



STOLEN
BY THE
MASTER
CHIEF

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
FIONA DAVENPORT

**STOLEN BY THE MASTER
CHIEF**

FIONA DAVENPORT

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STOLEN BY THE MASTER CHIEF

Arrow Hamlin was being a good samaritan when he stopped to help someone with a flat tire. He never expected his act of kindness would lead him to the woman who was meant to be his. Or that she'd be on the run from a dangerous situation.

Sage Elsher was stunned by a violent encounter in her own home. She had no idea who to trust until Arrow came to her rescue. The Master Chief inspires confidence...even when he steals her away to a safe house.

Staring up at the square-shaped whiteboard I used to design crossword puzzles, I tapped the bottom of my dry erase marker against my lips as I considered where I wanted to place the first word. I had decided on the theme this morning—the most difficult part of designing a puzzle—and was hoping to make good progress today so it would be ready for submission tomorrow. This particular puzzle was a harder one since I was hoping it would be accepted for a Sunday edition of the paper, which required a larger grid. It also paid three times as much, so competition for the coveted spot was fierce.

Just as I was in the middle of writing out the seven-letter answer, there was a loud pounding on the door. After quickly scribbling the rest of the word, I glared over my shoulder. My roommate had left for work a couple of hours ago, and I wasn't expecting anyone to visit, so I was tempted to ignore whoever it was. Unfortunately, my unwanted visitor made that option impossible when they only waited a few seconds before thumping against the hard surface again. Only this time they didn't stop until I finally stormed across the living room to fling open the door.

“What do you wa—” I hissed, the last word trailing off when I caught sight of the man whose fist was still raised, quickly regretting my decision. Popping in my noise reduction earbuds so I could ignore the interruption would definitely have been a much better choice.

My gaze darted to the guys standing on either side of him as they rushed forward to grab my arms as one of them

grunted, “Boss needs to talk to you, bitch.”

“Oww, stop,” I cried, trying to yank out of their hold.

“I wouldn’t bother trying to get away, Phoebe. You’re not going anywhere until I’m done with you,” the man in the middle warned. He was obviously the boss the two thugs had referred to.

“You heard him,” the jerk holding my right arm snarled, tightening his fingers enough that my skin was sure to be bruised when he finally let me go.

The name the boss had used finally clicked in my brain. “I’m sorry. Phoebe isn’t here right now.”

“Nice try, girlie.” He got right up in my face and reached out to grab my chin in a punishing grip. “But I’m not gonna buy your lies.”

I was terrified as tears filled my eyes and streamed down my cheeks. “It’s the truth, I swear.”

“You’re a better liar than your brother, I’ll give you that.” His dark, beady eyes didn’t have an ounce of compassion as he scanned my expression. “Every time he’s told me he’ll have the money he owes me, it’s been obvious he’s lying. But if I didn’t know better, I’d almost think that you’re telling me the truth.”

I blinked up at him in a daze. “But I don’t even have a brother.”

“Sure you don’t,” he jeered, releasing my chin to jab a finger toward the apartment number above my door. “The problem with your story is that I know damn well that Paul Baker’s sister, Phoebe, lives at this address. No way in hell would my source lie to me about that. He knows what price he’d pay for crossing me.”

Holy crap! He was here because of Phoebe’s no-good brother...who she hadn’t even talked to in months.

“You’re here for Paul?” I whispered.

He quirked a brow. “Thought you said you weren’t Phoebe.”

“I’m really not. I’m her roommate, Sage.”

It didn’t seem to matter how much I tried explaining the situation, none of these men were willing to listen to what I had to say.

“Too bad for you that your brother isn’t around to learn the lesson himself, or else I’d just take the money he owes me out of his hide.” The two goons laughed as he shook his head. “Since he’s disappeared into thin air without giving me the ten large that he owes for a brick he was supposed to sell, I’m gonna have to make do with you.”

“Junkie shoulda known better,” the guy on my left muttered.

“He really should have,” the boss agreed with an evil smirk. “I can’t let his transgression slide, or else I’ll lose respect. Then some dealer will think he can invade my territory, and I’d have to kill him.”

I knew that Paul had struggled with drugs in the past, but I had no idea that he had relapsed. Or that he owed his dealer enough money to have the man show up at our apartment. If I had, I never would have opened the door.

“I don’t know what kind of trouble my roommate’s brother has gotten himself into, and I have no idea where he is,” I swore, tilting my head back toward the apartment. “If you let me get my purse, I can prove that I’m not Phoebe.”

“Do you have ten K in it?” he asked, sarcasm thick in his tone.

Shaking my head, I whispered, “No.”

“Then no fucking deal.”

That was all the warning I got before he slammed his fist into my face. Pain radiated up to my skull, and I felt a trickle of blood drip down my cheek. A sob burst from my lips, and I would have fallen to the ground if his men hadn’t still been holding me.

The boss stepped closer, and I cringed back in fear. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“Save your begging for your brother. It’s up to him if you suffer more or not.” He looked up at his men, and they released my arms. I dropped to my knees, and he crouched in front of me.

“My roommate’s brother,” I whispered.

His eyes narrowed as he considered me. “You have me more than half convinced you’re actually telling the truth, but it doesn’t matter in the end. If Paul doesn’t get me my money, any woman who lives at this address is gonna pay for his mistake.”

He straightened and stormed down the hallway, his men following in his wake as he finally left me alone. Getting to my feet, I stumbled back into my apartment and grabbed my purse. As I yanked out my cell phone, I shoved my feet into a pair of shoes and grabbed a sweatshirt. Pulling the hood over my head, I slid my hair over my shoulder to cover as much of my face as I could while still being able to see where I was going. Then I headed out the door and down to my car.

Pulling out of the parking lot, I called Phoebe. I wasn’t surprised she didn’t answer since she was at work. When her voicemail finally beeped, I blurted, “Your brother is in trouble. Some guy came looking for him at the apartment. He...um...is dangerous. And incredibly insistent about finding Paul. You need to stay away from the apartment. Maybe go and stay with your parents for a while. Your brother owes the guy a lot of money, and he won’t hesitate to hurt you if Paul doesn’t pay him. Be careful.”

I skipped over the part about the punch to my face because I didn’t want Phoebe to worry about me. She had bigger issues to focus on at the moment.

Once I disconnected, a sob welled up my chest. I’d managed to hold back my tears while I was leaving her the message. I didn’t have a destination in mind when I left, I had just wanted to get as far away from my apartment as possible. When I hit a red light, I flipped down the sun visor and slid the mirror open so I could peer up at my reflection. My eyes widened when I spotted the cut in the middle of the apple of

my cheek. I hadn't realized how deep it was—or that blood was still dripping down my face. I definitely needed medical attention, so I figured that I might as well head to the nearest urgent care.

Glancing down at my sweatshirt, I groaned at the red speckles all over the front. I didn't have much time to obsess over how hard it was going to be to get the stain out because the car behind me honked several times. My head jerked up, and I saw the light was already green again. When I pressed my foot against the gas pedal, my car leaped forward. I gripped the steering wheel so hard that my knuckles turned white, but it was the only way to stop my hands from trembling.

It turned out to be a very good thing that I was holding on so tightly because about halfway to the urgent care, there was a loud thunk from the back of the car, and the steering wheel yanked to the right. As I regained control and managed to stay in my lane, the sound turned into a persistent thump, and I realized my tire had blown. I pulled over onto the side of the road, crossing my arms over my steering wheel and dropping my head as I burst into tears.

ARROW

It had been a long couple of months, and I was looking forward to a few weeks of leave. As the Master Chief at the HQ for several SEAL teams, my job included sending sailors into life-threatening situations, and that could be a heavy burden to bear at times. One of our SEAL teams had been trying to capture a particular target, and though we finally tracked him to the right place and captured him, the slippery son of a bitch had cost us a couple of good men. I knew these sailors and their families well, so I had personally written the condolence letters, and the Casualty Assistance Calls Officer, who made the personal visits to the next of kin, had been from our command. With all the other shit I dealt with on a daily basis, I was burned out. So this break couldn't have come at a better time.

I fiddled with the radio, but before I could settle on a station, I noticed a car pulled to the side of the road up ahead. The rear right tire was flat and missing a chunk, but I didn't see anyone working on it. On instinct, I pulled over behind the stranded vehicle. I would have offered my help regardless, but I was worried that the driver had been injured when the tire blew. Or that they might not even know how to swap it for the spare.

After putting my SUV in park, I shut it off and pocketed my keys, then exited the vehicle. I approached the car slowly because I didn't want to frighten the driver, but when I had a view through the window, I saw their head dropped forward, resting on the steering wheel. Though they were wearing a

hood, long, blond waves fell on both sides, obscuring what I assumed was a woman's face even further.

"Ma'am?" I called out so I wouldn't startle her when I reached the door. Her head flew up and whipped around. I stilled for a moment as I was hit with a barrage of sensations. She had the most delicate, beautiful face I'd ever seen. Porcelain skin, pert little nose, a rosebud mouth, and incredible, bright blue eyes. To my shock, my libido—which had been basically absent for years—roared to life.

However, I was also overwhelmed with a sudden need to protect this woman. The hood she had pulled up cast shadows over some of her face, but it didn't hide the terror in her eyes. Rage at whoever had put it there bubbled up inside me.

I didn't want to scare her any more, though, so I shoved my fury back and put a gentle smile on my face. "May I approach?"

She bit her lip, but then her eyes dropped to scan my uniform, and though she was still wary, some of the fear receded. Nodding, she pushed the car door open and swung her legs out before standing up.

Holy fucking shit.

Her frame was as delicate as her face. She wasn't very tall. In fact, she was at least a foot shorter than my six-foot-four height. Her petite, willowy body and sweet face reminded me of the fairy princess in the stories I read to my nieces. Except I wanted to do all manner of dirty things with this little fairy.

I shook my head a little, trying to clear away the fog of lust threatening to consume me. She'd be running away screaming if she knew the current thoughts in my head.

Once I felt I had a little control, I walked closer to her but stopped a couple of feet away. "I saw your blown tire and wanted to see if you needed any help." She was staring at the ground, and it frustrated me because I wanted those spectacular blue orbs focused on me. But I called on the patience I was known for and focused on what she needed.

“Thanks,” she murmured in a musical voice that fit with her beauty perfectly. “I know how to change a tire, it’s just...I needed a few minutes to collect myself.”

“Are you hurt?”

She shook her head, then finally raised it to look at me with a pretty smile. “I’m okay.”

Her hood had fallen back when she’d moved her head from side to side, and her hair had fallen in her face. When she tucked a chunk of it behind her ear, I saw the bleeding gash on her cheek.

“What the fuck?”

Forgetting all about my plans not to spook her, I rushed forward and took her face in my hands, turning it so the light fell directly on her injury. “Who did this to you?” I demanded.

“I...um...”

I gently turned her head back so that our gazes met, and my heart squeezed when her eyes filled with moisture that threatened to spill over.

Then she burst into tears, and I immediately pulled her into my arms. Her hands clutched the front of my white shirt—part of my summer service uniform—and I gathered her up in a tight embrace. With her face buried in my chest, she was probably getting tears, mascara, and blood all over my shirt, but I didn’t give a shit.

After a minute, I swept her into my arms and carried her to my car, setting her sideways in the front passenger seat. When her sobs died down, I tipped her head up with one finger under her chin. “Tell me what happened.” I didn’t mean for my words to sound so much like an order, but it was hard to turn off the natural instinct.

However, instead of recoiling, she sighed and wiped her eyes, smearing her mascara even more. I opened my glove box and retrieved the package of wet wipes I kept in there—always be prepared, right? I’d been a scout before I enlisted in the Navy—and handed them to her. She looked a little surprised

but took them gratefully and cleaned her face while she started talking.

“My roommate has a brother, and he’s been in and out of rehab since high school. Whenever he falls off the wagon, he gets into trouble, and usually, someone else has to clean up the mess. The last time Phoebe mentioned him a few months ago was because she’d driven him to rehab. I didn’t pay much attention, so I didn’t know that he was out or that he’d fallen back into his old habits.”

“He’s the one who hurt you?” I asked, seething inside and already planning on how to hunt the asshole down and make him pay.

“No. Well, not directly. His dealer came by my apartment earlier today, and even though I tried to tell him I wasn’t Phoebe, he didn’t believe me. He—he”—her eyes filled with tears again, and she touched her cheek just below the broken skin—“he hit me as a warning. And even though he said I almost had him convinced I wasn’t my roommate, if Paul didn’t pay back what he owed, he’d go after any woman who lived in the apartment.”

Shit. She was running from a drug dealer? They were ruthless and hard to pin down. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be around long enough to build a business. Trying to get to him through proper channels would take forever, if it even worked.

I hugged her again and kissed the top of her head before I had a chance to realize what I was doing. “That’s a hell of a situation you’ve got yourself in...?” I trailed off and leaned back so I could look at her expectantly.

