



STALK
ME
GENTLY

SHANNA HANDEL

STALK ME GENTLY

DADDY'S OBSESSION 1

SHANNA HANDEL

WELCOME

Sign up for my Newsletter to be informed of my next release

www.shannahandelromance.com

Stalk Me Gently: Daddy's Obsession 1

By Shanna Handel

Copyright © Shanna Handel 2023 All Rights Reserved



Welcome to this white-hot daddy duet

From the moment I see her I know... She's mine

Reece

When I get the first text I know I'm in danger

The man who's watching me calls himself my daddy

Our first encounter leaves marks on my skin

Scorching-hot memories in my mind

I find myself needing more

If I don't end this soon...

I'll be falling for my stalker

Daddy

She's young and naive with no idea how this world works
The kind of girl that needs a strong man
I'll be her daddy... I'll show her pleasure in pain
I plan to turn her world upside down
Then set her free
Instead I can't let go
There's one solution for my obsession...
Make her mine forever

CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Praise Me Sweetly](#)

[Ella's Story: Cash is King](#)

[More Daddy Books by Shanna](#)

[Also by Shanna Handel](#)

[About the Author](#)

CHAPTER
ONE



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

“LOOK, I SAID I WAS SORRY.” The apology wraps around my mind like a fog, intrusive but with the weightlessness of air. My so-called best friend pauses, waiting for my response.

Mattie’s pleas tug at my heartstrings, but how can I forgive her?

I shake my head, forcing a tight smile on my face, hoping the grin will lighten my tone. “I know. I just need some time, okay?”

“K.” She huffs through the phone and I can picture her pushing her thick fringe of dark bangs away from her face. With black and purple hair, a closet full of leather jackets, and ten tattoos, she really should have been the one to date a musician. “I mean...I told you. We were waiting for you.”

She says it like it’s my fault. Like this whole thing is my fault for being late that night. Maybe it is.

I want to tell her how much her betrayal hurts, how her disloyalty ripped me apart more than his even did. We were supposed to have one another’s backs, always. I can’t find the words, so I simply say, “I know.”

Her voice goes up an octave as she repeats the same story to me for a third time, pleading her innocence in all this. “He kept plying me with drinks and then he came on to me and you know how he is. So damn charming and as handsome as the

devil himself. If I could take it back, I would. You know I would.” There are tears in her voice and it makes me want to cry too.

I twist the string around my wrist—a friendship bracelet she made me years ago. “I know.”

“Please.” She can sense my hardened heart is cracking and she digs her fingers into the edge of what’s left of it, pulling it apart. “Don’t let this asshole come between us. We’re best friends. I don’t want to take on this city without you.”

“I feel the same way,” I say.

But I’m lying. I don’t feel the same. Not at all. Nothing feels the same anymore. There’s been a major shift. Something’s changed between us. Something’s been lost. And I don’t know if we can get it back.

Her voice is tiny, that helpless little girl voice that gets me every time. “Are you still coming Friday?”

I can’t say no. She made a mistake, but she’s my best friend. A few weeks ago I would have said I’d do anything for her. I can do this. Right? “I’ll be at your party. I promise.”

“Oh my god, really? Do you promise? There’s no way I could enjoy finally having my first legal drink at O’Tooles without you.” Now her voice is light and bright and I picture her bouncing up and down on the toes of her Doc Marten boots.

O’Tooles.

Mattie is sweet but self-absorbed. She probably doesn’t even remember that’s where I first saw him play.

“Of course. I’ll be there. See you then.” I hang up before she can say more. Or maybe I’m hanging up before the sob that’s choking in the back of my throat lets loose and tears stream down my face.

I’ve cried enough. Haven’t I? I swallow back the anger, the hurt, and the tears.

There’s a loud banging sound in the hallway that startles me. I hop down from my perch and tiptoe to the door. Opening it and peeking out reveals my neighbor struggling with a large

stack of boxes. He's dropped one on the ground. He gives me a friendly wave. "Sorry about that! Heavy one."

I give him a waggle of my fingers. "No problem. Need help?"

"I got it, but thanks." A dimple on his left cheek shows as he grins.

I close the door and go back to my spot. There's a ledge built into the window just wide enough for me to sit on, my back leaning against the frame, my legs stretched out in front of me.

I've only been here a few weeks and I'm still getting used to the place. The only upside to my new shoebox of an apartment is the big window that overlooks the city. The most prestigious housing development in Manhattan, The West is across from me, its shiny metal and glass a stark contrast to our dilapidated building.

I sit and I stare out the window. My reflection stares back at me. Pale skin. Brown hair. Brown eyes. Nothing special.

Not like all those other girls.

I think of *him*.

The asshole that broke my heart.

I should have known better than to get involved with an indie funk rockstar with a sex addiction.

Jake Jack.

God, even his name makes him sound like the tool that he is. But he was just being himself. I'm the one who was stupid.

I turned a blind eye to the long line of women waiting outside of his trailer after the show. I pretended I didn't notice how many of them happened to be wearing an article of his clothing. I'm not the jealous girlfriend, I told myself. I'm the cool girl. The one who can handle dating a rockstar, a woman strong enough to handle dating a man that every woman in the city lusts over.

But I couldn't keep him.

There was more than one time I walked in on him with another girl or a group of girls. But I kept coming back.

The day I found him kissing my best friend? Well, I guess I finally found my hard limit.

I was an idiot.

I'm smart. Book smart. The kind of smart that made teachers look at you funny when they got your scores back on the end-of-grade test. Smart like I probably could have gotten scholarships to a state college. Had I applied.

When it comes to love, I'm an idiot.

I heave a sigh, staring out the window. I feel that familiar tightening of my throat. Tears burning at the backs of my eyes. I'm not going to cry...I'm not going to cry.

But once again, I'm not strong enough and a single tear rolls down my cheek.

I brush it away with the back of my hand.

My phone dings at me. I slip it from my pocket, checking the screen. A text from an unknown number.

He's not worth a single tear you shed.

Prickles dance across the nape of my neck, making my hair stand on end. *Huh*. That's strange. Who would have sent this? Who knows I'm currently wallowing in self-pity, crying on my ledge, over him?

One of my friends must have gotten a new number.

They keep checking on me, sending texts, flowers, chocolates, wine. They all saw it coming way before I did. I didn't tell them about the party, about Mattie—we're all in the same friend group and that would be awkward. That would be throwing her under the bus.

I just said that I finally wised up and dumped his ass.

They told me I was worthy of better, but it's hard to see that when you're just a sucker with low self-esteem—quoting *The Offspring*, his favorite band other than his own—and you're caught up in a whirlwind romance with a badass rockstar swinging a killer dick.

God.

That thing was huge.

And probably germy as hell after being inside half the women in NYC. I'm lucky it wasn't filled with diseases. I had an IUD and cleared all the tests after our breakup—*it doesn't feel as good with a condom, baby*, quoting Jake Jack, the idiot—thank god.

My disgusting thoughts make another tear spring into my eyes. “Damn, Reece. Stop being so pathetic. He was a bad guy, and you were an idiot, and now it's over.” I press my hands to my eyes, wanting to stop the tears, but I can't.

My phone dings again. During my little trip down STD testing memory lane, I'd forgotten the text from the unknown number.

The screen is blurry through my tears.

I said

He's not worth a single tear

Stop crying

NOW

An eerie feeling comes over me. The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. A little tendril of ice tickles my stomach.

None of my friends would send texts like these.

I feel like someone's watching me. Like someone knows I'm crying—right now—not because they know what I've been through... but because...

They can *see* me crying.

The prickles turn to lashes of hot flames, licking at my skin. The back of my neck burns. I run a shaky hand through my hair.

I'm just being paranoid. Living in a big city will do that to a girl. Enough horror stories are going around to keep your doors locked and bolted twenty-four-seven.

I stare out of my window, peering up at *The West*. I can just make out a few outlines of people in their condos going about their evenings. I picture one of them watching me.

I don't know what comes over me, but I lift a hand and wave, mouthing the word *hello*. I watch the shadowy figures, waiting for a wave back.

God. I'm losing it. Maybe I need to eat. When's the last time I ate?

Thanks to the breakup, I haven't had much of an appetite.

Ding.

I look down.

Hello to you too, Reece

Holy shit.

It's him. The man from the texts *is* watching me. I mean... I kinda knew he would eventually contact me, but I wasn't expecting...

My phone falls from my trembling hands.

I pick the phone up from the scuffed hardwood floors, checking for damage. None. The twenty-dollar screen protector seemed like a fortune at the time but now I'm glad for it.

Is it really him? My fingers shake as I tap back a reply.

Who are you

I wait. Prickles rise on my forearms. I can't tear my gaze away from the screen.

I'll be your daddy now

Little Reece

Doesn't every good girl need a daddy

What. The. Actual. Fuck.

Fear and angst rise with bile in my throat. "*Daddy?* What the hell..."

I stare up at the high rise like I'll see his face, like a clear vision of a man will show up and I'll know just who this is on the other end of the phone.

It's sick.

And wrong.

And scary...

But somehow mixed in with the fear is a delicious thread of danger, one that trickles through my core, a hot wave of lava. I press my thighs together, tugging my bra away from my chest.

I'm turned on.

Fuck.

What the hell is wrong with me?

My fingertips hover over the screen. I should delete this number. I should tell someone. Hell—I should probably call the police.

But I don't do any of that.

I type back.

My dad is dead

I hit send. My father died twelve months ago, and he was my only family in this world. My heart still aches. I'm still scrimping away every extra penny to somehow afford the gravestone he deserves.

Your father passed away

True

But I can take care of you

Babygirl Reece

Oh my god. Again... I knew he would contact me but... what kind of sicko sends texts like this to a stranger? He knows my phone number. He knows my name. He knows my father is dead. I should...run. Shouldn't I? But my nipples tighten further, my panties dampen.

Begging the question: What kind of sicko replies?

Me. I'm the sick one. Because as I type back, my heart races and a warm flush gathers in the center of my chest.

Okay daddy

Where are you

My guess is The West

Am I right

I look up at the building. My gaze rises to the top floor, to the penthouse. A faint glow of light catches my eye, the dark shadow of a tall man with broad shoulders dipping behind the curtains.

Could that be him?

I wait for a reply but my screen stays dark.

He's gone.

I should feel relief, but I don't. I wanted him to text me back. Am I crazy or just lonely or just a sad case mending a broken heart? It was a momentary lapse in judgment to text back in the first place. I won't do it again.

Tomorrow, I'll wake up, sane. I'll tell Mattie what happened, what I did. We'll go to the police station together and figure this out. I'll destroy this phone. I'll get a new number.

Maybe I'll have to move.

But I don't want to go to Mattie. And I can't take the whole *we knew this would happen* sympathetic stares from my friends. We knew Reece would crack and do something crazy with this breakup.

I suddenly feel totally, desperately alone.

I can't believe I'm doing this. My fingers shake, shame filling my belly and making me feel sick.

Are you there

The answer comes back faster than the others.

Daddy is here

Daddy is always here

CHAPTER
TWO



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

I CAN'T STOP THINKING about the texts. Equal parts creepy as shit and hot as hell, they flutter through my mind. The last one stands out the most.

Daddy is always here.

No one has ever been there for me. Not really. What would it be like to have a daddy, to have a man by my side, caring for me? I try to picture it, what it would look like. I try to imagine it, what it would feel like.

I can't even conjure up a flicker of what it would be like. And I'm a pretty creative person. My students think my best skill is the silly stories I make up at the spur of the moment. But this fairytale? I'm just not the princess who gets the happy ending. I've come to accept that fact.

The days go by in a blur.

I don't receive any more messages from him.

I can't admit to myself that I'm disappointed he hasn't reached out again.

I teach private full-day preschool, a great income as I finish up my child development degree online at my own pace, which in the current climate of my life, is snail. My kids keep me busy with messy crafts and boo-boos and runny noses, but I find myself staring out the window.

My eyes drift towards the direction of The West. I know that's where he lives. I know he saw me crying. The thought of him watching me both sickens me and thrills me.

The kids have left for the day. All but little Ashby. Her father is a big shot on Wall Street. He's perpetually late but insists on being the one who picks her up, not the nanny. I respect that so I give him a free pass.

"Ashby, your daddy's a little late today." My face heats as I speak. God, I can't say the word daddy without blushing... I crouch down so I'm at eye level with her little heart-shaped face. "Want to help me tidy up? I could use a helper."

She gives a little shrug, her big round eyes locked on the doorway. "Okay, I guess."

"Thanks. Let's go over to the sink and clean these brushes." She follows me reluctantly to the kitchen area of the room. Together, we run the paint-filled brushes under the water. The reds and blues mix, washing down the sink in a royal purple. "It's pretty, isn't it?"

She nods, watching the paint swirl down the drain. "Red and blue make burple."

I don't correct her. It's too cute. There's a knock on the doorframe.

"Sorry I'm late!" Trevor, Ashby's father comes into the room, rushing as always. His blue eyes lock on mine as he straightens his tie. He gets down on one knee, clapping his hands, a smile beaming across his face. "There's my little pumpkin. Come give daddy a hug."

Daddy is always here....

Shame fills me and I have to look away as Ashby goes flying into her father's arms. He laughs, almost tumbling backward as he stands, holding her. He crosses the room to me. "Look, Reece—"

"That's Miss Weece to you, Daddy," Ashby laughs.

He gives a dramatic sigh. "My apologies. *Miss Reece...here.* Please. Take this." He slips his hand in his pocket just like he

does every Friday, pulling out two crisp hundred-dollar bills.

I look down at the money. I could really use it. Still, I say what I say every week, my hair brushing my shoulders as I shake my head. “I can’t. It’s no problem. Really.”

“Look at it as babysitting money?” Light lines crinkle around those blue eyes of his. “I feel terrible I’m always late and I’m holding you up and you should take it.” His fingers brush mine as he holds out the money.

“We do this every week, you know,” I laugh.

He shakes his head with false sheepishness. “I know. I know. You refuse and I find some way to sneak it to you anyway.”

“Like the taco buffet that a mysterious donor provided for the teachers on Monday at lunch?” I say.

He smiles, his handsome face lighting up. “Guilty?”

I push his hand away. “Really. It’s okay.” My hand lingers on his for a moment too long.

He holds my gaze a beat longer than appropriate. What am I doing? Am I truly this desperate, this lonely? To play text tag with a stranger and now borderline hitting on a parent? I must be going crazy.

Daddy issues...

I pull my hand away, rushing over to the sink on the other side of the room. My voice comes out high and strained. “You guys have a good weekend. Okay? And I’ll see you Monday.”

“Alright. See you, Miss Reece.” His gaze lingers a little too long on my ass as they leave.

I turn off the tap. My hands press into the counter. I’ve got to get a grip. Tonight is Mattie’s party. I’ll go and have enough drinks to forget about Jake, forget about the dirty man who’s texting me, forget about hot preschool dad.

I’ll go and be young and free and dance and drink and I’ll have fun.

I can do that. Right? I’m capable?

I laugh at myself. Who am I fooling? Ever since I buried my dad I've felt lost. That's probably why I hung onto Jack for so long in the first place. Just to not be alone.

Sad, isn't it... I thought being with a man who treated me like I was nothing was better than being on my own. But I like being a part of a couple. I like saying *us* instead of *me*. It's high time I found a good boyfriend. Someone normal. Someone with a steady, boring job like an accountant...

...or a man of Wall Street.

I stare out the window watching Trevor load Ashby into the car seat in the back of his silver Mercedes SUV. A car that says I'm up for a good time, but also with a high safety rating, I'm guessing, for transporting his little girl.

He tickles her tummy and she giggles. He closes the door, his eyes finding mine watching him through the window. Could he be my next good time? He smiles, raising a toned arm, his thick silver watch catching a stream of fading sunlight as he tosses me a wave.

Embarrassed to be caught, I wave back, turning away.

I don't date dads.

But your daddy waits for you...

That little chill dances up the back of my neck like I'm being watched again. Heat flushes my skin, the warmth a faint memory from last night's texts. I spin around, checking the classroom. I'm alone.

I'm always alone these days. Aren't I? Tonight that's going to change. I'm going to forgive Mattie. Apologize to my friends for not returning their calls.

And...

I'm going to dance with a man.

Yes. A stranger. A man I've never even seen before. One that dresses well, possibly drives a Mercedes, and smells like an expensive musk cologne I imagine Ashby's dad might wear on a night out.

With my mind made up, I head home to prepare for my evening out.

Back at my apartment, I slip into a tight little shimmery black dress. The fabric is almost sheer where it stretches across my breasts, showing a glimpse of my strapless black bra. I wear the matching satin panties as well.

Why not? Who knows where this evening could go?

I find a bottle of flat Prosecco in the back of my empty fridge. There's a block of cheese with a little mold on it. I scrape it off, slice the rest prettily, and put the jelly jar of wine on the tray.

I take my tray to the window ledge.

Staring out the cold glass, I nibble at the cheese and sip the wine. It's turned, the taste is sour. Who needs food when you can watch the city that never sleeps? I stare at the sparkling lights, the steady stream of cars, the bustling people who always look like they're running late for something, phones glued to their ears.

I sense the ding, I feel the sound of the notification ding before I even hear it. I'm Pavlov's damn dog; I'm starting to get wet every time I hear the sound. My phone is right beside me, resting on the window sill by my bare thigh, my short dress having slipped up around my hips.

Excitement pulses through my hand as I reach for my cell.

It's him. It has to be him. *Unknown Number* flashes at the top of the screen. My palms go damp as I hold the phone in my hands and read his texts.

Be a good girl tonight

Don't talk to strangers

Daddy's watching

Daddy's...watching?

Is he watching me now?

Or will he be at O'Toole's?

How does he even know I'm going out? Those baby-fine hairs stand up on the back of my neck again. I glance up at the penthouse suite of The West.

No shadow behind the curtains tonight.

I re-read the texts. Be a good girl...Daddy's watching... phrases that should make me sick to my stomach—especially coming from a stranger, but all I feel is a flutter of nervous butterflies in my stomach and a hint of hope in my heart.

I've been lonely. So. Fucking. Lonely.

Is it so crazy to get messages like these and feel a pulse of warmth run through me? Maybe not.

What does his voice sound like? I imagine it sounds deep and stern, the kind that could give you a serious talking to that would make you press your thighs together.

I can picture his height, his build, wide shoulders that demand respect as he enters a room. I'm sure he smells like expensive, woody cologne, the kind older, wealthy men wear, like preschool dad. Maybe he has a six o'clock shadow, a hint of dark scruff along his jawline...

Do I respond?

Or do I end this madness, delete this number like a normal human being, and never tell anyone I let it get this far? Let it be my dirty little secret...my temporary lapse of judgment?

Or do I keep my secret?

And keep him...keep this...madness...going?

My fingers graze over the screen as I decide. My phone dings.

My heart drops when I see it's Mattie and not him.

Caaaaaaaaaan't wait to seeeee you!!

Don't be late

I wish I felt as excited as her texts sound, but the truth is I don't want to go. I'm still confused by her betrayal. But, I've already committed. And made my decision to let loose tonight and find a man to dance with.

And I'm one to keep my word. Even if no one else around me does.

I've got to get going if I'm going to be able to teeter there in my heels by the time the party starts.

Leaving my phone on the sill, I hop down, going to my closet to dig around the discarded pile of dirty clothes for my black leather stilettos. I painted the bottoms red myself—homemade Lou Boutin's—a little inside joke with myself. I will never be able to afford the real thing.

Three coats of mascara and a couple of swipes of knock-off dollar store lip-gloss in Fire Engine Red and I'm ready to go. There's a smile at the corners of my lips like I'm holding back a secret. I look...seductive.

Daddy would approve.

Ugh. Did that thought really just cross my mind? Seriously, Reece? Get a grip. This is madness. What the hell is wrong with me?

Before I leave my apartment for the night, I find myself glancing up at The West. One last goodbye stare. No shadow in the window tonight.

A quick cab ride later, I'm standing alone outside of O'Tooles. The music is thumping at the door to the bar. I hand the bouncer my ID.

"Legal." He flashes a gold-toothed grin at me. "Just barely," he says, slipping the neon pink band around my wrist. His fingers linger too long, making my skin feel cold.

A people pleaser, I flash him a smile as I flinch, moving away from him as quickly as I can.

I go to text my friends but realize I'm forgotten my phone. Damn. That sucks. What if *he* texts...

As I breeze through the door that familiar eerie feeling crawls up my spine.

Am I being watched?

CHAPTER
THREE



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

WEALTH CAN BE A BURDEN.

I know—simply having that thought that makes me the biggest dick in the world, but I’m right. I’m almost always right. Not a boast, just the truth.

I grew up poor. Dirt poor, I believe, is the term my mother used. As worthless as the earth churned up under my shoeless feet as I ran through the barren fields of our family’s farm. Dry, dusty land that proved uninhabitable for not only crops, but for me. When I was sixteen, I left the Midwest and headed to the place I’d been fantasizing about, my only knowledge of the outside world borrowed from our shitty television.

New York City.

I didn’t know much, but I knew if anyone could make it in this world, I could. I would succeed in this life purely because my stubborn son-of-a-bitch ass refused to do otherwise. I started washing dishes in the kitchen of the poshest place that would take me—the Greenwich Hotel. My willingness to work twelve-hour days quickly paid off and I rose to server status. Invisible, I’d work the floor, delivering fifty dollar steaks that would only be half eaten to the business men that run this city. I would listen, observe, make mental notes.

I began to hear one surname mentioned over and over again. Bachman. I wanted to know more about the powerful people

that truly held the keys to the city. And I wanted an education. The wealthy men all seemed to be involved in the same industry: technology. I took online classes, finding I had a gift with computers. I kept rising up the ranks in the service industry, eventually becoming a bartender at the Bachman Family's rooftop bar in the Village, their hidden world set behind a street of brownstone shops and businesses. Just stepping behind their gates was a privilege. They called us non-family service workers *Bachman Friendly*. And god, were they generous employees, paying us not only for our service, but for our willingness to keep our mouths shut.

I'd never seen so much money in my life.

I became obsessed with working harder, making sacrifices to rise to the top. Now, I own and run a successful tech company. Needless to say, the wealth I've accrued is monstrous.

Money is a fickle mistress. Every human on this earth needs a certain amount of money to feel relaxed, safe, content. If you grew up without enough food on the table, you understand. Poverty makes people feel edgy, grow desperate. There can be no peace with an empty belly.

Make money and you can feed yourself, care for your basic needs. Make a little more and you feel like you can finally breathe. Accrue wealth? Real, solid avenues of prosperity, stocks, bonds, savings, IRAs, and you gain power over your destiny. You have the ability to create a bubble of beauty and comfort.

You revel in your privilege. But there's a line. And when you cross it, your god becomes your devil.

I make too much fucking money. Yes, to the still broke ones, there is such a thing. I promise you.

When you're a billionaire investor in a city that literally never sleeps, you can buy anything you want. When you can afford anything you want, you're easily bored. When I get bored, I need something to entertain me.

A pretty little toy to play with.

And how do I obtain my toys? I pay for the information. Cell phone numbers, addresses, names. Same as a luxury sports car that's just hit the market, when I see a girl I want, I spend the money. It's like shopping at a toy store but the stock's limitless, flawless, and made of flesh and blood.

Last week at my favorite bar, *Cue Ball*, a little dive on Ninth, I was waited on by a beautiful waitress in a purple tulle tutu showing off a lip ring and a *daddy's girl* tattoo. I had my people contact the bar, track her down, and give her ten grand for a night with me. Of course, my offer came with the demand she sign an NDA. I'm incredibly generous, but I have a reputation to uphold.

She accepted. The sex was hot and filthy and everything I anticipated it would be, but afterward, the heat faded fast.

The only thought left in my mind was how soon I could get her out of my bed.

Most of my escapades end like this.

It's unnerving, feeling unfulfilled after such a great night of sex. Is there something wrong with me? Or have I just been batting with the wrong playthings?

I'll soon know.

I've found a new shiny toy.

Five feet and two inches of pure perfection.

One that has me burning like never before.

Reece Bright.

She's just like her name.

The girl is radiant. A single shining star dotting an ink-black sky. A light in this dark world. A glimmer in my black heart.

She's a preschool teacher at Letters and Lunch, an exclusive school just down the street from me. Some of the teachers look tired by the end of the day, that worn-out look pasted on their faces. But not her.

She's still smiling.

Average height, average build, pretty brown hair that falls perfectly around her lovely V-shaped face. You may not see it at first glance, but look closer.

She's stunning.

Breathtaking.

Gorgeous.

The moment I first laid eyes on her I knew...

She's mine.

I was pleasantly surprised to find her apartment was across from my building. A hovel of a place on the fifth floor of a crumbling mid-century modern monstrosity of a building that's been hacked into tiny square apartments. I can practically smell the dank communal bath inevitably residing at the end of the dark hall.

She has a favorite spot. I'm guessing when she walked into the tiny place, her eye instantly went to the window and she told them she'd take it. She spends her time lounging behind the massive expanse of glass, seated on the sill, hugging her knees, contemplating the endless possibilities of the city.

Her hair parts down the middle and falls against her shoulders like a curtain as she tries to hide away from the world she so carefully observes.

She just turned twenty-one. I'm almost two decades older than the girl. Sinful, isn't it? But I don't see it that way. She's a lost sheep in need of a shepherd.

And a good shepherd isn't made by a boy.

She needs a big, strong man to protect her. To correct her. To care for her.

I'm that man. She just doesn't know it yet. But she will soon.

By the end of this night.

I dress in my dark gray suit, the one that brings out the blue in my eyes. Women comment on my eye color often. I wear a starched white button-down without a wrinkle in sight. I pay for the best help in the city and I demand excellence. I study

my freshly shined shoes to be sure they meet my expectations. They do. I slip them on and slip platinum cufflinks into the wrists of my shirt.

The reflection looking back at me is one of a handsome, well-dressed man with rugged good looks and a thick head of hair. A result of good genes—the only thing I inherited from my parents—and possibly all those years of fresh air and sunshine as I broke my back working my family's useless fields. Oh, and also a result of my assistant, Ashely. She purchases my clothing, has them tailored, and books my many grooming appointments.

Tonight, I've had a fresh shave. I wear a new suit. All for her.

It's all for her now. I need to look my best when I finally meet my baby in person. I ride the private elevator down from the penthouse suite. I make my way through the crowded lobby. The usual Friday night of well-dressed lawyers from Bachman & Bachman and the women desperate to snag them.

I get a few well-meaning looks my way, their dark lashes batting at me, the rise and fall of their breasts in their low-cut, curve-hugging dresses meant to draw me in, to tempt me. I give a polite nod and look away. There is only one thing that tempts me in this world now.

Her.

Leaving The West, I cross the street, bouquet in hand. Pink peonies amongst other flowers, and a little butterfly broach attached to a wire that's stuck in the mix. A nod to the tattoo on her right ankle.

Moments later I'm at the front door of her apartment. She's left her door unlocked. Of course she has.

Like I said, she's in desperate need of a daddy.

Tsk. Tsk. Naughty girl.

Anyone could walk in.

I close the door silently behind me and enjoy the solace of being alone in her sanctuary. The faint scent of her lotion fills

the air. Strawberries. I place the flowers on the center of the table for her to find when she returns.

She left her dinner behind. Lifting the glass, I smell the wine. It's gone bad. I lift the tray, taking it to the kitchen to wash her dishes. If you could call the cramped space a kitchen. It's small and old, the Formica cracking at the edges, but the counters are spotless. She takes care of what little she has. Excitement rises in my chest as I smooth a sudsy rag over the glass. I'll be the one to show her what real wine tastes like. I'll be the one to open her very first bottle of fine wine.

There're a few slices of sad-looking cheese forgotten on the wooden tray.

A night out drinking with the girls, and she didn't eat a proper meal first? For shame. Everyone knows some food in your stomach helps absorb the alcohol. A good meal can be the difference between a pleasant evening out and becoming a sloppy drunk. I dry my hands and open her kitchen cabinets. The hardware is clean. The cupboards are bare. There's a half-empty box of pasta and one can of tomato sauce. The cheapest food available, or maybe my baby craves Italian food?

I'll take her to Naples for pasta fritters, to Rome for carbonara. I finish washing and drying the dishes and carefully put them away. A throwback to my first few months in the city, my own shitty apartment.

I return to her favorite place in the apartment, to gaze over the bright lights of the city. What's this? Her cell phone sits out on the sill of the window. She left without it, putting her safety at risk.

Strike three.

My naughty girl is in desperate, desperate need of a daddy.

Making barely enough to pay for this apartment and her online classes, she must not have enough left over for decent food. She obviously can't afford an entire dress because that tiny scrap of fabric she walked out of here was anything but a dress.

That will change.

Everything will change for her as soon as she accepts my proposal. I grab her phone and slip it into my pocket. I make her bed. Fold her clothes. Hold a discarded sweater up to my face and inhale. Her sweet scent lingers on my skin. I want to keep the shirt, but she might need it. I reluctantly place it in a drawer.

When I'm satisfied with the apartment, I leave.

Time to find my girl. My pulse quickens as I make my way to the street. My driver waits for me on the curb. O'Toole's is a short ride from her place. Anticipation gathers in my chest as we grow closer.

She's still in line when I arrive, her arms wrapped around her body to shield herself from the cold.

She should be wearing a coat. No matter. Daddy will take care of that. I flash my pass and slip into the side entrance for the VIP's.

Or in my case, VID.

Very Impatient Daddies.

I'm a big name in this town. People are eager to please. Everyone wants a seat at my table and an invite to my annual gala, something Ashely's forced me into, telling me I need to be involved in local charities. The NYCG, the New York Compassion Gala. It's a fundraiser for some worthy cause, but I use it as an excuse to throw the biggest party of the year. Every year I attend solo.

This year I'd like to have my shining star on my arm.

I greet Greg the bartender, taking the tumbler of whisky he offers me. Having a drink ready for me before I even reach the bar? The gesture meets my expectations.

"Thanks." I take a sip of the whiskey. It's delicious. Smoky with a killer bite. Looks like Greg just made the list. I give him a nod. "See you at the Gala."

"NYCG?" His eyes light up with pleasant surprise. "Thanks. See you then."

The amber whiskey swirls against the sides of the glass as I wander through the club.

Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

There she is, having finally made it to her turn at the door. Just as gorgeous as when she left, a hint of rose on her cheeks, fresh from her travels. She gives a little shiver from the cold, and I want to wrap my jacket around her.

Not yet.

I watch as the bouncer grins at her like he'd like to eat her. Over his dead body. He snaps the pink band around her wrist deeming her drink worthy, his fingers gliding over her skin as he does.

This will be his last night working the door at O'Toole's. He's lucky I don't break his hand. If he ever lays a finger on her again, I will.

Her gaze flits away from him and she makes her way through the door. She releases a heavy sigh then looks around the room for her friends. There—she's spotted them over there on the other end of the club. Relief tinged with dread washes over her features as she tugs at the impossibly short hem of what she thinks passes for a proper dress.

