



DEFIANT  
KINGS

# SHAKEN

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
BELLA MATTHEWS

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THE DEFIANT KINGS

BOOK TWO



BELLA MATTHEWS

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# SENSITIVE CONTENT

## Sensitive Content

This book contains sensitive content that could be triggering.  
Please see my website for a full list.

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*Daddy ~ This one's for you.*

*John Kingston's legacy has nothing on the legacy of love you  
left behind.*

Hate is easy. Love takes courage.

— ALVIN SILVERSTAR



# WREN



“Sawyer Kingston is an asshole.” The bitter wind whips off the lake, chilling my cheeks but does nothing to douse the white-hot anger speaking his name causes. I guess some things you never really get over. You may have a momentary lapse in judgment, but reality always comes crashing back down on you.

I grasp my paper cup a little too tightly between my mitten-covered hands and glare at my best friend, Quinn. We’re huddled together on my new front lawn, watching the movers unload the first round of my furniture into the lakeside cottage I’m renting in Kroydon Hills. I haven’t lived here year-round since I was seventeen years old, before I left for college. More accurately, before I ran away. Now, ten years later, I stand here and inhale another deep breath of frigid air rolling off the frozen lake that holds so many memories, and my entire body relaxes, knowing it’s time.

Quinn looks over at the stunning house next to mine and groans. “I said *Hudson* Kingston lives in that house, not Sawyer. And seriously, Wren, just come to the hockey game with me tomorrow. Most of the time, Sawyer’s not even there.”

Quinn’s dad coaches the local pro hockey team, the Philadelphia Revolution, and she’s their office manager, who’s apparently required to attend all the home games. “And honestly . . . would it be the worst thing to see him again? When was the last time the two of you were even in the same

room? High-school graduation?” She nudges my shoulder gently with hers. “Billy Garner’s party after graduation?”

“No,” I whisper a little less dramatically than earlier. “I flew home when their dad died.”

“Oh . . . I forgot about that.” Why would she remember? She wasn’t there, and I never told her about that day. I never told anyone. Guilt is a bitch. “I can’t believe your dad hasn’t retired yet. Every now and then, he takes a meeting in the Revolution offices, and I get a chance to see him.”

My dad has been a senior vice president for King Corp., the Kingston family’s multi-billion-dollar conglomerate which owns the Philadelphia Revolution, for longer than I’ve been alive. He and the late John Kingston went to graduate school together.

When either of them remembered they had families at home, we’d all vacation and celebrate holidays together.

But that was a lifetime ago.

“Come on, Wren. Don’t worry about seeing Sawyer. He never makes it to the hockey games. He’s always working late at his bar. Just come with me tomorrow. It’ll be fun.” She drops her chin and bats her lashes at me with an exaggerated pout. “Please?”

“Fine,” I huff as we step back and out of the way of the large men carrying my couch into the house, nearly tripping on a . . . *What is this?*

I bend down and pick up the chewed-up piece of black rubber. “Is this a dog’s toy?”

Ten seconds later, a brown and white bulldog barrels across the frozen front lawn and screeches to a halt at my feet. Drool drips from its mouth, and big, excited eyes stare up at me as its stubby tail wags so quickly, I think it might be about to take flight. “Well, hello there.” I squat down and pull my mitten off, then offer my hand for the dog to sniff. It must decide I’m safe because a wet, pink tongue licks from the tips of my fingers to the cuff of my sweater. “Aren’t you a cutie?”

I'm nearly knocked over when that same tongue licks the side of my face . . . just seconds before a voice I hear in both my dreams and my nightmares stops me dead in my tracks. "Zeus, come."

The clipped tone grates on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard. But when I raise my eyes to the asshole himself, my heart skips that same damn beat it always has around him.

*Traitorous heart.*

But seriously, he's the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome—a little over six feet, with lean muscles, nearly black hair in desperate need of a cut, endless midnight-blue eyes, and a perfectly trimmed beard I know would feel fabulous against my skin.

Imagine Damon Salvatore but taller . . . *stronger* . . . and more dangerous to your heart.

He loved torturing me as a child.

I loved trying to prove I was smarter than him as a teenager.

*Which, by the way, I was.*

It was all in good fun, until it wasn't.

"Kingston." I stand up and cross my arms.

Okay, so that might have come off as more of a sneer than a greeting. But this is what Sawyer Kingston has always done to me. I'm a nice person. At least to everyone else. I bring babies into the world. People love me. But *gah* . . . this man has always brought out the worst in me.

"Red," he smiles that million-dollar smile of his, all perfectly straight white teeth gleaming back at me, and damn him for looking better now at twenty-eight than the egomaniac did at eighteen. "I heard a rumor you were moving into *our* neighborhood."

*Oh no you don't.* "I'm sorry, *whose* neighborhood?"

His smile grows broader . . . toothier . . . cockier.

*Shit.*

No. *No*. No, no, no.

Sawyer scratches behind Zeus's ears, and the dog's entire body vibrates with excitement. Leave it to him to name his damn dog after the king of the gods. "Didn't Quinn tell you?" He reaches forward and takes the chewed-up rubber out of my hand, then lifts his brows in question at Quinn.

"Tell her what?" she squeaks, and I hold my breath, knowing this isn't going to be good.

"I figured you knew." Sawyer points to the beautiful house to the left of mine. "That house over there is mine. Hudson and I have been buying properties around the lake for a few years, and I thought it was time to move out of my condo and get a little more privacy here." One side of his mouth tips up in a cocky smirk, and my fingers burn with the urge to smack it right off his face. "Looks like we're going to be neighbors."

For a moment, I stand frozen, staring at him.

Then I look from my house to *his* and wonder how hard it would be to ask the movers to pack everything back up and put it in storage. I *could* stay with Quinn for a few more days. A week maybe. Just until I can find another place.

"You okay, Red?" He points at my head and laughs. "You've got a little smoke coming out of your ears."

*Oh hell no.* "Absolutely. I was just thinking how convenient it must be to live two houses down from your brother. When you get scared at night, the big bad MMA fighter can come and check your closets for you. I'm assuming the whole bed-wetting issue has cleared itself up. If not, I could probably prescribe something to help with that."

"It was one time," he bites back, and I smile my best pageant smile at him and *tsk*.

"Whatever you say." I link my arm through Quinn's. "See you later, Sawyer." With a little wiggle of my fingers, I wave goodbye and drag Quinn toward my house. But not before Sawyer gets the last word.

"You can bet on it."

In a move I can only call a momentary case of complete insanity, I turn my head and look back over my shoulder and catch Sawyer—*the asshole*—Kingston watching me walk away. His hand rests on Zeus's head, and his eyes are glued to my ass. I may add a little extra swing to my hips as we walk into my house.

Eat your heart out, asshole.



## Sawyer

Instead of going home, I head across the yard to my brother Hudson's house and let myself in, then clear my throat when I see I'm interrupting him and his wife, Maddie.

"If my tongue's down her throat and my hand's full of her ass, you can feel free to show yourself right back out of the house, man." Hudson lifts his hand and gives me the finger as Maddie buries her face in his neck.

"Sorry, brother." I say the words. Doesn't mean I actually mean them though.

Maddie turns around and rubs her baby bump. "Come on in, Sawyer. Did you eat?"

"Sunshine . . ." my brother whines.

Maddie shakes her head and giggles. "Follow me, boys. I'll make eggs."

"No," I choke. "That's okay, Mads. I'm good." Maddie can't cook at all. She once boiled water for pasta and forgot the stove was on. They had to throw the pot out and repaint the kitchen. Between her and our stepmother, Ashlyn, I'm not sure who's the worse cook. They're both pretty bad. "But I'll grab a cup of coffee, if there's any in the kitchen."

Maddie shrugs. "Suit yourself. It's decaf." She lifts up on her toes, cupping Hudson's cheek, and presses a kiss to his lips. I look away, somehow feeling more like an intruder with that small intimate gesture than I did walking in on them a few minutes ago. "I'm going to get some work done. I'll be in the office if you need me."

Hudson levels me with a glare as I help myself to the remainder of the coffee. "Wanna tell me why I'm standing here talking to you instead of worshipping my wife?"

"Wanna tell me when you decided to rent out the house next door to Wren Davenport? And why the hell didn't you tell me before?" I stood on the side of my house for a good twenty

minutes this morning, watching the movers carrying things into the house, but not knowing whose they were. At least until Wren and Quinn pulled up.

Wren Davenport.

I definitely didn't expect to see her moving in.

A shit-eating-grin spreads across Hud's face. "Guess it slipped my mind."

"Fucker." Hudson and I are only a year apart. But he's always played the part of the annoying younger brother like a pro. "A little warning would have been nice."

"I've been telling you for months, we need to hire someone to handle this shit full-time. Maybe now you'll listen." He grabs a green protein shake from the fridge and chugs it.

"Dude. I'm an MMA fighter, and you own the hottest bar in the city of Philadelphia. We got into the whole lakeside real-estate thing for fun and to make a few bucks. I had no fucking clue it would be as big an undertaking as it is. You're the boy wonder slash business genius. You've got to know we need help, or we need to give up the rentals we've got and stop buying up properties around the lake."

I really hate when he's right.

"Your eye's doing that twitchy thing, so I know you agree with me. You only get twitchy when you don't want to admit I'm right." Hudson and I are kids four and five of a total of nine siblings. We've got two brothers and one sister older than us, then another brother and three sisters who are younger.

He and I have been inseparable our entire lives. He likes to play dumb, but he's far from actually being stupid.

*He's also an observant fucker.*

"Fine. You're right. I'll look into it this week." I chug the rest of my coffee, then put the empty cup in the sink. "But you still should have told me you were renting that house to Wren."



“Does she look as good as she used to? I haven’t seen her in . . . Christ, how many years has it been?”

“Six years,” I fill in. “She came home for Dad’s funeral.”

Hud gets quiet for a minute. John Joseph Kingston looms large over our whole family.

He always has and probably always will.

He took the company his father started and turned it into an international empire. Turning us into Philadelphia royalty in the process. But Dad was no saint. He had four wives, one mistress, and eight kids by the time he died. Our youngest sister, Madeline, was born a few months after we buried him. I wouldn’t say King Corp. mattered most to him. But it was definitely a close tie between the business and us kids. Losing him hit us all differently. I think in some ways, we’re still processing it.

We probably always will.

“So has little Wrenny Davenport grown into that nose?” Hudson asks.

Like there was ever any doubt she wouldn’t.

Wren was always pretty. With gorgeous red hair the color of a summer bonfire and piercing green eyes, there was no question she was going to be striking. But Wren also had legs and an ass for days. Still does. And by the time she hit her early twenties, she had a fantastic rack to go with them. I’m not sure I’ve enjoyed doing anything in my life as much as I did goading her into doing something she shouldn’t.

Until it all changed.

“Yeah. She’s fucking gorgeous,” I groan, picturing her. “And I’ll bet she’s still the prim and proper miss priss she always was.”

“I wonder if anyone ever managed to remove that stick from up her ass,” Hud asks. I smile, remembering exactly what that ass looks like.

Why does that sound like more fun than removing something from someone’s ass should ever sound? Oh

yeah . . . right. Because it's Wren, and torturing her has always been one of my favorite pastimes.

Turns out, fucking her could have been the other.

Before we fucked that up.

# WREN



Saturday morning, I wake up to a text from my older sister and smile. She's a nurse with an organization that travels to third-world countries where she helps educate and care for those in need. We were close as kids, but that changed in our teens. We've been working on that these last few years, but Haley had to work on herself first after a rough few years. Thankfully, she's doing better now.

HALEY

Are you all moved in?

WREN

Yup. Unpacked is a whole different thing. But I'll get there. Eventually.

HALEY

Like it won't drive you crazy to live out of boxes, little Miss Type A.

WREN

We can't all be Miss Free Spirited and enjoy moving from country to country with just one suitcase. Seriously . . . how do you do that?

HALEY

Having too many choices is overrated. You know, Costa Rica isn't that far, sissy. You should come visit me soon.

WREN

Not sure when I'll get vacation time. But I'd love that. On my way to Mom and Dad's house in a few minutes. Miss you.

HALEY

Miss you more. Give the 'rents kisses for me!

WREN

XOXO

I don't remember the last time we were all in the same room together. I think it might have been during the last of Haley's many rehab stays. She asked us to come as part of her therapy. She spent a long time on the *making amends* step. But that was the time it finally worked. Not the forgiveness part. My parents and I forgave her and accepted her years before that. We just wanted her to be okay. Something about that stint in the very expensive rehab facility on the California coast clicked with her, and it was her last one.

She says she hit rock bottom just before that, and that's why she finally turned her life around. I'm not sure what that meant for her because she never shared it with me, but I got my sister back after that. It was a slow process, but she turned her life around. She finished her nursing degree and has traveled the world helping people ever since.

And here I am, back in Kroydon Hills.

God, I hope I made the right decision to come home. There's something to be said about living where no one knows

you. But the pull to come back here was too strong to ignore.

When I step outside later that morning, I'm greeted by a fresh layer of powdery white snow and a slobbery, excited bulldog. I bend down to pet him. "Well, hello there, Zeus." He pushes his face into my hand, and I give him a good scratch as I look around for his equally slobbery owner.

"Where's your human, buddy?" I don't really expect him to answer me, but when his ears perk up and his head tilts to the side, I half think he might. A quick glance around my front yard doesn't yield any signs of the sinfully sexy and ungodly annoying Kingston.

*Thank God.* It's too damn early to deal with that man.

"But how'd you get outside then?" I muse.

After another tilt of the head, Zeus nudges me again, then takes a few steps in the direction of his house. When I don't move, he turns his head toward me and lets out a lazy bark.

"Are you locked out, buddy?" *Seriously?* Am I having a damn conversation with a dog?

I take a few steps behind him and am rewarded with a wet nose against my leg before he trots next to me.

Oh, for goodness' sake.

Fine. This is ridiculous.

I guess I'm walking him to his house.

Zeus pounces along in the dusting of snow covering the stone path that winds through the evergreen trees lining the properties. The stones eventually cut away from the trees, and the rest of Sawyer's house comes into view. It's all glass. Well, not *all* glass. But it seems to be more windows than wood.

It's gorgeous.

*Of course it is.*

Zeus and I walk side by side up to the front door, and I ring the bell, then look at myself in the reflection of the glass-paneled double doors and adjust my wool hat. I may be thrilled to be back in Kroydon Hills, but I did not miss the

snow or this freezing-cold weather when I was in California. Give me sunshine and seventy-degree days every day and you'll have yourself a happy girl.

The chubby dog plops down at my feet, and drool drips onto the doormat.

He's a cutie in his own sort of way.

After what feels like forever, I consider abandoning the dog here before finally giving in and ringing the damn doorbell a second time. I don't have time for this. I'm supposed to be meeting my parents at their house and want to stop by the bakery first.

Just as I check my watch, Zeus's sexy asshole of an owner comes into view through the door's window.

Damn . . .

A white towel is wrapped around lean hips, and droplets of water cling to a beautiful six-pack. Of course, I'm merely observing his body as a medical professional.

Ha.

Even I can't convince myself of that. And when the cocky ass opens his door with a shit-eating grin on his deliciously sexy, and completely full-of-himself face, I'd bet my medical degree he knows exactly what I was just thinking.

He steps aside, and Zeus strolls right past both of us, then disappears down the hall.

Sawyer's eyes travel up from the tips of my toes, slowly taking in every bundled-up inch of my body. "Hey ya, Red. Expecting a snowstorm?"

*Asshole.*

"It snowed last night, Kingston. I'm dressed appropriately." I fight the urge to stomp my cute, booted foot and glare at him instead.

Sawyer shakes his head. "It snowed less than an inch last night—that's nothing. But I guess when you're a West Coast

girl, being transplanted here can be a bit of a shock to the system.”

“I’m not transplanted, and you know it. I was born and raised here.” Okay. So now the foot stomp happens. But in my defense, I didn’t kick him in the nuts like I wanted to.

“Oh, I know it. I just wasn’t sure if you remembered where you came from. I mean, you haven’t been back in how many years? I thought maybe you forgot your roots.” Why . . . why does this man know exactly how to needle me? “Are you renting instead of buying because you’re not sure you’re gonna stay?”

I direct my eyes to the sky and take a calming breath, saying a silent prayer that I don’t kill this man. I’m pretty sure that would violate my Hippocratic oath. *Stupid ethics*. “Not that you deserve to know anything about me, but I’m staying. In fact, I was on my way to my parents’ house to discuss joining my mother’s practice as a full partner.”

Sawyer chuckles. “Nepotism at its finest. Our parents have always been good at that.”

“Fuck. You. Kingston.” My blood boils at his inference that I didn’t earn this position. Like his father didn’t fix his life for him when he needed it. “You were born on third base, just like I was. Don’t act like you hit a touchdown all on your own.”

“Pretty sure you just mixed up baseball and football. But keep going. Watching you lose your shit was always so much fun. It’s definitely worth the pain of listening to you butcher sports references.” He pushes the door open wider and steps aside. “As amusing as this is, it’s getting a bit nippy standing here. You wanna come in and tell me what brought you by this fine morning?”

I. Hate. Him.

“Keep your dog off my yard. And don’t leave the poor thing locked outside in the freezing cold. He needed help getting back in.” There. I said what I came to say. Time to go.

The gorgeous motherfucker starts laughing.

Like, legit belly laughing.

“What’s so funny?” I demand and shove my hand in my pocket so I don’t haul off and punch him. I swear he makes me stabby.

“Oh, Red. If you could only see how cute you are when you’re pissy.” His bottomless blue eyes sparkle with evil mischief, and I swear to God I’d kick his perfect ass if I wasn’t worried about slipping on the ice.

“Fuck off, Kingston. Take care of your dog better than you take care of the humans around you.”

Sawyer’s face freezes, and a mask slips into place. “He’s got a dog door, Wren. Zeus can come and go as he pleases. But he never leaves my yard. I’ve got an electric fence.” He looks over his shoulder, probably looking for Zeus, but that little troublemaker is hiding.

Smart dog.

“Then check your fence because he was in my front yard this morning. If he gets hit by a car, it’ll be your fault for not taking better care of him.” I turn to walk away, but Sawyer grabs my arm, and tingles shoot up my body.

I guess some things never change, no matter how much you wish they would.

“I’ll check the fence. I’m not worried about him on your lawn, but I’d never want something to happen to him. I’m not a monster.” My eyes slice to where his hand grips the forearm of my green puffer jacket, and he lets me go.

“That’s debatable.” I step back. “I’ll see you around, Kingston.”

I act like I don’t hear him when he responds, “Yes, you will,” and walk back to my house, then lock myself in my car, where I may or may not scream.

If no one is there to hear it, it didn’t happen.

Right?

Plausible deniability and all that jazz.



Okay, so I may not have been as sexually active as some of my friends were in my twenties, but I've slept with a few guys. *Is three a few?* I'm going with a few. I've slept with a few guys, not counting my one night with Sawyer.

A single night that doesn't count.

It can't. I won't let it.

Because if it counts, I'm a horrible person and a terrible sister.

So it doesn't count.

Regardless, none of the men I've ever been involved with managed to wake me up the way this man just did with one touch. Why does my traitorous body insist on sitting up at attention from one single touch—through two layers of clothing—when it's his?

I need to fix this.

Because acting on that attention is not happening.

There's got to be a better option.



□

Less than thirty minutes later, I walk into my parents' kitchen and set a Sweet Temptations bakery box on the counter behind my father. "Daddy."

He stands from his chair, a broad smile stretching across his face, and wraps his arms around me. It's comfort and nostalgia and a serene sense of safety I haven't felt in ages all rolled in one. I close my eyes and let my senses fill with the aromas of home. The crisp scent of Dad's Armani cologne. And the fresh smell of Mom's ginger-peach candle she's always burning still lingers in the kitchen. It all has the power to transport me back in time. To a time in my life when everything was easier.

When I decided to go to college in California, I never expected to stay on the West Coast for ten years. Or for those years to fly by so quickly with so few trips back home. But standing here, in my childhood kitchen, it's easy to second-guess things.

I missed this.

I missed *everything*.

Sure, I came home for holidays when I could. So did Haley. But we were rarely all together. My parents flew out to me when either of them found a rare free weekend in their schedules, but that was few and far between. I missed so many little moments.

I was a woman on a mission who refused to settle, and that mission revolved around becoming a doctor. Getting into the best med school, then the best residency, so I could become the best ob-gyn I could be. It was easier to focus all my energy on that rather than everything else, and I did it well.

It meant giving up summers in Kroydon Hills so I could take more classes. Pull more on-call hours in the ER. Volunteer more in the clinic. It meant missing family time. Missing seeing my old friends. My old life.

I left home a bright and shiny, optimistic teenager and came back an exhausted adult, who feels more like she's fifty than a few years away from thirty. And somehow, over the course of ten years, my dad went from being a giant of a man, who could take on the world in my eyes, to an average human. A little older, a little more wrinkled, and a little less invincible.

It doesn't matter that it's Saturday morning. He's dressed in pressed khakis and a sweater like it's casual Friday at the office. Handsome as ever, his salt-and-pepper hair is cut stylishly short, giving him the very George Clooney-esque look he's rocked for the past twenty years. His arms tighten around me until I finally tap his shoulder, wheezing.

"I can't breathe, Dad."

"Sorry, sweetheart." He kisses the top of my head and gives me one more tight squeeze. "I hated that I wasn't here when your flight got in, but I couldn't get out of my meeting in Chicago any sooner." His eyes roam over me. "I've missed you."

"I talked to Haley this morning. She says hi."

"Good. Mom and I are planning on flying down to see her soon. We want to surprise her," he tells me as he offers me a cup of coffee.

I decline and watch him pour himself another instead. "What's your blood pressure these days, Daddy?"

He sips his coffee and tries to give me the stern look that used to work when I was a ten-year-old. "Dad . . ."

"Leave it, Wren. Your mother is already watching me like a hawk." He picks a muffin from the pink bakery box I brought and smiles as he breaks it in half and throws it into his mouth.

"Apparently, not hawk-like enough if you're eating pure sugar, dear." Mom closes the garage door behind her, then leans in and kisses my cheek before she runs her palms over my father's sweater.

Dad swallows his muffin and quirks a brow. "Good night last night?"

“It was a long night.” Mom sighs as she kicks off her clogs. “Twelve babies, five c-sections. But everyone was healthy when I left this morning, so definitely a good shift.” Mom takes the muffin from Dad’s hand and breaks off a piece. “This is really good.” She smiles and presses her lips to his.

He whispers something to her, and I gag.

Well . . . not really. But I definitely want to when his hand slips to her ass. “Excuse me.” I clear my throat. “Some things don’t need to be seen.”

My mother’s laughter bounces off the vaulted ceilings. “Wren, do we need to talk about where babies come from, honey?”

“Very funny, Mother.” I grab my own muffin and sit down on one of the stools at the island in the center of the room. “I’m pretty sure my degree says I’m informed on that particular topic.” I purse my lips and scrunch my nose. “Seeing your parents attempting to make another baby, though, *not so much*.”

She runs her hand over my hair, then tugs. “Let me go shower, and we’ll talk. Okay?”

I nod, then catch my father watching my mother as she leaves the room. He was always so busy with King Corp. while I was growing up, but that never seemed to affect his relationship with Mom. While my friends’ parents were all getting divorced and remarried, my parents were having sex in the laundry room when they thought I wasn’t home. It only takes one time seeing that to make you hesitate to come home from school early.

Back then, it was mortifying.

Now it makes me smile . . . even if I hope to God I go the rest of my life without ever *again* seeing my mother’s tongue down my father’s throat while he’s banging her on the washing machine.



□

Two hours later, Mom and I have read through the contracts her lawyer prepared for us, and she hands me a Mont Blanc pen. “You ready for this?”

I trail my finger over the line awaiting my signature and read over the words one more time. “To be a partner in your practice?”

I bite the inside of my cheek and think about it for a moment.

Am I ready?

Let’s hope so. “I’m pretty certain this is what I’ve spent the past ten years working toward, Mom.”

I sign my name with a flourish and hand her the pen, then watch as she does the same before handing the document to my father to sign as a witness.

I was in shock when she offered to make me an equal partner in her obstetrics and gynecology practice. It’s one of the best in Pennsylvania. I always thought that was the goal. But it was an eventual goal. Not one I was expecting to achieve quite so soon.

When Dad places the contract back in the folder, I’m the only one smiling. “Are you having second thoughts?” I tease.

“No, sweetheart.” Mom sits back in the chair and forces a smile. “I’m just exhausted and so damn proud about this moment.” She tilts her head, and her warm smile loses a little umph. “Not necessarily in that order. I think it’s time for me to go to bed.” She slides a key across the table and stands. “That’s the key to the office. You’ve got about thirty-six hours before your cute little butt is on the clock, kiddo. Go enjoy it. I’ll see you Monday morning.”

“Any chance you could refrain from discussing my cute little butt and calling me ‘kiddo’ while we’re at work, Mom?” I’ve got a hard enough road ahead of me. Mom treating me like a child instead of her equal will definitely make it more difficult to be taken seriously.

She stands and holds my face in her hands. “Oh, honey. Outside the office, you’ll always be my baby. But make no mistake, inside those walls, Dr. Davenport better be ready to show us what she’s made of. I wouldn’t have offered you this opportunity if you hadn’t already earned it.” My mother kisses my cheek, then squeezes my father’s shoulder on her way out of the room.

“How about you let me take your mom and you out to dinner tonight to celebrate?” Dad places the contract inside his briefcase, waiting for my answer, and I cringe.

“I can’t tonight. I promised Quinn I’d go with her to the Revolution game.” I don’t tell him I made the promise begrudgingly or that she basically guilted me into it.

I’m not exactly good at making time for my friends, but Quinn and I have always been the exception. We talked all the time when we were both in college, even when we were on opposite sides of the country. Then when I started med school and she started law school, we implemented *Sunday Night Girl’s Night*. We’d change into our pj’s, pour a glass of wine, and FaceTime for a few hours while we watched whatever show was our latest binge. It gave us time to catch up and decompress.

When she dropped out of law school after her first year, she flew out to California and stayed with me until she was ready to face her father. And when I flew home a week ago, I stayed with her. If anyone can coerce me into doing something I don’t want to do, good or bad, it’s always been Quinn.

“Good. You should go and have fun. Let loose. We can try for dinner next weekend.” Dad’s eyes sparkle as he heads for his home office.

When you’re as much of a control freak as I tend to be, letting loose and having fun aren’t always the easiest things to do. But there’s no need to tell him that.





□

There were definitely a few minutes earlier, when I was trying to figure out what to wear tonight where I considered canceling on Quinn. I could have pulled the *needing to unpack* excuse out and slapped it down, but if I had, she'd have shown up and drug me with her anyway. So, I pulled my big-girl panties on, got dressed, did my makeup and hair, and promised myself to try to have fun tonight.

So far, I'm not impressed.

"How did I let you con me into this?" I hold up the lanyard Quinn handed me earlier, which gives me access to the owner's suite in the Philadelphia Revolution's arena, and glare at the security guard who wasn't going to let me past him.

Quinn smiles warmly at the guard and links her arm through mine. "Thanks, Henry." We take a few steps down the hall, and she shakes her head my way. "Don't act like anyone has ever been able to convince you to do anything you didn't want to do, Wren Davenport." Her black heels clack along the floor while she guides us through the crowd. "It wouldn't kill you to smile either."

"I'm smiling . . ." Quinn's brows lift in question. "What?"

She silently calls me out on my lie with that simple look, and I hold back my huff.

"Okay, so maybe I wasn't smiling, but come on. This is a ton of people to—"

"To what, Wren?" she challenges. "What are they doing to you that's so bad?"

"I was going to say it's a lot of people to deal with." We turn a corner and enter an entire hallway of suites with increased security, and I wonder again what I'm doing here.

Quinn stops us halfway down the hall. "You've been gone a long time, Wren. And I know you've worked really hard to get where you are, and you're *basically* going to be on-call twenty-four seven this next year. But I need you to do me a favor." She tips her head and sighs. "Try to loosen up and have

some fun tonight. I feel like I've just gotten you back. Do it for me."

"Wow. You're the second person to tell me to loosen up today." I cross my arms over my chest, trying to hide my frustration. "You know, it's not like I turned around one day and decided, *Hey, my life should be less fun*. I had to choose between partying and studying because nobody ever said, *Gee, I wish my doctor partied more*." My face flames hotter as each word leaves my mouth. "I'm aware my life is a little . . . boring."

"Oh Wrenny, Betty White has a more exciting social life than you do."

I stare at her, not sure if she's serious or not. "Betty White's dead."

"Yup, and so is your social calendar. You know, having fun won't take away your perfect-daughter badge. I think it's time for a little work-life balance."

"This has nothing to do with being the perfect daughter," I push back, then shut up when the door to the suite opens.

"Wren?" Becket Kingston steps out and looks between Quinn and me just before he pulls me in for a hug.

Damn. I forgot how touchy-feely the Kingston family is.

He lifts me off my feet for a moment before placing me back down and sliding an arm over my shoulder. "I didn't know you were back in town." This man's smile could light up the entire arena. Dark-brown hair and gorgeous blue eyes stare back at me, reminding me of a different Kingston.

I swear, if the men in California were as hot as the men in Kroydon Hills, maybe I *would* have had more fun. "Hey, Becks. Long time, no see."

I'm guided into the suite, where chaos is already underway. Voices emanate from every direction, a tiny toddler screams, and I'm handed a glass of wine, all before Becks leans in and whispers in my ear, "Welcome home, Wrenny."

# SAWYER



Standing in a dark corner of Kingdom and watching a band perform to a packed house is one of my favorite things to do. The room pulses with electric energy I've never experienced anywhere else. Kingdom isn't just my bar. In fact, some might call her my baby, and they wouldn't be wrong. Sinners and Saints, our house band, wraps up their first set of the night, and it's a good night. I can taste it in the air.

Most nights here are good nights, but occasionally something special hits and connects. The right crowd, the right band, the right feeling—the right something. And it's hitting tonight. I'm not sure what *it* is. But I love the energy.

The Revolution won their game earlier, so the fans have started piling in, knowing we're the unofficial bar for the hockey team. It makes sense. My family owns the Revolution and the Kings, so we tend to draw the sports crowds in the city.

But the hockey fans party harder.

And with that thought, I catch sight of my brother Jace and a few of his hockey buddies from college coming through the door. They're at the front of the crowd, followed by Becket and . . . Well, I'll be damned.

Her face is looking down, and she's laughing with Quinn. But there's no mistaking that hair. The light hits it, illuminating the burnished-copper color, just like a penny. It's a homing beacon for me. Always fucking has been.

As if it wasn't bad enough that Wren walked back into my life, now she just walked into my bar.

One fucking day . . . She's been back for one fucking day, and she's already haunting me. Everywhere I turn, awake or asleep, she's there. I had such a vivid dream last night, I had to rub one out in the shower this morning like a thirteen-year-old kid who saw her in a bikini for the first time.

True story.

I spent an entire family vacation in Bermuda doing just that when Wren and her family showed up. She tortured me daily with her teeny tiny bikinis. I remember Becks and Hudson both drooling over Haley, but I only ever saw Wren.

The thing is, she's more beautiful now than she was ten years ago. But I'll bet that goddamned stick is lodged so far up her fucking ass, she feels it every time she takes a step.

It used to be so much fun getting her riled up. Pissed off.

Just enough to get her to let go of her inhibitions.

To forget her carefully constructed plans and have fun.

"What are you doing skulking in the shadows instead of behind the bar?" Becks joins me, leaning against the exposed brick wall, mirroring my stance.

"Just taking it all in, asshole. My staff has it under control." I turn and catch Jace walking our way with a beer in each hand. "Hey, jack-off, how's it going?" Since the little shithead is our youngest brother, we all love to fuck with him. It's a rite of passage he may never outgrow.

"Going good, Huck Finn." Shithead hands Becks one of the beers and tips his chin my way. "These are on the house, right?"

Jace can give as good as he gets. After all, he grew up with six older siblings for most of his life.

"Yeah, smacker. They're on the house. Are your friends over there twenty-one?" I nod over to the crowded corner where a few of Jace's teammates are standing near Wren and Quinn.

“Yup. Everybody’s legal.” He turns to Becks. “So brother, what’s with you and the two ladies you came in with who *aren’t* your girlfriend? Does Kendall know you’re at a bar with other women?”

“Careful,” I whisper loudly. “If you say her name three times, she’ll show up and kill everyone.”

“That’s Bloody Mary, you fucking asshole. Kendall had an event for her law firm tonight. I didn’t have to go, so I figured I’d show my face at the game. It’s been a few weeks since I’ve been to one.” Becks’s girl is horrible. Our sister nicknamed her Medusa at one point, but honestly I’m not sure that’s fitting. Kendall is worse than Medusa. But Becks has been with her for years, so we tolerate her. “And I’m not at the bar *with* Quinn O’Doul. But Wren Davenport . . . That could be a different story.”

I crack my knuckles as I hear Becks say her name.

I don’t like it, and I don’t know why.

Actually, that’s fucking bullshit. She might be an uptight, anal-retentive princess, but she’s sure as shit not gonna fuck me, leave town, then come back ten years later and fuck my brother.

I push off the wall, leaving dumb and dumber behind, and make my way through the crowd. I’m stopped a few times by some regulars who congratulate me on the Revolution’s win. Like I had anything to do with it. That team is my oldest brother’s baby. My name is just one of many on the ownership documents. By the time I make it to where Quinn and Wren are, I’m not sure how much time has passed, but Quinn’s sister, Mackenzie, has joined their duo.

They’ve just downed a shot, and the three of them slam the glasses down on the bar next to a few other empties. Hmm. Guess it’s that kind of night then. “Long time, no see, Red,” I whisper the words in her ear and watch goosebumps rise on her pale flesh.

Or maybe it’s going to be *that* kind of night.

The three ladies all snap their heads up at me, varying shades of surprise on their faces. “What are we toasting, ladies?”

I catch the bartender’s attention. “Drinks are on the house for these three tonight.”

“No,” Wren argues immediately. She turns to my bartender, her cheeks a fiery red. “Please charge the card I gave you.” When she spins back to me, her long hair slaps me in the face, surrounding me with her spicy scent. “I don’t need you to buy my drinks.”

My lips brush her ear, and she sucks in a breath. “No, Red. That was never what you needed me for, was it?”

“Fuck off, Kingston,” she whispers back to me. “I never needed you at all.”