“Sage Elsher,” she replied with a tiny curve of her lips. “And you are Command Master Chief what?”

Stunned at her knowledge of my rank, particularly since she’d recognized the slight difference in my insignia—a star under the eagle rather than anchors—that designated me as a step up from Master Chief Petty Officer. “Hamlin,” I answered. “Command Master Chief Arrow Hamlin. How did you know my rank? Do you have family in the Navy?” I didn’t think she was a sailor because she hadn’t saluted me, and if

she was local, she was likely stationed at Coronado and there wasn't a sailor on that base who didn't know the name of the Chief Enlisted Officer.

Sage laughed, and I felt a little of my tension ease up. "Marine brat, I'm afraid. My dad retired at the equivalent of your rank. When I was a kid, I thought it would be a fun activity to memorize all the ranks and insignias in each branch, and the knowledge stuck with me. I'm kind of a nerd like that." Her cheeks flushed with pink, and it was adorable.

"Sounds to me like you're very smart. Despite being the daughter of a Navy freeloader."

She chuckled again, and I knew I wanted more of that sound in my life.

"Sit and rest," I told her gently. "I'm going to check your tire."

Sage nodded and scooted her legs into the SUV so I could shut the door. I walked over to the flat and checked the tire, rim, and wheel to make sure I didn't find anything that might indicate the car had been tampered with. After inspecting it, I was confident there had simply been a random nail in the road that caused the damage. Her tires weren't exactly in the best condition either, which irritated me because the idea of Sage not being safe would easily drive me batshit crazy if I let it.

I grabbed the keys she'd left in the ignition, then shut and locked the door before stowing the keys in a small crevice under the car where the person I sent here would be able to find them. Before I headed back to my vehicle, I called an old friend—who also happened to be one of my subordinates, but the favor I was going to ask of him would be off the books.

"Master Chief Hamlin," Kade answered. "What can I do for you?"

I cleared my throat, then spoke in a low, serious tone. "I need a favor, Truett." I didn't want him thinking this was coming from a superior officer, so I clarified, "To be clear, what I'm asking of you is not an order. It's...off the books."

He was quiet for a brief second, and I wondered if our friendship would be enough for him to trust me outside of our military roles. Some of the guys on his team had been burned by a former CO who betrayed them and forced one of their own to take the fall.

“Go on.”

I sighed in relief. “I need help hunting someone down and a place”—I looked at Sage and our eyes connected, sending a bolt of attraction straight to my core—“to stash someone while I figure out what to do with her.”

“Her?” His curiosity bled into his tone, but now was not the time to get into the details.

“Yeah. Do you know of a place?” I asked, getting the conversation back on track. “I need you to round up a few of your teammates and meet me there. I’ll explain everything then.”

“Huntley knows someone who could be very helpful with this,” Kade mused—referring to our friend and the Officer in Charge on his team. “I’ll talk to the boys and text you ASAP.”

“Hooyah,” I mumbled before hanging up.

After what had just happened to me, the last thing I should have done was trust a stranger. Especially a tall, muscular man who could easily overpower me if I tried to get away. But Arrow had stopped for a stranded car on the side of the road. And he served his country—even if he was in the Navy instead of a Marine. Plus, I felt a magnetic pull toward him unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

He was undeniably attractive with his closely cropped dark hair, scruffy cheeks, steel-blue eyes, and strong jawline. Hot enough to lower the defenses of most women. But it was his steady gaze and the concern in his deep voice that convinced me to go with my gut and trust him.

As I sat in the safety of his SUV, my nerves started to settle...at least until he finished checking my tire and hung up with whoever he'd called. When his gaze connected with mine through the windshield, the shiver that went up my spine had nothing to do with apprehension. My reaction was entirely due to the attraction I was feeling.

I took a slow, deep breath as he rounded the vehicle and grabbed something from the back. When he yanked open the passenger door, I realized it was a first-aid kit. "I want to get this cut cleaned up sooner rather than later."

Thinking about how awful I must look between the punch I had taken and all of the crying I'd done, I ducked my head and mumbled, "Yeah, that's probably a good idea."

Tilting my head back with a finger firmly pressed against my chin, Arrow's eyes narrowed as he examined my cheek. "I'm so fucking sorry you got hurt, baby."

Butterflies swirled in my belly at the huskiness of his deep voice when he called me "baby." I'd never had a man use a pet name for me before, but I really liked it coming from Arrow.

"It's not your fault, all you've done is try to help me since you found me."

"Doesn't matter, I still fucking hate seeing this cut on your pretty face." He stroked his thumb against my jaw. "He hit you hard enough you're gonna have a bruise soon."

Based on how my cheek felt, I didn't doubt he was right even though I had no idea what to expect since I'd never been punched before. "They'll probably give me an ice pack when we get to urgent care. Maybe it'll help keep the bruising to a minimum."

Rifling through the first-aid kit, he pulled out an instant ice pack and squeezed the center to make it cold. Then he gently pressed it against my cheek and murmured, "Hold this in place for me while I get the stuff ready to take care of your cut."

I felt a tingle of awareness when my fingers brushed against his as I took the ice pack, and the heat of my blush dimmed the coldness as I pressed it against my cheek. Then he dug through the bag for a packet of ibuprofen and handed them to me. "You should take these."

"Definitely," I agreed as he leaned past me to grab a bottle of water from the cup holder.

After twisting off the lid, he held the bottle to my lips so I could take a sip. While I swallowed down the pills, he set the water on the floorboard to pull some supplies out of the kit. Then he tugged me so that I was sideways in the passenger seat again. Then he moved so he was crouched between my legs. He was at the perfect level to work on my cheek, but I couldn't help but picture a different scenario where he was in a similar position...only a little lower.

I mentally chided myself for the naughty fantasy playing through my brain while I hoped like heck Arrow had no idea what I was thinking about. I'd never had a good poker face, so I wasn't surprised when he asked, "You don't need to be nervous, Sage. I'm never gonna do anything you don't want. You'll always be completely safe with me."

"Safe," I echoed softly.

"Yeah, baby...safe." His steely blue eyes hardened. "And not just when you're with me, if I have anything to say about it."

Although my dad would give him heck for choosing the Navy over the Marines, I had a feeling that it wouldn't take long for Arrow to earn his respect. He would lose his mind when he found out what happened, but knowing a Command Master Chief had helped me in my time of need would soothe his fury at least a little. My safety was a whole lot more important to him than any beef between the two military branches. Besides, it was mostly in good fun.

"Feeling safe sounds like heaven right about now."

"Then I'll make sure it happens." He used some hand sanitizer before lifting an antiseptic wipe to my cheek and warning, "This'll sting a little."

I braced myself but still let out a little hiss when he gently swiped my cut. His deep grumble and apologetic glance made my lips curve into a small grin that widened when he blew against my skin to ease the burn the antiseptic left behind.

"Better?"

"Uh-huh," I whispered.

"Good." He examined the cut and sighed, some of the tension easing from his shoulders. "Now that I've got it cleaned, the wound isn't as deep as I feared. Facial injuries tend to bleed more, so it looked worse than it really was."

It had looked awful to me when I'd checked in the mirror, so maybe I'd only need a few stitches instead of a bunch of them. "That's a relief."

“I’m going to apply some ointment and Steri-Strips.” His lips turned down. “Sorry, baby, but I’m going to need to tug on your cut a little to get them in place.”

“I figured.” Setting the ice pack on the seat next to me, I patted his hand. “It’ll be okay.”

“You’re fucking amazing.” My eyes widened at the compliment, and he shook his head with a sigh. “You’re the one in pain, but you’re trying to make me feel better. How you act when shit goes FUBAR says a fuck of a lot about the type of person you are.”

“Yeah, well...it’s easy to be kind now that the danger has passed. Especially to you considering how you’re helping me.” I shrugged, feeling uncomfortable with his praise. “It’s not as though I did anything to protect myself from those guys. I was at their mercy until they left, and then I ran away without a clue about where I was going.”

“Give yourself some credit, Sage. You handled yourself well enough to be able to walk away. Considering the kind of shit these guys are into, it could’ve been a fuck of a lot worse,” he growled, a muscle jumping in his jaw.

“I guess that’s one way to look at it.” Although my dad wouldn’t agree. He would definitely insist I take another self-defense class since the last one hadn’t done me any good today.

“It got you here, with me.”

“Yeah.” I beamed a smile at him. “It did.”

I cataloged every detail of Arrow’s face while he pinched my cut between his index finger and thumb as he applied the Steri-Strips. He was gentle, but I was still happy that the pain reliever he’d given me started to kick in because I had begun to feel the pain more while he was working on me.

Before he put everything away, Arrow covered my cut with some gauze. Then he tossed the kit into the back seat and circled the SUV to climb into the driver’s seat. As he buckled his seat belt, his cell phone beeped with a notification.

“I hope I’m not keeping you from anything important.” *Or from a significant other*, I thought as I glanced at his ring finger. I was relieved to see it was bare even though it didn’t necessarily mean anything because he could still have a girlfriend. Or he could choose not to wear a ring at work because the band got in the way.

“Nope, I’m all yours.”

The hit to my face must’ve addled my brain because I found all kinds of innuendo in his simple statement. He glanced down at the screen as I tried to pull myself together. Judging by the satisfied curve of his lips, he seemed pleased with whatever the message said. “I’m going to take you somewhere you can be taken care of.”

“Thanks.” I forced the smile I flashed at him, wishing he wouldn’t just drop me off at urgent care. That instead, he was the person who was going to take care of me.

Closing my eyes so he didn’t see the yearning in them, I leaned my head against the window as he pulled back onto the road. We weren’t far from urgent care, but I only lasted a couple of minutes before I drifted off to sleep.

ARROW

I was relieved when Sage fell asleep because now I could take her to the safe house without any questions or explanations. I'd still have to deal with all that when we got there, but at least I could use the drive to figure out what to say. When it came down to it, I was basically kidnapping her. I just hoped she didn't see it that way.

In order to avoid waking her, I put a Bluetooth device in my ear so I could call another one of my guys. I was the Chief Enlisted Officer for all of the teams assigned to Naval Base Coronado as their homeport, but outside of the job, I was closest with Kade and his teammates.

Silas answered on the first ring. "Arrow, I've been expecting your call."

When he called me by my first name, I knew he'd already spoken to Kade or Huntley about my situation, and they'd made it clear this was not a military operation.

"At your service," he added.

"I need you to go fix the tire on a car, then hide it somewhere. Make sure no one will accidentally stumble on it." I didn't know how far the dealer's network reached, and the last thing we needed was for some junkie to spot her license plate and let the guy know she was on the run from him. I gave him the location and description of Sage's vehicle, as well as the spot where I'd hidden the keys.

"Consider it done."

“Hooyah,” I murmured. He echoed the sentiment, and I ended the call.

It took just under three hours to get to the forests near Tahquitz Peak, where I drove up to an A-frame redwood cabin. The house was nestled in deep, thick woods, making it difficult to see if you didn’t know it was there. From the truck and SUV parked under the balcony that jutted out over the front door, I surmised a couple of guys were already there.

When Huntley texted the address, he’d mentioned that the cabin belonged to Merrick Ashford. I didn’t know him personally, but not many sailors around when he took the fall for his teammates didn’t know *of* him. From the little I’d gleaned over time from Huntley, Deacon, and Cash, Merrick had become a hitman, but when he met his wife, he “retired.” He was still paranoid about his past, though, so he’d taken plenty of precautions, such as this cabin. The front room that walked out to the balcony was almost all glass, but I was willing to bet it was bulletproof. The main floor only had two small windows and the front door, which looked like it would keep out Attila the Hun and his warriors.

As instructed, I pulled around to the left side of the house and hopped out to punch a code into the electronic keypad outside the garage. Then I drove in and got out again to shut it. Since it was so quiet, the loud whirring of the door coming down stirred Sage. She was yawning and stretching when I ambled up to the passenger door and opened it.

Her blue eyes bounced around, and her brow descended as confusion filled her expression. “Where am I?”

I opened my mouth, but the explanation got stuck in my throat. *Oh shit*. I had to say something.

“Somewhere safe,” I told her, hoping—but not expecting—her to leave it at that. I held out my hand, palm up, and she immediately put hers on top. That was something, at least. If I was lucky, her trust would extend enough not to flip her shit when she realized that I’d practically stolen her away.

“But this isn’t an urgent care.”

“No, baby. It’s not,” I chuckled and slipped an arm around her waist to lift her to the ground. “Let’s get inside, and then I’ll explain everything.” She nodded, and I held tight to her hand as I led her toward the door that likely opened to the house.

We walked into a mudroom with white walls, a bright, colorful rug on the floor, and cherry wood-paneled wallpaper with a matching shelf on top with various outdoor activities for kids, like a bucket of chalk and a basketball. Shaker pegs under the shelf were for hanging coats and whatever else, and a white bench seat spanned the whole thing. I had a feeling Merrick’s wife had handled the decor while he dealt with the safety aspects.