It does not.

Dressed in black, possibly trying to look older than their tender age, her friends are gathered around a high-top table, drinking and giggling.

Reece joins them. Mattie—the one that's supposed to be her best friend but stole her boyfriend—brings her in for a tight hug. I suppose I should thank Mattie for her disloyal actions. They finally knocked some sense into my Reece.

Jake Jack was a jackoff. An asshole. Not fit to breathe the same air as my princess.

One of the girls in her group lays eyes on me. I slide into the shadows. The last thing I need is some young thing with daddy issues trying to flirt with me. I've already got my hands full.

She's busy with her friends. The one that noticed me slips off to the bathroom. The perfect time to make my move. Keeping my face turned, I cross the room, sliding by their table. I deposit Reece's phone on the sticky black top without being noticed.

I find a dark corner and lean back, enjoying a sip of my drink. I'm ready to play. My finger flies over the screen.

She looks up, surprised when she hears the ding of the notification. She'd thought she left her phone at home. Grabbing it quickly, she glances around, looking for someone.

Me.

The corners of my mouth turn up in a smile.

Her eyes graze right over me. Past me. I'm hidden in the shadows. She glances back down on at the screen of her phone and reads my words. They make deep pink splotches rise on her lovely cheeks.

She'll soon have a matching set on her ass.

I've told her as much via text.

Daddy knows you left your phone

And your door unlocked

And where's your coat

Naughty girl

Daddy will have to punish you

Her hair hangs down, hiding her flushed face. I await her response.

You were in my house?!

Are you here now

She looks for me. I creep further into the shadows. I go to respond but now a man is coming up on her left. The ex?

He's sliding an arm around her shoulder.

Heat burns through me just watching his skin touch hers.

Mine.

I want to kill him.

CHAPTER
FOUR



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

WHAT THE HELL is Jake doing here? My skin crawls as I duck out from under his arm.

“Jake. I—I didn’t know you’d be here.” I have to hold back from shooting daggers at Mattie. Instead, I take a deep breath to calm myself and give her a glance.

We’re out of sync these past few weeks but she can still read my expression. She just shrugs, mouthing at me the words *Sorry, I didn’t know!*

Ignoring Mattie, Jake showers me with all his attention. He flashes that handsome as the devil smile and gives me a piercing gaze with his gorgeous eyes. His perfect white teeth gleam under the club lights. Like a shark, ready to take a bite out of his prey.

“Um...hey.” Do I sound as nervous as I feel?

“Hello, gorgeous. I knew you’d be here.” He goes to kiss me.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I turn my face, offering him my cheek. He brushes his lips across my cheekbone. Slow and sultry. Some nerve. But ego is one thing Jake never lacked.

He laughs, shrugging a broad leather-bound shoulder. “Just that I heard around town it was Mattie’s b-day. I figured you’d have forgiven her by now. And you have. Here you are.”

“Okay...”

He leans in so close I get a whiff of his familiar cologne. The one I love. The one I bought for him.

His eyes graze seductively over my lips. “What about me? Can you forgive me?”

His voice. God, his voice. It’s deep, soulful, and just hearing him speak takes me back to wild nights and broken hearts.

Suddenly dizzy, I step back.

I never would have come if I’d known he would be here.

Deep betrayal stings as it burns through my chest all over again. I look to my friend. Did she really not know he was going to be here? Mattie pleads me with her eyes to believe her. I do.

This is the kind of thing self-absorbed Jake would do — show up uninvited to a birthday party being thrown for the girl he cheated with.

I steel my nerves and grab his gaze. “You should leave.”

He croons. “Come on now, butterfly.”

God, not that...his nickname for me from the silly butterfly I had tattooed to my ankle on my eighteenth birthday. The tattoo was a bad decision.

So was he.

Looks like they’re both here to stay.

He props a shoulder against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest. “I can’t leave.” The corner of his mouth turns up in a grin.

“Why not.”

The smile on his face grows. “Didn’t you know? Stingray’s back in rehab and our band is standing in for *Coldskins*. I’m headlining tonight. I thought that’s why you girls came.”

He’s the band?

Fuuuuuck.

A tall man with a jean jacket and ear piercings comes to our table. He gestures to Jake. “Hey man, we gotta go. Sound

check.”

“I’ll be right there.” Jake looks like he wants to try to kiss me again. “See you girls after the show.”

“Mmm hmm.” I move away. I wait a moment before I glance over my shoulder. Jake’s gone. I scan the room. He’s on stage with his band, setting up his gear.

Mattie wraps me in her arms and squeezes me tight. Her mouth tickles my ear. “I swear I didn’t know he’d be here. I thought it was another band.”

“I believe you. Let’s just try to have fun,” I say, but my voice is high, strained.

She pulls me in tighter. “God, that guy is a creep. Thanks for not telling anyone in the group what an asshole I was. They’d never forgive me.”

It’s been weird, hiding their affair from our friend group. I feel hot and stifled. I give her back a pat and pull away.

I should go. But how can I leave?

Mattie’s just being handed her first legal drink and now Jake is blurring into the background of the night and we’re cheering her on as she chugs a sticky-looking pink concoction. She slams the empty glass down and lets out a loud howl.

The room seems close and suffocating. My head is spinning, all the Jake and Mattie stuff coming back to haunt me.

I need air. “Hey, Mattie. I’ll be right back.”

She grabs my hand, squeezing it. “Okay. Be quick. We’re doing shots.”

I wouldn’t let her walk away alone, but she doesn’t even ask me where I’m going. I’m kind of relieved, though. I need a moment.

I pass through the club and out a side door. The night air cools my face. I close my eyes, breathing deeply.

“Hey.” A heavy arm slides across my shoulders. “There she is.”

Jake...

He followed me outside.

I stare up into his eyes. His pupils are enlarged, round black circles giving him a wild look. Is he on something? I'd heard stories when I was with him about uppers he'd take that would make him feel like a god on the stage. I stayed far away from that stuff. If he was doing it when we were together, he wasn't doing it around me.

"Here I am." I slink out from under his arm. "What are you doing out here? Shouldn't you be getting ready for your show?"

"Yeah. I am," he croons. "But I wanted to do something first."

"What?"

He leans in, and that cloudy cologne waft of memories circles me, choking me. His lips are a breath away from mine. "This."

He's coming in to kiss me. A forceful, possessive kiss using his whole body. I can't just turn my face and offer my cheek this time.

My skin feels crawly and damp. I push my hands against his chest. "No. I don't want you."

"Come on, little butterfly. I never got a goodbye kiss. Don't you owe me at least that? A goodbye?" He grips my upper arms hard, pulling me into him. I try to push him away, but he's too strong. I squeeze my eyes shut tight, like if I can't see it, it's not happening. His mouth is hot and wet as he presses it against mine.

And then, he's gone. My eyes fly open. There's a gray suit jacket blocking out Jake's leather one, then a thud and a moan. Jake is slumped against a brick wall.

In his place stands a man with the bluest eyes I've ever seen. His hair is dark, cropped close with just a hint of silver at his temples. He's tall, muscular, and fills out his tailored suit jacket perfectly.

I'm guessing his body is a work of art under that suit.

But I can't tear my gaze away from his face.

God, those eyes...

He moves towards me. It doesn't occur to me to be scared. I let him wrap an arm around my shoulder, heavy and warm with protection.

"Are you okay?" His voice is low and rough, a rake running over gravel. I'm surprised by the gruffness of it, a stark contrast to his smooth businessman look. The voice could belong to a gangster, a mafia boss, but his look is so clean.

His gaze holds mine, demanding an answer.

"I—I'm okay." I take a shaky step backward, overwhelmed by his presence.

The man looks over his shoulder. "That asshole's going to be knocked out for a while."

I peek past him at Jake. He moves, giving a moan, but his eyes stay closed. At least he's alive.

The man turns back to me, shrugging out of his suit jacket. "Here. Put this on."

"No, thank you. I'm fine—"

But the stranger already has the jacket over my shoulders. The warmth from his body is trapped in the coat. He wraps it around me like a blanket. His scent is bold and clean and just the right amount of musk. I find myself inhaling deeper into it.

"You're not fine." He stands there evaluating me. He crosses his arms over his chest, the crisp edges of his white button-down shirt ironed in a sharp line that runs down his arms, creasing at his elbows. "But you will be."

With wide eyes and my breath caught in my throat, I watch him unhook his cuff link. I stare, mesmerized, as he slips it into his pocket and starts rolling up his sleeve. He does it carefully, methodically.

Holy shit. Watching him roll up his sleeve is making my panties melt off my body. How is that possible? The gesture

has my sex pulsing and my thighs pressing against one another under my short dress.

I pull his jacket tighter around me.

A low groan rises from the ground.

“Asshole,” the stranger mutters, nudging Jake with the toe of his polished boot.

“Yeah,” I say. “You can say that again.”

The man with blue eyes reaches out for me. “We’re leaving. Text your friends and tell them you’re going home.”

“What?” I take a longer look at the man.

I know him. He’s not taking his eyes off me. It’s been a minute since I’ve seen him. He’s changed his hair. It’s longer and swept to the side. With my focus being on trying to get away from Jake, then the adrenaline rush of the attack, it took a minute but now, I’m sure. It’s him.

My daddy from the texts.

What do I do? Turn and run, screaming for help?

Do I go with him? He did just help me, protecting me from Jake. His hand is big and strong in that way that makes you feel secure. I stare at his face.

There’s something there I trust.

And something that scares the shit out of me.

But I promised myself I would dance with a man tonight.

I guess this will be our dance.

He will be that man.

My fingers shake as I send the text.

Hey guys I decided to head home early

Have fun

I place my hand in his.

“Good girl.” The taboo words send a tickle of shame and pleasure down my spine.

His hand is warm as it wraps around mine. Mine feels absolutely tiny in his. He gives it a tug. "This way."

I've seen enough movies where women get hacked up by serial killers to know that this is the part where I'm supposed to ask in an innocent, breathy voice, *Where are we going?*

But I don't.

Because I don't care where we're going. I've been lonely and lost and now he's here. He's finally found me.

And I just want to be with him.

I know who he is.

"We have a lot to talk about, don't we, Reece?" His husky voice croons the words and the sound ripples through my chest. It's as stern as I'd hoped it would be.

My heart thuds against my ribs, blood whooshing past my eardrum like waves crashing into the shore. I'm terrified right now. So fucking scared. But I don't let go of his hand.

He tugs my hand in a demanding way. "Daddy's talking to you."

"I know." My voice comes out shaky and breathless, just how I feel. "We do have a lot to talk about, Daddy."

CHAPTER
FIVE



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

TO FINALLY HEAR her say the word *daddy* makes the vast emptiness in my chest fill with hope. She knows I'm the one who's been sending her the texts.

"How did you know it was me?" I ask.

"I just did." Her voice is barely a whisper as she gives a little shrug. She looks up at me with those brown eyes and I feel my world shrinking to accommodate only her. Sadness sweeps through her gaze as she thinks of her father. "I remember you from his office."

My throat tightens, thinking of my late lawyer. "Your father was a good man."

"I know. I miss him. When I saw you, it took me a minute to place you, but I remember you now. I'd seen you around his building. And at the...funeral. I remember your blue eyes." She openly studies my face. She brings a hand to my jaw, fingers fluttering over the small scar there. "And this..."

The tip of her finger runs along my jawline. The tiny touch is powerful, directly connected to every nerve ending in my body, bringing all my senses to life.

She was my lawyer's daughter. Way too young and totally out of bounds.

I end the conversation of her father, taking on a new subject.
“You’ve been careless with your safety.”

Her eyes cut to mine. “Like letting a stalker lead me away down a dark alley?”

So I’m her stalker now? Funny. I hold back a chuckle.

“No. Going to the bar tonight with no phone, leaving your door unlocked so anyone could walk in.”

“You walked in,” she says quietly. “That’s how you brought me my phone.”

“I did. But I belonged there.” I pull her to a stop. She doesn’t run screaming when she tells me she knows I was in her place uninvited. She trusts me. It’s time to tell her.

“I have a proposition for you,” I say.

She glances up at me. “Tell me.”

“One night.”

“One night of what?” she asks.

“You are mine for one night.” I pause, enjoying the lovely flush that creeps up her cheekbones. “I know what you desperately need. I’ll provide it for you. Just give me one night.”

A flicker of hope dances past the fear in her eyes. Her teeth sink into her full, glossy red bottom lip. She’s thinking. “How do I know you’re not some kind of psychopath?” she says.

But as she says it, her eyes meet mine. And I know she knows I’m no psycho. I’m just a touch...possessive.

Obsessive.

“I’ve got a full contact list for you. References you can call if you want. They’ll tell you I am who I say I am. The rest, you’ll have to trust.”

Her eyes flutter to mine. “You know what I need?” Her voice is so quiet, I almost don’t hear her. “How do you know what I need?”

“I just do. I know everything about you.”

She stares up at me for a long time. I know she'll say yes, but until she does, I feel like I'm standing on a tightrope strung between two high rises, ready to fall off at any moment. The world swirls beneath my feet, my head going light.

Finally, she gives a shaky sigh. "Okay. One night."

Hell. Yes. I slip my hand along the side of her neck, cupping her cheek. I pull her ear to my mouth. "First, you have to be punished by daddy."

She pulls away, trembling. "What for? How?"

I move to the back of her neck, slipping my hand through her hair. The strands feel like silk as they glide between my fingers. "Daddy wants you to think more carefully about your safety. Take your phone. Lock your door. I'm going to punish your ass so the next time you leave your apartment, you'll remember."

She gives a little shiver. I expect my threat to make her pull away more. I'm pleasantly surprised when instead, her hands go to my chest. My skin instantly heats at her light touch. Instead of pushing me away, she runs them over my hard muscles.

Her eyes flit to mine. "I don't know." She gives an unconvincing sigh.

I tip a finger under her chin, forcing her gaze to meet mine. In the flicker of her gaze, I see everything I need to know. She wants this—needs this—as much as me.

"I do," I say. "And you're coming with me."

She waits a beat before she finally submits. Her teeth dip into her full lower lip. "K."

I knew she'd be like this. Soft. Sweet. Shy at first but eventually accepting what she wants, what she needs. How did I know?

I've been watching her a long time.

I know exactly what she needs. She needs me.

Most girls would have run away screaming by now, and rightfully so.

Young women need to be careful about who they allow in their inner circle.

There are all kinds of creeps out there.

But I knew she would be curious about me. That she would be brave. That she would know I mean her no harm other than a sore ass.

I never want to hurt her.

I simply want to own her.

We reach the end of the alleyway. The tall black door with the gold knob that I know so well welcomes us. I flick the door open. Pale light floods the alley.

My tone dips an octave, anticipation warming my vocal cords. “Welcome to my office.”

I have a few hole-in-the-wall ‘offices’ around the city I conduct business in. This one is my favorite.

Only the best for my little Reece.

This place was the city’s most popular speakeasy in the days of prohibition. The feel of debauchery still lingers in the air. Perfect for what I have in mind.

She steps over the threshold, looking around.

It’s an echo-y den of concrete floors and walls. A vast, empty space save for one black leather Chesterfield sofa. The solid piece of furniture claims its place in the center of the room like a king. The couch is an exquisite piece and pure perfection for what I have in mind.

Its low arms are the perfect height to punish a naughty girl.

Her saucer-like eyes travel around the space. “What is this place?”

She jumps as I close the door behind us, locking it.

“It’s a place I do business.” I take her hand, leading her over to the sofa. She watches with fear-filled eyes as I sit down on the

couch, spreading my legs for her. I pat a thigh. “Come here.”

She glances around the room. It’s only us. She takes a few nervous steps towards me, pauses for a moment, then steps back.

“You want me to sit in your lap?” she asks.

“Yes, kitten. Come sit on daddy’s lap.” I pat my thigh again. Patience was never a strength of mine.

She’s unsure. Nervous. I’m a big, scary man. A man she barely knows. One who’s got her locked in an undisclosed location. She’s been taught to be wary of men like me. To run in the opposite direction.

But none of that matters now.

She needs only to obey.

My gaze grants her fair warning. “Don’t make me count.” My fingertips graze the buckle of my belt.

She reconsiders her delay.

A perfectly white tooth sinks into her full, lush, pink bottom lip as she eyes me, caution dancing beneath her dark lashes.

“One,” I say. The deep timbre of my heated voice vibrates through the cold, harsh space.

In one fluid movement, she rushes between my legs. She perches on the edge of my thigh. I take her arms and wind them around my neck. At first, she’s tense, but a moment later, her arms tighten around me. Her body relaxes. Her warmth presses against my chest, her weight rests against me, soft and vulnerable.

It’s a feeling I’ve been longing for.

I slip my arm around her lower back, cupping the curve of her waist in my hand. I slide a finger down the side of her face. “So beautiful. And all mine for one night.”

Her eyes catch mine. “What are you going to do with me?”

“I thought I made that clear.” My hand slips up her thigh, leather against silk, stopping just below the hem of her skirt.

Her skin is smooth and cool under my palm. Her dress is short. I catch a glimpse of her panties. Sexy black, shiny material that my fingers can slip right over. “I’m going to punish you.”

“How?” The tip of her tongue shoots out, wetting her bottom lip. It takes everything in me not to kiss her.

Too soon.

“When little girls are naughty, what do their daddies do?” I ask her.

“I—I don’t know...”

I bring my lip to her ear, nipping at her lobe. “He puts her over his knee and he spansks her.”

“Um...” She pulls back, startled. “I don’t...know about that...”

“I do. Daddy knows what you need.” I slip my hand further up her skirt. I tease the soft flesh at the top of her thighs, parting them with my fingers. She gives a pretty little gasp of a sigh. Her lids go heavy, but her body is tense.

With a whisper kiss of pressure, I run the tip of my finger over her panties—the material just as silky smooth as I thought they’d be—right down the seam of her sweet pussy, wishing my finger was the tip of my tongue. Her body shakes and jerks at my touch, tight as a spring.

“Now be a good girl and put yourself over daddy’s lap.”

She sucks in her breath, teeth sinking into her pouty bottom lip. “No. I don’t think I can.”

I move my finger up and down. Her breaths deepening as I tease her pussy over her panties with my light touch. I whisper, my words hot against her ear. “We had a deal, sweetheart. I give you what you need, and you give me one night of what I want.”

Her breaths come faster, her breasts rising and falling as she overthinks my proposition. Pink splotches rise on her cheeks. She slips her arms from my neck. “I can’t.” She grabs an arm of the couch, pushing herself away from my lap, from my touch.

“Naughty, naughty, my pretty girl. Does babygirl think she can run from me?”

Her eyes flash, a wild fawn caught in the presence of the hunter. Her teeth sink once again, gaining purchase in the soft flesh of her pretty, pouty bottom lip. Her voice rises an octave as she answers me, her words the note of a song. “Nooooooo...”

But her gaze tells me different as it darts right to left, looking for the nearest exit.

“I know you can do this, pretty baby. I know you can obey daddy. I’ll teach you. You’ll learn.” I grab her waist, tugging her over my left thigh.

She cries out, “Oh!” wriggling in a feeble escape attempt as I pull her over my thigh. I lock her in place, throwing my leg over the backs of both of hers. My pretty baby isn’t going anywhere. Her toes brush against the floor, her arms reach out, hands searching for an anchor to steady her in this wild new world I’ve introduced her to. Her fingers sink into the leather arm of the couch.

I move my hand to her barely covered ass. I’ve wanted to touch her gentle curves for so long...a dip of pleasure shoots through my chest as I brush my fingers over her cool skin. “I know you can do what your daddy asks of you.”

“Hmm...” The sound she makes is caught somewhere between a moan and a question. Chill bumps rise on the backs of her thighs at my touch. I dip a hand between her thighs, traveling upward and finding her warmth. I want to tease her, to make her beg for daddy’s touch. I massage her pussy over the gusset of her damp panties.

She’s wet for me. Fuck. She’s so, fucking, wet.

“Tell me you can.” The softness of her makes my words go gravelly and rough. “Tell me you can do what daddy tells you.”

“I...” Her hair hangs down, hiding her shame. She offers no other words.

Moving my fingers, I part her pussy over the panties, rubbing her clit through the thin, damp fabric. I love the way she responds to my touch. Her hips sway with shame, greedy to get all she can from my touch.

She gives a soft sigh then moans, “Oh...oh my god.”

I work her with my fingers. “Tell daddy you can take whatever punishment he wants to give you and I’ll let you come.”

“Unh...” She wriggles her hips wanting more. She bumps against my already hardening cock. It feels so good having her locked against me, responding to my touch, wanting more.

I rub faster, circling her clit over the gusset of her panties. “Say it. Be a good girl for daddy.”

She gives a little whimper, her hips circling clockwise against me. Finally, she breathes the words I ache to hear.

“I—I can take it. You can punish me...Daddy.”

Her last word is a whisper, and it makes my pants uncomfortably tight, my cock throbbing beneath her lithe weight. “Such a good girl.” I drop my hand from her sex.

Her head snaps back, her face trying to find mine. “Hey. You said you’d make me come if I—”

“And I will.” I cut her off with a sharp smack on her ass. She jumps in surprise, letting out a hot little yelp. “After you’ve been punished.”

CHAPTER
SIX



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

WHAT HAVE I AGREED TO? A man I've barely met who's almost twice my age demanded a contract. And I just said... *yes?*

I thought I was the one in control, but I'm not. He's turned the tables on me, taken over my own game. Now, I've given him myself for the night...what does that even mean?

It means—a wave of cold perspiration prickles at my skin—he can do anything he wants with me...

A feeling caught somewhere between fear and anticipation courses through me with such ferocity I can't process it and it crashes down around me throwing my senses into overdrive. Each touch makes my heart pound harder, my breaths come faster.

Nipples hard as rocks...check.

Pussy wet and throbbing...check.

Sex clenching, wanting the massive cock I can feel hardening under my belly...

Check, check, check.

But this is wrong. So fucking wrong.

If it's wrong, then why do I want it so badly?

His hand lands on my ass. I let out a yelp. "Ow!"

The fire spreads over my skin and pulls me from my hurricane of thoughts.

This is not the time to dissect my daddy issues or figure out the reason I'm in this mysterious warehouse laying over the lap of a strange man. One who's been sending me filthy taboo texts.

I just need to come.

"Please." The whine rises in my voice need surging in my core. I know what he wants me to say—his cock stirs beneath me in anticipation. "Please, Daddy, please make me come."

"Didn't you hear daddy, princess?" His hand cups my ass cheek. "I have to punish you first."

He arranges me with my forearms resting on the low, wide arm of the sofa, my torso tilted up. He slides an arm around me, his hand flattens against my clavicle.

He wraps his fingers lightly around my neck. Possessive. Controlling. Like I'm something he owns.

His fingertips stroke my skin. His touch is so... *erotic*...I lose my breath. I've never had a man touch me like this... each move, each brush of my skin carefully orchestrated like a brushstroke of an artist.

He's nothing like the twenty-something assholes I've dated. I've never even been with a real man.

He's shifting my body, repositioning me to his liking. He frees my legs, lifting them, resting them over the cushions of the couch. My bottom is centered directly over his lap. My knees sink in the buttery leather, the tops of my feet rest on the other arm of the sofa.

My tiny dress is all hitched up, my panties on full display. The leather is cool against the bare skin of my legs but my face is on fire, white hot flames of shame licking at my face and the back of my neck.

I'm beginning to understand this won't be a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am kind of arrangement at all. He's experienced and

patient. He knows what he wants and he'll take his time to get there.

He's so much older than any man I've been with. And he has peculiar tastes.

Ones that I'm finding I share.

Still, I'm fucking crazy to let this man lead me down a dark alley and lock me alone in a warehouse with him...

He squeezes my right ass cheek with his palm as the fingertips of his other hand stroke my jawline. "Who's my naughty little girl?"

My world spins as the words slip from my mouth. "I am, Daddy."

I like saying 'daddy,' it turns me on. I like his hand smacking my ass, telling me I'm naughty.

He smacks my ass and the sound echoes through the vacant room. "You need to make your safety your first priority. Lock your door." A sharp spank lands, making me suck air in-between my teeth, "and take your phone with you." His hand lands in a volley of short, stinging smacks. "Understand?"

The sting settles into my flesh. I wriggle my hips like it will alleviate the fire he's set on my ass. "Yes, daddy. I understand."

He shoves my dress further up my hips till it circles my waist. The cool air rushes over my warmed skin. He smooths his hand over my satin panties. Chill bumps rise on my flesh.

"Such a pretty, pretty girl. You look so beautiful laying over my lap, just like I knew you would." The tip of his finger dips beneath the elastic band around my ass cheek. He snaps it back in place. "Tell me, kitten. Have you been wanting a man you can call daddy?"

What the fuck am I doing here?

My words tremble from my lips. "I don't know...I didn't really know this kind of thing...existed..."

He runs a finger down the cleft of my ass over my panties.
“You didn’t?”

“No.” Fuck...his finger is pressing through the material...is he going to touch the entrance to my...I wriggle my hips over his lap, trying to get away from his touch. “What are you doing?”

His finger inches closer. He is *soooo* going there. I wriggle harder, but his fingers tighten around my neck, making me pause.

“Not tonight, of course,” he says, “but one day...this,” a whine rises in the back of my throat as he puts pressure on my asshole, “will be mine.”

He lets me go enough that I can perch up on my hands and whip my head back to face him. “I don’t think so.”

His blue eyes bear into mine. “You blush so pretty when you lie.”

Fuck.

“Now lay back down over my lap and let me do what I want to you.”

I’m too filled with shame to respond. Instead, I obey, laying myself back over his lap.

His fingers glide up and down my cleft and the satiny material of my panties aid his teasing trail. Whenever the pad of his finger brushes over my ass, I tremble.

I finally find my voice. “What makes you so sure there will be another meeting? I’ve only agreed to one night.”

My words have his finger traveling straight back to my asshole.

“What makes you so sure there won’t be?” He presses against it, the pressure making my throat feel tight. It feels strange and shameful, but good, sending tingles through me kind of like when he was stroking my pussy...but different in a way I can’t put into words.

A little bloom of submission rises in my soul like I *want* him to take me there.

“I...” My throat tightens and I swallow hard. “I don’t know.”

He moves towards my waist, hooking the waistband of my panties in the crook of his fingers. “I’ve been watching you, Reece. I know you’re lonely. I know you need a man in your life. And I know that man needs to be a stern daddy.” He tugs at my panties, pulling them down over my hips. “That man needs to be me.”

Laying over his lap, having him touch me through my clothing is one thing....having him see my bare ass is another. I squirm against him, suddenly shy and scared to be bared to him. “Um, do you think we can leave those on?”

He gives a dark chuckle that rumbles deep in his chest. The sound reverberates against me. “Kitten, daddy wants to see every inch of your beautiful body.”

Somehow when he proposed one night in exchange for something I need, I forgot to consider the whole me-being-naked part. My friends tell me all the time how hot I am, how they wish they had a body like mine.

I don’t see it.

I’m painfully shy—I didn’t even change my clothes in front of my ex—and now this whole thing is too much. Funny, I let him spank me, touch me, touch my ass, but my cross-the-line-point is him seeing my bare ass.

I push off of him and turn to face him. “I’m sorry, but I have to call this off. I can’t do this.”

His voice goes stern, dragging me from my thoughts. “Did you forget? I have something you need.”

His eyes lock into mine, pools the color of the ocean, and for whatever reason, I trust him. But I still don’t think I can follow through on our crazy arrangement. No matter what he might have.

“Come. Sit on my lap.” Leaving my panties around the tops of my hips, he scoops me in his arms, sitting me on his big, strong thigh.

Something in me wants to wrap my arms around his neck.
Bury my face in his chest. Inhale his scent.

Crazy.

I'm ending this. Right?

But it feels so good to be here in his arms. I'll just stay another moment. Then, I'll politely ask him to pay for a cab. I'll regroup. I'll make a new plan. I'll figure out how to proceed once I'm in the safety of my own home.

A home he's been inside of...

I can't believe I've let things get this far.

I look away.

He slips a finger under my chin, tilting my gaze up to meet his. "Baby. You know I have something you need. And you have something I want. You. But this exchange only works between us if you want it."

His face moves closer to mine. His lips are now just a beat away from mine. I can feel the heat coming off him. "Do you want to see what I have for you?" he asks.

Kiss me...kiss me...kiss me...

"Mmm hmm," I murmur. With his lips this close to mine, I've forgotten everything we're talking about. I just want his mouth on mine. I just want him to kiss me.

What would it feel like?

He's got to be a good kisser. As gorgeous as he is, as experienced as he is, I'm sure he's a damn good kisser.

I close my eyes. I wait for the kiss. I sense him pull away.

Damn...

My eyes snap open. He's slipping his hand into his pocket. What's this? Something shiny. It's... a key. An old-fashioned-looking brass key on a red ribbon.

One I desperately need.

That key belongs to me.

CHAPTER
SEVEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

HER EYES WIDEN as she stares at the key.

I've had it for weeks, resting in the drawer of my desk. When her father died and a mutual friend of ours brought it to me, I didn't think much of it. He said Mr. Sheffield wanted me to have it, for safekeeping. I wasn't given any instructions other than that. I slipped it in the drawer. Got back to work. Completely forgot about it.

Then one of the secretaries overheard Reece asking about it. Said she needed it badly. The secretary came to me. Told me Reece was looking for it. Suddenly, the key was powerful, unlocking a whole new world to me. One with Reece at the center of it. She became the sun of my own personal universe.

I saw my opportunity.

"Something I want for something you need." I raise the key in the air, letting it dangle from its red ribbon.

"I've been looking everywhere for this." She reaches out, letting her finger connect with the metal, then pulls her hand away. "It was my father's."

"Here. It's yours now." I take her hand in mine, letting the key fall into her open palm. I curl her fingers around it.

"He has this old cabinet in the back of his office. It's still there, but no one can get it open. I'm hoping when I get inside

of it, it'll help me figure out what happened to him," she says.

Find out what happened to him?

I respected her father—he had a sharp mind for twisting the law—but he wasn't the healthiest man. We were told he'd died of a heart attack, a fate from too much stress and fried foods. "I thought he had a heart attack," I say.

Her teeth sink into her bottom lip and she shakes her head. She opens her hand to look at the key. "I don't think so."

"What do you mean?"

She glances up, the look in her eyes close to trust but just out of reach. "I just have this feeling that there was something more going on. Maybe...foul play?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Something he said just before he died. Something about keeping your friends close and your enemies closer." She shakes her head. "I don't know. Maybe I'm crazy. But he seemed on edge before he died."

"And you think this key will lead you to clues?" I ask.

She gives a shrug. "I think it will at least lead me to whatever it is he's been keeping in that cabinet. He told me once that he kept everything that meant something to him in there."

"How will you get into his office? The law firm is very private. I'm not sure they'll let you in there, now that he's passed."

She shrugs. "I haven't gotten that far. I don't know. I was thinking of maybe applying for a night shift cleaning job or something like that to get access."

