

A pair of hands is shown from a top-down perspective, gently cupping a vibrant yellow flower. The hands are positioned over a surface of water, with ripples visible around the flower. The overall color palette is dominated by the blue of the water and the yellow of the flower, with a soft, ethereal glow.

THE

AIR

YOU

Breathe

A BREATHE NOVEL

MANDY MUSE

THE AIR YOU BREATHE

A BREATHE NOVEL

MANDY MUSE

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*To finding the perfect solution to love triangles. May you never
have to choose whether it's in your head or in your bed.*

CONTENTS

Content Warnings

Prologue

1. Darcy
2. Evan
3. Darcy
4. Evan
5. Dev
6. Darcy
7. Evan
8. Dev
9. Darcy
10. Evan
11. Dev
12. Evan
13. Darcy
14. Dev
15. Evan
16. Darcy
17. Dev
18. Darcy
19. Evan
20. Darcy
21. Darcy
22. Dev
23. Evan
24. Dev
25. Darcy
26. Evan
27. Dev
28. Darcy
29. Evan
30. Dev
31. Darcy

32. [Evan](#)

33. [Darcy](#)

34. [Evan](#)

35. [Dev](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Bonus Epilogue](#)

[What to read Next](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Mandy Muse](#)

CONTENT WARNINGS

A list of all my contents warnings and possible triggers are in the link below for each book.

[CLICK HERE](#)

PROLOGUE

DARCY

3 years ago

*H*e looked guilty, sad, and exhausted sitting on my bed in my dorm. Evan was a big guy and made my small dorm room look even smaller. Alarms in my head were ringing. Something was really wrong.

Shit it was his sister.

I grabbed his hand to offer him comfort, I can't imagine what it must be like to go through what he is going through. I'm an only child. I won't ever know the pain of losing a sibling.

He ran his hand through his longish hair. He had been letting it grow out and I'd been loving it nearly shoulder length. He looked so exhausted since he had taken that job to help his parents pay for his sister's medication. Grad school, working, helping his parents were taking a toll on him and my heart broke for him.

"Darcy..." His rich timbre of a voice always brought me comfort.

"I'm so..."

"We can't be together anymore," he said, interrupting my apology.

His words were like a slap on the face, I wasn't expecting this.

"Excuse me?" I asked, in shock.

“We can’t be together anymore,” he said, finally looking at me. “I just can’t deal with everything that’s on my plate right now and it’s not fair to you.”

“I told you that I would help however I could. I know your sister comes first,” I said hoping to remind him that I was all in.

“I know. I appreciate your help but it’s something I have to do alone,” he said, getting up from the bed.

“What happened to ‘I can’t live without you, Darcy’,” I snapped.

Guilt was written all over his features. He clenched his jaw and pursed his lips like he wanted to cry.

“Things change...” he said, but didn’t finish his sentence.

“Things change?” I wanted to yell but I kept calm. “What’s changed? A few weeks ago, you said I was your everything.”

He looked out my window, quiet for a moment before he turned around, his face completely passive.

“Family comes first and pretty soon you will be fed up with it and leave me. I’m just saving us some time and heartache,” he said with a hint of anger in his tone.

“Heartache? You think this is saving me from heartache?” I stood up.

“I’m sorry, but life happens, I didn’t know my sister’s cancer would be so expensive. I mean, that’s what insurance is for, right?” He looked even angrier. “But now my parents are going broke because they can’t keep up with the bills. They have already taken out a second mortgage, and it’s still not enough. I’m trying to do my part so my sister has a fighting chance.”

I wanted to yell at him that putting his happiness on hold wouldn’t change his sister’s life. I loved Evan and these past six months together had been the happiest I had ever been but it killed me that he thought he couldn’t have happiness and help his sister too.

“I said I would help you anyway I could. I know this is going to be hard, but I love you and I will be with you every step of the way,” I pleaded. I wasn’t ready to give up on us.

He stared at me for a moment with indecision. “I’m sorry... I can’t, I have to do this alone.”

“Alone?! Why?!” I yelled, in anger. “I love you, Evan.”

“It’s the only way,” he said, looking at me, then walked towards the door. That’s when it clicked.

I gasped when the realization hit me. “Evan, please tell me you weren’t stupid enough to go through with it?”

“Excuse me?” He turned around in shock.

“Evan, you said you weren’t going to do this. You weren’t going to take that man’s offer.” I started to panic.

He stared at me with indecision. “I have no choice, Darcy. If I don’t do this my sister dies. We need that money”

I wanted to say everyone does, but I knew that was really insensitive. He didn’t see that he was selling himself to the devil. Lucio was a vile man who preyed on people in need to trap them in his web.

“You won’t be helpful to anyone if you’re dead,” I whispered, knowing full well it was a possibility. “If that happens, who does your debt go to? Your father?”

Evan clenched his jaw as I pointed out things he probably hadn’t thought of. “I’m not going to die, and my sister won’t either,” he said, full of confidence.

I knew right then it was over and nothing I said would change his mind. The thought hit me so hard in the stomach I began to panic.

I walked up to him wanting to break down and cry. Each step was painful and hurt to breathe. I took in his handsome face. His dark hair and dark eyes that had a slight slant to them; his sharp cheekbones.

“I love you. Please don’t push me away.” I cupped his cheek, then slid my hand to his neck to bring him down to kiss

him. I was about to pull away when he didn't reciprocate but then he threaded his hand through my hair and pulled my face in to deepen the kiss.

I kissed him with everything I had, hoping this last effort would make him hesitate and see what he was really doing. He pulled away, resting his forehead against mine.

“You won't see this now but I'm doing this to protect you. I—I can't lose you too. One day we'll be together but for now, I love you, and I will do whatever it takes to make sure you're safe and happy.” He kissed my forehead and left my dorm room.

I struggled to breathe through the tears that kept coming. Gasping for air, I tried to settle myself down, but I knew without Evan it would hurt to breathe every day.

DARCY

No matter how much time had passed, seeing Evan walk out of my life still hurt. I used to let myself believe time healed everything but that was a crock of shit. The wound still felt fresh three years later. It didn't help that seeing him at the new club in Monroe, the next town over, a week ago brought back all these memories.

After I graduated college and moved back to Mountain View, I had only seen him a few times from afar. The pain from the break-up always seemed fresh, never lessening, never dying. Seeing him up close was more than I could handle. The years had been kind to him, and he looked so good, maybe even better. Back when we were dating, he still had that boyish face but now, Evan looked all man. He still had that killer smile with that small dimple that just drove me insane.

Working for the local thug Lucio didn't look like it was wearing him down at all. He looked like he was flourishing. He was obviously somebody high up because they let us into the club with no questions asked. I wondered what he was doing for him and why was he still with him?

Once his debt was paid, I assumed he would leave him, but I wondered what made him stay or worse, if he *had* to stay. Maybe the money was too good to pass up?

I always pictured him paying off his debt and coming back to me. He would finish college and we would go back to normal. Waiting for the first year had been hard, but what kept me going was the possibility that it was going to happen.

After the second year, I lost hope. I decided that I needed to let go of that dream and start living my life. I couldn't wait for a man who obviously didn't want me and why would I want a man who broke his promise?

I sighed as I made a latte for a customer. No matter how many times I tried to not think of Evan, it was like I couldn't stop myself. He had infiltrated my brain, making sure I only thought of him.

I handed the coffee to the customer with their pastry and thanked them for stopping by. I helped the next customer with their order, thankful I was busy enough that Evan only slithered into my thoughts a few times. As the morning went on, our pastries dwindled, and I had probably caffeinated the whole town of Mountain View.

It was eleven in the morning and the coffee shop would die down until we closed at three since it was the weekend. I wiped down the counters, cleaned the espresso machine and took some dishes into the back.

"You ok there, hon?" Mary, the owner, looked at me in concern as she closed the container of icing. She was also our pastry chef, preferring the silence of the kitchen instead of the customers. Somedays I was jealous that she got to hide out back here.

"Yeah, I'm fine, just thinking about things I shouldn't be," I said, leaning against one of the counters.

Mary raised her brow at me like she wanted me to continue but I shook my head, not ready to tell her I saw Evan at the club. She was the only one who knew what really happened between us, not the story I let everyone else believe.

Mary had been my neighbor ever since I was little. She was always the one who brought treats over, spoiling me like a parent would. When I saw her struggle with the coffee shop when I was in high school, I volunteered my weekends until she could pay me.

I worked here through college and once I graduated, I stayed. She baked and cooked delicious things behind the

counter, while I took care of the business side of it, making sure the money was flowing in the right direction.

“Go home, you’ve been working way too hard since we lost Mason,” she said, taking off her apron. “I can handle the front for the rest of the day.”

I couldn’t help the yawn that escaped my mouth. We had been working really hard, but this past week I needed it. If I was home my thoughts would eventually wander to Evan.

“You can watch the front while I do inventory,” I said, as I walked to the office to grab my clipboard. “We need to prepare for the winter anyways and make sure we have enough product for the influx of visitors with the upcoming ski season.”

“I think that can wait another day hon, you need to go home, take a bath and try these new chai macarons I’m playing around with.” Mary took my clipboard and replaced it with a box of macarons. My mouth watered instantly, and I knew they were going to be delicious.

“I can do that when I leave at three and we drive back together,” I said, giving her a pointed look.

“Oh, I can get Warren to drive me home,” she said like it was common knowledge.

“Don’t you hate...”

“No, child, leave now, before I decide I’m going to do the books myself,” Mary threatened, and I listened. She was awful with numbers, cleaning up her mess was a nightmare that I wanted to avoid.

“Ok, I’m leaving,” I said, going to the back to get my things.

“I think we need to look for some help again,” she said, peeking outside to make sure we didn’t miss anyone.

“I know, we need a person up front and someone back here to help you.” I mentioned a helper for her because for years she had been stubborn and refused help, but Mary wasn’t

getting any younger and I know all of these early mornings must be so hard for her.

“Hon, you know I don’t need someone to help me. I’m just fine and I love doing this... *alone*.” She emphasized the alone part.

I rolled my eyes. “I know you like doing this alone, but you work seven days a week sometimes and you’re no spring chicken anymore,” I teased.

“I’m only forty-one years old, I am a summer chicken.” She glared at me.

I laughed. Teasing her about her age was always my favorite. She also looked like she was still in her thirties, but I knew doing this by herself for all these years had to take a toll on her. Before I came to help her, she did everything by herself.

“Ok, fine but imagine being able to take a vacation or not come in and worry about all the pastries you have to make,” I said, giving her a hug.

“It’s not like I have anyone at home for me anyways. This coffee shop is like my child and there is no place I’d rather be.” She kissed my cheek, pulling away to hold my face in her hands. “You, on the other hand, need to get away so you can live your life, and be a normal thirty year old.”

I rolled my eyes at her because she knew damn well I was only twenty-seven. Mary had always said I was an old soul, but I needed to get out, live my life and experience everything life had to offer. I didn’t know what experiences she was talking about because in this small town there wasn’t much to do. Monroe did have a Target and that was probably the only life experience I needed.

“I do live my life, I just went out with the new girl Jane,” I said, a little defensively.

“The girl from Texas? I hear she’s ensnared those contractor boys. Aiden, Callum and Nathan come in quite often, in hopes to catch her.” She looked amused. “See you

need something like that, a few boys to show you a good time.”

“Mary! First of all, how do you know that she’s ensnared them? Second of all, are you suggesting I find a group of men to show me a good time?” I asked, worried about what she was going to tell me.

“Oh child, they look at her like she hangs the moon and stars for them, especially Nathan. Poor boy has no poker face with that girl.” Mary smiled. “And yes I am saying go find you some men or women who will show you a good time. You need to make up for some lost time.”

“Mary!”

She cackled because she knew I kept my lips sealed when it came to my sex life. “You just need some good sex—”

“Ok! I’m leaving! Bye!” I grabbed my purse leaving out the back as quickly as I could because I didn’t need to talk about my non-existent sex life with a woman who I saw as a mother figure.

She cackled again as the door closed, making me smile. That woman was crazy but she was an amazing person who was there for me for most of my childhood.

I grew up with parents who saw me as more of a nuisance than their baby girl. My father was a millionaire’s son sent to Mountain View to clean up his act with his uncle. My mom was a high school dropout who worked at the diner my father liked to eat at.

They had me when they were eighteen and seventeen, then got married and played house for a few years until they both got tired of it. When my father got his inheritance, that was it.

I was left alone most of the time since I was in middle school. They preferred dinner parties and social events in the surrounding areas until I was in high school when they were gone for longer periods of time. My senior year is when my parents finally let it slip that they had moved to LA. After I graduated, I got a standardized Christmas card with money. It had been years since I had seen them and I was ok with that.

My uncle—my mom’s brother—lived in the area, we’ve never been particularly close but he does still check on me from time to time. I see him around town with his grandchildren, who are absolutely adorable, or when he was on duty for the Mountain View PD.

Mary had been a better parent to me, spending my holidays with her was so much better. I think I also fulfilled that desire to have kids for her. I’ve always encouraged her to try a dating app, but she brushes me off saying no one wants to deal with her and her crazy schedule. I will agree with her on that, our work schedule made it difficult to date, but don’t get me started on trying to date in a small town.

I threw my stuff into the front seat of the car, feeling the morning catching up to me; I was exhausted. Mary’s advice sounded perfect. A bubble bath, a good romance book and some macarons sounded great. It was a short drive to my house that was left to me by my parents. It was a modest bungalow that most people would think was small, but it was perfect for me. I had updated it a little here and there; it also helped that I knew a contractor.

I stripped on my way to the tub, leaving clothes on the floor as I went down the hall to the master bedroom; perks of living on my own. Walking to my beautifully renovated bathroom, I turned on the water and plugged up my gorgeous claw foot tub. While the tub filled up, I grabbed a book, a random sweatshirt and some leggings. I laid out all of my things on the counter when I noticed I picked out a Monroe University sweatshirt.

Why the fuck do I still have this?

I internally cursed myself. It seems like the world was intent on making me suffer with memories of Evan.

EVAN

I walked to Misfits already dreading the night. The bouncer opened the door for me as I nodded. I strolled into the club, feeling the bass of the music immediately, and looked around to make sure everything was running as smoothly as possible.

I checked each bar, talking to the bartenders making sure we had enough inventory and to see if they were getting requests for certain things. Debating if I should go check on the DJ, but I knew that at this point I was just biding my time before I had to go into the office to deal with Lucio.

I walked to the door and entered a hallway that led to several different rooms and also, a way to leave without being noticed. Lucio was a paranoid bastard who always insisted on an escape route.

When we were having this place renovated, he demanded a secret route that no one knew about except a select few. He constantly talked about having a way to escape the feds. In the three years I had worked for him he had gotten worse and worse. It was exhausting.

He was a man who had started out as a loan shark, building this little empire with underground fighting, drugs and women. It was only a matter of time until he was noticed which made me paranoid too.

Delaying the inevitable even more, I went to go look at the fights we had scheduled for the night. There was a decent

opener, but our main event was a guy who had gotten kicked off the UFC scene for being a dirty fighter.

Brent was this massive guy who looked like all he did was shoot up steroids and workout. He was a mouthy, shit talking asshole when we had our meeting with him. I was curious to see if he would deliver on his promise of putting on a good show and not just knocking out his opponent.

The guy he was up against was a local fighter who had made a name for himself. He looked like Kimbo Slice and I had seen him knock out guys in less than a minute. It had been a while since he had a fight with us, making me wonder if he was ready for the mouthy fucker.

I made it just in time to see both of them get into the cage together with the ref. They looked to be even in size but there was something menacing about the mouthy asshole. He seemed ready to kill, not just knock out his opponent, making me nervous about what we would have to deal with if that actually happened.

“Boss is looking for you.”

I glanced over to see Lucio’s son Giovanni standing next to me with his arms crossed over his chest. He looked exactly like his father, dark hair, dark eyes, same nose and skin tone. His mannerisms were the same, but on the inside, they couldn’t be more different.

“I know, I’m delaying the inevitable.” I shrugged.

He chuckled. “I know. I almost called in sick.”

I laughed. “I think he would have dragged you out of your bed.”

“Cazzo, I think he’d find a gun to his head if he saw Vittoria naked,” he growled. “I wouldn’t be surprised if Vittoria didn’t threaten him first.”

I chuckled. His wife was a feisty Italian woman who didn’t give a shit who you were. She would protect her family at all costs. I envied their relationship and every time I saw them together, it was like putting salt into my wound, reminding me that I had given up something that felt like forever.

Darcy. She was beautiful, kind, funny and completely not made for this world. It's the reason I broke it off three years ago. I also didn't want this world to taint her and change her in any way. This was my burden to carry, she deserved a real life.

The crowd started to get wild, dragging me from my thoughts. The mouthy guy was on top of the other fighter pummeling him.

"Merda, he's going to kill him," Giovanni snarled as he took off for the cage and I followed him.

The ref was just watching the fight when he should have called it thirty seconds ago. Giovanni banged on the cage to get his attention, making the gesture to stop it. The ref quickly blew the whistle two times before Giovanni opened the cage and pushed Brent off the fighter.

He quickly turned his murderous glare to Giovanni but I knew Giovanni was packing and he wouldn't hesitate to pull his gun to show this asshole who was boss.

"He blew the whistle, fucking idiot," Giovanni snarled at him, while he checked on the Kimbo Slice lookalike dude. Looking for his team, I nodded my head so they could come in.

At the same time, I made sure Brent didn't come after Giovanni, since he had his back turned to him. I was nowhere near as big as the dude, but I might be able to hold my own, those Krav Maga classes might finally come in handy.

Lucio came into the cage clapping like the mad man he was. "Brent, that was some display of power," he said, slapping his shoulder and the dude looked like he wanted to break his arm off.

God, I wish. I wanted to beat him with it too.

Lucio grabbed his arm and raised it up to signal Brent was the winner. Everyone cheered and I had to control the need to throw up at the amount of people that were ok with this maniac.

I looked down at the other guy, seeing him look like a bloody mess. Fuck, I hope he didn't die. His team came

quickly assessing him and trying to wake him up. I was about to offer some help when Lucio's glare stopped me.

"Office... now," he snarled. "You too, Giovanni."

I nodded, leaving the cage and going straight there. No point in delaying the inevitable though, I don't know what he was pissed at. It was a short walk to the set of offices we had down here, but Lucio's was extravagant and so fucking gaudy it was ridiculous. The small room I had worked just fine. I didn't need anything to keep me here longer than I needed to be.

Walking into Lucio's office, I wasn't ready for whatever he was going to bitch about today. It was always something, but if Giovanni was in here today, he didn't like something we had done.

I sat down in front of his desk, while Giovanni went to the bar and poured himself a drink. I wasn't Lucio's son and if I did that, he would chew my ass out, but Giovanni had some leeway.

"What the fuck was that?" Lucio snapped, walking around the desk to sit down.

"What was what, sir?" I was honestly confused. Giovanni set a tumbler of alcohol in front of me but there was no way in hell I was going to touch it.

"Why the hell would you go into the cage," he said, glaring at us like we were the dumbest shits in the world.

"Can you imagine if he had died in that ring?" Giovanni didn't sit down, staring down at his father.

"If we let him kill the other fighter, then no one would want to fight with us. We have the ref there to stop it before it goes too far and if we let one man die, it makes us look irresponsible," I said, trying to keep Giovanni from speaking out against his father too much. I was worried one day he would go too far, and Lucio would get tired and put a bullet in his head.

"The ref had it under control," Lucio scoffed.

“The ref was watching the fight like a spectator not a ref.” Giovanni rolled his eyes.

“He needs to be evaluated because if...” I paused trying to remember Kimbo’s real name.

“Darren,” Giovanni supplied for me.

“Right. Darren’s followers would blame us, word would get out and no one would want to suffer the same fate, so they would fight elsewhere,” I explained.

Lucio stared at me like I had a hidden agenda before he finally nodded at me. “Fine, but I think that ref is fine, no need to get your panties in a twist.”

I wanted to roll my eyes at this man because his panties were just in a twist over something that he should have known.

“I think I will talk to him to remind him that we need these fighters alive for them to keep coming back,” I said, challenging Lucio. If he wanted fighters then he was going to have to deal with it.

“Fine, now I want to know about the shipment of drugs that was delayed in getting in the day before yesterday.” He leaned back in his obnoxious chair. I hated this part of my job. Lucio had started to dabble in drugs the previous year. When I told him we should just make a weed farm and sell to dispensaries, he scoffed at me.

He wanted coke, ecstasy and heroin, the hard stuff. It made me cringe at the part I was playing in getting these drugs in people’s hands. I tried to stay as far away as I could from it, making that more Giovanni’s domain, but I was still guilty by association. And fuck, did I feel guilty.

Giovanni started to explain what happened as I stared that drink down. I really needed something to take the edge off. The more time I worked for Lucio the more I felt my life was out of control. It was only supposed to be long enough to pay off a debt, but when he offered me more money to work for him, I hesitated and stayed.

I only did it because my father died, and I didn’t know how else to help support my ma and sister. I also didn’t know

when or if my sister's cancer would come back, so I wanted to be prepared. But I was getting tired, and I didn't know how much longer I could do this.

"... get a shipment of girls..." My attention snapped back to the conversation. I hoped I didn't hear what I thought I heard.

"You can't be serious?" Giovanni snarled. "You want to get into sex trafficking?"

"It's a lucrative business and if I'm to have the equity to take over Denver from my brother, I need all the help I can get," he said, nonchalantly.

Oh fuck no. I couldn't do this. I wouldn't do this.

"I think there are other ways for us to acquire funds that are less likely to get us thrown in jail," I said, hoping he would listen. Anytime I mentioned getting locked up, it always made him hesitate.

"If I don't take risks then how am I supposed to go back and claim what is rightfully mine." He leaned forward on his desk. "This is taking too long, and I need to make my move soon."

Giovanni rattled off in Italian, looking angrier as he continued speaking. I usually hated when they did this, but I didn't think I could stomach this conversation anymore. Lucio smacked the desk, looking irritated and yelled something back.

"We are going to do this, and I better not hear anything more from both of you about this," Lucio snapped, getting up and buttoning his suit. "Remember your place, Giovanni. Cresci Ragazzo!"

He walked around the desk leaving Giovanni and me. As soon as I heard him leave, I shot back the liquor, reveling in the burn. It was insane that he was thinking about sex trafficking when he had a granddaughter. I glanced at Giovanni who looked as sick as I was.

"Fuck, I guess we have no choice," he growled, nodding his head to the door, signaling we should leave. Lucio had his

office bugged and we just needed him to think we were on board.

“You heard him, and what he says goes,” I said, getting up and heading out. I walked a few doors down to my office, opening the door so we could go in. Taking a seat at my desk and pulling out a small device. I was constantly checking for bugs but I always turned this machine on so it disabled anything that could possibly record or hear us. Giovanni sat down in the chair I had in front of my desk. I opened my bottom drawer getting out my liquor and two tumblers.

“I will not fucking do this,” I said, after I poured us both a hefty drink.

“I can’t believe he would be okay with it,” he said, running his hand through his hair. “My daughter...” His voice broke and I couldn’t imagine what he was thinking. Any of those girls could be his daughter or Lucio’s granddaughter or my sister.

“We have to come up with a plan to either derail or delay it, so we can think of something,” I said, gulping down my drink.

“Evan, I think it’s time we start thinking about getting out,” he said, looking at me seriously. “I can’t raise my kids with the possibility I might not come home. I definitely don’t want them near that man. And my half-brother Dev and half-sister Ava don’t deserve to be sucked into this life either.”

I knew I could trust Giovanni, but I still hesitated. “I can’t do this anymore either, it’s taking its toll on me. I miss my life before this and I miss...” I almost said Darcy’s name, but I didn’t let myself dwell on her. I didn’t want to give myself hope because I knew if I ever went back to Darcy, I would have to grovel on my knees for the rest of my life. If she even let me.

“Then let’s brainstorm what we can do to stop this trafficking and my father,” he clinked my drink and we both drank to that.

DARCY

I took one last glance at the coffee shop before I closed the door and locked up. I always double checked everything especially today since I closed alone. Mary had a doctor's appointment she had to go to, and I told her I would watch the shop while she took care of herself. Walking to the car, I threw my stuff in and turned the key in the ignition, except it didn't start.

Shit, did I leave the lights on again?

I internally cursed myself because I always did this. But when I checked the lights, everything was still on. I tried to start it again and it almost started.

Come on! This was the last thing I needed.

I tried one more time and it finally turned on. I needed to take it to get serviced and get that checked. I felt the familiar buzz of my phone in my pocket and then the ringing in the car.

I hit accept on the car screen before I said, "Hello".

"Darcy! How are you girl?" Jane, my friend from Texas, came through the car speaker.

"Hey! I'm doing good, just got out of work and I am beat. How are you?" I asked, hearing another voice in the background. I knew I shouldn't be jealous, but I still couldn't believe this girl found three men to follow her around like lost puppies when I couldn't even manage to find one man.

"Great! What are you doing tonight?" she asked, sounding really excited.

“Not much, why?” I asked.

“Well... my brother’s wedding is tomorrow and my future sister-in-law said she didn’t want to go out but now she does one last time before she gets hitched. So, I was wondering if you want to have dinner with us and go out for a few drinks,” Jane said, as another voice yelled, “Come out with us please!” in the background.

I laughed looking at the clock, hoping I had time for a nap. I thought about what Mary had said and she was right. I needed to start living my life.

“Count me in, what time?”

Squeals came from the phone, and I flinched at the loudness. “Great, we are having dinner at La Mesa at seven thirty. Do you want to meet us at the gondola, and we can ride up together; let’s say at seven twenty?” Jane’s excitement now began to fuel my own. La Mesa was a great restaurant that I didn’t indulge in enough. It was pricey but so worth the food and scenery.

“Sure, I’ll be there.”

“Byeeee,” a chorus of women came through and I was already liking her sisters-in-law.

I had enough time to go home for a quick nap and get ready. The perfect dress was hanging in my closet, just waiting to be worn and it definitely made me feel sexy. It was exactly what I needed.

THE NIGHTS WERE GETTING a tad cooler and I regretted my outfit choice and not bringing a sweater. Apparently, that was all of us. I saw Jane and her sisters-in-law walking towards me in nothing but some skimpy dresses, walking really fast.

“Damn, I didn’t think it would be this cool,” Jane said, hugging me tight. After a crazy night at the club, it cemented our bond as friends, and I was so glad because I definitely

needed a friend. We had aired out all of our secrets, having a slumber party at her home after we got back from the club.

“I know! I should have known better but who wants to hold a sweater while they drink?” We pulled away and she introduced me.

“Sabrina and Katherine, this is Darcy, a badass woman, who makes a mean cup of coffee,” Jane said, and both girls hugged me.

“Darcy, so nice to meet you! We are so glad you came out with us, and that Jane has a friend here.” Sabrina smiled at me.

“Yeah, we were worried about her being all alone, well other than those hot as hell men she’s got chasing after her.” Katherine rolled her eyes, making us all laugh.

“I can’t help it if they all want me,” Jane shrugged with a small smile, looking a little embarrassed.

“Sure.... act all innocent!” Katherine laughed.

“Come on, let’s go. I’m starving.” Jane walked to the gondola and I knew she was still a little uncomfortable talking about the guys. Her relationship with Aiden, Callum and Nathan was still new. I knew she was worried about what other people would think about her being with the three of them especially in this small town when everyone knew everyone’s business.

“Let’s go!” the girls yelled, and we all followed.

Once we reached the top, we exited and walked into the restaurant. They sat us down very quickly at a table with a gorgeous outlook. We had a prime view of the mountains surrounding Mountain View. I loved living here but sometimes the small town was exhausting. Never having left didn’t help either. I looked at the women around the table, wondering if one day I could go back to Dallas with Jane, and she could show me around.

Dinner was amazing. Jane ordered a three-course meal with wine pairings and dessert. Each course was better than the last, but the wine was a little harder to swallow. I knew

Yellowtail and Cupcake but these fancier wines didn't taste very different from each other, except the champagne.

A girl could get used to something as delicious as that. I was afraid to ask how much the bottle was because I would probably spit it out and say no thanks from the shock.

The conversation was amazing, making me realize I was definitely missing out on girl talk. Seeing Jane with her sisters-in-law was refreshing and she seemed a lot happier. Or it might be the alcohol or even the fact she made up with the guys, after their big fight. Either way she looked so much better, and I was happy for her.

Jane didn't let anyone pay for the meal, making me feel guilty. I took a glance at it, and I swear it was over five hundred dollars.

My eyes bugged out at the amount, but every time we tried to pay for any of us, Jane glared at all of us and said she wanted to spend her hard-earned money on a girl's night out. After she settled the check, we finished our drinks and went out onto the balcony. We wanted to enjoy the view one more time. It was even colder up here so we squealed and went back inside to catch the gondola back down.

Once we made it to the bottom the girls said they wanted to get more drinks. We walked down to Group Therapy, while Katherine and Sabrina sang Miranda Lambert's "Tequila does". Jane and I chimed in on the chorus and at the end of the song we were giggling, debating what other song we should sing. Sabrina started singing "Jesus Take the Wheel" by the time we walked into the bar.

I was expecting a comment on how this wasn't exactly what they pictured for drinks, but the girls went straight to the electronic jukebox to pick out a song. Walking up to the bar to order tequila shots, I talked to Mac the bartender who was the sweetest man you had ever met. I paid for the shots, delivering them to the ladies as we cheered to Katherine's last night as a single woman.

"So, Darcy—do you have a man waiting for you at home?" Katherine asked, as she swayed to the music that was playing.

The question threw me off, I was stunned for a moment before my brain responded. “Uh—no I don’t,” I said awkwardly.

“Oh, I know that look,” Sabrina chimed in. “Who is he and why aren’t you together?”

“Oh, uh. There isn’t anyone,” I said as I got a pointed look from Jane.

“His name is Evan, and he is gorgeous,” Jane said, and now it was my turn to give her a look.

“That ship has sailed and there is nothing to talk about,” I said, trying to shut it down.

“Ah, is he the “jackass” variety of a man?” Katherine asked, looking through the jukebox again.

“He’s the sweet man who left her because he was protecting her,” Jane said, getting a glare from me. “I’m sorry. I think if you just talked it out maybe you would find out something you didn’t know before. You guys dated and he said all these swoon worthy things. Plus when we saw him at the club he looked like he was still interested.”

“Ooh and the plot thickens.” Sabrina raised her brows. “How long did you guys date?”

I took a deep breath, I definitely needed to. Every time I talked about Evan, I felt like I needed to calm myself down because I always experienced such anger and animosity after I told my story.

“Hold up, before you tell your story. That sigh told me we need another drink,” Katherine moved from the jukebox to the bar and talked to Mac. Suddenly the hair on the back of my neck stood up, and for just a second, I felt like someone was staring at me. I took a glance around the bar to check to see if anyone was looking at us. When I didn’t see anything, I shook off the invasive feeling.

“I’m sorry, I just want you to be happy,” Jane said, grabbing my hand and squeezing it.

“I know, I just don’t think he is worth my time anymore,” I said, feeling pathetic. It had been three years and I felt like I was still acting the same. The wound still felt as new as the day he broke up with me, and no matter what I did, the pain never truly went away. I think the more time that passed without him coming back to me just made the wound stay fresh.

“Oh honey, I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything.” Jane gave me a hug, making me want to cry. “I just saw the chemistry between y’all and I don’t know, I hoped maybe he would get his head out of his ass.”

“No, it’s fine. I just...”

“Okay, two shots.” Katherine interrupted me, putting down eight shots. “One before the story and one after because I’m sure you’re going to need another.”

My heart swelled because these girls were amazing. I wish I had them when we had broken up, maybe things would have been different. We all took the shot before I told them what happened between Evan and me. After I finished, they all looked at me with sadness on their faces. All the alcohol I had was making me feel even more emotional. The need to cry was rising to my threshold and I didn’t want to cry in a bar at someone’s bachelorette party.

“Fuck girl, you’re going to need my shot too.” Sabrina slid her shot over to me. “Seems like he made the easy decision for himself.”

“Damn, mine too,” Katherine said, as she pushed hers towards me too while she glared at Sabrina. “I think it’s sweet he was protecting her, but I think maybe you guys just need to talk it out.”

I nodded. “I feel like we are way past talking. He’s had three years to talk to me, but he’s kept his distance.”

“I agree!” Sabrina said, but Jane and Katherine looked like they wanted to say more. I had taken enough of Katherine’s bachelorette party.

“Ok, I definitely can’t take these, so help me out.” I slid the shots back to them. “Cheers to Katherine!”

The girls hesitated but they took the shots anyway, holding them up as we all clinked glasses.

“To Katherine!” Sabrina and Jane said together.

We threw back our drinks and slammed the glasses on the table.

“We need to put on some dancing music!” Sabrina walked up to the jukebox again and looked for a song. I felt like I was being watched again when “Let me take you dancing” by Jason Derulo came on and Katherine squealed as she got up quickly and started dancing.

Jane laughed at her, getting up and I joined her. I looked around the bar one more time before I locked eyes on none other than Evan, who was walking towards us with a scowl on his face. I should be over all butterflies but they were still as strong as the day I met him.

EVAN

I'm grateful on the days when I don't have to go into the club or meet with Lucio. I'm sitting across from Marc, who had a potential fighter. Word is, he's really good. I vetted both him and Marc, making sure he was clean and they were going to be easy to work with.

I laid out the contract for him when Darcy walked into the bar with Jane and two other women. I instantly smiled until I saw what she was wearing, what they were all wearing.

What the fuck was going on?

I watched them go to the digital Jukebox, as Darcy went to the bar.

"Evan?" I snapped my head towards Marc.

"I was just wondering about the weekend fights. Are those treated any different?" he asked, still scanning the document. I explained how weekends and weeknight worked, what they needed to expect and what we expected from them. He asked more questions and I answered them, keeping an eye on Darcy. She looked sad and heartbroken, which made me nervous. Did she break up with someone? Another glance around the room made me notice the men in the bar looking at them, making my skin crawl.

I almost texted Callum, Nathan or Aiden telling him to come over to see what their girl Jane was wearing but I knew I was being selfish. I ended the meeting quickly after agreeing to a few things. I wrote them down so I wouldn't forget,

shaking Marc's hand and watched him leave. I waited a few minutes hoping he wasn't going to come back.

I saw the girls take a shot, then one of them popped up and went straight to the Jukebox. Once their song came on, one of them squealed, she immediately started dancing with Jane joining her. I walked over because I couldn't take it anymore. Once I got close, we locked eyes, shock appearing on her face and then immediately turned into anger.

"Darcy," I said, as calmly as I could.

"Evan." She glared at me.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, looking at Jane and the other women.

"It's my sister-in-law's bachelorette party," Jane said, as she danced.

"Yes, now excuse me while I dance with my friends." Darcy dismissed me.

I grabbed her hand before she walked away getting a glance at her ass in that short dress. "What do you want?" she snapped.

"I'm just letting you know, all the men in the bar are staring," I whispered to her. "It's not like you've left much to their imagination."

"So, let them. It's not like I have someone at home waiting for me." She yanked her hand out of my grip, going back to dance with the girls.

I ended up sitting by their table keeping a watchful eye on them, getting glares from Darcy and smirks from Jane. The other two looked amused when they all chatted together, stealing glances at me.

After about their fourth shot, I was getting nervous. You could see them starting to slow down, the alcohol catching up to them. Someone walked up to the girls and I immediately turned to glare at them.

"Damn, Evan, if looks could kill, the entire bar would be doomed." Aiden snickered, walking towards me.

I rolled my eyes. “I’m doing the girls a favor. All of them forgot the rest of their dresses at home.”

“Whatever, Evan. You can’t be mad at how good Darcy looks.” Jane’s eyes lit up with mirth as she walked over to us, only looking at Aiden. I was happy they were working on whatever was going on with the three of them.

I glanced at Darcy for a second before I shrugged. “I’m not blind, Texas. Darcy always looks beautiful.” I murmured, knowing I didn’t want Darcy to hear.

“Just say something. Nothing is worse than regret and not saying something before you don’t have a chance to say it.” Jane looked somber. “Regret is a bitch.”

I already felt regret. Ever since I saw Darcy at the club a few weeks ago. It hit me like a train wreck. My emotions felt like the wreckage, and I was still picking up the pieces. I looked over at her with the other girls, she had a huge smile on her face as one of the girls yelled “Come on, who doesn’t kiss their girl when they see her?”

Jane and Aiden talked while I looked at Darcy. It had been a while since I saw her this happy. Even though it had been three years since we were together, I never stopped checking in on her. On nights I worked into the morning, I would stop by her house to see her leave for work.

Those were my favorite days, seeing her and Mary get into the car, while Darcy looked adorably half asleep as Mary chatted animatedly. Seeing her like that reminded me of the few mornings we spent together.

I noticed a guy say something to Darcy. She shook her head at whatever he said but he wasn’t talking no for an answer. I got up, lumbering towards them.

“She said no, asshole,” I snapped trying to remember who this guy was. He looked familiar.

I could see Darcy’s eyes get wide with worry, but I kept my eye on the guy.

“Who the fuck are you?” he snarled at me. “I was talking to her, not you.”

“Listen, asshole,” I sneered as I grabbed the front of his shirt, remembering that he was Mrs. Montgomery’s grandson.

“Evan!” Darcy shouted.

“What the fuck?” Fear crossed his face.

“Charles is that you?” Aiden came up to us and I noticed he had pushed the girls away.

“Uh, Aiden, Uh hi,” he stuttered, and I was glad he was starting to lose that bravado. It was going to make threatening him so much easier.

“How is your Grandma going to feel about you not taking no for an answer.” I let go of him.

“Especially when she hears it’s Darcy, you know your grandma adores her.” Aiden added.

His face blanched. “I... I...” He glanced back at Darcy. I snapped my fingers to get his attention again.

“Just leave and everything will be fine,” I said, enjoying the look on his face and deciding he probably had enough.

“Yeah, fine,” he said, walking away and leaving the bar. I turned to look at Darcy and she looked livid.

Fuck.

I heard one of the girls slurring and I knew it was time to go. As Aiden ushered them all out, I managed to grab Darcy’s hand as we walked out of the bar, hanging back.

“Let me take you home,” I said, admiring her fury.

“No,” she snapped about to turn away but hesitated. “Why the hell did you have to do that? I’m a grown ass woman, I don’t need you there to try and protect me.”

“He wasn’t taking no for an answer.” I defended my actions.

“I was handling it,” she said, getting angry again. “I’ve been doing just fine since you left me three years ago.”

She might as well have slapped me because it didn’t hurt any less.

“I know, I’m sorry,” I said with as much remorse as I could bleed in my tone. “Please let me drive you home.”

She studied me, her anger falling from her expression. “Fine, you can drive me home,” she said, glancing back at the group. “Evan is going to take me home.” She waved at the group, and I did the same as we heard loud giggles fading as they walked away.

I guided her to my Subaru and opened the door for her. She didn’t look at me as she slid into the seat, making me feel even guiltier about everything. I opened my trunk to get out a water bottle for her.

I climbed into the driver’s seat, handing her the water bottle.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

“I really am sorry Darcy,” I said, trying to apologize for everything but I was an idiot who didn’t know where to start.

“Do you even know what you’re sorry for?” she whispered.

She always made me want to smile when she called me out on my shit and I loved it. I stayed quiet on the drive to her home. Once I parked in her driveway, she quickly unbuckled her seatbelt.

“I do know what I’m apologizing for, it’s just, how do you say sorry for the biggest regret in your life?”

She slowly looked at me with indecision on her face.

“Maybe it’s too late.” Her bottom lip quivered.

I couldn’t stop myself. I wound my hand behind her neck pulling her towards me resting our foreheads together. I breathed her in, missing her scent, her warmth and I couldn’t help myself. I kissed her. I should have been gentler, but I was vibrating with need for Darcy. She was the air I needed to breathe, and I needed her now. I expected her to pull away, but she crushed her lips to mine in such a needy way that the groan that escaped her made me snap. Pushing the seat as far

back as I could I yanked her to me, helping her straddle my lap since it was such a tight spot.

I kissed her like I did the day I told her I loved her, like we hadn't been apart all of these years. It was supposed to be sweet until I felt her grind on me and she sighed.

"Evan," she pleaded, and I had no Idea for what, but at this point I would give her everything she asked for. She pulled me in for another kiss as she rolled her hips again, teasing me to lose control.

"Darcy, you keep doing that and..."

Another roll of her hips made me throw all the right decisions out of the window. I threaded my hands through her hair, grabbing a handful of her hair and yanking it back. I kissed the column of her neck down to the swell of her tits as I yanked her low neckline down enough to show me her lacy bra. She leaned back as much as the space allowed her, pushing her chest to my face, so I could take a bite of her nipple and then the other.

She moaned as she trailed a hand down my chest, past my abs and down to my cock. It was so hard, thrusting up to meet her hands, to relieve some pressure.

"Darcy, let's go inside," I said against her neck, as I felt her tug at my belt.

"I need you now." She kissed me, opening my mouth with her tongue, undoing my belt and zipper. Her hand pulled my cock out, giving me a firm stroke as she spit on it to make it easier to stroke me. This felt like it was out of one of my fantasies I had been replaying for years.

Her dress had slid up to her waist giving me perfect access to her pussy so I could run a knuckle over her sensitive nub. She gasped, breaking our kiss as I continued to rub her, rolling her hips against my hand. Darcy was fucking ethereal when she was wrapped up in ecstasy. I inserted a finger in her tight pussy. She was so wet, letting my finger slide in with ease as she moaned again for me. The need to hear her scream my

name when she came was unbearable. I inserted another finger, rubbing the heel of my palm against her clit.

“Evan, please...” Her eyes were closed, lips slightly parted, a flush to her skin as her tits jiggled every time she gyrated her hips.

“Please what, you dirty girl,” I groaned, as she started to stroke my cock with more speed.

“Fuck me Evan. Please fuck me like I’m your dirty girl,” she whispered.

“God damn Darcy, you keep talking like that I’m going to fuck you in this car.” I groaned.

“Fuck me now, I have a condom in my purse.” She reached over the console to get her purse and pulled out a condom.

“Darcy let’s go inside, so I can lay you out on the bed and taste this pussy, making you come several times before I fuck you until you can’t feel your legs,” I said, pulling out my fingers and putting them in my mouth so I could taste her.

“Please now,” she opened the condom with her mouth.

I instantly wanted to be mad at her for having a condom. Did she plan to get laid tonight? But watching her be so confident in herself, I couldn’t say no. The Darcy I knew was timid, but this woman was taking charge and I loved it. I looked around the neighborhood and when I saw no one I took the condom from her and rolled it on. Darcy hovered over me while I pushed her panties to the side.

“Baby...”

She didn’t let me finish as she slid down on me, making me grunt from how fucking good she felt. Her moan was erotic as she took all of me in, it was enough to make me lose control. I leaned the seat back enough for her to lean forward and it allowed me to fuck her with quick hard thrusts.

“Yes,” Darcy moaned, holding on to my shoulders as I thrust into her. I knew I should be going slower, but I’ve needed this for too long and I couldn’t hold back. Grabbing a handful of her ass as I took her nipple in my mouth giving it a

long suck before I popped off and gave her other nipple the same attention. Darcy's gasps and moans made me want to give her an orgasm she wouldn't forget. I slid my hand in between us, using her wetness to circle her clit with ease.

"Ahhh," Darcy yelled.

"Does that feel good, you dirty girl?" I asked, as I felt that tingle in my balls warning me, I was about to come but not before Darcy.

"Yes," she gasped, as I upped my pressure on her clit.

"Your pussy takes my cock so well," I said, feeling her walls flutter and I knew she was getting ready to come.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," she chanted as I pinched her clit between my fingers. "Evan!"

The sound of my name on her lips and her pussy squeezing my cock, tipped me over the edge. I emptied myself into her with shallow thrusts.

Darcy leaned forward so we were flush together, panting as if we were one person, loving the feeling of her on top of me. This was so different from three years ago. Shy, timid Darcy was now a confident woman, who knew what she wanted and took it.

"Darcy," I said, pushing her up so I could look at her face.

"Evan," she said, and the tone of her voice made me nervous. When she didn't look me in the eye, I knew something was wrong. Did I read the situation wrong?

"Are you ok?" I asked gently.

"Uh yeah, I'm fine," she said, sounding anything but. She pulled her straps back up, tucking her tits back into her bra. "Thanks for a great time."

She opened the door to the car and got off quickly, leaving me and my dick still in a condom. I scrambled to take it off, shoving it into my jeans before I followed her. Her door slammed shut before I could reach it. What the fuck happened? I knocked on the door feeling like I just had whiplash.

“Darcy, let me in, we have to talk,” I said, a little loudly.

I knocked two more times before I gave up, worried I might wake up Mary and she might kick my ass. She was fiercely protective of Darcy, and I knew she slept with a shotgun. I got into my car staring at the house hoping she would open the door and come running out.

I took a deep breath before I turned my car on and backed out of the driveway. Seems like we will have our long overdue conversation later. I needed to just tell her everything, even if it meant she would never be with me again.

DEV

I walked into Misfits, dreading having to talk to my father, Lucio. I hated even calling that man my father. Since he came back into my mum's life, he'd been nothing but a pain in my ass, in our ass. My poor mum had had to deal with him so much when he found out about me.

I wish she would have just gone back to Ireland when she found out she was pregnant with me and stayed there, but my grandfather was trying to make a name for himself here. She had no choice to stay because what was a nineteen-year-old woman going to do by herself with no job or money. He used her as leverage but when the Caruso family didn't take the bait, I was given the Quinn name.

The only reason I tolerated that piece of shit was because it made my mum's life easier. If it weren't for my younger sister, I would have moved us out of here and far away, but my mum had a moment of weakness back in Denver. He whispered sweet nothings and made promises that he had no intention of bringing her to Mountain View. Once she was pregnant with my sister, he reeled her in with a promise of something better. Things were great at first but like always he showed his true colors.

The club was packed with people drinking and dancing. I nodded at the guy who guarded a door that led to the offices and the fight ring I had heard about. He opened the door letting me through. I walked down a couple of hallways, following the path that Lucio had described to me, to get to his office.

I saw my half-brother Giovanni and Evan, looking at some paperwork in the hallway that led to Lucio's office. Once I got closer, Giovanni looked up at me, giving me a nod.

Evan looked at me and smiled. "Hey man, it's been a while since I've seen you."

He extended his hand out and I shook it. "He's left us alone while I assume he was working on this. The garage has kept me busy, too."

"That's good," Giovanni slapped my back and then rubbed my head. We were seven years apart, but he made it seem like I was much, much younger than him. He was fiercely protective of Ava and me, trying to keep Lucio's attention away from us.

I fucking loved him for it. I was a lost cause, but Ava didn't need to be anywhere near Lucio. She was a girl so he hadn't felt the need to give his whole 'you have to be a man speech' but I knew how he felt about women. They were objects to him, a way to make alliances with people by selling off your daughter.

"What are you doing here?" Evan asked.

"He called." I nodded towards the door that was what I assumed was Lucio's office.

"Cazzo, what the hell did he want?" Giovanni said, looking pissed.

I shrugged, "I don't know, he didn't say. He just asked to come down to the club, that he had something to talk to me about."

Evan and Giovanni looked at each, as though a silent conversation happened with that one look from each other.

"Go home Devlin. I'll tell father that you got held up with a job from me." Giovanni nodded to the exit. "I want to know what he has in mind before you go in there and you can't say no shit with what he asks you."

"I don't want you getting in trouble for me," I said, hating how he always stuck his neck out for me.

“Lucio is wanting to do some crazy shit. I think it would be smart if we figure out what he wants before he forces you to do something we know you aren’t going to like,” Evan said, rubbing his chin.

“What the hell is...”

The door to Lucio’s office opened, cutting my words off.

“Ah Devlin, I was wondering if you had gotten here yet,” Lucio said from the door, looking like a lion in sheep’s clothing. He was decked out in a suit that probably cost more than our monthly expenses.

“I was actually going to talk about him doing a job for us,” Giovanni said, trying to get me out of whatever they thought was going on.

“It can wait. Devlin, my office now,” Lucio said, with an authoritative tone, that ended the conversation. He had spoken and now I had to listen.

“Yes, sir,” I said, nodding at the guys before I walked towards Lucio.

I walked through the door, seeing an over-the-top office that looked more for show than anything else. Lucio loved to show everyone he was at the top of the food chain by the things he wore and the stuff he owned.

I hated how gaudy he was, and it was unnerving when I had to be out in public with him. Thankfully it wasn’t too often, but enough that I hated it when it happened. I sat down in the chair in front of his desk, dreading this meeting even more. What the hell was Lucio getting into that made Giovanni and Evan so worried.

“Would you like a drink?” he asked.

“Sure,” I said, figuring whatever was going on might be worse than I could imagine. I continued looking around hating that I was here, anxiety grew in me, making me feel like that small boy who was always worried about his father’s next move.

“Glenmorangie Signet,” he said, leaving a tumbler in front of me. “I know you like your coffee, and you can definitely taste it in this scotch.”

I hated when he made me feel special by remembering some stupid fact about me. That’s how he got under your skin, made you feel special like you meant more to him than you actually thought.