The small room opened up into a much larger space that had a pool table, ping pong table, and other games for kids in a range of ages. The big room was also white with bright rugs and colored art on the walls. The front door had state-of-the-art locks and a security monitor mounted beside it.

We headed over to the staircase across the room, and I let go of Sage’s hand to let her walk up ahead of me. “Some of my friends are here,” I informed her quietly. “So don’t be frightened if you get up there and see someone.”

“Okay.” She glanced back at me, and her gaze had become wary. I didn’t like seeing it, but I understood where the sentiment was coming from.

“Upstairs, baby. Then I’ll explain.”

Her eyes narrowed in warning, as if to say, “You better.” I almost smiled at how cute she was when trying to be fierce.

She turned back around and climbed the last few steps. At the top, we entered an open-concept great room with the kitchen, great room, and dining room all flowing from one space to another. Huntley and Kade sat at the table, deep in discussion with a man who I assumed was Merrick. He was muscular, with dark hair and eyes—and the dangerous air of someone you didn’t want as an enemy. They went quiet and looked up when we walked in.

Huntley lifted his chin, then canted his head toward the man I didn't know. "This is Merrick."

I nodded. "Thank you for letting us use this place."

"Hooyah," he muttered in return.

"I'm going to get Sage settled, then I'll fill everyone in," I told them.

They were smart enough to pick up on the fact that they shouldn't say anything in front of her.

"Two bedrooms down that hall, the one at the end is the master," Merrick grunted.

I placed my hand at the small of Sage's back and guided her to the last bedroom. Once we walked inside, I shut the door.

"Sit," I instructed, then remembered she wasn't one of my sailors. "Please."

Sage padded over to a small area that had a loveseat and an overstuffed chair on either side of a little table.

She dropped into the chair, and I took a seat on the couch. "Are you going to explain why you stole me from my life now?"

I bit back a chuckle at her indignant tone. She sounded put out but not angry, which boded well for this conversation. "I don't know if you truly understand the amount of danger your roommate's brother has put you in," I started. "I'd like to say I don't want to scare you, but the truth is, you should be scared."

Sage scooted back as far as she could and pulled her feet up onto the chair, then wrapped her arms around her bent knees. "Phoebe's brother couldn't care less about me, so why would they come after me if it won't make a difference to him?"

"Because you matter to Phoebe. Because you know his face. Because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, which put you on this guy's radar. Take your pick, baby. These

drug lords are ruthless and have no qualms about taking out anyone they perceive to be the smallest threat.”

“So you brought me here to protect me?”

“Yes. Until we can track down the brother and the dealer, and take action, I need you somewhere safe.”

She cocked her head to the side and studied me for a moment, her expression bewildered. “You don’t even know me.”

“Do you trust me?” I queried, almost sure that I was right in my assumption.

Sage glanced away, and her brow furrowed, then she met my gaze again and mumbled, “Yes, but I don’t know why since we’re practically strangers.”

“And I don’t know why I feel the overwhelming need to keep you safe,” I admitted. Although, on the drive, I’d come to the realization that it was because she was mine. But she wasn’t ready for me to go there yet. It was too damn soon, unfortunately.

I was also fighting the desire to lay her out on the bed, strip her bare, and explore every inch of her sexy body. I didn’t say that aloud either, but it was nearly impossible not to sweep my heated eyes over her.

Her lips curved up at the corners, and she relaxed a bit more.

“This place is off the grid and has no connection to you or me.” I canted my head and conceded, “Maybe I should have discussed it with you first, but it was a spur-of-the-moment decision. When you fell asleep...” I shrugged. “I figured we could fight about it once we were here. I was confident I could convince you that this is what’s best for you.”

I’d gone through many scenarios on how to achieve that goal. Most of them involved orgasms. Yet another thing I left unsaid.

Whoa. I had been stolen by a Master Chief...but his intentions were pure. Or maybe not exactly pure since those sexy eyes of his were full of heat, but they were definitely good.

“Okay, go ahead and convince me.”

He leaned against the back of the couch with a smile, crossing his arms over his broad chest. “As a Command Master Chief, I am uniquely positioned to keep you safe.”

“Is it really a unique position?” I tilted my head to the side. “My dad retired at the equivalent of your rank, after all.”

“Did you want to give him a call, have him pick you up and take over?”

His brow furrowed as he made the suggestion, and my fingers itched to smooth his forehead. Pressing my hands together in my lap, I shook my head with a sigh. “I can’t do that.”

“Why not?” he asked, somehow managing to look relieved and angry at the same time.

“Don’t get me wrong, my dad is a great guy and an amazing father,” I rushed to explain. “But he’s also a fantastic husband, and he’s currently in the middle of making one of my mom’s lifelong dreams come true.”

Arrow leaned toward me, resting his forearms on his thighs. “If your dad is anything like me, the only excuse he’s

likely to accept for you not reading him in on this situation is that he took your mom to outer space.”

He was spot-on about how my dad was going to react, and the fact that he probably had a lot in common with my dad only made Arrow more appealing to me. As far as I was concerned, my parents were couple goals. They’d fallen in love practically at first sight, and my dad had talked my mom into marrying him only a week after they met, right before he’d shipped out for his first deployment. Although the odds had been stacked against them, their love had only grown throughout the years.

I’d never felt that spark my mom had described to me when I’d asked her how she’d known my dad was the one for her...until now. Recently, I had started to wonder if maybe the bar I’d set for guys was impossibly high because I was waiting for that moment when I would just...know. But with Arrow, I finally understood what my mom meant when she’d said, “When you know, you know.” Unless it was just the adrenaline talking, which I sincerely doubted.

“They’re the closest thing you can get to it without leaving the Earth’s atmosphere,” I teased. “He took her on an epic cruise around the world—two hundred and seventy-four nights and more than sixty countries all across the globe. And they just left a month ago.”

“Damn,” he sighed, raking his fingers through his hair.

“You see the problem. If I call them now, my dad will figure out a way off that ship. Then my mom’s dream trip will be ruined.”

His eyes burned with determination as he nodded. “Sounds as though I don’t need to do a lot of convincing to make you understand that bringing you here was the right call.”

“Probably not,” I conceded. “But I’d at least like to know what the plan is.”

“We haven’t nailed down all of the details yet, but the overall gist of it is that you’ll stay here where that bastard

can't get to you while my guys and I figure out who the hell he is and make sure he forgets you exist."

"The guys downstairs are under your command?"

He nodded again. "All but one of them. But Huntley vouches for Merrick, and that's enough for me to trust him, regardless of his unconventional reputation. And he has resources, like this safe house, which are a tremendous help in this situation."

"You don't think we should just call the cops and let them handle this?"

"We may need to pull them in at some point," he acknowledged. "But not until we know how much pull this guy has with the police. It isn't unheard of for drug dealers to have someone on their payroll keeping an ear out for any trouble headed their way."

My shoulders slumped. "I feel as though I'm starring in an episode of a crime drama."

"At least you're not alone. You have me as your co-star." He got up and moved toward me, taking my hands in his as he perched on the arm of my chair. "And I'm not just any Command Master Chief, I'm the Chief Enlisted Officer for Naval Amphibious Base *Coronado*."

He stressed the name of the naval base, and it took me a moment to understand the point he was trying to make even though the installation was famous for their special operations training and personnel. "Oh, wow. Yeah, I guess you would be uniquely positioned to help me if you're in charge of SEAL teams."

"Good." Getting to his feet again, he tugged on my hand. "Now that the convincing portion of the agenda is done, I'd like you to tell Merrick anything you know about your roommate's brother. The sooner we can find him, the easier it'll be to make sure you stay safe."

"Phoebe, too," I murmured. "She should be safe at her parents' house for now. They live in a gated community in San

Clemente in the hills with a guard, so it would be hard to get in. Plus, her mom is remarried and has a different last name.”

“If we don’t see some decent progress in the next few days, we can send Phoebe and her parents somewhere else to make sure that they’re out of the line of fire, too,” Arrow promised, easing my concern about my roommate as he led me out of the bedroom and down the hallway.

The three men who’d been here when we arrived were still sitting at the same table, and Arrow quickly introduced me to them before getting me settled in a chair. Merrick had a darker edge to him that made me wonder about the unconventional reputation Arrow had mentioned, but I certainly wasn’t going to ask about it now...*or ever*.

When Arrow dragged a chair as close to me as he could get and flung his arm around my shoulders, Merrick’s lips curved into a grin that softened his features and made him seem more approachable. Which was a good thing since he turned his attention to me and asked, “Do you know Paul’s cell phone number?”

“Umm...I think I might have it in my texts from Phoebe somewhere.” Focusing on Arrow, I added, “If you grab my purse out of your SUV, I can check.”

“Sure, baby.” Instead of getting up, he jerked his chin toward Kade, who went to get it for me.

While we waited for him to return, Merrick commanded, “Kade and Huntley gave me a rundown of everything Arrow told them about your situation, but I need to hear it all from you. The best way for me to make sure I don’t miss an important detail is to get the story firsthand.”

Arrow gave me a squeeze as I nodded. “I can do that.”

Before I could start, Kade returned and handed my purse to Arrow. “Here you go, Arrow.”

I pulled out my cell and did a quick search for Paul’s name in my texts. I had to scroll a bit, but eventually, I found a message with his phone number from when Phoebe and I first moved in together and made sure we had contact information

for each other's family. Turning the screen toward Merrick, I said, "I'm not sure if it's current since I've never needed to call him, but this is the number Phoebe gave me for her brother."

"It's a good place to start." Merrick jotted it down with a nod. "Now tell me everything you remember from the moment you opened your door."

I was grateful to have Arrow so close as I recounted the harrowing details of what had happened. Once I was done, Merrick started to pepper me with questions.

"Did they touch anything other than you?" He glanced down at my blood-speckled sweatshirt. "Pulling fingerprints from clothing is a bitch."

Closing my eyes, I let it all play through my head like a movie before shaking my head. "No, sorry. They didn't come into the apartment, and I didn't hear them rattle the doorknob before pounding on the door."

Merrick shifted his attention to Arrow. "The brother is our best lead. We find him, and he can tell us everything he knows about his dealer."

Arrow nodded. "Agreed."

"We'll give you some privacy while we get working on that. Sage looks as though she's dead on her feet," Huntley said as he stood. Merrick and Kade followed suit.

After I thanked the three men, Arrow walked them down to the garage. I heard the deep murmur of their voices, and then his footsteps on the stairs as he joined me again.

Stroking his hand down my back, he asked, "You want dinner before you crash?"

"I could definitely eat," I agreed, my stomach letting out a little rumble as I realized how long it had been since I had lunch.

"You're in luck. Merrick let me know that his wife keeps the kitchen well stocked," he explained as he headed into the kitchen to rummage through the fridge and pantry. "And I

make a mean batch of spaghetti when there's jarred sauce and boxed pasta involved."

"Sounds perfect to me," I murmured.

We were mostly quiet while he pulled dinner together, but the silence wasn't awkward at all. I appreciated that he could tell I was mentally exhausted and didn't force me to make small talk. By the time I finished the food he put in front of me, I could barely keep my eyes open.

"How about you head to bed while I clean up?" he suggested as he began to clear the table.

Logically, I knew it wasn't possible for anyone to know where I was, but that didn't stop the spurt of fear from racing through my system. "Um...I know there are two bedrooms, but I'm not sure how much sleep I'll get by myself."

Arrow set the plates in the sink and came over to stand next to me. "You want me in the same room?"

I nodded. "There's a king bed in the room we were in earlier, so there's plenty of space for both of us."

"Whatever you want, baby," he agreed with a smile. "Go get ready, and I'll be right behind you."

"Okay," I whispered.

Although I'd been the one to suggest we sleep together, I was nervous as I slid under the covers. I'd never slept with a man before, let alone wearing one of his shirts and my panties since mine were pretty much ruined. But as soon as Arrow wrapped his arms around me, the tension eased from my body because I knew I was safe with him.

ARROW

I woke up from a sound sleep because my dick was so hard it was painful. Probably due to the soft, round ass pressed against it. *Fuck.* Sage felt amazing in my arms, her lithe body cocooned by my much bigger one. I was surprised I'd been able to sleep, much less so deeply. I'd expected to be up, wrestling with the need to fuck her all night.

She was wearing nothing but one of my T-shirts and a pair of panties, so I'd put on a pair of sweatpants, rather than sleeping in my boxers like I usually did. But with the shirt ridden all the way up to just under her breasts, her naked back was glued to my chest. And the head of my long, thick cock was poking out of the waistband of my pants, swollen and leaking from her lacy underwear abrading it.

