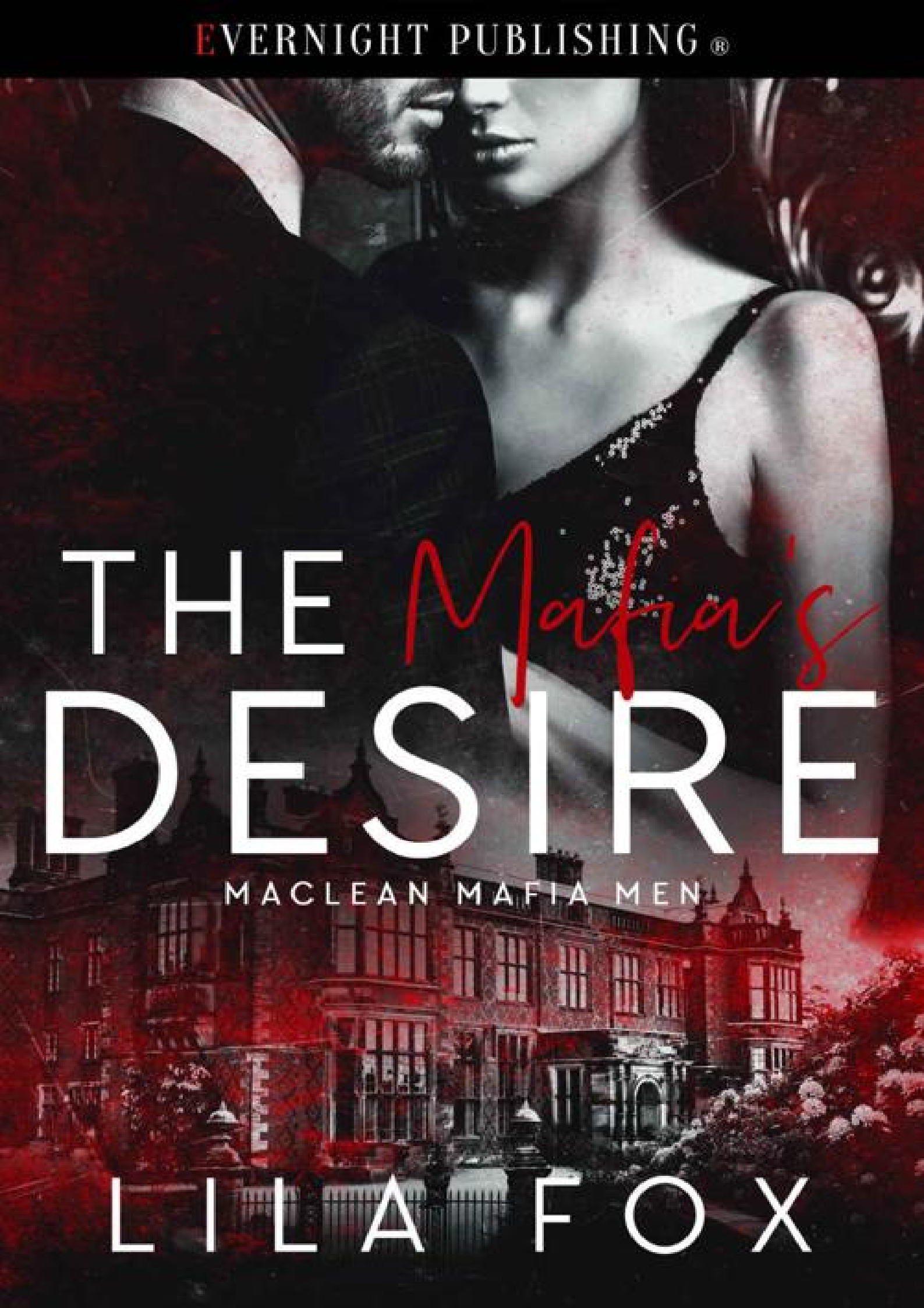


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DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this book to Evernight. You all have been so good to me, and I know I wouldn't be where I'm at without you. Thank you.

THE MAFIA ' S DESIRE

Macleon Mafia Men, 7

Lila Fox

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Chapter One

Ethan walked into the back door of one of his family's restaurants and was pissed. No one stole from the family and got away with it. It was pathetic when they did try to betray them because they knew what would happen when, not *if*, they got caught

He didn't mind this assignment. The good part of tending to this robbing bastard that Alastair sent him was that he would be able to hurt and kill someone. It might help the built-up fury and pain in him.

Fuck, he hated what he was turning into. But ever since he found out his sweet mother was a sociopath and serial killer, and had been his whole life, it fucked up his brain. He knew blaming all women for the actions of one was wrong, but he had yet to figure out how to get past this. Fortunately, his brothers were doing better than he was.

His brother, Drew, had brought up getting counseling, but he'd have to be half-dead and chained to a bed before he'd talk about his feelings to a stranger. Hell, he had a hard enough time with people he knew, loved, and respected.

A few of his men walked in front of him, but he could tell when Harvey Owens, the restaurant manager he had hired three years before, saw him, and by the way the man turned pale-white, the fucker knew what was coming. His men made a perimeter around the room, just in case the bastard tried to run, while he stood in front of the weasel.

"Sharp, check the front," Ethan said.

Ethan waited but stared intently at the manager. He was pleased to see the fucker get more and more anxious, and sweat dripped down his face. The guy deserved every bit of discomfort Ethan could give him.

"Everything is clear, Boss," Sharp said.

"Good. Now we can talk," Ethan said. "I don't have much time, so let's get to it. We both know what you did, and

you know it's not a good thing to steal from the family. I'll give you one chance. Now, if you tell me the truth, I'll be merciful and just put a bullet in your head. If you lie to me, you'll be feeling some pain before you die. Either way, you're dying tonight. Which is it?"

Owens sputtered and held his hands out in front of him. "Ethan, please. I've always been loyal to you."

Ethan sighed. "Fuck, you can't do anything right?" He pulled out a gun and shot the manager's knee.

The guy screamed and dropped to the floor, making Ethan smile. Most of the time, he hated hurting people, but lately he was getting way too much enjoyment out of it. He kept asking himself if he was as sick as his mother and hadn't known it. It was a thought he hadn't been able to vanquish and he grew more disturbed about it every day.

"One of you gag him, and then a few of you put him in the trunk of my car."

"You got it, Boss."

Ethan waited until the screaming man was taken out, and it was finally quiet again.

"Sharp, can you tell if he had tallied tonight's sales?" Ethan asked.

"I'll go look. Do you want me to bring everything in here?" Sharp asked.

Ethan wiped a hand down his face. "Yeah. We can always deal with it later. Who's the assistant manager?"

"Ray Bishop," Sharp said.

"Call him and explain that Owens had to leave town, and we need him to step up and take over. Do you think he'll be good?"

"Hell, yeah. I was shocked when you didn't pick him the first time."

"I had a reason, or I wouldn't have done it," Ethan said. At the moment, he couldn't remember what that was.

Sharp snorted. "You'll be pleased with him."

"Good. Go get the till for the night."

He watched Sharp leave, and he wanted desperately to sit down and close his eyes, but there were still a few of his guys in the kitchen with him, and he knew better than to show any weakness.

He leaned against the counter and crossed his arms over his chest. He straightened immediately when he heard something drop in the back pantry. The room was dark, and the door was half closed. Ethan pulled out his gun, walked over, and yanked the door all the way open. He didn't see anything at first because the light wasn't on, but when he turned it on, he saw a young woman in the corner trying to make herself as small as possible.

Fuck. He needed sleep because he would have never made this mistake otherwise.

"Who the fuck are you?" Ethan asked. The woman was small and incredibly beautiful with her long brown hair and light blue eyes.

"S-Sara."

"Why are you in here in the dark?"

"I was just putting away a few cans we didn't use tonight, so I didn't turn on the light," Sara said.

Jesus, what the fuck was he going to do with her?

"Fuck, I want some of that," Perkins whispered.

Ethan glared at the man when he heard Sharp behind him. "Sharp, Mike, and Perkins, you're with me. The rest of you take our friend away. I'll deal with him in an hour or so."

"You got it, Boss," Bryan, one of his men, said.

Ethan turned back to her. "What is your job?"

"I waitress mostly, but Mr. Owens has asked me to do other things around here lately."

"Oh, I bet he does," Perkins said behind him.

“No, it’s not like that, really,” she said.

“What does that mean?” Ethan asked.

“What does it matter if I’m going to be dead soon?” she said.

He was shocked that she said it so calmly, and there were no tears or pleading.

“You’re not going to plead for your life?”

She shook her head. “Even I know it won’t help, and the last thing I want is to give you guys entertainment of any kind.”

Ethan’s eyebrows rose. “Entertainment?”

“Yeah, don’t men like you like watching someone in pain and begging?”

He had to admit she was right, but only men that fucked with the family. Not women or children.

“Answer me about Owens,” Ethan said.

“It wasn’t sexual yet, but he tried to grope me, and I knew he’d try something soon.”

“What would you have done?” Ethan asked.

The woman pulled out a small knife.

“I would have cut him and then left.”

Why in the hell did she show them the knife? It was her only defense against them.

It also amazed him how pissed he was that Owens was sexually harassing her, and he didn’t know anything about it. He had men everywhere, so he got every bit of information pertaining to him or the family.

Ethan studied her. “Why didn’t you go to the cops?”

“For what? They’re not going to do anything about it. I already know that if I want to live, I have to fight for it every day of my life. I’ve dealt with men like Owens before.”

Jesus, her life sounded horrible. She could be making it up, but for some reason, he didn't think so. "What happened last time?"

"I hit him over the head with a pot and left," Sara said.

Ethan held his hand out. "Give me the knife," he demanded.

Sara shook her head.

He tilted his head to the side. "Why? Why would you want to keep it if you think you're dying tonight and know that little knife is no defense against me?"

"I don't mind dying. I expect it ... but I'll cut my wrists before you get to try to r-rape me."

That shocked the shit out of him. "You act like death is not a big deal."

The woman's lips pressed together, and any sign of life in her eyes faded to shadows.

"I don't want to talk anymore. All I ask is if you have any decency, you won't rape me or put me in water. I prefer a bullet if possible."

Ethan's head snapped back. Jesus, she was telling him how to kill her now?

"We'll deal with that later. Now give me the knife," Ethan said and held his hand out.

"You promise I won't get raped?" she asked.

He nodded. He hated when women and sometimes children or even men went through that, and he never intended to do that to anyone.

Chapter Two

Sara was just putting the last can on the shelf when she heard the back door open, and a group of men came in. She couldn't count how many, she just knew it was over six.

She pressed herself into the corner because the door was halfway open, and anyone would see her if they looked now. Fortunately, the light was off, so she had a chance to conceal herself.

She pressed her hands to her mouth when she heard the shot, and then Owens fell to the ground screaming. God, the man talking sounded so cold, like it was nothing to hurt another human. But then, she really hadn't met a man that didn't like to hurt people. She knew the nice ones existed, she'd just never met one.

They dragged Owens out the back door, and she waited for the others to go. A few minutes passed, and she felt the tension rising. What were they doing? Why weren't they leaving?

Sara wanted to peek and see. Maybe they were gone because she didn't hear anything, but she hadn't heard the last few men leave either. She snuck out of the small space she'd been crouching in and grabbed the shelves to steady herself. It was like slow-motion when the can of vegetables started to fall, and then when it hit the floor, the sound was explosive.

Just that little thing, that little bitty mistake, was going to get her killed because those men would definitely find her now. She crouched down, not really trying to hide because that was pointless. She wanted to pray that he killed her quickly. That's all she asked.

She tried not to flinch when the man reached for her but stood quickly and took a step to the side. He was very tall and either muscular or had some extra weight on him the way he filed out the suit he was wearing. Under normal circumstances, she would think he was handsome with his dark hair and eyes.

She tried keeping her attention on one man. It helped to keep her fear from soaring. The man seemed to be in charge, but she could see that without him talking. His persona was that of an alpha that had to control everything and everyone. She knew the type, she just hadn't seen one to this extreme.

All the questions were making her more nervous. She didn't want him to know anything about her before he killed her. No one would ever come looking for her or wonder what happened to her. She was as alone in the world as anyone could possibly be. Most of the time, it didn't bother her, but she sometimes wished at least one person cared about her and would mourn her passing if she died.

He held his hand out again. "Give me the knife."

She turned it so he could grab the handle and not get cut. She saw that he was surprised, but she didn't care.

"I'll put you somewhere for the night while I deal with other things. I'll leave Sharp and Perkins with you, and Mike will be with me."

She was docile when he grabbed onto her upper arm and started leading her out the back door and into a large black car.

Sara scooted over as much and as tightly as she could at the end of the seat. The boss got in next and sat across from her, and the man named Sharp sat next to him. She guessed the other two were up front, but she didn't want to turn around to look because she sat facing the back window.

She didn't take her attention off the boss. She knew he was the more dangerous of the two, but she didn't like how he studied her intently the whole time.

She breathed a sigh of relief when they pulled up somewhere, but then she saw that it was the back of a hotel, and she started to shake. She didn't want to be in a bedroom with any of them.

"Why can't you just kill me now?"

"Why?"

“Because I don’t want to be in a bedroom with any of you.”

“Why?”

She gritted her teeth together. “Because I don’t want my first and only experience with sex to be rape.” She knew she sounded defensive and probably shouldn’t have told him that, but she was so tired of fighting.

She could tell she shocked him again, but he hid it quickly.

The side door opened, and the boss got out, leaned in, and held his hand out to her. She blinked several times to dispel the tears that stung her eyes. She would die with pride that she hadn’t fallen apart. Sara ignored his hand, scooted out, and took a step away from him. He seemed angry when she flinched from him, but what did he expect?

The boss latched onto her arm and led her in the back door. They rode up an elevator and walked down to the end of the hall, where the guy named Mike stood with the door open. He let her go once inside the room, and she moved as far away as she could, pushing one of the chairs into the corner and sitting.

The men talked softly at the doorway, and then the boss looked at her one more time before turning and leaving Sharp and Perkins alone with her. She didn’t mind Sharp too much because he mainly ignored her, but the other man wouldn’t take his slimy gaze off of her, and the way he kept licking his lips and rubbing himself when the other guy’s back was turned made her want to scream.

She had no idea how much time had passed. Each guy took one of the queen beds in the room and watched sports. Sara stayed in the corner as silent and unmoving as possible.

The man named Sharp stood and stretched, but she kept her eyes down.

“I’m going for burgers down the street. What do you want?”

She didn't know he was talking to her until she saw his lower legs. She raised her face.

“What?” she asked.

“What kind of burger do you want?”

For some reason, that took her by surprise. “Why would you feed me?”

Sharp sighed. “I'll let Ethan deal with you and answer your questions, but I know he wants me to feed you.”

She shook her head. “No, thank you.”

“When's the last time you ate?”

She was getting more and more confused. “I don't know. Maybe last night.”

Sharp shook his head. “I'll get you a cheeseburger.”

“I won't eat it. It's a waste of money,” she said. “I don't need a full stomach to go to Hell.”

Sharp's eyebrows snapped together. “How do you know you'd go to Hell?”

“Why would I get a break and go to Heaven? I haven't done anything worthwhile but take up space. I really doubt God needs me on his lap.”

Sharp cursed, turned, and walked away.

Chapter Three

With one glance at Perkins and the malicious intent in his eyes, she desperately wanted to call Sharp back. Sara took calming breaths and stared down at her hands, counting each second Sharp was away. How long would it take to get hamburgers? Fifteen, maybe twenty minutes?

“Hey, how are you doing?” Perkins said.

Keep it simple and be quiet. Maybe he’d just leave her alone. “Fine, thank you.” The problem was she was good about sensing when things were about to go wrong, and her radar was going wild.

“So, I heard what you said about having your cherry, and I can take care of that for you.”

“No, thank you.”

He stood and took a few steps toward her. “But, cunt, I can make sure the boss just shoots you in the head instead of all the things he’s planning for you.”

Oh, God. Was Ethan planning to do things to her? When she talked to him, she didn’t see a psychopath, crude, sleazy man like the one standing in front of her. Ethan’s eyes were cold and hard but not cruel.

“I get the impression that if you touched me and your boss didn’t tell you to, he’d be pissed.”

Perkins grinned. “Well, you see, he might if he gave a shit about women, but I think he hates you more than I do.”

“I understand that, but he might be the one that touches me first.”

That stopped him in his tracks. She watched him think about it a moment, and then the smile was back and her heart dropped.

“I won’t fuck you right now, but I can beat on you a bit. He can still fuck you with a few bruises.”

He was on her before she could blink. His first hit was to her face, and slammed her head back against the wall. She could see black dots in her vision until his next hit. She curled up as much as possible, but he went at her as hard as he could and laughed the whole time.

The chair she was sitting on tipped over, and she tried to scramble into the corner, but he got a kick in that took her breath.

The beating seemed to go on forever until she heard someone yell.