“Thanks,” I said, not falling for his trap. “So, what did you want to see me for?”

“How is the garage? How is Jaime treating you?” he asked me, ignoring my question.

“Good. Jaime is great.” I gave him the cliff notes version because I wanted to get out of here.

“Jaime says you are really exceptional. You handle the customers well, your work ethic is impeccable and you take initiative,” he said, as leaned back in his chair.

I nodded irritated that he asked me about the garage when he already knew.

“I think it’s time you start making money here with me on a regular basis,” he said before he took a sip of his scotch. I did the same, thinking I was going to need it, for whatever he had planned. “I remember you liked to fight in high school.”

“I was in two fights.” I wanted to roll my eyes because I think I knew where this was heading.

“I’m going to put you in the cage here,” he said, with a huge smile on his face. When I didn’t say anything at first, his face turned to anger for just a moment before he regained his composure. I was no fucking fighter. I stayed in shape, made sure I could defend myself but to actually fight in a somewhat professional setting, I was shit. “I know this might be a surprise for you but I think it will be a great opportunity for you.”

Fuck me and this fucking delusional motherfucker.

“It is a surprise, but I don’t think my fighting skills are worthy of your cage matches.” I had to make this seem like I

wasn't good enough because if I flat out said no, he would be offended, and I didn't need to go there.

"Nonsense, you're my son, you have that instinct. Giovanni is an excellent fighter, but his time is needed elsewhere," he said, finishing his drink. "I think this would be perfect. I'll set you up and I'll make sure we ease you into this."

His phone rang and he answered it right away, changing to Italian quickly. I took that as my cue to leave, downing the rest of my drink before I left. As soon as I opened the door, Giovanni and Evan were still in the hallway. They looked at me with worried expressions and I knew there was something else going on.

"What did he want?" Giovanni asked.

"He said he wants me to start fighting," I responded and Evans' eyes widened.

"Che cazzo," Giovanni cursed but he looked relieved. I knew that there was definitely more going on but knowing Giovanni, he'd keep me out of it for as long as possible.

HAVING your father be a Scarface wannabe was exhausting. He always wanted me to be some version of him. I felt bad for Giovanni because he was the spitting image of our father and Lucio was grooming him for when he would take over the business. I know this is all my brother knows but I can't imagine doing what he is doing.

I grabbed another battery from our stock room, taking it to a Honda CRV I was working on. I set it on the rolling table I used that had all my tools on it. I rolled it to the front of the car as I looked at the worn tires, thinking I was going to have to call Martha and recommend new ones.

"Dev!" Jaime, my boss, yelled from his office.

I checked the clock, registering that it was three in the afternoon as I wiped my hands on a rag, walking to his office.

“What’s up boss?” I asked, leaning against the door frame.

“I’m about to head out. I need you to lock up and open the garage tomorrow.” He threw me the keys and I caught them one handed. “There is also going to be a drop off in about an hour so make sure you don’t leave until that is completed.”

I nodded, hating that I had to be here for the drop off, but that was one of the easier things to do that was associated with my father.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, kid.” He stood up and clapped my shoulder as he passed me.

“See you tomorrow,” I said, throwing the keys in the air and catching them. Jaime hauled ass out of the garage giving me the space I thrived in. I called Martha, suggesting tires and worked out a deal with her. She would replace two today and two in a couple of weeks. I turned the music up but low enough to hear someone or the drop off dudes as I continued to work on Martha’s car.

I tightened the last lug nut when I heard a hello. It was feminine voice and I figured it was Martha.

“Give me a second!” I yelled. I stood up grabbing a rag to wipe my hands off, throwing it over my shoulder as I walked to the front and noticed a blonde woman turned away from me. “How can I help you?”

She turned around quickly, and I noticed it was Darcy. I had seen her around, but we never talked except for the coffee I picked up every week with my sister. I knew Evan and her had history. He had talked about her when she showed up at the club with the new girl from Texas. She was a beautiful woman, with a lot of curves, and big green eyes.

“Hey Dev, I really need your help.” She smiled looking worried.

“What can I do?” I asked.

“My car won’t start. It did this a few days ago and it started on the third try but now it’s not wanting to start up,” she said quickly.

“Is it at the coffee shop?” I asked, looking at the clock, seeing I still had about another twenty minutes to wait for the drop off.

“Yes,” she said, tucking her blonde hair behind her ear. “Do you think you can come and take a look at it?”

“I’m actually waiting for someone and I’m alone. If you can wait until they get here, and I finish with...”

“Yo Dev!” I turned around to see Marco and Geraldo walking in from the back door with two duffle bags each. I nodded at them.

“They are who I was waiting for. Give me five minutes and we can drive the tow truck to the coffee shop.” I said, looking back at the guys again to make sure they weren’t doing anything stupid.

“Oh my god, thank you!” she said, looking relieved.

I walked to the back to see them bringing in another set of bags. This was a lot of cash, more than I’ve ever seen them bringing in before.

“Where’s Jaime?” Marco asked, looking towards the area Darcy was in. I knew Evan wanted to keep her far from this and she didn’t need to get mixed up in this bullshit.

“He left about an hour ago, left me to lock up,” I said, trying to get his attention away from where Darcy was.

Geraldo narrowed his eyes at me like I was lying. “Boss wants to talk to him. He says he’s not answering his calls.”

“I’ll pass on the message,” I said, crossing my arms across my chest, showing them I wasn’t intimidated. There was nothing to hide except that I was his son. I didn’t broadcast it and surprisingly he didn’t either. He had his heir; he didn’t need another.

“See to it that you do. I’ll let Lucio know we left it with you,” Marco said, as he hit Geraldo on the shoulder and they left.

Once the door slammed shut, I turned the deadbolt, feeling better that they were out. I locked up the office because there

was no way in hell that money was going anywhere on my watch, but I didn't think anyone would fuck around the garage.

Most people knew Lucio and knew what he would do if they fucked him over. I washed my hands quickly, wiping as much of the grime and sweat from my face.

“You ready?” I asked, as I walked over to Darcy .

She looked up at me really slow like she was drinking me in. We stared at each other for a moment.

Fuck me, she was fucking gorgeous but why was she looking at me like that?

“Uh yeah, I'm ready.” She cleared her throat while a slight blush rose to her cheeks.

I nodded, opening the door for her, wondering what the hell was going on. We jumped into the truck, and it was silent on the entire two-minute drive. It wasn't uncomfortable or weird, but I just couldn't get the way she looked at me out of my head.

Normally the women in town didn't pay me any attention except those few women who wanted to take me to their bed so they could scratch that bad boy itch they had. I preferred to entertain the tourists that floated through here, less gossip to go around and most of them were people just looking for a few hours to get lost in someone.

Once we arrived at the coffee shop, Darcy instructed me to go to the back, where her car was at. It was a black Mercedes SUV that looked fairly new. I exited the truck, going straight to the car, and attempted to start it. The lights turned on but there was no sound of the starter trying to start the car. After popping the hood, I went through a check list but when I went through everything, I knew I needed to bring it back to the shop.

“Do you have any idea what might be wrong?” Darcy asked, as I shut the hood.

“I have a few guesses, but I won't have any idea until I get it to the shop and test my theories,” I said, wiping my hands on

my coveralls.

“So, it’s not an easy fix?” She looked disappointed. “This is Mary’s car. We use it to go to work.”

“Not easy enough for you to drive it now. I’m sorry,” I said, starting the process of hooking her car up to the truck.

“Shit,” I heard her whisper. “When will you know how bad it is?” she asked as she watched me finish getting it strapped in.

“I should know by tomorrow,” I said, checking that everything was secure. “I can drive you home if you need me too.”

“Really? That would be great.” She looked relieved.

“Hop in,” I said, getting into the truck and turning it on. The entire way to her home, I kept getting side glances and I would kill to know what Darcy was thinking.

DARCY

The coffee shop was busy for a Friday at seven in the morning. It seemed everyone didn't want to make coffee at home and came here to satisfy their caffeine addiction. Most people would say they hate the rush, but I lived for it. Making coffee, getting pastries and hearing people groan like coffee was a balm for their soul gave me great satisfaction. I knew it was weird, but I liked knowing I was helping people get their ass into gear.

"I love you," Jeremy said, as he took a coffee from me.

I laughed because Jeremy was barely eighteen, but that didn't stop him from saying his 'I love yous' and constantly asking me out.

"I was talking to you, not the coffee, Darcy," he said, winking at me.

I laughed again because this kid was relentless. "I'm pretty sure you're talking to the coffee, kid."

He rolled his eyes at the word kid, but he did feel like one to me, since I was nine years older than him. He had just started his first year of college and I knew it was a matter of time before he was chasing those college girls.

"One day Darcy, you will say yes to me."

"I doubt it." I laughed as I walked to the register to help the next customer. I looked up to see Dev and his little sister Ava, who was looking over at Jeremy, with hearts in her eyes. When Dev noticed his sister was looking at Jeremy, he scowled.

“Really, Ava?” His voice was rich and raspy, giving me goosebumps.

She shrugged. “He’s cute.”

“What can I get you?” I chuckled.

“Do you have those amazing scones?” Ava asked, looking through all the pastries behind the glass. “I swear that woman can make shit taste good.”

“Ava, really?” Dev looked annoyed but I also saw the fondness he held for his sister. They usually came once a week before Ava went to high school. It gave me a new perspective on Dev because of all the rumors I heard that said he was involved with Lucio, and that he was possibly his son too.

That tidbit scared the crap out of me at first, on top of his silent disposition and his intimidating presence. He was someone I stayed away from until I saw him with Ava. There was something about a man who had a soft spot for family that made me turn into mush. His beautiful eyes didn’t help either or those lips or that hard body I noticed when he helped me with Mary’s car. Dev was *hot*.

“You know her pastries are delectable,” Ava said, still eyeing the pastries looking a little disappointed.

“I have more scones in the back, Ava.” I smiled at her.

“Darcy, I love you.” She looked up at me, relieved.

I laughed again. “It seems like everyone does when I give them pastries and coffee. What else can I get you guys?”

“I’ll take a mocha latte,” Ava said, still looking at the pastries.

“Surprise me,” Dev said, with a quirk of his lip.

I should know by now that’s what he was going to say because he said it every time. The first time he had no idea what he wanted, so that’s when he started saying “Surprise me.” I bit my lip nervously because until recently I didn’t have much interaction with him until he started coming in with his sister.

Every week I looked forward to him coming in and having him try out different coffees, seeing what he liked and didn't like. I swear it felt like foreplay, like we were flirting in a weird way and I'd like to think something might have happened between us—even if it was just a casual fuck—, until I slept with Evan.

Fuck.

I told myself after sleeping with him, that it would get him out of my system, but now I wasn't so sure. I blame the dry spell I was in, making me think with my vagina instead of my brain.

“I should have Mary's car ready by this afternoon,” Dev said, pulling me from my thoughts.

“Great,” I said, as I turned around to start working on their order, grabbing the scones first, setting one down in front of Ava with a cinnamon roll for Dev. I made their coffees on auto pilot as I cursed myself for thinking of Evan again.

Once I was finished, I set both coffees down, about to ring up their order but Dev never waited. He handed me thirty dollars, “See you later.”

I watched him leave with Ava talking animatedly next to him, he glanced back at me as he opened the door with an intense stare that always made me feel like he saw more than he let on. I took a deep breath to calm my crazy emotions, then I got back to work. The constant flow of people made the day go by really fast, and when I made my last coffee for the day, I was more than ready to leave.

Mary turned on the Rolling Stones while I cleaned the front. They were her favorite band to listen to while she prepped for the next day. I jammed out to “Miss You” as I closed out the register, singing along with Mary, moving my hips to the music. It was the perfect way to end the day, singing and dancing the stress out of my body.

Once we finished most of our closing duties, I made my way to the back for a glass of water. Mary was labeling and

putting things into the freezer, while I leaned back and took a break.

“You feeling better?” she yelled, from the freezer.

I stilled, because I could never get anything past Mary. I’m sure she knew something was wrong the day after I slept with Evan. I bit my lip wondering how much I wanted to tell her because let’s be real, I told Mary everything. She was the only person who knew the truth about the real reason why Evan and I broke up. By this point, I felt like a broken record except this time, I had slept with him, then left him with his dick out in my driveway.

“I slept with Evan,” I blurted out. My brain decided I just needed to get it out.

She walked out of the freezer with her eyebrows so high up they almost reached her hair line. “Did you say you slept with Evan?”

I nodded my head not sure how she was going to react to this piece of information, hoping disappointment wasn’t the reaction I would get. I hated disappointing Mary.

“Wow, I didn’t expect that,” she said, leaning against a table in front of me. “I take it things didn’t go how you planned or wanted?”

“I was the one to leave this time, after I freaked out.” I was embarrassed because now that I said it aloud, I felt childish.

“Did he say something wrong? How did you end up sleeping with each other? Did you guys talk or was it just sex? The heat of the moment?” Mary fired off the questions and I knew she was still in disbelief.

“It was in the heat of the moment and after we...” I stopped because I felt heat creeping up my cheeks.

“Did he at least make you come?” Mary said with a curious face. “I hope he did because that is the least that man could do after he left you promising to be back, but didn’t keep that promise.”

“Mary!” I hid my face behind my hands. Of course, she would ask that. She had been trying to get me to date for years, saying a woman needed to get satisfied every so often because we fucking deserved it. The least a man could do for us was to give us orgasms.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she said, smirking even though I was glaring at her. “Maybe you just needed to fuck him out of your system?”

“That did cross my mind, but I don’t think that is the case,” I admitted, hating that I was having this conversation with her.

“So, you haven’t talked since then or seen him?” she asked, looking pensive.

I shook my head. “He’s stopped by a few times at the house, but I pretended I wasn’t home. I think I’m done,” I said, feeling a little relieved. “I can’t keep thinking one day he’s going to come back to me, when I know he’s not.”

“You didn’t talk afterwards?” she asked. “You didn’t ask him what the hell was taking so long and why he just left you in the dark?”

I took a deep breath. “I freaked out, left him in the car as I ran into the house because I couldn’t believe we had sex.”

I couldn’t believe I demanded him to fuck me.

Mary smirked as she shook her head. “Darcy honey, you should have just said your peace.”

“I know,” I said, feeling ready to start letting go. “I don’t know why I slept with him but once it was over, I felt like there was no point in talking. We are both living separate lives, just like he wanted and I was tired of waiting for him.”

“I think it is time Darcy, I know you still love him, but I can guarantee he is different and so are you. Working for Lucio has definitely changed him. What your hopes and dreams used to be are different, and a life with him might not be as fulfilling as you thought it was going to be.” She walked up to me, extending her arms out, inviting me in for a hug.

I stepped into her embrace, and it felt like I had a weighted blanket on me, snuffing out all my anxiety with her warm touch and soothing fragrance. I audibly sighed, feeling better than I had since I slept with Evan.

“I love you Mary,” I said, pulling my arms out and embracing her with a tight squeeze.

“I love you too child,” I could hear the emotions in her voice. “Now I hear Dev is finishing the car today.”

“Yes ma’am,” I said, pulling away from her.

“Now that is a man I think you need to ride.” She smiled. “What do they say? Save some gas, ride a mechanic?”

I shook my head trying to hide my laugh but failed miserably.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I said, taking another sip of my water.

“I’m sure you will.” She grinned, going back to prepping for tomorrow. I finished closing up my end before walking to the garage that wasn’t too far away.

As I got closer, I noticed the two front garage doors were opened, giving me a great view of Dev bent over, looking under the hood of a car. He had his overalls tied at his waist with no shirt on and my mouth dried up, the muscles on his back rippled as he moved. He shifted up to showcase his mouth-watering physique and he leaned against the car inspecting a part in his hand. He had black stains smeared on random places of his body, accentuating the muscle he had. Did this guy purposely paint it on his body?

“Do you need something?” A voice pulled me from drooling over Dev.

“Oh yeah, I was here to pick up a car,” I said, as I saw Dev out of the corner of my eye walking towards us.

“Jaime, she’s here for the Mercedes.” Dev’s rich voice almost felt like a caress. “I’ll take care of her.”

I bet you will.

I wanted to roll my eyes at myself. Apparently, Mary had rubbed off on me and here I was thinking about Dev doing nasty things to me.

“Ok, but don’t take too long, we need to finish that van soon,” Jaime said, walking away from us quickly.

“You got it, boss,” he said, not sparing a glance at Jaime. His focus was on me, and I liked it. “Come on Darcy, let’s get your keys.”

He motioned me to follow him, as he walked into the front office. I got an amazing view of his muscular back and the huge tattoo of a symbol trailing down his spine. All the tattoos on his back mesmerized me and I craved to see what they meant or if they had any meaning at all, especially the one on his spine. It was beautiful.

“Did it hurt?” I blurted.

“Did what hurt?” he asked, as he turned around glancing at me before he bent down to get my keys from a safe.

“The tattoo on your spine,” I said admiring his other tattoos, noticing a stag on one of his pecks.

“The one that hurt the most was the one on my ribs,” he lifted his arm up showing me what looked like a tree but in the shape of a circle.

“Do they all have some sort of meaning?” I asked.

He chuckled. Whoa, it was a deep rumbly laugh and it lit his whole face.

“No, unfortunately, I lost a bet and got this guy because of it.” He turned his forearm to show me a tattoo of a minion.

I laughed because it was so random and cute. “Shit sorry, but I didn’t expect that.”

He shrugged with a small smile on his face. “My brother and sister ganged up on me. I’m actually ok with it, it reminds me of a good memory.” The fondness on his face made me melt.

“Then it does have meaning, family,” I said, smiling at him as I enjoyed seeing a different side to Dev.

He looked back down at it and then at me with those gorgeous eyes of his. “You’re right, family.”

His intense gaze usually was hard to hold but today it felt different, it felt comforting. He cleared his throat, breaking the moment and I didn’t know if I was sad or mad that he broke the spell. Handing the keys to me, he told me that the balance had already been taken care of. He nodded his head at me before going back into the garage and getting back to work.

I got a glimpse of his gorgeous backside before I made my way to the Mercedes, not expecting to like Dev the way I did, but the only thing that really held me back from pursuing him was he might be related to a man I loathed.

EVAN

I couldn't help myself, ever since Darcy and I had sex, she had been on my mind constantly. The feel of her against me, her soft cries, the way she took charge and the way she said my name as she came. *Fuck*, I've missed her so much. I passed by her home again to see if she was there and wasn't surprised she wasn't.

She had been avoiding me since that night and I didn't have her number anymore, so I had to resort to passing by her house or the coffee shop. Ok maybe it was more like stalking but I really wanted to talk to her.

No, I needed to talk to her. I was an idiot to let her go but I couldn't stay away anymore. I still loved her, and I made a promise that I intended to keep. Waiting till I was away from Lucio wasn't an option anymore. There had to be a way for me to make it work, I would do anything to make it work.

Deciding to do something differently, I pulled the note I had written earlier and attached a camellia flower to it. Exiting the car, I jogged to her front door to leave it there hoping she would read it. I left my number, and I sent a silent prayer to the universe to help me out.

Please let her call me.

I looked over at Mary's house, checking to see if she was home because I was desperate enough to endure her wrath just to talk to Darcy. But it looked like no one was home, so I made my way to my car, feeling defeated.

I hadn't gone inside the coffee shop yet because I didn't want to cause a scene, but it was looking like that might be my only option. She had until the weekend to talk to me before I gave her no choice.

We were long overdue for this conversation. Three long years had passed and my guilt was eating me alive. I regretted leaving her all those years ago because Darcy was my sun and moon. She was the reason I woke up every morning. I couldn't wait to spend my days making her laugh, cry, and feeling stupidly happy. I rubbed my chest absentmindedly as I started my car. Lately it had felt like I was having a hard time breathing, like I couldn't take a full breath the longer we were apart.

My days had been consumed with her but tonight, I knew I needed to get my head on straight. It was our big fight night that had enticed some rich guys to come and check us out. Lucio said it had to be a great night, no matter what.

On big fight nights, I usually came into the club right before we opened to make sure everything was running smoothly. I made myself available in case fighters were being unruly, drama queens or had any concerns.

Today, I had come in really early because staying at home had been brutal and I could use the extra time to make sure tonight was a perfect night.

The drive to Monroe was traffic-free, leaving me to go through lists in my head on what I had to do when I arrived at the office. I parked my car in the rear, using the back entrance. It was quiet as I walked into my office, since we wouldn't open for a few hours. I looked at the roster for tonight, immediately seeing something wrong.

First thing I noticed was that Dev was fighting someone who had more experience than him. I had paired him with a shit fighter since it was his first time. Second thing I noticed was Cal was paired up with Brent Alvaro. That psycho Giovanni had to step in and stop him from possibly killing his opponent.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I Immediately dialed Giovanni's number hoping that maybe it was him who had changed the schedule. If that was the case, it would be an easy fix and I could get away with changing up the roster.

Now, if Lucio changed it then everyone was fucked, especially Dev and Cal. Giovanni answered but didn't give me the answer I had hoped for. Lucio had changed it.

Shit, I hated that man even more and hated that he meddled in my fucking shit. I knew why he did it. In his last fight Cal brought in a shit ton of money. This fight would certainly make the crowd go even wilder, making more money flow and people making more confident bets. Cal definitely needed these bigger fights to pay his debt off to Lucio but at what cost?

I sat in my office trying to figure out a way to save either of them the ass whopping they might receive. Cal was an exceptional fighter, but this guy was a different breed and I'm pretty sure he was way out of his weight class too. I decided to skip protocol to give Cal a heads up. As my friend he deserved to know, to prepare for the fight properly with Aiden and Nathan since they always came to watch his back and patch him up if needed. I messaged Cal.

Lucio has you up against Brent Alvaro tonight.

Lucio was a fucking thief and always had someone making bets for him, making money the shit way, and if Cal lost he would be pissed. I'd hate to see what he would do if he lost, I wouldn't doubt he would have a lot of money riding on this fight.

Brent had made a name for himself, so I'm sure our regulars would definitely bet on him making Cal's winnings even greater. I took a deep breath, bracing myself for a night that might end badly. I debated on texting Dev, but decided against it because I felt like it might be worse than not knowing.

Everything else needed to go off without any problems tonight, so I went to work ensuring that. But when my phone went off, I froze when I saw Nathan's name.

“Hey,” I said, steeling myself from his wrath or worse, Aiden’s.

“How bad is this?” he asked.

“This guy is a machine,” I responded truthfully. “Last time he was in the cage, we had to stop the fight.”

“Seriously? What the fuck, Evan?” he snapped.

I felt guilty for a moment. “Nathan, you know I can’t do much. I had him down for someone else, but you know Lucio sees dollar signs when it comes to Cal.”

I was met with silence and I thought he had hung up until I heard him sigh. “I know. We’ll be there at nine and Jane is coming with us.”

“Is that a good idea?” I asked.

“No, but if this guy is as good as Cal says he is, then he’s going to need her,” he said, sounding a little unsure.

I remembered hearing she was a nurse, and it was probably for the best if they brought her. “Ok, but make sure one of you is with her at all times.”

“Cal would castrate us if we left her alone,” he chuckled, but it sounded forced.

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” I sighed. “Just stick together and tell Cal to be ready for anything.”

“I will, don’t do anything stupid Evan,” he said. He knew I had my hands tied but also that I would try and do everything I could to keep everyone safe.

“I won’t, there’s some things even I can’t change,” I said. “I’ll see you soon.”

I hung up thinking I would try and reason with Lucio, but I needed Giovanni for this to work. It would definitely take both of us to convince him he was making a mistake pairing both of them with people who had a big chance of kicking their ass, and Lucio couldn’t afford to lose.

Giovanni called me like he knew I needed him. He told me he would be right over, and we could figure out something to

do or talk to Lucio about the roster. He didn't have much interaction with the guys, but he knew they were good people and Cal was trapped in a shitty situation.

I walked upstairs, checking the bars, looking over the lists my bartender left me to order supplies or to make a suggestion. I went back downstairs to check the bar where the fights were held, making sure I put out the expensive scotch, whiskey and tequila. Lucio wanted our best for the high rollers that were coming in. We had a VIP section made just for them, and I had to make sure to talk to whomever was going to be manning the bar down here.

“Ah, Evan!” I looked up to see Lucio and Giovanni walking towards me. Just seeing him made me want to punch something.

“Hello Lucio,” I said, nodding at them, trying to gauge the expression on Giovanni's face to give me a clue on how this conversation was going to go.

“Everything ready for tonight?” he asked, looking around the area.

“Almost,” I said, preparing myself. “Sir, I think we need to change the roster back to what I had before.”

Lucio continued to look around for a moment before he looked at me. “Why would we do that?” He asked calmly and I saw that tell sign that I'd pissed him off. His eye twitched ever so slightly and his mouth turned down for just a millisecond.

“Dev has never done this before. We've seen him fight once and that was because he had to, not because he joined the fights here. He's inexperienced, and he doesn't know this is all for show. I think—”

“Dev will be fine, his opponent is a schmuck, and he is drunk most of the time,” Lucio glared at me like I had personally offended him. “He's my son, he will be fine.”

“That schmuck almost beat Cal,” I said, almost losing my cool.

“I think you’re thinking of Al, father,” Giovanni said, trying to help me.

Lucio looked at Giovanni like he was an idiot. “Either way we won’t be changing the roster.”

“Sir, we also need to reconsider Cal and Brent,” I said, feeling desperate. “Brent is clearly in a higher weight class and there is a very big possibility that Cal will lose this fight.”

“Alvaro is also unhinged, you really want to put Cal in jeopardy to not be able to pay you back?” Giovanni crossed his arms across his chest. “He might end up like that last fighter and then you will be really screwed.”

Lucio laughed. “Cal has paid his debt a long time ago, he’s an excellent fighter and makes more money than all of my fighters put together, which is why he is fighting Brent.” He slapped Giovanni’s shoulder, looking at the arena again like he was imagining the crowd and the money that would come in soon. “Everyone loves an underdog. Let’s hope he brings his hot nurse with him, and he doesn’t get his ass kicked. She can patch him up and then he will be ready for the next fight.”

This asshole. I can’t believe Cal has paid his debt and he is still stringing him along.

Giovanni and I shared a look of anger at this man.

“If she does come, maybe she can look after Dev. If what Evan says is true maybe she can also make sure he is taken care of.” Giovanni shrugged.

Fuck. Shit. Motherfucker.

I glared at Giovanni. The guys will lose their shit if she is forced into taking care of Dev. Lucio has never confirmed it but aside from Giovanni and myself, everyone else only suspected that Dev was Lucio’s son. There is no way they would agree for her to do anything for Lucio.

“That sounds like a great idea.” Lucio turned around, looking like he just won the lottery. “I’ll make her an offer she can’t refuse.”

I wanted to say something, anything to get him away from thinking about Jane but I knew it was going to be useless.

“Make sure tonight is perfect,” he said, to no one in particular as he walked away from us but turned around quickly. “I need the money from tonight to fund our other business adventures. So don’t fuck this up.”

He gave us a pointed look as he walked away. Dread pooled in my gut at the sound of his saying ‘our adventures’ like I would condone anything he did, especially sex trafficking.

“Seriously Giovanni?” I snapped, when Lucio was far away.

“Look, if she can help Dev, then I’m all for it.” He ran his hand through his hair. “We will keep an eye on her, and I’m sure they won’t let her go alone.”

“Why do I feel like this might be a shitshow?” I asked, feeling stressed already.

“When isn’t this a shitshow? Let’s get through tonight so we can focus on whatever he has planned next,” Giovanni said, nodding at me before he walked away.

I don’t think any amount of focusing would prepare us for what Lucio had in mind. That thought alone scared the shit out of me.

DEV

The day of my fight, I was on edge all day. Ava knew something was wrong, but I didn't want her to know about anything in my life that was attached to our father, so she had no clue that I was going to fight tonight.

"Why do I have a bad feeling something is going to happen tonight?" Ava asked, as she came into my room. I was packing a bag and sticking whatever I thought I was going to need for tonight. Thankfully I had packed the first aid kit before she came into my room.

"Nothing is going to happen," I said, with all the confidence I could muster. I hated when she worried about me, she was too young to do that and that was my job, not hers.

"Then why are you packing a bag? Are you not coming home tonight?" She sat down on my bed looking around my room.

"I might stay over at Evan's tonight, and I just want to be prepared if I do," I said, zipping up the bag.

"I wish you would just tell me what is going on. I'm old enough and I know that our father is a bad man," she said, with a hard sigh. She was frustrated, but if I could keep her from everything I would.

"I know you're old enough and mature enough but Ava, you don't need to know everything. Like you said, he's a bad man, there is nothing about what goes on with him that should worry you," I said, looking at her, seeing our father in her.

“That’s why I do what I do because I don’t want you anywhere near this world more than you have to be.”

“I’m in this world whether you like it or not,” she snapped. “That choice was taken away from me when he got our mother pregnant.”

I pulled her in for a hug. “I’m sorry, but I just want your life to be as normal as possible and that’s away from his bullshit.”

“That’s not fair, your life wasn’t normal, why should mine be?” she asked, muffled by my shirt.

“Because I didn’t have two older brothers who would murder anyone who fucked up my childhood,” I said, as I let her go.

She rolled her eyes at me. “You had Giovanni.”

“I didn’t know about Giovanni until I was almost done with high school. Now I gotta get going before I’m late.” I grabbed my bag and she followed me to the front door.

“Devlin, please be careful.” I glanced back to see her looking every bit the teenager she was. I knew when she used my full name, she was really worried.

“I will Ava, I’ll text you when I can, so you know I’m safe, and if I stay at Evan’s house.” I kissed her forehead, opened the front door and got into my Impala.

The drive to Misfits wasn’t too long from our home, it gave me enough time to get into the headspace I knew I was going to need for tonight. When I finally arrived, I entered through a side door like I was instructed, and Evan met me.

“Hey man, how’s it going?” he asked, as he showed me where I was going to wait and prepare for the fight.

I shrugged, “I guess, ok. I don’t know what to expect and I hate that.”

“I’m sorry. I wish he would have run it through Giovanni and I before he put you on the spot, maybe we could have dissuaded him,” he said, looking sad. “He’s really becoming

unpredictable, and it's getting hard for us to figure out what's going to happen next."

"It's not your fault, there is only so much you guys can do with that man," I said, knowing they did a lot for Ava and me that we didn't know about.

"Look, I'm going to be really honest with you. Lucio has put you up against a pretty decent fighter and I just want you to know that we had originally matched you up with a rookie," Evan said, looking stressed out as he stopped in front of a small room.

"Let me guess, he said I could do it because I was his son?" I sneered.

"He also said the guy was a schmuck, but I think he was thinking of the wrong person." He watched the hallway. "Look he's trying to get a big payout for something he has in the works and he's being irrational. You need to be prepared for this guy to come out swinging. He has no formal training but he's a big guy and he packs a punch."

I clenched my jaw, as my nerves got exponentially worse. "He has too much fucking faith in me. I'm not looking forward to hearing his disappointment."

"Just be quick and don't let your anger get the best of you." He nodded and clapped my shoulder. "I know it's not the best room, but Lucio gave away all the bigger rooms. I have to go, text me if you need something."

"Thanks, man," I said opening the door and it looked like a fucking utility closet with a chair. I sat my bag down on it, flipping the switch to turn the lights on. I changed into a pair of shorts, leaving my shirt off. I had no idea what the fuck I was doing but I stretched, trying to loosen my muscles as much as I could.

The room was too small, so I walked the length of the hall a few times to keep my body warm, punching the air here and there feeling like an idiot.

"Hey Dev." I turned around to see Candy in a skimpy outfit.

I grunted, not wanting to deal with her, and turned around to walk back to my cubby that made me feel like Harry Potter.

“Hey, are you fighting today?” She walked beside me and touched my shoulder. I pulled away from her regretting ever sleeping with her two years ago. Once she set her sights on Cal, Aiden and Nathan, she finally left me alone after months of telling her it wasn’t going to happen again.

“Come on Dev,” she purred, grabbing my arm. I pulled it out of her grasp quickly sneering at her.

“How many times do I have to tell you to fuck off, Candy? Don’t you fucking listen?”

“Oh, come one Dev, we had a great time together.” She tried to touch me again and I leveled her with a glare that had her hand stopping in mid-air.

“Look, I heard you were dumped by Cal and his friends but this,” I pointed at her and then me. “Isn’t going to happen.” I walked away and I was surprised when she didn’t follow me.

“One day Dev, you’ll wish you had taken me up on all my offers,” she yelled. “Once you realize your mistake, don’t come running back to me.”

I knew it was an empty threat, but my gut told me Candy was up to something, making me want to stay far away from her. She made me wonder if I should say something to the guys about her. I didn’t know why they kicked her to the curb, but they needed to make sure they left her there. That woman was a snake.

Once the girl in lingerie came for me everything felt like it was on fast forward. Lucio introduced me to a beautiful woman named Jane before my fight. He said that she would patch me up if I needed it. I looked at her belt with a whole bunch of supplies, for once grateful to Lucio. I knew it wasn’t because he cared, but because he had to protect his investment.

A blonde guy came with Jane but I paid no attention to him. I turned around to enter the cage to get this fight over

with but I was definitely not prepared for it. He landed a powerful punch that left me disoriented.

Jane pushed me onto a chair while she flashed a light in my eyes and put a cold pack against my face. The dude with Jane offered some sound advice, that left me suspicious until Jane said he knew Cal and had trained with him. So this had to be Nathan. I didn't know what the hell I was doing but I followed his advice that saved me from probably getting knocked out.

After I won the fight, Jane insisted she check my injuries and the only reason I went with her was because my face fucking hurt and I felt like I could trust her to make sure I was okay.

Walking into a room with Cal and his friends was a terrifying experience. I knew of Cal because I had seen plenty of his fights and the dude was a machine. His situation was complete shit; Lucio was a fucking shark and saw an opportunity to make some serious money.

When Jane told them she was going to fix me up, I almost said fuck it and left because Cal and Aiden were intimidating as hell. They never stopped glaring at me while Jane worked her magic. And I couldn't help but admire how beautiful she was. When Cal growled that she was theirs it all made sense why they were so protective of her.

So that's why they left Candy.

I said thanks to Jane, getting my ass out of there before they lost their shit. It wasn't hard to see they were on edge about Jane being away from them and they had no idea who the hell I was—or maybe they did know who I was—so I got it. I can't imagine what the hell Lucio did to make her tend to me, but I was grateful. She didn't need to help me after the fight, either.

Walking down the hall, feeling my body getting a little stiff, I noticed Giovanni was by the “room” they gave me, looking worried.

“Fratello,” I said, to get his attention. I only knew a little bit of Italian, but brother was a staple among all the curse words.

“Fratellino.” He looked relieved as he called me baby brother. “I heard you won but also took a good hit.”

“It hurt like hell, but Jane looked me over and told me I was fine. She patched up the split in my cheek, gave me an ice pack and told me to take some meds when I got home,” I said, lifting my hand up so he could see her handy work.

“That’s good, she bargained money off Cal’s debt to help you,” he said, looking around. That was one thing Giovanni taught me, was to always be careful of our surroundings. Just because we were Lucio’s sons didn’t mean we were safe, especially him since everyone knew he was his son.

“That explains why they were so tense when I was in the room,” I said, hearing the crowd from the fighting area. Cal must have just gone into the cage.

“Cazzo,” Giovanni cursed. “I have to go, the guy fighting Cal is pazzo and I need to make sure he stays in line. He almost killed the last guy he fought against. You should come by for dinner tomorrow. The piccolina misses you and Ava.”

Giovanni slapped my back, and he walked down the hallway. I was curious who Cal was fighting but I was also tired. Cal had never lost a fight and now he had a big reason to keep that record. I continued walking down the hallway, leaving out the door I came through. I made it to my Impala, throwing my bag in the back seat.

After I started the car, I pulled out my phone, texting Ava that I was fine and I would be home soon, when I noticed a few guys looking around a truck next to me. I instantly recognized one of them as Geraldo, making me suspicious as to who the truck belonged to.

I opened the door, standing and leaning on my door. “You guys need help?” I asked, trying to fish for information.

They looked at me like they had been caught, but relaxed when they noticed it was me.

“What do you want, Dev?” Geraldo looked at me with a bored expression, but I knew he was wary of me.

“I was just wondering if you needed help? Lucio had me sitting out here but didn’t say what for.” I said throwing out his name in hopes they would just tell me what they were doing, and I didn’t look suspicious.

“Boss just wants us to check on Cal and his friends’ rides,” one of the other guys responded.

I nodded, “Makes sense, he’s been worried about them for a while.”

Geraldo narrowed his eyes at me. “How do you know what he’s been worried about?”

“I heard stuff and today, he asked me to play nice with Jane and the guys. Get them to trust me, you know.” I was really talking out of my ass, but if they were there to fuck with their car, I felt instantly protective over Jane.

“Is that why he had Jane be your nurse today?” Geraldo asked me.

“Yeah, he says they might trust me after this,” I said, keeping my face emotionless as I started Geraldo down.

“Makes sense,” He shrugged. “Come on guys, there is nothing to see here.”

“Nice KO today man,” one of the other guys nodded at me as he walked by.

Once they left, I felt uneasy about the whole encounter. It didn’t make sense that Lucio would send them to *inspect* their truck. I walked around the vehicle making sure they didn’t leave anything on it like a tracking device. When I didn’t find anything, I decided to stay and watch it just in case. Leaving felt wrong, and I owed Jane something, so I pulled out my phone and entertained myself until they came out.

DARCY

I woke up feeling like something bad had happened. My stomach was in knots and my palms were clammy. Jane texted me yesterday afternoon that Cal had a fight, and that she was extremely worried. He was paired up with a guy who was a seasoned fighter, known to be a brutal fighter and shady as fuck. It was hard to find the words to comfort her, but I tried my best, asking for an update after the fight. I stayed up hoping to hear from her but when she hadn't texted by midnight, I went to bed hoping for the best.

It was hard to get out of bed this morning, since I had only about four hours of sleep. Once I remembered Jane never texted me, I was wide awake, anxious for an update. I also thought about Evan for a second, hoping he was helping them and that he was ok too.

Thankfully it was a busy morning, giving me little time to think or worry about Jane. It was mid-morning when I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket. Grabbing a breakfast taco and a few pastries, I charged them quickly before I went to the back and asked Mary to watch the front for a second.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket seeing a missed call from Jane and text from her saying he had won, but he wasn't doing well.

I called her immediately.

"Hey," she answered, sounding exhausted.

"What happened? Are you ok?" I asked quickly.

Jane went on to explain the entire night like she had to get it off her chest. Cal took a beating but managed to win the fight. Since they didn't go to the hospital Jane could only assume he had broken ribs and a concussion.

"Are you ok?" I was more worried about her.

"I don't know, but Darcy, I have never felt this kind of hate for another person. I fucking *hate* Lucio." The venom in her voice was a little startling but I could see where she was coming from. I hated him too.

"He is an awful fucking person, Jane, and I hope one day he gets what's coming to him." I let all my anger bleed into my tone.

"Me too, Darcy."

"I'm glad you're ok but I will call you after my shift," I said, glancing at the front, seeing the line was getting longer. "I also want to go out for drinks for my birthday, so we can talk about that."

"Shit, I'm sorry Darcy, I didn't mean to call you while you were working. Girl, you know I'm always up for a drink especially if it's to celebrate you. Call me later!" Jane made some kissing sounds.

"Bye girl." I smiled as I hung up the phone.

I was so glad she came to Mountain View, she was an amazing friend. I went back to the front to relieve a flustered Mary. She really did hate people, making me chuckle because why she thought opening a coffee shop was a good idea, still blew my mind.

Now that a weight had been lifted off my shoulders, I went back to work feeling so much better. Once lunchtime rolled around and things had settled down, I worked on getting things cleaned and reorganized. I wiped down the tables that some people had used and went into the back to bring in more pastries. The bell on the door signaled a customer and I walked out to see Dev walking to the counter in his coveralls. He normally didn't come in this late and usually only came in when Ava was with him.

His face was slightly swollen on one side, looking like he got punched in his face. I glanced down at his knuckles seeing them split and bruised too.

“Hey are you ok?” I wondered what the hell had happened to him.

“Oh, yeah, I’m fine,” he said, looking a little embarrassed. “A run-in with a disgruntled out-of-towner.”

“You want an ice pack?” I offered, because for some reason seeing him like this made me uneasy.

“That would be great, my head is killing me,” he said, with an uncomfortable look on his face.

“Hold up,” I said, going into the back for an ice pack we kept back here for emergencies and some ibuprofen.

“That boy looks like hell,” Mary peeked out. When she saw what I had in my hand she raised her brows at me. “Darcy, I didn’t ever think I would see you being nice to the opposite sex.”

I rolled my eyes at her.

“I think he’s a good kid; he might just be in a shit situation,” Mary said, before I left to the front.

“I thought you didn’t believe in the rumors?” I asked quietly, so he didn’t overhear us.

“That boy looks like he’s been through rough times, and I wouldn’t doubt it was at the hands of his father.” She looked angry for a moment. “His mother hasn’t said so in so many words, but I know for a fact they used to be together. I do know he is one hell of a brother to his sister and helps his mom as much as he can.”

All these questions entered my mind, and I wanted nothing more than to pick Mary’s brain about him, but he was waiting for me.

“This isn’t the last time we talk about this,” I warned, walking back out to see Dev looking at the pastries.

“Here is the ice pack and this should help too,” I said, grabbing a water bottle and showing him the pills I had in my hand.

“Fuck, thanks Darcy.” The way he said my name was like a caress. I know it wasn’t anything remotely sexual but it gave me butterflies. He was a man who didn’t say much but when he did with that deep raspy voice of his, it always did something to me.

He grabbed the pills and popped them into his mouth while he took a long drink of water. I watched his tattoos and the cords of muscle move as he drank the water, thinking he had a sexy neck.

Could necks even be sexy because Dev’s was hot.

I looked away quickly before he could catch me staring. “What can I get you?” I asked wiping the counter again.

He wiped a few droplets of water by his mouth with the back of his hand as he looked at the menu. “Uh... I don’t remember the name of the drink, but you made it for me two weeks ago. I think it had cinnamon in it.”

I bit my lip as I thought about what I had made him. “Oh! I made you a brown sugar and cinnamon latte,” I said, catching him staring at my lips.

“That sounds good.” He looked away quickly. “I also wanted a variety of pastries. Maybe a dozen?”

“Ok, anything in particular?” I asked, as I got to work making his coffee.

“At least two scones, please and the rest can be whatever,” he said, before finishing the water bottle I had given him.

I set his coffee down in front of him, glancing at him but we caught each other’s eyes. My cheeks felt warm from his intense and gorgeous gaze.

“Do you also have small pastries that look like sandwiches? They come in different colors?” he asked, looking embarrassed.

“Macarons?”

“Yes. My niece loves those, and I’ll be seeing her tonight,” he said, giving me a nod.

“Yeah, I think we have some in the back. Any specific flavors?” I asked.

“Surprise me,” he said, picking up his coffee and taking a sip. I stared as he licked his lips before I headed to the back.

What the hell was wrong with me?

Why was every little action he did so sexual to me? I know I found him attractive, but I felt like I hadn’t gotten laid in weeks, even though Evan did leave me more than satisfied.

Mary stared at me with raised brows as I just stood there. I gave her a sheepish smile before I opened a small box and filled it with macarons. Grabbing another box for the pastries and taking a deep breath before I walked out to Dev. He was drinking his coffee as I looked through the pastries, deciding what to get him.

“Is there a special occasion tonight?” I asked, grabbing the scones.

“Dinner with Ava, my brother and his family,” he said, taking another sip of his coffee.

“That sounds nice,” I said, realizing I really didn’t know much about Dev. He only ever had Ava with him and I knew his mom because of Mary but I had never once heard about his brother, much less his niece. I grabbed the last few pastries and put the box next to the macarons.

“This is really delicious, Darcy,” he said, pulling out his wallet.

“Thanks, it’s one of my favorites.” I couldn’t help the blush that surfaced with his cerulean gaze that kept studying my mouth.

“Thanks for sharing your favorite drink with me,” he said, laying down money while he grabbed the boxes and coffee.

“Uh, you’re welcome,” I said, watching him leave.

“I’ll see you soon.” He said it like it was a promise, pushing the door with his back. He left me speechless. I didn’t know what was happening but for once I felt giddy at the prospect of something new and different. There was also that little voice in my head reminding me who his father might be. He didn’t seem like his father but being tied to that man was almost enough for me to stop whatever was happening.

The door to the kitchen swung open. Mary leaned against the door frame, holding the door open. “Well, now I know what to get you for your birthday. I’ll make sure I put a bow on him before I deliver him.” Mary cackled going back to work.

I smiled, shaking my head at her brand of craziness but I didn’t think I would be disappointed with that present one bit.

EVAN

I pulled up outside my childhood home for my weekly dinner with my mom and my sister. Ever since Cal almost lost his fight, it seemed I was putting out more fires every day. Now that he was in contact with someone who was in the business of trading women, Lucio was becoming even more manic. Every day it was the same hue and cry, money, more money, we need even more money!

Giovanni and I had been trying relentlessly to get him to do something different, even buying a shit ton of drugs. He was dead set on trafficking women. It's where the money was at, he said, and he didn't want to miss out on a big payday. I took a deep breath trying to release some tension from my body.

I need a massage, fuck that, I need a spa day. I need to get away.

I got out of my car smelling sukiyaki as I walked up to the front door and opened it without knocking. The house smelled amazing. I inhaled deeply as I made my way to the kitchen. My sister and ma were singing to some song saying they wanted to dance with someone.

Since my father had died, my ma and sister lived alone in this house, even though my ma begged me to come home. I was too worried that they would get hurt because of me if something did go wrong, so I lived alone. They were safer away from me.

I leaned against the door frame enjoying the sight before me. My sister Kaili had a clump of rice in her hands, singing and swaying her hips. At the same time, my mom stirred a pot with both of them looking happy and carefree. This is one of the reasons I did what I did. This is why I put up with Lucio, why I did shady shit, and why I sold my soul to the devil. The thought of Darcy threatened to make my mood sour. I regretted not trying to make it work, but the tiny voice in my head always said she would have left me anyways.

My sister has been cancer free for one year now. It was a rough journey to get her here but completely worth it. I just wished my father was here to see it.

“Wow! Dinner and a show,” I said, walking through the threshold of the kitchen, when both women squealed in surprise.

“Musuko, you scared the crap out of us,” my ma said, coming up to me—calling me son in Japanese—, and giving me a hug. “I’ve missed you, Ren.”

“Yeah Ren, it feels like we haven’t seen you in a while,” my sister said as she came to hug me and my ma together. My family had always used my Japanese middle name, and it was comforting but my ma always said she wanted me to carry a piece of my heritage with me. She also said I was the spitting image of my grandfather, who I was named after.

I kissed both of them on their heads before we all pulled away.

“How has work been?” Kaili asked me, and I always felt guilty for lying to them.

“Good, busy and a little stressful,” I said, trying to keep to the truth as much as possible. They thought I worked for a startup software company as a data engineer. My boss was a pain in my ass, but I stayed because I had been promoted and earned a hefty salary.

I actually was a data engineer, working freelance and only took on a couple of jobs here and there, usually on a referral basis. This started to bring me a decent income on top of what

I got from Lucio. That money is what I used to help my ma because working on one income in Mountain View was extremely hard, especially when they took out a second mortgage to pay for my sister's medications and anything else she might have needed.

"You're always stressed out," my ma said to me as I helped my sister with the rice while ma served all of us.

"It's my big boy job, isn't stress a part of it?" I laughed. "How's school Kaili?"

"School is good!" Her face lit up in excitement. "I will start my clinicals next semester and I'm so excited."

I smiled at her excitement, glad that she was getting to finish her nursing degree. My ma had tears in her eyes, and I knew she was feeling the same way. We were able to give my sister a chance at life. My mom hoped she would stay cancer free for as long as possible because there was always a chance it could come back.

Kaili talked about her classes as we set the table, getting more excited at starting her clinicals and finally getting her nursing degree. Once we sat down for dinner, our conversation slowed easily. My ma was a teacher at Monroe University, teaching economics and statistics. She talked about her students and gave us a few laughs. I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket as I was eating the last of my dinner.

I fished it out of my pocket to make sure it wasn't Giovanni or Lucio. Nathan's name popped up in a text message and it made me curious what it was about.

It's Darcy's birthday and we are going out for drinks tonight at Group Therapy. Just thought you'd like to know.

I stared at the text, trying to figure out what the hell I wanted to do.

"You ok, musuko?" I snapped up to see my ma looking at me with raised brows.

"Uh, yeah just got a text from a friend," I said, putting my phone down.

“Oh, just a friend?” Kaili waggled her eyebrows at me.

I rolled my eyes at her. “Yes, it was my friend Nathan.”

“Is this the same Nathan that is friends with Aiden and Cal?” she asked, leaning forwards.

“Don’t even think about it,” I said, getting grossed out. “First, they are my friends and second of all, they are too old for you.”

My ma laughed, “She’s only four years younger than you.”

“Still, it’s weird and last I heard they are taken,” I said pulling out my phone and deciding on a whim I wanted to go to Group Therapy and see Darcy. I wasn’t going to talk to her just to wish her happy birthday, but I was also a chicken shit and I needed to enlist someone to go with me.

