



JENNIFER ROSE

THE
Light
WITHIN

Tis the season for *love*...
and *vengeance*.

The Light Within

Jennifer Rose

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Content Warning

***The Light Within* is a stand alone, full length novel that takes place after the last chapter but before the epilogues of *The Flames Within*.** While William and Everleigh's duet was finished in *The Flames Within*, I couldn't end their story without giving you their wedding. And in true William and Everleigh fashion, an enemy decides to wreck havoc in their lives.

This novel contains many triggering elements, which may be upsetting for some readers. Due to mature content and themes, this book is recommended for readers aged eighteen and older.

Triggers include abuse, child sexual abuse, gore, murder, kidnapping/captivity, near on-page sexual assault, sexually explicit scenes, stalking, torture, and violence.

Music Playlist

- “I Wanna Sex You Up” – Color Me Badd
- “Promiscuous” – Nelly Furtado feat Timbaland
- “Drive” – The Cars
- “Wherever I May Roam” – Metallica
- “You Shook Me All Night Long” – AC/DC
- “Waiting For a Girl Like You” – Foreigner
- “Cuff It” – Beyonce
- “How Many Licks” – Lil Kim
- “Him and I” – G-Eazy
- “Into It” – Chase Atlantic
- “Take Me to Church” – Hozier
- “Under the Influence” – Chris Brown
- “Dusk Til Dawn” – Zayn feat. Sia
- “Are You Entertained” – Russ & Ed Sheeran
- “Hands to Myself” – Selena Gomez

“Shivers” – Ed Sheeran

“Truly Madly Deeply” – Savage Garden

“All I Want For Christmas is You” – Mariah Carey

Will and Everleigh are back for the holidays... with a vengeance!

Everleigh

All my hopes and dreams for a future I never thought I'd have are now my reality. With my enemies destroyed, I'm finally able to move on with my life. And I have – I'm engaged to my soulmate, I'm pregnant, and we are getting married.

Unbeknownst to me, there's a new enemy lurking in the darkness, biding his time until he can get revenge against my finance. He's found the ultimate way to ruin William – *me*.

Can William save me before it's too late? Or will our dreams be devoured by darkness, eclipsing the light we've found in each other?

William

For the first time in my life, I have everything I've ever wanted. My life with my fiancée is nearly perfect. She makes the light within me shine bright. Nothing stands between us and the happily ever after we yearn for.

Except an enraged enemy is watching and waiting, devising the perfect plot to ruin me – capturing Everleigh.

Frantic in my need to rescue her, I'll do *anything* to get her back, including unleashing my dark monster and sabotaging everything we've worked so hard to build.

Can I rescue her before it's too late? Or will the light within
be permanently extinguished?

One

Everleigh

“In moments of pain, we seek revenge.” – Ami

Ayalon

EXHAUSTION SETTLES HEAVILY INTO my bones and my eyelids feel like they weigh a ton. My head droops as I head back to the hallway to our bedroom to prepare for bed. All day, I’ve done my best to hide my fatigue from Will, not wanting to confess I barely slept the previous night from the happiness dancing like a ballerina through my limbs.

There are so many new changes in my life. But it’s everything I’ve always dreamed of but feared wasn’t possible.

My first surprise of the evening was when Will brought me to an enormous house, the outside resembling every dream house I’d envisioned, but realistically knew it was out of reach. When he led me inside, we were greeted by balloons and decorations covering the foyer, with an elaborate sign that said, “Welcome home, Will and Everleigh?”

His intense gaze bored into the side of my face, watching every single expression I made. In my gut, I knew this house was already ours, all the preliminary details already taken care of, but I appreciated him making the effort to check with me first.

“Will, is this our new home?”

“I’m hoping. But I don’t want to make the same mistake I did before by not giving you a choice. I’ll let you decide that.” He gave me a boyish grin that melted my heart and then gave me a tour.

Of course, I loved the house, as he knew I would. He’d had it custom built and decorated especially for me. How could I not?

The second surprise came when our tour ended in the backyard. Will pulled a remote from his pocket, pressing buttons that lit our backyard with dozens of lights strung around trees, bushes, the fence, and the pergola. Music began to play from the speakers hidden outside. Will extended his hand to me and asked me to dance.

It was positively magical as he whirled me around, dancing beneath the crisp November air. When the song ended and he pointed to the bright stars overhead, I tilted my head to the sky, mesmerized.

I lowered my head only to find him on one knee in front of me, holding a magnificent diamond and ruby engagement ring in his hand.

His perfect words still roll through my head.

“Everleigh Renee, since the moment you literally crashed into my life, my entire world became so much better, full of things I’d never experienced before. The biggest gift you’ve given me is something I never had before and wasn’t sure if a monster like me deserved: your love. I fell ridiculously hard and fast for you. You are the perfect woman for me, the only one capable of handling my light and my darkness. We’ve traveled our own unique journey to get to this moment, but I wouldn’t change any of it. In fact, I’d repeatedly endure any amount of pain and suffering, as long as I end up with you.” He paused, his voice cracking. *“Everleigh, will you do me the honor of being my wife, having my children, and spending the rest of our life loving me?”*

I was crying and nodding my head before I finally choked out the words he said to me a couple of years ago. “Willingly. Completely. For a fucking eternity.”

After he slipped the ring on my finger and we celebrated, our hearts overflowing with our love, the lights and music changed and one of my favorite songs, “Everybody” by the Backstreet Boys, flowed around our backyard. I was getting ready to grind on him like I did at the Halloween party when my brother’s booming voice came from behind me.

Like a wave, our friends and family swelled behind us, anxious to celebrate our proposal and new home with us. It

was, hands-down, one of the best moments I've had in quite a long time.

Once the festivities wound down and Will and I were getting ready for bed, a wave of nausea hit me while I was brushing my teeth. I've had periodic episodes over the past two weeks, but considering all the stress I've been under, I didn't give it much thought.

Not until Will pulled a pregnancy test from the drawer and asked me to take it while he went downstairs to get me a glass of ginger ale.

My hand rubs over my flat stomach, a smile on my face. We're expecting a little bundle of joy, and I couldn't be happier.

Pulling my thoughts back to the present moment, I head to the bathroom to begin my nightly bedtime ritual. Grabbing my toothbrush and putting a dollop of toothpaste on it, my eyes stare at my reflection in the mirror as I brush my teeth. Dark circles line my bloodshot eyes, making me temporarily pause in brushing my teeth and grimace.

I look terrible. There's no way Will won't notice how tired I am.

The bedroom door opens, and I hear my fiancé's footsteps coming toward me. Despite the heaviness in my limbs and my scratchy eyes, I straighten my posture, trying to appear more alert than I feel.

He stops in the doorway, his gaze burning into me as it rakes over my profile, taking in every little nuance. I know before I turn to look at him that a disapproving frown is on his lips.

I finish brushing my teeth, rinsing my mouth out before turning to him.

His head is cocked and his arms are crossed over his body. He arches a disapproving brow at me. “You barely slept last night. Why didn’t you take a nap after we returned from signing the paperwork for the house?”

Giving him a chagrined smile, I wave my hand dismissively. “I wanted to tell Savannah the good news. I couldn’t wait any longer to tell her we’re pregnant, but I made her swear not to tell anyone else yet.”

Will’s lips quirk in amusement, but he still has that look in his light blue eyes. The one that conveys he’s pissed I’m pushing myself too hard.

Stepping closer to him, my fingers lightly stroke his bicep. I can’t resist touching him after not being able to touch him for so long. Those two years were unbearable. “I know I should’ve napped, but I was too excited. We started talking about baby names and wedding plans and the time flew by. Then I received Emma’s text about dinner and...” I rub my hand over my stomach. “We were hungry.”

A smile curls up his lips before he sighs, his arms uncrossing and wrapping around me, pulling me against him. “I understand, my love. I’m just worried about you burning

yourself out.” He rubs his nose against mine. “No matter what you say, I know that killing Ainsley and the man you thought was your father was harder than you let on. Despite how much they deserved everything you gave them, it’s still a lot to process.”

I nod, trying to assuage his fears. “I know. But Will, I’ve waited a long time to get my revenge on Ainsley. I had a clear head going into that battle.”

“Yes, but baby, none of us knew the man you thought was your father was still alive. That was a huge bombshell, especially for you.”

Blinking, I tighten my arms around his neck, involuntarily flinching from the wave of pain that lances through me as I reflect on that moment. “Finding out he wasn’t my biological father and orchestrated the plan to kill me to get my inheritance was a bitter pill to swallow. The betrayal cut deep.” Taking a breath, I push my negative thoughts away, focusing on the positives. “But you’ve spent every day of your life since the day I met you treating me like a queen, showing me genuine caring and respect. Your love took the sting away.” Standing on my tiptoes, I press my lips against his. “Besides, look what I gained when the truth was revealed. A wonderful father and a crazy brother.” My lips curl up in a smile, contentment stealing over me.

Will chuckles. “I agree, *especially* about the crazy brother. God, when Darin danced like a stripper around Grandma Lucinda and sang ‘I Wanna Sex You Up,’ I thought she was

gonna have a heart attack from excitement. I nearly died when she tried to take Darin's clothes off."

I burst into laughter. "That is going to live rent-free inside my head forever."

His hands slide down, grabbing my ass. "You and Darin singing karaoke together will live rent free inside my head. I still can't believe he talked you into singing 'Promiscuous' to Grandma Lucinda." He pauses, laughing as he remembers our crazy antics. "I've never seen Bryan laugh so hard. I thought he was going to piss himself."

Wiping the tears of laughter from my face, I shake my head. "When Darin asked me to sing with him, I knew it was going to be crazy. But I didn't expect him to choose that song. Kinda perfect for the way she acts though."

He shakes his head, laughing. "Honestly, I thought Darin was going to make up a song about blowjobs."

"That would have been priceless. Lucinda is the coolest grandma I've ever met."

"I agree. Although she didn't seem quite as cool to me when she tried to grab my dick at Irelynn's wedding."

I try to keep a straight face but fail miserably, howling with laughter. "I'm so sorry," I finally choke out. "She's just such a spitfire."

Will shrugs, taking it in stride. "She is. Lucinda certainly makes every occasion memorable." He pulls me against him and my laughter fades as I feel his hard dick pressing against

me. Immediately, heat rushes through me, pooling between my legs.

He rubs his nose against mine. “Don’t get too excited. As much as I’d love to be inside you, we need to go to bed so you can get some rest. You’re exhausted, although you’re trying damn hard to hide it.”

“I’m not too tired for sex.” The words are barely out of my mouth before I let out a yawn, despite how hard I tried to suppress it.

“Yes, you are. Plenty of time for that after you rest.” Before I can react, he scoops me in his arms, carrying me from the bathroom to our bed. I sag in his embrace, drowsiness hitting me again now that I’m content in his arms. He’s had that effect on me since the day I met him. Even under duress, fearful Ainsley would reappear and kill us both, when he held my injured body against his, all my problems faded away.

My eyes droop as he places me on the mattress, strips my clothes off, and tucks me under the covers. Still, I refuse to fall asleep until he’s beside me in bed. Once he pulls me against his muscular body, I curl around him, closing my eyes and drifting off immediately.



“Noooo!” I wail, terror climbing from inside my chest, pulling my breath from my lungs. “We deserve to be happy. We’ve dealt with enough shit.”

An evil laugh floats into the dimly lit room. "I don't care what you think you deserve. I'm here to get what I deserve."

I shrink against the dark wall, wondering where the hell I am. And who the fuck is this jackass in front of me?

Although my arms and legs are bound, I struggle against the restraints, trying to break free. Despite my best efforts, it's fruitless.

My gaze raises to the man in front of me, standing beneath a flickering lightbulb that threatens to go out at any moment, plunging us into darkness.

Panic wells inside me. I have no idea what his plans for me are, and no idea where Will is. Knowing there is life inside me that could be harmed by this jackass fills me with a combination of hopelessness and anger.

The man's cheap, overbearing cologne drifts over me as he hunkers down in front of me, a sadistic smile on his face. "Let the games begin."

Closing my eyes, I turn my head away, tears burning behind my lids.

Where are you, Will? I need you.

Shooting into a sitting position, my heart beats wildly inside my chest. My hand clutches at my shirt, my breaths heavy and uneven as my eyes dart around the room.

God, that was so weird.

A sigh of relief drifts from my lips as the realization that I'm at home, safe in bed, causes my heart rate to slow. My hand automatically reaches over to Will's side of the bed, finding only empty, cool sheets.

My mind races, wondering why I had this strange dream when life is so damn good.

It must be the shock of all the recent revelations.

Satisfied with that answer, I lean over to grab my cell phone from the nightstand. A red rose lays across my phone, a folded note beneath it.

Grabbing the note, a smile lights up my face when I read it.

Goddess,

In case you wake up, I'm making breakfast. Don't get out of bed except to use the restroom. You deserve some pampering, so I'm serving you breakfast in bed.

I love you.

Your-soon-to-be-husband

Smiling, I set the note on the nightstand and then pick up the rose, noting that Will cut off the thorns. Lowering my face, I inhale its beautiful fragrance, my heart swelling with love at the thoughtfulness of my fiancé. Setting the flower beside my phone, I slide out of bed to use the restroom.

By the time I crawl back into bed, my nightmare is forgotten.

I look up as the handle of the door turns. Will enters the room, a huge smile lighting up his face, his arms laden with a tray piled high with food. The aroma washes over me, my stomach growling.

“Good morning, Goddess. I made a feast for you and our two little girls growing inside you.”

Sitting up with anticipation, I give him a happy grin. “Morning, love. That smells amazing. Thank you for surprising me and them.” I don’t bother arguing about the number of babies inside me, nor the gender.

What Will wants, he gets, so I’m probably having twins.

I patiently wait as he sets the tray over my lap, making sure I have everything I need before he slides under the covers beside me.

“You’re welcome, love. Always happy to feed my girls.” His hand rubs over my stomach before he slides it to my side, squeezing gently.

Picking up my fork, I give him a huge smile. “This reminds me of our early days when I was injured from the car accident and you made me breakfast in bed.”

His eyes twinkle as he leans over, his lips close to mine. “It’s forever ingrained in my memory. We shared our first kiss.”

My hand traces over his jawline, feeling the stubble of hair beneath my fingertips. “Every time I kiss you, it feels like the first time all over again.”

“Same, goddess.” He closes the distance between us, his lips against mine. “I plan to kiss you every day for the rest of my life.” His hands slide into my hair, reenacting our first kiss all over again.

When we finally part, our breathing is heavy and our eyes hooded with lust.

He pulls back slightly. “Eat your breakfast, momma. You and our girls need to be fed.”

My stomach emits a loud growl. I giggle, turning my attention to the huge meal in front of me.

Grinning, I say, “No arguments from us, my love,” before digging in.

Damn, I'm so lucky to have him.

Two

William

“**N**O PEEKING, LOVE.” I grin, knowing she’s going to give me so much shit for that remark.

“*Will*. I’m blindfolded. I can’t see a damn thing. How the hell am I peeking?” She huffs out a breath, her expression full of indignation.

My lip quirks up in a smirk. I’m glad she can’t see my face right now. My fiancée is a badass, and though I’d never admit it to anyone other than her, she could kick my ass if she wanted to.

Not saying she’d win if we had a match inside a ring, but she’d certainly get in some good hits.

“Just checking.”

She gives an annoyed grunt as I guide her forward. “Are we there yet?”

I grin. I’m taking her the long way around our house to keep the suspense high so she can’t guess the surprise I have for her.

“Almost.”

“You said that five minutes ago.”

“Patience, goddess.” I nearly burst out laughing when I see the grimace on her face. She’s so fucking cute when she’s annoyed. “Okay, there are three steps I’m going to guide you down.”

She groans. “Can’t I just lift my blind slightly so I don’t tumble down the stairs?”

“Nope. That’s cheating. You know I’d never harm a hair on your head, love. Just trust me.”

Her lips quirk into a soft smile, all evidence of her earlier irritation gone. “I trust you with my life, Will.”

“Good. Because I’d rather fucking die than let anything happen to you.”

Her breath hitches, causing a slight blush to cover her cheeks. I love when I affect her this way.

After successfully guiding her down the steps, I position her where I want her to stand. Leaning over, my lips graze the shell of her ear, and she releases an involuntary shiver.

“Ready, baby? On the count of three, I’ll remove the blindfold.”

She nods. “I’m ready.”

“You start us off by saying one.”

“One—”

Before she can say another word, I remove the blindfold with a flourish, watching her eyes fly open, wide with surprise. Her hands press against her heart as she blinks a couple of

times, a gasp leaving her mouth as she stares at the car in front of her. “Oh my God, Will.”

“It’s a BMW Z4 convertible. I know how much you love red, so I figured—” That’s all I get out before she flings herself into my arms, leaping so that I have to catch her. Wrapping herself around me, she plants a huge kiss on my lips.

Fuck. If she’s gonna react like this, I’ll buy her a new car every week.

“Will. This is amazing. But you didn’t have to...”

My smile is huge, happiness lighting me up and filling my soul. “I know I didn’t *have* to.” I rub her nose with my own. “I *wanted* to.”

She kisses me again before hugging me tight, making me laugh.

“Do you want me to show you—oh shit, love, don’t cry.”

She waves a hand. “I’m sorry. Of course, I wanna see the car. I’m just... Overwhelmed. Two days ago, we bought a gorgeous house. Then you surprised me by proposing. That same night, we discovered we’re pregnant—”

“I knew we were pregnant, so change that to *you* discovered we’re pregnant.”

She laughs. “Okay, smartass. You knew before I did. Still, I’m pregnant and—”

I look at her with my brows drawn. “*We* are pregnant. Yes, it will be your body our girls are growing inside and you’ll be the one to give birth to them.”

“How are you so sure we’re having twin girls?”

I shrug. “I just know.”

After a few beats, a slow smile pulls up her lips. “Twins. I never really gave it a thought, but it makes sense. Your dad is a twin.”

Nodding again, I rest my forehead against hers, my goddess still wrapped around me. “He is. How do you feel about the possibility of two babies at once?”

She pulls back slightly, her smile growing as she warms to the idea. Shrugging one shoulder, she says, “Well, I know you’ll be a huge help. I’m sure Emma will be as well. And with our family and friends, I’m certain we’ll have a lot of support. Plus, I’ve always wished I weren’t an only child and had a sibling I could rely on.” She lifts one shoulder. “I’m okay with it.”

My smile widens. “Baby, you know I’ll be more than helpful. I plan to be involved in every single aspect of our girls’ lives.”

“What if I have one boy and one girl? Or two boys?”

I shrug, a smile on my face. “That is fine with me.” My voice lowers, rumbling through my chest. “But you’re having twin girls.”

She shakes her head, laughing. “Fine. Since you are so convinced, I’m having twin girls.” She looks over her shoulder at the car behind her. “Now, will you show me my new car?”

“Of course, my love.” Striding forward with her wrapped around me, she giggles, pushing at me slightly.

“You don’t have to carry me, Will.”

“Do I need to dignify that with a response?” Setting her down, I grab her hand, leading her around the outside of her new car. Stopping at the passenger door, I open it and help her inside.

“I feel like such a queen. You act like I’m royalty.” She tries to look annoyed, but the exuberance shining from her brown eyes says otherwise.

Leaning in, I kiss her cheek. “Anything for my dark goddess.” With a wink, I stand, heading to the driver’s side.

“I’ll give you a lesson on all the controls, then we’ll go for a drive. I’ll drive there, then you can drive us home.”

She nods. “I’m good with that plan.”

After our lesson, I hit the button to start the car. Backing out of the garage, music plays softly from the speakers. I laugh when she grabs her cell phone from her pocket, connecting it to the car’s Bluetooth. “We need some driving music.”

As we start out the long lane leading to our gates, she puts on “Drive” by the Cars. Our gazes lock and she grins. “I’ll change it to something faster when we hit the open road.”

My hand moves to her thigh. “I’d hope so. We need to see what this car can do.”

Once we are through the gates, I hit the button, putting the top down.

She turns her head to mine, her smile wide, her eyes dancing. “Just tell me when to change the music.”

My hand rubs over her thigh. “I’ll let you know.” We cruise through town, my smile widening as I watch her preen under the admiring gazes of people. This car certainly attracts a lot of attention.

One asshole has the audacity to glue his gaze to my dark goddess as we sit at a red light. He’s practically salivating as he takes in my woman. She is fucking gorgeous in the black leather jacket thrown over her red top, her long silky brunette hair gleaming beneath the late afternoon sun. Her face has a radiant glow from both happiness and pregnancy.

I glower at him, waiting until he meets my heated stare. “Look at her again, motherfucker, and I’ll rip your fucking eyes outta your skull.”

His face pales, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallows hard. Quickly turning his head toward the light, the asshole fidgets nervously, looking as though he’s praying for the light to turn green.

Everleigh turns to me with a smirk, her brows raised. I can tell she’s trying not to burst out laughing by the way she hurriedly bites her lip.

I give her a wink, and she can't hold it in, her head falling back against the seat as she howls with laughter.

"I scared the piss outta him." As the light turns green, I rev the engine and stomp on the accelerator, leaving that jackass in the dust.

She turns her head to mine, still chuckling. "Was that necessary?"

"Of course. No asshole should be staring at you. You're *mine*."

Her eyes soften. "Always, Will. I've been yours since the day I was in that car accident nearly three years ago." She leans across the seat, her face close to mine. "And I'll always be yours." Her soft lips press against my cheek, and happiness flows from my soul, lighting me up like a damned Christmas tree.

Locking my gaze with hers, I grab her hand, pulling it to my lips. As I kiss it, my eyes move to the road, then back to hers. "I've been yours since the moment I looked at you, hanging upside down in the wreckage of your car, sheer terror on your face. When I first touched you, pulling you from your mangled car, it felt like I was hit by a bolt of lightning. I've never felt anything like it in my life."

My heart nearly stops beating momentarily at the reverent look on her face. She's gazing at me like I'm the oxygen she needs to breathe.

Like I hold her heart in the palm of my hand.

My breath hitches inside my chest as I swallow against the rising tide of emotions inside me. She has no idea how much control she possesses over me.

I'd do anything in this world just to see her smile.

She's my whole fucking universe.

Once we are through town, I glance over at her. "Alright, love. Change the music."

"Wherever I May Roam" by Metallic fills the car. "Excellent song choice, love." I glance over at her, drinking in her beaming expression.

Fuck, I love this woman.

"I have a song for every occasion." Her chestnut locks flow around her face as we pick up speed, making her look nothing short of divine.

Removing my hand from her thigh, I shift, taking the exit that will lead us to the mountains.

Turning my gaze to hers, a wicked grin covers my face. "Ready to see what she can do?"

She nods, an excited grin on her face.

Shifting gears, I stomp on the accelerator, the convertible jumping to sixty miles an hour within seconds. We fly down the road, the wind blowing through our hair. My gaze cuts to Everleigh, watching as she throws her head back, her arms in the air. She looks over at me, a breathtaking smile on her face.

Reaching my arm in the air, I wrap my fingers around hers, causing her to laugh.

“This is amazing, Will. It feels like we are flying.” She tilts her face to the late afternoon sun, which is starting to make its decent.

“Now you know how I feel. It always seems like I’m flying whenever I’m around you.” Our gazes lock together, her expression matching everything I’m feeling inside. Pure elation, devotion, and unconditional love.

Slowing down, we lower our hands as I shift, racing up the mountain road, my heart pounding to the beat of the song, “You Shook Me All Night Long” by AC/DC. My gaze travels over the scenery stretching before me.

Fucking paradise.

As my gaze cuts to her, there is nothing more majestic than the feelings she stirs inside me. All the beauty of the mountains that whiz by us, the tall pines intermixed with maple, oak, and birch trees, pales in comparison to her timeless beauty.

Slowing my speed, I pull into a parking lot at the top of the mountain, going slowly over the gravel lot that crunches beneath the tires.

When I stop the car, my breath hitches inside my chest as I take in the wonder that is on Everleigh’s face.

She looks spellbound as her chocolate orbs widen, slowly scanning over the view. The golden rays streak across the sky,

painting it baby blue and golden yellow. The colors shimmer across her luminous skin.

I press the button so the roof slides into place, sealing us in and keeping out the elements. “Stay right there.” My voice cuts through her awe, drawing her attention to me. Opening my door, I hurry around the car and open hers, extending my hand.

When she places her hand inside mine, butterflies swarm inside my stomach. She gracefully gets to her feet, her black heeled boots crunching over the gravel as her gaze locks on mine. With her windblown tresses framing her face, I’ve never seen her more angelic.

She gives me a broad, happy smile, looking at me as though I’m the best thing that’s ever happened to her. Reaching up, her fingers trace my jawline, causing an electrical current to flow through me, lighting up every nerve inside my body.

Goddamn, I love this woman.

Swallowing hard while fighting to regain my composure, I lead her to one of the large rocks that overlooks the valley below. I wait for her to get comfortably settled before lowering myself beside her. Pulling her against me, I wrap my arms tightly around her, briefly closing my eyes from the waves of bliss that course through me.

As the sun slowly dips lower on the horizon, the colors of the sky deepen. The fiery red, orange, and violet is a breathtaking sight, but it pales in comparison to the beauty of

the woman wrapped in my arms, her face ethereal as she gazes at the sunset.

“Will,” her low voice is a gasp as she grapples to find the words. “This is the most gorgeous sight I’ve ever seen.”

“I’d have to agree.” My gaze is locked on her face, not caring about anything surrounding us.

“It’s surreal. It’s almost... Heavenly.” She turns her head to mine, her brown eyes a prism of the colors of the sunset.

“I completely agree.” My hand caresses her silky face, my heart overflowing with so much love for her that it’s hard to catch my breath.

She’s everything I’ve ever wanted and everything I didn’t know I needed.

“You aren’t talking about the sunset, are you?” Her voice is nearly a whisper, her breathing increasing as she takes in my expression.

Slowly shaking my head, my gaze drops to her lips when her tongue gently runs over her bottom lip.

“You are my own personal slice of heaven, Everleigh Renee. What I feel for you has no limits or bounds, unconstrained by the laws of physics and nature.” My voice becomes hoarse as my emotions overwhelm me. Pushing a lock of hair behind her ear, my gaze sweeps over her high cheekbones to bask in the love and adoration flowing from her eyes. “With all that I am and will become, I love *you*.”

She blinks a few times, trying to stop the tears that fill her eyes, but they escape anyway, trickling down her face like a slow running stream. Her breathing increases, her expression brightening as the world around us darkens, the sun disappearing over the horizon.

“I love you so much, Will. With every single piece of me that was fractured apart the day that I left you, splintering into hundreds of broken shards, I was barely functioning until the day you found me again. Only your love could make me whole.”

My thumbs wipe at the tears on her face. As if we are magnetic, our lips softly join. Her warm breaths dance over my face like a gentle breeze. Her mouth tastes like every wish and dream I’ve ever hoped for. Everleigh’s sweet jasmine and amber scent surround me like a cocoon, and I inhale deeply, feeling her beneath my skin as my nerves fire like missiles throughout my body.

I lose myself in her, not knowing where I end and she begins. Pulling her tighter against me so there is no space between us, I drown in the magic of her love.

When I finally pull away, my hands cup her face, feeling her velvety skin against my fingertips. “It’s no secret that I have a past filled with trauma, especially after my mom died. It shaped me into a cold, callous bastard and though I acted as though I didn’t care about or need anyone, that was far from the truth. It was a defense mechanism, meant to keep people out. But the day I met you, everything changed. You made me

drop all my walls, which allowed you to see *me*, the person I tried to hide from everyone else. I showed others my darkness, but I trusted you enough to show you my light. I fell so hard for you, not just because you accepted me for who I was, but because you are the most incredible woman I've ever met." My voice shakes slightly from all the emotions swirling inside me. "Every day, I fall more in love with you." Swallowing hard, I glance down at her lips before meeting her gaze. "I didn't think I deserved love until you."

A sigh of pure contentment comes from her red lips before they curve into a shaky smile as she struggles to hold on to her composure. A tear slips from her eyes as she reaches up, stroking my jawline. "I was so reserved when I met you, terrified of the past I was running from. You broke through all my defenses so easily. I showed you sides of me I've never revealed to anyone. It was so easy being with you, as you accepted *all* of me. And now, here we are. Putting the past behind us and about to start an amazing life together." Her voice falters as I wipe the tear away, then she gives me a soft smile before continuing. "I love you so much. Every single day I fall harder for you. I can't imagine how much love we will share over a lifetime."

We melt into one another, our lips fusing together, her exhales becoming my inhales.

Our lips slowly part, our smiles mirroring the others, before we turn our heads toward the horizon where the sun disappeared a few moments ago. We bask in the beauty of

nature, the sounds of the forest playing a soft symphony in the background.

We sit in silence for a long time, words unnecessary as we simply enjoy being together in nature.

The sky begins to darken, hues of gray descending over us as the clouds roll toward us, signaling a storm on the horizon.

Getting to my feet, I reach down and grab her hands. “I have an idea.”

She arches a brow. “What’s your idea?”

I simply smile. “Follow me and I’ll show you.”

Three

William

WRAPPING AN ARM AROUND her, I guide Everleigh to the car, a smile on my face.

The loud rumble of thunder makes her to pause, her face turning to the sky again.

Giving her a smile, I say, “Wait right here.” Unlocking the door, I slip inside, crack the windows, and connect my car to the Bluetooth.

Exiting the vehicle, “Waiting for a Girl Like You” by Foreigner begins playing. I smile as Everleigh turns her face to mine, her soft smile basking me in the warmth only she can provide.

“May I have this dance, goddess?”

“Of course, my blond knight.”

She melts into my embrace, a long sigh escaping her lips as her cheek rests against my rapidly thumping heart. My head dips to her hair, inhaling the flowery scent of her shampoo.

As the first drops of rain fall from the sky, we simultaneously lift our faces, the water flowing over our

heated skin.

As the storm increases in intensity and thunder rolls in the distance, I twirl her around, her musical laughter blending with the song. The memory of the first time I realized I had fallen in love with her drifts through my mind.

Relief fills me as I hurry across the parking lot, glad the business meeting is over. Sliding behind the wheel of my car, I slam the door, fasten my seatbelt, and start the engine faster than I ever have, fueled by the burning desire to get back to her.

I keep telling myself it's because Everleigh is injured and I just want to ensure she's okay. Once she heals, she'll likely go back to her life and I'll drift back to... mine.

Emptiness washes over me, my heart constricting inside my chest. As I put my car in gear and race out of the parking lot, heading for home, that feeling clings to me like a bad fucking habit.

Get it together, Will. She wouldn't want to be a part of your fucked up world even if she were to fall for you, which is highly unlikely.

No woman falls for the beast.

Women want a hero.

Something I'll never be.

My heart squeezes like someone put it in a damned vise, tightening to the point that it's barely beating.

What the fuck is that? Why am I feeling this way?

Shifting gears, I smoothly change lanes, weaving in and out of them. Flicking on my turn signal at the last second and pissing off the car behind me, I gun my engine, exiting the freeway and flying onto the mountain road.

The same road where Everleigh crashed into my life and my world flipped upside down. My heart beats erratically inside my chest, like a bird frantically flapping its wings, trying to get free from the cage that imprisons it.

And it hits me like a baseball that catches you off-guard when it flies into your stomach, knocking the breath from your lungs.

The thought of Everleigh leaving me and returning to her life has me feeling bereft.

I haven't felt anything like this since the night my mom was murdered.

White knuckles clench the steering wheel as I blink back tears. I barely even fucking know this woman.

How the fuck has she made such an impact on me in such a short time?

Shaking my head, I reach over, turning the volume up to drown out my thoughts.

But it doesn't work.

Before I know it, I'm making a comparison list of my mom and Everleigh and seeing so many similarities between them.

Physically, there are differences. My mom was blonde, while Everleigh's hair is a rich shade of chestnut. Everleigh's long hair is also thicker, the kind you want to run your hands through and inhale the floral scent.

What the actual fuck is wrong with me? I'm imagining smelling a woman's hair. And when did I get so eloquent with words?

But there are big differences, apart from the physical. Everleigh is so damn strong. There's a resilience there that rivals my own. I've also seen the stubbornness flare in Everleigh's big brown eyes when I've challenged her. There's a bit of a fuck around and find out attitude that flairs up, even though she's injured.

Which makes my dick harder than a rock every single time she challenges me.

There are too many differences between my mom and Everleigh, so I'm not simply transferring my emotions like my therapist usually cautions me about.

I roll my eyes. This is a complete waste of my time.

Repeat after me: Everleigh is *not* a big deal. She'll walk out of my life and...

And I see nothing except endlessly long, miserable days.

All these feelings from one fucking kiss.

Okay, more like one endless kiss that left me feeling like I was on a rollercoaster in complete darkness, flying blind but relishing the thrill that ran through me.

I couldn't stop. Couldn't get enough of her as her jasmine and amber scent washed over me like a tidal wave, drowning me in her scent. I didn't fucking care if I died at that moment because her arms were wrapped around me, her tight body pressed against mine, my hands tangled in that luxurious chestnut hair. As my lips drank her in, she sucked a damned piece of my soul from me.

Though my cock was so hard it physically ached, I had no desire to rush anything with her. Although if she begged for it, I'd be inside her faster than a baseball player sliding into home base.

But still... At that moment, she was in control, and I would have given her anything she wanted.

And that's what fucking bothers me.

I don't do this shit. I'm methodical, checking into every aspect of a woman's background before I pick her up for dinner. I analyze every word that comes from her mouth, looking for discrepancies.

Yet here I am, knowing nothing about this woman except she harbors a giant secret.

Her enemy wants her dead.

And there could be a very valid reason for that.

Yet my heart tells me otherwise.

I usually never listen to that fucker, since I've experienced indescribable pain every time I have. The kind that splinters

you into pieces, drawing you into the darkness, unable to function unless you learn to live inside the pain.

Exhaling a loud breath as my penthouse comes into view, I stop analyzing my reaction and desire to see her.

I'm parked inside the garage and dashing into my elevator in record time.

Again, I'm not questioning my motives for that, either.

Once the doors open and I step inside, her jasmine and amber scent permeates the air, filling my lungs. I close my eyes, breathing her aroma in before I continue toward the room she's been occupying since the car accident.

Her door is ajar. I raise my knuckles to knock and announce my presence, but something stops my hand mid-air.

She stands in front of the full-length mirror, topless, her back facing the glass. Her head is turned away from me, her long brunette locks covering one breast as she twists and turns, a frown pulling her lips down.

Her pained stare is full of anguish as her shoulders curl over her chest. Her lips tremble as she looks at the scars covering her back.

The scars are a gruesome sight. My eyes narrow as I zero in on them. Some of them appear to be burns, while others look like someone took a knife to her back, carving her up. As my gaze moves to her torso, I spot a few on her stomach, her arms, and even one on her breast. They are perfectly round

burns, roughly the size of the cigarettes I tried smoking and detested.

Her eyes are vacant, even as the first tear falls down her porcelain cheek.

I have the strangest urge to throw open the door, rush over to her, and hold her in my arms until I convince her that her scars are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

The trauma on her body, which has clearly been surgically improved by a plastic surgeon, albeit not someone as adept as the ones most of the elite people go to in my world, speaks of someone who has suffered the unspeakable horrors of abuse.

I can tell those scars are old, likely obtained during her childhood.

I know because they match mine.

My hands curl into fists, my arms shaking as the rage roars through my head, sounding like a train barreling down an open track. The fury swirling inside me demands I find whoever did this to her and inflict endless suffering on them until they beg me for death.

But I won't give it to them. They don't deserve it.

And she should be the one to end whoever inflicted those wounds on her. It will give her closure.

As I watch, she straightens, her spine stiffening. Impatiently brushing a hand beneath her eyes to wipe away the tears that have fallen, she chides herself. "Anyone who really loves you will love the scars you bear on your body." She pauses, her

chin quivering. When she regains her composure, her chin lifts. “That bitch was wrong. One day soon, she’s going to come face-to-face with me, and it will be her fear I delight in, just like she took pleasure in mine.”

I couldn’t agree more with her words. The strength she possesses impresses me, causing my breathing to hitch.

I’ve never been so impressed by someone in my life.

She shifts, and I silently move away from her door, holding my breath until I reach the hallway. Expelling it, waves of respect crash over me like the surf pounding against the rocks on the beach.

She’s like a phoenix, rising from the ashes, powerful and majestic, her beauty and strength refusing to be dimmed by those who have harmed her.

When her spine stiffened and she gave herself that brief pep talk, she was the most resilient person I’d ever seen, refusing to bow down to the memories that haunt her.

And suddenly, I realize that I don’t just want this woman in my life.

I need her like I need both of my lungs to breathe properly.

I need her because she’s broken, like me, yet she’s the brightest star that shines in the dark, lighting it up.

There’s a darkness beneath the light that has blinded me while in her presence.

But I saw the darkness, the thirst for revenge in her brown orbs. The flame flickered, ready to burst into an inferno at the slightest sign of her enemy.

The loud crack of thunder draws me from my thoughts.

Lifting my head, I shove my hands inside my pockets. Turning toward the window, I watch the lightning zigzag across the sky, illuminating the world briefly. It's breathtakingly beautiful.

I feel her behind me, like a bolt of lightning struck me directly. The hairs all over my body rise, goosebumps prickling my skin, as she draws closer.

Closing my eyes, I inhale her scent.

She stops beside me. "Gorgeous sight, isn't it?"

Opening my eyes, I stare down at her as she gazes reverently at the powerful storm raging outside the windows.

"Yes, it is the most stunning sight I've ever seen." But I'm not looking at the sky. I'm drinking her in like a man dying of thirst in the desert.

She turns to me, her smile growing softer as her eyes lock with mine.

The thunder cracks again, the flash of lightning so bright it illuminates both of us as we stand there, facing one another, the rain pelting the windows.

"When I was a kid, I used to love to dance outside in thunderstorms." She chuckles, her gaze dropping to her bare

feet. “My mom practically had a heart attack every time I ran outside, twirling around beneath the pouring rain, my arms outstretched like a lightning rod, or at least, that was her nickname for my pose.” She closes her eyes, lost in her memories.

I lean closer, completely mesmerized by her. “Let’s go dance in the storm.”

Her eyes grow wide with surprise. Her hand moves to her chest, but I don’t miss the excitement that flickers over her features.

“Oh, Will, I didn’t mean we had to... we’ll probably get struck by lightning and die in this storm.”

I already feel like I’ve been struck, but instead of lightning hitting me, it’s her.

Grabbing her hand, I twirl her around. “We’ll be fine. We can dance on the balcony.” Toeing off my Converse shoes, I pull her down the hallway, the large balcony only accessible from my bedroom.

She laughs as I tug her faster through my bedroom, anxious to dance with her in the rain.

I can’t think of anything I’d like more.

Opening the doors, I step outside onto the balcony, pulling her behind me. The rain has slowed but still drenches us within seconds. She tilts her face up to the sky, closing her eyes, a wide smile on her face.

The loud crack of thunder comes at the right moment, drowning out my heart's loud, relentless pounding against my ribcage.

Trying to gain control of my emotions, I pull my cell phone from my back pocket, pulling up a random Spotify playlist. My phone connects to my Bluetooth speaker, the loud music pouring from my room. Shoving my phone in my pocket, I grab her and spin her again, causing her to open her eyes. Unadulterated happiness dances on her features and I feel like a fucking king, erasing the utter devastation from when she looked at her scars in the mirror.

As I twirl her on the balcony, the rain steadily falls, washing over us. Our hair and clothing cling to us as we dance, occasionally having to break our hold to push the hair from our face and the water from our eyes, but we always resume dancing, spinning and twirling, the thunder accompanying the music that plays from my speaker. Flashes of lightning dance across the sky, just like my nerve endings from her skin touching mine.

The song changes and "Waiting for a Girl Like You" by Foreigner begins to play. Pulling her closer, our feet slow, moving in time with the music. The lyrics of the song hit me deep inside, making my heart pound faster and causing goosebumps to rise on my skin.

When she tilts her head, smiling up at me, the softness in her brown eyes tugs at my heart, leaving me breathless. She's a force of nature, a goddess lit up by flashes of lightning,

enchanted by the booming thunder, relishing in the feel of the rain on her skin.

I freefall over the edge of the fucking cliff, unable to deny it any longer.

She's perfect for me. A powerful vision that seems to command the storm behind her as she fearlessly dances with me.

Nothing can dim this woman's light.

Not her scars, nor a storm.

It may beat her down, but she'll just rise back up, stronger than before.

Desperation to make this woman mine crashes through me. It's not enough for her to continue to stay here with me while recovering from her injuries.

I want more.

Although if she tries to leave, I will fight to the death to prevent that from happening.

But it's so much deeper than that.

I want her to fall in love with me.

Willingly.

Completely.

For a fucking eternity.

She needs to surrender all of herself to me. Nothing else will satisfy me.

Pulling my mind back to the present moment, contentment and bliss steal over me. I have everything I've ever wanted and could ever desire because of her. She is the light in my life, changing my world from black and white to a whirlwind of colors.

Her love makes me a better man.

The rain comes down faster and harder, making us laugh as it soaks through our clothing, drenching us.

Releasing her from my embrace, I tug her hand, pulling her to the car and helping her inside. Running to the driver's side, I slide behind the steering wheel, slamming the door shut. The sky opens, water gushing from the thick clouds overhead, the sky turning pitch black as the storm settles in.

"Will. We are getting my new car all wet."

I shrug, starting the car and turning the heat on. Twisting my body around, I reach into the back seat, grabbing a large utility bag and pulling out two towels.

Handing one to her, she grins as she takes in my mischievous smile.

"You knew it was going to storm, didn't you?"

Rubbing the towel over my hair and then around to my face, I lift my head, turning to her. "I did. That's why I brought you here. Not just to take a drive with you in your new car, but to see the sunset, then dance with you as it storms."

Gently taking her towel from her, I lightly wipe over her face and neck, her pulse thrumming against her skin as we stare at one another, the ever-present flame flickering between us catching fire, burning us from within.

The desire coursing from her eyes practically melts my skin.

“How about we break your car in the right way?”

She grins. “What do you have in mind?”

“I think it’s better if I show you.”

Four

Everleigh

THE LOOK IN HIS eyes as we stare at one another inside my new car causes my body to tremble, shivers coursing through me. Every one of my nerve ending stirs and tingles as he swallows, his Adam's apple bobbing. His magnetic blue eyes shine as he shifts in the seat, moving closer to me.

My body craves his touch so much that the hair on my arms and the back of my neck rises, white hot bolts of electricity surging through my body.

Our lips meet in a hot and demanding kiss, the flames within bursting into an inferno of desire. His hands cup my face as he moves his mouth against mine, the heat coursing from his body easing my shivering.

Breaking apart slowly, our breathing is heavy as our gazes lock on each other. The storm descends directly over us, a flash of lightning coursing across the sky with jagged streaks, a loud crack of thunder following it. My attention shifts to the storm outside, until I feel Will's hands running over thighs in my wet jeans, sending tingles through my skin and lighting up my body like the sky outside.

“You are my fucking world, Everleigh.” The rain pounds against the car, pinging off the windows, sounding like a symphony of instruments as his words echo inside my head. His breathing is heavy beneath my hand that is resting on his chest. When he licks his bottom lip, heat shoots directly to my core. He looks like a wild animal ready to devour me and damned if it doesn’t make me crave him even more.

“You are my soulmate, Will. The love of my life.” My heart pounds inside my chest as I stare at the man I’m fortunate enough to call my fiancé. With his chiseled jawline, piercing blue eyes, and blond hair, he resembles a Greek God, sculpted to perfection.

“You’re cold, goddess. Let’s get this off you.” His fingers curl around my wet jacket, pulling it from my shoulders and over my arms, revealing my thin, red top beneath. Tossing my jacket to the side, his hands move to my hips, pulling me across the seat and over onto his lap. Straddling him, I grind against his hard cock that strains against his jeans.

Will’s fingers slide to the edge of my shirt, traveling beneath the material and onto my skin, goosebumps pebbling my skin. His hands slide up my waist to my back, undoing my bra, then around to my stomach, moving up to the lacy cups of my bra. Dipping beneath it, his large hands cup my breasts. My hard nipples tighten in his powerful hands as I moan into his mouth, my body feeling like it’s on fire from his touch.

A loud crack of thunder sounds as our mouths desperately fuse together. My heart pounds against my chest as passion

and desire rush through my body.

When our lips break apart, his light blue eyes are illuminated by the dash lights, the depth of the longing and need flowing from them sucking the air from my lungs.

He stares at me with a possessiveness that makes me shiver in the most delicious way, as though he'd storm the gates of hell and battle the devil to protect me. Even though I'm fully capable of defending myself, I can't deny how turned on I am when he looks at me this way. Until William, I've never had any man desire me so much. And though he knows how strong I am, he's protective as hell, as though he'd wage a war against the world to keep me safe.

His hands trace the curves of my face as he stares into my soul. "I need you, baby. Right now."

His words pull a moan from deep within my chest. "Then take me."

"Get in the back seat, love."

Crawling off him, I move toward the back of the car, the thunderstorm swirling around us matching my desperation for him. I need him touching me, licking me, and fucking me before I combust.

He's right behind me, his hands reaching around my waist and undoing the button and zipper, then tugging at my pants before I even have my knee on the backseat. A breathless giggle escapes me as his hot breaths flow over my neck and shoulder.

“Those jeans need to fucking come off right now.” He tugs them down to my knees, making me gasp at his feral tone, his movements frantic.

“Let me turn around. It will make it easier to pull them off.”

As soon as my ass hits the seat, he’s grabbing my boots, taking them off. Then he yanks on the bottom of my jeans, pulling them over my feet.

“Get that shirt and your bra off,” he grunts as he leans forward, his lips trailing up my thighs, but his eyes are on my movements, ensuring I comply with his demands.

Once I have the shirt over my head, he grins against my skin, hot breaths falling over my hips.

He slowly moves up my stomach, kissing me teasingly. When he reaches my breasts, his mouth latches onto my nipple while his other hand skates up, grazing over my other nipple. I gasp with pleasure as he rolls it between his fingers, sending a jolt straight between my legs.

“God, Will.” My hands slide around his back, holding him against me, not wanting him to stop. This man knows exactly what I like and delivers every single time.

His mouth releases my breast. “You are so beautiful, love.”

A grin pulls my lips up at his compliment. That’s such a William thing to do. Turn me on, then make me melt into a puddle from the raging sincerity behind his words and in his eyes.

His fingers slide down my torso, skimming over my abs, leaving a trail of goosebumps everywhere he touches me. When his hands reach my panties, I automatically arch my hips up so he can slide them down.

Tossing them aside, his eyes blaze white-hot from desire as he locks them on mine. “I want you to play with your nipples while I devour your soaked pussy, baby.”

Fuck. His words send a tingle straight through the center of my body, my thighs parting as my breathing increases.

Sliding back against the seat, I do as he instructs, my hands sliding over my breasts, my fingers squeezing my nipples. He hums his approval as his face moves between my legs, his hands spreading my legs wider.

He looks absolutely ravenous as he settles his mouth close to my center, licking his lips as though he’s desperate to taste me. “Your pussy is glistening from your wetness, baby. It’s so fucking beautiful.” Then he slides his arms beneath me, his hands going beneath my ass, before he flicks his tongue against me, slowly sliding through my wet folds and up to my clit, where he circles teasingly.

So maddeningly slow.

I automatically squeeze my nipples harder, a shiver coursing through me from the pleasure. “Please, Will. I need more.” My words are breathy and desperate.

He chuckles against me, in complete control as he watches me lose my composure, unraveling beneath his teasing touches

that are driving me mad. “Patience, baby.”

A slight growl of frustration leaves my lips. Arching my hips to his mouth, I mutter, “Fuck patience.”

He laughs against my sensitive flesh, tingles going through my body from the vibrations coming from his mouth.

“Good things come...” His tongue slides through my soaked folds, savoring me, making my muscles tense from frustration. “To those who wait.”

My head rolls against the seat, a heavy sigh leaving my lips. “Dammit, Will.” My speaking is stilted, my chest tight from exasperation.

He chuckles again, his warm breaths falling over my pussy, tickling me like a hot summer breeze.

Without warning, he pulls me against his mouth, giving me what I want. He roughly licks my slit with his tongue, then moves up to my clit, sucking it into his mouth. My hips jerk when his tongue laps at it, my name falling from his lips like a prayer.

One of my hands moves from my breast, gripping the hair on the top of his head.

He growls against me. “Hand back on your nipple, baby, or I’ll stop.”

A frustrated whine leaves me, but I do as he instructs, needing him to continue.

“That’s my good fiancée.” Lightning dances across the sky, illuminating him. His lips are curled in that little smirk I love so much, and his endearment warms my heart.

His mouth seals against me again, devouring my slit. My hips arch against him as he pleasures me. Tingles shoot throughout my body from the way his mouth sucks and licks me, alternating from teasingly slow to fast and hard, only to start all over again. Squeezing my nipples, the pleasure shoots directly to my pussy like a bolt of lightning, matching the storm surrounding us.

He slides his tongue up to my clit, circling the bundle of nerves while two fingers slide inside my wetness, sinking all the way inside. My hips buck up toward him of their own accord, my eyes rolling back from the pleasure he’s giving me.

“Damn, goddess. Your pussy is so tight and wet for me.” His low, raspy voice nearly makes my spine curl from the sheer sexiness of it.

Goddamn. Locking my gaze with his, the feral look in his eyes makes me half insane from lust.

He pulls his fingers out to the tips, then thrusts them back inside. Pulsing around him as he works my clit with his tongue, he sucks it deep into his mouth. “Will, I’m gonna—” I don’t get the words out before I shatter around him, my legs shaking while loud moans fall from my lips. Squeezing my eyes shut, fireworks explode behind my lids.

As he continues lapping at me through my orgasm, it feels like I’m floating amongst the storm clouds. When the shaking

stops and my climax ends, I'm a sweaty, panting mess.

Will slowly pulls back, sticking his fingers in his mouth and licking every drop of me from them. It's so fucking sexy when he does that.

Moving up my body, he kisses me passionately and thoroughly, making me taste myself on his tongue. I've never minded the taste of me on him. In fact, I enjoy it. I've never let any other man I've been with kiss me after they went down on me.

But everything with Will is different.

When our lips break apart, my eyes slowly flutter open. "This feels surreal. Like a dream."

His face softens as he caresses my cheek. "It's real, goddess. I promise this is reality and not a dream."

"I know. It's just that I was so miserable without you. There were days I..." Breaking off, I bite my lip, my gaze moving away from the intensity of his.

"Tell me, love." His hand tightens on my cheek, imploring me to look at him. I do, blinking back the tears, hating to tell him this.

But he needs to know so he understands how hard it was to be away from him.

I heave in a breath for courage, slowly letting it out, knowing he won't like what I'm about to say. "There were days I didn't want to wake up. At least when I was asleep, I could dream that we were still together. But then I'd open my

eyes and the realization that I was alone washed over me like a wave, threatening to drown me. I was so fucking lonely and miserable.” Rapidly blinking, I try to keep the tears at bay, swallowing the lump in my throat. “As I continually moved from one cheap hotel room to the next, stretching from California to the east coast until I finally ended up in the cabin in Pennsylvania, I... I could hardly stand it. Sometimes I toyed with the idea of just giving up.”

“Oh God, baby.” His hands cup my face. “I couldn’t stand it if anything would ever happen to you. Please, don’t ever, ever give up. Because I can promise you that if anything or anyone should ever try to separate us again, I won’t stop looking for you. I’ll burn down the entire fucking world until I find you.”

I blink back tears, the intensity of his promise dripping from his words.

I nod, my hands sliding to his biceps, gripping them tightly. “I promise that I’d fight like hell to get back to you, Will. You and me, and now the life inside me—” I reach down and rub one hand over my flat stomach, not yet showing “—are everything to me. Everything I ever wanted is happening.”

He pulls me into his arms, hugging me so tightly that all my fears that something will happen to ruin it dissipate into the air. “All of our dreams are coming true, love. Nothing is going to ruin our happiness. Stop worrying.” He kisses the side of my neck, his hands stroking my back.

I squeeze him tighter. “I released my fears into the universe. You hugged them out of me.”

He pulls back with a grin. “Good. Now get on your knees and suck my cock.”

I can't help the laugh that comes out as the desire swirls through me from his words, heating my insides. I quickly grow serious as I look at his handsome face, full of desire. A flood of arousal hits me, making my hands shake as I grab his hoodie, stripping it over his head. Fumbling with the button and zipper of his jeans, he reaches a hand down to help me, but I swat him away with a coy smile. “I've got this,” I say, exhaling a calming breath. He chuckles as I get them undone, then yank his jeans and boxers to his knees, desire burning low in my stomach. My gaze drops to his huge cock and instinctively, my tongue slips out, licking my bottom lip. When my eyes flick to his, he's intently watching me, blue eyes shining.

Slowly my gaze travels over the planes of his defined abs, my fingers tracing over the ridges and planes, moving upward to his chest. He flexes beneath my fingers, and I smirk. “Get your hot ass on the seat.”

He chuckles, doing as I ask. I always feel like a queen when he obeys me.

Sliding to my knees in front of him, my hand wraps around his thick shaft. “God, you have such a huge cock.” Lowering my mouth over the tip of him, I slide my tongue over the silky head, tasting his pre-cum.

He releases a series of curses when I shove him into my mouth. Hollowing my cheeks, I suck on him like a lollipop,

hearing his moan as his head falls back against the seat. Breathing through my nose, I flatten my tongue and take his cock all the way to the back of my throat.

“Fuck, goddess. That feels incredible.” His hands move to my hair as he arches his hips toward my face, sliding in and out of my mouth.

I moan in response, his words turning me on as his hand slides down so that his thumb strokes my cheek, showing his approval.

Moving back to the tip, I swirl my tongue around it before I once again shove him to the back of my throat. His hands tighten in my hair as he starts to lose control. He’s so damn sexy as he starts fucking my mouth, the sloppy sounds of him thrusting in and out mixing with the moans coming from me.

“Jesus, love. Damn, this is fucking hot.” His eyes are practically white with desire as we forget all about the thunderstorm around us, completely lost in one another.

My hands grip his muscular thighs as he continues thrusting in and out of my mouth. He hums his approval as he hits the back of my throat, tears pooling in my eyes and winding down my cheeks when I blink.

I feel like a queen on my knees in front of him.

He grips my hair, pulling out of my mouth. “Stop, goddess. I need you to ride my cock. I wanna cum inside you.” Taking my hand, he wraps his fingers around mine, helping me up so I can straddle him on the seat.

Before I can sink down on him, his hand moves to my clit, his fingers working it just the way I like. My head falls back, my hair tumbling down my back, as he teases me, turning me into a wet, quivering mess, frantic to feel him inside me.

“Please, Will. I need to ride you.” My voice is a desperate plea.

“Go ahead, baby. I’m all yours to do with as you please.”

Fuck. That’s so hot.

Positioning the head of his cock at my entrance, I slowly sink onto him inch by inch, a moan falling from my lips.

“Goddamn, baby.” His expression is tense, muscles taut, as he struggles not to grab me by the hips and yank me down on him.

I continue to slide down until he’s fully sheathed inside me, both of us releasing a long moan as I do. Gripping his shoulder, I give him a saucy smile before I slide back up to the head, then lower myself down on him again, rolling my hips as I do. “Damn, Will.”

“Fuck, goddess.” His hands grip my hips as I slowly rise to the tip, then slam myself back down on him, wincing slightly as I do from his girth. The man is very well endowed and despite how wet I am, when I take him this deep, a twinge of pain mixes with the pleasure.

As I move in a steady rhythm, my gaze locked on his, the sounds of our slickened bodies mix with the sounds that come

from both our mouths, our breathing heavy. He arches up, burying himself deeper inside me.

“Yes,” I cry out, utterly consumed by him.

“I love you, goddess.” His expression nearly brings me to tears as euphoria shines from his face.

My breath hitches, rendering me unable to speak as I take in the sincerity on his face. I know he’s never said these words to anyone else other than his mother. And the last time he said them to her, he was ten years old.

Cupping his cheek, I keep my pace steady as I whisper, “I love you so damn much, Will. With everything I am.”

He arches up again, filling and stretching me. “With all of me.”

A whimper escapes me as I ride him faster, consumed by all the passion and adoration I feel for him. My soon-to-be husband and the father of my children.

“That’s it, my love. Take all of my cock.”

Holy hell. His words are going to make me come undone.

I bite my lip in concentration, rolling my hips every time I slam myself down on him, my hands moving to the planes of his chest, feeling the taut muscles beneath my fingers. Unintelligible sounds leave my lips as the pleasure overwhelms me, my head falling back.

His hand moves to my face, tilting it. “Eyes on me when you come, my love.”

My muscles tighten as my pussy clenches around him, knowing I'm seconds away from falling over the cliff.

"Will," I gasp, riding him harder and faster, my breathing too heavy to say anything more.

"That's it, my soon-to-be wife. Take all of me. Every. Fucking. Inch." He slams into me from below, hitting that spot inside of me that makes me unravel, my pussy squeezing him like a vise as I come all over his cock with a loud scream.

My orgasm is so powerful that I temporarily lose my vision, slumping forward against him as my body shudders around him.

He keeps rocking into me, gripping me tightly as he emits a growl from deep within his chest.