“*What the fuck are you doing, Perkins?*” Sharp said and threw the sack of food on the dresser. He pulled him away and then decked the guy hard enough to send him flying.

“Oh, Jesus,” Sharp said.

She cringed from him when he reached for her.

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry. If I had known he’d do something like this, I would have never left. Let me help you up to the bed.”

She cried out and shied away from him. She wanted to yell, “*Don’t touch me,*” but no words came out of her mouth, just sounds. Horrible sounds she couldn’t stop.

“Fuck, okay,” Sharp said. “I’ll leave you alone and get you some help.”

She didn’t want help. She wanted to be left alone.

Sara wiped the blood that trickled down her face and saw Sharp kick Perkins hard in the gut a few times as he dialed his phone.

“Hey, Boss. You need to get back here.”

She couldn’t hear what Ethan said, and she didn’t care. This was her only chance to get past Sharp and into the bathroom.

“Hey!” Sharp yelled as she scrambled, part-ran and part-crawled, toward the only safety she could see. It hurt like hell to move, but she’d had enough.

She locked the door and then struggled over to the place between the toilet and the bathtub and squirmed her way in between. She rested her head against the tub and noticed liquid still dripping down her face. She didn't know if it was tears or blood, and at that moment she didn't care. She needed to concentrate on breathing through the pain that radiated within her body. Her body jerked, and she groaned when there was a knock on the door.

“Hey, Sara, it's me, Ethan. Open the door, so I can take care of you.”

If she could have laughed right then, she would have. The only way he could take care of her was if he put her out of her misery once and for all. She heard them talking but couldn't make out the words.

“Sara, come on, baby. Open up.”

She opened her mouth to yell at him, but the horrible sounds came out again, and no words. Maybe Perkins had done more damage than she thought.

“Are you away from the door?” Ethan asked.

She rested against the tub and closed her eyes. She didn't have the energy for anything else.

There was a crash, and then Ethan was in the room.

“Oh, Jesus Christ!” Ethan yelled. “Sharp, call Dr. Peters. I'm afraid to move her.”

She flinched away from him when he knelt down and reached for her. Her movements were so abrupt and violent that she slammed the back of her head against the wall.

“Fuck. Stop. I'm sorry, Sara. Just relax.” He picked up a few towels. “I'm just going to put these around you to make you more comfortable, okay?”

She opened her mouth and still couldn't talk, so she waited until he moved back before she rested against the padding he put over the tub.

She jerked awake when there was another commotion. Both eyes were swollen, but she could still see a bit out of one

that wasn't covered in blood. When she looked up, she saw a gentle-looking older man with a black bag. If she could have chosen her grandfather, he would have looked like him.

Her gaze turned to Ethan when he cleared his throat.

“Baby, this is Dr. Peters, but I always called him Dr. Ben. He's going to look at you.”

She tried pushing herself tighter against the wall and away from the men, and the whimpering and slurred screaming came out again.

The doctor sighed. “She needs to be sedated.”

She brought one of the towels in front of her as a barrier against them. She knew she probably acted like a cornered animal, but she felt like one at the moment.

Ethan crouched by her again. “Babe, listen to me. Do you want to go to the hospital?”

God, the thought made her start to panic.

“Keep distracting her,” Dr. Ben said, but her attention was on Ethan.

“I can tell by the way you're shaking that you don't want to go, so do you think you can relax for the doctor?”

She vaguely felt a sting on her arm, but it was nothing compared to her other aches, so she hardly noticed. Within a minute, she started to feel very tired and fought to keep her eyes open. She couldn't protect herself if she passed out.

She thought someone had picked her up, but she had no strength to fight. Maybe she could finally be free. It was something she dreamed about. Maybe not in this way, but she seemed to have no other option.

Chapter Four

Ethan was leaning against the wall at the warehouse while one of his guys played with Owens. He wouldn't let it go on too long, but he had to always follow through on his words in front of anyone—even his guys.

He reached into his pocket for his phone and answered.

“Fuck, Boss, you need to get back here,” Sharp said.

Ethan had known Sharp his whole life and had never heard him sound like this. “What’s going on?”

“Just come.”

Ethan heard Sharp yell, “Hey,” and then nothing. “Mike, we need to go back. Tony and you other guys take care of him and then meet at the hotel room.”

“What’s up, Boss?” Bryan said.

“I have no idea, but it rattled Sharp.”

“Oh, fuck,” a few of the guys said because they had never seen the man not in control.

Ethan and Mike made it back to the hotel, and Sharp was waiting with the door open.

“Tell me,” Ethan said as they closed the door behind him.

Sharp wiped a hand down his face. “I went to get hamburgers for us. When I came back, Perkins was beating on Sara.”

Ethan’s eyes widened. “Where is she?”

“She’s locked herself up in the bathroom. Boss, she looks bad.”

“Where’s Perkins?”

Sharp pointed to the space between the beds. It looked like Sharp had beaten the fucker, tied his arms and legs, and

put a gag in his mouth. The guy mumbled and fought to get loose, but Ethan ignored it.

“When the other guys get here, I want him taken to the basement at our place on 54th Street.”

“It will be done,” Sharp said.

Ethan walked over to the door and tried the knob to find it locked. He knocked. “Babe, open the door. I want to take care of you.”

He cringed when she made sounds, but it sounded more like a dying animal. He needed to get to her quickly but didn’t want to do more damage. He tried a few more times to get her to open the door, then stepped back and kicked the door open. His first glance at her made him want to howl in a fury. Not even the shit that happened with his mother had made him feel this deeply.

There was blood all over her, and her eyes, although swollen from the abuse, he could see the pupils were wide and dilated. Her lip was split in a few places, and he could see a cut-up by her hairline that continued to drip blood. It needed to have some pressure on it. She started to panic when he took a step toward her, so he backed off.

“Call Dr. Benjamin Peters and get him here.” He thought about taking her to the ER, but he knew she’d freak out if he touched her or tried to carry her.

Within thirty minutes, the doctor was there. Ethan relaxed. If anyone could take care of Sara, this man could. “Hey, Doc, I’m glad you could come so quickly.”

“The way Sharp made it sound, it was urgent, and one look at her and I agree. What happened?”

“One of my men beat her up,” Ethan said.

“I can’t believe you gave him permission.”

“Oh, hell no. He’ll be taken care of,” Ethan said. He didn’t need to go into specifics with Dr. Ben because he was one of his uncle Angus’s best friends and had known him his whole life.

Since the night of the killings that happened with his mother, Angus hadn't been the same. A few months after the incident with his mother, Ben had come over, taken a bottle of good scotch up to his uncle's room, and closed and locked the door. They stayed in the room until the middle of the night.

From what Ethan was told, they both got drunk, and his uncle poured out his heart to his old friend. It helped. His uncle had seemed listless in the days after the shootings and never smiled. Even his cousin Alastair's woman, Beth, couldn't get him to smile, which made his concern for his uncle grow.

Doc sedated Sara, and Ethan lifted her up and gently laid her on the bed. He sat down by her head and pressed one of the towels against her forehead to stop the bleeding and watched as Dr. Ben went over her and cleaned her up.

He made half of his men take Perkins out, and the others stayed in the hallway. He didn't want them in the room while he helped Ben take her clothes off. His anger grew at the contusions all over her body.

"Is anything broken?" Ethan asked.

"I don't think so. She has a lot of bruised muscles that will take time to heal. I can fix the physical, but I'm more concerned about her mental health. The sounds she was making, and her eyes, tell me that she's not aware of things happening around her and is kind of buried inside herself. It's a coping mechanism. She's protecting herself the only way she can."

"She'll always be like this?" He'd been afraid to ask but needed to know to make plans to take care of her.

"Not necessarily. If she's taken care of the right way, meaning she'll need quiet, and supportive people around her, and she gets enough food and rest, I think she'll be fine."

He already knew he would call Alastair and ask to have her there. He thought the girls would be great, helping her more than anyone.

"I'll take them to my cousin's house," Ethan said.

Ben nodded. "I agree. The Maclean home will be perfect, and she'll be safe."

Ethan pulled the blanket up over her naked body. He had no idea what she would wear out of there, but he couldn't put her back in her torn, bloody clothes. He shook Ben's hand.

"I'll be by tomorrow to check on her. The sedative I gave her will keep her asleep for several hours or longer. Don't panic if six, seven, or even eight hours pass, and she still isn't awake. She was very small, in pain, underweight, and tired. I can tell from the dark circles under her eyes. They're swollen, but I can still see some of the fatigue. I'll come by tomorrow, but if you see something that concerns you, call me."

"All right. Thank you for coming so quickly."

"Son, you're all my family. I will always come when you need me."

Ethan nodded because he didn't know what to say.

Ethan stopped the doctor at the door. "I have a question before you leave, and you can tell me it's none of my business, but what did you do to my Uncle Angus to make him feel better?"

Ben laughed. "Besides get him drunk with damn good scotch? I had to remind him that he was a lowly man like the rest of us, not God."

"What does that mean?" Ethan asked.

"He's taking responsibility for everything, and I had to remind him he can't read minds or control other people. I made him laugh a few times, let him talk for a while, and then on the way out, I said to stop being a pissy bastard and get on with life. The rest of the family needs him."

Ethan chuckled. Very few people would ever be able to talk to Angus like that.

"You got through to him."

"God, I hope so. I had a bastard of a headache the next day because of the scotch." The doctor sighed dramatically. "The things I won't do for the man."

Ethan smiled. “Bye, and thanks again.”

“Guys, come in,” Ethan said after Ben left. “I need one of you to get her some clothes. They have to be loose, so she’ll be comfortable.”

“I can do that,” Tony said. “I’ve learned a few things from my sisters.”

Ethan nodded. “I need to make a call, so the rest of you relax.” He walked across the room, never taking his eyes off of her, took his phone out, and called the Maclean house.

“The Maclean residence.”

“Hello, Martin, this is Ethan. Can Alastair take a call right now?”

“I will see, sir,” the Maclean butler said.

Within a minute, Alastair picked up the phone.

“Ethan, when are you coming home?”

That was one thing about the family — they always made him and his two brothers, Drew and Gavin, feel like it was their second home. They even had their own rooms and would for the rest of their lives. Ethan was born a Harrison but grew up in the Maclean family because his mother lived there after his father died. The Harrison family had a mansion not far from Macleans. It wasn’t anywhere as big, but it was their home. They got to go there often as children, but they felt more at home at the Macleans.

Ethan told Alastair about the meeting at the restaurant, finding the girl, and putting her in a hotel room and why he dealt with Owens. He had no idea what to do with the girl, so he put two guards on her.

“One of the fuckers, Perkins, beat the hell out of her when Sharp went for food.”

“Why in the fuck did he do that?” Alastair asked.

“I have no idea. I can’t see the woman antagonizing him. I know he hates women with a passion, but I’ve never seen him violent with one.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s tied up and at the warehouse on 54th Street.”

“Good. What do you need from me?” Alastair asked.

“I want to take her to the Harrison house, but I don’t know how to handle this type of situation, and I think the girls would be good for her. She’s had a shitty life from what I gathered.”

“Why do you say that?”

“She was calm and blasé about me killing her and even suggesting choices.”

“What the fuck.”

“I know. I thought it was fucked up, too,” Ethan said.

“I think you should bring her here. I’ll have her set up in a room in the same wing you’re in.”

Ethan wanted to disagree and say just put her in his room, but he’d already fucked up and didn’t want to make any more mistakes with her.

“That’s good. I’m not sure how much time I’ll be there, and I hate to drop the problem on your lap.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Alastair said. “I think the girls would enjoy having a new friend around.”

“Thank you. I had no idea what I was going to do about her.”

“You know she might be good for you, too.”

Ethan pinched the bridge of his nose. “The last thing I need is a woman in my life. It’s still fucked up from what happened months ago.”

“Don’t let your mother ruin the rest of your life. This was all on her, and she fooled every one of us.”

“Technically, I know that, but I don’t know how to describe it, except for feeling lost. It’s like the rug was pulled out from under me and left me floundering.”

“I can’t imagine what you’re feeling, man. She wasn’t my mother,” Alastair said. “But don’t let her take anything else from you. You just have to decide to take the next step.”

“I had Ben here to check her out, and he told me what he did to get Angus to feel better. Besides getting him drunk, he told him he wasn’t God and then said he needed to stop being pissy because the rest of the family needed him.”

Alastair laughed. “He’s right, and I think this pertains to you, too.”

Ethan paused. He hadn’t thought of that. “It’s something I’ll think about. I’ll be bringing her by in the next hour.”

“I’ll get Martin to get the room ready and tell the girls.”

“Thanks again.”

“That’s what family is for, dumbass,” Alastair said.

Ethan laughed and hung up.

Chapter Five

Sara moved her leg and then moaned when pain shot up her thigh. She tried to open her eyes, but it felt like they were swollen shut, and she didn't understand it until she remembered what had happened.

The pain intensified when she stiffened as she tried to listen for anything. She heard a rustle of clothing a few feet away and waited for more pain.

“Hey, are you awake?” a woman said softly.

She was even more confused.

“I've been waiting for you. There's nothing to fear here. My name is Beth, and I'm going to help take care of you.”

“Wh...” Sara stopped and tried to clear her throat.

“How about a drink?”

“Yes, please.”

She felt a straw touch her lips and then sipped. The cold water felt amazing in her mouth, and she drank until she couldn't anymore. “Thank you.”

“You're welcome.”

“Where am I?”

“You're at the Maclean mansion,” Beth said.

“I've never heard of it. Why am I here?”

“Ethan put you here so we could care for you.”

Her body stiffened again. “When can I leave?”

Beth snorted. “You just woke up from a fourteen-hour nap and have bruises and cuts all over your body.”

“I'm naked?”

“No. We have you in a long, button-down nightgown, and we girls have tried to bathe you the best we can, but

there's still some blood in your hair and on your body.”

Sara felt a cold cloth placed over her eyes.

“We've been doing this to keep the swelling down.”

Sara tried again to open her eyes and couldn't. “How swollen are they? Because I can't open them.”

“It's because blood and sweat have glued the lashes together. We've tried to wash it off, but it's stuck on your eyelashes. We didn't rub at them because we were afraid we'd hurt you.”

Sara raised her arm and bit back a groan when pain radiated down her spine, but she pushed through it, grabbed onto the washcloth over her eyes, and started rubbing her eyelashes.

“Doesn't that hurt?” Beth asked.

“A little, but I'll deal with it to be able to see.”

“I'd probably feel the same way. Tell me how I can help,” Beth said.

Sara blinked a few times, and then her eyes focused on the beautiful woman sitting next to her on the mattress.

“You have pretty eyes,” Beth said.

“I was going to say that to you,” Sara said and tried to smile, but it pulled on her split lips, and she needed them to heal. Ethan's face popped into her head.

“Ethan isn't here, is he?”

“No. But he checks on you often.”

“I don't want him to know I'm awake. Just give me a day to get on my feet, and I'll get out of here.”

“You have no reason to fear Ethan.”

If she could have snorted, she would have. “Who do you think did this?”

“I was told it was a guy named Perkins,” Beth said.

“Yes, one of Ethan’s men said his boss wouldn’t care if he played with me a bit.”

“The guy was a psycho, and Ethan was furious when he found out what that guy did to you.”

“It still doesn’t make any sense. Ethan’s going to kill me, so why bring me here?”

“Who said Ethan wanted to kill you?” Beth asked.

“He did. We discussed how I would prefer to die, and he agreed.”

“He’s not going to kill you. He would never have done that.”

“You weren’t there, Beth.”

“No, but I know him. This family might be scary to most, but the people that live here know they’d never hurt women or children.”

Sara didn’t know what to think.

“How about I get you some food? It will make you feel stronger, and then one of my sisters and I will help you with a shower.”

“I hate putting you guys out.”

“But you’re not. We’re excited to have another woman in the house.”

Sara really didn’t have a choice, but she’d pay them back in some way after she left.

The next few hours were great because she got her belly full, was clean from top to bottom, and put on fresh sheets and another nightgown.

She was exhausted by all the movement but also watched the young women scurry around and take care of her. At no time did they make her feel bad, and they actually cheered her up.

Hope, one of the sisters, stayed with her after the others left to let her rest.

“You don’t have to be here,” Sara said. “I’m just going to sleep.”

“We girls decided we’d watch you the first few days at least. We don’t want to leave you alone when you’re still too weak,” Hope said.

“I hate disrupting your life.”

Hope smiled. “You’re not. Sometimes we have a hard time finding things to do.”

“Why?”

“Because our men are extremely protective of us. We’re not allowed to do anything that might harm us, like ride horses or drive ATVs in the back.”

“Do you guys go anywhere?”

“Rarely. If we do, we have several guards with us.”

Sara didn’t know if she’d feel treasured or suffocated by the men’s concern.

“Why don’t you close your eyes and rest? Someone will be here with you, so you’re not alone.”