"No," I say too harshly.

Her eyes shoot to mine, and she pulls back. The idea of her traveling in the city at night, cleaning offices, has me physically upset.

I temper my tone. "That won't be necessary. I can get them to let you in."

I pull her in closer, wrapping my arms tightly around her waist. I love the feel of her weight on my thigh, the warmth of her skin, the smell of her hair. I want her to always be safe in my arms.

But I only have this one night.

I need to make the most of it.

First, I need to ease her mind.

“I’ll help you.” I take a deep breath, inhaling her sweet scent.

“I’ll find out whatever I can about your father.”

“You will?” she asks.

“Yes. I know people in high places. Ones that owe me favors. I’ll see what I can find out.”

“Thank you.” She gives me a radiant smile. *Bright*. My little star.

I take the key from her hand, slipping it back in my pocket.

“I’m going to hold this for safekeeping. I’ll get you in this week.”

Her eyes trail after the key. “I can keep it.”

“Where?” I ask. I eye her dress. “You don’t have pockets. You don’t have a coat. You don’t have a purse. What you’re wearing is barely a dress.” I run a fingertip along the hemline of her skirt. It’s ridden up to the tops of her thighs, proving my point. I can see her pussy, her panties still around the tops of her thighs.

She tugs at the hem of her dress. “This is a perfectly nice dress.”

I let my finger slip under her short skirt. “It’s a sexy little number, yes. But I wouldn’t call it a dress.”

“What would you call it then?” She crosses her arms over her chest and gives me a naughty pout with her full lips.

A pout that makes my cock ache for her.

“I call it a silly little scrap of fabric that I’m about to take off of you.”

“Humph.” Her argument is weak. A spark of light flickers behind her eyes.

I travel further beneath the dress. My fingers find the gusset of her panties between the tops of her soft thighs. The fabric is damp. “What’s this?”

“What?” Her cheeks bloom with rosy patches. She looks away, unable to meet my eyes.

I explore further, running my fingers up and down the seam of her sex over her panties. “Your panties are damp, young lady. Somebody’s all wet for daddy. Aren’t they?”

My touch makes her hips squirm. My words make her pretty flush deepen.

“That’s not *my* fault,” she protests. Her hand goes to mine, trying to push me away in her shame.

I don’t let her. I move my fingers harder, faster against her sex. Her hips start rolling. “Tsk, tsk, naughty girl. Never push daddy’s hand away when he’s touching you.” I move my mouth to her ear, nipping at her lobe as I stroke her over her panties.

“Mmm…” She moves against me, making a kitten-like mewling sound. A delicious little shudder travels through her body.

Her hand leaves mine, but she leaves it hovering near.

My lips graze her ear. “Does daddy need to put you back over his lap for another spanking? Or are you going to be my good girl?”

CHAPTER
EIGHT



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

THIS IS CRAZY.

I shouldn't let him touch me like this. I shouldn't be hanging on to every one of his filthy words. My breath hitches in my throat. My fingers open and close, my hand wanting to grab his and pull it away from me.

But I don't.

I give in.

I've been so lost, so lonely, and his touch, being so close to him...

It's intoxicating.

For tonight...for right now, I'll be his good girl.

I told myself I'd dance with a strange man tonight. I just didn't know how strange the dance would be. And how much it would turn my world upside down.

Now my arms wrap around his neck and my head rests in the cradle of his shoulder. I'm biting my lip and trying not to cry out as his fingers rub my sex over the satiny gusset of my—yes, daddy, you're right—very damp panties.

My sex melts further, a warm, liquid feeling spreading through my core. His arms are strong around my waist, making me feel small and protected. My ass presses against his lap.

His heat, his scent, his deep voice, his touch, it's all around me, cocooning me like a weighted sensory blanket that is just ...him.

The words fall from my mouth. "Oh, daddy..." A hot lick of shame plunges deep inside me as I hear myself say them.

The stubble of the five o'clock shadow darkening his chin scratches at my cheek. His breath is hot against my ear. "There's my good girl. There's my good girl," he hums to me as his fingers move faster, harder, making my hips buck against him, my ass grind into him.

My sex clenches and I feel another wave of arousal dampen my panties further.

He feels it too.

He gives a dark chuckle that rumbles against me. "My pretty baby, so responsive for her daddy."

His fingertip sneaks past the elastic band of my panties.

Oh my god—he's going to *touch me*, touch me. I think *finally* and *oh no* at the same time. Anticipation swirls through me, my head light and my sex tingly. His skin meets mine. A deep shudder tears through me.

Now his finger is gliding over my slick sex and my mind goes fuzzy as heat flashes over my skin. He finds my entrance, pushing past my tight muscles with his thick finger. God, it feels so good—what would it feel like to have his cock in me?

It's big—I know from his hardness digging into my ass cheek.

I want him inside me. I want to feel his weight over me. I want to know what it would be like to have my naked body pressed against his. He pushes his finger further inside of me, stretching me, filling me. My aching sex clenches around him, wanting more.

He nips at my earlobe. "You're so tight. So sweet and so tight. And wet. So wet for your daddy."

"You make me like that," I whisper, shivers running down my spine. "You do this to me."

“Because you were meant for me, Reece. I’m the only man who can give you what you need.”

He’s not talking about a key.

He’s talking about him. The way he is. The daddy inside him that is giving the little girl inside me the care and attention she needs.

I’m fucking crazy, aren’t I?

God. This...stranger...has me totally under his control. I’d do anything he asked right now if he’d just keep his hands on me. But as he breathes against me, pulls me closer and whispers dirty-sweet-everything’s in my ear, he stops feeling like a stranger to me.

He feels like someone I’ve been waiting my whole life for.

I want to see him again after tonight.

I want him to be...mine.

“Unh...mmm, oh my god...” The orgasm takes me off guard, the warm wave turning to a crashing tsunami that has me rocking, whining and clinging to his neck.

“There you go, baby. Come for daddy. Come all over daddy’s finger.”

Fuck—he’s filthy.

His sexy words force a second climax to build up inside me, my body begging for the next wave of sweet release. I’m ricocheting against him. A whine rises in the back of my throat. “Yes, daddy, I’m going to come.”

“Of course you are. You’re my good girl. Come for me... *now.*”

On command, the climax builds through me, leaving me breathless, speechless, flushed and flustered.

He moves his finger deeper, stroking my clit with the pad of his thumb, milking waves of the orgasm from me. His stubbly cheek caresses mine. “Come for me. Come for me, babygirl.”

Babygirl... like the text.

God, I love the sound of that word.

It's my undoing. I moan, clutching him like he's my anchor, like he's the only thing holding me to this earthly plain. I bury my face in his chest and I hold onto him while my mind and body feel like they leave this world.

He's kissing my cheek, his lips brushing against my skin.

"There you go, sweet girl—"

I come so hard I hear the chiming of bells. "Oh my god!"

The bells don't stop. Wait... that's not bells, it's a phone ringing.

Now?

"Shit. Sorry, baby." He wraps an arm protectively around my waist, taking his hand from me and sliding it into his pocket, telling me, "Hold on a second."

Still shaking from the aftershocks of my orgasm, I watch his face as he takes the call. The muffled voice in the background is barely audible but the tone sounds intense.

His jaw locks, his dark brow knitting together.

What could the caller be saying to him?

"It is what it is. I'll head that way now. Make it two passengers for London. I've got company."

Huh?

He hangs up the phone and looks at me. "Have you got a passport, kitten?"

"Do I have a passport? You mean to go to London with you?" I've never left the state, let alone the country, but I don't want to admit it. I move off his lap, scooting beside him on the couch. I quickly reach up under my skirt, sliding up my panties. "Ah...no."

His fingers tap at his phone screen at lightning speed. "No problem. I'll take care of it."

"Um. Don't you need my ID or something?" I'm trying to think where I left my purse in my apartment. I should be

telling him I'm not going.

"Nope." He shakes his head, swiping up. "I've got guys I pay for things like this."

"Oh."

He's deep in emails and texting, his dark brow knitting together as he works. It gives me a minute to think. This is crazy—I know. And he's a stranger, yes, but my dad knew him, worked for him, so he can't be bad, right? But a free trip to London? How can I turn down this opportunity? I've always wanted to go to Europe, but on a preschool teacher's salary, the idea was nothing more than a bucket list item.

Free. Trip. To. London.

I watch his sexy fingers as they tap across his phone, making things happen. I think about the way those fingers felt on me. I sneak a glance at his handsome jawline, the cuff of his sleeve, the collar of his suit jacket that makes him look oh-so-much-older and distinguished than the boys I've dated.

But I've not said yes. Wait a minute—he didn't even ask me, did he? He just assumes I will go with him. This crazy stalker went into my apartment, took me to a warehouse, and did delicious but very dirty things to me, then just tells me I'm flying across the world with him and he's having a passport made for me.

Reece—get your head out of your pussy and think clearly for one damn minute—you cannot go. Not only do I have work responsibilities that I refuse to ignore, it would also be insane to jump on a plane with this man and...

Wait...

All I've called him is daddy. The only way he's referred to himself is as daddy. I need him to tell me his name.

I reach out, placing a hand on his wrist to gain his attention. "Hey."

He stops his work, his blue eyes meeting mine. "What, baby?"

His calling me baby so casually makes my hand flinch from his. He says it like he's said it for years, like he knows me, like

I really am his baby. And I... I like it too much.

I clear my throat, trying to hold on to that fleeting clear-headed thinking I found. Stay with it, Reece.

I shake my head. “You haven’t told me your name.”

“Right.” He holds his hand out to me. “Well, Reece Bright, let me introduce myself. I’m Bryant Long, and it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Bryant. That’s a nice name.” I stifle a giggle at his playful, formal tone. I offer him my hand, and he takes it. His eyes pierce mine, holding my gaze as he brings my hand to his lips, brushing my skin with their soft heat.

He lets me go. “Look. I’ve got to get going. I can put off this trip for maybe”—he glances down at his Tankard watch—“twenty, maybe thirty hours, but that’s it. You can go home, grab what you need, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

My head is spinning at the craziness of these plans. “The rest?”

“Hiring a last-minute replacement for you at work so you stay in good standing with your employer, the food, the entertainment, and of course, a wardrobe. I have a woman who helps me with all that. She’s a godsend.”

Why do I find myself bristling at the mention of another woman? Ridiculous. This night just gets more and more unbelievable.

I just get more and more unbelievable.

But no matter how much I tell myself to do the sensible thing and get the hell out of here, I can’t. I can’t say no to him.

Finally I manage to squeak out an answer. “Let me take a minute to think about it?”

“Sure. Take all the thinking time you want.” He goes back to his screen, mumbling as he works. “Just know in twenty-four hours your ass better be on my private jet or I’m coming crashing into your apartment and dragging you with me, even if I have to throw you over my shoulder.”

The image makes me squirm in my seat.

Hot.

But wrong.

Right?

I don't know. I just don't know anything anymore. I need a minute by myself to breathe.

"Can you please call me a cab?" I ask, straightening my skirt.

His brow knits together. "A cab? You're taking my driver. And he'll stay parked outside your apartment until you decide you're ready to join me."

A private driver? Seriously?

I look down at the thin line of red ribbon hanging from his pocket. The key. The cabinet. My dad. I can forgive myself for forgetting my mission to find out what happened to Dad with Bryant's giant proposal looming before me. "And the key?"

He pushes the ribbon further into his pocket. "What's done is done. I promise to help you, but can it wait till we return?"

"I guess. Wait. I mean, I haven't said yes yet."

He leans forward, brushing his mouth against mine. "But you will." His light touch sends electric pulses dancing over my lips.

What do I do?

He swipes the pad of his thumb over his phone screen. "The car is ordered. Derek should be outside by the time we get to the front door."

"I don't know—"

I don't have time to decide for myself because he's grabbing me around my waist and lifting me from his lap. He stands, taking my hand in his. "Come. Let's get you to my car."

His hand is big and warm, protectively cocooning mine. I like it. I know it's crazy to let him lead me back through this warehouse, into the dark night, and put me into his car, but I do, I let him. I sneak a peek at his dark, stubbled jaw. It's

locked tight, a little muscle in the corner twitching away like he's mad or something.

Have I done something wrong?

What a silly thought—he's the one stalking and hooking up with a girl half his age.

Still, that little *tick tick tick* of his jaw muscle worries me.

I squeeze his hand.

My small gesture sends something through him, a lightness. His face brightens and he looks down at me with an almost smile. "Yes, kitten?"

"Are you...okay?" I ask.

"Yeah. Sure." He runs a hand through his air. "I'll be a hell of a lot better when I'm on the other side of the ocean dealing with this business crisis, especially since I'll have you by my side."

"I haven't—"

"I know." He cuts me off. "You think you haven't decided but I know that deep down you know you're going."

"Humph," I say.

"That wasn't much of a no. I'm not a betting man, but I'd put down a cool million on your ass being nestled down in the leather seat of my private jet by this time tomorrow." The pad of his big thumb runs over the back of my hand, sending little electric pulses dancing over my skin.

He opens the door to the warehouse and the chilly air robs me of my sassy response. My teeth lock and my hand leaves his, my arms wrapping around myself to keep warm.

"Here," he says, taking off his suit jacket. "Take this." He wraps the coat around my shoulders, slipping my phone into one of its pockets.

"I can't take this. Then you'll be cold." I'm grateful for the warmth, the clean masculine scent that is him enveloping me.

“Daddies don’t get cold.” He leans down, his lips brushing against my ear. “Don’t tell daddy no. Or I’ll take you in the backseat of this car and put you right back over my lap. Understand?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I whisper. The thought of him doing that to me...my panties are melting.

“Good girl.” He gives my ass a farewell pat, opening the car door. “Now get in here before you freeze your ass off. I swear to god that thing you’re wearing is not a dress.”

I slip into the velvety black leather of the back seat. The car still has that delicious new car smell. There are a hundred buttons and gadgets on a panel between the backs of the two front seats, a dim blue light shining from them.

I scoot back, careful not to accidentally touch one of them. Who knows if he’s got an ejector seat in here. I might accidentally bump a button and shoot right out the sunroof. This car looks solid, high-tech, and expensive. I could easily screw something up.

He pops his head in the car, a stern look emanating from his deep blue eyes. “Be good. Don’t leave home without my driver. I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon.”

My mouth gapes open like a codfish but no words come out. What use is it to argue with this man? He always gets his way. I sigh and snap my jaw shut.

“That’s what I thought.” He kisses my cheek. It’s a soft, chaste kiss, one a father might give a daughter before tucking her in at night, but it makes my sex clench and my panties dampen.

God, I’m a filthy girl...

“Good night,” I finally muster.

“Goodnight. Reece Bright.” He flashes a handsome smile with his enticing lips curling up to one side and I feel his sexiness right down in my core.

He closes the door.

It’s only then that I acknowledge that I’m not alone.

“Hello.” I catch the eye of the dark-haired driver in the review mirror. This must be Derek. He’s got his own stern daddy look, almost as tough as Bryant’s. But no one can match Daddy’s. I lean forward. “Do you need my address?”

“No, ma’am. Mr. Long already sent it to me.” He pulls away from the curb, heading towards my apartment.

How does Bryant know my address...oh, that’s right. He’s been stalking me. He knows who I am. Where I work. Who my friends are. Where I live. He’s been inside my apartment and he knew where I’d be tonight.

I have a stalker...

A shiver runs down my spine and I pull the jacket tighter around my shoulders. But the shiver is not altogether unpleasant and it turns to a warm, jittery feeling growing in the pit of my stomach, a feeling akin to—*what am I feeling?*

Excitement?

My life has been mundane at best. A cloud of loneliness follows me around most days.

Bryant made me feel...special. Beautiful. Sexy. Worthy of his attention, his obsession.

Is that what I am to him?

An obsession?

I don’t know. I don’t know if I care. Because right now an all-expenses-paid trip to London with a man who seems to have my every need on his mind is right there for the taking.

All I have to do is say...

Yes, daddy.

CHAPTER
NINE



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

THERE'S SO MUCH MORE to Reece's story. She left my mind churning, questions keep coming like waves. I'm wondering what really happened to her father, how he died, and why he chose me, of all people, to give his key to. What the hell could be in that cabinet? And why am I involved?

I barely knew the man.

I have people who can investigate. Same as having Ashely purchase the items I want for Reece, I can have my guy dig up every piece of information there is on her father, but this feels personal. This time, I don't want anyone else knowing my business before I do. Reece is mine and that means any sensitive information pertaining to my babygirl goes through me.

Our impromptu London trip will be the perfect time and place to interrogate her. All good daddies know how to extract information from their babygirls. I want to tease her, torture her, touch every inch of her beautiful body until she gives me what I want. Her sweet release, and the truth. Just thinking about how I can delay her pleasure, drawing information from her, makes my cock harden.

I think of the way her body felt over my thighs, her skin under my fingers as I smoothed my hand over her bare ass. The way she fit so perfectly in my arms as she sat on my lap, nuzzling her face against my neck. She's going to be all mine, sleeping

in my bed, waking in my arms. It's going to be an incredible trip. It may end up being the best of my life.

I'll take care of everything. I'm settled in my home office, surrounded by the richness of mahogany and the smell of the Black Dragon cigar I recently enjoyed, a pleasure reserved for only a few times a year when my mind is whirring.

Needless to say, Reece Bright has me... distracted.

Today is Saturday. She's welcome to go about her day pondering, questioning, and debating with herself if she should go with me. I'll allow her that freedom.

Then, I'll be picking her up at six o'clock sharp.

The jet is on standby.

We'll have dinner and champagne and I'll feed her strawberries dipped in fresh cream. I'll let her taste the finest things in life. Then, I'll taste her. She smells so sweet, the scent of her pussy lingers on my fingers, driving me to distraction. I'll make her come, then, I'll do... other things to her.

Things I've been dreaming of and planning for weeks.

Naughty girl...

First things first. Her work. I don't want my baby feeling a bit of stress and she takes her job seriously. She's a responsible employee. Hasn't missed a day. She's never even called in sick with a hangover, something girls her age tend to do. I don't want her to lose any respect or get in trouble with work.

We'll save all the getting into trouble for when she's with daddy.

I call her boss, Ms. Greene. She picks up on the first ring. "Hello?"

I put on my smoothest voice. "Ms. Greene?"

Her voice brightens at the sound of mine. "This is she."

"My name is Bryant Long," I add a slow smile to my words. "CEO of Long Line Tech?"

Everyone, and I mean everyone, has heard of us. If you haven't, you've been living in a cave.

Ms. Greene has certainly heard of us, judging by the excitement in her voice. "Oh! Mr. Long! I know who you are. Your company funds our reading program every summer. The one that donates tablet readers to economically challenged kids? And subsidizes their families' Wi-Fi?"

I'm drawing a blank. I donate a lot of money. Millions. The venture she mentions does sound like something my assistant Ashely would sign us up for. Her heart's as gold as the highlights in her blonde hair.

I'm a more of a grinch.

I clear my throat. "Ah, yes. Well, the youth, they are our future, aren't they, Ms. Greene?"

"Oh, I couldn't agree more." Her voice goes syrupy sweet. Ms. Greene must be single. I can practically see her fanning herself now. "And weren't you voted the city's most eligible bachelor last year?"

Was I? I might remember Ashely mentioning something like that to me. "I've been told that, yes. Though I don't put much stock in fake awards. I'm more interested in earned ones, such as the award one of your young teachers won. Reece Bright."

"Reece? Well, I'm not surprised. She's one of our most dedicated teachers. What did she win?"

"As you've said, the Long company is very invested in our future. We've chosen one young teacher to take to London for a few days to broaden the worldview of the children when she returns to the classroom. Reece will experience a first-class tour of the city and learn history and culture firsthand that she will share in the classroom when she returns."

"This is exciting," she says. "What's the program called?"

Shit.

What is the program called?

Daddy tours of London? Daddy's good girl gets spoiled overseas? I've been a bad girl, teach me a lesson?

“Teach me the world,” I say.

“What a marvelous opportunity for young Reece.” Her tone softens. “You know she lost her father not long ago. They weren’t super close but it left her with no family to speak of in this world. And then there was that matter of her and that boyfriend... Jake the Snake, we call him. If anyone could use a trip to London, it’s her.”

“Yes. She’s a very special girl.” *My special girl.* “So you’re okay with her missing a week of work? It’s such short notice, I’ve got interns I can send in if you’re shorthanded.”

“No, no. My nephew’s been substituting for us. The board approved him—I wouldn’t want to get tangled in a nepotism web, but he’s wonderful and the parents and students love him. We’ll be fine. You just tell Reece to enjoy herself.”

“Thank you, Ms. Greene.” I drop my tone an octave. “It’s been lovely speaking with you. Have a wonderful evening.”

“You too... Mr. Long,” she croons.

My next call is to Ashely. Ashely is my everything in the business world. She does all my scheduling, planning, prepping, she basically keeps my head on my shoulders and my entire work life organized. She’s a gorgeous girl, but I’d never cross that line with one of my employees. Though I get the feeling if I gave her so much as a wink, she’d be eager to test the waters.

“Hello, Mr. Long! How can I help you?” Her chipper *what can I do for you* lilt instantly calms me. It’s one of the reasons I hired her.

“Ashely, I need a favor.”

Before she even knows what I’m going to say, she shoots back an eager, “I’m on it.”

Ten minutes later, armed with Reece’s clothing and shoe sizes (checked by me when I was in her apartment yesterday) as well as the color and style of clothing I require, she’s tackling my requests.

She'll take care of everything and have it all to Reece's apartment in a matter of a few hours. I can't wait to see Reece in the clothing we're purchasing. I couldn't manage without Ashely and I make sure her paycheck reflects that fact.

Before we hang up, I add one more thing to the list. "Ashely. Stop by my place on your way to Reece's apartment. I have a note I need you to deliver to her."

"No problem, sir. Anything you need."

"Thanks."

We hang up. I draw a small white business card size of creamy card stock from my desk drawer. I grab my favorite pen and scrawl my message across the paper. The message is short. Only six little words, but they will turn her entire world upside down. She has no idea what's coming. She has no idea what I know.

I give a moment for the ink to dry, reading what I've written. There's a knock on the door. That'll be Ashely.

My houseman gives me a quick nod. "Sir, Miss Ashely is here for you."

"Send her in," I say.

Ashely quickly goes through each item she's purchased. Another great thing about her—she values my time. The items are perfect, exactly what I imagined for Reece. That's how it always is with Ashely. I ask, she delivers. Every time.

She holds out her manicured fingers to me. "And the note you'd like me to deliver?" she asks, eyeing the crisp white envelope on my desk.

I'd almost forgotten. A smile curls at the corner of my mouth. I can't wait for Reece to read it.

"Ah, yes." I hand her the note.

My babygirl is in for quite a shock.

CHAPTER
TEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

IT'S SATURDAY MID-AFTERNOON. After a sleepless night of tossing and turning, I've still not made up my mind. I lie awake on my bed, my sheets tangled between my bare thighs, my skin still feeling alive from his caresses. I've never met anyone like him. I've never felt the way I did in his arms. Safe.

But I'm not, am I?

I mean, the man broke into my apartment. Sure, he cleaned up and left flowers, but still... I finger the little butterfly pendant I found amongst the bouquet. There's a little bit of bright red on its wing.

I'm playing with fire and I'm going to get burned. I think of his chiseled jaw, his stern daddy tone. He's not a man who's used to being told no. Part of me doesn't even want to say no. I want to run into his arms screaming, *Yes daddy! Take me away.*

I want to go to London, I want to see the world. I want to be alone with him on a beautiful, romantic vacation. I want him to touch me, whisper his dirty words in my ear, I want him to make me come.

I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm pacing around my tiny apartment, my bare feet cold against the worn wood.

Do I go? Do I not?

How does one make such a life-changing decision as to hop on the private jet of one's stalker, who also happens to be twice one's age? And what about my job? He said he'd take care of it but I'd never jet set without giving my boss a proper heads up and making sure she has coverage for my classroom.

But. I need that key.

I think of him taking the key back from me and slipping it into his pocket. Why did I ever let it leave my hand? Why didn't I just demand it from him?

His voice rumbles in my mind, saying, *Because no one makes demands of Bryant Long, babygirl.*

A nervous giggle tickles through me. He would say just that. But damn, I never should have gotten in his car and left without it. I have to get it from him. That's what this whole thing was about from the beginning, wasn't it?

If I don't go to London with him, I may never see that key again.

If I'm being totally honest? This mission has gone off its rails. I'm so far from where I started with my plans. I thought I could do this. I thought I could pull off this facade, get what I need, and get out...

Forgetting all about him.

But I can't. It's not only that I can't forget about him, he's become the only thing on my mind, the center of my thoughts. And damn...those fingers of his...if he could make me come that hard with just one hand, imagine what he could do with his—

Three sharp knocks on the door stop my pacing, and my dirty thoughts melt away. Who could that be? A little butterfly of hope flutters in my belly.

Could it be my daddy? Already dying to see me again?

"Just a minute," I call in what I hope is a seductive voice. God—what's happening to me? I flit to the door, stopping just long enough to check my hair in the mirror. It's flowing around my

face, slightly disheveled but still sexy from my primping for Mattie's birthday party last night.

Shit.

Mattie.

I need to text her back. She's probably wondering where I got off to last night. I grab my phone from the side table under the mirror and shoot her a text.

all good was just tired

don't worry about me

happy birthday!

There's another knock.

"Sorry!" I put down the phone and open the door.

It's not daddy.

The six-foot-two-inches of muscles and sternness I'm expecting is nowhere to be seen.

Instead, a petite blonde woman stands before me. Short with curves for days. A gorgeous woman with glowing skin and a perfect smile. Bright blue eyes that grab my attention. She looks to be only a few years older than me.

"Hello, Reece! *Sooo* nice to meet you. Mr. Long sent me." She stares at me expectantly.

I stare back. Who is she? And my god, she better not be fucking my daddy.

Get a grip, Reece. He's not yours and after you get that damn key, you're calling this whole crazy mess off anyway.

Aren't I?

She clears her throat prettily to get my attention. She blinks her long, perfectly mascaraed lashes at me. "Um. Reece? May I please come in?"

It's only then that I take note of the white paper boxes clutched in her grasp and the bags that hang from her arms.

“Oh my god!” I say, stepping aside from the door to allow her to enter. “I’m so sorry. Where are my manners? Forgive me—I wasn’t expecting anyone.”

She gives a sigh and a smile. “He didn’t tell you I was coming? Typical Bryant. He does love a good surprise.”

“Can I help you with that?” I ask, eyeing her parcels. What could those pretty white boxes be filled with?

“Yes. Please.” She gratefully hands over the stack of packages, shifting the bags to two hands.

I take in the weight in my arms. They’re light but large. What could be in them? Are they for me?

“Come in, come in.” I usher her in, closing the door behind her. “You can put all your stuff on the couch.”

Breezing by me, I take all of her in. She wears a long wool coat in the perfect shade of purple to complement her expensive icy blonde highlights. And judging by the red on the soles of her shoes—actual Louboutins—she’s used to expensive things and being in nice places.

My apartment is neither.

“Thanks.” She politely but gingerly tiptoes into my apartment like she’s scared to touch anything.

I keep it clean, but yeah, it’s really old and kind of a hovel. I don’t have much money for home improvement.

I hurry over to her, setting the boxes on the couch beside the bags she’s deposited. “Would you like a coffee? Cup of tea or something?”

I can’t tell if she actually wants to stay, but her manners supersede her desires. “Yes. That would be nice. Thanks.” She removes her coat and I have to swallow down my jealousy. This girl has an hourglass figure and is wearing a black silk wrap dress that perfectly shows them off. That dress looks like it costs more than my rent for the month.

Even the graceful way she fold her coat, placing it over her forearm, makes me envious. The woman is pure perfection. I

catch a glimpse of my tousled hair and leftover eyeliner from last night. I'm anything but.

I think of Bryant's grumpy comments about my 'scrap of a dress' from last night.

Is the dress she's wearing what he likes? God, I need to get over myself. I just need the key—I don't need to obsess over this man and this woman he's sent to my apartment—wait, what's her name?

"I'm sorry," I say. "I didn't get your name." Did she tell me her name?

She gives a little wave with her perfectly manicured fingernails. "I'm Ashely. Mr. Long's *personal* assistant." She stresses the word 'personal' a little too hard.

The couch full, she remains standing, still holding her coat. I'm so used to my friends just showing up, kicking their shoes off and flopping down on my couch. I should take her coat from her. I should offer her a seat.

"Here. I can take your coat. Have a seat in the window. The view is awesome." I take her coat, putting it on my bed. She settles herself down in my window seat. I hurry back to my pathetic excuse for a kitchen, opening my cabinets.

Bare.

Of course.

I bet her kitchen is fully stocked. She probably even takes her cereal out of the box and puts it in those neat little clear glass containers, perfectly labeled. If she even eats processed foods. "You never did say tea or coffee?"

I reach my hand on the back of my shelf. Bingo! One box of cheap black tea. *Please say tea, please say tea.* Coffee is so expensive, I rarely buy it.

"Tea is fine," she says. Her voice sounds distant and I peek around the corner at her. She's staring out the window, a faraway look on her face. She murmurs more to herself than to me, "Wouldn't you love to live in The West. God, a life like that..." her words trail off.

What's up with this chick?

"Are you okay?" I ask.

She snaps to, jumping up from her seat and pasting a bright smile on her glossy lips. "Yes. Yes. Oh my goodness. I'm just so excited to show you what Mr. Long sent. Are you ready to be amazed? He really did go overboard this time. He does love to spoil."

This time? My stomach drops. Have there been other times? How many girls has he sent his gorgeous assistant to, loaded down with packages to spoil them?

Jealous, jealous, green-eyed cat. No one wants you here, so scat. I focus on my mission and smile like he's always sending me stuff. "Yes. I know. He does, doesn't he?"

She hurries over to the couch, lifting the first box. She hands it to me. "Ready?"

Am I ever.

She pulls back the lid. I step closer to get a better look. Nestled in white paper lays a blush pink silk wrap dress. I want to reach out and stroke the fabric but my fingers suddenly feel dirty and I'm worried I'd ruin it. It looks too delicate to touch. Too nice for someone like me. I just stare at it in awe.

Ashely gives a little giggle. "Go ahead, silly. It's yours!"

"Really? I don't know." But my hands are moving towards the box, my fingers delicately wrapping around the silk.

Ashely chatters on excitedly. "I hope you don't mind, I got you one like mine. It's a Dior. It's just so flattering, I figured every girl could use one and when Bryant told me the style and color he wanted, I knew this would be perfect."

"I love it. Thank you." The dress flows like water as I lift it from the box. It feels incredible between my fingers. I hold the dress up against my body for Ashely's approval.

"It's gorgeous," she says. "That color is stunning on you. It brings out the rosy tones in your complexion. But to get the full feel, you'll have to try it on. You'll need the other things as well."

