



AGE GAP DADDY'S MILITARY FRIENDS REVERSE HAREM ROMANCE

BARBICOX

4 NEW YORK BILLIONAIRES

Age Gap Daddy's Military Friends Reverse Harem Book 1-4

Age Gap Seduction by Daddy's 4 Dirty Friends

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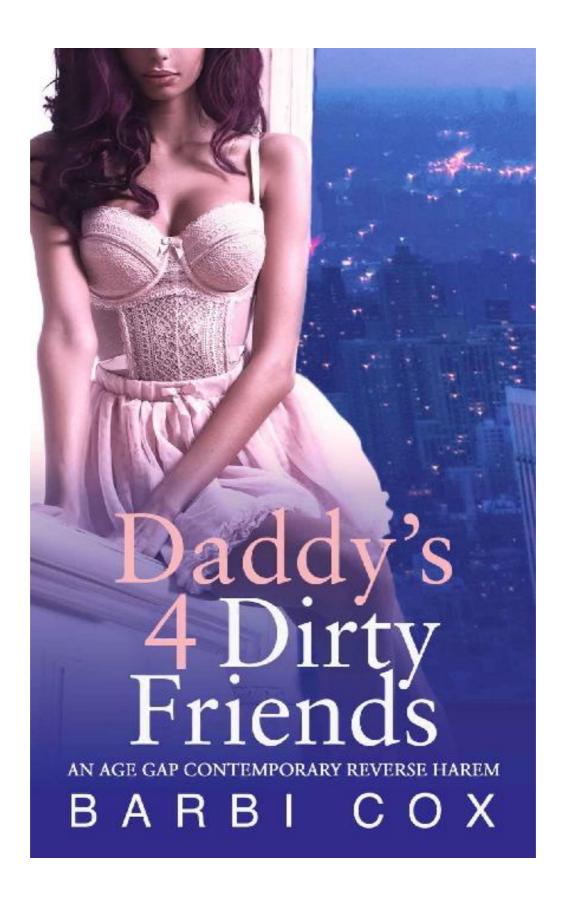
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Sophia

I ROLL MY NECK OUT, THEN FORCE MY HAIR UP IN A PONYTAIL. It's been a solid three years since I've spent more than a weekend with my dad, and something about taking him up on his offer to join him for a bit feels like regressing.

I'm twenty-four, fresh out of grad school, and expected to have a career, a house, and at least a boyfriend to show for it. Instead, I have two diplomas that don't seem worth anything, even with my experience working in the financial aid department for the last two years. What is an Econ major supposed to do in this world?

"It's right here," I murmur.

The taxi driver pulls over, and I hand him my card, letting him run it before I grab my bags from the trunk. I had him stop two buildings early so I can prepare to see my dad at work because he's always at work.

And when he's not at work... I think he sleeps, but that has yet to be verified. I take another deep breath, then look at myself in the mirror. It was a short plane ride, but my auburn hair curls in tangles, my leggings are askew, and my black button-up tank, hardly seems professional.

Oh well. It will have to do.

I shake out my ponytail one more time, put on the 'boss bitch' attitude, and switch from my flats to heels before I walk into Dad's office. It's a flurry of activity. I hear people on

phones negotiating and trying to sell their services. Others are running around, office to desks, to other desks.

The person at the front desk notices me after a solid two or three minutes. She looks at me, arches an eyebrow behind her glasses, and pushes a lock of her blonde hair out of her face. "Can I help you?"

"Sophia Lane. I'm here to see Miles Langston."

She sighs, looks at the computer, and shakes her head. "I don't see a meeting here. Have you scheduled an appointment? Mr. Langston is a very busy man."

I roll my eyes. "I don't need an-"

"Even if you're one of his ... girlfriends, you need an appointment." She sighs and shakes her head. "I thought I'd made that clear to the last one."

I almost choke on that. Holy shit. "Listen, I'm sorry, but if you just call him, I promise he'll ask you to let me in."

She stares at me, "no" written across her features. I rub my forehead. Today has already been too long. I type on my phone; a text should do the job. I don't like to play the entitled daughter, so I won't raise my voice or argue.

I'll just text my dad and have him take care of this.

"No loitering," the woman says after another minute. "But if you'd like to make an appointment-"

I groan and call my dad. I hear his phone ring somewhere, and then he picks up. "Hi, baby."

"I'm at the office."

"Is it Thursday already?"

"It tends to come after Wednesday." I sigh. The migraine is already settling in between my eyebrows. "Do you want me to go get food and meet you at the house instead?"

"No. No. I'll be right there, honey."

I hang up and continue to stare at the woman behind the counter. She sighs, stands, and shakes her head. "I'm sorry, but

I have to call security."

"Give it one more minute," I advise.

She goes to her phone anyway, dials, then my dad comes through the door with a wide smile. He has his brown hair cut short, like he could never really leave the military behind. And if Mom is reliable—which is questionable—he never really wanted to leave.

His green hazel eyes sparkle at me before he wraps me up in a hug that lifts me from the ground. I gasp, then giggle, hugging him back. I feel twelve, but I don't hate it. Dad smells the same—the faint scent of cigar and leather under his subtle cologne.

I bury my face in his neck and give him an extra squeeze. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, honey. Come on in."

"Sir, she doesn't have an appointment," the woman says.

"It's fine, Sasha. Thank you for your diligence." He keeps one arm wrapped around my shoulder. "My Sophie doesn't need an appointment."

She sits down, gives me a sneer, and watches as Dad leads me through the office. He nods to a few people, approves a few things, then ushers me into his office. There are people milling about until he shuts his door firmly.

He sits on his desk and beams at me. "How are you, sweetheart? How was graduation?"

We catch up until someone knocks on his door and walks in. "Miles, we still need to fix the Bella replacement thing, and Matthew is being a dick about it, per normal... and you're not alone in the office."

I look up and see one of the most aggressively attractive men I've ever seen. I don't even pay attention to what my dad says because I'm too busy memorizing him. He's enormous, arms straining against the button-up he has on, which is the first thing I notice. Arms that could protect better than the walls of a castle. His tapered waist, hips, nice legs, god, he's the complete package. When his hand moves to tousle his dirty blonde hair, I see his deep blue eyes and know that he's been more than one woman's fantasy.

Holy shit.

"Don't be rude, Sophia."

"Hi." I squeak.

His lips part in a smile, showing perfect teeth and just the hint of his tongue. "I'm Gunner Henderson."

"Nice to meet you." I offer him my hand. And lord have mercy, does he have some nice guns.

His fingers wrap around mine. Warm, rough, big. That's the theme of Gunner. Big. And I'm kind of curious to know if everything ...

"You too." I choke out before I completely embarrass myself.

A phone rings, and my dad stares at it, sighs, and apologizes before excusing himself from the office, leaving me with Gunner. I open my mouth to ask if I can meet him at home, but Dad's gone before I can say anything.

I take a deep breath and try to calm myself. It's been a while in the sex department, but that doesn't mean I should be throwing myself at the first man to get me excited. Gunner goes to the cabinet behind Dad's desk.

"Want a drink?"

"It's ... three in the afternoon, and you're at work, shouldn't you-"

"I think we're fine." He winks, then pulls out a beautiful decanter and a tumbler, reaches into the mini-fridge and pops a sphere of ice into the glass. "And this is the good stuff, so it's our secret."

"Okay," I say simply.

I can't imagine saying no to this man. He pours the amber liquor over the ice and offers it to me. I hold the cold glass in my hands as he makes another. I take a sip of the smoothest whiskey I've ever had, and my eyes drift around Dad's office.

His military awards, pictures of his business in Scottsdale, of his military buddies, of me, and then the first positive review he ever got from a customer. I smile and lean back in the chair. Dad's accomplished a lot.

Even if Mom loves to say he's a workaholic who will only slow down when he's dead, it's obvious he's proud of his business and has plenty of good non-work-related memories.

"So!"

I look over at Gunner and make myself focus on his face. Only his face. Nothing else. He leans his head to the side as he looks me over, head to toe. I feel it like a caress and have to take a slow breath to calm myself down.

"So," I agree.

"You're Miles' little girl?"

"I was once." I shrug. "I like to think I'm full grown now."

He bites his lip, then looks away, draining the rest of his glass in one go. "I'm tempted to agree."

I have to be imagining that roughness to his voice. I set the glass on the desk and rub my knees. "You don't happen to know a good hotel or where my dad lives so I can get settled in somewhere?"

"We all live together."

This time I choke on my spit. Dad said I'd have my own room, my own bathroom, my own space. That was part of the deal. "Together?"

"Trust me; you won't even notice us."

I doubt that entirely. "So I'll be on a ... separate floor or?"

"The loft probably. It's like a studio apartment near the living room, overlooking the park," he says simply. "You might notice us on game nights, but we could watch in another room. There's plenty of space."

"How much?"

"At least twenty-five people could live there. And you'll be invited to the hottest parties that will outdo any frat party you've been to."

Our gaze holds, and I feel my face heat. I have no clue what to say to that. Frat parties weren't something I ever did. I focused on school work and my friends. A few birthday parties, a few nights out at the bar, where I woke up with a nasty hangover, but always alone.

I never did the wild and crazy thing. It never seemed wise to tempt fate between my mom's unwillingness to back off and my dad's protective nature. But looking at Gunner, his sinful promises, his everything, I'm very *tempted*.

"Good to know," I breathe.

He chuckles. "We'll go easy on you ... at first, anyway."

"Replacing Bella is item one on my list. This meeting with a new client is number two," my dad says, coming back in the door. He pats my head. "Which is why I asked you to come in, Sophia."

"Why?" I try to focus on him and only him.

"I know that it's ridiculous to ask you to help as an office manager when you just got your master's from Brown, but ... I could use some help right now."

"Sure!" I nod. "If I start from the office manager's position and work my way up, then I'll learn how the company runs in multiple ways and can make better suggestions for improvement."

"Looking forward to it," Gunner says before heading toward the door. "I'll take care of the new client. Send me the information. Nice to meet you, Sophia."

"You too." I watch as Dad sits behind his desk. He points to the drink, and I shrug. "I'm not much of a drinker."

"Good." He takes it and takes a long drink. Dad savors it and nods. "So, let's talk work. Bella is here through Monday,

and she can give you some pointers and answer questions you have. Some overlap is good, I think."

"Of course, Dad." I nod.

He pats my hand. "I'll give you the paperwork to fill out, but I can get you a car to take you to the house. Holden is home right now, and he can show you where you'll be staying."

"You work with the guys from your platoon?" I remember seeing pictures of them when they were my age. They were all mouthwatering — Dad excluded. Jesus, I'll have the view of the city and all these gorgeous men walking around? "All of them?"

"Not all. You met Gunner. There's Holden, Matthew, Nick, and Roman. It's a lot to remember, and I'm sure you're tired after your day. We should get you settled in. You can have a nap and get something to eat. Maybe call your mom and let her know you arrived."

This is an unbelievable opportunity wrapped up in a fantasy. My best friend Valerie would drool at the chance to be in my position. Any position as long as it involves these men.

Gunner

I ignore the email that Miles has sent me in favor of giving Holden a heads up. I know Miles will tell him his daughter is on the way, but he'll leave out the important part, that she's mouthwatering.

And she is.

She could have walked right out of the pages of a magazine or an artist's studio. Her tight pants didn't hide a thing. Those long legs, thick thighs, and a round ass that's begging for at least one swat. The button-up tank top was a fucking tease.

Her breasts threatened the buttons, and she showed more cleavage than I had the sense to ignore. Those big beautiful eyes, full lips, and her willingness to do what she's asked. It's sin itself.

Holden finally picks up, silent as ever. "Warning, Miles' kid grew up."

"They tend to," he says evenly.

"As in, she's hotter than Bella, sweet, and my cock is hard just thinking of the way she looked sipping whiskey," I adjust myself as I say it.

Holden lets the silence draw out, then speaks in a low, rough voice. "Is Miles blind or stupid?"

"It's his daughter. Don't be a dick."

"Thanks for the warning."

He hangs up, and I address the issue at hand—the meeting with this new client and their financials.

But as I look it over, I think of Sophia. Soft, sweet, Sophia. I close my eyes and rub my cock. I need to not want her. But she's filling Bella's position. Which is dangerous enough for any woman but Sophia?

God, she needs to not be my best friend's kid.

We're already losing Bella because she went and fell in love with Matthew. And Matthew was stupid and traitorous enough to fall for her. They tripped over each other and cut the rest of us off.

Because we all loved *parts* of Bella, and we loved the things she did with *our* parts. Every kinky delicious moment with Bella lost now. I draw circles on my calendar, then groan and lean back in my chair, staring at the ceiling.

Bella and her dark hair in a high ponytail. The bright lingerie she'd wear that got progressively skimpier, the way she'd let us tie her up, the way she was thrilled to be shared, to please, to ...

I groan and rub my hand over my semi-hard cock. It's been missing the regular attention it used to get. No Bella, no even potential woman. Only little Sophia and the fact I'm definitely not allowed to touch her.

Just as I undo my button, needing some relief, my door opens. I put my hands on the desk, drag myself back to the desk to hide my erection, and look right up at Sophia. She looks at me, her eyes wide.

"I'm so sorry." She whimpers. "I'm ... lost, and Dad is on the phone. I'm sorry."

"Give me a minute, and I'll be happy to show you to the door."

"Want me to wait somewhere else?"

"No, actually." Because how long has it been since I pushed the button on something I wasn't supposed to? "Tell

me about you. Why are you accepting a job here when you just graduated from Brown?"

"Why not? It's a good job, and it could lead to a lot more." She shrugs, then sits down in the chair on the other side of my desk. "It's right here, and how often do people really get to jump in without a resume and the annoying interview process?"

"Interviews are annoying?"

"Stressful is probably a better word." She smirks slightly. "I'm sorry if I'm interrupting."

Oh, if only she knew how she could be helping. I lean my head to the side. "What else? About you, I mean. Are you seeing someone? Excited to be in New York?"

"It's new. Very different from Phoenix. Different from the sleepy town I've been in." She shrugs.

"And the other question?"

"No. I'm single." She bites her nail. "My last partner and I decided that a long-distance relationship was a recipe for disaster."

"Smart." The word 'partner' catches my attention. It doesn't draw a line that I need to be drawn. I need her to tell me she's interested in men. "As much as people want to believe that relationships are more than physical, the physical definitely helps."

She laughs but bites her lip and looks away. "It helps with fights, that's for sure. It's how he got out of the dog house ... or into it."

"Oh?" I lean forward.

She blushes and sinks a bit into the chair. "I shouldn't be having this conversation with you."

"Why?" I ask, actually forgetting who's daughter she is for a moment.

"Well, you and my dad are ... friends." Her cheeks turn bright red, and I want to know every dirty thought on her mind. But she clears her throat and adjusts her shirt, drawing my eyes to her cleavage, the cleavage I'd kill to lick. "And because we're going to be coworkers. I pride myself on being professional."

"I have no doubt you are." I nod.

My cock is still hard, but it's not going away with her in this room, so it's best to get her out of here. I stand up, and her eyes drop to the member in question. She licks her bottom lip and looks away.

Fuck, does she have any idea what she's doing to me? Looking so innocent and interested and ... I clear my throat, and Sophia's eyes lift to mine. "Are we going somewhere?"

"To get you the car, you need to get home," I mumble.

She stands, glances at me, trips over the chair, and nearly falls into the door. I catch her, holding her against me. Her thigh brushes my cock, and I groan. I can't take it back, and I know she heard it based on the way her lips part and her eyes search mine.

"Thank you ... I"

"Are you okay?"

She nods, and I let her go once she finds her feet. Sophia looks at me over her shoulder, but then lets me lead her to the front door. Sasha, the receptionist for the building, looks me over like she'd happily lick me at least once over.

Right now, I'm tempted to let her. Blonde, thin, with an eagerness to please and get ahead. That means she'll do just about anything. Not that I'd have to force her, given the way she's practically drooling over my cock.

I bet she could do plenty of good things with her mouth.

And I need to rein myself in. Jesus fucking Christ.

The car is out front, obviously waiting for Sophia. I put her bags in the trunk and hold the door for Sophia, trying to remember I once had a thing called honor.

"Thank you, Gunner," she whispers, sitting in the backseat and keeping her eyes on mine. "I ... I guess I'll see you later."

"You might not. It's a big house."

Not fucking big enough.

"And I'm sure I'll stay out of the way, so I don't mess up any of your routines. Have a good rest of your day."

She smiles, revealing a single dimple on the left side. She's more than sexy. She's cute. Which kills me. I nod to her and shut the door. As I walk back inside, Sasha jumps to attention. She smiles at me. "Mr. Henderson."

"Sasha." I nod.

"Is there anything I can, uh, help with?" Her eyes dip to my cock again.

"Not today, but I'll let you know." I wink at her, then head back to my office.

I shut the blinds and free my cock from my pants. I wrap my hand around it and give a long stroke. I don't want easy. I don't want just anyone and I should know that by now. I groan as I think of Sophia's easy blush, the way her lips parted when she drank me in.

I think of her body. I'd be happy to drag those leggings off her and bury my face between her legs, devouring her. My head falls back as my hand moves faster over my cock. Just like she would, if she were bouncing on me in this very office, trying not to get caught.

I wonder how she'd sound when I'm buried inside her. I want to know how she'd come. I want her. Here. Now.

Fuck.

My hand tightens around my cock as I jerk it faster and faster until I grab for the tissues and try to keep my office clean. I toss the tissues away and stuff myself back in my pants, jumping at the sudden increase in sensitivity.

When was the last time I was this turned on by a woman? When I had to jerk off after spending less than ten minutes

with her. Maybe Bella? Maybe the girl before her. What was her name? Charlie? Hallie?

Either way, I want her. Hell, I'm jealous of Holden right now. He's going to be with her all alone, in the house, away from her father.

I run to the bathroom to wash my hands and cool off and find Matthew and Nick waiting in my office when I get back. Matthew arches an eyebrow at me. "So, we have a new office manager?"

"Since you went and stole the last one." I smirk.

Nick chuckles, his bright blue eyes squint at Matthew. "You asked for that one, Matthew."

"Are you guys still mad? Bella and I are in love. We have invited you to the wedding and everything. She wants kids. What's the problem with wanting more than what we had?"

"Nothing." I sit in my chair. "So, what's this impromptu meeting about?"

"The new office manager is Miles' daughter?" Nick asks.

I nod. "Yes. She is."

"Then she's off-limits?" He asks, leaning toward me. "Right?"

"That's ... a way to put it."

"Is it the correct way?" Nick asks. Then he looks at Matthew. "You don't need to be here for this."

"I'd like to know what Wait. Is she heading to the house?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell Holden?"

"Yes." I sigh. "Of course, I told him. We all know how he likes to walk around."

"Fuck." Matthew leaves the office. "I need to get over there."

"You're supposed to be going to register things with Bella in an hour, don't forget, or you'll be denied," Nick says, teasing him.

We watch Matthew hurry off. Since he got with Bella, I swear he has a constant stick up his ass. It's like he can't slow down and like he's lost all his adventure. I know it's the stress, but I worry about him.

"Do you think that they're going to make it down the aisle as the same people they started out as?" I ask.

Nick shrugs. "Marriage changes people. Why wouldn't an engagement do the same?"

I think that over a moment. I haven't even gotten close to the real relationship thing since I got back from Afghanistan. First the PTSD, then the wealth. One scares women off, and the other draws the wrong kind in. There's no winning.

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"Hey."

I blink a few times. "Yeah?"

"Did you even hear me?"

"No."
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"How much temptation is this little kitten?" Nick asks, leaning toward me. "And more importantly, is she Sasha-level eager, or is she the shy, innocent type?"

"You mean like Bella before she was willing to admit what she wanted?"