“Thank you, Hope. I’ll never be able to repay you guys.”

“Family helps family.”

“I’m not family.”

Hope smiled. “You never know.”

Sara didn’t know how to take that but was too tired to stay awake much longer. She’d think about her future later.

Chapter Six

Ethan pulled up to the Maclean mansion and got out. He was incredibly tired but knew he wouldn't be able to sleep until he saw Sara and ensured she was okay.

The front door opened as he walked up the steps.

"Hello, Martin."

"Good evening, sir."

Ethan faced the butler after the door closed behind him. "Has there been any change?"

"She's been awake. The girls got her to eat and helped her shower, and she's resting again."

He felt himself relax. He hadn't known how worried he'd been until that moment.

"I'll go up and see her."

"Mr. Alastair would like to talk to you when you're done."

"I'll be down soon."

Ethan quietly opened the door to Sara's bedroom and saw Hope in a chair in the corner reading a magazine and Sara on the bed sleeping.

She looked much better than the last time he'd seen her because a few hours ago, she still had the scrapes and bruises, and her face was still swollen.

"Hey," Hope said and put the magazine down.

"How is she?" he asked.

"She's doing better. She got some food in her, and we got her bathed, which helped, and she's been sleeping the rest of the time."

"Good. I'm sorry this was put on you guys," Ethan said.

“We volunteered, Ethan. We really like her. It’ll be hard when she’s better and leaves.”

“Leave?” He never thought of what would happen after she was well. The one thing he did know was he wouldn’t let her go without a fight.

“Yes. What did you expect would happen?” Hope asked.

He walked and stood by the side of the bed, looking down at the sleeping woman. “I haven’t gotten that far.”

“We could introduce her to some of the brothers. She’s beautiful and sweet, so I’m sure one would want to keep her.”

He felt an irrational streak of fury hit him. “No. No one gets her.”

“She asked to leave, but she could barely walk when she woke up.”

A muscle in Ethan’s jaw tightened. “Jesus. She’ll be in bed for at least a week.”

Hope snorted. “Good luck with that.”

“She’ll do what she’s told.”

“Do you know that she thinks you’re going to kill her and that you told the guy it was okay to hurt her? He was going to rape her, but she said you might be mad because you might want to rape her first.”

He looked back at his cousin and saw her fight tears.

“Hope, you know me. I would never do any of that, and the guy that hurt her paid a huge price for touching her.”

“The way she said it was like she expected to die and that you two had talked about the way to kill her.”

Ethan put his arm around Hope when she cried.

Hope sighed. “She’s been beat down so many times she expects it from everyone. I don’t think there’s ever been a person she’s trusted. If she sticks around, I’m sure she’ll talk

about it in time, but we're going to have a hard time keeping her here."

Ethan squeezed her one more time before he walked back to the bed. "I can guarantee she won't be going anywhere except my home."

"Are you keeping her for yourself?" Hope asked.

"Yes." The word popped out of his mouth before he thought about her question, but he knew the moment he heard himself he'd been planning on keeping her the whole time.

"I think she's afraid of you, Ethan."

"I know, but she'll get over it."

Hope snorted. "You're all the same."

Ethan grinned at her over his shoulder. "And it's worked out for all of you now, hasn't it?"

She rolled her eyes. "Do you want some alone time with her, because I can come back?"

He shook his head. "I've got a few things to do. One of them is to meet with Alastair after I leave the room. He wants to talk to me about something."

"Uh-oh, are you in trouble with the boss?" Hope asked.

"Probably, but I stopped being terrified of him when I scared him with a frog when he was eight. But Jesus, don't tell him I told you. He'll shoot me."

Hope laughed. "I guess you still have a healthy fear of him."

Ethan chuckled. "If you're smart, you do. I'll stop by in the morning."

"Okay. Should I tell her you were here?" Hope asked.

"No, and don't tell her I'm coming. Thank you for taking care of her."

Hope nodded and sat back down in the chair. "We really like her."

Ethan couldn't help the smile that grew on his face as he walked down the stairs. He got to Alastair's office and knocked.

"Come in."

Ethan opened the door and then smiled. Alastair had Beth on his lap, and they were kissing.

"Go for now, but I'll come to find you." He lifted her off his lap.

She smiled at him and blushed. "Hi, Ethan."

"Hello, Beth."

She turned back to Alastair and grinned mischievously. "It might be a bit hard to find me, husband."

Ethan saw the spark of desire and anticipation in his cousin's eyes.

"You remember what happened the last time I had to look for you?"

His voice was all growly, but Ethan could tell they were playing, and he found it charming. He'd never seen Alastair as happy as he was at the moment, and he credited it all to Beth.

Ethan coughed and covered his mouth to hide his smile when Beth bit down on her lip and nodded a few times at her husband.

"Just so you know what will happen, love."

She nodded again and grinned. When she looked at Ethan, her face turned bright red before she scurried out of the room.

Ethan sat down in front of Alastair's desk and waited for his attention to get off the door and on him.

Ethan secretly wanted what they had but never thought he'd get to after what his mother did because it fucked him up so badly. The last few days had helped tremendously.

“How can she still blush like that after being here with you for over a year?”

Alastair shrugged. “I don’t care. I just don’t want it to end.”

Ethan nodded. He wouldn’t want to change Beth either. “What did you need? Martin said you wanted to talk to me.”

“I know you took care of Owens, but how’s Bishop doing managing the restaurant for us?”

Ethan nodded. “Good. Better than Owens was doing.”

“So, you want to keep him as the manager?” Alastair asked.

“Yes. I have people keeping an eye on things there so I know what’s happening at all times.”

Alastair nodded. “What about Perkins?”

“He’s been taken care of.”

“Good. No chance of finding him?”

“No. He’s in the middle of the lake.”

Alastair nodded. “One last thing. What’s going to happen with Sara? Logan showed interest in her if you didn’t want her.”

Ethan shook his head. “Tell Logan she’s mine, and she’s staying mine.”

“Does she know it yet?”

Ethan shook his head. “I’ll take your idea of how to get a woman and keep her in the room until she wants me.”

Alastair laughed. “Your woman is under the impression that you’ll kill her once she’s well.”

Ethan shook her head. “We’ll deal with that. At no time was I going to hurt or kill her.”

Alastair rolled his eyes. “I could have guessed that.”

“Is that all? I’ve got a few things to do, and then I have to crash.”

“Are you staying with her?”

“Not tonight. I want her to be healed a bit more before I start the war.”

“It just might be harder than you think.”

“I hope not, but I’m ready if that’s the way she wants it.”

“You can go.”

Ethan got to the door before Alastair called out to him.

“I’m glad you’re back, cousin.”

Ethan nodded. “I am, too.”

Chapter Seven

Sara was sitting up in bed later the next day when Ethan walked into the room. Beth and Faith sat on the bed, talking with her. She tried to keep the fear from her eyes, but she couldn't hide the fact that she tensed.

"Hello, girls."

"Hi, Ethan," Beth and Faith said as they stood.

"You won't mind if I have a word with Sara, will you?"

The two shook their heads, but Beth turned to Sara. "Are you okay with this?"

"She's fine, girls. You know I won't harm her."

"He really won't," Faith said and patted her hand.

She knew they were trying to make her feel better, but it wasn't working. She smiled to try to reassure them.

"We'll check on you later," Beth said.

"Thank you," Sara said. After the door closed, she looked down at her hands. Her body stiffened when Ethan sat beside her hip to face her.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

She tried to move away from him, but he stopped her by placing one of his hands on the other side of her hips, caging her in.

She inhaled and glanced up at him. "They don't know you very well, do they?"

"Why would you say that?" he asked.

"They think you're this nice guy when you hate women."

"But I don't hate women."

"I don't want to play this game with you. It doesn't matter if you do or not. I'm going to leave soon."

“No, you’re not.”

She blinked a few times. God, would her emotions ever stabilize where this man was concerned? “So, we’re back to silencing me because of what I saw?”

He growled. “That bullshit is going to stop now. I never have or would ever hurt or kill you.”

“That guy...”

“Was a psychopath and gone forever.”

That startled her. “You killed him?”

“Yes, and I’d gladly do it over and over for what he did to you.”

Different thoughts were racing through her mind. A small part of her didn’t trust he was telling the truth, but what she read on his face made him seem sincere.

“So, if he’s gone, why do I have to stay?” she asked.

“Because I’m keeping you.”

Her mouth dropped open. “What ... wait. You can’t just keep someone.”

“I am.”

“Ethan, you can’t...”

“Yes, I can. Unless you hate me, you’re staying here until you’re better, and then I’m taking you to my house.”

“I don’t hate you. I don’t know what I feel, but it isn’t hate. I have a life I need to get back to.”

“Your job is gone, I quit for you, and your apartment is packed up, and everything is in storage at the house until you’re ready to go through it.”

Sara sputtered and then tried to shove him away from her.

“Don’t do that, love. I know you’re still hurting.”

“Get away from me.”

He shook his head. “No. I’ll give you time to come to terms with your new life, but you better get used to it.”

“I won’t.”

“You will. Talk to the girls. They’ll tell you how they’re treated.”

“I already heard they were practically prisoners here.”

One of Ethan’s brows spiked. “They said that?”

“Not like that. They told me they couldn’t go anywhere without a group of guys with them. They have no freedom, and if they wanted to do something like ride horses, they aren’t allowed.”

“Everything these guys do is for their protection.”

“At the cost of their freedom.”

She could tell he was getting frustrated, but she wanted him to see it from her standpoint.

“Just talk to them. I think if you asked them if they would like to live like this or be out on their own in an apartment and work long hours, they’d choose this. They’re pampered beyond belief, and you will be, too.”

She’d never been treated nicely, so she had no idea what it was like.

“I don’t belong here.”

“Why?” he asked.

“I’m a waitress from the wrong side of town with no family or friends.”

“Beth worked at a tire shop before meeting Alastair. The sisters were prisoners in their home their whole lives. They weren’t allowed out of their rooms until their father left. He was a monster. Lastly, I recently discovered that my mother was a psychopath and killed several people. If you had met her, you would have said she was incredibly sweet and couldn’t hurt a fly. So, you see, we all have issues.”

She could see his pain and wanted to comfort him, but she had yet to decide if she would stay.

“I’m sorry about your mother.” She didn’t know what else to say.

Chapter Eight

He nodded. "We were all shocked." He almost grinned. Shocked was a timid word for the way he felt at the time.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty," Sara said. "How about you?"

"I'm thirty-nine." She seemed so much older than twenty, but it didn't matter. As long as she was of legal age, he was fine with how young she was.

"The swelling is about gone," he said.

Sara nodded. "The girls have helped me a lot."

"I want to see the rest of your injuries."

She shook her head. "No."

He grinned. "I'm going to look at them one way or another. Remember, I've already seen you. I undressed you in the hotel room and put on the clothes one of the guys bought you."

"I was asleep at the time. I'm not now."

He shoved down the blanket, and she cursed as she tried to grab for it.

"Stop it," she hissed.

He grasped her hips and slid her down until she was lying flat and then started working the nightgown up.

She continued to slap at his hands.

He paused when he saw tears fill her eyes. "Baby, I'm not going to hurt you. I want to make sure you're healing. If you're so against me looking, I'll call Dr. Ben in, but you better know I'll still be in the room. You're mine, and I plan to take very good care of you."

She stopped struggling.

"Good girl." He pulled the gown up over her hips and tucked it under her breasts. He ignored the silky white lace

panties she wore. She was much too thin, but he'd take care of that. Her contusions and scrapes were fading, and he could see how light her skin was.

Looking at his hand on her stomach, he noticed a sharp contrast between his darker-tone skin and her snowy white. Her tone was so light he could see a few of her veins below the surface of her skin. It made her seem even more delicate to him.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

He hadn't realized he was staring down at his hand for a long while. “Nothing.” He pressed on a few places and watched her expression to see if any of them were tender. He was glad he hadn't hit her ribs and bruised or broken them because he knew from experience it took a while to heal.

He pulled the gown back down. He wanted to push it farther up and look at her breasts, but he was trying to gain her trust. He was already having to hold himself back from tasting her the way he wanted to.

“Let's roll you over,” he said.

She balked at first but then did what he said. Eventually, she would learn to follow his instructions immediately or get punished.

He shoved the gown up to her shoulders. Fuck. Her ass was a work of art, and her legs looked long and toned from this angle. Her butt was round and enough for his hands, but he knew it would get even better when she put on some weight.

Ethan wanted to see it wiggle when she walked and have those dimples on them and her thighs that told him she was healthy, but women hated. He knew that sounded weird, but he'd always liked his woman with a little more meat on their bones. He knew it went against society's standards, but he always thought it was fucked up. No man he knew wanted a skinny girl.

The girls his cousins had were fuller-figured, just the way they liked them. If he remembered correctly, they each

had come to them on the thin side, but they added to their figures over time and with good food.

He couldn't hold back from running his hand down her legs, up over her ass, and onto her silky back. She had little to no bruising here, and he could see as well as feel how silky her skin was. Ethan kept his hand running lightly over her whole backside and was pleased when he felt her relax into the mattress.

“Do you like this, baby?” he asked.

“Mmmm.”

He grinned and kept stroking her. He was elated when he realized she had fallen asleep. Not only did she like his hands on her, but she also trusted him enough to nap with him in the same room. He continued for a few more minutes before gently pulling the blanket over her because he didn't want to wake her. The more she slept, the quicker she'd heal.

After he left her bedroom, he tracked down one of the girls and found Angel. “I have to leave. Will one of you sit with her for me?”

“Sure. We like her and enjoy having her here.”

“I'll be taking her to my house to live, but she'll be here often.”

Angel grinned. “Does she know that?”

“She does now.” Ethan chuckled and walked out the door.

Chapter Nine

Sara woke later that day to see Angel sitting in a chair off to the side, reading a book.

“You guys don’t have to stay with me. I can walk and get up by myself.”

Angel grinned. “Ethan gave the orders.”

Sara rolled her eyes and sat up. That was when she saw her nightgown bunched up over her chest. When Angel laughed knowingly, Sara could feel her face heat with a blush. She remembered lying facedown and Ethan rubbing her backside.

“Hey, don’t be embarrassed,” Angel said. “It’s good that he likes to touch you.”

“Even if I don’t want him to?”

Angel tilted her head to the side. “Is that true? Do you not want him to touch you?”

Sara sat up with her back to the headboard and pulled the blanket up to her chest. “I don’t know. A day ago, I still thought he would kill me for what I witnessed, and now he says he wants to take me home with him.”

Angel snorted. “You need to use your head, sister. Why would he want us to care for you and help you get better if he planned to kill you? Don’t you think he would have killed you at the hotel or somewhere else instead of bringing you home?”

Sara laughed. “When you say it like that, I know I sound ridiculous.”

“Give yourself a break. You went through a lot that night and probably did have your head bumped a few times.”

Sara didn’t remember that, but as violent as that man had been, she must have hit her head, or he had struck her.

“Now that you know a bit about Ethan, are you still confused?”

“Not really. I think there are some questions I’d like to ask all of you girls, though.”

“Do you feel up to coming down for dinner? Then we’ll sit in our room and talk until you get tired.”

“Yes. I want to get out of bed. I think I’m getting stiffer just laying here.”

“I would be too, if I were you,” Angel said. “Let’s get you up and into a dress we brought you.”

“You guys have been so good to me. I’ll never be able to thank you guys enough,” Sara said.

“We’re glad to do it. You’re family now if you want to be or not,” Angel said.

Sara smiled when Angel laughed.

She decided to shower because they had plenty of time, which made her feel more human. Her dress was long, and the top was high cut and had three-quarter sleeves that hid most of her wounds. She dried and brushed her hair until it was shiny and straight down to the middle of her back. The girls had given her the lotion she put on and sandals that made her feel more feminine.

Sara froze when they got close to the dining room for dinner and heard several voices she didn’t recognize.

Angel grabbed her hand. “Come on. This will be good for you. You’ll see the couples together and meet more of the family. I’ll make sure you sit by me. Okay?”

Sara smoothed the hair from her face. “I look awful.”

“No, you don’t, and I’d tell you if you did. I’m blunt like that. I can see the bruising, but it’s faded, and the swelling’s gone. Come on. You look beautiful.”

Sara didn’t think she came close to being as beautiful as the women in the family. She inhaled and nodded. She had to leave the bedroom eventually.

Angel smiled brightly and started leading her into the room.

Sara balked right inside the dining room a little when the people around the table stopped talking, and they all stared at her.

The girls smiled, and the older man at one end tried, but the rest of the men looked at her suspiciously like she was going to murder them. She couldn't look at most of them a second time because they all looked deadly.

“They don't want me here,” she whispered.

Angel snorted and pulled her along again. She put her in a chair between her and Beth, which helped settle her nerves.

It calmed her a bit more when they started talking amongst themselves again. Beth squeezed her hand to get her attention.

