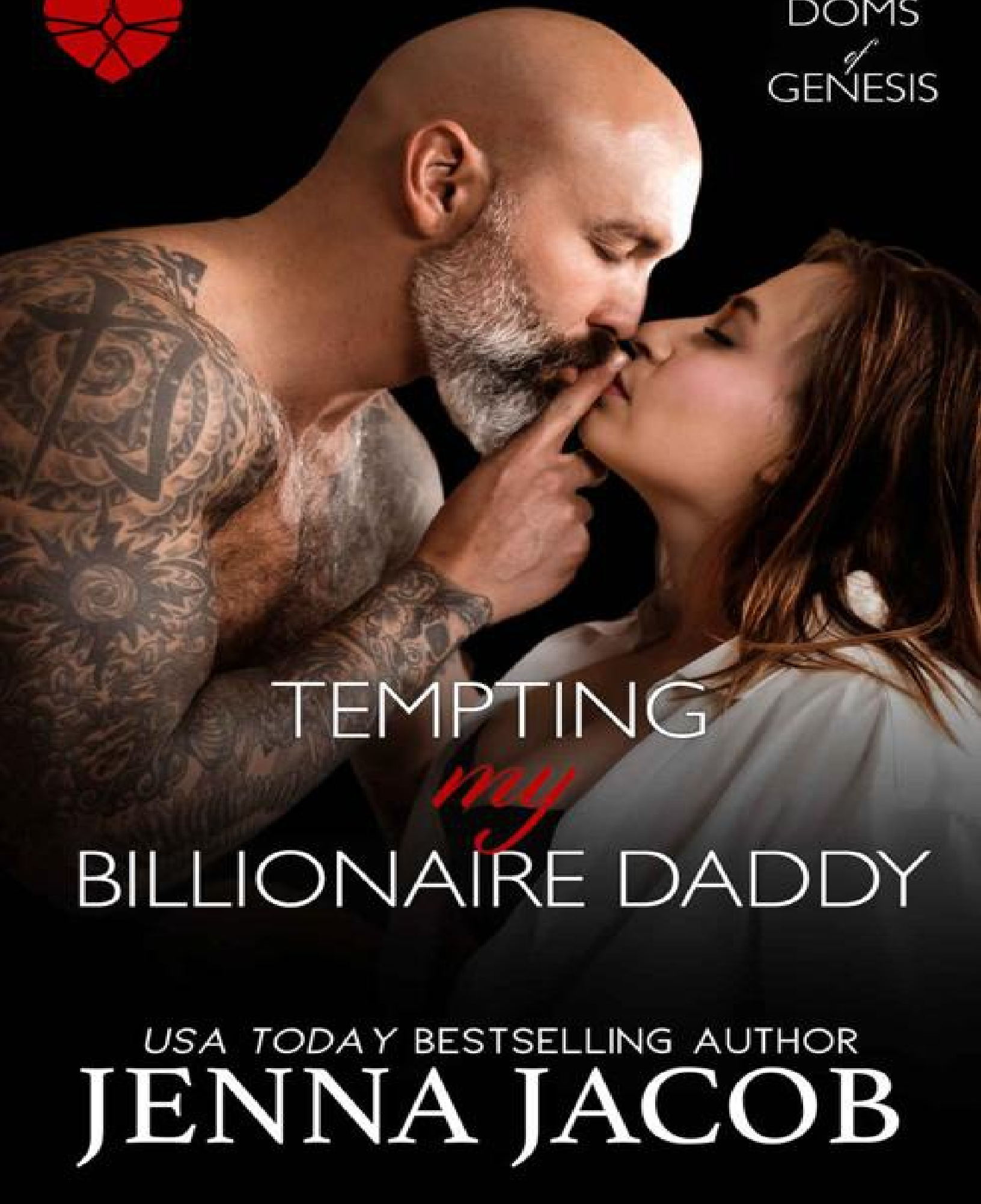




The
DOMS
of
GENESIS



TEMPTING
my
BILLIONAIRE DADDY

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JENNA JACOB

TEMPTING MY BILLIONAIRE
DADDY

THE DOMS OF GENESIS

BOOK NINE

JENNA JACOB

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TEMPTING MY BILLIONAIRE DADDY

Doms of Genesis, Book Nine

Jenna Jacob

Published by Jenna Jacob

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NOTE FROM JENNA JACOB

It seems surreal that I released the first book in The Doms of Genesis series, *Embracing My Submission*, ten years ago. I'm not going to lie. Pouring out the last words for *Tempting My Billionaire Daddy*—the final story of this sexually steamy, sometimes tormented, kink-loving family—was tearful and bittersweet.

Before I'd started plotting this book, I knew I couldn't close the door and walk away from the Doms and subs who'd spent the last decade whispering their dirty desires and sensual secrets in my ear. So, I've left you a little surprise at the end of this story.

And, oh, what a sizzling and emotional journey of self-discovery, hope, and love is pressed between the pages of *Tempting My Billionaire Daddy*.

For those of you who've been with me since the start of this wild dungeon ride, and those who are just now joining the kinky fun...thank you. Thank you for your unwavering support, your amazing encouragement, and your heartwarming love. I could never have created this series without you.

Huge Hugs,
Jenna

TEMPTING MY BILLIONAIRE DADDY

*I don't want any man controlling me...
but I ache for his command.*

Blair

Resolving never to be under anyone's thumb again, I leave my controlling, uber-rich father. My studio apartment is sketchy, and my job pays minimum wage, but I can finally be myself. Then a chance meeting with my father's hunky-as-hell billionaire business partner, Dalton Barnes, leaves me reeling. I'm convinced my teenage crush can make my filthiest fantasies come true... but he doesn't recognize me all grown up.

I'm determined to seduce him.

Dalton

Playing with women half my age isn't smart. Still, when the flirtatious beauty suggests anonymous afternoon delight, I say yes. Then she screams my name in passion, and I demand answers. Learning my business partner's barely legal daughter played me is infuriating. No matter how intense the pleasure, I won't touch her again. Except, she suddenly finds herself broke and homeless. She has no one else to rely on.

I have to save her.

But having her under my roof shreds my resolve. The sassy brat needs the firm hand I'm capable of giving, but letting her into my bed again would destroy my business. Still, my desire for Blair burns through all resistance, even as she fights the very boundaries she needs. Can I show her the difference between control and command before her defiance tears us apart?

CHAPTER ONE



Blair

“Sorry I’m late,” I breathlessly announced, racing through the door of the Dazzling Bean before weaving past tables of customers absorbed in their electronics while munching pastries and sipping coffee. “The bus was behind schedule and hit every red light on the planet.”

“Thank you, have a wonderful day,” my boss and bestie, Leesha Emery, smiled as she handed a cup of coffee to a woman in a navy power suit. When the customer walked away, she sent me a scowl. “You took the bus *again*? Blair...”

“I had to. My car’s on fumes and payday isn’t until Friday,” I explained, tossing my coat and purse in the kitchen before plucking a sunny yellow apron off the hook and quickly tying it around my waist. “Don’t worry. I didn’t get groped this time.”

“That’s a miracle. Take a twenty out of the cash register for gas. You can pay it back—”

“No. Thanks, but no.” I adamantly shook my head. “I shouldn’t have wasted half a tank driving home to get more of my stuff,”—*that I can pawn or sell*—“while Daddy Dearest was out of town.”

“Speaking of Daddy Dearest...” Leesha cringed.

My heart sputtered. “W-what about him?”

After skimming an assessing glance over the customers, she poured a cup of coffee and shoved it in my hand. “He called about ten minutes ago.”

Dammit! I knew that bastard hired someone to follow me. “Lemme guess, he tried to bribe you into firing me.”

“Tried, yes, but failed,” she said with a sympathetic frown.

“What did he say?” I asked, taking a sip of java.

“He offered to bankroll my new expansion.”

“I didn’t know you were expanding.”

“I’m not. But he tried like hell to convince me to branch out. Not only did he offer an obscene amount of money, but he also volunteered to send over a contract.”

I didn’t know whether to puke or scream, but I definitely wanted to punch something, preferably my father...in the face. “How much did he offer you?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Leesha stated firmly. “After I explained you were my *friend* and that I’d never throw you under the bus, I told him where to shove his contract and hung up.”

“I’m sorry he tried to coerce you.”

He usually saves that tactic for me.

“You have nothing to be sorry about, boo. In fact, I need to thank you. If you hadn’t told me how he’d gotten you fired from the ad agency, I would have been totally blindsided.”

“Like I was? Yeah, that was such a fun day,” I quipped sardonically, trying to harness my anger.

Though it had been over two months ago, I couldn’t forgive my father for orchestrating my termination from a job I’d truly loved. He’d more than proved he was willing to go to any lengths to continue controlling my life. As a child, it was irritating. As a grown woman, it was downright infuriating. Oh, he claimed he was ‘*Only doing what’s best for my daughter’s future*’ but we both knew that was bullshit. He was paying me back for quitting Yale and finding a job on my own, instead of blindly following the life-plan he’d laid out for me.

Leesha shook her head. “What is wrong with him?”

“The list is long.”

“No, I’m serious. Parents are supposed to encourage their kids to be successful, not set them up to fail. I wouldn’t have any of this”—she waved her arms around the shop—“without the support of my mom and dad. I can’t believe he’s sabotaging your livelihood because you refuse to go to law school.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less. Father and I have been locked in a power struggle for as long as I can remember. He’s disappointed I’m a girl and not the prodigal son he’d wanted.”

“I can’t wrap my head around that. I’ve always been a daddy’s girl.”

“Obviously, yours can relate to women. Mine? Doesn’t have a clue.”

“What about your mom? Surely, he can relate to her.”

I scoffed. “Not on a good day. They merely tolerate each other...well, most times. I swear, it’s a miracle I was even conceived.”

“Why do they stay married then?”

“Money. It would cost too much for my father to divorce her. So, he gives her an outrageous allowance each month that she promptly blows on designer clothes and accessories, then spends the rest of her time at the country club trying to one-up her fellow trophy wives.”

“That sounds...cold.”

“It’s arctic.”

Leesha scowled. “How did you turn out so warm and loving?”

“They hired a good nanny the day I was born.” I smiled as happy memories replaced the toxic ones. “Anya raised me, not my parents. She was kind and loving and oh, my god, she had the patience of a saint. I didn’t cope well being ignored by my parents.”

“They ignored you?”

“Not all the time. They showed up when it was time to punish me for screwing up at school or refusing to conform...which was *a lot* as I got older.”

“What did they do to you?”

“Nothing that required effort, that’s for sure,” I scoffed. “They’d put on the whole parental act while lecturing me about the *consequences of my behavior*, then threaten to take my phone away or ground me...which they never did. It was all for show.”

Until it wasn’t.

“Why does your father care about what you’re doing now?”

“Because by refusing to go to law school, I’m not conforming *again*. I guess getting me fired is the equivalent of taking away my phone in his eyes. I’d love to promise he’ll never call again, but I can’t. He’s out there now, plotting other ways to get me back under his thumb.”

“But if he keeps this nonsense up, he’s gonna lose his only daughter.”

“Trust me. He already has. He’s just too blind to see it.”

“Give me five minutes alone with him. I’ll open his eyes.” Leesha flashed an evil grin, then softened it as a sharp-dressed man approached the counter.

While she took his order, I pushed past the swinging metal doors and into

the kitchen. As I worked to replenish the display case, loading sinful sweets on a baking tray, sour memories swarmed my brain.

Memories of my roommate Leena and I, laughing hysterically as we bounded down the stairs outside the library at Perry Park Academy—the boarding school I’d been banished to at fourteen.

When we’d reached the bottom step, I’d looked up and found my father standing on the sidewalk, glaring at me. The smile had instantly slid off my face, and angst had flooded my veins.

Leena murmured that she’d catch up with me later, then jogged away.

Since my father had never once bothered to visit me in the three years I’d attended Perry Park, I’d worried something was wrong. At first, I’d thought maybe he and mother had decided to finally throw in the towel and get divorced, but...I knew better. He wouldn’t have risked losing half the wealth he’d amassed, and she’d never abdicate her coveted wrung on the social ladder or monthly stipend.

Though my mouth had been drier than the Serengeti, I’d gathered my wits and lifted my chin. “What are you doing here?”

“You’re graduating next spring. It’s time we discuss college,” he’d pragmatically stated, gesturing toward the bench beneath a shady oak.

I’d sat down foolishly, hoping that, after researching and choosing a college, I would finally gain his approval. When he’d joined me on the bench, I’d turned and confidently announced, “I want to attend Veterinary College.”

The caustic, belittling laugh that rolled off his lips had made my skin crawl.

“Be serious, Blair, and focus for five minutes. I haven’t spent an exorbitant amount of tuition on this place for you to become a comedian. I took time from my busy schedule to deal with this issue.”

Because I had been nothing but an issue for him to deal with.

“Since your GPA is only a 3.82, I placed a call and made a generous donation, one that left a huge dent in my investment portfolio. But I’m pleased to announce you’ve been accepted.”

“Accepted where?”

“To Yale, of course.”

“Yale,” I’d repeated incredulously. “I don’t want to live in Connecticut.”

“It doesn’t matter where you live. What matters is the education you receive. Yale is the most prestigious law school in the country.”

“But I don’t want to practice law. I want to be a veterinarian.”

“No child of mine is going to play with puppies and kittens for a living. You will attend Yale, earn your law degree, and accept the position I’ve secured for you with Jonathan Hastings. And that is final!”

He’d pinned me with a contemptuous glare, then stood and stormed away.

A week later, he’d e-mailed the list of classes he’d enrolled me in...at Yale.

Shoving the inky memories away, I sucked in a ragged breath and finished loading up the pastries. Just as I lifted the tray, my cell phone chimed. Since the only people who ever texted me were Leesha or my parents, I bit back a curse and pulled the device from my pocket.

DADDY DEAREST: YOU’VE PROVEN YOUR POINT, BLAIR. COME HOME. YOUR MOTHER MISSES YOU.

“Clearly, I haven’t proven anything. And as far as Mommy Dearest is concerned, she probably hasn’t even noticed I’ve divorced you both, and moved out after you had me fired,” I muttered under my breath.

Without bothering to respond, I tucked my phone away, let out a low growl, then hauled the tray from the kitchen.

After refilling the display case, Leesha and I waited on the masses of harried customers until the morning rush subsided. When the shop finally emptied, we each poured a cup of coffee and celebrated surviving another manic morning. Ten minutes later, we began cleaning and preparing for the lunch crowd to descend.

“Hey, I’m sorry I dropped the dad bomb on you when you first walked through the door.” Leesha flashed an apologetic smile.

“Don’t be. I’m glad you told me.”

“Yeah, but I could have waited until...now. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“Oh, boo, you didn’t. *He* did.”

“I know, but...you’ve been really quiet this morning. Do you want to talk it out?”

“You’re sweet for asking, but there’s nothing to talk about. My father is a narcissistic, manipulative prick who is never going to change.”

“I’m sorry.” Leesha sighed, then arched a brow. “Hey, what are you doing tonight?”

“Same thing I do every night, Pinky...watch the paint chips fall from my apartment ceiling and try to take over the world.” I smirked, wiping out the sink.

“I have a better idea. Come to Genesis with me.”

“You know I’m not into kink,” I lied as my heart rate tripled.

“No, you *pretend* you’re not into kink, though, I don’t know why. BDSM is the best thing that’s ever happened to me. It’s...life-altering.”

“I’m happy for you, boo, honest. It’s just not my thing,” I lied.

“Bullshit. I saw the look on your face when we watched that movie last month on Netflix.” Leesha sent me a knowing smirk.

Why was she always so flippin’ observant?

But she was right. I’d gotten so aroused watching the gorgeous Dom tease and torment his sub, it was all I could do not to squirm and moan.

“You can lie to yourself all you want, girl,” Leesha continued. “But I see the way your eyes light up when I’m telling about all the kinky things Andre does to me at Club Genesis.”

Aw, hell.

I hadn’t masked my curiosity as well as I’d thought. Leesha probably knew I absorbed every minute detail she shared like a sponge, too. Yes, I ached to trade places with my bestie for a night.

Ached to be cuffed to a cross and blissfully tortured with lurid licks and stinging spanks.

Ached for a commanding Dom to control my pain and pleasure while wringing orgasms out of me until I was wet, limp, and thoroughly sated.

Unfortunately, along with the lurid details Leesha often shared, she explained the dynamics of the BDSM lifestyle, too. I knew submissives handed most, if not all, of their power over to the Dominant. Though a part of me yearned to embrace the freedom Leesha had found, the idea of giving up the control I’d finally wrenched from my father and put in another man’s hands made my blood run cold.

But my issues with the lifestyle went deeper than simply giving up control. I’d spent a lifetime rebelling against obedience. There wasn’t a chance in hell that I’d kneel at any man’s feet. No, joining Leesha and her fiancé, Master Andre, at Club Genesis—like a third wheel—was pointless. Standing around watching other women live out my deepest, darkest fantasies—wishing I was one of them—was nothing but a waste of time.

“I don’t light up,” I lied. “As far as that movie we watched? Girl, that actor with all those tattoos, his shaved head, and muscles on top of muscles was so fine. There isn’t a woman on the planet who wouldn’t beg that man to tie her up and have his wicked way with her.”

“Are you saying you’d let him tie *you* up?”

“If he was real? Maybe. But he’s not. He’s an actor.”

“The Doms at Genesis are real. Some are even hotter than that actor.”

A wave of heat shot straight between my legs. “I’m sure all the subs cling to them like dryer sheets.”

“Nope. They kneel at their feet.” She chuckled. “You should try it. You might like it.”

Like it? No, I’d love it. Therein lies the problem.

“I’ll pass.” Determined to change the subject, I snagged the mini chalkboard off the counter and erased the breakfast menu. “What’s the lunch special today?”

Leesha landed a derisive stare. “Fine. I’ll stop pushing.”

Thank you.

“Today is honey ham and Swiss on a croissant with a choice of pesto or bruschetta pasta, potato or Caesar salad, and a sugar cookie or sea-salt caramel brownie.”

I printed the items on the chalkboard, doing my best to ignore the gnawing ache between my legs. It had been months since anything but my own fingers had touched my neglected pussy. While it would be nice to find someone who could put out my fire, I refused to even look at any man until my father stopped interfering in my life. No one deserved to be dragged into the middle of our war.

When I finished with the easel, I began disinfecting the tables and chairs.

“I’m gonna head to the back and start assembling sandwiches,” Leesha announced.

“Great. While you do that, I’ll sweep and mop the floors.”

“God, I’m glad I hired you.” With a grateful smile, Leesha disappeared into the kitchen.



Dalton

As I pulled my chromed-out Harley into the parking lot behind Genesis, I immediately grew concerned. Club owner Mika LaBrache’s SUV wasn’t anywhere in sight. The man was solid. He’d never blow off a meeting,

especially after calling me a couple of hours ago to confirm.

Easing to a stop near the back door, I killed the engine, removed my helmet, and pulled my cell phone from my leather jacket. Sure enough, there was a voicemail from Mika. Tapping the screen, I pressed the device to my ear.

“Hey, Dalton. I have to bail on our meeting. Julianna’s water just broke while she was at the hospital checking on Mellie and Savannah, who both happen to be in labor. Dad and Sarah are at the house watching Tristian, and I’m driving like a bat out of hell so I don’t miss our little girl’s grand entrance. Can you run the club for a couple of nights again? I’d really appreciate it. Lemme know. I’ll be in touch.”

The odds of Savannah and Mellie—biological sisters and subs at Club Genesis—going into labor at the same time had to be high. But adding Mika’s slave, Julianna, to the baby delivery parade was surely astronomical.

“Holy shit,” I muttered as I fired off a text to Mika.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL. DON’T STRESS ABOUT ANYTHING. I’LL HANDLE THE CLUB AS LONG AS NEEDED. YOU JUST TAKE CARE OF YOUR GIRLS. LATER.

As I pocketed my phone, ancient memories sucked me through an ugly worm hole I wasn’t expecting.

Suddenly, I stood at the foot of a bed, paralyzed with fear and heartbreak.

“Hold on, Heidi, I’m gonna call 9-11,” I’d said, forcing a calm I hadn’t felt while my wife writhed in pain as blood puddled on the sheets.

Heart in my throat, I’d forced back tears of sorrow and reached for the phone. I knew the child we’d created, the baby I’d desperately wanted, was gone.

“No. Just get a towel I can put between my legs. I’ll be fine,”

“Fuck that. You’re going to the hospital.”

The ensuing hours had been one giant blur until the doctor had sadly confirmed that Heidi had indeed miscarried. I’d wanted to howl and plow my fist through the fucking wall, but Heidi hadn’t even shed a tear. She’d just nodded, then started getting dressed after the doctor had left. I couldn’t comprehend her attitude. It was as if losing our child had zero effect on her.

She didn’t say a word the entire way home. Even after I’d helped her inside the house, she’d silently brushed my hands away, then strode to the pantry and pulled out a bottle of vodka she’d hidden there. Heidi didn’t even

bother with a glass. She'd simply tipped back the bottle and drank, as if it had been water.

I'd wanted to numb the debilitating pain, too, but knew it wouldn't have done either of us any good.

When I'd reached for the bottle in her hand, she'd sent me an angry glare.

"I know you're upset. I'm upset, too. But alcohol won't solve the problem. You can't mourn the loss of our baby in booze."

"Mourning? I'm not mourning," she'd scoffed derisively. "I'm celebrating. I never wanted that...thing growing inside me in the first place. If your fucking condom hadn't broken, I wouldn't have had to...never mind."

"You wouldn't have had to what?" I bit out as my stomach twisted.

"I guess it doesn't matter now," she drawled with a wave of her hand. "I went to a clinic, and they gave me some pills. The rest...is history."

Her confession, like a knife, carved out my heart. A level of hatred I'd never felt before thundered through me as I turned and walked out the door.

Even though it cost me my job, my relationship with my father, and an obscene amount of alimony, divorcing that bitch was the smartest thing I'd ever done.

Shoving the caustic memories away, I secured my helmet and rolled out of the parking lot. But even cruising down the street with the unseasonably warm sun on my back and the cool wind in my face, I couldn't escape the tendrils of resentment that still lingered inside me. And though it had been years since I'd wasted energy wanting to go back and change the past, that worthless longing had returned.

If I'd known—when I'd blindly followed my father's lead when he'd started grooming me as a child—that the golden road paved with unimaginable wealth wouldn't buy me an ounce of unconditional love, respect, or happiness, I would have veered off that path a whole lot sooner.

While my dad and I were no longer on speaking terms, I had to give him props. His guidance and my savant-like gift of reading the stock market had—and still was—netting me billions. It granted me the financial independence to be riding my new Harley down the streets of Chicago, living in a gated mansion north of the city, and investing millions in up-and-coming Fortune 500 companies.

Still, I'd trade every penny for a loving wife and family. While being poor would suck, sharing my heart and soul with a woman who truly loves

me for me would be fucking heaven on earth.

Biting back a curse, I scoffed at the useless fantasy.

There wasn't a woman on the planet who'd love me unconditionally. I was too jaded, too cynical, and too suspicious of their motives to let my guard down. I'd learned the hard way that women only wanted three things...

My money.

To climb my back and reach a higher rung on the social ladder.

Or ride my cock.

While I had no qualms about investing my dick to net a windfall of pleasure, I refused to divest my heart.

Turning onto Lakeshore Drive, I glanced at Lake Michigan and exhaled deeply. After my divorce and the fallout between me and my father, I'd hopped a flight to Chicago to check out the city and lick my wounds. Still teeming with anger, resentment, and rejection, I'd spent long hours sitting on the shore, staring at the water, sorting out my life. The ebb and flow soothed and calmed me so much I had enlisted the help of a real estate agent to find a waterfront home.

And she did.

To this day, I still enjoy watching and listening to the water break against the sandy shoreline, but now I do it from the comfort of one of my decks while sipping Macallan at home in Lake Forest.

As I passed Navy Pier, my stomach grumbled. By the time I paused for a red light on East Erie, I looked for some place to grab a bite to eat.

When I spied the Dazzling Bean, I inwardly chided myself for not thinking of it sooner. The quaint coffee shop was owned by Ebony, a long-time submissive of Club Genesis. I'd attended her grand opening a couple of years ago and had been blown away. Not only did the girl have a keen eye for design, but she also possessed culinary talents that would put most top chefs to shame.

When the light turned green, I hung a left, then pulled to a stop in front of Ebony's shop and killed the engine.

CHAPTER TWO



Blair

Lunchtime at the Dazzling Bean was always busy, but today it was nothing short of insane. By the time the customers had cleared out, my stomach was growling, and my feet were screaming. After Leesha and I grabbed some food, we plopped down at one of the tables. It felt good to finally sit, put my feet up, and fill my belly.

As I popped the last bite of flaky croissant into my mouth, I moaned.

“Do you make noises like that during sex?” Leesha smirked.

“It’s been so long, I don’t remember.”

“Girl. We gotta get you laid. I can find a man at the club who’ll—”

“Forget it. I’m not desperate enough to let some Dom whip my ass in exchange for a pity fuck,” I drawled, throwing my plate in the trash.

“It’s not like that. You don’t have to let him whip your ass. There are plenty of Doms who’ll drown you in painless sensation.”

Oh, god. I did not need to hear that.

“Are you ever going to tell me what’s in that sauce you put on your sandwiches?”

“No. And don’t change the subject,” Leesha chided with a playful scowl as she tossed her trash and joined me behind the counter.

“Then stop hounding me about going to Club Genesis. I don’t belong there.”

“What makes you think...” The words died on her tongue as she gazed out the front window of the shop. “Well, I’ll be damned.”

Following her line of sight, I saw a black Harley parked at the curb, and a

big beefy biker swing a long, denim-covered leg off the machine, and shrug off his leather jacket. A black tee hugged his wide shoulders and tapered waist like a second skin, outlining every sculpted muscle—covered in intricate, black ink tattoos—rippling and bunching as he removed his helmet. He was bald, just like that hot Dom in that naughty movie. Though his back was to me, and I couldn't see his face, the view I had was deliciously fine.

Mercy.

“W-who is *that*?” I stammered, unable to look away from the sexy beast.

“I told you the Doms at Genesis were better looking than that actor.” Leesha grinned.

“*He's* a Dom?” I barked, snapping my head in her direction.

“Oh, shit.” Leesha's dark eyes widened. “I wasn't supposed to say that.”

“What? That he's a Dom?”

She nodded; face lined with fear. “I just broke a cardinal rule.”

“I don't understand.”

“The club...there are rules. Who you see and what they do there stays inside the walls of Genesis.”

“But you talk about your friends from the club all the time.”

“Yes, but you don't know who they are or what they look like. If Sir Ink finds out I told you he's a Dom,”—*Sir Ink? The name fits him for sure*—“my membership will be revoked.” Her voice cracked. “I'll be kicked out.”

The palpable panic crashing through my bestie rocked me to the core. “Easy. Calm down, boo. I won't tell him. I swear. Don't freak out. It's gonna be fine.”

“Thank you,” Leesha groaned in gratitude before painting on a smile as the front door opened.

Turning my attention there as well, I nearly swallowed my tongue as the man of my dreams—the only one who graced my buzz bank, and my father's business partner—Dalton Barnes strolled toward the counter.

My heart sputtered before slamming to the back of my throat and plummeting to the pit of my stomach. Shock, lust, and longing zipped through me as I struggled to mask my surprise while waiting for a spark of recognition to ignite his sexy, green eyes. Instead, Dalton simply flashed an obligatory yet familiar toe-curling smile—then turned all his attention on Leesha.

What the hell? Hello! It's me...Blair.

Shards of rejection and disappointment sliced through me. Shoving the

discouraging emotions aside, I reminded myself that Dalton hadn't seen me since I left for boarding school. Of course, that had been eight years ago. I didn't think I'd changed *that* much, but maybe I had. Or maybe there was no reason to remember his partner's fourteen-year-old daughter.

While that stung like a bitch, it didn't lessen the excitement still pinging through me...just like it had the first time he came to visit my father.

The instant I'd clapped eyes on the handsome stranger, I'd felt an inexplicable draw toward the man. Though it hadn't been sexual, it had been instant and overwhelming in ways my twelve-year-old psyche couldn't comprehend.

Instead of returning to my room, like I was supposed to after he and my father had retired to the study, I'd snuck down the hallway and pressed my ear to the door. The sound of Dalton's deep, masculine voice had sent shivers down my spine. When I'd discovered the two men were entering a partnership and Dalton was going to financially back my father's elite hotel expansion, I'd nearly jumped for joy. Not because my father needed to become wealthier, but because I'd likely see Dalton Barnes on a regular basis.

And I had, nearly every week, for two glorious years.

When puberty hit, I harbored a serious crush on the man. Everything about him had intrigued me. He was the complete opposite of my father. Dalton had been the first adult—other than my nanny—who'd taken time to actually talk to me. And talk we had, about school, music, books, and movies. I'd fallen in love with him, because he'd been the first person in my life who'd been genuinely interested in my opinions, thoughts, and dreams.

The first three years after being shipped off to boarding school, I mourned the loss of seeing and spending time with him. Around age seventeen, my innocent infatuation matured into sexual fantasies—filthy, erotic, submissive ones. I'd realized then; it was Dalton's commanding aura that had captured me so completely as an innocent twelve-year-old.

But staring at the man of my dirty dreams—knowing he was a *real* Dominant—turned me on like a lightbulb.

He doesn't remember you, reminded the voice in my brain.

It didn't matter. I remembered him, though he'd changed a bit, too.

His face had grown more chiseled, making him impossibly more handsome. I found the shock of gray in his beard and the bold ink etched on his thick arms, so tantalizing and erotic I wanted to sprint from behind the

counter, throw my arms around his neck, and finally kiss his tempting lips.

“This is a nice surprise. What brings you to the city?” Leesha smiled.

“I was supposed to have a meeting with Mika, but the stork is making an early arrival.”

Leesha’s eyes widened. Her jaw dropped open. “Julianna’s in labor?”

“Along with Mellie and Savannah.” Dalton softly chuckled.

“All *three* of them are in labor at the *same time*?” Leesha gasped.

“Yep.”

“Oh my god. I’ve gotta get my butt to the hospital. I promised Mellie I’d be there when the baby was born.”

I’d never met any of the women they talked about, but I knew their names. They were Leesha’s friends and all submissives at Club Genesis.

“Go,” I prompted. “I’ll finish cleaning and lock up when I’m done.”

“But how are you going to get home?”

“The same way I got here.” When Leesha opened her mouth to argue, I raised a hand and shook my head. “I’m a big girl. I can take care of myself. Get moving before Mellie has that baby.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.” I reached into the kitchen and grabbed her purse before shoving it in her hands. Then I untied her apron and dragged it off over her head. “Call me later and let me know what the three of them had.”

“Babies.” Dalton smirked. “They’re having babies.”

I’d almost forgotten what a smartass he was.

Chuckling softly, I rolled my eyes. “I meant boys or girls.”

“I know.”

When Dalton grinned and winked, I nearly dissolved into a puddle.

“Okay. Okay,” Leesha frantically nodded. “You sure you’ll be all right?”

“Go.” I pointed toward the door.

“Thanks.” She hugged me, then turned to Dalton. “And thank you for sharing the news with me, S-s—”

“You’re welcome,” he cut her off with a voice so stern I got goose bumps.

Clearly aware of her near faux pas, Leesha flashed a too-bright smile. Then she turned and raced out the door, leaving me alone with the man who’d not only stolen my heart but also owned my dirty fantasies.

But he doesn’t remember you, reminded the voice in my head.

Not yet, but I aimed to rectify that...eventually.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to open my mouth and leave you stranded here alone.”

“Don’t apologize. Besides, I’m not alone. You’re here,” I quipped with a coy smile.

“Must be my lucky day.”

I didn’t know if he was flirting or simply being nice. All I knew was his whiskey-smooth voice made me throb in all the right places.

“What would you like?” *Please say me. Please!*

As if reading my mind, a mischievous glint flickered in his eyes as he caressed my body with a smoky gaze. “Too bad you’re not on the menu.”

Definitely flirting. Thank you, God!

“I could be,” I whispered.

A tiny smirk tugged a corner of his mouth as he slowly licked his lips. I nearly whimpered. But when he slid his gaze to the easel, I bit back a howl of disappointment.

“I’ll take the lunch special.”

“Sure. What sides would you like?”

“Which ones did you make?”

Heat blasted my cheeks. “For the health and safety of the customers, I don’t prepare any of the food.”

“Why not?” He grinned.

“Because I don’t know how to cook.”

“Who cooks for you then, a husband? Boyfriend?”

Until I informed my father he no longer had a daughter to be disappointed in...the cooks. Now?

“Neither. But a lot of people cook for me.” I grinned. “Stouffer’s, Pizza Hut, Marie Callender, Ben and Jerry, Colonel Sanders—”

“If you say Ronald McDonald—”

“No way,” I wrinkled my nose. “I do have *some* standards.”

“Good to know,” he said in a low, seductive tone. “I’ll take the potato salad and a brownie, please.”

“It comes with a drink...coffee, tea, juice, or soda?” I asked, arranging his food on a yellow tray.

“Iced tea, please.”

“Sweet or un-sweet?”

“If it’s as sweet as you, I’ll take it.”

“Sugar is behind you on the condiment counter.”

“Damn, I thought maybe you’d just dip your finger in it. But then it’d be sweet, *hot* tea.” He winked, pulling out his wallet.

As a blast furnace of heat rolled up my body, I knew it was time to pull out my A-game. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any game at all. But I was willing to fake it. Peering up at him with wide, innocent eyes, I flashed him a seductive smile. “My finger or my lips?”

“Be careful, little girl,” he warned, eyes narrowing slightly.

“I’m *not* a little girl.” *Not anymore.*

“Compared to me you are.”

“Age is just a number,” I said, handing him the tea.

“How many older men have you been with?”

“I never kiss and tell,” I assured before ringing up his order.

“I didn’t ask how many you kissed.” Pinning me with a carnal stare, so raw and penetrating my clit began to swell and throb, he handed me a fifty-dollar bill. “Keep the change, gorgeous.”

I would have refused, but my gas tank was almost empty, and my sock was soaked thanks to mopping the floor with a hole in my tennis shoe.

“That’s very generous. Thank you.” I smiled. “Enjoy your meal.”

“I’m sure I will.” Flashing another panty-melting smile, Dalton turned and paused at the condiment counter.

Losing the close proximity of his decadent body heat and masculine scent was like a physical blow. As he strolled to a table in the middle of the room, I tried to think of something flirtatious to say to keep the conversation going but came up blank. Then, I spied the cleaning supplies. Though I’d just finished disinfecting the tables and chairs, I grabbed the cloth and spray and strolled out from behind the counter.

Stealing covert glances at Dalton from the corner of my eye, I worked my way toward his table. It was difficult not to stare at his long, thick fingers sinking into the delicate croissant or from imagining them gripping my hips as he thrust deep inside me. Even the slow grind of his jaw as he chewed ignited lurid images of him feasting on my flesh while his coarse salt-and-pepper scruff scraped me raw.

Simply being in the same room with the man made my panties wetter and the ache between my legs sharper.

Dalton had already devoured half of his sandwich when it dawned on me that, once his belly was full, he’d walk out the door, climb back on his bike, and leave...maybe forever. The thought of never feeling his kiss or the touch

of his hands made my stomach knot.

I couldn't let him go. Not until I'd seduced him.

There was just one problem, I didn't know jack about seduction. While I wasn't a virgin—thanks to a rowdy frat party and too much Everclear where I accidentally gave my hymen to the captain of the debate team, and not Dalton as I'd planned—I wasn't a sex kitten either. I didn't know how to entice a grown man, who'd been having sex before I was even born, into jumping my bones. I only knew it was going to be a lot harder to get naked and busy with Dalton than it had been wrinkling the sheets with a disappointing college nerd.

Fearing I'd never get another chance to live out my fantasy, I pulled up my big girl pants—at least until it was time to rip them off—and dragged in a deep breath. Then I eased in between Dalton and the empty table beside him. But just as I bent over to clean, his cell phone rang.

“Barnes,” he brusquely answered, then paused before his demeanor made a one-eighty. “Hey, Jamison. Glad you called, man.”

Every muscle in my body tensed. He was talking to my...*father*.

Furtively watching Dalton from the corner of my eye, I swallowed tightly.

“I'm doing good. Damn anxious to hear what the developer in Queensland had to say.” As he stabbed a chunk of potato salad, he frowned. “What do you mean you haven't spoken to him yet? What the hell else have you been doing?”

Destroying my life. Obviously sabotaging my dreams takes time.

“Look, if your schedule is too busy to reach out to him, I—”

Dalton's derisive tone both shocked and delighted me. I'd never heard anyone put Jamison Brighton in his place. I didn't know whether to throw my arms around Dalton's neck and thank him or dance around the room. One thing was certain, he wasn't leaving until I seduced the pants off him.

Aren't you simply trading one controlling man for another?

Though I wanted to ignore the nagging voice in my head, I couldn't.

Yes, Dalton would want to control me, but I'd happily trade my newfound freedom for a few hours of spine-bending ecstasy. Besides, the control I ached for him to wield was only temporary and totally different from the hell Daddy Dearest put me through.

Purposely bending over the table, I put extra sway in my hips as I scrubbed the surface. Dalton's muffled grunt assured me I was doing

something right.

“I’m well aware it’s five in the morning there. I didn’t mean you needed to call him now,” Dalton impatiently bit out before mumbling a curse. “Look, I need to call you back. Something’s come up that needs my attention.”

Hopefully your cock.

Darting a glance over my shoulder, I nearly whimpered at the hungry gaze he had locked on my ass. But it was all the incentive I needed.

The time had come to go big or go home.

And I definitely didn’t want to go home unless it was to Dalton’s house.

Lifting onto my toes, I raised my ass into the air. Under the guise of cleaning the far edge, I stretched out flat across the table.

“What are you doing, little girl?”

Dalton’s deep, dangerous tone sent shivers skipping through me.

I slowly stood upright, set my cleaning supplies down, and turned. Then I peered up at him with the most innocent expression I could muster. “Cleaning the table.”

Dalton rose from his seat, holding me with a stare so penetrating I could practically feel him stripping me naked. “And?”

I instantly realized I’d bitten off way more than I could chew.

Though my nerves were jangling, I knew in my heart I might never get a chance like this again. So I continued my ruse.

“And what? I’m sorry. I don’t understand your question.”

“Then I’ll be blunt.”

Inching closer, Dalton held me with a gaze so intent I felt him climbing inside me. And when he lifted his hand and stroked his warm knuckles down my cheek, sparks sizzled through every cell in my body. Though I was trembling with excitement and fear, I didn’t look away, didn’t cower, even when he dropped his voice to a deep buttery baritone. “If you want more from me than a tip. If you want the whole thing...every thick, hard inch. All you have to do is ask.”

My breath hitched as a scorching blaze rolled through me.

“I just ask, and you’ll...”

With a predatory glint in his eyes, Dalton nodded and moved in even closer. His hot, wet breath wafted over my lips, making me tremble harder.

My heart raced.

My pussy clenched.

I knew if Dalton Barnes didn’t kiss me soon, I’d go up in flames.

“Then I’m asking. Will you—”

“Yes,” he growled.

Waiting for his mouth to crash over mine, I held my breath. Instead, Dalton simply stared at me, studying the contours of my face until his expression turned wary.

Twenty minutes ago, I’d been crushed he hadn’t recognized me. Now I silently prayed he didn’t. I was *this close* to feeling his lips on me, I could almost—

“How old are you?”

Thank you, God.

“Twenty-two.”

He closed his eyes and groaned, then slowly inched one open. “Are you a virgin?”

“Does it matter?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t do virgins.”

So saving my hymen for him would have backfired in my face. Good to know.

“Why not?”

“I’m too much for them to handle.” When I darted a glance down at his crotch, Dalton chuckled. “I was actually referring to my...preferences. Though, size has been a problem once or twice.”

“Are you bragging?” I teased.

“You tell me.” His eyes narrowed as he clasped my hand and cupped my fingers around his straining erection.

The quivering sigh rippling from my throat affirmed he wasn’t bragging.

Dalton’s cock was huge, hard, and so deliciously thick I couldn’t keep from stroking him up and down.

His entire body tensed.

His nostrils flared.

“Can you take all this?”

“I’m definitely willing to try.”

“How much longer does the shop stay open?”

“We close at three, but I can shut it down now.”

Surely Leesha wouldn’t be pissed if I closed up early. After all, *she* was the one plotting ways to get me laid. Hopefully, she’d be thrilled I found

someone—the only someone I’d ever wanted—to rock my world.

“Go lock the door.”

His growled command quaked me to the bone.

I’m finally going to have sex with Dalton Barnes.

Body tingling, I grudgingly lifted my hand from his hot shaft and hurried across the room. After twisting the lock and flipping over the *Closed* sign, I exhaled the breath I didn’t realize I’d been holding and dragged in a fortifying one.

When I turned around, I’d been so unprepared for his seductive half-lidded gaze, scraping up and down my body, my knees nearly buckled. Fighting the urge to strip off my clothes, I mentally cursed Leesha for not installing curtains over the windows. Though I wasn’t an exhibitionist, I was hard pressed to keep from asking Dalton to bend me over the nearest table and sail me to heaven. Which begged the question...where exactly did he plan for us to get naked and horizontal?

Does it matter? chortled the voice in my head.

To me? No, not really. I’d spent five, long years dreaming about this moment.

“Have you changed your mind?” he asked as I dawdled near the door.

“No.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I assured.

Dalton crooked a finger, motioning me to return. Like magnet to steel, I floated across the room as he held me with a disapproving stare. “There are three things I don’t tolerate. Games, deceit, and repeating myself. Little girls who tell me lies end up over my knee with a red-hot ass.”

Fear and intrigue roared through me. The thought of Dalton dragging me over his knees to punish me was terrifying, yet at the same time, turned me inside out...in a good way.

“Now that you know the rules, I’ll repeat myself this once. What is wrong?”

His firm tone melted my defenses. “I-I’m nervous.”

It wasn’t a lie.

Making love to Dalton was a dream come true. But once our clothes came off—wherever and whenever that would happen—filled me with angst. It wouldn’t take long for him to discover I was woefully inexperienced. Hell, I’d never even given a blow job. The fear of disappointing him clawed

through me.

Dropping my chin, I lowered my lashes and stared at my toes.

“Thank you for being honest.” As his warm praise spilled over me, I slowly lifted my head. His understanding expression worked like a balm to soothe my ragged nerves, but it didn’t erase all my worries. “I don’t want you to be nervous. Nothing’s happening unless you want it to.”

He thinks I’m afraid of him? Never.

His attempt to alleviate my fears was like the Dalton I’d always known.

But his sweet gesture inadvertently opened my eyes. By not being honest, I’d let Dalton assume I was willing to fuck a total stranger. While that didn’t seem to faze him one bit, I worried he’d think me a complete slut. But if I told him who I was, he’d probably walk out the door. No, he’d likely *run* and not look back. That was one risk I wasn’t willing to take.

“I’m not afraid of you. You’re a friend of Leesha’s. It’s just...it’s been a while since I’ve been with anyone.”

“We talking days...weeks?”

“Months. Eighteen, to be exact.”

“That’s...a long time. Don’t worry, I’ll be gentle,” he murmured, brushing a feather-soft kiss over my lips, sending arcs of electricity all the way to my toes. “Is there someplace private we can get naked...someplace no one will hear you scream...but me?”

A tiny whimper bounced off the back of my throat as I flitted a glance behind the counter. “The kitchen.”

I could have said, *Your house* or *The nearest hotel*, but I couldn’t wait that long.

Cinching his hand around my waist, Dalton tucked me in close to his side before leading me behind the counter. As we passed through the swinging doors, Dalton homed in on the tall table Leesha used to assemble the food. His brows shot up, and an evil smile tugged his lips. I had no idea what he was thinking, but I had a sneaking suspicion I was going to enjoy it.

“This is as private as we’re going to get,” I said, waving a hand around the small room.

“It’ll work just fine.”

Holding me with a captivating stare, Dalton palmed the small of my back and drew me in against his chest. As his hot breath spilled over my lips, the heat of his body bled through his shirt and seared my skin...lighting up my nerve endings.

“God, you’re so beautiful,” he murmured as he cupped my neck and gently traced his thumbs along my jaw.

Dalton always knew the right things to say to make me feel like the most precious and treasured girl on the planet. But hearing him call me beautiful combined with his tender touch, sent me floating on clouds.

“And you’re too handsome for words,” I whispered.

He was. And at that very moment I knew I’d never get my fill of him with this single, unexpected reunion. A fact that was painfully reinforced when he dragged his thumb over my bottom lip and groaned.

Determined to make this fateful encounter one Dalton would never forget, I tossed my inhibitions aside. Parting my lips, I captured his thumb between my teeth, then boldly stared him in the eyes as I laved my tongue over his flesh. His salty skin slid over my tastebuds as his eyes flashed wild and hot.

Dalton cupped my chin. Then, taking control of me, he held my mouth open and forced his digit deeper.

“Didn’t your momma ever tell you not to play with fire?”

“Uh-huh, but I didn’t listen,” I drawled, brazenly rubbing my pussy against the denim holding back his thick erection. “I like it hot.”

“In that case, let me kick up the flames.”

CHAPTER THREE



Blair

Dragging his thumb from my mouth, he slid his hands around my waist before rocking his hips and prodding my clit with his blunt crest. Like fireworks, sparks sputtered and sizzled as they cascaded through me. A needy whimper slid from my lips as I clutched his thick biceps.

“You make the sweetest sounds, but I can’t wait to hear you scream.”

Dalton dipped his chin and aligned his mouth over mine.

