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KADY ASH

Unholy
Cardinal Sin
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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

UNHOLY

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Sometimes things fall apart so better things can fall together, and sometimes they fall apart because a man twice your age wants to raw-dog you. Either way, win/win, amirite?

CONTENT WARNING

This is a fictional world with a fictional religion. This is not meant to depict any existing religion or their followers. With that said, this particular made-up religion has some extremely harmful beliefs, and the one that is explored here is no exception. I'd like to point out that I wrote this not because I agree with those beliefs, but because I understand firsthand how harmful some real-life beliefs can be, and I don't believe anything is black and white.

With that said, this is a standalone m/f romance with an extreme age gap (twenty-two years), a completely inexperienced heroine, a tiny little bit of sharing, dub-con, total power exchange, Daddy kink, and a whole lot of forbidden steam.

Please be kind to yourselves.

One

Luna Vale Sainthood Church is all I've ever known. I'm Vicar Sheridan's eldest and only daughter, homeschooled my entire life and raised in a house of worship with my younger brother Michael and our parents Harry and Susan. We all have the same brown hair with matching eyes, always dressed to impress no matter where we go, and everyone respects my father.

I've never known anything but going to church — whether that was for actual services, helping my mother with her duties as a servitor, cleaning the benches or baking in the kitchens. I spend about six days a week there, and when I'm *not* there, I spend time with my boyfriend Gavin Boxley. He's a former acolyte, poised to be the youngest servitor in our church and promised to me. He's everything I should want in my betrothed, yet when I look at him, I don't feel much at all.

My mother was promised to my father when she was younger than I am, and she tells me that love comes later.

Love is like the plants in our garden; you water them, give them your time and energy, and they flourish. If you don't, well... they wilt away and leave us, and can you really blame them for going away? Mother also says how happy a home is depends on the wife. The Saint wants us to serve, to take care of our men after a long day and put them above ourselves.

But Gavin is not my husband. Not yet anyway, so putting his needs and desires above my own soul doesn't feel right. He wants something I'm not allowed to give. I'd be the town whore, ruined, stained, never to find anyone who would want me.

I would end up just like our Aunt Bessy.

Old, alone, unloved.

Marked forever as tainted with an inverted cross burned into my neck, just behind my right ear for all to see. Condemned for eternity to The Shade, where no one but The Demon himself would touch me.

Eternal damnation for a few fleeting moments of pleasure.

Gavin just has to be patient.

“I don’t understand, Gav. Why don’t we just pick a date for our wedding? Then you know exactly when you can have me. We’re eighteen now, our fathers would be pleased.” I cross my hands in my lap as I watch him pace my room, his hands shoved into his pockets as he passes my open door. The thought of actually marrying him terrifies me, but I can’t show that to anyone, so I keep that buried along with the other wrong or dirty feelings The Demon tempts me with.

Gavin’s dirty blonde hair is messier than usual, falling over his pale green eyes as he narrows them at me. He doesn’t want to pick a date yet, he isn’t ready for this any more than I am — but there is something he *does* want, and it’s the one thing I cannot give. “You know how these things work, Evangeline. Even if we set a date right now, they’ll expect an engagement party and some ridiculous affair where I spend half my inheritance on cakes and decorations. I don’t want to wait that long. Why won’t you at least let me kiss you?” he demands, whispering sharply so we aren’t overheard.

“Because kissing is opening a door I’m not ready to enter. I made a promise to The Saint.”

I hold up my purity ring and point at it, making him roll his eyes. “Grow up, Eve. You’re an adult, you don’t have to listen to everything your Daddy tells you now. There’s no way all this bull about magically appearing marks sending us to The Shade is even true. The Saint doesn’t care what you do with your body. He doesn’t care about you at all, so why do you listen to them? I’m sure not going to, so if you don’t love me enough to even kiss me, I’m out of here.”

I can’t believe my ears. The Gavin I know would never speak like this, and he would never push me like this. I thought my virtue being so important to me would be appreciated by my future husband, but I can tell I’m wrong. “But our fathers—”

“Are old men who have no right to tell us who to marry,” he interrupts. “It’s not like we signed a contract. They just

wanted us together because they think they can control us.”

“Well, do you have someone else in mind already?” I ask, not sure where to go from here.

He shrugs. “Maybe, maybe not. All I know is you’re not cute enough to wait another three years for a kiss. Sorry, Eve.”

Ouch.

But it isn’t something I don’t already know. Every time I look in the mirror, I see how basic I am — how *not* special I am — and when you add in how huge my brown eyes are, I’m sure why any guys glance my way. “Okay.”

There isn’t anything else to say.

He steps toward the door, pausing long enough to say, “Better not tell anyone about this. Not like anyone would believe you anyway,” then disappears down the stairs.

I can vaguely hear him talking to my mother for a moment, then the front door shuts, solidifying the fact that I’m alone now.

It’s fine, I tell myself. I’m used to being alone. Even in a houseful of family or when I’m at church with hundreds of The Saint’s children, I still feel alone. The Saint will find me one day, I just haven’t been worthy yet.

After some time alone, I make my way downstairs for supper with my head down. “How can I help, Mother?”

“It’s almost ready. Wash up and help Michael finish setting the table.”

With a nod, I do as I’m told. I *always* do as I’m told, so a piece of me wonders why I didn’t just give Gavin what he wants. Wonders why I didn’t truly want to beyond the obvious.

“Evangeline?” my dad calls softly, and suddenly, I realize we’re all seated around the table and I’ve got a fork in my hand.

How long have I been zoned out?

“Yes?” I set my fork down, meeting his gaze with my hands in my lap.

“Your mother asked you a question. You’re not hiding headphones under your hair again, are you?”

“Of course not.” I fix my hair behind my ear to prove it. “I’m sorry. Can you repeat it, Mother?”

She frowns disapprovingly at my earlobe like she’s expecting to see something magically appear there. “I was expecting Gavin to stay for dinner. Why’d he leave so early?”

“Oh.” I clear my throat, hoping I won’t have to explain why he decided I wasn’t the one for him, but I’m positive they’ll make me. “We broke up.”

Okay, correction. They don’t ask — they just stare at me expecting me to continue.

Darn.

“He wasn’t ready to set a date for our wedding, but he was ready for... other things. Things I promised The Saint I would wait on.”

Dead silence spreads across the table.

“That’s a very serious thing to say, Eve. Gavin is about to be nominated as a servitor. He made a vow in front of The Saint and our congregation. Are you sure that’s what happened?” he asks, but it’s clear from his sharp tone and narrowed eyes that he won’t believe me even if I double down.

“Of course it’s not,” my mother adds. “You must have misunderstood him.”

I get the sudden urge to argue, to remind them they’re my parents and they should believe me. “Then why did he leave when I asked him to wait?”

“I don’t know, but Gavin Boxley is a good member of the Sainthood and a good man. You must have done something to upset him, and you will fix it,” my mother insists.

“But—” I snap my jaw shut the second I meet her gaze. This isn’t a request, it’s a demand. “Yes, Ma’am.”

My little brother snorts as he shoves a spoonful of corn in his mouth. “Told you guys I was the good kid.”

I ignore him completely. Michael is easy to ignore. “What if he asks me to do forbidden things? Are you telling me to just do them, even if it means becoming tainted?”

“No, because he wouldn’t ask you to do those things,” she counters. “You must have misunderstood, as I said. Now enough of this talk at the dinner table.”

For once, it seems my father takes pity on me and shifts attention away. “Susan, where are we with the pot luck?”

“Well, I could use some of Eve’s help with that, but she’s been terribly distracted. Go figure Gavin didn’t want to be around her. I bet that’s what it was. Anyway, we’re still trying to find a venue. It seems like most of the town will be attending.”

My cheeks burn with indignation, but I have no proof to back up what I said and they clearly don’t trust me. All I can do is keep my eyes down as my father puts a hand on my arm. “You’ll go with your mother tomorrow and help her set things up. Won’t you?”

“Of course I will. I was hoping I could bake some of my snickerdoodles as well?”

Finally, they relax. “That’ll be lovely,” she says. “We’ll start a list in the morning and head down to Carter’s Circle. Those ladies are always good for a few casseroles and a pie or two. Bit gossipy, but what can you do?”

“Right.” I force a smile. “How will we go about finding a venue?”

“I’m sure we’ll think of something. And if not, we’ll manage. The social hall will do just fine if need be, but Mrs. McConnell’s in a wheelchair now and can’t make it down the stairs. Would be nice if we could find somewhere else.”

“Yes, it would be. There’s also Abe. He struggles with the stairs as well, and he likes to attend anything public even though he misses church often.”

The softness on my mother's face tells me she's dropped this whole Gavin business — for now, at least. I'm allowed to finish my food and clean up without the third degree, but my father stops me as I'm about to head back upstairs.

“Eve, I've never known you to be a liar. I don't pretend to know what went on with you and Gavin or why you believe he's anything but virtuous, but I want to remind you that The Saint always has a plan. You two will be fine, I'm sure of it.”

“Yes, Father. I must have m-misunderstood him or something. I'll talk to him.” I find myself forcing a smile yet again, fighting back traitorous tears as he hugs me.

“He'll make a fine husband for you one day. This is just a hiccup.”

“Did you and mom ever have hiccups?” I blurt out before I can stop myself, but he laughs softly as he rubs my back and lets me go.

“Of course we did, especially before we were married. No couple is without trials, Evangeline. But you should trust your partner, and above all, trust that The Saint knows what He's doing.”

I nod my head, needing this to be over so I can hide in my room. “Goodnight, Father. Thank you for the advice.”

He doesn't say anything else as I head up the stairs two at a time, and I don't breathe again until I'm in the safety of my covers — the *one* place I'm allowed to feel however I need to feel, and to my surprise... all I feel is relief.

Denying Gavin was more than just saving my virtue and my soul. Nothing felt right with him, and when it's time for me to give myself to someone, I'll know it.

I'll just... know.

Two

When I wake in the morning, I have a brief moment of sadness. Gavin may not have been the one for me, but he *was* someone I thought was safe, someone I thought was a sure thing — and now that I know he isn't, I'm not sure how to feel about it.

I brush my hair and take a few moments to myself, french braiding the top of my head as I wonder who the man for me will be. To be honest, I want him to be older, more experienced and less like the young boy Gavin was. I want a man, not a boy too impatient to treat me the way I deserve.

By the time I'm in my dress and making my way to the kitchen, I feel a bit better about the ordeal. Maybe a safe, sure thing isn't what I want, and that thought has me feeling more alive than anything else. "Good morning, Mother. Where are we headed first?" I ask, grabbing a waffle and some orange slices for my breakfast.

"I told Diane Cook that I'd drop off some lemon bars for Julie's bake sale. It'll be a good time to ask for a favor, and she doesn't live too far from Carter's Circle," she explains, giving me a sharp look when I use a little too much syrup. "If we're lucky, we'll get commitments from enough people there."

I nod, eating as quickly as I can before I grab the lemon bars from the counter and follow her outside. Things always seem to go better when I shut my mouth and follow, and today proves no different.

Diane's bratty little daughter tugs my braid and steps on my foot while we wait in the living room, and I nearly snap at her. My patience is thinner today than it usually is and this little girl isn't helping. "You know if you pull people's hair, you might not get a lemon bar. You have to be sweet to earn sweets."

"Lemons aren't sweet, they're sour!" she argues, sticking her tongue out at me and running away.

Lucky for her, I don't have the time or the energy to chase her, and my mother peeks her head in a moment later. "Time to go."

Thank you, Saint.

I follow her once again, not daring to ask about anything until we're in the car alone. "So? It go okay?"

"Of course. She'll be bringing shepherd's pie and paper plates. It'll be nice not to have to do the dishes for once," she admits. "That's The Demon's work."

I know she's joking, but sometimes I can't comprehend how anyone can joke about The Demon. It seems like an invitation for trouble, if you ask me, and I don't want any part of it. "Right."

We drive in silence until we reach the infamous Carter Circle — it's nothing but a cul-de-sac full of rich ladies who have their finger on the pulse of Luna Vale. They're active in the church, in the PTA at school, community groups... they know everyone from the mayor herself to the prisoners housed in Luna Vale Penitentiary. If you want something to get done in this town, these ladies are your best bet.

If they choose to help, that is. I've never met a group who holds themselves in higher esteem than they do, but I'm not here to play politics. I know my mother, and she wants me to sit there quietly, legs crossed at the ankles, hands folded on the lap of my dress. Quiet, docile, obedient. The perfect daughter, while most of theirs were caught doing drugs in the school bathroom or taking their shirts off behind the bleachers from what I've heard.

Thank The Saint my parents homeschooled me.

But if there's one thing in this world that I excel at above all others, it's obedience. Life just seems to go a lot smoother when I do what I'm told, and not having the pressures of hard decisions weighing me down has made me happier, I think, than some of my peers. It's that alone that has me wishing Gavin would've stayed with me. He was rude, sure... but he was also going to take over for my father when it came to

making decisions for me. With him, I could've kept up this simplicity, and without him... I don't know if I'll find anyone else like that.

The prospect of being on my own is scarier than I'd like to admit.

"Grab the other container of lemon bars," my mom interrupts. "We're here, and Gladys is always the toughest nut to crack. If we can get her involved, the others will follow."

"Yes, Mother."

Those are the last words I speak before my command to behave takes effect. I smile politely of course, offer a few hums of agreement as Gladys lets us in and says hello, but other than that, I just listen. Since I didn't go to the local high school and haven't had much in the way of friends, the whole concept of gossip baffles me... but it's also one of the purest forms of entertainment I get.

"We thought it would be nice to organize a potluck," my mom starts. "The last one was a lot of fun and the community really enjoyed it. We were hoping maybe you'd make something for it, and maybe get the other ladies involved, too." She waves her hand toward the door like Gladys is supposed to understand that we know about the little Carter Circle Club, and to my surprise, she does.

"I'll see what I can do," she says, back straight and tone overly formal. "But I won't make you any promises, Susan. We've got our hands full around here trying to help the police department with all of these break-ins."

At five-five and maybe a hundred and ten pounds soaking wet, I find it hard to believe that she could help the police with anything at all, but my mom doesn't miss a beat. "Have you heard things, then? Rumors about who it could be?"

Oh, right. Gossip. I should've known.

"Whispers, mostly. It seems they're mostly on the outskirts of town, but the Millers' place was targeted last night and they're firmly within the city lines. I'm afraid if they're not caught soon, we'll all be at risk."

“Not here,” my mom gasps. “Surely you don’t think they’d come this close.”

Gladys shrugs. “Anything is possible, and we should be prepared just in case.”

I tune out then as my mother promises to start a prayer chain later, which I know will lead to me making eighty-six phone calls to members of the church, imploring them to add our town’s safety to their list of nightly prayers. It sounds like an exhausting evening to cap what will be an exhausting day, but at least I’ll be doing something useful.

Or maybe I won’t, and instead I’ll pray for those burglars to find my house and also turn themselves into kidnappers while they’re at it. It’s a horrible thing to wish for and I immediately send an apology up to The Saint for even having the thought, but at least maybe then... my parents will care about me for something more than what status I can bring them by marrying well.

We leave Gladys’ house and walk next door to Mary-Adelaide’s, get her to promise to bring something, and then move to Viola’s. Of all of them, her and Betty have to be my favorites — but Betty doesn’t appear to be home and Viola seems to be in a mood.

“What can I do for you, Susan?” she asks curtly, standing in the doorway like she doesn’t want to let us in.

My mother is nothing if not relentless, though. “I was wondering if you had a few minutes to discuss church business?”

“This couldn’t wait until the servitors’ meeting on Thursday?” she snaps. “I’m expecting company soon and don’t have enough food to feed you two as well, so I’m afraid you’ll have to come back another time.”

The lie almost makes me laugh. I don’t doubt she’s expecting company from the looks of the curlers in her hair and her caked-on makeup, but the thought of anyone in this town cooking a meal for less than ten is hilarious. We all overcook, just in case. You never know when someone may

visit or when leftovers could be taken to the mission on Calla Road.

“It’ll be quick, and I promise we’ll be out of your hair before your company comes,” Mom presses. “Or perhaps you can agree right here to bring something to a potluck at the church at the end of the month. That’s all we’re really after here.”

“At the church? You didn’t learn your lesson about that last time when Dr. Polis’ wife dropped a container of chili as she was walking down the stairs?”

That was one of the best things I’ve ever witnessed in that church, but you can’t pay me enough to say that out loud.

For once, my mother falters since she’s already having doubts about the church’s social hall. “Do you have a better idea? I’m all ears.”

Viola sticks her head out to look at the street, then huffs. “Yes, actually. It just so happens that my company this evening will be Colden Adler.”

My mother gasps and blurts out, “Really? How’d you swing something like that?” and I have to admit, I’m curious.

Colden Adler is one of the three richest men in Luna Vale, and the other two happen to be his business partners, Gideon Grant and Rory Holmes. Together, those three men run half the town, and while Colden himself is fairly active in the church, they’re considered elusive. I squirm a little thinking about his ice-blue eyes, the perfectly-groomed beard that covers his sharp jaw and strong chin, his broad shoulders and impeccable taste in clothes. I try *not* to think about the fact that he’s a foot taller than me at least and probably fifteen years my senior.

He’s the complete package, and maybe I resent my parents a little for promising me to a jerk like Gavin instead of someone older and more experienced like Colden.

I snap back to the conversation just as Viola is agreeing to ask Mr. Adler if the church can use the banquet center he owns, Crown Hall. My mother is adamant that she wants to

talk to him herself, but Viola doesn't seem to want to share — and I wonder if he's coming to dinner for business... or for a date.

No. Viola's in her fifties, uptight, and her husband only passed a few months ago. Surely Colden wouldn't be interested in dating her. It has to be business.

I'm ushered quickly back to the car, and the moment we're clear of the cul-de-sac, my mom stops at a stop sign and turns toward me. "You will call Mr. Adler's office tonight before you start the rounds asking for prayers for the town. Just ask him if he'll be available tomorrow to help out his church and leave the rest to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Good." She relaxes, grumbling to herself quietly as she starts to drive again. "Servitors bogarting millionaires and heathens breaking into houses... you mark my words, Evangeline. The Demon himself has come to Luna Vale. I can feel him taking hold everywhere. You make sure you impart the seriousness of that for the prayer chain. The Saint can't keep The Demon at bay all by Himself."

"Yes, Mother," I repeat, then turn my attention out the window. Judging by the sleepy little town with quiet houses and perfectly-groomed yards, I find it hard to believe that The Demon has ever even heard of Luna Vale, let alone come here to steal some old necklaces and a few televisions, but stranger things have happened.

Maybe he *is* here.

Maybe a sinkhole will open up in the town center and swallow us whole.

Maybe a mini hurricane will form in the Niagara Gorge and come sweep us all away.

Wow, this is getting a little morbid. I've never had thoughts like this before, and it's a little frightening.

Maybe I'm taking this Gavin thing harder than I thought.

Three

True to my word, I'd attempted to call Mr. Adler the night before to ask if he'd be available to help the church, but he didn't answer. I'd hoped that maybe that meant my mother would give up and settle for the social hall at church, but I should've known better than that.

"Eve?" she calls up the stairs. "We're leaving to go see Mr. Adler in twenty minutes. Don't be wasting time up there!"

Crap.

I hastily turn my hair straightener off. It's probably the most useless thing I own — my hair is poker straight, dull, mousey brown, and couldn't be any other way even if I begged it to. I can't hold curls, can't get it to shine. But there's one clump of hair toward the back that always seems to flip the wrong way and get all bent up when I sleep, so I'd used my first paycheck to buy one.

Even at eighteen, I'm not allowed to have a lot of makeup, so I quickly put some mascara on and a little bit of clear lip gloss. The blue dress I choose hugs my body a little better than most of the others, but the white floral print spattered over it and the buttons leading up to a thin blue collar definitely still make me look like a grandma.

Why I care all of a sudden when I never have before, I don't know... but now Gavin's voice will forever be in my head telling me I'm not cute enough to wait for.

I think I am. I may not be the most beautiful prize in town, but my nose is small and my face is symmetrical enough that I *should* fall within the traditionally accepted spectrum of beauty, and none of that should matter anyway. Beauty is subjective.

Ugh. I need to stop letting that jerk get to me. He's gone, and I didn't want to marry him anyway. I should be happy — even if my future is once again a gaping hole of uncertainty.

"Evangeline!"

I slip my white flats on and rush down the stairs to join her, and she's already half out the door and motioning for me to hurry up. "Sorry, Mother! I couldn't find my other flat," I say quickly, even knowing she only gave me three minutes instead of twenty.

Of course, that leads to a lecture about organization and keeping my room clean that lasts all the way until we're pulling into Crown Hall's parking lot. I should've known better, and yet...

"Be on your best behavior. Stay quiet, keep your head bowed, and stay behind me," she commands.

I'm reminded once again that my parents didn't want a daughter, they wanted a show dog.

"Yes, Mother."

The hall itself is gorgeous: the interior lobby has marble flooring, gold adornments, and a dark brown desk that stretches from one end to the other. Behind the desk, a receptionist that I recognize not from church, but from the bakery I work at is eyeing us with curiosity.

"Hello," my mom says curtly. "We're here to see Mr. Adler."

"He's in a meeting right now. Do you have an appointment or something?"

The look on her face makes it clear that people don't normally make appointments to come see Colden Adler here, but I was told not to speak so I can't warn my mother about that. Instead, I have an excuse to sit here and watch her embarrass herself.

"We tried to make one but he wasn't in last night, either. However, Viola Finney should've told him to expect us when he dined with her last evening."

The receptionist smiles a little slyly, making me shift on my feet — but my attention is pulled quickly from them when I see the man in question walking through the door from the main banquet room.

He pauses when he sees us and eyes the receptionist with all the curiosity I'd expect from a man who doesn't care at all. "Can I help you?"

"Mr. Adler," my mother starts, stepping in front of me and prompting me to drop my eyes and assume the position she'd commanded me to take. "We were hoping for a few minutes of your time. We'll be quick, of course. It's church business."

I can't see him anymore, but his voice seems to drop even deeper. "Of course, Mrs. Sheridan. Please, follow me."

As we follow him toward his office, I take an opportunity to peek at the back of his head, the side of his jaw, the way he walks and carries himself as a whole. It's captivating, so captivating he catches me staring when we reach his office door and I force my gaze down as quickly as I can.

"And you must be Evangeline," he nearly growls, hooking a finger under my chin and tilting my gaze up. "I've seen you around."

The tiny gasp my mother lets out sounds like one I would have made if breathing were possible, but the second I meet those endless blue eyes, all the air leaves my lungs.

I nod after what feels like an eternity, drawing a small, sultry smile from him. "Have a seat. Both of you."

The sharp click of the door shutting pulls me back to reality as my mother launches into her pitch, but Mr. Adler isn't looking at her.

He's looking at me.

It has my cheeks heating up when I drop my gaze again. It's almost impossible not to fidget under his intense eye contact as I sit there respectfully, and more than once I have to force my gaze back down every time our eyes meet.

"So?" Mother presses. "Can we use Crown Hall for the potluck?"

Colden finally shifts his attention to her. "My doors are always open for the church, but I'll have to check with my

business partners to make sure nothing will overlap. Perhaps we can go over the details later on?"

"Of course," she says with a wide smile. "Maybe you can come by for supper? Evangeline can bake for you."

I blush when I feel his attention move back on me, and even more so when he agrees.

He's going to be in my house.

"Then it's settled. Tonight for dinner. I'll leave our address with your receptionist," Mom announces, and I follow her out on unsteady feet a moment later.

I don't really hear anything at all as my mother works things out with his receptionist, and before she's done, I steal a glance back at his office to find him leaning in the doorway with his arms crossed and eyes dark.

There's a moment where I allow myself to feel things The Saint wouldn't approve of. They're narcissistic thoughts that allow me to believe he actually wants me. He's staring at me in a way no one else has, like he'd devour me whole if given the opportunity — and it has temptation clawing its way up my spine.

I've never run from a building faster.