"I mean, is it possible for any of us to keep our distance, or are we all doomed to fall for the girl like you obviously have, given the fact that your belt is still undone?"

I look at the belt and laugh. "Well, that explains a few of the looks."

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"But doesn't answer my question."
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[&]quot;Oh, we're all fucked."

Sophia

FINALLY, AT THE HOUSE! I SHAKE MY HEAD TO CLEAR THE lust from my brain as I get to the door. Dad gave me a key, but I'm nervous about using it. After all, I know someone is here, but I shake it off.

I'm going to be living here now, so I have to recognize this amazing building as my own. And it is impressive; it's old, beautiful and overlooks Central Park. I turn the key and walk into the foyer.

Gunner said the place was huge, but apparently, his huge and my huge are two different things. This could be an apartment complex. I swallow and take a few steps forward, dragging my luggage behind me.

Where am I going again?

I come to a kitchen after a few false starts, and my mouth falls open. Oh, I'm so screwed. A gorgeous, tall man is in the kitchen drinking red wine from a glass ... shirtless. Dark brown hair, tan skin, muscles that I want to touch ...

Why are they *all* so attractive? Come on! Why can't he be ugly or have a weird eye or anything like that? His eyes flick to me, dark and smoldering. My heart stops, and my mouth goes dry as I stare at him. Because that's all I can do.

Being in the same room as him makes me aware of exactly how young and stupid I feel right now. The cut of his jaw, the soulful look in his eyes, the way he slowly sets the glass down without looking at it, not missing a beat while appraising me, sets a fire inside of me.

"Um ... hi." I don't know if he even hears me.

He nods at me. I take another step forward. Wine suddenly sounds fantastic. No. No. A nap sounds fantastic. Rest is what I need. I swallow. "Do you know where I'm supposed to be staying? A loft or something?"

He nods, but his head cocks to the side. I lick across my lips. I need to sleep. No, I have to sleep. I need to forget everything I want to do with this man or Gunner before I'm with my dad again.

Because odds are we are all going to be hanging out together, I need to avoid thinking like this before I embarrass myself. I'm too young for any of them to take seriously. They'd just laugh if I even tried to flirt.

Gunner being hard was just ... a coincidence. After all, I walked in on him when he looked like he was ready to do a lot more than work.

I take a deep breath, steel myself, and walk all the way into the kitchen. "I'm sorry. If you can show me, then I can get out of your hair."

"Sophia," he says finally.

His voice is low and sexy, like silk dragging across my body. I shiver and nod.

"I'm Holden," he murmurs. "Go through there and take the stairs to the loft area on the right."

He points to the doorway without moving. I'm tempted to ask if he's wearing clothes, but I don't. Half because I hope he isn't ... and half because I'm a sane human who knows that it's not any of my business.

I hurry up to the loft, start unpacking, then sit in the middle of my things. God, how am I even going to take care of this lust when I know my dad's in the same house? I mean ... I guess I was able to get myself off when I lived with mom.

It's no different, right?

"Finding everything?"

I jump and nearly fall over. There's Holden, wearing lowslung jeans that are unbuttoned and reveal the black boxers underneath. I want to lick the light trail of hair that goes from boxers to belly button.

It's been eight months since I had sex. It's been two since I actually took care of myself. Maybe I need to put the shower to work. If nothing else, it will buy me some privacy so I can fantasize without being all guilty.

Holden doesn't apologize for scaring me. He just watches. I can see a million questions burning in his eyes, but I can also see something else. Something I feel. Heat, lust, blatant hunger.

I tuck my hair behind my ear. "Yeah. Everything is ... is fine."

"Anything I can help with at all?" He leans his head to the side. "A tour?"

"Maybe once I finish unpacking. I can handle this, but I'll let you know if I need anything; thank you."

He nods and walks away, just like that. I have a feeling Gunner would linger, so I appreciate that Holden allows me to have some privacy. I finish unpacking, get through a shower and drag on pajama shorts and a tank top.

I climb into the plush bed and take a deep breath. I need to sleep. I need to rest up so I can control all these stupid urges and keep my fantasies locked away. But sleep drags up nightmares of plane crashes, of Mom's boyfriends shooting me wicked smiles.

Gasping, I roll out of bed and into a tangle of blankets that I can't seem to escape. I whimper, then there are two hands pulling me from the sheets and against a warm body. I fight for a second, but he collars my wrists.

"Look at me." My eyes lift to Holden's. He nods once. "Take a deep breath." I make myself swallow air and exhale. His thumb strokes the inside of my wrist. "Take another and tell me something you can feel. Tactile."

"Your hands are rough," I whisper.

He smirks and nods. I swallow. "The ... the wood is cold."

"Nightmares?" He guesses, continuing to stroke my wrists, along my palms, against my fingers. His touch is so soft, it sends little sparks of shivers through me. "I'm familiar with them."

"It's stupid. I don't know why it bothers me so much," I admit, swallowing. "I feel like a little girl sometimes."

He shrugs. "Means you've lived through shit."

"That's one way to say it." I try to smile. "But it's fine. Just stuff I still need to work through."

Holden looks at me for a long time, and I feel the air between us sizzle. When he reaches a hesitant hand for my cheek, I lean into his touch. His fingers slide into my hair, and he leans forward.

"Nightmares acclimate us to our fears so we can be better prepared for the situation in the future." His low voice warms me.

When did I touch him? When did I put my hand on his shoulder, stroking down the firm muscle of his arm, over the tattoo the entire platoon has? Fuck, he's my father's friend. Why am I letting him touch me? Why do I want to touch him? This is insane.

"Does it work?" I ask.

He tips my chin up, and his nose brushes mine. "Occasionally."

"And do they go away?" I lean toward him.

He's a magnet, a promise, everything I need right now. Everything I'm tired of telling myself I don't want. Because I want Holden. Safety, assurance, warmth rolls off him. I drag my teeth over my bottom lip. One kiss wouldn't be terrible, would it? I could stop at one kiss.

"Some do." His hand tightens in my hair, and he leans back. "Others linger."

Of course, he's not interested. He just wants to make sure I'm still alive because he's friends with my dad. I look away and brush my hair behind my ear. "Well, thank you. I feel a little less ridiculous now."

"I don't."

My eyes flick to his, and he catches my jaw, drags me toward him, and kisses me. His lips mold to mine, and the burn sizzles across my skin. My lips part when his tongue strokes along the line between them. I whimper and press myself against him.

His hand grips the back of my neck while his other hand strokes over my knee and up my thigh. I pant into his mouth as he starts another kiss, his tongue stroking against mine. Easing his way inside and taking his time like I belong to him. Everywhere he touches, licks, kisses, he claims.

I deepen the kiss as his hand strokes down my back, and he pulls me over his lap. I gasp at the hardness pressing on my cotton shorts and wrap my arms around Holden's neck. He groans inside my mouth and thrusts up against me.

A door opens somewhere in the house, and I jump off him.

What the fuck did we just do? I put my hand to my mouth, look at Holden as he sucks his bottom lip with a sexy smirk that makes me eager to climb back on top of him and rub my fingers through his hair.

Which is the last thing I should do.

So I run to the bathroom, lock myself in and slide down the door. I still feel Holden across my skin, his fingers inching up the back of my thighs toward my ass, and dear god, I wanted him to toss me on the bed and show me the best remedy for nightmares.

"Holden?"

I don't recognize that voice. I'm stuck in a house filled with men. Men like Holden and Gunner ... and my dad.

My dad.

Because these are his friends, and they are my supervisors and I'm not going to move up in a company by sleeping my way to the top. So what happened with Holden is a one-time thing. No more kisses, no more worries, no more anything except general politeness.

I'm going to be good. I'll be a good girl, oh a very good girl if Holden offers up his mouth again.

No.

Wrong direction.

I want to beat my head against the tile floor. Holden is gorgeous. Gunner was gorgeous. And I still have more to meet. My phone rings, and I reach for the door handle. My fingers wrap around it, but I lick across my bottom lip and listen to the annoying ringtone cycle through again.

Groaning, I open the door and crawl across the floor for my phone. I grab it from the charger, put it to my ear, and answer it. "Hello?"

"Hi, baby! How is everything? Are you settling in okay?"

"Yes, Daddy." I adjust on my elbows and knees.

"No problems? Everything is to your liking?"

"Yes. I promise. Everything is great." I smile, but the hair on the back of my neck raises. I glance over my shoulder and find Holden watching me, blatantly staring at my ass which I'm now realizing is up in the air in a very ... sexual position. I flip around, so I'm sitting and swallow. "When will you be home? I was thinking we could do dinner?"

"I don't know, sweetheart. Order yourself a pizza or ask Holden what he would recommend. He likes the fancy food like you do. Sushi and ... salads and things like that."

"Dad, that's not fancy. It's healthy."

"Yeah. Yeah."

"Be home before I go to sleep, at least?"

"I plan on taking Saturday off to show you around," he says, as if that's interchangeable. When I don't answer, he

sighs. "I'll see what I can do, honey."

"Please, Daddy." My eyes are on Holden when I say it, and I don't miss his smirk. "Soon?"

"Alright, honey. I'm sorry. I should have known that moving in with a bunch of guys is a lot to ask you to do alone. I'll be home in an hour."

"Thank you." I hang up and watch Holden look me over, smile, and then head out. I cover my face with my hands. "Fuck."

Holden

Gunner's warning didn't do shit. Neither did Matthew coming by. I told him she was hungry and now he's out getting her food, which has left us alone again. Her soft self and me scarred a million ways.

Seeing her mid-nightmare had seemed safe. Calming her is what a gentleman would do. Kissing her ... taking the kiss. That's something else. As is the hard-on I'm trying to hide in my jeans. But her flushed cheeks, hearing the word "Daddy" on her tongue, the wild panting. Oh, it has me feeling all sorts of fucked up.

And I'm supposed to be the one with control.

I was the last to be with Bella. I was the last to agree to share. I'm always the last, but this time ...

"We shouldn't have done that," she says as she pulls herself up from the ground. "We shouldn't have. Not on any planet. We ..."

But the way she sucks her bottom lip argues for her.

"No, I'm serious. Don't look at me like that." She points at me and puts the bed between us.

She's right. She's Miles' daughter. I already know Gunner is interested, and we tend to have the same taste in women. She's young, innocent, and something else. She covers her mouth as she watches me, and I can see the conflict in her eyes.

Conflict I know well.

So I take a step back. "I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be. You don't have to apologize, I promise. It's just ... a lot. I just got here, and I'm already ruining things," she breathes.

It takes two people to kiss. I'm just as much to blame. She sits on the bed and puts her hands over her face, pushing back into her hair, which falls over her shoulders. "Fuck."

I take the chance and close the space between us. When she looks up, she jumps, then leans back. Fuck, I'd love to follow, but I stop. This isn't fair to her. So I take a deep breath and nod. "It never happened."

"What? No. I'm not crazy. This happened," she says.

I shrug. "It did, but it didn't."

She narrows her eyes for a moment, then nods. "Okay. Right. It didn't happen."

It's that simple. I glance at her, the bed, then take a step back. "Tell me if you need anything, Sophia."

"Thank you."

I walk away, make myself walk away. At least I was half-dressed when she came in. Gunner's warning did that. Matthew returns with food a few minutes later, and Sophia comes down from the loft in a smart, almost sensible white dress that she has tied just under her breasts. A sliver of cleavage is on display.

I force myself to look over at Matthew as he looks over at Sophia. He grins, no bad intention at all. Just friendliness. "I haven't seen you in years, Soph."

"Hi, Matt." She treats him to a sweet smile, complete with one dimple. "How have you been?"

They catch up in an easy way that I envy. Out of all of us, Matt has recovered the best. I have baggage inside and out. Things that aren't easy to ignore. Which is why I always wear shoes inside.

And to be honest, there's no way I could get a woman like Sophia with my shit. Matthew's been lucky to find a connection, to build a real relationship. A sniper who's had the luxury of a scope without the freedom of memory loss.

We're all fucked up in our own ways.

"Holden?" Matthew asks.

I've been staring at my sushi instead of eating it. I swallow, then put a roll in my mouth. Sophia's eyes go to me, and she blushes before shoving another roll into her mouth. Matthew smiles, but I see his eyes flick to me.

There's a question there, one that I won't answer. Not unless he asks directly. Then I'll lie. I've made an agreement with the girl. No matter how ill-advised, it's one I intend to keep. I'm going to make sure she feels safe.

"Holden, you okay?"

I nod once, then take my sushi to my room across the house and up the stairs. I need a moment. Being first in, being the driver of the jeep, being the translator for our party has eliminated the black and white of life.

After meditating, texting the online therapist I have, getting through a few hours of peace, I come back out. Matthew, Nick, and Roman are on the couch in the main living room. The one where the games are set up. Nick throws the remote down with a victorious shout.

"Come on, there's a girl here now," Gunner says, walking in with a cigar. He takes a long puff. "Keep it down."

"Oh, she'll be fine." Nick shrugs. "I 8Haven't seen her at all."

"Lucky you," Gunner says, shaking his head.

"What are we missing out on?" Roman pauses the game to look over at Gunner. "Paint us a picture."

"Nah, the real thing is much better. Holden can vouch for that." Gunner motions to me with the cigar before exhaling. "She's a peach." I shrug noncommittally. Miles is going to need someone on his side, my indiscretion being fucking ignored. The guys keep playing until Miles comes home.

"Sophie!" He yells, voice booming through the house.

"She's in her room, man," Roman chuckles. "Don't throw her to the wolves."

"Has she been there all day?"

Worry laces his features, but he's happy. And he's home before midnight. It's a good day then. Sophia, in oversized sleep pants and a robe, comes out and greets her dad with a bright smile.

"Dad, you said a few hours. Is this your version of soon?"

He chuckles, and they walk off, having a conversation none of us needs to get involved in. Roman's eyes follow them, but Nick shrugs. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't worry about it." Gunner shrugs. "Not being interested is much better."

"Less complicated," Roman agrees, but he's still looking in their direction.

I roll my eyes and let myself go to the office. I work on some of the accounting details. Details make sense. Numbers make sense. It's all clear and easy to define, to track, to make sense of. And I can lose myself in the spreadsheets, in the files, in the math.

When I stretch and rub down to my knee. I roll down the silicon and then remove the prosthetic. I don't talk about it. The guys don't talk about it. It's the unspoken between us. I rub it, trying to ignore the phantom pain in the toes I don't have.

Exhaling, I put it back on and head to the kitchen. I need something to eat even if it's two a.m. Alone time in the house is my favorite time. I love my friends, I remind myself as I adjust my pants and head to the kitchen.

I love them and love their determination to stay together despite no longer being on active duty. But there's more we don't say than do. And they are all happy to go back to what they were doing before, to the people they were before shit hit the fan.

I can't.

I can't even find the motivation to try.

I used to be the life of the party. The one who could drink anyone under the table, who would try anything once, who played life like every day, was a gamble that couldn't be passed up.

Now, I'm happy to have a bowl of children's cereal in the middle of the morning because I can. But when I get there, I realize I'm not alone.

Sitting in the almost dark is Sophia. She plays with the cereal in her bowl, lost in thought as she chews her lip. I knock on the wall, letting her know I'm here, and she looks up with surprise.

"Holden!"

"Just cereal." I point at the fridge.

I make a bowl in silence, but feel her eyes on me as I move. When I sit and meet her gaze, she blushes and turns away. "So, uh, what do you do for the company? I'm trying to figure it out. Dad's CEO, Gunner, is COO. What are you?"

"CFO. Head accountant," I murmur.

"That's amazing. How can you keep track of numbers like that?" She leans toward me as if this is the middle of her day, and she's interested. "I'm sorry. That's a big question."

"If you're interested, I can show you."

"Really? You wouldn't mind?" She perks up. "If I'll be in the way or something, I understand."

I shake my head and motion to her bowl. "My office is here."

She follows me, light on her feet as we get to the office. I pat a chair behind me, and she sits, eating her cereal. I show her what's going on in the books, and she asks questions, points at things, catches on fast. No wonder her father is proud of her.

She's quick, eager to understand, and not afraid to show when she does and doesn't understand. After a while, she sits back in the chair and shakes her head. "This is amazing, Holden. I feel like I'm speaking gibberish, but I know it makes perfect sense to you."

I shrug.

"I should get to bed." She swallows, and I'm aware of how close we are.

It's dangerous as hell, and since I don't want a repeat of earlier and I know she doesn't, it's best that we both go to bed. I lean toward the computer and nod. She looks over my face.

She glances lower at my bare chest, my shoulder, my arms. I clear my throat, and she jumps up. "Let me take your bowl."

Instead, I take hers and shoo her away. She gives me a "thank you" and heads off. I put our dishes in the sink, wash them, and head to bed. Once in bed, I take my pills, and I'm out. Luckily, I'll be able to sleep whether or not I want to.

In the morning, I hear doors slamming, and I know they've gone to work. Until I hear "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

I'm almost tempted to poke my head out, but the pills are strong, and I can peel my eyelids open. Sophia will figure it out. I have faith in her. But then I hear Roman's voice. "I can give you a ride."

"Really?!"

"We're going to the same place. It'll be fine."

I close my eyes and groan. If Roman wants her and she's at all interested, he will jump right on her. The fact that Gunner hasn't is a miracle but Roman is the kind to melt a woman down, and he can *sense* what they need and want. He can read people like no one else can.

I hear a knock on the door, then Roman's voice. "You good, Hold? Need anything from the world?"

I groan.

"Alright. I'll bring beer."

I smile and dig deeper into my bedding for another few hours until I drag myself out of the bedroom and to the kitchen in only my prosthetic. I make coffee, have a long drink, then get at least half-dressed.

It's the most I commit to most days.

It's more than enough, but I'll have to start wearing clothes considering Sophia is here. Unless we get to a point ... no. She deserves respect, no matter what we have done or what we might do.

And if we do anything, she'll still be too good for me.

I glare at my fake foot, the one that's not fooling anyone, just like me. I'm a husk of a man. Nothing more. Good for numbers, support, and the memories no one wants. I rub my forehead, then look at my phone.

A text from a number I don't have saved ... who would text me?

It's Sophia. Dad gave me your number. Thanks for last night.

I save her number and pour myself another cup of coffee. Nothing's happened.

Sophia

Being in the car with Roman is overwhelming. He smells like pure Italian sunshine and some kind of sexy spice. And when the morning light touches his face, I can't doubt that he's class personified. His tan skin, his dark, wavy hair that brushes his jaw, the deep dark eyes. Not to mention the control that rolls off him.

Like I want to obey anything and everything he says.

He glances over at me at a red light, and my knees squeeze together. He leans his head to the side. "Replacing the office manager?"

"According to Dad," I say. "I've never done anything like this though. I don't know how apt the placement will be."

"You'll grasp it quickly," he says, assuring me.

He wouldn't lie, and his tone promises the truth. I nod and play with the hem of my pencil skirt. That with the thigh highs I managed to wrestle myself into, and the nice silk blouse makes me feel professional, but I'm not sure I'm playing the part well.

"Something on your mind?"

I jump a little and look over at him. He's enormous but somehow fits behind the wheel of his ridiculously fast, sleek car. If I knew car types, I'd have a metaphorical boner over it.

"Just nerves. Not worth repeating."

"Let's talk about something else."

"Like what? My dad? Combat? The office?" I list off. "That's about all I know about you guys."

"My cousin is a football player." He shrugs. "It's a big deal."

"For what team? Has he been in the Rose Bowl or played in the Superbowl?"

Roman laughs, the sound so enchanting that I want to do whatever it takes to hear it again and keep that easy smile on his face. He shakes his head. "Soccer. LA Stars."

"Oh. I don't follow soccer," I admit.

"Breaking my heart like that? You may have to walk the rest of the way." He faces me, and I'm not sure if he's serious or joking.