"Fuck, baby," is all he gets out before he shoves himself deep inside me, finding his release. His muscles relax, his arms securing me to him as his heart pounds against my chest.

Pulling back enough that I can see his face, I give him a slow smile. "Best way to break my new car in. And you managed to do it during a thunderstorm, which is our thing."

His lips quirk up and he chuckles. "Symbolic, don't you think? No storm is more powerful than we are."

"We certainly rode our way through this one." Grinning, I rub my nose against his. "But you're exactly right. Nothing is more powerful than us."

His thumb strokes my bottom lip. "Here's to a lifetime of being fortified by whatever storms come our way. Together,

we are an indomitable force.”

“To a lifetime of endless love.”

As I slowly slide off him, our lips fuse together, sealing our fate with a kiss.

Five

William

“**I** HAVE THE LATEST research on Colin Fry. It contains some juicy tidbits I think you’ll be interested in knowing.” Bryan gestures toward the laptop in his hands. “I’ll review it with you on the way to the office.”

Glancing over at him before I hit the button for the elevator, I sigh. Since Everleigh came back into my life, I’ve been moving away from the illegal aspects of my businesses and focusing on the legal ones. Sumer Tech Industries has been on my radar for some time, but recently, they’ve encountered severe financial difficulties, making them ripe to either be bought out or merge with another company.

“I want this company, Bryan. They have some innovative, cutting-edge tech products, and the people who work there are the best in the industry. Colin is dragging them down. He needs to go.” My brows furrow as I picture Colin’s arrogant face smirking at me when I met with them over a year ago to obtain the tracking devices both Everleigh and I have in our ankles. I wanted to sign an exclusive deal to partner with him at that time, but he refused.

“Colin is a dick. Is he still pissed about you beating his ass at Stanford?”

My lips quirk up as we step onto the elevator. “He started that shit when he taunted me about my parents not coming to track meets. I finished it when I beat him to a pulp.”

Bryan chuckles. “Yeah, I remember. Coach Reid was pissed as hell at you that day. I thought his head was gonna explode.”

“Coach would have thrown me off the team if I wasn’t the top runner. Instead, the asshole made me go to counseling. Utter waste of my time.”

Bryan grins at me, opening his mouth, but I hold up a hand.

“Don’t even say it.” I glower at him before stepping off the elevator. “I don’t even wanna be reminded of *her*.” Disgust curls my lips as I picture Ainsley, the evil she-devil who tormented my woman. “Had I met Everleigh and known Ainsley did all that terrible shit to her, I would have tormented the fuck outta her, then watched while Everleigh sliced and diced her.”

Bryan chuckles. “You got to see it eventually.”

I smirk. “Everleigh was poetry in motion in that warehouse.”

“You still watch the video of it, don’t you?”

“Of course.” I give him a shit-eating grin. “My woman was fucking badass the way she took that bitch out. I’m glad she carved her up and burnt her with cigarettes, just the way Ainsley did to her when Everleigh was a kid.” My hands curl

into fists as white-hot anger burns through my veins whenever I think of Everleigh being abused when she was younger. It was bad enough she had to watch her mother die a painful death from cancer, but to experience abuse on top of that is inhumane. My hands shake from anger. It makes me want to burn down the town she grew up in.

“I’m glad Everleigh’s mom was smart enough to ensure Derrick Morrison didn’t get his hands on Everleigh’s inheritance. She must have known he was a prick.”

I run a hand through my hair, heading to my car. I stop when my phone beeps with a text message. “Hold that thought, Bryan.”

Turning around, I head back toward the elevator. I don’t miss the grin on Bryan’s face. He knows the text was from Everleigh, simply by my reaction to it. I can’t hide my smile when it’s anything to do with her.

The doors open and she and Savannah step off, laughing. When she turns her glowing face to mine, my breath hitches inside my chest.

Fuck, she’s gorgeous.

She closes the space between us, loving divine in a pair of dark skinny jeans, heeled sandals, and a black t-shirt. “Hey, love.” Her hands automatically curl around me as I pull her against my body, my lips pressing against her red ones.

“That’s my cue to wait by your car,” I hear Savannah say as she scurries around us.

Ignoring Savannah, I pull back slightly, staring into my woman's beautiful face. "What are you and Savannah up to?"

"We have an appointment to get pedicures and massages. I figured while you were in meetings, I'd have some girl time with my bestie."

I nod. "Perfect. I'll call with my card information—"

"Will, you don't have to pay for it."

Saying nothing, I glower at her, admiring her for being completely unaffected by the look I'm giving her. Most people shrivel and immediately apologize, giving into me. But not my woman.

It takes far more to intimidate her.

"How many times do I have to say it?" I hitch an eyebrow at her.

"I know, I know." She rolls her eyes. "Fine, you can pay." The shitty-ass grin on her face makes me want to turn her over my knee and smack her ass.

"You love tormenting me, don't you?" My expression eases as I take in her sparkling eyes.

"It's my sole mission in life." Her flirty giggle makes me want to shove her against the elevator wall and show her a mission. One that involves her coming around my dick until her knees are too weak to stand.

Inhaling her jasmine and amber scent, I lean my lips against the shell of her ear. "Keep it up, goddess, and I'll have you

screaming my name as I fuck you senseless.”

The involuntary shiver she tries but fails to hide lets me know she’s deeply affected by my words. My fingers stroke her bare arm, feeling the goosebumps beneath my skin.

“How about Bryan and I treat you ladies to lunch after? Maple Valley Café at noon?”

She pulls back with a smile. “I’d love that.” Her eyes twinkle with mischief. “I’m guessing I don’t get to pay for lunch, either?”

I snort. “What do you think?”

“I think you spoil me.” Her fingers graze the stubble on my chin, knowing I don’t shave it off because I know how much she likes it. “And I love you for it.” Her smile practically blinds me. “I love *everything* about you.”

With a growl, my hand winds through her hair while the other presses against her back, feeling her melt against me. My mouth covers hers, my lips move against hers, eliciting a throaty moan.

Kissing until we are both breathless, I slowly pull away from her, desire coursing through me. I’d love to say fuck this meeting and enjoy her instead, but I really can’t. I need to snap Sumer Tech Industries up before the word gets out about their financial difficulties.

“There is nothing I enjoy more in this world than spoiling you, gorgeous.” Pulling back slightly, my hand slips between

us, rubbing over her stomach. “And the two little girls inside you.”

“Ugh. Here you go with that again.” She shakes her head, a wry smile on her face. “We’re gonna need to find out the sex of these babies just so we can put this to rest.”

Laughing, my other hand slides down to her ass. “No need. We’re having twin girls.”

“Whatever you say, baby. Just don’t be disappointed if you’re wrong.”

“I’m not worried. I know I’m right.” My hand slides from her stomach and I spin her around, clasping her hand in mine as I walk her to her car. “Drive carefully, sweetness.”

“You know I will. I had an expert instructor who taught me everything I know.” She winks at me, referring to the time I spent teaching her to race when she lived with me in California. I loved watching her smoke the competition on the mountain roads. She has excellent instincts and doesn’t buckle under pressure.

Glancing over her shoulder, I see Savannah standing rigid as she looks at something on Bryan’s laptop, then rolls her eyes. Nudging Everleigh, she glances over at them, then looks back at me, shaking her head. Her voice is low as she says, “Those two just need to fuck so their sexual tension simmers down. They are always competing to see who can find information the fastest. The other day, Max asked Bryan if he could dig up some info on a case he’s working on, and Savannah jumped all

over Max about it.” She grimaces as she says, “Max told them he didn’t give a shit who got him the info; he just needed it.”

I laugh. “Yeah, he texted me about it. I called him because I knew he was pissed.” Shaking my head, I raise my brows as I watch Savannah stomp to the passenger side of Everleigh’s car, her blonde ponytail swinging behind her. “Looks like she’s pissed again.”

Everleigh glances over her shoulder, muttering, “For fuck’s sake. I’ll put her in a headlock if she has an attitude the whole way to get mani-pedis.”

My finger goes beneath her chin. “Kick her ass if she gives you shit, goddess.” I grin. Tilting her face up to mine, I press my lips against hers, happiness lighting me up the second she melts against me, all the tension draining from her body.

When she pulls back, her eyes are hooded with desire. “When we get home, let’s lock the two of them in Bryan’s basement. Then we can have our own fun while they fuck it out. Or kill one another.” Giving me a grin, she lifts one shoulder. “I don’t care which. The most important thing is having uninterrupted time with you.”

“I can arrange that.” Wiggling my eyebrows, she laughs.

She sighs, glancing over at Savannah before turning to me. “Well, we better get going. I don’t want to make you late.” Reluctance clings to her as she tightens her fingers around mine.

I understand exactly how she's feeling. Ever since we reunited, I hate being apart. If I had my way, I'd take her everywhere with me.

"Make sure you stop at the Maple Valley Bakery on your way. I'm ordering coffee and chocolate croissants for the two of you."

She squeezes my arm. "You are the best fiancé ever." Rubbing her hand over her stomach, she winks. "The girls are thrilled to hear that news."

"Glad to see you agree with me." Putting my hand over hers, I squeeze lightly. "That's my sole purpose in life—to make you and our girls happy."

"I have no doubt in your abilities, Mr. Anderson." Her smile is flirtatious, causing my heart to thump harder in my chest.

"Anything for you, soon-to-be Mrs. Anderson." Lifting her hand to my lips, I rain kisses over her hand, watching her face soften.

"Only seven weeks and three days away. Not that I'm counting or anything." She unlocks the car doors, sensing Savannah's patience to get away from Bryan. "Irelynn wants to meet with me tomorrow. She's stressing about wedding planning." Shaking her head, she sighs. "I keep trying to reassure her it will be fine, but she said she felt rushed planning a wedding in five months, so how in the hell are we going to get everything accomplished since ours is next month?" A wry grin is on Everleigh's face as she shrugs. "I

don't care if I marry you wearing a burlap sack beside the fireplace. I only care that I'm marrying you."

Grabbing her, I spin her away from the car, listening to her surprised squeal as I dip her slightly. "I don't care if you marry me dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. Hell, we could do it right here and now. I just want you to be my wife."

She's slightly breathless as grins up at me, but then her brows furrow. "I really want to wear a wedding dress, though."

Pulling her upright, I wink at her. "Whatever you want, goddess. You know that."

Her bright smile infiltrates me with warmth, feeling like my own personal ball of sunshine.

Glancing over my shoulder, she lowers her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Speaking of wedding attire, I found a dress I really like in a bridal shop about two hours from here. Even though I don't believe in silly traditions, Irelynn does. She will have a fit if she knows I'm asking you this." Her brown eyes glint with mischief, and I know what she's going to ask before she says it. "Can you come with me to see it?" She bites her lip anxiously. "We can sneak away and—"

"I'd be delighted to, goddess. How about tomorrow? That way, if you love it, we'll have them put a hold on it. Look around and pick out a few dresses to try on when your bridal party goes dress shopping with you. That way, Irelynn won't suspect a thing." I wink at her, taking in her glowing face, eyes dancing with excitement.

Happiness explodes inside my chest from her radiant expression. I'll do anything to see her exuberant on a daily basis.

"I love that idea." She shifts her weight from heel to heel, trying not to bounce too much and have Savannah wonder why she's so excited.

"Text me the bridal shop information while you are getting your pedicure. I'll call them and have them get it ready for you to try on tomorrow."

Hugging me tightly, she leans on her tiptoes, whispering in my ear, "You are the absolute best. Thank you, Will."

"You're welcome. Anything for you, goddess." My fingers tangle in her luscious chestnut locks, breathing in the floral scent of her shampoo. She tilts her head back slightly, brown eyes staring up at me, drowning me in her love. I bite my lip, then release it, my voice going husky and deep as I ask, "Have I told you today that I can't wait to marry you?"

Her arms wrap around my neck as she presses herself closer to me. "Only about ten times. But you can keep saying it until we say our vows."

Chuckling, I kiss her soft lips while sliding one hand from her hair, down her back to her ass. As I squeeze, she laughs against my lips, which turns into a needy gasp when I press my hard cock against her center.

Pulling back, I give her a devilish grin. "Save that thought for later. I really need to get to this meeting."

Her eyes widen. “Shit. Savannah and I need to go.” She hugs me before stepping back.

Grabbing her door handle, I open the driver’s side door, watching her as she slides behind the wheel. “Don’t forget to stop at the bakery.”

Savannah leans across the center console. “You bought us coffees and pastries, didn’t you?” The sour look on her face is gone, replaced by excitement.

“Of course.” I grin at her.

“Yes.” Savannah pumps her fist in the air as she sits back in her seat. “Everleigh, you are marrying the best guy ever.”

“Don’t I know it?” She blows me a kiss before starting her car.

Winking at her, I step back. “I’ll follow you. Drive safely, love.”

“You bet.”

Shutting her door, I hurry to my car, sliding behind the steering wheel. The angry tension radiating from Bryan, who sits in the passenger seat, fills the vehicle. Hiding a smile as I click my seatbelt into place, I casually say, “Savannah piss you off?”

He grunts. “When doesn’t she?”

I glance over at him, trying hard not to sigh in irritation. “What is it this time?”

Bryan shakes his head. “She has to find information first or find something I didn’t. She thinks she’s always right about everything. God forbid I call her out when she isn’t.” He turns his head, watching Everleigh back out of the garage.

I’m nearly positive he’s giving Savannah looks that could kill.

“Sounds like a lot of sexual tension to me.” Backing my car out of the garage, I press on the accelerator, following behind Everleigh. Despite not looking at him, I feel Bryan’s gaze boring into me.

“It’s not sexual tension,” he growls through clenched teeth. “She infuriates me.”

Laughter explodes from me as I shake my head. *Definitely sexual tension.* “Whatever, man.”

Bryan’s head swivels toward me, reminding me of Linda Blair in the Exorcist. The way he’s glaring at me, if he had a dagger in his hand, it would be in my chest already. “What the hell is so goddamn funny?” he hisses.

I’ve been friends with Bryan too damn long to be bothered by his attitude. We’ve sparred in the ring on more than one occasion. Both of us have punched the other in a fit of anger, although Bryan simmers before he boils over, while my temper shoots to blistering within seconds.

Still, we are best friends.

“You, man.” Stopping behind Everleigh’s car as she waits for the gates to open, I glance over at him. “You’re clearly in

denial about what is going on with you and Savannah.”

His eyes narrow at me, a grimace on his face. “I don’t know what the hell you think is going on between us, but you’re wrong if you think I’m interested in her.”

As Everleigh turns onto the road ahead, I shake my head, feeling the heat of his glare on my face. “Whatever you say, Bry. I don’t understand your denial. What’s the big deal? Just admit you like her.”

He utters a light curse, turning his head away, looking out the passenger window.

My gaze moves from the road to his face.

What is holding him back with her?

Six

Everleigh

RELAXING INTO THE MASSAGE chair, Elizabeth massages my foot and I let out a blissful smile. Lazily turning my head, I study Savannah's face as she sits in the chair beside me. Considering she's getting a back massage from the chair and a foot massage as part of the pedicure, she should look far more relaxed than she does. Instead, her shoulders are tense, and her brows are drawn in annoyance as she vacantly stares into space.

"Are you going to tell me why you are so pissed at Bryan, or do I have to guess?" Picking up my iced caramel mocha coffee, I take a sip.

Savannah's head snaps toward mine, a frown tugging her pink lips down. "He's an asshole. Infuriating as hell."

I'm glad I'm sipping my iced coffee so she can't see my smirk. *She's clearly attracted to the guy.*

Once I gain control of my features, I raise my brows. "Why, exactly, is he an asshole?"

“He thinks he’s always right. That he can find information faster than I can. When I find something first, he immediately searches to find something I missed. It’s annoying as fuck.” Her hands fist over the denim fabric of her capri pants as she grits her teeth. “William asked us to do research on that company, Sumer Tech Industries, he’s planning to buy. Specifically, Colin Fry. I said to Will, ‘I didn’t know Colin was on the track team with you at Stanford,’ Bryan immediately waves a hand and says, ‘That’s old news. Has no bearing on what he’s looking for.’ Duh, I know that. I was just making a comment to Will while I was digging. I shut my mouth and waited for Bryan to shoot his off with what he found. The information he spouted to Will wasn’t overly helpful. When Bryan was finished speaking, I asked Will if he knew Colin’s wife, Katrina, divorced him and he owes monthly child support and alimony. Then I said, ‘Judging from Colin’s massive amount of debt, he’s not going to be able to afford it.’ Bryan about had a stroke, as he barked, ‘Where did you find that?’ I smiled at the arrogant jackass and said, ‘The web.’ His face was as red as a tomato, and he clenched his jaw so hard I thought I heard him chip a tooth.”

Releasing a snort of laughter, I set my iced coffee in the cupholder beside me. “Sounds like sexual tension to me.”

Savannah scowls at me, her expression darkening. “You know better than that.” Her tone is clipped and low.

Regret instantly fills me. Reaching out my hand, I gently squeeze her arm. “I’m sorry, Savannah.” I keep my tone

soothing. “Look, sweetie, I know you’ve been through a helluva lot of trauma. But not all men are like—”

She holds up a hand, cutting me off. “Don’t say it! Don’t say either of their names or their relationship to me.” Blinking rapidly, she fights back her tears. “Just don’t talk about them or... what happened.”

Removing my hand from her, I study her pained expression, hating to see her so broken. I twist in my chair, leaning toward her. “You are *not* your past. You’ve shed that persona a long time ago.” I wait until she looks at me. “Savannah, you’re the strongest, bravest woman I know.”

Her face softens, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips. “That means a lot, coming from you.” Her breath hitches. “Thanks, Everleigh.”

I nod. “You’re welcome.” I shift, sitting back against my chair, letting it massage the tension away.

Savannah releases a long sigh, her head tilting against the back of the massage chair, staring at the ceiling. After a few beats, she says, “I know you’re right. I’m letting this hold me back. Letting them *win*. It pisses me off because it makes me feel like a victim. But I...” She swallows hard, turning her head to mine. “I’m not sure how to fix it. The last time I had sex, I shook the whole time. Memories of what happened...” Closing her eyes, she turns her head away. Inhaling deeply, she holds it a beat, then slowly exhales. After repeating this a couple of times, a wry grin spreads over her face. She opens her blue eyes, and they lock with mine. “Luckily, the guy was

dumb as hell and thought he was so good at sex that he was making me shake from pleasure.” She rolls her eyes. “Arrogant dumbass.”

A burst of laughter comes from me, and she joins in. I’m so grateful to see her smile again, and although I know what I’m about to say will cause it to fade, I say it anyway. “Have you ever gone to counseling? Irelynn volunteers at a center, and she could recommend someone.”

The smile immediately dies from her face. “I tried it twice. In high school and college. Both times, I had a male counselor, and they hit on me.” Disgust curls her lips before she shudders. “How unlucky am I that I manage to find not one, but two creepy counselors who tried to take advantage of my trauma? The high school counselor suggestively told me, ‘I’m available *anytime* you want to talk,’ before handing me a card with his personal cell phone number on the back. I thought I was imagining it until he leered at me, a creepy smile on his lips. The one in college was worse. He got up from his chair, trailed his fingers over my arm, then leaned over me and said, ‘I’m always here for you. For *anything* you need.’ After leering at me, he straightened, winked, and ran his hand over his junk in his trousers.”

“Oh my God. Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?” Gripping the arms of the pedicure chair so hard my knuckles turn white, I stare at her, fury filling every fiber of my being.

“I didn’t know you well enough when it happened in high school. I saw the counselor right before you went off on the

bullies harassing me at my locker. That was only the second time we'd spoken, and you know it takes me a while to open up to people." A light flush colors her cheeks as she shrugs. "And the college counselor happened while you were in California, the when you were in a car accident. No way was I going to burden you with that when you were injured." She grimaces, waving her hand. "Then I was distracted, trying to track down fucking Ainsley, and what happened with the counselor didn't seem important."

Shaking my head, I glare at her. "I would have gotten on a plane and handled it."

"Yeah, and that bitch probably would have killed you." Savannah waves her hands in frustration. "Besides, Will would never have allowed you to leave since you were injured and in danger."

Both ladies doing our pedicures still, their eyes wide as they look from Savannah to me.

"Long story." I wave my hand dismissively at Elizabeth, waiting until she and Kristen... Karen... whatever her name, resumes polishing our nails.

Changing the subject, I gesture to Savannah's foot. "I love that color."

She takes the hint, admiring the color, before her gaze moves to mine. "Blood red. How fitting."

Chuckling, I pick up my coffee, taking a sip.

"How are you feeling? Any morning sickness?"

Shaking my head, I balance my coffee cup on my thigh, my hand resting lightly on the lid. “Nausea every single morning. Emma told Will if I keep crackers beside the bed and eat one as soon as I wake, it helps. Saltine crackers are now a staple for me. Emma’s right, it has helped. And Will keeps the mini fridge stocked with tiny cans of ginger ale.” Smiling, I picture my adorable fiancé climbing out of bed as soon as I shove the first cracker in my mouth and padding over to the fridge. Opening the soda, he sits on the bed, handing it to me and gesturing toward the bathroom. I know damn well he’d carry me to the toilet if I was going to get sick. “It’s worked every time so far.” Holding up my crossed fingers, Savannah laughs.

“Let’s hope it continues working and the nausea goes away soon. I know how much you despise throwing up.” She shudders. “I understand. I hate it, too.”

“Ugh. It’s the worst.” My hand rubs over my flat stomach. “Hopefully they don’t make me sick.”

“They?” Savannah gives me a triumphant smile. “Giving into Will, huh?”

I wave a hand. “I’m sure he’s right about me having twin girls. He gets what he wants.”

Savannah giggles. “Yes, he does.” She gives me a pointed look, and I roll my eyes. “I don’t know why you didn’t tell him the entire story about Ainsley sooner. You know that man would do anything in the world to protect you. I swear, Everleigh, if someone told him he needed to go to hell and

beat information out of someone to save you, he'd find a way to do it.”

I nearly spit out my iced coffee as I laugh. “That’s a bit extreme.” I meet Elizabeth’s twinkling eyes before she ducks her head, trying not to laugh.

“It’s true, and you know it. Bryan made a comment about your flat stomach and asked me and Will how long until a pregnant woman begins to show. Will looked at him like he was going to rip his head off, then shove it up his ass. Bryan held up his hands and said, ‘It’s hard not to notice her stomach is still flat, Will. She was wearing a bikini all day yesterday by the pool with Savannah.’ That didn’t help matters. Will looked like a volcano about to explode. Bryan said, ‘Fuck, calm down. She’s like a sister to me.’ It took Will a couple of minutes to get himself under control and answer Bryan’s question.”

Throwing my head back, I laugh. Bryan is no threat to Will and treats me in the same manner as my brother, Darin.

But Will is a little bit... possessive.

“That’s hilarious,” I finally say, shaking my head. “Poor Bryan.”

Savannah takes a sip of her iced caramel coffee. “He handled it well. He’s used to Will’s temper, especially concerning you.”

Nodding, I say, “Will needs to calm down about Bryan, though. He doesn’t feel anything except friendship toward

me.” I give Savannah a pointed look, a devious smile curling my lips. “He has his sights set on a beautiful blonde staying in the cabin not far from his.”

Savannah’s face burns from embarrassment as she quickly ducks her head, trying to hide her blush with her long hair. As if that will work.

Changing the subject, I admire my red toenails, telling Elizabeth what a wonderful job she did, before I grab my cell phone beside me. Looking at the time, I say, “Feel like getting your hair done? We still have plenty of time before we meet Will and Bry for lunch.” When Savannah lifts her head and smiles, nodding at me, I enter the passcode into my phone, then text Will. I know he’ll want to pay for it. Despite him giving me a credit card and telling me there’s no limit to what I can spend, I still like to run expenses by him.

“Can we get an appointment?” Savannah starts to bring her drink to her mouth but stops when I meet her baby blue eyes. “Never mind. Dumb question.” She lifts her cup, taking a drink.

My phone beeps. “Will has already gotten us an appointment for ‘whatever we want to have done.’ I’m thinking cut and highlights?”

“Oh, I love that idea.”

My smile matches hers. As I hand Elizabeth my credit card, I high-five Savannah. “We are going to be gorgeous for our lunch dates.”

Savannah chokes on her coffee as I laugh. She has a crush on Bryan. Her reaction proved it.

Now I just have to figure out how to get her to admit it and convince her to flirt with Bryan. One bat of her long eyelashes and he'll be putty in her hands.



As soon as I exit my vehicle, a long, loud whistle pierces my ears. The smell of spice and woods engulfs me as Will's arms slip around my waist, pressing his chest against my back. My body responds instantly, sinking against him, my muscles relaxing.

"Hello, gorgeous." Will's warm breath flows over my ear, his voice low and seductive. My body instantly responds, heat coiling in my center from my ever-present desire for him. "You look fucking amazing."

Giggling, I cover his hands with mine, tilting my head so I can see him. "Hey there, handsome. Seems like you missed me." I grind my ass against his dick, his already hard cock thickening in his trousers.

"I *always* miss you when we are apart." His hands rub over my stomach. "Did you enjoy being pampered?"

"Absolutely. Thank you for treating us."

"Always, my love." He shoots a glance toward Savannah, and the expression on his face draws my attention to her.

I nearly laugh out loud when I see Savannah leaning against the passenger side of my car, her cheeks bright red, panicked eyes darting around, while Bryan stares at her as if he's in a trance. My best friend is gorgeous and her freshly cut and colored hair enhances her beauty.

I'm barely able to suppress my laugh when I meet Will's eyes again. His amused expression as his gaze drifts from Savannah to Bryan, then back to mine, is almost too much. "Savannah's face is a bit red, huh?" His grin is full of mischief as he looks at Bryan. "And his gaze hasn't moved from her since she stepped out of your vehicle."

This time, I laugh. "We had a nice time, but she got annoyed when I started questioning her about Bryan. She's attracted to the guy but in complete denial, resisting him at every turn. While we were getting pedicures, I asked her about him, and she said, 'He thinks he's always right. That he can find information faster than I can. When I find something first, he immediately searches to find something I missed. It's annoying as fuck.' That's code for she really likes him." Shaking my head, I sigh. "She's in complete denial."

He spins me around, clasping my hand in his. "You're going to meddle, aren't you?"

"It's not meddling. It's intervening in your best friend's life so she can have the happiness she deserves. Lord knows she's overdue." Although my voice is low, I shoot a glance at Savannah to ensure she didn't hear what I just said. When I glance up at Will, his brow furrows as he processes my words.

I quickly change the subject before he can ask me questions. “Are you trying to tell me you haven’t said anything to Bryan about her?”

The smile that spreads across his face is full of mischief. “I gave him shit about her. I think he wanted to stab me on the way to our meeting.” He tugs on my hand, guiding me toward the diner. Savannah glances at us, then pushes off Everleigh’s car, walking behind us.

Bryan holds the restaurant door open, gesturing for us to go inside. I hear Savannah mutter a nervous “Thank you,” from behind me, her voice cracking.

Yup, she definitely likes him.

Glancing up at Will as he escorts me to a table, my heart pounds as my gaze roams down his body. *Damn, this man is hot.*

Will is wearing black slacks, a white shirt open at the collar, and a black blazer. The dark colors contrast against his blond hair and pale skin. The way he carries himself gives off an air of intimidation as he moves through the diner, drawing attention as he passes. Nearly all the females look up as he passes, giving him admiring glances. I glare at them like I want to slit their throats, and they quickly look away.

When I meet Will’s eyes, he’s watching me, a smirk pulling up his lips. His head lowers, lips close to my ear. Warm breaths feather across my skin, leaving goosebumps in its wake, as his husky voice says, “You never have to worry, love. I only have eyes for you.”

His words cause my internal temperature to shoot up a few degrees. I know he's loyal to me. But I can't help being territorial when it comes to him. "I have no doubts, love. I just don't like them looking at you like you're on the menu. You're *mine*." I squeeze his hand slightly, a flirtatious smile on my lips.

"You're right, I am *yours*." He places a soft kiss on my cheek before gesturing for me to slide into the booth at a table in the back of the restaurant.

As I lower my body into the seat, I say, "How did your meeting go?"

"It went well. We will be formally signing the paperwork in a few days, but the deal is done." He slides in beside me, wrapping an arm around me and pulling me closer to him.

"That's fabulous news. Not surprising in the least. I knew you'd get it." His head turns to mine, and I can't resist him any longer. My lips press against his, the feeling of being home sweeping through my body and lighting up my nerves every time we kiss.

Slowly pulling away, I'm breathless as I stare into his mesmerizing ice-blue eyes. It's surreal that everything I've ever wanted is happening.

For the first time in my life, I don't have to worry about my enemy trying to kill us.

Nothing stands between us anymore, and it's pure bliss.

As the waitress sets glasses of water on the table for us, I grab mine and take a drink, my attention moving to Savannah over the rim. She's pressed against the wall, sitting as far away from Bryan as possible. I glance over at him and see him watching Savannah with furrowed brows. Hurt flares in his eyes as he locks his gaze with mine, then drops it to the table.

God. He thinks Savannah hates him.

Kicking her lightly beneath the table, she looks up at me with wide eyes. Shooting her a look, I look over at Bryan, who has picked up his menu and is intently staring at it. It's clear to me he's trying to disguise the hurt he's feeling by her treating him like he has a contagious disease.

She takes the hint and stops clinging to the wall. Her posture is still tense, but it's an improvement.

Will and Bryan start conversing about their meeting, so I grab my phone and shoot Savannah a quick text.

Me: Bryan won't bite you. He really seems like a nice guy.

When her phone beeps, she picks it up from the table. Reading it, she glances at me with raised brows before her fingers fly over her phone.

Savannah: Hopefully he doesn't. You can never be too careful.

Shaking my head, I stare at her text for a minute, debating what I should say back to her. I have to tread carefully so I don't scare her. The trauma she endured is still wrapped around her like a cloak, protecting her heart.

Me: Just relax and be cordial. There's nothing wrong with being friendly.

She reads the text, then looks up at me, a small smile pulling up her lips. The waitress returns to our table, distracting me from Savannah and Bryan. I place my order, earning a sly smile from Will. "What, love? I'm eating for three, or at least, that's what you keep telling me." Grabbing my water, I give him a big smile before I take a sip.

His hand moves to my thigh, squeezing gently. "It's about time you came around to my way of thinking. I'm just happy you're eating more."

I nearly choke on my water. "I've always eaten a lot, Will. Especially after those intense training sessions."

He leans closer, his fingers grasping my chin, a teasing smile on his full lips. "But you normally don't order this much food. Which you should, as you *are* eating for three." He kisses the tip of my nose. "Besides, I happen to love a woman with a healthy appetite." His mouth hovers close to mine, my body temperature rising a few degrees, desperate for him to close the distance. His low, masculine voice continues, "It's sexy as hell."

I'm captivated by the look in his eyes, as though he wants to devour every single inch of me. And not just my body, but my heart and soul.

I lean forward slightly, my lips against his. "Sexy, huh?"

He nods. "Uh huh. Very."

The deep timbre of his voice has me wishing I could drag him to the bathroom and drop to my knees, opening his trousers. My mouth seals over his, unable to resist him a second longer.

He pulls back slightly, the twinkle in his eyes telling me he knows exactly what I'm thinking. "Not now, love." His hand grazes over my upper thigh, causing tingles to cover the flesh beneath my shirt. "I was thinking of making a reservation at that Italian restaurant you like so much. Wanna go shopping for a new dress this afternoon? I'll treat Savannah to whatever she wants to buy as well."

Excitement fills me at the possibilities of an evening alone with my sexy fiancé. "That sounds amazing. I'm in."

He kisses me again as our waitress arrives. "Consider it done." He pulls away far too soon for my liking, but I can't help but smirk at the way the waitress's smile dims from disappointment.

That's right, bitch. He's mine. Move along.

Giving her a syrupy smile, my voice is a high-pitched falsetto as I thank her when she sets my food in front of me. She gives me a tight, fake smile in return. Just so there are no

lingering questions, my hand ducks beneath the table, dropping to Will's thigh, lightly grazing his dick. Her eyes drop, watching my hand, before she raises her head, locking her eyes with mine.

Will's head turns in my direction, raising his brows, but he says nothing. He sure as hell doesn't stop me as I continue lightly stroking his leg, repeatedly grazing his dick with my fingers.

It's ironic how possessive I am. I've never been like this with anyone else. Of course, the stakes were never this high.

It would completely destroy me to lose him. Even though I know he loves me and is loyal to me, there's an uneasy feeling that washes through me. As though there's trouble ahead.

Shaking it away, I focus on the present.

After our waitress places Savannah's plate of food in front of her, I meet her gaze, noting the laughter on her face at me staking my claim over Will in front of the waitress.

"Feel like a shopping trip this afternoon? I need to buy a dress." I say to Savannah as I move my hand away from Will's thigh, grabbing my fork.

Savannah shrugs. "Sure. I'm in. You're probably going to need new shoes, too." She looks over at Will, who simply smiles.

"Whatever my fiancée wants." He shoots me a wink.

Before I can answer, I'm distracted by our waitress. As she slides Bryan's plate of food in front of him, she gives him a

flirtatious smile. “Here you go, sugar. Does everything look okay?” She pushes her chest out, brushing a lock of hair over her shoulder.

He looks slightly startled, but he quickly rebounds, looking at his food. He gives her a smile. “It looks great. Thanks.”

Savannah’s shoulders tense and her spine stiffens as her attention locks on the waitress and Bryan. Her hand clutches her fork so tightly her knuckles turn white.

“Wonderful. If you need *anything*, let me know.” The waitress gives him a wink.

Savannah savagely stabs her fried potatoes like she wishes they were the waitress’s big green eyes.

Bryan doesn’t seem to be affected by her flirtatious nature, giving her a friendly smile. “Will do.” Turning his attention to his food, he picks up his fork and starts eating.

The waitress sighs and leaves the table. Savannah’s grip loosens on her fork. The relief on her face is obvious as she busies herself with her food.

Glancing at Will, I see the amused expression as he glances over at me, winking. It’s obvious he noticed Savannah’s behavior, as well as Bryan shrugging off the waitress’s flirtations.

Bryan turns toward Savannah, a shit-eating grin on his face. “How’s your potatoes?”

I’m glad I’m not drinking any water, or I probably would have spit it out or choked on it. Clearly, he noticed Savannah

stabbing her potatoes when the waitress was flirting with him.

A blush colors her cheeks as she turns her head to his with a smile. “Fine.”

“That’s good.” He grabs the pitcher of water setting on our table. “Would you like a refill?”

Surprise widens her eyes as she stares at him for a few beats, saying nothing.

Finally, she clears her throat. “Umm... sure.” As Bryan pours the water into her glass, she lets out a breath, as though she’s trying to regain her composure. “Thank you.”

His smile widens. “You’re welcome.” Turning his attention to me and Will, he offers to refill our waters.

As Bryan is busy refilling our glasses, I watch Savannah, who is still smiling.

Bryan impressed her.

Clearing her throat, Savannah says, “Can someone pass me the salt?”

Bryan reaches over, picks it up from the table, and hands it to her. She takes it with a smile, thanking him.

I don’t miss the way Bryan lights up when she’s polite to him.

Lifting my glass of water to help hide my grin, I lock eyes with Will. He shakes his head and mouths, “Don’t meddle.”

Saying nothing, I lift my glass slightly higher as though I’m toasting him. He rolls his eyes but grabs his glass. “To new

adventures.” I say, glancing at Savannah and Bryan, who have struck up a conversation about the food.

Will’s eyes drop to my stomach and then back to my face. Grabbing my left hand, he runs his finger over my diamond ring. “To new adventures.” His blue eyes sparkle with happiness as he clinks his water glass with mine.

Momentarily forgetting about Bryan and Savannah, I lose myself in the warm glow of love radiating from Will’s face.

“I love you, goddess.”

“I love you, Will.” Leaning forward, I press my lips against his, tasting steak and desire on his lips.

He slowly pulls back, his mouth so close to mine that his breath feathers across my skin. “I made dinner reservations for tonight.”

I raise my brows, surprise lighting up my face. “When did you...” Taking in his grin, I laugh. “Never mind. I assumed you were answering an email or reading a text. I should have known better.”

He laughs. “I’m friends with the restaurant owner. I text him and he reserves a table.”

“It’s going to take me a while to get used to the power of the Anderson name.”

He winks. “You’ll adjust. Probably faster than you think.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence. In any case, I can’t wait to spend the evening with you.”

He leans closer, his hand lightly rubbing over my thigh. “I’m always excited to spend time with you.” He slides his hand up a little higher, rubbing over my stomach. “And our girls.”

Giggling, I lean into him, his warmth enveloping me. “They already love spending time with you.” Rubbing my hand over his jawline, I say, “You are going to be an amazing father, Will.”

He freezes for a few seconds before a slow smile crosses his face. His eyes soften as he gazes into mine. “Thank you, Everleigh. That really means a lot.” His hand moves to my face, cupping it gently. “You are going to be one helluva mother. These girls are lucky that you’re going to be their mom.”

Tears prickle my lids. “Thank you.” My voice cracks slightly from the emotions swirling inside me. Will is well aware of my parenting fears because of my past. “If it wasn’t for you, I’d be freaking out, thinking I didn’t deserve them.” My hand covers my stomach.

“And if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t feel I deserved them, either. But here we are.” He covers my hand that rests on my stomach with his own. “Now we know better. We deserve them as much as they deserve us.”

I simply nod, overcome with emotion.

All our dreams are finally coming true, and nothing stands between us.

Seven

Everleigh

AS WE HEAD INSIDE the boutique, I duck my head to hide my smile at Savannah's buoyant mood. She's humming softly as she heads toward a rack of dresses.

I know her good mood has to do with Bryan being nice to her during lunch, but I'm afraid to say anything about it, for fear of how she'll react. As it is, my stomach coils, worried that at a moment's notice, she'll start thinking about her past and panic will settle in, making her tense and reserved again.

I'm enjoying her relaxed and carefree manner.

More importantly, it's good for her not to be coiled into knots all the time, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Heading towards the back where a bunch of dresses are draped over mannequins and hanging from the racks, my mind returns to lunch with Will, Bryan, and Savannah. Bryan and Savannah kept up a steady stream of conversation, ranging from food to music. But the best part was when Bryan mentioned he saw Metallica in concert. Savannah dropped her guard, animatedly describing how much she loves their music and would like to see them in concert.

Will nudged me, shaking his head, knowing I was seconds from doing a google search to see if I could get two tickets for Bryan and Savannah to attend a Metallica concert. For a minute, I thought Will was going to take my phone away so I couldn't meddle, as he calls it.

My mind snaps back to reality when I spot a silky black dress on a mannequin. I suck in a breath, a smile spreading across my face. Heading toward it, I'm mesmerized by the way the fabric drapes around the mannequin's skinny body. The dress is cut higher on one side, revealing a lot of leg.

If it looks that good on her...

A woman's voice beside me draws my attention. "That would look amazing on you. Would you like to try it on?"

Turning my head, a blonde woman is beside me, her sleek bob grazing her shoulders as she gives me a polite smile. "I'm Alicia. I'll be assisting you with anything you need today."

My phone buzzes in my hand. Glancing at it, I see Will's name, so I read it.

Will: Alicia will be assisting you. Whatever you want—dress, shoes, or anything else you and Savannah desire. And no, you don't need to text me. Just buy it.

What the fuck?

My gaze snaps up from my phone, moving over Alicia, who still primly stands in front of me, awaiting instruction. My

eyes peruse the store, but I don't see Will anywhere. "Excuse me, Alicia." Without waiting for her response, I move closer to the window, scanning the parking lot, but I don't see Will's car.

Lowering my gaze to my phone, my fingers fly over the screen as I respond to his message.

Me: Where are you?

I'm perplexed and surprisingly turned on. Will is the only man who can stalk me and it's not the slightest bit creepy to me.

My phone buzzes again.

Will: Wouldn't you like to know?

Oh, he's being coy. A wicked grin crosses my face. He wants to play games, huh?

Me: If you are anywhere around or in this store, I expect to see you in the fitting room, where I plan to fuck the hell outta you.

Seconds later, my phone beeps again.

Will: Fuck, that's hot. I'm not there, but I might ditch this meeting and take you up on that offer.

I knew I could figure out if he was here or not. Grinning, I spin on my heel, heading toward Alicia, chuckling as I text him back.

Me: You're looking at my tracker, huh? And you asked Alicia to help me find a dress. Cute. Since you're stalking me, you better have plans to give me lots of orgasms tonight.

Will: Are you threatening me with a good time? If so, I'm going to continually stalk you. Plus, I always give you lots of orgasms.

My smile is wide as I reach Alicia. "I apologize for walking away. I'd love to try this dress on."

Alicia smiles at me. "Of course." She's holding a hanger in her hand and as she lifts it higher, I see it's the dress the mannequin is wearing. "Follow me to the fitting rooms."

Biting my lip, I shake my head as I follow behind her. Passing Savannah, I see she has a few things in her arms, but she's still looking. I gesture toward the fitting rooms.

"I'll be there soon. I want to see that dress on you," she calls after me.

"Of course."

Alicia hangs the dress inside the fitting room, then turns to me. “Do you need any assistance?”

“Not yet, but I may with the zipper.”

She nods. “Of course. I’ll wait outside. Just let me know.”

When she steps out, my phone buzzes in my hand. Grinning, I read it.

Will: Take a picture. I want to see.

I chuckle. *Such a stalker.*

Me: I’d rather surprise you. You’ll just have to wait until tonight.

Setting my phone down, I quickly change out of my clothing, slipping the black dress on. The material is so soft against my skin and the slit exposes so much of my muscular thigh. It will drive Will insane from lust.

My gaze drops to my phone, and I grin as I see another text message. Picking it up, I read it.

Will: I don’t want a picture of the dress. I want a picture of you. Naked.

I can tell he’s irritated I didn’t comply with his demands. A small snort comes from my lips. *Of course he does.*

Me: I'm wearing the dress right now. You'll have to wait until I take it off.

Setting my phone down, I spin around, looking at the back of my dress in the mirror. My gaze lands on the scars. The dress is cut low in the back, revealing my past trauma. Frowning at my reflection, I release a frustrated sigh.

Fuck. I hate these things marring my skin. Even with the surgeries I've had, they're still ugly. Oh well. Nothing more I can do to get rid of them. Alicia will just have to be horrified when she zips up my dress.

Clearing my throat, I head to the dressing room door. "Okay, Alicia, I'm ready to be zipped up." Unlocking it, I turn the knob, pushing it open.

But Alicia isn't standing there.

My brows furrow and I take a step outside, pressing the unzipped dress against my chest. *Where is—*

A hand locks around my wrists, making me gasp as I'm pushed back through the dressing room door. A laugh escapes me as I meet his ice-blue eyes, fire burning in them.

He shuts and locks the door, cupping my face. "You're fucking gorgeous, goddess. And your scars are beautiful." His hands slide to my back, trailing up my skin and gliding over them.

My arms wrap around him, a smile pulling up my lips. “Okay, stalker. Were you inside the store the entire time?”

He grins, shaking his head. “No. But I know you, Everleigh. I knew that whatever dress you try on, you’d focus on your scars.” Leaning down, he places a soft kiss on my shoulder, before continuing. “Make no mistake, I despise the bitch who marked your skin like this. I’m glad she’s no longer breathing. But your scars are proof of your incredible strength. No other woman could endure what you went through and still have such a beautiful heart.” His hands roam over each one of my scars, leaving goosebumps everywhere he touches. “You have so much light inside of you. It’s all that shines from you since you destroyed your enemy. Yes, there’s still darkness inside, just like mine. But your light overpowers it.”

One hand trails up my back and then slides to my face, caressing my cheek. “Your beauty is far more than skin deep, my love. You are a damned phoenix. Powerful, beautiful, and absolutely majestic.” He wipes at a tear that falls from my eye. “You are a divine goddess.”

“Will.” My voice shakes, my breath stuttering. This man has said a lot of incredibly beautiful things to me, but this is one of the best. My shaky hand reaches up, caressing his jaw, touched by his words and the raging sincerity in his piercing blue eyes. “Thank you.”

“I mean every single word.” He grabs my hand that is on his jaw. “It comes from here.” Placing my hand over his heart, I nod, overwhelmed by the emotions circulating inside me.

I'm more affected by him coming here when he should be in a meeting.

There's no one else in this world who could make me feel better about the ugly scars that blemish my skin.

Throwing myself against him, his hands grip the globes of my ass as his mouth seals over mine. He takes a few steps and I feel the dressing room wall against the exposed skin on my back.

Tearing his mouth from mine, he gives me a salacious grin. "I'm going to fuck the hell outta you, goddess. Then I need to leave to head to my meeting."

I can't help but laugh. "Aren't you going to be late?"

"Fuck them. You're more important." His mouth seals over mine and I forget everything except the way he makes me *feel*.



As Savannah and I head out of the boutique, she shakes her head. "You two are insatiable."

I can't help the wide smile on my lips. "I know. I can't seem to help myself. But there was another purpose for his visit."

"Aside from giving you an orgasm... or three?"

Laughing, I swat her arm lightly. "Yes, aside from that."

She laughs, then points, drawing my attention. "I need a new pair of sunglasses. Can we head to that boutique next?"

“Of course. Let’s put our purchases in my car, then walk there. I need some exercise after all the food I’ve eaten today.”

“Will didn’t give you enough exercise in the fitting room?” Her eyes sparkle with laughter as she struggles to keep a straight face.

“Oh, he did. But since the weather isn’t too bad today, I figured we could walk.”

“Sure. I’m just giving you shit.” She pauses by the trunk of my car as I open it. “You were saying there was another purpose for his visit.”

Placing my bags inside, a smile pulls up my lips. “It’s really sweet. He knew I was going to focus the scars on my back when I tried on the dress.” Turning my head to hers, my grin is wicked. “Needless to say, he made me forget about them.”

Savannah pauses for a moment before setting her packages beside mine in the trunk. “That’s really sweet of him. Extremely intuitive.” When she’s finished and has stepped back, I close the trunk, then walk around my car to the back door, opening it. Placing my dress on the hanger, draping it across the back seat, I straighten, stepping back and shutting the door, walking over to her.

A wistful expression crosses her face as she looks away. “You’re lucky to have found someone who loves you so much.” Her gaze turns to mine, a tinge of envy in her eyes. “He pays so much attention to you because you’re his world.”

Moisture coats my eyes. “Dammit, Savannah. I’m getting emotional *and* I’m pregnant. Now I’m going to cry again.”

She wraps her arms around me, embracing me. “Will and Bryan left for their meeting so he’s unable to fuck you into oblivion again. You’ll have to make do with me.”

I burst out laughing. “Oh my God, Savannah. That’s not the only thing that makes me happy.”

She laughs, pulling back. “No, *he* makes you happy. And even though he left, if you called or texted, he’d likely turn around and race back here.” Her smile is wistful. “He’s always there for you.”

My face softens. “Savannah, you will find someone who will be there for you, too. You just have to open yourself to it.” Seeing her expression darkening, I change the subject, and wrap my arm around her. “How about we go check out sunglasses? I need a new pair, too. Darin broke mine.”

Savannah laughs. “Make Darin reimburse you for whatever sunglasses you buy.” We fall into step together, heading toward the sidewalk that leads to the store. She glances up at me. “Why did Darin break your sunglasses?”

“Oh, it was an accident. I said his football team sucked. You know that crazy nut. He threw me over his shoulder and jumped into the pool.” A snort of laughter escapes me. “Will told me Darin resembled that Gremlin, Stripe, the way he jumped into the pool with me.”

Savannah laughs. “He’s such a goofball. I told Darin his taste in coffee sucks and he tickled me until I fell onto the floor.” She makes a face. “Who the hell drinks plain black coffee? No cream or sugar?”

“Serial killers,” I jokingly say. “That’s so gross. It takes disgusting.” My thoughts change as a lightbulb goes off inside my head. “But that explains it.”

“Explains what?” Savannah grabs the door handle, pulling it open and gesturing for me to head inside.

“When Darin was tickling you, Bryan looked pissed, and I thought it was because of something you and Darin were talking about. But now I know it’s because Bryan was jealous.”

Savannah nearly walks into a display of sunglasses, her stunned gaze locked on mine. I put my arm out, stopping her. “He was pissed and... jealous?” Her lips twitch as she tries to fight the smile taking shape on her lips.

“Yup. His arms were crossed, and he was glowering at the two of you.” I shrug, heading towards a display of sunglasses. “Now it makes sense why Bryan was mad. Even though Darin is with Vanessa...” I grab a pair of sunglasses and put them on. “Well, sort of. He’s in love with her, even though they seem to be going through a rough patch.” Leaning forward, I examine the sunglasses in the small mirror, deciding I don’t like them on me. Pulling them off, I put them back, then continue browsing. “But I’ve seen Bryan tense any time Darin touches you. Even though I know Darin doesn’t mean anything by it.”

Savannah turns to me, a pair of sunglasses covering her eyes. Even they can't dim the excitement on her face. "Bryan gets tense when Darin touches me?"

"Hell yes, girl. I can't believe you haven't noticed."

She pulls the sunglasses off, putting them back before grabbing another pair. "We spend so much time arguing and he always seems annoyed or pissed at me. I just figured that's how he always looks at me." She turns her head a couple of times, examining her reflection in the mirror in front of us. "What do you think?"

"I think you are blind to what Bryan is feeling for you. Oh, and I like those sunglasses on you."

She shakes her head. "I think you're reading too much into things. Sure, he may have been nice to me at the diner, but it won't last. We'll be back to fighting in no time." She pulls the sunglasses from her face. "But thanks. I like this pair a lot. I'm buying them."

Rolling my eyes, I sigh. "No, Will is buying our sunglasses, or I'll never live it down. As for Bryan, he's fighting with you because he's attracted to you." I give her a wicked grin. "The two of you would have insanely hot hate sex if you'd give into the urge the next time you're arguing with him."

Her face is scarlet as she takes a few steps back. "Um, no."

I chuckle. "Relax, girl. I'm teasing you. Although I'm serious about the sex part. Hate sex is always hot." I wink,

moving to another rack, frowning as I take in the sunglasses in front of me.

Ew, no. These look like something a grandma would wear. Well, maybe not Grandma Lucinda.

Spotting a bench, Savannah heads toward it. “I’m gonna sit down. When you find something you like, show me.”

I nod, moving toward another rack. “Will do.”

After searching through two more racks, I find two pairs I like. Heading toward Savannah, I hold them up. “I can’t decide which looks better.” Sliding one pair on my face, I gesture to them. “Do you like these?”

Savannah’s eyes are as wide as saucers as she stares at me.

Puzzled, I raise my brows. “I thought I looked nice in these.” My hands move to my hips, tilting my head to examine her. But she doesn’t say a word.

As I slip the sunglasses from my face, I realize she’s extremely pale. “Savannah. Are you okay?”

She blinks and I realize she’s looking over my shoulder. Whirling around, I catch a glimpse of a man walking out the door.

Turning back to her, I watch as her eyes remain glued to the man, her head tracking his movements as he walks across the parking lot.

Stepping closer, I lean down, putting a hand on her arm. “What’s wrong, Savannah? Who is that?”

Finally, she seems to snap out of her daze. Her head turns, her eyes slowly climbing up to my face. Her hand moves to her shirt, fisting the fabric over her heart.

“Savannah?” Concern drips from my voice as I watch her. She’s clearly distraught, although she hasn’t told me why.

Her breathing is ragged as she says, “I think...” Closing her eyes, she swallows hard before opening them, her panicked gaze locking on mine. “I think that was my stepfather.” Her voice quivers as her gaze returns to the window.

Motherfucker.

I spin around, my hands clenching into fists beside me, poised for a fight.

But he’s no longer there.

Eight

William

BRYAN AND I HEAD toward the entrance of the modernized, smoky glass building. My gaze rakes over it appraisingly. It's a beautiful building from the outside and I'm thrilled it's only twenty minutes from home.

I just hope the inside is as nice. If it is, I'm buying it immediately.

Glancing over at Bryan, I see him studying the building, but his expression lacks his normal focus. I'm fairly certain his thoughts haven't left Savannah.

"What do you think?" Grabbing the door handle, I open it, gesturing for him to go ahead of me.

He's quiet for a few minutes, then looks around distractedly. "Looks nice so far."

Stepping inside the building, I shove my hands inside my pockets, falling in step with him. "I meant about Savannah."

He stops walking, sucking in a breath, completely caught off guard by my statement.

Pulling one hand from my pocket, I pat his shoulder. “Don’t fucking deny that you like her. You just gave yourself away.” I continue heading through the lobby to the elevator.

It might be an asshole thing to do, but he needs to get his head out of his ass. I’ve never seen him act like this toward any other woman.

Besides, I owe him. He was on my shit about Everleigh when I wouldn’t admit, even to myself, that I loved her.

I still remember his words.

“What are you so afraid of? You’re in love with her. Just man up and fucking admit it.”

I know my face reflects the fear that coils inside. I feel like an animal that’s been preyed on by the hunter, cornered with no way out.

I’m vulnerable, and I despise it.

I’d never been in love before and the thought that I am terrifies me. Being in love gives someone the power to destroy me. I’d given up that weakness years ago, shedding it like a snake sheds its skin.

Nothing had penetrated the shell of armor that surrounds me. I won’t allow anyone close enough.

I wasn’t sure I even had a heart anymore.

Until my best friend spoke those words to me, looking at me like I’m a pussy, and he can’t understand why I won’t just admit I’m in love with Everleigh.

He makes it sound so simple.

It was anything but.

She now holds all the power, whether she knows it or not.

For the first time since I was ten years old and watched my mother die at my feet, I realized my heart still works, and it's screaming at me, telling me that I am irrevocably in love with Everleigh.

And I have no idea what the hell to do about it.

Pressing the button, I wait for the elevator doors to open, knowing I've just shocked the hell out of my best friend. Some people are worth the risk though. If he hadn't said those words to me, I would have remained a coward and not taken a chance with Everleigh.

The risk was more than worth the reward.

Bryan hurries after me, stopping beside me. He turns to me, frustration on his face as he rubs the back of his neck. "It doesn't matter what I feel for Savannah. She's not into me, Will. You saw how she was sitting, her side plastered against the wall. She looked ready to climb out the window and flee." Heaving out a sigh, his muscles are tense and rigid beneath his shirt. His jacket is slung over one arm, which is unlike him. Bryan is a creature of habit. He never steps into a building without putting his jacket on.

That's how I know Savannah is causing him to come undone.

As the elevator doors open, we step inside. Pressing the button for the top floor, I turn to him, assessing his expression. His face is full of pain and... hopelessness. It tugs at my heart, remembering how badly I hurt when Everleigh vanished. I know it's not the same, but still, I feel bad for my friend. He's got it pretty bad for her, judging by his sad, puppy-dog eyes.

"I don't know the story, but Everleigh indicated Savannah has experienced trauma. Despite the fact that she's Everleigh's best friend, I don't know Savannah that well. When Everleigh lived with me in California, Savannah was still on the east coast, so I only met her once when she flew to California after Everleigh's accident to ensure she was okay. Savannah has always been very skittish toward me. From what Everleigh has said, Savannah is like that toward all men." Giving him a sympathetic look, I say, "Trauma impacts people differently. While I don't know exactly what happened to her, I did notice she relaxed around you when you talked with her about food and music. She was very animated." I watch him slip his jacket over his shoulders, deep in thought. "My advice is to keep being friendly and polite to her. Stop challenging her so much when the two of you are doing research. Try being respectful when she finds information and see what happens."

He slowly raises his head, his smile hopeful. "That's some pretty mature advice, Will. It's amazing to see how much growth you've experienced, particularly from when you abducted Irelynn until now."

I grimace, swallowing the lump in my throat as shame fills me. Staring at the floor, I cross my arms over my chest.

“Will, I don’t mean to upset you. That was supposed to be a compliment. You have grown so much in a short time. Not only did you reconcile your past with Irelynn, but you’re friends with her and Max, as well as Darin and Vanessa. Since Everleigh has returned...” My gaze lifts, meeting his. “You’ve really gotten your shit together. I’ve never seen you so happy and content. Now you’re about to be a married man, and expecting a baby...” He trails off, shaking his head. “I remember the William persona from high school that you cloaked yourself in to avoid being hurt. You were a cold, intimidating bastard.” Leaning over, he lightly punches me on the arm. “But now... Well, what can I say except you will be one helluva husband and father.”

His words make my heart squeeze inside my chest, gratitude filling me. “You’re wrong about one thing. We’re expecting two babies.” I grin, then swallow hard as I process the rest of his words. “That means more than I can ever say.” Heaving out a breath, I rein in my emotion before continuing. “Thanks, man.”

Bryan chuckles, lifting his hands in the air. “I stand corrected. You’re having twins.” The elevator doors open and we step inside. He claps my shoulder, a big smile lighting up his face. “You’re welcome. I’m glad to see you so happy. You’ve been through hell and back. But now, good things have finally come into your life and most importantly, are here to stay.” He squeezes my shoulder. “No one deserves this more than you.”

I rub the back of my neck, thoughtful. “Trauma can really make you grow if you learn the lessons from it. More importantly, the right woman walked into my life and made me realize what’s important. I’ve never had to pretend to be anything other than who I really am with Everleigh. It was a freedom I’d never experienced before. Before I knew what happened, I was head over heels in love with her.” Stepping back, I shove my hands in my pockets, leaning against the elevator wall. “She’s my entire world.”