“I'm so glad you came down. Everyone has wanted to meet you.” Beth turned to the man at the head of the table next to her and reached out. The man immediately grabbed Beth's hand and kissed her knuckles.

He looked like he was made of stone, and his eyes were cold chips of onyx. It was surprising to see a man like him do something so sweet. She hadn't thought it possible for him to feel anything, especially something as tender as that.

“I'd like you to meet my husband, Alastair. He's been excited to meet you,” Beth said.

Sara stared at her, thinking she would start to laugh as if it was a joke, but it seemed Beth really thought that man could feel something as ordinary as curiosity.

When no one laughed, she cleared her throat. “Oh ... well ... I ... it's nice to meet you. Beth talks highly of you.”

The man glanced at Beth. “She better.”

Sara stiffened at the threat in the man's tone but relaxed when Beth giggled. She relaxed a bit more when the man looked somehow softer as he stared at his wife.

Beth introduced the people around the table to Sara. She might be able to remember only half, but it was a start.

The dinner was pleasant but seemed to go on forever. Maids picked up the last few dishes and set a bowl of orange ice cream in front of her. It was such a small bowl that it would only take three normal bites to eat.

“Where the fuck is she?” she heard someone yell, and then Alastair sighed. If Beth hadn’t looked amused, Sara would have been afraid. The person sounded demented.

“Who is that?” she asked Beth. The people at the table that heard her laughed.

“You’ll find out in a few seconds,” Duncan, Angel’s husband, said.

Sara’s eyes widened when Ethan came through the door with a look very much like Alastair’s. He scanned the area, spotted her, and headed right to her.

He pulled out her chair. “What in the world are you doing?” she asked.

Ethan picked her up. “You shouldn’t be out of bed.”

“Why? I feel much better.”

“It was only three days ago.”

There was a slight struggle, but he was determined about her going back to bed. Sara finally gave up and wrapped her arms around his neck.

She saw the girls trying not to laugh and failing pitifully and decided to get back at them a bit.

“I don’t know why you’re so worried,” she said loudly. “The girls told me that women heal much faster than men because we’re stronger than you and not such babies.” She was pleased to hear most of them moan as the men got after them for the insult.

Faith scowled at her. “You did that on purpose.”

Sara waved as Ethan carried her out of the room and smiled. “You’re welcome.”

Several people in the dining room laughed, and she heard Angus say she fit right in. It was something she’d never

heard or felt before, and it was wonderful.

Chapter Ten

“Good evening, sir.”

“Hello, Martin,” Ethan said as he passed the butler on his way upstairs to see Sara.

Something inside him panicked when he couldn't see her in the room, and the bed sheets were cold. He couldn't see any evidence that she'd been there before, and it freaked him out. He knew he was being irrational, but he didn't care.

“Where the hell is she?” he bellowed as he raced down the steps.

“Sir, she's in the dining room,” Martin said.

Ethan scanned the dining room quickly until he saw her and then headed toward her, ignoring his family's chuckles and smiles. She looked beautiful and healthy, but he couldn't get the picture of what she looked like a few days ago, broken and bloody, out of his head.

He took her back up to the bedroom, but this time he took her to his.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“To my room where you belong.” He should have done this yesterday.

He felt her stiffen, but she didn't say anything or fight him. After he closed the door behind him, he locked it and set her on the bed. Ethan took a step back and pulled off his suit jacket, never taking his eyes off her.

“What are you doing?” Sara asked.

“We're getting ready for bed. I'm tired, and you need more sleep.”

“Why do I have to sleep with you?” she asked.

“Because this is where you belong, and it's time you got used to it. Nothing needs to happen, but you have to get used to me.”

He lay his jacket and shirt over one of the chairs and toed his shoes and socks off before unsnapping his pants and pulling them off.

He loved how her eyes widened and darkened with what he guessed was desire. He wasn't certain until he caught sight of the pulse on her neck and the flush of her skin.

She stared as his fingers unbuttoned his shirt. She couldn't pull her gaze away from his hands. His long, strong-looking fingers released one at a time, and it seemed to take forever. When the fabric separated and she could see his skin, saliva pooled in her mouth.

Ethan laid his shirt over a chair.

Her gaze ran over his chest and arms. He had so many big muscles that his veins protruded over his chest, but mainly down his arms and hands. He had next to no chest hair, and his skin was dark-complected like the other men in the family. Her gaze traveled up to his face, where he sported a trimmed mustache and beard. His eyes were dark and sometimes looked black, but she'd seen a dark brown in the right light.

It took her a moment to figure out he was standing there patiently with his arms at his sides, watching her stare at him. Oh, God, she'd never been so embarrassed, and she could feel a blush heat and redden her face.

Ethan smiled. "Don't be embarrassed. I love your eyes on me."

It didn't help until she pulled her gaze from him and looked down at her hands in her lap. She looked up again when he held out the shirt he'd been wearing.

"Let's put this on you."

"I've got a nightgown in the other room," she said.

"I know, but I want you in something of mine."

She sighed and reached for it, but he pulled back out of her reach.

“What?”

“Take off your clothes,” he said.

“In front of you?”

“Yes. You’ve been pretty much naked around me before, and you need to get used to it because when we’re in our room back at the house, I’ll have you walking around naked.”

She took a step back. “No. I can’t.”

He took a step toward her and grasped her upper arm. “You can and you will.”

God, the thought of it made her stomach tighten in anxiety. She shook her head and then gritted her teeth when he smiled and nodded.

She tried to slap his hand away, but he just brought her closer until her chest banged into his.

Sara stared up at him. He was so damn big, and standing against him made their height difference very noticeable. The top of her head came up to his collarbone. God, he could hurt her so easily.

“Don’t,” he said.

Her eyes widened. “W... what?”

“Don’t ever be afraid of me.”

“It’s hard not to be. You’re twice my size. You could hurt me without even trying.”

He wrapped an arm around her waist and held her tighter against his chest. “I know how small you are, and I love it. I also know my strength and will never use it against you.”

She swallowed. For some reason, she believed him. Maybe it was the sincere look in his eyes or the conviction in the tone of his voice.

He studied her for a moment before stepping back and unbuttoning her dress. His eyes never strayed from hers. The

dress pooled at her feet, and he helped her step over it.

“Shoes,” he said.

She slipped them off and stood before him with only a bra and panties.

Ethan unsnapped her bra, but she caught it before it could fall and held it up to hide her breasts.

He tugged on it. “Let go.”

She bit her lip and tightened her grip.

Ethan cupped one shoulder to hold her steady. “Let it go, baby. Everything’s going to be all right.”

God, she really hoped so. She knew he’d keep at it until she did what he asked, released the bra, and let it fall to the carpet. She almost felt the heat of his gaze as it swept over her.

“Fucking gorgeous,” Ethan said. He slipped his shirt over her shoulders and buttoned it before he rolled the sleeves back so she could use her hands.

Ethan stood back and smiled. “That’s huge on you.”

She looked down at herself and grinned. “I feel like I’m playing dress-up.”

“Go brush your teeth. There are new toothbrushes in the top drawer.”

She nodded and walked away. After brushing her teeth, using the toilet, and washing her hands, she studied herself in the mirror. The bruises had faded a lot, and she could hardly see them. Her lips had healed, and the swelling had disappeared.

She jumped when he knocked on the door.

“Are you about done in there?”

She sighed, opened the door, and gasped because he was standing so close her nose about touched his chest.

He chuckled. “I’m going to shower. Go get in bed.”

“Wait,” she said before he closed the door.

“What?”

“Do you promise you’re not going to try to ... you know?”

“Fuck you?” he asked helpfully.

She flinched and nodded.

“How about I tell you I’ll try to be on my best behavior?” Ethan said.

She narrowed her eyes. “It’s too soon. I need to get to know you better.”

“What better way to get to know each other, though?”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “Ethan.”

“Sara,” he mimicked. He grinned. “Go to bed. Nothing will happen tonight besides me holding you.”

Sara relaxed, nodded, and stood there after he closed the door. The first emotion she felt was relief, followed rapidly by disappointment, and she didn’t understand why.

The shower turned on, and she couldn’t help but imagine what his whole body looked like naked.

Jesus, she needed to stop it before he came out, or she’d burn up. The shower cut off, pushing her into action. She jumped into bed, turned on her side away from the bathroom, and pulled the blanket up to her shoulder. She’d deal with her emotions tomorrow. She was too tired to deal with them now.

Chapter Eleven

Ethan turned off the water, wrapped a towel around his waist, walked over to stand in front of the mirror, and surveyed himself. His hair needed trimming, but otherwise, he looked good. Working out kept him in shape, and his face looked less stressed than it had the last few months.

He was shocked to realize he was content. It was an emotion he hadn't felt before, at least to this degree. Alastair had mentioned how Beth made him feel, and now he understood. When he was with her, he was the most relaxed and happy, and he hadn't even fucked her yet.

He put some gel on his hands, rubbed them together, and wiped it over his mustache and beard to condition the hair and keep it soft.

After brushing his teeth, he whipped off the towel and pulled on a pair of boxers. He grimaced at the feel. He had always slept naked but didn't want to push his Sara anymore. A smile crossed his face. His Sara? He'd always thought Alastair was being a pussy calling his woman *his Beth*, but now he understood that, too.

He wanted the world to know she belonged to him. Fuck, this feeling should scare the hell out of him but thinking of her just made him feel calm and content. What's up with that? It would be something to ask his cousins. Right now, his woman was waiting for him, and he was looking forward to holding her all night.

Ethan turned off the lights and walked out of the bathroom. He snorted when he saw Sara close to the edge of the mattress away from him, pretending to be asleep, he guessed. Sliding into the bed, he wrapped an arm around her waist and slid her into the middle of the mattress with her back against his chest.

"Wait," she said.

"Easy. I'm just going to hold you. I made you a promise I'm not going to break. In fact, how about I say I

won't try to fuck you until you ask me for it?"

She looked over her shoulder in surprise, and if he wasn't mistaken, disappointment, which made him want to smile.

"Really?"

He nodded. "That doesn't mean we won't sleep together, or I won't touch you because I will. As much as I can."

"Isn't that cheating?" she asked.

He grinned. "Not at all. I'll use everything I can to get you to beg me to fuck you."

She snorted. "Beg? Really?"

"How about we make a bet?" he said. "If you beg me to fuck you in the next two weeks, I'll win your total submission."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you'll do everything I tell you to do."

He saw her bristle. "And what do I get?"

"What do you want?"

"What if I said I want my freedom?"

He instantly tensed. "That will never happen. Pick something else." If he really thought she was miserable, he'd let her go, but he saw the desire for him in her eyes and felt how her body softened when he touched her. She was already attached to him, and she just didn't want to admit it yet. She tried to look stern but failed. He didn't think this woman had a mean bone in her body.

"How about I get to see the girls whenever I want to?"

Ethan thought about it for a moment and then nodded. "All right. But there has to be a stipulation that you stay home if I feel it's too dangerous."

She twisted on her back. "That's not fair. You'll do that just to keep me home."

He grinned. He didn't think she realized that she was pressed up against him, and his hand covered her breast. As much as he wanted to move it and feel the contours of her tits, he wanted to see how long it took for her to feel him.

"That's not true. Yes, I'm going to be protective of you, but I'll think of your feelings."

He could tell her brain was thinking about the bet and outcome.

"All right. Let's bet."

She held out her hand, and he just smiled.

"How about a kiss instead?"

"That's no..." she sputtered before his lips dropped onto hers.

He kept it nice and easy and didn't give in to the searing male hunger that raced through his veins and made his cock harder than it had ever been. It was one of the most difficult things he had to do, but he wasn't going to lose the bet already after just making it a minute ago. He wasn't that pathetic.

There was enough light coming in through the sheer curtains that when he raised his head and saw the desire-filled blush on her face, he had to bite down on the inside of his mouth, hoping the pain would pull him back from fucking up and taking her. He could easily overcome her inhibitions because she was already feeling the effects of their kiss.

"Hey, Sara."

She blinked a few times and tried to focus.

Damn, she was so fucking beautiful, and she was his.

"Sara, baby. Let's get some rest. We have to stop because we're racing toward the fucking you wanted to wait for."

She nodded and swallowed. "Yes. I'm sorry."

"Don't you dare be sorry," he said. He let his thumb graze over her tit and smiled when she jerked in reaction to

realizing where his hand was.

He didn't give her time for anything and turned her on her side with her back to his chest. Pressing a kiss to the top of her head, he murmured, "Good night, my Sara."

Chapter Twelve

So many emotions and thoughts raced through her head. She loved it when he called her “my Sara.” It made her feel special. The feel of his warm body around hers made her feel safe for the first time in her life. It was the fact that she wanted to beg him to fuck her already that confused and pissed her off.

She hadn’t made it even an hour. All he had to do was kiss her, and she was lost. There was no way she would win the bet between them. No way in hell.

“Can we change the bet?” she asked.

“No. Go to sleep.”

Sara gritted her teeth at his smug tone. The rat knew he’d already won, dammit.

She decided to go to sleep and deal with it and him in the morning.

When she opened her eyes, the bed next to her was cold. She glanced at the clock and saw it was only six in the morning. She sat up and looked around. How long had he been gone?

Her attention jerked to the bedroom door when it opened, and her mouth went dry. Ethan was standing tall in just shorts and running shoes and with a fine sheen of sweat covering him.

“Good morning,” he said and closed the door.

“Good morning. Where have you been?”

“Working out. I try to do it every morning.”

That’s why he had so many muscles, and at the moment, every one of them was more pronounced because of the exercise.

He stalked over to the bed and crawled on the mattress to get to her. He pushed her onto her back and loomed over her

on his hands and knees.

“What are you doing?” she asked. She reached up to push him away, but when her palms came into contact with his hot, sweaty skin, she froze.

“I’m getting my morning kiss.”

“Oh, is that a rule?”

“You better believe it.”

She flexed her fingertips and then glanced up at him.

“Do you want to touch me, baby?” he asked.

She inhaled and started to shake her head but turned it into a nod. “I…”

“It’s okay. You can touch me anytime, except if I’m in a meeting. If my office door is closed, you can’t come in or knock unless it’s an emergency.”

“I understand.”

“We’re moving to my house today.”

“Really? Why?”

“Because that’s where my office is, and I want you to get used to our home.”

He said “our home,” and it made her heartbeat accelerate and her stomach tighten.

“Okay.”

“Give me a kiss, and then I’ll go shower.”

He leaned down and let his lips graze hers before returning and pressing harder. This time he deepened the contact, using his tongue to open her mouth so he could delve inside. She felt her body soften, a gush of her pussy cream slid out of her, and her cervix spasmed.

He lifted his head and stared down at her. “I’m going to shower.”

She nodded and watched as he stood and walked off like he hadn’t been affected at all. Hell, maybe he hadn’t. A

disturbing thought popped into her head. He'd probably been with a hundred women while she was still a virgin. It wasn't by choice. She just hadn't found the man she wanted to be with for the first time.

Now that she thought about it, the women he'd fucked before had to have been gorgeous and sophisticated and knew how to have sex and pleasure him. She couldn't see him with anyone like her.

Why in the hell was he interested in her? She could feel her insecurities grow. It was one of the emotions she hated the most. It made her feel small and dispensable. The last thing she wanted was for him to come out while she was still in bed. He might take it as an invitation, and she still wasn't ready for that, no matter what her body said.

She scrambled off the bed and dressed in the clothes she'd worn the previous day. She was sitting in one of the chairs waiting for him when he came out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist, and her mouth went dry.

He looked disappointed but didn't say anything. He just walked into the closet and dressed in a black suit.

He was fixing his cuffs when he came out to stand in front of her.

“Do you need the bathroom before we go?”

“Yes.” She closed the door behind her, used the toilet, brushed her teeth and hair, and smoothed out the wrinkles in her dress. It would have to do until she got more clothes.

He was waiting by the door and opened it when she got close. But instead of letting her pass by him, he wrapped an arm around her waist and pinned her to his chest before his head dipped and his lips took hers.

The kiss was sweet, but the longer it went on, the hotter it got.

He lifted his head. “Damn woman, you go to my head.”

“I hope that's good,” she said.

“Oh, fuck yeah.”

He latched onto her hand and pulled her along with him. She had to hurry to keep up and quickly got out of breath.

“Can you slow down, please? My legs are half as long as yours.”

He snorted but shortened his stride. “I’m going to want you to come with me to work out a few mornings a week.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Because you’re already out of breath. We need to get your stamina up because there are times I will be on you all night.”

She sucked in a breath but didn’t say anything. She was trying to push away the visual of him on top of her and couldn’t seem to. God, would she last even a few days, or would she lose the bet? And maybe, just maybe, she really did want to lose because she wanted him to dominate her.

She still had to overcome her insecurities, but she hoped with time, being with him would be easier.

Sara would take it hour by hour. That’s all she could do.

Chapter Thirteen

Ethan pulled her into the dining room, where several of the family were already eating breakfast. He saw Alastair and Beth and headed that way.