I swallow, squeezing myself against the car door. Roman pats my knee. "Bambina, I'm teasing. I can't let you walk. You would be ..."

I arch an eyebrow now. "Is this a bad area?"

"No." He shakes his head. "But you are too pretty to be on the street. Not safe."

"I have keys." It's his turn to give me a look. I roll my eyes. "I learned a lot in college—like how to keep myself safe. Keys between the fingers is the first line of defense. Then acting crazy. Then, if they won't let go, instep, knee, crotch, nose. I learned that one from a movie."

Roman chuckles. "We'll have to teach you self-defense, then."

"We?"

"We all have different specialties. My hand to hand is pretty good. So is Nick's," he says, as if it's business and not my safety that we're talking about.

"Oh."

When we arrive, I jump out of the car. Roman places his big hand between my shoulder blades and guides me inside as he tosses his keys to the valet. He walks me through, ignoring Sasha's good morning and parading me through the office.

I see women eye-fuck him, along with some guys. Apparently, I'm out of the loop. I mean, sure, he's tall, tall. Like Dad's friends only come in size XL, but I can't argue. He owns every room he walks into.

He takes me to a private office and motions to it. "This is yours."

"I don't need this much."

"You will," he says. "The calls, the files, the records. They'll need space. And you'll want privacy."

"Privacy?" Why does that word sound so dirty? How does he make dirty into swoon-worthy?

Roman smiles and takes a step forward, his hand under my chin, lifting it up to look at me. "Yes. You'll do fine, Bambina."

"Yeah." I feel my face heat.

He presses his lips to mine, and mine mold to him before I can make myself stop. Luckily, Roman has a little more tact than I do. He draws back and winks. "Italian for ... good luck."

"Thanks."

He heads off, then the day rushes by. The files, the phone calls, everything tumbles onto me as I struggle to keep up. Bella, the woman I'm replacing, is godsent, but I feel like I'm a baby duck clinging to her for guidance.

Her fierce feline face, tight ponytail, lush dark hair, and confidence in each heeled step leave me in awe. By the time she tells me she's getting lunch and I can take a break, I feel like I'm sweating, my thighs and calves burn, and I'm regretting my heels.

A knock on my door makes me jump up, and I find a thinner guy with slicked brown hair and a smile standing there. He's about my height – in heels – and his glasses and posture

make me sure that he's a salesman. Something about him says, "buy me."

"Hi, I'm Neal Parker. I wanted to introduce myself."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Sophia Lane." I nod.

He offers me his hand, and I take it in a firm shake. He grins. "You're all business. I like that."

"Only way I know how to be," I say before kicking myself internally.

"Miss Lane, I need ... Neal."

"Hello, Mr. Agosti," Neal says evenly to Roman.

Roman's eyes sharpen, and he jerks his head to the side. Neal nods to me, then obediently walks out. Roman shuts the door behind him, locking us in the room together. The room is like a sauna. I'm hot all over and too aware of how tight my skirt is around my hips.

I swallow as he approaches. He sets a stack of papers down next to me and closes the space between us. "Was he bothering you?"

"No!" I jump.

"You can tell me." His eyes search mine as he leans toward me. Like he can see into all my secrets. "Tell me if he does."

"I will," I answer breathlessly. "I promise."

"Good. We'll take care of you here."

"Because I'm Miles' daughter?" I ask, unsure if he can hear me at all.

"No." Roman's hands brush across my forearms. I shiver, and he exhales. "No, because you're ... we don't want to lose you."

"You keep saying we."

"I." He states. "I like you. You have potential. You're smart."

Fuck, he's so close and ...

Roman leans forward and kisses me again, then again, deeper and hungrier. His hand grips my upper arm as his tongue strokes deep until all I can do is accept and enjoy it. I groan and take what he offers until his other hand slides up my thigh. I feel a rush of warm fluid in my panties. Fuck, he's made me wet.

I gasp and draw back. Roman's eyes burn through me, and I struggle to catch my breath, to remember that this is wrong and I need to stop. I glance at the door and back to Roman. "We're at work."

"Yes," he says, as if it doesn't matter. "And I wanted to kiss you. Did you not want that?"

"No, I ..." I swallow. "I did, but this is my first day, and I have to do the right thing. This isn't right."

"Because you're new." He nods.

"Because I don't want anyone thinking, I got this position for any reason other than merit. I don't ride off Dad's last name. I'm not going to ride on ... this kind of thing, either."

Roman leans his head to the side. I swallow. If he kisses me again, I'll lose myself in him. I know that. He's domineering, he's sure, he's confident, and ... fuck, that's just my type. A man who knows what he wants. A man who will push the line. An *almost* bad boy, but this one is functioning. He has a job, and he's a good man.

I know that.

I know that because he's here, at Dad's work, in a top position. God, he could be in any position and—fuck. Roman cups the back of my head and kisses me again sucking my bottom lip until he nips me and pulls away.

"What's that for?" I ask, my chest heaving.

"You're doing well," he says with a shrug. "And I wanted to."

I lick across my bottom lip as he leaves. God, if his cousin is even half the man he is, whoever the Stars go against is

fucked. I shiver and shake my head. I have to focus. I have got to get work done.

And I manage to until the end of the normal day when half the people head out. Neal stops into my office again as I ruin my ponytail with my fingers. I must look like a hot mess. Neal looks me over and jerks his head in the direction of the door.

"Let's go out, celebrate your first day."

"I'm not done until Bella dismisses me."

"She left with Matt thirty minutes ago."

"Oh." I exhale. "And I didn't bring my car."

"Oh?" He leans on the doorframe. "Who did you-"

"Miss Lane." Nick butts in, giving Neal a look.

Neal lets some frustration slip. I don't get it. I don't know why there seems to be a constant pissing contest between Dad's friends and Neal, but I don't want to ask. Neal slides away with a muttered "next time."

"Miss Lane, your dad asked that I take you home. He didn't have time to call a cab."

"I'm done?" I blink a few times.

Nick chuckles. Out of all the guys, he seems the most approachable, other than Matthew, anyway. Nick is shorter than the others, but still a giant in my eyes at 6ft 2" with a near-perfect smile. He's so sexy I'm ripping his clothes off in my mind. His searing blue eyes and the salt and pepper hair just get me. He used to model for GQ, and trust me, he still belongs in that world. Brad Pitt has nothing on him.

"You're done," he says with a smile.

I grab my thighs, let my hair down, and follow him outside. He leads me to a sensible car and holds the door. I get in and realize the edge of my thigh high is showing. He says nothing if he notices.

Which is good. I'm nervous enough right now. First Holden, then Roman. I can't handle hot as fuck Nick too. I'm not a very good daughter or house guest. Kissing two guys in

how many days? That's not me. I'm not looking for a collection of men. I'm a one-person kind of girl.

"How was your day?"

"Why!?" I jump.

Nick shakes his head. "I didn't hear anything bad; I promise. You're doing well. I only ask because Roman mentioned that you may want self-defense lessons, and I'm happy to do so, but I want to be sure you're not in immediate danger."

"I'm not," I promise. "It was because of a joke ... but I'd be happy to learn!"

"Then we'll start today when we get home. We have a gym we can practice in." Nick decides. "If you want to, that is."

"Sure! It might help me sleep better."

"Then it's settled."

And that's precisely what happens. When we get home, I go upstairs and change. I freshen up in the process because I know I look like a disheveled, overwhelmed little girl, and that's the last thing I want. I'm an adult, and I'm going to act like it. Take life by the balls and all that.

As I come downstairs in leggings and a tank top, I see Holden and smile at him brightly. "I hope you had a good day."

His eyes drink me in, and I fight the urge to cover up.

"I'm going to learn how to kick ass. Bye." I wave and quickly follow the instructions Nick gave me to the gym. Better to leave my embarrassment behind so I can focus.

And I need some focus. Maybe this exercise will knock the horniness out of me.

Nick

I LOOK AT THE GYM AGAIN, MAKING SURE WE HAVE WHAT WE need. The wrestling ring, the punching bags, resistance bands, a mat, gloves, ropes, and everything else to keep a body in shape. And how lucky am I that I get some time with Sophia alone?

I had my doubts before about her, but damn, Gunner didn't oversell. Not based on how she was dressed at the office, even if she looked stressed beyond belief. First days will do that to anyone.

She comes into the gym and proves my point.

The leggings hug her delicious curves, and the tank top does favors for every bit of me. I feel alive, humming with vitality just by looking at her. Her ponytail bounces as she walks over to me.

"I'm ready."

"Let's see some punches and kicks first, and we'll go from there."

I have to stow my cock ... for now. Her safety is more important. I tell myself that as I watch her body move into the punch, which lands solidly against the bag. Her kick is just as good. She goes robotically like she's done this a hundred times.

When I arch my eyebrow, she shrugs. "Kickboxing."

I nod. Then I motion for her to come at me. She bites her lip, and I roll my eyes. "I'm older, not old. You won't kill me."

Oh, if she knew the trouble I get into, she'd know there's no chance of her hurting me. But while I'm busy making sure my stance is good and trying to keep hers in mind, she hits me square in the jaw.

I stumble, and she gasps. "I'm sorry! Oh, my god. I'm not even wearing gloves."

"It's okay," I say, rubbing what I know will be a bruise. "That's a good hit."

"Now what?"

"I'm going to be an assailant. Turn around." I motion with my finger.

She turns around, staring at the wall. She's far too trusting. And with her figure, her sweetness, her looks alone, there is no reason she should trust anyone. Especially not a man. Any man. Especially not Neal.

I come up behind her and lock my arms around her, one over her mouth, one around her middle, pinning her arms. It's an easy hold to escape from, and I want to see what she'll do to better gauge where she's at.

She doesn't move. "I don't want to hurt you."

"I'm not me. I'm some pervert on the street."

"Nick."

My hand covers her mouth more forcefully. She tries to talk, but I pull her tighter against me. She fits against my body so perfectly. Every curve filling where I need her. And even though I'm supposed to be focused on training her, I can tell my cock isn't.

It's been a while since we had Bella. Since I've been able to trust a woman enough to take her to bed.

Just as I'm determined to test her further, Sophia steps on my foot hard and then takes out my leg. We fall together in a tangle that she fixes, with a sharp shoulder to my side. I groan and let her go. She gets up, then pretends to reach into her purse.

"Then I taze."

I chuckle from the ground and lie flat on my back. "You're resourceful."

She grins and bounces on her toes. "College defense classes."

"Then what is there for me to teach you?"

"How to do it better." She nods.

We spend the next hour sparring. Miles would be proud of her. She throws punches like he does, with no hesitation, but she calculates each. She doesn't miss when I give her a place to hit. I adjust her arm a few times.

We keep going until she's panting, and I'm not thinking with my head anymore. Because this time, when I tackle her and challenge her to get me off, I don't want to let go. I grab her wrist when she tries to punch me and hold it down above her head.

The other hand is a surprise, but I get that down too. When she tries to use a leg, I pin her with a knee, making sure she can't get at me. She swallows and squirms, wiggles, attempts to throw weight she doesn't have around.

"Fuck!" she growls.

Her cheeks flush, a few strands of hair dragging across her forehead, and I swear my head isn't on straight because I feel like I'm about to explode. Her body under mine, pressing tight, is ... delicious.

"Nick."

My eyes go to hers as she exhales, trying to calm herself. "How do I get out of this?"

"Don't get into this," I whisper.

"Okay, but I'm in, so how do I-"

"You can't," I emphasize. "You can't let yourself get into this position because you can't escape."

"I don't believe that." She continues to pant. "There's always a way."

"Remember when you're fighting with someone on the street. If you're trying to get away, if it's a stranger, or if you're in danger, you *cannot* be nice. There's no such thing as fighting dirty when your life and safety are on the line."

She nods, then leans toward me, her nose brushing mine. I swallow and draw back. Miles' daughter. She's Miles' daughter. I can't. I won't. But she licks across my bottom lip, and the need is too much.

I lean in and devour her. Her mouth is so sweet and delicious, addictive. I need more after just one kiss. My hand tightens around one wrist while I release her other to stroke her thigh, cupping the back of her knee because I need her wrapped around me.

I groan in her mouth as she deepens the kiss.

Then all at once, I'm on my back. She's on top of me, one knee buried in my thigh, one hand on my chest, my hand still around her wrist. I blink a few times, and she smirks. "Taser in my hand means I am free, right?"

She kissed me just to win?

"Yeah," I agree.

She smirks and sits up. Her weight on my cock shifts, sending pleasure through me. I steady her hips and fight another groan. "Sophia."

She looks at our position and turns red. I swallow. When she moves her hips, I can't stop the moan. Sophia feels good, warm. The light sheen of sweat on her skin, the nervous look in her eyes, and the way she bites her lip.

I sit up, pull her closer and kiss her again just sucking her bottom lip. She strokes down my arm, then I remember. Fuck! My best friend's daughter. I draw back and nod. "Lessons are over for today. Good job."

"Thanks." She jumps off me and makes her getaway.

What's with this temporary insanity? I know better. Never shit where you eat, and I eat here. I eat with her father. I know better. It's base respect. It's the most basic way to respect another man to *protect*, not *seduce* his daughter.

I get through a shower but have to face the fact that my cock still wants her. Even if I know better, the morals haven't reached my dick. They need to catch up fast like now. Gunner's an idiot.

She's attractive, and that's almost a sin itself.

I can't be the only one who's noticed, and now I've kissed her, and the instant I licked into her mouth, I was fucked. Because she's addictive. And I'm screwed because I need another taste.

I let myself come, thinking of her on top of me, her sweet mouth on mine, and it's easy. It takes all of two minutes. I pant in the shower and shake my head. I have to collect myself before dinner.

Miles said we were all having dinner tonight as a real welcome/ you did it for Sophia. And she did it all right. And so did I.

We have pizza and beer for dinner, and Sophia is wearing something that I shouldn't find attractive. It's a nice outfit, not provocative, but I can't help but remember her on top of me. She doesn't seem affected at all, which makes it worse.

She meets my eyes, everyone's eyes without a problem. And there's no talk of war or business. Only about games, about what she'd like to do to settle in, what she wants to see in New York if jogging in Central Park is safe.

It seems like a usual dinner. Holden is quieter than normal, and Roman is more invested than usual, but other than that, things are easy. Until talk switches to Matthew.

"So, Bella and I were able to move forward. There was a cancellation for three months from now, and we're taking it."

"That's great!" Miles says and claps Matthew on the back.

"And she knows, right?" Sophia asks.

Matthew gives her a look, then sets his slice down. "Yeah, we talked about it after work. Why?"

"She's so swamped with teaching me, and I know she's making a lot of choices about things, and it's stressing her out." She chews her bottom lip, and my cock leaps to life.

I see Gunner adjust himself and wonder what's on his mind and why I care. I shouldn't care. He can feel whatever he wants about her. That doesn't mean he gets her. Hell, I kissed her, and that doesn't mean I get her.

"It will be a challenge she can handle," Roman says.

"Of course," Sophia agrees.

"I'll call her." Matthew gets up, and I know we've seen the last of him for tonight, but I don't mind.

After a bit more conversation, Sophia yawns. She stands and apologizes. "I should get ready for tomorrow and get to bed."

"Thanks for dinner, baby doll," Miles says, holding her hand with a father's glow of approval. "You're doing well, and you're going to do even better tomorrow."

Once she's upstairs, he drops the smile and faces us. "Keep Neal under watch."

"Of course." I nod.

"Neal?" Holden snorts. "Bastard."

We all know Neal and his slimy aggressive reputation with women. He loves to be seen with models and high-class, gorgeous women, but we also know what he does once they put out. Neal doesn't do the same woman more than once. He likes to sample the world.

And he likes to brag about it to everyone. Roman interrupted him earlier today, but I was lucky enough to put an end to his attempt to ask her out. Employees never get together to celebrate one new person. Not with the number of people we've been bringing on to assist with the growth.

I knew it was just going to be the two of them. If Neal gets her alone outside of the office, there will either be sirens for him because she'll kick his ass or ... sirens for Miles because he's going to kill him.

It will end in blood. I'm sure of it.

"We'll keep an eye out," Roman says, reassuring us. "They won't leave the office."

"Why don't we fire the prick?" Gunner huffs. "He's not worth the fucking headache."

"We have no cause," Miles says. "No H.R. reports, nothing of weight. And I don't plan on my daughter being the cause for that."

His words weigh heavy on my shoulders, and I finish my beer quickly. This guilt is going to devour me. I just need to ... steer clear except at work. I'll follow the rules for Neal, and it will be fine. I'll get some action and feel better.

Sophia is a phase that will pass. Nothing more. And since I know that's a shit thing to say, I just need to get under someone else and get it out of my system. It's better than ruining everything because I'm weak.

So I won't be weak.

Sophia

I SHOULD BE SLEEPING, BUT INSTEAD, MY WHOLE BODY IS humming. I've been here for forty-eight hours and kissed three different men ... or let them kiss me. I touch my lips and shake my head.

Holden was ... special, tender. Roman took control in a way that is totally unfair because how is a woman supposed to resist being swept off her feet? And I just couldn't resist Nick. The opportunity was right there! I would have been an idiot to ignore the way to get the upper hand and show I'm more than some lucky kid who learned a few things in college ... although I learned the make-out and flip move in college, too.

I groan and rub my hands over my face. Tossing and turning for hours makes me feel worse, so I get up and head downstairs. I know that this little living area isn't used much by the guys. Hell, this entire section of the house seems to only get used when I'm involved.

After listening for a long moment, I relax into the couch and turn the TV on as low as possible without muting it. Captions keep me in the loop.

I don't mind taking up space, but I feel like I'm ... inconvenient. Like they don't want me here, or they do, but not for more than an hour or so romp. I'm not stupid. I haven't missed Gunner's eyes tracking my ass or Roman's hungry gaze on my mouth, as if they're trying to figure out the best way to construct a fantasy about me.

But that's stupid, over-exhausted talk, and I know it. I'm just new. That's all. The kisses are to feel me out-probably—well, the ones I didn't instigate. Did I instigate with Holden? I hadn't told him to stop ... and it took two of us to get me on his lap. Nick was 100% me. So only Roman took control, and I didn't say no. I just folded under him, happy to be chosen for that experiment.

"I'm such a slut," I grumble, rubbing my forehead.

"Good."

I jump and turn to see Gunner. He chuckles as he leans his head to the side, a drink in his hand. "Sluts are women who live and take what they want."

"Sure. That's ... a definition."

He walks to me and sits beside me, leaving an adequate amount of space between us. "It's what I choose to believe considering how many times I've been called a "man-slut" ... as if the term has a gender."

I smirk, and he winks at me. "What's going through that Ivy-league head of yours?"

"Don't know. I just ... can't sleep." I shrug, wanting to escape. It's when I'm alone with them that problems start. I swallow. "I should try again."

"Exercise helps." He shrugs. "For some."

"For some? You don't exercise?" I look him over, taking in his massive arms, his muscle all over that's displayed from his tank top and P.J. bottom pants combo.

"Not at night, I don't ... I get to sleep another way." He smirks at me.

"Drinking?"

"Closer."

"Then I don't want to know." I stand up and shake my head. Gunner catches my wrist and pulls me back to him. I huff. "What?"

"You're not stupid." His voice is a dangerous, rough caress.

"You're making me feel it," I hiss.

He drags me onto his lap. I leave my lungs behind, having to catch my breath as I stable myself against his chest. Gunner's eyes bore through me like he can drag answers from my throat or more.

"I'm sure you know what I'm talking about, Sophie." The condensation from his drink splashes on my knee and rolls over my thigh, pulling goosebumps. Gunner follows the line with his finger and licks his bottom lip. "You feel it."

