bit of French that I knew. “My intelligence will lose me?”

She chuckled and leaned in, placing her hand on my shoulder. “‘You are too damn smart for your own good, would be the translation.’ You are thinking too much about this, Georgia. You are *brillante*, but when it comes to matters of the heart, you should let your heart do the talking, not your brain. Or, if you’re not looking for love, simply allow another part of your body to do the thinking.” She flicked her eyes down between my legs, making me laugh.

“Alright, I get it.”

“If you do not now, you will in time. But for now, just relax and have a drink, or two, or three, and see where the night takes you, *oui*?”

With that, she rose, drink in hand, and joined the crowd dancing in front of the DJ booth. Part of me wanted to go with her, to lose myself in the dancing and music. But there was too much on my mind.

Was Colette right? Did I think too damn much for my own good? And would it end up biting me in the ass when it came to my love life? I glanced over at the rest of the group. There’d been enough gossip to go around for me to know that just about everyone there had hooked up with *someone*, be they a local or even someone else in the group. Colette had been no exception, and I looked up to see that she had already found her man for the night, a tall, handsome Greek guy with long, black hair and model good looks.

I sighed. I loved being in Greece, but part of me was ready to get home, to start my new life in Colorado.

I took a sip of my drink, feeling more and more ready to pack it in for the night.

That is, until I saw him.

He stepped through the doors of the bar; tall and slim but strong, with olive skin and thick, dark chocolate-colored hair slicked high and back. He had chiseled features, with a thick, short beard and dark, hunter's eyes. The black Henley shirt he wore clung to his body revealing his muscular build. His hard expression exuded confidence and a clear sign that he was no one to be messed with.

And he was looking right at me.

CHAPTER 2

ALEX



“Something to drink for you, sir?”

I dismissed the bartender’s question with a slight wave of my hand, not bothering to look in his direction.

Why would I, *how* could I, when the most gorgeous woman I’d seen in my life was before me?

Marilyn Monroe—that’s who she reminded me of. My parents had never been ones for American culture because it did nothing but “rot the brain and poison the soul”, they would say. However, my mother made exceptions for that culture from decades past, especially the films from the sixties in their glorious, vibrant technicolor, films starring women like Marilyn Monroe.

It was only fitting in that moment those films came to mind. Something about the world around me changed as I laid eyes on her, the colors of the low-rent bar became more vivid, the blues and reds deeper and the silver of the moon more intense, as if real life had been infused with Technicolor brilliance.

The world around me suddenly didn’t matter. What did, was *her*. She was curvy, like Marilyn, with golden-blonde hair tied above her head allowing her gorgeous features to be on full display—her big, green eyes, her plump lips and full mouth set below a slender, pert nose. I could tell that she had the demeanor of somebody that always seemed to be smiling, as if nothing could get her down.

And her body. Good God, her body was something else. Her ample curves, from her full breasts to her round hips, were packed into a dark red club dress that was so fantastically arousing on her that it should've been illegal. The hem was short, showing off her thick, sumptuous legs. There was no doubt in my mind that she was American, there was something about the women from the States that I could pick out from a kilometer away.

I'd gone to the bar that night because I'd needed a diversion, something that would make me forget about the fact that I was stuck in the small town where my parents had grown up, rather than amongst the vibrant nightlife of New York City that I was used to. But in that bar, I'd found a jewel.

I had to have her. Lucky for me, I was a man used to getting what I wanted.

Right as I made the decision to make her my prize for the evening, one of the club lowlifes moved in, some gangly punk in a silk shirt decorated with a pattern gaudy enough to make my eyes hurt. He slid into the chair next to her at the table she shared with her group, laying on the moves good and thick.

My gut reaction was one of possessiveness and protectiveness. There was no doubt in my mind by the look on her face that she didn't want his attention in the slightest. Hell, I wouldn't even need to lay hands on him; any idiot in that place knew damn well who I was, and a sharp look would be more than enough to get them to high tail it out of there.

I cooled those instincts. Being a man in my position meant I didn't need to hurry, and I most certainly didn't need to worry, not that I'd ever been the type to. I took a few more seconds to watch the scene unfold, the man waggling his eyebrows and leaning in, the woman putting forth a bit of American patience before undoubtedly sending him packing.

She'd be mine. It was only a matter of time.

When I'd had enough entertainment, I turned to the bartender. He'd been waiting dutifully for me to give him my drink order. I didn't spend as much time in the area as I used to, but my reputation was still strong around these parts.

“A double Makers Mark,” I said, asking for my favorite American bourbon. “A splash of water.”

The bartender, some kid barely in his twenties, nodded before reaching for the bottle.

I stopped him with a look, the kid freezing in place like a wide-eyed statue.

“And when I say a *splash*, that’s what I mean. Not in the mood for the sort of watered-down shit I normally get from this place.”

The color drained from his face, relief taking hold a few seconds later once he realized that he wasn’t in trouble. The kid went to work, carefully measuring out my drink with jiggers, adding just a bit of water. When it was ready, he slowly handed the drink to me, as if his life were hanging in the balance.

Amused, I reached for the glass and took a sip, letting the blend of water and rich, flavorful bourbon play on my palate before swallowing it down. When it had settled in my belly, I reached into my suit jacket and took out my wallet, slipping out a fifty and handing it over to him.

“Keep the change.”

The relief was instant, the boy reacting as if he’d just been given a last-minute stay of execution. If he’d made the drink poorly, I simply would’ve told him to make it again, and again, until it was to my liking. But the kid had produced a perfect blend and I was satisfied.

Drink in hand, I turned back to the beauty just in time to watch as the man, his expression of confidence gone and replaced by disappointment, turned and left her alone.

I kept my eyes on her, wanting her to see that I was looking. It didn’t take long before she met my gaze, a small smile forming on those plump, pillowy lips. Already, I couldn’t help but imagine kissing that mouth, picturing what it would look like wrapped around my cock. I tried to recall the last time a woman had caught my attention in such a way.

I took one more sip of my drink, preparing to head over to her.

However, I didn't need to. Her eyes on mine, she rose slowly from her seat and started toward me, her hips swaying as she moved. Her dress was skin-tight, tight enough that I could spot the outline of her panties underneath. I imagined pulling that dress up, bending her over, moving those panties to the side...

"Can I help you?" she asked when she was near. Her accent was American, just as I'd anticipated. What I *hadn't* anticipated was that it had a southern flavor to it. However, I didn't know enough about the specifics of American accents to narrow it down any further than that.

She was starting me off with a challenge—I liked that. I kept my eyes on hers, sipping my drink slowly.

"You Americans," I said. "You're something else."

"Is that right?"

"That's right. Approaching a man in a bar in Greece and letting loose with the English, as if the whole world speaks your language."

"Sometimes it feels like the whole world *does* speak my language."

"All the same, a *hello* in Greek would go a long way, cowgirl."

She kept smiling, amusement taking over. "Cowgirl?"

"Your accent, you speak like the cowboys do on TV. But 'cowboy' wouldn't be the right word, so it would be *cowgirl*, yes? My English, it's good, but now and then it's hard to find the right word."

She smiled. "I speak like cowboys, huh? And yeah, it'd be *cowgirl*."

"Or perhaps *cowwoman*."

That got a laugh out of her.

“Ah, you’ll never see a woman more beautiful than when she’s laughing.”

She smiled. “Oh yeah?”

“Well, laughing or coming.”

She bit her lower lip in a manner that was impossibly arousing. My cock shifted a bit in my slacks, and once more all I could think about was peeling her out of that dress.

I glanced down at the drink in her hand, noticing that it was nearly empty.

“It’s a crime for a woman like you to wait for her drink.” I reached forward and slipped the glass out of her hand, a gasp sounding from her as I took a sip. “Vodka cranberry, and not good vodka, either. We’ll need to remedy that.”

I turned, spotting the bartender. He was with a couple of other customers, but as soon as he saw that he had my attention, he dropped them like sacks of dirt and hurried over to me, awaiting my order with obedience. The customers that he’d abandoned were shocked, but when they laid eyes on me their expressions showed that they understood why they’d been bumped back in line. They whispered to one another, pointing at me as surreptitiously as they could.

I raised her drink but nodded toward the good vodka on the top shelf. The bartender got the message, going to work and having the drink ready for me in an instant, another fifty Euro his reward.

“This should be more to your liking.”

She was skeptical but took the drink and sipped it anyway.

“What’s the verdict?” I asked, my eyes never leaving her face.

“It’s delicious. Usually, I go for the cheaper stuff.”

“That’s a mistake. I live my life by a few rules. One of them is to never drink the cheap stuff.”

“Is that right? What’s another?”

“To never miss an opportunity to talk with a beautiful woman.”

She smiled, and I could sense that I was winning her over more and more by the moment. I opened my mouth to speak, but before I got out one word, another woman approached. I recognized the petite, slender, pretty woman with black hair and big blue eyes as one of the woman’s friends that she’d come with.

“Georgia,” she said in a distinctly French accent, placing her hand on the woman’s shoulder. She gave me a skeptical once-over. “There’s this amazing man I want you to meet.”

It didn’t take a social genius to understand what was happening—her friend was giving her an out, just in case she didn’t want my attention.

“That’s OK. This guy here was nice enough to buy me a drink. I apologize I didn’t get your name,” she said, turning to me.

“Alexandros.” I offered her my hand. “But please, call me Alex.”

She shook my hand, the sensation of her skin against mine more intense than I’d expected. There was something about this woman, something I’d never before experienced.

“Georgia,” she said, her eyes on mine, speaking as if she were in a trance. “Very nice to meet you, Alex.”

“*Es-tu sûr?*” the other woman asked.

“Yeah,” Georgia said. “I’m sure.”

“*Ne t’inquiete pas,*” I said. “*Elle est en bonnes mains.*”

My French managed to put a small smile on the friend’s face.

“Alright,” she said. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“I will.”

The friend took one more look at me, making it beyond clear that she would be keeping her eye on me, then left.

“Sorry about that,” Georgia said. “Hard to be an unattached woman in Greece without the men being all over you.”

I smiled slightly, memories of that idiot who’d been hitting on her returning.

“Us Greek men aren’t shy about beauty,” I said. “I’m no exception.”

She bit her lip once again.

“Can I invite you to sit?” I asked.

Georgia looked me over once more, undoubtedly weighing the pros and cons of my offer.

“Yes, you can.”

I wasted no time placing my hand on the small of her back and leading her away from the bar, toward the stairs leading up to the next level. A large bouncer was positioned in front of the door, and he stepped aside as we approached.

We made our way upstairs to the bar’s VIP area. I recognized some of the patrons; local business types with a few low-level gangsters mixed in among them. All recognized me, their bodies tensing as they prepared to get up and move if I were to ask them.

The view was spectacular—the open patio looking out over the town on one side, the water on the other, the salty, fresh smell of the beach thick in the air. The floor was a stunning fresco of reds and whites and yellows, indeed my favorite part of this otherwise run-down establishment.

“I don’t often get to come home these days,” I said, leading her to a private, two-person table near the edge of the patio. “But whenever I smell that sea air, I can’t help but feel nostalgic.”

“This place is like nothing else,” she replied as she sat down. “There’re beaches in Texas, of course. But there’s something about the smell and the ambiance of the Mediterranean.”

I sat next to her, Georgia's legs close enough to brush against mine. The sight of those nearly bare thighs was enough to get me wondering what they felt like, their warmth and softness wrapped around my hips as I drove into her again and again...

"Texas?" I asked. "That explains the accent."

She smiled shyly, taking her gaze away from the water. "That's right, and don't even think about making any jokes about a girl from Texas named Georgia; I've heard them all."

"It does give one the impression your parents had something of a sense of humor."

"Oh, they do, my dad, especially. They named me that because I was born there; guess they thought it was fitting." She pursed her lips for a moment. "Alexandros... named for 'the great' by any chance?"

"You're right on the money, as you Americans say. My father had big ideas about what kind of life I'd live."

"And what kind of life *do* you live, Alex?" she asked. "Sorry to be so nosy, but when a guy walks into a bar and the staff all but rolls out the red carpet, a girl gets to wondering. Not to mention, the way these people reacted," she swept her hand toward the rest of the patrons on the patio. "I don't want to sound like a hayseed, but some of them look like pretty high-class folks. And they all got nervous when you arrived."

There was no way I could tell her the truth of who I was. At the same time, I wasn't the sort of man who lied, or one who was deceitful.

"My family is well-known around this part of the country," I said. "Lots of history to our name, and names mean a lot in Greece." I was being a bit careful with my words, but there wasn't a lie among them.

Georgia regarded me with a slight side-eye, as if she could sense that I was hiding something.

"I suppose so," she said. Her eyes went to my Rolex, lingering there for a moment. I could tell she wasn't regarding it with money-hungry eyes; more that she knew it was a sign

of wealth, which meant another clue in the mystery of who I was.

“Now, maybe this is a Greek thing, but my mother always told me that it was rude to talk about yourself. With that in mind, I’m very curious to know what a woman like you is doing in our humble country.”

“A woman like me?” she smiled as she spoke, a slightly challenging tone to her voice.

“Beautiful and brilliant, that sort of woman.”

She chuckled before taking a sip of her drink and shaking her head.

“Alright, I’ll let you say beautiful. But *brilliant*? How could you know that after only talking to me for a short time?”

“I can tell by your eyes. You’ve got that... certain flash that shows there’s real intelligence behind them. I’m going to guess that the group you’re with, they’re students, right?”

She nodded once slowly. “Yeah, sure.”

“And I’m going to guess it’s a master’s program.”

Her small smile let me know that she was both impressed and conceding that I was on the right track.

“Yep.”

“And... you’re either a classics major, or a classical architecture major.”

That got her attention. “OK, how the hell did you know that?”

I gestured toward the floor. “The way you looked at the fresco when we walked in, you pored over it. No one who isn’t truly interested in Greek studies would look at a floor the way you did. And as far as the rest of your group, let’s say that students aren’t as hard to pick out as one might think.”

She chuckled. “I’m impressed. You’re a pretty good judge of character.”

“In my line of work, you have to be.”

“And what line of work is that?”

How could I answer that truthfully? After all, there was no way to simply tell her that I was the private physician for the most powerful Greek crime family in New York City, that I was part of a dynasty of criminals.

“I am a doctor.”

I could tell by the look on her face that things weren't adding up for her.

“Doctors must get a lot of respect around here,” she said, referring to the deferential manner in which the staff and patrons of the bar had been treating me. “Not to mention, inspire fear.”

“Status, like names, goes a long way in Greece,” I replied. “Doctors... we're respected here. Besides that it's well known that I've treated some very high-profile patients.”

Now the look on her face suggested that, while she was still skeptical, she wanted to know more.

I threw back the rest of my whiskey, letting the booze settle in my stomach.

It was impossible to be around Georgia without being direct about what I wanted. Sitting there with her, my eyes on the slit of her dress that showed off a thigh that was both toned and silky at the same time... I knew I wanted more.

“My work is boring,” I said.

“Really? High-profile clients sound the opposite of that.”

“Trust me, it's dull. And as much as I'm enjoying talking with you, I'd rather dance. What do you say?”

I stood, offering her my hand. She regarded it from where she sat, a sly smile forming on her face as if she knew that as soon as she took my hand and went off with me to dance, she'd be making a decision that there was no coming back from.

“Mmm... sure.”

She took my hand, and I helped her up, her scent following as she moved past me, blending with the smell of the fresh sea and air, the effect nothing less than intoxicating. Together, we made our way downstairs. The dance floor was a bit fuller than it had been before, with nearly all of Georgia's classmates dancing, along with a few handfuls of other patrons.

I wasted no time putting my hands on her curves, turning her toward me. She met my gaze with a heated stare, and her eyes narrowed as she shook her hips to the steady, pulsing beat. Georgia tossed her hair, giving me a hint at just how much of it was tied up above her head. Watching her move, it was easy to imagine what she'd look like on top of me in bed, her hair undone and draped over her shoulders as she bucked back and forth.

It was enough to make me hard right there on the dance floor. One song passed, then another, the lights of the bar low enough that neither of us saw any problem getting good and close, close enough to press my hardness against her and let her know just what was on my mind. She wordlessly agreed, grinding her ass against my cock and sending the message she wanted more than a dance.

The fourth song ended, and I could wait no longer. I leaned in and spoke.

"I want to take you to my yacht. It's not far."

The sensual smile vanished, replaced by confusion.

"Your *what*?"

I grinned. "My yacht. You, me, another drink, the full moon. I can't imagine a better way to spend the evening."

Georgia was smart enough that I was sure she'd be able to put together what I had in mind. Once more, she bit her lower lip in the way that drove me wild, glancing aside as she tried to decide what to do.

Suddenly, she stepped forward.

"I'll be right back."

With that, she winked before turning and hurrying off the dance floor.

It looked like she was going to make me wait. Normally, I wasn't the sort of man to stand around while someone else decided anything. For a woman like her, however, I'd give her all the time in the world.

CHAPTER 3

GEORGIA



“**A** yacht?” Colette regarded me with an expression of total surprise. “You are sure that he used the right word? There are plenty of Greeks who have a hard time with English, *oui*? Perhaps he meant a small *bateau*, a little thing with sails.”

I glanced over my shoulder, making sure Alex wasn't standing behind us. He wasn't, of course, and the place where I'd dragged Colette to was around and away from the main floor of the bar—nice and private.

“I don't think that's the case. This guy's English is perfect, and something about him makes me think that he's the type who'd own a yacht.”

“Yacht or no yacht is not what matters,” she said, raising a finger. “*La chose importante* is that a strange man is inviting you to leave here with him. I don't know about you, but I get a strange vibe from him.”

I couldn't deny that I felt the same way. “You do? How? Like he's dangerous or something?”

She pursed her lips, trying to think of the precise words. “No, not that he is dangerous. More that... I don't know, more that he has a lot that he is not telling you.”

“Of course, he does. We just met; you think he's going to blab his life story to me within an hour?”

“That's not what I mean. I just think he's not your average man picking up a woman at a bar, *me comprend*?”

“Isn’t that what you wanted me to find?” I asked with a smirk, as if I had her dead-to-rights. “There’s definitely something irresistible about him. *Plus*, how the hell am I supposed to say no to sex on a yacht?”

“You are sure that is what he wanted?”

“Trust me, the way he was pressing himself against me while we were dancing made that super obvious.”

Colette let out a laugh, smirking and shaking her head. “Yes, you make a good case for all of this. But there is still the matter of safety to worry about.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“First of all, you are not drunk, *no*?”

“Nope. I had two drinks and that’s it.”

“Alright. But what if he gets you onto this yacht and, *sais pas*, drives it away or something? Boom, just like that, you’re gone for good.”

I laughed, but all the same she had a solid point.

“How about this—when I get there, I’ll drop you a pin to let you know exactly where I am. And before we leave the bar, I’ll tell him that we’re not taking the boat out. We stay in the harbor. And he’ll know that you know where we are.”

“That is a good idea. If you stay there, it is no different than going over to a man’s apartment. But are you sure that you do not simply want to bring him back to our place?”

“No way. I was dead certain that I wasn’t going to be picking up any guys, which means that I didn’t bother cleaning my room. It’s a freaking sty. Now, compare that to going on his yacht. Pretty easy call if you ask me.”

“Alright, you have made your case. But please, stay in touch so that I know you are safe, OK?”

“OK.”

The matter settled, Colette let out a squeal of happiness.

“I am so happy that you are finally going to, what is it you Americans say, *get some*.”

I couldn't help but laugh at the way she pronounced the phrase.

“That is what we say. But first I need to make sure he's worth it. A yacht's cool and all, but I'm not the type of girl to strip off my dress just because a guy's got a fancy boat.”

“That is right, make sure he is not some sleazy Greek twerp living on Daddy's money.”

With that, we headed back to the main bar area. Alex was still there, looking impossibly cool and sexy. He sipped his drink, and from my vantage point I could see that just about every other woman in the place was ogling him—even the ones there with another man.

All the same, there was something different about him that I couldn't quite put my finger on. He'd said he was a doctor, but what kind of doctor carried himself like that? He was built solid, and there was no doubt in my mind that he was the sort of man who could handle himself, if needed.

It was all so strange. While I was eager as hell to get him alone, I was glad that I'd had a quick chat with Colette about the matter of my safety.

Alex flicked his green eyes up to me as I approached the bar. I could feel the burning stares from other women boring into me—they wanted to know exactly who it was that had caught the attention of the most prized guy there.

“You have a nice chat?” he asked.

“I did.” I moved next to him, leaning up against the bar. “I'm thinking that it would be a lot of fun to hang out with you.”

The faintest hint of a smile formed on his lips. I was beginning to get the sense that Alex wasn't the sort of man who flashed big, pearly smiles all that often. He was too restrained, too stoic for that.

“I think so too.”

“Good. But before we do, I need to let you know about some rules I’ve got for tonight.”

His green eyes flashed with a strange expression, but he didn’t say anything.

“Is something wrong?” I asked.

He chuckled, glancing down at his drink for a moment. “No. It’s not often that I encounter someone telling me that I have rules to follow. My inclination is only instinct, I can assure you. If there are rules for tonight, then I’d like to hear them.”

There was something about Alex that told me he wasn’t the sort of man who lived by others’ rules—more like he was the sort who made his own.

I gave him the rules rundown, telling him that the yacht was going to stay docked, and that I was going to be in touch with Colette letting her know where we were. When I finished, Alex regarded me with an expression of slight admiration.

“Do you have a problem with any of that?”

“No. All of it seems perfectly sensible to me.”

“Good. I’m glad you think so.”

With another of his sly smiles, he stood up and nodded toward the door.

“Then let’s not waste another moment.”

He placed his hand on the small of my back, the gesture turning me on in a way I hadn’t felt in years. My pussy clenched, and I found myself wondering how long I’d be able to resist giving in to him.

We stepped outside into the cool, evening air. The stars twinkled above, and our footfalls crunched on the gravel walkway to the parking lot.

“Which one’s yours?” I asked as we approached the cars.

“The black one.”

I was about to tell him that “the black one” hardly narrowed it down. As we stepped onto the lot, however, I realized right away which one he was talking about. Alex’s car was sleek and impossibly sporty, the logo on the front one I didn’t recognize. There was no doubt, however, that it was the car of a man who had two things—lots of money, and a thirst for speed.

“That’s a nice car.”

“Thank you. It’s just a rental, though I have something like it back home. It’s a Bugatti if you’re wondering the make.”

I’d never been a car girl, but a ride like that even *I* could appreciate. I placed my hand on it as I made my way past, letting my fingertips slide over the smooth curves. But as I reached to open the passenger side door, Alex’s hand shot out, opening it before I had a chance.

He moved aside, giving me just enough room to slide in. As I did, he placed his hand on the small of my back once more, sending a shiver of delight up my body. I settled into the plush, leather seat, taking in the sight of the futuristic interior. Alex shut my door and was in the driver’s seat seconds later.

“You know, American girls have no trouble opening their own car doors.”

He chuckled. “Oh, I know how independent you American women can be.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. But just because a woman is independent doesn’t mean that a man can’t be a gentleman to her every now and then.” He smiled in a most disarming manner, warm and seductive all at the same time.

Part of me wanted to cut to the chase right then and there, to reach over and take his cock out of his slacks and lavish his almost-certainly gorgeous manhood with my tongue. The feeling was a shock to me; I’d never been the kind of girl to give myself so openly to a man on a first date, if that was even what we were on.

There was something different about Alex, however, that I couldn't ignore, something that made me feel like anything could happen.

He flashed one more grin, then pressed the button for the ignition. The car growled to life like a rocket, the vibrations from the powerful engine making me more tingly between my thighs than I already was. Alex put the car into gear and backed out of his spot, handling the car with precision and skill.

As he pulled out of the parking lot and onto the road through town, I found myself unable to shake the notion that there was something more to Alex that he wasn't telling me. Whatever it was, it didn't make me feel unsafe. On the contrary, actually—I felt comfortable and secure around him in a way that I couldn't recall feeling with any other man.

I checked myself, however, not forgetting about my personal safety. After all, it stood to reason that a potentially bad guy might be someone who knew how to play a woman like a fiddle, how to make her feel comfortable in spite of whatever nefarious ideas he had in mind.

We drove through the small town, the downtown area alive with activity, men and women gathered on the many outdoor bars, enjoying their drinks and turning their heads at Alex's car as we drove past. He pressed a button during the drive that pulled the top back and let the warm, evening breeze blow through my hair.

Please don't be a weirdo, I thought as we drove. It was all way too perfect for him to screw it up by ultimately showing me some creepy side that he was keeping hidden.

I glanced over at Alex as he drove. His narrowed eyes were fixed on the road ahead, his mouth in a straight line. He looked serious but in an extremely sexy way, and once more I was struck by how professionally he carried himself, as if his mind was always completely focused on the task at hand.

Who the hell was this guy?

The town wasn't big, so it didn't take long before we arrived at the docks. A handful of boats were there, one of them being the largest yacht I'd ever seen in my life, reminding me of the one Leonard DiCaprio drove into the storm in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. I diverted my eyes away from it, glancing over at the other boats and trying to figure out which of them Alex would be taking me on.

We parked, and the town was near enough that I could hear the sounds of fun and carrying on from the main drag. Alex slipped out of the car and was at the passenger's side before I knew what was going on, opening the door and offering me his hand.

I couldn't help but smile as I took it.

"God, it's so gorgeous out," I said. "A perfect night."

He gave me a quick glance up and down, a sultry smile on his face. "It most definitely *is* a perfect night. Come on."

His hand on my arm, he led me down the docks.

"I'm trying to guess which one is yours," I said, as we approached the boats.

He chuckled. "Which one do you have in mind?"

I let my eyes jump from boat to boat. I settled my gaze on a large sailboat, a charming vessel with the name "Cora" written on the side in Greek lettering.

Although he had said we were going to his yacht, I couldn't help but decide on the sailboat. "That one," I said, gesturing towards it.

"And what makes you think that one is mine?"

"Just a feeling. You seem like the modest type."

He chuckled. "Come with me; we'll find out if you're right."

"I have to wonder," I said. "Who's Cora? Maybe a beautiful Thessalonian girl who broke your heart once upon a time?"

He chuckled. “Cora is... I have no idea. You picked the wrong boat.”

“What?”

“This one is mine.”

My jaw dropped—it *was* the huge yacht.

“You’re kidding, right?” I asked. “*This* is yours?”

“You’re surprised?”

“I mean, a little.”

He chuckled. “Oh, and by the way, I’ve never had my heart broken by a woman. Come on.”

As Alex stepped toward the metal bridge connecting the boat and the dock, part of me expected him to stop, turn around, and tell me he was joking. He didn’t, however. He stepped onto the bridge and waved a fob in front of the door’s electronic lock. When the door opened with a click, there was no more doubt and I realized he wasn’t screwing around.

“Come on,” he said. “We’ve got an evening to enjoy.”

He flashed me one more smile before stepping inside the yacht, leaving the door open for me to follow him.

This guy has got to be too good to be true...

Those words in mind, I slipped out my phone and sent Colette a pin. Her text came only a few seconds later.

All good?

I took a deep breath, phone in hand as I tried to come up with what words to use.

Uh, yeah. I mean, great. I’ll let you know if anything weird happens.

I’ll have my phone near if you need me.

Tucking my own phone back into my pocket, I turned my attention to the entrance into the yacht.

I stepped inside, the interior as sleek and modern as I had guessed judging by the outside. There was room to spare, a

huge lounge area to the right, a dance floor to the left, and a big bar just behind that. Stairs led to a second floor, and I craned my neck to see that a large dining area was above us. No doubt the bedroom was up there, too.

I couldn't believe how big and spacious the interior was—my new condo could've been tucked into the corner without anyone noticing.

“Come in,” he said as he made his way to the bar. “Make yourself comfortable. Something to drink?”

The buzz from my earlier drinks had long faded, and a little something to deal with the eccentricity of this sounded good.

“Yes, a vodka and soda please. A lime if you have it.”

“Certainly.”

He made the drinks, and when they were ready, he pressed a button on the bar. The place filled with warm, low lighting, mellow jazz featuring a seductive saxophone coming from what were no doubt top-of-the-line speakers.

Alex approached me with the drinks, handing mine over.

“Ya mas,” he said, offering the Greek toast that meant, “to health.”

“Ya mas.”

We clinked glasses and sipped, his eyes never leaving mine. Although I'd intended on approaching the evening with Alex keeping my guard up, each moment that passed made me feel like throwing all inhibition away and giving in to what I'd wanted since I'd first laid eyes on him at the bar.

“I have to ask,” I began, “And I apologize if this is too personal. But how does a doctor afford such an extravagant luxury like this? I know doctors can make good money, but this is like, ‘king of the universe’ money.”

He chuckled, taking one more sip of his drink.

“There's a trick to making a lot of money,” he said, nodding for me to follow him. Together we walked over to the

other side of the main room, approaching a huge window that looked out onto the Mediterranean, the moon big and round over the rippling, silver water.

“And what’s that?”

“First, you acquire and specialize in a skill that not many people have. In my case, that’s medicine.”

“Alright, then what?”

“Then you find rich people and offer your services to them. You become indispensable. And when you reach the point where they don’t think they can live without your services, they reward you.”

I smiled. “That’s two tricks.”

He laughed, turning his eyes to mine, then looking me up and down. There was something about the way he gazed at my body, the way he looked at me with total confidence... he wanted me to be aware that he was looking.

I bit my lower lip, feeling the heat from his stare.

“When you know as many tricks as I do, you tend to lose count,” he said, taking another sip of his drink and stepping closer, so close that I could smell the expensive whiskey on his breath.

“So... you know a lot of tricks, huh?” I asked seductively. “I’d like to see them.”

“Your wish is my command, gorgeous.”

With that, he moved in and swooped his mouth to my neck, placing his lips on the delicate skin there. I gasped—shocked that he’d made such a brazen move yet thrilled that he’d done it. He kissed me up and down the slope of my neck, pushing me against the window, my body backlit by the moon over the sea.

I moaned, leaning into the kiss, and the two of us set our drinks down and quickly placed our hands on each other’s bodies. He put his palms on my breasts, squeezing them through my dress and making my nipples go hard.

Alex continued to kiss me, his lips going from my neck to my shoulders to my clavicle. I soon reached a point where I couldn't take any more teasing. I grabbed his head, working my fingers into the thickness of his dark hair, lifting his face up to look me in the eyes.

Then I turned the tables. *I* kissed *him*, sealing my lips against his.

The second our mouths touched, lightning ran through my entire being.

CHAPTER 4

ALEX



The way she kissed me was hot as fuck.

There was aggression and want behind the kiss, Georgia saying with her lips that she wasn't going to sit back and wait for me to take the lead. It was intoxicating.

Her fingers were buried in my hair, holding my face against hers. She pulled in sharp intakes of air as we kissed, moans of pleasure mixed in with them. The kiss was divine, her taste and scent more intoxicating than the whiskey still on my palate. I wanted to drink her down, to make her mine.

First, I needed to get a good look at the body that'd been driving me mad from the second I'd laid eyes on her. I placed my hands on her hips, feeling her soft curves through the fabric. Next, I pushed her back gently, taking her lips from mine. She regarded me with an expression of playful curiosity, as if she couldn't wait to find out what I was going to do next.

I turned her around, taking the zipper of her dress between my fingers and pulling it down, exposing the flawless expanse of her back and the strap of the black bra she had on underneath. It wasn't long before I reached her waist, the zipper stopping right at the hint of her matching lace thong.

Staying true to not standing around and waiting for me to make the moves, Georgia reached up and took hold of the shoulder straps of her dress, peeling them down all the way to her waist. I finished the job, pulling the dress down over her perfect, round ass, grabbing handfuls of it as I kissed the back of her neck and allowed the dress to fall to the floor.

Georgia moaned as I kissed and caressed her, sticking her ass out and signaling with her body that she appreciated my attention.

“You know, I wouldn’t have guessed that you were an ass man.”

I chuckled, sliding my hands up her curves. “Beauty is beauty,” I said. “And you have it in abundance. There’s not one bit of you that I’m not going to enjoy.”

She turned back to me and bit down on her lower lip, stepping closer until my hardness pressed against her middle.

“Is that right? And what do you want to enjoy next?”

I glanced down, taking in the sight of her full tits resting in the black lace bra she wore.

“I’ve got some ideas.”

“Don’t keep me waiting too long.”

Georgia reached around behind her, a devilish smile on her plush lips as she unhooked the clasp of her bra. She did it slowly, and I could sense that she was taking a bit of pleasure in making me wait to see what I so desperately wanted.

The clasp soon came loose, and she slowly moved her fingertips under the straps. If she was trying to ratchet up the anticipation, her plan was most definitely working—by the time she pulled her bra down enough to hint at the pink nipples hidden underneath, I felt like a wild animal barely in control of myself.

She grinned seductively as she slipped the bra down under her breasts. Just as I’d expected, her tits were perfect, round and full, her pink nipples practically crying out to be kissed.

That’s just what I did, leaning in and scooping her breasts into my hands, sucking and licking her nipples as she sighed with pleasure. Once more, she ran her hands into my hair and held me in place, silently telling me that I wasn’t going to stop until she wanted me to.

I grabbed onto one of her thick thighs as I kissed her, moving my hand up until I was between her legs, close enough

that I could feel the heat from her pussy. There was no doubt in my mind that she was as turned-on as I was, just as desperate for what we both knew was coming.

I took my lips from her breasts and stood straight. I brought my fingertips to her pussy, teasing through the soaked fabric of her panties. She gasped as I touched her, closing her eyes and parting her lips. I dragged my fingers along the outlines of her folds, her body shaking slightly from the pleasure.

“When I told you there wasn’t a bit of you that would go without my attention, I meant it.”

“God, yes. Keep touching me like that.”

Georgia definitely was not shy about expressing what she wanted. American women really were different.

I couldn’t resist teasing her more, pressing onto her clit through her panties, making slow circles as I did so. She pulled an “ah... ah...” into her mouth, her hands on my shoulders for support. She gripped me tightly, digging her fingernails into my muscles. I had to admit, I was having fun teasing her. Part of me wanted to bring her to orgasm right there on the spot.

What I wanted more, however, was to taste her.

I put my hands on her hips once more, and lifted her off the ground, a squeal of surprise sounding from her. Georgia wrapped her legs around my waist, her tits pressed against my chest. I carried her over to one of the big, plush chairs in the room, setting her gently down onto it. Once she was settled, I knelt, then reached up and took her panties by the waistband, pulling them down over her thighs, giving myself a perfect view of her gorgeous pussy, her lips glistening with arousal, a patch of blonde curls above.

I tossed her panties aside, spread her legs and began covering her inner thighs with kisses. Her skin tasted so damn good, and I could only imagine how delicious her pussy would be. I moved in closer, kissing her lips, sticking my tongue out just a bit to move between them. She gasped as I waited on the

brink of licking her, and as her fingers worked their way into my hair once more, I knew that the teasing was about to stop on her terms.

“You’re going to make me lose my mind if you keep doing that,” she said between moans. “I can’t take it.”

I chuckled, glancing up to watch as Georgia moved her other hand over her breasts, her mouth open in a wide “O” of pleasure.

As much as I wanted to draw out the fun, I couldn’t resist moving it along. I took my hands from her thighs, opening her lips and exposing the glistening pink wetness. I set my eyes on her clit, moving in and licking it slowly, pressing the flat part of my tongue against it and dragging up, letting her feel every sensation of my mouth on her.

She moaned, squirming to the side. I repeated it, licking her again and again, reaching up to take one of her breasts into my hand, teasing her lovely nipple until I felt it go hard against my touch.

She tasted divine, just as I’d expected. Her dewy sweetness was greater than any summer fruit, her pussy as delicious as honey.

She squirmed and writhed, her hips undulating in a way that somehow managed to make my cock even harder.

“Don’t stop,” she moaned. “Keep going, just like that.”

I allowed myself a small grin, knowing that I was bringing her to the brink of total ecstasy. I continued to lick her clit, changing the movement of my tongue from broad, flat strokes to quick circles with the tip of it.

A glance up, along with the quickening pace of her breathing, let me know that she was on the verge of orgasm. I slipped my fingers into her while I ate her glorious pussy, moving them slowly at first then quicker as I used my tongue to bring her closer and closer to climax. She grew wetter and wetter, the sweetness of her juices flowing over my tongue as I did my sensual work.

Her panting stopped, and I looked up to see that her mouth was open, her eyes closed, and her back arched. She shook slightly, the orgasm running through her body and freezing her in a pose of total ecstasy. When she peaked, Georgia fell back onto the chair and let out a long, slow sigh, her chest rising and falling as she came back into the moment.

I wanted more. I rose, wiping her wetness from my mouth with the back of my hand, taking in the sight of her gorgeous body before me.

After a few moments of recovery, she opened her eyes slowly, an expression of bliss on her impossibly beautiful face.

“There a reason why I’m naked and you’re not?”

CHAPTER 5

GEORGIA



Alex stood in front of me looking like a model and James Bond all at once. He was handsome and suave, charming, and even a little bit funny in his own sort of way. My attention drifted down to his cock and judging by the size of the tenting of fabric, I felt pretty confident that he was packing something special down there.

I couldn't wait a second longer to see it. He slipped off his suit jacket, tossing it onto the nearby couch. Alex looked so damn good in that tight, black T-shirt that I almost wanted to keep him in it for a little while longer—*almost*. The sleeves of the shirt gripped his thick biceps, the fabric practically painted on over his solid chest.

He pulled that off next, revealing a sculpted, powerful upper body that turned me on all over again. His pecs were two chiseled squares, and his stomach was a freaking eight pack. He had a thin happy trail and pelvic notches, those sexy as hell indentations disappearing below his waistline.

My breath quickened. I couldn't wait any longer. Sitting up, I reached for his belt, my fingers a blur as I opened it. Next, I went for his zipper and yanked that right down.

First, he raised his thick, dark eyebrows in mild surprise. After that, he let out a chuckle.

“Someone's in a hurry.”

“What?” I asked, yanking down his pants and exposing the tight, black boxer briefs he had on underneath. “You want to do a little striptease first?”

“That actually sounds fun,” he said. “A little Magic Mike?”

I tossed him a smile before grabbing onto the elastic of his underwear and preparing to yank them down. I pulled down his boxer briefs, and just as I’d anticipated, his cock was glorious, long and thick and so delicious looking that I could hardly think straight. I wrapped my fingers around it, barely able to close them the entire way.

He growled with pleasure as I touched him. The sight of his cock was enough to make my stomach tense, for my pussy to tingle like it never had before. He’d already given me my first orgasm of the evening with his mouth, and now I was ready for him to do it with the perfect specimen I had in front of me.

“As much as I want this inside of me,” I said, moving my fingers up and down his length. “First, I want to return the favor.”

I flicked my eyes up at him, a smile on my face as I opened my mouth and licked his end. He tasted amazing, savory and musky and perfect. That little hint of a grin was on his face, that sly expression that was cocky and sexy all at once. I teased him a bit more with my tongue, dragging it slowly over his head and the ridge below.