My mother follows with a confused expression I try hard to avoid. "Are you ready for lunch, Mother?"

"Yes, but why are we running?" she asked breathlessly. "Evangeline!"

I slow down, trying hard not to look like I was running even though I absolutely was. "Sorry. I'm hungry and it was... hot in there."

"Are you ill?" she asks, reaching out to feel my forehead with the back of her fingers. "It was perfect in there. What's gotten into you?"

No one, and suddenly it feels like a problem. Go figure I never wanted Gavin, he isn't what I'm attracted to... Mr. Adler is. "Nothing, sorry I was thinking of what I'm going to

bake and then I was hungry and hot and I'm sorry, Mother. I shouldn't have run out."

Her eyebrow quirks up, but she doesn't question me further as we get into the car and head to lunch.

Despite her best efforts to find a restaurant that doesn't allow public displays of affection, there just aren't any in Luna Vale — so when we walk in and see a woman riding a man in a booth, things just get worse for me.

I'll never understand the world I live in. How sex before marriage condemns you to The Shade and sex in a restaurant next to a family of four is okay is beyond me, but since we're so sex-positive after marriage, I wish it was the same before.

Especially because the desire to have sex is still something that plagues all of us.

I feel it now... the wetness between my legs, the pulsing in that small bud that brings so much pleasure I sometimes think even The Saint would have caved.

No, lunch doesn't help push Colden from my mind at all, so I take a risk and start a conversation with her. "Has something like that ever happened in church?"

"Absolutely not," she mutters. "Your father would never allow it. It might be legal out here, but that doesn't mean there's a place for it in our house of worship."

I nod, glancing over at the couple again and shivering when I see the inverted cross clear as day on his neck.

He doesn't look damned, though. He looks happy if anything, and with the way he's staring at his woman, he wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world.

I'd been convinced the tainted lived a life of regret and shame, yet I don't see either of those things right now — only a sated man and a woman who's squirming in her seat and praising how hard he'd been. "What's that mean, mother? *'Hard.'*"

I'm whispering, but the look of sheer exasperation on her face tells me she heard me just fine.

“Well... I suppose you’ll find out sooner or later. It’s when a man’s penis grows in order to have sex.”

“They grow? How big?”

She has all my attention now whether she wants it or not.

“It depends on the person.” She fidgets with her napkin. “Now enough. You’ll be taught everything you need to know the night before your wedding. Not a moment sooner.”

I nod as always and drop my gaze while we order our food, but when the man stands up, I can’t help but look over at his lap. “Oh my.” I cover both of my eyes with a gasp when I see how large it is down there and panic overtakes me.

No way they’re that big, it wouldn’t fit.

“Eve, don’t make a scene,” she hisses. “Put your hands down. Are you sure you’re alright? You’ve never acted this way before.”

I’ve never been this tempted before. “I think you’re right, Mother. I’m not feeling well, I think I need to have a night of prayer.”

“It’ll have to wait until after dinner. We need Mr. Adler’s support here, Evangeline. It must go well.”

“Yes, of course. I’ll be on my best behavior. I promise.”

I don’t know why The Demon is surrounding me today, but I really wish he’d leave before this dinner.

Colden Adler is the ultimate temptation.

Four

I burnt a dozen cookies.

I never burn cookies, I never burn anything, but when my mind wandered back to that man in the restaurant's lap and the way Colden was looking at me, my thoughts became muddy. I luckily don't burn any more, but after tossing twelve cookies into the garbage, I know my family will notice when they come down.

I disappear upstairs before they can comment and freshen up, slipping on a cute but modest blue dress along with some tights and then make my way back down to help my mother in the kitchen.

"You look like a whore," she hisses quietly, but I know it's just her nerves. I'm completely covered — not that it seems to make a difference when the doorbell rings at exactly seven pm and Colden Adler walks into my house like he owns it.

"Mrs. Sheridan," he croons. "Evangeline. Where is the vicar tonight?"

"He'll be along. Come in, come in."

I keep my gaze as dropped as I can, but I glance up every few seconds even though I shouldn't. If I look like a whore, making direct eye contact might make him think I am — but when our eyes lock, I'm powerless to look away.

I can smell his cologne, it's drawing me in like some deep, primal thing that's calling only to me, and I can't stop myself from taking a step in closer.

"The food smells delicious. Did you bake, sweet girl?"

The way his thumb brushes over my jaw sends a shiver up my spine and makes my head nod quickly. "I baked some cookies, Sir. Mother said we can't have any until after dinner, though."

"Right. Can't be spoiling our... appetites, now can we?"
He holds there for a moment as my mind races through

alternate meanings for that, but he pivots to follow my mother into the dining room before I find my voice again.

I'm summoned to the kitchen to serve the food just as my father comes down the stairs to greet Mr. Adler, and though I try to eavesdrop, I can't hear a word they exchange before we're all seated and their conversation picks back up.

"It's been difficult, yes," Mr. Adler says. "She passed almost six years ago now."

Who passed? Oh, his wife. I somehow conveniently forgot he was married before but I don't know how, he's the most handsome man in Luna Vale. "Do you plan to remarry?"

Why in the shadows would I ask that? How insensitive. How rude. How—

"It's crossed my mind," he admits, pausing only long enough for my father to lead a prayer to The Saint. Once the food is blessed, he clears his throat quietly. "It's not as though I haven't thought about it. It's... hard for a man my age, to be honest."

"How old are you?" I ask, earning myself an angry look from both of my parents — one that says I won't be allowed to taste those cookies I baked. "Sorry."

Chuckling, he takes a quick sip of water. "I just celebrated my fortieth birthday. How old are you?"

"Eighteen," I answer all too quickly. "I was betrothed to Gavin Boxley, but we just broke it off."

"Yes, but that was a misunderstanding, Eve. Eat your supper." Mother's tone is sharp, telling me to shut my mouth even though she's forcing a smile.

"Ahh." Something a little like disappointment flashes across his face. "So you're still engaged, then. Congratulations. Married life had its perks."

"I'm not." I really don't know what's gotten into me, but I can't stand that look on his face right now, and based on the kick I earn under the table, I'm going to regret it. "I'm not engaged."

“This isn’t dinner talk.” My mother fakes a laugh. “How about we go over the potluck, hmm?”

“Your daughter is clearly unhappy with her arrangement and you’re speaking to me of potlucks?” he asks, leveling a dangerous look at her. “Is that—”

“It’s none of your concern, Mr. Adler,” my father cuts in sharply. “It is family business and she’s an obedient girl. She will do as she’s told when she’s told, and that includes marrying Gavin Boxley. There was a misunderstanding that will be corrected soon, and she will once again be happy to wed him. Won’t you, Evangeline?”

His tone leaves no room for argument, so I nod and drop my gaze to my food. “Yes, Father.”

My brother Michael snorts. “Eve doesn’t really have her own opinion, Colden.”

“It doesn’t sound like she’s been allowed her own opinion. There’s a difference,” Colden corrects, and silence falls over the table. I’m afraid that my father is going to throw him out, but Colden says the one thing that saves him: “What day did you want to hold the potluck? Crown Hall is a busy place, but for the church, I’ll make whatever arrangements I need to.”

She visibly relaxes now that she believes the conversation is back in safe territory. “I’m thinking the twenty-third. Gives everyone a couple weeks to get everything together, and everyone is always so giving when they have time to plan.”

“Then consider it done. I’ll let Gideon and Rory know not to book anything else, and I’ll personally reschedule whatever it is we have going on that day.” His fork clinks sharply against his plate. “May I use your restroom?”

“Of course. It’s the first door in the hall on the right.” They watch him go, waiting until he is out of view to shoot daggers my way. “What is going on with you?”

I tense from my mother’s harsh tone and whisper my response, “Sorry, Mother. I told you I wasn’t feeling well. I was just making conversation.”

My father scoffs. “You should be careful of the conversation you make. Speaking like that might give him the wrong idea,” he mutters. “You wouldn’t want him vying for your hand.”

“Yes, Father.” I actually wouldn’t mind it even if he is a bit intimidating. Better than Gavin who doesn’t think I’m cute enough to wait for. “I will apologize to him and go to bed early tonight. I didn’t mean to make anyone uncomfortable.”

Relaxing, my father goes back to his meal, and Colden comes back a couple of minutes later. “Sorry about that. You have a beautiful home, Vicar.”

“I appreciate that. I’m sure it doesn’t compare to yours. I hear business is going very well for you.”

I take a risk and glance up to see Colden smirking just slightly, almost proudly. “It is. And without a family of my own, I have nothing to do with all of that money except for spend it and tithe.”

“And your donations have been appreciated,” Mother says. “I was hoping we’d be able to thank you somehow. Dinner is a good start.”

His attention shifts toward me again, making me squirm. “Yes, a good *start*.”

I drop my gaze again before he can see me smile. I shouldn’t be smiling, I shouldn’t feel the things I’m feeling right now, but I can’t fight it. I have so much praying to do.

“When I’m older, you should train me,” Michael interrupts. “I want to live like you do when I grow up.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” Colden argues playfully. “It’s a lonely business.”

“Yeah, but you could have anyone you wanted. My best friend Ben’s dad died last month and his mom is hot. You should take her out.”

“Michael!” my mother hisses. “I don’t know what has gotten into my children but I assure you, Mr. Adler, they will

be going to bed without dessert. They have a lot of praying to do.”

Chuckling, Colden shakes his head. “Don’t punish them on my account, Mrs. Sheridan. I find their bluntness refreshing. And Michael, I don’t think that would work out well. I have very specific tastes.”

“Don’t ask,” she rushes out. “Michael, perhaps you should go with your sister and help her bring in our dessert?”

“Why, w—” He stops himself after one stern look from our father and follows me into the kitchen. “Where’s the rest of them?”

I roll my eyes now that it’s just us. “Shut up. You don’t get any anyway.”

He sticks his tongue out at me. “You suck, Eve. Why don’t I get any?”

“Mom said. You were sitting right there, doofus.”

I bump him and grab the plate before he can and walk it back to the table, and if I lean over Colden’s shoulder for another smell of his cologne, that’s my business.

“Thank you, Evangeline.” His hand covers mine for a brief moment as I attempt to set the plate down. “They smell delicious.”

I try not to stutter over my next words. “I-If you like them you can take some home, Sir. I can make more for the rest of us.”

“I would love that. Thank you,” he repeats, finally letting my hand go to take a bite of one — and the deep, growled moan he lets out works its way through my body like a strike of lightning. I want to hear it again, but I know better than to show that and move back to my seat as quickly as I can.

“Seems your experience at the bakery is paying off,” my mother praises, stunning me. “They should give you a raise.”

“I’ll tell them myself,” Colden agrees. “Which bakery?”

I hate how easily he makes me blush. “Um... have you heard of CiCi’s? It’s pretty small.”

Nodding, he takes another bite of his cookie. “I’ve heard of it, yes. I’ll speak with the owner this week.”

“You don’t have to go out of your way for me, but thank you for complimenting my baking.”

“You already know you bake well, compliments aren’t even needed,” Michael cuts in, and I fight the urge I always get when he opens his mouth, the one that makes me want to slap the back of his head.

It’s clear that Mr. Adler wants to argue with my brother yet again, but in deference to my father, he doesn’t say a word. In fact, not much else is said at all until my mother orders me to clear the table and Colden helps me carry the dishes to the kitchen, when he whispers, “Your little brother is an ass,” to me.

After a small, surprised gasp, I chuckle. “He is. I feel sorry for whoever he gets betrothed to.”

“As do I.” Flashing me a knowing grin, he sets the plates down in the sink and glances behind us. “I think I’ve overstayed my welcome here tonight, but perhaps I’ll see you again soon.”

I hope so. “Perhaps. I apologize if I made you uncomfortable at all tonight, Mr. Adler.”

Again, his fingers find my chin. “You haven’t. A little embarrassed at admitting my age and bachelor status, but never uncomfortable. You have nothing to apologize for.”

“Okay.” Somehow I believe him... more than my parents. “Don’t be embarrassed. Anyone would be lucky to have you.”

“Anyone?” he asks quietly, but my idiot little brother comes in with more plates and forces Colden to drop his hand quickly. “It was nice to meet you both.”

“Nice to meet you,” I whisper, turning to get to work on the dishes before I try to follow him. My mother is right — I don’t act like this, not normally, and the only reason I am right

now is that The Demon is close by. I need to do penance, that's what will fix this. I need to do penance harder than I ever have and push all thoughts of temptation from my mind.

My soul depends on it.

Five

It's been two weeks since I last saw Colden and I finally feel as though I'm in control again. Hours on my knees with The Saint's prayer on my lips did the trick, but now that it's the day of the potluck, I fear my progress has run out. He'll be there, I know he will, and I already feel that progress slipping when I tie my hair out of my face and put on one of my best dresses.

"Evangeline!"

"Coming, Mother." I take a breath and rush downstairs, instantly jumping into action to help her get the dishes we made into the car. "I heard talk at work this week. I think most of the town will be attending today."

"Wonderful. I really want this to go well." She hurries around to the driver's side and gets in, waving frantically for me to follow. "We're supposed to meet Mr. Adler there to show him where we want the tables set up. Hurry."

My heart rate doesn't slow the entire drive, only picks up when we park outside his venue, and I have to say it's the nicest-looking place we've ever held one of these.

My arms are full of casserole dishes and containers of cookies as Colden himself opens the door to let us in, but he unburdens me quickly. "Let me take those. Don't want to ruin your dress."

"Thank you." Handsome as well as a gentleman. "I hope we didn't keep you guys waiting long."

"Of course not. You're right on time." He tilts his head toward the double doors just to our right, then leads me through them to find two other men about his age conversing in low voices. "Gideon. Rory. This is Evangeline Sheridan, the daughter of our vicar. See to it she has what she needs."

Gideon steps forward to shake my hand. "I've heard a lot about you, though I don't think Colden will appreciate me telling you that. Welcome to Crown Hall."

I want to ask a million follow-up questions to that statement, yet all that comes out is a weird laugh I've never made before in my life. "Oh, thank you. I've heard about you both as well. All good things, of course."

"Funny, the things we've heard about you have been very, very bad," he says with a mischievous smile.

"That's enough, Gideon. Take our tainted friend to see to her mother's needs, you're no longer allowed around her."

Rory scoffs. "We're just announcing that to the public now, huh? Why do I bother covering the mark then?"

I can't help but search out his mark with wide eyes, and before I can stop myself, I reach out and grab his arm. "Did it really just appear? My parents won't talk about it."

Rory eyes me like he's surprised I'm even touching him. "Yes. Burned like you wouldn't believe, too. Worth every second."

"It was?" I don't mean to look as dreamy as I'm sure I do, but I can't help it. "Everyone treats it like it's the end of the world. You seem happy."

"I am. Maybe I'm damned, maybe I'm not. But you learn who your real friends are and life gets a lot more fun once you let go. You interested in getting a mark of your own?" he asks quietly, but not quietly enough.

"Rory."

The threat in Colden's tone makes me step away and clasp my hands together behind my back. I shouldn't have touched his arm, I shouldn't have asked him questions. "Please don't tell my father I asked, Sir."

Colden shakes his head slightly. "I wouldn't. But if you have questions, I'd prefer it if you asked me. Not them."

I nod quickly as his business partners take their leave and then move a little closer to him. "Did I upset you?"

"No," he says firmly. "Don't think like that. Gideon and Rory just... don't always understand boundaries. I apologize if I scared you. I'm simply trying to protect your virtue."

I meet his ice-blue gaze and hold it for a few moments. “Thank you. I doubt they’d actually be interested in someone like me though, I don’t think we have to worry.”

“Why wouldn’t they? You’re young, untouched, and so obedient it should be illegal. There isn’t an inch of you that isn’t desirable, Evangeline. Don’t sell yourself short.”

As he brushes my hair out of my face and sends lightning to my toes, Gideon peeks his head back in. “Her mom’s looking for her, Col. Better get her out here.”

Only I don’t want to go. I want him to touch my face more and tell me more nice things. “No one’s ever referred to me as desirable,” I whisper, then turn away and walk out in a daze. My mom’s voice pulls me out of it even if I still feel like I’m floating. “How can I help, Mother?”

“Set the tablecloths out and stand out front to greet people as they arrive. They’ll be here any minute.”

Looking around, I’m amazed at how quickly Colden’s employees got the tables set up and the giant cross erected toward the far wall. I do as told with the help of a few early churchgoers and then stand with my posture straight. Normally these events are boring, but that’s because I’ve never been able to steal glances at Colden Adler. I see him every time I glance inside the doors, see him watching me always with those dangerous, hungry eyes, and I wonder how I ever found someone like Gavin Boxley attractive. He looks like a child compared to the man who now has my attention.

I’m so distracted by him that I nearly miss Viola and Betty, but they don’t pass me without saying hello loud enough for my wandering mind to register — and from there, it’s a constant train of people arriving and greeting me until I’m ushered back inside for the meal.

After a long prayer led by my father, we pile our plates and sit down at the table nearest the cross.

When Colden joins us and sits right next to me, I stop breathing entirely. It doesn’t last long though, because I remind myself of how good he smells and take a breath. It’s

somehow even better today, but I imagine it's because he's right next to me and I'm surrounded by it. "I hope you enjoy the food."

"If it tastes half as good as it smells, I'll be a happy man," he says, nudging my leg with his own under the table. They only separate for a moment before he moves his close enough to rest against mine fully, and my fork drops to my plate and makes my father look up from his own.

"Be careful, Eve," he scolds. "You're going to make a mess."

"Sorry, Father. I'll be careful." I pick it up again and surprise myself when I relax against Colden. It feels good to feel his warmth against me, so good I already want to feel more of him. I want my body surrounded with him the way his cologne is currently hugging me and it makes tasting the food I eat difficult.

It only gets worse when his palm flattens against my lower back.

"Tell me, Evangeline. What's your favorite thing to bake?"

I'm melting, I'm sure of it. "I love the satisfaction of finishing a beautiful cake, but to be honest, they aren't my favorite to bake. Cakes are tedious, cookies are much easier to work with, but nothing compares to a good pie."

"Have you been holding out on me?" he asks, amused enough to ignore the way my mother is staring at us. "I love pie."

"Do you? I'll make you one." I can't help how animated I get when it comes to pies. Most people prefer cake, so it's nice to meet someone with the same love of pie that I have. "Apple or cherry?"

"Hmmm. How about both? We'll do a taste test and decide together." Colden's thumb brushes my back. "I have a thing for cherry, but we'll see."

"You got it." I take a bite of food to stop myself from begging him to keep touching me. "You tell me when and I'll make sure to make the best pies ever."

“It’ll have to work out with our schedule,” Mother says. “You’re still unwed, you can’t be alone with a man.”

She might as well have dumped ice water over us both. Colden’s touch leaves me completely as he shifts a couple of inches away, but his shoulders are tense. “I don’t appreciate the insinuation, Mrs. Sheridan. I wouldn’t have suggested anything different. You let me know when it’s acceptable.”

Way to go, Mom. Good luck getting him to offer up his venues for you when you need him. “He managed to make room in his busy schedule for us today, I think we should be able to do the same, Mother. Even if it is a ‘thank you’ pie.”

Face red, she clears her throat and looks to my father for assistance — and she finds it. “Gavin is here, Eve. Maybe you should take this opportunity to go clear up that misunderstanding.”

More ice water. Their blatant disregard for what I told them about Gavin makes me want to scream. To *not* be the obedient daughter they know and tell them how messed up it is that they’re trying to hand me over to someone who only wants one thing from me. Someone who doesn’t really even think I’m cute. But I don’t. “Yes, of course. As soon as I’m done eating.”

“Good.” My father resumes his meal, but Colden stands entirely.

“I should go see if the drink pitchers need refilled. It was good to see you all.” Fixing his tie, Colden smiles curtly and heads back toward the kitchen where we’d been, and I hurry to take the last few bites of my food so I can go help him.

I avoid my parents’ gazes and Gavin’s too as I take a couple empty plates back there and smile softly at Colden. “Sorry about my parents.”

“You don’t need to apologize. My own parents were like that too until I was married,” he admits. “But I get the hint you’re not interested at all in their choice for you. Do you mind me asking what happened? What’s this misunderstanding?”

I shove the paper plates in the trash and sigh, looking around to ensure we're alone before I move closer to answer. "He wanted my virtue. He didn't care about the mark or waiting until marriage. They don't believe he was pressuring me and want me to apologize to him for it, but it wasn't a misunderstanding, Colden. He said it with his own tongue. He said I'm not cute enough to wait for."

"So he's insane then," he comments. "That makes more sense. I never understood why boys couldn't just be content with the things we are allowed to do pre-marriage. Patience isn't for everyone, I suppose."

I take a moment to breathe before I move closer. "Like kissing? I didn't let him kiss me. I didn't want him to."

"Kissing, yes. Among other things." His eyes drop to my lips. "Why wouldn't you let him?"

I shrug, dying to know what those other things are, but thinking is hard with the way he's looking at me. "I don't know."

"Are you afraid you won't be any good?" he asks. "That was my biggest fear right before my first kiss."

I couldn't lie to him if my life depended on it... and maybe it does. "Yes."

"Hm. Seems like you need someone to teach you, Evangeline." His eyes darken as he steps closer, closer, stealing my breath and invading my space until all I can see is him. "I'd be happy to. All you have to do... is ask."

"You'd kiss me?" It's barely a whisper, but he hears me. I know he does. "You want to?"

His next breath is shaky and sharp as he reaches up to cup my chin. "Yes. Ask me, Evangeline. Say the words."

Soul be damned, nothing else exists but him. "Please kiss me, Sir."

"Part your lips. A good kiss starts slow and gentle, like your lips are touching something precious," he whispers, leaning in just to ghost our mouths together. I barely feel the

contact and it still sends adrenaline spiking through my body, but it's nothing compared to when he actually kisses me.

I'm instantly glad I saved my first kiss for Colden Adler. He's experienced, soft yet commanding in the way he moves, guiding me through every movement of our lips, and when I get my first taste of his tongue, I feel myself reach out and cling to him.

I never want it to stop.

"Evie," he whispers sharply, curling his fingers around my waist and tugging me closer. "Fuck. We can't do this here. We shouldn't... they're all right outside."

Yet his insistent lips find mine again, tongue flicking across my teeth, and I dive in for a little more like I can't get enough. It takes a few minutes for his words to sink in and the world around us to come back into focus.

They're all right outside.

We can't do this here.

We can't—

I pull away with a gasp, my fingers touching my lips softly as what just happened truly settles in my gut. I just kissed a man — a man I'm not betrothed to.

I've given into temptation like the very whore my mother insisted was inside me. The Demon's whore. "Oh," I whimper, backing up more like if I just put enough space between us, he wouldn't see the panic in my eyes.

"Evie, please don't," he begs, reaching out a hand to me. "You're okay. There isn't anything wrong with what we just did."

"There isn't?" In spite of what I've been taught, I believe him. My neck isn't burning, I'm not tainted, The Saint hasn't cast me aside. I'm okay.

"Of course not. There are a whole range of things The Saint finds acceptable before marriage. You're allowed to feel good." He reaches out for me but drops his hand quickly. "I

shouldn't have pushed you. I shudder to think what your father will do when he finds out."

I move a little closer again. "I won't tell him if you don't."

"Deal." He closes the distance again, but doesn't kiss me this time — he leans in to whisper in my ear, "But don't call me Sir when we're alone. I prefer Daddy."

The shock on my face makes him chuckle as he pulls back and leaves me in the kitchen alone, and I'm so wet, I want to rush home right then.

Daddy's going to get me into trouble, and to be honest... I've never been more excited.

Six

Colden

Clearly, I've lost my mind.

Evangeline Sheridan of all people? Of all the human beings on this planet, I had to become obsessed with the vicar's only daughter. The daughter he's promised to someone else. Who is barely eighteen years old.

I really am old enough to be her father.

I shouldn't want this.

But shadows, I've never wanted anyone more. I'm not even convinced I lusted after my late wife like this.

The things she does to me... the way she haunts my every thought with her modest little dresses and those innocent doe eyes?

Fucking Shade, I'm screwed.