Anticipation spiked and my racing pulse began humming in my ears.

Dalton Barnes is finally going to kiss me.

“What do you want?”

“Everything,” I said in a trembling voice.

“That’s exactly what I intend to give you...and more, gorgeous.”

Erasing the scant space between our mouths, Dalton pressed his lips to mine, caressing them with a slow, soul-stealing kiss. I fisted his shirt to keep from floating away and melted against him, scraping my pebbled nipples against his unyielding muscles. When our muffled moans collided, I knew he was thrumming with the same sublime arousal as me. Empowered by that discovery, I glided my hands up his arms and across his shoulder, dragging my breasts over his chest again before cupping his nape.

Purposely pushing him to drown me in his Dominance, I traced my tongue over the seam of his lips. In the BDSM books I loved to read, they called it topping from the bottom, but I didn’t care. I wanted more...even if I had to *take* it.

Dalton didn’t let me push him twice.

Taking full control, a low rumble rose from deep in his chest and vibrated through me as he sank his fingers in my hair and gripped his fist close to my scalp. Painful shockwaves skipped over my head and tripped down my spine. When I immediately drew my tongue back and pressed my lips together, Dalton rewarded my surrender by releasing my hair and gently massaging my scalp. Every muscle in my body turned to melted butter.

Lost in the caress of his lips and arousing nudge of his cock, I didn't know where reality ended and fantasy began.

When Dalton swept his warm tongue along my seam, I parted without hesitation, even though I wasn't sure what to expect. But after the first scrape of his slippery invasion, I knew I never wanted him to stop. Sweeping inside my mouth, he delved deeper and deeper as if memorizing each slope and crevice.

His kiss was exactly like him...commanding and powerful.

The air turned thick and heavy.

Dalton reached back and untied my apron. When he lifted from my mouth and dragged it off over my head, the sight of his glistening, swollen lips and hungry, heavy-lidded stare stole my breath.

"You're wearing too many clothes," he drawled in a smoky voice as he tugged the white tee off my body.

The cool air collided with his searing stare—locked on the rapid rise and fall of my lace-covered breasts—sending ribbons of fire and ice swirling in my veins.

"So are you."

"Yes, I am." A lazy grin tugged his lips as he reached back and yanked his shirt over his head.

"Damn." I swallowed to keep from drooling as I dragged a greedy gaze over every inch of his sculpted, ink-covered flesh. "How do you keep all those muscles packed under your skin?"

Dalton tossed his head back. As his deep, rich laughter filled the room, my heart swelled as memories poured through my mind. Memories of us sitting by the Koi pond on father's estate swapping stupid knock-knock jokes and laughing like loons.

"You haven't seen the biggest muscle I'm packing...yet, baby girl."

Baby girl...

Those two words sent a rush of hot nectar spilling into my already saturated panties, followed by a second when Dalton licked his lips as he

dragged his finger over the swells of pale flesh spilling from my bra.

“You drive me crazy,” he murmured before crashing his mouth over mine.

Plunging past my lips, he swept deep with urgent, uncompromising strokes. I helplessly clutched his shoulders and groaned as his hot flesh seared my hands. I’d spent years dreaming of all the dirty things I wanted Dalton to do to me, but never once imagined him totally destroying me with a kiss. I couldn’t fathom how annihilated I’d be once his wicked mouth was between my legs.

I was dying to find out...if I could last that long. Each stab of his cock to my clit sent me soaring higher and higher. So desperate for him to put out the fire blazing inside, I started meeting his measured thrusts.

With a feral roar, Dalton tore from my mouth and clenched his jaw.

Before I could ask what was wrong, he gripped my ass with both hands and lifted me off the floor.

“Wrap your legs around me.”

It wasn’t a request.

As I raised my legs and locked my ankles behind his narrow waist, a naughty thrill skipped through me. But when my throbbing pussy meshed against his hard shaft, I whimpered while mentally cursing the barrier of clothing between us.

Dalton supported my weight in his hands as he tilted his head and latched his mouth over my neck. Shivers quaked through me as he nipped, laved, and kissed my tender flesh while lowering me onto the metal table. Once seated, he drew his hips back and thrust forward, driving his glorious fat crest between my folds.

Arcs of electricity splintered through me. I dug my nails into his flesh, tossed my head back, and cried out. With a hiss, Dalton raked his teeth down my neck, setting off a chain reaction of tremors quivering through me.

“Mmm. You make such pretty sounds.”

His sensual purr spilled into a low growl as he sank his teeth into my hammering pulse point. Shockwaves of pain and pleasure collided as a mournful wail tore from my throat. Dalton issued a rumbling roar of approval then laved his tongue over the bite, magically erasing the sting.

“Do you like suffering for me, baby girl?”

“No,” I moaned. “I love it.”

Dalton wrapped his lips around my pulsating vein again. I tensed and held

my breath ,waiting for him to deliver another sweet spike of pain. Instead, he simply peppered me with kisses as he reached behind my back and unfastened my bra. My breasts—aching and heavy—slid from the pink, lacy cups as Dalton skipped kisses over my shoulder. The site of his mouth on my flesh was a thrill all its own.

As if sensing my stare, Dalton lifted his lashes, and locked his emerald pools on mine. A devilish glint sparkled in them before he bit the strap between his teeth and dragged it down my arm.

I knew then, I wasn't going to last five seconds after he squeezed his big cock inside me. And while I ached to suffer beneath this blissful torture until the end of time, the demand for more had impatience clambering through me.

Cupping the soft lace as it floated to my fingers, I shimmied out of the other strap and tossed my bra to the floor.

“Are you in a hurry for something?” he taunted, cupping both breasts in his warm, broad hands.

“No. Yes. I...I don't know,” I breathlessly stammered. “I'm burning up inside.”

“But I haven't even started warming you up...yet.”

“Yes, you have. I was already smoldering when you walked through the door,” I confessed, boldly reaching for the button on his jeans.

Clearly intrigued, he cocked a brow. “Really? Why?”

“Because you're...” Dalton Barnes.

“I'm what?” His tone had become curiously suspicious.

I frantically searched for something to say—besides the truth—as silence descended.

“Don't make me repeat myself,” he warned, then scraped his thumbs over my stiff nipples.

Lightning ricocheted between my legs. I arched my back—filling his hands fully—and cried out in bliss. Dalton narrowed his eyes and studied me like a bug under a microscope.

“I don't like waiting, baby girl,” he stressed before dipping his head and lashing each swollen tip with his tongue.

“You're hot,” I blurted, rocking myself against his driving cock.

“That's the reason you want to fuck me?”

“Yes.” Along with a couple dozen others I wasn't going to discuss right then.

“Then I vote we get busy.”

Relieved he didn't intend to interrogate me further, I nodded, then started working the button of his jeans. Sadly, I didn't get far before Dalton cupped my nape and dragged me to his mouth. Claiming me with a ruthless, unapologetic kiss, he swept his tongue inside my mouth as if he'd owned me forever.

In a way, he had.

While our tongues urgently tangled, Dalton kneaded my breasts as he teased and tormented my tender nipples. Each pinch and pluck sent charges of electricity zipping to my aching pussy. Flames licked higher and higher up my spine, but when he fitted his thumb over my clit and slowly rubbed my screaming nub, I became fully engulfed. And as I rocked against his digit, Dalton swallowed each desperate whimper and moan peeling from my throat.

Like a blind woman learning Braille, I dragged my hands from his shoulders and traced my fingertips over every rippling, ink-covered inch of his hot, sun-kissed flesh.

Touching him wasn't enough.

I needed to taste him.

But Dalton's kisses were so delightfully drugging I couldn't find the will to pry my mouth away. Even when he splayed a hand to my back and pressed me down against the table—drinking down my squeals as the cold metal met my hot flesh—I couldn't sever our connection.

It wasn't until I traced my fingertips over his hard, brown nipples that Dalton tore from my lips with a hiss.

“You're making it impossible for me to be gentle.”

“I don't want you to be gentle. I want you to be you,” I purred.

Nipping his bottom lip between my teeth, I gave it a little tug before releasing it.

Dalton dragged his mouth down my neck before working his way across my collarbones. Leaving a trail of liquid silver in his wake, he inched lower before hovering over my left breast. He paused and flashed a cocky smirk, then opened wide and latched his mouth over my tingling flesh before drawing deeply.

A kaleidoscope of sensation twisted through me. While Dalton sucked and laved, I arched my back as I moaned, writhed, and whimpered. But when he pressed my pebbled nipple to the roof of his mouth, I clutched his head and screamed as I rode the waves of bliss rolling through me.

Back and forth, he bathed both breasts with his masterful tongue.

My pussy wept.

My skin grew tight and tingled.

And when he reached between my legs again to strum my throbbing clit, I nearly levitated off the table.

“Help me...please,” I panted, rocking against his slowly stroking finger.

He released my nipple, then flashed me a sympathetic frown. “How can I refuse when you beg so sweetly? Lucky for both of us...I can’t.”

Dalton then bent his head and worked his tongue down my body, over my quivering muscles, pausing when he reached the top of my pants. As he hooked his fingers beneath the waistband, I shivered and held my breath. Snagging the straps of my thong, he drew both layers over my hips and down my thighs.

His hot stare and thick knuckles grazed my bare flesh as he peeled my pants to my ankles. By the time Dalton removed my tennis shoes, my clit throbbed in time with my racing heart.

After stripping me completely naked, he raked a laser sharp stare up my body. The carnal gleam in his eyes and hungry expression sent a shiver down my spine. But when he softly dragged his fingertips up the insides of my thighs, a full-body tremor quaked through me.

“Spread your legs for me, baby girl.”

As his raw, gravelly voice scraped me raw, I complied.

“Jesus, look at you,” he whispered in awe. “So swollen and pink and pretty.”

Wrapping his hands around my thighs, Dalton spread me even wider, exposing my wet, throbbing sex to the chilly air and his penetrating stare. My pulse spiked and thundered in my ears.

“And juicier than a ripe peach.”

As Dalton circled my needy opening with his thick finger, I jolted and sucked in a gasp. And when he leaned in, closed his eyes, and inhaled my feminine spice, demand rolled up my body like lava.

“Please.”

As my pitiful moan filled the room, Dalton growled and extended his tongue before dragging it through my seam. A live wire of lust sizzled through me. I wailed and clutched his head. Before I could fill my lungs again, Dalton was already working his masterful mouth up my slit and over my clit like a man possessed. Back bowing with each decadent suck and lash, I started unraveling faster than I knew possible. All too soon, I teetered on the

point of no return.

Tendrils of panic wended through me.

Warring between giving into the ecstasy bearing down on me and staving off my release to bask in his commanding bliss, I quickly opted for the latter. I tried to close my legs, but Dalton wouldn't have it. Gripping me tighter, he held me open for his feasting pleasure...and mine. Though I knew he'd leave bruises on my pale skin, the thought of wearing his marks excited me to no end.

Relentless in his pursuit to ply me with pleasure, Dalton began stabbing his tongue in and out of my melting core. And when he fed his thick fingers inside me, stretching and filling my narrow passage and lashing my clit with his skilled tongue, my breathless whimpers turned to desperate keening cries.

My world began to crumble and fragment.

I tried to hold back my release, but my will was no match for Dalton's determination to wrest the explosion from me.

Want crested into churning waves of desperation.

My limbs tingled with an all too familiar numbness.

"Help me," I wailed, arching my back and grinding my sex against his wicked tongue, teeth, and fingers.

"Let go, baby girl. Come all over my face."

His savage command and masterful fingers mercilessly obliterating my G-spot called to the primal female within. And when Dalton wrapped his lips around my clit and sucked hard, I surrendered.

Sparks exploded behind my eyes.

Bearing down on his mouth, my muscles quivered, then turned to granite.

Lightning sizzled and thunder roared as ecstasy swallowed me whole. I sucked in a sharp breath and clutched his scalp, then tossed back my head, and screamed...

"Dalton!"



Dalton

As her fiery walls seized my fingers, I gorged on the sweet lava spilling from her succulent pussy, while struggling not to lose a load in my jeans and

follow her over.

So shocked by the arousal searing my system, it took several long seconds for her scream, still echoing in my ears, to pierce my brain. Then, like a freight train it hit me.

How the fuck does she know my name?

Fear and panic slammed me before rage quickly obliterated them both.

Son of a bitch. I'd stupidly assumed, since she was so young, she didn't know who I was. Clearly, the fifty dollar tip wasn't enough. She probably wanted a couple hundred now. That, or try to worm her way into my life to rub elbows with my powerful friends. Inwardly cursing the fact that I'd been played, I clenched my jaw.

Though she was still in the throes of orgasm...writhing, panting, and screaming, I reared back and yanked my fingers from her juicy core. With the back of my hand, I wiped her hot nectar from my lips and beard and studied her glowing face. Any other time I would have thought her stunning. Right now, I was searching for a spark of recognition but came up blank.

"Who are you?" I barked.

"What?" she breathlessly groaned.

"You screamed my name," I growled

Gripping her shoulders, I dragged her upright. Her glassy, unfocused eyes widened before she started rapidly blinking the sexual fog away.

"I what?" she gaped as panic and guilt crawled across her face.

"How do you know who I am?" I snarled. "Leesha didn't introduce us. She doesn't even know my given name."

The girl opened her mouth to answer, then quickly snapped it shut.

Anger rose like the plume of an atomic bomb as I glanced around the room for a timecard, a locker...anything that might shed light on her identity. Then, tucked into a shelf near the door, I saw a black leather purse. Snatching it up, I started rifling through it.

"Hey, that's mine. What are you..." The question died on her lips when I lifted out her wallet. "Don't...please."

Ignoring her, I opened it to find her driver's license staring me in the face.

As I read the name...*Blair Brighton* my heart sputtered, then slammed against my ribs. The air in my lungs turned to sand, and my jaw fell open. Slowly peeling my eyes off her ID, I locked a bewildered stare on my partner's *naked* daughter.

The daughter I'd just wrecked with my mouth and fingers.

The daughter who'd just shattered all over my face.
The daughter whose sweet nectar still stained my tongue.
The daughter who'd be exploding around my cock right now if she hadn't screamed my name.

My gut twisted.

When Jamison Brighton found out what I'd just done to his little girl...

Best case scenario? Dissolution of our partnership.

Worst? I'd soon be in a shallow, unmarked grave on his estate.

I had no idea why Blair had set me up, but I was determined to find out. After tossing her wallet back into her purse, I bent and plucked her clothes off the floor.

"Get dressed," I barked, dropping them in her lap.

Turning around to keep from ogling her sinful, still glowing body, I scrubbed a hand over my face. "I don't know what kind of game you're playing, Blair, but—"

"It's not a game," she bit out, angrily.

"Right," I scoffed. "What the fuck do you think your father is going to do when he finds out that we...that I..."

"Y-you're going to *tell* him?"

"Hell no!" I whipped around—immediately wishing I hadn't—and locked my gaze on her red, swollen nipples.

Thankfully, she'd put her pants back on and covered her luscious pussy. Pissed or not, I still wanted to peel them off again and drive balls deep inside her silky cunt.

Focus, asshole. She just used you, growled the voice in my head.

That feat was easier said than done until Blair covered her breasts in the delicate lace bra.

"And you'd better not breathe a word of this to him, either," I warned.

"Or what? You gonna turn me over your knee and give me a red ass?"

Though I knew touching her again would be like signing my own death warrant, her belligerent attitude made my palms itch.

"Is that what you want...a spanking?"

"What I *want* you're clearly not going to give me, now," she huffed, dragging on her tee.

"You're right. I'm not." Heaving out a heavy sigh, I pinned her with a glare. "What the hell was all this about? Why the fuck did you seduce me?"

"I didn't seduce you. *You* seduced *me*."

“Bullshit. I wasn’t the one wiggling my ass in your face while you were talking on the phone.” *Or rather, trying to talk.*

I should have paid attention to the overwhelming sense of déjà vu that had crashed through me when I’d first clapped eyes on her. Like a dumbass, I’d been too focused on her glossy dark hair, big, innocent eyes, lush pouty lips, and full tits.

When she’d started cleaning the table beside me, wiggling her sexy heart-shaped ass, while I talked to her fucking *father* about breaking ground on our new lavish hotel in Australia, I’d wanted to caress her sweet orbs. But when she bent all the way over the table, my brain filled with all the dirty Dominant things I wanted to do to her. Hell, I’d even started mentally rearranging my schedule so I could come by again tomorrow to lose myself in her big, hazel eyes.

Little had I known...I’d been lusting after *Blair*.

Fuck!

“I was cleaning.”

“No. You were trying to entice me. Why?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Oh, it matters. It matters a lot. Start talking, Blair.”

“No thanks. I’ve embarrassed myself enough. Just...go.”

“I’m not leaving until I get some answers. Why are you working at a coffee shop? Aren’t you supposed to be at Yale?”

“Not anymore.”

“When did you graduate?”

“I didn’t,” she mulishly replied.

“Why not?”

“None of your business.”

“Answer my question,” I growled.

“God, you’re like a dog with a bone. It doesn’t matt—”

“Answer me, now, dammit,” I barked.

“Because I quit over a year ago.”

“Quit? Why?”

“It’s a long, ugly story.”

Oh, no. You’re not blowing me off that easily.

“I’ve got time,” I bit out.

“Good grief. I quit because I hated it and moved back home.”

“Wait. You’ve been living at home for over a year? Why didn’t I ever see

you when I met with your father?”

“Because I got a job at an ad agency. I was working during the day.”

Okay, that made sense. Still, why hadn't Jamison mentioned she'd quit Yale and was living at home again?

“Why are you working here then?”

“Things at the agency didn't work out, so my girl Leesha hired me, and here I am.”

I allowed her to skirt my initial question, temporarily. But every word out of her mouth only added a dozen more to my list.

“Did you know Leesha before she hired you?”

“Yeah, her little sister Leena and I were roommates after Father shipped me off to boarding school.”

Our conversation got stranger by the minute.

“What do you mean, *shipped you off*? He told me you wanted to go.”

“Of course, he did,” she scoffed, rolling her eyes.

Her insinuation Jamison had lied to me completely caught me off guard. “Does your father know you work here?”

“Yes. Daddy Dearest knows *way* more than he needs to.”

Her caustic tone and cryptic comment only fueled more questions.

It was no secret Jamison Brighton would never win Husband or Father of the Year. While he was a shrewd businessman, he paid zero attention to his wife and daughter. I didn't blame him when it came to his wife, Pamela. The woman was a cold-blooded viper. Hell, icebergs gave off more warmth than she did. But Blair? She was a delightful young girl. We'd spend hours talking in the backyard before she left for boarding school. I found her to be smart, funny, and a hell of a lot more pragmatic than the women I dated who were twice her age.

“Is there some kind of problem between you and Jamison?”

“There's always been a problem.” She flashed a brittle smile.

Her comments were as enigmatic and riddled with holes as the shoes she was sliding back onto her feet. When I'd taken them off, I'd noticed the thread-bare soles. Yet, her lacy bra had felt like spun sugar on my tongue. Those two facts didn't add up.

“Like I said, it doesn't concern you. Please leave.”

Her dismissive tone rubbed me all the wrong ways.

“I told you; I'm not going anywhere until I have answers,” I reminded, inching into her personal space. “Truthful ones, this time.”

“I haven’t lied to you.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

“Why did you want me to fuck you?”

A crimson blush stained her cheeks. “I already told you.”

“Then tell me again.”

“Look, if you want me to stroke your ego, all you have to do is ask,” she taunted, derisively tossing my words back at me.

My palms didn’t itch anymore, they fucking burned.

“Trust me. When I decide it’s time for you stroke something, it won’t be my ego.” The carnal flare in her eyes was all but blinding. I needed to get the fuck out of there before I did something stupid, like strip her bare *again*.

“Respect me enough to tell the truth, Blair. Now.”

“The truth is I’ve humiliated myself enough for one day. Just turn around and walk away and we’ll pretend this never happened.”

“I can’t do that.”

“What do you want from me?”

“The *real* reason you seduced me.”

“Sex. I wanted sex. There. Happy now?”

“Sex. That’s all?”

“Yes.”

“Bullshit. You’re a beautiful woman. You could get sex from any guy you wanted.”

Daddy Dearest knows a whole lot more than he should.

There’s always been a problem between me and my father.

Her words spooled through my head, illuminating a darkness I didn’t want to see. My gut churned, and my blood boiled. Boarding school hadn’t saved her in time. Blair had grown-up to be a carbon copy of her mother... only worse.

“What did Jamison do to make you hate him enough to want to destroy him?”

“What on earth are you talking about? I’m not trying to dest—”

“Don’t insult me. You were a smart kid. Clearly, you’ve learned how to be a...conniving woman. What were you going to do after I fucked you...run home and tell Jamison?”

“No.”

“I don’t believe you. I think you were using me to take him down...to sit

back and laugh while his empire went down in flames. You knew exactly what would happen if we parted ways. The dissolution of our partnership would mean me pulling all the funding for his global expansion. All the contracts we've signed in Australia, Singapore, Paris, Turks and Caicos...and a dozen others would be rescinded. Our reputations would be worthless. But you don't care what happens to me, do you? All you care about is making *Daddy Dearest* suffer. Right?"

"No. I wasn't trying to set you up or tear him down. I just wanted to..."

I had no clue if the tears pooling in her eyes were real or manufactured. All I knew was I'd reached the end of my patience with her.

"Fuck me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because..." Blair closed her eyes and dropped her chin as a tear slid down her cheek. "Because I fantasize about *you*."

Her faintly whispered confession careened through me like a round-house kick to the chest. Shock rocked me to the bone and stole the air from my lungs.

I knew from experience the dirty things pubescent boys fantasized about, but had no clue girls might do the same. The last time I saw Blair was at her favorite restaurant, Eddie Merlot's, for her fourteenth birthday. In a rare display of parental affection, Jamison had invited me to join them for her special day.

I'd been in my mid-thirties at the time. The idea of her exploring herself while thinking of me at that age made my stomach roll. I enjoyed a lot of kinky things. Things like Dominance, bondage, paddles, and whips. But *never* kids. I wasn't a monster. I lived strictly by the code of Safe, Sane, and Consensual.

Of course, imagining her lying in bed, now a full-grown woman, naked, stroking her juicy pussy to thoughts of me, turned my cock to granite.

Cupping her chin, I forced her gaze. "What kind of fantasies?"

Blair closed her eyes and pinched her lips together.

"How long have you been masturbating to thoughts of me?"

Jerking from my grip, she pinned me with a glare. "That's personal."

"Sweetheart, I just had my fingers and tongue all up inside your hot little cunt. I'm not sure it can get more personal than that." Holding her with a penetrating stare, I lowered my voice to the uncompromising tone I reserved

for subs at Genesis. “Answer me. How long?”

Unable to miss the shiver quaking through her, I bit back a curse.

With the exception of her sassy mouth, everything about Blair screamed submissive. The yearning to draw those hidden desires out of her like a moth to flame, and introduce her to a new kind of freedom only added to my frustration of never feeling her shatter for me again.

Since the fallout of discovering Blair’s identity had settled, I was ready for round two. Not because I wanted to burn bridges with Jamison, but because I had to know if she could truly strip away my control or if it had been a fluke. Blair wasn’t the first woman I’d tongued to orgasm, but she was the first I’d connected with on a level way deeper than sex.

But that was a moot litmus test.

Blair Brighton was one-hundred-and-ten percent off limits...no matter how sensual, erotic, and mind-blowing.

“I-I don’t remember. I was at boarding school and...I missed you. Missed the talks we used to have.”

Oh shit. How the hell had she confused my kindness for something... sexual?

“But...you and I never discussed anything as inappropriate as...sex.”

“I didn’t think about you...sexually until I was way older,” she barked as she retrieved my shirt from the floor. After swiping another tear from her cheek, she shoved my tee into my hand. “Please. For the love of god, Dalton...go.”

Wiping another tear, she turned her back to me, hiding herself and her emotions. I clenched my jaw and bit back a roar. Though, I no longer suspected she’d maliciously used me to ruin her father’s empire...or mine, I was still pissed she hadn’t been honest with me from the start. Unfortunately, I couldn’t just turn and walk away. The Dominant code of conduct was too deeply ingrained. While she wasn’t my sub, and never would be, and we hadn’t engaged in any BDSM activities, the duty to care for her emotional wellbeing was something I couldn’t ignore.

Tamping down my own emotions, I moved in behind Blair and wrapped my arms around her. She tensed as I pressed my chest against her back, trying to ignore how perfectly she fit me before leaning in close to her ear.

“I’m flattered you think about me when you’re alone,” I whispered, then paused as I forced the next words off my tongue. “But a fantasy is all I can ever be, Blair.”

“I know.” She sniffed. “I’m sorry. Not for what you did to me, but for deceiving you.”

That makes two of us, baby girl.

“Apology accepted. What happened today stays between you and me. You understand that, right?”

“Yes. I won’t say a word to anyone. I promise.”

“Thank you. I won’t either. Are you gonna be all right?”

“Yeah.” She nodded.

I closed my eyes and breathed her in one last time...branding her sunny citrus scent to my brain, then pressed a chaste kiss to the top of her head and released her.

Clenching my tee in a fist, I turned and walked from the kitchen. Glancing at my food still sitting on the table and the cleaning items on the one beside it, I blew out a ragged sigh, tugged on my shirt, then unlocked the door and stepped onto the sidewalk.

CHAPTER FOUR



Blair

When the rumble of Dalton's motorcycle faded away, I let the tears flow. The fact that he was gone, and never coming back, ripped my heart in two.

I'd totally ruined the only chance I had...the only chance I'd *ever* have with him.

"Dammit! Why did I have to go and scream his name?"

Then again, I couldn't have stopped myself if I'd tried. Dalton played my body with his lips, teeth, tongue, and fingers as if he owned it. And for a few spine-bending minutes, he actually did. But the sliver of ecstasy he'd given me wasn't enough. I ached for more...ached for every thick, hard inch. Ached to dissolve around his big, fat cock.

I had to see him again. Be with him again. The thought of never experiencing his full command made my blood turn to ice and carved a dark empty hole in my chest.

Sucking in a ragged breath, I sniffed, then dried my eyes. I didn't have time to sit, sobbing on the pity pot, beating myself black and blue. I had to come up with a plan...to be with him...alone and naked. A tangible plan this time. One that wouldn't backfire in my face again.

The humiliation that pumped through me when he'd tossed my clothes in my lap and turned his back had been crushing. But his assumption that I'd used him to purposely obliterate my father's world had cut me to the core. I wanted to find a way to stop Daddy Dearest from meddling in my life, but using someone, especially someone like Dalton, wasn't in my nature. And

despite all his flaws, Jamison Brighton was still my father. I had no clue if I'd convinced Dalton of that fact, but I was bound and determined to prove my innocence.

As I disinfected the tall metal table, I began plotting ways to make that happen. I could call father's secretary, Allison, and ask her for Dalton's number. But there were no guarantees that he'd answer or simply hang up on me.

"Nix that option."

Brain still churning, I retrieved my purse and coat, locked up the shop, then headed to the corner. As I boarded the bus, I ignored the stench of stale sweat and exhaust fumes and sat in my usual spot by the driver. It was safer, at least in my mind. My butt had barely molded to the plastic seat when a gangbanger, covered in prison tattoos, slid in beside me.

"Hey sexy. Where you going?"

"Home," I curtly replied as the driver glanced at me in his overhead mirror.

"I got a better idea. Let's you and me get naked and...party."

"Sorry. I can't. I've got a raging case of syphilis and need to go home and take my meds."

"Ewww." Launching to his feet, the dude wrinkled his nose. "You a nasty hoe."

As he hurried toward the back of the bus, I pinched my lips together to keep from laughing. The older, portly, balding driver didn't bother to hold back. He roared and flashed me a thumbs up.

Though the rest of the ride was blessedly uneventful, I still hadn't devised a credible plan to see Dalton again.

When the driver pulled to a stop in front of my apartment building, I cleared my mind and threaded my keys through my fingers before stepping off the bus. Pausing on the sidewalk, I took in my surroundings. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, I wasn't in Kansas anymore. The south side of Chicago was a dangerous place to live, and nothing at all like the safe gated community where I'd grown up. This part of town, I had to watch my back, but it was all I could afford for now.

Between my father and Dalton, I'd learned the price of pride was exorbitant and proper planning was not in my wheelhouse.

After hurrying inside the faded, three-story brick building, I unlocked the door to my tiny studio apartment and stepped inside. After flipping the

numerous deadbolts behind me, I slid off my coat, plucked my cell phone from my purse, then poured a glass of wine I'd pilfered from my father's collection before filling the bathtub. I added a bit of my favorite citrus bath salts, stripped off my uniform, and sank into the steaming water. Enveloped in wet heat, memories of Dalton slammed my brain. I tried to block them but couldn't. Like a helpless masochist, I relived every blissful second I'd spent with the man.

His scent, taste, and touch swirled around me like a cyclone, heating and throbbing in my veins. My body tingled and hummed as the echo of his masterful mouth and fingers crested through me. Gliding my hand beneath the water, I stroked my fingers over my clit, pretending it was his tongue. And just as I reached the part when I'd screamed his name, my cell phone rang.

Jolting off the edge of ecstasy, I bit back a curse. After drying my hands, I plucked up the device and checked the caller ID. Leesha's timing was as infuriating as it was impeccable. She'd defused the orgasm pulsating within, but saved me the humiliation of revisiting the moment I'd screamed Dalton's name.

"Hey, boo. How's it going?" I asked, masking the lust in my voice.

"Just checking to make sure you made it home safely."

"Thank you, Mother. I did."

"Don't get sassy with me, girl. Somebody's gotta look after your ass," she playfully scolded. "Everything go okay after I left?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

"I don't know. I thought maybe you and Ink might have...had a little fun."

My heart bounced off my ribs. Either there were cameras in the kitchen—which meant she had gotten one hell of a show—or my bff was psychic. I prayed the latter.

Swallowing the lump of panic in my throat, I forced a laugh. "Oh, yeah. I stripped off all my clothes, then spent hours screaming in ecstasy while he bent me over every table in the place. You should have seen the crowd who gathered outside the window to watch. It was huge!"

"Smartass," she drawled.

Before she could say more, I quickly changed the subject. "Are you still at the hospital?"

"Yep. I'm sitting in a waiting room full of friends, watching the clock,

and pacing the floors.”

“No babies yet?”

“No, but I think Mellie will deliver first. Her cervix is the most dilated now.”

“Ouch.” I cringed.

“They call it labor for a reason, though, I wouldn’t know.”

“Me either, thank god.”

“What? You don’t want babies?”

“I do. Someday...*after* I find a man.”

“Girl, you should have asked Ink to do the honors. Seriously, that man has some hot-assed genes.”

Yeah, and what he’s packing inside them is pretty hot-assed impressive, too.

Biting back a moan, I tried to ignore the tingle of my hand and the memory of stroking his massive cock. “He’s a Dominant, not a daddy.”

“He could be both. I mean he *is* a lot older than you. I bet Ink would make a killer *Daddy Dom*,” Leesha taunted.

Me, too.

Sadly, I’d already burned that bridge.

“Thanks, but I don’t need any more daddies in my life. The one I have is enough of a headache.”

“True. Oh. Oh,” she squealed. “I’ll call you back. Mellie’s Mast...err, her boyfriend, Joshua just rushed into the waiting room.”

Before I could say goodbye, Leesha hung up.

I wasn’t insulted, I was...frustrated.

Her Daddy Dom comment was crowding my brain and igniting useless fires inside me.

With an irritated groan, I downed my wine, then drained the tub before drying off.

After donning my favorite cotton pajamas, I curled up on the couch with my e-reader, ready to lose myself in someone else’s dirty fantasy. One that hadn’t crashed and burned like mine. But every touch and kiss on the page had Dalton roaring back to life in my mind. My soft cuddly jammies chafed like sandpaper against my aroused flesh, and the room grew warmer than a sauna. Tossing my e-reader aside, I refilled my glass, then climbed onto the metal fire escape. The setting sun painted the sky in an ethereal orange and copper glow. But the blaring sirens and rats scurrying from dumpster to

dumpster in the alley below scarred its beauty.

Dalton had once talked about enjoying the view of Lake Michigan from his home in Lake Forest. I couldn't help but wonder if he was sitting outside, admiring the colors of Mother Nature's canvass like me.

Does it matter? chided the voice in my head.

No. Sadly, it didn't. Thinking about him without a game plan was pointless. Until I devised a way to see him again, I needed to gather the frayed edges of my shredded pride, sew them together again, and knock his sexy ass off the pedestal I'd foolishly placed him on years ago. Even though it was akin to demolishing the Taj Mahal, it had to be done. Leveling the playing field right now was a necessary evil. I'd built Dalton Barnes up in my mind until he was larger than life, and secretly worshipped him as if he were a God. He wasn't. He was just a man. A man probably as flawed and broken as the rest of humanity.

And wishing I could be a part of Dalton's life was a bigger fantasy than my sexual ones. Still, I hated that he viewed me a professional and financial threat. But that didn't sting as badly as him thinking me nothing more than an afternoon snack. In all likelihood, he wasn't staring at the sky, but gorging on subs at the club while I sat on my fire escape trying to change him from God to human in my mind.

Gulping down the rest of my wine, I climbed back inside my apartment and started to pace and plot. Unable to come up with a single idea, I sat at my computer and spent the rest of the night streaming safe movies guaranteed to keep my mind off Dalton...gory, bloody action flicks.



The next morning, I raced down the stairs to the parking garage, munching on my last pop-tart. Though the below-ground structure was secured with an electronic gate, it was dark and creepy. But this morning, I didn't care. I was eager to gas Betty up and reclaim my independence.

But when I climbed behind the wheel and turned the key, all I heard was a cold, hollow click.

"Come on, Betty," I murmured, patting the dashboard. "Be a good girl and I'll fill your tank to the brim."

I turned the key again, and again, and again until there was no noise at all.

“No. No. NO!” I groaned, dropping my forehead to the steering wheel.

Freefalling over a cliff of despair, I suddenly remembered the card in my wallet...the one father had given me before I’d left for Yale.

“Since you insist on keeping that ridiculous car, take this. You’ll need it sooner than later.”

“Betty Beetle is not a ridiculous car. She’s a classic, and I love her.”

“It’s a machine, Blair. Sane people don’t have affection for inanimate objects.”

Like you’d know anything about affection.

“I don’t care. She’s got...personality.”

“It’s got a hundred and twenty thousand miles on an original engine, and built the same year you were born. You’ll be lucky to get another five out of that piece of junk.”

“Then why did you buy it for me?”

“Because you wouldn’t shut up and stop hounding me until I did,” he barked, shoving the card in my hand. “Call that number when it breaks down and have it towed to the scrap yard where it belongs.”

“Don’t worry, Betty. You’re not going to a scrap yard. Not today,” I assured as I dug the card from my wallet and dialed the number.

“Roadside Rescue, are you safe?” a woman asked.

I glanced around the dimly lit parking garage.

“For now,” I replied, then explained my situation.

The woman *tsk’d* and said it sounded like a dead battery. Then she assured me that she’d send someone to jump start Betty before asking for my account number.

I rattled it off and asked, “How long do you think I’ll have to wait? I don’t want to be late for work.”

“I’m sorry, but it seems this account is closed. Yep. It was cancelled three weeks ago.” *Right after I divorced Father. Lovely!* “If you want to reinstate service, I’ll need a credit card and...”

Unfortunately, I didn’t have any credit cards now. I’d foolishly tossed them on Father’s desk before storming from his study that fateful day.

That whole proper planning thing again.

After thanking the woman for her time, I ended the call.

With tears in my eyes, I locked Betty Beetle and trudged to the bus stop. I had no idea what a new battery would cost, I only knew I probably couldn’t afford one. And after a few taps on my phone, my fear was confirmed.

More worry chewed through me as I unlocked the door of the Dazzling Bean. Not only were all the lights off, but Leesha wasn't behind the counter brewing coffee or filling the display case as usual.

"Boo," I yelled, locking the door behind me.

But there was no answer.

Racing into the kitchen, I found her sound asleep, slumped over her desk.

"Hey," I murmured, gently shaking her. "Are you all right?"

She jumped and sucked in a gasp, then sent me a sleepy smile. "Yeah, just exhausted. I didn't get home from the hospital until four this morning."

"Girl, it's five-thirty. Did you sleep at all?"

"No. I was afraid I wouldn't wake up." She yawned. "I learned one thing last night. Babies come when they're ready and not a minute sooner."

"Did Mellie finally deliver?"

"They all did. Poor Mellie was the last to pop. Go figure."

"What did she and your other two friends have?"

"Babies." She grinned, teasing me, exactly the way Dalton had yesterday.

A lump of anguish clogged my throat. Forcing it down, I painted on a smile and rolled my eyes. "I meant, boys or girls."

"Both. Julianna, who was last to go into labor, delivered first. In hindsight, it makes sense. After all, this was her third."

"Third?"

"Well, second for her and Mika. They already have a son, Tristian. Julianna was a surrogate and had a little girl for our friends, Drake and Trevor...they're gay."

"I figured based on their names." I chuckled. "So, what did she have this time?"

"A little girl. She so tiny, since she was three weeks early, but she's beyond gorgeous, like her parents. They named her Emilia after Mika's dad, Emile."

Leesha whipped out her phone to show me pictures of the little girl.

"Aww, she *is* beautiful."

"Next came Savannah. She had a little boy," Leesha announced, grinning at the image of a chunky, red-faced, squalling newborn. "His name is Cameron, after Mellie's dad who died. She and her significant others, Nick and Dylan are calling him Cam for short."

"She has two men?" I blinked.

"Yeah. They have a three-way relationship. It's called—"

“Polyamory.” I nodded. “I’ve read stories about relationships like that, but never knew anyone living one. That’s awesome.”

“Savannah does *not* complain.” Leesha winked. “And finally, here is Joshua and Mellie’s little girl. Her name is Olivia, after her and Savannah’s mom. She died in the same car accident as their dad.”

My heart clutched. “It’s so sad they’re not here to see their grandbabies.”

“I know, right?” Leesha frowned before yawning again.

“Girl, you need to go home and sleep. I can take care of things here.”

“No. We have way more customers than one person can handle...not that I’m complaining.”

“All right, then...catch some more z’s while I get everything set up before we open.”

“Okay.”

Leesha was dead-assed asleep again before I’d finished tying my apron. I let her sleep and turned to get the shop ready to open. But I stopped short as my gaze locked on the tall, metal table. Dalton’s ghost was still lingered there, making me clutch and shiver with memories.

Stop torturing yourself and get to work, gently coaxed the voice in my head.

Blocking the man from my brain, I started loading trays with the gooey pastries Leesha lovingly made from scratch.

The morning rush was hectic and crazy, but I survived with enough stamina to handle the afternoon crowd as well. It was nearly time to close when Leesha stepped from the kitchen, rubbed her eyes, then glanced at the clock on the wall.

“Girl. Why the hell did you let me sleep so long?”

“Because you needed it,” I replied, dragging the mop bucket toward the back room.

“But...but...”

“You’re welcome.”

“Oh, boo.” She sent me a sleepy smile. “You’ve just made Andre a very happy man.”

“How?”

“He bought a new toy he wants to break in...on my ass tonight. Now that you let me sleep, I won’t have to cancel on him and go to bed early. Thank you, boo.”

The club. Oh, my god, Dalton might be there. Why hadn’t I thought of

that?

“What kind of toy?” I asked, struggling to tamp down my excitement.

“I don’t know. It’s a surprise.”

“I’d love to see what it is.”

Leesha cocked her head and held me with a suspicious stare. “Girl, I’ve asked you to come to the club a million times, and you’ve *always* turned me down. Are you saying you *want* to go now?”

I gave a careless shrug. “Watching paint chips fall is getting a little boring.”

A slow, knowing smile tugged her lips. “Yeah, if I had to choose between paint chips and eye-fucking a certain Dom who came in for lunch yesterday...that’s a no brainer.”

I hadn’t expected Leesha to buy my bullshit. She knew me too damn well.

“Exactly.” I smirked. “Tell me what to wear.”

“I’m not telling you shit. You’re coming home with me. I’ve got just the right outfit that will make Sir Ink swallow his tongue and tie him up in knots.”

CHAPTER FIVE



Dalton

I sat at Mika's desk working on last night's deposit slip while images of Blair crowded my mind. I'd spent the last twenty-four plus hours obsessing about her...trying to purge her from my brain. But there was no erasing the ball-churning way she'd ground her gushing cunt against my face as she shattered. Every moment with her had been indelibly branded inside me.

I was either walking around with a perpetual hard on, or jacking off like a teen.

Not only did she haunt my days, but she'd invaded my dreams last night. I couldn't close my eyes without her beautiful face and brilliant smile searing my retinas. I could still feel the texture of her soft lips...tasted the addicting sugar of her sweet cunt. And hear the sounds of her kitten-soft moans, desperate whimpers, and keening cries of ecstasy still echoing in my ears.

I tried to convince myself that if I'd finished the job—fucked her senseless and left her boneless and sated—I could forget all about her. But that was bullshit. Even before I'd discovered who she was, Blair had already hard-wired herself inside me. I didn't understand the crazy connection we shared. All I knew was I had to find a way to exorcise her...quickly, or I'd cave and seek her out again.

And god help me, my whole world would implode.

I wasn't entirely sure that would be a bad thing. Not after my phone call with Jamison this morning. I pinched the bridge of my nose and sighed as our conversation spooled through my head.

I'd purposely baited him...

“I keep meaning to ask, how’s Blair doing these days?”

“Good.”

“She’s graduating from Yale, soon, right?”

“Yeah. Next week.”

His lie had me clenching my jaw so hard, my teeth hurt.

“Wow. Time flies. Tell her congratulations for me. She got a job lined up?”

“Dozens. She’s still trying to decide which one to accept.”

“You must be proud.”

“Yeah, yeah. Did you get the specs I forwarded this morning?”

I’d let him change the subject, but the damage was done. If he’d lie to me about his daughter, I knew he’d lie to me about anything.

In less than fifteen seconds, Jamison Brighton had erased ten years of trust.

Movement on one of the monitors across Mika’s office yanked me from my thoughts. Homing in on the image, I watched Dominant and Dungeon Monitor, Master Max enter through the back door...alone.

My stomach plummeted.

His very pregnant slave and club bartender, Samantha—known as Mistress Sammie before embracing her former submissive side—wasn’t with him.

“Oh, hell. I hope she hasn’t gone into labor, too.”

Rising from my seat, I hurried downstairs, past the private rooms lining the hallway, through the archway and into the dungeon. Max was already behind the bar, loading sodas and bottled water into the stainless steel refrigeration units.

“Hey, Max,” I greeted, striding toward him. “Is Sam okay?”

“Hey, Ink. I think so. She’s having some Braxton-Hicks contractions. Doctor says it’s normal,” he scoffed. “It’s not normal for me. I don’t like seeing her in pain...at least, pain I’m not responsible for.”

I chuckled.

“Anyway, she’s supposed to stay off her feet and rest.” Max shook his head. “I’m thinking about bungeeing her ass to the bed.”

“I take it she doesn’t like the idea of doing nothing.”

“Not one bit,” he drawled. “Hope you don’t mind, but after I get these coolers loaded, I’m gonna head home to make sure she stays in bed.”

“Mind? Hell, no. In fact, leave that shit, man. I’ll take care of it. I’ll also

ask for volunteers to tend bar for a while. Go on and get out of here...take care of your girl.”

“Thanks, man.”

“Tell Sam we’re thinking of her and to get some rest,” I called as he headed toward the hall.

“Will do,” Max hollered back.

When the back door clanged shut, I began filling the coolers as Drake and Trevor, Tony and Leigh, and Cane, Law, and Destiny arrived. When I explained Samantha’s situation, Trevor, Leigh, and Destiny checked with their Masters before volunteering to work the bar.

“I’ll handle the lobby,” Drake announced.

“I’ll help,” called Sir Bent-Lee as he strolled through the archway.

“Thanks, everyone.” I smiled. “You’re making this too easy on me.”

“This isn’t our first rodeo, Master Ink,” Trevor called from behind the bar with a grin.

“Thankfully, we have plenty of rope.” Destiny smirked.

“Oh, I like rope,” Trevor preened.

“Yeah, wrapped nice and tight around your balls. Behave yourself tonight, boy,” Drake warned. He then glanced at the clock above the bar before pulling a set of keys from his pocket. “Showtime. If everyone’s ready, I’ll unlock the front door.”

Cane, Law, and Tony, who’d already signed up for DM duty, flashed Drake a thumbs up sign, as did Leigh, Destiny, and Trevor.

“Let the kinky fun begin.” I grinned.

As Drake strode away and disappeared through the wide, velvet curtain, a sense of peace and normalcy—that I’d been missing since my encounter with Blair—slid through me. I knew damn well it was because of my Genesis family. They were the only ones I had now, and I was damn grateful for each and every one of them.

“Um, Sir Ink?” Leigh called from the bar. Turning, I saw her waving a twenty while Bent-Lee gripped a can of soda. “Could we please get some change?”

“Right.” After rounding the bar, I opened the safe and pulled out the cash drawer. “I knew I was forgetting something.”

“No worries, Sir. When Mika’s not here, we all have to work together.”

“That we do, girl.” I nodded as members began entering the dungeon.

It wasn’t long before the place was packed and nearly every station in

use. Accompanying the slap of paddles and crack of whips, submissive moans and screams loomed above the murmur of low voices humming in the air.

Focusing my attention on the scenes, I enviously watched Doms and Dommes work their subs. The ache to bind Blair to a St. Andrews cross and draw out the submissive hiding inside her, rode me hard.

Never going to happen, fucker.

No, but I could still dream.

Suddenly, Tony came up beside me, wearing a scowl.