After a bit of this, I placed my lips on his cock and kissed it, moving up and down his length, all the way to his balls. I teased those a bit too, sucking on them for just a few moments. I went back up his length and opened my mouth at his head, taking his cock into my mouth. The sensation of his warm hardness against my tongue was heavenly, and I lashed him with kisses as I formed a tight seal with my lips.

“God, you look so fucking sexy with my cock in your mouth,” he said, his voice low and sensual.

I flashed him my smiling eyes, then closed them, relishing having him in my mouth. Though I’d worried at first that he might be too much to take, after a little getting used to his size, I quickly discovered that he was the perfect fit.

I picked up the pace of moving my lips up and down his length. Alex's breathing quickened, his muscles tensing and flexing as he gazed down at me. I wanted more than just oral, but at the same time, I couldn't help but feel the want to bring him to orgasm. The sight of him standing over me, pleasure written all over his face, was too intoxicating.

Thankfully, he slipped his hands into my hair and guided me off.

"You're pretty good at that," he said with a grin. "Almost too good."

He looked my body up and down, his eyes narrowing with animal intensity, his mouth formed into a flat line. Without a word, he wrapped his arm around my waist and effortlessly scooped me off the ground, another surprised, but excited squeal shooting out of my mouth.

Alex carried me over to the couch, which was more than big enough to lay me down so I could spread out. He climbed over top of me, his huge cock hanging down so closely to my pussy that tingles of excitement broke out all over my body. I reached down and grabbed it, stroked it, teased it with my fingertips as I guided him closer and closer to where I wanted it.

Right as I grazed my lips with his head, however, a thought struck me— protection.

"Do you have anything?" I asked. "For, you know."

He pursed his lips, a tinge of frustration forming on his face that suggested he wasn't happy with himself for forgetting such an important detail.

"No, I don't. But I'm a doctor; I'm in the business of health. I always stay on top of such matters."

His meaning was clear, and his words put me at ease.

"But if *you're* worried about other consequences..."

"No, that's not a problem, I'm on the pill."

"Good. We're not going to do anything you're not comfortable with, but—"

“It’s fine,” I said, cutting him off with both my words and a finger across his lips. “I’m good if you are.” I was so caught up in the moment that I didn’t want to do a thing to wreck it.

He grinned, then kissed my finger.

“Then where were we?”

“Let me see if I can remember,” I said playfully.

I reached back down and took ahold of his cock, stroking it once more, loving how thick and heavy it felt in my hand. I guided it towards my pussy, spreading my lips with his head and positioning him right at my opening.

Alex did the rest of the work, pushing into me with a slow, deep thrust of his hips. My eyes went wide at the sensation of him filling me, stretching me out. It was a pleasure like nothing else but at the same time, it wasn’t easy. I pursed my lips hard, squirming my hips as I tried to accommodate his size.

“Oh my *God*.” I moaned the words, my hands on his hips as I guided him deeper and deeper inside of me. I forced my eyes open, watching as his thickness vanished, inch by inch.

When he finally stopped, and he was all the way inside, I took a deep breath to compose myself. The pleasure radiated outward from my pussy, so intense that I could hardly think straight. No man had ever made me feel as good as Alex did—not even close.

“You alright, gorgeous?” he asked with a small smile.

“Absolutely,” I replied. “I am so, so good. Just savoring every sensation of you.”

Alex chuckled. “It goes both ways—you feel amazing.”

His words sent a shiver of pleasure through me. I moved my hands up his hips, feeling the tightness of his muscles. Without another word, he pulled back and drove into me deeply once more. This time I was used to his size, his thick cock pushing deep into me, moans pouring from my lips.

Alex moved in and out, my channel gripping him tightly. His green, piercing eyes stared down at me, his gaze almost as

arousing as his prick inside of me. I writhed underneath him, wrapping my legs around his waist and holding his muscular, powerful body against me.

He leaned down, kissing me along my neck once more. There was something about Alex that I'd never experienced with a man before—and not just his huge manhood. It was the way he handled me, the way he made love to me, a perfect blend of passion and aggression.

It wasn't long before he raised himself up into a kneeling position and used the new angle to buck into me hard. I couldn't help but groan and gasp, my breasts swaying wildly back and forth from the collision of his body against mine. He grabbed my legs, holding them against his statue-like physique and thrusting into me over and over.

It was a true pleasure to watch his body work, my eyes drifting over his big, round shoulders, down to his ropey, thick biceps, then to his huge, powerful chest. He was powerfully built, but not bulky. There was a leanness to him, an athleticism that let me know he wasn't some meathead guzzling protein shakes all day.

The sight of him in front of me, coupled with the feeling of his cock thrusting into me over and over, was more than enough to bring me to another orgasm. This one was more powerful than the last, my legs shaking and more deep breaths pulling into my lungs. The sounds that came from me were unlike any other I'd made during sex, and even in the grips of pleasure I was aware that he was making me lose control in a way I never had before.

“You have no idea how wonderful it is to watch you come,” he said. “I could watch it over and over.”

“You keep screwing me like that and you'll get the chance.”

He chuckled, taking hold of his cock and sliding it out of me. The instant it was gone, all I could think about was how much I wanted it back inside of me.

Alex moved off the couch, nodding toward the stairs.

“Come with me.”

I rolled off the couch and got onto my feet, my legs a bit weak and wobbly underneath me. Alex took my hand and led me to the stairs, the two of us going up and to the second floor of the yacht. We stepped into a hallway with doors on both sides and another at the end.

We reached the door at the end of the hall, and Alex opened it for me, giving my ass a playful squeeze as I stepped past him.

The room was stunning. It was a huge master bedroom, circular shaped, the windows all along the far end looking out onto the front of the boat and the ocean beyond. The moon was big and full, placed right in the center window in almost cinematic perfection. Between the view and the man, it felt like something out of a dream.

The bed was massive, too. Alex and I stepped over to it, and, with a smile on my face, I guided him into a sitting position. He grinned as he sat, his cock pointing straight up. I spread my legs and moved over top of him, lowering myself slowly.

“F... *fuck*,” I moaned as he entered me once more.

Alex placed his hand on the small of my back, turning his body and bringing his back against the headboard, me still on top of him. He sat up, wrapping his arm around my waist and pressing my body to his as I rode him. I rolled my hips, grinding on him, savoring the feeling of his cock inside of me.

It felt so good, so damn good that all I could do was rest my forehead on his shoulder as I rode him. His hands moved all over my body, as if there was so much of me that he wanted to touch that he couldn't linger in any one particular place. He cupped my breasts, teasing my nipples as the third orgasm drew closer and closer.

“Come for me,” he growled into my ear, his breath hot and his voice commanding. “Do it, gorgeous.”

I couldn't resist any longer, nor could I come up with any sassy words to throw in his direction. The third orgasm broke,

and I arched my back as it rushed through me, the intensity and ecstasy like nothing else. This time, Alex came with me. With a hard grunt, he exploded deep inside, his cock pulsing as he shot himself deep. The sensation of him erupting inside me was enough to bring my pleasure to a new level, to make me feel like my body was about to come apart at the seams.

As the orgasm faded, all I could do was collapse on top of him. Alex wasted no time wrapping his arms around me, holding me close as our bodies melted together.



The two of us stayed like that for a little while and held one another as we watched the moon. His hand moved back and forth over the curve of my hip, the slow, rhythmic sensation enough to lull me tantalizingly close to sleep.

I finally drifted off, but it was only for a second. I shook my head and snapped back into alertness, sitting up in bed.

“I need to go.”

Alex sat up slowly, regarding me with an expression of mild concern.

“Something wrong?”

“No, nothing’s wrong. In fact, everything’s right.”

He smiled slightly. “In that case, why not stay? I can drive you back to your place in the morning.”

God, it was a tempting offer. The idea of drifting off to sleep with him, waking up to the blue sky over the Mediterranean, maybe even grabbing a little breakfast at some cute, seaside café... it was about the most perfect thing imaginable.

I shook my head. “I have too much to get done before the flight tomorrow. I still need to pack and clean the apartment.”

Alex didn’t seem bothered. In fact, he struck me as more amused than anything else.

“You Americans, always in such a hurry. At least let me drive you back to your place.”

That was a tempting offer—too tempting, in fact. I knew the longer I was around him, the more likely I’d say, “screw it” and give in to spending the night.

“Very nice of you, but that’s OK.”

“It’s not just a matter of being nice,” he countered, his voice taking on a more serious tone. “It’s a matter of your safety. Even a town like this, sleepy as it may seem, is no place for a woman to be walking alone in the dead of night.”

There was something strange about his words, something that caught my attention. It seemed he wasn’t just casually stating that, but more like he *knew* there was danger, *knew* what was lurking out there, as if he had first-hand experience.

I pushed it out of my head and spoke. “I wasn’t planning on walking. There’s this thing called Uber, after all.” I smiled, letting him know I was only messing around.

“Ah, true. In that case, I’ll leave you to it.” Without another word, he rolled off the bed and stepped over to the closet, my eyes lingering on his perfect ass.

I hurried out of the room, and back downstairs to where the pile of my clothes lay. I pulled on my underwear, then grabbed my phone seeing that Colette had sent me a text twenty minutes ago.

Sorry to be a mommy, but you’re OK?

I smiled, grateful that she was looking out for me.

Just fine. Better than fine, actually. I’m taking an Uber back. I’ll tell you all about it when I’m home.

You better, she responded followed up with a wink emoji.

Next, I pulled up Uber and ordered the car. Luckily, there was one only a few minutes away.

I put on the rest of my clothes, then turned to see Alex leaning against the wall next to the stairs. He was dressed in

nothing but a pair of jeans, his arms crossed over his bare chest, a small smile on his lips.

“You know, as good as you look naked, there’s something about a woman getting dressed that’s incredibly sexy.”

“Were you watching me the whole time?” I asked with a grin.

“Greek men appreciate beauty,” he said, walking over to me with slow, confident steps. “In fact, when we’re presented with it, we often find it impossible to tear our eyes away.”

He placed his hand under my chin, tilted my face up, and planted a slow, sensual kiss on my lips. The rest of the world melted away as he kissed me, and for a moment all I wanted was to go right back upstairs.

He was the one who showed restraint, however. Alex took his lips from mine.

“It was a pleasure, Georgia,” he said. “One I won’t soon forget.”

“Same here.”

I pursed my lips and glanced away; the sexual tension so thick in the air that I could hardly think straight.

“Uh, bye.”

It wasn’t the most eloquent or sexiest thing to say, but I had to say something and get out of there before I gave in to what I wanted.

As he opened the door to let me out, I took one last look at him, then stepped out into the cool, evening air. I hurried down the dock, and as I did, I glanced over my shoulder. Not sure why—maybe I was hoping that he’d be standing on the second-floor deck watching me, gesturing for me to come back inside. He wasn’t.

I reluctantly tore my eyes away from the yacht and turned toward the road beyond the dock. A car matching the description of my Uber was there, the headlights on. I hurried over and got inside, the driver confirming my information before driving off.

I watched the yacht shrink in the distance, the moon still high above it like a big, silver coin.

I couldn't help but smile, knowing that I'd just made a memory that would last me a lifetime, the perfect end to my magical adventure in Greece.

CHAPTER 6

ALEX



I was certain I was losing my mind.

Making my way down Fifth Avenue in the warm evening air, I felt positive that it was her. She had that same build, that same curvaceous body, that same sun-blond hair. I drew closer, weaving through the thick crowds on the sidewalk, the towers of midtown Manhattan looming large over me.

Could it possibly be her? We hadn't spent that much time together, but she didn't say a word about New York, or any connection in her life that would explain her being here in my city.

Nevertheless, my heart raced faster and faster the closer I got to her. Truth be told, I was so overcome by the possibility of it being her that I had no idea what I'd even say. Regardless, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to speak to her, to lay eyes on the gorgeous face that I hadn't been able to stop thinking about since that night in Greece over a week ago.

The woman stopped, slipping something out of her purse—her phone, of course. Phone in hand, she turned and, right at the moment I was about to open my mouth and say something, I realized it wasn't her.

I stopped instantly.

Although the woman was very attractive and looked similar to Georgia, she was just another woman. I watched as she started to raise the phone to her ear. As she did, she must've sensed that some idiot was standing a dozen or so feet away from her, staring at her as if he were invisible.

She turned slowly, making eye contact with me. I broke my gaze from hers the instant it met. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her watch me for a few moments, as if wanting to make sure that she didn't have anything to worry about, and that I wasn't some creeper that was going to follow her. Once she was convinced, she brought the phone the rest of the way up and began chatting to whomever was on the other line.

I ran my hand through my hair, feeling like an asshole. I'd gotten so carried away with myself that I'd nearly approached some random woman on the street.

The woman, whoever she was, flagged down a cab, hopped in and was gone.

I walked away, continuing on my path and shaking my head once more at the absurdity of it all. It would've been one thing if the embarrassing incident that had just passed had been a one-time thing. But it wasn't. Nearly every damn day I'd spotted a woman on the streets of Manhattan that I was certain was her, only for the woman to turn and reveal that it was someone I'd never seen before in my life.

As I approached my building at Fifth and West Fifty-third, I reflected once more on how strange it was that a one-night stand had left such an impression on me. While one-night stands were no longer common for me these days—I was far too busy with work for that—I'd had more than a few when I was younger. Most had been fun, one-off things, the woman and I going our separate ways in the morning, no strings attached and no lingering feelings.

Georgia was different though. She'd made an impression on me that I couldn't shake, one that made me furious with myself for not asking for her last name or any other sort of information that would've allowed me to get in contact with her.

Then again, maybe it was for the best that we wouldn't be seeing one another again. The last thing I needed was for a woman to be taking up mental space. Work was demanding enough already without a distraction like her on top of it.

I slipped my apartment keycard out of my wallet and waved it in front of the sensor for the big revolving door of my building's lobby. The lobby was stunning—situated in an art-deco style pre-war building, it featured marble and gold with a huge chandelier hanging high above it. There was always someone working the front desk, no matter the hour, and the employee greeted me with a nod as I strode past. Another swipe of my card in front of the elevator sensor, and I was on my way up.

I did my best to push Georgia out of my mind though not an easy task. The moment she disappeared from my thoughts, however, I found myself thinking about the shift I'd just finished. Namely, the poor kid I'd managed to bring back from the brink of death. Some nineteen-year-old biker working for Seamless had gotten himself smacked by a truck running a red light over in Long Island City. Our hospital, Midtown Presbyterian, had one of the best trauma surgery units in the area, so he'd been airlifted in around five PM.

The kid was covered in blood when he arrived, and part of me believed that he wouldn't make it. Lucky for him, I was never one to back down from a challenge, or a chance to save a life. Me, and the rest of my team, spent ten straight hours working on the kid, and more than a few times I'd been worried we were going to lose him.

I'd never been one to give up, however. Slowly but surely, we repaired the damaged organs, set the broken bones, and sealed the numerous lacerations. The kid was in rough shape and was going to need a hell of a lot of PT to even hope to be back on his feet.

But he was alive. Experiencing times like that, where someone would be waking up in the morning who otherwise might be dead, were the exact reason why I was in this business. Well, that and because I was damn good at it.

The elevator opened to the forty-fourth floor, and I made the rest of the walk to my front door. One final keycard swipe and I was in, my body aching with fatigue as I stepped over the threshold.

My place was small – two beds, two baths, the whole apartment eight-hundred square feet in total. But that was more than enough for someone like me who spent most of his waking hours at work. Not to mention that the view, an incredible sight overlooking the rest of Midtown and Central Park beyond, more than made up for the lack of space. I could have afforded something much grander but preferred the smaller and cozier digs after a long shift at the hospital.

I tossed my wallet and phone onto the kitchen counter, stepping over to the fridge and taking out some fruit and protein powder for a pre-bed smoothie.

The late-night shift wasn't normally my thing—it'd been part of the arrangement I'd made with the hospital for the couple weeks I'd taken off to visit my mother in Greece. It had its perks, however. I'd always been a man slightly out of step with the rest of the world, so a schedule that reflected that suited me. Besides, it wouldn't be forever.

I threw the ingredients into the blender, topping it all off with a couple scoops of protein powder and a glass of milk. A minute or so later I had my smoothie. Glass in hand, I stood in front of the big, wall-window that looked out over my private balcony, the city just as majestic as ever.

Right as I raised the glass to my lips, however, my phone sounded from the counter. Normally, I kept the thing on vibrate once I finished my shift. There were two exceptions—the first was for Nico Drakos, the kingpin of the Greek mafia in New York. I had set the *Godfather* theme as the ringtone for him. His nickname around the city was “Godfather of the Night.” Nico, sadistic and short-tempered, wasn't a man you let go to voicemail.

The *Godfather* theme wasn't playing, instead a series of high-pitched beeps sounded, chosen because they were loud enough to cut through whatever noise I might be around. Those beeps meant Johnny Baros, Nico's number two in the city—the man he relied on when hands needed to get dirty. Or, in my case, it meant that someone was hurt and needed medical attention.

I hissed a curse under my breath, knowing that the sleep I needed wasn't going to happen. I got a sip of my smoothie down the hatch before setting it down and heading over to the phone.

"This is Alex."

Silence at first. "Where are you?"

"My apartment. What's going on?"

"You're needed at the club. Gunshot wound. Not sure how bad."

Shit. "Got it. Coming now."

"Car's already on the way. Be outside in fifteen. You'll know it when you see it."

With that, the call ended.

Fifteen minutes meant just enough time to get out of my scrubs and into something that I wouldn't mind getting blood all over. I stripped, throwing on some dark jeans and a black T-shirt along with a pair of black sneakers.

When I was ready, I grabbed my things and hurried out of the apartment. A short time later, I was downstairs in front of the building. The warm, early summer air was pleasant enough, though the midnight heat didn't bode well for what was to come when the sun came out later. Thoughts of weather quickly left my mind as a car pulled to a stop in front of me, a silver Bentley sedan, to be precise.

Before I had a chance to move, the driver, clad in a sharp, black suit, sprang out of the car and hurried over, opening the door for me.

"Get in. He's waiting for you."

I flashed him a skeptical expression before sliding into the car, the door shutting behind me.

I couldn't believe who was sitting inside the car—none other than Nico Drakos, the Godfather of the Night himself.

"Evening, Alexandros. I hope you're ready to get your hands dirty."

CHAPTER 7

ALEX



I'd never been the sort of man to be taken by surprise but seeing one of the most powerful underground crime figures seated next to me at four in the morning sure as hell managed to catch me off guard.

Nico was the picture of power. He was dressed in an immaculately tailored navy suit, the Hermes tie he wore situated in a perfect Windsor knot. He wore a gold ring on the pinky finger of his left hand, a green jewel set into it. He was trim and tall, with an air of quiet authority, his eyes hidden behind large, designer sunglasses despite the hour, his silver hair slicked back. In his hand was a cigarette, a long trail of smoke slithering from the tip and out the slightly cracked window on his side.

“Good evening Mr. Drakos.”

He nodded slowly, acknowledging my words. Then he gestured to the driver.

“Go. We haven't a second to spare.” He spoke with a hint of a Greek accent, his voice low and deep.

The driver complied without a word, expertly pulling the car back onto the street.

“It's good to see you, sir,” I said. “But I don't think I'm too out of line to wonder what's going on that you're here personally to pick me up.”

He smiled slowly, taking a drag of his cigarette.

“Those things will kill you, you know.”

Nico chuckled. “Once a doctor, always a doctor. But you should know better than any of us that many in this business aren’t around long enough for these to put us in our graves.” He took one more drag. “But forgive me if I don’t screw around with small talk, Alex.”

Nico was one of the few people who called me by my first name, rather than Dr. Ecomides. There simply weren’t many in my life who were close enough to me to even know my first name, let alone use it. Nico, on the other hand, as someone who had been close with my father, and had known me since I was a boy, more than had that privilege.

“Of course. What’s going on?”

“It’s David.”

My gut tightened at the mere mention of the name. David was Nico’s nephew, a hotheaded little shit who’d spent his adult life writing checks with his mouth that his body couldn’t cash. He was a member of the Family, but Nico had been wise enough to limit his responsibilities, to keep him on low-level fetch-and-carry operations.

“David’s been shot? No offense, but how the hell did that happen?”

“Ran his mouth to some Albanians at Agrios. They went out back to resolve the matter, and David killed one of them on the spot, the other putting a round in David’s side.”

“Shit. And where’s the other Albanian?”

“Don’t worry about him. You won’t be needing to patch him up tonight.”

I shook my head, thinking what a waste it was that two men lost their lives because of out-of-control egos. It was something I’d gotten used to in the mafia world. Men like Nico, smart and shrewd, could keep themselves in check. For every one of them, however, there were a dozen David’s, ego freaks who went around looking for excuses to wave a gun and flaunt their connections.

David was young, barely into his twenties. The idea of something happening to him was no doubt tearing Nico up

inside, as much as he might've been playing things close to the chest.

“How bad is it?”

“He was still talking and walking last I heard. Johnny’s supervising the situation. Your place is between mine and the club, so I figured that I’d pick you up on the way. Besides, the last thing the people of Midtown need to hear at four in the morning is you racing that motorcycle of yours down Fifth Avenue.”

I chuckled. I’d need to see David to make sure he was OK, but Nico’s calm attitude suggested that he had information and wasn’t too worried about his nephew.

The club was only a few minutes south, and it wasn’t long before we pulled up to the entrance. “Agrios” meant “wild” in Greek, and only the lowercase, neon purple “A” on the otherwise black, nondescript door would hint that the place was a strip club. That’s how Nico liked it, only those in the know were aware of its existence, let alone knew how to get in.

Nico, of course, didn’t take the main entrance. The boss waved for the driver to go on. Moments later, we were pulling into the VIP parking area, where dozens of the finest luxury cars I’d ever laid eyes on were scattered here and there.

The driver parked in front of the underground entrance, stepping out to open the door for Nico. No such nicety for me this time—clearly, I was left to see myself out. We approached the door, and the driver opened that for us, too. On the other side was a tall stairwell, the space illuminated by soft, white light. Every time I went up those stairs, I felt like I was heading into a different dimension, a place that was disconnected from the day-to-day world outside.

That was by design, of course. Agrios was meant to be a place out of time. No matter what hour you arrived, the inside appeared to be sealed off from the outside world, the most beautiful women imaginable there dancing, a handful of rich and powerful men sipping their drinks watching them.

And as expected that's just what I encountered on the other side of the door. Agrios was dominated by colors of red and black and gold, the low, pulsing beat of electronic music in the air. It was a large area, with little nooks generously spaced apart where clientele could have a little privacy for dancing and conversation. Marble statues were situated here and there, Greek-style, all of women in erotic positions. The overall effect of the décor was sleaze and elegance all in one.

A handful of women were on stage. Didn't matter that it was nearly dawn—Nico had designed the club as a place where a man could fly in on the red eye from Tokyo or Moscow or Berlin and be greeted with a drink and a warm smile from one of many gorgeous women. And that sort of clientele was what I spotted as I entered. One table was packed with Yakuza, recognizable instantly by their tattooed arms and necks, and their serious demeanors. Another was a raucous table of what appeared to be Columbian drug runners, drinks being thrown back to calls of "Salud!", their arms wrapped around the waists of their women.

When I was a young man first stepping into Agrios for the first time, the place had struck me as so grand, so exclusive, that merely walking up those stairs and through the front door had been enough to make me feel as if the world was mine.

The truth had taken the shine off the place over the last several years. Agrios was a cover, for one. The front of the house made money and brought prestige to the Drakos crime family, but the real business was done in the back. Drug running, weapons sales, even human trafficking took place. Indeed, the girls dancing were all on the offer. Just being there anymore was enough to make me sick to my stomach, to wish each time would be the last.

Maybe it would be.

Nico made the rounds, going from table to table and chatting up the clientele. He was as dangerous a man as they came, but even so, he knew how to work a room.

I hurried over to Nico, placing my hand on his arm. He glanced down at it, then up at me with an expression that

seemed to say, “if anyone else other than you did this, they’d be on the floor.”

I took my hand away.

“Yes, Alexandros? Is there a reason why you’re bothering me in the middle of my duties?”

“David. He needs my attention, yes?”

He pursed his lips. “Yes, indeed he does. Johnny said that he was fine, that it was a simple matter of stitching up the wound.”

“Maybe so. All the same, a gunshot wound is a gunshot wound.”

He nodded, conceding the point. “You’re right. Let’s handle my nephew after we have a little something at the bar to celebrate, yes?” He turned his attention toward the nearest woman on stage, a stunning redhead. “Maybe I’ll even let you have your pick.”

Nico was off before waiting for my response. I glanced up at the woman, who met my gaze with a smile as she danced, nothing on her body but a skimpy red thong and matching pair of pasties—neither of which would likely be on her for long. She was gorgeous, just like all the rest of the women in the place. Truth be told, however, no woman had so much as caught my eye since my night with Georgia, other than the ones I’d thought were her, of course.

I hurried to Nico’s side. He flicked his hand toward the bartender, who responded by putting a glass of Nico’s usual cognac in his hand.

“Something for you, Alexandros?”

“Not when I’m working.”

He glanced back at me, a small smile on his lips. “Smart kid.”

We reached the door to the back area where two very large, dark-suited guards sat on both sides of it. One of them opened the door as we approached, and Nico and I stepped into the

only place in New York more exclusive than the main floor of Agrios—the back of the house.

The hallway was dark, and through the open door I could catch glimpses of the various illegal goings-on in the place. One room had a table of gangsters looking over recent illegal arms purchases, another with more goons packing neat bricks of heroin and coke for sale.

In another, an Agrios manager was in the middle of speaking to a beautiful woman who couldn't have been older than twenty. Her accent indicated she was eastern European, most likely from Belarus, and the conversation consisted of him explaining the terms of her employment which were she dances and “entertains” on demand, or she'll be sent right back to where she'd come from.

It all made me sick, ashamed that there'd been a point in my life when I'd thought this sort of stuff was admirable. I wasn't a religious man, but I thanked God or whoever else was up there that Nico had spotted my intelligence from a young age and decided that I'd be better use to them as a doctor than a common thug.

A moan cut through the muffled electronic music as we approached the main office. Nico knocked on the door.

“Uncle, is that you?” The voice on the other side belonged to David. But it sounded weak, lifeless.

Something was wrong.

The door opened, Johnny Baros greeting us.

Johnny, Nico's number two man, shot a skeptical glance in my direction. Dressed in one of his usual silk suits, this one a deep red, accented with a silver tie, nearly all of his fingers adorned with gaudy rings, alligator loafers with gold bits on his feet, he was the opposite of Nico's subtle refinement. He was short and squat, his face flashy and his head completely bald aside from his dark, bushy eyebrows and a small soul patch.

“I see you got the bullet-remover,” he said in his usual sarcastic tone, nodding toward me.

Johnny had been the one to take my father's position after his passing. Though I'd never expressed designs on the job myself, Johnny had always viewed me as competition, a little upstart that he'd have to take care of one of these days. Sometimes I found myself wondering what might happen if Nico were ever out of the picture... would Johnny take me out just to be on the safe side?

"Mind moving your fat ass?" I asked. "I can't see the patient."

"Now listen here, asshole," he stepped forward, raising his finger.

"Enough of the bullshit," Nico commanded. "My nephew's here and he's been shot. Help him."

"He's fine," Johnny said with a wave of his hand. "Told you all already."

"Let me be the judge of that," I replied.

"Whatever."

Johnny stepped out of the way, giving me a clearer view into the office. It was black and gold like the rest of the place, the one-way window looking out onto the main floor of the club. David was laying on the desk with his arms draped over the side, staring up at the ceiling.

"Shit," he moaned. "Shit, shit, shit."

He rolled his head to the side. The kid looked rough, his youthful face pale, his watery blue eyes glazed over.

"There he is," David said as he laid eyes on me, a weak smile forming. "There's the man who's going to save my life."

As Nico and Johnny fell into conversation, I stepped to the desk and assessed the damage.

"How're you feeling, kid?" I asked. No doubt what the answer would be, but I needed to make some conversation to get his mind off the wound.

"Oh, hanging in there. Got a hole in me, but that's... that's..." he trailed off.

Not good. His white dress shirt was soaked in blood, and I wasted no time ripping it off as slowly as I could not to scare him. Once it was off, I got a good look at the wound. It was near his liver—not a good sign. I lifted him a bit, just enough to see the other side of him. There was no exit wound. That was another bad sign, knowing that it meant more than likely the bullet was somewhere in there among his vital organs.

“Been a while since I’ve seen you,” I said, keeping the small talk going. “You still seeing that girl who’s no good? The one with the snake tattoo on her arm?”

“Oh, Melissa?” he laughed weakly. “Nah. She... she’s...” he trailed off again. “She’s old news.”

I was getting worried; he wasn’t doing well holding a conversation. Not to mention his skin was pale, and the wound on his stomach was bleeding like crazy. Blood loss was one thing however, what worried me were his fast heart rate, his cold, clammy skin, and the disoriented look in his eyes.

“Good,” I said, trying to hold back my worry at what was looking to be a far more serious wound than I’d been led to believe. “You remember what I said about women with snake tattoos, right?”

Another weak laugh. “Yeah, that they’re advertising how badly they’re gonna bite you.”

Nico approached my side, looking over his nephew. “How are you feeling, young man?”

“I feel... I feel... I mean, it doesn’t hurt anymore. Johnny said that I was going to be fine.”

“Then there you go. Alexandros here will have you patched up in no time.” He clapped his hand on my shoulder. “Isn’t that right?”

I said nothing at first, taking a mental inventory of all that would need to be done if I were going to save David’s life.

“I said, isn’t that right?”

I broke my eyes from David, turning my attention to Johnny. “Hey, I need you to make yourself useful.”

“The hell you say?” he asked, impudence in his tone.

I went around to the desk, pulling open one of the drawers and taking out a neatly folded, but very tacky shirt. I tossed it in his direction.

“Put this on the wound *now*. And apply firm pressure.”

“You kidding? This shirt was custom made, asshole, cost me almost a G.”

Nico’s face fell. No doubt he was beginning to understand that there was something seriously wrong.

“Alexandros?” he asked. “What’s going on here?” There was something strange to his voice, a softness, a trace of worry. Nico never worried.

In that moment, however, I could sense that he knew something was gravely wrong with his nephew.

His eyes were glued onto mine. There was no sense in lying. Nico could spot bullshit from a mile away. Besides, I’d never been in the habit of being untruthful, no matter what the circumstance. I placed my hand on his shoulder and led him away from David.

“This is bad,” I said. “The bullet’s still in there, and I’m almost certain that there’s major internal bleeding happening right now.”

Nico seemed confused. “Is he going to be OK?”

“There’s a lot of blood over here, guys!” Johnny shouted, his hands covered in it as he pressed the shirt against the wound. “It’s pretty freaking bad!”

“Uncle Nico?” David asked. “What’s... what’s...”

I could tell he didn’t even have the energy to speak. I hurried back over to him, noticing that the color in his face had drained even further. His lips were blue, his skin covered in a sheen of sweat. His breath was becoming shorter and shorter.

“Alexandros.” Nico’s voice was stern now, the tone of a man trying to keep himself in check. “You’re going to help him, right? You’re going to save my nephew?”

Without a word, I hurried over to the emergency first aid kit that I'd insisted would be in every room in the club. Setting it on the table, I popped it open.

"You're going to take the bullet out, right?" Johnny asked.

"No, there's no point in taking a bullet out. In fact, most cases that'll make it worse. It's the bleeding; I need to stop this bleeding." I pushed Johnny's hands out of the way, getting a better look at what was going on.

The blood flow hadn't stopped. Normal situation would be to seal up the wound ASAP, then to get the patient in a place where I could monitor for sepsis.

This wasn't a normal situation. The longer I looked, the more certain I was that the bullet had made it through an artery.

"What the hell were you thinking telling us that this was no big deal?" I hissed at Johnny. "This needed to be treated the goddamn second it happened."

"He was fine!" Johnny said. "He was bleeding, sure, but he was sitting up until just a few minutes before you all got here."

I wanted to fire back at him, to tell Johnny that he'd have to be a damn fool to think that any kind of gunshot wound wouldn't be a big deal. Johnny had no excuse to not know. After all, he'd been around plenty of violence. Nico, on the other hand, had likely been struck by wishful thinking, not wanting to believe that his nephew could be in any real danger.

"Uncle Nico?" David asked, his skin growing paler and paler by the second. "I'm... I'm tired..."

Another bad sign. There was no sense in putting up a front.

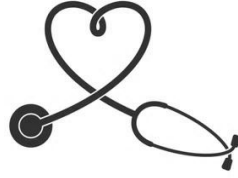
"We're losing him," I said, grabbing Johnny's soaked-through shirt and putting it back on the wound, blood gushing over my hands. "The only chance we have is to get him on a helicopter and—"

David went slack underneath me, the life draining from his eyes.

He was dead.

CHAPTER 8

ALEX



I placed my fingertips on his neck, confirming what I already knew. David was gone.

“What’s wrong with him?” Nico asked. “Why does he look like that?”

It was strange to hear Nico ask the question. He’d been responsible for more than his share of deaths during his time. If anyone knew what a dead body looked like, it was him. The question, I realized, was being asked more out of denial than anything else.

“What the hell did you do, Alex?” Johnny asked. “You fuckin’ killed him!”

Nico stepped forward, slipping his hand underneath his nephew’s head, the kid’s neck limp.

“David. Oh, David.”

He dropped down to his knees. Silence filled the room. Though my eyes were on David and Nico, I could feel the heat from Johnny’s stare from the other side of the room.

“You did this,” he said, hate in his voice. “You could’ve saved him, but you didn’t. Why the hell did you let him die like that?”

I took a slow, deep breath, keeping at bay the anger boiling inside of me at the accusation.

“The only way he was going to be saved would’ve been if I’d gotten here sooner, if I’d been able to give him the care he

needed. Why the fuck did you tell us he was fine when he clearly wasn't?"

"You should've known better!" Johnny shot back, sticking a stubby finger in my direction that reminded me of a sausage with a gold ring wrapped around it. "You're the doctor! You should've known what to do!"

I opened my mouth to speak, to put the prick in his place.

"Enough." A single word from Nico ended the fight. "My nephew is dead and you two are fighting. Enough."

He rose, letting David's head gently fall back onto the desk. Slowly, without a trace of hurry, he wiped his hands on a nearby rag and sighed.

"Boss," Johnny said. "There's something I didn't tell you."

"What is it?"

"We thought David had killed the other two pricks. But... just come with me."

Nico shot him a look of curiosity.

"You too, doc," Johnny said. "Maybe this'll be your chance to make up for this failure."

As we made our way out of the office and down the hall, however, I considered something. Johnny had had it out for me for a good, long while.

The whole thing had me wondering... was this a set-up? Did Johnny know that David wasn't going to make it? Had he planned on delaying me from getting to him in the hopes that the kid would die, that Nico would view my inability to save his nephew as a reason to get rid of me?

Johnny glanced back over his shoulder as we walked, shooting me a hard look. Before I had too much time to think about what he knew, what he was up to, we reached a door on the far end of the hall. I heard sobbing on the other side, followed by moans of pain.

"What the hell is this?" I asked.

Johnny grinned. “Boss, I told you that David killed the guys who he was tussling with. Turns out, he only killed one of them. The other, well, he got winged.”

Nico grinned. “Is that so?”

Johnny chuckled, opening the door. The room on the other side was stark white, bright, fluorescent light filling the space. The purpose of the room was for interrogations, where Johnny and his guys roughed up people who were dumb or unlucky enough to get on his bad side.

Tied to a chair in the middle of the room was a kid. I stepped inside, immediately noting that the guy was bleeding from a wound to his shoulder. The shot wasn't bad, unlike David's. Left untreated, he'd die of blood loss or sepsis, but given the chance, I'd be able to take care of him just fine, even there on the spot.

Getting closer to the skinny, blonde kid, I could see that there was no way he was older than eighteen. He was terrified, his face and hair soaked in sweat as he struggled against his restraints.

“Please!” he shouted. “Let me go!”

“This is him?” Nico asked. “This is the man who shot my nephew?”

Johnny chuckled. “Yep.”

“No!” the kid said. “It wasn't me! And... and... he threatened us, said that he was going to kill us for fun. He shot me, then my friend shot him back in self-defense! I swear!”

Another laugh from Johnny. “Pricks like this say whatever they need to save their own skins, huh?”

As far as I was concerned, the kid's story tracked. David, while young, had long proven himself to be a sadistic little shit. More than a few times I'd been called in to tend to the wounds he'd given to the trafficked girls he'd had his “fun” with. I didn't like to speak ill of the dead, but I couldn't help but feel the world would be a better place without him.

I glanced over at Nico, waiting for his reaction. He stepped slowly over to the kid, squatting just enough to get to his eye level.

“You killed my nephew, my blood. You can’t even imagine the pain that you’ve caused me. I can give you a taste of it. And that’s what I’ll be doing until you beg for me to send you to join my sweet David.”

Shit.

Horror dawned on the kid’s face. Nico and Johnny turned to me.

“What’s his situation, Alexandros?” Nico asked.

Putting aside my disgust, I stepped over to the kid and gave his wound a once-over, the young man hissing in pain as I moved his shirt away to see it.

“Clean shot, through-and-through. Let me take him to the hospital and patch him up.”

“Will he die if you leave him here?” Nico asked.

“In time, yes, from infection or blood loss. It wouldn’t take much to patch him up and have him back on hi—”

“We’re not going to have you do that. There will be no saving this young man. He’s going to suffer and suffer until *I* decide he’s done. You understand?” He directed those last words to the kid, who seemed so struck by fear that he couldn’t even answer.

Nico placed his hands on my shoulder and Johnny led us out of the room.

“So,” Nico said once the door was shut. “You’re going to be on call for the next few days, Alexandros. “We’re going to teach this young man many lessons, and we will need your help to make sure he doesn’t die until we’re ready for him to.”

“Don’t even think of telling us you need to be at the hospital or some shit,” Johnny said. “This, right here, is your real job. Don’t forget that you wouldn’t know a gunshot wound from your asshole if we hadn’t put you through med school.”

“*You* didn’t do a damn thing, Johnny. Other than weasel your way into my father’s job when he died.”

Johnny scoffed, shaking his head.

“We don’t need to get into any of that,” Nico said. “But he’s right—this is your first job.” He reached into his suit jacket pocket, taking out a thick stack of bills. “And this will be your bonus.”

I glanced down... there had to be ten thousand there, easy.

But that didn’t matter.

My mind went back to that kid in there, my gut tensing at the idea of him being tortured. He’d made a mistake, been in the wrong place at the wrong time and now his life was going to end in agony.

But maybe it didn’t have to.

“I’m not doing it,” I said.

Nico cocked his head to the side.

“What?”

“I’m not doing it.”

Johnny laughed. “Now, I *know* you didn’t just tell the boss no.”