Beth stood and hugged Sara and then sat down, pulling her down in the chair next to her. Ethan sat and grabbed a pitcher of coffee.

“Do you want some coffee, Sara?” he asked.

“Yes, please.”

He also put some fruit and Danish on a plate and set it in front of her. “Eat.”

Sara frowned at him, Beth giggled, and Alastair snorted.

“Hey, cousin. I’m going to take her home this morning. She is healed enough, and I want her to get used to her new house.”

Alastair nodded. “I understand. Call if you need anything.”

“Wait,” Beth said. “When will we get to see her again?”

“Soon. It might be days or a week or two. It depends on how much work I have, and we need to get things for her.”

“We gave her several things,” Beth said.

“Yes, I know, and I thank you, but I want her to wear the things I give her.”

Beth rolled her eyes. “You sound so much like someone else I know.”

Alastair growled and pulled Beth onto his lap. Ethan saw him whispering to her, and whatever he said made her laugh and blush.

Ethan pointed at Sara’s plate. “Eat, baby.”

She started nibbling on it while she talked to Beth. Alastair finally relinquished Beth to sit in her own seat.

When he felt like she'd eaten enough, he set his plate aside. "Let's go."

Beth and Sara stood and hugged. The other girls weren't down there, thank God, or he guessed it would take a long time to get out of the house.

"Goodbye, Martin," Ethan said.

"We hope to see you soon, sir."

"We'll be back. Sara wants to spend time with my cousins."

"They are a fun group of girls."

Ethan rolled his eyes. "That's one way to describe them."

Martin chuckled and held the door open for him. "You have a car waiting for you."

"Good. I want her guarded and kept safe."

"There's no place safer than with one of you boys," Martin said.

Ethan grinned and wondered what Alastair would say if he heard Martin call him a boy. The butler had been around as long as he could remember and had watched the boys grow up, so he guessed Alastair would put up with a lot more from him than he would most others.

Ethan saw Tony, one of his men, next to a car talking to another man and headed that way.

Tony opened the door when he saw them. "Good morning, Ethan."

"Good morning. Tony, I'd like you to meet Sara. She's mine, so I expect everyone to give her the respect I demand and to protect her."

Tony had seen what had happened to her in the hotel room but didn't say anything and pretended not to know her.

“It’s nice to meet you. May I call her Sara, sir?” Tony asked Ethan.

Ethan ignored the way she bristled next to him and nodded. “Yes. If it’s all right with her.”

“Yes,” she said.

“Please call me Tony.”

“I will. Thank you.”

Ethan led her into the car and slid in after her. After Tony closed the door behind them, he slipped his arm around her shoulders.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

She looked up at him. “Good.”

“Are you still achy at all?”

“A little but nothing I can’t handle,” she said.

He’d ensure she took a long bath and rested before dinner.

They pulled up to his house, and he watched her expression.

“This is beautiful, Ethan.”

“Thank you. It’s called the Harrison mansion, and it’s been in my family for over a hundred years. My great-great-grandfather built it, and then the ones that came after added on.”

“Was it wonderful to grow up here?”

“My brothers and I actually spent more time at the Macleans. When I turned eighteen, I started staying here most of the time.”

Tony opened the door. Ethan helped her out and then wrapped an arm around her waist.

“Thank you, Tony. It was nice to meet you,” Sara said.

“I think you’ll be seeing me around a lot.”

Ethan nodded. “You will. If you go anywhere, I’ll want Tony to drive you.”

“All right,” she said.

He started them walking and introduced her to a few of his men. There were three long steps and then an elaborate wood door. The man in charge of security, Thomas, stood at the top of the stairs.

“Good morning, sir,” Thomas said.

“Good morning. Thomas, I’d like you to meet Sara. She’s mine.”

“Do you have to say it like that?” Sara asked.

Ethan snorted and noticed the smile Thomas tried to hide. “I’ll try to do better,” he said, but he could see she didn’t believe him.

“Hello, Miss Sara. Welcome home.”

“Please just call me Sara.”

“Then you must call me Thomas.”

Ethan nodded over her head. “I’m going to show her around a bit. I’ll be in my office in an hour or so.”

“Good enough. There are several things we need to talk about.”

Ethan walked into the foyer and heard her gasp. He loved the way her eyes scanned the area.

“This is beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Ethan said.

He was glad she liked it so far because this was the house she’d spend the rest of her life in.

Chapter Fourteen

Sara looked at the marble floor and huge chandelier over a round table in the middle of the foyer. A huge bouquet of flowers was in a crystal vase. To the right were white marble columns that took her into the main living room. She saw white leather sofas and chairs and a large fireplace.

He pointed down the hall in front of them. “That will take you to the dining room and kitchen. The hallway to your right leads to our offices. It’s kind of the same layout as the Maclean house but flipped.”

“That will help,” she said.

There was a wide curved staircase up to the second floor.

“It’s a lot smaller than their house,” he said.

Sara smiled. “Good. I think I’ll have enough of a problem getting lost here.”

He chuckled. “Let me show you our room.”

She took his hand and let him lead her up the stairs. It was like a dream that seemed to get better as time passed.

He opened one side when they got to a set of double doors.

“This is ours.”

For some reason, she felt that if she took this step, there was no way of ever going back, and as much as it frightened her, it also excited her. She inhaled a deep breath and took a few steps that would take her through the doorway.

This room was larger than the one they were in at the Macleans. It had a sitting area with a comfortable sofa, chairs, and television. The bathroom and closet were on the other side of the room, and in the middle was a huge four-poster bed. It was high enough off the ground that she knew she’d have a problem getting up on top.

“Come this way. I want to show you something,” he said and took her hand.

The bathroom was beautiful. It was done in soft grays and whites with the color black for accents.

“This bathtub has jets and will help any soreness you might have.”

“Oh, that sounded wonderful.”

“I will start the water and get you a shirt to wear. I want you to stay in the tub as long as you like. I’ll have someone bring a tray of food up for lunch. I do want you to lie down for a few hours and rest.”

“But I’m not tired.”

He grasped her shoulders. “You might not be, but you’re still healing, baby.”

She sighed. She didn’t want to fight him, so she just nodded.

“Good girl.”

“Where will you be?” she asked.

“In my office. Dial two on the house phone to get to my office. One will get you to the kitchen.”

“When will you be back?”

“I’ll try to get back here for lunch, but I know my desk is probably buried under a ton of papers.”

Ethan wiped his hands on a towel before he walked over to her. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her. It was not a sweet, slow kiss. What he did was ravage her lips, and she gave as much back.

When he raised his head, he stared down at her.

She didn’t understand the expression on his face.

“I’ve got to go. I’ll lock the door behind me.”

“All right,” she said and watched him walk out. She exhaled when the bedroom door closed.

Her attention went to the bathtub, and she hurriedly turned it off before it went over the rim. She undressed and slid into the hot foamy water. She looked at the control panel, but it seemed so complicated she didn't want to try to work the jets.

The water was enough. She used one of the towels as a headrest, closed her eyes, and relaxed. It was unlike any feeling she'd ever had before. She felt like a princess and knew she could get used to this very quickly.

She spent over an hour in the tub. She moved to the shower to get the suds off her and wash her hair. Thankfully, there was conditioner. If she didn't have that, her hair would be impossible to brush.

Sara dried off and put on the shirt he gave her before looking for a hair dryer. After she finished drying her hair, she looked around the rooms, opening drawers and cabinets to familiarize herself with her new bedroom.

A knock on the door startled her.

"Who is it?"

"It's Melinda, Miss. Mr. Harrison has a computer for you and a platter of food."

Sara quickly opened the door and let the timid maid in.

"Hello, Melinda. Please call me Sara."

"Oh, Mr. Harrison won't let me be that forward. I can call you Miss Sara. How's that?"

"That will work."

Melinda put the large tray down and handed her the small laptop. "Mr. Harrison has an account set up for you, and you're supposed to get anything you want. All you have to do when you're finished is push the 'buy' button. If you have questions, there's a maid in the kitchen who's good with computers."

"I think I can handle it, but it's good to know there are resources here," Sara said.

“Is there anything else you’d like?”

“Not at this time. Thank you, Melinda.”

“You’re welcome. Dial one on the phone, and you’ll get to the kitchen. That’s where I’m usually at.” She stopped at the door. “I’m glad you’re here. The house and family needed a woman to liven it up.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Sara watched the maid lock the door and then close it behind her. It was nice to know at least one person accepted her. It was a beginning.

Chapter Fifteen

Ethan looked at the time. Fuck. He hadn't realized it was so late. He was surprised when his assistant scurried into the room with an armload of papers.

"What in the hell are you still doing here at midnight?" he asked.

She stuttered. "Oh, well, you just kept giving me things to do, and I know you were trying to catch up. I couldn't leave you dealing with it."

"I'm sorry. I was engrossed in contracts. Go home and take tomorrow off."

Brenda shook her head. "No, I'll go home, but I'll be back tomorrow. We have too much to do."

"Then at least sleep in," Ethan said as he straightened up the papers on his desk.

He really didn't care. His assistant was good, but he could find another one like her or better easily. He'd thought about it before because she seemed to think they were closer than they were. She had overstepped her role as his assistant a few times already. But he didn't have the time to find and interview other people. He promised himself he would soon.

His mind was on Sara. He'd left her alone all day and hoped she wouldn't be pissy about it. He was too tired to deal with it.

"Good night," he said and walked out. He could tell she wanted to reach out to him but pulled her hand away at the last second. She knew better than to touch him without his permission.

He opened his bedroom door to find all the lights off except a lamp on the table by the sofa. On the bed, he saw the covers over Sara, and her head turned away from him. He was glad she was asleep but disappointed that she hadn't waited for him. It was better this way because he was in no mood for a bitching woman.

Ethan found himself spacing off a few times. She'd been on his mind all day, and it sometimes pissed him off. He felt he could have gotten more done if she hadn't been there in the house, but the thought of her leaving made him physically sick.

There was no way he'd ever let her go. He'd just have to figure out a way to close her out of his mind when he was working. The thought almost made him laugh. That wasn't going to happen. He thought about asking one of his cousins how they dealt with it, which made him feel better that he had a plan.

Ethan walked into the bathroom and quietly closed the door. He showered, brushed his teeth, and put on a pair of boxers. Before turning off the light, Ethan noticed the food platter, and his stomach grumbled. He remembered a sandwich on his desk at some time during the day but didn't know whether he had eaten it or not. She'd hardly eaten anything, and that was something they'd talk about soon. He needed her to get healthy, and she couldn't do that unless she ate. He sat in one of the chairs and ate until he was full while he studied her soft, beautiful face.

The feeling of having her here in his house, knowing she was just his, made his selfish tendencies manifest into a pure possessive need to dominate every part of her and her life. He knew she'd fight the constricts he put on her at first, but she'd get used to it. She didn't have a choice.

After finishing the food on the tray, he brushed his teeth again and slid into bed. He pulled her back against him and smiled when she grumbled. He got comfortable and closed his eyes. The feeling of contentment calmed him. Being in her presence was enough, but when he had his hands on her, it was even better. Ethan breathed in her sweet scent, pressed a kiss to the back of her head, and fell asleep.

When he woke up the next morning, Sara was draped over his chest. As much as he wanted to stay in bed, he needed to get to work. When he caught up, they'd be able to cuddle in bed more.

He carefully slipped out from under her and walked into the bathroom. After a quick shower, he dressed and checked on her one more time before leaving the room.

Damn, it seemed to get harder every time he left her.

He walked into the kitchen. Even early in the morning, it was a hive of activity. Dora, the person in charge of the kitchen, came to him.

“Good morning, sir. What can we do for you?”

“Good morning, Dora, I’d like a plate and mug of coffee.”

“Of course, sir.”

“I’d also like a tray taken up to Sara.”

“Melinda will do that. She really likes her.”

“You all will. She’s very sweet and special.”

“I’m so pleased for you. You deserve it.”

He smiled. “Thank you.” When he got to his office, he was surprised to see his assistant, Brenda, there already.

“I thought I told you to take the morning off?” he asked as he walked behind his desk and picked up the notes and messages she’d laid there.

“I couldn’t sleep, sir, so I thought I might as well get things done.”

He nodded but didn’t look up at her. “Fine. If you get tired later, tell me.”

“I’ll be fine. Is there anything else you need at the moment?”

The sultry tone of her voice made him look up at her. His gaze swept over her. She looked thin in a tight black skirt with a blazer. The skirt was several inches above her knees. Her shirt was white, and the first three buttons were undone, showing her lacey white bra. He knew she was trying to get him to notice her. She was very beautiful, with her long blonde

hair in a tight bun. Her makeup and nails were always done to perfection.

When he looked at her face, he saw how pleased she was that he studied her. He noticed she had a light blush of desire and was smiling broadly but also trying to look provocative. Fuck, that's all he needed was this shit.

"Get to work," he said. He enjoyed the confusion and then anger in her expression before she covered it. She turned and walked to her desk in the room next to his. He decided he'd need to look for another assistant because he couldn't deal with this crap.

The morning sped by. The next time he became aware of the time, it was past dinner. Fuck. He needed to spend some time with Sara and figure out what she could do during the day to keep her occupied. The last thing he needed was for her to become bored, because from what he'd been told, that's when the women usually got in trouble doing things they knew not to do.

He thought about giving her room in the house like the Maclean women. The girls spent a lot of time in the room playing games, watching movies, and buying clothes. They called it their woman fort. He snorted.

Ethan's head lifted when Brenda walked in. He thought he'd sent her home a few hours ago.

"What are you still doing here?" he asked.

She stiffened at the harsh tone of his voice.

"Oh, well, I had some things..."

"Brenda. When I give you an order, I expect it to be followed."

"Yes, sir. I was trying to help..."

He almost rolled his eyes. "If I wanted your help, I'd ask for it. Now, go home."

"Yes, sir."

He caught the infuriated look in her eyes when she turned and wanted to throw her ass out right then, but unfortunately, until he found someone else, he did need her.

He waited until she walked away before he picked up his phone.

It was answered immediately. “Yes, sir.”

“Thomas, can you set up some people to interview for the job as my assistant? Brenda isn’t working out.”

Thomas snorted. “I wondered how long you would put up with her blatantly trying to get your attention.”

Ethan chuckled. “Hey, man, give me a break, I’ve been busy.”

Thomas chuckled. “I’ll take care of it. Maybe you should take young women off the list. Does it matter if they’re older women or men?”

“As long as they can do the job, I’d actually prefer that. Then I wouldn’t have to deal with the current situation.”

“A guy might be gay and find you hot.”

Ethan rolled his eyes but agreed. “True. Find an older woman. Check with the staff here to see if they have a relative?”

“Good idea. I’ll get back to you in the morning.”

“Thank you,” Ethan said and hung up. He glanced around his office and looked at the shelves filled with books and couldn’t remember the last time he’d read for pleasure or just sat and had a drink with a friend.

What happened with his mother was a huge part of why he worked long hours. After she was killed, he’d buried himself in work, so he wouldn’t have to think. Then the family started to have problems with some business of theirs, and he oversaw the majority of them.

Now that he had Sara, he needed to give his brothers a few of his projects and take some of the pressure off his own

shoulders so he would have time during the day. He'd work on that tomorrow.

Tonight, he could get a few of the businesses ready to hand over. He wanted the transition to be as smooth as possible.

Chapter Sixteen

Sara sat on the sofa with the television, debating on her next course of action. It was midnight on the fourth night she'd been there. Every day was spent sitting in the room and doing nothing but eating, reading, and watching television. Every night she'd gone to bed alone and woke the next morning the same way. She knew he'd been there because of the indent in the pillow, but there were very few other clues besides that.

A few times, he'd left her a quick note telling her to stay in the room, and he'd try to get back at lunch, but it never happened. The maid, Melinda, brought her trays of food and had only been able to stay for a few minutes to talk to her. Otherwise, that was the only human interaction she'd gotten.

The things she ordered had come the day before, giving her something to do for a few hours. She'd only bought a few outfits, dresses, jeans, and some underwear, so it didn't take long to put them away. She'd splurged on some makeup and bathroom products but otherwise didn't spend too much. She hadn't used the card he'd given her because she had enough in her savings and remembered her passwords for the bank she used. It made her feel funny using someone she didn't know for money. It just didn't seem right.

One more look at the clock made her stomach tense. She needed to figure out where to go because she wouldn't stay in the room another day. Her first action would be to go to his office and talk to him. If that didn't go well, she'd leave.

Her eyes kept closing, so she gave up trying to stay awake and got ready for bed. She had no idea what time it was when she felt him move up behind her in bed and wrap an arm around her waist.

He pressed a kiss to the back of her head, and then nothing. She could understand why he fell asleep so easily. The man was only getting four to five hours of sleep a night.

The next morning, she didn't have to look to know he wasn't there. The tears that filled her eyes surprised her. How the hell did she have feelings for the man she never saw and knew nothing about?