Oh, I feel something against my ass, but that has nothing to do with this conversation. Just like I feel his hand continuing up the outside of my thigh and towards my bottom. "Or are you about to file an H.R. complaint against me?"

"We're at home," I whisper, still not sure if I want to push him away or drag him closer. The hot and cold—has me on edge. I swallow. "Gunner, please. There's too much going on."

"Talk to me about it."

"We just met. We're not friends. We're not close," I argue.

I have to put up some walls. Matt and I are o.k.—he's engaged, after all. Now, if I can get Gunner to see reason, explain things to Nick, so he knows it was a onetime show of strength and manipulation, then I'll be okay. Because Holden has promised it didn't happen, and I have a feeling that as big and controlling as Roman is, if I say no, he'll back away with a suave grace that will make me beg him to come back.

But I can't want *any* of them. They're my dad's friends, partners, coworkers. What am I thinking? Their age difference alone should put me off ... right? Then why the hell does it just turn me on?

"We're very close, Sophia." Gunner adjusts me in his arms, bringing me so close to his face that I can feel his breath across my lips.

"You're drunk," I say, accusing him.

He chuckles. "If I was drunk, I wouldn't be talking. I'd be doing other things with my mouth. This is restraint, Sweets."

A shiver works down my spine, and I lick my lip. What do I have to lose? I've kissed everyone else. Why not Gunner? Why not let them find out, hate me, and then we can all move on. It'll be that easy, right? Holden might not tell, but he'll hear about it, and then it'll be clear.

I don't *want* any of them. I'm just a confused, impulsive little shit, who knows when it's time to be business-minded. Right? I can make that happen.

Gunner catches my chin in his hand, dragging me closer, so all I see is his handsome face. "Talk to me."

"About what?"

"What you're feeling." It's more of a demand than a question. "Do you want me to let you go?"

"I…"

"This is your out. Tell me to let you go, and I will. I will set you to the side, get up, and go to bed," Gunner breathes, rubbing his nose along mine until I swear my lips are upset they have gotten no attention.

I lean toward him, giving in to his touch. I'm too tired to resist him. He feels too good, is too reasonable. And he's willing to let me go. He's giving me an option, and I can take it. I bite my lip and turn my head to avoid Gunner's intense gaze.

"Time's up, Sophie."

"What?"

I jump as his lips caress my throat, his tongue stroking over my sensitive skin. I gasp, and my nails dig into his shoulders. Gunner continues his slow exploration, tongue, and lips, and teeth charting a map on my throat with bites and teases that have me wet.

He gets to the inside of my shoulder and works his way back up. I shiver and groan, frustrated. If he would just be done, I could run. And I have to run, don't I? It's a sin to enjoy

this. I shouldn't enjoy it. I should push him away, hit him, and lock myself away in my room.

But my body doesn't get that memo. I turn my head, giving him more access to my throat, welcoming him to suck my earlobe and graze his teeth across. When he exhales, I shiver and feel how damp my underwear is.

It's insane. I've never been this turned on by having my neck kissed. I don't know how to cope with it. Just as I'm sure that my whole body is going to break out in shivers, Gunner turns my chin and makes me face him.

Our eyes hold even as our noses brush. I can feel the tease of his lips barely brushing mine as he pants. Fuck it. I need something, anything. Any ounce of friction against any inch of my body.

I grab the back of his neck and lean into him. Gunner groans and licks deep into my mouth, but his tongue darts back just as quickly. He meets me halfway, his tongue tracing the inside of my lip, then teasing the tip of mine. I whimper and dig my fingers into his hair.

When Gunner's drink brushes my knee, I jump and draw back.

Fuck. We're not even alone. We're making out on the fucking couch! I gasp and jump up, staring at Gunner. He settles back into the couch, eyes on me. He takes a long drink and offers me his glass. I can't say no. Not when I can still taste him on my lips.

"My dad," I whisper.

"Will never know," he whispers. "I'm good at discretion. So are the others."

My face pales, and I feel dizzy. "Others?"

"Your father's clueless. You're not. The way Roman watched you at dinner. Holden's intensifying silence, Nick's nervous foot tapping. None of us will tell him. We're too fucking greedy."

I swallow and take a step back. "He can't know."

"He won't. We will keep everything that we do from him."

"But you're his friends," I gasp. "Why don't you feel guilty?"

"I do," Gunner says, trying to assure me, taking his drink back and finishing it before setting it on the table. "But some things are worth guilt."

"I'm not a thing."

Gunner stands, closing the distance between us with measured steps until he claims my chin in his hand. He leans toward me, sucking my bottom lip between his and then biting, dragging me forward by my lip until he growls and lets me go.

"You could be my toy. I promise to take excellent care of you.." His wicked grin makes my stomach flip.

"I'm a person." But I don't sound indignant. I sound like I'm mewling. My legs are shaking, my skin is searing hot. "Not a toy."

Gunner curls my hair around his finger. "You're a stickler for words?"

"This is too much," I breathe.

Gunner takes my hand and walks me up the stairs to my little loft. He motions to the bed. "It's just a dream. You're sleeping."

"Liar."

"Just like you saying you don't want to be a toy," he whispers in my ear, pulling me back so I can feel how hard he is against my lower back. "Just like if I was to say I can leave it at one kiss."

"No kiss. It never happened. It was a dream," I whisper.

Gunner brushes my hair off my shoulder and sucks my earlobe until I shiver and fight the tingling spreading across my breasts and hardening my nipples. "Sorry, Sweets. You can say it over and over, but I know what I tasted, felt, want to feel."

I swallow, but by the time I move, he's walking down the stairs. What the hell am I supposed to do with four men trying to claim my attention? What if they fight? What if this gets brought into work? What if I stop fighting it?

I gulp and throw myself in bed, dragging the comforter and duvet over me as if that will protect me from their wants, so I only have to confront my own.

Roman

GLOWERING AT GUNNER DOESN'T DO A THING. HE SMIRKS AT me and lets me follow to the kitchen, where he pulls an antique decanter of whiskey down. He refills his glass and takes a long drink. I arch an eyebrow at him. "Had to make that happen, did you?"

"I felt left out." He shrugs. "Feeling possessive already?"

I snort. "Me? Possessive?"

"Yeah. That was stupid." Gunner nods, taking another drink.

They've all seen what I'm like in a monogamous relationship. I get annoyed when I get texts or phone calls nonstop. I don't enjoy having to adjust a schedule to make someone happy. I don't like feeling tethered to someone. When you're tethered, there's a chance of pain. If you have more than one partner, and they do, too, then it's easier for everyone involved.

"I only have two concerns." I hold up my fingers.

Gunner squints to look at my fingers and nods. "That's two, alright."

I narrow my eyes and drop my pointer finger. Gunner chuckles and rolls his eyes. "I'm going. I'm going. I can tell you're not in the mood for fun tonight."

I'm not in the mood for his sass while I'm trying to rein myself in. Wanting her is twisting me up. She's off-limits. We knew that before she arrived, and yet I still couldn't resist having a taste. That taste is damning. Because now I want to feast on her, not just settle for a stolen moment.

"Be good," Gunner teases.

I roll my eyes. "You're drunk. Lay off the booze for one night."

"I resent that. I'm the perfect level of tipsy," he groans and grips his glass. He exhales after a long moment and shakes his head. "What, Roman?"

"Let's keep our promise to Miles." I nod. "Keep Neal away."

"Easy enough. Little shit is terrified of us," Gunner chuckles. "And I enjoy watching him squirm."

"Sadist," I say.

Gunner winks at me. "You bring it out in me, cupcake."

I roll my eyes. "Pour yourself into bed."

Gunner snorts at me and glances toward his bed, then we both look up as Holden comes out. He barely sees us, which means he's dealing with worse shit than I want to think of. He walks away like a ghost, silent, unseeing, not real.

"Yeah. Bed it is," Gunner says, setting his empty glass down.

I pat Gunner on the back. "You'll get to fuck with Neal tomorrow. That should keep a smile on your face."

"Yeah ... yeah."

And that settles it, even if he can't be trusted when it comes to remembering this. Holden may wear his own trauma on his sleeve, but Gunner's only slightly better. When he doesn't have a project or something to do with his hands, he finds his way to alcohol, cigars, other vices, and unhealthy outlets. Anything to make the hazy memories a little hazier.

I pat his shoulder and head to bed.

When I get up, Gunner, Holden, and Nick are all in the kitchen. I look around for Miles, wanting to share the idea I had last night after putting Gunner to bed. The best way to keep Neal's hands-off, Sophia, and, for me to get more time with her is to pull her from her office.

Maybe if Neal sees her with us, he'll get it through his thick head that she's not for him to fuck and toss.

I clear my throat. "I think Sophie should shadow each of us, get to know us, and allow us to get to know her."

"Why," Nick growls, looking me over as if he knows I want my hands on her and want to steal more alone time with her.

"She wants to run the company someday," Gunner says. "This might be a way for her to take on more and give us a little slack. It would be nice to have three days off."

"Please, she's swamped. No way Miles says yes," Nick disagrees, looking around. "The emails alone-"

"No. He'll approve," Holden says, promising us.

"And that means we'll each have lunch with her and keep her away from the slimy son of a-"

"Before the Italian kicks in." Gunner pats my shoulder. "Neal. Let's bring that fucktard to heel."

Holden sighs and scratches the back of his neck. I feel bad. He hates the office, and I know it. Just like I know, he has trouble being out on the road where anyone and everyone can see him. Once Matthew started talking about the wedding and all the people there, I could see him retreating into his shell.

"She'll shadow you here, Hold," I say, to encourage him.

No one argues.

"Alright. Pitch it to Miles and leave it in his hands," Nick huffs.

"One of you take today. I need some shut-eye," Holden grumbles before heading back to his room—the closest to the kitchen—since that's the only reason he leaves his quarters.

I nod and we talk it through until it's decided it should be me. My idea—me first. Feels like a reward, and I'm more than happy to take advantage of the time offered.

Once I get to the office, I slide into Miles' office. He's on the phone, as usual, but wraps it up when he can see my impatience. He sets his phone to the side and folds his hands under his chin. "Yes?"

I explain the situation and what the guys came up with. When he continues to stare at me, I shrug. "What do you think? She wants to learn it from the ground up."

"Great."

"I'll take her under my wing today," I say.

Miles smiles and stands to pat my shoulder. "I couldn't ask for better men to look after my little girl."

It strikes my heart for a moment, knowing what I want to do with his daughter, but it's easy enough to brush off. I nod and turn from the room, walking to Sophia's office with only a few second thoughts.

All of which evaporates when I see Neal sitting on her desk. *Mine* echoes in my head. Neal leans toward her, a hand outstretched, and I clear my throat. "You'll be shadowing me today, Sophia."

She jumps, and her cheeks flush pink when she looks at me. Neal looks between us, schools his features, and walks out. I shut the door behind him, ignoring the lingering smell of his cheap cologne and his squinted glare. Sophia stands, revealing she has on a black pencil skirt that hugs her hips and a buttoned-up blouse that looks soft to the touch and reveals cleavage.

"Roman ... Mr. Agosti." She corrects, stabling herself in her heels.

They shape her legs so gorgeously. I want to see her in just those heels and thigh highs. I pinch myself to stay focused. "Now, Sophia."

She blinks a few times but follows without questioning my harsh tone. She hovers close as I teach her what I do—the analytics and tech side to ensure that security isn't breached. She nods, asks questions, grasps things quickly.

When she leans forward, reaching toward the mouse, then hesitates. I realize why a second too late. My hand strokes over the back of her thigh, under her skirt. She shivers, swallows, then guides the mouse to the admin profile and brings up a few things we were just talking about as if I'm not doing anything at all...

I smirk and stroke further up her thigh.

She presses into my hand and exhales. "Roman."

"I like the way you say my name," I murmur.

Her eyes flick to me, and then Italian flicks off her tongue. "I like the way you speak Italian."

I groan, stand, and push her against my desk. My hand strokes over her lacy panties as I press my forehead to hers. She blushes and puts her hand flat against my chest. Blinking twice, her eyes drop to my chest, and she swallows.

I lean closer, rubbing my nose over hers. Her breath rushes across my face as I press myself tighter against her. Her legs spread to accommodate me, pushing that skirt further up, revealing the top of her garter belt. I want to tear it all off her.

"Mr. Agosti," she pants.

And I don't know if she wants me to continue or stop. Lifting my hand from under her skirt, I stroke over her hip, up along her side, and brush the outside of my fingers along the curve of her breast.

Her cheeks flush red, but her eyes flick between my mouth and my eyes. Her lips part, and I can't stop myself from leaning forward. My lips brush hers, sending a buzz of electricity through my mouth and down to my cock.

"We should get lunch." Because I don't want to be a worm like Neal. She deserves respect. She deserves to know what she's getting into. And because it's the last thing I want to do.

But we go to lunch, and I see her continue to blush when our eyes meet, and I can't stand it. Screw it. "Tell me about you, Sophia."

She swallows the food in her mouth, licks her lips, wipes the corners of her mouth with her napkin, and shrugs. "I graduated college, and now I'm here."

"No fun in college?"

"I wasn't the party type. I focused on my schoolwork." She tucks her hair behind her ear. "Not to say I had no fun, but ... what about you?"

"I was with your father in combat. Then used my brain and computer knowledge." I shrug. "And stuck with the men I know. I like the stakes staying high while the danger stays low."

"Why do I feel you enjoy danger?" she asks.

"Because you have excellent instincts, Bambina. What else do you feel?" I rub the toe of my shoe along her foot.

Her cheeks go pink, and she shakes her head. "Other than ... that. I feel worried about my dad. He's doing so much, and with his age and diet, I just worry."

I take her hand, lacing my fingers in hers. "Because you're a good person."

She shrugs. "Everyone can be."

"Some more than others."

By the end of lunch, she's laughing and doesn't mind the soft touches I manage to get. As we approach the office, I clear my throat. "About ... my office."

Her face goes red, and she swallows. "Maybe I stay on the other side of the desk."

That lasts until she has a question, then she's up and so close. I drag her onto my lap for the sake of ease. I try to tell myself I only do it so she can see, but I know it's because I'm greedy. I won't get to have her the rest of this week, and I want

each moment to count. It's been so long since I've had this reaction to a woman.

I get hard when she rocks forward to point at something innocently. She freezes when she leans back against me and feels my cock. I watch her throat bob as she swallows and her eyes flick to mine. My hand strokes over her hip, then along her thigh, playing with the hem of her skirt.

"We ... shouldn't."

But she leans toward me all the same. Shivering, she rubs her hand over my shoulder. Heat rips through me, and I get even harder. Sophia's nose brushes mine, but she's just out of reach. Driving me insane. That's what she does, and she does it so effortlessly.

My phone rings, jostling her. She sits back, looks at our position, then jumps up. Sophia straightens her skirt. "I ... I, uh, learned a lot today. I should go and ... review my notes."

"Would you like a ride home?"

"S-sure." She nods. "That sounds good."

She stops just inside my door and turns to look at me again. Every curve of her body calls to me, teasing me with what I can't have ... yet. The long game. I'll have her begging me for every touch soon enough.

"Later then?"

I smile. "Yes, Bambina. Soon."

She grins, rubs the toe of her shoe across the back of her calf, revealing the top of her thigh highs, then heads out of my office, shutting the door like she knows what I'm going to do.

Sophia

BACK IN MY OFFICE, I TAKE A DEEP BREATH. I JUST TOLD myself that I wouldn't kiss them anymore. Gunner was a mistake. He has to be. They've all gotten one now, and that's all they're going to get. But feeling his hand along the back of my thigh set something off in me—a firework.

Electricity sizzling across my nerves until I only wanted to think about Roman, Gunner, Holden, and Nick and what they could do to me. Roman, giving orders and rewarding me by letting me wrap my mouth around him while Gunner thrusts into me hard and deep. Or maybe Nick and Holden, while Roman has me all ...

I groan and let my head fall to the desk.

If they could hear my fantasies. If they had any idea how much I want each of them, all of them. I shake my head. This is ridiculous. And I remind myself of that until I grab my things and head towards the front. Sasha gives me a sneer and walks over.

"Real classy of you."

"What?"

"Fucking the bosses to get ahead? Please." She shakes her head. "After the whole 'fake father' thing. Come on. I've seen the women that Miles 'dates'."

"That's Mr. Langston to you." Roman's voice cracks like a whip.

Sasha takes a step back, going pale, and then hurries to her desk. Roman's hand falls on my lower back, and he guides me forward. I don't resist. His whole body is tense. When we get in the car, he grips the wheel hard.

Did I do something?

I almost ask, but he steps on the gas. We weave through traffic until we get home. "I'm heading out. Tomorrow you're shadowing Holden, so you can sleep in a little."

"Thanks."

I get through a shower–extra-long–and try to digest what I learned today. Cybersecurity is confusing as hell, but the way Roman lit up while showing me made it worth learning. I've already kind of shadowed Holden, but I have a feeling that the same type of tension is going to weigh between us.

And I'm proven right as soon as I see him in the morning, shirtless, pants slung low, and a calmness about him that makes me even more eager to give in to whatever he wants. He looks me over and smirks.

By comparison, I'm overdressed.

"Sweats?" It's half an offer, half a request.

I go upstairs and change. They're Victoria's Secret Pink, and I pair them with a comfy crop top that's still stylish. Not totally unprofessional, but cute, too. Which shouldn't matter. But it does.

Holden nods to my outfit, then starts cooking. "Lunch first."

"Okay. What are you making?"

Instead of answering, he motions me forward. I watch him toss veggies in a wok, adding sauce and seasoning. I watch him toss things in without a care. He glances at me, then pulls me in front of him. "I'll show you."

And he does, his muscular arms wrapped around me, body cradling me. It's heaven. I feel safe and ... warm. He's so strong and good. I swallow. "If I burn it, I'm sorry."

"You won't."

He's confident in me too?

Jesus, what were these men fed as kids? I laugh as we make lunch, then we sit down together to eat. I lean my head to the side. "Tell me more about you, Holden. I don't know a thing."

"Nothing to know." He shrugs.

"Come on. I don't need the nasty or painful bits. Just something about you."

He thinks about it for a moment, then shrugs. "I don't know how to swim."

"You what?!"

I give him shit about it, trying to understand, but I can't wrap my head around him not being able to swim. He laughs and throws his hands up. "I never got around to learning, and by the time I realized I should, I was afraid I'd drop like a rock."

I giggle and pat his knee. "I could teach you. You're going to teach me more about accounting. I feel like it's only fair."

He glances at my hand and nods. "I'd like that."

"You'd trust me?"

He takes our dishes and puts them in the sink, offering me his hand. I don't even think before I take it. "Really, Holden?"

"The shallow end will be fine."

I laugh, and then we sit down to go over numbers. After an hour, I feel like my head is going to explode. I dig my fingers through my hair and groan. The numbers just swim in front of my eyes.

How can he stay in this room and watch this? This—all day, every day. Over and over. I groan and peek at Holden from behind my hair. He smirks and reaches for me, pushing my hair back and holding it there as I pout.

"How do you do this?"

"It's learned," he whispers.

"No. You're insane," I say, trying to ignore the way his fingers massage into my scalp. "You're smart and bright, and your ability to make sense of this is ... I have so much to learn."

Holden releases me, turning to face the computer. It's like winter's rolled in early. Not that I should want him to keep touching me. Just like I shouldn't have wanted Roman's hands on me yesterday. But I see Holden's jaw tighten, and it takes everything in me to keep from touching him.

What did I do wrong?

Holden keeps walking me through things until I push back from the computer. Holden's chair squeaks. I glance over my shoulder and find him devouring me. I should have worn leggings to give him a better view of my curves.

But I'm not afraid of Holden. He's approachable and sweet. Understanding. Hell, he kissed me out of a nightmare.

"Holden, how do you do it?"