I eye the many boxes and bags cluttering my couch and wonder what other treasures they contain.

She holds out the empty garment box. “Here, lay it inside and I’ll get in settled back in the box while you open the rest.”

“Okay. Thanks.” I hate to part with the dress but I want to know what’s in the other boxes.

The next gift makes me blush. Yeah, rosy tones for sure, I can feel the heat rising in my face as I stare down at the box.

More blush pink.

A smooth silk bra with full cups to wear under the silk wrap dress. And a scrap of silk and lace I’m guessing you’d call panties. I crook my finger under the thin string waistband and lift them from the box.

“What,” I ask Ashely, “are these?”

She giggles again, clearly enjoying this. “That’s a g-string. Have you never had one before?”

I shake my head, too embarrassed to speak.

Her gaze smooths over my hips. “Well, with a body like yours, you’re going to stun in those. But,” she leans over, sliding her hand into her large purse. She knows exactly what she’s looking for and where it is. She hands me a shiny piece of paper. “You’ll need this.”

“What is this?” I look over the glossy paper she handed me. Pictures of half-naked women relaxing in fluffy white bathrobes cover the top.

“It’s the spa menu.” Her smile gets tighter as she continues. “After you try on that outfit, we’ve got to get going if we’re going to fit in your full body wax, hot oil massage, and facial before the jet leaves tonight.”

“Tonight?” Massage? Hot oil? The most I’ve ever splurged on is a discounted Groupon mani pedi package. And this Ashely girl seems perfectly normal. She would be warning me off Bryant if he was a bad guy. The decision has been made.

I’m going to London.

I let the idea settle around me like a blanket. My fate has been decided for me. I should be unsettled but somehow I find the knowledge warm, comforting.

“Well, okay,” I say. “Let’s hurry.”

Now that I’ve accepted that fact, I begin to enjoy myself. So many more outfits, all gorgeous with designer labels. There are hair products, skin products, even a cute new travel bag to hold all of my toiletries.

When I’m done there’s a mountain of discarded white tissue and boxes and bags covering my sofa.

“Oh,” says Ashely. “There’s one more thing.”

From under the chaos, she pulls a forgotten shoebox.

I take off the lid.

No way.

No—freaking—way.

It can’t be.

I lift one of the beige *Apostrophe* leather pumps from the box and I know before I look to confirm—they’ve got shiny red bottoms. “My very own Louboutins? I can’t believe it.”

“Believe it, honey.” She smiles but the grin doesn’t reach her eyes.

Is she jealous?

I can’t blame her. But I don’t want her to feel bad. I compliment her and shower her with thank yous as I slip the shoes on my bare feet. “You have such amazing taste. Seriously. Thank you so much for going to all this trouble.”

The buttery leather envelops my soon-to-be-spa-pedicured feet. God—the shoes feel as amazing as they look. They are as perfect as I knew they would be. I’m getting a little choked up remembering all those times I admired them from the street, gazing at the display through the spotless glass window of the shop on Madison Ave, a street I didn’t even feel I had the right to walk down in my Target jeans and clearance sneakers.

I clear my throat, reluctantly dragging my gaze up from the gorgeous shoe. “Ashely, seriously, you did a great job. Thank you so much for going to all the trouble for me—”

“I’d do anything for Mr. Long,” she says.

As in... she did this for him, not for me, and she wants to make that clear.

Okay....

“He also wanted me to give you this,” she says. She pulls a white notecard from her purse. It’s the size of a business card, creamy white card stock. Her manicured fingers hold onto it a little too tightly.

It’s mine. “Thank you.” I take it from her and flip it over.

I read the card. My heart drops to the shiny red soles of my Louboutins. The words burn into my empty chest, my face heating with a shame-filled flush.

I read the words again...

Daddy knows what you did, kitten

CHAPTER
ELEVEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

MY PHONE RINGS at three o'clock on the dot. I've been expecting her call. I swipe my thumb across the screen. "Hello, kitten."

Her sheepish voice comes over the phone. "Hi." She sounds cute as hell. I don't know if I want to hug her or spank her. Soon, I'll do both.

I keep my tone stern. "Is Ashely still there?"

She gives a little sniff. "No. She left after she gave me your phone number...and...the note."

Daddy knows what you did, kitten.

My cock hardens from thinking about how much trouble she's in with me. I shift my weight, leaning further back in the seat of my car. I'm parked on the street, just below her apartment. If I look out my window, I can see hers. I can picture the shame in her dark brown eyes. "What did you think of my note?"

"I..." Her voice tightens. "I don't know what it means."

I make a tsk sound, my tongue against my teeth. "Babygirl. Don't lie to daddy."

"I'm not. I don't know what you mean." She clears her throat. "What do you mean, exactly?"

“Last chance.” My voice goes low and gravelly. “I’m losing patience.”

“Oh...okay...um...is this about...”—her tone goes up an octave—“the... *key?*”

“Yes, sweetheart. This is about the key. That’s a good start.” God, she’s so naughty, trying to act innocent. She knows what she did. I wait to see if she’ll come clean, confess, tell me something more about what she’s done. She doesn’t. “Tell me more.”

“Tell you more?” A long pause follows. I can picture her teeth sinking into her pouty bottom lip. Finally, she says, “About what, exactly?”

“Tell me more about what you’ve been doing, what you’ve been up to,” I say.

Tell me the truth, kitten. Tell me about how you’ve been plotting to get to me. To get to this key. Tell me how you’ve been the one after me the whole time.

You just didn’t think I would catch you at your game.

And turn it around on you.

But you underestimate me, babygirl.

She says nothing. I press on. “Tell me about the plans you made to get this key.”

“Hmm... the plans I made to get the key... let me think.”

God, my hand is itching to spank her perfect ass. “Yes,” I say, but her answer is more silence. “Don’t keep daddy waiting.”

Her words are a whisper. “I need that key.”

“I know. But what lengths were you willing to go to get it?” I throw in a harsh daddy tone. “I want the truth, and I want it now.”

“Okay.” She gives a shuddering sigh.

“Take a deep breath, babygirl.”

She obeys, taking a long inhale. “I was looking for the key. And I found out that...” her words trail off.

“You knew I had it this whole time, didn’t you?”

“Yes. I did.” She waits for a beat. “One of my dad’s younger secretaries. We were pretty friendly when I would visit. I would bring her coffee, she’d give me information. She told me you had it.”

We’re getting warmer. Time for the full confession. I pull the key from my pocket, feeling the cold brass in my hand. “And you did things to get to the key, didn’t you?” I ask, lifting it by its red ribbon and letting it dangle before me.

“Yes,” she says.

“Like what?”

She says, “Um... like trying to get close to you without you knowing?”

“Thank you for telling me, I know that was hard for you.”

She sighs with relief. She thinks I’m done with her.

“But I already knew that, baby,” I say. “I knew the whole time.”

A little gasp comes through the phone. She seriously underestimated me.

“Tell me what else you did,” I ask.

She’s quiet for a moment, thinking, planning. Figuring out a way to get out of this. “You tell me first. Why did my dad give you the key?”

I’m losing patience. I’m about one minute away from tearing up those stairs and then tearing up her ass. “Let’s be clear. I’m the one in charge. Not you. Understand that, babygirl?”

“Okay, okay.”

“Your father gave it to a mutual friend of ours to give to me whenever he died. I was told to keep it safe and—”

She breaks in. “Not to give it to me?”

“Exactly.” There was more information given to me that day. A lot more. “That’s all I’m going to say for now.”

“Why?” She presses. “Why would he give it to you?”

“Why do you need it?” I ask back.

“I can’t tell you.” Her voice is small, desperate. “But I need it. Desperately.”

I want to lecture her, to demand she tell me everything, but her voice sounds so pitiful there’s a tug in my chest.

“You were surprised when I pulled the key from my pocket last night, weren’t you?” I ask.

“Hmm...” She makes a little mewing sound but doesn’t answer.

I soften my tone. “I don’t know why you need the key, but I know you need it. And I know that as soon as someone told you I had the key, you started stalking me.”

She gives a gasp.

“That’s right, babygirl. I knew *you* were stalking me.”

“Stalking is a strong word, Bryant,” she says.

I growl. “That’s daddy to you, baby.”

“It’s a strong word.” Despite her anxiety over me telling her I know the truth, there’s a smile in her voice. “Daddy.”

“What would you call it?” I demand. “Once you knew that I had your key, you found out everything you possibly could about me. You found out where I lived. You staked out my street. Then you moved into the apartment across the street from me. One with a window looking right up at my apartment.” And the part that ticks me off the most? She spent her scant savings on this whole thing, bringing her bank account down to double digits. “And with that apartment, you took on an insane rent commitment for a total dump—”

She interjects, “Hey! It’s not a dump. I’ve come to love this place.”

“Stick to the subject, please.”

“Sorry, daddy,” she says.

I continue. “So you moved across the street from me. Found an apartment with a nice big window facing my place.” Time

to drop a real truth bomb, one she'll be shocked about. "Then you started acting really, really naughty..."

I wait to see if she'll confess her sins. Instead, I get a murmur of, "Hmm..."

"You just happened to have a habit of walking past your window. Naked?" The memory of the first time I saw her breezing by her windowsill, bare skin on display for me comes back, heat and desire flashing through me.

She grumbles at me. "Half naked. I had on a bra and panties."

"Yes. Sorry. Half-naked, tempting me in your bra and panties—my favorite ones were the white ones with the little flowers, by the way—and lounging in your windowsill in your scanty little scraps of fabric you call dresses. You knew you would pique my curiosity. You knew I would look you up. You knew I would contact you."

"And when you found me?" she asks.

"I realized who you were. I knew you were that sweet little lost girl visiting her father's office. The girl whose key I had. Then I figured out what you were doing. Trying to seduce me to get me interested in you so you could get close to me and get the key." I give her a moment to process, then ask. "Were you going to steal it?"

"I honestly don't know what I thought I was going to do. I didn't get that far." She gives another sigh. "You weren't... you didn't... um... end up being what I expected you to be."

She was expecting a well-mannered CEO when she was stalking me. One who would take her out. Buy her a few drinks. She'd get him drunk, have him take her back to his, and find that key. Then she'd have what she wanted and be done with him.

I won't be dismissed so easily.

Yes, she thought she was getting a man she could manipulate.

What she got was a very demanding, dirty, dirty daddy.

"I wasn't what you expected me to be?" I ask. "In the texts?"

“Yes,” she says, shyly.

“You knew I would reach out to you, didn’t you?”

“Yes. At least, I hoped you would,” she says.

I hold back a dark chuckle, thinking of what her face must have looked like when she got those first filthy texts from me.

I’ll be your daddy now

Little Reece

Doesn’t every good girl need a daddy

“But something about the texts surprised you, didn’t they?” I ask. I shift in my seat, holding back the urge to rub the stiffness from my throbbing cock.

She’s so shy now, barely able to talk, my naughty little girl. Finally, she says, “Yes.”

I ask, “You were going after CEO Bryant Long, but you didn’t know you were stalking a daddy, did you?”

She really had no idea what she was getting into.

She still doesn’t.

I can hear the blush rising in her cheeks. “No. I wasn’t expecting that.”

“Tell me, how did those first texts make you feel?”

More silence.

“Baby?”

“I don’t want to talk about this. It’s...embarrassing.”

I step outside the Bentley onto the sidewalk, gazing up at her window. “Look outside.”

She appears behind the glass, her hair hanging like curtains on either side of her beautiful face.

She gives me a little wave. “I see you down there.”

“I see you too,” I say. “And if you’re not going to talk to me over the phone, I’m going to come up there and talk to you in person.”

“I really don’t want to talk about this.” She perches on the sill, looking down at me. “If you come up, I won’t let you in.”

“If I come up there and that door isn’t open for me, you’re not going to be a very happy girl.”

She stares down from the safety of her perch.

“Daddy’s on the way up, kitten. And you’re in serious trouble.” I slip my phone into my pocket. I’ll be needing my hands.

I knew what she was doing the second I saw her parading across the window in her matching bra and panty set, sipping at a mug. She’s not the first woman who’s tried to catch a billionaire. Only Reece isn’t after my money.

Just a key.

I gave it a few weeks. Enjoyed the show. Gathered as much information on her as I could.

Then, last night, I texted my babygirl.

I take the stairs two at a time. The concrete edge of the top step crumbles under my boot heel. Piece of shit apartment. She won’t be spending another night in this dump.

I bang on her door—I knew it wouldn’t be opened for me. My little girl does like to be bad sometimes, doesn’t she?

This little prank she’s pulling is going to earn her a very sore bottom.

“Reece. Open this door. Now.”

“No!” She shouts from the other side of the door, “Go away. I told you I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

I lean a hand on the door frame. Lord, give me strength to deal with this little hellcat. “I’m the one who decides when this subject is closed. And it’s not. Now open the door.”

“No.”

I could kick the door in. Break it down. Splinter it into little toothpicks that would scatter all over the cheap carpet of this hallway.

But I don't need to do that.

All I need to do is embarrass my kitten a little bit. And she'll open that door right up, welcoming the big bad wolf into her house.

I raise my voice so everyone with an apartment on this floor and in the next block can hear me loud and clear. "Reece Bright. This is your daddy speaking, and you've already earned yourself a good, hard spanking."

Down the hall, a door on the left opens a touch. An older woman's curious face peers out from the crack.

I keep going. "And unless you want to make it two, you'd better—"

Bingo.

Her door flies open.

She stares daggers at me. "Oh my God! This is *sooo* embarrassing! Everyone can hear you. I have to live here, you know," she hisses, peeking down the hall.

She waves at the woman who's staring at us. "Don't worry, Ms. Painer. He's just a friend, playing a practical joke."

"Not true." I look at her neighbor. "I'm here to punish a naughty girl. You're welcome to come and watch if you'd like to, ma'am."

"Oh my god!" Reece buries her blushing face in her hands.

I turn back to Reece, lowering my voice. "You going to invite me in or do you want me to keep the show going?"

"No! God, please, no. Come in. Come in, already." Reece opens the door wider for me.

I give Ms. Painer a little wave. "So nice to meet you!"

Ms. Painer slams her door shut.

Too bad her nosy neighbor didn't take me up on my offer.

I love an audience.

I brush past Reece, making myself at home. The empty boxes and bags from my gifts are neatly folded on the windowsill.

The clothing and shoes must be tucked away. I don't see them.

I take her in. She's wearing ripped blue jeans that hug her curves in the sexiest way and a tight white tee. She wears no bra underneath, judging by her already peaked nipples pressing against the thin fabric of the shirt.

I move closer, reaching for her. I brush my hand over her full breast, taking a nipple between my finger and thumb. "Looks like daddy's got you excited already." I give her nipple a pinch through her tee.

"What are you doing?" The pink in her cheeks deepens but she doesn't push my hand away.

"Where are all the pretty things I gave you?" I ask, taking a seat on her couch. I lean back, wrapping my arms across the back of the sofa, spreading my thighs as wide as they go. I cock a grin. "I thought you'd be in your pretty dress for daddy by now, packing for our trip."

She crosses her arms over her breasts, an attempt to hide from me. "I don't know if I'm going," she lies.

"Yes, you do. Now don't lie to daddy, kitten, or I'm going to have to spank you even longer than I'm already planning on."

"Spank me?" Her breath catches in her throat and she backs away. "I don't think so."

"Well, daddy does think so, and my opinion is the only one that matters right now. We have a lot to talk about and I'd prefer to do the talking with your beautiful body laid over my lap."

She eyes the vast expanse of my open thighs. She swallows hard. Clears her throat. A whisper of a whine rises from her.

I pat my thigh. "Now come lay over daddy's lap like a good girl."

She eyes the door, deciding whether she'll take her chances and run.

"Come here." I brush my fingers over the buckle of my belt. "Don't make me take my belt off and chase you down that hallway, little girl."

The image is too much for her. Finally, she decides to submit. But she takes her sweet time about it. Wrapping her arms around her torso, she inches towards me on her bare feet.

“That’s a girl. A little closer.” My cock stirs in my pants. I’m getting hard just thinking about having her laying over my lap.

“Daddy...I don’t want to.”

Jesus. That’s cute as hell.

But not permissible.

“What you want doesn’t matter right now. The only thing that matters is what daddy says. And daddy says, come here.” I pat my thigh again.

She gives a shame-filled shuddering sigh as she moves to the outside of my left thigh. She stares down at my thighs, giving herself a moment.

Then, like the good little kitten she is, she crawls across my lap. I grab her hips, pulling her where I want her, with her ass perched perfectly over the center of my left thigh, her legs dangling down.

Her torso is stretched out over my other leg, her pink face buried in her hands.

“Good girl.” I run my hand over her denim-covered bottom. “I know that was hard for you. You have a hard time obeying daddy, don’t you?”

“Sometimes,” she mumbles into her hands. “Like when you’re going to spank my ass.”

I hold back a chuckle. God, this girl is adorable. And the curves on her... I run my fingertip underneath the very bottom curve of her ass... perfect.

“The first thing I want to talk about,” I slide my finger along the thick seam of denim that’s running up the crack of her ass. “Is how you felt when you got those texts from me and found out you’d been stalking a daddy?”

“Um...I don’t know.” She wriggles her hips, thoroughly embarrassed by my question, totally turned on by my touch.

I lift my hand, bringing it down with a satisfying smack on the center of her right cheek.

She gives a little yelp. "Ow!"

I bring my hand down on the left cheek, right in the middle of her full curves.

She sucks air between her teeth. "That hurts!"

"It's going to hurt more if you don't start talking," I say, lifting my hand in the air and letting it hover over her ass.

"Okay, okay! I'll tell you, alright?"

"Don't get sassy." I spank her, hard, several times in a row, alternating cheeks until she cries out.

Her voice is sweet as she pleads. "Okay, I'm sorry, daddy. I tell you now."

I stop spanking her, smoothing a hand over her punished bottom. "Start talking."

"At first..." She wriggles her hips a little and I know the combination of the sharp spanks with the sweet touches I'm giving her now are making her panties very, very wet. "I was like, weirded out. You know? If my parading in front of the window in my bra and panties trick worked, I thought you would call, or send someone to invite me to meet you in person. I wasn't expecting texts and no...I wasn't expecting the kinds of texts you sent me."

"The daddy ones?" I ask, thinking of all those sexy messages I sent her.

I'll be your daddy now

Little Reece

Doesn't every good girl need a daddy?

Be a good girl tonight

Don't talk to strangers

Daddy's watching

Daddy knows you left your phone

And your door unlocked

And where's your coat

Naughty girl

Daddy will have to punish you

“Yes.” She gives a little moan as I explore her curves over her jeans. “Those. At first, I thought they were sick. Crazy. Wrong. But then the more you sent, I kinda started to look forward to them, I guess.”

“Tell me, baby.” I slide my hand between the tops of her thighs, spreading them open. I run my hand up and down the denim that covers her pussy.

And ask her the question that's really on my mind.

“Tell me, babygirl,” I keep stroking. “Did my texts make your pussy wet?”

CHAPTER
TWELVE



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

OH MY GOD, the mouth on him...he's filthy. A low moan of shame rumbles through my chest and I bury my face further in my hands. My hair hides my face from him—I'm sure it's bright red with humiliation.

But apparently daddies don't let you hide because now he's sliding my hair back from my face. He leans down until his mouth is brushing up against my ear. "What's the matter, kitten? Is someone shy?"

I don't know what to say? What *am* I supposed to say?

Yes, daddy, you make me so wet, wetter than any man before you has?

God.

He sits up and his hand comes crashing back down over my ass. The fire spreads over my curves, somehow shooting right between my thighs and making my sex clench.

"Answer daddy when he's talking to you, baby. And when you're over my lap?" He clutches my curves, digging his fingers into my flesh. "You answer me with sir, or daddy."

"Yes. I'm shy," I manage between clenched teeth. "It's not every day I'm in this position, now is it?" I throw in a testy, "Sir."

“Sassy.” He spans me again, harder this time, and the sting takes my breath away. But as he smooths his hand over the spot he’s punished, the fire turns to a glowing warmth that heats my core. “Keep being this sassy and it *will* be every day that you’re in this position, little girl.”

“Sorry,” I mumble. “Daddy.”

“Let’s see how wet kitten’s kitty is for daddy.” His hands go to the waist of my jeans. “Lift, babygirl.”

My sex pulses and clenches, my clit throbbing for some kind of friction. I just need pressure, I need to be touched or I’m going to lose my mind.

I lift up off his lap, giving him access to the button and zipper of my jeans. He yanks them down over my hips, slowly pulling them down until they rest at the middle of my upper thighs.

He leaves my blush-pink silk panties in place, but they’re no protection from the cool air that caresses my skin, chill bumps rising over my flesh. Naughty, sexy excitement fills me.

He’s finally going to touch me.

Now he’s pushing my thighs apart.

His fingers are dancing over the gusset of my panties. The slight pressure of his fingertips over my wanting sex makes me moan, my hips wiggling with a life of their own.

He rubs at the material and I know what he’s going to say, and my face heats before he says it. “These panties are damp, pretty girl. I bet if I slipped my finger inside them, I’d find you slippery and wet for daddy. Am I right?”

Oh my god...do I seriously have to answer him?

His fingers leave me. Losing his touch makes me whine in frustration. He spans the bottom curve of my ass, the fullest part, the area that’s not covered by my panties. The sting of his bare hand against my bare skin doubles the pain and I cry out.

“Yes, daddy! I’m wet for you.”

I can't believe I said those words out loud. I can't believe he *made* me say them. What else is he going to make me do?

His finger teases the elastic band of my panties, the one around the top of my thigh. My legs part further, wanting and welcoming his touch.

"My eager little kitten," he says with a dark chuckle.

Ok—if a person could die of embarrassment, I'd be dead.

I'm so frustrated. His fingers won't go where I want. I shift my hips, trying to catch at least a light graze over my clit, but he's enjoying teasing me and he keeps his fingertip outlining the line of my panties but not touching my sex.

A whimper rises in the back of my throat. Instinctively, I know what he's waiting for.

He wants me to beg.

Fine. My sex is clenching, more arousal dampening my panties. I need his touch.

"Please, daddy, please touch me," I gasp.

"There's my good girl." The tip of his finger slips under the elastic band. He's so close now...

"Please, daddy." My hips wriggle over his lap.

He likes it. I can feel his hardness grow beneath my belly and that makes me want his touch even more. Is he as turned on as I am?

Judging by the size of the bulge pressing into me, he sure as hell is.

"You beg so prettily." His free hand goes to my hair, stroking it as he croons to me. His thick finger presses against my slick entrance. He's there, but still teasing. I need him inside of me.

"Please, please put your fingers in me, daddy."

He winds my hair around his hand, pulling it into a fist. He tugs at it, making a thousand electric pulses dance over the back of my neck. He holds my hair tight and circles my slick sex.

“Please,” I beg.

“Such a good, good girl.” His thick finger presses past my tight entrance, entering me. He moves inside me and my hips start to buck. I can’t help myself, I can’t stop it. I move against him, wanting more. Needing more.

His full hand is inside my panties now, the elastic digging into my skin to accommodate him. He adds a second finger to the first, stretching me till I burn.

The intrusion is so welcome and my sex tightens around him. At the same time he’s moving inside me, he’s tugging my hair, and more tingles dance over the back of my neck. They travel down my spine as he pumps his two fingers inside of me. He’s in and out and in and out and my bucking hips create a rhythm with his hand.

I no longer care about shame.

I go for what I want, moaning and moving my body to capture as much pleasure as possible.

“There you go, baby. There you go.”

The climax fills my belly, rising in my core. My head goes light, stars flashing behind my eyelids. My breaths come short and fast. Then, he pads my clit with his thumb. The second he comes in contact with my aching bud, shocks of euphoria travel through me. My back arches and I cry out.

And I lose my mind.

“Oh my god! Oh my god, yes, daddy! Just like that.” I’m shamelessly moving against him, my fingers clutching at the edge of my sofa cushion. My nails dig into the fabric, anchoring me as my mind leaves my body.

His thumb circles my slick bud. His fingers are inside me, stroking deep inside my sex. The orgasm hits me hard and fast, my head flies back and my mouth gapes. “Oh god, daddy! Yes!”

My core grows tighter and tighter until it bursts. The climax rocks through me.

He pulls my hair harder. “There you go, babygirl. Come for daddy.”

I shudder, my teeth sinking into my bottom lip as I hold back a cry. A strange noise rises from my chest as the final waves of pleasure ricochet through me. “Uhn!”

I collapse over his lap. I can’t breathe. I can’t think.

I think I need a drink.

He slips his hand from my panties, patting my ass as I lay over him, panting.

He leans down, brushing a chaste kiss over my cheek. “Let’s get you to the spa, kitten. Daddy wants to see you in your pretty dress.”

I can barely move.

I can’t believe I just did those things, said those things. He does this to me. He makes me want to be dirty and bad.

His bad, good girl.

How will I even find pleasure with another man after this?

“Time to go.” He smacks my ass.

I’m in a postgasm daze as we get in his car, heading towards the parts of the city I know I can’t afford. We pull up in front of the spa, a place I’ve only heard whispers of in overhearing conversations between the moms at the preschool. They often come here after dropping off their babies to recharge with facials and expensive skin treatments made of exotic ingredients like mud, seaweed, and salt from the Dead Sea.

I breathe the name as I take in the shiny silver letters of the sign. “Saga Spa.”

“Swedish for Fairy Tale Spa.” He leans down, brushing soft kisses over the back of my neck. “Only the best for my princess.”

The spa is decorated in white and gold, it’s spotless and filled with the scent of lavender. I’m instantly surrounded by an array of stunning blonde women. They could be fairy godmothers or queens from their own fairytale world. I learn

that they're sisters and cousins who dreamt of life in New York City, and they've brought a bit of home with them in their spa. They tower over me, telling me how beautiful I am, how much they are looking forward to caring for my amazing skin, to deep condition my lovely dark hair, their Swedish accents laced with lilting vowels. Then they drag me away from Bryant, taking me to the back rooms.

They must apologize a dozen times for not being able to give me the full three-day treatment. They all work on me at once, one giving me a manicure, one a pedicure, another massaging my scalp while the others prepare the skin treatments. I'm lulled halfway between sleep and euphoria from the massaging, unable to think clearly. Someone hands me a glass of sparkling water filled with fruit and I realize...

I'm the only client here.

"Wait," I say, holding up my glass. "Am I the only customer here?"

"Of course." The woman that handed me the glass furrows her brow. "Mr. Bryant always closes the spa when he comes."

"Oh." Of course he does.

They finish with me, returning me to Bryant.

"Gorgeous, as always," he says, giving me a quick kiss. "We have to get going. We have a jet waiting for us."

And then I remember...

I'm leaving the country with this man.

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

RIGHT NOW, I won't ask her more about her plans or lies or the key.

I just want to be with her.

But soon, she'll need to come clean or find herself back over daddy's lap again.

Our trip to the spa was short, as we were pressed for time, but the staff accommodated us, and entire team seeing to her every need at once. Her hair gleams as it falls down her back, her nails are painted, her silky skin moisturized and massaged. I brought her back to her place to change and collect her luggage.

My pretty baby looks so beautiful in her blush pink dress. The silky fabric is the same shade that her cheeks turn when I call her my *good girl*. She loves that.

Her dark hair tumbles over her shoulders as she leans down to slip on the shoes I know she's wanted for years. I saw her fakes at the club. Clever girl, but she won't need to be making knock-offs anymore.

She's mine.

She can have whatever she wants.

Anything.

She only has to ask.

I grab her wrist, stopping her. “Allow me,” I say.

“I can put on my own shoes, daddy.” She straightens up, watching me with wide eyes.

“I know you can, kitten, but I want to do it for you.” I drop to one knee before her. I slide my hand up her leg, leaving a trail of kisses from her mid-calf to the soft skin behind her knee.

Gently, I wrap my fingers around her ankle, slipping her freshly manicured toes into the shoe.

I do the same with the other foot.

I stand, looking down at her. “You look...perfect. So beautiful.”

“Thank you.” Her voice is a whisper. She can go from sassy to shy in the blink of an eye.

“Come here, baby.” I reach for her.

She comes into me, wrapping her arms around my chest.

She looks up at me and my heart catches in my throat. Her eyes shine with trust and desire and wanting. I lean down to kiss her.

She whispers the words, “I barely know you.”

“I feel like I’ve known you forever.” As my lips meet hers, the world seems to melt away and the only thing left of the Earth is what I’m holding inside my arms.

My phone blares, interrupting the perfect moment. *Damn it all to hell...*

I take it from my pocket. “Hello?”

It’s my driver. He’ll take us to the jet, then circle back with another staff member to take the Bentley back to my house. I want to sit in the backseat with my babygirl for the ride.

“Sir,” he says, “we need to leave now. The jet is ready and waiting.”

“Be right down.” I slip my phone back into my pocket and ask Reece, “Are you packed?”

“Yes. The Steamline luggage set you sent is carefully packed and ready to go. Thank you, by the way. Everything you sent was gorgeous.” She gives me a shy smile. “I’ve never had nice things before. I’ll go grab my stuff.” She turns to go retrieve her bags.

I grab her arm to stop her. “Daddy has rules about that.”

“About what?” Her brows knit, confused. “My bags?”

“About you carrying your bags.” I shoot her a disapproving look and shake my head. “That’s not allowed.”

A slow smile spreads over her pretty face. “I like that.”

“I know,” I say.

My girl loves to be taken care of. And I love being the one to take care of her.

On the drive to the airport, she rides snuggled up against my side. I take the opportunity to wrap my arm protectively around her shoulders. I can’t stop leaning down to kiss the top of her head.

Her hair smells of strawberries and Reece.

When we get to the private airport, she can’t believe the opulence of the jet. She oohs and ahhs over the deep cushiony tan leather seats, the wide windows she’ll be able to watch the sky from, the sharply dressed attendants who wait to serve our every need and want.

We take our seats and to my surprise and immense pleasure, she curls right back up against me. She slips her heels off, tucking her feet underneath her.

I wrap my arm around her. “I can’t wait to show you the city.”

“I’ve never been out of the country,” she says.

“Really?” I ask

“Really.” She looks up at me from underneath her lashes. “Honestly? I’ve never even been out of the state.”

This surprises me. Her father was constantly on the move with his accounts—I know he’d go to the Cayman’s multiple times

a year—and without a mother in the picture, wouldn't she have gone with him at times?

“Your father traveled a lot for work. Didn't he ever take you with him?” I ask. I lift her hand to my lips, kissing each of her fingers.

“No, not really.” Secrets hide in her gaze. She looks away.

Maybe I do want some answers right now. “Why not?”

“He was busy with business when he traveled.”

I press on. “Who did you stay with when he was traveling?”

“Um, you know.” She gives a little shrug, offering no other information.

I tighten my hold, running my fingers down the back of her arm. “No, I don't. That's why I'm asking.”

She sighs, staring out the window of the jet. “Okay, so when he was traveling, I'd—”

“Warm towel?” A flight attendant holds a white towel between silver tongs. She gives a wide smile.

