

TOP PRIORITY

THE GAME SERIES, #1

CARA DEE

TOP PRIORITY

Copyright © 2019 by Cara Dee

All rights reserved

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment and may not be reproduced in any way without documented permission of the author, not including brief quotes with links and/or credit to the source. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author. This is a work of fiction and all references to historical events, persons living or dead, and locations are used in a fictional manner. Any other names, characters, incidents, and places are derived from the author's imagination. The author acknowledges the trademark status and owners of any wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction. Characters portrayed in sexual situations are 18 or older.

Edited by [Silently Correcting Your Grammar, LLC.](#)

Beta read by [Eliza Rae Services.](#)

CONTENTS

[Are You Ready for the Games?](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Epilogue 1](#)

[Epilogue 2](#)

[More from Cara Dee](#)

[About Cara](#)

ARE YOU READY FOR THE GAMES?

The Game Series is a BDSM series where romance meets the reality of kink. Sometimes we fall for someone we don't match with, sometimes vanilla business gets in the way of kinky pleasure, and sometimes we have to compromise and push ourselves to overcome trauma and insecurities. No matter what, two things are certain. This is not a perfect world, and life never turns out the way you planned.

***Top Priority** is the first book in **The Game Series**, and it's been written so it can be enjoyed as a standalone, but characters do cross over in several titles.*

The Game Series

Book 1: Top Priority – Lucas/Colt – Are you ready for the Games?

Book 2: Their Boy – Kit/Colt/Lucas – Welcome to the Games: The Hunt

Book 3: Breathless – Shay/Reese/River – The Game: The Cages

ONE

“**F**uck!” I slammed on the brakes and watched in horror as something shattered part of my windshield, creating a spider web in the glass. My car skidded along the highway, and my pulse skyrocketed.

I came to a stop on the side of the road, and I looked behind me to see if there were any cars nearby. Hail kept pounding the roof. Wide gaze trained forward again, I spotted a golf ball-sized chunk of ice stuck in the windshield. I flinched as more ice hit the car. Thunder roared, lightning struck out in the field, and the dark gray sky turned black.

“Jesus Christ.” I blew out a heavy breath and turned on the hazard lights, then sat back and drew my hands through my hair, fisting the short ends. I’d recently cut my hair, and I forgot I couldn’t really tug at it anymore.

A drop of water hit the dashboard. I glared at the broken windshield and killed the engine.

How the hell was I supposed to get out of here now? I could barely look through the window. Either I would have to sink as low as I possibly could in my seat and still duck my head, or I’d have to peer through the glass closer to the middle. One way or another, any driving instructor would fail me.

The storm wasn't going anywhere anytime soon, that much was clear.

I checked my watch and sighed. My heart rate was finally recovering.

Making it home to DC today was officially out of the question.

I couldn't help but laugh. What a splendid fucking way to end a week that already belonged in hell.

This was... No, I was done. I had no place at my father's company. Real estate wasn't for me, even when he'd kindly created a position for me so I could use my marketing degree. I'd been miserable—going nowhere fast—even before this week. Then I'd received the assignment to fill in for a coworker who was sick. It'd been straightforward enough. Go down to Georgia, mainly the Atlanta area, and meet with the higher-ups at an agency about a possible merger. Three real estate agencies along the East Coast were joining forces.

That *had* been the plan. After nine disastrous meetings, I couldn't in good conscience recommend my father go through with the merger. The peachy state of Georgia would take us all down, with properties in bad school districts, straight-up shacks, and unsellable swampland. Meanwhile, my father was selling townhouses in Georgetown, and the Philadelphia agency raked in millions in the townships along the Main Line.

I huffed in frustration and loosened my tie, hungry, irritated, beyond tired, and uncomfortable.

The hailstorm was finally passing, leaving the thunder and pouring rain behind. Rain, I could handle.

I couldn't stay out here in the middle of nowhere, though. No other car had passed me, so I supposed I was the only stupid one around.

All right, time to get out of here. Time to get wet. I braced myself and stepped out of the car, the rain immediately whipping me in the face. The heat was returning too. It'd been cooler at my last stop, not as humid, but I could feel it now. A cold gust of wind met a humid one. Summer was coming in fast.

Leaning over the windshield, I tried to pinch the chunk of ice— “For the love of God!” I growled. What the fuck was *wrong* with me? Why had I not just pushed the thing out from inside the car? Why was I out here?

Instantly infuriated, I wiped rain off my face and dug out the ice from the windshield, and then I hurried back into the car.

As I started the engine, I was met by a cold blast of the AC, not to mention the next “What's wrong with me?” moment.

Now the rain was coming in, goddammit.

“Fuck my life,” I gritted out, gripping the wheel at ten and two.

Two miles to Richmond.

Pulling out from the side of the road, I leaned toward the center console to be able to see the highway. I crept up the deserted road at twelve miles an hour, and still, not a single soul passed me. Saturday in the South. Everyone was at home enjoying a warm supper.

I remembered my way down to Georgia... I remembered the gas station in Richmond where all the Greyhound buses

had rolled through. I remembered seeing all the auto shops as I'd filled up on gas. It wasn't too far away from where I was now, so that was where I would go.

Hell, I hoped they hadn't closed for the storm. It was a big one. I'd heard them talking about it on the radio, though it hadn't even registered that I'd be smack-dab in the middle of it. All I'd seen was the image of my bed, coming home, showering off this godforsaken week, and then ordering a pizza.

One auto shop was still open. *One*. I could cry. From relief or exhaustion, I wasn't sure.

A man who, coincidentally, shared my name took the keys from me and said I'd gotten lucky with a broken windshield. Then he went on to tell me about the time his daughter had driven home from Virginia Beach and... I couldn't focus. He was chuckling. There was lightning, both in the story of his and outside the garage bay. Either way, his daughter had survived getting wrapped around a tree.

I looked out at where the rain kept gushing down.

"Do you think I'll get out of here today?" I asked, full of doubt. Yet, I hoped desperately.

Luke chuckled again, and he wiped his hands on a dirty rag. "Won't take long, but you shouldn't drive for twenty-four hours. Gotta give the adhesive time to dry, you see. Plus—" he pointed outside "—in this weather? You ain't goin' nowhere tonight, son."

I definitely wanted to cry, but I wasn't going to. I was a grown man. I was turning thirty next year. I'd accomplished approximately *nothing* of what I'd written down as my goals before college, but fuck it, right? Fuck it all. Fuck it all! I didn't own a home yet. I wasn't running my own company or climbing the ladder at a nice agency, I hadn't met the love of my life, I didn't have a dog, and now this. Stuck in goddamn Richmond. Stuck in a storm.

I was hot and cold. The sticky humidity made me uncomfortably sweaty, at the same time as the harsh winds blasted my wet clothes with icy cold.

Luke recommended a cab to a hotel up the road, and I didn't have much of a choice, did I?

"Thank you, sir," I said politely. Wasn't his fault my week sucked royally.

Standing in the opening of the bay, I pulled out my phone to call a cab, but I paused. Across the street, there was a bar. Best ribs in Richmond, they promised. That was probably setting the bar low, but I was positively famished. Oh, and alcohol. I really wanted a drink or fourteen.

"Is the food over there any good?" I asked my mechanic.

"Huh?" Luke looked across the street. "Oh—yeah." He nodded. "Definitely. Just stay away from the artichoke dip. It'll give you—hell." He shuddered, possibly at a memory. No artichoke dip, copy that. "I love the cornbread, though. Get that."

No need to mention to him I wasn't very fond of cornbread. Instead, I nodded in thanks, and I made sure he had my number and that he could call whenever. Then I left the

garage bay and stepped out into the storm, quickly picking up the pace to dart across the empty road.

Surely, this week couldn't get any worse.

I yanked the door open and...fucking tripped. I tripped, okay? I tripped. Because why not? Why wouldn't I trip? I cursed and steadied myself by grabbing on to the nearest—

“Ow!”

“I'm sorry!” Appalled and shocked, I stumbled back to gain my bearings. I hadn't been close enough to grab on to a barstool. I saw high tables and chairs scattered about, and in an attempt to steady myself, I'd sent a poor young woman to the floor instead.

Holy shit, I couldn't believe myself. My day had crossed over to bizarre at this point.

I swallowed hard and scrubbed at my face, wiping away raindrops and wishing the floor could swallow me whole. The smell of grilled food and old wood hit me and caused my stomach to snarl with want, though I had to do some damage control first. I cleared my throat and extended a hand to help the girl up, and I knew I was dead the second I saw four men approaching. Oh, they were mad. So very mad.

“I'm sorry, miss,” I told the girl.

“It's okay, but you should go,” she muttered and dusted off her knees. “My brothers get protective.”

“Heh.” I gave the exit behind me a quick glance. The place wasn't big. The dozen or so people filled up the bar fairly well, with most of them gathered in the back where I spotted a dart board. My gaze flicked to the bar and the three men seated there.

“Hey—don’t.” The girl stepped into the line of fire as the first guy reached us. “It was a mistake.”

I had to man up. Fast. “Apologies, sir. I’d be happy to buy a round of drinks for—”

“Oh, you think you can buy our silence, huh?” He glared, this mountain of a redneck. “You’re a long way from the city, pretty boy.”

Well, okay. I actually had limits. “What on earth are you talking about? Since when are an apology and a drink a way to buy someone’s silence? And for the *fucking* record—”

“Whoa, okay there, *pretty boy*.” Someone else came over quickly and obstructed my view. Rather than glaring at the mountain man, I was giving a lethal look—or so I hoped—to the back of a man’s neck. He was a couple inches taller than my six-one, and he was a lot more sculpted than me, too. The fabric of his tee stretched across his defined shoulder blades, and he folded his arms over his chest. I suddenly wanted to see that as well. “We’re not lookin’ for trouble here, are we? We’re all just waitin’ out the storm.”

His accent was different. Not my part of the South.

I took a step to the side and noticed the tattoo on his bicep. I’d know that symbol anywhere. A simple chain with two dog tags was tangled in metallic wings that could only belong to the Air Force.

He was military.

Perhaps the mountain man had noticed something too, because he puffed out his chest some more before he walked away with his brothers and sister.

I released a heavy breath and rubbed a hand over my mouth.

The Air Force guy turned around to face me with a mild smirk.

He was strikingly sexy and had the most gorgeous green eyes. Warm, bordering on hazel. I cleared my throat and averted my gaze, remembering I was in enemy territory here. It wasn't a bar with a Pride flag in the window in DC; it was a hole-in-the-wall in Richmond.

“Thank you for interceding, sir.” I held out my hand.

“Uh-huh. No worries,” he drawled and shook my hand. I wouldn't have expected anything other than the firm handshake he gave me. “You look like you've had a day.”

“And a half,” I replied.

He nodded at the bar. “You can join me in the opposite direction of the Richmond Royalty.”

A chuckle slipped out, and I followed him to the bar where we could share a corner.

The wall behind the bar was packed with bottles and a menu written in chalk. My stomach decided on a big rack of baby back ribs with mashed potatoes and collard greens.

After giving my order to the bartender, I turned to my nameless companion and asked if he was hungry. “I'm buying,” I added.

He squinted up at the menu and scratched his bicep absently. “Is the gravy any good, ma'am?”

The lady behind the bar rocked flannel and a wrinkled, motherly grin. “Goes back three generations, and no complaints so far.”

My company for the evening grinned right back. God, his smile was incredible. There was no doubt about it; he was

drowning in women who wanted him. Men too. I'd be first in line.

“Sounds better than the finest Yelp review. I'll have a number six, thanks,” he said. It was half a chicken with biscuits and gravy. It definitely sounded good. “Oh, can I get a side of mac and cheese too?”

“Of course, sugar. Beers for both'a y'all?”

We nodded. I wanted a Corona, and he wanted the same he'd ordered before. It came in a glass.

When the lady left, I slumped back in my seat a bit and removed my tie. I couldn't pretend to be comfortable in my clothes anymore. Wet goddamn clothes. I ran a hand through my hair too, hoping to make it a little less disheveled.

Laughter came from the dart board corner, and a bad country song was playing.

It truly was a country-lovin' place. Now that I wasn't facing a throwdown and I was away from the storm, I could better take in the surroundings. Posters graced the paneled walls. Country singers and ranches and cattle auctions... Lamps hung low over the tables, and smoke danced in the light.

“Nice place, innit?”

I couldn't respond truthfully without sounding rude, so I merely smiled politely. Then I went for introductions. “I'm Lucas, by the way. Lucas West.”

He took a swig of his beer. “Colt.”

TWO

Colt jerked his chin at my shirt. “You’re just passin’ through, I assume.”

“Yes. I’m on my way home to DC after a week in Atlanta. What about you?”

“Passin’ through too.” He nodded. “My folks just moved to Norfolk.”

Ah. “So, you’re not supposed to be at Langley at oh-six-hundred tomorrow or something,” I joked. Langley was near Norfolk, I was pretty sure.

His mouth twitched. “Day after tomorrow, and it’s fourteen-hundred.”

I laughed. “Really? Good guess on my part.”

He snorted. “Sure. Airman passing through Richmond, and Langley being one of the biggest bases around...”

Okay, so he was going to be difficult about it. “Perhaps you know this. Is it true that guys in the Air Force are arrogant and cocky as hell?”

Colt offered an infectious grin. “Well, our women too.”

“Great.” I should drop it. He’d been kind enough to save my hide earlier. I’d buy him dinner, and then we’d part ways. I

wasn't going to push his buttons or tell him I didn't like arrogance. It was an unflattering trait.

I chugged half my beer instead.

In a couple hours, I'd be in a hotel room. I could play nice until then.

"So what do you do in the Air Force?" I asked.

"Help keep the country safe."

Sweet Jesus.

"You should see the look on your face," he laughed. "I'm just fuckin' with you, man. I'm a pilot."

"Of course you are." I shook my head, torn between amusement and wanting to smack him. "The cockiest of them all."

He lifted a shoulder in a shrug. He carried himself in a special way. He came off young in his manners, yet there was structure the military had given him, and his eyes crinkled at the corners. He was older than me. Not by very many years, but it was noticeable.

Colt cleared his throat and dropped the humor. "We have to be cocky. Too many things can go wrong in a split second—literally—and our toys are worth hundreds of millions of dollars. If we don't have balls, we go down."

I knew next to nothing about his profession, not to mention the armed forces. I came from a family of paper pushers. That movie, *Top Gun*, came to mind. I remembered the pilots in the movie being awfully full of themselves.

I smirked. "Have you ever sung 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling' to a woman in a bar?"

Colt widened his eyes at me. If I didn't know any better, he looked offended. "That's the fuckin' Navy, son. Do I look like a goddamn squid?"

I pinched my lips together, but I couldn't stop my shoulders from shaking with laughter. "Touchy. I didn't mean to ruffle your delicate feathers."

"Oh...so that's how it is." He nodded slowly and wiped a finger along the condensation on his glass. "Anyway. You know I'm a fighter pilot. That's enough to know I'm in the top percentage in the world. In short, I'm great. Your turn—"

"Good lord, some humility wouldn't *kill* you," I blurted out.

He grinned. "Too easy."

I huffed and took a sip of my beer.

I eyed the ceiling fan, idly wishing there wasn't one right above me. My clothes would be wet for quite a while longer, and the cool air in here made me shiver.

"What about you?" he asked. "What job's got you runnin' around in a suit? Married? Bunch'a little ones bitin' at your ankles? No, wait. You're not there yet."

I had no desire whatsoever to discuss my career. "Single, no kids. Children aren't the type of *little ones* I'm interested in." I hoped that was vague enough. For all I cared, he could believe I wanted a pack of dogs. "I've worked for my father, but that's about to end. I foresee an impressive stack of job applications going out soon."

He leaned back in his seat and tilted his head, a pensive look on his face. "You're from around this area, yeah?"

I inclined my head. "Bethesda. You?"

He tipped an imaginary hat. “The great state of Texas, sir.” Ah. Cowboy hat, then. “Born and raised in San Antonio.”

“Military City,” I replied with a chuckle.

“That’s right.” He smiled, perhaps surprised I knew the nickname. “I went to high school in Austin, though. My folks took pity on me.” At my quizzical look, he let out a soft, uncomfortable laugh and leaned forward again. I’d only known the man twenty minutes, and I could already be certain of the fact that he didn’t “do” nervous and uncomfortable. “My whole family’s involved in the Air Force. Pop’s an old pilot himself and stayed in the service to be a flight instructor. My mother’s still a teacher. When we were overseas, she taught English at the base. And my baby sister is one hell of a genius—mechanical engineer.” There was an abundance of pride, I noted. “She’s stationed in Florida at the moment.” He paused and took a big swig of his beer. Then he cleared his throat. “The Air Force is my life, but...it ain’t the easiest environment to grow up in if you’re gay.”

Oh. Oh, wow. Okay, I could admit I had not seen that one coming.