Sage rested her head on my arm, and my palm splayed across her stomach. My other hand flexed, and I held in a groan when I realized it was cupping one of her full tits. The nipple was hard and scraped against my skin when she breathed.

Son of a bitch. How the fuck was I going to get out of this without waking her up and freaking the hell out of her?

She inhaled again, pressing the globe firmly into my hand and causing it to flinch again. When she moaned and her ass wiggled as she tried to scoot even closer to me, I almost came right then.

When had I turned into a horny teenager who could barely handle my hormones?

Sage shifted again, and her tiny gasp told me she'd finally woken up. I steeled myself for the explosion that was bound to happen.

"Arrow?" When her faint voice floated to my ears, it was breathy and needy rather than angry.

Well, shit.

Anger would have made it easier to extricate myself from our tangled bodies. But the desire in her tone sent even more blood rushing straight to my cock.

"What, baby?" I murmured as my head dipped down to place gentle kisses on her neck.

"I...um. Ooooooh," she moaned again when I nibbled her earlobe and massaged her breast. "I feel..." She trailed off, and I rose so I could look down at her profile. Her cheeks were stained with crimson, and she was biting her lip.

"You can tell me anything, Sage," I assured her before running my lips along her jaw.

"I'm not sure what I'm feeling," she admitted softly. "Would—um—would you touch me?"

Who in their right mind would be able to resist that? And I definitely wasn't in my right mind. I was struggling to maintain any control over myself.

"Anything you want, baby. Where?"

She turned her head into my arm, and her whole face flushed with color before she whispered, "Between my legs? I'm aching."

I kissed her cheek and glided the hand on her stomach up to hold her other breast. "You don't have to be embarrassed about anything with me, Sage. I love that you're being honest with me and asking for what you want."

My other hand slid down into her panties, and I cupped her mound, then dragged my middle finger up her slit. "Fuck," I grunted, dropping my head into the crook of her neck. "You're soaked."

Her legs clenched together, and I yanked my hand out of her underwear and wrapped it around her thigh, pulling it up and draping it over my legs. Exposing her fully to my touch. “It’s hot as hell that you’re so wet for me, baby,” I rasped as I returned to play with her pussy.

The pads of two of my fingers traveled from the bottom to the top, then swirled around her swollen nub before going back down. I put just the tips into her channel and groaned at the tight grip of her inner muscles. Imagining the way that would feel on my cock had precome leaking from the head.

Sage rocked her hips so minutely that I almost missed it. I pushed the digits in just a little more, and she did it again. *So damn hot.*

When I withdrew them, the sound of the suction popping as they left her made my balls heavy and my cock pulse with need.

She whimpered, and I knew using my hand to get her off wouldn’t be enough for me. I wouldn’t fuck her yet, though. She needed time to heal and get to know me a little more, although how long my good intentions would last was anyone’s guess.

I rolled Sage onto her back and covered her mouth with mine. I’d been dying to taste her lips since the moment I saw her.

She let out a tiny gasp, and I slid my tongue inside, rubbing it against hers in a slow, seductive rhythm. I groaned and angled my head to deepen the kiss, instantly addicted to the feel of her lips and her sweet, womanly taste.

Sage’s back bowed, and when I’d flipped her over, her shirt had ridden all the way up, so her naked tits were pillowed against my chest. I needed to taste more than just her mouth.

I broke our kiss, and the sight of her swollen lips was almost enough to make me come back to them for more. But I was hungry for the rest of her body. I sat up on my knees, and pushed her legs open as I shifted so I was kneeling between them. Then I trailed my fingers up her sides and over her

plump globes to circle her berry-colored nipples. “Damn, Sage,” I muttered. “You are so fucking sexy.” I pinched the stiff peaks, and she closed her eyes and cried out, arching her back as if offering her tits to me.

Cupping them firmly, I bent down and sucked one into my mouth.

“Arrow,” she whimpered as her hands came up to cover mine. I switched to the other nipple, and she moaned, turning her head back and forth restlessly. As I licked around the tip, I wondered how they would taste full of milk. The image of her feeding our little one, then taking my turn sucking on her nipples, broke my control, and I came a little in my pants. *Fucking hell.*

I’d known this woman for less than a day, and I was already thinking about knocking her up? *No, not thinking about it.* I intended to do it as soon as possible. Which should have scared the shit out of me...but it only turned me on even more.

I could have played with her gorgeous breasts for hours, but my hunger for her pussy was too insistent to ignore. And my girl had asked me to touch her there, but I’d been neglecting it so far.

With a kiss to each nipple, I removed my hands from beneath hers before guiding her up to palm her tits. She opened her eyes and looked down at them hesitantly. “Pretend they’re my hands, baby,” I prompted with a wicked smile. “Do whatever feels good.”

She nodded and licked her lips, making me think about how her tongue would feel on my cock. *Focus, Hamlin.* We’d get to all of my fantasies eventually.

I scooted back on my knees and stared at her lace-covered pussy. Impatient as hell, I didn’t bother with taking them off, I just grabbed the fabric in my fist and tore it away. Sage gasped, but I barely noticed. I was mesmerized by the sight in front of me. Her legs were wide enough that her glistening folds were slightly parted. Enough that I could see her pink center and the swollen nub that would bring her so much

pleasure. My mouth watered, and I quickly moved down to lie on my stomach.

I rested my elbows on her thighs and used my thumbs to open her completely.

“Arrow?” Her voice was tense, and I glanced up to see her watching me with big, round eyes. Her face was suffused with color, and she looked unsure. As if she’d never been touched like this.

“You’ve never had your pussy eaten, baby?”

I wouldn’t have cared if she had, but nonetheless, I was elated to think that I would be the only man to ever taste her pussy.

“No. I, um... I’ve never done...” She raised her eyes to the ceiling and inhaled deeply. “I’ve never done any of this.”

Holy. Fucking. Shit.

She was a virgin? I should have figured it out sooner. Her reactions had been so innocent and open. She hadn’t bothered to try to hide what she was feeling.

“You’re a virgin?” I croaked, my voice gritty from fighting the desire to shout that this woman was mine and only mine.

“Yes.” Her blue orbs came back to my face, and when she clocked my expression—which I imagined looked hungry and possessive—she relaxed a fraction. “You don’t mind?”

I double blinked, shocked she would think this would be a problem. “Baby, I wouldn’t care either way. However”—I grinned—“part of me is smug as shit that I get to be your first.” *And last.* I also didn’t clarify that I wasn’t just talking about being the first to eat her sweet center. She’d figure it out when she was ready, and we finally made love.

I couldn’t wait any longer. Bending my neck, I buried my face in her sex and licked her seam once before dragging my flattened tongue between her southern lips from bottom to top.

Sage moaned, and I opened my mouth over her and sucked on as much of her pussy as I could, including her needy little clit.

“Arrow!” she shouted as her hips bucked.

I pressed my pelvis into the bedspread, trying to keep from blowing my load while I feasted on her.

Stiffening my tongue, I shoved it inside her channel, and suddenly, her tightness made sense. She’d never been filled and stretched. I would have to be cognizant of that when I fucked her. I wasn’t a small man, and my shaft was bigger than average, even for a man my size.

Sage was just a tiny little thing, and worry crept in. I didn’t want to hurt her. Yeah, I was gonna need to make sure she was fully healed from her ordeal yesterday before I popped her cherry.

But for the moment, I wanted to make her come so hard she screamed. To give her a taste of the ecstasy she would experience when she climaxed on my cock.

I moved my mouth up to her bundle of nerves and teased it as I slowly pushed a finger inside her. She was tense and on edge, ready to explode any second. Her cries of pleasure had grown loud, and they bounced off the walls, making it even more difficult to hold back my orgasm.

“Oh! Yes! Yes! Arrow! Oh!”

Carefully, I managed to insert another finger, then I popped off her clit long enough to give her an order. “You scream *my* name when you come, baby.”

Then I pushed her past her breaking point, and she shattered, screaming my name like a good little girl. Watching her come and feeling her inner muscles milk my fingers was too much, and my dick emptied itself in my pants.

Just as her pleasure began to ebb, I doubled my efforts and made her come twice more before finally letting her rest. I crawled up her body and kissed her, letting her taste her own sweet flavor.

Then I sighed and moved to get off the bed.

“Wait.” Sage grabbed my arm, and I stopped to look at her confused face. “Why did you stop? I thought...”

“Not yet, baby,” I told her gently. “You need to recover from everything that happened yesterday.”

I brushed a tender kiss over her lips before standing. “I’m gonna take a shower, then I’ll make us some breakfast.”

I wasn't sure what to think as I stared at the way Arrow's sweatpants clung to his butt while he walked away from me. He seemed to derive almost as much pleasure as I did when he went down on me, but I hadn't returned the favor in any way.

Although he'd assured me otherwise, I couldn't help but wonder if he had pulled back because I was a virgin. Maybe our age difference and my lack of experience had cooled his desire for me?

Rolling onto my side, I squeezed my eyes shut and replayed everything that had happened since I woke up to the incredible sensation of being cocooned in Arrow's embrace with his hard length nestled between my butt cheeks. As the sensual fog from my orgasms started to lift, I finally realized something I'd missed...the giant wet spot on the crotch of his sweatpants. Arrow had been so turned on by what had happened between us that he'd come without my hands or mouth on his dick.

All my doubts fled, and my lips curved in a smile of pure feminine satisfaction. I didn't need to worry about Arrow not wanting me. He truly was just worried about giving me enough time to fully recover from the punch I'd taken.

His restraint was just another example of how amazing he was. And focused on giving me what I wanted without any regard for the potential cost to himself—including the possible danger of going up against a drug dealer who had no problem threatening an innocent woman.

In a twist of irony, the worst day of my life had led me directly to the perfect man.

I was just thinking about joining Arrow in the shower when I heard the water turn off. Heaving a deep sigh of disappointment, I sat up and stared at the bathroom door. When he padded out with a towel wrapped around his waist, I puffed out my bottom lip in an exaggerated pout and huffed, “C’mon, no fair. You can’t walk around like that unless you’re willing to do something about it.”

“I already did...three times if I remember correctly.” He flashed me a sexy grin. “Which I’m positive I do because I have a mind like a steel trap.”

“Of course, you do,” I muttered, letting the sheet drop.

Heat flared in his eyes as his gaze latched on my breasts. “Let me guess, turnabout is fair play? Only you decided to kick it up a notch?”

“Mm-hmm.” I licked my lips as the towel began to tent between his legs.

He strode over to the bed, and triumph surged through my veins until he brushed his lips against mine and murmured, “What do you want for breakfast?”

“Is it safe to assume that a big, thick sausage isn’t on the menu?”

His deep chuckle echoed around the room, making me smile.

“Sorry, baby. You’re gonna have to wait a little longer for that particular item.” He stroked his thumb across the bruise on my cheek. “As much as I want to feel your pretty lips wrapped around my cock, you need to heal before that can happen.”

Although I’d never given a blow job before, I assumed he was right. “Fine, I won’t push anymore...for now.”

“Good girl.” He gave me another kiss, deeper this time. “Thanks for taking pity on me, baby. My self-control only extends so far, but I want to do right by you.”

“How can I possibly argue when you’re being so darn considerate?” I complained.

“I was hoping you couldn’t,” he murmured with a grin as he wrapped his fingers around my wrist and tugged me out of bed. Once I was on my feet, he gave my butt a little pat to nudge me toward the bathroom. “Take a bath while I work on breakfast. It’ll make you feel better.”

“But will it help me heal faster?” I sassed, winking at him over my shoulder.

“I fucking wish,” he muttered as he dropped his towel and pulled on a different pair of sweatpants.

The quick glimpse of dick I got was enough to crank the cold-water faucet on full blast, but then I rethought my decision because a hot bath was too tempting. Especially when I found a basket of bath bombs under the sink. The mysterious Merrick seemed to have no issue with catering to his wife’s needs, no matter how girly they might be. It made me even more curious about his story—especially how they met and fell in love. Hopefully, I’d get the opportunity to meet her someday so I could ask since I couldn’t picture myself ever feeling comfortable enough to grill the man helping me about his love life.

By the time I climbed out of the tub, all of the aches and pains had eased from my body, and I was feeling almost as relaxed as I’d been after the third orgasm Arrow had given me. Tugging the shirt he gave me yesterday over my head, I grabbed my pants and pulled them on. Going commando felt weird, but I had no choice, considering Arrow had literally ripped them from my body. Not that I’d minded. I was more than willing to sacrifice every pair I owned to experience the same over and over again, and that was saying a lot since I had a weakness for lacy undergarments.

When I padded into the kitchen, I paused to appreciate the sight of a shirtless Arrow at the stove. When he glanced over his shoulder at me, I smiled. “Looks like you know how to make more than just spaghetti.”

“Yeah, I can do a hell of a lot with eggs.” He slid an omelet onto a plate. “I hope you like ham and cheese.”

I licked my lips. “The cheesier, the better.”