It's been a full week since I've kissed her, and while I should be listening to her father's sermon, all I can think about is how her soft, untouched lips would look wrapped around my cock. The way she'd choke, struggle to breathe. The way she'd beg me with her eyes to let her up... and the way I'd push her further. Maybe she deserves better than me, better than someone who would sit here in church daydreaming about fucking her throat until she passes out and then fucking it harder.

Yes, she deserves better than me... but that doesn't mean she's going to get it.

The moment the service is over, I wait for her just outside the doors and step in front of her to block her path. "Good morning, Miss Sheridan. Join me for a walk around the grounds?"

I see the ghost of a smile as she nods, and when we're out of earshot of all the nosey townspeople, that smile grows. "How have you been... Daddy?"

The things that does to my cock. It's a miracle I keep a straight face and swallow the moan that word elicits, but that's about all I can do. "Honestly? I've been a little bit of a mess," I admit, leading her around the back of the church and down the stone path toward the pavilions. We won't be seen there. "How have you been?"

She notices. It's engrained in young women to know when they're being led away from others by a man, but she continues to follow. "I've been okay. Why have you been a mess?"

Her eyes meet mine with genuine concern, settling any doubt in my mind. Whatever she's been taught, whatever her fears are... she's everything I've been looking for. She embodies everything I've been searching for, all the reasons I've remained single and never remarried. Obedient, kind, young, eager to please... and completely untouched by everyone but me.

I decide to be honest.

"You," I say simply. "I can't stop thinking about you, Evie. You're on my mind when I'm awake and when I'm asleep, so not seeing you again until now has been difficult."

"So I'm not alone?" she whispers. "I've been thinking of you so much, Daddy. I thought it was because of my temptations."

"That's just The Temptress trying to set you free," I explain, forgetting for a moment that I'm speaking to someone who has likely never heard of her. It isn't something freely taught by the church, and it's far too early for me to put these thoughts in her head. She'll only run from me. "But no," I add quickly, taking her hand and ducking into one of the shaded pavilions. "You're not alone. Do you want to kiss me again?"

I see all the questions on her face before my question sinks in, and when it does, she's thoroughly distracted. "Yes. Please."

"Then come here." Wrapping a hand around the back of her neck, I pull her into a rougher kiss than our first. Being

limited on time means I can't waste a second, and as much as I'm dying to spread her out and take my time feasting on her bare little cunt, I can't. I have to take what I can get right now.

Her whimpers, her youthful desperation, all of her calls to me in a way I've never felt before. "Daddy."

She dives in eagerly for more and tastes so fucking sweet I can't help myself. My hands slide up under her dress to grip her ass and I lift her off her feet, pressing her against the pavilion wall and slipping my tongue inside her mouth.

I'm gone, so fucking hard I'm sure she can feel it poking her as she squirms in my arms and only drives me crazier, but I silently scream at myself to slow down. She won't give herself to me just yet, I know she won't, and I'll die if she makes me stop kissing her right now.

I can feel her warmth on my cock, the small wetness I caused on her cotton panties heating me up through my dress pants as I realize how easy it would be to take her right now. If those panties moved — if I was free of my slacks, I could thrust deep inside her untouched, virgin pussy and claim her as mine. I could —

"Daddy. Daddy, please stop. It hurts."

Instantly, I set her down and step back. My vision is blurry, breaths are coming in hard, clipped bursts, and I realize too late that I've already pushed her too far. "Evie, I'm sorry."

"It's okay," she assures me. "It felt so good but..." I watch her press down on herself and gasp. "It hurts. It's like a pulsing."

Fucking shadows. She needs to come, I need to make her come. "Have you ever had an orgasm?" I ask. "Touched yourself?"

She closed her eyes tightly and shakes her head so quickly I can tell she's trying to shake away the thoughts. "No. I can't. I can't."

She's breathing so hard I don't know how to help her. Touching her again might make it worse, but I can't leave her

like this. I hug her quickly, contouring her small body to mine. “Breathe, Evie. Breathe with me. In.”

How quickly she complies only solidifies how perfect she is for me. Her trembling slowly drifts away, and after a few moments, I notice her nose is buried into my armpit as she breathes.

My scent is calming her, and it becomes a struggle to imagine letting her go at all. Why would I when it feels like her sudden presence in my life is a gift?

“Good girl,” I praise quietly, rubbing her back softly. “You’re a good girl, Evie. Just breathe.”

Slender fingers curl into my shirt. “I like when you call me that.”

Of course she does. She’s probably never praised in her home life, making her all the more suited for someone like me. The devotion I could draw from her if given the chance to mold her... it sends a chill down my spine in the best way. “Then I’ll always tell you how good you are. How beautiful you are.” Gently, I fist a hand in her hair and pull back enough to meet her gorgeous brown eyes. “Can I kiss you again if I promise to keep my hands to myself?”

She takes a moment before she answers, but I’m pleasantly surprised when she nods. “I really like kissing you.”

“So do I.” Knowing better than to stay standing, I ignore how much my suit cost me and sit down on the dusty floor, holding out my arms for her. “Come sit on Daddy’s lap, little doe. I’ll let you keep all the control.”

For now, anyway.

Evie bites her lip as she maneuvers into my lap, but pauses before she can sit. “Like this, or...?”

She spreads her fingers like she’s asking if she should straddle me, sending an unnecessary wave of lust through me. “Yes. Just like that.”

I pull her down into position and pepper kisses up her smooth neck, imagining what the inverted cross would look

like plastered there. Put there by me. It's a thought that's almost too tempting, especially when she moans out a "Daddy" that goes straight to my cock. "Your mouth is like fire everywhere it touches."

Oh, sweet girl. If you only knew.

"Do you like it?" I ask, voice thick with need. "I can make you feel good, little doe. Kiss all over your gorgeous body until you're trembling with pleasure."

"All over my body?"

She shivers again, moving just enough to have my cock thickening painfully. I need her. Now.

"All over," I repeat, slipping my hand under her dress to her stomach. "Here—" I slide down to her thigh — "Here" — back up to ghost over her breast — "Here... and here."

My thumb just barely brushes her panties, but it's enough to make me want to make her take them off. The ones I stole from her hamper when I went to her house for dinner don't smell like her anymore, but I know better than to ask. She gasps, moving away from me so quickly I don't catch her in time. "Daddy. You can't touch there. I— no one's ever touched there."

"I know," I rasp, desire burning to an almost uncontrollable level. "But see? I touched, and you're not tainted. How much have you been told?"

"Um." She looks so young right now, it hurts. "That touching it and giving in to my desires would Taint me. That I'd be a whore no one ever wanted."

And people like the vicar wonder why more and more people leave the church every year.

"There's a line, Evie. There's always a line. You can touch it, I can touch it. I just can't fuck it or lick it, apparently. The Saint has some very strange rules."

"You can touch me there? Tell me more, please."

She moves closer, but I don't dare reach out for her again or try to get up. "I'd rather show you, but I understand your

hesitation. Pleasure can be found in several forms. It's much harder to explain since you don't have much experience touching yourself, but... there's a little bundle of nerves toward the top of your cunt. The one you said hurt a little bit ago. You need release, Evie. That's your body telling you that you need to come. If you rub it, or let me do it for you... you'll feel better. So much better. Do you want me to show you?"

Despite my best efforts to remain at least a little professional, I can hear the growled desperation in my own voice, and she can, too.

She wants it, her body is calling to me, but she backs away. "They're going to wonder where I am, Daddy. We have to go back."

I'm so hard right now I know it'll be a mistake to even stand up. "So what? Let them wonder. You're an adult, little doe. I don't know when I'll see you again."

Her eyes drop down to my lap before they meet mine again. "Come over for pie."

"I will," I promise, knowing damned well that's a terrible idea — but I'm getting to my feet before I can think twice about it. "Kiss me one more time."

She looks down at my crotch again and gasps at the bulge, but she doesn't run away. "You're... hard, Daddy. Does it hurt?"

"Yes." There's no point in lying. It's too late for that. "Yes, it aches. I— I haven't been with anyone since my wife died, and I'm incredibly attracted to everything about you."

"You haven't?" she asks a little surprised. "And you want to be with me?"

"I told you at dinner, I have very specific tastes. It's hard to find exactly what I'm looking for and it gets harder every year," I explain quickly. "But yes. I want you. All of you, little doe. And I'm willing to wait."

"I'm cute enough to wait for?"

I can see how much this question means to her even if it sounds ridiculous to me, but that's the difference between boys and grown men.

“Yes. It's more than that, but yes. You're stunning, Evangeline.”

“Thank you, Daddy.” She pulls me in for a hug that's interrupted by her name being called, and I see the panic on her face when she realizes it's her father. “I have to go.”

She kisses my lips quickly and then runs away, leaving me standing there strung out and half out of my mind.

I have to believe that one day soon, she'll give herself to me even if I have to marry her to get it, but waiting is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done.

I think it's past time I pray for a little guidance of my own.

Seven

All day while I'm at work, I stare at the door. I think every ding of the bell is him coming to see me, and every time it isn't, I'm disappointed.

I shouldn't be. He has me feeling more temptations than I've ever felt in my life, and staying on the righteous path has never been harder.

It hurts, yet I'm still terrified to give in, terrified to be tainted and tossed aside by a respectable man like Colden.

But I can feel how badly he wants me.

"Eve, I can lock up tonight. You head on home before the sun sets."

I smile at my boss Gloria and remove my apron. "Thank you. I'll see you in the morning."

My walk home goes by in a blur. He's all I can think about when I'm awake, and even when I'm sleeping, he plagues my dreams.

I don't even see the extra car in the driveway, so when I walk into my house and see Colden sitting at my dinner table, I gasp. "D— Mr. Adler. Good evening."

A faint smile plays across those inviting lips. "Evangeline. How was work?"

My mother barely gives me time to stutter out a response before she sends me to wash up, and my little brother is grilling him by the time I come back to take a seat.

"How much?" he prompts excitedly. "Ten bucks? A hundred? A zillion?"

"Not quite a zillion," Colden laughs. "Let's just say it was enough."

Curious, I tilt my head toward my mom, who beams proudly. "Mr. Adler made quite a sizable donation to the church," she explains, "and he's here to discuss other things we might be able to use Crown Hall or his many other

establishments for. I was thrilled when his receptionist called earlier.”

“Praise The Saint.” For the first time, those words feel off. I should be praising *him*. “That was very kind of you. I’ll have to hurry and get on those pies, I think we have the ingredients we need.”

“No need to rush,” he assures me, flicking his eyes down my frame. “I’m more than happy to come back another night for your pie.”

I blush with a soft smile. “Really? You could make time for that?”

“For cherry pie? Absolutely,” he laughs. “My nights usually aren’t too busy anymore. Are yours?”

I shake my head, moving to sit near him like there was a magnet pulling me in. “I’m never busy after work.”

“She’s been neglecting her studies,” my mother chimes in, stern and judgmental as always. “Yet another reason she needs to fix things with Mr. Boxley. She never had these issues before.”

Colden hums, sliding his broad, scorching hot hand over my thigh under the table. “Surely a simple misunderstanding would’ve been cleared up by now.”

“If only,” she scoffs. “She hasn’t even taken the time to apologize to him. He looks so sad when he sees you, Evangeline. You could make an effort.”

That’s a lie if I’ve ever heard one. “Sad? Mother, he doesn’t want me. He said so,” I rushed out. “It wasn’t a misunderstanding. We broke up. Are you expecting me to beg him to come back? Is that what The Saint would want?”

My father eyes us like he sees just how strange it is that this particular conversation keeps coming up whenever Colden is around, but he ignores him entirely. “Yes. The Saint would want you to keep your promise and remember your place in the church. Marriage is about keeping things pure and holy. You’ve known this your whole life. Marrying for love isn’t a privilege we get to enjoy. In time, you and Gavin will come to

love each other as your mother and I have. I'll hear no more about it."

That hand squeezes my skin. "And what if someone else within the church made an offer?" he asks, as coldly as his name suggests. "Someone other than Gavin Boxley."

My parents exchange nervous glances, but I beat them to answering. "I wasn't the one who broke our promise. He was. So if someone offered and truly wanted to keep their promise to me, I think The Saint would approve."

"We're not currently entertaining other offers, Mr. Adler. I currently have a meeting set up with Gavin's father tomorrow to work out the details, and frankly, she'll marry the boy whether she's happy about it or not."

"Understood," Colden says, destroying any hope I have that he wants me enough to marry me instead.

It stings more than I thought it would. His hand on my leg feels colder than it did five seconds ago, so I slip away from my seat and disappear into the kitchen to breathe, ignoring Michael's voice when he asks my parents why anyone would want to marry me. "She's too bland," he mutters. "Gavin was hanging out with Susan the other day behind the dollar store. Why would he pick Eve over her? She's so hot."

"Susan is tainted!" my mother whispers sharply. "He would never entertain someone like that. You're mistaken, Michael, now hush."

More evidence I've been telling the truth. More evidence they're ignoring.

It's hard not to feel... lost. My parents love me, but not enough to believe me. Colden wants me, but not enough to marry me. Gavin needs me, but not enough to stick around and have a little patience.

It's just not enough. None of it is.

I'm not.

Gripping the kitchen counter to steady myself through a threatening avalanche of tears, I don't hear Colden

approaching until he's right behind me and slowly pulling my hair back over my shoulder. "Breathe, little doe. This isn't what it looks like. I just have to be careful about how I approach them, that's all."

I close my eyes tightly, not wanting to see him yet. If I see him — if I look into those eyes, I'll believe I'm enough. I'll believe the pretty words leaving his lips over everything else, and with all the disappointment surrounding me, I can't do that to myself. "They're not listening to me. I've never given them any reason not to trust me and they still don't."

My voice is so small I'm surprised he hears me at all, but his lips brush the top of my head as he quietly, gently shushes me. "I know you don't know me well enough to trust me yet, but you will not be marrying Gavin Boxley. I don't care what I have to do. You will be mine, little doe. I just need you to have a little patience and a little faith."

It's too late. Even with my eyes closed and my attempts to hold up a wall between us, I feel it crumble instantly. I already trust him, I already need all his pretty words to be true, I already have faith. "Okay, Daddy. I don't want to be Gavin's. I'll be patient for you."

"Good girl," he whispers, wrapping his hand around my throat as his lips press against my temple. "Just keep being my good girl and it'll all be over soon. Now go back to the table with your head high. I'm going to sneak out to the restroom, but I'll be there soon."

I nod, unable to find words after what his touch and that kiss did to me. I walk out with drinks in my hand for my family and take a seat where I was, pretending like my mind is there at the table and not wandering off into a future where my parents can't hand me over to someone like I'm nothing more than a business transaction.

"That's closer than the last few have been," my father says to my mother, and I drag my attention back to the moment. "I'll pray for the continued protection of our home then. And for the others as well."

“What?” I ask, knowing I just outed myself for my thoughts being elsewhere. “What happened, Father?”

“Someone burglarized a string of houses over on Willow Street last night and the police still can’t seem to figure out who is responsible,” he explains. “It’s nothing to worry about.”

“Of course it’s something to worry about,” Mom argues as Colden comes back and takes his seat. “They’re getting closer and more frequent.”

“Are they stealing from them or is it something more violent?”

All three adults glance at each other like none of them want to be the one to tell me, and it’s Colden who ultimately answers, “Both. I’m sure they’ll be caught soon, but it’s best if you don’t go out alone at night and you make sure you sleep with your windows and doors locked.”

“Thank you, Mr. Adler, but we can handle our daughter’s safety,” Mom says — but for once, she doesn’t sound angry.

“Gloria doesn’t like it when I walk home in the dark, so I’m sure I’ll be fine. Thank you, Colden. Plus, there are bars on my window for extra protection.”

He jerks, glancing quickly at my father. “Bars? Why?”

“Protection,” my father repeats. “Can’t have some hooligan breaking in here and taking her virtue before her husband can.”

His hand tightens around his glass until I fear it might shatter. “Right. That makes... sense.”

It’s clear to me from his tense shoulders and clenched jaw that he doesn’t think it makes sense at all, but I can’t figure out why he cares unless he’s planning on breaking in to steal my virtue himself.

Is that what he meant when he said he’d do whatever he has to do?

The shiver that creeps up my spine turns multiple heads, but I drop my gaze before I can bring too much attention to

myself. “I’ll pray for those harmed. Whoever is breaking into these houses needs to be caught.”

“Indeed. Now, no more of this talk. Mr. Adler, I’ve been thinking about making the potluck a monthly thing since it was such a success, and Crown Hall would be a gorgeous place to hold some of the wedding receptions. We could do fundraisers there, and benefits, and—”

“And virtually everything but the actual services themselves?” he interrupts. “I’m happy to help the church, Mrs. Sheridan, but I am still a businessman. I’ll need to be able to rent the Hall out occasionally for money.”

“Of course,” she rushes out. “We would work around your schedule, of course. I hear the high school is going to be holding their ball there as well?”

“They are, and somehow, I’ve been volunteered as a chaperone.” Laughing, he sits back and finally seems to relax. “I haven’t danced since my own wedding, so I hope they’re not expecting much from me.”

My parents laugh along with him, and are once again oblivious to the wheels turning in my head. I’ve never danced. I’ve never been *allowed* to dance, and suddenly, I want to know what it’s like. I want to dance with Colden. “Do you need help with the event?”

My question makes my mother balk at me like she’s waiting for me to say it was a joke, and then she places her hand on her chest. “Evangeline. You can’t be seen in a place like that, surrounded by harlots flaunting themselves along a dance floor. Absolutely not.”

“I hardly think it’ll be like that,” Colden argues. “But I really could use her help. What if she helps me beforehand and comes home before the dance starts? The second hall will need decorated and things like that.”

I plead with my mother silently before turning to my dad. “He needs the help and he’s already done so much for us. Father?”

Chewing slowly, he glances between me and my mother. “I’ll need a list of everyone who will be there helping out, and you’re not to be alone with him at any time. Understood?”

I nod enthusiastically and meet Colden’s gaze, happy to see he looks pleased. “Then it’s settled. I’ll get the list sent over and I’ll make sure she always has someone else near her. Thank you.”

“Yes, thank you. I’ll be home before you guys know it.” And if I get some more time with Colden, then it’s our business alone.

He wants me... I feel it.

Eight

I wake up to my parents going back and forth in the kitchen about something that sounds serious, so I rush down to ensure everything is okay. “What’s happened? Is everyone okay?”

“Here, yes. But I got a call late last night asking for prayers. Betty’s daughter’s church out west was burned down yesterday. The damage is unbelievable,” my mom says through tears. “We were discussing the possibility of going out to help them rebuild their church and heal their community, but we can’t.”

“Why can’t we?” I cross my arms over my chest to calm my rapidly beating heart. With all the talk of violence lately, all it’s done is make me want to be near Colden. I feel safest with him.

“You know why we can’t. Your father and I can’t leave you two here alone with everything going on, and neither of us will go alone. They’ll manage. We’re needed here,” she says.

“Michael has camp anyway. It’s just me and I’ll be working for most of it. How will they manage, Mother? They need help.”

She hesitates, but my father shakes his head again. “Working or not, it isn’t safe for us to leave right now. We’ll pray and that’ll have to be enough.”

“I’d love to come help too, but I can’t. I need all the money I can save right now with college coming up and Gloria needs me. I’m eighteen now, I can be alone for a little while. And if it was us, we’d want them to come help.”

I can see they’re close to agreeing, but not close enough. “We would, but we’d also understand why someone under our circumstances wouldn’t come. We’ll continue to ask The Saint for guidance. In the meantime, you’ll need to start another prayer chain about this. I’ll get my book for you.”

Great. More calls from our obnoxious landline that can’t leave the kitchen. I rush upstairs to brush my teeth and wash

up, then take my place at the dining room table as I await my mother's return.

She sets the book in front of me and touches my head softly. "I'm sorry things have been tough lately. The Demon never sleeps."

"He doesn't. But The Saint's got us, Mother. Everything always works out." I start my rounds in a daze, letting all my neighbors know of the fire and how they can keep Betty's daughter's church in their prayers, and when I stumble across Colden's number, I freeze. I can call him... will he answer? Will he be happy to hear from me? I remind myself I'm safe under the guise of a prayer chain and dial it with my heart fluttering in my chest.

"This is Colden."

His voice. It's him. I'm so pleased I take a risk now that I'm alone in the kitchen. "Hi, Daddy."

"Evie," he breathes, and I swear I can hear the smile behind it. "How's my favorite girl doing?"

His favorite girl. "Better now. I'm doing a prayer chain for a church outside of Luna Vale. Did you hear one burned down?"

"The one out west? It made the national news, so yes. I suppose your father put you up to this?" he asks, teasingly enough that I blush.

"My mother, but yes. Imagine my surprise when I found your personal contact information in here, Mr. Adler. You used to be a hard man to contact."

"What can I say? I now have a reason to be easy for the Sheridan family to reach. Are you alone right now, little doe?"

I feel my legs clench at the pet name. "Sort of. They're... around, but not right this second."

My heart is pounding and I don't have a clue why, but I swear he can sense it.

"Are you wet for me?"

“Daddy,” I whisper. “It’s always wet when I hear, see or smell you. My body responds to you in a way I don’t understand.”

“Good girl. Thank you for being honest with me. Have you touched yourself yet?”

I feel that pulsing again and he isn’t even near me. “Not yet, Daddy. Have you? While thinking of me?”

“More than once,” he admits in a low voice. “I’m hard just thinking about what that pretty pussy looks like. Are you wearing a dress?”

“Yes. Just one I wear around the house. I’m barefoot which Mother doesn’t approve of, but I’m comfortable. Are you in your suit?”

“Always. Will you do me a favor, little doe?”

“Of course. Anything.” I’m surprised by how much I mean it, but I do. I only want to please him.

“Good girl.” He exhales hard as I hear the creak of a chair. “Touch yourself right now. You don’t have to come, but get your fingers nice and wet for me then lick them clean. I want you to describe how it tastes.”

“Oh,” I gasp, throbbing once again. “I... okay.” My cheeks burn as guiltily reach under my dress and touch what’s most forbidden. The release I begin to feel is almost instantaneous, like that area was born to be soothed and make feel good, and those thoughts are jarring. I stop instantly with a small moan, then lift up my wet fingers to inspect them. “Two of my fingers are wet, Daddy. It’s clear but... thicker than water. You want me to lick them clean?”

“Yes,” he rasps. “One day soon, I’ll be the one licking you clean. For now, I need you to do it for me. Suck your fingers. Tell Daddy how good you taste.”

It feels so wrong and dirty to put my fingers in my mouth but I do it, and I let him hear me suck them clean. “I don’t really taste much, Daddy. Maybe I need to get more?”

Grunting, Colden agrees. “Just a little more. Don’t slide your fingers inside... that’s mine.”

I can’t fight the whimper that elicits as I do as told and pull then up to find them even wetter than before. This time, I taste a hint of sweetness that I struggle to describe to him, but he seems pleased when I try. “You really want to taste me?”

“Yes. I’d like nothing more than to put your legs over my shoulders and walk around town with my face buried in your sweet little cunt, but we can’t always get what we want. One day, though.” He pauses. “Do you want more?”

The mere thought of him putting his mouth directly on me like that... the fact that he’d want to, that he wouldn’t be disgusted — it’s almost too much. I want to ask him about it, but I’m afraid to break the spell we’re under. “I want my fingers to be yours,” I whisper instead. “I think it’d be even better tasting it on your fingers.” I don’t know where that came from, but I have a feeling he likes it when he growls in response.

“You’re coming to the dance in two days, yes?”

Suddenly, I’m nervous about the dance. I have a strong feeling I’ll be alone with him even though we said we wouldn’t be, and I don’t know how many more lines I can cross. “Yes.”

“Good girl. Then you’d better continue your prayer calls before your mom gets suspicious. I’ll see you soon, little doe.”

“See you soon.” I hang up feeling giddy as I go back to my rounds, and I’m not surprised by how quickly I start to miss him. He makes me nervous, scared, excited, confused... but more than anything, he makes me feel alive.