Sara showered and dressed. There was a knock on the door as she brushed out her hair. She smiled when she saw Melinda with her breakfast tray.

"Thank you so much."

"You're very welcome, Miss Sara."

"Can you tell me if you've been given any instructions having to do with me, besides the food?"

Melinda shook her head. "The kitchen hasn't heard anything. We're all wondering when he'll let you out."

Sara gritted her teeth. "It'll be fine. I'll probably not be here later."

"Oh, will you be back for dinner?"

"No. I won't ever be back."

Sara liked that Melinda looked sad. "I will miss you."

"I'll miss you, too."

Sara closed the door behind the maid and finished brushing her hair before she brushed her teeth. All she felt was nausea when she looked at the tray the maid had brought, so she decided to forgo eating.

She took one last look at herself and liked what she saw. She was grateful that there was no bruising left on her skin from the attack. She wore one of the long skirts she'd bought and a lacey top and sandals. It was a very feminine look and the one she was most comfortable in.

She stepped out the bedroom door and looked back and forth. She'd forgotten it was the first time she had ventured out of his room since he brought her there. Now she had to ask where Ethan's office was or find it herself, so she started hunting for it when she got to the main level.

Ethan had told her it was to the right of the front doors, so she started down that hall. Sara was startled when a beautiful woman came out of one of the rooms.

“May I help you?”

“I’m trying to find Ethan,” Sara said.

The woman looked her up and down and gave her a disgusted look.

“Ethan’s whores aren’t allowed here. Leave, and I’ll tell him you came.”

“I’m not a whore. What is your name?” Sara asked. She was beyond pissed.

“Brenda. I’m Ethan’s assistant. I take care of everything to do with him. If you know what I mean?”

Sara’s spine stiffened. “Are you talking about sex?”

“I said everything, didn’t I?” Brenda said.

“I still want to talk to him.”

“You can’t. He’s in a meeting. That’s his office, and the door is closed. I can’t even go in there now.”

Sara remembered Ethan saying something like that the first day she was in the house. “Could you tell him Sara would like to talk to him when he has a minute?”

“I will, but it won’t matter. He’s too busy for one of his girls right now.”

One of Sara’s brows lifted. She wasn’t going to let this bitch get the best of her or see any emotions she felt right then. “You’re okay with him having sex with other women?”

She almost smiled at the flush of embarrassment on the woman’s face.

“We have an open relationship,” Brenda said.

“I see. Well, I’ll see him later.”

“I wouldn’t expect that,” Brenda said. “He’ll be busy tonight, too.”

Sara knew what she was insinuating by the smile on her face. “When he comes to bed, I’ll see him.”

Brenda’s face paled, and Sara wondered about it.

“You live here?”

“Yes. I sleep in Ethan’s room. So, I think you’re probably lying about everything you just told me. I don’t know for sure, but I’ll ask him when he comes to bed. Thank you.” Sara turned and walked off.

When she glanced back, she caught the anxiety on the woman’s face. Was it from the fact she thought she’d lose him? Or get in trouble for lying?

Sara gasped when a large man came around the corner.

“Miss Sara. I’m Thomas. We met the first day you were here.”

Sara relaxed. “Yes. I remember.”

“I wondered what you needed help with?”

“Oh, I don’t need help. I just needed to talk to Ethan before I left.”

Thomas’s eyebrows rose. “Does he know you’re leaving?”

“Not yet. That’s what I’m going to tell him. Maybe you could give him a note for me?”

Thomas nodded, but he didn’t look happy about it.

“I’ll come up in a bit for the note,” Thomas said.

“Okay. Thank you.”

Sara watched him walk off and felt a moment of panic. Would he go to Ethan or just give him the note later? She’d pack her things and find out, although there was a chance Ethan would just nod his head in relief that she was going.

That thought stuck in her head because it seemed the most viable.

Chapter Seventeen

Ethan watched the men he had the meeting with leave and then got back to work. It didn't last long before he was interrupted again. He sighed and looked up to see Thomas standing with a scowl on his face and his arms crossed.

"What's up?" Ethan asked.

"I'm trying to figure out who has pissed me off the most."

Ethan leaned back. "Close the door."

Thomas did but still stayed back.

"Tell me," Ethan said. He rarely saw his friend show emotions like he was now.

"It's either you or your assistant."

Ethan's brows spiked. "Me? What the fuck did I do?"

"Well, normally, I would say this is none of my business, but you're not only my employer, you're my friend and have been most of our lives. The woman you have in your room..."

Ethan nodded. "Yes. My Sara."

"Dude, you've left her alone in the room for five days. Did you think she would keep putting up with that?"

"She knows I'm getting work done and that I was behind."

"Have you actually talked to her face to face?"

"No. She's always asleep when I get up there and still asleep when I leave in the morning."

"How about a call to ask how she's doing?"

Ethan scowled.

"That's what I thought."

"Where is this going?" Ethan asked.

“I just saw her in the hallway on the monitors. She was coming to see you, but Brenda prevented her and told her you don’t like your whores to come to the office.”

Ethan jerked to stand, pushing his chair behind him and hitting the wall with force, but he didn’t notice. “She did what?”

“She told your Sara to leave. Brenda doesn’t know you have Sara living with you?”

Ethan looked away, trying to think if he’d told her. “No, I can’t remember telling her. But it’s none of her fucking business. What happened then?”

Thomas grinned. “Brenda turned pale, and I could practically see her body tense with fear, knowing she insulted your woman.”

“Get her fucking ass in here.”

“Do you want me to stay in the room?”

“Yes. One, because you’re going to keep me from killing her, and you’ll get the chance to throw her out,” Ethan said.

“Sweet,” Thomas said. “I’ve hated the bitch the whole time she worked for you.” He tilted his head to the side. “Ethan, I know that look. You can’t kill your assistant.”

Ethan wiped a hand down his face. “Fuck. I know. It pisses me off that I can’t put my hands around her throat and watch the life seep out of her.”

“That’s a nice visual, but it can’t go any further than that.”

“Fuck, I know. Go get her.”

Ethan watched him go and took several deep breaths to calm down. He knew he was close to the edge and was liable to pull out a gun and shoot her. Thoughts of what Sara must be thinking were filling his head when Thomas returned with his hand around Brenda’s upper arm, practically dragging her.

He enjoyed seeing the fear in her eyes. Thomas let her go, closed the door, and stood in front of it with his arms crossed over his chest.

Ethan looked at Brenda for a long time, making her squirm. "I'd like you to tell me what happened in the hallway?"

"I don't know..."

"If you lie to me, I'll know it. Right now, I'm just thinking I'll fire your ass, but you lie, and I will have to hurt you."

"Fine. A woman was looking for you, and I know how busy you are, so I told her she needed to come back."

"I want the exact words," Ethan said. He watched the woman brace herself.

"I called her a whore and insinuated that I was your girlfriend."

"And what did she say?"

Brenda looked even more nervous. "She told me she'd see you later in bed. She insinuated that she lived here with you."

"She was telling you the truth. She's my Sara and will always be with me."

Brenda's mouth dropped open. "You're going to marry her?"

"Not that it's any of your business, but yes. She'll be my wife and have my children."

God, just saying it out loud made Ethan's plans solidify in his mind.

"Oh, well, I didn't know you were dating anyone," Brenda said.

"It's none of your fucking business. You were here to work, not flirt with me, not turn my woman away, or think you had a chance with me. I really wish I could kill you. I'd take great pleasure doing it, but Thomas here saved your ass. He'll

kick you out of here, and you'll never set foot on this property again. If I hear about you talking to anyone about this family, I will hunt you down and kill you. Do you understand?"

Brenda had tears pouring down her cheeks. "Y-yes."

Ethan waved his hand. "Get her the fuck out of here before I change my mind."

He watched Thomas walk her out before he went over to the small bar he had in his office and poured two glasses of scotch. He downed his and poured another for himself.

"She's gone. Some of the guys are making sure she gets in her car and leaves," Thomas said.

Ethan handed him a glass. "Good." He took half the glass down before he faced Thomas. "How did Sara act?"

"She's packing."

Ethan started choking. "She's what?"

"Packing."

"Oh, hell no."

"She said she'll leave you a note."

Ethan slammed his glass down. "Why the hell didn't you tell me this first?"

"Because I know you had to deal with the bitch, and I knew Sara wasn't getting out of the house without seeing you first."

Ethan exhaled and nodded. "Okay. Good."

"As far as I know, she's still packing," Thomas said.

"Not for long. I'll be in my room for the rest of the night. Take care of any emergency that comes about."

"Your brothers are here. I'll tell them. Have they met her?"

Ethan rubbed the back of his neck. "No. Fuck. I've screwed up in the past but never like this."

"You can fix this, man."

Ethan nodded. “You’re damn right I will.”

Thomas grinned. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Chapter Eighteen

Ethan quietly let himself into his bedroom and locked the door behind him. He leaned against it and crossed his arms over his chest. He saw the small pile of clothing folded on top of the bed, which made his stomach tense and his anticipation and anger rise. He'd show her who she belonged to. His heartbeat increased when he heard her in the bathroom.

He couldn't believe how much he'd fucked up, and he would only admit to himself that he was nervous it would be a fight to keep her.

She screamed as she walked back with an arm full of beauty products.

They stared at each other for a moment.

She looked so fucking good. He loved her in dresses, and the one she had on made her look incredibly feminine.

“Where do you think you're going, baby?”

She set everything down on the bed beside the pile of clothing. “It's time I moved on. I'm making you very uncomfortable being here.”

“Uncomfortable?” he asked.

“Yes. You can't have your women here with me in your room.”

“For one thing, I've never had a woman in the house, much less this room. You're the one and only one that I'd allow.”

“It doesn't matter. Let me get my clothes...”

One of his brows rose. “You mean the clothes I bought you?”

“No. The clothes I bought myself. You haven't paid for anything except the food I've eaten.”

His brows snapped together. “I gave you a card to use. Did you not receive it?”

“Yes. But I’m not going to let you buy things for me...”

“*Let me?*” he asked.

Sara crossed her arms over her chest and lifted her chin. “Yes. You don’t have to do anything for me. I’m guessing a lot of your attitude comes from guilt. Well, I don’t blame you for what that man did.”

“I’m pissed about it and want to kill the bastard again, but I don’t feel guilty.”

Sara sighed. “Whatever this is, it’s not working for me. I can’t sit in a room all day by myself and wait for the chance you might come to see me.”

“I’ve been away from my office a lot lately, and I was overloaded with work.”

“I don’t want to pull you away from it. If I’m gone, you can concentrate on it.”

“I’ll still think about you. You’re stuck in my head, baby.”

Sara looked away from him. “I’m sorry. I hope it will go away after I leave.”

“You’re not going anywhere,” he said. He almost smiled when her chin went up again. He liked seeing this spunky side to her personality. There was a lot to learn about each other, and it was going to start now.

He stepped forward and slipped off his suit jacket.

“What are you doing?” she asked nervously.

“I’m getting undressed,” he said as he unbuttoned his shirt.

“Why?”

He could hear the anxiety in her voice. If it turned to blatant fear, he’d slow down, but they were going to fuck before the night was done.

“Because my Sara and I are going to spend the rest of the day in bed together.”

Her mouth dropped open, and then she took a step back. “Wait. No, you can’t just say it, and it happens.”

He laid his shirt over a chair, toed off his shoes, and pulled off his socks before unbuttoning his pants.

“Wait,” she said and held a hand out to him.

“No. The waiting is over. We’re going to solidify our relationship.”

“But we don’t have a rela — ”

“The fuck we don’t.” He saw how agitated she was getting and took a deep breath to calm the feral need inside of him.

She swallowed. “What about our bet?”

“It’s null and void.”

“Don’t I have to agree to that?”

He set his hands on his hips and studied her. He could see the desire she was trying to hide from him and how her body was shouting the same thing with her tight nipples and the reddish tone of her skin.

“Tell you what,” he said. “How about this? If I can’t make you want me, I’ll leave you alone.”

“That’s not fair. We already know you can do that very easily.”

Ethan took two steps to get at her. He unbuttoned her dress, staring at her eyes and watching her expression.

“Ethan,” Sara said and gripped his wrists.

He tugged on his arms. “Baby, let go.”

“I just don’t know if this is a good idea.”

“It’s the best idea I’ve had in years. I should have already taken you and made you mine. Now, let go so I can make you feel good.”

The breath shuddered out of her lungs, and her arms dropped.

“That’s my girl. I’ll give you so much pleasure you’ll come to crave it, and me.”

The dress fell from her shoulders and pooled around her feet, leaving her in nothing but her panties.

Her hands covered her breasts.

“No. Don’t ever hide from me.”

She reluctantly dropped her arms before he bent, slipped her sandals off, and then started working on her panties.

Ethan heard her gasp as his lips roamed over her stomach, dipping his tongue into her belly button before moving farther down. He could feel the tremors start to build.

The first touch to her clit had her legs give out, but he caught her easily and stood with his hands around her hips. He used one hand to sweep her clothing and bath products to the floor before he lay her down.

“Fuck, baby, you’re so fucking gorgeous.”

“Ethan, don’t forget that I’ve never done this.”

“Baby, I would have never forgotten. The fact that I’ll be the only man to have you will be with me the rest of our lives.”

Being the man to take her cherry was something he’d never thought of before because the women he was used to fucking were seasoned whores.

He lay down beside her and rested his head on the one hand as his other spread across her stomach. He kept his pants on for the moment to keep her anxiety from spiking. He needed her as relaxed as possible.

The size and color of his hand on her skin made him somehow feel even more protective. She was so tiny and soft. He could have just stroked her for hours, watching his fingers glide over her skin.

“Ethan...” she whispered.

“I know. Let me show you how good my loving you feels.”

Chapter Nineteen

Sara's heart felt like it would burst from her chest, and her body would catch fire at any moment. She wanted to shout at him to hurry but didn't really know what she was asking for, and the unknown kept her from verbalizing her needs.

A gasp tore from her throat when his hand slid up to cup one of her breasts. He was so gentle with her that it made tears sting her eyelids.

"Look at this, baby. You fit perfectly in my hand. It was like you were made for me."

She reached for him and ran her fingers through the hair on the side of his head and loved it when he groaned at the simple touch. Her thoughts started becoming hazy as he stroked and sucked on her nipples.

"Fuck, you taste so good."

His mouth moved up her neck, nipping gently before it settled on her mouth. She'd been waiting for him to kiss her but had been too bashful to ask.

They both moaned as his kiss deepened, and he became hungrier by the second. She hadn't realized she'd curled her arms around his neck until he lifted his head.

"Ethan..."

"I know." He went back to kissing and sucking at any skin he could reach as he moved back down.

It wasn't until she felt her legs wrenched apart and his breath on her pubic hair that she realized where his face was.

She tried to pull him up. "No, Ethan, stop."

He chuckled and parted her cunt lips apart with his thumbs. The first puff of air he blew at her made her scream and her back arch off the mattress.

All her attention was on how he made her feel, and the outside world didn't exist for her at the moment.

“Ahhh,” she whimpered as he started to suck on her clit at the same time one of his fingers circled the outside of her cunt before it started to push into her.

“You’re so fucking tight, baby. We’re going to have to take our time.”

“No.” She had no idea what she was begging for or if she was protesting. Every thought was jumbled in her head.

He kept at her. It seemed like forever before he pushed in two fingers. The stretching sensation was a bit uncomfortable but not painful. Her tension started to rise when he worked in three.

“Easy, baby. You can take me. I want to make you come at least once before I work my cock into you.”

She didn’t catch every word but still nodded.

A scream built in her chest as his strokes became harder and his mouth sucked strongly on her clit.

“Come for me.”

She had no idea what to do but felt a surge of some unknown sensation build inside her, and the intensity was starting to scare her.

“Ethan!”

“Easy. It’s okay. I want you to let go. I promise I’ll be here.”

She couldn’t hold the massive wave of senses back anymore. The room darkened, and her breath stuck in her throat for a moment before bursting out in a scream that filled the room.

She vaguely heard Ethan talking but could only concentrate on breathing because she felt like she was going to pass out.

“That’s it. You did so good.”

Ethan moved up and over her, and it was then that she realized he’d taken his pants off at some time.

One of his hands gripped the back of her neck to hold her steady, and his other one was between them. She gasped when the feeling of fullness became more intense as the seconds passed.

“Easy, you can take me, baby. Just relax.”

“That’s you?”

He pushed in another inch, making her body tighten before she forced herself to relax.

“Yes.”

“Ethan, I’m not on birth control,” Sara said, trying to push him off her.

“I guessed as much. Don’t worry. I’m clean.”

“What if I get pregnant?” She gripped his hips to try to hold him still.

“Then we’ll have a baby sooner than we might have wanted, but this first time, I need to feel my skin against yours, especially because I’m going to make you mine and only mine. We’ll get you on birth control tomorrow if you don’t want a baby this soon.”