“Problem?” I asked, scanning the stations, looking for a submissive in distress.

It didn’t take long to find her. A sweet-natured submissive, Maple—whose ass was raw and bloody—stared up at her Dominant, Master Lewis—a troll, and piss-poor excuse of a Dom—with fear and anger in her tear-filled eyes. Law was quickly removing the cuffs binding her to a spanking bench, while Cane was up in Lewis’s face murmuring what I hoped was a scathing ass-chewing.

“I take it Lewis ignored her safe word again?”

“Yep,” Tony drawled derisively.

“Son of a bitch.”

Mika should have revoked Lewis’s membership the first time he’d ignored his sub’s safe word. But the prick somehow managed to convince Mika it had been nothing but an unfortunate miscommunication gaffe and swore it would never happen again.

Clearly, the prick had lied.

I wasn’t going to let the cock-bag try and talk his way out of it this time.

“Evidently, he thinks that since Mika isn’t here, he’s in the clear.”

“He’s wrong,” I growled.

Fury boiling my blood, I stormed toward Lewis while Law helped Maple off the spanking bench. Sobbing, she crumpled in on herself as her long-time friend, Symoné—submissive of Sir Justice—rushed to Maple’s side and wrapped the girl in her arms.

I stepped in beside Cane and gripped Lewis by the elbow.

“Get your hands off me,” the bastard barked indignantly.

“Mika’s office. Now,” I bit out between clenched teeth.

“Fuck you,” Lewis snarled as he tried to jerk from my hold but failed.

“You have no authority here.”

“While Mika’s gone, I *am* the authority. Stop making a scene and get your ass up to his office.”

From the corner of my eye I saw Symoné and several other subs guiding a sobbing Maple toward the ladies’ room.

“I don’t take orders. I’m not a sub,” Lewis spat.

“You’re not a Dom either,” I snarled.

Hatred blazed in Lewis’s eyes as he drew back a fist.

Really, fucker? I could kill you in one punch.

And damn if I didn’t want to.

Instead, I dodged his blow, then grabbed his wrist, and twisted his arm behind his back. Then I wrapped him in a bear hug, holding his back against my chest, and lifted his scrawny ass off the floor. As I headed for the front door, with Lewis screaming like a girl and kicking and squirming for freedom, the dungeon fell silent.

“What the fuck?” Drake barked as I barreled through the curtain and passed him at the podium.

“Just taking out the trash,” I muttered as the members waiting in line gasped and stared.

“Let me help you, man.” Wearing a cocky grin, Drake dashed past me and opened the front door.

When I stepped onto the sidewalk, I unceremoniously tossed Lewis to the ground before hovering over him. “You’re membership is canceled, fucker. You’re banned from Genesis...forever.”

“You can’t ban me, you bastard,” he barked, jumping to his feet, face red with embarrassment and rage.

“I just did.”

“I’m calling the cops, Ink,” Lewis threatened, jumping to his feet. “You’re going to jail for assault. I-I have witnesses.”

“So do I.”

“If you think anyone in that club is gonna backup your story, you’re crazy. I’m a real Dominant, not a player who merely spansks and fucks subs, like you.”

Fighting the urge to drive my fist through his chest and rip out his heart, I grabbed him by the collar and lifted him off the ground, watching him blanch and grow pale.

“You’re not a Dom. You don’t know butt-fuck about treasuring, nurturing, or protecting submissives.” Releasing his shirt, I shoved him

backward. “Get the hell out of here, you piece of shit.”

“You’re going to hear from my lawyer,” Lewis threatened as he crossed the street.

“You and your lawyer can suck my dick.”

After the prick climbed into his car and sped down the street, I dragged in a deep breath and bled the anger from my veins. When I headed back inside the club, the members who’d gathered at the entrance—gaping and even grinning—parted like the Red Sea.

“Thank you, thank you. Oh, god...thank you for kicking him out, Sir Ink,” a submissive named Honey said, wiping a tear away.

“Did Lewis do something to you, too, girl?” I frowned.

“No, but what he did to Maple is my fault.” More tears slid down her cheeks.

“How is it *your* fault?”

“Master Lewis said he wanted to collar me, but I told him no because he’d already collared Maple. He said not to worry that he’d take care of that problem.” Honey wailed. “Maple is never going to forgive me.”

Christ, Mika. How do you fucking cope with all this...drama?

I glanced at Tony, who sent me a sympathetic cringe before stepping in and draping an arm around Honey’s shoulder. “Calm down, girl. Let’s go inside and talk to Maple. She’s not going to hold you responsible for Lewis’s actions. The ass hat’s a textbook narcissist. Everything’s going to be fine. I promise.”

If anyone could keep that vow, it was Tony. The man was a licensed psychologist, and way more equipped to deal with the situation than me.

“Thanks,” I murmured before escaping inside the dungeon.

Though the hum of voices from the members seated at the tables and chairs had grown louder, I was relieved the commotion with Lewis hadn’t stopped the others still scening.

I was doubly relieved when the subs emerged from the bathroom.

While Sir Justice wrapped Symoné in his arms, Tony escorted Honey and Maple to his private room to help heal their hearts, minds, and friendship.

As the hours passed, more members arrived. Thankfully, the club remained drama free. After a quick glance at the clock, I exhaled a sigh of relief. It was nearly nine pm. While Genesis stayed open until two am, Drake would soon lock the front door, barring any chance of Lewis returning and causing more trouble.

Since Tony was still busy mending submissive bridges, I assumed his role as DM and began observing the members at play. As I turned to make another trek across the room, Master Andre and Leesha—known as Ebony at the club—strolled through the curtain. She scanned the crowd before her eyes locked with mine. A knowing smile tugged her lips as she turned and said something to someone behind Andre...someone I couldn't see behind his wide shoulders.

A strange combination of excitement and foreboding rushed through me.

No. It wasn't Blair. It couldn't be. Leesha would never bring a vanilla to the club.

Still, I couldn't keep from holding my breath as the trio turned and headed toward the tables and chairs in the center of the room.

Mother fuck!

Though she wore makeup, her lips painted a dark, red shade of *fuck my mouth...hard*, Blair's profile was unmistakable.

When she lifted her dark lashes—looking in my direction, but not at me—the sight of her innocent hazel eyes sent the air exploding from my lungs.

My heart slammed against my ribs.

My mouth turned as dry as a desert.

And when I skimmed my gaze down her cape-covered body and spied the silver straps of her stilettos wrapped around her ankles, like glittery bondage tape, I nearly swallowed my tongue.

I couldn't peel my eyes off her as the trio settled in at one of the empty tables. And when she began working the button of the cape near her throat, I sucked in a shallow breath and held it. Blair slowly peeled the cape off her shoulders before draping it on the back of her chair. The outfit clinging to her sinful body sent my world tilting on its axis and my cock nearly bursting from my jeans.

The barely-there, black V-neck top—shimmering in silver sequins and beads—plunged all the way to her navel, exposing the soft swells of her pert breasts...revealing everything but her dusty, cranberry-colored nipples. The same nipples I'd wrecked with my mouth and fingers a little over twenty-four, interminable hours ago.

Her bare ribs were framed by dramatic cuts out of the black fabric that resembled high-waisted panties and hugged her sinful hips and ass like a second skin. A long, flowing skirt of see-through black mesh kissed her ankles. It was decorated in a scallop pattern with the same glimmering silver

sequins and beads that cupped her tempting breasts. The flowing fabric was slit all the way to her hip, granting a teasing glimpse of her long, slender legs. The ones I'd draped over my shoulders as I'd gorged on her luscious cunt.

I could taste Blair's sweet nectar on my tongue, smell her spicy, earthy scent, and hear her moans of bliss all over again. Covered in a cold sweat, I raked a hand over my face as a string of curses burned through my brain.

"You all right, man? You look like you've seen a ghost," Drake said clapping me on the back.

Tearing my gaze off Blair, I flashed him a plastic smile. "Never been better."

"Good deal. Listen, I locked the front door and dimmed the foyer lights."

"Great. Thanks for handling check-in tonight."

"No problem. I'm gonna run the guest list and waivers up to Mika's office," Drake announced, waving the papers in his hand.

"Hold up a sec. I want to see something first."

"Looking for anyone in particular?"

"Actually, yes. The girl that came in with Andre and Ebony. Did she sign a waiver?"

"Of course. I took her info down while Andre and Ebony signed the guest disclaimer."

Nodding, I flipped to the back of the stack and quickly saw Blair's name. But when I read the club name she'd chosen, I wanted to roar.

Baby Girl.

"By the way, their friend Baby Girl wants to join the club."

Someone kill me now.

"Great. I'll talk to her in a bit." I forced an even tone, then handed him back the papers.

"Thanks for tossing Lewis to the curb. I never liked that dude...he was a dick."

"Man, don't go insulting our junk like that," I laughed.

"My bad," Drake said with a chuckle as he strode away.

Forcing a calm I didn't feel, I studied Blair. Her eyes were wide, shimmering in awe and desire as she watched the Dominants and subs scene. She was particularly enthralled with Sir Justice landing the falls of a heavy flogger over Symoné's ass. But when she turned to watch Lady Ivory opening up her male sub Dark Desire's butt cheeks with a single tail, Blair cringed. But her reactions were far more positive than negative, which

surprised, and intrigued me.

Suddenly, the confession she'd made at the Dazzling Bean roared through my brain...

I didn't think about you...sexually until I was way older.

Had those sexual fantasies included me binding her, blindfolding her, torturing her nipples, and flogging and paddling her succulent ass? Like a freight train, images of me fulfilling her dreams ignited my brain. My cock lurched, and a low growl rumbled deep in my chest.

As if sensing my turmoil, Blair turned her head and boldly met my stare. Once more, another fragment of our conversation spilled through my head.

You're playing with fire, little girl, I'd warned.

I like it hot, she'd answered, brazenly grinding herself against my angry erection.

"You're not going to like it as hot as I want to give it to you, Baby Girl. Trust me," I murmured under my breath.

Blair slowly parted her fiery red lips before swiping her wet pink tongue over them. In my mind, I had a fist in her hair, dragging her wicked mouth up and down my cock. And when she flashed me a demure smile, teeming with innocence and raw seduction, I mentally peeled off her sexy dress, and slammed balls deep inside her silken cunt.

"Hey, boss," Bent-Lee greeted, striding to a stop in front of me and breaking my visual connection with Blair. "Since Drake and I are done with check-ins and Tony's still busy doing his shrink thing, I'll fill in for him as DM if you'd like."

Biting back a snarl, I forced a smile. "Appreciate it. Thanks."

I turned and headed to the bar. Not because I was a coward and afraid to face Blair, but because I desperately needed to regroup and get a firmer hold on my control. I didn't know how, but the little minx shredded it effortlessly.

"What can I get for you, Sir?" Trevor asked in his usual bubbly demeanor.

"Water would be great. Thank you."

"No offense, Sir, but you look a little frazzled...like you need something a whole lot stronger."

I scowled. "Booze never helps anything."

Trevor frowned as he filled a plastic cup with ice. "Lecherous Lewis didn't come back, did he?"

"Lecherous Lewis?"

“Yeah, that’s what we subs always called him.”

“Does Mika know this?”

“Of course, he does,” Trevor said, handing me the water. “But Lewis pulled the wool over his eyes. When Mika returns, he won’t be happy the son of a... that Lewis played him.”

No, he’d be livid.

Blair’s familiar citrus scent wafted over me as she eased up beside me at the bar. Clenching my jaw, I struggled to keep from crushing the plastic cup in my hand. I couldn’t stop myself from swiveling in my seat, or drinking her in...from the top of her thick, glossy hair to her fiery red painted toenails.

“Well, hello,” Trevor cooed. “What’s your name, beautiful?”

“Baby Girl,” Blair replied.

Her kitten-soft voice was like a punch to the gut.

“Sister!” Trevor squealed. “Get ready, girl. The Dominants here are gonna devour you like Momma’s Sunday pot roast.”

Blair laughed, sending a blade of longing slice through me. “I doubt that.”

“Don’t. You’re stunning. Isn’t she just—”

“Breathtaking?” I supplied. “And then some.”

“Whoa, damn. Count yourself lucky, sister. I’ve never heard Sir Ink hand out a compliment like that before.” Trevor extended his hand toward Blair. “I’m Trevor. Daddy Drake’s boy.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Trevor,” Blair said, shaking his hand.

“Same. Now, what can I get you?”

“Do you have lemon-lime soda?”

“Sure do. Coming right up.”

While Trevor filled her order, I continued gazing at Blair.

From the outside she appeared calm, cool, and confident. But I had an advantage no one else in the club did...I knew Blair. Knew by the way she nibbled her bottom lip, she was nervous as fuck.

“That’ll be two dollars, please,” Trevor stated, setting her soda on the bar.

“Oh, I-I didn’t know. I-I thought the drinks were free,” Blair stammered.

“I’ve got it,” I said, reaching into the pocket of my jeans.

“No,” she barked. “I-I’ll borrow the money from...E-ebony,” Blair stated, turning toward her now empty table. A look of pure panic climbed her face. “W-where did they go?”

“They’re over there.” I pointed out the station where Andre was cuffing Ebony to a cross and tossed a five spot on the bar. “I hear you’re interested in

a membership. Let's go someplace private and...talk."

"It can wait. If I'm gone, Ebony will wonder—"

"Trevor, when Master Andre and Ebony finished scening, would you please let him know that Baby Girl is with me?"

"Yes, Sir."

Leveling Blair with a penetrating stare, I stood. "Come with me, *Baby Girl*."

Biting the plump flesh of her bottom lip harder, she nodded.

"Use your words when spoken to," I said, using my low, uncompromising Dom voice. As a shiver rippled through her, I leaned in close to her ear. "Yes, Sir is an acceptable display of respect...if you're inclined to grant it."

"Yes, Sir," she replied on a breathy exhale.

"Good girl," I praised, extending my hand.

CHAPTER SIX



Blair

Fingers trembling uncontrollably, I placed them in Dalton's palm. The instant my flesh melded with his, an overwhelming sense of peace and rightness spilled through me.

Prior to waltzing into the club, I'd been one hundred and ten percent certain my plan would work. But just one look at Dalton, strutting around, throwing off lightning bolts of Dominance, had me second-guessing everything...even life itself.

But his touch restored my confidence, and my plan felt rock-solid once again.

Sliding his hand up my arm, he gently clasped my elbow before leading me toward a wide, sweeping archway. From the corner of my eye, I saw him staring at my silky skirt, flowing around my legs.

"I like your dress. It reminds me of a silver waterfall."

"Thank you. But it's not mine. It's...Ebony's, Sir."

He responded with a grunt as he guided me down a long hallway of nondescript doors.

"Where do all these doors lead to?"

"The members' private rooms."

"Do you have one?"

"Yes."

"Is that where we're going to...talk?"

"No."

My heart sank. He didn't want me in his private space. Because I wasn't a

sub or because I was Jamison's daughter? Maybe it was simply because of the way things had ended at the Dazzling Bean the other day. I was half-stunned he was even speaking to me tonight. Still, discovering he had a private room he didn't want me in...a private room he probably fucked dozens of subs into delirium, stung.

Instead of asking more questions, I simply followed him up a flight of stairs to the second floor. After entering another nondescript door, he led me through a narrow passageway, then paused at a wide, intricately carved wooden door. While I admired the detail of the pattern, Dalton punched in a code and turned the knob before escorting me inside a huge, opulent office.

As we passed a massive desk, the first thing I noticed was a long, leather couch positioned beneath a wall of glass. Second, was the bank of monitors along the wall on my right. Upon further inspection, I noticed some were displayed couples and trios in explicit sex acts and BDSM play. Others were completely dark.

"Those are the feeds from the private rooms," Dalton explained as I stared at the arousing images.

"Do they know they're being recorded?"

"Definitely. Every member who rents a private room is well aware the space is equipped with cameras and microphones. It's a safety measure for both Dom and sub." He waved an arm, motioning toward the couch. "Would you like to sit down?"

"Sure. I-I mean, yes, Sir."

As I started across the room, I glanced out the windows and gasped. The entire dungeon was visible below us. Andre was paddling Leasha's ass, sending pangs of envy ricocheting through me. But when Dalton cupped my shoulders and turned me to face him, a whole other kind of reverberation quaked through me.

"What are you doing here, Blair?" He scowled.

"I want to learn about submission."

"You what?" he barked.

"I want to learn about submission," I repeated slowly.

"Why?"

"Because I fantasize about it all the time."

"I thought you fantasized about *me*." His frown deepened.

"I do...doing the things some of the Dominants are doing to their subs down there."

He shook his head and pressed his lips to a thin line. "I told you the other day—"

"That fantasy was all you could ever be for me. Yes, I remember. But I also know what happens at Genesis, stays at Genesis. No one outside these walls, especially my father, will ever know what you and I are doing."

"We're not doing anything," he bit out. "Do you even know what submission means?"

"Yes. I've read about it. I know I have to give up certain things."

"No. Just no." Dalton shook his head.

"Why not?"

"I can't do that, Blair."

"If you're worried about my father—"

"It's about more than your father. I'm twice your age. I don't do commitment. I live a solitary life because I like it that way. Hell, I've never even collared a sub because I don't want entanglements."

I'd spent hours devising my plan, and even more playing devil's advocate. I'd imagined every conceivable roadblock Dalton might toss in my path. I had rebuttals for everything except the collared sub. I'd have to argue that point on a wing and a prayer.

"You weren't concerned about my age the other day at the Dazzling Bean. As far as commitment goes, I'm not asking you to marry me. Your life will be as solitary as it is now. I'm not asking for anything but your Dominance. The only reason you haven't collared a sub is because you haven't found the right match. I don't even know what to look for in a Dominant. That's why I need you to teach me."

"No. No," he adamantly repeated, scrubbing a hand over his head.

Thankfully, I'd anticipated his rejection as well. Though it cut much deeper in person than anything I'd mentally practiced.

"Fine." I lifted my chin defiantly. I knew the odds weren't in my favor, but I had to toss my last bargaining chip on the table. "If you'll excuse me, *Sir*, I'm going back downstairs to find a Dom who'll teach me how to please him."

Heart in my throat, I turned on my heel and started toward the door. I'd only taken two steps before Dalton cinched his arm around my waist with a feral growl. Lifting me off the floor, he spun me around and quickly pinned me against the door.

His sweltering wet breath careened down my throat and over my barely

covered breasts, warming my flesh. At the same time, the heat of his hard cock pressed against my throbbing pussy leeches through my dress, searing me from the outside in.

He silently held me with a penetrating stare as he dragged my arms above my head. Fastening both my wrists in one hand, Dalton pressed them against the door. Then cupped my chin with his other hand while flames of anger and desire blazed in his eyes.

Yes. Yes. This is what I've spent years aching for.

“Don’t try and manipulate me, *Baby Girl*,” he murmured in a low, controlled voice.

His harsh command was captivating, thrilling, and terrifying. Still, I ached for more. Ached to provoke him until he stripped me bare and fucked me hard, right here against the door.

“I’m not trying to manipulate you,” I lied, unable to miss his gaze as it stalled on my mouth. “I simply offered you my submission. You declined, so I have no other choice than to give it to someone else.”

“The hell you will,” he snarled before crashing his mouth over mine.

The room was already spinning when he plunged his tongue past my lips, lashing my wet depths rough, deep, and urgent. Determined to prove I was willing to submit—at least this once—I clashed my tongue against his and ground my needy pussy against his hard cock.

With an animalistic growl that vibrated through me, Dalton squeezed my wrists, then lowered his hand. I heard his silent command loud and clear and kept my arms arched high above my head.

Shoving the fabric from my breasts, he cupped my aching flesh in his palms, then strummed his wide thumbs over my pebbled nipples. Dalton swallowed my needy whimpers before tearing his mouth from mine, kissing and licking a trail of liquid fire down my flesh. Pausing at my breasts, he looked up at me as if daring me to stop him.

Never.

“Please, Sir,” I begged in a soft whisper.

His eyes flashed with something untamed as he opened his mouth and latched onto my breast. Drawing my flesh deep into his wet heat, he pressed my nipple to the roof of his mouth, sucking harder still.

Crying out in bliss, I arched my back, pressing my flesh against his lips. Writhing and panting, I struggled to keep from lowering my arms to clutch his head. My only saving grace was the all-consuming fear of failing him

before I could prove myself.

“More, Sir. Please...I need more,” I whimpered.

With a savage snarl, he released my breast only to ravage the other with the same savage attention. Reaching through the slit of my skirt, his fingers danced up my thighs. Instinctively, I parted my legs and moaned as Dalton traced the edge of spandex before working his fingers beneath the fabric.

Anticipation spiked.

I closed my eyes and held my breath. And just as his thick fingers glided through my thatch of dark, drenched hair, someone began pounding on the door. As Dalton jerked back, releasing my swollen tingling flesh with an audible pop, I bit back a howl of frustration while he muttered a low curse.

“Ink. You in there?” A deep-voiced man bellowed.

“Yeah. What do you need?” Dalton called through clenched teeth.

“The police are here. They want to talk to you.”

My heart leapt to my throat before plummeting to my toes.

“The police?” I whispered. “W-what... Are they here to bust the club?”

“No.” Dalton smirked as he gently tucked my breasts into Leesha’s sexy club ware, then eased me away from the door. “I’m sure they want to talk to me about an altercation that happened earlier. Don’t worry. I have witnesses *and* video of the whole thing.”

“Altercation?” I repeated still trying to catch my breath.

“I’ll explain later,” he promised, protectively tucking me behind him before opening the door.

The big, intimidating biker-looking dude who’d checked me in stood in the portal.

“Let me guess,” Dalton drawled. “Lewis actually called them?”

“Yep.”

Dalton exhaled a heavy sigh. “All right. Keep ’em out of the club. I’ll be there in a minute.”

“I know the drill. But you might want to—” the big man motioned toward his mouth and smirked. “—wipe your lipstick off before you come down.”

“Shit.”

As the big man walked away chuckling, Dalton scrubbed the back of his hand over his lips.

“Who was that guy?”

“Drake.”

“Daddy Drake? Trevor’s Dom?”

“Yeah.” Dalton nodded. “Look, I’m sorry. I—”

“Don’t apologize. You didn’t know the police were com—”

“No, not about that. I’m sorry I lost my head. I shouldn’t have kissed you again. It was a—”

“Don’t. Don’t say it was a mistake, Dalton.”

“But it was, and we both know it.”

Regret etched his face as he slung an arm around my waist and guided me out the door.

“It didn’t feel like a mistake when you were kissing me.”

“Blair...”

“Did it feel like one when my tit was in your mouth?” I bit out as we reached the bottom of the stairs.

“No.” He exhaled heavily. “But I can’t keep doing this to you.”

“I’m not complaining. If you haven’t figured it out yet, I’m dying for you to do a whole lot more.”

“I know that,” he growled. “Look, we’ll talk about this later. Just...don’t ask any of the Dominants to train you while I’m talking to the cops, okay?”

Like a phoenix, hope soared. In my mind I was turning cartwheels and tossing confetti, but I somberly nodded. “Okay.”

“Promise?” he asked, splaying his palm against the small of my back before leading me down the hallway.

“I promise.”

“Thank you.” He nodded as we entered the dungeon. “I’ll be back as soon as I can, so we can talk.”

“Good luck,” I said as he strode toward the wide velvet curtain, then disappeared.

Savoring my still tingling lips, I made my way back to our table and sat down. My entire body, especially my clit, throbbed with need. I did my best to ignore my hungry hormones and focused on Andre. He had a blanket draped over his shoulder as he removed the cuffs from Leesha’s ankles and wrists. Her backside was glowed a brilliant shade of plum. After releasing the last cuff, Andre draped the blanket over her shoulders and caught her boneless body in his arms. As he tucked the blanket around her, Leesha’s head lolled against his shoulder. Her eyes were glassy and unfocused, and a sated smile tugged her lips.

Though I’d never seen her look more serene, pangs of jealousy pricked. I wanted to know what it felt like to float in space like her.

Andre kissed her softly, then smiled up at me. "I'm taking her to my private room for some aftercare. Do you want to stay here or come with us?"

The term *aftercare* sounded so intimate, it seemed rude for me to intrude.

"I'll stay here."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. I'll be fine," I assured, staring at Leesha in awe.

"We'll join you once she floats back to earth." He smiled.

Andre had barely walked away before a young man, wearing nothing but a pair of leather shorts, began cleaning the cross and packing Andre's toys into a small tote. When he was done, he approached me and smiled.

"Hi, I'm Eli. I heard Master Andre and Ebony brought a guest tonight. Welcome to Genesis."

"Hi, Eli. I'm Baby Girl." I smiled.

"Nice to meet you. If you don't mind, I'll leave this here for Master Andre." He nodded toward the tote.

"Not at all."

"Thank you. Is there anything you need?"

It was then I realized I'd left my soda at the bar. "How much is a cup of water?"

Eli grinned. "Nothing. Coffee, tea, and water are free. Juices and sodas cost two dollars. Would you like me to bring you some water?"

"I can get it."

"No. I insist. You're a guest. Please, sit back, relax, and watch the...fun."

"Thank you."

After what felt like an eternity of watching the scenes and darting glances at the curtain, praying Dalton would return, Eli appeared with my water.

"Sorry, it took so long, but more drama is unfolding."

"Drama?"

"You didn't see the fight earlier?"

That must be the altercation Dalton's talking to the cops about.

"No. What happened?" I asked before gulping down the water.

"Lecherous Lewis...err, I mean Master Lewis tried to punch Sir Ink." Eli shook his head. "I'm sorry, you have no idea who I'm talking about."

"Actually, I do. I met Sir Ink...earlier."

"Then you know how big he is." *Not yet, but I've felt it through his jeans.*
"Lewis is small and skinny. Picture a chihuahua picking a fight with a pit bull."

I cringed.

“Yeah, it didn’t turn out well for Lewis. Anyway, Ink revoked his membership and physically threw him out. Evidently, Lewis went to the police and filed assault charges. The cops just handcuffed Ink and hauled him away.”

My heart slammed against my ribs.

“They what?” I barked loudly, not caring that people jerked their heads my way.

“It’s utter bullshit. The cops were assholes. They wouldn’t even let Ink copy the footage from the security cameras to prove his innocence. Daddy Drake’s up in Mika’s office now getting it.”

Panic punched through me. “We have to...call a lawyer, a bail bondsman...something.”

“It’s already being taken care of. We’ve got at least a dozen lawyers in the club, and a circuit court judge. Trust me. They are on it. They’ll have Sir Ink out before the cops have time to process him.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive. We’re family.” Eli leaned in and lowered his voice. “Nobody fucks with our family and gets away with it.”

As another couple finished their scene, Eli sent me a smile. “Gotta get back to work. If you need anything else, just flag me down.”

“I will, thanks.”

My heart was still racing, pumping a steady stream of anxiety through my veins when Drake suddenly plopped down across the table and slid a lemon-lime soda toward me.

“What’s happening with Sir Ink?” I blurted.

“You’re welcome,” he not so subtly replied.

My cheeks caught fire. “I’m sorry. I’m a little rattled at the moment. Thank you for the soda, Sir.”

“Thank Ink. While I was outside with him, he asked me to get you a fresh drink and to...watch over you.”

My heart swelled. Even as he was being *arrested*, he made sure I was protected. That, or he didn’t trust me to keep my promise. Refusing to dwell on the negative, I opted to believe the former.

“You don’t mind if I—”

“Play bodyguard?”

Drake chuckled. “Something like that.”

“No, Sir. I’m honored.”



Dalton

After a restless night spent tossing and turning and dreaming about Blair, I finally climbed out of bed at one in the afternoon. After a long, hot shower, I fixed a cup of coffee. Then I planted my ass in the comfy lounge on my deck, praying the soothing waters of Lake Michigan would work their magic.

They didn’t.

My brain was stuck in a perpetual loop of everything that had and hadn’t happened last night. I was damn grateful Judge Kellan Graham, aka Sir Justice, had come to the police station with footage that eventually cleared me of all charges. I was still pissed that by the time we returned to the club, Blair, Andre, and Ebony had been gone.

But what weighed heaviest on my mind was my late-night conversation with Drake as we closed down the club. The intuitive bastard wanted to know when I was going to claim Baby Girl. When I explained I wasn’t, he scoffed and informed me that eight Doms had introduced themselves to Blair just while he was sitting at the table with her. Drake had no clue how many more approached when Andre and Ebony returned. I’d tamped down my bloodthirsty rage and pressed him for names, but Drake wouldn’t answer. He simply asked how long I intended to keep lying to myself, then strolled out the door.

It was insane for me to want to spend more time with her, but I did. In fact, I couldn’t stop. What worried me most wasn’t my obsession with Blair, but the fact that I kept losing control around her. It was suicide, not only for my sanity, but also a detriment to Dominance and bachelorhood. Not that I would ever consider marrying Blair, even if she stirred something domestic inside me I no longer hated. But why her? Why was I fixated on my partner’s daughter...a woman half my fucking age? It boggled my mind that out of dozens of women I’d been with not one, nadda, zero, zilch had *ever* climbed as deeply inside me as Blair.

I took a gulp of coffee to chase away the chill sliding through me.

Clearly, monogamy still scared the shit out of me...thank fuck.

“Why am I doing this to myself?” I muttered. “This is fucking ridiculous.”

Launching off the lounge, I began to pace.

How long do you intend to keep lying to yourself? Drake’s question echoed in my head.

“I’m done,” I barked to the waves cresting over the sand. “Done!”

Done trying to analyze my feelings for a woman I couldn’t have.

Done climbing the walls, obsessing about her.

Done worrying about fucking up my partnership with Jamison.

Done wondering why the bastard had lied to me about his daughter.

Done second-guessing Blair’s motives and warring with whether or not she had told me the truth...about anything.

My inner cynic roared, sending suspicion oozing from every pore.

But I didn’t care. It was time to end this shit, once and for all.

Glancing at the clock, I muttered a curse, then checked the temperature. It was still unseasonably warm so I grabbed my helmet and my leather jacket, then raced out the door. I knew seeing Blair again was reckless at best and dangerous at worst before swinging a leg over my Harley. But I didn’t care. I wanted answers to why Jamison was lying to me, and to the shitload of secrets I knew Blair was keeping from me. I wasn’t going to stop interrogating her until each one spilled off her plump, sinful lips.

A block away from the Dazzling Bean, I got caught at a red light. Glancing at my watch, it was two minutes after three.

“If she left early, I’m shit out of luck,” I murmured as Blair rounded the corner, cinching her coat tighter while she strolled to...

“The fucking bus stop? Why the hell are you taking a bus, Blair?”

Out of the blue, the veiled exchange she and Leesha had shared the other day gonged in my head.

“Oh my god. I’ve gotta get my butt to the hospital. I promised Mellie I’d be there when the baby was born.”

“Go,” Blair had prompted. *“I’ll finish cleaning and lock up when I’m done.”*

“But how are you going to get home?”

“The same way I got here...”

Leesha knew Blair was taking the city bus? But to where? The only way from Jamison’s Lake Forest estate to downtown was by train.

What the hell is going on?

Anxious to find out, I hit the throttle when the light turned green and zoomed down the street before pulling to the curb in front of her. Her shocked expression gave way to confusion as I removed my helmet and crooked my finger. But Blair didn't move...didn't approach me, simply blinked at me like I was a mirage as she clutched a white, plastic bag.

"We're not done, Blair," I called as a bus rolled up behind me and honked.

I was parked in the loading zone, but I wasn't leaving without Blair's sexy ass planted on the seat behind me, her sweet tits poking me in the back, and her slender arms locked around my waist.

When the horn sounded again, Blair flinched and snapped her head in the bus's direction. Flashing the driver a weak smile, she waved him on. Instead, he put the bus in park and stepped out the door.

"You all right, miss?" he asked. "Is this man bothering you?"

A part of me was grateful the old man was watching out for Blair, but the lash of jealousy—I'd never felt before—made me bristle. Lifting my shades up over my head, I glared at the man.

"Bothering me? Oh, no," she assured. "He's a...friend."

I'm a hell of a lot more than a friend, sweetheart.

"You need a ride?" the driver asked, eyeing me suspiciously.

"No," I barked. "I'm taking her home."

"You're what?"

Blair's panicked reaction confused me. Okay, she was worried her father would see me drop her off. Clearly, she didn't know he was a few blocks away in a meeting with his lawyers.

"You heard me." I held out my helmet as the bus roared by.

"When did you get out of jail?" Blair asked, finally stepping toward me.

"You heard about that, huh?"

"It's all anybody could talk about. Did they keep you overnight?"

"No. Sir Justice brought evidence of my innocence. I was there maybe an hour before they dropped all charges against me. Come, hop on."

"I've never been on a motorcycle before." She blanched as she finally stepped toward me.

"It's easy. You just climb on and hang on," I said, placing the helmet on her head and fastening the strap beneath her chin. "Give me your bag and climb on."

Blair clutched the sack tighter. “It’s fine, I’ve got it. H-how do I get on?”

Biting back a smirk, I lowered the kickstand and got off the bike. Then I plucked her off the sidewalk and set her on the seat. The heat of her body leeches from beneath her coat, making my fingers tingle. Reminding myself I couldn’t do anything but talk to her, I climbed back on the bike before glancing back at her. Sheer terror etched her face. “Relax, Blair. I won’t let anything happen to you. I promise.”

“I know. I trust you.”

“Good. You ready?”

“No.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m scared,” she confessed, tucking the plastic sack between us.

I clasped her hands and wrapped her arms around me. “Hold on. I’ll take it nice and slow.”

With a nod, she squeezed me so tightly, I thought she’d break a rib. Blair was mighty strong for such a little thing. She was also loud. As I pulled from the curb, her scream nearly blew out my eardrum. But as I turned onto East Erie, Blair started laughing like a little kid. I couldn’t help but grin.

“Oh, my god. I feel like I’m flying.”

The wonder and awe in her voice made me feel as if I’d given her the moon and the stars.

Taking it slow, as promised, I headed north out of the city. Blair leaned in and stuck her head over my shoulder. As her hot breath caressed my neck, I nearly groaned. “Where are we going?”

“I’m taking you home...to Lake Forest.”

“I-I don’t live there anymore.”

When the hell had that happened?

“Where do you live?”

“South Shore.”

My heart sputtered and my stomach twisted as waves of shock and panic rolled through me. I quickly pulled to the curb and stopped, then turned and gaped at her. “Did you say South Shore?”

Blair bit her lip and nodded.

“Why the fuck are you living there?” I barked.

“It’s all I can afford right now.”

“What are you talking about? Your father’s a multi-millionaire.”

“He is, but the apartment there is all *I* can afford,” she stated defiantly.

Scowling, I struggled to put the puzzle pieces together, but there were still too many missing. All I knew thus far—in no particular order—was that she'd quit college, lost her job, was now working in a coffee shop, and had traded a safe, palatial home for an apartment in gang central.

“Do you live there alone?”

“Yes.”

Fuck!

“For how long?”

“A little over three months.” She scowled. “I know what you're thinking.”

That I want to paddle your ass crimson? I doubt it.

“I know it's a rough neighborhood,” she continued. “But I'm not stupid. I'm always aware of my surroundings.

Which was all good and fine, but that wouldn't keep her from getting caught in the crossfire of a gang war. It was a miracle Blair was still alive.

“What's the address?”

“Forget it. Just take me back to the bus stop. I'll get home from there.”

The hell you will.

“Address. Now,” I growled.

With an angry scowl, she rattled it off.

Clenching my jaw, I merged back into traffic. I knew the area well.

Several years ago, I'd been approached by members of a non-profit outreach program seeking donations to build a youth center. I'd been so impressed with the opportunities they wanted to offer inner city youths that I'd offered to fund the entire project. They didn't turn me down.

Leaving the luxurious high rises behind, we were soon surrounded by faded brick buildings and worn-down houses with sagging porches and windows secured with metal bars. I didn't judge the people living there, I knew they were simply struggling to survive. My contempt was for the criminals who made that survival nearly impossible.

As I turned onto her street, Blair pointed to a three-story, brick building on the left. On the sidewalk, a balding man with a round belly, wearing a tattered flannel shirt, tossed someone's belongings on the pavement. I'd barely rolled to a stop when Blair leapt off the back of the bike and charged toward the man.

“Why are you dumping my things on the sidewalk?” she screamed, tugging off the helmet.

Having already killed the engine, I bolted off the bike and rushed to her side.

“You’ve been evicted,” he coldly replied.

Ah, the prick’s her landlord.

“Why?” Pain and defeat etched her face as she dropped to her knees and began scooping up her things. “I paid you my rent last week.”

“I got a better offer.”

“You have to give her thirty-days written notice before you can evict. It’s the law,” I growled.

“I don’t have to do shit, biker-boy,” the landlord spat.

“How much did he pay you?” Blair’s voice quivered as her eyes filled with tears.

“A hell of a lot more than you.” The cock-bag flashed a smarmy grin. “I got me a brand new fifty inch flat screen.”

“He bribed you with a television?” Blair screeched.

“And a bunch of streaming services. That beauty’s got surround sound.” The old man preened, then shrugged. “Nothing personal, honey. It’s just business. Oh, I almost forgot. He told me to tell you...Do the right thing.”

Who the fuck are they talking about?

As their cryptic exchange sputtered in my brain, the man turned and walked away.

Blair sat at my feet, face in her hands while her shoulders shook with silent sobs.

I knelt beside her and rubbed her back. “Who bribed him to evict you?”

“My father.”

Her caustic answer sent shock splintering through me. “Jamison? Why the fuck would he do—”

“Because he can!” she screamed.

I didn’t want to believe that her father—the man I’d spent years and countless hours, planning, traveling, and growing vast wealth with—was capable of causing her so much pain. But the proof lay scattered on the sidewalk, which turned my stomach and sent my anger boiling as fiercely as the waves of fury rolling off Blair while she scooped up her clothes, shoes, books, and toiletries.

The sobs peeling from her throat felt like razor blades slicing my flesh.

Locking down my fury at Jamison, I gently drew her to my chest. At first, she tried to fight me, but seconds later, Blair clutched my jacket and fell

completely apart.

I simply held her, rocking her in my arms as she sobbed. When she finally released me and eased back, sniffing and wiping her tears, my heart melted. Even though her lashes were wet and clumped together, and her eyes rimmed red, she was still the most beautiful woman on the planet.

“Would you mind helping me gather up my things?”

“Not at all, but...where are you going to put them? There isn't room on the bike.”

“I know. If you'd don't mind helping me carry them to my car, I'd—”

“Where's your car?” I asked, glancing up and down the street.

“In the parking garage under the building.”

“Oh. Okay. Sure, I'll be happy to. But...where are you going to stay?”

“Nowhere,” she replied on a strangled sob. “I can't go anywhere. My battery's dead.”

As she melted against my chest sobbing uncontrollably again, I closed my eyes and clenched my jaw. It was a good thing Jamison wasn't here. I would have beat him bloody. As soon as I took care of his daughter, he and I were going to have a long, ugly conversation.

I continued comforting Blair while I pulled out my cell phone. Then I rang up the one person capable of fixing this whole mess.

“Hey, Mr. B. I was just about to call yo—Do I hear someone crying?” My personal assistant, Marie, instantly went from carefree to concern. “Are you all right?”

“I'm fine, just helping out a friend who's having a bad day.”

“What do you need?”

“A small moving van with boxes and tape, and a tow truck. Moving van will be going to my house, the tow truck will be going to Gino's. Please let him know the car needs a new battery, then ask him to check it over and make any repairs needed.”

Blair jerked back and shook her head. “No, Dalton. I won't let you do that.”

Her defiant expression only hardened my conviction.

“Too late. I already did.”

“Consider it done, Mr. B,” Maria assured. “Mr. Brighton just called. He said you weren't answering your cell phone.”

“I've been on the bike.”

“Ahh, that explains it then. He wants you to meet for dinner tonight at

Dear Path Inn. Will seven-o-clock work?"

"Nope. Call him back and tell him I'll touch base with him in the morning."

"Got it. Is there anything else you need?"

Willpower. Lots and lots of willpower.

Without it, I wouldn't be able to keep my hands or any other part of my body off Blair—even with her ungrateful glare boring into me. The desire to turn her over my knee and give her the attitude adjustment she desperately needed clawed through me.

"Actually, yes. Call the house and let Baron know the van is coming and to put the boxes in the guest room facing the lake, please."

"You got it."

"Thanks, Marie. Have a good weekend."

"You, too."

As I ended the call and pocketed my phone, Blair's angry glare still burned a hole through me. I slowly turned toward her and arched a brow. "Is there a problem?"

"Yes. I don't want you sticking your nose in my business. I don't want you making phone calls and barking out orders to people on my behalf. And I definitely don't want you trying to take charge of my life."

"Where's the girl who wanted me to teach her submission?"

"Submission and trying to take charge of my life are two different things."

"Is that so?" I chuckled. "You might not like me taking charge, but someone needed to. I didn't *bark* out any orders. I simply asked my assistant to do what I hired her to do...assist me."

"I'm sorry if I sound ungrateful," she snapped. "It's just...I can do this on my own."

"I never assumed you couldn't." *At least, not out loud.* "There is one absolute in everyone's life, Blair. At one time or another, everyone needs help. It's not a sign of weakness, it just is. And I'm damn grateful I was here when you needed a helping hand."

Her shoulders slumped as she exhaled a heavy sigh. My advice, while far from epic, had taken some of the wind from her high and mighty sails.

"Me, too," she softly whispered, studying her meager possessions dejectedly. "You don't have to store my stuff at your place. I'll call Leesha. You can have the boxes dropped off at her place. She won't mind me

crashing on her couch until I can save enough money for another—”

“Stop.” I pressed a finger to her lips. “You’re not sleeping on anyone’s couch. Not when I have six empty guest rooms.”

“I don’t want to intrude on your solitary life.”

“You’re not.”

“But what about your financial future...your reputation. If my father finds out—”

“We’ll just have to make sure he doesn’t.” I tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and smiled. “As for my financial future and reputation...they will be fine. And as far as my solitary life goes...it could use a bit of company for a while.”

“Okay.” She sighed in resignation. “I’ll stay out of your way as much as possible.”

Though I wanted Blair *in* my way and *in* my bed, I knew that couldn’t happen. She needed to recover the independence Jamison had stripped from her far more than she needed my cock.

“It’s a big house, that won’t be hard. You can stay at my place as long as you need to...no strings or conditions. All I want to do is help you get back on your feet, so you can keep building the life *you* want.”

Blair’s chin quivered as a tear slid down her cheek. “I’m sorry for being such a bitch. I’ve never been good at holding my temper or my tongue.”

Please don’t talk about your tongue, baby girl.

“They’re what got me in this mess to begin with.”

“Tell me what happened between you and Jamison.”

“It was ugly but warranted, and I’m honestly too angry and exhausted to relive it right now. I need to start putting all this stuff in piles so I can box it up when the moving van gets here.”

“We,” I corrected. “*We* will separate it out and box it up, together.”

“Thank you, Dalton...for everything.” She sent me a soft smile, then started sorting.

I picked up the plastic bag she’d been carrying at the bus stop. It was light, and whatever was inside, though big, was soft and pliable. “Do you still want to keep this with you?”

“No. It can go over there,” she said pointing to the stack of purses.

“So it’s a purse, too?”

“Yeah.”

“Is it new?” I hoped she might have splurged and bought herself

something special.

“No. It’s one from what I lovingly call *My Louis Vuitton Bribery Collection*.” She pulled the purse out of the bag and tossed it with the others. “It’s designer, and worth a lot. I was going to pawn it on my way home today.”

Swallowing down the roar of rage within, I reached out and cupped her hand. “Now you don’t have to.”

With a self-deprecating expression, Blair nodded.

I didn’t know how I was going to survive cohabitating with Blair without losing my mind. The only thing I was sure of was Jamison and I were going to have a come to Jesus meeting, real fucking soon.

Long minutes later, the rescue vehicles rolled up and stopped. While Blair supplied the tow truck driver with the code to the parking garage and her car keys, me and the man from the van began assembling boxes.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Blair

As the tow truck hauled Betty Beetle away, I couldn't deny it any longer. I was miserably failing to survive outside the gilded gates of Father's estate. It was a bitter pill to swallow, especially after choking down my pride and accepting Dalton's help. Still, that was a small price to pay to keep Jamison Brighton from breaking me.

"The van's loaded and ready to roll," Dalton announced, pulling me from my maudlin musings. Dusting his hands off, he cupped my shoulders and frowned. "You look worn out."

"I am, emotionally."

"You need a big glass of wine, a thick juicy steak, and some crème brûlée from Eddie Merlot's before a long, hot bubble bath."

Though the mere mention of the restaurant had my mouth watering, my focus was fixed on my melting heart.

"You remembered."

"What? That it's your favorite restaurant?" He shrugged. "It's mine, too. I eat there way more than I should."

I glanced down at the uniform beneath my coat and shook my head. "They have a dress code."

"Not for me. Last week after I finished swimming laps, I tossed on a tee, slid on a pair of tennis shoes, and walked right in."

"Wearing swim trunks and tennis shoes?" I asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Yep. The maître'd didn't bat an eye. He greeted me with a smile, then

showed me to my usual table.”

Of course, he did. You're Dalton Barnes.

“It's Saturday. Even this early, we'll never get in without a reservation.”

“Wanna bet?”

“No, because I'll probably lose. But if you're sure they'll let us in...let's do it.”

Dalton chuckled as I rushed to his bike and tugged on the helmet. After fastening the strap under my chin, he swung his leg over the seat.

“Ah-hem.”

“Problem?” he asked.

“Aren't you going to help me on again?”

“You got off by yourself. I figured you'd—”

“I did? Wow. I don't remember doing that.”