“My mother, bless her,” he went on, “took a civilian job and rented an apartment in Austin for the two of us those four years I was in high school in a more accepting town.”

I stashed away any remnants of my surprise, and I smiled at what he told me. “Your family seems very lovely. Not many would do that.”

He held up his beer glass. “I’m fortunate.”

So was I.

This was interesting. Questions began piling up, and the first one was obvious. “What made you tell me this? From

what I've heard—and what I know from growing up—it's rarely a conversation starter with a stranger.”

He seemed to relax a little. Tension faded from his shoulders. “City folk are easier. You're not from around here, pretty boy.” He smirked at my eye roll. “And...I reckon I know what little ones you're interested in.” His drawl turned interested into “innerested,” and it drew me in like a moth to a flame—until I replayed his words in my head and sat up straight.

“Pardon?”

He chuckled under his breath. “You're involved in kink, aren't you? BDSM communities are a lot more accepting of other sexual preferences too.”

“How did you...?” I was at a loss. And utterly fascinated. Colt was sharp.

“Takes a Daddy Dom to know one?” he guessed, bobbing his head to the beat of the song playing. “I love this song. It's a dancin' tune.”

I merely stared at him as I processed. This cocky fighter pilot across from me was not only gay, but he was a Daddy Dom like me? I never would've guessed it so quickly, not like he had.

Colt must've noticed the state I was in. “Good guess on my part?”

“A little too good,” I admitted.

“I'm a gift that keeps on giving.”

I shot him a frustrated look. “You didn't guess my sexual orientation, *little one*.”

He flashed a quick grin at the nickname, only to frown in confusion. Finally, I got the fucker.

“You’re gay?” he asked in surprise.

“Yeah, imagine that,” I answered dryly. “We’re not that rare, you know.”

“Rare enough,” he said firmly. “It’s gotten easier, though. When I enlisted, I kept that shit to myself—only my family knew. It’s not until the past couple of years I’ve been more open.”

We hit the proverbial pause button when the lady arrived with our food.

We ordered new beers too.

I shivered at another cold breeze and eye-fucked my food. Jesus, this was going to be good.

“It’s a funny coincidence,” I said, picking up a rib. “We have a lot in common, all while...”

“We’re entirely different?” he chuckled.

I smiled and dipped my chin.

The food was incredible, and it stalled the conversation further, not that I minded. I’d earned this meal and then some. It was amazing.

We learned some minor tidbits about each other while we ate. He was thirty-six and happy his folks had moved to Virginia. His rank was Captain, though his buddies called him Top, which apparently was painted on the side of his headgear when he flew.

“Do I want to know the meaning?” I wondered.

His smirk made a reappearance. “I always end up on top.”

I snorted and wiped my mouth with my napkin.

“I’m a brand, baby.” Goddamn, he was too much. “It’s become a thing during training. Puns comin’ outta every orifice—‘get on Top,’ if they’re chasin’ me, ‘look at him topping from the bottom.’ Chuckles all ’round.” He paused. “Sometimes you gotta dive and fly low to confuse the bandit’s radar. That’s topping from the bottom. Well, among other things.”

I was familiar with *among other things*.

As overbearing as he was, I couldn’t help but want to get to know more about him. I wanted to see him fly. It had to be a heady experience.

If I were half as animated and passionate about my job, I’d be lucky.

“Another thing we have in common,” I said. “I top from the bottom outside of kink too.” Or within kink, if I dated a submissive boy who enjoyed topping as well. I was still exploring, to be honest. I’d only discovered BDSM three years ago.

Colt raised his brows. “Oh, really. That’s...innerestin’.”

Was it?

Fuck.

Was it? This was just dinner. It wasn’t going to turn into a one-night stand. I’d left those behind. I was fairly certain.

Christ, why did I go there? This one was on me, to boot. I’d brought it up.

To hell with it. I had no issues being blunt. “We’re not sleeping together,” I told him.

He smiled. “Course not.”

It was best to circle back to his job. It was a safe topic. “So, Langley must be a playground for you.”

He scratched his eyebrow, seemingly stuck on a thought, then returned his attention to his food and shrugged. “Wouldn’t know. I’m not stationed there. Yet.”

Oh. “Yet?”

“I’m at Shaw in South Carolina,” he confirmed. “But when you’re as good as I am, you’ll get advice from superiors that ain’t really advice.” He tore off the wing from his chicken. “They want me in flight training with a new plane after my deployment, hence the meeting at Langley the day after tomorrow.”

There was a fair bit of information to process, and deployment stuck out distinctly. “You’re getting deployed?”

“Yes, sir.” He inclined his head. “We ship out to Iraq in a few days.”

Shit. I didn’t know why that put an uneasy feeling in my stomach. It went beyond the general worry one felt when watching segments about our troops on the news.

“Have, uh, have you been overseas before?”

“A few times, sure.” It appeared to be obvious to him. “Bosnia was my first—just a short stint. Two tours in Afghanistan. This will be my second in Iraq.”

“Good lord, Colt.” I stared at him, unable to express what I felt. I barely even knew. It was something overwhelming, though. Having spent my life far away from the armed forces, I wasn’t close to any service members. Soldiers existed solely in movies and on the news. And now, here I was, having

dinner with a war hero. Someone who put his life at risk for this country and schmucks like me.

Unlike before, there was no trace of cockiness in Colt now. If anything, he was showing signs of discomfort. It'd gotten too serious for him. And the realization hit so squarely. He loved being in the spotlight, didn't he? But only if he stepped into it. If someone else directed the attention his way, or if we strayed too far away from easygoing subjects, his arrogance vanished into thin air.

"You're a hero." I tested the words.

He scoffed and shook his head. "I'm doin' my job—and I do it damn well—but I ain't a hero."

Uh-huh.

"You said it yourself earlier," I pointed out. Pushing a bit. "You help keep the country safe."

"Which is my job," he volleyed back. "Doesn't make me a hero. Now, change the subject."

I grinned and suppressed a shiver from the cold.

Colt narrowed his eyes at me. "You can't push my buttons, pretty boy."

"Looks like I just did, Captain." I finished my food and wiped my mouth, then sat back, satisfied and full. "For the record, calling me pretty boy doesn't bug me. My masculinity isn't easily threatened."

"I wasn't trying to threaten it," he chuckled. "But you are pretty. I bet you look good when you beg."

I sighed, not even tempted to take the bait. Then I gave the lady behind the bar a two-finger wave to get her attention.

“Did it taste all right, boys?” she asked, gathering our plates.

“It was great, thank you,” I replied. “I’d like a coffee—black—and a bourbon. Maker’s if you have it.”

Hopefully, that would thaw me out a bit.

“Same for me, hold the coffee,” Colt added. “You were right about the gravy, ma’am. Best I’ve had outside of Texas.”

“I’ll take it.” The lady winked and got started on our order.

The coffee warmed me up slightly—temporarily.

The first bourbon didn’t do much, but the second and the third hit the sweet spot.

By the fourth, Colt and I were the only ones left in the establishment. The lady, who’d introduced herself as Maggie, said we could stay a while longer. The storm was still raging, and she had “borin’ books” to go through anyway.

I excused myself to go to the bathroom after Colt had given me a minor quiz about my family. I was an only child, so there hadn’t been much to divulge, other than my mother having taken care of me on her own until I was three. Then she’d met the man who’d quickly earned the badge of Dad for me.

In the smudgy mirror above the two sinks in the men’s room, I saw my reflection and sighed heavily. My hair had dried, thankfully, but it didn’t look very good. I ran a hand through it and tried to smooth down the mess at the top. Then I threw away a paper towel and exited the—oh, for fuck’s sake. I came to an abrupt stop right there in the doorway because

Colt had evidently decided to pull the oldest trick in the gay book. A bathroom ambush, really?

Despite the cliché, my pulse spiked, and I ran my gaze over him quickly. What my body wanted, there was no question. He wasn't the type of guy I usually went for, but sweet Jesus, he was one perfect specimen. A perfect *Top*...

I'd had way too much to drink to make responsible decisions.

"My turn," he said.

Oh. So, he hadn't tried to... Never mind. I stepped to the side so he could pass.

Colt met me in the doorway, closer than necessary, and paused briefly. I swallowed hard. He raised a brow, and his mouth twisted up.

"We're not going to sleep together," I repeated.

He lifted his hand and ghosted his knuckles along my forearm, touching no more than the fine hairs on my arm. "So you keep tellin' me."

I shivered as he left goose bumps in his wake, and this time, I couldn't blame the cold.

"We're a bad idea," I stated as resolutely as I could. And even to my ears, it sounded weak and husky.

"On that, we agree," he murmured. Next, he wrapped his fingers around my wrist. A swift, firm hold.

I sucked in a breath. His body heat seared into me, and I was torn between pushing back and pulling in. Fight or surrender. No, I couldn't. I didn't surrender. I'd never liked it.

Colt flashed me a frown. “You’re chilled to the bone, Luke.”

Funnily enough, I felt hot. Desire stirred, causing my thoughts to derail further. I liked the way he said my name in that scratchy, warm voice. God, he was truly all man.

“I’m fine,” I replied quietly.

He shook his head. “No, not this. There’s a limit. You can get sick.” He cleared his throat and entered the men’s room fully. “We’ll finish our drinks, and then we’re outta here.”

Together?

Not wise at all.

THREE

Stumbling back to the bar, I pressed the heels of my palms against my eyes and did my best to wake up. Attraction was easy enough to deal with. There were a lot of men I found sexy, though Colt probably did take the prize. Which I would never tell him. But there was more. Tension—a draw. A game. There was chemistry and a dare. A delectable challenge.

I half collapsed in my seat and took a gulp of my bourbon, then asked Maggie for the check.

She gave me a puzzled expression. “Your friend already settled the bill, sugar.”

I clenched my hand around my drink and tensed my jaw.

He had no right to do that, goddammit. I’d *told* him I was buying.

Colt appeared from around the corner, and my scowl was instant. Fuck, how had I not noticed the jeans before? He wore them dangerously well. So simple, jeans and a tee, yet he looked like he belonged in a catalogue or on a runway.

Refocusing on his face, I remembered exactly why I hadn’t paid attention to his clothes. That damn face. Sharp features met kind, inviting eyes, a charming, dimpled grin, and a

dusting of stubble. His hair was short and dark, though still lighter than mine. It looked soft to touch.

Remember you're angry with him, you googly-eyed fool.

Right. I narrowed my eyes again. "You paid the check," I said accusingly.

"Oh." He scratched the side of his head and sat down. "Huh. My bad?"

I took a deep breath and searched for the mountain of frustration. Perhaps the bourbon had drowned it, because I couldn't find more than a small molehill.

"Finish your drink," he told me.

I finished my drink.

"Thank you for providin' the best shelter from this storm tonight, ma'am." Colt turned on the Texas charm for Maggie. "I'll be sure to come back."

"Oh, you're so sweet." Maggie blushed and waved him off. "You boys take care. Get out of the rain as soon as you can."

"Are you locking up soon?" I wondered. "We'd be happy to wait so we can walk you to your car."

Colt nodded.

"No need," she replied with a smile. "My husband will be here in a bit, and Carlos is still in the kitchen. You go on out of here now."

Very well, then. I snatched up my discarded tie and aimed for the exit, where the southern humidity was waiting right outside. As was the rain, though it had slowed down significantly.

I didn't know where we were going—

“My hotel's right up the street,” Colt said. “You up for a quick run?”

“Not at all,” I assured. I hit the sidewalk at a moderate pace, and I wasn't going to push it. At this point, the heat was merely a pleasure. “I have a question.”

Colt stuck his hands down into his pockets and bunched up his shoulders. “No, we shouldn't sing in the rain.”

I laughed. “You're funny. But no... Why are you in Richmond? This isn't on the way to Langley—or your parents'—if you're coming up from South Carolina.”

“I've been in DC this week,” he answered. “I had some R&R with a couple buddies from base.” He nudged my elbow with his. “One of them's kinky. A fellow Sadist—though he's on another level. He's heavily involved in his community. Maybe you know him?”

“Wait, you're a Sadist?”

He flashed me a quick grin. “Forgot to mention that, huh?”

I barely resisted rolling my eyes.

He'd take you like a fucking savage. And you want it.

I gave that unbidden thought a swift kick and followed Colt across the dead street. “Can't believe there're two of you.” Heavens, what was I doing with a sadistic Top?

I couldn't deny that when I bottomed, I wanted to hurt. Mentally, no one would ever receive my submission. I'd tried and despised it. I'd even been annoyed by my aversion to it. My sex life would've been much better had I at least been a switch. Alas, following orders and pleasing from underneath went against everything I desired.

Finding a sweet sub who also wanted to give Daddy a brutal fuck on the regular was close to impossible, though.

“Ev might be worse than me,” Colt mused. “Reckless kid with maso tendencies he hasn’t explored enough yet. I’m pretty sure he’s a switch.”

Sadomasochists were fun.

I didn’t know anyone named Ev, though. Which wasn’t strange. DC was a big city, and we had more than one thriving community.

“He’s told me some of the things he did with an ex-girlfriend.” Colt whistled.

That might explain it. “I’ve grown comfortable in my own little kink bubble. Mostly gay men.”

“Yeah, he’s dancing all over that rainbow too,” Colt said with a snort.

I side-eyed Colt, detecting an admiration he had for his friend. “Is he possibly a partner of yours?”

He frowned. “Who, Ev and me? Christ no. We’d kill each other.” He let out a laugh and wiped rain off his face. “He’s the kid brother I never wanted, and I’m...riding his ass hard in the non-fun way at work.”

I could see it clearer now. The Daddy Dom in Colt—I saw it. I could tell he was the type of Daddy who wanted to push his Little to be his absolute best.

My own approach, I supposed, had more cushion.

“Here we are.” Colt nodded at a building at the next corner, and I followed him when he picked up the pace a bit. “It was the best thing I could find within walkin’ distance of the bus station.”

Oh, so he'd taken the bus. "Let me guess. Your connection was canceled because of the storm."

"Bingo."

Made sense. The highway had really been deserted earlier.

The hotel was in better shape than I expected for the run-down area of Richmond we were in. I'd slept in worse places during my stay in Georgia. No flashing neon sign on the outside, and the white paint on the building wasn't peeling off the façade. Three stories. The lights were on in two windows.

"I'm gonna make you a deal, Lucas." Colt stopped when we were under an awning right outside the sliding doors. "You're sleepin' in my room. I'm genuinely concerned from before—you were ice-cold—and...shit." He scowled. "You didn't mention anythin'. You didn't say the bar was turnin' you into a popsicle."

I smiled, unable to help it. Daddy Colt was sweet.

"You think getting pneumonia's fun?" he asked irritably.

I shook my head, still amused, but mostly touched. "Tell me more about this deal." Taking a step closer, I looked him straight in the eye and waited.

"You're drunk."

"Not really." I was honest. I was intoxicated enough to ignore some of my general rules about hookups, but not tipsy enough to call it the perfect buzz. And he was...too fucking sexy for his own good. Even more so now when he was wet from the rain. I drank him in, the way his T-shirt clung to his body, the drops of water glistening in his stubble. I wanted to strip him down and lick every—

"I'm not gonna make a single move on you," he said.

My gaze flashed back to his, and I stiffened to hide my disappointment. Fuck. I'd been so sure—wait. He didn't say he wasn't interested.

“That's the deal,” he went on. “You agree to stay in my room so I can make sure you get your body temperature up, and I won't make a move.”

I would, though. He could fucking count on it.

“Lead the way,” I said.

“You should take a hot shower,” he told me, opening the door to his hotel room. “I'll be a good boy and separate the beds.”

No need. “I'm actually not that cold.” I felt the need to inform him.

He shook his head and dropped his wallet onto the desk. “That's the booze talkin'.” Across the small room was the bed, and there was a chair by the window. Not much else would fit in here. Everything looked fresh and clean, though the dark-brown rug had seen better days.

Colt traveled light. An army-green daypack rested against the wall next to the bathroom door. There were a handful of patches on it, one of which stood out. The Air Force signature wings with a star in the middle.

Shit. A thought occurred to me. I'd forgotten my suitcase in my car.

“Hey. I'm serious.” Colt turned on the nightstand lamps and pointed at the bathroom. “Go take a shower.”

Bossy. If I weren't already feeling the warmth of his concern, I would've argued for the sake of it.

I stepped out of my shoes and hung my tie on the knob of the door, then snuck into the bathroom and left the door ajar.

An amateur had done this bathroom with big ambitions. I could see they'd tried to mimic the clean hotel look with white tiles, a big sink, and a shower with a glass partition, but something had gotten in the way. Probably the budget. You got what you paid for, and that was unevenly placed tiles here and there, a leaking faucet, a slightly crooked towel rack, and one of the three dispensers in the shower had come loose. It rested on the floor instead.

I grimaced as I removed my belt and pushed down my pants. It felt great to finally come out of my wet clothes, but it was a struggle. And my skin was colder than I'd originally thought.