I can’t wait to see what he teaches me next.

Once I’m done, I rush upstairs to change out of my wet panties and put on a new dress, then meet my brother downstairs so I can take him to youth group. “Ready?” He grunts at me as a response and I take it for what it is. Things are better when he keeps his mouth shut, anyway. “Good talk. Let’s go before you’re late.”

Nine

My mother is nervous as she drops me off to help Colden, but the second she drives away, I let her uneasiness drift off too. I don't want to think about her, I want to think of the handsome man standing near the entrance in a suit. I wave at him, walking over with a smile that matches his, and when we meet in the middle, I have to fight the urge to hug him. "Good afternoon, Daddy. How is your day?"

"Better now. Come here." He takes my hand and leads me just inside the doors to an empty hall, then tips my chin up and kisses me softly once, twice, again. "Shadows, I'll never get over how sweet your lips are."

"I hope you don't. I still like how it feels when you kiss me."

I go on my toes to kiss him again, breaking it only to gasp as he picks me up and spins me around. As he sets me back on my feet, I feel lightheaded in the best way. "You know I don't actually need help, right? We've been done for almost two hours. I made sure of it."

"What?" I gasp, still breathless. "You don't need me?"

"Oh, I need you, little doe. Just not for decorations. Come with me." He laces our fingers together and leads me down a hallway, then through a set of double doors into the most gorgeous room I've ever seen.

There are blue and white icicles strung everywhere with garland and twinkle lights covering every inch of the huge space, and at the sight of Colden, a DJ on a stage in a corner starts playing a slow song I've never heard before. "I need you to dance with me."

As he spins to face me, I freeze. As many times as I imagined what this would be like, I don't have a clue where to begin. "Daddy, I'm not allowed to dance. I-I don't know how."

"I know. And it's okay, I don't expect you to know how. We can be terrible at it together."

All of a sudden, our bodies are flush and I can feel every hard muscle under his smooth black suit.

It's intoxicating yet not enough all at once, and I let him lead my body as I feel myself mold to him. I hum contentedly against him, feeling something warm in my chest that has me clinging to him even tighter. "I like this."

"See? Something you think you shouldn't do that isn't so bad after all," he whispers, twirling me around until I'm breathless with laughter and pulling me back in to the safety of his arms. "So beautiful."

"I like when you compliment me. I actually believe you," I admit. "Thank you."

"And I like how vocal you are about things." He kisses my forehead, then spins me slower this time. "How much time do we have tonight?"

"Probably an hour or so. She told me she'd be back outside by five, but knowing her, that means four thirty."

He looks a little disappointed, and I can't blame him. I am too. "Then let's enjoy the hour we have."

I follow him around the venue, taking in how beautiful everything is and I'm so distracted I don't notice we're alone until a door is closing behind him. "What room is this?"

"My office. Is that okay?" he asks, ghosting his fingertips down my side. "You're safe here."

"I know. I'm with you," I whisper in spite of the chill I feel at his touch.

"It's been a couple of days. Have you made yourself come yet?" he asks, moving behind his desk to sit down and pat his lap for me.

Obedying is as easy as breathing. "I haven't. I've pressed against it to stop the pulsing but... nothing more than what you asked me to do on the phone."

Colden nods a little and stares at his own hand as he wraps it gently around my throat. "And if I asked you to make yourself come for me right here, what would you say?"

He isn't squeezing, yet he still takes my breath away. "I-I can't."

"You were told you're not allowed to dance. Did anything bad happen to you when you did?" he asks.

I shake my head, practically begging him to stop and keep going at the same time.

"And you want to be a good girl for Daddy, don't you?"

Those fingers flex just enough for my clit to throb, and I release a moan that answers before my words can. "Yes."

"Keep your eyes on me then and do what I tell you. Slip your dominant hand inside your panties."

Ice-blue eyes and an unmoving hand hold me captive as I do as told, shivering when I feel how swollen that bud already is. "Oh. It's wet."

"Fuck," he growls, hungry and insistent. "Good girl. Good girl... now rub slowly. Let The Temptress in."

"Who?" I gasp, rubbing myself truly for the very first time, and suddenly I don't need him to tell me. I feel her. "Oh, Daddy!"

"That's it, Evie. Give in to it. It'll feel so good, I promise. Move your fingers a little faster, but don't look away. I want to see the look in your eyes when you come for the first time."

The hardest thing to do is not close my eyes. It feels so good, so... so good, and I never ever want it to end. "Is your girl being good for you?"

I feel it building, and the moment he says "yes" like he's never seen anything better in his life, I give in. It's the best thing I've ever felt, the most intense thing I've ever felt, and for a few seconds it's like I'll never breathe again.

"Daddy!" I yell, my body shaking as the waves of it overtake everything else. "How! Oh shadows, how is this a sin?"

"That's it, baby," he praises with a voice thick with lust. "It's not. It's not a sin, it's pleasure. Such a fucking good girl,

coming for Daddy like that. Give me your fingers, let me taste.”

Most of me doesn't want to stop rubbing, but the thought of him actually tasting me has my eyes widening and my fingers flying to his lips.

The way his hot, wet tongue feels slipping between my messy fingers, the combination of suction and vibration as he moans in satisfaction, the mass growing between his legs and poking me — none of it compares to the fire in his eyes.

The desire.

“More,” he growls when he finally pulls off. “More, Evie.”

His hand is squeezing now, blocking blood flow to my brain as I reach back in to feed him more, and even with his hand in control of my breathing, I still know I'm safe. “You need release too, Daddy.”

“I know,” is all he says. “I'll get mine. I'm not in control enough right now to try. Will you— fuck,” he grunts, letting my throat go and closing his eyes for a moment as he tries to breathe easier. “Will you let me look at you? I need to see your pussy.”

This time, my blush travels over my whole body, but The Temptress is still with me and I can't find a single thing wrong with it. “Yes, Daddy.”

“Good girl. Up.” Tapping me, he helps me off his lap and lifts me up onto his desk, then bends my legs for me and spreads them so my panties are the only thing between him and my most precious place. “Already beautiful, little doe. But I want these.”

Rough fingers grip the waistband and I barely have time to lift up to help him take them off, but when he holds them to his nose and breathes in deep instead of looking at me, I clench my legs closed as my whole body twitches. “Is that good? Do you like my smell?”

“Yes, sweet girl.” He inhales deeply again then slips them into the inside pocket of his suit jacket, finally letting his eyes drop to my shiny, wet pussy. The way he jerks and grips his

growing bulge only solidifies that he's the one I've needed all along. "Fuck. Look at you. Untouched... smooth... so fucking wet. So fucking young."

There's something different in his eyes now as he slowly reaches out to touch me, and as much as I want it, I know we can't.

We can't.

"Daddy, no. I'm sorry. Y-You can't, please." I grab his hand before he can touch and close my legs. "We won't be able to stop. M-My soul."

He flinches like I slapped him and stumbles back a step. "You're right," he mutters. "So fucking hard right now all I want to do is break your little body in half. You should go."

The Temptress's warmth is gone, replaced by what feels more like The Demon's chill than anything. "I'm sorry."

I hop off his table and run from the room. I still can't breathe, but once I find what I hope is a normal pace, I focus on getting my emotions in control. I sinned, yet it felt better than anything ever before it and I don't feel anything burning into my skin. I'm not tainted, I only made a mistake that I need to atone for. He doesn't hate me for denying him, he was just struggling because his privates were hurting.

Everything is fine.

The second the fresh air hits my cheeks, I feel better, only to have it ruined when I run straight into Gavin. "Oh. Excuse me, I was just... leaving."

"Bet you were. No date, Prude? Mine'll be here any minute," he jests. "Change your mind about me yet?"

Did he get uglier? Yeah, he did. He looks like a baby with three hairs on his chin and I don't know why in the shadows I ever thought I could want him. "No. Not at all, actually."

His smug smile vanishes. "Whatever. I've just about got my dad convinced to call off our engagement. No one will want you then and you'll regret this."

“I hope he does. Marrying you would be worse than being shunned by the whole town.” I don’t know what’s come over me, but I don’t stop there. “In fact, I’d rather be tainted than have you as a husband.”

Fury overtakes his features as he steps forward, his body language screaming that he’s about to hurt me — but he barely gets the “fuck you” out before Colden is standing between us and lifting Gavin up by his throat to slam him against the wall.

“Sorry, I didn’t quite hear you,” Colden mutters dangerously as Gavin sputters and claws at his hand, his legs dangling and flailing uselessly. “I think you owe her an apology.”

“It’s okay D- Mr. Adler. I don’t need anything from him.”

I can’t fight the panic I feel when I fear someone might see. “Fuck you, too,” Gavin spits, and I barely have time to shield my eyes before Colden lifts him from the wall and slams him against it again.

The sickening crack of his skull hitting the brick makes my stomach roll and has fear building so rapidly I think I might throw up if I look, but Colden didn’t kill him.

“Okay, okay!” he whimpers. “I-I’m sorry!”

I peek out through my fingers to see Colden setting him down again. “Spit on me again and it’ll be the last thing you ever do. Insult her again... and you’ll *wish* it was your last act. Understand, boy?”

Gavin is blinking so quickly I’m sure he will cry, but I won’t feel sorry for him. He was going to hurt me.

“I understand. Don’t kill me, please.”

“Why would I kill you when it’ll be so much more fun to listen to you tell her parents exactly what you said to her?” Colden asks. “That’s the vicar’s daughter, remember? You may not be tainted because no one wants to fuck a scrawny, pathetic little thing like you, but when the vicar is done with you, you’ll be as good as. You’ll never set foot in a church again, never hold a job in this town. Never be worthy of a match as good as the one you’d have had with her. It’ll be

much more satisfying than getting your blood all over my shoes. Now go.”

Gavin trips as he runs off, and I move closer to Colden without realizing. “I’m sorry you had to hear that.”

“I’m not,” he says quietly. “I’m sorry that you were ever promised to a rat like that, but he just did us both a favor. I wasn’t bluffing, Evie. I fully intend on making him tell your parents the truth.”

No one has ever cared to protect me this much. “They’d never believe me but... they wouldn’t have a choice but to believe it from him.”

“I know.” He wraps me up in a hug and kisses my head. “They should trust you, but now they won’t have a choice. You’ll be free of him for good soon enough... and if not, I really will kill him. He’s not your future, little doe.”

The thought of him killing someone for me has butterflies scattering in my stomach. I see the truth in his eyes as clear as I see the blue. “Thank you.”

“Hmm. Now go, Freya here will wait with you outside. Your mother should be back any minute and we need to keep up appearances.” His lips sweep lower, down by my ear, where he whispers, “I’m keeping the panties. Be Daddy’s good girl and make yourself come again when you get home. Don’t stop until you feel like your bones have turned to jelly.”

“Yes, Daddy,” I gasp, then clench my thighs together. “Will you come for me too?”

“Yes. Picture me at my desk with your panties in my mouth so I can taste you as I come. I’ll see you soon, little doe.”

He steps back as I’m reminded suddenly that I’m soaked with nothing but my dress to hide it, but a woman Colden’s age walks up to wrap an arm around me before I can tell him that. “You must be Evie. I’m Freya. You’ll need to tell your mom you’ve been with me the whole night, understand?”

“Yes, of course. Thank you.” I fight the urge to turn around for one more glance of Colden because I know walking away

will become impossible.

My knees are weak enough.

Ten

It takes less than twenty-four hours for Gavin to tell my father everything. The weight that lifts from my shoulders when both of my parents apologize to me for the first time in my life nearly sends me to my knees, but my mother doesn't give me time to revel in my new freedom.

I'm told that Colden will be arriving for dinner and I'm to finally have that pie ready for him as a thank you, so I dash to the kitchen and fight a series of spontaneous laughs whenever I remember that I do not — and will not ever — have to marry Gavin Boxley. Colden saved me, and I'm going to make him the best pie he's ever tasted even if it takes me a dozen tries.

Thankfully, I'm pretty sure I've got it perfect the first time, which gives me an opportunity to clean myself up and put on the only red dress I own. I hugs my body in a way that no others do, and as I slip a bow into my dark hair, I take a second to let myself breathe.

He'll be here soon, and now that Gavin is out of the way, there's nothing stopping him from taking his place.

I just need to be patient.

When the doorbell rings, I practically skip toward the door to open it for Colden. He looks sinfully handsome in dark jeans and a sport coat, and his slightly-greying hair is laying as perfectly as always.

"I'm starting to think we should just make this a regular thing," he quips as he steps in. "I think you all invite me to dinner now more often than my partners do."

"You'll get no complaints from me, Mr. Adler. I'd love it if you came over for dinner every night."

My brother fakes a gag from somewhere behind me but we ignore him. Michael wouldn't understand anyway.

"Be careful, Evie. I just might take you up on that." He winks as he steps in to shake my father's hand, and the

atmosphere is already so different that it's hard to believe.

"Come in, Colden. Do you want some wine?" Father asks, and Colden looks as surprised at the offer as I am.

"I'd love some, thank you."

I rush over to grab the wine bottle and glasses, but my mother is thoroughly scrubbing them in the sink. "A little dusty?"

"It's been ages since we've had a reason to use them," she whispers. "I wish your father would've told me. Quick, grab a towel."

I do as told, drying them quickly and setting them aside so I can work on the bottle. "How long are we supposed to let it breathe for? They're already sitting and waiting."

"Just decant it, it works much better than just uncorking and letting it sit. Here." She looks through our cupboards frantically and hands me a glass pitcher. "Good enough. Pour slowly."

I listen to her, because what do I know of wine? I've never even tasted it, but it smells sweet as I pour, and every second I stand there with my mother only makes me want to get back to Colden faster.

It feels like I can't breathe at all until we're sitting around the table and his leg is resting against mine again, but the relief doesn't last long. I should be used to our conversations making me breathless by now, but Colden seems determined to one-up himself. "I'm sorry about the business with Gavin," he says almost believably. "I shouldn't have gotten involved."

"No, no. Well, it was a little surprising that you did, but we appreciate it. His father always made him sound like he was a proper Saint-fearing man, not a hooligan like the rest of our youth these days." My father takes a long sip of his wine, thankfully missing the way Colden's hand snakes under the table to grip my thigh.

"Unlike Gavin, I am a Saint-fearing man," he lies smoothly. "There are enough horrors in this world without letting things like that happen right under my nose."

“Don’t I know it,” my father agrees. “I’m struggling with our decision not to go help with the church that burned. I feel the Saint is calling me, yet... it’s too dangerous to go without taking my whole family.”

“What if Mr. Adler comes over for dinner each day to check in?”

It’s out before I can stop it, and the way the entire table seems to freeze in time should tell me I made a mistake, but wild hope keeps me breathing.

“That would... be a start,” Father says. “But the police still haven’t caught the criminals who have been terrorizing Luna Vale and I don’t feel comfortable leaving you alone overnight.”

“So why doesn’t he just stay?” Michael asks. “He kicked Gavin’s butt. Bet he could kick some criminal butt too, and his beard is cool.”

It’s probably the nicest thing he’s ever said about another person, so I use his momentum to fuel my next question and slip my hands under the table to touch Colden’s. “Could you? Could you watch over me so my father can answer The Saint’s calling?”

He looks trapped for a moment, like he’s afraid to answer — but when no one tries to throw him out at the thought, he squeezes my hand and nods once. “Of course. I could fund the trip as well, and donate to the rebuild. Anything to help.”

My mother lets out an exasperated gasp. “Henry, you can’t be considering this. He’s a man! A grown man, and Michael’s due to leave for camp for weeks. There wouldn’t be anyone else here.”

Father shrugs. “And why not? You heard him. He’s a Saint-fearing man who just offered to donate his time and a considerable amount of money to the cause, and he did just save our daughter’s virtue. I highly doubt he’s going to turn around and take it himself.”

“And there’s always the mark,” Michael cuts in. “Not like she could hide it from us if he did. I think they’ll be fine. He

could have anyone in this town, Mom.”

He waves his hands at me like she’s never seen me before and I drop my gaze, understanding his meaning thoroughly. Why would Colden want me when he could have someone much prettier? “See. Everything would be fine, Mother. He could stay in the guest room.”

“Or on the couch,” Colden adds. “Better to position myself directly in front of the door if it’s a break-in you’re concerned with.”

She stands, pulling my father out of earshot to talk, and Michael gets up and follows them sneakily to eavesdrop.

“Are you sure, Daddy?” I whisper. “I bet your bed was thousands of dollars and you’d sleep on our old couch?”

“If that’s what it takes to be close to you for a week or two, yes,” he whispers back. “But I’d much rather sleep in your bed with you.”

I bite my lip without realizing and try to cover it up with a drink of water. Sleeping next to him sounds like a dream. “She might say no.”

“Then I suppose I’ll have to find a way around the bars on your window,” he growls. “But she won’t say no. She wants the money and the time away with your father. I can see it in her eyes. Just wait.”

I nod, hoping with all of me that he’s right, and when they return, my father looks satisfied — if not a little apprehensive.

“You’ll both need to check in daily, and you’re to limit your interactions with each other. Mrs. Corley will check in on you once a day while we’re gone and you’re not to miss work or slack on your schooling, Evangeline. Understood?”

“Of course,” I rush out. “You won’t have to worry about me, they need you more right now. I’ll be a good girl.”

I glance at Colden when I say that just in time to see the ghost of a smirk. “And I’ll make sure she’s a good girl,” he confirms. “She’ll be safe with me.”

With a satisfied sigh, my father nods once. “Then it’s settled. We’ll leave first thing Monday morning.”

I keep my face as neutral as I can while everything else buzzes. We’re going to be alone at night together. “For how long?”

“As long as The Saint needs us,” he replies like it’s obvious. “Or until Mr. Adler here is no longer willing to stay. Perhaps we’ll even find a suitable match for you while we’re out there, Eve.”

So they’re still not considering Colden.

It hits me then that they’re never going to allow him to marry me. For what reason, I don’t know — maybe the age gap, maybe his experience or the fact that he’s already been married once, maybe a combination of all of it. Maybe they don’t think he can provide them with grandchildren since he never had kids with his first wife.

Whatever the reason, it’s clear that Colden comes to the same conclusion when I do, and all those good feelings are gone, even if I can’t show it. That’s why they’re not worried about us being alone together now. They’re not even considering him as an option. “Don’t worry about that,” I say lightly. “The church needs all of your focus, and I’ll pray for you.”

“As will I.” Colden lets go of my hand to eat his dinner, and my parents launch into a conversation about the things they want to accomplish with the new church. Knowing that I’ll be alone with him soon gives me the patience not to engage too much with him right now so I don’t tip my hand in front of them, but it becomes increasingly difficult when he moves his leg so we’re not touching at all anymore.

I crave his touch almost as much as I crave oxygen in my lungs, and every inch between us is palpable. “Are you ready for some pie?”

I touch what I can reach and pull my hand back before anyone can notice, grateful when he stands to follow me to the kitchen under the guise of helping me slice it.

The moment we're out of sight, he grips my throat and kisses me hard. "Two days from now, little doe... you're all mine. If he comes back with a suitor for you, I'll kill him."

I whimper against his lips. "I know, Daddy. Two days."

"Good girl. Stay patient for me until then." He squeezes my throat tighter and lets me go, turning to slice the pie as I catch my breath and grip the counter for support, and the noise he lets out when we're seated again and he takes a bite of my cherry pie makes me throb. I make a mental note to bake more for him while he's here.

"How's it taste, Mr. Adler?"

"It's easily the second-best thing I've tasted this week," he says, and it takes me a moment to realize that it isn't an insult — the best thing he tasted was *me*.

"She has some work to do then," my mother interrupts us. "Normally her pies are perfect."

Chuckling, Colden takes another bite and rests his leg against mine again. "She'll have plenty of time to prove that soon enough."

Yes, yes I will.

"I think it's pretty awesome," Michael mumbles around a huge bite, and for once, I don't find myself wanting to slap him.

Two more days. Just two more days and I'll get to finally spend some real time with Colden Adler.

If only I could fast forward time.

Eleven

As soon as my mother pulls me aside, I know exactly what she wants to talk about, but I don't act like I know. I can't have her thinking anything salacious has been on my mind, not with them leaving in the morning. "Yes, Mother? Are you all packed?"

We sit down on the couch together and she regards me like I'm fragile enough to break. "Your father is convinced that Mr. Adler's actions are a sign from The Saint that it's safe for us to do this. Part of me is inclined to believe him; Mr. Adler has been a member of our church since before you were born and he's never been anything less than devoted... if not a little mysterious."

All good things, but I know that's not why we're sitting here. "Mhmm."

"But I'm not blind," she continues. "Your father might refuse to believe that a man devoted to The Saint would never risk your virtue, but he was also clearly wrong about Gavin. Are you sure you feel comfortable with this?"

"Yes," I say confidently. "Has he given us any reason not to trust him?"

She eyes me and shakes her head slowly. "No, but... never mind. If you ever get uncomfortable, call Mrs. Corley."

"I will, Mother." I take her hands in mine. "I'll be okay here. He saved me from Gavin. You should have seen his face, he was going to hurt me and Colden protected me."

Relaxing, she pulls me into a tight hug that sends her perfume rocketing up my nostrils. "And that is the only reason we're allowing this." Sitting back, she asks, "Do you have any questions about anything?"

I do, about a million, but any one of them would worry her and make her hesitate leaving. I can't have that. "No. I'll be on my best behavior and make us dinner every night."

“Good. Make sure he has whatever he needs while he’s here. Towels, food, drink, entertainment. It’s your job to be a good host and represent our family while we’re gone.”

“Of course I will. You don’t have to worry about us, okay? Give the church all of you so it flourishes and Colden and I will pray every night.”

My mother glances at the huge cross adorning the wall across from our couch and closes her eyes, then stands and helps me to my feet. “May The Saint surround you both then.”

The Saint... hopefully The Temptress. I make a mental note to ask him about her, because even though I felt her, I still have no clue who she is. “May The Saint surround you too.”

I can’t sleep.

There are a multitude of reasons why I wouldn’t be able to, like how my parents are leaving, Colden is going to be staying here, how The Temptress is surrounding me. My most precious area is throbbing, calling to Daddy like he could hear her if he were close enough, but she has to wait at least one more day.

Or does she? Colden wants me to touch her, he wants me to give her release and feel good, as does The Temptress — and even though her presence is still intimidating, I don’t want her to fade away.

With a blush, I slip my hand in my panties and gasp at first contact. It’s swollen, wet, aching with need. I’ve neglected her since Colden last told me to touch myself, and when I roll my finger along the bud, I know how badly she needs this — how badly *I* need this.

“Daddy,” I whisper, wishing I had something of his here so I could smell him. I want my hand to be his, I want to hide inside his armpit as he pushes me over that edge and fall asleep on his chest.

Soon. So soon.

Tonight, I'll have to be enough for myself. It doesn't take long for me to forget everything but the pleasure. It's blinding, all-consuming, and for a few moments of my life, I don't care about anything else at all. Just this, just my fingers on my clit, my trembling body as I fall over that ledge and come all over my fingers.

Somehow I managed to pull the pillow over my face to stifle the noises and I tug it off to catch my breath. Tomorrow he'll be here and I won't have to be quiet. Tomorrow I'll come even harder than I did today. Tomorrow will be better.

Finally, sleep finds me.

The next morning, I'm still wet down there when I wake, but I feel better than I have in a while. "Let's go, Michael. Do you need help packing?"

"Help? You're going to help me?"

I shrug as I slip on my flats. "If you need it, yes."

"I don't, but why are you in such a good mood?"

Oh, I don't know, maybe because I won't have to see your face for a while. Or Mother and Father's, for that matter. "I don't know, I slept well."

"I slept well," he mocks, only making me chuckle.

"I take it you didn't?"

"No," he admits. "Never sleep well before something exciting, especially camp. All my friends will be there."

I help him drag his bags downstairs and then grab him a bagel. "Then eat up, you'll need your energy if you want to make the most of it. Sure you won't miss our parents?"

Michael scoffs. "I'm sure. You'll miss them more than me."

No. Not at all. "Maybe. Hurry up and eat. I have work later."