“Taken? All of them?” I looked up to see Kaili looking genuinely disappointed, and I am thankful that Jane had taken them because I don’t think I could see my baby sister with three guys. I think I would have a coronary, wondering if ALL of them were treating her right. Looking up Dev’s contact info to text him.

Wanna get a drink at Group Therapy?

I looked up to see Kaili rambling about Nathan and the guys, I had to tune her out. It’s going to be hard to look them in the face when all I can hear is my sister raving about how big or muscley they are.

Tonight? When do you ever want to go to Group Therapy?
Dev texted back.

I debated on telling him the truth but Dev knew almost everything. One good thing about working for Lucio is I’ve made great friendships with Giovanni and Dev.

It’s Darcy’s birthday, tonight. I decided to go for the truth.

He didn’t respond right away. Dev’s priorities are his mom and sister, choosing to stay home with them most of the time. He protected Ava at all costs because he wanted her to have a life that was free from a father who only wanted children to further his business or make him money. I think he was also

afraid Lucio was going to use Ava to further climb to the top. Marriage is a powerful tool when you're trying to get into power.

Kaili got up from the table and I saw that she is was grinning as she was typing away. I hoped it wasn't some dude because I'm not ready for some guy to try to swoop in and take my sister.

"Are you dating someone, Ren?" My mother didn't beat around the bush.

"No, I'm not." I knew my answer was going to disappoint her. We've had several discussions that I'm not getting any younger and I need to find a wife and have kids.

She sighed. "Don't put love on the back burner, because life is so much better when you have someone to share it with."

Regret about Darcy came back in full force. "I know," I said, trying to keep the sadness out of my tone.

"You know, it wouldn't matter if it were with a man or woman," she said, matter of factly.

I was confused by her statement until I realized that she thought I might be gay. "Thanks ma, but I am straight," I said with a smile. I thought it was incredible she was trying to make sure I was ok with coming out to her. "I love you, ma," I said, getting up and bringing her in for a hug.

"I just want you to be happy. The last time I saw you over the moon was with Darcy and I hate to think you passed up a good thing," she said into my shoulder, a little muffled. I closed my eyes feeling too vulnerable. My mom hit the head on the nail with that statement.

"I am happy, ma," I said, but I didn't feel like it. "Relax while I do the dishes." I kissed her forehead as I got the table cleaned while my emotions spiraled out of control. When I had the table cleared I felt my phone buzz.

I'll meet you there in an hour? Dev texted back.

Great, see you there. I responded.

It's about time I started putting myself first in my life. I wanted and needed Darcy in my life and I wouldn't stop until she was mine again.

DEV WAS WAITING in the parking lot for me, leaning up against his Impala. If you were just passing by him, he looked like trouble. His brown hair was buzzed short, with crazy blue eyes, covered in tattoos, and a don't fuck with me expression most of the time. I thought he was wearing contacts when we first met, but they are one hundred percent his.

"The Impala looks great, man," I said, walking up to him checking out his car. He had fixed it up from just the frame and now it looked damn good with a fresh coat of paint.

"Thanks, I had to redo the paint twice because the first color wasn't dark enough," he said, with a ghost of a smile on his lips.

"Looks good." I clapped his shoulder as we both walked to the front and Dev opened the door.

Music, laughter and chatter instantly filtered out as we walked into the bar. It was surprisingly a busy night as I looked around to find Darcy, Jane and the guys. I spotted Aiden right away because I swear that guy was a beast, and it was also the man bun that gave him away. I walked towards them, looking for Darcy but didn't see her right away.

"Hey guys," I said, as we got to the group.

They all responded with heys, how are yous and a wave from Jane. The guys looked at Dev a little warily, but I couldn't exactly blame them, they kept a tight circle and distrusted anyone who wasn't in that circle. I also think years of being in the military had made Aiden and Cal paranoid.

We talked about getting ready for our tourist and ski season, and apparently there were a few new ski instructors coming to town. Nathan talked about his new classes he was teaching when I looked around for Darcy again. I had assumed

she was in the bathroom when we first arrived, but it had been a while. I half listened to the guys talking about a baseball player and some injury he sustained during a game that might derail his career.

Dev and Jane caught my attention, when I noticed they were talking. He was usually pretty quiet and kept to himself, so it was surprising to see him talking to her. It was hilarious to see the guys quickly notice that Jane was talking to Dev. It was like their Jane alarm went off; another man was talking to her. I chuckled when Aiden left our conversation to go be with Jane and I could tell that Nathan and Cal relaxed.

Dev didn't look phased by Aiden, but he had expressed that the guys were people he wouldn't fuck with. I wouldn't mess with them either, especially Aiden. Nathan and Cal went back to their game of pool while Aiden and Dev got drinks for us.

That's when I noticed Darcy talking to some dude at the bar. She was laughing at something he said as he leaned a little closer to her. I clenched my jaw, feeling like I had gotten punched in the gut. It was an irrational response, but she was *mine*. Then I started thinking about who she had been with these past three years. I kept an eye on her, but I knew I didn't see everything. I knew for a fact she hasn't had a serious relationship but just thinking about her being with other men had me on edge.

Dev nudged me, pushing a beer into my hand.

"Who the fuck is Darcy talking to?" I asked with venom in my voice as the dude got closer to Darcy.

"You've passed up that chance, man," Callum replied.

I glared at Callum as he called me out on my shit. I knew I had no reason to be mad. "Still doesn't hurt any less," I said, feeling a little of my anger fade.

"Don't be an ass. Just tell her how you feel," Jane spoke up.

"She knows I haven't stopped feeling something for her," I said, feeling somber. "There isn't a day that goes by that I

don't regret what I did, but I'm also grateful I've kept her safe for so long." I wasn't going to regret the last three years because I had seen what Lucio did with the leverage he had over people and I would do anything to make sure she was safe. That didn't lessen the fact that I hated that it was without me.

DEV

I spotted Darcy as Aiden and I went to get some drinks. It was hard not to notice her when she was looking so carefree and laughing with someone. When I saw it was some dude, my hackles raised and I was furious. I clenched my hands in anger, stealing another glance at her seeing the douchebag slide closer to her.

Aiden handed me two beers, taking my attention away from them. I took a long swig of my beer trying to calm myself down. Why the hell was I so angry? She was Evan's girl, well used to be but I knew he still had feelings for her. He watched out for her like she was still his. I glanced over at him wondering if he had seen her yet, finding him already locked in on her.

Son of a bitch.

Aiden said something to the bartender before we walked away, and I went straight to Evan. I tried to distract him with a beer in his hand but his mind was already spiraling. After he asked who the fuck was talking to her, Cal called him out on his shit while Jane tried to push him to just talk to her. Before things got too depressing, Cal's sister Kelsey showed up.

She looked surprised to see me, but we were long overdue for a conversation. Since she had just had her baby, we hadn't had time to catch up. I nodded at her before she said she only had an hour to enjoy herself. Jane dragged her to their table and Darcy joined us bringing that douchebag with her. She took a double take at Evan and me, giving me a smile and just nodding at Evan.

She didn't introduce him, taking him straight to the table with the girls. If I were a good man, I would have felt sorry for the dude but all five of us were glaring at the poor guy and I knew he had to be uncomfortable. I'm sure he felt like a small fish in a sea of sharks.

The girls danced to a few songs, and he made sure he stayed really close to Darcy. When he put his hands on her waist a few times, I swear Evan was going to beat the crap out of him. Jane's men and I were on edge, ready to intervene if we needed to.

It got to the point where I was ready to hit the guy anytime he touched her. The guy looked way too soft for Darcy. I couldn't imagine her being with a guy like that, but she seemed like she was having fun with him oblivious to the looks Evan was giving her.

Once Kelsey's hour was up, Jane also said they were heading out. She kept glancing at Cal, and he was looking like he was getting more and more uncomfortable. I took the opportunity to walk Kelsey to her car, but Cal looked like he wanted to pop my kneecaps. Thankfully Jane intervened and I saw that glint in her eye. I knew she thought it was because we liked each other but it was far from the truth.

Kelsey and I walked out of the bar into the cool Colorado night. I followed her to her car looking around to make sure we were safe. You could never be too careful especially when your father was a wannabe mafia guy. When we stopped at an older SUV, she didn't turn around and look at me. I knew this was hard for her.

"We can pretend I didn't find anything," I said, trying to ease her emotions.

"I won't be able to pretend you didn't find anything," she said, her voice full of emotion. "Rose deserves to meet her father and her father needs to know she exists."

I nodded my head even though she couldn't see me. Kelsey had a fling with an out of townner last winter and ended up getting pregnant. By the time she found out she was

pregnant, he was gone and they never exchanged information. “He lives in Denver, and I found a number for him.”

She turned around abruptly. “A number?!” She yelled with panic on her face.

“I have a picture of his driver’s license and his phone number,” I said, pulling out my phone and looking for the picture. Once I found it, I gave my phone to her.

She took it with shaky hands, taking a deep breath before she finally looked at the picture. Her eyes immediately closed as her face looked devastated.

“Shit, is it not him?” I asked, bringing her into my arms. I tried to give her as much comfort as I could rubbing her back, letting her get it out of her system. I couldn’t imagine how hard this was for her.

“It’s him,” she whispered as she continued to cry. “It’s Sebastian.”

I squeezed her just a little tighter. Kelsey and I had become friends unexpectedly last year when Ava needed a dress for homecoming. I had no clue what the hell I was doing. It was apparently a big deal and Ava said it was her coming of age moment, when we bumped into Kelsey and she saved the day. From that day on they talked regularly, saving me the awkward conversations I knew were possible with a teenage girl.

We live in a ski town, so when she found out she was pregnant from an out of town dalliance, she tried everything to get a hold of the guy. So many people come and go during ski season that she had no idea where to start looking for him.

When her SUV had been giving her some problems, she brought it in and I don’t know if it was the cost of the service, the hormones of pregnancy or being overwhelmed but she broke down and told me everything. I didn’t know what I could do but I reached out to some of Lucio’s contacts and they came through for me.

“Do you want me to go see him and let him know he has a baby? I can take a picture,” I said, thinking of a way to help

her out. She finished crying, pulling away from me as she wiped her eyes.

“Dev, you’re an incredibly decent man. I don’t know how I would have found this guy without you, but I know I need to do this on my own.” She took a deep breath, wiping her eyes. “Thank you.”

“I’m just helping a friend out, you would do the same for us,” I said, putting my hands into my pockets, feeling uncomfortable with the praise. “I could go with you for emotional support or maybe you can tell Cal.”

“No, if I took Cal, I think he would end up punching the guy and I don’t need this relationship to start off badly.” She rolled her eyes.

I couldn’t help but chuckle because I would do the same if it had been Ava. “Well, my offer still stands, just call me if you need me,” I said, looking back at the bar, worried about Evan.

Kelsey hugged me again. “I will and maybe Evan will pull his head out of his ass. I don’t think he noticed the glare he was giving that guy and you, too. Don’t think I didn’t notice that you were looking at her too.”

“I’m just worried about both of them,” I said, saying it more to myself than Kelsey. I couldn’t have feelings for my friend’s girl.

But what were the unexpected trips to the coffee shop then?

“Well maybe it’s best if they go their separate ways, maybe you can be the shoulder she needs to cry on,” she said, wiggling her eyebrows.

I rolled my eyes at her. “First of all, it’s not like that, and how would it look to Evan if I swooped in and stole Darcy.”

“Is it really stealing his girl when they haven’t been together in three years?” Kelsey rebutted, opening the door to her car.

I shook my head because there was no point in talking about this when Darcy and I weren’t going to happen. “I meant

what I said about going with you if you need me to. Text me when you get home.”

“I think you might be perfect for her, that guy looked like a dildo,” she yelled, ignoring my offer, as I walked away and laughed, caught off guard by her comment.

“Dildo? Really, Kelsey?” I turned around, amused by her choice of word.

She laughed. “I’ve been hanging around Jane too much.”

I shook my head, turned away, and walked back to the bar, nervous at what I would find. Since everyone else had left it was just Evan, Darcy and the dildo, as Kelsey had dubbed him. I grinned as I walked in, thinking the name fit perfectly.

My eyes immediately found Darcy and the dildo, igniting a jealousy in me that I was unprepared for. When I didn’t see Evan near them, I looked around the bar and I spotted him at the other end of it. He was glaring at them as he took a drink of his beer, a look of hurt passed his features but he quickly masked it with another swig of his beer.

I couldn’t help myself as I glanced at Darcy one last time, seeing her stare up at the guy, like she wanted to be kissed. Looking away before I witnessed something I would probably hit the guy for, I walked to Evan thinking I had to convince him to leave, or he might be the one to punch the guy.

Weaving through all the people I ordered two shots when I got to Evan. He looked like he was about to bite my head off until he realized it was me next to him. The bartender slid the shots in front of us as I ordered two more, leaving a fifty on the bar.

“We are going to have two shots before we pick up some burgers and fries and we are going to get trashed at your house,” I said, giving him one shot, clicking his glass as we both downed them.

“I waited too long,” he murmured, looking at them again.

“You kept her safe,” I said, giving him the other shot. “You gave her a life that is untouched by that man and we both know he would have used her against you.”

“I know, but why does it feel like keeping her safe is the worst mistake of my life?” He grabbed his shot and drank it quickly, slamming it down on the bar, then took mine and drank that too.

“Sometimes the right thing to do isn’t always the easiest, especially when it comes to the people we love,” I said, getting up from my seat. “Come on, let’s go before you see something that will end up with both of us in jail. And give me your keys.”

Evan sighed. “You think we can find his car and let the air out of his tires?”

I smirked. “I’m pretty sure I can guess what car he drives, it’s probably douchey.”

That got a laugh out of Evan. We both stood up and walked towards the door. I wasn’t strong enough to just leave, I had to take one last look at Darcy. We locked eyes; it made me want to turn around and pull her away from that guy. Her face said it all, she was just as miserable as Evan, but they were just too stubborn to admit to each other that they still had feelings for each other. Jealousy raged through me again, not at the douchey dildo but at my friend Evan. Life hated me.

EVAN

*A*fter seeing Darcy with that guy, I threw myself into work and anything that might make me forget I ever saw her flirting with another man. I knew there was a possibility of her moving on but actually seeing it, especially after we had just slept with each other, made me want to hit something.

It was another fight night. The last time I saw the roster it was mostly regulars and Cal was going up against someone he had previously beaten before. I was looking forward to seeing Cal get an easy win, after having two fights where it looked like he might lose. My long list of things to do kept me busy most of the early evening. I was counting cash for the girls downstairs when my phone started to ring nonstop.

Sliding it out of my pocket, I saw two missed calls from Giovanni, two missed calls from Nathan and a text from Aiden. I called Giovanni back immediately, knowing what he was going to tell me.

“Office now,” he growled, before he hung up on me.

“Fuck,” I whispered as I finished counting the cash, leaving the girls to stock the bar. The arena was slowly filling up with people, when I noticed Lucio was talking to a few men in business suits. I immediately became suspicious as to what he was doing with those men. They screamed that they were the top of the food chain, looking arrogant and if the security detail said anything, these men were important.

I made my way down to the hall of offices, feeling dread in my stomach. When I walked into my office, I knew this night was going to be a shitshow.

“What happened,” I asked, seeing Giovanni nursing a glass of whiskey.

“Did you see those men out there with Lucio,” he asked, looking like he was ready to lose it.

“Yeah, why?” I sat in the chair in front of my desk.

“Those men are in the business of human trafficking,” he growled, downing the rest of his drink.

Shit. Fuck.

“I thought we thwarted his meetings? What the hell happened?” I snapped, getting up from my chair. Giovanni and I had been creating false leads, losing messages and blatantly ignoring calls with anything that pertained to human trafficking.

“This guy called Lucio directly, said he heard that he was looking into getting into the trade and that he had some girls coming in a couple of weeks.” Giovanni poured himself another glass and one for me too.

“Fuck, how do we get out of this?” I asked, desperate to make this all go away. We couldn’t let this go through no matter what.

“I have no idea and that’s not all,” he said passing my drink to me, clicking my glass before we both took it like a shot. “Cal is going up against someone who looks like they might be a professional. He gave a nondescript name that I’ve looked up but the way he and his crew looked I knew the name was bullshit.”

“And Lucio took it because he knew this was going to be a big payout. He needs money to pay for those girls he most likely will be getting from those sleazy guys,” I said, putting everything together.

“Exactly, I called Dev for backup in case it gets ugly, but I have a bad feeling about tonight.” Giovanni looked stressed

out. “I’ve also sent a few of my guys to watch my home, your ma’s and Dev’s just in case.”

I wanted to say he was being dramatic, but I knew things could change in a heartbeat and I would rather be prepared than taken by surprise. “Can we trust them?” I asked.

“I trust them with Vittoria and my piccolina. They have no loyalty to him,” he stated, with a fire in his eye that said if they double-crossed him, they would pay, and I don’t doubt they would. Giovanni had been creating his own little following right under Lucio’s nose, with many of the guys feeling angry at the situation that got them into servitude. Lucio was a con artist through and through. Giovanni was capitalizing on their hatred of him, making an inner circle he could trust if shit ever went south.

“I appreciate it,” I said, as I thought about what else we could do to fuck up the trafficking deal and help Cal out. Giovanni looked just as lost for a solution as I was. “Let’s just get through the night and we can worry about how to make the trafficking deal go away later.”

“I agree.” He poured us another drink. “I’ll go to my father while you see if you can find any info about the guy Cal is fighting.”

I took the shot wishing I could just get shitfaced and pretend this whole night was a dream.

CAL’S FIGHT WAS BRUTAL. The guy he went up against had him playing defense from the moment that bell rang. He was clearly a professional, doing combos and taking hits like it was just an easy Sunday morning. It took two rounds before he punched Cal so hard that he fell like a sack of potatoes. I winced at the hit, seeing Aiden and Nathan go into the cage, trying to wake him up.

It took five minutes before Cal woke up, another minute to get him off the floor and even longer to walk back to his locker room. Cal looked completely out of it, and I hoped he

didn't have any brain damage. I wished that Jane was here to check on him but also grateful she wasn't here.

Right now, Lucio was passive, but I saw the anger in his eyes. He played nice to a couple of high rollers and made his rounds seeing other clients. He made one last stop with the traffickers, then left quickly with two of his guys flanking him. I took a shortcut to Cal's locker, walking to the room that had two guys guarding it. I needed to give the guys a heads up, but I barely made it before Lucio barged in looking like he was ready to kill someone.

"What the fuck was that, Cal?" Lucio snarled.

"That was me losing," Cal responded, being a cheeky bastard at the wrong time.

"I had thousands of dollars riding on you. I gave you an out for your sister to keep her safe and this is how you repay me," he said, looking disgusted.

"That fighter was no underground fighter. He looked like a professional out there with his fancy crew." Aiden spoke first before Cal could put his foot in his mouth.

"It wasn't the first time he went against a professional. This should have been easy for him," Lucio snapped, not seeing how flawed his reasoning was. "You did this on purpose."

It was silent for a minute, while everyone processed that Lucio accused Cal of throwing the fight. Cal was sporting a shiner already and half of his face was swollen. He still didn't fully heal from the last fight and his eyes were a little unfocused, I would bet he had a pretty good concussion.

"Who the fuck—"

"That's fucking bullshit."

"Why the hell would he fucking do that?"

All three of them started talking at the same time before Aiden glared at Cal and Nathan to shut up.

"I wouldn't doubt this was payback for enlisting Jane to help Dev." Lucio walked up to them, unconcerned that Aiden

or Cal were close enough to snap his neck. “I think you’re so pissed about your situation, that you had the need to rebel.”

“Why the fuck would I want my ass kicked?” Cal snarled, having a hard time keeping his anger in check. “I haven’t even fully—”

“That makes no sense. Losing means he doesn’t get a payout and his debt stays the same,” Aiden interrupted Cal, giving him another glare. “Cal would never throw a fight.”

“I agree with Aiden, Lucio, it doesn’t make sense for him to lose the fight. He was up against a guy who clearly had been trained professionally and his crew looked just the same.” I tried to appear cool, calm and collected. Lucio knew I had some sort of friendship with them, but I had to seem like the uninterested party. “It seems we might have been played by the other fighter and his team.”

Lucio looked at me as he thought about what I said. If I could shift the blame to the other fighter, I might be able to get Cal out unscathed and with no more debt. Two more men entered the room, standing by the exit.

“That seems like a possibility Evan, but I think it might be far-fetched.” He walked with his hands behind his back. “Cal lost me a shit ton of money. Since he’s been acting out and adding to his debt, showing him a lesson isn’t getting my point across.”

“I think it has gotten—”

“Let’s make sure he knows his actions have consequences.” He snapped his fingers and the two men who were beside him stepped forward. I assumed he was going to get another beating, but they went for Nathan instead.

Aiden and Cal both lunged forward to protect their friend when I heard the first punch. The guy by the door was next to Aiden with a gun pointed to his head making Cal stop in his tracks. The other man came forward aiming his gun at Cal.

“Lucio, I think we should think about this,” I said, trying to keep the panic out of my voice.

He shrugged nonchalantly like he was thinking about what to have for dinner. “I have, are you doubting my leadership capabilities?” He asked and I knew it was a loaded fucking question.

“No, sir. I’m just worried this might have the opposite effect,” I said, flinching as I heard a loud crunch.

“Evan, you are so naive. You have much more to learn about this world,” he said, patting my cheek, in that condescending way. “Make sure they don’t go to the authorities. Make sure he feels—they all feel it tomorrow.” Lucio yelled over his shoulder walking out of the room at a leisurely pace.

I looked back to see Nathan, a bloody mess on the floor. Aiden was vibrating with anger while Cal looked like he might throw up. Lucio’s guards took a break before they went at it again and then they stepped on his hand. A loud crunch was heard by all of us and then Nathan yelled.

“Alright you’ve made your fucking point,” I snarled, walking up to the guards to push them back if I needed to.

“I don’t remember Lucio putting you in charge.” The larger guard, Poalo, sneered at me. He was a little bigger than me, but his reputation preceded him. He was a textbook psychopath and he scared the shit out of me.

“I know it’s hard for you to understand, but he said to make them feel it tomorrow, breaking his hand does that.” I stood in front of Nathan, knowing I was going to get shit for this later.

The door swung open as Giovanni walked into the room looking like he was ready to kick some ass. When he saw Nathan on the floor his face transformed into a murderous glare.

“Lucio needs you to escort some men to the airstrip. He said they are very important and if something happens to them, there will be consequences,” Giovanni snapped at them, and they didn’t question him. They left the room, but Poalo looked back at me one more time. His gaze held a promise that me

talking to him like that wouldn't go without some sort of retribution.

Fuck, don't look scared.

Once he left the room, I took a deep breath, dreading what was to come out of that. Aiden and Cal rushed to Nathan, as I heard one of them curse up a storm. I took another breath before I turned around to see him, I almost wish I hadn't. His face was bleeding, swelling quickly and his hand looked horrendous. He passed out from either the pain or a concussion.

Aiden tried to make him as comfortable as possible. He checked his injuries, washing away some of the blood from his face. Cal was pacing behind Aiden, like a caged tiger. If I felt guilty, I knew Cal was taking this harder, blaming himself for something that was completely out of his control.

"I know you want to leave right away, but I think it might be best if you guys stay here for a bit, while the place clears out," Giovanni suggested. "I want to make sure no one else bothers you and we don't have another run-in with Lucio."

Aiden looked like he wanted to lash out but he nodded. "Fine."

"Do you need anything?" I asked, feeling helpless.

"A doctor?" Cal sounded defeated.

"You know—"

"It was supposed to be a joke, I know. No doctors," he said, rubbing his face and flinching.

"Just let us know when we can leave," Aiden grumbled.

"I'll come back and check on you guys in a bit," I said, following Giovanni out of the room. Once we were in the hall, I felt a little panicked.

"I'm going to make sure those men have left and see if anyone around heard anything about who they were." Giovanni said, pulling out his phone. His shoulders sagged in relief. "The guys just reported that everyone is ok."

“Fuck, at least one thing is—” Panic silenced me.

Darcy.

“Where the hell is Dev? I need him to go check on Darcy just in case.”

“I had him keeping a watch on the building,” Giovanni started to say something else, but blood was rushing to my ears as I pulled my phone out of my pocket.

Please check on Darcy. I texted Dev.

Right now? He responded.

Wait an hour and then go to her please. Giovanni has people watching my family, but I just want to make sure she is safe. I typed out.

Ok, I'll go check on her. He sent back.

I leaned against the wall a little relieved. I couldn't do this anymore. Giovanni's eyes were on me for a moment before he started talking.

“I feel the same. I can't put my family in danger anymore.”

I looked up to see a man who was just as exhausted as me. We both had families and loved ones we had to keep safe. If I was Giovanni, I think the moment I had a kid I would have left but I knew it was hard to leave the grasp of Lucio.

“Let's figure out how to stop him and put an end to all this bullshit,” I said, feeling a resolve I had never felt before. “We have to make sure we get to see tomorrow with our families.”

DARCY

Mary is way too chipper most mornings. She is happy talking about the latest gossip about one of her friends and their daughter who is seeing an older man. Mary is all for the relationship, saying she is an adult, but her friend is mortified. I agree with her, if it isn't hurting anyone, people need to mind their own damn business, whether you're their mom or not.

As we drove through the neighborhood, I noticed a suspicious looking black sedan in front of Evan's mom's house. When we passed the car, I noticed two men inside, but I couldn't get a good enough look to see who they were. I looked in my rearview mirror, wondering what the hell was going on. Was Evan being surveilled by the police?

Unease prickled at my mind that he could be in danger even if it was his own fault. I thought about what that would mean for his sister and mom, if he ended up going to jail. My heart broke at the possibility that all this time he was just trying to help his family, only for him to end up having to do jail time. I didn't think he wouldn't regret doing what he did because his sister was still here.

As I was about to turn towards the coffee shop, I noticed a car right in front of the coffee shop. I passed it and saw Dev in the car, we locked eyes briefly and he nodded at me. I returned the nod wondering what the hell he was doing here at five in the morning.

Parking in our usual spot, we opened the back door, heading inside to get ready for our six am opening. I turned on

all the lights, putting my stuff away before I headed to the front to put down the chairs in the small dining area. I glanced out the door seeing Dev's car still there, which confused me even more.

Still feeling uneasy about the black car in front of Evan's mom's house and seeing Dev, I put my headphones on and turned on an audiobook by Whitney West. I lost myself in the book, making the hour go by quickly. Once the first people start to trickle in, I completely forget about what I saw in the morning.

Jeremy came in, professing his undying love for me, asking me out for the hundredth time. I shut him down again, but I can't lie and say him asking me out is not a serious ego boost. He was blowing me kisses when Dev walked in. Dev looked from Jeremy to me a couple of times and on the last time Jeremy caught his gaze, instantly clamming up. He headed out quickly, leaving me to raise my eyebrows at Dev.

"Does that kid ever give up?" he asked, walking towards me. Today he wasn't wearing coveralls but simple jeans and a black shirt with a baseball cap. It was nothing fancy, but he looked *good*.

"Nope. Jeremy insists that I will say yes one day," I grinned.

"I think you might say yes because you're annoyed he won't ever stop. Isn't he like fifteen?" he asked, with a little annoyance in his tone.

I laughed. "He is eighteen, but he is seriously harmless."

"I know his mom, so if he tries anything, let me know," he said, looking at the menu. I don't know why I found the offer so endearing but I did.

"I'll keep that in mind. What can I get you?" I asked, leaning over the counter. "Or should I whip you up that brown sugar and cinnamon latte?"

"I would like that, I desperately need the caffeine," he said, in an exhausted voice. That's when I noticed he did look a

little rough with dark under his eyes that screamed he hadn't slept well.

“Well, being outside the coffee shop so early will do that to you. Is everything ok?” I asked, trying to appear unconcerned.

He shrugged. “It's just some stupid shit with the garage. It's exhausting.”

“At five in the morning?” I asked, a little suspicious.

He looked around, then leaned in, making me lean in too. “We had someone try and break in a few nights ago. Jaime wanted us to see if we saw anything suspicious.”

“Oh, that sounds serious,” I said, still leaning over. We were close enough that if I wanted to, I could bend forward slightly to kiss him. He glanced at my lips before leaning back.

“Yea, it is,” he said, before he licked his lips, sending my mind spiraling into thoughts about what that tongue could do.

“Are you hungry?” I asked, turning around to start his coffee.

“Actually, I am. Do you have any of those burritos?”

“Yeah, I think we still have some in the back, let me check,” I said, glancing over my shoulder to catch him staring at my ass. Well, I'm pretty sure he was, but his eyes shifted too quickly. I walked to the back with a little more sway in my hips.

What the hell was I doing?

I had flirted with a guy at a bar for my birthday, we exchanged numbers before we made out but no matter how many times I pulled up his phone number, it didn't feel right. Of course, I thought of Evan and that stupid note he left at my home a couple of weeks ago. It took everything I had in me not to call or text him. I thoroughly believed our ship had sailed and nothing good would come of us trying to get back together.

Then I thought of Dev. There was no reason to think of him but his expressions on my birthday were startling. He looked almost as angry as Evan, sending me a thrill of

excitement at the possibility that he might be jealous, but when he left with Kelsey, it left me unsure. This is why I was always too hesitant to date; all these doubts and feelings made me feel out of control.

“Your head looks like it’s going to explode,” Mary said, while I checked to see what burritos we still had in the back.

“I think it might,” I admitted.

“Care to quickly unload?” She wiped her hands on a towel and leaned her butt against a table.

“I think I like Dev but...” I couldn’t finish the sentence because I had so many buts.

“Child you complicate things so much.” She walked over to me. “You’ve always been a woman with a lot of buts—in her vocabulary,” she said, winking at me, making me laugh. “Forget the buts and go with what you want. Stop selling yourself short, stop overthinking everything, stop hesitating, do this for yourself and no one else.”

She pulled me in for a hug. “I don’t know what I would do without you, Mary,” I said, squeezing her just a little tighter.

“Well, you obviously wouldn’t be thinking about getting railed by a gorgeous man with tattoos,” she cackled, going back to work.

“Mary!” I hissed at her, praying that Dev did not hear her, and I wouldn’t have to stand there embarrassed.

“Child, you can’t hear shit out there, plus if he did hear, then that is the push you need to get over yourself.” She went back to work.

I rolled my eyes at her as I grabbed the burrito and prayed that he didn’t hear anything. When I looked for him, he was on the phone sitting at one of the tables that were off to the side. Relief flooded me, making me feel at ease that he couldn’t have heard that I might like him, or that I was thinking about getting railed by him.

Fuck my life, I did not need to be aroused at work.

I started to think about everything that was not sexy as I put the finishing touches on his coffee. I delivered his coffee and burritos. He nodded at me as he said something in another language. Did Dev speak Italian?

It was hard not to focus on his conversation too much, but the switch between English and Italian was really fucking sexy. Thankfully more customers came in, taking up my time and giving me a chance to stop hyper focusing on everything that was sexy about Dev. At one point he laid a twenty on the counter while I helped someone else. He nodded at me before he left, leaving me disappointed.

The late morning crowd died down giving me a chance to take a break. I made myself an iced brown sugar and cinnamon coffee and I ate a burrito while I stared outside at the people walking the town. My phone buzzed on the table as I noticed a large man across the street looking at the front of the coffee shop. The hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up. I felt like I had seen him before, but I couldn't figure out where or why; he was giving me bad vibes.

I looked down at my phone, opening a text from Jane.

Hey, I'm so sorry, but I had an emergency in Dallas. I didn't have a chance to bring the car back to you but it's at my house. I left the keys in a flowerpot by the front door, on the right side. I'm so sorry.

I read her text twice feeling like something was seriously wrong.

I hope everything is ok. Let me know if you need anything. Take care and be safe.

Three dots appeared and I waited for her response.

Can you please not let the guys know where I'm at? I just need some space to think.

I was still dissecting her text looking to find a clue in it but it seemed innocent enough. The front door opened, making the bell chime. The guy who was across the street was walking to the counter and I felt frozen with fear. He was giving me the heebie jeebies.

I stood up and gave him a smile that hopefully didn't look scared. "Hi, how can I help you?"

He studied me for a moment. "I'll take just a black coffee," he said, glancing over at the pastries.

This man looked dangerous, making my body go into a fight or flight response. Was this the guy who tried to rob the garage?

"I'll take that muffin," he said, pointing to a blueberry lemon muffin.

"Great!" I said, a little too loudly. I poured his coffee, grabbed his muffin quickly and hoped he would pay and leave. I set them down on the counter and rang him up. He handed me a credit card, never taking his eyes off of me until the door opened. Dev walked in again.

I was so relieved he was here, that I wanted to cry. They both stared at each other like they knew one another. There was so much animosity coming from the large man that it made me wonder if they knew each other or if Dev felt the same level of danger from him. It almost felt like I was the sacrificial lamb in a den full of predators.

"Here you go, sir," I said, holding his card out, waiting for him to turn around to me.

"Thanks." He ripped the card out of my hand, put it back in his wallet all the while never taking his eyes off of Dev. He glanced back at me with an inquisitive expression then glared back at Dev.

"Have a great day," I said, really hoping he would leave. He grabbed his coffee and muffin and walked towards the door. Both men stared at each other in what felt like a drawn-out fucking pissing contest. Once he left, Dev walked up to me running his gaze along my body like he was checking for something.

"Are you ok?" he asked, looking like he wanted to touch me.

"I'm fine, who the hell was that guy?" I asked, peeking outside, hoping he wasn't going to come back in.

“His name is Geraldo, and he is trouble.” I looked over at Dev who was looking out the door like a guard dog. My body reacted before my mind could postulate the thought. I walked around the counter into Dev’s solid chest. Without any hesitation, he wrapped his arms around me. I was safe.

The tension left my body, leaving me exhausted.

“You’re safe, Darcy.” His voice brought me even more comfort.

“Thank you,” I murmured into his chest. “I’m glad you didn’t leave the area.”

“I was about to get in my car when I saw him walk in here.” He squeezed me a little tighter.

I wanted to ask who he was, but I was also scared of that answer. I had a feeling he lied about why he was outside the shop this morning. I didn’t want to press the issue because if he was here to keep me safe, then who was I to say anything. I squeezed him a little tighter in gratitude.

“Can you help me with something?” I asked, pulling away, but he kept a firm hold on me.

“Anything,” he said, looking down at me.

“Can you give me a ride to Jane’s home? I have to pick up my car from her,” I asked, figuring one more snuggle wouldn’t hurt.

“Of course, let me go home and I can pick you up. What time?” He was a really great hugger.

“I should be done by three,” I said, basking in the safeness of Dev’s arms. I could stay here forever.

“I’ll be back by then,” he said. I thought he was going to pull away, but he stayed for just a moment longer like he was savoring this just as much as I was. He kissed my forehead, lingering for a second more like letting me go was too much. He then walked out the door without a backwards glance, disappointing me just a little.

“That was a long-ass hug, but he looks like he gives some pretty good ones,” Mary said, as I continued to look at the

door.

“It was a really good one,” I said, trying to keep the smile off my face but failing horribly.

“Care to tell me what made the hug happen?” she asked, and I looked back at her.

“Nope,” I said, popping the p, thinking she didn’t need to know what might be happening.

“Alright you keep your secrets, but I have to say I approve of riding the mechanic till the cows come home.” She blew me a kiss while I shook my head.

I think I approved too.

DEV

Seeing Geraldo in the coffee shop scared the shit out of me. He was a fucking manic that was fine doing things on his own. His mantra was, it's better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission. Not that he ever asked for forgiveness, but he tended to go rogue very quickly.

Once I followed Darcy home, staying until I was sure she locked herself in, I was able to take a deep breath without anxiety bubbling in my chest. I debated if I wanted to tell Evan what had happened. He was going to freak out worse than I did, but I knew if we weren't all on the same page, then how could we protect her? I wish I knew if Geraldo was there on his own or if Lucio had sent him.

I waited until I got home, surveying the neighborhood as I pulled up the driveway. It was easy to assume that he would never hurt us, but I wouldn't put anything past Lucio. If hurting us meant that he would get what he wanted or needed, he would do it in a heartbeat. I promised myself we would never be the collateral he needed to succeed, especially Ava.

The house was empty as I walked in; I threw my keys on the entryway table. Lucio had given my ma a good home, that was relatively new, it had enough space for us to live comfortably. I hated that she had to rely on him when she needed to but the house was paid for.

It would be stupid of us to move just out of spite, but it gave us a chance to save money. One day I would move us away, and I wanted to make sure my family wanted for

nothing. That's what they deserved, and I wouldn't rest until they were safe from him.

Ava and my ma would be home soon, so I checked on the stew in the crockpot my ma had started this morning. It needed just a little more time before it was done, giving me a chance to finish the two loaves of bread. Taking the cloth off the top of the bowl, I punched down and split the dough my ma left rising, separating it into two loaves, leaving it to rise again. I knew I was just delaying the inevitable in calling Evan to tell him Darcy might be in danger. It was going to hurt him and make him hate himself even more.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I dialed his number as I walked into my bedroom. Not much had changed in the years we had lived here. I honestly thought we wouldn't be here for too long, so there was no point in putting pictures up or making it my own. It had the same queen-sized bed,

"Is she ok?" Evan answered in a panic.

"She's fine but Geraldo stopped by and bought coffee," I said, sitting on my bed.

"Shit, fuck, goddammit, kuso," Evan snarled, his voice not so loud making me think he put his phone down to swear. "Hold on, I'm going to get Giovanni on the phone with us."

The line went silent as I waited for them to get on the phone. I wondered what Darcy was doing, kicking myself for not getting her number, just in case I needed to text her and check on her, or Geraldo stopped by the shop again. I'm still surprised she didn't grill me about him, demanding answers that I didn't know how to answer.

Evan never told me how much of his life she knew about. But knowing him, he's kept her in the dark the entire time. I didn't want to be the person who had to give her a crash course in the underground workings of a wannabe gangster and how her ex-lover is pretty high up the food chain.

"Giovanni?" Evan's voice came through the phone.

"What happened?" Giovanni asked, while I heard my niece in the background yelling something.

“Geraldo was snooping around the coffee shop,” Evan snarled, like he was barely keeping it together.

“He walked in and ordered coffee, by the time I walked in he looked like he was debating what to do with Darcy. Maybe I read the situation wrong, but as soon as I stepped in, he looked at me like he was ready for a fight,” I said, rubbing my head.

“I don’t think Lucio sent him.” Giovanni broke the silence.

“It’s a possibility and you know how he likes to venture off and do things by himself. He might be doing this just to get in Lucio’s good graces even more,” I said. It was utterly stupid how these men fucked each other over thinking it was going to get them some brownie points with Lucio.

“So, let’s assume he is doing this on his own. You think he just has his focus on Darcy?” Evan exhaled loudly.

We were all silent as we thought of our families and what that meant for them. The need to do something drastic like go and kill him made me sneer with disgust, but I knew if I had to I would do it to save all of our families. I was taking deep breaths to calm myself down, thinking if he did anything to Darcy, I know Evan and I would be on the same page to get rid of him.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, we need to think things through and not be reckless.” Giovanni was the voice of reason. “Let me see if my men have heard anything or maybe one of them can find out.”

I was waiting for Evan to say something but he remained silent.

“Evan, we can’t be rash,” Giovanni said, with a hint of panic in his voice.

“If he does anything to anyone, I swear Giovanni, I’ll take him north to Rupert’s and leave him there bound, but conscious,” Evan said, so calmly that it freaked me out a little. Rupert had a pig farm and if he was saying what I think he was saying then I’d help him. One less psycho in the world.

“If he does anything, I’ll drive you there,” Giovanni said, with so much conviction in his voice. “But we have to be careful, you know Lucio is fond of that sick fuck and we don’t need him getting suspicious of us.”

“I agree, let’s play it smart,” I said, hoping we could keep everyone safe.

“Dev, can you help keep an eye on Darcy, since you’re so close to her?” Evan asked. He was probably trying to think how he could be everywhere at the same time.

“Yeah, of course,” I said immediately. Darcy was getting under my skin, but her safety was my priority too. “If I can, I’ll see if I can make sure I check on Vittoria and your ma too Evan.”

“I think I might be able to sacrifice a few guys to keep at our homes when we are not there,” Giovanni said, as I heard my niece yell close to him.

“Tell the piccolina I love her,” I said, thinking I needed to see them again soon. “I’ll take Ava over too, so they can visit. It will be easier to keep everyone safe if they are all together.”

“Let’s just move everyone together,” Evan sighed. “Make our jobs easier.”

“Yeah, and how are we going to explain to your mom and sister that the data engineer needs to keep them safe,” I chuckled, still in disbelief that he had kept this life from his family for so long.

Evan laughed. “My ma would be so heartbroken if she found out what I was doing with my life.”

“Papa!” My niece screamed her head off.

“Well, let’s hope she never has to find out. I have to go but let’s just stay on alert until we can find more answers,” Giovanni said, with my niece still screaming in the background. “Bye.”

“I’ll see you later Evan,” I said, as I was about to hang up too.

“Dev,” he said, with a lot of emotion in his voice.

“Yeah?” I asked.

“Please, keep her safe,” he said quickly. “I *need* her safe because if anything ever happened to her, I don’t think I could forgive myself. I left to keep her safe and it looks like that was a false sense of security I had been naive to believe.”

“I’ll watch over her the same way I watch my family,” I said, with assurance that didn’t take much to muster. He didn’t need to know that I would watch over her without him asking.

“Thank you. You and your brother are great friends.” He sighed again. “Let me know if you notice anything else.”

He hung up and I instantly felt guilty. Was I really a great friend if I was attracted to his girl? Fuck this was getting messy but at this point I didn’t care. I would do anything to keep her safe.

THE NEXT WEEK WAS BRUTAL. It was exhausting trying to keep tabs on everyone, making sure they were safe. Evan, Giovanni and I had been on constant alert for our loved ones, sometimes staying up really late to make sure things were okay.

It wasn’t uncommon for Evan and me to drive around to make sure our families were safe. It made me feel better when I knew Darcy was in her house locked inside.

I went in for coffee almost every morning now, getting that delicious crack she made for me and whatever pastry she picked for me that day. Both were addicting, now I knew why I would see the same people come in here every day. It was either to see Darcy, the coffee she made, or Mary’s pastries.

I didn’t get to go to the coffee shop this morning, Ava was running late and I told Evan I would pass by his house since his mom didn’t call him back. Before I headed to work, I passed by the coffee shop; I saw her inside which made me feel somewhat better. I wouldn’t feel completely better until I saw her up close and heard her voice. Giovanni hadn’t heard anything from his guys, which made us all very nervous.

Either he hadn't talked about it to anyone, or Lucio had told him to keep his mouth shut.

Once Jaime came back from lunch, I bolted to the coffee shop as nerves flooded my body. I knew she was probably safe but not going had messed everything up for me. I walked into the shop feeling the need to work out this excess energy I had been feeling. Hearing that familiar jingle of the bell instantly made me relax, but disappointment hit me when I noticed Mary was in front and not Darcy.

"Ah Dev! We missed you this morning." Mary smiled at me as I walked up to her.

"Ava took her sweet time to get ready, like she didn't have a care in the world." I wanted to complain but I knew I would miss these mornings with my sister. She was destined for big things. She was way too smart for this small-town life.

"Ah... teenage girls will do that, I'm sure she had a good reason to take her time. Does she have a boyfriend?" she asked. I knew it was an innocent question but just thinking how shitty guys can be made me want to lock my sister up in a tower and tell her she needed to remain a virgin for the rest of her life.

My face must have had the horror of my sister dating because Mary laughed. "Dev you know she is eventually going to marry, maybe have kids or she might live a life only satisfying her sexual needs."

"Mary," I grumbled, horrified at the picture she was painting.

She cackled at my response.

"Mary, leave poor Dev alone, I'm sure he doesn't need to be thinking about his sister like that." Darcy walked in looking fucking beautiful, distracting me enough that all thoughts of my sister went out the door.

"Good morning, Darcy," I said, keeping my eyes on her as she came up to the counter.

"It's not morning anymore, Dev." She smirked.

“Well, I’ll leave you to get his coffee.” Mary eyed us like we were her favorite soap opera. “I’ll be in the back if you need anything.”

Darcy and I didn’t respond to her, stuck in our own little bubble. Every day she was flirting more. It started with small touches when she gave me my coffee. Then I found more than one pastry in my bag. And now she was writing “have a good day” on my coffee cup. I knew encouraging her was a dumb idea, but I couldn’t help myself. Darcy was becoming my favorite part of my day, like that first taste of coffee. If this morning was any indication to me that not seeing her anymore wasn’t an option.

“Same thing?” she asked, with a small blush on her cheeks.

“Surprise me,” I said, remembering the days I said it because I loved to see that challenge in her eyes.

Fuck! I think I’ve had a thing for her for a while now.

“You sure you want to be surprised?” She leaned over the counter, showing me the top of her ample tits, making my mouth water with the need to take her nipples into my mouth and tease her until she begged with the need to come.

“A mhuirnín, I love when life surprises me, especially when it expresses itself in a beautiful woman,” I leaned over, close enough that if she leaned a fraction of an inch forward she would graze my lips with hers. Her proximity made me forget to explain what I called her.

“I like surprises too, especially when they come in the form of hot tattooed men who get coffee every morning,” she whispered seductively, close to my lips. “You are definitely a good surprise I wasn’t expecting.” She licked her lips, the tip of her tongue grazing mine, making my restraint crack.

I pushed forward only to have that damn bell signal someone was coming in. I pulled away slowly as she jerked back, turning around to start on my coffee.

I clenched my jaw in irritation, but also relief. I almost crossed a line; she was Evan’s girl. They weren’t together but

he still had feelings for her, and I was the asshole who almost kissed her. I don't think it was a good idea that I was watching over her anymore. I needed to tell Evan I couldn't do it anymore because If I kept this up, I was going to have Darcy screaming my name.

EVAN

*A*fter Cal lost the big fight, everything had been going wrong, and Lucio was getting angrier and angrier. We were supposed to have another big fighter come in, but he ended up canceling at the last minute. Our usual shipment of drugs came in late with only half the product we ordered, and the men Lucio talked about getting the girls from had stopped responding.

I felt nothing but relief from the traffickers not replying, but it had put Lucio in a shit mood, which at the moment everyone was enduring. Even Geraldo was behaving himself or maybe he was waiting for the right moment to strike. Giovanni's guys hadn't heard anything, but he still made me nervous as shit, so all of us remained on high alert.

Tonight's fight made me scramble for a fighter to keep Cal out of the cage. Since it was last minute, no one was available. I called everyone, almost begging for a fighter. Lucio made the call when I didn't find anyone, making me really fucking worried about how Cal was doing, not just physically but mentally. I was there when their girl Jane left them the morning after the fight that Cal lost, and now they had no idea where she was at. The two times I had messaged Nathan to ask how he was feeling were responded to with very short and to the point text messages. He had to have surgery to fix his hand and they still hadn't heard from Jane.

My phone rang pulling me away from guilty thoughts. Cal's name flashed on my phone and I answered. "Hello."

“Evan.” His clipped tone made me brace myself for his anger as I leaned back in my chair in my office. “Who am I going up against?”

“He’s new,” I said, running a hand through my hair. “I don’t know much about him, but Lucio said he’s good and the guy who came and championed for him said he’s been fighting for a few years.”

“Fuck, I’m not a hundred percent—” He stopped talking.

I waited for a moment to see if he was going to start talking again. I was about to say something when he started talking again.

“Evan, I can’t get knocked out again. Jane said if I have too many head injuries I either won’t wake up or I could have severe brain damage.” He took a deep breath. “Nothing is going to keep me from Jane, especially something that I can prevent.”

“Have you heard from her?” I asked.

“No, Aiden and Nathan are in Dallas right now looking for her. I had a hunch she might be there, but so far they’ve had no luck,” he said, in a somber tone.

“Damn, I’m sorry man.” I felt bad for the guys. Last time I saw them all together they looked good, like they were meant for each other. I mean if she got Cal to smile and laugh, that was a fucking miracle on its own.

“We will find her.” Cal sounded confident.

“I hope so man, you guys seem so much happier with her. It’s good to see you smiling,” I said, picturing him scowling at what I said.

“Whatever, man. Look, I’ll see you later,” he responded.

“Sure, don’t be late,” I said, hanging up the phone.

I rested my forearms on my desk worried he would be alone tonight. He usually had back up just in case he did go down, Aiden was also his medic, helping him with whatever injuries he may receive. I knew he wasn’t a big fan of Dev, but

I called him too, hoping Cal would just accept the help. He was definitely going to need it tonight.

IT HAD BEEN a few days since Cal had won his fight against that nobody. It wasn't an easy win, but he managed to escape getting hit too many times. Lucio was back to his cheerful self now that he had won some money. He still thought Cal lost on purpose, but that he had learned his lesson, he was also pleased he was alone. I was thankful I had called Dev to watch Cal's back. Lucio narrowed his eyes as they both walked out to the cage, but didn't think too much about it when Cal had won. It was a relief that something was finally going our way.