I'd better not get sick.

There was no bathtub, just a comfortably big shower, which sparked the thought that two grown men could easily fit in there.

Would he go for it?

I got rid of the last of my clothes and walked into the shower, turning the water on hot.

Hell, that's it. I just stood there for a while, letting the warm water cascade down and loosen the tension in my muscles.

After a couple minutes, I called for Colt and poured some body wash into my hand.

“God,” I muttered to myself. It was the first time in a week I’d felt utterly relaxed and comfortable. Lust and mental images of Colt sparked when I soaped up my cock, and I wondered how long he was going to be before he got here. He better not have fallen asleep. “Colt?”

“Right here, darlin’.”

“Jesus.” I looked over my shoulder and saw him leaning casually against the sink, ankles crossed, arms folded over his chest. “What’re you doing?”

“Enjoying the view?”

I shook my head, amused. “Join me instead, Captain.”

“Thank fuck, because I was lyin’ about separatin’ the beds.” He yanked his tee over his head and stripped off his jeans—well, then. Okay. No boxers or anything. I swallowed hard and stared at his cock, this thick, long, beautiful cock that I couldn’t fucking wait to suck.

He stepped into the shower, and I faced him fully, drew him closer, under the spray with me, and slipped a hand up his sculpted back.

He took a breath and one last step, slowly aligning our bodies. Goose bumps rose along my arms, and I appreciated that he wasn’t in any rush either.

Colt ghosted his knuckles up my arm. “For a second, I thought you were under some weird illusion that Tops can’t fuck.”

I let out a low laugh. “No, I just recognize danger when I see it.” Even a blind person would sense the risk here. Colt had the ability to drive me insane, I knew that much. “I can already picture myself cursing you for weeks to come.”

“And then jerk off to the memory of me?”

I grinned and kissed the corner of his mouth. “That would be the infuriating part, yes.”

He hummed and dipped lower, grazing his nose along my jaw. “It ain’t about recognizing danger. It’s about what you do once you know it’s there.”

He didn’t have to spell it out further.

I wasn’t going anywhere.

A tremor ran down my spine, and I cupped his jaw and slid my mouth over his. At the same time, he gripped my hips and pressed our bodies together, and I exhaled a groan into the kiss. I didn’t know what was water from the shower and what was saliva, but a wet kiss that tasted of bourbon shot straight to my list of favorites. The kiss deepened quickly, and the urge to take more roared inside me.

I pushed him up against the wall, eliciting a breathless chuckle from him, and ran my hand up his chest. Chest hair wasn’t usually something I cared about, but on him, it was suddenly mouthwateringly sexy.

“Don’t steal my moves,” he murmured huskily. “Fuckin’ hell, you’re gorgeous.” One of his hands glided down my back and over my ass, where he stopped and kneaded the flesh. “Will you bottom for me?”

I nodded and kissed him hungrily. The need grew stronger and stronger when I thought about him taking me, about him getting violent with me. It’d been so damn long since I’d hurt.

“I’m not a fan of spanking or pain from whatever implements you like to use,” I said, breathing heavily. “But I still want the pain.” I brushed a hand over our cocks, pressing them together. “Don’t go easy on me.”

He cursed and sank his teeth into my bottom lip. “I’ll fuck you without mercy. How’s that sound?”

“Like we’re done showering.” I needed him right now.

FOUR

Colt fucked like a god.

The pain he gave me every time he punched his cock deep inside me sent sparks of fire up my body and turned the pleasure into a live pulse that held me captive. I had to clutch the headboard with both hands to stay in place, despite his fingers digging into my hips in a tight grip.

“Don’t tease me,” I growled when he slowed down. It wasn’t the first time. He’d push me to the edge, take me back down, push a bit further, then rinse and repeat, and it was getting old. I was frustratingly close, my cock was leaking on the damn sheets, and every muscle in my body was protesting.

“I have to,” he panted, pushing inside too slowly. “I can’t stop fucking you. You feel...so...goddamn...*good*.” He emphasized each word with a thrust.

“You realize we can fuck more than once, right?” I snapped. My annoyance vanished into thin air when he swiveled his hips, and I let out an embarrassingly loud moan. “Oh God, right there, Colt. Keep going—fuck me.”

He fucked me. He fucked me deep and hard in long strokes, and I fisted my cock to chase my orgasm again.

“Perfect,” he breathed. “Fuck—perfect.” After a painfully hard thrust, he eased back to sit on his haunches, and he hauled me with him. “Move with me. I wanna see you get off.”

I hissed and sank down on him, feeling him brushing against my prostate. My breathing stuttered, and he caught it. He halted me, only to rub the head of his cock over that sensitive spot. Over and over until my moans had no ends or beginnings. He drove me fucking crazy.

“That’s it. Fuck yourself on me.” He snaked his arms around me, one hand stroking my chest, one hand taking over for me. With a firm grip on my cock, he stroked me closer to my release while his mouth never left my neck and shoulder. “There will definitely be more than once. I’m gonna wake you up with my cock later.”

I shuddered and felt the pleasure crashing down on me.

The cobwebs of sleep were too comfortable to shake off when I roused to the feeling of a mouth on my neck and two wet fingers circling my ass.

I was mostly on my stomach, with one leg pulled up, arms under my pillow.

“Don’t move,” Colt murmured in a gravelly tone. “I wanna take care of you just like this.”

I hummed and kept my eyes closed. “Take care of me... Kinda like the sound of that right now.”

“Yeah?” He pressed an openmouthed kiss to the spot between my shoulder blades. “So do I.” The heat of his body

disappeared for a moment, and I heard him reaching for something. Then he was back. He put a hand towel undernea
—

“Gross,” I muttered. “That’s the one you used to clean off my stomach earlier.”

“It’s either this or coming on the sheets.” He gave my ass a light swat. “You big baby.”

I snorted drowsily. “Don’t push it.”

He leaned over me and rolled a condom onto his cock. “Why?” There was a grin in his voice as he nipped at my earlobe. “You’d make a cute little slut boy for Daddy.”

I coughed a laugh and tilted my head back.

He was there and met me in a slow, drugging kiss.

Colt was too much. Funny, conceited, intoxicating, sexy, *sweet*... And caring.

“Fuck me, Colt,” I mumbled, sweeping my tongue around his.

“Mmm, I will.”

A second later, he drove his cock deep inside me.

I was the one who woke him up for the next round.

I fumbled in the darkness and reached for the bottle of lube, nearly knocking it off the nightstand.

“Shit, darlin’...again?”

“Again.”

I rolled him onto his back and sucked his cock into my mouth, always having loved feeling a cock grow hard against my tongue. And Colt's was unforgettable. I swirled my tongue around the head and took him deep, tracing the vein along the underside.

"Fuck, that's good," he exhaled, weaving his fingers through my hair. "I think I'm outta rubbers."

I had one in my wallet. "I'm clean," I said instead.

That got him going. Before I knew it, I was lying flat on the mattress, and he was hovering over me.

I cursed as my stomach flipped.

"Me too," he replied. "Tell me you want me to come in you." He grabbed my jaw and pushed his cock against my opening.

"Easy, boy," I said mildly. Turning my head, I kissed the inside of his palm.

He let out a low growl and kissed my jaw. "Lucas... Let me hear it."

He was too cute. Even more so when he rubbed our noses together.

We didn't speak while he prepared me with the lube. We kissed, felt each other, and just lived in the moment. It was incredible. *He* was incredible.

"Legs around me," he muttered into a messy kiss.

I hitched my legs around his hips, and then he pushed in. I gasped at the soreness that flared up, but it was quickly replaced by lust and need.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd made out with someone like this.

The burn grew stronger as the minutes ticked by, and we kept fucking, keeping the same pace, with as much focus on kissing and touching.

"I'm gonna be so sore tomorrow," I chuckled through a groan.

Colt drew a breath and grinned wolfishly. "Good."

"Sadist," I whispered and sucked his bottom lip into my mouth.

After...who knew how long, we realized we weren't going to get off in this position. Three times in a night was a damn stretch. I wasn't a kid anymore. We were both tired and found it deliriously funny when the other complained about muscle ache.

With me on all fours, on the other hand... He got me there in a few minutes of punishing thrusts and the sexiest sounds.

"Oh fuck," he gritted.

I pushed back and stroked my cock faster, right on the edge. A bead of sweat trickled down my temple, my thighs throbbed, and my gut clenched as the euphoria dropped lower and lower. Screwing my eyes shut, I poured all my focus onto Colt and his cock pushing in and out of me. The slick sounds we made, our breaths, and how the bed creaked.

"So close," he hissed.

"Come inside me, Colt," I moaned.

"Fuck!" He slammed into me with a growl that sent me over.

Pain and pleasure mingled and set off the explosion that robbed me of air and energy. Ropes of come shot out of my cock, and Colt pulsed inside me, the sensation prolonging my own orgasm.

Tremors rocked my body, and I knew it wouldn't be long before I collapsed. I locked my elbow in place and hoped that would work. Colt wasn't making it easier as he slumped forward, his chest rising and falling rapidly. *Fuck*. I couldn't stay upright. I went down with a squeak from the springs in the mattress, and I couldn't even be bothered to care about where I landed. I'd shower in the morning.

Oh God, he'd killed me.

"I should've thought about this last night," I said.

"You were too busy thinkin' about me." Colt sent me a smirk over his shoulder and hung my pants over the towel rack in the bathroom.

Meanwhile, he'd graciously lent me a pair of USAF sweat pants and a T-shirt. "I see how it is. Your jeans are dry, so you clearly weren't thinking about me very much."

He laughed.

I smiled and leaned against the doorway. I liked making him laugh, I realized.

"Sorry to burst your bubble, princess," he replied, "but my jeans weren't that soaked, and the only reason I hung them over the radiator was because I stepped on them when I went to take a leak around three."

I made a face of disapproval. “You know what you don’t hang on radiators? Clothes. Wet or otherwise.”

“You sound like my mother,” he retorted.

I shrugged.

Colt walked toward me on his way out, and I stopped him with a finger in one of his belt loops.

He lifted a brow in question.

“Let me take you to breakfast,” I said.

If possible, his eyes were a brighter sea green today. They were stunning. “Sounds good. I’m just gonna fish out my flip-flops for you.”

That made me grimace again, though I was thankful. Flip-flops, as much as I disliked them, were better with sweat pants than a pair of damp dress shoes.

Colt dug out a surprising number of clothes from his backpack. Another pair of jeans, a black button-down, socks, a pair of...I wasn’t sure, maybe shorts... Every item of clothing was rolled tightly to take up as little space as possible.

“How long did you say you were in DC?” I asked.

“Four...five days? Here.” At the bottom of the pack, he found a pair of black flip-flops. “I left some shit with Ev, though. He’ll bring it back to base next week.”

“Thank you.” I slipped my feet into the shoes and wriggled my toes, grateful we wore the same size. “Is he being deployed too?”

Colt nodded once and stood up. “His first tour.”

Christ. “I can’t imagine.” I had a feeling I would be following the news more closely in the near future.

Both of us were showered and dressed—and smelling like Colt’s deodorant and aftershave—and we left the hotel room, taking the stairs down instead of waiting for the elevator. We’d experienced how slow it was last night.

It was a hot day in Richmond, the sky bright blue and the sun shining. Unlike Colt, I didn’t have a pair of fancy aviator glasses. I had a phone with very little battery on it, and I was praying Luke from the auto shop would call soon. But the way I figured, I could at least stop by the garage after breakfast to get my bag.

Colt checked his watch. “We should be able to beat the next church crowd.”

I hadn’t thought of that, but I supposed he was right.

We found a diner a couple blocks away, and it was almost empty. The people attending the early services had already eaten and left.

“Can the South play anything other than country?” I muttered as we found a booth.

I eased into my seat carefully and rested my chin in my hand.

“What do you have against the best music in the world?” Colt frowned. “When I get back from Iraq, I’m gonna teach you my ways. If you’re a good boy, I might even show you my line dancin’ moves.”

I drummed my fingers over my lips to hide the smirk. “You own a cowboy hat, don’t you?”

“That’s a stupid question.” He turned his attention to something behind me. An approaching server, it turned out.

“Mornin’, boys,” the woman said. “Here’re some menus for y’all. Are we starting off with coffee?”

“Yes, thank you,” Colt and I said.

I opened my menu and didn’t read a word. Something Colt had said came back to me, and now I couldn’t think about anything else. He’d said he would teach me his ways when he came back from Iraq. Which implied we were going to stay in touch.

“What’re you getting?” Colt asked, concentrating on his menu. “Do I want steak for breakfast? I’m weak when it comes to steak.”

“Do you want to stay in touch?” I blurted out.

His eyebrows went up. “Huh?”

“You said—earlier, you said when you get back from Iraq...”

He remembered now, and he shifted in his seat. In a split second, I was given a rare glimpse of his discomfort. Or uncertainty. “I wouldn’t mind it, no. But we don’t have to—”

“I think we do,” I said honestly. “I think we have to.”

Because there was something here, whether I wanted to admit it or not. I had no idea how or why or when or what, but there was something.

Colt stared at me for a bit, brow furrowed, maybe trying to read me just like I was trying to read him.

Maybe we’d turn out to be great friends. I wanted to find out.

Our server chose that moment to return with coffee, and I scrambled for something to order. Colt was quicker on his feet

and went with steak and hash browns with two eggs—sunny-side up—and I picked one of the specials of the day. There were eggs and bacon and a short stack of pancakes, so I didn't see how it could go wrong.

“I guess we'll see how things go,” Colt said.

It took me a beat to realize what we were talking about.

“I'm not very good at keeping up with anything at home when I'm in the sandbox,” he admitted. I understood him, and the last thing I wanted was to add stress or pressure on him. “The only one I make sure to call here and there is my mother. If I don't...” He winced.

He was a mama's boy, and it was endearing as fuck.

“Hey—we barely know each other,” I told him. “I have no expectations. Don't worry about it.”

He grazed his teeth over his bottom lip and watched me with that look again. He was thinking, and I had no clue about what.

“I actually have the Facebook now,” he mentioned. “I'll give you my email before I leave too.”

I nodded slightly and took a sip of my coffee. Facebook was safe, and it was sweet that he called it *the* Facebook.

“Anyway,” he said, “how's that fine ass of yours? Sore?”

Instinct kicked in right away, and I decided it was practically vital I didn't give him the reaction he wanted. Colt struck me as the type of person who tested those around him. To see if they had what it took or something.

“To tell you the truth,” I answered, dragging it out with another sip of coffee, “I hardly feel anything.”

Colt stared back at me, eyes calculating, amusement tugging at the corners of his mouth.

He most likely knew I was lying, but that was neither here nor there. I hadn't taken the bait.

FIVE

I didn't want this day to be over. Colt infuriated me as much as he delighted me; he challenged my perspectives, offered a new narrative, and opened up my whole world. All with simple conversation.

While we ate, I asked him more about his childhood and learned that music was one of his biggest hobbies. It kept him sane when he was deployed, and it was, in his words, “a language everyone understands.” He played the fiddle and the guitar, and when his mother pleaded with him, he sang too.

“So, when did—”

“No, no, no,” he said, shaking his head. “My turn to ask you questions. I feel like you know everythin’ there is to know about me at this point.”

He exaggerated. I was far from done.

Colt forked up the last piece of his steak and egg and chewed while his mind worked. At least I'd learned that part about him. I could see when he was trying to figure something out.

When he was finished, he wagged his fork at me. “Let me guess, you're using some kind of online dating service.”

Okay, I didn't see that "question" coming. I cleared my throat and placed my napkin on my plate. "I am. Why?"

"What does your profile say?"

I furrowed my brow. If he wanted to get to know me, my OkCupid profile left a lot to be desired. I'd grown resigned about the whole dating jungle. I'd tried Grindr for approximately two days when that was launched last year. I'd tried some dating groups on Facebook too, though I always gave up and returned to the kink site where I had my friends. Even there, it was difficult grasping on to something that interested me.

"It doesn't say much," I replied. "I mention that the real estate market is sucking the life out of me, that I enjoy spending time with friends, that I date exclusively in the BDSM community, and...well, you know the type of guy I'm into." Because he was into the exact same kind of cheeky submissive, with the addition that he enjoyed masochists. "I make it clear what I'm looking for, in other words. That's about it."

"That's fuckin' boring, Lucas."

I winced internally and smiled slightly. I *was* boring, and he was about to find that out. "There isn't much to know about me."

Colt shook his head. "I don't buy it." He finished his coffee. "How long have you been workin' for your pop?"

I hummed, thinking back. "Full time...? Four years. Ish. But I started helping him at the office when I was in college." I'd helped him with advertising campaigns and branding since he realized I had an eye for it. "He called me once." I chuckled as the memory popped up. "I was somewhere in France—it

was the middle of the night, and he called to ask what color to put on his business cards.”

Colt grinned faintly and cocked his head. “What were you doin’ in France?”