To say work is slow would be an understatement, but I'm able to get my studies done in the downtime and Gloria ends up sending me home early. All that does is give me time alone at home as I wait for Colden, but I use that opportunity to get a shower done, dinner on the stove, and cookies in the oven. None of that helps my nerves though, so when everything is ready for him, I sit down with a book and try to distract my mind. I'm going crazy knowing he'll be staying the night with me, but it's a crazy I can get used to.

If only I was truly his.

Twelve

Colden

“Don’t look at me like that,” I mutter, throwing a glare at Rory and Gideon both. “It’ll be fine. I’ll be fine.”

“Fine? You haven’t been fine since you were properly introduced to little Eve. Just tell us what it is. Plenty of virgins running around, so I know it’s more than that.”

Rory leans in a little closer as he waits for a response that I don’t know how to give him.

What *is* it about her that has me so bent?

She’s not the type of conventional beauty people start wars over. She’s not experienced or particularly talented at anything but baking, from what I can tell. She’s...

“She’s obedient,” I say finally. “And a blank slate. Her need to be good surpasses even the fear her parents have instilled in her. She’s innocent and breathtaking and the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen, convention be damned.”

To my surprise, my business partners smile. “Obedient, huh? How far have you guys gone?” Gideon asks.

If anyone else in the world asked, I’d have lied. But I know I can trust them both with my life... and hers, too. “Not far. She made herself come in front of me, but she hasn’t touched me yet. Just a few kisses.”

“Sweet Temptress,” Rory hisses. “I need to find one of those for me. That tension and buildup is everything.”

“Only if she actually gives herself to me,” I remind him. “One look at her pussy had me ready to Taint her right there.”

“Making me hard under here,” he jokes, only I know it’s not really a joke. “When will you see her again?”

And now, the whole reason I asked them to meet me in my office. “Tonight... and all the nights after until her parents get

back from renovating that church that burned down out in Goyleton. They've asked me to stay with her."

How hard Rory laughs makes me want to slap him. "Well... let me know if you need an order of Temptress Cream to cover up her mark."

My stomach drops. "I can't do that to her, Rory. She deserves better than me, yet I'm afraid I won't be able to stop. You can't imagine the things it does to me when she kisses me. She's so fucking young."

"I hear you," Gideon interjects. "But you're one of the best men we know, so don't sell yourself short. You'd take care of her. You mean to tell me if you slipped and she was tainted you wouldn't want her anymore?"

"Of course I would. How could I not? The mark means nothing to me, especially if I'm the one who will be putting it there." Suddenly, my thoughts darken. Thinking about what it would feel like to have her walking around with a permanent, physical reminder that she's mine, that I'm the only one she needs to worship... it has me gripping the edge of my desk and my cock straining in my slacks. "Fuck."

My business partners share a knowing look before Rory speaks up. "Have you talked to her about The Temptress?"

"Not really. I mentioned Her a couple of times, but it's clear she's never been taught about her. I'll get there, but I'm not sure what difference it'll make. She's had eighteen years of indoctrination into the Sainthood. She never even made herself come before I asked her to."

Rory adjusts himself and curses under his breath. "Did you help her with her first one?"

"Just my voice and my hand around her neck. She's got such a pretty throat." The memory of her shiny, bare pussy is enough to have me wanting to go to her house right now, but I need to calm down if I have any hope of controlling myself. "Should've seen the way her body moved."

"Fuck," he whispers. "I'm way too horny for this."

"Get it together, Rory. This is about him, not your cock."

“Hey, I take what I can get,” he argues. “And tell me you’re not at least a little thick right now.”

Knowing Gideon, he’ll never admit it, so I clear my throat to bring their attention back to me. “All Shade will break loose if I Taint her, but it’s almost inevitable at this point. She’s a grown adult, yet I’ve tried testing her a couple of times and she still won’t disobey her parents’ wishes for marriage which means I won’t be able to take her that way.”

“Have you made an official offer?” Gideon asks. “If you have and they denied you, yet you know she’d choose you, I say do it. You both deserve happiness.”

I shake my head. “Not exactly. I’m walking a tightrope here. If I make my intentions known and they’re not receptive, I won’t be permitted to see her at all.”

They both nod in understanding. “Quite the predicament, Adler.”

“Hmm. So it would seem.” I stand, snapping my briefcase shut. “Whatever. I’ve denied myself long enough. If I can’t convince her to let me fuck her now, I’ll just take her somewhere else where her parents can’t control her anymore... whether she wants it to begin with or not. She’ll forgive me eventually.”

They see the promise in my eyes, I know they can. “I’d stand but... you don’t want to see this.”

Gideon scoffs at Rory and shakes my hand, the small bulge when he stands proving this conversation got to him too. “Good luck. We’ll be here for you no matter which way you go.”

Their support in all things has me smiling and offering something that surprises me. “Maybe I’ll have her put on a little show for you when it’s done. Have fun with that visual,” I laugh, ducking out of there and getting in my car to head to the Sheridans’ house.

I may need to tread carefully and take things slowly, but we’ll get there.

That girl is mine.

Rolling my suitcase up to her front door, I knock once and loosen my tie as I start to get nervous for the first time. I'm so lost in her, so fucked over every single thing she does that it hasn't really occurred to me that she wouldn't want me to taint her or even marry her.

Why would she? I'm over twice her age, greying and more controlling than her own father. Why w—

The door opens and derails my thoughts. She's in some pajama shorts I've never seen before, making her look even younger than ever before as she steps aside with a sheepish grin. "Hi, Daddy."

Oh, fuck. All the blood in my body rushes south as I slowly walk forward and she closes the door behind me. "Beautiful little doe. How's my good girl?"

"Better now. Did today go slowly for you too?"

She moves closer to me now that we're alone, giving me a silent green light to pick her up and kiss her. "Yes," I growl, carrying her to the couch and sitting down with her pinned in my lap. "But I get you all night now."

"All night. Tell me, Daddy, have you been thinking of this? Just you and I locked away in here all night?"

Fucking cock throbs so hard under her, it makes me grunt. My fingers slide over impossibly smooth skin as I work my way up her thighs and under the back of her shirt, and I can't figure out how to answer her question without scaring her.

"Yes." Keep it simple. "Made myself come twice last night just thinking about you sitting here, squirming on my lap."

On cue, she squirms. "I made myself come for you too."

"Did you?" I ask, pleased and curious all at once. "How'd it feel?"

"Amazing but... I was missing you. I really wanted it to be your fingers."

Her legs clench as my eyes flutter with a rush of lust I nearly can't stop. "I can, you know. I can touch you like that without you getting tainted."

"You can?"

She's whispering, hips rolling slightly without her even noticing, but I notice.

That tight, perfect, virgin little ass is brushing my aching cock through my slacks. I notice every time she breathes.

"Yes. Fingers don't count. Do you want to try it?"

She gulps, shaking her head once. "I'm scared. Can you tell me more about The Temptress? Is she who I feel when I... touch?"

She's the one making it impossible to think straight right now.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, I nod and attempt to ignore the heat coming off her body. "Yes. She sits at the right hand of The Demon. She seeks to bring us freedom through pleasure, and by giving yourself to her, you're freeing yourself from The Saint's wrath and The Demon's damnation."

Evangeline's brow furrows as that sinks in. "Free from both? Why haven't I heard of a third way?"

Shadows, I have to be careful here. "Because her very existence makes The Saint useless. There are those who think the mark of the tainted is actually The Temptress' mark, not The Saint's. That it's a way for her to mark you as hers in the afterlife. If you'd have been taught that from the beginning, would you have worshiped The Saint?"

Her mind is reeling before me, and even with as much as she trusts me, she still can't grasp what I'm telling her. How could she after eighteen years of praising The Saint? "Those that believe in her, they believe the mark is a good thing?"

"It's complicated," I admit. "You're aware, I'm sure, that the mark shows up if you have sex of any kind before marriage, yes? And that consent or lack thereof doesn't seem to matter, you get tainted just the same?"

She nods, clinging to my shirt as she clings to every word. “Of course.”

“There are people who consider the mark a good thing and don’t care how it got there. Then there are others who think it’s a good thing, but care very much how it got there. And then there’s me, who falls somewhere in between,” I admit, realizing how it’s going to make me sound. “But at the end of it, The Temptress is supposed to be the one who welcomes us when this world is done, and I’d rather take my chances with her than either of the other two even if I’m not tainted.”

I see the moment she catches up and worry overtakes her. “But you attend our church? You said you were a Saint-fearing man. Was that just for my dad?”

Fuck.

“Again, it’s complicated.” Thinking is easier now, as is everything else. “I attend your church to keep up appearances. It makes my life... easier, and it got me invited here tonight.”

Eve hums, staring at me like she’s still trying to understand, but that’s enough for me. She’s trying. I can mold her, all I need to do is get her away from her family.

And I need to at least pretend to control myself.

“Does it make you uncomfortable when I kiss you?” I ask, brushing her hair from her face as she shakes her head no.

“Not at all. I never want it to end. Mother said The Demon would disguise himself as something like that, but I don’t feel him.”

“Good girl. He’s not here. None of them are here, it’s just you and me.” I thread my fingers through her hair and tug her in, kissing her until she parts her lips with a gasp and lets me in. The first taste of her sweet, unskilled tongue has me hard enough to fuck a hole right through her, and I realize if either one of us want to make it through the night... I need release.

And I need it now.

Thirteen

Colden quickly moves me off his lap and gets up to go shower, and with as fast as he's moving, I think I know why.

I wait a few moments on the couch with my legs clenched together, but I don't last long. I want to see.

I tiptoe my way over to the guest bathroom and find the door open for me, and knowing he left it open just for me gives me the confidence to lean against the wall and peek inside.

At first, all I see are the toned muscles of his back, the tattoo snaking around his hip, and his bare backside. It's the first time I've seen a man like this — especially one dripping wet and so handsome it makes me weak.

This is enough for me, yet I find myself rooted to the spot when he moans and turns just enough that I can see his hand swiping over the length between his legs.

“Evie,” he growls, but he's not talking to me.

He's thinking of me.

Oh, shadows this is hot. My clit is pulsing again, wanting to beg him to touch me and make me feel good while also wanting to please him.

I need to see more.

The door creaks as I push it further and take a tentative, entranced step forward, and his head snaps toward me the second I get both feet inside the bathroom.

Panting, he shuts off the water without breaking eye contact and steps out onto the floor, dripping wet and massive length swinging as he stalks toward me. “Little doe.”

There's something different in his eyes now. Something primal and raw and dangerous.

It makes me so wet I feel it soaking my panties. “Daddy,” I gasp. “You're so big.”

“Think so?” he asks, stopping so close to me I can feel the steam from the shower. “Kneel, Evie. Be Daddy’s good girl and get on your fucking knees.”

My entire body shivers from the power he’s radiating. It has me dropping to my knees without question, a gasp or maybe a whimper stuck in my throat as I wait for his next move.

I drop my gaze to the floor, looking up again only when he hooks a finger under my chin and guides my face back up. “Look at it.”

“Oh.” This time I do whimper. It looks angry and desperate and commanding, a combination that has me twitching and biting my bottom lip. I feel so close to him right now, it’s so intimate down here, so raw I feel exposed even though I’m the one dressed.

“So fucking beautiful, Evie. Don’t move.” His broad hand wraps tight around it and moves, stroking until I’m almost salivating with the need to touch him, to have him touch me.

But I’ll be good, and he told me not to move.

“Fuck. Bet I’d wreck your fucking throat, girl. Want to so fucking bad... spit. Spit on Daddy’s cock.”

Spit? Ladies aren’t supposed to spit, but his tone leaves no room for second-guessing. I go against everything I’ve ever known and spit right on it, shaking when he uses my spit as lubrication and makes a noise like I’ve done good.

“Shadows, that’s... so fucking hot.” Moving faster, his whole body flushes. “Gonna come. Fuck, you’re perfect. Daddy’s beautiful little good girl. Open your fucking mouth.”

I don’t, I’m too stunned to — and he grunts in frustration as he yanks my head back by my hair and I feel something hot, wet and thick coating my neck.

He’s coming on me. A man just finished himself on my skin and I can smell it. “Daddy!”

I’m full-on trembling now as he drags his wet length across my chin and then swipes up some of the mess on his

fingers.

“You’re okay. Daddy’s got you, little doe. Just look at me. Suck Daddy’s cum off his fingers like a good girl.”

I think of how much he loves the taste of me, how much I want to love the taste of him too, and with the slightest bit of hesitation I lean in and suck his fingers into my mouth. It’s much more potent than mine, much thicker too, and although there’s a bitterness to it, I find myself sucking them in deeper for more.

“Good girl. There she is... get it all. There’s plenty more painted all over that pretty neck.”

By the time he’s done, I feel dizzy with it — drunk on it like a summer wine, and all the hesitation in my body is gone as he picks me up and carries me into the still-running shower. My clothes soak through quickly as he kisses me and backs me against the shower wall, snaking his hand down my body and into my pajama shorts.

The first contact of his rough fingers on my clit makes me thrash, but it feels so right I can’t find it in me to say no. “Oh, shadows!”

“Fuck, you’re so fucking small,” he whispers roughly. “Pussy’s so smooth it makes me weak. Come for me, Evie. I’m not letting you out of this shower until you’re gushing all over my fingers.”

“Gushing? I — Daddy, it feels so good. So much better than my fingers. Please don’t stop.”

“There she is. There’s my girl. Won’t stop, little doe.”

Hot, insistent lips find mine as his fingertips take me apart, and when I come, I stop breathing entirely. I clench around him as it overtakes me and The Temptress wraps her arms around both of us. I feel her then more than I’ve ever felt The Saint, and deep down I don’t know how to feel about that realization.

He holds me under the water, and though I can feel all the parts of him I know I shouldn’t, this doesn’t feel sexual. It feels intimate. Like he needs to hold me just as much as I need

to be held, and that soothes all those confused parts of me. No one has ever made me feel as wanted as Colden does, and the idea of not being next to him at any point in the future already hurts.

Is this how it feels to love?

“Did you eat dinner?” he asks, stepping back to peel my wet clothes off of me. “I’m going to clean you first, but then you need to eat if you haven’t already.”

“I haven’t. I’m not to eat before my father sits at the table, so I was waiting for you.”

Colden lets out a startled, deep laugh. “I’m not that kind of Daddy, little doe. I don’t want you to wait for me to eat. You need to take care of yourself because you belong to me now, do you understand? My good girl would always make sure she’s healthy and taken care of.”

I belong to him.

I smile, nodding happily at how good he already makes me feel, and we’re only beginning. “I understand. I’ll be your good girl always.”

“Of course you will. Now let me see you properly,” he commands, stepping back a little in the shower to give me space to strip off my drenched clothes.

As his eyes rake over my naked frame for the first time, I fight the urge to cover myself back up. I know he’s seen a million bodies that look better than mine, yet his crystal-colored eyes are shining in the dim light as he watches me turn for him.

“You’re a little thin, but we can fix that. You’re gorgeous, Evie. Gorgeous and all mine.”

Stepping behind me, he slides a soapy hand over my stomach and leaves a trail of goosebumps everywhere he cleans. “I eat my three meals a day, Daddy. Mother said this is what’s desirable.”

“You are desirable, and don’t doubt that for a second,” he says firmly, dipping his hand between my legs. “But I’m not a

gentle man, Evie. A little extra weight on you will be good for us both.”

I nod. “Would that mean I get snacks in between meals?”

“Yes.”

My face flushes unexpectedly as his touches this time feel clinical — but I feel more comfortable here like this than I ever have with any doctor. “Thank you, Daddy.”

“You’re welcome, little doe. Now just relax and let me take care of you.”

For the next several minutes, my heartbeat remains erratic as he cleans parts of me that have never been touched by anyone else, and he asks questions that have my cheeks exploding with heat.

Yes, I’ve been to a gynecologist.

No, I’m not on birth control — it’s against The Saint’s wishes.

Yes, I had the treatments to ensure the area between my legs stays bare.

No, I’ve never seen anyone actually having sex all the way through. Other than the handful of times I’ve glimpsed it out in public, my parents have kept me far away from that.

I think I know what happens, but do I?

“It’s okay, little doe. I’ll teach you. These are the types of things you’d normally be told on the eve of your wedding, but you need to know where the lines are.” He shuts the now-cool water off and steps out first to help me, then wraps a towel around my shivering body and kisses my forehead. “You’ll wear my clothes while I’m here. I’ll pick your outfits out for work, but I expect you to change into something of mine when you get home each day. Do you understand, Evie?”

“Yes, Daddy. I understand.” I’m good with directions, life always runs smoother when I know what to do. “I like your clothes. They might be a little big, though.”

He smiles, kissing my head again. “I know. Dry off, I’ll be right back.”

Still naked, he leaves and comes back a few moments later with a faded t-shirt and a pair of my panties.

“Thank you.” I reach out for them only to be stopped. He doesn’t want me to dress myself, he wants to dress me, and something about that has me swooning. “You’re so good to me, Colden.”

“Just remember that when you get tired of me,” he jokes quietly, kissing my stomach as he slides my panties up. “I told you a while ago that there’s a reason I haven’t remarried. Not everyone can handle my tastes or my needs.”

That statement alone has me needing to handle him, needing to be the one for him. “Would you marry me, Daddy?”

Hopeful eyes meet mine as he stands up slowly. “Of course I would. I see you, Evie. You need me, just like I need you.”

I do, I need him so much already it hurts. “I don’t want them to find me anyone else,” I whisper desperately.

“So speak up. Tell them that. You’re a woman, Evie. You have a say in this,” he insists, slipping his shirt over my head. “They can’t force you.”

“I never speak up,” I admit. “When I do, I don’t get supper and they wouldn’t care. You saw how they were about Gavin.”

The mention of supper has my stomach growling and Colden lifting me off my feet to carry me to the kitchen as he speaks. “If they won’t listen or they’ll starve you, then just come live with me.”

The thought of living with him, of having my everyday be like this... it’s almost too much to handle. “Okay. I-I’ll say something when they come home.”

Setting me down, Colden rummages through the kitchen to fix me a plate in utter silence, like something I said upset him — and when he comes back and lets me see the look in his eyes, I know I have. “You’re still after their permission,” he

explains before I can ask. “What will you do if you tell them what you want to do and they don’t approve, or worse, won’t let you leave?”

My gaze drops to the floor. I don’t like seeing him upset, I don’t like seeing anyone upset. “I’m sorry. They’re my parents. I have to respect them.”

He lets out a slow, measured breath as he sets the plate down and sits, patting his lap for me to join him. “Then I’m afraid this is all the time we’ll get. I’ll make a formal offer for your hand when your parents return, but I don’t see that going well. I doubt I’ll be permitted to see you after that.”

I cling to him, not able to imagine a world where I wasn’t allowed to see him. “But I need to see you. I feel better when you’re touching me, even if it’s just my knee or my hand.”

“That’s because you’re mine, little doe. Or you should be, anyway. Here—” he gathers some rice on a fork and holds it to my lips — “let’s not focus on that right now. You need to eat and then sleep.”

My hand is still balled in his shirt as I lean in and take a bite. How do I please everyone around me while also not forgetting to please myself? I want Colden, Colden wants me. My parents have to understand that. To enjoy the present, I convince myself they will, that they’ll accept his offer and I’ll be able to be fed by Colden whenever he wants to feed me.

It’s so intimate being fed, it makes me feel precious and vulnerable in the best way... loved. He cares for me the same way I care for him. “Thank you, Daddy.”

“You’re welcome.” He gathers another bite for me, and another, and another after that until I don’t think I can eat any more at all.

“I’m full now,” I mutter after a yawn, then nuzzle my way into his neck so he can keep eating.

He doesn’t let me move at all. His strength surprises me as he holds me there with one arm, half asleep as he finishes my food himself, then gently rouses me to drink some water.

“Finish this, then go brush your teeth and wash your face. It’s late.”

I kiss his cheek and rush off to do as told, and when I walk out of the bathroom to find him standing there, I get butterflies all over. “Goodnight, Daddy.”

“Can I sleep with you?” he asks, following me to my doorway. “It doesn’t have to be ‘goodnight’ just yet.”

Suddenly my heart is racing in my chest. I want it so badly I want to scream ‘yes’ and jump in his arms, but I know we can’t. We won’t keep our hands to ourselves. “I’m sorry, Daddy. We can’t.”

Nodding his understanding, he lifts me up again, carries me to my bed and tosses me down, then forces my legs apart and dives in to sniff my panties. Terror explodes when I fear he’s about to do something more, but I don’t even find my voice before he’s standing up again with a bulge in his pants. “Goodnight then, little doe. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He’s gone quickly after that, leaving a wetness in his place. Sleeping feels far away as I cover myself with the blankets, and the second I hear him touching himself outside my door, I have to fight myself not to go to him.

It’s going to be a difficult couple of weeks.

Fourteen

The following day goes exactly like the previous one. We both go to work, miss each other like crazy, eat dinner together and shower, but we do it all early enough to cuddle on the couch together and watch a movie. “I never watch movies, my mother doesn’t like them. What is this one about?”

“It’s a fantasy. Swords, magic, epic quests... all the things I bet your parents hate.”

I chuckle. “They do hate all of those things. My brother snuck a book about wizards into his room and they grounded him and made him burn it. I don’t know why, it’s not like these things specifically go against The Saint.”

“It’s because magic is supposed to belong only to The Saint,” he explains. “According to them, He alone should possess these abilities. Hence why The Demon was cast down for stealing The Saint’s magic and perverting it.”

I remember that from my studies, but I don’t understand why He’d be so threatened by something fictional, especially since He is real. “And The Temptress? Was she cast down?”

“No. She joined The Demon willingly as his equal in all things. She, like so many of us, thinks that power shouldn’t be held by one person. Or in this case, one deity. And she thought that by forcing people to suppress the most primal, natural parts of themselves, irreparable damage was being done to our souls.”

I can see that, but I still can’t forget all I’ve been taught. “So sex shouldn’t be all about procreation?”

His body stiffens. He’s been so careful with me today, so patient. He hasn’t touched me like that at all, and from what I can tell, he hasn’t touched himself, either. “Sex should be about passion. About love, about pushing your body to the highest of highs and trusting your partner completely.”

I nuzzle into his neck to hide a smile that shouldn’t exist. This goes against everything, but it sounds better than I can admit out loud. “Did you love your first wife?”

“In my own way. She was given to my father to satisfy a debt, and he gave her to me. We rarely saw eye-to-eye and she never quite submitted to me, but yes. I loved her in the sense that I was devastated when she died, but she always felt like a business partner more than a romantic one.”

Submitted to him... I could. I want to. “I understand. How often do married couples have sex? Is it for birthdays and stuff?”

He cracks an amused smile. “For some people, maybe. But no. Some of us would prefer to have sex much more often than that. Multiple times a week, at least. Maybe multiple times a day.”

I sit up abruptly and meet his gaze. “Some people do it every day? Are those the ones with passion?”

“Mmhm.” He pulls me fully into his lap and slides a hand up my body to cup my breast. “The ones who crave each other so badly, they can’t keep their hands to themselves.”

I already crave him in ways I haven’t had him, so I can only imagine what it’s like for the people able to share that passion. It has my clit swelling again and my hips twitching whether I want them to or not. “Oh,” I gasp. “That feels good.”

“Does it?” he asks, pinching my nipple just hard enough to make me gasp. “Keep moving those hips for Daddy. Start slowly. I’ll teach you how to move.”

I hesitate for the briefest of moments before I move. I trust him, and this technically isn’t sex, but after that first good roll of my hips, it feels an awful lot like it is. Not that I’d know. “Oh, shadows,” I whisper.

“Fuck. Just like that,” he hisses, dropping his hands to my waist and gripping hard. I can feel him underneath me, the long, thick shaft growing each time he drags me across it. “Such a good girl for Daddy.”

I can’t fight the moan from escaping. “Oh sweet Temptress.” My head falls back in pleasure before I realize what I said, but I don’t fight it. It feels so right. “Daddy!”