“Explain yourself, Alexandros.” Nico slipped the money back into his suit jacket pocket.

“I’m a doctor. And when you become a doctor, you take an oath. And the first part of that oath is do no harm. I save lives. But if I go in there and patch that kid up over and over again only so you can torture him... that goes against everything I’ve been trained to do.”

Another mocking laugh from Johnny. “Look at the trained monkey thinking we pay him to think and actually give a shit.”

“You want me to save the lives of your men, to... clean up after them, that’s one thing. But I’m not going to play a role in killing this kid.”

Nico said nothing at first, his stony gaze locked onto me.

“I’ve been telling you he’s trouble, Nico,” Johnny said. “Got a chip on his shoulder since he was a kid.”

Nico raised his palm. “Enough.”

Johnny, arrogant as he was, shut his ass up.

Nico took in a slow draw of air through his nostrils. It was something I’d seen him do many times before—it was his sign that he was angry, angry almost beyond reason.

“Go home, Alexandros. Go to your apartment and wait for my call.”

That was it. He turned to Johnny, glancing at me one more time before the two of them went down the hall, stepping inside one of the offices.

Johnny had a look for me too as they disappeared into the room, one that seemed to say, “you’re *done*.”

Maybe I was.

I took one more glance at the door, knowing the kid was on the other side. I wanted to help him in the way I knew how, to patch him up.

As I stood there, trying to figure out what the hell to do, I considered that maybe there *was* a way I could help him. Not only that, but a way I could be done with the criminal side of my life.

I left the backrooms, taking one more look at the scenes of debauchery, keeping in mind just how much evil took place back there, evil that I’d turned a blind eye to over the years. I stepped out onto the main floor, knowing how many criminal men were there, all of them responsible for untold misery. I looked at the girls on stage, understanding that they were trapped slaves to the worst men imaginable just for a chance at a better life.

Minutes later, I was outside. It was nearly dawn, a deep orange rising through the towers to the east.

I was in a bad, bad situation. Although it’d been surprisingly easy to say no to Nico, I knew there would be

consequences to looking the boss in the eye and refusing his command.

I was going to save that kid, and I was going to do what I should've done a long, long time ago. I took out my phone, looking up the address for NYPD headquarters, 1 Police Plaza, down in lower Manhattan.

Next, I called an Uber. I spent the drive thinking about what was happening, what I was going to do. Before I knew it, I was in front of the massive concrete building, officers streaming in and out of the place. Inside, I'd tell whoever I needed to what I knew, give them whatever I had to in order to make Nico pay for his crimes.

My life was about to change forever. Good thing I'd never been someone scared to do what needed to be done.

CHAPTER 9

GEORGIA



One month later...

“Georgia Lang!”

Only the dean calling my name from the podium was enough to snap me out of my thoughts.

Didn't matter that it was finally the day of my graduation, the day I'd be officially getting my Masters. All I could think about was the evening ahead, when I'd be telling my parents the biggest news of my life.

Applause boomed through the auditorium. I rose from my seat, plastering a big smile on my face as I made my way across the stage. After two years of nothing but studying and writing, mostly in seclusion, it was strange as hell to be on a stage like that, with thousands of eyes on me.

I glanced toward the stands, spotting Mom and Dad and my best friend Haley with them, the whole trio on their feet and cheering so loudly that I could make them out through the din of applause from the rest of the audience. I had a hell of a lot on my mind, but the sight of the three of them there supporting me, happiness all over their faces as they celebrated my success and hard work, went a long way.

Mary West, the dean of the classics department at University of Colorado, Denver, awaited me with a warm smile on her face. It was a heck of a thing to see—Professor West rarely cracked a smile. Tall and trim with a fan of wrinkles around her dark eyes and a head of immaculately coiffed silver hair, she was the picture of academia.

“You’ve earned this.” Her voice was low as she leaned in to speak the words into my ear. “You’ve got a bright future ahead of you, Georgia. Oh, and congrats on the book.”

I stood there stunned for a long moment as she performed the hooding ceremony. Professor West had, for the last two years of my master’s program, been nothing but a stern-faced ball-buster who never seemed to give me a moment’s rest from the seemingly endless workload she piled onto me.

She leaned in once more. “Got a little bit of a line waiting, Georgia. Get out there and celebrate.”

“Huh?” I came back into the moment, realizing that I was still on stage, that Mary’s words had totally stunned me. I forced a smile onto my face, one that almost certainly looked on the dopey side, sputtered out a quick “thank you so much,” then hurried off the stage.

I had a hell of an evening ahead of me. As I made my way offstage and back to my seat, however, I gave myself a moment to savor what I’d accomplished.

Whether or not I had a bright future ahead of me was yet to be determined. Professor West, smart as she was, didn’t know the secret I’d been keeping for the last month since my trip to Greece. And it was a secret that might derail the life I’d been so carefully building over these last few years.

The ceremony ended an hour later. The sun had begun to set, and big beams of glowing, orange light filled the auditorium. I hurried out of my seat and made my way through the crowd, weaving my way through the knots of friends and family congratulating their relatives as I tried to spot Mom and Dad and Haley.

Haley was easy to find, tall and black-haired, her face lighting up the moment she laid eyes on me. She let out a shriek of happiness, running over and gathering me up in her slender arms and pulling me into a tight hug.

“I can’t believe it!” she shouted, looking me up and down as she released me out of her hug. “I mean, I *can* believe it,

you're brilliant; you getting your master's was always going to happen. But you know what I mean."

I laughed. "Yeah, I know. And thanks. Seriously."

Mom and Dad stepped through the crowd and approached. Mom was all me, blonde and curvy, just as pretty as she was in the pictures I'd seen of her from when she and Dad were my age. She was dressed in her usual flowy, linen clothes, an eager demeanor about her.

"Alright, Haley," Mom said, sidling around her. "You better not hug this girl out."

Mom opened her arms and pulled me into an embrace, squeezing me tight.

"This is a heck of a day," she said, stepping back with her hands on my shoulders as she looked me up and down. "You should be proud as hell of yourself, Georgie."

Dad was tall and broad shouldered, his square head topped with close-cropped silver hair, wearing a simple button-up shirt tucked into his jeans, his belt decorated with a buckle that left no doubt which state he was from. As he approached, his cowboy boots plodded on the auditorium floor.

"Never thought I'd see the day," he said, shaking his head in disbelief. "Not only are you the first in our family to go to college, but you're also the first to get a damn master's degree."

Dad was a self-made man through and through, starting off as a cashier at a local hardware store called West Side Builders in Dallas and moving up through the ranks until he was the owner of not just that store but a whole chain of them. Mom and Dad were the heart and soul of the operation; Dad handled the books and Mom used her abundance of charm to be the face of the stores.

"You did this," Dad said. "And I couldn't be prouder."

What I saw next shocked the hell out of me... it was a tear. Dad *never* cried. Though, to be fair, what he was doing in that moment wasn't really crying. The tear lived for only a split-second, catching the sunlight beaming in and glistening just a

bit before he wiped it away. There were no sniffles, there was no blubbering.

All the same, it moved me deeply. In fact, it was almost surreal to see my tough-as-nails dad break his typical emotional restraint.

“Anyway,” Mom said, clasping her hands together. “We need to go out for a little dinner and celebrate. That’s what we’re here for, right?”

“Dinner sure sounds good,” Dad said, placing his hand on his middle, which was surprisingly flat for a man his age who loved meat and potatoes the way he did.

Haley grinned. “How about pizza? There’s the best place here in Denver that does Colorado mountain pizza, super thick with crust that you dip in honey.”

My stomach growled. “That works for me. You two have any objections?”

Mom cocked her head to the side. “Georgie, it’s your day. We can go get those fancy Japanese steaks if that’s what you’re in the mood for. What’re those called? Woo-goo?”

That got a laugh out of me.

“As long as there’s drinks so we can make a proper toast,” Dad said. “I’m game for anything.”

His words made my stomach tense. A toast would mean alcohol, and there’d be no way to bring up the subject of me not drinking without explaining why. And *that* would mean breaking the news.

“You alright?” Dad asked, putting his hand on my shoulder in the way he always did when he suspected I wasn’t feeling myself.

I shook my head. “Totally fine. Just, uh, just thinking about what I want on my pizza.”

Dad was as sharp as they came, and the way he regarded me with an expression of skeptical concern let me know right away that he could sense that something was up. All the same,

he'd never been one to pry, and he took his hand from my shoulder.

“Alright then, let's do this.”

The drive was only fifteen minutes, Haley in the car with me and Mom and Dad in the other.

“So,” Haley said a few minutes into the trip. “You hear from him?”

I winced. I'd told Haley about what had happened during my trip to Greece, how I'd hooked up with the hottest guy ever—and on his yacht, no less. Ever since then, and even though I'd made sure to tell her that we hadn't exchanged contact info, she'd asked me about him every time we'd hung out.

“Same answer as the last time you asked,” I said. “And the time before that...”

“I know, I know,” she said. “No phone numbers, no last names, no nothing. Still, he's rich!”

“And what does that have to do with anything?”

“When you're rich, the world's yours. If he really wanted to know who you were, he could... I don't know, pay some detective to track you down or something.”

“Yeah, I suppose you're right about that. So what're you saying that he doesn't care enough to do that?” I followed this up with a grin, letting her know I was only messing around.

“If that's the case, then he's an idiot and doesn't deserve you and all your awesomeness. All the same, I think it's a little weird.”

“It's actually weird that you think it's weird. He and I hooked up and that's all. I didn't even spend the night. Not like we had some months-long relationship or something.”

“See? There you go again.”

“Go again what?”

“Acting like this thing you and he shared was no big deal.”

“That’s because it wasn’t. We hooked up, it was fun, he was hot, but that’s it. There doesn’t need to be any more to it than that.”

“You’re saying that like hooking up with guys for one-night stands is something that you do on a regular basis. Shoot, I can’t even remember the last guy you slept with.” She scrunched her brow, trying to think. “Oh, wait! It was that guy... um, Mike! The one who wore that stupid beanie everywhere and was obsessed with bad horror movies.”

I groaned. “Don’t even remind me. That was a, uh, desperate time.”

She laughed. “I still think that he wore the beanie when you guys were, you know...”

“Gross! And no, for the thousandth time, he didn’t. I had to draw the line somewhere.”

“Still, it proves my point. The last time you slept with a guy was some dork you met on Hinge that you weren’t even that crazy about. But Alex... he was different.”

“Says who?”

“Oh, don’t even try to play it cool. I’ve noticed the way your eyes light up when you talk about him. You *liked* the guy.”

I pursed my lips and looked out the window. The sun was well into setting behind the westward mountains, and it was beginning to shape up into another gorgeous Colorado summer night. My windows were cracked a bit, and perfect, fresh-smelling air was breezing into the car.

The conversation was starting to make me a little uncomfortable. After all, the connection between Alex and I was far more serious than Haley knew.

“I mean, so what if I did? I liked him, fine.”

She crossed her arms, a pleased smile on her face that made it clear that she was happy with my admission.

“There. Just so long as you admit it.”

“But liking someone that you have a one-night thing with, that’s the bare minimum. It doesn’t mean that anything more is ever going to happen between us.”

“It could if you really wanted it to. You could look him up.”

“Look up a doctor named Alex? And where? I don’t know where he lives. There’s got to be thousands of Dr. Alex’s running around.”

“So? Narrow them down.”

“OK, let’s pretend that I was even interested in doing something like that. Imagine that I went to all the trouble of finding this guy for him to be like, ‘uh, who are you again?’”

“He wouldn’t do that.”

I laughed again. “How do you know? The guy swooped me off my feet and brought me to his *yacht*. Something tells me that’s not the first time he’s done that. Heck, seducing starry-eyed American women is probably his go-to activity when he’s bored on a Friday night.”

“Or, just maybe, you caught his eye in a way no woman had before. He couldn’t help but bring you back to his yacht and make sweet, passionate love to you on the Mediterranean.” She clasped her hands together, bringing her tone up to theatrical levels. “And right now, he’s sailing the seven seas—in his yacht, of course—trying to find the love of his life.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Alright, alright, that’s enough.”

“Really though, you never know. It’s only been a month.”

My stomach tensed, and I knew it was something more than just the first-trimester symptoms I’d been experiencing over the past week. Though Haley was being silly, there was a part of me that did kind of wish that Alex was looking for me, that he’d come back into my life. After all, this kid was going to need a dad.

I spotted the sign for Beau-Jo’s up ahead, giving me a good reason to end the line of conversation.

“We’re here,” I said. “I didn’t even realize how hungry I was until just now.”

“Oh my God, same. I’m pretty sure I’m at the point where I could eat an entire pizza myself.”

Haley grinned, the two of us stepping out of the car and heading toward the restaurant. My phone buzzed with a text as I arrived. It was from Mom, letting me know they were already there and had found a place to sit.

We stepped into the place, greeted by the din of a full restaurant and the smell of delicious pizza. The place was packed, not a table empty. Servers zipped here and there, setting down trays topped with the massive pies with crusts as thick as your forearm.

We spotted Mom and Dad in the back corner, Mom rising from her seat a bit and waving to us. Seconds later, we were seated with menus in our hands.

“I can’t believe the size of these things!” Mom said, looking around at the pizzas on other tables.

Dad said nothing, his eyes on the drink menu. My stomach tensed again, knowing he’d want a round for the table, which meant that I’d have to tell him why I wasn’t drinking.

“Think I’ll do a beer to start off,” he said with a nod, passing over the menu to Mom. “You guys want anything?”

“Just a Coke!” The words shot out of my mouth with such speed and intensity that the rest of my little group couldn’t help but look at me like I was a crazy person.

“Uh, a beer for me.” Haley glanced at me with an expression of slight skepticism, letting me know that while I might’ve dodged the question for the time being, it was only a matter of time before someone at the table realized that I was being cagey about something.

We went over the menus, ordering our drinks and pizzas when the waitress stopped by.

Mom clasped her hands together and leaned in. “So, your new book...”

“My what?”

Mom cocked her head to the side, confused. “The new book? The one you’ve been writing?”

“You know,” Haley said. “The book you wrote that sold, like, a million copies?” She spoke with a wry tone, joking at the possibility that I might forget something like that.

It took me a second to come back to Earth.

“Oh... oh yeah!”

The three of them shared a look, one that suggested they knew something strange was going on.

I had to get my head in the game unless I wanted to turn this celebratory dinner out into a three-on-one session of Mom and Dad and Haley prying the news out of me.

“OK, so it’s the final book in the series, called *Master and Minotaur*. It’s going to be everything that people love about the previous books but turned up to a million. Lots of action and romance and se—” I stopped myself, realizing that I was talking to my parents. “Se... riously fun adventures.”

“The second one just came out, right?” Mom asked. “And you’re already writing another?”

Dad nodded, a proud smile on his face. “That’s my girl—hard-working as they come.”

“Well, it’s the outline, not the book. The outline is just all the chapters and the basic idea of how the book is going to go. The writing part’s going to take a long time.”

“Well, you’ve got time now,” Dad said. “You’ve got your Masters, your own place, and all the opportunity to work on it.”

“I know, and I can’t wait. I’m going to be looking for something in academia before too long, but right now the idea of just me and my laptop in my new condo with time to focus on my writing... sounds like total heaven.”

Dad reached over, putting his hand on mine.

“I couldn’t be prouder.”

My heart tingled, tears forming in my eyes.

“Thanks, Dad.”

The conversation drifted to lighter subjects, like my new place and my new town and everything else about the new life I was about to start. There was one little detail though that I was ignoring, one that I knew we were drawing closer to by the second.

The pizza arrived, two massive pies, one supreme and one extra cheese with extra pepperoni—my favorite.

I lifted one huge slice of pepperoni off the tray, steam rising from it, goopy, melty cheese dripping off the side. I didn't even wait long enough for it to cool before diving in, slicing off the end and popping it into my mouth.

“These are huge,” Mom said, lifting up her slice at the end and giving it a once over. “You really think we needed two, Georgie?”

“Oh yeah,” I said, taking a bite of my slice, already halfway through. “Trust me, you're going to want some tomorrow.”

I was voracious. I finished my first slice, using the massive, fluffy crust to soak up the orange pools of delicious grease. Once that was done, I wasted no time going back in for another slice, this time of the supreme.

“God, this is so freaking good.” I took one big bite, bringing what had to be a third of the slice into my mouth. The explosion of flavors, meat, cheese, veggies, the sauce, the crust, was heaven.

That slice didn't last too much longer, and when it was totally gone, I went in for another. With the third slice, I started by ripping off the crust, dunking the end into a little pool of honey.

It was *so* good—dessert and dinner all in one. I finished that off, then started on the fourth slice.

“I don't know what's gotten into me,” I said, not taking my eyes off the pie. “Guess graduation works up a hell of an

appetite, huh?”

Bit by bit, I took down the fourth slice. I was starting to get full, but I figured a half of another couldn't hurt.

When I reached for the slice, however, I noticed something.

Mom and Dad and Haley were staring at me with stunned expressions on their faces.

“Uh, kiddo?” Dad asked. “You training for one of those iron man things or something?”

I looked around, noticing that the rest of my group was about halfway through their *first* slices.

“What's the expression?” Mom asked. “A hollow leg?”

I glanced back down at the pizza slice I'd just finished destroying. I couldn't believe how much I'd eaten, and how quickly.

I'd imagined how I was going to break the news to everyone. I'd practiced a little speech, pictured how I was going to slip it into the conversation. I hadn't, however, imagined that it would happen with four slices of pizza grease all over my mouth.

I slowly swallowed, then wiped my hands.

“Uh, everyone, kinda-sorta got some news for you all.”

I took a deep breath.

“I'm... pregnant.”

CHAPTER 10

ALEX



I'd never been one to carry around a gun.

Then again, I'd never been one to turn my people over to the police.

I picked up the Glock, giving it a once over before checking the clip and flicking on the safety. Getting a carry permit in New York was no small thing—I'd had to call in some serious favors to not only get the application put through, but fast-tracked. Didn't hurt matters that I'd made some new connections with the NYPD after blowing the whistle on Nico and the rest of the scumbags at Agrios.

Standing in front of the window of my apartment, I looked down onto the city. Nighttime was quickly coming alive, and I tucked the gun into the holster under my coat as I turned toward the door. I had more or less holed myself up in my home over the last five weeks since I'd turned in Nico and his goons. Things had been quieter than I would've expected after betraying Nico.

Part of me had begun to wonder if he'd found out it'd been me. I hadn't heard a peep from him since that night, not even to ask me to come back and do the horrible work of fixing that kid up so he could torture him a little more. Maybe he'd respected my wishes and given me some space.

Or maybe he was hoping that eventually I would let my guard down, and he was waiting until it was the right time to strike. Either way, I wasn't going to be caught off guard.

The raid had been immediate. After I'd gone to the cops, they'd wasted no time getting a warrant and breaking in within two hours of my leaving.

But they'd found nothing. Nico was gone, as was Johnny. The rooms had been cleared out, with no traces of drugs, guns or trafficking. As for the kid... I had no clue. He could be dead for all I knew. On top of it all, I was left with the lingering concern that Nico had a paid contact in the NYPD who'd warned him of the raid. There was a good chance that was the case, which left one question... did he know I'd been the one who'd betrayed him?

I headed downstairs, taking the elevator to the gym on the fifth floor. Lucky for me, everything I needed was either in the building or within a block of it. I'd spent the last five weeks when I hadn't been at work either in my apartment or the gym—the only two places I could at least guarantee a small measure of safety.

It couldn't last forever.

Down in the gym, I changed in the locker room and hopped onto the treadmill. Starting off at a trotting pace, I pushed the speed faster and faster until my legs burned and sweat began to pour. Only the buzzing of my phone in the treadmill's cup holder pulled me out of my focus.

I hit the *stop* button, picked up my phone, and gave the screen a look. The number wasn't in my contacts, but the display read that the area code was for the Denver area.

Denver. Shit.

Normally, I'd never answer an anonymous number like that. The fact that it was from Colorado made all the difference in the world.

"This is Dr. Ecomides," I said. The treadmill slowed to a stop, and I stepped off. The front of the gym was made up of tall, floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out over the city, and I made my way over to them.

"Alexandros, how are you? This is Duncan Pitt."

My pulse quickened at the name. Duncan Pitt, *Dr. Duncan Pitt*, was one of the biggest names in medicine in America. His company, Pitt Medical, had been founded years ago as a private alternative to the dismal American health care system. The company had grown like wildfire since then, opening multiple locations throughout the country, with plans to expand to the east coast within the next few years.

Duncan and I had met by chance at a medical conference a few months back. We'd chatted at the conference bar only for me to find out that he was the keynote speaker for the whole damn event. Somehow, he'd recognized my name. I'd suggested that it was because "Ecomides" was a name that stood out among the Smiths and Jones in the US, while he offered that it was because I had a reputation as one of the best trauma surgeons in the country.

He'd offered me a job on the spot, but at the time I'd been too mired in my New York life to take him up on it. With things changing over the last month, however, I'd gotten in touch with him via email, letting him know that I was looking for something out of state.

"Duncan," I said. "Good to hear from you."

"Listen, I just wanted to apologize for not getting back to your email. I try not to slack on things like that. But with kids and the newest expansions to the main campus..."

His voice was low and commanding and I had no doubt in hearing him speak that he was a man of power and importance.

"Don't apologize, please. I know you're a busy man."

"It's not only that. When I read your email, I wanted to take some time and see where I could best use you. Not every day that one of the best surgeons in the country wants to make the move to private."

"You're too kind."

"It's true. When you told me who you were at that Long Island conference, I wanted to poach you on the spot. Pitt Medical only accepts the best of the best, and you fit that to a

T. Anyway, I'll cut with the flattery and get to the point. We've got a project going near our base of operations in Denver, and I think you just might be the man I'm looking for."

I wiped the sweat from my forehead with my towel, leaning against the window.

"I'm all ears."

"Pitt Medical thrives where public medicine fails. Funny enough, back when I started this whole operation, I wondered if there'd be room for a private practice the size I had in mind. Turns out, there're are all sorts of holes in the medical industry. And that's where we step in. You familiar with Evergreen, Colorado?"

"Can't say that I am."

"Right, you're a New York guy. Evergreen's a small town just on the outskirts of the Denver metro area."

"How small are we talking here?"

He chuckled. "Population ten-thousand, small. But it's charming as hell—situated in the mountains, lots of green, and a charming downtown area. Even got one of the best pizza places in the state there."

"Go on."

"You haven't hung up so far, that's a good sign. Anyway, there's a hospital not too far from Evergreen. When I found it, it was in a bad state—skeleton crew, peeling paint, desperate for supplies. But I saw potential; it's right in the middle of three counties, after all."

Duncan continued.

"Bought it a few months back, and the repairs were completed last week. Only problem is that I need staff. Denver's the HQ for Pitt Medical, which means that I've spent the last few years making sure that all the best medical professionals in the area are on my team."

"So, now you're going a little further afield."

"That's right."

“Tell me what you have in mind?”

“I want you to run the ER. You’ll be in charge of getting the operation up and running, finding staff to work underneath you. The hospital’s not huge, but it’s a tall order all the same. I think you’d be perfect for it. Naturally, you’d be well-compensated although we can discuss salary later. The point of this call is to get a sense of how you feel—”

“I’ll do it.”

Silence followed, as if Duncan wasn’t quite sure what to say.

“You’ll do it? Just like that?”

“Just like that. I’ve been in New York for years, and I’m more than ready for a change. This opportunity at Evergreen sounds like exactly what I need. Not to mention that Pitt Medical’s the sort of operation that I’d be pleased to be a part of, especially with your stance on providing care for those who otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford it.”

I wasn’t lying at all. However, I *might* have left out the part about how I probably burned serious bridges with some of the most dangerous criminals on the east coast and needed to get the hell out of town.

“That’s right—we’re not just about making money, we’re about providing care for anyone who needs it.”

“So then, there’s really nothing to deliberate. You’re offering me an incredible opportunity, and I’d be a fool to turn it down.”

“Excellent. In that case, the only thing to discuss is how quickly can you make it to the area? I’ve got a place in Denver where I could put you up until you found something more permanent closer to the hospital. You’d be about a forty-five-minute drive away until then.”

“The sooner, the better. In fact, if we could work it out, I’d like to fly into Denver and meet with you face-to-face, assuming you have the time.”

“I’d love to. I’ll give my schedule a look over and get back to you within the hour with a date that works.”

“Sounds perfect. Thanks, Duncan.”

“Thank *you*, Alex. You’re going to be a great addition to the staff, and I can’t wait for you to come aboard.”

After we finished our call, I tucked my phone into my pocket and let it all sink in.

Just like that, I’d ended my life in New York. Part of my terms with Nico had been to stay in the city, to be on-call for whenever he needed me. Over the course of a five-minute conversation with Duncan, I’d unilaterally terminated that arrangement.

Nico would *not* be happy. That is, assuming he didn’t already have me in his crosshairs.

I finished my workout, then headed back up to my apartment to shower and get ready for that evening’s shift at the hospital.

Once I was dressed, I headed out the door and was on my way, the gun tucked into my jacket pocket. Over the course of the last month, I’d trained myself to watch over my shoulder in a way I’d never needed to before. Sure, I’d been affiliated with the Godfather of the Night himself, which might make me a tempting target for anyone looking to get at him. However, one of the benefits of my association with Nico was that no one dared touch me.

I had no doubt that things were different now. I made my way down the lonely streets of Manhattan, pulling my jacket tight against an unseasonably chilly breeze. Figures made their way down the sidewalks, cars driving through puddles from the afternoon’s rain.

I put all thoughts of danger out of my head as I hurried down the street toward the hospital. Part of me wished I’d taken my Jeep to work. Perhaps an oversight, but this was going to be my last night at Midtown Presbyterian, and one of my last in New York.

I reached the hospital without issue, the bright lights of the building shining like a beacon in the night. Calm washed over me as I hurried inside. Once there, I made my way to the office of Dr. Jenna Ruben, one of my immediate supervisors and the head of Midtown's ER, the same position I'd just accepted from Duncan.

"This is a hell of a loss." She sat back in her leather chair, regarding me with eyes of shimmering intelligence as she took off her glasses. "You're really quitting tonight?"

I wasn't one for lying, but I'd managed to conjure together some excuse about a family member in Denver who needed to be cared for, and that I had no idea when I would be returning.

The truth wasn't an option. What could I have said? That I was on the run from the mob and my life was in danger? Doing so would put her at risk—Nico hated loose ends.

"I'm so sorry to have to do this," I said. "To leave you in a bind."

"Don't you worry about that," she said, shaking her head and sitting forward. "If your uncle needs you, then he needs you. Last thing I'm going to do is keep you here for the obligatory two weeks if you've got a sick relative."

"I really appreciate that. You've no idea how much it means to me." I upped the sympathy factor a bit. And I really was appreciative. Dr. Ruben was doing me a major solid letting me depart on such short notice.

She nodded, and I could sense she wasn't happy about the idea of losing me.

"We've got the staff to cover you, so don't worry about that. Plenty of doctors fresh out of med school who all want a chance to prove they're the next Dr. Ecomides."

That got a chuckle out of me. "Well, I'd love to finish out my last shift here, if that works for you."

"Of course, it does." She offered a small smile. "And it's been a pleasure having you on staff."

With that, we wrapped up the meeting and I got to work. The shift wasn't anything too bad—a stabbing from a street scuffle was the worst I had to deal with. When the shift ended, I learned that Dr. Ruben had snuck out at some point to pick up cupcakes and non-alcoholic champagne to throw an impromptu going-away party for me.

It was all bittersweet. As eager as I was to get out of the city, I truly loved my position at Midtown Presbyterian, not to mention the people with whom I was lucky enough to work. By the time the shift was over, and I was done saying my goodbyes, I felt a small tugging at my heart.

I pushed it aside as I stepped out through the doors one last time, into the cool night air. Once I was alone, my mind focused on the tasks at hand. I'd need to make arrangements for my trip to Denver.

I had the money to take care of whatever needed to be done. All the same, I hated feeling like I was fleeing, like I was sneaking away like a rat. But the perfect opportunity had presented itself. Nico wasn't stupid, and if he hadn't figured out yet that I was the one who'd called the NYPD on him, he'd put it all together soon enough.

I hurried down Fifth Avenue, my heart racing with excitement as I realized I was mere minutes away from getting to my apartment.

“Sir? Excuse me?”

I stopped, the back of my neck tingling. Quickly, I turned.

The person who'd asked the question was a woman, slight and in her fifties. Everything about her was non-threatening, almost as if by design.

“I'm looking for East Seventieth and Second. Is there any way you could help me?”

Heavy footsteps sounded out behind me.

The back of my neck tingled hard, and I reached into my jacket pocket for my gun as I turned.

However, I never got the chance to see who was running up behind me—a fist flying toward my face made sure of that.

A dull thud sounded out, pain blasting through me as I staggered backward.

It'd been a long time since I'd taken a punch, I realized. I was getting soft.

“There's the good doctor.”

My vision unblurred, and I glanced over my shoulder just in time to watch the woman who'd been used as a distraction run off, disappearing around the nearest block.

Before I even had a chance to think about how dumb I'd been for even stopping, a huge hand clapped down onto my shoulder, spinning me back around. When I turned, another fist slammed into my stomach, air rushing out of my lungs.

As I staggered backward, I managed to catch a glimpse of the men who'd gotten the best of me. They were a pair of very fat men, both tall as I was, but obese instead of muscular. As they stepped toward me, however, I could tell by the way they moved, how they carried themselves, that their power was the weight behind their punches, not skill.

Both regarded me with beady eyes situated among fleshy faces, their heads shaved and their looks so similar that they almost appeared like brothers.

“Man, that was easier than I thought,” one of them said.

“Yeah,” spoke the other. “I thought this guy was supposed to be tough.”

I coughed once more, getting my bearings. “I see that the dumbass goon store is having a two-for-one special.”

They regarded each other with the same confused expression, as if they'd expected me to have been too beat-down for a fight.

“The hell you say?” one of them stammered.

“Forget it,” said the other. “We got a job to do.” He followed his words by reaching into his coat pocket and taking

out a mean-looking knife. The weapon was a sign that these guys weren't as dumb as they looked, or at least, had been given orders by someone smarter than they were. Committing crimes in New York with guns brought attention and heat. Knives, on the other hand...

He stepped toward me. I was confident, despite the pain. These guys were huge, but that was all they were.

The goon shoved the knife forward, going for a hard stab to my belly. I pivoted away, grabbing his huge arm as it flew past and brought it down hard onto my raised knee. A sick crack sounded out, and he let out a cry of pain as I snapped his ulna like a dry branch. I followed up the move with a quick jab to the face, stunning him and breaking his nose all at once. He toppled and went down.

The other goon watched the events with wide eyes, as if he couldn't believe what had just happened. The surprise on his round face turned to determination, however, as he rushed in with a knife of his own as fast as his out of shape body could move him.

A palm strike to the nose brought him down just as fast, and I swooped my leg under his to trip him up for good measure. When the men were down, I grabbed their knives and tossed them into the nearest storm drain. The street around us was dark and quiet... not a soul had seen the fight that had started and finished in under a minute.

The men were down, groaning and moaning. While they weren't going anywhere anytime soon, I didn't want to be around when they regained their bearings. I broke out into a jog, quickly making the rest of the way to my apartment, my heart beating hard.

Once I was up in my place, reality dawned on me.

Nico knew. Nico knew and he wanted me dead.

My plan to leave New York at the end of the weekend had to be pushed up right fucking *now*.

I rushed around the place grabbing only the essentials. I packed my bags, putting a few outfits together to get me

through the first week and potentially some meetings with Duncan. Next, I grabbed the bug-out bag that I'd assembled for such a situation, a small kit with my IDs—some fake, if I needed them—along with lots of cash.

Didn't take me long at all to get ready. After thirty minutes of preparation, I stood at the entrance to my place, a pair of duffel bags next to me. I'd have to take care of matters with the apartment later—send money to the property management firm and then hire movers to both move and dispose of what I had. Everything other than what I had packed would need to be replaced.

It was a damn shame, really. I liked that apartment. More than that, I liked my life in New York.

But it was all over now. I took one last look at the place before picking up my bags and heading out.

My Jeep was parked below in the parking garage, my motorcycle next to it. As tempting as the idea of driving cross-country on my bike sounded, I knew the Jeep would be more practical. I approached slowly, gun in hand as I checked the vehicle for any sign of Nico's goons. Once it was clear, I gave another look under the hood and under the chassis to make sure there was no nasty surprise awaiting me when I turned the ignition.

There was nothing. I settled into the driver's seat, wondering how I'd made it out so easy. Nico didn't screw around when it came to getting even, and for him to hire two inept losers and nothing else... it was strange.

I wasn't about to sit around second-guessing my good fortune, however. I started the Jeep and pulled out of the garage and was on my way. I drove through the city one last time, taking in the sights and sounds of the place I'd called home for years.

Google Maps revealed that the drive from New York to Denver would be twenty-seven hours, a good three days of driving. That was fine with me, I had a hell of a lot to think about.

I was soon on the road, pulling out of the Holland Tunnel with the city lights shining bright behind me. My new life was about to begin. What it had in store for me, I could only guess.

CHAPTER 11

GEORGIA



One month later...

I walked out of the doctor's office in a daze, still trying to wrap my head around what I'd just learned.

Twins. I was going to have *twins*.

Haley flashed me a grin as the two of us made our way down the sidewalks of downtown Denver. It was the middle of the day, the mid-August air pleasant and warm.

"That's two," I said.

"Come again?"

"Two babies. There are literally *two* babies inside of me. Right now."

Haley put her arm around my shoulders, stopping me in my tracks. She smiled, but there was an expression of concern on her face.²

"You alright? I mean, that's a hell of a lot to take in."

I stood there for a moment, people walking around me. It was a good question... *was* I alright?

"I think so. Yeah. I'm good. I mean, I'm not sure how I'm going to push two kids out of my vajayjay, but other than that... yeah, I think I'm good."

She laughed, seeming to take my word for it. "Good. Then let's get moving before you get trampled by angry pedestrians."

Haley led me out of the path of oncoming foot traffic, the two of us making our way to the parking garage. Haley had one week left of her summer break before the next school year began, and she'd been cool enough to come with me for my two-month checkup.

I'd been nervous, of course, worried that something might be wrong with my son or daughter. And when that expression of confusion had taken hold on the nurse's face as she tried to puzzle something out, the ultrasound wand on my belly, that'd taken my anxiety to another level.

"What is it?" I'd asked.

"It's... there's a heartbeat, you hear that?"

I did, that little *whomp-whomp, whomp-whomp*.

"Why does it sound weird? It's like... there's an echo or something."

Her expression of concern turned to a smile. "That's not an echo you're hearing—that's two heartbeats."

Twins. I was going to have twins.

The rest of the appointment was a total blur, the doctor telling me how my lifestyle needed to look over the next seven months, though it could be less since twins tended to show up a little sooner. She gave me some printouts about diet and told me that I needed to keep my exercise low impact.

It'd been so hard to wrap my head around—I felt like I was underwater, the doctor's voice faraway and muffled. All the rest of the news about the twins was solid, however. They were growing at a good rate, and their heartbeats were strong and healthy.

Everything was lined up for me to become, in less than a year, the mother of two gorgeous children.

Haley, of course, had nearly exploded with happiness when I'd told her the news, throwing her arms around me and letting out a scream that everyone in downtown Denver must've heard.

“Alright,” Haley said, snapping her fingers in front of my face as I walked. “I know you’ve got a lot on your mind, but I’m going to make sure you don’t walk straight into traffic.”

I laughed. “Alright, sorry. I’ll be a little more careful.”

She grinned back at me. “You know, we should’ve guessed it was twins—look at that bump!”

Haley was right; my bump was already bigger than it should have been for only being two months pregnant.

“It makes sense now. I mean, I just thought I was having one huge baby.”

We reached her car and got in. Once I was seated, a new wave of anxiety washed over me. I buckled up, then placed my hand on my belly.

“You alright?” Haley asked again once her seatbelt was on.

“I don’t know. I’ve been spending the last month getting psyched up about *a* baby. I’m really excited and can’t wait to meet him or her, but it’s taken some time to let the idea settle that I’m going to be doing it all on my own. And right when I finally got to that point, I find out that I’m going to be having *two* babies. Don’t get me wrong, two babies means double the love and I’m super thrilled. But...”

I trailed off, not knowing where to finish. Haley, supportive as always, reached over and took my hand.

“Trust me, you’ve got this. I mean, seriously, you got your Masters, you’ve written two bestselling books. A couple of kids is a piece of cake compared to that. Plus, I’m here. I know I’m still in Denver, but I’ll help whenever I can. I’m only barely an hour away.”

I smiled. “Thanks, Haley. I couldn’t hope for a better friend to go through all of this with. I know that sounds super corny, but it’s true. You’ve been amazing, and I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You know I love corny. And I’m happy to do it. Who knows? Maybe someday when I’m knocked up by some

gorgeous, mysterious Greek millionaire you'll be there to help me through it."

"You bet your ass I would."

My hand still on my stomach, I felt it growl.

"OK, I'm getting kind of hungry, which is weird considering I ate breakfast like an hour ago."

"Not weird at all, you're eating for three, remember." She checked the time on her phone. "How about an early lunch before you head back? What sounds good?"

"Something on the lighter side, I think. I've been craving nothing but all-meat pizza for the last month, but I think if I eat another slice of it, I'm going to turn into a human made out of pure grease."

"Something lighter, huh?" Haley placed her fingertip on her chin, giving the matter some thought. "Oh! I know just the place. It's this amazing vegan taco joint."

"Vegan?"

"Remember that guy Jerrod I was dating a while back? The guy from Boulder who played in that jam band?"

"The one with dreadlocks? I have vague recollections."

"Trust me, after dealing with that dork for two months, I *wish* I had nothing but vague recollections. Anyway, he was a super hardcore vegan, which means I now know all the best places in town. I'm normally a meat-eating kind of girl, but sometimes it can really hit the spot when you don't want anything too heavy. Plus, it's right here downtown, so we don't even need to drive."

"Sounds good to me. I never thought I'd say this, but vegan tacos it is."

She laughed. "Let's go!"

We hopped out of the car, making our way around the block to the taco joint. My stomach growled as we approached the place, and by the time we were seated on the patio with menus in our hands, I was starving. I ordered the five-taco

platter, which came with two jackfruit tacos, two tempeh, and one with their version of vegan chorizo.

“So, how’re you feeling?” Haley asked once our orders were in, and the waitress was gone. “I know it’s a crazy question since you’re probably still trying to process it all.”

I took a deep breath, still trying to wrap my head around it. “I’m feeling OK, I think. I’m going to have to tell Mom and Dad as soon as possible, but they’re going to be thrilled. I’m looking forward to hearing Mom’s reaction when I tell her she’s going to get two grandkids for the price of one.”

“They’re going to be so happy,” Haley said with a big smile. “And I know they’re crazy proud of you for everything that you’re doing.”