Oh boy. “The stereotypical backpacking adventure so many Americans go on after high school or college. I went after high school and was gone for four months.”

“Did you go alone?”

I inclined my head. “I discovered BDSM in Amsterdam.”

He smirked. “Of course you did. In the red-light district, you could finally put a name to all those forbidden fantasies you’d had.”

Well, he was right on the money. My God, I’d lived a predictable life.

“I don’t have the stories you have, Colt,” I admitted. Because it was best just to get it out into the open. So I started rambling.

I was an average guy with an average degree that I wasn’t using very much. And I lived an ordinary DC life. I went out to dinner with friends on the weekends. There was always a new restaurant to try out. Brunch on Sundays. Dinner with my parents once or twice a month. I played squash and badminton with my cousin once a week. Sometimes I took his dog to the park. Money went to rent and food. I didn’t actually live in DC. That was just what you said. I lived in Alexandria. There was a coffee shop down at the corner that I called mine. I ordered the same thing every morning on my way to work.

“Okay, I get it,” Colt chuckled.

“I’m not sure you do.” I frowned, wondering if *I* got it. Was my life boring? Probably. But the thing was, other than my job situation, I was happy. All right, it was getting tedious to be single. I hadn’t been in a relationship in over two years, and for a while, I’d been content to play with casual partners. That time had passed. “One of my favorite things to do is have friends over at my place,” I told him. “I put a lot of effort into everything from appetizers and dinner to...” I waved a hand. “Hell, the playlist for the evening. But I’m not the storyteller. I go on pleasant vacations every once in a while. I don’t go on risky adventures. I find my joy in the small, everyday things. You, Colt, are a *fighter pilot*...in every sense of the word. You’re the war hero who gets a book deal one day to write your memoirs. You put everything on the line, and I’m...I’m —”

“You’re the one we come home to,” he said.

I didn’t understand. His words deflated me, only to flood me with confusion.

He leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table. “Every storyteller needs their audience, Lucas.” He cracked his knuckles absently, and there was a soft smirk playing on his lips. “Someone who cares to listen to our drivel.”

“You clearly don’t know what drivel is.”

He laughed under his breath and looked down for a moment. Then he lifted his gaze again and shook his head slowly. “Veterans are a dime a dozen, and many of us have the same stories. The same issues, the same hurt. We’re always looking for someone outside the services to understand us, even though we know no one ever will.”

How did anyone respond to that?

I couldn't even begin to imagine, yet there was this quiet voice in the back of my mind telling me I *wanted* to understand. Because that was my thing. I wanted to understand people. I wanted to help. I wanted to be there and watch the people I cared for reach their goals and get what they wanted.

I cared for Colt. To an extent, at least.

"I think..." I stopped myself so I could make sure I phrased this properly. "In short, I don't want to make any assumptions or pretend to know what it is you need, but...if you need someone to listen..."

He nodded once. "I appreciate it. And I could sorta tell that's the type of Dom you are."

I smiled and lifted a shoulder. "It's who I am, period."

"I didn't mean for this to get heavy," I said after some silence. The quiet hadn't been uncomfortable per se, but I felt our time was running out.

Colt had checked his watch twice in the past five minutes, and he'd declined the last offer of a coffee refill.

He gave me a rueful little grin. "I don't think either of us did." He cleared his throat and glanced toward the counter. The register. "I should probably go get a new bus ticket."

Fuck.

"When were you picking up your car?" he asked.

I sighed. "The mechanic said I shouldn't drive until it'd been twenty-four hours, so...around seven or eight, something like that."

He nodded in acknowledgment.

Once I had my car, I was going to spend two hours on the road before I was back home. Two hours. The same amount of time it took to drive from here to Norfolk.

Sweet Jesus, there was something wrong with me. Norfolk was in the other direction, basically. And I was what, thinking about driving him to his parents' house? And then drive four hours back to DC?

I couldn't be that desperate to spend more time with him. It was insane. We'd had a hot night. A wonderful evening to wrap up a disastrous week. A nice breakfast.

And maybe one more round in bed? He didn't check out until noon.

"Let's go to the bus station, then," I said. "Perhaps we can kill some time at the hotel after."

Colt lifted a brow and barely contained the expression that told me he knew what was on my mind. Smug bastard. "You need more cock, baby?"

"Need is a very strong word," I drawled.

He laughed.

The urgency was supposed to dissipate after we'd gotten off. Instead, he stayed on top of me, buried deep, and kissed me with the same hunger I felt.

I was fucking high on this man.

Once we weren't panting anymore, I took charge of the kiss. I wove my fingers into his hair and tugged, angling his

head where I could kiss him deeper. He groaned lustfully and cupped my cheek. Then he gave a slow thrust, pushing his softening cock deeper, and it drew a shudder from me.

I swept my tongue around his and breathed heavily, fully aware that we were down to the final minutes of our... whatever this had been. Maybe he was just as aware. Maybe that was why he pushed harder, took control again, and kissed me more forcefully.

My heart pounded. The sheets were a twisted mess. My feet slid up his calves, locking him into place. My blunt fingernails raked their way down his back. He exhaled a moan and pressed our upper bodies together, evidently not giving a shit about the release he'd stroked out of me.

Fuck his fucking bus ticket. He had it in the back pocket of his jeans that were thrown somewhere on the floor.

“What time is it?” I muttered, out of breath.

“Don't remind me.” He dragged his teeth along my bottom lip and gave it a sharp nip. “Had I been fifteen years younger, I would've taken you again right now.”

I coughed around a hoarse chuckle and surrendered. If I didn't offer to take him to Norfolk, I'd regret it. No matter how crazy it was.

“Don't take the bus,” I told him quietly. That halted all movement, and he furrowed his brow as he looked down at me. I kissed him on his scruffy chin. “I'll drive you to your parents' house.”

A silence stretched between us, but I didn't waver. I could see where his mind went. The questions, the doubt. Yes, I was aware that I'd drive two hours in the wrong direction. Yes, I knew I would be leaving Norfolk in the middle of the night for

a four-hour drive to DC. I didn't care. I wasn't willing to read into anything beyond that, but I was sure. I wanted a few more hours. I wanted today.

“Are you sure?” He pressed his forehead to mine. “This is nuts, innit?”

Yes to both.

“I'm sure,” I replied. “We'll head out tonight.”

And I was going to walk down to reception and book us an extra night just so we didn't have to check out until tonight. Screw it. This was what I wanted.

“What do you think you're doing?” I asked with a frown. “The person who drives is in charge of the radio.”

“Not if the driver has shitty taste in music.” Colt fiddled with the channels until he landed on a country station. Then he nodded in satisfaction and sat back again with his fries. “I have so much to teach you.”

I shook my head. “There is nothing wrong with the music I play.” I dug into the McDonald's bag between us and threw a few fries into my mouth. “Everyone loves Bruce Springsteen.”

“Overrated is what he is,” Colt informed me. “I'll give him three songs. ‘Born in the U.S.A.,’ ‘The River,’ and ‘I'm on Fire.’ The rest...? He sounds like he hates life when he sings. 'Scuse me, when he *whines*.”

I pressed my lips together to hide my amusement. He was...passionate about this.

I switched lanes to pass, comically enough, a Greyhound bus. “It’s funny to me that you complain about The Boss whining when you’re seemingly obsessed with a genre that has two very depressing themes. Either someone gets shot down by the creek, or they drink their sorrows away at a sad bar.”

Colt shot me a scowl.

I grinned and unwrapped my last cheeseburger. “Sorry, I forgot the dog. Country songs tend to have dogs.”

He snorted. “You don’t know what you’re talkin’ ’bout, slick.” At first, it looked like he was going to settle into silence and enjoy his damn country music, but then he caught a second wind and laid into me. “You know, you’re the reason us real southerners don’t like it when people say Virginia’s part of the South.”

“I’m—”

“I’m not done. I mean, look at you. City boy—you drive a Mercedes! You go to brunch on Sundays. You’ve got a two-hundred-dollar haircut. You listen to Bruce Springsteen like some—”

“I’m pretty sure southerners like him too.”

Colt huffed in frustration and glared. “Does nothing *ever* rattle you?”

I side-eyed him. Oh...he was trying to rile me up again? Precious boy. I supposed wisdom didn’t always come with age.

I grabbed his hand and kissed his knuckles. “My haircut was fifty dollars, I’ll have you know, and I told you I’m from Bethesda, yes?”

“Yeah?” He frowned. “Fake southerner.”

I withheld my laughter and released his hand. “Or perhaps not a southerner at all?”

“Right, but people keep saying Virginia’s the South.”

Oh, bless. Hey, there was a southern phrase I’d grown up with. My mother came from Tennessee after all. That said... “Bethesda is in Maryland.”

“Oh.” Colt cleared his throat and folded his arms over his chest. “Did not know that.”

I laughed silently, fearing he might actually blow if he heard me.

“Look on the bright side,” I said, “there’s even more for you to teach me. For instance, what exactly is a hoedown?”

“Now you’re just fuckin’ with me,” he grumbled.

“Not at all,” I lied. “Teach me, Captain. What is a hoedown?”

I felt his narrowed-eyed look more than saw it.

“No. Fuck that. You’re bein’ all smug,” he said and turned away. Like a child.

I sighed and smiled to myself.

I was smitten.

After about an hour on the road, Colt suggested we stop for coffee.

Darkness had fallen, and we were in the middle of nowhere. Perhaps he wanted to stall too. Either way, I was happy to play along, so I took the next exit that had a truck

stop. There was a gas station with a crappy-looking diner attached to it, as well as a Chick-fil-A that was closed.

“You stay here,” Colt said, leaving the car. “I’ll get us coffee and some donuts.”

I was halfway out of the car, so I looked at him quizzically.

“More privacy out here,” he elaborated. “There’re picnic tables over there if you wanna sit outside.”

I glanced over at a semi-wooded area and the three picnic tables that sat on a small lawn. A single light cast a faint glow over the place.

“All right.” I closed the door behind me and locked up.

Colt returned within a couple minutes, and he was on his phone. We sat down at one of the tables. It was a muggy night, leaving a mist around the light next to us.

He handed me my to-go cup. “I’m listenin’! You said—” He sighed. “No, ma’am. I’m not givin’ you attitude.”

I grinned and removed the lid to my coffee, and I blew some steam off the hot beverage. I was willing to bet he was talking to his mother.

“Yes, ma’am, I’m stayin’ safe.”

“Adorable,” I mouthed.

He rolled his eyes and flipped me off.

“Okay,” he said. “We can talk about this soon, though. I’ll be there in an hour and some change.” He wrapped up the call shortly after, and he looked like he’d just suffered half an eternity. “I’m thirty-six years old, I’ve voted in every election, I drink, and I’ve been to war. But around that woman, I’m always seven.”

I chuckled and took a sip of my coffee. “It’s supposed to be that way.” The subtle sweetness of sugar mingled with the strong coffee, and I couldn’t help but ask if Colt had done something.

His brows knit together. “Two sugars, right? I thought for sure I saw—”

“You did.” I smiled. My chest constricted weirdly.

“Messed up, if you ask me,” he went on casually and stuck a hand into the brown paper bag. “If you take sugar in your coffee, you can’t have a donut.”

“Says who?” I laughed.

“My mama.” He winked. “Jelly or regular glaze?”

“Jelly, please.”

“One jelly donut comin’ up.” He handed one over to me, then sucked powdered sugar off his thumb. “By the way, a hoedown is what I holler when I throw you down on the bed.”

I blinked with my donut in midair.

Colt cracked up.

Did the cocky jackass just call me a ho?

“Your face,” he wheezed through his laughter.

Amusement trickled in, and I couldn’t stop staring at him. He was just so out-of-this-world handsome and sexy. Eyes alight, crinkling at the corners.

“Shut up and eat your donut,” I chuckled, shaking my head. Then I got fucking jelly on my T-shirt. Scratch that, on Colt’s T-shirt. “Look what you made me do, asshole.”

Good lord, I had powdered sugar everywhere too.

Colt found that too funny as well. “Keep it. It’ll give me a reason to visit when I come home.”

“This has to be one special tee if you’re coming all the way to DC for it in a year.”

He shrugged and chewed on a mouthful of donut. “I guess your fuckable ass is a second reason.”

“Please, don’t inflate my ego. I can’t take it,” I deadpanned. “I swear—” How frustrating. If he’d been a sub... “I wish I could make you choke on my cock. You arrogant prick.”

“Oh...” His eyes glinted with something dark. “That ain’t a punishment, darlin’. But tell ya what.” He leaned forward as if he were going to whisper a secret. “I actually wanted a stop on the way so I could get my mouth on your cock. If you’re a good boy, I’ll make it happen.”

I narrowed my eyes, ready to spit something sharp back at him, except...my brain was flooded with images of him sucking me off in the car. Fuck.

He’d almost done it twice already, but I’d stopped him because I’d been too revved up and needed him to fuck me. Now, though... Hell, I wanted a last memory of him. Something I could think back on when I was alone in my shower at home.

“Finish your donut,” I said.

It seemed like no time passed between our stop in the dark nothingness and when I pulled up on the street where Colt’s parents lived.

“That house right there, with the pickup parked outside.”

I nodded in acknowledgment and stopped in front of a nice suburban house with a big front yard and a white picket fence.

I killed the engine.

The lamp over the table in the kitchen was lit, and so was a small light in one of the windows on the second floor.

“So, you haven’t been here before?” I asked.

He shook his head, turned away from me. He was studying the house too. “Pop promised Ma her dream house when he retired. He wanted a backyard, and she wanted a big kitchen.” He let out a breath and scratched his arm. “This is most of their savings.”

I hummed. It definitely was a lovely house. It was too dark to see the exact color of it. Pale yellow or light beige, perhaps. A red-painted door. White shutters.

“They want grandchildren.” Colt finally faced me, and he was wearing a tired little smile. “My sister better cough up a few, ’cause they ain’t comin’ from me.”

I chuckled quietly.

I’d never really thought of having children of my own, though I did like them. My cousin and his wife were actually expecting their first, so that was something to look forward to. It would also satisfy my parents, as my cousin was closer to my mom and dad than his own folks, who lived in Tucson.

Refocusing on Colt, I covered his hand with my own and brushed my thumb over his knuckles. “Don’t get hurt over there.”

Merely saying that put a rock in my stomach.

“That’s the goal. Come here.”

We met in the middle, and my heart jumped as we fell into a slow, deep kiss. His fingers disappeared in the short hairs at the back of my head, and I stroked his jaw.

“You have my email and my phone number,” he murmured against my lips. “Use them.”

“Ditto.” I kissed him once more, a hard, hungry kiss that stole his breath.

Our time was up, and it was more difficult than I’d thought it would be. Colt broke away first, and he didn’t linger. He reached back to grab his bag, then opened the door.

“I’ll come back for my clothes, Lucas West.” He leaned in and kissed my cheek faster than I could register, and I had no way of pulling him back. He was already out of the car, disappearing from my life as fast as he’d entered it. He tapped his hand on the roof of the car and peered in one last time. “And that ass.”

I forced a grin.

He probably saw it was bullshit. He cursed under his breath and shook his head. “Thank you for the ride. I’ll see you, yeah?”

“Yeah.” I nodded once for emphasis. Evidently, I’d lost the ability to form proper sentences. “Be safe, Colt.”

He returned my nod, and that was it. He closed the door and walked toward his parents’ white picket fence.

SIX

I was dead on my feet by the time I got home around four in the morning.

I'd had to make a lengthier stop past Richmond to inhale both caffeine and sugar.

The floorboards creaked as I zombied over to my bed, throwing off clothes on the way.

Why had I not changed the radio station? Why had I listened to that god-awful, depressing shit all the way home?

I scrubbed tiredly at my face. Brushing my teeth and rinsing off were out of the question. My neck was stiff, a headache was rolling in like a thunderstorm, and I just needed my bed. I landed facedown on the mattress and squeezed one of my pillows to me, and I inhaled deeply.

I was calling in sick tomorrow.

I fell asleep in no time, and my dreams were filled with images of Colt. The two of us laughing in the car, him throwing fries at me, then back to the hotel room in Richmond and the goddamn amazing sex we'd had. His voice tickled my ear, that rich, warm drawl saying the filthiest things as he fucked me into oblivion.

My mind also felt the need to conjure scenarios that hadn't happened, in which we laughed off the whole weekend and called it a hookup. *We ain't right for each other*, I heard him say. I agreed with him, the surroundings fuzzy, but I smelled coffee. Were we at the diner? Why did my stomach hurt?

Two Tops. More than that, two Tops who were into the same BDSM kinks. Two Tops who saw those kinks as more than kinks. It wasn't role-play; it wasn't a spice. It was a lifestyle with which we identified.

My headache had only grown worse when I woke up around seven to take a leak and call the office.

I promised I'd be there tomorrow instead and give a detailed report of my Georgia trip.

A couple Excedrin PM knocked me out till lunch.