His eyes darken as he moves me faster, bucking up underneath me. “Bet your pussy’s so fucking tight. Shadows, I can’t wait to feel you come all over Daddy’s cock. My good little whore all split open and begging for release... kiss me.”

Tongue hot and demanding, he kisses me like he owns me, and in a way, he does. He’s had me in ways no one else ever has, and even the filthy words leaving his lips feel good. Someone else calling me a whore would hurt, but not now.

Not like this, not with him. “I’m your good little whore.”

“Course you are. Made for me, little doe.” Colden’s movements slow until his hands are ghosting up under my shirt and his fingers are shaking. “Sometimes, people have sex just like this but without clothes. It’d be so easy to just move your panties to the side...”

As his hand snakes lower, I tense, digging my nails into his shoulders for leverage. “Daddy... w-we can’t.”

“I know,” he growls, moving them anyway and flicking his thumb over my clit. “But I’m about to use your tiny body and figure you deserve a little pleasure first.”

I don’t recognize the noises coming out of my mouth as he moves me faster, but when I come, I practically sing his name and stop breathing entirely. In a couple swift movements, he spins me around and pins my back to his chest with one hand around my throat and the other between my legs. There’s no mistaking the guttural moans filling my ear or the hard mass sliding over my ass harder and faster with every movement of his hips, and I have a brief moment where I panic again.

Is this sex?

Is he tainting me right now?

“Daddy!” I whimper in panic, but I don’t want him to stop. Oh, please don’t stop. I need to make him feel as good as he makes me feel, I need to feel what it’s like when he comes too, even if it’s through clothes.

“Shhh. You’re fine, little doe. Doing so good. Just stop squirming. Don’t fight it,” he begs, both hands tightening and

pressing me down further until I can feel the heat coming off of him. “Tell me you want me.”

I groan and immediately stop fighting him. I belong to him, and this is what he needs... honesty. “I want you. I want you so bad it hurts.”

“Good girl. I lied, keep squirming. It feels so fucking good.” He smacks my clit hard and groans happily when I jerk, his movements erratic and more drawn out now. “Good... good girl. Oh, fuck.”

It takes a second for me to realize it happened. His movements slow, his breathing heavy as I begin to feel something hot and wet against my backside. “I’m your good girl.”

I swear, I can feel his heartbeat. “Yes, you are. Just stay right here for me, little doe. I need to feel you.”

His hand stays wrapped around my throat as he other roams my body, touching and pinching and gliding over my chest, my waist, between my legs, over my thighs.

“Why did you sound so afraid?”

I shiver, still clinging to honesty for my man. “I thought it was sex.”

He shakes his head, spreading my folds with his fingers and gently grazing his fingertip over the hole. “Sex is when someone puts their cock in here,” he explains, dragging his lips over my neck. “When two become one.”

I’m not breathing now, I can’t, not when I feel myself clench and move a little too much toward his finger. “Inside,” I whisper. “Our bodies will become one because you’re inside me?”

“Mhm. And I’d claim you from the inside out, little doe. Fill this tight little cunt up over and over again with Daddy’s cum.”

“Oh,” I moan, ignoring the trembling of my skin so I can focus on him. “Your cum would be inside my body, Daddy?”

“Yes. Do you want that, little doe? Want to feel it dripping out of you and running down your thighs?”

He’s touching me again, tapping my clit just enough to make me twitch. “Yes,” I gasp. “Once we’re married, I want you inside me every day.”

“Good girl.” Suddenly, he stops, then fixes my clothes and taps me to get up. “Let’s get you cleaned up and in bed. Will you let me sleep with you tonight?”

My chest aches when I deny him with a shake of my head. “I’m sorry. We can’t.”

“Are you sure? It’s supposed to storm pretty badly tonight,” he presses, but when my answer doesn’t change, he sighs and sits back on the couch and grabs his remote. “Then get yourself ready for bed and sleep well, little doe.”

I back away slowly, the heaviest feeling I’ve ever felt weighing me down as I turn away and run to the bathroom.

I feel cold by the time I’m climbing in my bed alone, the house shaking with the wind, and every creak has my heart pounding in my chest.

Within an hour it’s pouring... thundering... chilling me to the bone, and try as I might, I can’t even attempt to sleep.

I need him. I *need* him.

Before I can stop myself I take off running to his room, knocking on his door like there’s someone chasing me, and when he opens it, I launch myself into his arms. “Daddy.”

“Okay, little doe. You’re okay. Come here.” He picks me up and kicks the door shut, then carries me to the bed and lays me down as lightning illuminates the room through the windows. He barely has time to climb in with me before the thunderclap rattles us both, but sinking into his warm arms and comforting scent soothes me more with every passing second.

Still, I cling to him, marinate in him until my heartbeat is normal and I can finally relax. “I’m sorry I disappointed you.”

He shakes his head as his arms tighten around me. “Not disappointed, Evie. Just bracing myself for a broken heart.”

“I won’t,” I whisper, almost too softly under the wind. “I won’t break your heart, I can’t.”

“You can, and I’m almost positive you will whether you mean to or not. I don’t blame you.”

“I don’t want to. My heart wants to be right here,” I admit. “My parents will see, I’ll make them see.”

“Okay,” he whispers, planting his lips to my forehead and holding there until the next roll of thunder stops. “Just sleep, little doe. Stay with me tonight, I promise this is all we’ll do.”

“Thank you.” We’re quiet for a while — so long I’m not sure if he’s still awake, but as I drift off to sleep in his arms, I whisper one last thing to him: “I don’t ever want to sleep alone again.”

Fifteen

“Good morning, Gloria.” I shrug off my coat with a concerned expression when I take in my boss. To say she’s stressed is an understatement. “Everything okay?”

“No!” she hisses. “I was just informed ten minutes ago that we’re under new ownership effective immediately, and he’s coming in. Today. Like now.”

“Oh, my. How can I help?” I rush over to take the broom from her and begin sweeping. “Do you know who it is?”

“Not a clue, but I have a few guesses,” she mutters, grabbing the paper towels and glass cleaner. “Same three who keep buying up our entire town little by little.”

I freeze, my mind reeling at the possibility that Colden would be my new boss. He wouldn’t... would he? “Possibly. I wonder which one.”

But even as I say that, I know it’s him. It has to be him.

“Don’t know, but I heard one of them is tainted. Can you imagine? Utterly ridiculous, but here we are. Straighten your apron and sweep faster.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” I do as told, sweeping and mopping the floor before he finally walks in. He looks so good in his navy-blue suit I clench my legs. “Hello D— Mr. Adler. Can I interest you in a pastry this morning?”

His ice-blue eyes rake my frame. “Evangeline. I am in the mood for something sweet, so surprise me. I’ve got some news.”

“You?” Gloria asks. “You’re the new owner?”

Colden doesn’t take his eyes off of me as he answers her. “Yes, and you will speak to me with respect or you will find a new bakery to manage. Understood?”

Gloria stutters out an apology, and for some reason, how commanding he is nearly has me dropping to my knees. I love

Gloria and I'd be really sad if she got fired, yet the power radiating off of him is palpable... addicting.

I rush back to find a fresh cherry turnover for him and plop it on a plate, coming back to the front to them discussing how sturdy the few tables we own are. "Here you go, Sir. They came out about ten minutes ago. They're one of my favorites things we sell."

"High praise from the woman who makes the best cherry pie I've ever tasted," he praises, taking a bite with a low moan as Gloria eyes me curiously. "This is now the third sweetest thing I've ever put in my mouth."

I feel that throbbing again, and I'm not sure if it's from the praise, the moan, or the fact that one of those three things is me. "I'm happy you like it. It's actually my recipe, it's my only one on the menu."

"You have that special hot chocolate in the winter," Gloria adds, like she's already catching on that Colden likes me more than her.

Sorry Gloria, he always will.

I take a step closer to him without realizing, but it prompts him to put the plate down. "Seems like you're my girl, then. Care to give me a tour?"

"Of course." I smile softly at Gloria and lead him to the back as she mutters something about grabbing the paperwork he asked for. "This is the kitchen, where all the magic happens."

"Is it?" he asks, pushing me up against the counter and gripping my chin. "You've been given a raise, by the way. I've doubled your salary. Now kiss me."

"Doubled?" I kiss him before he can respond. That amount of money will pay for my college. Shadows, I could stay here and not go off to college at all if I make that amount an hour. "I missed you."

"I missed you too. Take me somewhere more private," he growls. "Somewhere we won't be interrupted."

I shouldn't, but that doesn't stop me from ducking under his arm and leading him to the back storage room.

The second the door is closed, he tugs me closer by my apron. "You look so fucking hot right now, little doe. Been thinking about you all morning, you know that?" he asks, moving the fabric out of his way until he can slip his fingers in my panties.

This time, he doesn't stop at my clit. He goes further, slipping the tip of a single finger inside me — but he doesn't push in too far, and I honestly don't know if I'd have stopped him if he did. "Daddy. I've been thinking of you too. You look so handsome... you smell so good."

His lips find mine, stealing desperate kisses as that finger starts to move and his palm flattens against me. With pressure on my clit and his tongue slipping between my teeth, I fall apart all too quickly. I thrash into him as my orgasm takes over everything, and if it wasn't for how deeply he's kissing me, I'm sure Gloria would have heard me.

"Fuck." He withdraws his hand, sucking his fingers clean as his eyes flutter closed. "So fucking tight. Undo my belt, little doe. Take Daddy's cock out. I need to feel your hands on me."

I don't have it in me to hold back from obeying. I reach down and unbuckle it, tugging it open and pulling out his hard mass.

It's radiating so much heat I gasp, barely getting both hands around it before he's thrusting forward and caging me against a stock shelf.

"So small and smooth, I— shadows," he moans. "Pull your panties down just a little bit, Evie. Let me see you."

It's a struggle to release his heat, but I do. I shove my panties down in the front for him and watch him as he spits on his cock and wraps a tight fist around it. "Daddy's little girl's got such a pretty, wet pussy. Don't move."

I don't have time to react before the head of his length is rubbing my clit. Each time he roughly strokes himself, I jerk in

pleasure. It's easily one of the best things I've ever felt. It's warm on my clit, I feel closer to him than I ever have — it's so intimate I can't stop moaning for him. "Pl-please cover my mouth. No one can hear. I'm going to come again."

His palm folds over my mouth as he meets my eyes, leaning in and speeding up his hand as he whispers, "Gonna make a mess of this pretty pussy, little doe. Keep looking at me with those wide, innocent eyes. They'll never know you're back here being Daddy's little whore."

One, two, three more swipes of his swollen head has me coming again, my legs giving out only for him to continue holding me up by my face. It's so good I lose focus and my eyes roll, but Colden doesn't let me slip too far.

"Mine, Evie. Push your panties down further."

I do it, whimpering into his hand as he begins to release all over me. I feel every squirt of warm cum as he makes a mess inside my panties, dripping all over my sensitive clit and onto the fabric.

"Pull them up just like that," he growls. "Now."

"Yes, Daddy. Do you want me to stay this way today?"

He nods as I obey him, then reaches to rub it into my skin. "Yes. I want to watch you wait on customers all messy with Daddy's cum. My dirty little doe."

"Just like your little whore would?"

If feels filthy leaving my lips but he likes it, he kisses me over and over again until I'm dizzy and clinging to him just to stay on my feet.

"Yes." He fixes my dress for me, then my apron. "Wash your hands but nothing else."

"Yes, Daddy. I'll meet you out there."

I leave first and go to the bathroom, the wetness so distracting I find myself walking funny, but once my hands are washed I find my footing and make my way out front. I take over for Gloria at the counter and begin doing my job as she and Colden talk at one of the tables. He's watching me, his

eyes hooded and lust-filled as he watches me hand out donuts and crullers to unsuspecting customers.

Knowing that public sex is legal for married people and one day we'll be married... I can't help but wonder if he'd take me here.

In front of other people.

I truly can't wait.

He's there for longer than I thought he'd be, long after he and Gloria finish talking and she whispers to me that he wants to see how often customers flow in and out of the bakery, but I know differently.

He's staying for me.

A full hour later, he walks up behind me and wraps a hand around my neck as he leans in to whisper, "Go home. Keep the same panties on, but put one of my shirts on. I'm fucking obsessed with you, Evie. I need you all to myself and I don't want to wait until your shift is over. I'll cover for you with Gloria."

He squeezes my neck until the blood slows and I gasp, then kisses my temple and walks to the back to find her.

I walk home in a daze, forcing one foot in front of the other. I'm sticky as hell but I do exactly as he says and pick out one of his shirts from his suitcase, but I'm stopped in my tracks when I see what's in there.

It's my panties, multiple pairs — some of which have been missing for weeks. My mind reels as I wonder how he got them, why he has them, why he'd *want* them... but it hits me that he probably stole them the times he'd come over for dinner, and he wanted them so he could smell me even before I let him have me like that.

It makes me feel good. *Really* good. He wants me as much as I want him, and that makes it easy to believe that everything will work out for us in the end.

It has to.

Sixteen

Colden

I am not a good man.

I'm not a Saint-fearing man.

I'm a son of the Temptress, and I'm at the end of my rope.

I'm done waiting.

She'll never marry me. She doesn't have it in her, and I can't bring myself to be mad about it. For all of their faults, her parents have molded her into the perfect wife. Obedient to a fault with a desperate, deep-seated need to please.

The only problem is that right now, she's obeying the wrong people.

Worshiping the wrong people.

No amount of time will change that.

I have to do this. I have to set her free, have to make her mine in a way that no vicar or well-meaning mother can ever undo.

Once unburdened from her insane need to please The Saint, she'll see this for what it is: her future. I'll never betray her. Never fail her. Never let any harm come to her that I don't inflict myself, and I'll forever build her back up when I do.

And with The Temptress on our side, I'll continue taking care of her and guiding her through our afterlife. She'll never find anyone more devoted to her than me, and it's time she stops fighting that.

Walking into her home, I don't stop to say hello. I grip her throat and pull her into a rough kiss as I back her toward the kitchen. Her soft hands fist in my shirt as she tries to gasp out a question muffled by my tongue, and the sweet, innocent taste of her has any trace of doubt disappearing.

This is it.

“You’re mine, little doe. Forever,” I growl, shoving her panties off and lifting her up onto the counter. My shirt looks so good on her I nearly don’t remove it, but I don’t want anything blocking my view of the mark when it finally appears. I toss it on the ground and slip a single finger inside that tight, permanently wet pussy. “Fingers don’t count, Evie. Just let Daddy make you feel good.”

She moans, opening up for me regardless of knowing she shouldn’t. “Oh, shadows. Daddy, y— we—”

“What?” I press, curling my finger against her g-spot over and over again. “Say the word and I’ll stop, little doe, but there’s nothing wrong with this, nothing wrong with us. Nothing wrong with giving yourself to me, so do it. Give yourself to me, girl.”

My hand closes around her slender, fragile little neck as I catch her in a crashing kiss, stealing her breath and her ability to speak as I work my finger faster, more insistently.

Talking is impossible for her now, but that’s the point. I feel her twitching in my arms as she feels a pleasure she’s never felt before, her tight, sweet pussy clenching around me, and when she comes for me, I see tears in her eyes. “Oh, Temptress!”

“Not her, little doe. Me. You’re soaking my finger right now, not hers,” I growl, twisting it slowly and pulling it out to suck it clean. “Best thing I’ve ever tasted.”

I’m tempted to taint her just like that, with my face between her thighs tasting everything she has to offer — but if I don’t get inside of her soon, I’ll die. I’ve waited too fucking long.

“Sorry, Daddy. You... I... thank you.”

Her nails dig into my arms as she stares at me like she’s trying to read my next move, and I have a singular, fleeting moment where I allow myself to think twice about what I’m planning to do to her.

She’s so innocent.

So pure.

So trusting.

And I'm about to ruin her.

“You're welcome, little doe.” Patience now, I've almost got her. The lie I'm about to tell coils in my gut, spreading like fire up my spine and out of my mouth like it's nothing. “There is a way I can fuck you without tainting you,” I whisper. “A way we can be one without angering The Saint.”

Her head tilts, but I see it in her eyes... she believes me. This time the lack of knowledge her parents have given her plays in my favor. “How?”

Bracing myself for the disgust I imagine I'm about to see on her face, I slip my wet finger down to her ass and press gently. “Here. It's called anal, little doe. It doesn't count.”

“What?” Instead of disgust I see shock and fear. “Inside there? No, I thought that was just for... you know.”

She blushes, nearly breaking me with how beautiful she is.

“It's not just for that,” I assure her, and my eyes close for a moment as I realize that whether I want to admit it or not, we were always going to get here. I was always going to ruin her, just like this. I didn't bring an enema with me for myself, after all. “There's a tool we can use that will make sure you're all clean, and I'll use my fingers first to make sure you can take Daddy's cock without getting hurt.”

“So it won't hurt? And it won't count because you can't make a baby that way?”

“That's right,” I lie, kissing her jaw gently as my hands start to shake. “It'll feel good, sweetheart, and it'll make Daddy happy. You want to make me happy, don't you?”

I feel her whole body relax at that question, solidifying how much she cares for me. “Of course. Always, Daddy. Let me make you happy.”

My perfect, obedient little Evie.

“Good girl. Now up, we need to go upstairs. I need a couple of things from my bag, so while I grab those, go drink some water and meet me in the bathroom.”

She nods, her legs like jelly when they touch the floor, but she finds the strength to grab a glass of water and drinks for me then disappears up the stairs.

As much as I hate to admit it, my movements are slow as I retrieve the enema and the lube from my suitcase. I'm scouring the recesses and dark corners of my brain trying to figure out a way to have her that doesn't involve this — tainting her, ripping her from her previous, bastard Saint, her family, her people — but I can't. I'm not some naive little boy who can sit here and tell myself she'll come around or that she'll love me enough to choose me over her parents. I'm not foolish enough to believe her parents will give their blessing for me, since they'd never have allowed me to be the one to watch over her these weeks if their intention was to let us marry.

There is no other option, and as much as I want her pussy to be the first thing I sink my cock into, I know it can't happen like that. She'll know what I'm up to if I try, and she'll deny me.

I am not a good man.

Still, when I nudge the bathroom door open and see her kneeling with her head bowed and her hands behind her back, I don't feel like a bad man. I feel like a good man who is about to set a trapped little girl free.

“Up, beautiful. I need your help with this.”

I use the lube and open her up just enough to take the enema with minimal discomfort, and she only tries to squirm away a couple of times. I see when it hurts her, but after the first few times, she begins to relax. “How many times do we have to use that, Daddy? The water is clear now.”

My lips brush her shoulder. “That's it, my good girl. Would you be more comfortable in Daddy's bed or yours?”

“Yours. The sheets already smell like you.”

I clean her up a bit more and then carry her to my bed, her grip tightening more with each step closer to her guest room.

“Are you okay, Evie?” I ask, laying her down and climbing up on the bed between her legs. “This is your last chance to tell me no.”

“I’m scared I won’t be good for you,” she admits, and I have to fight the urge to leave her here and murder every single person who has ever made her feel unworthy.

Never again.

She will never again feel like she’s less than perfect.

“You will be, little doe. You’re already so good for me.” I trail my lips over her soft thighs, ghosting over the spot I want the most to kiss her belly button. I stay there as I unsnap the lid on the bottle of lube and rub some between my fingers, and the moment I slip one inside her, she gasps.

“Oh, Daddy. It burns.” But this time she doesn’t pull away, she grips the sheets and clenches so tightly it makes moving my finger difficult.

The thought of her squeezing my cock like that soon...

Fuck.

Patience.

“Breathe for me, Evie. I won’t move until you’re calm.”

She nods her head for a few too many seconds, her breathing faster than normal until she locks eyes with me and tries to match mine.

“There she is. There’s my good girl,” I praise, slowly nudging my finger deeper. My cock throbs insistently between my legs, needing to be inside this tight, hot, perfect little virgin hole like yesterday — but I have a long way to go to get her ready. I don’t plan on holding back once I’m inside her.

“Fucking gorgeous, little doe. Look at you.”

The praise makes her fucking glow. She smiles, even rocks down on my finger slightly in an attempt to hear more.

“Easy, gorgeous. Daddy wants to be inside you so bad, but I won’t hurt you.” Twisting my finger, I pepper kisses along

her stomach as I start to stretch her enough to take two. “I’ll take care of you, Evie. Always. Tell me you know that.”

“I do.” She’s breathless again as I stretch her. “I trust you’ll take care of me. I want to take care of you too.”

She’s so perfect for me in every way that it’s almost impossible not to take her right now. It’s all I can do to keep breathing in the scent of her delicious pussy as I work a third finger inside her, but fucking shadows, the way I want to lick her cunt is almost too much. Just one little swipe of my tongue would taint her and then it’d be too late anyway. I could bury my cock inside her and there wouldn’t be a fucking thing she could say or do to stop me, but I know this is best. I don’t want her first experience with my tongue to be one that permanently scars her.

Evie whimpers, her eyes watering slightly as she stares down at me. “Daddy. Am I ready? I feel cold.”

Funny, I’ve never been more overheated in my life.

Experience tells me she’s not ready for any of this, but short of fisting her, I don’t know what else to do. I can’t think straight enough to be rational.

I need this.

Need her.

Need to strip all of her saints and demons away from her until all she’s left with is me.

“Knees up, little doe. Keep breathing.”

Sliding off the bed, I strip down to nothing with rushed, careless movements, then take one final moment to look at her like this: trusting and kind, pure, untouched. Untainted. Holy.

Mine.

The squelch of the lube as I squirt it too fast on my aching, angry cock is the only sound I can hear as my blood thunders through my veins, and for a moment, I really do feel like a god.

Her body is mine, her mind is mine, her soul is mine.

“Evie.”

It’s just a whisper as I line up and press in, pinning her to the bed and forcing my tongue between her shocked lips.

“Ouch!” she yells, nails digging into the back of my neck as she tries to pull away, but there’s nowhere for her to go. “Wait! It hurts! My... it fucking burns!”

It’s the first time she’s ever cussed in front of me, and that alone tells me this isn’t about her ass.

It’s happening already.

“Breathe,” I beg, stilling my movements and watching the inverted cross burn itself into her skin just below her ear. It floors me in a way I’d never have expected — she’s fucking mine.

“Daddy!” She’s trembling now for a very different reason. “It counted! I’m tainted!”

Tears fall down her cheeks but she doesn’t shove me away, she’s shaking too hard to try. Just hearing those words from her lips, knowing that she knows she’s mine... fuck.

“I know, little doe. I always knew. I set you free.”

I lick the tears off her cheeks as I stop holding back. My focus shifts to the clenching, blazing hot heat wrapped around my cock, and it feels so fucking good to fuck something after years of depriving myself that I lose control quickly.

Over and over, I hold her down and rail that tight little ass until I can’t hear anything but the beautiful way she’s screaming my name, begging for mercy, for *my* mercy. “Daddy... please.”

She’s sobbing now, but the way she kisses my face is different than it was before. Every kiss feels unburdened by The Saint’s guilt, like this little act of treachery had exactly the result I hoped it would.

“My Evie. You’re so good, baby girl. Daddy’s g— good girl,” I grunt, losing rhythm as the truth sinks in and my orgasm looms. “Daddy’s gonna defile this pretty little ass, little doe. Clench for me.”

My hand wraps tight around her throat as my thrusts become brutally rough for both of us — the inhumane way her body bows under me only sends me over, and I nearly black out as I come inside her.

She goes completely boneless under me, tears still rolling from her closed eyes as her erratic breathing mirrors mine.

Her head falls to the side, giving me the perfect view of her tainted neck. “I’m sorry Evie,” I lie again. “I promise you, I’ll always take care of you. You’ll never want for anything.”

She sniffles and meets my gaze for the first time since I slid inside of her. “You won’t toss me aside now that I’m tainted?”

“Evangeline, I did this because I didn’t know how else to keep you,” I admit. “I’m never letting you go.”

I can’t tell from the way she nods if she’s relieved or devastated, but in this moment, I can’t bring myself to care.

I am not a good man.

Seventeen

I'm still numb as he cleans me up afterward.