I walked into Misfits on a night that was usually low key. It was on these days that I checked inventory, audited our books and processed payroll, among other things. The club was fairly busy as I made my way down to my office. Once I got to that hallway, I knew something was wrong. Giovanni looked at me like he was ready to blow a gasket.

“What happened?” I asked worriedly.

“They are sending the girls tonight,” he said, through clenched teeth.

“Girls? What—” I cut myself off when it dawned on me what he was talking about. “I thought they hadn't responded to him, that communications had stopped.”

“I don't know what the fuck happened, but he called me when I was at home, telling me they came through and we needed to go pick them up.” He ran his hand through his hair.

“Fuck,” I breathed. “This is bad, how do we stop it?”

“I think we are way past that, we need to figure out something else.” He walked to my office, as I followed, going straight for the whiskey I kept in here. I closed the door and immediately turned on my anti-surveillance gadget.

“Maybe we can let them go?” I said, sitting down as he passed me a glass that was way more than two fingers of

whiskey.

“We should call the police,” he said, as I choked on my spit, making me cough.

“Excuse me,” I said, once I caught my breath and stopped coughing.

“We send an anonymous tip and once we see them there, we bail. I’m sure he wouldn’t think twice about what happened other than the feds were tracking those other guys,” he said seriously.

“What if we get caught?” I worried about this plan and the endless possibilities that could go wrong.

“We won’t, we will make sure we have a clear exit and leave as quickly as we can.” He downed his whiskey. “It’s the only plan we have and it’s the only plan that is going to work.”

“I think we really need to think about this first, there’s a possibility that he will find out and then what?” I asked, as all these scenarios went through my brain.

“He won’t, I have a burner phone. It can’t be traced back to me,” he said quickly, almost as if he were convincing himself more than me.

I stayed silent as I tried to think of something else, other than us possibly getting caught. Once I looked at him, he shot me a desperate look.

“I’m not going to let him do this Evan, we agreed to do whatever we could so that this wouldn’t happen,” Giovanni argued.

“We agreed to derail his plans but without the possibility of getting caught. What’s going to happen to your family if that happens?” I asked, as I really came to terms that this might be our only possibility.

“Vittoria knows what to do if I die or get put in jail. I have a contingency for everything because I know that every day that is a possibility,” he replied, like it was common sense. “Don’t you have a plan?”

“No, I don’t, I never thought I would need a plan, to me this was always temporary,” I said, feeling like an idiot that I never thought that I would need to have one.

“After all this shit tonight, you need to make a plan because it is a possibility and leaving your loved ones to suffer in ignorance is worse.” He poured himself another glass.

“Fuck, ok,” I said, running my hand through my hair and then rubbing my neck to release some tension that had been building.

“Are we in agreement about what needs to happen?” he asked, looking at me with pleading eyes. I knew sex trafficking was a hard no for both of us, but we wouldn’t be able to do shit from jail or six feet under. What other choice did we have?

“Fine, fuck, let’s do it,” I agreed, but it still felt like the worst solution.

“Good,” he said, getting up. “I’m going to go for a drive and make the call. See if you can get anything else out of Lucio before we have to head out. We need as much info as possible if we are going to survive this.”

As he got up to leave my office, I nodded my head and turned off my gadget. I stuffed it into one of my drawers, still trying to think of a different solution we could employ but nothing came up.

“Evan!” Lucio called me.

I got up from my chair, feeling like I wasn’t a part of reality anymore as I walked down the hall to his awful office. When I passed the threshold, I noticed Geraldo and a few other men surrounding Lucio’s desk. I instantly went to the back of the room, but I knew he was only going to call me again and I didn’t need the unwanted attention.

“Ah, Evan, great! We can talk about the packages we are going to pick up today. Make sure everyone is on the same page,” he said, sitting down, like we were about to talk about deliveries we were getting from Amazon.

I walked close to his desk but still kept my distance from everyone else. Geraldo glanced at me with a glint in his eye that raised my hackles. This fucker was planning something, making me worried that he was going to go after Darcy sometime soon.

Fuck, I needed to check on her or have Dev do it.

“So, tonight we will be getting a shipment of—”

My thoughts went back to Darcy and our families that we were trying to keep safe, thinking of ways to increase their security without running us into the ground. I needed more loyal men that listened to Giovanni, so we could have more hands on deck.

“We will keep them at the safe house outside of Mountain Ridge. Once we have secured potential buyers for them, we can talk about security or retrieving them.” Lucio clapped his hand like the deranged psycho he was.

Giovanni walked into the meeting quickly standing next to me giving me a nod, which I figured meant he had made the call.

“So now that my son Giovanni has decided to grace us with his presence, he will be running this operation making sure everything is going well,” Lucio said, trying to keep a neutral face but you could see the fury in his eyes.

Giovanni walked in front of everyone talking about keeping our profile as low as possible, and only sending a few people to retrieve the girls. He kept a neutral expression until he said the word girls, and I knew it took everything he had not to look disgusted with this situation. The rest of us were there to keep a look out and signal for the possibility that the deal might go bad.

“The deal is solid,” Lucio snapped.

“I’m not taking any chances, we barely know these men. It could be a stupid mistake to trust them completely,” Giovanni said, with a little snap to his voice. “Would you like all of us going to jail for something that could have been avoided?”

Lucio glared at Giovanni and the silent power struggle between both of them was overwhelming, until Lucio looked away first. I didn't know I was holding my breath, but it seemed like Lucio was not giving up and Giovanni would pay for this later. Giovanni showed that he was not above putting his father in his place and in front of everyone too. The men in the room kept looking between them like they were waiting for Lucio to do something.

"If a sacrifice needs to be made then so be it," Lucio said. It was a warning to us all that he didn't need any of us. There was always someone who would rise up to take our place and I wouldn't doubt it.

"Well, I'd like to see our men go home to their families, so the less chance of casualties, the better," Giovanni retorted, and in that moment, I saw the shift in men's loyalties. Giovanni was willing to do whatever it took to get them back home. Lucio was ready to sacrifice anyone for his lack of planning. Giovanni talked about where everyone would be, giving us all direction and what was expected of us.

"Evan will be on the east—"

"Evan will be at the exchange. He will be handing over the money, making sure we have an even trade." Lucio vetoed Giovanni. He looked like he was going to say something, but I shook my head. We needed to be smart about this and he had already stuck his foot in his mouth. We didn't need him to get into more shit.

"Ok, let's head out in fifteen," Giovanni said, and everyone started to filter out of Lucio's office. I stayed just in case Lucio decided to do or say something to Giovanni. I wanted to back him up, not that he would need it, but I felt better if I was close to him.

"Next time you have the need for a pissing contest, make sure you're willing to bring it to the death because I will not tolerate your childish tantrum when I fucking correct you or tell you how it's going to go." Lucio seethed. "I brought you into this work and I can fucking take you out of it." He tossed a gun on his desk to drive his point home.

“Don’t ask me to lead an operation if you don’t want my fucking opinion, I’m trying to do what is best for all of us in the long run, and not just the right now. What good is money if we can’t spend it,” Giovanni looked at Lucio like he was ready to lunge for the gun if he needed to.

I stood as still as possible, they stared at each other for a minute.

“You’re leading because you’re my son but if you die; I can just replace you,” Lucio snarled. “Remember your fucking place.”

He walked out of the office, sneering at me as he walked past. Giovanni was vibrating in anger, like it was taking everything he had not to lose his shit.

“It’s not worth it, man,” I said, hoping to knock some sense into him.

He turned to look at me, his breathing was erratic, his nostrils were flaring, and his body was tense. “One day, I’m going to snap,” he said, not saying anymore because we knew his office was bugged. “Let’s get this shit show over with and we can go home.”

I nodded, following him out and we headed to the drop off.

Giovanni was right, it was a shit show; the cops and feds showed up. A few of our guys were taken into custody. I barely made it out, almost getting arrested if it weren’t for Giovanni tackling one of the cops. Unfortunately, Geraldo made it back with us, with a few of his friends, and Lucio went nuclear.

No one was safe from his wrath.

DARCY

Going to Monroe was a treat for me. Since I worked so much with Mary, making the trip was such a hassle, so I never wanted to go. When I went to work this morning, it was like any other day, but when one of Mary's friend's daughters came in ready to work, I was confused.

Her name was Lyla and she had lived with her dad most of her life and came here to attend Monroe College. She had previously worked for Starbucks, so when Mary had heard she needed a job, she hired her on the spot. Her classes were in the afternoon and nights, so she was perfect for the job.

Mary had it all worked out that I would open, and she would close with Mary on the days she didn't have an afternoon class. She picked up all of the recipes quickly and I think I could have kissed her when she worked like she had been there for years instead of a few hours.

I didn't realize I desperately needed some time off until I was perusing the racks at Target with a Mango Dragon fruit refresher. Mary would give me the side eye if she knew I ordered one of these, but it was fucking refreshing.

I bought things I didn't need, walked around the dollar section too many times and decided I needed a whole new skin care line. As I loaded my bags into my car, I suddenly felt lighter, like Target had recharged my battery. I had been coasting on low battery mode for way too long.

I got into my car when I heard my phone ring. Looking through my purse, I smiled because I knew it would be Mary

asking me some questions. When I saw it was a number I didn't recognize, I let it go to voicemail. If they really needed to speak to me, they would leave a message. Not too long after the phone stopped ringing, a text message came through as I was backing out of my parking spot. I glanced down at it as I saw a message on the screen.

Please call me, Darcy.

I wondered who the hell it could be as I drove to the highway that would take me back to Mountain View. When I stopped at a light, I responded.

Who is this?

The light turned green as I turned on to the highway, losing myself in the music I was playing. I sang my heart out, with the windows rolled down until I realized that number might be Jane. I got out at the next exit, eager to call the number back. I hadn't heard from her in a few weeks, making me worry as more time went by, especially since she hadn't answered a single phone call or text.

Once I pulled over, I checked my phone again.

It's Evan, please call me back.

Disappointment shot threw me when it wasn't Jane. I missed my friend, and I was really fucking worried about her, hoping that she was ok. Since I was already pulled over, I dialed her phone number hoping she would just answer the phone. It rang for what felt like forever, every ring making me lose more hope that she wasn't going to answer. I left a message, telling her I loved her, I wanted to make sure she was ok and if she needed anything that I was here.

Hanging up the call, I felt like I was the worst friend in the world because I wasn't with her, to help her work through whatever was going on. I stared at Evan's text to call him back wondering what the hell he was doing and how he got my number.

We had gone our separate ways after we had sex. I just had to dodge him for a bit so he would understand that we were still nothing. It wasn't until he left that note with that camellia,

that I had almost reconsidered talking to him, asking why he wanted to talk after all these years.

I shook off my thoughts of Evan, he made his choice and now I was finally coming to terms with his decision. Maybe I should have slept with him years ago just to get him out of my system or maybe I was just exhausted from always thinking of a man who didn't think twice about me.

Throwing my phone back into my purse, I turned my car around to get back onto the highway. I raised the volume on my music, getting lost in "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus, fortifying my decision that I was better off without Evan.

I belted out the song—maybe a few times too many—until I turned down the street that led to the coffee shop. Mary told me not to come back, but I just wanted to make sure they were ok. I parked in the back of the shop, grabbed my purse, and I heard my phone ring again.

Searching through my big purse I began to wonder why the hell I had decided to get such an enormous bag that served no purpose other than to frustrate me when I couldn't find something. After what felt like an eternity, my hand brushed up against my phone. It had long stopped ringing, but I was on high alert for Jane. Another missed call from Evan and two missed calls from another new number. That new message caught my eye.

Darcy, its Dev. Please call me back.

Chills crept up my spine, giving me the creeps because something had to have happened for both of them to be calling and texting me. Was it that guy who came in the other day? Dev hadn't been in as much as he used to—my mornings weren't the same— but when he did make it in, he looked bone tired. I assumed that whatever danger he thought was in the area, had gone away. I wasted no time calling Dev back.

"Darcy," he answered on the first ring like he had been waiting for me to call.

"What happened?" I got out of my car.

“I need to see you. We need to see you,” he said quickly, as I heard murmurs in the background.

“What happened?” I asked again.

“Can we please talk in person?” he asked, a hint of desperation was in his voice.

“I’m at the coffee shop,” I said.

“Oh, we just left there,” he said, as another voice said something too.

“Who is we?” I asked, wondering if he was with Evan.

“Are you in the back?” he asked.

“Dev, if you don’t start answering my questions, I’m going to hang up,” I snapped, getting frustrated.

“Evan and me,” he said, as I heard a car pull up behind my car. The doors opened right away, Evan and Dev got out rushing to me as they both checked me over and visibly looked relieved when they saw I was okay.

“Thank god.” Evan rushed me, enveloping me in his arms in a hug that felt too familiar. He pulled away quickly, holding my face in his hands. “Darcy, I’m so sorry but I need you to go home and pack a bag. Dev is going to follow you and—”

He took a deep breath, not finishing his sentence, looked up to the sky and then he said. “I need you to go with Dev to a safe house.”

“Excuse me?” I said, confused, pushing him away. “What do you mean go to a safe house? What the hell is going on?” I looked at Evan, noticing he looked like shit. He had dark circles under his eyes, his clothes were rumpled and dirty. He had stubble along his jaw and he just looked exhausted. I glanced at Dev to see if he was in the same shape, but he only looked mildly better and not so dirty.

“Darcy, I’m so fucking sorry, but I’ve tried to keep you safe all of these years only to fucking fail. Lucio knows about you.” He looked like he might throw up at his admission. “The man that came into the coffee shop last week was one of his men. He was—”

“Let’s give her some time to process that first before we go unloading more shit on her.” Dev interrupted Evan, his voice bringing me a little comfort that I wasn’t going through this alone, but the panic was slowly bubbling up.

“I can’t stay at a safe house forever,” I said, trying to think this through, making sense of what Evan had just said.

“Just for a few days, please,” Evan pleaded.

“I can’t just pack up my life for you, Evan,” I snapped, feeling overwhelmed, and I was also perturbed that he thought I would just do whatever he wanted just because he asked. “I have a life, a job, people who depend on me not to just get up and leave when it gets too hard.”

He looked hurt at my jab, but it didn’t deter him. “Darcy, I’m not doing this to be an ass. There is a possibility that something could happen to you.”

“Maybe you should have thought of that before you—”

“Darcy, please think about Mary,” Dev interrupted me.

I glared at him because all he had to do was mention Mary; he knew I would do anything for her. I was a little peeved that Evan and he were obviously close and I had no idea about their relationship.

“We just want to make sure you’re safe and the more we can take the attention away from the coffee shop, the better,” he said, stepping close to me. “Evan is just trying to keep you safe and it’s just for a few days, like he said.”

I looked at Dev, seeing nothing but sincerity in his gaze and maybe just a little worry. Looking back at Evan, his intense chocolate gaze was bouncing between Dev and me like he was trying to figure something out. When he noticed I was watching him, he softened.

“I know, this is all my fault, I just want to keep you safe. No—I need to keep you safe.” He exhaled harshly looking between Dev and me again. “Dev will be staying with you.”

I didn’t know who was more surprised by that, Dev or me. It looked like Evan didn’t tell him what was going on either.

“Please,” Evan pleaded again to both of us.

“And where will you be?” I asked, feeling like an idiot because I wanted to know what he was going to be doing while I had to stay at a safe house doing nothing. “I have a fucking job that Mary relies on me to be at.”

“I’ll be making sure everyone stays safe by putting out fires and distracting everyone. Can you tell her you need a break?” he sighed. “I’m sorry you’re getting dragged into this, but something happened that I couldn’t control and now I’m trying to fix it before it implodes. I know that doesn’t tell you shit, but the less you know the better.”

Evan looked exhausted. Long gone was the man who gave me flirty smiles, stealing kisses before class and telling me he loved me. He was a man who looked like the last three years had aged him in the worst way possible and not the twenty-eight-year-old he was.

I wanted to tell him to go fuck himself, but if this kept people safe, I had no choice.

“I need to go pack a fucking bag,” I said, turning around to go back to my car. What the fuck I was going to tell Mary, since I wasn’t going to be able to go to work. The stress of the situation was already giving me anxiety.

“I’m sorry, Darcy, but if you need anything please call me, you have my number,” he said as I got into my car. I didn’t respond because I had nothing else to say to him.

The entire drive to my house, I grew angrier and angrier. Not even Dev was safe from my murderous thoughts. He lied to me. It looked like he and Evan were friends, and it felt like I had been played. We almost kissed last week. Was that all fake too?

Once I pulled up into my driveway, I popped the trunk to get all my Target bags.

Today started out so great, what the fuck happened?

“Let me help.” Dev’s raspy voice made me want to cry.

“I don’t need your help,” I snapped, grabbing all the bags, even though there were too many in my hands, making them hurt. Dev didn’t listen and grabbed all the bags from both of my hands, walking to my front door. I rolled my eyes as I followed him, possibly glancing at his ass that looked great in his jeans.

He stood off to the side of the door while I opened it. I didn’t want to be near him so I mumbled that he could leave the bags in the dining room. I ran to my room, closing and locking the door just in case he decided to come up here for whatever reason.

Leaning against the door, I slid down until my butt hit the floor, pulling my knees up, wrapping my arms around them and letting go. To keep myself from making noise, I bit my lip, my body needed a release of all the stress and anxiety I was feeling.

I cried for a life that Evan could have had if he hadn’t tied himself to Lucio, for the life I could have had with him, and for the lives of everyone who was being affected by that awful fucking man. Now I was really curious how Dev was involved with Lucio. Was he his son, after all?

I gave myself five minutes to let it out, feeling a lot better afterward, but also so emotionally drained. I stepped away from the door but stopped quickly when I thought I heard something outside the door. When nothing made a sound, I went to my closet to grab a weekender bag and started to pack.

It didn’t take me long to get all my stuff, throwing in my laptop, hoping they had internet so I could catch up on some TV shows. I checked my reflection in the mirror noticing I didn’t look too splotchy but at this point who cared. It’s not like I should be trying to impress Dev.

Walking to the dining room, I noticed my bags were nowhere to be found. I heard a cabinet close in the kitchen and I turned a corner to see Dev looking in my pantry.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” I asked, getting angry again. Who the hell did he think he was

snooping through my shit. It was only my pantry, but it was still weird.

“I was putting away the things you got at Target.” Dev looked a little sheepish, that intense blue gaze looking me up and down.

I wanted to be upset that he was doing something nice, but I couldn't help but find it sweet and endearing.

“I left the clothes you purchased on the sofa in case you wanted to bring them, and I also have a bag of snacks from here. I don't know how well stocked he has the safe house, but it might be better to go prepared.” His cheeks had a faint blush to them. Damn him for being so thoughtful and that blush was fucking adorable.

“Thanks,” I muttered, feeling grateful but also angry that he was being like this. It was easier to hate a man who was an asshole than a man who was sweet like Dev. “I'm ready to go.”

He nodded his head. “I'll drive us to the safe house. It will be better if we leave your car here.”

The need to say something snarky or snap at him was on the tip of my tongue, but I couldn't find it in me to do so. It was like kicking an injured puppy on the floor. I didn't want to be a puppy kicker.

I locked up the house, getting a weird feeling that it would be the last time I saw my house.

Dramatic much?

Dev grabbed my bag, opened my door for me, then went to the trunk to put everything there. Once he got into the car, I made sure to look out the window trying not to appreciate his clean smell and soft singing as we drove away from Mountain View.

“Darcy, I know this isn't ideal, but thank you for coming out to the safe house,” he said, with so much understanding that even though I was angry, I still appreciated his gratitude.

I stayed silent, watching as we left town. Every mile that we drove away from my home caused dread to pool in my gut. Hiding me away wasn't the solution, this would help for a couple of days but then what? I couldn't hide forever.

I decided to text Mary that I would love a few days off and she was more than willing to give them to me. She said the new girl was doing great and if she needed me she would let me know.

The car ride was over an hour long. When we turned onto a dirt road, I noticed what looked to be an orchard to one side. The entire drive had given me time to stew in my anger that was boiling hot when the car stopped in front of a cabin that I was not expecting. In my mind it was dilapidated, a one-room shack. This beautiful cabin had a wrap-around porch that looked amazing.

Dev exited the car, popping the trunk as I stared at my home for the next few days. I opened the door, following Dev into the house that looked cozy and warm. There was a sectional in front of a fireplace, a few bookshelves and a TV off to the side. To the left was an open kitchen that looked relatively new and a small breakfast nook. It looked like a romantic getaway not an 'I'm hiding from a psychopath for a few days prison.'

Goddammit, if this is what isolation looked like, then maybe it wasn't so bad.

I grabbed one of my bags from Dev's hand and walked to the hallway straight ahead where I assumed the bedrooms were at. I opened the first door and thankfully it was a bedroom, closing the door quickly behind me.

I leaned against the door feeling like—I honestly didn't know how I was feeling—it was like my mind couldn't make up its mind. Setting my bag on the wooden floor, I climbed onto the bed that was nicer than the one I had at home.

For fuck sakes, it was heaven.

It didn't take long before I fell asleep dreaming about Dev and Evan.

DEV

When Evan and I couldn't find Darcy in the morning, I panicked. I had been slacking on watching over her, I simply didn't have the guts to tell Evan I couldn't do it anymore. Most mornings I passed by to see if she was ok; some lunches I did the same. I just couldn't go inside because I was worried about another near-kiss.

It had only been a few days since I started to avoid her. I missed our subtle flirting and those shy glances she gave me more than I realized. I was in way over my head with Darcy, but the longer I was away from her, the more my feelings toward her grew. Was it a crush or an obsession? I swore I thought about her all the time.

When Evan told me the feds busted a deal and Lucio was pissed at everyone, guilt ate at me when we couldn't find her. My job was to keep her safe and it had suffered because I was developing feelings for her. These feelings couldn't ever lead to anything because she wasn't mine. Not that she was Evan's either, but I couldn't do that to him.

After we found her and told her she needed to go to the safe house, she looked at me like I had betrayed her. In all reality I needed her safe too. Evan had told her that I was staying with her, I had never wanted to punch my friend more than I had in that moment. I couldn't stay there with her with these feelings, it was a disaster waiting to happen.

Thankfully, she had agreed to go to the safe house but I was scared to think it was because of me. When she took off to go pack a bag, I glared at Evan.

“Thanks for fucking volunteering me,” I snapped. “I have my own family to watch over, I don’t have time—”

“Please, just watch over her. Giovanni will have someone watching over Ava and your ma,” he said. “Darcy will not be comfortable with an outsider, and it seems she is comfortable with you. She won’t stay if it’s anyone else.”

I wanted to argue more, but if me being there meant that she would be safe, then I had to fucking do it. I didn’t know what I would do if something happened to her, especially when I almost lost my shit this morning.

Not bothering with saying bye, I left Evan at the coffee shop and made my way to Darcy’s house. I shot Jaime a text saying I needed the next few days off hoping he didn’t ask too many questions. I had finished all the cars we had in the shop, so I knew he wasn’t going to be busy. Worst-case scenario, I could tell him Giovanni needed me and that would be enough to let me go, but he just told me to let him know when I would be back.

When I arrived at Darcy’s house, the mood was awkward and emotional. I could hear her crying in her bedroom, but I knew I had made the right decision to come with her. Evan was right, she needed someone familiar with her.

I expected her to take a lot longer to get all her stuff, but she was ready quickly and we immediately left for the cabin. It was a quiet ride except for the radio pushing droning background music onto our icy mood. When we arrived, Darcy’s face was priceless. I don’t know what she was thinking the cabin looked like, but I knew it was probably a lot nicer than she had imagined. Evan had this location secured with a high-tech security system, that alerted us of movement down the road and an obscene amount of cameras. This was the best place for her safety.

It was a nice place that Evan had put a lot of time and effort into, with the occasional help from Aiden, Cal or Nathan. Evan, Giovanni and I stayed here one weekend getting wasted, having a ‘dude weekend’, and blowing off some

steam. I wished we had more time to come out here because it had been an awesome experience.

Darcy followed me into the house, stopping at the entrance to admire the inside. For just a second, I thought she might be ok until she yanked her bag from my hand, storming off to one of the rooms. Taking a deep breath, I felt a little frustrated, even though she had every right to be mad. My phone buzzed and I fished it out of my pocket to see a text from Evan.

One of the guys is taking a bag of clothes for you. I'm sending food too. I'll try and be over soon.

Sounds good.

I really wanted to be mad at the man, but I knew he was under a lot of stress. He and Giovanni didn't tell me much about what had happened. All I know is Lucio was pissed about a deal gone bad and we all needed to be on high alert because we didn't know what he might do.

I sat Darcy's other bag on the sofa by the hallway in case she needed it, then took some of her groceries to the kitchen to put them away. The silence was deafening as I sat down on the sofa, trying to figure out what the hell I was supposed to do. Should I leave her alone or go and check on her?

To keep me occupied, I texted my sister to let her know I wasn't going to be home, but that I would check back in with her every so often. I didn't know if I should have let her know what was going on, but I texted my ma to let her know things hadn't been good with Lucio and to just keep an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. She told me to be safe and she would keep an extra eye on Ava.

I got an alert on my phone that a car was approaching. The camera feed came up, showing me that it was one of the men Giovanni trusted. Opening the door, I waited for him on the wrap-around porch. He pulled up and we unloaded a shit ton of grocery bags, with a duffle bag for me.

"Thanks man," I said, shaking his hand before he got back into his car and left.

It took me several trips to get the bags into the cabin. Evan had gone overboard and sent us enough food to feed a small army. Once I had all the groceries put away, it was close to dinner time. I stood at the end of the hallway for a moment, listening for Darcy. When I didn't hear anything, I silently walked to the door to the room she was staying in, trying to listen for any noise but I was still met with silence.

The need to walk in to make sure she was ok was almost too much to handle but I needed to give her space. I didn't want her to hole herself up in the room the whole time we were here; she didn't need to feel like a prisoner. Walking back to the kitchen I looked through everything to see what I could make.

There was a lot of pasta, so I decided to make a carbonara since there were eggs, bacon and surprisingly some pecorino cheese. It made me wonder if Italian food was his favorite or if Giovanni's guy just liked Italian and that's all he knew how to shop for.

Either way, making Italian was easy for me. Giovanni's wife, Vittoria, had been nice enough to show me how to cook a lot of dishes and I wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to cook amazing food. I swear she could cook with her eyes closed and whip up homemade gnocchi with a delicious pesto sauce.

Checking to see if I had everything for pesto because gnocchi and pesto sounded delicious. I had everything except pine nuts. I might have to ask Evan to stop for some, if he was coming by soon. As I cooked dinner, I listened to a Whitney West novel on my phone.

Yeah, I like romance novels. Sue me.

I had just finished mixing everything together when I heard a door open and close. Putting the tongs down, I pressed pause on the audio book before she came out to the kitchen.

She came in looking ruffled from sleep and was fucking adorable.

“I thought I heard someone else,” she said, as she rubbed her eyes looking around the kitchen. “It also smells really good in here.”

“I was listening to music,” I said quickly, feeling my face grow hot. Telling Darcy I liked romance novels wasn’t how I wanted our conversation to go tonight.

She looked at me suspiciously and walked closer. She glanced at my phone and I realized my mistake too late. The audiobook cover was still up. Her eyes widened when she saw what I was listening to, and I wanted the earth to open up and swallow me.

“Dev, you listen to Whitney West?” she asked me, with a smirk.

“Yeah, I like her and a few other romance authors,” I said, trying to remain as confident as I could but I was nervous about what she would say.

“Oh yeah? Let me see who else.” She picked up my phone and looked through my collection of audiobooks. I plated our food, finishing it with a sprinkling of bacon on the top, with more shredded pecorino.

“Wow Dev, that’s quite a collection you have there,” she said, placing my phone on the counter. “I do have a few recommendations; Willow Winslet has some fantastic books too. Enzo and Violet are great narrators.”

I nodded my head. “I’ll take all of your recommendations over dinner,” I said, putting the plates of food on the island bar as she pulled her own phone from her pocket.

“Jesus, Dev, did you make this?” she said, with wide eyes, leaving her phone on the counter.

“It’s just a simple carbonara,” I said, feeling myself get hot again. Fuck, I’m acting like I hadn’t been near a woman before.

“Wow,” she said, as she sat down at one of the barstools, looking at the food like it was her long-lost lover.

I took out the bottle of white wine I had chilling, opened it and served us each a glass. I didn't know if she drank but I could always drink hers if she didn't like it. The way this night was going I was probably going to need it.

"Damn Dev, this looks amazing," she said, picking up her fork, as I placed the glass in front of her, waiting for me to sit down next to her.

I sat down next to her and grabbed my own fork as we both dug in. An obscene moan came from Darcy, making me look at her. She had her eyes closed looking like she was in heaven.

I wondered if she looked like that when she came.

"Dev, this is fucking delicious. It's the best carbonara I've ever tasted." She moaned as she took another bite. I noticed I was staring as she licked her lips, making noises that no one should make when they're eating because I was growing hard watching her.

I definitely needed this wine, I downed most of the glass as I went back to the pasta, suffering through her moans and groans. I finished first, getting up to put my plate in the sink and grabbed myself more wine.

"That was amazing, Dev. Thank you so much," she said, leaning back in the barstool, holding out her glass for more wine.

"You're welcome," I said, topping her off.

I set the bottle down before I grabbed her plate to put it in the sink. Looking for Tupperware, I found some and put the rest of the carbonara away in the fridge.

"I'm sorry," Darcy said, making me glance back at her.

"For what?" I asked, putting away the cheese.

"I was a bitch to you."

"It's completely understandable," I said, shrugging. "You had every right to be mad at your situation."

“I’m just confused, I feel like I don’t know what the hell is going on and I’m just expected to go along with what everyone is telling me.” She sounded exasperated.

I stopped what I was doing, walking up to her still sitting on the barstool. “It’s a shitty situation that you’ve been put in. I know Evan hasn’t told you much but maybe it is for the best.” The height difference between us was enough that I had to look down at her.

“Are you his son?” Darcy asked and I knew who she was talking about. I had been expecting this question for some time now.

“Yes,” I said, looking away, knowing that when I looked back at her she was going to see me differently. I didn’t expect to feel a hand on my cheek, bringing my gaze back to hers. I didn’t notice anything different at first but then the flicker of sadness bled through.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to ask such a personal question.” She placed her other hand on my face. “I just wish I knew more about you.”

“You can ask me anything,” I said, enjoying the feel of her hands cupping my face. She pulled me forward and I didn’t resist as she brought my body in between her legs.

“Anything?” she asked, with a raised brow.

“Anything. But I might not answer it,” I smirked.

“What about one kiss for one answer?” she asked, a little breathy.

My smirk quickly vanished as she finished her sentence. Did I hear her correctly?

“Darcy—” I said, feeling nervous that she wanted to kiss me but also the need to kiss her made me impatient. I wanted to know what her full lips felt like on mine as I swallowed a moan from her.

“I feel like it might be a good incentive,” she said, a little sheepishly.

“An incentive for who. You or me?” I said, standing just a little closer to her.

“Both.” She pulled me in a little closer until our lips were just a few inches apart. “Do you want to kiss me?”

I didn’t know what spell she had me under, but I answered quickly without thinking of the repercussions. “Yes.”

“I’ve been thinking about kissing you since that day in the coffee shop and I can’t stop,” she said, pulling me forward until our lips met.

It was soft and unsure at first. I grabbed the back of her neck, licked the seam of her lips until she opened for me, and I deepened the kiss. She sighed, brushing her tongue against mine while she looped her arms around my neck, bringing our upper bodies flush.

Kissing Darcy was like taking a breath after being underwater for too long. I didn’t know how much I needed it, how much I craved it until her lips touched mine. It was frantic, desperate and opened the floodgates for all the naughty things I had been thinking about doing to her.

Darcy dragged her hand down my chest, hooking her fingers in my belt pulling me forward until I was nestled in the warmth between her legs. I shuddered at the need to thrust against her, so she knew exactly what she was doing to me.

“Darcy,” I groaned, kissing down the column of her neck.

She whimpered when I sucked on her neck by her pulse, pulling her hair back to give me better access as she ran her hand up my shirt. I shivered picturing her hands, clawing at my back as I fucked her senseless.

“Darcy, tell me to stop.” I kissed back up her neck.

“What why?” She ran her nails down my chest and abs before she slid her hand to my ass and gave it a squeeze, making me roll my hips against hers. That was the response she wanted, when she squeezed my ass again.

“Darcy, we shouldn’t,” I said, as I kissed her jaw, capturing her lips again. My brain wanted to stop but my body had no

plans to.

“It feels so good.” She moaned, when I cupped one of her tits and rubbed a thumb across her already hard nipple.

“Darcy, tell me to stop,” I pleaded, as she kissed my jaw, rolling her hip against my already hard cock, making me impossibly harder.

“No.” She nipped at my ear, running her hands over my short hair.

My resolve was running thin, but I didn't want this to be just a hook-up because she was feeling confused and mad about her situation. I knew I shouldn't, but with Darcy I wanted something more than a one-night stand or to be the distraction she needed. It was getting old, always being the person that women got lost in but not the person they stayed with.

Fuck, this was a bad idea!

“Darcy—”

Her phone started to vibrate on the counter. She quickly took a glance at it, stilling when she saw the name. She pushed me away as she quickly grabbed the phone to answer it.

“Jane,” she said with so much emotion in her voice, looking up at me as I took a step away from her.

“No, no, no, don't you dare say that,” Darcy responded, getting up from the chair, giving me an apologetic look before walking to her room.

Once her door shut, I exhaled sharply, setting my hands on the counter and leaning over to take a deep breath and slow my erratic heart rate. I was horny as fuck but also felt guilty as shit.

Being in this cabin with her was not going to be easy and I didn't know if I could keep my hands to myself anymore. Just a taste of Darcy had my brain going into overdrive with all the things I wanted to do to her, but I also didn't want to be that guy who she lost herself in. I wanted more.

DARCY

Two days had passed since I arrived at the cabin. It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it was going to be, especially with all the updated amenities this cabin had to offer. Yesterday I took a bath in that amazing soaker tub in my bathroom, almost falling asleep because it had fucking jets that worked out some kinks in my back, leaving me a big pile of useless limbs.

The nap after that was epic. If I wasn't so stubborn, I would thank Evan for bringing me out here, because I needed to relax for a moment. If I didn't feel a little uneasy about what might be happening in Mountain View, I would definitely feel like I was at some cabin getaway.

It was the afternoon, and I was outside enjoying the fresh air, attempting to read a book. Dev had left this morning to take care of some things and he looked like he was getting twitchy about not seeing Ava. Now that he told me he was Lucio's son, I saw why he was so protective of his sister. Just hearing him admit he was his son led me to believe he wasn't a big fan of his.

It almost seemed like he was ready for me to stop talking to him or see him differently, but I think it made me like him more for some reason. Being Lucio's son seemed to leave a heavy burden on his shoulders that made me want to ease his pain. So, I kissed him. I wasn't prepared for the toe-curling kiss he gave me or the nibbles and sucks he left on my neck. Just thinking about our kiss again made me flush with desire. If Jane hadn't called, I'm sure I would have asked him to fuck

me on the counter making me scream with that talented mouth of his.

I was so grateful for the disturbance especially since I had been thinking so much about Jane. She said she was doing fine, catching me up on everything that had happened since she left. My heart broke for her, since she had been through more than enough and now, she had to deal with more. We ended the call with promises to speak again soon.

I expected the morning after to be awkward with Dev, but it was far from it. He made me delicious pancakes and we watched some trashy TV while we ate and before I took my amazing bath and nap.

Throughout dinner I was hoping for a repeat of the night before, but he seemed content with just making conversation about my book recommendations. Surprisingly we had very similar tastes when it came to books, making our conversation flow easily. After dinner he took a few calls in his bedroom, and I knew one of them was Evan, who I surely thought would have visited us by now. When I finished cleaning the kitchen, I put on a movie and prepared to relax with a glass of wine.

I woke up, tucked in my bed, when I saw a note that said he had to head into town. It felt like he might be avoiding me, but if that was the case, wouldn't he have gone into town yesterday? I rubbed my face as I mulled over everything that was going on between us. Not that there was an us, but I just didn't know what to make of it. Him being so close for a few days sent my body on overdrive, even more so when I learned a little more about him.

I wrapped the blanket I had a little tighter around myself. The fall was quickly turning into winter weather, and I knew it wouldn't be long until we had our first snow. Opening my book again, I was desperate to get lost in someone else's drama as my eyes grew heavy.

“Jesus Christ, Darcy, it's getting chilly out here.” I opened my eyes to see Dev walking over to me. I blinked a few times to wake up when I noticed the sun was starting to set.

Shit I must have fallen asleep for a few hours.

“I didn’t mean to fall asleep,” I said, looking up at him as he gathered me into his arms, enveloping me in his warmth and I realized just how cold I was.

“You scared me when you didn’t answer your phone,” he said, opening the door and walking me to the sofa. “The only reason I didn’t lose my shit was because none of the alarms had been tripped.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, feeling a little guilty as I looked up at him. He had been tense these last two days, constantly checking the alarm system and making sure everything was locked when we came in for the evening.

“It’s ok, halfway here I figured you had taken another nap and it quelled my fear that something had happened to you.” He leaned down, giving me a kiss on the forehead before he leaned back to look at me. His electrifying gaze brought me comfort and eased my guilt but also gave me butterflies.

“Are you hungry?” His raspy voice added to those butterflies in my stomach.

“I could eat,” I said, keeping my voice even without the desperate whine I really wanted to release and ask if he would just eat me instead.

“Good, I bought stuff to make pesto,” he said, lingering for a moment until he leaned back, walking out of the cabin.

I took a deep breath, getting up to make myself some tea to warm up. Filling up the kettle to warm some water, I went in search of some tea when Dev walked in with some grocery bags.

“I also brought you some pastries from the coffee shop,” he said, leaving a brown bag on the counter. “I figured I would go check on them for you and make sure they were okay.”

I melted. Did he always think of everything?

“The new girl seems to be doing just fine and Mary came out to say hello. She told me to go check on you with a really big wink.” He looked up and smirked at me.

I rolled my eyes. “That woman needs to stop meddling but if you’re curious, she told me to save gas and ride a mechanic,” I said with a chuckle, finding tea bags and grabbing a mug.

Dev barked a laugh. “That sounds like something she would say.”

His laugh was amazing, it lit up his whole face making him look young and carefree. There was also a slight blush to his cheeks that was adorable.

“Dev, how old are you?” I asked, sitting on a barstool watching him put his groceries away except for what he needed.

“Old enough that I know riding a mechanic does indeed save gas,” he said, with a mischievous grin.

I hid my growing blush with a bite into a blueberry scone, thinking about how I would test that theory out. Lost in my thoughts, Dev set my tea in front of me with a sugar bowl and some honey next to it.

“I’m twenty-four, Darcy,” he said, grabbing a pastry and biting into it, then licking just a little bit of jelly that had escaped the corner of his mouth. “Damn! Mary makes some really good stuff.”

“Uh—yeah she is amazing,” I said, adding some sugar to my tea thinking I would have loved to have been that smidge of jelly.

“While I cook, would you like to listen to an audiobook with me?” Dev asked, as he took out a food processor and a pot. “Wander Whitlock’s new book just came out on audio.”

“Oh, what’s it called?”

“Temptation,” he said, with his intense gaze that made me want to clench my thighs.

“Temptation sounds really good,” I said, noticing my voice growing a little husky.

“Yeah, it does,” He pulled out his phone, opening up the audiobook and hitting play.

My little angel didn't know it, but she was mine and I didn't care who I had to kill to make that happen. The narrator growled.

Maybe listening to a mafia audiobook was a bad idea.

“DEV, where the hell did you learn to cook like that?” I asked, after I finished washing the dishes. I walked to the sofa where Dev was sitting while on his phone. Almost sitting right next to him but decided that might be too much and sat by the other arm of the sofa. After hearing that audio book that went straight to sex, I felt like I needed a release.

“My brother’s wife is an excellent cook. I usually watch her when she makes dinner and one day, she asked me to help her. Since then, we always make dinner together when I go over,” he said looking up at me. “I wanted to make sure Ava knew where she came from on her father’s side and her mother’s side.”

“Wow, that’s really sweet,” I said, melting at his constant need to take care of his sister.

“I can’t take full credit for that. My ma has always instilled an importance of family and to know where you came from.” He grabbed his wine glass, taking a sip. “Lucio is an asshole who I hope my sister never has to be around, but she needs to know what her heritage is. My brother and his family are helping as much as they can. Vittoria’s mom is amazing too.”

I was jealous for a moment when he talked about all the people who were around his sister to help her. I wished I had that growing up.

“That is great,” I said, hearing the emotion in my voice before I downed the rest of my wine.

“Do you have a lot of family around here?” Dev asked an innocent question, but it still hurt.

“No, my parents traveled a lot when I was younger. Mary practically took care of me since I was in middle school,” I

said, giving almost the same spiel I gave to almost everyone. “Once I graduated, they gave me the house I lived in as a present and bounced.”

“What do you mean they bounced?” The anger in his voice was startling.

“They left. I don’t see them very much. My dad came from a wealthy family and once he received his inheritance, they started going on trips more, now they live in L.A.,” I said trying to smile like it didn’t bother me.

“I mean no disrespect Darcy, but your parents are fucking assholes,” he sneered. I enjoyed his anger at my parents, grateful he said that they were the problem and not me.

“You don’t have anyone else around here?”

“My uncle lives in town, but I wouldn’t say that we are really close.” I felt the need to distract myself with something because I wasn’t too fond of talking about myself.

“I always thought Mary was your aunt,” he said, shifting back on the sofa.

I smiled, a lot of people assumed that. “She doesn’t need to share my blood to be my family. She was a better parent than my own.”

“She sounds amazing, no wonder you guys are so close.” He drank the last of his wine.

“She is,” I smiled but anytime I talked about my parents it always dragged my mood down. It didn’t help that I was stuck in a cabin and if something happened to me would they even know? How long would it take for them to find out?

“You ok?” Dev asked, as he put his glass on the coffee table.

“Yeah,” I sighed.

“That doesn’t sound like you are fine,” he said, leaning his elbows on the tops of his thighs.

“I think—I’m just tired,” I said, getting up from the couch. “I’m going to head to bed.”

“I’m sorry Darcy,” Dev said, watching me as I walked around the sofa.

“For what?” I asked, feeling emotionally raw.

“For your parents and—”

“Oh, please don’t apologize. They made their choice and it’s fine,” I said, admiring him once more before I left for my room.

I should have brought my vibrator.

I walked down the hallway to my room glancing at him before I went into the bedroom. We locked eyes, giving me a glimpse of the hunger in his eyes. My face grew hot as I entered my room, closing the door and leaning against it. That man might be able to get me to come from one look alone.

I shook off the desire that was starting to feel like I was going to be permanently aroused while I was around Dev. Grabbing a nightie out of my suitcase, I completed my nightly routine in the bathroom. Picking up the book I was reading earlier, I tossed it into the bed before I turned off the lights leaving just the lamp by my bed on. I climbed into the bed just as there was a knock at my door.

I stilled for a moment wondering if I should just pretend that I was asleep.

“Darcy, I can hear you thinking about ignoring me,” he said, and I rolled my eyes.

I yanked the door open. “I wasn’t going to ignore you, I was just—”

“Don’t lie. You were standing there or sitting in bed, wondering if you could get away with it.” He smirked but it fell off his face when he glanced at what I was wearing.

It wasn’t a particularly revealing nightie, but it cut low enough that you got an eye full of my cleavage and short enough that you got a very nice view of my legs. His eyes looked up at me as I noticed him swallowing roughly. He stepped through the threshold as I took a step back. Glancing

at my cleavage again, he took another step forward licking his lips as I took another step back feeling like I was the prey.

“Darcy,” he said, in a huskier tone, taking another step as I took another one back. We were halfway to the bed.

“Yes,” I responded, feeling a little out of breath.

“Let me make you feel good,” he said, taking one more step, but I stayed still. One more step and we would be flushed together, a few more steps we could be on the bed.

Did I want this? Hell yeah, I did.

“Please,” I whispered. He didn’t move right away making me wonder if he heard me then it was like he snapped. He picked me up, and I wrapped my legs around him as he caught my lips in a kiss. I moaned when our lips touched, giving him access to massage his tongue against mine.

He laid me down on the bed, still kissing me before he pulled away, looking at my nightie again before he trailed kisses down my neck. He pulled down my strap over my shoulder, brought my cup down to capture my nipple with his mouth. He sucked on it, palming the underside of it before he bit me, and then soothed the sting with a slow swirl of his tongue. I clenched my thighs around his middle as the electricity zapped down to my pussy.

I rolled my hips up as I ached for friction or to be filled. He gave the same attention to my other nipple while he rolled my first nipple between his fingers. His other hand trailed down my side past my hip until he abruptly stopped.

“No underwear?” he asked, with a smirk. “Are you soaking wet for me? Or have you been wet since we listened to the Audiobook.”

His hand trailed the apex of my thighs in slow, languid strokes, teasing me like he was going to touch me but pulled back before he got too close. I shivered as he teased me, and I was more than ready for him to dive in.

“Dev,” I whined.

“You didn’t answer my question, Darcy.” He ran his finger down my slit, but he didn’t touch the nerve I needed him too.

“What?” I forgot what he asked.

“Did hearing about a man getting on his knees while he serviced his little angel in a closet, turn you on?” he asked, looking down at me, still teasing me.

“I was listening to it, thinking it was you doing that to me that turned me on so much.” Once I made my confession, Dev made contact with my clit giving it a small swirl with his fingers. My back bowed in euphoria. I wasn’t going to last long as the tremors started in my legs making their way to my core. He inserted one finger and rubbed my clit with the palm of his hand, igniting my orgasm.

He captured my mouth with a kiss as he swallowed my moan of ecstasy. He continued to pump into me a few more times before he pulled out to lick his finger clean.

“Holy shit, Darcy, you fucking taste amazing,” he groaned. “I need to devour you.

I didn’t have time to make sense of his words before I felt his tongue lap at my clit. My orgasm left me too sensitive, making me pull away from his mouth.

“Come on Darcy, I want your release all over my face.” He rubbed his nose against me before he kissed my clit and sucked on me. He inserted two fingers in me, gliding in smoothly, curling his fingers until he hit a spot that made me roll my hips.

I cried out running my hands over his head to hold on to something, but his hair was too short. Dev grabbed my hand, placing it behind his head, right as he sucked in hard on me. I ground into his face chasing the orgasm he was luring out of me. Sloppy kisses, little nibbles, long sucks had me panting until he groaned against me, and the vibrations threw me over the edge.

“Dev!” I yelled my release so loud I’m sure Mountain View heard my cries as Dev kept up his punishing strokes against my clit that kept my body in a never-ending orgasm.

After my shaking subsided, I pushed him away, my body was overstimulated, and I was overcome with exhaustion.

Dev kissed my stomach, kissing each breast and then giving me a kiss on the mouth. It was sensual and made hotter by the fact I could taste myself on his lips.

“Darcy, you’re a fucking goddess and hearing my name on your lips while you came was intoxicating. Maybe I’ll grow out my hair, so you have something to hold on to in the future.” He kissed me again before getting off the bed. I stretched my body, wondering when the hell we could do that again.

I felt a warm towel in between my legs, but I was too exhausted to open my eyes. He put me under the covers and kissed my forehead. I dreamed we had plenty of time for us to do that over and over and over again.

EVAN

The last few days I had been lucky if I had gotten a few hours of sleep. After the feds busted the exchange—which was scary as fuck that almost led to me getting arrested—Lucio had been paranoid, angry as fuck and doing some really irrational things. Giovanni’s men had been hearing a multitude of things Lucio had been mouthing off about finding the rat in our midst and killing him.

There had been a few times I wanted to tell Giovanni to make a run for it to Denver with his uncle, but I knew he wouldn’t because that was a coward’s way. He was relieved that what he did worked, but he wasn’t going to let it happen again.

We finally got through to Lucio telling him it was a fluke or maybe one of the girls was someone important and she ruined the exchange. It took a lot of convincing, but we got him to settle down. We found a great fighter for the cage that posted a ton of videos to YouTube. He had over a hundred thousand followers and was pretty well known, enough to bring in a lot of money. We were also able to run drugs to some dealers in UT netting us decent profits.

I was so exhausted from trying to bury this stupid sex trafficking mistake. All I wanted to do was to go make sure Darcy didn’t hate me. Driving down to the cabin was always soothing to me. I bought it three years ago, upgrading it because you just never knew when you needed to lie low, especially working with Lucio.

Pulling up to the cabin, I realized it was later than I thought it. The cabin was almost all dark. I hoped that Dev was still awake and we could talk over a beer. I was so burnt out from everything else going on that I desperately needed a getaway anyway.

I opened the front door when the sounds of whimpering and soft cries had me rushing through the door. When I didn't see anyone in the main area, I slowly walked down the hall. I wasn't expecting to find Dev with his face buried in Darcy's pussy, with her tits on display and her cries of pleasure.

Fuck, I still remember how good she tasted.

I couldn't stop watching as she ground into his face as he took her over the brink. She cried out his name like he was the answer to her prayers, and I wanted to murder him.

She was mine.