She was right. I was lucky as hell to have parents as supportive as they were. When I’d told them I was pregnant, they hadn’t freaked. In fact, they’d been thrilled to find out they were going to be grandparents.

“Yeah, I know. And they’re going to come in for the first few months after he or she... I mean *they*, are born. That’s going to go a long way.”

“You’re going to do awesome. Doesn’t even matter that Dr. Greek isn’t going to be around.”

Some kind of look must’ve come over my face, one that gave Haley pause. She reached over and put her hand on mine once more.

“Sorry, I know I shouldn’t have brought him up. That was stupid of me.”

“No, it’s fine.” My throat felt tight, and I cleared it to make the tension go away. “It’s stupid, really. I’ve got you and Mom and Dad, and I’m lucky enough to be able to live on my royalties for a little while *and* have time to work on my next book while I’m pregnant with the twins. I should be counting my blessings instead of thinking about what I don’t have.”

“You’re allowed to feel a little sadness, babe. You’ve got an amazing attitude about this, don’t get me wrong. But I don’t think anyone who imagines having kids hopes that they’ll have

to do it alone when it happens. 8The twins are not going to have a dad in the picture. It's totally fine that you're a little bummed about that."

Tears formed in my eyes, but I made sure to quickly wipe them away. I was going to be a single mother of twins—I didn't have time for tears.

"Two kids, two parents, right? Sounds perfect. But, if it's not to be, then it's not to be." I cleared my throat, closing my eyes and giving myself a few seconds to compose myself. "And I'm going to be fine with it. These kids are going to get tons of love, no matter what."

"There you go!" Haley said, her face flashing with happiness. "You're going to be a kick-ass mom; I know it. And I'm so happy that I'm going to be in those kids' lives."

Tears formed in my eyes once more, this time out of happiness rather than worry.

"Thanks, Haley. You're the best."

At that moment, the waitress returned with a big basket of tortilla chips, along with three different kinds of salsa.

"Alright, alright," I said. "Enough about me. You excited about the next school year?"

Her eyes flashed with the sort of excitement I always saw when Haley talked about teaching. She was born to be a teacher, and few things got her jazzed up like the subject of her students.

"So freaking excited. I'm working on this new lesson plan for history, trying this role-playing stuff I saw on teacher TikTok..."

We got into it, eating our chips and salsa as she went over her big plans for the next year of fourth grade. Before too long, our tacos showed up and I was more than ready to tear into those. My stomach rumbling, I lifted a jackfruit taco to my mouth and prepared to take a bite.

Before I managed to do that, however, something across the busy road caught my eye. Walking into a glass-fronted

restaurant was a trio of men, all tall and wearing sharp, dark suits. One of them had medium-long dark hair, his stride confident and, more than anything else, familiar.

A soft *plop* pulled me back into the moment, and I looked down to see that half of the jackfruit had fallen out of my taco and onto the platter.

“What’s up?” Haley asked. “You look like you just saw a headless guy walk down the street or something.”

I pursed my lips for a moment. “I’m going to check something really quick. Be right back!”

“Wait, what? Where are you going?”

I was already out of the seat and on my way off the patio as she spoke, her voice drifting into the distance with each step I took. I checked the traffic and hurried across the road toward the restaurant.

The place, called “The Drover” was one of those fancy joints where the wealthy businessmen and women of downtown Denver took clients to wine and dine them. As I approached, I could see through the glass windows that everyone there was in business attire, all taking small bites of the no-doubt insanely expensive meals in front of them. Light poured into the space through the glass walls.

I knew that I was doing something kind of crazy. There’s no way it could be him, after all.

Could it?

I entered the place, the young, pretty hostess greeting me with a smile.

“Good afternoon! Do you have a reservation?”

“Just looking for someone.”

I flashed her a quick smile before scanning the place, looking at each and every guy there to see if he was the one I thought I’d seen.

“Ma’am?” asked the hostess.

I didn't spot him. Just as I'd thought, I'd only been imagining things.

"Ma'am?"

I shook my head, turning my attention back to the hostess. She regarded me with an expression of slight worry, as if she were wondering whether or not she'd need to call someone up front to escort me out.

"Sorry," I said, offering her a reassuring smile. "I was sure I'd seen a friend of mine come in."

I turned and hurried out of there. Once I was back outside, I spotted Haley across the street on the patio at the vegan taco place, an expression of worry on her face.

I felt a little silly, thinking I'd seen Alex. As I made my way back, part of me was glad that it hadn't been him, as if it were confirmation that I was going to be going through this all on my own.

CHAPTER 12

ALEX



I stepped out of the washroom at The Drove and immediately someone caught my eye.

She was tall and blonde, with a gorgeous figure clad in a light sundress. While I couldn't see her face, that didn't stop me from staring like a horny teenager. I felt my mouth open slightly; my eyes go wide. I'd noticed since arriving in Denver that there was no shortage of beautiful women here. None of them had caught my eye like her, however.

She turned slightly as she looked both ways across the street. It wasn't enough to see her face.

When the road was clear, she hurried across. Traffic picked up once she crossed the street, blocking me from seeing where she was going.

"You alright there, Alex?"

A hand came down on my shoulder, pulling me out of my trance.

"Huh?" I turned to see that the hand belonged to Dr. James Hunt, the CFO of Pitt Medical and the other doctor I was meeting with for lunch. He was tall and good looking, with close-cropped black hair and ice-blue eyes. "Sorry, just got distracted by the view. Denver's a beautiful city."

The glint in James' eye suggested that he knew that my attention had been captured by something else.

"You're right about that," he said. "I never get tired of this place. But if you ask me, the real beauty's outside of the city."

You into hiking?”

“More of a boating guy. But I’m open.”

He chuckled. “Not many places to park your boat around here, though we do have some nice lakes. I’d definitely recommend hiking for your nature fix. Nothing quite like traveling up into the sky for three hours then turning around to take in that view. Closest to heaven you’ll get on earth if you ask me.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

He flashed me one more smile before heading into the washroom himself, and I found myself grateful that he didn’t pry about what I’d really been looking at—being called out for ogling didn’t exactly lend itself to a business meeting.

I made my way back to our table. We were seated in a private room, a large area away from the rest of the dining floor. The space was incredible—with high ceilings and huge windows that allowed in plenty of natural light. Only a few other tables were there, the patron at one of them being, Duncan told me, Denver’s Attorney General. Light, pleasant jazz filled the air, just loud enough to give the diners a bit of privacy.

I slid into my seat across from Duncan, taking a small sip of my wine. Duncan was an impressive man and seeing him in person left no doubt that he was a mover and shaker in Denver. He carried himself with an air of gravity and power, almost reminding me of Nico in a sense, without the whole mob thing, of course.

“Alright,” he said. “James told me to go ahead and get started. We’ve got a hell of a lot to talk about.”

“No doubt. I’m eager to get into it.”

“First, let me ask you how you’re getting settled in Denver? The apartment is to your liking?”

“It’s perfect,” I said. “Thanks again for providing it.”

“Glad to do it. With Pitt Medical, we look out for patients, but we do the same for our doctors. I figure that the better

they're taken care of, the happier they'll be. And the happier *they* are, the better treatment they'll give to their patients. Not to mention that the better they're compensated, the easier it is for us to hang on to top talent."

He pursed his lips after he spoke.

"Sorry, just gave you the sales pitch."

"It's a good one," I said. "I've known about Pitt Medical by reputation."

Duncan smiled. "So, our reputation precedes us, even all the way in New York."

"It does. And just a word to the wise, you're making a hell of a lot of people nervous in the Big Apple."

He arched an eyebrow slightly. "Is that right?"

"Sure is. The medical industry in New York has a stranglehold on the city. They're powerful, but I've heard more than a few whispers here and there that they're keeping a close eye on what's been happening here in middle America."

He laughed. "And they've got good reason to. Ignore flyover country at your own peril. We're a few years, if not a decade, out from making it all the way to New York, but it's on the docket—make no mistake. Hey, you never know, maybe you'll end up back in the big city waving the Pitt Medical banner."

The idea of returning to New York made my stomach tense a bit. I did my best to keep those feelings buried deep down, however.

Duncan opened his mouth to speak. But before he could, the waitress approached with the bottle of white wine. She smiled as her eyes flicked from me to Duncan, her pale cheeks blushing a bit as she refilled our glasses.

"Let me know if there's anything else I can get for you," she said, her eyes lingering on mine for a long moment before she departed.

"Looks like there was something else she was interested in getting you," Duncan said with a small smile.

I chuckled. “Same to you. Seemed like her attention was pretty evenly split.”

Duncan gently tapped the gold band on his ring finger. “Happily married for four years now, with just as many kids. Don’t want to get all mushy on you, but when you’ve got a wife like mine, it’s as if other women don’t even exist.”

His words made me think of Georgia, how I couldn’t get her out of my mind.

“Not to go all life coach on you,” he said. “But marriage does a lot of great things for a man. And believe it or not, it’s the biggest boon you can imagine to your career.”

“That right?”

“Sure is. I’ve never had problems with ambition or motivation, but all the same nothing gets your ass out of bed in the morning like the idea of providing the best life possible for your wife and your kids.” He swallowed, and I could sense that the mere mention of his family was enough to get him a little tight in the throat. He wore it well, however, and it only lasted a breath of an instant. “Anyway, the point is that if you’re looking to settle down, Denver’s the place to do it. There’s wide, open spaces, big homes, and everything else you could want.”

“You mean I wouldn’t have to cram a family into a thousand-square-foot apartment like in New York?” I asked with a smile.

“Exactly. I could see you with a place here, maybe a place in Greece for the winter.”

James returned at that moment, sliding into his chair. “I see Duncan’s in full salesman mode.” He grinned as he settled himself.

“Hey, that’s part of the job. If I want the best talent America has to offer, I have to make a case for them.”

“Thing with Alex here,” James went on, “is that you’re not just getting the best talent that America has to offer, you’re going international.” He leaned over, reaching into his suitcase

and taking out a folder of printouts. “So, you’re a Greek import?”

I tensed a bit, realizing that my past had just become the new subject.

“That’s right. I was born and raised in Corinth—that’s the part that connects the bottom half of Greece to the top.”

“Very little trace of an accent,” James said. “And your English is flawless.”

“That’s no accident. My mother is a small-town Greek woman, but my father...”

That was where the lies had to begin. I hated being untruthful, but it had to be done.

“My father was more of an international sort of man; he worked in the import/export business.”

Of course I didn’t mention that the sort of importing/exporting my father had done involved drugs and guns and stolen goods.

“He did most of his work in New York, and I’ve spent plenty of time there since I was a boy.”

“But you didn’t get into the family business?” James asked. “Why is that?”

Duncan said nothing, his eyes on me as he awaited my response. I was being grilled a bit, but that was fine. I’d expect no less from an operation like Pitt Medical.

“My father’s boss, a man who was more like a member of the family to us, saw something in me. My father wanted me to get into the family business, of course, but this man convinced him that a brain like mine would be wasted in such a field. As such, he encouraged my father to direct me toward medicine.”

“And that he did,” James said, turning his attention back to the papers. “Graduated top of your class from NYU, then went off to Johns Hopkins to do it all over again. And your MCAT scores... they’re something else.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way,” Duncan said, “but with your background, you could be earning millions a year doing facelifts and butt lifts in LA. Why’d you pick trauma surgery at a city hospital in New York?”

“Not taken the wrong way at all, it’s a good question. After growing up in the city, I wanted to do something to give back. But make no mistake, I wasn’t totally altruistic with my skills. New York has no shortage of very, very wealthy men and women willing to pay a premium to have a doctor on call.”

Of course, I didn’t mention that one of these clients was the damn Godfather of the Night. Most of my fortune I’d made through working with Nico, taking my earnings and investing them wisely in property, along with a few up-and-coming tech companies.

“So,” Duncan said with an approving smile. “A nice blend of altruism and business savvy.”

I chuckled. “Something like that.”

“I started this business to help people,” Duncan said. “But I’d be lying through my teeth if I were to tell you I didn’t have money in mind. There’s a certain level of success that you’re only going to achieve if you go into business for yourself. And I make sure to tell every new doctor that joins my team that they can be a part of this.”

“I can attest to that,” James said. “I started off as an assistant surgeon at the Greeley clinic. After putting in a couple of years there, Duncan here noticed that I had quite a flair for numbers. After giving me a test run being in charge of the books for the north Colorado clinics, he gave me the position I have now. And don’t think that I spend all my time clicking around in Excel these days. Pitt Medical operates a dozen free clinics around the area where I volunteer my time when I want to give back.”

“There’s plenty of room for growth,” Duncan said. “And I’ve got a good feeling that a doctor like you would move up quickly in our organization. But if you like Evergreen and want to stay there for a while, that’s your prerogative.”

“Speaking of which,” James said. “We want to do a social media campaign in order to introduce you to Evergreen. A little getting-to-know-you thing so the residents in the area will recognize you.”

I shifted in my seat, not sure how to respond to the news. I wanted to keep a low profile, and a damn social media campaign sounded like the exact opposite of that.

“That a problem?” Duncan asked.

“Just... I’ve never been much of a social media guy, never been one for putting my face out there for attention.”

“Not about attention,” Duncan said. “At least, not that kind. The Pitt Medical clinics that we open in places like Evergreen go for a small-town sort of feel. Having the residents be able to recognize your face and know that you’re their new doctor would go a long way to establish that.”

“Is there any way we can do this without having my face on it?” I asked.

“We could,” James said. “But that would really defeat the purpose of the campaign. Not to mention that they’re going to see your face eventually.”

“It’s all local,” Duncan said. “Mostly in the Denver metro area and that’s it. And we’re not going to do a press junket or force you to make TikTok videos or anything like that.”

I obviously had my reasons to not want to plaster my face front and center in a social media campaign. All the same, I was aware of how my hesitation might come off.

“It’s fine,” I said, forcing a smile. “I’ve just seen so many of the younger staff at my old hospital get sucked into social media. Always wanted to stay away from that world.”

“Totally understandable,” Duncan reassured. “We all got into medicine to help people, not to start Instagram pages. Some people just aren’t into social media and I’m one of them. All you’d have to do is come to a photoshoot so we can get some good pictures of you and that’s it. We’ll take care of the rest.”

“That sounds manageable,” I replied. “And if it helps me get settled in Evergreen, then why not?”

Duncan smiled and nodded, pleased with my answer. “It will. And I’d appreciate it.”

James regarded me with skepticism, however. “Speaking of your old hospital, when I called to speak to your supervising doctor about your tenure there, she mentioned that you left on very short notice.”

“What can I say? After speaking to Duncan, I was eager to get started on my new path. And I’m sure Dr. Ruben mentioned that I made sure there was plenty of staff to cover me when I left. She was more than eager to see me move onto the next stage in my career.”

Duncan grinned. “Hope you’re not taking James’ questions personally. All standard practice.”

“Not at all, it’s totally understandable.”

“Great,” Duncan said. “Then let’s get into the nitty-gritty—duties, starting date, that sort of thing...”

The rest of the lunch went well. Duncan and James discussed the finer points of the job, like how I’d be in charge of putting together a staff, doing all the hiring. Turned out that the hospital needed a little more work, so until it opened in a couple of months, they’d be cycling me around Denver, putting me where I was needed and letting me get to know the staff of Pitt Medical.

“Looking forward to having you on board,” Duncan said as we departed. “Got a feeling you’re going to be a huge asset.”

“And I’m looking forward to getting started.”

“Happy to have you,” James echoed. However, there was a slight glimmer to his eye that suggested he was still curious about my background.

We shook hands and went our separate ways, with plans to reconnect the following day to discuss next steps.

The moment I was alone, however, something happened to push thoughts of my new job right out of my head.

The blonde, the same one I'd seen in the restaurant not too long ago, was across the street. And she wasn't alone. Once more her back was to me as she faced another woman. The two of them chatted for a moment before heading down the sidewalk. I craned my neck to get a better glimpse of her, hoping to see her face.

More traffic arrived, however, once again blocking my view and preventing me from seeing her. The traffic cleared just in time for me to watch the pair turn the corner of the nearest block and vanish.

What was the deal with this woman? Why had I been so drawn to her?

She reminded me of New York, how I'd imagined seeing Georgia over and over. As I turned to head back to my car, I found myself wondering if I'd ever manage to get her out of my head.

CHAPTER 13

GEORGIA



Five months later...

My belly felt tight.

Sitting back from my computer, I placed my hands on my stomach and opened and closed my eyes. I could feel the girls going crazy in there, squirming back and forth like they were playing tug of war.

“Calm down, ladies,” I said. “Stay chill for another month longer, alright?”

The latest draft for *Master and Minotaur* was in front of me, but it was getting well into the evening, and I was having a damn hard time focusing. With no small amount of effort, I heaved myself out of my seat and made my way to the kitchen. My waddle was out of control, like my whole body was swaying back and forth with each step I took. Part of me felt like I was going to drop through the floor of my third-floor condo.

I made it to the kitchen, giving myself a moment to recover by placing my hand on the counter and taking several deep breaths.

I poured myself some decaf tea, bringing the steaming mug over to the living room window. I loved my place—it was just big enough with three bedrooms and a study, and a large living room with a view overlooking the lake and an endless sea of trees. The green was all white, however, a recent snow having blanketed the area.

On the other side of my ultra-modern condo, the view looked out onto downtown Evergreen. The town was impossibly cute, all the buildings designed in that rustic, all-wood style that came to mind when one thought of small-town Colorado. There was nature everywhere, my condo minutes away from hikes and trails and places to explore. And if I wanted the city, Denver was only a thirty-minute drive away.

My phone buzzed in the study. Tea in hand, I slowly waddled over to see who was trying to get in touch. My study was perfect, too—a big room with tall bookshelves lining the walls, a view of the woods and the clear, Colorado sky above with the mountains in the distance the ultimate inspiration.

My phone was next to my computer, and I gave it a quick look. It was a text from Mom.

What's going on? If you don't text me back right away, I'm going to assume you're in labor.

I smiled as I read the text. As soon as my parents found out I was having twins, they decided that the thing to do was to get out of Texas and come join me in Colorado. At first, I'd been hesitant for them to sell the family home and put down roots in a brand-new city, but they'd been quick to let me know that nothing mattered more to them other than being close by and being able to be in the girls' lives.

They'd been a huge help. After they sold the house, Dad finally retired and put some of his trusted managers in charge of the stores. They bought this adorable house in City Park West, close enough to swing by whenever they wanted to and help out.

Not in labor, just trying to relax and get some work done.

You can't relax and work, Georgie. You ask me, you should be sitting on your butt and taking it easy.

I smiled, typing up my response.

Working is relaxing for me. I'd go insane if I was just sitting around watching Netflix and waiting for them to come.

The girls moved again; this time way more than they'd done before. It felt like they were teaming up to smash their

way through. I set the phone down, placing my hand on my belly and giving myself a second to get composed.

Well, you've got my opinion. Your father and I are home from dinner, so reach out if you need anything this weekend before we come visit on Sunday.

Will do. Thanks.

I slipped my phone into my pocket, turning my attention to the computer and deciding that maybe Mom was right—that I needed to relax, at least a little. A little time out on the heated balcony sounded just right.

Fresh cup of tea in hand, I made my way down the hall, stopping at the nursery and flicking the light on. The room was gorgeous, done up in Greek style with pretty columns painted on the walls, little cartoon renditions of Greek gods here and there. It was only fitting that the nursery be decorated like that, not only was Greek mythology my thing, but the girls were going to be given Greek names. The first was Danae, which was the name of a Greek queen. The second was Daphne, which meant “tree spirit.” And not to mention, their father was Greek, and it ran through their veins.

I couldn't wait for them to see their new home, and I could only hope they loved it as much as I did.

The bedroom next to the nursery was currently functioning as a guest room for when Mom and Dad or Haley came to visit. When the girls were old enough, it'd work just as well for one of their bedrooms.

I'd been scared as hell when I'd first found out I was pregnant. But over the last few months, the fear had faded and been replaced with total excitement. It was going to be hard to raise them as a single mom, but I couldn't wait to meet them, to hold my little girls in my arms.

As I reached over to turn off the nursery light, the tightness returned. This time, it was so intense that I had to put down my mug of tea, so I didn't spill it. I closed my eyes and winced, leaning forward and putting my hand on the dresser.

“Oh... oh-oh-oh...” My words echoed in the nursery. The longer it went on, the more I realized that it wasn’t just simple tightness—there was pain, too.

I took in one deep breath after another, letting the pain pass. It took a little longer this time, more than these sorts of spells had ever taken to pass, but before too long I was back to normal.

Hesitantly, I picked up my mug and went into the living room, grabbing a blanket and stepping out onto the balcony. I turned the heater on, warmth soon pushing back the January chill. The evening was quiet, the white-covered expanse of trees perfectly peaceful. A few roads snaked through the woods, the small lights that dotted them the only sign that there was anyone else around.

Combine that with the smell of the fresh air blending with the towering pines, along with the perfect silence, and I was in total heaven. I sipped my tea before setting it down then wrapping myself in the blanket and having a sit in one of the wooden lounge chairs.

Picking up my mug again, I wrapped my hands around the tea, taking one more long, leisurely sip, a smile spreading across my face.

I was content. That is, until I thought of him. Alex appeared in my mind’s eye as he so often did when I was trying to relax. What I wished was that I could be mad at him, that he could be some worthless loser who’d abandoned me. He wasn’t, however. For all I knew, he’d jump at the chance to be a dad, and that he’d feel terrible if he were to find out that I’d been going through a pregnancy with twins all by myself.

It didn’t matter. He was probably on his yacht somewhere on the Aegean Sea, a glass of whiskey in his hand and a few gorgeous, bikini-clad women lounging around nearby. He had no clue that he’d knocked up the American woman he’d slept with one time nearly eight months ago. As far as he was concerned, it’d been nothing more than a single night of unattached fun.

Mom and Dad had, against my wishes, tried to find him. But with nothing more than a first name and a vague job description to go on, it'd been impossible. It was almost like the guy was trying not to be found.

It was fine. I'd do it without him. There hadn't been a thing in my life that I hadn't been able to conquer when I'd put my mind to it, and I was sure that single motherhood would be no exception.

The girls started kicking again, the tension returning to my belly, along with the same pain that had accompanied it before.

“Easy, ladies,” I said, placing my hand on my belly and making slow circles. “We've got another month to go in there, might as well get along.”

It was wishful thinking on my part. The second I took my palm away, another spasm of intense pain took hold, the sensation like my stomach was being gripped by a giant hand that wouldn't let go. It was so sudden and severe that I couldn't help but jerk my hand away and accidentally knock my tea over, the mug hitting the ground with a dull thud as the liquid spilled everywhere.

I groaned, wrapping my arms around my belly and hunching forward, the aching, tight pain that radiated from my belly so powerful that I couldn't think straight.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, the pain subsided. I took one deep breath, then another, making sure that the pain was completely gone. When I was sure it was, I rose slowly, looking out onto the woods to give myself a moment to compose.

I hated to admit it, but I was worried. The pain had been so intense—more intense than I'd ever felt before. One thing was for sure, I needed to go to the hospital.

I closed my eyes and took a few more breaths trying to totally work through the panic slowly creeping through me.

I picked up my phone and slowly, calmly typed a text to Haley.

Hey. I think it's happening.

The response came seconds later.

What? You mean IT? Where are you?

At my place. You think I should Uber to the hospital?

Are you kidding? I'll be there in twenty minutes, OK?

Haley, living closer to me than Mom and Dad, had been planning on taking me to the hospital when it happened. All the same, I felt like I was being an imposition.

OK, I know for a fact you live thirty minutes away, so be careful!

A winking face emoji was the response. With a smile, I tucked my phone into my pocket and went back inside.

Calm. I kept the word in my mind as I went to the bedroom to grab the hospital bag I'd packed, taking the duffel out of the closet and going back to the living room. I'd gone to plenty of pregnancy classes over the last few months, and all of them stressed the importance of being calm when labor started.

All the same, I couldn't help but imagine how nice it would be to have someone there with me, to have Alex there to put his hand on my shoulder and guide my breathing, to tell me everything was going to be OK.

Ten minutes passed, and as I was in the bathroom gathering a few last-minute things, another spasm of tight pain ran through me. The intensity was so much that I had to grab the sides of the sink for support as I groaned. I could feel the girls moving around inside of me, and when the pain reached its crescendo, I felt something strange, something wet.

The pain faded and I looked down at my jeans, spotting a wet stain.

My water had broken.

The intensity of the pain had been a sign that it was happening. My water breaking left no doubt—the girls were coming.

My phone buzzed in the other room, and I hurried over as quickly as I could manage, checking the screen to see a text from Haley letting me know that she was five minutes away, that I should meet her out front. I grabbed my bag and took one look at the place, letting it sink in that this was the last time that I'd be there alone. When I saw my home again, there'd be two little girls with me.

That was more than enough to keep the anxiety at bay. A smile on my face and my bag in my hand, I left the condo and headed out front. Haley was there, the engine of her burnt orange Kia crossover rumbling. She got out and ran over the second she laid eyes on me.

“Oh my God!” she shouted, the three words coming out as one all squished together. “Give me that!”

She grabbed my bag and went over to the SUV, setting it inside before returning to my side. She looked me up and down with worried eyes.

“Are you OK? How're you feeling?”

“Good, I think. My, um, water broke.” I swept my hand toward the stain on my jeans, embarrassed that I'd forgotten to change.

“Holy crap! That means it's happening. Come on!”

She opened the passenger side door and guided me inside, gently placing her hand on the small of my back. I felt like a helpless old lady, and it took some mental effort to realize that I wasn't going to be able to go through this on my own, that I'd need people to help me.

Haley shut the door once I was inside the car, then hurried over to the driver's side and wasted no time getting us on our way.

“OK, so here's the deal—I know you've got your hospital that you like in Denver, but I don't think we should risk the drive.”

“Are you serious? What do you want to do then, have me deliver the girls on the side of the road?”

She shook her head. “Have you heard of Pitt Medical?”

“Kind of. They’re some big private health care firm based out of Denver. I looked into them when I was checking out places for prenatal care, but I ended up going with one of the big hospitals instead.”

“Right. I know they’re private, but they have *tons* of locations around here. And they’ve even got one for the Evergreen area that just opened like two months ago. It’s small and you won’t have to wait forever to get in.”

I tensed a bit at the idea. “I don’t know... I kind of like First Jewish.”

“We can go there. But I checked Google Maps on the way here and there’s an accident on the road leading to town... drive time is even longer than normal. I know it’s not ideal to go to a place you’re not familiar with, but I think it’s the right call.”

“But what about my OB? My OB won’t come to Evergreen.”

Haley nodded. “True, but if your water’s already broken, I don’t think we have time babe. Better to get you somewhere safe, quickly. It’s a hospital. I’m sure they’ll have an OB on staff.”

I pursed my lips, deliberating. Right as I did, however, another contraction hit hard. I let out a pained groan as I grabbed onto the door handle and center console. The pain was sharp and so intense that I could barely hear Haley yelling to ask if I was OK.

She pulled over and stopped, the orange glow of downtown Evergreen’s streetlights overhead.

“OK,” she said once the pain had started. “When’s the last time you had a contraction?”

“Um, fifteen minutes ago, I think.”

She nodded with total certainty. “Then we’re going to the local hospital. Last thing either of us wants is to get stuck in

traffic, right? Especially since these little ones are ready to come out.”

In the midst of the uncertainty, I wanted something familiar.

Haley was right, however. Getting stuck in traffic in the middle of labor with early twins was the last thing I wanted.

“OK, let’s go.”

She nodded again before wordlessly pulling the car back onto the road. Downtown Evergreen was as sleepy as it always was at night, all of the businesses closed except for the Red Mug Diner, the wide windows giving me a look at the handful of patrons seated inside.

“I know this isn’t how you wanted the birth to go, but the place is only a few minutes away. And I saw these ads for it, it’s super nice and modern. Oh! And they had the lead doctor in the ads too... he’s sexy as hell.”

I laughed, my hands on my belly. “That’s the last thing on my mind right now.”

“But it doesn’t hurt, right?” she asked with a grin.

We drove down the main drag of town. I sent a text to Mom and Dad, letting them know what was going on, that I was going into labor, and I wouldn’t be having the kids at First Jewish like I’d planned. Mom got back to me right away, letting me know they were packing and heading over that instant.

I felt a lot better. Haley was at the wheel, and Mom and Dad were on their way.

It didn’t take long before we pulled up to the Pitt Medical facility. Even from the outside, I could tell it was something special. Most private care facilities seemed to be designed to be about as drab and depressing as possible, the building’s big blocks usually situated in strip malls.

This small hospital was different. It had an all-glass front allowing a clear view in to the sleek, modern interior of white furniture and green plants. It was almost futuristic looking,

without being cold and sterile. Just the sight of it put me at ease, made me feel like I was in good hands.

Haley came to a stop out front. A pair of nurses—one male, one female—were there waiting for us. They were dressed in white scrubs which somehow managed to be fashionable, even for that kind of wear.

“She’s in labor with twins and they’re about seven weeks early,” Haley said.

The female nurse nodded, bringing over a wheelchair to the side of the car. Haley opened the door, and the male nurse helped me out.

“Easy,” he said, his voice calm and soothing. “Let’s get you out and into the chair and we’ll take care of the rest. OK?”

“OK.”

He wheeled me to the entrance while Haley filled the other nurse in on all the details. I was soon in the lobby of the hospital, and it was somehow more calming and beautiful inside than out.

“Don’t worry about paperwork and all that,” the nurse said over her shoulder. “First priority is getting your babies delivered, we’ll take care of the rest later.”

“And if you don’t have insurance, that’s fine,” the male nurse added. “We’re more than happy to work with you.”

I had insurance, but all the same it was reassuring to hear that this place wasn’t jumping down my throat about forms and payment. I was soon in a delivery room, spacious and clean, the windows looking out onto the big courtyard park in the middle of the building. A small team of nurses helped me out of the wheelchair and into the big bed. Haley set my bag on one of the chairs and came to my side.

“Dr. Ecomides will be taking care of you,” the male nurse said with a smile. “He’s on his way.”

“Ecomides?” Haley asked. “That’s an interesting last name.”

“It’s Greek,” said another nurse. “And don’t worry—he’s one of the best doctors I’ve ever worked with.”

Greek. Of course, that got me thinking about Alex.

Haley stayed at my side holding my hand while the nurse team did the rest to get me situated and ready. Mom sent me a text letting me know they were stuck behind an accident, and it would be an hour or so before they got in.

A deep voice sounded out through the buzzing of nurses around me, one that sounded strangely familiar.

“Georgia Lang?” he asked.

The nurses parted, and I was given a full view of the Greek doctor who’d be taking care of me.

My jaw dropped when I realized it wasn’t just any Greek doctor, it was *my* Greek doctor.

Alex, the man I’d been thinking about for almost a year, stood in front of me with an expression of slight confusion on his face.

“Georgia? It’s... *you*.”

CHAPTER 14

ALEX



It was her.

It was *really* her.

Instead of wearing a light dress and sipping a cocktail in a Greek bar, she was in a medical gown with her legs in stirrups, her belly huge with twins. She still looked as beautiful as the day we'd met.

She was stunning, in fact. So much so that all I could do at first was stand and stare.

“Doctor?” Melanie, one of my lead nurses asked. “Are you alright?”

Georgia stared at me with the same stunned expression that I surely had on my face. It was as if the rest of the world melted away in that moment, only the two of us remaining.

“Doctor?”

Melanie's voice brought me back to the present. Insane as the reunion was, I had a job to do.

“I'm fine, thanks,” I answered. “Let's clear this place out a little while I go over her information. You and Sam stay and make sure the room's in order for a birth. Something tells me it's going to happen soon.”

Melanie nodded. “You heard the doctor,” she said, speaking to the half-dozen staff in the room. “The rest of you, stay nearby in case we need some extra hands.”

“Thanks, Mel.”

One more nod before she and Sam went to work getting the room set up. Georgia and I went right back to staring at one another, my heart racing like it hadn't since that first night.

"Is something wrong?" the woman with Georgia asked. She was slender and pretty, about Georgia's age, and was regarding the scene with total confusion.

"Nothing's wrong," Georgia said. "Just..."

I smiled, stepping forward and offering my hand. "I think it's well past time that you and I are formally introduced. My name is Alex, Dr. Alex Ecomides."

She smiled as she took my hand. The sensation of her skin against mine was electric. I could hardly think straight, my cock twitching in my scrubs.

"Georgia Lang. Though I'm sure you've got all that and more on your sheet."

I chuckled. "Hadn't taken a thorough look at it yet. I see that we've got twins here, and contractions about fifteen minutes apart."

"That's right." A strange expression crossed her face, as if there were more to it that she didn't quite want to say or know how to say. "I'm not the doctor here, but I think they're really, *really* eager to come out."

I smiled again. "That's what I'm here for, what *we're* here for." I swept my hand toward Melanie and Sam, both still in the room making preparations for the delivery. "I'm going to step out into the hall for a moment and page our on-call OB, alright?"

She matched my smile with one of her own. "Sure."

I nodded to Melanie and hurried out, stepping just outside of the delivery room and shutting the door.

Melanie offered a small smile. "I've never seen you smile like that before, Doc. I was starting to wonder if you *ever* smiled, in fact."

"Oh, come on—I'm not *that* serious."

She chuckled. “You looked at the patient like you knew her. Do you?”

How could I describe the situation without getting into too much detail?

“We... met on vacation in Greece. Hit it off. But that was a while back.”

“That’s all I’m going to get?”

I gave a small smile. “Yep.”

“Ok, want me to page Dr. Schmidt?”

“I’ll take care of that. Look after the patient please.”

She regarded me with a skeptical expression, as if she could sense that I had ulterior reasons for wanting to stay out in the hall.

“You got it, Doc.”

She winked before heading back inside, leaving me alone. The second I was by myself with my thoughts, I began the mental calculations. It’d been nearly eight months since my vacation to Greece, back at the beginning of the previous summer. Nine months was a standard pregnancy, but this wasn’t one of those. Georgia was having twins, and they were coming early.

My heart skipped a beat as I realized that the timing worked... there was a good chance that the twins were mine. I tried to keep myself in check. For all I knew, she’d been with other men around that time. Still, the odds were better than good that I was about to help deliver my own kids.

I paged our on-call OB, Dr. Schmidt.

A cry of pain sounded from the delivery room—Georgia was having another contraction.

I hurried inside, rushing over to her as the contraction hit.

“Ok Georgia, I’ve paged our OB, but I’d really like to check you and see how dilated you are. Are you okay with that?”

She nodded her head.

I stepped to the end of the bed and did my examination. She was already dilated to nine centimeters.

I'd been sure that the babies were going to arrive soon, but it seemed as if they were coming even faster than I'd anticipated.

"Alright," I said, standing up and speaking to Georgia. "You're already dilated to nine. I don't think these babies are going to wait for Dr. Schmidt. I'm going to have to deliver them. Don't worry, I've delivered several babies in my career. I assure you that you and your children are in good hands."

She nodded again, licking her dry lips. "Can I get an epidural?"

I shook my head. "Unfortunately, you are too far along for that. You're going to have to deliver these babies naturally. But you can do this, Georgia."

She smiled weakly and then groaned again as another contraction hit her.

"Alright," I said, stepping back and turning my attention to Melanie and Sam. "Let's get everything ready."

The rest of the team finished the last-minute preparations in the room, Georgia speaking in low tones to her friend. I couldn't help but wonder if they were talking about me, and how strange it was that Georgia and I had come back into each other's lives under such circumstances. It sure as hell was on my mind.

"OK, just call for me if you need anything," her friend said after a time. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched as she threw a furtive glance in my direction before heading out of the room.

"Hey, Alex?" Georgia's voice was gentle, even a little hesitant.

I turned, catching Melanie regarding what was happening with a sly smile. Being tactful as always, she stepped over to the other side of the room to give me some privacy.

“Yeah?” I stepped to the side of the bed.

Georgia gave me a weak smile. “This is really weird.”

I let out a snort of a laugh. “No kidding. I never thought I was going to see you again, and now here you are in my ER about to give birth to twins.”

“Moirae,” she said.

“Fate.”

She chuckled. “Nice thing about you being Greek is I don’t have to explain it to you.”

I smiled back at her. “It’s good to see you.”

“Yeah. Good to see you too.” She pursed her lips, glancing aside. I could sense there was something on her mind, something that she wasn’t sure how to say. “I don’t know how to say this, but—”

Before she could get the rest of her words out, Georgia winced, biting down on her lip before letting out a cry of pain as another contraction took hold.

“What’s the time on that, Mel?” I asked.

“Two minutes.”

Without thinking, I reached for Georgia’s hand. Before I could close the distance between us, however, her friend came rushing into the room.

“I heard *that* yell!” she announced, hurrying over to Georgia’s side and grabbing her hand. As she did, I realized how inappropriate it would’ve been for me to do something like that, how lucky I was that she’d arrived just at that moment.

“Oh, my *Gooddd!*” Georgia cried.

“OK, OK!” her friend replied. “You need to do the breathing stuff! Remember? We did, like, five lessons on this, it should be second nature!”

“It’s not second nature when it feels like your stomach’s about to freaking explode!”

“Easy, girly! Don’t bite my head off!”

The two of them went back and forth, their sharp comments to one another putting a small smile on my face. Her friend’s words sat poorly with me, however. She’d said that they’d gone to classes together. I’d never gone through pregnancy with anyone before, but I understood it enough to know that attending classes together was something the *couple* did.

If those babies were mine, it meant that Georgia had gone through her entire pregnancy all on her own, no help but from friends and family.

“You ready for this?” I asked. “Because these kids are coming soon.”

She nodded, pursing her lips once more. Georgia took a deep breath, then turned to me.

“The babies,” she said, her voice low enough so only I could hear it. “They’re yours.”

Her words hit me like a crack of lightning, the rest of the world vanishing. Emotions ran through me that I could hardly comprehend. While I’d suspected as much, hearing the words come out of her mouth, knowing that in a short time I’d be holding *my* children in my arms... it was too much to even begin to process.

I cleared my throat, putting on as professional a demeanor as I could. “We’ll talk about this when they’re here, OK?”

She nodded.

We didn’t get a chance to say anything else. Another contraction hit, and more screams and shouts filled the air.

“Where’s my baby?”

A woman’s voice came from behind me. I turned to see an older couple at the door, a woman who resembled Georgia so much that it almost shocked me, and a tall, strapping man in his mid-sixties.

“Mom, Dad!” As if there were any doubt that these were her parents, Georgia’s words confirmed it.

I looked down to see one of the babies crowning. There was too much chaos.

“Only one of you can stay,” I said. “Twin births are no small thing. We’ll have you all in here as soon as possible.”

Georgia’s friend threw her arms around her. “We’ll be right outside, OK?”

“OK.”

She left Georgia’s side, hurrying over to the parents and stepping out with Georgia’s father as her mother came over and took her hand.

Normally, the father of the babies would be the one to stay in the room. A small smile took hold when I realized that he *was* there.