"Numbers make sense, Sophia. There's no confusion. Every error has an obvious solution, and I can fix it all. It's simple," he says. "No confusion or ..."

"Emotion." I walk back to him and hesitate a step away. "Did I upset you?"

Holden stands, towering over me. He cups my face and shakes his head. He searches me for the answer, scouring my face like he can find it. I wrap my arms around myself. "You just seem bothered."

"It's not you," he says, in a murmur.

I want to believe him, want to give myself at least that, but now it's a pattern and Holden is all about patterns, right? "Okay."

Holden takes a slow breath. "I used ... I like video games."

"That's surprising."

"The puzzle ones," he says.

I smile and nod. Holden tells me about nothing and everything. We end up just talking and drinking wine until I hear the door open. I jump up and giggle as I trip over my own socks. Holden smirks and gets up, taking my glass from me and helping me out of his room.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm better than when I was staring at the numbers." I giggle, then cover my mouth.

God, is it the wine, or is he more attractive when he's grinning at me? I bite my bottom lip and rise up on my toes. This could be a date, and I would love to finish it the right way.

"You should rest, Sophia." He winks.

I rest back on my heels with another pang of rejection. Am I reading this wrong? I have to be. I tuck my hair behind my ear and nod. "You're right. Sleep sounds good."

"Can you make it up the stairs?"

"I'm fine," I grumble, pulling myself free of him.

I stumble in front of Nick and Gunner but ignore the hands that are offered to me. I stalk up to my room and fling myself onto the bed. I groan and push my face into the pillow. I'm screaming in my head, which must be why I don't hear him come up.

"Lucky it's just us and not your dad, Sweets."

Gunner's voice rubs across my skin until I turn to face him. He lies on his back, reclining like he owns the place. It's sexy. All of him is sexy, in all honesty. I can still feel his mouth on me.

"You shouldn't be in my bed," I grumble.

"Oh?"

"Or you'll get pissy with me, too." I sigh.

"No one's pissy with you." He flops onto his back, both arms folded under his head. "You don't have to worry."

But I do. I have to worry because I live with these men and I've somehow pissed off at least Roman and embarrassed myself in front of Holden. Two out of five isn't good. I can't make it three.

"I just need some sleep." I clutch my pillow closer.

Gunner nods. "Then I'll see you in the morning."

"I'm with you?" I ask.

He winks at me and pats my calf. "All day."

It thrills me. Almost as much as when I'm in his office in the morning. Last time I was here ... I shake my head and sit at his desk, listening to him. Hell, I could listen to him read the dictionary and be happy. But what he says is so boring I can't focus.

My brain is numb.

And it's easier to think about him fucking me across his desk, his hand around my mouth to keep me quiet. Pounding into me over and over as I get louder and louder. He'd be so much better than that massage setting on the showerhead.

"Sophia."

I blink a few times and Gunner arches an eyebrow. "Am I boring you?"

"No!" I jump up, realizing I've been on my elbows on his desk. "No, sorry. It's a lot to take in."

"It's a big job." He leans back in his chair. "Sweets, if this is boring, I understand. It's not the most exciting of jobs."

"No, but you're taking the time to teach me," I say.

"Something better on your mind?"

The smile he wears tells me he knows what I've been thinking. I feel my cheeks heat. I'm embarrassed at getting caught. But fantasizing is safer than acting on what I want. Even if having him would feel better.

I'm sure my squeak is unconvincing, considering he tries to rub his smile away. He shakes his head at me. "Behave, Sweets. We're at work."

"I am!"

"Yeah. That smile says you're *not* behaving." He leans toward me, his hand on mine. "And I want in on whatever your pretty head is stuck on."

"Gunner," I breathe.

He smirks. "Let's order lunch instead. Might be a better use of our time."

Lunch is delivered by a frustrated Neal. I can see the warning in his gaze, and he glowers at Gunner the entire time. When he heads out, Gunner huffs, "Fucker."

"Why don't you like him?"

"I have my reasons." Gunner's fingers rub into my wrist, and then he pulls my hand to his face to kiss across my palm. "Now, be a good girl, so I can focus."

I swallow. I need to behave. I need to get myself under control so I can keep the peace in the house, right? But I can't resist pushing the envelope. "Gunner, why is Roman mad at me?"

He chuckles, just laughs, and shakes his head. "He's not mad at you, Sweets."

"Yes, he is! You didn't hear his tone yesterday," I insist.

Gunner gently kisses my wrist. "Trust me. He's frustrated, but he's not angry. I promise. We're frustrated."

"We?"

Gunner grins wickedly, kisses my palm one more time, then goes over his job again. I don't remember a damn thing considering that smile and the way it made me feel drunk and all too aware at the same time.

I'd love to know I make him ... them frustrated. As I leave, I meet Gunner's eyes. "So, who am I with tomorrow?"

"Nick. Then we'll all have dinner."

"Why?"

"To prove no one is mad at you." He winks at me.

Nick

I GET UP EARLY, AN HOUR BEFORE MY ALARM. I DON'T KNOW why I bother to set one. Even on nights, I've been drinking or out late, my body wakes me up with the sun. Like the military reprogramed the part of me that liked to sleep in.

I stretch, get through a shower, pull my pressed and folded clothes out for the day, and drag them on before looking myself over. Even without today being the day Sophie shadows me, I take pride in my appearance.

As much as the world says not to judge based on looks, I know it's horse shit. Just walk through any kind of militarized zone as a citizen, then in full gear. The reaction is different despite it being the same person.

I head to the kitchen and see Gunner. He grunts at me before heading back to his room. At least he does me the courtesy of one grunt before disappearing. "Hey, Miles."

My eyes flash toward the door. Sophia's going to come through any minute. I feel a slight pang in my chest. The same way I felt holding the line and not letting anyone go retrieve Holden until we were sure it was clear.

The threat of guilt.

"Miles," I say, greeting him as he goes for the coffee.

He flashes me a wide smile. "Showing my girl the ins and outs of H.R.?"

"Only the good," I say.

Miles chuckles, then glances in the same direction I'd nearly been caught looking. He sighs and shakes his head. "I was worried about this, you know? My little girl coming to work from the ground up in this company."

"Why?"

"I didn't think she'd take the job. I didn't think she'd have all of your support."

Not just our support.

I swallow straight black coffee to suffocate that thought.

"Not to mention her mother. God, that woman. Always dragging her new boyfriends around. I swear, half of them only gave her the time of day so they could keep their eyes on Sophia."

The vein in his temple pulses, a telltale sign of his temper. Miles takes a slow drink, then nods once. "You make excellent coffee, Nick."

"See you at the office."

He walks off with a hand raised in a half-hearted wave. As soon as he's out the door, I glance toward Sophia's room. I haven't spent any alone time with her since our sparring match.

I'm almost nervous that I'm the only one that felt something. Sure, she kissed me, but she did it to get free, and I, like a high school boy, fell for that trick and kissed her back. I know better than that. She's Miles' daughter. I shouldn't want to be alone with her.

As I'm telling myself I'm remembering things wrong, that it was a fluke, that she only seems so attractive because I shouldn't want her, she walks in.

Sophia, with her rich hair falling down and over her breasts in a business smart dress that does nothing to help me think less of her. Because the dress clings to her hips, and the buttons are making my fingers twitch.

It would be so easy to strip her. Her eyes flick to mine, and she bites her bottom lip. She grabs some coffee, more cream than anyone could ever need, then stirs in sugar, too. She braces herself against the counter and takes a slow sip.

Shaking my head, I smirk. "So you like milk with a hint of coffee?"

"It's cream, and I don't want my taste buds to suffer first thing in the morning," she says.

I know her dad is gone. That's the only reason I can't stop my feet from carrying me to her. I offer her my cup. "Maybe we should compare."

I'd love to let her taste the coffee from my mouth, to feel her tongue against mine again. She's the first woman in years to make the first move on me. But now, she's skittish and unsure. I wonder if any of the other guys have had a taste of her, or if being around her dad makes her anxious.

She shakes her head at me. "I don't like black coffee."

"That you know of." I wink. "Ready for work?"

"Sure. What ... uh ... what is it you do?" She asks as she follows me out of the house.

Before I can grab the door for her, she opens it herself. She gasps when she moves too fast and the coffee splashes on her hand. Then she licks it from her fingers, and all I can do is stare at her. Stare as her tongue wraps around her index finger before she sucks her ring finger.

When I meet her gaze, I find her blushing bright red.

"Uh, I'm okay."

"I'm head of H.R. I answer."

Sophia laughs once, then again, shaking her head as she sits in my car. I hand her a napkin, and she takes care of her hand and the cup before setting it in the holder. In the car, I let her know my job isn't to handle simple complaints. It's overseeing hiring, background checks, policies, and write-in employee incentives.

That seems to hush her until we go upstairs to my office, away from the other guys. The woman and man that work for

me both wave to Sophia, and she grins right back. I follow behind her, watching her hips sway as she walks in her heels.

I remember what it's like to be wrapped up in her legs, and I'd love to have her on top of me again. I tug at my tie as I sit at my desk. She looks around, then smirks. "So if someone had a complaint, they'd talk to someone out front."

"Matching their gender or whoever they feel more comfortable with. I learned early on that women didn't feel comfortable talking to men."

"Because most men aren't understanding." Sophia's arms wrap around herself, and I swallow. She takes a slow breath. "So, us women have to learn to defend ourselves and use what we have."

"Like tricky means of escape," I grumble.

She turns and smiles at me. "I'm sorry if it hurt your ego."

"Makes me think we need to go another round, since kisses aren't going to save you every time."

Her eyes flick to my lips, and I feel my cock harden in response. She exhales and leans forward, giving me a chance to peek down her shirt to see the curves of her breasts. They're as perfect as she is.

"Nick." Her voice is soft but husky.

I don't apologize for staring. Not considering I see lust in her eyes, too. I lick across my lips. "Maybe we should review the general policies."

"Okay."

I slide her the handbook, and when our fingers brush, it takes effort to keep my hands to myself. I have a useless table in my office. One that she'd fit perfectly on as I hold her ankles on my shoulder and fuck her hard, half-dressed, blushing hot and ...

Her heel brushes my leg under the desk, but she doesn't look away from the packet on her lap. Still, I see the slight curve of her lips, and I know it wasn't an accident, especially not when it happens again.

"Miss Lane."

"Formal now?" She asks, head lifting. She sets the packet down. "I'm familiar with general H.R. packets. I have worked at companies before, and I like to study the policies."

"You're interested in policies and whatnot?" I'm tempted to get excited. I love rules—making them, fine-tuning them, watching how they create a reliable structure that has consequences when broken.

She smirks.

"Or you're teasing me?"

"I enjoy finding loopholes," she says, and her heel, sharp and threatening strokes along my calf sending a shiver up my body.

It's not like she's dropping herself on my lap or undoing buttons, but that she's poking a button repeatedly, proving to me she's aware I'm here, is driving me insane. I take a slow breath and focus on what she says instead of how her lips move.

"Sure, breaking rules is fun, but it's more fun to wiggle between the rules, not breaking anything, and watching frustration follow."

"You like frustrating others, then?"

"Maybe."

She leans back and drums her fingers on the chair. "Teach me something I don't know, Nick."

My cock hardens further. I'd like to teach her what happens when you push a person too far. But I take a slow breath. We're at work, and I prioritize my work. I have to. I didn't get to this position by breaking the rules that I put into place.

So I introduce her to my assistants, talk with them, and show her how I set up employee incentives. She sits close to me, perched on the counter behind my desk and leaning forward, so a lock of her deep red hair brushes my shoulder. I'd be happy to lose myself in her smell or to drag her onto my desk, spread her legs and devour her right here and now. I swallow the lump in my throat when Sophia puts her hand on my shoulder.

"Nick, I'm starving."

"Oh."

I jump up, and she nearly falls on top of me. Her hand strokes over my chest as I stabilize us both. I shake my head. "Sorry, Soph."

"I didn't expect you to move so fast."

She presses her body against mine, her hip right against the growing bulge in my pants. I swallow and let her go, but her fingers stroke down my sides for a moment, and she leans toward me like we just might do more than stare at each other.

All at once, she looks up and takes a step back. Her father opens the door. He grins. "Hi, sweetie."

"Hi, Daddy," Sophia replies, greeting her father with a kiss on the cheek. "Nick and I are going to get lunch."

"Good. Learning a lot?"

"More than my head can handle." She gives a gentle smile, but then her eyes flick back to me.

I feel her gaze on me as Miles drops off some folders for me to review. He pat's Sophie's head. "Now you get to see some of the real stuff."

"Once we're back from lunch."

"Exactly." He gives her a one-armed hug and heads right out the door. Not a single concern.

Of course not. I've always been the good one. Why else would he put me in H.R.? I'm the D.D., I'm the voice of reason. I'm the one person he'll never have to worry about leaving Sophia with.

Until she takes my hand and leads me to the elevator. The air is denser once we step in, and my temptation to touch her ramps up at least seven notches. I face her. "Soph..."

"Yes, Nick?"

Her eyes catch on me as I take a step closer, and she swallows. She doesn't back away, doesn't push me to do more, just watches as I brush my fingers across her jaw. Her breath catches, and she shivers.

I feel heat race through me, just being closer to her. I lean toward her, almost brushing my nose along hers. Sophia stands up on her toes, and her lips brush mine. I almost groan at even that soft contact. The electricity I feel buzzing between us, demanding I move closer just to get more of her, more of this. It's so loud in my ears I almost don't hear the ding of the door as her tongue brushes my bottom lip.

I step back and stumble to put some space between us and watch worry flood her face. She covers it, nods, and walks out of the elevator, taking the lead yet again.

Sophia

What is with these Guys? Nick has been shy since I've been around, compared to the others anyway, but it's like there's a collective effort to keep me at arm's length. Is it because my dad's gotten suspicious?

Oh no. If he even *thinks* something is going on with one of his friends and under *his* roof, I'm toast. I'm worse than toast! I'll be stale, burned toast. I chew my bottom lip, but my eyes flick up, and I see Neal watching.

It almost feels like he's protective of me, which is weird since we haven't had a real conversation, but maybe he's just curious. I can't blame him for that, either. How many people come in, get hugged by the big, bad CEO, given the title of office manager, then go around and shadow all the bosses?

I steady myself against Nick's car. At lunch, he makes me laugh. His fingers brush mine every now and again, and his focus is on me—much to our waitress's frustration. I've seen her undo no less than three buttons and pour herself in his lap, but he doesn't waver.

"Sophia, how are you dealing with all the changes? Not to mention having to deal with one of us every day this week? That has to be ... exhausting." He smirks, something that is way too sexy for him to be allowed to do.

When he's nervous and giving me space, letting me take the lead, I feel in control. I feel ... a lot. But with that smirk, I'm swooning and trying to figure out how I can get my hands on him again. I could make an excuse to spar with him. This time wearing short shorts instead of leggings so we can have some skin-on-skin contact. But that's too obvious. Although, I did like holding him down, being the one that took charge.

"Soph?"

"Oh. Sorry. It's a lot. My brain must be overloading." I pat my head and shrug. "It's still there, so I think I'm safe for now."

Nick chuckles. "Well, you and I are almost done. My job's not as complicated as the others."

"Don't say that."

"I had much more to do in the beginning, but we have a strict policy in place about harassment. Whether it's sexual, bullying, online, zero tolerance. Once a report is substantiated, the person is gone. It eliminates a lot of problems, considering it's something we're known for."

Nick takes a bite of food, and I nod. "No wonder so many women work with you guys."

His eyes flick up to mine, and I see the question written there. I shrug. "I've had other jobs where it was kind of ... bad to say something. Sure I've been groped and had to deal with ... awful jokes and forced to laugh because the other side of that would be a mark on my report saying I like to start drama or that I'm too sensitive, or that I have too many complaints."

1. Nick offers me his hand, and I take it, lacing my fingers through his. His eyes focus on mine, and instead of feeling small and vulnerable like I'm used to, I feel empowered. I feel like he has my back and would support me if I threw a chair at some asshole who grabbed my boob while walking by.

"You never have to fear that with us. The entire company is going to take care of you."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Eh, the people who run the company," he says with a chuckle

His thumb rubs across mine, and my thighs clench. I've been on edge all week, begging for release, and getting myself off just isn't the same. I need to be touched, need to be fucked hard, need to be slow fucked, I need something from one of these guys.

Maybe Nick is the right one. He'd let me have the lead. But he's also ... such a rule follower. I know Roman would take me the second he sensed a chance. They're all so ... much. Intense, wild, reserved, a million different things across these four men, and I don't have a clue who to pick, because I want them all.

"Having a flashback?"

"No. Buffering." I laugh. "Like a computer."

"I'm not that old, Sophia. I know what buffering is," he says, chuckling.

The waitress comes back, looks at our hands all intertwined, and bites her bottom lip. She forces a fake smile and nods. Then she looks at me. "What site do you use to catch a man like that?"

"Site?"

"I didn't want to say anything, but I could use a sugar daddy."

"Oh, we're not." I know I'm bright red. "That's not what this is. He's a friend. That's all."

"Mm-hmm. Sure." She winks at me as she takes the check and walks away.

Nick missed the whole thing escaping to the men's room. He takes me home instead of back to the office, saying that I've learned enough for today and that he can't disclose private files, even if he wants to. And I didn't miss the wanting in his eyes.

I slip into the house and kick off my shoes. I tug at my dress, frustrated with how tight it is when I catch movement in

my peripheral. Swallowing and looking up from where I have undone buttons to my belly button, I see Holden.

He looks me over and his gaze goes from passive to carnal in a heartbeat. I take a hesitating breath, then swallow. I could make it to my room. Although I kind of love the idea of him chasing me, catching me, and tossing me on my bed.

"Hi." I breathe.

Holden crosses the space between us, mumbling something about fucking the rules, then pushes me against the door, locking it. I shiver as his body presses to mine. The hard planes of his chest rubbing against the lacy fabric of my bra to tease my nipples. Shivering, I look up the long column of his throat to his face.

I feel every breath he takes, feel his thigh as it wedges between mine, then he strokes through my hair and along the back of my neck, raising goosebumps, hardening my nipples, and soaking my panties.

"Holden." Is that my whimper?

"Pay more attention when you get home." His voice is sharp.

I almost flinch away, but there's something so ... magnetizing about his gaze that I can't break the spell he has on me. My lips part, and I fight the urge to close the space between us. This is Holden, not Nick. I don't have control here.

"I'm ... sorry."

One of his fingers follows the curve of my breast, a slow stroke that sets my skin on fire and has me grinding against his thigh. Holden brushes his nose along mine, and his tongue strokes his bottom lip, a tease.

"You're making it very hard," he rasps.

I stroke his sides, not able to stop myself. I don't know if he's talking about his cock, this living situation, or what. But it seems stupid to ask. Not that it stops me. "What's hard?" His lips turn up. "Remembering that *nothing* happened between us."

"Is something going to happen?"

He gauges my expression, then nods. I swallow. "Good."

That does it. Holden presses against me so I can feel how hard he is against my belly as his mouth brushes against mine. He's gentle, but his tongue is sure as it slips between my lips to tease mine with gentle flicks and strokes.

I melt and give in. I'm so tired of resisting what I want. So tired of pretending I don't want him, them, any of this fucked-up-ness. I lick Holden's tongue, and he groans into my mouth. I rub myself on his thigh, needing some kind of friction, no matter how juvenile.

Holden reaches inside my bra and circles his thumb around my nipple, a tease considering how tight and hard it is. Even the lightest flick of his fingertip across it sends tantalizing sparks racing through my body to pool in my pussy.

I gasp and bite his bottom lip, trying to drag him back to me, needing more of this. His hand tightens in my hair, and he renews the kiss, licking deep as his fingers pinch my nipple until I whimper and arch my back into his hand.