It took everything I had in me to not storm into the room to pull him off of her, but I couldn't do that to Darcy. She didn't need any more drama, plus, she looked like she was ready to pass out. Dev kissed her one last time before he got up to go to the bathroom. When he came out, he noticed me. He stilled for a second before he went to her.

I thought he was just going to crawl into bed with her, but I realized he was cleaning her up and tucking her into bed. He was caring for her like she meant something to him. My anger dissipated a fraction.

Actually, I was really fucking confused. As much as I wanted to be mad, I also felt like the weight on my shoulders had been relieved a little. If he cared about her, he would protect her against everything, because that's just who Dev was. He was the most loyal asshole you will ever meet. If she had to be with someone, he was the best choice for her. He was a hundred times better than some frat boy or the douche ski instructor she was talking to at her birthday.

Walking to the sofa, I sat on the edge, thinking about what the hell this meant. She obviously had moved on, but was it before or after we fucked in my car? I rested my forearms on

my thighs, letting my head hang forward, wondering where the hell I went from here? What was my next move?

The sounds of Dev's boots echoed through the cabin as he walked down the hallway. I looked up, his face was guarded, with no emotion on it. One thing he did inherit from Lucio was his ability to hide his emotions. I for one was shit at it, it was hard to keep what I was thinking off my face most of the time. Right now he saw everything I was feeling. We stared at each other, while I waited to see if he was going to defend himself or his actions.

"You're not going to say anything?" I said, attempting to keep my voice leveled.

"If you want me to apologize, that's not going to happen." He shrugged.

"You knew that we had history, that I was trying to work my way out of this," I said, with more emotion than I intended to.

"Look, I didn't expect for this to happen," he said, still looking unfazed.

"What, did you just magically fall on her pussy?" I snapped.

He rolled his eyes. "You know Darcy better than I, you think that she would just let this happen because we were here?"

I did know Darcy. She didn't just randomly jump in bed with guys, not that I made sure of it, but she did just randomly fuck me in my car. Dread pooled in my chest. What if she slept with me in the car because that was it? It was her goodbye.

The possibility hit me like a train, dragging my heart through the mud. I wanted to be mad or upset, but she had every right to move on. I made a promise that I had every intention of keeping it, but life kept pushing us apart like we were the same pole of a magnet that kept repelling each other. When we got too close, life worked harder to push us apart.

The cabin felt like it was caving in on me. I got up, ignoring what Dev was telling me, and walked out the door

while I fished my keys out of my pocket. Pushing the unlock button I opened the door only for it to close on me. Dev was standing in front of me.

“What the fuck man?” He looked confused.

“I have to go,” I said, opening the door and he closed the door again.

“No, we are talking about this,” Dev snapped. “Running away isn’t solving anything, it’s just going to make this worse.”

“I’m not running away,” I said, raising my voice.

“It sure looks like you are. What the hell is that going to fix?”

“Even if I wanted to, there is no running away from you two.” I sneered.

“Look, I didn’t expect this to happen.” He started explaining and I shook my head because I didn’t want to hear it. “You’re the one who threw us together.”

If I had known this would happen, then I wouldn’t have had Dev watching her in the first place. I had done it because I trusted him, but it’s not like I set any rules in place, I just expected him to keep his distance.

“Well congratulations, I hope you guys have fun together.”

“No, this isn’t how we are fucking doing this,” he snapped.

“You don’t get to tell me how to handle my feelings with the woman I’ve been in love with for years.” I pushed him away. “I have thought about my decision every day wondering if I made the right one, wondering if I was a fucking idiot for doing what I did to keep everyone I love safe. You don’t get to tell me how to feel.”

“Don’t be an ass. Look, I know it’s unexpected—”

I punched him before he could say anything else. It was a fucking dick move but didn’t want to hear how they had feelings for each other or worse, how they fucking fell in love.

God, I hoped they weren't together when Darcy and I fucked. He fell back on the dirt, looking at me in shock.

"I don't want to hear it." My voice broke at the end. Emotions bubbled up to the surface and if I didn't get my shit together, I was going to lose it in front of him. "I took too long, and I was the idiot who expected her to wait for me. I thought I had time."

"Evan—" He got up from the floor, moving his jaw side to side.

I shook my head at him. "I just came by to let you guys know, things have settled down enough, I think she should be fine going back to work. I'm sure you guys can figure out the details to keep her safe and I'll do as much as I can on my end."

I opened the door, sliding in and yanked the door closed but Dev stopped me from closing it.

"That was your free shot because I should have told you what was happening, but I think we should talk about this. I think we could—"

"I have a lot of shit to do and I don't have time for this. There is nothing to talk about." I interrupted him, holding on to the steering wheel like it was my lifeline.

"You don't have time for Darcy?" he snapped. "You fucking make time for her, if you care about her as much as you say you do, she is a priority."

"You think she isn't a fucking priority?" I yelled, getting really pissed off. "What the fuck do you think I have been doing these past few days?" I exited the car getting close to him. "I have been making sure your father isn't fucking doing shit like killing everyone who he thinks is a threat or killing someone because he is pissed about a deal that fucking went south. The feds are on our ass, Dev."

Dev scowled. "Why didn't anyone tell me this?"

Giovanni made sure Dev was kept out of as much of the business as possible, because if something went down, the less he knew, the better. We were trying to protect all of our

families and that meant Dev too, even though he was old enough to be brought into the business years ago. Giovanni didn't want him to be sucked into this life like he had been, and I agreed.

“We've been keeping this as quiet as possible so as not to stir anything up. The deal that went bad brought a lot of unwanted attention. Your brother and I are taking the heat for it.” I took a step back, trying to reign in my anger. I wanted to tell him his father was trying to get into sex trafficking but the less he knew the better. “So, I have been busy putting Darcy first. Don't say that shit again.”

Dev looked at the cabin and then back at me. “Look, I get you're fucking stressed and if you and Giovanni just told me shit instead of keeping me in the dark, then maybe I would be able to help.”

“I think your attention is needed elsewhere,” I said, being an ass, but I couldn't help it. “Just keep her safe and watch out for anything that looks suspicious. Geraldo is salivating at the mouth to do something stupid; I can feel it.” I walked back to my car.

“This isn't over. We will talk about her,” Dev called out.

“Not if I can help it,” I muttered, closing the door.

I started the car, backing out to turn around. Dev was standing there with his hands in his pockets looking just as lost and confused as I was, but he wasn't the one losing his world. It seems like no matter what I did three years ago I was meant to lose someone even though I fought hard to do the right thing. I was damned if I did and damned if I didn't.

On the drive back to Mountain View, I went over every possible choice I had three years ago and no matter what, it seemed I was bound to lose someone, whether it be my sister or Darcy. No matter what, I had to come to terms with my choice because at least everyone was alive, but for how long?

DARCY

*A*pparently after I passed out from the two amazing orgasms, Evan came to the cabin to let Dev know I was ok to go back home. I was disappointed I didn't get to see him but relieved when Dev woke me up early the next morning so he could get me to work before we opened.

Mary was a little annoyed when she saw me, but she also looked grateful because she would have been alone today. I was only away from the coffee shop for two days.

I worked the morning with a pep in my step especially after that delicious kiss Dev left me with when he dropped me off. He said he had to go check on his family and go back to work but to call him if I needed a ride back home.

Before I knew it, it was the end of the day and I was locking the front door, looking around to make sure no one was left inside. Dev said I was safe, but we should still keep our eyes opened. I cleaned the front, worked on inventory and restocked everything I needed in the front.

I was humming as I was cleaning the espresso machine when Mary barreled into the front of the shop on a mission.

"You ok there?" I asked her when she leaned back against the counter smirking at me.

"I should be asking you that." She raised her eyes suggestively.

I rolled my eyes at her wondering what the hell she was getting at, but I knew she saw Dev when I walked in this morning since she was right by the door.

“I’m good,” I said, making her sit there waiting for me to say more.

“Just good? You’ve been gone for two days, child, and all you’re going to give me is that?” She huffed in annoyance.

I smirked at her, wiping down the counter. “Nothing happened,” I said, with a straight face, because there was no way I was talking to Mary about what Dev did with his mouth.

“Did you have sex with Dev?” She was getting impatient.

“No, I did not,” I said, looking up at her, loving that she was so desperate for a little bit of gossip. “Plus, I don’t kiss and tell.”

“How about you suck and blow the gossip to me,” she cackled.

“Mary! We did no such thing either,” I shook my head at her bluntness, but I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Ah! Ok, I see how it is Darcy.” She stood up and put her hand in her pocket, slowly walking to the back like I was going to change my mind. “I guess I’ll just assume he made your kitty purr with his mouth.”

“Mary!” I screamed, embarrassed because of course my face turned red at that fucking moment.

“I knew something happened! Child, I can see the pep in your step, and it’s definitely from having your kitty loved on.” She grinned and went to the back.

“Please never talk about my kitty again!” I yelled, horrified that she had to bring it up. Mary lived to make me uncomfortable.

I finished cleaning up, setting everything up for tomorrow. The place wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be. It seems like the new girl was doing ok and I was glad we had someone I could share the workload with. We just needed to find another baker so Mary could take some time off and take her own advice. Live life.

I TOOK my homemade dinner rolls out of the oven, admiring how beautiful golden brown they were. I placed them down on top of the stove to cool off before I transferred them to a basket. Stirring my bacon and maple brussels sprouts, I checked the scalloped potatoes, and made sure my steaks were at a low temp in the oven.

I might have gone overboard with my dinner with Dev tonight. Mary whipped up some of her vanilla bean ice cream to go with the apple pie I made. Nerves swirled in my chest, wondering if he was going to like dinner or think it was too much. When we discussed dinner plans a few days ago, I originally planned on something simple like burgers, but then I thought of the meals he had cooked for me at the cabin and I wanted to do something special for him.

The doorbell rang and I swear my heart felt like it was beating too hard and too fast. I smoothed out my T-shirt dress, fluffed up my hair and almost changed into some flats but the nights were getting cooler, so my short UGG boots stayed on. Checking myself in the mirror by the door before I let him in.

“Hey,” I said, as I held the door open for him. Dev looked good. Damn good. He was wearing dark jeans, with a plaid shirt, a worn brown leather jacket, and black boots. He had a five o’clock shadow and his hair looked a little longer on the top but still short on the sides, reminding me of his comment about growing his hair.

“Hey,” he said, giving me goosebumps from his intense gaze and that raspy voice. He walked in giving me a kiss on the cheek, moving in a little further as I closed the door.

“I can take your jacket and hang it up,” I said, as he turned around, putting a bag on the floor shrugging his jacket off.

“It smells delicious,” he said, handing over his jacket.

“I might have gone a little overboard with food.” I hung it up and walked to the kitchen. “What’s in the bag?”

“I brought dessert.”

“Oh! What did you bring?” I asked, as he put the bag on my counter and got out a round dish with a cover.

“I made tiramisu.” He unlatched the cover, showing a small round cake covered in powdered cocoa.

“Holy shit Dev, this looks amazing.” He was surprising me more and more each time we hung out. I was loving all these unpredictable layers of Dev.

His cheeks turned pink from my praise, and I was ready to hop on the counter and let him have his way with me.

“I can’t take credit for it all, Ava helped me. She also told me to be on my best behavior because she likes you and no one knows how to make coffee like you and scones like Mary,” he said, looking embarrassed as I chuckled.

“I think I might prefer you not to be on your best behavior,” I said, skimming the edge of the cake and licking the frosting off my finger as I stared at him. He grabbed my finger licking it too, reminding me what that tongue could really do.

“I think we better start dinner before my behavior gets really bad.” He let go of me.

I nodded, feeling like my brain was mush and I couldn’t speak. I plated our food and brought it to the dining room.

“Beer or wine?” I asked.

Dev looked at his steak. “I’ll have a beer this time.”

I came back with his beer, setting it down before I sat down, and we dug in. Everything came out perfectly by the way Dev was voraciously eating; it made me happy. He nodded his head a few times throughout the meal. When he finally finished, he leaned back in his chair.

“Damn, Darcy I should have let you cook out at the cabin. That was delicious,” he said, wiping his mouth on a napkin.

“I’m glad you liked it.” I preened at his praise. “I had no clue what to make and I figured steak and potatoes would be

the safe way to go.”

“I’d probably be happy with anything you made as long as I was eating with you,” he said, with a small smile. “You could have made me a bowl of cereal and I would have been content.”

I blushed at his comment. “Are you ready for dessert? I can put a pot of coffee on too.”

“I’m definitely ready for dessert but no coffee for me,” he said, looking at me like I was the dessert.

“Ok, I’m going to go get it,” I said, feeling my nerves get the better of me. The last time I had a date with a man was about a year ago and it was a disaster. He was an out of townner here for the ski season. Our dinner was ok, the conversation felt forced, the sex was mediocre, but the kissing was atrocious. He made me feel like he was trying to drown with too much tongue and too much saliva. I shivered from the memory as I grabbed the tiramisu.

Dev was different though, it felt like this was supposed to happen, like I was going in the right direction, but I kept thinking about Evan. When we were together it felt just as right. A part of me was sad, like I was missing a piece of me, and I had been feeling guilty that I had ghosted him after we had sex. I shook off thoughts of Evan; tonight, it was about Dev and me.

I walked into the dining room with plates and the tiramisu, setting them down in between us.

“Big or little piece,” I asked.

“Little, I don’t want to have too much sugar,” he said, his electric gaze looking downright lustful at me.

“A little sugar never hurt nobody.” I cut him a big piece just to prove my point.

I set it in front of him and cut myself a piece too, giving each of us a fork. Right before I sat down, Dev pulled me towards him guiding me to straddle his lap. I raised a brow at him.

“I think I want my dessert right here,” he said, cutting a piece of cake and feeding it to me. I took a bite, looking at him as I slowly pulled my mouth away. He gave me another piece, but it fell on my chin and chest, most likely on purpose.

Dev wasted no time in leaning forward, getting the piece on the top of my breast, kissing his way up to my chin. His stubble was a rough contrast to his smooth lips and tongue that gave me chills, making my nipples harden.

When he kissed the spot on my chin, he went back for another forkful bringing it to my lips. I took my bite, then he kissed me. He opened my mouth, sharing the piece he just fed me, making our kiss that much sweeter. I felt Dev move as we kissed. He pulled away holding another piece in his hand up to my mouth but smeared it on my lips trailing it down my neck and chest.

“It tastes better on you, Darcy.” His voice made me clench my thighs. I grabbed his hand licking it clean before we clashed together in a passionate kiss that made my heart race and my body singing with desire.

“I need you Dev,” I said, as he kissed down my neck, cleaning up the mess he made, as I rolled my hips against his growing erection.

“Darcy,” Dev groaned, as he held my hips still, resting his forehead against my shoulder.

I grabbed a piece of cake, leaning back so he could look at me. I took a bite, then another, licking my fingers clean. His gaze darkened as I grabbed another piece, putting it against his mouth, down his neck and dropping it into his shirt.

“Oops,” I said, as innocently as possible.

Dev looked down at his shirt, leaning forward as he grabbed the back of his collar and took it off. The piece of cake rolled down his abs, like it was leaving me a trail of icing exactly where I wanted to go.

My hands trailed down his neck, then his inked chest, down his contracting abs until I stopped at his belt buckle. Keeping my eyes on Dev’s face and those stunning eyes, I

slowly unbuckled his belt, pulling it out of the belt loops as I thought of all the dirty things we could do with it.

Dev looked down at the belt like he knew what I was thinking, smirking at me with mischief in his eyes. I let it drop to the floor before I kissed him. The taste of cake on his tongue made me want more, moving into kissing his jaw, then the column of his neck. I slid off of his lap, cleaning up his chest, the ridges of his abs, unbuttoning his pants as I made sure he was clean.

“Darcy.” His raspy voice held a warning that I wasn’t going to listen to, sliding my hands down his briefs and pulling his cock out.

A piece of jewelry stuck out at the tip of his head surprising me for a moment before my mind went wild with all the stuff I had heard about piercings. I clenched my thighs with the need to find out if what they said was true.

“Darcy, you don’t—”

I took the head of his cock in my mouth, gently sucking before I took him deeper in my mouth, pulling back to suck on the head of his cock again.

“Goddammit, Darcy.” Dev let his head fall back showing the cords of muscle in his neck, his stomach contracted and his hands came up like he didn’t know what to do with them.

I slowly came back up, swirling my tongue around the piercing when he jerked and gave me the sexiest moan I had ever heard, which only spurred me on more.

“You don’t have to be gentle,” Dev groaned when I looked up at him, taking him deeper in my mouth. “Fuck, Darcy. Your mouth—”

He weaved his hands in my hair pulling it up, watching me trying to take all of his cock in my mouth for one more of those sexy moans. I wanted to see Dev fall apart for me.

“Jesus Christ, woman.” Dev’s hips thrust one more time before he pulled me away, leaning down to kiss me like I was the air he needed to breathe. He quickly picked me up, pushing things off the table, breaking something, but I didn’t care.

He sat me down, pulled the dress off, unlatched my bra before he took a nipple into his mouth, causing me to gasp. He bit me softly before he pushed me to lie down, kissing and licking his way down my soft stomach, giving me chills. I slapped my hands down on the sides of me, my left hand landed in the cake splattering everywhere as Dev pulled my panties down, throwing them over his shoulder.

He noticed my hand covered in cake bringing it to his mouth to lick, then smearing it on my stomach and breasts.

“I love seeing you dirty for me,” Dev said, licking my fingers one more time before he kissed me down to my navel, spreading my legs. “And fucking wet.”

He licked me softly at first, blowing on my clit, giving me a new sensation to appreciate, then he sucked on me. My hands flew to his hair desperately wanting something to hold on to, bucking my hips up to meet his mouth.

“Dev,” I moaned, leaning up on my elbows to see him ravishing my pussy. He looked up at me, moaning as he sucked on my clit. I grabbed my nipple and tugged gently as he used his clean hand and inserted one finger into me and then another. My orgasm tingled low in my stomach before he curled his fingers, pushing me over the edge. He growled at my climax, extending my orgasm from the vibrations that almost made me think I was going to orgasm again.

My heart was pounding, my lungs felt like they needed more oxygen. I leaned up to see Dev standing up with his mouth glistening. He cleaned his mouth with his arm, his chest rising and falling quickly with his cock pointing at me like a damn compass.

He tugged me upright about to pick me up when I shook my head.

“Bedroom?” he asked.

“No, here,” I said, pushing him to sit down. “Condom?”

He nodded his head, looking down at my chest, licking his lips. He lifted himself up, pulling out his wallet, fishing for a condom in hurried movements. He gave it to me, and I ripped

it open with my mouth, grabbing it and rolling it down Dev's cock.

"Darcy," Dev said, my name like a prayer as I slowly lowered myself onto him. Once he was fully inside me, I let out a breath, loving the stretch. Holding on to his shoulders, I rolled my hips slowly feeling that piece of jewelry hit just right. I moaned as his hands slid to my ass, grabbing a handful moving my hips for me. He grunted when I lifted my hips up and slammed down on him.

"Alright, you had your fun," he snapped, lifting me up, turning me around quickly, bending me over the table, thrusting into me in one motion. I glanced at my china cabinet seeing Dev's reflection in the glass making my stomach swoop, while his grip on my hips was soft, like he was trying to be careful with me.

"I'm not glass, Dev." I exhaled, catching his eyes in the reflection and that's all it took. I gasped at the force of his hips when they moved at a pace that made me clench my fists. His grip was tight pulling me to his hips, over and over again, hitting the sensitive spot in me.

"Touch yourself and watch as you come on my cock," he demanded, as we locked eyes. I slid a hand down to my pussy, rubbing in soft circles, because I was already so close. A few strokes was all it took as I looked at us.

I screamed my release while Dev grunted my name. My body trembled when he stopped, leaning his forehead onto the middle of my back. My cheek was on the cool surface of the table when Dev leaned up, wrapping an arm around my middle pulling me to sit down with my back flush against his.

I saw the aftermath of our sex and I couldn't help but giggle. There was cake all over the table, there were broken plates and cups on the floor.

"Shit Darcy, I didn't mean to do that. I'll pay for everything," Dev said, hugging me a little tighter.

"I think it was worth it, " I said, snuggling into him, turning my head to look at him. Dev's eyes were full of

warmth making him look so much younger than he really was.

“Come on mhuirnín, we definitely need a shower, but hold on cause I don’t want you to cut your feet up.” He turned me around, picking me up, holding me with one arm as he pulled his pants up.

“What does that mean?” I asked as he walked over the glass while I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Dev didn’t say anything right away, but I could see a blush making its way up his neck to his cheeks. I saw him swallow as he pursed his lips.

“It’s Gaelic for—” He bit his lip like he really didn’t want to tell me what it meant.

“Is it bad?” I asked, extremely curious.

“It means my beloved or my sweetheart,” Dev said, not looking at me, but I could feel the panic in his body language.

“Dev,” I said, as he opened my door looking around to find the bathroom off to the left.

He sat me down on the counter, to start the shower still not looking at me.

“Dev.” I pulled his arm to bring him back to look at me. I cupped his face. “What happened?”

He looked up before he looked at me. “I’m out of my element Darcy. I’ve never had a relationship; this makes me nervous that I’m going to fuck it up before it starts and I’ve never wanted anything more than you.”

“Are you asking me to be your girlfriend, Dev?” I asked, smirking at this big scary guy who gives off ‘don’t fuck with me’ vibes only to be a guy who’s nervous about the same things I am.

“I’m asking you to trust me and keep an open mind.” He cupped my face. “Give me a chance to give you what you need.”

I don’t know why, but this felt like it might be our defining moment. I nodded before I pulled him in for a kiss, showing

that I trusted him.

DARCY

“*I*’m stuffed,” I said leaning against Dev at a pier that overlooked Lake Grande. Dev picked me up after his shift at the garage a few days after our dinner date at my house. He said he had a perfect place for dinner. I didn’t think about it much, until we pulled up to the lake and Dev had everything we needed for a picnic next to the lake on the pier. I suddenly realized I was missing romance in my life.

“I still have dessert,” he said, with his mouth full, but he had a glint in his eye.

“Yeah, not out here buddy, having sex in cold weather is not on my bucket list,” I said, pulling the blanket around me a little closer even though Dev was warm enough.

“We could always go back into the Impala.” Dev whispered into my ear. “I could suck that pussy in the back seat and then you could ride my cock until you come all over me.”

I shivered from his dirty talk.

“Or we could go home, and I can spend hours lapping at you like ice cream.” He tilted my face, giving me a smirk before he kissed me. It felt like a promise to do all the dirty things he could think of later. I nipped his lower lip before pulling away to see the last of the sun as it set. It gave the water beautiful hues of yellows, oranges and blues.

“Thank you, Dev,” I said, leaning my head on his shoulder. “I can’t remember the last time I enjoyed a sunset.”

“I love this lake and it has been a while since I enjoyed being out here, but I can’t take credit for this. Ava made the suggestion.”

“She’s a smart girl. How does it feel to have your sister helping you get laid?” I joked.

“I’ll take any help that I can get,” he chuckled, nipping at my neck.

I squealed when he tickled my side, making me laugh until he kissed me again. It was like he couldn’t get enough of me, and I loved it. I shivered as a cool breeze swept over us and Dev held me a little tighter as he gave me one last lingering kiss.

“Come on, let’s get going before you freeze to death.” He stood up, cleaning our mess and putting everything away. I helped fold the blankets, and we took everything back to his car.

“Oh, before I forget, Ms. Warner came by to pick up her car and brought these. I took a few, thinking you might like them.” He grabbed something out of his back seat, putting a few pink camellia flowers in my hand. “She said they were in season and dropped a few bushes for Jaime. The flowers were beautiful and reminded me of you.”

“Thank you,” I said, before he pecked me on the lips. I slid into the car in a daze. Did Dev know?

He started the car and drove us back to Mountain View. It was about a forty-five minute drive and all I could think about were these flowers in my lap and the guilt I had over them. It was irrational, the past was in the past, but it was like these flowers came back to haunt me.

“Are you ok?” Dev asked, as we made it back to Mountain View turning onto a street that led into my neighborhood. “You’ve been awfully quiet.”

“Yeah, I just didn’t realize how tired I was,” I said, hating the lie on my lips. “I—”

I looked out the window to see Evan leaning against his car and I knew something was wrong.

“Stop!” I yelled.

Dev quickly stopped the car looking out the window for whatever reason I had said stop. That’s when he noticed Evan too.

“Shit,” he murmured, pulling over as we exited the car. I walked over to him worried that something was wrong with him.

“Evan?” Dev called out to him as we got closer.

He looked up at us and my instincts were right. Evan had a swollen eye, his face was bruised, and he had a cut on his forehead.

“Oh my god, Evan,” I said, rushing to him.

“What the fuck happened?” Dev snapped.

“What the hell are you guys doing here?” he asked, looking at me.

“I saw you,” I said, itching to inspect him for other injuries. “You didn’t look right.”

“Are you bleeding?” Dev asked, pulling his jacket open, so we could see some wetness on his shoulder.

“We have to go to the hospital,” I said, shrugging off my scarf and putting it on his wound. Evan hissed at the pain.

“I can’t, it was Geraldo,” Evan said, like I would know what that meant but when I glanced at Dev, it looked like he understood completely, making me aware that there was this whole world I had no idea about.

“Come on, let’s get you in the back seat and we can go see Cole.” Dev put Evan’s arm over his shoulder helping him to the Impala. I helped get him in the front seat noticing that he had blood going all the way down to his jeans and I wanted to panic.

I looked over to Dev, hoping for some answers and he shook his head. He closed the door on Evan’s side, turning to me.

“I’ll take you home, then I’ll take care of Evan.” He ushered me to his side of the car, opening the door so I could climb into the back.

“No, I’m going with you,” I said.

“Darcy, It’s ok. I’ll make sure he gets taken care of,” he said, looking at me with understanding in his eyes.

“No, I’m going with you, Dev,” I made sure he knew I meant business.

“Darcy,” he pleaded.

“No, I am coming with you whether you like it or not,” I said, climbing into the back and sitting in the middle so I was close enough to Evan in case he needed something, but he had passed out already.

Dev slid into the driver seat, started the car and drove us to what I thought was the way to the cabin. He got on the phone talking to some man pleading for his help. The guy must have said yes because we kept driving instead of turning onto the dirt road to the cabin. We continued going straight to the orchard I saw when I first came out here.

There was a small gate that was open, and we drove down a dirt road that led to a house with a wrap-around porch. Instead of pulling up to the front of the house he took the driveway behind the house to what looked like a smaller house. Dev parked his car, helping me out before we got Evan out of the car. Evan opened his eyes, looking around quickly until he noticed Dev and I holding him up.

“Cole?” He murmured.

“Yes,” Dev answered him.

“I don’t have a favor,” Evan said as Dev knocked on the door. Their conversation confused me.

“I do,” Dev replied, as the door opened.

“You’re lucky I like you and Evan or else I would tell you to go fuck yourselves.” A man opened the door motioning us inside. He was really tall, with broad shoulders, a blonde man

bun, a beard and gorgeous blue eyes. He could have been a stunt double for Chris Hemsworth.

Jesus Christ, this man was too hot.

“I know, Cole” Dev grunted, as he and I moved Evan to what looked like a waiting room.

“In here,” Cole said, opening another door that led us into a hallway. “Go to room three.”

Dev and I walked Evan into a room with a large metal table. It looked like we were in a clinic with all the equipment. The cabinets looked like they had medical supplies in them, but there were posters of dogs and other animals. That’s when it clicked. Dev brought Evan to a vet.

“Gunshot? Stab wound?” Cole asked.

“Wow,” I whispered, helping Evan to the table, wondering how the hell he was going to help him.

“Stab,” Dev said, as he sat Evan on the side I was standing on, sitting him down in front of me.

“Darcy, what the hell are you doing here?” Evan asked, looking like keeping his eyes opened was too much to handle.

“Don’t,” I snapped, as I pushed his jacket over his shoulder eliciting a groan from him, while I pulled the sleeves off one by one.

“Here, Doll, get his shirt off,” Cole said, handing me a pair of scissors. I didn’t waste any time cutting his soaked shirt, trying to pull it away and not hurt his stab wound. Once I had the shirt off, they laid him down. I looked over his torso seeing a different man for the first time. The Evan I knew was tall and had a toned body, but this Evan was so different. His body had a lot more muscle with defined ridges that made me shiver. Evan wasn’t that boyish man I dated a few years ago, he was *all* man. He also had a lot of tattoos and a few scars that hadn’t been there when we were together.

Suddenly I felt foolish to think I had been the only one affected by his choice. It seems life had been rough on Evan,

and I had no idea what he had to go through during these last three years.

Evan winced when Cole started cleaning the wound and grabbed my hand before I could walk away. I looked down at our hands, remembering when all I wanted to do was hold his hand, thinking I was going to be able to do it for the rest of my life.

I pressed my lips together as tears gathered in my eyes.

Why did this happen to us?

Slowly breathing through my nose to ease the need to cry, I reined in my emotions that seemed to want to rear their ugly head. I looked at our hands one more time before my eyes caught something on Evans ribs. A row of beautiful camellia flowers trailed up with a row of Japanese words on the side of it.

I bit the inside of my cheek to keep myself from freaking out and crying. A firm squeeze of my hand brought my gaze up to Evan, who was staring at me with such clarity in his eyes that I was wondering if I was dreaming this. The anger I harbored for him slowly deflated when all I could think about was what these last three years had done to us, but would happened now? Even if I wanted to lie to myself, I still loved Evan. I think I would always love him.

I felt another set of eyes on me. When I looked up, Dev was staring at me too. No, this couldn't be happening. My past and present were about to collide, the thought made me feel like my life was playing a cruel joke on me. I didn't love Dev, but I knew it wouldn't take much for me to love him. He was quiet, but his presence was loud and comforting. He made me feel secure and that was something I didn't know I needed.

His gaze was too intense for me, making me look away when I noticed Evan looking at Dev and then back at me. It was a neutral expression that didn't look like he was angry. But my heart hammered, I felt my body panicking. Did Evan know about us? Did it matter?

Evan hissed in pain, squeezing my hand a little tighter as Cole messed with his wound. I stood closer to him, running my hands through his hair, confused at everything that was happening and my feelings. His face relaxed a little at the small comfort I was bringing him, leaning towards me like I was his lifeline.

Guilt weighed heavily on my heart as I took another glance at Dev. His face still had that same indifferent mask he wore when I first met him, like he was already pulling away from me. It made me want to cry because no matter who I chose, I felt like a piece of myself would never be the same.

DEV

Cole assessed Evan for about fifteen minutes. After he decided he needed stitches—in more than one place—I grabbed Darcy a chair. While Cole worked, I stepped outside to get some air and clear my head. Seeing her comfort him should have made me jealous, I mean that stupid kid who flirted with her at the coffee shop made me feel rage, even though I knew nothing was going on. But with Evan I didn't feel any rage or jealousy.

Ok I'm a liar, maybe a little jealous.

But it wasn't all consuming, it was more that I knew Darcy still had feelings for Evan, but seeing them up close just made me feel like a fool.

When it was just us, it felt right. Like I was always supposed to wait for her, and life had brought me exactly where I needed to be to cross paths with Darcy. Kismet knew exactly what I needed, but now I didn't know if it was just giving me a glimpse of what I could have, just a taste, and nothing more.

I grabbed my phone out of my pocket to call Giovanni and see if he could give me more information about what had happened to Evan. If it was as bad as I thought, it meant we couldn't go back to Mountain View. The line rang and rang until it went to voicemail, calling again just so he knew it was urgent, but it went to voicemail again. I hoped I was overreacting, and it was just a feud between Geraldo and Evan, or maybe Evan said something Geraldo that nasty temper didn't like.

Nerves made me feel uneasy, like I only had half of the story. I hated when my brother and Evan kept me out of the loop. They still treated me like I was a child. I leaned against my car dialing a few other guys, but no one had heard anything or were near what had happened to Evan.

Geraldo either wanted to know what he was doing, or Lucio wanted to make sure no one knew what *they* were doing. Evan and Giovanni held a lot of sway with the guys, so they were making sure they didn't incite discord within.

I couldn't shake the feeling that something bad was going to happen. We couldn't go back to Mountain View tonight. I needed a better feel of what was going on, and I needed to talk to Evan or Giovanni so I could prepare.

Thinking of Darcy made me feel extremely guilty. That day with Geraldo in the coffee shop definitely put her on Lucio's radar again, if she wasn't already. Now I know why Evan left her all those years ago. If something happened to her, no one would be safe from my wrath. Not even Lucio.

I pocketed my phone and walked back into the room. Darcy was drifting off to sleep while Cole finished Evan's shoulder. He was passed out, but Darcy still had his hand in hers sitting on her lap.

"I just need to add a stitch or two here." He pointed at another spot on his chest. "Then you should be good to go."

"Thanks, man," I said, walking over to Darcy. "Mhuirín, come on, let's get you to the car. You can sleep there." I cupped her face.

"I'm fine here," she said, looking around a little disoriented.

"He's almost done and you're going to hurt your neck like that," I said, grabbing her other hand so I could get her up.

She looked up at me, sleepy with her beautiful dark green eyes. "I'm tired but I'm worried." She frowned. "Is he going to be ok?"

"He will be fine," Cole said with a smile. I didn't like the way he was looking at her.

“Come on,” I said, as I picked her up, giving Cole a glare before I walked away.

I heard him chuckle as we left the room. I was trying to keep my shit in check because I knew pissing off Cole wasn't a good idea. Darcy laid her head on my shoulder as I carried her to my car. The feel of her in my arms felt like she was always meant to be there. I looked down at her sleepy face wanting to freeze time because this felt significant.

Love never seemed to be in the cards for me, but these past few weeks with Darcy felt like I had never truly taken a full breath and I had been starved for oxygen for all of my life. I tried to lay her in the back seat as best I could without disturbing her, but she opened her eyes before I leaned back. We stayed suspended in each other's gaze, but it felt like she wanted to say something. She cupped my face, then laid her head back down before she closed her eyes.

I felt disappointed, expecting something more from her, but I'm sure she was confused. Could I really blame her?

Evan had told me that he thought she was the one when they were in college, but he had wanted to keep her safe because he didn't want her to get involved by accident like Cal's sister Kelsey had. My father was a vile man who trapped everyone.

It was getting late. I was ready to get back to the cabin to sleep off this stress and all these feelings. When I walked into the room Evan was alone laying down. His torso was starting to bloom bruises, looking like either someone held him up as someone punched him over and over again or he was kicked while he was on the ground.

I desperately wanted to shake him awake so I could ask him what the hell was going on, but I knew he needed to rest.

“The stitches need to come out in about a week. I'm sure you can cut them out or if you really need to, you can bring him back here.” Cole gave me a bag. “There should be enough dressings to last you the week. I wouldn't get water on it for the first 24 hours and then after that he can shower, but no

bath. Watch out for infection and high temperatures. Take him to the ER immediately for either of those. “

“Thanks for helping us. I know it’s not easy,” I said, walking to Evan. “If you need anything let me know. I know Ava would love to babysit again.”

“I might take you up on that offer. I’m wearing myself thin here.” He ran his hand over his face. “If you know anyone that might need a farm manager job, let me know. I’m drowning in this business and I owe it to Holly to keep it operational.”

“I might know someone,” I said, thinking about a few people.

“Thanks,” he said, looking at me funny. “I know it’s not my business, but life is too short to keep your feelings to yourself. Tell her how you feel, one of you should. You’ll regret it so much sometimes it will feel like you are drowning.”

I knew Cole’s wife had died recently, leaving him to raise twin girls. The pain in his eyes was unbearable to look at. He looked like he held so much regret for whatever reason and he was right, life was too short.

“Thanks man, things are just complicated,” I said, looking at Evan.

“Life is also too short to think about what other people say. Fuck the world and live for you man. Alright get out of here before I give you more unsolicited wisdom from someone who doesn’t know what the hell they are talking about.”

I chuckled. “Thanks,” I said, waking up Evan enough so he could help me get his ass to the car. Cole ended up helping me get him into the passenger seat, throwing his jacket on him.

“Be safe,” Cole said, closing the passenger door as I got into the car. I didn’t feel comfortable going to Mountain View, so the cabin would have to be enough for right now. It was a quick drive to the place, thankfully. I parked the car as close as I could to the front porch, making it as easy as possible to get Evans’ ass in the door. When I came back from opening the front door, Darcy was awake looking around.

“Dev, why are we here? she asked, when I helped her out of the back seat.

“I didn’t want to drive back so late to Mountain View,” I said, but one look from Darcy’s glare made me rethink keeping things from her. “I don’t know everything that happened to Evan, and I’m worried it’s not safe to go back tonight. At least until I know more.”

“Look I understand this is a world that I’m not a part of, and I have no idea what the inner workings are but please, I don’t like being kept in the dark.” She cupped my face. “I’d rather hear something I don’t understand than be sheltered. I have so many questions.”

“Ok, I’ll tell you everything I know, even if I don’t want to,” I said, leaning down just far enough to see if she would meet me for a kiss.

Darcy glanced down at my lower lip before she pressed her lips to mine. I desperately wanted to continue what we had started back at the lake, but now that seemed like a lifetime ago. I bit her bottom lip before I pulled away, taking her in, then kissing her forehead.

“Come on, let’s get him inside; I need a drink,” I said, going to the passenger’s side of the car. Evan was a lot heavier than he looked. It took us a few minutes to get him into bed. Darcy undressed him without him making any sound or even waking up. She tucked him into bed, running her hands through his hair with a look that said she really hadn’t moved on.

I left the room as I felt my heart ache, going to the kitchen for that drink that I really needed. Evan had a scotch that was delicious, and I poured myself two fingers before I knocked it back. I heard the door close to the room while I poured both of us a drink. When Darcy came out of the hall, I walked to the sofa just as she sat down. I handed her a glass, setting mine on the coffee table to start a fire. The cabin was a little chilly, it also gave me something to do while I thought about what I wanted to tell Darcy.

Once I finished, I sat down next to Darcy leaving enough space between us, patiently waiting for all her questions. Glancing at her, I took a sip, seeing her lost in the flames, wanting to know what she was thinking, but also afraid of what I would find.

“Who is Geraldo?” she asked, taking a sip.

“One of Lucio’s men who is ruthless,” I said, wondering how painful this was going to be.

“Was he the same person who was at the coffee shop?” She looked over her glass with a worried expression.

“Yes,” I said, holding back the need to wrap my arms around her. After the way she looked at Evan I didn’t know where she and I stood.

“Is that who hurt him?”

“Yes, but I don’t know why,” I said, answering a question that I knew was coming next.

“Does this happen often to Evan?”

“I don’t think so, but there have been a few instances where a rival or someone shady has gotten the upper hand.” I took a deep breath. “Giovanni or someone is usually with him to help him out, but I don’t know what’s going on.”

She swallowed the rest of her drink, wincing a little as she set her cup down on the coffee table before she turned towards me.

“Has that happened to you?” she asked, her voice trembling a little.

“Twice, once because I thought I was tougher than I really was, and another was because someone found out I was his son.” I looked at the fire remembering the day someone thought they could force Lucio to give up his control here.

“How bad?” she scooted closer to me.

Not many people knew what happened to me and telling Darcy felt like I was putting myself out there more than I really wanted to, but I did say I wasn’t going to lie to her. If

she was going to stick around, she needed the entire truth, especially the ugly parts.

“I was in a coma for a week, with nine broken bones, my jaw was wired shut for a couple of months and I needed surgery on my leg to put it back together.” I couldn’t look at her.

“Did they pay?” she asked, with venom in her voice.

“Giovanni made sure they did,” I said, looking at her appreciating the fierce look in her eyes. “Lucio did nothing, saying it was a lesson I needed to learn about being in this life.”

“He didn’t protect his own son?” she sneered.

“Everything is a life lesson in Lucio’s world. Giovanni made sure that it would never happen to me again, and taught me to defend myself,” I said, thinking I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Giovanni or even Evan for that matter.

“I hope he made them suffer,” she whispered.

“He did; I was there to watch it,” I said, waiting for her reaction.

“Good.” The satisfaction in her eyes made me hard. I had always assumed Darcy was some delicate flower that needed to be held with care, but under the small-town good girl was a woman who fought fiercely for those she loved and cared for. Evan sheltered her to keep her away from the ugly, but Darcy was a grown-ass woman and tonight proved she was willing to fight for what she believed in.

“Darcy,” I said, grabbing her, pulling her closer but she climbed on my lap to straddle me. I wasn’t expecting her to get so close and I knew she felt how hard I was.

“Dev, I think—”

“Wait, Darcy,” I said, putting a finger on her lips. “Before you make a decision, I just need to ask you one thing. Do you remember when I asked you to trust me with your needs?”

Darcy nodded her head slowly.

“I feel like things aren’t always black and white or even different shades of gray. Our life is colorful, giving it the beauty it deserves.” I tucked her hair behind her ear. “I can’t imagine you would ever be truly happy with me; I think a part of him will always belong to you. I want to belong to you too, Darcy. I want to make you whole, to make you scream my name when I come home from the garage. I want to give you everything you need even if that means sharing you with Evan.”

She opened her mouth to say something, knowing that she wasn’t ready to make whatever decision she was going to make.

“Don’t say anything yet,” I said, rubbing my thumb across her lips. “Sleep on it and tell me when you’re ready.”

I pulled her in for a kiss, giving her everything I had to offer, hoping it was enough for her to choose me too.

EVAN

When I opened my eyes, I immediately knew I wasn't at home, but at the cabin. I felt a body flush against mine, and looked down to see Darcy's head laying on my chest with her arm around my stomach. The night's events slowly came back to me as I tried to piece together how I got here.

Geraldo was waiting for me at the warehouse after I got a call from one of the guys saying there was a problem and Giovanni wasn't answering. He hit me when I rounded the corner. That sent us into a fighting frenzy, telling me I was getting what I deserved. When he stabbed me, I knew this was how I would leave this world, at the hands of a psycho.

A phone call stopped his assault and whoever was on the other line distracted him enough that I was able to hit him a few times before I pulled the gun from the back of his waistband and told him to leave me the fuck alone. He taunted me, saying to keep the ones I loved close and to watch my back, that I was going to get what was coming for me. I didn't know if he was acting solo, or if the order came from Lucio.

The fear he instilled in me had me rushing home afraid that he had done something to them. By the time I had gotten to my mom's house, I couldn't go in. I had blood all over me but once I saw they were ok, I was starting to feel tired, and the pain was settling in.

The next part of the night was fuzzy, but I remember Darcy in bits and pieces, comforting me when I knew I didn't deserve it. I looked at her again, noticing Dev spooning her.

They both looked content as they slept together. I was waiting for the jealousy to flare up at the sight of them together, but it never surfaced.

The last time I saw them together I was confused and angry when I left, but it didn't last long, quickly changing into acceptance. Darcy didn't owe me anything, I knew that I had taken too long to come back to her.

I enjoyed her warmth for a few more minutes, remembering the times I woke up in her dorm wrapped with Darcy's arms and legs. Waking up to Darcy was better than any shot of espresso. I kissed the top of her head before I got up to use the restroom.

Once I finished my business, I took a good look in the mirror. Geraldo really kicked the shit out of me. My face had varying degrees of bruising, it was swollen and my body was not much better.

The kicks to the ribs were the worst, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were broken. I remembered how Darcy looked at me with appreciation in her eyes, my body had definitely changed over the years.

The first tattoo I had gotten, I wanted it to be of her, so I had the artist draw up Camellias. Then more ink came, I worked out a lot more and learned early on that if you didn't know how to defend yourself, shit was going to be hard. You might get jumped for the sole reason you were weak.

I looked back at the door wondering if I was making this more difficult than it really was. Aiden, Callum and Nathan shared a woman and the guys looked happier than ever. I know each relationship had its own share of problems but if everyone was ok with it, why not?

This whole thing with Lucio made me uneasy. With Dev watching over her, it gave me some relief and one less thing I had to worry about.

Could I share her with Dev? When we dated in college, I wanted all of her attention, I craved it like it was air. I shook

my head feeling a headache settling in, thinking that maybe I just needed to have a conversation with Dev and Darcy.

I stepped out of the bathroom to see Darcy awake on the side of the bed. She was in the clothes she wore last night, looking beautiful in the morning sunlight, all ruffled with sleep still in her eyes.

“Good morning,” she said, looking up at me. “How are you feeling?”

“Morning, I’m sore,” I said, wincing as I walked to her.

“Are you in pain?” She got up to help me to the bed.

I nodded feeling like all my pain was starting to hit me all at once.

“Lay down and I’ll see if you have any pain meds.” She helped me lie down before she looked at me for a moment. I wanted her to kiss me, to tell me what she wanted, so I could try my best to give her everything she needed. She gave me a smile before she got up and left the room. It took her a few minutes for her to come back with pills and water.

“Here, take these and then let’s get some food in you.” She held the glass up to my mouth. My arms were working just fine but I could feel like she felt the need to do this.

“I want a shower,” I said, after I swallowed the pills.

“Dev said no showers for twenty-four hours, doctor’s orders,” she said, glancing at Dev. “I’m starving, so I’m going to get some coffee started and hopefully there is something to eat.”

“Thanks Darcy, you didn’t have to come with Dev last night but I’m glad you did,” I said before she got to the door.

“I’m just glad you’re ok.” She gave me that shy smile that made me melt before she left.

I closed my eyes as I laid back against the pillows Darcy had propped me up against. I needed to figure out what the hell triggered Geraldo and if it was him being a dick or was it something Lucio had ordered him to do. There was a fed

snooping around the club two nights ago, making Lucio even more manic.

We brought this mess upon ourselves, but I couldn't help but wonder if this was a good thing. I was guilty by association, but this life was getting exhausting. The more I was around Darcy, the more I began to crave a life where I could come home to a family. I could go to soccer games, birthday parties or camp out.

This life I was leading was wearing me thin, and I needed to get out now or else I might be stuck doing this for the rest of my life. I don't know how Giovanni did this every single day. I really needed to find my phone, because I needed to call him and see what the hell was going on.

"You know, if you guys just kept me in the loop, I would be better prepared to help you," Dev said, making me open my eyes to look over at him. He had an arm covering his eyes.

"You know half the shit we do is illegal, why would we do that to you?"

"I'm not a kid anymore," he grumbled.

"I didn't say you were, but the less you know the better. If we ever get caught, you need to be as clueless as possible because if both of us are sent to jail, we need you to watch our families," I said leaning up more. "Giovanni doesn't want you in this life any more than you have to because it's a shit life, and if we can keep you out of it as much as possible, then that is what we are going to do."

"I hate standing on the sidelines." He rubbed his eyes.

"I know, but it's the safest option for you and our families."

"What the hell happened last night?" he asked, sounding frustrated.

I told Dev everything that happened from the phone call to getting my ass kicked. It was embarrassing but Geraldo was a beast, and I was surprised I was able to hit him a few times.

Dev nodded his head as he listened, taking the story in.

“That doesn’t explain why he did it.” He looked at me, confused.

“Does Geraldo ever need an excuse to do something?” I asked, because we both knew the guy was deranged. It was the only reason Lucio kept him around. He got shit done, even when it was something no one else wanted to do.

“No, not really but I feel like there is more at play here, and you’re keeping me in the dark,” he said, looking at me with his vivid eyes. Dev’s instincts were always spot on. He always knew more than he let on, but Giovanni was adamant about keeping him in the dark.

“There’s always things at play that you don’t know about,” I said, fishing my phone out of my pocket, grateful that it didn’t break in the fight, but it was dead.

“I know, but shit like yesterday shouldn’t have happened,” he growled. “Geraldo is a loose cannon, and someone needs to leash him. You also don’t know if it was Lucio who sent him.”

“Look, I know that, it’s sitting in the back of my mind that he was sent rather than him just being a dick.” I ran my hand through my hair, thinking that if Lucio wanted me dead, it was only a matter of time before he finished me off.

“If he’s trying—”

“I need to call your brother before I assume Lucio is trying to kill me,” I interrupted him. “Can you check the living room for a charger, so I can get started making calls and figure out what the hell my next move is.”

Dev stared at me for a moment before he nodded and left the room.

I took a deep breath, wincing at the pain as I exhaled. If Lucio wanted me dead, I had a plan in place to get my sister and mom out of here and far away from him. It involved me telling them the truth, but I would survive their wrath for the sake of keeping them alive. I think my sister would be the most upset because she was almost done with school, and I don’t know how much this would set her back.

“I think this one should work,” Dev came back in, plugging in the cord by my side of the bed and handing me the other end. “I called Giovanni last night, but he didn’t answer. I hope it was because he was busy with the girls instead of whatever shit might be happening.”

Dread coursed through my veins because if Lucio wanted me dead then it was because he found out we fucked with his deal. I hoped he only thought it was me.

“Since I didn’t show up at the club last night, he was probably covering for me,” I said, trying not to panic.

“Probably, I hope it’s just Geraldo being an asshole.”

“Me too,” I said, seeing my phone power back on.

“There wasn’t any milk in the fridge, so you get black coffee with a little sugar in it,” Darcy said, walking into the room and leaving the coffee on the nightstand.

“Thanks, Darcy.” I tried to smile, hoping neither one of them noticed anything was off as my phone started beeping over and over again. I picked it up, seeing texts coming through, each sound making me more nervous.