I pushed all of that out of my head as I stepped to the end of the bed.

“Georgia, I need you to push.”

CHAPTER 15

GEORGIA



It was morning. Snow had started to fall a few hours before and was still going. Soft, morning light poured into the hospital room. And in my arms were the most beautiful little girls I'd ever seen in my life.

Danae and Daphne. I'd been in love since the moment I'd laid eyes on them last night, the girls so beautiful and perfect that I could hardly believe that they were real. They were fraternal, not identical. Danae had gorgeous, blue eyes that were no doubt mine, while Daphne had the green eyes of her father. Danae had a head of dark, thick hair, while Daphne was as adorably bald as a cue ball.

A soft knock sounded from the door. As much as I'd wanted to see Alex, I could tell from the sound that it wasn't him. Besides, with the news I'd dropped on him, I didn't mind him taking some time to process it all.

"Come in," I said.

The door opened and Melanie, one of the nurses who'd helped deliver the twins, walked in.

"Hey!" she said, her voice soft but filled with happiness and enthusiasm. "How're the girls?"

"Sleepy," I said. "But perfect."

Melanie smiled before stepping over and giving them each a look. She checked their skin tone, their pulse, and their reflexes.

"Everything good?" I asked.

“Preemie twins can be touch and go, but these two are looking as good as we could hope for a pair that came out of the oven a month early. I just wanted to pop in and let you know we’ll be taking them back to the newborn care unit in a few minutes. Thought it’d be nice to give a little warning before we actually did it.”

“No, I appreciate it. Thanks again for everything.”

She smiled. “I know Dr. Schmidt checked you out early this morning, but Dr. Ecomides will be in shortly to look in on you, as well.”

I smiled. “Sounds good.”

She flashed me one more warm smile before leaving the room. Moments later, Alex entered. He was dressed in slacks and a white shirt with a doctor’s coat thrown over it.

He carried a gorgeous bouquet of flowers in each hand. I gasped at the sight of them.

“Special delivery for the special deliveries,” he said with a grin.

“Don’t tell me you got me *two* bouquets.”

“I didn’t, just this one here,” he said as he raised the larger of the two bouquets. “Though, a bouquet for each girl seems pretty fitting. The other one is from... Penrose Publishing?”

“That’s the company that does the publishing of my books. Haley must’ve told them the news.”

“I’ll set them over here with the, ah, rest of the flowers.” He stepped over to the other side of the room, where three bouquets—one from Haley, one from my parents, and another from Kaitlyn, my agent—sat on a counter. It took some doing, but he was able to make room for all of them.

I smiled. “Thank you.” I looked around at the room, clean and inviting and comfy all at once. The big picture windows to my right gave me such a lovely view of the courtyard, of the snow still falling softly. “I can’t get over how nice this place is. I was scared about not having these two at my usual

hospital, but I'm really pleased with how everything turned out."

"I'm totally sold on Pitt Medical," he said. "After just a few months of working here I can't believe that I spent so much time at the standard sort of hospital that's all fluorescent lights and administrators pushing you to get patients out as quickly as possible."

His expression turned as he stepped closer and laid eyes on the girls. His mouth formed a flat line, and his usual hard gaze turned soft. He swallowed, as if giving himself a moment to compose.

"They're beautiful," he said.

Seeing his reaction was enough to bring tears to my eyes. "I hope you don't mind the names. Normally, picking them out would be a collaborative process instead of a unilateral one."

"Danea and Daphne," he said. "I love them. And they're all the more fitting now that I know they're half-Greek." He stepped to the side of the bed, placing his finger against the side of Danae's cheek. His finger looked so big next to her little head, making me all the more aware of how perfect and precious she was, how fragile.

"If you mix them up, remember that Daphne's the one with no hair," I said with a smile.

"Good to know." He took his finger away, an expression of concern forming on his face. He stepped back, sitting in the big lounge chair underneath the windows. "I hope you don't take it too personally if I get a paternity test."

I shook my head. "It's fine. Seriously, I completely understand. I can tell you without a shred of doubt that they're yours, but I get it. You and I spent one night together, and that's not nearly enough time to get to know someone well enough to know if they'd lie about something like this. So, if you want to take a paternity test, let's do it. You probably have all the stuff to do it here in the hospital, right?"

He said nothing at first, regarding me with a strange expression, as if he were deep in thought.

“We do, yeah. But are you sure you’re fine with me doing the test?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t I be? I know they’re yours, but you don’t. If you want to do this to put your mind at ease, then go for it.”

Another few beats of silence passed. “Let’s hold off on it for now. You’ve got more than enough on your mind already without having to worry about more tests.”

At that moment, Danae opened her little eyes and glanced up at me. I’d learned in my reading that babies couldn’t really see much when they were first born, and I was sure that this doubly applied to premature babies. All the same, looking down at those tiny blue eyes, the same eyes as mine, was enough to send a rush of emotions through me that I could hardly bear.

“Let me get another look at those two.” He rose from his seat and came over, leaning down over the bed. Danae turned a bit, facing him. She opened her mouth and let out a tiny, almost imperceptible gurgle that was so precious I could hardly stand it. Then, to make things even cuter, she reached her arm out toward Alex.

He lifted his index finger in front of her. Danae kept reaching, wrapping her teensy, tiny fingers around his and gripping it as hard as she could.

“Looks like she knows you’re her daddy,” I said.

Alex said nothing as she gripped his finger. He swallowed hard, then cleared his throat. A few seconds later, she took her hand away and tucked it next to her cheek. He brought his eyes to mine, and in that moment, I was struck by the connection between us, memories of that night flooding back into my mind. The faraway look on his face suggested the same was happening with him.

“Doctor?” Melanie’s voice pulled us out of our dazes.

Alex regained his composure, his professional doctor’s posture immediately returning.

“Yes?”

“Sorry to break up the moment, but we need to take these two back to the preemie nursery.”

“Of course.” He rose, reaching out for Danae. I lifted her slightly, enough for him to scoop her into his big arms. She looked so small next to him, so delicate. But he held her as if she were the most precious little thing in the world. Melanie took Daphne, and together they placed the girls in a two-baby bassinet.

It felt like a part of myself was being taken away.

“I know it’s hard to think about,” Melanie said. “But as a mom, take my advice and use this time to get some rest. Once you’re home with the girls, you’re going to wish you did.”

The logical part of me knew she was right. All the same, it broke my heart to watch her roll the bassinet out of the room. Tears formed in my eyes. Without a word, Alex picked up a box of tissues from the counter covered with flowers and brought it over to me.

“Sorry, just hormones I guess.” I wiped my eyes and blew my nose.

“Don’t write off the way you’re feeling to hormones,” he said. “This process, meeting your girls for the first time, bonding with them... it’s something more than chemicals. It’s almost magical.”

I smiled, wiping the last few tears away. “No offense, but you’re the last guy I’d expect to talk about magic.”

He laughed, sitting back down. “I’ve delivered enough babies to know that there’s no other way to describe it. Mothers go from the pain of labor to the love of motherhood the second they lay eyes on their kids. There’s nothing else like it in the world.”

There was something wonderful about what I saw in Alex then, this tough, towering guy showing a touch of sensitivity. I sensed that he didn’t let this side out very often.

“And is that how you felt seeing the girls?”

He turned his head toward the window, long moments passing as he watched the snow gently fall.

“It was... something else.” He didn’t say another word for several long moments. “Truth be told, I’m still wrapping my head around it, knowing that I’m a father.

“You know, when I walked into the delivery room and saw you there, I wondered if I was seeing things.”

“Same here.” I wrung my hands together, the subject hard to even talk about. “I was sure that you were out of my life for good. I was all set to raise these girls by myself, and...”

I realized what I’d said. Maybe Alex was ready to accept that the kids were his, but he’d said nothing about whether or not he was going to help raise them.

I cleared my throat, trying to think of some way to dodge the subject.

“How the hell did you end up in rural Colorado?”

CHAPTER 16

ALEX



Her question was so direct that all I could do was laugh.

My smile faded, however, when I realized there was no way to answer that other than with a lie. The more I thought about it, the more I understood that, with the girls being mine, I was pulling Georgia into my life and that meant into all the danger it entailed.

“You OK?” she asked.

I shook my head, coming back into the moment. Whatever the situation was with Nico, it’d have to wait.

“Yeah, just fine. Still processing all of this, you know?”

I stepped over to her. Once I was near, there was no way I could resist taking her hand. Her skin felt so damn good against mine, and the post-birth glow of her face only served to make her look more beautiful than she already was.

She squeezed my hand back. “Take your time. This is a lot for both of us. But... do you know how long the girls and I are going to have to be here for?”

I opened my mouth to speak, the buzzing of my phone in my inner coat pocket giving me pause.

“One sec. Sorry, when you’re running an ER, you don’t get the option of ignoring texts.”

“Of course.”

I took the phone out and checked the screen. At first, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing—it was from Nico. I

scanned the paragraph of text, my blood running colder and colder with each word I read.

Once I'd read it all, I closed my eyes and set the feelings the text had brought up in me aside. I'd gotten good at compartmentalizing emotions over the last decade or so of my life working with the mob, for better or for worse.

"You alright?" she asked.

I tucked the phone back into my lab coat. "Fine. Just something I needed to do that I'd forgotten about. Anyway, regarding your question about when you will be able to leave. There's good news and bad news. The good news is that for you, I'm thinking another day should be all we need. For the girls, on the other hand, while they're looking healthy, the fact of the matter is that they're still very premature. I'm going to recommend that they stay here another few days at least so we can monitor them."

"I guess it's not so bad if they're going to be here with their dad." She smiled and took my hand once more. "And... you're probably going to want to do the paternity test soon, right?"

I shook my head. "I think we can skip that."

She cocked her head to the side, curious. "Really? Why's that?"

"Because of the way you reacted when I asked you to take one. There was no doubt in your voice that the kids were mine."

Georgia smiled. "Trust me, around the time when you and I met, guys were the last thing I had time for between my writing and finishing up my Masters. Not to mention, just look at those girls. Granted, they're less than a day old, but can't you tell by looking at them that they're yours?"

I thought back to those faces, how I'd felt something looking at them that I'd never felt before. In fact, it was almost too much to bear.

As I stood there, Georgia moved her hand up my arm, teasing the contours of my forearm with her fingertips.

“And there’s still the matter of us.”

My cock noticed her words, shifting a bit down below.

“You’re right. We’ve got a lot to talk about, a lot of getting to know one another.”

She smiled up at me, pleased with my words. As I gazed down at her, I couldn’t resist leaning in, planting a kiss on her cheek. She turned her head to let me do it, the softness of her skin and the scent of her hair so intense that my heart thudded in my chest.

“It’s good to see you again,” she said as I took my lips from her cheek.

“You too.”

The moment between us didn’t last for very long. My phone buzzed again, and this time I quickly reached into my coat pocket to silence it.

“You can answer,” she said. “Don’t put off your calls on my behalf.”

Wanting to change the subject, I backed up and took a seat in the lounge chair. “So, what I want to know is how I can help right now. Do you have everything for the girls? I noticed you were dropped off by your friend Haley. Just so you know, it’s clinic policy that we don’t let newborns leave unless they’ve got approved car seats.”

She nodded. “We’ve got that taken care of. But I know there’s stuff that fell through the cracks when it came to getting things ready for the girls. Maybe diapers and all that.”

I leaned forward in the chair and took her hand. “Whatever you need, just let me know. Put together a list and I can pick it all up when I’m off work. And what about lunch? We do some decent food here, but I’d be happy to grab something for you from town.”

Georgia smiled. “Thank you but Mom and Dad are going to get me something.”

Tension undid itself in my belly as it began to dawn on me that she had family and friends taking care of her. I didn’t get

too much of a chance to think about it, however, before my phone buzzed in my pocket once again.

There was no putting it off. I needed to read those texts.

“I have to go,” I said. My tone came off brusque, but I had other matters to worry about. “I’ll check in with you in a bit.”

“Yeah. Sure.” The look on her face made it clear that she could tell something was wrong. No way in hell I was going to tell her about Nico and what I’d left behind in New York.

Moments later, I was in my office. By the time I sat down behind my desk, my phone was practically burning a hole in my pocket. I took a deep breath, then pulled it out. A few texts were on the screen.

Yo, kid. This is N.

Need to talk to you. Get in touch ASAP.

Not sure what the hell crawled up your ass to make you leave NYC, but I need you back right now. The family needs your help, and I didn’t put you through med school so you could drop off the face of the fucking earth whenever you please.

I had no idea what to make of the texts. When I’d left New York, I’d been sure that Nico had put it together that I’d been the one that had called the cops. But the texts gave no indication that was the case. He was asking me to come back to the city as if I’d simply popped out for a day or two to get some fresh air.

Either way, I didn’t care. I was done with Nico and that world. I pulled open the text and hit the block button.

I’d come to Colorado to start a new life. Sitting there in my office, however, my daughters just down the hall, I couldn’t shake the notion that my old life wasn’t done with me.

CHAPTER 17

GEORGIA



It was three days later, and I was back at my condo.
I *wasn't* happy.

The hospital had told me that they'd only need to keep the girls for another couple of days, but that hadn't ended up being the case. They'd wanted more time to make sure they were eating well and thriving. It made sense, but that didn't mean I was pleased that my girls were at the hospital instead of at home.

I wanted to be there with them. And that's just where I had been since being released. Mom and Dad, however, had insisted that I take a break. But it was impossible to relax. Being apart from my little girls was unbearable, and I was right on the verge of saying *screw it* and driving back to the hospital. Only the fact that Mom and Dad and Alex were there with them kept me in check.

I'd tried to get some writing done over the last couple of days, even with my publisher telling me to take as much time as I needed or wanted. Normally, work was where I retreated when I wanted to get away from things. This time was different. Being a mom, as I was learning, meant that you couldn't just *turn off* the "mom" part of your brain. I'd make my tea, do some stretches, then sit down at my laptop only to be immediately consumed with thoughts of the girls.

I needed to be with them.

My phone shook on the counter, and I wasted no time running over and snatching it up. A call was coming in, and

my heart skipped a beat when I saw that it was from the hospital.

“Hello?”

“Is this Georgia Lang?”

I closed my eyes and focused, not wanting to get too excited at the idea of my girls being ready to be picked up.

“This is she.”

“This is Anne over at Pitt Medical Evergreen. Just wanted to give you a call to let you know that the results for the paternity test came in. Would you like me to read them to you over the phone?”

Disappointment ran through me. “Sure, go ahead.”

“The blood test indicates that the man tested is, in fact, the father.”

We’d had to jump through a few hoops in order to test Alex without the rest of the staff finding out that he was the father of the twins.

“Great. Thanks for your help.”

“Of course! The results have been emailed to you, as well.”

“Hey, I’ve got a couple of newborns there, twin girls. Is there any news on when I might be able to bring them home?”

“Hmm, unfortunately, that’s not my department. I’d be happy to transfer you over, however.”

“No, that’s alright. I’ve got the doctor’s number. Thanks.”

The call ended, and I tucked my phone into my robe’s big front pocket. Alex had meant what he’d said about the paternity test, that he felt it wasn’t necessary, that he trusted me. It meant a lot. All the same, I’d wanted to do it and put any doubt to rest. Mission accomplished. I made a mental note to screenshot the email and text it to him when I got a chance.

Once that was decided, I went right back to pacing. It was still white outside, the snow from the day of the twins’ birth

still piled high.

I had to go to the hospital. I'd been away long enough, and I didn't care if Mom and Dad and Alex were holding down the fort. After a quick shower and change, I bundled up and headed out into the cold.

The Rockies loomed to the west as I made my way to the car, their tops snow-capped against the slate gray of the sky. As I slipped into the driver's seat, all I could think about was how much I wanted the girls to be home with me.

I kept my cool as I drove, heading through downtown toward the hospital. There were lots of cars parked in the front lot, suggesting that it was a busy day.

I strode in through the doors, making my way over to the newborn care unit.

Mom, of course, took my arrival as a sign that something was amiss. Worry painted her face, and she zipped over to me.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. "What're you doing here?"

"Yeah, something's wrong," I said. "It's been three days and I still don't have the girls home."

Dad's walk was a little more composed; he strode over with slow steps.

"Kiddo, why aren't you at home? You're supposed to be resting up."

"There's no way I can rest up," I said, shaking my head. "I want to be with my girls."

Mom and Dad shared a look that suggested they knew there was no sense in trying to talk me out of it. Hell, they'd raised me—they knew better than anyone that once I set my mind on something I'd stop at nothing until it was done.

"We just checked on them," Mom said. "They're doing great. We sent you a picture, too."

Confused, I took my phone out of my back pocket and checked the screen. Sure enough, there was a text from Mom.

I swiped it open and saw that it was of the girls, both sleeping peacefully in their bassinets. Just the sight of them was enough to make my heart hurt, for tears to form in my eyes.

“They’re so perfect,” I said, shaking my head in disbelief. “I still can’t believe they’re mine.”

“I know you want to see them,” Mom said. “But they’re only letting us go in there for a few minutes at a time. It might seem unnecessary, but it’s a very good thing that they’re so careful with premature babies.”

Dad nodded. “Those girls needed another month to bake in the oven,” he said, a small smile forming on his face at his turn of phrase. “Things are extra delicate when they come out before they’re supposed to.”

Mom and Dad were reassuring in their own ways—Mom in her concern and Dad in his calmness. All the same, I wanted to see my babies.

“I’m going to see the doctor. He told me that I could go right to his office if I needed anything.”

Mom and Dad were still in the dark about Alex being the father. I wanted so badly to tell them, but I didn’t want to do it without discussing the matter with Alex beforehand. The list of things we needed to talk about was growing by the second, it seemed.

I hated keeping my parents in the dark about the identity of the father of the girls. But I knew it was what was best, at least for the moment. I knew once I told them there’d be the whole process of everyone getting to know one another and joining the families in whatever form that might take. For now, I just wanted to get the girls home.

I took the elevator to the second floor, hurrying down the sleek hallway of the office area. There was no mistaking where Alex’s office was located, the big, white door at the far end making it clear that he was the boss.

I approached, ready to knock. Right as I raised my hand, however, I heard something on the other side. At first, I wasn’t

sure what it was. But the more I listened, the clearer I was able to hear.

A woman was crying behind the door.

What the hell was going on?

I lowered my hand, stepping aside. A low voice spoke through the door, a voice that I recognized right away as belonging to Alex. The woman spoke, a bit more crying punctuating her words. Before long, a chair squeaked, followed by two sets of footsteps. I hurried out of the way of the door as the footsteps drew closer.

The door opened and I watched as Alex led a woman out of the office. His hand was on her upper back, tears in her eyes.

“You have my number if you need anything,” he said. “And once again, I’m so sorry for your loss.”

His eyes flicked up to me as he led the woman off, but other than that, his attention stayed fully on her until she was in the elevator and the doors had closed. Right away I felt as if I’d intruded on something that I had no business seeing.

Alex glanced in my direction as he approached.

“Aren’t you supposed to be at home resting?”

“Couldn’t bear sitting around waiting,” I said.

“Figured as much.” He nodded for me to come in.

Alex shut the door behind me. The office was large, clean and sleek as the rest of the place. I spotted Alex’s degrees on the wall, along with photos of New York City and landscapes that I recognized right away as Greece. The big windows behind the desk looked out over the courtyard below, the Rockies in the far distance.

“Is everything alright?” I asked.

“With the girls?” he replied as he sat. “Everything’s great. They’re eating and sleeping. Haven’t seen a single sign that they’re doing anything but thriving.”

“Thank God,” I said. “Sorry, I’m just...”

“You’re being a mom, I get it. And I understand that no one likes sitting around waiting for news. But you’re lucky enough to not be in that position. You can assume that everything’s fine unless you hear otherwise.”

I cleared my throat. “Is... everything OK with her?”

He shook his head. “No, not at all. She gave birth the day after you did. She wasn’t as lucky as you, as us.”

“My God. I’m so sorry.”

He pursed his lips. “Yeah. I’ve helped with quite a few births since taking over this place, despite my focus being surgery. Most babies come out happy and healthy. But not all.”

I sat back. “I feel like such a jackass. Here I am, stressing over my two healthy girls. Meanwhile, there are parents like her trying to deal with an unthinkable loss.”

“I didn’t tell you to guilt you or anything like that. But when you work this job for as long as I have, you can’t help but develop a certain perspective on life, like how fragile it is, how lucky someone is if they’re in good health.” He sat back. “All the same, I know how tough it is waiting to bring the girls home. We’re thinking another day and they should be ready to leave.”

“OK, good. Sorry to be a pain. Just...”

He raised his palm. “Like I said, I get it.”

“Can we at least see them?”

He glanced aside for a moment. “Yeah. We can do that. Come on.”

Together we left his office, making our way downstairs. Before too long we were in front of the postnatal ward, the windows looking in on a small room of a half-dozen bassinets. The girls were in there, both sleeping soundly, looking glowing and healthy.

“We’re lucky,” he said. “Two beautiful, healthy girls.”

I couldn’t resist taking his hand as I looked at my babies. As I glanced over at Alex, however, I noticed a tense

expression on his face.

Something was on his mind. I kept my questions to myself, feeling like I'd pried enough for one day.

Besides, I had too much to be grateful for. I watched the girls sleep, a love coming over me that I'd never known. And I knew it was just the beginning.

CHAPTER 18

ALEX



It was a day later, and I was in the middle of getting the schedule together for the next week when a gentle knock sounded at the door to my office.

“Come in!” I called out, not taking my eyes off the computer in front of me.

The door opened, Melanie stepping inside. A small, almost playful smile was on her face.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Just came in to tell you that we’re getting the twins ready to be taken home. Georgia’s down in the waiting room with her parents, and they’re chomping at the bit.”

“I thought we weren’t going to be releasing the twins until later this afternoon?” I checked my watch, seeing that it was a little before noon.

“That was the plan. But the weather’s looking a little rough. There’s supposed to be a snowstorm in the next few hours. I didn’t think you’d want them stuck on the road.”

“Hm. Yeah, good call.”

I glanced up at her, that smile still on her face. “Now, as for that knowing smile you’ve been sporting around me, are you going to make me guess what it is, or are you going to tell me?” I softened my expression after I spoke, letting her know that I wasn’t mad. All the same, I was curious as hell what had the normally professional Melanie smirking like that.

“It’s just... the staff’s been talking. I think you can guess what about.”

I sat back, shaking my head.

“It’s the resemblance. Not to mention the way you’ve been talking with Georgia. And you certainly didn’t help matters when you held her hand yesterday in front of the postnatal room where anyone could’ve seen you two.”

“I suppose I asked for this, didn’t I?”

I ran my hand through my hair. It wasn’t that I was sensitive about the topic, but more that I liked to keep my work life and personal life as far apart as possible. The last thing I wanted was for my staff to be gossiping about matters like that behind my back.

“Not to mention it’s a small town,” she added. “I know you’re used to New York, but people *love* their gossip around here. But I get it. You’re the man in charge, and I’m right underneath you. It’s unprofessional of me to have let this go on.”

“All the same, it’s the truth—those girls are mine. I’m not planning on keeping that information hidden from my staff.”

“Right, especially since we’re definitely going to want to throw a party for you.”

I let out a dry laugh. “Let’s not go crazy now. Do what you can to keep the gossip to a minimum and give Georgia and me a few days to get settled and discuss matters. After that, I’ll share the news with the rest of the staff.”

She grinned. “Perfect. God, this is so cute—you’re reunited with the love of your life just in time to become parents together. The Hallmark channel couldn’t come up with something like this in a million years.”

“Love of my life?”

Her eyes flashed, as if Melanie had realized that she’d gone just a bit too far.

“I mean, maybe? We’ll see, right?”

“Yeah, we’ll see.” Truth be told, the mere mention of “love” was enough to make me uncomfortable.

“And congrats, boss. I can’t wait to see you be a dad.”

“Thanks.”

She flashed me one more smile before stepping out of the office.

Melanie might’ve been right when she’d said the situation with Georgia was like a romantic comedy. What she didn’t know about, however, was the other issue in my life—the one that was shaping up to be more like a suspense thriller.

Nico.

I took my phone out of my desk, checked the screen and viewed the last barrage of texts from my old boss. I’d unblocked his number after the first set of messages, figuring it was better if I knew he was coming rather than walking around blind.

Where the hell are you, kid? I’m not liking this one bit.

Get your ass back to NYC now. Whatever the hell is going on, talk about it with me face to face—like a damn man.

If you did something that you don’t want me to know about, you’d be better off telling me in person. Trust me.

Don’t make me come find you. You’re not going to like what happens if it comes to that.

I opened my drawer once more and laid eyes on the burner phone I’d picked up in town. I’d been debating for the last day whether or not to use it, whether or not to get in touch with my people back in New York.

As I re-read the texts from Nico, however, the answer became clear. I needed to learn all I could about what was going on in the city.

I picked up the burner and dialed the number for a heavy hitter named Bolter I knew from my first years in the underground life. He and I had run some low-level jobs for Nico back before I was pulled out of that to go to college then

med school. All the same, Bolter and I had an agreement that we'd always watch one another's backs, be there for each other if we ever needed anything—no matter what.

I held the burner phone in my hand for a long moment, knowing that by calling New York there was a damn good chance I'd upset the delicate balance I'd established since coming to Colorado.

It had to be done. I knew Bolter's number by heart and dialed it.

The phone rang and rang, and I worried that he might not pick up an unrecognized number.

"Yo, this is Bolter. Who the hell is this?" Bolter's voice was low and gruff, his words coming out in a rough, Brooklyn accent.

I smiled a bit, pleased that I was catching a break.

"Hey, Bolt. This is Alex."

"Holy shit! The Doctor? No way!" He laughed. "You serious? It's really you?"

A small, tentative smile formed on my face at his excitement and his surprise. At the very least, it meant that he hadn't been expecting my call, which likely meant that he didn't know what was going on with me.

"It's really me. How're things in Hell's Kitchen? Still knocking heads down at the pool halls?"

He laughed. "You been to Hell's Kitchen these days? Man, it's all kinds of gen... gendy... what's that word?"

"Gentrified."

"That's the one. The places that I hung around making my name back when I was a kid, shit, they're all smoothie bars and high-end gym equipment stores. Other than that, doing alright. What's going on with you?"

I allowed myself a bit more tentative relief. His question suggested that my flight from the city wasn't the talk of New York's criminal underworld. Bolter, as far as criminals went,

was a good guy but he was a little on the guileless side. If he was working against me and trying to hide it, I'd likely have been able to tell.

“Not much, just out of the city for a while.”

“Really? Where at?”

I opened my mouth to speak, ready to tell him the truth. Before I did though, I realized that the truth wasn't going to be my ally here.

“Wyoming,” I said. “Middle of nowhere, Wyoming.”

He laughed. “What the hell are you doing all the way out there?”

“Needed a break from the city, to clear my head and all that.”

“That's one way to do it, I suppose. But it's a good idea; Lord knows that it's easy to let time fly. Shit, it's been... what, two years since I've been out of the city. Maybe it's time *I* go on a damn vacation.”

“Hell, I bet you've earned it.” A pause of silence passed, and I knew that it was time to get to the heart of the matter. “Listen, I hate to drop this on you, but I need to ask a favor.”

“Don't hate it at all. You've done more than enough solids for me since we've known one another. Happy for the chance to pay you back, bud. What is it?”

“It's... somewhat of a strange request. I wanted to see if you'd be able to keep your ear to the ground while I'm gone, let me know if I end up the topic of conversation, especially when it comes to Nico.”

“Nico? What's the matter? Something going on with you and him?”

Time for more lies. “Just... want to see where I stand with the old man on the subject of my vacation. He said he was fine with me leaving, but if he starts grumbling about me being gone for too long, I want to know about it.”

“Ah, that’s smart. It’s always a good idea to stay on the old man’s good side. Sure, I’ll keep my ears open when I’m making the rounds around town. No problem.”

“Thanks, Bolt. Next time I see you, drinks are on me.”

He laughed. “Sounds good. Get some relaxing in, Doc. See you when I see you. And I’ll be in touch if I hear anything.”

We said our goodbyes and that was that. I set down my burner phone and sat back in my chair. All I could hope for was that I hadn’t put Bolter in danger. But I’d done what I’d needed to do. After all, I had three more lives than just my own to worry about now.

CHAPTER 19

ALEX



I checked my burner phone one more time as I sat outside of Georgia's place.

No message from Bolter or Nico, same as the last few days.

I didn't like it one bit. Bolter might've been a low-level guy who didn't exactly have his finger on the pulse of the inner circles of the New York crime world, but he was trustworthy and dependable. If he'd found anything out, he would've told me by now. Sure, there was the possibility that he hadn't learned anything new, but if that was the case, I would've expected to hear something about that, too.

It was early evening, snow softly falling on the windshield of my new Land Rover. I'd sold the Jeep when I'd arrived, not wanting to have a traceable car that Nico might be able to find. I glanced up toward Georgia's place, a modern five-story condo complex that was easily one of the biggest buildings in town.

Tonight was a big night. Not only was I going to see the girls for the first time since they'd been brought home, but we were also going to tell Georgia's parents that I was the twins' father. My stomach tingled with anxiety—a feeling I wasn't used to. It was strange. I'd faced down gangsters and seen some rough things in my time, but fatherhood was a totally new territory, making me feel things that I was unfamiliar with.

At the same time, it was a thrill that I'd never known before. Being with a woman who drove me wild, and two kids that were the product of that passion... I couldn't even describe it.

But I liked it.

When I was ready, I tossed the burner phone into the glove compartment and got out, shutting the door and pulling the collar of my pea coat against my neck. Colorado was cold in a way that New York wasn't, as if you could feel the full force of the mountain air barreling down on you wherever you stood.

I approached the front doors to the condo building, stepping in front of the security camera, my face appearing on the small screen next to the intercom system. At first, the security struck me as a little extreme for a place like Evergreen. But after considering that Nico was up to God only knew what, the more security there was for Georgia and the girls, the better.

"Hey!" Georgia's gorgeous face appeared on the screen. Just the sight of her in that small rectangle the size of a pack of playing cards was enough to make my heart skip a beat. "Been waiting for you!"

"Sorry to be so late, got hung up at the hospital."

"No problem at all." She glanced aside, as if she had something to tell me that she didn't think I'd be happy about. "So, there's been a little bit of a change of plans."

"What do you mean?"

"It's with my parents."

"They couldn't make it?"

"No, they're here. It's just that... you'll see when you get here." She flashed me a smile before turning off the screen. The lock on the front door clicked open and, a little confused, I stepped inside the building. The lobby was nice enough, done up in greens and grays and whites. A man at the front desk nodded as I entered. Good, even more security.

After signing in with him, I entered the elevator and took it up to the top floor. As it rose, I found myself wondering just what the hell she was talking about. I hadn't had the chance to say so, but I hated surprises.

Another camera spied down on me from the corner of the elevator. Once the doors opened, I stepped into the hall and found Georgia's condo. My stomach tensed once more with anticipation as I raised my hand to knock.

I knocked on the door, and immediately heard footsteps coming to answer. It opened and Georgia was on the other side, greeting me with a big smile.

She looked stunning. She was dressed in black jeans and a black blouse, looking effortlessly chic and sexy. I couldn't help but look her up and down, admiring her curves the same way I had that night we'd met.

"Good to see you," she said.

I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around her. She hugged me right back, the sensation of our bodies pressed against one another's enough to make my cock twitch. There was so much we needed to talk about, but all the same, I couldn't shake how much I wanted her.

"You t—"

I didn't get a chance to finish. A voice called out from another room, one that carried the same Texan twang as Georgia.

"Is that him? Is he here?"

Before I could react, Georgia's mom burst into the living room.

"There's the father of my grandkids!" She rushed over to me and threw her arms around my body, letting out a squeal of delight as she did.

"I was going to explain to you what the surprise was," Georgia said, stepping back to give her mom some space. "But I'm sure you can guess at this point."

“You already told her the news,” I said, giving her mother a hug back.

Her mom let go of me, stepping back and grinning. “It wasn’t hard to put together—you and the girls look so much like one another. Not to mention the way you two look at each other.” She followed this up with a sly smile. I glanced over at Georgia, who shrugged, as if there were no arguing the point.

“We didn’t mean to keep you both in the dark,” I said, Georgia stepping behind me and shutting the door before helping me with my coat. “It’s just that not only had we not expected to even see one another again, but I had no idea that she was even pregnant.”

“Don’t worry, Georgia filled me in on all the details. It’s a hell of a story. But all that matters is that you two are together now.”

“Well, Mom,” Georgia said. “The fact of the matter is that we’re *not* together. We still need to talk about, um, well, everything.” She flicked her eyes at me, her cheeks taking on a tinge of red.

Her mom waved her hand dismissively. “Oh, you’ll get it all figured out, don’t worry about it. The important thing is that he’s here now.”

Just then, Georgia’s father stepped out from the kitchen.

“We meet again, doc,” he said, coming over to me.

Her father looked me up and down one more time, sizing me up on the spot. I could sense that he wasn’t someone to be screwed around with—I knew the type well.

“Name’s Jerry,” he said, offering me his hand. I took it, and he gave me a firm shake. “I know we’ve met before, but in a much different situation. Now feels more like the real deal, doesn’t it?”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jerry.”

He nodded, the serious look on his face suggesting that he wasn’t even close to being done with me.

“Now, I know you and my daughter have quite a few things to discuss. But I’ve got some questions of my own, and my wife does too.”

“I’m sure you both do. And I’d be happy to answer them.” I was staying cool, but I knew that the conversation ahead was going to involve more than a little bit of lying. I wasn’t looking forward to that aspect of it.

“Good. I’m making some chicken and rice right now, should be ready in twenty or so.”

“Sounds delicious. In the meantime,” I said, “I’d love to see the girls.”

Michelle’s eyes flashed. “God, look at us jumping down your throat when you’ve got your daughters in the other room. They’re both napping, but you both go on and check in on them while we get dinner ready.”

With that, the pair left the room, her father taking one last look at me before leaving.

“Nice place,” I said, looking around. I wasn’t just saying that to be polite, the place was big and spacious, with a separate living room and dining area, the kitchen down one hall and what appeared to be multiple bedrooms down another.

“Thanks. I kind of bought it as a little treat to myself for graduating and gaining some success with my books.”

“Congratulations on both of those fronts,” I said.

“Thank you.”

Silence fell over us, and I found myself wondering if she was thinking about me in the same way that I was thinking about her.

“Let’s go see the girls, yeah?” she asked.

“I’d love to.”

She smiled, and together we headed down the hall.

We reached a closed door, my heart beating faster with excitement as I realized the girls were on the other side. I’d only known them for a few short days, but they’d already

managed to have an effect on me that I could hardly wrap my head around.

Before I had a chance to say anything, one of the girls started to cry on the other side of the door. Georgia raised her eyebrows, then opened the door. We hurried inside, and Georgia turned on the soft, orange light of an owl-shaped lamp on the far side of the room.

I hurried over to Danae, scooping her tiny, wailing form out of her crib. Daphne didn't wait long to join in, quickly waking up and turning on the waterworks as well.

"That's the thing about twins," Georgia said. "Once one starts crying, it's only a matter of time before the other chimes in."

I chuckled, craning my head to get a look at Danae's diaper. The line was solid blue, so I wasted no time stepping over to the changing pad and setting my little girl down, going to work opening her tiny onesie and changing her diaper.

As I did, I was struck by just how small, how beautiful she was. I changed her, Danae opening her little eyes and looking up at me. My heart tightened. Behind me, Georgia softly sang to Daphne, lulling her back to sleep.

There was something about that moment, something about Danae right before me and Daphne in Georgia's arms, Georgia's soft, sweet voice filling the air, that felt different.

It felt *real*.

"You alright over there?" she asked, her voice a whisper. "Got another one here that needs a change."

I finished putting the diaper on Danae, buttoning her onesie back up. Gently, I lifted her up and off the pad, leaning in and kissing her softly on the forehead.

"Hey, little lady." She opened her eyes a bit once more.

"I think she likes you," Georgia said with a smile.

"Want to switch?"

"Yeah."

With a little doing, we swapped babies. Daphne was just as precious as her sister, and I doted on her just the same as I changed her diaper. By the time I was done putting on Daphne's diaper, the girls were ready to drift off once more.

Georgia and I put the babies in their cribs. As I gently set down Daphne, I noticed the décor of the room, the Greek theme.

“Love what you've done with the place.”

She chuckled. “Maybe I went a little overboard with the Greek stuff. But I still think it's cute.”

Once the girls were down and back to sleep, Georgia led me out of the room and shut the door. We stood facing one another for several long moments, the tension building between us by the moment.

I couldn't resist putting my hands on her hips, squeezing her softness through her clothes as I pulled her close.

Georgia bit down on her lower lip, as if trying to decide right then and there what she wanted.

I knew what I wanted. I leaned in, pressing my lips against hers, kissing her hard and deep. The sensation was like heaven, and as I kissed her, I realized just how much I missed her touch, her scent, her softness, her everything.

“We're ready in here!” Jerry called out.

We pulled our lips apart, taking a moment to compose ourselves.

“Don't get any big ideas,” she said with a coy smile.

“I wouldn't dream of it,” I teased back.

She pursed her lips, glancing aside. “Just so you know, they're going to grill you in there.”

“Can't say I blame them. They're the grandparents, of course they're going to want to know all about the father of their grandchildren.”

“Good. I wanted to tell you, so you didn't feel like you were walking into an ambush.”

“It’s appreciated. And, not to dump too much on you, but you and I still need to talk about all of this. I know I’ll never be able to make up for not being there during the pregnancy, but I’m here now, and I want to be there for the girls.”

She smiled. “I appreciate that. And yeah, we’ve got a lot to hash out.”

“How about a date?”

She raised an eyebrow. “A date?”

“Yeah. You know, two people who like one another going out to grab some dinner or drinks. Non-alcoholic, in this case.”

“You’re serious?”

“Of course, I am. We’re in this together, and the first step is going to be us getting to know one another. A date sounds like just the thing. Hell, maybe a few dates.”

She glanced aside, thinking it over. “That could be nice. It’d give us a chance to talk, and not just about kid stuff.”

“Then it’s settled. We can talk it over later.”

“Deal.”

I couldn’t resist kissing her once more. She fell into it, taking her lips back after several long, sensual seconds.

“And you’re going to have to learn a little patience,” she said with a smile.

CHAPTER 20

GEORGIA



Six weeks later...

I was running late, and I knew exactly why. I'd spent way too much time explaining to Haley how to take care of the girls. I'd talked her ear off, letting her know in excruciating detail the finer points of looking after twins.

I'd rambled a ton, telling her all sorts of things that there was no doubt she already knew. After all, it wasn't like she hadn't looked after the girls before. I couldn't help it, I'd been so excited about my date with Alex that I could hardly think straight.

A date. I couldn't believe I was going on one. Alex and I had seen each other more than a few times over the last month and a half since he'd come back into my life. A lunch here, a dinner there, most of them ending with a hot make out session.