How silly is it that just making out with him has me on the edge of coming? Holden's mouth slides across my jaw, nipping and kissing his way to my ear. The rush of his breath makes me shiver and cling to him all the tighter.

"You have no clue what you do to me." He growls before biting my earlobe.

I groan and stroke down his body. No one will be home for a while. We have so much time. We won't get caught. No one will know but us. A dirty secret to end the what-ifs I play in my head every night.

"Fuck." I pant, head falling back to give him more room to kiss.

He takes advantage of what I'm offering, licking across my neck and exhaling so I feel the chill that comes with him not touching me, kissing me, being wrapped around me. He kisses across my neck, hungry and demanding.

I groan and roll my hips again. He tugs my nipple, then squeezes until it's almost painful, but not quite. When his tongue strokes the pulse point on my throat, I dig my nails into him. Then I go for his belt.

All at once, Holden stops. He draws back and presses his forehead to mine. "What are we going to do with this?"

I give his belt another tug, but he releases my nipple and grabs my wrist. "No, baby."

"But I'm ..., and you're. What?" I demand. "But we ..."

"I know." He kisses me, his tongue soothing my bottom lip. "We almost went too far."

"Not far enough. I want you, Holden," I say, sure.

He pushes my skirt up to my hips, and I know he can tell how wet I am. He's had his hand in my bra, his tongue in my mouth, and his thigh rubbing my pussy, and *now* we have to stop?

Holden takes a slow breath, but something in his searing gaze tells me why. Because if we cross that line, there's no pretending it didn't happen. We can't erase it as a silly 'almost.' We can't say it's a lapse in judgment.

I wrap my arms around his neck, and Holden adjusts me, carrying me to the kitchen while I try to cool my burning cheeks. He sets me on the counter and turns around. I push my hair back. "I just ate."

But instead, he hands me a glass of wine. I look at it and him, then swallow. "Why did you tell me no when.."

"You wanted to forget?"

It's that simple to him? That because I couldn't stand thinking about our first kiss with my dad coming home, he wouldn't touch me again, wouldn't kiss me again? I see his cock straining against his jeans, and the ache between my legs gets worse.

Wine will not fix this. Neither will masturbation. I need relief. I don't care if it breaks the rules anymore.

"I don't want to forget now, Holden," I murmur before finishing my glass in one go.

His eyes flick to me, then hold. "Repeat that."

Swallowing, I straighten my back and undo another button. Then another. Holden watches until he turns and grabs my wrists, holding them against the counter. We're both panting when our eyes meet.

He looks across my breasts and belly, then to my raw lips. "Repeat it."

Holden

"I DON'T WANT TO FORGET," SOPHIE SAYS.

God, the magic words. But instead of encouraging me, they remind me of why we can't. I've been hiding my attraction to her. I've been struggling every second she's around to keep my hands to myself, and if I have her now, if I push it any further than we already have, my brain might fall to pieces. As long as I leave her alone from the waist down, there doesn't have to be regrets.

The second we take that next step ...

But Sophie spreads her legs and pulls me closer until I can see her pale purple panties and how wet they are. I groan and lean in for another kiss. It's stupid. But I've done a million stupid things. Thousands of mistakes have led me here, to Sophie's greedy mouth following every stroke of my tongue and clinging to me like I alone can give her the satisfaction she needs.

She groans and rubs herself against my cock, taking full advantage of the friction as I drag her closer, fingers tugging at the hem of her dress so I can feel her silky panties covering her ass.

I devour her, feast on her, and enjoy every second we have. She rubs my back, ignoring the raised scars and tattooed lines, whimpering as she gives me more access to her mouth. I cup her breasts, teasing her nipples through the lacy fabric as her hips roll against mine. Fuck, I'm so hard, so ready.

The timer on the microwave goes off. Sanity returns, and I draw back. I turn away from her, trying so hard to get my head on straight.

Sophie's going to be the death of me.

"Holden?"

I glance over my shoulder and find her sucking on her bottom lip. Soft bedroom eyes focused on me, and that gentle flush over her cheeks as she fights to keep herself there. Her feet rub each other, and I can't do it.

I can't walk away. I know I should. She's my friend's daughter. I know Roman and others are interested, but fuck, I want her so badly, and she wants me ... I blink a few times. It's because she doesn't know.

She's only seen me in pants. Women don't want someone they have to fix, and I can't hide my scars. I take a deep breath and scratch the back of my head.

"Sophie, you don't want me."

"Yes, I do. I'm old enough to know what I want. And I know you know it too." She swallows.

The hard way it is. Because I can't go through the rejection again. I can't fall for another woman only to have her push me away, watch me with pity or disgust when I have to drag my prosthetic back on in the morning.

I walk to Sophie, my hand between her breasts so she can't come closer. Fuck, it would be easier to lose myself in her, to let my lips wander all the way to her hips, sucking and licking. And would it be so bad if I touched her, gave her the relief she needs as long as her panties stay on?

Fuck, focus.

"Sophie, you can do better than me. I'm scarred. I'm broken. I'm-"

"Do you want me, Holden?" She asks, cutting me off.

"It's not that simple."

"It is to me. I'm an adult. I can decide what's best for me. I can make my own choices too. So if you're pushing me away *again* because you think there's something about you that's so terrible, I can't see beyond it ... I need to know."

I rub my thumb over the inside of her breast. She nods like that's what she expected. "We're all broken in different ways. That's what life does. I want you, and that's what matters right now."

"I can't do this, Soph." I kiss her cheek. "I'm sorry."

I grab my food and walk away, trying so hard to be the good guy. This is what Nick would do. I know it. And Miles, schedule-less, free-spirited Miles, could come home anytime. Just before I get to my room, a small hand appears on the door.

"Please don't run away from me, Holden."

My eyes go back to her. I'd love to tell her everything, to spill my soul. To unlock all the shit that makes me unlovable and lay it out, chart it like a map so she can see how every turn is going to take her to another horror story and further away from the romance she wants.

I turn her cheek so I can softly peck her lips. "I'll have better control next time."

"You never answered me," she insists.

I manage to get the door between us, but I turn and rest my forehead against it. With something in the way, I can tell her. "Yes, Sophie. I want you."

She takes a sharp breath, then I hear her run off. The shower kicks on, and I smirk. I toss my food to the side, drop myself in bed, and finish undoing my pants. I drag my cock from the denim and groan as I wrap my hand around myself.

Sophie's long showers don't fool me. And I know that Gunner and Roman are just as aware of how many she takes. Especially when she plays music loud enough to cover every sound.

So I let myself picture her, legs spread, naked, touching herself. Her fingers stroking her wet pussy—the pussy that I

made wet—as she moans and whimpers. God, her moans taste good. I love hearing them, feeling them, knowing I'm the reason for them.

I pump my cock again.

Eager Sophie, so determined to have me even though she can have anyone. Anyone in this house, anyone at work, anyone in this whole fucking city, and she's turned her attention to me.

I pant, thinking of her lips moving down my body, of her hot tongue stroking and lapping at my cock as her mouth sucks me hard. Sophie likes challenges. I bet she'd try to fit me down her throat, taking every inch of me.

Shivering, I gasp and picture her wicked eyes, sinful and vulnerable, all at once. I come before she does—or at least before she turns the shower off. After I clean up, I try to continue on with my day. I get more work done than I have in over a week while trying to avoid her.

I hear the guys come home and wait until the TV is on to come out. Sophie is sitting with everyone at the table. Miles waves me over. "Come on, Hold. Take a break from work and join us. We got a full Southern spread."

The smell of fried chicken wins me over. I take the spot next to Sophie because it's the only one left and focus on filling my plate. Conversations whirl around. Which department did Sophie like best? Was anyone out of line with her while she was there? Does she have any questions?

"Daddy, when do I shadow you?"

That word on her lips reminds me of our first kiss, of when I came in and saw her ass up in the air, perfect to smack and fuck. I take a slow breath and look at Miles. He chuckles and shakes his head. "My job is the worst. Phone calls, emails. All I do is talk to people. I'm an underpaid therapist."

"No, he's the complaints department," Gunner teases.

"Then even more underpaid."

Everyone laughs, and even I crack a smirk. Sophie nudges me with her knee and gives me a gentle smile. Just that tells me we're okay. She's not worried I'm mad. She's not hurt. And maybe she'll behave tonight.

"You have a mountain of work waiting for you now, hon. I can't take you from that anyway," Miles says, his mouth full of food.

Sophia shrugs and sucks mashed potatoes from her spoon, her tongue flicking out to catch what remains on her lips. Her eyes move around the table, and I can tell that she feels relaxed here.

Which is another reason to not push things further. She deserves to feel comfortable and safe among us. This is supposed to be her home. I can't ruin that just because I'm greedy for her affection.

"How're you, Hold? You've been living like a cave creature," Gunner asks.

Roman's eyes focus on me. "Everything good?"

"Yeah." I nod. "Just getting through."

They nod, and Sophie looks around before her hand comes down on mine. "What? What's ..."

"It's up to Holden to tell you," Miles says. "Don't pry, sweetie."

But no one says a thing about her small hand wrapping around mine and her pleading eyes. I shrug. "No one leaves war easily."

There's no pity in her eyes. She just nods and murmurs a word that goes straight through me. "nightmares."

"Massimo has invited us for the weekend. One of his parties or something," Roman says, helping the conversation move away from me.

I shoot him an appreciative look, and he nods his head. He fills Sophie in on his cousin, then shrugs. "It's weird, though. He said he had news but didn't want to say what news, just

that there was no way we were getting out of the visit this time with a work excuse."

"Maybe he's settled down," Nick says.

"Oh please, him?" Matthew drops into the last remaining chair. "Please, he's worse than Roman."

We all laugh, and Sophia looks to her dad for answers. He shrugs. "Player."

"Oh." Then she grins at Matthew. "How's the wedding planning?"

"I come here to escape it, Sophie," Matthew says, pointing at her with a beer. "You want details? Go talk to Bella." He smiles and winks at her.

"I'll make it a lunch date," she says. "I'd be happy to help."

I clean up after dinner, and Roman pats my back. "If you need anything, man."

"I know," I grumble. "Thanks, man."

"Sophia's easy to talk to as well," he says. "I know you like secrets and all that, but if anyone is going to listen without getting all weepy and dramatic about it, it's her."

"She doesn't need to know the hell we went through. There's a reason we kept it overseas," I affirm.

"So, why did you carry it home?" he asks.

With that, he leaves. I hear his booming voice as he greets Miles with drinks. They have an informal business meeting on Thursdays. Gunner, Roman, and Miles. They watch sports and talk about shit that needs to be addressed back in Scottsdale. I'm glad they leave me out of it.

I stretch, take care of some physical therapy, then take off the prosthetic. I set it on the floor and compare my legs again. The scarring goes all the way up my thigh to my hip. I trace it with a shaking finger. Sure, Sophia is eager to be in my lap, eager to take whatever she can, but she doesn't want this. She can do better than an ex-soldier who can't leave the battlefield. One who's marked by it inside and out. Even Gunner's a better option, and he's a miraculously functioning alcoholic. I shake my head and push myself into bed.

Sophie only wants me until my own demons come out.

Still, Roman's advice to talk to her is stuck in my head. Because I'd kind of like someone—a nonprofessional civilian—to know that I'm surviving. I want someone who won't stare at me like I'm not a man, someone who won't try to fix me like a wounded bird.

And if Sophia, in her sexy wrapping, could be that person ...

I shake my head and rollover. No. She's too sweet, too gentle, too loving. She doesn't need to suffer under anyone else's baggage. She deserves more than this.

But when I lick across my bottom lip, I swear I can still taste her. I can still feel her hard nipple against my palm, still feel her nails dragging down my sides. It's a beautiful way to fall asleep.

Sophia

The drive to work with Dad is easier than I expect it to be, which has me on pins and needles. Considering I've made out with each of his friends, I should feel guilty. I should sweat bullets and be waiting for the shit to hit the fan, but it's easy between us, like it always has been.

Dad's just one of those people.

"So, honey, how are you settling in?"

"Oh, everything is great, Dad. The company is welcoming," I tell him with a smile.

"And home? I've noticed that you're spending a lot of time in your room lately. Is everything okay?" he asks, looking at me at a red light.

I roll my eyes. "I'm the only girl in a house full of guys."

"I'm sorry." He nods. "I'm worrying too much, aren't I?"

"Just a little. But it means you care."

And I know that. Just like when I know he walks me in on his arm and I get that nasty look from Sasha, I can ignore it. My dad would do anything to make me comfortable. I still remember telling him I was looking for a place to stay for a few weeks and how he volunteered himself.

When my mother tried to argue, he offered to get me my own place in the city, to take care of everything. He didn't start arguing with her right away. I hug him before going to my office. New York could offer me a real-life outside of my mother and father. Here, it doesn't seem to matter who I am. Or at least, it doesn't for long. Before going through my emails, I write a sticky note to myself—a reminder I desperately need.

Check out New York.

It's been so easy to get wrapped up in these guys and my dad that I've forgotten exactly where I am. The city that never sleeps. The city has everything any person could want *and* some. It's paradise itself—to everyone in different ways.

There's a knock on my door, and Roman walks in. He looks all business, but I can't help but think of the last time we were in his office together, the way his hands stroked over my skin, the promise of more building up between us, the heat and insanity that churned in the air even when we were doing nothing at all.

I swallow and squeeze my thighs together tight. His presence alone shouldn't affect me like this. But it absolutely does. I swallow and toss my hair over my shoulder. "Hello, Mr. Agosti."

"I have a special assignment for you," he murmurs, not coming any further into my office.

"Oh?" My eyes focusing on his seem to make him move.

The space between us disappears as he walks toward me. I cling to my desk, trying to control my reaction that seems to have a mind of its own. He sits in the single chair across from me and nods.

"It's important."

"Oh! I'm happy to help however I can," I say, folding my hands together. "What is it?"

The corner of his mouth lifts. "I would like you to play babysitter."

"What do you mean?"

He leans back in the chair, spreading his legs, so his massive body looks even bigger. I can't believe I sat on his lap in his office. I should have been facing the other way, should

have let him know how wet I was, how much I enjoy kissing him and surrendering control to him.

"Sasha has been ... questionable lately."

"She hates me."

"I'm sure that's impossible," he says with a smirk. "But I haven't been getting nearly as many opportunities as Gunner has lately." I feel myself flush hot all the way down to my breasts. "When it comes to our clients, I mean," he says.

"And I have a feeling that she's not happy with her place here, so she may not be doing the job justice. If any of us hang around her or investigate, I know that she'd suck up and get even less done. Any ideas?"

"If you have IT install a tracker on her computer, you'd be able to check into her activity and how much she does on the computer every day," I say with a shrug. "That's the least invasive method to monitor her accurately."

"And perhaps you could talk with her as well, clarify that time with the company means nothing if we don't see the expected performance?"

"She already thinks I'm dating my dad ... and not related to him. I don't think she's going to take any advice from me," I snort. "But the IT monitoring could work very well."

Roman nods once, then stands, closes my door, and walks around my desk. I shrink back into my chair, and he curls a strand of my hair around his finger. "The second task is Neal."

"Neal?"

The only thing that exists for me at this exact moment is him-Roman-taking up everything around me. I smell his cologne, so entrancing and warm, I feel his body around me, see his controlled eyes as he leans closer.

His thumb traces my bottom lip, and he turns my chin up. "Neal. His numbers are good, but they could be better. We have seen no improvement while he's been here, and I think that's because he needs to be reminded to do his job. What do you think?"

"I ... yeah."

"So you'll check in with him throughout the day? Be your sweet, charming self and get him to work?"

I gulp, and my eyes flick to Roman's lips. Fuck, what is he doing to me? I want to say yes, to make him smile, to see what he'll do if I'm obedient. Maybe I'll get a reward? Like his mouth stealing mine as his fingers edge up my skirt and slip under my panties.

"Sophia?"

"Yes. Okay," I answer in a high voice I barely recognize.

"Good." Roman leans closer, his nose brushing mine. "I appreciate you."

I giggle, then swallow. "This is outside the job description."

He chuckles, and his lips brush mine as he speaks, sending shivers racing through my body and heat pooling in my lower stomach. "Then I will compensate you."

"I don't want a raise."

"I know." His lips press to mine. He draws back just enough to speak. "Tell me what you want, Bambina."

"Roman ... I"

"If you don't tell me, I won't give it, Sophia. I need a yes, or I'll go back to my office and call it."

"Yes."

One three-letter word. That's what's kept him in check?

Roman grips my hair, jerking back until my lips part for him. He kisses me like a starving man feasting on the last plate of food he'll ever see. His tongue strokes deep, claiming me as his. I whimper against his mouth but lick his tongue before he groans and pulls me against him.

I feel him hard and big against my belly. Every line of him is hard, but his cock. Oh, god, I fucking need it. I need him bending me over my desk and burying himself deep inside me

over and over again. I groan against his mouth, and he answers, nibbling my bottom lip before stroking over it with his tongue.

When he draws back, I'm panting. My nipples are hard, and my legs are shaking. I know my bottom lip is puffy and raw, but Roman doesn't look like he's half done with me. Still, he takes a slow breath and nods.

"Tomorrow morning, I'll show you where I jog," Roman says, walking to my door pushing his hard-on down. "I think you'll like it."

"Okay."

"I'll call IT so you can start with Sasha on Monday, but Neal needs attention now." Roman pauses at the door, then turns to face me. "I trust you can handle yourself around a man like him?"

"You're right," I whisper, cutting myself off before I can say more.

I haven't thought about Neal or any other man since these four have come into my life. I know how to handle guys. Subtle ways to tell them no, then there's always the larger, louder ways. The only people who've got under my skin and turn me into the personification of need and want are these men I don't have any business with but can't seem to leave alone.

Roman nods at me. "I'll talk to you at lunch, just to make sure everything is going well."

"Okay."

He has me down to the smallest sentences in the human language. After a wink and a smile, he shuts my door, giving me the moment and a half I need to collect myself. I let my breath out in a whoosh, but even that's shaky.

"Jesus. They're going to be the death of me," I whisper to myself.

I've never had my control tested like this... and I've never failed as badly as I did yesterday. I kissed Nick on the elevator.

The elevator! Anyone could have seen. And now, kissing Roman in my office again?

After another five minutes to get the blush out of my system and to put the heat in my skin to rest, I brush my fingers through my hair and head out to Neal's desk. He's missing. I sigh and run my fingers through my hair.

I'm not stupid. I've seen how he looks at me. So I turn to his desk mate and ask if she's seen him. She huffs. "He's getting food ... or something ... oh. No. There he is."

Turning, I find him flirting with another girl who works here. She's half interested, but I recognize the look in her eyes that says she would rather be working. I cross the room, feeling twice as powerful in my heels, especially when Neal is so wrapped up in the innocent girl he doesn't see me coming.

He notices when she doesn't reply, and then he notices me crossing my arms in front of him. "Neal."

"Sophia!" He jumps to attention. "I ... um, were you looking for me?"

"Yes. Mr. Langston said that you are one of the best salesmen, but he was worried that he hadn't seen you at your desk making the calls he relies on."

Neal stares at my mouth, and I pout. "I was hoping to see what the top salesman here does, but I suppose I could go to the next person on the list if you're busy right now."

He shakes his head and walks me back to his desk. "No. No. I'm more than happy to show you what I do all day."

"I can't wait."

Neal shows me the system they use, then he calls clients. I take notes, and we talk about things for a bit, but he tells me quick 'fun facts' about his life between calls. How he helps support his sister and his niece because he loves kids, and family comes first. Then he tells me about all the events he goes to with models and actresses, showing me pictures that have ended up online of him with different women.

At lunch, he clears his throat. "But really, it was just a way to keep creeps away. I'm sure it comes off badly."