“What’s for breakfast, Darcy?” Dev asked, as he steered her out of the room giving me the space I needed. He looked at me before he closed the door nodding at me, reassuring me he was here for me with whatever was going on.

I took a deep breath seeing two calls from Giovanni but at least eight from Saul, one of Giovanni’s closest guys. I called Giovanni first and it went straight to voicemail. It was only eight in the morning, so it wasn’t a big surprise that his phone was off. Calling Saul next, and he answered on the second.

“Boss, where have you been?” Saul asked, with panic in his voice.

“Geraldo was waiting for me at the warehouse,” I said, really not wanting to go into details.

“Shit, we thought he killed you too.”

“Almost, man,” I said, running a hand over my face. “Wait, what do you mean too?”

“He killed Giovanni last night.”

DEV

I figured a good night's sleep next to Darcy would make me feel better, but I had a sense of dread today. Talking to Evan didn't make me feel better, in fact it made me even more anxious. If Lucio wanted to kill Evan, he would do whatever it took. That meant Evan didn't have time.

He would need to leave now if he wanted to survive, but I know that might not be an option because his sister and mom lived here. I wondered if we could just move them all to somewhere safe. I knew Evan had been saving some money and if he needed more, I would give him my entire savings if I had to. I needed to talk to Giovanni to see what we could do to help him.

Would he leave Darcy?

Before I sat down at the island, I pulled my phone out of my pocket, but it was dead too. I'm sure Evan was going to talk to Giovanni about whatever he would need to do. I could help when they had decided what they wanted to do. I also needed to text Ava to tell her I was okay.

"You okay, there?" Darcy looked at me with concern. *Shit.* Darcy would not like this, especially if she had decided to give her and Evan another chance.

"Yeah, I'm just tired," I said, leaning over.

Darcy gave me a look like she knew I was lying, but she slid a cup of coffee towards me, then walked around the island to stand next to me. She wrapped her arms around my neck, pulling me in for a hug.

“I’m worried too,” she said, close to my ear, then nuzzled down to my neck, placing a small kiss on it.

A shiver ran down my spine as I wrapped my arms around her waist. I took a deep breath of her, burrowing my face into her neck, dreading the aftermath that might ensue soon. She sighed, melting against me like this was the best place in the world. It made me stupidly happy that she found comfort in my arms because I felt like she belonged here.

“I needed this,” she mumbled against my neck. “It’s going to be okay, right?”

“Yeah, I think everything is gonna be alright,” I said, technically not lying because I did think that everything was going to be alright. Getting there was probably going to be hard, but I would do everything in my power to get us there.

She gave me one last squeeze reminding me of what it felt like being so close to this body while I was buried deep inside of her. What I wouldn’t give to release some stress with her shuddering around my cock.

“What’s for breakfast?” I asked, while she went back to the stove, wondering what the hell we left here that was still good.

“Oatmeal, but it will be without milk since we don’t have any, and I found some bacon in the freezer,” She stirred the oatmeal before she took out another pan to fry up the bacon. “I know it’s not much.”

“I think that is more than I expected. Coffee would have been just fine too.” I took a sip thinking I might need the whole pot to get through the day.

“We might as well eat; are we staying here another day?” she asked, laying the bacon on the pan making my stomach growl.

“I don’t know, I’m waiting to see what Evan wants to do,” I said, looking back at the bedroom door. “I know he probably has to talk to my brother. I don’t know if he feels safe enough to go back to Mountain View, but I know he will want to check on his mom and sister.”

“Do I have to stay here too?” She looked up at me. I expected to see anger or annoyance in her eyes, but she looked like she was trying to figure out what the hell we were going to do.

“If Evan thinks you’re safe at home, we will go back, but he might ask you to stay here for peace of mind,” I said, twisting my mug around, thinking about everything I wasn’t telling her.

“Well if I have to stay, I would like to pick up a bag of clothes, plus I need a shower,” she said, flipping the bacon.

“Once he talks to my brother we can figure out when we can go back to pick some stuff up for all of us,” I said, watching her face in case she was annoyed with all of this.

“Ok,” she said, as she watched the bacon.

I knew this couldn’t be easy for her, but I was glad that she was taking this all so well. We stayed in a comfortable silence while she finished up the bacon. Every now and then, I would catch a frown on her face like she kept thinking of shit she wasn’t happy with.

“Breakfast is almost ready, should we take Evan some?” She took the bacon off the pan.

“Let me go ask him what he wants to do,” I said, getting up and walking down the hall to the room we had all stayed in. When Darcy had wanted to sleep in the same bed as Evan, I was nervous that I was going to hate it, or I was going to get jealous.

I meant what I had said to her last night. I was ok with sharing her, even though I felt like I was way out of my element. It felt like she was testing me. What she didn’t know is that I had shared a bed with Evan and my brother before, so I guess it wasn’t that weird.

When she scooted close enough to touch him, she looked over at me like she was gauging my reaction. I took my boots off, scooting over to her and spooned her. I placed my hand on her stomach and Darcy wrapped her hand around mine. I fell

asleep instantly, waking only to make sure everyone was ok before I went back to sleep.

I walked into the bedroom noticing that Evan wasn't on the bed anymore. The bathroom door was closed so I knocked on it.

"Food's done, you want us to bring you a plate?" I asked. There was no answer for a moment and I knocked again. "You ok in there?"

"I'll be right out," Evan yelled out.

"Do you need anything?" I wondered if something had happened or if my brother told him some really bad news.

"I'm fine," he snapped.

Shit.

I leaned against the door listening for anything that could give me a clue as to what had happened. It didn't sound good. I hated being in the dark, because I was always a man with a plan. Well, I planned as much as I could because with Lucio around, even the most predictable things weren't predictable.

When all I heard was silence, I turned around checking to see if he had left his phone on the charger. Seeing the cord free, I took my phone out of my pocket and plugged it in. I left it on the nightstand and walked back to the kitchen because that bacon was calling my name.

"He said he will be right out," I said, sitting down on the stool seeing Darcy split the oatmeal between three bowls.

"Ok," she said, passing me a bowl and the sugar too. She looked to be deep in thought but I was glad she was taking all of this in stride.

I grabbed a piece of bacon and put it in my mouth while I mixed a little sugar into my oatmeal. The door to the bedroom opened before Evan came walking down the hall with his head down. Immediately I knew something was wrong and his face confirmed it when he looked up at me. His eyes were red like he had been crying.

We stared at each other because he couldn't even spare a glance at Darcy. I braced myself for him to tell us that Lucio put a hit on him and what that would do to Darcy. Evan clenched his jaw, his nostrils flared, and he looked gutted. He looked up at the ceiling, Darcy looked like she wanted to cry.

"Dev." Evan's voice made me look at him as a tear rolled down the side of his face.

"Evan it's going to be ok, look we can—" Evan shook his head stopping me from telling him the plan I had come up with.

"Giovanni is dead," he choked out before he looked away from me.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up, a chill rolled down my spine, and the world stopped.

"Excuse me?" I snapped. "This better not be a fucking joke, Evan."

"I just talked to Saul, one of the guys confirmed it." Evan's voice broke as another tear fell down his face.

"No," I growled out because Giovanni wasn't supposed to die. "He fed you the wrong information."

"I don't think Saul would do that. You know he was one of the most trusted men that Giovanni relied on." Evan's composure was slowly returning. "Look, I need to go assess the situation because Saul doesn't know what the hell happened, only that he saw him get shot."

"No," I growled out again, refusing to believe that the brother I lost so much time with was taken from me. My breathing quickened. Everything was silent like I was in a bubble, and my vision was starting to blur.

"I'm sorry Dev." I finally heard Evan's voice. A hand touched my shoulder, making me look over at a blurry Darcy. Tears fell from my eyes letting me see her just a little bit clearer. She also had tears in her eyes, looking so beautiful even though her face was so sad. I clenched my jaw so hard, ground my teeth, and looked over at Evan again who was wiping his face from the tears he was shedding.

“I have to go, but I think it’s best if you guys stay here,” he said, looking down at his phone. “I need to find out what happened and pay a visit to Vittoria. No one has told her anything.”

“I’ll tell her,” I said, feeling Darcy put her hand in mine, hugging my arm and all I wanted was to hold her close and let the storm of emotions let go.

“Dev, you need to stay here.” Evan shook his head as he glanced at his phone again.

“No, I need to go with you,” I snapped back at him. “We need to find out who the hell did this. Wait, was it fucking Geraldo? I swear to God if that motherfucker did this—”

“It wasn’t him,” Evan said quickly, shaking his head.

“Who was it then?” I asked, as Evan’s phone rang.

“Look, I have to go,” Evan looked outside. “Please just stay here until I get back. I need to figure out what we are going to do and what happens next.”

“Who did it, Evan?” I snarled, feeling my patience, my anger and emotion threatening to make a big scene.

“Dev,” Evan said, looking like he was in pain.

“He deserves to know,” Darcy said, as she tightened her grip on my arm.

Evan glanced at her, swallowing roughly like he didn’t want to tell me who it was. They shared a look that made Evan’s shoulder drop while he ran a hand through his hair.

“Saul is pretty sure it was Lucio,” he whispered.

My blood turned cold, my vision tunneled, and I felt like I was going to pass out. My piece of shit father shot him? Giovanni was Lucio’s pride and joy, it didn’t make sense. What the hell happened?

“Please stay here,” Evan said. “I need you guys safe while I find out what the hell made Lucio go off the deep end.”

“Evan, don’t lie to me,” I said, through gritted teeth. “Do you know why you got jumped and why my brother was killed

the same night?”

We stared at each other, and I knew he knew why.

“I have an idea, but I need to find out if I’m right, because if it’s what I think it is, then no one is safe. When I come back, I will tell you everything, but I have to go now,” he said looking at his phone again.

“No, you stay here and tell me what the fuck—”

“No,” Evan said with authority. “Let me figure shit out and I will tell you everything I promise. Stay here while I figure out our next moves and I will go see Vittoria.”

He didn’t give me a chance to say anything, strolling out of the house quickly as I saw him get into a car. I was losing control quickly, my breathing was getting shallower, my vision fuzzy and I needed to get out. Darcy was rubbing her hand in circles on my back when I pulled away and walked out the front door. She said something as I walked away, but I needed to get away from her before I did something to hurt her.

I left the cabin and walked down the patio steps, making my way to the trees on the side of the house. When I was far away from the house, I started to hit the tree. Once my hands started to hurt, I fell on my knees and yelled. That fucking bastard took away the one person who had always fought for me.

Giovanni saved me from a life I knew I was barreling towards before he told me to get my shit together. He gave me a purpose, made me the man I am today, and I never even told him thank you. I yelled again when my emotions were bubbling up, thinking about Vittoria and my niece.

Tears fell down my cheeks thinking about her growing up fatherless. Then I thought of Ava and how much she loved Giovanni. My heart broke all over again when I realized I would have to tell her he was taken from us.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” I yelled so loud my voice broke.

The sound of a twig breaking brought my attention to my left, but I didn’t see anyone or anything. I panicked when I remembered I had left Darcy alone and anyone could come up

to the house without my knowledge because I didn't have my phone on me.

Picking myself up, I rushed back to the house to see Darcy on the steps of the porch hugging her legs. She had tears running down her cheeks and I hated that she was sad because of me. I walked up to her, hesitating.

"Please," I choked out.

Darcy threw herself at me as I felt tears falling down my face again.

"I'm so sorry, Dev," she cried into my neck.

I nodded, not trusting myself to say anything. We hugged for a few minutes, calming down enough, as I realized I had to go tell Ava.

"Let's get our shoes on, I need to go tell Ava in person before she hears it from someone else." I pulled away, wiping the tears from her cheeks gently. "We can get you some clothes too."

She nodded her head and leaned up to kiss me softly on my lips. I ushered her up the steps, dreading what I had to do and hating that my sister would have to go through this. This was the last time that man would ever hurt Ava and I was going to make sure it never happened again.

DARCY

When Evan said that Giovanni died, I thought it was just another guy they worked with, but when Evan looked like he was in pain. I knew it wasn't just some random dude. I wracked my brain trying to figure out if Dev had said anything about Giovanni and then it clicked. It was his brother.

I didn't know what to do, especially being an only child, so I just held his arm and then he ran outside, I knew he needed space. When I heard him yelling, I rushed outside looking around, and I heard it again. It sounded like he was in an insurmountable amount of pain, making me silently cry for him.

It had always just been Mary and me most of my life, losing her is what I would imagine the pain that Dev is feeling. I waited on the steps of the porch for him, feeling useless as I hugged my legs to my chest. All I wanted to do was bring him comfort, but I didn't know how. When he came walking out of the trees, relief flooded my heart because for a moment it was too quiet, and I thought maybe he got lost or someone had taken him.

His face was red, splotchy, his blue eyes looked muted against the sadness in them. My heart broke for him again, hating that he had to go through this, fueling my anger even more for Lucio. I hesitated until he choked out a 'please' and I threw myself at him. We cried together as I held him as tight as I could, rubbing his back then stroking his head.

Once we both settled down, he said he needed to go tell Ava in person, making that anger flare up once again at that

piece of shit man. I put my shoes on quickly, grabbed my bag, and saw Dev looking at his phone with a lost expression.

“Do you want to eat?” I asked, before I left the room.

He shook his head as he typed out a text. I left him to do what he needed to do while I started to pick up the kitchen.

“Come on, Darcy, we can do that when we get back,” Dev’s voice was grittier than normal. He held his hand out to me and I took it without hesitation. We left the cabin, opening the door to climb into his Impala. I noticed some blood on the seat from the night before, making my stomach sour.

“Shit, let me get something to wipe it down really quick before we pick up Ava.” Dev ran into the cabin.

He came out with a rag and some cleaning spray. When most of it came out, I checked the back to make sure we had cleaned everything. The last thing we needed was to scare poor Ava.

It was a very quiet drive as Dev held my hand running his thumb over my knuckles, looking over at me like he was afraid I might disappear. I squeezed his hand often, trying to reassure him in any way that I could.

It was mid-morning when we passed the main road, the town was going about its business, and I hated that things felt so normal here when everything around Dev and I felt like destruction.

“I will drop you off, then go see Ava,” he said, looking around like he was on high alert.

“I want to go with you,” I said, squeezing his hand looking over at him.

He shook his head. “Darcy, you don’t have to.”

“I know, but I want to,” I said, leaning my head on his arm. “I know this won’t be easy and I want to be there for you.”

“I’m picking her up from school and then I’ll tell her at home,” he said, pulling his arm away and laid it on my thigh, squeezing the inside.

“Okay.” I kissed his upper arm.

We drove to Mountain View High School, towards the football field because that is where we left to skip class. Ava was there texting on her phone; she looked up at us with a huge smile on her face. Dev got out of the car to let her in.

“Hey guys!” she yelled, looking excited.

“Hey Ava,” I said, trying to keep my face from falling apart.

“We haven’t had a ditch day in forever! What are we going to do?” I couldn’t help but smile hearing that he did this with his sister often.

“We are going to stop at the house first,” he said, looking back at her in the rearview mirror.

“Great, I think I want to change my shoes, my feet hurt because—” Ava rambled the entire way to their house which was in a nicer area of Mountain View. It was a new development that was only about a decade old. Their house was a cute two-story home that was black and pine colored. Ava raced out of the car first, storming into the house while we followed her.

“Ava!” Dev yelled for her as she disappeared into the house. “Fuck,” he grumbled. “I’ll be back, make yourself at home. My bedroom is down that hall to the right if you want to lay down.”

“Go, I’ll be fine,” I said, before I gave him a peck on the lips, but Dev had other plans. He kissed me like it was our last, making me feel it in my soul and for a moment I wanted to panic. He rested his forehead against mine.

“Thank you for being here.” He kissed my forehead. “You just being near me is making this bearable. If you weren’t here, I think I would have lost my shit and done something really fucking stupid. I lo— I’m glad you’re here.”

Did he almost say he loved me?

“I wouldn’t be anywhere else,” I said, pressing my lips to give whatever I could to ease his pain.

“Jesus Christ, you guys are so fucking cute.”

Dev and I pulled away from each other to see Ava looking at us like we were a gold mine. She had changed her outfit to go with the new shoes.

“Ava, come one we have to talk.” Dev walked to her. “Let’s go to your room.”

“Omg, are you guys pregnant?” Ava whispered, as they climbed the stairs.

“Ava...” Dev groaned, and I loved it. I watched them disappear into the hallway, with a heavy stomach and my heart aching for them.

I looked around the house, noticing it was so homey. There were pictures along the wall that lead into the living room. I looked at them seeing Dev and Ava through the years. They were so fucking cute together.

“NO!” Ava’s scream made me flinch. A door slammed shut as I walked to the stairs to see Ava running down the steps.

“Ava.” I held out my hands to stop her from running.

“Move, Darcy,” she sobbed, black tears running down her face.

“Ava.” Dev’s voice was hoarse with emotion as he came down the stairs right behind Ava.

“No, Devlin. No.” Ava tried to push past me. Dev caught her, bringing her into his arms as she sobbed even more. He sank down to the floor, adjusting her so he could hold her better. Dev and I locked eyes as he nodded at me.

His eyes were glassy, laying his cheek on the top of her head, letting his sister grieve his brother in his arms. Just seeing him like this made my heart swell with—love? I apparently had a thing for men who took care of those around him, like their little sisters.

I walked away before I started crying too, just hearing her cry broke my heart. I moved back to the photos I was looking at earlier, seeing Dev as a scrawny little boy. I walked away

from the photos to see a beautiful sitting area in the back of the house that overlooked the mountains. I sat in one of the chairs that looked like an egg enjoying the comfy feeling it gave me, admiring the view, and then closing my eyes as Ava's cries quieted down.

"Darcy?" I was startled, realizing I had fallen asleep.

"Shit, sorry," I said, looking at Dev in the entrance of the room.

He walked towards me, lifting me up as he sat down and leaving me on his lap so I could rest my head on his shoulder. I ran my hand over his chest hoping to ease some of the ache that I imagined would be there. He lightly ran his fingers up and down my arm, as we took comfort in each other's presence.

"Dev?" a woman was in the doorway looking at us.

"Ma," he said, when I noticed the familiarity of the woman. She had the same striking eyes as Dev. I got out of his lap, letting him get up to walk over to his mom to embrace her. She whispered something, but it didn't sound like English.

"Mow grah hoo," Dev said, pulling away looking down at her with tears on his face. She wiped his tears as she said something else. He nodded his head, kissing her on the forehead and then looking my way.

"Ma, this is Darcy," he said, as he let go of her.

"Hello, Ms. Quinn," I said, knowing her through Mary.

"I know who she is, Dev." She slapped him on his chest, coming over to give me a hug. I enjoyed her motherly warmth for a moment before she pulled away. "Has he fed you?"

"No, we—"

"Come, I have some fresh bread we can make sandwiches out of." She pulled me into the kitchen as Dev looked at us with a small smile on his face.

This felt like a moment in the relationship where you meet the parents, which made me feel instantly nervous. Dev's mom started asking me questions as she made us sandwiches, while

Dev watched us. I couldn't help but blush from his attention, feeling like I would never get enough of his gaze as he always looked like he wanted to eat me up.

“YOUR MOM IS AMAZING,” I said, as we drove back to the cabin.

“She is a phenomenal woman,” he said, keeping his eyes on the road and occasionally looking around us. I knew he was worried that we might be seen by Lucio's men, and he showed me there was a gun underneath my seat. The further we drove away from his family, the more broody his expression got. He had his hand gripping my thigh in a possessive way as I traced his tattoos up his arms.

I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what. By the time we made it back to the cabin I could tell he was getting ready to lose it again. He parked the car, getting out quickly, scooting the chair forward to get my stuff and slamming the door hard.

He stomped up the porch steps, unlocked the door, and headed inside without a backwards glance at me. I took a deep breath before I got out of the car when Evan pulled up.

He got out of the car, with a duffle bag, and a few plastic bags, making his way to the front door completely unaware of me. I assumed he was close to Giovanni too with his reaction this morning. He looked defeated, stressed out more than I could imagine.

“You need help?” I asked, and he flinched.

“Jesus Christ, Darcy, you scared the shit out of me.”

“Sorry, I was standing here the entire time,” I said, walking to him to get a few bags out of his hands.

“Darcy!” Dev yelled, and I turned around to see him coming out of the house in a hurry.

When he saw Evan and me, he relaxed but still looked a bit tense. “Yeah, I went to Mountain View, I had to,” he snapped at Evan.

“I know,” Evan replied, like it was no big deal. “I knew it was stupid to ask you to stay here so I made sure Saul watched your house. Ava deserved to be told in person.”

Evan walked past me into the house. I followed him, setting the bags on to the counter, hearing the door shut.

I pulled out some groceries from the bags and I don’t know why I giggled. Picturing Evan at the grocery store, shopping like a housewife popped into my head and I couldn’t get it out, giggling even more. I couldn’t stop and I was laughing so hard I was crying until I heard them on the other side of the island. They looked at me like I was crazy but for just a moment the all-consuming despair left their eyes.

“I’m sorry,” I said, wiping my eyes.

“You want to tell me what’s got you laughing so hard?” Dev asked, sitting on a stool.

I laughed again when the picture came back. “I’m sorry, I know this an awful time to be laughing but I couldn’t help but picture Evan shopping for groceries like he was a housewife and I just lost it.” I pulled out a bottle of whiskey out of one of the bags when Dev came up to me.

“You never have to apologize for laughing. It’s a fucking amazing sound.” Dev kissed me slowly as he brought me flush against his body, grabbing a handful of my ass. He kissed my nose before he walked to the cabinets behind me.

“He’s right Darcy, you have a great laugh.” Evan gave me a small smile before he grabbed the whiskey, opened the lid and drank straight from the bottle. “Fuck the glasses, Dev.” He kissed my cheek as he walked to the sofa.

Dev grabbed another bottle from the cabinet, following Evan before he kissed me on the cheek too. They were so nonchalant about the kiss it made me wonder if they did it on purpose, or if it was so natural to them that they didn’t even realize they had both kissed me on the cheek. I looked over at

them saying something to each other before they clinked their bottles together, taking a shot straight from the source.

They drank both bottles that night, drowning their sorrows. I gave them water and ibuprofen before I helped them into the bed we slept in last night and they both kissed me before squishing me in between them. I laid on Dev's chest while Evan spooned me.

I could get used to this.

EVAN

I tried to get up a few times before I finally was able to keep my eyes open. My head was pounding viciously that even the faint snoring coming from my left side was hurting. I looked over to see Dev on his stomach hugging a pillow, wondering where the hell Darcy had gone.

My stomach growled when I smelled food. I was grateful that Darcy was cooking something because I hadn't eaten since yesterday morning. I rolled out of bed feeling like I had gotten run over by a truck that then backed up and ran over me again. It had been a while since I had drunk like that, but I felt like I needed to escape even just for the night, before I moved forward. Dev needed a moment to escape too before I told him what the hell had happened. I'm pretty sure he drank way more than I did, but most of the night was fuzzy.

Dev asked what I had found out, but I didn't want to tell him yet because I knew what I needed to tell him was going to be hard to hear, and he might hate me. It was selfish, but I needed one night before our lives were going to change. A few of Giovanni's guys kept an eye out for me while I regrouped. Dragging my ass out of bed, I went into the bathroom to shower, taking my bag with me.

Once I took the coldest shower I could handle, I began to feel marginally better; I left Dev snoring away. I walked out into the hallway smelling some really good food, but my stomach was so out of whack that I didn't know if I wanted to stuff my face or throw up.

Man, why did I think drinking my sorrows was a good idea?

I walked into the kitchen to see Darcy cooking as someone was talking.

I kissed down her neck, hearing her sharp intake of breath as I rubbed circles over her nipple on top of her bra. Pulling the cup down, I took her nipple in my mouth, sucking hard, making her hips buck against my own as she moaned.

“Oh god, Brett,” Darcy groaned, leaning down to get something out of the oven and I realized the voice was coming from her phone.

What the hell was she listening to?

“This is why you should have just slept with him from the beginning.” Darcy put a sheet on the stove turning around quickly when the guy on the phone explained how hard he was thrusting into the girl.

Take it like the good girl you are. Take all of me.

Darcy looked at me and her eyes grew big, as her face turned a beautiful shade of pink. She quickly went to her phone to shut it off.

I couldn't help but smirk at her, wondering what the hell she was listening to? She fumbled with it for a moment before it stopped playing and looked at her phone like it had betrayed her.

“What was that, Darcy?” I said, sitting down and enjoying her discomfort because she looked so damn beautiful like this.

“Can you pretend that you never heard that?” She was still looking down at the phone averting my gaze.

“Hell no. I will forever remember ‘take it like the good girl you are’,” I teased her. “What were you listening to?”

She stayed silent. I got up to walk to her, grabbing her chin to look up to me. Her face was still adorably red.

“Are you listening to porn?” I smiled at her.

She rolled her eyes at me. “No, it was a romance book.”

“Romance book? That sounded like erotica,” I said, stepping just a little closer to her.

“You obviously haven’t heard erotica before because that was pretty tame,” she explained to me. Her eyes widened when she realized her mistake.

“Is that what you like? To be called a good girl?” I leaned down ever so slightly.

“I would rather be spanked,” she exhaled.

I raised a brow, picturing spanking Darcy.

“I’m a pretty good dominatrix too,” she joked.

I laughed.

“Ok, get out of the kitchen while I finish my biscuits and gravy with a chicken fried steak.” She pushed me away and I let her because I wanted food marginally more than I wanted sex. I sat back down admiring her in the kitchen.

“If you need to eat now, I have some pastries from the coffee shop, you can snack on,” she said, laying the steak on the pan to fry it.

“Where did you get the pastries?”

“I went to work this morning,” she said like it was no big deal.

“Darcy, you should have told me that you were going to leave,” I said knowing I was getting upset for no reason. She came back and that was what mattered.

“Both of you were knocked out, there was no way I was going to get you guys to wake up,” she said, continuing to cook the steaks.

“Someone could have taken you or worse, hurt you,” I said, looking out of the windows wondering if she was followed.

“I couldn’t leave Mary. I don’t have the luxury of just calling in and not going to work.” she snapped, and I could hear the anger in her voice. “I was careful, Dev told me he had

a gun in his car, so I made sure it was near me all day just in case something happened.”

I wanted to argue with her, get mad at her some more because she didn't know how much danger she was in. But I had kept her in the dark from all of this, in hopes that she could live a normal life and not one where she would have to be constantly looking over her shoulder.

I tried to give her a life she would be happy with, but all I gave her was heartache.

“I'm sorry, Darcy,” I said, rubbing my hand over my face. It was a loaded apology because I had so much to apologize for.

She didn't say anything as she cooked. I was about to apologize again when she turned around with tears on her face.

“Darcy,” I whispered, her tears were like a punch to the throat.

“I told you that I would weather the storm with you. I would be there for you on your good days and your bad ones. I would have stuck with you every second of the last three years, but you made that decision for me.” She took a shaky breath. “I fucking loved you Evan, with every breath I took, with every thought I had, and with every moment I was with you and without you.”

“I was scared.” I said rubbing the back of my neck. “I was selling my soul to the devil because I was so scared of losing Kaili. Since I had no idea what I was getting into, I didn't want to lose you too or worse get you involved in something that could have you in danger.”

I stood up walking up to Darcy, cupping her face in my hands.

“At first, I thought I had made the right decision. Kaili went to get her treatment. I was doing small stuff for Lucio, like working on getting as much of the business legit, making his stuff look like he was just a businessman. It was easy to keep my distance, checking on you every so often. Giovanni's wife loved your coffee with Mary's pastries, so she gave me

updates about you.” I rested my forehead against hers, finding the strength to tell her the rest.

“I thought when I paid my debt, I would leave, but then my dad died. My mom wasn’t able to cover her living expenses alone, especially with the medications Kaili had to take. Things started to get more serious with Lucio. I was in charge of the fights, and there were a few times I experienced the really bad side of working for Lucio. Then you went out on a date with those guys, and I almost lost my shit. Two years had already gone by, and I knew asking you to wait would only placate you for a little bit.”

I took a deep breath, kissing her forehead, then each of her cheeks. “I felt like every time I wanted to go back to you there was always something in the way. The more time that went by, the more I lost my nerve to go back to you. I knew I had failed you, failed us and your rejection would have just made this reality more real. When I saw you at the club and actually talked to you, I was hooked again. Then we slept with each other. Fuck, Darce, I thought we were getting our break, but then you ghosted me.”

I rubbed my nose against hers then brushed our lips together, butterflies soared in my chest. “I get why you did it, but it didn’t hurt any less. Then seeing you with Dev, I almost kicked his ass for fucking touching you, but I remembered that I left you and you didn’t owe me anything. If there was anyone who would protect you to the ends of the earth it would be Dev. So, I accepted it.”

“Evan,” Darcy exhaled. “I’m sorry.”

I waited for the rejection, I was sure it was about to come but I didn’t know if I could hear it. “You have nothing to be sorry for.” I tucked a stray hair behind her ear, then held her by her shoulders admiring her beauty. “My camellia, you don’t need to apologize.”

“I ghosted you because I didn’t want to be rejected again. You also looked so good at the club; I assumed things were going great for you. I hated that you looked like you hadn’t suffered like I had, making me think that our one night was

just a moment of weakness.” She pulled away from me, wrapping her arms around herself. “It wasn’t until I saw you more often that I realized that this entire thing with Lucio was hard on you and maybe you only looked good because that’s what you wanted me to see.”

She scrubbed her face with her hands like she was frustrated. “I miss you calling me camellia, I wish we could go back to my dorm to redo everything. I would pester you until you let me back in, but thinking about the past isn’t going to get us to move forward. What I’m trying to say is, I’m trying to forgive you.”

“That’s all I can ask for,” I said, moving towards her to bring her in for a hug. I might have gotten carried away earlier, but if Dev is who she wanted in the end, then I would have to respect that, even if it broke me. A small part of me wondered if she could love both of us.

Would I be ok with only sharing a piece of her heart?

She wrapped her arms around my waist as she burrowed her face into my chest, reminding me of those days she used to seek comfort in my arms. I basked in her warmth, savoring the closest feeling I’ve had to absolute peace in God knows how long. Darcy would always be the air that kept me living, even on days when the waves of life kept pushing me down.

I squeezed her a little tighter, thinking I might need to just get over myself. If she could give me a piece of herself then I would be happy because not having Darcy in my life sounded like a future I wanted no part of.

DEV

*M*y head was pounding like bulls were running across my forehead, making me flinch when I opened my eyes. The sun was way too bright, the clock was too noisy and my body fucking hurt. I put my face back into my pillow, debating if it was even worth getting up. I looked over to see it was just Evan and I in the bed. Darcy must have gotten tired of our snoring, or we had hogged the bed.

I honestly don't remember coming to bed or even falling asleep. We finished drinking half the bottle not long after we started, making me regret drinking on an empty stomach. I must have fallen asleep again because this time I woke up alone in bed. The sun wasn't so bright making me think it was a little later in the day.

This time my headache wasn't quite so bad, but I still felt like shit. The smell of something amazing made my mouth water and I really needed to eat. I also needed to check on Darcy, worried she and Evan might be getting into a fight.

I rolled over, getting off the bed to go to the kitchen when I realized, I really needed to fucking shower. I had been in the same clothes for the past two days. A shower would hopefully help me wake up, and make me feel better or as good as I could be without my brother.

Just thinking about yesterday made my stomach sour even more. I knew drinking wasn't the answer, it didn't even make me feel better, but I *needed* to forget for just a moment. When Evan got to the cabin, I had every intention of asking about what happened or even asking how Vittoria and my niece were

doing, but I think my mind just shut down. I was starting to feel numb to it all, making me feel even guiltier. I needed just one more fucking day and then I could take care of whatever I needed to do.

After showering, I put on nothing but a pair of sweats and walked to the kitchen. The smell of gravy hit me, making my stomach growl. As I walked into the kitchen, I saw Evan and Darcy hugging. I stopped and slowly began to back out to the hallway to give them some privacy even though I really wanted to eat. They needed to talk, more than I needed some food, when I was about to turn around, Evan looked at me.

“Food is almost ready,” he said.

Darcy turned around to look at me, with a worried expression, but she still smiled at me.

“I’m starving,” I said my voice more gravelly than usual, sitting on a barstool watching Darcy check on the food. Evan grabbed a few glasses of water and some pills from a drawer before setting them down in front of me.

“Thanks,” I mumbled, taking the pills.

Evan was helping Darcy finish a few things, which felt very domestic in their kitchen dance. I expected to feel a little jealous because they had clearly talked, with the small glances and touches. The conversation was long overdue, and appeared to have been good for them, and I was content to see Darcy happy. That’s all I wanted, her happiness no matter what.

“Do you need help?” I asked, my mouth watering.

“I think we are all done,” Darcy said, putting the food on some plates. “Actually, can you put the biscuits on a plate or in a bowl while Evan sets the table?”

I nodded, walking behind her, touching her waist as I passed by for a bowl. She needed to know I still wanted her no matter what she and Evan had talked about. I joined their dance, noticing Evan was touching her and she was doing the same to us. It felt like foreplay, but I didn’t know if anyone else saw it that way.

Darcy cooked an amazing dinner, with biscuits, gravy, chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, and green beans. When we sat down, I couldn't help myself, I scarfed down the food desperate for relief from my stomach grumbles.

We were all silent while we ate except for the occasional groans Evan and I made.

"Damn, Darcy, that was fucking delicious." I leaned back in my chair catching Darcy's gaze on my chest.

"It was exactly what we needed." Evan stretched out and Darcy looked at him. Lust slowly made her eyes look darker.

She clearly wanted both of us, but was she going to make the first move or did I need to offer a little push? I got up to grab the empty plates off the table, kissing her cheek as I picked up her plate too.

"I can wash the dishes," she said, getting up to follow me.

"No, you cooked, the least I can do is clean," I said, putting the dishes on the side of the sink, seeing her picking up things from the stove. "Darcy, I can do the dishes." I took a spatula from her hand, pushing her away with my hand on her stomach as Evan came behind her with our glasses.

"Let us clean the kitchen." Evans' voice held a little authority.

"We got it." I leaned down to kiss her softly, but I couldn't help myself, pressing my lips to her firmly, tracing my tongue along the seam of her mouth. She opened up to me, but I wanted just a little taste. I sucked her lip before pulling away, seeing her blush as I took a quick glance and saw Evan hadn't left.

I was taking a gamble because we never talked about what the hell we were doing or if any of us wanted. The looks she was giving both of us was enough to make me test the waters. I turned her around so she could see he was still here.

"I think he wants a taste, Darcy," I said, in her ear, seeing Evan looking at her lips.

Evan stepped forward hesitantly like he was giving her a chance to back away from this. When she didn't stop him, I pushed her gently into him and they both hesitated for a second before they crashed into each other.

Evan threaded a hand gripping her blonde strands in his hand as he devoured her. I don't know what Darcy did to us but I felt that same urgency, the need to consume her like she was the air I needed to breathe.

Stepping closer to her I kissed the side of her neck, testing the waters, wondering if I should push us a little farther. I ran a hand up her ribs, kissing her shoulder, nibbling at her flesh, tasting her as she gasped between us. She turned her head to me, looking intoxicated with lust before I captured her lips in mine for a demanding kiss.

“Tell us what you want, Darcy.” I said, against her lips.

“You're in charge, Darcy,” Evan mumbled against her neck.

“I want—” She looked unsure for a second and I backed away immediately.

“Darcy, we don't have to do this,” I said, feeling disappointed, but I wouldn't push her.

“I want this, I want both of you.” She reached for me, pulling me close to her again. “I need both of you.” She whimpered.

Evan immediately picked her up, grunting from the pain I'm sure he was feeling as he carried her to the bedroom. I followed, palming my cock, ready for a release and wondering how this was going to work out. I had never had a threesome before, but it seemed Darcy was giving me a lot of my firsts and I was definitely okay with it.

Darcy and Evan fell onto the bed as he kissed her, grinding himself in between her legs. I walked to the other side of the bed and sat by her head, taking advantage when Evan kissed his way down her neck, to bring her in for a kiss that held promise for all the orgasms I was ready to give her.

“I’m still mad at you, Evan,” she moaned against my mouth. “But orgasms do help your case.”

“Let me fuck the anger out of you, Darcy,” he said, against her skin.

I chuckled as I kissed her again, trying to reach for her hem without breaking our kiss. When I felt Evan bringing up her shirt, I pulled the shirt over her mouth, but I stopped before I brought it over her eyes, keeping her hands up too.

“Don’t move or else we won’t give you an orgasm,” I said, kissing her again, seeing Evan kiss down her stomach.

Fuck, this might be the best sexual experience of my life. We should try making an Eiffel Tower.

I picked her up enough to snap off her bra, bringing it up around her arms, wanting to secure it so she really couldn’t move her arms. The thought of her restrained, with us pleasing her, had me pulling away to take my sweats off, pumping myself twice before I got back on to the bed. Evan was pulling down her leggings kissing each thigh before he spread her open.

“Goddamn, Darcy, I’ve missed your sweet pussy,” he said, before he licked her.

“Fuck,” Darcy gasped, as I leaned over her head to suck on her nipple. She licked my pec before biting down on it. Grunting at the pain, I bit her back to give her a taste of her own medicine, as I licked and sucked on her nipple to ease the pain of the bite. Kissing and sucking my way to her other nipple, giving it the same attention, working with Evan to bring her to orgasm for us. It wasn’t long before she shouted her release.

I kissed her as she came down, feeling her pull at the t-shirt that was covering her eyes. She ran her hand over my head trying to grip at the little hair I had, and I really needed my hair to grow faster.

“You don’t think we’re done do you? I want to fuck you.” She pushed me on to my back as I nodded, I couldn’t form any words since all my blood was in my rock-hard dick.

“Condom.” I groaned when she grabbed my cock giving me two slow firm strokes.

“Here,” Evan said, as a packet fell on my chest. I tore it with my mouth before Darcy ripped it from my hand, rolling it onto my cock. I expected her to straddle me but she surprised me by straddling me with her back to me, so I got an eyeful of her gorgeous ass as her pussy took my cock.

My eyes rolled back into my head at the sight that would forever be in my spank bank. She bounced her luscious hips up and down on my cock, giving me the view of the century. I swear this should be used as a military tactic to have male spies give their secrets because right now I would say and give whatever information I needed to keep Darcy going.

I helped her bounce on my cock as I heard Evan taking off his clothes. He stood in front of her as she whimpered his name. “You want this cock baby, you want to show me what that mouth of yours can do.”

She leaned forward to give me a better view of her pussy and that tight puckered hole. It drove me mad to have everything on display, making me thrust up into her. I heard her gag on his cock, reminding me of when she took my cock in her mouth, making my stomach clench in pleasure. The sounds of our moans, slapping skin, and Darcy sucking Evans cock had me trying to hold off my orgasm because I was so close.

I used some of the wetness from between us using my thumb to spread it around her puckered hole, slowly inching it in her ass.

“Dev,” Darcy panted, as she clenched around my cock and my thumb.

“Mhuirín, I need you to come.” I thrust harder, pulling out my thumb, slowly fucking her ass... “Touch that pussy, and come around this cock while we fill you up.”

Evan looked like he was lost in the ecstasy Darcy was giving him, thrusting into her face. I felt her hand graze my balls, it took everything I had not to come before her.

“Come now,” I growled, spanking her, thrusting harder with my cock and thumb.

“Don’t spill a drop,” Evan growled, his release igniting her own as her pussy squeezed me so tight, I felt lightheaded as I came, wishing there was nothing between us.

I looked up to see Evan saying something to Darcy before he kissed her, then helped her up. I groaned as my cock slid out of her.

“Shower?” Evan asked her, but she looked blissed out and sleepy. She mumbled something as I got off the bed to throw away the condom, and look for something to clean her. I found a small towel after I threw the condom away using warm water to wet it.

When I walked back into the bedroom, Evan wasn’t there, and Darcy was almost asleep while I cleaned her up. I tossed the towel into the dirty clothes bin putting on my boxer briefs before I crawled into bed with Darcy, exhausted even though I had slept all day. I maneuvered her on to my chest as she mumbled something and snuggled into me.

Evan came back texting on his phone, instantly making me worried but his face was relaxed. He set his phone down on the nightstand and looked at Darcy and me. I wondered if he was going to lose his shit and walk out on us, but he just climbed into the bed. He spooned her, wrapping an arm around her waist, squishing her between us.

“If this is what makes her happy, then I’m in.” His voice was muffled against her back.

“Whatever makes her happy,” I said, still expecting this to be weird. When Darcy sighed with a small dreamy smile on her face, I knew I would do whatever it took to make sure she went to sleep with that same expression on her face every night. Life was too short and I honestly didn’t know how long I had with her.

DARCY

I don't know what I expected to happen the morning after we all slept together but it wasn't what I was looking at right now. Dev and Evan were both shirtless in the kitchen while I watched them make breakfast. Who knew that something so mundane could be such a big turn on?

Now I knew why Jane always had a dreamy expression on her face. She was getting fucked on the regular, she had hot men dote on her, and I'm sure they walked around shirtless all the time. It was like a live show in the morning and if this was my future then I was all for it because I couldn't choose.

Did I even have to?

After Evan and I talked, my feelings for him hadn't changed, even though I tried so hard to forget about him. And Dev was not what I had expected. Initially, I had reservations about him, but I didn't expect for him to speak to a part of me that I didn't know needed attention. While Evan was a leader, a great people person, and charismatic, Dev was your silent, intuitive, reassuring presence that knew exactly what I needed. He had healed a part of me that had been broken by Evan. It was like life knew I needed to be healed before I let him come back into my life.

"Darcy?" I snapped out of my thoughts seeing Evan putting a plate of French Toast in front of me. "You ok, baby?"

"Yeah, I was just enjoying the show when my mind wandered." I blushed, looking at his ripped body.

He smirked. “Maybe if you finish all of your food, we can have a quick dessert.”

“Yes, please,” I said, even though I was a tad sore from last night.

Evan leaned down to kiss me softly. “I feel like I have so much to make up for, I think saying no to you is going to be my weakness for a while.”

“I think we all need to discuss what this means,” I said, hating that I had to put a damper on things, but I needed to hear everyone was okay moving forward.

“I don’t think there is much to say.” Dev filled my coffee, leaving the cream and sugar by me. “I want you and if that includes Evan, then so be it. If we make you happy and whole, then you have no arguments from me. I want you to feel complete, not torn apart.”

Dev said everything so matter of factly before he kissed my forehead, looking down at me like I was his world.

“I agree, even though I thought sharing you would be a problem. I can appreciate having Dev with you, taking care of you, giving you what I can’t and keeping you safe.” They both stood close to each other looking down at me. “Triangles are the strongest shape, and maybe that’s what we always needed, someone to stabilize us and make us stronger.”

Dev looked at Evan. “Only you would make something nerdy sound romantic.”

I laughed. “He has always been a nerd at heart and it’s cute,” I said, defending Evan.

“I mean it’s true,” Evan said, shrugging, but I noticed a blush creep up on his face.

“I think you’re right.” I stood up, kissing Evan, but laid my hand on Dev’s chest, loving his steady heartbeat. Then I kissed Dev, still holding onto Evan.

“Does this make us boyfriends?” Dev asked and I laughed. He smirked at Evan kissing my cheek as he went back to the kitchen.

“I mean I wouldn’t be opposed to you guys kissing, I think that might be hot,” I said, sitting down.

“You’ve been reading too many romance books,” Dev laughed.

“That one from yesterday didn’t sound like swords were crossing.” Evan sat down with his plate of French Toast.

I laughed, but I couldn’t help but blush when I remembered the scene he walked in on.

“Are you still listening to the one we started the other day or are you on to a new one?” Dev asked, sitting down.

“Oh, it’s a new one! It’s about one of the brothers from the other series,” I said, getting excited because Dev liking romance books was like finding a unicorn in my backyard. “I love these narrators. They sound so good together.”

“Did she write about the grumpy older brother or the shy nerdy one?” Dev asked, throwing us into the entire series, and what we thought might happen in the next few books she had planned. Evan teased Dev for a second before he played him a sex scene that shut Evan up. It was erotic, listening to the scene with Dev and Evan in the room. Once it finished, Dev turned off the audio, as the air charged with sexual tension.

“Is that what you want Darcy?” Evan got up from his chair, leaning over me with one hand on my chair and the other on the table. “You want to be spanked and be called a good girl?”

“Among other things,” I whispered, not trusting my voice.

“Do you want us to call you our good little slut?” He leaned down close to my lips. “Do you want us to tie you down and blindfold you while we fuck every hole, leaving you dripping with our cum?”

I closed my eyes while I nodded, because he was asking about all of the things I was so curious about.

“I think she wants us to take her at the same time, fucking her until she gasps for air, and we became the air she breathes

as she comes on our cocks,” Dev said, close to my ear and I swear I was on the verge of coming.

“Please,” I groaned, picturing it all.

Someone threaded their hand through my hair, yanking it back.

“Then go lay down, Darcy but make sure this is what you want because we won’t stop until we play out all your romance book fantasies.” Dev bit my ear before he kissed my neck and let me go as goosebumps peppered my body. I looked up to see Dev behind me and Evan in front of me like it was a promise of what was to come.

I was about to get up when a loud pounding on the door broke our spell.

“Darcy, go to the room,” Evan said, helping me up and pushing me to the room as Dev looked out the window.

“It’s Saul,” Dev called out.

“Fuck,” Evan snapped, and just like that, the bubble we had been in the last forty-eight hours had popped. “Go put some clothes on baby, we will be leaving here soon.”

I nodded my head, walking to the room to get ready. A long hot shower eased the soreness I felt, I loved that I was still reminded of our night together. I dressed in leggings and an oversized sweatshirt. I brushed out my wet hair when I heard the yelling, dread pooled in my gut.

“You didn’t think to tell me that?” Dev’s voice was furious.

“You know how your brother felt about—”

“Don’t use that fucking excuse on me.” Dev’s voice snapped at Evan.

“I know it’s a shit excuse but what the fuck was I supposed to do? That’s what he wanted. You wanted me to tell your brother to go fuck himself or what?” Evan yelled back. “He did this to spare you, to keep you safe, to make sure you had a fighting chance of not being sucked into this life.”

“Maybe he should have asked me?” Dev said, with a lot of emotion in his voice. “Maybe you both should have asked me what the hell I wanted?”

“I know we should have, but we didn’t and now that Giovanni is gone, it looks like you don’t have a choice.”

It was quiet for a moment. I got closer to the door to see if they had started talking in normal tones, but all I heard was silence.

“I want in because I don’t want to be left in the dark again, and I want to be able to help,” Dev said, just loud enough for me to hear.

“Are you sure?” Evan asked.

“Who else do you completely trust to watch your back? No offense, Saul.” Dev sounded like he was calming down.

“I get it, right now we don’t know who to trust. We need to find out who said something to Lucio, and I really think we need to talk about taking care of Geraldo,” someone else said, who I assumed was Saul.

“We definitely need to take care of Geraldo, but we have to be smart about it. Lucio is going to be pissed if he finds out that we killed him.” Evan said it like killing was so commonplace. They were talking about taking a life, but since he had tried to kill Evan I think this might be the one time it was okay for someone to die, especially if he had a hand in Giovanni’s death.

Jesus Christ! Being with Evan and Dev for a few weeks had made me okay with a man dying. Well, two men dying because Lucio had to fucking go, too.

“Geraldo is mine,” Dev snapped. “So, figure out a way he won’t be missed, and we can take him out.”

“We will figure it out, but we need to be careful with Lucio. I don’t know if he thinks I had a hand in it too and he’s just buying some time,” Evan said, and I instantly felt worried.

“I think if he knew it was you then you would be dead too,” Saul said.

“Geraldo tried to distract me, so I wasn’t around when they planned to take him out.” Evan countered. “I think you’re right, Saul, but we need to assume he knows about my disloyalty, and he will do something in the future. I don’t want to be caught off guard. *We* don’t need to be caught off guard.”

“Agreed,” Dev and Saul said together.

“Let’s go check on the girls, and make sure everyone is ok. I’d like for you to talk to your men and make sure you are a hundred percent sure that we can trust everyone.”

“Do you remember if you guys told anyone?”

“I sure as hell didn’t. I knew if I told someone then we would get fucked because men are quick to use any evidence against you to get ahead,” Evan responded.

“Then someone had to have been listening to his calls.” Dev suggested. “He left the building when he called so that’s a possibility, but I thought he had gone to his car,” Evan said. “There’s eyes and ears everywhere.”

“Well, let’s figure out who we can trust, I’m going to go check on Vittoria, and I think we need to talk about what the next move is,” Dev said, and then I heard murmuring. I pushed my ear by the door to hear better, but I still couldn’t hear anything.

I pulled back slightly and the next thing I knew the door hit me right in the face making me fall back. Dev peaked around the door to see me on my ass.

“Holy shit, Darcy are you ok?” he asked, leaning over me.

“Uh yeah, I was—” I didn’t know what to say as a blush crept up on my cheeks.

“Mhuirín, were you eavesdropping?” he asked, helping me up, checking my face.

“Maybe,” I said, hugging him to hide my embarrassment.