Bryan grins. “I know. And you couldn’t have fallen in love with a more perfect woman for you.” Respect fills his eyes. “She is badass. I pity anyone dumb enough to mess with your kids.”

I chuckle. “Even I’m no match for mama bear. Just don’t tell Everleigh that. I like her to think I’m in control.” I wink at him.

Bryan laughs. “I think Everleigh knows she’s in control. She just allows you to live under your delusions.”

I lightly punch him on the shoulder, laughing. “What can I say? She knows me well.”

“She certainly does.” Bryan’s smile turns wistful. “You two are really lucky. I hope to find a love like the two of you have. Someday.” He gives me a quick grin that doesn’t reach his eyes.

As the elevator stops, I say, “I doubt Everleigh will let up about you and Savannah. I tease her about meddling, but she really wants the two of you together. She’s bound to play

matchmaker.” The doors open and I step out, waiting for him. “I’m taking her to dinner tonight. Let me see if I can find out anything helpful. I’ll let you know. In the meantime, take my advice. When you were nice to Savannah, the façade she wraps herself in started to crumble and I saw a genuine smile on her face.”

Bryan’s face brightens. “For once, we weren’t arguing, and she wasn’t pissed and swearing at me before stomping off.”

I glance at him as we walk down the hallway, heading to meet my real estate agent. “Sometimes that can lead to really hot hate sex. But you can’t antagonize her all the time or you’ll never make progress.” Clapping his shoulder, I give him a devilish grin. “You can’t ever tell anyone I told you this, but Everleigh said that Savannah thinks you’re really hot. Stop aggravating the lady and show her you’re a nice guy.”

He gives me a look, raising his brows. “She thinks I’m hot?”

I give him a look, shaking my head and slugging him on the shoulder lightly. “You know you’re hot, asshole.” Rolling my eyes, I say, “Yes, Savannah thinks you’re hot.” The smile that lights up his face makes him look like a kid on Christmas day, surrounded by presents and holiday magic. I hold up a hand. “But, if she’s been hurt before, she will have her defenses up. It will be even worse if she’s traumatized. The only way to scale the walls she’s built around her is to prove yourself. Prove that you are real.” Turning down the hallway, I say,

“Stop being an ass and arguing with her. Change tactics by being nice and listening to her. Give her what she needs.”

He chuckles. “Is that how you got Everleigh?”

My smile is wide as I say, “You’re damn right. I listen to that woman and give her whatever the hell she wants.”

We laugh, the mood lighter.

“Thanks, Will. I appreciate the advice.”

“Anytime, Bry.”

As we see my real estate agent ahead, our professional masks slip back into place.

“The usual routine?” Bryan says, his gaze on my agent.

“Hell yes. Never let them think they have the sale.”



The scent of jasmine and amber overwhelms me as I step through our bedroom door, the sound of Beyonce’s voice reverberating around the room. The door to the walk-in closet is open, my goddess’s beautiful voice carries through the room as she sings along to “Cuff It.”

I head in that direction, leaning against the door frame, salivating as I watch her swiveling her hips while she slips the dress on. Pulling it over her hips, she smooths the material over her body, staring into the giant mirror. She fumbles with

the zipper in the back but gives up. When the chorus plays, she gives up on the dress altogether and loses herself in the dance.

I'm mesmerized by the way she moves and impressed she knows that dance already. She and Savannah saw a dance challenge to this song and talked about it before I left earlier. Obviously, Everleigh learned it already and has added her own personal touch to it.

Goddamn is she sexy as fuck.

She swivels her hips and turns, facing me, her face contorted with embarrassment as she squeals, "Will! I had no idea you were there!"

Pushing off the wall, I give her a smug grin. "Don't stop on my account. You look decadent as fuck, especially with your dress open." Reaching her, I gesture to the dress that exposes her lacy red bra. I saw the matching thong before she got the dress over her hips. "I highly approve of this attire." The black dress hits mid-thigh and there's a slit up the left side, showing a hell of a lot of leg. She's wearing black fishnet stockings with rhinestones that shimmer beneath the bright fluorescent lighting of the large walk-in closet.

A blush stains her cheeks. "God, I'm so embarrassed. I didn't know you were there." She ducks her head against my chest, her cheek resting over my heart.

One hand goes beneath her chin, tilting it up so I can stare at her gorgeous face. "Goddess, you shouldn't be embarrassed. That was hot as hell. And just like the song lyrics, you make me see stars."

She laughs, shaking her head, her chestnut hair hanging in large curls that frame her face. Her magnetic brown eyes are enhanced by the subtle makeup she wears, and they shimmer with happiness. “You’re too kind. Now you know what Savannah and I did while you were looking at that building—learning the ‘Cuff It’ dance.” She lifts one shoulder. “What can I say? My life is so hard.”

I throw my head back, laughing. “You’ve endured more hardship than any one woman should have to endure. I’m glad learning a new dance is the extent of the difficulties you face right now.” Leaning down, I nuzzle her neck, making her giggle and squirm.

Thank God she’s happy again.

When I saw her looking at the scars on her back in that dressing room, it fucking gutted me. The rawness of her pain reflected in the mirror, a memory permanently etched onto her body, reminding her of the trauma that left scars on her body, nearly destroyed me.

Yet it hardly compares to the scars within.

Pulling back, I cup her face in my hands. “Have I told you, goddess...” My hands slide down her body. “This dress...” My hands continue lower, trailing over the sides of her thighs. “Fishnet stockings.” A low growl escapes me, causing her breathing to accelerate. “And the lingerie beneath it.” My lips move to her neck, nipping gently. She lets out a groan that immediately has my dick rock hard. I grip the hem of her dress, fully prepared to remove it.

“Will.” She giggles, pushing against me. “Don’t we have reservations?”

“We do,” I say against the skin of her neck. “Fuck those reservations. They’ll wait. I need to be inside you before we leave.” My tongue runs over her warm flesh, feeling her pulse pound beneath it. Nicking her with my teeth, I soothe over it, kissing and licking gently. She moans, tilting her head, giving me more access.

My hands trail over her ass, squeezing her round, firm cheeks before lifting her. She wraps her legs around my waist as I kiss my way from her neck to her lips. My voice is full of desperation, even to my own ears, as I gruffly say between kisses, “I need you. Right now.”

“Will.” My name comes out as a whisper, tinged with her hunger and desire, curling around me like a heated blanket, igniting my body into an inferno of lust. “Take me.” Her voice is ragged, barely getting the words out before I capture her mouth with mine again, drinking in the taste of her.

Placing her gently in the center of the bed, I fall on top of her, balancing my weight on my elbows. I stare into her striking eyes, breathing her in until she completely consumes me, burning like a raging inferno beneath my skin.

Although we’ve experienced more trauma than two people should ever have to face, leaving as many scars within as we possess on our bodies, when we come together like this, we are molten lava that will destroy anything that tries to come between us.

I slowly lower my head to hers, our breathing accelerating the closer I get. When I finally press my lips against hers, searing heat burns within my veins. As much as I want to devour her, my desire to cherish her outweighs it. I lazily explore her mouth, leisurely moving my lips against hers, as though we have all the time in the world.

Slowly pulling back, I study her long lashes resting against her porcelain cheek before her eyes slowly open. The golden flecks in her brown eyes mesmerize me, matching the lighter streaks in her hair as it flows around her on the bed. Her skin is radiant, the subtle makeup she's wearing only enhances her beauty.

She's so fucking gorgeous that it's almost as though she isn't real.

When her hand lifts, her fingers stroking my jawline, electricity courses through me from her touch.

Her voice is a breathy whisper as she says, "I love you so damn much, Will."

My lips tip up in a lazy smile as the back of my hand grazes her cheek, tracing over her soft skin. "I love you so fucking much, goddess. You're my entire world." My mouth seals over hers, drowning in her.

Slowly releasing her mouth, I rain kisses over her throat, my hands pulling her dress away from her breasts, baring them to me. My head lowers, my lips sealing over one of her taut buds, sucking the nipple into my mouth, a raspy moan escaping her lips.

Shifting my weight slightly, my hand lowers to the hem of her dress, gliding it up her legs. She arches her hips up and I bunch it around her waist.

Releasing her breast, my gaze travels over the fishnet stockings, the rhinestones glittering beneath the lights. “As sexy as they are, I really wanna rip those motherfuckers off you.”

She leans up on her elbows, a salacious smile on her face. “I figured you would. I bought a couple—”

My hands yank on them, ripping them apart before she can even finish. She lets out a surprised gasp, then giggles, raising her hips as I pull the tattered stockings down her legs. Removing one heeled shoe, then the other, I pull them over her feet, then toss them onto the floor.

Before she can react, I’m between her legs, pushing her underwear aside as I seal my mouth over her pussy. Her laughter dies on her lips the second my tongue touches her wet folds, sliding through them.

“Fuck, Will,” Her hands grip the ends of my hair, tugging my face against her soaked center, her hips grinding against my mouth.

Goddamn, I love when she does that.

She could smother me and I’d die a happy man between her thighs.

Pulling back slightly, my voice is low and raspy as I say, “Fucking hell, goddess. You taste amazing.” Moving my

thumb to her clit, I teasingly circle it, her head falling back. “I want you to take control and fuck my face the way you like, sweetheart.”

She moans, her hands tightening in my hair. “Please, Will. I need your mouth on me.”

My mouth descends on her, my tongue moving through her drenched folds as my thumb continues circling her clit. She moves her hips up and down, then in circles, unintelligible noises leaving her lips as she arches her back, her hard nipples pointed toward the ceiling. She rolls her hips slowly, reminding me of a belly dancer, controlling the pace as my mouth and hands pleasure her.

Harsh moans fall from her lips as she speeds up and I match her movements with my hands and tongue.

“Goddamn, Will,” she pants, her hips rolling faster, her hands fisting in my hair, driving my face into her.

I become lost in pleasuring her, changing how I move my tongue, sliding it around her walls in a circle, then up and down. I change the pressure on her clit, moving faster, then slower, listening to the way her breathing hitches, feeling the way her hands press me tighter when I go slower, her hips speeding up. Her hold loosens when my tongue and thumb move faster, her hands going slack against the strands of my hair, until I slow the pace again, teasing her maddeningly, causing her to fist my hair, shoving my face against her.

She clenches like a vise around me, her legs beginning to shake. “Will, I—”

That's all she gets out as my tongue licks furiously through her wet folds, my thumb circling her clit faster, throwing her over the edge. As she comes on my tongue, I drink her in, staying with her through every aftershock of her orgasm until she's finished.

"Mmm... Fuck, baby," I mutter against her, feeling her convulsions against me as the vibrations of my voice swirl with her orgasm.

She arches into me. "Fuck, sweetie," she rasps, all her energy drained from the orgasm.

Moving my thumb, I rain gentle kisses over her clit, my eyes taking in the way her arm is thrown over her forehead, her chest heaving as she tries to catch her breath.

Climbing up her body, I unbutton and unzip my pants, my mouth latching onto her nipple. Her hands gently wrap around my neck, small whimpers of pleasure coming from her lips.

As I shift to her other breast, lavishing it with attention, she reaches her hand between us, rubbing my hard cock through my boxers. I moan against her skin, her hand stroking me the way I like.

"Baby," she whispers, her fingers moving to the waistband of my boxers, her other hand joining it. She releases my cock from the clothes restraining me, her hand wrapping around the base of my shaft, then stroking me to the tip. Pleasure shoots through me as she again slides her hand to the base, then back to the tip.

Releasing her breast with a pop, I mutter, “Fuck, baby. I love the way you stroke my cock.” My head falls against her chest as she continues. After a few more strokes, she guides the head of my cock to her entrance, dragging it through her soaked folds, a loud moan coming from her lips when she nudges her clit.

Raising my head, I lock my gaze on hers, pleasure tingling through my spine. “I need to be inside you, goddess. Right fucking now,” I say through gritted teeth, impatient as hell to feel her enveloping me in her tight, warm pussy.

My words cause her to whimper as she traces another path through her folds, covering me in her wetness. Glancing down, I can see my cock shining with her arousal.

“Look how wet you’ve made my dick, goddess.” Biting my lip, I raise my eyes to hers, watching the lust dance through her earthy orbs.

“I need you...” She arches against me, her thighs spreading wider as she pushes my cock inside her, inch by inch, her greedy pussy gripping me. She tries pulling me inside her, but I resist, bracing myself on my forearms.

She teased me. Now it's time I tease her back.

As much as I’d love to shove myself inside her until I can’t go any further, the delicious torture I’m inflicting on both of us has every nerve ending firing as she tightens around me, her arms and legs clinging to me.

Our gazes are locked together as I continue slowly sinking inside her, losing myself in the sensual bliss that courses down my spine.

“Fuck, Will,” she gasps, lightning dancing in her eyes.

“I know, baby.” My lips press against hers. Her nails dig into my back, clutching me against her as I bury myself inside her until I bottom out.

Slowly pulling out of her, my voice is low and commanding. “Watch me sink inside you.”

Biting her lip, Everleigh locks her gaze on the sight of our bodies joining together as I slowly ease inside her again. She rocks her hips up, and I close my eyes, relishing in the feel of her tightness surrounding me.

Fuck. This woman completely unravels me.

I slowly pull back, nearly all the way out of her, my voice heavy with lust. “You’re so damn wet.” With a powerful thrust, I bury myself inside her, my mouth sealing over hers, swallowing her loud moan. As she opens for me and our tongues tangle, a deep growl of approval rumbles from my chest as I slowly slide nearly all the way out, then thrust hard inside her.

My hunger for her consumes me as my movements become desperate and frenzied, a powerful need overcoming me. Driving inside her body, my strokes are full of desperation as I pull my lips away, my sweaty forehead resting against hers.

She locks her arms behind my neck, her legs sliding higher up my back as I thrust in and out of her tight pussy.

I slow my movements, and she unclasps her hands, digging her nails into my shoulders, but they slide off my sweaty skin.

Pulling back, I grab her legs, throwing them over my shoulders. She moans as my cock slides deeper inside her with the changed angle.

“You better hold on tight, momma.” I wink at her before pounding into her soaked pussy, her moans turning to screams as she tightens, clenching around me. I keep railing her, driving my cock into her as the sounds of her wetness combine with her moans, filling the room and overpowering the music that continues to play.

My goddess likes it when I sensually make love to her, but there are plenty of times, like right now, when I fuck her like a whore, and she relishes it.

Gritting my teeth, I hold back as her first orgasm coats me with more of her wetness.

I slow my pace slightly as she trembles around me, her nails digging at my skin. “Fuck, Will. You’ve turned me into an addict.”

I grin. “Good. I’ve accomplished what I set out to do.” Turning my head, I press a kiss on the inside of her ankle, my strokes smooth and controlled.

As I meet her eyes, lust rolls through every part of me, demanding I take every piece of her, latching onto her soul

with mine until neither of us can tell where she ends, and I begin.

My thrusts are wild and frantic, as I give myself over to it, no longer able to distinguish which parts belong to her and which belong to me.

I'm not making love to her, nor am I fucking her. I'm losing a part of my soul inside her, never to get it back.

I grunt as I move through her wetness, my thrusts unrestrained, sweat dripping from my skin and onto her. My balls tighten against my body, and I feel her shudder around me. Barely hanging on, a shiver wracks me before my entire body goes taut, and I bury myself deep inside her, filling her with my release, my body shuddering in her arms.

"Fuck," I mutter, my breaths heaving from my lungs as I slump against her, my face buried in her neck.

"Holy fuck," she gasps, her words punctuated by her heavy breathing.

Holding her in my arms, waiting for our pulse and heart rates to slow and our breathing to return to normal, a rush of euphoria fills me.

Raising my head, I push the hair back from her face, drowning in her love. "You..." I press my lips against her forehead. "Are what I live for. Every single day."

She blinks, tears glistening in her eyes. "I live for you..." She reaches a hand up, caressing my jawline. "Always."

Catching her hand with my own, I turn her palm against my lips, kissing it. Sighing, I slowly pull out of her.

“I guess I should take you to dinner, huh?” A teasing grin is on my face as she laughs.

Sliding a hand between us, she rubs her belly. “The babies are getting hungry, as is their momma.”

Moving off her, I grab her hands, pulling her to a sitting position. “We can’t have that. Let’s get ready so that I can fill all three of your bellies with pasta.”

Her stomach growls in response, making us both laugh. “Let’s see how quickly I can repair the damage. I’m sure I look dreadful.”

Standing, I pull her to her feet and against my chest. “Never, love. You are always the most beautiful woman in the world to me.” Her head tilts, gazing up at me, her skin ethereal. I could hold her like this forever, but I really need to feed the four of us.

Giving her a mischievous grin, I say, “Personally, I love the freshly fucked look on you. I say you go just like that.”

A throaty laugh comes from her as she wrinkles her nose. “No way. Only you get to see me like this.”

A feral feeling courses through my chest. “You’re damn right. I’d have to tear someone apart, limb by limb, if they saw you like this, then burn their body parts.” I wave a hand dismissively. “And you’re too hungry to waste time on that.”

She laughs, and I slide my hands down to her ass, squeezing gently. Kissing her lips, I whisper, “Go get ready, goddess.”

Everleigh steps back, saluting me. “Yes, sir.”

Goddamn. I swear my dick is getting hard again.

Tugging her dress down her hips, she spins around, heading for the bathroom, my gaze glued to the curve of her ass as she sashays away from me.

As much as I hate when she leaves the room, I love to watch her go.

Catching a glimpse of my rumpled, sweaty clothes, I shake my head.

I'd better change. I am not escorting my gorgeous goddess to dinner in wrinkled clothing, looking a mess.

By the time I've changed, leaving my shirt untucked so I can reapply more deodorant, I step into the bathroom, a gasp leaving my lips.

I don't know how the hell she can transform herself into a fucking vision so quickly, but my dark goddess steals the breath from my lungs for the second time tonight.

Catching my eye, she blows me a kiss before reapplying her red lipstick. Transfixed, I watch her, one thought running through my head.

I'm the fucking luckiest man in this goddamn universe.

Nine

William

I LIFT MY GLASS and take a drink, studying Everleigh over the rim from where I sit across from her. Raising my eyebrows, I set the glass on the table. “Can you tell me about Savannah’s stepfather?”

I knew something was wrong with my fiancée when she was quiet in the car. When she said she needed to check in on Savannah, pulled out her phone and called her, then proceeded to talk to her in low, reassuring tones, my scalp prickled with unease.

My gut instinct that something happened when the girls were shopping turned out to be correct when Everleigh confessed what occurred at the sunglass boutique.

I’m pissed Everleigh ran outside after the guy. My girl can hold her own, but I don’t know how much she knows about this man, especially if he’s been out of the picture for a while. It was rash and irresponsible, but I’m trying not to lash out at her.

She sighs. “I can’t go into too much detail, but suffice it to say that Savannah’s stepdad was a creep. An abusive alcoholic

who cut her down every chance he got, at least while her mother was alive. But once she passed away, he became a monster.” Everleigh’s hands twist together nervously.

“He sexually abused her.” It’s all over the pained expression on Everleigh’s pale face.

She winces at my bluntness and nods. “When I first met her in school, she came across as very reserved. Guarded. I was new and most of the people in school had their cliques. I didn’t fit in with that group, considering...” She stares at the table, her hand wrapping around her water glass, then spinning in slow circles as she’s lost to her memories.

Reaching out a hand, I gently pry her fingers from the glass, clasping her hand in mine. “The two of you became good friends. Eventually, best friends.” I redirect her thoughts, her face brightening from my words.

“Yes. We were both social outcasts, so to speak, so it made sense that the two of us started bonding.” Her gaze flits to mine, the flame from the candle on the table highlighting the golden flecks in her eyes. Her face is troubled, her brow furrowing as she continues. “Her stepbrother was terrified of his father and wouldn’t stand up for Savannah. He knew what was going on, heard her cries, yet did nothing to stop it. One day, he apologized for not intervening, but by that point, Savannah was too angry and traumatized from the repeated sexual assaults. She lashed out at him. Her stepfather came home from work early and heard them fighting. He accused her stepbrother of becoming soft and hit him. It was a brutal

beating and Savannah tried to escape, but her stepfather caught her at the door of the mobile home they lived in. He forced her stepbrother to hold her down and made him watch while he assaulted her.”

My hands clenched into fists, my stomach churning. *No wonder Savannah is so skittish toward men.* What a fucking horrific thing to endure.

It's too damn bad Everleigh didn't kill him.

“Savannah didn’t talk about what was happening at home. After that horrendous night, Savannah and her stepbrother, Tyler, had bruises and other injuries. One of the neighbors heard Savannah screaming as her stepfather dragged her away from the door. Rather than call the police, they came over to investigate, but of course, her stepdad threatened to kill Savannah and her stepbrother if they made a sound.” Everleigh lifts her glass of water, taking a long drink. Setting it down, she brushes a hand through her hair. “When Savannah’s stepdad left for work the next morning, she and her stepbrother planned to skip school to hide their injuries. The neighbor returned, catching them off guard, and started asking questions. Her stepbrother shut the door on them, but they’d seen enough of his injuries. Since he was afraid the police would be called, he and Savannah decided to go to school. The neighbor called the school and told them what they heard and saw. They notified the authorities, who started investigating. Somehow, their stepdad got wind of it because he left his job and never returned. Ultimately, it led to Savannah and her

stepbrother being removed from the home, though it took quite a while.”

My jaw clenches, feeling terrible for all Savannah endured. Although a part of me feels bad for her stepbrother, the other part blames him for not doing anything to help Savannah. She was raped by his father, and he didn't do a damn thing to stop it.

As for her stepfather, I'd like to find him and torture that bastard to death.

“Were Savannah and her stepbrother separated?” Will asked, his face full of concern.

“Unfortunately, yes. Savannah was lucky and a wealthy family was interested in fostering her, thanks to Mrs. Johnston, my guardian. Their daughter died in a car accident six months before Savannah went to live with them. In my opinion, Savannah looked like their daughter, and that's why they took her in. But her stepbrother wasn't as lucky. He bounced from one awful foster family to another until he finally ran away, never to be heard from again. Savannah wanted her foster family to look for him, but they refused, wanting her to move on with her life.” I squeeze Will's hand. “Part of me understands why she wanted to know what happened to him. But the other...” I suck in a breath, trying to control the anger that races through my veins, making my blood boil. “He never tried to stop his stepfather. Then to hold her down...” Her eyes filled with tears. “I mean, I know he was beaten, but still.”

“Her stepbrother should have his balls put in a vise and ripped off for allowing the assaults to happen without doing anything. He’s not blameless. Not by a long shot.” I gently stroke Everleigh’s hand, hoping to calm her. “Has her stepfather or stepbrother made any attempt to contact her that you know of?”

She shakes her head. “She hasn’t mentioned anything until today.”

Frowning, I lose myself in my thoughts, wondering why he’d make an appearance now. I feel certain by the way Everleigh described Savannah’s reaction that it was her stepfather.

But why now?

Everleigh’s phone beeps, indicating she has a text. Her gaze meets mine and I nod for her to read it.

“It’s from Savannah. She heard a noise and she’s scared.”

“Let me make a phone call. I’ll handle it. Why don’t you call her and talk to her? Make sure she’s okay?”

Everleigh gives me a grateful look, her face softening. “I’m sorry this is occurring during our date night.”

My finger goes to her lips. “Don’t apologize, love. It’s important that she’s safe.” Removing my finger, I lean across the table, kissing her. “I’ll make a call and be right back. Call her and make sure she’s okay.”

She nods, and I get up, heading towards the balcony. It’s reserved for me and Everleigh, so I know it’s vacant. I planned

to bring her out here after we had dessert so we can dance.

Pressing Bryan's name, I put my phone to my ear. When he answers, I hear the alarm in his voice. "What I'm about to tell you is confidential."

"Always, Will. You know that."

I nod, though he can't see me. "It's about Savannah." Feeling his tension through the phone, I quickly relay Savannah's past, leading up to her being frightened when she saw him at the boutique.

Before I've even finished speaking, I hear Bryan's door slam. "Tell Everleigh I'm on my way to Savannah's cabin. I can either stay with her or she can come to my cabin. Whatever she's most comfortable with."

"Thanks man." Heading back inside, I say, "Hold on while I tell Everleigh to let Savannah know you are on your way." When I reach the table, Everleigh looks up at me. I tell her to let Savannah know that Bryan is en route to her cabin. I see the relief in Everleigh's eyes as she relays the information to Savannah. "Okay, Bryan. Savannah knows you're heading over."

"Good. I'll be at her cabin in five minutes."

We hang up and I sit down at the table.

When Everleigh hangs up the phone, she gives me a smile. "Thank you, Will. I appreciate what you did."

I wink at her. "Bryan's a good guy. He'll make sure Savannah is safe. The guy is a helluva shot and always

carries.”

She nods. “I told Savannah he’s a good guy. In her heart, I think she knows that. She’s just... been through a lot.”

Clasping Everleigh’s hands in mine, I lean toward her. “It’s not surprising she has trust issues.”

Everleigh nods. “She told me she’ll text me when Bryan arrives.”

“He said he’ll either stay at her cabin or take her to his. Whatever she’s more comfortable with.”

Her eyes twinkle. “She needs a nice guy in her life. I wonder—”

I burst into laughter. “Stop meddling, love. Just let whatever is going to happen between them occur without your involvement.”

She leans forward, a determined glint in her eyes. “I was only going to nudge them.”

Chuckling, I lift one of her hands to my lips. “How about we go outside and dance and you can nudge me any way you want to?”

A huge smile blooms across her face as she laughs. “How can I resist an offer like that?” Her phone beeps and she immediately picks it up, reading the text, her tense posture relaxing. “Oh, good. She said she’s going to Bryan’s cabin with him.” Her eyes gleam as she says, “Text Bryan and let him know she loves action movies.”

Pushing my chair back, I stand, heading to her side of the table. Grabbing her hand and her purse, I pull her to her feet. “You can’t help yourself, can you? Stop playing matchmaker and dance with me. Bryan will figure her out on his own.” Giving her a pointed look, I continue. “It’s better that way. Savannah won’t see it as contrived if he learns about her organically through her opening up.”

My fingers entwine with hers as I lead her outside. There’s a large fireplace in the far corner to ward off the chill. Directing her toward it, I set her purse on the table beside it, taking her phone from her hands and putting it inside it.

“Bossy tonight, huh?” She has a challenging look in her eyes, making my dick twitch.

“Always.” I twirl her around, making her laugh. When I pull her into my arms, her expression softens. Tightening my grip on her, I rub my nose with hers. “You like when I take control.”

“Eh. Sometimes.” Her eyes sparkle. “It was entertaining watching you glower at the waiter, then dominate the conversation and order for me.”

My expression darkens. “If that motherfucker looked at you one more time, I was going to get out of my chair and beat his damned ass.”

“So possessive,” she teases.

“You’re damn right. You’re *mine*,” I growl.

“You’re damn right I’m yours.” Her lips crash against mine, and all my anger and irritation fade. Pulling back, the love shining from her face makes my heart hammer like a drum. Everything fades away as she gives me a big smile, lifting her hand from my shoulder to caress my face. “I’ve belonged to you, and only you, since you pulled me from the wreckage.”

Fuck! My dick stirs in my trousers and a feeling of pride wells inside me. “You’re damn right,” I say gruffly.

She giggles, rubbing against my hard cock. “Now dance with me and then take me home and fuck me again.”

Damn, this woman is going to be the death of me.

My smile is salacious as I say, “Whatever you want, goddess.”

Ten

Everleigh

“**A**RE YOU SURE YOU don’t mind me coming to work with you today?” I look over at him as he drives, watching his jaw tick as he slowly turns his head, his eyes burning into mine.

“Do you want me to beat your ass?” he growls, his eyes flashing.

I love getting under his skin. It makes him hard. And the more I push him, the harder he fucks me. Besides, I’ve never had sex on his desk, but I firmly intend to change that today.

“With your hand or your belt?” My smile is sinful as I wiggle my brows at him.

“Keep it up and I’ll shove my dick in your mouth while I drive.”

I raise my brows. “Are you threatening me with a good time?”

He winks, his anger abating as his lips curve into the smile I love so much. “Always, goddess.”

Stretching my legs out, I see a text from Irelynn. Reading it, a plan forms in my head. Turning my head toward Will, he glances at me, cocking his brow. “What are you scheming about now?”

I can’t help the laugh that comes out of me. “It’s not scheming. Irelynn brought up Thanksgiving and an idea started forming.” I shift in my seat, pulling my leg up. “What if we had everyone come to our house for a Thanksgiving feast? You, me, and Emma could cook.” Excitement fills me, but I try to temper it until I see what Will thinks about the idea.

“When you say everyone, are you talking about our friends?”

I shake my head. “Everyone at our engagement party, including Irelynn’s grandparents.”

Will laughs, glancing from the road to me. “You just want to see if Lucinda will grab my dick in front of you.”

“Honestly, if she did, that’s the only time a woman could grab your dick and I wouldn’t murder them.” I chuckle, thinking of her blowjob advice. She’s not wrong though. A man won’t leave you if his cock is in your mouth.

He laughs. “I love the idea. But we better start planning and inviting everyone. Thanksgiving is eight days away, love.”

I’m already typing on my phone. “With Irelynn and Darin, not only will everyone know in less than an hour, but if they

already have plans, they will convince them to come to our house instead.”

“Especially Darin. He’s like a dog with a bone and won’t let up.”

I laugh. “I still can’t figure out why he and Vanessa are having problems. As persistent as Darin is, she should be planning a wedding to him.” The smile dies on my face. “Do you think she’ll come if we invite her for Thanksgiving?”

Will shrugs, navigating through traffic. “That depends on how she and Darin are doing. If things aren’t strained, then I’m sure she will.”

I hold up one hand. “Say no more. Are you meeting about Sumer Tech?”

He nods. “Yes, it will probably take about an hour and a half to two hours. It begins at 9:00 a.m.”

“Good.” My fingers fly over my phone. “I’m going to ask Darin to meet me for coffee.” I shoot Will a warning glare. “I’m not meddling, so don’t even say it.”

He grins, not saying a word. But it’s written all over his face.

“Stop it. I’m not meddling. I’m helping my brother solve his problem.”

“Uh-huh.” Will hits the turn signal, stopping at the light a block from his new office building. “Because Darin isn’t capable of solving his own problems, right?” He gives me a teasing grin, but there’s a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

“He needs my assistance to fix his relationship issues. And if you keep badgering me about meddling, you and I will have problems.” Crossing my arms over my chest, I shoot him a scathing glare.

He reaches his hand out, stroking my cheek. “You’re adorable when you’re pissed.”

I swat him away, making him laugh. “I know your tricks. Knock it off.”

“Those pregnancy hormones have you riled up today.” He accelerates as the light turns green.

My mouth drops open, but I’m stunned by his words, so no sound comes out. Finally, I slap his arm. “William Alexander Anderson! What the hell?” I can’t help laughing and it’s only made worse when he gives me that boyish grin. “You’re in a lot of trouble.”

“Blowjob in the car kind of trouble or...” He turns his head, wiggling his eyebrows at me.

I bite my lip, trying not to laugh. Giving him a stern expression, I say, “No blowjobs in the car. In fact, I didn’t say —”

“Oh, so a blowjob in the elevator. I’m here for that.” Winking at me, he pulls into a parking space.

“Are there cameras in the elevator?” Realizing what I just said, I try to backtrack. “I mean, if—”

“Why? Do you want me to send you the feed to watch later? I’m sure I can have Bryan zoom in—”

“No, we don’t need Bryan zooming in.” Shaking my head, I give him a stern look. “And there won’t be any blowjobs in the elevator.”

He chuckles. “Keep telling yourself that, love.” Opening the door, he hops out of the car while I sit there, hands in my lap, exasperated with him. Even though he’s so fucking hot.

My car door opens, and he extends his hand. Clapping his, I get out of the car, my gaze locked on his heated angelic blue eyes. His ethereal light blocks out the darkness within him, despite him being an ornery devil today. Lifting my hand, he twirls me around, then pulls me to him for a kiss, causing me to melt. When he releases me, he turns, holding my hand, and we head toward the door.

Little bastard. He knows how to work me.

We walk inside the modernized office building, my gaze assessing the interior as we head to the elevators.

“What do you think?” His low voice by my ear pulls my attention to him.

“Very posh. All the sleek black glass and modernized gadgets suit you.” The elevator doors open and we step inside. His grin is wicked as I shake my head. “No blowjobs here. Your office is a different story though.”

He throws his head back, laughing.

Smiling, I bite my lip, my gaze roving over him in a suit. *God, I love seeing him so relaxed and carefree. And the man looks so fucking fine in a black suit.*

When the doors open on the top floor, Will ushers me down the long hallway to his office. I take in all the modernized furnishings, my gaze raking appreciatively over the suite of offices.

“Want a job here?” Will jokes.

“A job in security? If so, I’m happy to be your bodyguard.” My gaze glides over his muscular body that fills out his suit.

“You’re the only one I’d hire to do the job because of your unique qualifications.” He stops, turning toward me, his finger going beneath my chin and tilting it up. His lips lower to mine, a low moan escaping me.

“That sure doesn’t look like work.” Bryan’s voice comes from behind us, making me laugh as I pull away from Will’s lips.

“Sure it is. She needed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation,” Will deadpans.

I shake my head. “He’s in rare form today, Bryan.”

Bryan grins, shoving his hands in his pocket. “So I see.” His gaze slides to Will. “Is this bring your wife to work day?”

Will laughs as I say, “I’m not technically—”

“Yes,” Will cuts me off, sliding his arm around me. “I may hire her as my bodyguard so she can accompany me daily.”

Bryan groans as I laugh. “No offense, Everleigh, but if you are Will’s bodyguard, he won’t get shit done.” He looks at

Will, his eyes dancing with mischief. “Let me rephrase that. You’ll be the only thing getting done around here.”

Will and I burst into laughter.

“You’re not wrong,” Will says before dipping his head, nuzzling my neck.

Bryan shakes his head. “Speaking of bodyguards... Have you heard from your dad or Maverick?”

Will smirks, nodding. “Is this about Savage Rob?”

Bryan laughs. “Sure is.”

My head swivels between Bryan and Will. “Who is Savage Rob?”

Will’s smirk grows and he rolls his eyes.

Bryan studies his face before his eyes lock with mine. “He’s an asshole who thinks he’s tough. He mouthed off to Will in public several times, but refuses to fight Will in the ring. Now he’s running his mouth, saying Will is too pussy whipped to fight him.”

Anger courses through me as I look up at Will. “That just means Will needs to get his ass in the ring and beat the shit out of him. His mouth won’t run after that.”

Will looks down at me. “Are you good with me fighting?”

Cocking a brow, I search his face. “Why wouldn’t I be? I have complete faith in your abilities.” I hold up a finger. “But there’s one caveat. I accompany you to the ring and stay outside for your fight like you did mine.”

Will shrugs. “I’m good with that.”

Bryan pulls out his phone. “I’ll text Maverick and set it up.”

“Wait. Do you think the pussy will step inside the ring? From what you’re saying...”

Bryan looks up from his phone, grinning. “I’m taking care of that. I know how I can get him riled up so he’ll agree to the fight.”

I bounce on my feet lightly. “I’m excited to see you fight. You’ve seen me fight, but I’ve never seen you... well, I’ve seen you spar with Bryan, but it’s not the same as stepping into the underground ring.”

Will chuckles, pulling me against him. “Think I’ll win?”

“Hell yes. I have no doubt.” Leaning on my tiptoes, I press my lips against his.

“Thanks for the confidence, love.”

“Always, my love.”



I push through the doors of the coffee shop, a wide smile lighting up my face when my eyes land on my brother. His brown head is bent over his phone, his lips quirking up from whatever he’s reading. As I move toward him, his head lifts, his green eyes brightening when they land on me.

“Hey, lil sis.” Shoving his phone in his back pocket, he strides to me, wrapping his arms around me and pulling me in for a hug. “Will let you drive his beamer today, huh?” Pulling back, he nods toward the window where Will’s car sets in the parking lot.

“Hey, big bro. Of course he lets me drive his car. What’s his is mine and all that.” I wave a dismissive hand, changing the conversation. “How’s life?”

He quirks an eyebrow, his eyes flashing with mischief. “And that’s code for ‘how are things going between Vanessa and me,’ right?” The loud noise of the frozen coffee machine causes him to stop speaking. “First, we order coffee and a pastry, then we’ll gossip about my love life.” His voice lowers, lips dipping into a frown. “Or lack thereof,” he mutters, before turning around and getting in line.

Hmmm... I’m not liking the direction of this conversation.

As I get in line behind him, he gives me a grin, his demeanor changing to typical Darin mode. “You are glowing today. Did Will give you an orgasm before you met me for coffee?”

Laughing, I shake my head. “Something like that.” I haven’t told anyone other than Savannah that I’m pregnant and planned to do so at Thanksgiving dinner, which is one reason why I’d like to get everyone together. “Have you heard back from anyone about Thanksgiving? Is anyone able to join us?”

Amusement is all over Darin’s face as he puts an arm around me, giving me an affectionate squeeze. “Stop fretting.

Max and Irelynn are definitely in, as well as her parents and grandparents. Of course, Dad was an immediate yes, which you already know. He said the two of you have established a routine of taking turns calling one another every evening.” Darin pulls away, his smile widening. “I love the relationship the two of you are developing. He’s been happier than I’ve seen him since...” His voice trails off as his gaze drops to his shoes. He runs a hand through his hair, resting it on the back of his neck. Lost in his memories, I squeeze his arm lightly, drawing his attention to me. I haven’t asked him many questions about our sister yet, but the day for a heart-to-heart conversation about her is drawing closer.

“Words can’t describe how much it means to build a relationship with our dad. All those years I spent believing Derrick Morrison was my father...” I heave in a breath, trying to prevent my thoughts from going to a dark place that is all too commonplace when I think of him. “To have you as my brother is icing on the cake.”

The line moves forward, and Darin turns, dropping his hand from his neck, moving behind the guy ordering drinks at the register. Turning to me, his dazzling green eyes sparkle radiantly. “I know it’s rare that I’m serious, but Everleigh...” Pausing, he makes sure the guy in front of us is still ordering, then he continues, “I don’t talk about our sister much, but I’ve missed her so much since she... passed.” He swallows hard. “I’ve thrown myself into my work, hanging with friends, and of course, spending time with Dad. Things have been rocky with Vanessa, but our relationship has been anything but

typical.” He gives me a wry grin, shrugging one shoulder in a gesture that indicates things are beyond his control. “But since you and I became friends, it’s as though a weight was lifted from my shoulders. Seeing how much shit you and Will endured, yet persevered, gives me hope for my relationship with Vanessa.” He shifts his weight. “Discovering you are my sister has been the icing on the cake for me. You’ve become one of my best friends.”

His words wrapped around my heart, making it feel lighter. I quickly hug him, noticing the guy in front of us moving away from the register. “You are one of my best friends, too. And one helluva awesome brother. I can’t ask for a better family.” I almost rub my hand over my belly but catch myself. Darin is far too observant and would question me like a detective in an interrogation room.

Darin and I order, then when our food and drinks are ready, we snag a table in the corner. We ease into the conversation by talking about Will’s bid for Sumer Tech Industries, then I fill him in on Savannah’s fears that she saw her stepdad and that he may be stalking her. Darin’s face registers concern when I say, “He regularly abused her, Darin. It was bad. And her brother didn’t do anything to prevent or stop it. He was also threatened and beaten by his father, not that it’s an excuse to look the other way.”

There’s a look I’ve never seen before in Darin’s eyes as he says, “Judging by what you are saying, yet not saying, I’m assuming she was sexually abused.” He takes a sip of his

coffee, his eyes roaming over the diner. Leaning forward, he sets his coffee cup on the table. “Did she wind up pregnant?”

I’m taken aback by his astute observation. Sadly, I nod. “She was bullied in school by her peers. That’s how I met her. She was very quiet and withdrawn at first. Like a scared mouse, she kept her head down and her books pressed to her chest as she shrank into herself, trying to appear invisible. Savannah is far too beautiful to be invisible, unfortunately. The bullies taunted her, saying she was probably doing drugs. They delighted in shoving her into locker doors, tripping her as she tried to walk down the hallways or into the classroom. The day I’d had enough was when she came into school, soaking wet from the pouring rain, as though she’d walked there. She didn’t have an umbrella. She’d barely taken two steps into the door when they tripped her and she slid across the floor, her books going everywhere. She burst into tears, which broke my heart. Furious, I went after the two who did it. When they ran their mouths, I punched them.” I grin, remembering that day. “I thought I was going to be suspended. I knew Mrs. Johnston would have my back. I was taken to the principal’s office and Mrs. Johnston was called. She came into the school and listened to the principal, then asked me what had happened. I explained everything—all the bullying episodes I’d witnessed and how everyone had looked away and done nothing about it. By the time Mrs. Johnston was through, I was released to the classroom with no punishment.” I chuckle, remembering Mrs. Johnston effectively and professionally ripping Principal Adams a new asshole.

Darin chuckles, respect in his eyes. “I’m glad she had you to defend her. I’m assuming that was the start of your friendship?”

I nod. “It took some time, but Savannah looked me in the eye and whispered a thank you before she hung her head. I invited her to sit with me at lunch and I’ll never forget the look on her face.” I blink back the tears as the memory assaults me. “It was as though I’d told her she’d won the lottery. She’d had no friends that I’d seen at that point.” My shoulders slump from sadness as I fidget with my coffee cup.

Darin’s warm fingers wrapping around mine cause me to look up and meet his sparkling emerald eyes. “You’re an amazing person, Everleigh. Your kindness changed the course of Savannah’s life.”

My eyes fill with tears as I nod. He has no idea how much time I devoted to trying to form a friendship with Savannah. Once that happened, one day I caught her in the bathroom throwing up. She collapsed in my arms and confessed her stepfather had been raping her and she was pregnant with his child. I wanted to get her out of there, but she said it wasn’t that simple. An investigation had started because of a concerned neighbor, who had heard Savannah screaming one night when her stepfather attacked her.

I didn’t know what to do, so I asked Mrs. Johnston for assistance. After a lot of prodding, I convinced Savannah to see a doctor. Before that happened, her stepfather returned from wherever he’d run off to and beat Savannah unconscious.

I found her in a pool of blood inside her mobile home and called Mrs. Johnston. Savannah regained consciousness and begged us not to call an ambulance, so we rushed her to the hospital for treatment. She miscarried the child, and I was sick with worry that her stepfather would return and kill her.

Mrs. Johnston was also distraught but had the ability to enact change. Turning to her contacts from her former FBI career, she was able to get Savannah placed with a local wealthy family who was looking to foster. I'm confident the security detail they hired was due to Mrs. Johnston advising them of the violence by Savannah's stepfather.

One of the perks of living with the wealthy foster family is that they catered to Savannah's interest in technology. She had a natural inclination for it and ultimately learned how to hack. She found that her stepfather had been on the run for screwing over a well-known drug dealer and after the trail went cold, we believed the drug dealer caught up to him and ended his life.

Now, I'm wondering if we made a huge mistake thinking that.

I let Darin digest those words. Raising my brow, I cock my head, studying him. "That was an astute observation about Savannah being raped and pregnant. Sounds like it came from someone with involvement in a similar situation."

His face pales as he shifts in the chair, his eyes rapidly flicking around the room at everything and everyone but me.

Finally, he locks his gaze on mine. Taking a deep breath, he said, "Monica, our sister, was sexually assaulted and ended up

pregnant. She...” His voice quivers and he stops speaking, his gaze lowering to the table. I can see the struggle on his face as he battles to rein in his emotions.

Once he does, his gaze raises to mine. There’s so much pain and guilt there that it feels like someone stabbed me. Lowering my hand to my stomach, I lightly rub it, as though I’m protecting the life within. The ones who bring so much light to my life already.

Finally, he says, “Monica committed suicide.”

The world stops spinning as I stare at him, unable to form words. And fuck, I want to, so badly. Seeing the utter devastation on Darin’s face, guilt making him grimace as he tugs his shirt collar away from his neck as though it’s choking him.

After shaking off the shock I’m feeling, I wrap my hand around his, squeezing it tightly. “I’m so fucking sorry, Darin. I wish I could have met her.” Seeing the tears forming in his green eyes and watching him blink to prevent them from falling twists the knife in my stomach further. “But you need to know, you aren’t responsible. You couldn’t have saved her.”

Sucking in an audible breath, Darin lowers his head, tipping it to his chin. “Dad has tried to tell me that for so long...” His voice cracks and breaks, his chin quivering. Yet he battles through his pain, not letting his tears fall. I’m not sure if it’s because we are in a coffee shop or if he doesn’t trust me enough to cry around me yet, but I hope it’s because we are in public. “I took it upon myself to be responsible for Monica at a

young age. Mom was...” He lifts one shoulder, looking up at me. “It’s hard to describe her. She was physically present yet weak in the sense that she couldn’t handle problems. She wanted life to be a happy bubble and that’s just not realistic.”

“That’s tough, Darin. But still... You couldn’t single-handedly save Monica. Not if she wasn’t willing to save herself.”

He stills at my words and I can see him turning them over and examining them before he slowly exhales. “I know you’re right...”

“But it’s hard to convince yourself, huh? Much easier to wrap the guilt around yourself and keep your feelings buried deep. And the happy-go-lucky guy full of jokes convinces nearly everyone that you don’t carry around any deep burdens or remorse.”

A slow smile crosses his face. “Everyone except Dad... then Max... then Will... and now you.”

I raise a brow. “The people who care enough to get to know *you* will always see through the façade you try to hide behind.” Pausing, I gauge the words I’m about to say, then decide to say them. “I noticed you didn’t include Vanessa on that list.”

He winces, then groans. Removing his hand from mine, he puts his head in them, his fingers tugging at his hair. After several beats, he lifts his head. “We’re communicating, Everleigh. Trying to work through some things.”

Nodding thoughtfully, I bite my lip. “Has Vanessa failed to try to get to know the vulnerable person you hide inside? Or has she pushed too much and you’ve shut her out?”

His breathing becomes deeper, chest pushing out against his long-sleeved t-shirt as he slouches against the back of the chair. “Maybe both? She pushed a lot in the beginning, but I was careful. I...” He runs a hand through his hair, making it stand up. “I don’t want to be hurt again like that. I was devastated when Monica killed herself and I didn’t see it coming.” Grabbing his coffee, he takes a swig, his hand squeezing the cup as anger fills him. “After a while, it seemed she stopped trying to dig deeper and I resented her for it. I know that’s unfair as hell...”

“It is, but I get it. Who doesn’t want someone to prove they love us enough to keep digging no matter how much we try to push them away? It shows they really care. And when they don’t... we think the opposite.”

He studies my face for a few beats. “I wish Monica could have met you. Your strength and genuine concern and your ability to see straight through the bullshit to the heart of the matter may have been exactly what she needed.” He slowly sets his coffee cup on the table.

I lean closer to the table, my eyes imploring him to believe me. “You didn’t fail her, Darin. At all. There’s no guarantee that even if she had met me and had me in her life, the outcome would have been any different.” Gauging his reaction to my words, I switch the conversation back to Vanessa to

keep digging to see if my theory is correct. “Is part of your issue with Vanessa due to her kissing Will?”

Darin’s spine snaps straight and hurt flashes through his eyes before the anger settles over him. His hands reach out and clench around his coffee cup. “That’s part of it.”

“And the other part is how she reacted when Irelynn returned home from captivity, correct?”

He explodes. “Vanessa had no business going off on my friends like that. Especially Irelynn and Max, who had been through something so fucking traumatic. It’s as though Vanessa wasn’t even listening to what Irelynn was trying to tell her. Irelynn was so conflicted when she was telling us what happened. And I’ll be honest, at the time, I fucking *hated* Will. I wanted to kill him. But when she told us about how he was with her and that he prevented Damian from raping her, I realized there was far more to it. Did I agree with what he did? *Hell no*. But there was a ton of history between Irelynn and Will. They were able to work through it and I saw how much Irelynn had matured from the situation.” His jaw clenches tightly before he spits out, “And then Vanessa had the fucking nerve to insult Irelynn’s parents. Jack and Rosalyn McDaniel are the nicest people. They were shocked when Vanessa snapped at them.” His breathing is ragged and he leans back in his chair, trying to rein in his temper.

He changes the subject to one less controversial. “Jack and Dad have become close since your engagement party. They watch football together, work on Jack’s old car on the

weekends, and it sounds like Jack has convinced dad to join the bowling league.”

My mind is having problems processing all Darin has said, yet didn't say. He feels betrayed by Vanessa in many ways. And he's taking it personally that she insulted his friends, which includes Irelynn's parents. And now with Jack and our dad becoming friends, Darin is even more resentful that Vanessa went off on Jack.

It's quite apparent Darin is extraordinarily loyal to those he cares for.

Inwardly, I cringe, wondering if I can help save him and Vanessa, or if too much damage has been done to ever fix them?



After changing into a pair of sweatpants and a long-sleeved t-shirt, I head to join Will and Bryan in our kitchen. As I'm sliding into a chair beside Will, my phone beeps. Looking at it, I see a text from Savannah, who spent the day with Vanessa.

Savannah: Hey. Would you mind if I hung out with you? Vanessa can drop me off at your house.

Me: Sure, no problem. Come on over.

Savannah: Thank you. I'll be there in three minutes.

“Savannah is on her way over, huh?” Will’s voice pulls my attention from my phone. As I turn my head to Will, I see Bryan freeze, his shoulders taut, before he lifts the water bottle to his lips.

Nodding, my gaze moves to Will. He’s studying Bryan, but his attention quickly turns to me. A smirk curls my lips. *Too late, love. I can read you just as well as you read me.* “Yup. She’ll be here in a few.” My tone is casual, but I’m hyper aware of Bryan’s reaction. He looks awkward, yet there’s an undercurrent of excitement as he shifts in his chair.

When my gaze locks with Will’s, he smirks at me, then shakes his head in defeat, as though he’s well aware it’s a lost cause.

There’s no way in hell I’m going to refrain from finding out what happened between Savannah and Bryan last night.

Eleven

William

THE FIGHT HAS BEEN arranged between me and Savage Rob for the Saturday night after Thanksgiving. Adrenaline courses through my veins. It's been far too long since I've stepped inside the ring. But more than that, sometimes I fear I'm getting too soft.

William hasn't come out since the night Everleigh faced Ainsley. And though I know that part of me is cloaked in darkness and doesn't have much of a place in my current life with Everleigh, I always want to feed the monster within. It's imperative he be vigilant, always ready to protect my soon-to-be wife, as well as my unborn children.

I'll be damned if I'll let anyone hurt them.

Channeling my anger into my fists, I connect with Bryan, knocking him across the ring and into the ropes.

"Damn, Will. What the fuck?" His chest heaves as he bends at the waist, gasping for air. "This fucking padding is worthless against you."

I grin, smugness causing my chest to puff out. I may not be training as often or as hard, but I'm not losing my strength or skill in the ring.

"Need a break?" I taunt, raising my eyebrows.

Bryan reluctantly nods. "Maybe I should have Everleigh step in and take my place?"

I glower at him. "You fucking know better. I'd never hit her like I'm hitting you. I don't care if she'd beg me to."

Bryan's lip turns up in a smirk. "Not even if she starts beating the hell out of you?"

Tossing him an arrogant smile before I bend over and pick up my water bottle, I say, "Do you honestly think Everleigh would unleash on me?" Opening it, I take a swig from the bottle, quenching my thirst.

Bryan chuckles. "No, I don't. But man, I'd love to see her unleashed if someone tried to harm you. Or the kids inside her." He lets out a long whistle. "Fuck... can you imagine?"

I can, and the image both terrifies me and makes me so proud that my chest swells. "Hell, yes. There'd be nothing left of them."

"Nothing left of who?" Everleigh's voice comes from behind me. Turning, I take in the vision that is my fiancée as she glides across the room to the ring, her black yoga pants clinging to her muscular legs. Her smile is like the sun after days of gloomy gray skies.

I can never get enough of her.

Her earthy eyes sparkle as she catches me checking her out, so I blatantly drink her in, my leisurely gaze perusing every curve. Locking my gaze on hers, she heads to the ring, her smile becoming flirtatious the closer she gets to me. Spellbound, I track her movements until she climbs the steps to the ring.

“See anything you like?” Jutting out one hip, she steps close to me, the ropes between us.

My arms shoot between the ropes, pulling her closer, my arms winding up her back and into her chestnut locks. “I love everything I see.” Pressing my lips against hers, I don’t even give a second thought to how sweaty I am as I press myself against her, the ropes digging into my body.

Pulling back, it hits me that the ropes could be near her stomach. Pushing her slightly back, she chuckles. “Even if the ropes were pressing into my stomach, they aren’t going to hurt our girls. Stop fretting, daddy.”

My gaze travels from her stomach to her face, taking in her teasing smile. “Can’t take any chances.” Putting one foot on the bottom rope, I wrap my hand around the middle one, stretching them apart. “Get your ass inside this ring.”

Laughing, she does as I instruct, waving at Bryan once she’s inside the ring with us. “Is Will kicking your ass?”

Bryan grimaces. “I’m gonna be sore for a week at this rate. Wanna switch me pl—”

“No,” I roar, glaring at him. “She is *not* switching places with you, asshole.”

Chuckling, Bryan shrugs. “Worth a try.”

“Might be a bad idea. I don’t think we’d get any training done. We’d likely end up naked.” She lifts one shoulder in a shrug, her gaze moving to mine.

A low growl comes from my chest at her words. “As much as I’d like for that to happen, you will *not* be naked in front of Bryan.”

Leaning into me, she places a gentle kiss on my lips, her hands splayed on my chest. “Demanding and possessive. I like it,” she teases. “But I’m not here for that. I just wanted to let you know everyone has confirmed their attendance at what I hope will become our annual Thanksgiving dinner.” Her eyes soften, the golden flecks sparkling. “I was wondering if we could discuss how we will share our pregnancy news with our family and friends.”

Her words make me melt. “Of course, love. I can’t wait to see their faces.” My hands slide over her stomach.

“I can’t wait for them to see how excited you are to be a father.” Her face is radiant, her hands sliding up my chest to the back of my neck.

My smile is wide as I say, “I honestly couldn’t imagine I’d be this excited about having kids. But having them with you... There’s nothing better in this world.” I feel like my heart is

about to explode as tears shimmer on her lashes, her arms wrapping tightly around me as she stands on her tiptoes.

“I love you, Will. I can’t wait to marry you, then meet these two girls in about 7 months.”

“I can’t wait to make you my wife. Then I’ll pamper you until our girls arrive.” My hands slide under her ass and I lift her, laughing as she squeals, her legs wrapping around my waist.

“Is this my cue to leave?” Bryan asks with a chuckle.

Everleigh looks over her shoulder. “No. Will should finish training—”

“Yes. Leave.” My tone is gruff as I shoot him a look.

Everleigh playfully swats my arm. “Finish training. Plenty of time for us to be together later.”

I growl, making Bryan laugh. “I agree with her, Will. Use your pent-up sexual frustration... Wait, what the hell am I saying? Let me find some random guy from the streets and I’ll throw him in here for you to pummel the hell out of.”

The three of us laugh as Everleigh says, “Put me down so you can finish. Then we’ll discuss how we will reveal our big news before we get naked.”

Slowly lowering her to her feet, I nod, my lips capturing hers.

That’s what she thinks. I prefer her naked first and then we plan our big reveal.

When I release her, she steps through the ropes, leaving the ring. My lips curl into a smug smile.

We'll see which one of us wins.

I bet I'll have her naked before she can even say the word "reveal."



An elaborate feast is spread on three large tables lined against one wall of the large room, while an enormous table adorns the center of the room with those I love most in this world sitting around it, talking and laughing.

Raising from my chair, I gently tap my knife against my glass to get everyone's attention. "Thank you all for joining us for dinner. My lovely fiancée would like to make this an annual tradition if you are willing to celebrate with us." My gaze slides to hers as she looks up at me, the flecks of honey in her brown eyes causing me to forget the speech I've prepared.

She's so fucking beautiful, inside and out. How the hell did I manage to get her to fall in love with me?

I hear a chorus of voices agreeing, drawing my attention back to our family and friends surrounding us. "Everleigh and I have some news we'd like to share before we eat." Reaching out my hand, she clasps it, shoving her chair back and getting to her feet beside me. The red dress she's wearing clings to her

curves. No one would suspect she's pregnant from the way she looks right now.

She is regal as she looks around the table. Taking a breath, her smile is wide as she turns her head to mine. At the same time, we say, "We're pregnant."

Darin is the first one to let out a loud hoot. I barely have time to react before he's out of his chair, throwing his arms around us. "I'm going to be an uncle!" He squeezes us against him so hard I hear Everleigh yelp.

"Darin, stop hurting my pregnant fiancée," I bark, causing him to loosen his grip and ruffle Everleigh's hair.

"Sorry, lil sis." Then he grabs her, lifts her in the air, and swings her around, chanting, "I'm gonna be a motherfucking uncle" over and over again.

I can't help the laughter that bursts from me as I watch them. Everyone laughs around us and starts getting to their feet to congratulate us, so I grab Darin, stopping him mid-spin, and extract Everleigh from him.

She's breathless from laughter as I pull her into my arms, kissing her on the top of her head. "I should have known Darin would react like this."