I want to believe him, want to believe he'd never abandon me now that I'm tainted, but my mother always told me they would. They'd taint us and leave us and then marry someone they could have proudly on their arm. But the way he looks at me, touches me, kisses me... I believe him. And truth be told, I don't have another choice. I have to believe him or I'll lose my mind. "How does it look? I can still feel it burning, but it's already fading away."

"It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen," he whispers, ghosting his fingers across it as he kisses my breast. "Second only to the blush on your cheeks the first time I kissed you."

All that does is elicit another one. He still thinks I'm beautiful, he thinks my mark is beautiful... even if the world won't. "How does your friend cover his?"

"He... uses a special kind of makeup," he says slowly. "He might've told me already that he can get you some."

I try to read his tone, but I don't want to jump to conclusions if he feels a certain way about it. "He did? Do you not want me to wear it?"

"I think that decision is entirely up to you," he says gently. "I thought you'd be angry with me when you realized I did it on purpose."

Am I angry?

I feel a lot of things, but anger isn't one of them... not yet, anyway. "I don't really know how to feel about that, Daddy. I think it will sink in when I actually look in a mirror."

He nods a little, then slides off the bed and pulls me to my feet. "Then come with me." My legs shake as he leads me to the bathroom and faces me toward the mirror, and my eyes stay locked on his face in fear of what I'll see when I look down. Slowly, he moves my hair behind my shoulder and

reaches up, splaying his fingers under my chin and exposing my neck. “Do you know what I see right now, little doe? I see a gorgeous, strong woman who no longer has to bow to The Saint. I see my future.”

Finally, I let my eyes drop to the spot I know is branded and take it in. It feels bigger on my neck than it looks on others, but after a moment of panic, I realize that’s probably how everyone feels the day they’re marked.

I am marked.

I am tainted.

Tears spill over as that truly sinks in and my legs nearly give out, but Colden’s grip on me is strong.

“I’ve got you, Evie.”

His lips brush my hair as he holds me tighter, giving me the space and time I need to process the loss of the life I thought I’d have. As sad as I am at that loss, it isn’t as heartbreaking as I thought it’d be. I know it’s because of Colden, because I believe he’ll still keep me and love me regardless of what’s to come for me in the afterlife.

I make a mental note to stop thinking of what’s to come after, because this is now, and there’s no going back. I might as well enjoy it. “I’m still not mad at you,” I admit. “I don’t know why.”

“Good, because this is only the beginning for us. It might be hard for you to believe right now, but this was the first step of a very long road. All I was doing here was making sure you stayed on the right path and didn’t try to run from me.”

“I didn’t want to run from you. I want you, Daddy. Only you.” Even if I’m still scared to do more.

Colden kisses me slowly as he ghosts his hand down my stomach. “Tell me what you need, little doe. A bath? Food? To come for me again?”

“A bath.” I clench my legs slightly. “I can feel it dripping out of me... then yes, food.”

Something a little like disappointment flashes across his face, but he's no less gentle with me as he runs me a bath and helps me inside. Feeling his warmth behind me as we sink into the water together keeps me grounded, helps me forget that look in his eyes and just soak in the feeling of being held.

“Does The Temptress have a church?”

“There are a few scattered across the country. None close by here, which is probably why your parents were so thoroughly able to erase her at Luna Vale Sainthood Church.”

“That makes sense. Feels... wrong. To erase someone just because they can threaten what you want to believe in.”

He lifts my arm up to clean me. “I agree. Rory, Gideon and I have been quietly trying to change things, but it takes time to change minds. Unlearning behaviors is one of the hardest things for a person to do.”

I know that first hand. In spite of being tainted, I still feel the need to hang onto my virtue, even if it's already technically gone. Old habits die hard. “Maybe I can help too one day?”

“I'd love that, and so would she. Rory, Gideon and I meet once a week to go over options, next moves, progress we've made. Do you want to come?”

I nod. “I'd love to, Colden.” I don't know how to be if I'm not dedicating myself to a life of worship. The thought of having no one to pray to scares me.

“I'll let them know then. For now, lift up a little bit so I can clean you and then I'll leave you to relax while I make you something to eat.”

Tapping me, he waits until I shift and catch my balance again before cleaning my ass and my thighs, and I swear it's not a feeling I'll ever get used to.

It makes me not want to separate from him at all, but I know better than to argue. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

“Always will, Evie. Daddy's got you.” He eases me back down and gets out, giving me a full look at his thick frame

dripping with water before he covers himself with a towel. “Stay here as long as you like, but come down when you’re ready to eat. You’ll be sleeping with me again after and that’s not an option this time.”

The order actually makes me smile. I like that he isn’t giving me an option, I just don’t really understand why. “Yes, Daddy.”

“Good girl.” He bends down, tugging my hair back to kiss me deeply, then walks away and leaves me breathless.

I stay there until the water is cold. It isn’t that I don’t want to be down there with Colden, but my mind begins to focus on my parents’ reactions. They’re going to kick me out, shun me. My time of having a family is over. I doubt my brother will care at all, but even the thought of losing him hurts too. I cry for a while, then get out to dry myself and cry some more as I stare at my mark in the mirror, but when I finally go downstairs, I’ve pulled myself together and actually smile at what I see. “Pancakes?”

“Absolutely. Nothing better than some of these after a rough day.” His eyes rake my face as he brings me a plate. “You’ve been crying again.”

He can see right through me. “Yes, but I actually think I’m done now. Just realized how much my life is going to change and it hit me kind of hard. Sorry.”

“That’s understandable,” he concedes. “But what if it doesn’t have to change right away?”

“How wouldn’t it?” I ask. “How could I hide this from them while living under their roof?”

“I’ll have Rory bring me some of the makeup in the morning and you and I can go shopping for clothes. They make shirts that will cover your neck and dresses too, so you could tell your mother you’re choosing to cover more of your skin to be more virtuous.”

That will do it. “She’d actually like that. She’s told me I look slutty more than once because too much of my chest was showing.”

His eyebrows shoot up. “I don’t think your collarbone counts as your chest, but I’m not surprised. I may have intentionally tainted you, but that doesn’t mean I want you to completely upend your life before you’re ready. My door will always be open for you when you decide it’s time to leave them.” He takes a bite, waving his fork to urge me to do the same. “I’d take you with me right now if you were ready.”

“You would?” My heart skips a beat, the fear of him changing his mind if I take too long climbing its way up my spine as I watch him.

“Of course. But this is a big thing, and I don’t want you moving in with me right away and regretting it later. I won’t be letting you leave.”

His tone is so flippant that I almost miss how serious he is. “When I move in, will I still work?”

The sound of his metal fork clanking against his plate makes me flinch, but there’s something new in his eyes now. “I wish I could tell you yes, but no. I’m a very possessive man, little doe. I’ll want you home and safe, always.”

I cover my smile with some food, then slowly chew as I watch him. “I’m okay with that, Daddy. I’ll just bake for you.”

“Good girl. Then I feel comfortable telling you that you won’t be going out in public without me, you won’t see anyone without my permission, and you’ll only wear my clothes once you move in.”

I freeze with another bite halfway to my lips. It’s a lot to take in. “Why?”

“We live in a dangerous town, little doe,” he says plainly. “A dangerous town full of dangerous people who aren’t afraid of your Saint. People who would take one look at you and decide to help themselves... not unlike I did.”

His words make me shiver and set my fork down. “I don’t want that... I only want you. I don’t want to go out without you.”

“That’s my girl. You’ll never have to, so relax your shoulders for me, sweetheart. I’ll kill any man who looks at

you in a way I don't like.”

I see the truth in his eyes, and that look alone has me relaxing so I can eat my food. “Yes, Daddy.”

The silence we sink into after that feels natural. It's not like the angry silence at dinner with my family when they think I've done something wrong, it's a comfortable one where I feel safe, seen. Where he's somehow giving me the space to think things through while not giving me any space at all, and I'm still lost in my own head when the dishes are cleaned up and he's sweeping me off the kitchen floor.

“Tired, little doe?”

“Yes, but I'm excited to sleep in your arms again. I slept so much better once I could hear your heartbeat.”

Not even fierce, stoic Colden can hide his smile for long, and I feel like I'm floating as he carries me into the bathroom to wash up and then tugs me to bed.

The way he pulls me to him, contouring our bodies together until my leg is trapped between his and I'm safe in his arms... I don't feel very tainted at all. In fact, I've never felt more loved before in my life.

Eighteen

I've been sore since it happened. Every time I sit down I'm reminded of our time together and it makes me miss him, which is why the last two days I've instantly jumped into his arms the second he walked in. "Hi, Daddy. I still feel you."

"Daddy took your ass a little too hard, huh?" he asks, kissing me deeply and squeezing my cheeks. "Good thing you're already tainted, now I can play with other holes."

I feel myself tense. If he was that rough with my ass, what will he do with my pussy? "I'm still scared," I admit.

"Don't be." Insistent lips trail over my jaw to the base of my neck, where the mark is. "Feels much better, little doe. Remember how good my fingers felt?"

I nod. They felt amazing, but I know his cock is bigger than his fingers, and it's going to be painful. "Can we do other things before we get there? Please?"

He strips the shirt off my body, devouring the sight of me like he can't hear me at all. "Not much left, Evie. Take your panties off."

I do as told in spite of being scared, spreading wide so he can see that I'm already wet for him. Just because I'm nervous to have sex doesn't mean my body isn't responsive to it... I want it, I just can't help but to want to keep that last part of my virtue intact for a little longer.

"I'll stretch your pussy open with my fingers first," he presses, ignoring my wishes entirely as he bends me over the arm of the couch and spanks me lightly. "It won't hurt like anal did."

"No." I hate saying no to him, but he's not listening to anything else. "Not yet."

His body stills behind me as my heart beats faster. "No?" he repeats. "Are you sure?"

I nod quickly. "Please be patient for me."

“I’ve been patient, little doe,” he growls. “But fine. Put your clothes back on.”

I try to hide my disappointment when he doesn’t use his fingers again and I dress quickly, then curl up on the couch as it sinks in how much I must disappoint him.

Several minutes pass in silence as he puts his briefcase away and changes out of his suit, and when he comes back to sit next to me, I don’t know what to do.

Do I say something? Apologize? Stand my ground?

“I’m sorry,” he says first. “I shouldn’t have pushed you.”

His apology helps me figure out what to do next... I want to please him. “I’m sorry for not being what you need. I’m trying to get there, I — can I help you in other ways? Any other way?”

“You’re exactly what I need, little doe. Come here.” He pulls me onto his lap and kisses me slowly. “Tell me you know that.”

I want to believe him and his eyes are telling me it’s true... so I do. “Yes, Daddy. I’m still wet for you.”

“Good girl. I can’t fuck your ass again if you’re still sore, and if you’re not ready for me to fuck your tight little cunt... maybe you can do something else for me,” he whispers, brushing his thumb over my lip. “Get on your knees for me. Right here. Want you to kiss Daddy’s cock.”

A shiver makes its way up my spine as I sink down to my knees and glance up at him. He wants me to use my mouth. “People use mouths there, Daddy? On privates?”

Grunting, he nods once. “Mmhm. Take it out, Evie.”

My hands are trembling as I reach out and lower his pants, nerves overtaking me as it truly sinks in. My assumption when he’d mentioned tasting me before was right — people put their mouths on other people’s privates, and as gross or wrong as it sounds, it doesn’t feel that way as I lean in and kiss the tip.

“Fuck.” It jumps in my hand as Colden’s fists curl on the couch. “Good girl. That’s it. Lick Daddy’s cock.”

I lick it, hands clenching at my sides at the first real taste of him. “More, Daddy? You want more of my tongue?”

I lick again, loving the way it’s unraveling him. His eyes are wild, breaths heavy, jaw slack.

“Yes. You have no idea how fucking good you look down there, gorgeous... or how fucking good that feels. Keep going. Use your hand to stroke.”

I reach up with both hands and place one on his thigh, the other gripping his shaft as I lick again, this time letting him actually inside my mouth.

“You’re a natural, Evie. Mouth is so fucking hot, but tuck your teeth. I shouldn’t feel anything but your tongue and the roof of your mouth.”

Common sense should have told me to cover my teeth, so I send up a silent apology as I do as told, happy he’s guiding me and teaching me how to make him feel good.

The low moan he lets out when I get it right makes me even wetter, but fear spikes up my spine as his hand flattens on the top of my head and pushes it down.

Breathing is almost impossible but it becomes secondary to his pleasure. I have to make him feel good, I need to hear his praise and know I’m good for him, to know I deserve him.

He shoves himself halfway in before I finally hear it. “Good girl. Fuck.” Thighs trembling, he tugs my hair to hold my head steady as he rocks up and hisses. “Could wreck your fucking throat right now. Need to fucking fuck something.”

Just as I fear he’s about to lose control and really hurt me, he pulls me off and lets me gasp for air.

“Get up here.”

I climb up, no part of me able to deny him anything in that moment, and when he instantly spins me around, that fear from before is back. Only I try not to show it, I trust him. “Daddy...”

“Relax.” He spits on his hand and strokes himself, then fingers my pussy for a moment before smearing the wetness

he finds there all over the inside of my legs. I don't understand what he's doing until he lowers me down and I see the leaking head of his cock peeking up through my thighs. "You have such a beautiful body, sweetheart. So fucking smooth and tiny. Eyes up, don't look away from that cross until I'm done."

I'd forgotten all about the huge cross on the wall, forgot The Saint was watching us — and as he grips my hips hard and starts to move, I almost disobey him. I don't want to think about The Saint, I want to think about my Colden, but the reminder that I no longer belong to The Saint doesn't upset me this time. "I'm yours, Daddy."

"I know you are, little doe. I'm the only god you need. I'm the only one you need to worship," he growls, fucking up harder until his length shifts and I feel it rubbing my clit. "No Saint could save you from me."

"Oh!" I moan, not fully understanding what those words are doing to me, but they have me dripping down onto his cock. "Only you. There's only you."

"Good girl. So fucking good. Say it again," he commands, movements faltering. "Say it—"

His teeth sink into my neck right over the mark as he pulls me down, and I feel that hot, angry cock pulsing between my straining thighs and covering my skin. It gets everywhere as he continues to move: my legs, my stomach, my hands. He's making a mess of me and it makes me moan loudly like I just came with him.

For a second, it feels like I did.

"Only you, Daddy." I repeat. "There's only you."

"My turn then." He throws me onto the couch on my back, looping my legs over his shoulders and leaving a line of bites up my thighs.

Through ragged breaths, I realize what he's about to do — he's about to put his mouth on me now, kiss and lick my most sacred place, and the thought of anyone wanting to do that has me arching toward him.

The first slow, deliberate swipe of his huge tongue has me scrambling away but not with any conviction. There's nowhere else I want to be. "Daddy!"

"Evangeline," he mutters, yanking me back to him and wrapping his arms under my thighs to grip my sides again. "Tell me no or stay still. You taste so fucking good I could stay here all day."

"I'll stay still," I gasp. "Oh! More please."

His lips are shiny as he grins almost ferally, and he doesn't let me move an inch as he kisses my clit and starts flicking his tongue.

It's better than anything I've ever felt before, the pleasure radiates throughout my entire body as I push into him for more and practically scream his name.

I swear, it only turns him into an animal. His hot tongue is everywhere, lips moving just right until I can't fight it off any longer and I'm choking and gasping for air. "Daddy! I'm gonna—"

Two thick fingers slide inside of me and curl up as his tongue moves faster, and I forget everything that isn't him, everything that isn't the pleasure he's giving me and I come so hard tears flood my eyes.

It's so crashing that it takes me a moment to realize he hasn't stopped at all, hasn't slowed down or changed anything at all. His fingers spread and curl as he sucks my clit again, and I still can't seem to take a breath. "Daddy! I can't, I can't again!"

But he doesn't listen, somehow he knows I can, and after a few moments I actually feel it building.

His fingers drive deeper inside of me until I'm gasping and trembling with overstimulation that just keeps taking me higher, and Colden growls happily as I clench my thighs around his head and give him one more.

Those tears fall down my face as I slump against my father's favorite seat on the couch. I'm sated, buzzing and

desperate to be held by him when he kisses his way up my body and licks the tears from my cheeks.

“Perfect, little doe. Did that feel good?”

“So good,” I admit as I catch my breath. “So good, Daddy. I see why people kiss there now.”

“Mhmm. Feels better than fingers, doesn’t it?” he asks, standing to lift me off the couch and carry me up the stairs. “Made my beard all messy. The smell of you alone is making me hard again.”

I couldn’t fight my smile. “I like the smell of you too. Next time will you finish in my mouth? You let me finish on yours.”

Chuckling, he kicks our bedroom door shut behind him and lays me on the bed. “Sorry. Yes, you can finish what you started next time. I got a little carried away.”

“It’s okay. I like when you get carried away.” I reach out to feel the wetness on his face and bite my lip. “I did all that?”

“More than that, little doe.”

It makes me hum, still sated enough to fall asleep. “Is it bad I don’t want them to come home?”

“No, but I wish you’d just come home with me. Then it wouldn’t matter.” As he lays down next to me, he opens his arms for me to cuddle close. “We’d never be apart again.”

I want that more than anything in this moment, but I also don’t want to disappoint my parents. It seems no matter which road I take, *someone* is going to be disappointed, so I don’t say anything at all. I curl up against him and kiss his neck softly, hoping he can feel how much I care for him. I’m falling for him, and that might scare me more than sex... I just don’t know what to do to get over either of those fears.

Nineteen

The second my parents came home, Colden left, and it felt like he took all the warmth with him. I hate him not being close, hate the questions and how closely my parents are looking at me. It's like they can see the mark underneath the cream he got me, but I knew they can't. That's just guilt.

"How was it, Mother? Did it get built?"

"Yes," she says sharply, lifting my hair up to inspect me closer, then relaxing with an almost-believable smile. "Yes, The Saint blessed the project. The new church is gorgeous."

"I'd love to go see it one day." My heart's pounding at how close that was, at how easily she could have seen my mark. "I'm sure Michael is ready to come home on Monday as well."

She hums, checking out the clean house with an approving nod. "Yes, I imagine he is. No issues while we were gone, then? I heard there were three more break-ins."

"None here. I think having Colden's car in the front was helpful, no one bothered us at all."

I make my way to the kitchen to pour her some tea, fixing the turtleneck collar so I don't draw more attention to my throat. I'm thankful all over again for the things Colden bought me when we went shopping, even if hiding a secret cell phone is going to be a nightmare, and also for my mother being easily distracted.

"Do you work tonight?"

"No, I work in the morning, Gloria has been giving me the early shift. I've been wanting to call and see if she needed more help, though. She's been worried about the crime, but I also worry about her."

It's only half a lie. I do worry for Gloria, but mostly I want to get out from under my parents already. These weeks of just *being* were nice.

"That would be good. You need the money anyway," she comments. "Were you good for Mr. Adler while he was here?"

“Of course I was,” I respond quickly with a blush. If only she knew how good. “Made him dinner every evening and made sure he was comfortable. He worked a lot.”

Again, she hums. “Good. Your father wants to invite him for dinner again, but I’m not so sure that’s a good idea. Wouldn’t want him getting the wrong impression.”

My heart speeds up again. “What wrong impression would that be?”

“Well, your father wanted to tell you this himself, but we thought a lot about your future while we were gone,” she says. “And we believe maybe you should take up the Sainthood.”

It feels as if she just dumped a bucket of ice-cold water in my face. The Sainthood requires ten years of dedicated, celibate service to The Saint before the vicars can even think about marrying, and it takes every ounce of strength not to fall to my knees. “Why?” I almost whisper. “Why do you think I should?”

“After all that business with Gavin, I thought you’d be thrilled at the idea,” she says simply. “It’s a chance for you to serve The Saint and follow in your father’s footsteps. Nothing would make him more proud.”

I don’t want to follow in his footsteps. I suddenly don’t even care if I make him proud. I want to live my life... I want Colden. “No,” I rush out before I can stop myself. “No, I don’t want to. I want a husband. No!” I rush up the stairs before she can recover from shock and slam my door closed, rushing to my phone to see if Colden had reached out while I was down there.

Daddy: Miss the way your pussy tastes, little doe. Are you wet right now?

Me: I wish I was. I need you, Daddy.

My phone buzzes a moment later, startling me. I answer with a whisper as I glance back toward my door, and Colden immediately senses something is wrong. “Did they hurt you?”

Tears fill my eyes. “No. No, they didn’t hurt me. They want me to take up The Sainthood!” I whisper sharply. “I don’t

want to! I want you.”

“Sweetheart, breathe. The Sainthood wouldn’t take you now, remember? You’re mine, not His. They can’t force you to do it,” he reminds me. “But I want you here with me. Can you drive or should I come get you?”

“I’d have to sneak out. They won’t let me go anywhere now, I told them no. I-I stood up to them, Daddy.”

His gruff voice fills with pride. “Good girl. Pack your things then, I’ll be there in twenty minutes and wait two houses down.”

“Yes, Daddy.” I’m scared, but his pride gives me strength and has me moving on autopilot as I toss all my things in my bag. I need a plan, so for the first five minutes, I stand there chewing my nail and staring at my room. It might be the last time I ever see it if Colden keeps me, so I sigh and grab my black stuffed cat I’ve had since I was three. I don’t want to leave him, so I tuck him into my backpack and sneak my way into my brother’s room. He doesn’t have bars like I do, and although I hear my parents animatedly talking downstairs, I don’t stop. I slip from his window, struggle down the side of the house, and land wrong after I take the leap. My ankle is twisted but I’m running on adrenaline as I limp my way two houses down and crouch to hide behind a car.

Thankfully, Colden shows up less than five minutes later, whipping his trunk open and tossing my bag in when I come out from the shadows. “Did they see you?”

I shake my head and climb into his car. “I don’t think they even know I left. They were bickering when I snuck out through my brother’s room. What if they come to you looking?”

“Let them come.” He grips my chin, pulling me into a kiss before driving off that leaves me breathless. “They won’t bully you anymore, little doe. You’re mine.”

“Yours,” I repeat, leaning over so I can feel close to him. “I hope I didn’t interrupt your night.”

His fingers lace with mine as his lips brush my hair. “It was a welcome interruption, trust me. Nothing could’ve been more important than coming to get you.”

I feel the truth in his words and it has me wanting — no, needing — to please him. I reach over with my right hand to rub his cock through his pants, making him chuckle almost darkly.

“We should talk first, little doe. Tell me what happened. We’ll have plenty of time to play once you’re settled.”

I stop moving but keep my hand there, telling him exactly what happened and how she and my father decided my future without me. “I used to think I wanted them to decide everything for me so I wouldn’t have to, but now I don’t. I want you to.”

“There’s my girl,” he praises. “I knew you’d get there, but I have to confess... I thought it would take a little longer. This is a big decision.”

I nod. “I know. I thought I needed more time too... instead all I needed was to watch you walk out the door.”

“I didn’t want to.” His hand curls around mine. “Leaving you isn’t something I’ll be able to do again, so don’t ask me to.”

It’s that that brings a smile to my face. I lean in to kiss his cheek, then rest my head on his shoulder as he drives the rest of the way in a comfortable silence.

That silence continues on my part when we pull into his driveway and I see the sheer size of his house — I knew people lived like this, I just never thought I’d meet any of them. My father always made a point to teach me that simplicity was key when it came to living for The Saint — our house was just big enough for our family, we only had what we strictly needed, and all extra funds were diverted to the church.

Despite knowing how much Colden donates, it’s clear he kept some for himself.

As he carries my bag inside for me and gives me a tour, I feel like I'm in a dream. His kitchen is twice the size of my living room, and my entire house might've fit inside *his* living room. There are three full bathrooms each with huge showers and bigger tubs, four bedrooms all completely furnished, and a basement that makes me blush.

In one corner, there's a normal-looking office hidden behind an open door, but the rest of it? It looks like a shrine to The Temptress.

He's got a huge mural of her painted on one wall with a shelf full of candles across her chest, and three couches all situated to face her.

"This is where we meet," he explains. "Remember I told you?"