“I'm sure the shock of your landlord dumping your things on the sidewalk was responsible. I guess I should teach you since you enjoy riding. No doubt, you'll probably hound me night and day to take you out on the bike again,” he teased with a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“I don't *hound*,” I replied, biting back a grin and haughtily lifting my chin.

“Good, I'd rather hear you beg,” he muttered so softly I'd almost missed it. But I didn't. And the rush of hope that sailed through me nearly lifted me off the ground. If Dalton wanted to hear me beg, that meant... “All right. Put your right hand on my shoulder...”

With his direction, I climbed on behind him. When I leaned in against his back and wrapped my arms around his waist, Dalton groaned. The deep, feral sound vibrated south and stalled between my legs. I didn't know how I was going to live with him and not sneak into his bed each night. Then again, if I stood any chance of him teaching me submission—which I hadn't given up on yet—I had to be patient and wait for him to offer. Just how I was going to do that without losing my mind remained to be seen.

I knew my reprieve from poverty was temporary, but as Dalton pulled from the curb, a giant weight of worry slid off my shoulders.

Resting my chin on his shoulder, I thanked him again for his help. He simply smiled and nodded, then dropped his left hand and patted my leg before cupping my calf. And just like last night, when I'd placed my fingers in his palm, calm wended through me.

Forty-five minutes later, we entered the restaurant and checked our coats.

Though it was barely five-thirty, like I'd feared, the place was packed. Trying to avoid the critical stares of women dripping in diamonds and designer-wear, I held my head high. Seconds later, the maître'd flashed a bright smile and motioned us toward him. I knew then that Dalton's unbelievable story about swim trunks and flip flops was true.

Pressing a hand to the small of my back, Dalton guided me through the crowd to the maître'd's station.

"Welcome, Mr. Barnes," he greeted before nodding my way. "Miss. It's an honor to have you join us for dinner."

"Good to be here, Raúl."

"If you'll please follow me."

"I'm glad I didn't take you up on that bet," I whispered to Dalton.

"I'm sorry you didn't," he murmured.

"Why?" I asked as Raúl paused at a table near the back of the room, and set our menus on the white linen surface.

"Because you'll never know what I was willing to bargain." A devilish smile tugged Dalton's lips as he held out the chair for me.

"Enjoy your meal." Raúl smiled before striding away.

"You have to tell me now."

"First, I want to know what you would have wanted if you'd won the bet?" Dalton asked, easing into the chair beside me.

"That's easy. A whole day at Tiara."

"What's Tiara?"

"It's a salon and spa," I said as a young man filled our water glasses before darting away.

"Like a shave and a haircut?"

The teasing smirk on Dalton's face sent me sailing back in time, sending bittersweet memories spilling through me. He'd worn the same expression when we'd sat by the Koi pond, listening to me try to explain why I'd dyed my hair neon green. It was an ugly color and looked hideous on me, but I'd been thirteen and in the peak of my rebellious phase.

"It's a bit more involved than that, but..." I chuckled. "What about you? What if you'd won?"

"Are you sure you want to know?"

His voice was so deep and sensual I was sure it was something sexual.

"Of course...unless you're too embarrassed to tell me," I purposely taunted.

“The last time I got embarrassed you weren’t even born,” he drawled. “A massage.”

A massage?

“With a happy ending?” I quipped with a smirk.

Dalton’s expression turned painfully serious. “No. Just a massage. You haven’t asked why I picked you up at the bus stop.”

“I thought it was coincidence.”

“No. It wasn’t. I came to the city to talk to you about last night.”

His remorseful tone made my heart sink as rejection burned through me. “I know what you’re going to say, but can it wait until we get to your house? Please?”

I just want to sit beside you and wrap myself in denial. Give me an hour to pretend we’re finally on our first date. Pretend that I spent all afternoon doing my hair and makeup, and that I’m driving you crazy in my black Caroline Herrera cocktail dress and Louboutins stilettos.

“All right, but—”

“Well, hello, Dalton. It’s good to see you again, sugar,” purred a thirty-something, blond-haired, blue-eyed waitress with a thick southern accent. The woman was tall, slender, and so stunningly gorgeous she should have been walking the runways in New York or Milan instead of waiting tables. “Raúl told me you were here, so I rushed right over.”

“Good evening, Celeste.”

Celeste. Even her name was beautiful.

I would have complimented her on it, but she was so busy climbing Dalton like Mount Everest with a hungry stare, she hadn’t even noticed me.

“Blair?” Dalton’s quizzical tone pulled me from my catty thoughts. “Would you like a glass of red or white wine?”

“Either is fine, thank you.” I said demurely, savoring the flare in his eyes.

“Goodness gracious. What is this?” Celeste darted a glance between me and Dalton. “You bad boy. You never told me you had a daughter... especially one so precious. Why, sugar, you’re as cute as a bug’s ear.”

While Dalton pursed his lips, I tried not to choke on her saccharine-sweet tone and met her plastic smile with one of my own.

“It must be thrilling to have your daddy spoil you with such a *lavish* dinner. But then again, your daddy’s exceptionally good at *spoiling* a lady.”

Clearly, she and Dalton had history...sexual history. While I struggled to tamp down the little green-eyed-monster snarling inside me, she sent him a

pained expression. “Sorry, sugar, but since your daughter doesn’t look a day over sixteen, I’m gonna need to see some ID before I serve her anything stronger than a soda.”

It had been a long time since I’d punched a bitch, but I ached to do it again now. During my second year of boarding school, Melody—a pretentious, hateful cow—called Leena the *N* word. Livid, I’d knocked Melody’s nasty ass out cold. It had cost me a week in solitary detention, but it was well worth it.

Thankfully, I’d learned how to fight with words instead of fists.

“She’s over twenty-one,” Dalton assured.

“Actually, I’m twenty-two. Oh, and for the record, I’m not his daughter, *sugar*.” Pausing, I flashed Dalton a seductive smile. “I’m his...*friend*.”

Celeste’s face fell. She flashed a jealous glare at Dalton before realizing her mistake and slid her acidic smile back in place. “I still need to see some ID.”

“No, you don’t,” Dalton glowered, handing Celeste our unopened menus. “She’ll have a glass of Beringer Private Reserve cabernet sauvignon. We’ll order now. Oysters Rockefeller for our appetizer. Two bowls of French onion soup. We’ll both have the eight-ounce filets...medium rare. I’d like a loaded baked potato and my *friend* will have the lobster mac and cheese.”

I had no clue if Dalton’s *friend* barb had been aimed at me or Celeste? I was actually too busy processing the shock that he’d remembered each of my favorite foods on the menu. That also left me trying to sort out why I felt miffed and strangely aroused that he’d ordered my entire meal *for* me.

“That’s it for now. We’ll decide on dessert later.”

“I’ll be back with your wine in a moment,” Celeste announced with a tight smile.

Dalton simply nodded, silently dismissing her before turning my way and holding me with an unreadable stare. After several uncomfortable seconds, I cocked my head and arched my brows.

“Problem?”

The corners of his lips twitched as if fighting back a grin before he leaned in close. His hot, wet breath skimmed over the shell of my ear before cascading down my neck. I couldn’t have stopped the shiver quaking through me with a court order.

“If we were alone, your bare ass would be draped over my lap right now.”

Doing my best to mask the shiver morphing into a nine-point-nine

earthquake, I inched back and arched my brows. “Why, because I didn’t want your booty call assuming I was your *daughter*?”

“What makes you think she’s a booty call?”

“Tell me she’s not.”

“You’re jealous?”

“Yep.”

He sighed heavily. “At least, you’re finally being honest.”

“That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Always. Look, Blair, you have no reason to be jealous.”

Because you’re never going to make love to me? Or because Celeste was a one-and-done? The questions burned the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed them down. It was ridiculous to ask him to explain when I’d already begged him to postpone his rejection until we were at his house.

“Good evening,” a tall middle-aged man with dark hair greeted, holding my glass of wine. “My name is Tim. I’ll be taking over as your server this evening. Unfortunately, Celeste wasn’t feeling well and went home.”

I darted a sidelong glance at Dalton as he gave a subtle, unhappy nod.

“Here’s your wine,” he announced, setting the glass in front of my plate. “Your appetizer will be out shortly.”

“Thank you.” Dalton nodded.

As Tim hurried away, Dalton silently stared out the window across the room.

A million questions crowded my brain, but they took second stage to the foreboding chill spreading through me. Taking a long sip of wine, I prayed the alcohol would chase away the familiar isolation carving a hole inside me, but it didn’t. I didn’t want to believe Dalton was purposely shutting me out and ignoring me like my father, but as more silent seconds ticked by, salt began spilling into old wounds.

Disregarding the wine, I tossed my napkin on the table. “I’m going to the ladies’ room.”

Dalton turned, studying me as I blinked back the tears stinging my eyes and frowned. “Tell me what’s wrong first.”

I so badly wanted to say *nothing*. But I knew he wanted honesty, even the brutal kind.

“What has you so lost in thought?”

He narrowed his eyes, intently delving deep into my soul. “What button did I just push?”

“Don’t answer a question with a question. It drives me nuts,” I blurted.

“You mean like you just did?” He smirked, and quickly sobered. “I was thinking about the age-gap between us.”

“That really bothers you?”

“Yeah. It does.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m forty-four years old. You’re twenty-two.”

“So? Are you’re afraid people are going to think”—I lowered my voice—“that you’re a pedo?”

“Celeste thought you were sixteen.”

“No, she didn’t,” I scoffed. “Her comment was a jealous jab meant to insult me.”

Dalton scowled and scrubbed a hand down his face, then muttered, “Women and their games, I swear. This is why I don’t do relationships.”

A fact that broke my heart.

“Is that why you needed to run to the ladies’ room...to cry because she insulted you?”

“No. I thought you were upset with me and...ignoring me on purpose.”

He held me with a blank stare. I could practically hear the wheels spinning in his head. “I’m not your father, Blair.”

“I know that.”

What I didn’t know was how he’d instantly associated my feelings of being ignored with my father.

“Obviously, you don’t. Do you think I didn’t notice the way Jamison looked past you...as if you didn’t even exist when you were young? I did, and it pissed me off. But it wasn’t my place to criticize his parental shortcomings, so I did the only thing I could to make up for them...I spent time talking to you.”

His confession crushed me. Mortification, like acid, surged through my veins, disintegrating my heart. “So, I was what...nothing but a pity case?”

“No,” Dalton barked, causing everyone around us to turn and stare. “I enjoyed talking to you. Enjoyed hearing you laugh at my stupid jokes. Enjoyed listening to your opinions about life and the world. Enjoyed the excitement that lit up in your eyes when you talked about your future...your dreams.” Pausing, he scowled. “Why did you change your mind about becoming a veterinarian?”

“I didn’t. Father changed it *for* me.”

“Here’s your Oysters Rockefeller,” Tim announced, sliding a platter onto the center of the table. “I’ll be back shortly with your soup. Bon appétit.”

To my relief, Dalton didn’t ask why I’d been too weak to stand up to my father. Instead, he satisfied my curiosity and told me about the altercation at the club last night. Together, we steered clear of sensitive subjects and devoured the decadent dinner laughing at nothing and everything.

When Tim arrived with the check and the go-bag of crème brûlée—we were too full to eat—Dalton’s cell phone chimed. After handing the waiter his card, he looked at the message and frowned.

“Everything all right?”

“Yeah. It’s just a text from Drake. He and Trevor won’t be at the club tonight to help out. Their daughter, Hope, is running a fever.”

“Oh, the poor thing. I hope it’s nothing serious.”

“Me too.”

“I’ll be happy to help at the club.”

“I appreciate the offer, but you’re not a member yet. Don’t worry. I’ll find plenty of volunteers. The only problem is I’ll have to drop you at the house and leave.”

“It’s fine. That hot, bubble bath you suggested is already screaming my name.”

“Okay. While I’m gone, make yourself at home. Help yourself to anything you need or want. If there’s something you can’t find my valet, Barron, will be happy to get it for you,” Dalton instructed as he signed the check.

“Honestly, I plan on taking that bath, then climbing into bed.”

When Dalton stood and helped me from my chair, I clutched our desserts. After he retrieved our coats and helped me into mine, we stepped outside. The icy wind whipped my hair and stole my breath.

“Shit,” Dalton grouched as I ducked my head to shield my cheeks from the biting gusts. “Go back inside and have another glass of wine at the bar. I’ll ride home and get the Escalade, then come back for you.”

“How far is your house?”

“About eight miles or so.”

“That’s not far. I can handle eight miles.”

“I’m not sure *I* can,” he scoffed. “It’s dropped at least forty degrees since we got here.”

“Aww, come on. It won’t be that bad.”

But it was. It was worse than bad.

Eight miles in a windy deep-freeze felt like eight thousand. By the time we reached his beautiful, sprawling estate, I couldn't feel my toes, nose, or fingers. I was a human popsicle. Thankfully, Dalton's garage was toasty warm, and his fingers were limber enough to help me off the bike, then open the door to his house.

As we stepped inside the enormous kitchen, my jaw dropped. It was a gourmet chef's wet dream. White walls and a multitude of white cabinets framed with light-gray marble countertops and industrial sized stainless steel appliances glimmered beneath the recessed lighting of the tall ceiling. Stone crocks of cooking utensils and other kitchen knick-knacks decorated the counters while rich, dark hardwoods shimmered the floor. The room held so much personality and lent such a warm and homey vibe, I was anxious to see the rest of Dalton's house.

"Ah, there you are. I thought I heard you come in, Mr. B," an older gentleman with a shock of white hair and a warm smile greeted.

Dalton grinned. "Blair, this is Baron...my left and right hands for most everything. Baron, this is Blair. She's a good friend of mine who'll be staying with us for a while."

"Miss Blair." Baron bowed. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"I'm sorry I can't stay and show you around, but I need to run upstairs and change, then head to the club."

"Then you'd better get moving," I laughed, shooing him with my hands.

Dalton flashed a feigned look of warning. "Baron, make sure she has everything she needs."

"Did you honestly just say that?" he teased. Dalton shot him a crooked grin and jogged from sight as Baron extended his elbow. "May I have the honor of escorting you to your room?"

"Of course." I looped my arm through his with a grin. It was impossible not to. Baron was like a spunky grandfather. I found him totally adorable.

"We'll take the elevator. My knees aren't as limber as they used to be, and the staircase is a monster," he said as he led me from the kitchen and into a formal dining room.

As my feet sank into the thick pile of a cream-colored Persian rug, I admired the massive mahogany table and chairs, and the delicate chandelier hanging from the coffered ceiling above. Beyond the floor to ceiling windows, I caught a glimpse of a huge swimming pool before Baron ushered

me through a massive family room. I couldn't help but smile. The decor was masculine, like Dalton, but not overpowering. The light colored walls and gold gilded paintings lent an air of elegance. But the dark, overstuffed leather couch and chairs—adorned with gold and burgundy accent pillows—and the intricately carved coffee table atop another pale-colored Persian rug, facing the stately fireplace, gave off a warm and relaxing impression. Dalton's interior designer had an impressive and keen eye for luxury and comfort. But the glossy black, baby grand in the corner captured all my attention.

“Does Dalton play the piano?”

“Oh, yes. He's an exceptionally talented musician,” Baron boasted as we made our way into the open foyer.

The elegant crystal chandelier above me caused colorful prisms to shimmer over the marble floor. Pausing at an inconspicuous elevator opposite a grand staircase—which really was a monster—Baron opened the metal gate and gestured me inside. As we quickly ascended to the second floor, he informed me the boxes delivered earlier were waiting in my room.

“I'll be more than happy to help you unpack,” he offered as the elevator stopped and he opened the door

When I stepped out onto the thick, beige carpet and followed him down a long, wide hallway, my knee-jerk reaction was to tell him no. But Baron was so genuinely warm and kind—unlike the stoic servants I'd grown up with—I wanted to know all I could about him.

“How about, I unpack and you keep me company?”

“Splendid.” He smiled, ushering me through a doorway.

Though I shouldn't have been surprised, the sight of the king-sized sleigh bed, covered in a white eyelet comforter, and adorned with fluffy Wedgewood and dark, blue-colored pillows, nearly stole my breath. Compared to the horrible, lumpy twin size I'd been sleeping on the past three months, it looked like a fluffy, inviting cloud.

Matching nightstands framed the decadent bed, each with tall lamps. As with the other rooms, a Persian carpet in delicate shades of blue lay over the smooth hardwoods. More floor to ceiling windows, overlooking Lake Michigan, lined one wall, and a muted Wedgewood damask patterned wingback chair, with a thick white cotton blanket draped over one arm, sat near the windows.

The walk-in closet was bigger than my studio apartment. Beside its door was a long, white mirrored dresser. Opposite the bed, the bathroom—

decorated in soft shades of blue—called to me like an oasis of relaxation. Stepping inside, I wanted to weep. The massive, blue-streaked marble vanity and back-lit mirror nearly took up one whole wall. While the deep soaker tub, shower, and spa tub claimed the other. At the end of the vanity was another room with the private toilet.

A pang of sorrow sliced deep. After three short months, I'd forgotten what pampering myself felt like. Thanks to Dalton, I would soon remember.

"Is the room suitable for you?" Baron asked.

"*More* than suitable. Thank you." I smiled.

Since my fingers had defrosted, I began ripping off the packing tape from one of the boxes near the dresser. Baron eased in beside me and began peeling it off the others. As if sensing my melancholy, he engaged me in carefree conversation.

Long after I'd unpacked my things and broken down the boxes, we were still talking.

Dalton's seventy-one-year-old valet had led an eclectic life. First, as a guitar player for a famous sixties band I'd never heard of, before moving to England where he'd met his wife attending Le Cordon Bleu in London. After they married, they opened a posh restaurant in London...which explained the impressive, state-of-the-art kitchen downstairs. After his wife died of cancer eight years ago, Baron moved back to the states and settled in Chicago. He'd accepted a position as head chef with a prestigious hotel where he'd met Dalton at a fundraiser. According to Baron, after serving his special, seared steak au Poivre, Dalton had strolled straight to the kitchen. They'd talked less than five minutes before Dalton offered him an obscene salary and offered up his guest house to him. Baron said he made some calls to make sure Dalton was the *real deal*, then accepted the position.

"How long have you been with Dalton?"

"Six years next month."

"Do you always call him, Mr. B?"

"Yes. He told me in no uncertain terms that his father was Mr. Barnes, *not* him."

Why? Was he estranged from his father like me?

"Of course, once in a while, I slip up and call him son. But that's only because he *is* like a son to me." Baron patted my hand. "I've prattled on long enough about me...tell me about yourself, Blair."

Without going into great detail, I explained how I'd grown up in an

estate, like Dalton, but had recently climbed out from under my father's thumb. I glossed over being fired from the ad agency, my dead battery, and being evicted. I didn't tell him who my father was or how I'd known Dalton prior to working at the Dazzling Bean. Thankfully, Baron didn't ask any questions.

"I'm glad Dalton was with you today, and that you didn't have to endure such trauma alone."

"Me, too."

"It's past my bedtime." Baron smiled and stood. "If you need anything, I'm in the guest house next door. There are phones all over the house that ring me directly."

"I won't need a thing, but that's good to know. Sweet dreams, Baron."

"Sweet dreams to you, Miss Blair."

As the whirr of the elevator faded, I grabbed my pajamas and robe. After racing to the bathroom, I let the spa jets pound away my stress and worries until I was limp and boneless. Forcing myself from the tub, I dried and dressed and climbed between the sinfully soft sheets. And as I closed my eyes, I softly whispered, "Thank you for saving me, Dalton."

CHAPTER EIGHT



Dalton

A gentle snow was falling when I locked and left the club. But as I drove home, my mind was a blizzard of questions. The long conversation I'd had with Leesha earlier had been enlightening and disappointing. Blair was *still* keeping secrets. Considering all the bullshit Jamison insisted on putting her through, I *could* give her a pass. But lying or conveniently hiding the truth from me was non-negotiable. Still, some sixth sense told me Blair's lack of honesty wasn't my enemy...it was her pride.

Once home, I climbed the stairs, ready to take a hot shower and collapse into bed. But as I made my way down the hall, I couldn't stop myself from peeking in on Blair. I had to make sure she was still safely under my roof. Quietly opening the door, I stepped inside the guest room and eased in beside her bed. Her hair cascading over the pillow looked like an ebony waterfall, while the reflection of the snow falling outside cast an ethereal glow over the delicate features of her young face.

What the fuck am I doing?

I'd asked myself that same question a million times since climbing onto my bike yesterday afternoon. I still hadn't come up with a valid answer.

Scrubbing a hand over my face, I eased onto the chair near the end of her bed and simply studied her as she slept. Blair had been spot on at the restaurant. I was worried people would think me a pervert—well, a bigger pervert than normal—which wasn't like me at all. I'd stopped caring about others' opinions decades ago. Yet, when it came to Blair, I did care.

Who am I worried about protecting? Me or her?

The answer was easy...Blair. After the bombshell Leesha had dropped tonight in Mika's office, I had zero fucks to give right now about my future with Jamison. But taking Blair under my wing could do lasting damage to her relationship with the man...no matter how dysfunctional it was.

Tucking the bedsheets under her chin, Blair moaned and rolled to her side. She looked so peaceful...so fucking innocent. As her dark lashes began to flutter, I stayed perfectly still. Slowly, she opened her eyes and peered out the window.

"Oh, wow, it's snowing," she softly whispered, leaning up on one elbow.

"Yes, it is." The instant I'd murmured the words, Blair snapped her head my way and screamed. "Easy. It's me. It's just me."

"Dammit, Dalton," she panted, pressing a hand to her heart. "You scared the living shit out of me. What are you doing in here?"

"I wanted to make sure you"—*hadn't run off*—"were doing okay."

"I was until..." Pausing, she narrowed her eyes. "Are you a vampire?"

"A what?"

"A vampire. You know, like the movie where Edward sneaks into Bella's room, then sits there and watches her sleep."

I shook my head. I knew the film she was talking about, but had never seen it. "No, I just wanted to check on you. I know yesterday was shocking and unsettling for you."

"Not half as shocking or unsettling as you sitting there watching me sleep." She frowned before nibbling her bottom lip. "Have you changed your mind about me staying here?"

She honestly thinks I'm going to turn her away like her father.

"No. In fact, I'm even more determined that you stay here now."

"Why? What happened?"

Though every cell in my body told me to keep my ass planted in the chair, I stood and eased onto the side of the bed. It took all the willpower I possessed, but I kept my hands flat on the mattress. "I had a long talk with Leesha tonight."

"About what?" she asked, blinking away the flicker of fear in her eyes.

"You."

As expected, Blair scowled and lifted her chin defiantly. "You don't need to pump my friends for information. Whatever you want to know, I'll tell you."

"Only if I ask the right questions."

“What do you want to know?”

“Why you didn’t tell me Jamison tried to bribe Leesha to fire you?”

“It doesn’t matter. He didn’t succeed.”

“Trust me. The things he’s doing to you, the bribery, the manipulation... those things fucking matter to *me*.”

“But you’re his business partner.”

“So?”

“Does he know you’re a Dominant or that you’re a member of Genesis?”

“No.”

“So, what you do in your personal life is your own business, right?”

“Correct.”

“That’s exactly my point. What he does in his personal life doesn’t affect you.”

“Bullshit,” I growled. “It does when it concerns you.”

“Why?”

“Because what he’s doing to you is wrong.”

“What he does to my mother is wrong, too. I don’t see you moving her in here with you.”

I bit back a scoff. “Pamela chose to marry your father. Staying with him is her choice, too.”

“She isn’t choosing him, she’s just choosing his money,” Blair drawled.

It was a bit surprising to discover we shared the same opinion of her mother.

“Agreed, but *she* has choices. You didn’t. You were born and grew up without any. When you went away to boarding school, I was actually relieved you’d found a way to escape.”

“Why did that matter to you? I was just a kid.”

“Because you deserved better.”

“I know. That’s why I moved out.”

“Did Jamison get you fired from the ad agency?”

I knew the answer before the words fell off my tongue. Not because Leesha had told me, but because it was the only question she’d refused to answer.

“Yes,” she whispered.

The son of a bitch had not only stolen her dreams but was still stealing them. Maybe he always had. That thought pissed me off even more. “Do you still want to become a veterinarian?”

Blair stared out the window, contemplating my question. Finally, she turned to me. “I don’t know. That fantasy was ripped away from me so long ago, I’m not sure if it exists inside me anymore.”

I nodded. “Think about it and let me know.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s time you started dreaming again.” Fighting the urge to cup her chin, claim her mouth, and drag her beneath me, I pressed a chaste kiss to her forehead and stood. “Get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning...or afternoon, depending on when I wake up.”

She chuckled and nodded. “Sweet dreams, Dalton.”

“Sweet dreams, Blair.”

As I closed the door behind me and headed down the hall to my room, I thought about the plan I’d concocted earlier at the club. While there were still some loose ends I needed to tie up, I was anxious to discuss my idea with her. But it was late and I was exhausted.

After a hot shower, I climbed into bed and was asleep seconds after my head hit the pillow.



Yanked from oblivion by my ringing cell phone, I groaned and palmed the device off the nightstand while glancing at the clock. I had no clue who was calling me at nine am until I checked the caller ID.

Jamison. Great.

He was the last person I wanted to talk to.

“What’s up?” I answered, forcing myself to be civil.

“I just got an email from Oliver. He wants another two-point-four million for the land.”

I sat up with a growl. “People in hell want ice water. He signed a contract for ten. That’s all he’s getting.”

“He’s claiming we coerced him and wants to re-negotiate the contract.”

“I hope you told him to fuck off.”

“Not yet. I’m going to do that in person. Pack a bag. I’ve booked us a flight leaving O’Hare at two this afternoon.”

No way. I’m not leaving Blair right now. She needs help, emotionally and financially...needs the things you’ve refused to give her.

“I can’t. I’ve got other commitments.”

“Then rearrange them,” Jamison barked. “I want a face-to-face with this bastard.”

“That would be nice, but I can’t fly to Australia right now. Look, let me get out of bed, get a cup of coffee in my system, and I’ll call the little weasel and let him know we’re not going to play his extortion games.”

“I already told him that.”

“Then I’ll tell him *again*. If he insists on still being a prick, I’ll give him the choice...meet us in court, or we’ll pull the project.”

“Pull it? Are you insane? We’ve spent too much time and money on this deal to—”

“I won’t let him lead me around by the dick. If you want to, fine...send him a fucking check.”

“What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you being so obtuse?”

Because I want to beat the fuck out of you for treating Blair like shit and lying to me.

“Why are you overreacting?”

“Don’t answer a question with a question. I hate that shit,” Jamison snarled.

So does your daughter.

“Fine. Because you’re overreacting.”

“The hell I am! We’ve already sunk a ton of money into this—”

“Correction. *I’ve* sunk a ton of money into the deal. If Oliver insists on being a greedier prick than he already is, I’ll kill that contract so fast it’ll give him whiplash.”

“Christ, man. You can’t do that.”

“Oh, I can. And I will. Assholes like Oliver are the reason I put a ripcord clause in every contract.”

“I know, but that doesn’t mean you have to pull it, Dalton,” Jamison spat. “We’re never gonna find another tract of land as perfect as that one.”

“I know you have your heart set on the Whitsundays location, but if push comes to shove, we can always build someplace else. Queensland has other prime locations on Deception Bay, Bundall, Mermaid Waters, and Newport.”

“True,” Jamison sighed. “All right, call Oliver. I’ll start drinking...heavily.”

“Dude, it’s nine am.”

“I don’t care. I need something stronger than coffee to calm my damn

nerves. Just...pursue every avenue before pulling the ripcord.”

“I plan to. Try to relax. I’ll call you as soon as I’m done dealing with Oliver.”

After ending the call, I rolled out of bed and dragged on a pair of sweatpants and a tee. Outside, the ground was covered in a thick blanket of snow, and it was still coming down. In desperate need of coffee, I headed for the kitchen, but paused at Blair’s open door. I stepped inside, but she wasn’t there. The only trace of her was the sweet citrus scent lingering in the air.

Halfway down the staircase, I was hit with the smell of bacon and Blair’s laughter. Picking up the pace, I came to an abrupt halt as I entered the kitchen and saw her and Baron—wearing matching aprons—standing at the stove.

“You want each slice to be brown and crispy, but not burned,” Baron instructed.

Suddenly, the grease popped, and Blair jumped back with a yelp.

“Did it burn you?” Concern lined Baron’s face as he gently clasped her wrist before inspecting her fingers.

His solicitous reaction surprised me. But the fact that he’d not only allowed Blair into his most holy and sacred space...his kitchen, but was also teaching her how to cook, blew my fucking mind. Clearly, I wasn’t the only one enamored with the little vixen.

“No. It just startled me. I’m fine,” she assured.

“How about we play it safe and you beat the eggs?”

“*Beat* the eggs?” The hint of a smile playing at the corners of her mouth left no doubt what Blair was thinking.

I pinched my lips together to keep from laughing and giving myself away. Neither had noticed me yet, and I was enjoying the hell out of watching their interaction.

“Yes. You know”—Baron plucked a whisk from the crock of utensils—“with this.”

“Okay.”

As Blair gently stirred the eggs, I knew she had no idea what Baron had asked her to do. One glance at her, and he quickly discovered it, too.

“You need to get mean with them, Blair.” Baron cupped her hand before vigorously mixing them. “You never watched your cook prepare meals growing up, did you?”

That was some unexpected insight. Clearly, the two had talked...*a lot* while I was at the club last night. I needed to find out if Baron knew she was

Jamison's daughter.

"No. It was forbidden."

Baron *tsk'd*. "No disrespect intended, but your parents did a terrible disservice by not allowing you to learn the basics of cooking. How did they expect you to survive on your own?"

"I'm not sure they wanted me to," Blair murmured.

"I do," I assured, stepping into the kitchen and startling them both as I headed straight for the coffee maker.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. B."

"Hey." Blair smiled proudly as she continued whipping the eggs.

I filled a mug with java and arched a brow. "I thought you said you didn't know how to cook."

"I don't. Baron is teaching me." Blair's smile was so bright it not only lit up the room but also reflected off the dark, empty recesses of my soul.

"So, this is what you do the first time I bring a pretty girl home...ply her with all your culinary secrets?" I playfully scowled at Baron.

"Guilty as charged, Mr. B." He laughed.

"Please," Blair drawled. "I am *not* the first girl you've brought home."

"Yes, you are," Baron and I replied in tandem.

She eyed us suspiciously before Baron plucked the whisk and bowl from her hands. "Now, you're just punishing them."

Blair darted me a wide-eyed glance, then slapped a hand over her mouth to hide her grin.

"Maybe they needed to be punished," I quipped with a smirk.

"No. What they *need* is time-out in this hot skillet," Baron chuckled, nodding for Blair to join him at the stove again.

"While you two deal with your disobedient eggs, I'm going to run to my office and make a quick phone call."

Blair laughed and nodded as I clutched my mug and strode from the kitchen.

Seven minutes later, I leaned back in my chair, propped my feet on my desk, and rang up Jamison on speaker phone.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"You can stop drinking and cancel our flight. Oliver is taken care of."

"Do we still have a contract?"

"Yes. I told him the contract he signed wasn't up for negotiation. That he could either accept the original terms without attempting to extort more

money, or we'd give the ten million dollars to another developer.”

Across the room, movement at the doorway caught my eye. Glancing up, I found Blair staring at the phone on my desk...listening to her father's voice.

“Did he push back?”

“Of course, but I shut him down,” I replied, intently watching Blair's brow furrow as tightly as her lips pressed in an angry line.

“So, we'll still be breaking ground on the Whitsundays location?”

“Yep.”

Jamison let out a cry of delight. “Thanks for keeping Oliver in line, man. I still wish we could have done it in person. I would have loved to see the look on his face when you threatened to pull the contract. But this...this is the best outcome I could have hoped for.”

“Same.”

“Thanks, Dalton...I'm proud of you.”

Pain, raw and eviscerating, instantly chased the anger from Blair's face. Her chin quivered as big fat tears filled her eyes. Yanking my legs off the desk, I grabbed my phone and launched out of the chair as Blair turned on her heel and disappeared down the hall.

“I gotta go.”

Without waiting for a reply, I ended the call and dashed from my office. Two long strides later, I snagged an arm around Blair's waist and spun her toward me. She quickly dropped her chin, but I still saw the tears sliding down her face and the unmitigated pain and rejection reflecting in her eyes. Drawing her to my chest, I smoothed a hand over her head and breathed in her intoxicating citrus scent.

“Don't cry. He doesn't deserve your tears,” I whispered.

“You're right. He doesn't.” She sniffed and swiped her cheeks, then peered up at me. “It's just...I spent my whole life waiting and praying that one day he'd finally grow a heart and tell me that he was proud of me. But...”

The rejection Blair harbored was crushing. Logically, I knew she was too young to have figured out—like I had—that parental approval didn't matter. But that didn't stop me from wanting to rip out Jamison's cold heart.

“The only person whose respect has impact on your life is your own. If you can wake up each morning and look at yourself in the mirror, you have reason to be proud.” As Blair pondered my words, I released her. “Come on, I'm betting breakfast is ready.”

“It is. That’s why I came to your office...to tell you.”

“Good.” I flashed her a cocky grin. “I’m dying to taste those eggs you beat into submission.”

She softly chuckled as we made our way back to the kitchen.

“Baron taught me how to make omelets. I hope they’re edible.”

“I’m sure they’ll be delicious.”

Mine was better than delicious. Each bite was light and fluffy and oozing with melted cheese. In fact, Blair’s was surprisingly better than Baron’s. Of course I didn’t tell him that. Instead, the three of us sat at the table and enjoyed breakfast while laughing and talking as if we did it every day. I tried not to fixate on how, in less than twenty-four hours, Blair had seamlessly melded into mine and Baron’s lives. I couldn’t it, though.

As I finished my meal and drained the last of my coffee, Blair popped out of her seat and snagged my mug off the table. After peering into Baron’s, that was still full, she plucked up her mug and refilled both of ours. The gesture was so submissive, I had to bite my tongue to keep from praising her.

Bells and buzzers blared in my brain. There were a thousand reasons I had no business offering to train her, but it was becoming blatantly clear Blair needed structure, direction, and a way to heal from the damage Jamison inflicted.

As she returned to the table, I stood and eased my mug from her hand. Then I threaded my fingers through hers. “Follow me.”

Blair didn’t ask where we were going, simply nodded and thanked Baron for the cooking lesson as I led her from the kitchen. When we reached the family room, I grabbed the thick, cotton blanket off the arm of the couch and tossed it over my shoulder. As I’d hoped, the snow was still falling, and ice had started forming on the shoreline from the rolling waves.

Notching up the heat as we entered the sunroom, I gestured to one of the padded lounge chairs facing the lake. Blair didn’t immediately sit back. Instead, she stood staring out the tall windows watching the waves ebb and flow.

“It’s so beautiful,” she said before easing onto the chaise and smiling when I draped the blanket over her.

“And relaxing,” I added, dropping onto the lounge beside her.

“It feels like forever since I’ve been able to simply relax. Thank you, Dalton...for everything.”

“You’re welcome, but I don’t want you thanking me anymore...for

anything. Understood?”

When she lowered her lashes and nodded, my heart clutched.

Suddenly, I stood at a fork in the road.

Either I trained Blair, or found another Dominant to guide her. As the image of her kneeling before another Dom slammed my brain, I wanted to commit murder.

“I told you yesterday I wanted to talk to you about Friday night.”

“We already did at the club that night.”

“Yes, but I have more questions.”

“All right,” she pensively replied.

“Is it right for me to assume that you and Leesha talk about the lifestyle?”

“I-I can’t answer that.”

“Why not? You were her and Andre’s guest at the club.”

“Because I’m afraid to say something that might jeopardize her membership.”

Blair’s determination to protect her friend was as telling as it was shocking. Clearly, she knew the price for outing members...and I suspected a whole lot more. But the fact Blair hadn’t automatically tossed Leesha under the bus to impress me—like a lot of women I’ve known have done—spoke volumes about her moral code.

“That’s not an issue. You signed a waiver Friday night. It’s still binding.”

“So, nothing’s going to happen to Leesha if we *happened* to discussed the club prior to me signing that waiver?”

“No. Even if you did, I wouldn’t run to Mika and tell him Leesha was outing members.”

“Okay. Yes, we might have discussed a *few* things,” Blair cautiously confessed.

Biting back a smile, I nodded. “Tell me what you know about the lifestyle.”

CHAPTER NINE



Blair

Dalton sipped his coffee, silently listening, and wearing an unreadable expression while I told him what I knew, suspected, and assumed about the lifestyle.

When I was finished, he sat up and swung his legs over the chaise to face me. “Anything else?”

“No.”

He pursed his lips, then handed me his empty mug. “I need a refill. How about you?”

My coffee was long gone, and my throat dry. “Definitely.”

After tossing the blanket aside, I stood and took our mugs to the kitchen. When I returned, Dalton stood at the windows, watching the tumultuous waves roll toward shore.

He turned and lifted his mug from my fingers and smiled. “Thank you, baby girl.”

My body began to tremble. My mouth went dry. And my heart thundered against my ribs. He hadn’t called me, baby girl, since we were at the club. What did that mean? Had it been a Freudian slip or intentional? I didn’t know. But his dissecting stare sent my anxiety through the roof.

“You have a basic understanding of the lifestyle,” he began, gesturing me to the chaise before sitting sideways on his again. “But you also have a lot of misconceptions. I’m surprised Leesha didn’t explain more to you.”

“It’s not her fault,” I blurted. “I...I didn’t ask questions. I just listened when she told me what she and Andre did at the club.”

Confusion stamped his face. “Why didn’t you ask questions?”

“Because I didn’t want her to know I was interested in the lifestyle, until...”

There was no way I could tell him that Leesha accidentally outed him.

“Until what?”

“Until you came into the Dazzling Bean.”

“Go on,” he prompted.

Praying Dalton didn’t remember that day as vividly as me, I decided to go with a little white lie.

“She addressed you as Ink instead of Dalton. I knew then, you had to be from the club.”

“How did you know I wasn’t a submissive?”

“Please,” I scoffed. “Your commanding aura is so strong, the International Space Station could track your moves.”

Dalton smirked then instantly sobered. “Do you still want me to train you?”

Shock, excitement, and disbelief plowed through me.

My heart rate tripled, and I could barely breathe.

“A-are you serious?”

“Don’t answer a question with a question. It drives me nuts.” He grinned.

Like champagne bubbles, relief, anticipation, and joy exploded through me as laughter spilled off my lips. Tears of happiness stung my eyes as I manically nodded. “Yes. Yes. A million times yes. When do we start?”

“We already did.” He smirked, lifting his mug.

“We did? When?”

“I didn’t *ask* you to get me more coffee. I *told* you I needed a refill.”

“That was a command?”

“Yes. An easy one that you passed with flying colors.” Pride whipped through me. “Don’t expect the rest of your lessons to be that simple.”

“I won’t,” I promised. “What do you want me to do next?”

He chuckled and nodded toward the lounge chairs. “Relax and drink your coffee while I list the expectations I have of you and your submission. When I’m done, you can ask all the questions you want.”

The word *expectations* sent panic cresting through me. What if I couldn’t meet them? What would he do then? Stop training me? Pass me off to another Dominant?

“I can see the fear in your eyes. I don’t like it. I swear to everything holy;

I will never do anything to hurt you, Blair.”

“I believe you, but that’s not what’s worrying me.”

“What is?”

“What happens if I don’t like some of your expectations?”

“You won’t. But they will never physically hurt you, like floggers, crops, or canes might.”

“What if I don’t want you using floggers, crops, or canes on me?”

“That’s called limits. Every submissive has them. That’s why, before we ever scene, we’ll discuss what’s going to happen. It’s called negotiating.”

“You mean, I have a choice? I thought I had to follow all your orders.”

“No. That’s one of those misconceptions I mentioned earlier.” He studied me for a long second, then smiled. “Before we start discussing limits, you need to learn what the lifestyle is *really* about.”

“Okay.”

“In its simplest form, BDSM is a power exchange. Once a Dominant has earned a submissive’s trust, she hands over her heart, mind, body, and soul to him. He takes those gifts and molds them into what she needs, then gives them back to her.”

“How does he know what she *needs*?”

“Through open and honest communication.”

This is going to be a breeze.

“So, if she wants sex, she tells him, and he gives it to her?”

“Despite popular belief, BDSM has nothing to do with sex.”

“What do you mean? Of course, it does. All the kinky romance novels I read—”

“Are fiction, right?” he interrupted.

“Well, yeah, but...are you trying to tell me that everything I’ve read is a lie?”

“Not necessarily. It’s very common for couples to incorporate sex in their BDSM relationship. But the actual crux of the lifestyle is the submissive serving and surrendering herself to the Dominant for him to treasure, nurture, and control.”

Control. My blood ran cold.

“No.” Launching from the chaise to put some much-needed distance between us, I adamantly shook my head. “I don’t want you or anyone else controlling me. All I want is you to command me.”

“Controlling and commanding are the same thing.” Dalton frowned as he

stood and studied me.

“No, they’re not.”

“Explain the difference.”

“Letting someone control you is giving them *carte blanche* to do anything they want, without permission. Being commanded is living out a fantasy... temporarily.”

Dalton frowned. “Are you telling me you only want kinky sex?”

“Yes. I mean no.” I heaved out a frustrated sigh. “I just don’t want—”

“To be played like a puppet again.”

“Exactly!”

“Do you honestly think I would do that to you?”

“No. Maybe. I don’t know.”

“I wouldn’t. Ever.” Dalton scowled. “I know this is all...”

“Confusing? Very.”

Though I was relieved Dalton understood what I was trying to say, concern still etched his face.

“From here on out, the words control and command do *not* exist. Understood?”

“O-okay.”

“There’s an aspect of the lifestyle you need to understand. Dominants hold the authoritative position in all BDSM relationships, but in actuality, the submissive holds all the power.”

“What? No, they don’t,” I scoffed.

“True Dominance is never forced, coerced, or demanded. A submissive must willingly surrender herself to him before the Dom can Dominate her.”

“In a weird way, that makes sense.”

Dalton cupped my cheek. The heat of his hand eased my angst, but the warmth in his eyes melted my heart.

“I know what you need, Blair. But more importantly, I know how to give it to you. The only question is...do you trust me enough to be willing to let me?”

I couldn’t lie. The thought of giving Dalton the power to destroy me scared me shitless.

I’m not your father. The words he’d said at dinner last night rolled through my brain.

No, he wasn’t. He was the complete opposite of my father in every way. It was the reason I’d set Dalton on a pedestal long before I knew anything

about infatuation or...

"I do trust you, Dalton. But I need to know if our *arrangement* will include sex?"

He lifted his hand from my cheek and sat back, clenching his jaw. "I told you—"

"I know. I know...you can only be my fantasy," I bit out. "Is that because you're being chivalrous or because you don't want me...sexually?"

"Dammit, Blair," he bit out between clenched teeth. "You have no idea how badly I want to strip you naked and squeeze my fat cock inside you."

The air caught in my lungs. *Please. Yes, please. I'll even strip for you.*

"But there's a million reasons I can't."

"Yes, you can. You just said you wanted to strip me naked and—"

"We don't always get what we want, Blair."

"The only one stopping you is yourself."

"Yes. You need to understand...it doesn't matter that I want you more than my next breath or that you're too tempting for my sanity. Your *needs* take precedence over your *wants*...over both of ours. If the only reason you want to learn about submission is for sex, then we're wasting our time."

My heart clutched. "Why?"

"Because fucking my partner's daughter is professional suicide."

"Only if he finds out," I naively quipped.

"How long did it take Jamison to discover what apartment you were living in, and where you're working now?"

My stomach knotted. I knew where Dalton's questions were leading, and it sent a rush of panic swirling inside me. "I'm not sure when he started having me followed."

"He's definitely still following you. When I drop you off or pick you up from work tomorrow, your father will know that you're with me. Are you prepared for what's going to happen after that?"

As my heart drummed in my chest, I plopped back down on the chaise, swallowing back the bile burning my throat. After Dalton saved me yesterday, I'd been floating so high on clouds of relief. I hadn't thought about the position I was putting *him* in. Then again, why would I? I had nothing left to lose. Unfortunately, Dalton was risking everything.

Suddenly, I was back in my dorm at Penny Park Academy; cell phone pressed to my ear.

"But Father, I really want to go on the senior ski trip. Colorado isn't that

—”

“Of course you do, because you only ever think about yourself. Grow up for fuck’s sake, and stop being so damn selfish.”

Blinking the memory away, I sucked in a ragged breath. “There’s not much more Father can do to me. You’re the one I’m worried about.”

“Don’t. I’ll deal with Jamison.”

“What are you going to tell him?”

“The truth.” Dalton shrugged, taking his seat beside me again. “That you’re staying here until you can get back on your feet.”

“He’s going to lose his mind over you saving me,” I murmured. “What are you going to do if he ends the partnership?”

“He won’t.”

“But the other night at the club, you said being with me would ruin—”

“That was a test to see if you were being honest with me. I also told you yesterday, outside your apartment, that my financial future and reputation are going to be fine.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because Jamison’s only purpose in life is to expand his empire. The only way he can do that is with *my* money, or risk sharing a bigger slice of his pie and seek out another investor. He’s too greedy to do that.”

The realization Dalton’s power dwarfed my father’s was gratifying and daunting at once.

“Why can’t he invest in his own expansion? My father has millions.”

“Jamison doesn’t have enough liquid assets to fund the contracts that have been signed. He won’t be able to realize his dreams without me. I have more money than he does...a lot more.”

It wasn’t so much the grimness in Dalton’s tone, but the lack of arrogance that perplexed me. “You don’t like being rich?”

“Did you?”