"Seriously?" I pull back, giving her a skeptical look. "Darin is unpredictable. You never know what antic he'll pull next." To prove my point, I nod my head toward him as he gyrates his hips, doing some crazy dance.

“Look at him shaking that ass,” Grandma Lucinda yells. “Give me my purse. I think I have some singles in my wallet.”

The room erupts with laughter. Our fathers are the first to approach us, and Everleigh and I hug our respective dads. Then we switch. When David, Everleigh’s father, grabs me in a bear hug, I nearly sob from happiness. He became a father figure to me the moment Darin introduced us. Finding out he was Everleigh’s biological father was the icing on the cake for me.

“Congrats, Will.” He slaps my back. “Nothing better in this world than being a dad.”

“If I need advice, you are the first person I’m calling.” I pull back, blinking rapidly to keep the tears from falling.

“I’m always here, son. Anytime you need me.” His face is soft as he claps me once more and then releases me so Max and Irelynn can congratulate me.

As I shake Max’s hand, memories of our turbulent past flow through my mind. It’s fucking incredible where we started and that we’ve ended up here.

Max echoes my thoughts. “It’s been a helluva journey, Will. But I wouldn’t change a thing. I’d do it all over again to end up here, as I’m certain you would.” He wraps his arms around me, hugging me like a best friend.

Squeezing him, I pat his back. When I step back, I give him a chagrined look. “I’ve harbored so much guilt for what I did to you and Irelynn.” I glance over as Everleigh and Irelynn

hug, bouncing up and down, their squeals piercing my ears. “My therapist has been on me about forgiving myself like the two of you have.”

Max tilts his head, his blue eyes softening. “Maybe you’ll finally listen to her? We love you, Will, and hold no resentment toward you.” He looks over at Irelynn, love and affection all over his face. “She and I wouldn’t be married if not for you. I was fucking terrified of dating, relationships... all of it when I first met her.” Taking a breath, his head turns to me. “But you’ve more than made up for your mistakes, Will. Personally, watching you mature into the man you are now... Well, I’m fucking blessed to see it. You’re going to make one helluva husband and father. And your friendship is something I cherish. You’ve given me some of the best advice, including relationship advice. You’ve been level-headed, calming me when I’ve gotten pissed at Irelynn and acted like a dickhead.” He casts an affectionate glance in Darin’s direction. “If I’d taken that asshole’s advice, Irelynn probably would have divorced me already.” We both laugh, thinking of some of the crazy shit Darin has said in jest.

“Thanks, Max.” I squeeze his shoulder, my heart full from his heartfelt words. “I cherish our friendship and I’m always here to give you ‘real’ advice whenever you need it.” Laughing, I look over at Darin, who sticks his ass out, wiggling it at Grandma Lucinda. She reaches into her wallet and slides a few dollars inside his back pocket. “Don’t ever take Darin’s advice. There’s no music playing, except whatever is in that crazy head of his, and he’s dancing like a

damn stripper and taking money from grandma.” Max and I burst out laughing, watching the foolishness.

Once we stop laughing, I grow serious. “I hate how we started, but I’m glad we ended up here.”

“Me too, Will. Congrats on your upcoming nuptials and child.”

“Children,” I correct, causing him to raise his brows. “We’re having twins. But Darin couldn’t keep his big mouth shut long enough for us to tell you.”

Max’s eyes are wide. “Twins? Hell, dude. If you guys need help, let us know.”

Laughing, I shrug. “I’ll keep that in mind, but it’s nothing I can’t handle.” The scent of jasmine and amber hits my nose as her arms wrap around my waist, her warm body pressing against my side.

Turning her head toward Max, she squeezes me. “Will is calmer than me about having twins. When he first said it... Well, I felt nothing but panic.” Her musical laughter floats in the air as she tilts her head to mine. “But he was so damn calm that all my fears disappeared. Now I’m just excited. And though we don’t know the sex yet, he’s convinced we’re having girls, and since he was right about me being pregnant before I realized it was a possibility...” Her voice trails off as I lean down, kissing her nose.

“Will, you’re going to be a daddy.” Irelynn’s arms wrap around us as she hops up and down from excitement. “Oh my

gosh, I can't wait to spoil your girls." She pulls away, beaming at us.

I glance at Everleigh, who laughs and beams at us happily. She's come a long way from her jealous days over what I did with Irelynn, and I'm glad we're all in such a good place now.

Darin dances over, holding Lucinda's hand. "This lovely lady wants to congratulate you, so I'm butting in line." He winks at us, then bows at Lucinda, who stands in front of us now that Darin has shoved Max and Irelynn out of the way. Max looks amused but Irelynn has a tinge of fear on her face as she stares at the side of Lucinda's face.

Everleigh starts cracking up, tears in her eyes as she looks at Darin. "W-W-What i-is that r-ridiculous h-hat you're w-wearing?" she gasps.

Darin tips the hat toward us. "It's my gangster hat. Ms. Lucinda told me I look sexy in it." He pretends to look hurt. Vanessa comes up beside him, linking her arm through his.

"Don't worry. I think you look sexy as hell in it." Vanessa winks at us as Darin excuses himself from Lucinda and proceeds to dip Vanessa to the floor, kissing her.

"My, that's hot," Grandma Lucinda says, fanning herself, unable to tear her eyes away for a few beats. Everleigh has her face buried against me, her body shaking from laughter.

Finally, Lucinda looks at us, her eyes twinkling. "I can't help my flair for the dramatics. I've never been able to stand stuffy, boring events. I never worry about that when I'm

around this group.” She points her finger at Darin and Vanessa. He has her in his arms and is somehow gyrating his hips like a stripper. “I knew Darin would help with that.” She winks, then grows serious as Everleigh pulls away from my chest and turns to her. Lucinda grasps one of Everleigh’s hands, then one of mine. “I couldn’t be happier for the two of you. I know it was a tough road to get here, based on what Irelynn has told me. In all seriousness, you two belong together. And you’re finally getting the happily ever after, with an upcoming wedding and a baby on the way.”

“Two babies,” I say, smiling at Everleigh, then at Lucinda.

“Twins?” Her smile widens as I nod. “How wonderful, Will and Everleigh.” Squeezing our hands, her face grows more animated. “Two bundles of joy. That will keep you busy. Just make sure you take time out for sex. I’m happy to babysit whenever you need.”

I burst out laughing. “I’m sure we’ll always make time for that.”

“Don’t rush it. Kids are important but so is an enjoyable sex life. Hell, I gave grandpa a blow—”

“Okay, grandma, that’s enough congratulations for now.” Irelynn’s face is mortified as she grabs Lucinda’s hands, tugging on her. Mouthing an ‘I’m sorry’ to us, she tries to pull her away.

“Irelynn, rude. I was talking,” Lucinda scolds. She yanks her hand free from Irelynn, waving it dismissively at her. “As I was saying before I was interrupted, I gave grandpa a blowjob

in the car. Made him go to the lookout you kids like going to. I was a little worried it was too much excitement for him, but he's still kicking."

"Oh my God, Grandma! Why do you say these things?" Irelynn is still tugging on hand while Max turns his back to us, his shoulders shaking from laughter. "Max! Would you help me?" Irelynn hisses.

Everleigh is wiping tears of laughter from her face as she watches the scene in front of her.

"Wow! Did I hear Lucinda say she blew Grandpa before Thanksgiving dinner?" Darin finally sets Vanessa on her feet as he cocks an eyebrow at Lucinda. "Damn, Grandma, no wonder he's still married to you."

"I'll admit, I agree with Darin on this one." Squeezing Everleigh to me, I joke, "Take notes, goddess. I hope you're still blowing me before Thanksgiving dinner when we are their age."

Darin reaches his hand out and I fist bump it. "That's the type of wife I want," Darin quips, his green eyes sparkling.

Vanessa laughs but looks slightly uncomfortable at the mention of "wife." Darin and I have discussed the two of them so I know about the problems they've been having. But they seem to be on good terms tonight.

"There are certain advantages to giving a blowjob when you get older." Lucinda grabs Everleigh's hand, squeezing gently.

“For example, I take my false teeth out, so he never has to worry about me grazing his dick—”

“Grandma!” Irelynn squeals, her face scarlet. “No one wants to hear this!”

“That’s ironic,” Lucinda deadpans, waving her hand at all of us surrounding her. “These young folks are riveted and seem to be enjoying my story immensely.”

“I know I am,” Darin says with a laugh, making the rest of us laugh.

Grandpa shuffles over, laughing. “I heard my girl Lucie tell you about the fun we had earlier.” He slings his arm around his wife, a smile on his face. “That’s why I married her. She keeps me guessing.” He winks at me, a mischievous grin on his face. “She even took her teeth out beforehand.”

We all burst into laughter again as Darin fist bumps grandpa.

“She told us,” I say, grinning and shaking my head. *These crazy people make my life complete.*

Everleigh tilts her face up, her eyes sparkling. “God, I love these people. This is the best Thanksgiving ever.”

Grabbing her, I dip her toward the floor, making her laugh. “They’re amazing. And though I love them, there’s no one I love more than you.”

“Awe, Will,” she says, her eyes watery as she traces her finger over my face.

Sealing my mouth over hers, I feel like I'm on top of the world and nothing can bring us down.

Twelve

Everleigh

MY LEG BOUNCES AS I hold Will's hand while he drives us toward Maverick's underground fighting club beneath a shady bar I'd never set foot in without Will.

Will glances over at my leg, but I don't want to talk about it. I can't help but be nervous, not that my fiancé won't kick some serious ass tonight, but how I'll react to someone putting their hands on him. I'm not sure I can remain outside the ring if he takes a cheap shot like The Beast did to me, hitting him before the referee starts the fight.

Not wanting Will to ask me questions, I quickly say, "I still can't believe Darin got Lucinda to sing 'How Many Licks?' by Lil Kim. I thought I was going to piss myself laughing so hard."

Will chuckles, his eyes back on the road. "Well, Lucinda heard that song when Mike, Irelynn's brother, and I hung out together. Our parents hated us listening to it, but Lucinda would sing along and dance. She had even crazier dance moves back then."

“Oh no.” My eyes widen as a visual of her dancing like a stripper fills my thoughts. “Did she grind on you?”

Will looks at me, a smirk on his lips. “Would you be jealous if she did?”

“Well... a little. I’m sure she was really pretty in her day. Look at Irelynn and her mom, Rosalyn. They’re beautiful ladies.”

Will wiggles his eyebrows. “Lucinda used to twerk when I was in high school.”

I slap his leg, laughing. “Now you’re just trying to make me jealous.”

He grabs my hand, squeezing it lightly. “My distraction technique worked. Your leg isn’t bouncing anymore.”

“You don’t miss a thing, do you?” Shaking my head, I give him an affectionate look.

“When it comes to you? I don’t miss a damn thing.” He moves his hand, shifting as we come to a red light, then placing it back on my thigh, squeezing lightly. “Are you going to tell me what’s bothering you?”

I arch my brows. “Why? You probably already know.”

His smirk grows. “I still like you to confirm what I think.”

“Just tell him already,” Savannah chirps from the backseat, leaning up behind my seat. As I turn my head, glaring at her, she rolls her eyes at me, turning her head toward Will. “She’s worried she’ll jump in the ring and beat the shit out of that guy

if he takes a cheap shot. And she'll probably kill him if that asshole manages to hurt you." Savannah gives me a satisfied grin before sitting back.

Grumbling under my breath, I shoot Savannah a dirty look. I glance over at Bryan, who looks out the window, trying to hide his grin. He lifts his hand, covering his mouth, which is a dead giveaway. Huffing, I turn to Will, who watches me with amusement twinkling in his crystalline eyes.

"Is that true, babe?" Will lightly runs his fingers over my denim-clad thigh, tingles shooting through me from his touch.

Gritting my teeth, I grumble, "You already know it is."

Will leans over, his lips pressing against my cheek as I stare out the windshield, my arms folded over my chest. "Your protective streak is hotter than hell, goddess." His low tone has me squeezing my thighs together.

My lips quirk up, despite my efforts to be mad. Turning my head toward his, I give him a salacious smile. "Oh yeah?"

His Adam's apple bobs as he swallows hard. "Keep it up and I'll drag you into a bathroom and bend you over the counter."

I shift in my seat, spreading my legs and causing his hand to move closer to my pussy, a challenge in my eyes. "Sounds fun."

A low growl comes from his chest. "I'll give you fun." The gleam radiating from his heated gaze makes me wet.

He pulls away from me, shifts gears, and accelerates as the light turns green.

Game on.

Reaching into the outside pocket of my purse on the floor, I grab my lipstick, feeling Will's gaze burning into me. He loves my red lipstick, especially when I get it all over his cock and it smears on my face when I give him a blowjob. I pretend to ignore him, though I'm hyperaware of the sexual tension swirling from him as I grab the visor, look into the mirror, and reapply my lipstick. Smacking my lips together, I grab my boobs, adjusting them in my shirt and ensuring an ample amount of cleavage is hanging out, before I turn to him with a smile.

I hear the murmured laughter of Bryan and Savannah behind me, the sounds of a video playing from his phone reaching my ears. They aren't paying Will and me any attention.

A wicked grin crosses Will's face. "I'm going to fuck you so hard," he mouths, before shooting me a wink.

"You better," I mouth back, twirling a lock of hair around my finger.

He presses down on the accelerator, driving faster, as I look out the passenger window, a victorious smile on my face.

I know how to get what I want from him.



I'm in the locker room with Will, pacing in front of him. He sits calmly on the bench, an amused look on his face as he watches me.

"I can't help it," I mutter, turning on my heel and walking past him again. "Is this how you felt before I fought?"

His grin widens as he leans forward, his elbows on his knees. "I knew you could handle yourself, but I won't lie and say I wasn't anxious at the thought of you getting hurt. I wanted to fight The Beast so you didn't have to, but I knew I couldn't."

Releasing a long sigh, I stop in front of him. Sliding my hands around his neck, he wraps his arms around my back, our bodies pressed together, drawn like magnets to one another. Holding him, I breathe in his woody, spicy scent, contentment stealing over me.

He's home to me.

The two of us are alone, as Savannah had to use the restroom, and Bryan volunteered to walk her there while I remain here with Will. If I weren't so damned nervous about Will's fight, I'd be jumping for joy over the progress I've seen with the two of them. They're still competitive at times, but they don't constantly fight like they used to.

My phone beeps and I slowly pull back from Will. Pulling it from my pocket, I read the message. “Savannah said she and Bryan will head to their seats when she’s finished. It’s a packed house tonight. Bryan said it’s because you are fighting.” I raise my face to his. “You must be a pretty popular fighter.”

The corners of his mouth tug up in that grin I love so much. He shrugs one shoulder. “I haven’t fought in a while. They’re probably anxious to see me in action again.”

Shoving my phone in my pocket as he stands, I wrap my arms around him, our foreheads touching. “Make no mistake, love. I can’t wait to see you fight. And though I have complete faith in your abilities, I won’t lie and say I’m not going to want to turn that ring red if he hurts you.”

Will chuckles, love emanating from his orbs. “I get it, love. I’ll be fine.” His lips meet mine, and my breath catches from how he kisses me, as though he’s stealing a piece of my soul. I melt against him, losing myself in the way he claims ownership over me with his kiss.

My phone beeps, the noise breaking through our moment, and I groan in Will’s mouth. We slowly pull away, our lips close but no longer touching. “That’s probably Darin. He told me he’d text me when he arrived because he wants to see you before the fight.” Stepping back slightly, I pull my phone from the back pocket of my jeans, reading the message. “Yup. Let me go get him and bring him back.”

Will's hand slides from my back, traveling to my fingers. He wraps his hand around mine, then says, "Hurry back." He loosens his grip but doesn't fully let go, our fingers grazing until we are too far away to touch. The husky tone of his voice makes me not want to leave and instead, have sex with him—again—only this time in the locker room.

Grinning as I back away, I bite my lip, hating to leave him, even for a few minutes. "I'll be quick." Spinning on my heel, I hurry to get my brother.

Hurrying through the hallway, my thoughts are still in the locker room with Will. I know he's not nervous, or at least he doesn't appear to be, but I still hate leaving him alone before his fight.

Stepping into the arena, my eyes travel the room before landing on the huge ring in the center. My steps falter as I stare at it, the roar of the packed crowd filling my ears. Savannah isn't kidding. The crowd is huge. Probably as big, if not bigger, then when I fought The Beast, but I blocked it out, focusing solely on my opponent.

Realizing I'm wasting time, I hurry down the aisle, but end up getting behind a couple, who slowly move toward their seats.

God, just move out of my way already.

The aisles are too narrow for me to squeeze around them.

They stop moving, talking to someone. I grit my teeth, frustration filling me, then open my mouth to say something,

when I feel it. A hand squeezing my ass.

“What the fuck?” I whip around, my fists clenching in anger. A guy stands behind me, a cocky smile on his face. I don’t even think as I grab his wrist, twisting it and making him howl from the pain. “Consider this your only warning. Touch me again, and I’ll fucking break it.” Then I shove him backward, releasing his wrist.

When I turn back around, the couple in front of me is staring at me, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

“Move the hell outta my way.”

They hurry down the aisle, quickly finding their seats. I follow behind them, then cut around the ring and over to the door. Shoving it open, Darin stands there, phone in hand. Looking up at me, the smile dies from his face. “What the hell happened?” His brows furrowed as he studied me.

“Some dickhead grabbed my ass. I almost broke his wrist.” Waving my hand dismissively, I say, “I scared the piss outta him. Then some slow fuckers delayed me getting here.” Grabbing Darin’s arm, I tug on him. “Let’s get back to Will.”

Darin chuckles as I drag him behind me. “You’re a little wound up.”

I toss him an irritated look over my shoulder. “This fucker better not hurt Will.” People move out of my way as we hurry up the aisle, having seen me nearly break a guy’s wrist earlier. Darin chuckles again. “I’m pregnant, hormonal, and not in the mood for people’s dumb shit.”

“Gotcha, sis. Just take some deep breaths. Everything will be fine.”

I glower at him as he pulls the door open that leads to the locker room area before stepping through it. Darin follows me, then steps beside me, wrapping his arm around my shoulders. “Will is a badass fighter, Everleigh. He’s going to be fine.”

Blowing out a breath, I look up at him. “I know. I just feel... unsettled. I’m not sure why.”

Darin squeezes my shoulder with his big hand. “That’s normal. Inwardly, Will was a mess before your fight. He didn’t show it to you, but I talked to him about it afterward. And when The Beast took that cheap shot... God, Everleigh, you have no idea how enraged Will was. I’m surprised he didn’t kill every fucker in that arena except for those he knows and loves.”

Some of the tension melts and I can’t help but release a giggle. “I can only imagine. His rage washed over me and I feared he would jump in the ring and kill The Beast. I don’t know how he held it together.”

“Easy. You. Above all else, he loves you and would do anything for you. He knew you needed to fight without his interference. As much as he wanted to kill your opponent, he was more concerned about you being angry and upset if he interfered.”

“Thanks for telling me that. It helps.” I grin up at him. “And I’m damn lucky to have someone who loves me so much.”

Darin grins. “Yes you are.” He glances at the door to the locker room as we near it. Lowering his voice, he says, “You don’t want to tell him about the guy grabbing your ass, right?”

I shake my head. “Not yet. It will distract him from his fight because he’ll want to find, maim, and kill that dude instead. He needs to focus on the match.”

Darin nods, removing his arm from my shoulder, opening the door to the locker room for me. “Gotcha.”

As we walk into the room, Will is doing pushups. He finishes and gets to his feet. “Hey, Darin.” Walking over, he fist bumps him, then they do their weird handshake thing. “Have you considered my offer further?”

I look back and forth in confusion. “What offer?”

Darin looks from Will to me. “Will has offered me a position in the company he’s buying. They are doing some reshuffling and a few people loyal to Colin Fry either have left or are leaving. Will and Bryan have offered to train me if I’m interested in a job there.”

I nod. “What about your motorcycle business?”

He shrugs. “Max is going to be leaving soon. As it is, he’s limited in the amount he can help me because of school and his internship. Dad’s knee injury prevents him from being able to work there on a consistent basis. And while I make good money from spring to early fall, during the winter I hardly work.”

Will grins. “Sounds to me like you want to work for me.”

Darin's smile matches his as he holds out his hand. "Can't hurt to try." They shake on it. "If I don't like it, I can reopen my business in the spring, so I'm not losing anything." His smile fades. "You think Colin is gone for good?"

Will nods. "He stormed out of the office last week. No one has seen him since. We'll deal with his second in command when we finalize the paperwork next week."

"Great. Then I'm on board." Releasing his hand, Darin steps back. "Are you ready to fight?"

Will looks up at the clock. "I'm ready." Stepping over to me, he pulls me into him, giving me another kiss before looking deep into my eyes. "I'll be fine, love."

I smile at him, but my stomach is in knots.

I hope so.

Will refrained from interfering in my match, but I can't promise I won't interfere in his. If this Savage Rob cheats or hurts Will, I'm stepping in and bloodshed will occur.

Thirteen

William

AS I STARE ACROSS the ring at Savage Rob, the adrenaline flows through my veins, fueled by the loud roar of the crowd. It invigorated me as I walked down the aisle behind my future bride, confidence filling me as people along the aisle yelled, “William! Kick his ass!” as I passed by.

Everleigh stands outside the ring, while Darin, Savannah, and Bryan sit in the front row seats behind her. Max and Irelynn sit beside Darin. I notice Vanessa’s absence and lock eyes with Darin. I see the sadness before he gives me his usual smile, mouthing at me to beat the hell out of Savage Rob.

I saw the worry on Everleigh’s face and the glint of fear in her earthy eyes before she cupped my face, pressing her lips against mine. I tried to put every ounce of reassurance in the kiss, but an air of trepidation swirled around her as she pulled away, her smile forced before she stepped outside the ring.

Cracking my neck, I shake my limbs out. When the bell rings, we head to the center of the ring and I block out all the noise, focusing on my opponent. I’m barely cognizant of the referee’s instructions as we stand in the center of the ring, my

gaze locked on Savage Rob. His smile is full of arrogance as I coldly stare at him.

“Hot looking woman you have there, William. I’d love to fuck that tight ass of hers as she screams and cries.”

My pulse pounds in my ears from the rage flowing through my veins, burning hot like lava from a volcano. My vision turns red as the thirst for blood nearly chokes me as the stupid, arrogant motherfucker stands there with a cocky smile on his face.

How fucking stupid is he to threaten to rape the woman who is the other half of my dark soul?

He doesn’t realize the war he just started.

The desire to see the ring painted with his blood nearly chokes me as my eyes narrow. My limbs shake from the rage burning white hot through me, begging for release. My hands curl into fists, and a desire to humiliate, break, crush, and destroy his punk ass fills me.

“You’ll never get the chance, motherfucker. I’ll kill you before you lay a finger on her,” I growl, murderous rage pouring through me.

As the referee goes over the rules, I don’t hear a fucking word he says. The darkness fills me, unleashed from deep within, rushing through my veins and seeping through my pores. My heartbeat pounds into my ears like the drums at a heavy metal concert as my fury roars through me like a wild animal, intent on one thing—bloodshed.

No one can dispel the monster that is poised to attack, ready to tear him to pieces with my bare hands.

His eyes grow wide, his smile vanishing as his face turns ashen. He freezes, his veins beating a visible pulse beneath his skin. He gasps, then expels a breath as he gazes into my eyes, seeing the monster inside, baring its fangs.

That's right, asshole. William is coming out to play.

As the referee's hand slices the air starting the fight, I'm on him, not giving him a chance to react. My fist connects with his face, then his stomach. He lets out a grunt of pain as I spin around, kicking him, watching him sail into the ropes.

Goddamn, this feels good.

Savage Rob's body slumps over as he starts to fall to the ring floor, but I grab him by the hair, yanking him to his feet. He howls from the pain as my fist connects with his nose so hard the sound of his bone cracking fills my ears. Blood sprays through the air, covering my skin. The sight of it incites more violence, feeding the monster within.

I pound on him until the referee rings the bell and kneels in front of me. "That's enough, William. Go to your corner," he screams.

Turning my head to his, I bare my teeth, then drop Savage Rob's body to the mat. Slowly backing away, I see the referee release an involuntary shudder before I turn away, trying to rein in some of the darkness before Everleigh gets close to me.

“Will.” Her voice cuts through my rage, pulling me toward her like a magnet, though I’m desperately trying to resist. My head lowers, staring at the floor of the ring as I take hesitant steps closer to her, begging the monster for a reprieve.

Her body slams into mine, her hands cupping my face, forcing my gaze to hers. I know my eyes resemble a frozen lake as I feel her shiver slightly. Shame fills me, hating that I’m scaring her.

“God, that was so fucking hot.” Then her lips are on mine, hot and demanding, her hands sliding to my hair, fisting the strands.

A deep, guttural moan is released as I push her to the corner of the ring, my body slamming into hers the second she stops, unable to go any further. My mouth devours hers, punishing her lips as she does mine, battling for dominance.

The cheers and whistles from the crowd around us thrust me back to reality. Slowly releasing her lips, my lungs heave for air. My forehead rests against hers and I inhale, breathing her in, trying to calm my raging emotions. “Everleigh...” My hand cups her chin, not caring if I’m getting blood on her as her eyes shift back and forth between mine. “You aren’t terrified of me?”

Her face blooms into a full-blown smile as she shakes her head, biting her lip. Her eyes twinkle and a small burst of laughter leaves her. Releasing her lip, she tightens her grip on me. “Hell, no. It’s fucking hotter than hell watching you unleash your darkness.” Her eyes are bright, and I can feel her

pulse thrumming beneath her skin when I slowly slide my hand down the side of her neck. “Hello, William,” she drawls, her voice breathy.

My lips tug up as I shake my head in amazement. “You are so goddamn strong you scare me at times,” I growl, my hand moving to her hair, tugging her head back slightly. “Rather than run *from* the monster, you run *toward* it.”

She slides her hands to the top of my head as I lean over her, my lips impossibly close to hers, almost touching. Tugging on the short strands, she tilts her head, her smile tinged with malice. “Haven’t you figured it out? Only a monster can love another monster. I love *all* of you. The sweet, considerate, caring Will and the possessive as fuck, overbearingly arrogant William. I adore the gentleman *and* the devil.”

My voice is deep and raspy as I shake my head. “You make me completely crazy in the best way, Everleigh Renee. But I’d never label you as a monster. You are one incredible woman, who will be an amazing wife and mother.”

Her face softens and the way her skin glows from my words nearly makes me want to say fuck this fight, throw her over my shoulder like a caveman and carry her out of here so I can have my way with her. Again.

I suck in a breath from the vision I see in this gorgeous woman’s eyes. She is everything I’ve ever wanted in this world and more. “You own all of me, goddess. Every dark, broken piece to every smooth, shiny fragment.” Swallowing

hard, I lightly push a strand of hair from her face. “You have *all* of me, forever.”

“There’s darkness inside, but you don’t view me as a monster. I don’t see you as one, either. You are just... *you*. I accept and love every bit of you, William. I have since the day we met.”

“God, I fucking love you, goddess.” Love overflows from me, pouring into her as I hold her protectively against me, not caring about the blood, the fight, or everyone around us.

Her eyes shine with tears as her eyes close and she presses her lips to mine, too overcome for words.

She doesn’t need to say anything. I saw everything she was feeling in her eyes.

I know her better than I know myself.

Sighing as we part, she strokes my jawline, her teeth sinking into her bottom lip.

“What is it, goddess?” I tilt my head, scrutinizing her. Rubbing my thumb over her bottom lip, she releases her lip.

“What did Savage Rob say to you before the fight? I know he said something, based on your reaction.”

Fury fills me, my jaw ticking. “He said, ‘Hot looking woman you have there, William. I’d love to fuck that tight ass of hers until she screams and cries. He’s a complete dumb fuck,’” I spit the words out, pissed all over again.

When I see her wince from hearing those words, I stroke her cheek, my face softening. “You know I’d never let him hurt you, right? I won’t let him fucking touch a single inch of you.”

She turns into my touch, rubbing her cheek against my hand. “I know.” Her smile slowly widens. “I’d beat the shit out of him before he laid a finger on me though.”

I chuckle, pride filling me. “Yes, you would, goddess. But you won’t have to because I’d kill him first.”

She shivers again. “So fucking hot.” Her breathy voice makes my dick twitch. Reluctantly, she looks over my shoulder. “Looks like the fight will resume soon. Needledick is swaying on his feet and staring daggers at your back.”

My grin widens. “Good. I’m ready to beat the shit out of him.”

“Torture him slowly, baby.” She pulls back slightly, her eyebrows raised. “Then *end* him.”

Her words stir the monster inside, who rears his head, breathing fire through my body. “Anything for you, my love.”

Shifting my body beside hers, we stare daggers at Savage Rob, our combined rage burning into him. He’s lucky we can’t make him combust from our looks alone.

He flinches as he sees the monsters inside us, his back pressing against the corner of the ring.

But he’ll get no mercy whatsoever from me.

No one threatens my woman and lives long enough to see the light of day.



The once light bluish gray mat is covered in Savage Rob's blood as I stand in the center of the ring.

I had no intention of telling Everleigh what he said about her until she asked. I'd never lie to her, so I repeated his disgustingly vile words. I saw the flash of fear flit across her face before she schooled her features, her lips trembling and her long lashes rapidly blinking.

That was the instant I knew I would break, then destroy Savage Rob.

No one makes my woman fearful.

Not without paying with his body... then his life.

My gaze locks with hers and she gives me that smile I live for every day of my life. The monster inside her stares back at me, a flame inside her earthy orbs. She licks her lips, giving me the answer I seek.

She wants to watch me violently destroy him.

A smile pulls up my lips. I *always* give my woman what she wants.

Reaching into the sheath at my hip, I pull the knife out, the steely blade glinting beneath the light, matching the gleam of

excitement in my woman's espresso eyes.

The crowd animatedly roars with eagerness, knowing what is coming next.

The death match.

Savage Rob can barely stand on his feet as he staggers into the ropes, his gaze locked on my knife.

The imbecile proves his ineptness when he reaches into his sheath, pulling out his knife. The referee looks at him, stunned, then at me, before exiting the ring.

Even he knows what a fucking idiotic mistake Savage Rob is making. He should have turned around and exited, heading back to the dressing room.

Although I'd still hunt him down and kill him for insulting Everleigh.

I head to the center of the ring. With two fingers, I gesture for him to come and face me.

He staggers toward me, stopping within striking distance, his weak body swaying.

My lip curls in a sneer. "I'll give you one opportunity to stab me first. Then I'm going to slice and dice you into tiny fucking pieces for *her*." I nod toward Everleigh. "I'm going to make you drown in regret, wishing you'd never uttered those filthy words. But I won't give you one fucking second of mercy. You'll *beg* me to kill you, but I won't. You'll *wish* for the death that will evade you until finally, your weakened body

won't be able to stand it and you'll welcome death like an old friend."

Terror is in his eyes and his body folds as he falls to his knees on the mat, his head down. I wonder if he's going to puke when suddenly, his head lifts and a foreign substance flies into my eyes, blinding me. It burns my retinas, and scalding tears course down my face.

"Will," I hear Everleigh scream, fear in her voice.

Turning my head in her direction, I'm unable to see her. Then I feel the sharp sting of the blade as Savage Rob's knife plunges into my skin, the pain so intense I drop to the mat.

Time seems to stop as I lay there, flashes of my life exploding through my mind. Every happy moment I've ever had with Everleigh flicks behind my lids rapidly as I close my eyes, unbearable pain rolling over me.

I don't even know where I've been stabbed as pain radiates from every direction.

The sound of footsteps around me causes me to lift my head, waiting for the sharp blade of the knife to pierce my skin again and again.

Instead, Bryan's voice is in my ears as he grabs me, rolling me onto my back. Holding my eyelid open, I thrash around, trying to fight him, but he pours water into my eye, trying to flush out whatever substance was thrown into it. He does the same with the other eye, letting me blink a few times.

Slowly, the pain eases enough that I can focus on him. He's still a little blurry, but I can make out most of his features.

He repeats the process, flushing out my eyes again.

Blinking rapidly, I struggle against him, panic filling me. "Where's Everleigh?"

Bryan pulls me into a sitting position. My head turns, my breaths coming too fast as I search for her. She's not at ringside, nor is she over in my corner of the ring.

Searching for her, my gritty, red eyes widen as I see her beating the shit out of Savage Rob, her fist bloody, though I'm not sure if it's his blood or hers.

She lets go of him and he collapses onto the mat. She turns, her gaze locking with mine, a smile forming on her red lips. She advances toward me, but movement on the mat draws my attention. I watch in horror as Savage Rob grabs her ankle, surprise covering her features as she falls.

I'm on my feet, catching her before she can hit the mat, my foot smashing down on his arm, causing him to howl in pain and release her. Steadying her, I give her a smile, her face coming into focus. "Allow me, my love. I have a score to settle."

Her brow furrows, but she gestures toward him, bowing slightly. "By all means, love." She kisses my cheek, then hurries to Bryan's side.

They don't even exit the ring before I rip the knife from Savage Rob's hand and begin slicing and dicing, blood

splattering everywhere.

And I don't stop until the ring is red.

Plunging the knife into his chest, I pull it out, then repeat a couple more times. He gasps, his face pale, his eyes full of fear as I stare at him, emotionless.

“I told you I wouldn't allow you to fucking touch her.” Then I press the blade against his throat, slicing deep into his skin, from one side to the other.

The monster gleefully watches as he sputters and gurgles, blood pouring from him, until he's no longer breathing.

Fourteen

Everleigh

A SMUG SENSE OF satisfaction wells inside me as Savage Rob's remains lay in the center of the ring. William was absolutely brutal, not showing an ounce of mercy. Savannah had to look away and I saw her chest heaving, likely trying to keep from vomiting.

Bryan and I are completely unaffected by the scene. I wonder how much damage he's inflicted on his and William's enemies in the past. While Bryan is a nice guy, he is intensely loyal to those he loves. I imagine he could inflict some serious damage if you're stupid enough to harm anyone he cares for.

We are still inside the ring in the corner, too mesmerized by Will to move once he unleashed the monster inside.

Bryan pats my shoulder, drawing my attention from the bloody man in the center of the ring who raises his arms in victory. The roar of the crowd is deafening as they scream and cheer, giving Will the adulation he deserves.

Leaning close to my ear, Bryan says, "I'm going to take Savannah and Darin to visit with Maverick. Find us when you're finished."

My brow wrinkles in confusion. “When we are—”

I don't get another word out as I'm tossed over Will's shoulder. He fist bumps Bryan, then manages to climb out of the ring with me slung over him like a sack of potatoes. I grip his waist, calling his name, but I'm not sure he hears me as he carries me down the aisle. I weakly smile at Savannah, who laughs at me, then turns to Bryan, who is now at her side.

As Will pushes through a door, the roar of the crowd disappears. My ears ring slightly from the sudden change, although I'm grateful for the quietness. The only sound is the steady tap of Will's boots as he strides to a destination only he knows. I don't recognize this hallway. He stops and presses a button, and I crane my neck, spotting an elevator.

“Um, Will. The blood is going to my head. Can you put—”

My body slides down his, my legs wrapping around his waist as his hands grip my ass cheeks. His face is still red from his rage and his icy blue eyes are practically white as they bore into mine. His breathing is heavy as his penetrating stare looks right through me, the monster still in control.

I lightly shiver from the heat pooling inside my body. I'm throbbing with desire, the flush of warmth spreading from my groin outward and I start grinding against his hard cock, aching to feel him inside me.

Will leans closer, tilting his head, gently pushing his lips against mine, then pulling away, a smirk on his face.

Ahh, I'm not dealing with Will. William is fully in control.

A white-hot rush of desire pulses through my center, making me wetter than I've ever been. The darkness that is normally hidden deep inside fills me, extinguishing my light.

"I need you, William." I barely get those words out before his lips crash against mine. The elevator doors open and he marches us inside, my back hitting the wall as he grinds against my center so hard it's both pleasurable and painful.

One hand leaves my ass as he presses a button behind him. I feel his movements, but I'm feral for him, positively desperate, as he kisses me so deeply and passionately that he takes all my air. This kiss is unlike anything we've shared, packed with an electrical current so strong all my nerves feel like live wires, the hair standing up on my arms and neck from the goosebumps that cover my skin.

His hand returns to my ass and he squeezes as he presses himself against me harder. Moaning loudly into his mouth, my fingers dig into his scalp as I grip his hair. Bright colors explode behind my eyes as he devours my mouth, kneading my skin. There's no music playing in the elevator, but I hear a symphony of instruments playing inside my head—and heart.

William tilts my head, sucking my bottom lip between his, giving it a playful bite. Surprise jolts through me as the metallic taste of blood hits my tongue, but he sweeps it away, drinking my life essence.

Fuck! Why is that so goddamn hot?

For a moment, betrayal makes me stiffen my spine. It's as though I'm cheating on Will, even though they are the same

person.

His lips pull away from mine. “No.” His hand shoots up, gripping my face, holding it in place. “You aren’t cheating or betraying me.” His stare is so intense it causes goosebumps to pebble over my skin.

His monster beckons to mine, seducing me to let her out. Fear latches onto me with its tight tentacles, constricting my breathing. I’ve always hated the name Eve because that’s what I called the devil that swirled inside me, enticing me with thoughts of vengeful murder. Ainsley would call me “Eve” anytime I did anything wrong, bitching to the man I thought was my father about me. Eve would stare her down with murderous eyes, and she’d clutch at her chest, pointing at me, screaming that I was the devil.

As if Will can hear my thoughts, his smile widens, his voice seductive and lilting. “Let her out to play with William, Everleigh. I can handle her, just like you can handle me.”

A growl comes from inside as the darkness comes forth, rearing her head, staring back at him confidentially, my shoulders straightening with pride. His eyes darken with arousal as he watches me transform, my features shifting as I reveal Eve to him.

“Hello, William. I’m Eve.” I feel the seductive smile on my lips. Cocking my head, I trace one red, long nail over his bloody cheek, scratching it until the blood pools from it. Leaning forward, my tongue traces over it, my eyes closing as I taste him on my tongue. Like a bonfire, my blood rushes

through my body, arousal mixing with my power and his. Pulling back slightly, I look back and forth between his eyes, my brow raised in a challenge. “Think you can handle me?”

A deep, guttural growl I’ve never heard before bursts from his lips as his mouth slams against mine, consuming me. I take his mouth with the same passionate enthusiasm, stealing his breath away. Our tongues tangle together, arms clenching one another as the elevator stops. Cold air seeps inside as the doors open, pulling me from my lustful thoughts.

Pulling back from him, I give a bewildered look around. “Where—”

“Eyes on me, Eve.” His commanding voice draws my attention as I lock my gaze with his. “As long as you face me, your eyes remain on mine at all times. Do I make myself clear?”

Fuck. My pussy pulses inside my panties, my thighs tightening around him, squeezing him. Despite my arousal, which I’m sure is apparent to him, Eve is defiant. “And what if I don’t?”

His hand moves to my neck, squeezing lightly. It’s not enough to cut my air off, but enough pressure to exert his dominance over me. “Fuck around and find out.” His blue eyes sparkle as though he wants me to defy him.

I say nothing, staring him down until his hand slides beneath my ass. He spins me around, hurrying out of the elevator, and carries me. My eyes remain on his, but my other senses are on alert, feeling the brisk, late November air against

my exposed skin, goosebumps coating it. The sounds of traffic come from below, indicating we are on a roof. Darkness surrounds us, but there is some light, which I assume is from the stars overhead.

I don't look up and it's not because he commanded me to stare at him. I genuinely am enthralled, watching William take complete control, his eyes so light they are practically white. His power and intensity are unmatched as he carries me with ease. His gaze is hungry as it sweeps over my face, warning me of what is to come.

Give it to me. I want everything you can give me.

A sudden warmth flows over the back of me, hot like fire, as he lowers me to my feet, pushing me against a high wall that is so cold it burns against my back. The rough texture presses against my top, reminding me of bricks, as his hands slide to the hem of my shirt. His thumbs move beneath it, caressing my skin, heat flaring through me everywhere he touches. My breaths are ragged as I wait to see what he'll do next.

As his head tilts, I slam my mouth over his, unable to wait one moment longer for his kiss. Eve is in control, taking what she wants, giving no fucks about anything other than giving and receiving pleasure... and pain.

William groans into my mouth, his hands moving lower, unbuttoning my jeans and pulling down the zipper. My hands slide from his back to his front, feeling the deep grooves of his abs, before dipping lower, gripping the band of his shorts,

tugging on them. He shoves my pants down and I take the opportunity to do the same with his shorts.

His mouth pulls away from mine as he grabs my shirt, pulling it up my torso and over my head. Tossing it, his hands move to my bra, unfastening it and yanking it from my chest. My nipples tighten from the cold air and my arousal, even as heat from whatever source we stand near fights to cut through the chill.

His shorts pool at his feet as my gaze lowers, locking onto his thick, hard cock, automatically reaching for it. I've never seen him this hard before, his arousal pooling over the head of his cock. I'm desperate to feel his sizable girth in my hand, to drop to my knees and taste the saltiness of his precum.

Before I can touch him, his hand grabs my wrist, stopping me. "Did I say you could touch me?"

His arrogant tone raises my defenses, and my eyes snap to his, anger lashing through my veins.

"I didn't fucking ask for permission, nor do I need to," I snarl at him, pissed.

He's unfazed by my tone and words, the arrogant smile on his face growing.

With lightning speed, he sheds his boots, and steps out of his shorts. Then shoves me against the wall, yanks my boots off, and practically rips my jeans and panties from my body. My nipples harden even more as I squeeze my thighs together, trying to prevent my desire from running down my inner thigh.

William drops to his knees, spreading my legs. He makes a tsking sound at me before his tongue comes out and starting at mid-thigh, he licks my inner thigh, up to my pussy, his gaze locked on mine. “Don’t close these thighs again. I’ll take care of licking all the juices that run out of you.”

Fuck. My body jolts slightly as his tongue moves through my folds and up to my clit, then back down to the opposite inner thigh, ensuring he’s licked my juices from my skin.

“Goddamn, William, that’s hot,” I rasp, my chest heaving as I watch him. The feral look in his eyes is enough to make me come undone, but I’m trying hard to hold on to some control.

Raising to his feet, he lifts me, and I wrap my legs around him. Carrying me, he lays me on the plush cushions of some outdoor furnishings that I catch from my peripheral vision. His mouth latches onto my breast while his hand glides down my body to my soaked entrance. My legs widen beneath him as he pushes two fingers inside me, coating him in the arousal that drips from me.

His mouth releases my breast, a hum of approval coming from him. “Yess,” he hisses. “That’s what I like. When this pussy soaks my fingers.” He shoves them deep inside of me and I moan, my head tilting toward the night sky.

Immediately, his other hand grips my chin, pulling my head back down. “Eyes on me, Eve.”

Holy fuck.

The way he says Eve makes my body burn like I'm on fire, increasing my arousal. I move my hips against his fingers, arching into him, mesmerized by the hunger in his icy blue orbs.

“Yes, Eve. That's it. Fuck my fingers.” He shoves them inside me harder, making my body shake, as he hovers over me, watching my reaction. His lips meet mine, the kiss full of deep desire as he takes my mouth with a dominance he's never expressed before.

It's fucking sexy as hell and exactly what I need as I let Eve loose. The thirst for maximum gratification is all that fills me as Eve unabashedly fucks William's fingers, demanding and taking what she wants from him.

And he's all too happy to give it to her.

When his fingers slip out of me, I snarl like a wild animal. His laugh is part evil, yet pure sin as his mouth covers my opening, his hands spreading me wider as his tongue delves inside my walls.

“Oh fuck yes.” My eyes are locked on him as my hand reaches down, gripping his hair, nails digging into his scalp. I rock my hips against his mouth, my arousal covering his face, running down his chin.

God, I've never been this soaked.

I heave in a shuddering breath as I writhe against his mouth, focused only on the sensations that travel through my body.

“Damn, Eve. This fucking pussy tastes like heaven.” His voice vibrates through me, making me moan and clench around him.

His tongue slides through my folds to my clit, sucking on the nub, while his two fingers go back inside my opening. My body writhes against his mouth, demanding more of the exquisite pleasure only he can provide. My thighs instinctively squeeze his head, holding him in place, as a loud moan escapes me. He chuckles against my pussy, the vibrations coursing through me and causing goosebumps to pebble over my hot skin as the heat source combines with the vast pleasure he’s giving me and I forget about the cool air around us. I feel the deep pull inside my core, indicating I’m about to come.

Suddenly, he pulls away from my center. Shock and coldness replace the fire dancing through my veins, my release imminent. My eyes widen from shock as he hovers over my face, staring down at me, anger making his face red. Confusion washes over me as I struggle to process what is happening.

His fingers grip my chin, digging into my flesh, holding me in place. His icy gaze bores into mine, causing my blood to run cold. “I’m so damned pissed at you,” he hisses, his jaw clenching.

I lay there in stunned silence, wracking my brain, having no idea what had set off his rage.

He sees the confusion on my face and continues. “You had no business jumping into the ring and going after Savage

Rob.”

My shock changes to anger, my body tensing, and heat coursing through me. “I had no business?” I yell, pushing against his chest, shoving him back, and shooting up to a sitting position. “I had every fucking right to do what I did, William.” I’m so angry I’m shaking as I swing my legs over the side of the couch, ready to stomp away from him.

But he’s quicker, his hand on my wrist like an iron vise. Spinning me around to face him, he gets in my face, his anger palpable. “I didn’t interfere in your match, so why the hell did you intervene in mine?” His voice is low but deadly from his rage. If I didn’t know him so well, I’d be fucking terrified.

“Completely different circumstances, Will. The Beast didn’t throw something in my eyes, blinding me, then stick a knife in my shoulder.” To prove a point, I reach up to the wound, pressing my fingers against it, watching the wince he tries but fails to hide. “I wasn’t going to fucking let him seriously injure you—or worse—when I can do something about it. So knock off the fucking macho bullshit! We are a fucking team, William... Or so I thought. Maybe I’m fucking wrong.” I pull so hard that he releases me, and I stomp across the rooftop, not knowing where I’m going.

And I’m naked.

A hand on my arms spins me around. William stands there, a contrite look on his face. “I’m sorry, Eve.” His eyes are earnest as they look between mine, an embarrassed flush on his cheeks.

In an instant, my anger goes from boiling to a simmer as I blink rapidly, barely unable to process what I'm seeing. I could count on one hand the number of times William Anderson has apologized in his lifetime.

“You're right. We are a team. I just...” He trails off, eyes downcast, his chin dipping down to his chest. After a few beats, he raises his head, worry lining his face. Swallowing hard, he runs a hand through his blond hair. “When I could see again and you were distracted by me, I knew something was going to happen. Then you took a step and he wrapped his hand around your ankle...” His face pales and he looks sick. “The thought of something happening to you and our babies...”

Guilt punches me in the gut. Tilting my head, it's now crystal clear why he's angry. “You were worried he'd seriously hurt me and possibly cause me to have a miscarriage.”

William nods, the sadness on his face making my chest tighten. Stepping closer, my hands cup his face. “I get it.” My voice is soft and low. “That's how I felt about you when I saw him incapacitate you with whatever he threw in your eyes before he stabbed you. You should be getting checked out by a doctor and not on the rooftop with me,” I admonish, giving him a stern look.

A slight grin tugs his lips up. “I will get checked out. But I needed you first. It sounds crazy but being with you gets me out of my head. It convinces me that you are really alright...” His hand moves to my stomach. “And that they are okay, too. I

couldn't bear it if anything happened to the three of you. You're my world." He blinks rapidly and though it's dark, there's enough light from the stars overhead that I see his moist eyes as he struggles to prevent the tears from falling.

"We're fine, William. Completely unharmed. Part of that is because of you." I lean up on my tiptoes, pressing my lips to his jawline. "You didn't let me fall. And while you may disagree with my decision, I *can't* live without you, either love. I stand firmly behind my decision. No matter how mad you are that I intervened, which I wouldn't have done had Savage Rob not acted like a cheating asshole, I don't regret it. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

When I pull back, I see that his face has softened, his anger abating. "I know you can take care of yourself, Eve." He tucks a lock of my hair behind my ear. "I just get extremely protective of you. I can't stand the thought of you or them being hurt." His hand has remained on my stomach this entire time. He blows out a breath, removing his palm from my stomach. "I shouldn't have gotten so angry."

"And you shouldn't have edged me. I'm going to make you fucking pay for that." I glower at him, watching as the beast springs forth, ready for a battle.

Changing tactics to gain control, a flirtatious smile pulls my lips up. My voice is low and seductive as I say, "There's one good thing about your anger." My hand wraps around his big cock, stroking it. A breath hisses from his lips, his cock twitching in my hand. "Eve really liked playing with

William.” My hand goes to his chest and before he can react, I push him back against the wall. Dropping to my knees, I flatten my tongue and shove his cock inside my mouth, taking what I want.

His hands go to my hair as a strangled moan leaves his lips. “Fuck, sweetheart.” He tilts his head, a smirk on his lips. “That’s it, Eve. Take all of my cock in your mouth.” With those words, he thrusts hard, not giving me time to take a breath as his cock fills my throat. I can’t breathe, and tears pool in my eyes, then run down my face. He cups my cheek, then pulls out and I greedily suck in a breath. “Eyes on me, Eve.”

My tongue swirls over his head, my gaze locked on his, turned on by the flames burning in his eyes. Licking the underside of his dick to his base, I wrap my hand around his thick girth, stroking him as I lick his balls. Then I remove my hand, licking back up to the tip, the breath he releases audible. Licking him repeatedly, I tease him, barely able to refrain from smirking as I watch his head tilt toward the sky.

Just when I think I’m completely in control, his fingers grip my hair. “Take it all, Eve.” With one hard thrust, he pushes into my mouth, shoving his cock into my throat. I was prepared this time, sucking in a breath of air at his words. Tears spring to my eyes from his large cock in my throat. He pulls back and I greedily take in a breath of the cool night air.

As he shoves his enormous cock into my mouth again, the tears gathered in the corners of my eyes fall down my cheeks.

His fingers move from my hair, gently wiping my cheeks. “Fuck, goddess. You’re so beautiful when you cry for me.” His head falls back as pleasure rolls through him. Slowly pulling out of my throat, his fingers gently stroke my cheek, letting me know how much he’s enjoying it.

“Show me how much you love my cock.”

Jesus.

His words turn me on so much I squeeze my thighs together, forgetting about the cold, uncomfortable rooftop floor that scrapes my knees. Grabbing his large cock by the base, I push him into my mouth, letting my tongue cushion his entrance. Taking him into my throat, my hands move to his balls, stroking them, then slowly pulling back. A loud groan reverberates from his chest as I watch the red tint fill his cheeks, a combination of the cool night air and the pleasure I’m giving him.

Saliva drips from the corners of my mouth as I continue working his dick in and out, my pussy growing wetter as I watch him lose control. I feel like a queen, servicing him and watching as he comes undone.

He grabs my hair with one hand and the base of his dick with the other, pulling out of my mouth. I’m in shock as his hands slide to my arms, pulling me to my feet. His mouth slams on mine, fingers going back into my hair, tilting my head the way he wants. The sounds of the traffic below fill my ears, the cool night air making goosebumps pebble on my skin.

Sliding his hands to my ass, he gives it a good squeeze before lifting me around his waist. He starts moving with me in his arms, feeling his heat warming my skin. Removing his lips from mine, he gingerly sets me on my feet, his eyes blazing with desire. “I need to be inside that wet pussy right now.” His gaze is so possessive and intense as he says, “Who do you want to fuck you? William or Will?”

A smile pulls up my lips. “Is both an option?”

He chuckles, his face moving closer to mine. “It can be.” He spins me around, pressing my hands on the edge of the ledge. “But I know what you really want. Who you need.” His chest presses against my back, the deep, low timbre of his voice increasing my arousal.

Looking down, I see the traffic flowing below, looking like ants from this height. He spreads my legs a little further, then the head of his cock is against my entrance, sliding through my wet folds.

“Please,” I beg, turning my head to look at him over my shoulder. “Give me what I want. What I need.”

“Impatient,” he teases, a smirk curling his lip. In that moment, I know it will be William taking control and fucking me into oblivion.

I gasp when I felt his enormous dick pushing inside me. With a shove, he penetrates me so deeply that I let out a little wince as I moan from the painful pleasure he’s inflicting.

His hand fists my hair and he presses his hand into my back, causing me to stick my ass out more. He pounds into me, a stream of curses leaving his lips, as the pleasure courses through me. Losing all control, I let Eve take me over, meeting William thrust for thrust. Our moans fill the night air as he pounds into me and I scream for more, begging him to go deeper and faster.

My skin is flushed from the heat source beside me as well as the way we are fucking with complete abandonment, not caring if anyone hears us, only focused on giving each other as much pleasure and pain as possible.

“Goddamn, William,” I pant as he shoves deep inside me. “It hurts so damn good.” I can’t say anything else as the fire burning inside my veins overtakes me. My legs shake as the orgasm hits me like a bolt of lightning. My hips slam back against his as incoherent sounds leave my throat.

“Look down, baby.”

It feels like I’m flying through the sky as the intensity of my orgasm rolls through my body. My eyes widen with wonder at the sensations swirling through me, goosebumps lighting up my skin despite the frigid air around us, my body slick with sweat.

Gripping my hair, William keeps slamming into me for a few more strokes until he tenses, spilling himself deep inside me with a loud groan.

He leans over my shoulder, his lips beside my ear. “I wanted to give you the same experience you give me. You make me

feel weightless, like I'm flying through the sky, whenever I'm with you. It's a heady sensation and makes me feel like the most powerful man, yet at the same time, I'm out of control."

I turn my head, feeling his heated breaths on my skin. "Thank you for giving me this experience. All of it. Letting our demons out to play and making me fly. It was incredible."

He nods, his lips meeting mine in a long kiss. Pulling back, he gives me a smile. "I'm not done with you yet." His hypnotic gaze is locked on mine as he pulls out of me. Spinning me around, he puts one hand beneath my legs as the other goes behind my back. Lifting me, he carries me bridal style to the couch he had me on earlier. He sits down with me on his lap, a soft smile on his face.

Lifting me up, he repositions me so that I'm straddling him. My breathing is shallow as his arms cocoon me, our faces close together. His head tilts slightly as those ice-blue eyes penetrate deep inside me, as though he can see straight to my soul. His muscular arms are wrapped around my back like a warm blanket.

Slowly, he moves his lips closer to mine, and I suck in a breath, anxious to feel his soft, pillowy lips against my own. As they press together, the coarse stubble of his facial hair lightly scratches my face. The metallic tang of the blood on his skin drifts through my nose as a gust of wind blows, lifting my hair from the back of my neck.

As he moves his lips with mine, electricity courses through my veins, lighting up my nerves. One of his hands slides into

the fall of my hair as the other moves to my ass, squeezing it. He presses the center of my body against him as I marvel at his hardness. I cup the back of his head, holding his lips against my own, breathing him in as he takes my breath away.

When we pull away, we are breathless.

“Ride me, Everleigh. I’ve shown you how much William loves Eve. Now show me how much you love Will.”

His deep voice flows through me, the timbre of it turning me on more, making me wetter. Wrapping my hand around the base of his cock, I lift myself, pressing his head against my folds. Slowly, I sink down on him, inch by inch, both of us moaning in unison, sinking until I can’t go any further.

“Fuck, baby.” His eyes are nearly white from the lust filling him. “That pussy is so wet and tight.”

“Only for you, love.” I slowly raise myself up, then slide back down on him, sheathing him deep inside me. “It’s always been you, Will. You are the only man I’ve ever loved.” One of my hands moves to his cheek, gingerly stroking it. He blinks, a lone tear falling down his cheek. I wipe it away with my finger, still moving up and down, swiveling my hips every time I sink down to his base.

“I love you, Everleigh. You are the only woman I’ve ever loved. The only one I could ever love.” Wrapping his arms around my back, he tightens his grip, squeezing me like a python. “You’re mine.”

“Always yours,” I say, moving my body a little faster once he loosens his grip. “I belong to you and only you, Will. Every single piece of me, broken and whole.”

A small smile crosses his lips. “Same gorgeous.” He moans as I slide down on him, moving my hips like I’m working a stripper pole. He leans forward, his face against my neck, as though he’s fighting not to lose control. It spurs me on, becoming the biggest turn-on I’ve ever experienced as I feel him shake, feel him weaken as his strength leaves his body. “Fuck, your pussy is incredible,” he whispers against my skin, his deep voice making me shiver slightly.

The orgasm rolls over me and I grip him tightly, my nails cutting into his skin. I grip his dick like a vise as the pleasure hits me like a ton of bricks, making me breathless. “Will,” I choke out as tears flow from my eyes, overwhelmed by the emotions coursing through me.

It takes less than sixty seconds for him to let out a deep moan and follow me over the edge, filling me with his seed. His thrusts come to a standstill as we clutch one another on the couch, our hot breaths warming the other’s skin. Closing my eyes, contentment fills me as he holds me in his arms.

Suddenly, my eyes fly open and I pull back slightly, trying to examine his wound using the fire behind us. He startles, then chuckles lightly when he realizes what I’m doing.

“I’m fine, love. Once we get dressed and head to Maverick’s office, I’ll get checked by the doctor.”

I heave out a sigh. “Thank you.” I blink rapidly, trying not to cry.