I nod, moving closer to the painting in a daze. She's who I'll pray to now, and it feels right — better than I ever thought it could. "She's beautiful."

"She doesn't hold a candle to you, little doe. No one could." He steps up behind me, curling his fingers around my throat as I keep my eyes on her face. "And I'll spend more time worshiping you. She'd want it that way."

"I like her already." I grin, letting my eyes flutter closed. "I'll worship you too, Daddy. I worship you."

My stomach flips suddenly as he sweeps me off my feet to carry me back upstairs, and this time, he doesn't stop until we're in his bedroom.

Our bedroom.

"Just need to see you in my bed, Evie. Please."

The word sounds foreign on his lips as he sets me down, and I immediately spring into action, pulling off my clothes so he can properly see all of me in his bed. I lay back, letting my knees fall to the sides and watch him as he takes me in.

"Never seen anything better in my life," he purrs, climbing up to touch my legs and lift them up to his shoulders. "How's your ass, little doe? All better?"

“Mmhm,” I hum, my heart speeding up. “My body already misses you. I-I’m ready, Daddy.”

Fingers ghost down my legs to my hips. “Are you sure? I’m not a patient man, but I’m trying.”

“You’re doing perfect, you’re exactly what I need... but I’m ready. I’m wet for you.”

I bit my lip and reach down to touch it then bring it up to Colden’s lips, and the first swipe of his skilled tongue only makes me surer.

“My good girl is always wet for me.” He slips off the bed to strip, then settles again with his between my legs. “Come twice for me and then tell me again you want me inside you.”

“I—” his tongue steals my words for a long, glorious moment, and as he eases two fingers inside of me, I arch off the bed with a growl-like noise I’ve never made before. “Oh, shadows! Oh, that feels so good.”

Feeling his beard, his hot tongue, insistent fingers... seeing him like this, hearing him moan from the taste of me... I don’t last long. That first orgasm builds and explodes, and before he gives me a second to breathe, his fingers shift and start to spread inside me.

The stretch makes me gasp, but even in this moment I know it’s only the beginning. “It hurts... I like it.”

I twitch as I feel that next orgasm blossoming, spreading like heat through my bones, and Colden’s tongue only gets more insistent as he slips a third finger inside of me.

The way he curls them has me screaming, gasping and moaning his name as I release and stop breathing entirely, but it has me floating unlike anything I’ve ever felt. “Daddy! Please, I want you inside me.”

He bites me.

“Taste so fucking good, girl. Look at what it did to me.”

Kneeling up, he gives me a clear view of his thick cock — and for a moment, I have the good sense to be scared. I don’t

know how it will even fit in such a tiny hole, but I felt the same way about my ass. “I love you.”

“And I love you, little doe. Breathe for me,” he whispers, kissing me and nudging my legs apart further. I try to keep up with that kiss as he presses the head of his cock against me, but I break it with a whimper.

It hurts, the stretching inside me burning its way through my body as I try and fail to close my legs. “It hurts.”

His crystal blue eyes soften as he stills his hips and kisses all over my face, just soft little things that have me clinging to him. “You’re okay, little doe. You’re so strong. Roll your hips for me until you feel more comfortable.”

The tenseness of his muscles gives away how hard this is for him, but as always, he’s my patient man. My good man. I start to roll, allowing my body to adjust to his size as he slides in a little more. Every inch is like it rips me open more and more, and by the time he’s slipping the rest of his length inside me, I find I like the pain. “I’m okay, Daddy. I’m your strong girl... I— take what you need from me. My body is yours.”

“My perfect girl,” he praises, arms straining as he holds himself up and tries to keep his movements slow. But each time he bottoms out, I feel his control slip a little. His thrusts get sharper, harder. Faster. “Gonna spend fucking eternity with my cock buried inside you.”

“Yes,” I gasp. “I’ll always be yours and only yours. Only for your cock.”

“Fuck. I— fuck, Evie. I’m sorry,” he rushes out, and I have no clue what he means until his hand closes around my throat again. It isn’t like all the times he does it gently. He’s squeezing now, slamming inside of me as he pins me to the bed by my neck, and I don’t get the feeling he’s sorry at all.

He needs this, needs to give in to the animal that lives inside him, and I’ve never seen him look wilder. I find I love it.

“Daddy,” I croak around his grip. “Y-Yours to ruin.”

I'm too lightheaded to focus on what he says next, but with the headrush, the pain fades to gentle, rolling waves that somehow take me higher and drag me under all at once as he uses my body.

I can't move, can't squirm away or tell him to stop or do anything but float as he hammers into me, but the rough kiss that follows as he floods my body grounds me again.

"Mine to love," he growls, ripping the cross necklace off my body and tossing it aside. "Every inch of you is mine now, little Evangeline."

I feel his words with every inch of me even if I still can't reply. I nod so he knows I hear him, so he knows I believe him fully, and then I let my eyes close as exhaustion takes over. I don't need a cross or a Saint, I have Colden.

And he has me.

Twenty

For the next nine days, neither of us leave the house. Colden fields a few business calls and Gideon stops over once, but for the most part, we don't do anything but eat, sleep, and have sex. If I thought he was patient before, knowing what his appetite is truly like gives me a whole new perspective.

I'm to the point already that with prep, I can take him in any hole and have it feel good for me, too... so much so that I'm craving it as much as he is.

He looks so damn good in his suit I crawl into his lap before his business partners arrive. "So handsome, Daddy."

I roll my hips just enough to make him grunt, then still as he grips my sides and ruts up. "Careful, little doe. Better to let him sleep unless you want to be used in front of a crowd."

That makes me blush, but it isn't because I don't want it. After all of the times catching little glimpses of people enjoying each other in public and craving that for myself, it's the opposite. "Would you?" I roll again. "Would you let them all see what's yours?"

"As long as they understand you're mine, yes. You belong to me, Evie." His teeth catch my mark and suck as his cock pokes my ass, and I let my eyes close so I can picture it.

"Let them see how good I am for you, Daddy. For only you... own me in front of them like I'm nothing more than a cocksleeve."

My mouth doesn't surprise me anymore. Talking to him this way feels right, and he always says such pretty praises when I do.

"My perfect girl. If you change your mind, all you have to do is tell me to stop, okay?" He kisses my nose, my cheek, my lips. "I might get a little carried away."

I nod, trusting him in contrast to his last sentence. If there's anything I've learned while living here, it's that I like it when he gets carried away. "When will they be here?"

I roll again to tease him, loving the way his eyes darken.

“Any minute. Rory’s got a key, so they’ll just come down here when they get here. Do you want to come for me first?”

“Please?” I whimper. “I need it, Daddy. I’m so, so wet.”

He hums, pulling up the old, faded tee of his I’m wearing just enough to expose my wet panties and rub my clit through them. “My greedy little doe can’t get enough now, can she?”

I really can’t. I find myself humping my pillow in the mornings when he gets out of bed early, and then I can’t sleep until he makes me come. “I can’t, Daddy. I’m your greedy little slut... I need your touch, whether it’s your cock, your tongue or your fingers. Shadows, I’d be happy riding your thigh. I just need you.”

“Would you?” he growls, moving me completely onto his left leg. “Prove it. Hug my neck and ride Daddy’s thigh until his friends get here, and then you can come.”

“Yes, Daddy.” I start to move instantly, moaning loudly now that my soul is free of guilt. It feels amazing — The Temptress surrounding us as we let our pleasure take hold of all our other senses — nothing can compare.

The scent of his skin fills my nose as he guides me to slow down, and my body trembles with need as I feel my clit sliding along his slacks, my panties getting wetter by the second.

I’m so lost in him that I barely hear the footsteps coming down the stairs, but Colden’s grip on me tightens as he speaks. “Rory. Gideon. Have a seat, this won’t take long. She’s almost there.”

“Don’t rush for us,” Rory’s voice fills my ears. “So beautiful when they’re free.”

Knowing they’re watching me only nudges me to that edge faster, and when I remember I was granted permission to come when they arrived, I let my head fall back and I scream for him as I do it. “Daddy!”

He holds me as I ride it out, then kisses the mark under my ear. “There’s my good girl. Feel better now?”

I still can't talk for a few moments, but I nod, skin still trembling as I cling to him until I can. "More."

I can hear Gideon curse under his breath as Rory chuckles. "She's insatiable."

"She is," he agrees. "But isn't she beautiful like this?" His hand fists in my hair and tugs my head back, making my body bow. "She'd let me do anything to her as long as I make her come after. Isn't that right, little doe?"

"Yes," I gasp. "Anything you wanted, Daddy."

"Well, I get it now," Gideon speaks up for the first time. "Why you were drawn to her. You could see how perfect she is a mile away, huh?"

"Couldn't you? She was raised to be the perfect, obedient little wife. But my Evie is stronger than that. She knows when to obey and when to speak up, and I've never seen anything more beautiful."

"So you're keeping her then?" Rory asks. "Her dad's pissed. He showed up to Crown Hall this morning asking where you live."

Colden huffs, tapping my hip. "She's an adult whether he wants to admit it or not. There's nothing he can do to me. Now up, Evie. Strip for me. Let me show him exactly why I'm keeping you forever."

Standing on my shaking legs is hard, but I find the strength in his gaze and I slowly pull his shirt from my body, then slide those soaked panties down to the floor. Not even the mention of my father can phase me now, not when I'm making Colden so proud.

"Good girl. Now take Daddy's cock out and just keep me warm while we talk, okay? Can you do that, gorgeous?"

The devotion in his eyes has me feeling so warm inside, there isn't a world where I would have denied him. "Of course, Daddy. I'd love to."

I drop to my knees and pull out his cock, then gently suckle him into my mouth and close my eyes. I really love

doing this for him, love the way he pets my head and whispers how much he loves me when I do.

This is no exception.

“She’ll stay like this all day if I ask her to,” he says proudly. “But while she’s keeping me warm, let’s talk business. Where are we with the Bonehallow build?”

“It’s almost finished. We’ve modeled it after the chapter in Foster, but ours will be a little bigger. We have about a dozen more houses to build.”

Gideon wastes no time diving into the conversation, but I can tell Rory’s attention is still split when he speaks. “Yeah, about a-a dozen or so.”

I know his eyes are on me, on the way my even breathing betrays just how comfortable I am like this. Colden ignores it at first, but when Rory outright doesn’t answer his next question, he chuckles. “Speak, Rory. You seem a little distracted.”

“Huh?” He clears his throat. “I uh—come on. You expect me to give a flying shit about work when there’s a beautiful woman on her knees?”

“I do, since our work includes building communities for people like you and this beautiful woman,” Colden presses. “And if her father truly wishes to put up a fight about this, I need to know Bonehallow is ready for us to move there.”

“It is,” Rory assures him. “Fuck, doesn’t she hate being down there like that for so long?”

Colden tugs my hair, trying and failing to pull me off — I need his cock.

“Does it look like she hates it? Come feel how wet she is for me right now. Bet she’s dripping all over the floor.”

I can hear the grunt that escapes Rory’s lips. “I can touch her? You’re not gonna get all Colden about it?” Yet I hear him moving closer already, knowing Colden can change his mind at any given moment.

He meets my eyes briefly, and I blink slowly to let him know I'm okay with this if he is. "You can slide two fingers inside of her. You get ten seconds each, nothing more. Try to go over that and you'll lose those fingers."

"Shadows," Rory hisses, dropping down behind me. "Can I touch anywhere else in those ten seconds?"

My heart begins to race when he responds with just a single, clipped word. "Yes. Your time starts now."

I don't have time to brace myself before two of Rory's fingers slip inside of me and his other hand starts freely roaming my naked body.

I can feel how pent up he is, and that natural need to please overtakes me. I clench around those fingers, making him moan and squeeze my hip hard. "Fuck. One lucky man, Colden. I want to fuck her. How much?"

He pulls out his fingers right on time and the sound of him sucking them makes me shiver.

"She's not for sale," he growls. "You had your ten seconds. Gideon, get over here before the offer expires completely. It won't happen again."

I can feel him throbbing in my mouth though — whether he's admitting it out loud, this is turning him on. A lot.

That alone turns me on more too, but I'm glad to know he still doesn't want another cock touching me.

To my surprise, Gideon rushes over so quickly I hear him trip, but he's on me in seconds, shoving his thick fingers inside with a moan. "Damn shame. I'd love to be last breeding her after you two."

"Quite the fantasy you have there, Gideon. No one will ever come inside my little doe but me, I don't care how much money you offer me. Time's up."

He pulls out and moves back to his seat, and for some reason I smile around my man when I hear him suck his fingers too. They'd pay for me... and they still can't have me.

“Up, beautiful,” Colden commands, helping me back onto his lap as his eyes search my face. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” I whisper with a smile. “Can I ride you? Can we show them what they can’t have?”

He tugs me down so quickly, my gasp dies in my throat. “You know how badly Daddy needs to come, don’t you, perfect girl?” he praises, wrapping a hand around my neck as I sink down all the way. “Fuck. This what you want them to see? That my hand makes a prettier necklace than that cross ever did?”

It did. If I had to choose, I’d only ever wear his hand around my throat. “Yes!” I moan. “Yes. Oh, shadows. Harder.”

“That’s my girl. Pretty whore isn’t so pure anymore, is she?” His fingers flex, squeezing just enough to slow the blood flow as I start to ride him. “Loves having a fat cock in her greedy little cunt.”

“Yes, Daddy! I love it, I need it, crave it — crave you. I’m your pretty little whore.”

His teeth catch my nipple and bite until I come for him again, and Rory swears under his breath as Colden’s arms wrap right around me and he stands us both up to fuck me.

I hang on for my life, moaning so loudly into his ear I may as well be screaming. “So deep! Oh, shadows.”

“Damn,” Gideon hisses. “She looks like a doll.”

Colden growls as he snaps his hips harder and drops me down on his cock over and over again, then squeezes me tighter as he loses it and comes hard inside of me.

“Thank you, Daddy. Thank you!” I kiss all over his face. “Was I your good girl?”

“Of course you were, sweethea—”

“Colden!” Rory’s frantic voice startles me, making me jerk my head toward him and miss Daddy’s kiss, but him and Gideon are both staring over my shoulder. Not at me.

“Get behind me and put your shirt back on,” Colden mutters, lifting me off his cock and setting me down just as I turn to see my father standing at the base of the stairs.

His chest is heaving, eyes wild as he takes in my mark, my exposed body, and the feral look in Colden’s eyes. “What have you done to my daughter, you monster!”

“I’m not yours!” I yell, hiding my body as quickly as I can as his friends move forward.

“How the fuck did you get in here?” Rory yells, charging forward until Colden throws out an arm to stop him.

“The front door was unlocked,” Father spits. “I walked right in. Evangeline, come with me. Can’t you see they’re using you?”

“This isn’t what it looks like,” Colden counters. “Nor is it your concern anymore. Your daughter made her decision.”

Panic rises in my chest. He can’t make me go, he can’t, I don’t want to. “No. I want Colden. I’m only his.”

“Only?” My father points a shaky, enraged hand toward Rory and Gideon. “Then why are they here!”

Colden slowly steps forward until he’s closing his hand around my father’s outstretched fingers. “You have two choices, vicar. Leave and forget you ever saw her here... or earn yourself an express trip to meet your precious Saint. Choose.”

I’m shaking as those words sink in for my father and he jerks away. “You just— this is my town! You can’t— you know what? Fine. Keep the little whore.”

Colden’s hand wraps around my father’s throat so fast, I nearly miss the yelp he lets out. “You will not... speak of her like that in my presence. And do not forget who owns this town, little vicar. It’s not you. Apologize to her and get out of my house.”

Colden doesn’t let him go until he croaks out an apology and then he shoves him toward the stairs.

Rory and Gideon follow him up as Colden turns back toward me and I run to him. “You’re okay,” he whispers, picking me up and kissing me deeply. “No one will ever take you from me, little doe.”

“I wouldn’t go. I wouldn’t ever leave you. I’m no longer theirs.”

I hear my father yell I’m no daughter of his as the front door slams, and all I get from that statement is relief. He won’t come back for me. I don’t have to fear him anymore.

“He’s gone,” Rory says as they come back down. “Want us to go after him?”

Colden sits again with me in his lap. “Nah. If he ever changes his mind, I’ll be ready for him. Until then, can we get back to business? I’d like to wrap this up quickly. We have a wedding to plan.”

A wedding to plan.

Our wedding.

In spite of the fears my mother embedded in me, Colden didn’t cast me aside after he claimed my virtue. It’s the opposite. He wants me more now than ever before, and I feel the exact same way about him.

I may be tainted, but it’s not the end of the world like they led me to believe, in fact... I feel like my life is finally beginning.

Epilogue

Colden

Looking around Bonehallow's encampment, I'm proud of what we've done here. It's now a safe haven for tainted and their partners, and most importantly, it's a safe place for my wife.

She told me she was fine staying in Luna Vale, but the first time we'd run into her family out in public, she'd cried for almost four hours. I knew that wouldn't get better with time, so I'd offered to bring her here — and one short trip later, we were moving.

Now, she's happier than I've ever seen her, and I'm dying to see her smile again as I drive home. Though smaller than my house in Luna Vale, the cabin we live in now is twice as nice and made all the better by the fact that I don't have a single memory there without her. She walked in the first time before I did, and she hasn't left without me since then.

It's why I'm not surprised when I open the front door to find her on her knees with her head bowed. She's been training to stay that way for long periods of time, and I can't help but wonder how long she's been down there. "Hello, Daddy. I missed you."

"I missed you too, little doe. How are your knees?" I ask, setting my briefcase down and taking off my suit jacket. "We need to get you a pillow."

"They're okay. I wasn't sure when you'd be home, so I figured it was a good time to work on my kneeling. I've been down here almost three hours now, Daddy. It's so calming."

She takes a deep breath in and releases it, and I can't help it.

I'm in awe of her.

"Up, sweetheart. Kiss me."

Her legs wobble as she stands and takes a step closer, and then she leaps into my arms with a smile. “I baked you cherry pie.”

“Shadows, I love you.” I carry her to the kitchen, setting her down on the table as I strip the shirt from her body. “Have you eaten?”

“I had some grapes earlier to tide me over so I could eat dinner with you. Everything tastes better with you feeding me.”

How did I ever get so lucky?

I kiss her soft lips and take a moment to appreciate her smooth skin, then whip up some dinner as she tells me about her day and I tell her about mine.

“Chair or floor?” I ask once it’s done and I’m sitting again with two plates.

“Chair, Daddy. I want to sit next to you, you smell so good.”

She gets comfortable sitting so close to me our legs are touching, and I take a moment to just drink in the sight of her before I feed her a bite.

“Fuck the chair. Just come sit in my lap.”

Scooting back, I wrap an arm around her once she climbs up to hold her steady, then feed her another bite. The tiny little happy dance she does sends a warmth up my spine while simultaneously turning me on. “This is the best seat in the house.”

“I like you here better too,” I agree. “But feed yourself for a moment sweetheart, I need to touch my girl.”

The overwhelming urge to fuck her nearly supersedes my desire for her to eat, so I compromise by slipping my hand between her naked thighs. She’s so wet for me it calms me almost instantly, and I push her legs apart a little to slip a finger inside of her.

If it were up to me, we’d stay like this every hour of every day — with some part of me inside some part of her — but the

hours I spend without her only remind me over and over again that she's precious to me, that she's perfect. That I have something to look forward to when I come home.

It's worth the time apart. She's worth it.

All of this was worth it... and I've never been happier.

Evangeline

Life has seriously never been better. Colden is everything I've ever wanted in a husband: generous, thoughtful, appreciative, passionate, and unapologetically insatiable. He takes care of me just as I take care of him, and because we're such a team, we've never had a bad day. Every day feels like a dream, and I'd have killed someone if they woke me.

Today starts no differently. Colden wakes me with his tongue, only letting up after I come for him, and even then, I know one orgasm isn't enough.

When he slips inside me, I try to reach out to grab him, only realizing then my hands are handcuffed to the headboard right above my head. "Daddy," I gasp, loving the feeling of being bound and vulnerable for him. "Good morning."

"Good morning, little doe. I canceled my meetings today, but Rory and Gideon are visiting tonight. They have a surprise for you." He rolls his hips slowly, driving deep. "Would you like that?"

Curiosity peaks in my bones, but I know better than to push. If I beg for the surprise... he'll tell me, and I want to let him surprise me. "I'd love that."

"Good girl. You should know I have every intention of making it impossible for you to walk by then. I feel like I'm starving for you, Evie."

Insistent lips meet mine, stealing my response as he lifts my hips and uses my body, and it's everything we both need. "I love when you're starving for me. I'm starving for you, Daddy. I've been craving you so badly recently."

“I’m here, sweetheart.” His teeth drag down my neck to my collarbone, where he leaves new marks to go with the older ones. “Come for me.”

Still soaked from his tongue, it doesn’t take much to send me over once his hand wraps around my throat and he slams into me hard enough to dent the wall with the headboard.

“Daddy!” I try to reach again and groan when I can’t. My arms are beautifully sore and I love every bit of it. “Bruise me... breed me... please.”

“What a gorgeous little cocksleeve you are,” he growls, leaving fingerprints on the sides of my neck as he fucks me harder. It drags a third orgasm from me before he finally gives me what I really crave — his load, deep inside of me.

I clench hard to milk my man and smile, rolling as much as I can to show him how happy I am. “I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too, little doe.” He kisses me sweetly as he uncuffs me and massages my wrists, then helps me out of bed.

I’m commanded to stay naked as I help him clean the cabin, but we barely make it through the living room before he’s bending me over the couch and ducking down to eat me out from the back.

Knowing he can taste himself only turns me on more. I love that he never shies away from his own cum, in fact, if I had to guess I’d say he loves tasting it on my pussy because it’s just another reminder that it belongs to him. “So good. You make me feel so damn good.”

My legs shake with that orgasm as he drags it out of me, and he fucks me twice more before we finally get the cleaning done.

I’m trembling by the time we sit down to watch a movie — me in his lap and him mindlessly, lazily playing with my messy, sensitive pussy — but my body is thrumming with satisfaction.

Like always.

I don't have a clue what movie it is, all I know is I smell my man everywhere and it's nearly impossible to keep my lips off of his neck. "What time are they coming, Daddy?"

Even with how sleepy I am, I still find myself excited for my surprise, so I'm happy when he tells me they're on their way.

I'm disappointed when he stops touching me the moment the door opens, but it's clear pretty quickly why he did: Rory walks in behind Gideon holding a blanketed cage, and both of them immediately walk over to hug me.

"Figures you put a shirt on her this time," Gideon teases. "Getting possessive in your old age, Colden?"

He scoffs as he pulls me back to him. "I've always been possessive of her, but the shirt isn't for your benefit. It's for his." I'm confused when he nods to the chattering cage, but Rory sets it down quickly on the table and steps back for Colden to grab the blanket. "I know you get lonely when I'm working, so I had them get you a little friend."

Somehow I know exactly what it is the moment before he reveals him. My love of ferrets isn't a secret, not since Colden and I saw a photo of one in an art gallery a few months ago, but with one here in front of me I hear myself squeak in excitement without actually realizing I made the noise. "Oh, Daddy!" I drop down to work the cage open with shaking hands and pull the white and grey baby into my lap. "He's perfect."

"Better be. Do you know how far we had to go to find one that looked like that damn portrait you saw?" Rory asks. "Ridiculous. And he doesn't like car rides, for the record. Tore my backseat up before we put him in the cage."

The tiny little thing in my hands doesn't seem to be nearly ferocious enough to do anything of the sort, but the way it makes Colden laugh warms my heart. "You deserve it for something, I'm sure," he quips. "But thank you for going to the trouble."

“Just remember your gratitude when he ruins your whole house,” Gideon says quietly. “Ferrets are notoriously difficult pets.”

“So are a lot of subs, but Colden doesn’t have any trouble with me,” I retort. “Our boy will be good for us, I just know it.” There isn’t any doubt in my mind and not one of them try to argue. I’ll be here with him all day and knowing Colden... this little guy won’t want for anything, just like I don’t.

We’re the luckiest pets in the world.

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