“I like the way you think.”

I poured mugs of coffee while he dished up the second omelet and set the plates on the table. As we sat across from each other and started to dig into the delicious breakfast he’d made for us, I explained, “There was this cheese shop in Oceanside when my dad was stationed at Camp Pendleton. My mom let me pick a different kind to try each time we went there.”

“What was your favorite?” he asked.

“It was this semi-soft cheese from Chile, Panquehue. It’s kind of similar to Tilsit.”

“You sound like quite the turophile. You’ll have to do a tasting of all your favorites for me someday.”

My jaw dropped as he casually used a word most people had never heard before. “By any chance, do you do crossword puzzles?”

“I do,” he confirmed with a quirk of his brow.

“I don’t even know what to say. You’re literally the perfect man.”

He tilted his head to the side, his eyes narrowing. “That’s an unusual reaction to something most people find mundane.”

“Most people aren’t cruciverbalists who make their living selling crossword puzzles to newspapers, magazines, and publishers.”

“Gorgeous, brave, and smart as fuck.” He let out a low whistle. “Talk about being perfect.”

“More like the wallflower nerd who’s into weird stuff like D&D,” I muttered.

His head jerked back. “You like RPGs?”

“A little too much,” I mumbled as my cheeks heated. “I was actually the Dungeon Master for the group I played with while I was in college. I met them during the middle of my sophomore year, and our campaign ran weekly until I graduated.”

“What level did you guys hit?”

“Seven.”

“Impressive.” He grinned at me from across the table. “Maybe we can play sometime.”

“I’d really like that.” Although I couldn’t help but think of a much more personal kind of role-playing the two of us could do together. But since he insisted on me healing more before we went any further, I suggested, “If we hunt down a pad of paper, some tape, and a pen, we could make a crossword puzzle together. It’ll help us pass the time while we wait to hear back from your friends.”

“That’s a fantastic idea.”

I was surprised by how quickly and enthusiastically he agreed. “Really?”

“Abso-fucking-lutely.” He gestured toward the half of my omelet I hadn’t eaten yet. “As soon as we finish with breakfast, I’ll find what we need to get started.”

“We can...um...actually start now since the first step is brainstorming a theme. Funnily enough, the one I was planning to work on before everything happened was military formations. Considering your position in the Navy, you’d probably be a huge help with that one.”

“How far did you get on it?” he asked.

“Just the first word.”

“Sounds like we have our theme picked out already, then.” He wolfed down the rest of his omelet. “I’m looking forward to seeing you in your element.”

“I’ve never worked on a puzzle with someone else before.” Rubbing my palms together, I grinned at him. “This is going to be so much fun.”

This time, he was the one who winked at me. “And I’ll get another of your firsts.”

ARROW

I was getting impatient with the lack of news. Even though spending the day before with Sage and learning just how fucking brilliant she was had been amazing. She was the sexiest nerd I'd ever met, and I adored everything about her.

Sleeping with her again and not burying my cock deep inside her had been more challenging than BUD/S. I'd eaten her pussy until she passed out, then took a shower to clean up the sticky mess from coming in my pants again. That had left me with only boxers to sleep in, and since I'd ruined Sage's underwear, she was naked under my shirt.

When the sun came up, I scrambled out of bed and took a cold shower before heading to the kitchen to make breakfast. I checked my phone again and saw no missed calls or texts. Then twenty minutes later, Sage and I were eating pancakes—this time, she was the one to show off her skills in the kitchen—when my phone pinged with a text.

Merrick: Be there in five mikes.

“Merrick is on his way. He'll be here in five mikes.”

Sage nodded and ate another bite of pancake. I chuckled, and she glanced up curiously.

“I forgot you're a military brat. I almost explained that mikes are minutes in military jargon.”

I disengaged the alarm but watched for Merrick on the television, where he'd shown me how to pull up the feed for

all the cameras.

“I like that about you,” I told her with a smile. Then I winked. “You get me.”

Sage laughed, and I basked in the sound. It was so beautiful.

Five minutes later, his black SUV pulled up and drove around to park outside the garage. He used the keypad and a thumbprint to open the door, then I switched off the television as he ascended the stairs into the kitchen.

He was carrying a duffel and held it up, looking at Sage, before tossing it on the couch. “My wife gave me hell for not having clothes here for you when you arrived. I wanted to bring them up earlier, but I was following a lead.” He ambled over to the table and sat on the chair across from me.

“Please thank her for me,” Sage replied with a sweet smile. “It’ll be nice to wear something besides Arrow’s T-shirts.”

“Audrey’s clothes might be a little big on you, but they should do,” he said with a shrug.

“Baby, why don’t you change?” I suggested, suddenly very aware that my woman was only wearing a big shirt—although it fell below her knees—with nothing underneath while there was another man in the room. Unexpected jealousy crept up, tightening my chest. It was a foreign feeling, but then, Sage had inspired a lot of emotions I’d never experienced before.

“Did the lead pan out?” I asked Merrick.

Merrick leaned against the chair and slung one arm over the back. “I think it will, but Deacon and Stirling are running it down in person. They’ll call with an update shortly.”

My phone rang less than five minutes later, and I hit the video button to answer Deacon’s call.

“Hooyah,” I greeted him and Stirling, who was standing beside him.

“Hooyah,” Deacon repeated.

“We found the little weasel,” Stirling announced.

“Which weasel?”

I turned at the sound of Sage’s voice as she walked back into the room. My instinct was to send her right back out and shield her from all of this, but I knew our life would be full of classified information, and I didn’t want her to feel like she was out of the loop altogether.

Holding out my hand, I beckoned her closer, and she came right over and let me settle her in my lap.

“Go on,” I instructed the men.

“We found Paul holed up in a motel. It’s a local junkie spot, so he’s lucky as shit that Bartman didn’t find him first. He’s got goons searching the whole area for the idiot.”

“I assume he’s coked up?”

“Looks like the last time he shot up was yesterday. So we should be able to get something out of him soon.”

“Where did he get the cocaine?” Sage queried. “The dealer guy...Bartman?” I nodded. “He said Paul owed him ten grand for a brick he was supposed to sell. If Paul is using that stash, could we just give Bartman what’s left? Then Paul would owe him less, right?”

“It’s not a bad thought,” Merrick chimed in. “But even if he returned some of the coke—assuming he had a portion still untouched—Bartman will probably demand full payment just to make a point. He’ll use it as a warning to anyone who considers stealing from him.”

“Oh,” Sage sighed. “So what are you hoping to get from Paul?”

“We want him to set up a meet with Bartman,” Deacon supplied.

“Won’t that put his life in danger? Using him as bait?” Sage glanced at me with a worried expression, and I knew she was thinking of her friend and the impact it would have on her. I loved that she had such a big heart. It was another reason I hated to have her involved in this situation. I didn’t want the darkness to touch her.

“Paul won’t actually attend the meeting,” Merrick piped up, reassuring her. “A few of us will go in his place.”

Sage was quiet for a moment, then she turned to look up at me with fearful eyes.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you, baby,” I told her in a low tone.

“What...um, what will you do at the meeting?”

I didn’t want to lie to my woman, but I felt like I could omit the worst parts of what I expected to happen because killing someone qualified as classified in my mind. Still, I was pretty sure she picked up on the gist when we all remained silent.

“I don’t want anything to happen to you,” she mumbled, her beautiful blue eyes filling with tears.

Placing my palms on her cheeks, I brought her face close to mine and locked eyes with her. “I will do whatever it takes,” I repeated, “to keep you safe.” Then I kissed the tip of her nose and gave her a lopsided smile. “There is no way I’m going to let anything happen to me now that I’ve found you.”

“We’ll keep his ass safe, ma’am,” Stirling chimed in. “And even if he has gotten soft with his cushy desk job”—I rolled my eyes. I trained with these assholes multiple times a week. I might not go out on missions, but if I was ever called up, I’d damn sure be ready—“he’s still a SEAL.”

Sage wiped underneath one of her eyes and nodded. “I’m going to kick your asses if you guys let him get hurt,” she threatened. When there was a deafening silence, she sighed, obviously picking up on the fact that we were all trying not to smile or laugh. “Fine. I won’t kick your ass. But my dad will,” she finished haughtily.

“Isn’t your dad a jarhead?” Deacon asked.

Sage narrowed her eyes at him and huffed, “Yes, squid, he is.”

I burst into laughter, along with the other guys, and then hugged her close when she blushed bright red. “Adorable,” I

whispered in her ear. “Sexy as fuck and adorable. Lethal combination, baby.”

Sage shivered, making me grin and wink at her, deepening her blush.

“We’ll let you know when everything is set,” Deacon announced. Then he grunted, “Hooyah,” and received a chorus of them in return before he hung up and Merrick took off.

“Do you have to go with them?” Sage asked, her tone sad.

“I protect what’s mine, Sage,” I stated firmly.

“Yours?”

“Yeah, baby. You haven’t figured that out yet?”

Sage dropped her gaze to her hands, which were folded in her lap. “I didn’t want to assume.”

I raised her face with my curled index finger under her chin. “Maybe it’s time I proved it to you.”

“Don’t expect me to argue,” I murmured, twining my arms around his neck. “I’ve been telling you for days that I’m ready for this.”

“Days? Really?” He shook his head with a chuckle. “It hasn’t even been forty-eight hours since I got my first taste of your pussy.”

“Maybe I’m exaggerating a teeny-weeny bit,” I conceded as I grinned up at him. “But only because I feel as though I’ve been waiting my whole life for this moment. For you.”

“You have no idea how fucking thrilled I am that you waited for me, baby.” He bent low to slide his arm under my knees and lifted me against his chest. “But I’m going to do my best to show you.”

I felt like a sexy princess as he carried me into the bedroom and gently laid me on the mattress. One who was finally going to be seduced by her prince.

Before joining me on the bed, Arrow whipped his shirt off and dropped it on the floor. But when my hands went to the shirt I’d put on when I changed, he shook his head. “No, baby. I’m going to strip off every piece of clothing covering your delectable body, and I’m going to enjoy every inch of skin I bare while I’m doing it.”

A sensual shiver raced up my spine as I lowered my arms and pressed my palms against the sheets. “Hurry,” I urged.

“Don’t worry, my sweet baby.” He shoved his sweatpants down his thick, muscular legs, and his dick bounced against his stomach as the hard length sprung free. “I’m not going to make you wait any longer.”

He kneeled on the end of the mattress and leaned over my legs to tug my yoga pants down my thighs. His eyes darkened to a stormy gray when he saw the pink lace panties I was wearing. “Merrick’s wife is my new best friend. She included a few pairs with the tags still on.”

“I guess I should be more careful with them.” He hooked his fingers in the sides and dragged them down my legs. “At least until we have the chance to get you some more.”

“I have lots of them at home.”

“Good to know.” He tossed the bit of lace over his shoulder. “And I can always take you shopping for more once we know you’re safe.”

“Sounds like a fun time,” I murmured, arching my back off the mattress so he could pull my top over my head.

“But not nearly as satisfying as this is going to be,” he growled, wrapping his fingers around my ankles to spread my legs. Then he lowered his big, muscular body over mine without anything between us for the first time. His hard length glided through my wetness, nestled between my pussy lips as he positioned himself over me, one forearm pressed against the mattress for balance.

Lifting my knees, I cradled his hips between my legs, moaning when the change in position made his dick slide against me. “I want you so much.”

“You’re gonna have me, baby. I promise.” His hand drifted down my chest to cup my breast, his thumb brushing against my pebbled nipple as he lowered his head to capture my lips. His tongue swept inside to tangle with mine, and the kiss quickly turned heated...which wasn’t a surprise, considering we were naked and as close as two people could get without having sex.

He kept playing with my breasts while we kissed, and when he finally lifted his head again, he trailed his lips down my chest to suck a stiffened peak into his mouth. I felt the pull of his lips deep in my core and writhed against him. He lifted his head, his steely blue gaze connecting with mine as he murmured, “So fucking perfect.”

His mouth moved to give the other side the same attention before he added, “And all mine.”

“Yes, yours,” I panted.

“Which means I get to taste you whenever I want, doesn’t it, baby?”

“Uh-huh,” I breathed as he kissed his way down my belly to wedge his shoulders between my thighs.

“Because you’re mine.”

“Yes,” I gasped when he swept his tongue through my wetness and circled it around my clit. “I’m yours.”

“Damn straight, you are,” he grunted before his teeth sank into my inner thigh just hard enough to leave a mark. “And your pussy knows it, too. Look how drenched you are for me. I’m the only one who’ll ever know how sweet you taste.”

The scruff on his cheeks scraped against my sensitive skin, sending a shiver up my spine as he moved his mouth directly over my core. His hold on my thighs tightened, and he held me in place as he devoured me. There was no other word for it—he used his tongue, lips, and teeth to lick, suck, and nibble every centimeter of my pussy.