“You could have just asked us.” I heard the laughter in his voice.

“I didn’t know how much you planned to tell me, so I thought I would just listen to how bad the situation is,” I said into his chest.

Dev sighed. “Darcy, I don’t want to say I would never lie to you when it comes to what happens with my father, but I’m afraid of telling you too much. I don’t want to scare you away and if I’m being honest, see where I come from. Then you’ll realize that I’m not worth staying around for.”

I looked up at him, seeing him looking out the window. He looked worried, unsure and scared.

“Dev, I know you’re not your father,” I said, cupping his face, hoping he would look down. “You know what he is doing is wrong, you protect those you love from him, and I can see the anger you have towards him. You are not your father.”

His blue eyes finally looked down at me. “I’m still his son and with Giovanni gone, I don’t know what he is going to expect from me.”

“Look, whatever he expects out of you we are going to get through it okay?” I pushed to my tiptoes to kiss him on his lips, pouring all the comfort and reassurance into it.

“Darcy, I don’t deserve you, but I will do anything I can to keep you in my life. You. Are. Mine,” he growled, pulling me in for another kiss that definitely left his initials on my heart like some damn tattoo. “I want to be your everything, I want to be the air you breathe during the storm and on gorgeous summer days.”

It sounded like a declaration of love and before I had a chance to say anything to him, he kissed me senseless, leaving me dazed as he left to take a shower. The need to say something back was overwhelming, but I was so hesitant. I was scared of what it meant loving two men who could be taken from me in a heartbeat. I barely survived Evan leaving me, what would happen if they both left me?

EVAN

Walking into the club the past few days had left me feeling like at any moment Geraldo or Lucio were going to finally kill me. The day we left the cabin and I finally met with Lucio, he told me of Giovanni's crime against him, and why he had to kill him. I defended Giovanni when I knew it was pointless, but for the first time since I had started working for Lucio, I argued with him.

I shouted Giovanni's innocence hoping that he would tell me who had fucking tattled and also, to help my case too. Lucio didn't budge but I managed to get a funeral for my friend if only because people would wonder what had happened to Giovanni. Saul had taken Giovanni's body and had a place to keep him for safekeeping until I could figure out what we were going to do.

I pointed out that we also had the feds on our tail, we didn't need to look even more suspicious. We had a funeral home and a medical examiner under Lucio's belt so all we would have to do is come up with a story as to what had happened.

Giovanni deserved so much more, but I knew if I pushed too hard Lucio would take it all away, not giving his wife or his daughter a chance to say goodbye. My heart ached from losing him. He had been my rock the last few years and we managed to get through the rough days together. He was the brother I never had, he made sure I didn't go crazy, and took me under his wing so I could become invaluable.

Lucio also asked me where the hell I had been, but I had a feeling he knew Geraldo had kicked my ass before I told him. All he told me was that we should play nice, and it was probably something that I had done. He gave me a list of shit Giovanni managed, expecting me to pick up the slack. I left his office seething because I was pretty sure he was playing me.

Two days gone and I was behind on a lot of stuff. Inheriting Giovanni's list made it seem like he was either keeping me really busy or he wanted me to fuck up and have a reason to kill me too. Before I entered my office, I noticed Dev walking down the hallway to me and I instantly got nervous. I had hoped Lucio would leave Dev alone, but I knew that would probably take a fucking miracle.

He shook his head at me. We agreed to keep things quiet when we were around people, so as not to raise suspicion and to keep Dev safe. If Lucio was suspicious of me, we didn't need him to question his other son. I went to work feeling like the weight of all my problems crashing in on me. How long I was going to be able to keep this shit up?

After I caught up with as much as I could, I walked into the club to see it busy for a Thursday. I did my normal rounds, checked all of the bars, and made sure that we were working well before I left.

"Evan!"

I turned around to see one of our bartenders behind me.

"Hey Casey!" I shouted. "What can I help you with?"

"I just thought you should know that Candy just arrived and is on her way to go speak to Lucio." She leaned in closer to me.

I looked at her a little confused, not understanding why I would care.

"Word is she's his eyes and ears," Casey said with disgust. "I would watch out for her."

I nodded at her, still confused that she knew this information.

“Vittoria is my cousin,” she stated, and it clicked.

“Did Giovanni know about this?” I asked, looking around to make sure we weren’t being watched.

“He knew about her, but I’m pretty sure he underestimated her.”

Grabbing a case of alcohol, I kept up the ruse we were talking about work. I walked to her bar hoping she was following. I set it down and replenished the bar.

“Is this the first time you’ve seen her here?” I asked.

“No, she comes in at least once a week.” She answered all my questions with no hesitation.

“Casey, I need you to tell me everything you know,” I said, feeling like this was the break I needed. The break we needed.

PLANNING GIOVANNI’S funeral was a fucking nightmare. I never thought I would bury my best friend, but here I was, putting on a suit and getting ready to head to Vittoria’s house. The last few days had been fucking awful working all day and only an hour or two with Darcy or sometimes just a phone call.

Dev had been keeping an eye on her, giving me updates when he could. Even though I should have been jealous, I couldn’t help but feel relieved that she had someone who was there for her when I couldn’t be, reminding her she wasn’t alone and that she was safe. I was anxious to finally be able to spend more than just a few moments with Darcy after the funeral.

Fixing my tie one more time before I grabbed my keys, locked up and headed over to Vittoria’s house. She didn’t live far but on my way, I called Saul to see if he had anything for me. It seemed that almost overnight all of Giovanni’s loyal guys had begun to look to me to fill his shoes. I knew people hated Lucio, but the seething hatred directed at him was something I hadn’t expected.

Giovanni was respected by his men because he was fair and honest; he was a good fucking person in spite of half the illegal shit we had to do. It wasn't fair that Giovanni and I had tried to keep Dev from Lucio, but he needed an "heir" and apparently your empire was only as good as your heir.

I pulled up to see Dev already at Vittoria's house, and thankfully no one else. Before I let myself in, I took a deep breath to keep my emotions in check. I owed it to Dev and Vittoria to be strong.

"Fanculo!" I heard a scream with a whole bunch of Italian swear words and I rushed into the house expecting to see someone like Geraldo inside, but Vittoria was screaming and throwing things in the living room. Dev looked relieved when he saw me; he had his niece by the hand and pushed Ava away. I went straight to Vittoria, dodging the things she threw at me. She was in a white robe with her hair done, it looked like she started to lose it while she was getting ready.

She was speaking so fast that I couldn't even pick up individual words until she screamed my name. Giovanni told her everything, and I didn't keep anything from her either. She had to be blaming me for his death because for the past few days I had been blaming myself too.

"Vittoria, I'm sorry," I said, inching myself closer.

More Italian was spewed at me, but she was losing steam. I took the chance to grab her and hold on to her. She thrashed for a bit before she just sobbed in my arms, holding on to me tight.

I sat on the floor, hoping I wasn't going to sit on some glass. I rubbed her back while trying to fight back my own tears, the guilt was always there.

"I'm so sorry, Vittoria." My voice broke, making me clear my throat to finish what I had to say. "I know saying sorry doesn't help, but I will do everything in my power to make him pay. I owe you that."

"I want his head on a platter, Evan. He deserves to suffer like the cowardly animale he is," she mumbled against my

chest. “He stole my baby’s father, my husband, and Dev’s brother.”

“I don’t know if I could deliver his head on a platter but I will make sure he suffers for his crimes.” We sat there for a few more moments before she pushed away from me.

“Don’t let Devlin go down the same path.” She wiped her face with her arm. She looked so worn out with bags under her puffy eyes from crying so much.

“I won’t, I’ll make sure I do whatever it takes to keep him in the same position Giovanni and I wanted for him.” I wiped the tears off her face with my thumbs. “I know Giovanni left you guys with money to take care of yourselves, but if you need anything please let me know. I will do everything I can to make sure you don’t need anything.”

“I will,” she said, looking around. “Fuck, I have to pick this up.”

“I got it, I think you need to see the piccolina,” I said, helping her stand, picking her up to make sure she didn’t step on any glass. I heard Dev and the girls in the kitchen, so I carried her all the way over there. They were all at the table coloring.

“Mama.” Her daughter ran up to her. “Are you ok?” She threw herself at Vittoria when I set her down.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, picking her up and kissing her head. She spoke to her in Italian while she ran her hand through her hair.

“Come on sweetheart, let’s let your momma finish getting dressed.” I held my hands out to her and she instantly launched herself at me.

“Efan!” she squealed, hugging my neck as tight as she could.

“Is he coming?” Vittoria looked at me like the fearless woman I knew she was. For a moment after I broke the news that Giovanni was dead and that it was more than likely at the hands of Lucio, I seriously thought she would take one of the many guns she had and send Lucio to hell herself.

“I keep hearing he’s not, but I expect him to show a display of power,” I said, being as honest as I could.

“Ok, give me thirty minutes,” she said, before she turned and left us all in the kitchen.

“Have you eaten, piccolina?” I asked, taking her to the table, kissing her cheek.

“Si, zio made me pancakes,” she smiled.

“That’s good,” I said, sitting down. “Hey, Ava.”

I sat across from her feeling that guilt creeping up again. She looked at me, her face crumbling into tears as she put her head down. Dev nodded at me, reassuring me that it was okay, but that nagging feeling that it should have been me, had been eating away at me.

I left the girls with Dev while I picked up the living room quickly, spending the next fifteen minutes in silence. Dev calmed Ava down and I kept the piccolina entertained by coloring with her and doing a few puzzles. I gave her a snack—maybe a few pieces of candy, because she fucking deserved them—before I knew Vittoria was going to be done. As she was eating, I didn’t know how much she understood about what was going on today. She was three, but I was too afraid to ask, in case I made it worse.

Vittoria came out looking ready to kill; she looked every bit the wife of a mobster. Her makeup hid away all the pain, the exhaustion and the weakness. She was ready for battle, and I didn’t want to say that’s what we were doing, but I knew that at any moment I could be next or worse, Dev.

The limo was waiting for us outside. Vittoria, the piccolina, Dev and Ava got into the limo while I followed watching our surroundings. I carried several guns in the car now because I wasn’t going to take any more chances. Saul and several men were on the lookout just in case Geraldo showed up to cause shit. We arrived at the church seeing the hearse outside already.

People were filtering into the church, when I got out of the car to escort Dev and the girls to their seats. I saw Armando

standing by their car already. We had men everywhere in the church and outside of it, even outside of Lucio's home, to tell me if he was coming or not.

"She's here, sir," Armando told me, as we walked into the church.

"Thanks," I said, looking for Darcy right away. Dev and I stressed to Saul and Armando that she was supposed to be taken care of like she was family. We didn't say it in so many words, but I think they both got that she was ours and she was to be protected. I spotted Darcy with Mary in the middle of the church, speaking to each other in hushed tones. As much as I wanted to go over there and kiss her, I kept my distance.

The mass was a very somber experience. The priest talked about celebrating Giovanni's life. We had told everyone that he died of a rare aneurysm. So, what the priest said was fitting but most of us in the church knew it was bullshit. The time came for the pallbearers to lift Giovanni up and make our way to the hearse. Dev and I were in the front while Armando and Saul took the middle, and two more men took the back.

Feeling the weight of Giovanni on my shoulder choked me up. I failed him, but I couldn't afford to fail again. Too many people were relying on me, especially the beautiful woman who couldn't take her eyes off Dev and me. Failing wasn't an option, when the future I had fought for and dreamed about was so close to coming true.

DEV

*B*urying my brother was not something I expected to do —ever. I knew there was always a possibility because of what he did with Lucio, but I always thought he was too good at his job to ever be put in that situation. It never occurred to me that Lucio would be the one to put a bullet in his head.

I really hated Evan and Giovanni; I thought they would have been smarter. They were reckless, costing Giovanni his life. As much as I wanted to blame Evan for his death, the only person I needed to blame was Lucio.

Looking around the cemetery for him, I wondered if he was going to ruin this with his presence. I held on to my sister and Vittoria who was holding my niece on her hip as the priest said some more words. I didn't pay attention to what he was saying, I was too lost in my own thoughts, and I also wasn't a man of God.

I looked up at all the faces in the crowd and knew they were all here for good reasons. The only person missing was Giovanni's mama, but it was hard to get her down here and she was afraid of being here with Lucio in the same city. I spotted Darcy with Mary and my heart flipped.

We all had a discussion and we told her she didn't need to be here, but she was adamant on being here for us. We locked eyes for a moment before I lingered too long, and I had impure thoughts at my brother's funeral. Giovanni would have liked her. He would have thrown a party to celebrate that I had a woman who I was settling down with.

He always said I was missing out on coming home to a woman in my house, in my bed and someone to share my life with. Giovanni and Vittoria had been together since they were twenty, and eleven years later, they were still crazy about each other. I wanted that. I was just worried I wouldn't find a woman who would live through the shit I had to deal with.

“Would the family like to say any last words?” The priest looked at me because we agreed I would say something, but I couldn't. The thought of saying goodbye to him for everyone to hear would be unbearable.

I shook my head at the priest, and saw Evan walk up behind him quietly saying something to him before he stepped forward.

“Thank you for coming today. We appreciate everyone and the kind words you have left for Giovanni's family. I still think that my friend is going to call me, and that last week didn't happen, this was all a bad dream. I keep thinking he will call me and tell me I'm a coglione.” Evan chuckled and so did most of us. “I know he made an impact on a lot of your lives, but for me he saved me. I was a mess a few years ago, but if it weren't for Giovanni, my life would be shit. I know that I would not be where I am today if it weren't for him.”

He glanced at Darcy and then me.

“I owe him for giving me so much that I will never be able to repay that debt. But I will try everyday to make sure I pay —” He stopped talking abruptly, looking tense. I would have thought it was him choking up, but he looked angry. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I knew he was here. That asshole had come to his funeral. “I'm sorry. I will make sure to pay it forward because he deserved so much more from this life.”

Evan started the line to pay respects to us, starting with the *piccolina* and Vittoria. Vittoria held on to him for dear life and let go for a minute. I heard her whimper, which broke my heart, making Ava bury her head into my chest too.

Evan stayed close as the rest of the guests made their way to give us their condolences. My anxiety increased with each

person I saw come up to Vittoria. I hoped it wasn't him and once everyone had come forward, we didn't see him. After we buried Giovanni, we went to Evan's home for the reception, where he had someone cater for us.

I was on edge the entire time expecting Lucio to walk through Evan's door at any moment. Vittoria, Ava and I were on the sofa eating and watching the commotion around us. People were nice enough to give us space, but a few people had come up to us again expressing their sympathy again.

"Hey, Saul needs a word." Evan came up to me on the sofa. "He's in my bedroom."

I looked at him like he was crazy, but he gave me that look that I needed to go talk to him. I nodded, looking over at Ava who looked so tired.

"Come on Ava, let's get you a nap, I'll be back to sit with them." Evan looked over at Vittoria, then grabbed Ava's hand, tucking her against his side as he took her to a guest bedroom. I walked to the other side of the living room, going down the hallway to the last bedroom, walking in without knocking.

"What the hell is so important that you couldn't wait—"

I saw Darcy standing in the middle of the room, making me close the door quickly to rush to her. We collided forcefully, kissing frantically, touching each other everywhere. I wanted just a moment to kiss her and hold her, but the need to have Darcy was overwhelming.

"Darcy," I groaned, about to pull away because I knew if I didn't, we would end up fucking.

She pulled me back like she knew what I needed, making us fall onto the bed.

"Darcy." She bit my lip, making me grind into her. "I'm not going to be gentle. I need to fuck the pain away."

"Then use me," she sighed.

Clenching my jaw as she kissed down my neck, I tried to reign myself in because I really didn't want to hurt her. I wanted her to feel pleasure and euphoria with me not—

“Fuck me, Dev, now,” she snapped.

“Goddammit Darcy, I’m trying to be a fucking gentleman.” She rubbed my cock through my pants, my hips pushing against her hand, needing relief desperately.

“Use me for your pain,” she said, unzipping my pants, reaching inside my boxers to stroke my cock using more pressure around my piercing.

“Darcy,” I grunted, before grabbing her hand and pinning it to the bed while I grinded myself against her. Lifting her skirt up, I saw her completely bare for me. Swallowing roughly, I was unprepared for her to be naked for me, sinking onto my knees to have a taste of her.

I licked her pussy with a languid stroke, teasing her from her hole to her clit a few times before she ran her hand through my hair, still hating that it wasn’t long enough for her to pull herself closer.

We couldn’t drag this out like I wanted to, but I needed to bring her to the brink of an orgasm so I could have her come on my cock. I inserted two fingers curving them slightly, making her shiver. Knowing it wouldn’t take long to have her come for me.

I stood up, grabbed my wallet, only to realize I didn’t have a fucking condom.

“Shit,” I gritted. “Darcy, I don’t have a condom.”

“I’m clean, I haven’t slept with anyone and I’m on the pill,” she said, leaning up on her elbows panting slightly.

“I’m clean too, the last person I slept with was before I tested and we used a condom,” I said, realizing I was not going to last long if we did this.

“Then fuck me bare, Dev.” She bit her lip as she laid back, holding up her legs.

“You’re such a dirty fucking girl, mhuirnín,” I said, taking my jacket off quickly and throwing it. Slowly, I slid my cock right up to the entrance of her glistening pussy. I began to stretch her slowly until I was buried all the way in—*fuck*, I

really wasn't going to last. Taking a deep breath, I leaned over to kiss her when the door to the room opened, making me look for something to throw over Darcy, but it was just Evan.

"Goddamn it, I knew it." Evan looked enthralled with Darcy. "You better be quick." He walked over to Darcy kissing her and I wasted no time in slamming into her as she shouted into Evan's mouth. Maybe it was a good thing he showed up. I could fuck her, and he could keep her quiet. I held on to her lush hips as I pounded into her, feeling myself get lost in her warmth.

Darcy was perfection as I saw her kissing Evan, clawing at his buckle.

"I want to desperately fuck you Darcy, leave my cum in you so later on when you get home to clean yourself up, you know who you belong to." He kissed her but she was persistent in unbuckling his belt.

"I want both of you to come inside of me," she moaned.

"Darcy, I don't have enough willpower to—" His words cut off as she stroked him.

Seeing her bring him to his knees made me pick up my pace as I felt the need to come at the base of my spine. Darcy rubbed her clit with quick strokes that was fucking mesmerizing. I felt her start to flutter before she gasped, and her orgasm set me off. I wanted to shout my release, but I said Darcy's name like it was silent prayer. The orgasm was so intense that I almost fell on top of her, catching myself on my forearms.

"You asked for it, Darcy," Evan sounded angry but the look on his face was anything but that. He took off his jacket as I moved to sit down next to her before he flipped her on to her stomach, in between my legs.

The loud smack on Darcy's ass was erotic.

"Do you like it when you make us lose control," Evan said, positioning himself behind her. "Shit, I'm not going to last long either."

"I love it," she gasped, when he thrust into her.

“Then take it like the good girl you are.”

Darcy looked up at me as her face contorted in pleasure.

“Harder, Evan,” she cried out, pushing back against him as I grabbed a handful of her hair kissing her before she made too much noise.

“You get any louder Darcy, I’m going to make you choke on this cock to make you be quiet,” I snapped, kissing her again, pulling her hair just enough that it skirted the line between pleasure and pain.

If I had thought I was rough, Evan was fucking the life out of Darcy while I kept her as quiet as I could.

“I need one more orgasm, Darcy,” Evan panted. “Give me one more baby, I need to feel your pussy squeezing my cock.”

He reached under to play with her clit, while I kissed her and played with her tits. Once I pinched her hard enough, I felt her tensing up. She pulled away from my kiss.

“Evan, I’m, I’m—” she scrunched her eyes, shaking as she bit her lip through her orgasm.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” Evan fucked her hard, riding out both of their orgasms.

When they came down from their high, I picked Darcy up, laying her on her back, kissing her forehead, when she moaned again. I looked down to see Evan looking at her pussy, while he was pushing his cum back inside of her.

“You better not clean that up until you get home, and you can bring yourself to another orgasm with our cum,” Evan said standing up as he buckled his trousers before he went to the ensuite bathroom.

I did not expect that to be so fucking hot, but it was, and Darcy seemed to be loving it.

“You ok, beautiful?” I asked, a little worried.

“I’m perfect, and I can’t wait till tomorrow when I’m sore and the entire day I’m reminded of how we fucked.”

“You are fucking perfect,” I said, leaning down to kiss her when Evan came up to her and began cleaning her legs.

“I’m going to go out first, and then I think each of you need to leave at different times too. I don’t want to take any chances, ok?” Evan looked around the floor. “Darcy, where is your underwear?”

“I didn’t have any.” Darcy smirked at him.

He stared at her for a moment. “You minx,” he said, pulling her in for a kiss before he rested his forehead against hers. “I love you,” he breathed out.

“I—”

He covered her lips with his fingers. “Not yet. I’m not worthy of your love, I want to be sure when you say those words again, you are positive of my love and have no doubt that what we have is forever.”

“Evan—”

“Baby, I’m not the same man I used to be and there’s a lot of things I’ve had to do to survive. Please, just give me time to prove to you that I’m deserving of you again. I will be one day.”

“Ok,” she said, before they kissed again.

He kissed her nose before he smoothed out his jacket and pants, leaving the room. She stared after him with a dazed expression then looked over at me. She looked thoroughly fucked, making me want to go for another round, but I knew I needed to check on Vittoria.

“I want nothing more than to stay here with you, but I have to go check on Vittoria,” I said, getting up to put my jacket back on and make sure everything looked like it was in place.

Thank god no cum got on our clothes.

“Yeah, poor Mary is probably waiting for me to leave.” Darcy stood up and I knew as soon as she went out there, people would know she had just had sex. I wanted everyone to know she was mine, but I had to reign it in, it would put her in more danger.

“Stay for a few more minutes, I’ll let Mary know you are ok,” I said, kissing her on the cheek because if we kissed, we would go for round two.

Or would it be round three?

I left the room looking for Mary as I walked down the hallway. She was seated next to Armando talking up a storm as he nodded at her.

“Excuse me, Mary,” I said, coming up to her feeling self-conscious for a moment. I knew this woman was everything to Darcy and I wanted her to like me. “Darcy is—”

“I know, child,” she said, smirking at me.

The room suddenly felt really hot as she called me out.

“Uh—ok. She should be out soon,” I said, as embarrassment no doubt made my face red.

“No rush from me, she needed to make up for lost time, since she hasn’t gotten her kitty—”

I interrupted her with a cough since Armando was right there, as she cackled at me with mischief in her eyes.

“I’ll let her know,” I said, trying not to smile as I turned away.

“Dev,” she called out to me, and I turned around. “I’m really sorry for your loss but I’m glad you have someone to weather the pain with. But please don’t hurt her, she’s been through enough with Evan, and needs something good in her life.”

“Yes ma’am,” I said, not wanting to make a promise to her because I was so afraid that I was going to mess this up.

“You deserve to be happy too, Devlin.” She gave me a sad smile that said she knew what my situation was.

“She makes me happy,” I said, turning around before I let my emotions get the best of me.

I walked back to Vittoria and the piccolina.

“Are you ok?” I asked. “Do you need something to drink or more food?”

She looked up at me with that fierce expression she’d had on all day, cracking slightly when she saw it was me. I couldn’t imagine what it would feel like to lose the love of my life. Just thinking about losing Darcy had me on the edge of a panic attack.

Bringing her into my arms to give her a moment.

“I know you think you have to be strong, but you deserve to be home and let go.” I kissed her temple, giving her one last squeeze before I pulled away. I made sure she composed herself before I looked for Evan.

I noticed Darcy talking to Mary before I spotted Evan in his kitchen. I nodded my head towards the door, signaling we were going to be leaving. He said something to whomever he was talking to, and walked to Armando before he left to the guest bedroom to get Ava. We said our goodbyes, I carried my niece with Vittoria by my side as we walked out the front door with five guys behind us.

“This is a lot of men for a funeral, were you expecting something to happen?” The sound of Lucio’s voice made me stop instantly. I gave the piccolina to Vittoria, stepping in front of them.

“We didn’t want anyone to ruin the day we laid Giovanni to rest.” Evan walked out of the house with Ava, pushing her towards me. “I think Vittoria and the piccolina deserved that. There was also the threat we received, and I didn’t think you would want harm to come to your granddaughter or your daughter.”

Lucio looked at Evan like he was sizing him up or he was trying to figure out what Evan’s next move was.

“Cazzo di merda” Vittoria mumbled behind me, making me glance at her quickly as she held onto Ava too.

“Per favore, Vittoria,” I said, pleading with her not to say anything that might make things worse.

“Well, it seems you’ve all paid your respects to a fucking snitch. I think you’ve used my men long enough,” Lucio snapped. “I didn’t hear of any threat.”

Geraldo walked up behind Lucio whispering something to him.

“I left a note in your office, and I called, leaving a message. It seems like the rat is still out there and we just had a shipment of drugs get picked up, too,” Evan said looking relaxed with his hands in his pockets. “A few men said they noticed a black car at the drop off, but couldn’t tell if it was one of our guys or if it was someone else. I think it’s something to be looked into.”

Lucio glared at Geraldo.

“You don’t think this is something that I needed to be made aware of? Weren’t you in charge of this?” he snarled at him.

“I had it under control, but I didn’t want to say anything to you before I knew what was going on.” Geraldo glared at Evan for a second before he looked at Lucio with worry in his expression.

“You tell me shit as it happens,” Lucio said, looking angrier by the moment.

“I put some feelers out and the feds are just waiting for someone to slip. Whoever told you that Giovanni was the snitch, clearly wants us to crumble from within.” Evan walked closer to Lucio. “The last report I saw said a woman called the hotline.”

Lucio looked at Evan like he was seeing him in a new light, and I hoped it was because he was believing what he was feeding him, and not because he now saw Evan as a threat.

“He could have had Vittoria call,” he stated, trying to come up with a reason to have killed his son. His stony mask of indifference was starting to slip like he might be realizing that he had incorrectly killed his full blood heir. Vittoria grabbed my arm squeezing it and I knew she was on the brink of saying something or worse doing something stupid.

“She could have, but I don’t think so. I have someone trying to find out the phone number that was used to make the call from. We will know our answer in a day or two,” Evan said, like he wasn’t worried about finding out the number’s origins. I could feel my body heating up from worry, and the fact that we might all die at the end of this if he ever found out the truth.

They stared down at each other, but you could tell who had the upper hand. Evan was calm while Lucio looked like he was about to bust a blood vessel in his eye.

“Who are your informants?” he asked.

“I think that is better kept in private in case we have the snitch right here.”

Lucio looked around at all of us, making me instinctively get closer to Vittoria.

“Then you better make sure you’re in my office tonight,” Lucio said quickly, before he turned around to get into his car.

Geraldo looked at Evan with narrowed eyes like he knew the truth, but how he knew was another question.

Once they left, it felt like everyone took a collective sigh of relief.

“Mama, I’m tired.”

I looked back at Vittoria, rubbing my niece’s back.

“Come on, let’s get you guys home,” I said, looking around again in case Lucio came back. Evan and I locked eyes and he nodded at me. He hadn’t told me what he was doing, but I trusted him completely. Evan didn’t know it yet, but the tables were turning, and Lucio was starting to worry about how many of these men were really his.

DARCY

*A*ny preconceived notion I had about a relationship with more than two people went completely out the door the week after the funeral. Every day I saw either one of them, and sometimes both. Dev started coming back to the coffee shop in the morning, making Mary like him so much more.

I was still worried that I hadn't told her about Evan, but I was going to take it slow when it came to him coming back into my life. He surprised me when he said he wanted to earn my love back, making me love him more just for saying that, but I don't think he knew that I still loved him even after all these years.

We fell into a routine fairly quickly. Some days we would have dinner together and they would talk about what was happening at the club or with Lucio. Evan was worried because Lucio seemed too happy lately, even though there was more talk of feds in the area, placing him and Dev on edge.

Some days they stayed over; you would have thought Evan and Dev had shared a woman before with how comfortable they were with each other. One evening Evan came to my house early to find Dev fucking me on the couch because we couldn't keep our hand off of each other.

He watched as I fell apart with Dev slamming me into next year, saying all the filthy things that I loved. Evan fucked two more orgasms out of me before we fell asleep together on my bed.

Thankfully, I was off the following day because I was deliciously sore with fingerprints on my hips and thighs from how hard they were fucking me. I shivered at the memory, surprised that I had slid so easily into the role of a wanton woman.

I had always liked sex, and I craved it as much as the next woman, but with Dev and Evan, I needed them like I needed my next meal. They nurtured my sexuality, letting me make demands, seeing what I liked and didn't like, giving me a safe space to find out what I wanted and how I wanted it. It was liberating.

The bell rang as someone entered the coffee shop just as I finished making a coffee. I grabbed a blueberry scone from the pastry window, setting both items on the counter before I looked up to see Dev walk in.

I smiled immediately, my chest fluttering like it was about to burst. I checked Mrs. Montgomery out as she told me about the renovations Aiden and the guys had been doing to her house and how she was in love with what Jane had designed.

Once Mrs. Montgomery paid and grabbed her things, Dev walked up to me in his coveralls that were opened just enough to see his tank top underneath. I knew it had to be cold outside but Dev wanted to tease me. A whole bunch of thoughts of him fucking me in those made me blush.

Jesus Christ, it was like I hadn't gotten laid repeatedly last night.

He smirked at me like he knew what I was thinking, clenching his jaw as it looked like he might have had the same thoughts of me.

“Good morning, mhuirnín,” he said, leaning over the counter to press a soft kiss to my lips.

“Good morning, gnéasúil,” I said, knowing I was butchering the word that I had practiced the other day but was too scared to use.

“Oh, you think I'm sexy?” Dev had a small smile on his lips, but his eyes were full of wickedness.

My face burned hot. “You know I do, I know I butch—”

Dev grabbed my chin kissing me softly, that was so unlike Dev. “Hearing you speak Gaelic is a bigger turn on than I imagined. I think I’m going to have you shout out a few words while I fuck you.”

He gave me a roguish grin before he leaned back.

“Surprise me,” he said.

I bit my lip at the request, as I got to work on making something different for him. The bell rang again as I glanced to see who it was. Evan walked in looking like a wet dream in jeans, a white shirt, and a leather jacket.

“Oh, for the love of all things holy, really guys?” I said, feeling like it was a hundred degrees inside.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about?” Dev was looking at Evan as they shared a look.

“I hear Mary is out at a doctor’s appointment.” The sound of the lock turning made my stomach clench. Evan turned the sign on the door to “be back in twenty minutes” that I had up there in case either one of us had to use the restroom or grab some food.

“You think twenty minutes is enough time?” I glanced at Evan and then Dev. Both looked like predators looking to murder some pussy.

“Plenty of time for four orgasms,” Dev stalked towards me, as I backed up to the counter dropping coffee grinds on the floor.

“Four orgasms, that seems like a lot.” I saw Evan walk towards me too.

“Greedy girl, you think those are all for you?” Their looks were dark and menacing, making me shiver in anticipation.

I bit my lip. “I guess you’re not up for the challenge.” I smirked, as Dev lunged for me but I was fast but I didn’t realize Evan was close enough to scoop me up over his shoulder, spanking my ass as we all went to the back. It actually took thirty minutes for six orgasms.

“I’M SORRY DARCY,” Dev said on the phone the following day. “I have to be there, so I don’t raise suspicions.”

“Don’t apologize,” I said, stirring the pot of chicken soup I was making. The days and nights were getting colder, and I just had to make something warm. “When you’re done just come over, you can have some soup and I’ll play nurse.”

“I might just get my ass kicked so I can have you all over me. I wonder if we can order a nurse outfit for future use.” His deep chuckle was a balm for my heart. He and Evan have been so anxious lately. I would catch both of them being quiet and broody, looking way too stressed out.

“I’ll look on Amazon,” I said, to keep up the happier conversation. If I had my way, I wouldn’t ever have had a use for that costume except for the occasional role play that I’m sure was brewing in Dev’s head. “Just be careful tonight.”

“I will, mhuirnín,” he sighed. “Armando will be outside watching the house. If you need anything and you can’t get a hold of us, just ask him, ok?” There was a commotion on his phone with a few swear words.

“Baby?” Evan said on the phone, and I realized the commotion was him taking the phone. Sometimes having two men vying for my attention was a great fucking feeling, washing away those old insecurities of not being wanted by my parents.

“Evan,” I said, hearing Dev curse at Evan, which made me giggle.

“You don’t open the door for anyone unless it’s Dev or I,” he said, sounding worried.

“Maybe it would be better if Armando was in the house with me?”

“Hell no, baby, he can sit outside in his car,” Evan growled. “Don’t let him inside.”

I rolled my eyes at his caveman response.

“Yes, sir,” I said jokingly.

“You make sure you call me that when I’m balls deep in that tight cunt, telling you to come,” his voice deepened.

“Or when I tell you to swallow,” Dev yelled, making me shiver in anticipation.

“You guys are horrible,” I said, serving myself some soup, trying to ban these dirty thoughts of them.

“I love you, Darcy,” Evan said, like he was worshiping me with his words.

“I—”

“Not yet, Camellia,” he interrupted me. “I’m almost there.”

I pressed my lips together because I knew saying I love you wasn’t out of habit. Having heard all of the things he does at the club, how he’s constantly taking care of people, everything makes more sense now. Evan was selfless, but it was also his Achilles Heel because he puts himself on the back burner too often. I was ready to say it and he would have deal with it.

“Evan, I love—”

“Not yet, Camellia,” he said, in a stern voice.

Butterflies danced in my chest as he used my middle name again, loving that he also had a piece of me on his body too.

“I’m almost there, baby,” he said. “I will be worthy of you again, we have forever for me to prove it, and I will do it when I have nothing holding me back. I’ll see you soon.”

He ended the call, leaving me speechless. He was so worried about being worthy of me that he couldn’t see that just moving past all our bullshit was enough for me.

I grabbed my soup, headed to the sofa to watch some cheesy rom-com and probably fall asleep. These men were wearing me out and I needed some sleep before they got home.

Darcy!

I woke up startled when I heard my name, but when I looked around, I was alone. Standing up quickly, I looked out my window to see Armando's car still outside, making me feel better. A chill ran through my body as I could have sworn I had heard my name, but it could have been a dream too.

I wiped the drool off my cheek and started to watch a different movie on TV. I picked up my phone and saw that it was only ten o'clock. The guys didn't say when they would be home, but I figured they should be here soon. I picked up my bowl, taking it back to the kitchen, picking up as much as I could. Wondering if I should just put the food away when I heard a loud thump.

Where the hell had that come from?

I stayed quiet then I decided to call Armando. The call rang and rang but he didn't answer, making me really nervous as I walked to the front door. I peeked out the window, seeing his car was still there but I couldn't see if he was inside it.

This was getting too weird. I called Dev and it rang and then went to voicemail. I quickly dialed Evan, when the same thing happened.

Ok, stay calm, Darcy, it could be nothing or it could a real-life horror movie come to life.

I went back to the kitchen, stuffing my phone in my hoodie pocket, trying to decide what to do when there was pounding on the front door that scared the shit out of me. My entire body broke out in goosebumps.

This was definitely not good. Looking around the kitchen I looked for a weapon, deciding against a knife because I would probably stab myself, so I grabbed my cast iron skillet.

I walked slowly and quietly to the door to see who was there, freezing in place when I saw it was Geraldo. I pulled my phone from my pocket sending out an SOS text to the group message we had, praying they at least checked their text messages.

He had a scowl on his face as he chewed some gum. I slowly backed away, to make a break for the back door. When he looked into the window and spotted me. We stayed frozen for a second before both of us moved. He broke the window while I headed to the back door but when I got close another man was standing there.

Where the hell was Armando?

“Shit, shit,” I said, backing up, almost freezing. I quickly entered my bedroom and shut my door quietly. My mind was racing on what to do when I realized I had an attic door in my closet, and I could probably hide up there. Opening my closet door, I walked in reaching for the string to open it. The hinges screeched in protest because I never used the attic, I prayed to whatever was out in the universe to keep them out of the house as long as possible. I ran up the stairs, climbed up to the top, and set the cast iron down.

Fuck! How do I get the stairs back up!?

The panic was starting to set in making me lose my confidence.

“Come out, you little bitch!” A voice I didn’t recognize yelled.

I froze, one of them was in the house. I heard their muffled voice when they opened the door to my bedroom as I tried to bring up the stairs with my foot. The door to the closet opened, as I scrambled up the steps. He grabbed my ankle before I could bring them up.

Trying to yank my ankle out of his grip but he had a firm hold on it, until I kicked his hand repeatedly. He shifted to the side, I saw my opening and kicked him square in the face, his head snapped back, and he fell hitting the door.

I stared at him for too long wondering if I might have killed him, before my mind kicked into gear. Grabbing my skillet, I looked around the attic for somewhere to get out. I was way too big to go out the exhaust pipe hole and all I had was a shelf in the corner. I stepped on the beams, grateful that I at least knew that you couldn’t just stomp around on the

ceiling. There were a few plywood sheets against one side that looked like I could hide behind them when I noticed a place near the corner, I could lay down and hopefully not be seen. I tested the stability of the space with a little bit of my weight.

“You fucking whore!” Geraldo yelled, forcing me to hope that this part held my weight and I would not end up on the floor. I laid down, relieved that I didn’t immediately fall through. I pulled the plywood over me so it looked like an area just like in the other corner. It felt like a coffin. I pulled out my phone hearing Geraldo climb the ladder.

I typed out SOS again when my phone vibrated with Evan’s face on the screen. I wanted to answer it so badly because I had a gut feeling Geraldo was going to find me.

I heard his steps around the attic walking to one side before he made it to the side of was on. He moved a few things before he stopped close to me. I held my breath, so scared to make any sound, when his steps walked right next to me. When he took two steps away from me, I thought I was in the clear but then the wood was dragged away, and we locked eyes before he reached for me.

EVAN

It had been a while since we had a big fight night like the one that was happening right now. Dev had a fight, and so did Cal. Lucio had planned all the fights, keeping me in the dark until the day of the fight. It seemed like Lucio was having a hard time finding fighters and I was glad he had to put some work into it, so he didn't think it was all easy. The people who he had up against Dev and Cal were decent fighters. Neither one of them should have a problem with taking down their respective opponent.

I left Dev in a room by himself before I went to go check on Cal and the guys. It had been a while since I had seen all of them after Jane had left. I knocked on the door before walking in. Cal was warming up with Aiden, but there was no sign of Nathan.

"Hey guys," I said, walking in with my hands in my pockets looking around the room. It had started to become a habit to check my surroundings like Giovanni did. I guess he always knew that there were threats everywhere.

"Shit, man, how are you doing?" Cal asked me, as he stopped his warmup to look at me. "I'm so sorry about Giovanni, and not making it to the funeral."

"It's ok, man," I said, running a hand through my hair.

"We are sorry for your loss," Aiden said, nodding at me. "We didn't go because Jane came back."

I looked up at him to see a big lovey-dovey smile on his face that made me get that same face. I'm pretty sure my face

looked like that after I talked about Darcy.

“That’s great, man!” I said, really happy for them. “Is that why Nathan isn’t here?”

“Yeah,” Cal smiled, and I liked seeing the guys like this. I don’t know if it was because I was lovesick too or it was just good to see my friends happy, especially after the way Cal looked last time. “Plus, he still has trouble with his hand, so he took advantage and stayed with her.”

“That’s good, I’m glad,” I said, genuinely happy for them. “Tonight should be an easy win.”

“Good! I feel like I’m finally healing from all the fights I’ve been doing lately, and I want to get home to my woman,” Cal said, as he went back to warming up.

“Alright, Dev is about to go on, and as soon as he is done, you’ll be up next,” I said, walking towards the door.

“Is it bad?” Aiden asked, before I opened the door. He didn’t have to say who he was talking about. “We heard a few things and nothing good.”

“He’s the one who did it,” I said, wishing I could tell them more.

“Shit.”

“Goddammit.”

“Just be careful, things are barely hanging by a thread,” I said, before I left the room. My phone vibrated as I closed the door; it was a call from Darcy. I smiled, about to answer when I saw Candy out of the corner of my eye, walking down the hallway that led to Lucio’s office.

I knew I was on borrowed time, but I couldn’t help but put into motion some security measures to cover my ass. Candy seemed to be the perfect person to help me do that. My phone buzzed while I followed her, seeing her walk into Lucio’s office. I waited a few seconds before I got close to the door.

“Lucio, it wasn’t—”

“I should kill you,” Lucio snarled. “Did you lie to me?”

“Look, I’ve done all that you’ve asked me to do. I spent years with—”

“Oh, they fucked your brains out, don’t fucking act like it was burden,” Lucio snapped. “If I find out that you—”

Lucio moaned and I immediately pulled away from the door, completely disgusted. I knew she fucked around with Nathan and the guys, but damn, Lucio was keeping tabs on them for fucking years without them even knowing.

Nathan had confided in me that he was drugged several times and they thought it might be her. Jane had also confronted her about it on the night of Darcy’s birthday but I didn’t get to hear what Candy told her. Was Lucio giving Candy the drugs? So many more questions about her popped into my head.

Fuck, I did not see this coming. How the fuck did I not notice her here before?

I walked down the hallway to check on the fight Dev was in, wondering if he had already won. I looked out to the cage, and noticed no one was in there anymore. I stood at the entrance remembering the days Giovanni and I would watch the fights, talking shit about everyone. Most days I was able to ignore the pain enough that I could function, but every so often it would creep back in.

My best friend was dead, and it felt like it was my fault. Guilt threatened to suffocate me because I had failed Darcy and Giovanni.

Shit.

I forgot Darcy called. I took my phone out to call her back seeing her SOS text. Worry flooded my veins as I called her back immediately. Walking to the room I had left Dev in, I was surprised to find it was empty.

Goddammit.

I hoped he had seen the text before I did, and was half way there already. I ran to my car running into Candy as I was about to exit the building.

“Oh!” she squealed as I grabbed her by the waist, to keep us from falling. When she realized who I was, her expression changed into what I think she thought was a sexy expression. To me she looked like a rat in a dress. “Evan, are you ok?”

“My sister,” I said, letting whatever I was feeling for Darcy come through at the moment. “She said someone broke in, I have to go.”

“Oh my God,” she looked at me in confusion. *Bingo*. “Are they ok?”

“I don’t know, I have to get to them. I’m sorry, Candy,” I said, rushing out of there. I planted the seed and I wanted to see where it grew and how much she knew.

I jumped into my car as I called Darcy again. When she didn’t answer, I tried Dev, but no answer from him either. I broke every law to get to Darcy’s house and it still took me thirty minutes to get there. I didn’t even bother turning off my car, I opened the door and ran in, seeing the house a mess.

I wanted to yell out for them, but I was worried someone was still in the house. I walked around the mess trying to hear something when I heard crying coming from the bedroom. I ran to her bedroom to see Dev cupping Darcy’s face. Geraldo was on the floor, but I couldn’t tell if he was still alive.

“I’m so fucking sorry, Darcy,” I said, rushing up to her and throwing my arms around both of them. “Are you guys, ok?” I asked.

“I got here just in time.” Dev’s voice was even raspier than normal. The left side of his face was swollen but I didn’t see anything else wrong with him. I looked over my shoulder at Geraldo. “He was choking me when Darcy saved the day.”

Dev pointed at a cast iron skillet that was on the bed.

I couldn’t help but smile looking down at Darcy. “You hit him with a fucking skillet, baby?”

“He was choking Dev and I had no doubt he would have killed him.” She looked fierce as she glared with so much seething contempt at Geraldo.

“You’re so fucking amazing.” I couldn’t help it, but I brought her in for a kiss, relieved they were ok. “Come on Rapunzel, go pack a bag, we need to get the fuck out of here. You’re going to stay with me, okay.”

She looked confused before she got my reference, smirking as she nodded and hugged me tightly. I felt her shaking a little bit from the adrenaline.

“It’s okay, baby, we’ve got you. Go pack a bag.” I kissed her forehead. “I’m so sorry I didn’t get here earlier.”

She shrugged before she went to the bathroom giving Dev and I a minute.

“Is he dead?” I asked, walking around Geraldo to see another guy in the closet. I had an urge to pick up the skillet and continue to beat the shit out of him.

“No, but I think we should do it.” He glared at Geraldo and then spit on him.

“I think we should take him to the pig farm and let him get eaten alive while he is conscious,” I said, kicking him to see if he would wake up.

“Call Saul?” Dev asked rolling his shoulder, moving his neck from side to side. It was red and swollen.

“You okay?” I asked, worried.

“I’m fine,” he said, looking at the bathroom door where Darcy was packing. “I didn’t think. I ran in here as he was trying to drag her down the attic stairs, she was kicking and screaming and I snapped. He had me down in a minute before he started choking me.”

“I can’t believe she hit him with a skillet.” I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“I mean, you have to admit it’s a smart choice of weapon.”

I nodded as I took my cell phone out, debating what I wanted to do. Anger coursed through me at this piece of shit on the floor. I spit on him for good measure before I called Saul.

“Yeah, boss,” he answered immediately.

“I need a maid for Darcy’s home,” I said, not knowing who was listening. “She’s been busy at work, and I want to lighten her load. Two people would probably be able to get the work done.”

“Do we need them to be extremely experienced?” he asked as I heard him move around.

“Yes, the best of the best,” I said, seeing Darcy walk out of the bathroom looking at Geraldo with disdain. “I’ll leave the door open.”

“You got it,”

“Come on baby, let’s get you out of here,” Dev said, throwing an arm around her shoulders.

“I just need a few things from my dresser,” she said, walking over Geraldo to get to her drawers. Dev and I watched Geraldo like a hawk to make sure he didn’t wake up. Darcy looked down, and spit on him. A smile sneaked its way onto her face as she walked over his body, grabbed the skillet and “accidentally” let it fall on his head before she left the room.

We looked at each other and I swear we both just fell a little more for her. A scream made us run out of the room to her. Armando was on the floor in front of her bleeding from what appeared to be multiple stab wounds.

“Hey, hey.” I pushed him back down as he tried to get up. “Armando, you need to lie down so we can see what we are working with.”

Dev handed me a few towels so I could staunch the bleeding.

“I’m sorry.” He coughed, looking at Darcy.

“Darcy, baby, go with Dev to his car,” I said, knowing he was about to die on us and I didn’t want her seeing this.

“Is he going—” The emotion in her voice didn’t let her finish her sentence.

“Come on, mhuirín.” Dev dragged her out of the house.

I looked back at Armando, grief creeping in at his loss. I held his hand, thanking him for everything he had done for Giovanni and me. He took his last breath a moment later. I laid a towel over his head, wondering what else was going to happen.

Lucio needed to be taken down, he had caused so much pain and grief that I had to do something. I was just hoping to get my name cleared with the feds, but it seemed that wasn't enough. He needed to be taken care of if we were going to have some kind of life away from him.

Saul walked through the door as I got up.

“Armando?” His voice was gruff.

I shook my head, looking back at the body.

His nostrils flared, his mouth pressed into a line as he stared at the body. He started cursing in Italian, walking to the body and lifting the towel off his face. He hugged him as he murmured a few things, silently crying.

“I'm so sorry, Saul,” I said, feeling even worse.

“Make him pay, Evan.” His accent was thicker with all the emotion in his voice.

“I will, Saul, you have my word,” I said, walking out of the house, feeling like I was suffocating again. “I'll meet you at my house,” I called out, walking to my car, getting in, and slipping into auto-pilot mode.

Since I'd never turned the car off, I put the car in drive, when the passenger door swung open, making me stop and Darcy slid in.

“Baby, what are you doing?” I asked, feeling like I might lose it.

“Let's go home, Evan,” she said, grabbing ahold of my hand.

I clenched my jaw, checking my rear-view mirror, pulling out of her driveway. The entire drive was silent as she rubbed her thumb over my knuckles, keeping me grounded with that one motion.

Pulling up to my house, I put the car in park and turned off the ignition. We sat in silence until Darcy climbed over the console sitting in my lap. I pushed the seat as far back as it could go, holding her to me. I should be comforting her, not the other way around.

“You don’t have to go through life on your own anymore Evan.” Darcy kissed my cheek. “You’re not alone anymore.” She kissed my other cheek. “We got you.”

I grabbed Darcy behind her neck as I brought her in for a kiss that was demanding and rough, to keep my emotions at bay.

“Use me Evan, let me make it better,” Darcy moaned, as I kissed the column of her neck. I reached for the door handle, because I needed Darcy.

“Out now,” I growled.

She scurried off my lap, letting me get out the car, closing the door before I picked her up. Dev had the door open for us, while I kissed her, frantically taking each other’s shirts off as we entered my home.

Out of the corner of my eye, Dev was watching us, looking unsure of what he should do. He was close enough that I grabbed him by the shirt dragging him close to us, so he knew to follow.

I walked to the stairs as she unbuckled my pants, grateful for the loose shorts she was wearing, so I could get inside her now. I needed her more than I felt the need to breathe. She stroked my cock as I climbed the stairs, feeling Dev at my back following us. Once we reached the top of the stairs, I pushed her against the wall, entering her in one hard thrust.