I sent him a mock glare. “You answered my question with a question on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Yep.” He nodded with a mischievous grin. When we both started laughing, a familiar warmth slid through me. “Yes, I like having money, most times, but too much can be a curse.”

“True. It can buy the nicest cars, clothes, houses, and vacations. Unfortunately, the things you need to be happy aren’t for sale.”

“Like what?”

“Respect. Unconditional love. Encouragement.”

“Don’t forget honesty,” he drawled before taking a gulp of coffee.

Unlike all the other times, Dalton’s comment about *honesty* didn’t zap me with twinges of guilt anymore. Instead, a light bulb went off in my brain. Clearly, someone other than me, had fed him so many lies that he’d been left with deep scars marring his psyche. Overwhelmed by the need to help heal him, I silently vowed to be open and honest with him about everything...even the things Dalton didn’t yet know to ask.

“You ready to talk about the lifestyle some more?”

“Yes. Definitely.” I smiled.

As Dalton explained everything from limits and safe words, to the toys and equipment I’d seen at the club Friday night, images of him Dominating me flashed through my brain. When he began telling me about the meaning of the collar, I sent up a prayer that one day I would be worthy of wearing his.

“If and when we go to the club, you’ll be wearing my training collar,” he announced.

I was so excited, my heart nearly leapt out of my chest.

“I think I’ve given you enough information overload for one day.” He chuckled. “I do have some homework for you, though.”

“Homework?”

“Yes. I’m going to give you a BDSM checklist. It encompasses everything from tickling to permanently branding flesh.” I sucked in a hiss and cringed. “Next to each item, you’ll check yes if it’s something you’re willing to try. No, if you want nothing to do with it...like branding.” He smirked. “Or maybe, if you might want to give it a go but aren’t a hundred percent sure. If you don’t know what the word or phrase means, just put a question mark beside it and I’ll explain.”

“Why do I need to fill out a checklist?”

“It tells me what your hard, soft, and medium limits are. Over time, your needs and desires will change, so we’ll revisit the list to see if you want to move something from the no column to yes. I don’t anticipate you ever moving branding from the no column, but...you might surprise me.”

“Don’t hold your breath. That sucker’s staying a big, fat no, forever.”

“Fair enough.” He chuckled, then sent me a quizzical stare. “Do you still play pool?”

“The one and only time I ever played was with you during that wicked

storm.”

Dalton grinned. “I’ll never forget that day. Never forget Pamela running into Jamison’s office screaming that we were all going to die, and to get downstairs to the game room before a tornado dropped from the sky and flattened the house.”

“If they handed out Oscars for the most overdramatic actress, she’d win every year.”

“That, or just give her a lifetime achievement award and call it a day.” He flashed a crooked grin.

“For sure.” I chuckled. “Are you a pool shark now?”

“Me?” Dalton laughed. “Not in my wildest dreams. I’ve only played one time, that day with you.”

“You have a pool table and you don’t practice?”

“Did you?”

“Dammit, Dalton. Stop doing that!” I barked.

Launching off the chaise, he stood over me with an angry scowl. Like warriors, fear and arousal clashed inside me.

“That tone, right there...the one that just came out of your sassy mouth? That’s not allowed when speaking to me...ever. Understood?”

Clit throbbing in time with my racing heart, I nodded and swallowed tightly.

“Use your words, baby girl.”

His deep, buttery voice slid over me like warm honey as he sat on the side of the chaise again.

“Yes. I understand.”

“Sir. The correct response is, I understand, *Sir*.”

“Sorry. Yes. I understand, Sir.”

“Good girl.”

I sat poised, waiting for Dalton to pummel me with a long, hairy lecture about my disrespectful tone, but he didn’t. He simply glanced out at the snow and smiled.

“What would you like to do, Blair...head to the game room and tease each other about our atrocious pools skills, or bundle up and go outside and make a snowman?”

“A snowman?” I grinned. “I’ve never made a snowman before.”

“What?” He barked. “Why not?”

“I wasn’t allowed to play in the snow because it would get tracked into

the house.”

“That’s the most absurd shit I’ve ever heard.” He shook his head and gaped.

“My nanny took me to the park a couple times after a big snow. But we only made snow angels.”

“That’s a sin. Do you have any winter wear upstairs....any snow pants, gloves, or boots?”

“No. The only boots I have are designer ones with high heels.”

“We’ll need to fix that. Give Baron a list of your sizes...shoes, dresses, etc.

“You don’t need to spend money on me, Dalton.”

“Are you arguing with me, baby girl?”

“No, Sir.”

“I didn’t think so.” He smirked. “Looks like we’re going to *attempt* to play pool then.”

I chuckled. “It will be fun.”

“Undoubtedly, but first, I have to do something that’s not fun.”

His voice had a strange edge to it that I couldn’t decipher. “What?”

“Stand up.”

Confusion wended through me as I complied.

“Face down, over my lap, baby girl,” Dalton commanded.

“Excuse me?” I blanched as panic punched through me. “W-why?”

“You lied to me,” Dalton calmly explained. “I have to punish you.”

“I didn’t lie to you?”

“That’s two lies, now.” He scowled. “Be very careful what words you let roll off your tongue.”

Trembling like a leaf, I swallowed the fear lodged in my throat and dragged in a shallow breath. “What are you accusing me of lying about, Sir?”

“It’s not an accusation, girl. It’s a fact.”

“What did I lie to you about, Sir?”

My cheeks were blazing, like my ass would be if I didn’t figure a way out of this terrifying situation...fast.

“You said you knew I was in the lifestyle because Leesha addressed me as Ink when I came to the Dazzling Bean the other day. She didn’t. She didn’t address me by any name, simply welcomed me. I know this because she apologized to me last night for blurting out that I was a Dominant from Genesis as I climbed off my motorcycle.”

Oh, shit! Leesha! What the fuck? You just threw me under the bus. You weren't supposed to confess!

“While I appreciate the lengths you were willing to go to in order to protect your friend, I won't tolerate lies between us.”

“I'm sorry, Sir. It's just—”

“Don't. Don't waste your breath,” he warned. “There will never be a valid excuse for you lying to me. Not now. Not ever. Is that crystal clear?”

“Yes, Sir,” I whispered, trying to harness the outrage and embarrassment climbing through me.

“Good, girl. Let's get this punishment out of the way. Pull down your pants, and drape yourself across my legs.”

CHAPTER TEN



Dalton

I *don't want you or anyone else controlling me.*

The instant the words had spilled off Blair's tongue, not only had a lightbulb gone off in my head, but they'd started spooling through my brain on an endless loop. I'd assured her I was nothing like her father. My claim had obviously fallen on deaf ears.

A simple vow was never going to be enough to convince Blair to willingly hand control over to me. I had to prove the submission I sought from her didn't involve the same tricks, ploys, and manipulation her father had exacted.

I knew I was fucked the minute I told Blair to pull down her pants. I didn't realize just how fucked until she began sliding them over the flare of her hips. When I caught the first glimpse of her pale skin, I clenched my hands to keep from sinking my fingers into her tempting flesh and dragging her clothes off with my teeth.

Trembling like a leaf, she continued slowly tugging the fabric toward her knees. The sight of her lacy thong had my cock roaring to life. I started to sweat. And when the scent of her musky, feminine heat hit my nose, saliva pooled in my mouth. I could taste her warm, sweet nectar coating my tongue all over again.

I'd done some foolish things in life, but none as painfully masochistic as this.

Fuck. Me.

When Blair reached for the delicate lace at her hips, I shook my head.

“Leave your thong on.”

Please! That little barrier is my only salvation. You take those off and I'll be stabbing my fingers inside you, dragging orgasms from your wicked body until you pass the fuck out.

“I-I've never been spanked before. What do I do?” she whispered.

Her confession sent a my excitement spiking. I was going to be the first person on earth to redden her ass. I extended my hand and guided her quaking body over my lap. I raised my hand and hovered it over her lush, milky-white cheeks. My cock jerked and strained, as if searching for a way out of my sweats to squeeze inside Blair's snug little cunt.

Sorry, pal. You're getting nothing but my fist.

That fact made me want to howl.

“Wait up,” Blair blurted, snapping her head up and flashing me a look of panic. “I don't want to do this.”

“Rule number two is no talking during punishment.”

“Two? You haven't even told me what one is yet.”

Her tone dripped with so much exasperation and fear, a part of me wanted to reassure her that I had no intention of punishing her as harshly as she was imagining. But I couldn't. It was imperative that I climb inside her head, reinforce my role as her Dom, and start building the foundation of our power exchange by setting boundaries.

“My apologies, baby girl. Rule one...the cardinal rule of submission is you don't always get what you want, but I'll make damn sure you get what you need.”

“That's all good and fine, but I don't *need* a spanking. I swear, I'll never lie to you again.”

“I'm happy to hear that, but you're still getting spanked. Think of it as a reminder for you to keep that promise,” I replied, skimming my hand over her supple orbs and swallowing back a moan. “Remember those safe words we discussed earlier? Red? Yellow? Green?”

“Am I going to need one?” Blair screeched.

“Maybe.” I shrugged, purposely frowning to keep from grinning. “If you do, use it. Understood?”

“Dalton... Please, you don't need—”

I cut her off with a quick, stinging slap. As the sweet burn spread over my palm, Blair jolted and screamed.

“Son of a bitch.” Lifting her head, she looked over her shoulder and

pinned me with a seething glare. “That fucking hurt.”

As she tried to wiggle free, I banded an arm around her waist and held her in place. “Rule number three...no cursing.”

“Fuck that. Fuck this. And fuck you! Let me up, Dalton. Now!”

“Fuck is not a safe word, baby girl.”

As she frantically struggled for freedom, I brought my hand down against her blushing backside.

“Dalton, I swear to God...if you don’t let go of me this fucking second, I’m going to—”

Before she could finish her threat, I spanked her harder. Then soothed her burning buns with my stinging palm. “Stop talking *and* cursing, baby girl. You’re making this harder than it has to be.”

Blair issued a humorless scoff and scowled. “Fine. Red. There. I said it. Now let me the fuck up.”

“You’re fine right where you are for a minute. Tell me why you used your safe word,” I instructed, ignoring her defiant glare.

“Because I-I...”

“You promised not to lie to me again. Remember? Why. Did. You. Use. Your. Safe word?”

“Because this is humiliating!” she growled.

If Blair had been a sub at the club, I would have lifted her off my lap and walked away. I also would have instructed her to start attending the submissive classes held at Genesis each Saturday morning. But she wasn’t. She was my sub in training. My responsibility.

Cinching her tighter, I leaned in close to her ear. “If your only takeaway from this punishment is humiliation, you’re not focusing on my Dominance or your submission. Pride, like lies, has no place between us, baby girl. Your punishment is over. I’m calling red. We’re done here.”

As I slowly released her, Blair remained draped over my lap. She didn’t bolt upright or run away like I expected. Instead, she rolled to her side—rubbing against my rigid erection, sending sparks of need pinging through me—then stared at me in unadulterated confusion, contrition, and raw rage.

“What are you thinking?”

“I don’t know how to put it into words. I’ve never felt like this before.”

“Try,” I coaxed. “I need to know what’s going on in your head.”

“It’s too much. I don’t know how to process it.”

“First of all, you don’t get to process it by yourself. That’s part of *my* job.

Now tell me what you're feeling."

"I'm sad and angry and embarrassed all at the same time."

I gently lifted Blair off my lap, then eased her onto her feet between my legs. Keeping my gaze locked on hers—and not the skimpy scrap of lace covering her succulent cunt—I pulled her yoga pants up and over her hips.

"Why are you sad?"

"I'm sad because I failed. I always fail, just ask my father."

"Thankfully, he's not here right now. So, I'm asking you...who did you fail? Me or yourself?"

"Both of us."

"Wrong. You didn't fail at all. Instead of choosing to surrender, you chose fight and flight. Do you know why?"

"Because I was pissed."

"Why?"

"Because it was humiliating. You spanking my ass wasn't remotely close to the kind of spankings I've read about."

"First of all, the books you've read are fiction. This is real life. Humiliation was simply an emotional reaction because the spanking was *unfamiliar*. You didn't fail me or yourself by fighting me. That's human nature. What does concern me is the fact that you forgot all about the promise I made you earlier...the one about never hurting you."

"But it *did* hurt."

I arched a brow. "No. My spanking stung. The only thing *hurt* was your pride."

Blair scowled. "Are we done here?"

"Not by a long shot. But we'll take a break...for now. You ready to play some pool?"

"I don't feel like it anymore. I just want to go to my room and...think."

As she turned and headed toward the door, every cell in my body screamed to stop her, but I didn't. Blair needed time to process...but not too much. Her concept of the power exchange was still in its infancy. If I backed off, she'd climb deep inside her head, and likely reject my Dominance along with the submission she didn't know how to embrace yet.

I wasn't going to stop until I'd finally introduced Blair to the desires she was fighting.

But making it even harder to keep from bounding up the stairs after her was the fear of sub drop. Though I hadn't spanked Blair to the point of

tasting subspace, it was my duty to check on her emotional wellbeing.

Pacing the sunroom, I waited three interminable minutes before hauling ass to her room. Standing in the hallway, I steeled myself to hear her crying, then pressed my ear against her closed door. Inside, Blair wasn't crying. She was cursing like a sailor.

"How could that asshole leave me like this?"

Leave you like what, baby girl?

I raised my hand and tapped the wood.

"Who is it?" she barked.

"It's me." Turning the knob, I strode into her room.

As Blair jolted off the bed, she quickly tucked something beneath her pillow before pinning me with a scowl. "I didn't tell you to come in."

"It's my house," I reminded her. Biting back a smirk, I strode toward her, curious to find out what she'd hidden.

"My apologies, your Lordship. How utterly stupid of me to assume this was my private space. What do you want, Dalton?"

Fighting the urge to take her across my knees again and spank the sass out of her, I simply arched a brow. "What's under the pillow?"

"Nothing that concerns you."

Angst rolled off her in waves. That coupled with the fact Blair didn't say a thing about me answering her question with a question, spoke volumes. And when she swallowed tightly and purposely plopped down on the pillow, I *had* to know what she was hiding.

"Do you not understand what I need time to think means?"

"Stand up, baby girl," I instructed, ignoring her haughty attitude.

"No." She lifted her chin defiantly.

"Why not?"

"Because I've humiliated myself enough for one day."

Hiding my disappointment that she was already rejecting everything I'd tried to teach her, I leaned in and reached beneath the pillow. Clearly, the three minutes I'd given her to process her emotions were three minutes too many.

The instant my fingers surrounded the smooth, cool cylinder, I knew what Blair had been hiding. The fact I was now fisting a vibrator that had probably been inside her slick pussy hundreds of times made me jealous as fuck.

After pulling the hot-pink vibe free, I lifted it to my nose and inhaled. Sadly, I couldn't smell her on the toy. With a mortified groan, Blair covered

her bright-red face with her hands.

I bit back a chuckle and cleared my throat. “It’s quite ironic this issue has come up now. I’d actually planned to talk to you about masturbating while we were playing pool.”

Blair dropped her hands. “What about it?”

“Rule number four...no masturbating or coming without permission.”

“I thought you said we weren’t going to have sex.”

“We’re not. But at some point, you *will* come for me. Using orgasms and orgasm denial as a teaching tool can be quite...motivating.”

“So, teaching me about submission is what...just a huge mind fuck?”

Yes. *The best kind.*

“Remember those expectations I said you weren’t going to like? Yeah, this is one of them. Your orgasms are now mine, baby girl. They don’t belong to you.”

“What?” she bit out indignantly.

“They’re mine. Unless, of course, you’ve changed your mind about me teaching you. If that’s the case”—I offered Blair the vibe—“buzz yourself off all you want.”

Knowing my ultimatum could come back and bite me in the ass, I prayed the submissive inside Blair would scream loud enough to sway her decision. But as she pressed her lips in a thin angry line and stared at the vibe, my gut told me she wasn’t listening to her heart.

“I can’t believe how stupid I am.” Shoving the toy away, Blair rolled off the bed and squeezed past me before pacing the room.

“Don’t degrade yourself like that again.”

“Why not? It’s true. For years, I told myself you were nothing like my father. Hell, you even tried to convince me. But you’re exactly like him.”

Her comparison to Jamison stung, but I shoved the insult away. “Why? Because I’m setting boundaries?”

“Boundaries? Ha,” she scoffed. “If I wanted you to control me, like him, I’d give you a remote. Listen and listen good, Dalton. I won’t sacrifice my independence for *any* man again. Not even you.”

Inwardly cursing Jamison for fucking with Blair’s psyche for so many years, I met her furious glare with a smirk.

“I don’t want your independence, baby girl. I want your submission. Unlike your father, I respect you and the lifestyle enough to never try to take it from you. Once you figure that out, we’ll either continue exploring the

power exchange...or not. That's up to you. Until then"—I tossed the vibe on the bed—"knock yourself out."

Leaving Blair fuming and gaping, I turned and strode from the room, closing the door behind me.

She needed time to cool off. And I needed time to come up with a way to heal her soul from all the damage Jamison had done.

Scrubbing a hand over my head, I blew out a heavy sigh, then made my way downstairs to my office. After pulling out my cell phone, I placed it on my desk before staring at the device while weighing my options.

In the past, when I found myself between a rock and a hard place, I merely shoved the rock away. But this wasn't your average rock. It was a motherfucking boulder. I had two choices; I could be proactive or reactive. Since reactive wasn't my style, I plucked up the phone and punched Jamison's number.

"Hey! If it isn't the man of the hour!" Jamison happily greeted.

He wasn't going to be happy for long.

"There's something I need to tell you."

"Damn. You sound grim. Did Oliver change his mind?"

"No. This has nothing to do with business."

"All right. What's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong." *Not yet.* "I ran into Blair the other day at a coffee shop downtown."

"Shit," Jamison muttered. "Look, I'm sorry, Dalton. I didn't mean to—"

"What? Lie to me? Yes, you did. Look, I'm not going to sit here and ream you a new asshole for saving face. Though, I find it disturbing you felt the need to hide the truth from me in the first place. I called to let you know Blair will be staying with me for a while."

"Why?" Jamison barked.

"*You* know why," I snarled. "What did you expect her to do...live under a bridge?"

"No. I want her to move back home...where she belongs."

Locking down my rage, I dragged in a calming breath.

"Clearly, that's not what *she* wants. Look, whatever issues you two are having are none of my business." *Liar.* "I just wanted you to know that Blair is safe and off the streets."

"What did she do? Call you and ask for help?"

"No. When I was downtown yesterday, I saw her standing on the curb,

waiting for a bus. So, I offered her a ride home. When we arrived at the shithole she'd been living in, her landlord was tossing her belongings on the sidewalk. I soon found out *why* he was doing that."

Jamison didn't say a fucking word.

"She'll be staying with me until she can get back on her feet. Hopefully, her next landlord won't be bribed to kick her out."

"Blair *chose* to live in that shithole," Jamison bellowed.

"Like I said, whatever issues you two are having has nothing to do with me. I trust the fact that since you're her father, you'll find a way to work them out. In the meantime, you and I will continue conducting business as usual, correct?"

"Fine," Jamison bit out. "But you'd better hide your valuables. That ungrateful little brat has been sneaking into the house when I'm gone and stealing things."

My thoughts zipped back to yesterday, when Blair pulled her purse from the plastic bag.

It's designer, and worth a lot. I was going to pawn it on my way home today.

"I'll keep that in mind."

"If you're helping her out under some misguided notion of obligation to me, cut her loose. You have no idea the trouble and havoc that girl is capable of wreaking. *I do. I've lived it.* Why do you think I sent her away to boarding school? I hate to say it, but my daughter is a very troubled girl."

Gee, I wonder how she got that way?

"Understood. I'll touch base with you tomorrow."

"One more thing. I know this goes without saying, but...keep your hands to yourself, Barnes, or you and me are going to have serious problems," Jamison warned before ending the call.

"It's way too late to start playing the concerned father now, asshole. Blair can legally do whatever the fuck she wants," I muttered, sliding my phone to the desk.

Tamping down the desire to punch Jamison ugly, I stood and strolled across the room. As I stared at the thick blanket of snow outside, I worked to tamp my fury with Jamison until my cell phone rang.

"You better not be calling to lecture me more about not violating your daughter," I grouched before reaching my desk and snagging the device.

When I saw Mika's name on the caller ID, relief slid through me.

“Hey, man. How’s baby life going?”

“Fantastic. I know every parent says this, but Emilia is the prettiest baby on the planet.”

“Of course, she is.” I chuckled to myself.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call sooner, but thanks for dealing with Lewis the other night. I’m sorry you had to go through that whole bogus arrest, man.”

“It’s fine. Kellan came down, ripped the sergeant a new asshole, and we were on our way.”

“I know. Drake filled me in. I just wish I’d been there to deal with Lewis myself.”

“I’m not. Tossing that piece of shit to the curb felt fucking awesome.”

“I bet it did. I’m a little jealous.” Mika chuckled. “Dad and Sarah are going to stay a few more weeks, so if you can keep an eye on things until Wednesday or Thursday night, I’d appreciate it.”

“Whenever. There’s no rush. Everyone is stepping up, pitching in, and sharing the load. The place is running smoothly.”

“I figured as much. We’ve got a damn amazing family.”

“Yes, we do.”

“Do you ever wonder if it’s a fluke that we all get along so well? I mean...do you think members at other clubs are as tight as we are at Genesis?”

For someone with a laid-back, go with the flow reputation, Mika’s philosophical question surprised me. Either lack of sleep due to the new baby was getting to him, or something heavy was weighing on his mind.

“I’ve never really thought about it. Why?”

“I’m thinking of expanding, but I have to make a decision ASAP.”

“You mean like renovating the club to make it bigger?”

“No. Opening another Genesis in a new city.”

I sat up straighter in my chair. “Go on.”

“An old friend of mine owns a club in Dallas. It’s been around for decades. He’s got a ton of long-time, dedicated members...like Genesis. A couple months ago, a smaller club in a town called Denton suddenly closed up. He’s had an influx of new members, which is great, but he wants to retire.”

“Has he made you an offer to buy him out?”

“Yeah,” Mika exhaled heavily.

“Do you know what shape it’s in, financially?”

“Yeah. I’ve seen the profit and loss statement for the last decade. It’s solid. So solid, the dude just paid cash for a luxury beachfront villa for him and his sub on St. Barts.”

It sounded like a no-brainer, but Mika was hesitating.

“Is his asking price too high?”

“No. He’s asking a million-five. I’ll recoup that in the first six months.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“There’s a shit-ton more than one,” Mika scoffed. “First of all, leaving Chicago isn’t an option. Julianna would never leave Hope, and Drake and Trevor would kill me if I tried taking their daughter’s biological mother away. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg.”

As Mika began listing the litany of other issues, I heard every word he said, though my brain churned in a completely different direction.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Blair

Frozen in place like a statue, I stared at the vibe on the bed while confusion, anger, and hopelessness careened through me. How had something so simple as taking the sexual edge off turned into such a horrible nightmare?

I couldn't help my body's reaction when Dalton eased me onto his lap. Every hormone inside me cheered. Even though he'd made it clear sex wasn't in my future, when I felt his thick, hot erection throbbing against my flesh, I wanted to shove him back on the chaise, rip off his sweatpants, and make all my kinky fantasies come true. Aroused beyond reason, I masked my disappointment and tried to save face by asking a million questions, then started throwing shade.

But the only thing I actually accomplished was fucking everything up.

I had to fix it, but I didn't know how.

"Leesha would," I murmured before grabbing my cell phone and punching in her number.

"I need your help," I groaned.

"What's wrong? Are you hurt? Where are you?" Like rapid gunfire, she pelted me with questions.

"I'm fine...sort of. I mean, I'm not hurt...just confused."

"Where. Are. You?" she bit out.

"I'm...I'm at Dal...err, I'm at Sir Ink's house."

"You're at his *house*?" Leesha shrieked. "What the fuck are you doing there?"

Plopping down on the side of the bed, I proceeded to spill my guts. I told

her everything, from meeting Dalton as a kid to sitting in his guest room being clawed alive by fear.

“All right. Take a slow, deep breath and wipe your tears,” she said in a calm, soothing voice.

“Okay.” I sniffed, then followed her instructions.

“You know I love you, but you need a dose of tough love, boo.”

“I already know I fucked up. Tell me how to fix it.”

“First of all, we *all* fuck up. The question is why? *Why* are you fighting his Dominance and your submission so hard? Be honest.”

“I’m scared.”

“I know. I have a sneaking suspicion why, but I need to hear it from your mouth.”

Twenty minutes later, I padded downstairs to find Dalton sitting in his office, lost in thought. When I tapped on the door, he snapped his head my way, then held me with a penetrating stare.

“Come in.”

His brittle tone ramped my angst even higher. But I didn’t chicken out; I simply nibbled my bottom lip, and walked straight to his desk. Then I lifted my shirt and tugged the vibrate from the waistband of my yoga pants.

I’d hidden it there in case I accidentally ran into Baron.

When I placed the toy beside Dalton’s phone, a faint smile tugged his lips. “Did you use it?”

“No, Sir.”

As he stood and rounded the desk, his expression softened. Without a word, he threaded his fingers through mine and led me from his office. I was dying to know where Dalton was taking me, but remained silent as Leesha’s words echoed in my ears like a mantra. *You’ll never experience his Dominance, unless you give him your trust.*

Dalton guided me all the way to the opposite end of his house, then through a door, and into a massive game room.

“Feel like playing now?” he asked, nodding toward the pool table.

“Yes, Sir.” I smiled softly.

He fell silent again while he racked the balls. After handing me a stick, he lined up his own with the cue ball, then turned his head and asked, “Why’d you change your mind, baby girl?”

“I called Leesha,” I announced as the balls exploded in all directions with a deafening crack.

“Good girl,” he murmured before sinking the yellow ball into a corner pocket.

Relieved he wasn’t upset that I’d sought her advice, I still had a whole lot to atone for. “I’m sorry.”

“For?”

“Everything. Lying. Fighting your Dominance, my submission, and my punishment. Comparing you to my father when deep down I *know* you’re nothing like him.”

“Then why did you?” he asked, setting his stick on the table.

“It was a knee-jerk reaction. I was trying to protect myself.”

Dalton lifted the stick from my hand and placed it on the green felt beside his before guiding me across the room toward an intricately carved wooden bar with a white, marble top. On the wall behind it was a huge, big screen television. After helping me onto a thickly padded barstool, Dalton stepped behind the bar and opened one of the cabinets. But it wasn’t a cabinet. It was a refrigerator, stocked with water, sodas, juices, beers, and bottles of wine.

“What would you like to drink?”

“A lemon-lime soda would be wonderful, thank you.”

He grabbed one for himself, and popped them open, then sat beside me.

“Protecting yourself from what?” he asked, handing me a soda.

Clasping the can, I dragged in a deep breath. “Leesha explained that I was doing you a disservice by not telling you why it’s so hard for me to trust people. I could give you a million examples, but one sticks out in my mind the most.

“The night before I turned nine, we were sitting in the dining room eating dinner. I asked if Cook could make some cupcakes, so I could take them to school for my birthday. All the kids did it. Father got pissed and told me he didn’t pay our cook to feed a bunch of snot-nosed brats and nobody gave a shit about my birthday anyway.”

“What the fuck?” Dalton murmured.

“He was punishing me for not getting an A on my spelling test. The next morning at breakfast my parents didn’t say a word about my birthday until my nanny, Anya, handed me a card and a present. Father’s face turned red with rage, but I ignored him and opened her gift. It was a little porcelain English bulldog.”

“The one on the dresser upstairs?”

“How did you—”

“I saw it this morning when I checked to see if you were awake. So, you like English bulldogs?”

“Yes. I think they’re precious.” I grinned, then sobered. “I wasn’t allowed to have a real dog, so Anya got me the next best thing.”

“Go on,” Dalton prompted, blinking the sympathy from his eyes.

“After I’d opened her gift, father told me to take it to my room. I was halfway up the stairs when he started yelling at Anya. He told her to stop interfering with his punishments, and that until I started making straight A’s, she wasn’t to buy me anything.”

“But you were only in what...third grade?”

“Yes. That was the day I started failing at least one test in every subject.”

“Why?”

“Because Anya was the only adult, until you, who showed me kindness. But she was more than my nanny. She was my tutor, too. I didn’t want father to fire her, even though he nearly did that same night.”

“What happened?”

“Anya and I got busted.” Though it wasn’t funny at the time, I couldn’t help but smirk at the memory. “On the way to school, she stopped at a little bakery and bought me two dozen cupcakes. That night at dinner, my mother informed us that one of my classmate’s mothers had called to find out where she’d gotten the cupcakes. The mom wanted to send them for her daughter’s birthday, too.”

“Oh, shit.”

“Yeah, it got ugly, fast. When Father accused me of talking Anya into buying them, she stepped in and confessed it was her idea. At first he’d told her she was fired. But then Mother whined about not having time to hire another babysitter for me, so Father banished me and Anya to our rooms for a month.”

“A whole month?”

“Yeah. It was great, actually. Except for sleeping and going to school, she and I spent the time laughing, doing makeovers, and shopping online.” I paused and tamped down the ache squeezing my heart. “When I turned fourteen, Father decided I was too old for a nanny and fired her.”

“Do you still keep in touch with her?” Dalton asked with a sympathetic frown.

“I tried, but the agency she worked for wouldn’t give me any information. It was *confidential*. I have no idea where she is or how to find her.”

“I’m sorry. I can tell she was an amazing and positive influence on your life.”

“So were you,” I softly reminded him.

“I wasn’t around enough to help you the way Anya did.”

“Trust me. After Father fired her, you didn’t *want* to be around me. I was mad at the whole world. So mad, I gave new meaning to the word defiant. Do you know why Father shipped me off to boarding school?”

“No, but I’d like to.”

“A week after Anya left, I swiped the most expensive bottle of scotch my father owned. I was going to sneak out and meet up with a boy from English class at the park down the street. I’d barely made it out the front door before Father caught me. He yelled my name so loud; I dropped the bottle and it shattered at his feet. When he saw the label, he went berserk and dragged me to my room.”

“Did he beat you?”

“No, that would have taken too much effort,” I drawled. “He shoved me in my room and slammed the door, then did what he did best...ignored me. Three days later, I came home from school to find my suitcases packed and sitting by the door. The chauffeur came in a second or two behind me and hauled my luggage out the door. When he was done, my father didn’t say a word to me, simply told the driver, *You know where to go and what to do*. Then he turned and walked away. I didn’t see him again until he came to the school to inform me that I was going to Yale to become a lawyer. He’d bribed my way in.”

Dalton scrubbed a hand over his face, then blew out a huge breath.

“After I graduated from boarding school, I packed up my car and drove to Connecticut. It took me three years of skipping classes, failing tests, trashing the sorority house, and literally partying my way out of Yale, but I succeeded.”

“You *partied* your way out of Yale?”

“Yeah. It wasn’t one of my prouder moments when the assistant dean called me to his office and politely asked me not to return in the fall. But for the defiant young woman still pissed to the gills at her father, it was an unmitigated victory.”

“Why didn’t I know any of this was going on?”

“You think the great Jamison Bartholomew Brighton would risk you finding out what a shitty father he was? Get real, Dalton. You know how

pretentious he is.”

“I do, but still... What happened next?”

“I cleaned out my dorm, loaded up my car, and headed home. I drove from New Haven to Lake Forrest while Father blew up my phone. When I reached his estate, I didn’t know if he’d even let me in. But I pushed the button and the gates opened. He didn’t look at me or speak to me for six whole weeks.

“Of course, by then, I’d already accepted the job at the ad agency. Ironically, that’s what prompted him to speak to me again. He wanted to know where I was going every morning. When I told him, he had a total meltdown. He was beyond livid. After reaffirming what a failure I was, he demanded I quit and enroll in the law program at the University of Chicago. When I told him no, he yelled some more, then finally asked how long I planned to defy him. I decided to be honest. I told him I would rebel as long as he continued to manipulate me. He didn’t like my answer. His face turned red, and he pounded his fist on the table, then told me to grow up and find a career instead of some menial job.”

“Was it menial to you?”

“No. I loved working at the agency. That’s why he had me fired.”

“How did he manage that?”

“A little over three months ago, I’d gotten ready for work, then hurried downstairs to grab some breakfast to eat on my drive to the city. As I passed the dining room, Eather looked up from his phone and pointed to the chair beside him. I told him I was running late and didn’t have time for another one of his lectures. He scoffed and told me I needed to manage my time better, then proceeded to tell me—for the umpteenth time—how disappointed he was in me. How ashamed he was that, after wasting a fortune on securing me a spot at the most prestigious law college in the country, I’d pissed it away. When he began hounding me about law school again, I stood up and walked out the door.

“At three-thirty that afternoon, my boss, the owner of the agency, called me into his office. He grinned from ear-to-ear when he told me that one of the biggest companies in Chicago had just signed us as their agency of record. I was excited too, until he sent me a sympathetic grimace. When he told me the client was Brighton Bay, and due to a *conflict of interest* he had to let me go, I knew my father had set the whole thing up. I was devastated. I couldn’t wrap my head around my own father doing something so evil, so

underhanded, and so callously crushing to his own daughter. But he did.”

I hadn’t realized I was crying until Dalton wiped the tears from my cheeks with the pad of his thumb.

“I truly believe everything you’re telling me. But like you, I’m having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that the man I’ve been in business with for over ten years is capable of doing such horrific things to you...his only daughter.”

“He didn’t want me. Neither he nor mother did. I was a mistake...because I wasn’t a boy.”

“If you’re a mistake, you’re a beautiful one,” Dalton whispered as he leaned in and brushed a soft kiss over my lips. Clenching his jaw, he eased back and inhaled a deep breath. “What happened after your boss fired you?”

“I cleaned out my desk and started driving home. By then, white-hot rage had replaced my shock. I stormed into the house and straight to father’s office. Then, for the first time in my life, I unloaded all the hurt, resentment, and anger I’d kept locked inside me for the past twenty-two years. I said awful, hurtful things to him. But the saddest part is every word was true. When he called me an ungrateful bitch, I pulled all the credit cards from my wallet and tossed them on his desk. I told him he didn’t have to worry about being disappointed in me anymore, then ran to my room. I packed everything I could in a duffle bag, grabbed the two thousand dollars I’d managed to save from the safe in my closet, and ran out the front door.”

“Where did you go?”

“I started driving toward the city. I thought about simply flashing my driver’s license at the Brighton Bay, downtown. I could have stayed there for free, but I didn’t want anything to do with him. So, I bought a cheap bottle of wine, checked into the Motel 8 near O’Hare, then cried and drank myself to sleep.”

Dalton tensed. His expression seemed overly concerned.

“Don’t worry. I was safe. The hotel had two security guards.”

“Right.” He nodded as his expression softened. “Why is Jamison doing all this to you?”

“He’s trying to destroy the life I’m struggling to build because he’s pissed I won’t fulfill his dream...won’t follow the life-path he’s chosen for me, and become a lawyer. He’s pissed that I rebelled and moved out of his house... out from under his controlling, manipulative thumb. He’s probably pissed he can’t threaten to take my phone away anymore.

“Unfortunately, I didn’t know until *after* losing my temper, and severing ties with my father, that being poor is hard. Still, every morning when I woke up in that crappy apartment, I was truly happy.

“I’d finally tasted freedom, and it’s damn addicting. Being able to spread my wings without him forcing them back into his ideal mold...living life on my own terms is beyond priceless. Or, rather it was until he took it all away. I’m down right now, but thanks to *you*, I’m not out. I’ll get back on my feet, because I refuse to let him destroy me. Even if I have to live under a bridge and eat out of dumpsters, I’ll never let him control me again.”

“I won’t let it come to that, baby girl,” Dalton vowed.

“Me either. He’s not going to win. I will rise up from these ashes and carry on,” I vowed, raising a fist in the air.

Dalton smiled. “Damn right, you will. You’re one of the strongest women I’ve ever met. Thank you for opening up and sharing all that with me. The puzzle pieces are finally snapping into place.”

“What puzzle pieces?”

“The other day at the Dazzling Bean when you told me that you’d missed me. You didn’t mean sexually, you meant emotionally, right?”

“Yeah,” I whispered.

Dalton cupped my chin and delved deeply into my eyes. “If Jamison ever tries to destroy your life again, I’ve got your back. And when it comes time for you to spread your wings, I’ll help you fly, baby girl. Understood?”

“I can’t ask you to do more for me, Dalton. You’ve already gone above and beyond—”

“You damn well better ask if you need anything.” When I scowled, he cupped my cheek. “Close your eyes.”

Oh, god. Is he going to kiss me again?

Praying he would, I instantly complied.

“Good girl. Now think about all the Doms and subs you watched at the club the other night.” As if he’d waved a magic wand, the images came to life in my mind. “Were any of the scenes you witnessed abusive?”

“No,” I replied emphatically, still keeping my eyes closed.

“What about the edgier types of play? The ones that caused the subs to bleed. Would you call them abusive?”

“No. I mean...I didn’t want to trade places with any of them, and it blew my mind how they could take all that pain and look so...peaceful.”

“So, nothing you saw that night was the least bit abusive?”

“Definitely not.”

“Would you change your mind if I told you that each of those Dominants were controlling their subs?” My eyes flew open as the familiar knee-jerk panic roared through me. “There are two types of control, baby girl,” Dalton continued. “Good and bad. I don’t use the bad kind on anyone, especially subs.”

“But...how do I overcome twenty-two years of bad control?”

“You don’t. That’s my job.” Dalton tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. “If you trust me enough, I can change the bad to good.”

CHAPTER TWELVE



Dalton

After Blair agreed to let me start altering her perception of control, I strapped on my emotional body armor and got to work. Deciding to battle her pride first, I took her shopping. When I pulled to the curb of a designer clothing store, she sent me a look of pure panic.

“Dalton, I-I can’t—”

“Build a snowman without proper winter wear. I know. That’s why we’re here.”

“Wait. You were really serious about that?” The awe in her voice and the tiny smile tugging the corners of her mouth warmed my heart.

“Hell yes.”

Of course, once she was in the dressing room, I pulled the salesclerk aside and instructed her to supply Blair with a new wardrobe, from top to bottom. Then I sat and enjoyed the hell out of Blair modeling each stunning, sexy outfit.

An hour and a half later, I handed the clerk my credit card.

“What are you doing?” Blair tersely whispered. “You can’t buy me all these clothes.”

“Watch me.” I arched a brow in warning.

“B-but, it’s too much.”

“Nothing is ever too much for you.”

“Aww,” The salesclerk gushed. “I wish I had a father like yours.”

Without missing a beat, Blair hugged my waist and lifted to her toes, and kissed my cheek. “He’s the best daddy on the planet.”

Daddy. Like a kick to the gut, filthy, cock-hardening images of Blair—wearing pigtails and little see-through nighty—dotted with tiny pink bows—sent dirty daddy fantasies blazing through my brain.

I'd done a bit of age play at the club but was never motivated to fully explore that particular fetish...until now.

Flashing Blair a wolfish grin, I bent and chastely kissed her forehead. "Anything for you, baby girl."

Blair's eyes flashed hot, sending even more decadent daddy scenarios unraveling in my mind, and jarring me with a massive epiphany. I'd found the key to unlock her psyche and heal the scars Jamison had left on her soul.

Pinging with excitement and ready to start putting my plan into action, I helped Blair into the passenger seat of the Escalade. Then loaded the packages in the back and headed home. She was concerningly quiet. I wanted to ask her what she was thinking, but needed to stop prompting her. It was up to Blair to drop her walls, to decide if she could risk being vulnerable enough to share, not only her past, but also her feelings with me. In a silent reminder that I was there with and for her, I reached over and threaded my fingers through hers.

Blair glanced my way and squeezed my hand with a pensive smile. "I know you don't want me thanking you, but—"

"Then don't." I grinned. "I enjoy pampering you, baby girl."

"But I feel guilty. Those clothes cost a fortune. I don't know how, but I *will* pay you back."

"No, you won't. Everything I bought you today is a *gift*."

"I appreciate that, but you don't have to spoil me, Dalton."

"Daddy, I'm no longer Dalton to you, baby girl. I'm Daddy or Sir," I corrected.

I couldn't miss her full body shudder or the way her breath caught in her throat. "You don't have to spoil me...*Daddy*"

Her breathless whisper sent my libido soaring. Tamping down a surge of lust, I stroked the pad of my thumb along the inside of her wrist. "I haven't even started yet, baby girl."

The quivering exhale spilling off her lips made my balls churn. Instead of imagining all the kinky ways I planned to spoil her, I focused on the snow packed roads and told her about the conversation I'd had with Jamison earlier. I omitted his accusations of her being a thief, as well as his warning to keep my hands to myself—a feat that grew impossibly harder by the minute.

Blair made a few snarky comments about the man, but mostly she was relieved I'd made the call.

Once home, we bundled up in our winter gear, and went outside.

The awe glowing on Blair's face reminded me of a kid on Christmas morning. It hurt my heart that she'd never been allowed to play in the snow, so I made us matching forts and taught her the joy of an old-fashioned snowball fight. I quickly learned that my little spitfire was competitive as hell, and had a wicked right arm. Blair tagged my ass more times than I could count. But it was her carefree and contagious laughter that hit me hardest.

The bitter wind blowing in off the lake bit our faces, but we didn't care. We were too busy laughing and rolling around in the snow while making angels before building the most epic snowman of all time. After draping my scarf around the neck of—what Blair had dubbed—Frosty the Snow Beast, she pulled out her cell phone. She took a million photos of the massive snow beast, as well as several selfies of us clowning around, laughing, and making faces beside it. The smile on her face and the laughter rolling off her throat filled me with pride. Snaking an arm around Blair's waist, I tucked her in close to my side before we ventured back into the house to change out of our wet clothes and get warm.

Twenty minutes later, Blair and I sat by a roaring fire in the family room, sipping hot chocolate. As a mouth-watering aroma wafted from the kitchen, I decided to start putting my plan in motion.

"I'll be back in a minute," I announced, rising from my chair. "I'm going to check with Baron about dinner."

"Take your time. I'll be right here...defrosting." She grinned up at me.

Fighting the urge to bend and claim her berry-ripe lips, I turned and headed toward the safety of the kitchen. As I entered Baron's consecrated space for the second time in one day, he arched a brow.

"Can I help you, Mr. B?"

"Yes. I need a favor."

When we'd finished ironing out the details, I trekked to my office before returning to the family room. Easing onto the ottoman in front of her, I handed Blair a notebook and a pen.

"What's this for?"

"Your daily journal. When you get home from work each day, I want you to spend thirty minutes writing in it."

"Writing what?"

“Anything you want. Thoughts. Feelings. Poetry. Dreams. Fears. Insecurities. Questions. What you put on the pages is entirely up to you.”

“I think I’m a little old to start keeping a *diary*.”

“It’s not a diary. Diaries are private. This isn’t. Every night before dinner you’ll give me your journal. I’ll read your entry for that day, and we’ll discuss what you’ve written.”

“What if I don’t want you reading what I wrote?”

“Then that tells me you want to keep secrets from me. Open, honest communication starts here.” I tapped the notebook.

“But what if I write something stupid?”

I shrugged. “Then you write something stupid. Don’t worry about *what* you write. Worry about what you *don’t* write. If you’re not willing to share what’s in your heart, I can’t unlock your submission.”

Blair stared into the fire, pondering my words, then gazed down at the notebook in her hand. “All right.”

“All right, *who*?”

“All right...Daddy,” she whispered.

Gaze stalled on her lips; I clenched my jaw as another rush of lust roared through me. If Baron hadn’t stepped in and announced dinner was ready, I would have wrecked her sinful mouth all the way to my room before violating her every way known to man.

As if reading my mind, Blair sucked in a ragged breath, then clutched her notebook and pen with trembling fingers. When she started to stand, I cupped her elbow and steadied her simply because I couldn’t keep from touching her. As she started to veer toward the kitchen, I gently guided her into the dining room. As I’d requested, Baron had arranged a romantic table for two, complete with fine bone china and flickering candles.

“Oh, wow,” Blair murmured, glancing up at me. “Do you eat dinner like this every night?”

“No. But I will from now on.” I glanced at Baron—standing in the doorway smirking—and gave him a barely perceptible nod.

“If you’ll please follow me, Miss Blair?” He stepped forward and extended his hand.

Confusion was written all over her face as she bounced an uneasy glance between Baron and me.

“Go with him, baby girl,” I instructed.

As he led her from the room, I sat and grinned to myself. Short minutes

later, the pair returned. Under my watchful eye, Blair placed my plate on the table in front of me, while Baron set hers down at the empty space beside me.

“Nicely done.” I smiled as Baron left the room.

“Thank you,” Blair murmured, easing onto the chair next to me, still wearing a confused expression.

Instead of cutting into the chicken marsala steaming on my plate, I waited for her to ask the questions I knew were swirling in her brain. It was only a long second before she opened her mouth.

“Will I be serving you dinner like this from now on?”

Though it was a small victory, I sent up a mental fist pump. “Yes, as well as preparing each meal.”

Blair blanched as a flicker of panic danced across her face. “But...I don’t know how to cook.”

“I know. That’s why Baron is going to start teaching you.”

Her jaw dropped, and her eyes grew wide. “Are you kidding?”

“No. Why would I?”

“Because he’s a world-class chef...I can barely heat up a can of soup.”

“Then you’ll have a lot to learn.” I winked.

Suspicion replaced her surprise. “Why are you doing all this for me?”

I leaned over and cupped her cheek. Stroking my thumb along her silky flesh, I smiled. “Because you’re worth it, baby girl.”



At five am the next morning, my alarm blared. Silencing the damn thing, I sat up as memories of waking each day at the same ungodly hour before heading to work with my dad pelted my brain. I didn’t miss the old bastard *or* the fucking alarm clock. With a muttered curse, I rolled out of bed, then showered and dressed before tapping on Blair’s door.