Although he’d already given me several amazing orgasms, knowing he was about to take my virginity made this time different. Better. More explosive.

It didn’t take long for the pleasure to build, my body going taut beneath him. “I’m so close.”

“Fly apart for me, baby,” he commanded in a raspy tone thick with need. “Need you to come a couple of times so your tight pussy will be ready to take my cock.”

Between his deep voice and the flick of his tongue against my clit, the pressure inside me reached a peak, and I exploded, shouting his name. “Arrow!”

He didn’t let me come down from my release, instead keeping at me until I was writhing in pleasure again. Warmth continued to build in my lower belly as he worked me with his mouth and fingers this time, inching his thick middle digit into my tight channel until my inner walls stopped resisting the invasion.

“Can’t wait to feel you wrapped around my cock like this, but you gotta give me another orgasm first. You can do that for me, baby, can’t you?”

“Yes,” I hissed, my hips bucking off the mattress as he twisted his wrist so his finger rubbed against my G-spot. “Oh, Arrow! Yesss!”

He didn’t stop until I collapsed against the mattress, breathless from my second release. Then he finally lined his dick up with my pussy, notching the tip at my entrance. “Now you’re ready to take me. To become mine in every way.”

My inner walls fluttered at the possessive thread in his words. “I am.”

“Want to hear it again,” he grunted as he worked the first inch inside my tight heat. “Tell me that you’re mine, Sage.”

“I’m yours, Arrow.” I twined my arms around his neck and brushed my lips against the shell of his ear. “Only ever yours.”

“Damn straight, you are.” He slid in another inch. “Put your legs around me, baby.”

I followed his instructions, and his hard length slid a little deeper. “Oh, wow.”

“You doing okay so far?” he asked, holding still above me.

Although he wasn’t all the way inside, our bodies were intimately connected in a way I’d never experienced before. There wasn’t any pain yet, though. “So good.”

“My brave girl,” he whispered as he pulled his hips back. Then without warning, he thrust forward, filling me until his

balls smacked against my butt.

“Holy heck,” I breathed, my body locking tight as I adjusted to his invasion.

“Sorry, baby.” He trailed his lips against my jaw. “I figured it’d hurt less if you didn’t have the chance to brace.”

“Probably a good call since you’re so darn big.” I dug my nails into his shoulders as I gave my hips an experimental wiggle. “And it seems to have worked.”

“Thank fuck,” he grunted, a bead of sweat dripping down his forehead. “I wasn’t sure how much longer I could last without moving.”

I pressed my heels into his butt cheeks and urged, “No need to wait. I’m ready for you to make me completely yours.”

“Fuuuuck,” he groaned, seeming to lose all control as he pulled out and drove back in fast and hard until he bumped against my cervix. Then he repeated the action, over and over again until my screams of pleasure echoed around the room.

Spurred on by the pleasure coiling in my body, my hips bucked to meet him thrust for thrust.

“That’s right, baby. Squeeze the fuck out of my cock while you take every inch of me.”

“Yes, Arrow. Oh my gosh, yes!” I cried out when he leaned down and sucked one of my nipples deep into his mouth, his arm going between our bodies to circle my clit. Waves of ecstasy beyond my imagination crashed over me, and I shattered while screaming his name.

As though he’d been waiting for my release before he gave in to his, his cock exploded inside me, hot spurts of his come filling me to overflowing. Instead of worrying that we hadn’t used a condom and I wasn’t on birth control, it set off another shock wave inside me, and I shuddered beneath him, overwhelmed by bliss.

We stayed locked together while we both caught our breaths. When my trembling finally subsided, Arrow pulled out of my body and rolled onto his back.

“There’s no turning back, baby.” His hands tightened on my waist as he dragged me onto his chest. “This means you’re mine.”

“Yeah, you definitely proved that,” I murmured, rubbing my cheek against his pecs as my eyes drifted shut. Apparently, three intense orgasms while losing my virginity had completely worn me out.

ARROW

It was almost five in the morning when Huntley called to tell me that everything was set in motion. I ducked out of the room so I wouldn't wake Sage. Two of our guys would come protect her. Merrick would pick me up in a helo, and he gave me coordinates for our meeting spot. "We'll walk you through it when you get here."

We hung up, and I hurried to shower and dress. Deacon and Cash showed up half an hour later. I trusted them both with my life, but that didn't make it any easier to leave my woman's safety in their hands.

They walked the house and the perimeter while I went back to the bedroom to wake Sage. I hated to do it, but I knew she'd be pissed if she woke up later and found out I'd left without telling her.

"Baby," I whispered before giving her a soft kiss. "Wake up, Sage."

I'd worn her out, and it was hard not to be proud of that, even though I really needed her to be coherent for a few minutes.

"Sage," I repeated, a little louder this time.

"Hmmm?" she moaned as she stretched, the sheet dropping down to her waist.

Shit. I grabbed it and quickly covered her before I decided to make Merrick wait another twenty minutes so I could give Sage a proper goodbye.

“Baby, I need you to wake up.”

“What?” Her blue eyes were hazy as she blinked the sleep out of them. When she realized I was sitting next to her on the bed fully clothed, her brows drew down. “What’s going on?” She held the sheet as she sat up, her gaze now alert.

“I have to go. But I shouldn’t be gone more than a day—two at the most. Deacon and Cash are here to watch over you. I need you to promise me that you’ll stay inside and do what they tell you if they become aware of any danger.”

Sage nodded and placed her hand on my arm. “I promise. Now promise me you’ll come back safe and sound.”

I leaned in and kissed her, savoring her taste and the feel of her lips, memorizing them to carry with me. When I pulled back, I rested my forehead against hers. “I promise I’ll come back to you, Sage. Remember what I said? What you admitted to me multiple times?”

“I’m yours,” she answered.

“Damn fucking straight you’re mine,” I growled.

Sage giggled. “For some reason, your Neanderthal attitude makes me feel better.”

I grinned, then gave her a deep, passionate kiss. “I have to go,” I muttered when I reluctantly tore my mouth from hers. “Be good.”

“Semper fortis, sailor.”

Damn, I loved her. “Always Courageous” was the unofficial Navy motto.

“Hooyah,” I murmured before giving her one last kiss and forcing myself to walk away.

I STARED at the meadow below as Merrick took the helo into the air. I’d hiked nearly two miles from the cottage to the spot where he’d told me he’d land and pick me up.

“That kid better not have screwed us,” I yelled into my headset over the *whomp whomp* of the blades. I crossed my arms over my chest and stared at the morning sun peeking over the horizon. “Or his ass will be swimming with Davy Jones.”

After the hour-long flight, Merrick brought the helicopter down at a private airport, where Kade, Stirling, and Huntley were waiting for us.

“How reliable is this kid?” I asked as we all piled into an oversized black SUV.

Kade was driving, and he glanced over at me in the front passenger seat. “I’m pretty sure he did what he was told. The kid might be a junkie and an idiot, but he loves his sister and doesn’t want to see her hurt.” He was quiet as he turned onto the highway and headed south. Then he added, “Besides, he seems to think we’re handing him a ‘get out of being murdered free’ card. He jumped at the chance to save his ass. And Phoebe’s.”

“You explained to him that this comes with a price?” I asked, although I was confident they had. Unfortunately, the kid probably hadn’t heard everything they’d said after the part about us taking care of the man who wanted to kill him for stealing ten grand worth of cocaine.

“Yeah.”

“Punk forgot all about that part, right?”

Kade rolled his eyes. “If he even understood it. I don’t know if this kid had a brain before he fried it with drugs, but from what we’ve seen, he’s a few boats short of a fleet.”

Once they’d sobered up Paul, they’d explained the goatfuck he was in and made him an offer—get us in touch with Bartman and we’d take care of the problem. But he also had to agree to go to rehab. One of my choosing.

An old friend of mine was a former BUD/S instructor, and after his son died of an overdose, he decided to open a rehab center. But this place was like being sent to military school. He got the shit out of their systems, then showed them how to

keep their minds and bodies in shape. He taught them discipline, pride, and how to rely on the right people to help you when you faltered. It wasn't the right place for everyone, but his patients' relapse rate was amazingly low.

Then when Paul was out of rehab, he had to be tested for drugs every three months for three years. If he failed any one of those tests, we'd have his ass thrown in jail for dealing. Even if I had to plant that shit on him myself.

The only reason I was helping the guy was because Sage loved Phoebe and wouldn't want to see her hurt. But I would not let that dumb fuck put Sage, Phoebe, or anyone else at risk again.

Kade turned the SUV into the parking lot of a free clinic and drove into one of the empty spaces. When he shut it off, we all exited the vehicle and headed toward the entrance.

"We're having him tested for all kinds of shit," Huntley informed me.

It was a smart move. Jacob—the owner of the rehab center—wouldn't let Paul in the door if he was carrying anything that would harm the other patients.

But that didn't explain why we were here. "Didn't he give you the information on the meeting?"

Merrick shared a look with Kade before answering. "Bartman wanted proof that Paul would be there. Alone."

"What the fuck?" I sputtered.

Stirling chimed in. "I know the plan was to go in Paul's place, but Bartman is sending a goon to scout the situation before he'll show up."

"He wants to know Paul's exact location. He's covering his ass with a sniper," I presumed.

"That's our assumption as well," Kade agreed.

"I told Sage we weren't going to use Paul as bait."

Merrick shrugged. "That's why we didn't tell you until now."

“I don’t think she’s going to be really happy with that distinction,” I muttered.

“You want her safe. This is the way it’s got to be,” he replied.

We were approaching the clinic entrance, so we stepped off to the side to finish our discussion. “Okay, so other than using Paul as a lure, how will this work?”

“I’ll go early and find a perch. I’ll spot his guy when he sets up.” Huntley had special training in Snipers and Advance Air Operations. No one was better to cover our sixes from above. “I’ll fire a warning shot at him before Bartman shows up. If he doesn’t back off, I’ll take him out. Once Bartman is dead, his second in command won’t give a shit what’s going down. These guys are only loyal until the payday stops. Then you can reason with the FNG.”

“Appropriate,” I muttered dryly. *Fucking New Guy*. Bartman’s second in command would no doubt step up to take over the crew and production. Ideally, we would wipe out the whole operation, but that would take months of planning and preparation. So this FNG was lucky as hell because he would be offered the chance to walk away rather than eat a bullet.

I had one more question. “Paul is supposed to show up alone?”

Stirling nodded. “This won’t work unless he goes in by himself to meet the scout.”

“And if Bartman decides to rid himself of the trouble rather than show up?”

“He chose a spot out in the open,” Huntley responded. “He thinks the sniper will give him cover, but all he did is open himself up to me.”

I nodded. “Let’s get this damn show on the road.”

We filed inside the clinic, and Huntley went to find Paul.

The kid looked like death warmed over when they trudged into the waiting room. As Huntley firmly led Paul over to us,

his eyes were clear, confirming he was sober, but as he looked over the five of us, he practically trembled with fear.

“Do as you’re told, and you have nothing to worry about,” I told him in a low voice before turning on my heel and marching outside, going straight to the SUV.

ARROW

Everyone followed me, and we all piled into the vehicle. As Huntley pulled out, I glanced back at Paul and demanded, “What do you know about Bartman’s number two?”

Paul shrugged. “Gorev. I don’t know if that’s his first or last name. He never said much. Rumor is he’s former SVR.”

“Russian Intelligence?” I scoffed. “Complete bullshit.”

Unless he was undercover for some reason, no way even a washed-up SVR agent would be the second in command for a small-time dealer like Bartman. He ruled the roost in his territory but had to answer to much bigger fish.

Kade turned into a relatively empty warehouse district. That wasn’t surprising, considering it was barely eight in the morning. But from the looks of the area, the place didn’t have much activity anymore. Many of the buildings had broken windows and doors, graffiti, and other vandalism.

When he pulled into a parking garage, he drove around a bit until he found a spot in the shadows and out of camera range. Huntley jumped out of the car first, walked to the back, and opened the rear door to grab a long, black case.

“Hooyah,” he murmured before taking off.

“We have an hour before the scout is supposed to be at building nine,” Stirling said as he exited the vehicle and dragged Paul out with him. “Let’s go over everything again.”

“I go out there alone and—” His face blanked, and he looked like he might be sick, causing us all to take a step back.

“I can’t do it,” he heaved as he leaned over and planted his hands on his knees.

I stomped to his side and grabbed the collar of his filthy T-shirt before yanking him upward. Then I moved around to stand toe-to-toe with him. “Listen up, you bent shitcan. If you don’t pull your head out of your ass and get it together, you’re gonna end up in the same dark hole as Bartman. Your sister’s fucking life is on the line! Not to mention the woman I love. So man the fuck up before I feed your balls to the fishes. Lima Charlie?”

Paul looked confused and ready to piss his pants.

“Just say ‘yes, sir,’ kid,” Merrick drawled.