“Hey, stop that goddess.” His fingers trace lightly over my face. “I needed this. You’re the best medicine for me, healing all that ails me. Please don’t feel guilty for losing control and getting wrapped up in the pleasure.” He presses his lips gently to my forehead. “Everything that happened on this roof tonight, I wanted to happen. Needed it. Needed *you*.”

My smile is watery as I stroke his jawline. “No regrets, huh?”

He shakes his head. “None for either of us.” He kisses me gently. “Now, how about we get dressed and go downstairs?”

Grateful he’s going to get checked out by a doctor, my smile grows. “Sounds good.” Cupping his face gently, I whisper, “I love you, William *and* Will.”

His eyes brighten, drawing in the light from the stars above. “I love you Everleigh and Eve. My goddess of light *and* darkness.”

Fifteen

William

I HOLD EVERLEIGH'S HAND in mine as we make our way to Maverick's office. Everleigh fidgets beside me, smoothing down her hair, then tugging on her shirt.

Smirking, I lean over, my lips close to her ear. "No matter what you do, you can't wipe that 'I just got fucked good and hard' look away."

"Will." She pushes against my arm, a faint pink blush covering her cheeks. It's so fucking hot that my woman can beat someone's ass, torture, and even kill them, but she blushes at the thought of everyone knowing she just received a good banging from me on the rooftop. "It's just weird walking into Maverick's office like this. He stares at me enough whenever he sees me."

A growl comes from deep within my chest. "And if he fucking does it today, I'll beat his fucking face in."

Her smile widens, her earthy eyes sparking. "So possessive." She stops in the stairway, turning and facing me. One hand slowly works its way over the grooves of my abs

and up my chest. Her gaze follows her fingertips, then flicks up to mine. “It’s hotter than hell.”

Lowering my head, I stop when my lips are a breath away from hers, so close, yet not touching. “If you don’t stop touching me like that, I’ll bend you over and fuck you again.”

She cocks her head, her voice flirty and breathy. “Is that supposed to discourage me?” Her fingers keep trailing over my skin, stained with blood.

I raise my brows. “You’ll be uncomfortable sitting tomorrow.”

She presses her body tighter against mine. “Sitting is overrated.”

A loud laugh escapes me as I tighten my arm around her, turning her and continuing down the stairs. “If our friends weren’t waiting, I’d take you up on that offer.” When she looks up at me, I wink at her. “Wait until we get home.” My voice is deep and low, causing her to shudder slightly, just like I knew it would.

“I’m holding you to that.” Her eyes sparkle with desire.

“You don’t have to worry, love. I *always* keep my promises to you.”



Maverick shakes my hand, a smile on his face. “That was a helluva fight, Will. Impressed the hell out of me. Although I’m

sorry he decided to be a cheating asshole.” His gaze moves to Everleigh. “But your woman had your back.”

I bristle, my spine snapping straight, angered by him looking at her, and reminding me of the way she put herself and our babies in danger. “She shouldn’t have endangered herself. Especially since she’s pregnant with my children,” I snap.

Maverick’s smile widens as his eyes lock with mine. “Dad mentioned that to me. He stepped out to use the restroom, but he watched your fight. Impressed the hell out of him.” He stares at me for a few beats before continuing. “He knew Everleigh would beat Savage Rob’s ass when he cheated, then stabbed you. His words were, ‘Stupid fucker has a death wish,’ then he shook his head like he pitied the bastard.”

Everleigh’s shoulders were tense from my words, but now they pull back from pride. “At least he has faith in my abilities,” she mutters.

My gaze snaps to her face. “I have complete faith in your abilities, love. I just don’t relish the thought of you recklessly jumping into danger, especially when you’re pregnant with my girls. And I won’t apologize for it.”

“Will,” Everleigh admonishes me. “We don’t know for certain we are having twin—”

“We are,” I interrupt, my tone firm and leaving no room for argument. “We’re having twin girls.”

Maverick chuckles, putting his hand on my shoulder. “Sorry, Everleigh, but I’m with Will. This guy has an uncanny ability to know things before the rest of us. If he says you’re having twin girls...” He shrugs, removing his hand.

Everleigh chuckles, looking up at me. “Will *always* gets what he wants.”

“That’s right.” Grabbing her, I bend her backward slightly, my forehead pressing against hers. “Don’t forget it, goddess,” My voice is low and comes out as a slight growl, making her breath hitch as she blinks up at me. I cover her mouth with my lips, kissing her until she’s breathless. Slowly breaking the kiss, I stand her upright, taking in her slightly dazed expression.

“Congrats, Will and Everleigh.” Maverick extends his hand and I take it, shaking it. Then he does the same to Everleigh, squeezing her hand gently. I glower at him, making sure he understands she belongs to me. He quickly releases her hand.

“Hello, there, son. And his beautiful, soon-to-be wife.” Dad stands in the doorway of Maverick’s office. As soon as I turn to him, he strides over, clapping my shoulder. “That was one helluva match. You really kicked that guy’s ass.” His smile turns into a grimace. “It’s a shame the asshole decided to cheat. I’m still pissed about that.” He shakes his head, removing his hand from my shoulder, then lightly grips Everleigh’s fingers. “My soon-to-be daughter-in-law sprang into action, though.” He gives her an impressed look. She preens under it, then gives me a gloating look.

“That would be fine and well except she put herself and our babies in harm’s way.” My eyes narrow at her.

“Now, Will.” My dad lays a comforting hand on my arm. “I know you are protective as hell of Everleigh and your girls, as you should be. But you can’t blame her. She loves you. And if the situation were reversed, you would have jumped in the ring if The Beast would have thrown something in her eyes, then stabbed her.” He looks from her to me. “You would have killed that fucker. At least she stopped before she killed Savage Rob. That says a lot.”

His words deflate my anger as I lock eyes with hers, seeing the defiance blazing in her irises.

“Will and I have discussed it. He knows my position on what I did and that I stand by my actions. But I also understand his concern and protectiveness.” She squeezes my bicep affectionately, a worried frown covering her face. “The more pressing issue is his injuries.” Her eyes sweep over me, examining me before they cut to my dad, then Maverick. “Is there a doctor here, or should I call William’s physician?”

Maverick grins, putting his hand up to try to hide it. “There is a team of doctors here and of course, William’s physician is always present on nights he fights. I can escort you and Will so he can get—”

“I know the way,” I bark, irritation making my muscles tense. I still don’t like the way he looks at Everleigh, even though he’s being far more respectful than the last time. But if

I catch him looking at her like he wants to fuck her, I'm ripping his dick off and shoving it up his ass.

Catching Darin's eye, my brow furrows. He's been awfully quiet today, and I can tell he's bothered by something. He gives me a grin, communicating to me it's nothing for me to worry about.

That must mean he's having issues with Vanessa again. If Everleigh notices, she'll meddle.

Inwardly, I roll my eyes. My gaze cuts to Bryan's, who smirks at me. He knows me well enough to know what I'm thinking and arches a brow in silent warning to keep my mouth shut. He knows if I warn Everleigh not to meddle, it's like waving a red flag at a bull.

I can't help but notice that he's been glued to Savannah's side. Everleigh hasn't noticed yet, but it's not surprising, since she's been preoccupied with me.

Squeezing her hand, I head to the door, Darin, Bryan, and Savannah following us as I lead Everleigh toward the medical quarters. My muscles are tense, and the wound from where the knife sliced into my flesh burns, making me grit my teeth. I'm lucky my body was angled the way it was because of Savage Rob throwing that shit in my eyes, or I wouldn't be walking right now.

Everleigh's lips curl into a smirk. "Good thing I intervened when I did, huh?" She gestures toward my shoulder, covered in blood.

I glower at her, anger prickling beneath my skin. “Do you really want to start this again?”

Her laugh is low, completely unbothered by my pissy attitude. “I’m just sayin’.”

“You’re going to be saying something if you keep it up.” I lower my lips to her ear. “I’ll make you scream my name while I fuck you until you’re too exhausted to move.”

Her body shudders from my tone of voice and words. Her head turns toward me, earthy eyes full of desire. “Is that a promise?”

Damn, this fucking woman makes me insane. Now my dick is hard again.

“If I make it, you know I never break it.” Winking at her, I push through the doors to a flurry of activity in the room in front of us as nurses and doctors run around, treating injured fighters. A nurse spots me and hurries over, beckoning me to follow her.

“She stays with me. As do they,” I say to the nurse’s back.

She tosses me a look over her shoulder, never ceasing her movements. “Yes, Mr. Anderson. Whatever you wish.”

As I follow behind her, Everleigh tugs on my hand. “Does everyone do what you want?”

“Everyone except you.”

She barks out a laugh, her hand moving to her mouth to cover it. “I sometimes obey you. When I’m naked and in the

throes of passion.”

I snort. “Yes, occasionally. You’ve also bossed me around in the bedroom and prior to you, I *never* allowed that.”

Her smile holds the warmth of the sun. “I must be pretty special, huh?”

I spot Dr. Jackson waiting by the hospital bed. Stopping, my other hand lifts, knuckles grazing her cheek. “You’re more than special, goddess. You’re my entire fucking universe.”

Her breath hitches in her chest as her eyes soften. “You’re mine, too.”

Lowering my head, I give her a soft, brief kiss, then pull away, heading toward the bed. Internally, I’m grumbling about doing this, preferring to go home to spend time with my woman. But this will appease her and I live for her happiness.

As I sit on the bed, Dr. Jackson asks me questions, examining the knife wound first. Everleigh, Darin, Bryan, and Savannah sit on chairs surrounding me. I notice Savannah’s posture is tense as Bryan settles in the chair beside her. My gaze moves to Everleigh and fuck—she’s noticed, her eyebrows raised at Savannah.

Goddamn it. She’s going to meddle.

Dr. Jackson moves in front of me, blocking my visual of Everleigh, as he examines my eyes. Once he’s finished, he pats me on the uninjured shoulder. “The good news is a few stitches will fix up the wound on your shoulder. I recommend you flush your eyes out before bed tonight and give you some

drops that should ease the irritation. Otherwise, I'd say you got pretty lucky." He shifts his weight and my gaze locks with Everleigh, wearing a shit-eating grin.

She shakes her head and sticks her tongue out at me.

I'm going to bend her over my knee when we get home.

My dad comes in, drawing my attention to him as he walks over, his hands shoved in his pockets, a worried frown on his face. "How are you?"

"Doctor is gonna stitch me up. He's giving me a rinse for my eyes, along with some drops. Then I'll be as good as new."

His features relax, as does his posture. "I'm relieved to hear that. Wonderful news." He pats my good shoulder, then moves out of the way as Dr. Jackson moves around him, ready to work on stitching my wound. My dad goes over to Everleigh. "And how are you feeling, young lady? How are those granddaughters of mine?"

Her face glows as she looks up at him. "The three of us are great. It's been pretty easy, so far. I've been nauseous in the mornings, but ginger ale and crackers seem to take care of it." She rubs a hand over her still flat stomach. "I can't complain."

"That's wonderful news." He puts a hand on her shoulder, squeezing gently. "Thank you for ensuring my son didn't get seriously injured." He says it low, meant only for her ears, but I hear it because I'm watching them so intently.

I'm always watching my woman.

“You’re welcome. I’d do anything to keep him safe. I know he’s angry I intervened, but I...” She ducks her head, sniffing. My heart lurches inside my chest as I see the sorrow she tries to hide. Her head is lowered so her hair falls over her face. After taking a few deep breaths in and out, she looks up at my father. “I love your son so much and I can’t live without him. It destroys me to think of him being seriously injured. I hated it when Ainsley kidnapped him. It was the worst torture, imagining what she could be doing to him. When I rescued him and he was injured from the car accident and the torment they inflicted, it shredded my insides.” Her body releases an involuntary shiver that makes her wrap her arms around herself, her face pale. “I was so grateful once he was healed and feeling like himself again. Until he was, I ached whenever he did.”

My heart lurches inside my chest, a knife twisting it, as I hear her low confession to my father. My woman hid her trauma over my suffering well. It guts me, knowing she was in agony along with me.

It makes the boy inside me want to weep that someone finally loves him, loves *me*, so much. Everleigh is everything I’ve ever dreamed of, and more.

I’m the luckiest damn man on this planet, completely undeserving of her and her love, yet grateful as hell and fully accepting all she gives me.

I love her just as much.

More than I even dreamed possible.

Sixteen

Everleigh

WILL AND BRYAN HAD a meeting, so I finished eating my breakfast, asking Emma to join me. Although it was tough to get her to stay seated and not want to serve me. I talked to her about Will's fight, sparing her some of the gory details, and about Will being upset at me for intervening when he got hurt.

Emma is the voice of reason and really helped put things in perspective for me. I know Will is very protective of me and the babies inside me, but hearing Emma describe how broken Will was when I left him cut me to the core. Reaching across the table, she squeezed my hand in hers and said, "Everleigh, William just wants to ensure nothing will happen to you. He lost you once and it nearly killed him. But if he lost you again... I'm not sure he would survive it. He'd turn into a completely different person if he did... Someone I'm not sure any of us would want to know."

That spoke volumes. Emma knows more about the darkness inside William than I previously thought.

And while I know he ached for me as much as I did for him, to hear how badly he went off the rails consumed me with guilt and remorse.

Emma's voice is inside my head as I sigh, heading down the hallway to change out of my pajamas. "I'm not telling you this for you to feel guilty. I'm telling you this so you understand Will better."

While I know that to be true, I can't help the regret that swirls inside me, twisting me into knots. I vow to spend the rest of my life making it up to him with all the love I can possibly give him.

My phone beeps as I reach my bedroom door. A smile pulls up my lips and I shake my head as I read it.

Savannah: I'll meet you at the bridal shop at 11:00. I have a surprise for you, but I need to make a stop beforehand.

Me: That's fine. I love surprises and can't wait. I'll see you then.

As I step through the bedroom door, I glance at the time. It's only 9:15 am.

Plenty of time. I need to see Will.

I hurry into the walk-in closet, change my clothing, then grab my purse and car keys. Will doesn't have his meeting with Sumer Tech Industries until 11:00 and I'm excited to

surprise him and talk to him about an idea that's been percolating inside my head.

Last week, I had lunch with Irelynn, and her conversation about the counseling program and the internship she's doing left me envious. I think it would be fulfilling to counsel children, particularly those who are victims of abuse, but I've never been able to stay in college without Ainsley interrupting.

Now she's out of the picture and I can finally plan my future.

I want to talk to Will about it and get his perspective. He fully supports everything I do, but the excitement and anxiety circulating inside me won't stop until I share it with him. As much as I want to return to school, I worry about the timing of it. I'm sure he'll suggest hiring a nanny to help out, but I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that idea. Mostly because I have no idea what having one entails. Although my mom had money, I never had a nanny.

"Bye, Emma. I'm going to go surprise Will at his office." I cut through the kitchen, giving her a kiss on her soft, round cheek. Her smile is wide as she grabs me in a hug. "Thanks for the talk this morning. It really helped."

She pulls back, her eyes sparkling. "Anytime, sweetie. Are you going to talk to Will about going to college?"

After my lunch with Irelynn, Emma could tell I was preoccupied when I returned home. I wistfully told her about the conversation with Irelynn and she deduced I'd like to return to college and continue my education.

Pulling back, I give her a nervous smile. “Yes, I plan to.”

“Don’t be nervous, sweetheart. Will loves you and will do anything possible to support you.”

I let out a puff of air. “I know I’m being silly. I have no idea why I’m nervous. I’m also excited about it.”

“As well you should be.” She watches as I grab a bottle of water from the fridge. “How about I make you some of those brownies you like so much? Then we can celebrate when you return.”

“Emma, it’s like you can read my mind.” Uncapping my water, I take a drink, then give her a huge smile. “I’m going with the bridesmaids to pick out their dresses after seeing Will, and then we are going for lunch. It will be later this afternoon until I’m home.”

She waves a hand dismissively. “That’s fine, my dear. I’ll make the brownies and have them waiting.” She grabs a dish towel and lightly swats my butt with it. “Now go. Once you talk to Will, I know you’ll feel better and wonder why you didn’t do it sooner.” She gives me a wink as I let out a relieved giggle.

“Thanks, Emma. You’re the best. See ya soon.” Turning on my heel, I stride from the room, heading to the garage.

She’s right. Will is nothing but supportive and will do anything to help me reach my goals.

Humming as I reach my car, I open the door and slide behind the steering wheel.

I can't wait to surprise Will.

As I start the car and back out of the garage, I decide to stop and get coffee and pastries on the way.



Fifteen minutes later, I walk down the hallway toward Will's office, pastries and coffee in hand. Bryan walks out of his office, his eyebrows raising when he sees me.

“Good morning, Everleigh. Here to see Will?”

“Good morning. Of course. But I have a coffee and a pastry for you as well.”

“You're the best.” He hurries toward me, grabbing the stuff from my hands. “Will has been cracking the whip all morning and I could use some caffeine and sugary goodness right about now.” He rolls his eyes, making a disgusted face before his expression transforms into an easy grin. “He'll be much more bearable now that you are here.”

Laughing, I fall in step beside him. “It's not that bad, is it? Isn't he just trying to ensure he's putting the right people in place since Colin what's-his-name is gone?”

“Colin Fry. And yes. But you know Will. Meticulous as hell.”

“That certainly describes him.” I pat Bryan's arm. “Thanks for carrying that stuff. I'm happy to return the favor by calming Will for you.”

“Bless you. And you are welcome. It’s no big deal.” He shrugs.

“Your momma raised you right.” I wink at him, taking in his profile. I debate for a few seconds before diving in. “How are things going with Savannah? I haven’t heard the two of you squabbling quite as much.”

Bryan snorts, turning his head toward me, his dark hair gleaming beneath the overhead fluorescent lighting. “We’ve dialed it back so that we aren’t snapping at each other every single second we are around one another.” He shakes his head. “She’s infuriating at times.”

I’m barely able to suppress my grin. “Infuriating, huh?”

He doesn’t notice as he blows out a frustrated breath. “She’s so competitive. Even when I try to dial things back and not antagonize her, she’s still at my throat, trying to prove she’s more efficient and smarter than me.”

I can’t help the laugh that escapes as I pat his arm. “She can be a handful. It’s worse for you since Savannah has always strived to prove herself in the male-dominated tech industry.”

He sighs. “I get it. The girl is insanely talented and smart. She needs to dial back the aggressiveness and accept a compliment when I give it to her.”

As we step through Will’s office door, I laugh again. “Good luck with that. The last time I complimented her, she turned red and ran out the door.” Will looks up from his laptop, his

face transforming from aggravated to pure happiness in mere seconds.

“Hey, goddess.” Shoving his chair back, he gets to his feet, striding toward me with muscles flexing beneath his suit as he moves. “This is a pleasant surprise.”

Goddamn, this man is gorgeous in a suit.

Enfolding me in his arms, he pulls me into his embrace, the scent of woods and spice enveloping me, calming all my inner turmoil.

“Hey, handsome.” Pressing my lips against his, I taste the coffee on his tongue, awakening my taste buds. Wrapping my arms around him, I forget about Bryan, focused only on the man in front of me.

The one who owns my heart and soul.

“I thought I’d surprise you and bring you coffee and pastries.” Tearing my eyes away from his penetrating blue orbs, I nod toward Bryan, who is opening the pastries, not paying any attention to us. “Bryan, too.”

“Ah. A sweet surprise. Although, you are by far the sweetest surprise.” He kisses me again before pulling back. Grabbing my hand, he leads me toward the coffees and pastries Bryan set on the round conference table in Will’s office.

My heart flutters in my chest at his words. He has a way of making me come undone at every turn.

Bryan sits down at the table, taking a drink of his coffee. His eyes twinkle as he looks from me to Will. “I’m just glad she’s here. Now you won’t act like a bear with a sore asshole.”

A loud burst of laughter comes from me as Will glares at him. “I’m not that bad, jackass.”

Bryan snorts. “You’re right. You’re worse.”

Will punches him in the arm, laughing. “Whatever, fucker. You’re used to dealing with me.” Grabbing my coffee, he hands it to me, then pulls out the chair across from Bryan, gesturing for me to sit down. Once I’m settled, he pushes the chair in, then pulls out the chair between me and Bryan, dropping his lean body into it. “I’m about to make your day far worse.”

Bryan pauses with the chocolate croissant halfway to his lips. “Worse, how?”

Will glances at me, then turns his attention toward Bryan. He grabs his coffee, leaning back in his chair, crossing his ankle over his knee. “Well, I needed to fill a position in the IT department. Someone knowledgeable about networks and good at preventing hacking attempts.”

Bryan’s shoulders tense, and he grabs a napkin, setting his pastry on it. Running a hand through his hair, he glares daggers at Will. “Please don’t say who I think you’re going to say.”

Will smirks, staring at him, not the least bit intimidated by the anger creeping over Bryan’s face. “Savannah has accepted.

She starts—”

“Son of a bitch.” Bryan’s hand slams down on the table so hard that his pastry nearly bounces off the napkin. “Do you fucking enjoy torturing me? Isn’t it bad enough that she and I work together outside the office? Now I have to be tortured by her all damned day?” His hand wraps around his coffee cup, squeezing it until some sloshes out of the top. “She’s high-strung and gets pissed easily. She’ll be at my throat all day.”

“Possibly. But you need to figure it out because you’ll be getting her up to speed—”

“Fuck that.” Bryan jumps to his feet, hands going to his hips. Turning to me, he says, “I apologize, Everleigh. I know she’s your best friend, but she’s insufferable around me.” His breath heaves out of his lungs, his face red. He starts to pace back and forth. “I know she has impressive skills, Will. So do other people. And they wouldn’t piss me off and challenge me at every turn.”

Will is not at all ruffled by Bryan’s behavior or anger. “I know you and Savannah have had your differences, Bry.”

“Had our differences!” Bryan stops pacing, spinning around and pinning Will with a look. “You’ve personally witnessed how we argue and fight over the slightest things. And now you want me to work with her?”

Will smooths his tie as he uncrosses his leg, pushing his chair back and getting to his feet. He walks over to Bryan, his demeanor relaxed and his voice soothing as he says, “Listen, Bryan, you are my best friend, and my decision to hire

Savannah is in no way to torture you. You know she's the best candidate for the position. I'm confident you can handle her and find a way for the two of you to work together without constant discontentment." His tone is placating, but I can see it's barely breaking through Bryan's heightened defenses.

Pushing my chair back, I stand, causing Will to turn his head toward me. I avoid looking at him, focusing on Bryan. "Listen, Bryan, I know Savannah is a handful. I knew you guys were arguing a lot, but I had no idea it was affecting you this way. I'll talk to her."

Bryan's dark eyes shoot to me, mahogany from the rage that makes his hands curl into fists. He's still not convinced anything will change.

But something has to. Savannah likely has no idea how much she's affecting him.

Putting my hand on his arm, I gently squeeze. "Savannah comes across as overly aggressive. It's a defense mechanism she uses to keep people from getting close to her." My gaze flicks to Will and he nods. Focusing on Bryan, I say, "She's had a traumatic past and unfortunately, she's taking it out on you. You're the first guy she's told me she finds attractive and because of that, she's doing everything she can to keep you at a distance."

I can feel his corded muscles softening as his expression transforms into shock. "Yeah, I kinda heard she finds me attractive. But she sure as hell doesn't act like it."

I snort, covering my mouth, unable to stifle the laugh that bursts free. “I know. But it’s not just that you are a good-looking guy. She thinks you are nice, and it terrifies her. She’s used to...” I swallow hard, looking down at the carpet, sadness filling me. Sighing, I look up at him. “She’s only experienced the worst in men. But you are testing her, showing that not all men are like that, and it’s tempting her. That’s why she’s pushing you away so hard. She’s terrified of getting hurt.”

The anger abates from his body, the redness leaving his face as he blinks at me, processing my words. I squeeze his arm one final time, then pull my hand away.

Will’s arm wraps around my shoulders. “She likes you, man. I don’t know how else to say it.” He cocks his head. “Remember some of the advice you gave me. The best things in life are both the hardest, yet easiest things to endure.”

Bryan stares at Will, swallowing hard, before Will drops his eyes to mine, our gazes clashing together as he gives me a gentle squeeze.

My heart pounds faster, overcome by the feelings I possess inside for him. He’s my partner. My confidant. My lover.

We make one hell of a team.

Bryan’s stunned voice breaks through my daze. “So how do I handle Savannah?”

Ahh. He really likes her.

“Keep doing what you’ve been doing. Be nice to her. Even when she’s infuriating. Be patient. You’re breaking down her

walls..." I pause, biting my lip, then deciding to go for it. "You can't tell her this..."

For a moment, Bryan looks slightly offended. "Everleigh," is all he says, his brows lowering.

I hold up my hand. "Sorry, Bry. I shouldn't have said that. You're discreet as hell."

His expression relaxes. "Yeah, I'd never break confidentiality. Ask Will."

I glance up at Will, who nods. "Bryan is my ride or die. His word is law. He never breaks a promise, nor would he ever betray anyone's confidence. Even if he was tortured." He grins and holds out his hand, fist bumping him.

"Forgive me for saying that, please. Maybe it's my pregnancy hormones." I shrug, still feeling bad. "She and I went for a run in the woods and she couldn't stop talking about you. When I brought it up, she turned bright red before she said, 'He's different, Everleigh. And it makes me feel weird because he's not... a monster.' I nearly tripped over a root when she said that because, although I've known Savannah for a long time, she's never said anything like that to me before."

Bryan sucks in a breath, his expression turning hopeful. He's quiet for a few beats, processing what I said, before he slowly smiles, his gaze returning to mine. "I'm glad you entrusted me enough to tell me that. It will help me hang onto my patience more when she's pushing me away."

“She’s a tough person to get close to. When I first met her in high school, she didn’t seem to have any friends. Even after I stood up to the bullies tormenting her daily, she was still guarded and hard to get close to. But she’s worth hanging in there for. There’s a heart of gold inside that girl. She’s just had a really shitty life.”

Bryan’s face is full of sympathy and sadness. “I’m sorry. She didn’t deserve any of what she’s endured.”

“I don’t want to reveal any further details than I already have. You’ll know you’ve made progress with her if she starts revealing her past to you.” Giving him a warm smile, I squeeze his arm. “Hang in there, okay?”

“Thanks, Everleigh. I appreciate what you did here.” He gives Will a devilish grin. “And thanks in advance for occupying this prick. I need to gather data before our 11:00 meeting, so I’m heading back to my office.” He grabs his coffee and pastry and heads to the door. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” With a twinkle in his eyes, he steps through the doorway, pulling Will’s office door shut behind him.

Will looks at his watch, grinning. “I have forty-five minutes of free time. Any ideas on how I can pass the time?” His smile is flirty as he steps into my space, his arms wrapping around me.

“I can think of a few things.” Grabbing his tie, I pull his mouth down to mine. Wrapping my arms around him, I start to lose myself in him.

And then I remember my conversation with Emma in the kitchen before I left.

Pulling back, I suck in a breath, trying to center myself. “I need to talk to you about something before we get too carried away.”

He studies my face, eyes shifting back and forth between mine. Slowly, a smile curls his lips. “Ah, you’re finally going to tell me why you’ve been preoccupied lately.”

Surprise fills my features as I stand there in his embrace. “You knew? You didn’t say anything.”

“I wasn’t going to push you since I could tell you were mulling it over, and it didn’t seem traumatic in any way.” He pushes back a lock of my hair before cupping my face. “Talk to me, love. What is it?”

“It’s about my goals and finally pursuing them.”

“You have my full attention, goddess. Please, continue.”



With his fingers wrapped around mine, Will stands beside me at the elevator, waiting for the doors to open. “Are you sure you don’t want me to walk you to your car?”

I put my hand on his chest. “Don’t be silly. You have a meeting to go to and need to prepare. I’m fully capable of walking myself to my car, love.” Standing on my tiptoes, I press a kiss to his lips. “But thank you for offering.”

“Always, love.” He hugs me as the elevator doors open. “Have fun with your bridesmaids.”

I give an exasperated laugh. “Sure, fun. Irelynn will be like a fluttering, stressed mother hen. Savannah will be indecisive as hell because she seldom wears anything formal. And Vanessa will probably be down in the dumps from whatever in the hell is going on with her and Darin.” I shake my head. “I may have to call Darin to hang out with me afterward and gorge ourselves on Emma’s brownies.”

Will chuckles. “Darin will never say no to hanging with you and eating brownies.” Kissing my cheek, he squeezes my hand. “I’ll be home around 4:00. Call or text if you need anything.”

Nodding, I reluctantly release his hand, stepping onto the elevator. “I love you. See you later.”

“Love you, goddess. See you in a few hours.”

As the elevator doors shut, I press the button for the lobby, leaning against the wall. I don’t know why, but there’s a sense of uneasiness in my gut.

As the doors open and I step into the lobby, I take a deep breath and release it, admonishing myself for being silly.

I’m sure it’s stress making my belly curl with uneasiness. As much as I love those three women, I dread shopping for bridesmaid dresses with them. I suspect it will be worse than stepping into the ring with The Beast.

With a purposeful stride, I exit Will's office building, the cold December air flowing into my lungs. Tightening my jacket around me, I stuff my hands into my pockets.

The wedding is slightly over three weeks away.

I must keep them on task and ensure we get their dresses today.

Seventeen

William

AS I SHOVE MY hands in my pockets and head down the hallway toward my office, a huge smile is on my face. I'm so proud of Everleigh for finally telling me what has been preoccupying her thoughts lately.

I chuckle. She was surprised I'd noticed. Of course, I did. I notice *everything* about that woman.

I'm thrilled she wants to return to college and pursue her dreams. Exhaling a breath, a lightness fills my body. She's finally moving on from the trauma of Ainsley terrorizing her, destroying all her dreams.

Now, we have nothing but happiness and the fulfillment of our goals and dreams to look forward to.

Loud voices pull me from my reverie.

"Who the hell are you, and how did you get in here?" Bryan's loud voice is stern, laced with anger. Hurrying toward the sound, I find him a few feet from his office doors, arguing with a man wearing shoddy clothing, looking as though he's homeless.

“Sorry, man. I was just cold and looking for some warmth. I didn’t mean to disturb anyone.” He slowly spins around, his gray eyes locking with mine.

“I’m sorry, but this is a private office building. I’ll have you escorted out—” Before I can utter another word, the man shoves past me, running toward the stairway. I watch him, baffled and uneasy, then turn to Bryan, who has moved beside me.

“That was weird. I looked out my office door and saw him peering around. Something about him made me uneasy.” Bryan’s brows are furrowed as he stares at the stairway door as it slams shut behind the odd homeless-looking man.

“Agreed. That was fucking weird.” Uneasiness makes my scalp prickle and there’s an unshakeable sense of something being wrong.

“He seems... off.” He looks at me, his face is full of concern. “I’ll check the cameras around the building.”

Bryan’s phone rings, interrupting us. He pulls it from his pants pocket, looking at the screen. “It’s Melinda.”

I nod for him to answer it. Melinda is my secretary and efficient as hell. She used to work for Gregory, the man I spent years believing was my biological father, until I offered her more money and much better working conditions.

“The team is in the conference room. Should I stall them?” Her voice has an edge of panic to it.

Bryan swears as he looks at the time on his phone. “We’ll be right there.” He hangs up. “Grab the elevator. I just need my laptop and I’ll join you.”

I nod, spinning on my heel and striding toward it, my mind whirling. I need to refocus my attention on the company I’ve just taken over, but there’s a nagging feeling in the pit of my stomach about that homeless-looking guy who ran out of here.

Holding the elevator, Bryan runs down the hallway, his laptop under his arm. As we step inside, he says, “I have some reports pulled up. It’s the information I’ve shown you earlier. Nothing new, which is good.”

Nodding, I heave out a breath. “That’s good news. I was hoping there wouldn’t be any surprises before the meeting.” I raise my brows, giving him a look. “At least, of that variety. That homeless looking man was unexpected.” Shoving my hands in my pockets, my thoughts whirl inside my head. “His build was pretty big for someone supposedly homeless. Like he works out a lot. And I swear I caught a glimpse of a tattoo on his neck before he fled.”

“Agreed. His clothing was off for someone with that physique.” Bryan shifts his laptop and I grab it from him.

“Why don’t you pull up the cameras on your phone? I’m curious about him.”

Nodding, Bryan pulls out his phone, his fingers rapidly flying over the screen. When he gets them pulled up, he checks a couple of cameras before we see the guy entering the lobby behind a group of people talking animatedly, probably

employees from Sumer Tech Industries. They pay him little attention as he stands in the lobby, looking around at the surroundings, before heading toward the stairwell.

The elevator doors open, and we step off. “I want you to investigate this more after the meeting.” Walking side by side, we head down the hallway to the large conference room on the floor below our offices.

Bryan nods. “No problem.”

Slipping my professional demeanor firmly in place, I walk through the door behind Bryan, surveying the room quickly. The atmosphere is full of tension and worry as people look at me with unease and furrowed brows. They don’t have anything to worry about as long as they keep doing their jobs. I’ve already gotten rid of the dead weight dragging the company down.

Handing Bryan his laptop, I wait until he’s settled in his seat before striding to the front of the room. I give everyone a polite, warm smile, then begin speaking. “Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming here today to meet with us. I’m excited about the future of Sumer Tech Industries.”

Melinda walks around the room, placing an agenda in front of the attendees seated around the enormous conference table. I see many bent heads and eyes skimming the page before they return their attention back to me.

I finish my speech, then introduce Matthew Byers, the man I’d chosen to replace Colin Fry. Before sliding into my seat

beside Bryan, I shove my hands into my pants pockets to pull out my phone.

My brows furrow when I realize it's not there. Checking my jacket pocket, I come up empty as well.

As I sit down, Bryan leans over. "What's wrong?"

"I can't find my cell phone," I whisper back.

"Did it fall out of your pocket when you were—ahem—busy with Everleigh in your office?"

I grin. "There's a real possibility. It's probably on the floor."

Bryan nods, his eyes lowering to the agenda in front of him. "We have a break in thirty minutes while they set up the catered lunch. You can grab it then."

Sitting back in my seat, I nod, turning my head toward Matt. It bothers me that I don't have my phone on me, but I try to reassure myself that I can last without it for half an hour. I really can't leave now and run back and get it. That would appear callous and rude and the employees of Sumer Tech have been through enough bullshit because of Colin's mismanagement.

Forcing my attention on the meeting, I reassure myself that everything is fine and I need to stop worrying.

I'll have my phone soon enough.

Eighteen

William

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, BRYAN'S phone vibrates on the table beside him, and his brows furrowed as he picks it up, looking at it. His eyes flit to mine before he holds out his phone so I can see it.

I don't like the look in his eyes. It sends a chill down my spine.

Panic fills my chest as I look down at his screen, Savannah's name staring back at me.

Savannah: Hey Bryan, it's Savannah. Is Everleigh still with Will? She hasn't shown up at the bridal shop yet and she's not answering her texts or calls.

It feels like cold fingers wrap around my neck, squeezing it. I can't get enough oxygen into my lungs as I reread her text, my stomach dropping. My heart beats sluggishly inside my chest as my brain scrambles to process what is happening, my emotions overwhelming me.

Pulling my gaze from the phone, Bryan's dark, concerned eyes are locked on me, studying my reaction.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen," Pushing his chair back, he stands, interrupting Matthew mid-sentence. "I'm so sorry to interrupt, Matt, but Will and I have an emergency we need to attend to. Our apologies. Please, continue without us."

I'm numb as I stand up, my eyes flitting around the room, a sea of faces gazing at us. I'm unable to discern one from the next.

The only thing I can see is Everleigh's face in every single person inside this room.

Spinning on my heel, I hurry to the door, shoving it open. Dashing outside, my breaths heave in and out of my lungs as my thoughts whirl.

Where the hell is Everleigh?

She should be at the bridal shop with Savannah, Irelynn, and Vanessa.

Bryan is hot on my heels, rushing after me. Putting a hand on my shoulder, we exchange only a single, loaded look before turning and hurrying toward the elevator. No words are exchanged until we step inside and the doors close, the elevator lifting us toward our offices.

"Do you think it's connected? That strange, homeless guy and now Everleigh not answering her phone?" He's already pulling up the app to the tracker in her ankle.

I glare at his phone. “I wish I fucking had my phone.” Running a hand through my hair, I grip the ends tightly, trying to control the spiraling rush of emotions that threaten to spin me out of control. “My gut tells me it’s related. I wish we knew who the hell he was and why he was here.” As the doors open, we scurry out, rushing down the hallway toward my office.

Once inside, I immediately run to my desk, my eyes scanning my desk where I usually set my phone.

But it’s not there.

Pulling out my desk chair, I checked the floor, but no luck.

Without saying a word, Bryan is beside me. “I’ll call you.” He presses my number and we wait, our gazes still searching my desk and the area surrounding it, expecting my phone to ring so I can grab it.

But it doesn’t.

Icy fear prickles my skin as I run my hand through my hair. “Call Everleigh’s phone.”

Bryan immediately calls her, but it rings and rings, then goes to her voicemail.

“Fuck,” I begin pacing, agitation flowing beneath my skin, making my hands shake.

“I’ll call Savannah. See if Everleigh showed up and left her phone in the car or something.” He dials Savannah, who answers on the first ring.

“Is Everleigh with you guys?” Her voice is laced with panic that flows through the line.

“No,” Bryan says, his eyes on me. “She was here with Will, then left around a quarter till eleven to meet you, Irelynn, and Vanessa.”

“She’s not here, Bryan. I’ve been texting and calling her. Her car wasn’t in the parking lot when I pulled in and it’s still not here.” Savannah’s voice quivers, the threat of tears apparent through the phone.

“We’re gonna check the parking lot to see if her car is still in front of my building.” My words are deliberately slow, trying to convey a calmness I don’t feel. “We’ll call you back soon.”

Bryan hangs up, his brows raised. “Think that homeless guy may have swiped your phone?”

“Possibly. I assumed it was in my pants pocket when I walked Everleigh to the elevator. I never returned to my office because of him, and I didn’t have it during our meeting.” I spin around, swiping my keys from my desk drawer and grabbing the handgun I keep under my desk.

Bryan lifts his jacket, showing me the gun on his hip. Releasing it, he looks at his phone. “Okay, the tracker in her ankle is showing... Wait, what the hell?”

I lean closer, staring with unblinking eyes at his phone. “Why the hell would her tracker say she’s there?” Pointing at the street name, Bryan lifts his head.

“She’s in trouble, Will. There’s no way she’d go there. Especially not on her own.”

Fear wraps around my heart, squeezing it so hard I lean forward, gasping for air.

“Are you okay?” Bryan’s hand is on my shoulder, but his voice is faint.

Curling my fingers into a fist, I dig my nails into my palm, waiting for the dizziness to fade before answering. “Let’s go check the parking lot.” My voice is firm as I straighten. “Check the footage from when she got on the elevator.”

Panic grips me as I stare with wide eyes out the window. As if I am having an out-of-body experience, I slowly walk toward it, my gaze locked on the parking lot.

As I gaze down, I spot her car, parked beside mine.

Whirling around, I sprint toward my doorway and out the door, anger replacing my fear. It begins like light rain, then increases in intensity until it boils into a pure rage, like a tornado that destroys everything in its path.

I’ll fucking burn the world down to find her.



Using my spare key to get inside Everleigh’s car, Bryan and I frantically searched it, but found nothing. No clues at all as to what may have happened.

Her purse sits on the floor where she left it. She only brought her keys, phone, coffee, and pastries inside my building when she came to see me.

The sound of a vehicle flying through the parking lot draws our attention. As it stops on the other side of Everleigh's car, Savannah moves quickly, removing her seat belt and throwing the door open. She doesn't even bother turning her vehicle off.

Running over to us, her face is white as a sheet, eyes wide and panicked as she locks eyes with me. I watch the last bit of hope drain from her blue eyes. Her hands clamped over her face as tears well inside them. She shakes her head back and forth, in disbelief that this is happening.

I feel the same fucking way.

"Okay, here." Bryan thrusts his phone in front of my face. "She's walking out of the building."

My attention immediately shifts to his phone. Savannah grabs Bryan's arm and from the other side of him, looks at his phone. A white van is parked a few rows behind her car. Everleigh is looking at her phone as she walks across the parking lot to her car.

There is no one around, other than her and the van that steadily creeps closer. Everleigh's attention is on her phone, not paying attention to it.

As she gets to her car door, my heart pounds so hard in my chest that I feel faint. She unlocks her car door, the van stops behind her car. A guy with a hoodie pulled tightly around his

face jumps out, running over to her. Before she can react, his hand is over her mouth and he shoves something into the side of her neck. She flails against him for a few seconds, her phone slipping from her hand, crashing to the asphalt. As she loses consciousness, he scoops her up, throws her in the van, then grabs her phone, running to the driver's side and hopping in. Slamming the door shut, the van shoots out around our cars, then does a U-Turn.

The last view is of the van barreling out of the lot, then making a right onto the street.

Savannah screams, her hands pressed against her chest, tears coursing down her face. Bryan turns, grabbing her as she sinks to the asphalt, yelling, "No, No, Nooooo!"

Adrenaline floods my system and my hands clenched into fists, watching Savannah break down without really seeing it.

Before anyone can react, I run around Everleigh's car, heading to mine. I hear Bryan call my name as I unlock the door, but I don't slow my movements. My thoughts are singular and I want only one thing—to get Everleigh back.

Sliding behind the steering wheel, I start my car, not even bothering with my seatbelt. Putting it in gear, I stomp on the accelerator, barreling out of the parking spot. My tires squeal as I do a U-turn and fly out of the parking lot.

I know the street where her tracker showed she was. I saw the white van in the video, and I have an estimated height of the asshole who grabbed her. He was wearing a dark sweatshirt and jeans.

Red hot rage floods my veins like lava erupting from a volcano. There's a pounding in my ears like the drums at a concert as my breathing escalates. If I looked in my rearview mirror, I suspect I resemble a fire-breathing dragon.

Bloodlust courses through my body, making my hands shake. I shift, gaining more speed as I whip in and out of lanes, the desire to get to her ruling all my senses right now. As my eyes shift around the landscape surrounding me, I see blood flowing over the streets and sidewalks, dripping from trees and plant leaves, covering the entire town. The thirst for blood is so intense it nearly chokes me, burning my throat, as I imagine all the ways that asshole's blood will slowly flow out of him.

I'm going to torture that fucker until he begs and pleads for death.

And I won't give it to him.

He'll suffer until he's so weak that his body will start to succumb to his injuries.

And only then will I kill him.

Nineteen

Everleigh

MY CHEEK IS PRESSED against something cold and hard as I slowly open my eyes. As my awareness gradually returns, I blink, taking in the dimly lit room surrounding me. All I see are concrete floors and walls. I slowly raise my head, taking in the little bit lit by the single lightbulb that shines overhead. It looks like it could go out at any time, plunging the entire space into complete darkness.

My breathing stutters as I let out an involuntary gasp.

Dropping my head, my cheek presses against the hard floor. Shivering from the cold that permeates my skin and seeps into my bones, despair washes over me, my body curling tighter into a ball as I lay on my side.

What the hell happened to me? Where am I?

Fighting the heaviness draped over my body like a weighted blanket, I force myself to try to move. I need to sit up and clear my head, figuring out how I can escape this cold dungeon.

Looking down at my body, ropes bind my wrists and ankles. Emitting a frustrated groan, I struggle against them, but all I manage to do is make them cut deeper into my skin. The pain burns through me, but I continue to work at them, hoping I can loosen them slightly.

All I succeed in doing is making myself sweaty and breathless.

Heaving in a breath of stale air, despair washes over me like a wave of cold, muddy water. My body feels heavy and weighed down before numbness replaces it. My head pounds like a marching band beating inside my skull.

My eyes grow wet and my vision blurs, hating that I'm in this predicament and not knowing why.

Sniffing hard, I close my eyes, sucking in a breath. I hold it for a few beats, then release it.

You can't cry or give in. You're stronger than this.

Focus!

Opening my eyes, I ignore my pounding head, searching through my memories to give me some clue of where I am and what happened to me.

The last thing I remember is walking out of Will's office, the brisk December air causing me to tighten my jacket around me. I hurried to my car since I had forgotten to grab my gloves. My phone beeped with a text message and I looked down at it. It was from Savannah.

Savannah: I rarely get sappy but today I am, so brace yourself. I'm a closed off introvert who has been through hell and back. I wasn't always this way. I wasn't always the recluse that I'd become until the shit with my stepdad. You met me at the lowest point in my life. I had no one... until you. You refused to give up on me. Despite all my efforts to push you away, you wouldn't be deterred. You're the sister I always wanted but never had, and the bestest best friend I could ask for. It means the world to me that you chose me to be your maid of honor. I hope that one day, I meet a man who loves me half as much as Will loves you. More than that, I hope I'm not so afraid of it that I push him away. I think it's worse to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Once you've experienced love, losing it seems to be the worst form of misery and torture. Anyway, sorry to get all morbid on you. I just wanted to say thank you and... I love you, girl.

Tears were in my eyes as I reread her sweet, touching message, my heart warming. I was touched that she sent me such a sweet message, knowing how hard that must have been for her.

I opened my car door, intending to slide inside, start it up, and turn the heat on before responding, and then... everything is hazy.

Shaking my head, I clench my jaw, my frustration mounting. Panic slams through my body, wondering where I am.

And where is Will?

Does he know I'm missing?

How long have I been gone?

Who the hell has me, and what do they want?

My insides quiver from the fear of the unknown and not having any control right now. My chest tightens while my breathing accelerates until I feel dizzy, like I can't take in enough air.

When I think I'm about to completely lose it, Will's soothing voice is like a calming breeze inside my head. "Just breathe, Everleigh. In and out, purposefully. Focus on me and only me."

Closing my eyes, I see him in front of me, his heated breaths caressing my face like the warmth of a summer day. His light blue eyes are magnetic, drawing me in, making me forget everything and everyone exists around me. I breathe in time with him, his exhales becoming my inhales. The spice and woods aroma comforts me, as does his touch when his knuckles graze my cheek, feather-light and soothing. My muscles uncoil and the fear that paralyzes me vanishes.

A smile curls my lips up as my eyes pop open.

But it feels like I've been punched in the stomach as the desolate, cold room comes into focus.

I'm still here, wherever the hell here is.

Inside this cold, barren, dimly lit dungeon.

My muscles tense as resolve courses through me.

I need to stop this shit and focus on getting the hell out of here.

Lifting my head, I fight against the ropes, moving my hands in all different directions. Ignoring the burn of their abrasive texture against my skin, I try like hell to loosen them so I can get free. A low grunt escapes me from my efforts, beads of sweat trickling down my spine and forehead.

Once I get my wrists loose, I'll remove the ropes from my ankles. I'll need to get the circulation going before I try to get to my feet and—

The sound of male voices penetrates my ears, distant at first. I halt my movements, ears straining, my heart pounding inside my ears. As their footsteps draw closer, their voices rise and echo from the concrete walls.

Laying my head down, I close my eyes, pretending to be unconscious. Holding my breath, I pray that whoever is approaching won't know I'm awake.

“Why the fuck did you grab her now? We're not ready yet, you incompetent fucking moron,” a deep, angry voice hisses.

Their voices are loud, indicating they are inside the room with me.

“I saw an opportunity and took it. Don't worry, Ronnie. We can grab the other one—”

His words are cut off as he yelps from pain. Slowly cracking my lids open to see what is happening, I catch a

glimpse of a slim, brown-haired man being held in the air beneath the dim light bulb, feet dangling above the floor. A tall, muscular man, his coal hair streaked with gray, tilts his head, glaring at the guy he's holding mid-air, as though his weight is nothing. His rippling bicep strains against his white t-shirt.

“Ronnie, please—”

“Stop saying my name, asshole.” Ronnie gives the guy a shake, the sleeve of tattoos on his arm apparent beneath the dim lighting.

Narrowing my eyes, I focus on the tattoo. It's a serpent wrapped around a long knife, wilted roses clinging to the snake and blade.

“We can't take her *now*, you fucking idiot.” A trail of spit flies from Ronnie's mouth onto the face of the guy he's still holding in mid-air. “You don't think William isn't searching for *her*? You took her in broad daylight from his motherfucking office building, asshole.” The side of his mouth twists in a menacing grimace, shaking the more diminutive guy in the air, as though he's trying to shake some sense into him.

The more petite guy sucks in a breath, his hands gripping the massive forearms of the guy still holding him.

The smaller guy wheezes out a plea. “I have a plan. We can still get the other girl—”

“I can’t grab Savannah *now*, you fucking moron,” Ronnie growls.

My breath leaves me with a whoosh when I hear Savannah’s name, fear lancing through my spine. Luckily, the more diminutive guy is flailing his hands against his assailant, his gurgling, choking noises covering mine.

With a loud roar, Ronnie throws the lean guy into the wall. The smaller guy smacks against it with a loud thud, then to the concrete floor like a sack of potatoes. Groaning, he lays there, gasping for air.

My muscles are coiled and tense as I watch with bated breath, waiting for Ronnie to kill him.

He’ll probably kill me next.

The more diminutive guy finally raises his head, sliding his body up the wall, holding his hands up in a pleading gesture. “Ronnie, this wasn’t a mistake,” he rasps, still wheezing from being choked, his voice strained. “I saw an opportunity and took it. I even had Pete dress as a homeless man to distract William and Bryan...” He trails off as Ronnie leans closer to him, his face twisted in a sneer.

There’s a shift in the stale air from the threatening energy that swirls around Ronnie, his anger so palpable it could disturb the dead. The light slowly swings from the chain on the ceiling, the creaky groan of the rusted metal protesting against the movement.

Ronnie's deep voice is chilling, making goosebumps cover my skin. "This wasn't an opportunity, Colin. God, you're such a fuckwad." His hands are on his hips as he shakes his head. "We had a plan and now you've fucking ruined it." Spittle drips from the side of his lips as he snarls at Colin, staring at him like he's a piece of shit. "You're nothing but a worthless, incompetent jackass. No wonder you ruined Sumer Tech Industries and your wife divorced you."

Oh. My. God. It clicks into place for me. Colin Fry is the guy Will ousted after he took over Sumer Tech Industries.

Colin trembles as he presses his spine into the wall. His fear turns to anger as Ronnie's words sink in, veins standing out against the side of his neck.

Yup, this dumb asshole is going to get himself killed if he opens his mouth again.

Ronnie senses Colin's anger. His hands clenched into fists as his intimidating, unblinking stare drills into him. Colin begins to shake, pressing his spine tighter against the wall. His breathing accelerates as he stares at Ronnie with wide eyes, waiting to see what he'll do next.

Fear coils in my stomach, my chest heaving as I watch and wait.

Ronnie remains still, his hulking body unmoving for several beats until suddenly, his hand shoots out, grabbing Colin's neck and squeezing it again. "You're on your own, Colin. *If* you manage to survive this, don't try to track me down, or *I'll*

fucking kill you.” He gives Colin a malicious smile. “Not that it’s possible for your dumbass to survive what’s coming.”

With a final squeeze, he releases Colin with a shove, causing Colin’s head to smack against the concrete wall, the sickening sound penetrating the room. Colin howls from the pain, grabbing his head.

Ronnie slowly turns his head my way. Quickly closing my eyes, I feverishly pray he didn’t see that they were open and watching.

My heart pounds furiously inside my chest as I wait for his footsteps to approach, trying hard to keep my quaking body still, anticipating his large hand wrapping around my throat and choking me next. With my bound wrists and ankles, I’m defenseless against him.

When nothing happens, I slowly open my eyes. Ronnie hasn’t come any closer, but he’s pivoted his huge body toward mine, staring at me curled into a ball on the hard floor.

Shaking from the fear that spirals uncontrollably through my body, Ronnie says something surprising, and it helps calm me.

“If you’re stupid enough to think that William won’t torture the hell outta you and kill you for touching her, you’re more of a dumbfuck than I thought.” His evil laugh bounces off the walls as he turns his head toward Colin. “I’ve spent months planning this and you ruin it all with your rashness. Mark my words—your blood will coat this town once William is through with you.” He shakes his head, staring down at Colin

with pure contempt on his face. He mutters, his low voice reaching my straining ears. “Your foolishness means I need to lie low for a while, but eventually, I’ll get my hands on Savannah.”

Heaviness descends over me from his words. He plans on going after my best friend, and there’s not a goddamn thing I can do about it right now.

Helpless tears well in my eyes, blurring my vision.

“See you in hell, asshole.” With that, Ronnie turns, his heavy boots plodding against the concrete floor as he heads away from me. I watch his bulky figure leave the room, knowing that is the way to freedom if I get a chance to escape.

Ronnie’s words replay inside my head, lingering on Savannah’s name. I didn’t get a good look at his face the day Savannah said she saw her stepfather, but I did catch the sleeve of tattoos on his left arm, and the man’s bulging frame before he disappeared.

He must be Savannah’s stepdad.

Fear coils inside my chest, wishing I could warn her.

I have a feeling if Will and Bryan knew she was in danger, they would do anything to protect her. They’d likely increase security and take every precaution. Hell, they’d probably put a tracker in her ankle like... My thoughts trail off as hope blossoms in my chest.

My tracker. Hopefully, Will and Bryan can use it to find me!

My gaze moves to Colin, who is still quivering against the wall. I'm not sure who he is more scared of right now—Ronnie or William.

Personally, although Ronnie is a huge hulking man, after seeing William inside the ring, he is every bit as intimidating as Satan himself.

Closing my eyes, I twist my wrists together, not feeling any slack in the ropes that bind them. Frustration mounts inside me and I want to scream that they haven't loosened.

When Colin gets to his feet, muttering about Ronnie being an asshole and that he doesn't need his help, I freeze my movements.

He stills as his gaze locks with mine, a slow, devilish smile curling his lips.

I try curling into myself, desperate to make myself smaller, invisible somehow, as fear winds through my body.

“Well, well, well. The lovely Everleigh is awake. How wonderful.” He claps his hands together in delight, his voice hoarse from being choked recently.

He slowly advances, each step making my heart pound faster until he's right in front of me. Hunkering down, his jade eyes glow as his leering gaze travels over my body, making me nauseous.

His words fill me with a mind-numbing fear as he gives me a mocking smile. “Now we can have some uninterrupted fun together.”

Twenty

William

PARKING MY BMW ALONG the street, I jump out and slam the door behind me. I sprint her last known location, the spot her tracker showed on Bryan's phone, my eyes looking around wildly.

There's nothing here except an empty, crumbling parking lot full of weeds that pushed their way through the asphalt.

Fuck! I run my hand through my hair, pacing back and forth like a caged animal.

Where the hell is Everleigh?

My emotions are overriding my logic, hampering my ability to find her. I suck in gulps of the cold December air, filling my lungs with it, hoping it will help me think clearly.

Instead, tears fill my eyes as a stabbing pain lacerates my heart, splintering it into pieces. The last time I felt this fucking helpless, I was a child. My father raped my mother while I was locked inside the closet, my sweaty hands clinging to the doorknob and turning with all my strength, begging and praying to a God who never listened to make it stop. When I

realized I couldn't get out, I prayed someone would come along and stop it, but no one ever did.

Fuck! What if Everleigh is being beaten and raped right now?

My body feels like a ton of bricks hit me in my chest, a heaviness descending over me like a powerful storm. My knee buckles, dropping down and hitting the asphalt so hard I feel my pants tear from a rock that cuts through the fabric, slicing my skin. My head lowers, staring at the pavement, helpless and vulnerable, disgust curdling my guts.

I'm a fucking failure.

I've let my woman down, unable to protect her. She was fucking taken from outside my office building, for fuck's sake.

Despair washes over me, tears coursing down my cheeks as worst-case scenarios run through my head like a movie that won't stop playing. It's making me half insane as I grip my skull, regret pouring from me a flood of water.

When I think I'm about to snap from the insanity, I hear Everleigh's beautiful melodic voice flowing through my head. "Please, find me, Will."

It soothes me, halting my whirling thoughts. Like a defibrillator just shocked my heart back into rhythm, the heaviness abates, strength filling my limbs. Lifting my head, I survey the vacant, dilapidated lot surrounding me. Hoisting myself to my feet, my thoughts are clear and focused on one thing—finding her.

My phone is missing, so I have no way to receive updates from Bryan. Since he had his hands full with Savannah, it's unlikely he's behind me, considering she collapsed in his arms.

I'm on my own.

Turning toward my car, it sticks out like a sore thumb in this bad part of town. The area is pretty much deserted except for a few birds and animals running around the old, decaying buildings surrounding this lot.

Fuck! I wish I had my phone.

Like a lightbulb, it hits me that I have a spare burner phone in the center console of my car for emergency situations. Sprinting to my car, I rip open the door, reaching in and grabbing the phone from the console. Pressing the power button on the phone to turn it on, I close the console lid, then climb out of my car, nervous energy flowing through me.

My eyes lift as the rumbling of a vehicle engine flies toward me. My hand reaches for the gun holstered on my hip, but I stop as the car draws closer. Squinting against the sun, Darin stops his Jeep behind my vehicle, cutting the engine and jumping out.

“What are you doing here?”

Darin's worried emerald eyes lock with mine. “Bryan called me and told me what happened. Luckily, I was running some errands in town when he called.” He steps into my personal space, a frown on his lips. “Do you know who took my sister?”