"Ouch..." I groaned as I rolled out of bed.

A shower was in order, and it lasted long enough that the air in the bathroom became difficult to breathe. But at least the water had loosened the tension in my neck, and I felt marginally awake.

I needed to do laundry today. With a towel wrapped around my hips and Colt in the forefront of my mind, I picked out a pair of sweats and a tee from my closet and forced my sluggish mind to put together a list of things for me to do today.

I had to prepare the work report, so I powered up my computer before I left my bedroom. Colt had called me a city boy, and perhaps I was, but the Mercedes didn't represent how I lived. It'd been a birthday present slash thank-you gift from my father when I turned twenty-five. I'd worked day and night for months to rebrand his agency, to give it a modern design

and logo, including a new website and everything they produced in print, from business cards to the agents' profiles. I'd also designed a guide for potential clients that many agencies tried to copy today. A guide with questions, explanations, options, and suggestions that could lead the way to a potential buyer's dream home.

I hardly had a dream home of my own. I had a rather small one-bedroom apartment, but because the living room and kitchen blended together, along with a nook that was supposed to be a dining area, it felt more spacious.

My building was also old, and when they renovated a few years back to meet the demands of the fire department, they'd only retired the fire escape that ran vertically along the back. They hadn't removed it. Meaning, the tenants now had a makeshift balcony.

Granted, you had to climb out the living room window to get there, but it was still a popular feature when I entertained friends here. My mother had made the area cozy with a chair, bistro lights, and some potted herbs that a neighbor of mine took care of. She watered my plants, and I fed her cat when she was out of town. It was a good deal.

Making my way to the kitchen, I could visualize Colt taking in the place. He'd criticize the walls, I was sure. White-painted brick with absolutely nothing on them, not counting the flat screen in the living room. I...just hadn't gotten around to it. I would have to buy a drill bit that went through brick. I'd tried to compensate with tall shelves and a couple floor lamps, though it was still pretty bare.

As I waited for the coffee to brew, I surveyed my living room and wondered if there was anything here Colt would

like. Or if it was all too modern for him. The floor, I guessed. A cowboy would like rustic wood. Right?

I shook my head at myself and—then my phone rang. I grabbed it off its stand on the counter that separated the kitchen from the rest of the space and saw my parents' number on the display. I wasn't surprised. By now, my parents had completed their lunch routine. He called her every day when he ate in his office. It was sweet.

"Afternoon, Mom." I cleared my throat and grabbed one of the mugs that hung underneath the cupboards.

"Hi, honey," she replied. "I spoke to your father. He said you're sick? Is there anything I can do?"

"Nah, I'm okay." I yawned and poured a mug. "The trip just knocked me out for a bit."

"I figured it was somethin' like that," she murmured. "Are you still coming over for dinner later?"

Fuck, I'd forgotten. "Yeah, I'll be there."

It was a reminder. Not only of dinner, but of the fact that I had my own life to get back to. I had a dinner party at a friend's house next weekend, lunch plans with a few people from my kink community on Thursday... We were planning an event together.

How quickly all of that had been forgotten when I was with Colt. Christ, one might think we'd shared more than twenty-four hours together.

That following Thursday, I worked from home before I was to meet up with my friends.

It was four minutes past ten in the morning when my computer dinged with a notification that Colt had accepted my friend request on Facebook.

Finally, I could gain access to his profile. The past few days, I'd only seen his profile picture. Which wasn't even of him. It was just a fighter jet.

“Sweet Jesus.” I leaned forward and clicked my way through his pictures. Most of them were Air Force-related. Him standing with his shoulders squared and arms folded over his chest in front of the fighter jet he flew. An F-16, I'd learned through some late-night research. There were pictures of him and his buddies. All geared up in flight suits, dressed down in tees and military-style pants, dressed down further in workout clothes... More fighter jets—Christ, *loads* of them.

I got the distinct feeling that he had a thing for jets.

I smiled and drank from my coffee.

There were a few pictures of his family too. His mother was a short, lovely-looking lady, and she wore the proudest smile standing there wedged between Colt and his father. And she appeared every bit as proud in the next photo, which was of just her and another woman, who I assumed was Colt's sister. The siblings shared similar features to their dad. Rich brown hair with lighter streaks, green eyes. Colt's sister looked like another hell-raiser. She had the same smirk as Colt. She was a couple inches taller than their mother.

A message popped up, and I clicked on it right away.

Hey. Sorry I haven't been available until now. Work's crazy before we ship out. I'm back at Shaw. We leave tomorrow. Hope you're well, pretty boy. I have just enough

time to stalk your photos for a bit before my debriefing from today's training. Talk soon. –Top

I chuckled, feeling absurdly giddy at his quick reappearance in my life today. Of course he signed off with his call sign. *Top*. To bug me, no doubt.

I fired off a response for him to read when he had the time.

Good to hear from you, little one. :-) No need to apologize. I know you're busy. I actually read something for family and friends of service members. I don't expect frequent updates, so don't worry. And I know you'll be in another mind-set when you're overseas. Just take care of yourself, and I'm here for whenever. –A toppier Top.

I wanted him to know I'd read up on deployments. Even if we were only friends, at best—and very new ones—I took this seriously. I wouldn't bother him with frivolous crap when he was in the middle of a war zone. He'd have enough pressure and distractions.

Colt sent me a quick reply before he signed off.

You're such a fucking Daddy. Oh, and the third picture in your album, the one with your sleeves rolled up? I saved it to jerk off to. Later.

I laughed under my breath and went to my album to see what picture he'd saved. I was friends with my parents on Facebook, so I knew it wouldn't be anything scandalous.

“Huh.” There were better photos than that one, though. A friend had taken it of me last summer. We'd been to an outdoor craft beer festival, and you could see I'd had more than a few beers by the time the picture was taken. My smile was wider than usual, my eyes a little glassy. I remembered having just laughed my ass off because another friend had

spilled beer on us. Which, thankfully, didn't show because my shirt was black. My pants had been another story—gray had become black—but they were hidden under the table where we sat.

I'd had a bit of a tan after a weekend in Providence.

So maybe I would wear that button-down when I saw Colt again?

It took me a few weeks, but at long last, I eased back into the everyday life I'd cultivated to fit me the past couple of years. There was structure and a routine that I enjoyed, set hours for work and always a plan with friends.

The fact that Colt had the ability to shake the foundation rattled around in my head, though I did my best to put him in the category where he belonged. He was a Facebook friend. One I was indescribably drawn to, but a Facebook friend nonetheless.

It actually helped that we didn't talk much. A couple short messages here and there, that was all.

He was in Iraq.

I watched the news a lot more lately.

Not today, though. I'd had a taxing meeting with my father, who was disappointed I wanted to leave the company, so I'd needed a distraction. When a friend had called to ask if I could fill in as dungeon monitor at a kink event, I'd jumped at the opportunity to get out of my apartment.

The club was cloaked in darkness, and the music was too heavy for my tastes, but those participating were thoroughly

enjoying themselves. The place was called The Attic and looked the part, including the vaulted ceiling. A bar at each end and scening booths along the walls, with a seating area and a dance floor in the middle.

Tonight's theme was like a kick in the head, Bigs and their Littles, and I was spending the majority of the time telling Littles not to go too close to active scenes.

"Mister West!" someone hollered.

I squinted toward the bar and spotted the only girl I'd ever had a relationship with. A nonsexual one, of course, but it had fit us perfectly at the time. I smiled and watched her maneuver herself between the crowds of people to get to me. I couldn't leave my spot at the moment. A Mommy Domme had tied her girl to a whipping post, and I knew they both played hard enough that I wanted to stay and keep an eye on them just in case.

"You haven't visited in *forever!*" Ivy ran the last distance, her dark curls bouncing near the bodice of her dress, and I grinned and held out my arms just as she jumped. "Hi!"

"Hi, sweet girl." I gave her cheek a kiss and hugged her tightly. "Are you up to no good as usual?"

She laughed and squirmed her way down. "You know it." She shot me an impish grin and smoothed down her dress. "So why haven't you been around? Are all the hotties in your other community keeping you that busy?"

I laughed and snuck a glance at the Domme who was now dripping hot wax over her sub's breasts. "Mostly work, I'm afraid," I told Ivy. "You know you're more than welcome to join us for our events too, right?"

She'd accompanied me before, and it wasn't like everyone there was gay.

Ivy puffed out her cheeks and crossed her eyes. "Then I'll never meet a Dom for myself. Oh! Speaking of." She got excited. "I played with River and Reese earlier. They were so much fun!"

That was interesting. I didn't know they were back in town. The twin brothers were thrill seekers to the extreme. River had a job he never divulged much about that took him all over the world too. Last I heard, they were living in Bangladesh or something.

"You are showing surprisingly few bruises to have played with them, little one," I noted with a smirk.

Even in the dark, I caught Ivy's blush.

"Let's just say I can't sit down," she replied.

I chuckled.

Much like me, River and Reese struggled to find the partner who fit just right. They were both gay, sadistic beyond words, always played together, and were exclusively drawn to sadomasochists who got off on adrenaline rushes. That's where adorable unicorns like Ivy came to our rescue. Despite her young age of twenty-four, she'd been around for as long as she'd been legal, and she took it upon herself to welcome newbies by pointing out that nonsexual play was a great way to explore certain kinks. And she wasn't wrong. Submissives, in particular, risked getting too attached when they were new in BDSM. Having someone like Ivy, and those of us who agreed with her, to show them options was wonderful.

The only downside was that the longing grew within. I felt the ache flaring up here and there. I wanted a Little to take

care of, to guide, to push, to use, to nurture. Someone who obeyed me, someone who called me Daddy.

I met up with both Ivy and Reese for lunch the following week.

I'd been stuck in meetings all morning, so it felt nice to get out for a bit. The weather was lovely, the air was crisp, whispering of the last notes of summer before fall arrived. Ivy was waiting for me outside the French bistro, and she wore scrubs underneath her cardigan, so I assumed she was working today too.

"Hi, sexy suit guy, do I know you?" She waggled her eyebrows.

"Hello, beautiful dork. You've seen me around once or twice." I dipped down and kissed her cheek. "Are you going to inhale lunch, or can you sit down with us this time?"

She chuckled and linked her arm with mine. "I'm actually just off my shift—plus overtime. This is my final meal before I hopefully sleep for twenty-four hours."

Nothing had changed there, I noted quite sourly. The girl was always working. She was an ICU nurse over at GW Hospital, and she took all the overtime she could. And then some.

"Reese is already inside," she said.

"Then why aren't you?" I opened the door for her.

Ivy flushed. "He's still scary, Lucas. You wouldn't understand."

I laughed softly, then notified the hostess that our friend was at our table. With a hand at the small of Ivy's back, I guided her through the busy lunch crowd until we reached Reese in the back.

Reese nodded at us and rose from his seat—

“—Iraq or Afghanistan, I don't know.”

I whipped around to see who had mentioned Iraq, but it was impossible to tell. Behind me, Reese and Ivy greeted each other. I kept searching. I heard Reese tease Ivy about the fact that she could let him whip her ass but she was too shy to sit next to him at a crowded restaurant in broad daylight. The background noise drowned out the possibility of finding whoever had talked about Iraq. Nothing had happened, had it? I hadn't checked the news since before I took the Metro to work this morning.

Fuck. Knowing someone who was deployed was freaking traumatic. I couldn't imagine what actual family went through.

“You okay, buddy?” Reese asked.

I scanned the lunch guests once more, then nodded once and turned back to Reese and Ivy. They were looking at me quizzically. I couldn't blame them.

“Sorry about that.” I extended my hand to Reese and straightened my tie. “It's good to see you again, my friend.”

“You too, West.” He shook my hand firmly and clapped me on the shoulder. “River wanted to make it, but he's working.”

Reese and River were one and the same. Where some twins wanted to break free to find their own identity, others were two peas in a pod and happy to stay that way. River and Reese were bikers without ugly mustaches and bandanas,

James Deans without hair gel, quarterbacks without gear, and punks without anarchy shirts. Rough around the edges was putting it mildly, yet they were also charming as hell.

The only way I could tell the two apart was by the tattoo Reese had on his neck. River was also a bit quieter than his other half.

We chitchatted to catch up while we ordered and waited for our food to arrive, and Ivy was too cute when she became excited. She'd evidently hung out a bit with the twins since they'd come home a couple weeks ago, and every now and then, she would tug on my arm and go, "Oh, tell Lucas about the time you went..." *Insert anecdote about fun adventure.*

"And yet, you're too afraid to go near him," I teased.

Ivy huffed. "Look, mister fister—"

Reese and I barked out a laugh.

"*Listen!*" Ivy tugged on her ear, frustrated. "They were nice until the last party. They told me I better watch myself! So that's what I'm doing. Ya gotta be smart, son."

"Same applies here, you know." I stifled my amusement and draped an arm along the back of her chair. "Don't get too sassy with me. Definitely don't call me son."

She contemplated what I'd said, probably scheming and looking for loopholes—the brat—then scrunched her nose at me. "But I can call you fister?"

I lifted a shoulder and exchanged a "why not?" look with Reese. "At least it's more accurate."

Reese nodded and closed his fist for Ivy to see. "Nothin' like hearing that sharp scream when you—"

"Okay, I get it!" Ivy exclaimed.

I smirked and took a sip of my wine.

Our food came shortly after, and Ivy pushed for the next thing Reese simply “had to tell” me.

Reese waved his fork at her. “Do you have a list somewhere that you’re checking off, sassafras? How many topics are left?” He snorted when she pretended to zip her mouth and throw away the key, and then he faced me instead. “But I guess I should tell you why I wanted to meet up.”

“Because I’m wonderful to be around?” I guessed, cutting into my duck.

He puckered his lips. “Always, princess. More than that, Riv and I are opening a kink place, and we want to build our own community around it.”

My brows went up, and my food was momentarily forgotten. “Color me interested. Tell me more.”

He launched into the plan he’d put together with his brother and told me they’d already bought a piece of land outside the city. There was a big house too, a three-story Victorian, but it needed work. They wanted it to be exclusive, invite-only. Members paid an annual fee to gain access.

I was already nodding. Christ, this could be big. “I like the part about the membership. We’d be able to get away from the pop-up events.”

It was basically what we had now. Kink communities rented regular nightclubs for special occasions. A club that was solely a kink dungeon was rare.

“We knew you’d get it,” Reese said. “We’re sick of that too. Then we visited this place in Germany, and it was fucking heaven. It sparked the idea.” He shoveled some food into his mouth and continued. “I haven’t told you the best part yet.

Most of the property is forest. Think of the games we could play. Capture-takedowns, hide-and-seek—”

“Easter egg hunts!” Ivy squealed behind her hands.

I laughed and kissed her temple. “Where you little ones are the eggs, maybe.”

“Now we’re talking.” Reese nodded at me. “One more thing. We want your help with a website.”

I didn’t even hesitate. It would be the perfect distraction to work on at night when I was otherwise watching the news and stalking Colt’s Facebook profile.

SEVEN

“**B**ut it’s a good idea, isn’t it?” I trapped my phone between my cheek and shoulder and picked another bottle of wine. “You won’t have to hire someone new to make up a whole department. I’ll keep you as an account instead.”

Dad hummed in the background, and I moved on to the whites. Trader Joe’s was having a wine sale, and I wasn’t missing it.

“It’s a risk, son. That’s all. Starting your own business—it’s not for everyone.”

“Uh-huh. I’m well aware.” I had been raised by a man who ran a successful business after all. I knew the hours he’d put in to make it. “Is Mom still on her Chilean wine kick?”

“Where are you?” he asked.

“Trader Joe’s,” I replied. Meaning, two minutes from my apartment. “It’s half-off on one I know she’s liked.”

“I’m sure she’d like a bottle,” he said. “What sparked this idea that you would start your own marketing firm?”

“A friend—I’m helping him and his brother with a project.” And I was loving it. “When he first asked me a few weeks ago, it was only a website. Now I’m helping them with

all kinds of things, and it's... I can't describe it. It's what I want to do."

We were putting our stamp on the land they'd bought. When the house was finally ready, it was going to be unforgettable. We had a name and a logo, and I was working on the concept whenever I had time.

"Can I call you back in five?" I asked. "I can't hold the phone, and don't make me choose between you and wine."

Dad laughed gruffly and ended the call.

With the phone back in my pocket, I could pick out two more bottles, and then I made my way to the registers. I should've taken a cart. Though, there was tomorrow too. The sale didn't end until Saturday.

I'd just left the store with six bottles of wine when Dad called again.

"I said I'd call you back, Dad," I chuckled.

There was a pause, and then...and then it wasn't my father at all. "I usually prefer Daddy, but Dad is an improvement, I guess."

Colt's voice made me stop dead in my tracks, and my heart jumped up into my throat.

Holy fuck.