Today was different, however. After all, it was the first day we'd be seeing each other since my regular OB/GYN had given me the all clear for certain activities that I'd been instructed to avoid after birth. I smiled as I thought of the red lingerie I had on under my dress, a set I'd bought just for our date.

The trees towered overhead as I drove down the winding road toward Alex's place, the slivered moon high in the sky. As I drove, I couldn't help but notice how remote his place was. Evergreen was hardly a metropolis, but even so he lived well outside of town, far enough that I wouldn't have even

known there was a house out there if I hadn't had his exact address.

I pushed the thought out of my head as I drove through the woods, the forest eventually opening up into a large clearing. Situated in the center of the clearing was a gorgeous, two-story house done in classic Colorado ski-chalet style, with just a touch of modern design in the large glass walls in front. Inside, I could see a roaring fire in the big fireplace, the house putting out an inviting orange glow.

I pulled to a stop and got out. As I did, Alex stepped around one of the corners inside. He was dressed in a cream-colored cable-knit sweater and dark blue jeans, black leather boots on his feet. As I approached the door, he did the same, having it open for me by the time I arrived.

I couldn't help but smile as I laid eyes on him.

"Evening, handsome," I said.

He smiled right back, his face so good-looking that it almost hurt to look at.

"Welcome. Come on in."

He greeted me with a kiss, one that lingered just long enough to make me want to turn it into something much more. He tasted so good, like whiskey and sex, and my pussy clenched as my lips stayed on his.

Luckily, Alex had the self-control to take his lips from mine, placing his hand on the small of my back and guiding me inside.

"This place is gorgeous," I said, looking around. "I love it."

The interior was vast, with tall ceilings that gave the house a cavernous feel in the best way possible. The furniture was a charming mixture of classic rustic and modern, with tall bookshelves along the walls of the living room. Looking out the front windows I could see the road through the woods that I'd just come in on, and through the back I spotted a bit of a drop off, the big, wooden deck allowing a sweeping view of

the forest. Mellow, relaxing jazz played on the speakers, and the scent of something delicious cooking was thick in the air.

“Thanks,” he said. “The timing was right when I was looking for a new home. Something to drink?”

“Well, I fed the girls before I left and I have a bunch of pumped breastmilk in the freezer for them, so I’d really love a glass of wine. I haven’t had any in ages.”

He stepped over to me after pouring two glasses of luxurious looking red. He handed me one then tapped the rims together. “Cheers.”

“What’re we drinking to?” I asked with a smile.

“To whatever the night has in store for us.”

His words were enough to make me tingle down below. I took a sip, the wine rich and flavorful and delicious. The drink still lingering on my tongue, I glanced around his home once again.

“I love this,” I said. “But I have to admit, it’s a little... remote for me.”

He gestured toward the half-circle sectional couch that dominated the living room.

“Some people might consider living anywhere in Evergreen to be remote.”

“Yeah, you’re right about that. It’s just, there’s remote and then there’s *remote*.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted,” he said as the two of us sat down, the big fire crackling. “Trust me, after years in New York, I wanted to be around as few people as possible.”

“You and New York,” I said, shaking my head. “For a city you spent over a decade in, you’re pretty scanty on the details of what your life was like there.”

I was joking, but serious at the same time. Over the course of our handful of dates in the last six weeks, the subject of our pasts had come up more than a few times. And during those

conversations, I couldn't help but notice how cagey he was about his time in New York, always quick to blow it off.

“What's there to know?” he asked with a shrug. “I lived there, I went to school there, I worked in a hospital there. Then I moved here.”

“*Then I moved here,*” I said, playfully mocking his ultra-deep voice. “You're what, thirty-five?”

“Thirty-seven,” he said.

“OK, thirty-seven. Say you finished med school around ten years ago, that's still nearly a decade of time in New York.”

“Sure. And?”

“*And?* You lived in *New York*—the center of the freaking universe! You've lived near Central Park and the Museum of Natural History and all those other amazing places, surrounded by millions of people! You've seen things that most people only dream of! And you're just like, ‘*and?*’”

He let out a low, dry laugh. “Just don't see it that way, I guess. New York was New York. I had some fun there, met some interesting people. But I was more focused on work. I tend to think there's a different view of it when you're a resident versus a visitor.”

I narrowed my eyes, a small smile on my face. “You're doing it again.”

“Doing what?”

“Deflecting.”

He scrunched his forehead. “I told you what I did in New York. You only think it's weird because I'm not going into detail. But you know the broad strokes.”

“I just find it hard to believe that a man like you who owns a yacht and drives sportscars and lived in the coolest city on the east coast doesn't have anything more than a few words to say about a decade of his life spent there.”

“Well, the yacht wasn't technically mine.”

“Huh?”

“I own it with a few other people. We bought it together; all pay for the maintenance.”

“Is that right?” Of course I didn’t care that he wasn’t the sole owner of the yacht. “What other people?”

“Just friends of the family.”

“OK, so we’ve got some family friends in the picture. What about family?”

“We’ve been over this—no brothers or sisters, just like you. My dad passed a while back, and my mom still lives in Greece. She was the one I was visiting when you and I met. That’s the whole story.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but I didn’t get a chance. Instead, he leaned in and closed the distance between us.

“Now, you and I could spend another hour or so going over the same boring details about my past that we’ve already talked about. But I’ve got something else on my mind.”

As much as I wanted to try to pry more information out of him, I couldn’t resist his nearness. And as I gazed into those green eyes, I couldn’t help but suspect that his intentions were partly driven by a desire to get me to shut up and quit asking questions.

I set aside my eagerness to know more and allowed myself to get lost in his gaze, be wrapped up in his musky scent.

“You’ve got something else on your mind. Is it the dinner cooking in the oven that’s probably going to burn if you ignore it?” I teased.

“It’s already done, just sitting in the oven waiting to be served. Braised beef, by the way, perfect for weather like this. And just the thing to regain one’s energy after certain vigorous activities.”

Flashes of our first night together almost a year ago came back. I began to remember what it’d been like to be in bed with him, how good he’d made me feel. Then he placed his hand on my thigh, making me think of nothing but how much I wanted him to do it all over again.

“Activities, huh?” I asked.

“Mmm-hmm.” He leaned closer. “Let me show you what I mean.”

With that, he kissed me once more. I fell into it just like I always did whenever his lips touched mine, the soft, gentle kisses we exchanged at first soon leading into deeper ones. Our mouths opened and I moaned as soon as the tip of his tongue touched mine.

I was helpless. Alex, secrets or not, had me right where he wanted me with just a few words followed by a kiss.

We kissed deeper, his hand landing on my breast. He rubbed me through my sweater, my nipples going so hard that he was able to easily find them through the thick fabric. He teased one, then the other as his lips moved from my mouth to my jaw, then down to my neck.

I’d almost forgotten how effortlessly he was able to carry me away, how just his touch and taste was more than enough to make me drift into a world of total bliss. I smiled, listening to the delicious sound of his lips against my skin.

Suddenly, something occurred to me. My eyes flashed, and I sat up straight.

Alex regarded me with an expression of confusion.

“Something wrong?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No, something’s *right* for once.”

Predictably, that did nothing to assuage his confusion.

I stood in front of him, smiling as I reached down to the hem of my sweater. With a quick motion, I pulled it off and over my head, letting him get a good look at my red, lacy bra.

“Beautiful,” he said, his eyes lingering on my chest.

“That’s not all.” I undid my button and zipper as slowly and seductively as I could manage, taking down my jeans and stepping out of them along with my shoes and socks. When I stood back up, I was in nothing but my red lingerie. “I’m still in the process of getting my body back.”

He stood up and shook his head. “Not another word. You look as stunning as that first day I saw you.”

There wasn't a trace of deception in his voice. Alex looked at me as though he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

“If I don't have you right now, I just might lose my mind.”

“Well, we can't have that, can we?”

He smiled, leaning in and kissing me once more. Alex then placed his hand between my legs, moving up over my thighs pushing my panties aside. I was already wet, but a tension came over me as he prepared to touch me.

“Sorry,” I said. “Just a little nervous since the delivery.”

“Don't be nervous. I'm a medical professional, after all.” He followed this up with a sly smile.

“Oh yeah? And what does *Dr. Ecomides* have to say?”

“He says that you're more than ready for what I've got in mind.”

He scooped me off my feet, bringing me back over to the couch and setting me down. Once there, he sat beside me and began kissing me again, returning his hand to between my thighs. I moaned, the kiss and his touch so intense that I could hardly stand it. I placed my hand on his, guiding him right to where I wanted his touch.

My eyes went wide when he touched me, one finger gently gliding between my lips. I moaned and squirmed, the sensation strange and pleasurable all at once. The strangeness faded the more he touched me, and I let myself become carried away by the sensation of him moving inside of me.

The pleasure began to build, my chest rising and falling as he slipped his other hand underneath my bra.

“Yes, please,” I moaned. “Just like that. Just like that.”

It barely took any time at all before the orgasm erupted. I writhed as he stroked me through it, soft whimpers coming from my mouth. When the orgasm faded, I gathered my strength to put my hands on his hips, guiding him to a standing

position in front of me. I felt possessed as my hands went to work opening his zipper.

I reached down and wrapped my fingers around his warm thickness, taking him out. Though I'd seen his cock before, I couldn't help but gasp at the sight of it. I stroked him, glancing up at Alex's face and taking in the sight of him standing over me, pure passion on his features.

I began with a few licks, dragging my tongue along his impressive length and going all the way to the base. Once there, I glanced up at him playfully as I licked and sucked his balls, my hands stroking his cock. He closed his eyes and growled with pleasure, and by the time I made it back up to his head, the tip glistened with precum.

I dabbed it up with my tongue, loving the saltiness. By then I was ready to take him. I opened my mouth and brought his head inside, sucking it gently as I teased his shaft with my fingertips. I glanced up to savor the sight of him breathing in deeply as I sucked, my tongue dancing around his length as more groans poured from him.

As much as I wanted him to finish in my mouth, he had other plans. His eyes flashed and he reached down to bring me to my feet. Once there, he grabbed my panties and ripped them off, tossing the lace aside.

"Wow!" I said. "Those were brand new!"

He grinned as he swept my hair back. "Then we'll have to buy you a dozen new pairs, because I can't resist ripping them off you."

His words sent a thrill through me that only grew when he took my hand and placed it on his cock.

"You want this?" he asked.

"So much."

"Then ask nicely for it."

I squirmed where I stood, my breaths short and quick.

"Please," I moaned. "I need it so badly."

That was apparently all he wanted to hear. Alex guided me onto the floor, onto the rug right in front of the big fireplace. The heat was perfect, and Alex wasted no time stripping out of his clothes and climbing on top of me. I wrapped my legs around him, gazing into his green eyes as I took hold of his cock one more time and guided it between my legs.

I'd been worried about what it would feel like to sleep with Alex after the delivery, whether or not it would hurt. It didn't. There was nothing but pleasure, nothing but the delicious sensation of him pushing inside of me, inch by wonderful inch.

When he was fully buried, he pulled back, driving into me with force.

"Tell me if it hurts," he said.

"I will. But it doesn't." I smiled a bit, pleased that he cared.

He moved inside of me, the pleasure building by the second. As I watched his powerful body move, I let my fingers dance all over his contours, tracing the outlines of his muscles as he pumped into me again and again.

"I can't believe I went so long without this," he growled into my ear.

I felt the same way. By that point, however, I was so overtaken with pleasure that I couldn't do anything with my mouth other than moan.

"Come for me," he said. "Now."

There was no sense trying to resist his words. I shrieked one more time, the pleasure ripping through my body and filling me with sensations that I'd never known before. Alex came with me, his cock pulsing inside as he released deep within.

When we were done, he collapsed at my side, moving behind me and placing his hand on the curve of my hip. The two of us said nothing for a time, content to watch the fire.

"What's going on with the girls?" he finally asked.

“Haley’s with them. But... I told her I’d get back tonight.”

“Then maybe you should.”

His words were delivered in a grave tone, one that filled me with disappointment. He was right, after all, but I supposed that part of me had hoped that the night might last a little longer.

“And how about I come with you?”

I turned, surprised to hear the words.

“You’re serious?”

He smiled. “Serious. Besides, what kind of gentleman would I be if I sent you off into the cold on your own?”

I smiled, moving in for a kiss.

The sex had been amazing. However, I couldn’t help but imagine how wonderful it’d be to curl up in bed with Alex, the father of my girls and a man I was falling for more and more by the minute.

CHAPTER 21

ALEX



“**Y**ou’re positive?”

A few days later, I was seated in my Range Rover in the parking lot of the hospital, Bolter on the phone.

“As much as I can be. No one seems to give a shit that you’re gone.”

I shifted in my seat. The news should’ve been the best I could’ve hoped for, but it seemed too good to be true.

“Not even Nico?”

“I mean, I can’t say for certain. I asked around about you at the usual bars we went to when we were younger, you know?”

“Sure.”

He laughed. “I had this whole routine, told people that I had this killer hemorrhoid, and I needed a doc I could trust. It was such a good line.”

I chuckled, but more to humor him. The idea of Bolter asking around for me so openly didn’t sit well at all.

“Anyway, everyone I talked to said they hadn’t seen hide nor hair of you in months. Oh, and Jax the bartender said that you still owed him fifty bucks from a tab a few years back. I paid him. You’re welcome, by the way.”

That got a laugh out of me. “I’ll pay you back. Anyway, you didn’t hear anything from anyone else?”

“Well, there was one person who seemed to notice that you were gone.”

“Yeah? Who?”

“That shithead Johnny Baros.”

My blood went cold at the mention of Nico’s right-hand man.

“What’d he say?”

“It was kinda freakin’ weird, actually. I was over getting wings at The Chicken Palace in Sunnyside. Anyway, I’m eating outside, and he shows up out of nowhere, all decked out in his stupid suit and rings and shit.”

I already didn’t like this story.

“Why the hell was Johnny Baros in Queens? He barely ever leaves Manhattan.”

“I don’t know. He tried to play it off like it was just some coincidence. Maybe it was.”

“Tell me what he said.”

“He told me that he heard I was asking about you, wanted to know if I knew where you’d gone. I said I didn’t know, and then asked why *he* wanted to know so damn badly. He said that Nico had heard that you’d left the city and wanted to know why, said he missed having a doc like you on hand.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope. Well, he said that if I heard from you to tell him. That was it.”

I said nothing at first, trying to process the information. My gut reaction was that something was up.

“Anyway, you want me to keep asking around?”

“No, that should be good. Thanks, Bolt.”

“Yeah, sure. Goes without saying that I’m not going to tell that sleazy asshole shit.”

“Appreciate it.”

We finished up the call and I sat for a time, thinking over the conversation.

Johnny Baros wasn't the kind of guy to go out of his way to find out information unless he had a damn good reason. Knowing that he'd tracked down Bolter all the way to Queens didn't sit right with me one damn bit.

Then again, there was something about what Baros had said. He'd told Bolter that Nico didn't seem too concerned about where I was, just that he was annoyed to be without me and my skills. Of course, there was always the chance that Nico had passed the information through Bolter to get to me, to trick me into letting my guard down.

I had to stay frosty. Men like Nico knew the value of keeping their targets off-step.

Last thing I wanted was for him to get the drop on me.



One week later...

I was excited as all hell, practically feeling like a damn kid. I was on my way back to my place to take a quick shower and change before heading over to Georgia's. Just the thought of seeing her and my girls was enough to make the workday drag, and by the time I'd clocked out for the day, I felt like driving a hundred miles an hour back to my house.

I was careful, of course. Last thing I wanted was to wrap my car around one of the towering pines that lined the road to my place. All the same, I couldn't wait to get over to Georgia's, to scoop her into my arms and plant a big kiss on those sexy as hell lips of hers. There'd be more kisses, one for Danae and another for Daphne. After that, the night was ours. I'd planned on making her dinner—pastitsio, Greek lasagna.

I'd never imagined I'd be the sort of man that would not only be somewhat domesticated but would love it. The three women in my life were bringing something out of me that I never realized I possessed.

In fact, I was ready to take my relationship with Georgia and the girls to another level—I wanted them to move in with me. It was a huge step, but I couldn't think of anything I wanted more. The house was plenty big, with more than enough space for the girls. Georgia could have a huge home office to work on her books. All the same, if she didn't like living out in the middle of nowhere, I'd be more than happy to buy a new house in town, or even in Denver.

I pulled up to my place practically buzzing at the idea of proposing the idea that she and the girls move in. Not wanting to waste a second, I hurried inside and went up to the master bedroom on the second floor, throwing off my work clothes and quickly showering before changing into something a little more comfortable for the evening.

Once I was dressed in jeans, a pair of sneakers, and a gray T-shirt, I stepped out onto the balcony overlooking the first floor. The place was dead silent, as usual. As I stood among the silence, I closed my eyes and fantasized about what it would be like for the house to be filled with the sounds of my children.

It wouldn't be just a house any longer but a *home*.

A small smile took hold as I entertained the fantasy. Before I could get too lost in it, however, the buzzing of the burner phone in the bedroom caught my attention.

It had to be Bolter. Truth be told, the idea of hearing from him again caused my stomach to tense. He'd told me that Nico hadn't seemed too bothered by my leaving, and no news was good news on that front, as far as I was concerned.

I stepped back into the bedroom, laying eyes on the phone where it sat atop my nightstand. It buzzed and buzzed, then stopped. Relief washed over me, lasting just long enough for the phone to start buzzing again.

Seconds later, I had it in my hand. Sure enough, the call was from Bolter.

“Hey, Bolt,” I said, taking a seat on the edge of my bed. “What's up?”

The voice on the other end did not belong to Bolter.

“Alexandros.”

Nico.

“First of all, congratulations on your new family. Second, you’d better pay attention, and pay attention well. All four of your fates depend on it.”

CHAPTER 22

ALEX



“Nico. What the hell do you want?”

He let out a dry laugh of mild amusement.

“Now, that’s no way to talk to your boss and the man who put you through medical school. I want this to be a nice conversation, nice and reasonable. Can you do that?”

“No nice and reasonable conversation starts with someone threatening the other man’s family.”

“I suppose you’re right. But I wanted to get your attention. I trust I have it?”

I said nothing, rage boiling inside me, an anger I’d never known before. Nico threatening Georgia and the girls had unlocked something inside of me, something I wasn’t sure I’d be able to put away.

“If I don’t have it, let me try this.” I heard footsteps, followed by the sound of a door opening, then the sound of horrible, blood-curdling screams.

“How’s this, boss?” called out a voice.

The whirr of a power tool sounded out, followed by a horrified “no, no!” from whatever poor SOB was on the receiving end of the thug’s special “skills.” More screaming followed.

The move was a common tactic of Nico’s. Whenever he wanted to intimidate someone, he liked to walk in on one of his punishment sessions. I’d never been on the receiving end of this particular tactic, but damned if it didn’t have an effect.

“You’re going to go somewhere quieter if you want to have a normal conversation,” I said.

“Fair enough.”

“No, Nico!” shouted the man. “Tell him to stop, please tell him to—”

The door shut, the voice cutting out.

“Now, where were we?” Nico asked. “Ah, yes, I was preparing to tell you the reason why I called.”

Part of me wanted to deny that I had a family, but the idea only lingered in my mind for a moment. If Nico knew, then he knew. And few people could see through a lie like he could.

“I want to know why you left.”

I grit my teeth. There was still the matter of whether or not he knew I’d been the one to tip off the cops. Was he trying to trip me up? For all I knew, he was simply mad that I’d left without saying a word to him. I had to play it smart.

“You know why. That kid.”

He snorted. “*That’s* what this is all about? You severed our relationship, left to go to the other side of the country, all because of some *kid*? Jesus, if it was about money or some such, I’d understand. But a no-name *kid*?”

“It’s more than that. You wanted me to break my Hippocratic oath. I wasn’t about to do that.”

“Please. You’ve been working with me for years, being a good little boy while you stitch up bullet wounds and knife injuries and whatever else. And now you want to tell me that out of the blue you got a wild hair up your ass, grew a conscience, and decided to leave? No, something isn’t adding up.”

He went on. “Either way, I’m not happy with what you did. What happened to obligation, Alexandros? Or gratitude? After all, you’re only where you are because of me. *I’m* the one who recognized your genius, pulled you out of a life on the streets; *I’m* the one who sent you to the best schools this country has to offer. Everything you have in your life is

because of me, even that cute little blonde thing of yours and those two precious babies.”

The mere mention of Georgia and the girls coming out of his mouth was enough to make me wish Nico was right in front of me so I could rip his throat out with my bare hands.

“Get to the point, Nico.”

He chuckled. “Never been one to respect authority. You know, I’ve killed men for speaking to me the way you just did. But I digress. What matters now is what you do next. As far as I’m concerned, you still owe me, Alexandros. You owe me for all of the time and money I put into you. To that end, I want you back in New York by the end of the month.”

“Not going to happen.”

He chuckled mirthlessly. “I figured you might say something like that. So, I have a deal. You come back to New York, bring your little family for all I care. But you’re giving me five more years. I want five more years. Once that’s done, you can fuck off forever for all I care.”

There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that this was bullshit. Nico never let people go. Hell, the only reason my father had gotten out of the organization was because he’d died. Once Nico had me back in the city, I was certain he’d use my nearness as a way to make sure I never left again. I wouldn’t even put it past him to threaten my family as a way to make me stay. Not a chance I was going to let that happen.

“No.”

“No?”

“You heard me. When I left New York, that was my way of telling you that I was done.”

“Not even a two-week notice. Not very professional or courteous of you. I would say that your father should’ve raised you better than that, but then again, he really wasn’t around for long enough to do much raising, now was he?”

Nico was pushing my buttons, trying to get a rise out of me.

“Keep his name out of your mouth.” I was barely able to hold back the anger.

“Such a fiery young man, Alexandros. Anyway, I can hear that you’re hot under the collar right now, and not in the best position to make such drastic decisions. But let me show you a little something else that might make doing the right thing a little easier. One moment.”

I heard footsteps on the other end, followed by knocking.

“Is he ready?” Nico asked. “Good.”

A door opened.

“Ah, very nice,” Nico said. “Now, how to take some pictures...” He chuckled. “I can never figure out these new phones. Here... Alexandros, I’m going to send you something to take into consideration while you’re making your big decision.”

A few moments passed, my phone shaking in my hand with incoming texts. I checked the screen, seeing that they were pictures.

My stomach sank when I saw what they were.

The photos were of a man tied to a chair, his face swollen and bruised, his throat slit, blood soaked into his clothing.

The victim wasn’t just any man.

It was Bolter.

“Nico, you fuck!” I shouted into the phone, my voice booming so loudly that it filled the house. “You’ll pay for this!”

Nico laughed. “Bolter... he was never the sharpest tool in the shed, as the Americans say. When he started poking around town in his obvious way, I put together pretty quickly what was going on. And I decided he’d work quite well as a message. You know what I’m capable of, Alexandros. In case you forgot, here’s your reminder.”

I gripped my phone so hard that I worried it might shatter in my hand.

“Come to New York, come home. Put in your time, and that will be the end of it. Otherwise, I’ll have to come find you. Say, that blonde bombshell of yours, she’s really something else. I think it’s only fair that if I have to go to all the trouble of tracking her down in person, I should be able to give her a little of my special attention.”

“Nico, you miserable fu—”

“Two weeks. You have two weeks to make your decision. Call me at this number when you’re ready to do the right thing. I’ll be waiting, Alexandros.”

With that, the call ended, the line going dead.

There was no way in hell I was going back. Nico would come for me.

I had to be ready.

CHAPTER 23

GEORGIA



I noticed two things when Alex arrived that evening—the overnight bag in his hand, and the strange, tense expression on his face.

Even so, he leaned in and kissed me exactly how I wanted to be kissed. In fact, the kiss lingered for several moments, long enough that I had to wonder if it was going to lead to something more right then and there.

“You look good,” he said, taking his lips from mine and stepping back.

“So do you.” I let my fingers drag down the taut muscles of his arms underneath his coat. Once the kiss was over, however, my attention went right to the duffel bag at his feet. “What’s the story with that?”

His face flashed, as if he’d forgotten all about it. “Well, I got an idea right before I left. What if I stayed over here for a little bit?”

“A little bit? How long?”

“Maybe a week, maybe a little more if that’s alright with you, of course. Figured that we ought to get used to spending plenty of time together with the girls.”

I smiled, loving the idea.

“That sounds nice. You don’t want to have the girls and me come over to your place, though? Might be a little more room.”

“No.” The word came out with a sharp tone that I hadn’t expected, as if the idea were totally off the table. Realizing he’d spoken a little gruffly, Alex softened his expression. “There’s something wrong with my water heater, it needs to be replaced.”

“Are you serious?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yeah. Tomorrow’s going to be a nightmare, workers in and out of the house all day.”

I got the sense that there was more to his story. Was he lying? Or did he feel self-conscious about wanting to stay with me and felt the need to come up with an excuse?”

Either way, I was happy to have him.

“Well, you’re more than welcome to stay as long as you want. It’d be great having another pair of hands here to help with the girls.”

He smiled. “Wonderful. How are they?”

“Napping. Want to check in on them?”

“There’s nothing I’d love more.”

I took him by the hand and led him down the hall toward the nursery. The door was closed, and the moment we approached one of the girls started crying.

“That’s Danae,” I said.

He raised his eyebrows, impressed. “You can tell?”

“Believe it or not, yeah. Daphne’s cry is more of a whimper.”

“Someone’s on top of this whole mom thing.”

“You spend a little more time with them, you’ll be the same. Now, get your cute butt in there before she wakes up Daphne.”

He nodded, and I opened the door to let him in. Alex hurried over to Danae’s crib, carefully and gently picking her up and holding her close.

“Let me get you some milk,” I said quietly.

I hurried to the kitchen, grabbing one of the bottles of breastmilk I'd stored. That in hand, I returned to the nursery and, before stepping inside, simply watched Alex with Danae. He held her so carefully, as if she were the most precious little thing in the world. As he did, he spoke to her quietly in Greek. I couldn't make out exactly what he was saying, but heard the word for "love," and "beautiful."

Realizing I had returned, he said, "She's a little fidgety. Might need that." He nodded to the milk.

"Oh, of course." I stepped over and slipped the bottle into his hand. Alex placed the nipple to her mouth, Danae wrapping her tiny little hands around the bottle as she drank.

"You're a natural," I said.

He glanced up at me. "You need to take care of anything in town? I can look after the girls while you do."

My eyes flashed. "Yes!" I said the word with such excitement that for a moment I worried I'd wake up Daphne. "I mean, *yes*. I've been needing to run to the store. If you want to watch them while they nap, I can run out and do that."

"Sounds perfect."

I leaned in and planted a kiss on his cheek. As I hurried out of the room, I closed my eyes and thanked my good fortune that the man who happened to get me pregnant was also shaping up to be one hell of a dad.

I snapped a photo of my grocery list on the refrigerator markerboard, grabbed my coat, and headed out. On the elevator down, I took a moment to realize that this little errand was the first trip I'd been on by myself in almost a week. Mom and Dad had spent plenty of time in town helping me, but even they needed breaks.

It was a chilly day in late February, the sky a solid blanket of gray and a light dusting of snow still on the ground from a snowfall earlier in the week. After a quick drive down the main drag of town, I was soon in the big, main supermarket of Evergreen.

I loved the twins like mad. All the same, it was nice to have a little time to myself, to be alone with my thoughts. To that end, I didn't rush as I went up and down the clean, well-organized aisles. I smiled as I walked, checking out different items, comparing prices, selecting what sounded tasty rather than what I could shove down the quickest while the girls were screaming their heads off.

Was this what life with another parent was like? A tingle ran up my spine as I realized that, if Alex was staying over, I could ask him to watch the girls while I went to the gym, or even to grab a cup of coffee. The possibilities seemed endless.

"Excuse me, miss?" A strange, male's voice called out to me. I turned, and was confronted with a short, squat man with a mean, fleshy face. He was dressed in an expensive-looking suit, rings on most of his fingers. He wore a smile that seemed plastered on, as if it were taking him all the effort he had to do it.

I already felt ill at ease. The man, whoever he was, seemed totally out of place.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

He smiled again, as if he understood that he was doing something a little out of the ordinary.

"Sorry, didn't mean to bother you. Just that I was trying to figure out why you looked so damn familiar, and I think I know why."

"You do?"

"You're dating Alex Ecomides, right?"

I raised an eyebrow. "What?"

The man, the smile still on his face, raised his palms. "OK, let me back up. The other day I was over at the hospital visiting my cousin. I met with Dr. Ecomides about helping with the medical bill. I thought I saw you in a picture on his desk."

A bit of relief took hold. All the same, I wanted to be out of the conversation and away from the strange man as quickly

as possible.

“Um, well...” I checked myself as I spoke. The last thing I wanted was to be explaining the uncertainty of my and Alex’s relationship. “Yes, that would have been me in the picture.”

The smile deepened. “That’s wonderful. He’s an amazing doctor. You’re a lucky girl!” He laughed, then sighed. An awkward silence hung in the air between us. “Anyway, I’ll let you get back to your shopping. You see him, tell him Johnny says hi, alright?”

“I will.”

He flashed one more smile in my direction before heading off, thankfully leaving me alone.

Something about the encounter didn’t sit right with me at all. The man, aside from being extremely out of place in small-town Colorado, seemed disingenuous to his core, like every word out of his mouth was a lie. More than that, he knew me, and he knew Alex.

The peace and ease of my errand was over. I quickly grabbed what remained on the list and hurried to the checkout, hoping that I wouldn’t bump into the man again. Once I was done, I rushed out to my car and practically threw my bags into the back. That done, I climbed into the front seat and started the engine.

Snow began to gently fall as I pulled out of the parking lot and onto the main road of town. All I wanted was to get home, and as I drove, I found myself checking the rearview mirror over and over again, sick to my stomach at the possibility of that strange man being close behind.

CHAPTER 24

ALEX



The situation was completely out of control. There was poop everywhere.

“Uh, Danae?” The adorable little girl looked up at me with the most innocent smile on her face, as if she weren’t covering my hands in a torrent of smelly stuff.

Daphne was over on the other changing table, a calm expression on her face as she filled her own diaper. I was in a hell of a jam. The mess was so bad that I couldn’t touch either of them without getting dirtier than I already was. The wipe warmer was a few feet away, and I leaned a bit to see if I could keep one hand on Danae while pulling a wipe out with my teeth.

No such luck, it was too far away. The situation was so desperate, in fact, that I half-considered saying “screw it” and wiping my hands on my shirt.

Thankfully, before I had to make the decision, I heard the front door to the condo open and close.

“Hey!” Georgia called out. “Where are you?”

“In the nursery! I could use a hand! Like, immediately!”

At that moment, Danae let out another jet of stuff that I most definitely didn’t need more of.

“Aw, come on, kid,” I said, shaking my head. “Give your dad a break, huh?”

I glanced over my shoulder for any sign of Georgia. She wasn't there yet, but I could hear the crinkle of plastic grocery bags down the hall.

“One second!”

I turned my attention back to the girls just in time to watch as Daphne soiled her already-dirty diaper even more, the changing table turning into a complete mess.

“Oh man.” I looked around for something, anything I could use to start the process of cleaning up. All I could find was a wad of dirty wipes in the bin—better than nothing.

A light laugh sounded out behind me. Confused, I turned to see Georgia standing at the entrance of the nursery, an amused smile on her face.

“Something funny?” I asked.

“No, not funny. OK, maybe a little. Just wanted to watch for a second and see how you handled the poop-pocalypse.”

“The what?”

“That's the name I have for it when both girls poop at the same time. The first time it happened, I had no idea what to do.”

“So, that means you know how to handle it.”

“Sure do.” She entered the room, opening the nearby closet and reaching up for a stack of towels. “I buy a huge pack of these on Amazon for barely anything. I use one to soak up the gross stuff, then stuff it into a bag and tie the top. I can't quite say ‘no muss, no fuss,’ but it's the easiest solution that I've managed to find. That right there looks like a two-towel job.”

She pulled two towels out of the closet, tossing them over to me. I put them to work right away, soaking up the mess, and getting it cleaned up to the point where I was able to function. It took a little doing, but I finally managed to clean the girls up and change their diapers, putting each back in their cribs when all of that was done.

“Very nice work,” she said, coming over to me and assessing the situation. “You know what? I think this is a great

first lesson for you learning about poop-pocalypse. Why don't you go wash up and I'll take over from here?"

"You sure?"

"Yes. Trust me, you'll have plenty more opportunities to clean up these kinds of messes."

I smiled. "Thanks. I can't get over how that much *stuff* can come out of those little bodies. I'd, uh, give you a kiss, but..."

"I get it," she said with a chuckle. "Go ahead and get cleaned up."

I took one last look at the girls before heading out of the nursery toward the master bedroom's bath. On the way, I stripped out of my dirty clothes, placed them into the washer and turned it on, then rushed down the hall jumping into the shower and getting a stream of hot water going.

It felt like heaven, and I closed my eyes to let the water do its thing.

A little bit into my shower, the bathroom door opened. In stepped Georgia, who slipped out of her clothes as she approached.

"Mind if I join you?" she asked, a sly smile on her face through the blurry glass. "Both girls went down pretty quick."

"Not at all." I opened the shower door to see her in nothing but a pair of black panties, which she quickly stripped off and tossed aside. The sight of her naked body had the same effect on me that it always did, my cock going to spear-straight. "Couldn't resist the sight of me covered in baby poop?"

"More that when I looked up and saw you running down the hall wearing nothing at all, I got some ideas in my head." She stepped under the stream of water, saturating her hair, the water streaming down her shoulders, her breasts, her belly.

Once she was good and soaked, she wiped her eyes then opened them, glancing down at my hardness.

"Now, that's certainly a little presumptuous of you," she said with a slight grin. "What if all I wanted to do was to jump in here and take a quick rinse like you?"

I placed my hands on the softness of her hips, moving her aside and getting under the water. The traces of the busy day at work, not to mention the incident in the nursery, washed away instantly.

“You’ve got to be out of your mind if you think you’re going to get in the shower looking like that without me pouncing all over you.”

She arched an eyebrow. “Oh, you’re in a pouncing mood?”

“I sure am.”

I closed the distance between us, her breasts pressing against my chest. My arm around her waist, I held her close as I moved in for a kiss. Her body pressed against mine, a soft sigh coming from her lips as the kiss began. Her body loosened as she fell into it and threw her arms around me.

I wanted to make sure no part of her gorgeous body went ignored. I kissed her shoulder, the warmth of the water blending with that of her skin, my hands on her perfect, round ass. I squeezed hard, a gasp pulling into her mouth as I did. Down below, her hand found my cock and she began stroking me, teasing the tip of my head with her fingers in a way that drove me wild.

My hands went to her breasts, rubbing her nipples and feeling them go hard. I moved my touch down over her belly and then between her thighs. Georgia was warm and wet, and I could only stand to tease her for a moment before slipping a pair of fingers inside her.

Her lips parted and she gasped again, both of her hands gripping my shoulders as I moved my fingers in and out of her, rubbing her clit gently.

“That’s... yeah, touch me just like that. Don’t stop.” Her voice was sexy enough already, and the effect was only greater when it was breathy and heavy with pleasure.

I had no plans of stopping. I fingered her at a steady pace, letting her hold onto my shoulders for support as I brought her closer and closer to orgasm. When she finally came, her moans filled the bathroom, rising over the sound of the rushing water.

Her orgasm faded, but I wasn't even close to being done with her yet. I put my hands back on her hips, turning her around and bending her over. Her palms went flat against the tile wall. I took my cock by the base into my hand and guided it closer, placing it at her entrance and slipping it inside. Her legs shook as my inches vanished into her, Georgia glancing back over her shoulder once I was fully inside.

I raised my hand and brought it down onto her ass, a soft crack sounding out and another gasp pulling inside of her. I slipped my cock out and thrust it back deep inside, her breasts swaying underneath her from the force.

The sight of her bent over in front of me was exhilarating—the sexiest damn thing I'd ever seen in my life. And there was no ignoring the fact that pregnancy had done something amazing to her body, thickened her curves and taken them to the next level.

I drove into her hard over and over, her pussy gripping me tightly, her warmth wonderful. It didn't take much thrusting before she came again, clenching my cock as more moans of pleasure came out of her mouth. I pulled my length out, Georgia's legs shaking as she turned around to face me.

"You just feel so damn good," she said, shaking her head in disbelief.

"So do you. I could spend all day making love to you, gorgeous."

She grinned. "I might hold you to that some time."

A smile of my own formed as I swept my arm underneath her leg, scooping her up and bringing my cock against her pussy once more. I slid into her again, her juices running down my length from her last two orgasms.

"You don't get away with coming less than three times with me," I growled into her ear.

"Such confidence," she replied with a challenging smile.

The position was perfect, Georgia's body on full display. Her tits bounced up and down, her face tight with pleasure as

each full plunge of my cock brought her closer to another climax.

She opened her stunning blue eyes. “Come with me. Please. I need to feel you deep.”

Georgia always seemed to know how to bring me right to the edge.

“You first.”

She nodded, seconds later opening her mouth and letting out a silent scream. Her pussy gripped me so tightly as she came that there was no chance I’d be able to hold back. I grunted hard as I erupted into her, my seed spraying deep against her walls, dripping down my length.

The orgasms faded, both of us content to hold one another for a time under the hot stream of water. Georgia soon lifted her face from mine, gazing at me with those perfect blues.

I knew what I wanted to say.

I love you.

I caught the words on the tip of my tongue, however. The feelings rushing through me were too great to simply let slip like that. I couldn’t help but wonder if she felt the same way.

“We should get cleaned up,” I said. “For real.”

“Right. I’ve got to get started on dinner.”

We washed each other, taking our time but not too much time; both of us well aware that there were two little girls sleeping in the other room that could wake up at any moment.

After finishing up in the shower, we wrapped towels around our bodies and headed out into the kitchen, beginning the process of putting the groceries away.

“Oh,” she said, standing in front of the open fridge. “Something weird happened at the store today.”

My ears perked up. “Something weird? Weird like what?”

“This guy at the grocery store. He said that he met with you at the hospital. Something about paying a bill for a

relative.”

I scanned my mental appointment book. “I don’t recall that happening. Did you get his name?”

“Yeah, said his name was Johnny.”

The box of cereal in my hand fell onto the counter. I turned to her slowly.

“I’m sorry, you said *Johnny*?”

“Yeah. Why?”

I closed my eyes, taking in a deep breath and planning my next words very carefully.

“Georgia, pack your things. We need to get the twins out of here. Now.”

She cocked her head to the side.

“What? Why? What the hell is going on?”

I raised my finger. “Not another word. You’re going to do exactly what I say, got it? ”

CHAPTER 25

GEORGIA



“**W**ait, *what?*”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I'd told him about the strange man and now he was barking commands at me in the middle of my house like I was some nurse at his hospital.