Frustration wells inside me as I shake my head. My jaw aches from clenching my teeth so hard. The camera footage has been on repeat in my mind since I saw it. I can't make out any identifying information about the hooded man who jumped out of the van and injected my woman with something, knocking her out, before he threw her in the vehicle.

Feeling defeated again, my shoulders deflate like a balloon. My vision blurs as I stare at the crumbling sidewalk beneath my shoes, feeling like a helpless kid.

Darin reaches his hand out, squeezing my shoulder, drawing my attention back to him. "Don't do that, Will. Everleigh needs William to find her and get her back." He stares at me for a few beats. "I need you to focus. Think of some enemies you may have, someone who—"

My snort interrupts him. "*Some* enemies I *may* have?" Crossing my arms over my chest, I give him a scathing look. "That would likely take the rest of the year, and neither Everleigh nor I have that kind of time."

Darin gives a brief chuckle. "Okay, asshole, so you have a lot of people who hate you." He shakes his head, leaning against my car. "I'm here to help you. Pull your shit together and man the fuck up. Become the callous, shrewd bastard William who is always two steps ahead of everyone else." He glowers at me before rolling his eyes. "My sister is turning you into a pussy."

My hands grip his throat, slamming him against my car, cutting off his air. “A pussy, huh?”

Darin slowly smiles and I release his neck, breathing heavily. He slouches against my car, hand coming up to massage his throat. “There he is. Hello, William.”

Eyeing him with cold disdain, he chuckles.

He pushes off my car, pulling his phone from his pocket. “Let’s get down to business. If you were me and this happened to Vanessa and I started freaking the fuck out, what would you tell me?”

“Aside from telling you to pull your shit together and not melt down like a pussy?” A smirk curls my lips before I say, “We’d go over everything we know, and I’d have you list anyone who has a grudge against you for any reason...” I pause, my hand going to the back of my neck, lost in thought.

“What is it?”

I quickly dial Bryan’s number on the burner phone, putting it on speaker so Darin can hear.

“Will. Thank fuck. Is Darin with you?” The sound of his vehicle engine comes through the line, indicating he’s on his way.

“I’m here,” Darin says before I can. “It’s a good thing, too. Will was—”

“Have you heard anything from Colin Fry?” I cut Darin off, shooting him with a warning look. “His whereabouts? Where was he last spotted?”

Bryan curses as he says, “Hold on. Traffic is a bitch. Let me pull off and I’ll check.”

Savannah’s voice is audible as she says, “I want to help, Bryan. I... I need to. What can I do?”

There’s a pause and then Bryan says, “Grab the laptop. I’ll have you start digging into Colin Fry while I drive.”

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I’m barely able to contain the anger welling inside me. “How long will this take?” I snap.

“Easy, William,” Darin says, raising his brows at me. Then to Bryan he says, “I’m assuming you’re following Will’s tracker and heading here. The location of Everleigh’s tracker is nothing but an abandoned, ruined parking lot. How could she just disappear?”

The sound of fingers flying over the keys comes through the line as Savannah says, “That’s a good point. If someone took her underground somehow, like maybe a bunker or something, wouldn’t that block the signal?”

I turn, narrowing my gaze on the lot. I don’t see anything to indicate an access point leading to something underground, but what Savannah just said is correct. The signals don’t penetrate underground or through concrete bunkers.

A horrific thought occurs to me, making me feel sick. I look at Darin, my eyes wide, my heart beating like a frantic bird flapping inside a cage. We run back to her last known location, searching for blood, footprints, or the possibility she was killed and buried—

My chest constricts as a wave of dizziness hits me. Right as my knees buckle, Darin grabs me, holding me upright, somehow managing to take the phone out of my hand. “Breathe, Will. She’s not...” His voice trails off as he looks away, swallowing audibly. “She’s not dead, okay? And I hope like hell no one buried her alive, but if so, we’re on borrowed time to find her. Get it together. Everleigh needs you.” His voice lowers, cracking when he says, “Your unborn twins need you.”

His words clear my vision, pulling me from the darkness that threatens to overtake me. Focusing on my breath, I close my eyes, a recent memory assaulting me.

The blinding smile on Everleigh’s face, porcelain skin glowing with happiness, her earthy eyes twinkling with love as she rubs a hand over her flat stomach. Her eyes lower to it, then raise to mine, before grabbing my hand, putting it on her stomach. “You’ve given me everything I’ve ever wanted, Will,” her breathy voice whispers. “A future I could scarcely afford to dream of. I didn’t think I deserved this because of the darkness within me.” Her lashes shimmer with tears, sparkling like dew on the trees, before falling down her cheeks. “You focus on the light within me while I fixate on my darkness. My light spills from me because of you. And when the darkness finds me, it’s always you who pulls me back into the light.”

My heart beats faster inside my chest, my breath hitching from the sincerity of her words. “I’ll always pull you from the

darkness, Everleigh, as you do for me. Alone, the darkness consumes, threatening to destroy us. But together, we draw out the light within, until it shines like a full moon in the darkness, blanketing our world.” My fingers cup her face, thumbs wiping away her tears. “No matter what happens in our life, Everleigh, I’ll always be here for you. Anytime you’re lost, I’ll find you.” Pressing my lips softly against hers, I taste the tears on her lips.

“I love you, goddess. You’re my world. The only thing that matters to me.” My hand lightly moves over her flat stomach. “And once these girls are here, they will also be my world. But you... you’ll always be my first priority. The woman who taught me how to love. Without you, none of this is possible. And I never, ever, want to lose you.”

Her arms pull me so close that our lips practically touch. “You’ll never lose me, Will. I’m yours, forever.” Biting her quivering lip, she clears her throat as she struggles to gain control of her emotions. “Damn pregnancy hormones,” she finally mutters, making us laugh.

Her smile slowly dies on her face as our bodies begin moving, dancing to the rhythm of our heartbeats.

“We are forever.” Giving me a soft smile, she says, “You and I are badass. We’ll save the other should anyone be stupid enough to try to separate us again. Or to hurt our kids.”

“We’re the perfect people to protect them.”

“Damn straight.” She winks at me. “Our pasts fortified our strength, showing us the worst behavior from parental figures.

It taught us what we don't want to be. We'll use those lessons to mold us into the best parents we can possibly be, offering our children all the love and affection we lacked."

"Indeed, goddess." I rub my nose against hers. "We've been through hell and back and have come out on the other side of it." I spin her around, lightening the moment. Rubbing my nose against hers, I sway with her in my arms. "I don't regret a moment of my past. I'd do it all over again as long as I end up right here with you." I kiss her, long and slow, showing how much I adore her. When I pull back, I slide my hand between us, over her stomach. "And ultimately, them."

Bryan's voice jars me out of my memories. "Savannah found something."

Darin and I lock gazes, holding our breath. "A guy named Pete Campbell is in debt to Colin. Apparently, he's been doing some work on the side, both stuff around the house Colin used to have before his wife divorced his scummy ass, but also illegal shit to pay his debts. Oddly enough, the guy in your office who looked like a bum—"

"Was Pete Campbell," I finished, the pieces clicking into place. "That son of a bitch, Colin, is behind this. Remember him seething with rage, screaming that he was going to get his revenge against me when I fired his ass?"

"Yup, I remember it well. Though I didn't think the jackass would be this fucking stupid to go after your fiancée." Bryan says.

Darin has a look on his face like something just clicked.

“What is it?” I whisper.

“Savannah. Can you hear me?” Darin says into my phone.

“Loud and clear, Darin. What’s up?”

“You mentioned the tracker doesn’t work underground in many cases, right?”

“Yeah, that’s correct.”

He nods. “Okay, thanks.” He spins around, pulling his phone from his pocket.

“That makes no sense,” Bryan says. “What is Darin doing?”

“He’s calling someone.” I watch as he brings his phone to his ear, his back turned toward me. “You guys will be here soon, right?”

“About ten minutes,” Bryan answers.

“Good. Talk to you then.” Without another word, I end the call, walking over to Darin, who is already having a conversation with someone.

“I know you know the history of this town better than anyone. Any World War II underground bunkers in this area?”

Stepping around Darin, I level him with a look. He simply whispers, “Dad,” then moves the phone from his ear, pressing the speaker button.

“What’s going on, Darin? You barely give two shits about local history, telling me it’s ‘nerdy’ and ‘boring,’ so I know something’s up. Out with it,” my dad says.

Darin blows out a breath, locking his gaze on mine. I nod, indicating he should give him the shortened version.

“Someone took Everleigh. We’re pretty sure it’s Colin Fry, who used to run the company Will recently purchased. Will and I are at her last known location, but it’s a parking lot with nothing around but some decaying businesses in the distance.”

I hear tires squealing through the phone as David, Darin and Everleigh’s dad, mutters curses. “I’ve turned around and am heading in your direction. I need you to tell me exactly where my daughter’s last known location is.”

Darin gives him the address, describing the surrounding buildings, but Darin’s dad cuts him off. “I know that area well. Yes, there is a bunker beneath that lot. It was owned by a former, very paranoid veteran. He was well known for conspiracy theories and fears of nuclear meltdowns. When the Three Mile Island accident happened, he was offering to let people stay in the concrete bunker beneath the lot... for a fee, of course.”

Hope glimmers inside my chest.

“How do you get inside the bunker?” I interrupt, my hands shaking from anticipation. I’m more than ready to save the love of my life.

“From where you’re standing, if you look to the right, you’ll see a small group of trees and what appears to be a hill behind it.”

Darin and I immediately head in that direction. I hear Everleigh's dad say, "Now walk around the other side."

I'm already there, spotting the door. Putting my hand on the knob, I'm already anticipating ways to break the fucking thing down if it's locked.

"You're going to lose me. Cell service won't work," Darin's dad says. "Go through that doorway and continue down the hallway. You'll probably need to use the flashlights on your phone because it will likely be dark. There is a small room and if you walk through it, it opens to a large room, roughly the size of the parking lot you were standing on. I'll be there in about twenty minutes." The line goes dead before Darin can even thank him.

Turning the knob, it opens. Darin and I turn on our flashlights and grab our guns. He nods at me as I head in first, leading the way, adrenaline flowing through my veins, not bothering to wait for Bryan and Savannah.

The only thing I care about right now is getting to her.

A sense of foreboding washes over me, causing me to hurry forward, removing the safety on my gun.

My woman is in trouble.

I feel it within every cell inside my body.

I just hope I'm not too late.

Twenty-One

Everleigh

FEAR WELLS INSIDE ME as I stare at the combination of rage and desire on Colin's face. The heat in his gaze makes vomit rise in my throat.

Like an inchworm, I wiggle my body across the concrete floor, away from Colin's leering gaze.

One of my biggest fears is being raped.

After listening to what Savannah endured at the hands of her cruel stepfather, there is nothing more horrific in this world to me.

But I refuse to just lie there and give in. Despite the wooziness I'm feeling, I will fight with every ounce of strength inside my body.

Not just for me, but for my babies.

My eyes are focused on a pipe running up the wall across from me, hoping that if I manage to crawl to it, I can grab hold of it and pull myself up. Maybe there is a bolt or something I can use to cut these ropes.

Hands grab my hair, jerking my head back. Pain courses through my pounding head and down my neck.

“Where do you think you’re going, Everleigh?” His foul breath hits my face as he leans over me, causing me to wrinkle my nose in disgust, nausea swirling in my stomach. “Oh, what’s the matter? Will’s breath smell so much better?” He gives another tug, making me yelp as he tries to roll me from my side to my stomach. I fight against him, searching my brain for all the self-defense moves I’ve learned over the years, and of course, from Will.

“You fucking bitch.” He grunts as he struggles against me, still unable to get me on my stomach. One hand releases my hair and punches me in the nose, making me scream as blood spurts out. He uses my distraction to roll me onto my stomach, his heaving breaths hitting my ear.

Victory is in his voice as he says, “I’m gonna fuck you up the ass until you bleed for making this so goddamned hard.”

Tears stream down my face, fear starting to overcome me. I have a desperate urge to flee but can’t do a damned thing about it since I’m bound, my wrists and hands pinched tightly against my chest beneath me, making it harder to breathe. My heart races so fast it feels like it’s going to beat through my chest and onto the cold, dirty concrete floor. The metallic tang of my blood fills my mouth as I heave out a sob, images of Colin raping me filling my mind like a vile nightmare come to life.

“Please, don’t,” I weep, turning my head to the side. “Don’t do this, Colin.”

The zipper of his jeans is loud as he releases my hair and pulls away slightly, obviously to get his dick out. I wiggle with my hands beneath me but can’t get them out from beneath my body. His excited pants fill the room as I squirm, bumping against his hard cock.

Colin slides his hands beneath me, yanking my body toward him as his hands dig into my hips. His hands slide around, fumbling for my button and zipper as I twist and turn my body away from him.

Tears stream down my face, rendering me unable to see. Helplessness descends over me, my body becoming heavy as I lose the fight, my body starting to give in as he manages to get the button and zipper undone.

No matter how much I struggle against him, I know the end result will be the same, and there’s not a damn thing I can do to stop it.

Giving into my grief, I wail like a child, my entire body going limp as he struggles to keep me on my knees so he can get my pants down. Colin curses and hits me in the face again, right beneath my eye.

Failure hits me square in the chest as Colin drags me to my knees, his hands pushing my jeans down my hips. Goosebumps cover my thighs as the cold air hits them, reality smacking me in the face, reminding me again of what’s about to happen.

He's breathing heavily from the exertion, the stench of his body odor hitting my nose, making me want to vomit. Sucking in a deep breath, I try to hold the contents of my stomach down as my body shakes and quivers with terror.

One of his hands lifts from me to wipe his brow. I wait with bated breath. The second his hand moves away, I throw my head back as hard as I can, smashing my skull into his face. Colin screams from the pain, dropping me to the floor. I wiggle like an inchworm, trying to get free, but it's in vain. Grabbing me by the hair, he yanks my head back and pulls me back to my knees.

“You fucking bitch. You're really going to pay now.”

It almost seems like wishful thinking as I spot movement from my peripheral vision. And then my heart nearly bursts from my chest, hope filling me, when I smell Will's signature cologne, the spice and woods scent feeling like home, making me want to weep.

Please, don't let him be a dream.

The feral growl that comes from him sounds like a pack of wild animals, ready to devour their prey.

Colin freezes for a beat, then releases me seconds before Will hits his body, knocking him off me. I fall to the floor, my hair covering my face. I twist my head, trying to see what is happening when I feel strong arms grabbing me. I flail at first until I recognize my brother's soothing voice in my ear.

“I’ve got you, Everleigh.” He pulls me to my knees, hugging me against him. I sob with relief, unable to touch him because of my bound hands. I feel him move beneath me, then he pulls away, pushing my tangled hair from my face. Holding up a pocketknife, he says, “I’m going to free you,” then uses the knife to cut my ropes before I can nod or say a word. As soon as they fall away from my skin, I wiggle my fingers, then shake my arms, trying to get the circulation going again.

“I’m going to help you stand to help you pull up your pants. Unless you think you can get them up yourself?”

I try gripping his shoulders, but my fingers have pins and needles sensation in them. “I can’t,” I mutter, feeling helpless.

Darin nods, helping me to my feet, holding onto me as he tugs my jeans up my legs.

“Bet you never thought you’d be doing this to your sister,” I say in an attempt to lighten the awkward mood.

Darin pauses, a chuckle escaping him. “Never in a million years, ketchup.”

“Thanks for helping me, hot dog.”

He meets my eyes and I nearly start to cry, seeing so much love in them, yet also the unadulterated rage at what has happened to me.

“Always, lil sis.” He winks before buttoning and zipping my pants.

I turn my head, looking for Will, the sounds of fighting echoing off the walls.

Only when my head turns, I find William, raging like a beast, beating the living fuck out of Colin. His fists repeatedly slam into Colin's limp body like a punching bag. Even though I'm relatively confident Colin is unconscious, William doesn't let up, continuing to batter his bloody body, raging like a beast.

I'm so happy to see him that a loud sob bursts from my lips and I croak out one word.

"William."

The second I say his name, he ceases all movement, his face raising to mine, eyes pinning me in place. The devil burns in his eyes, darkening them from his rage.

I hear Darin say, "I've got this."

William leaps to his feet and faster than a tornado, he's in front of me, lifting me into his arms. I wind my arms around him, burying my face in his neck as I break, my loud sobs filling the room, echoing from the walls.

"I've got you, love," his strong voice whispers against my skin as he grips me tightly. "I'll always find you."

His words soothe and calm me, throwing me the safety net I desperately need as I drown in his arms.

Pulling back, I wipe the tears from my cheeks. "Thank God you're here." I give him a shaky, watery smile, agony still coursing through me at how close I came to be assaulted.

His eyes glow with all the love he feels for me. "When the darkness finds you, it will always be me who pulls you back to

the light.”

I nod, tears flowing down my face. Raising my hands to cover my quivering lips, he grabs my wrist, halting my movements. His eyes roam over my face, a deep frown marring his as he takes in my beaten, bloody face. I feel the stickiness, the copper smell swirling around me, the pain from the hits Colin delivered.

A growl rumbles deep within his chest, shaking my body as he holds me in his arms.

“William, don’t.” I slide one hand from his neck to his jawline, caressing gently. “I’m fine.” Staring into his ice-blue eyes, I see the guilt simmering there and know exactly what he’s thinking. “You saved me, Will. He didn’t get a chance to...” I close my eyes for a few beats, unable to say the word.

Opening my eyes, I say, “You prevented it. You’re my hero... again.”

His face softens, and in a span of seconds, he goes from William to Will.

A slow smile tugs his lips up. “I’ve never wanted to, nor claimed to, be a hero. But I’ll proudly be your hero, goddess.”

I grip him tighter, my gaze going over to where Darin has his knee pressed into Colin’s back, who lays face first on the floor. Colin lays there, limply, as Darin meets my gaze. His face and hands are bloody, as though he was beating on Colin, too.

Will follows my gaze, then gently grabs my quivering chin, turning it to him. “Eyes on me, goddess.”

“I’m scared, Will. That experience...” I shiver. “It left me in a very dark place.”

“I know.” His voice is husky with emotion as he presses his back to the wall, sinking down to the floor, still holding me in his arms. “But remember, I’ll always pull you from the darkness, drawing out your light.”

Laying my head against his neck, I breathe in his comforting scent. His powerful yet warm embrace is like a security blanket wrapped around me.

Raising my head, I meet his concerned blue eyes. Raising a hand to his face, I touch him reverently. “You’re my full moon, cutting through the darkened sky, lighting up my world.” I try to brush my tears away, but he stops me when I wince, my wrists raw from the rope burns.

Using his thumbs, he gently wipes my face, warmth flowing inside my aching heart from the trauma I experienced tonight.

Although he treats me with softness, he doesn’t make me feel like I’m broken or victimized. His gentleness is a healing balm, covering my invisible wounds, making me feel stronger.

His eyes lock with mine. “I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond.”

I’m so overwhelmed by the swirling emotions inside me, like a tornado of light and darkness swirling inside, that I can only say, “Ditto, my love.”

He squeezes me tighter. “Let your light shine, beautiful. This problem will be eliminated, and I’ll make damn sure no one ever hurts you again.”

He stares at me for a few beats before his lips cover mine, and I taste the promise on his lips and tongue.

Twenty-Two

William

AS I HOLD HER in my arms, I focus on being what she needs. A calming force, driving back the darkness, pulling her into the light.

Inwardly, however, it's a different story. Rage leaps inside me, burning through my veins like an uncontrollable wildfire, ready to burn down this entire fucking town because the unconscious jackass on the floor put his hands on my woman.

He *hit* her. Tried to *rape* her.

Fucking unacceptable that he put his hands on her, let alone assaulted her.

I'm glad I was able to get here before he sexually assaulted her.

I should fucking cut him with a thousand razor blades until he slowly bleeds out, then hang his naked ass in the center of town and set it ablaze for all to see.

It would certainly set an example, letting everyone know you don't fuck with the woman I love.

Darin meets my eyes, nodding that everything is under control. I stare at him, rage burning within. Everything isn't under control yet.

Not until I torture the motherfucker lying on the floor.

I turn my head as I hear feet running toward us, my muscles tense, bracing for battle. But it's only Bryan and Savannah who draw to a stop, surveying the scene.

Bryan turns his head to mine, nodding when he sees Everleigh in my arms, his gaze roaming over the blood that covers me.

Savannah runs to us, tears flowing down her face. Everleigh hears her voice and turns, awkwardly hugging Savannah while she holds onto me like an anchor.

I don't mind at all.

I'm happy to be her anchor and anything else she needs.

Bryan approaches, squatting down, his hand clasp my shoulder. "Glad you got her back, Will. Everything good?"

We exchange a loaded look, and he winces, removing his hand from me. He sees the rage on my face, knows my thoughts since we've been friends and he's been my right-hand man for so long.

This is worse than the night Irelynn was nearly assaulted by my half-brother, Damian. This is much more personal, cuts so much deeper, permanently scarring my heart and soul.

I fucking *hate* that Everleigh had to experience this trauma.

Bryan looks over at Darin. “I have rope. We’re going to need to get him out of here before...”

I nod. “Everleigh’s dad is on the way here. Can you and Darin carry the punk-ass bitch to your vehicle? I don’t want David to see him...”

Bryan is already on his feet, pulling the rope from his back pocket. “Gotcha. Consider it done.” He pauses, his gaze dropping to Savannah, who rocks back and forth with Everleigh, clinging to her. “Can you take Savannah home?”

I give him a soft smile. “Of course. I’ll have Darin stay with her while Everleigh gets checked out.”

“Excellent. Thank you.” He strides over to Darin, and they quickly tie up Colin, carrying him from the room.

The beast inside me growls as I watch Colin until I can’t see him anymore.

Everleigh shifts in my lap, drawing my attention. “Your face looks like the guy that was possessed in that Amityville horror movie.”

I say nothing, blinking at her.

She rolls her eyes, not at all intimidated by me. “I need to talk to Savannah. It may get a little mushy. She sent me a text that I never got to properly acknowledge.”

“Gotcha, love. Do what you need to do. I’m right here.” My hand squeezes her thigh gently.

She grabs my hand, her brows drawing in as she looks at my knuckles, then back at me. “I know. Also, the doctor is going to check out your hands once he’s through with me.”

Rolling my eyes, I say nothing, knowing I’ll give her whatever the hell she wants.

Doesn’t mean I have to like it though.

She gives me a small, victorious smile, then turns around, settling into my lap, facing Savannah. I hear her say, “I read your text before...” She looks around the room and gestures before continuing.

I tune her out, the beast inside me still raging, my mind running over the events leading to this moment.

The worst sound I’ve ever heard in my life was the sound of my woman, desperately pleading for him to stop. “Please, don’t. Don’t do this, Colin.” The fear that permeated the air, penetrating my heart, hit me in that long hallway as I rushed toward the sound of her weeping, drowning in sorrow.

Panic clawed at my chest, threatening to crack it open, as my worst fears played through my head. It was like reliving my mother’s rape all over again, my past mixing with reality. Only, I’m not a helpless kid anymore, wishing for someone to come along and save the day.

I was going to do whatever it took to stop my woman from being assaulted.

As I moved toward her, I fully expected to be too late. And like a glass of red wine that shatters to the floor, breaking into

various shards, that's how my heart felt as it splintered into pieces inside my chest.

I felt like the worst type of failure as despair filled my limbs. It felt like time slowed down and the faster I tried to move, the slower my movements. As though I was walking through quicksand.

Mentally, I was drowning, but I kept swimming, knowing I had to stop him from hurting her.

As I was walking through the small room, I could see them in the distance. My woman was limp, having given up the fight, resigning herself to the inevitable. It was like a thousand knives stabbed me in the gut as I silently willed the most powerful woman I've ever known to fight.

It was as though my thoughts reached her, giving her the strength to fight until I got to her. As Colin wiped the sweat from his brow, she was poised and waiting. The second his hand dropped from his forehead, she reared her head back with everything she had in her, slamming her skull against his.

He screamed like a little bitch, but I'm certain it hurt Everleigh as well.

Then I heard that motherfucker threaten her. "You fucking bitch. You're really going to pay now."

I saw nothing but red as the entire room turned into a pool of blood, covering the floor, dripping from the ceiling, thick and vicious as I narrowed my eyes.

Sprinting to her, I leap onto Colin, tackling him with the force of five football players. He hit the floor with a loud, sickening thud that sounded like a crate of watermelons being dropped, bursting everywhere.

The fire-breathing dragon burst from my skin, wanting to burn every damn thing in this world down because he hurt my woman. I was relentless, my knuckles cracking against his skin, hitting him repeatedly. Like a punching bag, I gave myself over to my rage, letting the darkness consume me, as I beat the hell out of the motherfucker, the crack of bones splintering and breaking like music to the beast inside.

After that beating, there's no way he's waking up anytime soon. It will take Bryan an hour and a half to get to the location I haven't used in quite a while. A remote cabin in the thick of the woods, full of devices to torture someone to death.

I let the rage simmer beneath my veins until I can take care of Colin.

Right now isn't the time. I need to take care of my woman and our babies and ensure that they are okay.

Once I'm confident they are, that motherfucker is getting tortured to within an inch of his life. A broad smile covers my face as I envision it.

Don't worry, William. You'll get to have your fun, soon.

The beast stares me in the face, eyes burning with the desire to maim and then kill, before retreating deep inside me, impatiently waiting his turn.



Everleigh and Darin's dad, David, comes running into the concrete room where Everleigh was captured, his eyes wild from fear and panic. When he spots Everleigh sitting on my lap and hugging Savannah, he draws to a stop. His expression changes, relief all over his face.

His gaze slides to mine and he nods, mouthing two words, "Thank you."

I nod, giving him a smile as he hurries toward us.

Everleigh looks up as she hears him approach. "Dad." Releasing Savannah, she springs to her feet, swaying. I shoot to mine, steadying her so she doesn't fall, my hands on her waist. I feel her tense the second my hands grip her waist.

When David wraps his arms around her, I release her. She hugs him tightly, and I see her back quaking from the silent sobs she's trying hard to hide.

"Everleigh, sweetheart. Are you okay?"

His words make her tremble more. "I'm okay," she whispers.

He nods, looking relieved.

My heart sinks because I know better.

She's *not* okay.

This experience is going to haunt her. I'm sure she's going to have nightmares from it.

It makes me feel helpless because I can't prevent it. I can only be there for her, holding her tight until she feels safe again.

David pulls back, studying her face. He frowns as he notices the blood and swelling.

"Yeah, yeah." Everleigh waves a hand dismissively. "I'm going to get checked out soon."

"Good." He looks at me, winking. "It will put me and your soon-to-be husband at ease." He squeezes her arm gently.

She looks over her shoulder, giving me a soft smile. "As if Will would let me go home and crawl under the covers without having a doctor check me out."

"You damn well know that's *not* happening," I scolded. Lowering my voice slightly, I say, "You can crawl under the covers after we're sure all three of my girls are okay."

The little minx gives me a wink, as though she enjoys getting me riled up, then turns around, exchanging a few more words with her dad before she turns to Savannah, hugging her again.

David moves closer to me. "She's a shit liar, but I left her off the hook." He shakes his head, shooting a concerned look at Everleigh before turning to me. "Will she really be okay?"

Shoving my hands in my pockets, I release a long sigh. "Eventually."

I see the question brimming in his eyes and decide to address the elephant in the room. “I stopped it. He physically assaulted her, but not...” I swallow the huge lump in my throat, my hand running through my hair. “He didn’t sexually assault her.” My voice is low, so Everleigh can’t hear me. Not that she could with the way Savannah is gushing over her like a mother hen.

“Thank goodness.” His hand moves to my shoulder, squeezing gently. “From the bottom of my heart, thank you, Will. For saving her.” He pauses, his eyes traveling over me, stripping my soul bare. “I know how hard this is for you, too. You stopped it, but you can’t prevent the trauma she will have to work through. Nor can you prevent the images of what almost happened from haunting you.” His Adam’s apple bobs as he swallows, raw from his own pain. “I’m here anytime you need me. Day or night.”

Tears fill my eyes as I wrap my arms around him, catching him off guard. He laughs lightly, then squeezes me tight as I whisper against him in a rare moment of weakness, “Thank you.”

“Always, Will. You’re a helluva man. The best my daughter could have possibly fallen in love with.” He pats my back, hugging me until I finally pull away.

Quickly brushing my hand over my cheeks to erase the tears I’ve shed, my voice is hoarse as I say, “I’m damn lucky that you’re going to be my father-in-law. You’re the fucking best.”

He gives me a wide grin. “And I’m the luckiest son of a bitch to have you as my future son-in-law. You’re the fucking best, Will.”

We slap hands together, doing the handshake Darin and I do whenever we see one another before I turn to my woman.

Like a magnet, she heads straight into my embrace, her head laying against my chest.

She looks at her dad, then tilts her head up, eyes locking on me. “I’m the luckiest woman ever. You two are the fucking best.”

“We’re feeling left out.” Darin throws an arm around Savannah’s shoulders, steering her closer to us. We laugh at him, especially when Savannah frowns up at him, giving him a look. Rolling his eyes, he amends, “Okay, *I’m* feeling left out.”

“That’s more accurate,” Savannah says with a smile.

“Geez. I feel called out,” Darin winks at her, letting Savannah know he’s kidding.

David moves closer to Darin, patting his shoulder. “He’s so needy. If you don’t give him attention, he sulks.”

Darin sighs as we all laugh. “Fine, it’s the truth.” He grins at us in his typical Darin way, then nods toward the exit. “What do you say we get out of this creepy place? I’m fucking hungry.”

“Imagine that,” Savannah and Everleigh say in unison, rolling their eyes and laughing while Darin pretends to look hurt.

“I agree with the hungry hippo. Let’s get out of here.” David ruffles Darin’s hair before turning.

“Hippo? Are you trying to say I’m fat?” Darin looks down at his body, frowning.

Moving Everleigh with me, I sling my arm around Darin’s neck. “Nah, he’s just saying you need to hit the weights more,” I joke.

“Whatever. I look damn good, and you know it.” He shrugs off my arm, grabbing Savannah’s arm and looping it through his, before sticking his nose in the air like he’s royalty.

David and Savannah howl with laughter. I grin, but my gaze is on Everleigh. She laughs, but it’s lacking her usual delight at her brother’s antics.

As David follows Savannah and Darin out of the room, I need a moment alone with my fiancé.

Pulling her to a stop, I turn her to face me, my hands moving to her hips. She winces, fear making her skin pale before she recovers.

It stings, but I’m not surprised.

I move my hands to her back and she relaxes.

“How are you really feeling, love?” Watching her intently, I wait for her answer.

She shifts her weight from one leg to the other, her eyes downcast. Taking a deep breath, she slowly raises them. “Shitty... traumatized. And I fucking *hate* it.” She grits her

teeth, then grabs at my arms, moving them to her hips. As soon as my hands touch them, she winces, her body tensing.

Removing my hands from her waist, I wrap her fingers in mine, gripping them firmly. “Stop, Everleigh. Don’t force yourself to deal with this. To try and hurry to get over it.” I press my lips to her forehead before pulling back. “It’s going to take time.”

She exhales a frustrated breath. “In my heart, I know that. But I don’t like it. I hate being weak and vulnerable.”

I nod, squeezing her hand. “I know, goddess. If it’s any consolation, I don’t view you as anything less than the badass woman I first met a few years ago. And you’ve only grown more powerful and amazing the longer I’ve known you.”

Her expression slowly brightens, a sparkle of hope lighting up her brown eyes, making them look like darkened honey. “Yeah?”

“Oh, sweetheart. There is nothing in this world that could make me view you as anything less than the incredible fucking badass goddess you are.”

She melts against me, a soft smile on her face.

The light dims in the bulb overhead, causing us both to look up, knowing the light won’t last long.

“We should get out of here before that thing burns out.”

She squeezes my hands, her lips curving into a smile. “It doesn’t matter if we are plunged into darkness. Your light brightens my world and always leads me home.” She stands on

her tiptoes, her lips softly pressing against mine. When she pulls back, she whispers, “I love you to the moon and back, Will.”

I grin at her, raising a brow. “And what if your moon is standing right in front of you?”

“Then I love you to infinity. And beyond.”

Pressing my lips against hers again, her light fills me, letting me know that she will ultimately be okay.

It will just take time.

And I have all the time in the world for *her*.

Twenty-Three

Everleigh

SITTING ON THE HOSPITAL bed, I stare at my feet as I swing them, turning my ankles in clockwise, then counterclockwise circles, my gaze locked on the raw scarlet marks that blemish my skin. A reminder of my helplessness and loss of power.

An inability to save myself.

“Do they still hurt from the ropes? Or are you a bundle of nerves?” Will leans over my shoulder. Jumping slightly, I let out a breathless giggle. I was so consumed by my thoughts; I hadn’t realized he’d moved behind me.

“Both.” Drawing in a long, shuddering breath, my hand shifts to my stomach beneath the hospital gown, rubbing gently. I stare at the floor, shame washing through me that I couldn’t protect my babies inside that concrete bunker. “I just... I want them to be fine. I think they are, but...”

Will’s large hands sink into my shoulders, massaging gently but firmly. “Relax, my love.” The smell of wood and spice tickles my nose as he presses his lips against my ear. “They’ll be just fine, sweetheart.”

A long sigh escapes my lips as I lean against him, enjoying how his fingers loosen my taut muscles that, until this moment, resembled piano wire about ready to snap. “God, that feels amazing, Will. Please don’t stop.”

His chuckle is low and deep, sexy as sin, as he whispers, “I won’t. I’ll do it for as long as you like.”

Despite the traumatic events of the night, heat floods my core. I squeeze my thighs together, and my voice is husky as I retort, “You never disappoint. My pleasure is your priority.”

To my shock, he freezes, his muscles tensing. With an awkward laugh, he resumes massaging me, but moves slightly away from me, putting some space between us.

My brows furrow as my thoughts race, trying to understand the distance he placed between us. Opening my mouth, I search for the words to explain all the confusing thoughts running through my head, but I’m interrupted by the door swinging open.

Dr. Jackson steps inside the room, wearing his signature white coat, a smile on his face, crinkling his eyes.

“Hello, Everleigh.” Dr. Jackson steps over to me, clasping my hand in his. Removing his hand from mine, his gaze moves to Will as he steps beside me. He looks at Will’s knuckles, frowning, but Will shakes his hand heartily, as though his knuckles aren’t all bloody and busted open. “Will.”

“Dr. Jackson. Thank you, and your team, for coming tonight.”

“Of course, Will. Anytime.”

Will releases Dr. Jackson’s hand, then interlocks his fingers with mine. Our gazes lock and hold for a few beats before we turn our attention to Dr. Jackson.

Dr. Jackson gets right down to business, sitting on a stool and grabbing my chart. Sliding in front of me, he reviews my injuries, which luckily, are all minor, and consist of contusions and burns from the ropes.

He then shifts to the topic of my pregnancy, saying everything is more than likely fine, but he’d like to do an ultrasound. Will and I immediately agree, and preparations begin.

Once the ultrasound is underway, it’s not surprising that Will is correct and I’m pregnant with twins. The doctor anticipates I’m about eight to nine weeks pregnant at this stage.

I watch Will’s face as he stares at the ultrasound images, overcome with love for him. He reminds me of a child at Christmas who just received the gift they wanted most in this world. When his gaze locks on mine, he springs from his chair, hugging and kissing me, tears of relief and happiness mixing with mine.

When he releases me, Will turns to the doctors and nurses, shaking their hands and thanking them. They laugh when he repeatedly refers to the three of us as his “girls,” reminding him it’s too soon to know the sex of the babies. But Will is so

convincing that I even hear Dr. Jackson slip and say “girls” before he quickly corrects it to “babies.”

Once I’m dressed and out of the ultrasound room, Dr. Jackson tends to Will’s hand, examining and cleaning it. He orders an X-ray because he suspects a fracture or break.

Afterward, we sit and wait, Will’s uninjured hand clasped in mine. His legs bounce as he sits in the chair, drawing my attention.

“Are you worried about the results of your X-ray?”

Will turns his head, light blue eyes moving over my face, his brows furrowing. “No. If it’s fractured or broken, it’s not that big of a deal. I’ll adjust.” He shrugs, turning his head away.

A sickening feeling swirls through me, dread settling in my stomach. There’s an invisible wall between us, a distance I’m not used to. I don’t like the look in Will’s eyes, even though I’ve never seen it before. It just leaves me... unsettled.

Dr. Jackson pulls us into an exam room once he has the results from the X-ray, which shows that Will has a fracture in the finger of his right hand. Using a local anesthetic, Dr. Jackson sets the bones back into place. Although my man is tough-as-nails, the clenching of his teeth and jaw and the painful hiss he emitted indicates the pain he’s feeling.

When he lifts his gaze to mine, I frown. “You were giving me a massage.” My tone is accusatory as I glare at him.

He gives me a shit-eating grin. “Yes, I was.”

“Fucking brat,” I grumble in a low tone, causing Dr. Jackson’s lips to twitch as he puts a splint on Will’s finger.

Will just laughs at me, giving me a wink, not the slightest bit bothered by my anger.

Once Dr. Jackson steps out of the room so the nurse can return and schedule my next checkup, Will slides over to me, his bright smile contagious. I wrap my hands around his neck as he cups my face.

Relief courses through me.

This is us.

The closeness, the vulnerability.

Our bodies alight from the love that flows between us, a back-and-forth electricity that crackles the air.

“I love you, goddess.”

“I love you, ornery devil.”

He chuckles before pressing his lips against mine, kissing me until we are both breathless.

When he pulls away, I cup his face. “Can we go home now?”

“As soon as your appointment is scheduled, absolutely.”

The nurse comes in, handing us our discharge instructions before scheduling my next appointment. Then we are finally free to go.

Hand in hand, we walk down the hallway to the waiting room. As soon as Darin spots us, he shoots to his feet, a

worried frown between his brows. Savannah shoots up beside him, her gaze locked on me, both waiting expectantly.

“The four of us are fine,” I say with a broad smile, rubbing my stomach while squeezing Will’s non-injured hand.

They cheer, relieved smiles on their faces, and a group hug ensues before the four of us head out into the frigid December air. I pull my coat tighter, moving closer to Will, seeking his warmth. He wraps his left arm around me, looking down at me.

“What is it, goddess? You look disgusted.”

My gaze travels down the clothing I’m wearing, then back to his, shivering. This time it isn’t from the cold, but from flashes of images that circulate through my head.

My coat was removed before I woke up, the hard concrete floor uncomfortable, the cold seeping into my bones. Consciousness slowly flooded me, my mind still sluggish from whatever drug he’d knocked me out with. My limbs were bound, helplessness surging through me. Struggling against the ropes to free myself. The angry voices arguing. Watching Ronnie manhandle Colin. Then Ronnie left and Colin started tugging at my clothing...

My breathing accelerated quickly, but I’m not taking in enough oxygen. I gasp, my hand clutching my coat, trying to unbutton it because it’s too constrictive.

“Goddess,” Will’s low, soothing voice is against my ear, his warm, cinnamon breath washing over me. “Breathe in and out

with me.”

I don't realize we've stopped moving until Will stands in front of me, hands rubbing my arms through my coat, his worried gaze pinning me in place.

Mimicking his breathing, I focus on the way his chest swells and then deflates beneath his suit jacket. Stepping forward, I lift one hand, my fingers trailing over the softness of his silky shirt, feeling his chest lift beneath his ribcage. Raising my head, I look up at him, taking in the stubble covering his chiseled jawline, his soft, pillowy lips, and his light blue eyes, an endless sea of love shining in their depths.

The anxiety attack fades away and reality washes over me. “You're not wearing a coat. And your suit is torn...” My gaze roves over it, locking on every torn piece and thread, from his shirt to the knees of his pants. “And you're rubbing my arms with a fractured hand.”

He chuckles, shrugging. “My jacket is still inside my office. I had much more important things I needed to take care of.” He cups my face, the splint on his right hand rigid against my cheek. “I tore my clothing during the fight.” Completely unconcerned about the frigid air or his clothing, his gaze searches mine. “And your comfort is always my priority. It outweighs my own.”

A choked sob comes from my lips before I can stop it; the night's events hit me hard. I wrap my hands around his wrists, staring at the strongest, most protective man I've ever met. “Thank God for you.” My hands shake as I think how close

Colin got to—I cut the thought off, not wanting to think about it. “You saved me, Will. You prevented the one thing I feared most in this world.”

His face changes, that weird look flashing in his eyes before it’s gone, as though I imagined it. “It shouldn’t have happened in the first damn place.” Bitterness drips from his tone, his jaw clenching. “I failed you.”

Horrified, my wide eyes blink rapidly, shocked at what I’m hearing. “What? No, Will. You didn’t fail me. At all.” I shake my head frantically as I say it, tightening my grip around his wrists. “No one could have prevented what happened tonight.” Blowing out a breath, I lean closer to him to ground myself, forcing myself to stay in the present moment and not drift back to that concrete hell. “You’re my hero,” I whisper.

His hands leave my face, and he tugs me into his chest, his arms wrapping around me, holding me so tightly that all the broken pieces of my heart stick together, resembling the way it was prior to Colin kidnapping me.

But when he steps back, the pieces of my heart break apart again, and sorrow wells inside me.

“We’ll get through this, love. Whatever you need. Whatever I have to do to ease your pain.”

Closing my eyes, I nod, letting his love and concern wash over me.

Opening my eyes, I whisper, “I love you, Will.”

“I love you, goddess.” He presses a kiss to my forehead, then we turn, heading towards the vehicles.



Will and I are in the backseat of Darin’s Jeep with Savannah at the wheel. Darin is behind us in Will’s BMW, since Savannah was afraid someone would hit her while driving Will’s car.

Silence fills the Jeep as I sit beside Will, the side of my legs pressed against his, holding onto his left hand. He stares out the window, lost in thought.

I feel that distance between us again, and it makes my stomach heavy, like a rock was dropped inside it.

Savannah locks eyes with me in the rearview mirror. But now is not the time to have a discussion about how I’m feeling. I hate all the uneasiness that swirls inside, the haunting memories that I have to keep forcing away.

“So, um, where is Bryan?” she finally says, trying to sound casual.

Will slowly turns his head my way, leveling me with a look, before he turns to her, his gaze locked on her eyes in the rearview mirror. “He had a few things to take care of. He’ll be back soon.”

She nods, not saying anything. I can tell she wants more information.

“Have you heard from Bryan?” I ask Will.

He raises his brows at me, the look he's shooting me clearly indicating he thinks I'm meddling. "Yes, he texted me a few times. He plans to stop by our house once he's finished. Probably in about an hour."

Savannah's shoulders relax as she continues driving us home. She doesn't say anything, but her mood is lighter. Changing the subject, she says, "Oh, I love this song. Mind if I turn it up?"

"Of course not," I say.

As she turns it up, Will's lips brush my ear. "Meddler."

Relief rushes over me like I'm sinking into a warm tub of bathwater. Shivers course down my spine, his tone heating my insides like an inferno.

"You love that I meddle."

He chuckles. "I love everything about you, my soon-to-be wife."

Thank goodness the distance is gone again, and we are us.

Reaching up, my fingers trail over his jawline. "I can't wait to call you my husband." Leaning over him, my lips replace my fingers before hovering over his lips. "I love you."

I don't give him a chance to respond, pressing my lips against his, needing to feel the connection that is ever present between us, coursing through my skin, lighting up my nerves.

Making me feel pleasure, rather than pain.



Curled against Will's warm chest with my favorite heated blanket thrown over me, I'm so relaxed I can barely keep my eyes open. I'm fighting sleep with everything I have right now. Not because I fear the nightmares I'm sure will come, but I'm relishing in every moment Will's warm breaths flow over my scalp or against my forehead as he presses his warm lips against my skin. Or the way his muscular biceps and forearms encircle my frame, cocooning me in his protective embrace, ensuring I'm safe. Or the way his heart thumps steadily in my ear, the beats increasing every time I tilt my head up and smile at him.

God, I love him with an intensity that surprises even me.

I never thought it was possible to love someone so much.

Or to be loved by him with such potency that it sweeps over me like an endless ocean wave, carrying me safely along for an infinity.

I used to think I was a monster who didn't deserve love. But I've found a man with a beast inside who rivals my own.

Bryan walks into the living room, exhaustion lining his face. Blood stains his hands and clothing.

Savannah straightens in her chair, subtly fixing her hair, before giving him a smile. Unfortunately, he's too preoccupied

to notice, heading to Will and sitting on the couch beside him, giving an update.

The second I hear Colin's name leaving Bryan's lips, my muscles tense so hard that I wince.

Will pulls me closer to his chest, tightening one arm around me while the fingers of his other hand lightly run over my back. My body melts into the heat of his body and the warmth of his touch.

My reaction makes me feel foolish and weak. I've always been strong and unafraid of men because I've fought so many and won.

But this time, it's different. I had no time to prepare because I didn't know the fight was coming until I was captured.

Now, the damage has been done and all that's left is for me to work through the trauma.

Bryan's voice pulls my attention from my thoughts. "The asshole barely regained consciousness at the cabin, but I questioned him anyway." He gives Will a dry smile that indicates the questioning involved his fists or some other method of beating the information out of him. "I'm certain he is working with someone other than Pete Campbell. Pete certainly doesn't have the intelligence or resources to be a mastermind behind anything. But Colin refused to give the guy up. We couldn't continue to torture him since he was barely hanging onto conscious—"

“I know who it is,” I say, my voice low, my eyes shifting to Savannah and locking with hers. Her expression is blank as she blinks back at me, unsure why I’m looking at her.

I suck in a breath, hating that I haven’t had a chance to talk to her privately.

Exhaling as I lower my gaze, I slowly sit up, dreading what I’m about to do. “Savannah, come here.” Gesturing with my hand, I motion her over.

Her brows draw together as she looks from me to Will and then to Bryan. Shrugging at Bryan, she rises from the chair across from me, settling beside me on the couch.

When I slide a comforting arm around her shoulders, her expression is quizzical before her breath accelerates from fear.

She knows what I’m about to say is bad. I’ve known her long enough to see the wheels turning inside her head.

Closing my eyes momentarily, I let myself drift back to that concrete dungeon, the coldness seeping into the marrow of my bones. Shivering, I pull the electric blanket tighter around me before I rest my hand on Will’s leg, my fingers digging into his sweatpants. Will’s uninjured hand covers mine, rubbing circles over the back of my hand to keep me grounded.

Opening my eyes, I stare straight ahead, letting myself relieve the moment. “When I first woke up on that cold floor in that dungeon, I was alone. While trying to process what was happening and orient myself to my surroundings, I heard two men arguing, coming closer. I pretended to be unconscious,

hoping they'd leave me alone. They entered the room I was held in and the fighting escalated between them, causing me to open my eyes. Colin was being manhandled by a muscular, tattooed man because he didn't stick to the plan." I halt, turning my head and studying Savannah for a few beats before continuing. "The man's tattoo was pretty unique, so I focused on it. It was a serpent wrapped around a long knife, wilted roses clinging to the snake and blade."

Savannah gasps, her muscles tightening beneath my arm. Her hands fly up to her mouth, covering it, as she stares at me with fear and horror darkening her blue eyes. Her body starts to tremble as she shakes her head.

I can feel Bryan's penetrative gaze fixating on Savannah, watching her reaction.

Tightening my arm around her, I reflect for a couple of minutes, deciding it will be better for Savannah if I rip the bandage off and say his name.

Plus, it will confirm what I already believe to be true.

"Colin referred to him as Ronnie..."

Savannah's loud gasp fills the room as she shrugs my arm off, shooting to her feet. "No... it can't be... I've changed my appearance to stay hidden. I've changed everything..." Her face crumbles, tears coursing down her cheeks before she lowers her head, her hair acting as a curtain, hiding her face.

It's Bryan who gets to his feet and moves to her, gently touching her elbow. He says a few words that I can't make out,

steering her away from Will and me. The care and concern he has for her are evident.

Will's lips are against my ear, his hand still stroking mine. "Savannah's stepfather?"

"Yes. She just confirmed it." I turn my head toward him, releasing a long sigh. "She never said his name before... always referred to him as her stepfather or stepdad or, most frequently, bastard." Shifting my body toward his, I interlock my fingers with his. "I'm worried, Will. Ronnie was furious and flipping out on Colin for being an 'incompetent moron' and not following their plan. He said he couldn't grab Savannah now, insinuating the plan was to grab both of us." I shiver, fear coursing up my spine.

Will wraps me in his arms, pressing his lips to my forehead. "You're safe, love. I won't let *anything* happen to you."

I nod, but Ronnie's words are still going through my head. Pulling back, I tilt my head, locking my pleading gaze on him. "But Savannah could still be in danger. We may have Colin, but we don't have Ronnie. Ronnie told Colin before he left, 'Your foolishness means I need to lie low for a while, but eventually, I'll get my hands on Savannah.' It was so chilling, the way he said it. There was a determined glint in his eyes, and desperation in his words."

"I'll do everything I can to ensure you and Savannah are safe. I'll discuss this with Bryan, and we'll devise a plan to keep the two of you safe." His eyebrows lower as his voice becomes stern. "That will mean you and Savannah *must* listen

to us. You will have security detail driving you and watching over you anytime either of you leave this property without me and/or Bryan.”

I swallow hard, not loving the idea, but knowing Will is only trying to keep me and Savannah safe. “I promise, Will. I won’t do anything stupid, and neither will Savannah.”

Will studies my face, pushing a lock of hair behind my ear. “Baby, you’re a fighter and strong as hell. But as you learned, bad things can happen unexpectedly.” His gaze drops, and I see the flash of guilt tightening his features before he shrugs it off. It happened so fast that I wonder if I imagined it.

As his hands move away from me and he tucks the blanket tighter around me before heading over to talk to Bryan, I feel that invisible wall sliding between us again, putting a distance between us.

And I hate it.

Twenty-Four

William

ONE WEEK HAS PASSED since that horrific day Everleigh was captured in front of my office building. Since then, I've worked from home, not wanting to leave her side.

Because of Everleigh's admission about Ronnie, I gave her and Savannah a handgun and took them to the shooting range Bryan and I frequent, giving them lessons. Everleigh grumbled a bit, preferring knives, but as I pointed out, you need to be close to stab someone.

She relented after that, focusing on learning how to shoot well and exceeding my expectations.

I was pleasantly surprised at how good Savannah is with a gun.

I'd never admit this to Everleigh, but Savannah is better. She's precise and calculating. When we went outside to shoot at moving targets, she accurately accounted for the change in wind direction, speed, and a host of other factors and conditions, hitting her mark nearly every single time.

With practice, she won't miss her target.

As we were leaving the shooting range, Everleigh and Savannah started talking about bridesmaids' dresses and it hit me that Everleigh missed out on that experience because she was kidnapped.

Coordinating with Bryan, Darin, and Max, I surprised Everleigh by renting out the bridal shop.

Sitting beside Everleigh, I'm delighted by the smile that reaches her eyes as her bridal party tried on various dresses, giggling like a bunch of schoolgirls. Bryan keeps shooting me looks that could kill for subjecting him to this, but he finally calms down when Savannah walks out in a scarlet dress, his mouth dropping open. I didn't miss the look of desire on his face as he watched every move she made as she twirled and pivoted.

Unfortunately, neither did Everleigh. I swear, she made Savannah pose and twirl twice as long as the other two because she saw Bryan watching her.

"Stop meddling," I whisper into her ear, before taking a sip of my water.

"Why? What are you gonna do? Beat my ass?"

I choke on my water, drawing everyone's attention.

"Are you okay, Will?" Bryan looks from me to Everleigh, his expression quizzical as the disappointment on Everleigh's face is apparent to anyone who looks at her.

“Excuse me. Irelynn needs me.” She’s on her feet and hurrying toward Irelynn before I can say anything.

“What’s going on, Will? I’ve noticed some tension between you and Everleigh.”

“We’re fine, Bryan. Nothing to worry about.” I wave a hand dismissively before leaning back in my chair, my watchful gaze on Everleigh. Running my opposite hand idly over my splint, my heart sinks as I watch Everleigh, relaxed and happy, giggling with her friends.

Around me, she’s been tense or distracted and I know she’s either relieving the trauma again or trying damn hard to pretend it never happened.

But it’s relentless and unyielding, presenting itself every night when she wakes up screaming, her body trembling and covered in sweat.

It’s gotten to the point I barely sleep, watching her instead, waiting for the first sign of a nightmare. I try to wake her, but each time, she’s relieved enough of it to be distraught.

All I can do is hold her in my arms, stroking her hair and back, feeling completely helpless.

The feeling worsens daily as the shadows beneath her chocolate eyes grow deeper and darker and her smiles no longer brighten up her entire face.

Until today.

I brought up counseling yesterday, but she shut that idea down practically before I said it. I know Ainsley misusing her

counseling skills and sending her mother into a spiraling depression really impacted her, but I was hoping she'd have a different view since she knows I was attending counseling sessions.

And then it hits me like a punch in the gut.

I'm the cause of her nightmares.

It's because of *me* that she was captured.

Even if she isn't consciously aware, she must hold some resentment toward me for what she's enduring.

It's all my fucking fault.



I'm sitting inside my home office, my feet propped on my large mahogany desk, one ankle crossed over the other, staring at the ceiling, feeling completely fucking miserable.

A knock on the door pulls me from my thoughts. "Come in."

The door opens and Savannah steps inside. Surprise contorts my features. I quickly school my face, trying to hide it, and sit up, lowering my feet to the floor.

"Hi, Will." Her voice is timid. "Mind if I talk to you privately? I won't take much of your time."

"I have plenty of time to talk to you, Savannah." I gesture toward the chair in front of my desk. "Please, shut the door

and have a seat.”

She nods, closing the door, then pads to the chair, settling into it. She twists the hem of her shirt, her gaze bouncing around the room before it finally settles on me. She takes a calming breath before she says, “I know we haven’t talked much, at least not without others around. I’m a direct person even though sometimes what I say comes out... awkward.” Her cheeks are pink, enhancing her blue eyes, as she swallows nervously.

“I appreciate that, Savannah. Personally, I love direct and to the point. I value brutal honesty as well, so don’t think you need to sugarcoat anything.” I give her a warm smile, hoping to put her at ease.

She gives me a small smile, nodding before she shifts in her chair. “Everleigh and I are very close, sharing a lot of things. Obviously, her recent experience has traumatized her, and she’s trying to work through it.” She pauses as I nod, indicating for her to continue. “I know she’s opposed to counseling because of Ainsley, and I’m trying to convince her she should consider it. I think it could help her.”

I lean forward, studying Savannah, trying to figure out where she’s going with this. Everything she’s saying, I already know. But the knot in my stomach tells me there’s something more.

“Shit...” Her face turns scarlet as she heaves out a deep breath.

In a rush, her words tumble out. “Everleigh told me that the two of you aren’t having sex, and it’s really bothering her. More than she’s indicated to you.”

Embarrassment rolls over me, making me feel exposed, and causing me to turn my head away from her.

“I’m sorry, Will. I don’t mean to make you embarrassed or defensive.” Savannah’s soft, pleading voice has me turning my face to hers, my eyebrows raised.

Leaning forward, she pushes her hair away from her face, her pleading eyes meeting mine. “Please don’t reveal to Everleigh anything I’m about to tell you.”

I hold up a hand. “Savannah, this conversation stays in this room. I won’t reveal anything to Everleigh. Not even that we’ve spoken.”

She lets out a sigh of relief, her posture relaxing as she nods. “She feels as though you think she’s... contaminated or dirty. Even though Colin didn’t... um... violate her.” She clears her throat. “That since he touched what’s yours, she’s tainted.”

My breath leaves my lungs in a rush, blinking rapidly as I try to digest her words.

Savannah keeps talking, and I’m forced to focus on what she’s saying. “I’ve tried to reassure her that her reactions are a normal response to a traumatic experience and that you don’t think that. But this morning, we went for a walk in the woods...” She pauses, sadness lining her face. “She started

crying, saying she doesn't think you desire her after she was nearly assaulted. When I asked why in the hell she'd think that, she said you rejected her advances last night..."

"Oh God," I interrupt, my hands covering my face, trying to hold back the tears that prickle my lids, threatening to break free. The words that Everleigh said to Savannah pierced my heart like an arrow. Lowering my hands, I shake my head. "I haven't been rejecting her because I don't want her. Christ, that couldn't be further from the truth."

Turning my head, I stare at a picture of the ocean on my office wall, trying to draw comfort from the serene beauty of the sea captured in the photo.

"It's my fault, Savannah." My voice is low and my chin quivers.

Silence fills the room long enough to make me uncomfortable. I turn my head to find Savannah staring at me with so much sympathy in her blue eyes.

She reaches across the desk, her fingers wrapping around my uninjured hand. "What do you mean, it's your fault?"

I release a long sigh. "She's been having nightmares, dark circles are under her eyes, and the only time her smile has reached her eyes is that day in the bridal shop when she was surrounded by you, Irelynn, and Vanessa." My shoulders slump from despair. "Deep down, I think she blames me. As she should since I'm the reason this happened to her. If not for me, she never would have..." Trailing off, my teeth sink into my bottom lip, trying to hold back the flood of tears.

Savannah shakes her head, eyes wide with disbelief, as she releases my hand. “What? Why would she blame you? Why do you think it’s your fault?”

“The day I rescued her, my hands went to her hips to steady her when she got up to hug her dad, and she went rigid. I thought her reaction was just a response to the trauma, but the evidence keeps indicating that deep down, she resents me for what happened to her.” Leaning back in my chair, my hands go through my hair, and I wince as my fractured finger throbs in protest.