“Fuck off? Or fuck me, Davenport? I seem to remember you enjoyed fucking me once.” Her friends are watching us, but not closely enough to hear our conversation or I’d probably have already gotten a knee to the nuts from Quinn. “You used me good that night, and we both know it.”

Jace and his friends grab the O’Doul sisters’ attention, and Wren steps closer to me. “*We* don’t *know* anything. You *think* you know, Kingston.” Her hand presses against my chest. “You assume. But you aren’t sure.”

The scent of whiskey lingers on her breath as I lean in closer.

“You came on my face twice before you came on my cock that night.” Her green eyes blink as her face flushes, and I *know* I’m getting to her. “And then you came on my cock another two times before you slunk out of my apartment, like a thief in the night. I know what your pussy feels like when it milks my dick. And I know what your orgasm tastes like on my tongue.”

I run my nose up the side of her neck, my cock growing hard in my jeans. “I know what you sound like screaming my name.” I run my hand up the same trail my nose just traveled. “And I know you’re wet, just thinking about it. So go ahead

and lie to yourself all you want, Red. I might not ever be as smart as the high-and-mighty Wren Davenport, but I know you've been thinking about how I fucked you for fucking years. I *know*."

I take a step back and enjoy the dazed look on her face.

"You might not like me, and that's fine. I don't like you either. But you liked how I fucked you. You've compared every dick you've had to mine since that night. I dare you to deny it." With those words, her face goes from flushed to flaming red.

"I was just happy to learn you'd finally found something you were good at besides destroying someone's life, Kingston. Or was that night just a fluke?"

She might as well have just sucker-punched me, but I don't let her see how well the hit connected. "You can find out any time you want. All you've got to do is say the word." I have no clue why I'm taunting her like this, but it's so damn fun.

"And what word would that be?" Her haughty attitude still in place, she closes the distance between us.

"Please," I tell her.

Wren laughs in disbelief. "You want me to beg?"

"No, Red. I want you to ask . . . nicely." Her green eyes spark with a fire so strong, I think she might be about to actually throw that punch, but then she calms herself down and runs her lips over my ear.

"It'll be a cold day in hell before I ever ask you to fuck me again, Kingston. I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you." She straightens her shoulders and purses her lips. "On second thought, maybe you *should* hold your breath. Yeah. You should definitely try that."

She turns around and inserts herself between the O'Doul sisters and is immediately handed a glass of wine as the crowd fills the now-vacated space between us.

Becks moves in next to me with a predatory smirk. "Care to share what that was all about, brother?"



“It’s history, brother. You were never good in that class.” I clap his back. “But leave Wren alone, you got me?”

Becks’s smile grows. “Yeah, man. I’ve got you. But you really think this is a good idea? There’s a whole lot of history there. Even I know that.”

“Not everything is what it seems, Becks. You, of all people, should know that.” I leave him there and make my way to my office, then turn on the monitors and watch the crowd from my sanctuary for the rest of the night.



□

Wren

“What the hell was that?” Quinn asks while Mackenzie argues with Jace Kingston and the guys he introduced as his teammates. Little Jace grew up. Not enough . . . I mean, he’s still seven years younger than me. But the last time I saw him, he was a gangly teenager. He’s filled out since then and has grown at least five inches. Now he looks like the rest of the Kingston family.

Gorgeous.

Damn them.

“Hello . . . ? Earth to Wren.” Quinn snaps her fingers in front of my face, attempting to get my attention while I sip my wine.

“I’m right here. Both feet firmly planted on planet Earth, thank you very much,” I chide.

She doesn’t look amused. “Care to tell me why you and your arch enemy looked like you were about two point five seconds away from finding any flat surface available to screw on?”

If my memory is as good as I know it is, he’s just as good on two feet up against a wall as he was on a flat surface. Not that I’ll be reliving that night any time soon. Although, I may be revisiting it when I get home and grab my vibrator from the charger.

Guilt floods my system. It was easier to act like that night never happened from the other side of the country. Not so much when I’m living right next door. Damn him.

“Would you *please* lower your voice?” I look around at the mass of people, but no one is paying attention to us. Thank goodness for small mercies. “You know how we always were.” I try to play it off, unsure if I’m willing to tell her the whole story.

“You were always at each other’s throats. But you never looked like you were about to get naked on the floor in front of a room full of people before.” She waves her wine around in front of herself and sloshes some on the floor.

Umm, nope. I would not have sex on that floor. It’s filthy.

My mind goes back to the idea of fucking that man against the wall again, and I swear my pussy throbs in response. Good lord, I’ve got to get laid by something that’s not rechargeable.

“I’m not talking about this here, Quinn.” There. Conversation ended.

“Oh my God,” she gasps. “You fucked him.”

My eyes grow wide. “Lower your voice.”

“You fucked Sawyer Kingston,” she practically yells. “What the hell, Wren? When?”

“Yeah, Wrenny. When?” Becket Kingston joins our conversation, and I cringe.

Cringe isn’t a strong enough word.

I’m mortified.

I want to die of embarrassment.

I’m going to kill Quinn.

Actually, screw that. I’m going to kill Sawyer.

Yup. I’m going to torture him, then dismember him. *Slowly*. While I tell him the name of every bone and muscle, just so I can remind him I did better in biology than he did, the fucker.

“Becket Kingston, I know your father taught you better than to ask a lady something like that.” That might have worked at some point in my life, but that point is long forgotten and so are Becks’s manners.

He laughs . . . in my face. Much like his brother did this morning. Damn these men.

“Nice try, Wren. But I stopped trying to live up to my father’s expectations a long time ago.” A smile stretches

across his face, and it's like I'm staring at the Cheshire cat from *Alice In Wonderland*. Creepy. And maybe high. "You should give it a try."

"Becket, are you high?" I demand.

"Nice try, little bird. But I'm stone-cold sober, and you and my brother are hiding something. Not sure if you remember, but we don't have secrets in my family." What the hell? He's enjoying this a little too much.

"Good thing I'm not in your family. You want answers, go talk to your brother. It's getting late. I'm going home."

"Maybe *you* should talk to him," Becks pushes back, and my last thin thread of tolerance for people frays and snaps.

That's it. I'm done.

I turn back to Quinn. "Are you staying or coming with me?"

"Let's roll." Always my ride or die. She taps Mackenzie on the shoulder and tells her we're out of here.

"Night, Becks." I'm not sure why, but I kiss his cheek, then look around one more time before the three of us slide into the back of an Uber and head home.

Quinn has the decency to wait until after we've dropped Mackenzie off before she resumes her interrogation.

"Spill it, Wren. What the hell was that back at Kingdom? I've never seen you and Sawyer go at it like that."

"You haven't seen us go at it since we were kids, Quinn." I cross my legs and lean back against the seat. "Things change."

"Not everything. You two still can't stand to be in the same room together. And there's no way there wasn't something else going on there tonight." She lowers her voice, and hurt flashes in her eyes. "Don't lie to me, Wren. That's not us."

Guilt hits me straight in the chest. "I'm sorry. I never meant to lie. I just didn't want to tell you when it happened. I guess I didn't want you to think less of me. It wasn't my finest night."

“Wren . . .”

I think back on that day. I’d flown home for John Kingston’s funeral.

Emotions were running so high.

# WREN



## *Six Years Ago*

*“I know, Mom. I’ll be there. I’ll meet you at the church.” If this damn Uber ever shows up.*

*“Honey . . .” My mom can’t hide the annoyance in her tone. “This is why you should have flown in yesterday.”*

*“Mom. Stop. I changed in the bathroom, and I’ll be at the church in a half hour.” She sighs, and I swear to God I want to scream.*

*“If anyone asks, your sister couldn’t get away from school long enough to come home.”*

*Mom never stops making excuses for Haley. She’s been out of rehab for over two years, but she doesn’t want to come back to Kroydon Hills. That’s her choice. I’m not sure why my mom insists on keeping it some kind of secret.*

*“Yeah, Mom. I know.”*

*I caught the red-eye last night so I could be home for John Kingston’s funeral today, and I’m catching another red-eye tonight, so I don’t miss any classes tomorrow. My sister can’t drive a few hours to get here, but apparently, being a few minutes late after flying across the country is unacceptable.*

*“Mom,” I cut off whatever she’s saying that I’ve already tuned out. “I think I see my Uber. I’ll see you soon. Love you. Bye.”*

*I slide into the back seat. “Hi. How long will it take to get to the cathedral?”*

*The driver looks at his screen and tells me it'll take twenty-seven minutes.*

*"Thank you." I unzip my carry-on and search for my black, patent-leather heels, then slip them on, and dig out my makeup case so I can try to make myself look as presentable as possible. Not the best I've ever looked, but it'll have to be good enough.*

*Once we get to the cathedral, I grab my bag, get out of the car, and look up at the long, daunting marble stairs in front of me, second-guessing my choice in shoes. Maybe heels weren't the best move.*

*People are mingling at the bottom of the steps, and Sawyer and a few of his siblings stand at the top near the doors. His sisters, Scarlet and Lenny, are speaking to and consoling guests as they leave the church, while Sawyer and Hudson stand behind them, looking stoic and not saying a word.*

*I guess the viewing is over and the service is starting soon.*

*I slowly and carefully climb the steps and hug the girls first. "I'm so sorry."*

*"Thanks for coming, Wren. I think we're about to head inside," Scarlet tells me as Hudson wraps an arm around Lenny and guides her through the doors.*

*My eyes dart to Sawyer, who hasn't looked up yet.*

*I haven't seen him much during the four years since I left Kroydon Hills, but I follow his socials and know what he's been up to. He's become so successful for a twenty-two-year-old, I'm constantly blown away but not surprised.*

*"Thanks, Scarlet. I'll be in, in a second."*

*She looks between Sawyer and me and nods her head. Everyone knows we have more of a hate/hate relationship than a love/hate one, but today . . . Today, I push that all aside. I want to be here for him. Scarlet walks into the church, leaving Sawyer and me alone on the steps.*

*I drop my bags, and without any forethought to my own sense of self-preservation, I walk into his personal space and*



*wrap my arms around his waist. "I'm so sorry, Sawyer. I know how much your dad meant to you."*

*I bury my face against his black suit coat and realize what a dumb move this probably was, just before Sawyer's strong arms wrap around me, and his chin rests on my head. "I just can't believe he's gone," he answers in a watery voice, and his hold on me tightens.*

*We stand there in silence for a few minutes, holding each other in a way we never have, and something about it feels oddly normal.*

*Like we aren't the same two people who fought like cats and dogs to be valedictorian of our senior class. The captains of the boys and girls swim teams, who bickered over whose team was better. Like he wasn't the same asshole who dared me to jump off Kroydon Falls into the lake below, then laughed when I came up for air and my bikini top was missing.*

*And that was before everything changed.*

*None of that matters now.*

*Right now, we're just Sawyer and Wren.*

*Two people who've known each other our entire lives.*

*Even though I wouldn't call him a friend, he's hurting. And that, by itself, hurts my heart.*

*I let my hands trace the planes of his back, sliding them up and down and attempting to soothe him. I'm not sure if it's working, but it's definitely having an unexpected effect on me. I force myself to stay put until Sawyer drops his hands. He runs them over my hair, then picks up my bag for me.*

*"We better go inside before they start the mass without me." Sawyer places his palm on the small of my back, and a small tremble runs down my spine.*

*He walks me to the pew where my parents are seated, which is across the aisle from where his siblings sit. I kiss my parents and sit down, but my eyes are drawn to where Sawyer takes his place between his siblings. They're seated oldest to youngest, starting with Max and ending with Jace.*

*A small Kingston army. They've always been so tightly knit, and I've always envied that.*

*To know you have these people who will always stand by you.*

*Who will always love you.*

*Who will always know you better than you know yourself.*

*That will never be Haley and me.*



## Sawyer - 6 Years Ago

*Offering to have the luncheon at my restaurant after Dad's funeral seemed like a no-brainer at the time. Closing the place for the day and hosting what seems like the entire city of Philadelphia might not have been so bad if I wasn't trying to keep myself busy. I'm not sure whether I've stopped moving since we got here, even though my manager has it completely under control.*

*But maybe that's a good thing. No time to stop means no time to think.*

*Not about the argument I had with Dad the day before he died.*

*Not about the fact that my newest stepmother, Ashlyn, is pregnant with a baby who'll never know our dad, or the way Max stepped up as Jace's guardian. Lenny's already got her ticket for the first flight out of here tomorrow so she can get back to Cambridge. And forget about the fact that Dad's lawyer informed us the other day there's a long-lost sibling of ours out there somewhere.*

*It feels like our family is falling apart.*

*"Hey." A glass of red wine is placed in front of me, and the spicy scent I've only ever known to belong to Wren Davenport envelops me. She stands in front of me in a standard black funeral dress. It has a big, open neckline and shows off just a hint of her chest and her tiny little waist before the skirt flares out around her legs. She's got that perfect hourglass figure that could bring a man to his knees. "How are you feeling?"*

*I look around us and realize people have started leaving, then take the offered wine. "Thanks. It's been a long day."*

*She smiles a sad smile. "I'm sure it has. Everyone who's anyone in Philadelphia society came out to pay their respects today." She looks around the dining room, then back to me, and leans in and whispers, "I doubt half these people even knew your dad, or that he actually liked most of them. John*

*wasn't exactly the most welcoming to outsiders." She laughs, but then she realizes what she just did and stops.*

*I grip the delicate, soft skin of her shoulder and trace the freckles there, then smile for the first time all day. "Have I ever told you how much I love your laugh?"*

*I can answer my own damn question.*

*No. I haven't.*

*We don't say nice things to each other.*

*We never have.*

*Maybe it's time to fix that.*

*The crazy electricity zapping between my palm and her skin should make me pull back. But as I take in the overwhelmingness of today, I don't think, and I don't fight.*

*Instead, I lean in and tuck a lock of her thick, copper hair behind her ear. "Wanna get out of here? I'm over dealing with people today."*

*"You said the magic words. I'm definitely peopled out." Her green eyes shine with a glint of excitement, like I'm daring her to do something she shouldn't, before she holds her hand out for me. "Where to?"*

*"Do you trust me?" I question.*

*"Absolutely not." She doesn't hesitate. "But you're kinda cute when you're pitiful, so lead the way."*

*Absolutely not.*

*And she shouldn't.*

*Never trust a liar.*

*"Pitiful?" I take her hand in mine and ignore the attraction surging between us, then tug her along behind me through the kitchen. I stop at the back door and shake my head at the beautiful smile on her face. "I'm not pitiful," I insist, even if it's a lie. Leave it to Red. "Always gotta call me out on my shit, huh?" I pull her through the door, then crowd her against the wall of the building in the alleyway behind it.*

*She tentatively touches my cheek, and my cock jumps behind my suit pants.*

*“I’m always going to call you on your shit, Kingston. This tentative truce we’ve got going on today doesn’t negate that.” Her pink tongue comes out to wet her lips, and I groan, having no clue what the fuck I’m doing.*

*“Tentative truce, huh?” I drag my eyes over her face and down the lines of her body. “Is that what we’re doing?”*

*Wren laughs again. “I don’t have any idea what we’re doing, Kingston. But you promised to get me out of here, and so far, we’re standing in an alley.”*

*“Is that all you want, Red? A tentative truce and to get out of here?” I run my hand over her long hair, then wrap it around my fist and tug until she tilts her head.*

*“What are my options?” she asks deviously.*

*“See those stairs?” I point to the metal staircase that leads up to the apartment above the restaurant, and she nods. “That’s my apartment.” I trail my finger over the freckles dotting the hollow of her throat.*

*“You were never good at listening to directions, were you, Kingston?” Her green eyes challenge me to deny it. But she’s right. I hate being told to follow directions or color in the damn lines. Call it middle-child syndrome.*

*She lifts her chin higher, and for some reason, that simple movement makes my cock ache.*

*“I asked. For options.”*

*Fuck it.*

*I slide my hands to either side of her face and drag my thumb over her plump bottom lip, then hesitate.*

*What am I doing?*

*I don’t have a chance to answer my own question because her lips crash against mine, like a tidal wave crashing against the shore. Strong and sure and powerful. She tastes like cherry wine and bad decisions, but God, I want more.*

*I palm the back of her head and press her against the brick building. My body no longer just crowding hers. Not now. Not when I want to own her in this moment. I lean into her, grinding my cock against her expensive dress, and she gasps, opening her mouth to mine. I push my tongue inside. Tasting. Taking.*

*Our hate mixes with lust, and the combination temporarily wipes away my grief and guilt.*

*My free hand slides from her hip up to her tits, and Wren moans into my mouth before she pulls her head back. "I still hate you, Sawyer Kingston."*

*"Let's see if a few orgasms change that, Red."*





## *P*resent Day - Wren

By the time I finish telling Quinn the story, we're a few glasses of wine in, sitting on my couch, and we're both a little drunk.

Okay, so I'm a little—but Quinn's a whole lot—drunk.

“And then what?” she asks as she sits up on her knees, and I shrug.

“And then he made me come . . . a lot,” I tell her as I stare through the windows at Sawyer's house. “Seriously, Quinn. It was the hottest sex I've ever had. Why did it have to go hand in hand with the biggest asshole I've ever known?”

“He's not that bad, Wren.”

“Yes. He is. Don't get dickmatized.” I blow out a frustrated breath.

“Dickma-what?” she asks.

“Dickmatized.” I wait a second for her to pick up on it, but she's obviously more drunk than I am. “You know . . . hypnotized by good dick? Come on, Quinn. Catch up.”

My best friend snorts out her wine, like the lady she was raised to be, and laughs so hard, she can't breathe. “That's great. If I ever touch another dick before my vagina shrivels up and dies from lack of use, I'm totally using that.”

I nod slowly. “Sure, girl. You go for it.” She's not even going to remember this conversation in the morning, judging by the empty bottle of wine. I've only had one glass, and between that and the shots at the bar, I'm feeling it. She's bound to be passed out and snoring any minute.

She lifts the bottle of Pinot and attempts to refill her glass. “Do you have any more of this?”

“Let me check.” I grab the bottle from her and walk through the house into the kitchen. Unsurprisingly, when I walk back into the room to tell her that was the only one, she's

passed out on my couch. I nudge her shoulder. “Come on, Quinn. Come sleep in my room.”

“Promise not to try any funny business on me? I love you, but this girl needs to be dickmatized,” she tells me through half-open lids.

“I think I can hold myself back, babe.” Besides, after sparring with Sawyer tonight and then filling Quinn in on what actually happened, I don’t know if even my favorite vibrator could bring me any relief.

I need the real thing.

The only problem is, the real thing lives next door and isn’t even an option.

He can’t be.

# SAWYER



I ignored the buzz of my phone the first time it chimed Sunday morning.

I ignored it the second, third, and fourth times too. I knew it would be my family. No one else would ever text at the ass-crack of dawn on a Sunday. And if it was actually important, they'd call. Hell, if it's really important, they'd let themselves inside my house without thinking twice about it.

My family is as codependent as they come. All of us. Brothers and sisters. We're not sexist in the least. We're all up each other's asses, and we're all nosey as shit.

I grab my glasses from the nightstand, then snag my phone, not at all surprised to see I was right.

MAX

Family dinner tonight at my house. Five o'clock.

SCARLET

Bless you. I am not hosting this week.

BECKS

Ordering takeout getting harder by the week, Scar?

SCARLET

Talk to me when you have a six-year-old, a two-year-old, a five-month-old, and an organization to run, Becks. Oh wait . . . Can Medusa even reproduce?

LENNY

Ha ha ha . . . Medusa. Please don't let her be the mother to my future nieces and nephews.

BECKS

Who says I even want kids?

SAWYER

I may have compared her to Bloody Mary last night.

BECKS

Was that before or after you practically fucked Wren Davenport in the middle of the bar?

JACE

Seriously, brother, why bother dating Medusa if you can't even remember what sex looks like. Our boy was balls deep in sexual tension, but he wasn't almost balls deep in her.

AMELIA

I find it hard to believe Sawyer was about to bang someone in public. Now Jace, on the other hand . . .

JACE

I'm not sure if I should be offended or complemented by that. But since you're not wrong, I'm gonna go with complemented.

HUDSON

Haha . . . you said bang.

MAX

You were about to bang little Wren Davenport?

BECKS

Didn't you see her at the game last night? She's not so little anymore.

JACE

You're talking about her boobs, right? Do you think they're real?

SCARLET

You're a pig, Jace.

JACE

Oink, oink, Scar.

SAWYER

I wasn't about to bang anyone in public or private. Can we drop it?

LENNY

Not anyone?

AMELIA

They make prescriptions to help with that, Sawyer.

SAWYER

I give up.

HUDSON

Never give up, brother. I'll hold your hand at the doctor's office if you're scared.

SAWYER

Remind me why I put up with you all.

SCARLET

Because you love us.

LENNY

Because you don't have a choice.

BECKS

Because you'd be bored without us.

SCARLET

I'll bring the wine, Maximus. We're going to need a lot.

LENNY

Me too. We always need a lot.

HUDSON

I've got the beer covered.

JACE

I'm a broke college kid. I'll bring a big appetite.

LENNY

You're a billionaire, dumbass.

JACE

Shh. Don't mess with my thing, Len.

LENNY

Your thing? Eww.

ASHLYN

Madeline and I will bake some cookies.

MAX

No. Don't worry about it. Just bring you and Madeline. That's all we need.

AMELIA

I'll grab a box from the bakery. You don't have to do that.

SAWYER

Yeah. Let Amelia bring some from the bakery. She owns it. We might as well mooch off her.

HUDSON

Agreed.

SCARLET

You're all a bunch of scared little bitches. I think what everyone is too big of a baby to tell you is that we're not quite over the food poisoning from the last time you and Madeline made cookies, Ashlyn.

ASHLYN

Oops. Sorry about that.

HUDSON

Oops, she says. I spent forty-eight hours in the bathroom. I may never eat another cookie again unless I need to cut weight for a fight. That shit was fucked up, no matter how cute my little sister is or how much she likes to make them.

MAX

Stop your bitching. Five o'clock at my house. Don't be late.





| | |

Trip, walking into my backyard that afternoon.

Am I looking at Wren's house instead of watching where I'm going?

Of course, I fucking am.

Why?

Because there was never a time growing up when she was near me that I wasn't obsessed with her. We were combustible, even as kids. Why would that change now?

I may have dared her to steal a bottle of champagne from our parents on New Year's Eve when we were eleven . . . no, twelve years old. But that's not how she remembers it.

She'd tell you that was the night I stole her first kiss. I didn't steal it. She gave it. Willingly, I might add. Well, that might actually have been another dare, but she could never pass up a dare. Wren always had to one-up me. If I did something, she'd do it better. Or at least insist her way was better.

*Most of the time, it was.*

Not that I'd ever tell her that.

Even then, she had a spark about her I've never come across anywhere else.

She's magnetic, albeit a bit prickly.

People used to say she was stuck-up. The girls in school used to think she was a bitch because she was quiet and prettier than them. But she wasn't. She just didn't like big crowds or fake people. She'd loosen up when she was with people she knew. She'd loosen up with me. She was still bitchy, but with me, that was on purpose.

Then that changed.

So why the fuck does my damn dog like her so much?

I came out here looking for Zeus. As far as I can tell, the electric fence is working fine. But somehow, he keeps finding

his way into her yard. Guess I'm turning the doggy door off. At least until he realizes he's fraternizing with the enemy.

Ha. She'd love to hear that.

"Zeus," I call out as I cross the property line and find her sitting bundled in a blanket on a white Adirondack chair, looking out at the lake. A black puffy pom-pom hat covers the top of her head, and a cup of something steaming hot is in her hands. Her legs are tucked underneath her, and the blanket is wrapped around her body. She shouldn't look so pretty, but prickly or not, she's always taken my breath away. Sometimes that's because she's just kneed me in the nuts, though, so I tread carefully.

The steam from the mug wafts up, and Wren smiles a contented smile . . . until she sees me. Then the smile gets replaced by a sour pucker, like she just sucked a lemon. "Still haven't gotten your fence fixed yet, I see."

"It's been twenty-four hours since we talked about this. Sorry if I haven't had a service out to the house just yet. Some of us have jobs, Red." Her pale-pink cheeks tinge red so damn fast, but I don't give her a chance to answer. "I checked the system myself yesterday, and it's fine. There must be a dead zone somewhere, but I don't know where yet." I move next to her and watch Zeus play in the snow. "Is he bothering you?"

"No," she snaps. "He's a sweetheart. Unlike his owner."

He brings her his ball and drops it at her feet before he nuzzles her leg.

"He's obviously a little ladies' man too. *Again*, unlike his owner," she challenges.

I squat down and grab the ball, then toss it down toward the lake. "You already know there's nothing little about his owner."

Her eyes follow me as I stand back up and cross my arms over my chest.

She rolls her lips over her teeth, then tries to act unaffected. "Obviously, you remember that night in more vivid detail than I do, Kingston."

“Well, I wasn’t the one who snuck out, so I guess I have less reason to—”

“I did not sneak out. I told you I had to catch a red-eye back.” She places her mug on the side table next to her and stands up, shoving a hand against my chest. “It was my second year of med school. I couldn’t miss my classes. I had to leave.”

“You could have woken me up before you left. Why are you back? Did you get bored of the West Coast and their laid-back attitudes? Not uptight enough for you?”

“Do you ever listen when someone else is speaking?” She pokes my chest with the tip of her bare finger.

“No gloves today?” I tease just to see the fire in her eyes flame.

“My tea was keeping me warm before you interrupted my peace and quiet.” She pokes me again, and I smile, pissing her off more. “I know you love the sound of your own voice, but pay attention because I already told you this yesterday. I’ve joined my mom’s practice as a partner. I start tomorrow. And for your information, I didn’t have time to get bored in California. I went to school, I studied, and I worked. That’s the life of a med student, a resident, and a doctor, asshole. I know you understand those words. As much as you like to act like it, you’re not stupid, Sawyer, and you know what hard work is.”

Her eyes sharpen, and a weird fucking expression crosses her face. “What about you?”

“What about me?” I repeat, just to fuel whatever flame is pissing her the hell off.

“Aren’t you bored yet? How challenging is it to still run Kingdom? Because the Sawyer Kingston I knew loved a challenge and got bored easily.” She eyes me skeptically, then keeps going. “You got bored in all areas of your life, if I remember correctly.” She cocks her head to the side and appraises me, suddenly curious, like one of those creepy dinosaurs before it attacks.

What the fuck?

“You could never keep a girlfriend back then. Not because they wanted to break up but because you were bored to tears. Are you still going through women faster than the drive-thru at Taco Bell?”

“You really have been gone a long time. That drive-thru takes forever these days.” But a taco sounds pretty good right now. “And I don’t have time to be fucking my way through Kroydon Hills, Red. I’m a little old for that. I think we both are.” Then, just to be a bigger dick, I add, “Between Kingdom and the lakeside real estate, I’ve got no time left to find someone worth the hassle.”

The thought hits me like a bolt of fucking lightning from above . . . And she’ll either castrate me out here on her frozen fucking lawn, or I’m going to need to skip the family dinner tonight.

Not sure which option is the better one.

But I’ve never backed down where this woman is concerned. I wrap my hand around the delicate, ivory skin of her neck, and instead of freezing, Wren steps into me, curious. “It doesn’t sound like either of us has much time for extracurricular activities, Red.”

“No.” Her green eyes narrow as they meet my heavy gaze. “It doesn’t, does it?”

Here goes nothing. “Maybe we could help each other out with that . . .”

“But I don’t like you,” she whispers as my thumb runs along her racing pulse.

I lean my head down so our lips are barely a breath apart. “I don’t like you either.”

Lies. Complete and utter lies.

My lips ghost over hers before she drops her blanket and throws her arms around my neck.

“This is just sex,” she insists as I slide my hand down to palm her ass.

“Just sex.” I lift her from the frozen ground, and she wraps her legs around my waist. “Do you have condoms in your place?”

“I haven’t had sex in two years, so if I do, they’re expired.” She pants and grinds against my erection, and I move to get us inside my house as fast as possible before I prove my brother right and fuck her out here in public.

I ignore all the reasons why this is a bad fucking idea.

Forgetting all the baggage that stands between us, I kick open my back door.

“Well, let’s fix that.” I walk inside, letting the door slam shut behind me as Wren pushes out of my arms.

She pulls her hat off and runs her fingers through her thick hair, and as I move for her again, she stops me with another hand to the chest. “Wait. We need to get a few things straight first. First of all, I don’t need to be fixed.”

“And there’s the Wren I know,” I groan.

She pushes against my chest with her right hand, but when I don’t move, she squeezes my pec and bites down on her lip. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“It means I should have known you agreed too easily.” I reach for her hips and squeeze.

Wren rolls her eyes. “We need rules.” She places her left hand on my other pec and squeezes both, then pulls my thermal over my head.

I fucking love a woman who knows what she wants and takes it.

Her fingers trace the black lines of my ink, and her eyes follow the trail. “Is this a one-time thing, or are we allowed to use each other whenever we want?”

I slide my hands along her cool skin under the black, slouchy sweater. “Do you need a contract drawn up, Red?”

“No, dumbass. But if you’re fucking me”—she unbuckles my belt and leaves it hanging—“I’m the only one you’re

fucking. I've been told a few times this weekend I need to loosen up." The top button of my jeans pops open next. "And I think you could help with that. But that's all this is."

Wren takes a step back and waits.

I kick off my sneakers and shove them aside, then push up her sweater but stop before it uncovers her bra. "This might be the only time we ever agree on anything."

She lifts her hands over her head, and I tug her sweater off, adding it to our growing pile of clothes. "No talking about family. Yours or mine."

"If you're thinking about either of our families right now, then we're doing something seriously wrong."

"One more thing," she tells me as she stands in front of me in a sheer black bra that looks X-rated. Her no doubt expensive lace does nothing to hide her nipples but sits in stark contrast against her pale skin.

She shimmies out of her black leggings, and *fuuuuck* . . . her black thong matches her bra.

Sheer. Silk. Lace. It covers a tiny strip of soft red hair, and my mouth fucking waters.

"Kingston . . ." She lifts my chin with her fingers. "Eyes up here."

"You've got ten seconds, Red."

"No kissing." My head snaps up involuntarily, and she takes another step back.

"What?" I ask, not liking this new rule.

She puts more space between us. "No kissing. It's too intimate. And this isn't about intimacy. I don't like you."

"I don't like you either, but you better fucking believe my mouth is about to get real fucking intimate with your pussy." I prowl toward her, *hungry*.

Wren twists her head to look for an escape. "No kissing on the lips." She thinks for a second then adds, "On the mouth, smart-ass."

“Fine,” I tell her. “Run.”

The color vanishes from her face. “What?”

I pick her up and throw her over my shoulder, smacking her bare-ass cheek. Hard. My dick jumps at the image of my palm print on her pale skin as I start walking toward my stairs. “Here’s *my* rule. You do what I say, when I say.”

She pinches my ass, then lifts her head as her red hair falls around her face. “Excuse me?”

“Trust me,” I tell her.

“I’ve never trusted you, Kingston.” She pinches me again. “We’ll see how this works.”

I take the steps two at a time, walk into my bedroom, then kick the door shut behind me. No need to have Zeus wander in. Wren weighs nothing in my arms, and I carry her to the bed and drop her down, then watch her perfect fucking tits bounce.

Not one thing is fake about them.

“You can stop at any time, Red. But trust me or not, you’re gonna enjoy this.” I pull my belt from the loops, and her eyes grow wide.

“Umm . . . Sawyer?” she whispers with a smile growing on her face. “Am I going to need a safe word?”



# WREN



*M*y skin buzzes with excitement, and I lean back on my arms, waiting for Sawyer to answer me.

I can't believe I'm doing this.

Guilt tugs at me, but I ignore it.

There's a time and a place. And right now, all I want to focus on is what feels good.

I really can't believe he spanked me.

I seriously can't believe I liked it.

But oh my God, I definitely liked it.

He told me to *run*. Did he really want me to?

"Red." His voice is deep and rumbly and commanding.

I bite down hard on my lip and try to focus.

"Have you ever had a safe word before?"

Shit. Right. I asked him a question.

What was my question? What was *his* question?

My head spins, but it's in such a good way. My blood feels warm coursing through me, and my mouth waters. This man looks incredible. Better than he did the last time I saw him naked. The tattoos are a new addition, and they highlight his beautifully sculpted swimmer's body perfectly. He's all lean strength and confidence. I hate that it's so sexy and love that I'm so turned-on.

But wait . . . his question. *My question*. A safe word.

“No,” I answer hesitantly. “I’ve never had a safe word.”

“Do you want one?” Sawyer asks, still standing in his unbuttoned jeans with his chest on display. How the hell does he expect me to think straight like this?

I’ve studied the human anatomy. I can name all the muscles, ligaments, and bones. But they never looked like him. “I think I’d like to see if I like having a need for one.”

His predatory smile grows, and I almost wish I didn’t like it. But screw that. If I’m going to have fun. I want to have all the fun I can, without the drama that goes with being in a relationship.

“Get on your hands and knees, Red.” Even the rasp in his voice is sexy. Ugh. I do not like this man.

“Why?” I ask before thinking better of it. Hmm . . . or maybe I just want to see how he punishes me.

“Because I told you to. That’s the rule.” He snaps his belt, and a shiver runs down my spine. “Knees. Now.”

Oh. Shit.

I turn over onto my hands and knees and look over my shoulder, then shiver at the glint in his navy-blue eyes.

Sawyer drags the leather belt along my bare skin, and my nipples pucker behind the lace of my bra. “Pick a safe word, Red. Something you’ll remember. Something you feel comfortable saying. And something you won’t confuse or say without meaning it.”

“Dandelion,” I tell him without overthinking.

“The flower?” Sawyer growls and waits for my nod. He rolls his lips over his teeth and sucks in a breath when I give it to him. “Okay. Dandelion it is.”

His belt hits the floor as he mutters, “We’ll work up to that.” A second later, I feel the mattress dip under his weight, and the smooth skin of his palm cups my ass seconds before he spansks it. Harder than last time.

I can't find my voice, or my breath, or my thoughts as I cry out in an exciting mix of pleasure and pain. My senses heighten as my body vibrates and my pussy floods.

Sawyer runs his palm soothingly over the spot he just spanked, and I momentarily think I shouldn't like this. But that thought flies right out the damn window when he smacks the other cheek. I moan and shudder, and stars burst in front of my eyes at the sharp sting.

Holy hell. Who decided spanking during sex should be a thing?

Because I'd like to thank them.