“Sure.” I take one, handing it to Reece, then take one for myself. I want the flight attendant to leave, I want to hear what Reece was going to say, but she stands there, waiting for us to finish freshening up with our towels. Reece wipes her pretty fingers on the towel, then holds it, unsure of what to do with it.

“I'll take that.” The flight attendant retrieves our towels and walks away.

When she's out of earshot, I ask again. “Who did you stay with?”

Reece looks down at her fingers, playing with them as she thinks.

I wait patiently, holding her close.

“There's something you should know, Bryant.” She takes a deep breath as if she's unsure she wants to continue the conversation. “About my dad.”

She already had my attention, but now I'm hanging on her every word. What does she want to tell me about her father? I give her a moment to clarify without me pushing, but she doesn't. I'm just about to press her for more when another flight attendant arrives at our seats.

"Champagne?" the attendant asks. She holds a tray with two sparkling flutes of bubbly.

"I don't know." I eye Reece, try to lighten the situation. "Are you old enough?"

"Plenty." She holds her hand out to the flight attendant. "Yes, please."

"Not so fast." I take her hand and lower it back down to her lap. "You didn't ask daddy's permission."

Her cheeks go that deep, lovely pink I've grown so fond of. She eyes the flight attendant then mouths to me, "Are you serious?"

"Very."

Her eyes drop to her lap and she twists her fingers nervously. Her words come out in a whisper, but obediently they come. "Daddy, may I have champagne?"

"Certainly, baby." I give the flight attendant a nod. Professional as always, my staff member hands them to me without comment.

I hand one to Reece and keep one to myself. I hold my glass up in the air. "Cheers. To your first trip out of the state."

She looks at me like she doesn't know if she wants to kiss me or slap me, but she echoes my toast, holding up her glass. "Cheers."

Reece watches the attendant as she walks away. Once Reece is sure she's out of earshot, she hisses at me. "Why do you always make me do such embarrassing things?" She washes her question down with an agitated gulp of champagne.

"Because, kitten." I rest my hand on her upper thigh, giving it a stroke and a light squeeze. "You love it."

Her mouth falls open in an attempt to defend herself, then snaps shut.

Daddy's right.

Daddy's always right.

I slide my hand further up her dress. My, this silky fabric feels so nice under my fingers. It's thin enough I can feel the heat from her skin through it.

"Now, spill your secrets." I say. "What do you need to tell me about your dad?"

She eyes me, unsure if she wants to divulge. I dig my fingertips into that soft flesh of her upper inner thigh.

Suddenly, she's ready to speak.

"What do you want to know?" she asks. Her legs part, her lips part, her lids grow heavy as I stroke the very highest part of her thigh, just out of reach of her sex.

"Haven't I made myself clear?" I inch up further, teasing her sex over her clothing. "Daddy wants to know everything."

"Fine." She gives a shuddering breath, her eyes closing as I stroke the seam of her sex. "The truth is...he's not my real dad."

What?

My fingers freeze.

In all my research, it was made clear to me that Matthew Sheffield, of *Sheffield and Sutherland Law*, was her father. I never saw a birth certificate and her last name is Bright, but I chalked it up to the fact that her parents were never together and they generally give the baby the mom's last name in that situation.

If Matthew Sheffield isn't her father, who is he?

And why did he have her key?

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

HIS HAND PULLS AWAY from my thigh.

I already miss the warmth of his touch. Icy tendrils of doubt twist ropes around my spine. Should I tell him? Will things change between us when he finds out the truth about my past? His hand comes back to my thigh. His gaze holds mine, firm and steady and solid. He's the only solid thing in my life right now.

That final text he sent on the first night comes to the front of my mind.

Daddy is always here.

At the time, I couldn't picture what that would feel like, to have a man by my side, caring for me. Now I can. It's dangerous, and it's making me vulnerable. You can't miss something you never had, but now, everything is different.

I can't afford to lose him.

I'm not going to tell him.

"He was just a friend. That's all. A man who was helping me out during a tough time," I say quickly. I tip back my champagne.

A dark brow rises to the sky. "Reece." He's using that daddy tone that makes my belly flip-flop and my toes curls.

"I...don't want to tell you."

His hand slides up the side of my face, fingers tangling in my hair. He pulls my ear to his mouth.

His words rush hot against my skin. “Tell me. Or so help me god, I will put you over my lap and spank you until tears are running down your face, and every single staff member on this plane will hear you begging me to stop.”

The white heat of shame flashes over my face. I try to pull away. He pulls me in tighter.

He grabs my gaze, his eyes baring down on mine. “The truth, little girl. Now.”

He releases me.

“Fine.” I do my best to gather myself, smoothing my hair and straightening my dress, trying to scratch up some shred of dignity. But when I see the look in his eyes, there’s none left. I’m utterly lost to his control. I submit. “I’ll tell you.”

Leaning back in his seat, he folds his arms over his chest, waiting. The heaviness of his stare never leaves my face.

Icy prickles dance over my skin. I’ve never told anyone about this part of my life. For the past few years, I thought I’d outrun my past. Steady boyfriend, nice apartment, respectable job.

But my employment wasn’t always so respectable, teaching kids their letters and numbers and silly songs to occupy their time.

The music that filled my world was the very furthest from a nursery rhyme. The thump of the bass, the four-to-the-floor beat on repeat. No matter the song, they all ended up sounding the same.

Thump, thump, thump, thump.

I can still feel the music thrumming through me.

Hands on the pole, arms raised above my head, my bare breasts held high, fully on display. Peaked nipples on show, hungry stares lashing out over them, wanting a taste. Thighs spread, knees bent, I lower myself to the ground, giving them a full view of what they want.

But will never have.

Underage. No home. No parents.

That pole was my everything.

All cash. Under the table. No questions asked. None answered.

No paperwork.

Just me, dancing under the lights, hundreds of eyes on me every night. And when I'd leave, my pockets were full of cash. More than all the other dancers.

None of the women took me under their wing or showed me any mercy. Mostly, I was just ignored. But when I was on that stage, I was everything. You couldn't *not* see me.

I loved every moment of being on that stage.

But at the end of the night, when the lights went out?

I say, "My mom was negligent at best, a long string of bad boyfriends holding her attention, but the day I turned seventeen she assumed I was old enough to care for myself and just never came back to the shitty apartment she'd rented for us. I stayed there, in shock, waiting to see if she'd come back, knowing she was gone. I waited it out till eviction day but not wanting to be shoved into the foster care system for the next year, I took off in the only thing she left me—a twenty-year-old Honda Civic. I had nowhere to go. My friend worked at a club, she got me a job...dancing."

He doesn't even flinch. "Go on."

"I made good money, but I was too young to sign a lease. I slept in my car, parked behind the club. I got a ten-dollar-a-month gym membership. I'd work out, strengthen my muscles for the pole, then I'd shower and get ready for my day."

"Clever girl," he says with a smile.

It gives me the confidence to go on.

"Dressed in respectable clothing, I'd spend my day at the library, working towards my GED. Then, at night, I would dance. Mr. Sheffield came in every night. I don't think he was addicted to the girls or anything. I just got the feeling that he

was lonely. That he liked the ambiance of the place. He never even had more than two drinks.” I say, “I started to notice him because he wasn’t like the other men.”

“How so?” he asks.

“He actually looked at my face.” I take a deep breath. “And he’d smile at me. It was...nice.”

“He was a good man,” he says.

“He was.” I nod. “One night when I was leaving, he grabbed my arm and stopped me. He asked me how old I was. No one in the club had asked me that, not even the owner when I asked for the job. His eyes were kind. I told him I was seventeen.”

“What happened after that?”

“He took me in. Let me stay at his place. He found me the job at the preschool, and helped me pass the test for my GED.” A tear shows up at the corner of my eye.

Mr. Sheffield treated me kindly. Never once made me feel like he wanted more from me. He didn’t ask questions about my past and I didn’t offer any information.

“I lived with him for two years. Then I started dating Jake. The day I moved in with Jake, Mr. Sheffield begged me to stay. Told me I was too young, that I should wait just one more year before I decide to move in with a partner.”

“But you went,” he says.

“Yeah. I left the first stable home I’d ever lived in and moved in with my asshole boyfriend.” A strangled laugh comes from the back of my throat. “Mistake, right?”

He shrugs. “We’re human. We’re made to chase love.”

His words resonate, echoing in the canyon of my soul. I’ve felt empty for so long, stupid for ever falling for Jake. But that’s what I was doing, all those humiliating nights I tried to make it work. I was chasing love. I glance up at Bryant. Solid, steady Bryant. Being with him doesn’t feel like chasing anything. It feels like running towards something.

My future.

“Thanks for that,” I say.

His hand returns to my face, pulling my mouth to his. “Love makes us do crazy things sometimes, doesn’t it?”

He envelops me in his kiss.

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

I DON'T CARE about her past. I only care about her future. And her future is me.

I want to pry, to find out why she ran away from home in the first place but telling me this story already has her drained. It can wait. "I'm sorry that happened to you, babygirl. But it doesn't matter anymore. You have a daddy to take care of you and protect you." I hate the idea of her dancing on that pole, all those lecherous eyes on her, fantasizing about touching her.

I want to kill every man that entered that club and set eyes on her.

And where the hell were her parents? If I ever have a kid... their every need will be met as long as I live. And if anyone ever took advantage of my daughter, well they'd be dead. I feel the same about protecting Reece.

I want to know why Sheffield had that key, why she needs it so badly, and why he didn't want her to have it. I'm a patient man. I will get to the bottom of this, but I know the importance of timing. The truth can wait.

Besides, hasn't my baby been through enough tonight? "Come here, sweetheart." I hold my arm out to her.

She curls up against me. "So I guess our whole 'one night in exchange for the key' thing is over."

“That’s right.” I kiss the top of her head. “You’re all mine now.”

“Mmm... that sounds nice.” She snuggles into my side.

I have the attendant bring blankets to cover her with. She’s tired. The confession of her past and the excitement of the day prove to be too much and she drifts off to sleep.

I wake her when we land, guiding her to the car. We take a town car to the Mandarin Oriental hotel. I always stay in Hyde Park. I thought it was a fitting first place for a young lady to make her London debut.

My young lady is currently snoring.

She’s fallen back asleep. Her head is on my shoulder, her pretty pout is parted, a little puddle of drool forming on my thousand-dollar Italian suit. It’s fucking adorable.

“Wake up, babygirl. We’re here.” I rub her thigh over the blankets, waking her.

She makes a sweet little moaning sound. “Hmm?”

“We’re at the hotel.”

“We are?” She smiles, stretching her arms over her head. Finally, she opens her eyes and sees the hotel. “It’s beautiful.”

The 11-story high-rise building of Portland stone and red brick spans an entire city block. Lights illuminate the front, showing off the proud architecture against the night sky. Two policemen trot by, riding high on thoroughbred horses.

Her nose practically smooshes against the glass as she scoots closer to the window, taking it in all. Her gaze travels up to the top of the hotel. “We’re staying... here?”

“It’s my favorite place to stay when I’m in London. I wouldn’t take you anywhere else.” Little does she know that our room is on the top floor that her eyes are currently locked on. I point to the center room on the 11th floor. “That’s ours, right there. The Penthouse Suite.”

Her hand slips into mine as we make our way through the lobby. There’s a chorus of “Welcome!” and, “Mr. Long, so

good to see you again!” Staff stop us with almost every step, wishing us well, welcoming us, asking how our flight was. They hand us warm, damp towels to wash our face and hands with.

When Reece is done with hers, this time she knows what to do with it. She holds it out and the attendant reaches for it with gold tongs, taking it back from her.

“Thank you,” she says. Another staff member offers her a glass of red wine.

She goes to accept and I put my hand between her and the wine. “No thank you.”

Reece gives me a curious look.

“It’ll only add to your jetlag,” I say. “And I have plans I want you awake for.”

A pretty flush rises in her cheeks. “So inappropriate.”

“You love it,” I say, discreetly smoothing my hand down her back to give her ass a squeeze.

The hotel manager rushes over. “Mr. Long! Such a welcome surprise. We were thrilled when we heard you’d be staying with us. We know you have your pick of hotels and it’s such a compliment when you choose us. Allow me.” He pushes the elevator up button, a simple task I’m more than capable of completing.

“Gosh, you’re like a celebrity here, aren’t you?” Reece giggles, and whispers to me as the elevator doors close. “They’re speaking English but I don’t understand what they’re saying.”

“I had the same experience my first trip over. Ashely made me watch bad British television until I could hold my own in a business meeting.”

She bristles at the mention of Ashely’s name. “Like, you watched it together?”

Why would Ashely and I watch tv together? Is she jealous?

“No,” I say. “She downloaded an app on my phone for when I was working out on the cardio equipment. Let’s make this clear now. I don’t cross that line with my employees.”

“Just with your stalkers?” she giggles.

“Yes. I only cross the line with my little kitten stalkers.” I stroke her soft hair, kissing her cheek.

The elevator doors open, revealing a long hall. The dark gray door to the penthouse waits for us at the end.

She floats down the hall, her hand in mine. I open the door and show her our suite. She’s just as happy with the room as I’d hoped.

“Wow. This is beautiful.” There’s a massive king-sized bed covered in dove gray velvet blankets and pillows. A wall of windows spans the length of the hotel room, overlooking Hyde Park and the city. She walks over, looking through the glass. “This view! Is this even real?”

“It’s very real. And all yours to discover tomorrow. But tonight, you’re all mine.” I wrap my arms around her, ready to touch and taste and tease.

At first, she melts into my arms. Then her hands press against my chest. “Wait.”

My teeth are nipping at the lobe of her ear. I run my hands up the silky sides of her dress. The pad of my thumb runs underneath the curve of her breast. Moving upward I find her nipple peaked under the thin fabric of her clothing. I thumb the sensitive bud, sending a shiver through her body. “What?”

“I...um...I mean...are we going to...”

My hands glide down, cupping her ass, digging my fingers into her curves, squeezing. “Are you asking if I’m going to fuck you?”

Her wide eyes stare up at me. She purses those full lips of hers. I want them wrapped around my cock. “Yes, I guess I am.”

“The answer is yes.” I slip my finger between her ass cheeks, gliding it over the silky fabric of her dress, teasing her tight

little bud over her clothing. “And one day, I’m going to fuck you in this pretty little ass of yours.”

Her knees go weak and she moans, leaning into me.

I stroke the pad of my thumb over her lips. “And I’ll take you here too.”

She gives a little gasp, feeling the size of my erection as I push against her. “Um...I don’t know if you’re going to fit... anywhere.”

“I’ll fit.” I grab her hand, pressing it over my bulge. “And you’ll take every inch of daddy, babygirl.”

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

HIS ERECTION PRESSES INTO ME, hard and throbbing against my hipbone. There's no freaking way that thing is going to fit inside me...

Anywhere inside of me.

I'm trembling, my fingers digging into his shoulders. Holding onto him is the only thing anchoring me to this world right now. My head feels dizzy. Is it jetlag setting in or just the promises he's made me to me, the things he's said he's going to do to me?

My sex clenches, wanting his touch, curious to feel him inside me but fear overwhelms me. I've never been with a real man before. All my other boyfriends seem like teens compared to him. And all the sex I've had has been pretty straightforward. Sure, I've given a blowjob, but doggy style is the kinkiest thing I've done with a man.

And that's not even kinky.

The little ring of muscles at the entrance of my ass clenches. I've certainly never had someone take me...there. Until his fingers just glided over my ass, no one's even touched me there before.

The idea of his big cock going inside my ass... it's terrifying.

A shiver creeps down my spine. "Bryant...I don't know..."

A sharp spank lands on the center of my ass. “Babygirl. Don’t ever let me hear you call me anything but daddy when you’re in my arms.”

“Yes, daddy.” My words are a whisper.

My mouth is dry as sandpaper and my throat feels tight. I don’t know what to say. I just cling to him. Fear and adrenaline and sure, yes, curiosity and excitement, all the emotions flow through me, twisting together like a windstorm, threatening to blow me over.

His fingers clutch at the fabric around my upper thighs. Slowly, he pinches the silky material, dragging it up over my hips. The cool air rushes over my skin. He keeps pulling at the dress until it’s wrapped around my waist, my panty-covered bottom-half exposed.

He steps back, his heated gaze traveling over the seam of my sex. “I love your lacy panties. I can see your pretty pussy without even taking them off.”

“I wouldn’t call them panties,” I say, my face heating. Glancing over my shoulder, I look at the curves of my bare ass hanging out. “They don’t even have a back.”

That makes him chuckle. Holding my dress up with one hand, he slips a fingertip under the string that runs down the crack of my ass, pulling it and letting it go. It snaps against my skin, a line of fire across my skin.

“Haven’t you ever worn a G-string before?” he asks.

“No, daddy.” I shake my head, silky waves of my hair brushing over my shoulders. “I think they’re silly. There’s nothing there.”

He runs a hand over my bare skin making chill bumps rise over my flesh. “They’re sexy though, aren’t they, babygirl? Tell me how sexy you look.”

How am I supposed to do that?

Unable to do as he asks, I bury my face in his chest. “I can’t.”

“Do what daddy tells you, baby.” He gives my ass another sharp smack. The sting dances over my curves. He slips

fingers down my crack, parting my cheeks and running the pad of his finger over my ass again. This time there's no dress between us. He teases my bud, rubbing his finger up and down over the entrance to my ass. His voice drops low, a rake over coals. "Don't be a bad girl. Do as I say."

I take a shuddering breath. "I look...sexy?"

He nips at my earlobe. "You're not convincing me." He lifts my dress higher.

"I...am...sexy."

"Arms up." He tugs the dress over my breasts.

I lift my arms. He slips the silky dress up my arms, tossing it to the ground. Before I can lower my arms, he captures my wrists in the circle of his forefinger and thumb.

The room is chilly but his eyes are fire, his gaze burning me up, turning me to ash before him. I want him. Standing here in nothing but a bra and my barely-there panties, him pinning me to the air with nothing more than his gaze and his one, strong hand...

The words find their way to my tongue.

"I'm sexy," I say, my voice a melodic hum. "I'm sexy, and I want you."

He growls, grabbing the waistband of the panties, ripping them away from my body. The elastic digs painfully into my skin for a moment until they tear. Leaving me bare and wet for him, with nothing to hide the wetness of my arousal.

The scrap of fabric wasn't much, but it was something, a barrier between my sex and his massive cock. Now there's nothing there. He still holds my wrists, his other hand making quick work of my bra, somehow tugging it and with a twist, popping it open.

He releases my arms and they drift down to my sides, the straps of the bra gliding down my arms, falling to the ground.

I'm naked and in my nakedness I find myself glancing over my shoulder. My backside is facing the city, fully exposed to the buildings across the way, to anyone who cares to glance up

at the penthouse. A thrill runs through me at the thought of someone seeing me standing here in the center of the room, fully nude.

While he stands in front of me, fully clothed.

There is no balance between us. He's wealthy, I'm broke. He has what I need, I have nothing to offer him. He's older, wiser, and more experienced. He holds all the power.

And I'm powerless before him.

Cupping my breast in his palm, he brushes a thumb over my tightening nipple. He reaches for the back of my neck, twisting my hair around his hand. He tugs my hair, pulling my cheek to his mouth. In the same moment, he takes my nipple, capturing it between his finger and thumb and pinching.

Pain rockets through my breast, shooting over the back of my head and down my spine. The scratchy stubble of his unshaven chin runs along the curve of my neck, down my shoulder. His lips find the tender skin above my clavicle, the tip of his teeth nipping at me until I cry out.

His lips cover mine, capturing my cry with his kiss. His tongue swipes against mine, as he grasps my nipple tighter. My hands go to his, trying to pull him away from my breast. He grabs my hand, pinning it to my lower back.

"No, baby. You don't stop me from touching you." He pinches my nipple harder, then lets it go. The pain melts away, leaving a throbbing warmth that beats like a heartbeat between my thighs.

His tongue lashes against my earlobe. "Do you want me to make you feel good, babygirl?"

"Yes, please, daddy."

He releases me.

And drops to his knees.

What is he doing?

I look down at him, kneeling before me. He grabs the backs of my legs, moving closer to the apex of my thighs. He nuzzles

my sex with his lips, his breath heating my naked skin.

The light caresses of his exhale feels so good, it makes my head loll back and my eyes close. “Oh my god.” My hands go to his hair, running through it as he parts my sex—my skin made smooth as velvet in the spa—with his fingers.

His tongue is hot as it laps at my pussy. My clit buzzes, wanting nothing more than a swipe, just a lick, but instead, the tip of his tongue does figure-eights over me, avoiding my throbbing bud altogether.

A whine rises in the back of my throat. I know exactly what he wants. I know what he’s doing.

He’s going to make me say it out loud. He wants me to ask.

He wants me to beg.

My fingers tighten in his thick hair. “Please, daddy, please lick me... there.”

“Where, baby?” he whispers heat into my sex.

“My... clit.” Shame burns through me, but I need his touch oh so badly. I need the pressure, I need the release. “Please lick my clit.”

I get my reward, his tongue massaging, licking, and lapping at my aching bud. My sex clenches, no longer fearful of what his cock will feel like. I want him inside me. All of him.

“I... I want you inside me.”

“Not before I make you come.” He slips a finger inside of me, pressing into the slickness of my tight sex. He pumps his finger, delicious waves of friction trembling through me. He pulls out, adding a second finger to the first, pushing them inside me as one.

He pumps his fingers inside me while lapping at me with his tongue. The feeling of climax comes over me, warm and wet and wanting. I grab his shoulders, my body rocking, my hips moving back and forth as his fingers fuck me and his mouth pleasures me.

“Yes. I’m coming. I’m going to come.”

The climax tightens every fiber of my being, pressing inward, pressure like I've never felt, then a burst...

And I'm free-falling into sweet release, calling his name and going weak at the knees for him. "Daddy, oh, yes."

His mouth doesn't leave me, licking and massaging until he draws another orgasm from me. I can't take any more. "Please." He stops and the last shudders of pleasure move through me.

I come to and my eyes pop open at the clanking sound his unbuckling belt makes. The slow warmth and relaxation of the afterglow of the orgasm is short lived. I look down, watching him unzip his pants, freeing his cock.

He lives up to his name, Bryant *Long*, his cock is hard and long and now the relief I felt is gone. My inner muscles clench as I stare down. He's still on his knees, his white button-down untucked, his pants lowered, his sex standing tall and proud, the head of it glistening, ready for me.

But am I ready for him?

He grabs my hips. "Come here, babygirl."

He brings me down towards his lap, my knees bending at either side of his outer thigh. The head of his cock is lined up with my slick, throbbing entrance. My hands cling to his shoulders, the only thing that can steady me.

He captures my gaze, holding it as he presses the head of his cock into me. He's so big, and I'm so tight, my entrance burns as he pushes into me. "Yes, baby. Let me in. You feel so good. You're so tight."

His fingers dig into my hipbones, controlling my movements.

"Uhn... ah..." I whimper, unsure if I can take more, my skin burning as it stretches to bring him in. At the same time, my pussy tightens, begging, wanting to pull him further in.

"Come here, baby. Sit on daddy's cock."

I moan, his filthy words making another wave of arousal slicken my skin. He pulls at my hips, bringing me further

down onto him. He's halfway inside of me and I don't know if there's room for more.

He moves his hips upward, thrusting inside me, hard. Gasping, my fingers dig into him. "Oh, oh my god. It's too tight... it hurts."

"Let it hurt. The pain will turn to pleasure. Relax and let me inside you."

I try to do as he says, taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling. It helps and the next time he pushes upward, I loosen my hips, letting him bring them down onto him until his full cock is inside me.

He's right.

As I get used to the fullness of him being inside me the pain starts to turn to pleasure. My pussy gets wetter, wanting him to move inside me. I'm starting to enjoy this, my head rolling back, my eyes closing, my lips parting...

And then I have a terrible, horrible realization...

He's not wearing a condom.

CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

SHE'S PUSHING her hands against my chest. "Stop!"

"What is it?" I ask, driving my cock up further inside her.

Her hand comes down on the top of my thigh, balancing her weight as she protests. "Seriously. There's a conversation we need to have before we go any further."

"Further?" I ask, lifting my hips and driving into her. "How much further can we go?"

"You know..." Her pretty face flushes. She looks down, trying to hide from me with the dark curtain of her hair. I reach up, tucking the silky locks behind her ears so I can see her. "When you... come."

Her eyes shyly raise to meet mine.

"Oh, sweetheart," I say, moving deeper inside her. She moans with pleasure, lids falling over her unsure gaze, her head lolling back. "I've already looked into all that."

"What do you mean?" she asks, her breaths coming faster now.

"Before we started this little charade of who's stalking whom," I slip my fingers down over her clit. She lets out a whimper of pleasure, "I got your medical records."

Her eyes fly open like I knew they would. "You what?" she says.

“I knew you were after me for something you wanted and I knew you’d stop short of nothing, even trying to seduce me.” A wicked grin spreads over my face. “Am I right? You’d have fucked me just to get that key from me. Wouldn’t you?”

Shame and anger and desire war behind her gaze. Desire finally wins out as I lift my hips, fucking her deeper. Her moans sing in my ear as her head finds the cradle of my shoulder.

“My god,” she says. “What did you do?”

“I paid for your medical records. Money can buy you anything. I know you’re clean. I know you were tested after you left your shitty ex. And I know you’re filling a monthly subscription for a hormonal birth control pill.” I nip at her earlobe, lashing it with the tip of my tongue. “Which, I have to admit, was a bit depressing, considering I’d love to be putting my baby inside of you right about now.”

Her head flies back as my fingers dance over her aching clit. “You did that? You got a hold of my medical records?”

“Hell yes, I did.” How was I supposed to know if this little minx that was planning on seducing me was clean or not? “And you should know, I’m clean, too, of course.”

“Oh, good. I’m *sooo* glad you told me that.” There’s a sarcastic bite to her words that makes me want to lift her from my cock, throw her over my lap, and spank her ass. “I’m glad you’ve broken, like every law in the world and broke into my medical records and—”

“Purchased, not broken into,” I correct. I slide my hand up the back of her head, tangling her hair between my fingers.

“Whatever,” she says.

I circle her bud with the pad of my thumb, keeping rhythm with my rising and falling hips.

“Don’t talk to daddy like that.” My hand leaves her hip, curving around her ass. I press against the tight bud of her back entrance. “Be sweet.”

“Or what?” she whispers, her head lolling back as I touch her.

“Or I’ll take you here.” I press my finger inside of her ass, up to my first knuckle. “And I won’t be gentle.”

She gives a little shudder, her hand going to mine, trying to push me away. “Oh, no, I don’t do that.”

“Maybe.” I push in further. “Maybe you didn’t do ‘that’ with the boys you’ve dated, but you’ll do ‘that’ for daddy. Daddy’s going to take you here one day. Soon.”

Her breaths come in hard, panting shudders. She can’t deny how close she is to orgasm. She’s riding me harder, her arms tight around my neck, her face buried in my neck.

“Oh, oh my god.” Her hips move against mine, begging, needing the sweet release only I can offer her right now.

“What do you want, babygirl?” I ask.

“Please, please,” she begs. “Please make me come.”

“You beg so pretty, baby.” I fuck her harder, wrapping my arms around her lower back, pulling her against me. “Come all over daddy’s cock.”

She gasps at my filthy words, her sex locking down on my cock. As she tightens around me, her breaths grow faster, a deep whine rising in the back of her throat.

“I’m going to come,” she whispers like she’s crying. “Oh my god, I’m going to come.”

“That’s right, baby,” I say, the tightness rising from my core. “Daddy’s going to make you come.”

Her teeth sink into my shoulder. I embrace the pain that shoots through me, wanting the mark that she’s going to leave on my skin. Some small impression, made from her pretty mouth, making me as much hers as filling her with my cum will make her mine.

Her muscles tighten around me as she gives a little kitten-like mew of victory, chasing her pleasure, riding through the waves of her climax.

I grab her hips, pulling her down, hard onto my lap. As she comes, I feel the tightening in my balls, that delicious moment

I know I'm going to have my own sweet release. I come inside her, full and hard, my cum filling her until it spills out, hot cum running over us.

I hold her against me, our skin damp, our breath heaving together as we try to regain our place in this world. I've known this girl all of, what? A few days? And I feel closer to her than I've felt to anyone in a long time.

Feeling this close to her, it's...world shattering. It makes me want to tell her the truth.

As we come to, I kiss her cheeks, smoothing locks of her hair back from her face. "Baby," I say. "There's something I need to tell you."

Her lips are swollen from our kissing. "What?" She gives a breathy sigh.

I tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. "You know when I told you that I took care of everything for our trip, paying your bills, and—"

"You paid my bills?" She shakes her head. "I don't think you mentioned that."

"Did I not?" I thought I had told her. "I paid them through the rest of this month."

"Oh." Her eyes widen.

And the next. And the one after that. But I don't tell her because I don't want to overwhelm her.

"It's only fair, considering you're missing work because of me."

A smile spreads over her face as the relief from her responsibilities lifts from her shoulders. "Ooh. Um...okay. Thank you?"

"It's my pleasure to take care of you." Now it's time to come clean. "When I called your employer, I requested a bit more time off for you than I originally told you."

"What do you mean? I thought this was a quick trip?" Her teeth sink into her bottom lip.

“It was, but then some things came up at my work.” *And I can't bear to let you out of my sight.* “And it turns out if you agree, I need to extend our trip several weeks.” *I can't imagine the thought of exploring Europe without you.* “I'm hoping you say yes.”

She stares at me. Her pretty mouth drops open, but no words come out.

“You see, I have business in London, and then Scotland, and Paris after that. It's just so easy to hop from country to country out here—sometimes it's just the matter of a train ride. And, I know you said you'd not been out of the country, so I thought you might like to accompany me as I check on all of my businesses while we're out here and—”

“Yes! Oh my god, yes!” She wraps her arms around my neck like I'm her safety anchor. She glances up at me with awe sparkling in her beautiful brown eyes. “Yes. Please. I'd love to go all those places with you.”

Now it's my turn to be speechless. Having her in my arms like this, clinging to me, wanting me, making her so happy, it brings a tightness to my chest. A warmth spreads through me.

I feel... *happy.*

It's not a feeling I'm used to.

But I seem to be experiencing this feeling more and more in her presence.

She... makes me... happy.

“Thank you.” She leans up, brushing a sweet kiss against my cheek. “Daddy.”

My cock goes hard again already from the sweet cadence of her words, from the heat of her naked body against mine. Wrapping my arms around her, I say, “Put your legs around my waist.”

She obeys. I stand, holding her. I grab the base of my cock, finding her hot, wet, welcoming entrance with the head of it. I press into her warmth, her slickness. She gives a moan, her head lolling back.

I carry her to the small hotel suite kitchen, setting her down on the edge of the island. Her hands go behind her, her palms pressing into the marble counter. Her back arches, her breasts rising as she breathes.