“You heard me.” He stood tall and firm, his eyes narrowed in total seriousness. Part of me had hoped that it was all some kind of joke. But the look on his face made it clear he wasn't screwing around. “Go pack a bag right now for yourself, and I'll put something together for the girls. But the important thing is that we leave right *now*.”

I raised my palm. “Hold the damn phone. First of all, don't talk to me like that. I'm not a soldier to be commanded around.”

“You don't get it,” he said. “This is serious shit.”

“Serious or not, you don't speak to me that way. Second, I'm not so much as moving one step, let alone my little girls, without you telling me what on earth is happening.”

He formed his mouth into a flat line. I realized that Alex wasn't used to people talking back to him like that.

After some serious thought, however, he spoke again.

“No, going out of the condo is too dangerous. I'd like to have you over at my place, but that's too far of a drive.”

“And... you've got that water heater issue, right?” I asked sarcastically.

“Huh?” He cocked his head to the side in total confusion. “Oh. Yeah, that’s right.”

I snorted, shaking my head. “There’s no water heater situation going on, is there? I had a feeling you were hiding something from me, Alex. And now here you are, getting ready to do it again.”

“None of that is important.” He sighed, then took a look around the room. He stepped over to the window, tapping it. “This is solid—not going to be able to break through. Anyway, it’s probably a better idea that you and the girls stay here. I already gave this place a look over and it seems pretty secure.”

That was even more shocking news. “Wait, so you knew that there was a reason to ‘give this place a look over’? Alex, I’m going to repeat this, and I’m going to repeat it as clearly as I can... *what the fuck is going on?*”

He shook his head. “Trust me, the less you know, the better. Tell me where the last place you saw this Johnny guy was. Be specific.”

The way he spoke left little doubt that there was danger. All the same, the way he kept barking orders at me, the way he kept shutting me down like I was some idiot asking too many questions... it infuriated me.

“I’m not saying a word until you explain what’s happening.” Another question occurred to me. “Who are you, Alex? What were you doing in New York all of this time? Why did you come to Colorado?”

Once more, he formed his mouth into a flat line. “Those questions aren’t important right now.”

I shook my head. “Yes, they are. And this isn’t how this works.”

“Yes, it is. In fact, let me make it clear to you—I’m going out to handle this, and you’re going to stay here and do what I say. Got it?”

I wanted to grab the nearest grocery bag and throw it at him.

“Let me get one thing straight with you, alright? I don’t know what we have going on here, exactly. But this is not the kind of relationship where you can just tell me what I can and can’t do.”

“It’s not about bossing you around, Georgia. It’s about keeping you and the girls safe. You have to trust me.”

“Safe from what? How the hell can I trust you when you won’t let me in on what’s going on? Telling me that it’s not my business, that I’m in danger, and that I have to hole up in my condo with the girls is *not* an acceptable answer.”

I was frustrated as hell, and it was obvious that he was too.

“OK, let’s try this again. I’m going to go out there and see what’s happening. I need you to stay here—don’t leave the condo. When I’ve gotten this taken care of, I’ll explain everything to you.”

“No, not good enough. You’re not going to bark orders at me and expect total compliance. Understand? Now, here’s *my* deal—either you explain to me what’s going on and we handle this together, *as a team*, or you can leave right now and find someplace else to stay while you ‘take care of this’.”

He shook his head, not even debating the subject.

“No.”

“I need to know who you are, why you’re bringing danger into my life. If you can’t sit down and talk with me right now, then I can’t have you here. Not with me, not with the girls.” I gestured to the small table in the breakfast nook, giving him a chance to put his stubbornness aside and sit down with me.

He glanced at the table, as if giving it a moment of consideration.

Without another word, he stormed out of the kitchen. I hurried after him, watching as he grabbed his duffel bag and went into the bathroom. I stood stunned, unable to believe that he was going to leave, that he’d rather walk out of my life than let me in.

He emerged a few moments later, dressed in jeans and a sweater.

“This is for your own good,” he said.

“Please tell me what’s going on.”

“I *can't*. None of it matters—not my past, not the details, none of it. What *does* matter is keeping you and the girls safe. And that’s just what I’m going to do.”

“Then leave. You walked into my life out of nowhere, you can walk right back out of it.”

He gazed hard at me for a long moment before turning his head and striding toward the front door, bag in hand.

Seconds later, he was gone. I stood there stunned, tears in my eyes that I refused to let fall.

CHAPTER 26

ALEX



Regret filled me as I drove toward downtown. Part of me wondered if I'd made the wrong call by not sharing with her who I was, where I'd come from, and why I needed to keep her and the girls safe.

I reminded myself that the less she knew, the better. The thought of Johnny and Nico deciding that Georgia knew too much and needed to be “dealt with” was enough to make me sick to my stomach and fill me with pure rage.

If Georgia wanted to hate me, that was her prerogative. The most important thing was to keep her and the girls safe, to make sure that neither Johnny nor Nico could lay a hand on them.

First stop was the grocery store. I pulled into the lot and looked around, knowing that the odds were poor that Johnny would still be there. He was a bit of an ape, but even so he wasn't dumb enough to linger around like that.

Sure enough, I didn't spot any sign of him. Next stop was my place. I headed down the main road of town and pulled onto my street, my heart beating fast. Being away from Georgia and the girls was torture. If it were up to me, I'd hurry back as quickly as I could and try to talk some sense into her. It was becoming abundantly clear, however, that Georgia was as stubborn as I was.

Could I blame her for how she'd reacted? She was right—I had barked orders at her and expected her to obey like a soldier.

I weaved down the road leading to my place. When I arrived, I pulled to a stop in front, glancing in every direction. I got out, stepped around to the trunk and opened it, taking out a tire iron and holding it at the ready. The woods around my cabin were still and quiet, no sign that anyone else was there.

All the same, I scanned every last bit of the tree line. If Johnny was there, I was going to find him and kill him.

There was no trace of the man, no sign of tire tracks in the light dusting of snow. When I was ready, I entered the house and began a sweep.

Room by room, I checked out the house to make certain it was clear. When I was satisfied, I leaned against the kitchen wall where I stood and tried to collect myself.

Regret took hold of me.

I'd screwed up.

When Georgia had told me that Johnny was in town, an indescribable rage had coursed through me. I'd needed all the restraint I had to not explode with anger. While I'd managed to keep myself cool, I'd made a huge mistake.

No doubt Georgia was furious at me for the way I'd talked to her. My best bet was to find out what I could about the Johnny and Nico situation, then check in with her later. After all, I was right about one thing—nothing was more important than keeping her and the girls safe.

I went back into the living room and stood near the stairs. I heard the buzzing of my burner phone in the kitchen. Hurrying back in, I snatched it off the counter and checked the screen. It was a New York number. I answered.

“Who the hell is this?” I asked, snarling into the phone.

A chuckle sounded from the other end, one that I recognized as Nico.

“Sounds like the good doctor has lost his cool. How are things in Colorado, Alexandros?”

I glanced at the tire iron in my hand, wishing more than anything that Nico were there with me so I could end this

bullshit once and for all.

“I’m going to tell you something, and I’m going to say it as clearly as possible... if you so much as touch a hair on their heads, I’ll rip you apart with my bare hands. Got it?”

“An interesting choice of words, Alexandros, considering that one of the girls is as bald as they come.”

My blood ran cold. His comment meant that, one way or another, he’d seen Daphne. How long had he been watching us from afar?

“You’re walking a dangerous line, old man,” I growled.

“Maybe, maybe not. As far as I can tell, you’re all the way over there and I’m all the way over here. But *I’m* the one with people in your neck of the woods.”

“Do you have any idea what’s going to happen to Johnny if I get my hands on him?”

Nico chuckled. “I’m sure you have big plans. But you know, there’s a way that we can get through all of this without any harm coming to your adorable little family. Come to New York. Now.”

“What happened to two weeks?”

“After our last conversation, I changed my mind. I want you here as soon as possible. We have matters to discuss, and I have a good idea that you know what they are.”

The cops. He had to have learned by this point that I had sold him out.

“You want me to come to New York so you can kill me.”

“A true gambler never shows his hand. But I think it’s a safe bet to say that you’ve officially done enough to get on my bad side. It’s not too late to do the right thing, Alexandros. Come to New York and pay penance for what you’ve done, and I’ll leave your family alone. If you insist on making this difficult, well, who’s to say what Johnny will do?”

More anger raged through me. Johnny was pure scum, the type of prick who wouldn’t hesitate to do horrible things to

women and children.

“One phone call and I could end this right now. It’s really as simple as that. And Johnny stays with Georgia until you’re back here with me. Understand?”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Not a chance in hell, Nico.”

Several beats of silence followed. “Then whatever happens next in your life is on you, Alexandros. I only hope that you can live with your decision at the end of today. That is, if you have a life left to live.”

The line went dead.

I turned and ran toward the entrance, out to my car.

I’d been a fool for leaving Georgia alone. I could only hope that it hadn’t been the mistake of a lifetime.

CHAPTER 27

GEORGIA



The twins were sleeping peacefully, and I allowed myself to feel a little bit of pride. It'd taken me a hell of a lot of practice to learn how to feed them both at the same time, but I'd done it. Giving both of the girls their bottles collectively meant that I could feed them, then get them to bed at around the same time. Coordination was king when you were dealing with twins.

I shut the door to the nursery after taking one last, lingering look at my girls. The moment it was closed, all I could think about was Alex. I was still pissed at him. I had every right to be. He'd all but said that he'd lied to me about his background and didn't seem to respect me enough to explain the truth even when I had him dead to rights.

All the same, there was no doubt in my mind that he'd meant it when he'd said that our safety was at the top of his list. Part of me wanted to call him to make sure he was alright. What if he'd run into the man from the store?

He'd only been gone for an hour, but it felt like it had been several.

“Screw it.”

I said the words out loud to myself before hurrying into the living room and over to my phone on the coffee table.

The second I reached for it, however, a knock sounded at the door.

I froze where I stood, as if I'd only imagined things. After all, no one had rung the buzzer to be let in.

Another knock sounded, this one more intense than the first.

What if it was Alex? Maybe a neighbor had let him in. A smile took hold at the thought, and I rushed over to the door and pulled it open.

It wasn't Alex, however. It was the man from the store, the one with the gaudy suit, unsettling smile, and chubby hands covered with rings.

"Hey there," he said. "Is Alex home?"

"What are you doing here?" I asked, stepping back a bit. "And yes, he is."

The man craned his neck to the side, as if listening for a sign that Alex was indeed there.

He smiled that creepy smile. "You and I both know he's not. It's just you and those sweet babies in there. So much the better, yeah? I was hoping that you and I might have a little talk."

"How the hell did you even get into the building?"

"Amazing what you can do with a bribe here and a threat there." He waved a chunky hand dismissively.

He took a step into the condo, but I quickly shut the door as hard as I could. The man grabbed it halfway through, holding it open with surprising strength.

"No, no, no, sweetheart. That's not going to do at all."

Before I had a chance to respond or to scream for help, he lunged forward. The man slammed his shoulder into my chest, sending me tumbling backward and into the couch. I hit it hard, pain rushing through me as I landed.

The world blurred around me, and I opened my mouth to try and scream. Nothing came out, the fall having knocked the wind out of me. Helplessly, I watched as the man came into my condo and shut the door, locking it tight. All the places in the building were soundproof, which meant that I could scream and scream and no one would be able to hear me.

“Now,” he said. “Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to stay here with you until Alex gets back.” He looked around, nodding his head approvingly. “This is a pretty nice pad, actually. Easy to get good and comfy in here. Anyway, when Alex shows up, he and I can talk over our business together.”

“What kind of business?” I asked.

He smirked, the smile spreading across his fleshy face. “The kind of business that’s none of yours.”

After he spoke, his face went strangely blank. His eyes latched onto my body. I was dressed in nothing but a pair of athletic shorts and a T-shirt with no bra, the kind of outfit I wore when I wasn’t expecting company.

The way he looked at me made me sick and angry all at once.

“What the hell are you staring at, asshole?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I was thinking of making some coffee and relaxing, but maybe there’s some other way I can pass the time. I can send a little message to Alex about screwing with his boss. You know, he screws his boss, I screw his girl.”

My heart skipped a beat. My blood ran cold when I realized what he meant, what he wanted to do.

“I’ll take good care of you.”

He pounced, moving surprisingly quickly for a man his size. I’d finally come to my senses, just in time to move out of the way as he attempted to grab me. I scrambled to my feet as he hit the side of the couch.

“Quit being difficult!” he said, pushing himself back up to his feet. “Trust me, I know what women like.”

I turned and ran into the kitchen, tears forming in my eyes while my heart raced. Once there, I scanned the room for anything I could use to defend myself, settling on the knife block.

“Don’t you even think about it.”

I pulled the biggest knife out of the block and turned just in time to see Johnny approaching, his fist in mid-swing. He connected with my head, the pain like a small explosion inside my skull. The knife fell from my hand with a clatter, and I dropped onto my behind.

The girls started screaming in the other room, the world spinning around me. All I cared about was protecting them, making sure they were safe. As Johnny loomed over me, however, my head blasting with pain, I found myself unable to think of a next move.

He bent down, picking up the knife. Once it was in his hand, he placed the tip of the blade against my cheek.

“I normally like having my hands free when I have my fun with the ladies,” he said. “But if I’ve got to use this to keep you in line, then so be it.”

The girls kept on screaming. As I listened to their cries, I found a strength inside of me that I didn’t know I had. Anger and determination unlike any I’d known before took over.

“Now, you want to do this the easy way? Or the hard way?”

“The hard way.”

I pulled my fist back and slammed it hard into Johnny’s crotch, connecting with that one area where no man wanted to be punched. I twisted my fist, giving him an extra dose of pain as he dropped to his knees, his face red.

“You... you *bitch!*”

I rose to my feet, and slammed into him hard, knocking Johnny against the counter. The knife had fallen when he had, and I quickly snatched it up and hurried out of the kitchen. I went for my phone, but it wasn’t there—Johnny must’ve taken it.

The girls. They were all that mattered. My head still ringing with pain, I rushed into the nursery, flicked on the light, and shut the door. Next, I pushed the dresser in front of it before checking on the girls. They were fine, but could no doubt sense the strange energy in the air.

“I’m coming for you!” Johnny shouted.

My heart pounding, I held the knife in front of me, saying a silent prayer for Alex to come back soon.

If he didn’t, I’d defend my girls with everything I had, no matter what.

CHAPTER 28

ALEX



“**Y**ou need to get your asses there, *now!*”

Anxiety gripped me as I sped down the winding road into town from my house, the trees a green blur on both sides of me. The street was still slick, and the snow had picked up over the last hour. I was driving like a maniac, driving dangerously, but I didn’t give a damn.

I was on the phone with the cops, screaming into the speaker as I drove.

“Sir, you’re going to need to calm down.”

“How the hell am I supposed to stay calm when some prick is threatening my girlfriend and our kids?”

Was she my girlfriend? It was hard to say. Moreover, it was about the most irrelevant thing to worry about.

“I understand that sir. First, you’re going to need to tell us her address.”

I didn’t know it off the top of my head. “It’s that big condo on Main Street, the one that looks brand new. You have to know the one I’m talking about.”

“Sir, it’d be easier with an address.”

I wanted to scream.

“Look it up! It’s the biggest building on Main Street!”

“Give me a moment.”

I continued through the trees, and it was becoming more and more apparent to me by the moment that I was going to be on my own. Didn't even matter if the cops showed up, I was only five minutes away.

"Is it Stafford Condos?" she asked.

"I don't know the name. It's big with light wood-colored exteriors."

"This looks like it might be it."

"Then get there, now! There's someone inside trying to kill a woman. He's armed!"

"How do you know this? And how do you know he's armed?"

"I just do. Trust me."

"Mmm-hmm. What was your name again, sir?"

"You've got all the information you need, just get over there!"

I was done talking. I ended the call and tossed the phone onto the passenger's seat. Right at that moment, I pulled onto Main Street and started toward the condo, visible in the distance. I sped the rest of the way, weaving in and out of the little bit of traffic that was on the road. The snow was coming down harder as I pulled into the parking lot. I turned off the engine and hurried toward the front doors of the building.

Just as I'd suspected, no cops were yet on the way. It was going to be up to me.

Luckily, Georgia had given me a keycard. I swiped it and headed inside.

"Call the cops!" I shouted to the front desk. To my shock, I realized that no one was there. Johnny must've bribed or threatened them to let him in. I hurried over to the desk and grabbed the phone, hitting 911 and yelling that it was an emergency as soon as someone answered the line.

Moments later, I was in the elevator. As soon as I reached Georgia's floor and the doors opened, I rushed out and toward

the condo door, swiping my key card in front of it.

It wouldn't work.

I tried it a few more times, harsh *beeps* sounding out each time. I realized, to my horror, that the keycard was for the main entrance of the building, but not the condo itself.

Shit.

The door was sturdy looking, but there was nothing else I could do but break through. I backed up, putting my shoulder forward and running as hard as I could. Pain erupted as I slammed into the door, but it was still on its hinges. I pulled back and rushed it again, more pain blasting through me as I collided with it. This hit took it off the hinges a bit, but not enough to open.

I rubbed my arm. Hitting the door one more time without it breaking could very well do some serious damage to myself. I didn't care. If Georgia and the girls were on the other side of the door, no price was too high.

I backed up and ran forward, slamming into the door again. This time, it came off its hinges and I ran through it into the condo. I was in a daze for a second, the door falling to the ground as I came to.

“Alex?”

I regained my senses to see Johnny in the bedroom hall. Georgia was there too, a handful of her hair in one hand, a gun in the other. I spotted a knife on the floor by Georgia's feet.

We stood staring at one another for a long moment before I rushed toward them, stopping only when Johnny put the gun against Georgia's temple and clicked the safety off.

“Ah, ah, ah,” he said, shaking his head. “You don't want to do anything stupid, do you?”

My gut tensed. The girls cried in the nursery, reminding me what was at stake. Georgia watched me with terrified eyes, her expression seeming to say, “it doesn't matter what happens to me, just save the girls.”

“Let her go, Johnny,” I said. “The cops are on their way.”

Johnny narrowed his eyes. “Yeah, you’re the type to call the law, aren’t you, prick? I know you’re the one who sold us out to the police back in New York.”

“That doesn’t matter. What *does* matter is that if you leave now, you might have a chance to get away before they get here. You really want to get busted in Evergreen, Colorado, end up in some county jail with the locals?”

His eyes flashed, as if he were considering the idea. “No. Doesn’t matter anyway. I get out of here without killing you, I’m as good as dead.”

The intensity in his eyes made it obvious that he meant his words. I turned to Georgia. Over her shoulder, I could see a sliver of the nursery, the Greek design on the walls. Then I glanced down at the knife.

It gave me an idea.

“Hey, Georgia,” I said.

They were my last words in English.

“*Do you understand me?*” I asked in Greek.

Her eyes lit up.

“*Yes!*”

I grinned. Though Greek himself, Johnny had been born in New York and was too lazy to learn to speak in his family’s native tongue.

It’d take some luck, but I saw a way out of this mess. I could only hope that neither of our lives would be lost in the process.

CHAPTER 29

GEORGIA



Fear had me in its grips. When Alex spoke in Greek, however, I saw a way out.

“Here’s what’s going to happen,” Alex said. “When I give the signal, grab the knife on the ground and jam it into his leg.”

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Johnny asked. The worry in his voice suggested that he knew he was out of his depth, that he could feel the situation slipping from his control.

“And then what?” I asked.

“Run into the nursery and shut the door.”

Alex was cool and calm and totally in control. If he was as freaked out as I was about the safety of the girls, he sure didn’t show it.

Johnny took the gun from my temple and raised it toward Alex. “If either of you says another goddamn word in Greek, you’re not going to like what happens. Got it?”

Alex and I shared a look that suggested we knew that the time for talk was over, that we needed to act.

I was ready.

“Alright,” Johnny said. “Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to shut her up in the nursery, and then you and me are going to have a talk. Got it? No more of bullshit. I came here to sort things out with you, Alex, and that’s what’s going to-”

“Tora!”

The Greek word for “now” blasted through the air.

I dropped to my knees, pain screaming from my scalp where Johnny still had my hair. Fortunately, the surprise meant he lost his grip when I fell. Once down, I grabbed the knife and swung it toward Johnny’s leg.

I’d never stabbed anyone before. The sensation was strange. Though it all happened so fast, I could feel the fabric of his suit pants tear, followed by the give of his flesh as I sank the blade in deep.

Johnny let out a yowl of pain as he let go of me. I took my hand from the knife, the blade still stuck into his leg.

Everything else happened so quickly. I looked up to see Alex, who was in the process of lifting the door from the ground. I knew the thing was heavy, but to him, it seemed like nothing at all. Johnny, taking his attention from the knife stuck in his leg, looked up just in time to watch Alex run toward him, the door held up like a shield.

Johnny raised his pistol and fired, the shot panging off the door. It was the only one he managed to fire. I ran into the nursery, nearly tripping over the fallen dresser Johnny had pushed over moments earlier to get to me, just in time to watch as Alex slammed into Johnny hard, using the door to completely knock him off his feet.

The girls.

They were both still wailing, and I hurried over to each of them to calm them and let them know Mommy was there. Johnny groaned and yelled, Alex still on top of him, pressing the door down.

More commotion sounded out, and before I could step out into the hallway to see what it was, a swarm of police officers poured into the condo. The noise was deafening as they pulled Alex and the door off Johnny, getting the men apart as other officers removed the gun and the knife.

I stayed between the girls and the chaos, holding my arms out to make sure no one got near my babies. The world

became blurry, and I felt dizzy. My hand shot out toward one of the cribs and I grabbed the side, trying to stabilize myself. The wailing of the girls blended with the hollering of the police officers, and the hits to my head caused an intense throbbing.

I felt woozy, like I wouldn't be able to keep myself upright. Through it all, I spotted Alex. He saw me, saw that I was in a bad state, and broke away from the cops, running over to me.

He didn't make it in time. I fell into a heap, my eyes closing, the world descending into a deep, dark black.

CHAPTER 30

ALEX



A couple of hours later, I was at the ER of Pitt Medical with Jerry and Michelle, who'd just arrived. I'd told them the story on their drive over as I stayed in the waiting room, letting the staff on duty handle Georgia.

I'd been worried as hell at first, but when Melanie had come out to let me know she was stable, I allowed myself to relax a bit.

"She's going to be fine," Melanie said as Jerry and Michelle approached. "Just a mild concussion from getting hit in the head."

The mere mention of what Johnny had done to Georgia was enough to send a fresh wave of rage through me. I wished Johnny were there right then so I could really make his sorry ass pay for what he'd done.

He was in custody. That would have to be enough. Beating some piece of shit to a pulp would hardly be the right way to start a new life away from the world of New York underground crime.

"Is she up now?" Michelle asked, worry in her voice.

"She's a little groggy, but in the waking world," Melanie replied. "I'd give her another hour before you go in to see her."

"And the girls," Jerry asked. "Are they here too?"

"They're with Haley," I said. "She's watching them while we're here with Georgia. She might need a relief crew in a few

hours from now.”

Michelle nodded. “Here or there, it doesn’t matter, we’ll go wherever we’re needed.”

I allowed myself a small smile. Michelle and Jerry were still a bit apprehensive about me, and for good reason. That aside, I was pleased to see how much they loved our girls, how they were on the small team of people who’d do anything for them.

“Doc, you’re welcome to come in and take a look,” Melanie said. “She’s down in room fourteen.”

“Thanks, Mel.”

Melanie left the three of us.

“You’re the doctor,” Michelle said. “Go check out our little girl, and we’ll be waiting here when you’re done.”

There was more to be said to them before I left.

“Michelle, Jerry... I wanted to tell you both that I’m sorry. All of this that happened, it’s because of me, because of my dishonesty. I’ve led a life that I’m not proud of, but one I came to Evergreen to leave behind.”

The two regarded each other for a long moment.

“I can see that you’re sorry,” Jerry said. “And I won’t lie, it’s going to take some time before you’re back in our good graces.”

“But you were there for our little girl, our little *girls* when it counted. And you’re here now. Let’s make sure Georgie is back on her feet, then we can talk about where to go from here.”

I knew it was the best I was going to get. Hell, it was more than I deserved.

“Thank you both.”

With that, I turned and headed toward Georgia’s room. I opened the door slowly, stepping into the low-lit space. Georgia was in bed, resting quietly. I went over to her and looked down at her face. There was a large bruise on her

temple where Johnny had struck her. She looked beautiful in spite of it, and the fact that she'd be fine, that we'd gotten through this in one piece, was no small thing to celebrate.

She opened her eyes slowly, a small smile forming on her lips.

“Hey.”

I took her hand, clasping it in mine.

“Hey.”

“The girls,” she said, her voice weak. “They’re OK?”

“They’re good. Just talked to Haley a little bit ago. If they were shaken up by what happened, they’re over it now.”

“Tough little ladies,” she said.

“That’s right. They must get it from you.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Hey, you’re the one who rushed that jerk with a door for a shield like some kind of freaking Achilles-wannabe. And that was after you smashed the door open with your shoulder. How is that, by the way?”

“Bruised but fine. And don’t sell yourself short when it comes to tough stuff. You put a knife in the guy.”

“Hey, you know what they say about mama bears.”

I squeezed her hand once more before letting it go.

“Speaking of that prick, what happened to him?”

I chuckled. “Talked to a detective at the local PD. Turned out that once they got him good and locked up, he started asking what he could do, who he could send up the river so that he could get out and into Witness Protection.”

“So... who is he going to talk about? You have to remember that I’m still in the dark about this old life of yours.”

“He’s the second-in-command to Nico, the man who I used to work for.” My face fell. “There’s so much that I haven’t told you, so much that I’ve kept hidden. I don’t know if you’ll be able to forgive me when you learn the truth.”

She formed her mouth into a flat line. “There’s only one way to find out. You tell me the truth and let me decide.”

“You ready to hear all of this?”

“Yeah. Lay it on me, Achilles.”

I took a deep breath and began.

I told her everything. I started from my childhood, how my father was a criminal working for Nico, the Godfather of the Night. From there, I explained how I was set to follow in his footsteps until Nico and my father decided that my intellect would be best used elsewhere. I told her about med school, how I worked part time as Nico’s personal doctor.

When it was all over, silence fell.

“That explains the yacht,” she said with a laugh. “I know there are rich doctors out there, but not that rich.”

Although I *did* have quite a bit of money through savings and investments, I decided that all of that could wait until later.

“I’m sorry that I kept all of this from you. In my defense, it’s not like we had a normal courtship or anything like that.”

“Very true. We met, and then the next time we saw each other you were delivering my babies, our babies.”

“I’m in this,” I said. “I’m so damned glad that we’re back in each other’s lives, and I’m so eager to raise those beautiful little girls together.”

“Then get me out of here and let’s do it.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at her enthusiasm.

“Not yet. I’m still a doctor, and that means you need to stay here overnight so the fine staff of my hospital can monitor you. Your head’s going to be fine, but let’s be on the safe side. Not to mention the screams of two babies are the last thing you need.”

“I already miss those screams. God, it hurts to be apart from them.”

“You won’t be for long. All goes well, you’ll be out at noon tomorrow. I’ll handle the girls until then, OK?”

“Yeah. I know they’re in good hands.” She smiled softly.

“And so are you. Tomorrow the NYPD detective on the case wants to speak with us. He’s flying in tonight. I told him that the condo would be better, that you likely weren’t going to be up for a noisy police station after what happened.”

“Good call, thank you. I’m looking forward to it. It’s one more step to putting this all behind us.”

I glanced aside. “And there’s something else I wanted to tell you. Something important.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

I leaned in, kissing her softly on the lips.

“*S’ agapo.*”

Her eyes lit up.

“*S’ agapo.* I love you, too.”

“Good, rest well, my love.”

One more kiss, and then it was time for me to leave.

Michelle and Jerry went in after me. We talked first, the two of them agreeing to hold down the fort while I headed home to relieve Haley. As much as I wanted to stay with Georgia, the girls needed a parent home with them.

I went back to the condo, thanking the management staff for fixing the door so quickly, and for firing the front desk guard that had let Johnny in. I thanked Haley and let her take the spare bedroom for the night. I spent the evening with the girls, feeding them and changing them and holding them close, thanking God or whoever it was out there for making me a father.

These girls were mine to protect, and I’d die before I let any harm come to them.



The girls were kind enough to give me a quiet night's sleep. Haley headed out that morning to visit with Georgia before going back to Denver to teach the second half of her day.

Noon couldn't come soon enough. When it arrived, I was there waiting to take Georgia home. Jerry and Michelle had rented a hotel in town so they could be within minutes if we needed anything.

We received a text on the way home from the NYPD detective I'd spoken with back in New York. Another text followed from Sara McDonald, my lawyer who was also flying in from New York.

"You alright?" Georgia asked, the girls sleeping in the other room as we sipped coffee and waited for the pair to show up.

"Yeah. Kind of. Listen, I don't know how this is all going to shake out. If Johnny's talking, he might try to put me on the hook."

She seemed confused. "But you weren't a criminal, right? It was Nico who did everything."

"That's right. All the same, I don't know much about the legal implications of any of that. I've treated patients who were not in a hospital, and I wasn't reporting gunshot or stab wounds."

She took my hand. "Whatever happens, I'm here. That's all you need to know."

Her words meant a hell of a lot. I realized then and there just how much I was used to living alone, relying on no one but myself. Having the love of someone like Georgia felt like a damn superpower.

Hell, maybe I *was* Achilles with her at my side.

Sara McDonald, tall, trim and in her fifties, a shock of neatly styled white hair on her head, was the first to arrive.

“Say nothing,” she said, seated at the dining room table with us. “We want to know what they have before we start talking.”

Sounded good to me. Detective Wakefield, a heavysset man in his late forties, his hair thinning and his eyes glimmering with sharp intelligence, arrived soon after.

I was nervous; not at the idea of facing consequences for what I’d done, but at the idea of being taken away from Georgia and the girls.

We said our greetings, poured our coffee, and got right to the chase. Georgia kept her hand on mine underneath the table.

“I’m here to make a deal,” he said. “It’s as simple as that.”

“What kind of deal?” Sara asked, leaning forward.

“A good one. Fact of the matter is that Johnny Baros is spilling his guts trying to stay out of jail and get himself into WITSEC. That’s the good news. The bad news is that he’s offering to sell you up the river.”

“But I haven’t done anything,” I said.

Wakefield shrugged. “You were associated with one of the largest criminal gangs in New York. I’m guessing you failed to report gunshot and stab wounds, which your license would require you to do.”

Sara grinned. “Your ‘guessing’ implies that you don’t have anything concrete.”

Wakefield raised a palm. “Easy, no need to jump in for the kill just yet. We want Nico, not his doctor on call. If you’re willing to work with us, to help us make a case against Nico and testify if we need you, then we’re more than happy to cut a deal that provides total immunity.”

“Now we’re talking,” Sara said. “And when you say total immunity...”

“I mean total immunity. I’m here on behalf of the NYPD, and when Alex came to us before, that established a hell of a lot of goodwill.”

“So, no charges?” I asked.

“Nothing. Help us put this piece of shit away, and we’ll leave you here to start your new life.”

I glanced over at Sara. She nodded. Wakefield took out a tape recorder.

“Let’s do this,” I said, eagerness in my voice.

CHAPTER 31

GEORGIA



The conversation took a good few hours. By the time we were done, Alex and I were exhausted. Of course, that was the moment the girls chose to wake up.

“You know,” he said as we made our way to the nursery. “After nearly three hours of cops and lawyers, I’m more than ready to hang out with a couple of gorgeous little ladies.”

“Same here,” I said with a smile.

We flicked on the lights in the nursery, each of us taking one of the girls to change her. Once that was done, we fetched a couple of bottles of milk from the fridge, warmed them up, then retired to the living room to feed them. I turned on the fireplace, the snow that had started yesterday still falling, though not nearly as intensely as it had been.

The room soon grew warm and toasty, as each of us fed the girls—Danae in my lap, Daphne in his.

“God, this is so much easier when you’ve got two parents,” I said, shaking my head. “Can’t believe I thought I could do this on my own.”

“I can,” he said without missing a beat. “You’re one of the toughest women I’ve ever met. I wouldn’t be surprised at all that you could handle these two by yourself.”

I smiled. “Thanks. All the same, I’m glad you’re part of the team.”

“Me too.” Focus took over his face, and he glanced toward the window.

“A drachma for your thoughts?” I asked with a cheeky grin.

“Cute. Just thinking about our next step. As nice as this condo is, I think it’s time we move.”

“What, you don’t like the lingering effects of trauma?”

He laughed. “Seriously, until Nico is behind bars, I want us to be someplace safe. I’m thinking my place is the best option for that. Johnny was able to easily get into here, after all.”

“That sounds good to me. Then what?”

“Then... whatever we want. Duncan Pitt told me that if I put in a few years at the hospital here in Evergreen, the world’s my oyster. I could stay here, or we could move to Denver or wherever else they’ve got a clinic or hospital. And you can work from anywhere.”

“That’s true. But there’s no reason to rush, right?”

“Right. We take it one step at a time. I don’t even have to officially move in with you yet, or vice versa. In fact, let’s wait on that.”

“OK. Baby steps, right?”

“Baby steps.”

We fed the girls, and by the time the bottles were empty, both of them were ready to be put back down.

“Two easy babies,” I said. “We’re lucky.”

We put the girls back in their cribs, turning off the lights as the snow continued to come down. Together, we went back to the living room and stood in front of the window. He wrapped his arms around my waist from behind, and I rested my head on his shoulder.

“That meant a lot to me today,” he said. “Having you there at my side.”

“That’s how it is from here on out. I’m there for you, and you’re there for me.”

“And we’re both there for the girls.”

It was as simple as that. I turned my head, and he met my lips with his. In that moment, everything was perfect. And I had a damn good feeling that all of the moments to come would be, too.

EPILOGUE

GEORGIA



One month later...

My productivity was off the charts. Sitting in my new office at Alex's place, I typed like a madwoman at the computer. *Master and Minotaur*, after a long spell of creative draught, was coming along at an insane pace.

"I don't know what it is!" I said to Haley an hour later as she was over for lunch.

We were in the bright, sunny kitchen. It was late March, an unseasonably warm day. In fact it was the first day over sixty degrees in months. There was a good chance that we had more cold weather to deal with—it was Colorado, after all—but the day was a wonderful peek at the spring to come. The girls were napping, and Haley and I were enjoying some delicious chicken salad sandwiches that she'd brought in from her favorite deli in Denver.

Haley grinned, leaning forward over her sandwich. "You know what I think it is?"

"What?"

"I bet it was your head getting knocked around."

I couldn't do anything but laugh. "You're kidding, right?"

She shrugged, popping a chip into her mouth and wiping her hands. "Stranger things have happened."

I laughed again. "So, you're saying that this low-life thug hitting me in the face, what, unleashed my creative potential?"

“I don’t know. You ever heard the expression ‘knocking someone’s block off?’ Maybe that’s what he did to you, but that he knocked your *writer’s* block off.”

“You’re out of your mind!”

“Hey, it’s just a theory!”

We laughed a little more before turning back to our sandwiches. Haley’s expression suddenly turned serious.

“What’s going on with you and Alex?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, you’re together, right? But you’re *not* together. I know you said that you two were taking baby steps and all that, but have you made this little thing of yours official?”

“What, you mean like... being more than girlfriend and boyfriend?”

“That’s exactly what I mean! You two haven’t had the most conventional relationship, but you’re in love, you’ve got a family, and you’re living together. Why not take it another step and actually get married?”

“Not yet.” I didn’t know what else to say other than that. “We’re not there yet.”

“And you’re fine with that?”

“That’s not important. What does matter is that we’re together, raising the girls. Whatever happens after that, we’ll have to see, you know?”

“So, you’re not fine with that. Deep down, you’re hoping he pops the question, so you don’t have to call him whatever the Greek word is for baby daddy.”

I laughed again. “It’s fine! We don’t need labels. I’m happy with what we have. Anyway, enough about Alex and me... how about you and this new guy of yours? Michael? The assistant principal from Denver Southwest?”

She blushed. “I mean, we’re not officially anything either.”

“Tell me all about it.”

The two of us finished our sandwiches as Haley told me all about this new guy of hers. She'd never been a huge dater, so to hear her going gaga over what sounded like a great guy was awesome news to me. We chatted until Alex arrived home.

"Hey, ladies," he said, setting his briefcase down onto the kitchen counter. He was dressed in his usual work outfit of slacks and dress shoes and a button-up shirt. I swear no matter how many times I saw that outfit it never failed to make me want to gobble him up on the spot.

"Hey, Doc," Haley said.

He chuckled. "Hey Haley."

"Anyway, I should get going," Haley said. "Give my love to the girls, OK?"

"Will do."

We hugged and she was off.

"Hey, can we talk about something?" Alex's voice sounded serious. Coupled with that, he had a grave expression on his face.

Something seemed wrong. I didn't like it one bit.

"Sure." I cleaned up the kitchen table and we sat down. There was still a bit of coffee left from that morning, so I poured it into two cups for us.

Once we were seated, he drummed on the table with his fingertips for a second as if wanting to collect his thoughts.

"So, we've been together for a little while now."

"That's right."

"And you're all but living here permanently. And we're raising the girls as a team."

"We sure are." Where was he going with this? My stomach tensed.

"Well, I've been doing some thinking. What would you call what we have?"

“I’d call it great,” I said. “Better than great, it’s perfect. I love it.”

He shook his head. “It’s not perfect.”

“It’s not?”

“Not as far as I’m concerned.” He smiled slightly. “What we have... it’s like nothing I’ve ever known before. I love you like mad, Georgia. I love our little girls, and I love the life we have together.”

“I do too.” Then what was wrong? I didn’t understand where he was going with this.

“I was planning on taking you out tonight, into the city. Your parents are coming in... I planned it behind your back; hope you don’t mind.”

“Of course I don’t mind. That sounds wonderful.”

“And it was all going to be leading up to something. At first, I was fine waiting until tonight. What’s a few hours, right? But the more I thought about it, the more I didn’t want to wait a minute longer before doing what I had planned.”

“And what is that?”

He smiled for the first time since he’d come home.

“Come here.”

He rose, offering me his hand. Still uncertain, I took it. He led me out of the kitchen, over to the floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the now green sweep of the backyard. Once there, he reached into his pocket and took out a small, black box.

“Georgia Lang, my life has never been the same since you’ve come into it. And I couldn’t be happier. You’re the mother of my daughters, the greatest love I’ve ever known. I’m so damn excited to see what else our life together has in store. So, let’s get it started—officially.” He opened the box, a gorgeous diamond ring inside, the stone catching the late morning light as it poured into our home.

“Will you marry me?”

All I could do was squeal and throw my arms around him, covering his face in kisses.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” he said with a grin.

He slipped the ring on my finger. Before I had a chance to admire it, however, the sound of the girls crying came from the baby monitor on the kitchen counter.