She inhaled and nodded. Her nails started digging into his back as the pressure started to grow again.

She tensed when she felt Ethan bump against what she thought was her hymen and then stop.

“Ethan?”

Her brain scrambled when she felt something push into her ass. Not far, but far enough to distract her.

He busted through her cherry, making her scream, and paused.

She hadn’t realized she’d been crying until Ethan wiped her tears away with his thumb. Taking a few breaths, she was able to calm down, only to tense again when the finger he had in her ass wiggled.

“Oh my God, Ethan, what are you doing?” she asked.

“I was taking your mind off of what I was about to do. I wanted to ensure you had the least amount of pain, and distracting you is what I thought would help.”

“Are you supposed to do that?” she asked.

He chuckled. “Oh, baby, soon you’re going to crave my cock anywhere in your body. Be it your cunt, mouth, or ass.”

She could feel herself blush, but she didn’t know if it was from embarrassment or anticipation. He pulled out, and it somehow left her feeling empty even when his cock stretched her pussy to the point of pain.

“I’ll give you more of that, but later. Right now, I need to work my way into your sweet wet cunt.”

The burning started again as he moved deeper.

“Ethan, I don’t think I can take much more.”

“I’m just about in. Here, let me do this.”

She didn’t understand until she felt his fingers start to press against her clit. An instant wave of desire rose in her making her cum gush, and her body gave way for him to push the rest of his cock into her. He stared down at her and waited.

She could never articulate the sensations and emotions racing through her at that moment. It was like their souls were touching, bringing tears to her eyes.

This was one of those moments in her life that she never wanted to forget.

Chapter Twenty

Ethan tried to think of something to distract himself from the most delicious feeling in the world. He'd never felt this kind of tightness or his body's response as he looked at her.

He used one of his hands to cup the back of her head and the other on her hip to keep her from moving around. It was already taking all his control to hold back his body's need to start thrusting into her.

"How are you?" he asked.

She exhaled and nodded. "I think I'm okay."

"Good. I'm going to start moving, but I want you to tell me if you feel any pain."

Sara nodded. "I will."

He started off slow and easy, wanting to make this moment last forever, but his balls were ready to blast out his seed. They'd only been at it a few minutes. He was used to being able to fuck a woman for hours. Fortunately, he could feel her cunt start to throb and tighten.

"Baby, I need you to come."

"I don't know how," she said.

"Just like before. Relax and trust me. Let go and loosen up a bit, and I'll push you over."

He pumped his cock into her, and each thrust was stronger than the last. He could tell she was still fighting it, so he reached between them and started manipulating her hard clit.

A scream tore from her mouth, and her body stiffened as he threw her over. He started ramming into her, trying to give her the most pleasure he could. He couldn't hold back his own raging orgasm.

He gritted his teeth to prevent himself from roaring. The sensations were so much more than he ever knew they could be. He'd always gotten pleasure from the act, but at no time with another woman did it come with emotional bliss that left him in an elevated state of euphoria.

Ethan balanced himself on his elbows as the air billowed in and out of his lungs. He was aware that Sara was relaxed and half-dozing.

“How are you, baby?”

Her eyes blinked open, and a blush covered her face making him smile. She was as charming as any of his cousin's women, and he was astounded and thrilled that he'd found his own.

He gently pulled out of her and saw her grimace.

“I'm sorry. The last thing I want is to hurt you.”

She reached up and touched his brow. “I know.”

He slid them to the side and pulled her tightly against his chest. “Give me a minute, and then I'll get us cleaned up.”

“I'm fine where I am.”

When she tucked her head under his chin and threw one of her legs over his, it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

He could have lay there forever but thought the sooner he got her into a warm bath, the quicker she would heal.

“I'll be right back,” he said, kissed her forehead, and rolled from the bed. He was back within a few minutes to lift her up into his arms.

“I can walk,” she said.

“Of course, you can, but you don't have to right now.”

He stepped into the bathtub and sat down before arranging her back against his chest.

“My hair is going to get wet.”

“That’s okay because I’m planning on us taking a shower after this.”

Sara traced one of the veins in Ethan’s arm.

“So, how did ... you know ... I do?” she asked.

“Do? With what?”

“You know what. The thing we just did in bed.”

He looked at the side of her face to see it bright red, grinned, and decided to play with her a bit.

“I’m sorry, baby, but you’ll have to be more specific.”

“The activity we were just doing,” she said.

“Activity?”

She twisted around and looked up at him suspiciously. “Yes. You know what I’m talking about, Ethan.”

“You mean the sex?” He had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing at her frustration.

“Yes.”

He tried to look innocent, but it was fucking hard since he doubted it was in his DNA. “So, what was your question again? I forgot.”

She growled in frustration and turned back around to face the other way. “Forget it.”

He cupped her chin and turned her head so she could see him. “I thought it was beautiful. I’ve never felt that depth of emotion in my life. All I could think was this is the woman I’ll love for the rest of my life. Does that answer your question?”

Her mouth dropped open as she stared at him. “You love me?”

He nodded. “Yes, and every day it will get deeper.”

She didn’t say anything to him, and he was starting to get nervous. He hated waiting for anything, especially her telling him she loved him too.

He growled when she sat still. "I'm waiting."

She bit her lip. "For what?"

It took him a second to realize she was teasing him back as he'd done to her. "Sara," he said in a playful warning tone.

She giggled. "Yes, I love you."

Something inside of him settled, and it felt like he'd finally found the home he was meant to have. He didn't mean the house they lived in but the person that would complete him.

She still looked pleased with herself and squeaked when he lifted her, turned her to face him, and pressed her chest against his.

Sara wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled.

"You look proud of yourself, baby."

"I am."

He slid his hand down her back and between her ass cheeks. Before she guessed what he was going to do, he speared one of his fingers up her ass as far as it would go making her scream. The oil from the bubble bath helped lubricate him.

The fact that her body turned pliable instead of fighting him made his cock grow as a rush of blood made it swell.

Ethan's finger fucked her ass for a long time, and he sighed when she relaxed against his chest taking everything he was giving her.

"Do you like this, Sara?"

She paused for a moment and then nodded. "I do, but I don't think I'm supposed to."

"Fuck, yes, you are. I want you to enjoy everything I do to you. Let's try a bit more."

"Ahhh," she screamed when he thrust two of his fingers deep inside of her ass.

Her arms started to tighten, and her ass pulsed around his fingers. “Come for me, Sara.”

A strangled sob tore from her mouth, and she clamped down on his fingers so much he had to force them into her.

Her body shuddered and then dropped onto his.

He pulled out and soothed her by running his hand up and down her back for a long time, giving her a chance to settle.

“How about we shower, and then I’ll have a tray sent up?”

She straightened and looked at him. “What about work?”

“You’re more important than work.”

She smiled at the same time, tears pooling in her eyelids, telling him he’d done the right thing. He just had to never forget it.

Chapter Twenty-One

Sara looked out her bedroom window and sighed. Ethan had been so good to her in the last few weeks but had slowly turned into the workaholic he'd been before. She only saw him when he came to bed, and most of the time he was too tired to do anything other than hold her.

She never saw him during the day except when he caught her helping in the garden or kitchen. It bothered him so much that he'd forbidden her to do it again. When she asked what she could do, he got frustrated and just said to figure it out and walked away.

She wanted to yell back at him and tell him that was what she'd been trying to do. Her frustration was growing, and she didn't know what to do about it.

The phone rang on the bedside table, making her jump. "Hello?"

"Hey, girl, it's Hope. We haven't seen you. Are you two lovebirds too busy for us?"

Sara could tell Hope was joking, but it just made tears come to her eyes, and she sniffed.

"Hey," Hope said. "What's up? I can hear you crying."

Sara went over everything that had happened, and it felt so good to get it off her chest.

"Jesus, men are stupid," Hope said. "The girls and I will be over to get you in ten minutes."

"Wait. What? I can't just leave, can I?"

Hope snorted. "Sometimes you got to hit these guys over the head. This will open his eyes. The men need to learn that they can still lose us from neglect even if we love them."

Sara thought about it for a moment. "Okay. I'll be ready. Where should I meet you?"

“We’ll come into the house to get you, so be by the front door.”

“Should I tell anyone?” Sara asked.

“Who’s in charge there?”

“I assume it’s Thomas.”

“I’ll have Martin call him after we leave.”

“He’ll already know what I’m doing. They have cameras everywhere.”

“Shit,” Hope said. “Okay, so be ready to run to the car.”

“Ethan will be so mad,” Sara said.

Hope chuckled. “Yup. This will be the knock on the head he needs, and if it doesn’t work, I’ll send Blake and Graham over there to kick his ass.”

Sara laughed. It felt good to be happy again. “I’ll be waiting.”

She changed clothes, brushed her hair and teeth before she left the bedroom, and started walking down the stairs when she heard the commotion by the front door. She hurried and then grinned when she saw Thomas had his arms crossed over his chest, scowling down at the four women as they all tried to explain things to him at the same time.

Beth saw her, walked over to her, grabbed her hand, and started pulling her toward the door.

“Wait,” Thomas said.

Faith smacked the man in his chest. “Listen up. It sounds like Ethan has his head up his ass again, and Sara is lonely. It’s our job as her cousins and friends to keep her company.”

“Can’t you do it here?” Thomas asked.

All the girls shook their heads.

Sara walked up to him and set her hand on his arm. “I will go crazy if I have to spend one more day in that room.”

“He never said you had to stay there.”

“Thomas, every time I tried to venture out and do something, he’d come and forbid me to do it.”

Thomas looked toward the ceiling, sighed, and then nodded. “Go. At least I know you’re guarded well.”

The girls squealed, latched onto her, and dragged her out of the house.

The next few hours were the most enjoyable she’d ever had. The girls showed her their “girl room,” which men were forbidden to come into. They talked about doing something similar in Ethan’s house. They had lunch in the garden and started to bake some cookies. She loved baking and hadn’t had a chance to for years. When she heard the bellowing, she knew her time had come to an end.

“Shit, I thought it would take him longer,” Faith said.

Sara braced herself when she heard footsteps. Ethan came into the room, furious.

“Woman, with me now,” Ethan growled and pointed down at the ground.

The women made a line in front of her with their arms crossed over their chests.

Ethan’s eyes widened.

“Ethan,” Alastair said, coming up to him from behind. “It’s good to see you.” He slapped his cousin’s shoulder. “What’s the problem?”

“I want Sara to come home right now, and the girls are being rebellious and keeping her from me.”

“What did Sara do?” Alastair asked.

The girls said nothing.

“This is between Sara and me.” He looked at Sara. “Now, let’s go home.”

“What if she wants to make this her home?” Hope asked.

Sara felt bad at the shock on Ethan's face and took a step toward him only to have Angel grab onto her arm.

"He needs this," Angel whispered to her.

Sara agreed, but she didn't like seeing him upset. "What do you want from me, Ethan?"

"I want you to come home where you belong."

"So, I can rot in the bedroom?"

"I never said you had to stay in the bedroom," Ethan hissed.

"Every time I tried to do anything, you forbade me to do it. I got tired of it, so I stayed in your room."

"Our room," Ethan said.

Sara sighed and looked down at her feet. She felt defeated because she had no idea how to get through to him.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Ethan, may I have a word with you in my office?” Alastair said.

Ethan gritted his teeth. “I’ve already told you, this is between Sara and me.”

“Now.”

Fuck. He couldn’t ignore Alastair’s demand. He took one more look at Sara, turned, and followed him into the office.

After the door closed, Ethan went to the bar and poured himself a drink. He held up his glass to his cousin. “Do you want one?”

Alastair snorted as he sat at his desk. “Not even I start drinking at one in the afternoon.”

Ethan didn’t care. He needed something to settle him down. He’d have a heart attack if he didn’t mellow out. When he’d been told that Sara left the house, he’d felt a fear he never had before. He couldn’t keep her safe if she weren’t by him. He needed to get this conversation over so he could take her back home.

“What do you need?”

“I need you to take your head out of your ass,” Alastair said.

Ethan stiffened. “Wait. What?”

“If you don’t, the women will drive us all crazy until they get what they want, and right now, they want Sara to be happy, and even I can tell she isn’t.”

His emotions were going haywire, and he didn’t know what to do. They were all over the place, and it felt like his head was about ready to explode. Hell, he’d sound like a pussy if he talked about it, but there was no one else he knew that would understand.

He stood and walked over to the large window behind Alastair's desk to look out. He didn't see anything because his inner focus was on Sara.

"I want to wrap her in cotton and keep her on my lap, so she doesn't get hurt. On the other hand, I'm mad because I can't control myself when I think about her. It's disrupting my work."

Fortunately, Alastair didn't laugh and just nodded. "I get it. When Beth came into my life, I was consumed with her. Fuck, I still am."

"How do you think straight and get work done?" Ethan asked. He watched his cousin think about it for a moment.

"I tell myself I will have Beth in my arms in a few hours, and she's close if I need her at any time. But first, I must ensure our family's business stays on track to provide for her. I also delegated more of my work, so I didn't work such long hours. Have you done that with your brothers Drew and Gavin?"

"A bit, but I know they can take on more. They ask for it a lot."

"Then do it. You're never going to be able to not think about her. She'll pop into your head all the time. You just have to make peace with it if you want her in your life. The way you're trying to deal with it is pushing her away. What's this I hear that you won't let her garden or be in the kitchen. What's that about?"

"She can get hurt."

One of Alastair's eyebrows rose. "Shovels and spoons have become dangerous?"

Ethan snorted. "I don't like her being outside. Anyone could take a shot at her. And there are knives and hot things in the kitchen."

"She seems like a reasonably smart individual. I would think she knows how to cook and not hurt herself."

Ethan shrugged.

“As for being outside. You’re heavily guarded, right?”

Ethan nodded. “Yes, but what if it’s not enough?”

“What if she falls down the steps or drowns in the bathtub?”

Ethan chuckled. He understood what Alastair was talking about and knew he sounded ridiculous. He just didn’t know how to get his emotions in check so he could live his daily life and have her in it.

Alastair continued. “If you think the backyard is too open, have an area that’s blocked by trees and other things. I had the gardener build a canopy over a portion of the garden for the girls. They love spending time out there. If it makes them happy, it makes our lives easier. If she likes growing things, build a greenhouse as we did with Angus. He spends hours in it. Also, give her a room that’s just hers. Tell her she can decorate it and put whatever would make her happy there. I’ve got other ideas, but those are the biggest and will get you started.”

Ethan nodded. They were all good ideas, and he’d work on them when he got home.

“Try to remember that our women are soft and sweet, but they take only so much before they rebel, and then your life is hell until you fix it,” Alastair said.

Ethan nodded and drank the rest of the scotch. “Could you help? I might need it getting Sara out of here.”

Alastair chuckled. “Make the girls promise they can come to your house and help Sara design her room.”

“You don’t mind Beth leaving the house?”

“Oh, fuck yeah, but it’s one of those times I have to give in to make her happy. I also have a few cars that follow. She doesn’t know how many men I actually have watching over her, but she doesn’t need to know.”

Ethan laughed and stood before he followed Alastair back into the kitchen.

The women instantly made a line again to block him from his Sara. Ethan sighed and looked at Alastair.

Alastair cleared his throat dramatically. “Girls, his head is out of his ass. You may release his woman.”

Ethan snorted. “Wow, thanks, cousin.”

Alastair grinned. “You’re welcome.”

Ethan rolled his eyes. “Sara, can we go home?”

The gentle way he said it and not demanding it made an instant difference. All the women relaxed, and a few even smiled.

Faith looked over her shoulder at Sara. “What do you think?”

Ethan held his breath. He was ready to toss her over his shoulder if he had to, but he would rather she came to him.

Sara nodded and hugged the girls before walking to stand beside him.

“Thank you for letting me visit, Alastair.”

“You’re welcome here anytime.”

Alastair nudged him with his elbow.

Ethan cleared his throat. “Oh, girls, how would you like to come over to our house and help Sara with her room?”

“My room?” Sara asked.

“Yes, you need your own space,” Ethan said.

She looked shocked.

“We’ll decide what room when we get home.” He held out his hand to her. “Are you ready?”

She took it, turned, and waved at the girls as he walked her out of the house. He got them situated in the back of the car, pulled her tightly against his side, and kissed the top of her head.

Ethan was calm now that he had her next to him and was able to touch her. Now, he needed to follow Alastair’s

advice and find ways to keep her happy, so she didn't pull this shit again.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Sara sat silently, waiting for Ethan to talk. When he didn't say anything, she tipped her head back so she could see his face. "Aren't you going to yell at me?"

He looked surprised. "No, baby. I'm not."

"Okay." She turned away and looked out her window. It wasn't long before they pulled into their driveway.

Ethan got out and then reached back in for her. He wrapped an arm around her waist and led her into the house. Sara wasn't surprised when he continued up the stairs and into their room. Her heart sank, thinking he didn't really care.

"Take your clothes off."

She spun to face him. "What?"

"I want to take a bath together."