“Colin was my enemy because of shit that happened between him and me in college. His resentment toward me worsened when I bought Sumer Tech and removed him from the helm.” Moisture fills my eyes as I say, “It’s because of me that Everleigh was targeted. I’m responsible for the woman I love being drugged, kidnapped, and then nearly raped.”

As the first tear falls down my cheek, I’m startled to see Savannah in front of me. I never saw or heard her leave the chair and come around my desk.

I turn away from her, impatiently brushing the tears away.

“Will, look at me.”

I breathe in and out for a couple of beats, getting control of my emotions, before I swivel in my chair, facing her.

“This is *not* your fault. It’s Colin’s. Sure, you may have a bad history together and you made an enemy of him. But I’m sure it’s not entirely one-sided. From what Everleigh has told

me, Colin provoked you every chance he got until one day, you snapped.”

When I nod, she gives me a gentle smile before continuing.

“Colin nearly ran Sumer Tech into the ground, not you. You came along and saved a lot of people’s jobs when you purchased it.” She puts her hand on my shoulder, squeezing it. “Colin is a dickhead who bit off more than he can chew when he went after Everleigh to hurt you. I know it’s only a matter of time before you torture and kill him. Not that it matters, but I fully support it. Make sure you torture him some for me.” She shoots me a wink, making me feel slightly better.

“My point is, Colin is responsible for what he did, not you. You prevented it, which trust me, when I was assaulted by my stepfather, I prayed every single time that someone would come along and stop it. You are her hero. She’s told me that repeatedly since that day.”

I fidget with my splint, still not feeling any better.

Savannah sighs. “Will, she doesn’t blame you for what happened to her. If she did, she wouldn’t desire you. Many women wouldn’t be where she is right now, wanting to have sex with their fiancé after something like that. But she wants you because she feels safe with you. Because she loves you. And sure, maybe there is a part of her that wants to flip the bird to Colin by having sex with you. But I think the biggest reason is that she wants to take her power back.” Savannah’s head lowers, her hair hanging in her face. “She doesn’t want to feel like a victim, but rather, in control again.”

Her words punch me in the chest. As they sink in, I feel foolish for the way I've been acting. For not discussing this with Everleigh to find out what she's thinking and feeling in the aftermath of what happened.

Savannah pats my shoulder, drawing my attention back to her. "Please don't let guilt drive a wedge between you and Everleigh. Especially since it's unfounded. What happened to her is *not* your fault and she does *not* blame you. I know she's been reliving what happened, and honestly, she is afraid to admit that to you because she doesn't want to appear weak in your eyes."

"I'd never think Everleigh is weak. She's the strongest woman I've ever met."

Savannah's eyes are soft. "Maybe you need to tell her that. Or better yet, show her. Everleigh knows herself well enough to know what she wants and needs. And that's *you*, Will."

For the first time since I held Everleigh in my arms in that dungeon, I can fully breathe. I grab Savannah's hand. "Thanks a lot, Savannah. I appreciate you talking to me about this. I know it wasn't easy for you..."

She snorts, her brows raised in disbelief. "Are you kidding? It wasn't the slightest bit awkward to essentially walk into your office and say, 'Hey, you need to fuck my best friend because she's thinking some crazy shit that I know isn't true.' I mean, come on, that's normal, right?" Her voice is laced with sarcasm.

A howl of laughter rushes out of me, causing Savannah to jump. Her lips twitch and within seconds, she joins in.

Wiping her eyes, she tries to get control of herself. “I’m sorry to be so blunt, but those words I just said were what I was thinking the entire time and trying hard *not* to say.”

I wave my hand, still trying to get myself under control. “I’m glad you didn’t. I may have started laughing and we would never have had this conversation.”

She giggles, her hand on her stomach. “I’m glad I could make you laugh. Seriously, Will, there is no one who knows Everleigh better than you. It’s obvious how much you love her every time you look at her. Release your guilt and do what you do best. Give her what she *needs*.”

The lightness in my chest has me feeling like I’m floating on air as I jump to my feet, grabbing Savannah in a hug.

“Where is Everleigh?” I say as I pull back.

“She told me she was going to take a bath before—”

Interrupting her with a whoop, I run toward the door. “Even better. I’ve gotta go see my woman, right now.”

Savannah laughs, waving her hand. “Go. Bryan and I will review more things on Colin and... stuff.”

Pausing with my hand on the doorknob, I give her a sympathetic smile, knowing she’s referring to Ronnie, her stepdad.

Waving me away, she says, “Get out of here, Will.”

Throwing her a quick wave, I open my office door, running toward my bedroom as fast as I can.

It's time I give Everleigh what she needs.

All of me.

Twenty-Five

Everleigh

MUSIC PLAYS SOFTLY FROM the speaker on the stand beside me, filling the room with melodic notes meant to relax me. As I sink lower into the tub, the bubbles rise to my chin, the scent of vanilla swirling around me. Usually, all of this would ease my stress and anxiety, pulling me from the depression that tugs me into the darkness.

A long, mournful sigh escapes my lips as I lift one leg. The ligature marks from the ropes that were tied around my ankles taunt me, serving as a constant reminder of that concrete hell I was held captive in.

A lock of hair from my messy bun falls into my face. Lifting one hand from the water to push it behind my ear, my breath stutters as I gaze at the scabs intermixed with the raw, angry marks from the ropes that bound my wrists.

No wonder Will doesn't want to have sex with me.

The ugly marks serve as a constant reminder of the trauma I endured.

Contaminating and victimizing me.

Leaning my head back against the bath pillow, my vision blurs as tears fill my eyes.

Colin took a lot more than I could have possibly imagined when he kidnapped me.

Even though he's being held somewhere, waiting for William to torture and kill him, the wedge he's successfully driven between Will and me seems to grow wider daily.

As tears stream down my cheeks, the bathroom door flies open, startling me so much that I slip, sinking further into the water. Before I can go under, strong arms grip me, pulling me up and holding onto me.

My hand flies up, trying to wipe the suds from my face. The scent of spice and woods intermixed with the vanilla, and I can't help but suck in a big inhale, breathing Will's aroma into my lungs and holding it there, before exhaling.

I've missed him, even though he hasn't left my side.

One hand releases my arm, then a soft towel pats my face.

"Will." Surprise is evident in my voice as my eyes lower to the splint on his hand. "You shouldn't get that wet. I'm fine—"

He drops to his knees beside the tub, tossing the towel onto the floor. His hands cup my face, his ice-blue eyes locking on mine, penetrating my soul. "Fuck the splint. Fuck my hand." He moves closer, his lips close to mine, stealing the breath from my lungs. "I'm so sorry, baby. I've been holding something back and I shouldn't have." His chin quivers as he

exhales a slow breath, as though he's trying not to cry. "Can we talk?"

"Of course, Will." I try to shift my body in the large tub to subtly take my weight off his injured hand without being obvious, but he holds onto me, preventing me from moving.

His uninjured hand strokes my cheek, causing me to emit a low whimper, melting into his touch.

"I'm so sorry for your tears, love. I hate that you're hurting." His thumb raises higher, gently tracing beneath my dry, gritty eyes.

It feels so amazing to be touched like this, with his face this close to mine. As though we are rewinding time to the moment before I walked out of his office building and was kidnapped by his enemy.

To the time when we were simply Will and Everleigh, two people very much in love.

When I think he's about to kiss me, he shifts his weight and stands, his hands falling away from my face.

I turn my face away quickly before he can see the sting of rejection that I'm sure is quite obvious.

Movement from my peripheral vision and his low grunt as he pulls his t-shirt overhead draws my attention back to him.

"Will, what are you—"

My words catch in my throat as his fingers grip the waistband of his sweatpants, tugging them down. He winces,

sucking in a breath, and I open my mouth to admonish him... But close it when I notice his pronounced erection tenting his boxers.

My breathing accelerates and my tongue sweeps out, licking my suddenly dry lips. My throat is parched as my breathing accelerates. Desire causes the hair along my arms and on the nape of my neck to rise.

Fuck, he's beautiful.

My gaze peruses slowly over every hard ridge and muscle, drinking him in from head to toe and back again.

He smirks, one corner of his lips lifting higher, and desire heats me, burning my skin. Biting my lip; the intensity of his possessive gaze makes me shiver. I try to prevent the whimper by biting my lip, but it slips out, overpowering the music surrounding us.

His tongue darts out, licking his lips, and I fucking melt. My muscles go slack, barely able to keep me from slipping beneath the water. My body trembles from the arousal coursing through me, causing the water to slosh inside the tub.

He drops his sweatpants, letting them pool on the tile floor beneath his feet.

And why the fuck do I find his feet so damn sexy?

As he steps out of the sweatpants, kicking them away, I'm entranced with every movement he makes, watching his muscles ripple. Unable to say a word, I overtly stare, barely blinking.

When his fingers hook around the waist of his boxers, a moan escapes my lips, making my cheeks heat.

Christ, Everleigh, pull your shit together. You're acting like a horny teenager.

My teeth sink into my bottom lip as he slowly pulls his boxers over his hips, a painfully slow striptease that has lust slamming into my core, spreading through me like a freight train. My nerve-endings tingle like a live wire.

He gives me the smile he reserves only for me, charging the air between us.

Will's gaze drinks me like he's been in the desert, dying of thirst. Those possessive blue eyes penetrate me, locking onto every single movement that I make. When I swallow hard, his eyes move to my throat, as though he's watching my saliva slide down. When I exhale, letting out the breath I've been holding, his gaze goes to my chest, partially hidden by the water, studying every inch of my exposed skin.

I shift my weight, bending my knees, my heels pressing into the tub so I don't slip. His gaze locks on my exposed kneecaps. Squeezing my thighs together, his hungry eyes travel back to mine, his desire like an inferno.

His lips curl into a salacious smile as he drops his boxers to the floor, his thick cock jutting out proudly.

And fuck, do I want to slide my tongue over his shaft before wrapping my lips around him, sucking him deep inside my mouth.

He saunters toward me, drawing my attention back to his face. I'm captivated by his every move, his gaze pinning me in place as he steps inside the enormous tub. Lowering into the warm, vanilla scented water, his hands shoot out, grabbing my arms and dragging me onto his lap. I whimper as he settles me on his cock, desire making my hands shake as I grip his shoulders.

“Goddamn, baby, I can feel how wet you are for me.” His deep, low voice makes the lust coil and snap inside me, making me ravenous for him.

But the fear is right behind it, afraid I'll get rejected by him again.

Trying to refocus on his earlier words, I lick my lips, my mouth dry. “You asked if we could talk?”

“I did.” His smirk widens. “I want to briefly discuss something with you.” Something flashes in his eyes, revealing the beast inside.

William.

My pulse beats against the side of my neck as my heart slams inside my chest.

God, he's torturing me.

His smile is arrogant as he says, “Then I want to devour every fucking inch of you.”

Shit.

My eyes widen, my breathing accelerates as though I'm sprinting on the treadmill, a slight buzzing in my ears.

Did I hear him correctly?

His hands slide from my waist to my back, pulling me from my thoughts.

It's not lost on me that he was just gripping my hips, and not only did I not flinch, but I wasn't even aware his hands were there as he made my body come to life.

And he's barely touched me yet.

His fingers go to my messy bun, pulling my strands free so they hang down my back. "That's right, goddess. I plan to devour every single inch of you. Cancel any plans you've made for the rest of the day—and night. Because you're mine. *All mine.*"

Christ.

My pussy clenches, and goosebumps erupt all over my body.

"But first, I need to reveal what I've been keeping from you." His fingers lightly run over my back, making me shiver. "I've been feeling guilty as hell. It's because of me that you were drugged, kidnapped, and nearly—" His voice wavers before cutting out, the first sign of his confidence slipping. He clears his throat. "Violated. It shredded my insides, tearing me apart when I realized that if not for me, you wouldn't have been in that predicament."

"Oh, Will." My eyes swim with tears as I shake my head.

“Let me finish, gorgeous.” He gives me a small smile that vanishes far too quickly. “It was hurting you, likely causing you to form assumptions that aren’t true. *At all.*” His eyes burn into me, an inferno of desire that nearly incinerates me. His uninjured hand moves to my cheek, fingers gliding over my skin, even though they are still marred with cuts and scabs from him beating the shit out of Colin. “My guilt has been driving a wedge between us, making me lose focus on what matters most—*you*. Right here and now, I vow to toss my guilt away, and place the blame solely where it belongs—on Colin.” Staring at me with a promise in his eyes, I see the beast and man shining from his blue orbs, captivating me. He waves a hand dismissively. “I’ll take care of that bastard later. But right now...” His hand slides lower, causing me to suck in a breath when his hand squeezes my breast, his thumb flicking over my nipple. A lightning bolt zings through me, straight to my pussy. I whimper again, my hips automatically moving, grinding over his hard cock as I bite my lip. He smiles, his voice low and husky when he says, “I’m going to worship you and make you come so hard you see stars.”

Fuck yes.

Hooking his arms beneath my legs, he stands, my arms cinched behind his neck.

“Will, your hand—”

“Fuck my hand,” he growls, stepping from the tub, striding toward the bed, not even bothering with a towel.

“But I don’t want you—”

His mouth crashes against mine, a deep growl rumbling from his chest. The vibrations of it flow through me as my lips tingle from the way he's devouring them with his. I groan into his mouth, grinding against him.

The silky sheets stick to my wet skin as he lays me on the bed, pulling back enough to say, "Damn, I've missed the taste of your mouth," before lowering his head and pressing his lips to mine again.

I submit, losing myself in him, dizzy from the lust that swirls inside me. He deepens the kiss, our tongues tangling, our hands sliding over one another's skin haphazardly from the soapy bubbles that cling to us, scenting the bed in vanilla elixir and making it harder to grip one another.

When his lips leave mine and glide over my skin to my neck, I gasp out, "I really don't want to hurt your hand more."

His lips move away from my skin. "I'll make allowances. Besides, I can always use my mouth and tongue more. You like it better, anyway."

Fuck me. He has an answer for everything.

He's not wrong. It drives me crazy the way he uses his tongue and mouth.

I gasp as he sucks on my neck, hitting my favorite spot. He chuckles against me as he slowly moves down my body, his mouth leaving a trail of fiery, wet kisses over my skin.

"No protest about me using my tongue and mouth more, huh?" He smiles against my skin.

I bite back a groan, the arrogance in his tone causing me to mutter, “Jackass.”

He chuckles louder, before biting down on my nipple, then soothing the sting with his tongue.

I gasp, the mixture of pleasure and pain the most delicious torment.

Because I enjoy matching my wits against the beast, I mutter, “Arrogant jackass.”

Angling his hips, he rolls his cock against me, coating it in the wetness that seeps from my opening. He pinches my nipples while he grinds against me, the sensations nearly making me dizzy.

“What did you call me, goddess?”

My head rolls from side to side as I stutter, unable to speak. He chuckles, lowering his lips to my other breast, pinching and biting, then easing the sting with his tongue and soft touches while teasing me mercilessly by rubbing his cock over my clit.

“Fuck,” I hiss, my breath quickening.

“No, that’s not what you called me.” He sucks my nipple into his mouth, swirling his tongue around it.

I peel my back from the bed, a blazing inferno of lust consuming me. “William,” I moan, my hands sliding over his muscular back, aching to touch all of him.

He releases my breast from his mouth with a pop. “Nope. That’s not what you called me, either.” He slides up my body, his lips hovering near mine, warm breaths feathering my face.

Anger flares inside me. “Jackass,” I bite out.

“Jackass is correct.” He reaches down, sinking a finger deep inside me, eliciting a loud moan as I arch against him. “But you called me something else right after that.” He pulls his finger out of me.

What the fuck?

Now he’s pissing me off and he damn well knows it.

“Arrogant jackass,” I spit, fury rolling over me.

“Ah, yes, there it is.” He slips his finger inside me again, pumping it deep as he circles my clit with his thumb. “But you like it when I’m an arrogant jackass, don’t you?”

Whimpering from the pleasure coursing through me, I’m unable to answer.

He slows his movements, clicking his tongue as though he’s disappointed. “You’ll have to do better than that, love. I need an answer, or I’ll stop.”

His words hit me like a ton of bricks, and I force myself to focus so I can tell him what he wants to hear.

“Yes, I love when you’re an arrogant jackass. Please don’t stop touching me.”

He grins, moving his fingers faster. “I don’t break my promises, baby. You know that.” He lets out a growl of

approval, his icy eyes glimmering. “You’re soaked, goddess. And I’m fingering you with my non-dominant hand. Imagine if it was my other hand.”

I answer with a moan, my head moving from side to side, my fingers squeezing the covers beneath me.

He hisses his approval as I flood him with wetness, fingering me faster, his thumb circling my clit harder.

I never want this to stop.

He slows his movements, making my chest constrict as need barrels through me. Raising my hips toward him, I try to grind against him, whining as he slides his finger out to the very tip.

“Please, Will,” I beg.

“No, it’s not Will fingering you right now, love.” He slowly plunges his finger inside me again. “I’m giving you what you *want*. What you *need*. I’m *your* beast. Your fiercest protector.”

Unintelligible sounds leave my lips as he slides his finger so that only the tip remains inside. I arched toward his hand, wanting more. Raising my head, I lock my eyes with his. “Please, William,” I whine.

“Tell me I’m your beast,” he growls, plunging his finger deep inside.

“Fuck, yes. You’re my beast.”

“That’s right,” his husky voice rumbles through me, making me wetter. “Goddamn. Look at that greedy, soaked pussy, just begging for me to please you.”

I whimper again, wanting and needing everything he's capable of giving me.

He adds a second finger, pushing both deep inside me. "Goddamn. Look at your pussy gripping my fingers."

I do as he instructs, fearful that if I don't, he'll stop.

And I think I'll fucking die if he does.

My juices shine on his fingers when he pulls them out, my cunt gripping him, not wanting them to leave.

He moves down my body, settling his head between my legs. "If you want me to eat this pussy, I need you to tell me who you want right now."

I shiver, desperate for his tongue against my aching clit. "You. William. My beast." My voice is breathless and so fucking needy.

He grins, leaning forward and swiping his tongue over my clit. I grip his head, my nails curling into his scalp, making him chuckle.

"Tell me you love William the beast as much as you love Will, and I'll lick that pussy until you come all over my face."

Fuck. Me.

This beastly man knows how to speak my love language.

His words are an electrical current, zapping my body. Every nerve is on fire, dancing with want and desire, begging for his touch. I'm so turned on I can barely form a coherent thought.

Yet, I dig deep, my gaze locking on his as I say, “I love William the beast as much as I love Will.” Tears fill my eyes. “I love *all* of you. Beast. Protector. Defender. Soulmate.”

He growls with approval before he dives in, his tongue and fingers working in tandem to draw the most incredible yet indescribable amount of pleasure from me. My head tilts as my back arches, nails digging into his scalp. My breaths heave in and out as he licks me furiously, fingers rapidly moving in and out of me. My body contorts as I feel the pleasure building, my walls clenching at him.

The seductive pull of my orgasm beckons me, and my body responds. My jaw clenches as heat coils inside my core.

And then I crest.

“William,” I scream as the orgasm slams over me like a fierce ocean wave, my body floating with it, letting it completely take me over.

Riding it out, I float aimlessly along the current as he stays with me, milking every drop of pleasure from me.

When my tremors subside, I collapse, my limbs splayed on the mattress, my breathing heavy.

Tilting my head, my eyes lock with his. He presses a gentle kiss against my pussy, then sticks his fingers inside his mouth, licking them clean.

Damn, that's hot.

Climbing up my body, he hovers over me, spreading my legs wider. Grabbing the base of his cock, he slides the tip

through my wetness. “I’m going to fuck you like the beast I am, making you scream out to a god who can’t, nor won’t, save you.” His other hand moves to my face, his splint gliding over my lips. “Nor will you want him to. You’ll only crave the beast, knowing he’s your biggest protector, the one focused on your pleasure, on everything that makes you happy. Because, at the end of the day, the beast and I are one, and we are *obsessed* with you. You are our world. We’d die trying to protect you.”

He pushes the head of his cock inside me, a loud curse leaving him as he feels how wet his words have made me.

“I love you. My beast. My man.” My voice stutters as he slides his cock further inside me. “I know you’ll do everything in your power to protect me. If something goes wrong, I can *always* count on you to save me. You’ve proved that.” My eyes are coated with moisture as he pushes deeper. “I love every single piece of you. Man and beast. Light and dark. Will and William.”

With a strangled moan, he pushes the rest of the way inside me, bottoming out.

We moan in unison, the feelings of pleasure unlike anything I’ve ever experienced in my life.

His mouth seals over mine with a deep, soul searing kiss, meant to drive a specific type of darkness away. The part where my trauma lay, like a serpent, coiled and waiting to strike, stealing all the pleasure and light from my world.

As my beastly man thrusts in and out of me, slow and deep, he drives all the darkness away, bathing me in nothing but light and pleasure. The sensations are so consuming, so extraordinary, that everything else falls away except us.

“Fuck,” he bites out, his muscles rippling as he moves, his head falling back.

When he lowers it, his intense gaze bores into me, possessing me completely. I wrap my legs tighter around his waist, the feeling of him inside me so incredible that I begin to sob.

Will continues thrusting, gripping me tightly, disregarding his pain for my pleasure. His lips devour mine until we have to pull apart, greedily sucking in oxygen before our lips join again. The experience is surreal, connecting us on a soul-deep level, darkness and light merging together.

He moves his hips in a circle, hitting my walls, causing me to squeeze his dick like a vise.

“Fuck,” I mutter against his lips.

Will grins against mine. “Fuck is right. You feel fucking incredible.”

Slowing his movements, he grabs my legs and throws them over his shoulders, changing the angle. Leaning his forehead against mine, he thrusts inside me, penetrating me so deeply that each thrust causes a mixture of pain and pleasure.

“Your pain is mine. Your pleasure is mine. All of you belong to *me*.” Sweat drips from his forehead to mine, his eyes

locked on me, his stare possessive, obsessively analyzing every micro expression I make.

I'm completely exposed to him right now.

William knows exactly what he's doing, breaking me open, tearing at my wounds, and then piecing me back together again.

He's not fucking me, nor is he making love to me.

He's mending the broken pieces of my heart and soul.

Repairing all the damage Colin did.

Making me once again feel sexy and powerful.

Giving me the control back that was taken from me.

He's giving me what I need like he always does.

My nails dig into his back, another orgasm brewing. He increases his thrusts, hitting me deeply. Then he moves his thumb, pressing it against my clit, rubbing it in circles.

That's all it takes to make me shatter, tears flowing down my cheeks from the ecstasy that flows through my body like lightning. Every nerve ending is like a live wire, cresting into an inferno as I scream his name, clenching him in a vise-like grip, my eyes squeezing closed as stars explode behind my lids.

He keeps going, riding out my orgasm until I'm finished. Then he rocks into me faster, his arm locking around my leg, spreading me wider. "I'm going to fill you with all my cum."

His voice is raspy as sweat coats his body. “It will be dripping out of you for days.”

“Give it to me, Will. I want it.”

“Fuck.” Squeezing his eyes closed, he thrusts hard and fast twice more before shoving himself deep inside me, the heavy weight of his cum filling me.

With our foreheads pressed together, we stare at one another, sweaty and breathless.

Rubbing his nose against mine, he says, “I love you to the moon and back, goddess. For all infinity.”

Tears of happiness fill my eyes as I echo. “To the moon and back. For all infinity.”

We seal our promise to one another with a long, deep kiss, just as we will when we say our vows in the very near future.

Twenty-Six

William

“ARE YOU SURE ABOUT this, love?” My brows scrunch together, worry spinning through my being.

I watch her calmly scroll through her phone while sitting at the dining room table, wearing only her panties and my t-shirt as she sits beside me.

Everleigh’s chocolate eyes lift to mine, the flecks of gold brightening from the beam of sunlight that streams through the window. She narrows her gaze as she analyzes me, the crease between her brows deepening from my question. She shifts in the chair, crossing her legs so my shirt rides higher on her thighs, trying to distract me.

Nice try, goddess, but you won’t distract me from this.

“Did you see that picture of me and the bridesmaids that Darin captured? Irelynn tagged us on Instagram,” she says, ignoring my question.

I lean forward, placing my elbows on the table. “I saw it, love. It’s an amazing picture.” I grab my coffee and take a drink, letting her think she’s off the hook. Setting my coffee

down, my eyes shoot to hers, my stare unrelenting. I let the silence swirl between us for a few beats before I speak.

“Stop evading the question,” I growl.

Everleigh rolls her eyes, propping her chin in her hand. “Your gruffness may work on everyone else, but it won’t work on me. I’m not scared of the man *or* the beast.”

I level her with a look. “The beast is nearly ready to rear his head and smack your ass if you don’t answer the damn question.”

“Oh, threatening me with a good time.” She winks, enjoying the fact that she’s crawling under my skin.

And I let her.

Seeing the glow on her face and the sparkle in her eyes reminds me of how she was before she was captured.

Before she experienced the trauma that dimmed her glow.

Now it’s back, and I want it to stay indefinitely because I live for her pleasure.

I slide my chair back, crooking my finger at her, then pat my lap, knowing she will be pissed as hell, yet incredibly turned on.

Either way, I can handle her.

Pushing her chair back, she saunters over to me, pulling my shirt up over her hips, exposing her panties, before straddling me and settling on my lap. Her arms wrap around my neck, her lips inches from mine.

Her expression changes from flirty to serious, indicating she's going to give me what I want. Determination lines her set jaw, her eye contact unwavering. "I'm certain, love. Zero doubts whatsoever. Where you go, I go."

"I know that. But I need your assurance that you can handle this. That you won't fear the monster taking you over completely." I arch my brow, my stare intense and probing, waiting for her answer.

"Will, I need this. I'm... different from most. Some people talk to their friends. Write in a journal. Take up running. Turn to escapism." She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, her eyes clouding over. "Or they see a therapist." Her gaze drifts, and I know she's thinking about what Ainsley did to her mother. I wish like hell I could change her perception, but I can't. She needs to come to the realization on her own that not all therapists abuse their job for their own gain.

She blows out a breath. "I write in a journal, run on the treadmill, and talk to you and Savannah to sort things out." Tightening her arms around my neck, her spine stiffens. "Instead of long, arduous therapy sessions, I torture and kill the motherfuckers who traumatize me." Relaxing her posture, she shrugs one shoulder. "To each their own."

My lips twitch before I burst into laughter. "This is exactly why you are the only woman I've ever loved. Why I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you." My hand slides to her stomach. "And why you're the only woman worthy of birthing

my children.” I give her a smug smile. “Because you torture and kill the motherfuckers who harm you.”

She throws her head back, laughing. “All of that was so sweet... until that last sentence.” She rubs her nose against mine. “That final sentence was pure, fucking poetry at its finest.”

I chuckle, giving her a kiss. “That’s why we are soulmates.” Releasing her hips, I cup her face, knowing she’s going to grind against my dick, which she immediately does.

“Thank you for the note.”

She stops grinding, her face lighting up. “What did you think?” Her voice trembles with a hint of nervousness.

“That it’s the sweetest thing anyone has done for me.” My voice is low and deep, full of emotion. “I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond, goddess.” Pressing my lips to hers, I show her how much her words meant to me.

When I pull back, she gives me a broad smile. “I’m glad. I meant every word.” Heat burns from her chocolate eyes as she grinds over me again. “And I’m really horny. Can I just ride you now?”

I chuckle, shoving my chair back and standing with her in my arms. Her eyes widen with surprise as I lay her on the table, yanking the shirt she’s wearing higher. She gasps as my fingers grip the waistband of her panties before ripping them off, man and beast desperate to taste her. “Not until I’ve had my breakfast.”

Then I kneel between her legs and worship her like the goddess she is.



Quickly scanning through my emails to pass the time, I impatiently look at the time on my phone, anticipation rolling through me.

Bryan opens the door, stepping inside my office.

“Savannah is at Max and Irelynn’s house with Darin and Vanessa. They’re having a movie night.”

I glance up at him. “Does Savannah know what we’re doing tonight?”

“Nope. Everleigh told me it would be better for her if she didn’t.” His lips twitch. “Before I drove Savannah to Max and Irelynn’s house, Savannah asked Everleigh if she was sure she didn’t want to join them.” He chuckles, shaking his head. “Everleigh said, ‘Hell no. I’m gonna fuck my man, making up for lost time. Have fun with the gang tonight.’ Savannah’s face was as red as the blood that will be spilled tonight. Hell, I think I may have blushed from Everleigh’s words.”

Laughing, I shake my head. “That’s my woman. She says what she’s thinking.” Growing serious, I say, “Everleigh’s right. It’s better Savannah doesn’t know.”

“I heard my name.” Everleigh steps inside the door, a smile on her red lips. My mouth drops open, my gaze drinking in her

appearance.

Clad in a low-cut red top that bares ample cleavage, black leather pants, and what I'm sure are Louboutin heels on her feet, she looks fucking incredible. As she shuts the door behind her and turns, her chestnut locks hang around her face in big, bouncy curls.

I'm fucking mesmerized as she saunters across the room, completely commanding it.

She stops in front of me, one hand on her hip. I hold up one finger and make a twirling gesture. Her eyes glimmer before she slowly spins around, letting me get a good look at her ass in her tight pants before facing me.

Goddamn, she's fucking fierce.

A smirk pulls up my lips as I move closer, my hands grabbing her hips. "Hello, Eve."

She smirks back at me. "Hello, William. Ready to have some fun tonight?" Her tongue slips out, slowly rolling over her crimson lips.

Fuck.

I drink her in, our eyes locking.

The demon inside her snaps its jaws, the hunger palpable, revealing her thirst for retribution.

Colin took something from her, and tonight, she's going to take it back.

I can't fucking wait to see her in action.



Colin's screams fill the air of the small cabin, tears streaming down his face, blending in with the snot and blood dripping from his chin. He squeezes his eyes closed, his face scrunched up from the pain coursing through his body.

I grab the pair of dull, rusted pliers from Bryan's outstretched hand, a humorless smile pulling my lips up.

I'm in my element, euphoria mixing with the adrenaline flowing through my veins, making me feel high.

Powerful.

Untouchable.

When Colin's eyes open, I'm standing in front of him, my stance wide, a smirk on my face. "Come on, Colin. Admit that you missed me since our previous encounter. You know, the one where I kicked your ass until you lost consciousness."

He grunts, spitting a mouthful of blood on the floor. The dumbass gets it all over his feet, probably because he's having trouble seeing out of his swollen eyes. He jerks, trying to kick me, but his ankles are bound by heavy chains. He screams as they dig and cut into his skin.

He better get used to it. He's going to feel a hell of a lot more pain before the night is over.

Colin's body tenses, shaking like a leaf, as I hold the rusty pliers close to his face, letting him take a good, long look,

smelling the rust that coats the jaws before I pull them away. I slowly walk behind him, enjoying how his body trembles, causing the chair he's sitting on to shake, the wood scratching against the dirty, uneven floor.

“Please, William.” His voice is low and strained, sweat coating his exposed skin and running down his torso. “Have mercy on me.” His head lowers as tears run down his face, glimmering beneath the fluorescent light overhead.

I smirk at him, but inwardly, the rage courses inside me. The beast rattles behind my ribcage, shaking them like the bars of a jail cell, rage giving me tunnel vision as memories of Everleigh pleading with him, begging him to stop, wash over me.

Reaching down, I grab a fistful of his hair, snapping his head back so he can see my face. The darkness washes over me, taking control, giving me increased strength, and blocking my pain receptors as I yank on his hair so hard I pull some of it out.

“You fucking touched what is *mine!*” I seethe, spittle flying from my lips, spraying his face. “You tried to fucking *rape* the woman I love. Do you really fucking think I'm going to take it easy on you?” I roar, the sound so loud it nearly deafens me.

He trembles uncontrollably, wails coming out of him like the fucking pathetic pussy he is. I release his head with a shove, pacing around the room.

I want to fucking kill him right now.

But I don't.

My gaze seeks out hers, knowing she needs this as much as I do.

I'll sacrifice my needs for hers and only for her.

My soul is bound and tethered to hers. Her needs are my needs.

The thirst for vengeance swirls in her chocolate eyes, and I'll give that to her.

I'll give that beautiful woman *anything* she wants.

Although we are shrouded in darkness, even as we stand beneath the fluorescent lights of the cabin, we thrive here. The darkness intimidates others, but Everleigh and I aren't afraid to seek it out, finding solace in it, because we aren't alone.

With her, I'm never alone.

That knowledge fortifies my resolve and gives me the strength to inflict pain on Colin without losing my shit and killing him.

My goddess will get the honor of ending his life.

Spinning on my heel, I face Colin, my pulse no longer pounding in my ears from my rage, my focus clear again.

Hope flares in Colin's pathetic eyes as I calmly regard him. He visibly relaxes when he no longer sees the beast raging behind my eyes.

Foolish bastard.

My gaze drops to the short, uneven nubs of his fingernails as he wiggles them, ropes binding his wrists to the arms of the chair.

“Please,” he rasps again, a desperate smile pulling his lips up for mere seconds before his strength wanes.

Giving him a false smile, I lean down, patting his shoulder. “Don’t worry, Colin. Just follow my instructions, and things will be much easier for you.”

Relief eases his tightened facial features, and he closes his eyes, drawing in a shaky breath.

The dumbass obviously forgot about the rusty pliers I hold in my hand. And he’s stupid enough to believe my calm façade.

Good. I’m going to enjoy the hell out of this next part.

When he opens his eyes, I raise the pliers, watching the fear wash over him, stealing the color from his face.

Opening the pliers’ jaws, I grab one short, stubby thumbnail and pull the nail from his nail bed with a quick, sharp jerk.

Colin howls from the pain, throwing his head back like he’s baying toward the moon. His cries sound like a symphony to my ears, the monster inside me dancing gleefully.

Then I grab the other thumbnail and do the same to it.

His deafening screams continue, but I can’t hear them. My gaze once again slides to the small balcony above us where Everleigh stands, watching the action. Her hands hold on to

the railing, red nails curled around it, her broad smile brighter than the full moon in the sky.

Her monster rages inside her, dancing with mine.

I wink at her, her excitement palpable as I torture Colin, giving her some closure with every bit of torture I inflict, with every scream that comes from his mouth.

While I can't undo the trauma he inflicted upon her, I *can* fucking make him pay. Giving her comfort that he will never lay a fucking finger on her ever again.

Pride shines on her moonlit face as she blows me a kiss.

Show her you're worthy of her.

Pulling my attention from her, I focus on the task at hand, removing the rest of his fingernails with the rusty pliers. Colin howls and screams, grating on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

Grabbing him by the throat, his screams are silenced as I cut off his oxygen. "Shut the fuck up or I'll yank out your toenails."

Releasing him, my eyes flick over his red face with contempt. He audibly sucks in air, his chest heaving as he coughs. Crossing my arms, I stare at him, impatiently waiting until he's silent.

It seems to take a fucking eternity until he complies.

The coward refuses to look at me, so I force him, squeezing his jaw with my left hand. Bryan walks over, calmly handing

me a blow torch.

“Honest answers only, Colin. Or...” I hold up the blowtorch before lowering it, his eyes following my every move.

“Tell me, how long have you been watching my woman?” The beast howls inside me at the thought of another man watching what is mine.

He whimpers, wide eyes locked on the blowtorch. “I-I d-d-don’t k-know w-what you’re t-talking a-bout?” His voice is hoarse from being choked.

My jaw clenches. “Lies,” I growl.

Turning the knob, I open the valve, the gas releasing with a hiss. I press the trigger, the telltale blue flame shooting out, causing him to shriek.

“W-w-wait,” he stammers, his gaze not moving from the flame. “I-I s-saw h-her. A-at your o-office.”

I smirk. “Partial truth.” Turning up the flame, I press it against his bicep, the stench of burning flesh filling the room.

He howls, throwing his head back.

Pulling the torch away, I give him thirty seconds of reprieve, then I ask again. “But that wasn’t the only place you saw her. Tell me where you saw her before that,” I seethed through gritted teeth.

His Adam’s apple bobs as he swallows. “I... I-I saw h-her. A-At y-your f-fight.”

“Ahh... finally, an honest answer.” I pace in front of him, my finger leaving the trigger on the torch, my probing gaze analyzing him. “You saw her get into the ring and knew she could fight. And that’s why you drugged her, then bound her with that thick rope.”

Wisely, Colin doesn’t say anything.

It doesn’t matter whether he does or not.

Turning the blow torch on, I turn the flame control valve to max capacity. “But before that, you grabbed her ass.” With those words, I burn his right nipple, making him scream.

Everleigh startles from above me. She didn’t think I knew about that.

I have eyes and ears everywhere and they knew better than to keep that from me.

Moving it away, I release the trigger. “You should know better than to *look* at what is mine. And then you *touched* her!” I scream, the anger building, coursing through my body like a volcano on the verge of an explosion.

I fire up the blow torch again, running it steadily over his bound hands, listening to his screams.

When I stop, Colin’s breathing rasps in and out of his lungs, his chest soaked from sweat.

Bryan walks over, handing me a pair of large pruning shears. My chest heaves from the adrenaline coursing through my body, delighting in the torture I’m inflicting on him.

It's all for *her*.

While I can't stand anyone touching what is mine, it's more than that.

She's more than that.

If it were any other woman, I wouldn't go to these lengths.

But I love her with a depth that astounds even me.

It's not a typical love.

Our love is messy, born from tragedy, a spark lit during the darkest time of our lives.

The flame flickered, bursting to life, engulfing us with a reckless passion neither of us knew we needed.

Once we got a taste of it, we couldn't stop.

It consumed us, lighting up our darkness, and we found an equal in one another.

We are two halves of one dark soul.

Both of us possess a lightness that only the other can bring out.

Right now, that light is hidden as we feed the darkness.

My voice is low, dripping with venom. "You put your filthy, unworthy hands on my fucking woman, sticking a needle in her neck. You removed her jacket and bound her wrists and ankles together, throwing her in that disgustingly cold concrete bunker." Pacing slowly in front of him, my gaze never wavers as the rage floods my veins like a dam bursting.

Suddenly I pull to a stop, my fist flying out and striking him in the face.

His head jerks with the hit, blood pouring from his nose.

The fucker is lucky I'm punching with my left hand and not my right.

Bryan moves closer, grabbing Colin's sweaty, oily hair, holding his head in place, forcing him to watch what I'm about to do.

When Colin's eyes snag the large pruning shears in my hand, I set to work. "You put your filthy fucking fingers on her." I cut off one finger with the shears, blood spurting from it and spraying on me, Bryan, and of course, all over Colin. "You don't fucking touch what's *mine*." I cut a finger from his other hand, his loud wails filling the space. "Keep screaming, asshole. Where we are, no one can fucking hear you."

Bryan smirks, tilting Colin's head back. "You cry a lot, Colin. Fucking pussy." Bryan spits in his face before releasing his hair.

"P-please. I-I have... a f-family," he stutters weakly.

I raise my brows. "Do you, now? You mean, the wife you cheated on with every whore you could find who would fuck you? The one who left you, filed for divorce, and took nearly everything you own." I sneer at him, despising him for lying, but even more for being a cheating scumbag. "And what about your kids, who hardly know you since you were never around? The ones who don't want to see you. Your wife had to bribe

them with candy and toys to get them to go with you. When they cried because they missed their mom, you called your mother and dumped them on her.” I shake my head. “Is that the family you’re talking about?”

His body shakes, surprise lining his face as he stares up at me.

“I know far more than you think, Colin. You’re a pathetic asshole. You treated them like shit, using them as a trophy in public. But in private, you wanted nothing to do with them.” I grab his chin, forcing him to look at me. “You don’t have a family, Colin. They want nothing from you. I wonder if they’ve even noticed you’re missing? Probably not.” Releasing his chin, I wave my hand dismissively.

Colin sobs, his misery and pain mingling together like a black cloud filling the room.

I have *no* sympathy for him.

Tilting my head up, I gaze at Everleigh. Her love for me shines in her eyes, preventing me from slipping completely into the darkness.

Preventing the monster from taking me over.

As I spit those words at Colin, a certainty that I will never be like him vibrates in my bones. I will love my wife and kids, giving them everything I lacked as a boy, but desperately wanted.

As will the woman looking down on me, her hand sliding over her stomach, reassuring our twins.

They are going to be so fucking loved.

As she lifts her head, shifting her body, I'm mesmerized by how the moonlight pours through the side window, lighting up one side of her face. One side of her porcelain skin is bathed in light, giving it an ethereal glow. It glints in her eye, turning the color to honey. Meanwhile, the other side of her face is shrouded in darkness, her skin a dark bluish gray. Her iris is so dark it's barely discernible from the shadows, only the sclera visible.

She is the epitome of light and dark.

Sucking in a breath, I slowly release it, giving her a nod. Her smile widens before she drifts to the staircase. She slowly descends, a vision as her hand glides over the wooden banister, her heels clicking against the stairs.

Colin jerks his head toward the sound, his eyes widening when he sees her. He was unconscious when we arrived, and I asked Everleigh to stand on the balcony and watch before I brought him back to consciousness.

Everleigh steps into the room, owning it like the goddess she is. The air shifts, swirling around her with sinister energy. Her brown curls bounce as she strolls across the room, her shoulders back, her steps sure and confident as she glides across the room.

She stops beside me, her gaze drinking me in with a smile before she turns and faces Colin, her smile fading, disgust contorting her features.

Pulling her knife from the sheath on her hip, she holds it up, the blade glinting beneath the light.

“Let’s have some fun now, shall we, Colin?” she says, brow arched, a malicious smile pulling her lips up.

My gaze locks with Bryan and we smile.

Eve is a fucking force to be reckoned with.

Colin is about to get the full experience of her wrath.

It’s showtime.

Twenty-Seven

Everleigh

MY BODY HUMS AS I stand beside William, vibrating with an intense desire to torture and kill Colin. But my desire wars with a gripping need to strip off William's clothing and give myself over to the haze inducing lust that courses through my body.

I sneer at Colin's injured body, bound to the chair.

William sure did a number on him.

My head turns, my eyes lifting to William, who stares at me with lust-filled eyes. Eve turns him on just as much as Everleigh does.

He's not afraid, nor is he disgusted by Eve.

Instead, he reveres her as much as he does me.

It's a heady feeling, to be loved and accepted so completely.

Forged from pain and trauma, we don't operate on the same level as most do. We aren't afraid to step into the darkness. We seek it out in moments such as this, craving it so that it can provide us what we need.

Vengeance.

Closure.

Healing.

I'm never alone in my darkness, for it reaches out, seeking William. When my darkness beckons him, he answers, providing everything I need.

And more.

Right now, the monster inside me seeks his darkness, drawing from his strength. Gifting me more courage and power to take back what was stolen from me.

My light.

While Colin failed to rape me because the man standing beside me intervened and saved me, he was successful in stealing other things from me.

My sense of safety and security.

The loss of intimacy with the man I love.

Since the kidnapping and near assault, I've experienced flashbacks and nightmares. I've felt like I'm dirty or tainted, and experienced a loss of control over my life.

While I've been working damn hard to take it back, and Will and my friends and family have been extremely supportive and instrumental to my healing, all these issues wouldn't have been present if not for what Colin did.

His actions are unforgivable.

The fucker needs to *pay*.

As the darkness swirls around me, letting Eve come to the surface to play, I no longer have the concerns I once had about being swallowed by the shadows.

William would never allow that to happen. He'd storm the gates of hell to pull me back into the light.

Will is my savior, as much as I'm his.

My gaze bores into Colin's, but he refuses to look at me, as though I'm insignificant.

That pisses the monster off inside me. Eve doesn't tolerate being ignored.

My hand shoots out, grabbing his hair, yanking his head back so his gaze is level with mine. "I won't show you a single drop of leniency, so save your breath and don't fucking bother pleading with me." Then I drag my knife along his arm, making a long shallow cut, ensuring I'm not hitting anything that will make him bleed out too fast.

I want this to *last*.

Colin screams, and a laugh escapes me. His weakness strengthens me, making me powerful again.

Defiance flares in his eyes and he stops screaming, taking in my face. His face contorts and with a sneer, he chokes out, "I-I w-wouldn't b-b-beg you f-for a f-fucking thing, b-bitch."

My fist shoots out, cracking him in the nose so hard the snapping of the bone fills the room. Blood pours down his face as he howls from the pain.

“Glad we have that settled.” I roll my eyes, shaking my head. “You snivel like a little bitch, Colin.”

He spits on me, a mixture of phlegm and blood hitting my cheek before I can dodge it. The guttural roar behind me has me spinning around, dropping my knife to the floor, my hands crashing against his chest, stopping William.

“Don’t worry, my beast. I have this under control.” I seal my lips against him, my mouth hot and demanding, changing his rage to desire.

I slowly pull back from his lips, aware that if I don’t, the lust will consume me.

He reaches one hand up, catching the towel that Bryan throws him, gingerly cupping my face with the hand that still wears the splint, his other hand cleaning my face. The smell of rubbing alcohol assaults my senses, making me blink.

“I don’t want his disgusting spit and blood marking you, Goddess. He’s toxic. Unworthy of you.”

A smile pulls at my lips. “There is only one man and beast that’s worthy of me. And he’s cleaning my face right now.”

A possessive growl rumbles in his chest. “You’re damn right.”

The air crackles with electricity between us, but I fight it, unwilling to give into it yet.

“Do you have the razor blades I requested?”

He pulls the towel away, inspecting my cheek before his eyes lift to mine. “Do you even need to ask?” Our gazes remained locked as William wiped his face, cleaning Colin’s spit off him that I got on his face when I kissed him, before tossing the towel over my head, the sound of Bryan snagging it from the air behind me.

Breaking eye contact, William bends down, retrieving my knife. Standing up, he hands it to me. My skin tingles as soon as our hands touch, the spark of electricity brighter than the lights of this cabin.

My grin widens as I lift a shoulder. “I already know the answer. It was a distraction technique.” I tuck my knife into the sheath at my hip, planning to use it later.

After spitting on me, there’s a different kind of torture I have in mind for Colin.

A smirk pulls his lips up, his eyebrow cocking. Only William can pull off such an arrogant look and make it so fucking sexy.

“What has you distracted, Eve?” he drawls, moving so his body is flush with mine. His low and husky voice has desire racing through my body like lightning dancing across the sky.

“You.”

I release a light purr as his hand glides down my body, lightly caressing my exposed cleavage, before sliding lower, trailing over the thin fabric of my shirt covering my stomach before settling on my hip.

His eyes light with happiness that I don't flinch, but he tests me further, his fingers digging into me through my pants, gripping me and holding me in place.

My eyes heat, completely unafraid. I trust William—and Will—completely.

And while I'm not completely healed from the trauma Colin inflicted upon me, the man gazing at me with hungry eyes gave me what I needed most when he stripped my soul bare, breaking me apart before putting me back together.

My soon-to-be husband loves and respects me unconditionally, proving that although he's a monster, he is not the depraved darkness intent only on inflicting pain and suffering on others.

There is goodness inside him.

A radiance that, when it shines, illuminates everything in its path.

Brazenly, one of my hands slides from his chest to his dick, feeling the hardness straining through the fabric of his jeans. His chest heaves when I grip him through his pants. Digging his hand into me, I wince from the pain.

And I like it.

Only he can inflict the kind of pain I enjoy.

The kind that provides me pleasure.

“When this is over, I'm gonna fuck you so hard.” Pausing, I bask in his hot breaths that hit my face, feathering over my

skin, the heat blistering between us. “But first, let me get a little bit dirty.”

With a wink, I release his cock, hearing the growl of frustration that leaves him before I spin on my heel and walk away.

“Tease,” I hear William hiss behind me.

“Are you two... Going to torture me... Or just fuck in front of me?” Colin rasps, his dark eyes pinning me in place, stopping my movement.

Before I can react, William delivers a hard punch, sending Colin’s head flying back, nearly toppling the chair over. William’s foot stops it, shooting out and catching the chains between his legs, keeping it upright.

Leaning over him, his eyes glitter. “Jealous, Colin? I’m sure you would be if I fucked her in front of you.” William pauses, staring him down. “Too bad I won’t. You’ve seen enough of my woman already. If you see any more of her, I’ll dig your eyeballs out of your fucking skull with my bare hands.”

Colin trembles, and I shake my head, barely able to suppress my smile.

I love when William is possessive as hell.

I also know damn well he wouldn’t fuck me in front of anyone because he doesn’t want anyone to see what’s *his*.

Resuming my trek toward Bryan, I feel William’s gaze boring into my back. I put an extra swing in my hip for his benefit, his eyes burning holes through my clothing.

When I reach him, Bryan shakes his head. Handing me a dull, rusty razor blade, he arches a brow. “Do you really think it’s wise?” He nods his head in William’s direction. “Getting him worked up like that?”

“I can handle him,” I say, full of cockiness. “It will make for a fun night.”

Bryan grunts. “You better plan for more than a night. I’d say a day, possibly two. Judging by the look on his face, you won’t be walking afterward.”

I can no longer suppress my smile. “Wouldn’t be the first time.”

As I spin around to walk away, I hear Bryan mutter, “No wonder he’s so damn obsessed with you.”

Bryan’s words wash over me, a titillating thrill coursing through my body as I lock eyes with William, his feral irises so hungry for me they are the color of ice.

I really shouldn’t tease him right now.

I need to save that for later.

Then my gaze narrows on Colin, and red tinges my vision. All the hell he inflicted comes racing back, washing over me like ocean waves during a raging storm.

I need this.

After the hell of being tied up and helpless in that concrete dungeon, Colin is going to get what’s coming to him.

My eyes never leave Colin's battered face as I saunter closer to him.

Leaning over the chair he's bound to, I stare him down, flames dancing in my eyes.

The monster roars inside me, licking her chops, hungry for vengeance.

Colin trembles, unsure how to handle a strong woman.

Eve is intimidating the fuck out of him.

I spit in his face, just as he did mine, watching the anger redden his cheeks.

Holding up the razor blade, I smile. "This blade is a bit dull and rusty, but it still works." I tilt it, letting the light wash over it so he can see it better.

"Just tell me when it hurts."

Then I slice it across his face, his screams filling the room.

I patiently wait for Colin's howls to turn to whimpers.

When they do, I give him a cold smile. "That was just a taste. Let the real fun begin."

Then I begin carving up his body, his screams and cries a symphony to my ears.

I don't know how much time passes, but when I look up, Bryan stands beside the chair.

Locking eyes with me, Bryan waves smelling salts beneath Colin's nose. "Don't fade out now. You wouldn't want to miss any of the fun things we have planned for you."

Colin jerks, his eyes nearly swollen shut, making it harder for him to see.

Feeling his presence beside me, I turn my head to William, my gaze locking with his.

A smirk pulls my lips up. “Those eyelids are pretty swollen. It seems he’s having problems keeping them open.” I lift one shoulder. “Maybe I need to cut them off so he can see better.”

William steps closer, cocking his head as he studies Colin. “He wouldn’t be able to keep his eyes off you then.”

Colin sucks in a breath, his fear palpable as his gaze slides from William to mine. Sweat pours down his body as he looks back and forth between us, terror etched on his face.

“What do you say, Colin? Are you going to keep those eyes open... Or do I need to cut your eyelids off?” I cock a hip, waiting for his response.

He quivers uncontrollably. “I-I’ll s-stay a-a-awake. J-J-Just p-please, d-don’t.”

Winking at William, I hand the dull razor blade back to Bryan, then grab the knife from my sheath. “I feel like a different kind of fun now. How about you, Colin?”

“Please don’t.” His lips quiver as the tears flow from his eyes, dripping down his chin and mixing with the blood and sweat on his torso. “Don’t do this.”

His words send me back to that concrete dungeon, the cold seeping through the marrow of my bones, fear lodged in my throat.

It's not Colin's battered and broken body tied to a chair that I see right now.

It's me, wrists and ankles bound, struggling against him as Colin tears at my clothes, intent on raping me.

Terror causes my body to quake uncontrollably, my chest burning from the sobs that well in my throat, choking me.

With an animalistic roar, I attack him, my knife savagely slicing into his skin, my vision seeing nothing but red as blood spurts everywhere.

The cuts I make are no longer shallow.

These are meant to make him bleed out.

With a growl, I ram my knife into his stomach, intent on stabbing him over and over again, not stopping.

Even when he's dead, I don't plan on stopping.

As I pull my knife out, strong arms wrap around my waist, the smell of spice and woods washing over me.

"Eve. It's over." His voice is calm and soothing against my ear. "Come back to me." His hands slide down my body, resting over my stomach, pulling me from the darkness.

Blinking, my vision clears. "William," I rasp, feeling him pressed against me.

"I'm here, baby. Always."

Tears fill my eyes. "Thank you..." I choke on a sob, unable to say anything else.

“Shhh... No words are necessary, Eve. You aren't in that dungeon. I rescued you.”

My body goes limp, sagging against him, letting him support me. “You stopped him from...” Biting my lip, I'm unable to say the word.

“I did.” His warm lips press against my neck. “I'd do anything to save you. I'd burn the entire fucking world to the ground, painting every city and town in this godforsaken world red as broken and dead bodies fall behind me in my quest to get to you.”

I heave out a sigh, knowing he means those words with every fiber of his being.

He presses himself tighter against me, a hard edge to his voice. “I won't ever let my guard down again. I refuse to let anyone get close enough to hurt you... or our kids.”

Turning my head to look into his light blue irises, I nod. “I love you.”

Spinning around to face him, my lips trail over his jawline, his stubble rough beneath them before landing on his soft, pillowy lips.

He moans as our mouths crash together, full of passion, commitment, and promise.

And most of all, *love*.

The kind of love that lasts an eternity.

My breathing is heavy as I slowly pull away from his mouth. “Let’s go home now.”

“Of course.” Wrapping an arm around me, he guides me to the door. “Just let me say some final words to Bryan first, okay?”

I nod and he releases me.

As I watch him stride away, there is something chilling in how he moves toward Bryan. My eyes search Bryan’s face, but he’s only focused on William.

Then he hands him a large ax.

A ferocious snarl leaves his mouth as William grabs the ax, then spins around, fire flaming in his eyes as he heads to Colin.

Colin’s eyes slowly open when he hears William’s snarl, his breathing ragged, laying there like helpless prey on the verge of death.

William stares down at Colin, contempt and rage battling for dominance on his face. “You’ll never fucking hurt my woman again, motherfucker.” With one single, forceful swing, the blade connects with Colin’s neck, decapitating him. Dropping the ax, he spits on Colin’s headless torso before raising his head, his gaze connecting with Bryan’s. “Call the guys. Dispose of this piece of shit.”

Bryan nods, already pulling out his phone.

William turns to me, his ferocious gaze freezing my body in place as the darkness engulfs him.

He advances toward me, blood splattered over his clothing and body.

My eyes remain locked with his as I wrap my arms around him, not fearing the man or monster as I pull him against me with a hard tug.

My hands cup his face reverently. “Come back to me, William,” I whisper, coaxing him from the darkness, just as he did for me mere moments ago. “It’s over, and I’m safe. That asshole won’t ever hurt me again.”

“You’re fucking right.” His lip quirks up. “I decapitated that son of a bitch. He’ll never fucking touch you. And I hope like hell he never haunts your dreams again.”

My lips press against his. This kiss is meant to calm, rather than excite. “The only man that will be in my dreams is *you*,” I whisper against his lips. “And the only demon that will give me nightmares is yours.” My lips curl into a gentle smile.

His smile turns salacious. “I’ll give you a demon.” With that, he leans down, lifting me over his shoulder, my torso hanging down his backside.

As he opens the door, the cold December air sucks the breath from my lungs. “Put me down,” I gasp as I hit his ass.

“Do that again and I’ll make your ass red.”

I smack his ass harder, causing him to growl. One hand comes up and delivers a sharp slap to my ass, stinging my skin through my leather pants. A blissful moan escapes me, swirling on the December wind that blows around us.

“You’re lucky it’s freezing out here, or I’d already have you naked, impaled on my cock.”

Fuck. That’s hot.

His words are like a lightning bolt to my pussy, making me grit my teeth from the want that courses through me, flames bursting through my core.

Opening the passenger door of his car, he shifts my body in his arms, tossing me on the seat. As he fastens the seat belt around me, I’m a panting mess of desire, my hands and lips seeking any piece of him.

Laughing, he dodges my advances, the sexy sound making me half-crazed with lust.

“William,” I bite out, angry that he’s not giving into me.

His hands grip my shoulders, pushing me against the seat. “Patience, Eve.” Then his mouth seals over mine in a brutal, punishing kiss, stealing the breath from my lungs.

Pulling back, his eyes glitter with desire before he stands upright, slamming the car door shut. Hurrying around to the other side, he slides behind the wheel.

But I already have my seat belt off and the second his ass hits the seat, I launch myself at him, banging my leg against the center console and yelping before landing on his lap. I ignore the pain, undeterred, desperate for his touch.

Starting the car, he shakes his head. “Okay, Eve. If you want to play it like this.”

As my lips latch onto his neck, grinding against his hard dick, he shifts and backs up. The car jerks, tires squealing, as he stomps on the gas, his hand moving my hair to one shoulder so he can see as he races out of there.

“Where... are we... going?” I say between mouthfuls of the skin on his neck, his taste invigorating, igniting the lust like an inferno inside me.