"Well, I don't think so. I think when you put your mind to something, you can accomplish it. In fact, I plan on keeping up with your career here, just to make sure we're doing what we can to provide the right incentive to bring out the best in you."

He licks across his lip as he looks me over. I know that look, and I know exactly what kind of game I'm playing. I've done it enough when babysitting kids. Just dangle what they want most in front of their face, challenge them, and watch them fall in line.

Gunner

I NOD MY HEAD TO SOPHIA FROM MY OFFICE. MATTHEW ROLLS his eyes. "You're worried about her talking to Neal?"

"I'm worried that he's going to weasel his way into her life."

"You say that because you want her."

"Which is why I'm telling you this and not her father," I hiss. Not that I'm wrong. Neal is a bastard who is great at playing a hero. I've seen him bring smart women down to his level with perfectly constructed lies. He's a salesman who specializes in selling himself to women that are far too good for him.

"I don't want anything happening to Sophia. She has so much potential here," Matt says.

His eyes focus on me, though. I roll my eyes. "I'm behaving ... mostly. I want this to work with her. I haven't seen Miles this happy in years. I swear, he has the proud papa glow. I will not fuck that up."

Matthew sighs. "Roman has her incentivizing Neal."

"That's supposed to be Nick's job."

"You don't believe me. Go ask her yourself," Matthew says, stealing my stress ball and tossing it. He shakes his head. "I don't have time to meddle like I used to, man. I have a wedding coming up. And you and the other guys need to stop

thinking with your dicks and start preparing for my special day."

I roll my eyes. "I wear a suit, I do a speech I'll think of on the spot, and I will happily watch Bella walk down the aisle and tell you everything we've known for months."

"That's fucking ominous."

I chuckle and shove him. "That she doesn't have eyes for anyone but you, brother. We saw the writing on the wall a long time ago. She's been yours for months, and I don't think she could be happier if she tried."

Matthew lights up and hugs me briefly. "Thanks. I have to go deal with Sasha now."

"Oh?"

"I.T. stuff that doesn't fall under the security umbrella."

"Well, if you need a distraction."

"If you're offering, let's go. She's easier to manage when there's some eye candy," Matthew chuckles.

I walk out of my office and make a quick stop when I see Sophia ahead of Neal. She nearly runs into me and blinks a few times before swallowing and taking a breath. No blush for me today? I'll have to fix that.

"Sophie, everything okay?"

"Of course." She leans her head to the side. "I assume you guys have a hive mind or something when it comes to work." She stumbles over the last part of the sentence, and then a blush flares on her cheeks.

"How so?"

"Don't you make decisions together? I thought Roman would have at least told you that I'm supposed to be helping with ... productivity."

So she is keeping him in line and making him do his job. Damn, Roman has an interesting idea of keeping her away from Neal by *throwing her directly at him*. I force a smile and nod.

"If you need anything, please let me know."

"I think I can handle it," she says, then smiles. "But thank you."

"My offer isn't limited to work, Sweets," I whisper in her ear. "I've noticed the long showers."

She gasps, then coughs. I walk away, being sure not to look back. I enjoy keeping her on her toes, so she's not sure what to expect. Neal glowers at me, and I hear him mumble. "What did *he* want?"

"Oh, just to make sure I'm finding everything okay."

"Ah. They seem ... interested in you. I mean, aren't you supposed to be our office manager?"

"Oh, no. I'm starting in that position, but I'm helping wherever I can. The more I can do for the business, the better."

I chuckle at that. She hasn't dropped the knowledge that she's the CEO's daughter? Life would be so much easier for her if she did. Neal wouldn't bother her. Sasha would fall into line. Hell, she could have whatever she wanted.

So why bother keeping it a secret?

I shake my head at the thought and head out to the lobby. Sasha eyes Matthew suspiciously, but when she sees me, she lights up. "Gunner!"

"Sasha." I nod.

She stands up and walks to me. "How has work been? Are you busy enough?"

"Those consistent meetings keep me sharp as a tack. I'm sure I have you to thank for them?"

Roman told me he hasn't been getting quite as many meetings lately, not since he snapped at her when she mouthed off to Sophia. The man needs to learn to read people better and to follow through on what he finds out about them instead of just tossing that information to the side and being a dick.

"No!" Sasha shakes her head. "They just ask for you. So they must have good taste."

She bats her lashes at me and smiles. "Is there anything I can help you with today? Matthew is doing the updates on my computer, but I'm more than happy to get you lunch or ... anything."

Her eyes flow down my body to my cock. Sasha has stuck her nose in plenty of places it doesn't belong, and at one point, I was happy to let her flirt, let her try to snare me, even if it just meant a quick blowjob in my office.

Now I see through her. The twinkle in her eyes, the hungry and blatant lust on her face, neither hide the expectation and darkness underneath. I've met plenty of women like Sasha since Miles' company has gotten big. They want what's in my pants, but it has nothing to do with my cock. It's all about power and money.

If she had the choice, Sasha would take my money and run.

Once Matt gives me the thumbs up, I ask Sasha to make sure my lunch comes directly to me and if she'll bring it herself. She giggles and nods, not suspecting a thing. Which keeps her busy for the rest of the day while Sophia keeps checking on Neal.

At four-thirty, Miles comes in and asks if I can take Sophia home. At my look, he sighs. "I know she's my daughter, man. Don't give me that face. I just have these conferences in Singapore, and you know the time difference."

"No worries," I say, reassuring him. "I can handle it."

"Really?"

"I can get her from point A to point B," I say.

"Thank you."

At five, I collect Sophie, which bothers Neal. He looks me over but remembers his place and nods. Sophia waves him goodbye, and he heads out before we do. I wink at Sasha, making her grin.

Once we get in the car, Sophia shakes her head. "Wow."

"Did he hurt you? Touch you? Try something?" I demand, facing her and looking her over.

"No." She rubs her temples. "He just never shuts up. For any comment I make, I swear there's an entire story. But he's fine."

"You don't have to lie to me," I snort, buckling up before starting the engine. "We've all met Neal."

"Is he that bad, though? Other than annoying and full of himself, he kind of reminds me of an excited five-year-old. He just needs someone to give an ounce of validation, you know."

"And when he does more than the job we hired him to do, he'll get it. Especially if he stops spending half the workday talking to every woman he can in the office."

Sophia considers that and doesn't say a word until we're parked in front of the house. I roll my eyes. "What? Where's the sass? I can handle it."

"He may talk to girls in the office, but I have yet to suspect him of kissing or making out with them." Then that sly look comes into her gaze. "And I haven't caught him with his zipper down."

I lean toward her, holding the back of her neck in my hand. "That's because he doesn't have an office to enjoy after talking to you."

"Eew."

"What did you think I was all hot and bothered for, Sweets? It wasn't your daddy," I growl.

Sophia licks that lush bottom lip, and I can't resist. Fuck the rules, fuck everything except this moment. I kiss her, then deeper. I'm starving for her, and one kiss just isn't enough, just like kissing her neck wasn't enough the other night. I need her response; I need to feel that she wants me as much as I want her.

It helps ease the guilt.

Sophia's hand slips along my jaw as we kiss in the car. I lick deeper into her mouth until she sucks my tongue, dragging

a moan from deep in my belly. I shake my head, keeping my forehead against hers.

"Fuck, and that was before you did that little trick."

"Oh, the tongue thing?"

"No, the fucking rabbit out of the hat. Yes, the tongue thing," I growl before kissing her deeper, faster. Her nails drag down my arms, and she pushes herself against me until she whimpers and draws back. I glare at the console. "Fucking car"

She laughs and shakes her head. "Don't yell at the car. It can't help how it's made."

But it's driving me insane because I want to edge her skirt further up her thigh and see whether these are stockings or thigh highs. If they're thigh highs ... oh fuck. I'd love to see her in thigh highs, lingerie, with my cock in her mouth.

Her thighs squeeze together as I stroke the top of one. "Sophia ..."

"Gunner." Her hot, husky voice does me in.

I kiss along her throat as my fingers drag up her thigh. When I feel the elastic of the thigh-high, I groan and pull it tight before letting it snap against her leg. She gasps, and her thighs part, welcoming me to take further advantage.

It's gotta be a sin not to touch her where and when she wants, but I undo her seat belt and pull her inside. I want her the right way. Not a quick fuck in the driveway, hoping no one else sees.

Sophia's face burns red as she walks to her room. "I'm ... I'm getting a shower. Can you order dinner?"

"What do you want?"

"Pizza, Chinese? Whatever." She hurries, not looking back.

Fuck, I blew it. I order dinner while trying not to curse at myself. Nick comes home and looks at me as I pace the

kitchen. He clears his throat. "Roman is going to be running late, and I think Holden's asleep."

"Miles got hung up, too. Movie night?" I offer.

"Hell yeah!"

I nod. "I'm going to invite Sophie. She needs to get out of her room more."

"Well, then why don't we take her out clubbing instead? With us both there, she'll be safe, and it's Friday. What grown girl wants to stay inside with two old men watching a movie?"

I chuckle. "That's a damn good plan, Nick. We'll eat, then head out. Rock paper scissor for DD?"

"We have these things called taxis," he says.

But our gaze holds. I don't give two shits about who's driving. I have a much bigger concern in mind. I'm a horny bastard on the best of days. With Sophia and alcohol, I have a feeling I will not be at my best. Nick swallows and then nods after a moment.

"One. Two. Three. Shoot."

He's paper, I'm scissors.

Sophia

"Out?" I ASK, LOOKING BETWEEN NICK AND GUNNER. Gunner looks way too sly for this to be true. "Out where?"

"We want to show you New York," Nick says with a shrug.

"Not necessarily the New York your father approves of, but we feel bad that you've been cooped up here all week. You graduate, and then you're thrown right into work without even a chance to celebrate?" Gunner shakes his head. "Not our style."

"His style." Nick corrects.

I laugh and nod. "Okay. Dress code?"

"We're going to clubs, bars, and the town," Gunner says with a wide smile.

Fuck, that makes me think of his fingers slipping under my skirt to tease my garter belt. The harsh bite of the material when he snapped it against my thigh versus his soft fingers drove me insane.

"Okay." I nod.

After we eat, I go upstairs and change into a slinky black dress and black heels to match. I brush through my auburn hair, pin the top half back, then do my makeup. By the time I finish, I feel like a college kid again, much less professional, much more fun.

I grin as I meet the guys downstairs. Gunner has on jeans and a nice shirt, and Nick is still rocking slacks. Both of them

look at me as if I'm all dressed up for prom or something. By the looks on both their faces, I'd say my entrance is playing in slow motion.

Then that sexy, playboy smirk turns up Gunner's lips, and the moment is amped up times a hundred. Even Nick can't drag his eyes from my legs. He swallows and looks away, phone in hand. "I got us an uber. More trustworthy than a taxi."

"You know best," I answer.

And just like that, we're swept up in the city. We bounce from club to club, without question, without knowing where we're heading half the time. I laugh as Nick points out street performers and people who are already drunk enough to be using the alleyways as bathrooms or bedrooms.

"This is New York," Gunner says, draping an arm over my shoulder as we walk to yet another club. I've had to limit myself to one drink in each place just to avoid blending in a bit too much with the others around here. "Dirty, grimy, questionable, and more fun than you could have in a week anywhere else."

He gives me a lopsided smile. Nick rolls his eyes. "After this next place, we're getting food!"

"I already had dinner," I say. "I enjoy dancing. Why won't you guys dance with me?"

They look at one another, a hard look, then Gunner's fingers trail over my arm, causing goosebumps to rise on my skin, despite the city heat. "I think that can be fixed, Sweets."

"Gunner."

"Nick likes to dance, too. But we'll have to convince him to join."

"Okay!"

The next club is loud, but at least I recognize the music. I head to the dance floor, dragging Gunner behind me. He twirls me in a circle, then pulls my hips back against his. He rolls

and moves to the beat, one hand on my hips, the other in mine like he can keep me all to himself.

I wiggle my ass against him, following the beat and losing myself in how good his body feels against mine. His hands stroke down my sides, grazing the outsides of my breasts, sending shivers through me.

Nick joins in then, and I tug him closer by his tie. He holds my hip in one hand and leans toward me, cupping the back of my neck in his other hand. "Are you okay?!"

"Yeah! I'm having fun!" I yell back.

I drop lower, knowing that my dress is probably barely covering my ass, but I don't care, can't care. Gunner leaves to get us drinks, and Nick shows off his dance moves. Unlike Gunner, he doesn't just want my body against his. He twirls me, leads me in an actual dance, and makes my night all the better by showing me everything he's capable of.

I can't get enough. He spins me again, and I land against Gunner's chest. He grins and puts a shot glass to my lips. I down the tequila and lick the salt off his hand. I look for the lime, and then he smiles wider, showing it between his teeth.

Lifting myself up on my toes, I pull it from his mouth, our lips barely brushing. I suck the lime and hand it back to Gunner. "Thank you."

He tosses it to the side, takes my hand, and twirls me, so my back is to him again. He holds my hands as we dance, moving our hips, feet, and whole body to the rhythm. After more than a few songs, Nick says something in Gunner's ear, and we head out to the street again.

Compared to the club, it's freezing outside. There aren't warm bodies pulsing, lights, heavy music. I almost feel deaf, but my skin hums with life, and I feel like I can't get my heart to slow down.

"Wow!"

"Easy." Nick chuckles, taking my hand. "I think you've been in there a little too long."

"Am I shouting? I feel like I'm shouting!"

Nick winces, but Gunner grins. "Nah, you're whispering."

I elbow him, and he chuckles. He rubs down my spine over and over. Between the two of them, I feel invincible, safe, appreciated. We grab some food at a hole in the wall, then we walk along the street until we get to a bench. I see Nick pull out his phone and turn my pout on Gunner.

"Are we going home already?"

"Considering it's after midnight, I think it's time." He pinches my cheek. "Don't give me that pout."

"Or what?"

His eyes flash slightly. "At least you're not challenging Roman."

"Oh? Why's that? Are you going to do something about it?"

"Cut you off for one," Gunner says, then glances over my shoulder to where Nick is working on his phone. I can tell he's frustrated, but can't tell why.

I lean my head to the side, then lean towards him, resting a hand on his thigh. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, Sophie. It's called control. I'm trying to have some."

"Have some for me too, then."

"You're going to be hungover tomorrow," he teases, tapping my nose. "How drunk are you?"

"Not drunk enough to not remember." I shrug. "But drunk enough to be fun!"

Gunner rolls his eyes, but I prove it in the back seat of the Uber. We're all stuffed in the back, which means I'm in the middle, and just because we're not in a club doesn't mean I can't dance. Gunner laughs and encourages me, and I even see a smile on Nick's face as we head home.

Nick thanks the guy who drove us while Gunner has me hop on his back as if I'm a kid. I lock my legs around his waist, and he groans. I kiss his ear. "I'd rather have my legs around you in a different way."

"Sophie." He warns.

Nick glances back at us, then shrugs. He bids us a good night, saying old men have to get rest and that Gunner should go to bed too. I expect to see my dad somewhere, but he's missing.

Gunner drops me off at the couch closest to my room, then turns, climbs on top of me, and holds my face between his hands. "So how do you want to wrap your legs around me, Sweets? I need a demonstration."

I groan and grab his shirt, pulling him close, but Gunner doesn't kiss me. He smirks instead. I tug him again, and he arches his eyebrow. "I like when you talk dirty."

"I can do better things with my mouth if you let me," I whisper.

That does him in. He kisses me hard, stroking down my body as he devours my mouth. I wrap my legs around his hips, locking my ankles behind him so I can feel every amazing rub of his hardness between my legs. Gunner fists my hair while his other hand pushes my dress up so he can grab my ass.

"Please tell me you have underwear on." He groans before biting my earlobe.

I don't know if it's his husky voice, the mix of pleasure and pain, or the alcohol, but I'm wet, wishing I wasn't wearing underwear and wanting him deep inside me. I catch his eyes and tell him. "You'll have to find out for yourself."

Gunner groans and palms my bare ass cheek again, his mouth brushing my collarbone. God, I bet he could make me feel amazing. But he's holding back. I take an unsteady breath. "I think you'd do more for me than those long showers I take."

His eyes lift to mine, and he devours my mouth again, almost punishing me with the force he uses. His other hand cups my breast, squeezing as his tongue explores my mouth with sure strokes. My body trembles for him, and I arch into

his touch. I want to beg him to slide his fingers into my thong and find out how wet I am.

But before I can get the word out, I hear a door slam somewhere. Gunner jumps back, pushes his hair into place, and exhales while looking me over. My dress is bunched up at my hips, showing my little black thong and not hiding anything else.

At least he can't see how wet I am just from making out and dancing. He jerks his chin towards my room. "I bet it's your father."

But what if it's not? What if it's Roman or Holden or Nick, and what if they'd want to touch me too? Two sets of hands on me, stroking me, pleasing me. Or three ... could all four of them touch me at once? And would I be able to get through that without spontaneously combusting?

"Sophie. Go." Gunner insists.

I nod. He wouldn't tell me to leave if it was just one of the guys. Hell, he was grabbing my ass and grinding against me with Nick, so it must be my dad, or probably my dad. I only get halfway up the stairs before I see him.

He looks exhausted, bags under his eyes, pale. I pause, and he smiles at me. "Sophie. You look beautiful. Did you go out tonight?"

"Yeah! I took your advice and checked out some of New York."

"The clubbing part?" He asks, then looks at Gunner, arching an eyebrow. "Did you let her drink?"

"I encouraged it." Gunner replies. "Nick and I kept her safe."

Dad nods, but his eyes flash dangerously. "Not all of New York is nice, honey."

"There's always dangerous places in the world, Dad," I whisper. "I'm okay, don't be mad. And get some sleep, please? I'll make pancakes in the morning."

His face softens, and he nods. He smiles. "I love you, kiddo."

"Love you, Daddy."

I duck into my room before the mix of emotions can drown me. I was just making out with one of Dad's best friends wanting him to touch me and fuck me right there. The same man who sat there and heard how much my dad loves me and wants to protect me.

Is this wrong?

Or is it just ... complicated? Because complicated I can work with, but wrong ... taking advantage of my dad or his house or his kindness seems like too much. Not that I'm able to control myself with or without alcohol.

I take a slow breath. Sober me can decide what to do while drunk me takes advantage of that massaging showerhead and the privacy of an attached bath.

As soon as I turn the water on, I glance over my shoulder, almost sure that Gunner has followed me in to prove he can give a better orgasm.

But my room is empty, and once I lock the bathroom door, I lose myself in fantasies that don't have a single stitch of guilt laced in.

Roman

I GET DRESSED IN SHORTS AND A TANK TOP TO GO RUNNING. I lace up my sneakers and go to grab Sophia, only to find her hard at work in the kitchen ... making a mess. She has batter all over herself, a bowl, and a spoon that refused to submit to the sink.

She flips her hair to the music that's playing, and now I know why there's a mess. She rocks a few other dance moves, wiggling her hips and ass before turning around and jumping. "Oh my god!"

Chuckling, I walk to her and drag my finger over the batter that's on her cheek. I arch an eyebrow, and she swallows hard. "Roman." Then her eyes widen. "Jogging, in Central Park!"

I nod once and look her over. She has on microscopic shorts and a tank top. She motions to the stack of pancakes. "I told dad I'd make pancakes. Even though it was while I was tipsy, it counts."

"Hey, baby," Miles says, walking in and taking a healthy stack of pancakes. He kisses the top of her head. "They look good."

"I promise I'll clean up," she says.

"I'll take care of it," he says, stuffing a pancake in his mouth. "Roman, have some."

Miles walks away without me answering. Sophia hesitates before she flips another pancake. Her dad's in the next room, but I don't care. I stand behind her, breathing down her neck, and watch her squirm. It's fun to watch her try to figure me out.