"Colt," I breathed. "I...I can't tell you how good it is to hear your voice. How are you? What time is it over there? Are you okay?" *Shut up! Remember what you read.* Christ. I was an asshole. I shook my head at myself and picked up the pace again. "I'm sorry. The website told me not to overwhelm you. You talk. I'll be home in one minute, but you talk."

He laughed softly, sounding tired but in good spirits. “You’re sweet. The base is pretty dead. I couldn’t sleep, and no one’s hogging the phones, so I thought I’d call.”

I had to stop myself from asking why he couldn’t sleep. There’d been an escalation in some conflict zones, but I didn’t know exactly where he was.

“You do tend to have your best ideas at night,” I agreed.

That earned me another little laugh, and it felt so good to hear. It was the best thing I’d heard in...well, over three months.

There was a beat of silence, long enough for me to enter my building and climb two flights of stairs, and then I had to say something.

“I think about you a lot,” I admitted.

“Yeah?” There was no hint of arrogance, no smugness in his tone.

It worried me.

“Yeah.” I reached the third floor and set down my bags to dig out my keys. “I bet I’ve visited your Facebook more than you have.”

“Heh. Well, good. I like being memorable.”

“That would be an understatement.” As soon as I was in my apartment, I abandoned the wine on the hallway floor and aimed for the couch. I wanted to sit down and be able to give him my full attention. “What do you need, Colt? You sound a little...lost.”

He hummed. “I had my worst training today. I fuckin’ sucked. I missed a bogey—completely missed it. I didn’t see it.”

I squinted at nothing and rubbed my forehead. I didn't know what a bogey was, but I'd heard it in movies.

“And a bogey is, uh...”

Colt chuckled lazily. “When we see something on the radar that we can't identify—or we get a visual on.” Then he quieted down for a brief moment, and when he spoke again, the humor was gone. “I can't afford to miss those things. I'm better than that. And out here...? Fuckin' hell.” He blew out a heavy breath. “Lucas, I have a really selfish favor to ask of you.”

“Name it.” Right now, I didn't think there was anything he could ask that I wouldn't do. All my warning bells were going off because of his behavior. Something was wrong, and I wanted to fix it.

He cleared his throat. “Are you seein' anyone?”

“No...?” I frowned. “That's—no. I'm not there right now.” The more I thought about it, the more certain I became that it was because of him. I could admit I missed someone, something, but there was no face to those dreams, nor was I in a place where I had the slightest desire to get involved.

I'd been to a few events since I'd met Colt, and...no. I hadn't looked at another man with that type of interest.

“I woke up pissy and distracted today,” he said. “Pissy with you, pissy with myself.” He huffed, then let out a sigh. “I had a weird dream that fucked me up. You were here and—” He chuckled darkly. “Christ. You were here on base, and you were datin' one of the maintenance guys...”

“Oh,” I mouthed to myself.

“And then this morning, I saw him, you know? He was on the crew making sure my jet was flight ready, and I snapped at the fucker.”

I pinched my smile and felt the warmest sensation roll in, settling in my chest.

Colt scoffed. “I’ve never been jealous before, okay? I don’t know what the fuck is wrong with me, but I reckon it’s why I didn’t do well.”

I had no words to describe how adorable he was right now. So unsure and flustered.

“Ask your favor, sweetheart.” I smiled and loosened my tie to take it off. “I’m sure I’ll agree.”

He took a breath. “We’re going dark for a while. I’m part of a mission—can’t really talk about it, but I’ll be out of reach for weeks. And for my peace of my mind, I’d love it if you were as celibate as I am.”

“Consider it done.” It wasn’t even an issue. This mission was, however. “You can’t just drop that on me, Colt. Will you be safe? You have to be safe.”

“Did you hear what I said?” he asked exasperated. “I’m asking you not to date. To fuck.”

“And I’m agreeing.”

“Why?” he demanded.

I laughed and shook my head. I was so screwed with this man, and I couldn’t deny it anymore. Even less so now that he’d admitted to jealousy. I wasn’t alone in being screwed, and that helped. In fact, I was half embarrassed to say I felt fucking giddy.

“Because of this arrogant, overbearing fighter pilot I met in Richmond a few months ago. He’s constantly on my mind. As soon as someone mentions Iraq, I’m scrolling through the news to see if anything happened.”

“Oh.” That appeared to take the fight out of him. “Okay, good. I needed to hear that.” He coughed. “And, uh...yeah, fuck. I fucking miss you, Lucas. Deal with it.”

I grinned and rubbed a hand over my mouth. “I don’t know why you’re being so defensive, but it’s very endearing.”

“Shut up.”

I laughed.

Fall arrived with a week-long rainstorm, and I took my car to work because I couldn’t be assed with the Metro. I was also feeling a bit sorry for myself and didn’t want to be around people.

I went from watching the news obsessively to shutting it all down and avoiding everything that had to do with the war in the Middle East. Everyone had questions, and experts had answers nobody understood. Just the other month, President Obama had stated that we were bringing our troops home from Iraq, and yet...

It was nerve-racking.

In my attempts to learn more, I’d picked up bits and pieces and knew there were regions in Iraq that were controlled by rebels, and the north was the worst. Of course, that was also where I suspected Colt was. Mainly because of what I’d heard and read, but partly because Colt’s mother’s Facebook wasn’t set to private. She’d shared a couple articles and some news about things happening near a base in Mosul.

I contemplated contacting Colt’s mother every freaking day.

I'd contemplated picking up a drug habit too...

Arriving at work, I was surprised to see Mom here. She was chatting with Helen, the receptionist, and I couldn't sneak by without her seeing me. My mother could read me too well, and I wasn't in the mood to divulge things I didn't understand, such as the feelings I was developing for a man I hardly knew. A man I hadn't spoken a word with in twenty-two days. Not that I was counting.

Mom spotted me as soon as I stepped out of the elevator.

"Lucas, darling!" She hurried over to me, looking happier than usual. "Last time I interrupted your father in a meeting, he wasn't very happy, so perhaps you can interrupt this time?"

I chuckled in confusion and kissed her cheek. "Not that I'm not thrilled with how easily you'd throw me under the bus, but could you tell me why? Has something happened?"

"Only good things," she assured with a big smile. "Charlie and Maxine had their baby." That was definitely good news. "Charlie called me a while ago, and I want to go over there. These things can't wait. Why don't you join us?"

I checked my watch. I was technically only working here part time now, so I could postpone work until later. I wasn't sure Dad could, though.

"I'll go see what the meeting's about," I told her. "If he's in there with clients, he'll have to see the baby later."

Mom huffed. "Fine."

An hour later, I was sitting in a chair next to Maxine's bed, and I was holding the tiniest, most precious baby girl I had

ever laid eyes on.

Maxine was asleep.

Dad wasn't here.

Charlie stood by the window, visibly exhausted but happy.

My mother was taking an unreasonable number of pictures.

"She will spoil you rotten," I whispered to our newest family member. The girl, who didn't have a name yet, had a tight grip on my index finger, and she blinked drowsily.

"I think it's Grandma's turn again." Mom tucked her camera into her purse.

Just as well. My phone had beeped a couple minutes ago, and I only had sound alerts from one website. A military-oriented online magazine that followed the war closely and posted news several times a day.

After pressing a careful kiss to the baby girl's forehead, I stood up to switch places with my mother. Then I excused myself from the room to get everyone some coffee across the street. Charlie looked like he could use a double shot of espresso.

On the way down in the elevator, I brought out my phone to check my notification.

"Three US military jets crash in battle with insurgents in northern Iraq."

My stomach dropped, and I was overwhelmed with nausea as I clicked on the article.

This morning, it was confirmed that three F-16s crashed in the Nineveh province on Wednesday night local time. The Air

Force is currently assisting the 101st Airborne in the area—

I abruptly pocketed my phone, unable to read another word, and left the elevator. Oh God. Oh hell. It wasn't him. There was no way. I scrubbed my hands over my face, then searched unseeingly for the exit. There were too many people around me. I had to get out. I had to find a private place where I could read the rest of the article.

I had to get home.

Coffee. You were going to buy coffee.

I cursed under my breath and stalked out of the hospital, and I jogged across the street to Starbucks.

I didn't know half of what I ordered, only that I could feed an army with everything I bought. Cookies, coffees, decaf iced tea, juice, and some other shit. Truth be told, I didn't care. I wasn't staying. I was going to bring everything up to my mother and the new parents, and then I was getting my ass in a cab.

When I finally got home, I rushed toward my bedroom to power up my computer. Mom's confusion and worry as to why I'd taken off in such a rush would be addressed much later. Now it was time to contact someone else's mother. I'd had it with the lack of information.

Colt was alive; that was all I knew. The three pilots who'd gone down in the rough terrain of northern Iraq had ejected from the jets before the crash. And what I needed to know now was if Colt, in fact, was even involved in the mess.

I prayed he wasn't.

Logging in to Facebook, I shrugged out of my jacket and made my way to Colt's mother's profile. I sent her a friend request along with a message.

Hello Mrs. Carter,

I don't think your son has mentioned me, but we've grown quite close. Last time we spoke, he told me he wouldn't be able to contact me for several weeks, and that was no problem until I read about the F-16 crash today. Do you possibly have any information to share? I would really only need to know that he's okay, though the questions have certainly piled up for months now. Anything you're willing to divulge, I'd greatly appreciate.

Best regards,

Lucas West

I added my phone number in case she wanted to look me up. I couldn't blame her if she did.

Then I went back to the hallway to hang up my jacket and get rid of my shoes. When I returned to the bedroom, it was with a bottle of Maker's, a glass, and the promise that my pizza would be here in twenty.

If I could even eat. After taking a generous swallow of my drink, I sat back in my desk chair and chewed on my thumbnail as if I were still seven years old.

Why was this happening to me? Where was my Little? A kinky soulmate who begged for Daddy? My greatest concern should be work or whether I was attending a private play party on Saturday or going to a club. I shouldn't be fretting my ass off over a man I'd spent twenty-four hours with.

You know it's more than that.

I sighed and ran a hand through my hair.

I thought back on the messages we'd sent each other and the one brief talk we'd had over the phone, and...fuck my life, it *was* more than twenty-four hours. It was four months of banter, quick jokes, stalking each other's photos online, and making sure the other one was all right.

"Jesus Christ." I blew out a heavy breath and leaned back, staring up at the ceiling.

I was falling hard for the bastard.

Pizza arrived, and I didn't touch it.

The evening news passed, and my computer remained silent.

It wasn't until two god-awful days later that Mrs. Carter responded, and by then, I knew everyone involved in the crash had made it and was back to safety.

I still didn't have any details, though.

I was tired and wary when I opened her message.

Hi, Lucas. I apologize for the late response, but I had to check with my husband and my son before I could, in good conscience, tell you anything. Colt is fine, as I am sure you've heard by now, and he's going to contact you soon.

I am attaching the debrief my husband was privy to. It will give you some answers.

With that out of the way, I would love to know more about you! Colt doesn't get bashful about anything, but when I asked him about you, he sure took us by surprise. You must be special to him. Perhaps we can meet? I will be in DC to visit a dear friend in a couple weeks' time.

Look forward to hearing from you!

—*Mary*

It was impossible not to smile a little, weak and uncertain as it was, at how Colt had reacted. I couldn't picture him as bashful.

Then I clicked on the link Mary had sent, and I saw it was a picture taken of a document they must've printed out. Several lines had been blacked out, and I had to zoom in to see what someone had written on the page.

Four jets had been out that night, Colt's being one of them. They'd flown low to do a drop of...okay, I didn't understand that abbreviation but felt it didn't matter. They'd been close to the ground in a valley high up in the mountain range, a place they'd thought was secure.

It had been anything but. Insurgents had been all over the place and opened fire. Two F-16s had been hit immediately, and the pilots had ejected from their aircraft.

Colt and another pilot named Lindsey had launched missiles to take out heat sources on the ground, eliminating four targets—four settlements. The report continued with some jargon I couldn't decipher, and a whole paragraph following that was blacked out. But somehow, Captain Lindsey had been shot down too, leaving Colt alone in the air.

I sucked in a breath, realizing I hadn't been breathing, and read the rest.

Colt had taken out the last targets and then circulated over the area while waiting for rescue. He'd been reprimanded for staying in the conflict area past the point of no return, and he'd been dangerously low on fuel by the time helicopters had

arrived to bring the pilots back to base. Colt had then received in-air fuel before returning to base as well.

I sat there and stared at the text for a long time, reading it over and over.

I'd once called him a hero, and I would do it again.

I didn't understand why I was so nervous to see Colt. I knew he was okay. He'd messaged me on Facebook less than two hours after his mother had reached out, and he'd asked if I had Skype.

Even if I hadn't had Skype, I would've gotten my hands on it.

I was actually going to see him, see his face, and my stomach was a chaotic mess because of it.

I stayed up until three in the morning for when he was off his shift and could talk.

3:02

I paced in front of my computer and sipped my coffee. My fourth cup. Tomorrow was going to be rough. I had meetings starting at seven, and one of them was with a potential client for my own business.

“Oh, thank fuck.” I rushed to the computer when it signaled an incoming call, and I pressed the button to answer before I'd even landed in my chair. Then Colt's gorgeous face appeared on the screen, and I could only stare. His hair was shorter. The scruff was gone. He'd gotten a tan. But most of all, he looked hardened. It was as sexy as it was worrying.

“We gotta Skype more often.” His rich voice filtered through, and he raised his brows as he stared back at me. Well, currently, his stare was reminding me that I wasn’t wearing a shirt. After my shower, I’d only put on a pair of sweat pants.

“No argument from me,” I answered. “How are you doing?”

“Tired,” he yawned. “It’s been a long day. Fuck, it’s been a long *week*.”

“I read the report your mother sent me,” I said. “Why on earth did you get reprimanded for literally watching over the pilots who’d crashed?”

He grinned sleepily and scratched his arm. “You get yelled at when you don’t follow protocol. If rescue hadn’t arrived when it did, I would’ve gone down too. I was out of fuel.”

But still. “You were protecting them.”

He shrugged. “Gettin’ yelled at ain’t always a bad thing, darlin’. They have to do it. Don’t mean they would’ve wanted me to do anything different.”

Fair enough, I supposed.

“How’re you?” he asked.

“Good. Worried about you.” I let out a small laugh and leaned back in my chair. “You’re hot, Captain.”

“Ditto.” He rested his forearms on the desk and cracked his knuckles. I couldn’t tell where he was by the background. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he sat in a cubicle. “I have some good news. Looks like we’re coming home earlier.”

“Really?” Hope flared up inside me. “Anytime soon?”

“Well. No.” He chuckled. “But nine months is better than twelve, right?”

“Ugh. I honestly feel like throwing a tantrum,” I admitted. Nine months was still five months away.

A faint smile graced his lips, and he rested his chin in one of his hands. “It’s good seein’ you, Lucas.”

Those words took the fight out of me, and I mirrored him and leaned forward. “I miss you.”

His eyes softened. “Me too.”

We went quiet and just watched each other. Maybe we were thinking the same thing, how strange all of this was that we had this level of chemistry. A small voice in the back of my head kept asking how this was ever going to work, but when I saw him, when I sat here and stared at Colt, I didn’t fucking care. I had to have him.

“Your mother wants to meet me,” I said.

He drummed his fingers absently against his cheek, and one of the corners of his mouth tugged up a bit more. “She told me. Are you?”

I lifted a shoulder. “If there’s no objection from you. We haven’t set any boundaries, so it’s up to you.”

He hummed. “I’m the selfish dick who wants to claim you from thousands of miles away. So, no, it’s actually up to you, Luke.” His tone changed to carry some gravity. “I can’t get you outta my head for shit. No matter how different we are—or...” He huffed. “Rather, we’re the fucking same. In what we’re usually into, I mean.” He received only agreement from me. “Doesn’t matter. I want you. I wanna try. But—”

“Why are there buts?” I blurted out. “You were doing so well. No buts, please.”

He smirked, undoubtedly thinking of puns.

“I want to try too, Colt.”

He offered a patient smile but went on. “It’s still unreasonable to ask you to wait for me. Nine months—after half a weekend together? Come on.” His expression turned hesitant.

“I don’t care. You’re already all I can think about.” I shook my head. “You gotta say it, though. Set the boundaries. I’ll need them.”

He cocked his head at that. “Why do you need them?”

Because...because we lived in the real world, and at some point, we would have to move those boundaries if we ever wanted to live out our fetishes to the fullest. And before we went there, I would need stability. Security.

“I’m not poly,” I admitted. “I’ve only been in monogamous relationships.”

“So have I.”

Oh. Colt struck me more as one who’d tried everything.

“Okay, but eventually...” I trailed off.

He nodded slowly, processing. “That’s why I’m cautious about trapping you. It was one thing to ask for a few weeks while I had a mission. It’s a whole other, setting you up for monogamy when we both know we’re not gonna find that particular thing with each other.” It hurt to hear it, despite that I felt the same. It was nothing but the truth. “If we’re open—” He paused at my cringe and became visibly confused. “You’re

kinda givin' me mixed signals here. The way I figure, if we're open, I can get used to it. I think." He frowned to himself.