“I’m up,” she announced, pulling it open and holding the new tennis shoes I’d bought her the day before. “I just need five more minutes.”

“Take your time. I’ll meet you in the kitchen with...coffee.”

Blair let out a dreamy sigh. “Coffee. Yes. Thank you.”

I chuckled, glancing at the tangled sheets on her bed. Instead of tossing her to the mattress and messing them up even more, I brushed a feather-soft kiss to her lips, then forced myself to head downstairs.

When I picked her up from work at three, I handed Blair a piece of paper.

“What’s this?”

“A new task. They’re called affirmations.”

“What am I supposed to do with them?”

“Repeat them to yourself in the mirror each morning.”

Blair scoffed before reciting each phrase sarcastically. “I am enough. My past doesn’t dictate my future. My dreams matter. I am worthy of love. I can achieve good things in life. I am confident. I am brave. I am strong—” the sassy little brat then started singing a song I’d heard as a boy—“I am invincible. I am womannnn.”

A part of me wanted to pull her over my knees and blister her ass. But a bigger part celebrated. Blair was growing secure enough to speak her mind and be herself with me again. I leaned in and brushed a kiss to her lips, then smiled. “You’re still going to repeat them.”

“Dalton,” Blair groused.

“What’s my name?”

“Sorry. Daddyyyy,” she whined.

“Don’t argue, baby girl. They build character.” I winked.

She mulishly pressed her lips together and continued mentally reading the list.

Two days later, Gino delivered Blair’s car with a new battery and a refurbished motor. While I loathed getting up at the ass crack of dawn, I hated relinquishing my chauffeur duties even more. I enjoyed our conversations to and from the city. But Blair’s need for independence outweighed my need to hover over her like a helicopter.

Besides, I was exerting my control in other devious ways.

As the week winded down, Blair’s journal entries—that had started out short and unrevealing—had grown longer and more insightful. She was analyzing her feelings on a much deeper level than ever before. While she still wasn’t sure what she wanted to be when she “*grew up*,” Blair noted she didn’t want to go to Veterinary College anymore. She couldn’t stand the idea of seeing innocent animals suffering on a daily basis.

She still struggled with her affirmations, but no longer complained or tried to argue while I stood beside her each morning, watching and listening to her recite them in the mirror.

Truth be told, Blair wasn’t the only one struggling. Each morning when she brought me coffee in bed before heading to work, I prayed for strength.

Her growing submission called to me, like a siren's song, making it nearly impossible to remember why stripping her bare and dragging her beneath me wasn't an option.

Deep down, I knew it was only a matter of time before my resolve completely crumbled.

Scrubbing a hand over my face, I focused on the computer screen at my desk and opened an email from Oliver. Construction of Brighton Bay's newest luxury hotel, at Whitsundays Island, Australia had started. So far, it was running smoothly.

Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for my partnership with Jamison. Since informing him that Blair was living with me, his warm and friendly demeanor had turned arctic and aloof. I didn't care. I had zero fucks to give the cock-bag now. As long as he left Blair alone, I'd honor our contract and continue making money with the man. But there was no clause in the thing that stated we had to be friends.

Baron appeared in the doorway, dragging me from my thoughts.

"Mr. LaBrache is here to see you."

Mika is here? I didn't remember setting up a meeting, but quickly clicked on my calendar to make sure I wasn't losing my damn mind. Nope. No meetings with Mika.

"Thanks, Baron. Please send him in."

Seconds later, Mika tapped on the open door. With a smile, I waved him in, then stood and shook his hand. "What do I owe the honor?"

"Sorry for just stopping by. I was in the neighborhood and...I need to bend your ear."

"No need to apologize, my door is always open." I motioned him toward the couch. "You want something to drink?"

"No, thanks. I'm good," he replied as we both sat on the soft, leather cushions. "I bought the club in Dallas. Wired the money this morning."

"Congratulations." I grinned. "What made you take the plunge?"

"I had a video conference with the former owner. He introduced me to a Dom who takes care of the club when he's away. Kinda like you and Drake handle things when I'm gone. His name is Grant Holden. He goes by Blade at the club. We talked for a couple hours, and I gotta tell you, I got a really good vibe from the man. Anyway, long story short, he agreed to keep the place in Dallas running until I find someone to take charge of the place."

"That's fantastic, man. Got anybody in mind to run it for you?"

“I came by to see if *you* might be interested.”

“Me?” I barked, shocked beyond belief.

But as I opened my mouth to gracefully decline, something in my gut told me not to be so rash, so I quickly snapped it shut.

Mika cringed and nodded. “Sorry, man. I know this is out of left field. But you and Drake are about the only two people I trust enough to do the job. If it’s a hard no for you, that’s—”

“Weirdly, it’s not,” I interrupted. “I love Chicago, but unlike you, I don’t really have any roots here. I mean, I can work from just about anywhere on the planet. How much time can you give me to think about it?”

“As long as you need. There’s no rush. Grant said he’s good with however long it takes for me to find someone to oversee the club.”

I nodded. “All right. Lemme think about it for a bit, and I’ll get back with you.”

“Of course.” He smiled. “There’s no pressure, man. And regardless of what you decide, you and me will still be rock-solid. Understood?”

I shot him a *bitch please* stare and tossed out a sarcastic, “Yes, Sir,” before we both laughed.

“Sorry, bro. Habit,” Mika chuckled.

“I totally *understand*.”

After he left, I pondered his proposal for several hours. Still undecided, I tucked the opportunity away and began typing a reply to Oliver’s email when my cell phone rang. After a glance at Blair’s name on the caller ID and the clock, I smiled. “You done for the day?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Be careful driving.”

“I always am.”

“Is there something *else* you need to tell me?”

“Oh, yes. Sorry, Sir. Lemon bars.”

In an effort to build her confidence and ease her angst about learning to cook, I tasked her with telling me what dessert Leesha offered at the shop each day. Then, with Baron’s help, Blair would create the same sweet treat and serve it after dinner. So far, she’d blown my tastebuds away.

“I’ll let Baron know. See you shortly.”

After ending the call, I strolled to the kitchen. “It’s lemon bars tonight.”

“Ewww.” Baron wrinkled his nose. “That will *never* pair with seared pork loin and nectarine glaze.”

“I’ll suffer through it.” I chuckled before strolling back to my office.

I’d barely sat down when Blair called again...something so out of the norm that the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end.

“Hello.”

“Someone slashed my tires,” she sobbed.

Jamison, you cocksucking, motherfucking bastard!

“All of them?” I barked. Bolting out of my chair, I sprinted from my office and down the hall.

“Yes,” she moaned as a siren screamed in the background.

“Go back inside and lock the doors. I’m on my way,” I instructed, biting back a growl as I dashed into the kitchen.

After blurting the situation to Baron, I raced to the garage and hopped into my Escalade. As I hauled ass toward the city, I lowered the window, hoping the tepid spring air would blow the anger off me. It didn’t. Fighting the demand to call Jamison and verbally tear him to shreds, I gripped the steering wheel tighter. The bastard had pulled this trick to get a reaction. Maybe not from me, but definitely from Blair. Thankfully, I knew calling her father was the last thing my stubborn girl would do.

Shoving down the brutality I wanted to inflict on Jamison, I focused on the fact that instead of trying to deal with the situation on her own, Blair had called *me* for help.

I’d earned her trust.

My methods were working.

It was time to start pushing her limits.

But when I arrived at the Dazzling Bean and saw her sitting at a table, holding her head in her hands, I knew today wasn’t the day to start. The sight of her slumped shoulders made me want to rip Jamison’s cold, dead heart out of his chest. Sucking in a deep breath, I slammed a lid on my fury and lightly tapped on the door. Blair jolted and jerked her hands from her face. Blinking the flash of fear from her eyes, she jumped up from the table and flipped open the lock.

When I stepped inside, she threw her arms around me and held on tight. “I’m sorry you had to come all the way down here, but I didn’t know who else to call.”

Easing back, I pinned her with a censoring stare and cupped her chin. “If you *hadn’t* called me, I’d be tucking you into bed with a red-hot ass tonight, baby girl.”

The arousal flaring in her eyes made my palm itch to turn her over my knee anyway. And when I glanced at the metal door behind the counter, a tsunami of memories—memories of her naked on the tall metal table, writhing and moaning while I tongue-fucked her sweet, hot cunt to orgasm—roared through my brain. Every cell in my body screamed to toss Blair over my shoulder, carry her to the kitchen, and drown in her slick nectar again. But I couldn't afford to lose control. Not here. Not now.

Swallowing back a growl, I kissed her forehead. "Where's Leesha?"

"She had a migraine and went home early."

"All right. Let's get your tires fixed."

"How? I only have one spare."

"Don't worry. I've got this."

I whipped out my phone and punched in Gino's number, who promised to send his tow truck over immediately. After locking up the shop, we climbed into my SUV and drove to the alley behind the building. When I got out and squatted to inspect Blair's tires, my fury spiked even higher. All four sidewalls had been slashed wide open. A foreboding chill raced up my spine.

This wasn't an act of manipulation; it was an act of rage.

Frustration and disappointment clawed through me.

Blair was still keeping secrets.

Dragging in a calming breath, I climbed back inside my SUV and studied Blair intently. "What's really going on between you and Jamison?"

She tensed and paled while a myriad of emotions swirled in her eyes, but when she tore her hand from mine, I could palpably feel all the inroads I'd made swirling down the drain. No way was I going to sit back and let that happen.

Gripping her chin, I narrowed my eyes. "Tell me," I softly growled.

Pain etched her face as she sucked in a deep breath. "My father never hid the fact that he's a raging misogynist. He's always said women are weak and helpless. He despises me because I'm not the son he wanted to groom to take over his empire."

I realized then how much my dad and Jamison had in common. Still, his abhorrent actions toward Blair didn't make sense.

"If he loathes you so much, why is he doing everything in his power to force you to move back home? And why pressure you so fucking hard to go to law school?"

"Law school was never the *real* issue. It was just an excuse...a tool to

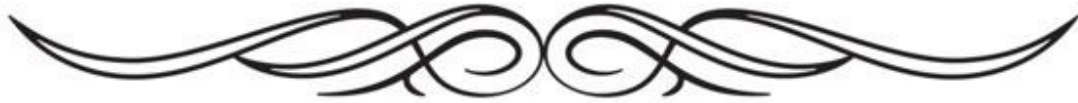
manipulate me. Unlike my mother, who doesn't react to him, I do. I react every damn time....or rather, I *did*," she bit out contemptuously. "For my entire life, he practiced pulling my strings until he knew which one to tug and how hard to get the reaction he wanted. Each time I rebelled, he'd find another string and use it. I had no idea he was playing me, until he got me fired from the ad agency. That was the day I finally figured out what he'd been doing for so long, and that I had *given* him the power to hurt and control me. The *only* reason he wants me under his roof again is so he can keep me under his thumb. He's sabotaging my life because he's pissed that I took away his power to control me and gave it back to myself."

The fact Blair had reclaimed her power only to start giving it to me, warmed my heart, and filled me with so much pride, I wanted to burst.

"I, for one, am damn glad you were born a girl. I'm proud of you, Blair."

Cupping her nape, I drew her lips to mine before claiming her with a raw, savage kiss.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Blair

Erasing my angst with his potent kiss, Dalton swallowed my needy whimpers as our tongues swirled and tangled. It had been an eternity since he'd kissed me with such feral desire. As I started to climb over the console to get closer to him, a loud roar vibrated the SUV.

Tearing his lips from mine, Dalton glanced in the rearview. "The wrecker's here."

The regret in his gravelly voice coupled with the frustration spiking through me, I wanted to scream. Instead, I mentally cursed a blue streak, fished out my keys, and handed them to Dalton.

"I'll be right back," he promised before climbing out of the SUV.

With tingling lips and drenched panties, I watched the tow truck driver attach a cable to Betty Beatle before wrenching her onto the flat bed.

My steadily increasing anger, toward my father, quickly obliterated my arousal.

I'm done with you, Jamison Brighton.

Done letting you destroy my life.

Done being a victim of your brutal power games.

Done putting Dalton in the middle of this ugly war between us.

But most of all, I am done sitting back doing nothing while you sabotage my life.

I didn't know if I'd simply reached the end of my rope, or if Dalton's silly affirmations were working. No doubt, he'd given me the tools. But I'd done all the work. I was stronger now than I'd ever been in my life. Strong

enough to end my father's manipulative rampage once and for all. When Dalton climbed in behind the wheel again, I shoved my red-hot fury down, saving it for the man who'd earned it.

"They're going to replace the tires in the morning and deliver your car to the house sometime in the afternoon." He smiled reassuringly.

"I'm sorry you keep getting caught in the fallout between me and my father, and having to taxi me back and forth to work...again."

"Don't apologize. In case you hadn't noticed, I kinda like taking care of you." He winked.

And just like that, Dalton doused my flames of fury, soothed my guilt, and melted my heart at once.

"I kinda like it, too."

Heat flared in his eyes. "When we get home, you can skip the lemon bars if you want."

"But I love my cooking lessons and making desserts for you. Can I trade it for a night off from writing in my journal?"

Dalton's deep rich laughter spilled over me like sunshine, making it impossible not to grin.

"Nice try, baby girl. But your journal isn't up for negotiation any longer."

"What do you mean, *any longer*? Are you saying I could have told you no when you gave me the notebook?"

"If you'd given me a reason *not* to keep the journal, we would have discussed it."

"Did that apply to my affirmations, too?"

"And your cooking lessons. Yes. Every task I give you is up for negotiation."

"That would have been nice to know *before* I started doing them," I huffed.

Fighting a smile, Dalton arched a brow. "Would you like to negotiate now?"

"We can still do that?"

"Sure." He shrugged. "Which ones don't center you or fill you with pride for pleasing...*me*?"

Like the skies after a summer storm, blinding rays of understanding streaked through parting dark clouds of confusion that had filled my mind.

The clarity of awareness surging through me overwhelmed my system.

Tears of happiness, astonishment, and relief stung my eyes.

Forcing down the emotion lodged in my throat, I peered up at Dalton. “I’ve been submitting to you all along, haven’t I?”

With a sublime, compassionate smile, he lifted my hand to his lips before pressing a kiss to my palm. “Yes. And watching you grow stronger and more confident each day has been...stunning.”

His praise, coupled with the unfathomable bliss of enlightenment pulsing through me, had me wanting to submit to him in every way.

“I need more tasks. Please tell me you haven’t run out of them,” I begged.

He chuckled. “All I’ve given you is a taste, baby girl. I haven’t even started scratching the surface of your submission yet.”

Shivers sped up my spine. I couldn’t wait to gorge on his command.

Dalton was unlike any Dominant I’d ever read about. His style wasn’t harsh or overbearing, but subtle, which made his command impressively more powerful. At least, to me. I’m sure the subs at the club thought so, too. But maybe they didn’t. Though Dalton could have a whole harem, he didn’t have a single collared sub. He didn’t have a girlfriend or a wife either for that matter. Why not? I knew for a fact he wasn’t gay...so did my pussy. Why in earth was such an amazing man still single and so averse to commitment?”

It quickly dawned on me that I didn’t know anything about Dalton, other than he was my father’s financial backer and a Dominant. I knew nothing about his family, his childhood, where he was from, or how he’d gotten so filthy rich.

It’s time to get to know the man I’m cohabitating with.

“Why aren’t you married?” I blurted. When he shot me a bewildered glance, I quickly backpedaled. “Sorry, I know that kinda came from left field.”

“You think?” He chuckled, then pursed his lips. “I was once...years ago.”

“What happened?”

“I made a mistake.”

“Did you have an affair?”

“No. I meant I should have never gotten married.”

“Why not? You loved her, didn’t you?”

“No, not really. I was young and dumb, and... whatever. It’s not important.”

His cavalier attitude was so abnormal, I knew I’d hit a nerve. But I couldn’t drop the subject, there were too many questions flooding my brain. “Did you ever consider getting married again?”

Dalton scoffed. “Sometimes, when you fall off a horse, it’s not wise to get back on.”

Undaunted by his vague reply, I kept going. “What was her name?”

“Heidi.”

“Where did you meet her?”

“Does it matter?”

I ignored the fact that he’d answered my question with a question, but I couldn’t ignore his terse tone.

“Sorry if I overstepped a line. I assumed the open, honest communication you’re always talking about went both ways,” I quipped with a sassy smile.

Dalton smirked. “Don’t be a brat. She was the daughter of my dad’s chief financial officer. The two of them sort of arranged the marriage.”

“I thought they only did that in China.”

“They do it in a few other countries as well.”

“Why did they force you to marry Heidi?”

“I wasn’t forced, I was *instructed* to find a wife.”

Dalton’s story was getting more intriguing by the minute. “Because?”

“When the owner’s son, fresh out of college, was hired as the new Executive President of the Investment Advisory department, it started a bonfire of nepotism and jealousy to sweep through the staff. They didn’t care that I could read the market inside out, or that I’d increased profits and dividends sixty to eighty percent each quarter...I was the enemy. I didn’t give two shits what others said or thought about me. I was there to do a job. Unfortunately, my dad *did* care. But instead of firing and replacing the disgruntled employees, he decided to change their perception of me. He wanted to prove that though I was young, I was mature and stable and committed to long-term goals...like they were. And since the employees were all married and raising families, he *instructed* me to find a wife.”

My heart sank. The fact that Dalton and I had both been forced to walk the paths our fathers paved for us, made my blood run cold. Still, something wasn’t adding up. No way would the commanding man beside me submit to anyone, even his own father. Bowing down wasn’t Dalton’s nature.

“Why didn’t you rebel and tell him to go pound sand?”

“Money,” he scoffed. “My dad began grooming me in the stock market before I was in first grade. I began working as an intern during summer vacation while I was still in middle school. I spent most of my free time growing up studying the markets. I learned how inflation, wars, and changes

in governments affected the stocks. I'd netted my first million when I was sixteen. By the time I started college, eager to follow in my dad's footsteps, I'd increased my initial million tenfold. When I joined his company I started making so much money, it was obscene. Though I had more than I could spend in three lifetimes, my only focus was on making more. I know it sounds harsh and cold, but getting married was like...buying a new car. It was just something to do."

"Sounds like you were a workaholic."

"And then some."

"Why aren't you still working for you dad?" I asked as Dalton pulled into the garage.

"We'll need to save that conversation for another day," he said, turning off the engine. "Come on, let's get inside. You have writing to do."

After I ran to my room and changed my clothes, that was exactly what I did...I wrote out every question I'd forgotten to ask him on the way home. When I was done, I hurried down to the family room and handed Dalton my journal, then clasped my hands behind my back and waited.

The first time I had passed him the notebook, he'd given me explicit instructions on how to *properly* present my journal. I'd thought his persnickety protocol was beyond anal retentive. By the third day, I looked forward to the warmth in his eyes, the joy in his smile, and the pride his praise evoked inside me.

"Very nice. You may take a seat now." As I eased into the chair beside him, Dalton began to read...and chuckle.

"All right, my curious little minx, I'll answer your questions quickly, so you can go have *fun* in the kitchen. I was born in Atlanta and grew up in a suburb north of the city. Both my parents are still living, and I call and visit with my mom a couple of times a month. No, I didn't have a nanny, but we had a house staff. No, I don't have any siblings. I attended only private schools. Yes, I had a lot of friends. Yes, I did play sports...football and baseball."

I sat stoically eating up every word, but on the inside I grinned from ear to ear. I hadn't expected Dalton to placate me, but he had. And it warmed my heart that he was sharing all the pieces of himself.

"I graduated from Emory University in Atlanta with a master's degree in business. No, I don't work out every day," he waggled his brows, then flexed his bicep. Though I started laughing, deep down, all I wanted to do was trace

my tongue over his thick, tattooed flesh. “I hit the gym downstairs every *other* day, while you’re at work.”

When he glanced at the page again, the smile fell from his face. His body tensed so tightly; I could practically feel his muscles straining.

“Heidi and I were married for two and a half years.” Dalton paused and clenched his jaw for several long seconds, then shook his head. “No. We didn’t have any children.”

His words were short and clipped, but beneath their brittle veneer, I felt the oppressive weight of his sorrow. And just like my father was for me, Heidi was Dalton’s big, fat hot button.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I whispered.

“No,” he murmured. Closing the journal, he handed it back to me.

“If you ever change your mind, I’m here for you.”

“I know.” He sent me a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “You can begin your cooking lesson now.”

Clutching the notebook to my chest, I stood. “I’m sorry she hurt you, Daddy,” I whispered before softly kissing his cheek.

As I left the room, guilt stung my soul. Dalton was the strongest man I’d ever known, yet leaving him alone to deal with painful memories *I’d* exhumed was the hardest thing I’d ever done.

Weighing heavy with regret, I trudged into the kitchen.

Baron sent me a sympathetic smile. “I’m sorry to hear about your tires, Miss Blair.”

“Me, too.”

I was sorry for a lot of things. My car was just one of many on my list.

“I have something that might cheer you up.”

“What’s that?”

“Today, I’m setting you free.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you’re ready to start preparing desserts on your own.” Baron grinned, nodding toward the counter. “You’ll find a recipe, all the ingredients you need, and the items necessary to create the lemon bars. If you have any questions, I’ll be at the other counter working on the salad.”

As a rush of anxiety rolled through me, I quickly tamped it down. If a master chef had faith in me, there was no excuse for me to be scared. Mentally flying my confidence flag, I got to work. By the time I pulled the golden yellow confection out of the oven and dusted it in powdered sugar, I

was bursting with pride. While making a pan of lemon bars wasn't like saving a life or attaining world peace, it was a major achievement for me.

As I served Dalton his dinner, he sent me a warm smile. While relieved his sadness hadn't lingered, I was ridiculously anxious and antsy to gobble down dinner so I could present him with my dessert.

"I talked to Leesha a little bit ago," he announced, spearing another piece of pork on his fork. "She asked me to thank you for sending her home early and wanted you to know that her migraine was gone."

"I'm glad, but...why did you call her?"

"To tell her what happened to your tires, and to inform her that I was sending a security company over in the morning to install a couple of cameras around her back door."

Another rush of guilt rolled through me. "I'm sorry I'm putting you two through all this bull—all this *stuff*."

"Good save." Dalton smirked, then quickly sobered. "But stop apologizing. None of this is your fault."

"It's *all* my fault."

Dalton sat back and draped his napkin across his empty plate. "Are you calling me a liar?"

"Never. I'm simply stating a fact."

"Your fact is wrong." As he held me with a taunting stare, I bit my tongue. "Good girl. It's time for dessert."

His announcement replaced my guilt with giddy excitement. So ready to wow him, my hands trembled as I gathered up our dirty dishes and raced to the kitchen. They were still shaking as I sliced two pieces and arranged each one on a plate before garnishing them with a sprig of mint. My feet barely touched the floor as I returned to the dining room and proudly set the biggest slice on the table in front of Dalton.

"This looks delicious, baby girl."

"I made them all by myself," I preened, easing into the chair beside him.

"I'm impressed. Congratulations."

Lifting our forks in tandem, we each took a big bite.

As the flaky crust melted away and the creamy center hit my tongue, the sweet gooey goodness I'd anticipated was replaced by a burning, acrid bitterness. My tastebuds screamed, and my lips began to pucker. Quickly spitting the vile concoction into my napkin, Dalton's eyes grew wide. A painful expression creased his face as he involuntarily coughed.

“Bloody hell,” Baron bellowed from the kitchen. “There’s no sugar in these things.”

Oh, fuck! I forgot to add the sugar.

As Dalton grabbed his glass of water and chugged, my father’s voice thundered in my ears.

The only thing you’ll ever succeed at is being a failure.

Tears stung my eyes.

Swallowing down the sobs bubbling up inside me, I dropped my fork on the plate and bolted out of my chair. As I sprinted from the room, Dalton yelled my name. Ignoring him, I raced up the stairs and straight to my room. I knew I was acting like a child as I launched myself across the bed and buried my face in the pillow, sobbing. The disappointment and embarrassment roiling inside me didn’t care.

I’d failed again, like always.

Long seconds later, Dalton hoisted me onto his lap. Still sobbing, I tried to cover my face with my hands. He gently clasped my wrists and lowered them to my lap, then tucked me in against his chest, and gently rocked me.

“Shhh,” he whispered. “Don’t cry, baby girl. It’s all right.”

“No, it’s not,” I wailed.

“It will be. Calm down and talk to me, Blair.”

Dalton continued rocking me as I struggled to stem the flow of tears.

Long minutes later, I dragged in a ragged breath and sighed. “I’m crushed.”

“Because of the lemon bars?”

I sniffed and nodded. “You don’t need to tell me I’m acting like a child. I already know that. But you don’t understand. I was so stupidly proud of myself for *finally* achieving something on my own. But I didn’t. I fucked it up, like I do everything else.”

“First of all,” Dalton scowled. “Watch your language. Secondly, you *did* achieve something all on your own. Was it perfect? No. But that’s not the *real* reason you’re upset.”

“Yes, it is.”

“No. It’s not,” he stated firmly. “Your wounded pride is the only reason you’re up here crying, instead of still sitting at the table with me, laughing about how they turned out.”

I hated that he knew me better than I knew myself. But what really pissed me off was he was right.

“You mean, laughing because they taste like dog shit?”

Something wicked darted across his eyes. “You need a spanking.”

“No. I need an *orgasm*,” I growled. “It’s been five fucking days since I handed over my vibrator. Every time I get in the shower, it’s all I can do to keep from soaping up my pussy and rubbing one out. But I don’t because I want to follow *your* rules.”

“So, your wounded pride is what...now *my* fault?”

“No. Stop twisting my words around,” I snapped. “I’m saying, I might not be so damn emotional if I weren’t so horny.”

“Ah.” He smugly nodded. “Then, I guess we’d better fix that.”

Before I could process what he meant, Dalton flipped me onto the bed, tugged off everything from the waist down, and tossed them to the floor.

“Go ahead. Use your fingers and...*rub one out*, baby girl,” he instructed standing beside my bed.

“You mean *now*?”

“Yes. You have permission. If you’re so horny that you need to come... do it.”

My cheeks caught fire.

My heart thundered against my ribs.

“Are you just going to stand there and...watch?”

The thought of masturbating in front of him was mortifying.

“Oh, I’m definitely going to watch you come for me, baby girl.”

His low, decadent voice ignited a forbidden fire that incinerated my embarrassment.

Holding me with a hungry stare, Dalton widened his stance and tucked his hands behind his back.

Like magic, he suddenly appeared even more powerful and commanding.

Savoring the Dominant aura rolling off him, like a morsel of dark chocolate, I dragged an indulgent gaze from his sexy bald head to his tempting tapered waist. Gliding lower, my stare stilled on the thick erection straining beneath his jeans.

My breath caught.

My pussy clutched and wept.

My nipples drew up tight and hard.

My clit throbbed in time with my beating heart.

And as I began to lower my hands to my pussy to put out the fire he’d ignited, the confession he’d made nearly a week ago, whispered through me.

You have no idea how badly I want to strip you naked and squeeze my fat cock inside you.

With a moan, I slid a finger between my wet curls and slowly began circling my clit.

Dalton's eyes grew dark.

His chest heaved, and his nostrils flared.

Let's see how badly you want to fuck me, Daddy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Dalton

As Blair's finger sank past her dark, wet curls and disappeared between her folds, I nearly swallowed my tongue. My cock had started screaming for freedom when I'd stripped off her pants and thong and inhaled the scent of her succulent cunt. Her heady, feminine fragrance was so strong now, I could taste her on my tongue.

My stare was locked on her dainty finger gliding back and forth over her clit. Licking my lips, I inched closer until my knees pressed against the mattress. I could feel the heat rolling off her pussy and see the glistening nectar coating her finger with each slow, exacting stroke.

"Is your clit hard and swollen, baby girl?"

"Yes, Daddy," she whimpered.

Ahhh, fuck. This is going to be torture.

I'd foolishly set myself up for this level of agony, but deep down, I didn't care.

"Show me. Spread those pretty pink lips. I want to see."

Without hesitation, Blair used both hands and parted her wet folds.

The sight of her slick juices spilling from her tiny, pink slit made my mouth water and my cock lurch. Sucking in a hiss as it scraped against my zipper, I worked the button of my jeans.

Watching me raptly, Blair began rubbing faster.

When my eager cock sprang free, thick and hard and weeping, our gratified groans merged in the sexually saturated air. Blair's gaze was still locked on my dick as I gripped and stroked it to ease the pain.

“Can I please touch your cock, Daddy?”

Her innocent tone sent flames clambering up my spine.

“No.” I shook my head while every cell in my body cursed and screamed.

I had to stay in control for both our sakes.

Clenching my jaw, I fought to keep from sinking a fist in her hair and feeding every hard inch past the dejected pout on her lush lips.

Maybe someday, but not today.

I had to make sure Blair didn't confuse my Dominance with rejection.

“When I want you to touch me, I'll command you to. Understand?”

“Yes, Sir.”

As her doleful expression gave way to relief, I knew I'd achieved my goal.

I also knew, as I climbed onto the bed and knelt between her legs, I was inviting the second, third, and fourth rings of hell to possess me, but I didn't care. I had to get closer to her.

Blair's fingers stilled, and her breaths turned shallow.

Poised in front of her juicy pussy, my cock—leaking like a fucking sieve—grew impossibly harder.

I couldn't not touch her.

Without a word, I cupped her knees and spread her legs wide, then locked my stare on her distended clit, narrow glistening slit, and puffy pink folds.

Filling my lungs with her earthy tart scent, I trailed my fingertips up her thighs. The whimper quivering on her lips and the heat spilling off her pussy raked my flesh like a torch. Tempting fate and wondering when I'd become such a fucking masochist, I leaned in close—so close I could have swiped my tongue through her sodden furrow—I pursed my lips and softly blew over her tender flesh.

“Oh, god,” Blair groaned, fisting the bedspread as her empty tunnel clutched at the stream of air.

Unable and unwilling to stop myself, I sank my nose into her dark, wet curls and filled my lungs again. Blair whimpered and rocked her hips, wordlessly begging for my tongue.

It would have been so easy to latch my mouth over her sweet cunt and make her scream. But I wasn't here for pleasure. I was here to teach a lesson.

Biting back a growl, I lifted my head and lowered my voice. “You may continue.”

“But I want *you* to get me off, Daddy,” she moaned.

“Yes, I know.”

Fighting the urge to chuckle at her irritated scowl, I pried her hand from the bedspread and dragged it back to her pussy. Covering her finger with mine, I guided it back and forth across her stony clit.

“You want me to get you off like this?” I taunted.

“No.” Blair scowled. “I want you to use your mouth, tongue, and fingers, like you did at the shop.”

“I think you’ve forgotten who gives the orders here, baby girl,” I chided, still steering her finger over her clit.

“But it feels so much better when you do it.”

“Do you want to come or do you want to complain?”

“I want to come, but—”

“Then close your eyes and block out everything but my voice.”

With a heavy sigh, Blair complied.

No matter how much I ached to climb inside her sinful body, I had to climb inside her mind first.

Lifting her finger away, I drew it to my lips, then sucked her digit deep inside my mouth. After copiously coating it in my saliva, I slowly rubbed her saturated fingertip over her clit again.

“Do you know what that is, baby girl?”

“My finger.”

“No,” I quietly corrected. “That’s my wet tongue, licking your pretty cunt.”

A raspy moan caught in her throat as more spicy nectar spilled from inside her.

My cock stretched, painfully tightening my already thin skin. Biting back a curse, I dragged the fingers of my other hand through the silky puddle she left on the bed and painted it over my purple crest. I used our mixed juices as lube and slowly stroked myself from tip to stem.

“Do you like Daddy’s tongue teasing your hard, little clit?”

Blair jolted and quivered. “Yes... Oh, god, yes.”

Her desperate wail raked my flesh. And when she scrubbed her clit harder, restlessly rolling and arching her hips, I wanted to howl.

Stay in control.

I sucked in a ragged breath while repeating the words over and over in my brain.

“You like my mouth all over your hot, little pussy, don’t you?”

“Daaddy. Please. I need *you*.”

The combination of her pitiful plea and her juicy pussy swaying in my face—like a red cape in front of a bull—annihilated me to the core.

My control snapped.

With a feral roar, I shoved Blair’s fingers away, gripped her hips, and latched my mouth over her slippery cunt. Her surprised scream vibrated through me as I stabbed her narrow passage and sucked her sweet nectar like a man possessed. I peered up at her savoring the raw pleasure dancing over her face while my cock screamed and my tastebuds exploded. The sight of erotic bliss consuming her was as mesmerizing as her wet walls gripping and sucking at my tongue.

“Oh, god, Daddy. Yesss. Yesss,” she breathlessly moaned, gripping my head while I pillaged her pussy.

Chest heaving with each labored breath, Blair’s pebbled nipples strained toward the heavens. Her tempting tits begged for attention. Sliding a hand under her shirt, I walked my fingers up her torso, dragging the cotton tee over her ivory, see-through bra. The sight of her dusty, rose-colored nipples, drawn up tight and hard, had me inwardly cursing the gods for not giving me two mouths.

Refusing to abandon her sugar-sweet pussy, I captured her berry-hard nipples—first one, then the other—before rolling, plucking, and pinching the tips while Blair writhed and moaned.

When her eyes slid shut, I pinched a nipple and tugged hard. Instead of crying out in pain, as I’d anticipated, she simply purred and flooded my tongue.

Mmm, my baby girl likes a little pain.

Tucking that information away for later, I bit the inside of her thigh. Blair’s lids flew open as a yelp tore from her throat.

“Eyes on me, baby girl,” I growled. “I want to see all the pleasure I give you.”

With a pitiful whimper, Blair locked her smoky stare on me.

“Very nice.”

Deciding to reward her submission with more than words, I squeezed two fingers inside her melting core and scrapped my teeth over her hardened clit. Her low, throaty moan went straight to my balls.

Gripping my head tighter, she ground her juicy cunt against my mouth.

Still lapping and licking her stony nub, I dragged my fingers in and out of

her wet, fluttering pussy as I continued teasing and torturing her nipples. Forcing Blair higher and higher, I branded the sound of her lust-laced whimpers deep in my soul.

When she began plucking and pinching each unattended nipple, my need spiked.

Blair was unlike any woman I'd ever been with. Her uninhibited hunger and innate response to my every touch—as if we'd been hard-wired together—was erotic and mind-blowing.

But the long-lost feelings she'd awakened inside me—to claim, own, and make her mine—scared the fuck out of me. Locking down my fears, I focused on giving Blair what she needed. And based on her keening cries bouncing off the walls and vibrating through me, I was succeeding.

All too soon, heat flared in her unfocused eyes, and her lips pursed to a fuckable O. When her hot cunt fluttered around my fingers, I knew my baby girl was ready to soar. I was desperate to send her sailing...Dominance be damned. Wrapping my lips around Blair's blood-filled clit, I drew deeply and lashed it with my tongue.

Panted shrieks tore from her throat.

She lifted her hips off the bed and rocked against my face and fingers as she buried her shoulders into the mattress and arched her spine—offering her gum-drop nipples to the gods. Struggling to keep a grip on my melting resolve, I scraped my fingers over her G-spot.

Blair gasped as her muscles turned to stone.

Well...all but one.

As if heeding some primal feminine command, her tunnel softened and expanded. The idea of her body preparing to accept my pulsating cock—of filling, stretching, and packing every fat inch into her narrow, silky core—decimated my entire being. And when Blair bore down around my digits, screaming, “Daddy!” any hope of clinging to my command vanished.

Still, I had to try.

With a beastly roar, I tore my mouth and fingers from her wicked cunt; purposely stalling her orgasm. As she screamed in frustration and trembled with need, I gripped her hips and aligned my crest to her slick, hot folds.

“Is this what you want, baby girl?” My voice was thick and raspy as I nudged my purple crest just inside her fragile slit.

“Yes!” Blair shrieked before thrusting her hips downward, impaling herself on half my cock.

The heat of her clutching walls and slick nectar surrounded me and sent my eyes rolling to the back of my head. Lost in a sublime nirvana I never knew existed, she rocked on my cock, trying to pack more of me inside. I gripped her hips to lift her up but couldn't. The thought of pulling out of her heavenly cunt made me want to weep.

But she needed boundaries.

She was topping from the bottom. And while that was no surprise, the fact that the desperate, horny parts of me didn't care, shocked the shit out of me. No woman had ever stripped my Dominance or rendered me this powerless...until Blair.

Shoving that disturbing revelation down deep, I seized the soft flare of her hips tighter. Knowing I might bruise her pale flesh only added fuel to the bonfire blazing inside me. Before we were through, I planned to mark Blair in every way possible.

But first, I had to salvage some semblance of command.

"What do you think you're doing, baby girl?"

"What we both want," she whimpered, trying to wriggle her hips.

"I'm not wearing a condom."

"I don't care. I want you inside me...all the way."

Me too. More than air.

"Wants and needs," I reminded. "I have a duty to protect you...and myself. Are you on the pill?"

"No," she huffed, not bothering to hide her annoyance. "I finished my period last week. I'll get on the pill tomorrow. Just...help me come."

"You told me before you hadn't had sex for eighteen months. Is that true?"

"Dalt...Daddy. Stop interrogating me. I need you. Please!"

"Then answer my question," I chided, reaching up and plucking her nipple.

Blair sucked in a hiss and shivered. "Yes. It happened while I was at college. Why does it matter?"

I arched a brow. "Because I need to know that we're *both* clean."

"I'm clean. I'm clean, dammit," she bit out tersely. "Can we get on with this now?"

Mentally cursing a blue streak, I gathered all the willpower I possessed and slowly eased from her blissful pussy.

"What are you doing?" Blair whined, bolting upright as I settled back on

my heels.

“Deciding whether to take you over my knee and spank the sass out of you, or reverse my permission to let you come and leave you here....*alone*, aching, wet, and wanting.”

While I truly had no desire to enforce either punishment, I knew the latter would be harder for Blair to endure. Not because she wouldn't achieve the sexual relief she wanted, but because it was too reminiscent of Jamison's discipline.

When Blair blanched and gaped at me, I knew she thought nothing wrong with her behavior. “Why?”

“Who's in charge here, baby girl? You? Or Me?” I whispered.

As understanding swept through her, Blair's expression softened. Her shoulders slumped. She lowered her lashes and dipped her chin. “You are, Daddy. I-I was just trying to...entice you.”

“No. You were doing what's called topping from the bottom. Do you know what that means?”

“Yes,” she replied in a contrite whisper.

“Tell me,” I demanded.

“It means I'm trying to make you give me what I want.”

“Yes. I won't play that game. Understood?”

“I'm sorry, Daddy.”

I cupped her chin and forced her gaze. The unhappy pout on her plump lips and remorse glistening in her eyes wasn't the lesson I wanted her to learn.

“Prove it.”



Blair

Prove it. How? What am I supposed to do?

I had no clue. Kissing him, touching him, hell, even offering him a blow job—though I'd never given one before—all involved *me* taking control again.

But that wasn't what a submissive was supposed to do.

And based on Dalton's challenging stare, still boring into my soul, it

definitely wasn't what he wanted.

Think, dammit. Think.

I was trying, but the incessant throb assaulting my pussy, clit, and nipples made it almost impossible to focus on anything but a big, fat orgasm. Unfortunately, it was going to be a cold day in hell before I'd get to enjoy one if I didn't pull something out of my ass to *prove* my remorse.

He's not asking you to prove that, whispered the little voice in my head.

Suddenly, I realized Dalton was asking for...my submission.

Closing my eyes, I focused on the warm, alluring contentment expanding inside me, then tossed my fears and worries to the wind before easing back to the mattress again. Confident that Dalton would catch me and not let me fall, I raised my arms over my head, clasped my fingers around the base of the headboard, and surrendered my mind and body to his masterful command.

"Fuck me," Dalton murmured in a barely discernible whisper.

Unsure if his *fuck me* was a good fuck me, or a bad fuck me, I opened my eyes to find him staring at me in utter awe.

Whew, it's a good fuck me.

"You finally understand, don't you?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"I'm damn proud of you," he preened with a soft smile that sent a different kind of warmth rolling through me...the warmth of success. "Now tell me what you want, baby girl,"

"To please you, Daddy."

With an inhuman growl, Dalton surged over me. Supporting his weight on one bulging arm, he bent and speared his tongue through my lips as if he owned me.

And at that moment, he did.

Cinching his wide hand in my hair—sending tingles of pleasure mixed pain dancing over my scalp—he tugged my head back before driving his wicked tongue deeper, claiming every wet inch.

Dalton's toe-curling kiss was like the man himself. Raw. Urgent. Commanding.

As he savagely ate at me, devouring my helpless whimpers, I gripped the headboard tighter as he wedged a knee between my legs and nudged them wider.

Lowering to his elbow, Dalton swept his hand down my chest and cupped my breast in his palm. As he rubbed his thumb over my aching nipple,

swallowing my needy groans, his fiendish fingers pinched and plucked first, one nipple, then the other. Lost in an ocean of splendor, I writhed and whimpered as he laid waste to my throbbing tips.

When he tore his lips from mine, I wailed at the loss of his tongue, but as he laved, kissed, and nipped his way down my neck, I started purring like a kitten.

He lifted from my hot flesh, pausing with his lips poised over my breast, and peered up at me. His face was etched in the same passion, longing, and hunger that reflected in his eyes. I'd never felt so treasured or desired in my life.

"You're so fucking gorgeous," he murmured in a raw, raspy voice before latching his magical mouth over my straining nipple.

As Dalton pulled deeply, pressing the tingling tip to the roof of his mouth, shockwaves pulsed straight to my pussy. With an indulgent shriek, I arched my back, filling his wet mouth while gripping the headboard so tightly I felt my racing heart thrumming in my fingertips.

For a moment, I feared Dalton would pull away and reprimand my bold behavior. Instead, he rewarded me by raking his teeth over my hot flesh while lashing my nipple with a hungry moan. Teasing and tormenting the straining tip to the point of pain, he dragged his tongue across my chest—leaving a trail of liquid fire searing my skin—before drowning my other peak in the same indescribable bliss.

Skimming his hands down my quivering body, Dalton combed his fingers through my wet curls. Anticipation pressed in all around me, and I held my breath. And just when I thought I was going to crawl out of my skin, he thumbed my clit and speared his fingers in my pussy before massaging my G-spot. The air in my lungs exploded as I screamed and arched against his hand.

"The way your hot, little pussy sucks at my fingers is fucking incredible," Dalton murmured as he captured my nipple between his teeth and released it with a little tug. "I can't wait to squeeze my fat cock inside your hot, wet cunt."

As his naughty words bounced in my brain, I clutched around his fingers while a brutal tremor shook through me.

"Oh," Dalton growled. "You like it when I talk dirty to you, don't you?"

"Yes. Oh, god. Yes," I pitifully panted as my limbs began to tingle.

"Can't wait to feel your slick walls suck me up inside you as your sweet juice drips down my dick."

“Now. Please...” I whimpered as my growing orgasm hummed through me.

“You need Daddy’s big cock stretching and filling you, baby girl?”

“Yessss,” I whimpered, wildly grinding myself against his wicked fingers.

Flames flickered in his emerald eyes as Dalton raised to his knees. The muscles in his jaw twitched as he slowly dragged his hand from my pussy. Mourning the loss of his rugged body heat, I was doubly bereft at the hollowness between my legs. Groaning in frustration, I watched him lift his glistening fingers to his lips and slowly lick my juices from his digits.

“Your succulent cunt tastes as sweet as I remember.” Reinforcing his claim with a gratified groan and a sexy smile, Dalton jerked a nod at the headboard. “Give me your hand.”

Releasing my grip, I lowered my arm and extended my palm. He clasped my wrist, then guided it to his thick, red, swollen erection. It looked painful and somehow impossibly bigger than when he’d taken off his jeans.

“Touch me, baby girl. Feel what you do to me,” he commanded.

Though my heart soared, a part of me was afraid I might hurt him. I gently closed a loose fist around him, then sucked in a tiny gasp as his thick veins throbbed against my palm. Growing bolder, I softly squeezed the velvety skin stretched over his steely cock, watching gratitude and bliss skip across his face.

“Fuck, your soft fingers feel so good,” he groaned. Covering his hand over mine, he squeezed tighter before guiding my fist up and down his hot shaft. “Like this, baby girl.”

While I memorized the rhythm and pressure of each stroke he commanded, I stared in awe at the liquid bead growing on the tip of his cock. Without thinking, I released my other hand from the headboard and captured the drop on the tip of my finger. Drawing it to my mouth, I placed it on my tongue. As his warm, slick, and slightly salty flavor lit up my tastebuds, Dalton quivered and quickly pulled my hand off his cock.

“That’s enough,” he bit out in a raspy voice. “Spread your legs. It’s time to take Daddy’s cock, baby girl.”

Like an earthquake, tremors rocked through me as I parted my thighs and opened myself up for him. But instead of slamming his cock into my aching core, Dalton stretched out over me again and captured my lips in a slow, sensual kiss. I could taste the urgency running wild inside him. But he

refused to set it free. Dalton harnessed his hunger and made love to my mouth with such reverence and tenderness, my heart melted. Lost in the passionate press of his lips, I whimpered as he wedged a hand between us and aligned his crest to my folds.

When he grudgingly lifted from my mouth, I forced my heavy lids open.

Holding me with a soul-stealing stare, he gripped my hips and slowly pressed his wide crest inside me. Feeding me inch after glorious inch of his cock, he stretched and filled me while a sublime burn spread from my pussy and enveloped my whole body. I clutched his arms and whimpered as I tried to soften and accept his invasion.

“Do you like Daddy’s cock packed inside you, baby girl?”