This happens two more times before Sawyer's hand is replaced by his mouth and his teeth and his tongue. Kissing and touching, licking, and nipping my hypersensitive skin. Running his hands up my sides and under my bra. Shoving the cups up and squeezing my breasts that already feel too tight. Teasing me. Tasting me. Leaving me aching for so much more than what he's giving me.

Momentarily forgetting how much I hate this man. I whimper and bite my tongue before I can beg for more.

But of course, that's what Sawyer wants. "Do you like that, Red?"

His voice is sinful and needy and dripping with sex.

I whimper, wanting more, but don't answer.

"Words, Red. I need to know if you liked it. I need to know if it made you wet."

I look over my shoulder and shudder. "There are other ways to find out if I'm wet, Kingston."

He snaps the string of my thong against my throbbing clit, and I cry out. "Yes. I liked it. God, yes. It made me so wet."

I'm rewarded when he buries his face against the lace of my panties, sucking my clit through the sheer material.

I drop my head to the bed and mewl as I push my hips back, searching for more. For relief. For the rush of the

promised orgasm that's building like a storm, ready to pull me under. Strong, urgent strokes of his tongue get me so close to the promised euphoria before he rips my panties from my body and flips me over on my back.

He throws my legs over his shoulders and traces a long finger around my clit before pushing it inside me. When he looks up with those sinful eyes, the urgency in them dies, replaced by a lazy, cocky confidence.

Long, flat strokes of his tongue edge me closer while he finger-fucks me.

I reach down and run my fingers through his soft, dark hair, then tug and tilt my hips. Inpatient and needy.

This man may have the makings of a god in bed, but I know the female anatomy, and there's nothing wrong with helping him find my G-spot. And oh my, the vision of him between my legs is definitely one I'll be revisiting again and again when I'm alone.

Sawyer pushes down on my clit with his tongue just as he presses another finger inside me and pushes against that rough spot that most men think they find but rarely do.

Of course, *this man* knew where it was without my help.

If I thought I saw a glimmer of stars earlier, it was nothing compared to the meteor shower dancing in front of my vision as a violent orgasm rips through me.

"Oh my God," I pant as I try to catch my forgotten breath while Sawyer licks and kisses and sucks his way up my body. Sending aftershocks coursing through me again and again.

He leans over to his nightstand and opens the drawer, sending his charging phone crashing to the floor. "Fuck."

My happy little afterglow vanishes with that one word. "What's wrong?"

"I'm late for dinner at Max's house," he groans, pained.

"Oh." I sit up, not wanting to be the reason he misses dinner. "Okay. Well, I guess you better go then. Thanks for the orgasm."

Sawyer surprises me when he chuckles. It's a deep sound that vibrates through my body. I like it—not that I'd ever tell him that. “Thanks for the orgasm?”

“Yup. Have fun at dinner.” I pick up my bra and panties and slide them both back into place. “This was fun. We should do it again.”

“New rule,” he states like a lawyer might . . . or a little boy who's mad that someone took his toy away. “The night's not over until we're both satisfied.”

I shrug. “Guess next time you better cancel your plans then.” He doesn't need to know I plan on wearing out the charge on my vibrator today picturing his face buried between my legs.

“I can still cancel my plans tonight, Red.” His husky voice deepens when he stands and okay, so my mouth might water a bit at the incredible erection this man sports behind those black boxer briefs. Damn.

“No, you can't. Not with your nosey family. Go. Eat.” I head to the door, and he laughs again.

“I already ate.” I turn around, shaking my head and catch him texting something, then dropping the phone. “Now, I want to fuck.”

I almost say, *Well who am I to argue?*

It's on the tip of my tongue.

But I just can't say *those* words to *this* man. I'll always argue with him. Just not right now. Not when his dick is peaking out of the top of those boxer briefs and making all sorts of promises.

So instead, I cross the room, stand in front of him, and drop to my knees.

“Sawyer,” a distinctly male voice calls out from beyond the bedroom door, followed by a feminine laugh.

“What the hell?” I ask as I look up at him.

“I’m gonna fucking kill him,” he growls low and kinda hot.

“Dude . . . I just tripped over a black sweater I know isn’t yours, asshole.”

I stand up and move behind Sawyer. “Why does that voice sound like it’s getting closer?”

“Because it is.” He runs his hands through his hair and lifts his face to the ceiling before he puts his jeans back on and lets himself out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Of course, I want to know what the heck is going on. So I tiptoe to the door and crack it open to see what I can hear.

Probably not one of my smarter decisions, since the voice on the other side of the door says, “Hey, Wren.”

Oh, fuck.

I angle my nearly naked body behind the door and peak my head out. “Hi, Hudson.”



## Sawyer

I'm going to kill my brother.

He doesn't scare me. I don't give a flying fuck that he's a world-champion MMA fighter. This is taking cock-blocking to a whole new level. And I'm going to kill him . . . until I see his wife at the bottom of the stairs.

She wiggles her fingers at me. "Hey, Sawyer."

"Hey, Maddie." I look from her to Hudson. "Couldn't help yourself, could you?"

"Nope." He smiles so big, he'd put Miss America to shame.

Fucker.

The door behind me closes, and I'm pretty sure I'm going to have to sleep with one eye open tonight because Wren was vicious as a kid when she'd get embarrassed about something. And I can't imagine her being thrilled right now.

"Speaking of not being able to help yourself . . . Wren Davenport?" He raises his brow. "She's been back for two days, brother. Damn."

The door opens again, only this time, Wren's thrown on a Kingdom hoodie she must have stolen from my basket. It's black with the neon-purple logo across the front, and it falls to her knees, leaving the rest of her legs bare.

*Fuck me.*

Oh wait . . . That's what should have been happening.

"Sorry to make him late, Hud." She steps around me.

Hudson stretches out his arms to hug her, and I step between them. Not happening. My mouth was just on her naked body. I can still taste her orgasm on my lips, and she's wearing my favorite fucking shirt. No fucking chance in hell he's allowed to touch her right now.

"I'll call you later, Red," I tell her.



Her hair spills around her shoulders as she shakes her head. “You don’t even have my number, Kingston.”

“Make sure you answer the phone, Davenport.” As if laying down a challenge like that ever stopped me.

She waves at Hudson, then hurries down the stairs and quietly introduces herself to Maddie before she darts for the kitchen and the rest of her clothes.

My shithead brother has the decency to wait until she’s gone before he laughs hysterically. “Oh, this should be a great story. I can’t wait to hear you tell the whole family how you made it two whole days before nailing Wren Davenport. Because this shouldn’t get *complicated*.”

“I really fucking hate you, Hud.” I push open the bedroom door and finish getting dressed.

“Maybe you’ll think about knocking next time you walk into my house,” he answers.

Yeah . . . probably not.



I'm sitting in Max's kitchen later that night, when my stepmother, Ashlyn, joins me. She takes the seat next to me at the counter, throws her blonde hair up in a messy bun on top of her head, then grabs a bottle of red wine from the counter and refills her glass. "Why are you moping by yourself in here, Sawyer?"

I take the bottle from her hand and top off my glass too. "I'm not moping. Just thinking."

"Tomato. Potato. You're quiet and none of you are ever quiet." Ashlyn's not exactly what you'd expect from a stepmother. Starting with the fact that she's a year younger than me. Ending with the fact that there was always something odd between her and my dad. She's more like a sister than a mother, which is kinda strange, considering she's my youngest sister's mother.

Damn. I'm not even drunk, and that sounded fucked up.

"Have you ever done something you thought was the right thing to do at the time but regretted it later?" I'm not sure why I ask the question or how I'm expecting her to answer. But what I'm not expecting is for her to laugh, which is exactly what she does.

"You have no idea." She sips her wine and shakes her head.

"Are you still looking for a job?" I blurt out with absolutely no couth.

Ashlyn coughs and covers her mouth. "Remind me to strangle Becket."

I lean back on the stool and wait her out.

"Fine. Yes. I'm looking for a job. And before you ask, no, I don't need the money. I need something to do, Sawyer." She sips her wine and shakes her head. "Madeline is in school full-time now, and I'm sorry, but if I have to sit through one more charity luncheon with one more stuck-up socialite, I might rip her thousand-dollar extensions right out of her shiny hair. But

no one wants to hire a retired Olympic skater whose marriage made the front page of *People* magazine.”

“Want to work with me?” I ask, hoping she says yes.

“At Kingdom? I don’t think so. But thanks for the pity offer.”

“It’s not me who’d be taking pity. Hudson and I need someone to run the lakeside real-estate venture. It’s gotten to be too much for us. Maybe twenty hours a week. And totally flexible. You could work it around Madeline’s schedule.” At the mention of her name, my little sister runs into the room with fairy wings flapping in the wind on her back.

Ashlyn runs a hand over Madeline’s blonde ringlets. “No more sugar tonight for you, baby. It’s a school night.”

“Okay,” Madeline pouts. “But Lenny said I could have a piece of cake if you said yes. Please say yes, Mom.” My hyper little sister dances in a circle, and I hide my laugh behind my glass.

“Fine. One piece.” She stands and picks Madeline up, then turns to me with my sister resting on her hip. “And you.” Her pale blue eyes crinkle at the sides. “Can I start tomorrow . . . ? Please?”

“How about you come to my house after you drop Madeline off at school?” I offer.

“I want to go to Sawyer’s too,” Madeline pouts.

“See you tomorrow.” Ashlynn kisses my cheek, then Madeline blows kisses through her fingers before they both go back into the dining room for cake.

One problem solved.

How many more to go?

# WREN



*I* may have spent more time than is socially acceptable getting ready for my first day at the office today. I don't have hospital hours until tomorrow, so I wanted to look nice while I could, before scrubs took away any chance of that happening. I was trying to dress to impress and, in reality, probably ended up looking cliché, but I don't care. The tight, hunter-green pencil skirt and white button-down blouse with black patent-leather Mary Janes fit perfectly. And my goodness, did I miss having a reason to dress up? I've lived in scrubs for so long, I was worried I may have forgotten how to do it.

I pulled my hair back and pulled out my favorite overpriced work bag.

It's expensive but so pretty.

I work a million hours a week . . .

Well, not really a million, but most weeks, it comes in close to eighty.

Shopping is my only vice, and I like nice things.

Okay, so after yesterday, I might need to add Sawyer to that list of vices too. My body warms at that thought. At that memory. The memory of how his fingers felt against my skin. The memory of my orgasm ripping through me.

I drop my head to my brand-new desk in my sparkling clean office and close my eyes.

It doesn't matter that I categorically know this is a bad move. Or that I loathe Sawyer Kingston with every fiber of my being for reasons I refuse to think about at this point in my life. I'm an adult. We're both adults. I should be past all the things that happened in high school.

I should be able to move on and not hate him the way I still do. But—and that's an elephant-in-the-room-sized *but*—I don't know how to do that. The only time I've ever been able to get past my anger toward Sawyer was when I came home for the funeral. And this whole not-friends-with-benefits thing is bound to blow up in my face. I mean really . . . how smart is it to hate-screw my enemy?

But . . . another but—this one's just not quite as big . . .

On second thought, it might actually be bigger.

What's bigger than an elephant? A dinosaur?

Whatever. If Sawyer Kingston is half as skilled with his dick as he is with his mouth and his tongue . . . with his hands and his fingers . . . *Jesus*. My skin erupts in warm goose bumps, recalling how talented he was. I guess I'll let him be a vice for a while. Because unless something severe happened since that night six years ago, it really is an impressive dick. Long and thick with a beautiful curve. I have no doubt he's not lacking in that department.

My pulse thrums violently as I think about how many women he's probably practiced those particular skills on.

I've got to stop thinking about sex . . . and Sawyer Kingston.

A throat clears at the threshold of my office, and I look up to see my mom standing there in her pink scrubs. "Good morning, Dr. Davenport," she greets with a proud smile before she walks into the office.

"Good morning, Dr. Esher." I beam and stand from my desk, straightening my white coat embroidered with *Dr. Davenport* on it.

Mom has always gone by her maiden name professionally, reasoning that she hadn't worked her entire life to be anything

besides Dr. Esher. Now that I'm wearing my name on my coat, I understand that.

“Are you ready?” she asks with a challenge shining back at me from her warm eyes. “The staff is here, and I want you to meet them before the first patients come in.”

I unplug my tablet and move around the pale wooden desk. “Lead the way.”





□

*I*t's eleven-thirty when Isla, one of the few women working in the office under the age of thirty, knocks on my door.

“Dr. Davenport.” She waits for me to look up. “Your next appointment is waiting for you in exam room three, and I’m about to order lunch. Do you know what you want?”

I jot down my order on a Post-it Note and hand it to her. “Thank you.” I straighten my coat and walk down the hall into the exam room, then stop quickly in my tracks.

I’ve met this patient already.

Yesterday, to be precise.

When I was half naked.

Doing the walk of shame.

Because why wouldn’t this happen on my first day?

I take a moment to look at the screen, which has already been pulled up for me on the computer, and quickly scan the information before schooling my face and turning around to the patient. A beautiful blonde with soft features, who manages to somehow look good in her pink paper gown, sits on the exam table. “Hi, Madison. I’m Dr. Davenport.”

The surprised look on her face leaves no doubt she recognizes me too.

“I’m pretty sure you’re realizing we met yesterday.” I try to resist the blush creeping up my neck. *Damn pale skin.* “I’m sorry about that. If you’re uncomfortable, I’ll understand if you’d prefer to reschedule with Dr. Esher.” Day one, and I’m already blowing it.

It’s not like this is something they cover in med school.

*Hi. I nearly fucked your husband’s brother yesterday. You saw me afterward, trying not to run from his house, and now I need you to place your feet in the stirrups so I can check to see if you’re dilated.*

She laughs lightly and casually rubs her bump. “No need to reschedule, Doc. I’m already here. And honestly, if I was uncomfortable around all the people my husband’s family knows, there’d be no one left to talk to in the entire state of Pennsylvania.”

Well . . . at least she didn’t say *all the people my brother-in-law fucks*.

“Okay, then.” We go over a few necessary questions before I squeeze ultrasound gel on her abdomen and roll the transducer over her bump.

Maddie sucks in a quick breath when her baby appears on the screen. Tears crowd her blue eyes as Isla knocks on the door. “We have a very excited daddy-to-be out here, who’s trying to get inside.”

“Hud . . .” Maddie calls out, and Isla steps aside.

Hudson Kingston steps into the room and goes immediately to his wife’s side. “Sorry I was late, Mads.” He presses a kiss to her lips and wraps her hands in his bigger one, then he looks at me. “Well, hey there, Wrenny. Fancy seeing you here.”

“Mr. Kingston,” I respond, trying to compose myself before I look back at the monitor.

Hudson smirks. “Mr. Kingston? Uh, Wren, I’m pretty sure you’ve seen me naked. I think we’re passed the point of *Mr. Kingston*, aren’t we?”

“What?” Maddie asks, obviously confused.

“Pretty sure everyone saw you naked that summer.” A smile pulls at my lips, thinking back to the summer before my senior year. “I mean, I’m not sure I ever saw you jump in the lake with a bathing suit on.” I clear my throat. “But that was a long time ago, and it was also outside these walls. Inside these walls, I’m Dr. Davenport. And I need to know if you already know the sex of your baby.”

Maddie shakes her head and giggles again. “Why am I not surprised to hear you’ve always been an exhibitionist?” She

turns and stares at the screen next to me. “And how’s our girl doing?”

“Ahh. Okay. Well, your girl is head-down and ready to go. She has a strong heartbeat. Your fluids are where I want them.” I roll the transducer around. “She’s measuring right where she should be.” I hit print and hand her the printout, then check her cervix. “Have you discussed a birth plan with Dr. Esher?”

“Yeah. Maddie wants all the drugs.” Hudson kisses his wife’s hand.

“I do not.” She shoves him away. “I want a natural childbirth, Doc. I’d like to avoid drugs if we can.”

“Okay, great.” I sit back and remove my gloves. “Everything looks good. Do you have any questions or concerns?”

“I don’t. Do you, Hud?” The way they speak to each other, look to each other. It’s . . . I see couples together all the time. A good percentage is during the happiest event of their life—the birth of their child. But there’s just something about this couple—about the way they seem in tune with each other—that I suddenly envy but doubt I’ll ever have.



I'm tucked into my couch with a white cashmere throw wrapped around me, a glass of wine in hand, and my new favorite show queued up on my television, when my phone buzzes later that night.

QUINN

How was your first day?

WREN

Good. Busy. Fantastic. Exhausting.

QUINN

Want to meet for lunch tomorrow?

WREN

I can't. I'm on all day tomorrow.

QUINN

Fine. You're no fun.

WREN

Seems to be a recurring theme. Want to try for the end of the week?

QUINN

The team's on the road for the next three games, and it's my turn to travel with them. So I'll be gone until Monday.

WREN

Okay. Next week. I promise.

QUINN

I'm going to hold you to it.

WREN

Drinks when you come home.

QUINN

At Kingdom? The bartender was really hot.

WREN

Seriously?

QUINN

Wren . . . You're loosening up, remember?

WREN

I hate you, Quinny.

QUINN

You love me, Wrenny.

WREN

Have a good trip.

QUINN

See you next week.



## Sawyer

I hear a knock at my front door a moment before it opens Thursday morning.

Ashlyn isn't coming in until this afternoon, so I assume it's one of my siblings.

Whose idea was it for us all to have keys to each other's houses?

"Hello?" Max bellows.

*Yup.* My oldest brother.

"In the kitchen." I sip my coffee and look over the contract Ashlyn left for me yesterday.

Max walks in, ready to take on the world in his bespoke Italian suit and shades. He pours himself a cup of coffee before leisurely looking around the room and taking a seat across from me. "What are you working on?" He nods toward my laptop.

"Ashlyn agreed to help Hudson and me with the real-estate business." I close the laptop and push it away. "What's going on, brother? A little late to be heading into the office."

Max shrugs. "I'm not on my way *into* the office. I've already been there, and now I'm here."

"Maximus." It's too early for this shit. "Why are you talking like Yoda?"

"What?" he asks me, having no clue what the fuck I'm talking about. Max was never a movie guy.

"In riddles." I run my hand over my mouth. "Why are you speaking in riddles?"

"I'm not." The vein in his forehead bulges, and I hold back a laugh. It's always been easy to know when my oldest brother was getting frustrated. That damn vein is always his tell-tale sign. "I came here to see you, asshole."



“Why?” I glance at the clock on the coffee machine, knowing this isn’t his norm. “It’s ten-thirty on a Thursday. Should I be worried? Is somebody in jail? Dying?”

Max stirs his coffee like he’s got all the time in the world and isn’t answering a question with a question. “How are things at Kingdom?”

“What the fuck, Maxipad? Kingdom’s good. I’m good. We’re all good. Now spit it the hell out, man. What’s going on?” I’m over this confusing conversation and might need a second cup of coffee if it keeps going this way.

“Do you remember what you said to me when I bought the Revolution?”

“Jesus, brother. That was—how many years ago? No, I don’t remember what I said to you, but I have a gut feeling you’re about to remind me.” He’s got my attention now, even if he’s pissing me off in the process.

“I asked you if you were ready to join King Corp. yet. If you wanted to take your place in the family business and come on board to help with the mergers and acquisitions team. You’re twenty-eight years old, and you’ve built four successful businesses. Five, if you count this real-estate thing you’re doing with Hudson. But let’s be real.” Max unbuttons his jacket and pushes his sleeves up his forearms. “We both know you’re the one running this business. That’s not Hud’s thing. But it is yours.”

I don’t say anything, so he continues, “Come on, man. You’ve been running Kingdom for years now. Aren’t you ready for the next thing?” My oldest brother isn’t trying to be an ass. It’s just his natural state. And in all fairness, I’ve always been the guy who gets bored easily.

But Kingdom’s different. She’s my baby.

Do I find myself getting a little restless?

Yes.

Am I ready to move on?

The thought has crossed my mind, but I'm not sure that's what I want to do. My brother and my father before him both tried to get me to join the family business through the years. I've never been interested and always shot them down immediately. I'm not sure what's different this time. But my interest is piqued—not that I plan on telling him that. “You trying to fill a position?”

“Brent Davenport told me he wants to retire this morning.”

Well, damn. That's not what I was expecting. “I had no idea Wren's dad was thinking about retiring.” He's been with the business as long as I can remember, always working side by side with Dad.

“Apparently, he promised his wife he would. I knew it was coming, sooner or later. He's mentioned it a time or two over the past few years, but he usually laughs the idea away right afterward. That's why I offered you a position on his team when we were moving things around with the Revolution acquisition. You know how to take a struggling business and make it work, Sawyer. It's what you love doing. Why not do it for the family business?” Sometimes your family knowing you so damn well isn't a good thing.

He's not wrong. I love taking an old business and bringing it new life. There's a rush to it that's different from building a new business. But I don't know if I want to work for King Corp.

I've spent the last ten years working for myself and answering to no one.

I don't know if I want to change that. I don't know if I ever will.

But I can't ignore the fact that this time, I'm intrigued.

Max stands to face me, then pulls an envelope out of the inside pocket of his suit and drops it on the counter next to me. “Look this over, then call me so we can talk. It would be really nice to have you where you belong.”

“I'm always with you, whether I work there or not.” I follow him to the front door.

“Just look it over, Sawyer.” He opens the door and laughs. “Zeus just almost took out your neighbor.” He laughs again, then stops. “Oh shit. That’s Wren, and she looks pissed. Nobody told me she moved in next door. Good luck with that.”

I step outside as Max walks to his car and cringe when my overly excited dog jumps again, nearly tackling Wren to the ground as he tries to get the stubborn woman’s attention.

Always so fucking stubborn.

Today she’s wearing pink scrubs and a gray jacket. Her messy hair is pulled back in a lopsided ponytail, and from over here, she looks tired. And maybe pissed.

*Oh yeah.* When her eyes turn my way, they’re definitely pissed.

“Kingston,” she calls out in a puff of cool air. “Zeus almost ran out into the street. Again. Fix your damn fence or I’m reporting you.”

“Reporting me to who?” Fuck. I’m going to kill my damn dog, who never left the fucking yard until *she* moved in. “I just had contractors out here earlier in the week. They said there are no weak spots and he should be fine. What the hell?”

She squats down and scratches behind Zeus’s ears, whispering something to him that I can’t hear.

Great. She’s turning my own dog against me.

I march across our property lines until I’m close enough to make out what she’s saying, then roll my fucking eyes.

“I know your human is a jackass, buddy, and I can get 100 percent on board with you ignoring most of the things he tells you to do, but you can’t go into the street.” My fucking dog flops down and rolls over, giving Wren his belly to scratch until his back leg starts vibrating.

“Zeus,” I call out but get no response.

“Zeus. Come.” He looks at me.

Wren looks at me.

But absolutely nobody, K-9 or human, move.

I scrub my hands over my face and groan.

## WREN



Sawyer's eye twitches when Zeus refuses to move, and my exhausted body perks up.

He's frustrated.

*Ha.*

That eye has always twitched when he was close to losing his calm, cool, and carefully held control. Which means it's time to poke the bear.

I rub the lazy bulldog's belly and coo, "Such a good boy, Zeus. Maybe you should come inside with me. I'd take much better care of you than some people." I look up through my lashes, and for a moment, I honestly think I see steam billowing out of this man's ears as I stage-whisper to the dog, "Does your daddy not take good enough care of you? Is that why you're always coming over here?"

Kingston's fists flex at his sides, and I wet my lips with sudden interest and anticipation.

This man would never hurt me. Not physically, at least.

Emotional warfare is an entirely different story.

Either way, I drag my tired eyes up his muscled forearms, taking in the gorgeous ink peeking out from under his shoved-up sleeves, then across his broad chest, which is stretching a dark long-sleeved cotton tee to its limits. I stand, my muscles no longer the only thing perking up. *Nope.* Not anymore

*Maybe I'm not as tired as I thought.*

“Long shift, Red?” Sawyer’s cocky grin annoys me, but he’s not wrong. My shift was long and hard but so incredibly rewarding, I can’t help my responding smile.

“Why, Kingston . . . I’d almost think you care.”

He shakes his head and crosses those muscled arms over his chest. “Not at all. Just wondering if you have enough energy to deliver on the promises your eyes are making.”

“Are you serious? I’ve been delivering babies for over eighteen hours straight, and that lame line was the best you’ve got?” I poke his chest and relish the way he doesn’t budge beneath my finger. “No lame lines. That’s a new rule. In fact, no lines at all. There’s no need to try and woo me.” I wonder if I could get away with a no-talking rule.

I’ve got much better ideas on ways to keep his mouth busy.

He laughs, and the rough sound rolls over my skin. “Woo you?” He takes two steps forward, and I take two back, caught up in an unwilling dance until I’m caged against my own house.

Tired.

Annoyed.

Turned-on.

The familiar trifecta occurring whenever I’m around Sawyer Kingston.

“Jesus Christ, Red. If that’s what you think wooing looks like, I feel sorry for you.” He trails a light finger along my hairline before tucking a wayward lock behind my ear. “You’ve clearly been missing out.”

Damn him.

I can’t control the shiver racking my body in response to his touch. Or how my nipples peak in anticipation. *Fucking biology.*

And that cocky smile emerges again, haunting me, right before he leans in and brushes his lips over the shell of my ear.

“If I were trying to romance you, you’d know it. And you’d like it.”

Fuck him for *probably* being right. But two can play at this game.

I run my palms up his chest and around his neck, then slowly and dramatically inhale his crisp, clean scent.

Oh hell, he smells good. I like that.

*Focus, Wren.*

Ugh. He drives me nuts.

I bury my fingers in his hair and tuck my face against his rough beard. Planting a warm, wet kiss on his jaw as I rub against his body with mine, scrubs and all, and whisper, “Do you want to fuck me, Kingston?”

I know the answer.

Sawyer’s dick is hard and thick and pressing against my stomach, leaving little to the imagination.

Not sure if this is what everyone meant about having fun and letting loose. But it’s definitely the best idea I’ve had in a long time.

“I’m a man, Red. So yeah, I want to fuck you, but I might need to gag you first.” What the hell is wrong with me that I find the idea of him gagging me arousing? “Did you buy any condoms yet?”

Wait . . . what?

*Condoms.*

Did I buy condoms? “Of course, I bought condoms.” I push back and grab my work bag and keys. “I’m not sure if the ones I picked up are small enough for you though. But we can give it the good old college try.”

The look he gives me as that eye twitches, yet again, says it all.

This man is confident. He knows I’m full of shit. And he knows I remember exactly how big his thick dick is. The

magnums I have tucked in my nightstand will prove that later.

Once the door is unlocked, I push through, leaving it open for Sawyer to join me if he wants but not inviting him in. *Hey, at least I'll know he's not a vampire.*

I kick off my sneakers and drop my jacket and bag on the chair before turning around to look at him. He's taking in my house. Well technically, I guess it's *his* house since I'm just renting it. The view of the lake and Kroydon Falls are what sold me on it when I started working with a realtor from the other side of the country. Not that I'll have much time to enjoy it with my schedule. White walls and tons of windows give it a very cottage-chic feel I love. Unfussy. Lived in. The opposite of me on so many levels. But the truth is I feel at home here in a way I haven't felt in years.

Sawyer takes a predatory step forward, and I hold out my hand to stop him, suddenly unsure of what I'm doing. "I need to shower."

"Want some help?" His raspy voice holds a hell of a promise I'd probably enjoy taking him up on.

"Help?" I slip my pink scrub top over my head and drop it to the floor. "No. I don't want your help."

He takes another step forward, and I back up as I untie the ribbon of my scrub pants, slipping my hands inside. "I'll never need your help, Kingston."

I step out of my pants and watch Sawyer's Adam's apple bob as he swallows.

Standing in front of him in pale-pink panties and a matching bra, I'm suddenly glad I did my laundry over the weekend and that I'm not wearing granny panties and a sports bra. His pupils blow wide, and his hands reach for me as I spin away from him, putting an extra sway of my hips in each step I take upstairs.

I feel his presence behind me without him uttering a word.

He doesn't speak, doesn't touch. Not until I stop to open my bedroom door. That's when his lips graze over my shoulder, and he bites down against my heated skin.



A small moan slips past my lips before I push into the room with his hands on my hips and guide us into the master bath. I think about slipping into the giant soaking tub, but something about that seems intimate, and that's not what we are. Instead, I open the glass shower door and turn on all four body sprays as well as both overhead sprays, then turn while I wait for the water to warm.

“You're overdressed.”



## Sawyer

Wren's hands reach for the hem of my shirt, shoving it up over my head, while I kick off my jeans. She pushes me back against the sink, then holds me at arm's length. "I need to wash the stench of the hospital off me."

She briefly loses a little of the bravado I've seen since she came home to Kroydon Hills.

But after a moment, the mask slides back into place. "You can either join me or give me five minutes and meet me in the bedroom." She opens the glass door and shimmies out of her bra and panties. Her perfect pale-pink nipples are peaked and mouthwatering, tempting me to take. To taste. To fucking devour every inch of her flawless porcelain skin.

"Your choice." She turns and steps under the water, and my cock leaks in my boxers seconds before I strip them off and join her.

Like there's any choice.

She squeezes a citrus-smelling shampoo onto her head, and I step up behind her and massage it through her hair. With her entire body, she relaxes against mine for a moment while I rinse the suds from her hair and watch as they glide over her body.

It's the first time I can remember the two of us being silent. Her being pliant. No sarcasm. No nasty retorts. Just us and the quiet.

But the calm doesn't last.

Wren turns around and drops to her knees with a wicked smile on her face as the hot water trickles over her soft skin. She looks up at me through long lashes and lidded eyes, waiting. "I'm pretty sure I owe you a blow job, Kingston."

I reach down and push her hair away from her face, then rub my thumb over her jaw. "Open up for me, Red."

Without hesitation, she parts her lips and swirls her tongue around the head of my throbbing cock. The water pounds down over both of us while she fists the base.

A smug smile pulls at my lips when her hand can't quite wrap entirely around me.

Jesus Christ, the sight of this woman on her knees tugs at every fucking ounce of restraint I have. I wrap her hair around one fist and tug gently.

She reaches up, grabbing my wrist, and bats those fucking lashes.

She's not stopping me.

Not trying to slow me down.

She's encouraging me.

She wants more.

"What's your safe word, Red?" I growl as thundering need pulls at the base of my spine.

She licks up the length of my cock, then pops off and rolls her lips. "Dandelion," she whispers before taking me down her throat and moaning as I give her what she wants—what we both want—and fuck her face.

Her hot tears mix with the warm water, and I lean a hand against the tile wall as my abs pull tight, not wanting to come yet.

But after a few minutes of torturous pleasure, I tug her hair, needing to come but wanting her tight cunt wrapped around me when I do.

"What's the matter?" she asks like she thinks she did something wrong.

I lift her from her knees and wrap her legs around my hips. My cock kisses her entrance, pulling moans from both of us. "We don't have condoms in here, and I need to fuck you."

She bites down on my neck as I shut off the water and walk us out of the shower. "Nightstand," she pants. "Hurry."

“No,” I grunt and slap her ass. “Patience is a virtue, Red.”

“God, you’re an asshole.” Her words are a mixture of a whimper and a complaint. She claws at my back after I spank her again before gently lying her down on the bed.

I settle between her legs and kiss her toned calf. “You know what to say if you want me to stop.” I drape her legs over my shoulders and bury my face in her pussy.

“Don’t you dare stop . . .”

“Yes, ma’am,” I growl against her cunt and suck her clit harder each time she squirms.

“*Oh, God.*” She bows off the bed, grasping my hair. “Please . . . Please, please, please.”

The sound of Wren’s begging may just be the hottest fucking thing I’ve ever heard.

But I have other plans for her.

I pull away and sit back on my knees.

She whimpers at the loss while I reach over and grab a strip of condoms from the nightstand, holding them up in one hand for both of us to see. I trail my other hand back up her legs and cup her pussy before I slap it.

“Ohmygod,” she keens.

“You got the right ones.” I rip a square off and toss the rest of the magnums to the side. “Good girl.”

“Of course, I did. Now stop teasing me and make me come,” she demands.

“Oh, Red . . .” I sheath myself and rub my dick up and down the length of her pussy. “We’re just getting started.”

# WREN



Sawyer leans over me, pinning my waist to the bed with his big hands and making me feel small and delicate in his hold. Then he finally pushes the tip inside me.

Gently.

*Teasingly slowly.*

Barely moving.

*Oh my God.*

Every freaking synapse in my brain starts firing as we go straight from frenzied to intimate.

I try to wriggle free. To force him to fuck me. To stop torturing me and screw me the way I desperately want him to. Without any feelings. No romance. But this stubborn man hovering above me . . . this man . . . all lean muscles and black ink, with blue eyes deeper than the depths of any ocean I've ever seen, isn't letting me move. "Kingston," I huff, refusing to beg. "Move."

He pulls his cock back, and I cry out before he inches back in, even slower. Stretching me in the most tantalizing way.

His rough hands slide up my rib cage, then cup my breasts. The cool air and rough pads of his fingers send shivering chills dancing over my skin before his beard scrapes my chest. He takes my nipple between his lips, tugging it with his teeth and pulling a moan from me as my need becomes a living, breathing thing, dying for release. For the earth-shattering orgasm I'd bet my medical degree will hit me soon.

My back arches off the bed when Sawyer moves to the other breast and squeezes it roughly before he takes it in his hot mouth.

I wrap my hands around his thick biceps, digging my nails into his skin as he thrusts deeper. *Harder*. But not faster. His thick cock finally and completely filling me.

Rubbing against every inch of my pussy.

Every. Inch.

Hitting my G-spot. But pulling away just as quickly.

Still not giving me the rhythm I know would have me coming in seconds.

“Kingston,” I moan and lift my hips, urging him on, more out of frustration than pleasure.

Lightning fast, his hand moves from my breast to my throat, and I stop moving. Stop speaking. My body and brain go on high alert. *In shock*. Instantly, my world quiets, and I stare up at this man who’s cutting off just enough of my air supply to be dangerous.

I suck in a ragged breath as my eyes fly to his.

“Do you ever just shut up and enjoy yourself, Red?” His raspy voice and the beating of my heart are suddenly all I can hear. “Let go. Give up control.”

“Sawyer,” I whisper quietly. *Carefully*. A hint of excitement mixing with trepidation.

His right hand is around my throat, pressing on my carotid artery but not my trachea.

Not tightly enough to cut off my oxygen completely. Not yet.

But definitely enough to get my attention and pique my interest.

The doctor in me is screaming for him to let me go.

You’ve got three to five seconds with no oxygen before you pass out.

Five minutes and you'll be dead. But Sawyer isn't cutting it off. Just withholding.

"Do you want me to stop?" he asks as he finally, *fucking finally*, sets a slow rhythm.

"If I can't breathe," I keened and lift my hips. "I can't talk." I moan, loving the feel of his muscular body. His thick cock. His weight on me. "How can I tell you to stop if I want you to?" My pussy pulses with need and want and desire so strong, I can taste the metallic tang of desperation in my mouth.

His abs coil with each thrust, in and out, until he's dragging his cock along the lips of my pussy over and over, teasing and taunting until he pushes back in.

He's keeping me on edge. His firm grip on the column of my throat is just enough to excite me but not block my breath. Not entirely.

I keep my hands wrapped around his beautifully strong arms and let my eyes close, getting lost in the sensations.

"Eyes on me, Red." He releases my neck and gathers my hands in his before pinning them to the mattress above my head and leaning down to let his lips graze my ear. "Keep your hands here. If you want me to stop, tap my chest three times."

My pussy throbs, and I moan, then nod in heady anticipation.

Suddenly, an inextricable pull of arousal replaces my nerves.

Both his big hands wrap around my neck, pressing again on the carotid arteries as he takes me over and over, leaving me gasping with each powerful thrust of his hips.

Lighting me up as an orgasm builds deep within me.

*Oh, God.*

"That's it," he praises. "You're doing so good, Red."

I lift my hips to meet him, thrust for mind-numbing thrust.

Taking him deeper than I ever thought possible.



The sounds of our bodies moving together, along with his groans and my wheezing, raspy moans, fill the room and mix with the scent of sex and hunger.

Sawyer tightens his hold on me.

I can't breathe.

Can't think.

Can't speak.

I'm lost. To the way I'm responding to him. To his hands on me. To my need to come.

"*So close,*" I whisper as his hands push infinitesimally harder.

Cutting off the last of my air.

"Come now," he demands and releases me just as my eyes roll back into my head and a warm wave of euphoria washes over me.

I come hard and fast. My body convulses as I'm pulled under, drowning in wave after wave of mind-blistering pleasure.

Sawyer's lips immediately replace his fingers, worshipping me. Kissing the sides of my throat, of my collarbone, then the other side of my neck. Sucking and scraping my skin with his beard as he thrusts harder, faster. Chasing his own orgasm. His hips snap against mine while I wrap my arms around his back and my nails score his skin. *Oh. My. God.* I moan. I might even scream it as I come again.

Every inch of my body becomes hyperaware.

Hypersensitive.

Pure electricity soars through me.

Every nerve receptor screaming that it's too much.

Clinging to him.

Begging for more, without saying a word.

Sawyer comes on a long raspy, sexy, moan. His hands pin me to the bed as he empties himself in the condom. Those blue

eyes remain locked on mine. Seeing too much.

Suddenly, I'm unsure whether the most incredible orgasm of my life was worth allowing myself to be this vulnerable with this man. But I'm way too far gone to think too hard on that, and I close my eyes again.

My body suddenly exhausted from the dopamine drop.

Sawyer climbs off the bed to dispose of the condom, then walks back into the room, pulling on his jeans. He sits on the mattress and runs his fingers through my hair, like they're soft, silky, pretty tresses and not a wet, tangled mess, fresh from the shower. "I told you letting go of control can be fun, Red."

"You did," I yawn, not caring that I agreed with him for a change. "Maybe next time, it should be your turn to let go of some control."

"I don't think so." A smile pulls at his lips, and butterflies take flight in my stomach.

Damn insects.

"Why is it okay for me but not you?" I counter.

He leans over and presses his lips to my forehead. "Because you loved that." Sawyer rises from the bed, shirtless, and my eyes rake over every inch of his defined chest and each ripple of his abdominals and lats. The beautiful dips at his hips, leading to his unbuttoned jeans and just a peek of a dark thatch of hair hiding underneath.

I bite down on my tongue, stopping myself from initiating round two.

That can't possibly be a good idea with our arrangement.

Hell, my pussy probably couldn't survive after the pounding it just took.

I purse my lips to stop from smiling, or more likely purring like a freaking happy cat who wants to lazily lounge while someone strokes her spine and tells her she's a good girl.

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

“You just had an entire internal conversation with yourself, didn’t you?” Sawyer laughs, then puts on his shirt, and damn him, his hand caresses my spine before he pulls the sheets up over me. “Take a nap and set your alarm so you don’t blame me when you’re late for work this afternoon.”

My eyes tighten, and my teeth grind together. “In your dreams, Kingston.”

The asshole laughs again, cocky and self-assured. “You’re already going to be dreaming about me, Red.”

*The hell I am.*



□

“Why do you look so tired?” Mom walks into the small kitchen area in our office later that afternoon and fills her water bottle. “Was last night that bad?”

How do I want to answer my mother?

*No, Mom. Last night was great. But I let my new fuck buddy choke me out while I orgasmed harder than I ever dreamed possible. And according to my medical degree, I’m an expert on the human body, so that’s saying something. Oh, and PS: I know he already fucked up all our lives once, but I’m just delusional enough to think he’s not going to do it again.*

“Last night was fine. Just busy, and I didn’t catch much of a nap this morning.” I sip my coffee and keep my snark to myself.

What would she think if she knew I was sleeping with someone I’ve loathed for years?

Mom screws the lid back on her bottle with her eyes locked on me. “Whatever you say, honey. You’re a big girl. I have one more patient, and then I’m heading over to the hospital. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Bye.” I watch her leave and finish off my coffee, knowing there’s not enough caffeine in the city to get me through today. Then I grab my phone from my pocket and text Quinn.

WREN

911.

QUINN

What’s going on? Do I need to bury a body or bludgeon something with the shovel?

WREN

You are so dramatic.

QUINN

You're the one who just texted 911. The last time you did that . . . Scratch that. You've never done that before. So tell me what's going on. The buses are leaving for the arena in a minute, and my ass is the one who has to take attendance. Ever had to deal with twenty professional hockey players before?

WREN

Umm . . . no.

QUINN

They're oversized babies. So why the 911?

WREN

This can wait until you come home.

QUINN

Wrenny . . . You sounded the 911. What the hell is going on?

WREN

I let loose. But we can talk about it when you get home.

QUINN

My dad is looking for me. Ugh. Like he can't see me standing in a sea of men. Can I call you tonight after the game?

WREN

I'll probably be sleeping. I was on-call last night. We'll do drinks next week.

QUINN

Call me tomorrow.

WREN

Okay. Have fun.

QUINN

You too.

*I* think about texting my sister for a hot minute before deciding against it and shoving my phone away, then head for my office to contemplate my next move.

I wouldn't mind a repeat of today.

Who am I kidding? I haven't stopped thinking about it for hours . . . but . . .

What *is* the next move? It's not like I can just text him for a booty call . . . Can I?

And if I can, what the hell am I supposed to say?

*Hey, asshole. I really liked when you choked me earlier. Can we do it again? PS: I still hate you.*

Is enjoying yourself supposed to be this stressful?

# SAWYER



Sundays during football season are sacred.

Most of my siblings and I try to make it to the Kings home games whenever we can, which means my family is together each week. We grew up in that stadium, and in a lot of ways, it's always felt like a second home. But there's something to be said about Sundays during the off-season.

You'd think it would be hard to get a family of twenty-plus people together weekly.

You'd be wrong.

My niece and nephew fly past me on their way to attack their Uncle Jace. Two small hockey sticks between them, with the baby of the family chugging behind them both with a plush Snow White doll in her arms.

This house is at its best when it's full of laughter, loud voices, and complete chaos.

Kingston Manor, a sprawling estate, nestled in a private, quiet corner of Kroydon Hills is where most of us grew up. John Kingston married four times, divorced two wives, buried one, had a mistress, and still managed to die in bed while he was cheating on wife number four. Ashlyn was pregnant with Madeline at the time. They're the last two to live full-time in this house, and I'm pretty sure Ashlyn would rather find her own place. She's dropped a hint or five this week while working on some of our real-estate contracts. She may have mentioned that she'd love to live on the lake. But if she and



Madeline move out, we'd have to sell the manor, and I don't think any of us are ready for that last thread to snap yet.

Becks hands me a beer, pulling me from my thoughts. "So have you thought about Max's offer yet?"

I twist the cap off my bottle and tap it against Becks's. "Guess the whole family knows about that, huh?"

"I'm vice president of operations, asshole. I know everything." He fakes an evil laugh, and as if on cue, his girlfriend joins us.

"You know I love it when you laugh, Becket." Kendall, also known as Medusa, raises up on her toes and kisses Becks's cheek.

I can't fucking stand this woman. None of us can. It would be different if Becket seemed happy with her, but he doesn't. It seems forced. Faked. She's fake. And that one fact infiltrates every aspect of her being. I don't like *it*, and I don't trust *her*.

And trust is everything.

I cringe at the thought.

"Ohh. Are you finally joining King Corp., Sawyer?" Her blue eyes skip over me like she's a hunter carefully sizing up her prey. "Finally ready for a real job?"

Before I have the chance to lose my shit, Becks wraps an arm around her shoulders and steers her away from me with an apologetic look on his face.

"Why is he always apologizing for her?" My sister Lenny walks toward me with my nephew Maverick in her arms. "Here." She hoists him on me. "Take him for a minute."

Mav's nearly two years old and twice the size of the other kids. Doesn't hurt that his dad is six feet six, I guess.

Lenny fills a glass of wine as the little man rests his head on my shoulder and pops his thumb back in his mouth. "What the hell did Medusa want?"

"To turn me to stone," I tell her as I sip my beer, but Lenny doesn't look amused. "She was asking if I'm finally getting a

*real job* and joining King Corp.”

“What a twat waffle. You have a real job. One you love . . . don’t you?” She’s eyeing me suspiciously over her glass.

“Like you didn’t know Max was making the offer.” Len’s the numbers wiz in the family and the business. We all run everything by her.

She presses her lips together without saying a word.

“The whole damn family probably knows by now since Becks does,” I grumble, knowing gossip spreads through our family like wildfire.

Lenny runs her hand over Maverick’s back as he falls asleep on my chest. “Are you considering the offer? You’ve been at Kingdom for a while. Is it time for a new challenge?”

“It could be time . . .” I shift back against the counter. “But that doesn’t necessarily mean King Corp. is the answer, little sister.” I don’t know that I’m ready to give up Kingdom, and I don’t think I’m interested in going corporate. But I’m not sure . . . yet.

“Only you can know the answer to that, Sawyer. But I know you, and you’ve been restless these past few months. It’s like you’ve been waiting for the next big thing. Your next adventure.”

I smile, thinking about what I want my next adventure to be.

Knowing it doesn’t have anything to do with Kingdom or King Corp.

An image of Wren pops into my mind before I can push it away. Because anything happening with Wren is going to get *complicated*.

“Wait.” Lenny steps closer and lowers her voice. “What’s that?” She points at my face. “That right there. That smile . . . You’re thinking about something, but it’s not business.”

“Stop, Lenny. It’s nothing.” *Shit.*

“No way,” she pesters like only a little sister can. “That wasn’t nothing. Something made you smile. More likely, *someone*.”

She’s like a dog with a bone. More like *my* dog, who doesn’t listen to a damn thing I say anymore. “Give it up, Lenny. I’m not talking about this with you.”

Her eyebrows shoot up. “Are you talking about it with someone else?”

Her husband, Bash, joins us and kisses the top of Lenny’s head. “What are you getting all excited about, Len?”

“Sawyer likes a girl,” she singsongs.

“The fuck?” I question, then look down at Maverick, whose eyes never open.

She turns away from us and scans the room. “Where’s Hud? If you’re seeing someone, he’s gonna know.”

“Eleanor,” Bash stops her. “Leave your brother alone.”

She tilts her head back and glares at her husband. “It’s like you don’t even know me.”

Bash sighs and pats my back. “Sorry, man. I tried.” Then gently takes Maverick from my arms and abandons me to his wife.

“I’m not seeing anyone, Len. Not yet. Probably just *not*. But if that changes, I’ll let you know.” I can’t tell her I’m not even sure if I want to be seeing this person because that’s a straight-up fucking lie. One I’m not ready to deal with yet.

“Fine,” she pouts. “But someone’s caught your eye. At least admit that.”

“Yeah, Len. Someone’s caught my eye.” In a really big, fucking way.



□

Later, I join Max and Jace, whose eyes are both glued to the Revolution game on the big screen. “What’s the score?” I ask.

Neither of them looks up. “It’s tied, 2–2. Boston’s got a power play with ten seconds left on the clock.” Jace leans forward as if he can feel the ice under his feet. The kid’s an incredible hockey player. He was on the US men’s hockey team in the Olympics last year, and we all flew over to see him play. I’m not sure I was ever as proud of anyone or anything as I was of him, when he stood on that stage with his team, while the national anthem played over the speakers and gold medals hung around their necks.

It was incredible.

I drop down on the couch between the two of them, just as Boston scores, and both brothers groan.

Jace stands up and stomps out of the room.

“Fuck.” Max throws the remote down on the table. He’s the general manager for the Revolution, and he’s never been a great loser.

I guess none of us are.

“I’m surprised you’re here tonight, Maximus. I figured you’d have been in Boston with the team.”

“Yeah, well”—he leans back and crosses his leg—“I promised Daphne I’d balance work and life a little better this year.”

“I get it.” We sit quietly for a few minutes before my niece Serena toddles over to her father and throws her chubby hands into the air for Max to pick her up. Her soft sandy-blonde hair is held back by a red-white-and-blue bow that matches her Revolution jersey and tutu.

We’ve got babies and toddlers everywhere these days. And while some guys my age may get cold feet at the idea of kids, I

have no doubt I'll be ready when I find the right person. It's the *finding* part that's been the issue.

Not that I haven't had fun in the meantime.

"Have you read the proposal I gave you?" Max bounces Serena on his knee while she claps and giggles.

"I read it, brother. But I'm not sure why you think I'm the right fit. I've never worked nine-to-five a day in my life. I've never been corporate. Never had to punch a clock and answer to anyone but myself. I don't scream *good fit* for King Corp."

I knew he'd ask tonight.

And I knew I wouldn't have a real answer yet. "I'm just not positive I'm ready for that, or whether I even want to be. Hell, I don't know if I ever will."

"Just don't say no yet, okay? Think about it. I want you there. I want you to be more than a shareholder of the company. You've got one of the best business minds I've ever seen, Sawyer. We could use you."

"Stop blowing smoke up my ass, Maximus."

Serena giggles. "Ass."

"Baby, that's a bad word. Don't let Mommy hear you say that. Please." Max kisses her head and tickles her side, making the one-year-old belly-laugh. Then he looks at me. "You're gonna get me in trouble with Daphne."

"Ass," she says again as soon as Max stops paying attention to her, and I stand up, knowing I'm about to get yelled at. "I'll call you sometime this week, Max."

He glares. "Why don't you stop by the office? Let's talk more about it."

I nod and walk away, not sure how much more there is to say.

I feel like I'm floundering.

Like I'm not sure what it is I'm looking for, but I'm pretty sure about what I don't want.

Knowing, though, I'm ready for the next thing.





□

Opt for the long way home from Ashlyn's, taking in the town I've always loved. Kroydon Hills is hidden away in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Close enough that the city is a quick ride, but far enough removed that it's still able to maintain the small-town feel we grew up with. Main Street has been seeing somewhat of a renaissance these past few years, after the recession drove most of the shops on the tree-lined street out of business. But there are still more empty storefronts than full ones.

When we were young, it was easy to hop on your bike and peddle up to Main Street for lunch, ice cream, or a comic book. But now, even the two-screen, old-fashioned movie theater has shuttered its doors. The first time I ever made it to third base with a girl was in the back of the balcony of Theater One.

Now you've got to go into the city to catch a movie.

Max might want me to be thinking on a multi-million-dollar scale. But I think I'd rather help struggling businesses in my own town instead of dealing with the bullshit of buying smaller ones for King Corp. to absorb. I love our family's business. It's our legacy. But I'm not sure it's the only legacy I want to leave behind.

As if a lightbulb suddenly goes off in my mind, an idea sharpens and solidifies.

Our town doesn't need a full-blown revitalization.

But it could use a little help.

Excitement takes hold of me as thoughts start shooting in rapid fire. By the time I pull into my driveway, a plan is forming—well, the beginning of a plan. Nothing I'd be willing to take to Max and my siblings yet.

But it's there.

It's viable.

And it's a damn good idea.

When I'm parked and out of the car, I look over at Wren's house. It's dark, except for a warm glow coming from her bedroom. Does that mean she's awake?

For some reason, I've got an urge to talk to her.

To tell her about my idea.

Not because she'd like it right away. Although, who wouldn't like something that would get the empty storefronts filled and create new opportunities for their town. No . . . I want to talk to her because I know she'll pick it apart. She's Red. And this woman has fought everything I've ever said to her since the first time she talked to me.

In all fairness, I may have cut her Barbie's hair off that day.

So I guess she had a right to be pissed.

I lean against the side of my car, staring for a moment and debating on going over to Wren's or going to bed.

The internal debate continues as I walk up to her front door.

It ends when she opens the door in a pale-purple pajama shirt, her hair falling down around her shoulders. "Sawyer?"

"Hey ya, Red."

## WREN



“*K*ingston?” My stomach flips at the sight of him. A worn leather jacket and soft-looking black beanie never looked so damn good on a grown man. *Asshole*. His crisp, woodsy scent envelops me, and I lick my suddenly dry lips. “What are you doing here?”

“Do you have a minute?” he asks but doesn’t wait for my answer. Instead, he walks right by me and into my house, like he owns the place. I guess he does, and that pisses me off even more.

Sawyer stops and looks around, like he’s looking for something specific before he turns into the kitchen. “I need a pen and paper.”

“You have a house. Go home. I’m sure you’ve got what you need there. *Dear Diary, it’s me, Sawyer.*” When he doesn’t even turn around, I slam the front door closed and turn the deadbolt, then follow him into the kitchen, where the big jerk has already pulled a notepad and pen from a drawer. “What are you doing?”

He sits down at the kitchen table and starts scrawling furiously across the yellow legal pad. “Listen. I’ve got an idea, but I need you to do me a favor.”

“Barging into my house after I just got home from a sixteen-hour day might not be the best time to ask for a favor, Kingston.” As true as it may be, it doesn’t stop my curiosity from being piqued enough to pull out another chair and sit

down. I glance over his notes, but they don't make any sense . . . at least not yet. "Hellooooo . . . Sawyer?"

His hand snaps up and covers my mouth. "Listen, Red. I want you to argue with me—all night tonight. I want you to pick out every possible argument and not stop until we've figured out all the ways around them. I don't just want you to. I *need* you to. But not yet."

"Not yet," I mumble behind his hand indignantly, then lick his palm.

Sawyer's eyes flare as he drops his hand and stares at me for a long moment.

The tension between us grows thick . . . and hot . . . and a little desperate . . . until he wraps a hand around the back of my head and presses his forehead to mine. "Remind me why I can't kiss you, Red."

I run my thumb over his full bottom lip, then lift my eyes. "Because I don't like you," I whisper. "Now tell me what I'm supposed to be arguing with you about."



□

Three hours, two cups of coffee, and an entire box of cookies later, we've moved to the couch . . . well, *I've* moved to the couch. Sawyer is still pacing the living room while he talks through the rest of his plan. I'm not even sure he realizes I'm still in the room until he finally stops talking and turns to face me. "Well . . . what do you think?"

I blink up at him a few times at a loss for words, not something I'm overly familiar with, but there's nothing left to argue. "You've got it. You need to take this to Max. You need to present this to the King Corp. board and get your funding."

"You really think so?" He squats down in front of me and places both hands on my bare legs. A zing of frenetic energy shoots through me. The yawn I've been trying to hide disappears, and I'm suddenly more awake now than I was after the last jolt of caffeine.

I run my fingers through his hair and enjoy the way he momentarily closes his eyes and relaxes his shoulders. "It pains me to say this, but it's a great idea, Sawyer. You're in a position to help new and struggling businesses. Bonus points, it also helps the town you love. I mean, come on, your family is one of the founding families, for what it's worth. You said Max has been trying to get you to join King Corp. for a while. And now, you could do it on your own terms."

While I'm talking, he slides onto the seat next to me and digs his thumbs into the back of my neck, and I moan, "Ohh. That feels nice."

"Here's the other thing . . ." His strong hands move to my shoulders, and I practically purr in his arms. "I'm not sure I want to run this traditionally through King Corp."

I look over my shoulder at him. "What do you mean?"

"I've always liked being my own boss. I like the freedom it allows."

He works his fingers over a tight knot of muscles, and a moan slips past my lips. "Keep doing that."

Sawyer laughs, but those fingers keep digging. “Yes, ma’am.”

“I could get used to this.” I flutter my eyes as one hand stays on my shoulder and the other moves down and slides under my nightshirt. “So, what’s your next move?”

“Do you really have to ask?” His rough voice drops to a sexy, playful tone.

“I mean with the idea.” I let out a quick gasp as he pushes my panties to the side and teases my pussy. “It’s not really a proposal if you don’t try to get approval from King Corp.”

One thick finger teases my entrance as his hot breath skims over the shell of my ear. “I’m not really someone who seeks approval. I’d much rather do what I want, then ask for forgiveness.”

Whipping my head toward his, I lift a brow in question.

“Consent is a whole different thing, Red.” He pushes a finger inside me, then another. Curling them both, while the heel of his hand presses against my clit. “And I’ve already got that, don’t I?”

I ride his hand, wishing I was riding his cock, until he takes it away. “Hey.”

“Your phone’s ringing.” His words douse me like a bucket of ice water. I come out of my lust-fueled haze and finally register my work phone shrilling loudly.

“Damn it. I’m on-call tonight.” I jump off the couch and run to my purse, then check my messages. Shit. “I’ve got to go back to the hospital.”

A wicked grin pulls at Sawyer’s lips. “We’ll have to pick back up another time, Red.” He rises from the couch and crosses the room, then takes my face in his hands.

For a moment, I think he’s going to break our rule. I don’t want this man kissing me.

I won’t give him that. That’s giving him more than my body.

But he doesn't kiss my lips. No . . . Sawyer's lips press against my forehead. "And don't get yourself off. If you do, I'll know. Your next orgasm belongs to me. New rule. All your orgasms belong to me while we're doing whatever this is we're doing."

"What?" I demand. "You've got to be kidding. You cannot be delusional enough to think I'm going to listen to you."

His knees bend, bringing him down to eye level, and he yanks me to him. "Try me and see." His eyes stray back to my mouth before he releases me and grabs his coat and hat from the kitchen. "See ya soon, Red."

The front door shuts behind him, and I silently scream in frustration.

If it weren't for the baby I need to deliver, I swear to God, I'd make myself come twice, just to tell the asshole I had.





□

“Dr. Davenport . . .” The fast escape I’d been trying to make from the hospital is thwarted Monday, just before I make it outside. I turn to find my new favorite scrub nurse, Phoebe, behind me.

Some nurses anticipate everything you need before you even open your mouth to ask for it. They know your next move before you do, and they’re absolutely incredible with the patients too. In the short time I’ve been working at Kroydon Hills Hospital, Phoebe has demonstrated how supremely capable she is.

And it doesn’t hurt that she reminds me so much of Quinn, I find it hard to believe they’re not related.

“Hey, Phoebe.” I zip up my coat and walk into the vestibule, ready to get the hell out of here and catch a few hours of sleep. I’m off for the rest of the day, and I promised the actual Quinn we’d grab drinks tonight. We both step through the automatic doors leading to the employee parking area, and the bitter wind takes my breath away. “You done for the day too? You did a great job earlier with Mrs. Metzger.”

“Thanks. Yeah. I’m off for two whole days. I can’t wait to go home, get a hot shower, and sleep in my own bed.” She stuffs her hands in her pockets. “I wanted to . . .” She pauses. “I guess what I mean is . . .”

I stop and wait for her to spit it out, not sure if this will be good or bad but intrigued either way.

“It’s just . . . I’m kinda new in town too. Well, I’ve been here for close to a year, but I don’t really have time for the whole making-friends *thing*. And I thought maybe you’d want to meet for coffee or something one day.” She covers her face with both hands and makes a gagging sound. “To be completely honest, I kinda like the standoffish vibe you’ve got going on. I’m not really a people person either.”

“Wait.” I grab her hands and pull them down to find a completely mortified look on her face. “Standoffish?”

“Well . . . It’s not exactly like you’re a people person.” I’m not sure whether she’s blushing or if the cold air is turning her cheeks pink.

“I guess I’m really not. I just didn’t realize it was that obvious.” Damn. That’s not great news. Nobody wants a doctor who’s a bitch.

“It’s okay. I’m just observant, and you strike me as my kinda people. You’re a little salty and a lot sarcastic. I like it.” She smiles, and I start to wonder if she wants a friend or if she’s hitting on me.

Pretty sure it’s the former. *I think.*

Wow. I really do suck at peopling.

“Well, you kinda nailed me. So, if you’re not exactly looking for the warm and fuzzy type of friend, I guess I fit the bill.” I’m being completely serious, but she laughs. Am I this out of practice at making new friends? “I’m meeting a friend for drinks tonight. You kind of remind me of her. Would you like to join us?”

“I appreciate the offer, but once my head hits my pillow, I plan on sleeping for at least twelve hours. I’ll catch you at the end of the week, Dr. Davenport. Maybe we could grab lunch or something.”

“Sure,” I tell her, and she takes a step away, before I call out, “Phoebe . . . Call me Wren.”

“See you later, Wren.”

Should making a new friend be this stressful?

Am I really that standoffish?



□

*I* get my answer later that night when I tell Quinn about my conversation with Phoebe. We're sitting at the bar on the main floor of Kingdom, and lucky for Quinn, the hot bartender from last week is working again.

Luckier for me, I don't see Sawyer anywhere.

Not that I've been looking.

"So wait, let me get this straight. You think she may have been hitting on you?" Quinn sips her martini, then covers her mouth. "Oh my God. What if she was?"

"She wasn't." I run my finger along the rim of my glass. "Do you ever wish you were interested in women instead of men? I feel like a woman would make such a better significant other than most men ever could."

Quinn sighs. "Of course, I do. Who wouldn't? At least they'd know where to find your clit."

And that's when I spit out my drink. "Oh, honey."

The bartender hands me a napkin and smiles at Quinn.

Oh yeah. He's interested.

He clears his throat and eyes her like a man who knows exactly where to find her clit and what to do with it. "If they can't find it, they're not worth your time."

Isn't *that* the truth?

I lift my glass in the air. "Cheers to that."

"Cheers," Quinn agrees. But it's not me she's looking at.

That's when I feel eyes on me.

I look around. Discreetly, of course. But I don't see Sawyer anywhere.

I shouldn't be fazed by that, but if I'm being honest . . . I am.

*Shit.* I think I'm disappointed.

It must be the sex.

That's the only reason I'd want to see Sawyer Kingston. He got me all worked up last night, and I've been daydreaming about the incredible sex from the other day. Daydreaming . . . night dreaming—basically, reliving it whenever I can has been at the top of my to-do list.

My cheeks heat at the memory of how his hands felt on my body.

“Wren?” calls a familiar voice from behind me, but it's not the one I was begrudgingly hoping it would be. “Wren Davenport?”

I turn my head and come face-to-face with my high-school sweetheart, who unfortunately turned out to be not so sweet and broke my heart. “Dash?” I ask, not sure this day could possibly get any longer.

He pulls me into a hug I never asked for and really don't want. I turn my head when he kisses my cheek, so his lips barely graze me, while I try to wrap my head around seeing him again. Dash was the first man I ever loved—well, the first boy, at least. And now, here he is, standing in front of me, acting like he didn't shred my heart ten years ago.

He's a little heavier, with a little less of the soft, blond hair I loved back then. Though I'm sure some women would say he's classically handsome. But there's not a single tingle or butterfly. There aren't even any memories I can look back and smile over.

My heart hurts when I think about the way he humiliated me in front of the entire school. Not that I'll let him know that.

“What are you doing here, Wren? Are you visiting, or are you back?” His hand rests on my shoulder, and my eyes pointedly look at it, then back to his face, hoping he'll get the hint. Big surprise—he doesn't.

Quinn knows how much he hurt me back then, and her protective side comes out in full force. She leans across the bar, gripping her drink in her hand, and I grab her wrist, in case she's thinking about throwing it in his face. I will not be

at the center of a scene with my ex-boyfriend in my current fuck buddy's bar.

“It's girl's night, Dash. I know you're a pussy, but since you don't actually have a vagina, you can move right the fuck along.” She shoos him away with her hand. “Buh-bye.”

“Still the same, huh, Quinn?” Apparently, Dash still can't take a very loud, very nasty hint either.

He was always prettier than he was smart.

But what does that say about *me*?

I spent two years with him.

Maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought I was.

# SAWYER



*M*onday nights are our slowest night of the week. It's been this way since we opened the doors a few years ago, so it's always been my night to catch up on the business side of Kingdom. Go through my emails, respond to vendors, place the week's orders, and confirm our bands are lined up for the upcoming week.

All the things that have to get done at some point but don't more than once a week because I hate being stuck behind a desk.

Add to that, I'm really not in the mood to be here tonight, and *yeah*, I'm fairly fucking miserable. When I was behind the bar earlier, my head bartender told me I was scaring away the patrons, and I wasn't surprised.

I can't help it . . . I want to be home.

My home.

Wren's home.

I don't care which.

I want to be inside one of them, with my face buried between her legs for fucking hours. It's all I've thought about since yesterday. Hell . . . since the morning she moved in.

Yeah. It's time to get the hell out of my office.

Preferably out of Kingdom altogether.

I close my laptop, grab my keys, and glance at the security feeds hanging on the wall before I get the fuck out of here.



*Wait.* A quick look back at the screens, sure enough, shows me a gorgeous head of copper hair sitting at the bar.

My bar.

Next to her loser ex.

*What the actual fuck?*

This piece of shit. He spent all senior year screwing around on her. No fucking way am I letting that dick anywhere near Wren now. Not if I have anything to say about it.

This is fucking bullshit.

I slam my office door closed and storm through the bar until Wren comes into view. She's laughing at something, but judging by what I can see of her face, it's not a happy laugh.

This isn't my fired-up and feisty Wren.

This version of her has the fury of a thousand fiery suns burning behind her eyes. "Everything okay here?" I ask as I move behind them, inserting myself in the middle of whatever the hell is going on.

Anger pours off my girl in waves.

Not that she's mine.

Not in her mind.

*Not yet.*

I'm gonna fix that shit real soon.

Quinn peeks around Wren and cracks a smile. "Dash the dick is ruining girls' night, just like the old days."

My bartender writes something down on a napkin, then slides it across the bar toward Quinn. "I'm off in two hours, if you're giving up on the girls-only thing."

"If I'm not bailing Wren out of jail for murdering one of these two, I'll take you up on that." Quinn offers him a playful smile as she carefully tucks the napkin in her purse.

"Wren," I start, but she nails me to the wall with one frighteningly furious look.

“Nope. It’s not your turn to speak now.” Her head swivels back to Dash, and I throw up a silent thanks that he seems to be the focus of her fury. You never know with Wren.

“You.” She glares at Dash. “You want to buy me a drink?” Her voice is a mix between sugary sweet and, as my sisters would say, *stabby*. But this dipshit smiles anyway.

“Yeah, let me buy you a drink, and you can tell me what you’ve been up to.” He looks back at me in triumph, but even after spending their junior and senior years of high school together, he still doesn’t know Wren.

I step back and cross my arms over my chest, prepared to watch the show.

“Hmm . . .” She runs her finger along the pink liquor that was just poured into her martini glass, then sucks that finger between her lips. Dash swallows audibly.

What kind of fucking idiot would ever let her go?

This fucking asshole had her for two years and never appreciated what he had.

“Let’s see,” She smiles sweetly—too sweet. “I went to California for my undergrad, like you and I always talked about doing *together*. I was a little heartbroken at first. But I threw myself into my classes and forgot about you pretty quickly.”

“Oooh . . .” She claps her hands together excitedly. “And after a few months, I started dating again. That’s when I finally found out what a real orgasm feels like. I mean, I knew from my vibrator. But you know, when you finally broke up with me, you kind of did me a favor. I hadn’t even realized what a pain in the ass faking an orgasm to appease someone else’s ego really was. Or that, technically, what you’re sporting is a micropenis. I mean, I’d heard of them, but before that, I hadn’t realized they were real.”

“You fucking bitch,” Dash sneers, and I step forward before Wren stops me with a palm to my chest.

“Think about it, Dash. If you hadn’t told everyone I was a lousy lay, and the only reason you stayed with me was because

he told you to . . .” Her glare slices to me, and I feel like I’ve been slapped across the face.

*The fuck?*

“We’d probably be married with kids, and I’d still never know what good sex, or mind-blowing, soul-crushing orgasms could feel like. Or how I should refuse to settle for anything less. So thank you, Dash.” She cups his cheek, then throws her pink martini in his face, then very calmly watches him sputter as my bouncers immediately move to my side. “Don’t ever speak to me again. I deserve so much better than wasting even a single second more of my time on you.”

I nod toward the bouncers. “Get him out of my bar.”

“And you . . .” Wren directs her fiery gaze my way, but it’s lost a bit of the anger fueling it. “Don’t try to fight my fights for me.” She carefully places her glass back on the bar and smooths her hands down over her knee-length, dark-red leather skirt. “Not that Dash is worth a fight or even an ounce of my energy. But I’m not going to lie. I’ve been waiting to throw that drink for years. Fuck him for thinking he’d ever deserve my time again.”

Quinn jumps up from her barstool and wraps an arm around her friend. “Wren, I swear to God, if I swung that way, I’d totally do you right now. That was so badass.”

Wren blushes but smiles. “That’s not something I’ve ever been called before.”

When Quinn orders them another round of drinks and goes back to flirting with my bartender, Wren seems to run out of the adrenaline she had a minute ago. Her voice lowers, and there’s a visible shake in her hands. “I never understood how you could have known what that ass was doing back then and still not have told me. Not that it’s something I think about now, but I just don’t understand why.”

I see the vulnerability she’s failing to mask.

Something Wren has always done well.

I take her hand in mine and pull her behind me, even as she tries to dig her heels in and stand her ground. “No. I’m not

going anywhere with you right now. I'm not in the mood for your Neanderthal games tonight, Kingston." But a new fire lights her face, this one laced with excitement and anticipation. This one I know, and damn, I love that look on her.

"Don't you know sometimes you just need to Neanderthal shit up, Red?" I lift her up and throw her over my shoulder, then turn toward Quinn as Wren smacks my back with her fists. "She's got a ride home, Quinn." I look to the bartender Quinn's been flirting with. "The crowd's dead tonight. Ask someone to cover for you, and you can get out of here early too."

I don't wait for either of them to reply as blood wooshes in my ears.

I'm done playing this game.

I'm done playing any game.

Whether she realizes it or not, I've played by her rules for fucking years, and now, I'm done.

"Put me down." Wren's legs fight against the arm I've got hooked around the backs of her thighs. "Kingston," she shrieks. "I'm warning you."

I march across the empty dance floor, intent on going upstairs to my office. But when her pointy boot makes contact with my abs, I turn and head down the employees' hall instead, and walk all the way back to the corner before dropping her down on her feet in front of the storage closet. I cup the back of her head with one hand and her hip with the other, then push her body up against the wall.

"Would you stop acting like a spoiled little girl for five fucking minutes?" She refuses to face me until I force her to. "Ten goddamn years, Wren, and you're still blaming me for your bad taste in boyfriends? I thought we were past this shit."

Her cheeks flame brighter than her hair when she smacks her palm against my chest and smiles a seductive smile. "Why the hell would you think that? You fucked me before you ever touched me, Sawyer, and you know it." Her fingers grip the front of my shirt, pulling me closer. "Did you wish it was you

instead of him?” Her breath catches when I lean into her. “Is that why you never said anything about all the other girls? Were you too scared? Too jealous?” She nips my bottom lip. “You never told me why.”

My hand slides from her hip down the length of her leather skirt, pushing it up and feeling her bare skin. Then I slide my knee between her legs.

I don’t miss the beautiful hitch in her breath, which has my already hard cock leaking in my jeans. “Jesus, Red. Is that seriously what you think?”

I slide my palm along the inside of her soft thigh and groan as her furious eyes flutter shut. “There were rumors all year. But that’s all they were. *Rumors*. It’s not like I knew they were true. And if you ever bothered to really think about it, you might remember me asking you why the hell you were still with that asshole, and you told me to mind my own fucking business.” My finger runs along the seam of her lace panties.

She’s wet and hot, and she might not know it yet, but she’s mine.

“Wren.” I shove her panties to the side and rub my palm over her clit, playing with her drenched sex. Teasing her. “I told him to come clean to you as soon as I found out what was happening. I threatened him and basically forced him to tell you the truth. I didn’t want to see you get hurt.” My voice is low and angry, remembering how pissed I was all those years ago. “But I told you all this back then. Why the hell are we talking about it now?”

Her eyes fly open when I push inside her hot pussy with two fingers. I watch her bite down on her pouty lip to hold back a sexy moan that still manages to escape.

“Because I don’t want to like you. I can’t. We can never be more than this, and we both know the reasons.” It’s not anger she’s projecting. It’s hurt.

“All I’ve ever tried to do is protect you,” I admit.

“Why?” She tugs my hair and wraps one leg around mine, opening herself up for me. “Why did you have to protect me?”

“Are you really that dense?” I boost her up the wall, shoving her skirt around her hips, then push us both into the storage room, letting the door swing shut before I drop her back down to her feet.

Wren pops the button on my jeans, already breathless, and goddamn, I like that.

“But you hate me. Why would you want to protect me?” She palms my dick, and I hiss through my teeth, then spin her to face the wall.

She bends over, sticking that beautiful ass out and whips her head around. Shiny strands of copper hair spill in a waterfall around her shoulders. Her pupils are blown wide with a wild need that matches my own, but I refuse to give her what we both want until she hears me.

Really hears what I’m telling her.

Because I’m not doing this again.

“I’ve never hated you, Red. I’ve always loved firing you up, but that was because you came alive and out of that perfect little shell you constructed for yourself each time you reacted. We pushed each other to be better for years. You may have acted like you hated me, but I never believed it. I still don’t. And it never came from a place of hate for me.” My hand skims the curve of her hip while the other guides the tip of my dick through her slick, wet heat.

My muscles contract with the sheer will it takes not to fuck her now.

To wait until neither of us can think—forget either of us being able to talk.

No one has ever had the effect on me this woman does.

*She always has.*

“Speak for yourself, Kingston,” she pants and pushes back against me. “You know it’s not that cut and dry.”

I hold her still. “It never will be, if you only see what you want to see.”

“I still don’t like you,” she pushes.

“You like my cock,” I tease, then slide my hand up her back, stopping between her shoulder blades and pushing down to bend her over an old bar stool. “You like the way I fuck you.”

She whimpers but doesn’t answer me.

“Tell me, Wren . . .” My hand moves under her sweater, needing to feel more.

*More . . .*

More skin.

More Wren.

“Yes,” she whimpers and wiggles back against me. “So fuck me.”

*I*n a harsh move, I pull the lace cup of her bra down and plump her perfect fucking breast, loving the way her nipple hardens against my palm. Loving it almost as much as the strangled moan that escapes her when I finally stop teasing her and slam home in one long, hard thrust.

Her back arches, and we both claw at each other as I fuck her. Claim her.

My cock kisses that sweet spot over and over again. “You feel so fucking good, Red.”

I take her hard and fast, loving the sounds spilling from her lips.

The way she pants and pleads and every sharp breath in between.

With my hands wrapped tight around her hips, I pull out.

“Sawyer . . .” she cries.

I spin her around to face me and slam her back against the wall, then wrap her legs around my waist. “I want your eyes on me when you come. I want you right here in the present with me. Only me.”

“Please, please, please,” she whimpers and clings to me as her gorgeous green eyes shine bright in the darkened room. A strip of silvery moonlight streams in through the small window dancing over her flushed skin, illuminating the freckles she’s always hated but I’ve secretly loved. “Kingston . . . move. Please God, just move.”

A torturous heat licks down my spine with every thrust of my hips.

Every slide of my cock as I drive into her perfect pussy.

Hot and wet and tight. *Fucking magnificent.*

Like nothing I’ve ever felt before.

*Shit.*

“Wren,” I stop, and she cries out. “Baby . . . I don’t have a condom on.”

Her eyes soften. Maybe at the endearment that just slipped out.

I can’t tell. And I’m a little scared she’s about to kill me for my lack of a condom.

But this woman never does what I expect her to. Instead of screaming, she runs a hand over my cheek and shocks the hell out of me when she presses her lips to mine. Soft and warm. She tastes like sugar and something stronger. Her tongue traces my lips, and I tangle my fingers in her hair. Savoring her before cupping her face in my hands and taking control. Tasting her. Devouring her.

“Fuck me, Sawyer. I’m on the pill. I’m clean. Please, please, please, tell me you’re clean,” she begs. And I’ve never been so fucking happy in all my life to agree with her.

I stroke my tongue into her mouth and move inside her again.

Wren’s head tips back against the wall, and her eyes close.

“Eyes on me, Red.” Those eyes flutter back open, and I can’t help the cocky smile spreading across my face. “I’m clean. I’ve never been with anyone without a condom before.



Never.” I drive into her again and pull her body down at the same time. “Never. Just you.”

Her mouth slams down on mine, and her walls tighten around me. Electricity soars between us, sending a shockwave tugging at my spine. My heart beats a rapid and wild pounding song while I fuck her through her orgasm and mine. Something primal in me knows this is different. Knows there’s no going back.

I hold her close while we fight to catch our breath.

Her face burrows against my shoulder until she stretches her long legs to get down.

As soon as I set her feet on the floor, she adjusts her skirt and sweater but never makes eye contact, and my heart drops. I lift her chin and catch the tears in her eyes. “Shit, Red. Did I hurt you?”

“No.” She shakes her head and steps back. “I’m sorry. I can’t.” She touches my lip with her finger. “I shouldn’t have . . .”

I reach for her again, but she pulls away. “I’ve got to go, Sawyer. Just . . .” She takes another step away. “Don’t follow me.” She pushes through the door, and I feel like I’ve been sucker-punched.

“Wren . . . don’t do this.”

The door swings shut behind her, and I’m left standing there.

Alone.

What the hell just happened?

# WREN



*Damn it.* I move as quickly through the bar as I can in my heels, trying not to topple over on my face and make an even bigger fool out of myself than I already have. I'm not sure how long I was gone, but Quinn and her hot bartender are no longer here.

*Okay. I've got this.* I quickly pull up the Uber app on my phone and grab the first car I can. And *yay* to the walk of shame gods for feeling generous, it's only two minutes away.

But, if Sawyer wants to stop me, it won't be hard.

*Shit.*

My head spins in so many directions after the literal mind-fuck that was tonight.

Everything he said . . . I still have every reason to hate him. *Don't I?*

I'm fairly sure half the reason I started hating Sawyer Kingston was because he said he hated me first. Granted, I was probably five at the time, so it seemed very important that if he hated me, I had to hate him too.

I may have made his GI Joe marry my Barbie. Even at five, I knew GI Joe was way hotter than Ken. Who wants the boring blond with no muscles, and no job to speak of, when you can have tall, dark, and handsome instead?

Damn you, Sawyer Kingston.

Once I'm home, I deadbolt the door, then fall against it and slide down to the floor.

What the hell did I do?

I ignore the time and pull out my phone.

So help me God, if my sister doesn't answer, I might catch the next flight to Costa Rica. She's the only one who can help me work through this. I just hope I don't lose her in the process . . . and that maybe she can forgive me.

I stare at her picture on my phone with tears in my eyes before I rip the Band-Aid off and FaceTime her.

When she finally answers, her eyes are half closed, and her room is pitch-black. "Did someone die?" she croaks into the phone.

"Haley, I think I messed up, and I don't know how to fix it." The pit in my stomach grows with each word.

She turns on her bedside lamp and rubs her eyes. "What time is it?"

"It's midnight here, so I think it's eleven for you." My first tear falls, and I know I'm fucked. "I need to ask you a question."

"Wrenny, what's wrong? Are Mom and Dad okay?"

I take a deep breath, knowing it's now or never.

We've avoided talking about this for years, but I have to know. "Do you think you'll ever be able to forgive Sawyer Kingston for what he did to you?"

Hayley's green eyes grow wide with confusion before narrowing on me. "Forgive him for what?"

"Forgive him for the accident," I whisper, as if the mere mention of it can conjure all her demons.

I remember getting the call like it was yesterday, not the summer before my senior year of high school. Haley had just graduated, and we were all at a party. Sawyer and Hudson had shown up in a brand-new Jeep, and Haley and her boyfriend had gotten in a huge fight, so she wanted to go home.

I didn't want to leave, so Sawyer drove my sister home.

And flipped his Jeep.

They amputated my sister's right foot four days later.

That night started Haley's drug addiction. We just didn't know it at the time.

When they stopped refilling her pain meds, she stole Mom's prescription pad.

That's when she got caught.

That was the first time she ended up in rehab.

Hayley's brows pull together. "Oh, Wren. I don't need to forgive Sawyer."

"Why, Hales? Was that part of your recovery? Forgiving everyone who's wronged you?" I push through the tears. So protective of my sister and desperately wishing she was sitting in front of me instead of on a separate continent. That way, when I tell her what I've been doing, at least she could be disgusted with me in person. There'd be no hiding.

Self-loathing wraps itself around me in a tight grip.

"It wasn't his fault, Wren." A single tear slides down her cheek before she carefully wipes it away. "I told Mom and Dad we should have talked to you about this."

"How could it possibly not be his fault? He lost control of the Jeep." I shake my head, confused and emotionally exhausted. "I know he didn't mean for it to happen, but I hate him for what he did to you."

"Sawyer didn't do it," she says in a quiet confession, and at first, I think I heard her wrong. "He wasn't driving."

"What?" I ask through a full-blown sob.

"I asked him if I could drive the Jeep home." She rubs a hand over her face, hiding her eyes. "Dad had offered to get me a new car to reward me for being accepted to the University of Penn. He was so proud that I was going to his alma mater. I was thinking about getting a Jeep, so I asked Sawyer to let me drive home."

"Haley?" *No.*

“He didn’t know I was high, Wren. You can’t be mad at him. Sawyer didn’t know,” she pleads. “I told him I hadn’t been drinking. Then when it happened, I freaked out and begged him to switch places with me. I’d stolen Mom’s prescription pad to get the Oxys. I didn’t want her to get in trouble.”

“Why . . . Why would he switch places with you?” I don’t understand. None of this makes sense.

“I lied, Wrenny. I lied and told him I’d had a few beers and begged him to switch places with me. I didn’t even feel the bone sticking out of my leg at that point. Hell, I couldn’t feel anything. But none of that was Sawyer’s fault. He was trying to protect me.” She wipes away another errant tear, battling to keep her composure.

My pulse throbs behind my eyes as the room spins around me with a new reality I’m not ready to accept. “I thought your addiction started because of the accident,” I whisper, trying to wrap my head around the betrayal. “I’ve blamed him for that for years.”

“No, Wren. I spent my senior year getting high with that asshole, Mark. He got hurt playing football that year. The first time I ever tried anything, it was his prescription.” The shadows dance across her face, hiding her eyes but not her tears.

“You lost your foot, Hales. I blamed Sawyer for that. I blamed him for everything. We grew up with them, and you let him take the blame.” My anger is no longer pointed at Sawyer.

I’ve never yelled at my sister.

Not once in all the years since the accident.

Not when she stole money. Not when she made Mom and Dad cry.

Not when she broke my heart.

But I’m yelling now. “How could you do that?”

“Mom and Dad know the truth, Wren. So did Mr. and Mrs. Kingston. I don’t know why they never told you, but I thought

you knew.” She holds her composure and pushes away another tear. “I thought you knew,” she repeats weakly.

My anger breaks, and I lean my head back against the door and close my eyes.

Suddenly exhausted.

“He was protecting you.” The same way he was always trying to protect *me*.

She wipes her face on her sleeve. “I’m sorry for not telling you sooner, Wren. I wish I hadn’t assumed you knew.”

“Me too, Hales. Me too.”

“I love you, Wren. Please don’t let this break us.”

“It won’t. I just need some time, okay?” Haley nods her head, and I end the call, then throw the phone across the room and curl up in a fetal position.

Fuck this day.

My phone vibrates a while later with an incoming text, and I think about leaving it there. It’s not like I can sleep on the floor, so I guess it’s time to pull up my big-girl panties and get up.

I pick up the phone and scroll through the notifications.

One text from Quinn and four from Sawyer.

Because that’s just who I need to deal with now.

The first one is from an hour ago.

SAWYER

I’m not sure what the hell has you running, but can you let me know when you make it home?

The weight of Haley’s confession crushes me.

He waited thirty minutes before sending the next one. I didn’t get the notification because I was already on the phone with Haley.

SAWYER

I asked nicely, Red. Now I'm telling you – Text me when you're home safe.

His next text is five minutes after the last one.

SAWYER

Don't forget, I have a key to your house, since I own the damn thing. Don't make me use it.

That's followed up five minutes later by the final one that just came through.

SAWYER

Open your front door, Red.

*Oh no.*

No. No. No . . . I stand and pull the sheer curtains to the side and peek through my front door. *Oh shit.*

Sawyer's sitting on the rocking chair in the cold, with Zeus sleeping at his feet.

I'm not sure I can do this now.

Scratch that. I can't handle this . . . him. Not now.

I crack the door open, hiding my tear-stained face in the shadows, and Sawyer jumps up from the rocker. His cheeks are pink from the cold air, and his eyes are blazing with anger.

“What are you doing here, Kingston?” The cold air skims my heated, damp skin, and I shiver, so unbelievably over today.

Zeus must be over it too because he doesn't wait for an invite. He just trots right into my living room and curls up on the rug. I turn back to his owner, annoyed. “I can't do this with you tonight.”

“An hour, Red. I've been waiting for you to answer me for over an hour. You can be pissed at me, but I needed to know

you were okay. Was it so hard to just text back and let me know you were alive?” He doesn’t move to come inside like his dog. No, he stays where he is, both feet firmly planted on my porch and both arms crossed over his chest, like he’s the one with the right to be pissed right now.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” That’s it. I feel my last string of sanity snapping and reach a hand out then tug him toward my door. “If you’re going to patronize me like a goddamned child, you need to do it inside the house where it’s warm, asshole.”

He strides into my house like he owns the place.

I guess that’s because he does.

Damn it.

Then with one hand, he pushes the front door closed and cups my face. “I’m not patronizing you. You ran out of the bar like your ass was on fire. You told me not to follow you. I was worried, Wren. I have sisters. And I’d hope, even if they’re arguing with their husbands, they’d still make sure they got home safe.” His eyes skim over my face before his thumbs brush away my tears, and his voice softens. “Why are you crying?”

“You’re not my husband, Kingston. You’re not my boyfriend. You’re not even my friend.” The words leave my lips, but I’m not sure I entirely believe them anymore.

“What if I told you I *should* be?” His thumb caresses my cheek, and I lean into it for a hot second before realizing exactly what he just said.

“We don’t even like each other.” I pull away from him and walk into the kitchen so I can fill a bowl of water for Zeus. I feel Sawyer’s body behind me as I turn the faucet off.

His hands grip my hips as his lips brush against my neck. “Yes, we do.”

Why does my body like the sound of that so much?

“You like lying to me, Kingston. And I don’t like liars.” I refuse to turn around and face him. I can’t. Not yet. I’m not



sure who I'm angrier with—my sister or him.

“I've never lied to you, Wren.”

Well, that makes this decision easier.

I spin around in his arms and push him back. “Yes you did. You lied to me for eleven years.”

He plants his hand on either side of me, gripping the counter and staring straight into my eyes. “Listen to me, Wren, and listen good—because I'm only going to say this once. I've never lied to you. Never.”

I take a step back until the counter is cutting into my back, and I can't escape any further. “Why did you let me believe you were the one driving that night?” I whisper, and as if the words alone are enough to break me, more tears threaten to fall.

Sawyer's face stays stoically blank. “Wren . . .”

“No. I just got off the phone with Haley, and she told me everything. Everything,” I sob, giving in to the hurt and pain. “You let me believe you ruined her life.”

He wraps his strong arms around me and rests his chin on my head. “That wasn't my story to tell, Wren. It was Hayley's. And I swear to God, I thought you knew. Your parents knew. My parents knew. How the hell did you not know?”

“I didn't know,” I cry. “Everyone knew but me. You let me hate you for years. I thought you started my sister's downward spiral. I thought it was all your fault.” I shove against him, but he refuses to let go. “My family was broken for years. *Years*. How could you let me believe that about you?”

I pound against his chest, and this man just stands there and takes it.

He lets me cry. Sob. Scream.

Until I've got nothing left.

Until my legs give out.

Then he carries me to my bed.

This man, who I hated for something he didn't even do, crawls into bed next to me and holds me while I cry.

At some point in the early hours of the morning, he presses his lips against mine and whispers, "I will never hurt you."

He moves off the bed and pulls the covers up around me, though, it doesn't matter. They're not as warm as his arms were. But I don't tell him that. I take the coward's way out and leave my eyes closed, pretending to sleep. "We're gonna get through this, Wren. I promise."

And then he's gone. And I'm left lying there, alone, wondering if that's possible.

# SAWYER



I leave Wren sleeping soundly in her bed and walk across the yard to my house with Zeus tailing behind me. My mind is reeling.

*Can't slow down. Won't shut up. Reeling.*

I can't call Hudson because if I wake up Maddie, he'll kill me. She's getting less sleep with each day she comes closer to delivering the baby. If I call Max, I risk waking up Serena. Jace is clueless. That leaves Becks.

I walk in my front door and swipe my finger across the screen, then hit his number.

It rings twice before he answers, "What?"

"I need to talk to somebody."

He grunts, then shushes someone I assume is Kendall. "You okay? Need a lawyer?" he asks, deadly serious.

"No, asshole. I just need to talk. You remember when Haley Davenport and I were in that car accident?" I put the phone on speaker and drop it to the kitchen counter, while I start a pot of coffee.

Becks yawns. "Yeah. She totaled your new car. Tried to get you to take the blame for it. Thank God, Dad knew you were lying."

"Wren thought I was driving." All these fucking years, she blamed me. "She's hated me for years because she thought it was my fault."

“Oh fuck.” I hear a door shut on his end, and then the fucker starts peeing. “Dude, that’s bad.”

“You’re seriously peeing while you’re talking to me?”  
Why am I surprised?

The toilet flushes. “Not anymore. So what are you going to do about Wren?”

“I’m not sure. I know it’s bad, but it’s not my fucking fault. I’m not sure how I ended up being the bad guy.” I lean against the counter, picturing the devastation on her face last night and knowing I’ve got to fix this.

“I say give her space. She’s got to deal with shit herself. She’s the one who just found out everyone lied to her.”

“I didn’t lie,” I groan and beg the coffee gods to speed the hell up.

“Do you care about her, brother?”

“I’m not sure care is a strong enough word, man.” *Fuck.*

“Give her space to work through it then.”

“You aren’t even a little helpful, brother,” I groan.

“I do what I can. Call me later, after I’ve had some coffee and sex, and I’ll come up with better options.” He ends the call, and I’m left staring at the phone.

*Space.*

I’ve never been good at space.

I shoot off a text and hope she hasn’t blocked my number.

I can try physical space, but that doesn’t mean I’m leaving her alone.

SAWYER

I never wanted to hurt you.

Wren: Thank you for telling me the truth last night.

SAWYER

I will always tell you the truth.

SAWYER

Let me take you to dinner, and we can talk.

Wren: I'm not ready to talk yet.

SAWYER

The ball is in your court, Red.

*Y*et. Small win, I guess.

She could have said fuck off. Not that I would have.

I throw my phone on the bed and jump in the shower.

This is going to be a long week.



| |

Wren

I don't see Sawyer for the rest of the week. Not even in passing. Not even his dog. Which I guess is good for Zeus, but I may have gotten used to seeing the slobbery little guy on my way in and out of the house.

He hasn't stopped by again.

Sawyer . . . not the dog. Even if, occasionally, I do think of him as a dog.

I do not miss arguing with him.

I don't. Really . . . I don't think I do.

The question is, who exactly am I trying to convince?

My heart hurts, and while I've spoken with Haley two more times since our call Monday night, I haven't talked to my mom or dad about it yet.

Maybe that's why I haven't felt like I'm ready to talk to Sawyer.

At least not until he texted earlier today.

A swarm of butterflies take flight as soon as his name appears on my screen.

SAWYER

I'm about to walk into a meeting with Max, Scarlet, Becks, and Lenny.

WREN

About your proposal?

SAWYER

Yup.

WREN

Good luck.

SAWYER

I knew you didn't really hate me.

WREN

I wouldn't go that far.

SAWYER

Go out to dinner with me tonight.

WREN

It's a Friday. Aren't you working at Kingdom?

SAWYER

I own the place. I make my own hours.

WREN

Go wow your brothers and sisters, Kingston.

I shove my phone in my pocket and grimace, knowing Maddie Kingston is my first patient today.

She's in and out in thirty minutes.

Hudson and she came together.

She's got three weeks left until her due date, and we'll see her weekly between now and then. I absolutely adore this couple, but it's hard to see them and not think about Sawyer and my sister, and the accident, and the lies.

But then again, it's all I've thought about all week.

I've successfully avoided my parents with surprising ease.



I guess I just wanted to wrap my head around everything before I asked them why.

But that avoidance comes to an end when my mom pops her head into the exam room at the tail end of my next appointment. “Good morning, Mrs. Ryan. How are you feeling today?”

Mom has already delivered three babies for this patient.

The pretty blonde sitting on the table rubs her lower back and groans. “Hey, Dr. Esher. I’m okay. Just sore. One of these little buggers doesn’t like it when I sit down for too long. Of course, they’re little pains in the ass,”—she looks at the woman standing next to her, and smiles—“just like their father.”

My patient is a surrogate for her twin brother. He couldn’t be here today, but his wife hasn’t stopped smiling throughout the entire appointment, not even as she cried when one of the babies appeared to be waving on the ultrasound.

“Please tell your family I said hi. And congratulate your husband for me. That was a big win.” Mom looks between the ladies and winks, then turns to me. “Dr. Davenport, would you stop by my office when you’re done, please?”

I nod, and watch her leave, then turn back to my patient. “Big win?” I ask, and a dazzling smile spreads across her face. But she merely nods and grabs her sister-in-law’s hand to push on her belly.

“He’s kicking,” the mommy-to-be exclaims, and I’m reminded again why I love my job.

I tell Mrs. Ryan to make another appointment for next week and say my goodbyes before begrudgingly stopping by Mom’s office. “Hey.” I stick my head in her door. “You wanted to see me?”

“I did. Your father and I want to take a cruise around Greece next month, maybe do a little island-hopping. I’m working with someone to plan it now.” She pushes a paper across her desk.

I glance down at it and drop down into the chair facing her.

I look at it again. “Mom, this says you’ll be gone for six weeks.”

“It does.” She pushes more sheets of paper toward me. “Don’t worry, darling. I’m not leaving you in a lurch. I’ve interviewed a few doctors already. We need to bring at least one or two more on board if I’m going to cut my hours back.”

“What?” I ask, utterly confused. “You’re cutting your hours? Permanently? Do you think maybe you might have wanted to talk to me about this?” My skin breaks out in a cold sweat. “Or is keeping things from me going to become a regular thing?”

Mom rolls her eyes, looking less than thrilled at my concern. “We’re talking now, Wren. Your father and I are getting older. He’s finally agreed to retire, and I’d like to enjoy some time with him.”

I can’t help but wonder, if this is something she’s been planning, why she didn’t discuss it with me earlier. It’s like all those years of hero-worshipping my parents was destroyed with one phone call.

“Please don’t worry about this. It’s not like I’m saying we need to bring on another partner. Just a few associates, so you don’t run yourself ragged the way I have for years. I want more for you, sweet girl. I want you to have a life where you don’t have to miss all the holidays with your children. I want you to be able to go on vacations with your husband. I want you to have a life.”

“I don’t even have a boyfriend, let alone a husband, *Mother*. And I promise you, I’m in no rush for kids.” I glance over the resume sitting on the top of the pile before looking back at her. “Mom, are you telling me you’re going on vacation, or are you telling me you’re retiring?”

My head feels like it might explode, depending on which answer I get.

Hell, it might detonate either way.

“I’m not retiring yet, Wren. But I am going to be cutting back my hours.”

When my eyes triple in size, she reaches across the desk and takes my hand. “Listen to me. I want you to have more of a work-life balance than I did. So I won’t be doing anything until I have the infrastructure in place to support it. I’m not throwing you to the wolves.”

Could have fooled me.

“Have you hired anyone yet?” I ask indignantly, unsure how I feel about all of this.

She taps a pen against her desk. “No. I want you to look over these resumes. These are the three I’ve narrowed it down to. I’d like you to meet with all of them, then give me your opinions on each. They’re coming in this afternoon. Why don’t you stop by the house on your way home, and we can discuss it then.”

I guess tonight is the night all sorts of things will be discussed.

I pick up the papers and stand. “I feel like you just ripped the rug out from under me, Mom.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way. That’s not what I’m trying to do.”

I nod and walk out of her office.

This is not at all how I imagined my day going when I got out of bed today.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and I silence it without looking.

I’m nowhere near ready to deal with another person yet.

Instead, I paste a smile on my face and deal with the rest of the day.

*Fake it till you make it, and all that shit.*

## SAWYER



Since it's the middle of February and we're knee deep in hockey season, my siblings and I are meeting at the Revolution offices today because Max is slammed this week. His assistant, Quinn, greets me when I step off the elevator to escort me to the conference room. "They're all waiting for you," she tells me with a knowing look on her face.

"Thanks. You really don't have to walk me to the meeting. I know where I'm going."

Quinn turns to face me and blocks me from moving past her. "I like you, Sawyer. I always have. I like the way you make Wren forget to stress out, but if you hurt her . . ." Both of her eyebrows raise, and she tilts her head.

I hold back my laughter. Pretty sure this tiny woman is threatening me.

She's five foot nothing and maybe a hundred pounds, but she's going to bat for her friend, and I like that.

"I gotcha, Quinn." Then the idea hits me. Winning over Wren's best friend might help me with my newfound mission in life. "I'm not going to hurt her, if that's what you're worried about. I'm really trying here. Have you talked to her this week?"

"Yeah. We've talked." She looks away quickly. "For what it's worth, I think it was very nice of you to try and cover for Haley. I just wish Wren hadn't spent the past ten years believing something that wasn't true."

She plants her hands on her hips and narrows her eyes. “It wouldn’t bother her if she didn’t care. I guess that should give you a little hope.”

“I want to take her on a real date. Start us over the way it should have been.”

Quinn looks skeptical. “You better have a good plan.”

“I’m working on it. But I need to get her to agree to talk to me first.” I look over her shoulder and catch Lenny popping her head out of the conference room. She sees me talking to Quinn, then disappears.

A slow smile spreads across Quinn’s face. “If you can’t get her to go on a date with you . . . Bring the date to *her*.”

“Sawyer,” Scarlet calls, having stepped out of the conference room and tapping her red-soled shoe a million miles a minute. “Stop flirting with Quinn and get your ass in here. I’m hungry.”

Quinn’s face flames as she slowly turns toward my sister. “We’re not flirting. He wants advice about Wren, not me.”

Scarlet’s mouth gapes open, and I freeze before she laughs.

More like cackles.

*Son of a bitch.*

“Not helpful, Quinn,” I mumble under my breath, and she stops breathing.

“Oh, God. I didn’t mean to say that.” She looks from me to Scarlet. “Guess you’re not going to just forget I said that . . .”

My sister shakes her head very slowly, and Quinn pats my back. “Good luck, Kingston.” Then she walks away. Guess I no longer need to be escorted to the damn conference room.

*Chicken.*

When I step into the room, Max, Becket, and Lenny all sit around the large conference table that’s dominated by the dramatic red-white-and-blue Revolution logo inlaid in the middle of it. Rather than taking her seat, Scarlet leans against the window overlooking the ice below. “Oh, little brother . . .”

She shakes her head, then looks over at Lenny. “He was asking Quinn for dating advice.”

Lenny gasps, and I glare at Scarlet, while at the same time preparing to embrace the *suck* that’s about to happen.

Max leans back in his seat at the head of the table, a look of disbelief in his eyes. “Really . . . ? Come on. You’re asking Quinn O’Doul for dating advice? You didn’t think maybe, *just maybe*, if you wanted advice on women, you should come to me, asshole?”

Becks snorts, but keeps his mouth shut for the first time in the history of his life.

Yeah. I’m going to owe him one after this.

Max sits up straighter and challenges him, “At least I’m married to a woman everyone doesn’t secretly hate.”

“Oh, it’s not a secret,” Lenny adds. “Please don’t marry Medusa, Becks.” Then she turns to me. “And you . . . whatever you do, do not go to one of our brothers for advice on women. You’ve got three sisters, who are perfectly capable of giving you good advice. Hell, Madeline would give you better advice than our brothers. Come to one of us.”

Scarlet rounds the table and sits across from Max. “I second that. Do not ask any of these idiots.”

“My wife’s amazing. What are you talking about?” Max counters.

Lenny chuckles. “And the fact you married her is also amazing, Maximus, because you’ve got absolutely zero game with the ladies.”

For fuck’s sake. “Guys, I wasn’t asking Quinn for advice.” Well, not really, but they don’t need to know that.

“But you do like Wren?” Lenny purses her lips together, waiting for my answer. All I see when I look at her is the little girl who used to follow Hudson, Wren, and me around on family vacations. Only now, she’s looking at me with hearts in her eyes, like she sees a potential sister-in-law, and strangely, I

don't hate that idea. But I don't have the time or any desire to discuss it now. "I like her, Sawyer. I always have."

I ignore my little sister and hand each sibling my proposal. "Can we discuss my proposal? Please?"

"Aww. Sawyer, honey," Scarlet coos in her mom voice. "I hope you don't sound quite so whiny when you're with Wren. Most women don't do whiny—unless that's her kink. Cade likes it when I—"

"Jesus Christ, Scarlet. Stop." I sit down and drop my head to the table. "Just stop."

"Oh, but it's so much fun," she laughs before finally sitting down. "Fine." She opens her proposal. "Okay, Sawyer. Wow me."

"Yeah, Sawyer," Becks agrees. "Wow us."

Lenny snickers, and Max checks his watch. "Okay, let's hear him out. Go ahead, Sawyer."

"Thanks, Max."

"Wow us," he responds, and I swear to God, my siblings are assholes. Every single one of them—except Madeline. She's too young to be an asshole yet. But give her time, and I'm sure she'll join the ranks of the rest of us.

I guess they're finally ready to take me seriously because the four stooges stop busting my balls long enough to shut up and listen while I present my proposal for the angel investment firm—King Investments—and what I want to do with it in Kroydon Hills.





□

Wren

I'm not sure what I was expecting when I sat down at my parents' dinner table and decided now was the time to drop the bomb.

I guess I expected an argument, or tears, or maybe an apology.

What I got was silence.

Complete silence.

Nobody speaks.

Nobody moves.

Neither of them so much as shift their eyes from me.

They don't even look at each other. It's like the world has stopped spinning.

"Say something," I demand. "Tell me why you let me believe that this was Sawyer's fault for years. Tell me Haley was wrong and you didn't know. Tell me you didn't know she started using the year before the accident. Tell me you didn't let me blame someone who should never have had to carry that burden."

My mother finally looks at my father and takes a deep breath before answering me. "One day, you'll have children, and then you'll understand the need to protect your child at all costs, Wren. Your sister's life was turned upside down in a matter of days. We didn't know about the drugs. We just knew she was hurt and the accident would have life-altering consequences for her."

"We didn't know the truth right away." Dad picks up his bourbon and swirls it in the crystal glass. "It came out a few days later when we were told they were going to amputate Haley's foot. The truth came out in the chaos of the week and the following weeks and months that turned into years. Our lives were turned upside down, and I guess we never thought about correcting everyone's assumptions. We were just so

worried about our little girl, we didn't think about the consequences facing anyone else."

I slam my napkin down over my uneaten food. "But John Kingston was your best friend, and Sawyer was his son. How could you do that to them?" I want to scream, *How could you do that to me?* But I bite my tongue . . . for now.

"Honey," my mom starts, then stops when I level my glare her way. "We weren't thinking."

"You're right. You weren't. You let me believe a lie for a huge part of my life." I look my father's way. "I was your little girl too. And by trying to protect one, you failed the other." I reach down into my bag and pull out the folder full of resumes and my notes and hand it to my mother. "I circled the two I like. I think you should hire them and take your vacation as soon as you can, Mom. I think it would be best for all of us."

"We love you, Wren. You've got to know that," Dad tells me as I rise from my chair.

"I do know that, Daddy. I also know we went through hell during those years. But I still deserved to know the truth. I was affected too, but no one thought about that. You protected her but hurt me. That's going to take some time to get over."

I grab my bag and look at my mom. "Let's just hope it doesn't take as long as this did."

I walk out of the room with my head held high and grab my coat.

I don't turn around. I can't. But I do tell them, "I love you too," before I leave the house.

This is all too fucked up for words.

# SAWYER



I look at my watch for the tenth time in the last ten minutes and wonder if Quinn knew what she was talking about.

I stopped by Quinn's desk after my meeting, and she was more than happy to help me however she could, including letting me know Wren isn't on-call today and should have been home almost an hour ago. I debate texting her, but knowing Wren, she'd ignore me on principal alone.

Luckily, I don't have to debate with myself for long because moments later, a car pulls down the gravel driveway in front of her house. I double-check to make sure it's not a delivery truck, then send Zeus on his way.

Phase One of my plan is a go.

If she wants to treat me like her archnemesis, I've devised a plan like an evil mastermind. My goal is to get her to admit we can be *more*. That we could work. That it's worth giving us a real shot at being more than friends with benefits. Or as she'd put it, *enemies with benefits*.

But first, I need to get her to forgive me.

I'm not expecting her to jump at the idea, but I don't mind playing the long game if she's the prize waiting for me at the end.

I watch through the window as Zeus trots right through the goddamned electric fence like it's not even there, then sits at Wren's feet once she gets out of the car.

*Bend down, Red.*

She scratches behind his ears, then under his chin.

That's when she notices the note hanging from his collar.

She straightens and looks over at my house.

*Come on, Red. Don't let me down.*

She grabs a bag out of her car, then slams the door shut behind her. For a moment, I think she's going to ignore me and head into her house. She looks between our houses, like she's not sure what to do, but eventually, she turns left instead of right. And when I open my door, her cheeks are already on fire.

"You're using your dog to get me to talk to you now? Who knew you'd stoop so low, Kingston?" She slips her arms out of a cashmere coat and throws it at me as she walks in. "Do I smell pasta?"

"Yeah." I hang her coat up and slide my hand to the small of her back, then guide her to my kitchen. "It's lasagna. Are you hungry?"

She whips her head around, surprised. "You made lasagna?"

"Not *exactly*." I hold up a bottle of red wine in one hand and a bottle of white in the other, then wait until Wren taps the red. "Lenny and Amelia's husbands' grandmother always makes extra food for all of us to take home. Nona's lasagna is my favorite, so she drops off a tray for me to freeze whenever she makes it. She basically adopted all of us after Lenny met Bash. By the time Amelia married Bash's brother, Sam, she'd become part of our family."

"Do you think she'll adopt me too?" She sits down at the kitchen table and drops her head. "I may be on the lookout for some new family members after today."

I hand her a glass of wine, then sit next to her, pulling her feet into my lap. Her shoes have tiny buckles that are a bitch to unclasp, and she seems amused to watch me struggle until I

eventually undo each one and drop them to the floor. “Care to fill me in?”

“Can we call a truce for tonight, Sawyer?” Her voice softens and reminds me of the last time we called a truce.

I don’t bother telling her we don’t need one. She won’t believe me anyway. She’s going to have to come to that conclusion on her own.

Once I nod in agreement, she crosses her legs over my thighs, and the tightness she’s holding within her slightly relaxes. “You first. Tell me how your meeting went today. Did Max and the others like your presentation?”

Wren closes her eyes and moans as I dig my thumb into the arch of her foot, the sound shooting straight to my dick. This woman has no fucking clue what she does to me. But that isn’t what tonight is about.

Tonight is about trust. It’s about laying groundwork. It’s the first step in breaking through the box Wren Davenport put me in twenty fucking years ago. Because I refuse to accept I’m destined to be this woman’s enemy forever. “They loved it. Max wanted to fold it in under the King Corp. umbrella, but that’s not what I want.”

“I told you they’d want it. Did you tell them no, or did you cave?” There’s something so fucking sexy about a woman who knows you well enough to call you out on your shit.

I run my hands up her calf, then switch my focus to her other foot. “I told them this is something I want us to do as a family, but not under King Corp. Not under the board of directors. I don’t want us to answer to anyone but each other. I think we can do more good this way.”

“And . . . ?” she pushes as she sips her wine.

“They all agreed. Eventually.” She looks up at me through her long lashes in question. “It took a while. Max and Scarlet didn’t understand why I didn’t want to add it to the King Corp. portfolio. Becks and Lenny understood my reasoning right away. But in the end, they all agreed. We’ve got to talk to Hudson, Jace, Amelia, and Ashlyn to see if they want to be

involved too. But everyone loved the idea of helping people who haven't had the same opportunities we've been given our entire lives."

"Sawyer." Wren's voice shakes hesitantly. "I think what you're going to do is amazing." When my smile stretches across my face, she rolls her eyes. "Don't let it go to your head, Kingston."

"I'll try not to." This. This right here. Relaxing with her. Talking about our day. How can she not see this could be something more than either of us imagined? "Now, tell me what happened with your parents and why you want to be adopted by Bash and Sam's Nona. I mean, she's fantastic, but I'm willing to bet she's shot a person or two in her lifetime. I don't know if you're cut out for that life, Red."

The look she gives me would scare a lesser man, but I'm no lesser man.

"Or we could always talk about the other night," I challenge, wanting to get that out into the open instead of it hanging over us like a noose.

"Can we please just not? I just went through it with them, and I really don't want to rehash it again. I feel stupid enough as it is."

I lean in and grip the back of her neck. "You've got nothing to feel stupid about, Wren. But we don't have to talk about that now if you're not ready."

Wren's stomach growls, and she pushes me away with her foot. "Feed me first."

"Oh yeah?" I stand up and grab the plates from the warming drawer. "Then what?"

She blows out an exasperated breath. "Fine. My father's retiring, which you already know. But apparently, he and my mother are leaving soon for an extended trip to Greece. And when they come home, Mom plans on cutting back her hours at the practice." Her voice grows more animated with each new statement. "She's not officially retiring. Yet. But she's cutting back her hours."

I refill her now-empty glass of wine and watch as her pale skin grows pinker and pinker with each new thought. “Because why would she bother telling me that before I took ownership of half the practice?” She sips her wine and almost spits it out with her next thought. “Oh! And she had me interview three doctors today because apparently, I have no life, and neither did Mom. But she wants to make sure I can get a life. Geez! I’m tired of everyone feeling the need to point out how pathetic my life is.”

When I place a plate in front of her, my girl stops her tirade and gives me a surprised smile as she tastes a forkful of lasagna. “Ooh, this is *good*.”

“Told you.” She glares at me. Like a truce was going to keep me from pointing out I was right. But I ignore her glare and take a seat at the end of the table, next to her. “Now, tell me what your mom said.”

“We’re bringing two more doctors on at the practice because she doesn’t want me giving up everything she did. She regrets how much of our lives she missed and doesn’t want me to have to make those same sacrifices. Forget the fact I don’t even have kids or a husband yet. She’s worried about her imaginary grandbabies, apparently. Seriously? What the hell?”

“Help me out here, Red. Why is this a bad thing? You’re already a partner in the practice. You’re doing exactly what you’ve busted your ass to achieve since high school. And now you get to have a life too. You’re being handed exactly what most of us hope we’re able to do.” The way her green eyes sharpen immediately is like a flashing neon sign.

*Danger. Danger. Abort.*

“Handed?” she questions, clearly pissed at my poor choice of words.

“Sorry.”

Her brows shoot higher.

“Give me a break. That’s not what I meant, and you know it,” I argue.

“I haven’t been *handed* anything. I had no problem working in a hospital or in someone else’s practice until my mom asked me to come home. She. Asked. Me.” She runs a hand through her long red hair, then looks away. “I should have known *then* something was going on.”

“Can you explain to me why this is such a bad thing?” I push back, wanting to understand.

“Because”—she brings her eyes back to mine—“I like to work. I enjoy what I do. Now is the time I’m supposed to be throwing myself into my work, so later on, I can slow down.”

“Haven’t you thrown yourself into work, so to speak, for ten years? What’s wrong with having a little more balance? Enjoying yourself a little? I know a healthy work-life balance isn’t something either of us grew up seeing with our parents. But it doesn’t mean we have to emulate them.” If any of us wanted to talk to my dad, we were better off trying to catch him at the office than at home on most nights, and we all just accepted it as par for the course.

I’ve watched my siblings all handle relationships and parenthood in a much healthier way than he ever did. And I know that’s what I want.

Wren looks away from me like she can’t stand to see me, or maybe it’s my reaction she’s scared to see. “What if . . .” she starts out slowly. Unsure. And I fight the urge to reach out to her because I know that’s not what she’d want right now.

“What if I don’t know *how* to have a life? It’s been so long since I’ve had one. I mean—” She cuts herself off before abruptly turning back to me. “I’m nearly thirty, and I don’t know what a healthy balance would even be for me. If I’m not working . . . Well, there’s no *if*. I’m always working. Or studying. It’s who I am. And ever since I’ve come back here, everyone’s told me that’s not good enough.” Her first tear falls, and it’s not from sadness. It’s from frustration. “That *I’m* not good enough.”

“Wren.” I lean into her and cup her face in my hands. “No one is telling you you’re not good enough. They’re making sure you have options.”



“What if I don’t want options? What if I like my life the way it is? What if I don’t want anything to change?” She wraps her fingers around my wrists and holds me to her. “You were supposed to be my compromise, Kingston.” A small smile tugs at her lips. “You were what I was doing for *me*. What I was doing for fun.”

She doesn’t say, until things got messy, but I can read between the lines.

“I like knowing I can be an escape for you, Wren.” I tuck her hair behind her ear and let the soft strands slip through my fingers. “That doesn’t have to change.”

“Remember when you said the ball was in my court?” she asks softly as she pulls my shirt out of my jeans.

I tug on her hair and nod in agreement. “Yeah, Red. What happens next is up to you, but I want you to be sure.”

“What am I supposed to do if I think I want to play but I’m not sure how?” She peers up at me through her long, inky lashes, and my heart hammers against my chest.

“What do you mean?” I push, needing to know where her head’s at.

Her warm palms flatten against my abs before she drops her forehead to my chest. “I’m really good at work, Sawyer. I excel there. I know what I’m doing there. Relationships. Friendships. Fun. None of that comes easily to me. It’s not that I don’t want those things. I just don’t know how to get out of my own head long enough to try.”

I lift her chin and gently press my lips to hers.

Scared if I push too hard or too fast, she’ll bolt.

But Wren doesn’t bolt. She opens to me, slowly melting against me.

“Then let me help you.” I look into her eyes and ask, “Do you trust me?”

# WREN



*D*o I trust him?

*Can I trust him?*

Sawyer's blue eyes remind me of a storm raging over the ocean.

Powerful and beautiful. Threatening to pull me under and steal my breath.

Trusting him . . . truly trusting him completely and without question. I think I can. I might already, but I'm not sure. I'm torn in a million different directions by a riot of emotions, and they all leave me confused and unsettled—not words I like to use when describing myself. Ever. Which leaves me with only one option, if I'm being honest. "I'm trying, Kingston."

"We're going to work on that, Red." He caresses my face, comforting me, and I wonder again how we got here. We were rivals our entire lives. But it was always fun to challenge each other. That was all before the accident. The one that wasn't his fault.

As if reading my mind, Sawyer stands and takes a step back, pulling me up from my seat. He links his fingers through mine, then tugs me behind him into the living room, where a fire is roaring in a beautiful, stacked-stone fireplace in the center of the room. A wall of windows overlooks the dark lake, and sheets of water fall off in the distance as a storm rolls in.

It's peaceful and calming, two things that have definitely been lacking today.

Sawyer guides me to an oversized leather sectional. “Sit here and get comfy.” Grabbing a soft blanket off the back of the couch, he wraps it around me. “I’ll be back in a second.” His lips ghost over mine, and I give myself up to him.

Willing to try.

“Hey, Kingston,” I call out as he walks away.

Sawyer turns back around, and the look on his face is so freaking delicious. A black Henley is stretched over his broad chest, and soft, well-worn jeans hang from lean hips. And as if he knew the effect it would have on me, the man is barefoot. I’m not sure why the whole look is so intoxicating, but it definitely is. “Don’t forget the wine,” I add, and he smiles.

Just smiles and heads out of the room.

Meanwhile, I fold my legs up on the couch and adjust the blanket.

When he comes back in the room, he’s got two glasses and a bottle of wine in one hand, and a pink bakery box of cupcakes in the other. “Wow, Kingston. That’s impressive. If King Investments doesn’t work out, you could always be a server at Kingdom.”

“Ha ha,” he laughs. “You act like I haven’t done that over the years.” He carefully balances the glasses as he places the cupcakes and wine down on a wooden tray on top of the ottoman. Then he hands me a pretty pink confection and runs a finger through the frosting before he sits down next to me and turns on the TV. “How about we watch a family who’s more dysfunctional than either of ours are?”

And that’s how I spend my night.

Sandwiched between my sworn enemy and his slobbery dog, binge-watching old episodes of *Schitt’s Creek*. Drinking way too much wine and completely avoiding reality.

Hours later, when the second bottle is empty, and I’ve enjoyed more sugar in one night than I typically would in a week, the flames of the fire are dying down, and the snow has started to fall. I’m warm and sleepy and a little bit drunk. I’m

also happily tucked against Sawyer, with my head resting on his shoulder, and his arm wrapped around my back.

Something about this whole night is more intimate than any amount of time I've ever spent with this man.

Instead of letting that thought scare me, I settle my heart and remind myself to breathe.

"I should really go home." I yawn and tip my face up to Sawyer's.

He presses his lips to my forehead, like it's the most natural thing in the world. "You don't have to go home."

"Sawyer Kingston," I gasp, going for dramatic but coming off more like mid-yawn. "What if our parents found out?"

"Oh, the scandal." He scoops me into his arms, like a groom carrying his bride across the threshold, and stands up. "I guess I'd have to marry you then."

"Umm. *No*. Put me down, goofball." But instead of listening to me, *not like he ever does*, his grip tightens, and I'm carried up the stairs, laughing. "Sawyer, my house is a thirty-second walk from here. Literally thirty seconds. I can brave the snow. I have to go home. I have to work tomorrow."

He places me gently on his big bed, then grabs a t-shirt from his dresser and hands it to me. "Are you on-call?"

"No. Not tonight. But I am on-call tomorrow." My heart skips a beat when he smiles. *Damn it*.

"Well then, I guess it's a good thing it'll only be a thirty-second walk in the morning when you go home to get ready for work, now isn't it?"

I run my hands over the soft cotton tee sitting in my lap, thinking about how cold it is outside and how warm I am right now. It would only need to be one night. "If I stay, I need my bag from downstairs."

"I've got to lock up and turn off the lights anyway. I'll grab it and be right back." Then as if the discussion has been settled—because according to Sawyer, *it has*—he disappears

down the hall, and I realize something that rocks me to my core.

I like when he takes control.

I like when I don't have to make the decisions.

I spend all day, every day, with someone else's life in my hands.

I like it when I don't have to think.

Does that make me less of a feminist?

Maybe I've had a little too much merlot tonight to contemplate the mysteries of the world and its effects on my life. Let's *maybe* start with something a little less stressful. I slip off the platform bed and out of my dress and pantyhose, then debate what to do with my bra. On or off? Any woman will tell you sleeping with your bra on is an experience in torture the CIA should employ if they want to get results quickly. But those same women, me included, also know that as you approach thirty, the girls start to droop, and the boost a good push-up bra gives you definitely helps.

The only light filtering in the room is from the glass doors leading to his balcony and overlooking the same view of the lake as the family room below. So I take my chances and add my bra to the pile of clothes I'll be doing the walk of shame in tomorrow.

Problems to be worried about in the morning—check.

I run my palm over Sawyer's soft bedding before crawling under the covers and laying my head on the pillow.

Am I supposed to look sexy?

I fix my hair so it's lying flat around my shoulders and call it a day.

A very long day.

At the end of what was quite possibly the longest week of my life.

I close my eyes and yawn again, thinking I'll just rest them for a few minutes until Sawyer comes back. Sleep pulls at me,

and I feel myself drifting off, thinking about piercing blue eyes that belonged to my childhood tormentor. Eyes I hated for years . . . that now belong to the man I think I may be falling for.



□

A boom of thunder shakes the house, and when a loud beeping follows, I nearly jump out of my skin. But when I jump, I remember I'm not in my own bed.

Sawyer might have been better off if I remembered that before I shoved him away and possibly kneed him in the dick. *Son of a bitch.*

“Breathe, Red. The beep is just the generator kicking in. We probably lost power from the storm.” He pulls me back down and wraps his arm around me. “Stop thinking so hard and go back to sleep before I give you something else to think about.”

My sleepy body perks up as the beeping stops and my nerves calm. I drape my arm over Sawyer's bare chest and trace my fingertips along the dips and lines of his abs while I watch the snow fall through the windows. “It's beautiful, isn't it? I almost forgot how pretty it can be.”

Sawyer presses his lips to the top of my hair and whispers, “I never forgot, Red”—just before he rolls me over him. My legs straddle his waist, and his hands slide under the gray t-shirt and grip my hips as he moves me against the erection straining the limits of his boxer briefs. “You've been the most gorgeous woman in any room for as long as I've known you, Wren.”

“Sawyer . . .” I press my palms flat against his chest and roll my hips again, loving the feel of this man under me.

His hands slide up my ribs, stopping just under my breasts, teasing me. “Tell me what you want, Red.”

“I want to *not* think. I want . . .” I pause, choosing my next words carefully, afraid of how he'll react. “I *need* you to take control.”

Sawyer jackknives up, pressing his hard body impossibly close to mine.

Holding me to him as those dark eyes stare into my soul.



Seeing too much.

“What’s your safe word, Wren?” His lips skim up my jaw, and goosebumps break out over my hot skin.

“Dandelion,” I breathe as my shirt is shoved up until I lift my arms over my head, and it’s thrown to the floor. Sawyer’s mouth closes over my nipple, his beard tickling my skin as we both shove my panties off, followed by his boxers. The electricity shining in his eyes is desperate and needy, mirroring my own.

“Fucking beautiful.” His thumb traces over my damp nipple. “Do you like that?” he asks roughly and pinches me.

“Yes,” I moan and arch my back, pushing my chest into his hands until Sawyer pinches again. Harder. Longer. My pussy throbs in response.

He wraps his arms around me and flips us over so I’m under him, then licks and kisses and sucks his way down my body.

Worshipping each soft curve and flare before pulling away and standing up.

I watch him in confusion as he grabs his jeans off the floor and removes a leather belt from the loops. Nerves and excitement war inside me as adrenaline spikes and surges through my blood.

Sawyer pays close attention to my reaction as he climbs back on the bed. “Give me your wrists.”

Without thinking . . . Without worrying . . . Without guilt or second-guessing myself, I place both wrists in front of him and hold my breath as he wraps the belt around them, securing them tightly together, then moves them over my head, resting them on the pillow. “Don’t move your hands, Red.”

I nod, and heat rushes to my face.

“So fucking pretty.” He throws my legs over his shoulders and buries his face against my pussy, then growls.

*Holy shit.*

His lips wrap around my aching clit, and *my God*, fireworks go off behind my eyes.

I pull mindlessly at the belt, enjoying the bite of pain, while my thighs press tightly against Sawyer's shoulders. Long, flat lashes of his tongue send me closer to the edge. He wraps his hands around my waist and holds me still until I'm squirming and screaming and coming so hard, I can't breathe or think or see anything but him.

His lips press against the soft flesh of my inner thigh, and a whimper lodges in my throat. "It's too much."

Navy-blue eyes sparkle up at me, full of a fiery need touching me everywhere.

"No, baby." He nips my hip, then traces my navel with his tongue before sitting up on his knees. "I'm just getting started with this perfect little cunt."

"Please . . ." I beg.

He wraps his hand around his thick cock and runs it through my soaked pussy. "Should I get a condom, Wren?"

I shake my head no, and Sawyer slaps my pussy, sending a jolt of electricity coursing through my already vibrating body, and I cry out. Not from pain. No. It's from pleasure. Overwhelming and all-encompassing.

"Words, Wren. I need words on this one."

I stare into his eyes and cross my ankles behind his back. "No. No condom."

He doesn't move. Not a single inch. He just stares into my eyes, and I go with my gut. "I trust you."

I lick my lips as his entire being lights up in the dark room . . . but his smile—*damn*. I'm not sure there's anything I wouldn't do to see that smile every day.

The energy in the room shifts, and his mouth covers mine in a scorching kiss which takes my breath away and brings me back to life.

Each hungry stroke of his tongue decimates any defenses I'm clawing to hold onto.

Tight muscles coil as he rises above me. And in one smooth move, he pulls my bound arms up and circles them around his head while he sits us both up and then shoves me down onto his thick cock. Pleasure and pain mix as my body stretches to take him.

Sawyer kisses me, swallowing my moans.

Whispered words are pressed against my lips.

*Beautiful.*

*Perfect.*

*Mine.*

I'm lost. Completely, utterly, and devastatingly lost to him. He fucks into me over and over, one powerful thrust after another. I chase an orgasm so powerful, I know it will knock my entire world off its axis. And yet, I'm right there with him when it happens. Completely in sync as I sob brokenly against his lips.

Unable to stop, now that the dam has been opened.

Not sure what caused the crack.

Or if there's a way to fix it.

Or even if I want it fixed.

## SAWYER



I'm surprised to find Wren still sleeping the next morning when I walk back into the bedroom with a cup of coffee in hand. I sit it carefully on the nightstand and enjoy watching her eyes open slowly, focusing first on the coffee, then slowly working their way up my arm until they land on my face. I honestly expected her to try to sneak out on me hours ago, which is why I barely slept last night.

I gave up on sleep sometime around five o'clock this morning and decided to check to see if the snow had stopped. It had, so I made a pot of coffee and cleared the snow from the steps and the path between our houses. Then I decided to shovel her walkway and also cleared off her car. I figured by the time I was done, she'd be dressed and arguing with me about last night.

I'm not an idiot. I could tell she was second-guessing everything. Second-guessing us. To be honest, I was surprised by . . . well, everything last night. And if I was caught off guard, I can only imagine how my type-A girl is doing.

She rubs her eyes and looks back at the mug. "Is that coffee?"

"Uh-huh," I pick it up and offer it to her, enjoying this soft, sleepy side of Wren.

She sits up and leans back against the headboard before taking the cup from my hands. "Thank you. What time is it? Did I miss my alarm?" Her eyes dart to the nightstand and her phone still resting there.

“It’s a few minutes before seven. I wanted to get the snow cleared away before you woke up, so you wouldn’t have a problem getting to work.” I leave out that I also did it because I didn’t want to give her any reason to regret last night.

She sips her coffee and sighs. “Thank you. I don’t think I missed the snow at all when I was in school.”

“How are you feeling?” I push, not sure what I’m expecting.

“Honestly?” she asks, and I nod. “I feel like last night was incredible but a little overwhelming.”

I expected the *overwhelming* part, so I’ll take the win of *incredible* and back off. I push a lock of her hair behind her ear and kiss the top of her head. “What time do you have to be in the office?”

“Nine.” She sips more coffee and sets the cup back down. “I really should get going. It’s going to be a long day. I’m not sure what my mom was thinking by throwing all this at me at the same time, and I’m pretty sure we’re not exactly on speaking terms right now.”

“She was probably thinking you’ve handled everything that’s been thrown at you your entire life and made it your bitch. You’ve got this.” I stand up and pull her to her feet, then cup her head in my hands and run my thumbs over her cheeks. “I liked having you here last night, Wren. I liked our truce.”

She raises up on her toes and presses her lips to mine. “Yeah well, don’t get used to it, Kingston. It was a one-night-only truce.” I’d be concerned if a smile wasn’t firmly in place on her gorgeous face.

“Not everything needs to be a fight, you know?” I pick up the pile of clothes folded at the foot of the bed and hand them to her. “Here. I thought these would be more comfortable than your dress.”

“Ohh . . . you’re good.” She takes the sweats and brushes past me as she makes her way to the bathroom, with those enticing hips swaying as she goes.

“Kingston,” she stops and calls my name before she closes the door.

“Yeah, Red?”

“Thanks for listening last night.” Her pale skin pinks as she closes the door.

“Thanks for letting me,” I whisper, then walk out of the room with a lazy bulldog at my heels.



□

*S*top by Hudson's later that day to talk to him about the new investment firm, but his eyes glaze over before we finish page one of the presentation packet. "Seriously, brother. If you think it's a good business, then I'm in. I just need to run it by Maddie."

"No, you don't." My very pregnant sister-in-law waddles into the room and pours herself a glass of chocolate milk. "I could hear you guys from the other room. It sounds like a great idea." She picks up the folder and flips through it. "Is everyone else on board?"

"Max, Becks, Scarlet, and Lenny have signed on. I still need to talk to Ashlyn, Amelia, and Jace. I want to keep this within the family. Not under King Corp. I want us to have complete control." I run over a few key points and answer a few more questions before Maddie closes the folder.

"It's your money, Hud. If you want to invest, invest." She kisses his cheek and puts her glass in the dishwasher.

He grabs her by her waist . . . Or what I think *used* to be her waist. I'm not sure. But he pulls her down on his lap and pushes his hand against her bump. And damn, I'm more jealous of my brother, and what he has, than I've ever been in my life.

"It's *our* money, Mads. If you like it, then we'll do it." She winces and sucks in a breath.

"Contraction?" he asks as his entire body goes rigid.

Maddie blows out a breath, and I let go of the one I didn't realize I'd been holding. "No. Not a real one. Just another Braxton-Hicks contraction. Speaking of . . ." She turns her face my way. "What's going on with you and the good doctor, Sawyer?"

"What?" I ask, not sure what she's talking about until I look at Hudson. "You've got a big fucking mouth, man."

"Yeah, he does," she agrees. "But I was there when she did the walk of shame from your bedroom a few weeks ago,



remember? Not to mention, she's my new ob-gyn. So I've had a few appointments with her now. I like her, Sawyer. She's smart and funny, and I bet she doesn't take any of your crap, does she?" Maddie grows more animated with each new thought, and I groan.

"When did you start acting like Lenny?" I ask, finding it hard to miss the comparison between the two.

"You mean overly involved?" Hudson chuckles, and Maddie elbows him.

"I blame all of you for this. I very happily minded my own business before I married into your family." She moves off Hudson's lap into the chair opposite him, making Hud laugh harder.

"Madison Kingston," he gasps in an overdramatic, very Hudson fashion. "You little liar. Don't act like you and your girls haven't always been nosey little busybodies, constantly involved in each other's lives. You didn't get that from *my* family. You got that from *your* friends, long before you ever met me."

"Whatever." She refuses to look at him and focuses on me instead. "So . . . are you two dating?"

*Are we?*

"I'm not completely sure what we're doing yet." It may not be the clearest answer, but it's the truth. "We've spent a lot of time antagonizing each other over the years. There's been some shit communication. I think it might take Wren a little longer to get over that than me."

Maddie inches forward until her belly bumps the table. A cute frown tugs at her lips as she adjusts the way she's sitting until she's comfortable. "Oh? Do you have a plan?"

I look from her to Hudson, then back.

*Why not?*

"No," I admit, and she groans immediately, then cracks her knuckles.

"Okay, that's the first thing we've got to work on."

“Baby, I know you’re bored to death without work, but do you really think trying to fix my brother up with your obstetrician is a good idea? What if he pisses her off and she refuses to deliver the baby?” *Fucking douchebag.*

“Just because you’re not getting laid, Hudson Kingston, doesn’t mean I can’t help your brother with his love life.” She turns back to me with a wicked gleam in her eye. “Now, what’s her favorite flower?”

“Mads,” Hudson whines. “What do you mean, *I’m not getting laid?*”

Maddie ignores him and snaps her fingers in front of my face when I don’t answer fast enough. “Favorite flower, Kingston. What is it? You’ve known this girl forever. You have to have a clue.”

“Kingston?” I ask, seeing a new mean side to my sister-in-law and liking it. What the hell is wrong with me?

“Dandelions,” I tell her and somehow manage not to smirk. “But seriously, Maddie. It’s not like I can call the florist and order a bouquet of weeds.”

“Why are men so dense?” she asks no one in particular. “You’re a billionaire, Sawyer. Order the weeds.”

She’s not wrong. I pull out my phone and find the number for the florist. Once I tell them money is no object and I want dandelions delivered to her office, they only ask me for the address and confirm they’ll be there before the end of business today.

“Hey, Maddie?”

“Yeah . . .” She smiles.

“You’re my favorite sister-in-law.” I kiss the top of her head and get out of there so I can head to Kingdom for the night.

Dandelions.



□

Wren

“Care to tell me who sent you the weeds?” my mother asks when she stops by my office before leaving for the day.

“They’re not weeds,” I argue.

And they’re not. They’re dandelions. And they’re absolutely perfect to me.

Mom tries to take the card out of the arrangement, but I grab it first and put it in my pocket. “Wren,” she reprimands. “Are you hiding a man from your mother?”

“As opposed to hiding other things?” I question, and she backs away.

“We’re sorry, Wren. Your father and I should never have kept that from you. And honey, I promise it wasn’t done with any malicious forethought. We were just so overwhelmed by everything we were dealing with . . . I guess it got lost in the chaos.”

“Please don’t lie to me again.” When she opens her mouth to correct me, I cut her off. “Intentional or unintentional. Just don’t, Mom.”

Mom smiles and blows one of the dandelions. “Are you hiding a woman? Because you know your father and I don’t care who you love. We just want you to be happy. You know I experimented in college—”

“Stop, Mom. I’ll tell you if there’s ever a man or woman in my life you need to know about.” *Good lord.*

“But the weeds . . .”

“Can you let me figure out what I’m doing before you give me the third degree?”

“Okay, sweetie.” She takes a step back. “Any chance this has something to do with your newfound interest in Sawyer Kingston?”

“Mom,” I scold, and she smiles.

“But there *is* someone. I knew it.” She vibrates with excitement, and I want to scream. “Be smart, dear. We know where babies come from, and I’d like you to be married before that happens.” Then she thinks about that for a moment. “Though I guess if they’re from a woman, we wouldn’t have to worry about babies, now would we?”

“Go home, Mother. I have to get to the hospital.” I push away from my desk and start filling my bag.

Mom’s shoulders slump a little, but she hides it well. “Fine. Do you want to stop by this weekend?”

“I’m on-call all weekend,” I remind her.

“Fine,” she gives in. “We’ll talk Monday.”

I agree, and she leaves. This is difficult for me. I love my mother and appreciate everything she’s done for me. But I feel so damn blindsided by her, I can’t help but be angry. At least for now. She’s got to at least give me a few days to wrap my head around it. Right?

Great. Now I’m carrying on complete internal conversations with myself.

I know. I hated Psych, but I’m pretty sure that’s not the best sign of sanity.

I pull out my phone and take a picture of my flowers, then send it to Sawyer.

WREN

I can’t believe you sent me dandelions.

SAWYER

Do you like them?

WREN

I love them. Thank you.

SAWYER

How's your day?

WREN

Long. I'm hungry, tired, and cranky. How's your day?

SAWYER

.....

The dots start and stop a few times, and then . . . nothing.

Okay then.

Maybe he thought I was complaining.

Or trying to pick a fight.

I wasn't.

I'm just tired.

When he doesn't respond, I pocket my phone and look at the card one more time.

*Make a wish.*

*~ Sawyer*

He remembered.



□

Later that night, Phoebe and I are standing behind the nurse's station during a lull when she asks me about my dandelions. Since it's Friday, I brought them with me because I want to bring them home when my shift ends, and everyone . . . absolutely everyone has asked about them.

"Come on, Dr. Davenport. They're weeds," she insists.

"I swear I'm not answering you until you call me Wren." I fix the pretty purple bow tied around the vase and smile. "And they're not weeds."

"Okay, Wren." she over-annunciates my name. "Fine. They're not weeds. I always called them *wishies* growing up. So who sent you the *wishies*?"

"I guess my not-enemies-with-benefits friend." Yeah. That sounded as bad in my head as when I said it.

"What?" she asks, and I can't blame her for being confused.

*Same, girl. Same.*

"Have you ever done anything that felt completely wrong and completely right at the same time?" That's the best I can come up with to explain how I'm feeling right now.

She crosses her arms over her chest and narrows her eyes. "That would be a hard no, because I'm not a psychopath."

"Very funny. Ha ha. There's this guy . . ." I start.

"There always is," she answers.

"Yeah well, I've known this one for twenty-five years. And he's been a pain in my ass for most of them." I start thinking back through the years. "As much of a pain as he's always been, I usually enjoyed the bickering. The pushing. The tormenting. It *was* fun."

"But . . . ?" she pushes.

"But can you build a relationship on that? Because I've got to be honest. The idea of putting myself out there freaks me



out a whole lot. But the idea of flipping the script on its head and falling in love with this man, who I thought I hated, is seriously fucking with me.” There. I said it to someone.

“Slow your roll, doc. Do you hate him or not? Because I’m pretty sure you’ve got to figure *that* out before you worry about anything else. And don’t forget, there’s a fine line between love and hate.”

A fine line between love and hate . . .

Have I crossed that line?

# WREN



I meet Quinn for breakfast at a little café in town called The Busy Bee on Saturday morning. She's sitting in a tiny booth with two cups of coffee already waiting for both of us when I sit down across from her. One cup slides my way while my best friend eyes me with a curious expression before she points at my scrubs. "Please tell me they're clean. Because seriously, Wren, I'm not eating breakfast across from you if you're covered in baby ick."

"Baby ick?" I shake my head and open the menu. "They're clean, smart-ass."

A young server approaches a moment later, with a notepad in hand and a disinterested look on her face. Mental note. Don't piss this girl off. She looks like she'd spit in our food.

Quinn orders scrambled eggs before the server, who looks like she'd rather be anywhere but here, waits.

"Could I get chocolate chip waffles with whip cream and bacon, please?"

Quinn kicks me under the table as she walks away. "Since when do you eat sugar for breakfast, Miss Yogurt and Granola?"

"Since I'm eating my feelings. Don't judge," I counter and enjoy the look of confusion on Quinn's face before it morphs into self-satisfaction. "What do you know?"

"Oh no . . . You're not getting out of this." She sits up and leans across the table conspiratorially. "And why are we eating our emotions, Wrenny?"

“*We’re* not, Quinny. I am. Unless there’s something you haven’t told me.” I feel like we’re playing a game of chess, each of us waiting for the other’s next move.

She bites her lip and tries to hold back a smile but fails miserably. “Fine. What’s with the last-minute brunch date? Not that I don’t like seeing your face, but I wasn’t expecting a text at four in the morning.”

“You do realize most normal people have their texts on silent overnight, right? And that I didn’t expect you to answer me in the middle of the night?” I knew I needed to talk my thoughts out because that’s how I’ve always processed things, and I knew it couldn’t wait. But I didn’t think she’d answer me then. I figured I’d get a text back when she woke up.

“Yeah well, maybe I wasn’t alone. And maybe . . . just maybe, I forgot to turn my texts off because I was busy.” Excitement pours off her in waves.

“Ohh. Hot bartender?” I ask, happy for the chance to shift the focus to her.

“He has a name,” she chastises with no heat behind her words.

I cock my head to the side and purse my lips through a smile. “I’m sure he does. But *hot bartender* is more fun.”

When she shakes her head, I give in. “Okay, sorry. I was kidding. But seriously, he is gorgeous. What’s his name?”

“Drew.” She throws her napkin at my face, but I catch it instead. “Whatever. Fine. Now stop dancing around and tell me why I’m here today instead of in bed with him, having a very different kind of breakfast.”

“Because I don’t know what I’m doing,” I admit to both of us. “And it’s scary. I’ve always been so sure of my path. Of my goals. But I feel like everything changed when I wasn’t looking, and now I’m not sure what I’m doing.”

“Explain,” she stresses as the server places our food in front of us.

I wait for her to walk away, then fill Quinn in on everything that's happened over the past forty-eight hours. Well, *almost* everything. She doesn't get to hear *all* the dirty details. Some things are just for Sawyer and me.

Once I'm done, I lift a fork full of waffle to my mouth and wait for her to say something . . . *anything*.

Quinn takes a few beats, sizing me up with narrowed eyes. "Do you want your super supportive best friend right now, or do you want *rip the Band-Aid off honesty*?"

"The second," I tell her through a mouth full of food and hope it's not too bad.

"Don't tell me I didn't warn you." She waits for me to argue before she lays it out for me, then goes for it. "Okay, I need you to really hear what I'm about to say because I'm coming from a place of love. Your parents made a mistake by not telling you. But can you put yourself in their shoes for a minute? They were going through hell and trying to protect one of their daughters and get her help. I doubt hashing out all the details with anyone was their top priority back then."

"I guess I can see that," I admit and stuff a heaping fork of waffle into my mouth.

"You also can't be mad at your mom for living her life. She asked you to come here and be her partner in one of the most prestigious obstetrics and gynecology practices in the state of Pennsylvania. I understand you thought she was going to be your mentor and hold your hand, but you don't need that. That's a crutch. You've been mentored for years. Maybe not by your mom but by amazing doctors. I should know. You've told me about them all. You've got this. And she's going out of her way to make sure you can have it all—an amazing career and an amazing life."

"That's what Sawyer said," I admit begrudgingly.

She picks up her coffee mug and taps it to mine. "And that brings me to my third point. He was never your enemy."

I move to speak, but she shakes her head. "He wasn't, Wren. Rival? Yes. Enemy? No. Even if it had been him driving

the car that night, your sister has to own her actions. But it wasn't him. Your decades-long reasoning is flawed. And before that, you guys drove each other crazy. Everybody saw it but you—because it's always been clear as day. The friction between you two was more push-pull than it was ever hate. And I'd bet my firstborn, that man has been in love with you since we were sixteen."

"No, he hasn't," I argue, but I'm not sure I actually believe that.

I think back over so many memories.

The many times we were forced together because of our fathers.

The sparkle in the stormy depths of those blue eyes while he was tormenting me throughout high school. The way he held me after his father died. The look in his eyes the other night. "What if I've wasted all these years hating him?" I whisper.

"What if you waste any more time trying to hold on to the lie that you still do?"



□

*I* pull into my driveway and have to dig through my bag for my ringing phone.

Hayley's face flashes across my screen, and I contemplate ignoring the incoming FaceTime.

I almost toss it back into my bag, but then it stops ringing, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Apparently, a little too soon—because it starts up again.

*Fine.* I slide my thumb across the screen and accept the call.

“Hey,” Haley smiles nervously from the other side of the equator. “Did you just get off shift?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“You look like you haven't slept in days, sissy.” She fidgets in her seat and adjusts the phone. “So I talked to Mom today.”

“I'm fine, Hales. Mom has her panties in a twist because she hit me with a surprise this week and I hit back.” I think about the looks on their faces and feel a little guilty. “It might not have been my finest hour.”

“Good.” She shrugs.

“Good? What's good about it? Because I actually feel pretty shitty, to be honest.”

“Wren . . . Don't do this. Don't be mad at Mom and Dad. Don't be mad at Sawyer. Be mad at me. But while you're doing that, you want to maybe tell me what the hell's going on with you and the hottest Kingston?”

I dig my fingernails into my palm before I reach through the phone and rip my sister's hair out from hundreds of miles away.

“She was right,” Haley goads. “Don't go getting all huffy on me now. Mom knew you had a thing for Sawyer.”

“Do you have a point, Hales?”

She laughs, and I cringe. “I do have a point. Are you listening?”

“Come on, Haley.” I bump my head back against the headrest as my frustration grows. “I’m exhausted and sitting in the car. Spit it the hell out, so I can go inside.”

“Fine. Here goes nothing. Don’t let *my* mistakes screw up your life. I’ve worked hard to get my shit together. But I did it. Please don’t let my mistakes screw with your future, Wren.”

“I’m not planning on it, Hales. I love you, but I realized something this week. I’m not letting anyone else dictate my life. I’m not letting Mom and Dad do it. And I’m not letting our pasts do it—yours or mine.” I might not have realized that until just now . . . or more like this morning at The Busy Bee, but I mean every word of it.

“Good. I expect to be your maid of honor one day, sissy.”

I laugh quietly. “You’re going to have to fight Quinn for that someday. Love you, Hales.”

“You too, Wren.”

The screen goes black, and I toss my phone into my bag and head inside.

I’m grateful I don’t run into Zeus or his human when I get out of the car. I’m feeling uncomfortably fragile and don’t know whether I could handle seeing either of them right now. Instead, I kick off my shoes and change into sweats before faceplanting onto my bed.

Okay . . . so they might be Kingston’s sweats, but nobody needs to know that.

I grab my phone and set my alarm for later this afternoon, then pull up my text thread with Sawyer. I guess he got busy last night because he never answered me. Maybe it’s time I answered him.



WREN

Ask me to go out with you again.

*A*fter staring at the chat for entirely too long with no response, I do what I told Quinn she should have done and turn the fucker off. I need to sleep.



□

*I*'m not sure what time it is when I wake up, but it's not my alarm that drags me out of the best dream I've had in ages. No.

*What is that noise?*

It takes me a minute to pinpoint where it's coming from before I jump out of bed and run down the stairs. It sounds like someone is trying to bang their way through my front door. "What the hell?" I move the curtain out of the way and see Sawyer standing outside, obviously shaken, then throw the door open. "What? What's wrong?"

He grabs my hand. "Maddie's in labor. Hudson wanted to take her to the hospital, but she said she felt like she had to push and didn't want to have the baby in a car."

*Oh shit.* "Okay. My car's unlocked. Go pop my trunk and get my medical bag."

"Wait." He pulls on my hand. "Where are you going?"

I squeeze his hand, then lean in and kiss his lips quickly. "To get my shoes. Now move."

The two of us run across my lawn and finally, through Hudson and Maddie's front door. "We're in here," Hudson yells from around the corner, and Sawyer takes me through the massive house to the kitchen, where Maddie is lying on the floor in a flood of amniotic fluid.

"Madison."

Her scared, red face pops up as she breathes through a contraction. "Oh God, Doctor Davenport. It hurts."

"Can you tell me what happened?" I ask as I begin checking her vitals.

Hudson moves behind his wife, definitely a shaking mess.

"Braxton-Hicks," she stutters. "All night."

Hudson pushes her sweaty hair out of her face and presses his lips to her head. "She just told me it was time to go to the

hospital. The contractions were still five minutes a part.”

“Then my water broke, and the pressure was unbelievable,” she pants.

“Okay, Madison. Breathe.” I look around the room, then back to Hudson. “Hudson, I need you to help her onto the kitchen table. I want her off this floor.” I spin around, looking for the sink and wash my hands. “Sawyer, I need you to get me some towels and olive oil. And find me a chip clip, if they have one.”

“We do,” Hudson answers. “Check the top drawer.”

I move back to the table and rest my bag on a chair. “Okay, Madison—”

“Maddie,” she corrects me. “You’re about to get up close and personal with my hoo-ha, doc. I think you can call me Maddie.”

“Okay, Maddie. I’m going to check where the baby is, okay? This might be a little uncomfortable.”

She makes a sound that’s a mix between a scream and a sob when I check her, which is easy because this baby is ready to meet the world. “All right, you’re about to meet your baby really soon. She’s right there.” I take a deep, centering breath, then look at the guys, who seem petrified.

“Hudson, Sawyer, I want you each to grab a knee.” I demonstrate what I want them to do. “Maddie, bend your legs and put a foot on each of their biceps.” Maddie does as she’s asked, and the guys move in. “Hold her like a football, boys.”

“Keep your eyes above the waist, Sawyer,” Hudson growls at his brother.

“Oh, God. Do not look at my vagina, Sawyer,” Maddie calls out, and Sawyer’s entire face flashes red.

“Jesus Christ,” Sawyer groans. “I wasn’t. I promise. I swear.” He looks at me in horror, and I refuse to laugh.

No man wants to see what a woman’s vagina looks like when a baby pushes out of it. But if it’s not your wife, I definitely wouldn’t suggest looking. Because the first time you

see a head stretching the surrounding skin, it's a little traumatizing.

I pull gloves out of my bag and put them on, then pour a little olive oil around the baby's head.

"Are you going to sauté my kid, Wren?"

"No, Hudson. I'm trying to prevent any tearing for your wife." No sooner do the words leave my mouth than Maddie cries out.

"Maddie, your baby's crowning," I tell her, and Maddie moans and breathes.

"Oh, God. She's gonna have your big head." She squeezes Hudson's hand, and his face pales.

"I need you to not push for a minute, Maddie," I tell her as I slide my hand inside her body.

"What's happening?" she cries out, tensing.

I slide my finger under the umbilical cord that's wrapped around the baby's throat and loop it over her head, then breathe a sigh of relief because it was only looped around once. "The cord was wrapped around the baby's throat, but I was able to untangle it. Now I want you to push with this next contraction, okay?"

She nods, and the guys pale.

"Hudson, Sawyer, I want you to each help Maddie hold her legs back." They do as instructed.

Hudson's eyes never leave his wife's, but Sawyer's are locked on my every move.

"It hurts. Oh God, it hurts," she cries as another contraction hits her, and she pushes.

The baby's head emerges.

"Good job, Maddie. Now wait one minute," I tell her.

"Why isn't she crying?" she asks, petrified.

I get my hands around the shoulders and look up at my scared patient. "You're doing great, Maddie. It's time for a big

push.”

“Sunshine.” Hudson holds her hand with one hand and her leg with the other. “Push, baby.”

A scream rips from her chest as she pushes a beautiful baby girl out into the world.

The room is quiet as everyone holds their breath, waiting for that first, miraculous sound.

“She’s not crying,” Hudson says in concern.

But I don’t answer. I just massage her back and look at the clock on the wall. I rub harder than any parent ever realizes is necessary until the beautiful baby girl gasps and cries for the very first time.

I love this moment.

I quickly perform an APGAR test to determine how well she tolerated the delivery, then lay her down on Maddie’s chest and clamp the umbilical cord with the chip clip. “She’s perfect. Do you want to cut the cord, Hudson?”

Hudson holds his crying wife, and they both stare in awe at their new baby while I grab a few extra towels and lay them over Maddie. “No. Not even a little, Wren.”

Happy tears stream over his cheeks as he kisses his wife. “You’re an amazing warrior, sunshine.”

I find my surgical scissors and cut the cord, then tug on it slightly as I massage Maddie’s abdomen, working to deliver her placenta. “How far out did the ambulance say they were?”

Hudson looks around, then points to the phone. “Uh, I think 911 is still on the phone.”

Sawyer picks it up and asks for an ETA at the same time there’s a knock on the door, and a loud voice announces, “Paramedics.”

Sawyer lets them in, and I cover Maddie and the baby with a fresh towel.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Davenport. Baby Girl Kingston was born at sixteen ten. APGAR at one minute was eight. Placenta’s been

delivered. No hemorrhaging. Strong heartbeat.”

The paramedic thanks me, then moves past me to take Maddie’s vitals, and I step out of the way and remove my gloves as Sawyer approaches. He cups my face in his hands, and the look of awe in his eyes isn’t lost on me. “You were amazing.”

“Maddie was amazing. I was just doing my job.” I lay my head against his chest for a moment. “I’m glad I was here.”

“I got your text earlier. Can I take you out to dinner tonight?” He looks so hopeful, I hate to shoot him down.

“I’m on-call tonight, and I want to follow up on Maddie and the baby. I’d say I could meet you after that, but I don’t know if I’m going to be called in. I probably will because it’s a full moon. Raincheck? I’m not on-call Monday.”

One side of his mouth tips up, and then he kisses me. Deep and hungry and so promising, I feel it down to the tips of my toes. “Monday. I’m going to hold you to that, Red.”

“Promise?” I whisper, suddenly nervous.

“Yeah.” He runs a hand over the back of my head. “Promise.”

The paramedics get Maddie and the baby up on a gurney and wheel her over to us with Hudson behind them. “We’re taking them to Kroydon Hills Hospital.”

I trail a finger over the baby, then smile at Maddie. “I’ll be right behind you.”

Hudson grabs my hand as they take Maddie through the door. “I’ll never be able to thank you, Wren.”

“You just did, Hudson.” I push him to the door. “Go. I’ll see you there.”

I turn to Sawyer. “Do you still have my keys?”

He pulls them from his pocket and places them in my hand before he covers it with his. “Maybe we could grab a cup of coffee at the hospital later?”

I kiss his cheek. “I’ve got to go, Kingston.”

“See ya, Red.”



# SAWYER



*J*ump in the shower after Wren leaves, then shoot Hudson a text.

SAWYER

Heading to the hospital. What do you need me to bring?

HUDSON

Left the overnight bag in our bedroom. Can you grab that?

SAWYER

Sure. You want me to call anyone?

HUDSON

Thanks, man. For everything. Maddie's on the phone with her brother now. I'll text the family in a minute.

SAWYER

Be there soon.

wenty minutes later, I pull into the parking lot of Kroydon Hills Hospital with a smile on my face. My little brother's a dad, and my woman's a fucking rock star. I love the sound of that, but I'm not sure she's ready to hear it just yet. Good thing I'm the patient Kingston.

Hudson and Jace have always been instant-gratification guys.

Max and I have always understood that anything worth having takes time earning.

Becks is just *Becks*.

I laugh to myself as I grab the bag from the passenger seat and make my way into the hospital. After I check in at the front desk and get a badge and a room number, I head up to the maternity wing and smile when the double doors swing open. Wren is there, standing behind the counter, looking at something on a computer.

She glances up as I step through the doors, and her entire face lights up.

Somewhere deep in my chest, something clicks so completely into place, I almost trip. "Hey, Red." I lean against the counter and watch as she hands something to the woman beside her, then leans over and kisses me.

Right there in front of anyone who might be looking.

I slide my hand under her hair and hold her there for a moment.

"Hi," she whispers against my lips before pulling away. And damn, I don't want to let her go.

"Oh, it's like that," the woman, whose badge says *Phoebe*, laughs. "Let me guess. You're the weed guy."

I narrow my eyes in confusion when Wren walks around the counter, stopping next to me. "They weren't weeds."

"Fine. The *wishie* guy," Phoebe mocks.

"Oh?" I push. "Did you make a wish, Red?"

“I think maybe I did.” She pushes me away with a laugh. “We’ll see if it comes true, Kingston. Come on. I’ll take you to your brother.”

We walk down the hall and stop at a closed door. Wren knocks and waits a moment before she walks in and over to my sister-in-law’s side. “How are you feeling, Maddie?”

I step in behind her and stop in my tracks.

A tiny baby burrito with a big pink bow wrapped around her head is tucked into my brother’s giant arm as he sways in the silence of the room. “Hudson . . .”

Little blonde wisps of hair cover her small head.

She’s got Maddie’s nose and lips, but when she opens her eyes and looks up . . . well those are all Kingston.

She’s perfect.

“She’s beautiful. Just like her momma,” I tell him through the overwhelming emotion clogging my throat.

I place the bag on the long couch sitting under the window, then drop a kiss on Maddie’s head. “How are you feeling, little momma?”

“Like I pushed a Hudson-sized head out of my vagina.” She smiles and closes her tired eyes. “Hudson, let your brother hold Teagan.”

“Teagan?” I question.

Hudson carefully places the little bundle of pink in my arms and smiles proudly. “Sawyer, meet your niece—Teagan.”

I’ll never get used to this.

I’ve got seven nieces and nephews—six I’ve known since the day they were born. There’s something crazy about watching your siblings become parents. It’s powerful and a little awe-inspiring.

But when I look up, it’s not the look on Hudson’s face that hits me.

It’s Wren.

Pretty sure it always has been.



□

Later that night, I'm sitting behind my desk at Kingdom instead of watching the band on stage. Not my usual spot, but nothing about today feels normal. Not the fact that I helped deliver my brother's kid. Or that I realized I'm madly in love with Wren Davenport.

Kinda feel like an asshole for not realizing that earlier.

Now the question is—what the hell am I going to do about it?

And how hard is Wren going to fight me?

Because there's no way she's not going to fight this.

A knock at the door pulls me from my thoughts before Jace opens it. "Hey, man."

My youngest brother drops down in the chair across from me and kicks his feet up on my desk until I knock them off. "Keep your feet on the floor, shithead."

"Ooh. Somebody's grouchy. You need to get laid, brother. Loosen up some." He hands me a pink-candy cigar. "We're celebrating. There's another Kingston for us to fuck up."

"What the hell is wrong with you? Are you drunk or high, asshole?"

Jace makes a *Fuck if I know* face and half shrugs. "Maybe a little of both. Today's been fucked."

"Did you help deliver your brother's baby?" I wait for him to answer, but he doesn't. "No? Then I'm pretty sure I've got you beat, jack-off. So tell me why you're here."

Jace pulls his Kroydon University Hockey hat down, shading his eyes. "You ever wish you weren't a Kingston?"

"You're kidding me, right? I'm pretty sure we've all wished that at some point in our lives." When he still doesn't look at me, though, I get worried. "You in trouble, kid?"

"Nothing for you to worry about. But what about you?" he pushes. "What's going on with you and the doctor? Hudson

said she was pretty amazing today.”

“Is there a question in there? Because I’m not sure what you’re asking.” Or that I’ll tell him anything.

“I don’t know what I’m asking . . . I guess—do you think dad fucked us up? Because sometimes, I wonder.” He finally looks at me, and this kid, who’s not a kid anymore, looks like he’s going to cry.

I move around my desk and take the seat next to him. “Listen. Dad was no saint. But he loved your mom, and he loved you. He loved all of us, even if he wasn’t always the best at showing it. But I need you to listen to me and really hear me now. You’re a grown man, Jace. Only you are responsible for your actions. If you want to blame everything that’s gone wrong in your life on losing your mom and having the original man-whore for a dad, you can. But that’s not what a man does. A man takes responsibility for his actions and takes control of his own life. If you want something, go for it. If you need to fix something, fix it. Because at the end of the day, you’re the one who’s got to live with the consequences.” I should fucking know.

“Thanks, brother.” He scrubs his hands over his face, then looks up at me with haunted eyes.

“Tell me what’s going on.”

“Nah . . .” He stands and cracks his neck. “I gotta fix this one on my own. But hey. Don’t forget to take your own advice, okay?”

“I’m working on it.”







I've just gotten home and climbed out of the shower after a really long night at the bar, when my phone chimes with an incoming text.

Then another.

Before I can get across the room to check it, it's ringing.

I grab it and check the screen. "Jace? What's up?"

"Sawyer . . . I need help."

# WREN



In true full moon fashion, I delivered triplets, twins, two preterm babies, and one chubby, hairy little boy to a mother who'd been laboring for over twenty-four hours. It was a long night. I contemplated just sleeping in the on-call room, but lucky for me, it's past midnight, which means I'm no longer on-call.

Thank you , sweet baby Jesus. I get to sleep in my own bed.

I contemplate calling Sawyer for a hot minute after I get in the car but decide to wait and text him when I get home instead. Then I giggle to myself. At least he won't have to sit outside my door, wondering when I got home this time.

It's not like we don't both work fucked up hours. If this whole non-enemies thing is going to have any chance at working, I guess understanding each other's crazy hours will help.

I probably have to stop thinking of us that way.

But it's actually kind of fun.

A smile pulls at my lips when I think about the way my ovaries self-detonated, seeing him hold Maddie and Hudson's baby girl earlier.

Obviously, I'm a baby person. I bring them into the world every day. What a woman's body is capable of doing will never cease to amaze me. And the fact that I get to be a part of that is the highlight of my day, every single day I work.

My ovaries do not explode.

I delivered celebrity babies at my old hospital in California. I'm talking full-on Oscar-winning parents. I've seen some of the most beautiful people in the world holding their new babies. None of them ever had me feeling so much as a twinge. But seeing Sawyer Kingston holding his niece—game over. Pretty sure any hope I had of trying to convince myself I'm not already head over heels for this man went right out the window because I realized something in that room.

I want to have his babies.

Why?

Because I'm in love with Sawyer.

Goddammit. That means he was right. We aren't enemies.

Hopefully, this doesn't mean the arguing has to stop though.

Because I really enjoy the angry sex.

Yup. I'm going to text that man when I get home. Maybe he can come over, once he's home, and we can hide from this disgusting ice storm together.

It's been a really long day.

Actually, it's after midnight, so it's finally over.

Maybe Mom's got the right idea. More doctors in the practice means I can change the way we rotate the on-call shifts. And right now, that sounds like music to my ears.

Speaking of music, I turn the volume of the radio up to drown out the sound of the ice hitting my car, then scream and cut the wheel as hard as I can to avoid the lights coming right at me.

I feel the moment I lose control on the slick road and scream again as my muscles lock up with fear.

*Oh, God. I'm going to hit a tree.*

It's not like in the movies.

Nothing about this is in slow-motion or quiet.

The lights fly by me at warp speed as my car spins out, then slams into a tree.

A sickening crunch makes my stomach turn, just before the driver's side door bends in against me and my head slams into the side window.

Pain explodes in my shoulder and my head.

I can't think straight.

Everything hurts.

*Where's my phone?*

I blink my eyes, and something drips down my face.

I touch it with the tips of my fingers.

*Oh shit.* That's blood.

"Wren . . . Wren . . . Shit, Wren."

I swing my head around and think I'm going to throw up. Then somebody tries to open the passenger door.

"Jace?" This can't be right. "Jace?" I ask again. I try to unbuckle my seat belt and scream out in pain.

"Don't move, Wren." He yanks on the door again, but it still doesn't open. "Shit, Wren. I can't get it open."

"Call 911, Jace." I'm getting dizzy and feel myself being tugged under.

"Oh God, Wren. I'm sorry."

It's the last thing I hear before I close my eyes . . . just for a minute.

Just until the world stops spinning.

"Sweetheart. Oh, Wren. Wake up, honey."

*Why is her voice so loud?*

"Give her space, Charlotte. If she opens her eyes and you're that close, you'll scare her to death." Dad's voice isn't

any better as it bounces around in my head, like a pinball pinging around the machine.

“Don’t be dramatic, Brent. Which one of us is the doctor? It certainly isn’t you,” my mother chastises my father in a huff.

I force my eyes open, then slam them shut as the harsh light turns my head to Swiss cheese. “You bring babies into the world, Mom. Don’t know if that’s a great argument,” I rasp out over a very dry throat. “Where am I?”

“Oh, Wren.” Mom’s voice trembles and my heart thunders in my chest. “Can you tell us what happened, Wren?”

“She slid on ice, Charlotte,” Dad chastises, then takes my hand in his and kisses my knuckles.

“Please . . . stop fighting.” I try to sit up, but the room spins, and my father gently guides me back against the bed. “Or at least argue quieter. My head hurts.”

“Oh, honey, we’re sorry. How do you feel?” Mom cautiously runs her fingers over my hair. “The good news is you don’t have a concussion, sweetheart. You do have eleven stitches though, and . . .”

I reach up and touch the bandage covering the stitches and hiss.

*Damn it.*

“And a dislocated shoulder they’ve already popped back into place.” She trails her finger along the sling immobilizing my arm, and it starts to sink in that I won’t be delivering babies for a few days. “No surgery required there.”

“How long have I been out?” It doesn’t feel like that long, but I’m having a hard time piecing it together as everything starts hitting me all at once. “I remember the lights coming at me. I think . . .” I push myself harder, trying to remember. “I think I hit a tree.”

“You’ve been in and out for two hours, honey.” Mom finally sits down in the seat next to me, which will hopefully calm the nervous energy coming off her in anxious waves. “What else do you remember, Wren?”

That's a good question.

What else do I remember?

"I was on my way home from the hospital. The storm was just starting, and I think I hit a patch of black ice." *Wait . . .*  
"Jace . . . I think Jace was there. I think he saved me."

Dad steps closer, clearly confused. That makes two of us. "Jace Kingston?" he asks, and it's hard to miss the accusatory tone in his voice.

"Yeah. Is he okay? I think he saw it happen and called the ambulance." Or I'm absolutely certifiable and hit my head harder than I think. It could go either way at this point.

Luckily, Phoebe walks into the room and smiles before I can go deep down that line of thinking. "Look who decided to wake up." She dims the lights, and I swear she just became my new favorite person in the entire world. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I've been run over by a truck." Mom sucks in a breath, and I immediately feel terrible at my poor attempt at a joke. "You're on the wrong floor, aren't you?"

"Oh look, she's got jokes," she mocks as she checks my chart. "Just checking in on you. You had us worried. There are better ways of getting out of work. Most of them are considerably less dramatic too, Wren."

Jokes are good.

Jokes I can handle.

"Phoebe, any chance you know whether anyone was brought in with me?"

She shakes her head, then looks between my parents. "Not that I've heard, but I can check. Do you want me to get you anything?"

"No, thank you. I just want to go home." I feel like I could sleep for days.

After she leaves the room, Dad clears his throat and kisses the top of Mom's head. "I'm going to see if I can get us some

answers. I'll be right back."

"Okay," she whispers before she starts fussing with my blankets, and the calm I she's been trying to present finally cracks, taking a little piece of my heart with it when I realize what kind of awful déjà vu she must be having. "You scared me to death, Wren. When the hospital called and said you'd been in an accident . . . I had the worst flashbacks of my life. I don't know that I've ever been so scared. The past . . . your sister . . ."

"I'm okay, Mom." I try to sound convincing, but judging by the look she gives me, I fail miserably. "I am. I swear. I'm just a little sore and a little tired." Really sore and utterly exhausted, but I don't think she needs to know that right now. "I'll be fine for work on Monday. But I'll need someone to cover my on-call tomorrow."

"Wren." She picks up my hand, the one not in the sling, and holds it between both of hers. "This is what I'm talking about, honey. I want you to know that the world won't end if you need to take time off. I know you're upset with the way I handled things with the practice, with your sister, with our family. But I need you to understand that I did it for you . . . for us."

"I'm working on it, Mom." At least I was before I ended up h





## Sawyer

When Jace said he needed help, I didn't think I'd be picking him up on the side of the damn road. But it had been icing outside for a few hours, so I wasn't going to let him sit there and wait for Triple A or an Uber. What I hadn't expected was for him to be surrounded by police officers in the storm, not twenty feet from a car that had crashed into a tree.

When he saw me approach, he breathed a sigh of relief, and my nerves settled. *Slightly*. But something about the situation isn't right. I pull him into a hug, ignoring the police and their questioning stares. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine." He pulls back, like it's not cool to be hugging his brother. "I was driving home and saw a car spin out on the ice, then hit the tree." He looks between the officers, then back to me, and I don't like the look on his face. "Like I just told them. I checked on the driver. That's when I saw it was Wren."

"What?" I grab the back of his neck and yank him back. "Wren? *My* Wren? Why didn't you say that on the phone?" I look around for an ambulance or any sign of Wren. "Where is she? Is she okay?"

An officer clears his throat. "Ms. Davenport was taken away by ambulance."

"Dr. Davenport," I correct him as my heart drops. "Is she okay?"

"Are you her husband?" a different officer asks.

When I don't answer, Jace steps up and answers for me. "Yes, he is."

I don't correct my brother.

Not right now.

Not when I need to find Wren.

Not when the officer is already eyeing us as if he doesn't believe us.

"She was taken to Kroydon Hills Hospital."

I grab Jace and thank the officers, then turn to leave.

"Mr. Kingston," an officer calls out. "We'll be in touch."

Jace nods, and the two of us get in my car.

"What did you do?" I ask as soon as the car doors close.



□

When Jace and I race into the quiet hospital, my heart beats a mile a minute.

She has to be okay.

An older woman at the front desk stops me. “Excuse me, sir, but visiting hours don’t start again until eight a.m. You’ll have to come back then.”

Jace steps forward with a charming smile plastered on his face. “His wife was brought into the emergency room earlier.” Apparently, lying is coming easily to him tonight, but I appreciate the *do whatever it takes* attitude right now.

“Oh. I’m so sorry.” She pushes a button and buzzes us into the ER waiting room, where I find Wren’s father standing with a phone in his hand and anger radiating off him.

“Brent.” I approach, desperate. “Tell me she’s okay.”

This man, who I’ve known since I was a kid, looks at me like he’s never seen me before. “Sawyer?”

“How is she?”

“What the hell are you doing here? Why are you always around when one of my daughters gets hurt?” An accusatory tone laces every word.

Whether it’s confusion or anger causing it is up for debate.

But I’m done debating.

“I love her, Brent. Tell me she’s fine.” I all but drop to my knees to beg.

“You what?” He looks from me to Jace, who’s standing behind me. “You and Wren?”

“Yes. Me and Wren. Where is she?” I push. I’m on the verge of snapping.

“And you.” He motions to Jace. “She said you were there. At the accident.”

My protective instincts kick in, and I step in front of Jace. “He saw it happen and popped a flat when he pulled off the road to check on her. He called the cops. He called me. He was the reason they got to her so fast.”

Brent eyes Jace like he doesn’t believe me.

I’m not sure I believe me either. But right now, I need to get to Wren.

“I’m finding her with or without you. So are you going to tell me where she is, or am I going around you?”

“Are you going to hurt my daughter, Sawyer?” he counters.

“No, Brent. I’m going to protect her for the rest of her life, if she’ll let me. Now, take me to her before I stop asking and find her myself.”

I give him one more chance, and lucky for both of us, this time he says, “Follow me.”

# WREN



When I slowly force my eyes open again, my parents are nowhere to be seen. A nurse I don't know is checking my vitals, and Sawyer is holding my hand while he sleeps in the chair next to me. "What time is it?" I whisper to the nurse, not wanting to wake Sawyer.

"A little after five a.m.," she answers just as quietly. "Dr. Smith should be in to check in on you one more time, then you can get out of here."

"They're not admitting me?"

She shakes her head. "No concussion. No need to stay for observation."

"Are my parents still here?"

"No, baby." Sawyer's deep raspy voice washes over me, soothing me. "Your parents left a while ago. How are you feeling?"

The nurse finishes inputting something into the system and steps out of the room, leaving us alone. "I'm sore, but I'm okay. I just want to get out of here."

"The doctor doesn't like being a patient," he teases, but the way he's looking at me holds no teasing at all.

"I've never met anyone who likes being a patient. I just want to go home and get in my own bed." I squeeze his hand, not ready to let go yet. "Will you take me home, Kingston?"

"Yeah, Red." He runs his fingers along my jaw, and I lean into his palm. "I'll take you home. Just don't ask me to leave

afterward, okay?”

“You don’t have to do that. I’ll be fine alone. It’s just a few stitches and a dislocated shoulder.” I really want to beg him not to leave. To stay with me all day. Maybe all week. Possibly longer . . . But I push that needy girl to the side and brush my lips over his hand instead.

“How about, just this once, you agree with me? You scared me last night. I didn’t know what happened, and the cops wouldn’t tell me anything. I may have told them you were my wife to get information out of them.”

I skip right over the fact he told someone we were married. But I know there’ll absolutely be some overanalyzing done later, when I let myself focus on how much I didn’t hate the sound of that. “How did you even know I was in the hospital?” My head still hurts a bit, but I’m thinking clearly now, and I know I didn’t call him.

“Jace called.”

“Oh my God. Jace. He was there. Is he all right? Did I hit him?” Fear slams into me with overwhelming force at the thought that I could have hurt someone else.

“He’s fine, Wren.”

*Oh, thank God.*

“He saw you lose control and hit the tree. He’s the one who called the police, and then he called me.” Sawyer finally leans down and brushes his lips over mine. It’s a whisper of a caress, and I want so much more.

I grip the front of his shirt, tugging him closer, desperate for the strength and safety I feel when I’m with him. “Thank you for coming . . . and staying.”

“Always, Red. *Always.*” There’s so much emotion hiding under his words.

Promises not yet spoken.

They brush against my skin.

And for once, I don’t want to fight it.





□

It took entirely too long to be released from the hospital, but at least now I have a better understanding of how my patients must feel. Sawyer opens the door of his SUV, then, once I'm seated, leans over and buckles my seatbelt for me. "Pretty sure I can buckle myself in, Kingston."

"Pretty sure you're going to have to deal with me hovering for at least a day, Red."

He carefully shuts the door so it doesn't slam, then rounds the front and climbs in behind the wheel. "Do we need to stop anywhere?"

"No." I hold up the bag with the prescriptions the hospital pharmacy filled for me. "I've got everything I need."

"Then let's go home."

Those words have never sounded so good, and I'm pretty sure it's because of the man saying them. I lean my head back and close my eyes, still exhausted from the long night.

We drive in silence until Sawyer turns onto our street. "My house or yours?"

"I really want my own bed, if that's okay."

He pulls into my driveway and cuts the engine. "I'll do whatever you need, Red."

"You can bring Zeus over if you want."

Sawyer's bottomless blue eyes search my face for a moment before he nods. "I'll check in on him later. Right now, let's get you upstairs and into bed."

I cock a brow and press my lips together, holding back a smile.

"I mean to sleep," he volleys back with a gorgeous grin.

Once we're in my room, Sawyer nods toward my bed. "Sit."

"Aww. Do I get a treat for listening like a good girl too?" I mock but sit anyway.

He squats in front of me and peels my jeans down my legs, then manages to work my shirt over my head and off me without too much pain.

“Thank you.” I pull my legs up and tuck them under the blanket, watching with rapt attention as he pulls his shirt over his head and shucks off his jeans. This man is gorgeous. Even after so little sleep for either of us, he still makes me breathless.

“My eyes are up here, Red. Now move over.” He pulls the blanket back and climbs in behind me.

I lean my head against his chest, cursing the sling and my dislocated shoulder for making it so difficult to get close. “Sawyer . . .”

“Hmm . . . ?”

“You were right.” Good God. Even as drained as I am, those words feel like an act of emotional warfare. “And before you get cocky about it, fair warning. Those shouldn’t be words you get used to hearing from my lips. Got it?”

He chuckles, and the deep sound reverberates against my skin and lights a fire in me. Like I’m in any shape to fan those flames today. “I’m always right, Red. But it’s nice to hear you admit it for a change. Care to tell me what you’re talking about this time?”

“You know.” I glare and somehow manage to hold back my smile. “If I could shove you off this bed without hurting myself worse, I would.”

A crooked smile pulls at his lips as he fingers the strap of my bra. “You say the sexiest things, baby. Tell me more.”

I laugh so hard my head pounds. “Promise it will always be like this?”

He moves his big body up, so he’s looking down at me. His eyes caress my face as if his fingers are touching me before he finally presses a gentle kiss against my lips. “Promise me forever?”

“What?” My mind spins, and my heart races as I try to process his words.

*Forever.*

“I love you, Wren.” He wraps a hand around my head and leans in close as shivers breakout over my skin. “I love your strength, and your drive, and your beauty, and your sarcastic sense of humor. I want to be the reason you don’t want to spend all your time at the office. I want to be that thing you do for yourself for the rest of your life.”

I wrap my good arm around him and press a kiss to the dark ink on his chest. “And what do I get if I promise you forever, Kingston?”

“You get to fight with me every day. You get a man who’ll worship you, even when you’re wrong because, believe it or not, Red, you’re usually wrong.”

“Keep dreaming,” I taunt, then open my mouth to argue but don’t get the chance before Sawyer kisses me. The kind of kiss that makes me swear the earth moves beneath us both. The kind of kiss that changes your life.

“I love you, Wren.” My heart sighs a blissful sigh while I run a finger along the lines of his ink.

His throat.

His lips.

This man of mine.

This man I love . . . *This man I love.*

“I love you, Sawyer. I’ve wasted so much time hating you. I don’t want to waste anymore.”

Before my next breath, his mouth moves over mine. “Let’s not get too hasty.” His tongue dips into my mouth. Tasting me. Loving me. “The sex after the arguing is so much fucking fun, Red.”

I giggle and lay my head against his chest. “No sex tonight, hot stuff. I’m not sure I’d survive.”

“That’s all right. You just promised me forever. I can wait a few hours.” Sawyer wraps his arm around my waist and holds me close. “Sleep now. I’ve got you. I always will.”



## Sawyer

Wren spends most of the day sleeping, so sometime that afternoon, I pull myself away from her to get Zeus from my house. I assumed he'd be happy to see me, but happier to see Wren. I didn't expect to walk into my house to find my dog sleeping on the couch with my little brother. The little traitor doesn't even lift his head when he sees me.

"What the hell are you doing, jack-off?" I kick Jace's leg and stand back as he jerks up.

"What the fuck?" Jace's eyes fly open, and Zeus jumps off the couch.

"Don't you have a house to go to?" I ask with more anger than I'm ready to deal with right now.

"Relax. I knew you'd be at the hospital for a while, and I wanted to make sure your dog was okay."

I know in my gut there's more going on here. "Bullshit. I wasn't going to do this today, but here you are . . . again. So now you're going to tell me what's happening with you. I let you coast last night, but then you ended up watching my girl get in an accident."

"You think I had something to do with the accident?" He stands up and gets in my face. "Go ahead. Say it."

"Maybe I'm itching for a fight, but I'm fucking angry. She hit a tree, Jace. A fucking tree. She could have—"

"But she didn't. Now ask me if I had something to do with it." He shoves me, and I crack my knuckles as my hands fist at my side.

"I'm not asking you because I know you didn't hit her car last night." The thought may have crossed my mind, but it was fleeting. "I know you, you little shithead. And I know something's going on, but you aren't why she crashed. You would have said something if you were. I know you, little

brother, and you're not that fucked up. Not yet. Now tell me what's going on and why you're avoiding your house."





□

“*W*hen I went to bed, there was only one Kingston in my house. Now there are two. Did I hit my head harder than I thought?” Wren walks into her living room and ties the sash on her robe a little tighter before she joins Jace and me on her couch.

“I thought I’d save you from suffering through an entire day alone with Huck Finn.” Jace shrugs and snags another wonton with his chop sticks. “How are you feeling, Wren?”

Wren grabs it from him and pops it in her mouth, then leans back very carefully. “Why do you call him Huck Finn?”

“Seriously?” The little smacker hands her the carton of Chinese food and smirks. “I thought you were the smart one.”

I smack the back of his head. “Watch it.”

“Come on. *Tom Sawyer*. Huck Finn.” Jace shakes his head when she just stares at him. “They’ve been calling me jack-off my whole life. I had to come up with something.”

“If that’s what you’ve got to tell yourself.” She smiles and adjusts herself against me. “So . . . are we having a slumber party? I just got off the phone with my mother, and I’m taking off the next few days. *I could do your hair and your nails.*”

I kiss the top of her head and groan. “No. No slumber party.” I wrap an arm around her. “Jack-off is going home.”

When Jace doesn’t have a snappy comeback, I throw him a bone. “Unless you want to take Zeus back to my house and crash there for the night.”

Jace kicks his feet down and jumps up. “Yeah. I’ll take care of Zeus. Are we all going to Hud and Maddie’s tomorrow?”

“They’re getting released in the morning, guys. Do you really think she’ll be up for visitors right away? They might want some quiet time to themselves.”

Jace and I both laugh at her unknowingly absurd assumption.

Not that they'd want time alone.

No, that's not out of the question.

It's thinking my overbearing family would ever consider *not* descending on them as soon as they get home. That's comical.

"I'll just take some of this back with me and leave you two alone." He picks up two cartons and turns to leave.

"Jace . . ." Wren grabs his hand before he can walk away. "Thank you for helping me last night."

"You scared the shit out of me, Wren."

*Yeah, brother. That makes two of us.*

Jace, ever the fucking ham, lifts Wren's hand and kisses her knuckles, then nods toward me. "You scared the shit out of him too. You might have to kiss away his nightmares tonight. I mean, unless you *like* bedwetters."

"Get the fuck out," I laugh.

"I told you I could help you with that little problem, Kingston."

These two together are going to be trouble.

# WREN



Once Jace leaves, I stand and offer Sawyer my hand. “I’m going to take a bath. Want to help me?”

“Oh.” His eyes skim up my bare legs, and heat pools in my belly. “Do you think that’s a good idea?”

He cups my head in his hands, and I’m tempted to say, *Screw careful*. “I think it’s the best idea I’ve had in days. Now, are you coming?”

“Wren . . .” My name is a pained plea on his lips. “You’re hurt. Your muscles have got to be sore. Your shoulder is . . . We can’t.”

His words follow me up the stairs and into the bathroom. “Get your mind out of the gutter, Kingston. There will be no funny business in this tub.” I turn the faucet on and throw a bath bomb into the water while I contemplate my next words. Nervous about his reaction to them. “Sawyer . . .”

He turns me around to face him and carefully removes my sling, then peels off my robe. “Yeah, Red?”

Next, he unfastens my bra, and with the kind of care you’d show a priceless antique, pulls it down my arms and off me, then kisses the bruises blooming on my body.

My breath catches in my throat when he bends and pulls my panties down my legs, then stuffs them in his pocket. “You were saying?”

What was I saying?

Oh right.

Damn. “I don’t know if I want to say it now.”

“Say it, Wren.” Sawyer steps into the tub, then takes my hand and helps me in. I very carefully sit down between his legs and lean back against his chest, enjoying the way my muscles relax. The way my entire body relaxes.

“You know, we went about this thing a bit backward.” I sigh as he squeezes a sponge and drips hot water over my chest, being careful not to touch. “You’re making it hard to focus,” I chastise with no heat behind my words.

“Sorry,” he kisses my neck. “We wouldn’t want you unfocused.”

“Sawyer, I’m serious.”

His chuckle fills the room, but he stops. At least for now. “Sorry. What were you saying?”

“Fine. I don’t want to have sex with you.” I blurt out the words and regret them almost immediately. But that’s the thing. The words might suck. What I’m asking for might not be what I want. But it’s what I think we need.

“I got you, Red. No sex. Not until you’re healed.” His hand dips down under the water, and I moan when his fingers slide along my pussy.

“No. Not just for now. I think we need to take a step back. We started this whole thing as enemies with benefits, and even that was based on a lie.”

Sawyer starts to say something, but I cut him off, “Not a lie by you. More like a lie of omission which my family perpetuated. I understand you had no control over that and weren’t even aware of it. I’m not saying you were. I’m saying . . . What I’m trying to say is this all happened fast. One day I hated you, and then I was fucking you, and now . . .”

“Now what, Red?”

“And now I love you. But I think we need to take sex off the table for a while, so we can build a stronger foundation than we have right now.” There. I said it. Hopefully he won’t

storm out of here—because getting out of this tub alone would completely suck and probably really hurt. Not as much as my heart would hurt, but one thing at a time.

“Okay,” he whispers against my skin, and I shiver.

“That’s it? *Okay?*”

Sawyer wraps his arm around my waist and holds me close to him. “Yeah, Red. Okay. You’ve got a point. It’s not going to change anything if we don’t have sex for a few days. We’ve known each other our entire lives. The foundation is there. But I understand what you’re saying, and I see your point.”

“Just like that?” I’m shocked. He never agrees with me.

Did I want him to fight me on this?

No . . . *Yes?* No . . . No, I didn’t.

“Thank you. I’m surprised you agreed so easily.”

“Oh, baby. There’s nothing easy about it. And I might have agreed, but I’ve got a stipulation.”

“Of course you do . . . Spit it out. What is it?” My smile is hard to hide, but this is where we excel. Arguing. Pushing. Ha—this is our foreplay.

His hands run up my body and gently cup both breasts.

What he does to my nipples isn’t so gentle, and I moan.

“We won’t have sex until you’re ready. Until you’re begging for it. And until that moment, neither of us gets to come. Not by each other and not by ourselves.”

“Sawyer,” I gasp as he pinches my nipples. “You can’t be serious . . . Can you?”

“Oh, you better believe it, Red. If I don’t get your orgasms, *you* don’t get your orgasms. Got it?”

“Fine. But we’ll just see who’s begging first.” Thank God, I’m not facing him right now, because I know exactly what his smug face looks like. And I may or may not wish I could sit on it.



□

“Are you sure they wouldn’t rather be alone?” I ask Jace and Sawyer, who both sit across from me at my kitchen table the next afternoon, eating the soup my mother dropped off a few hours ago. Apparently, it’s the cure-all for everything, not just the flu. At least according to her. The good news is she bought it at The Busy Bee and didn’t make it herself. World-class surgeon? Yes. Good cook? That would be no. But hey, you can’t be good at everything, right?

Jace grabs our bowls and grins. “Nah. They got home at least two hours ago. They’ll just be grateful one of us wasn’t sitting in their kitchen waiting for them.”

“The way you were sitting in ours this morning, jack-off?” Sawyer asks, and I arch a brow in question.

“Ours?” I ask.

“Yeah, Huck Finn. Pretty sure this is the good doctor’s house, not yours.” Jace, the little kiss-ass, hands me a cookie and a glass of milk, then sits down next to me with a stack of his own. Okay. I can handle this kind of ass-kissing.

“Remind me why you haven’t gone back to the hockey house yet?” Sawyer glares, and I bite my tongue. I kinda like having Jace here. I never got to know what having a younger sibling was like. Seeing them together is entertaining.

Jace sighs dramatically and shakes his head, like that was the most ridiculous thing he’d ever heard. “For starters, the view is much better here.” Then he dips his cookie in my milk, and I reconsider my earlier thought about wanting a younger sibling. “And the food is better too.”

“Hey . . .” I snag the chocolate chip cookie out of his hand and enjoy the pout he gives me. “Get your own milk.”

The devilish Kingston does just that. And when he sits back down to a still-glaring Sawyer, he announces, “I like her, Sawyer. She’s gonna fit in with the rest of the crazy women in our family just fine.”

I point a cookie at his face. “You do realize I’ve known your family longer than you’ve been alive, right?”

The little shit bites the cookie right out of my hand.

“Then you better learn to protect your food and your booze. We’re savages.”





□

“*T*hey really are more savage than I remember,” I admit to Maddie that night while the two of us sit in her living room, watching the Kingstons fight over who baby Teagan will love the most.

Maddie’s tired eyes close for a moment. “They are. But man, they love hard.”

“Hey.” Her brother, Brandon, joins the two of us, with Teagan tucked in his monstrosly big arms. “It doesn’t really matter which one of them thinks they win that fight. I’ve already claimed the title of favorite.”

The tiny baby is sleeping soundly against her uncle’s broad chest, and I’m not sure who looks more content—him or her.

He looks me over cautiously, like he doesn’t trust me. Something about that doesn’t surprise me. “You’re Sawyer’s woman?”

“Brandon,” Maddie chastises. “This is Dr. Davenport. She delivered Teagan.”

“Oh, shit. Sorry. Good job, doc.”

“Thanks. I guess. But your sister was the one who did all the work. I just caught Teagan. Maybe that’ll make *me* her favorite.” I like the sound of that.

“Are you planning on being around that long, doc?” Maddie asks nonchalantly as Brandon carefully transfers Teagan back to her momma.

I look at Sawyer, who’s laughing with his brothers, then back to the baby in her mother’s arms. “Yeah. I think I am.”



| |

When we change for bed later that night, Sawyer does a little striptease I think is supposed to be sexy but in reality looks silly. “What are you doing?” I snicker.

He turns around and shakes his delectable ass. “Reminding you what you’re willingly giving up, Red.”

My little snicker threatens to turn into hysterics, but I purse my lips and push it down. “Oh, Kingston. I think we can do better than twenty-four hours without sex.”

When he turns around, he looks like I kicked his puppy. “It was worth a shot.”

I press up onto my toes and kiss his lips. “I love you.”

“Can we at least make out like horny teenagers?” He runs his tongue along the seam of my mouth and cups my breast in his big hand.

“That sounds like fun . . .”

Apparently, I hadn’t thought this through because making out for hours was amazing. But not coming at the end of it was stupid. This whole *celibacy* thing might not last very long.

## SAWYER



“Are we going to talk about where you’re living?” Ashlyn looks up at me with a playful glint in her eye and closes the laptop on the desk in my home office. She’s been looking for a better space for King Investments since officially taking over the management of all my businesses a few weeks ago.

It’s after ten in the morning when Zeus and I walk in, leaving no doubt I didn’t sleep here again last night. It’s been nearly three weeks since Wren’s accident, and I’ve slept in her bed every night.

Something Ashlyn never fails to tease me about when I come home after she’s already here.

“Why don’t you ask her to move in with you, Sawyer? You’re basically living together already. What are you waiting for?”

“We rushed through the beginning of this relationship, so now we’re supposed to be taking it slow.” I move to the window and stare at the waterfalls in the distance. The snow-covered ground surrounding the lake has turned into bright-green grass, promising an early spring. “Ashlyn . . . can you come here?”

She crosses the room and stands next to me, looking at the lake. “What am I looking at? Has the lake changed?”

“No. What are those flowers? The bright yellow ones growing everywhere?”

“Those?” She points. “They’re not flowers. They’re weeds. They’re dandelions.”

“I thought dandelions were the white puffy things,” I admit sheepishly, wondering if I sent Wren the wrong flowers last month.

She crosses her arms over her chest and leans her hip against the wall. “You guys were so sheltered, you probably never had a single weed in your lawn. Dandelions are bright yellow when they first bloom. Then the little flower closes before the white wispy petals appear. You make your wish on the white petals and blow it into the wind.”

“Do you still wish on the wind, Ashlyn?”

“Every chance I get, Sawyer. A girl is never too old to wish on the wind and hope it finds its way back to you.”



□

W ren

“Stop teasing me, sissy . . .” Haley whines as I pull into my driveway. “Are you really flying down to see me?”

“Well, not yet. But yes. Sawyer and I talked about it last night. We need to wait for Mom and Dad to get back from their vacation in three weeks, then we can fly down for a long weekend.” I pop my earbud in and head up to the house.

“Soooo . . .” she drags the word out dramatically. “Does this mean things are going well with the hot Kingston?”

I stop outside the door and laugh. “Things are going well with *all* the Kingston hotties. Jace is still crashing in the guestroom most nights. It’s not like he’s moved in, but something is going on at the hockey house, and he doesn’t want to talk about it. We see Hudson, Maddie, and Teagan almost every day, and Becks and Max are always on the phone with Sawyer, talking about the new business.”

The door opens, and Sawyer takes my bag, then takes my phone. He glances down at it, then also takes an earbud out of my ear. “Hey, Hales. She’s gonna have to call you back.”

I can’t hear what my sister says to him, but the smile on his face is deliciously sinful before he pockets my phone and ties something around my eyes. “Sawyer . . . what are you doing?”

He throws me over his shoulder and smacks my ass, and I swear my panties dampen immediately. “I’m taking away your ability to overthink, Red.”

“I love it when you talk dirty, Kingston.” I bite down on my lip when his hand cups my ass. Oh this man is so getting laid tonight. We’ve waited long enough.

The clink of the door shutting behind us sends my senses on high alert. Sawyer takes heavy footsteps through my house and out what sounds like my backdoor.



“I hate surprises, Kingston.”

“Two more minutes, Red.” Another smack to the ass, and I’m squirming.

“You’re killing me, Sawyer.” Three . . . almost four weeks with no sex has been absolute torture. This crazy man loves to parade around my house in boxer briefs with all that beautiful ink and those even more beautiful muscles on display. I’m not sure how I’ve held out this long. It’s physically painful.

Why . . . *Why* did I say we needed to take it slow?

Sawyer stops and gently lowers my feet to the ground, then removes the silk from around my eyes.

When I blink to adjust to the brightness, he cups my face in his hand. “Did you know dandelions start out as these bright yellow flowers?”

“What?” His thumbs rub my cheeks, and I glance around us, my heart thrumming against my chest. We’re standing at the edge of the lake, surrounded by a field of vibrant yellow dandelions. “Sawyer?”

“They start out as these bright little dots mixed in with the fresh grass. And then they close up tight, protecting themselves until they’re ready to show their real beauty.” He bends down and plucks a dandelion from the ground and hands it to me.

“Then they open back up, and they’re these delicate white wisps that sway in the wind. They get a second chance to get it right. And you get your chance to make a wish when they do.”

Tingles race over my skin as his words settle in my soul.

“I forgot the way you used to blow on the white flowers when we were young.” He steps away and picks up a bouquet of wishies wrapped in a ribbon, handing them to me.

Then as if this isn’t already the most perfect moment in my life, he drops to one knee.

Oh my . . .

“Don’t you see, Wren? We’re like these flowers you love so much. We started out as kids, bright and shiny and not knowing any better. Then we decided we were better off fighting each other, and what we could have been shriveled up and closed. Until . . . Until we got our second chance. Our wish on the wind. My wish for you . . . For the rest of our lives.”

“Please . . .” I beg him through trembling lips. “Stand up, Sawyer.”

“Marry me, Wren.” He holds up a black velvet box in front of me. “I know you’re going to say it’s too fast. You’re probably going to tell me we need more time, but I don’t agree. I know what I want. I don’t have any doubts. You’re my wish, Red.”

He cracks the box open, and instead of a diamond ring, a small band of flowers rests on the velvet interior. “I love you, Wren.”

“Stand up, Sawyer Kingston,” I demand over my happy tears, and as soon as he’s on his feet, I throw myself into his arms.

I press my lips to his, and I kiss him. Every ounce of hesitation and fear I’ve been holding onto for weeks vanishes. My toes tingle, and my knees go weak as he wraps his arms around me. “Yes, I’ll marry you, Sawyer Kingston.”

“You had me worried there, Red. I thought for a second you were going to shoot me down.” His hands slide down to cup my ass, and his lips trail down my neck as we take a few steps toward the house.

“Wait . . . Kingston.” I stop him.

He sucks at my pulse point, then moves up to my bottom lip. “What, Red?”

I smile against his mouth. “How about you pick up that silk tie and we have a little fun?”

“Baby . . . does this mean we’re allowed to have sex again?”

I dig my fingers into his hair and relish his responding groan. “Sawyer Kingston, if you don’t fuck me now, I just might rescind my acceptance of your proposal.”

“That’s how we’re gonna play this, huh?” He bends down and snags the black silk, then loops it around my throat and tugs me to him. “I love the way you think.” His tongue slides against mine, and I moan into his mouth.

“And I love you. Now stop wasting time and make me come.”

We step into the house, frantic. Drowning in each other. Ripping off our shirts and clawing at each other’s skin. Hunger like I’ve never known sparks between us.

“*Whoa . . .* We sharing today, guys? Cause my only rule is no sword-crossing,” Jace calls out to us, and I scream.

Sawyer moves me behind him, and I manage to step on Zeus, who yelps and runs away.

So much for romance.

“Get out,” Sawyer yells at Jace while I find my balance, hiding behind his back.

“You can go to Sawyer’s place,” I add. “He won’t be needing it tonight.” Then I skim my lips over Sawyer’s ear. “You won’t be needing it anymore.”

“Go, jack-off.”

Jace looks around the room and starts laughing, but at least he’s smart enough to get the hell out of my house before Sawyer physically removes him. Once he’s gone, Sawyer locks the deadbolt and the chain.

“I think it’s time to kick the baby bird out of the nest,” I giggle. “And maybe you could move a few more of your things in, while we’re at it.”

“Are you asking me to move in with you? Because I asked you to marry me first.” He lowers to both knees and unbuttons my pants, then slowly inches them down my legs. “So when you tell this story, I don’t want you reversing that little tidbit, Red.”

I kick off my heels and step out of each leg, then place my foot against his chest and push him back. “Oh, Kingston . . . I’ll never forget today, not a single second of it. Now how about we make some more memories?”

He grips my panties in both hands and rips them from my body, then stands and pulls my bra off too. His eyes devour every inch of me, and I clench my legs in anticipation.

My God, I love this man.

He wraps his hand around my throat and cups my sex with the other.

I whimper, desperate for more.

“Whose pussy is this?”

“Yours. It’s yours. Please . . .” I beg. Yup. Full-on *beg*. Desperate. Needy. Shameless. “Why did I say we had to wait?”

Sawyer slaps my sex, and my knees threaten to give out. “Because you knew we needed it, Wren.” One finger slips inside me, and I moan. “Because you knew what we had was worth banking on. Was worth taking extra time to build.”

Another finger slides inside me, and I grind down against the heel of his hand as it presses against my clit. “Kingston . . .” I keen, needing so much more. But the fucker doesn’t give it to me. Nope. He pulls his fingers from my body, then puts them in his mouth and sucks. “Tell me how I taste.”

He traces my bottom lip with the finger that was just inside his mouth.

*Inside me.*

It’s achingly intoxicating.

“You taste like mine.” He pushes down against my bottom lip, then slides his tongue into my mouth. “I fucking love you, Red. Now, on your knees.”

“Yes, sir . . .” I drag out and leisurely drop to my knees, then run my fingers over his belt buckle. “And what exactly

would you like me to do on my knees, Kingston?”

Before he can open his mouth, I add, “In detail, please. I wouldn’t want to get anything wrong.”

The look on his face is hotter than anything I’ve ever seen in my life.

“Pull down my zipper and take out my cock.”

I lick my lips, then do as he says and lick his cock.

It’s long and thick . . . so thick.

“You ready for me, Red?”

I don’t answer with words. Just open my mouth and swallow him down.

“Open wider, baby.”

My eyes water, and my throat opens. He cradles the back of my head as he fucks my face. His muscles contract, and his sexy groan and heavy breaths fill the room while I lick and suck, loving the effect I’m having on him.

Until he pulls back and lifts me up and onto the kitchen table.

“Three weeks, Wren.” He tugs gently on the silk around my neck.

“You made me go three weeks without your body, baby. Never again.”

“Never.” I grab at him, anxious for what happens next. “It’s what we needed then. But never again.”

“What do you want, Wren?” His hand trails down over my breast and stomach, then grips my hip.

I smile and preen. “To not think, Kingston.”

“What’s your safe word?” he growls as his pupils blow wide.

“Dandelion,” I whisper with so much heady anticipation, goosebumps break out over my skin, and a shiver skirts down my spine.

His fingers run up and down my throat as his cock presses against my entrance, and I wrap my legs around his waist, digging my heels into his ass. “You ready for me, Red?”

“Fuck me, Kingston. Please . . .” I beg.

“As you wish.” He thrusts into me, then leans over, his big body engulfing mine. Dominating mine. Worshipping mine. His lips are everywhere. “You’re my everything.” His heated breath glides over my skin.

Sawyer wraps each end of the silk around his fists so it’s only pressing on the sides of my throat, as he drives into me relentlessly. Violently.

My pussy clenches around him, and a guttural moan claws its way up my throat.

“And you are mine,” I tell him as I wrap my fingers around his wrists and hold them tight. “Now, give me more.”

Navy-blue eyes light up, and he slows his breathtaking assault, dragging his thick cock out of my body.

“We’re going to take this real slow, Wren.” He crosses the silk around my throat loosely and pulls it just a tiny bit before filling me again slowly.

Gently.

Setting my body on fire. And I come alive under his touch.

“More,” I rasp out, and Sawyer’s wicked grin tugs at every hypersensitive nerve in my body.

His cadence picks up, and I rock my hips against his.

Meeting him thrust for thrust.

Gasping for breath.

My walls tightening around him.

This man I love. The one I spent so much time hating.

I wasted so much time ignoring the other half of my soul.

“So good. You feel so fucking good. Tell me you feel this, Wren. Tell me you’re here with me, baby.”

“Always with you,” I gasp, clawing at him with tears gathering in my eyes.

Sawyer tightens the silk the tiniest bit and fucks into me over and over until my walls flutter around him and I come on a breathless moan.

He lets go of the tie and wraps his arms around me, pulling me toward him as my orgasm tips us both over the edge, and we’re left draped over the kitchen table, gasping for breath, grabbing for each other.

When I can finally breathe again, I drag my nails down his chest. “You, Mr. Kingston, are the best thing I’ve ever done for myself. Do you think that counts as letting loose?”

The way he looks at me sends a sharp, sweet bolt of hunger rushing over me.

“Pretty sure that was you *tied* up, not you letting loose, Red.” He kisses my nose, then lifts me into his arms and carries me up the stairs. “Now how about we finally christen the tub the way I’ve been dying to since the first time we were in it together?”

I wrap my arms around his neck and hold tight as he takes the stairs two at a time.

Later, once we’ve added more hot water to the tub to replace what sloshed out during round two, I lie in his arms, content and at peace. “So . . . where are we going to live? My place or yours?”

“I love your house, Red, but mine is bigger, with a home office and a bigger tub. What do you say we give mine a try for a week or so and see what you think?”

“Hmm . . . I like the sound of a bigger tub.”

## EPILOGUE



Wren

I lie on my side on the chair and stare at the art on the wall. “Maybe this wasn’t the best idea.”

“You’ve been planning this for months, sissy. It’s the best idea.” Haley claps her hands, then shoves Quinn my way. “Tell her not to worry.”

Quinn squeezes my hand. “It’s not going to be huge, babe. You’re going to be fine.”

A large man whose baby I delivered last month walks into the room. “So, are we doing this tonight or rescheduling, doc?”

“No.” I shake my head. “Let’s do it.” I look over at Haley and Quinn. “Pass the flask.”

“After I’m done,” the artist says, and I groan. “I have no tolerance for pain.”

“You’ll be fine, doc. Just think of this as my way of thanking you for my baby girl.”

I blow out a long breath. “Okay. I’m ready.”





□

Haley laces up the back of my wedding gown, and I bite down on my lip. “Ouch. Not so tight. I need to be able to breathe, Hales.”

She ties my bow and fluffs my hair. “Perfection, sissy.”

My mother fills the champagne flutes and passes one to each of us. “Pain is the price of beauty, darling. And you look beautiful, Wren. Absolutely beautiful.” She lifts her glass in the air, and Haley, Quinn, Maddie, my soon-to-be sister-in-law who’s become one of my closest friends, and I all do the same with our own glasses.

“To my beautiful girl and your handsome husband-to-be. John and your father used to always joke that you two were meant to be. The two of you fought constantly, but even as small children, you only had eyes for each other. Some kind of magnetic energy constantly drew you to one another. You just had to be in a place to be ready for it. And I’m so glad you’re both finally there. Cheers.” My mother taps her glass to mine. “Choose happiness, Wren. Choose love, and never regret your choices. Life is too short.”

A knock on the door sounds before my father appears, looking dapper in his gray tux. “They’re ready for you, ladies.”

The girls clear out, and Haley quickly links her pinky with mine. “See you on the other side, Wren.”

“Love you, Hales.”

Dad holds his arm out for me to take. “Are you ready, honey?”

“I’ve never been more ready for anything in my life, Daddy.”



□

The next generation of Kingstons walks down the aisle first, followed by Haley and Quinn, while Dad and I wait at the back of the field where Sawyer proposed. The music changes to the acoustic version of “Over the Rainbow,” and Dad and I walk down the aisle to where Sawyer stands at the end, surrounded by Hudson, Jace, and Becket, while Max stands next to them, having become ordained so he could be the one to marry us.

Once we get down the aisle, thankfully without tripping, I turn to face my father and swallow down my emotions.

“I’m so proud of you, Wren.” He takes my veil and lifts it from my face, then kisses my cheek and offers Sawyer my hand. “Her heart is yours to take care of now, son.”

“I’ll guard it with my life, sir.”

When Sawyer takes my hand in his, all the noise of the morning stops. Silence surrounds me as everything disappears, except this man standing in front of me. “Hi,” I whisper, then kiss him quickly.

Sawyer wraps his palm around my head and deepens the kiss, until Max clears his throat.

“Vows first, brother. Then you can get to the good stuff.”

My groom kisses me again. “I’ve already got the good stuff,” he tells Max, then turns to me. “You ready to marry me, Red?”

“Hey, Max?” I smile. “Can we hurry this part up, please?”

A round of laughter breaks out behind me, and my husband-to-be takes both my hands in his as we stand in front of Max.

“Welcome,” Max announces. “We’re gathered here today to join Sawyer and Wren in holy matrimony. Most of us here had the opportunity to watch these two grow up together. We’ve seen them dance around each other. Argue with each other. Challenge each other. I’m pretty sure I helped Sawyer’s

GI Joes kidnap Wren's Barbies at some point, many, many years ago. But what we all saw back then is still clear as day today. Sawyer and Wren were made for each other, and because they trusted in love, we're all here to watch them take the ultimate leap of faith."

A leap of faith . . .

Faith in the future.

Faith in each other.



## Sawyer

As the party dies down and the sun slides behind the falls, I scoop Wren into my arms and head for our house. “You ready to call it a night, Mrs. Kingston?”

She giggles. Fucking giggles. And it’s the best sound I’ve ever heard. “I’m ready to call it forever, Mr. Kingston.”

I walk into our house and lock the backdoor behind us. Wren and I officially moved into my house a few weeks after we announced our engagement. Ashlyn ended up buying Wren’s cottage, and she and Madeline moved in shortly after that. Still . . . I sit Wren on the kitchen counter and move to the front door to deadbolt and chain it shut. Not taking any chances on Jace or any of my other siblings interrupting us tonight.

When I walk back into the kitchen, Wren is holding two champagne flutes and a bottle in her hands. “Take me upstairs, husband. I have a wedding present to give you.”

I pick her up in the classic bridal hold and press a kiss to her lips. “I love presents.”

Once we’re in our room, my girl places the glasses and bottle on the nightstand, then turns her back to me. Her gown has long white laces that tie just above her perfect peach of an ass.

I’m not going to lie, I’ve been itching to untie them all night.

“Come on, Kingston. Untie me.” *That’s my girl.*

She doesn’t have to ask twice. “Yes, ma’am.”

I tug her laces free and swear my heart skips a beat when she steps out of her gown and stands before me in white silk lingerie, including white thigh-high stockings and garters. And along her ribs, just under her breast, she’s got a brand-new tattoo on her never-before-inked skin. “Wren . . .”

She lifts her arm in the air. “You were my wish, Kingston. You will always be my wish.”

“Red . . .” I trace the skin just outside the dandelion blowing in the wind that’s inked on her body. The tiny, white wisps floating on an invisible breeze. Then my finger trails along the word *Kingston* in script, running down the stem of my girl’s favorite flower. “You are my everything, Wren. You always will be.”

She grabs the finger that was just tracing her skin and presses her lips against it. “Thanks for making my wish come true, Kingston.”

“Thanks for trusting me with it, Red.”

The End



# AFTERWORD

Not Ready to say goodbye to Sawyer and Wren yet?

Enjoy this free Bonus Epilogue!

<https://dl.bookfunnel.com/tia6n9lbhs>

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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And finally, the biggest thank you to you, the reader. I hope you enjoyed reading Sawyer and Wren as much as I loved being lost in their world.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bella Matthews is a USA Today Bestselling Author. She's married to her very own Alpha Male and raising three little ones. You can typically find her running from one sporting event to another, or yelling from the sidelines. When she is home, she's usually hiding in her office with the only other female in the house, her rescue dog Tinker Bell by her side. She likes to write swoon-worthy heroes and sassy, smart, strong heroines with a healthy dose of laughter and all the feels. Big family dynamics are her favorite and sarcasm is her love language.

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