“My god. You’re so beautiful.” I smooth my palm over her ribs, running a hand over her breast, her nipple hardening under my palm.

“I want to see you,” she says shyly, reaching out and tugging at the end of my shirttails.

I unbutton my shirt from the top, loving the excited look in her eyes as she watches me. Her gaze lowers with my fingers as I make my way down the shirt, exposing the muscular, tan expanse of my chest.

I shrug out of my shirt.

She leans forward, my cock stirring in her as she moves. The tips of her fingers stroke over the black tattoo that’s swirling over my right pectoral muscle. She glances up at my face, gauging whether she should ask me what the tattoo means.

I shake my head. There’s no way I’m ready to get into the tattoo now. The weight the swirling black symbol carries. What it means to me. What it could mean for her.

She understands. “Pretty,” she says, her fingers dropping from my chest. She leaves it at that.

God, I love the way she can read me.

Her fingers dance over my chest, sending electric tingles through my body. She stares at my body. The heat in her gaze makes me even harder.

She wants me. I need to fuck her. Now. I grab her hips, pulling her closer, thrusting deeper inside her.

She moans, her hands going to my hair. I bury my face in the curve of her shoulder, nipping and biting at her flesh. She’s so tight, so eager, the urge to come is already tightening in my core.

Her hands rake at my back. “Daddy. That feels so good.” Her legs wrap tighter around me, her pussy wraps tighter around

mine. I grab her hair, tugging at it gently but hard enough to get another seductive moan from her.

I nip at her earlobe. "I love that you're all mine now, kitten. Every little bit of you." I run my finger down her spine, making her shiver.

I kiss her lips. My finger travels further down her spine, dipping below her waist, sliding into the crack of her ass. "God, I love your body."

She gives a little gasp, but she doesn't protest. She just wraps her legs tighter around my waist. I lift her from the counter, my arms scooping under her ass. I can't wait any longer. I need to make her come again. I need to come.

I move my hips against her, hard and fast. She clings to me, fingers digging into my bare skin, her naked thighs damp with perspiration as they slip back and forth against my hips.

She grabs the back of my neck. "I'm...I'm going to come. Ah..." Her whole body tightens around me.

"Fuck," I growl into her hair, my climax rising until it explodes within me. I fill her with my seed, mildly irritated with her birth control.

I'd love to put my baby inside her.

Too soon?

I kiss her cheek, pushing her damp hair back from her face. "What do you want to do with the rest of your night?"

"Eat," she laughs, still trying to catch her breath. "I'm starving."

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

AFTER CATCHING a few hours of sleep while wrapped in his arms, surrounded by what have to be million thread count sheets, I'm standing in the most amazing bathroom I've ever seen in my life. My jaw drops as I take in the multiple shower heads, the expanse of spotless white marble, and—hell, is this floor heated? The tiles feel warm beneath my feet.

He's got calls to make. By the time I woke up, he was already showering. He gave me a quick kiss, then left me to my own devices. I was grateful for the time. I need a moment alone.

I need to process.

I push the buttons. All of the buttons. Heat comes down from a fan in the ceiling, warming my naked body. Water streams from two showerheads, as well as trickling down from a rain shower positioned over the center of the floor.

My feet dance along the heated floor. I can't believe this is all mine for the time being.

Standing under the steamy water, I take a moment to let it massage me and think over what just happened.

Did I just have sex with Bryant Long. Twice? Holy shit. And it was the best sex I've ever had.

I always wondered what it would be like to be with an older man. Did the experience live up to my fantasy? Hell, yes.

Yeah—there’s a difference between fucking a twenty-year-old guy that has no idea who he is, versus a man who’s almost two decades older than me.

He knows what he wants. And he takes it. And, damn...does he know how to take it.

I thought this whole crazy stalker-daddy thing was just about sex. Giving him something he wanted—*me*—for something I needed.

That damn key.

But now, here with him, the key is the furthest thing from my mind. I mean, I still need it. Desperately. I hate the idea of it still being in his possession and not mine. But I no longer want this thing between me and him to be just about the stupid key.

When I was sitting on his lap, his cock deep inside me, his strong protective arms wrapped around me...I felt like I was at...home? Is that the word? *Home* feels like too much, too meaningful for fucking on a floor, but I can’t think of another word to describe it.

I just felt like I was home...

Like *he* is my home...

Crazy? Right?

I don’t even know anything about him. Not really. What was that massive, swirling tattoo he had? The thing covered almost half of one side of his upper chest. It’s got to mean something to him. Or be a part of his past.

I know nothing about his past, do I?

And he’s just learning about mine...

If I had my way, we’d leave my past in the past and he wouldn’t learn anything else about me.

But now, I want to know everything about him. Every little detail. I guess sex does that to you, ties you to someone emotionally in a way you might not be prepared for.

I was not prepared to feel like this about him.

I need to get a grip, to come back to reality. To remember...

This little fling has an expiration date on it.

He's just a restless billionaire having a fun time with an innocent, naive twenty-one-year-old. He'll get bored of me eventually and toss me to the side.

Won't he?

His voice still echoes in my mind, *That's right, baby. Daddy's going to make you come*, and delicious shivers run down my spine.

I wash my hair then find a sponge, pouring lavender-scented bath gel over it. There's a soreness between my thighs as I clean him from my skin. It feels good. I like the reminder of what we did together.

The products in the shower feel amazing against my skin and hair. No expense is spared here at this hotel. No expense was spared by him. Crazy to think the staff prepared all of this under his direction.

The realization that I traveled on a private jet to stay in this fancy hotel, in London, and am about to get a free one-month tour of Europe courtesy of my billionaire daddy escort...hits me. Hard.

I can't help the smile that surfaces on my face. I think it's going to last the entirety of the trip.

It's funny. I've enjoyed this time alone but now I'm starting to miss him. God—that's so silly, isn't it? I mean, he's in the next room, for goodness sake. But I want to see him. I want to see the gown he's chosen for me to wear tonight. I want to know where he's taking me to eat. And I want him to kiss me...

I step out of the shower, reaching for the towel.

The huge fluffy white towel is...warm? Oh my god, the towel bar even has a heater. I press the soft warmth into my face, patting it dry. There's a robe. I wrap it around my body, finding a round brush and blow dryer to blow out my hair.

As I pull the last lock of my hair out into a silky wave, I hear him calling me.

“Baby. Time to get ready.”

I go to him. He’s already dressed. He looks incredible, wearing a dark gray suit jacket with a pinstriped shirt underneath. He holds a black garment bag in his hands. “I hope you don’t mind. I know my assistant packed plenty for you but I ordered this from the plane.”

Holy shit—he ordered me a gown on the way here?

“You like to spoil me,” I say. A pleasant warmth rises in me. He’s done so much for me.

“I love to spoil you.” His eyes hold mine as he slowly unties to the belt of my robe. His hands go to my shoulder, tingles dancing over my skin as he pushes the robe away, letting it fall to the ground. My only covering puddles around my feet, discarded, leaving me bare. His appreciative gaze travels down my naked body. “Because you’re perfect. Aren’t you?”

I think about my past. The way I stalked him to get closer to my key...

I think about the reason I need the key...

No, I’m not perfect. Far from it, Mr. Long Daddy...

I swallow back my guilt. “Um, no. But that’s sweet.”

He senses my unease, his gaze staying on my face a beat too long. Sometimes I wonder if this man can read my mind. He goes to ask a question, then thinks better of it.

I change the subject. “Can I see the gown?” I feel an excited flurry of anticipation in my belly.

“Yes. I can’t wait to see you in it. And the best part about this dress?”

“Yes?” I ask, my breath catching in my chest as he pulls the zipper down, exposing a sliver of silky lavender.

A wicked look flashes through his gaze. “You don’t need anything underneath.”

The dress moves over my body like the water from the rain shower gliding over my skin. A pale lavender color I’d never have bought from myself, made of pure silk. The neckline

plunges in a deep-v. My bare breasts are perfectly encased by the fabric, but there's nothing there to hide my peaked nipples. You can see the outline of my hipbones, the crack of my ass as I move.

I can't hide my body from him in this dress, even though I'm fully covered. I may as well be naked. Just like how I can't hide my thoughts or my feelings from him even though I try to wear a mask. He just keeps getting deeper and deeper inside me.

He takes me in his arms. "God, you're so beautiful." He slips a long curl of my hair over the back of my shoulder, his fingers gliding over my exposed collarbone.

He kisses me and for one perfect moment, I buy the lie he's selling me. I pretend he cares about me. That he'll take care of me. That he does all this for me because he wants me.

That I'm not disposable.

That I'm not a toy.

That we might even have a future together after this trip.

As his kisses get more fevered, I remember what I am to him.

Am I any different than a sex worker? I mean, what did this dress cost?

Something he wants for something I need...

An exchange of goods.

That's all I am to him.

I want to dive deeper into his kiss, but I can't.

I pull away, hiding my gaze from his.

Of course, he won't let me hide from him. He captures my chin, tilting my gaze to his. "Tell me. What's wrong?"

"It's nothing," I lie.

"Tell me." His other hand smooths over my ass, his gentle touch drifts over the delicate fabric. "You know how I feel about lying, little girl."

What can I say? I look into his heated gaze. He expects an answer.

I give a little shrug. "I don't know. I just...I feel like I'm..."

Many words spin through my mind but none of them find my tongue.

I feel like your toy?

Disposable?

Like time is ticking down, a little clock sitting on my shoulder, telling me that this paradise will soon be over?

He squeezes my ass. His fingers dig into my skin, pain shooting through my curves. I shoot up on tiptoe, sucking air between my teeth.

"Talk," he commands.

"Okay." I take a deep breath. His punishing hand makes the words rush to my mouth. "I just don't know where this is going. You know. Between us."

"Where this is going?" He looks deep into my eyes. Deep down, down, down, till I can almost feel him inside of me. "We're already there."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

He cups my face in his palm. "You're my girl. It's already done."

"But for how long?" I ask. "When we get home, won't you want to move on?"

He gives a dark chuckle. "Babygirl, we haven't even gotten started."

And he kisses me. And for a moment, the doubts melt away.

He takes me down the hall, to a rooftop restaurant that overlooks the city. He makes sure we get a table against the massive bank of windows. The lights of London sparkle against the dark sky.

He holds a black leather chair out for me. I slide my legs underneath the white tablecloth. Crystal water glasses are full

and waiting for us. Wine goblets sit empty, ready for us to choose red or white. I smooth a linen napkin over my lap, taking in the view.

I can see all of Hyde Park.

He orders sparkling water and a charcuterie tray to start and steaks for the entree. I sip the bubbly drink, nibble on delicate meats, and I just stare.

“I can’t believe I’m here,” I think to myself.

“Believe it,” he says, reaching for an olive and popping it in his mouth.

“Did I say that out loud?” I giggle, piercing a pepper with my fork as our steaks arrive.

“You did. And it was adorable.” He slices a sliver of beef from his plate, holding his fork out to me. “Try this.”

I lean forward, taking the bite from his fork with the tips of my teeth. Damn...I’ve never tasted steak this tender before. “That’s amazing.” I dab at my mouth with the corner of my napkin.

“It’s Wagyu,” he says, taking his own bite. “They fly it in from Japan.”

“Of course they do,” I laugh, dipping the tines of my fork into tender, rosemary-dotted potatoes. “This is the life, isn’t it?”

“It is.” His voice drops an octave, his gaze caressing my face. “If you have someone to share it with.”

I can tell by the softness in his tone that he means what he says. He wants me. I’m not disposable. And I love spending time with him. All the billionaire amenities he comes with are just a bonus.

But...and this is a huge but...everything is moving so quickly. I’m losing control. I feel as if the ground under my feet is quaking, threatening to crumble, leaving me to freefall. I’m not entirely sure I want to tumble into the center of the earth.

He reaches out, grabbing my hand in his. “I want to know more about you. I want to feel close to you. Tell me more

about your past. Tell me about Sheffield.”

Noooooooo...

The delicious buttery potatoes sink to the bottom of my stomach. Why does he have to take a perfect night and ruin it like this? Dread settles around my shoulders. “How about instead, you tell me what you want?”

His brow furrows. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that night in your warehouse, you said *something I need for something you want*. What did you want?”

“You.” He looks at me like it’s the most obvious answer in the world. “I wanted you.”

Warmth creeps in, melting my guard, making me believe he really might want me.

“Now, tell me about Sheffield.”

I take a sip from my sparkling water. I offer him a smile but it feels tight, fake. My voice is too high as I speak. “What do you want to know?” I cross my fork and knife over my plate. I’m done. I’ve lost my appetite.

His brow knits together. “Why do you get like this?”

“Like what?” I pull my hand from his, fiddling with the napkin in my lap.

He folds his arms across his chest, pushing his chair back from the table. His eyes are on my face, heavy and demanding.

I squirm under his gaze.

He’s not going to let me out of this one.

“You know exactly what I mean, babygirl. I want to know why every time your past comes up, you look like you want to run.”

“You really want to know?” I ask.

“Yes.”

My answer forms in my mind, but I can’t say the words out loud. Instead, they swirl around my brain, heavy and hurting...

Because if you knew the real me, daddy, you wouldn't want me anymore.

CHAPTER
NINETEEN



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

SHE DOESN'T WANT to tell me. She's doesn't want me to know all of her. Too bad, babygirl. That's not how daddies work. I want to know all of her. Every little bit.

She won't answer me.

I look over the park. The lights of the city draw my eye. It's a beautiful night.

I'll let her off the hook.

I don't want to ruin this moment for her. I just want to be close to her.

"You don't want to tell me. I understand." I lean forward, dropping my voice to a whisper. "But know this. One day, you'll tell me." *Everything.*

Her teeth sink into her bottom lip. She nods, grateful I'm dropping the subject.

I nod to her plate. "Eat some more. Please?"

"That's the kind of thing women dream a man will say," she laughs. She smiles at me. And it's real.

She has another bite of potatoes.

After our meal, she falls into the bed, exhausted from our travels and the excitement of the day. We'd napped for a few hours earlier, but jetlag still has her tired. She wraps her body

around mine, sleeping deeply against my chest. I wrap my arm around her shoulders, loving the weight of her against me. I normally toss and turn.

Now I sleep like a baby.

We spend the next morning walking in the park. We get espressos and pastries from a little French café on the corner. I can't do the proper English breakfast. Tomatoes and baked beans are not morning foods. She takes pictures on her phone as we explore.

She gives me a shy glance. "Can I take a picture of us?" she asks.

"Why not?" I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

She points her camera at our faces. I'm quite a bit taller than her. "Here." I take the phone, holding it out. I center our faces in the screen, the rose gardens behind us.

My very first selfie...god, that sounds ridiculous. I snap the picture, glancing down at the screen.

We look good together.

Really good together.

Sure there's a little silver hair at my temples and smile lines crinkling at my eyes where her flawless skin is smooth...I'm old enough to be her father. Well, her young father. I'd have to have had her when I was about nineteen. What was I even doing when I was nineteen?

Starting my own business. Serial dating in the city. Wining and dining the New York royalty to garner investors. Basically, the furthest thing from fatherhood.

She leans up on the tips of her toes, kissing my cheek. "Thank you. I love it."

Her fingers fly over her screen and a moment later, there we are, the two of us as the background on her lock screen.

In her world, that makes us official. Doesn't it? She and I, my arms around her, the two of us decorating her most important possession, her lifeline, her phone.

She slips her phone into her back pocket. The jeans Ashely bought her hug her ass in the most amazing way. I'll have to give my assistant a bonus.

I know it probably wasn't easy for Ashely to have to buy things for Reece. Ashely tries to hide it, but I know she has feelings for me. I write it off as an innocent crush that any employee might get on a boss.

But I draw a hard line in the sand about that.

I am your boss.

You are my employee.

And nothing will ever happen between us.

Sending Ashely to Reece's apartment only served to strengthen my message. Seriously, I couldn't function without Ashely but I've been hinting to her that it might be in her best interest to find a new employer.

She politely declined.

Ashely's harmless. I'm sure of it. There's just a bit of underlying unease that prickles up in her gaze whenever Reece's name comes up.

I tighten my arms around Reece as we look over the Round Pond, watching the white swans glide over the water. Ashely's going to have to get used to me talking about Reece if she wants to stay.

Reece isn't going anywhere.

I bury my face into her hair, kissing the top of her head.

She sighs, leaning her back against my chest, snuggling deeper into my arms.

I think of her face at dinner, when I asked about her past. What is she hiding? What is she not telling me? And what will I do when I find out?

I won't leave her. That's for damn sure. Her past is just that. Her past.

I'm her future.

Still, there's a nagging voice in the back of my mind and it won't quit asking me what I don't know about her, what information was left out of that report I first ran on her.

Probably because I'm hiding my own secrets.

My phone rings, breaking the magic of our perfect moment. Fuck. I do not want to answer it. I slip the phone from my pocket. It's Rockland, the head of the family. My pulse quickens. He only calls me directly if something's gone wrong.

What does he want?

"Sorry, baby. I've got to take this. Hang tight." I hate to leave her, even for a moment. I walk a few steps away to where I'm out of her earshot but I can still keep a close eye on her.

I clear my throat. "Rockland. How are you?"

"Bryant. I'm well. I heard you made it to London."

"I did."

"With cargo in tow?"

"Yes." I give a chuckle. Word travels fast in this family. "Precious cargo."

"Nice. Tess's been on me to set you up for years. I'm glad you finally found someone that grabbed your interest." His voice dips as he dives right into business. "Have you got our little problem under control yet?"

"I've been..." I think of Reece's body on mine, of our rooftop date, our lazy morning. "Getting settled. Not yet. But it will be. Soon."

"The family is counting on you."

"I know. It'll be taken care of."

Before Reece, the family was my only concern. My throat feels tight as I watch her. She's smiling at the ducks as they bathe.

Now she feels just as important to me as the family.

And she's never even heard of us. The Bachman Brotherhood. A powerful secret society running the city from behind closed doors. And I can't tell her a thing about us.

The tattoo she's so curious about was inked on me after my grueling initiation.

I'm a ground guy, our little nickname for family members who remain in the real world after initiation, undercover, running a legit business while making contacts around the world. No one outside the family knows I'm a Bachman.

And I can never tell Reece. Ever.

Unless...

There is one condition.

There's only one reason I would ever be able to tell her who I really am.

If she were to join the family.

And there's only one way for a woman to join the family.

Through marriage to one of us.

If she were to be my wife, I could tell her everything.

My thoughts unsettle me and excite me all at once. I've never had these thoughts before her. But Reece is so special, my bright little star. She shines. She brings light to my darkness. I watch her as she looks over her shoulder, offering me a sweet smile and a wave, a little delicate waggle of her pretty fingers. God, she's so beautiful. Looking at her strikes a bolt of longing in the center of my chest.

Here I am, wondering about her past when she has no idea who I even am.

Is it fair to her? To pull her further into her own game? Sure, she started this whole stalker nonsense to get her key, but I'm the one who upped the stakes.

I'm the one that made her mine.

And now, she doesn't even know what that means.

I've got business to deal with. There's a task before me the family is expecting me to complete. That's why I'm in London. I need to remember that fact. I need to focus.

But she's swiping her hair from her face as it blows in the wind, running the tip of her tongue over her glossy lips...

Just begging me to kiss her.

My phone burns hot in my pocket. The boss doesn't call unless he's unhappy. And I know better than to keep the boss unhappy.

I've got to get to work.

Which means...I have to leave her. If my eyes aren't on her, then someone else's should be.

Ashley's in town. She always travels with me. Well, not with me—I fly private, she flies commercial then does her thing on my dime—shopping mostly—but is on standby 24/7 should I need her.

Of course, I buy her first-class tickets, put her up in a lush hotel, but I don't invite her on my jet and we stay different places. It's best to keep boundaries with your employees. Especially younger female employees that may have feelings for you. Sure, I'm corrupt when it comes to my private life, taking my taboo, forbidden, barely-legal babygirl into my bed.

When it comes to work?

I don't fuck around where I make my money.

And I make a hell of a lot more money now that I'm a Bachman. And I fucking love my chosen family. So let's keep Rockland happy.

I move to her, sliding my hands around her waist, pulling her in close. "Sorry about that, babygirl." I breathe in her scent, feel the softness of her hair against my chin.

"Who was that?" She tilts her face up toward me, meeting my eye. The smile she gives me makes me want to give her the world. "On the phone?"

“Work.” I push my hand against her lower back, pressing her lithe body into mine. “You’re so fucking beautiful and sexy, you’ve had me distracted. Now, unfortunately, I’ve got to get some work done.”

I’ve got to accomplish what I came here to do.

“Aw...” She gives a pretty pout. “I wanted to play some more.”

I kiss the top of her head. “We will, kitten. I promise. Listen, I don’t want you alone. Not in a strange city. I’ve got someone here. She can take you shopping, take you to see any sights you want to hit, or hell, together you can just eat your way through the city. She’s got my black AMEX and there’s no spending limit. Do whatever you’d like.”

“Thanks. But...” Her nose crinkles like she already knows the answer to the question she’s about to ask, and she doesn’t like it, “Who’s taking me?”

I force a brightness in my tone like it’s the greatest match in the world. “Ashely! She’s great. You’re going to love getting to know her better. She knows all the shops that women your age—”

“Women my age?” She lifts a brow. “I’m not that much younger than you. Only a decade or two. And I’ll be fine on my own.”

My hand goes from her waist to her ass. “I’m the daddy. And what I say goes. And I don’t want you alone. You don’t speak the language. Ashely can translate,” I joke.

“It’s true,” she laughs. “I still have no idea what anyone is saying.”

“If I can’t be with you, I trust Ashely.” I give her ass a discreet squeeze, letting her know it’s not up for debate.

She gives a sigh of defeat. “Okay. But I’ll miss you.” She pouts, begging for a kiss.

I kiss her, sliding a hand along the back of her neck. “Be a good girl for daddy.”

I love watching that blush bloom on her face.

“Yes, daddy.” She rises on tiptoe, kissing my cheek.

An hour later, Ashely and Reece are marching down Oxford Street, my credit card in hand. Reece says something that makes Ashely laugh. Ashely smiles, putting her hand on Reece’s shoulder. Ashely glances back at me, knowing me well enough to know I’m watching them. She gives me a smile that’s meant to reassure me, to tell me that she’s got this.

That she’s got Reece.

But the smile stops just below her eyes, leaving me feeling uneasy. The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. I rub them away with my hand. I’m being silly...overprotective.

Reece does this to me.

I give Ashely a wave. I have no choice but to trust her. I’ve got work to do.

I could call a car but I choose to walk. I need to clear my head. Being with Reece has me all kinds of cloudy. For the past twenty-four hours, all I’ve thought about is her.

It’s time to think about family.

Of course, even that idea makes me think of her...of how this whole twisted secret in my life would be so much easier if she just knew the truth.

If...she was my wife.

Moving too fast?

Hell. I do everything fast. Except pleasing my woman.

That I take my time with.

Still, she’d make a hell of a Beauty.

Beauty—that’s what we call our women in the Bachman family. We treat them like queens. We’d lay down our lives for them if we needed to. The Bachman family is a secret brotherhood of powerful men who tend to look at the law as more of a gray matter than black and white. We take what we want. When we want it.

And as far as NYC goes? We rule the city. Our headquarters are a hidden, secure, town. A place we've named the Village. It's surrounded by brownstone buildings housing businesses that we own. Almost like the castle walls forming a bailey.

Since I'm undercover as Bryant Long instead of Bryant Bachman, I'm housed at *The West*. The most desirable apartment building in Manhattan. Also owned by the family. My townhome in the Village is vacant, waiting for my return.

Who knows when that will be? Right now the family needs me right where I am. Today, I'm in London because there's a man here. One who wants to threaten us. I don't take well to threats. Neither does Rockland. That's why he sent me here.

The man's name is Frank Graham, known to some as Frankie. He's a shipping merchant. Someone who can help us get our arms to our storage facility in Greece. We own a private island there called The Parish. It's where we store our weaponry.

We did the background checks. Questioned every damn businessman in this city. Frankie came up clean. A man who would keep his mouth shut. But now, we're hearing whispers... words that could damn a man.

Some say he's tipped off others to what we're shipping. Pirates who stand to gain from terrorizing the open seas. Men who embrace violence. Men who could overtake a barge of automatic rifles.

Money. Power. Both are involved. And both will make men do foolish things.

Frankie is waiting for me in the place we agreed to meet. A quiet bar on the corner of *Market* and *Great Castle*. He's sipping on one of those dark English beers. I can tell by the condensation-less glass it's room temperature.

I prefer my beer the way it should be, ice cold.

He's a thin man. Tall with a blondish mustache I suppose he thinks makes him look distinguished. I move to his side. I stand, towering over him.

"Frankie."

A grimace washes over his face at the sound of a nickname he doesn't like.

"Mr. Long. Long time, no see." He takes a drag of his beer. "No pun intended."

I nod towards the rear exit. "Walk with me."

He eyes me, then the beer. He doesn't want to leave the beer. And he certainly doesn't want to leave with me.

I lift the glass. Hold it up in the air. Tip it upside down, pouring the dark liquid over his lap.

His bloodshot eyes go wide. "Mate! What are you doing?"

I set the empty glass down. "Walk with me," I repeat.

A sheen of perspiration dots his upper lip as he stares up at me. His words come in a stutter. "Al—alright then. Hold your horses. I'm coming." His gaze skitters right to left like he's looking for his own horse to ride right out of town.

He throws a ten-pound note on the table and follows me out to the alley.

It's quiet out here. Dark, the sun partially blocked out by the height of the buildings. Frank wraps his arms around himself as if there's a chill in the air. There's not. He knows what's coming.

His lips tremble as he speaks. "Look, mate. I know why you're here. And I have to tell you—you've got me all wrong. I'm not the one who tipped off the pirates, I'm—"

"I never even said why I'm here." I grab his collar, pulling him close enough I can smell the stench of his alcohol-laced breath. "And that's all the evidence I need."

"For what?" he asks, shaking in my grasp.

"For this." The knife slides from my pocket. It's so sharp, it glides through his artery like it's gliding through a stick of butter.

He stares at me, grasping at me for life. Clutching at me while the gurgling sounds fill my ears. I release him. He falls to the

cement ground. I watch as a pool of red surrounds him. The knife, I wipe clean of my prints, leaving it in his hand.

Stopping in the Mandarin lobby, I wash my hands. A dozen times. I return to the hotel room. After an event like this, I can never quite feel clean. As soon as I push the door to our room open, I know by the silence that there's no one here.

Damn. Where is she?

Grabbing my phone I dial her number.

No answer.

Fuck.

I call Ashely. She doesn't pick up. She's never, ever, not picked up my call before.

The hairs on the back of my neck go on end again. Should I have trusted Ashely? Could she have done something to Reece? Have I misjudged what I thought was a harmless crush from Ashely?

I'm crazy. Right?

Just coming down off what happened in the alleyway. I'm overreacting. I take a deep breath.

I text Reece.

Where are you

Call me

Now

No answer.

I slam the phone down.

CHAPTER
TWENTY



SHANNA HANDEL

Reece

“OH, DARLING,” I say. “That dress looks smashing on you. Positively smashing.”

Ashely giggles at my terrible attempt to fake an English accent as I impersonate the saleswoman that helped us.

“She just wanted you to buy it,” she laughs. “I mean—you look amazing in that Vera Wang. Red is totally your color, but she was laying it on a little thick, wasn’t she?”

I slip my keycard in the handle, pushing open the door to the room while balancing armfuls of packages. “I know, right—” My words lodge in my throat as I take in the scene in my hotel room.

Daddy Bryant is standing in the foyer, stony-faced, hands on his hips. He lowers his voice and a rumbling growl seeps into his tone.

He doesn’t even wait for us to step into the room. “Could either of you have picked up your phone when I called?”

“You just called. Like one minute ago.” I try to laugh off his anger, but the sound dissolves in my chest. “We were in the lobby when you called us. We didn’t think we’d need to answer—”

Ashely jumps in, helping me out, “We knew we’d be up in a second. Sorry, Mr. Long. We didn’t mean to scare you.” She

sets my other shopping bags down on the island. Clearing her throat, she looks from him, back to me. She shoots me an apologetic look. She's going to ditch me... "Ah—I've got to be going. I've still got a few calls to put into the office at home. You guys have a great evening!"

Seriously, Ashely? I mean, I know we're not besties but still, you could be on my side just a little bit... then I take a closer look at Bryant's stony face. Yeah, okay, if I were her, I'd be running out of here as well.

And with a flutter of her fingers and the gentle closing of the door, she's gone. Leaving me alone. With a very angry daddy.

He runs a hand over the back of his neck. His blue eyes have storm clouds gathering in them. "You couldn't just pick up your phone? Is it so hard?"

"Ashely didn't pick hers up either and you're not yelling at her." I slide the bags from my arms, letting them fall to the ground.

He's over to me in one step, his hand capturing the back of my head and bringing my ear to his mouth. "Ashely. Is not mine. You are."

A shiver runs through me. *I am his.* It's a wonderful feeling, and yet there's a nagging sense of fear clenching at my stomach.

I'm his.

And his to do what he wants with.

And right now...

"I'm going to punish you." His fist wraps around my hair, tugging it until prickles of heat run over the back of my neck. "So the next time I call you, you'll know. You pick up."

"Yes, daddy." My words are barely audible. A whisper against his stubbled cheek.

His hands are at my waist, undoing my button, lowering my zipper. He's shoving my jeans over my hips, down to the middle of my thighs. The cool air dances over my bare skin, chill bumps rising on my flesh.

My words tremble as I ask. “Wh—what are you going to do to me?”

His lips move down the side of my neck, teeth nipping at my flesh. His only answer is his thumbs hooking into the elastic waistband of my panties, tugging them down to meet the tops of my jeans.

He smooths his hands over my bare ass. His fingertips dig into the curve of my bottom where it meets the tops of my thighs. He then drags them back up my ass, fingers digging into my skin.

A moan rises in the back of my throat. What is he going to do to me? My stomach flips and flops, desperate to know what my future holds.

He grabs my hips, moving me towards the island. He pulls out one of the backless, armless barstools. One hand on my waist, the other on my lower back, he bends me over the stool.

My belly sinks over the cold leather. My hands go to the wrought iron legs of the stool. My palms are damp with perspiration and they slip over the metal as I grab it to balance my upper body.

My legs hang down behind me, the tips of my toes barely grazing the wood floors. My hair hangs down around my face. My bare ass is on full display for him.

I hear the clinking of his metal belt buckle unlatching. My ass cheeks clench. *No way*. He’s not planning on using his belt on me. Is he?

I get my answer in the form of leather dragging over the fullest part of the curve of my ass.

Yes, he’s going to use his belt.

I tremble, my hands tightening around the metal legs of the stool. He leaves the belt resting on my ass. It’s light, its weight barely registering but it feels like it’s a thousand pounds when I imagine the sting it will make.