“Y-Y-Yes, s-s-s-ir,” Paul stammered.

“Lima Charlie is loud and clear,” Kade told him with a pitying glance.

“After you get to the muster spot, what then?” I quizzed.

“Stay in the shadows if possible, don’t look anywhere but at the ground or straight in front of me.”

The last thing we needed was for the turd to look around for us and give away that he wasn’t alone.

“And when the scout leaves?”

“Don’t do anything different.”

“Good. It’s almost time. But let me just be perfectly clear about one more thing,” I intoned. I waited until he lifted his eyes to my face before continuing. “No matter how scary Bartman seems, what he threatens, or how afraid you are. Remember, I’m scarier, more deadly, and someone you should be fucking terrified of. So don’t blow this.”

Paul jerked his head up and down.

“Get to the meeting spot. When Huntley gives us the word that the scout is gone, we’ll move into our positions.”

He moved toward the stairs that would take him down to the first level, stumbling on his feet a couple of times.

I gritted my teeth and shot Kade a brooding frown. “You said he could handle this.”

“That was my honest assessment,” he acknowledged.

“If he screws the pooch, there will be no way to un-fuck this situation without more blood on our hands.”

“Paul is Oscar Mike,” Huntley’s voice filtered through the Bluetooth devices we were wearing. “Conveniently for us, Bartman’s hired gun is on the roof of the garage. If you stick to the walls, he won’t see you moving into position.”

“The kid found his backbone,” he mumbled after a few minutes.

I was getting antsy, feeling the need to move, to do fucking *something*.

“You must have scared him straight, Hamlin,” he joked. “He’s doing exactly what you told him.”

Silently, we moved toward the stairs and descended until we were on the first floor, ready to go when Huntley gave the signal.

“A black Hummer is approaching.”

Huntley was quiet again, and the need to act kept building.

“Motherfucker,” he hissed suddenly. “Bartman decided to skip the drama and show up now.”

“What the fuck?” Stirling snarled.

We sprang into action, darting toward our chosen positions while staying out of sight. We were SEALs—trained in stealth—but the conditions didn’t always support our abilities. In order for me to get behind Paul, I would have to step off the foot-wide curb that I was walking on to hug the building. I’d be directly in the light and the view of the shooter.

Poking my head around the corner, I spotted Paul in the hold of a big, ugly man who was clearly Bartman’s “muscle.”

The dealer was so average looking that most people would barely notice him, which worked in his favor since he didn’t

want to be seen. But there was a gleeful expression on his face that failed to mask the evil inside.

“One of his goons has Paul,” I whispered. “One wrong move, and he’d be able to snap his neck like a twig.”

“What are you thinking?” Merrick asked.

“You got another long-range rifle in the car?”

“Of course.” He almost sounded insulted, and if the situation hadn’t been such a clusterfuck, I might have laughed.

“Huntley, take out the trigger man. Quietly. Merrick, get up to his spot ASAP. You’ll have to coordinate and make sure Bartman and the goon go down at the same time. Stirling, Kade, and I are gonna get close. When you fire, we’ll move to subdue the other three standing behind the boss.”

“On it,” Merrick muttered.

“Let me know when the coast is clear, Huntley.”

Silence ensued for a few heavy beats, then Huntley grunted, “Go.”

I backed up and crossed the street, then clung to the shadows as I moved closer to the small group. When I was a few feet from the Hummer, I spotted Kade and Stirling, both close to their targets but still out of sight. Everyone was standing with their back to the right side of the car, except the man I was aiming for. He was leaning against the vehicle’s hood, doing something on his phone and paying little attention to what was happening around him. I crept up to the driver’s side door and lay in wait.

“On your signal,” I whispered.

“Ready,” Huntley announced.

We waited for sixty seconds until Merrick grunted, “Ready.”

A heavy gust of wind whipped through the alley, but as soon as it died down, there was a very faint whisper of sound, then Bartman cut off mid tirade, and Huntley hissed, “Go.”

Stirling, Kade, and I sprang into action. Everyone was staring at the two fallen men, frozen in shock. That worked in our favor, and Stirling and Kade had their targets unconscious and slumping to the ground in seconds.

I needed the last guy to be capable of understanding what I was going to tell him, so I jabbed him in the kidney so he instinctively bent over. Then I grabbed his wrists into one of my hands and used the other to slam his torso onto the hood of the car before placing it on his head to keep him down.

“It’s your lucky day, motherfucker,” I growled. “It would be so easy for me to take your life, but there’s a deal to be made here. Interested?”

“Yeth,” he mumbled since the side of his face was smashed against the metal.

“I’ll let you up, but if you make a single move that I don’t tell you to, I’ve got two sets of eyes in the sky. Either one of them would be more than happy to blow a hole through your head.”

“Yeth.”

I kept his arms twisted behind him but allowed him to rise to a standing position. Kade came over and patted him down, removing two guns, a knife, and a knucklebuster. “Clean,” he remarked before returning to stand by Stirling.

“Don’t try anything,” I warned. “If the sniper doesn’t get you first, believe me, I’ll have you screaming in agony with your next breath.”

I released Gorev, and he stumbled a few steps, then looked from side to side. At the sound of the growl rumbling in my chest, he tensed and slowly turned to face me.

“That kid? Paul?”

Gorev nodded.

“His debt is clean.”

“That’s it?” Gorev asked hesitantly in a thick Brooklyn accent. SRV, my ass.

I rolled my eyes. “Did I knock your head too hard? Of course there’s more. You think we’d go through all of this to clear his bill? It would be easier to come up with the ten grand.”

Gorev’s beady eyes watched me carefully, and he muttered, “Point taken. What else do you want?”

“His sister and her roommate—yeah, she wasn’t lying when your former boss roughed her up the other day, asshole—starting the moment we’re done here, they are off your radar. You’ll spread the word in your circles—the girls no longer exist. And no one is to sell to this punk. Just stay the hell away from him.”

“Is that all?”

“If I think of anything else, I’ll send you an email,” I retorted.

Then the fucker had the nerve to ask, “And what do I get?”

“Your life, such as it is. I imagine you’ll step right into the boss’s shoes, right? The next low-level kingpin of San Diego,” I spat in disgust. “Do you understand the terms of this negotiation?”

Gorev studied me for a moment, then glanced at my companions before looking back at me. “Yes.”

I stalked up to him before he had a chance to back away, and my hand clutched his throat. “One more warning. If you think for one second that this is over when you walk away, think again.”

Gorev clawed at my hand as he choked, trying to get a breath through his constricted airway.

“You take one step too far, and I’ll know it. And you can bet your ass that the next time my hand is around your neck, I won’t let go until you’ve taken your last breath.” I chuckled without humor and added, “So to speak.”

I released him with a shove, and he stumbled backward until he tripped over his dead boss and fell on his ass. His eyes were filled with enough terror that I was satisfied.

“Move out,” I ordered, trusting Merrick to make arrangements to clean up the mess we’d left behind since he’d done it for himself when he was an assassin.

I needed to hold Sage, to let her goodness chase away the darkness that lurked inside me. Everybody has a wicked side, and it served me well when I had to make tough choices in the service of my country. And protecting my woman, taking out scum like Bartman, I considered those acts of service. But it would be a hell of a lot easier to see the bright side of life with Sage at my side.

It felt as though I'd been waiting forever when Cash came over to where I was curled up on the corner of the couch and said, "Just got the all clear. Situation has been handled."

"Did you talk to Arrow?" I jerked up, my hands clenched at my sides. "Is he okay?"

He nodded. "I got a text thanking me for giving you a ride to meet up with him at your place, so it's safe to say he's fine."

"That's all he said?" My brows drew together as I got to my feet.

"Phone records can be subpoenaed, ma'am," he explained, leading me toward the stairs that led down to the garage. "He couldn't write anything that would raise red flags if the situation doesn't remain permanently contained."

"Oh, right. I guess that makes sense," I murmured, my heart heavy at the reminder of the risks Arrow and his friends had taken to keep Phoebe and me safe.

Deacon was loading Arrow's duffel and the one Merrick had brought for me into the back of the SUV when we entered the garage. They didn't waste any time once we were in the vehicle, and we were quickly on the road back to San Diego. I hadn't gotten any more sleep after Arrow left, but now that I wasn't worried about something awful happening to him, I could barely keep my eyes open.

I ended up sleeping the entire ride back to my apartment, my lids not popping open again until Arrow ripped my door

open to pull me from the back seat and into his arms. He didn't give me the chance to say anything before his mouth was on mine, his tongue demanding entrance. Twining my arms around his neck, I went up on my toes to press my lips against his, needing this kiss just as much as he did.

I was so focused on him that I didn't even notice anyone else was in the parking lot with him until Huntley murmured, "I'm gonna head home to get a kiss like that from my wife."

"I plan on getting a fuck of a lot more than a kiss," Kade chimed in.

Stepping away from Arrow, I pressed my fingers to my lips to stifle a giggle as my cheeks heated. "Oops, sorry."

"No apologies needed," Huntley insisted with a grin. "It's about damn time Arrow found a woman of his own to come home to. He more than deserves to have found happiness."

"Yeah, he does." I smiled up at the man I'd so easily fallen for.

Arrow brushed his lips against mine again before turning to his men. "I can't thank you enough for all of your help."

"You'd do the same for any of us," Huntley murmured.

"Hooyah," Arrow confirmed with a nod.

Huntley, Kade, Deacon, and Cash echoed the Navy call.

"Thank you so much." I sniffled, my eyes filling with tears. "I don't know what I would've done if Arrow hadn't stopped to help with my flat tire."

Arrow pulled me against his side as his men accepted my gratitude with soft smiles. "Best damn decision I've ever made."

"Hooyah," Huntley, Kade, and Deacon repeated with wide grins while Cash just shook his head.

Deacon grabbed our bags from the SUV and handed them to Arrow, and then the four men climbed in and drove off. Merrick wasn't around, so I assumed he had already headed home to his family.

“Paul’s here,” I whispered when I spotted Phoebe’s brother in the back of a black SUV parked near the front entrance to the building. The vehicle door was open, but he was just sitting there with his shoulders slumped.

“Yeah, he wanted to see his sister before we took him back to the rehab facility where he’s going to be for a while.” Arrow scrubbed his palms down his face. “The guy is a major fuckup, but he came through when shit went down, so I figured he earned this since it was a small ask.”

“He’s doing rehab again?” I asked.

Arrow nodded and explained, “It was part of the deal I made with him to clean up his mess. I would’ve done whatever was necessary to neutralize the threat to you, but he didn’t know how heavily invested I already was in your safety. Plus, I could’ve come up with other solutions that didn’t end as well for him, so he came out ahead.”

“Thanks for offering him that lifeline and agreeing to bring him here.” I’d never been a big fan of Paul’s and was even less so now, but I knew how much seeing for herself that he was okay would mean to my roommate. “Is Phoebe on her way?”

“Yeah, she should be here any minute since Paul called her when we were en route,” he confirmed with a nod as my car pulled into the parking lot.

The man behind the wheel claimed the spot next to us before exiting the vehicle and tossing my keys at Arrow. “Replaced all four tires, sir.”

“Thanks, Silas.” He pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and tugged some bills out to hand them over to the younger man. “Let me know if this doesn’t cover it.”

I reached for the zipper on my purse. “I should be the one to pay.”

Arrow’s fingers wrapped around my wrist, stopping me as he muttered, “Didn’t I prove to you last night that you’re my woman?”

“You did,” I admitted softly. Silas snickered, and my cheeks heated.

“Which means I get to take care of anything that has to do with your safety, including those damn tires that should’ve been replaced months ago.”

“I wouldn’t bother arguing with him, ma’am. He can be a stubborn motherfucker,” Silas warned.

I was trying to decide if I should give in that easily when I spotted a familiar car turning into the parking lot. As Phoebe pulled up next to the black SUV, Paul climbed out to wait for her. As soon as she was parked, my roommate jumped out of her vehicle and threw herself into her brother’s arms. “Thank goodness you’re okay. I was so worried about you.”

“I’m so damn sorry, sis. I never meant for you to be dragged into my mess.” Paul sobbed against her shoulder. “When I think about what could’ve happened to you...”

“I’m okay. They didn’t get anywhere near me.” Phoebe patted his back before stepping away. “Sage is the one you owe the apology to since she was here when they came looking for me.”

Paul turned toward us, his gaze darting toward Arrow before he looked at me. “You will never know how much I regret that you got hurt because of the shit I pulled. I am so sorry, Sage.”

Phoebe had been so focused on her brother that she hadn’t noticed the small bandage and bruise on my cheek until now. “You got hurt?”

“Only a little,” I reassured her with a soft smile. “I’m fine now.”

Her shoulders slumped. “I hate that you were hurt at all.”

“Sorry to break this up.” Silas jerked his chin toward the SUV. “But it’s time for us to go.”