"I need to build something," I explained. "I have to know you and I are solid. It feels bizarre talking about it so soon, but it's what my gut is telling me. Yes, eventually we will have to explore options. *Eventually*. Right now, I just want you. You're my priority. I can miss the Daddy/Little thing but miss you more. And—fuck. We shared more than twenty-four hours, Colt. I know you well enough to be sure that I'd like to go all in with you—and only you—and create something that's only ours first. And whatever happens after that, we will figure it out together. At least, I wanna try. Does that make sense?"

"It does," he murmured, smiling tentatively. "I'm gonna drive you insane."

I exhaled a laugh. "You already do, baby."

His grin reached his eyes there. "All right...let's consider ourselves off the market, then."

Let's.

It was fruitless to rein in the smiling. God help me, but I was with Colt.

"Anythin' else I can do for you, darlin'?" he drawled.

I inclined my head. "You can come home to me, Captain."

"Workin' on it. I promise."

EPILOGUE 1

Nine months.

Two hundred and seventy-seven days, if one wanted to be accurate.

Two thousand days if one went by how long it'd *felt* like.

Colt's squadron was coming home to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina today, and the state was giving them a warm welcome for it being early March. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and we were all waiting for a roar of a greeting from our pilots.

I'd driven down with Colt's parents yesterday, and his father, James, had told me what to expect today. It hadn't been on my mind when I'd talked to Colt; that conversation had been all about the fact that he was coming home. That said, James had impressed me with the details of today.

The Air Force came home in style when an entire squadron was returning. Cargo planes with non-flying airmen, missile crews, engineers, intelligence, and others would be escorted by the fighter unit. There were other types of planes that James had mentioned, I wanted to recall something like...tanker? I wasn't sure. Either way, it was a massive homecoming, and you could tell. The base had gone all out with flags, balloons, live music, and banners.

Families had been here all day. Inside of a huge hangar, there'd been three hot dog stands and a bunch of picnic tables. Each hot dog stand had carried a sign displaying the name of the veterans charity their proceeds went to.

It was overwhelming. And it was quickly dawning on me how tight-knit the military community was. It was a lifestyle. There was no other way to describe it. It was a lifestyle, and there was something for everyone. Support groups, social functions, classes... If you were a service member or if you knew someone who was, there was a place for you.

As the squadron's arrival approached, most people moved out of the big hangar to wait in the sun. The band kept playing, children were running around, and the energy was buzzing.

We couldn't see the runway from here, but we'd see the planes fly in. Then they'd taxi in on the vast concrete taxiway in front of us. Maintenance crews had already walked out to the parking ramp where the pilots would pull in under a roof.

"Mia's late," James noted.

Mary patted his arm. "She'll be here."

"I know. I'm just pointin' out that she's late."

I slid on my Ray-Bans and kept my smirk to myself. If there was one thing I'd learned lately, it was that the Carters were all the same. Mary was the exception. She was the glue. But James, Colt, and Mia were all hell-raisers.

When we arrived down here yesterday, I'd met his sister for the first time. We'd gone out to dinner, and it'd been enough to discover she was basically a shorter, female version of Colt. Cheeky, sharp, lovely, and cocky. A force to be reckoned with.

A ball of nerves dropped into my gut as I checked my watch. They would be here any minute.

Fuck, I couldn't wait to see him again.

"I'm here! I'm here, I'm here." Mia ran over to us, carrying two cowboy hats. "I had to flirt with the guy checkin' my pass first."

I grinned.

James rolled his eyes.

"I'm glad you've got your priorities in order, sugar," Mary said.

I truly adored this family.

It was probably weird that I'd spent more time with Colt's parents than him, though it'd happened effortlessly. The Carters were kind people, and family was number one. After my initial meeting with Mary, they'd invited me down for dinner in Norfolk once a month.

They'd even met my own parents.

My father didn't quite understand my relationship with Colt yet, given how little we'd seen each other, but he would. I had no doubt.

"I spy with my little eye..." Mia squinted at the sky, and I was quick to follow her gaze. Holy hell, finally.

"Why can't I hear them?" I asked. The music wasn't *that* loud.

"Oh, bless." Mia came over to me and had to stand on her toes to pat me on the head. "You haven't been around fighters much. You see them before you hear them."

"Pat me on the head one more time, I dare you."

She narrowed her eyes at me.

I stared right back. It was eat or be eaten in the Carter family. If you didn't stand your ground, you would forever be the butt of every joke. A pro tip from Mary.

James snorted in amusement. "He'll fit right in."

"Mm-hmm," Mary agreed. "Oh! Here they come!"

My attention was back in the sky in an instant, and mere seconds later, the roar thundered. Nine fighter jets flew over the base in a V-formation, the sound so overpowering that I got goose bumps. Children with headphones screamed and cheered, waving madly in hopes of their own pilot seeing them on the ground.

"Watch my boy impress a crowd," Mary gushed. "He does this every time."

The jets came back around and broke formation, after which two fighters dove and—Jesus Christ—whizzed past us at an insane speed, all while doing spins and loops.

"One of them was Colt?" I asked to make sure. I had no words for the sensations coursing through me, but I wanted to freaking jump him.

James nodded. "He's not done yet. Cover your ears for this bit, son."

I watched. I gawked. I stared as Colt and his wingman came back once more, and I covered my ears just as the sound exploded above us, creating a sonic boom.

They broke through the sound barrier twice more before they flew off.

Foreplay was so unnecessary, I decided right then and there. He'd already seduced me.

My eyes were on him from the second he climbed out of the jet. He was some two hundred feet away, and that was the time I gave his family. I'd stay back a couple minutes so his parents and sister could hug him, and then it would be my turn, and I wouldn't be as generous about handing him over.

With all the jets safely parked and the pilots leaving the ramp, base personnel gave permission for family members to enter a sealed-off area of the taxiway. The band cranked up the country music, and Mia ran out alongside children who dragged their parents with them.

"A tradition of theirs," Mary explained. "They never miss each other's homecomings. Mia's next. She's shipping out to Afghanistan in a couple weeks."

"Great, another Carter to worry about," I muttered.

Mary laughed softly and gave my hand a squeeze. "Story of my life, honey."

We weren't the only ones who watched the Carter siblings when Mia reached Colt. She ran to him, he picked her up, and they hugged tightly as he spun her around. Then Mia slapped a cowboy hat onto Colt's head. The second hat was for her

"Where's the show, Top?" another pilot on the taxiway shouted over to Colt. "My wife brought singles!"

I couldn't hear Colt's response, only see how he threw back his head and laughed.

My chest seized. Sweet Jesus, how I loved him. Which I hadn't told him. I didn't know if he was waiting too or if he

wasn't there yet, but I was minutes away from letting him know.

Mia tugged on Colt's arm, and it looked like he was surrendering to whatever everyone was waiting for. Whether the wind was right and the music reached them out there, I had no idea, but that was when the two of them kicked into gear and showed the spectators how line dancing was done.

Some people were born to be in the spotlight, and Colt was one of them. The work he did, the personality he had...he wasn't meant for a life in the shadows. He was a natural entertainer, and making someone laugh was at the top of his agenda if they needed a pick-me-up. Because underneath the cockiness, behind the arrogance, was a caregiver with a big heart. A Daddy Dom who took it upon himself to guide, push, and nurture. A wonderful man who looked out for those he held dear.

He was a leader, but a reluctant one. He *showed* leadership; he never spoke of it. If someone asked for help, he helped. If someone pointed out that he was an authority figure, he called them—me—crazy. If he noticed he had an audience, he'd do one of two things. Be the entertainer like right now, or retreat a bit because this enigma I'd fallen for both loved and hated to be listened to. He wanted to run the world from a remote corner and only come out to play for the fun parts.

It was one of the things I'd discovered when we'd talked on the phone and Skyped these past months. He could be such a fucking child, and I supposed that was where I came in. He'd often started a conversation by bitching about something going on at base, and then I'd calmed him down, something that had given me a lot of satisfaction.

Let him shine, I thought, and when the leader turned into a toddler, I would take over. I would take care of him.

Colt greeted his mother much like he'd greeted Mia. He picked Mary up and spun her around, earning himself a slap on the shoulder. I smiled and approached slowly. Mary righted her skirt while Colt and James shook hands. James clasped Colt's shoulder too, giving it a squeeze, and Colt nodded and grinned at whatever his dad said.

My turn, Captain.

As if he heard my thoughts, Colt lifted his gaze, and it landed on me. He removed his cowboy hat and handed it over to Mary with a kiss to her cheek, and then he was walking toward me with purpose.

My pulse went through the roof, and we both picked up speed until we were within each other's reach. I threw my arms around his neck, and he wrapped his arms around my middle in a tight hold. I screwed my eyes shut. His flight suit had a bunch of straps everywhere, and it appeared heavy. It was in my way; I needed to be under his skin.

"Thank you for not spinning me around." My voice came out thick, and I realized I'd gotten emotional.

He chuckled hoarsely and tightened his hold further. "The thought did cross my mind, but I gotta piss so fuckin' bad."

I let out a laugh and eased up so I could get a proper look at him. That handsome face, how much I'd missed it. I cupped his cheeks and felt his scruff under my fingers.

"Are the diapers fighter pilots wear a myth?"

He shook his head in amusement. "You had to go there."

"You brought it up."

He chuckled. “They exist. I’ve never been on a mission that was long enough for me to need to try one, though. In today’s day and age...” He trailed off with a shrug.

I smiled and pressed my forehead to his. “You prima donnas in the Air Force are too fancy for that.”

“Somethin’ like that.” He closed the last distance and kissed me hard. “It felt like this day would never come.”

I hummed, definitely agreeing, and pecked him once, twice, three times. “You can fight me on this, but I’m gonna fuss over you a lot in the next foreseeable future.”

He grinned into one more kiss. “I’ll allow it. But only because I’m so fuckin’ in love with you, it ain’t funny.”

Oh, for the love of— I kissed him again, hard and deep, not caring that we were surrounded by hundreds of people.

“I was going to tell you first, goddammit,” I muttered, out of breath.

“You made your choice, pretty boy. You chose to talk about diapers.” He nipped at my bottom lip, then gripped my chin and gave us a few inches of distance. His eyes shone with happiness. “Tell me what, by the way?”

“That, come hell or high water, I’m done for.” I sighed through a soft chuckle at my own destiny. I was fucked. “I love you, Captain. I never stood a damn chance.”

A low growl rumbled in Colt’s chest as he kissed me. “Say that again but call me Major.”

I broke away and smiled curiously. “You got promoted?”

He nodded. “It’s not official yet, but yeah. For outstanding capabilities, leadership, and bravery. Can you believe that shit?”

If only he knew just how much I could believe it. “I can.” I touched his jaw. “But you’ll always be my Captain.”

The look on his face was priceless, and it was just so him. He wanted his new title. His new rank. He wanted me to replace Captain with Major. What he didn’t want to acknowledge was why it had been given to him. That part, he wanted to laugh off.

“I mean, you could *try* calling me Major,” he suggested.

“Where’s the fun in that?” I patted his cheek. “Kidding aside, I’m very proud of you, Captain.”

He nodded once, squinted, and scratched his eyebrow with his middle finger. “Come hell or high water, huh?”

He got it.

After an eternity of waiting, we got to take our fighter pilot to our hotel an hour away in Columbia. Mia drove ahead of us in her own car and met up with us in the lobby.

Colt threaded his fingers through mine, and I gave his hand a squeeze.

Soon. Two minutes tops, then we’d be alone in our room.

“Well,” Mary said, looking around her. “I mean, Colt, you showered and changed at the base, so there really isn’t a reason to wait. How about we try the restaurant here at the hotel? Then you can rest—”

“Mary.” James gave his wife a pointed look. Colt and I exchanged an amused glance. “Even I understand. I mean, it’s been almost a year...”

“We’re goin’ upstairs first, Ma,” Colt stated.

Mary, bless her heart, didn’t get it yet. “Why? You gotta be hungry, sugar.”

“I’m famished,” Colt agreed. “So Luke and I are gonna go fishin’.”

Mia spluttered a laugh, then shimmied her hips and sang. “Let’s go fishin’ in the dark...”

I pretended to look over my shoulder to hide my grin.

“Oh my God.” Mary understood now. “I’m so sorry! I’m... Goodness, of course. I’m sorry. You boys go and—yes. I’ll be at the bar, drinking heavily.”

The rest of the Carter family cracked up, hard, resulting in Mary stalking away from us.

“Come on, darlin’,” Colt chuckled, nodding at the elevators. “We’ll see you guys later.”

“Yeah, I’m not holdin’ my breath.” Mia linked arms with James and aimed for the bar and restaurant. “Daddy, can I buy you a whiskey?”

We heard the suspicion in James’s response as Colt and I reached the elevators. “Last time you offered to buy me a drink, you’d crashed my truck. What did you do, girl?”

I snickered and entered the car, and that was the end of the humor. Within a second, Colt had me up against a wall.

“Fourth floor,” I managed to say before he kissed me.

The first fuck was over embarrassingly quickly.

We hadn't even made it to the bed...

Thankfully, Colt was in no hurry to meet up with his family downstairs, so we shed the last of our clothes and slipped under the covers together.

He kissed my chest while I gathered my hands under my head and savored the dull pain from having his cock stretching my ass. Not having sex for almost a year was...new. But God, worth it. All I saw was this man.

"Any news about the transfer?" I asked lazily.

"Mmm." His teeth grazed one of my nipples. "I report at Langley in two weeks."

That was a relief. We'd be relatively close. Much closer than South Carolina, at least.

Colt had told me his goal was to be stationed in DC, though he'd have to wait a couple years. That was fine. He wasn't close to retirement yet, and I'd read up on enough military tales to be thankful we were on the same coast.

"Do you think you're going back to Iraq?" I hadn't wanted to ask, but I couldn't avoid it any longer. That was just how it was. I was dating a guy in the Air Force. Deployments were a part of it.

"I don't think anyone's goin' back there anytime soon." He seemed more interested in kissing my chest and stomach, not that I minded. He pushed down the duvet and got settled between my legs. "We're pulling out of Iraq—or that's the plan."

"Afghanistan, then? Or any other war zone?"

He shook his head. "Not now, anyway. I'll be home for a year or so before there's even talk about it, and by then, I'm

pretty sure we'll have new regulations in place.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s been a lot of debate about the toll it takes on pilots to be gone for twelve months. The missions turn us into head cases.” He winked up at me, and I merely touched his cheek. “I’ll tell you more about it—later.”

I smiled. “You got plans now?”

He hummed and licked the length of my cock, only to suck me into his mouth, and I let out a long sigh of pleasure and closed my eyes.

His tongue swirled around me, and he took his time to tease me and drive me fucking crazy. Long strokes, firm lips around me, humming sounds that sent vibrations up my shaft.

“Jesus fuck, love,” I exhaled.

My fingers disappeared into his short hair, and I guided him over me, but he set the pace. He found the most seductive rhythm and slowly and steadily pushed me toward the brink in the distance.

I rolled my hips and hit the back of his throat, my head sliding along the roof of his mouth, and it felt so good that I did it again and again and again. Colt caught on quickly, relearning my sensitive spots, and redoubled his efforts.

When I thought it couldn’t get any better, he tightened his lips around my cock further, and my abs clenched. I groaned and pushed him down on me. He let me have it. He let me fuck his mouth and take what I wanted.

“*God...*” I fisted my hair with both hands and arched my back.

I had to decide quickly if I wanted to come like this or if I wanted him to fuck me when I came.

I. Couldn't. Stop. Him.

I couldn't bring myself to pull away.

Colt sucked hard at my head and glided one hand up my thigh, up my hip, up my side, and I met his hand next to us and threaded our fingers together. Then he took me so deep, and I stumbled mentally. My heart pounded, my muscles contracted, and sweat beaded across my chest.

“I'm gonna come, Colt. *Fuck.*”

My orgasm surged through me and swept me with it, and I was gone.

My release shot out of me in sharp bursts, each one leaving me a bit more listless than the last.

Colt took all of me and squeezed my hand tightly.

I couldn't think. I swam in the bliss and fragments of faraway thoughts. I couldn't grasp anything.

As I shook with the remnants of the most intense orgasm I'd had in a year, Colt climbed over me, slicked up his cock, and pushed inside my ass.

I groaned through a gasp.

He kissed me brutally and fucked me even harder. Deep, forceful thrusts that halted my recovery. I was torn between begging him to stop and begging for more.

I lolled my head against the pillow and just barely managed to lift up enough to look between us. Trickle of come pulsed out of my cock, and I tasted it on Colt's tongue as he fucked me into the mattress.

“I love you.” His breathing turned shallow.

I slipped my feet up his calves and pulled him down on me. “I love you too.”

“Say it again.”

I moaned. “I love you.”