Nerves flood in. “I’m sorry. I should have picked up. But is this really necessary—”

“Very necessary. And I want to. I’ve wanted to since the first time I set eyes on this beautiful ass.”

I give a little shudder of tense anticipation.

His words are a rake over coals. “Do I have your permission?”

His question, which sounded totally like a demand, hangs in the air. He drags the cool leather over my bare skin once more. The belt is soft, tickling my skin. But I know if I let him spank me with it, it’s going to go from sweet to stinging.

Do I want to agree to this?

He’s shown me pleasure in pain.

And... I’m curious.

“Yes—ah!” Before I even can take a breath after consenting, the belt comes lashing down. My words go to a sharp intake of breath as he lifts the belt and snaps it down again. Fire dances over my skin, two trails of burning heat making my mouth gape and my eyes fly open wide. “Oh my god! Seriously? That hurts!”

“It should hurt. It should hurt enough to make you remember what I require of you. Which is...”

I can’t think clearly as the pain ebbs. “Huh?”

“Why are you being punished, kitten?” He drags the belt across my ass. The leather is soft and sweet again as it glides across my burning flesh. “Why am I setting a fire to your ass? What do I want you to remember?”

“To answer your phone calls?” My teeth clench together as another spank of the belt comes crashing down over my ass. “*Yeow!*”

He drags the belt over the hot lines he’s made. The belt is gone, hovering for a moment before it comes down again, a loud crack echoing through the hotel room. The pain bursts across my skin. White lighting, a flash of inferno. Tears burn at the backs of my eyes.

“Babygirl. Tell daddy. Tell daddy how sorry you are.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t pick up the phone. I promise I will next time.” I dance on the balls of my feet, shifting my weight. I can’t take another spank. I beg him. “Please.”

I hear the belt drop to the ground. A breath of relief rushes through me. He grabs me in his arms, lifting me from the stool. He sinks onto the barstool, pulling me into his lap. My ass burns as it presses against his thighs. He holds me against him. I sniffle, wiping my damp eyes on his shirt.

He smooths his hand over my hair, down my back, whispering against my cheek. “I was so worried. I don’t ever want to feel that again. If I call, I need you to tell me where you are. To tell me that you’re okay.”

“I will,” I say. “I promise.”

The heat from my ass travels, warming me between my thighs. Pain to pleasure...

A pool of arousal escapes me. Will I leave a damp patch on his trousers? The thought has me equal parts turned on and humiliated. The stripes from his belt start to throb. Then my pussy starts to throb. The punishment was pain, turning now to some form of shameful pleasure. I squirm in his hold.

I want him to touch me.

I want him to make this aching between my legs disappear.

I want...him.

“Please,” I beg. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I fold into him. “Please.”

He knows what I want, his fingers traveling up my naked thigh.

“Bad girls don’t get to come like this...” he slips the tip of his finger over the seam of my sex.

“How—how do bad girls get to come?” I ask, my breaths coming in hard pants. His fingers leave me wanting, begging for more. “Please. Touch me.”

“Bad girls come from getting fucked...” His fingers slip under my ass, pressing at the tight ring of muscles there. “Here.”

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

“BUT FIRST I have to train your ass to take my cock.” His fingers tease my entrance.

My spine stiffens. Train my ass? “What do you mean?”

He pats my thigh. “Hop up.”

I stand from his lap, my jeans and panties still wrapped around my mid-thigh. He leaves me, going to the bedroom. I’m standing here, my bottom half fully exposed, wondering what’s going to happen next. The air feels suddenly chilly, and I wrap my arms around myself as goosebumps rise on my arms.

He returns. A tube of lube in one hand. A funny little gold thing shaped like a top in the other. Its metal head is smooth and rounded, narrow at the top, widening as it comes down, then pinching into what looks like a handle.

I can’t tear my eyes from the object. A tremble runs through me because there’s only one place he can mean for it to go.

My ass.

“What’s that?” I ask, trying to hide the trepidation from my voice.

He holds it up with a sparkle in his eye that matches the sparkle shining off the gold as he twists it between his finger and thumb. “It’s a pretty gold plug for your lovely ass.”

Holy shit.

My throat feels tight, my heart lurching in my chest.

I go to back away from him but my jeans are tight around my thighs and they make me stumble. I grab the kitchen counter to steady myself. My fingers tighten around the stone as I try to calm myself but my head feels light. “That...thing...is not going inside of me.”

He moves towards me, twisting the plug back and forth, furthering my unease. “Daddy says that it is. You’ve been bad. I’m punishing you. And I want to fuck you in the ass. Trust me, you’ll be a lot more comfortable if I get you ready first.”

He sinks onto the barstool. He spreads his legs. He taps the handle of the plug against his thigh. “Back over my lap, babygirl.”

I give a gulp. I can’t do this. Shame covers me, heating my face, but my shaking feet somehow take a few steps toward him with wetness pooling between my thighs at the heat in his gaze.

He takes my arm, helping me lay back over his lap, smoothing his palm over my chill bump-covered flesh. “Such a pretty girl. It’s a shame you can’t be a good girl for your daddy, but I can teach you.” His hand slips between my thighs, applying pressure and spreading them apart. “Spread those pretty legs for daddy so I can see all of you.”

All of me? He means my back entrance...a place no one has ever seen or touched except for him...the place he wants to put that...thing. “Uh...I don’t know if I can—”

My words are cut off by a sharp spank, his palm coming down on my ass. “Daddy knows you can.”

I give a low moan, spreading my legs, now impossibly wet between my thighs, knowing I’m leaving a wet patch of arousal on his trousers again. I hear him opening the lube.

His fingertips crawl up the cleft of my ass. He reaches my asshole and my first instinct is to clench my cheeks together and keep him out, but I remember how stingy his big palm is and I stay still.

“There’s a good girl, lying so calm for her daddy.” His slick fingertip, covered in cool jelly, presses against my tight ring of muscle. I let out another low moan. This is so...shameful, to have him touching me like this...there.

My pussy clenches as his finger makes its way inside my ass, up to what feels like his first knuckle. “This plug I’m going to be putting in you is a small one. You’ll feel it stretch and fill your ass. When you move around you’ll feel it inside you and you’ll think about what a bad girl you were and how you belong to your daddy. And when daddy calls?”

“I answer my phone.”

“Good girl.”

Oh, damn. His words make me as wet as his touch. His finger leaves me and I find myself wanting more pressure there, more touches. But wear a plug in my ass? How long?

“Um...” I wriggle my hips at his heated touch. A whine rises in my tone. “How long do I have to wear it, daddy?”

“Till I tell you it’s time to take it out.”

I let out a shuddering breath as I hear the cap on the lube again.

“I’m going to lube up your pretty little plug and slide it into your ass. It has a sparkly gold jewel at the base of it that daddy can see peeking out between your pretty little ass cheeks.”

The slippery tip pushes against my ass. I let out a whimper, not from pain, just from how strange the sensation is, having something fighting to go past my tight ring of muscle.

He smooths his hand over my lower back. “Relax, baby. I’m going to push it in further. Take a deep breath.”

I obey, taking in a deep breath and exhaling my tension. There’s more pressure, more fullness, pressing inside of me. I let out a moan and a whimper as he pushes it further in. Is it in all the way? I don’t know. My ass feels strange and full but the pressure down there is also heating my core, making my sex pulse, my muscles clenching together.

It's in all the way. I can feel the handle nestling between my ass cheeks. He tugs at the base. "Just right."

Now what? Do I go out like this? We have plans this evening, a fancy dinner with some of his business partners. Will I be dining with a plug in my ass?

He helps me stand. His arms go around my lower back, pulling me into him. He grabs my naked ass in his hands, his fingers teasing my cleft, finding the end of the handle of the plug. He teases it, tapping with his finger. The gentle pressure makes me melt into him, burying my face into his shoulder.

It feels so strange, but as I shift my weight on my feet, it feels good, too. I'm a mess. Confused and turned on, my curves still stinging from his belt, my ass filled with his plug.

He kisses my cheek. "Time to get dressed, babygirl. I've got important people for you to meet."

"Okay..." I wriggle my hips like it will alleviate this strange feeling.

I guess I'm going out like this...

With a plug.

In my ass.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

TRAVELED TO LONDON.

Had sex with my babygirl for the first time.

Killed a man.

Hell, that's a pretty full fucking forty-eight hours.

Reece looks gorgeous tonight, the navy silk skimming her curves. She's a walking work of art. Although my little masterpiece's walk is a little funny...

She's teetering on her gold Louboutins, their bottoms as red as the stripes on her ass after my belt. Naughty girl. I hide a laugh, watching with pure satisfaction, knowing she's trying to get used to the feeling of my gold plug in her ass while she walks.

She'll never dismiss one of my calls again.

I love punishing her. I love that she trusts me to punish her. I have to have her answer her phone. I can't not be in contact with her. Not when we're in a strange city. Not now that she's involved with me...

We're going to have a little discussion later tonight about me putting a tracker on her phone.

It's not my fault.

The girl stalked me first. I can't help that she intertwined our lives with her sexy little ways, her pretty pout, those striking brown eyes.

God.

Why did Sheffield have to give me the key? Couldn't he have given it to someone else? Someone less dangerous for her to get involved with?

Did she have to come for me?

Now she's got me wrapped around her finger and she doesn't even know it.

I'm having feelings for her. Strong ones. Ones that make my breath catch when she walks into the room.

I can't let anything happen to her.

I won't ever let anything happen to her.

Would the best, safest thing for her be for me to give her the key?

Say goodbye?

Never see her again...

But now she's teetering over to me, that smile that makes me melt resting easy on her pretty face. She wraps her arms around my neck and calls me, "Daddy."

I lean down to kiss her. Her eyes lock on mine, sending a spiral of warmth shooting straight through the center of my chest and in this moment, I know—

I can't give her up.

"Come on," I say, holding the emotion from my tone. I press a kiss lightly on her sweet lips. "They'll be eager to meet you."

Cash and Preston are already waiting for us at the table in the private room we've reserved.

The men's wives are with them, Ella and Jules. The two women sip champagne and whisper and giggle between themselves. Reece tenses beside me, noting she's the odd woman out.

But the moment they see her, in classic Beauty fashion, they're popping up out of their chairs, embracing her and welcoming her.

Ella grabs Reece's hands in hers. "Oh my gosh. We're *sooo* excited to meet you! Bryant just told us this afternoon that he was bringing company."

Jules chimes in. "You have to tell us all about yourself. Do you like Manhattans?"

"I don't know. I've never had one," Reece says, giving the women a shy smile.

"There's only one way to find out." Jules links her arms in Reece's. "Girls trip to the bar! We want to get something pretty to sip on and leave you men to your boring work talk."

I give Reece a *you good?* eyebrow. She smiles reassuringly, teetering off to the bar between the two women, leaning heavily onto Jules's arm.

She still hasn't gotten used to the plug.

I take my seat with the men.

Cash pushes a waiting whiskey over to me. "Don't worry. We let Ella and Jules know to keep everything on the down-low."

"For now." Preston flashes me the devilish smile he's known for.

"What do you mean, *for now?*" I ask.

Cash gives a casual shrug. "We've never seen you with a woman."

"Other than your assistant," Preston adds.

Cash tosses Preston a pointed look. "Who he immediately employee-zoned the first day she arrived."

"Right." Preston toys with his heavy gold watch, twisting it around his wrist as if he's deep in thought. "So to see you here, halfway across the world with a gorgeous brunette on your arm, when you never so much as brought a woman to a family dinner..."

A teasing light flashes in Cash's gaze. "Well, it leads people to make assumptions."

I grumble into my glass before taking a sip of my whiskey. "You know what they say about assumptions."

"Yeah." Cash's dark brow raises. "They're going to make a total ass out of you when we find out we're right. Six months from now I bet we'll be hearing wedding bells."

"The pitter patter of little Bryant Long feet," Preston laughs.

"Jesus, you two. Give it a rest." I swirl the amber liquor against my glass, not wanting to look at either of them. Are they right? Will Reece be my forever? I have no fucking idea, but they're not lying when they say I've never brought a woman to a family function. Change of subject. "Did you tell Jules and Ella not to use my last name?"

"Yeah." Preston shoots back the rest of his whiskey, setting his glass on the table. "We told them your last name is Long. Nice. Did you pick that for any particular reason?"

"No. It was given to me when I got my fake papers. But don't worry." I take a deep sip of the whiskey. "I live up to the name."

"Cheers to that, man." Preston lifts his glass. Cash joins in. We clink glasses toasting our dick size. Yeah, we're grown-ass men, but sometimes we have to let off steam.

Cash moves his finger and thumb, twisting the glass against the tablecloth. "You took care of our little issue?"

"It's taken care of." I think of the color draining from Frankie's face as the breath left his body.

"Any problems?" Cash asks.

I shake my head. "No problems. None at all."

Preston runs a hand through his hair, leaving it standing on end. "Good. Rockland will be pleased."

I glance over my shoulder, checking on Reece. She's perched on a stool, her spine straight as a rod, her ass teetering on the edge of the seat.

She's trying not to put any pressure on that plug.

But she's happily sipping on her drink, laughing at something Jules just said.

Preston nods toward the bar. "How long has that been going on? Or is the topic totally off limits?"

"Not too long," I say, keeping my tone casual.

Cash's dark brow goes sky-high. "Seriously? You've been eyeing that girl like you've got a damn diamond in your pocket."

"Have I?" I ask. What kind of diamond would she like? Round, oval, square...

Preston gives me the side-eye as he sips his drink. "I'm not gonna lie. Judging by the smiles on your faces when you two walked in I half expected you to hand me a save-the-date card."

Is it that obvious? Damn. I run a hand over the back of my neck. "Things are moving...quickly." As in at the speed of lightning fucking striking.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Long?" Preston lowers his voice. "You can't tell her anything unless you're serious about her."

"You serious about her?" Cash leans his elbows on the table.

"Am I serious about her..." I tap the tips of my fingers against the table. I think of the way it feels to have Reece in my arms. To be inside her. The sound of her laugh, her sighs, the soft moans I pull from her lips. "Yes. Very."

Cash leans back in his seat, crossing his arms over his chest.

Preston lets out a low whistle. "Damn, Long. You've gotten yourself in a quite a bind, haven't you?"

"How'd you two even meet?" Cash asks.

How the hell do I answer that?

I give them the basics, leaving out the tug in my chest I feel every time I look at her, the warmth her presence brings to me,

the fucking smile I can't seem to erase from my face. "Undercover, I had to retain my own lawyer, couldn't use the family one, could I? Sheffield and I became friends. Not close or anything, but we'd shoot the shit whenever I ended up in his office. When he died, he gave me a key... turned out it belonged to Reece."

Desperate to get her key back, she made a plan to stalk me...

But I stalked her back...

Harder than she stalked me...

And brought a daddy kink to the mix while I was at it?

And fucking fell in love in the process?

Shit, Bryant. Don't use that word. Don't ever use the L word.

I'm in way too deep.

I've drug her into the dark, churning waters with me.

I glance over at her. She's happy, light, beautiful. Just perfect.

A horrible, heavy, sinking feeling punches me in the gut.

I have to give her up.

I have to let her... go.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-THREE



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

JULES ORDERS ME A SECOND MANHATTAN. I'm going to need it for what I have to do later tonight. I shift my weight to my right ass cheek, trying to keep the weight off the plug.

"Thanks," I say, taking the glass from the bartender.

He flashes me a flirty grin. "On the house, pretty lady." He winks.

"No thank you very much." Jules's tone turns to a teacher-y one I recognize from my preschool work. She gives the bartender the cold shoulder. "We buy our own drinks."

He holds his hands up in surrender. "You got it, girls." He raises a questioning brow at me as he makes his way to the other end of the bar.

My face heats with embarrassment. "That was harsh." I take a sip of my drink.

Ella puts her hand on my forearm, giving me a sweet smile. "Trust us. You'd be a lot more embarrassed if one of our guys went to pay the bill and there wasn't one."

"Bachman men do not allow other men to buy their women drinks," Jules says.

Bachman men? Are Cash and Preston related? They couldn't look more different from one another. Maybe through

adoption? “You’re both married to Bachmans? Are they brothers?”

I don’t miss the flash of worry that passes over Ella’s face as she responds. “Oh! Yes. Um...not like brothers, just—”

Jules jumps in. “Distant relations. But Bryant is just a friend of theirs.”

“He’s not, you know, related or anything,” Ella quickly adds.

Hmm...weird.

A look passes between them. They’re hiding something. I’d pry or at least think about it more but I don’t want to be rude. I ask a question I presume to be safe.

I take a dainty sip of my second drink. “Tell me more about your husbands. How did you meet?”

Jules jumps right in, roses blooming beneath her freckled cheeks. “Preston and I knew one another in high school. We had this one crazy night together then both of us moved on. I ended up back in our small town, thinking I’d never see him again, but then when his dad passed, he came back. He just showed up one night, knocking on my door and the rest is history.”

“You have to visit Jules’ hometown sometime,” Ella says. “They have a beautiful castle up on this hill. It’s gorgeous.”

Jules nods with a bright smile, clearly proud of her town. “We use it for events, weddings and reunions, things like that.”

“That’s when Jules and I got really close. She planned Cash’s and my wedding. We had it at the castle.” A sparkle of good memories shine in Ella’s eyes as she sighs, “It was magical.”

Jules leans in. “Your turn. Tell us how you and Bryant met.”

“Yeah,” Ella adds. “He hasn’t told us much. But I know he likes you because the man has literally never shown up with a woman before.”

“Other than Ashely,” Jules adds.

“Yeah, but he doesn’t look at Ashely the way he’s looking at Reece.”

We all turn over our shoulders, looking at Bryant. He is staring at me. Intensely. Like a stalker. I hold back a giggle.

What do I say about how we met?

Ms. Greene always says to KISS when dealing with difficult parent interactions. *Keep it simple, sweetie*. “My father was his lawyer.” I take a long, slow sip of my drink so I can’t say more.

These girls can take a hint. Jules gives a smile like she knows there’s more to the story then says, “That’s nice.”

Ella rises from her seat, putting a hand over her flat stomach. “Should we eat? I’m hungry.”

I think of Bryant’s hands on me, back at the suite. My stomach ties in knots. I don’t think I can eat. The Manhattans goes to my head, making me feel dizzy. I stand on shaky legs.

Bryant comes up behind me, his hand running along my lower back. His reassuring touch clears my mind.

I glance up at him.

He’s smiling down at me but there’s something troubling in his eyes. Is he upset? But his voice is steady, his hand making circles on my back. “You good, babygirl?”

He’s just worried about me. That’s sweet. My head is swimming, my stomach clenching with nerves. I’ve never had anal sex before. This plug is filling me, making me wonder if I’ll like it, if it will be uncomfortable. I feel bad for asking to cancel our plans but I’m so nervous, there’s no way I can eat.

I offer what I hope is a reassuring smile. “You know. I’m good, I’m just not feeling up for a big dinner.”

He stares at me a beat, his brow furrowed. “You want to get out of here? Go home?”

I nod.

He slips a protective arm around my lower back. I already feel better. Tonight will be a new experience, but it’ll be with him.

“Sorry, Jules and Ella. It was so nice to meet you. I just—”

He makes my excuse. “We’re still feeling a bit jetlagged.”

“Oh, we totally understand.” Jules pops up from her seat, leaning over to kiss my cheek. “Get some rest.”

“It was so nice to meet you, Reece!” Ella gives me a quick squeeze.

I slip my hand in his. He squeezes it. It feels good, reassuring. But I still feel off. We say goodbye to the rest of the group. My hand never leaves his.

Back at the hotel, he closes the door behind us. He flips the lock and the sound of the door bolting makes a chill run through me.

Am I ready for tonight?

Can I do this?

He removes his suit jacket, slowly. He folds it in half, putting it over the seatback of the barstool. He sinks down into the leather chair.

“Come here, babygirl. Let me take that plug out of you.”

I kick off my heels, going to the stool where he sits. He pats his thigh. I know what that means.

Over daddy’s lap...now.

My bare feet pad across the tiled floors. Nerves flutter in my belly as I make my way to him. I’ve got no idea what to expect but as I get closer to him, my body begins to respond, my panties going damp. I press myself against his warmth. Strong hands grab my waist, helping me over. I balance my torso over him, sliding my arms over his right thigh. My ass is perched over the edge of his left thigh.

His fingers drag the silky material of my dress upward. The cool material clings to my lower back as the chilly night air dances up my legs. His fingers dip below the elastic band of my G-string. He taps on the base of the plug.

His voice goes low, gravelly with desire. “What did you think of wearing daddy’s pretty plug tonight?”

“It felt funny. Kind of uncomfortable...” I leave out the part about it making me wet, knowing it was there. Feeling it inside me.

He doesn't let me hide. He strokes my curves with the tips of his fingers, dragging them over my ass. “Did it turn you on? Knowing you were wearing daddy's plug?”

My answer is a whisper. “Yes, daddy.”

“I know, babygirl.” He gives a deep chuckle, his fingers grabbing the ends of the handle. “Take a deep breath and relax.”

“Okay.” Everything in me wants to clench up but I try to do what he says, letting my muscles relax.

He tugs on the plug. It starts to move out of me. It feels so weird, to have it leaving my body. It slips along my muscles, then, it's all the way out. I give a little whine, shifting my weight on my feet, wriggling my hips.

I feel...achingly...empty.

And he knows it. He smooths his hand over my ass. “Is your ass ready to take daddy's cock now, baby?”

How would I know? “Um...”

All night I wanted that damn plug out of me but now that it's out all I want is something back inside me. I want to be full, I want friction back there...

He gives my ass a sharp spank. Fire lights on my skin. “Words, babygirl.”

I clear my throat but my voice still shakes. “Yes. I'm ready.”

My response makes him growl. I feel his cock stir under my belly. He grabs my hips, pulling me from his lap. My feet only rest on the floor for a moment before he bends me over the kitchen counter, forcing me up on tiptoe. My dress had ridden up over my belly. The marble is cool on my bare skin. I sneak a glance at him. He's grabbing the lube from earlier, freeing his cock from his trousers.

Wetness pools between my thighs as I watch him stroke his proud, hard cock with a palmful of glistening lube. It's not big. It's massive. I'd forgotten how huge it was, but now, watching it stand at attention as he prepares, it, my stomach flips. How in the world is that thing going to fit where he plans to put it? He slips his hand around the head of his cock, bringing it down to the base, fully coating it with lube.

The lubrication should ease my mind. Instead, my ass cheeks clench at the sheer size of his cock, the idea of it in my ass. I'm glad for the plug now, for the preparation. Because that thing is going to be hard to get inside of me.

"You ready, babygirl?" His slick hands go to the inside of my thighs, parting my legs. I glide my toes across the floor, widening my stance. My palms are damp from perspiration and nerves. I flatten them against the cold marble.

The head of his cock presses against my entrance. It's huge as it battles with my unwilling muscles. I take a deep breath. Focus on this new sensation, of having him try to go inside me...there. "Breathe, babygirl," he moans as he rubs circles over my lower back.

"I'm trying." I release the breath and the slippery tip of his cock pushes into my ass, stretching me and making my ass burn. The pressure builds within me, my ass wanting more. My pussy is empty and clenching, jealous of the attention my ass is receiving.

"You're doing so good, baby. Daddy's going to help you take my cock. Let me touch you." His arm wraps around my waist, his slick fingers dipping in my folds. He circles my clit, a thousand bursts of electricity dancing over me.

"Oh my god." His touch is exactly what I need. My body relaxes. My jaw drops. My eyes roll in the back of my head. My palms drag along the stone counter. He pushes harder, moves further inside of my ass. I'm taking him, inch by inch. The fullness rocks me as his fingers make waves of pleasure ricochet through me.

A whine rises in my throat. I move my hips backward, my ass backing into him, demanding more from him.

“Beg me, babygirl. Beg your daddy to fuck your ass.”

Shame fills me but I beg. “Please. Please fuck my ass. Hard.”

“You sound so pretty when you beg.” He growls in victory. He knows I’m powerless to him right now. I’ll beg, I’ll cry, I’ll do whatever he says as long as I get that final climax.

He fucks me harder. I gasp at the sudden fullness. There’s more burning and I’m stretching to let him in. His magical fingers work my clit and I throw my head back.

“Oh god.”

He leans down, his tongue lashing at my neck. His hot kisses bite at my tender flesh as he thrusts into my ass. The tension building in my core is like nothing I’ve felt before. The sound of my pulse fills my ears. Bright white lights flash behind my tightly closed eyelids. I’m free-falling, disconnected from everything that is not this bursting release deep inside of me.

He whispers his command and I obey. “Come for me, babygirl. Come for your daddy.”

I come.

Hard.

And when I think there is nothing left in me, that I’ll die if he doesn’t stop this madness, my body tightens into one, final, trembling burst.

“Babygirl,” he calls, his fingers digging into my hips as his cock explodes in my ass. Pulsing, filling my ass with his hot seed. It spills out, running down my thigh.

Marking me as his.

But I’m not.

Am I?

Emotions flood me. The aftershock of the orgasm’s leaves me breathless, my limbs useless, but my mind whirring. I’ve never felt anything so powerful. And I know I never will again. There is no one else on this earth that can make me feel the way he does.

He brushes the hair from my back, softly kissing my neck, my shoulders. Whispers warm sweet words in my ear. "There's my baby. There's my sweet babygirl."

I've let this go too far. The realization hits me like a tsunami. I have to end this.

I have to stop this charade.

Tonight.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FOUR



SHANNA HANDEL

R eece

WE SHOWER TOGETHER. He pulls me into his arms, wrapping me in his warmth as the water streams down my back. He soaps my skin, cleaning me and rinsing my body. The luxury, this spoiling... I'll miss this.

I'll miss him.

He makes me eat something. "Shouldn't have let you drink on an empty stomach," he says. I nibble at the cheese and crackers he ordered up. Sip at the bubbly water.

He's on the balcony, taking phone calls. Speaking in hushed whispers. Glancing over at me every so often. Giving me a tight smile. He's acting distant. Pulling away from me.

How can he be pulling away from me when I'm the one who's leaving?

Does he sense something is up? Is this daddy a babygirl mind reader too? Does he know what I'm about to do? I should be relaxed after the sex and the shower and the sweet nothings but my stomach clenches in knots. I want wine but after my two Manhattans, I don't see daddy allowing it.

You know what? I'm a grown ass woman. If I want a glass of wine, I'm going to have one. I go to the wine fridge under the counter. I find a clear glass bottle of golden liquid. White wine? Sure. Wine not. I giggle at my little joke, more a product of nerves than actually thinking I'm funny. I put the

bottle on the counter, searching the drawers for a corkscrew. I find one and begin my battle with the cork.

So, yeah. I'm young and I'm broke. I've only opened screw caps.

I sense him before I see him. "Hold on," he says to the person on the phone. He comes up behind me, the phone cradled between his ear and shoulder. He gives me a grin, amused at my predicament. "May I?"

I hand him the corkscrew, watching his big, strong, extremely capable hands as he works the wine opener. There's a quiet pop as he slips the cork from the bottle. The small sound makes me jump. I really am wound up. He grabs a glass from the cabinet, saying, "Just a minute," to whoever he's speaking with.

He gives me a generous pour and a kiss on my head and leaves me, returning to his secret conversation on the balcony.

I sip at the cool, sweet wine. It's like nothing I've tasted. Delicious and bright. I glance over my shoulder and see that he's watching me, a gentle smile on his face.

I'm being silly. He has no idea what I'm about to do and he's not acting strange. He literally just washed my body for me and fed me. Everything is fine with him.

Thinking he was pulling away is just from the upset feeling I have, knowing what I must do.

It must be.

I'm just nervous... but as I dig deeper into my emotions I realize what I'm really feeling.

Devastation.

These last few days have been the best of my life. Too bad, Reece. You have a job to do. I grit my teeth and steel my nerves. There's a bigger picture here. It's time to put the final piece in the puzzle. And it's my job to do that.

I can do this.

Feeling more settled, I finish my wine. Dress in the elegant silky gown he's bought for me. Sink into the cotton sheets and cover myself with the feather-filled comforter. I wait for him. He comes to the room, stands in the doorway and just stares at me for a moment.

"What's up?" I ask after a quiet moment.

"Nothing. I'm not ready to sleep. Want to watch a movie?"

"One of your bad British ones? I should probably be working on the lingo." I give a laugh but it sounds forced.

"Sure." He holds his hand out to me.

I leave the bed and join him.

We watch a movie together on the couch but I can't focus. I couldn't tell you what even one of the plot points are. It's just dull sound and pictures in the background of my thoughts.

He's not focused either. Just stares at the screen like he's a world away. His arm is around my shoulder, his fingers mindlessly stroking up and down the back of my arm.

Things are tense between us, I can feel it. I know something is off with him. He's quiet. Is the movie an excuse to not have to make eye contact with me? He's pulling away from me.

But why?

Does he know what I'm going to do?

No, I don't think it's that.

No matter the reason... all the more reason to do it tonight.

Afterward, we collapse on the bed together. I snuggled against him, my head on his chest. I don't want this moment to end. I slow my breath, pretending to sleep.

A half-hour must have passed.

He says, "Reece?"

I don't answer, keeping my breathing slow and steady. He thinks I'm asleep.

He pulls me close, breathing into my hair. He takes a long inhale, and on his exhale, he whispers words against my

cheek.

“I’m in love with you, Reece Bright.”

Did he just tell me...

He’s in love with me?

I try to tell myself that I misheard him...that it couldn’t possibly have been what he said.

But it was...wasn’t it?

He just told me that he loves me.

My heart beats three times faster, thumping against my ribs. I’m careful not to tense, to keep pretending to sleep but everything inside of me is fully awake, every nerve on end, my mind and body on high alert.

Tears burn in the backs of my eyes. I force myself to breathe normally, to stay perfectly still so he still thinks I’m asleep.

What I have to do was already making me dizzy with nerves, sick with the regret I might feel.

Now?

Hearing this?

The knowledge of what I have to do shatters my heart into a thousand pieces. Jagged pieces like broken glass glitter inside of my chest, the sharp shards digging into me, making my chest burst in pain. I steel my nerves, blinking back tears. I tell myself...

It doesn’t matter.

This has to be done.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FIVE



SHANNA HANDEL

Daddy

I HAVE TO END THIS.

It's what's best for her.

It's the only way.

If you love someone, you'd do anything to protect them. Even if it means living without them. It's too dangerous, dragging her further into my world. I need to tell her it's over.

I can't give her the key, either. I hate to go back on my word, but there's no way she'll tell me the truth about what that key leads to and I can't risk her doing something to hurt herself.

I trust Sheffield. I know he had her best interests in mind. Otherwise, he wouldn't have taken her in, in the first place. He took good care of her when no one else would. If he didn't want her to have that key, there was a damn good reason for it.

She needs to go back to her life. Her preschool job, her friends. She's such a doll—she'll have a boyfriend her age within a month.

I have no doubt about that.