We gasped together as I pumped into her a few times before heading to my bedroom. Each step was a small thrust inside her warm pussy that made me shiver with the need to fuck her into oblivion. I walked to my bed, sitting down on the edge. She rolled her hips on my cock, leaning back to change the angle, and giving Dev a chance to kiss her.

The angle was incredible, giving me a view of my cock sliding into her. Her tits were pushed out and she was kissing Dev making me groan at the eroticism of this entire situation. I thrust up at a quicker pace, needing a different angle to satisfy the violence, the disappointment, and sadness in me.

I waited until they stopped kissing to get up and throw Darcy on the bed, taking off the rest of my clothes as Dev pulled her shorts and underwear off, getting a taste of her as I stroked my cock watching them.

She clutched the comforter as I climbed on the bed.

“Come for us, Darcy,” I said, before I took her nipple into my mouth, sucking it before I tugged it with my teeth. She held onto Dev’s hair with one hand as she rolled her hips up, making me smirk, finally realizing he grew his hair out for this vixen. Darcy owned us and she deserved no less than everything from us.

I kissed her as she orgasmed, enjoying her body spasming as I ate up her cry. Dev gave her a few sloppy kisses, making her shudder.

“I love seeing you come, Darcy,” I said, nuzzling her cheek, feeling like the ache in my chest was finally letting up.

“Fuck me, please,” Darcy whimpered, just as Dev thrust into her. She closed her eyes, crying out in pleasure, as Dev found a punishing pace. “I want you at the same time.”

Dev’s thrusts faltered as I looked at her in shock.

“Darcy—”

“Shut up and fuck me, Evan,” she said, sitting up, positioning Dev to sit down on the bed as she straddled him. Dev’s surprise quickly vanished when she sank down on him.

“Just give her what she wants,” Dev said, leaning back on the bed.

I went to my nightstand to get the lube feeling my heart racing as I put some on my fingers. I stood behind Darcy, inserting one finger in her ass slowly.

“You want us to fill you up Darcy? Have us fucking you until you can’t take it anymore?” She moaned at Dev’s dirty talk, while I inserted another finger in her.

She clenched around my finger causing Dev to groan.

Through the thin wall, I could feel each and every one of Dev’s thrusts. It was intimate and erotic at the same time.

“Evan, I can’t wait.” Darcy cried out. “Please fuck me.”

I pulled my fingers out, desperate to be inside of her. When Darcy begged, I was a man with no restraint. I inched myself in as I felt Dev slowly thrusting into her.

“Yes. Yes. Yes,” Darcy chanted.

I bottomed out, letting out a ragged breath as I leaned my forehead on her shoulder. The room was silent as we all breathed in and out together, connected in a way that was more than just sexual. I loved Darcy with every breath I took, and it wasn’t the same type of love but I loved Dev just like a brother.

They gave me hope.

“I love you,” I said, before I pulled out and sank back into her tight ass. I brought her mouth close to me as I kissed her, not ready for her to say I love you back just yet.

“Fuck, I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of you, Darcy,” I said, wishing this moment could last forever.

DARCY

I needed the connection, the feel of both of them in me and around me. They moved inside my body in perfect synchronization, bringing my body to new heights of pleasure that I never thought possible. Dev sucked on my nipples as Evan gave me kisses that left me breathless, while their hands roamed my body, leaving no part untouched.

“You’re so fucking tight, baby,” Evan gritted. “You need to come now.”

“Come for us mhuirnín.” Dev swirled my clit with his thumb, his azure eyes focused on my face with his jaw clenched like he was about to come too. “Don’t make us wait, give it to us.”

“Not yet,” I whined, holding off my orgasm, wanting this moment to last a little longer. “Just a little more.”

“Darce,” Evan whispered against my neck.

“Fuck, Darcy.” Dev pulled me down by my neck kissing me as he rolled my clit in between his thumbs and pinched it.

I screamed when my orgasm hit me with such force, I shook in their arms that prompted their own release. Evan nuzzled into my neck while Dev pressed his face into my breasts, as we all caught our breath together. Dev held me as Evan pulled out, making both of them shudder.

He rolled me over, pulling out of me too, leaving me empty; I instantly missed both of them in me.

“I love you, Dev,” I said, before he got up.

“Mo chroí, mhuirín.” Dev kissed me softly, resting his forehead against my own.

“I hope that means I love you or this is awkward,” I joked.

He chuckled. “It means you are my love, but also our way of saying I love you and I think I have for a while now.”

Tears gathered in my eyes, so grateful he was in my life. I kissed him one more time before I laid back, closing my eyes.

I jumped a little as a warm wet towel cleaned me up and someone gave me a drink of water. Evan picked me up as Dev pulled the covers for us to get into the bed together.

Evan laid me down on his chest and Dev snuggled behind me. They cocooned me in their warmth and their scent, making me burrow myself even further into Evan and pulled Dev even closer. I wanted no space between us, no stop or end to all of us together.

“You’re not alone, Evan,” I murmured, against his chest. “This burden shouldn’t be yours to shoulder alone.”

Evan stayed quiet, making me think he had fallen asleep, but he was staring at the ceiling with his lips pressed into a line.

“She’s right, Evan.” Dev said, leaning back away from me. “You used to share some of your burden with Giovanni, but now you need to share that load again, if not you’ll go crazy. We can work together because this whole ‘I want to protect you’ isn’t going to fly anymore.”

“We need to kill Lucio,” Evan said, matter of factly.

“I agree,” Dev said.

“Me too.”

“Or he needs to go to jail with nothing,” Evan said, pulling me closer.

“Which is easier?” I asked, running my fingers on his abdomen, seeing a piece of the camellia flowers peeking out from in between us. A piece of me, always with Evan.

“I don’t know, but I think we need to make his empire fall, making him vulnerable to create doubt.” Evan held my hand in his.

“What if we use the Feds to our advantage,” Dev said, getting up on his elbow to look at both of us.

“I wasn’t lying when I said I was putting feelers out. I have a guy looking into what the feds have on Lucio and everyone else.” Evan looked over at Dev. “Once he finds out what they have, I was going to see what we could use.”

I knew I should have been paying attention, but with both of them near me and hearing them talk about Lucio going down, it was like a perfect lullaby and I fell asleep.

GOING BACK to work like everything was ok was so hard. I knew the guys discussed what was going on, they recapped what they had talked about the next morning but every day after the attack I could see the toll it was taking on the guys.

Lucio was livid when no one knew what had happened to Geraldo, but Evan said Lucio was looking at him with renewed interest. He asked about Evan’s sister and the break-in without Evan having told him. Lucio asked detailed questions, if he had seen who it was. Evan said he called the cops and had heard some of the feds had picked up a few people.

Lucio was livid and he had no proof it was Evan unless he outright said he had sent Geraldo for me. The story Evan was telling was throwing him off, especially since we knew it had come from Candy. The circle around Lucio was getting smaller and Evan said he was now looking at everyone suspiciously.

Dev worked at the garage during the day, going to the club at night, then either staying at Evan’s house or going to his home. Evan’s schedule was also really busy, he was usually at the club with Lucio breathing down his neck, at home talking to his hacker friend, or on his computer.

They each had another family to take care of too, making them more worried each day that Lucio hadn't done anything. I tried checking in on their families as much as possible. Evan's mom and sister were ecstatic that we had gotten back together, saying he was an idiot for leaving me.

Other than the stress of Lucio, we navigated our relationship as if we had been together for years. I was never alone anymore, and the day off I had two days ago, I spent it at the cabin. Jane was back in town, but I felt too worried to spend time with her because I didn't want to put her in any danger. The weather was definitely getting colder and before we knew it our busy ski season would start.

The last customer had just left, and relief coursed through me. I was so ready for this day to be over, so I could go home and relax in the bath while reading or listening to a good book. Cleaning at the end of the day was so hard, when all I wanted to do was leave but I did it anyway.

I packed up a few pastries so I could take them to the guys, turning off the light to the front as I walked into the back and saw Mary putting away some dough.

"Alright, I've given you a few days, but I'm tired of waiting," Mary said, coming out of the refrigerator.

I looked at her, wondering what the hell she was talking about. "Uh, what are you waiting for?"

"Child." She gave me a pointed look. "I'm not stupid, so don't assume I haven't noticed some suspicious things going on at your home."

"Uh," I said, feeling nervous that she found out about Lucio trying to have me kidnapped.

Fuck, what the hell was I going to tell her? She really didn't know what the hell was going on, right?

"Fine, I'll say it for you. You're back with Evan?" She had her hand on her hips like she was mad at me and about to scold me. "How long has it been going on, and what about that poor man Devlin? You know I really liked him, but why Evan? I mean he—"

“Mary,” I said, but she kept talking. “Mary!” I yelled, and she finally stopped.

“What?” she asked, irritated when she noticed my smile. I was relieved that maybe she really didn’t know anything.

“Are you ready to be proud of me?” I asked, teasing her because I knew out of all the people I would tell about Dev and Evan, she would be the most accepting.

“Oh, spit it out, child,” she huffed.

“I’m with both of them.” I leaned against the table.

She looked at me confused. “Do they know?”

I laughed. “Mary, they are the ones that said we want you to be happy, so I didn’t have to choose. Plus, they share quite well.”

Her eyes grew like saucers. “Well shit, I didn’t expect this, but I have to say I am fucking proud of you.”

“I love them both.” I smiled, shaking my head. “I can’t imagine life without either one of them now.”

“I’m so happy for you, child.” Mary embraced me. Even though I knew she would be happy, I was relieved because I hated keeping shit from her.

“Thank you, Mary,” I said, choking up. “You’ve saved me, and given me a life I never thought I would get to live. Thank you for helping me get the chance to find love and be loved in return.”

“It was all you, Darcy. You’re such a strong woman that I never doubted that you would succeed in anything you put your mind to, especially bagging very sexy men.” She raised her eyebrows suggestively. “Come on, let’s have a few macaroons and you can tell me who is the better lover.”

“Mary!” I yelled, as she walked away cackling.

When I got home a little later than usual, since Mary insisted we talk about my sex life, I was ready to take a long warm bath. I noticed a big truck parked in front making me a little wary of who was in the house. I knew Dev and Evan

were home, so I wasn't too worried. Opening the door with a key that Evan had given me, I heard voices coming from the dining room.

"She wasn't smart about it, and he assumed no one would look at her." The voice I was unfamiliar with announced, "She's also been taking a cut of the money she's been helping him clean."

I walked into the dining room seeing a really big guy behind a computer while Dev and Evan were on either side of him.

"Hey", I said, getting all their attention on me.

Whoa, the guy behind the computer looked like Henry Cavill as Clark Kent.

He was *big* with dark hair and a gorgeous pair of blue-green eyes.

"Baby, I told you to wait for me," Evan said, looking annoyed.

"I know, but I didn't want to wait, I'm exhausted and I want a bath." I shrugged, going up to kiss him. "Plus, it looks like you're busy." I smiled at Clark.

"This is a friend, Clark, this is my girlfriend Darcy," Evan introduced us, and I couldn't help but smile.

"Nice to meet you, Clark," I kissed Evan on the cheek again. "I'm going to go take a bath, I'm exhausted."

"Come on, mhuirín, let's get that bath ready for you." Dev grabbed my hand pulling me in for a kiss as he led me to Evan's gorgeous en suite bathroom.

"Did he find anything good? I asked, stripping as he got the bath ready for me.

"Some, but I don't know how we are going to use it."

"I'm sure Evan's mind is going a mile a minute trying to figure out the best way to make this useful," I said, taking my bracelet and earrings off.

“Lucio has been acting weird, and I have a feeling something is going to go down soon.” He shut off the water and walked to me, wrapping me in an embrace that spoke volumes. He was really nervous about everything. “Darcy if you see anything suspicious, I need you to call me or Evan and run, ok?”

“Dev.”

“No excuses, you save yourself. You need to shoot first and ask the questions later, ok?” He cupped my face and as much as I wanted to argue, I nodded my head.

“I need you to say it, say you promise,” he demanded.

“I promise,” I said, leaning up to kiss him. “I love you Dev, and I will do whatever it takes to keep us all together.”

“I love you too, mhuirín.” He took a deep breath like he was taking my scent in. “Come on, I have a new book for you to hear and you have to tell me if you like chapter seventeen, maybe we can recreate it after all this shit is over.”

“I can’t fucking wait,” I said, as he helped me into the bath that smelled like lavender and Epsom salt.

I leaned back, he kissed me on the forehead and left me to listen to the audio book as I tried not to worry.

“Hey, my beautiful Camellia.” I felt a kiss on my forehead.

I opened my eyes to see Evan looming over me in the bath as I gave him a sleepy smile. Any longer in the bath, I would have fallen asleep.

“Hey,” I said, leaning up for a kiss.

“Come on and get some warm clothes on, we are going for a drive.” Evan kissed me softly on my lips, holding out a hand so I could get out.

“Where are we going?” Evan wrapped me up in a towel, picked me up and walked

me to his bed.

“A date.” He smiled. “So, hurry up.”

He kissed my forehead again, giving me butterflies. I quickly got ready, opting more for warmth than for style. I walked down the stairs, seeing Dev and Evan talking about something that had both of their faces looking tense. Once they noticed me, my heart stuttered at the looks both gave me.

Dev looked at me with so much adoration and love that it choked me up. Evan bit his lip, with a slight blush on his face that made me think of when we first dated, when he looked lovesick all the time.

Why do I feel like I'm that girl from 'She's All That'?

I couldn't stop the blush that crept up on my face as they both walked to me, standing side by side, gazing down at me.

"You ready?" Evan asked, kissing me softly.

I nodded, a little speechless.

Dev pushed Evan out of the way, kissing me, nipping at my lip just slightly before he smirked at me, grabbing my hand and leading me to his car. He opened the door for me, while Evan got in through the other side.

"So, are you going to tell me where we are going?" I asked, getting excited, but also a little worried about how this was going to work out in public.

"I ordered some food. We will pick it up and I figured we could eat by the lake one more time before it gets too cold," Dev said, as he backed out of the driveway.

Evan must have seen the worry on my face.

"We have blankets and something that will keep you warm, I promise," Evan said, easing my worry a little.

"We can do other stuff to keep you warm, too." Dev grabbed my thigh and squeezed it.

"Not on my bucket list remember?" I laughed.

"Evan and I can be pretty persuasive." He sounded confident, making me pretty sure they could get me naked.

"I don't mind getting under that blanket to lick that pussy until you scream," Evan whispered in my ear, giving me chills.

“Or we can get our hearts racing while I fuck you, until you scream our name, hoping no one catches us.”

“There’s always the car, too,” Dev’s husky voice said, as his hand went up my thigh grazing my pussy.

“We can make it work here, we’ve definitely done it before, right Darcy?” Evan sounded amused as I clenched my thighs on Dev’s hand.

“Three people might be too much.” I swallowed roughly.

“I have tools in the back so I can take one of the seats out.” Dev shrugged, and I stared at him in disbelief.

“Even better.” Evan chuckled, as Dev parked in front of the Deli.

“I’m going to get the food,” Dev said.

“Oh, I want some cookies,” I said, getting out of the car, hearing Evan say something but I wasn’t paying attention.

“I could have gotten them for you,” Dev said, opening the door, when a man came out and walked right into me.

“Careful, you need to watch where you are going.” The man grabbed my waist, making my skin crawl. I looked up to see a tall man who looked similar to the man who had come to the coffee shop. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up as Dev yanked me out of his grasp, pushing me behind him.

“Paolo,” Dev growled.

“Devlin,” Paolo sneered, glancing at me, then looked around. “She’s beautiful. Geraldo thought so, too.”

“Keep walking, Paolo.” Evan walked up to us, looking calm despite the tension in the air.

“Evan, you know you hold no weight here, it’s only a matter of time before Lucio decides what to do with you.”

His threat was loud and clear. I grabbed on to Dev’s bicep as fear made me get closer to him. Paolo was the same height as Evan, but he was twice as bulky.

“I would be careful Paolo, Lucio might send you to your disappearance.” He shrugged like he didn’t just threaten to kill him like Geraldo.

Paolo’s nostrils flared. “Is that a threat or an admission?”

“Just stating facts.”

“I know it was you—”

“Excuse me!” A woman behind Paolo waited for him to move.

He glanced behind himself, seeing a woman and a little girl, then looked back at Evan. “Make sure you keep an eye on your surroundings, you never know what might happen.” He walked up to Evan letting the woman pass. “I hear he might be cleaning house.”

“I also hear the feds are cleaning house too, I wouldn’t get too comfortable either way. Come on, Darcy,” he said, reaching his hand out to me. I grabbed his hand as we entered the deli.

“Ava is turning into a beautiful woman, too,” Paolo called out, making Dev get in his face. Dev was shorter than him but just as bulky.

“I would—”

“Dev,” Evan said, interrupting him. Paolo smirked at his outburst. “I heard Ava also knows a girl by the name of Claire.”

Paolo’s face paled, giving Evan a glare before he left. Once he was gone, I sagged in relief, but anxiety was still aching in my chest. I had so many questions, but I knew this wasn’t the place to ask. We picked up our food in silence and continued on our drive to the lake.

We parked in a different spot this time, but no one got out of the car. Dev finally broke the silence and sighed, getting out to open the door for me.

“Come on beautiful, let’s eat,” he said, helping me out of the car, but didn’t move so we were really close when I got out. “Are you ok?”

“Yeah,” I said quickly, even though I was a little freaked out.

He cupped my face with his big hands. “Are you ok?”

I looked away for a moment because I didn’t want to add to their emotional load. They were both taking on way too much, they didn’t need my anxiety on top of that.

“Mhuirín.” He rested his forehead against mine. “You don’t need to lie, we need to know if you are ok, or just how you are feeling.”

“I’m fine,” I said, against his lips before I kissed him, hoping he would drop it. “But who is Claire?”

“Paolo’s sister, come on, let’s get you fed.” Evan pulled me away, leading me to a much larger dock than the one Dev and I had had on our date.

A blanket was laid out with the food on top and a few other blankets folded off to the side. I didn’t realize he had set everything up. The stress from earlier slowly melted into the background as I smiled.

“Wow, you guys pulled out all the stops.” I sat down on the blanket, and it was warm, making me want to lay down on it and roll myself up like a burrito. “This blanket feels so good!”

They chuckled.

“My father had a ton of camping stuff, and he had a few battery-operated heated blankets.” Evan laid another blanket on my lap. I was in heaven, but my heart threatened to burst when he laid out two camellias on my lap. Each was a different color, making me want to cry.

“Holy shit, this is amazing,” I said, as Dev passed out our food, giving me a moment so I could get my shit together. We enjoyed our sandwiches and soups as the sun set, in silence, which worried me even more. When we finished our food, Evan sat behind me while Dev laid on my legs as I ran my fingers through his hair. Dev mumbled that he should have popped Paolo when he had the chance.

“I’m sorry you had to go through that Darcy,” Evan said, turning my head towards him. “It won’t happen again.”

“Evan, it was bound to happen,” I said, trying to ease the guilt I knew he was feeling.

“Paolo saw an opportunity, but it backfired,” Dev added, looking up at us. “They won’t hurt you, Darcy. I promise.”

Their promises made me tear up again. I picked up the two camellias as my first tear fell, landing on Dev. He sat up slowly, placing his hands underneath mine.

“I’ve always wondered why you grew quiet that day I gave you these flowers,” he said softly, with just a hint of raspiness. “Then, Evan told me it was your middle name and I knew it had to be fate. I was always meant to be yours.”

“I freaked out because what were the odds you would give me a flower that isn’t native here, is my middle name, and stands for love and devotion.” My voice cracked at the end.

“It’s fate,” Evan stated, putting his hands underneath Dev’s. “It was never just about me and you, Darcy. You always needed both of us, our love and devotion, to complete you.” He pushed our hands together, so that I was cupping both flowers together with their hands underneath mine. “We will always be there to hold you, and to give you everything you need to feel whole.”

“You’re all that matters, Darcy,” Dev said, before leaning forward to kiss me.

“The air we breathe,” Evan whispered, making me shiver from their words, but also from the thought that we might not make it to forever.

EVAN

The fact that Darcy had to leave so early in the morning was a fucking travesty. She always slept in the middle of us, but when she left, Dev and I always managed to gravitate toward each other. One morning, I even woke up to his arm and leg thrown over me.

It was a little weird, but I just lifted them off of me and went to the bathroom without mentioning it. This morning was different after Darcy had left. I had been so stressed out that when I woke up again and we had our backs to each other, I felt comforted instead of a little freaked out.

It had been a few days since we saw Clark, and he had given us so much information that I had to sit on it for a day to figure out the best way to take down Lucio. I wish I had the balls to do this earlier because I might have saved my friend from dying at the hands of his father.

I stayed still for a moment, remembering I wasn't doing this alone. Dev and I talked about what we were going to do endlessly, including Darcy as much as possible. Saul had been privy to most of the information we had but I was paranoid. I hadn't told him everything, just in case he was still working for Lucio.

"I can hear you thinking man, it will be fine," Dev said, with sleep still in his voice, he didn't pull away from me either.

"I was just thinking, I wish we had done this sooner, maybe we could have saved him," I said laying on my back.

“There are a lot of shoulda, coulda, and wouldas, but I think at the end of the day, Lucio would have killed one of us.” Dev leaned back too.

“You’re right,” I said, I always felt like I was disposable and the easiest way to get rid of me would be to just shoot me in the head. “The only thing that matters is we keep Darcy safe no matter what.”

“If he takes her away from us, Evan, I don’t care what I have to do. I’m putting a bullet in his head and following her.” His voice had so much conviction in it, I wouldn’t doubt he would do just that.

“A bullet would be too easy. A vat of crocodiles or maybe he should suffer the same fate as Geraldo,” I said, conjuring up all the different ways he could die.

“I think chopping his dick off and having him choke on it would be good for me too.”

I laughed, thinking that might just be the perfect way for him to go. Dev got ready for work while I checked on some stuff on my computer. He came into the dining room in coveralls, grabbing his keys and wallet off of the table.

“Have you ever thought about what you would want to do if Lucio wasn’t in the picture?” I asked Dev wondering what would happen with all of us if Lucio went to jail.

“I like working at the garage, but I think I would like to take on bigger projects like restoring some classics. Why do you ask?”

“I was just wondering what life would be like for us afterwards,” I said, looking at the plans I had to build a house. I had designed it in hopes that it would help me win Darcy over. The land was already purchased, and it paid to have friends in construction.

Dev’s brows furrowed, looking away from me, “To be honest Evan, I don’t think about the future because it’s one less thing to be disappointed in when something that I want doesn’t happen.” His voice was gruff.

“Not anymore, when all this shit goes down, we will plan our tomorrow,” I said, mustering all the conviction I could.

“I hope so, I gotta go, I’m going to stop by for some coffee.” He looked like he had a lot on his mind, so I just said bye. I knew once Darcy was on board, he would be too.

Walking up the stairs, I got ready to go to the club early today. I set my last piece of information in motion yesterday, and all I had to do was wait for Candy.

After I got ready, I dialed her work phone number and asked for her, pleased when they said she called in sick today. Now, here’s to hoping she does what I needed her to do.

I made a few other phone calls, checking on Lucio and where he was at. After Geraldo went “missing”, the number of people that he kept close went down dramatically. He was starting to crack, but I didn’t want to get my hopes up yet.

Before I made it into the club, I checked in on my sister. She was getting ready to go to school, looking exhausted but extremely happy. She was finally chasing her dream, making all my hard work worth it.

I left the house feeling like this was all going to be ok in the end. I drove to Monroe in no rush, enjoying one of the last warmish days we were going to have for a while. I pulled up to the club, parking on the side. When I walked up to the door, it was open.

Goddammit someone didn’t lock up correctly.

The parking lot was empty when I drove in, and it was way too early for anyone to be here yet. I listened from the door to see if I could hear anything but doubted my earlier assumption when I realized no one would be stupid enough to steal from Lucio.

My gut was telling me that this was the moment that could change everything. I walked back to my car and called Saul, but he didn’t answer. I returned to my car to grab my gun from my glove compartment, slipping it into the back of my jeans.

I dialed Dev and he immediately answered. “You okay?”

“Did you see Darcy this morning?” I asked, hoping he would say yes.

“Yeah, she was good,” he said, as I heard tools falling.

“What’s wrong?”

The sound of a gun cocking made me freeze.

“Evan?” Dev said before my phone was ripped from my hand.

“Walk to the cage,” the voice snapped. When I turned around it was Paolo with so much anger on his face. He was a part of the crew that Geraldo kept close.

“Paolo, do you even know what you’re doing?” I asked, not moving. My phone kept ringing, knowing it was Dev freaking out .

“Lucio said you killed Geraldo.” The gun was digging right against my head, I was dead at this distance.

“I didn’t kill him,” I said, because in a way, it was the truth. I sent him to his death, but I didn’t actually kill him.

“Go to the fucking cage, you liar.” He pushed me towards the door, staying close to me. If I could get enough space between us, I might have a chance. The door opened and I noticed another one of Geraldo’s men sneering at me. He pushed me all the way in and now there was no chance I was getting out of this.

We walked in silence as I scoured my brain for any possible way to get out of this. Even if I got out, I knew there was always a reason for me to come back. My family was here and there was no doubt Lucio would use them to get to me. The cage was dark as we walked down the pathway to the center.

“Evan.” Lucio’s voice made me nauseous.

“Lucio,” I said, keeping a cool exterior, even though I knew I was pretty bad at looking emotionless.

“I have to hand it to you, I almost believed you were innocent in this entire situation.”

I couldn't see much since we were in the dark, but I heard him stepping closer, making me step back into the gun that was still pointed at me. The lights suddenly came on, making me flinch from the brightness.

"I almost believed you until guess who came back from the dead?" He clapped as my vision finally came back and there stood Giovanni. The blood drained from my face because I was expecting Geraldo.

"Giovanni?" I said in disbelief.

"Did you really think I would go against my father?" He looked at me with no emotion. "I knew what the hell you were doing for a while. I knew you wanted all of us to go to jail. So, dying was my last play so you couldn't hurt our family anymore. Sneaking around proved to be easier when everyone thought you were dead."

I ground my teeth, wondering how the hell I had missed all the clues that he wasn't against his father as he led me to believe. What didn't make sense though, was Vittoria's hatred for Lucio. I scrutinized him again, looking for any sign that these past years weren't a fucking lie, but Giovanni had his expression firmly in place that he had learned from Lucio.

Giovanni wouldn't do this, this wasn't him. Something else had to be going on.

How the hell did he pull off his death? Saul told me he got shot— he got shot in the face and when I saw him in the casket... I could have been looking at anyone. Vittoria refused to see him, but this man had all of Giovanni's personal belongings. A punch in my face knocked me back on my ass with a gun to my face.

"I hear you also poisoned my brother with your bullshit and both of you are sharing a woman. You think pussy will keep him in line?" Another blow to the face. "I guess you guys weren't that smart about keeping her safe."

"Evan," Darcy screamed.

I snapped my head in the direction of her scream, trying to get my vision in order. Two men were dragging her in as she

kicked and screamed.

“Darcy,” I said, lunging forward, but Giovanni was there with a gun in between my eyes.

“No, No, No,” she yelled more.

“On your knees, asshole,” he snarled.

I slowly got on my knees glaring at this man who I thought was my friend. It made no fucking sense. A small part of me hoped that this was just some play.

“Alright Evan, so here’s how this is going to go. You will tell the feds that this was your entire operation. You masterminded everything and we will give you a few names so they can also be arrested with you.” Lucio walked up to me. “You will take the fall for me, and you will continue to keep up the lie because if you don’t...”

Giovanni moved so I could see Darcy crying with a gun to her head.

“I’ll make sure she is taken care of, after your arrest, maybe she will even enjoy some father and son action,” he said. I lunged for him, but Giovanni was too fast, pushing me down, swinging at me before I leaned back so he would miss. I reached for the gun, when Giovanni fired a shot really close to me that I felt a sting in my arm from the bullet grazing me.

“Stay there,” Giovanni ordered.

My lip quivered as I thought about having to leave her, when this morning, I was ready to build a house for her and see what Dev’s plans were.

“You got that cazzo di merda?” Giovanni pushed the gun against my temple.

“Let me say goodbye,” I said, my voice hoarse from wanting to cry. “Then I’ll do whatever you need me to do.”

“You have a few minutes before the police arrive for your arrest.”

Giovanni stepped back, still glaring at me. It was a punch to the gut to think I had trusted him, but I guess in the back of

my head I was always wary of trusting him too much. I just didn't know how the hell I was being punished for Giovanni calling the cops. Why would he do that? I was missing something, but I couldn't concentrate. My thoughts were too consumed with keeping Darcy safe.

I stood up and walked over to Darcy who was crying hard enough that she was taking deep, sharp breaths every so often. My head was pounding as I knelt in front of her, bringing her into my arms.

"I'm so sorry, baby," I said, by her ear.

"Evan there has to be another way." She cried into my chest.

"Not with your life on the line." I kissed her forehead.

"I just got you back." She looked at me, trying to control her crying. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Dev will take care of you," I said, leaning back, taking her face into my hands. "I left things for both of you. On my computer is a folder labeled Camellia. Please tell my mama and sister I love them. There is some stuff for them too."

"No, I refuse to believe this is how it ends. This is not our fucking ending, Evan." Fire lit in her eyes. "I will not sit quietly while you sit in jail."

"Darcy, think about Mary and everyone else. He doesn't care and will kill you if he has to." I wiped her tears with my thumbs. "I fucking love you, even if our time together was fleeting, I don't regret any of this."

"Police!" I heard commotion.

"Evan, no, don't say goodbye." She panicked.

"Hands in the air!"

"Don't let this hold you back Darce, live a full fucking life with Dev." I kissed her. "Don't do anything stupid, ok. I love you so fucking much, and I hate that I won't experience all that life offers with you, but I'm glad I get to keep you safe." I kissed her again full of all the love I felt for her, savoring her lips one last time.

“Hands in the air,” an officer yelled, closer this time and I was yanked away from Darcy by an officer who I recognized was on Lucio’s payroll. My arms were yanked back with handcuffs slapped on quickly.

Darcy was pulled away by another officer.

“You’re safe,” he said to her, but she pushed him away, launching herself at me.

“I love you, Evan, and you deserve my love even if you think you don’t. You’re worthy of my love and so much more and I’m so sorry I’m just saying this now.” She kissed me as tears streamed down her face. “I should have told you every day. My life will never be full without you.”

“Alright.” An officer yanked her back roughly. I snarled at him trying to pull away, but the two guys had a good hold on me.

“Freeze DEA!”

“Freeze FBI!”

The officers who were holding on to me froze, while my eyes stayed locked on Darcy. Memorizing her face and everything about her because it looked like things were going to get so much worse.

1 year later

“**G**uilty,” the juror said as she continued to read more charges that they had concluded he was guilty of.

Darcy’s grip on my hand was so hard that I was starting to lose feeling in it. Tears were flowing down her face as I brought her closer to me. I knew what the verdict was going to be because there was so much evidence stacked up against him; it would have been a miracle if they didn’t find him guilty.

The last charges were read, and he was found guilty of those too. The judge ordered him to be taken away immediately, telling him he was going away for a long fucking time, and concluded the session.

“Darcy—baby, are you ok?”

“I knew this was going to happen but why can’t I stop crying?” she asked, leaning against Evan’s chest.

“It’s a relief, Darce, we can put this shit behind us,” Evan said to her. “Lucio will be behind bars for hopefully a really long fucking time. We are free Darcy.”

She cried harder as we left the courtroom. I knew after everything went down, Darcy was a mess. It was a memory that would haunt us for a while.

I had arrived at the club just as everyone and their fucking mom showed up. When I ran in through the side door, Evan was being taken into custody and Darcy was screaming bloody

murder. The officer who had her was on my father's payroll and as soon as he saw me, he let her run to me.

She cried in my arms telling me what had happened as I watched everything unfold with my dead brother in the middle of the fucking chaos. Everyone was arrested except my brother, Darcy and me. To see my father in handcuffs should have been a relief but I couldn't appreciate it just yet.

I eyed him suspiciously after what Darcy told me, but he kneeled in front of us, telling us he faked his death because he knew Lucio was going to kill him. He didn't have much time, so he threw a plan together, without letting anyone know. Then he went to the feds telling them everything. So, this was a setup to get a confession from Lucio; Giovanni was wearing a wire.

I was relieved that he wasn't dead, but I was angry that everyone had to suffer his loss to make it believable to Lucio.

It was the longest few days of our life, but they let Evan go with a deal that he would have to testify. His information would put Lucio and the men who had organized the sex trafficking deal behind bars.

Evan also helped the investigation with all of the information he had sent in. The cherry on top was that he had threatened Candy to go to the feds with evidence about Lucio or he was going to tell Lucio she had been stealing from him and that she was embezzling money from her job.

We walked into the hallway of the courthouse as Giovanni walked up to us with a very pregnant Vittoria. If I was angry that he had faked his death then Vittoria must have gone nuclear, she cussed him out so badly he wasn't able to come home. He begged her profusely, saying he had to do it, that it was the only way.

She eventually forgave him, and they definitely made up for lost time. It was no surprise that they announced she was pregnant just a few months after he came back.

"Sorella," Vittoria said, before she hugged Darcy. She had taken to calling her sister after we decided to have a small

commitment ceremony. Evan didn't want to wait anymore, telling us he wanted to make Darcy our wife, tying us all together. After, we took a week off at some resort here in Colorado because they didn't want Evan to leave the state.

Once this whole trial was behind us, we planned to go to a resort where we had our own private villa on top of the ocean. I planned to make Darcy scream my name over and over again to make sure everyone remotely close to our villa, knew my fucking name.

"You ok?" Giovanni asked us, as the girls talked.

I shrugged, knowing I should be feel relieved, but it was like my brain couldn't process that my father was going to jail for a really long fucking time. Even though we had lived this year as normal as possible, there was always the fear he was going to send someone to come and get us, or worse, he would be released on a technicality.

But Giovanni had a lot of his bases covered, so he called our uncle and told him what had happened. He was more than happy to give us whatever the state needed to put Lucio behind bars for a really long time. One of his lawyers Elio came down to help in the case for a few days before the trial. He was sharp and smart as hell, spending a lot of time here helping anyway he could.

"I think once he gets sentenced, we will feel a hell of a lot better too," Evan said, looking around like he was waiting for someone.

Candy came out of the courtroom fixing her hair and lipstick before she walked away.

"Baby, I have something you're going to want to see." Evan grabbed Darcy's hand as they walked behind Candy, making the rest of us follow them. Candy left out the front of the courtroom immediately getting swarmed with reports about Lucio's case and how she was pivotal in the case.

Just a whole bunch of smoke up her ass that she had clearly loved during the last few weeks of the trial. All the

reporters followed her down the steps, Evan opened the door silently as we all got out without anyone noticing us.

“Evan, what the hell, I really don’t want to talk to reporters.” Darcy looked annoyed.

“Just watch baby.” He pulled her to his side.

“Move, move!” An officer yelled coming up the steps, straight to Candy.

“Ms. Candice Waverly, you are under arrest for—”

Then all hell broke loose around her. A TV crew was filming her getting arrested as we watched Candy fall from grace.

“How the hell did you do that?” Darcy looked positively giddy. “Oh my god, I have to call Jane so she can tune into the news and see her get arrested.”

I laughed, happy that she was feeling better.

“What is she getting arrested for?” I asked.

“Embezzlement, selling narcotics and sex with a minor,” Evan said, putting his hands in his coat.

“She would also sell drugs to the high school kids,” Giovanni added.

“Sex with a minor?” Darcy asked.

“She was dumb enough to save everything to her phone, which saved it to her cloud. Clark found all of it during his search, but I kept some stuff to myself in case I needed something else to threaten her with.” He shrugged like it was no big deal.

“Fuck, well Clark needs to get a fucking fruit basket sent to him,” Darcy said, with raised brows.

“I think she’s right or maybe even a hooker,” Vittoria laughed. “Come on, *vita mia*, I’m ready to go, this baby is hurting my back.”

We all said our goodbyes before we led Darcy to Evan’s car. I don’t know what I expected for us to be feeling when we

got into the car, but the somber mood wasn't what I had predicted. We got what we wanted, but it felt like we had been wound tight for so long that we had no idea what to do with ourselves.

"Mary is here," Darcy said, confusedly when we pulled up to the house an hour later since the hearing had been in Monroe.

She got out of the car before Evan could put the car in park, opening the front door and we quickly followed her. When we walked in, Mary was hugging Darcy. Aiden, Nathan, Callum and Jane were all together. My mother and Ava were also there with Evan's mom and sister too. Giovanni, Vittoria and my niece managed to get here before us.

"What's this?" I asked, coming up behind Darcy.

"We thought you might need some company after that awful trial." Mary said, giving me a hug and then moving on to Evan.

"Girl, I have that shit recording on DVR and I can't wait to see her ass get arrested," Jane said, as Darcy laughed.

"You should send her a letter with snapshots of the whole fucking thing that way that bitch can remember her fucking fall from grace," Darcy said, and they both cackled.

"I'm going to make a fucking calendar and send it to her, maybe one every year she rots in jail!" Jane laughed.

We all chuckled watching them talk shit.

Evan and I walked over to the guys to say hello.

"You doing okay, man?" I asked Cal, shaking his hand.

"Yeah, I am," he sighed. "I'll feel even better when I know he's not going to get out anytime soon."

"No shit. I hope he stays there forever," Nathan said, looking relieved too. "And Candy too."

"Let's hope, man," Aiden added.

"He will and let's hope she will too," I said more confidently than I really felt. He had affected so many people

it would just be better if no one heard from him again.

Everyone brought a dish over and more than one in Mary's case, so we ate and drank the afternoon away.

My mom and Ava hounded me, making sure I was ok, asking me questions nonstop. Seeing them fuss over me was great, but seeing the change in them this past year had been even better. I never realized my mom had so much trauma from her time with Lucio, she was always worried he'd wanna start seeing her again. She looked so much better, so much healthier. She looked like a different person, making me wish we had done something sooner.

Evan seemed to be getting the same treatment from his mom and sister, but I knew this was a different story. He had to tell them what he did for his sister, and it was a rough couple of weeks for them, but his sister was the first to forgive him. His mom tortured him for a bit longer but finally gave in.

Jane and Darcy were pretty tipsy when Candy's arrest came on the nightly news. They had a field day with her, cackling between themselves when Callum and the guys decided it was probably time for them to go.

Our parents decided it was time to leave too, giving us hugs and kisses, telling us to take care of Darcy or there would be hell to pay. Mary might not be Darcy's mom, but she loved Darcy like her own, and that was more than enough. As I closed the door, I heard them talk about getting together for a girl's night.

Our families had gotten along so well, accepting us with no questions asked, that it felt like a dream come true. We were lucky we had amazing women as our mothers.

"No! One more drink, please." I heard Darcy protest when Evan picked her up, taking her upstairs.

I finished locking up the house, checking every window and door, an old habit that I knew was going to live with me forever. I grabbed a glass of water for Darcy, looked at the dirty dishes but decided they could wait till tomorrow. I was exhausted.

Darcy was pouting when I entered the room as Evan took her clothes off.

“Here, drink up or you’re going to regret it tomorrow,” I said, bringing the glass up to her lips.

“I’ll be fine, I’m just tired,” she said, climbing into bed after Evan put one of his shirts on her.

I shook my head because a minute ago she was ready to keep drinking. I undressed quickly, sliding in so she could lay on my chest. She snuggled close to me laying a hand over my heart and the Camellia flowers I had tattooed there. Evan turned off the light before he crawled in, spooning Darcy.

“I love you and I’m so happy we found each other. I’m a lucky girl.” Darcy kissed my chest, then turned so she could kiss Evan. “Thank you for not making me choose.”

“I love you too, mhúirnín,” I said, kissing her head. “I’m glad we found each other and we get to build this life together that I never thought was possible.”

“I love you, baby,” Evan said, sounding a little muffled. “I never thought we would be here, and I definitely didn’t expect another man in our bed.”

Darcy giggled.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to make this work because I want us to be the air you breathe when you’re sad, mad, orgasming and especially when you’re happy. You’re the oxygen for our souls, making them burn brighter just because you exist. I can’t wait to see where life takes us next,” Evan said, as he leaned over stealing a quick kiss from her.

I kissed the top of her head feeling peace that I never knew was possible, until I met Darcy. We had an unconventional relationship, but it worked for us because Evan was right, the strongest shape was a triangle. We held each other up, giving all of us the stability we craved and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

I couldn't wait for our next chapter.

EPILOGUE

DARCY

6 months later

“*M*rs. Quinn-Toa this is your suite to change in. There is a sitting area with refreshments, while you wait for someone to come and get you.”

I smiled at the woman as she left me in the suite; I still couldn't believe all this was for me. Dev and Evan had purchased a premium spa package at the resort we were staying at. This was technically our “honeymoon” since Evan hadn't been allowed to leave the state due to Lucio's case. We honestly thought that they just wanted him close because they still weren't sure how involved Evan had been. I was so glad when they found Lucio guilty and gave him life in prison. A weight had been lifted off of all of our shoulders, and I desperately needed this relaxation.

It still felt surreal that everything was behind us, and I had two husbands. Just remembering our small but beautiful ceremony made my heart swell. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine my life would change so much in so little time, but I was so grateful that life had given me another chance with Evan and added in Dev.

I undressed quickly, leaving my clothes folded on a chair and put on a fluffy robe that I swear was heaven and smelled like lavender. Four hours later I was relaxed, skin glowing, nails done, and my hair was just blown out. The stylist turned me around showing my blonde hair still long but with so much more style.

“You have such beautiful hair,” she said, running her hands through it, then fluffing it up showing off the great haircut.

“Thank you, it looks beautiful,” I said, as she took the cape off, giving me a chance to run my hands through it, admiring how soft she left it.

“I’m so glad you like it!” She smiled at me. “How did you like everything?”

“I don’t want to leave.” I laughed. “It was amazing.”

“I’m so glad. There will be a boat ready to take you back to your villa, Mrs. Quinn-Toa.” She smiled at me as she left me at the entrance to the salon.

I opened the door and walked out to the beautiful weather. We arrived in the Caribbean two days ago, and so far, it has been gorgeous weather. I changed before my haircut into something a little sexier. It was a full-length skirt with a slit that went all the way to my hip. I wore no panties so that all you saw was the gorgeous tattoo of camellia flowers going up my thigh to my hip.

Jane’s brother JD did it for me last year when Jane and I took a girl’s trip to Dallas. The guys tagged along—no fucking surprise—but left us to do our own thing. Dev also got a few Camellias too and now we all matched.

I climbed onto the boat, greeted by a man who gave me an appreciative glance. He drove me to the small chain of over-water villas that I could have walked to, but the boat was faster, and I loved the wind in my hair. I was also impatient to get to the guys, so they could see my dress and the surprise I had for them.

Once he reached the small dock, I got off and thanked him, walking past a few villas that were spaced out a good distance from each other—thank God because I’m sure last night someone would have heard me—until I reached our villa.

I opened the door, walking into the beautiful open concept with a view of the ocean. We had left the doors open to the outdoor patio that had a swing, an infinity jacuzzi and a small deck that led to the ocean.

As I walked outside Dev was coming up from the water onto the deck, looking like a sex god. He was wearing black swim shorts that I had bought for him that only came down to mid-thigh. They were shorter than he was used to, but he looked so fucking good with those tattoos and muscles on display. He wiped the water from his face and his longer hair, laughing as he turned around. I loved how his stoney expression faded away when it was just us.

Evan came up right behind him and Goddamn. He was wearing the same black shorts, water dripping down his torso, highlighting his lickable abs. I clenched my thighs. They looked utterly delectable. He was also laughing about something, making my heart soar, seeing them look so carefree and like actual twentysomethings. The year and half had been hard for all of us but they had been worried about the possibility that Lucio would somehow get himself. They had slowly started to let that anxiety go when he was sentenced and they've been healing themselves one day at a time.

I set my things down as I walked out onto the patio.

Quickly catching Dev's eyes, and Even turned to look at me too.

"Damn, mhuirnín."

"Fucking gorgeous, baby."

I turned around so they could see the back dipping low and when I turned back to them Dev picked me up, kissing me like I was his next breath.

"Damn woman, you walked back from the spa like that?" He squeezed my ass possessively, kissing me again.

"I took the boat," I said, in between kisses.

"Fuck, Darce," Evan grunted, when Dev pushed me up against his chest. He bit my neck, sliding his hands to cup my breasts. "We might have to punish you for letting the driver see you like this."

"Yes. I've been a bad girl," I moaned into Dev's mouth, as I felt us moving. I expected us to go to the bed, but Dev put me down by the round swing bed. He unzipped my dress as he

trailed kisses down my neck while I stroked his cock over his wet trunks.

“Won’t someone see,” I said, a little worried.

“They won’t, but I can’t promise they won’t hear you scream our names.” He smirked, getting the dress to fall off of me.

“We are pretty far away from the other villa,” I taunted, before I sank down to my knees, pulling his shorts down before taking him into my mouth quickly. I sucked on his head lightly, then swirled my tongue over his piercing that made him shiver. Evan walked to us, standing by Dev completely naked.

I grabbed his cock, stroking him as I gagged on Dev’s cock, sucking a little harder, letting my teeth skim him slightly because Dev liked it a little rough. Once I had him worked up, I switched over to Evan.

He liked when I looked at him, with his cock in my mouth, moaning as I tried to take as much of him as I could. He threaded his hand through my hair, fucking my mouth in small thrusts.

“As much as I want to come down your pretty little mouth, I need you to get on that swing so I can fuck you,” Evan said, helping me up, kissing me roughly before he sat down on the swing.

Dev picked me up, and sat me on Evan’s lap. I adjusted myself before I slowly took his cock.

They both groaned, when I looked over my shoulder to see Dev enthralled with my ass.

“Darce, are you wearing—” Evan moaned, as I rolled my hips.

“Camellia how long have you been wearing this,” Dev was right behind me pushing the plug slightly in.

“Right before my haircut,” I moaned, as he moved the plug again

“You’re such a fucking dirty girl.” Evan slapped my ass.

“I need both of you,” I panted.

“You want both of us to fill you up?” Dev slapped my other ass cheek hard before soothing the sting with a rub of his hand. “You want to be sore tomorrow, so when we are walking around, you can remember how good it felt to have both of us fucking you at the same time.”

“Yes,” I said putting both hands on Evan’s chest to get more leverage to fuck him harder.

“Fuck that ass Dev, so she knows who she belongs too,” Evan growled.

Dev circled his finger around the edge as I helped him push the plug out. The sensations had me clenching Evan so hard, making him shout a curse. Dev wasted no time adding more lube and notched himself in. He held my hips from moving, allowing him to enter me, bottoming out in me quicker since I had been prepped.

We all made a noise when they both filled me up to the point of pain. I didn’t have much warning before they slammed into me. Dev used the small motion of the swing to thrust into me harder and harder. For a moment I was worried we might break it but I was to the point where all I wanted was to come.

Fuck, we might to need to get a swing for the house.

“I fucking love you,” Evan said, swirling my clit with his thumb, gritting his teeth. I could see he was close.

“Harder,” I gasped when Dev pulled my hair.

“You’re such a dirty girl, and you’re ours.” Dev slapped my ass.

They didn’t hesitate to fuck me harder before my whole body felt like it was tingling with pleasure leading me to an orgasm that made my back bow and I screamed from the force of the orgasm. Evan shouted my name, holding on to my hips roughly. Dev lasted a few more thrusts before groaning loud enough that I knew the villa next to us heard us.

Our breathing was hard, our bodies were slick as we all stayed connected for just a little longer. Dev pulled out of me first, kissing my shoulder before he picked me up from Evans lap and took me to the bed. He laid me on the bed gently rubbing his nose with mine.

“Mo chroí, mhuirnín.” He kissed me tenderly, sweeping his tongue against mine before nipping at my lip.

The bed dipped and I reached for Evan, bringing him closer to us.

“I love you.” I kissed each of their cheeks before resting my forehead on theirs. They snuggled closer until we were a pile of limbs wrapped around each other.

I felt complete. I was so glad I didn't have to imagine a world without them.

BONUS EPILOGUE

Not ready to say goodbye to Darcy, Dev and Evan?

Grab a free copy of their bonus epilogue from the guys point of view.

[Click here to see what their future looks like.](#)

WHAT TO READ NEXT

Are you curious about Jane, Aiden, Callum and Nathan? Start their story [here](#)! We see a glimpse of Darcy, Dev and Evan before their love story.

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To My Anxious Authors– I'm so grateful that you let me join your group because y'all are so fucking amazing. Thanks for being anxious with me.

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To my readers – I can't thank you enough for taking a chance on me. I know you have a plethora of authors to choose from and I'm flattered you chose me. I also do a happy dance when you buy, or I see pages read on KU. Thank you for the hype, the encouragement and the love you guys give. Y'all are

amazing and for those of you who found me on social media
and like all my stuff. You guys are the greatest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mandy Muse writes spicy adult romance. Born and raised in Texas, she is a stay at home mom with an imagination that has always left her daydreaming. When she is not writing, she is a voracious reader and is a lover of a good margarita. She is constantly trying to keep three kids from playing with her laptop and keep them from learning how to read, so she never has to explain what mommy writes.

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