“Again,” he growled, punching into me.

I locked my fingers at the back of his neck and spoke against his lips. “I love you, Colt. Don’t—Christ, fuck, don’t stop.”

He came at me from every angle, and it was uncomfortably hot. He messed with my head. I didn’t know what I wanted. I was spent, yet his raw urgency was infectious, and I was turning into a desperate animal to match his inner beast.

“Fill me,” I panted. “I wanna feel it. Come in me.”

Colt groaned and buried his head in the crook of my neck. “Almost there, baby.”

Time lost its footing and ceased to exist. Something unfurled within me, and I drew a ragged breath. I blinked. What the fuck was happening? Pleasure and pain zinged and zapped their way around my system, dropping lower and lower. I couldn’t come. Oh God, but I could. Just as Colt’s thrusts became irregular and his breathing stuttered, a rapid rush of overwhelming euphoria flew through me and temporarily immobilized me.

I’d used forced orgasms on subs before and caused more than a few dry climaxes, but Jesus Christ, it’d never happened to me. Of course, Colt had to be the one to push me through it.

Colt shuddered violently above me, his labored breaths hitting my neck.

“Holy fuck,” he rasped.

“Yeah,” I breathed.

I winced when he pulled out of me. Landing right next to me, he somehow mustered the strength to haul me with him. His chest became my pillow, and he intertwined our legs and hugged me to him.

The absolute tranquility of my mind, combined with being in his arms, made me feel like I could take on anything, and I’d be fine. *We* would be fine.

I placed a hand over his heart, feeling it beat rapidly while he calmed down.

“I’ve missed you.” I kissed his chest.

“Mmm.” He gave me a squeeze. “Once I knew I had you to come home to... You kept me going at times, Lucas.”

I lifted my head and rested my chin on his chest so I could see him. “I want to be what you need in all this. You’ve been through a lot, and I can’t imagine half of it.”

He hummed. “After five deployments, at least I’ve gotten good at communicatin’. I don’t think you’ll have a lot to worry about, but I promise I’ll tell you.”

“Good. Always be open.”

His mouth twitched, and I saw the innuendo coming from a mile away.

I narrowed my eyes. “Don’t.”

“I wasn’t gonna!” he laughed.

Sure.

It was better to change the subject. “Have you told your parents we’re going straight to DC tomorrow?”

Mia was returning to the base she was stationed at in Florida, and James and Mary were under the impression Colt would stay in Norfolk a few days. But given that he would live so close to his parents when he was at Langley, he'd be able to see them whenever. I, on the other hand, wanted to show my man the apartment that would be his part time until he could move to DC permanently.

"I'll tell 'em at dinner," Colt murmured sleepily and closed his eyes. "I ain't spendin' the next two weeks away from you." He yawned. "Don't be surprised if I tag along to work with you."

I smiled.

I vowed to myself to make frequent trips to Langley once he was back on base.

It was easy to make plans and promises in the beginning of a relationship, even without the future...obstacles, one might call them...that we had, but the connection I felt with Colt had to be different. And we *knew* about the obstacles. We knew we'd have to address them eventually—way down the road when we were ready.

"We're going to beat the odds, Colt."

"Hmm?" He cracked one eye open and hugged me to him. "Of course we are, darlin'. It's you and me."

Him and me. And we'd tackle every curve ball life threw us—together.

EPILOGUE 2

“Oh wow. That’s... I don’t even know what to say.” I trapped the phone between my shoulder and cheek so I could spread the jelly on my toast. “Why would you ask that? It’s painful to think about.”

Colt lowered the newspaper he was reading and raised a brow in question.

“Ivy wonders what I’d choose, morning sex or coffee,” I said.

Ivy giggled in the background.

Colt scowled. “What a stupid fuckin’ question. Can we punish her?”

I grinned and sucked some jelly off the edge of my thumb. “Colt wants to punish you, dear.”

“He can’t!” Ivy spluttered. “He walloped my butt so hard last time. I’m good for a decade, thank you very much.”

I chuckled.

A couple minutes later, we wrapped up the call, and I promised she’d see us at the munch this weekend.

“What a horrible question,” Colt muttered, not taking his gaze off the paper.

“What if you had to choose?” I had a bite of toast.

“I don’t. Already got laid today, and now this.” He held up his coffee mug before taking a sip.

I shook my head in amusement. “But if you had to.”

“If I have to choose, I’ll have both. End of discussion.”

“Maybe you’ll only get coffee tomorrow,” I lied.

“That would’ve been believable if I weren’t engaged to a cock slut.” He winked at me, then returned his attention to the paper.

I rolled my eyes.

Even after eight years together, his arrogance hadn’t faded one bit. For a minute, I’d thought it would simmer down slightly when he semi-retired from the Air Force, which he did last year. Joke was on me. He was still active in the Reserve, and the Air Force loved to sic Colt on newer recruits for training missions. Colt simply held too many records for him to stop being a cocky prick every now and then.

The only time he became apprehensive was when we discussed playing with someone. For kink events and nonsexual arrangements, there was no issue for either of us. Our fetishes went beyond the sexual, and it scratched a nice itch just to play with Ivy or Tommy, who was a nonsexual Little.

It wasn’t perfect, though. It was far from perfect. And it was the most noticeable when we came home after events. Something was missing. Nothing we wanted to risk our relationship for, but it was there, something we wanted outside of events and temporary solutions. It was a compromise that stung to make, and in my opinion, Colt fought it too hard.

“Did you check that guy’s profile that I told you about?” I wondered.

“Nope.”

“Colt...”

He put away his paper and sighed. “Why are we still on this, darlin’? The last three attempts were colossal mistakes.”

To put it mildly. Two of the men had tried to come between Colt and me, failing miserably, and the third had... lacked something. Our kinks had lined up, and the play had been decent; we’d even invited him to our home. But the chemistry hadn’t been there, and we’d lost motivation and barely there desire to take things further.

Now it’d been over a year since we’d done anything remotely sexual with a submissive.

“Are you not happy?” Colt asked, shifting in his seat. He was trying to hide how much he hated asking that question. It wasn’t the first time.

“Nothing’s changed, baby. You’re the love of my life, and you’re my priority—always.” I reached over the table and squeezed his hand. “But we can’t shut the door on all guys because of how three of them were.” I paused. “What if we find that third and can finally have it all? You miss it. I miss it. You know the saying, and what we used to keep in mind—we need the exception that proves the rule.” There had to be *someone* out there for us.

He blew out a heavy breath and scrubbed at his face. “Tell me about the kid again.”

“He’s not a kid.”

Colt shot me a look. “He’s what, twenty-one? Twenty-two? He’s a kid.”

Oh, whatever. “You’ve seen him. His name is Kit Damien. You actually checked him out once.” I could tell he had no idea whom I was referring to. “He looks like a brat but acts like...” A wallflower. There was something going on with this boy. “He’s always dressed the same at munches. White dress shirt, black pants. He’s very shy and usually sits with Cam.”

I’d asked a couple of our friends about the boy, without much result. It was difficult to get to know someone when they never attended events, which this boy hadn’t in a very long time.

Colt squinted. “It rings a bell. He the kid who was in the car accident and lost his folks?”

“Yes.” If I’d known Colt was aware, I would’ve started with that. “Truth be told, the reason I can’t really let him go is because he and his online profile are night and day, and he hasn’t updated his profile since before he lost his parents. I think—I think he’s lost.” I went on to tell Colt about the cheekiness and sharp wit that bled through Kit’s writings online, and he was obviously very intelligent. I’d scrolled through old threads to see his biting comebacks to idiots, well-formulated responses with an undertone of sarcasm, and brilliant analogies that had both made me laugh and made me think. “And then I see him at munches, and he’s trying to blend in with the furniture.”

“I think your heart is bleeding. He could also be one of the millions of people who have a set of online balls that don’t exist here in the real world.” Colt reached across the breakfast spread and stole the other half of my toast. “That’s why I don’t do the online thing. It’s bullshit.”

I swear, it was like pulling teeth with this man sometimes...

“Could you at least look?” I asked patiently. “He expresses curiosity toward pain on his profile, if that sweetens the deal.”

“They all state that.” Colt rolled his eyes. “But fine. Send me the link again.”

“*Thank* you. I appreciate it.” I finished my coffee and rose from my seat. “Don’t forget to call your mother today.”

“Huh?”

“It’s her birthday, Colt.”

“Oh shit.”

I brought my plate to the sink and adjusted my tie. “I sent flowers from us, and I’m picking up her gift after work.”

Colt smiled and leaned back in his seat, locking his fingers behind his head. “What would I do without you?”

“You’d be forced to learn how to put reminders on your phone.” Rounding the kitchen counter, I smacked a kiss to his lips, then grabbed my suit jacket from the back of his chair. “I’ll bring dinner home with me later. You work up a good sweat with those moving boxes.”

“Will do.”

The apartments in my building had been turned into condos last winter, and Colt and I had managed to take out a mortgage to both cover the purchase of our place as well as a renovation. Then work had gotten in the way; Colt was in the development stages of the security company he was opening with two others, and I had more clients than ever. This summer, though, at last... Renovations began next week and would take three months.

“Love you, baby,” I said on my way out the door.

“Wait!” he hollered, and I paused in the doorway. “Coffee or mornin’ sex? Mornin’ sex with *me*.”

“Coffee!” I laughed and closed the door while he cursed me out and called me a liar.

He *had* worked up a sweat...

Our hallway had turned into a maze of moving boxes, and the living room was completely empty, with the exception of the couch and the entertainment center, which he’d disassembled.

“You’ve been busy today.” I entered our bedroom and set down my briefcase and the bag with takeout.

Colt hummed, seated at the desk. So that’s where I’d left my reading glasses; I spotted them next to the mouse pad. I’d missed them today.

“Yeah,” he responded eventually. “How was work?”

“Good. Busy.” I positioned myself behind him and dropped a kiss to the top of his head. “What’cha doin’?”

“As you can see...” He drawled.

I smiled. He was reading Kit’s profile. I dipped down lower and kissed Colt’s neck, my hands slipping down his exposed torso. “What do you think?”

“Mmm.” He gathered my hands in his and kissed my knuckles. “I admit he’s piqued my interest, but you said he ain’t like this in real life.” He skimmed the text with his finger.

“Here—this. I didn’t know this hashtag, so I googled it. Avgeek stands for aviation geek. Did you know that?”

I hid a smirk and kissed the shell of his ear. “If I’d known he was into airplanes, don’t you think I would’ve led with that?”

“I guess.” He tilted his head back to look me in the eye. “As long as you and I remain solid, I suppose we can try.”

I touched his cheek and kissed his forehead, then his nose. “Colt, it took me five minutes to recognize how attracted I was to you. Less than an hour to feel the chemistry. One night to get attached and realize you’d be trouble.” I pressed a kiss to his lips. “Half a deployment to fall in love, another few months to know I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you. At the risk of stealing your words from when you proposed to me, our love won’t die.”

It’d been four years since he’d asked me to commit to him for life. We wore engagement rings but had no intention of getting married, because we didn’t know if we’d one day include another person in our relationship. Either way, he’d told me our love was the kind of love that went beyond the grave. We would guard it with our loyalty to each other, and those words had cemented over time. I trusted Colt with my life, with everything.

It was the only reason I was willing to search for that one missing piece.

“I love you.” He kissed me and didn’t break away as he spun the chair around so we faced each other.

“I love you too.” I gripped the armrests and kissed him deeper. “My point is, I think we’ll notice pretty fast if there’s

anything with this man. And if there isn't, we won't push it. We didn't listen to our gut feeling with the other ones."

"But you think there might be somethin'." There was only curiosity in his tone now.

I relaxed a bit and squatted down in front of the chair, my hands on his thighs. "I do. I've observed him more than you have, and I think...yeah. I think he's holding back parts of himself since the accident."

Reese and River had started this community seven years ago now, and Colt and I had been lucky to have been there from the start. We'd been there when the house in Mclean had finally been ready. Colt had effortlessly become a crew member and spent many weekends helping out around the property, whereas my focus had landed on the people who'd joined our circle. And I remembered when Kit's application had hit River's desk. I'd been there. Kit hadn't been invited by anyone; he'd found us online. But back then, we'd needed more members.

We'd found it funny that he'd sent in the application on the day he turned eighteen. It was such a significant date, as if he'd been waiting.

Kit had never attended an event Colt and I had been at, though, so I'd forgotten him. Our munches in the city were open to anyone with an interest in kink, and there were often too many people to pay attention to. But if his plan was to stick to the munches and attend two or three events in the span of four years, paying the quite hefty membership fee seemed pointless.

I wanted to know if there was something that held him back. If nothing else, then as one of the founding members, I should at least make sure he was enjoying himself.

Except, when I gave that as an excuse to Colt, he merely looked at me like I was dumb.

“Okay, a bit farfetched—”

“Ya think?” Colt snorted. Then he leaned forward and pressed a kiss to my forehead. “You’re cute. We’ll see him at the munch, then. And all I need is a minute with him to know.”

Suspicion rose inside me. “Don’t be a child. A minute—Jesus.”

“Maybe two.” He leaned back again and smirked. “Two minutes alone with him.”

My eyes narrowed. “What’re you up to?”

He shrugged, smirk still in place. “Nothin’. I’ll just do what I did with you. Corner him in the bathroom.”

We were doomed.

MORE FROM CARA DEE

Next up in The Game Series is Their Boy, in which Kit meets two Daddy Doms named Colt and Lucas.

Cara freely admits she's addicted to revisiting the men and women who yammer in her head, and several of her characters cross over in other titles. If you enjoyed this book, you might like the following.

[Power Play](#)

MM | Daddykink Romance | Age Difference | Mental Health | Standalone

Love sucked. Correction: it sucked when you were in love with your parents' closest friend and he didn't feel the same. Madigan had always been there for me, from when I was a kid to when I got drafted by the NHL. Then I made the mistake of confessing my feelings for him... I was such a loser. My bipolar disorder was already difficult to manage as it was; add high anxiety and, most recently, as the cherry on a shit sundae, a suspension from the team. Why couldn't he see that I was perfect for him? We even had kink in common! Not that he knew that...

[Touch: The Complete Series](#)

MF, MFM, MM | BDSM | S/M | Daddykink

Seven novels and novellas, several outtakes and future takes, and one epilogue. *Touch: The Complete Series* is your not-so-little black book of kink. Meet Nicholas Ford, club owner and Daddy Dom, who can't resist Kayla, the forbidden fruit. Mark Cooper is a Master and works the bar, and in his story he's tasked with introducing two subbies in the lifestyle. He just might keep them both to himself. Rio Kelly, a high-protocol Master, sees a ghost from his past in the club one night. A girl he's never been able to forget. A girl on a mission to serve. And Cade Kingsley may be a rough-around-the-edges Daddy Dom who scares off some subbies, but he wears his heart on his sleeve, and when two Little hearts need mending, he's there.

The series originally consisted of six kinky love stories: *Look but Don't Touch*, *Twice the Touch*, *A Touch to Surrender*, *Comforting Touch*, and *Touching Ink*. Now they've been reworked and prettied up, and they're published together with a dozen outtakes as well as the new novella, *Touching Truth*, that follows masochist Greg, sadistic Daddy Ryan, and switchy baby girl Angel.

Their Boy

**MMM | The Game Series, #2 | BDSM | Daddykink |
Standalone**

Left all alone in the world after the loss of his parents, Kit Damien feared his life was over before it had truly begun. Then he met Colt and Lucas, two Daddy Doms who changed everything. The three embark on a journey to learn about true love, growing up, the importance of sprinkles, and the rules of The Game that can make them all winners.

Check out Cara's entire collection at www.caradeewrites.com, and don't forget to sign up for her newsletter so you don't miss any new releases, updates on book signings, free outtakes, giveaways, and much more.

ABOUT CARA

I'm often awkwardly silent or, if the topic interests me, a chronic Rambler. In other words, I can discuss writing forever and ever. Fiction, in particular. The love story—while a huge draw and constantly present—is secondary for me, because there's so much more to writing romance fiction than just making two (or more) people fall in love and have hot sex.

There's a world to build, characters to develop, interests to create, and a topic or two to research thoroughly.

Every book is a challenge for me, an opportunity to learn something new, and a puzzle to piece together. I want my characters to come to life, and the only way I know to do that is to give them substance—passions, history, goals, quirks, and strong opinions—and to let them evolve.

I want my men and women to be relatable. That means allowing room for everyday problems and, for lack of a better word, flaws. My characters will never be perfect.

Wait...this was supposed to be about me, not my writing.

I'm a writey person who loves to write. Always wanderlusting, twitterpating, kinking, cooking, baking, and geeking. There's time for hockey and family, too. But mostly, I just love to write.

~Cara.

Get social with Cara

www.caradeewrites.com

www.camassiacove.com

[Facebook: @caradeewrites](#)

[Twitter: @caradeewrites](#)

[Instagram: @caradeewrites](#)