Sara watched as he pulled off every piece of his clothing to stand in front of her in just his boxers. The saliva pooled in her mouth, and her cunt spasmed, needing to be filled with his cock. She loved how close having him inside of her made her feel.

Although they'd made love a few times, most often than not he was tired, and they both just went to sleep.

"A bath right now?" she asked.

"Yes."

She watched him turn and walk away and then heard the bathtub start. She reluctantly started to undress but kept her bra and panties on as she walked into the bathroom.

He had stripped off his boxers, and the sight of his hard cock made her uterus cramp and her cream gush from her cunt, wetting her panties.

Ethan walked to her and silently took the remaining garments off of her. She didn't hesitate but reached out and circled his cock with her tiny hand making him hiss.

His eyes closed. “Fuck, that feels so good. I love it when your hands are on me.”

“I love it, too.”

She stroked him a few times before bending down and sucking the head of his cock into her mouth.

His eyes popped open. “Jesus Christ, woman. You’re in such trouble.”

She tried to smile and kept pleasuring him until he gripped a chunk of hair on the back of her head and pulled her off.

“Enough. I’ll come in your mouth, and I want to be somewhere else when I come the first time tonight.”

Her nipples were swollen and ached right along with her pussy and clit. In a way, it felt like her whole body was burning with some kind of internal inferno.

He handed her a scrunchy to put her hair up, then held her arm as he guided her into the bathtub, sat down, and maneuvered her until her back pressed against his chest. The feeling of being surrounded by masculine heat made her desire spike even more. She had to bite her lip to keep from moaning as his hands started roaming all over her, never staying in one place for long.

After several minutes she felt like she’d explode if he didn’t do something. “Ethan?”

“What, baby?”

He sounded so relaxed she felt a little bad about rousing him, but he was the one that built the desire in her, and now he had to fix it.

“Please do something.”

“I thought I was,” he said.

“You know what I mean. Please stop teasing. I need you inside of me.”

She felt his hand slide down her torso over her mound, and then he shoved two of his fingers into her. It was

uncomfortable, but it was exactly what she needed from him.

He finger-fucked her for a long time, making her beg for more.

Three fingers pushed in roughly, making her body tense with the need to come. "Ethan."

"I know. Let me help you."

She gripped the side of the bathtub as she was lifted.

"Line my cock up to your cunt," he said.

She reached down and positioned the head of him against her, and right away, he slowly released her until she was impaled on his cock. A moan tore from her throat, and her head fell back against his shoulder.

"Fuck, nothing will ever feel this good," he moaned.

She agreed but couldn't reply because she focused on how he made her body feel. She wiggled her hips, making both of them groan.

Ethan lifted her a bit before releasing her and letting gravity bring her back down on him. The blissful torture seemed to last forever, and her body was so primed it was turning painful.

"Please, Ethan."

She screamed when he lifted her off him, only to turn her until she faced the other way on her knees. She gripped the side of the tub and looked over her shoulder at him. "What are you doing?"

"Something I've wanted to do for a while."

"I don't care. Just hurry," she whined. She felt his finger push into her ass and stiffen. As much as she loved having him there, there was still a moment in the beginning when she felt it was forbidden and naughty. It didn't take long for the thoughts to fall from her mind.

"Easy. You can do this. Just relax and remember how good it felt when I finger-fucked you. There's enough oil in the water to lubricate you and make it easier to get in you."

Her full attention centered on where his finger was. He thrust into her several times before adding another finger. When he had three in, her body had taken over, begging for more.

He moved in behind her, and then she felt his cock start to invade. The pressure built, and she didn't think she'd be able to take any more.

“Oh, God...”

Ethan growled. “Easy. Let me get in, and it will feel better.”

Something popped inside of her, giving her instant relief. It still stung, but not to the level it had been. The breath rushed from her lungs as he glided into the depths of her ass until he could go no further.

She never imagined she'd feel this sensation. It was good, but she still felt it was so naughty it added an element to their loving. His fingers dug into her hips as he started to thrust in and out. Every thought in her head splintered as a wave of mind-blowing pleasure rolled over her.

Sara could vaguely hear herself beg him, but he kept his cock sliding in leisurely. Tears were rolling down her face as the pressure inside her threatened to explode, just not in the way she needed.

“Please, please, please,” she chanted until he picked up his pace.

“Oh, fuck. You're so hot and tight you're strangling my cock so hard it feels like it will tear from my body, but I'd still ask for more,” he said.

Sara had no idea she was pushing back against him. “Fuck me, Ethan.”

“You want me to make this ass mine?”

“Yes.” She had no idea what that meant, but she knew he wouldn't hurt her.

His grip on her turned bruising as he sped up, but it just added to all the other sensations. Within a minute, he was

ramming into her, and she was holding onto the side of the bathtub for dear life.

The coil inside of her started to crack until one of his thrusts burst it into a million pieces sending her flying. Her scream echoed in the room and mixed with his groan until the space was filled with the sounds of satisfaction.

Her body sagged when she finally came down from a high she didn't know existed. He grunted behind her and then lay his head on her back. She could still hear how hard he was breathing and was pleased she'd been able to give him that much pleasure.

It seemed to take forever before he roused, and her limbs were still numb.

“Let's get in the shower,” Ethan said and pulled out of her.

She winced.

“I'm sorry, baby.” Ethan got out of the tub, pulled the drain, and then helped her to stand. He grabbed her under her arms when she swayed. Her legs felt like noodles, and it was hard to balance on her own.

He lifted her into his arms and walked into the shower. He blocked the cold water coming out until it warmed enough for her.

She pulled the band from her hair, letting it fall down her back.

For the next several minutes, Ethan bathed her so gently that tears filled her eyes. She loved how he murmured words and phrases telling her how much he cared for her and how special she was. She would never have guessed that this arrogant, mean, sometimes violent man had this height of sensitivity in him, and she loved it.

He dried them off and sat her on the counter as he dried and brushed her hair.

“Are you sore, baby?” he asked.

She wiggled. “Maybe a little.”

When he finished with the dryer, he tucked his fingers under her chin and tipped her head back. “How about a nap? I’ll have them send up a tray for dinner. After we eat, I want to love you again before we sleep.”

She cupped the side of his face. “That sounds wonderful.”

He lifted her hand and kissed her palm before helping her off the counter. He tucked her in bed and sat next to her as he called down to the kitchen.

The drapes were still open, so the room was filled with light, but it didn’t matter because she felt him go to sleep and followed close behind. She couldn’t have asked for a better day.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Ethan woke up an hour later and sighed when he realized he had his Sara in his arms. It was a feeling of contentment he couldn't get anywhere else. She was so precious to him that he needed to keep her happiness as the main focus of his life. Business would have to come in second.

He thought that would make him angry or anxious because he'd always loved what he did, but he felt no resentment.

She was a gift he was lucky to have found, just like the rest of his cousins who found their own.

Sara started waking. She was so beautiful. He knew their dinner was outside his door on the table next to his room. Although he told her they'd eat before they made love again, he couldn't bring himself to hold back from the need to be inside of her.

He rolled her onto her back and braced himself on his elbow to look down at her. Before she was fully awake, he started running his hands up and down her body. He started sucking on her tits while circling her little clit with the tip of his finger.

"Mmmm," she murmured.

"Are you finally waking up?" he asked.

She nodded and stretched, making saliva pool in his mouth.

Before he fucked her, he needed just a little taste. He moved down her body and in between her legs and instantly started sucking on her clit.

"Oh, Jesus," she yelled.

He chuckled. "I like hearing that." He built her up until she withered on the mattress, and she was begging.

"Ethan!"

“I know.” He couldn’t hold off anymore. He moved up her body and spread her legs farther apart to make room for his hips. He lined his cock up with her cunt and stared down at her.

“Ready?”

She gripped his shoulders and nodded. “Yes.”

A scream tore from her throat as he rammed every inch inside her, taking her with one smooth thrust.

“Fuck, this is Heaven.” He thought he’d be able to torment her a little and hold off on giving her an orgasm, but his own was quickly taking over.

“Baby, I need you to come.”

She stared up at him in a daze, and he could tell she wasn’t listening. He smiled. He’d just have to push her over without her help. He raised one of her legs and draped it over one of his arms, opening her up to deeper thrusts.

“Ahhh,” she screamed when he started pushing into her.

“That’s it. I can feel you start to tighten on me. Let go and come.”

He felt her shudder, and then her cunt clamped down on his cock, making it nearly impossible for him to move. He fought through the muscles to prolong her orgasm and to let his control go.

His movements slowed and then finally stopped. All his concentration was on breathing. His heart felt like it would gallop out of his chest at any moment.

Ethan tipped them to the side but stayed in her because the feeling was too perfect for pulling out if he didn’t need to. He felt her sigh against his chest.

“How are you doing?” he asked.

She looked up at him with the brightest smile. “I’m doing great. You make my body tingle.”

He chuckled. “That’s good.”

“Mmmm...” She nodded, then tucked her head under his chin.

“Are you happy, baby?”

“Oh, God, yes. I couldn’t be happier.”

This is what his cousin had been talking about. If he made her happy, it would brighten his whole world.

She looked up at him. “Are you happy?”

“Fuck, baby. I’ve never been happier.”

She smiled and lay her head back down. “Good. I’m glad.”

He felt her relax and determined she’d fallen asleep again. That was okay. He’d let her sleep a bit and feed her before taking her again. Just one more time would appease him for the night. Or maybe two more times?

The End

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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

HER MAFIA DESTINY

Maclean Mafia Men, 1

Lila Fox

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Sample Chapter

“Yo, brother, I think you need to go back home and mellow out.”

Alastair turned abruptly to face his brother, Calum, getting in his face and gritting his teeth. “Would you like to say that to me one more time?”

“Jesus Christ.” Calum raised his hands and took a hasty step back. “Man, it’s just that you’re really pissed off....”

“Aren’t you usually like this after talking to your mother?” Alastair asked.

“She’s your stepmother. That counts, nut fuck. But yes, I do. The woman’s a viper. It’s just when you’re pissed like this, someone usually ends up dead.”

Alastair rolled his eyes, turned, and walked down the long hallway. The woman, Calum's mother, was his fourth stepmother. Alastair's mother died a few days after giving birth to him, which ruined his father. From what his family had told him over the years, they had been passionately in love, surprising because of their lifestyle.

Being a part of the mafia was not easy. You had to be cold and vicious to survive. It was especially hard for the women. The wives and mistresses had to deal with a lot.

His father had married four more times, trying to find the love he'd had with Isabella, Alastair's mother, and it had never happened. This last one, Una, Calum's mother, was the worst.

The first three stepmothers had died of surprisingly natural causes and not murder like one would expect living with the mafia—one in a car accident, one in an accidental drug overdose, and an accidental fall down the steps.

Alastair had liked that one the most. Nessa had been Logan, Ewen, and Rory's mother and had been sweet as can be. It had hit his father hard when she passed away. Not as hard as Alastair's mother, Isabella, but it took a while for him to want to have another woman in the house and in his life.

This last wife was a viper, and Alastair hated her, but he had to get along with her because his father was alive. After the stroke, his father had been unable to lead the Maclean clan, so Alastair had taken over the whole operation then, which was fine because he ran most of it anyway.

He shivered inside. Two minutes with his stepmother was torture. The woman was as mean as they came, and he couldn't understand what his father saw in her. She might have been attractive if not for the permanent sneer she had on her face.

His brother was probably right, but he couldn't stand the thought of going home to the same house his stepmother lived in, knowing she'd probably try to hunt him down to talk some more because he'd walked out on her tirade. The

temptation to just kill her was too strong, and he didn't know if his father would ever forgive him.

“What exactly are we looking at?” Calum asked.

“Our strip joint in Newport needs new women, and I sent out some of our guys to find ones who were attractive and loved being a stripper. Most of the ones we have now are getting old and tired, so we'll get them other jobs in the business.”

“Cool. Maybe think about taking one of them home,” Duncan, another brother, said. “It might help your disposition.”

“Fuck off,” Alastair said without turning around.

Alastair opened the door to what could pass as a conference room. It had a long table and chairs and a small bar off to the side. Some meetings went late, and the guys were more pleasant if they had some alcohol in them. But not too much, or they started killing each other.

The women were already there waiting. The ones that noticed him stood as seductively as they could, begging for his or his brothers' attention. Being one of their mistresses was sought after not only for their good looks but mainly for the money.

“Hey,” Stuart, one of his best men who had been with him for years, said and walked over to shake his hand. “I think we did well.”

“You checked for diseases and made sure they had no children?”

“Sure, boss. I know what you like.”

Alastair nodded. “Where's Ross? He was supposed to be helping you.”

“He's coming in with the last one or two.”

Alastair turned to Calum. “Can you get me a bourbon on the rocks?” He wouldn't admit it to his brothers, but he did need to mellow out, and a nice drink helped every time.

“Sure.”

The first drink went down smoothly and helped calm his anger a bit as he talked to Stuart and ignored the women trying to vie for his notice and interest. He shook his head and snorted when his brothers did give the women their attention and had girls all over them.

“Craig is going to take these women to the club if you’re okay with them,” Stuart said.

Alastair turned and whistled for Duncan. “I’m going to put you in charge of this. Take them to Speedy’s, get the women who will live in our apartments next to the club moved in, and take the rest back to their place but tell them they have to be at work tomorrow. If they are late, they’re fired. There are no second chances.”

“I got it,” Duncan said.

His brother and a couple of the men rounded up the women and took them out a back door to the vans waiting.

“Are you going to wait for the last of them?” Stuart asked.

Alastair looked at his watch and sat down. “I’ll give them a few minutes.”

He hadn’t finished with his second drink when a side door opened and Ross, one of his guys, walked in, dragging a woman. She was crying and fighting to get away from him.

“Shut up, bitch,” Ross said and shook her.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Stuart yelled.

Alastair held up a hand, set down his drink, and stood to face Ross. He walked to stand in front of the man and crossed his arms over his chest to keep from strangling the man, trying to ignore the woman’s pleas and cries. “Tell me.”

Ross stuttered. “Oh, well, her uncle owed us some money, and I was supposed to get it, but he didn’t have it, and so I thought we could use her as collateral until he pays up.”

Calum, Stuart, and the rest of his guys cursed, and the tension rose in the room.

Alastair just stared at the woman. She was tiny but had curved hips and larger breasts. She was dressed in a long white nightgown with lace. Her dark hair was tousled like she'd been pulled from bed.

"Who gave you permission to do that?" Alastair asked when he turned back at Ross.

"Well, no one. I just thought..."

"Is it your job to think?" Alastair asked.

"Well, no."

"Jesus Christ, you dumbshit," Stuart said.

Alastair walked up, cupped the woman's chin, and raised her face. His breath stalled in his lungs because her eyes were the most beautiful he'd ever seen, even when they were red and swollen from crying. They were light blue in the middle and green on the other part, and they seemed to look right through him.

"Who is your family?" Alastair asked her.

She sniffed. "I don't have one besides an uncle I haven't seen in years."

"No husband?"

"No. Please, let me go home. I won't tell anyone. I don't even know you," she said.

For once in his life, he made a decision with his heart instead of his head. He pulled out a gun and shot Ross in the forehead in one smooth move.

Everyone in the room stood frozen and in shock until the woman screamed.

Alastair put his gun away and reached for her when it looked like she was going to faint, only to have her flinch in horror away from him. He knew why, but it still pissed him off, which was ridiculous. Of course, she would be terrified of him. He just murdered someone in front of her.

He didn't like the blood that had been sprayed over her from Ross's head, and he wanted her clean as soon as possible.

He kept a few feet away from the woman and waited for her to be calm enough to hear him. "My name is Alastair Maclean. We're the mafia in this part of the city."

Alastair heard his brother curse behind him and ignored him.

The woman was hunched against the wall. Tears mixed with blood and brain matter ran down her face. "Why are you telling me this? Are you going to kill me next?"

Alastair shook his head. "I'm making sure that you won't be able to go anywhere, ever."

"I don't understand. I've never done anything to you or anyone."

"I know. Sometimes your life takes a path you didn't expect." *No kidding.* He never predicted he'd kidnap a woman and plan to keep her forever. "My advice is to make the best of this. I'll treat you like a princess as long as you're loyal to me. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. I don't understand any of this."

He sighed. "That's okay. We have plenty of time." He held out his hand and waited.

She shook her head.

"You can either take my hand and walk out of here with some dignity, or I can have a few of my men carry you out. Choose."

She studied him for a moment and before she reached for his hand. He could see how much she was trembling, but he would take care of her as soon as they got home. When her shaking, tiny cold hand slid into his hand, something inside of him settled, and a warmth filled him.

"That's good, baby." He pulled her along and looked at one of his men. "Take care of Ross."

"You got it, boss."

As he led her out to his car, he felt something shift in his universe, and he knew he'd forever be changed. He just didn't know if it would be for the good or bad. Only time would tell.

End of sample chapter

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