“Yes. Yes,” I mewled, rocking against the base of his shaft.

“Good, ‘cause I plan to be inside you all night.”

With a cocky smile, Dalton began gliding in and out with long, measured strokes, setting fire to every nerve ending in my body. Plying me with pleasure, he gradually picked up the pace while murmuring filthy things that turned me inside out. Dalton knew how to fuck my mind and my body... keeping my elusive orgasm just out of reach.

“You’re so tight and hot...so fucking perfect,” he bit out.

His praise sent my heart soaring. I ached to give him every living, breathing piece of me. Lifting my hips off the bed, I boldly met his feral thrusts. A savage grunt tore from his lips as he gripped my hips tighter and drove harder. Determination and raw lust lined his sculpted face. A sheen of sweat glowed over his chiseled body. And the muscles of his thick, tattooed arms bunched and flexed with each animalistic thrust he pounded into my needy, whimpering body.

Dalton looked like a beautiful, fierce fucking warrior.

“You’re going to come hard for Daddy, aren’t you?” he taunted.

“Yessss,” I hissed.

“Damn right, you are. You’re going to come harder than you’ve ever come in your life.”

Dalton gripped his big hands around the cheeks of my ass. As he sat back on his heels, I sank my nails into his biceps while he dragged me onto his thighs.

“That’s right, baby girl. Hold on,” he instructed. “I’m about to make you shatter.”

Lifting me off his cock, he surged into my pussy while dragging me down

onto his shaft. A ragged scream peeled from my lips as he drove deeper, stretched me wider, and filled me fuller than before. And as he scraped his wide crest over my G-spot, I cried out again as lightning splintered through me. But instead of retreating to plow through me again, Dalton held me down on his cock and rocked his hips—burnishing his thick crest over my sensitive bundle of nerves.

The air froze in my lungs as I was swept up in a tsunami of mind-bending, limb-numbing sensations. The orgasm Dalton had denied, bore down on me with a deafening roar before consuming me in a blinding, white-hot blaze of bliss.

Sucking in a gasp, I threw back my head.

“That’s it, baby girl. Come for Daddy. Come. Now!” Dalton growled.

Lights exploded behind my eyes as I screamed his name and completely fragmented. Cinching me tightly to his chest, he held me in his powerful arms and sank his teeth into my shoulder as he manically shuttled in and out of my spasming core.

Quaking and mindlessly crying out, my tunnel gripped and sucked at his stabbing shaft as the powerful orgasm continued rolling through me. Dalton’s deep voice, teeming with pride, vibrated through me, but I was lost and soaring too high to decipher his words.

As I slowly floated back to earth, spent and boneless, he pressed his lips to mine with a kiss so tender and gentle, I simply melted against him with a dreamy sigh.

“Feel better, baby girl?” he whispered.

“Mmm,” I moaned.

“Look at me,” he commanded.

Forcing my heavy lids open, I blinked the haze of bliss away until Dalton finally came into focus. A wicked grin tugged his lips as he slid a hand between my legs and softly circled my clit.

“Again,” he growled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Dalton

Two weeks later...

Stuck in a gridlock of rush-hour traffic deep in the city, I glanced at the clock and cursed. I hated not being there when Blair came home from work. After stopping at the jeweler to pick up a little something I'd had designed—just in case dreams do come true—I had driven to Jamison's office. That meeting took a lot longer than I'd expected because the impatient prick had prematurely pulled the trigger and given the go-ahead to start building the new location in France. After discovering the manipulative bastard's M.O., I was fairly certain Jamison was doubling my workload to keep me away from his daughter.

"Not happening, fucker," I scoffed.

Oh, I'd kicked myself in the ass for a full twenty-four hours for losing control and making love to Blair. But when I finally got honest and forgave myself for letting my carnal desires rule my brain, I realized I hadn't been weak. I'd simply stopped fighting the inevitable.

The following day, I moved Blair into my bedroom. Nearly every afternoon, and all day Sunday, we drove downtown and joined the tourists. We took a river cruise, wandered the Navy Pier, hit every pizza place we could find, and took a zillion photos from the observation deck at the Hancock Center—where I kissed her breathless. But at night, Blair was *all* mine, and it was nothing short of pure magic.

Aching to see, touch, and hold her, I pulled out my cell phone and punched in her number.

“Hello, Daddy.”

The smile in her voice made me grin.

“What are you doing, baby girl?”

“What I’m *supposed* to be doing. I’m writing in my journal.” I loved her sassy tone. It gave me an excuse to redden her ass...often. “What are *you* doing?”

“I’m stuck in traffic, trying to get home, so I can do dirty things to you.”

“Oh, that sounds fun. Honk the horn so the other cars will get out of the way.” She giggled.

“If I thought it would do any good, I would. How was work?”

“It was fine.” She paused and drew in a deep breath. “How did your meeting go?”

“All right,” I bit out. The last thing I wanted to discuss was her devious father.

“Did he...ask about me?”

The hope in her voice made my heart ache. Gripping the steering wheel, I steeled myself to tear hers apart. “No.”

“Good, maybe now that he realizes he can’t bribe you to kick me out, or Leesha to fire me, he’ll finally give up and let me live my life.”

Jamison Brighton give up? Never.

“What’s for dessert tonight?” I asked, purposely changing the subject.

“It’s a surprise.”

My curiosity was piqued. She’d never dodged the question before. Of course, the pervert inside me was already envisioning her naked pussy and a can of whipped cream. But Blair wasn’t topping from the bottom anymore.

“I look forward to it. Finish your journal. I’ll be home as soon as I can.”

“Yes, Sir.”

With a stupid grin, and a warmth—that had nothing to do with the setting sun beaming through the windows—spreading through me, I ended the call.

I couldn’t remember ever smiling or laughing or feeling as content as I felt with Blair. I certainly hadn’t when I was married to Heidi or working for my dad. Hell, even in high school, I was always under pressure to keep my GPA high to be accepted at Emory.

While divorcing Heidi and my dad, moving to Chicago, and partnering with Jamison—up until recently—had removed ninety-nine percent of the stress in my life, there hadn’t been a whole lot of things in life that made me happy. Sure, I liked making money in the market and with Jamison. I even

enjoyed spending time at Genesis. I hadn't realized, until Blair moved in that I'd merely been existing.

Now that she was here, filling my world with kindness and laughter—when she wasn't pushing my buttons with her sassy mouth—and stealing mine and Baron's hearts, I'd finally found purpose in my life.

I was finally, truly living.

It was going to be a cold, depressing day in hell if Blair actually wanted to move out on her own again. My heart clutched, and my stomach cramped. I quickly shoved the dismal thought from my mind, and focused on the ring in my pocket, and the possibilities that might come my way.

When I finally arrived home, I was disappointed Blair wasn't in the kitchen to greet me like usual. I'd grown accustomed to the routine we'd unconsciously established.

"She's in the family room waiting for you," Baron supplied with a cagy grin.

"Thanks," I murmured, quickly striding away.

As promised, Blair was there, but instead of sitting in the chair, clutching her journal, she stood by the fireplace wearing a mega-watt smile with her hands behind her back.

Donning a faux stern scowl, I lifted my chin. "What are you hiding, baby girl?"

"It's your surprise. I told you about it on the phone not twenty minutes ago."

"Watch your tone," I warned, biting back a grin. "You said *dessert* was a surprise. And since we've not had dinner yet..."

"Oops, sorry." She grinned—not the least bit contrite—as she drew a small, white box with a red bow from behind her back. "Just think of this as a pre-dinner dessert."

Blair nibbled her bottom lip as I took the box and removed the bow. She moved in closer, anxiously watching me as I lifted the lid. When I peered inside, it was filled with candied pecans. I loved candied pecans.

"Where did you get these?" I asked, plucking one up and popping it in my mouth. When the cinnamon laced sugar hit my tastebuds, I moaned.

"I didn't *get* them anywhere. I made them...for you," she preened. "They turned out pretty good, didn't they? I mean they're not as good as the ones we got at Navy Pier that day—"

"You mean the ones I ate an entire bag of? No. They're not." The

beaming smile instantly fell from her face. And as I watched the excitement blink out in her eyes as she lowered her gaze to the floor, I frowned.

Oh, baby girl. We need to work on your self-esteem a whole lot more.

Cupping her chin, I tilted her head back and strummed my thumb over her pouty lips. “They’re a hundred times better.”

As Blair’s blinding smile returned, sparks of joy flickered in her eyes. I brushed a kiss across her mouth and released her chin, then placed a sugary pecan on her tongue. After popping a few more into my mouth, I sat, and she handed me her journal.

As I began to read, my heart swelled, then shattered as every assumption I’d ever made about Blair was ripped to shreds. Not only had she included everything we’d done at the Pier, but also poured out her feelings—in-depth—about how spending that *one* day, with me, had been the best day of her life. What I’d assumed was just a fun way to spend a warm spring day had made a major impact on her life.

It also gave me another reason to beat Jamison bloody.

Locking a lid on my anger, I closed Blair’s journal and laid it on the coffee table. “So, your parents never took you to Navy Pier?”

“No. Never.”

“What about the Field Museum or the ballet, or concerts in the park?”

“Nope.”

What kind of parents... I already knew the answer before my brain finished the question.

“They took you on vacation with them to Bora Bora, Dubai, and New York, right?”

“I wish,” Blair drawled. “No. They left me with Anya, so I wouldn’t *get in the way.*”

Tamping down the roar of rage rising inside me, I scrubbed a hand over my face and drew in a deep breath. Though I didn’t know how many more scars were left for me to uncover, I was determined to heal every last one of them. No. I couldn’t undo the damage her self-involved parents had done, but I’d find a way to take Blair to Bora Bora, Dubai, and the fucking North Pole. I’d move heaven and earth to give her more memories than she could fit in her damn journal.

“Keep Sunday open, baby girl.”

“Why? What’s happening?”

“We’re going to the Field Museum.”

With an excited squeal, Blair leapt from her chair and jumped into my lap before peppering me with giggling kisses. “Thank you, Daddy. Thank you so much.”

After cinching an arm around her waist and a hand in her hair, I crashed my lips over hers and swept my tongue deep inside her sultry mouth. With a carnal moan, Blair melted against my chest and kissed me back with matching passion. As she wiggled her hot, little cunt over my growing erection, I mentally made a note to book us a flight somewhere...soon. But tonight, I was gonna take Blair on a trip to the heavens...in bed.

And I did...three times.

A couple of days later, I drank in the awe glowing on her face—like I had the day we’d played in the snow—as Blair snapped a million pictures with her phone while we toured the museum.

It was nearly midnight when I wrapped her sated, boneless body against my chest and pressed a kiss to her sweat-soaked forehead. Blair dragged her heavy lids open and sent me a soft, dreamy smile.

“Thank you for another best day of my life, Daddy.”

My heart swelled. “Get used to them. I’m going to give you so many *best days* you won’t be able to count them all.”

“You already have,” she murmured softly as she drifted off to sleep.

I wanted to shoot the damn alarm when it began blaring at five am. Instead, I untangled my limbs from Blair’s as a disgruntled groan rolled off her lips, then swatted her sexy ass.

“Happy Monday, baby girl,” I announced, grinning at her startled yelp. “Hop in the shower and get ready for work. I’ll go downstairs and start the coffee.”

With another groan, Blair sat up, brushed the wild hair from her face, and rolled out of bed.

Forty-five minutes later, with a half-a-pot of caffeine racing through her system, she flashed a smile and blew me a kiss as she backed out of the garage.

Fighting the urge to go back to bed, I refilled my mug and strolled to my office. In the center of my desk was a plain white envelope. It hadn’t been there yesterday or the day before. After setting my mug down, I eased onto my chair and tore the envelope open. Reaching inside, I pulled out a colorfully decorated, hand-written coupon for a *Free Massage*. Beneath Blair’s feminine, flowing signature was a tiny red heart.

I leaned back in my chair and traced my fingers over each letter on the card and smiled.

The last gift any woman had given me, besides orgasms, was the Zegna suit Heidi had bought me for my birthday years ago. Since I paid her credit card, I knew the thing had cost a small fortune. I also knew I'd tossed it in a box for the thrift store before I moved to Chicago because it never meant a damn thing to me.

Unlike the priceless card in my hand I planned to keep forever. It meant the world. Clearing the lump of emotion lodged in my throat, I picked up my phone and punched in Marie's number.

"Morning, Mr. B," she answered sleepily.

"Sorry, darlin'." I cringed. "I forgot it was so early."

"That's okay." She yawned. "What do you need?"

"For you to go back to sleep for a few more hours. And when you get up, I need you to send over a basket of the finest massage oils you can find."

"Did you say *massage oils*?" she asked, clearly perplexed.

"Yes, I did. Sweet dreams, Marie."

With a chuckle, I hung up the phone.

The next morning, after a long hot shower, I entered my office. On my desk was a tall glass jar filled with white squares,= and a note from Blair that read: *For you to relax and unwind*.

Trying to figure out what the hell I was supposed to do with them, I unlatched the lid. But before I could lean in and take a sniff, the scent of spearmint and eucalyptus filled the room. Grabbing the jar, I strode to the kitchen. Baron sat at the table, reading something on his cell phone. After placing the container down in front of him, he looked up at me.

"Do you know what these are?"

"Yes. They're shower steamers. Miss Blair made them for you a couple of days ago while you were working in your office."

"She made them?"

"Yes. She even gave me one to try. They're amazing."

"What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Put it on the floor of the shower, turn on the water, and step in." He smirked. "You know embracing your feminine side isn't always a bad thing."

"Ha ha," I drawled, plucking up the jar and returning to my office.

An hour later, Baron tapped on my door, wearing a perturbed expression.

"Is there a problem?"

“I don’t know what kind of Wesson Oil party you and Miss Blair had last night, and I don’t want to. I simply wanted to inform you that I had to throw out your sheets. They were completely ruined.”

As Baron turned and walked away, I burst out laughing.

After Blair had massaged the tension from my muscles, I tied her wrists to the headboard with soft, cotton rope. Then I’d reminded her of her safe word before introducing her to *other* ways to enjoy the oils...by slowly penetrating her tight virgin ass with my fingers. My baby girl *loved* ass play. And while I’d wanted nothing more than to claim her tight puckered opening, she needed a lot more anal training before I could do that...not that either of us were going to mind those lessons.

Cock throbbing as memories of last night assaulted my brain, I grabbed the jar off my desk and ran upstairs to grab another shower...and take the edge off.

Baron had been right; the shower steamers *were* amazing.

As I dried myself off, I noticed Blair’s perfume sitting on the vanity. It was nearly empty. So were the same brand of bath salts sitting on the spa tub. I quickly dressed and hurried back to my office. Then fired off an email to Marie asking her to deliver a couple more sets of sheets and a gift basket of everything the perfume company made in Blair’s fragrance.

We continued trading gifts back and forth for weeks. When Blair left a tin of woody beard balm on my desk, I called the spa she’d mentioned the day her landlord tossed her out and booked a full day of pampering for her. And when she left a throw pillow she’d made with *Daddy* embroidered on it, I bought her a gold key chain and had it engraved with *baby girl*.

A few days after she’d given me the pillow, I found the colorful, decorative glass bowl—that always graced the kitchen counter—on my desk, filled with packets of microwave popcorn, some sodas, and a DVD of my favorite movie: *Goodfellas*.

Two things dawned on me at that moment.

One, everything Blair had put in the bowl had come from the kitchen.

And two, the movie wasn’t new. The cellophane had been removed from the clamshell.

Plucking the DVD from the bowl, I hurried to the media room and began skimming over my movie collection. Baron, being the most anal retentive man I’d ever known, kept every title in alphabetical order. As I’d suspected, there was a space where *Goodfellas* had been.

Out of the blue, a wrecking ball of awareness plowed through me.

Mouth agape, I stumbled back and sank onto one of the buttery soft theater chairs.

Blair was spoiling me with creative gifts, not from her wallet, but from her heart.

With what little time she had between working, writing in her journal, and creating desserts, she'd been busy making me presents with her own two hands. While I'd been in my office, making phone calls and sorting through emails, Blair had been plucking off pieces of her heart to give to me.

The one and only thing she'd ever asked me for was to teach her submission.

Blair didn't want my money.

She didn't post the hundreds of photos of us together on her phone all over social media to gain attention and status.

Hell, there were even some nights she opted for sleep instead of riding my cock...which I never got butt-hurt about. My job as her Dom was to care for her mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

Your job? scoffed the little voice in my head. *Open your eyes, and look in your heart, fucker.*

Clenching my jaw, I let out a low growl.

I knew what was in my heart. I'd known for weeks. It was the most important thing that had been missing from my marriage...*love.*

While acknowledging that fact sent a rush of fear rolling through me. I couldn't deny the truth, or continue lying to myself any longer.

I was completely and irrevocably in love with Blair Brighton.

"And totally fucked," I grimly muttered to the empty room.

Blair might *need* a Dominant Daddy to work out her issues, but that didn't mean she *wanted* a man twice her age who'd foolishly fallen in love with her.

Scrubbing a hand over my face, I exhaled a heavy sigh and strode back to my office.

As I tucked the movie back in the bowl, I saw a note wedged behind a can of soda. Lifting it out, I sat back in my chair and started reading.

As you know, Daddy, I've been a good baby girl all week. I'm leaving this little, innocent, non-topping from the bottom bowl as a suggestion, in case you feel the need to reward me for my exemplary behavior. And just for the record, movie nights with you rock! Your baby girl.

Even though my palm was itching, I couldn't help but chuckle. Only Blair could top from the bottom while in the same breath deny it. After I spanked her ass crimson, I'd *eventually* reward her. In fact, I wanted to spend the rest of my life rewarding her...but first, I had to convince Blair to stay.

And maybe, if I got lucky, she'd fall in love with me. Then I could finally take the pretty ring out of its box and place it on her finger.



Blair

While Dalton was in his office on a conference call with my father and some guy in Australia, I sat on our bed, scrolling through my cell phone, looking at apartments. I'd finally saved enough money to cover a deposit and two full months of rent. I'd found a couple that were doable, but the thought of moving out made my eyes sting. Dalton would hate the apartments I'd found. They were all in sketchy parts of town. But I couldn't stay here mooching off him forever. It was time to bid my Prince Charming goodbye, return his glass slipper, and go back to my life as Cinderella *before* the ball.

I dragged in a ragged breath, brushed the tear from my cheek, and turned off my phone.

"Why are you crying?"

I snapped my head toward the sound of his voice, surprised to see Dalton standing in the doorway—arms crossed over his chest, wearing a concerned frown. I'd been so lost in my depressing thoughts; I hadn't heard him come up the stairs.

Instead of painting on a cheerful smile before blowing smoke up his ass, which he wouldn't let me do anyway, I shrugged and sent him a sad frown. "I was looking at apartments."

He strode across the room and climbed onto the bed beside me. "Did you find one?"

"A few, but they're in gang central like the last one."

Dalton tucked an errant strand of hair behind my ear and scowled. "I don't want you living there again. In fact, I don't want you to leave...at all."

"I don't either, but I can't stay here forever."

"Why not? Give me one good reason," he demanded, delving so deeply

into my eyes, I could feel him crawling inside my soul.

“Because I don’t want to be a burden.”

A humorless chuckle rolled off his lips. “You don’t even know what a burden is, baby girl.”

“Yes, I do.” I bristled. “I’ve been a burden my whole life.”

“Maybe to your father,” he growled, cinching a fist in my hair. Tingles of pain and pleasure raced over my scalp as Dalton tugged my head back and aligned my lips beneath his. “But not your *Daddy*. Stay, baby girl. Stay with me.”

“For how long?”

“Forever.”

When my body finally caught up with my brain, shock pinged through my system, and my heart sputtered. All this time, I thought he was simply being kind and putting up with me because I was Jamison’s daughter.

But it was way more than that...*Dalton has feelings for me.*

How? Why?

I’d given him a million reasons to turn his back on me and walk away, but he hadn’t. Dalton had been by my side, guiding me, challenging me, and encouraging me. Even when I’d tried pushing him away, he’d been a rock... steady, constant, and so eerily hard-wired to me. The man knew every emotion swirling inside me before I could dissect them.

Not only had he delved deep enough to see the real me, he’d also accepted the good, bad, and ugly parts of me no one else had bothered to take the time or expend the energy to notice.

He’d worked his ass off to peel back the layers of protection I’d built around me. But instead of using a battering ram, like my father, Dalton had used patience, understanding, and trust to open my eyes, broaden my horizons, and...slide inside my heart.

When it comes time for you to spread your wings, I’ll help you fly, baby girl.

As his promise whispered through me, I let my walls crumble to the ground. Though I was more raw and naked than I’d ever been in my life, I wasn’t afraid of being myself anymore.

Dalton bent and captured my lips with a soft, sensual kiss. The depth of love spiraling through me was so blinding tears spilled down my cheeks. I clung to Dalton’s shoulders as if he were a lifeline as a sob rolled from my throat and fluttered over his lips.

Easing back, he sent me a soft understanding smile before sipping at my tears.

“Is that a yes?” he asked, eyes twinkling with hope.

“Yes. Yes. A million times, yes,” I answered on a laughed-mixed-sob.

With a gratified groan, he prowled forward, easing me back onto the bed before hovering over me.

“Forever,” he whispered in a ragged snarl as he crashed his mouth over mine.

I could taste the hunger roaring inside him...feel it in the urgent sweep of his hands as he peeled off my clothes. But there was more than lust and greed in Dalton’s savage kiss. With each lash of his tongue, nip of his teeth, and beastly growl, there was a palpable undercurrent of benevolence and tenderness that made me feel treasured and complete.

Consumed with the need to please him, I surrendered.

But instead of only handing over my mind and body, I placed my heart and soul in Dalton’s Dominant hands.

As if sensing my total acquiescence, Dalton ripped his mouth from mine and pinned me with a penetrating stare. A dirty smile slowly tugged his lips, and a gratuitous gleam twinkled in his eyes as he arched a brow.

“Who do you belong to, baby girl?”

“You, Daddy.”

“Do you know how Daddies claim their baby girls?”

My stomach swirled. Yes, I did. I used to masturbate my brains out to those particular chapters in my kinky romance novels. But the idea of hearing Dalton tell me sent a naughty thrill up my spine.

“How?” I innocently asked.

With a deviant smile, he rose to his knees and skimmed a hand down my naked flesh. Pausing at my pussy, he dipped a finger inside my quivering core. After gathering up my juices, he began massaging it against my puckered rim.

Sparks sputtered through me, and with a gasp, I spread my legs wider.

“By squeezing their fat cock inside their baby girl’s tiny, virgin asshole.”

“Oh, god,” I whimpered as a rush of liquid spilled from inside me.

“Mmm,” Dalton moaned, gathering and swirling it over my tingling rim.

“I love how wild you get when I play with your ass.”

Snagging an arm around my waist, he flipped me onto my stomach before reaching across my body to retrieve the lube from the nightstand. Tendrils of

fear wended through even as my body tensed with anticipation. Though he'd been preparing me for this for weeks—with his fingers—I had no clue how Dalton was ever going to get his huge dick inside my ass.

“Up on your hands and knees, baby girl,” he instructed, snicking the tube of lube open. I sucked in a deep breath and clambered into position. “You have permission to play with your clit while I prepare and fill you. But if you come before I tell you, you’ll not only have a throbbing asshole, but stinging butt cheeks as well. Understood?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Oh, one more thing...remember to breathe,” Dalton murmured.

I gasped and shivered as he squeezed a dollop of cold lube to my puckered flesh.

“Relax, baby girl. I’ll take it nice and slow. Trust me. There’s no way in hell I’m going to rush this,” he assured me, warming the gel with his thick finger as he massaged it against my tingling rim.

Lost in each tiny explosion pulsating outward, I lowered my head to the bed. My clit throbbed relentlessly, and the slow building fire Dalton had ignited consumed me. I sighed and relaxed. But when the tip of his finger pierced my gathered rim, I jolted and tensed.

“Easy, baby girl. I’ve done this to you dozens of times.”

He had. But knowing he was going to cram his fat dick into my tiny hole fucked with my head.

As promised, Dalton took his time circling his slick finger inside my rim, slowly thinning it open. Soon, he was gliding in and out as I softly panted and restlessly rocked my hips. My clit screamed for relief, but I simply gripped the bedspread. The orgasm clawing inside me was growing bigger and hotter by the second. I was terrified that if I touched myself, I’d accidentally unleash the beast too soon.

When he started introducing another finger, I wanted to strum my aching nub like a banjo. But the thought of failing Dalton was a million times more crushing than my need to come. Stilling my hips, I inhaled several deep breaths as a sublime burn slid up my spine.

“That’s it. Relax. Let me stretch you open.”

When his second knuckle squeezed through my taut rim, I clasped down around his fingers and pitifully whimpered.

“Fuck,” Dalton hissed. “The sexy noises you’re making, and your silky walls sucking at my fingers has my cock ready to explode. I can’t wait to

squeeze inside your hot ass.”

His dirty words sent me soaring even higher.

As if I wasn't suffering enough, Dalton reached between my legs and stroked my clit.

“Daddy,” I wailed, struggling like hell to keep from tumbling into oblivion.

“You don't have permission, baby girl,” he warned.

“Then stop touching me there,” I barked.

Jerking his fingers from my clit, Dalton landed a wicked slap to my ass.

Pain charged up my back, down my thighs, and seeped deep into my flesh...thwarting my need to come. Tossing my head back, I panted wildly and struggled to rise above the flames burning my butt cheek.

“Is that how you speak to Daddy?” Dalton chastised.

“No, Sir. I'm sorry,” I whimpered. “I'm just...”

“Desperate?”

“Yes.”

“Welcome to my world,” he drawled, adding more lube. “You've got my cock screaming like a banshee and leaking like a fucking waterfall.”

I didn't know what was blazing more, my butt cheek or the fire of my expanding asshole as he pressed a third finger alongside the others. Panting like a pornstar, I closed my eyes and welcomed the burn.

“Good girl. We're almost there. You doing okay?” he asked, adding more lube.

“Yesss,” I hissed.

With a satisfied grunt, he started seesawing his thick fingers in and out of my throbbing passage, driving them deeper with each thrust. When he'd finally wedged all three deep inside me, sparks of light and blotches of darkness danced behind my eyes. My clit throbbed so hard I thought it would explode.

“Daddy,” I whimpered, trying to will away my need to come.

“I got you, baby girl,” Dalton bit out as he pulled his fingers from my ass and slathered on more lube.

A heartbeat later, his blunt tip pressed against my virgin ass.

“Rub your clit,” he instructed in a strained voice.

“But I'll come.”

“I know,” he growled. “That's what I *want*.”

With a blissful groan, Dalton pressed his bulbous crest past my throbbing

ring while he sank a fist in my hair and cinched tightly. He inched in deeper as sparks careened off my scalp and sputtered down my spine, merging with the burning pulses surging from my stretching rim.

The conflagration of sensations zipped to my clit as if drawn by a magnet. Pleasure and pressure pressed in all around me.

And as my keening cries echoed through the room, I dragged my fingers to my clit and began to rub.

“Mine!” Dalton roared driving deeper.

“Yours,” I hissed.

“I’m your safety, security...your fucking salvation. Forever!” he snarled, thrusting balls deep...filling and stretching me as white-hot fire rolled through me.

His promise cradled my heart, while his glorious cock, now gliding in and out of my innocent ass, destroyed me.

The burn blended to blinding pleasure.

My cries turned to screams as the beastly orgasm clawed through me.

“Come for Daddy,” Dalton choked out in a raspy voice.

Multi-colored lights exploded behind my eyes.

Every muscle in my body seized.

A tidal wave of euphoria rolled through me.

I clamped down around his driving shaft and screamed his name as Dalton bellowed mine. And as we shattered together, he claimed my heart as my Master and branded my virgin walls with his hot, seed.

Throat raw and body throbbing, I dropped my boneless hand to the bed. With his cock still buried deep inside me, Dalton trailed kisses up my spine as he stretched out over my back. My pussy and ass fluttered around his twitching cock as aftershocks rippled through us.

And as I slowly floated back to earth, the fact that Dalton owned me, plowed through me. Instead of being terrified, I was blindsided with more joy than my heart, mind, body, or soul could comprehend. Pressing my face to the mattress, I sobbed.

Lifting from my back, he slowly eased his cock from inside me, then hoisted me into his arms. As he sat on the bed, he cradled me against his chest and brushed strands of wet hair from my face.

“Did I hurt you?” he asked.

“No. I-I just...I don’t...I can’t find the words,” I stammered, struggling to stop crying and align my thoughts.

He leaned down and sipped my tears, then whispered, “Tell me what’s rolling through your mind.”

“I just feel so...small, but in a good way.” I sniffed. “And I don’t understand why. What’s happening to me?”

Pride shimmered in Dalton’s eyes. “You’ve acknowledged the submissive inside you and opened your heart to her. You feel small because *she* is. She’s finally ready to start learning how to grow.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Blair

After returning home from a fun day spent shopping the Miracle Mile, Dalton hauled all our packages upstairs to the bedroom. While I started putting away the clothes he'd bought the both of us, he gave me a kiss, then headed to his office.

When I was finished, I plucked the box of decadent, chocolate champagne truffles off the bed and popped one in my mouth. As the sugary goodness melted over my tongue, I closed my eyes and moaned.

"Dalton is going to love these," I murmured, clutching the box, and racing downstairs.

I entered his office to find him sitting at his desk, scowling at a multitude of monitors, and fingers flying over his keyboard.

"Is everything all right?" I asked, easing in beside him and peering at the screens.

Though I had no clue what I was looking at, I wanted to lend whatever support I could.

"No," he grumbled. "One of my biggest stocks has started tanking, *hard*. I sold off what I had, but I'm trying to figure out why it's taking such a giant shit."

"Is there anything I can do?" It was a stupid question, but...

"Yeah, be quite a second so I can concentrate, baby girl."

Weeks ago, I would have taken his words as a rejection, or at least a dismissal, and left the room. But Dalton hadn't told me to *go away*, simply to be quiet so he could work. Resting my butt on the edge of his desk, I watched

his scowl deepen before his eyes grew wide.

“Well, yeah. That’d definitely do it,” he drawled shaking his head.

“What happened?”

“The president of the company, who had a lucrative contract with the government, was busted in a hotel room with an underaged prostitute. Uncle Sam just pulled their contract, and the stock is sinking faster than the Titanic.”

“But you got out, right?”

“Yep. Thankfully, I only lost a couple million.”

A couple million? The idea of losing *that* much money made me nauseous.

“Sorry, baby girl. Did you need me for something?”

“I wanted you to try one of these,” I said, lifting a truffle from the box.

Pushing back from his desk, Dalton tucked an arm around my waist and pulled me onto his lap. I let out a startled yelp, then wiggled with a purpose and grinned. When he glanced at the candy and stuck out his tongue, I wanted to toss the truffle away and suckle it instead. Quashing the urge to top from the bottom, I place the morsel on his tongue and watched him draw it into his mouth.

“Mmm,” he moaned as he cupped my nape and captured my lips in a toe-curling kiss.

As our tongues tangled in the melting chocolate, Dalton dragged the hem of my sundress up over my hips, then gripped my waist and repositioned me until I straddled him. A familiar ache throbbed low in my belly as the heat of his growing erection warmed my ready pussy. The sugar, now long gone from our tongues, was replaced by a different kind of hunger.

Feeding the flames, Dalton arched his hips and ground his thick shaft between my folds. With a needy whimper, I rocked my clit against him, praying I wouldn’t explode. Especially when Dalton dragged his lips down my neck...laving, licking, and nipping my tingling flesh.

“Lift onto your knees,” he commanded, brushing the strap of my dress off my shoulder and scooping a breast from my bra.

Body trembling in desire, I complied as Dalton latched onto my nipple. As I whimpered and writhed, he quickly freed his straining erection before ripping my thong away. Anxious to feel him stretching and filling me, I started to lower myself onto his thick crest when he bit my nipple and tugged hard.

I yelped and froze.

“Not yet,” he growled, dragging my sundress off over my head and tossing it to the floor.

After reaching behind my back to unfasten my bra, Dalton scraped the straps down my arms and sent it sailing through the air. Then he latched his mouth over my other swollen nipple, teasing and torturing it with the same mind-bending pleasure.

When I tossed my head back with a gratified groan, I felt him smile against my flesh.

“What do you want, baby girl?” he asked in a raspy voice.

“I want to ride your cock, Daddy.”

“Are you going take every fat inch inside your hot, little cunt and ride it wild?”

“Yessss,” I hissed.

“Even while your tight little pussy is burning as I stretch and fill you?”

“Yes!” I screamed.

“Then ride me, baby girl. Ride me hard,” he growled, gripping my hips harder and dragging me down...impaling me on his thick length.

An unladylike growl tore from my throat as I sank my nails into his wide shoulders. Struggling to soften and accept his invasion, I whimpered as I lifted up and down, feeding each impossibly thick inch inside my screaming core.

“Yes,” Dalton moaned, cupping my breasts and teasing the throbbing tips with his thumbs. “That’s it...slide your silky, wet cunt up and down my cock. Fuck me. Be a good girl, and fuck me harder.”

“Daddy,” I wailed as he latched his mouth over my breast, sucked deep on my tingling flesh, and pressed my nipple to the roof of his mouth.

“Get your dick out of my daughter.”

The sound of my father’s voice thundering through the room turned the fire blazing in my veins to ice. Dalton jerked his head up, releasing my nipple with a pop, as I snapped a petrified glance over my shoulder.

Daddy Dearest stood the doorway. Shock and rage were written all over his crimson face.

“I-I’m sorry, Mr. B,” Baron ardently apologized, glaring at my father as he squeezed past him and hurried into the room. “I told him you were busy, but he shoved me out of the way and ran back here.”

As Baron rushed toward the couch, Dalton clutched me to his chest and

tried to cover my bare ass with his hands. Mortified beyond all comprehension, I pinned him with a panicked stare. But Dalton didn't see me. Every ounce of his angry expression was locked on my father.

"Get the fuck out of my office," he snarled.

"Not until you get your filthy dick out of my daughter, motherfucker!"

Oh, god. This was already getting ugly.

"I'm sorry, Sir," Baron profusely apologized again, draping a blanket over my back.

"It's not your fault," Dalton murmured as the old man stepped to the side of the desk.

Jaw ticking in anger, he wrapped the soft cotton around me before easing from my pussy. Never taking his furious glare off my father, Dalton carefully tucked his cock back in his jeans and zipped up. With a tenderness he definitely wasn't feeling, he gently lifted me off his lap and eased my feet to the floor. Body trembling, I clutched the blanket tightly as he stood and rounded the desk.

"What the hell are you doing, barreling into my house, assaulting Baron, and storming into my office?" Dalton's low, even tone was incongruent with the fury rolling off his big body and lining his face.

"To tell you the Paris build has been put on hold due to some ridiculous archeological find. Not to find you violating my daughter."

"Blair's an adult. Like it or not, she doesn't need your permission or blessing. She can do what she chooses, with whomever she chooses."

"Are you sure you gave her a *choice*?" my father snarled.

His insinuation Dalton had somehow forced me to have sex with him sent virtual flames shooting from his eyes and his hands curling into fists.

"Unlike you, I've never forced Blair to do anything she didn't want to," Dalton replied in that same cold, controlled tone. "Sadly for *her*, you can't say the same."

My father's nostril's flared, and his face grew a deeper shade of crimson as he stormed toward us. A feral growl rumbled in Dalton's chest as he extended his arm and protectively swept me behind him.

"What happened to keeping your hands to yourself?" he snarled, poking Dalton in the chest.

He narrowed his eyes and gripped my father's wrist before shoving his hand away. "Touch me again, and I'll break your fucking neck. I never made that promise. Like Blair, I make my own choices. You've said what you

came here for, now leave.”

“No. I have a lot more to say...to *both* of you.”

Peering around Dalton, my father pinned his livid glare on me. A foreboding chill clawed up my spine, but I shoved it away. Steeling myself for the caustic venom about to spill from his lips, I squared my shoulders and lifted my chin. I’d come too far and grown too strong to let Jamison Brighton break me, ever again.

“I wish I could say your actions surprise me, Blair. But they don’t. You’ve always lacked vision, drive, and...intelligence. Instead of moving back home when you failed to succeed in the real world, you simply spread your—”

“Choose your next words carefully, Brighton,” Dalton warned.

Fearlessly stepping from behind him, I held my father with a defiant stare. “I *was* successful, until you decided to start sabotaging my life.”

“Still playing the victim, I see,” he drawled, rolling his eyes.

“Being fired from my job, kicked out of my apartment, and my tires slashed doesn’t make me a victim. They do, however, make me hate you more, you pathetic, spiteful, impotent piece of shit of a father.”

His face turned impossibly redder as his eyes narrowed to tiny angry slits. “So, you what...went and found yourself a new *daddy*?”

Christ, how long was he standing there, watching and listening?

I suddenly realized it didn’t matter.

“At least, Dalton is capable of loving something other than money.”

“So, he’s told you he *loves you*?” my father scoffed.

I darted a glance at Dalton, inwardly praying he’d finally say the words. But when his furious glare remained fixed on my father, I mulishly pressed my lips together as my heart splintered in sorrow.

“How can you still be so foolish and naive, Blair? Good god, I should have listened to your mother and let her abort you.”

Abort me? Like a sword, his words sliced my whole world in two. As Dalton bristled and growled beside me, shock nearly made my knees buckle. My stomach twisted so violently that bile burned the back of my throat.

“Instead of giving me the son I’d wanted, she spawned *you*...a defiant, ungrateful little bitch who whores herself out to a man with a load of money and a stiff cock, just to keep a roof over her head.”

With a feral roar, Dalton charged my father, plowing a fist into his face and another to his stomach. Father’s snapped back while the brutal blows

lifted his feet off the floor. Blood exploded from his nose and mouth, and as a horrified scream peeled from my throat, he sailed through the air and landed on the floor with a sickening thud.

“Get out!” Dalton roared. “Get the fuck out of my house, you miserable piece of shit!”

Blinking up at him in abject shock, my father wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand, then narrowed his eyes and stood. “You’re actually choosing *her* over me? Over our partnership? Over ten years of friendship?”

“I’ve seen your true colors, Jamison. Get out!” Dalton bellowed.

“Open your eyes, man. She’s playing you,” he snarled, looking at me, again. “So, fucking up your own life wasn’t enough for you, was it? No. You had to go and fuck up mine and Dalton’s as well. I hope you’re proud of yourself, you selfish little cunt.”

Like a tsunami, guilt flooded my veins. But before I could defend myself, Dalton lunged toward him. My father backed up and lifted a bloody hand. “I’m leaving. When you finally see *her* true colors, you know where to find me.”

As he turned and walked away, the room fell deathly quiet.

Struggling to purge his hateful words from my system, I stood frozen in place. Dalton, still wearing an angry scowl, stared at the empty portal while Baron eyed him with a worried expression.

The slam of the front door jolted me out of my shocked stupor, and I rushed to Dalton’s side before splaying a hand to his back. He whirled around, like a tornado, and pinned me with a glare that shattered what was left of my heart.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I’m not playing you, Dalton. I swear. He’s lying. I’d never—”

“Stop.” He shook his head and stepped back as I reached out to him again. “I need some time to sort this out...alone.”

“Let me help you.”

“You can’t.”

“But I’m to blame for this whole—”

“Don’t even think of blaming yourself for this, Blair,” Dalton roared. “I’m the one who hit him.”

“Yes. Because he deserved it.”

“He did, but *I’m* the one who lost control *again*. I never lose control...or

at least, I didn't until..."

"Until what? Until me?"

Dalton didn't answer. He didn't have to. His tormented expression said it all.

When he turned and silently walked to the window to stare at the budding trees and new spring grass—dismissing and ignoring me—the shattered fragments of my heart turned to dust.

Baron issued a heavy sigh, then quietly left the room.

I cinched the blanket tighter around me as the accusations Dalton had made that fateful day at the Dazzling Bean roared through me.

I think you were using me to take him down...to sit back and laugh while his empire went down in flames. You knew exactly what would happen if we parted ways. The dissolution of our partnership would mean me pulling all the funding for his global expansion. All the contracts we've signed in Australia, Singapore, Paris, Turks and Caicos...and a dozen others would be rescinded. Our reputations would be worthless. But you don't care what happens to me, do you? All you care about is making Daddy Dearest suffer. Right?"

While the memory continued spooling through my brain, I realized the only emotions I felt toward my father was anger, resentment, and rejection. The only reason I was even alive and breathing was his greed for a son. Mentally tugging out the last knife Jamison Brighton would ever stab through my heart, I used it to dissect Dalton's words.

Had he been right? Had my rebellious subconscious chosen *him* as a pawn to destroy my sperm donor father? Was I truly nothing but a defiant, ungrateful little bitch? If so, maybe *I* was the only one who'd never taken the time or energy to see the real me. Second-guessing everything from my motives to my soul, I stood and wrapped my arms around myself, then turned and walked from the office.

Before making my way upstairs, I detoured through the living room and snagged a bottle of mango-flavored vodka from the bar. When I reached our bedroom, I paused and turned in a slow circle, wondering how much longer Dalton would want me in his bed, or under his roof. Tears stung my eyes, but I blinked them away. I had no right to feel sorry for myself. I'd been the catalyst that had made him lose control. I'd been the reason there was a massive, probably irreparable wedge between him and my father now. While every cell in my body screamed for me to *fix the mess I made*, I had no clue

how to erase the damage I'd caused.

"I should have saved everyone a ton of heartache and moved in under an overpass," I muttered, twisting the cap off the vodka.

Tipping back the bottle, I took a big gulp and promptly choked and coughed until my eyes watered. It tasted like battery acid. But like a penitence, I welcomed the burn sliding down my throat and assaulting my stomach. Listening for the sound of Dalton climbing the stairs, so we might talk this mess out, I took another drink and cringed. There was still no sign of him as I sucked down the fifth gulp. By then, the alcohol no longer cauterized my insides, but wended a sublime, numbing heat through my system.

As I started to tip the bottle back again, Dalton strode through the doorway and blanched. "What are you doing?"

"Enjoying this lovely bottle of Ciroc."

"Is that how you intend to solve your problems?" he asked, storming toward the bed.

"I got a newsflash for you, Dalton...nothing in the world is gonna solve the mess I made."

"Give me the bottle, Blair," he demanded.

"No." I shook my head and clutched the vodka to my chest.

"Give. Me. The. Fucking. Bottle."

Pinning him with a defiant stare, I tipped it back and took a long, satisfied pull.



Dalton

The ghosts of my past rose from their graves as visions of Heidi assaulted my brain. Paralyzed in anger, panic, and fear, my heart thundered against my ribs as I watched Blair dismiss my command and guzzle from the bottle. I tried to tell myself her escape was merely a one-time thing, brought on by stress. But my subconscious refused to buy the same desperate lies I'd fed it in the past and emphatically whispered, *Protect yourself. Get out now, before it's too late.*

Though history was repeating itself, in living color, I knew it wasn't fair to either of us to cut and run, yet. And as a bloody battle between my heart

and head ensued, I clenched my jaw and inhaled a deep breath.

“Well, I’ve got a newsflash for *you*, baby girl,” I growled, snatching the bottle from her hand. “You didn’t cause this mess. Your father did.”

“Yeah, but I dragged you into the middle of our...*dysfunction*,” Blair scoffed. “The shrink Daddy Dearest sent me to told me our relationship was dysfunctional.”

“It is.”

“No shit.” She rolled her eyes.

“Watch your language.”

“Why? You gonna spank me if I say *shit* again?”

“No. I’m gonna wash your mouth out with soap.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” she drawled, reaching for the bottle.

“We’re not having fun right now,” I bit out, holding it away from her.

“No shit.”

“Language, Blair,” I warned. “What do you think you’re going to solve by getting drunk?”

“Solve?” she repeated in a humorless laugh. “Come on, Dalton, you’re a smart man. There’s no way to *solve* a trainwreck like this. It’s a fucking disaster.”

I leaned in close and stared into her already glassy eyes, then clenched my jaw. “It’s still fixable if you’re willing to talk it out instead of drowning your shit in alcohol.”

“Language, Dalton,” she mimicked.

With a giggle, she yanked the bottle from my hands, swiveled away from me, then tipped it back.

If I hadn’t already lived this nightmare, I would have laughed and told her to drink up. But I had, and nothing about her behavior was the least bit funny or endearing to me.

“Fine. If you want to drown your feelings in booze, knock yourself out. But I can’t...no, I *won’t* be with a woman who refuses to be honest with me or herself.”

“What does that mean?” she asked, setting the bottle on the nightstand.

“That means... Decide what you *truly* want, Blair. Me. Or the approval your father isn’t capable of giving.”

Biting back a curse, I snagged my keys off the dresser, then turned and walked out the door.

“Where are you going?” she called as I stormed down the hallway.

“Dalton,” Blair yelled, then softly whimpered, “Daddy...come back.”

Though every cell in my body wanted to turn and race back to our room, I continued down the stairs. The past had taught me she was already too drunk to have a rational conversation. And I was too jaded, pissed, and finally smart enough not to waste my breath trying. I had to wait until she was sober.

As I stomped into the kitchen, Baron arched a curious brow.

“Keep an eye on Blair tonight for me, will you? She’s upstairs getting drunk.”

“Of course, but where are you going?”

“Out.”

“When should I expect you back?”

“Tomorrow,” I replied, slamming the kitchen door behind me.

After sliding onto the buttery leather seat of my Maserati, I put the top down, turned off my cell phone, and roared from the garage. Instead of heading downtown with its suffocating skyscrapers, I turned up the stereo and drove to the only place guaranteed to clear my mind.