“Sorry,” I said with a grin. “I must’ve gotten carried away.”

“Speaking of getting carried away...” He wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me close, kissing me long and deep. “Just a taste of tonight.”

“I can’t wait.”

“S’ agapo,” he said.

“S’ agapo.”

We kissed once more before taking one another’s hands to go upstairs to our girls, for the first time as husband and wife to be.

The End

I sincerely hope you loved Georgia and Alex’s sexy love story. Luckily the party isn’t over. You can get an exclusive glimpse into their future with an extended epilogue [HERE](#).

Can’t get enough? I have another steamy doctor’s secret baby romance, [Secret Babies for my Best Friend’s Dad](#).

I’ve included a free excerpt to this Amazon Top 20 Bestseller on the next page!

SECRET BABIES FOR MY BEST FRIEND'S DAD (PREVIEW)



A masquerade ball.

My one chance at a forbidden fantasy.

I had the most passionate night with my best friend's dad.

**And he'd TOTALLY flip if he knew I was the girl behind
the mask....**

I've wanted Noah ever since I knew what it felt like to desire a
man.

He's the epitome of sexy.

And the only person I could trust my heart to.

I reunited with the single dad at a masquerade ball.

And I walked away knowing my secret would go with me to
the grave.

Until today...

"Sadie?"

A familiar baritone voice enters the room.

I feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise up.

"Noah? What are you doing here!?"

**Unbeknownst to me Noah has been assigned to administer
emergency deliveries for my twins. OUR twins!! The ones
he knows nothing about!!**

CHAPTER 1

NOAH



“**Y**ou’re joking. There’s no way you’re here alone!”

The young, beautiful woman that stood in front of me wore an expression of total shock from what I could see behind the mask on her face. Her big, blue eyes were wide through the sequin-rimmed eye holes, her red, full lips exposed just enough beyond the curve of the gaudy mask traveling past her mouth.

She was gorgeous, but at that moment, I wasn’t the slightest bit interested in conversation.

Her mouth slightly open in a sexy pout, she put her hands on her hips, her ocean-blue dress catching the light of the ballroom chandeliers above. Although she was quite attractive, the woman couldn’t help but show off her slight immaturity in the way she carried herself.

Then again, when you’re a man staring down the barrel of the big 5-0, anyone under the age of thirty seems like a cocky, overconfident kid.

“Well, not technically alone,” I replied. “I’m here with some friends of mine.”

I nodded over her shoulder. Through the crowd of well-dressed guests attending the masquerade ball, I spotted the two couples I’d come with. Duncan Pitt, owner of Pitt Medical and, by the way, my new boss, and his wife Annie were in the center of a tight knot of people.

Nearby were Finn and Kenna O’Connor, another couple to whom I was close. Finn also practiced at Pitt Medical. Kenna

was a wildly successful event planner; her company having been the one to put this whole event together.

“Friends don’t count,” she said, the sly grin still on her face. “What I want to know is if you’re *with* anyone.”

“Nope,” I answered, wishing I were home with a good book, a bit of whiskey, and maybe a fire in the fireplace to ward off this late spring chill.

“Just me.”

She licked her lips as if my words were her sign to move in for the kill.

“God, that accent is so sexy. I’ve only heard Irish accents on TV – you ever watch that show *Kilts and Kisses*?”

My gut tightened at the mention of it. *Kilts and Kisses*, a smash-hit reality show about the lives of three brothers who all happened to be doctors, had done more than a million Colin Farrells could ever do to put Irishmen in the hearts and minds of women the world over.

“I’m familiar with it. Not much of a TV guy – too busy with work these days.”

“Busy with work, huh?” she asked as if my comment gave her something to think about. “In that case, I think it’s even more important that you learn how to relax a bit. Come on, let’s dance, see where the night takes us.” She offered her hand. “My name’s Ka—” She stopped suddenly, her eyes going wide as she shook her head. “Oops, look at me, almost telling you my name and ruining the fun of the evening.”

“Listen, you’re a gorgeous girl from what I can see behind the mask but tonight, I’m just not—”

“Hey!”

A booming voice cutting through the classical music coming from the band on stage and the din of the crowd caught my attention. I looked in the direction of the noise and spotted Finn. He was dressed in a black tuxedo, a matching black mask on his face that made him look like Zorro.

“There you are old man!” he stepped over to me and clapped his hand down hard on my shoulder. “Been looking everywhere for your ancient arse!” His voice was thick with the same Dublin brogue that I spoke with.

“Ancient?” I asked, putting some mock outrage to my tone. “Get off it, man – I’m what, eight years older than you?”

“Aye,” he replied with a grin. “Old enough to have some salt and pepper in your hair.”

The woman smiled.

“I think it’s sexy.”

“Oh, I’m sure you do, love,” Finn said. “Crow’s feet or not, this man’s been beating ‘em off with a stick since we were in secondary school.”

The woman grinned even more broadly.

“Oh my God, listen to you two! I feel like I’m in the middle of Dublin instead of Denver.”

“Well, I hope you enjoyed it while you could, love,” Finn said. “Because I’ve got to steal this tall drink of water away from you.”

Relief washed over me. “Aye? What’s the craic?”

Her eyes lit up as she pointed at us. “You said it! Like they did in the show!”

I kept my attention on Finn as he spoke. “Private conversation, sad to say. This man’s the newest doctor at Pitt Medical – got to go over a few things with him before the night’s over.”

The excitement on the woman’s face turned to disappointment.

“That’s boring. You’re really going to talk about work stuff during a party?”

“I am indeed,” Finn said. “Being a doctor’s not all glamour, you know.” He flicked his green eyes onto me. “Now, mind if I peel you away from the lass?”

“Sure, sure.”

I shrugged, giving the woman a, “sorry, but what can I do?” look as I walked off with Finn. Moments later we were back in the crowd, making our way through the tight knots of the city’s elite.

Even with the masks, I could still make out some familiar, famous faces – the DA and the Mayor, for starters. Pitt Medical was absolutely huge, and when Duncan and his team threw a party, it was always a successful turnout.

The DA went out of his way to give me a nod and a wave. My daughter, Cammy, worked at his office, so we’d met each other more than a few times.

“You know,” Finn said as he led me through the party with his arm around my shoulder. “That has to have been about the most damn pathetic sight I’ve ever seen in all my years on this earth.”

“What’s this about?” I asked. I glanced up to see that he was leading us to the bar. Good thing, too – my drink was almost gone.

“Noah bloody McMurray, I swear to Christ. You had one of the most gorgeous women at this party ready for a ravishing and you appeared as if she was trying to sell life insurance or some such.”

I put together at what he was getting. “Finn, don’t tell me you were watching the entire time.”

“Of course, I was! I looked up and saw you and that sexy little thing and started wondering, could this be the night that my nearly celibate friend is going to actually make a connection with a woman? I swear, for a second, I thought I saw the old Noah, the one who’d left a trail of broken hearts through Oxford during our premed years. Then, I got a closer look, saw underneath that mask of yours,” he reached up and gave my red and gold mask a tug, “that you couldn’t have been more bored.”

We arrived at the bar, and he raised his hand. A black-clad bartender hurried over, and Finn quickly ordered a couple of

whiskeys.

“I wasn’t bored,” I said. “I just...wasn’t all that interested in talking.”

“Uh-huh,” he sarcastically replied. “In other words, you were bored.”

A fresh drink in hand, I glanced through the crowd and spotted the woman I’d been speaking to. She was already in the middle of another conversation with someone else.

Judging by the way his hand was resting on her hip, it appeared she was going to be making up for all the time she’d wasted with me – and good for her.

Finn sighed, turning around, and leaning against the bar. I took a sip of my whiskey and leaned next to him.

“I get it,” he said. “I do. Well, as much as I can.”

I tensed, knowing where this was going.

“Finn...”

“Now, now,” he said, raising his hand. “Hear me out.”

“I know what you’re going to say. I mean, Christ, we’ve had the same bloody conversation more times than I can count.”

“Well, maybe we need to have it one more time. Bud, you’ve been single, for how long?”

“You know the answer to that one.”

“I do. You’ve been single since Saoirse passed, almost two decades ago. Now, you don’t need me to tell you that your wife was a damn good woman – brilliant and beautiful and all the other reasons you married her. But she was my friend too, and I knew her well enough to know that she’d be *kicking your arse* if she knew that you were languishing in eternal bachelorhood out of respect for her.”

God, just the mention of Saoirse was enough to make my heart hurt like mad. Seventeen years it’d been since she’d been taken from our daughter and me. “It’s not just out of respect. I’ve been too—”

“Too damn busy to date, not to mention you’ve got a daughter to worry about. Bud, I’ve heard it time and time again. And maybe that excuse worked when Cammy was a little girl, but she’s good and grown! Hell, she’s been out of the house for years, well on her way to being the next damn DA of this city.”

He was right, but it didn’t do any good in changing my mind.

“There’s work,” I said. “I just started at Pitt Medical after almost two decades working in public medicine. I’m going to need to make sure my head is in the game for at least a year or two.”

“Ah.” He waved his hand through the air dismissively. “Listen to you, talking like some boy fresh out of med school. Duncan and I didn’t hire you because you’re our friend, Noah – we hired you because you’re one of the best bloody OB/GYNs in the country. Hell, *two* countries if you count Ireland. You’re so good at this job you could do it with your eyes closed.”

“Alright, alright,” I said. “Enough blowing smoke up my arse.”

He laughed that big, booming laugh of his, catching the attention of everyone nearby for a brief moment. “Just saying – it might’ve been a fire that finally got you to sign on with us, but it was your skills that made us want to make the offer in the first place.”

The fire. Other than Saoirse, it was the last damn thing I wanted to think about.

“Anyway, the reason I’m mentioning all of this is to make my case that it’s time for you to start looking for someone to spend your life with. It’d be a damn shame if you were single for the rest of your days, you know.”

“Now, you’re saying that like I haven’t tried dating.”

He laughed. “You went out on, what, *three* dates over ten years ago?”

“It was five – two of them were second dates.”

“All the same, five dates are hardly an attempt to get back out there.”

“Five dates were all I needed to realize that I didn’t *want* to get back out there. I’ve got my job and my daughter and my hobbies and that’s more than enough for me. And when I make partner at Pitt, I won’t have time for anything else.”

He grinned. “Already thinking about partner, huh? There’s that ambition.”

“I mean, if you’re going to go private, you might as well aim for the top.”

Finn nodded as he brought the whiskey to his lips. “Now, that’s what I like to hear.”

I ran my hand through my hair, my eyes drifting toward the exit.

“You know,” I said. “I think I’m ready to head out.”

“Aw, seriously?”

“Seriously. I made an appearance, rubbed elbows, and now a little time in my easy chair with one more of these” – I raised my glass – “is sounding about right. Got a new apartment to break-in, after all.”

“That’s about as boring as I’d expect from a man of a certain age.” He turned his attention to the crowd. “But this is a rare chance, lad. You’ve got plenty of single women here who’d kill for a chance to be with someone like you.”

“Someone like me?”

“You know, a, ah, handsome doctor-type.”

I chuckled. “Finn, is there...anything you want to say to me?”

He laughed, reaching over, and giving me a punch to the arm.

“Funny, jackass. Anyway, you’ve got a party that happens once a damn year, if that, and if you’re even thinking about dating, this is the night to look for someone. The masks, silly

as they might be, are perfect – kinda sexy, a little mysterious. Just the thing to get the ladies in the mood for...”

He went on, but I was suddenly distracted.

The woman was so damn beautiful that it hurt just to look at her.

She was tall and curvy, with wavy, sun-kissed blonde hair that was tied up above her head, tendrils hanging down over the purple and silver mask that hid most of her face. Still, I could make out her ice-blue eyes, slim nose, and full, plump lips.

Her dress was dark green, cut low enough to hint at her full breasts, the fabric clinging to her body like it was made for her alone. She moved slowly, with grace and ease, the sly smile on her lips suggesting that she felt right at home at a party like this.

“It won’t kill you to go out on a date. Just one! I’m telling you, finding the right woman, starting a family with her... there’s nothing like it. I mean, you already know this, but it kills me to think that you might spend the rest of your life alone, Noah.”

“Uh-huh.”

Finn was still going on, bless his heart, but my attention was totally captured by the woman. She stepped through the crowd, her hips swaying, her curves enough to make my cock move in my tuxedo pants.

I wanted her like mad.

The feeling of wanting was overwhelming. I scanned my memory, trying to come up with the last time I’d felt this way about anyone. I couldn’t – aside from Saoirse, that is.

She chatted here and there with some of the guests, not showing the slightest bit of apprehension or fear in striking up a conversation with the elite attending the party.

It was almost hypnotic to watch her. She moved slowly, but purposefully like she wasn’t in any kind of hurry. Her warm, genuine smile lit up her gorgeous features as she spoke.

Finn went on. “I know it sounds hard and you feel like you’re abandoning Saoirse. But I’m telling you – no one is going to think that. Then again, you’ve always been the type of man to do whatever you want, regardless of what anyone else thinks. All the same...”

I couldn’t take my eyes off her. My inclination to leave the party and go home had vanished. All I wanted now was to speak to her, whoever she was. I took a sip of my drink and prepared to break away from Finn.

Before I got the chance, however, a man stepped out of the crowd and approached her. Her face sank as soon as she laid eyes on him. The man moved in, cutting the distance between the two of them and speaking closely in her ear.

It was clear she didn’t want anything to do with this man. She turned her body in an attempt to move away from him, but he didn’t let her. Instead, his hand shot out and grabbed her wrist. She tried to pull her hand back, but it was no use.

The back of my neck went aflame, my blood pulsing hard.

“Anyway,” Finn said, “just give it a bloody shot. What’s the worst—”

“Be right back.”

“Huh?”

I didn’t stick around to answer him. Instead, I casually strode toward the couple. It took a little weaving through the crowd until I was close enough to hear them talk.

“Seriously, Tyler,” she said. “You’re not getting the hint.” There was no fear in her voice. The man might’ve had her by the wrist, but she wasn’t scared.

“You’re being a tease,” the man said. “It’s so obvious.”

I stopped when I was right next to them. The woman’s gaze broke from the man, her eyes latching onto me, surprise washing over her face. The man turned to me too, irritation visible on the portion of his face that wasn’t covered by the mask.

“Everything alright?” I calmly asked.

The woman opened her mouth to speak, but the man beat her to it.

“Get out of here, asshole – this is none of your business.”

I folded my arms over my chest.

“It is now.”

CHAPTER 2

SADIE



I was too busy trying to wrench my wrist free from that prick to even notice that another guy had shown up.

“Now, let her go.”

He stood tall and still like a statue. His huge arms were crossed over his chest, and I could see below the silver mask on his face that he had a jaw that would make Superman envious.

His hair was dark red, with a little silver around the temples that let me know he was clearly older than me. But he wore his age well.

He also seemed extremely familiar.

“What the hell’s your problem?” Tyler didn’t take too kindly to the interruption. However, his momentary distraction gave me the chance to yank my hand free.

“I’m going to give you one warning,” the man said. “Let her go and get the hell out of here.”

His accent was Irish which made him seem even more familiar.

Who the hell was this guy?

Tyler turned toward the man, puffing his chest out in that obnoxious, wannabe alpha sort of way. As annoyed as I was by Tyler, it was kind of funny watching him trying to get all aggressive with a man who was easily twice his size.

Even though I had the situation perfectly under control, I had to admit that seeing this guy standing there, tall and built and steely-eyed, was a turn-on.

“Listen, Lucky Charms, you’re putting yourself in the middle of something that doesn’t concern you. Now, why don’t you just turn around and—”

“Tyler.” I spoke with a sharp tone, cutting him off. It was enough to get him to shut up and turn in my direction.

“I don’t want to talk to you. Whatever you’ve got on your mind, keep it to yourself and back the fuck off.”

“But Sade—”

“*Don’t* call me Sade. Just turn around and get the hell out of here before you embarrass yourself even further.”

Tyler narrowed his brown eyes at me from behind his mask. The man, seeming to understand that I had the situation under control, stood still and silent.

Tyler scoffed. “Whatever. If you want to blow it with a guy like me, that’s your own damn loss. Later, losers.”

With that, he turned and stormed off, disappearing into the crowd. I felt intense relief come over me when he was finally gone.

The man turned to me. “You alright?”

He gazed down at me with those rich, green eyes, his luscious mouth flat and serious, his face dusted with salt and pepper stubble.

That’s when it hit me.

I finally recognized the man. It was none other than Noah freaking McMurray, the father of my best friend and the man who’d been single-handedly responsible for my sexual awakening when I was a girl.

Granted, he had no idea about all that.

“I’m fine.”

Judging by the look on his face, I could tell that he didn't recognize me. That meant I had a choice to make – tell him who I was, little Sadie Clarence – or keep my identity a secret.

Nothing wrong with a little fun, I decided.

He flagged down one of the passing servers carrying a tray of high-end water bottles. Noah plucked one of the bottles off the tray, cracked it open, and handed it to me.

“Here, drink some of this.”

“Why?” I asked. “I was dealing with some prick I went on a date with, not walking through the desert.” I followed this up with a smile to let him know I was only messing around.

His expression stayed stony and serious. I could sense that he didn't consider this a laughing matter.

Noah was keeping it cool. That's how he'd always been – cool, calm, and collected. I could see, however, that the idea of a woman being in potential danger was enough to make the mask slip a bit – so to speak.

I sipped my water, wishing I had something stronger.

“Mind if I have a bit of that?” I asked, nodding to his whiskey. “I could use one of those after the conversation I just had.”

Without a word, he handed the drink over to me. “Of course. But tell me who that guy was. I want to make sure you're safe.”

Another warm wave flowed through me. Noah was part of a generation where looking out for women was a little more common. I didn't mind fighting my own battles, but it was nice all the same.

I sipped the whiskey, the warmth of the booze hitting just right. He placed his hand on the small of my back, leading me out of the crowd.

The sensation of his palm on my skin was enough to make my pussy clench. It'd been years since I'd seen him last, but

the old attraction I'd had for Noah was returning with a vengeance.

I spoke as he led me over to a quiet corner. "Tyler was this guy I met on Hinge."

Confusion took hold of his handsome face. "Hinge? What the hell is that?"

I smiled. "Not up to date on the latest dating apps?"

As far as I knew, Noah hadn't been serious with anyone since his wife passed a long time ago.

He shook his head. "Never used one of those apps in my life."

I chuckled.

"What?"

"Nothing," I said, shaking my head. "Just the way you said it. Like it was dirty."

Noah let out a snort. "They're not my thing. Can't believe people are meeting after looking at a couple of pictures and exchanging some texts. That's not how we did things when I was—" he stopped himself.

"When what?" I asked with a smile.

He sighed, shaking his head as if he knew how silly it was what he'd been about to say.

"When I was your age. God, I can't believe I just said that." Noah chuckled, his stony expression breaking for the first time since the conversation had begun.

Mentioning the age gap between us did nothing to tamp down my attraction.

"So, Hinge. Is that a swipe thing?"

"Sort of. It doesn't matter, really. We went out on one date where he took me out to dinner."

"And I'm guessing it didn't go well?" He flagged down a server, pointing to the glass of whiskey in my hand. The server nodded and headed off to the bar.

“Let’s just put it this way – he pulled out his phone to show me exactly how much money he had in his retirement fund.”

Noah laughed. “What? I swear that’s this generation for you. They get a taste of money and think all they have to do is wave some bills under a woman’s nose and she’ll be putty in his hands.”

I looked Noah up and down. He was dressed in a nice tux, a silver watch peeking out from underneath his sleeve. I knew he made good money as an OB/GYN, but he’d never been flashy about it – one of the many things I’d always liked about him.

“No kidding. Anyway, between that and, like, two dozen other things he’d done over the course of the night, I decided I wasn’t into him. He’d texted me the next morning, asking me when we were going to meet up again. I told him I wasn’t interested, and he didn’t take it well.”

“That right?”

“Yep. Told me I used him for a free dinner, said that I owed him another date.”

“Arrogance and entitlement,” he said as the server arrived and slipped the drink into his hand. “Not a good combination.”

“No kidding. I ended up having to block his number. Just my luck that I’d bump into him here. Somehow, he recognized me even with the mask on.”

“Truth be told, you looked like you were managing the situation just fine. But seeing him grab you like that...” he trailed off, shaking his head as he sipped his whiskey.

“Thanks,” I said. “You’re right – I had it taken care of. All the same, it’s nice to know that someone had my back.”

The side of his mouth curled in a slight smile, and he offered his free hand to me. I took it, his palm so big that mine looked tiny in comparison.

His skin was rough and warm, my heart beating faster at his mere touch.

“Name’s Noah,” he said. “Charmed. And you?”

“My name?” I asked, a sly smile on my face. “Why would I tell you that? This is a masquerade. Isn’t not knowing who we are part of the fun?”

He narrowed his eyes, regarding me with skepticism.

“You serious?” he asked.

I raised my eyebrows, the crafty smile staying on my lips.

“Do I look like I’m playing around? Just because you were Mr. Chivalrous and saved me from having to toss my drink into that asshole’s face doesn’t mean I have to break the rules of the evening.”

He chuckled, shaking his head as he took a sip of his whiskey.

“Fine. You want to keep your name a secret, I suppose that’s in the spirit of the evening. But I’d still like to get to know you.”

Once more his eyes moved over my body, lingering on my hips and breasts.

A shudder of excitement ran through me, and all I wanted was for those big hands to be all over my body.

“Is that right?” I asked.

“That’s right.” From the stage, the band finished their song, light applause sounding from the audience before the musicians began a new tune – this one a lively waltz. “I’ve always found dancing to be a great way to get to know someone.”

He offered me his hand once more.

“Come on – I’m going to show you what you’ve been missing out on playing around with those apps.”

Noah had always brought an even share of confidence to his calm temperament. It was really something to have that confidence turned onto me, especially when it was sexually charged.

I flicked my eyes down to his hand, certain that this was the last chance I'd get to put a stop to all of this before it went too far; before we did things that couldn't be undone.

I took it. Without wasting a moment, he pulled me close, wrapping his big arm around my waist as he brought me against his powerful, stone-solid body.

My heart began to beat harder, and for a moment I worried that I'd gotten myself in over my head.

The waltz went on, Noah bringing me into the beat and moving me across the dance floor as if it were second nature.

"Now," he said as we danced. "You can keep your name to yourself. But I'd still like to know a bit about you." He was close enough that I could smell his cologne.

"What do you want to know?" I asked.

"Well, let's start with what you're doing here."

I frowned. "You're saying that like I'm not supposed to be here or something."

"Because something tells me you're not. Or, at least, that this isn't quite your crowd."

He was good. Noah was such a keep-things-close-to-the-chest kind of guy that it was easy to forget that he was also one of those types who saw everything.

"What, you think I snuck in here or something?" I couldn't help but smirk a bit as I spoke.

"You see that security out front? Not a chance anyone's sneaking in here. All the same, I'm getting the impression that you're not exactly on the guest list."

Noah was right, but there wasn't a chance in hell I was going to tell him the way I'd gotten in – by using his daughter's invitation that she'd gotten through her job at the DA's office.

Cammy knew I was here, of course, but how on earth would I be able to tell Noah that, as far as security was concerned, I was his daughter?

“Can you keep a secret?” I asked.

“Of course. I’d love to be a part of your little intrigue.”

The song changed, the medium-paced waltz turning to a much slower-tempo song. Noah kept his arm wrapped around my waist holding me close. I stepped up on my tiptoes and whispered into his ear.

“I’m here on someone else’s invitation.”

It was damn hard to resist nibbling his ear, my mouth so close to him. I pulled back, observing him regarding me with an expression of mild surprise, one of his thick eyebrows arched above the top border of his mask.

“Now, that’s certainly a risky move. This isn’t just any party – this is *the* party of the year. The mayor’s here, the DA, not to mention the head of Pitt Medical. You could get into some serious shite if you got ratted out.”

“But you’re not going to rat me out, are you?” I asked with a playful, challenging tone.

“Maybe I am. For all you know, I could be the head of security ready to throw you into the back of a paddy wagon.”

“A paddy wagon, huh? You know where that term comes from, Mr. Irish?”

He cocked his head to the side, putting it together and letting out a laugh once he’d figured it out.

“Alright, a cop car, as you yanks say. But you’re evading the question – I could be onto you.”

I tossed my hair back, thinking it over as I wrapped my arms around his shoulders. He responded by putting his hands on my hips.

I was so close to him, so turned on by his nearness, that it was a surprise I was able to get out a single word.

“You don’t seem like the security type. I mean, you’re tall and strong and capable of speaking in a way that sends pesky bad dates running for the hills. But you seem a little too... thoughtful for that.”

“Aye? And what kind of job do you imagine a thoughtful, tall man like me does?”

I had him at a disadvantage, but I was going to play along.

I placed my hands on his, bringing them off my hips and up to my face.

“You’ve got big hands,” I said. “They could possibly be put to good use choking the life out of some poor schlub. But these...they strike me more as healing hands. Doctor’s hands.”

“Very good guess. Or maybe not.”

“No?”

He shrugged, slipping his hands from mine, and returning them to my hips. This time, he gave my curves a squeeze that made my heart skip a beat and my panties soak.

“This is an event for Pitt Medical. You could throw a pebble into the attendees here and most likely hit a doctor in the head. And then you could throw another pebble and hit a doctor who could take care of the first guy that you hit.”

I laughed. “Alright, alright – good point.”

I wasn’t at the end of my advantages, however. So what if I’d known since I was a kid that Dr. Noah was an OB/GYN? What was one little fib on top of another?

“How about if I guess what field you’re in?”

“Now *that*, I’d be impressed with.”

I placed my fingertip on my chin, glancing away. “Hmm. Well, you’re smart, that’s for sure. And you’ve got a way about you that puts women at ease. So, I’d guess...OB/GYN?”

He nodded slowly. “Very good. Have to say I’m rather impressed.”

I smiled.

“Now you know my name and my job so that’s two disadvantages you have over me. At this point, I’m thinking it’s only fair that you tell me what you do for a living.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” I asked, his hand moving along my hip in a way that made it clear he wanted more than just a dance. “I had to guess your job, after all.”

“Good point, good point.”

He opened his mouth slightly, his tongue moving between his lips as he considered the question.

“Well, you snuck into this place. That means you’re either into parties, even ones that you’re not invited to, or you’re into networking.”

He was on the right track. “Good. Which do you think it is?”

“Hm. This is a party, sure, but it’s not exactly a cut-loose type of affair. Women your age tend not to be into black-tie situations like this. So, I’m ruling that out.”

“What, you don’t think I’m the classy sort of woman who appreciates an event like this?”

He laughed. “You’re telling me you do?”

I grinned. “Fair enough. So, what’s your guess?”

Noah kept moving me to the steady rhythm of the music, his right hand traveling from my hip to the small of my back. I wanted him like crazy, and I was becoming certain that he felt the same way about me.

“You could be a gold-digger,” he said, glancing away with a thoughtful expression. “Sneaking in here to try and get your hooks into one of the wealthy and powerful men in attendance.”

“Now, that’s a cynical guess.”

“Hey, you get to be my age and you’ll find out that a little cynicism goes a long way. But...I don’t think that’s your game. The way you were zipping from person to person, making people’s acquaintances and shaking as many hands as you could – you strike me as more of a networking type.”

“Very good. You’re on the right track. But I can’t help but notice the implication that you’d had your eyes on me from

across the party.”

He smirked, not even trying to hide it.

“What can I say? You caught my eye. And good thing I had been watching. Otherwise, you’d still be in the middle of trying to send that little twit off.”

“Please. He’s lucky you showed up if anything. The moment he grabbed my wrist like that he was done.”

Noah smirked. “Is that right?”

“Oh yeah. I’ve taken more than a few self-defense courses – a kick to the balls is more than enough to bring any entitled prick to his knees.”

“Remind me to never get on your bad side.”

“To be fair, that’s not all there is to my bad side.” I grinned, making it obvious what sort of “bad” I had in mind.

He leaned in. “I’d love a chance to get to know you better away from prying eyes.”

Noah spoke in a low voice, the deepness of it enough to make me weak in the knees.

“Oh? And where would that be?”

“Got a room here in the hotel in the event I ended up not wanting to make the drive back home. How about we continue this conversation up there?”

Getting Noah to invite me to his room was exactly what I’d been hoping for from the moment I’d spotted him at the party. Hell, it’s what I’d been fantasizing about since I was a freaking teenager.

Now that it was happening, now that I was moments away from being between the sheets and underneath him, I wasn’t sure what to do with myself.

“You alright?” he asked, sensing my shift in mood.

“More than alright. And yeah – let’s do it.”

The song ended, and the light applause that sounded from the attendees gave us the perfect cover to sneak out of the

party without catching anyone's attention.

Noah took me by the hand and led me through the crowd. Moments later, we were past the security checkpoint at the huge double doors of the hotel ballroom and back out in the art-deco-style hallway.

We were so close to being alone together that I could hardly think straight. A handful of other masked attendees were in the hall chatting quietly to one another in small groups.

I couldn't believe it. Noah McMurray, the man who'd been the ideal to whom I'd compared every man I'd ever dated, was leading me by the hand up to his hotel room.

I was thrilled and nervous and more turned on than I'd ever been in my life.

As we stepped in front of the gold-surfaced elevator doors in the lobby, I suddenly realized something as I caught my reflection.

The masks.

No doubt he'd want to take them off as soon as we were alone. How the hell could I have forgotten about them? I had to think of something quick. If he were to find out who I was, who he was in the middle of seducing...

The doors opened, and my mind was still blank as to how to deal with the mask situation. Noah didn't give me a single extra second to think it over, taking me by the hand once more and leading me into the elevator. He pulled me inside and the doors shut.

As soon as they were closed, just as I'd feared, Noah wasted no time whipping off his mask.

The face underneath was impossibly handsome. His hair was a deep, dark red, and his eyes a gorgeous green, situated above a slender, but strong nose.

His cheekbones were chiseled, his jaw wide and his luscious mouth curled in a sly grin above his cleft chin. Even

the slight crinkles at the corners of his eyes only made him look sexier, more distinguished.

“Now,” he said, stepping toward me and placing his hands on my hips once more. “Take that thing off and let me get a look at you.”

Shit.

CHAPTER 3

NOAH



“Uh, what?”

Her blue eyes flashed from behind her mask. It was easy to see that my asking her to remove it had taken her by surprise.

“Your mask,” I said, gazing down at her. “I want to see what you look like underneath.”

She pursed her lips together, and I could sense that she felt conflicted. Was she having second thoughts?

I realized in those moments that I needed to be careful – the last thing I wanted was to make her feel pressured.

The conflicted expression faded and was replaced by one a little more sultry, one that showed she was in the mood for the same thing I was.

“You know, I’m starting to like the idea that you don’t quite know who I am,” she said. “Why don’t I leave this on?”

I chuckled. “Might’ve been the right time to say that before I took mine off.”

She shrugged. “Doesn’t matter – not like I know who you are other than your first name and face. Maybe the masquerade’s a little corny, sure, but I’d be lying if I said the mystery wasn’t kind of fun.”

There was no doubt in my mind that she had other reasons for not wanting to take off her mask. What those might be, I could only guess.

Maybe she wasn't the one-night-stand sort of woman and keeping on her mask was her way of maintaining her privacy.

If she didn't want to take it off, I wasn't going to make her – despite my curiosity.

“Fine,” I said with a smile. “Stay hidden.”

She smiled back, and there was more than a little relief on her face that I wasn't going to press the matter. I turned and pushed the button for the top floor of the hotel.

“Good,” she said, stepping over to me and putting her hands on my chest. “And trust me, when I show you what I've got in mind, my mask is going to be the last thing you're worried about.”

As the elevator rose, she slipped her hands up my shirt and traced the outline of my pecs with her fingertips. Then she stood on her tiptoes and brought her lips to mine, kissing me slowly and sweetly.

Her eyebrows flicked up as she dropped to her knees, her hands working quickly to open up my belt along with the front of my tuxedo slacks.

I couldn't believe what I was doing. Mask or no mask, it wasn't hard to see that this woman was young. Hard to say, but I guessed somewhere in her mid-twenties.

There was a damn good chance she was a couple of decades younger than me.

It was wrong. A man my age had no business with a woman as young as her. As she yanked down the front of my boxer-briefs, however, my stiff cock springing out and into her hand, the part of my mind that thought it was a bad idea went dark.

Besides, she had a point – neither of us knew who the other one was. What was the harm in having a little anonymous fun?

She flicked her eyes up at me from behind the mask, her slender fingers forming a fist around the thickness of my shaft.

She stroked me slowly, placing her wet lips on my head and kissing me gently. A tingle of pleasure ran through me, and I couldn't help but groan.

“See?” she asked, her hand moving up and down. “Told you I'd give you better things to think about.”

Before giving me a chance to reply, she opened her mouth and took me inside, forming her lips into a tight seal just underneath my head. I couldn't see it, but I sure as hell could feel it as her tongue flicked over my most sensitive area, her blue eyes locked on mine as she moved her mouth up and down.

She knew what she was doing.

Her mouth followed her hand up and down my length, soft, wet sucking sounds filling the small space of the elevator as she took as much of me as she could into her mouth.

I slipped my hand into the back of her blonde, wavy hair, savoring the sight of her mouth full of my cock. Every now and then she'd let me fall away from her lips, switching up her technique by dragging her tongue along my length, her hand cradling my balls.

The elevator ride took less than a minute all the way to the top floor, but that was more than enough time for her to bring me to the edge of orgasm.

With a growl, I reached down and took her by the arm, lifting her up to her feet. Her lips were wet and opened slightly in surprise.

“How was that Doc?” she asked.

“Fucking perfect. But not a chance in hell I'm going to come before you.”

The doors opened with a chime, revealing the spacious, opulent penthouse hotel room that I'd taken for the night. The place was gorgeous, done up in the shiny gold, art-deco style of the rest of the hotel. The glass walls looked out onto Denver; the evening skyline alive with city lights.

She stepped into the room as I switched on the low lights and tucked myself back into my pants, her eyes focused on the view.

“This is quite the room you got for just one evening.”

While the city was a spectacle, I was far more interested in the way she looked in that dress.

She turned on her heels, putting one hand on her hip and the tip of the other hand’s index finger on her lips. She glanced aside as if she were giving something some serious thought.

“Now. Where were we?”

I stepped over to her, the echoes of my footfalls filling the vast space. When I was near enough, I put my hands on her hips.

“I do believe you had my cock in your mouth.”

She brought her eyes to mine, letting her hand fall as she began stroking me through my slacks.

“That’s right. We could get back to that, or—”

“Take off your dress.” I cut her off, not able to wait another moment.

The corner of her mouth curled. “Someone’s bossy.”

“When I know what I want, I don’t screw around. Now, take off your dress.”

My commanding tone didn’t seem to bother her one bit. If anything, the way she licked her lips signaled that it only turned her on even more than she already was.

Her hands moved to the straps of her gown, and I watched as she pulled them down along the length of her slender shoulders and elegant arms.

Little by little, she exposed more of her body.

My eyes went right to her breasts, her full cleavage seeming on the verge of bursting out of the black, lacy bra she wore. Her stomach was next, toned and trim, leading into her wide, curvy hips. The panties she had on matched the bra, and

between lingerie and her shapely legs, I was on the verge of exploding.

The dress fell to her feet, and she stepped out of it. The smile on her face was confident and self-assured, suggesting that she could tell the effect her body had on me.

“Now what, Doc?” she asked.

I closed the distance between us, putting my hands on her hips and lifting her off the ground. She let out a squeal of excitement and surprise as I carried her over to the bar that separated the suite’s kitchen from the main room.

Once there, I set her down on one of the plush, black barstools.

She grinned as I put her down, her breasts rising and falling with each excited breath she took. My hands went to her bare, silky thighs and I spread them open, stepping between her legs and pressing my hardness against her pussy through her panties.

A moan sounded from her lips as I pushed, her eyes closing as she squirmed back against me.

“I need it,” she said, passionate desperation in her tone.

I reached behind her head, taking a handful of her blonde hair into my fist.

“You need what?” I asked, speaking in a low growl as I pulled her head back, exposing the length of her neck.

“I need this inside of me.” Her fingertips fell onto my cock, and she pressed onto my head.

I let go of her hair, her blonde tresses falling over her shoulders. My free hand went to the side waistband of her panties, and, with a quick tug, I ripped the sheer, thin fabric and pulled the panties off her.

She gasped as I tore them, but the way she licked her lips as I stripped her bare let me know that she was more than pleased with what I’d done.

Her pussy was pink and glistening, a neatly trimmed patch of blonde hair above it. She opened up my pants once more, taking my cock out and into her hands.

She brought my head to her opening, rubbing her clit and moaning at the sensation. She was soaked, and I could already imagine what she'd feel like wrapped around me.

Right before I plunged into her, I remembered something.

“Shite.”

“What?”

“Protection.”

She closed her eyes and nodded, as if she didn't want to break the flow of things, but knew we needed to.

“My purse. I have an emergency condom in there.”

“Got it.” I hurried over to the elevator, snatching her purse from where she'd placed it on the way in. That in hand, I rushed back to where she was seated and handed it over. With a quick unzip, she reached in and pulled out a gold-wrapped condom.

“Put it on,” I said.

Her hands moved quickly, and it took no time at all before the condom was unwrapped and she was rolling it down my length. Even the feeling of her putting it on was enough to drive me mad with desire.

She stroked me a few times for good measure once it was on and then guided me right back to her entrance.

“Please,” she moaned. “If I have to wait any longer, I'm going to scream.”

“Oh, you'll be screaming,” I said with a grin.

She placed my head between her lips, and I wasted no time pushing in the rest of the way. I stretched her out as I entered, her wet, warm walls gripping me as I put each and every last one of my inches inside.

She let out a long, pleased moan as I drove inside, her breasts shaking from the collision of our bodies.

I wrapped my arm around her waist, using my free hand to grab onto her thigh and spread her wide open for me. My view was perfect, her body exposed before me, a glance down giving me the sexy sight of my cock pushing into her again and again.

Her pussy was wet and slick, taking me easily.

“Yes,” she moaned as I thrust into her over and over. “Just...just like that.”

Her blue eyes were open wide, her mouth slacked as if she were surprised by the pleasure.

I threw her legs over my shoulders, putting my fists on the stool on both sides of her ass. In this position I was able to drive into her hard, her pussy clenched around my cock.

“Noah,” she moaned. “I’m going to...ahh!” Her walls gripped me even harder as she came, her mouth opened wide in a silent scream of total pleasure.

She dug her nails into my back, my thrusts into her relentless. I leaned in and sucked on her neck, kissing the delicate skin hard as the orgasm flowed through her.

When the climax passed, her arms fell limp to her side. I pulled my cock out of her and stepped back. Still taking heavy breaths, she opened her eyes and looked me up and down.

“You’re not done, are you?” she asked.

I chuckled. “Not even close.”



END OF PREVIEW

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K.C. Crowne is an Amazon Top 10 bestseller.

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