"After breakfast, I'm all yours, Roman."

"I like the sound of that," I murmur, then kiss her neck.

She turns and nearly drops a pancake on me. "Roman! He's ..."

I tug her shirt, pulling her toward me. She squeaks and turns around, giving me a sly smile, then going back to her pancakes. I smirk and let her cook. I'm sure she and her dad can't eat the entire pile of pancakes she has.

Nick takes two, Gunner takes four, and then Holden comes out as I go through the emails on my phone. Sophia looks up at him, and I see her blush. She motions to the pancakes. "As many as you want."

He smiles, and I see him brush her hip as he walks by. A little jealousy takes over for a moment, and I feel my heart pick up the pace. She's mine. I feel an anger rise from deep within, but remember to breathe and let it pass. I can feel it but, let it go. Then I remind myself it's Holden. He's more like a brother than my actual brothers. He'd never hurt her. He'd only protect her, and we'd do anything for each other, including share.

Sophia cleans up a little, then runs upstairs. When she comes downstairs, she's clean, in leggings and a big t-shirt. She laces her shoes and smiles at me while sweeping her hair up and into a sleek ponytail.

"I'm ready." She bounces.

We head out and jog together. She follows while focusing on everything else but me. It's a simple route through Central Park, but I come to a stop at my normal breakpoint—with beautiful scenery and a bench for us to rest at.

I stretch, and Sophia does the same, leaning over to touch her toes, which nearly embarrasses me right here in the park. I can't help but stare at her ass, her thick thighs, and everything in between them. Sophia stands and looks at me over her shoulder, eyeing me up and down. Like she's thinking about having me for dinner.

She blushes, then exhales. "You know it's not safe to jog the same way every day, right? People could memorize your path and use it to corner you."

I arch an eyebrow and look around. "I don't think I have to worry about that."

"You are pretty big, so I guess you don't have to worry about it," she whispers, and her cheeks go pink for me.

"A perk of being me," I say with a chuckle.

"Are there many?"

"Depends on the day," I say.

She nods once and then looks around. "So ... more?"

Sophia has good endurance. I nod and lead her through the rest of my normal routine. Before we get back to the house, I insist on a walk to cool down. Sophia walks in silence for a bit, then clears her throat.

"So, you work late on Fridays?"

"Sometimes." I nod. "What do you do?"

"Well, last night, Gunner and Nick took me out. We danced and drank and had so much fun." She grins. "I haven't danced at a club in so long."

Oh, I bet she wasn't the only one who enjoyed it. I nod, wishing I was there for it. "Sounds like you had a good time, then."

"I did!" She bounces a little. "Do you go out often?"

I shrug. Not as often as Gunner. I haven't seen the appeal. But I want to see her dance, sexy, hot, and wild. I want to watch her body move, feel her move against me. I catch her hand.

Sophia looks at our hands and swallows as I rub the inside of her wrist. "So ... Anything you recommend doing in New York?" Her eyes catch mine, and I want her now.

"New York has its moments, but the people in it are what matters," I answer. "There's a movie I've been meaning to watch that's on my to-do list for this weekend. Why don't we have a movie night by the fire with some takeout?"

"So an in weekend?"

"A get to know you and spend some quality time with you weekend," I growl with a wink.

She nods as she thinks about that and then bites her lip. "You wouldn't mind my company?"

"Not your company." I squeeze her hand, feeling the electricity between us, and wonder if she feels it too.

She pulls away before we get home, which is smart, considering her dad is barreling out of the house on his phone. He pauses, walks to her, and nods. "I'm sorry, honey. I have to take care of this. Shit is hitting the fan."

"It's okay, Dad," she says, assuring him. "Take care of business."

"Tomorrow, we'll have lunch. No phones. Just us." He gestures between Sophia and himself.

Sophia watches him leave and shrugs. Just like that, she hops inside and goes upstairs. Holden is still eating pancakes in the kitchen. He scratches at his knee, then stretches it. I nod to him. "Feeling okay?"

"I should be used to it after this long," he murmurs.

"No judgment," I say.

We stand there in silence for a while. He doesn't judge me for not wanting commitment. I don't judge him for being secretive about his scars and ... losses. I clear my throat and get through a quick shower. I drop onto the couch and stretch out.

"Join me for a movie?" I ask Holden, who's still in the kitchen, now drinking a beer.

Holden rolls his eyes and shrugs. Just like that, he heads back into his room to do whatever he does on weekends. I'd

love to pull him out of there more, help him get back into society. But it's up to Holden to do that.

Nick is nowhere to be seen all day, and when I get ready for the movie, only Sophia comes out to join me. She has on a simple dress which shouldn't grab my attention the way it does.

But I'm learning that Sophia breaks all the rules when it comes to what I'm used to. Her bare shoulders, long legs, all free and tempting. I need to touch her right now, and she sits as far as possible from me.

Once the movie starts, I lose my patience. I don't *need* to have her on top of me, but I want her close. I slide to the middle of the couch and let the back of my fingers graze her knee. Sophia jumps, and her eyes flick to me.

She makes eye contact, smiles, and tries to refocus on the movie, but when my finger strokes along her soft knee, I see her legs spread, like an offering. One I can't resist. I rub my hand along the inside of her knee.

"Roman." Her voice is a low rasp.

I glance at her, and she squirms. Her mouth tastes amazing. I bet her pussy tastes even better. And this gametrying not to get caught while testing her boundaries, letting the heat sink into her skin until she's obedient and sweet for me—it's fun but damning.

"Sophie." I purr.

She leans toward me, then her eyes lift and go over my shoulder. Holden comes in, eyes on the TV. I pull my hand away and move to the corner of the couch, guiding Sophie to the middle. Holden sits on her other side without a word.

Sophia beams at him. "Holden! You came."

He nods once, pulling his eyes from the TV to look her over. His gaze lingers on her chest before he refocuses. She pats our thighs. "I think we need popcorn."

Holden is up before I am. He walks to the kitchen, and even though it's not far, it's far enough. I grab Sophia's thigh

and drag her closer to me, kissing along her shoulder and neck.

Shivering, she turns to look at me. It would take next to nothing to kiss her right now. I lick across my bottom lip, and she leans forward. "Don't tease."

"Or what?"

"I can't handle more teasing. Not now." Her hand rubs over my thigh, high enough up that my cock stirs.

I groan and shake my head. Fucking hell, it's always something, isn't it? I exhale and shake my head, my nose brushing hers. "You can end the teasing when you're ready to beg me, Bambina," I growl into her ear.

"If only I wanted to beg." She smirks, pulling away from me. Teasing me.

What a brat. I grab the back of her neck and kiss her, hard, hungry, demanding. She melts against me. All her sass evaporates once I have my mouth on her. I rub my fingers up her thigh, teasing under her dress until she gasps.

I brush fabric and bite her bottom lip, sucking it before releasing her mouth. "I think you just like teasing me, dolcezza."

"Roman." Her breathy voice, the way her thighs spread further for me as she rolls her hips against my hand. "You don't know everything."

I tap her underwear, watching the color flood her face. "Maybe I should be talking to your pussy instead of you." I can tell she's wet. "Seems to be more eager."

"That's wishful thinking." But her voice wavers, and she can't meet my eyes.

"Is it?" I run my finger along the hem of her panties. She's warm and soft against my finger as I dip it just inside her underwear. I groan and let out a string of curses in Italian while kicking off my shoes. "Maybe we should find out."

I nip the inside of her shoulder. "I think you're wet, Soph." I rub over her panties, teasing her with the lightest touch. "Soaked for me."

"You're killing me."

"Beg, and I'm yours," I whisper. "We can find an excuse to leave right now and take care of you the right way."

Her breath wooshes out of her, and she shivers as I stroke over her panties one more time. She bites her lip and meets my eyes. "Please?"

"Barely a beg," I growl, but I can't resist any more than she can. I slip a finger inside her panties and find her wet, hot, and perfectly shaved. I groan and bite her shoulder as her head falls back. I circle her clit with a lazy finger. "Give me more, and you get more, Sophie."

All she has to do is admit that she wants me as much as I want her. She swallows. "I want your fingers inside me, stroking me, please, Roman. Please."

Her husky voice is straight with lust. I groan and push my fingers inside her. She covers her mouth with her hand, but that doesn't hide a damn thing. Fuck, she feels so good. She leans back, and my eyes follow. Seeing Holden watching just on the other side of the couch, rubbing the bulge in his pants.

I smirk and pull my fingers out of Sophie so I can shift to my knees and drag her panties down. She gasps and looks between us, then nods. "Please?"

"The magic word," I tease, jerking her forward as she drags her dress up. She watches as I kiss up the inside of her thigh. I can't stop the words pouring out of me as she reveals more and more, spreading her legs wider and wider for me. The Italian whips off my tongue as I toss my cashmere shirt to the side and lick across her pussy.

Sophia

I'm insane, wild for him, for them. I can't keep holding out. The shower time works less and less. I'm going through batteries at a suspicious rate. And Roman's tongue is *so* much better than anything I can do to myself. He laps at my clit like he needs it to survive.

When he groans, I feel it all across my skin. Holden sits next to me, and I swallow as I look at him. He's so hard to read. I'm not sure how to approach him, how to keep him from pulling away when all I want to do is have him pin me against a wall again and devour me, every inch of me, like he needs me, like I need him to. And I still need him, even with Roman between my legs.

I've never been this wild, this ... determined.

God, they're driving me insane.

"Sophia," he breathes, looking from Roman's head between my legs to my face.

I grab his shirt and pull him toward me. Holden hesitates an inch from my lips. His throat bobs as he swallows, then he runs his nose along mine. I need him to tell me I'm not crazy for wanting him.

He brushes his fingers through my hair and kisses me. Our lips mold together. His tongue teases mine, and his hand rubs up my hip, brushing the side of my breast in a touch so light that I crave more.

Holden draws back, then kisses me again, harder. I groan and open for him further, welcoming his tongue deeper as he drags one of my thighs over his lap, allowing Roman to lick deeper. I whimper into Holden's mouth and rock my hips against Roman's skilled tongue. He groans softly, then pulls away, shaking his head.

"We shouldn't do this out here, Soph."

"I don't care. I want to." I kiss him. "We can't have this conversation every time we ... start this."

"You deserve better than me. You don't know everything."

"I know I want you. I *need* you," I groan and fist Roman's hair. "Both of you."

Roman's eyes flick up to me, and I can see the satisfied smile there as he sucks my clit between his lips and flicks his tongue over it. My head falls back, and I groan as Roman's fingers thrust in and out of me. My nails dig into Holden's thigh under my own.

"Please, Holden?" I turn to him.

He kisses me again, hungry and demanding, while palming my breast until every touch is pure ecstasy. How the hell am I supposed to hold out when they're both touching me? When they're giving me everything and then some.

I hear a belt being undone and open my eyes, drawing back from Holden's mouth. He lifts his hips and drags his pants down to his knees. He's so hard, so thick, perfect. I lick my lips, then gasp as Roman slides two fingers back inside me.

"Fuck," I breathe.

"You have a dirty mouth," Roman says before dragging his tongue from my entrance to my clit.

"I blame you," I pant as I try to increase the friction between us, grinding on his tongue. "You're why I'm wet."

"Good," He growls, burying his face back in my pussy.

Holden turns my chin and kisses me again, his tongue tangling with mine, claiming me with every stroke of his. He and Roman are so different, but fuck, being between them ... it's insane. Holden guides my hand to his cock, and I stroke over him as I shiver and groan.

I'm so close. So close already. However, I've never been one to settle for using my hand when I have a good mouth. Not that I want to move when I'm on the edge, but Roman turns and bites and sucks my inner thigh hard, making me moan.

"I was almost there."

He winks at me. "I know." He nods to Holden.

Holden takes my hand in his hair and holds it as I adjust, so I can lie in his lap and wrap my mouth around the head of his thick cock. God, it's going to be work blowing him, but I'm drooling, just teasing us both.

He lifts his hips, and I take more of him down my throat. Roman jerks my thighs and licks my clit again, focusing. I know he's going to see it through this time. There's no stopping us now. His nails dig into my thighs, then push back to hold my ass in his hands as he devours me.

My mouth sinks deeper around Holden's cock, and I groan as he fills my mouth and my throat. I lick and suck, determined to make him feel as good as Roman is making me feel with every move of his wicked mouth.

I moan around Holden's cock, and his hand tightens in my hair.

"Just like that, Sophie," he moans.

His hand wraps around my throat, but he just places it there, so light. I arch my back, lifting my chin until he has plenty of room to grab me. Groaning, his fingers tighten, and I gasp.

"You three look ... cozy."

I gasp and freeze as Gunner's voice reaches my ears. I know I'm flushing bright red right now. But there's no way

I'm wasting this opportunity. The thought of Gunner watching this makes my pussy gush, and I take Holden deeper again, drawing back just to take him as far as possible without choking. I want all of him inside me, and if this is what I can have right now, I'm greedy enough to have it.

Roman curls his fingers and licks me just right. My mouth opens wide as I pop off Holden's cock, and I come hard, my hips rolling and grinding against Roman again and again as I clutch Holden's thigh, riding out my orgasm.

I shiver and pant. My eyes open, and I see Gunner crouched in front of me. He smirks. "Having a good night?"

I nod once, wrapping my hand around Holden's cock again, eager to make him come too. My voice comes in, raspy. "Yes."

"Good." Gunner kisses me, sucking my bottom lip as he pulls my hair.

Roman teases my pussy with a slow brush of his fingers while Holden tightens his hold on my hair again. They're an intense combination. My hand tightens around Holden, and I stroke him as Roman moves my thigh to smack the outside. "You're so naughty, Sophia."

Gunner swallows my moan as my mind jumps forward. I can already see myself sandwiched between the three of them as they undress me, touch me, kiss me. I want to taste them all, want to feel them all inside me.

"The perfect level of naughty," Gunner agrees with a wink.

Holden turns me and devours my mouth, licking along my bottom lip before sucking and nibbling the same spot. My hand tightens around him, and I shiver. Roman teases me with his cock, rubbing it against my pussy without diving in.

It's driving me insane.

"It's our turn to come, Sophie," Roman whispers.

I nod and shift on the couch, wanting to take all of them at once. Gunner undoes his pants in front of me, his eyes

scorching me as he does until Roman grabs my chin and kisses me, making me taste myself on his tongue.

They tug on my dress until my breasts are free. I pull away from Roman, taking the bite that I earn, and look at my free breasts. I shiver and look between them again. All three of them hard, cocks free, all for me to enjoy.

"Holy shit," I groan.

"So sexy," Gunner whispers in my ear as his fingers tighten around my nipple. "No bra or anything."

My body rolls between them, but I feel clumsy in comparison. Their mouths on my neck, hands on me, bodies around me. It's our whole world. It's all I need, all I know. Roman guides my hand to his cock, and I test it with a slow pump before he pulls my hand up and licks across my fingers, my palm, and wraps my fingers around him again.

Gunner takes my hair from Holden and pulls me forward.

I lick across the head of his cock, and he moans. "Good girl, Sophie."

This is too much. More than any one woman can handle. But I'm determined to do it. I take Gunner deeper as I stroke Holden and Roman's cock, fisting their cocks in my hand and going up and down over and over. Their moans tell me all I need to know. They're as into it as I am.

Holden's hand slides up my thigh to tease my pussy with touches that threaten to make me come again as Roman tugs and rolls my nipple between his fingers. And Gunner guides my head over his cock.

Unlike Holden, he keeps complete control, bringing me up and down on his cock just like he likes. Italian rolls off Roman's tongue like music, and Holden groans, his hips pushing up and into my hand. Gunner makes a sound close to a growl.

"Take it all, Sophie. All of my cock down your pretty little throat," He orders.

I whimper and do what I'm told. He slides across my tongue, filling my throat until I gag. My eyes water, but all I want is more of him. I lick and suck his cock, taking everything I'm offered. Roman shakes as he thrusts into my hand, too.

I lose track of everything but these men. Holden rubbing my pussy until I'm on the edge as I rub and stroke his cock. Gunner fills my throat, fucks my mouth like no one has before, his moans and panting filling the room. Roman, playing with my nipple until I don't know the difference between the sparks of pain and pleasure while I keep rubbing his cock.

It's overwhelming, insane, beyond everything I've ever known and ever expected. I whimper and moan as I reach my climax again. My whole body shakes, my hands tighten, but the guys keep me going until Gunner comes, filling my throat with his come. His hand relaxes on my hair, and he moans again.

"Fuck, Sophie," he pants, drawing back even as I lick the head of his cock for more.

Roman curses. "Fucking shit!"

I turn and catch his cum all over my chest. I moan and press my breasts together as he unloads his cock into my cleavage. Roman lays back with a satisfied smile; I turn to Holden. He licks his lips, but he doesn't even look close.

"Fuck, that was good," Roman says, finding his voice.

Yes. This is what I want. All of them happy, all of them kissing me and touching me, and the only thing that could make this better would be Nick walking through this door right now and the four of them having me right here in the living room all together. Before my dad walks in and catches us, that is.

But Holden smiles and unwraps my hand from around him. He kisses me and winks before heading to his room, leaving me confused and unsatisfied. They are *all* supposed to come.

"Don't worry about him," Gunner says with a shrug. "I gotta go clean up. You're welcome to join me, Sweets."

Roman chuckles and rubs my thigh. I glance toward my room. "Should I ... should I go ... or check on Holden?"

"You can go or stay right there, Bambina. Either way, you're okay."

I don't believe that. Roman lifts my chin to kiss my temple. "We're happy, and your father can't read minds."

"Which is why all three of us are still alive." Gunner calls from somewhere else.

So why do things feel unfinished?

Holden

I SIT ON MY BED AND LOOK AT MY HARD-ON. GOD, SOPHIA IS amazing. I don't know why I couldn't finish. I swear I was on the edge, and it's fucking with me. She's sexy as hell and all I've wanted to do since the moment I've kissed her is have her mouth wrapped around my cock, have my cock buried deep inside her. So why can't I fucking finish!

There's two soft knocks on my door, then it's opened. Sophia stands there, her dress on, but the flush is still across her face. She's so gorgeous, so ... sexy. She smiles and tucks a stray hair behind her ear.

"I'm going to finish you," she says.

I chuckle. "I believe it with that attitude."

She reaches for my jeans, and I jump, reaching for her and pulling her chin up. She freezes and leans her head to the side. "What is it, Holden? Please. I want to know."

"I'm not ..."

She arches an eyebrow and bites her bottom lip. "Please?"

I sigh. Now is as good a time as ever. I kick off my shoes and see her look down. She blinks a few times, then squints to focus. The low light isn't helping with this explanation, but she deserves to know what she's getting into.

Sophie sits next to me, leans her head on my shoulder, and rubs my thigh. I kick off my pants, revealing the full

prosthetic. She looks at it, tilts her head to the side, then looks up at me. "I don't ... I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"It's a-"

"I know what it is, Holden. I'm not an idiot." She climbs onto my lap, rubbing her bare pussy against my still hard cock. I take a sharp breath, but she wraps her arms around my neck. "This changes nothing ... not for me."

I stare at her, seeing if she's serious or just still turned on. I run my nose over hers. I'm not like the others, not really. A part of me will never come back from war, and I wear it all the time, no matter the counseling.

Sophia reaches for the hem of her dress and pulls it off. I groan as I get to see every fucking perfect inch of her. No tattoo, no big scar, nothing. She grins at me. "You're sexy, Holden. And I *like* you. Nothing else matters."

I groan, and she rolls her hips on my cock. "If you want to talk, we can."

"Talking sounds ... good." My voice sounds fucking strangled.

She smiles, then rubs her pussy over me again. "Or it can wait until later. It's up to you." