



She's a

Mad Hatter

S.J. Ransom

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She's a Mad Hatter 2022 S.J. Ransom

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Dedication

*To all the girls and women that were too afraid to take
revenge, this one is for you!*

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Warning

This book is a stand-a-lone book in Wonderland, TX. You can read this book by itself. However, you may enjoy knowing this book will be the opening to more stories to come. These books will be interconnected by some character within the previous story but again, you do not have to read anything before or after this book.

[Trigger warnings can be found on my website.](#)

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Blurb

Maddie:

I'm not a psycho.

I have a rhyme and reason for what I do.

Maybe it's against the law. I don't care.

Besides, I'm the judge and executioner here in Wonderland,
Texas.

That is, until my brother's best friend takes up for me. Loves
me.

Now I'm not sure I can continue my mission.

Drew:

I'm a detective of the Wonderland Police Department.

The Mad hatter is on the loose.

My attention isn't on the case.

No, it's on my best friend's little sister.

She's trouble.

Trouble, I want to get lost in.

But can I keep her safe and love her at the same time?

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Playlist

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Gives You Hell by The All-American Rejects

Sweater Weather by The Neighbourhood

Good 4 U by Olivia Rodrigo

Fallin' (Adrenaline) by Why Don't We

Don't You Know by Jaymes Young

All I Want for Christmas is You by Chase Holfelder

Beauty and the Beast by Chase Holfelder

Angel with a Shotgun by The Cab

Fresh by Artist vs Poet

Everybody Talks by Neon Tress

These are the Lies by The Cab

Temporary Bliss by The Cab

Drugs & Candy by All Time Low

She Looks so Perfect by 5 Seconds of Summer

Stupid for You by Waterparks

Still into You by Paramore

Medicine by Artist vs Poet

Uh Oh by Junior Doctor

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CHAPTER ONE



TEXAS in the Fall is fucking ridiculous. One day we'll have a beautiful, crisp day, and the next we're sweating our asses off. The list of things I hate about living in Wonderland, TX grows daily. The heat coupled with the fact everyone here loves to compare our town to *Alice in Wonderland* are both at the top of my list. There are no fantastical creatures here. There are no spectacular people. This town is pathetic. I'm not much better. I'm one of ten thousand sad souls wasting away while living here, wishing I could be anywhere else.

I'm dreading tonight. I would rather be in the cool air conditioning of my room. But then again, I'm not sure I would be safe at home. So here I am, standing at the bus station, waiting for the bus driver to pull along the curb. It's twenty minutes late. Let's add the bus system to the list of things I hate.

I place earbuds into my ears as people approach. I don't enjoy talking to strangers, and these people look way too friendly.

The ten o'clock news should start any moment, so I turn my phone to the local news station. It's fun to hear all the wonderful lies these dumbasses try to pump out about the town.

"We interrupt your regularly scheduled news for a breaking news report. The serial killer dubbed 'The Mad Hatter' has claimed another victim."

The news anchor stops talking as the camera pans away from her. There's a blonde woman, who is introduced as a

psychologist, talking now. The smile on my face probably makes me look like a freak, but I can't find a reason to give a damn. The news station considers the blonde woman an expert on serial killers. I laugh at the absurdity she's spewing.

The news anchor continues to ask the psychologist questions and read the report that was obviously provided to her. She is such a puppet for them. Word for word, she drones on about how "The Mad Hatter" is a public menace. Another news anchor joins in, and I immediately recognize him as the father of the two boys I'll see at the club tonight. I don't like him. He believes anyone from the west side of town is trash. Good thing he doesn't know his sons are slumming it. They love to come to the west side and go to the Jabberwock Bar. It's where they meet easy women and get their drugs. If he knew they were doing this every weekend, he'd have a heart attack. Maybe I should send him pictures ...

My mind returns to the news. The smile I had a moment ago is long gone as I try to tune out what they are saying, but it's hard.

"The police suspect 'The Mad Hatter' in multiple ongoing murder cases. They have no leads on the case—not even a description of what 'The Mad Hatter' looks like. These crimes are heinous and should not be taken lightly. The people of Wonderland are being encouraged to stay inside their homes during the hours of ten o'clock at night and six in the morning. The police station has a twenty-four hour hotline for anonymous tips. If you know anything or see anything, please utilize it."

My bus finally stops in front of me, and I step back to let passengers off. I bite my lip as I step up and make small talk with the bus driver for a moment while I put change into the coin slot. I sit down on the second seat to the left and continue watching these three prattle on.

People are staring at me and what I'm wearing. I'm in a tall top hat, a pink wig, and a black and pink shirt. My black cargo pants house the many items I will need for tonight. Let them stare. It doesn't bother me.

“The most recent murder brings the death toll to eight. How many more need to die before the Wonderland Police Department catch this killer?” the male news anchor asks, with heated urgency.

The psychologist nods her head as if agreeing with the man. “The crimes indicate someone seeking attention. They may even feel as if they are an avenging angel. The murders are not random either. The killer has a pattern—young men between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. All of the bodies have been brutally mutilated. So far, the victims have been from, or have recently graduated from, Wonderland High School. Parents of the victims’ friends are encouraged to cooperate with WPD.”

As the psychologist continues, I listen to see how correct she is.

“We assume the suspect keeps a meticulous schedule and needs things to be organized in their life. The pattern is showing a decline in their mental state with each kill. If we look at the first victim, the throat was sliced. What we now know as the perpetrator’s signature, a white rabbit calling card, was left on the body. The most recent victim’s throat was sliced, *and* their tongue was cut out. The phrase ‘Now we are even’ was written on the body. Another white rabbit card was left with the body. We can confirm that the white rabbit card has been left at each of the eight murder scenes.”

My mouth goes dry as the psychologist keeps talking. I don’t like how she’s classifying me and acting as if she really knows what is going on. The audacity of her assumptions infuriates me. *How dare she?* I take out my red book and put the bitch’s name in it. Fuck her. She just signed her own death certificate. I place the book and my phone into my back pocket. I don’t want to hear any more garbage. The bus driver takes a corner too fast, and I am thrown to the right. I hang onto the bar in front of me to keep from falling to the floor of the bus. I feel the knife in my boot slip. Righting myself, I push my hand down my boot to keep the knife inside. No reason for anyone to see that.



GRAND ROYAL AND QUEEN STREET INTERSECT AT THE Jabberwock Bar. In a rather drab area, with lowlights and shady back alleys, the bar is like a bright star.

My phone goes off, and I pull it out of my pocket.

Knave: You still coming tonight?

Me: Yes, almost there.

Knave: He's not been seen yet.

Me: Ok.

I put my phone back in my pocket and thank the bus driver as he opens the door for me.

“Are you sure you should be out here tonight?”

I can hear the concern in his voice as I take the last step onto the sidewalk. I turn back toward him and wink. “Don't worry, I can take care of myself, but thank you for your concern.” Pulling out my mask, I turn toward the bar and slide it on. Tonight, is about anonymity. There are too many people at this bar that could see my face and put two and two together.

The front of the club has a line around the building and out onto the street. I go over my plan, mentally organizing what needs to be done as I walk around to the back of the club. I'm not quite eighteen yet, so I have to sneak in. Knave, my best friend from high school, is out by the door, just like he told me he would be. I grin at him as he winks at me, knowing I'm too young to be here. The club is full of neon lights, and it is cringe worthy. *Yuck.*

The club's theme is The Red Queen vs. The White Queen. God, this town is such a fucking cliché, even the owner considers herself the goddamn Red Queen. Then again, so am

I. After all, I'm dressed like a prettier version of The Mad Hatter. I canvas the crowd. My target isn't here. I sigh and wait in a dark corner, brooding. It takes an hour for him to arrive. When he does, he's dressed like Tweedledum and his brother is Tweedledee. My skin crawls at the sight of them.

Using my cell phone as a makeshift mirror, I fix my mask and reapply my lipstick. I give myself a pep talk. *Be prepared, he's handsy. Don't flinch. Remember, he's here for an easy lay.* It's not working, but with a confidence that I can only perfect in this getup, I walk over to Jon and Tom.

One at a time, I remind myself. I'm not here for Tom tonight. Only Jon. *Calm yourself.* You cannot kill him here in front of everyone. I tap Jon on the shoulder. As he turns around, I watch him. For fuck's sake, he's already halfway drunk. When he sees me, he smirks. He thinks he's so charming. In reality, he's a douchebag living high off stupidity. "Why hello there, pretty lady!"

His voice is like nails on a chalkboard. My spine squirms with anticipation and disgust for this rotten bastard. God, help me keep it together.

He should have worn a mask. "Hello Jon," I speak in a stilted accent and wink at him, stepping a smidgen closer, swaying my hips. His eyes light up with want.

"Oh yeah, baby, say my name," he slurs in my ear as he touches me, pulling me into a hug even though he doesn't know who the hell I am. "My reputation must precede me if you're seeking me out." My fingers itch to hurt him. This has to end tonight. My ex-boyfriend needs to pay for his crimes against me.

"Let's dance," I whisper in his ear, wanting to pull him away from the crowd he's hanging with. Especially his brother, Tom. Those two together are dangerous. Besides, he will get his soon enough.

He doesn't hesitate because he's gullible, and he thinks he's going to get lucky tonight. He grinds his hips into mine as someone hands him another drink. By the third song, he's

sloppy drunk and trying to kiss down my neck. If this is his idea of romance, I'm glad I got away from him.

As his pathetic lips find their mark, I see red. The urge to gut him here and now is thick within my bones. I don't do that, of course. Instead, I put on a brave face and pull his hair roughly.

His eyes pop at me in surprise. There's a look of wolfish lust in his gaze.

"Take me home," I whisper.

He looks at me with an overconfident smirk. He thinks he's scoring tonight. If only he knew. He walks me out of the club, groping my ass. As we walk, I notice he takes me to a remote location. My skin starts to tingle as worry filters through me. The parking garage for the club is on the other side of the building from where we are. He's parked in the back alley where no one is around. The hairs on my arms stand at attention, priming me to strike, as he takes me to a green sports car with a Cheshire cat on the back window.

"Nice car," I lie through my teeth. It's a 1994 green Camaro that desperately needs a paint job.

Jon fumbles with the keys as he tries to open the door. I bite my lip to keep from laughing at him. He finally gets the right key into the lock and opens the door. He bows at me with a stupid grin on his face. Sweeping his arm out, he wiggles his eyebrows at me.

"Get in babe. I'm going to make you smile."

Oh God. My barf is already threatening to come up. I look at my target and decide I should end it here. He's drunk and I shouldn't get in the car with him.

Flirting with him at this point would be for sport. However, I like to toy with my prey. I crawl into the backseat; it's a junkyard of wrappers and beer cans. Disgust makes me rethink my decision for a second. But I don't change my mind. As he crawls into the backseat with me, I urge him on by unbuttoning the top two buttons of my silky, black shirt.

“Why don’t you make me smile now, sexy?” I should win a fucking Emmy for my performance with this sack of shit.

“Yeah, I plan to,” he slurs as he crawls in on top of me. I try not to think about what will happen if I can’t pull this off. I smile when he focuses on my boobs even though he can only see the swell of my cleavage. His hands move over my breasts, and he grabs them—hard. I hold back a scream of pain. He doesn’t get to hear that, and I refuse to give him the power.

Jon’s distracted when I pull out the short blade from my boot. He bends down to kiss the skin he can reach, but I jab the knife into his right side. I feel the skin give way and hear his sharp intake of breath.

I giggle as he looks down at me. “Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about. Make me smile, baby.” I use one of my legs to shove him out of my space, straight out the door and onto the ground.

He lands on his back, and I can see the look of confusion and pain. “What ...”

I climb out of the car and stand above him for a moment. I smirk, bend down, and take my knife out of his side. The force wasn’t enough to kill him on impact.

“He ...” His words are cut off as I stab him in the stomach and step on his crotch with my high-heel boots. He tries to scream, but I cut him off by stabbing him right under his sternum and shoving upward. I chuckle as he coughs. This isn’t enough, though. He’s begging me to stop but that’s not happening; I want to see the light fade from his eyes.

I cut about a four-inch wound crossing his femoral artery. He’ll be dead shortly. I move my blade up his body, teasing the edge along his left side. He gasps and I stab him in the neck. A whistling gurgle slips from his lips as the light escapes his eyes and his eyelids close.

“Not the fun you were expecting, huh, Jon?” I mock him. I know he’s gone, and it’s probably wrong of me to mock the dead, but I can’t find my give a crap button anywhere. Payback is a bitch, and she’s come to collect.

I slice his throat for good measure and stand there, feeling victorious. The blood on my blade shines in the light from the club. So, so pretty.

My stomach reminds me I haven't eaten today, and I lick the blade. The taste of his blood seeps into my mouth, and I moan.

“The blood of victory, Jon.” I wipe the blade on his cheap shirt and stow it back into my boot. Taking out the small container of lighter fluid and a lighter, I douse him and his disgusting car. Walking around to the other side, I flick the lighter into the car, and it goes up in flames. I watch in fascination as the car burns bright, until I hear the sizzling of flesh. As I walk away, I hum, “Down with the Sickness,” and leave a white rabbit card on the dumpster. I wonder if the police are smart enough to find it. I smile a grin worthy of the Cheshire cat. Huh, maybe I am a little like The Mad Hatter after all.

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CHAPTER TWO



THE TREADMILL BEEPS AT ME, and I raise my arms in victory. Two more miles than last week. Fuck, I'm starting to like running. Damn my best friend Donnie for daring me to run the Wonderland Marathon with him. With one last sprint, I hop off the treadmill and make my way to the showers. I love the fact that our police department has its own gym. With a quick shower, I get dressed for my shift. Taking one last look in the mirror, I comb my spiky, black hair to the right side. I nod, happy with the results I see.

Tightening my belt, I walk into the police station's front office like I own the damn joint. I gaze over at the desk and see Desk Sergeant Williams is on duty tonight.

Shit, maybe tonight won't be so great after all. I grumble as I try not to think about walking out the door and calling in sick. How many fucking cops saw me in the gym? Can I pretend to have a virus?

"Boy, if you aren't coming to give me good news, then what the fuck are you doing in my lobby?"

I turn when I hear her sharp tone. God, she's such a bitch. "Hey Sergeant." I try to be civil, but she looks up at me with her reading glasses perched on her large, pronounced nose and shakes her head.

"Boy, why aren't you out on the streets for your assignment? Shift started three minutes ago. You're late and that damn Mad Hatter lunatic has hit again."

My eyebrows meet my hair line as I look at the woman who has given me nothing but hell for the last seven months.

Ever since I was promoted to detective, she's treated me like I am a damn rookie. It's been pure hell. She gives me the crappiest assignments and chaps my balls every chance she gets. My father told me she's always been a damn bitch from hell that made everyone miserable. Back in the day, he was the Desk Sergeant and she was a rookie beat patrol officer.

Williams throws the keys at me, and I catch them in mid-air. She smirks, huffs, and looks at me with cold, green eyes.

"Make sure you clean it this time, Drew. I'll make you do foot patrol if you don't."

For once, she makes me laugh. "Yes, Ma'am." I walk out of the lobby to the carpool lot. *Shit*. I didn't even look at the key number. Don't let it be SUV #15. It's the oldest SUV in the hopper. The damn thing breaks down at least twice a week.

There it is, sitting, mocking me. It lights up and the horn sounds. Lt. Michaels walks over and gets in. Thank you, God. I look down at my key ring and smirk. Oh, hell yeah. SUV K-9 unit #21. Fuck, this unit is nice. Brand new and all mine for the night. I do my inspection of the vehicle and get in.

"Dispatch, Alpha Bravo #21 on duty."

"10-4 Alpha Bravo #21."

I'm not out of the parking lot before dispatch is beeping in.

"All units respond to Grand Royal & Queen Street. Fire in progress."

"Alpha Bravo #21, responding."

"Negative. You're needed at the corner of Grand Royal and Maple. Address 1774 Maple."

"10-4. Mark as en route."

A pop-up box lights up my laptop screen. Level two domestic case. Two officers are already on scene. See, what did I tell you? Crap assignments. *Fuck me*. The domestic cases in that area are always such a pain. No one presses charges. Everyone says they had a misunderstanding. I'm still trying to figure out why anyone calls these types of things in when no one ever follows through with charges anyways.

“Alpha Bravo #21, please be advised, a minor is involved.”

“10-4.”

My screen changes from level two to three. Sirens on and lights blinking, I haul ass to the scene.



I MARK MYSELF AS “ARRIVED” TEN MINUTES LATER. TELLING dispatch I’m going radio silent, I walk over to the officers already on scene. They are having a heated discussion. As they see me, they pipe down and give me a grim look. I already smell more than a domestic case here. My gut is telling me something is wrong.

A detective doesn’t get called out to a domestic case unless everyone else is on a call. With The Mad Hatter running loose, I know I have to keep an open mind and get this scene wrapped up. Officers Moody and Chantle shake my hand, and I notice they are clearly uncomfortable.

“What do we have?”

Officer Chantle sighs. “Waiting on medics to show up. We have a teenage girl that needs to be transported.”

My hackles rise as I think about what this could mean. “Do we have a sexual assault case?”

Officer Moody looks downright green as he shakes his head. “Um, not exactly Drew. We think this is a breaking and entering gone wrong. The girl has been stabbed. The wounds differ from any kind of knife wound I’ve ever seen.”

“Well, that’s better than sexual assault.” I try to keep my tone light.

“Sir, someone has stabbed her from her pelvis to her throat.”

Fuck me. “Have you called in Sergeant Adams?”

“Yes, but he’s over at the fire call and we weren’t sure if it would relate this to The Mad Hatter. He told us not to bother him if it wasn’t. Also, this doesn’t fit with The Mad Hatter. This is a girl, not a guy.”

I listen to Chantle, and while it makes sense, a random break in doesn’t happen in this part of town. This is the glamorous part of Wonderland. Teenagers playing music too loud during a party on Friday night? Absolutely. A domestic violence allegation because someone had too much to drink? Yes. But a B & E in a gated community with million-dollar homes? No. Something is up.

“I’m going in. Make sure we have CSI and a sergeant on the way.”

Chantle laughs. “Already done, Sir.”

I walk away thinking tonight is going to be interesting. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out a pair of gloves and put them on. With my recorder in hand, I start describing the scene before me.

“Entering the entryway now, and the floor is littered with debris. One green high heel and two shattered champagne glasses are scattered toward the living room. Following the blood trail, it runs from the backside of the couch into the kitchen.”

I walk into the kitchen and my entire body jolts to a stop. My stomach lurches. “Fuck me.”

Officer Moody said someone had stabbed the girl from the throat to the pelvis. Good God, I thought he meant multiple wounds around her body. Not this. Taking a moment to gather myself and put my words together, I look around the scene. Fuck, this was overkill.

I have to clear my throat before continuing. “They propped the victim up against the oven. The victim’s hair is scattered all over the floor.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. “The victim’s eyes have been cut out and placed in her hand. Tongue is on the

floor to the left of the body.”

Gulping, I stop the recording. *Lord have mercy.* I have to pause for a moment because this is brutal. This isn't random. If this is The Mad Hatter, they are getting progressively more violent.

Turning the recorder back on, I continue with my notes. “Victim's clothes have been removed. Victim has what appears to be a two inch wide cut the length of her body from neck to pelvis. The skin around the wound is jagged, with tears around the stomach.”

“Don't you throw up on my crime scene.” I turn to see the medical examiner and a forensic analyst standing at the door. I turn off the recorder as they walk in.

“Oh my God.” The forensic analyst takes a step back. He's fresh out of college. I want to say welcome to the shit show, but I stop myself.

“Doctor, you can take over from here,” I tell Dr. Forsythe.

“I've been a medical examiner for thirty years, and this town has gotten worse over time. But this right here, this takes the damn cake.” The older doctor looks at me, takes out a handkerchief, and wipes his brow. His wrinkled hand tremors as he looks at the naked girl with guts hanging out of her body.

He places his hand on my shoulder, and I look at him. “Son, you better buckle up because I'm pretty sure things are about to get even worse.”

I nod at him and continue down the hallway. My gut isn't settling, and I feel as if something is still amiss. I've seen death and destruction before, but I consider this to be the worst. Opening the first door, I shake my head.

“Oh, this is definitely The Mad Hatter,” I whisper to myself as I see a young man hanging from the ceiling fan by a tie. A white rabbit card is at the end of the man's cock with a knife sticking through the card and his urethra.

“Yeah, that had to hurt.”

I look at Officer Chantle as she comes in.

“You didn’t tell me about this.”

“Didn’t get this far. Officer Moody took one look at victim number one and told me to wait on entering.”

“You mean to tell me you and Officer Moody didn’t clear the scene?”

She looks down with guilt written all over her face.

“Fuck. Call in a second victim. Get another ambulance here. I’m calling Sergeant Adams, and I will report this fuck up to your direct superior.”

God damn it. I don’t wait for her to respond. I go to each room and clear the house. With a push of a button, I call Sergeant Adams as I canvas the backyard.

“Adams.”

“Sir this is ...”

“I know who it is. What the hell do you want?”

“The Mad Hatter has struck again. Over on Maple Street. Two victims.”

“Mother fucker that makes five in one night.”

I blink. Seriously? This sick fuck is getting bold.

“Have forensics tag all the shit. Don’t move the bodies. I want to see what the hell I have over there. I’ve got one burnt up car and an overly crisp body here. Fuck.”

He hangs up on me. Shaking my head, I walk around the perimeter of the fence and the front yard. Nothing seems disturbed.

“Another dead end,” I whisper.

CHAPTER THREE



MY BEST FRIEND Knave's house is a block and a half away from the club. It's quite easy to make my way there undetected. I take the back alley and slip past the hospital that's being renovated. It's nothing fancy, but he lets me come and go through his home when I need to make a quick getaway from my family.

Taking my time, I pull my clothes off and take my makeup off. I stare at the mirror, looking at the jagged scar that crosses from my right temple, passes along the top of my nose, and under my left eye. My hands shake the longer I look, so I turn away quickly. I wash the blood off my hands and my blade.

After I put on the clothes I was wearing at school, I stuff my outfit and other items into the backpack I left here earlier. I take a deep breath and walk into the kitchen. Sitting down at the bar, I take the cereal that's on the counter and eat straight out of the box. My cell phone goes off and my body tenses.

"Where the hell are you? You worthless tramp. The sun is down, and you're supposed to be in your room."

I swallow down the bile and anger. "Hi Father. You know I tutor on Wednesdays and Fridays."

"Don't you fucking talk back to me."

"I'll be home in twenty."

"I didn't ask what time. Get home now or I will have your brother come get you."

That's even worse. "Yes Sir. I'll be there shortly." If there's one thing I don't want, it's having my brother Donnie pick me

up. My father hangs up the phone and I know the clock is ticking. Grabbing my backpack from the couch, I sling it around my right shoulder, turn off the living room light, and walk out the door without locking it.

It's five blocks to my community, and I have to pass through Mr. Jenkin's yard. His dog is a purebred Malamute; he loves me but he also loves to bark. I've learned to give him treats so he will be quiet and not wake my family. It won't work tonight, though. My father is on the porch looking ready to murder me. I shiver. I hate my family.

Before I can make it even three steps into our yard, my father is in my face. "I told you to get straight home." His words are slurring, and his eyes are glassy. He's been drinking again. I take a deep breath and square my shoulders.

"I got here as fast as I could."

He slaps me across the face, knocking me to my knees. I clench my fists. If I could kill him without making a scene all over the place, I would. I'm still working on a way to get out from under his hand.

I stand up and look at him. "Don't hit me, Father," I spit his name like it's a poisonous bite of food.

"Shut your whore mouth up. Get your ass in the house and get to cleaning."

"No."

He rears back like he's going to punch me, but my brother Donnie comes running out.

"Pops, that's enough, alright? The neighbors may see." My brother didn't save me from my father. No. He just wants to move it into the house so they can tag team me. It's what they've done for the last three years. Every night, I come home, and they belittle me or whip me until I can't see straight. It's worse if I'm not home when they get home from work.

"Well golly, Donnie, that's so nice of you."

“Maddie, don’t push it,” he warns and I want to push it. I want to make their lives as miserable as they’ve made mine. I don’t know why I don’t just kill them already. Maybe it’s my atonement for what I do in secret. I’m not sure. But the day is coming. I’m going to kill them, and they are going to pay for everything they’ve put me through.

We walk into the house, and before the door is even shut and locked, Donnie has me on the ground. My eyes close as he rips off my backpack and sits on me. The air leaves my lungs as he yanks my hair and forces me to look at him.

“You know, sis, if you’re going to keep being a disrespectful little whore, I can show you how to be *my* good little whore.”

I bite my tongue. When he makes a threat to teach me a lesson, I am sure to get in line quickly. The last time he taught me a lesson I wasn’t able to walk for a week. The idea of my father or brother doing that kind of thing to me makes me sick. It’s the one thing that keeps me in line for now. His cruel chuckle resonates through me as my father comes over with the belt.

“Get up Donnie, she’s going to be good now.”

My father is right. I am. I don’t want them touching me more than they already do. Donnie gets up and I can breathe. My father puts the belt around my throat and squeezes, forcing me to look at him.

“For your rudeness, you know you’ll get punished. But first, come kiss my feet. Show me you didn’t mean to be a bad girl.”

Rage runs through me, causing tears to sting my eyes. I refuse to cry for them anymore. “Yes, Father,” I whisper and get on my knees, kneeling in front of him.

“First the left one, then the right. You know how to be a good girl, don’t you Maddie?”

I look up at the man that is my blood, and I see nothing but hate. “Yes, Father.” I know better than to disrespect him. I saw him beat my mother, and when she died, he started on me.

I hear Donnie unbuckling his belt. My lower lip trembles as I crawl to my father's bare foot and kiss it. The first hit of the belt on my ass makes me jump, and my father tightens the belt around my throat. I choke as my hands come up to my neck.

"You know to count, bitch," Donnie barks, and I nod.

"One." The belt comes down, this time on the right side of my back, and I gasp. It's been a long time since they hit me on the back.

"Two." I bend over again and kiss my father's right foot. Donnie hits me harder with each smack of the belt. This is harder than anything he's ever done to me. On the seventh hit, it stings, and I feel the pain throughout my entire body. My skin tears open, and I tremble. Tears run down my face as I count the last three hits. Each one breaks my skin, leaving me in pain. I'm livid they get to see me cry.

"Get to your room and get cleaned up. Don't you stain my floors with your trashy blood."

I tremble as I stand up and bow to my father. Mother always taught me to bow when they were like this. If I didn't, it would get worse. "Yes, Father. Good night."

My back burns as I pick up my backpack. Dragging it along, I try to remove my father's belt from my neck but my hand is shaking too much. Donnie opened my skin tonight. He promised he would the next time they had to punish me. I can feel the cool air through the cuts, and I relish in it. The pain means I'm still alive.



"WHEN I TELL YOU TO DO SOMETHING, YOU FUCKING DO IT!" MY father yells at my mother as she cowers in the corner. I can't do anything. I'm only five years old. Mother always told me to

stay in the corner or to stay in my room. Donnie never stays in his room. No, my father brings him and tells him, "This is how we deal with bitches."

"I'm sorry, honey. I will get the dishes done now." My mother pleads with him as the belt comes down on her body over and over again. My brother looks at me on the stairs. I jerk backward and run to my room. Avoiding him is the best thing. Donnie coming after me would be bad. I lock my bedroom door and throw myself on my bed.

Why does father hurt mother? And why do they hate me so much?

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CHAPTER FOUR



PAPERWORK IS A BITCH. My eyes droop, ready for sleep. I have twenty minutes of my shift left, and I have to pick up my best friend's little sister for school.

Looking up as the door opens, I smile at my best friend's dad who comes walking into the bullpen. He's also my boss. "Hey Chief."

"Ah, just the man I was looking for. I heard you caught a domestic case last night."

I cringe at the thought. "Yeah, Chief, that was not a domestic. More like a brutal homicide."

He slaps my right shoulder, almost knocking me into the damn table. "Look Drew, you're a good detective, son. But I need you to be the best if you are going to go places here. I heard you got queasy at the scene. You need to toughen up."

I look at him and notice the dark circles under his eyes. He rarely talks to me like this, so when he does, I've learned to read between the lines. I bet he's rethinking his decision to promote me to detective. I take a deep breath and nod.

"You got it, Sir. I will get a hold of my stomach."

He sips his coffee and takes a bite out of his chocolate glazed donuts, moaning, before he continues.

"I'm putting you on The Mad Hatter case alongside Donnie. He'll be changing shifts starting tomorrow night. Can I count on you to get this nut job?"

Holy shit. I wasn't expecting this. "Absolutely. Yes, you can."

I stand and shake his hand. Donnie, my best friend, has three years on me as a detective. I'm late in the career path because I went to college to get my master's degree in criminal justice. New detectives never get the high-profile cases. This could make or break my career.

"Good, now go get my lazy ass daughter and take her to school."

The way he talks about his own flesh and blood makes my skin crawl. I don't argue, though. There's no point in getting into an argument over how he chooses to speak. "You got it, Chief."

I finish signing my paperwork and file it. The Chief likes to have a paper copy and a computer copy. It's overkill, but I get it. Wiping my eyes, I make my way to the locker room. Taking off my uniform and throwing it into the bin for laundry, I sigh. The shower feels great as I clean up and think about tomorrow. Donnie will take his sister to school starting tomorrow. Unless he doesn't want to. I have no problem doing it. Maddie's a good kid.



THE DRIVE OVER IS UNEVENTFUL. I PULL UP TO THE CHIEF'S house and see Maddie standing there. She's beautiful and growing into quite the woman. Shit, I shouldn't notice how her boobs look in that shirt. As she walks toward me, I notice she's limping. Her backpack is in her left hand instead of on her shoulder like normal. Hmm, that's odd. She also has on long sleeves and blue jeans. This is the same girl that in twenty-degree weather chooses to wear a tank top and shorts.

She opens the passenger side door and throws her backpack onto the floorboard. I watch as she hoists herself up

into my jacked-up pickup.

“Hey, Short Stack. What’s going on?” I smile at her, but her head is down. What the fuck?

“Nothing.”

When Maddie is with me, she is vibrant and carefree. Who the hell is this girl in my truck right now? Goddamn I can feel the chill from her. She’s never been dismissive of anything. I refuse to move the truck until she’s in and the seatbelt clicks.

“Have a hard time waking up?”

“Drew, just drive.” Maddie changes my radio station to 96.1. She’s the only girl I know that loves old rock. I turn the truck around and we drive, listening to Metallica. It bothers me that she’s not talking. She’s always so animated with me. I chalk it up to her having a shitty morning.

Stopping in the Whataburger drive-through, I order us two breakfast sandwiches and orange juice. The line is long, but it’s the perfect opportunity to talk to her. Maddie’s ebony, wavy hair is down today. She turns to me, and I look into those brilliant hazel eyes. There’s a sadness there that I don’t understand.

“Maddie, I know something is wrong. Talk to me.” *Why won’t she open up to me? Is she worried I’ll tell her father?* I’ve never begged anyone to talk to me, but for this girl, I’m willing to do so. There’s something happening that I’m unaware of; I feel it deep in my bones.

The truck in front of us pulls away from the window, and I drive forward. I pay for the food and drinks and hand Maddie the sack and her orange juice.

“Thank you, Drew.” Her smile doesn’t reach her eyes. But I say nothing, waiting for her to tell me what’s going on. “I’m alright, Drew. It’s just been a morning.”

I nod and drive her to school. She’s a senior this year, and I think about our age difference. At eleven years older than her, I shouldn’t be turned on when I see her, but hell, I’m a guy and she’s got the prettiest ass I’ve ever seen. I park and let her finish her sandwich.

Putting her trash in the bag, she moves to get out of the truck. I get out and help her down. It's a nice thing to do, after all.

Her smile reaches her eyes this time. "Thank you, Drew."

"You're welcome, Short Stack." I pull her into a hug. If there's one thing in this world I love, it's Maddie's hugs. She doesn't know how much I love them. I hear her whimper, and as I pull back to see if she is alright, the right side of her mouth is drawn into a wince. Her eyes are closed and she's slightly hunching.

"What the fuck?"

She's quick to straighten herself. "It's nothing. I fell down the stairs. I was running for the phone, and you know me, clumsy as can be." That doesn't sound like the truth, but what am I going to do? Demand to see her back? No. I'll have to ask Donnie about it later.

"Maddie, you know I'm here for you. You're special to me."

She blinks her charcoal lined eyes at me and smiles. Damn, it's good to see her happy. My world warms with what feels like an angel's ray of sunshine shining down on me. She hugs me and walks away.

Getting back into the truck, I watch her walking. She's limping and she winced when I hugged her. Yeah, something's up. I know she doesn't have a boyfriend, so I don't have to worry about her being abused. Shit, maybe she really did fall down the stairs. I shrug and start the truck.

Before I turn out of the parking lot, I shoot her a quick text.

Me: What do you want for your birthday?

Maddie: A movie night with you, popcorn, and no drama?

Me: I can make it happen, Short Stack. Have a good day at school.

She doesn't text back after that, and I drive off. While I'm thinking about it, I call Donnie to see what's going on with

Maddie.

“Hey man, I heard about us working together,” Donnie answers the phone with a chuckle.

“Yeah, it’s going to be good working with you,” I tell him, wondering whether that’s true or not. Donnie can be a bit of an egomaniac.

“So, what’s up? You going home now that my stupid sister is at school?”

Why do they insist on belittling her? I’ve noticed it in the past, but Maddie gives as good as she gets so I don’t ask him.

“Yeah man, I am. Listen, Maddie was limping today. Did she fall down the stairs?”

Donnie hesitates and chuckles a little too long for my liking. He’s nervous. *Why?* “Yup, she’s a clumsy person. You know how she doesn’t watch what she’s doing.”

“Sure do. I remember a few years back she fell down the stairs and almost broke her arm at your birthday party.”

He laughs again and we talk for a little longer, but something isn’t setting well with me about this. Sitting at the red light, I gnaw on my bottom lip, deep in thought. Maddie is always bubbly. No matter what’s going on or how she feels, she’s always full of life. Today she was like a damn zombie. I feel as though Donnie is lying to me. His hesitation seemed off, and he definitely has a tell when he’s lying. Nervous laughter.

What the hell is going on?

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CHAPTER FIVE



I WISH I could have told Drew the truth about what's going on at home. He'd never believe that my father and poster boy brother are evil. I've thought about what Drew said all day. Not that that's different, he's always on my mind. I smile as I bite into my apple. *He is so hot.* If he knew I was crushing on him, he'd most likely have a cow. He's so far out of my league. Even though I know I shouldn't, I dream about what it would be like to have him kiss me.

At lunch, I sit in the library and eat. The cafeteria is where *they* are. The people I can't stand. My brother comes in and stops at the librarian's desk to flirt with Miss Hannigan. They've known each other forever. I think they have sex sometimes. My stomach is tight when he turns and sees me at the far corner table in the back of the library. Crap, he's not here for Miss Hannigan. He walks over and sits down. His glare tells me he's not happy.

Donnie grabs my hand, gripping it until I whimper. I take in a deep breath as he growls at me. He looks around to make sure no one is nearby and then he demands between clenched teeth. "What did you tell Drew?"

"I didn't tell him anything, Donnie." I clam up and try to keep myself small. The idea of him doing something in the library is preposterous, but I don't put it past him to try.

My brother hates it when I don't talk, but I'm telling him the truth. I look at his shaved head and see that it's red. Yeah, he's pissed at me. God, I don't want to know what he's going to do to me when I get home tonight.

“Then why did I get a call from him asking me if you are alright?”

I blanch. “I wasn’t very talkative this morning because of the pain.”

He grabs my hand and tugs me closer. “You’ve not seen pain yet, you little bitch.”

I try to dislodge his hold on me, and he squeezes my hand harder. “If you keep this up, Dad’s going to make you switch back to homeschooling. Remember last time?” He forces me to stand with him and he pushes my arm behind my back. I shake, my back is killing me. Fear runs down my spine as he moves us so we are out of the line of sight of Miss Hannigan.

“Donnie, please, we are at school, not here.” I don’t beg for him to stop. It never works. He does what he wants, when he wants, and I have to take it. After all, who is going to believe the daughter of the police chief is being abused?

He’s crowding my space and his hot breath hits my ear as he whispers, “When you get home, you better have dinner on the table. Don’t make me whip you again.” The idea of him whipping me here at school makes me blanch. I gulp, feeling my insides quiver with fear. I nod my head vigorously at him. Trying to keep it together and not cry, I lower my head.

“Ok, Donnie,” I whisper.

He moves my arm higher up my back. Jerking it so high my shoulder feels as if it’s about to pop out of its socket. Excruciating pain radiates through my shoulder and up my neck. I can’t help but to scream behind his hand that’s now covering my mouth. No one can hear me, but I know Donnie does. He grips my face harder and digs his fingernails into my left cheek.

“Goddamn, you must really want that ass whipped. Stop trying to cause a scene. No one will help you, and if they do, I can make them disappear. Now fucking answer me properly, you cunt.”

He removes his hand from my mouth and lowers my arm. Tears well in my eyes. I refuse to let him see them, though. I

nod my head in agreement that I'll do what's right.

“Yes, Donnie. I'll be good and have dinner ready.”

He pats my ass and shoves me back into the chair. “Good little bitch.”

As he leaves, I breathe a little easier. I'm shaking as I gather my trash and leave the library. Donnie has violated my sanctuary. Head held high, I walk right in front of the school's mean girls. They used to be my best friends. The in crowd. Not anymore.

“Oh look. It's Maddie the fatty.”

“Nerd.”

“Weirdo.”

“Look, she's finally got it. She's actually covering up her nasty body.”

“Thank God! I was so tired of looking at her flab bouncing around.”

I keep walking. There's no reason to let them know what they say hurts me. Hell no, fuck them all. I walk to my next class, thinking about how I won't have to worry about a single one of them soon enough. They'll all pay.

As I get into class, I sit down at my desk and open my notebook. No one is here yet since the bell hasn't chimed. With irritation, I strike through the names of the ones I killed last night. With a manic need to kill the next person, I circle their name. I giggle into the empty room, whispering, “I'm coming for you, you son of a bitch.”



AFTER SCHOOL, I SET THE OVEN TO PREHEAT. THE NEED TO BE clean overtakes me, and I go wash up. The sweat from the day washes down the drain as I mentally prepare what I need to do

for tonight. I get out of the shower thinking about Drew and wonder if he'd like the way my body looks. I try to disregard the cuts, bruises, and old scars. A blush runs along my neck as I chuckle to myself.

Once dressed, I go to the kitchen, and I'm grateful I prepped for dinner this morning. Now all I have to do is pop the casserole dish into the oven and wait for it to cook. I set the timer for one hour and go about my other chores for tonight. First thing is mapping out my route to the next victim's house. It's a good thing he's not too far, I can walk. Taking public transportation gives the police a better way to track me.

Once I have my route, I clean and sharpen all of my knives and my Katana. I make sure everything I own has no trace of me on it. Once I'm done with cleaning, I put them back into my backpack. The timer on the oven goes off, and I set the table. I have exactly five minutes before they walk through the door. My father likes to listen to classical music while we eat. I hate classical music, but he likes to have music filling the air around the dinner table so we don't have to interact. If he only knew that I didn't want to talk to begin with, he'd probably force me to be their entertainment.

“Maddie.”

My thoughts falter as I take a deep breath and try hard not to hide. My father's voice sounds on edge. I bite my lower lip telling myself I've done nothing wrong. He's going to be nice tonight. *Right?*

I walk slowly into the living room, seeing my father to the right of the door by the fireplace. He stares at me, his hands behind his back. He could be holding anything, and I don't feel good about this.

“Dinner better be ready,” he hisses at me.

I'm quick to nod. “Yes, Sir. It's on the table.”

“Good, now come here.” He points to the spot right in front of him and taps his foot, waiting for me to move.

As I walk over to him, I look into his black eyes, which are nothing but pools of endless menace. I stand in front of him. I cannot find a single thing in him that is kind. He snatches me by my arm and forces me to the right of the fireplace. My back hits the wall, and I gasp.

His hot breath against my ear makes me flinch. He knows how much I don't like him crowding my space, yet he pushes his body against mine until not even a sliver of space separates us. His hand rubs against my breasts as he holds me there, forcing me to listen. With clenched teeth, he growls, "You tell anyone about our business in this house, and I will kill you. Do you understand me, Maddie?"

My lower lip trembles with anger as I look at him. I try to school my features and keep my tone even. "Yes Sir, I won't."

He throws me to the side, and I slide down the wall. "Good, now go open the back door for your brother."

I want to tell him that my brother can open the door for his damn self, but I don't. Picking myself up from the floor, I walk to the back door and unlock it. I whisper to myself, "Bide your time."

Donnie stands with his hands empty, smirking at me.

I'm immediately wondering why he needed me to open the door.

"Forget your keys?" I ask with a snarky tone. God, I can't seem to help myself. I'm playing with fire here, and I know it. Maybe I *am* a glutton for punishment. I know that at any moment he could slap me—or worse. I chide myself for being stupid.

"Nah, bitch, it's just time you learned who your superiors are." He walks in the door, and I roll my eyes and slam the door shut, locking it.

We sit down and eat in silence. I cannot wait for the sleeping pills to kick in. It will take some time since I diluted them in the drinks, but once they take effect, I can get busy.

Once dinner is over, I clean the table off and go to the kitchen. The farther away I am from them, the better. I hear

them yawning as they scrape the chairs across the dining room floor. I smirk to myself; it won't be ten minutes before they are fast asleep. Last night I forgot to put the sleep medication in their food. I didn't forget it tonight. In fact, I put in a bit more than normal.

I wash each dish by hand since my father refuses to let me use the dishwasher. He'll have a tantrum if he thinks I'm being lazy. After the dishes, I tiptoe into the living room and they're both out. I giggle, knowing that they will never know I'm leaving the house. A sigh escapes my lips as I go to my room to get ready for tonight's activities.

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CHAPTER SIX



THE NEXT NIGHT, I'm driving around with Donnie, getting ready to get some coffee. Donnie loves donuts, but I don't stop for them. "Alpha Bravo #21, copy?"

"Alpha Bravo #21, go ahead dispatch."

"Respond to Royal Grand and Heart. There's a report of a fight."

"10-4, mark en route," Donnie says as I gun the gas. The last two nights have been rather quiet. Getting a call this early means it's going to be a busy shift.

"Alpha Bravo #21, copy," Delta #5 chimes in. Donnie raises an eyebrow but acknowledges them.

"Alpha Bravo #21, over." There's a moment of silence, and then Delta #5 chimes in again.

"One confirmed dead. But we have another issue. We are getting reports of a mob trying to surround the suspect.

Donnie swears and responds, "Alpha Bravo #21 to Delta #5, copy." I shake my head, knowing we're in for a shitstorm.

"Delta #5, over."

"Let's get crowd control underway. If we can apprehend the suspect, do so. Only if it's safe."

"10-4 Alpha Bravo #21."

Donnie puts the radio back in its holder. He's pecking away at the computer. "This is a shit show," I say. "The crowd could get hurt if this is The Mad Hatter."

“Yeah, you’re right Drew, but if it is, then we’re lucky. Maybe we can catch this son of a bitch and be done with this bullshit.”

I don’t believe it’s going to be that easy. The Mad Hatter has eluded us at every corner. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, Donnie.”

“All units. Respond to Royal Grand and Heart. All units, respond.”

The dispatcher’s radio crackles. “Fuck, something big just happened,” Donnie says as I put the sirens on full blast.

The radio crackles again. “Alpha Bravo #21, copy.” Delta #5’s commander sounds out of breath like he’s just ran a marathon.

“Alpha Bravo #21, what’s y—” The radio crackles, then goes silent.

Donnie slams his hand down on the dash. “Dammit, what just happened?”

“Not sure, but we’re about to find out.” I take the corner way too fast, but I see a short body running in the opposite direction of the crime scene. I unhook my seatbelt, and I’m out of the car.

“Donnie, check on the Delta #5 team. I’m going after the runner.”

Someone from behind me screams, “Get that person!” They are pointing to the person I saw running away. They are fast, but I am determined to get them.

“Stop, WPD!” I shout but they keep running, so I’m forced to take out my gun. “I said stop! Don’t make me shoot.”

The person looks back at me and winks as they take the corner of Heart and Joker. Damn, I can’t believe how bold this perp is. It’s amazing I can see their eyes over the shine of the face mask they are wearing. Fuck, I wish their face wasn’t covered.

A throwing knife flies by my head, and I duck. Fuck, I’m armed, and they don’t care. I take a shot, but it’s too late.

They've ducked around the corner.

"Dammit," I growl into the dark alley as I run around the corner. The alley is clear. *Fuck*. I pull out a pair of gloves and an evidence bag. Putting on the gloves, I bring out the flashlight and start looking for the knife. I find it about three feet away from where I was standing. Gulping, I pick it up, and I realize that this is a custom-made blade. Which means it may not be traceable.

I need to get a sketch artist to the station because I have a profile. If they weren't wearing a mask, I would be able to give a better description but now I know the killer is a woman.

"Dispatch, have the sketch artist at the station." I keep canvassing the area, but it's clear. The person disappeared into thin air. *Fuck!* I walk back to the crime scene with the throwing knife in an evidence bag. To have solid evidence means we may be able to catch The Mad Hatter ... finally.

The closer I get to the crime scene, the louder the hustle and bustle gets. Witnesses are being questioned all over the place. Some of them are crying and others are getting their wounds tended to. At least crowd control has been done, and we don't have to worry about the unruly nature of a crowd being left unattended.

Hell, Donnie looks a bit green around the edges when I step up next to him. "What do we have?"

"A fucking freak show. Main male victim is under eighteen and has no dick anymore. It's been cut clean off." He points toward the first body. We walk a little farther to where half of a female body is upright. The other half is almost a foot away. *Fuck*.

"This is the second victim. She's female, eighteen according to someone who knows her. She died of asphyxiation before a car hit her, and that took the lower half of her body off. By the way, the first victim's cock is still in her mouth. Allegedly, the driver thought they were pulling the entire body out from under their car. When someone screamed, they saw that it was just the top part, and they freaked, letting

the victim go. The body slumped against the wall and the driver got back in their car, traumatized.”

Who the fuck tries to pull a body out from under a car? I look between the two victims and shake my head in denial. Or at least I think it's denial. How did she get his dick in her mouth?

“The person driving the car is over at the ambulance station, getting checked out. They said there was a person wearing black and pink that shoved the girl in front of them. There was one witness that stated the killer killed the male victim and cut his cock off while the girl was pushed down onto it. That's how we know she died of asphyxiation.”

Donnie stops talking and walking. I turn to him, and he fiddles with his pen. “I wish we only had two victims, but we aren't that fortunate. The other victims have been brutally slain.” He continues walking until we get to the alley.

“Victims three, four, and five. They impeded the perp trying to leave.” When he said brutally slain, he's not lying. The first victim doesn't have a leg. The second is missing a hand and foot, and *fuck me*, the third is missing their head.

The carnage is savage. So much fucking carnage. I turn away from the scene and walk back toward the road. Donnie follows me, continually talking.

“We have a ton of witnesses. Some have minor cuts and bruises from the perp running through them. The Delta #5 team is questioning them.” I already see that, but I let him talk. When he doesn't have control over a crime scene, he gets nervous. When he's nervous, he jabbars.

The commander comes over and tips his hat. “Sorry to interrupt, but we wanted to let you know something important. The witnesses, while they disagree on a few things, all agree on one thing; the killer is a female. As they were trying to stop the perp, they ripped the shirt, exposing a bra.”

I figured as much. The person I chased had such a petite frame. There was too much of a curve to their hip to be a man.

I keep seeing that wink. It was too flirty and familiar but I can't place it.

“There are three injured on the Delta #5 team. My team said the person went ape shit and started slicing their way through. One of them picked up the playing card with the white rabbit on it as it fell from the perp's hand. We can confirm The Mad Hatter has struck again.”



DONNIE AND I SPEND THE REST OF THE NIGHT BACK AT THE precinct. We go over case notes and make reports of our own. This was the first time The Mad Hatter had witnesses. I wonder what made them commit the crime tonight in such a public place. Usually they choose places such as the victim's home, or a public place, but with no one around.

“Are you going to the mixer tonight?” Donnie asks me.

“Nah, I'm going home, eating something, then hitting the bed. Got some chores around the house to do today. No point in going out tonight. It's really unsafe for anyone to throw a party at night these days.”

I don't understand the audacity of people. We have warned them not to throw parties. Not to be out past a certain time. Yet even the police officers are fucking around.

Donnie laughs at me. He cocks an eyebrow, and that cocky grin of his makes him look ridiculous.

“Dude!” He slaps my shoulder and shakes his head. “It's one girl. We can handle her. We are, after all, cops.”

I don't tell Donnie he's being arrogant or that it's stupid to go. He's a big boy, he can take care of himself. Shaking my head, I laugh and head out the door. My bed is calling me. As I walk to my truck, I think about Maddie. Seeing the time, I

know it's inappropriate to send her a text, but she won't see it until the morning.

Me: Five more days until your birthday. I can't wait for that movie night.

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CHAPTER SEVEN



DREW ALMOST CAUGHT ME TONIGHT. Dammit, that was close. I run to Knave's house to change my clothes. The crowd ripped the bodice of my shirt open to expose my chest. The embarrassment is eating me alive. At least they didn't see the scars. I'm pissed as hell at the idea of almost getting cornered. Too close for comfort.

I change with a quickness, uneasy with being naked. I don't like the idea of someone seeing me naked with all these bruises on my body. I sigh because it's not just the damn bruises that mar my skin, it's the scars too. I feel like trash when I see them. Shame eats at me. My Momma used to tell me I was pretty as a doll. If she could see me now, she'd call me hideous.

Sighing, I leave Knave's house to make my way back home. I climb the tree that's beside the window of my room as carefully as I can, so I don't scrape my knees or cause any rustling of the leaves. The thought of waking up my father terrifies me. If he wasn't the Chief of Police, I would just gut him. I don't need an investigation into his murder—at least not yet.

As I get into my room, I hear my father screaming in his study. He's no doubt received a call about tonight's incident. I smile, knowing I've disturbed his sleep. Creeping along the second-floor hallway and into my bathroom, I take off the shirt and pants while cleaning the blood off my body with wet wipes.

I use the restroom but don't flush the toilet. I really don't want him coming up here right now. Making my way back to my room, I stash my clothes and weapons in the back of my closet. Old bags cover them, and since I have clothes on the floor, my father won't be nosy. No, he'll demand I clean up. That's exactly what I want from him.

Throwing a sleep shirt on, I get into bed and turn my back to the door. It's easier to pretend to be asleep when my father opens the door.

"Maddie?"

I don't answer him, trying to keep my breathing even.

He shakes my shoulder, and I stretch, trying to hide the disgust of him touching me. "Yeah?"

I blink up at him. In a hurried, irritated tone, he rushes onward. "Going into work. Don't forget you have to work tomorrow at the police station. Your brother is going to be asleep. Don't wake him up. Get to work on time."

"Yes, Father."

For once, he doesn't call me any names or belittle me. He walks out and closes the door without locking it. That's a shock, considering he is always trying to keep me in the house.



SHIT. I HEAR MY ALARM GOING OFF AT A QUARTER TO SIX. I wanted to be up at five. *Fuck.* If I'm not on time for my shift in the dispatch office, my father and Donnie will make my life a living nightmare. I rush out of the house, hoping if I bike fast enough, I won't be late. Maybe I can stop and grab something to eat. As I grab my bike, a horn blares, making me jump. I look and see Drew waiting for me. I normally ride my bike to the dispatch office on Sundays, but having Drew here is a pleasant change.

I look at my phone and smile when I see I have a text waiting for me from him. I read it as I walk toward his truck, wondering what he's doing here this early on a Sunday.

“What are you doing here, Drew?” I ask as I climb in. He laughs as he pulls out of the driveway. I could live off that laugh of his. It's never forced, and when he gives me that smile, it lights up my day.

“Thought you'd like to ride with me to the station. I'm off duty, but I forgot my bag in my locker, so I'm going to get it.”

“Thank you, Drew. And just so you know, since I didn't respond to your text, I'm looking forward to movie night too.” I click the seatbelt into place.

“Yeah?” He looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

I laugh and nod. “Yeah, of course I am. Just the two of us? Absolutely.”

He frowns at me. “You don't want your father and brother to be there?”

Bile rises in my stomach. Sometimes I forget that Drew doesn't know about the secrets I'm keeping. Or my true feelings for him. With a gulp, I try to make my words sound sad. Frankly, I'm glad the bastards won't be anywhere near me. “Nah, they're busy with this Mad Hatter case and already told me they wouldn't be home to celebrate my birthday.”

He nods his head and keeps driving. A text message comes through, and I see it's Donnie.

Donnie: Next time you leave, you better tell me goodbye.

My hands are unsteady as I type a reply.

Me: Father said not to bother you.

I put my phone into my backpack. I just don't care what Donnie wants. Our father's rules are absolute. I refuse to disobey him any more than I already do.

Drew draws my attention back to him. “Do you have enough time to get a quick bite to eat?”

He is so thoughtful. I smile at him, thinking he cares. “Yes, with you picking me up, I have plenty of time to go inside and eat.”

Drew laughs and turns up the radio as he takes us to my favorite hangout. I love going into the retro 50s vibe decor of Whataburger. The place is another refuge I have. Thank goodness.

I sit down at the table and wait for Drew to come with our drinks. I always get the same thing so Drew orders for me. It takes five minutes for him to sit down and another three minutes after that for our food to arrive.

“Drew, what are you doing here?”

My father’s voice grates down my spine. I’ve stopped midair with my food as Drew looks at my father like he’s a goddamn hero.

“Hey Chief. I’m feeding Maddie before I take her to work.’

My father’s eyes meet mine, and I see the flash of anger in them before he can correct himself. He smiles down at Drew and pats him on the shoulder.

“Thank you for looking out for my little girl, Drew.”

I swallow the bite of food I just took before I can choke on his fakeness. *You self-righteous bastard.* I seethe in silence as he talks a little while longer with Drew. He acts like a damn God out in public. If only they knew what kind of monster he was behind closed doors.

I wish lightning would strike him, but he leaves. I try to school my features so Drew doesn’t see how pensive I am.

CHAPTER EIGHT



ONCE I DROP Maddie off at the dispatch office, I head to the locker room to get my bag. Something isn't sitting well with me as I think about the interaction with Maddie and her father. Maddie clammed up as soon as he was around. But that's not the only thing that's got me unsettled. She usually jabbers the entire time she's in the truck with me. Once again, she didn't talk as much. I was going to ask her if she was feeling alright, but she jumped out of the truck and headed inside as soon as I parked.

Two officers interrupt my thoughts as they discuss The Mad Hatter case. They are bitching about how they get all the boring shit while the night crew gets the exciting cases. Fuck, if they want it, they can have it. The Mad Hatter case is causing me nightmares.

The crackling of the radios perks up my ears. "Lieutenant, we received a call from the security guard over at the school on Spade and First. There's a room that's locked, and he doesn't have a key. He says there's blood leaking from under the door."

It takes a moment to realize they're talking about Wonderland High School. I head out of the locker room and bump into the Chief. Before I can tell him I'm willing to work this scene, he looks at me and shakes his head.

"Drew, go home. I'll call you back if I need you. Get some rest and be ready to go full throttle tonight."

"10-4 Chief." I choose not to argue. It doesn't look good on your record if you disobey a direct order from the Chief.

Walking out of the precinct, I sigh, thinking about how this case is taking a turn for the worse.



MY FIRST NIGHT OFF TURNS INTO ME HAVING TO WORK. THE bodies at the school racked up. Three more murders, all with similar M.O.'s of The Mad Hatter killings. One body was warm. The Mad Hatter does not kill in the daylight, and the wounds were different. The Mad Hatter kills with passion and reason. Someone killed this person methodically—it was incredibly calculated. There was no passion or even a reason from what we can tell. This body seemed staged.

I'm flipping through this morning's case notes on my phone when Donnie talks about a party he wants to go to. I tune him out because, honestly, at this point, he's annoying me. There's no way he should go to a party during his days off. He's a grown ass adult and should know better.

Cutting him off, I place the files in front of him. "These two victims are *definitely* the work of The Mad Hatter. This third person is not. The angle of the wound suggests this victim was killed by someone well over six feet tall. The stroke of the blade is downward instead of upward. Every victim from The Mad Hatter has been upward or straight in. This doesn't fit the pattern. We have a second killer."

Donnie laughs as he stares at the picture, studying it. "Man, let's just lump it in with The Mad Hatter and be done with it."

He's always been lazy, and everyone knows it. I shake my head. "No, Donnie. We need to go to the Chief and explain this is not the same case. They are separate cases. We may have a copycat killer. They aren't related."

Donnie huffs but agrees with me. Sometimes I wonder how he became a detective and how we're still friends. As we

walk to the Chief's office, I text Maddie.

Me: What movie have you picked out?

Maddie: *The Godfather*.

Me: Really? No chick flick?

Maddie: You know better. Four days and counting.

Me: Pizza, birthday cake, and sweet tea?

Maddie: Duh!

I laugh at her message. Maddie has always been easy to please. Simplistic gestures have always made her smile. At first, I hadn't thought of Maddie in any way but a sister. But recently? Hell, I can't stop thinking about her and how I want to sink my cock into her. I'm fucking ecstatic that her family isn't going to be around so I can have some time alone with her. She's too damn quiet with them around. I enjoy listening to her prattle on about any subject she brings up.

The only problem I can see is how I'm going to keep my hard on from being seen. Hell, Maddie loves to lay her feet or head in my lap when we watch movies. I'll have to think of a way not to be a damn pervert around my sweet angel.

Me: So, are we doing a marathon of *The Godfather* franchise?

Her text bubbles instantly pop up. I don't understand why that makes me smile, but I'm holding my phone in anticipation.

Maddie: You think you can stay up for all three movies?

Is she trying to insinuate something?

Me: I bet you fall asleep before me.

Maddie: Bet! You are going to lose, old man.

She sends me a loser sticker, and I laugh. This girl just called me an old man. I feel rocked off kilter. I pause while walking. *Fuck*. I can't flirt with her. She's my best friend's little sister. Not to mention the Chief's daughter. Yeah, I better nip this weird emotion in the bud. *Quick*.

I choose not to respond and put my attention on what the Chief may have to say as we walk into his office.

“Drew, Donnie said you have something for me on the case?”

I nod and walk closer to the desk. “Yes Sir. Let me pull the case up on your screen.”

Once I have the files on the screen, I use the pointer to make it easier for him to discern what’s going on.

“Here is what I found—all of the victims go to or have graduated from Wonderland High. As far as I can tell, this all started about one week before the beginning of school last year.”

I pause for just a moment. The next part isn’t going to set well with the Chief. It has to do with Maddie, and I’m certain he’s going to want around the clock guards on her. I mean, if she were my daughter, that’s what I would want.

“The last thing I found is that every victim used to be friends with or in the same social group as Maddie. If you look at these photos here, they will confirm what I’m saying.”

I show him the pictures and where Maddie is in each one. I recall her brother bitching and moaning about how all the rich hounds were after his sister’s ass. I’d never put it together until now. I should have been worried. Maddie could be next.

“Maddie could be the next victim, Chief.”

Donnie laughs. “No way. My sister has been an outcast of that group for a while now. She’s safe.”

Is he truly that cold? I look over at the Chief, and he gets up, coming over to the screen to look closer at the pictures.

“Look here, Sir. These three photos show the victims that are dead. So far, every one of them has come from this group. Which leads me to further believe the third body we found today does not coincide with The Mad Hatter killings.”

Chief nods his head. “Go on. I’m listening.”

“Alright. All of The Mad Hatter victims are under the age of nineteen. This man is thirty-one and has never lived in Wonderland. He has no priors and came to Wonderland last month.”

I stop because Donnie huffs. “We have the same M.O.”

I shake my head. “No, Donnie, we don’t. The throwing knife we picked up has a serrated edge, and all of the victims are left with jagged cuts.” I point to the wound on one of the victims. “This man was killed with a smooth-edged weapon. But that’s not what killed him. Some type of blunt force trauma to the head killed this man. The knife wound was done afterward.”

The Chief sighs. “He’s right Donnie. We have two killers.”

After some time, the Chief sits back down and looks at both of us. “I don’t believe Maddie is in danger, but that brings me to my next order of business. Sit down Drew, and let’s have a little chat.”

I sit down across from the Chief at his meeting table. Donnie stretches backward, seemingly without a care in the world.

The Chief looks between me and Donnie. “You know I have that conference in Austin coming up this week. Donnie is going with me for additional training to become a Sergeant.”

I smile. Although I tire of Donnie’s crap, I’m proud of him. “Hey man, that’s great,” I tell him and we fist bump.

“You are right. Maddie *could* be on the list of potential victims, although it’s unlikely. The idea of something happening to her while we are away doesn’t sit well with me. Do you think she could stay with you for the week?” He sounds like having her with me would be an imposition.

Fuck. A whole week with her? My cock tries to pop up, but I think about my grandmother, and it shrinks back down. Still, my mind is going in every direction, trying to sound calm. “Yeah, of course she can. I’ll get her moved over to my house after my shift this morning.”

“I knew I could count on you.”

He slaps my back, and we discuss The Mad Hatter and this copycat murderer. The only thing I can think about is that he wasn't concerned for Maddie's safety. Sure, he said all the right things, but there was an undertone there that gave me a weird vibe. It was more of a control thing.

Shit, maybe I'm reading into it, but Maddie was correct. Her father and brother are leaving her alone on her birthday.

Well, she has me.

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CHAPTER NINE



I MAKE it a habit not to kill on Sundays. After my shift, I went home and cooked dinner but ate it alone. My father and brother were at work. I was grateful for the solitude and peace. My nerves were at ease as I ate. Finally, I was able to get an entire meal down without being made fun of or a fight over who gets to hurt me tonight. When I think about being near them, my stomach gets queasy.

My phone goes off as I'm washing the dishes, and I smile. Knave is texting me. I don't think much of it. It's his night off and sometimes we chit chat.

Knave: Whatcha up to?

Me: Just finished dinner. What are you doing? No date night with lover boy?

Knave: Actually, on a date right now but had a moment and wanted to check in on you.

Me: Thank you Knave. I'm good.

Knave: Alright. You know you can always come live with me if those bastards start something else.

Me: I know. Thank you.

Knave: Ok, gonna get going before lover boy decides on a dessert.

I finish cleaning and head to bed. I'm pretty sure any normal teenager would be doing something fun. Not me. I just want some uninterrupted sleep.



WHEN MY ALARM WAKES ME UP, I GROAN. I HATE MONDAYS. I open my bedroom door, and Donnie is standing across the hallway. He's standing next to the doorway of the bathroom, leaning up against the wall.

“Since we're heading out in a few hours, Drew is going to take you to school, and you'll be going home with him tonight. Dad and I are going out-of-town like we discussed.”

I shrug my shoulders like this isn't the greatest thing in the world. “Ok, cool.” Trying to get to the bathroom, I sidestep him, but his attention is on me. He grabs my hair, forcing my head up toward the ceiling. There's an immediate, sharp pain down the middle of my back as he angles me until my eyes meet his.

“Are you happy we won't be here?”

“That ... that's not it Donnie. I swear.”

He doesn't believe me and tries to slam my head into the wall. Quick thinking has me moving my hands up to deflect the initial hit, but it doesn't keep me from getting hurt. My forehead hits the wall, and when he pulls me back, I see stars. I take a deep breath, trying to keep from being dizzy. I'm pretty sure a bruise is already forming.

“I can make you enjoy what I do to you, sissy.” He licks my ear, and a rush of bile rises. I swallow hard to keep it down.

“I'm sorry Donnie. I know you can. Please, I meant nothing by what I said, I swear to you.”

My lower lip is trembling, and my body is quaking inside. He releases me, and I trip, landing on my knees. The force of the jolt makes my back hurt even worse. My wounds from Friday night are burning. I had almost forgotten about them.

Donnie holds my hair, forcing me to look at him as he snarls at me. “You make me fucking crazy. If you didn’t have school, well, you know full well what would be happening.” He yanks my head back and spits in my face. “Go put some makeup on your ugly face and cover that damn scar and bruise. I don’t want questions circulating about you getting abused. Because you aren’t. You’re just an ungrateful brat who needs to learn her place.”

“Yes, Donnie,” I agree only to make him happy and run into the bathroom. I shower and put makeup on. If Donnie is still up, I’ll have to get his permission to leave. He loves to make me beg to go to school or anywhere else that’s not within the confines of this house.

When I get downstairs, Donnie is standing at the bottom of the stairs. I stop and move toward the right side of the wall. I don’t want to accidentally hit him or rub up against him when I pass. He gazes at me, giving me a once over. I feel disgusting as he inspects me from head to toe. He adjusts his crotch, and I want to throw up.

“Yeah, that’s better. Get out of here.” He dismisses me with a wave of his hand. I rush to get out of this house. The hate I feel for them boils over, but as I shut the front door, I see Drew. Everything just melts away when I get into his truck.

It smells of Old Spice and his favorite cinnamon drink.

“Hey, Short Stack.” His smile warms me. He’s the only light I have in my life on a constant basis, and I get ten minutes and twenty-seven seconds with him. I plan to make the most of it this morning.

“Hey, Drew. Thanks for taking me to school.”



I FORGOT TO TELL DREW THAT I WAS GETTING OUT AT NOON today. Since I don't ride the bus, I decide to walk to my house. I'll be able to gather my things and pick up the films for my birthday movie night in two days. To say I'm excited is an understatement.

Me: Heading home.

Before I can hit the send button a car rolls beside me, and I hear the window going down. Great, another moment for someone to make fun of me.

"Yo, skank." I turn to see my best friend idling beside me in his old clunker. He graduated high school a year early, so I'm left alone with these hellions all by myself.

"What's up, Knave?"

"Get your ass in here. I'll take you home. I was going to pick up Imogene, but she's riding the bus home."

I smile. "Thanks. Keeps me from having to walk to my house."

"Yeah, you better pay up."

I laugh as he peels out of the parking lot. "Maddie, I have to ask ..."

"No. Don't ask. You know it's me. You know why. Leave it at that. I'm going to be at Drew's house this week since my father and brother are out of town. I want to think about how amazing it's going to be not having to live here."

Josh Knavelton, my one and only friend, is the only one who knows my secret. I've put a lot of pressure and stress on him by keeping him in the loop. But he was there for me when my life changed, and he's here for me now.

"You know I don't care that you're The Mad Hatter. I just wonder when it's going to stop."

I pull out my red book and look at him as he pulls into my driveway. "As soon as the last person on this list is marked off."

He sighs and looks at the list. “You’ve only got seven more names.”

“Yup. And once it’s done, it’s done. I won’t ever have to feel helpless again. Nor will I ever have to wait for the system to get justice for me. I’m taking care of it myself.”

Knave doesn’t say another word as he gets out of the car and walks me to the front door. “How are you going to continue doing this while under the same roof as Drew?”

He knows I’ve had a crush on Drew since I was a young kid. I blush, thinking about him catching me killing. “I don’t know if I’ll kill anyone this week. But we shall see.”

That’s the thing about Knave, he takes it in stride. He knows my plan. Let’s hope he doesn’t spill the beans before I’m done. He helps me pack a week’s worth of clothing and makeup for my stay.

“You have to tell me all the details when this week is over. Don’t forget to give Drew my number. He may need it.” He kisses my cheek as he leaves the house.

I finish texting Drew that I’m out of school and home. I make my way to my father’s office so I can search through his files. Drew’s text comes instantly. I smile as I know he’s on his way. Twenty minutes. This gives me time to make sure there’s nothing left disturbed in my father’s office. I am nosy enough to see if he has anything on The Mad Hatter case stashed here. I look in his desk drawers and find nothing. Deciding to try to crack the lock combo on his safe, I get busy. Five minutes later, I’m still not able to get into it.

My father doesn’t have anything here, so I leave his office. I walk into the kitchen and grab a bottle of water. Seeing I still have four minutes left until Drew gets here, I decide to go outside and sit on the porch. It’s too beautiful to be in the house. As I swing on the porch swing, I think about Drew and how much I want him to see me as a woman.

CHAPTER TEN



TWENTY MINUTES FEELS like an eternity as I sit in traffic, waiting for the wreck to be cleared. I heard that two people were injured. It gave me time to browse through Maddie's Instagram. She posts some weird shit, but it's intriguing. Her hate for *Alice in Wonderland* doesn't get past me. I laugh at the fact we live in a town dedicated to the book.

Her aspirations to be a travel journalist makes me wistful. I think of all the crap I wanted to do before I became a cop. But I can't think about that right now. No, I'm reading the comments on Maddie's posts, and I can't believe the Chief hasn't put a stop to it. The kids are saying downright disgusting things.

One girl religiously posts the same comment on anything Maddie may post.

Die, you loser. You aren't welcome here in Wonderland anymore.

The traffic finally moves, and I put my phone down. I'm excited to get this ride over with. I want to see Maddie, and if I'm being honest, I want to have her all to myself. In my house and in my arms. We can't do anything, but I can hold her and enjoy her company.

With my thoughts on how much I need Maddie, the rest of the ride to her house is quick, and when I see her on the porch waiting for me, I smile. She comes skipping to my truck and opens the side door. Her perfume hits me. Jasmine and blueberries accost my nose, going straight to my cock. I want

more of it. Shifting in my seat, I try to hide that I'm getting a hard on.

"Sorry I wasn't there to pick you up from school."

"Eh, don't be. My friend took me home. Besides, walking home wouldn't have been a hardship. I needed to get the movies." I watch her shrug her shoulders and her tits bounce. I seriously need to stop looking at her. It's inappropriate.

I laugh to cover up my damn horniness. She is never angry about anything. "Thanks. Tonight, I have to work, but I've called in a favor to work from home. And tomorrow, your father said you picked up a tutoring gig with a football player. Something about meeting him at the library?"

"Yes. I wasn't aware my father knew about that. I'm pretty sure every teacher reports back to him like clockwork." She laughs and shows me her planner. She's so close her breath tickles my ear. The nerves in my body are wound tightly, urging me to kiss her. I'm on an edge that I'm not sure I want to stop from jumping off of. I barely keep myself in check as she moves back into her seat.

"I tutor on most Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Coach Caterpillar asked me to help one of his players. Supposedly, I'm the only one who can help him."

"Not a problem. I'll take you to the library any time you need. The Chief changed my schedule for me. I asked him to let me work tonight so I'm off from Tuesday until Saturday. So, you better get excited about that birthday party."

Her cheeks turn a beautiful crimson color as she blushes. My balls tighten again. *Fuck*. I need to get laid. I won't try anything with this girl. Even if I want to sink my cock deep inside of her, I can't. She's too young.

"For now." My brain taunts me.



“MADDIE?” I CALL OUT TO HER FROM THE DOORWAY. SINCE I only have a one-bedroom house, I let her have my bed. I took the couch. It’s the honorable thing to do. I keep telling myself not to lie down with her in the bedroom.

“Drew, is everything ok?” She peers toward me, and I take her in. Her hair, tousled, does nothing to take away from her beauty. She’s in yesterday’s makeup and she’s yawning. I watch her roll to her back and her arms peek out from the covers.

“It’s early, I know. But I need you to get up. I have to go into the precinct to return these files. I told the Lieutenant he’d have them by seven.”

With the cutest little grumble I’ve ever heard, she throws the covers back. She’s ... holy shit, she’s naked. I have a full front view of the girl I want.

“Um, clothes?” I ask, still staring. I would turn away if I were a better man. Looks like I’m not the better man I’ve always strived to be, because I’m staring, and I’m mesmerized. Her long legs are a pale, creamy white. Fuck, not a single hair on her little pussy either. I don’t even realize it, but my eyes haven’t left her cunt, once.

“I ... I’m sorry. I didn’t want to dig into the suitcase.” Before I can move upward from her sweet pussy, she wraps the blanket around her body. I almost roar in outrage at her beauty being hidden as she folds the blanket around her.

Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I watch her get out of bed. Once she’s near me, I pull her in for a hug. “Don’t be sorry. It’s perfectly fine. We stayed up late last night. Tonight, I’ll have you in bed by nine.” When she shows me that beautiful smile, I wink at her, causing her to giggle.

That precious sound coming from her sounds like angels singing. I want to keep that sound coming from her as much as possible. “Go get ready for school and I will make us some breakfast.”

“I can cook for you,” she offers, but I push her toward the bathroom.

“Nope, you are my guest. Now get to it.” I swat her bottom gently through the blanket and she looks at me with wide eyes, and I swear I see lust in them.

Knowing my own eyes shine back at her with the same lust, I break eye contact as I move away from her as fast as I can. I focus on making breakfast. I am treading through some very muddy waters. After a small pep talk, I manage to not burn the toast or overcook the scrambled eggs.

When she comes out, her wet hair hangs around her shoulders. She’s in a long-sleeved shirt and pants. Once again, I wonder what she is hiding. I watch her pad over to the dining room table and sit down. Putting two plates down on the table, I slide into my chair.

“Maddie, are you sure you aren’t ill?” I ask her, concerned.

“Yeah, I’m good Drew. Why do you ask?” She smiles brightly at me and digs into the food. I’m not sure she is telling me the truth, and I don’t let it go.

Even if she is uncomfortable, I need the truth from her.

“Maddie, look at me.”

She sets her fork down and blinks her eyes at me. I take her hand and the urge to suck on her fingers and kiss her palm is overwhelming.

“You live in tank tops and shorts. Lately you’ve been in long-sleeve shirts and blue jeans. What’s going on?”

I watch her for signs of nervousness or deceit, but she doesn’t show any.

“I’ve had a few accidents with the stairs, and the new martial arts class I’m taking makes me look like I’ve been through hell. I didn’t want anyone asking about the bruises.”

I can almost buy that. Before I can follow up with another question, Maddie picks up her fork and shovels food into her mouth. She moans and smacks her lips.

“This is so good. Gosh, you really can cook.”

Her words are pleasant to hear. She’s distracted me from the topic, so I let it go as I relish in her compliment. “Thank you, Maddie.”

“You’re quite welcome, Drew. I’m sorry you have to deal with me all week.”

“Hush, you know I don’t mind. Besides, you can’t drive, and riding public transportation right now is dangerous for anyone.”

She nods and puts her fork down again, this time picking up her juice. “Do you think you will catch The Mad Hatter?”

“I will. It’s only a matter of time.”

“With you on the case I have no doubt. Do you think the killer has a reason for killing?”

Her interest in my case makes me proud. *Fuck*, I’m actually smiling while talking about a fucking killer. “All killers—well, criminals—have a reason for doing what they do. However, it’s still against the law and they need help. When we catch The Mad Hatter their motives will come out.”

She shakes her head and goes back to eating. I watch her from the side. Being discreet is hard, but I’m good at it now. She’s beautiful. Her mouth opens wide to stuff in the eggs she’s trying to stuff into her mouth. I laugh as her cheeks look like a chipmunk with too many acorns stuffed inside.

“I can get you more.” As she swallows, I watch her neck work. *Stop. Just stop it, Drew. You need to keep your head about you.*

“I know, thank you, Drew. But this is more than enough.” She smiles at me, and I feel like a damn god.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



DREW WAS KIND to me this morning when he let me eat like a pig. It should have embarrassed me how much I ate, but it didn't. The feeling of being accepted races through me as he takes me to school. He made no snide remarks about how much I ate. There were no hateful statements about me being fat. I am uncertain how to take him being so nice. I want to start something to see if he will be upset with me. But I'm hesitant. What if he turns out to be like Donnie or my father? I decide against the idea. Being a brat isn't something I want to show Drew. Well, not yet anyway.

"What time do you need to be at the library?" Drew asks as I open the door to get out of his truck.

"Seven. He needs to get through practice. The session should last an hour. Maybe a little longer if he doesn't comprehend the material."

Drew nods his head in understanding. "Not a problem, Maddie. I'll see you when school lets out."

Before I can stop myself, I launch myself at him. Wrapping him in a tight hug, I kiss his right cheek. "Thank you," I whisper in his ear. Not waiting to hear his reaction, I get out of the truck. I shut the door and walk toward the school. I want Drew so bad. The urge to be in his arms and for his cock to be inside of me, is so strong. I wait for the uneasy feelings to come, but they don't.

Only with Drew do I feel safe. I'm ready to be with him. My mind is so focused on feeling his cock in me, I almost don't notice the yellow tape marking off the area where I left

the bodies Saturday night. I put my shoulders back, knowing there's two fewer people in this world.

I jump as someone tries to put their arm around me. I turn around and see Knave. "Who was that handsome devil with you?"

My heart rate calms down as I blush and look downward. "That's Drew."

"You mean the detective on the case?" he whispers.

I look at him with a quizzical glance. "Yes, why?"

Knave pulls me into an empty classroom. He locks the door, and I get an uneasy feeling. One I don't understand. This is just Knave. "Are you insane, Maddie?"

Am I? I play it off as no big deal though. With a shrug and a quick laugh. "What? Drew's been a family friend forever." I try to be nonchalant, but Knave isn't buying it. Mentally, I'm worried. Can Drew ever accept me being The Mad Hatter?

"Maddie, he's out to get you. He won't understand your reasons for this mess."

Knave paces back and forth in front of me. He's been my best friend since we were in Pre-K together. I can count on him to never let me down. Besides, he accepted what I was doing the minute I told him all about it. He wanted to kill for me, but I've kept his hands clean. For now.

"What are you doing here, Knave? You already graduated, remember?" I tease him because he hated school. There should be no reason for him to be here now.

He chuckles sinisterly. "I came to give you this." He hands me a small bag, and I look at him, confused.

"What's this?"

"Open it." He puts his right ass cheek on the desk and looks at me expectantly.

I pull back the flap and reach in. It's a Mad Hatter pin, four new decks of white rabbit cards, and a knife. I look at the knife

that has my initials engraved on it. Biting my lip, I look up at my best friend.

“Happy Birthday, Pumpkin.” He gets up from where he’s slouched against the desk and wraps me in his arms. “I know I won’t be here for your birthday, but I had to give this to you.”

I blink away the tears he’s caused. I hate crying in front of people.

“Thank you so much, Knave. This means a lot. I know you and Mike are going to his parents’ anniversary party, but I’m going to miss you.”

He kisses the top of my head and lifts my chin. “If I weren’t madly in love with Mike, I’d definitely be pursuing you. But he stole my heart, so you are stuck with me being the best friend, forever.” He winks at me and helps me put all the items back into the bag.

I laugh at him and gently hit him on his ass. “You just want to see me naked, you pervert.” Knave stands before me and slowly brings his hands up to my face. He knows I have a tough time with people moving quickly toward me. He holds me gently and smiles at me.

“I’ve taken care of your wounds. Wounds I never should have had to take care of. But I do it because you are my best friend, Maddie.”

I gasp and he looks at me. “I meant what I said. If you want me to finish the ...”

With a hand to his lips, I cut him off. It’s sweet he wants to do this for me. But this is my vendetta. Not his. “I’ve got it, Knave. Thank you.”

He releases me, and I’m almost certain I see desire in his eyes. *What?* No, I’m being silly. He’s my best friend. He’s gay, for goodness’ sake. With a chuckle, I open my backpack and put my gifts inside.

“You better get going. If you’re late for class, you’ll be in trouble. I’ll call you when I get back into town. The house is open if you need it.”

“Thank you, Knave.” I hug him one last time and leave.



I ASKED DREW TO MEET ME AFTER SCHOOL AN HOUR LATER than normal. The reason? I was leaving the white rabbit cards that Knave gave me on multiple lockers. I mean, why not? It's important to keep these assholes in line.

I wish I could have stayed home with Drew tonight. Instead, here I am trying to teach this jock something he should have learned two years ago. The hour is dragging by. Slow as fucking molasses. The school basically passes the students that play sports so they can play on game days. But when it comes to their senior year, they have to get tutored so they can pass the basic skills test.

I feel sorry for William because he's trying hard to get the material. The problem is that he has a short attention span. I'm going to tell Coach I need more money. Fifty dollars a session isn't enough to handle William. He needs extra learning material, and that's going to cost money.

“I'm sorry, Maddie.” He puts his pencil down in defeat. I don't blame him, to be honest. I watch him bang his head against the table.

“Stop, William. You're going to hurt yourself. We can get the homework done, but you have to listen to me and stop texting.”

The front door of the library opens, and the warning bell rings.

“Were you expecting someone?”

Before he can say anything, we spot some of his teammates walking toward us. They haven't spotted us yet. *Fuck*. My hackles rise, and my hand twitches, ready for a

fight. I help William because he's always been nice. He's never been a jerk like the other idiots on his team.

"Fuck, hide Maddie. I don't want anyone to see you," William grates out. He pushes me under the table and anger brews within me.

I stare at him incredulously. "What?"

"I mean it, Maddie. Get under the table, now." When all I do is stare at him with a gaped mouth, he pushes me under the table and my mind goes into the trenches of madness.

What the fuck?

Here I was thinking he was different. As I hear his conversation, I can tell I was wrong. My hands shake with his betrayal of fooling me. White hot rage makes me lose all thought. There is only one fucking solution. I will not tolerate being a dirty secret. I grab my bag and pull out my knife. I don't think about what I'm about to do. No, I pull my new knife out from its beautiful leather sheath, and I jab William from under the table. My knife goes straight into his stomach.

He moans and the other guys laugh about him being a pig. They've sat down around the table, giving me easy access to their bodies. Jabbing the first one, I quickly turn on my knees and stab the next one. Each one squeals with pain. Their pain is my pleasure. While I have never been turned on by the boys at this school, seeing their blood run from their bodies and hearing them yelp and mutter for the pain to stop makes my nipples harden. I'm sure there's something wrong with me but I don't care.

They pull back from the table, and each one looks at the blood coating their shirts. I climb from under the table. They stare at me with shock as I make quick work of slicing each one of them again. I watch them crumble to the floor, holding onto their stomachs. They aren't quite dead yet, but they will be.

"Fuck you guys." For good measure, I slice their throats. I clean my knife on William's shirt and put it back in its sheath. I grab my books and place everything in my backpack.

One thing I love about this library is that it has no cameras. The librarian left early to go out to eat with friends. She told us to be done by eight. She trusts me since I've been volunteering here for two years. I use the restroom to clean up the messy state I'm in. Once I'm done, I make sure everything is in its place. I lock the front door and make my way to the back. Drew is waiting for me right where he said he'd be.

"Thank you for picking me up." I buckle my seatbelt and smile at him. Nothing about what happened in the library bothers me as we drive off. Except that Drew would disapprove if he knew what the hell happened inside. I'm pretty sure he would not be happy with me. I look out my window and smirk. No one will know those schmucks are dead until morning. And when they find them, they won't point to me. Why? Because I left an interesting surprise for everyone.

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CHAPTER TWELVE



I PULL into my driveway and wonder why Maddie isn't talking. To pry is not in my nature unless I'm on the job. And Maddie is not the job. Locking the door as we get out, I take Maddie's backpack.

"Let me carry that for you." Her smile is worth it. It lights up her face and shines within those dark eyes of hers. I hope to keep that smile on her face. She sashays into the house, and I catch myself staring at her ass. *Fuck, get it together, Drew.* She's not into you.

"I'll cook tonight," she offers, looking at me as she walks into the kitchen.

"No need, Maddie. I have pizza on the way." I put her backpack in the foyer, near the bedroom, and stalk into the kitchen. Opening the fridge, I notice I need more food. "Besides, the only thing you'd be cooking is eggs. That's all I have."

Maddie laughs and shakes her head at me. "Well then, we need to go grocery shopping this week." Her hand brushes my back as she walks past me. My cock doesn't miss the feel of her hand, and I bend over to cover the massive hard on I have.

"I'm going to shower while we wait for the pizza." I can hear the pout in her voice as it trails along my neck. Shit, did she really want to cook for me that bad? A shiver runs along my back as I feel her body against mine. Oh hell. I hold on to the fridge door, trying with all my might not to turn toward her. She has the cutest pout. She's driving me wild.

"Good. I'll find a movie to watch."

I watch Maddie leave the room, and I shut the door I was hanging on. The idea of touching her ass has me walking toward her, but I turn at the last minute. I sit down on the couch and flip on Netflix.

“*Bloodsport*, Drew!” Maddie calls out right before the shower starts. Damn, this girl is after my heart. She loves action and drama movies. I remember a few years back Donnie and I were babysitting her. She refused to watch the Disney channel and the only way we could calm her down is to include her in our activity, cleaning guns.

She soaked up every bit of knowledge I gave her that day and took part in cleaning the extra gun I brought with me. I smiled at the way she never complained about anything. It was crazy, but the more I think about it, the harder I get. *Shit*.

The water turns off, and I try my damndest not to think about the water droplets on her skin. My breathing is heavy and labored with my effort. It goes out the window when she comes out in knee-high socks and a button-up shirt. *My* button-up shirt. It goes to mid-thigh, and I may as well cum in my pants right now. Fuck me sideways. If I ask her why she’s in my shirt, I may embarrass her. Fuck, she may as well be naked.

She has no idea I have a weakness for knee-highs. I’m so busy looking at her legs and nipples, I don’t notice anything but her beauty. My mind drifts off, wondering how it would feel to fuck her feet in those knee highs. She prances right up to the couch, sits down, and plops her feet into my lap. *Shit*, my cock throbs and my heartbeat races in my ears. I know she can feel my hardness. Fuck, she’s going to think I’m a pervert. I press play on the remote and the doorbell rings. Getting up, I turn away from her, trying to hide my erection as I pull my wallet out of the back pocket of my jeans. Deep breathing doesn’t help me as I make my way to the front door. I’m grateful for a moment to get my head on straight. She’s intoxicating. I’ve turned into an addict, and I want to overdose on her.

The pizza guy tells me how much it’s going to be, but he’s so busy gawking at something behind me, I have to look. I see

Maddie, almost right behind me. The smile on my face leaves as soon as I finally notice her face. Who the fuck hurt her?

I turn around and hand him the money. “Keep the change.” I just gave him way too much for a tip, but I don’t care. I need to know what the hell is going on with Maddie.

I lock the front door and set the pizzas on the side table. She crowds me and I look down. It was a mistake. I shouldn’t have looked. Her nipples are hard under my shirt. They are poking out and all I can imagine is how she’s going to taste in my mouth as I suck each one of those hard pebbles. I shake my head. Now isn’t the time to be thinking about sex.

“Maddie ...”

She smiles at me and starts unbuttoning her shirt. “Drew.” Her voice is barely above a whisper. My eyes go wide as I get a peek at her creamy skin. *Fuck*. I’m supposed to be asking her something, but hell, I can’t remember.

My gaze goes from her beautiful tits down to her toned stomach. I keep looking down and see that hairless pussy. I close my eyes and try to find the will not to keep staring at her like some old fool.

“What are you doing?” A moan slips from me and my voice is laced with desire. She goes to remove the shirt all the way, but I stop her. My hands are supposed to land on her arms, but she moves, and they graze her breasts. Goddamn they are firm.

“Drew, don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone. It’s just us. I want you. I’ve ...” She trails off and I glance upward to see her swallowing. “I’ve always wanted you.” I refuse to stop this. I’ve tried to be good, and honestly, she’s making me lose all control. Hell, I don’t think I want it back. She flings her arms around my neck and kisses me. Lord in heaven, she tastes like spearmint and happiness. My head swims, and I want more. Fuck that, I *need* more. I grab her by the hips and turn us around. Her back hits the wall, and she grimaces.

Wait. Did she grimace? I pull back and see the pain before she closes her eyes. “What’s wrong Maddie? Are you hurt? I

look her over, trying to assess what may have caused her pain.

“Nothing. I wasn’t expecting you to push me to the wall so fast.” She looks down, trying to hide from me.

Her words ring as a lie. I back away. “Do you not like what you see?” she asks me as the shirt falls from her body. Perfection. She’s utter perfection. My mouth waters as my eyes catch her bare little pussy. I know she’s turned on because I can smell her need.

I can’t do this. She’s not eighteen yet. This is wrong. I tell myself one more time and pick up the shirt. “Put this back on. You ... Me ...” My words catch in my throat as she turns away from me, grabbing for the pizza boxes.

At first I catch her shapely ass, but it’s the wounds and scars riddling her back in odd patterns that I can’t stop staring at. Some of them are older and some are new. *What the fuck?*

Before she gets two steps, I stop her with my hand on her upper left arm. “Who the fuck hurt you?” I demand as I turn her back around to face me. She turns so white, I’m worried she might faint.

She pulls away from me, puts the shirt, on and takes off running with tears in her eyes. I run after her and catch her right as she tries to shut the bedroom door in my face. Pushing the door open, it knocks her off balance, and I grab for her. I never expected this reaction from her. She drops to the floor and shields herself. Oh God. It makes a pit in my stomach, catching me off guard.

“Maddie.” My voice wobbles. Fuck, this is bad.

“I’m sorry, please don’t hit me. I’m so sorry.” She blubbers and my heart breaks into a hundred pieces as she begs me not to hit her.

I get on my knees so that I’m face-to-face with her. Without hesitation, I carefully pull her into a hug. “Tell me, who did this, sweet angel?”

With a soft hand, I stroke her hair, trying to calm her down. “No one. It doesn’t matter. I’m sorry for being such a brat.”

Her words strike a nerve in me. Her kissing me is not her being a brat. “The fuck it doesn’t matter. Who hurt you?”

I can’t stand when she flinches away from me. I realize how harsh my tone is, and I pull her back to me gently, almost afraid I will hurt her. I notice that full bottom lip is quivering, and she averts her eyes from me.

Taking a deep breath, I count to five to calm myself. I place my hand on her chin and smile as I try to reassure her. Keeping my tone soft, I whisper, “Tell me sweet angel.”

I get up and help her stand. The floor is not suitable for this girl. With a gentle hand, I guide her to the bed and pull her into my arms. We are atop the covers. She curls herself around me, and I almost laugh. She’s like a tiny panda trying to get closer to me.

“Shh, you are safe. You are such a good, sweet angel. Tell me who did this.” I stroke her hair, nice and slow. My lips find her forehead and linger on her silky skin. The tremble running through her has me scared. It’s violent as I continue to soothe her by stroking her hair and repeating how safe she is with me.

“You won’t believe me.” There’s a shake to her voice. It kills me to know she thinks I won’t accept whatever it is she has to tell me. I think of a million different scenarios as I wait for her to answer. The idea someone could hurt this sweet angel is beyond me.

I’m scared at how violent the trembling gets within her. I console her once more, letting her know I’m here for her.

“Tell me.” I stroke her hair as I hold her as close as I can. I want to punch the shit out of whoever did this to my girl.

Maddie lifts her head from me, and I instantly feel the loss of her heat on my chest. Unshed tears well in her eyes. She doesn’t cry, though. No, my tough angel sniffles and looks me dead in the eyes. I think her voice is going to come out strong, but it doesn’t. It’s nothing but a whisper. “Donnie and my father.”

She buries her head in my neck and I freeze, shell-shocked. *What the hell?* As gently as I can, I pull her face up. I

need to look into her eyes to clarify I heard her right. There's honesty written all over her face.

“How long has this been going on?”

“Since Mom died three years ago.”

“Why didn't you say anything, Maddie?” I try to find a reason in her eyes. But she's guarded, and I don't blame her.

She huffs and shakes her head in denial. “Yeah right. Like you'd really believe me. Besides, had I told you and you'd mentioned anything, they would have beaten the shit out of me.”

Can she honestly believe that? Does she think for one second I'm not on her side?

“The fuck they will! Your wounds are no joke, Maddie. They may be healing, but some look bad. We need to get you to a doctor.”

“No, it's alright. I'll just cover up.” I can hear the shame in her words. “They are nothing new. It'll take a week or two and then they will be scars.” I swear I hear her mutter, “Like all the other times.”

I stare when she looks down. She's beaten down, and it kills me. But things are starting to come together. *Fuck*. My best friend and her father are hurting her. God, are they ... I blanch at the thought. It makes me sick.

“Maddie, angel, look me in the eye and tell me, are they sexually hurting you, baby?”

The mother fuckers will die if they are. I push a strand of hair out of her face and smile reassuringly at her.

“No.”

Her left eye twitches when she lies. It's twitching now. “Yeah, we need to get you to the hospital. Has it been recently?”

She looks at me with wide eyes. “No, I'm alright. Nothing else is happening, I swear.” Maddie is too frantic for my liking. She's trying to cover up what they are doing to her.

What the fuck? She wants to let this slide. She's not alright.
The idea of not getting her help makes my stomach turn sour.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN



PANIC. Fucking panic at the thought of going to the hospital overtakes me. I grab hold of Drew, wrapping my arms around his neck.

“No. No. No. No hospitals, Drew. Please.” Fear runs deep within me as I think about going to the hospital. The memory of what happened the last time I tried to seek help.

“Shh, Maddie. I’ve got you angel. It’s all right.”

I try to let his words soothe me but it’s not working. Anxiety is seeping into every fiber of my being. My breath comes out labored as I try to control it. I’m spiraling as Drew pulls my arms away from him, and he lies me on the bed. I frantically try to get up, but my wits aren’t about me.

“Maddie, stay on the bed. I’m getting you some clothes. We are going to the hospital. This isn’t optional, Maddie.”

I almost gasp at his tone. He’s ... he’s so demanding. I like that. I am stunned and my fear subsides. I lie there as he grabs a shirt and puts it over my head. I slip my arms through it as he puts a pair of shorts on my legs. I lift my hips and he slides them up. I hear the moan he makes, and I want to make him moan in other ways. I blush at the thought as he pulls the knee-highs off my feet and slips flip flops onto them.

Emotion wells inside of me as I think about how caring he is. I haven’t had anyone to show me this kind of kindness since my momma. I tremble and a tear falls down my right cheek.

“Now, let’s go. You can’t get an infection in your back. Don’t worry, I will not let your family get away with this.”

He holds me for a moment, stroking my hair. “I’ve got you angel. I’m not going to let anyone hurt you ever again.”

I almost believe him. But all I can think about is how careless I’ve been. How could I not remember my back wounds? My need for Drew is the reason. I didn’t think he’d react this way. I should have known. He’s one of the good guys. He tries to get me off the bed, but I refuse.

He’s one of the good guys. But he’s not listening to me. He gets me off the bed and we walk into the living room. I sigh, exasperated. “Drew, no one ever believes me. We can’t go to the hospital. The first thing they will do is call social services. Then they will contact my father. They will notify him, and you know what happens to me? He tells them I’m delusional, and that the scars from my back are from a car accident or some other bullshit story.”

I pull away from him and get on the couch. I’m sitting on my knees and the panic is back. It’s as if the only thing that keeps the fear and uncertainty away is Drew.

“Angel...”

A frantic need for him to understand has me crossing my arms under my breasts and looking at him. “You have to call this off. I can’t go.”

He’s standing in front of me. His hands touch my shoulders. “Calm down, sweet angel.”

The feeling of happiness when he touches me is back. I take a deep breath and try my hardest to relax. “I’ve got you. Remember?”

I nod my head, and he smiles. “I need to get you help, Maddie.” He holds me to him, stroking my hair. I know he is trying to help. But it won’t work. It never works.

“No. Please, I will turn eighteen in two days. After that, I can move out. I’ve got money saved up that they don’t know about.” He’s so comfortable, the raging emotions seem to settle within me. I can finally breathe, knowing he has me.

His hand stroking my hair calms me and his heart rate that was speeding like a race car slows down. I peek up at him and he kisses my forehead again. “I’m doctoring your back, then. But if it gets worse, you are going straight to the hospital. Do you understand me?”

That commanding tone of his. Fuck, it’s hot. I want more of this. I have no idea how to tell him that I would do anything for him. Especially if he used that tone. His growl when I unbutton the shirt again makes me blush.

“Let’s get you to the bedroom. That way you can be comfortable.” I don’t care where we are as long as he’s beside me. But I don’t argue. We walk hand in hand back to the bedroom, and I want to beg him to take me. I don’t. I know it’s not right to make things harder for him.

“Here sweet angel, let me take it off for you.” I drop my hands as he gingerly unbuttons my shirt and pushes it off my body. *Enchanting*. That’s how it feels to be in his presence. I tremble as he helps me lie down on the bed.

I’m face down, back up, when he walks away. The cool air in the house sweeps across my flushed skin. I shiver as he opens the bathroom door. He’s rummaging through his cabinet as I think about how he wants to help me. Not even my best friend truly knows my home life. Why is he helping me?

“You are going to tell me why you aren’t going to the hospital.” His words sound measured. It’s like he is trying to hold in his anger. Cold cream hits my back, and I arch into the bed.

“Fuck, it stings Drew.” I whimper, but he doesn’t stop rubbing it into my skin.

“I know, sweet angel. We have to get this onto your back to heal the wounds.” The way Drew is rubbing the cream into my back shouldn’t hurt, but it does. The sting is almost unbearable, but I know I need to let him continue. His slow and steady stroking is to calm me. All it does is remind me how he wants to take care of me. I hate knowing I’ve ruined his friendship with my brother and that he now knows one of my many secrets.

I blush even more at how gentle he is. “Start talking, Maddie.”

I prefer when he calls me sweet angel. That nickname does things to me. With a huff, I spill the story to him.

“The last time I went to the hospital, my ex-friends dropped me off. Literally, pulled up to the ER doors and pushed me out of the car without a care. These so-called friends drove off.” I’m spitting the words out, not realizing the anger still boils at the surface. I know I’m getting revenge, but it still hurts. Good thing I found a way to turn it around and get justice.

“Why ...” I cut Drew off before he can ask.

“I was assaulted by the entire group. Even the girls.”

Drew’s hands stop massaging the cream into my body. “What fucking assault?”

I sigh with shame and embarrassment running through me. He rubs my lower back.

“A year and a half ago, before school started, I went to an end of summer party. We were playing truth or dare. Everyone was pretty wasted. In a moment of liquid courage induced bravery, I asked for a dare. The group of friends ...” I laugh, with no merriment. The pain jolts me as his hand swipes over a rough wound.

“Keep going, sweet angel.”

“The group of friends I thought had my back dared me to sleep with Jake Bayard. I told them no. This started a riot, and the guys ganged up on me.”

The overwhelming sensations of that night swarm through me, causing me to choke out a tiny cry of despair. Hell, I’m going to cry, and I refuse to shed any more tears about that night. Drew stops massaging me. He sits down beside me.

“Hey, it’s alright. Deep breaths, sweet angel.” He wipes his hands on a towel before he pushes an errant strand of hair out of my face. “Tell me everything. Get it out of your system.”

I gulp, but as I stare into his gorgeous gray eyes; I tell him the rest. “The ... the guys raped me.” I hesitate to tell him more. The bile won’t go down, and I gulp continuously, trying to get stable enough to get the whole story out. “They tore off my clothing, and the girls who were supposed to be my friends videotaped it, streaming it live to social media.” My hands shake, and I close my eyes. The confession just tore me in half.

“The hospital couldn’t get in touch with my father.” I take a deep breath before I continue. “The nurse, the one that was dating my brother at the time, called Donnie.” I bite my lip because I’m pretty sure Drew was dating the same nurse.

“Was this Crystal Franks?”

I nod and continue. “Anyway, I was in the middle of the rape kit when they both showed up. My father took one look at me and told the nursing staff to leave.”

The sound of his harsh intake of breath helps me to power on. “That’s not the worst part of it. Even though my father and Donnie had the video, they didn’t believe me. It came down to the fact that the video showed the Mayor’s sons raping me. They didn’t press charges for me even though I wanted to. I wanted justice, but they said it was a lost cause.”

I stop. I can’t continue because a lump has grown in my throat. The betrayal from my family is painful.

“Sweet angel,” Drew whispers and gently pulls my head up. “Please go on. Let it all out. I got you.”

Looking down, I try not to feel the repulsion and rejection from my father and brother. “He told me I would not say another word. Donnie would gather all the evidence and make it disappear.”

Drew swears with such a fierce tone, I flinch and look at him, terrified he will tell me I shouldn’t tell him anything else, scared he will side with my family. Instead, I see him looking down at me with something I haven’t seen since my mother was alive. Sympathy and genuine concern.

“Even my family doesn’t believe I’m worth saving. They took the evidence and burned it. That night when I got home, my father told me I’m not allowed out past nightfall except when I tutor someone. The beatings came more often after that. He said it was my punishment for the cluster fuck I caused. He ranted and raved that he had to ‘clean up my mess.’”

I’m emotionally exhausted from having come clean about all this. I still can’t believe someone is really listening and not passing judgment. I can’t help but wonder though, does Drew really believe me? I can’t help but wishfully hope he is on my side. The darkness inside of me tells me to be careful. But my heart wants me to believe he cares.

“Everything is going to be alright, angel. I swear to you, we will work this out.”

His gentleness is going to become an addiction. I need him to stay this way. But what if he changes his mind when daylight comes?

Drew pulls back the covers and tucks me into the bed, kissing my right cheek, then my left. He plucks a tissue from the Kleenex box on the bedside table, then wipes my tears away.

“You will always be more than worthy to save, sweet angel.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



WHAT THE EVER-LOVING FUCK? I want to smash my fists into those two mother fuckers. To say I'm livid is an understatement. I'm fucking murderous. I try to pause my thoughts and gather my goddamn anger, but all I can see is my best friend of twenty-five years as a damn child abuser. A no-good, dirty cop with a goddamn badge. A badge I vow to pry from his cold, dead hands.

A darker thought occurs to me about Maddie's dad. He's not any better. Hell, he's worse. He's covered up a major crime against his daughter. This man has been my idol since second grade. How the hell do I come to terms with this?

There's only one thing I have to do right in this moment, and that's protect Maddie. Even if it means blowing up my career and life, I will find a way to bring justice to her. She falls asleep as I continue to rub her back and watch the redness go down a little. I can't focus on the fact she's naked and I'm touching her. No, my mind is on how I am going to get my hands on that video.

I know Donnie, and he would never throw away evidence. Even when we were supposed to take the drugs to the incinerator, he would always stash some away. I thought nothing of it, and now I realize that's on me too. *Fuck.*

My phone rings, and I silence it quickly. It's Donnie. My rage has me answering in a much different way than normal. "What?"

Donnie chuckles. "Where's the bitch?" He thinks he's being funny, but now I know he really means Maddie is a bitch

to him; it makes me see red spots in my vision. My blood pressure runs through the roof as I listen to him snort.

I'm holding onto the damn phone so hard, I'm afraid I'm going to crack it. "Your sister is sleeping. And that's not really a nice thing to call her."

"Dude, chill the fuck out. I was calling to make sure she isn't causing you any problems." His words make me want to snap his neck. That cocky son of a bitch doesn't have a clue that I'm onto his game. I used to believe he was so self-assured because he was good at what he was doing. Now? Fuck, it's all been one big smoke screen.

"And what problems could she possibly be causing, Donnie?" I can hear the ice in my tone. I'm ready to jump through this phone and beat the shit out of him.

There's a moment where all I hear is his breathing. He sighs and for once there's no other smart remark. "She has a problem with telling lies. Just watch her, ok?"

It takes me a moment to keep from cussing him out. Who the fuck does he think he is? He's the one keeping a damn secret and lying to my face every damn day. I swallow and close my eyes before I talk. "Oh. Yeah man, no. She's gone to school, went to her tutoring gig, and came home at a reasonable hour. Did her homework and everything."

I just lied and I can't find a fuck to give about it.

"Good. She gives you any trouble and we can be home within a few hours."

"Got it. She's good and so am I. Don't worry about anything."

He hangs up, and I want to throw my phone in a fit of rage. I feel dirty even talking to the son of a bitch now. My stomach growls, and I sigh. Taking a moment to watch Maddie, I remember she didn't eat. I sigh and get off the bed, remembering the pizza. Walking into the kitchen, I pick up a plate from the dish strainer and put some slices on it. I hate to wake Maddie up, but she needs to eat.

I glance at her from the bedroom doorway. She's gorgeous with those long, ebony strands of silken hair fanned out around the pillow. Her face is delicate and even in her sleep, that bottom lip pouts outward. I bring the pizza over to the bed and sit down beside her.

"Maddie," I whisper in her ear as I kiss her forehead. She doesn't stir at first. I chuckle and lick her ear this time. "Oh, Maddie."

"Mm," she mumbles so cutely. I want to devour that sound in a kiss, but this girl, damn, she's emotionally scarred and physically abused. There's no way I can do anything like that. Not now, I think to myself.

"Wake up, sweet angel. You've got to eat. I don't want you starving."

Maddie rolls over to look at me, and she smiles. As she sits up, I notice her worrying her bottom lip. "You ... you aren't mad at me?"

My brow furrows and I reach out to touch her cheek. "No, sweet angel, I'm not mad at you. I'm going to take good care of you. Just relax and eat."

I hand her the plate of pizza and get up. My nerves are shot, and I'm restless. I need to fix this, but I don't know how. The right thing to do would be to turn this in but Maddie is adamant about not going to the hospital or the police. I'm not sure I blame her.

Maddie eats in silence as I pace back and forth. I almost don't want to believe the story that she just told me. However, the way Donnie speaks of his sister helps me settle it in my mind that it's all true. They hurt her, and they refused to get justice for her.

"Maddie, we are going to make this right. You'll get justice." I am adamant about it. Do I know where to begin looking? Yes, I'm going to raid Donnie's warehouse.

"Can we cuddle?" She sounds so little right now. It kills me. This girl needs someone in her corner to take care of her. Fuck, I can do that. I can take care of this sweet girl. She's

mine. I don't give a damn if anyone doesn't like it. If things hadn't interfered with my feelings toward Donnie and the Chief, I would have asked them for permission to date her. Not now. Fuck them.

“Of course we can.” Her smile feels like the sun shining down on me. I get back into the bed and pull the covers over us. She curls around me, and I hold her. Grinning like a damn fool, I hold her tightly. The tease puts a leg between mine and her arm around my waist. I hold back a moan as I try not to think about those breasts of hers pressed up against me.

Running my hands through her hair, I feel her hand on my stomach as I move the pizza to the side table. At least she ate two pieces of pizza. I'll make sure she eats more later. She trembles in my arms, and I look down at her.

“My sweet angel, you're such a good girl. You did a good job eating. Now I want you to rest. Just rest, sweet one.” My words make her body tremble. She snuggles into me and I think if she was a cat, she'd be purring. She's plastered herself to my side. Fuck, my hard on is going to be hard to hide if she inches her leg up even a little farther. Praising her has my cock raging, begging to slide deep into her wetness.

Shit, I'm a goner.



MADDIE SLEEPS SOUNDLY AS I SLIP FROM THE BED. I DON'T want to leave her, but I have to find the evidence. If I have any shot in hell of getting Donnie and the Chief investigated, I need to find the flaming bullet. I get dressed in a pair of black running shorts, Nike running shoes, and a blue police department issued T-shirt. If anyone asks, I'm getting my miles in. Besides, I normally go running at this time of morning. I'll be back before Maddie wakes up.

In case she wakes up, I've left a note that I went jogging. I don't want Maddie to be scared or worry. Shit, I'm already feeling the obsessive need to protect her. Putting my earbuds in, I slip out the door and start my run. It's a five-mile run to the warehouse Donnie keeps, but I can catch the bus about a mile from my house if I hurry.

The smell of the morning sun's rays shining down on dry pavement hits me, and I take a deep breath as I round the corner to make my way toward downtown. I take the next corner and stop dead in my tracks. What used to be the library is now a smoking pile of rubble. *Holy fuck.*

I check my phone for any messages, and I see I've missed four calls from the department. Two alerts of a level four fire and there were people inside. I come to a stop at the corner facing the library and read through the reports. From what I can gather, Maddie missed the fire by twenty minutes.

"Hey Lieutenant, sorry I missed your calls. I was ..."

"I don't give a good goddamn what you were doing. I know you are off, and I know you have the right to a life, but the next time I call you better fucking answer. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Sir. Do you need me to come in?" Shit, he's pissed.

"Yes. This has to do with the damn Mad Hatter. There were four bodies burnt to a crisp, and we have to identify them by their teeth. But, per the librarian last night, there were students in the building at the time the fire broke out."

"Fuck, alright. Let me get home and change. I'll be in within the next hour."

"Make it less than an hour, Detective Vega."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



WITH A LONG STRETCH, I arch my back and sigh with disappointment. Drew isn't in the bed when I get up. I've never slept so soundly before. I feel safe when I'm in his arms. It's hard to believe I'm here with him.

Picking up the note, I read it and think about how long I have before he's back. I think about my list and who I could kill but think twice about going after anyone this early in the morning. Guilt runs through me, and it's the first time it has knocked me for a loop. I don't normally feel anything after I've killed someone. It's a mission. It needs to be done.

Right now, though?

I'm feeling all kinds of guilty. I can only imagine it's because I have feelings for Drew, and I know that if the truth comes out, he will never forgive me. But I can't stop. Not yet. Not until the last person is six feet under. I check my phone and see there's going to be a party tonight. They know it's a school night and they have a curfew. Yet, they still throw parties. How fucking dumb can they be?

It will be a good night to get Tweedledum and Maggie his stupid as fuck girlfriend. My anger at Maggie is a bit more personal than with Tweedledum. She had been my best friend since the tender age of five. The girl was my shadow and I hers. We used to confide in each other about everything and anything we could think about.

When she recorded the rape, she showed me her true colors. She even said it was her idea to post it to social media. She thought it would do wonders for my popularity. Well,

darling Maggie, I have a fucking surprise for you, you little bitch.

The door to the house opens and I tremble with anticipation at seeing Drew.

“Hey Short Stack, I’m glad you’re up. I’ve got to go to work. I have time to take you to school.”

My smile turns into a frown. “We’re back to Short Stack?”

Drew stops mid-walk and turns to me. He comes over and holds my face in his large hands. “You are my short stack and my sweet angel. Don’t you pout at me.”

I make my lower lip tremble on purpose. It’s to goad him, but to be honest, to hear him call me anything makes me happy. He kisses my lips softly, patiently. I whimper as I put my arms around his neck and he deepens our kiss. I lose myself in the taste of his tongue in my mouth. It’s addicting how he tastes, like cinnamon and peppermint. I just want him to keep kissing me.

“That’s my girl. Go get dressed, and I’ll fix some leftover pizza and some coffee to take with us.”

I don’t move. I enjoy being in his arms. Without thinking, I kiss down his throat, licking his rising pulse. He groans and I push into him.

“Maddie, stop.” He pulls away but keeps his hands on my arms. “We can’t do this. You ...”

I jerk away from him. “Fine. Whatever,” I snap. I’m being childish, and I know it. He steps back and my heart hurts. Coldness surrounds me as he takes his body heat away from me. Drew walks away, and I feel as if I’m scaring him. It’s probably for the best since I’m the criminal he’s trying to hunt down.



THE LIBRARY FIRE IS ALL EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT AT school. I keep my head down, but I am wearing a smirk. I look at them as they look at their lockers. Screams and panic ensues. Yeah, fuckers, enjoy. I giggle as they all start running around, wondering what the hell is going on. *Why do people have white rabbit cards? Who's going to be next?* These bastards and bitches don't know that the person they are talking about is me. They think it's some dude doing a random killing here or there. But it's not, it's me. I'd love to see their faces when they find out who The Mad Hatter is.

I'm walking to the bus stop when someone from behind pushes me.

"Oops, didn't see the trash there. I bet you're next." Maggie Redheart stares at me and laughs as she and the fake girls she hangs out with walk out to the school parking lot.

"What? No big brother's friend to pick you up today?" I count to twenty to calm myself. My hands clench at my sides, ready to tear into them.

"Not today. He's busy with The Mad Hatter case." I leave it at that and walk away. The need to slice their throats runs wild inside of my brain. *Patience*, I tell myself. *Patience*.

Drew had sent me a text message letting me know he was working on the case all night, and that I should ride the school bus to his house. Fuck that. He doesn't want me either, so I might as well go home and be alone.

As I get onto the bus, my phone dings. "Wrong bus, Short Stack."

I look out the window and there Drew is. The fight to not smile is strong, but I cave. My lips quirk into a smile before I can stop myself. He winks at me and comes around to the bus door.

"What are you doing here?" I ask as I look around. I'm the only one on the bus besides the driver at the moment.

"I knew you'd try some kind of shit like this. You are a stubborn but sweet angel."

A blush runs from my toes to my head as he talks to me. He pulls me toward him and my breath catches. “You are supposed to be working.”

“I am. But something told me to come get you. I don’t like how we left things this morning.”

He runs a hand through my hair and smiles at me. “Come on. I’m taking you to my house, and then I have to get back to work. You’re not allowed out tonight. I know there’s a party somewhere.”

I act dumb and look at him as we get into the cruiser. “Why can’t I go out?”

“Maddie, The Mad Hatter, well ... they burned down the library you were in last night. I don’t know if you’re a target, but I need to keep you safe. Can you just trust me?”

My heart blossoms at his words. This is kind of perfect. If he thinks I’m a target, he won’t be looking at me when things happen. And tonight, considering he thinks I’ll be home, it will be the perfect opportunity to strike.

I smile at him and nod. “Of course I can trust you.”

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN



MADDIE MAY HAVE TOLD me she can trust me, but I can tell she's still upset from this morning when I pulled away. I have a feeling my angel needs reassuring that she's mine. But I wonder, is she afraid I'm not going to be able to protect her? Is it more that she needs to be touched and I can't touch her until her eighteenth birthday? I sigh and decide to tell her my thoughts.

“Maddie, your birthday is one day away. When you turn eighteen, I can legally touch you in a more intimate way and not have to worry about the legalities.” Fuck, I want to say so much more. But this will have to do. Hell, let's be honest, it's the furthest thing from what I want to do. I've jacked off twice today at work when I should have been working on the fucking case. She takes up my headspace, and frankly, I can't stop it. I don't want to stop it.

Her loud huff ricochets through the silent cruiser. “Look, I know I'm a little sister to you, and you don't have to be nice about it. I get it. I'm your best friend's sister and you don't need that grief.”

She's looking out the window, and I can tell by the way she folds her arms under her breasts, she's feeling unwanted. *Fuck*. That's not it at all. Nothing can happen between us yet. I know this. But hell, I won't have her feeling unwanted.

I pull into the driveway of my home, and I turn the cruiser off. Turning in the seat, I take her face in my hands and make her look at me.

“Listen to me, you have your whole life ahead of you. You don’t need to worry about your family. I’m working on it. All you need to worry about is getting to tomorrow so I can celebrate your birthday with you like you want. A movie and junk food, remember?”

Her pink tongue comes out and swipes along her bottom lip as she stares at me. “You aren’t tired of me yet?”

I laugh. How can this girl not know I’d walk through hell and kill the devil himself if it meant she was smiling at me? Leaning forward, I kiss her lips. Just a peck, to satisfy my hunger for her. “I’ll never tire of you. Now, get your cute ass in the house before I take you over my knee.”

Her eyes go wide, and her mouth pops open. I can tell she’s turned on by the way she’s breathing. Fuck me. I can’t do this right now. I need to get back to work. She unbuckles her seatbelt after I let her go. It’s painful for me to see her leave.

“Text me if you get lonely!” I call out to her and my phone dings before I can get out of the driveway.

Maddie: I’m lonely, but I know you’ll be coming home tomorrow and we will hang out then.

The smile on my face says it all as I drive back to work.



TIME GOT AWAY FROM ME. I NEED TO GET HOME TO MADDIE. Getting up from my desk, I stretch. Shit, I sat too long. The radio crackles and I groan. Not now.

“Alpha Bravo, #21.”

“Alpha Bravo #21, go ahead dispatch.”

“Respond to a 10-54 at Clubhouse and Twelfth.”

Fuck, a possible dead body.

“10-4, Alpha Bravo #21 en route.”

I wasn't supposed to be on duty, and now when I find a moment to stop and get home, this shit goes down.

Me: Hey, I'm sorry, but I got a call. I'll be home later. Please stay inside, sweet angel.

Her text message is instant, warming my heart.

Maddie: Don't worry, I'm home. Be safe.

I stow my phone in my back pocket and get in my cruiser. This is going to be a long fucking night.

Officer Chantle is walking toward me as I pull up. Getting out of the car, I look at her. “What do we have?”

Her head shakes as she sighs. “You remember the scene at the club a few days ago?”

“Yeah?” What did this have to do with anything?

“Well, that victim had a brother and said brother is on the grass over there ... with no tongue.”

Fuck.

“Got it. Thanks, Chantle.”

I move toward the victim when Chantle stops me. “That's not all Detective.”

“Go on,” I tell her as I turn back toward her.

“Before you look at victim number one, walk with me.” She strides toward the house and I follow as she gives me details. “The male victim was stabbed in the stomach, and the perp cut his tongue out. We found the white rabbit card next to him. This one had a message on it.”

She passes me the evidence bag, and I look at the card. “Should have spoken up. Now you can't speak at all.”

Each card we have found so far has one or two words on it. This one is personal. I take another look at the young man. He didn't stand a chance. Not with the way his eyes are open. The killer took him by surprise.

“Inside.” Officer Chantle points toward the living room. “The other victim is his girlfriend, according to the other party-goers. We don’t have any ID on her, but they say her name is Maggie Redheart.”

Shit. Judge Redheart’s daughter. *Fuck.*

“Warn—” I cut Chantle off with a gasp.

“Mother of God!” I didn’t mean to shout out, but holy shit.

“Yeah.” Chantle looks down and steps backward.

The girl’s head is on the floor, severed from her body. But that’s not what made me scream. It’s the human heart stuck to the wall and the rest of the body that’s in pieces strewn about the living room.

“How the fuck did no one see this, Chantle?”

“The party was out back in the pool house. These two were leaving the party. No one heard the screams over the music, I guess.”

Chantle steps out of the room, and I turn away from the carnage. “Did we find a white rabbit card for victim two?”

“Yeah, it’s stuck in the heart. No one wanted to move it so the CSI team could take pictures.”

Chantle leaves, and I walk over to where the girl’s heart is. This kill was special. It’s one of the most brutal kills. The Mad Hatter is trying to tell me something. I just can’t put my finger on it. Sure enough, the card is stuck to the heart.

“Backstabbing, lying, untrustworthy whore.”

Yup, I was right. This kill was personal.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



I HATED LYING TO DREW. I'm not home. Not yet, at least. It felt like vengeance and retribution when I killed those bastards tonight, but guilt is eating at me again. I hate knowing that one day Drew will find out I'm The Mad Hatter.

Once I'm back at Drew's place, I clean myself up and slip into bed wearing only Drew's T-shirt. I toss and turn, trying to shut my mind off. Usually after a kill, my entire body shuts down, and I can sleep without the nightmares haunting me.

Tonight, I'm wired. Drew's scent is everywhere, wrapping me up in him. I bite my lower lip as I run my hands down my body. Is this what being turned on feels like? My nipples are hard and my pussy is throbbing.

This is so different from bloodlust. I pull Drew's pillow to my face and sniff. His smell is so strong, and I can't get enough of it. I'm burning up, and I don't know why.

When I'm playing the seducer to get my kill, I'm not sexually turned on. Ever. No, I'm on a mission to take someone out. Whenever Drew is around, I'm happy and I get excited. This is on a new level, though.

I'm almost scared of how my body is acting. I try to calm myself, knowing that this has to be normal and Drew would never rape me. When I'm ready, I'm sure he will help me through this.

Ignoring the need running through me, I roll over on my side, holding his pillow and will myself to go to sleep. I don't know how long I'm out before I feel the bed shift.

“Shh ... It’s alright Maddie.”

My eyes fly open. I look up at Drew with a sleepy smile. He’s sitting next to me with his shirt unbuttoned and his hair a mess. I smile as I sit up. He pushes my shoulder back down gently and shakes his head. “No getting up.”

I giggle. “Ok.” I am more than happy to be right here with him.

“You were murmuring in your sleep. Everything, ok?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure it was just a nightmare.”

He pushes my hair out of my face. Suddenly, I’m nervous. I was bold enough to come on to him a few days ago, but now, something crazy is going on with my body and I crave his touch.

“Happy Birthday,” he whispers.

That’s it. I can’t take it anymore. I fling myself at him and he chuckles as we fall sideways onto the bed. He holds onto me as I bury my face in his neck.

He’s kissing my forehead as he strokes my hair down my back. “Why don’t we stay home today?”

I can’t believe Drew is asking me to play hooky, but I’m totally willing to do so.

“That sounds awesome, I’d love to.”

He brushes another strand of hair out of my face. I push my nose into his chest, smelling him through his white tank top as I take a deep breath to stabilize myself. I’m getting turned on again. The ache is almost ridiculous.

“D-Drew,” I stutter his name as his hand trails down my back. My lips have a mind of their own as I kiss his neck. Images of us naked, rolling around the bed, flash through my mind. God, I want that to happen.

Without thinking, I get up and straddle him. The need to feel him skin to skin makes me bold. Surely, now that I’m of age, he won’t deny me. I hope not. God, if he doesn’t feel the same way, I may have to run away.

I run my hands along his chest and he looks at me.

“Maddie ...”

“Yes, Daddy?” Fuck, I didn’t mean to say that.

Drew flips us over so fast, I scream. “Say it again,” he growls the words into my ear. My body ignites into flames. I thought I was hot before. Now ... Now I’m so turned on, I can’t see straight.

“Yes, Daddy.”

“*Fuuuuuck.*” His voice is like gravel. He looks down at me with fire blazing in his eyes. It’s the hottest thing I’ve ever seen in my life.

“You’re in my shirt.”

I would giggle at him, but he sounds like he is on the edge of something, and if I do too much, I might push him over.

He grabs the hem of the shirt and jerks it upward. “Fuck, no panties. You naughty girl.”

My pussy clenches at his words. I really like this side of Drew. Hell, like is too weak of a word. I fucking love the way he is right now. He’s almost rabid as he pulls the shirt over my head and throws it onto the floor.

Before I can feel shy about how my body looks, he descends on me. His mouth latches onto my left nipple and my eyes go wide as the pleasure hits me.

“Mm.” I breathe as my back arches into him. He bites down and I moan.

“I got you, sweet angel. Relax and let me take care of you.”

If I wasn’t in so much need, I would have cried at his words. He’s so gentle with me. I tremble as he moves to my right nipple and sucks on it. My breathing hitches as he trails open mouth kisses down my stomach and licks my navel. Who the hell knew that having someone’s tongue in your navel would be a direct hit to your pussy?

“D—” I can’t even get his name out as he runs a hand down my wetness.

His chuckle is dark, and it speaks to me. He will not use his mouth down there, will he? I barely finish the thought before he touches his tongue to my aching clit.

My back arches off the bed, and I moan his name repeatedly. He doesn’t stop, and I’m not sure I want him to. I shake in his grasp as he pushes one finger into my quivering pussy. It causes a chain reaction within me as he sucks on my clit and slides that finger all the way in.

“That’s my good angel. Now I’m going to make you come for me.”

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



MADDIE'S WETNESS hits my tongue, and I know she will forever be mine. My sweet angel tastes like peaches and cream. I wasn't going to touch her, but she called me Daddy and all my good intentions went straight to my dick.

"That's it, sweet angel," I praise her, wanting her to know she's doing such a good job.

"Drew!" she moans, erotically. I stop. It takes a moment to realize it.

"What did you call me?" I demand, taking my finger from her cunt.

"What?" Her little nose scrunches up in confusion as she tries to focus on me.

"You'll call me Daddy whenever I eat your juicy pussy."

I almost laugh at how the blush blooms across her cheeks. But I don't miss the way her pussy gets wetter.

"I'm sorry, Daddy."

I've got to get these jeans off me before my cock gets damaged by the zipper. Fuck, I want her.

"That's better. Now, I said you were going to cum, didn't I?"

Without waiting for her to answer me, I push two fingers into her wetness and bite down on her clit. Her body gives me what I want as her pussy clenches around my fingers and she screams out my name.

Maddie arches her back, and I get a full view of her hard nipples. Her hands fisting the sheets as she quivers and gives me a show. I pump my fingers into her one more time before I pull out. Crawling over her, I kiss those pouty lips. She moans as she gets to taste herself on my lips.

“That’s my sweet angel. Now suck my fingers clean.”

She doesn’t hesitate. She pulls my hand to her mouth and sucks them. Her eyes close as I push them deeper, feeling her tongue swirl around them.

“Look at me, Maddie.”

Her eyes pop open. “Such a good girl. Keep those eyes on me.” She nibbles on my fingers and she giggles. I take my fingers from her mouth and kiss her neck. I lick down the middle so I can feel her gulp along my tongue.

“Are you going to fuck me now, Daddy?”

God, I want to. More than anything, but I think about how my angel’s sexual experience has been. She needs to be put first and needs to be taken care of and adored before I slip my dick into her. Even though my dick is protesting that thought, I shift off her and pull her into my arms.

I walk to the restroom with her cradled in my arms. I don’t want her to leave them, ever.

“Not yet, sweet angel. Right now it’s all about you.”

“But ...”

“Quiet. Don’t talk back.” I set her down on her feet and instantly miss having her so close to me.

“Unzip my pants for me, Maddie.”

I reach over and turn the tub on. My angel unbuttons my pants, and I feel the teeth of the zipper with each movement. I bite my lip to keep from growling.

“Wow.” She gasps and I chuckle at her expression.

“What, little angel?”

“You’re so ...” I don’t hear another word she says as her hand wraps around my cock and pulls it out of my pants.

Fuck. Her hand strokes me, and I momentarily forget what I need to do.

I step out of my pants and push my hands into Maddie’s hair. Tilting her face upward, I smile at her. “Keep doing that and I may have to fuck you right here, right now, on the floor.”

Her breath catches and her tongue sweeps along her bottom lip. “Yes, please, Daddy.”

I’m trying to be a good man, dammit. With a firm grip on her hair, I bend down and kiss her. She has to quit those little pleas if I’m going to get through pampering her.

Pulling away, I help her into the tub as I step in. I sit down and bring her with me. I should make her turn around and have her back against my chest, but I want to feel her straddled against me.

Maddie looks at me with complete trust, and that guts me. I feel as if I am a God in her eyes. My heart races as she doesn’t even hesitate to straddle my lap. While the water fills the tub, I tell myself to calm down.

She’s wrapped around me, my dick sitting between us. If she moves a half inch up, I’ll slide right into her.

“Hand me the soap, princess.”

I’m granted with that giggle again. “I like when you call me cute names.” She’s so carefree right now. But as my hands roam down her back, I get a reminder that she’s recently been abused.

As she hands me the soap, I’m deep in my thoughts.

“Did I do something wrong?” I look up at Maddie and her lower lip trembles.

“No. No, you haven’t, sweet angel. I was just thinking. You’ve done nothing wrong. Don’t worry.”

I take the soap from her and start with her left arm. The soap trails along her arm, dripping down her hand. Maddie

raises her arm so I can move the soap along the underside and to her armpit.

Repeating the process with her right arm, I take in the beauty of my girl sitting on my lap. She is mine. I'm staking my claim, dammit. I've never been possessive over anything, but I've gone down a deep rabbit hole where Maddie is concerned.

As I move the soap along her chest, she wiggles on me. I growl with the need to feel her pulsing wetness around me, making me hers.

"Drew, I ..."

With a kiss, I cut her off. I know what she needs and wants. They are the same desires for me but I'm trying to be a better man for her.

Her pussy glides along my dick and I pull back from her. She moves so she slips down on me.

"Fuck," I groan out, dropping the soap and gripping her hips to stop her. I wasn't prepared for how fucking amazing she would feel closed around me.

"Make it go away, Daddy."

Her plea makes me lose the hold I have on myself. Her pussy is tight and fits me like a glove. With a hard pull on her hips, I inch into her until I'm balls deep. She wraps her arms around my neck and kisses my right ear.

"Please, Daddy. Make me forget all the bad."

My sweet angel begs so beautifully. I turn my face to meet hers and passionately kiss her. We rock together in the warm water, giving her a new experience. One she will never forget.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN



DREW KISSES ME, making me forget what I'm doing. His lips take over mine, giving me everything in this moment. I hungrily kiss him back, wanting him to know I'm here for this. I need this more than anything. Since being raped, I have never thought of sex as a fun experience. But now ... God, now I want more.

I've dreamt about Drew for years and nothing compares to how he feels right now. He's hitting some spot inside of me that makes me gasp and whimper for him to not stop.

"Angel, relax into me. I've got you." He pulls my hair gently so I'm looking him in the eyes. "Just let it happen, sweet angel."

His words cause me to tremble. But that's not what makes me orgasm. It's how gentle and loving he is. He's throbbing inside of me, on the verge of an orgasm himself and yet, his only concern is for my pleasure. He kisses down my neck and my body gives in. My mind is a wreck of emotions as I scream out his name and clench around him. He grunts into my collarbone as I feel the liquid heat of his orgasm coating the inside of my pussy.

I slump against him, exhausted. I am whole right now. The need for revenge and the urge to kill is gone. Is this what peace feels like? I can't remember ever feeling a calm like this.

"Such a good girl," he praises me and I feel proud that I could make him see me as someone worthy of his words.

"Thank you, Daddy." I blush and he laughs. I kiss his cheeks and bounce on his cock, making the water slosh around

us.

“Angel, we can do it again, but I want to get you cleaned up first.”

A giggle leaves my mouth before I can stop it. “I don’t want to be clean. I want you to dirty me up.”

Drew groans and brings me to his chest. He hugs me, keeping me plastered to him. I love the feel of his skin against mine.

“No. I’ve got to take care of you, sweet angel. You need to get used to me pampering you.”

I kiss his shoulder and lay my head down. I’ve had no one to pamper me. Not since my mother died. And what she could do was limited because of my father.

“Ok, Daddy.”

“That’s my angel. Lift your bottom, sweetheart. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

I move because I want to do what he asks of me. The idea of disappointing Drew worries me. His kind nature toward me is something I crave. Knowing at any moment I could anger him, terrifies me.

When I sit down in the water again, my back is toward Drew. I pick at the skin on my left thumb, nervous at the prospect that this may be a dream. Pleasure still runs through me but it’s muddied now with my thoughts. I’m conflicted about what I’m doing with Drew and how it may turn out badly.

He picks up the soap and gently runs it along my back. “Sweet angel, I can tell something is on your mind. Are you alright? What’s wrong?”

He doesn’t stop cleaning me. I watch the water slosh as he moves closer to me. His lips brush the back of my neck, and I gasp. The pleasure intensifies within my body. I didn’t know I could feel this way. That he turns me on with a simple kiss amazes me.

“That ... that feels so good.”

He chuckles and kisses my neck again. His lips move to my right ear, and he blows on it. My spine tingles, and my stomach feels like there are hundreds of butterflies in it. Dear Lord, my ears are a spot that I never would have thought would be a turn on. I mean, they are ears, for goodness sake. I want more.

He pulls back and I instantly miss him. I whimper. “Answer my question.” He bites the top of my ear. Soft, but with enough pressure that my clit is throbbing. I wonder if you can have an orgasm from someone playing with you like this.

I arch back into him and feel his hardening cock. He’s turned on by this. He wants me as much as I want him. I think. Okay, I hope he does. I know nothing when it comes to wanting someone.

“I’m worried I’ll disappoint you. That I’ll end up making you angry, and this kindness you are showing me will go away.”

His hands grab my breasts, and the soap sashes into the water. My head falls onto his chest. I feel his heart beating fast as he massages my breasts.

“Never,” he growls. “I will never hurt you.”

His words give me hope, but I’m uncertain. “Promise?” The insecurity inside of me runs wild. I don’t know if I can believe anyone when they say they won’t hurt me. Everyone I’ve ever liked or loved has turned on me.

“Angel. I promise with my life on the line, I will never lay a finger on you in anger. You have my word that the way I’m treating you right now will continue.”

I slump into him. “Thank you, Drew.” My voice quivers with unshed tears. I want to believe him. Maybe then I can believe I’m worthy of kindness.

He pinches my left nipple and my back arches, causing me to look up at him.

“What was that, sweet angel?” His eyes have no harshness in them. Although his words are firm, there’s no malice in them.

I scrunch up my nose and smirk. “Thank you, Daddy.”

He pinches my nipples again. “I see someone has a little attitude, huh?” He claims my lips to keep me from answering. I wouldn’t have it any other way as his hands glide down my body with the soap he must have picked up. We stay like this, tongues dancing, for a long time.



AFTER OUR BATH, WE GET DRESSED. DREW INSISTS ON carrying me into the living room, which I don’t argue about. I enjoy being in his arms. He puts me on the couch, legs stretched out and my head on the arm. I bite my lip to keep from laughing as he lays a blanket over me and hands me the remote. I get the movie ready while he goes into the kitchen.

I can’t believe I’m skipping school, but I’m not complaining about it. A whole day with Drew? It’s the perfect day.

“Popcorn, Mountain Dew, and cake for the birthday girl.”

Sitting up, I smile. “I could get used to this.”

He winks at me and my insides melt. Drew chuckles and sits down, putting my legs in his lap. “Alright, Short Stack, start the movie.”

I roll my eyes at him as I press the play button. “Isn’t Short Stack impersonal now?”

He bursts into laughter, pulling me to him. Those gentle lips graze against my forehead. “You will always be my Short Stack, Maddie. And know this, you are mine.”

His claim does weird things to me. My heart bursts into a million joyful pieces, and my pussy clenches. I don’t know whether to cry from happiness, jump him, or shout with glee that Drew wants me.

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CHAPTER TWENTY



THE WEEKEND WENT by in a blur. My favorite part about it though, is that Maddie has moved in with me. Yeah, it gives me easy access to her, but the beautiful thing about it is that I can hold her any time I fucking want to. I've made a plan for turning in Donnie and the Chief. I know I will have to be careful because I will not allow Maddie to be hurt anymore. And if this plan backfires, this could get worse than it already is.

The first thing I do when I drop Maddie off at school is go hunting. I'm going to find the place where Donnie keeps his shit. I know he has that damn evidence somewhere. I pledged to Maddie I would take care of the situation, and I meant it. The only problem is that the two places I've checked so far are empty. I look at the map I drew of the places Donnie has frequented that he had no place being. I will have to thank him for talking when he was drunk. Never could keep his damn mouth shut.

"Fuck!" I growl into the silent car. Of course he would put the shit in a warehouse near the river that runs from Wonderland, TX to Gotham Valley. The dock area is neutral ground but everyone knows that Gotham Valley owns that area. And no one goes there by themselves unless they want to deal with the crazies.

I pull into the warehouse, knowing I'm in way over my head. I shouldn't have come here without backup, but I have to get things done for Maddie. I'm about to get out of my car when my phone goes off and I answer it. Donnie doesn't even say hello before he yells in my ear.

“Why the fuck is my sister’s shit gone, Drew?”

Fuck, I knew this was going to happen. I just wasn’t sure how I’d feel when he called. All-consuming rage eats at me. Taking a deep breath, I expel it before I answer him.

“I told her she could move in with me.”

“Do what?” His voice is wobbly. I know he’s pissed because his tone is uneven and he’s mumbling to himself.

“She wants to live with me until she graduates.”

“Well, she can’t. Bring her shit back. Dad is over at the school picking her up.”

Dread and fear fill me. *Damn. Damn. Damn.* I can’t exactly go and take her from them in public. But Maddie cannot be by herself with them.

“I’m coming over ...”

Donnie cuts me off with a huff. “What did she tell you, Drew?”

“Nothing. She simply wants to move out. She said it would be easier on me if we lived together since I’m the one that picks her up for school and after school. It makes sense to me.”

“Bullshit. Did she give you some sob story?”

He’s stretching. It’s something we do in the interrogation room to get people to open up. It’s not going to work on me.

“She’s eighteen now, Donnie. I don’t see the problem. You left her with me while y’all were away and nothing happened. She can live with me and be safe from the crime that’s going on our streets.”

There’s silence for a moment and then a humorless laugh leaves Donnie’s lips. “I told you, she’s a liar. That she can be trouble. And look what a few days alone with her has done. You need to get this through your head, she can’t be trusted or left alone for too long. Ever since Mom passed, she’s caused us nothing but trouble.”

I'm truly contemplating murdering my best friend. Well, ex-best friend now. I feel like every damn word out of his mouth is nothing but utter horse shit now.

"Bring her shit over so we can just put this behind us. Dad doesn't blame you, he'll take care of your time and trouble."

Yeah, I bet he will. Bastard. "I'm not home. You want her stuff, you can get it if she says she wants to stay with y'all. But she has to be the one to tell me."

I hang up on him. If I am not careful, I'll blow my cool where Donnie is concerned. I want to bury them both for what they've done. As I walk toward the storage area, I say a little prayer to whoever is listening that the evidence is here.

There are no guards in this area. Fuck, that means no cameras as well. So much for having an eye on me. This is good in a way though. It means no witnesses to see who the hell is snooping around.

A sophisticated lock stands in my way of getting into the storeroom. I should wait for the police to investigate this. But I need to know if this is the evidence locker. My worry for Maddie is making it hard to focus on the lock. I should call someone to do a drive by and check on her. I know better. Anyone that shows up and the Chief opens the door, they will forget why they are there.

Me: You ok?

Maddie: Yeah, my father is talking to the principal. He's mad.

Me: You're an adult and can choose what you want to do.

Maddie: I know. I'm not able to get up and walkout. I'm still in school after all. Hopefully, the principal will hear me out.

Me: Do you want me to come get you?

Maddie: No. I'll be alright.

I want to ignore Maddie's wishes but I don't. I'm going to let her be for now. Turning to the lock, I shake my head. This is breaking and entering and could be considered as tampering

with evidence. Dammit. I close my eyes and think of what I can do.

Knowing that we have an open case down here, calling it in would keep me from breaking the law. I sigh and laugh. Even now, I refuse to break the law. The other places were open and didn't require anything more than me showing my badge to get the attendant to open the doors.

“Dispatch, this is Detective Drew Vega, badge 1006.”

“Go ahead, detective.”

“I'm down at the Broomdog Docks following a lead. I've come across a storage unit that has an undercover division issued lock on it. However, the only case we have down here has been closed.”

“Do you have the number on the lock, Detective?”

I look over the lock, and I can feel the scratches against the numbers. Dammit. Pulling out my flashlight, I bend down, looking at the area. It's not too damaged that I can't read the numbers. I smile.

“Echo, five, delta, two, zero.”

There's silence on the other end for far too long, and my heart is racing. I imagine my career is about to be over once they find out I'm investigating the Chief and Donnie. But I don't care. This far more important.

“Detective Vega, this is Sergeant Glen.”

“Yes, Sir, what do you want me to do with this storage unit?”

“I want you to hang tight. We are sending over the lock crew to retrieve this stolen lock, and we will have crime scene investigators over as well. Good work.”

I hang up the phone feeling like a damn rat. Even if this isn't Donnie's unit, someone did steal the lock and that means we have someone doing shady work on the force. *Fuck.*

The wait is killing me. I check my phone twenty times wondering if Maddie is truly going to be safe and can get out

of the situation. As I'm nonstop worrying, I see the lock crew pull up along with Sergeant Glen.

"Detective," Sergeant Glen says as I meet him for a handshake. "We know the lock is stolen but to use it out here? That's a new low."

I nod. I know who owns this unit but I need hard evidence. Standing back, I watch the lock team get to work. It doesn't take them long which is good because I'm getting antsy. Ok, I'm getting even more antsy than I already was.

The door opens, and I fall on can't move for a moment. Sergeant Glen stands with me and looks at me then back to the room. "Shit."

Yeah, my sentiments exactly. I can't believe the magnitude of the amount of shit that's in here. There are filing cabinets lining the west wall. Guns are hanging on the other three walls. I see evidence bags strewn about and drugs are piled high. Damn, I was expecting something to be in here but this? Fuck me.

What catches my eye makes me sick to my stomach. There's a corkboard full of pictures of Maddie. They are in different positions and various stages of undress. That's not the issue. No. Fuck, no it's not. It's the one picture in the middle glaring at me. Maddie is on her back, fully naked, hands tied to the headboard of a bed and a rag in her mouth. I can't see anything else in the picture but I now know what goddamn depraved shit she's been through.

"Is that ..." I turn on the sergeant.

"Not another word." I am shaking. I can't look anymore. I am positive everything is here that I need to get Donnie. Maybe not the Chief but Donnie is going down.

"Detective, please explain what you've got us mixed into."

I look at the sergeant and I shake my head. "Internal affairs needs to be called in before we proceed; call my union rep in too."

"I believe you are right. There's personal artifacts ..."

“Say nothing else, Sir. We need to get this taken care of before we pass judgment on who this storage room belongs to.”

Inside I’m jumping for victory but I am livid over those damn pictures.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



THE PRINCIPAL TOOK my father's side. Of course he did, he's the chief of police. A real saint in the community. I was ignored. As usual. My father took my cell phone away from me as soon as we stepped out of the principal's office.

When we get to the car, he puts me in the backseat. He bends down, and I cringe away from him. He grabs my face, and I feel the pain immediately as he twists my neck to make me look at him.

"You think I don't know that you've told our secrets to Drew?" He releases my face with his right hand and slaps me. "You think I'm not going to punish you? That Donnie isn't going to fuck you up?"

I keep quiet. I know better than to fight with him. It's better to be docile for now. He slams the car door and locks it before he walks around the front of the car. He gets a phone call and ignores it. It's significant that he doesn't answer the phone. It means he's too pissed off to talk to anyone, and that equates to me getting my ass beaten or worse.

When he gets into the car, I try to plead. Just this one time. I can't go to my doom knowing I didn't try. It's going to backfire. I know it will. But nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

"I'm going to graduate in a few months, Father. I won't be a burden to you and Donnie anymore. With me moving out, I can keep you from worrying about me." I am stretching for his emotions. It's stupid to believe he has anything but anger toward me

“Did you sleep with him, Maddie?”

I look down. I’m not going to let him cheapen what Drew and I have.

“You fucking whore. I told you no sex. No dating. And what do you do? You fuck the first man that gives you attention. You’re never leaving the house again.”

My hands twitch for a knife. To gut the fuck out of him with it. The end of his life would mean freedom for me.

“We own you. You’ll learn that tonight. I didn’t want to go this far, but I can see you think because you’re eighteen that you don’t have to stay with us. Well, little peach, you’re so fucking wrong.”

“I’m not your little peach. That was Momma.”

He reaches into the backseat and slaps the hell out of me. “You became my little peach the minute your mother died. Don’t you fucking forget it.”

My lower lip trembles as blood trickles down my chin from my split lip. I hate when he reminds me that I am his. I’m not. I won’t be, ever. Drew owns my heart. I know this with every fiber of my being.

We pull into the driveway, and Donnie is outside, waiting. He’s looking at me like I’m a piece of meat, and I’m not sure I want to get out of this car. I could fight them. Make a big scene and get the police called out. But one look at who lives here and the police will take my father’s side.

“Get out of the car, Maddie,” my father demands as he turns off the ignition. I feel like I’m opening the door to my doom.

“Please,” I whisper just as Donnie opens the back door. I know better than to think I can get out of this punishment I’m about to receive. Before my father can respond, Donnie is yanking me out of the car.

“You fucking snitched to Drew, didn’t you?” he growls in my ear. I try my hardest not to think about what is about to

happen to me. It's best I don't contemplate it. My father opens the house door, and Donnie drags me in by my left arm.

"You ungrateful little whore. I fucking told you before we left not to do anything stupid. And what do you do? I bet you couldn't wait to fill Drew's head with lies the minute we left."

"I didn't tell Drew on purpose. He got a look at my back when I was undressing."

I shouldn't have said that. My father yanks my hair as Donnie rips my shirt off my body. "You want to be a whore for him? That's going to cost you." Donnie sneers at me.

Trembling, I try to cover my exposed breasts but Donnie grips my chin as father yanks my pants down. My skin crawls as I know it's going to be a massive beating. I hear my father's belt being unbuckled. I gulp, trying and failing to keep the tears from spilling.

"You know we will have to kill Drew now that he knows. He was a damn good friend for years." My brother spits at me as my father brings the belt down onto my thighs. I scream out in pain as the belt comes down, fast and without mercy.

Donnie slaps both my breasts. "Pay attention now. Mom had to be beaten like this a few times to keep her in line. Dad sure did love doing that. He taught me a good woman stays still. So fucking be still."

I can't. My father is beating the hell out of my legs, and I can't stand the idea that Donnie is seeing me naked. I whimper as Donnie grabs my hair and bends me over so that I'm standing at a ninety degree angle from the ground. My father kicks my legs apart, and I feel the cool air against my skin. I'm grateful he's not taken my underwear off me.

"No child of mine is going to be the neighborhood slut. This is for fucking Drew," my father says right before his belt hits my pussy. I scream as the belt comes down, lashing out onto my soft skin. I feel my vision blur as Donnie keeps slapping my face.

"Donnie ..." I beg. I know my father isn't going to hear my pleas. Not over the whoosh of the belt flying through the

air and me screaming. Donnie doesn't stop. He never stops. A slap comes with every single sting of the belt. They've synced their hits.

I feel the blood running down my thighs as my father goes from hitting my pussy to my ass. "This body will know it doesn't belong to anyone but us. Isn't that right Donnie?"

My brother ... oh God. He's No. He can't do this. His zipper comes down and he knocks me in the face with his fist. My nose breaks and blood flies everywhere. "Fucking be still, dammit."

The front door explodes open, and I hear shouting, but I can't see anything as I crumble to the floor. I close my eyes in hopes that this is over. That I'm not dreaming someone is coming to my rescue.

My brain has to be playing tricks on me. There's no way I really just heard Knave and Drew.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



KNAVE CALLED ME, telling me that he had seen Donnie grabbing Maddie out of the car. He had been on his way over to help Maddie but didn't want to intervene without backup. I told him I understood, and that I was ten minutes out. How Knave got my number, I can only wonder, but I'm glad he had it.

We were going to ring the doorbell, but I heard Maddie scream and lost it. With a swift kick to the door, it splinters, and I enter with my gun drawn. I notice that Knave isn't empty handed. I look at the knife but it's not of importance right now. No, getting to Maddie is.

We round the foyer, and I'm not prepared for the scene before me. Maddie is on the ground, naked, being pulled across the floor by her hair, as if she is a doll. She's trying to fight her brother but she doesn't stand a chance with her father whipping her. There's blood everywhere, and I focus on what the source is.

"You son of a bitch!" Knave screams as he charges her father. I'm too busy running toward Maddie to stop him. I know I should, but my focus is singular and frankly I just don't give a damn.

I hear Knave and the Chief scuffling but I charge Donnie and knock him down. Maddie drops to the floor and stays there. God I hope she's alright. "You sick bastard. How ..."

Donnie's fist hits me square in the face. I sway and pull my gun. Without hesitation, I shoot and miss him because he dodges me, running toward the back door. I want to run after

him, but that's not the main goal right now. I turn back to my angel and she's not moving. A thumping pain in my head makes me gasp as I try to calm my anxiety. Fuck me.

"You'll never hurt her again." I blink, turning toward Knave as he yells. He's got the Chief on the ground and he's stabbing the hell out of him. I should feel some kind of remorse for what he's doing. But I don't. Hell no. All I feel is gratitude.

"Baby, come on angel, stay with me," I say as I bend down and check on Maddie. She's breathing, but she's unconscious. I'm glad. She doesn't need to see the carnage.

"Knave." I can barely get the word out as I assess the damage done. "Knave," I say a little louder and he looks at me. He's got a deranged look in his eye.

"He has to pay."

"You got him. Put the knife down and call 9-1-1."

"We can't!" Knave says in a panic.

I glare at him. "We have to. We have a domestic abuse victim who needs an ambulance. One of the perps is near dead and the other is on the run. We need backup, and this was in defense of Maddie. I will testify to that."

Knave looks down at the Chief and spits at him. "I should go after Donnie."

"No. You call 9-1-1. I need to canvass the area and make sure it's safe. Do not touch anything or anyone else for that matter. Put the knife down and do as I've asked."

I kiss Maddie on the forehead. "I'll be back for you, my love." I get up, gun out in front of me and posed to shoot.

As I clear every room, I feel the dread sweep over me. Donnie's gone. The Chief is as good as dead, and I don't feel any remorse for it. In fact, I feel relieved that I don't have to muddy his name through an internal affairs investigation. He's ruined his reputation himself.

"Put your hands up!" I hear a police officer scream from the first floor. Sighing, I make my way from the second floor

and see the chaos that's going on.

Thank God, Knave isn't fighting. No, he's on the ground, hands behind his back and not talking.

"Stand down, officer," I speak and everyone around me freezes.

"But this ..."

"I said stand down. The real perp here is the Chief."

"Detective, we have to take him in."

"Yes I know. But stop shouting and let me explain what is going on."

The Sergeant comes over and I look at him. "What the fuck is going on here, Detective?"

They wheel Maddie and the Chief out of the house on stretchers. My heart hurts knowing I didn't get here in time. I feel like a goddamn failure. "We, myself and Knave, got here at the same time. We heard shouting, and I kicked the door in."

"Where's Donnie?" We hear the Chief yelling from outside. Fuck, he's still alive. How?

"Most of the knife wounds are through his vest, luckily it stopped full force impact."

"Not lucky. He's the one that was whipping his naked daughter while Donnie was attempting to ..." I have to stop talking because I can't get the image of Donnie's dick being out, fully hard, and how he was trying to force Maddie's mouth on him.

"Attempt what, Detective?"

I holster my gun and look down. I'm near tears thinking about this shit. "Donnie was trying to rape her mouth, and I'm pretty damn sure he was going to do more."

"What the fuck?" He jerks back from me and I nod.

"Yeah," I whisper as the scene around us becomes busy with people bustling about, trying to bag evidence.

Sergeant looks over at his crime scene investigators. “Everything in this room, the clothes, the blood on the carpet, everything is evidence people. Bag and tag it.”

I watch everyone get to work as he pulls me aside. He sighs and looks down for a moment. It’s as if he is dreading what he has to say next. He puts a hand on my shoulder and shakes his head. “Look, I hate to do this. But in order for me to figure this out, I have to start somewhere. So for now, I’ve got to put you on administrative leave.”

I look at my sergeant and nod. “Yes, Sir. Not a problem.”

There’s no need to fight. I hand him my gun and holster. I keep my badge since I need it to be on desk duty. Sighing, I head to the door.

Turning back, I look at Knave being taken out in cuffs. “I’ll get you out buddy.”

Knave gives me a wink, and I hear someone yelling.

“We found a Mad Hatter card.”

What?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



THE POUNDING in my head wakes me. Light assaults my eyes as they open, and I quickly shut them. Where am I that it's so bright? I peek my eyes back open, and I slowly adjust to my surroundings. Beeping tells me there's a machine somewhere, but I can't turn my body. Bile rises in my stomach at the thought of my brother and father having tied me down. Or worse, put me in a mental institute like they tried to do after the first rape. I didn't stay long because the doctors assessed me and found I was sane.

"Hello?" I call out and my voice cracks. I'm glad to be facing the door. At least I can see who is coming in when it opens. When I get a good look at the nurse dressed in a blue uniform, dread fills me. *Fuck*. It's Crystal, my brother's old girlfriend.

"I'm so glad you're awake dear. It's been three days." Her voice grates on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard. I wince and attempt not to snarl at her. My face hurts. Why does my face fucking hurt?

Flashes of what happened hit me, and that sick feeling comes back as she steps closer to the bed.

She's as crazy as Donnie is. Hell, I think she still has a crush on him or something. "What are you doing here?"

Crystal just smiles at me. It's saccharin sweet; a tell that she's faking how she feels. I can't stand her.

"Detective Vega will be here shortly. He stepped out to take a phone call."

I don't want her near me. "You don't have to come closer. I'm good." I try not to sound panicked.

Her laugh comes out forced. "Oh Maddie, you are such a drama queen. I'm not going to hurt you." She pauses and pulls out a syringe. "Much."

"You called my brother, didn't you?"

Her easy smile turns malicious and she gets closer to my arm. Fuck, I can't move. Why can't I move dammit?

"Yes. He'll be here soon." That's the tipping point of the panic mounting inside of me and I can't control it. I yank on the restraints, and pain shoots through me but I don't care.

"Crystal, let me go!" The idea of my brother here while I'm tied down makes me frantic to get up. To run.

"I have you restrained and sedated. You were talking nonsense. I couldn't have you tarnishing my Donnie Bear." She still looks completely smitten with my brother. God, how sick can someone be? I want to ask her, but she's dangerously close to the IV. If she puts that needle in, there's no telling what she may drug me with.

"If you are quiet, I don't have to worry about you talking." She starts to put the needle into the IV, and I jerk as hard as I can. The restraints bite into my arms, and I cry out. She slaps me with her free hand, and then puts the cap on the syringe to glare at me. "Fucking be still."

"You are delusional and a fucking idiot. My brother is a psychopath who wanted to rape me!"

She laughs and my anger simmers right at the surface, ready to come out and play.

"This storyline is getting old, Maddie. You tried saying a group of guys raped you but we both know the truth, don't we dear?" She raises the syringe but doesn't put it into the IV. Liquid spurts from the tip, and she looks down with a condescending eyebrow arched toward me.

I spit at her. It doesn't land on her face like I had hoped but the front of her scrub top has my spittle on it.

“You are a dirty, filthy, disgusting, dick-chasing slut who wants attention. When someone says no, you act out and try to make it look like *you* are the victim.”

I strain against the restraints when the door opens. My nerves and muscles freeze until I see it is Drew.

“Drew!” The fucking bitch acts all sweet and innocent as she puts the lid back on the syringe and puts it into her pocket.

He looks murderous. “I heard you, Crystal.” Her fake ass smile drops from her ugly face and her true hateful look returns.

“So?” She tries to act cool but I can see the nervous twitch of her pulse in her throat. It’s just like when I’m toying with my victims. They try to be calm but it never fails, they always give me a sign they are terrified.

Drew doesn’t talk. No, he walks over to her and yanks her arm. “It’s time for you to get the fuck out. And if you come back in here, I’ll have you fired for badgering a patient and gross misconduct.”

She huffs, but leaves. I’m glad Drew came when he did. I can’t imagine what she might have done if he didn’t show up. He locks the door to my room and comes back over to me. He sits down on the bed and pushes my hair out of my face. “I’m so glad you’re awake, love.”

Love? He’s not said that before. I smile up at him, ecstatic that he may actually mean he loves me. Before I can ask if he means it, he’s already talking again.

“I’m sorry sweet angel. I had to make sure Knave was released. I won’t leave your side again unless it’s police related.” He gets up so he can pull the restraints off my arms and legs. Then the neck brace comes off. I can breathe a little easier now.

He sits back down and pulls me up into a hug. I feel safe in his arms. It’s as if he’s my solace. My safe haven. “First, please tell me you heard her say she was trying to keep me sedated?” Drew takes a deep breath and pulls away from me long enough to nod and whisper.

“Yeah, I heard sweet girl. I’ll take care of it.”

I don’t tell him that with me being untied, I’ll kill the slut if she comes back in here. “And second, why was Knave locked up?” Confusion muddles my brain. I remember a lot of the things that happened but what did Knave do?

“Angel, Knave stabbed your father fifteen times when he saw what was happening to you.”

I gasp and glee washes through me. “Did ...” I almost give away how ecstatic I am about this so I stop talking until I can control the smile in my voice. “Did he kill him?” Please say yes. That will be one less name on my list.

“Almost. He’s in intensive care.”

Fuck. That’s not what I wanted to hear. Doesn’t matter though because as soon as I can, I’m going to kill him. He will feel my blade end his life. “Ok.” I say, trying to remain calm.

“When can I get out of here?”

Drew kisses my forehead. “Now that you are awake, you can be seen by the attending physician, and they will make their decision on how soon you get to leave.”

“Did Donnie...” I pause, gulping down the dread of the answer. I don’t really want to know if they succeeded in raping me, but I need to know.

Drew shakes his head emphatically, interrupting me. “No my sweet angel. They didn’t get the chance. Knave and I stopped them before anything could happen.”

A small morsel of relief hits me and I smile. “Good. Thank you so much,” I whisper into Drew’s neck as he holds me to him.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get there sooner.”

I pull back from him with a scowl on my face. “Don’t blame yourself. This isn’t your fault. You and Knave kept me from any real harm. It’s all good Drew.”

“But you’re mine to protect. I let you down.”

Drew looks remorseful. “How can you really believe that? You freaking saved me. You came for me, Drew.”

His left hand moves from my back and brushes through my hair. He grips a fist full and forces me to be still. “What was that?”

I give him a flirty smile. Even through his remorse and me not being a hundred percent, I can tell he’s in a playful mood. Thank God. I need him to heal my heart. To take my mind off what my family almost did to me. “Drew.”

He gives me a growl and a kiss. “Try again.”

It feels so natural with him. There’s no pretending I’m happy or forced to act a certain way. I can be myself and I have the freedom to let my guard down with him.

“What? Your name is still Drew, right?” I give him my innocent eye look and he chuckles.

His nostrils flare and he growls at me. “I see. So now I’m just Drew. Well, when you get a clean bill of health, I’ll show you exactly who I am, little angel.”

My entire body hums with the idea of him showing me he is *Daddy*. God, he turns me on so much I can barely sit still. I bite my lip to keep a moan from leaking out.

“I can smell your wetness, angel.” He kisses me behind my right ear, and I arch into him. I run my hands along his back, needing him—*wanting him*—to take away this ache he’s caused. But we don’t get that chance. A knock comes from the door.

Sighing, Drew gets up. “Looks like the doctor is here.” He lays me back down in the bed so I’m properly covered up and walks over to the door and unlocks it.

When the doctor comes in, I feel a sense of genuine concern from him. He looks at me, excited to see me awake. He seems relieved. Do I know him or was he worried because I am the chief’s daughter and if I died he’d be held accountable? “I’m glad you are awake, Ms. Maddie. You gave us quite a scare.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Drew stands beside me, and I grab his hand, interlacing our fingers together.

“The police are here to question you, but only when you are ready,” the doctor says as he comes over to me. “But before we do that, I’d like to do an examination of your lungs, eyes, ears, and take a look at those open cuts on your body.”

Drew looks down at me and winks. I smile at him and turn toward the doctor. “I understand.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



WITH EVERYTHING that Maddie described not only to the doctor but to the police as well, I almost feel like I'm the one that should fucking be in jail. I have been clueless all this time. And it has been going on for years upon years. I sit here watching her sleep and trying to decide whether or not I'm worthy of her.

When I tugged Crystal toward the door, I slipped a tracker into her jacket. My phone beeps, and I see she's on the move. Donnie tried to get into the hospital, but when he saw all the police officers in the lobby, they said he ran. Some gave chase, but he got away. *Slippery bastard.*

I watch the red dot moving toward Timberland. This throws me off because Gotham Valley would have been where I headed. My eyes close for a moment to concentrate and think about who I know in Timberland.

Fuck. Me. It dawns on me that the Timberland Wolves and the Mexican Cartel

reside there. I disregard them almost as fast as I think about them. They are not known to move outside their territory or mix with outsiders without being provoked.

Hell no. Fuck! No. Not them. If Donnie is with the Powers, we are fucking screwed. I've felt panic before, but now I'm worried that he's gone off the deep end and decided to join forces with them. I remember about five years ago we had a run-in with them when they chased a traitor to our boundary. They swore if we stepped foot in Timberland, they would

come back and kill us all. Blow the whole town off the map. Goddamn, he better not have gone there.

But why would he go there? I watch the dot, nervously biting my tongue. The dot moves along the trash corridor we share with the surrounding areas. Where the hell is Donnie located that Crystal has to go this route?

I call Monica Iverson in the IT department. “Drew, why are you calling at two in the morning?”

“Hey Monica. I was wondering if you could tell me if a tracker is faulty or if it’s just bouncing off a different signal nearby?”

“Drew Vega, did you put a tracker on someone and not log it in?”

“Oh, come on, help your friend out.”

“You were my friend when we were five years old. You don’t get to play that card.”

“Even if I promise to buy you an ivy plant for your cave?”

“Damn you. Ok fine. What’s the ID number?”

“Alpha #62 bravo bravo #61.”

“Why is this tracker ...”

I cut her off. I don’t need all these questions right now. “Just go with me here. Is it reading hot or cold?”

“It’s cold, Drew. Are you tracking the heat signal for a reason?”

Goddammit. She lost the tracker. How did she know I put it in her coat?

“There may be a coat in the trash truck that’s headed to Timberland Landfill. We need to stop it before it gets there. Also, there may be evidence of drug paraphernalia.”

“Drew?”

“Monica, do it, please.”

“Ok, you so owe me.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t forget the ivy.”

I hang up, chuckling. Donnie may not be sharing his location with me but it doesn’t hurt to try. Pulling up the mapping program, I see the Chief is here. Panning out on the map, I see Donnie. He’s in Gotham Valley. I’ll be damned, the dumbass forgot to turn off his GPS.

I don’t have jurisdiction there, so I can only watch where he goes. I’ll have to talk to the sergeant about getting GVPD involved.

“Drew?” Maddie speaking out, startles me. I turn toward her and her eyes are wide.

“It’s ok, Maddie. I’m here.” I put my phone down on the couch and walk over to her. Picking up her right hand, I smile down at her.

“Yes, angel?”

“I thought you left.” Her whisper is full of vulnerability. It makes me ache to take away her insecurities.

“Never. I’ve got you sweet one. Do you need a drink before you go back to sleep?”

She smiles at me, and I rub my thumb across her palm.

“Can you get me some food?”

“I’ll have to go down to the vending machines. The cafeteria is closed.”

“How long will you be?” God, I wish I could help her not feel so small right now. I kiss her forehead and brush her hair away from her face with the back of my hand.

“The machines are three floors down. It shouldn’t take longer than ten, maybe fifteen minutes at the most, if there is any kind of line.”

“Chocolate, an orange drink, and some chips.”

I can’t help but laugh. She’s always been a junk food eater. “Of course, I’ll be back. Don’t get up by yourself. Wait until I

come back.”

“Ok, Daddy.”

My dick chooses this moment to perk up, and I groan. Kissing her, I lick her bottom lip until she caves and opens her mouth. Her little whimper is music to my ears. I know we can't do anything, but just tasting her makes me fucking hard. I leave before I try to do something bad. Like taking her when she needs to be relaxing and recovering. Maddie probably needs to go to a therapist after all of this.



SHIT, THE VENDING MACHINES HAD A DAMN LINE AT THEM. I'M looking at the clock on my phone, and I'm pissed. I told Maddie it would be fifteen minutes. It's been almost thirty. Hopefully she's alright and not too worried. She seemed so vulnerable when I left.

When I get back to the room, the first thing I notice is Maddie isn't in the bed. Fuck. I knew she was stubborn, but damn it, she disobeyed me. The second thing I notice is her IV hanging there, dripping blood.

“Oh, hell,” I whisper as I rush out of the room and to the nurse's station. A nurse sits there pecking at her phone.

When she doesn't acknowledge me, I blurt out, “Did you see the patient in room 2106 leave?”

“No, Sir. There hasn't been anyone but you come through here.”

“How long have you been sitting in this exact spot?”

She gets offended. I can see the indignation all over her face.

“If you are ...”

I wave a hand in the air to keep her quiet. “That’s not what I meant. What I mean is that if you’ve been here since I went to get snacks, then you would not have been able to see the end hallway on the right side of this floor.”

“Oh.” She relaxes and nods. “Yes, I’ve been here filing paperwork and scanning in notes.”

“Alright, thank you.”

I don’t say anything else until I get downstairs to the security room. This is a fucking disaster. Who is working with Donnie and Crystal?

“Can we help you?” The security officer asks.

“Yes. I’m Detective Vega with WPD. A patient is missing from the fifth floor. I need to see if you can find her on the cameras.”

“I’m sure she wandered off and will make her way back to her room. No need to be alarmed,” he says dismissively. He turns to go back to work but I grab his arm.

“Stevens is it?” I raise a brow at him. “Do you understand that this woman is a victim of family abuse?”

“Uh ...”

“Exactly. Her father is in the ICU, two floors up. Her deranged brother is on the loose. Now let me see the damn surveillance footage from the last”—I glance at my watch then back up to Stevens—“twenty-two minutes.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



I BROKE my word to Drew. The minute he was gone, so was I. My father has to go. I wanted to make him my last kill, but it's gotten worse at home. If he gets out of this hospital, I'll be the one that's dead. He'll be sure to put me six feet under.

Getting away from the cameras isn't easy, but I know the stairs don't have any. There are cameras at the nurse's station and at the elevators. The hospital didn't think this security layout through. I smirk as I climb the stairs.

Fuck me, it hurts to move, but I'm determined to end my father's life. It takes me way too long to get up two flights of stairs. I'm winded and can barely stand upright. Doesn't matter. I'm on a mission, and I always complete what I'm going after.

I open the door and the floor is bustling with people. How strange that the ICU is so busy. This side of the hallway has the nurse's station. Shit, I duck into a room and am grateful that no one is in here. I watch as the nurse leaves her seat. She's coming straight toward me, but she turns right and goes into a locked room.

She doesn't shut the door all the way. This is good for me. I walk in behind her and can hear her music coming from her earbuds. I see she's in a break room of sorts. There's a coat hanging on the wall. Hell, she doesn't even turn around when I take the coat and it rustles. Dumbass.

Making my way out of the room, I put the coat on and it covers me from shoulders to ankles. There's a small box on the side of the wall that has masks and gloves in it. Well, this

is going to be easier than I thought. Putting the mask on and then the gloves, I make my way through the rooms.

I'm surprised that there are no police outside my father's room. He's a criminal after all and should be handcuffed to the bed. He's not. This makes me irrationally angry. Of course they don't treat him like the creeper he is. Crazy ol' Maddie is making up stories again.

"Hello, Father."

His eyes pop open in shock, and I glare down at him. "Not so great and illustrious anymore, huh?"

I poke at his bandages, causing him to wince in pain. It's a lot easier to do when he's helpless. His neck is in an immobilizer and his ankles are in traction socks. There's an oxygen tube in his nose, and I yank it out. He doesn't deserve to breathe. He starts gasping but his mouth is wired shut so he can't call out for help. A quiet laugh escapes my lips.

Bending down, I whisper in his ear. "You should have killed me, Father. But since you didn't, I'm going to kill you."

I yank on his IV, and he coughs. Good. I want him to suffer. "I was going to make you watch as I killed Donnie. Oh well, it's better this way."

Searching the drawers, I find the scalpel and extra syringes. The hospital really does need to lock this stuff up. Not that I would tell them that. Fixing the syringe and needle together, I smile but he can't see that smile because of the mask.

I look at him and then the machines he's hooked to. Pulling the cord on the breathing monitor, blood pressure cuff, and the heart monitor, an overwhelming sense of happiness fills me. "By the way, *I'm* The Mad Hatter. You stupid fuck. You didn't want anyone to know I was raped, and now everyone involved is dead. Except Donnie, but don't you worry, I'm going to find him."

I push the needle into the IV and push the plunger down. The IV monitor beeps but I silence it. "That big air bubble is

going to hit your head soon. I'm not taking any chances though." I use the scalpel and slice his wrist closest to me.

"Enjoying the pain, Daddy Dearest?" I wink at him, taunting him. Funny how he can't talk now. It's beautiful to hear his whimpers. I walk around the bed and slice his other wrist.

"I love that you're suffering right now. Bleed, mother fucker." Giggling, I run the scalpel along his body and jab in a few areas. Not to break the skin but to cause just enough pain to make him jolt.

I look at him for just a minute and then slice his throat. Not once, but twice.

"Enjoy death, you sick son of a bitch. Just remember this, I fucking won."

He's bleeding enough that he will die soon. I can't believe the air bubble hasn't hit his brain yet.

I growl in frustration as I walk over to the arm that has the IV in it, and I take out the syringe. I look at the monitors, and there's no heartbeat. I put the syringe and the scalpel in the coat pocket and walk out before anyone gets to the room.

Victory. Fucking victory over the sorry son of a bitch. It took only three minutes to kill his ass. I hope he rots in hell.

I stand in place, taking a deep breath before making the decision that the psychiatrist that I added to the list is no longer a person I want to kill. The smile on my face says it all. *Happy*. I'm relieved now that freedom is almost here for me. Just one more fucking kill. Then I can be done and rest in peace.

Taking the stairs, I move along the floors slowly. I stop down one floor before I get to my own, discard the jacket into the trash, and put the scalpel in the metal recycler and the syringe into the sharp's container. I just want to be done so I can love on Drew. I take a deep breath before I go back into the stairwell and get to the floor I'm supposed to be on.

As I'm walking to my room, Drew sees me. "Where have you been?" He grabs me and pulls me to him. I moan as he

holds me. It feels so good to be in his arms. His heat permeates against me, calming me.

“You weren’t here, and I got worried. So I ... I just went downstairs to the vending machines, and you weren’t there. It took me forever though because ...”

He kisses me. “Don’t you ever disobey me again. I was so worried someone got you.”

I feel bad that I made him worry, but that’s not the only reason. I’m lying to him, and I hate it. It’s like a sharp knife carving my heart out. Looking into his eyes, I gulp. “I’m sorry. I just wanted to be with you and got scared. I couldn’t stop thinking that Donnie may have gotten to you.”

He chuckles and shakes his head. “Come on, sweet angel. Let’s get you back into bed.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



KNAVE ENTERS the room twenty minutes later. I lift my finger to my lips to keep him quiet. Maddie ate and fell asleep shortly after. It's probably creepy that I've done nothing but stare at her, taking her beauty in.

He walks over and sits down next to me. "The policeman that was supposed to take me home received a phone call diverting him to the hospital."

Although he's speaking softly, I hear him loud and clear. Something is going on here. "Why?"

"The chief was murdered."

Alright, I wasn't expecting that. "Fuck, Knave. This is going to be bad for you."

He chuckles. Goddamn, he's cold. "The bastard didn't die from my stab wounds."

The door opens and my sergeant comes in.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I quickly stand, thinking this is it. I'm going to get fired and Knave is going back to jail.

"Vega, let's talk outside for a moment."

I look down at Knave who's busy staring at Maddie. The guilty look on his face leaves me with so many questions, but they'll have to wait until I'm done getting my ass handed to me.

"Keep an eye on Maddie."

Knave looks at me for a second and nods. “You don’t even have to ask.” He stands and walks to the chair next to Maddie’s bed. Jealousy rears its ugly head, and I almost tell him to get away from her, but the sergeant whispers my name again, urgently.

The door shuts and the sergeant doesn’t waste any time. “Did Maddie kill her father?”

“Hell no. She’s been unconscious for days.” He paces in front of me with his hands in his pants pockets, muttering about psychotic killers and bullshit red tape.

I’m pissed he would think that Maddie had anything to do with this.

“You asked the nurse if she had seen Maddie. How long were you gone and where did Maddie go?” He stops pacing and turns to me.

“Shit.” I say under my breath. I forgot about the few minutes I couldn’t locate her.

“Well?” the sergeant asks me impatiently as he starts to pace again. It’s annoying me that his train of thought goes to Maddie and not me. I had ample time to kill the son of a bitch.

“I know she’s been through some shit, Sarg.” My mind refuses to think that Maddie could have anything to do with this. “But to kill her own father? No way. She was so scared of him that she wouldn’t let me take her to the hospital a few days ago.”

“Alright, then where the fuck was she from the time you left and the time you got back?”

I don’t give a damn. No way in hell am I going to let him drag her through the mud just because he has some kind of inkling that she may be responsible for this. “She said she was scared after she had the run in with the nurse.”

“What run in?” He runs a hand through his hair. Frustration is coming off him in waves.

“The nurse that Donnie used to date is stationed on this floor. I took care of it but Maddie was spooked afterward. She

went looking for me but didn't know where the elevator was. She found the stairs and took them down to the vending machines."

"Chief had his neck and wrists slit. Donnie is hiding and you are here, which leads me to believe either you or Maddie did this. But I know for a fact you wouldn't do this. Would you, Vega?"

He knows better. I'm not a criminal. I follow the law to the letter for a reason. "No, Sir. You know better."

"Good enough. Did you see anyone that looked suspicious or out of place here?"

"No. There hasn't been anyone on this floor and no radio chatter about suspicious persons."

"Well fuck. Who the hell killed him?"

"I know he was your ..."

He gives me one of the coldest glares I've ever seen that my words slip from me.

"That son of a bitch hurt his daughter. Hell, now I'm wondering how long this has been happening and what kind of officer am I that I didn't know about it? He is no friend of mine. I wanted to see him fry in the chair for what he did. The killer gave him an easy way out, dammit."

Maybe this is a way for me to come back to the police department full time. "I know you have your hands tied with The Mad Hatter case. Are you sure I can't come back on duty and continue the hunt?"

"No. While I thank you for wanting to do your job, you are now involved in a domestic abuse and murder case. I can't have you anywhere near it."

I sigh with agitation. "Fair enough. I'll be here with Maddie until she's released."

He walks away and I go back inside the room. Knave is bent over the chair with his head down on the bed. He's murmuring to her as she sleeps. I catch the last portion of what he's saying.

“I love you, Maddie. This whole thing is almost over. Please don’t let them win.”

My hackles rise at his words. “What the fuck does that mean?”

I thought I said that in my mind, but Knave looks up and his eyes widened.

“What did you hear?”

My hand goes to my hip, reaching for my gun that isn’t there. “You were telling her this is almost over. What’s almost over?”

He stands up and walks toward me. I’m not one to back down, but hell, I’m not sure I could take him on.

“It doesn’t matter, Drew.”

“Does this have to do with The Mad Hatter?”

“Not at all.” He doesn’t blink or look away when he talks. Damn, I was hoping to find a tell that he was lying.

“Then why were you so guilty looking when you first came into the room?”

He looks down and I’m not sure why. I’m nervous because I’m not sure if he’s willing to hurt me.

“I didn’t know her home life had gotten this bad. You have to believe me, I would never let her stay in harm’s way. She told me things were fine.”

“Wait, you knew she was being beaten?”

He looks at me for a long while before he speaks again. “Yeah.” He turns toward Maddie and touches her right foot. “She swore she was keeping herself out of harsh punishments. That she could handle the emotional abuse as long as she still could leave when she turned eighteen.”

“That makes sense, but why not go to the police? Social services?”

He refuses to look at me, and I’m not alright with that. I step toward him but then I hear it ... sniffing. He finally looks

up, and I see the tears welling in his eyes.

“This is the first time, I swear to you, that she’s almost been raped. They’ve given her bruises and lashings before. Every time, when she was younger, she would come over and I would fix one or two little bruised spots. The situation is a lot worse than I thought.”

I watch him watching Maddie. His tears run silently down his face as he lets his guilt eat at him. None of this is his fault.

“Everything is my fault. All of it. I should have turned her family in. I shouldn’t have pushed her to go to the damn party.” He wobbles on his feet, and I grab his arms.

“Look at me, Knave,” I demand of him and he shakes within my grasp. I guide him over to the couch and softly push him into a sitting position.

“Get it off your chest. Tell me why you think it’s your fault.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



“THIS REALLY ISN’T my story to tell you but I doubt that Maddie has told you the full truth. She likes to hide things because she feels it makes her weak if she says them out loud.”

I watch as Drew sits next to me, analyzing every word I’m saying. He’s trying to work out in his head if I’m telling him the truth.

“When Maddie’s mother died, Maddie became the punching bag. Most days at school she was so tired teachers would let her nap during lunch and eat during classes. They assumed it was because her mother died. Not once did they ask her what was wrong.”

Drew looks a little green as I tell him about the first year after her mother died. I believe that he didn’t know. Didn’t have a clue that Donnie and her father were assholes. That he was in the house many of the nights they would sneak into her room and beat her for any little thing they deemed worthy of punishment.

“When Maddie turned fourteen, she was pushed into dating Jon. Her father wanted an in with the city, and what better way to do that than with a news anchor on speed dial? The Mayor’s daughter and Maddie became pretty close once the Chief helped her get off from drug charges.”

I stop talking so I can gather my thoughts on how I want to proceed without giving away that Maddie is the killer.

“I hate how they used her, but she refused to tell on her family. It’s understandable now after the rape she endured. Her

family covered it up so that they could get ahead in the political world.”

“How is any of this your fault, Knave?” He puts a hand on my shoulder and makes sure I’m keeping eye contact. “You were a kid. None of this falls on your shoulders.”

“But it does. I was supposed to be at the party where everything went down. My boyfriend broke up with me the night before, and I chose to cancel on Maddie at the last minute. I was such a self-absorbed prick.”

I’m angry with myself. So fucking angry. “I should have gone, Drew. They would have never done what they did if I had been there. The entire group knew that Maddie was more than a friend to me. She is special and most of the girls hated it.”

Getting up, I walk over to the window and look out. The lights below in the parking lot twinkle up at me, mocking me.

“Those bastards were going to hurt Maddie, no matter what. It didn’t matter if you were there or not, Knave. How many were there?”

I don’t turn around to look at him. I keep staring out the window. “At least twelve.”

“Yeah, Knave, you would have gotten your ass handed to you. You were no match for them. Stop blaming yourself.”

“That’s not all of it, Drew.” I finally turn around and face him. “I had the opportunity to end her abuse. My family even invited Maddie over to live with us. All I had to do was persuade her to agree to it. Instead of doing what was right, I listened to her downplay her abuse. She never once told me about more than just the occasional spanking. I didn’t do anything, and look where it’s gotten us ...”

I choke on the last word and Drew stands. He comes over to me and puts a hand on my shoulder. “Knave, this isn’t your fault, alright? None of it.”

A sob leaves my throat and I hug him. I put my head on his shoulder and let my angst out. “I’ve been trying to right my wrongs.”

He stiffens when I say that. “What are you saying, Knave?”

I step back from him and shrug. “I’m The Mad Hatter.”

He looks shocked, but before he can say anything, Maddie interrupts. “Drew? Knave?”

I expect Drew to take his phone from the table and turn me in. Instead, Drew turns away from me and walks over to Maddie. He sits down so she doesn’t have to strain to look up at him.

Maddie’s secret is safe with me. I won’t ever let anyone know that she’s The Mad Hatter. Even if that means I go to jail. Watching them interact, I see the nerve ticking in Drew’s right cheek and Maddie smiling at him.

“Sweet angel, are you alright? Do you need anything?” Drew fusses over her and it is endearing. I know that if Drew turns me in, he will take good care of Maddie.

“Could you get me some fresh ice?” she asks and I smile.

“Of course I can.” I tell her. “Be right back.”

Drew gets up. “Actually, let me get it. That way I can flash a badge and get it faster.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind getting it.”

“No. I don’t mind. You two talk while I go get some ice and water.”

Shit. I better not argue. The idea of losing time with Maddie has me sitting down next to her. As the door closes, Maddie stares at me.

“I heard you. What were you thinking?”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



KNAVE IS silent for far too long. I begin to fidget in my bed and glare at him. “I cannot believe you told him you’re The Mad Hatter. This is going to be a cluster fuck as it is. Now you are lying for me? Knave, dammit, I love you but that was stupid.”

Knave holds my hand for a moment and then lets go. He stands there visibly upset as his hands slide into his jean pockets.

“If they put the murders on me, you are free to live with Drew without him ever knowing.”

I don’t like the way he’s talking. I’d never let him take the fall for my crimes. “I should just tell Drew it’s me.”

Knave’s eyes get wide and he grabs hold of me again. “No, I’ve already told him I’m the one responsible. If he catches on that I’ve lied, I’m going to be in trouble either way. At least this plan is for a good cause.”

I shake my head. “Run. Right now. Leave the room, turn right and go to the stairs. All the way down to the basement and don’t look back. Go to Gotham Valley or somewhere far from Wonderland.”

“What about you? You can’t tell Drew.” He bends down and kisses my forehead.

“Don’t worry about me, Knave. I’ve got to finish this bullshit, and then I can hang up The Mad Hatter for good.”

“I love you, Maddie.”

“I know you do. I love you too. You were always the brother I wished I would have ended up with.”

“Come find me when you can.”

“YOU KNOW IT.”

I feel a piece of my soul leaving when the door shuts behind him. A knock at the door is followed by a woman in a green suit and glasses three times too big for her face.

“Hi there.” She looks at the piece of paper then back at me. “Are you Maddie Hatterson?” She looks at me expectantly, which unnerves me.

I sit up straighter in my bed and nod. “Yeah, who are you?”

“I’m Monica Iverson, I work with Drew Vega. The hospital receptionist said Drew would be with you.”

“Oh, yeah, Donnie’s talked about you. You’re the IT guru.” Crap, what is she doing here, and why does she need Drew?

“That’s me. Anyhow, I need to speak to Drew about something. Is he here?”

“Yes. He will be back soon. He stepped out to get some ice and water for me.”

“Perfect. I’ll step outside and wait for him.”

“Are you and Drew ...” I leave it open-ended because the thought of her having anything to do with Drew makes me livid and I’d hate to have to kill her.

She laughs. “No, I’ve known him since we were five years old, and he moved in next door to my grandma.”

I can breathe a little easier now. “Oh, that’s good then. Have a seat, I could use the company.”

She smiles and sits down by my bed. “Whatever you discovered must be really important for you to have come all this way instead of calling Drew.”

“Well, everyone knows that Drew isn’t leaving your side, and the hospital notes are in the file ...” She stops talking and gulps. “I shouldn’t have said that. I’m sure you don’t want to be reminded that there’s a case against your brother and father.”

“Actually, I’m relieved. It’s the first step in the right direction of my freedom from my family.”

“It’s hard to think that the Chief would do something like this and even harder to imagine that Donnie would be involved.”

It almost sounds like hero worship coming out of her mouth. I want to roll my eyes but Drew steps through the door, and I reel the urge in.

Drew looks from me to Monica and his eyes get big. He laughs a little bit nervously as he walks over to us and says, “Monica, I didn’t expect you, what’s going on?”

She stands up and straightens her pencil skirt. “I need to discuss that matter you asked me to look into with you.” Monica is whispering but I can hear her. She’s really bad at being quiet. It’s almost comical at how loud she’s being.

“Let me get Maddie settled, and we can talk outside in the hallway.”

“Don’t leave on my part. I can turn the television on.” I really want to know what’s going on, but I can’t blame them for wanting privacy to discuss police matters.

Monica smiles as she opens the door. “Nice meeting you Maddie.” Once the door is closed, Drew sets the water down and hands me a full cup of ice. “It will take ten minutes or less, but first ...” He kisses me, and I whimper into his mouth. His lips are rough and dominating, causing me to moan his name.

“We’ll talk about where Knave went when I get back.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” I pull him down by his neck and he chuckles. My lips graze his ear and I can’t help but tease him. “Hurry back, Daddy.”

I let him go and he stares at me. “My angel is a tease. Remember, I can still find a way to punish my naughty girl.”

My entire body heats up and my breath hitches in my throat as I watch him leave the room with a satisfied smirk on his face. As the door closes, I sip on my ice water thinking about how I am going to talk Drew out of going after Knavé.

Somehow, I don't think that's going to be the hardest barrier I have to break down.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



SOMETHING ISN'T ADDING up to me where Knave is concerned. I'm irritated that he lied to me about being The Mad Hatter. I know the killer is a woman, and there is no way in hell that Knave fits the profile. Why would he confess to something like this? I file that train of thought in the back of my mind to process later. Right now I need to figure out this mess with Donnie and Crystal.

“What do you have for me, Monica?” My tone is brisk and sharp. I watch as she flinches and worries her bottom lip with her teeth. Shit, this can't be good if she's nervous to tell me.

“We found the truck in time to get the coat, tracker, and syringe. It's being processed but I'm here about something else.”

“What?” I anxiously wait for her to tell me. This is what I can't stand about half the people that work at the station. They like to drag shit out.

“Yeah.” Monica looks down, pushes her hair out of her face and then looks at me with a grimace. Fuck, I want to yell at her to just spit it out already. “So, the fingerprints on The Mad Hatter card we found at the Chief's house.”

She hands me the paper and I scan over it. “None. You mean to tell me there are no fingerprints on it?”

“Yup. Just like all the rest of them. Not a speck of DNA on them except the victim's. This time there was Maddie's blood and the Chief's.”

“Fuck me. But that means ...”

“Drew, I think you let the killer loose from the jail cell he was in earlier. Josh Knavelton had the perfect opportunity to throw the card down today.”

No. I already know Knave isn't it. “The killer isn't a male. *Shit, what the fuck is going on?*”

“Well, there was only one female at the crime scene today. But, we think that this card may have come from the Chief.” She pulls out another piece of paper. “If you look here, we found a briefcase at the scene that had the files for The Mad Hatter plus some evidence that should have been logged.”

Fuck, was the Chief trying to cover up this killer's crimes too? “We have to assume that Maddie could be the ...”

“Don't fucking finish that sentence, Monica. Maddie is the victim. Not the criminal.” There is no way in hell Maddie is involved. I refuse to believe she has anything to do with the killings. She may be bold in some aspects, but she's not that bold.

“Besides, she's a victim of domestic violence. If she were the killer, she would have already killed her brother and father.”

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean for it to sound like I was accusing her, but we need to look at all the facts. If it's not Maddie or Knave, who is it?”

“Well, that's for the detectives on the case to figure out. It makes more sense to believe that Donnie and the Chief are involved in this case in some fashion. This isn't the first time they have hidden evidence, so we need to start digging again.”

“I'll let the sergeant know.” Monica adjusts her crossbody bag and looks at me. “Anything else you want me to look into?”

“No. I know I can't ask you to keep me in the loop because you aren't supposed to be talking to me about the case. Although, I would like to know if you do find something.”

“Don't mention it, Drew. It's nice to repay the favor every now and then. I'll see you later.”

She walks away and I stand here, digesting the information Monica just handed me. I close my eyes for a moment, trying to calm down. It's useless though. I have a psychotic killer on the loose, a possible murder suspect in the wings, and fucking Donnie out there doing God knows what.

What the fuck am I going to do? I rub my temples and slouch against the door of Maddie's room. The idea that Maddie is involved is fucking preposterous. I know I can rule Donnie out. But what about Crystal? Is she crazy enough to have done something like this? The motivation behind the crimes doesn't make sense. It would make it random killings in her case. And The Mad Hatter is definitely not random. Not a single thing they do is done just because they felt like it. No, they are meticulous, and their reasoning is within the cards.

With a big sigh, I stand up. Enough of this. I need to focus on Maddie right now. Frankly, it's not my case anymore, and I'm tired. With the decision to let everything go, I walk back into Maddie's room. The little tease is uncovered and has her legs spread wide.

Goddamn, that wet, pink pussy of hers is swollen and needy. I should be afraid that this is her reaction. She's not facing the problem at hand. But hell, I'm so enamored with her body, I can't seem to remember that I need to tread softly with her.

"About time." She smiles at me, and I walk over to her. I sit on the edge of the bed and start to bring the covers up. She stops me and kicks the covers back down.

"You're a naughty tease, you know that?"

She giggles for me, and I wink at her.

"Is it wrong of me to want you?" She moves my hand where she wants it, and I feel that bare pussy of hers. Fuck. I haven't even touched her yet and she's radiating heat.

"Of course not, angel. But you ..." She makes me lose my train of thought as she pushes my fingers into her. Maddie moans and I feel my morals slipping once again.

“Angel.” I want her, but she moves her hips into my hand. There’s no stopping it. “Fuck it.” I growl. Without another moment of hesitation, I shove three fingers deep into her.

“Daddy.” She whimpers and I grab her neck, bringing her lips to mine.

“My angel needs this, doesn’t she?” Her eyes are wild and unfocused while her body milks at my fingers. I dance my tongue around hers, giving her a slow, seductive rhythm to follow. Her eagerness to play with me makes me uncomfortably hard.

“Yes, please.” Oh, that whiny tone does naughty things to me. I chuckle into her mouth as I pull back.

“No.” Maddie grabs for me, but I squeeze the back of her neck, stopping her.

“Don’t be greedy, little angel.”

“Dr—” I kiss her and shove my fingers back and forth inside of her.

She closes her eyes in pleasure as I bring her to the brink of an orgasm. “I believe I told you to call me Daddy.”

“Ah ...” I pull my fingers from her and she protests loudly.

“Oh, sweet one. You will have to wait for more. Consider this your punishment for almost calling me Drew.”

“You ...” she sputters and I yank her toward me by the neck.

“Yes, angel?”

“You ... you can’t stop there.” she’s flustered and can barely form her sentence. I want to take her, make her scream my name, but now isn’t the time for all of this. Maddie needs to heal and work out her emotions from the abuse.

Even if my cock is ready to burst from the need to claim her.

CHAPTER THIRTY



DREW IS SUCH A FUCKING TEASE. He hasn't so much as kissed me since earlier. I'm going crazy. Stark raving crazy for him. He's been attentive to me and keeps me full of food. But that's not what I want. I crave to feel him deep inside of me.

He's asleep on the pull-out couch, and I can't help staring at his chest as it rises then falls. The only thing stopping me from getting up and crawling into the bed with him is the fact I'm The Mad Hatter, and I'm uncertain how he's going to take the news.

The door opens and my worst nightmare walks into the room. Donnie raises his gun at me so I don't make a peep. He walks over to the bed and unplugs all the monitors.

"Get up, put these on, and follow me." He shows me the gun, waving it in my face, and I spot the syringe in his other hand.

"You don't comply, this syringe holds a lethal dose of epinephrine and it has Drew's name on it.

The deranged look in his eyes scares me. He's not bluffing, not one bit. "Ok, Donnie. I'll go with you. Please don't hurt Drew."

"Shut up and do what I said. I'm ready to end your life if I have to. Don't fucking test me."

I get up and pull on the leggings and the hoodie. He hands me shoes, and I slip them on. I don't try to argue or cause him to get angrier. I have no idea what he's going to do to me but I have to save Drew.

He pulls me out of the room and to the stairs.

“Why do you hate me so much, Donnie?” I ask knowing I shouldn’t talk, but the need to know why my brother, who I thought was a hero when I was younger, is hell bent on hurting me.

“Now isn’t the time for this conversation.” He grits and yanks me down another set of stairs. “You cause me any grief, I’ll kill you. The only reason you’re alive for the moment is so I can get access to father’s vault.”

We are almost down to the ground floor, and I’m winded. “Why in the world would you need me for that?”

He slaps me and I stumble against the wall. White lights flow in my vision as I try to make myself small. I hate cowering to him but I have no weapons at my disposal.

“Funny thing happened last night. Our father died in a very unique way. A way only The Mad Hatter could pull off.” He leers down at me and I tremble.

“If you weren’t such a cunt, I’d say you did it. But we both know you don’t have the guts or gumption to pull something like this off.”

He laughs and yanks on my hair. I whimper but move when he demands we move. “Enough of your stalling. Drew isn’t coming to save you.”

Dammit, I wish I was stalling. I’m fucking tired but there is no point in back talking with Donnie. Instead, I swallow my pride and apologize.

“I’m sorry.”

“You don’t know what sorry is little sister, but you will. We just have to get somewhere private.”

I can’t. No. No. Fuck, I’m going to have a panic attack. Without thinking, I shove at Donnie’s right side. This was stupid on my part since he still has a hold of my hair. He just laughs at me and throws me down the steps. I fall to the landing between floors and cry out in pain.

Looking at him, I get to my knees but I'm wobbly as he comes down the stairs to get me. "You never were bright were you?" He mocks me as he steps closer. He's lowered the gun and is in the process of tucking it into his belt when I strike.

My fist goes right for his scrotum. I'm not going to play around and be the weak one anymore. If he shoots me, at least I died trying. I make contact, and at first the two of us are in a stare off. I hit him again and Donnie goes down, holding his cock.

As he lies there crying out in pain, I force myself to stand up. This has to end now. With a strength I usually only muster with The Mad Hatter suit on, I glare down at Donnie. "I'm The Mad Hatter, Donnie. Daddy Dearest found that out last night. You're realizing it now, and it's beautiful."

I kick Donnie in the back, and he grunts and rolls onto his back from his side. I stomp on his hands as he holds himself. He is begging me to stop but I won't. No. He doesn't deserve that.

"I admired you growing up." I stomp on him again, and he howls in pain. "You were supposed to love me and care for me. Just like our father was." I spit at him and stomp on his leg as he tries to crawl away.

I sneer at him mockingly. "You know, my plan was to kill you nice and slow so our father could watch you suffer. He was going to see you get gutted and then sliced from neck to penis. He would have loved the taste of your cock in his mouth; he was going to die with it there. But instead, just like dear old dad, you are going to die alone."

Donnie's guarding his cock, so I have ample room to do what is necessary. I stomp on his face, and I hear his nose break. "You—" He doesn't finish his sentence as he tries to shield his face from my foot.

He's gasping for breath. The left side of his face hangs a little off center since I shattered his jaw with my foot. He rolls to his stomach, blood flowing down his nose as he tries to crawl down the stairs.

I grab the gun from his belt and cock it. I don't like killing with guns. It's so impersonal, but that's alright. It will do.

“Any last words you want to say to your sister, The Mad Hatter?”

“Maddie!” Drew's voice comes from behind me and I turn. Oh shit. “Drop the weapon, Maddie.”

“But he's ...” I point to my brother lying on the ground trying to move down the stairs on his stomach.

“This isn't the way, Maddie.” Drew takes a step toward me and I step back. I regret it instantly but I don't want to let this go.

Drew frowns at me. Hurt, confusion, and repulsion flicker through his eyes. I hand the gun to him and step back into the corner. I have no doubt he is going to arrest me now.

“Donnie Hatterson, you are under arrest for domestic abuse and attempted kidnapping. Anything you say ...”

Drew looks at me as he puts the cuffs on my brother. It doesn't feel like the justice I wanted to serve, but at least I know Drew has my back for the moment.

A security guard comes from the ground floor of the building while another comes from the second floor. “Miss, you alright?”

“Take her back to her room. She was being kidnapped,” Drew tells the man in front of me. He doesn't look at me and my heart breaks.

“Police will be here within ten minutes. Please stay outside her door to make sure she's safe.”

“Drew?” Vulnerability laces my tone as the guard helps me from the corner.

“Go now, Maddie.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



“SON OF A MOTHER FUCKING BITCH!” I cuss loudly once Maddie is taken back to her room. I couldn’t face her. Not now, because I need to grasp what the fuck is going on here.

“Fuck.” I pound my fist against the wall and snarl. Donnie isn’t conscious and the guard’s radio is going off insistently.

“You ok, man?”

Am I? No. No, I am not ok. I’m not even sure if I’m mad that Donnie took Maddie from under my nose or if it’s ... I don’t finish the thought. I can’t wrap my mind over the fucking shock of this goddamn drama.

It’s been Maddie this entire time. *Fuck*. I turn to the guard and sigh. “Yeah, let’s get him medical attention before the police get here.”

“Already radioed it in. They should be here soon.”

“Thank you.” I pace from the staircase to the wall, back and forth, as I try to come to terms with Maddie being the killer.

What’s crazy is the police beat the damn doctor here. I am immediately questioned and give them evidence I do have. They seem to take my explanation with what I saw and how things went down.

I don’t tell them that Maddie confessed to the killings. Knave is never mentioned either. Fuck, if it comes back to it, I’ve just broken the law, and I’m not sure if it was because I want to keep Maddie safe or that I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing.

The shattering and sinking feeling inside of me grows by the second. I feel almost betrayed by Maddie but I'm not sure I can blame her for the killings. My mind runs through the group of victims and realize they were the ones that betrayed her. All of them. It doesn't matter though, the law dictates that she's a criminal. I stand by the door that opens to Maddie's floor and take several calming breaths. It's not fucking helping.

"Detective Vega?" Someone shakes me out of my stupor and I turn to focus on the person. It's Detective Gardner.

"Yes?"

"We need to question Maddie before we leave."

Not tonight I think. She will think I've turned her in, and I haven't done that yet. "Come by my house tomorrow around noon. We should be home if she has no other injuries. She isn't going to be in any state to answer questions tonight."

"We ..."

"I said not today. She was just kidnapped by the same man that tried to rape her. If you recall, she's the victim here."

He steps back because I'm yelling at him. Enough that I've made my throat sore from doing so. The sergeant comes up behind Gardner and nods. "That's enough Gardner. Drew will not let Maddie leave his sight. We will speak with you both tomorrow."

My mind is so fucked up right now. I've just aided and abetted Maddie. I'm withholding pertinent case information and still, I can't bring myself to turn her in.

Not yet.



I OPEN THE DOOR AND MADDIE IS ON THE BED, HOLDING HER knees to her chest. Those beautiful eyes are crying right now. I wonder if it's from Donnie trying to take her or if it's more than that. The longer I look at her, the more pissed I get.

The guard looks in. "I'm going to take off, but we will monitor the hallway through the rest of the night."

"Thank you." I lock the door when he leaves. I pull the blinds down and close them.

Maddie hasn't said a word but she tracks my every move. I don't go over to her. No, if I do that and she touches me, I will not be able to do what I need to do.

"You are going to turn yourself in."

"No." Her bottom lip quivers and she won't quite look me in the eye.

The nerve in my right cheek twitches as I grind my teeth together. The audacity of my angel is intriguing and infuriating at the same time.

"This isn't an option Maddie. You ..."

"No." She interrupts me and I walk a tiny step closer to her. "I have a plan. One more kill and it's done. They never need to know who it is."

Maddie gets up and I back up. She gasps and the tears fall harder. "Daddy?"

She can't use the weapon of her voice against me, dammit. Or at least that's what I tell myself.

"No, Maddie. It's Drew. Daddy isn't here right now. You are in so much fucking trouble, and you need to take this seriously."

Maddie stands there, hands in front of her, fingers interlaced and her head bowed. Shit, that's hot but so not the right moment for this train of thought. Not when she is crying her eyes out and looks stricken. God, I didn't want to back away from her, but she has to know I mean business.

“I know. You weren’t supposed to find out.” She speaks clearly with no remorse.

“Is that why Knave confessed? To keep you from going to jail?” I watch her as her head pops up. Fire in her eyes.

“No. He did it because he’s a fucking good friend. I didn’t put him up to it, and I told him to run. He’s not taking the heat for me.”

“Alright. Now, why did you think it was alright to be a vigilante?”

“You know my brother and father right? They chose those bastards over me. I’m not wrong with wanting justice. I would do it all over again.”

She steps closer to me and all I want to do is hug her. Kiss her. But I can’t. I have to stay strong and remember my oath.

“Drew, you have to understand, my father ...” She closes her eyes and swallows down what I can only assume is a knot of emotion in her throat.

“He would have never let me leave here. They had ... they had bad plans for me, and Donnie ... he promised to make me pay as soon as we got to a private area. It was the only way I know how to get my revenge.”

I grab her and push her against the door. “You should have fucking came to me. Dammit, Maddie, I could have helped you. I could have made sure the truth got out there. Now? Now I have to turn in my badge because I fucking lied for you.”

My hands are on her shoulders, holding her down on the door. I’m not hurting her and if I am reading those perky nipples right, she’s turned on. Again, Drew not the time for this. I chastise myself trying to regroup.

“You wouldn’t have believed me. I know you said you would have, but you and Donnie were tight. Really tight. Plus, you were trying to make a name for yourself with father. So I get it. I did what was necessary. Now, just let me go finish off Donnie and then I’m done.”

“You aren’t going near Donnie. I don’t believe in what he did. He deserves to fry for the crimes he’s committed, but you are not going anywhere.”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



A MIXTURE of emotions are running through me in a crazy cocktail of confusion. I am turned on by how forceful Drew is being. On the flip side of things, I'm scared to death he's going to hate me forever. I don't understand the mixed emotions at all. I can't look at him anymore. The disappointment and anger in his eyes is killing me.

"Let me finish it, Drew," I whisper.

"No. You are done Maddie. Done. Do you understand me?" He hits a hand against the door and I jump. "Are you going to turn me in?" I whisper.

He points to the bed. "Go get in the bed, now."

He moves back from me and I skedaddle to the bed. My heart is racing in terror and delight. Fuck, I wish my heart and mind would get on the same damn page.

Drew stalks over to me and when he begins to pull his belt buckle loose, I lose my shit. "I'm sorry, Drew. I didn't mean to hurt you. Please don't hit me." Fuck, I never thought Drew would hurt me. I scramble over the bed and stand there, wide eyed and frantic.

"Stop it, Maddie. I'm not going to hit you. I'm taking the belt off so I can take my pants off. I'm going to hold you and discuss this entire fiasco."

"Oh." I'm shaking so bad, I almost fall over. Am I ever going to be alright to be with him? My mind laughs at how stupid I am. He's not going to talk to me about being with me.

Nope. He will insist on telling me why I have to turn myself in.

“Get in the bed, Maddie.” Drew holds the covers back for me and I crawl into the bed. He gets in and pulls the covers over us. “I’m pissed as hell that you are in this situation. But you broke the law, on more than one occasion. I can’t rightfully let you get away with this. Even if I know why and we could get you mental help for a reduced sentence, I have to turn you in.”

I am crying again. Daddy wanting to turn me in hurts more than anything I’ve ever endured. “You know why I did this. You know they had to die. They couldn’t get away with it.” I’m adamant about this although I’m scared to death, he will really turn me over to the police.

“I know that, angel, but you can’t go around killing people.”

“If you are going to turn me, at least let me kill Donnie.” I can’t give it up. No matter how much I love Drew, my mission has to be finished.

“No and that’s final.” His words are resolute. There’s no talking him out of this. “Now, go to sleep. We have a busy day tomorrow.”



FIVE HOURS LATER AND THE CLOCK READS SEVEN O’CLOCK IN the morning. Drew is passed out once again. He’s halfway laying on me so I can’t move. It is agonizing lying here, contemplating running. It’s what I told Knave to do. I should be sneaking out of the door and finding him.

A harsh knock comes and the doorknob is rattled. Drew gets up immediately and walks over to the door. I pull the covers up to my chin as the police officer comes into the room.

“Maddie Hatterson?” he asks and Drew looks at me with accusing eyes.

“Yes, that’s me.”

“Please stand up and face away with your hands behind your back.”

Drew cuts in. “What the fuck is this?”

“Donnie woke up and explained that Maddie is the one that beat the hell out of him. She’s under arrest for assault.”

“But, he tried to kidnap me.”

“Not the way he is telling it.” The officer comes closer to me but Drew doesn’t let him get far.

“Touch her and it will be the last thing you do in your career with WPD.”

Drew’s sergeant comes in and looks at the situation. He seems to always be everywhere. Damn, I wouldn’t want him to be my boss.

“Drew, release Officer Rabtin.”

I watch Drew reluctantly release him and step away.

“No one is under arrest. I’m sorry for Officer Rabtin’s misunderstanding.” He gives his officer a hard look and tells him to leave the room then turns back to me. “We do need to question you. Drew wanted to meet at noon at his house. However, since the allegations are serious on both parts, we need to clear up a few things.”

“I’d like a lawyer present,” I tell him and Drew smiles. He’s giving me mixed signals. One minute it feels as if he wants to turn me in and the next he wants me to be free. It’s odd but at least there is approval in his features this time around.

“Very well.” The sergeant sighs. “Meet us at the station at noon with your lawyer. And Drew, I suggest you get a union rep.”

He leaves me with Drew with the door banging loudly behind him.

“Get a shower, get dressed, and do not move from this room. I mean it Maddie, you fucking leave this room. I can’t help you.”

Drew puts his pants on and brings out a fresh shirt from his bag. “Security will be up here in three minutes now that I’ve paged them. If you leave they will tell me.”

“I understand Drew.” He doesn’t kiss me goodbye or give me a hug. The door shuts with a silent click and my heart crumbles.

Taking a shower, I cry like a baby. I guess I had an unrealistic hope that Drew wouldn’t turn me in if he ever found out about my extracurricular activities. I should have known better. It’s not his fault he’s a straight and narrow type of guy.

I blow dry my hair and look at myself in the mirror. Revenge or love? I keep going back and forth between them. If I confess and Drew can help me plead an insanity bargain, I wonder if that means I get to see him. If he even wants to see me. Somehow, I think he only slept in the same bed with me last night to make sure I didn’t try to run.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



I TAKE out my cell and I call Knave. I know he's innocent, and by me asking him to do anything regarding the case, is putting him in jeopardy.

"Is Maddie alright?" He answers on the first ring. I can hear the anxiety in his voice.

"Donnie tried to take her. She crushed his skull."

"Fuck." Knave laughs and I realize that I'm not exactly upset that Maddie did this.

"I don't want to know where you are, but I need you to track down someone for me."

"You mean the nurse, Crystal?" How the fuck did he know?

"Yes, how ..."

He interrupts me with a scoff. "Because I'm sitting in her house watching her write a note telling the whole story of how she became The Mad Hatter."

"Um ..." Alright, I'm dumbfounded.

"Don't worry, I've got you covered. You'll need to know she's implicating Donnie in helping her with the murders."

"Knave, that isn't what we need."

"You wouldn't be calling me unless you knew Maddie was the real killer. You also wouldn't allow Maddie to take the fall for wanting justice. Was it wrong of her? Yeah, it was, but she did it and I stick behind her a thousand percent."

Damn, he's loyal, I'll give him that. "Man, I ..."

"I get it. She went from this innocent, sweet girl to this mad, vengeful mission-oriented person. You can't let her kill herself. That is her actual last kill. Not her father or Donnie."

"She won't kill herself. Not on my watch." Shit, maybe I shouldn't have left her alone. Panic rises but the anger flowing through me as I make my way down to where they are taking care of Donnie, overshadows it.

"Look, I know I dropped a lot of bombs on you, and I'm pretty sure you are wiggled out, but we can work this so no one ever has to know. I'll take care of Crystal. You take care of Maddie."

He hangs up and I, as a policeman, should know better than to do this. I should know to turn Knave and Maddie in. Right now though, I have to take care of Donnie.

I walk around the floor and find Donnie's room. Two police officers stand outside his door. Doesn't matter though. I'm a detective and they let me in, no questions asked. There's no outside window so no one can see into the room. Donnie's awake but not talking. His mouth is wired shut. How the hell did the officer hear anything from Donnie?

"Hello, Donnie."

He holds up a piece of paper. "Go fuck yourself." Ah, so he's able to write his messages. Son of a bitch should have had his hands cut off.

"Nah, Donnie. You've fucked yourself. Crazy how that works." I glare at him right before I unplug the monitoring system and then I bend down so he can hear every word I am about to say.

"For years you've acted like you were God's gift to the world, fucking everything up—who knows how many women you've assaulted."

I realize my anger has reached its boiling point. Betrayal from Donnie, the Chief, and Maddie are warring against one another. There's no wrong here though. Or at least that's what I'm telling myself. My mind believes I need to walk away

from this. Turn them all in and be done with it. It's my heart that refuses to let it go. If I kill Donnie, it's one less thing I have to deal with. And that scares me.

What keeps me moving is that Donnie hurt Maddie and if I can save a sliver of her soul, I'm going to do it. He's writing something on his paper. I watch him intently, hoping it's a confession for everything he's done.

"You're just like Maddie—weak."

"And you're a dumb fucker who thought he could get away with hurting his sister, hiding evidence, and murder."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" He scribbles and holds it up, looking at me with cold eyes, and for the first time, I'm really seeing him. The true psychopath that he is.

"The man at the school. You remember how you tried so hard to make me believe it was the same M.O. as The Mad Hatter?"

I sit down in the chair and smirk. "Forensics had a hay day with the evidence they found at the house. The murder weapon had your fingerprints on it. Funny, how it matched your service record prints almost 100 percent.

"Bullshit." He tries to move but stops. A tiny wince comes from him. I laugh and pull out the fucking syringe I found on the floor in the stairwell.

"Epinephrine. Looks like this one is for you, Donnie boy."

"You don't have the guts."

"Once upon a time you would have been right. Too bad for you though, I'm past the point of caring." I take the cap off and smile down at him. "I'm pretty sure you're a dead man either way. This way, I get the satisfaction knowing I'm the last person you'll ever see."

Putting the needle into the IV, I press down on the plunger. Donnie fights to get away but he's cuffed to the bed by his ankles and arms. I recap the syringe and put it into my pockets. Then, I plug the machines back in and look back.

"I hope you enjoy hell, motherfucker."

I walk out and make it to the elevators.

“Code blue!” is announced over the loudspeaker as I step into the elevator. Fuck, I can’t believe I just did that.



IT TAKES ME ALMOST AN HOUR TO GO BACK TO MADDIE’S room. I fucking killed someone. It went against every fiber of my being but I had to do it. If Maddie can’t kill Donnie, she can’t kill herself. That was my one goal, to keep Maddie alive and with me. Sighing, I enter the room, almost afraid to see if she’s where I left her. My deathly angel is in bed. Her back is to me, and she’s curled into a ball. I desperately want to hold her but I need the space. I have to wrap my mind around all of this before I face her.

Sitting down on the couch, I turn toward the window and watch as rain falls steadily down. Everyone I know around Maddie except Knave is dead. She’s a murderer, and legally, I have to turn her in. Fuck me sideways though, because now I’m one too. I’ve killed for her. I can’t turn her in and not myself. I’d be a hypocrite.

“Drew?” I don’t know how long Maddie has been calling my name, but I get up and walk toward her.

“Yeah, angel?”

Her lower lip trembles as she reaches for my hand. I don’t deny her my touch. God, I couldn’t even if I tried. And believe me, I want to. I want to be a hardened professional but this is my girl. My sweet angel.

“I’ll turn myself in.” Her whisper barely reaches me but I hear it.

I shake my head. “No.” I sit down in the chair and keep her hand in mine.

“But ...”

“I said no, Maddie. Donnie’s dead.”

She gasps and sits up. Her legs swing over the side of the bed and she looks at me. “What do you mean, he’s dead?”

I can’t tell if she is relieved or excited. That should make me question if she is mentally sane, but I stare deep into her eyes before I pull her onto my lap.

“He will no longer bother you Maddie. It’s over. All of it.” She brings her hands to my face and pulls me gently upward.

“What did you do, Drew?” The worry in her eyes make me happy to know she still has some humane parts about her.

I look at the girl I just killed for, and I know without a shadow of a doubt, that it was the right call.

“Angel, I couldn’t let you kill again. I had to take care of you, and the only way I could do that was to kill him. I know how the system works and he would have gotten a lighter sentence because of his service record.”

She bends her head down and kisses me. It feels like sorrow and love wrapped together in a twisted, maddening spiral of emotions.

I pull back and she whines. “Now’s not the time for this, Maddie. I’ve got to find some way to clear this case up before anyone finds out it was you.”

“I want to turn myself in so I can tell them all the full story. The reasoning behind it. And maybe ... maybe I can get a reduced sentence if I agree to do therapy.”

My poor girl doesn’t understand. If it was one murder, she would probably get off free and clear with counseling. But with how many she killed? Fuck, she will get the electric chair.

“I won’t have you ruining your chances at a good future. You did what you did. I don’t agree with it. Hell, I’m still trying to wrap my mind around it, but I get it. Knave is on the run. He won’t be in trouble because he’s not that big of a person of interest. We can simply say he moved away with his boyfriend.”

The wheels in her brain are turning, assessing. “What ...”

“We can pin all of this on Donnie, the Chief, and Crystal. Hell, there’s enough evidence in Donnie’s storage unit to pin it all on him already. You won’t have to testify because you know nothing. Do you understand me?”

“Drew, thank you for all of this, but I really think I should ___”

I kiss her. Enough of this. She will not turn her life upside down any more than it’s already been.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



WHENEVER DREW KISSES ME, my mind short circuits. I want to talk and let him know I will turn myself in for him. I will continue on for him. I had planned on ending everyone and then myself, but then Drew came along and turned the plan around. I have a reason to live. Even if it means being in prison.

He pulls on my hair as he tilts my head the way he wants it to go. I rub myself against him and feel his hardness under me. He's turned on. He's not repulsed by me. Tears slip through my lashes as I moan into his mouth.

I pull back before it gets out of hand. We are both panting, breathing like we ran a marathon. "I love you, Drew."

He growls at me and picks me up as he stands from the chair. "I love you too Maddie. I know about your plan to kill yourself. Not on my fucking watch little angel. You are mine and I'm yours. You will fucking live."

I land on the bed with him on top of me. There's no hesitation from me as I spread my legs for him. My tears are fast and hot as I look at him. He looks down at me with adoration and for the first time in a long time, I finally feel loved.

His hands tear at the clothes I'm in. "I ought to spank your little ass for doing all of this. Fuck, I just might." He licks his lips and growls again at me.

My pussy pulsates, ready for him to fuck me. "Daddy."

“Fuck right, I’m your Daddy.” He bends his head and takes my right nipple into his mouth. My eyes close and my back arches as he runs a hand down my stomach. His fingertips tingle my nerves and I call out for him.

“More, Daddy, please.”

“That’s my good girl, beg me.” His hand makes its way down to my pussy. He runs a finger along the wetness and I tremble.

“Such a good girl, angel.” He moves to my left breast and starts sucking on it. The sensations are overwhelming me. I am not expecting his hand to slap my pussy but when it does, I almost have an orgasm.

I lay there looking at him, wide eyed and wanting him to do it again. He doesn’t make me wait long as he brings his hand down on my pussy again, making it sting. “Oh ... oh ... Da-” He hits my pussy again. Not enough to hurt but the right amount of sting to make me orgasm.

“There it is. My sweet girl needed that. Look at all this wetness gushing out.” His words make my orgasm prolong itself. “My angel is so responsive, you didn’t even need Daddy’s cock to cum.” His words make me tremble as my orgasm extends itself.

I can’t talk right away. Instead, I look at him as I run a hand through his hair. My breath slows and I smile. “I want to be your good girl and give you an orgasm now, Daddy.”

He chuckles and my heart heals a little from all the things that I was worried about. It’s hard to remember that he isn’t rejecting me. That he isn’t going to turn away from me now that he knows what I’ve done.

I thought he was going to fuck me but he gets off the bed and sits down over at the couch.

“Come here, love.” He crooks his finger at me and pats his knee. My pussy quivers again and my mind goes nuts. That look he is giving me tells me I better obey.

Getting up, I begin to walk to him. “Get on your knees.” Oh hell. I can’t breathe at his command. I’ve never heard him

like this but I'm here for it.

I drop to my knees and look toward him, waiting for my next command. "Good girl, now crawl over to me."

When my father or Donnie would demand it or force it from me, I wanted to kill them. With Drew, it's different. I want to do everything he says. It grounds me to know he's in charge. Then again, he's not wanting to hurt me.

Biting my lip, I crawl to him. I sway my hips more than necessary but I'm trying to seduce him. Not that I know how. He unzips his pants and he pulls his cock out. Precum drips from the tip and I moan. I'm almost to Drew when there's a knock on the door.

Frustration hits me. "Go get in the bed and cover up. No one sees you naked but me." He zips his cock back in his pants and opens the door. I have the covers to my chin, hoping it's not a nurse wanting to look over my body.

"Come in, Sergeant." Drew says as he backs away from the door.

I bite my tongue as anger gathers in me. The need to be alone with Drew is overwhelming and this man interrupts that need. He better have a good reason.

Drew looks at me as the sergeant comes toward me. His eyes hold a warning for me not to do anything stupid. The urge to be a brat and tell the sergeant to fuck off, is strong but for Drew, I will be good.

"Ms. Hatterson, I came to tell you that your brother, Donnie has passed."

"Good."

I must shock him because he takes a step back. "I'm sorry?"

"The bastard beat the shit out of me for years. He ..."
Drew comes over to the left side of the bed and pulls my hand into his.

"You don't need to worry about talking, angel. It's ok." He knows how to calm me. I smile at him and turn back to the

sergeant.

He sighs and looks down at me. “I understand there are circumstances surrounding your family that have been hidden and are now coming to light. Had either your father or Donnie lived, they would have been prosecuted to the full length of the law.”

“Thank you. I believe you would have seen that through,” I lie. This man is a moron if he believes that either one of them would have seen the inside of a courtroom.

“You need to come to the station tomorrow to give a full statement about all the things that happened so we can document it and close the case.”

Drew puffs up. “No, you were coming to my house at noon.”

“Drew, I am reinstating you to full duty. I need you to get busy on this Mad Hatter case.”

“Thank you, Sir, but I’m not leaving Maddie’s side until she is back to full strength.”

“I see.” He sighs and looks hard at Drew. “We can put security teams on your house if it will make you feel better.”

Drew is about to argue. He has this twitch under his left eye that tattles on him. It only comes out when he’s ready to fight to the death about a subject he is passionate about.

“That would be great, thank you, Sergeant. Drew will be at work tomorrow after you come to his house to get my statement.”

Sergeant laughs and nods. “Well, you have your hands full with this one, Drew.” He shakes Drew’s hand and leaves.

As the door clicks shut, Drew traces a finger along my left cheek. “I’m sorry angel.”

“For what?”

“The interruption.” He chuckles and kisses me. I kiss him back, happy that we are not awkward or distant with one

another. Hell, happy isn't the right word. Elated. I'm elated that he's accepting me.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



THE REST OF THE EVENING, I held Maddie in my arms as she slept. We only had a few hours of sleep before the doctor came in and told us Maddie was fine to leave. It took some convincing, but Maddie agreed to let Crystal take the fall for The Mad Hatter crimes.

I understand why she is willing to go down for the crimes but I won't let her fall on that sword. Her past is just that, in the past. Except, all I can remember hearing as Maddie told the detectives and my sergeant what happened over the years, is my heartbeat beating in my ears. I want to kill Donnie all over again.

The only thing I can say is that it's done. Being at work seems wrong, especially since I'm technically a killer. I will follow through with the case as Knave has made it come to fruition.

"Vega, we got a lead in The Mad Hatter case, we need to get a move on it."

I catch the keys he throws at me and I stand up, put my jacket on and I can only hope that the scene isn't too crazy. Knowing Knave, it's likely a wreck.

Fuck.



THE DAY FLEW BY AS WE PROCESSED THE CRIME SCENE. Crystal's death was ruled as a suicide and the media ran with it. It's wrong to go along with this story, but it's for Maddie.

I am driving home right now, thinking about how I'm going to enjoy making my girl have multiple orgasms. A smile creeps onto my face before I can stop myself. My phone rings and I hit the answer button. Thank goodness for Bluetooth headsets nowadays.

"Tell Maddie I said goodbye."

Knave's voice echoes in my ear. I sigh, knowing this is going to be hard for both of them but I made a decision to change Knave's name and get him a job in Gotham City. It will work itself out. Once all this shit dies down, I will take Maddie to see him.

"You know I will. This isn't forever. Just until everything settles. Besides, you may like working for Dr. Freeze."

"The guy creeps me out, Drew. Who the fuck has blue hair?"

I laugh so hard I almost miss my turn to the house. "Shut up, Knave, and enjoy your new life. You are getting paid four times what you were as a bouncer."

"True, the damn money is going to be amazing. I left Maddie a present in the mailbox. But don't let her have it until after graduation."

"You got it. Talk soon."

He hangs up on me, and I feel a part of Maddie is going to be pissed as hell knowing she won't get to freely come and go to his house like she used to. Or that he can't come to Wonderland right now. His boyfriend turned out to be the victim we found at the high school. The one where I knew it was a different M.O.

The police already ruled this killing to have been done by Donnie but the parents of the victim aren't having it. They are trying to go after Knave. So yeah, I got him out while I could. Now, to convince Maddie not to go looking for him. I can already smell the trouble she's going to cause.

My girl is on the porch, giving one of the officers a hard time.

“You aren’t getting into the house. Drew will be here in a minute and if you have to pee, you can do it outside for all I care.”

I try hard not to chuckle as she continues to give him a hard time. “Angel, let the man go pee for God’s sake.”

“Thanks, Drew.” The officer side steps Maddie as she barrels herself at me.

“About time you got home.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. I had to deal with a case closing and all.”

“I got bored.”

Oh fuck. “What did you do?”

“Well, I may have slipped out of the back window and went for a run.”

She smiles at me, and I know she is telling the truth. “Dammit little angel, I told you to behave.”

Maddie squeals and takes off running as I chase her. “You aren’t getting away from me that easily.”

The front door shuts and I hear the two officers laughing. My girl is a brat but I know that our future looks bright.

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EPILOGUE



“Daddy!” I scream his name as he pulls me into a room to the right of the auditorium.

“You snuck out again, Maddie.”

I try to look innocent but I know I’m failing miserably. “Well, you were sleeping, and I didn’t want to miss the pre-graduation party.”

Drew growls at me and locks the door. My back hits the wall and he lifts my legs so that I have to wrap myself around him.

“What did you do, Maddie?”

I kiss him so I don’t have to tell him. I giggle when he bites my bottom lip. “Nothing, Daddy.”

“Ah, another lie. What is that? Three lies so far. My oh my, that ass is going to be sore when I’m done with you.”

I moan with the idea of him spanking me. He has helped me enjoy the spankings and not fear his touch in a more violent way. I really do like when he chokes me.

“I may or may not have put a white rabbit card with a “you’re next” note written on it onto the projector when the slideshow starts.”

I gasp as he slaps my thigh. “Fuck me.”

“Gladly, Daddy.” I smirk at him and he runs a hand underneath my skirt that’s scrunched up.

“Goddamn right I’m going to fuck you. You are a brat when I don’t.” He speaks the truth. I am a brat if I don’t have him inside of me at least twice a day.

“Please, Daddy?” I give him my best pleading look. He kisses me roughly, as he dry humps me against the wall.

“How can I say no to that?” he murmurs into my skin as he moves his lips along my jawline.

“You’re not.” I push my hands through his hair and arch into him. “Daddy, it hurts, make the hurt go away.”

“Fuck, angel.” He unzips his pants and I clench my pussy in anticipation. The sound of that zipper going down turns me on so much.

I don’t say another word as he slides his cock deep into me. There’s no need for words now that he’s in me.

Screams can be heard from all around us, and I know they found the card but my only care and thought is Drew and his cock. How he completes me and how badly I want to keep being his.

“Fuck, you are tight. Stop squeezing so much, so I can slide deep into you.”

I almost giggle at the whine in his voice. He loves for me to be a brat, but when he’s fucking me, he wants me to be a good girl.

But why? It’s a lot more fun when I am bad. I clench tighter and Drew cusses. “Goddamn, angel. You just can’t be good for me, can you?”

“Nope!”

He pushes my legs from around his waist and turns me around, bending me until I am bent in half. “Hands on the wall and don’t you dare clench on me again like that.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“That’s my angel.”

I’ll be good for now. He’s giving me what I want—an out of control Daddy. “More Daddy,” I beg as he pulls my hips

back to meet his thrusts.

He isn't gentle, and I don't want him to be. Each thrust gets harder, faster. It's like he has lost all control and isn't going to stop until we are both at the finish line. "Come for me, angel. Come right fucking now."

I tremble as he slams into me, giving me every inch of his cock. The feeling of those butterflies in my stomach makes my nipples harden and my mouth drool a little with how out of this world he makes me feel.

Drew's large hand grabs a fist full of my hair and pulls me up to where I can look at him. "Marry me."

That does it for me. Two simple words make me tip over the edge and into oblivion. I scream out, "Yesssss!"

Drew chuckles. "That's my girl," he says and releases my hair. I smile as he fucks me harder until he's spurting hot cum deep inside of me. I love to feel his cum coating me. There is a possibility that I'm secretly hoping that he gets me pregnant.

He pulls me up and straightens my dress. "Next time I tell you to wear panties, you better do it."

I grin at him and wrap my arms around his neck. "But your punishments are so much fun, Daddy."

With a kiss, he chuckles against my lips and then gets on one knee.

"I know you said yes, but I wanted to do it the old fashion way." He opens the ring box and there it is, the most beautiful pink diamond I've ever seen.

"Maddie Hatterson, will you do me the honor of marrying me?"

I nod my head vigorously. "Yes. But it's my honor to marry you."

He winks at me and slides the ring on my finger. I stare, enchanted by it.

"I love you," he whispers as he zips his cock back into his pants and then stands up. We hug each other and kiss until a

knock comes at the door.

“Detective, you in there?”

“Yeah, I’ll be out in a minute.”

“There’s a situation down at the projector.”

Drew opens the door and looks at me. “Wait five minutes then come out. Go sit down in your assigned seat, and don’t cause anymore chaos for me ok?”

“Ok, Drew.” He leaves and I stand there, looking at the diamond and knowing my life is going to work out just fine.

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EPILOGUE



“Angel?” I call out into the silent house. I don’t like it when I come home to an empty house. Especially when Maddie doesn’t tell me there’s some place she needs to be. Over the last two years, Maddie has been vital in helping me set up my personal security guard and surveillance business.

She opted out of traditional college and took online courses to get her associates degree in accounting. Once we have the baby, she said her college career would start up again. I almost laughed at what she told me she wanted to do but she was so dead serious about it, she brought me research to show me she wasn’t joking. A forensic accountant and ethical hacker. I’m not sure I trust Maddie to hack anyone ethically, but she’s been a good girl in the crime department.

“Maddie?” My voice is strained with panic. The doctor warned us that carrying triplets would take a huge toll on my angel’s body. Where the hell is the live-in nurse?

“Ms. Carrington?” I call out as I walk into the kitchen and see no food. Oh God, what if ...

“Hello Mr. Vega. Mrs. Vega is outside, waiting on you.”

The nurse sets down a basket full of fruit. “Why is she outside?”

“She told me she wanted to enjoy the sun. Don’t worry though, I took her to the enclosed eating area so she wouldn’t get too hot.”

“Thank you, Ms. Carrington. Why don’t you retire for the night? We’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Of course. Have a great evening.” I watch her walk away, and I smile with relief.

As I approach my wife, I realize her back is turned toward me. She’s looking at the flowers ... or at least I think she is. Maddie hates flowers. I laugh at how much of a fit she threw when we planted the damn things. But they’ve grown on her, and I catch her staring at them from time to time.

“My angel isn’t where she’s supposed to be.”

“Drew!” She gets up as fast as she can for a pregnant lady. I smile as she wraps her arms around me.

“Don’t you mean, *Daddy?*” I smack her bottom, and she gives me that beautiful giggle.

“Yes, of course, Daddy.” She kisses me before I can say anything else. “I missed you today. Why can’t I come to work with you?”

Goddamn that pouty little whine of hers still turns me on. I growl at her as I nibble on her ear. “Because you need to be on bed rest, and this is not bed rest my angel.”

“Well, I feel useless.”

Oh no. Not this again. Those hormones of hers are driving me batty. “Angel, you aren’t useless. You are making our little humans; humans that will be here within a week. Now, stop pouting. I have a present for you.”

She gives me a giggle and sits down on my lap. “I think you are going to like this.” I pull out an envelope and hand it to her.

Her little nose scrunches in confusion as she reads the envelope. “To The Mad Hatter ...”

“Oh ... It’s from Knave.” She starts to open the letter, but I feel a wet spot on my knee.

“Angel, you better not have gotten turned on over a letter from Knave.” I playfully pull her hair. She looks at me with wide eyes.

“I ... Oh ... Water ...” I blink at her. “Drew, it’s time,” she says breathlessly.

I pick Maddie up and run to the house as fast as I can with her in my arms. Dialing Ms. Carrington, I let her know that we need to get to the hospital pronto. She tells me she’ll drive. We get Maddie into the car, and I sit in the back with her.

Stroking her hair with one hand, I hold her left hand in mine. She squeezes as the contraction starts. “You are doing so good, Maddie. Keep breathing.”

“I love you Drew,” she whispers and I bend down and kiss her.

“I love you too, Maddie. Never forget that.” I kiss her again as she screams with her next contraction.

One hour, twenty-two minutes, and thirteen seconds later, our babies are born. Two boys and one girl lie in their cribs as my beautiful Maddie sleeps peacefully. I can’t stop staring at my family, knowing that my life is complete and Maddie has the family she always wanted.

The End

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Sneak Peek...

Want to know what's in Knave's letter? Keep reading!

Dear Maddie,

I'm sorry I had to go away. You know I would have taken the fall for you. Don't let the fear of loving Drew and going up in flames let you make a bad decision. Your life is too important and while I know you don't know what love really is, you are loved.

Drew set me up with Doctor Freeze in Gotham Valley. But that's not what I'm writing to you about. I need to tell you something. That extra body in the school, it's related to why I left. But don't worry, nothing will come back to you. I couldn't continue the charade any longer. He was controlling and while I loved him; he had to go. The last straw was when he told me he wanted me to no longer be friends with you. He should have known better.

Also, I'm not exactly gay. Well, alright, I love men, but I love women too and I know I always teased you about if I weren't gay, I'd make you love me. It wasn't a tease, but I know I'm not what you need. You need Drew and he needs you. I will always love you and one day we can see each other again.

Don't you dare kill yourself.! If you do it, I must do it. Remember our pact. Be good for Drew and when this all blows over, we can be a big, happy family.

Love always,

Knave

Knavelton – Coming Soon

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About S.J. Ransom

S.J. Ransom was born in Texas where she currently lives in a small town that is inspiration for her book worlds. She is obsessed with romance novels. She loves writing, reading, crocheting, and cooking unique foods. Follow S.J. in her journey of bringing out emotionally gritty and dark taboo romances to the world.

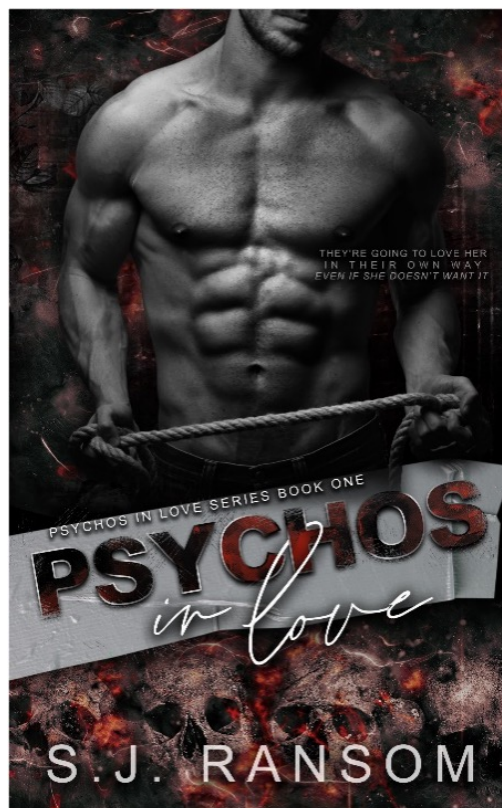
Want to have some fun and get to know S.J.? Join her [Facebook Group](#)

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S.J. Ransom

Psychos In Love – [Get it here](#)



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Blurb:

Charlotte

I shouldn't have witnessed the murders.

But I did.

And now I can't escape the men who want nothing more than to make me pay for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Kronos, Hypnos, and Ayres hold my life in their hands. And they just so happen to live by the motto of *Leave No Witnesses*.

They are psychos who love nothing more than death and destruction, but for some reason I've intrigued them enough to be kept as their pet.

They want my submission, but I'll do anything to get my freedom.

Kronos

I'm under her spell as she struggles to break free. Her eyes haunt me in ways I've never experienced. But she's the sole witness to our crime, and she has to die.

Eventually.

Right now, all I can think about is sinking my cock inside of her, claiming her for all of eternity.

Am I crazy?

Fuck yes, I am.

Especially when it comes to her.

Hypnos

I instantly fell for her, but no one needs to know that.

She's smart - too smart for her own good.

The moment she tried to fight us; my heart woke up from its dull existence.

There was no satiating my desire for her once I took her virginity with my tongue.

Ayres

I shouldn't have called her Kitten.

I most certainly shouldn't have wanted her to call me Daddy.

But those sorrowful eyes nagged at me in unexplainable ways.

My own demise from keeping my distance from her dissipated the moment she gave herself to me.

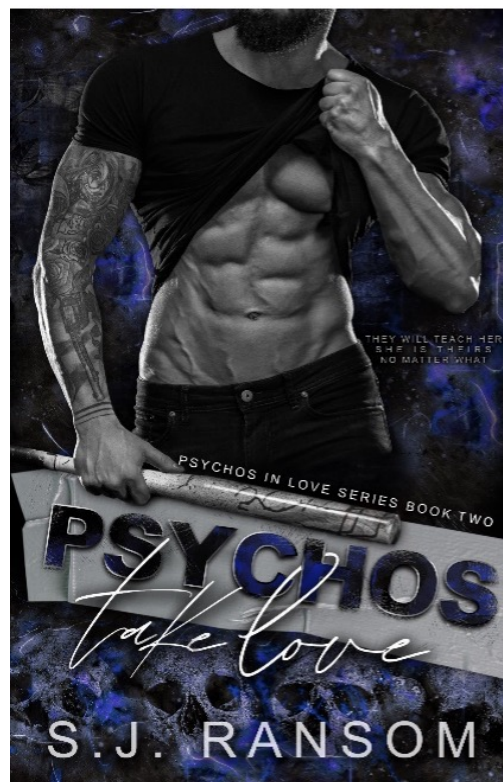
Unwillingly?

Yes, but she liked it.

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Psychos Take Love – [Get it here](#)



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Blurb:

Continue the fast-paced, riveting, and heart stopping story of Charlotte and the Psychos

Charlotte

I tried to get away from them.

I've learned my lesson.

Now, I just want their softness to continue.

But I don't know why.

Nothing makes sense anymore.

Kronos

My little rabbit has spunk and tenacity...

It's something I wasn't sure I'd admire.

Every time those beautiful green eyes look up at me,

all I want to do is lose myself in them.

Ayres

Little kitten's claws have sunk themselves deep into me.

I don't know why, but all I want to do is make her purr.

Especially when she's being naughty.

Hypnos

Betrayal makes me do something rash and permanent.

But the way she looks at me, talks to me, begs for me...it has me forgiving her.

The only problem is, I'm not sure I can trust her.

Haydes

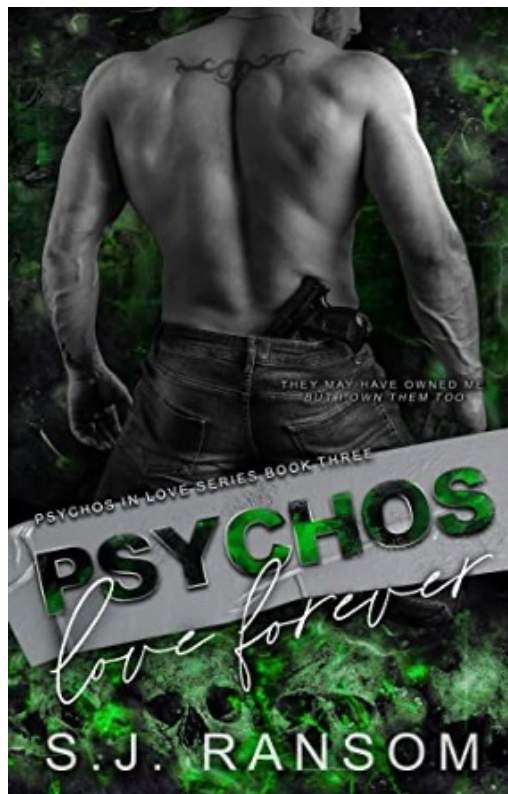
They cannot keep my little bird in the coop.

When the time's right, I'll have what's mine.

I just have to be patient.

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S.J. Ransom



Psychos Love Forever – [Preorder it here](#)

Coming to you on: November 30th, 2022

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Blurb:

Finish the trilogy and find out what happens to Charlotte and the Psychos.

Charlotte: I've been naïve, and that's a cold pill to swallow. If you had asked me just a month ago, I would have told you that betrayal wasn't possible anywhere near me. Boy, was I wrong. It's been a hard lesson to learn that the person I thought was once my protector is now my enemy, and the ones I thought were my enemies are protecting me. It's all really fucked up. Although, I want to believe I've found it in this messed-up trio of men, but have I?

I'm out for blood and not just the three of them, but my once protector. They will all pay before I let them make me bow again. I want to give in to them and let them have their way, but first, I must show them I am not someone they can walk all over. They will kneel before me as the queen that I am.

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