“You’ll see when we get there.” He releases a groan as my teeth sink into his skin before my tongue soothes it. “Or not.”

I groan against his warm skin, a pleasurable shiver causing goosebumps to flare over my skin.

“Fuck, that feels amazing,” he rasps as I grind harder against him, my body pressed against him as though I’m trying to climb inside his skin.

Gravel crunches beneath the tires before the car comes to a stop. William cuts the ignition, his hands moving to my face, pulling it away from his neck, before his mouth slams over mine.

I whimper, tasting blood, enjoying the mix of pain and pleasure. His hardness presses against the seam of my leather pants, my panties soaked from my desire for him.

I hear the door opening, feel the coldness of the December air bite into my skin, before William shifts his body, somehow sliding out of the car and standing with me wrapped around him. I’m cognizant of the door slamming shut before I feel him striding with me in his arms. My eyes pop open and I start

to pull away, but his hand grips my head before his mouth finds mine again, pulling me under, drowning me in lust.

My back hits wood, the smell of it mixing with pine and the smell of the forest. My eyes open as he pulls back slightly, his lips trailing to my shoulder as his hand moves, a series of beeps floating on the breeze before a door unlocks. He shifts me in his arms, pulling me away from the door, then kicks it in, banging it against the wall.

Pulling back, a giggle escapes me as I look at him with raised brows. “Don’t you do anything normal?”

A shit-eating grin is on his lips as he says, “When it comes to you, hell no.” He strides forward with me in his arms, hitting a light switch before kicking the door shut with his foot. “Normal is overrated.”

The way he looks at me makes me shiver. It’s as though he’s barely holding onto his restraint, one tenuous thread away from it snapping.

He carries me through the cabin, my eyes drinking in what I can. He flips a switch, striding into a bedroom. Leaning over, he grabs a remote, and a fire roars to life in the fireplace. Tossing the remote onto the nightstand, he continues on to the bathroom with me still wrapped around him.

William lowers me to my feet and I shiver from the chill inside the cabin, his warm body no longer keeping me warm. Reaching over, he turns on the water in the shower before his hands return to me, stripping me of my clothing.

Once I'm naked, he quickly removes his clothing before taking my hand, helping me into the shower, following behind me.

I'm shocked that he isn't all over me, considering the desire that rolls off his body.

Instead, he gently pushes me under the spray of the water, pouring body wash into his hands before running them over me.

My voice shakes slightly from my nerves as I say, "You're washing me." It comes out sounding more like a question than a statement.

He pauses, lifting his gaze to mine, a smirk pulling up his lips. "You're wondering why I haven't devoured you yet?" I nod, staring at the barely restrained demon in his eyes. "I want *his* blood off you. Colin has contaminated you enough. Although I'm practically dying to touch you..." He slides his hand higher on my thigh, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, before exhaling it. When his eyes open, they blaze with lust. "My needs must wait a few minutes until I can take care of yours."

An overwhelming rush of love courses through me, touched by his selflessness.

At this moment, we are Will and Everleigh, sharing a tender moment.

But beneath the surface, Eve claws at me, desperate to sink her nails into William's skin, dying to taste him.

He spins me around so the water can rinse the front of me, while he soaps the back. I moan as his hands rub over my body.

Reaching out, I grab the body wash, pouring some into my hands. When he spins me around, my hands move over his body, soaping him. His jaw clenches and he tilts his head back, my hands trailing over his chest to his stomach.

He catches my wrist before my hand can move to his dick. I pout at him and he chuckles. He grabs the soap, quickly washing off, then steps into me so we are both under the spray.

How the hell does he look so damn sexy when he's wet?

His hands slide over my hips, then to my ass. Squeezing it, his icy eyes blaze with desire, his jaw clenching. "I hope you know what you're in for tonight."

I tilt my chin, staring at him defiantly. "Do your worst, William."

He growls, then delivers a hard smack that stings my ass cheek. My pussy throbs, growing wetter. "That's for teasing me earlier." His hand connects again, this time harder, making me clench. "That's for shaking your ass in front of Bryan and that fucker, Colin." His hands massage lightly over my cheeks, taking the sting away. His grip tightens on my ass before he shoves his body against mine, slamming my back into the shower walls, a surprised squeak leaving my lips. "This is *mine*. Don't do that shit again."

Tilting my head, I stare at him defiantly. "Or what?"

With a growl, he shuts off the water, then opens the shower door, stepping out before pulling me out behind him. Then he lowers his shoulder, lifting me over his back again. I smack his ass as he rushes toward the bed, throwing me on it. His body falls on top of mine, his arms caging me in.

A growl reverberates through his chest. “You make me crazy.”

I lick my lips, which is all the permission he needs to take what he wants.

Then his mouth covers mine, tasting, caressing, and devouring me. My legs wrap around his waist, feeling his hardness against my entrance, my nails digging into his back, holding him against me.

I’m completely lost in him—the smell of the body wash on his skin, his warm skin heating my body, the taste of his mouth as my tongue tangles with his. My fingers grip his blond locks that have grown a little longer. The stubble on his face brushes over my face, making me moan into his mouth.

William pulls back, a wicked grin on his face. He’s breathing heavily as he arches a brow. “I’ll let you take control and do whatever you want to me. On one condition.”

Heat courses through my body. “Anything I want?”

He nods, his eyes an inferno of lust. “Any damn thing you want. But I want one thing in return?”

“What do you want?”

“I want to fuck your ass tonight. I promise you’ll like it.”

Swallowing hard, my gaze drops. Even though he's pressed tightly against me and I can't really see his cock, Will is very well endowed, and the thought...

His hand grips my chin, pulling my gaze back to his. "I promise, I won't hurt you. You just need to trust me."

I stare into those crystalline blue eyes, seeing the demon and man shining back at me. I don't hesitate any longer. "As long as you have lube, then yes."

He reaches over to the nightstand beside the bed, opens the drawer, and pulls a bottle out, holding it up. For a moment, jealousy grips me as I stare at it.

His chuckle draws my attention to him. "No goddess. You are the first and only woman I've ever brought here. I had supplies delivered here by the staff who cleaned it before we arrived."

A burst of laughter falls escapes as I shake my head. "So your plan for the night was to torture and kill that motherfucker, then bring me—" I gesture to the room around me "—here and fuck my ass?"

He gives me a smug grin. "Pretty much."

Pushing against his chest, I shove him to his back, rolling on top of him. "I like the way you think." My mouth seals over his, devouring him.

When I pull back, he grins at me. "I'm yours to do with as you want, Eve."

“You may regret those words.” I wink at him before my mouth covers his again.

Twenty-Eight

William

MY BODY IS SOAKED from sweat as Eve rides my dick like she's riding a bull in a rodeo, sending waves of pleasure curling through my spine.

Her hands on my skin set me on fire and the filthy fucking words pouring from her lips sear my brain, making it nearly malfunction from lust.

She incinerates every part of me, inside and out, as she slams down on me, soaking me with yet another orgasm.

This woman is going to be my undoing.

“Fuck, William. I need your cum.” Her nails dig into my arms, bruising me, lust coursing through me.

While I want to give it to her, I plan to fuck in her ass first.

Flipping her over, I push her face into the bed, ass in the air. Lining up with her entrance, I sink inside her wetness with a groan. Fumbling around, my fingers wrap around the lube, opening it and coating my finger with it before pressing the tip against her back entrance, feeling her tense.

“Trust me, baby,” I whisper as I rock deep inside her pussy, hitting her in that spot that drives her crazy. She takes a deep breath, muscles relaxing, and I ease my finger inside her, hearing her clipped cry. Being careful that my splint doesn’t hurt her, I rub over her clit while slowly driving my cock inside her.

Her muscles loosen to take more, and I begin working my finger in and out of her ass, sinking deep. She tenses, jerking slightly, and I whisper, “Breathe, Eve. My beautiful she-devil.” My words cause her to relax, and I continue slowly fucking her while working her clit, feeling her ass loosen around me. I slip another finger inside her, feeling her tense. “Trust me,” I whisper to her, waiting until she relaxes before I start stretching her with my fingers.

As I work my fingers in and out of her ass, she begins moving, meeting the thrusts of my cock and pushing against my fingers. Her moans grow louder, her fingers gripping the sheets on the bed as she murmurs my name.

“That’s it, my beautiful devil. Stretch that ass for me so you can take my cock.”

She practically purrs from my words, moving her gorgeous body in time with my fingers. I let her get lost in the rhythm, ensuring she’s ready.

Pulling my fingers and dick out of her, she squeaks in protest. Even though I’m soaked from her wetness, I pour lube on my cock before shifting, easing the head of my cock into her ass.

Placing my palm on her lower back, I rock into her, the tightness causing me to close my eyes, cursing lightly. Her muscles contract and I whisper, “Breathe,” before my fingers begin circling her clit. I don’t move, letting her relax around me, before pushing forward, easing into her ass.

“Good girl. That’s it, my fiery devil. Take all of me.”

My words have the desired effect, a moan slipping out of her. She releases an unsteady breath, flexing her pussy, which pushes me in deeper.

I bite my lip, her tightness squeezing me, and it’s all I can do not to come.

Not yet.

I need to show her how good this can feel.

Slowly moving in and out of her, she moans, rocking with me, nearly unraveling the beast inside. Closing my eyes, I struggle to keep him contained so I don’t hurt her.

“God, that feels so damn good.”

“Fuck, baby,” I groan, opening my eyes, working her clit faster. “You’re fucking perfect. Work that ass and take all my cock.”

“William.” Her fingers grip the covers, turning her head so her beautiful porcelain profile is exposed. Pleasure lights up her face and I feel it deep inside my chest.

“That’s it, my beautiful devil.” I move a little faster, driving in deeper.

“Yes,” she cries, working in tandem with my movements.
“Harder.”

I curse, giving her what she asked for, feeling her tremble beneath me. “That’s it, baby. You like my cock in your ass, don’t you?”

“Yes, William,” she pants, pushing back against me. “Fuck my ass harder.”

Holy shit.

My loud groan fills the room as I back out, then pound inside her, feeling her grip me as I work my cock deep inside her ass.

“Your ass feels incredible, love.” Leaning over her, I nip at her neck, my chest against her back as I continue fucking her.

“You. Feel. Incredible,” she gasps, her moans growing louder.

Fuck, this woman makes me insane.

Her words spurred me on, convincing me she’s fully aroused and any pain she’s feeling is in equal measure to her pleasure.

Straightening, I thrust harder, then slap her ass hard. She bucks against me, turning me practically feral.

“Little devil, you need to stop tempting me,” I growl against her ear. “Before I fuck this ass so hard you cry.”

She slams back against me harder. “Fuck yes. I need it. Please give it all to me.”

Wiping the sweat from my brow, I grip her hips. “You asked for it.” Then I begin slamming into her ass, her loud screams filling the room, pushing me closer to the edge. Working her clit harder and faster, I pound into her, feeling her body quivering around me. “Goddamn, my beautiful devil,” I rasp. “I’m going to come soon.”

“William, yes,” she screams louder, her trembling growing stronger. “I want you to come in my ass.”

Fuck. This woman though.

I ram into her, impaling her ass on my cock. “I’m... Going... To... Come,” I growl, slamming into her, my cock throbbing as I break.

As I release inside her ass, her body quivers as she has another orgasm, collapsing on the bed. Pulling out, I fall on the bed beside her, panting from exertion.

Grabbing her, I roll her to her side, curling my body around hers, holding her. We lay like that for a few minutes until I calm down and can move again.

“Stay right here,” I whisper before releasing her and climbing out of bed.

Her voice is muffled by her arm as she says, “Not going anywhere.”

I can’t help the chuckle that slips out of me as I head to the bathroom, grabbing a washcloth and wetting it. I clean myself quickly, then grab another one to clean her with.

Entering the bedroom, I head to the bed, placing the cool cloth against her ass, cleaning her lovingly and tenderly.

When I'm finished, I throw the washcloth in the hamper, then walk around the bed. As one knee hits the mattress, I pull the covers up, sliding beneath them. Then I tug on the covers beneath her until she's under them.

Gathering her in my arms, she curls around me, a soft sigh leaving her lips. I hold her against me, raining kisses over the top of her head.

Tilting her face up, her tired eyes gaze lovingly at me. "Thank you for everything tonight. You always seem to know exactly what I need."

I kiss the tip of her nose. "You're my priority, love. I'll always put your needs first."

She grins at me, squeezing me tighter. "I'm so damn lucky to have you."

"Goddess, I'm the lucky one. You make my life complete. I can't live without you."

She smiles up at me, one hand lifting, caressing my face. "Same, love. I don't ever wanna live this life without you."

Just like that, we are Will and Everleigh again, all the darkness retreating. It will never vanish, nor would I want it to.

Dark William is necessary to protect her, and the little ones growing inside her.

Her eyes drift closed as I gently rub my fingers over her back. The heat from the electric fireplace is soothing, flowing over her alabaster skin, painting her face in an array of oranges and blues. Her breathing and heartbeat are in tandem with mine.

“Will?” Her eyes pop open and she tilts her head up, staring into my eyes. “I can’t believe we are getting married in a week. I’m suddenly... Panicking.”

“You have nothing to worry about, love. I’ll assist with everything I can. Plus, Irelynn is always chomping at the bit to help, so we can get her involved.”

She exhales, her muscles relaxing. “Okay, so maybe tomorrow—”

“Nope,” I growl, my hand stroking her back slowly, contrasting with my gruff tone. “I get you all to myself tonight and tomorrow. Then we’ll head home and plan the wedding of the century.” The tension eases from my voice, not wanting to cause her stress. “We have a lot of things accomplished, love. Stop fretting.”

“Maybe it’s my hormones making me anxious.” Her fearful eyes lock with mine. “I’ll probably be a monster by the time these two are born.”

“I can handle it. Bring it on, goddess.”

She giggles. “But what if I’m a nightmare to live with? Crying one minute, happy the next, screaming ten minutes later.”

Lifting a shoulder in a shrug, my voice is calm. “Who could blame you? You’re growing two babies inside of you. I’d be surprised if you weren’t.”

“How are you so fucking perfect for me? Nothing I do ruffles you.” She lifts her head, a smile curving her lips. “Unless I’m friendly to the coffee shop guy and you flip out.”

“I did *not* flip out. That asshole was looking at you like you were on the menu. I leave you alone for a few minutes to take a damn piss and some jackass starts hitting on you.”

A peal of laughter leaves her as her head shakes against my chest, causing me to smile.

“Damn it, Everleigh, this isn’t funny. That asshole was hitting on you.”

She lifts her head from my chest, barely able to suppress her smile. “So, what? You growl and act like some maniac ready to slam his head off the counter, then slit his throat?” Her eyes twinkle with amusement.

“You’re enjoying this a bit too much. I think you like it when I get all jealous and possessive.”

She sits up, then climbs on my lap, wrapping her arms around me. “I never said I didn’t.” Raining kisses over my jawline, she says, “I happen to love possessive William.”

My hands wrap around her hair, tilting her face to mine. “Is that so? Well, then, you’ll love possessive William pounding into your soaked pussy again.”

A moan escapes her, and she bites her lip, eyes blazing with lust.

Lifting her up, I slide her down onto my hard cock, feeling her tight heat surrounding me. She winces when I bottom out inside her. “Is your ass sore?”

“A little.”

I grin. “Only a little, huh? Well then, it’s my mission to fuck your pussy and ass until they are both more than a little sore.”

Her smile is salacious. “Bring it, devil.”

“Challenge accepted, she-devil.” Slamming my mouth against hers, I lift her up, then lower her back down on my cock, not giving her a chance to say anything else.

Twenty-Nine

Everleigh

MY EYES BLINK RAPIDLY as I take in my perfectly curled hair, then over my face as I analyze my makeup.

“You’ve made me absolutely stunning, Belinda.” My wide eyes meet hers in the mirror.

She blows me a kiss. “It was an easy task, Miss Everleigh. You’re a natural beauty.”

Turning my head, Savannah’s blue eyes meet mine, eyes shimmering with tears. “Oh my God, Everleigh. I’ve never seen you look more beautifully radiant than you do today.”

Vanessa leans forward in her chair slightly, receiving a light swat from the stylist as she curls her hair. “Fucking gorgeous, Everleigh. Will is going to cry when he sees you, especially once you are in that phenomenal dress.”

My smile widens, my heart fluttering inside my chest. “I can’t wait.”

Turning my head to the right, I meet Irelynn’s brown eyes, glowing from happiness. “It’s practically an indescribable

feeling, isn't it?"

Reaching out, I squeeze her hand. "It is. I just can't seem to find the words today." Biting my lip, I stare at her, worry clouding my mind. "I hope I remember my vows."

Irelynn squeezes my hand. "You will. Just focus on William. If all else fails, just say what's in your heart. No one will know if you mess anything up."

"Great advice. Thank you." Exhaling a breath, I turn back to the mirror, my reflection revealing all the happiness I'm feeling inside.

There's a knock on the door before Darin yells, "Is everyone decent?"

A chorus of yells follow, and I laugh. "Come in, Darin."

My brother steps through the door, looking dashing in his tux, a wide grin on his handsome face. Turning in my chair, his eyes widen as he sucks in a breath. "Lil sis! You look stunning!" He hurries over and I stand to hug him.

I couldn't ask for a better brother—and friend—than Darin.

Pulling back, he grips my hand, holding a small box in the other. "Dad is going to sob when he sees you. I better get a box of tissues and line his tux with them." He gives me a grin, but it's more subdued than normal. When his gaze trails over the girls and locks on Vanessa, I see a flash of pain on his face.

I'm fairly certain I see the same flash on hers.

I squeeze his hand. My voice is low as I say, “Let’s step outside a minute.”

He gives me a smile. “Okay. Besides, I have a surprise for you.” Turning, he heads to the door.

My brows furrow, wondering what the surprise could possibly be. “I’ll be right back,” I say to my friends, following him outside the room.

Shutting the door behind me, I turn and assess him. “Are you okay?”

“Of course. Your soon-to-be husband instructed me to deliver this gift to you.” He holds out the small box and my eyes drop to it, chest hitching. Taking it, my gaze flits up to his. “Is that the only reason you’re here?”

He releases a sigh. “I wanted to see Vanessa. Gauge her reaction.” He shoves his hands in his pockets, his tone intentionally light. “We’re having some issues, but we’ll get through them.” Pasting a smile on his face, he shrugs.

I’m not buying the bullshit he’s selling. I know my brother and he’s hurting.

“When Will and I return from our honeymoon, I’ll talk to Vanessa. I don’t know what’s going on with her, but I feel she’s making the same mistake my mom did. And if she’s not careful, she will lose the best man she could ever find. Someone who genuinely loves her.”

Darin’s smile is soft. Pressing his lips to my cheek, he whispers, “Thank you, Everleigh. That means the world to

me.” Pulling back, his green eyes brighten. “I’m lucky as hell that you’re my sister. And it’s your wedding day.” He grabs my arm and starts doing a ridiculous dance that has me laughing and trying not to cry.

Blinking rapidly, I give him a little slap on the arm. “Stop it. I can’t ruin my makeup already.”

He pulls out his cell phone, looks at the time, then points to the box in my hands. “If you don’t open that, Will may be kicking my ass before the wedding.”

Laughing, I pull off the bow and lift the lid. Inside is my favorite picture of us, a note on the delicate frame, telling me to follow Darin.

Holding out his hand, I clasp my fingers around Darin’s and we hurry away. He leads me down a long hallway and into a room I haven’t been in before. We climb the steps, entering another room. “Will was pretty good about keeping this hidden from you.”

Looking around wide-eyed, I say, “Yes, he’s full of surprises.”

Ascending another flight of stairs, Darin strides forward, his hand on the doorknob. He pauses before opening it. “This is the end of my journey. Continue inside for your present. I’ll see you soon.”

I squeeze his bicep, leaning on my tiptoes and kissing his cheek. “See you soon, big bro.”

Darin opens the door and I step inside to find a huge room, bookshelves lining the wall around a fireplace and a large chaise lounge beneath a huge window. Taking a few more steps inside the room, my hand presses over my heart as I gaze around, awestruck.

“Why do you look so hesitant?” His low voice sounds from behind me.

Whirling around, tears fill my eyes as Will stands there, handsome as sin in his black tux, a huge smile on his face. Flinging myself into his arms, he catches me, lifting me into his arms, just like I knew he would.

“Will. This is breathtaking.”

His voice is husky and emotional. “Not nearly as breathtaking as you.” He grins. “I know you love to read, so I thought I’d give you a library. A place for you to relax.” He places a kiss to my forehead, then pulls back, looking into my eyes. “A place for you to study when you return to college.”

Blinking back tears, I swallow over the knot of emotion rising in my throat. “It’s beautiful.” Cupping his face, I give him a watery smile. “You’re perfect.”

His grin widens as he shakes his head. “No, you’re the one who’s perfect, my love.” Lowering me to my feet, he lightly fingers a curl that hangs around my face.

“When did you do this?”

“I’ve been working on it for a while now. I had Darin, Bryan, and Max help me.”

Squeezing his hand, my heart bangs inside my chest. I'm awestruck by my soon-to-be husband's thoughtfulness. "Thank you for this amazing surprise, Will. I absolutely love this room."

His hands tighten on my waist as he rubs his nose against mine. "This is only a small part of your surprise, love."

"Will. I don't have anything to give you right now," I admonish.

He shakes his head. "You've already given me what I want. You and your love." His hand moves over my stomach. "And our two little girls that we'll meet this summer." His eyes shine with moisture, enveloping me in his love. "But this, I wanted to do for you. For us." He steps back, sliding his jacket off. Then he begins unbuttoning his shirt.

I move to help him with the buttons, loosening his tie. "You just got that splint off. Let me help you."

Will levels me with a look. "If I can't unbutton a shirt and undo a tie, I've got bigger fucking problems than a splint will solve."

With a laugh, I step back. When he has the buttons undone and his tie loosened, he slides his shirt from his shoulders, his pale, muscular upper body causing me to lick my lips.

"Calm down, goddess." Winking at me, he turns to the side, revealing a tattoo. My eyes widen as I take in a man and a woman sitting with their arms around one another, facing a giant full moon.

Handwriting in the full moon catches my eye. I gasp, one hand covering my heart. “Oh, Will. You had the words I wrote in that note I gave you tattooed on you.” My fingers reach out, reverently tracing over it. “My handwriting is on your body.” My chin quivers as tears fill my eyes.

“Do you like it?” his voice comes out in a husky whisper.

“I love it. This is such an unexpected surprise. Just when I think you can’t get any sweeter, you do something like this...” Blinking rapidly, tears roll down my cheeks.

Blinking rapidly, Will turns his head away, getting his emotions under control before turning back to me. “I’ll do anything to see that smile I love on your beautiful face.”

“Will.” I shake my head, too overcome to say anything.

He smiles at me, knowing what I’m thinking without me saying it.

Trying to get my emotions under control, I heave in a breath, then slowly exhale. My gaze drops to the tattoo again. Tracing over the letters in the moon, I repeat the words aloud, “To the moon and back. To infinity and beyond.”

Will points beneath the couple, and my eyes narrow, reading the small words etched below. “Willingly. Completely. For a fucking eternity.” My heart bangs against my chest from his perfect characterization of us that marks his skin.

Then the puzzle pieces start connecting and I laugh, swatting his arm playfully. “You told me you were injured from sparring with Bryan.”

He looks sheepish. “I hated lying to you, but I wanted to surprise you. I knew you’d see it unless I kept it bandaged when I was shirtless or naked.”

“You certainly surprised me. This is perfect.” My fingers leave his arm, tracing over his shoulder and to his jawline. “You’re perfect.” Giving him a watery smile, I shake my head. “I’m not even sure the vows I wrote can compare to this.”

He chuckles. “I’m certain they will. The main thing I want to hear is you saying, ‘I do.’ That’s all I need to hear to make me happy.” His thumbs wipe the tears from my cheeks. “Then you’ll be mine forever.”

Shaking my head, I sniff. “Will, I’ve been yours since the moment our eyes locked together the day of that horrible car accident.” A sob escapes me, although I try like hell to hold it back. “I’ve always been yours. And I’ll always be yours.”

He pulls me against him, wrapping his arms around me, and holding me tight. “I’ve always been yours, too, my love,” he whispers against me. “And that will never change. I belong to you.”

A contented sigh spills from me.

Whenever I’m in his arms, I’m *home*.

I slowly pull back, my heart lurching at the sight of his handsome face that I’ll be looking at for the rest of my life. “You’ve given me so much already, but this tattoo... I can’t find the words to express what this means to me.”

He shakes his head. “You don’t have to. It’s in your eyes.” His hand slides to my throat. “It’s in the thrumming of your pulse.” Then his hand slides lower, over my silky white robe, covering my chest. “And it’s right here, in every beat of your heart.”

“I love you for a fucking eternity, Will.”

He smiles widely. “I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond.”

As we kiss, I feel perfectly safe and content. Not worried about anything or anyone that may come along, trying to jeopardize our happiness or worse, try to pull us apart.

We’ll overcome any obstacle that attempts to come between us.

We always have.

And we always will.



Gripping my dad’s arm as Savannah walks down the aisle, her scarlet dress highlighting her natural beauty, I exhale a breath.

“Are you nervous, pumpkin?” My dad squeezes me against him, pulling me from my thoughts.

“I thought I would be. But I’m more excited than anything.”

“I’m glad. You have nothing to be nervous about. You’re marrying one helluva man. And I’m so excited I’ll be meeting

my grandbabies in the summer. I can't wait to spoil them rotten."

With a light groan, I shake my head, my eyes sparkling when I look up at him. "They'll be spoiled nightmares from all the love and attention they'll get."

He pats my arm. "Nothing better. I'm always happy to babysit or help in any way I can."

My heart swells with happiness. "You can count on it. Will and I are excited to have such loving fathers in our lives."

The music changes and my dad and I stare at one another.

"Are you ready?"

"Absolutely."

As we drift forward, my eyes lock with Will's brilliant blue eyes, tears prickling my lids. His gaze travels over me slowly, drinking me in, and I watch him struggle to contain his emotions.

Goddamn, I'm so lucky to be loved so much.

All the guests are standing, and I smile at them without really seeing them. The décor is gorgeous, a blinding array of Christmas trees and wreaths, covered in white lights and red ornaments, festive and bright.

It's a winter wonderland, accentuated with red accents, my favorite color.

But I can't focus on the décor.

Not when I'm about to marry Will.

The only thing I see is *him*. The only man I've ever loved, and the one I'll be spending the rest of my life with.

As we reach the end of the aisle, my dad turns to me, kissing my cheek. "You look gorgeous, Everleigh. I'm so damned proud of you. I know your mom would be, too."

I give him a one-armed hug, holding my bouquet with the other before I feel it slipping from my hand.

"Give your dad a proper hug, love," Will whispers from behind my dad.

I hug my dad, both of us sobbing happy tears before I pull back. Wiping my face, I whisper, "Thanks, Dad. I love you."

He wipes his eyes. "I love you, too, sweetheart." Grabbing my hand, he steps aside and guides me to Will, placing my hand in his. My dad's gaze moves from me to Will. "You've taken my daughter's heart, and I trust you to always keep it safe."

Will's voice is gruff as he chokes out, "I promise. She's my entire world." He hands me my bouquet and I take it, never letting go of his other hand.

My dad nods, patting Will's shoulder before he gives me one last smile and heads to his seat beside Will's dad.

Will's hands move to my face, wiping away the fallen tears. "You're the most gorgeous woman I've ever seen in my entire life, goddess."

I squeeze his hand. "And you're handsome as sin." Turning, I link my arm with his and we move to the archway where

Darin stands, a beaming smile on his face. He gives a slight bow, a giant top hat on his head.

“Why did we agree to let Darin officiate our wedding?” I hiss at Will.

“He wore us down after he got ordained, refusing to shut the fuck up until we agreed,” Will whispers back.

“I heard that,” Darin grumbles as we stop in front of him, his smile fixed in place on his face. “You know you love me and the multiple roles I’m serving tonight.”

Will and I look at one another, groaning, as Darin pretends to be hurt.

Growing serious, Darin asks, “Are you ready?”

“Absolutely,” we both say, looking at one another.

Darin’s voice booms out through the room. “Let’s get this show on the road before these two run off and fuck somewhere.”

Laughter rings out around us as Will mutters, “Fucking asshole.”

I burst into laughter, knowing this will be one hell of a memorable day by the time it’s over.



Taking a deep breath, all eyes are on me, awaiting me to say the vows I wrote to Will. Nerves hit me hard as I swallow and

I freeze as I gaze at the people around me. Sucking in a deep breath, my eyes skate to my dad, who gives me a subtle nod, tears in his eyes.

Although I love my dad, he still doesn't quell the nerves that spark beneath my skin like a live wire.

"Eyes on me, goddess." Will's low, deep voice flows over me, commanding my full attention. A shiver rolls down my spine from his domineering tone.

Doing as he says, my gaze locks on his, and everything around us disappears until it's only him and I.

Everything always boils down to the two of us.

Opening my mouth, I begin speaking effortlessly from my heart. "You found me during the darkest time of my life. The last thing I was looking for was love, but that's exactly what I found with you. As you cared for me, I was drawn to you in a way I'd never been drawn to another. For the first time in my life, I felt appreciated, respected, safe... and most of all, loved." Clearing my throat, I choke back tears. "When my enemy found me and threatened you, I ran to protect you. It was the worst—and dumbest—decision I've ever made." Will's face breaks into a smile, forgiveness in his blue irises. "You refused to give up, continuously searching for me until eventually, you found me." I squeeze his hands, my breath hitching. "You changed my life in unimaginable ways twice now. The day we met, and the day you found me. Every day with you is the best day of my life."

A tear trails down Will's cheek. Gently extracting my hand from his, I wipe it away, staring at him reverently. "You're the man and the beast who always finds me in the darkness, pulling me into the light. Anytime I'm hurt, your love mends all my broken pieces. You're my fiercest protector, the source of my strength, and the man I love with an intensity that rivals the fiercest storm." I cup his cheek. "I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond. You own every piece of me, now and forever."

More tears fall down his face as people begin sobbing around us, Darin being one of the loudest.

"Fucking onions," he mutters, causing Will and me to laugh.

"I love you, Goddess," Will whispers, squeezing my hand, the love in his eyes lighting my soul on fire, making me complete once again. "You're the light within me." He kisses my hand. "Always."

"You're the light within me. Always and forever."

Thirty

William

I'M THE LUCKIEST MAN on the planet.

Staring at the only woman I've ever loved; I'm emotionally wrought from the heartfelt vows she just delivered.

My heart pounds inside my chest and my knees are weak at the thought of saying the vows I've been working on for weeks.

Are they good enough? Will they accurately express what I feel for her?

Darin's voice pulls me from my thoughts as he dabs at his eyes. "I hate both of you," he whispers, before blowing his nose. "I already know you're gonna make me fucking cry as much as my sister just did."

Chuckling, I glance over at him. "Challenge accepted."

His eyes widen with horror. "No! That wasn't meant to be a challenge."

Everleigh and I laugh, our hands and hearts joined together. Staring into her big, honey brown eyes, the world disappears

around us, until it's just the two of us.

At the end of the day, that's all that matters—the two of us.

Taking a deep breath, I speak directly from my heart. “The moment I locked eyes with you, something went through me that I've never experienced. I didn't even know what the hell it was that I was feeling, and I blamed a host of things. Everything except what I was actually feeling, because I'd never felt it before.

One day, I was leaving campus, in a hurry to get back to my penthouse to see you, and it hit me like a ton of bricks: *I was in love with you*. It was exhilarating, yet terrifying, for me. Then a storm hit and you told me about dancing outside during thunderstorms when you were a kid. Nothing ever appealed to me more than dancing in one with you. As the storm raged around us, one raged inside me. I tumbled over the cliff, loving every single piece of you. It was heady and light, but also a little dark and scary.” Lifting my hands, I cup her face, catching her tears with my thumbs. “I experienced the darkest time of my life when you left, hitting rock bottom. Sometimes I was afraid...” My voice cracks and I pause, drawing in a deep breath, before releasing it. “I was terrified I'd lost you forever. That I'd never know love again if that happened.”

Irelynn sniffs behind us before a sob escapes her. I hear her muttering a shaky apology and my grin widens as Everleigh giggles.

I continue, my gaze never leaving Everleigh. “I was determined to find you, no matter what I had to go through, no

matter how long it took. I'd fucking die trying to find you. I had nothing left to lose without you." My thumbs caress her cheekbones, hating the pain in her eyes. "Luckily, fate stepped in, and you and I ended up running in the same woods. I saw you running away and even though you wore a wig, my heart knew it was you. With determination, I set out to find you... And I did. Even though it was a long, sometimes extremely painful road to get here, I don't regret one damn second of it. Nothing that I've endured since the moment I laid eyes on you again could ever keep me from you, the love of my life."

More sobs fill the room and this time, I'm pretty sure I hear my dad crying.

"No matter what happens, no matter who tries to come between us, we will prevail. Because I love you too fucking much and I'd burn this whole damn world down to find you if you're lost to me." Another tear falls as Everleigh stares at me, a radiant smile on her face, and I fucking ache from the desperation I feel to kiss her.

"No matter what obstacle we face, we will overcome it. We've proved it time and again. Whenever the darkness arrives, we fearlessly turn and face it, because we are comfortable with it. We know what it's like to be lost to it. But since we've found one another, we've experienced a lightness, a clarity that showed us what it was like to experience a rare, one-of-a-kind love that illuminates our life. The darkness will never consume us completely because we will always be there to pull the other into the light."

Darin chokes back a sob, whispering an apology, making me smile.

I continue, not missing a beat, completely focused on Everleigh. The love burning from her eyes sears my soul. “You illuminate my world, brightening it every single time you look at me. Your endless love will always light my path and guide me home, should I ever become lost.” I breathe her in, jasmine and amber filling my lungs, closing my eyes before releasing a slow exhale. “I feel you with me wherever I go because you’re locked inside my heart. You’re the full moon that lights my way, always leading me back to you.” Grabbing her hand, I twirl her around, causing her to release a surprised laugh, her eyes sparkling. “We will dance through every storm together for a fucking eternity.”

Tears stream down her face as she nods, taking in a shuttering breath.

“You’re my heart and soul, Everleigh. The light within me shines brightly because of you. I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond.”

Not giving a fuck that we haven’t finished, or that Darin hasn’t given me permission to kiss my bride yet, I pull her against me, devouring her lips with mine, sealing the promises I made to her.

Our friends and family cheer and clap as I lose myself in her.

Darin mutters, “They never fucking listen. I should have brought my whip.”

Everleigh laughs against my lips, but I ignore Darin, deepening the kiss, the taste of forever on my tongue.

When we finally pull apart, Darin clears his throat. “Stop breaking the rules. I didn’t say you could kiss her yet.”

“Bite me,” I say with a grin, causing Everleigh to turn her head away, giggling.

Darin rolls his eyes. “You wish. If you two are done, shall we continue?”

“Hell yes. I want to marry this woman right now, dammit.” I wink at Everleigh, who beams at me.

“Best wedding ever,” she whispers.

I lift her hand to my lips, kissing it. “I promised it would be.”

We grow serious, continuing our vows. When Everleigh and I exchange rings, I bite my lip so hard I taste blood, trying to keep from crying and turning into a blubbering mess.

All my fucking dreams I never thought a monster like me could have are coming true. And it makes me want to break down from the unadulterated bliss welling inside me.

Everleigh squeezes my hand, knowing what I’m thinking. “Only a monster can love another monster.”

I wink at her, whispering, “Indeed, my she-devil.”

Darin continues speaking, but I tune him out, focusing on the future I see shining in Everleigh’s honey brown orbs.

I swear this woman was born for me, as I was for her.

Finally, he says the words I've been waiting to hear since she walked down the aisle. "You may now kiss your bride."

Grabbing Everleigh, I dip her toward the floor, my mouth covering hers, tasting and devouring her as the room erupts in cheers and catcalls around us.



I twirl Everleigh around, then lift her in my arms, the beading on her white dress glimmering beneath the thousands of twinkling white Christmas lights surrounding us. Setting her on her feet, I lead her across the floor, dancing to "Truly Madly Deeply" by Savage Garden.

When the song ends, I dip her, my lips covering hers. Our family and friends cheering and whistling is audible, but I ignore them.

She's all that matters to me.

I kiss her until we are both too breathless to continue, then raise her to a standing position, her brown eyes so full of love that I feel myself falling even more in love with her.

A lump is in my throat.

A love I never thought I deserved until she proved me wrong.

The music changes to Christmas music and she sighs, contentment lighting up her face, making her glow. "Thank you for giving me a winter wonderland wedding." She tears

her eyes from mine and gazes around the festively decorated ballroom, our family and friends joining us on the dancefloor. “It’s absolutely stunning.”

“It pales in comparison to your beauty, goddess.” I push a strand of her long, brunette curls over her shoulder, the bright lights shimmering over her porcelain skin.

Her smile lights up my world as she cups my face. “Thank you, husband.”

My grin widens, my heart filled with such elation that I feel like I’m floating. “You’re welcome, wife.”

Tugging on my hand, she pulls me from the dance floor. Our family and friends pat our shoulders and offer congratulations as we pass them, but she’s persistent.

“I want to take you somewhere. I have a special gift for you, but it’s not for our wedding. It’s for your birthday.”

“Everleigh,” I growl, stopping her, leaning my forehead against hers. “Marrying you was all I wanted for my birthday.”

“I know.” She gives me a coy smile. “But I think you’ll like this.” Interlocking our fingers, she tugs me down the hallway and upstairs to our bedroom. Pulling me inside, she shuts the door, then tugs me toward the dresser.

Opening a drawer, she grabs a small box, turning toward me. It’s wrapped in silver paper with a pink bow. She hands it to me, a radiant smile curving her red lips. “Please, open it.”

Raising my brows, I take in her expression before I tear it open, wondering what has her so excited. Pink tissue lines the

inside of the box.

When I look inside, my breath catches in my throat.

Two pairs of pink baby booties are inside, nestled against a framed picture of her ultrasound. When I pull the picture out, there is a note on it.

Will,

I know we don't know the gender of our babies yet, but you've convinced me we are having girls. We haven't discussed names, but I'd really like to name them Isabella and Emilee, after their grandmothers. It's the best way I can think to honor our mothers, who can't be with us to celebrate this momentous occasion.

I hope you agree.

All My Love,

Everleigh

Tears spill down my cheeks as I look up at her. “This is the perfect fucking gift. Just like you.” Wrapping an arm around her waist, I pull her into me, my lips meeting hers. “I absolutely love the idea of naming our twins after your mother and mine.” I rub my nose against hers. “You’ve given me the best birthday I’ve ever had in my life.”

Her face clouds, a soft sigh leaving her lips. “I hope this helps make up for the birthdays I missed when I was...” She swallows hard, visibly pained. “Away.”

“Baby, that’s in the past. What matters most is that we’ll never spend another birthday apart. Or any other occasion, for that matter.” I sway with her in my arms, her beaming smile brightening my world.

“I have one more present for you.” She bites her lip nervously.

“Everleigh,” I scold, glowering at her.

She holds up a hand, releasing her lip. “You’ll like this one.” Her hands push against my chest and when we stop, I look up to see mistletoe hanging in the bathroom doorway above us.

Lowering my head, I chuckle, shaking my head at the pure radiance lining her face. “Happy birthday, my love. I love you to the moon and back.”

Lowering my lips so they almost touch hers, I whisper, “I love you to infinity and beyond.” Then I kiss her as though our lives depend on it.

When we pull apart, she stares at me with pure lust and desire burning in her chocolate eyes. “Everleigh,” I warn, but her hand has already slid between us, rubbing my erection through my pants. I hiss in a breath, my forehead lowering to hers. “Fuck, that feels amazing. But we have a room full of—”

“Fuck them,” she cuts me off. “I need you inside me.”

Goddamn. Hello, Eve.

Her demanding nature summons my beast and William rises, taking me over.

I turn, setting my present on the bathroom counter.

Turning back to her, Everleigh is already on her knees. Undoing my pants, she shoves them and my boxers down to my ankles. Wrapping her hand around my cock, she looks up at me, before taking me inside her warm, wet mouth.

My hands grip the door frame as she takes me to the back of her throat, then slowly pulls out. She gasps for a breath, then does it again, her mouth tightening around my shaft, but it's not enough to keep the saliva from spilling from her lips as she hits the back of her throat.

“Fuck, baby. You keep that up and I'll be skull fucking you.”

She groans, the vibrations flowing over me, making my cock twitch as she slowly pulls back, taking a deep breath. Her eyes lock on mine. “Please?”

A feral growl escapes me as I grab her hair, twisting my fingers in her curls. “You asked for it.” Then I shove my cock into her mouth and down her throat, cutting off her airway for a few seconds, before pulling out. I let her take in air before I start thrusting into her mouth, my hands yanking on her hair, controlling the pace and motion.

She gives herself over to me, letting me use her mouth to give me maximum pleasure. When I feel my balls tightening against my body, I pull out of her mouth, grabbing her arms and yanking her to her feet.

Toeing off my shoes, I step out of my pants and boxers.

Spinning her around, I guide her over to the bed, pointing to the bedpost. “Hold on tight, my gorgeous she-devil.”

Bending her over, I yank her dress over her hips. I hum with desire when I see the sexy white panties that say, “bride” in pink rhinestones across her ass.

Fuck, this woman is every damn thing.

Grabbing them, I yank them down her legs, trying not to tear them.

At least, not yet.

I’ll shred them later.

I kick my foot in between her legs, spreading them wider. She whimpers, looking at me over her shoulder, desire burning in her irises.

Slowly sinking my fingers into her wetness, my eyes remain locked on hers. “This beautiful pussy is soaked for me.”

She nods, her body trembling as I slowly work one finger, then another, in and out of her. “Please, William,” she begs.

Moving my fingers faster, she pushes her ass back against me.

“Tell me what you want,” I hiss.

She looks at me over her shoulder. “I want your cock deep inside me.”

Cocking an eyebrow at her, I say, “Is that all you want?”

She frantically shakes her head, fingers curling around the bedpost that she’s gripping like it’s anchoring her to this plane.

“Then I want your cock in my ass.”

Fuck!

My cock throbs, jerking in response to her words.

Sliding my fingers out of her, I head to the nightstand, grabbing the lube from the drawer. Carrying it over to her, I lay it on the bed, then drop to my knees. My hands spread her lips apart as I run my tongue along them, feeling her tremble.

“William,” she gasps, her head hitting her arm on the bed. “Fuck, that feels amazing.”

I twist my body so my back is against the bed. Sealing my mouth over her clit, Everleigh releases a loud moan.

“Goddamn, your pussy tastes amazing,” I murmur against her, diving in and devouring her, holding her with my hands as her body shakes harder.

I tease her for a while, getting her closer to the edge. Then I shift my body, sliding my tongue to her asshole, hearing her gasp when I slide it inside before she lets out a long moan.

Pulling back slightly, I rasp, “I own every part of you, goddess and she-devil. And I’m taking it now.” Then I dive back in, my fingers slipping inside her pussy, her arousal dripping on my fingers.

This woman completely owns me as much as I do her.

I tease her, licking her ass and fingering her before I can’t stand it, needing to be inside her. Getting to my feet, I press

my palm on her back, arching her so her ass is in the air the way I like it, then I shove myself deep inside her soaked pussy.

“Oh, fuck, William,” she screams, her breathing heavy. “Fuck me. Please, fuck me hard.”

Goddamn, she makes me come undone.

I thrust in and out of her, hard and fast. “Your. Wish. Is. My. Command,” I grunt out between thrusts, hitting her hard and deep. Her warm heat envelopes me. She’s so aroused she soaks me to my balls.

She’s everything I ever dreamed of and more.

I fuck her until she’s a sweaty, panting, quivering mess, gripping the covers and bedpost until her knuckles are white. Her muscles tense, her pussy gripping my dick like a vise, before she screams my name, showering my dick with her cum.

I ride out her orgasm, wiping the sweat off my brow. Slowly moving in and out of her, I grab the lube from the bed, putting some on my fingers and slipping one inside her ass.

“Fuck.” Her voice is muffled from her face being pressed against the mattress.

“That’s it, she-devil. Open that ass for my cock.”

She lets out a long moan, shoving back against me, my dick moving deeper inside her as my I finger her ass.

Shit, this woman is fucking hotter than hell when she becomes a slave to her passion.

Sticking another finger inside her ass, she turns her head, groaning.

“You like me inside your ass, don’t ya, sweet devil?”

She nods, breathing heavily. “Fuck yes.”

“Tell me you want my cock inside your ass, she-devil.”

Eve slams back against me. “Please shove your huge cock inside my ass. I need it. Now!” she commands.

Fuck, that’s hot.

Pulling out of her pussy, I grab the lube, applying a liberal amount on my dick, even though I’m soaked from her juices.

But I can’t risk hurting her.

As I put the tip of my dick in her ass, she releases a moan.

“Yes, William. Please, fuck my ass.”

With those words, I drive inside her, stretching her around me. My head falls back from the pleasure that radiates through every part of me.

“Fuck, my gorgeous devil. You feel so damn good.”

“Yes, William. Take it. Take all of me.”

Pulling out to the tip, I thrust back inside her. “I’m taking every damn piece of you, love. I’ve filled every hole in your body, every piece of your heart, and now I’m taking your soul.”

She bucks against me, wanting more, demanding I give it to her harder.

Throwing one foot on the bed, I drive into her ass while I slide my fingers inside her pussy. She screams and moans, bucking against me, encouraging me to keep going.

And I do, losing every piece of myself to her, until there's no divide between us.

Nothing to separate us as we are joined in every possible way.

She bucks against me harder. "Make me scream, William."

Oh, shit.

I pound into her ass hard, rubbing her clit with my thumb.

"William, yes." Her pussy tightens around me and I know she's about to come.

Then she screams, falling over the cliff.

I keep slamming myself into her, knowing my release is imminent. "Fuck, she-devil, I'm going to come." I clench my jaw, trying to hold back.

"Don't hold back, William. Fill my ass with your cum."

With those words, a tingling rushes through my spine, my balls tightening against my body, before I release, filling her ass with my cum, just like she demanded.

When I'm finished, I'm breathing like I just sprinted a mile. Lifting an arm, I wipe the sweat from my brow, then pull out of her.

Leaning over her, I feather kisses along the side of her face, causing her to giggle and turn her face to mine.

“I love every piece of you,” she says breathlessly before her lips capture mine.

When we pull apart, I smile. “I love all of you.” Standing, I say, “Let me clean you up. We have a reception to return to.”

I hear her laughing as I head to the bathroom and I turn, watching her sag against the bed. “Can you carry me there? Not sure I can walk. And Belinda is going to be pissed as hell about my hair and makeup.”

“Whatever you need, goddess. I’ll help you repair the damage to your makeup and hair.”

I clean myself off, then bring a washcloth to her, gingerly cleaning her up.

When I’m finished, I grab her waist, pulling her to her feet. Sealing my mouth over hers, I give her a long kiss.

Slowly pulling away, a smile curls my lips. “You sure know how to give your husband the best fucking birthday present ever.”

Laughing, her eyes sparkle. “What can I say, hubs? I do my best to please you.”

I chuckle. “Mission accomplished.”

Retrieving her panties from the floor, I help her put them on.

“This is the first time you’ve fucked me in the ass with heels on,” she says as she stands, adjusting her dress.

As I get to my feet, I chuckle. “It won’t be the last time.” Winking at her, I give her a kiss. “Let’s fix your hair and makeup and head back.”



As we enter the ballroom, Everleigh stops in front of me. “What the hell?”

Following her gaze, I howl with laughter at the antics currently underway.

Grandma Lucinda is sitting on a chair in the middle of the dance floor while Darin lip syncs “All I Want For Christmas Is You” by Mariah Carey. He dances around her, shirtless, but still wearing his top hat. A whip is in his other hand.

As he cracks the whip onto the floor, he bends over, wiggling his ass in Lucinda’s face, who cheers and yells.

Everleigh falls into my arms, wiping her eyes as she laughs hysterically. “What... the hell... is Darin doing?” she gasps.

I laugh harder. “Possibly having a seizure?”

That sends Everleigh into hysterical laughter. “Oh my God. I can’t handle him,” she finally gasps.

It only gets worse when Darin straightens and Lucinda shoves dollar bills into his pants while he gyrates his hips.

Then Vanessa and Savannah put on Santa hats, strutting behind him and dancing with giant candy canes.

My gaze searches for Bryan, and a smile crosses my face as I see him practically drooling as he stares at Savannah, heat in his eyes. Nudging Everleigh, I nod in his direction. She watches him, then looks at me.

“See. My meddling pays off.”

I groan, shaking my head

My attention is drawn back to the Lucinda and Darin when Irelynn’s grandfather, Raymond, heads over to them. Grabbing Lucinda’s hands, he helps her from the chair, then begins grinding against her.

Everleigh howls with laughter.

He helps Lucinda back into the chair, then takes off his shirt and starts dancing beside Darin. They get on either side of Lucinda and start grinding on her.

Irelynn comes running over to us, barefoot and wide eyed. “Max and I tried to stop them. Well, more me than Max, considering he’s over there, howling with laughter, standing beside my parents.” She rolls her eyes.

Everleigh finally stops laughing. Tucking her arm into mine and looping her other arm through Irelynn’s, her eyes twinkle with mischief. “You know what they say. If you can’t beat em, join em.”

Then she pulls me and Irelynn to the dance floor.

Best fucking wedding reception ever.



My arms are wrapped around my bride, my hands interlocked over her stomach. Her back rests against my chest as we stand on our balcony, staring up at the full moon.

Pulling the blanket that's slung over her shoulders tighter around her, I nuzzle her neck. "Are you cold, Mrs. Anderson?" I ask when she shivers.

"No." I feel her smile as my lips slide up the side of her face. "You have that effect on me."

Grinning, I spin her around so she faces me. "I hope I always make you shiver. And tremble. And scream my name." My smile is salacious as she laughs.

"I have no doubt whatsoever." Wrapping her arms around my neck, she leans up on her tiptoes, kissing me.

When she pulls back, she searches my eyes in the darkness. "Did you have a good birthday?"

"I had the absolute best birthday. I got hitched, fucked my bride in her mouth, pussy, and ass during the reception, then danced with a bunch of crazy friends and family on the dance floor. Then I ate cake."

She lets out a loud bark of laughter. "Sounds like an amazing birthday to me."

Pulling her tighter against me, I sway her in time to the rhythm of our heartbeats. "You are my light in the darkness,

Everleigh Renee Anderson. I love you to the moon and back. To infinity and beyond. Now and forever.”

She blinks, tears in her eyes. “You always say the best things to me, William Alexander Anderson. In fact, the best things I’ve ever heard in my life have always come from you.” Nuzzling her nose against mine, she says, “I love you. Willingly. Completely. For a fucking eternity.”

“Why don’t we head inside and pretend to sleep? Tomorrow is Christmas Eve and we have a house full of guests staying with us until we leave for our honeymoon on December twenty-sixth.”

Her smile widens. “I love that our friends and family are here with us for Christmas.” She steps back slightly, her hand lowering to her stomach. “Just think. Next Christmas we’ll have two little girls to share it with.”

“I can’t wait. And they’ll have a friend to celebrate with.”

She shakes her head. “I’m so glad Max and Irelynn are pregnant. God, we practically had to drag that announcement from Irelynn’s lips during the reception. Was she really that scared that Max would freak out?”

I sigh, nodding. “She came up to me when we were decorating, freaking out that she was nauseous again and hadn’t gotten her period. I thought she was worried about being in college and pregnant, not that Max would be upset. I’ll admit, she shocked me when she feared his reaction.” I shrug. “As much as he loves her, I don’t know why the hell she thought he’d be upset.”

Everleigh grins. “You’re such a good big brother to her. I’m glad you brought her to me so she could take one of those pregnancy tests I have. I had to reassure her Max would be just as excited as you are about us having kids.”

Kissing her, I swat her ass, guiding her back inside our warm bedroom. “Max is ecstatic. He cornered me at the bar and asked a million questions about your pregnancy so he can be prepared with hers.”

“I’m glad it all ended well. And now our babies will have a friend.”

Everleigh slips off the blanket, revealing her silky porcelain skin. With a flirtatious smile on her face, she says, “You said we’d pretend to sleep...”

Lifting her in my arms, I throw her on the bed, making her giggle. “Let me show you exactly what I mean by that.”

Thirty-One

Everleigh

IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO believe Will and I have been married for six months.

Change is the one constant in our lives, and with the birth of our twin daughters, just as Will predicted, life is as chaotic as ever.

But it's the most enjoyable kind of chaos.

Our daughters, Emilee and Isabella, are named after our respective mothers, just like I requested.

They've brought unparalleled joy into our world.

I'm holding my squirming pink bundle of joy, Emilee, in my arms, while Will rocks a cooing Isabella in his arms. Our eyes meet and hold before he slides into bed beside me, ensuring Isabella can see Emilee.

Our girls arrived two months ago at two-forty in the morning on June twelfth. To my relief, they are both perfectly healthy baby girls, which, after going to war with Ainsley, then being kidnapped by Colin and nearly raped, leading to me

torturing him, a part of me worried I'd done emotional, mental, or physical harm to our babies in some way.

Will meets my gaze. "Stop fretting, goddess. They're fine. Healthy and happy bundles of joy." He winks at me.

A relieved sigh slips out of me. "How do you always know what I'm thinking?"

He leans over, kissing me. "I know everything about you. Haven't you learned by now that I'm obsessed and insanely in love with my gorgeous wife?"

"I never like to assume..." My eyes sparkle with mischief as I look at his content face. "Have I told you lately how much I love seeing you happy and relaxed?"

"Every day. But I never tire of hearing it."

Emilee yawns, drawing my attention. "I'm gonna put her down for a nap, then I better shower before the gang arrives."

Will gets up, Isabella cradled against his chest. "I better put Isabella beside her, or Emilee will wake up screaming."

I laugh. "One can't be without the other." As I lay her in the crib inside our bedroom, I look over my shoulder at him. "Sounds familiar."

He winks, his shoulder brushing mine as he tucks Isabella beside her sister. "Speaking of, I think I'll join you in the shower."

My pulse starts racing, my body thrumming to life. "No objections from me."

Lacing his fingers in mine, he pulls me toward the bathroom, grabbing the baby monitor along the way. “Have I told you lately that you are the light of my life?”

Grinning, I kiss the stubble on his jawline, running my fingers through his blonde hair. “You tell me that every day. But I never tire of hearing it.”

He squeezes my ass, then gives it a smack. “Good. Now get naked and get in the shower so I can fuck you while our daughters nap.”

Instead of doing as he instructed, I grab his pajama bottoms, shoving them down to his feet, then pull his boxers down.

“Oh, so that’s how you want to play this?” The monster glimmers in his beautiful blue eyes and I chuckle.

“Absolutely. I love playing with you—and William.” I take him in my mouth, showing him exactly what I mean.

When he’s close to coming, he grabs my arms, yanking me to my feet. Tearing my clothing off, he pushes me into the shower, a growl coming from his lips as he slams his lips onto mine.

We are breathing heavily when he pulls away.

“You better hang on tight, she-devil. I have lube in the drawer and plan to fill all your holes.”

Trembling from the desire shooting through me, I slam my mouth against his, moaning as my hand slides between us, grabbing his cock.

“Fuck, Everleigh. I can’t get enough of you,” he mutters against my lips.

Pulling back slightly, a wicked smile pulls my lips up. “I’ll never get enough of you, husband.”

“Good. Because you are never getting rid of me, wifey.” He gives me a shit-eating grin.

“Why the hell would I want to? You’re the best. You’ve given me such an amazing life already. Every day keeps getting better.”

He nuzzles my neck. “I’ll always put your needs first. Right now, I’m putting your body’s needs ahead of your need to talk.” He slides his hand to my center, rubbing over my clit before slipping two fingers inside me.

“You always know exactly what I need,” I gasp, before I lose myself in him, forgetting about the world while I enjoy the man I love.

At the end of the day, it always boils down to us.

Will and Everleigh.

And sometimes, William and Eve.

Acknowledgments

I hope you've enjoyed *The Light Within*. If you wouldn't mind leaving a Goodreads or Amazon review, I'd greatly appreciate it.

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About Author

Jennifer Rose is the author of romantic suspense and dark romance novels. At the core of her books is a soul-deep love that, even when things appear dark and hopeless, love persists and guides the way.

Jennifer resides in a small town in Pennsylvania with her husband, two spoiled senior dogs who are living their best life, and a rabbit with an attitude (she stomps her foot a lot). She enjoys long walks, listening to a variety of music, writing, and lounging reading a good book. She loves slasher horror movies and yes, Michael Myers is her favorite, followed by Jason, Freddy Krueger, and Ghostface. She loves all things autumn and Halloween, but also adores all things Christmas, especially decorating. Her favorite book, television, and movie characters are of the morally grey variety.

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3. *Casualty of Devotion* (book three) – ends with a HEA

Fated Vengeance Duet:

1. *The Scars Within* (book one) – ends on a cliffhanger
2. *The Flames Within* (book two – ends with a HEA
3. Bonus Novel – *The Light Within* – standalone holiday novel following William and Everleigh. The time period is set after the last chapter but before the epilogues of *The Flames Within*. *The Scars Within* and *The Flames Within* should be read before reading *The Light Within*.