I'll still keep her bank account full. I'll have security posted at her work, at her home. Undercover. She'll never know, but I will. They'll protect her until I'm sure she's safe, that she's been completely untangled from my web.

Until I know there is no one out there interested in hurting her to get to me.

I try to picture her with a boy her age. Maybe even getting engaged...married...having kids.

But I can't.

Every image I try to conjure up of her future has me at her side. It's me slipping the three-carat diamond on her finger. Me reciting vows to her at the altar.

It's my baby that she carries in her belly.

Fuck, how did I let things get this out of hand?

How did I let things get this far out of my control?

I guess love is the one thing I can't control.

She's breathing deeply, her cheek warm against my chest.

I say, "Reece?"

She doesn't answer. Her breathing is slow and steady. She's asleep. I pull her close, breathing into her hair, then inhaling her scent.

I shouldn't say the words—hell—I shouldn't even be feeling them.

But I can't stop them from coming. Something in me has to let them go.

I have to put these words into the world.

Just. One. Time.

Then I can let her go.

"I'm in love with you, Reece Bright."

She sleeps, steady, trusting against me. She has no idea that in the morning when we wake, I'm ending this.

I'm sending her on her way.

I fall into a troubled sleep. When I wake, I reach for her, wanting to hold her close. One. More. Time. My bed is empty. My heart lurches in my throat. She's not here.

I check the rest of the suite but I already know she's gone.

Where the fuck is she?

I tear through the closet. Her phone is here but everything else is gone. She must have known I could find her if her phone was on her. Even though I never put that tracker on it, tracing her would have been easy enough.

My only hope in finding her is if she uses her passport or a bank card. My men can trace her then. But she has a ton of cash and I have no idea if she's planning on leaving the country.

If she doesn't leave an electronic trail, it's just a wild chase with no clues as to where she's gone. If she left her phone, she doesn't want me to find her... God, she's out there in the city. By herself. And...she's left me.

Where did she go? Why did she go?

Why did she leave me? I know—it's a crazy thought to have because I was going to send her home this morning. I was going to end things with her...

But—I know my own reasons. I love her and I want to keep her safe.

What were her reasons for taking off like this?

My throat closes. My shoulders knot. A creeping sense of doom fills my belly.

Why would she leave?

What could she be doing?

The image of it enters my mind before I even think the word. A small brass key hanging from a red ribbon. "Shit! The key."

I rush to the closet, digging through the small pocket of the overnight bag I've been keeping it in. It's gone. The key is gone.

The key is gone...and so is she.

I don't need our tech, our trackers, our security to solve this mystery. Taking the key tells me everything I need to know.

She knew her phone would let me track her movements. She knew once she used that passport, boarded that plane, I would know exactly where she was headed.

She's taken the key and she's trying to beat me to the cabinet in the back of Sheffield's office. She just wanted a head start. And she's gotten one.

I flip through my phone, checking the airport's commercial flight times. I find the most recent flight that's taken off for New York.

"Fuck."

It just left. My visions of charging down to the airport and ripping her off the plane and spanking her ass right there in the terminal...dissipate. Reece is somewhere in the air, flying among the clouds. Anger fumes in me.

I literally cannot get to her.

If she took that flight, she had no choice but to use her ID and passport. I need to know if she is on that plane. Luckily, I have connections. I make a few calls to confirm what my gut is already telling me...

She sure as hell is. Bought her ticket at the desk. In cash. She's flying commercial. I have a private jet that can take off within fifteen minutes of my command. I do the math.

Flying private, I can beat her there.

Just barely.

When she shows up at his office with his key in her hand, I'll be there waiting for her. If I can make it.

I stand to pack my bags, but a lead weight in my stomach slows me down, making me drag my feet. If I can beat her there, should I? What's best for her? I mean, just last night I decided I was getting out of her life for good. My whispered *I'm love with you* was my goodbye, thinking that what is best for her is to be completely uninvolved with me.

Now?

I'm not so sure. I'm finding out that saying you're going to quit someone and actually having them out of your arms are two very different things. She's gone and I'm sitting here, aching for her.

The moment I realized she was gone, it felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest.

Like a piece of me was missing.

The very best piece of me.

I have a choice to make. I could do what I set out to do this morning and let her go, let her leave my world, my tangled web. Let her live her life and find happiness with a boy her age—even though the thought makes me want to kill any and every boy that might try—let her find whatever it is that she wants so desperately in that cabinet...and...

Let her go.

Or do what this tugging in my chest is telling me to do?

Go to her. Take her in my arms. Keep her safe the best way I know how to.

By making her my wife.

I made the promise before I even really knew her. One to a man I very much respected. Sheffield's voice rings in my head. The last words he said to me never left me.

His hands were cold, but his eyes were warm. "Look, I'm having some health issues. I might not have long and I need you to do me a favor. When the time comes...when I pass, a friend of mine is going to bring you a brass key on a red ribbon. Promise me you won't give Reece the key. Promise me."

He looked so desperate I answered without asking questions. "I promise. I'll keep the key."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "I just want her safe. She means the world to me. You having this key... if you have the key, I know she'll be safe..." His words trailed off.

A few weeks later, when he passed, a mutual friend brought me the key.

At first, I didn't think much of it. I just kept it locked away in a drawer inside my desk. But then I heard that Reece had been prowling around Sheffield's office, asking after the key. It piqued my interest. I kept tabs on her.

That's around the time she moved into that hovel of an apartment across from The West. She started her little panty window escapades.

She started to stalk me.

I knew there was more to the key—that it really meant something to her. That if she was willing to try and seduce a strange man twice her age to get to it...

She was desperate for it.

I just didn't know why.

Once I meet Reece and saw the desperation in her eyes, how badly she wanted that key, the lengths she was willing to go to get it, yes, I had ties to Sheffield but he was gone and Reece was right there in front of me, flesh and blood with a heart that was beating for that key.

I gave her the key, once, knowing I would take it right back, which I did, telling her she had no pockets in that silly little dress of hers. I showed it to her, even let her hold it. I did this, hoping she would tell me why she needed it, what was in that cabinet that she so badly desired. But she didn't.

Instead, she lied.

Making up some story about how she thought 'her father' died of foul play and the cabinet held the truth about his death. I knew it was a lie. He was my lawyer and he had the Bachman family protection behind him. No one would touch him.

His secretary confirmed he'd not been feeling well, that he had had some chest tightness in the past but refused to seek the help of a physician. He died at his desk. As we do any time a Bachman-friendly employee dies, I investigated his death. There was no foul play. I saw the autopsy report with my own

eyes. Heart attack. Ventricular fibrillation, the most common life-threatening arrhythmia. It's an erratic, disorganized firing of impulses from the heart's lower chambers and the heart is unable to pump blood.

Death occurs within minutes.

Why would she lie? Sheffield must be right. She shouldn't have it, I decided. I never gave the key back. I told her I'd hold onto it for safekeeping. I held onto it and kept my promise. The key was safe and so was she... I thought.

If I go and hunt her down and rip that key out of her pretty little hand, I'll have kept my promise to Sheffield. I'll keep her safe from whatever danger that key opening that cabinet is going to bring her.

But I'd be pulling her back into my world. If I go now, if I make it in time and see her again...

There's no way in hell I can leave her.

The moment I see her, I know I'm going grab her in my arms and make her mine.

I line up the jet. I call my driver. I pack my bags.

And I wait...

The next ten hours are going to be absolute hell. The waiting... god.

It's going to kill me.

WHAT HAPPENS with Reece and Daddy's love story?

[Order Praise Me Sweetly NOW](#)

PRAISE ME SWEETLY

L *et's continue this white-hot daddy romance duet...ORDER*
NOW

REECE

He's my daddy and there's no going back
I'm addicted to his scorching touch and filthy mouth
He's from a dangerous world
One I don't fit into
But I want him so badly
I need him but I don't know if I can do this...
If I become his forever it could end me

Daddy

She thinks she can't handle my world
I can't let her leave
She's become my obsession
I know every inch of her beautiful body

The way she sighs when I'm getting her close
I'd do anything to keep her safe
Which might mean letting her go...

ELLA'S STORY: CASH IS KING



Ella

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'm back. It happened weeks ago. I shouldn't still be coming here.

"Miss?" The cab driver's voice pulls me from my thoughts. He studies my face, concern etched in the lines of his. "You sure you want me to leave you here?"

"Don't worry. I'll be fine." My fingers reach for the car door handle. "Thanks."

"Um...you sure we're at the right place?" His eyes dart up to the sign arching over the entrance. "Should you be here alone? At midnight? You sure you don't want me to stay and wait for you?"

I shake my head, offering what I hope is a convincing smile. "No, really. I'll be okay."

"Hmm." He remains unconvinced this is a good idea.

I'm with him; getting dropped off alone in a graveyard probably isn't my best idea. But we're already here.

"Thanks again." I open the door and the cool night air rushes into the car. I've got one foot on the ground, but a clearing of the driver's throat stops me.

He says, "Ah...are you forgetting something?"

"What?"

He glances at the phone in my hand. “You gonna pay me?”

“Oh, shoot. Sorry! Hang on.” I pull up the app, sending him the payment and a generous tip I can’t afford. “Thanks. Seriously.”

“You’re welcome. And be safe.” He shoots me one last worried look.

I shut the door, my boots crunching over the gravel drive as I make my way to the paved path. The cab pulls away slowly, like the driver is unsure about his moral obligation in leaving a woman alone in a place like this in the middle of the night.

I’ll be fine. The angry squawk of a low-flying crow makes me glance up. He’s so close I can see his glittering eyes. Creepy. Okay, I’m 99% sure I’ll be fine.

The full moon is bright, lighting the night with an eerie bluish tint. It’s beautiful, but in that haunting way that finds you holding your breath, waiting for something to happen. A chilly gust of wind caresses my face. Tendrils of my long dark hair get stuck to my lip gloss. I stare up at the moon as if it’s a promise of something beautiful to come.

A ding from my phone startles me, making me pause my journey. I look down at the screen. “Shit.”

It’s an alert from my bank.

Of course.

My little splurge on the cab over-drafted my checking account. Looks like I’m walking home. I quickly splash a little cash from my dwindling savings account over to my checking.

I keep going, my eyes scanning the headstones. I’m almost to his. As soon as I see the name on the grave, tears spring to my eyes. I shouldn’t still be crying. I don’t even miss him. But here I am, standing at his headstone dabbing my eyes with a crumpled napkin I found in the pocket of my trusty yet worn gray wool coat.

Why do I keep coming back here?

He’s gone.

And I've got to move on.

I don't know what haunts me more...the guilt or the sadness. After all, the death of a monster is still a loss of life. I just hate that I was involved in someone's violent end.

My phone dings again, this time with the sound I use for an email notification. Kinda late for an email. I slip the phone from my pocket, sighing as I swipe my finger over the screen. It's from my boss. My ex-boss, as of today. My fingers shake as I hold the phone closer to read the email.

Dear Ella,

I received your letter of resignation. Thank you for aiding The Primary School in making this a smooth process in what is otherwise a very unique situation.

"Unique. Code word for disastrous," I tell the headstones.

As we discussed, two weeks' pay will be transferred to your account tomorrow as severance.

Best,

Ms. Ross

Two weeks' pay gives me time to find a job (hopefully) and hey—being unemployed means I can sleep in tomorrow. I guess being a person of interest in a murder investigation has its perks after all. I slip my phone back into the pocket of my coat.

The wind is growing stronger, rustling up a tornado of dried leaves at the heels of my black leather boots, equally as worn as my coat, but with a little polish they're no worse for the wear. I pull my coat tighter around me. It's time to leave. I give his name one more glance, my emotions caught somewhere between anger and relief.

Why did he have to do what he did?

And why did I do what I did?

My heels click against the pavement as I make my way over the moonlit hill. Huge concrete memorials mark the graves to my right, smaller rounded headstones like his to my left. A

chill runs through me, the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end.

I'm ready to be home. If you can call my bleak, three hundred square feet of New York City real estate a home. I live in a crumbling Victorian that was chopped up into apartments in the late Seventies, the only thing I can afford by myself.

A streak of black darts across my path. I stop in my tracks. Rabid raccoon? Deranged possum? A ghost of critters past? A pathetic little meow rings through the night.

Awww...it's a cat.

An all-black cat, no less. Good thing I'm not superstitious. Just a little stitious. "Too late, buddy—I've already had all the bad luck one girl can take."

Green eyes flash from behind a headstone in response. Another meow, this one more desperate than the first. Being orphaned myself, I'm a sucker for a stray.

I crouch down, offering an opened palm. "Here, sweetheart. You want a little pet?"

The cat gives me a curious look, but his desire to be scratched behind the ears wins out. He curls around me, making figure eights around my ankles as I stroke his silky fur. He's almost all black but with white markings on his feet like boots.

I scratch behind his ear. He purrs. "Boots is too cliché a name for you. Isn't it? How about..."

"Pepper."

I'm startled by the deep rumbling sound of a man's voice. Shit. I'm not alone after all.

I look up into the bluest set of eyes I've ever seen. The man clears his throat, then his husky tone caresses the night air once more. "His name is Pepper. At least that's what I've been calling him."

I rise, brushing fur from my hands. "Oh. Is he yours?"

He shakes his head. "No. He's just always here. I started bringing him treats when I come. He's already emptied my

pockets for the night.”

“That’s sweet.” I’m probably safe. But who is this man alone in the graveyard feeding a cat?

Trying to not be too obvious, I sneak in a gawk. Thanks to the bright light of the moon I get a good look. Upon further inspection?

The man is gorgeous. Tall enough you could wear your highest heels next to him and still feel dainty. Broad shoulders that fill out what looks to be a ridiculously expensive suit that fits him so perfectly it had to be made just for him. Square jaw. Perfectly formed lips that curl at one corner. Dark hair makes a stunning contrast with his blue eyes. His hair is cropped in a utilitarian look, but judging from the scent of his clean cologne and the just-barely-there shadow darkening his chiseled jawline, he’s not one to overlook his grooming.

With this backdrop he could be one of those Cullen vampire men. He’s that good-looking. In fact, he’s *drop-dead* gorgeous. A fitting description for a man in a cemetery. A nervous giggle brims up. I cover my mouth with my hand, trying to hide it.

He lifts a dark brow in a perfect arch. “What’s so funny?”

The steely look he’s giving me dries the giggle right up. I shake my head, clearing my throat. “Nothing.”

He takes a step toward me. “What the hell are you doing alone in a graveyard, anyway? Not exactly the safest place to be, is it?”

The sternness in his tone surprises me. The cemetery is suddenly eerily quiet, and I’m painfully aware of how alone I am with this stranger.

I take a step back. “I could ask you the same thing.”

He gives one of those caveman-like grunts. “I’m perfectly fine. But you—”

“Are a woman?” I offer a grin. “Yes, I’m well aware. Have been since birth.”

His eyes cut into me, making me rethink my cheeky stance.

I clear my throat, glancing down at the toes of my shoes. “But I’ve been coming here for weeks and you’re the first person I’ve even seen.” I nod to the cat. “Well, besides Pepper here.”

Pepper gives a whiny meow, brushing up against Mr. Handsome’s eighty-thousand-dollar suit, surely leaving a dusting of fur behind.

“You’ve been coming here alone...for weeks?” His brow cocks even higher—a feat I’d not have thought possible if I wasn’t seeing it with my own eyes.

A shiver runs through me at the look he gives me. Like I’m a naughty little schoolgirl caught by the principal. He stares at me, hard, waiting for an explanation.

I don’t have one for him.

He presses. “Well?”

I clear my throat. “Ah, I’m not sure it’s any of your business, sir.”

Sir? Where did that come from? A flicker dances through his gaze. Did he like me calling him sir?

[GRAB Cash is King NOW](#)



MORE DADDY BOOKS BY SHANNA



A nnabelle

OK THIS IS IT. My big exam, the one that's going to count for half of my grade. This is the moment I nail my experiment, impress Ms. Pinchyface and get an *A* in Organic Chemistry.

I take a deep breath, focus my gaze and dip just the tip of the dropper into the blue liquid. *Atta girl, you got this.* Filling it exactly to the third *ml* line, I pull the dropper up and with steady hands, move the dropper over the beaker.

One, two, three. Three blue dots swirl through the cloudy liquid. *Perfect!*

Now, the whole thing should turn to a gelatin-like material, thus me having performed the magic of making a liquid into a solid. Kid stuff, right? Piece of cake. But I seem to have a special knack for screwing up even the most simple stuff.

I hold my breath, watching, waiting for the chemical reaction to kick in so I can breathe a sigh of relief as three weeks of work comes to a close. Maybe I'll even get a celebratory pat on the back from my hard-nosed professor, Dr. Faircloth. With her constantly narrowed gaze and pursed lips I've secretly taken to calling her Ms. Pinchyface.

I can just imagine the surprise on her face as she takes in my accomplishments. She'll have to smile, won't she? And maybe she'll say, *Good job, Annabelle! I always knew you were my brightest student—*

A noxious odor reaches me, tearing me from my daydream.

The liquid in the beaker bubbles and foams, overflowing the beaker in a sudsy heap.

I stand, jaw slack, staring helplessly at three weeks of work down the drain.

That's not...right. The fumes grow. *Wait. What? No.*

This can't be happening.

My gaze scans the room. Everyone is so involved in their own experiments, no one has noticed my disaster yet. The foam has doubled in size, growing like some monster from the depths of my own personal scholastic hell. I murmur to myself, "Shit. Shit. Double shit."

What do I do?

"Ms. Pin—Dr. Faircloth? I think we have a problem here." I grab a rag, flapping it over the beaker trying to dissipate the smell but the extra oxygen only serves to make the bubbling worse. Now the blue gooey liquid is growing, bubbling over the edge of the table. The odor becomes stronger, burning my nostrils as it fills the room. "Uh—I think it's an emergency?"

Ms. Pinchyface rushes over, her brow tightly furrowed. "Annabelle, what's this? What have you done?"

I pick up the jar, showing it to her. "Uh, I just added the—"

She stares at the label on the glass. "You used the wrong reagent in your experiment. This is a toxic chemical reaction. We need to evacuate the lab. Immediately!"

"I'm so sorry, I thought I had the right bottle, but I must have misread the label."

How did I mess up? Again?

"I'm really sorry."

"No time for apologies now. Out, class! Now!" She rushes about the room, herding students with her clapping hands and screeching for everyone to get out.

Just last week I put cardamon in my oatmeal instead of cinnamon. Another stupid mistake, but one that didn't mean potentially blowing up a building. Now, my lack of attention has put people in danger. My stomach sinks, my vision blurring with tears.

Grabbing my bag, my face hot with embarrassment, I stumble from the room, following the others.

Sally, a notorious drama queen, shoots me a dirty look, giving a choked cough. "Nice work forcing everyone out of the lab with your nasty concoction, Anna-smell."

Anna-smell? I haven't heard that since kindergarten and here we are in our junior year of college. I can't think of a witty comeback and returning rudeness with rudeness makes me cringe, so I find myself murmuring a pathetic apology. "Sorry."

We walk by the fire alarm in the hall and Ms. Pinchyface pulls it down, shooting me an accusatory look as she does.

The damn thing blares, *wee—ouhn wee—ouhn*, each jarring note adding to the weight of my guilt. I can't take the sound and I cover my ears with my hands. Students pour into the hall from adjacent classrooms, tugging on coats, tossing bookbags over their shoulders.

All because of me, and another one of my silly mistakes.

We gather around the entrance of the *Brian T. Fellows* science building, shivering in the cold, waiting for help to arrive. Ms. Pinchyface is counting off students. She walks past me muttering, "Fourteen," with a sneer.

Sally whispers to the group forming around her, their eyes heavy on my face as she tells them it was me who's forced them out into the cold like this. It's freezing, and I shove my hands in the pockets of my hoodie, which is much too thin to protect me from the New York winter.

My stomach ties in knots. "Sorry, everyone. It was a stupid mistake." But no one hears my words over the approaching sirens.

What can I do to make this right?

Should I walk around from person to person and apologize? The sound of the sirens wailing in the distance grows louder. Do I wait around for the police to come and arrest me? And what crime would I even be confessing to?

Stupidity? Carelessness? Those are the two character traits I've been embracing these past few months.

A fire truck pulls up to the front of the building. The first man that hops down from the truck has a chiseled jaw and a body built for a calendar pose. For a moment, I'm forgotten about as Pinchyface and Sally rush over to offer their services, batting their eyelashes as they explain the issue.

I find myself wanting to sneak away.

I know I should wait here, confess my sins to whoever wants to hear them, then take my punishment like a good girl, but you know what? I'm getting really tired of messing up. And, as usual, I don't have a way to fix my mistakes.

Pinchyface knows where to find me if she needs me.

I'm getting the hell out of here.

In an attempt to warm myself, I shove my hands deeper in the pockets of my hoodie. Why didn't I check the weather before I left the apartment this morning? Hell—I didn't even need to check it, its winter, in New York.

Of course it was going to be cold. I should have known better than to leave the house without a proper coat.

Just like I should have known to double check the labels on the chemicals.

Just like I should have known to pay my bills on time, instead of piling up unnecessary late fees like I am.

Just like I should have known better than to overextend my monthly financial commitments.

Damn. It's freezing out here.

I make it to my little gold Honda hatchback without any policemen chasing me down. In fact, I look around to find

myself the only one in the parking lot, able to make my escape completely unnoticed.

As usual, I'm alone, but for once it serves me.

I hop in my car and crank the engine, shivering harder, my teeth starting to chatter. Why bother waiting for the heat to kick on? I just need to get the hell out of here. I pull out of the lot, sneaking away via the back of the building, avoiding the crowd at the front.

Where to go?

The electricity in my apartment has been turned off (late payment, oops) and they won't come to crank it on until Monday. I'm too cold to go back there now. I need to at least warm up a bit, first.

And I need a drink.

All the cash I own is in my back pocket—a twenty dollar bill. Just enough for two margaritas, over ice, salt on the rim, *please*. I can feast on free chips and salsa, *dinner taken care of*. And I'll still have a five left over for tip.

Perfect.

I'm only a mile from *Mi Casa*, my favorite little Mexican restaurant, a hole in the wall snuck in between two upscale boutiques in a line of brick front shops. Little red chili pepper lights hang over the glossy black wood door, inviting you in. It's small and cozy and they keep the lights dim and the music loud and they know me by name.

I can already taste the tequila.

My mood is lifting.

It was just a mistake.

Everyone makes them.

Right?

Yeah, sure, Annabelle. Everyone makes mistakes, they just don't make them so often they are the only memorable part of their existence.

But you know what? I might have messed up, but I have a car, and a home, and a twenty in my pocket and that's more than a lot of people have, so I'm going to enjoy the evening.

I put in my favorite disc.

Yes, my car is so old I have a CD player instead of XM radio, but I love this little car.

And yes, my favorite CD just happens to be Christmas Classics. I think Christmas is too big to only enjoy it one month. I like to sing these songs year round.

I think everyone should.

I hit *play*, and happy music fills the car. Just what I need to brighten my mood. I sing along, to *Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer*, belting out the notes at the top of my lungs. I'm turning into the *Mi Casa* parking lot just as a rumbling, banging sound overpowers my soprano, making me turn off the radio for a closer listen.

Knock, knock, knock, claaank.

It's coming from the engine of my car. *Shit.* I pull into a spot, throwing the car in park and search the dash. Two little accusatory words stare back at me.

Low Oil.

I can't remember the last time I had this thing serviced.

I cut the engine. Wrapping my hands around the steering wheel, I rest my forehead on the top of it. "Come on, Annabelle. You can do better than this. You've got to get your life together."

A wave of depression twisted with self-hatred threatens to wash over me. *Not today.* I push it away, straighten my spine and lock gazes with myself in the rear view mirror.

Time for a come-to-Jesus meeting with myself. I stare back at my own wide green eyes. "Annabelle, these are just setbacks. The late bills, blowing up the chem lab, destroying your car. Nothing but a few minor setbacks. You'll get your life together. You'll pull through this. You still have a full, happy life to be grateful for."

But the words turn to sandpaper in my mouth.

I'm not happy.

Haven't been for over a year now. But I try to stay in a place of gratitude and perseverance. God knows, I try.

Will things ever get better?

I just need a little help, a little boost, something, someone to come and light my path, to help me out of this hole I've dug for myself.

But that'd take a miracle, wouldn't it.

You know what—the time for self-reflection is over.

It's time for tequila.

So what if my car is broken down and I won't have enough money to get a taxi home? So what if I'll be walking alone in the dark in nothing but a sweatshirt in freezing temperatures to return home to an apartment with no heat or lights?

We can worry about those things later. Right now, this girl needs a margarita on the rocks and a basket of warm chips and freshly made salsa. I hit the lock button on the door and give it a slam, promising her I'll be back with a tow truck just as soon as I can, as soon as my next month's stipend hits my bank account.

I make my way to the door of *Mi Casa* and pull the handle. I'm immediately hit by the warm familiar smell: corn flour, peppers, spiced meats. The place is packed, couples chatting over small tables, what looks like an after work gathering in the corner. Making my way to the bar, I slip onto an open stool.

Miguel, the bartender, looks up, a bright smile stretching across his face. "Amiga! So good to see you. Where have you been?" Without waiting for my order, he slides a slice of lime around the blue rim of a margarita glass, then dipping it in crunchy salt.

I let out a happy sigh. I haven't been here in ages and it's just as I remember it. After a hard day, it's nice to be here, in this

warm place, happy mariachi music blaring over my head while my friend makes me the perfect margarita.

He hands it to me with a wink. “Enjoy, Annabelle.”

“Thanks, Miguel.” He moves on to take the next order, and I take a long sip from the drink. Sweet and tangy and salty and ice cold on my tongue. Just the way I like it.

Happily, I sip at my drink, swinging my feet on the high barstool, and try to hold onto this perfect moment, this feeling of utter contentment.

And push away the dark thoughts that threaten to come after me—how the hell did I let my life get into this big of a mess?

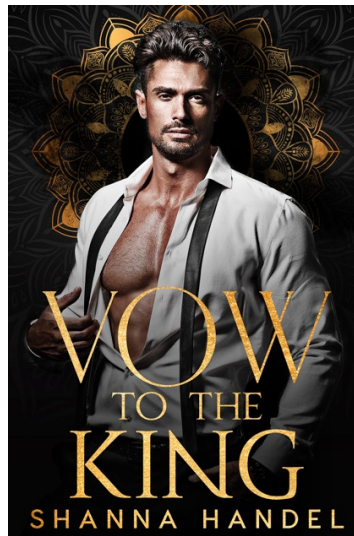
KEEP READING... My Birthday Babygirl

ALSO BY SHANNA HANDEL



New Vow to the Mafia: Dark Mafia Series

Vow to the King: A Bachman Mafia Romance



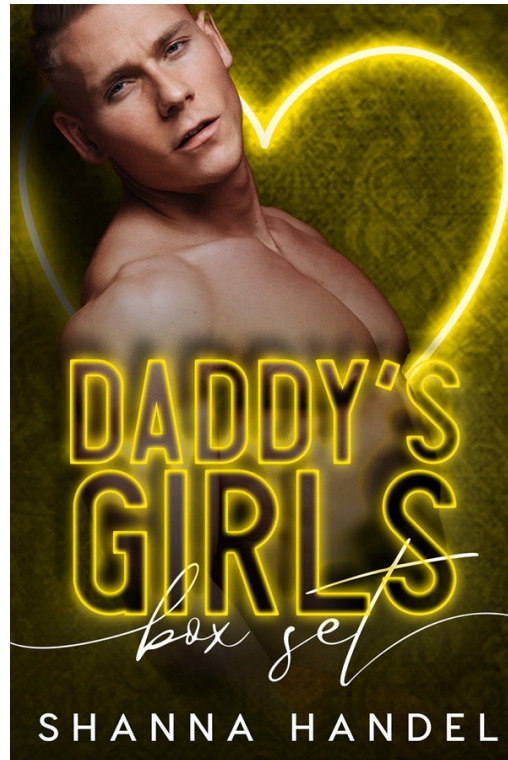
Mafia Fire: A Dark Mafia Romance

Mafia Beast: A Dark Mafia Romance

Mafia Captor: A Dark Mafia Romance

MORE DADDY ROMANCE

Try my *Daddy's Girl* Series



My Birthday Babygirl

My Blind Date Babygirl

Wedding Date Daddy

Dark Daddy Romance



Stalk Me Gently: Daddy's Obsession Book 1
Praise Me Sweetly: Daddy's Obsession Book 2

Beauties and Billionaires
Steamy Billionaire Romance



Cash is King

Devil in Gold

Rich as Sin

Make it Rain

Wild and West: A Billionaire Pregnancy Romance

DARK ROYALS

Arranged Marriage Mafia Romance Series

Book ONE

DARK CROWN

Book TWO

DARK THRONE

Book THREE

DARK KINGDOM

Book FOUR

DARK FOREST

Book FIVE

DARK CASTLE

Want more of the Bachman Family?

It all starts here...

Bronson: A Mafia Billionaire Romance

I like nice things, but this time I've stolen from the wrong man.

He caught me red-handed, but he didn't call the police.

He's the kind of man who settles his own scores.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

Carter: A Mafia Billionaire Romance

She is mine. It's time she learned what that means.

In my world, a man keeps his woman in line.

She is used to doing as she pleases.

That is about to change...

[Buy on Amazon](#)

Rockland: A Mafia Billionaire Romance

The code of the family makes her mine to protect, but I will make her mine in every way.

I moved across the world to escape my need for her.

Then my brother's death left her a widow.

I gave her time to grieve, but now I will take what is mine.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

Virgin: A Mafia Billionaire Romance

Yesterday I'd never been kissed. Today every inch of me belongs to him.

I didn't ask for a guardian, but it wasn't up to me.

I disobeyed him, just to see what he would do.

Then I found out what happens to bad little girls.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

Love Daddy Dom Romance?

Bachman Daddies: A Mafia Billionaire Romance Series

[Click Here for Book 1- Daddy](#)

[Click Here for Book 2- Say Daddy](#)

[Book 3- Daddies: A MFM Ménage Romance](#)

[Book 4: Her Mafia Daddies MFM Ménage Romance](#)

Vegas Daddies with Jane Henry

[Click here for Be My Babygirl](#)

[Click here for Always My Babygirl](#)

[Click here for Forever My Babygirl](#)

Love Cowboy Romance?

[Shanna Handel's Cowboy Dom Ranch Rules Series](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SHANNA HANDEL

Romance

Shanna Handel is an internationally bestselling author of over 50 romance novels. She is currently living her own, hard-won happily ever after.

Sign up for Shanna's newsletter to hear about new releases:

<https://www.shannahandelromance.com/>

Follow Shanna on Amazon:

<https://author.to/ShannaHandelRomance>

You can keep up with Shanna Handel via her Facebook group, her Facebook page, and her Goodreads profile:

[Shanna's Reader Group](#)

[Shanna Handel Romance Page](#)

[Follow Shanna on Goodreads](#)

[Follow Shanna on Bookbub](#)