Sixteen minutes later, I raised the rag top and locked the car. Then I strolled to the dock of the Waukegan Harbor and Marina and boarded my eighty-foot Pearl yacht that I’d lovingly dubbed, *Sanity*. After unhooking the moorings, I slid into the cockpit and drove out toward the middle of the lake. Then I dropped the anchor and headed to the master suite where I traded my jeans for a pair of sweats before grabbing a cold soda from the galley.

My mind was a jumbled mess of past and present as I settled onto the thickly padded sectional of the outside saloon. Closing my eyes, I filled my lungs with the warm, salty spring air and started sorting out my emotions... past and present.

Long hours later, as the horizon began to lighten, I stood and exhaled a heavy sigh.

It was no surprise that I, alone, still held the number one spot on my disappointment and regret list. Or that Heidi and my dad were there, too...as usual. In the past, I’d revisited the role I’d played in the rise and fall of those relationships a million times. But the fact that Jamison and Blair now graced my list, made me pause to dissect my actions and reactions with them, as well.

Blair had been right. Jamison deserved the punch I’d landed and a whole lot more.

While I’d witnessed her hatred toward her father, up close and personal, I

hadn't seen Jamison's hatred for her until now. It was shocking to hear and watch him treat her so brutally, but the part I still couldn't wrap my head around was him confessing he would have supported Pamela aborting Blair if he'd known she was going to be a girl.

I'd wanted the baby Heidi and I had created more than I'd wanted air. When she'd ripped that away from me, a part of me had died, too. The fact that Jamison was as cold and heartless as Heidi was a bitter pill to swallow.

How do you think Blair managed to choke that pill down? whispered the voice in my head.

"With a bottle of vodka."

As guilt flooded every cell in my body, I scrubbed a hand over my face, then gripped the railing of the boat before tossing back my head with a roar.

I'd fucked up bigger than I'd ever fucked up in my life.

I'd wrongly judged Blair because of the old tapes, old memories, and old fears that were seared through me.

Once more...I'd lost control.

I never lose control...or at least, I never did until...

Until what? Until me?

"Fuck!" I screamed.

On top of everything else, I knew, without a doubt, she assumed I blamed *her* for my own failure.

"I gotta get home and fix this fucking mess," I muttered, racing to the cockpit and firing up the motors.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



Blair

“Miss Blair. Miss Blair, where are you?” Baron barked.

“In here,” I called, sitting in front of the toilet, sticking my finger down my throat again.

Gagging, I groaned, but still couldn’t force myself to throw up.

“Are you decent?” Baron asked.

“Not according to my father,” I drawled as the older man peeked into the bathroom.

“What are you doing child?” His gray bushy brows furrowed together so tightly they looked like a big, fat, woolly worm above his eyes.

“Trying to get this shit out of my system, so I can go find Dalton,” I replied, spitting into the bowl. “I saw him flying down the driveway. Where did he go?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know when he’s coming back?” I whined, working to tamp down the panic rising inside me.

“He said tomorrow,” Baron sighed as he bent and reached beneath my arms. “Come on. Let’s get you up and off the floor. I’ll brew you a tea that will sober you right up.”

As he hauled me to my feet, I gripped the blanket around my boobs and wobbled as the room spun.

“I’ll wait in here and give you some privacy while you put some clothes on.”

“Thank you,” I murmured.

Staggering into the bedroom, I managed to thread my rubbery arms through a cotton shirt. But had a much harder time pulling on my yoga pants.

"I'm covered," I announced, flopping onto the bed in hopes the room would stop moving.

Baron eyed me and the half-empty bottle of vodka before plucking up the bottle and extending his elbow toward me. I stood, latching onto him as if he were a lifeline, then wobbled and swayed against his side as he led me to the elevator.

"I take it you two had a fight?" he asked as we descended to the first floor.

"It wasn't a fight it was...I don't know what it was. All I know is I messed up...messed up really bad." I swallowed the lump of regret lodged in my throat and blinked back my tears. "Look, if I don't get a chance to tell you before...before I have to leave, I loved you teaching me how to cook."

"I loved helping you learn, sweetheart." He smiled softly and squeezed my hand. "But don't go putting the cart before the horse. Give Mr. B some time to...sort things out. He's a fair and level-headed man. But he's learning new things, too."

"Like what?" I scoffed as the elevator doors opened.

"Like having a feisty, sassy woman living with him for one." Baron grinned, ushering me into the kitchen and helped me into a chair at the table. "No offense, Miss Blair, but you women are often a difficult puzzle for us men to figure out."

I pinned him with a *bitch please*, expression and rolled my eyes. "Women are easy. Men simply need to look deep inside us to see what's in our hearts, and those puzzle pieces will snap right in place."

With a noncommittal grunt, he pulled out a marble mortar and pestle and began grinding several herbs and pills.

"Don't be too hard on, Mr. B. He's in a very precarious position," Baron stated, adding fresh lemon and orange peel to a pot of boiling water.

"I know. I put him there," I replied glumly.

Baron chuckled. "I guarantee Mr. B. doesn't get himself into any situation he doesn't *want* to be in. So take all that guilt you're carrying on your shoulders and toss it in the trash where it belongs."

If only it were that easy, I would. Instead of arguing with Baron, I simply nodded as he placed a steaming mug of the vilest smelling sludge I'd ever inhaled on the table before me.

“Drink up.”

“Are you going to bring me a pan or something?”

“For what?”

“To puke in. No offense, Baron, but this smells putrid.”

With a soft chuckle, he placed the garbage pail next to me and smirked. “If it comes up, okay. If it stays in, even better. Either way, you won’t be drunk much longer.”

I somehow managed to keep the tea down, but couldn’t wait to brush away the nasty film it left in my mouth. However, I remained in my seat and ate the greek yogurt, banana, and oatmeal concoction Baron had whipped up for me. Compared to the tea, it was like a little bowl of Christmas candy. When I’d finished, he handed me a glass of water and some ibuprofen, then kissed my forehead.

“I’m going to bed. Try to get some sleep tonight, child. Life will look a whole lot better in the morning. I promise.”

“Thank you, Baron. Sweet dreams.”

After he locked the door behind him, I took the elevator to the second floor. I didn’t want to tempt fate and barf on the stairs. As I climbed into bed, I realized being sober was way worse than being drunk. My drunk brain couldn’t string two thoughts together. Whereas, my sober mind raced like a thoroughbred...in last place.

I’d actually stopped second-guessing myself or my motives. The truth was, I hadn’t set out to seduce Dalton to ruin my father. I’d seduced him purely for my own guilty pleasures. I wasn’t a cold, calculating bitch like my mother. Or a manipulative prick, like my father. I was simply selfish, like everyone else on the planet was in one way or another.

Being human didn’t make me a bad person.

Being human and fucking up didn’t either.

It was the way Dalton had left—angry and throwing out a thinly veiled ultimatum—that tore me apart.

Decide what you truly want, Blair. Me. Or the approval your father isn’t capable of giving.

That was a no-brainer. I wanted Dalton. But I wanted the Dalton who could see the *real* me. Not whatever demons I’d resurrected trying to numb the pain of dealing with my father in a bottle of vodka.

Once again, I realized there were millions of things I didn’t know about Dalton. Was his father or mother an alcoholic? Was he a recovering one as

well?

I still had a thousand questions about the man who'd stolen my heart.

I did know he couldn't live with a woman who wasn't honest about her feelings, just like I couldn't live with a man who'd turn his back on me and shut me out if I didn't meet his expectations and *behave*.

Dalton was very different from Father in a lot of ways. But in the ways that mattered, they were frighteningly alike. Like a wrecking ball, fear and regret slammed through me. I should have listened to my gut before I'd handed Dalton my heart.

It was time to go. I wasn't going to stay in another prison of invisibility.

Swiping the tear sliding down my face, I quickly packed everything I'd brought with me into Betty Beetle. When I was done, I sat at the kitchen table and left Dalton a note, thanking him for everything he had done for me.

Biting back a howl, I stood and glanced over the kitchen one last time. When I spied the recipe box Baron had insisted I keep the instructions for every dessert I'd made for Dalton in, a sob bubbled off my lips. Holding back the deluge of heartache and sadness inside me, I tucked the box under my arm, then stepped into the garage. After opening the door, I backed Betty out, then removed the remote control from my visor. Holding back a primal scream, I stepped out my car, pushed the button, then slid the device back inside the garage as the door closed.

I made it three blocks before I pulled over and let the tears fall.

By the time I'd finally stopped crying, the sun was a soft glow on the horizon. I dried my eyes and sent Leesha a text telling her I was sick, then turned off my phone. Compared to ruining Dalton's life and his partnership with my father, lying to my bestie was easy.

Fighting another round of tears, I drove to the hotel near the airport. The same one I'd gone to after divorcing my father. I knew I could only stay one night. Dalton was a smart man. He also listened to every word I said. Eventually, he'd figure out where I'd gone. Even though I didn't know if he'd bother coming to find me, I couldn't risk seeing him again. Not yet. Not until I found a way to purge him from my heart and grow strong again.

Once in my room, I peeled off my clothes, stepped into the shower, and cried until I ran out of tears.



Dalton

The sun had just begun to glow on the horizon when I pulled into the driveway. My eyes were gritty from lack of sleep, but I didn't care. My only focus was on sitting Blair down, spilling my guts about Heidi, and apologizing for being such a bastard.

But as I reached for the remote for the garage door, an ominous feeling sent my heart racing and the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. Dragging in a deep breath, I pushed the button.

Not only was Blair's car gone, but also the remote I'd given her was on the floor of the garage.

"No. No. No!" I roared, pounding the steering wheel.

Bolting from my car, I raced inside the house and sprinted to my office. After plucking the blue, velvet box from my safe, I hurried back to my car and sped toward the Dazzling Bean.

After what seemed like endless hours later, I pulled to a screeching stop in front of the shop and launched from my car. The place was lit inside, but I didn't see Blair or Leesha anywhere. Storming to the door, I tried to push it open, but it was locked. When I began pounding on the glass, Leesha bolted from the kitchen, wearing an irritated scowl. When she saw me, her annoyance was replaced by a look of confusion as she hurried to let me in.

"Where's Blair?" I barked, staring at the metal door, willing her to come through it.

"What do you mean, *where's Blair*? She's home sick in bed, right?"

"No. She's gone."

"Gone? What are you talking about? No. That can't be. She sent me a text a few minutes ago, saying she was sick and wouldn't be in today."

"Fuck!" I roared, wanting to punch something...hard.

"What's happened, Sir Ink?"

"We had a...disagreement."

"Okay," Leesha bristled. "That didn't mean she had to lie to me. Why didn't she tell me—"

"Because she knew I'd come straight here, and Andre would punish you for lying to another Dom. She didn't tell you where she was going because she wanted to protect you."

"Of course, she would," Leesha groaned, pulling out her cell phone.

“Have you called her?”

“No. I need to talk to her in person. I thought she’d be here.”

“She should be, and she should know by now she can run to me for anything, regardless of protocol,” Leesha drawled as she punched Blair’s number.

When her call went straight to voice mail, my heart sank to the pit of my stomach.

“Oh, no, you didn’t,” Leesha growled, ending the call, then trying her number again.

Like before, it went straight to Blair’s voicemail. Tears shimmered in Leesha’s eyes as she ended the call and helplessly peered up at me.

“Where’s she at?” she asked, voice quivering as a drop spilled down her cheek.

“I don’t know, little one,” I murmured, wiping it away. “But I’m going to find her.”

“How?”

“Leave that to me.” I lifted the phone from Leesha’s fingers and entered my number. As I handed it back to her, I gave her a reassuring nod. “If you hear from her, call me. Understood?”

“I will. Can you...tell me what the disagreement was—”

“No. That’s between me and Blair. But I’ll tell you one thing...I’ll lay waste to this entire fucking planet until I find her, and when I do, I’m never letting her go again.”

Leesha flashed a watery smile and nodded. “Good. Go find her, Sir Ink.”

“I will. I promise,” I vowed as I raced out the door and jumped back into my car.

After pulling a U-turn in the middle of East Erie, I headed north and tapped a number on my phone.

“Chicago Police Department, how may I direct your call?”

“I need to speak to Captain Scott Bushman, please.”

“One moment, I’ll connect you.”

“Bushman,” my old friend Scott answered.

“Barnes.”

“Hey, man. Long time. Where you been hiding?”

“In my office, like you.” I chuckled.

“Evidently not, if you’re calling me. You got another speeding ticket, right?”

“Nope. I need a bigger favor.”

“What’s up?”

“Any way your boys can locate a car for me?”

“Dude, if you want to buy another car, call a dealership. We’re not CarMax.”

“I’m not looking to *buy*. I’m looking for the driver, she’s...lost.”

“Oh? Does *she* have a name?”

“Yeah, but all I need you to do is find a 1994 powder blue, Volkswagen Beetle. Illinois license plate, victor, tango, eight, seven, five, six, three.”

I heard Scott pounding on his keyboard. Thirty seconds later, he barked out a laugh. “You want me to find Blair Brighton? Jamison Brighton’s daughter? Dude, he’s your business partner, just call him.”

“It’s...complicated.”

“Oh?” Then as if a lightbulb went off in his head, Scott repeated, “Oh,” in a tone dripping with understanding. “Please tell me you’re not banging your partner’s—”

“Watch yourself, bro. I don’t ask who you’re banging besides your girlfriend.”

“And I thank you for that,” he drawled. “So, all you need is the location of the vehicle?”

“Yep. Just an address.”

“All right. I’ll send it out over the radio and let you know if anyone spots it.”

“Thanks, man. I appreciate it.”

“Hopefully, I’ll have some info for you shortly.”

After ending the call, I spotted a sign for Midway Airport. A conversation I’d had with Blair jogged my brain like a fucking earthquake.

I thought about simply flashing my driver’s license at the Brighton Bay, downtown. I could have stayed there for free, but I didn’t want anything to do with him. So, I bought a cheap bottle of wine, checked into the Motel 8 near O’Hare, then cried and drank myself to sleep.”

“Dammit!” As Blair’s words echoed through me, I wanted to bang my head on the steering wheel.

When she’d told me about getting drunk after divorcing Jamison, I’d had the same knee-jerk reaction I had last night watching her tip back the bottle of vodka. Neither time did I stop and dissect the situations, I’d simply let my painful past blind me, while foolishly assuming they were the same.

They weren't.

Blair didn't grab a bottle of booze when Jamison had her evicted. I'd been the one who'd ordered her a glass of wine at dinner...a glass she didn't even finish. The day he'd sliced her tires, she didn't rush through the door when we got home and drown her frustration in booze.

Blair didn't use alcohol to escape life, like Heidi. She used it to numb the disappointment and pain of dealing with her father face-to-face. It wasn't an addiction. It was a coping mechanism. One I could exchange with positive reinforcement and love...if she'd let me.

"How could I be so fucking blind?" I growled before punching the gas pedal and heading toward O'Hare.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



Blair

My brain refused to shut down long enough for me to drift off to sleep. So, I took a shower, dried my hair, and tucked it up in a messy bun. There wasn't a thing I could do about my puffy, red-rimmed eyes, blotchy face, or red nose, but I honestly didn't care. I felt like a damn zombie, but I knew I had to get used to that, at least for a while.

The sun was up, so instead of digging out my pajamas, I tugged on a clean, cotton tee and blue jeans. Then plopped down on the bed with a heavy sigh. I'd spent hours making a mental list of all the reasons I had to fall out of love with Dalton, but at that moment, I didn't have the energy to start erasing him from my heart. Especially when my brain insisted on reliving every magical moment we'd spent together from laughing and playing in the snow, spending the day at Navy Pier, the museum, the symphony, the opera, to endless hours making love.

"Stop it," I chided out loud. "I didn't fight my way out from under my father's thumb to be shut out, dismissed, and ignored by another man incapable of accepting me for who and what I am, dammit!"

Slamming my fists on the bed, I stood and started pacing. I'd barely made it across the small hotel room when a thunderous knock came from the door.

Jolting to a start, my heart slammed against my ribs.

Jesus. He's found me already?

I tip-toed across the room, peered through the peephole, and nearly swallowed my tongue. On the other side of the door, wearing an impatient frown, stood my father.

What the hell...

Flipping the locks, I opened the door and scowled. "What are you doing here, and how did you find me?"

"You didn't honestly think I stopped having you followed after you moved in with that molesting bastard, did you?"

"Why? Why waste your *precious* money having me followed when you've never given a damn about me in my entire life? Are you seriously that addicted to the need to control me?"

"I've never been able to control you," he muttered in disgust.

"You're right. You haven't, and you never will. Do yourself a favor, go see the shrink you sent me to. I'm sure she can help cure your obsession."

He clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes. "I didn't come here to argue with you, Blair. I came here to take you home."

"Not that shit again. Give it a rest," I groaned. "I'm not moving back home...ever. Understand?"

"Why do you always refuse my help? Clearly, Dalton doesn't want you anymore, or you wouldn't have checked into this cheap, shitty hotel. I came all this way...hunted you down, to offer you an olive branch. Why are you too goddamn stubborn to take it?" he bellowed.

"Because it comes with conditions and expectations I'm not willing to tolerate anymore."

"You ungrateful little bitch," he spat as he fisted the front of my shirt and dragged me from the room. "Like it or not, you're coming with me. I'll chain you to your bed and lock you in your room if I have to."

"Over my dead body," Dalton thundered, eating up the distance between us in three, long strides. His expression was nothing short of murderous, yet to me, he'd never looked more handsome and beautiful. "Take your hands off her, Jamison, or I'll kill you."

A caustic laugh rolled off my father's tongue as he released my shirt. "Well, well...if it isn't Prince Charming, riding in on his Maserati convertible to rescue the undeserving scullery maid. What did she do? Steal the silver? Hock a couple of Rembrandts? I tried to warn you, but you wouldn't listen."

"*She* didn't do anything. *I'm* the one who fucked up."

His confession stunned me to the core. I froze beside them and gaped in silence.

"As long as I'm in Blair's life," Dalton continued, "whatever you're trying to force her to do isn't happening now, or ever."

“She’s really pulled the wool over your eyes, hasn’t she?” my father scoffed. “I thought you were a smart man, Dalton. But clearly, you’re as dumb as a stump if you’re allying yourself with a conniving, manipulative little brat like her.”

“What is wrong with you? Why are you incapable of loving your own child...your own flesh and blood, for fuck’s sake?”

“She doesn’t deserve my love.”

“No, she doesn’t.” Dalton’s expression softened as he turned and locked an apologetic stare on me. “Blair deserves real love. A love that comes from the heart. A love that’s pure, honest, and true. A love like...*mine*.”

Like a derecho, the strength and heat of his declaration slammed through me, stealing the air from my lungs.

“I’m sorry, baby girl...for everything,” he murmured as he extended his arm.

“Oh, Dalton,” I whimpered.

Rushing to his side, I wrapped my arms around his waist and buried my face against this chest. Breathing him in like a lifeforce, I filled my lungs with his familiar, masculine scent as tears of joy stung my eyes.

“Oh, Dalton,” my father mimicked sardonically. “Do you have any idea how ridiculous you two look? Honestly, Blair. The man is twice your age. What’s he going to do with a flighty, unambitious little girl like you...besides use you as a fuck toy?”

Giving my father a taste of his own medicine, I completely ignored him and peered up at Dalton. “You love me?”

“All my heart, baby girl.”

Unable to hold back my tears, I let them flow. “I love you, too,” I blubbered.

“We need to talk, but first, I need to take care of something.” Dalton pressed a kiss to the top of my head, then released me. “Step back, baby girl. I’m not sure how this is gonna play out, and I don’t want you getting hurt.”

His ominous command made me shiver. As I backed up toward the still open door of my hotel room, Dalton stepped in front of my father, then squared his shoulders.

“I’ve been thinking long and hard since our altercation yesterday,” Dalton began. “Seeing you physically drag your daughter out of her hotel room, and listening to all the things you’ve said since I arrived have solidified my decision. From today forward, I’ll no longer be backing your expansion. I’m

calling an end to our partnership.”

Oh my god.

Shockwaves of disbelief rolled from my head to my toes.

“You’re what?” my father barked. “Now, wait. Hold on a fucking minute, Dalton. You can’t do that.”

“Yes. I can. Of course, per the contract, I’ll be giving you written notice, but...I’m done with you, Jamison.”

“B-but...you can’t just leave me high and dry. We’ve signed contracts... numerous ones. You’re legally bound to provide the financial resources until each one of those builds are completed.”

“No. I’m legally bound to...you know what? We’ll let our lawyers hash it out.” Dalton smirked. “Oh, and by the way...you try meddling in Blair’s life again, and I’ll destroy you in the only way that matters to you...financially.”

“Y-you can’t do that.”

“Watch me.”

“You’re...you’re insane. Think of what you’re giving up...the passion, the—”

“It’s not my passion, it’s yours. *Mine* is the person you never wanted or deserved. The beautiful, strong, and amazing woman you were too angry, too self-absorbed, and too busy treating like a puppet to ever truly *see*. Take a long, hard look at your daughter, Jamison. Because if I get my way, this is the last time you’ll ever see her again.”

Dalton’s ominous words meshed with the shock pinging through me, setting a fire of confusion and fear blazing in my brain.

While my father yelled curses and threats, Dalton turned his back on the man and approached me. Determination blazed in his eyes and etched his face as he snagged an arm around my waist and pulled me in close against his rugged body.

“We need to talk, baby girl,” he softly growled as he swept me up into his arms, cradled me against his hard chest, and carried me into the hotel room.

The primal woman within ached to surrender and melt into his strong, protective arms. But my bewildered brain and broken heart refused to risk giving him the power I still possessed.

After kicking the door closed behind him, Dalton sat on the edge of the bed before settling me on his lap.

“Why did you tell my father this would be the last time he ever saw me? If you think you’re going to lock me in some ivory tower and throw away the

key, you'd better think again. I haven't fought like hell to get out from under my father's thumb to be squashed by yours."

Dalton pressed his forehead to mine and a finger to my lips.

"Shhh," he whispered. "I don't want you under my thumb, baby girl. I want you by my side."

I scowled and huffed.

"I'm sorry, Blair. I'm sorry for not handling things the way I should have last night. Turning my back on you and leaving was unforgivable. You have no clue how embarrassed and angry I am at myself for treating you the same way your father always did."

"Then why did you do it?" I asked.

"I'll explain in a minute. But first, I have some promises to make. I will never walk away from you again in anger. Ever. I will spend the rest of my life doing whatever it takes, to erase the hurt I caused you last night. I *do* love you, baby girl. Love you with all my heart."

"Then why didn't you just say that instead of telling me to decide what I *truly* wanted before you walked out the door? You didn't even let me answer...didn't let me tell you that all I've ever wanted was you. I know you were pissed because I got drunk. But after you all but blamed me because you lost control and hit my father...I'm sorry if I dented your ego by choosing a bottle of booze over—"

"Stop. I wasn't angry with *you*. I was angry..." Dalton heaved a heavy sigh. "Look, I know how ridiculously hypocritical I've been, especially after endlessly lecturing you about honesty, but I haven't been totally honest with you. I've been keeping the deepest, darkest secrets of my past locked away. I'm sorry, Blair. I thought they were dead and buried, but I was wrong...I'm a fool."

"No, you're not. You're just scared to let anyone inside your walls, like me."

He grunted and nodded. "You're right. But you deserve to know why watching you drink that bottle of vodka last night sent me over the edge."

Tamping down the million questions circling my brain, I nodded. "All right. Tell me...*everything*."

When Dalton began explaining again about how his father had groomed him, and how he'd amassed his wealth through the stock market, I didn't interrupt to remind him I already knew those details. I simply let him lead me through those stages of his life at a pace he was comfortable with.

I realized Dalton and I were a lot alike. Neither of us were the type to vomit out the darkest parts of our past without a bit of preamble.

When he began telling me how he'd discovered BDSM in college, I couldn't help but smile. I had no trouble imagining him spreading his Dominant wings.

As he continued peeling back the layers of his life, and said Heidi's name, his body tensed and his voice grew brittle. I knew he was about to impart the pieces of his past he'd kept locked away. I desperately wanted to stroke my hand over his chest. To tell him his secrets were safe with me, and that he was loved, but I couldn't let my guard down. Not yet.

"Heidi was polite and softspoken until she didn't get her way. Her hobbies included shopping, manis and pedis, shopping, hanging out with her girlfriends, and more shopping. Over time, she began resenting me for not spending more time with her. And I resented coming home each night finding her passed out drunk on the sofa."

My heart clutched as the pieces started snapping into place.

"I knew she needed something to fill the empty hours while I was at work, so I encouraged her to get out of the house. To go volunteer at a food kitchen or homeless shelter...something more gratifying than lunch dates with her friends and shopping. But Heidi wasn't motivated to do anything else.

"During one of our many fights, I asked her to tell me what she'd accomplished in life so far. She told me she was doing exactly what she was supposed to...look pretty on my arm and play hostess with the mostest for my clients and coworkers."

Ouch. I knew Heidi's type...I'd gone to boarding school with dozens of girls just like her.

"I came home late one night, and though she was drunk as fuck, she was still awake. She made some snide remark about real husbands having dinner with their wives. I told her to find another husband. She got pissed and told me the only reason she married me was because her father told her I knew how to make a lot of money."

My stomach knotted. I knew Heidi was long gone from Dalton's life, but I still wanted to bitch slap her to the moon.

"I knew then I'd made a massive mistake," Dalton sighed. "Disgruntled and disenchanting, I started working out at the gym just to avoid her. Heidi started drinking more...morning, noon, and night. She was thin as a stick and

blacking out three or four times a week. I'd had enough and took her to a doctor. He suggested rehab right away...before the baby was born."

I couldn't help it, I gasped. "Oh my god. Heidi was..."

"Pregnant? Yeah. I'd stupidly thought if we had a baby, she'd have something in her life far more special than booze. She was only a few weeks along, but the doctor warned her that if she didn't stop drinking, the baby might not develop properly. When we got home, I poured every ounce of booze in the house down the drain. Heidi was livid. She threatened to kill me in my sleep. Obviously, she didn't. Instead, she went to a clinic and got some pills."

The pain in his voice felt like a physical punch to my heart. Blinking back tears, I remained silent so he could continue purging his pain.

"I thought she was having a miscarriage and rushed her to the hospital. The doctors thought she'd had one, too. It wasn't until we got home and she opened a bottle of vodka she'd hidden that I found out the truth. When I told her drowning her sorrow in booze wouldn't take away her pain, she laughed and told me she wasn't mourning...she was celebrating. Then she told me she'd never wanted that *thing* growing inside her...didn't want it to ruin her perfect body."

I couldn't not comfort him. Pressing a kiss to his neck, I softly whispered, "I'm so sorry"

"Me too. I felt so betrayed and played, I wanted to file for divorce. Unlike you, I never rebelled against my dad. I never questioned any of the ways he *controlled* me. I believed it when he told me it was for the best. I knew my dad wouldn't stand for me divorcing Heidi. So, I offered to move her into her own apartment and pay her six figures a month if she'd *pretend* we were still together. She jumped at the chance. A month into our secret separation, she decided she wanted conjugal visits because she missed my cock. I told her no."

Oh my god? What a bitch!

"About that same time, a new client walked into my office...a man by the name of Mika, who wanted some investment advice and told me about the club he owned...Club Genesis."

"So *that's* how you became a member."

"Yep. Though Heidi and I were separated, I was legally still married. I worked a few subs, but never had sex with any of them. On our second wedding anniversary, Heidi begged me to take her to dinner. She said she

realized she was the reason we were living separate lives and wanted to try to get back together. So, I went over to her apartment to pick her up for dinner and found her passed out drunk on the couch again. That was the last straw. I went to my dad and told him I was filing for divorce. His advice was to find a mistress and stick it out with Heidi. I told him no.”

Dalton paused and scrubbed a hand over his face. “The rest is long and involved, but I’ll give you the ugly highlights. Heidi was having me followed and found out I was going to Genesis. She not only told her father I was an immoral, disgusting pervert, but pretty much everyone in the company as well. When my father got wind of the rumors, he was so embarrassed and livid that he fired me on the spot. I moved all my investments from his company to a competitor, told him to go fuck himself, and walked out the door. I haven’t seen or spoken to him since.”

Stunned speechless, I cupped his cheek as he went on.

“I am truly sorry for the way I reacted. I know you’re not Heidi, but the ghosts—”

“Came back to haunt you, just like mine did me when you left last night. I understand way more than you might think I do. Trust me.”

“Thank you,” he whispered as he brushed a feather-soft kiss over my lips.

“What happened after that?”

“A couple years later, I sold my house in Atlanta and moved here to Chicago. But the day my divorce was final...” He jostled me on his lap before pulling the sleeve of his shirt over his thick bicep and pointing to a tribal owl tattoo. “I got this...to remind me to make wiser choices.”

“And do you?”

“Definitely. I chose you, didn’t I?”

I softly smiled and nodded.

“I need to know something,” Dalton murmured.

“What?”

“Do you want children?”

“Yes. I want a ton of kids that I can spoil rotten with unconditional love.”

He smiled. “Good.”

“I need to know something, too.”

“What?”

“I get why you turned your back on your own father, but why’d you just ruin your future by turning your back on mine?”

“Because Jamison was never my future. You are. I love you, Blair.”

Lifting me off his lap, Dalton eased me onto the bed, then knelt on the floor in front of me. “Because nothing in the world matters more to me than you. And because I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Shoving a hand in his pocket, he pulled out a small, blue velvet box. As he lifted the lid, my wide eyes latched on to a huge, stunning, diamond ring. The air in my lungs froze. My heart leapt to my throat before plummeting to my toes.

“Marry me, baby girl.”

It wasn’t a question; it was a command. Though my broken heart was frantically knitting itself back together, and my brain was screaming for me to say *Yes*, I pinned him with a probing stare.

“Do you promise to never shut me out or walk away again?”

“Never.”

“Do you promise to put up with my horrible cooking?”

“Forever.”

“Do you promise to tolerate my sassy mouth?”

“I have something to keep your mouth busy day and night, baby girl,” he drawled in a bedroom voice that should be illegal in every state.

“Do you promise to keep using that delicious heavy flogger on my butt when I’m good?”

Dalton chuckled, then lifted the box higher. “Say yes, baby girl.”

“How are you going to keep my father from ever seeing me again?”

“We’ll discuss that after you say *yes*.” He grinned.

“Will I like it?”

“I think so.”

“Okay, then yes!” I screamed, unable to hold back my excitement a second longer.

“Yes?” Dalton asked, looking almost shocked.

“Yes. Definitely,” I choked out on a gloriously happy sob.

“Thank fuck,” he cheered as he lifted the ring from the box and slid it on my finger.

Blinking the blur of tears from my eyes, I gazed in awe at the ring while dazzling prisms of light danced across the room.

“I’m going to make you the happiest woman on the planet, love,” Dalton vowed.

As he hauled me off the bed and hugged me tightly, I wrapped my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist.

“And I’m going to make you the happiest man in the world.” I grinned.

“I love you, baby girl.”

“I love you, Daddy...love you to the moon and back.”

He claimed my lips with a kiss so full of passion it curled my toes and stole my breath. My hope and faith in the man of my dreams had been restored.

Grudgingly lifting from my mouth, Dalton lowered me onto the bed and hovered over me. “I want to strip you bare and bury myself inside you until the end of time.”

“Mmm,” I moaned. “Good thing I have the Door Dash app on my phone. We’re gonna need food every now and then.”

His rich, deep laughter flowed over me like warm honey. “We will, but I’m not going to defile you every way known to man in this hotel room. I’m gonna wait until I get you home.”

I pouted and sighed. “Fine. But before we spend eternity humping like bunnies...tell me how you’re going to hide me from my father.”

“How do you feel about moving to Dallas?”

“Texas?”

“Yeah.” He grinned.

“I-I don’t know. I’ve never been there. Why Dallas?”

Rolling to the mattress beside me, Dalton explained how Mika had purchased a BDSM club in that city and was looking for someone to run it for him. Of course, I had a million questions, some of them Dalton could answer, some were yet to be determined.

“What about Baron?”

“Oh, he’ll definitely be coming with us,” Dalton assured.

“What about Leesha?” The instant her name left my lips, waves of guilt rolled through me. “Oh, god...I did something unforgivable. I lied to her.”

“We know. I went to the shop first.” Dalton nodded somberly.

“Oh, god. She hates me, I know it,” I groaned.

“No. She’ll never hate you. She’s hurt, but I know she loves you enough to forgive you...after you apologize.”

“I will, until I’m blue in the face. I swear,” I vowed adamantly, praying Dalton was right. “I just hope she’ll forgive me when I need to quit. It kills me to leave her high and dry.”

“I’ll do everything I can to help Leesha hire your replacement. She won’t be as cute or sexy as you, but...” He winked.

“Thank you, Daddy,” I sighed, somewhat relieved. “Okay, then yes. Let’s do it. Let’s move to Dallas.”

“Seriously? You’ll just up and move to Texas with me?”

“As long as I’m with you...I’ll go anywhere,” I murmured as I climbed on top of him, and softly kissed his lips.



Dalton

Six weeks later...

Dallas, Texas

To say Mika had been happy when I’d offered to run the new club put it mildly. But there was nothing mild about the days that followed. Each one was a non-stop whirlwind. Between selling and buying estates, spending hours with my attorney severing ties with Jamison, hiring a temp agency to supply Leesha with a new assistant, and sending Baron to Texas to lend his discerning eye to the interior designer, I didn’t have much free time. But when I did, I spent it checking in with Blair. Like a trooper, she choreographed the movers as they packed boxes and loaded them into their truck.

It wasn’t long after that when I shoved the rest of our belongings into the back of my Escalade. Then I closed the garage door one last time before we hit the road, headed to Texas.

After three un-rushed and relaxing days filled with laughter, music, and two erotic nights of orgasmic splendor, we neared our destination. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out a blindfold.

“Put this on, baby girl.”

She eyed me and the cloth suspiciously before complying without a word.

A few blocks further, I pulled into the driveway of our new estate, and smiled as I rolled to a stop that offered a breathtaking view of the estate. While the massive water feature situated in front of the main house paled in comparison to Lake Michigan, it had been the deciding factor for me submitting an offer on the place.

Glancing over at Blair, I checked the blindfold and grinned. “No peeking,

baby girl.”

“I’m not. I swear. Why did you stop? Are we there?”

“We’re here.”

“Can I take this thing off then? I’m about to climb out of my skin.”

“We can’t have that, can we?” I chuckled, staring at her face so I didn’t miss a single second of her reaction. “Go ahead. Take it off, love.”

Blair pulled the blindfold away and blinked twice before her eyes widened, and her jaw dropped.

“Oh, my god, Dalton. Are you serious? We’re going to be living...*here*?”

My heart dropped to the pit of my stomach as fear and regret climbed my spine.

“You don’t like it, do you?”

“Are you crazy?” She jerked her eyes off the mansion before pinning me with an incredulous stare. “It’s...beautiful. It’s huge as hell, but...oh, my god, Daddy...it’s stunning.”

Relief rushed through me as I inwardly released a massive sigh.

“How many rooms does this thing have?”

“The main house has eight bedrooms, twelve bathrooms—”

“Wait, the *main* house? You mean there’s more than one?”

“Yes. There are three. The main mansion, and two separate domestic houses at the back of the estate.”

“I hope this place comes with a map, love, because I’m definitely going to need one.” Blair grinned.

“I’ll make one for you.” I chuckled, lifting my foot off the brake and continuing along the drive.

As planned, Baron stepped onto the porch and welcomed us as we pulled to a stop in front of the house. I could tell by the gleam in his eyes he was as anxious as me to reveal Blair’s surprise.

“Welcome home, Mr. B...Miss Blair,” Baron greeted with a wide grin.

“I know it’s only been a few weeks, but it feels like you’ve been gone for months,” Blair moaned, hugging him tightly.

“Same, dear. But I had to make sure everything was in place for your arrival.” Baron shot me a knowing smirk. “Come in. I’ll show you around.”

As we stepped inside, I was impressed with the new decor, but Blair was over the moon.

“This is crazy. From the outside, it looks so formal and intimidating, but on the inside...it’s warm and cozy and...so inviting.”

“That’s the vibe I was going for.” I grinned.

“Wow. Just wow,” Blair marveled.

“This is nothing. Wait until you see the patio and the pool. Come on...”
Baron urged as I watched him struggle to tamp down his excitement.

Striding in front of them, I darted outside first, then locked my gaze on Blair’s face once more. As she stepped onto the inlaid patio stones, the woman sitting on a couch near the outdoor fireplace stood and sent her a watery smile.

Blair’s shocked expression crumpled as she instantly burst into tears. When her knees started to buckle, I quickly wrapped an arm around her waist and guided her to Anya—sobbing and laughing at once. My heart surged and warmed as the long-lost friends hugged each other fiercely, crying uncontrollably.

“You did good, Mr. B.” Baron clapped me on the back, his voice thick with emotion. “Anya’s been counting the days, hours, and minutes since she got here. It warms my heart to see her this happy.”

Unable to push words past the lump in my throat, I simply nodded and drank in the blinding joy on Blair’s face.

“I never thought I’d see you again,” she sobbed, tugging Anya to the couch beside her.

“Oh, sweetheart. I’ve missed you every day,” the older woman choked out.

“How did you...what are you doing here?”

“Dalton. He contacted me three weeks ago,” Anya sniffed.

Blair snapped her head my way before coming undone all over again.

“Y-you did this f-for m-me?” she wailed.

Swallowing the even larger lump of emotion lodged in my throat, I nodded and knelt in front of her. “Of course, I did. There’s nothing in the world I wouldn’t do to make you happy.”

“I don’t deserve you,” Blair sobbed, wrapping her arms around my neck.

“You deserve everything your heart desires, baby girl,” I murmured, kissing her forehead.

Slowly easing back, I stood, Blair turned her now worried expression on Anya. “How long can you stay?”

“As long as you want me,” she grinned, raising a hand and pointing to the little brick house beyond the pool. “Baron helped me move in a week ago.”

“She’s not only beautiful, but a damn fine cook, too,” Baron said,

flashing Anya a flirtatious grin.

What an unexpected twist. Go for it, old man.

“Would you like to see the rest of the house now, Miss Blair?” he asked.

She waved away Baron’s question and shook her head. “Later. Anya and I have years of catching up to do first.”

A wide grin stretched my lips. The grandeur of the mansion and its obscenely expensive contents didn’t mean a fucking thing to my baby girl. Blair’s priceless treasures were found in the hearts of the people she loved... who loved her back.

“You two take all the time you want getting reacquainted, I have some calls to make in my office.” I smiled.

When I moved to walk away, Blair clasped my hand. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl, but seeing so much happiness light your face is all the thanks I need,” I murmured before kissing her softly.

EPILOGUE



Dalton

Four days later...

Club Genesis - Dallas

“Are you sure I’m not showing too much skin, Daddy?” Blair asked, tugging on the tiny leather skirt hugging her hips as we entered the new club.

Raking a hungry gaze over her lush breasts spilling from the top of her black leather corset, I licked my lips.

“No. You look utterly fuckable, baby girl,” I growled, nipping the soft, warm flesh beneath her wide, silver collar before making our way through the empty foyer.

We’d arrived a couple hours early to meet and get to know the core group of volunteers who’d kept the club running.

Ironically, the place reminded me of the club in Chicago. The foyer was tastefully decorated in soothing shades of cream and burgundy. There was even a podium across the room. The only difference I noticed was instead of a wide velvet curtain, a pair of wooden, swinging saloon doors marked the entrance to the dungeon.

Well, we are in Texas. I inwardly chuckled.

As we passed through the western-styled doors and into a massive open room, Blair fell in a half-a-step behind me. A crooked smile tugged my lips. I hadn’t taught her that particular protocol, yet she’d innately known not to

walk beside me. While such posture was an outward sign of submission, for me, it simply reinforced my role as her protector.

The layout of the stations was almost identical to the club in Chicago. But instead of the bar being in the back of the room on the right, this one was on the left. A cluster of people sat on barstools talking and laughing. Short seconds later, as if sensing our presence, a tall, slender man with sandy-blond hair glanced our way. As a wide grin slashed his face, he hopped off his barstool and hurried toward us.

In tandem, the others turned their heads and stared.

Suddenly, another man with dark hair and wide shoulders stood and raised a can of soda as he bellowed, “The cavalry has arrived.”

“Thank fuck.” Grinned a slender blond woman behind the bar dressed in red latex.

“Welcome. Welcome,” smiled the first man as he extended his hand. “I’m Grant Holden...Master Blade.”

“Dalton Barnes...Sir Ink,” I grinned while we exchanged a firm shake. Then I cinched an arm around Blair’s waist and eased her in close to my side. “This is my fiancé, Blair Brighton...Baby Girl.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both,” Blade said, sweeping his arm toward the bar. “Come, let me introduce you to our kinky band of misfits.”

When we reached the others, Blade patiently waited while everyone welcomed us with smiles and handshakes. Their reception was warm and reassuring, but the banter and teasing and the familiar family energy made a much bigger impact. I knew the same nexus that fused our family in Chicago bound the kinky band of misfits into a family here in Dallas as well.

Mika would be thrilled.

“All right, let’s *pretend* we know how to be proper and do some introductions.” Blade chuckled. “This is our new fearless leader, Sir Ink, and his lovely submissive, fiancé, Baby Girl.”

When the group collectively broke out in cheers and applause, I couldn’t help but laugh. Blair simply grinned from ear to ear.

“We’ll start with the daring duo who checks our members in, the lovable smart-ass, Master JJ, and his purrfectly, precious sub, Alli-Cat.”

The dark-haired man—who’d yelled about the calvary arriving—stood and shook my hand while Blair and Alli-Cat exchanged smiles.

“What the fuck happened to ladies first?” grouched the woman behind the bar.

“You’re no lady, Mistress Magic,” Blade scoffed with a grin. “I’ve seen the things you do to Knotty’s ball sac.”

She flashed him an evil smile. “I’ll be more than happy to torture yours, too. Just say the word, Blade.”

“Red. Red is the only word for me when it comes to that shit.” He chuckled with a cringe.

When everyone finally stopped laughing, Blade introduced us to the queen of the bar, Mistress Magic, and her slave boy and bar-back, knotty.

After meeting the dungeon and private room monitors, Sir Axel, Master Savage, MissTakeHer, Master Darkness, and Sir Indigo, Blade turned the floor over to me.

“On behalf of myself and our absent new owner, Mika LaBrache, thank you for all the hard work and countless hours you dedicate to the club. And for being patient while baby girl and I relocated here. It’s definitely a hell of a lot warmer in Dallas than in Chicago.”

“You think it’s warm now, wait till summer gets here,” Sir Indigo chuckled.

“I look forward to it.” I grinned, then sobered. “I’m going to observe for a couple of days, but I want you all to know, I don’t have any plans to change shit for the sake of changing them. I believe if it isn’t broken...don’t fix it. There might be a few things I’d like to tweak, but I’m not going to implement anything without discussing them as a group. So, just keep doing what you’re doing.”

“Seriously?” Magic Mistress gaped. “You’re not coming in here waving your big dick around?”

“No. I’ll keep it in my pants until I get my baby girl home,” I said, flashing Blair a wolfish grin.

“Thank god,” Magic sighed, dramatically.

“There is something I want you all to know. My door is always open. If any of you have a problem in or out of the club, I’m here for you. Thank you for allowing me and Baby Girl to join your family. We’re honored.”

“We’re damn glad y’all are here.” Blade smiled. “All right, folks, let’s get busy setting this place up, so we can open the doors and have a spankin’ good time.”

I couldn’t help but smile as everyone scattered and got straight to work.

Sliding onto the barstool beside Blair, I lifted her onto my lap and brushed a kiss over the shell of her ear. “What do you think, baby girl? You

think we made the right choice coming here?”

“Yes. I think this is going to be a perfect fit for us.”

“Me, too.”

“Can we go home now, Daddy?”

Her question shocked and confused me. With a frown, I spun Blair around. “Why? What’s wrong? Did someone make you feel uncomfortable?”

“No.” She grinned. “I just wanna go home, so you’ll whip out your big dick and start waving it around.”

Blair barely got the words out before she doubled over laughing.

The sound of her carefree giggles melted my heart.

“Soon, baby girl. Real fucking soon,” I vowed before cupping her chin, easing her upright, and melding my mouth to hers with a soul-stealing kiss.



Thank you for reading ***Tempting My Billionaire Daddy***.

I hope you enjoyed Dalton and Blair’s story as much as I loved delving into their hearts, seizing their fears, and fanning the embers of hope that glow inside them. If you did, I’d love for you to leave a review and recommend this book to *all* your friends.

If you’d like to be the first to hear about my upcoming releases and read exclusive excerpts, please sign up for my **newsletter**. Oh, and if you want to let your hair down, get a little rowdy, and grab some freebies, join my private Facebook group **Jenna Jacob’s Jezebels**. I’d love to see you there!

Sadly, Tempting My Billionaire Daddy is the final book in The Doms of Genesis series. But I’m sure you’ve already guessed, there are more decadent Doms like, Blade, JJ, Magic Mistress, Indigo, and sassy subs in the new sizzling series:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

USA Today Bestselling author **Jenna Jacob** paints a canvas of passion, romance, and humor as her alpha men and the feisty women who love them unravel their souls, heal their scars, and find a happy-ever-after kind of love. Heart-tugging, captivating, and steamy, her words will leave you breathless and craving more.

A mom of four grown children, Jenna, her husband Sean, and their furry babies reside in Kansas. Though she spent over thirty years in accounting, Jenna isn't your typical bean counter. She's brassy, sassy, and loves to laugh, but is humbly thrilled to be living her dream as a full-time author. When she's not slamming coffee while pounding out emotional stories, you can find her reading, listening to music, cooking, camping, or enjoying the open road on the back of a Harley.

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