“Where are you taking him?” Phoebe cried, clutching her brother’s arm as he tried to climb into the passenger seat of the SUV.

“He’s agreed to go back into rehab.” Arrow explained how strict the place was, and hope filled my roommate’s eyes.

She turned to Silas, her lashes fluttering as she took in the Navy SEAL. “Thank you for helping my brother.”

“My pleasure,” he murmured.

Phoebe’s cheeks filled with a pink blush, and she ducked her head as Silas and her brother climbed into the SUV. If the moment wasn’t so serious, I definitely would have teased her about her reaction to the man. Instead, I made a mental note to try to play matchmaker at the first opportunity in the future.

When they were gone, Phoebe sighed. “I guess I’ll see you inside, Sage? After you’ve had the chance to say goodbye.”

The thought of Arrow driving away from me had me stiffening at his side. I hadn’t really thought about where we’d go from here until now, and I hated the idea of us being apart after spending every minute together until he’d left to meet with Paul’s drug dealer.

“I’m not going anywhere without you, baby.” Arrow gave me a squeeze as Phoebe’s eyes widened.

“Oops, I missed more than I thought while I was hiding out at my parents’ house.”

I nodded. “Mm-hmm, you really did.”

“Now that the danger has passed, will you feel safe staying at the apartment on your own?” Arrow asked Phoebe. “Or would you like to pack up some stuff before heading back to your parents’?”

“I’ll totally be fine.” She gave me a quick hug and whispered, “Nicely done, girly. Can’t wait to hear all the deets later.”

I giggled as she headed inside. When it was just the two of us, I turned to Arrow and asked, “Now what?”

“Now I take you home, where you belong.”

“Your home?”

Sliding his arm around my back to yank me against his chest, he shook his head. “You’re mine, baby. It’s *our* home now.”

“Oh.” My lips formed a perfect circle as my eyes widened.

“I meant it when I said I wasn’t going anywhere without you.” He brushed his lips against my forehead. “I love you too damn much to ever let you go.”

“You love me,” I echoed, happy tears welling in my eyes.

“Damn straight,” he confirmed with a grin. “I think I fell for you the minute you stepped out of your car on the side of the road.”

I smiled up at him. “I guess that’s only fair since I fell for you just as quickly.”

“Give it to me straight, baby. I need to hear those three words from your perfect lips,” he demanded.

“I love you, too.”

EPILOGUE

To say my parents were stunned by all that had happened while enjoying their cruise was an understatement. Something I had waited to tell them when they made their regularly scheduled call the following Sunday.

My dad was furious that I hadn't called him for help, then flabbergasted when I told them about all Arrow had done for me. And he was completely out of his element when Arrow had taken the phone from me to introduce himself...and ask for my hand in marriage. Learning that I had fallen in love with a man who was only a few years younger than him had been almost as shocking to him as the danger I had faced.

My dad had thought he was being sneaky when he agreed with one stipulation—that the wedding couldn't happen until he had the chance to meet the groom. But Arrow hadn't fallen for that trick, and ten days later, we boarded a plane to Chile to meet them at their next port.

"I can't believe you pulled our wedding together so quickly." I turned to my groom with a big smile. "This is amazing."

We were at a winery overlooking the Cachapoal Valley. We'd just exchanged our vows on the terrace, where we'd had breathtaking three-hundred-and-sixty-degree views of the vineyard and surrounding mountains. Our parents were our only witnesses since it was a spur-of-the-moment destination wedding.

“Wow,” my mom gasped, her eyes going wide at the hot air balloon Arrow had arranged to take us on a ride before dinner with our parents.

“You did good, kiddo.” His mom elbowed his dad in the side. “He definitely gets his romantic side from me.”

“He did okay,” my dad begrudgingly conceded.

Pulling out of my new husband’s embrace, I walked into my dad’s arms and whispered, “Love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too, sweetheart.” He looked at Arrow over my shoulder. “You better take excellent care of my girl.”

“Always, sir.” Arrow wrapped his fingers around my wrist and tugged me against his side. “I’ve given my life to the Navy for almost twenty years, but my wife is my priority now.”

My dad nodded in approval. “As she should be.”

“Let them be, dear,” my mom urged. “They’re already married now, so you can’t do anything to stop it. Our girl is all grown up and has a worthy man to look after her.”

“Even if you didn’t have my ring on your finger yet, there’s nothing anyone could do to keep me away from you,” Arrow muttered as he led me to the basket beneath the balloon.

After he lifted me inside and set me on my feet, I beamed a smile at him. “Thanks for being such a good sport and taking my father’s ribbing. It was difficult for him to walk me down the aisle to you, knowing he won’t see us again until the end of the cruise in another seven and a half months.”

“I know.” He vaulted into the basket with a grin. The hot air balloon pilot instructed the attendant to untie us, and Arrow wrapped his arms around my shoulders. Then he settled his other hand over my belly and said, “That’s why I promised him that I would put in a request for more leave in a few months. A lot can change before they’re home again.”

I waited until we were high in the sky, drifting over the valley, to press Arrow’s hand against my stomach again. “I

have a feeling things will change sooner than you think.”

His lips curved into a wide grin as his eyes filled with happiness. “Are you trying to tell me you’re pregnant, baby?”

“Somewhat, yes. Or at least it’s highly likely that I might be.” I squeezed his hand. “I haven’t taken a test yet because I didn’t realize I was late until my mom started bawling over my engagement ring and mentioned how much she’s looking forward to having grandchildren. But considering how many times we’ve”—although the pilot wasn’t paying attention to us, I lowered my voice—“ahem...without any protection, I figured it’s fairly safe to assume it will be positive. I wanted to save the news for the perfect moment, and this seemed like the right one.”

“It absolutely was, baby.” He brushed his lips against mine and patted my belly before reaching for the picnic basket on the floor next to his feet. “And now that we have even more to celebrate, it’s a good thing I had them pack some sparkling grape juice to go along with the wine.”

“Yeah, no wine for me. I already had to pretend to sip my champagne earlier so my mom didn’t ask any questions. I wanted you to be the first to know.” My eyes widened when he unloaded the picnic basket, and I saw a chunk of Panquehue. “You got my favorite cheese?”

“Of course, I did.” He jerked his chin toward the landscape. “Why do you think I picked this stop during your parents’ cruise for our wedding? We could’ve gotten married in Panama or Peru instead, but I figured you’d appreciate the opportunity to try the Panquehue while you were in the country where it was made.”

“I barely even mentioned Chile in passing,” I gasped, my eyes filling with tears of pure joy and appreciation. “I can’t believe how close attention you pay to me.”

“I always will, baby,” he promised. “I’m an observant man, and you’re the center of my world.”

EPILOGUE

ARROW

“Open your eyes,” I murmured in Sage’s ear.

She blinked a few times, then gasped as she took in the beautiful log cabin in front of us. “Did you rent this for the week?” she asked, clapping her hands excitedly. “It reminds me so much of Merrick and Audrey’s place!”

I chuckled and wrapped my arms around her from behind. The kids were with her parents for a week, so it was perfect timing for my surprise. “Nope. This is ours.”

“What?” My wife wiggled around in my arms to look up at my face. “You bought it?”

I nodded, then pecked her on her rosebud mouth. “I got it for a steal because it wasn’t in great condition, and the bank was looking to offload it.” Although, I could have purchased it new. After living on base for nearly twenty years and having basically no expenses, I’d saved us an extremely nice nest egg.

She frowned, and I laughed. “Don’t worry, baby. I traded favors with some of the guys, and they helped me fix it up.”

Her mouth formed a cute little O, and I swallowed hard, thinking about my cock sliding between those lips. Shaking my head, I set those thoughts aside for later.

“But we didn’t do any decorating. I figured you’d want to make it ours.”

Tears filled Sage’s eyes, and I panicked. “We can sell it if you don’t like it. Don’t cry, baby. You know how much I hate it.”

She giggled and patted my chest. “These are happy tears, Arrow,” she assured me.

“I still don’t like it,” I grumbled.

“Sometimes I’m amazed that even after ten years, you still surprise me when you make me feel loved and cherished.”

I clutched the back of her shirt, pulling her in until I’d plastered our bodies together, then bent my head and kissed her passionately. We were both breathing hard when I pulled back, and I panted, “Because that’s what you are, baby. Loved, adored, and all mine.”

Sage beamed at me and giggled when I scooped her into my arms and carried her to the front door. After opening it, I took her over the threshold, set the alarm, and headed straight for the master suite.

I didn’t stop until we were in the bathroom, then I set her on the counter and stripped her naked. My eyes swept over her, and I rasped, “I swear, you get more beautiful every fucking day, baby.”

She blushed, something I loved about her, and I trailed a finger from her cheek and down her neck to one of her breasts, where I drew a circle around the rapidly hardening nipple. “Be right back,” I grunted. Quickly, I started the shower and flipped on the tile and towel warmers. Then I removed my clothes and returned to collect my wife.

“This shower could easily fit four people,” I told her as I carried her into the glass enclosure. “But it will only ever be the two of us. I just wanted to make sure we had plenty of room.”

“Oh?” Sage squeaked, her skin flushed pink from her face to her pussy. “Room for what?”

“Let me show you.”

First, I ate her out until her screams bounced off the tiles and rang in my ears. Then I fucked her against the wall and again while sitting on the built-in bench before she dropped to her knees and took me to heaven. By the time we’d worn ourselves out, the water was cold—I’d put in a massive water

heater for exactly this reason—and we hurried to wrap up in warm, dry towels.

“Good call on the big shower,” she said with a cheeky grin.

I winked at her. “Priorities, baby.”

Sage laughed and took the soft, fluffy robe I handed her, switching it out for the towel. Then I took her hand and gave her a tour of the three-bedroom, two-bath cabin. While I’d planned to spend plenty of alone time with my wife, I’d also made sure it was kid friendly so we could come as a family. One bedroom had furniture for our two boys and the other for our daughter. The large living room had couches, a fireplace, and a big television. The room had a vaulted ceiling, but the rest of the house was topped with an attic I’d set up as a game room.

“This place is amazing, Arrow,” Sage sighed when the tour ended. She dropped onto one of the couches and yawned.

She’d seemed a little tired lately, which was one of the reasons I’d been looking forward to a week of relaxation. Sitting at the end of the sofa, I hooked my arms around her middle and hauled her over to me. I stretched out, and she got comfortable lying on top of my body, which had my cock twitching again. But I ignored it since my wife—whose eyes were drooping—was clearly exhausted.

“I only see one problem,” she murmured.

My brow furrowed as I tried to think of what I might have forgotten. “Problem?”

“Avery’s room only has one bed.”

Confused, I lifted her chin and turned her head to see her face. “Our baby girl is spoiled enough,” I joked. “She doesn’t need two...”

Her meaning finally dawned on me, which she confirmed when she said, “You need to add a crib.”

My mouth opened and closed a few times because I was struck speechless. Then in the blink of an eye, I’d reversed our

positions and scooted down so I was level with her belly. I untied her robe and stared at where she'd carried our babies. "You're pregnant?" I breathed, caressing the soft, slightly rounded area.

"Don't sound so surprised," she giggled. "If you don't start remembering to carry condoms with you, you're going to knock me up every time we have a quickie."

I grinned, then kissed her stomach. "Fine with me. I love seeing you pregnant." Something occurred to me then, and I popped my head up. "Wait, you said a crib for Avery's room?"

Sage laughed and shrugged. "You'd think after three babies I would have seen the signs. We've been so busy lately that I thought I had a bug. I went in to see the doctor, and she wanted to do an ultrasound to check that everything was normal when the test came back positive."

I raised an eyebrow, and she smiled brightly. "We're both right as rain. Anyway, turns out, I'm already twelve weeks. She asked if I wanted to know the gender, and I decided that I wanted to surprise you for once."

"Another baby girl as beautiful as her mother," I murmured. "Thank fuck we had two boys first."

After kissing her stomach once more, I swiftly shucked my robe and opened hers completely before gliding up, making sure our skin rubbed together until I covered her from head to toe.

"I love you, baby," I rasped, nearly overwhelmed with happiness. "Thank you for trusting me and building this incredible life with me."

Sage smiled and placed her palms on my cheeks. "Best decision I've ever made. I love you too, Arrow." She wrapped her legs around my hips, and her expression turned salacious. "But I think I need a reminder of who I belong to."

She didn't have to ask me twice.

Silas and Phoebe's story is up next in [Claimed by the Sailor!](#)

Just in case you missed it, Kade got his happily ever after in [Owned by the Officer](#), and Huntley, Merrick, and Deacon's stories are all available in [Black Ops: Volume 1!](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The writing duo of Elle Christensen and Rochelle Paige team up under the Fiona Davenport pen name to bring you sexy, insta-love stories filled with alpha males. If you want a quick & dirty read with a guaranteed happily ever after, then give Fiona Davenport a try!

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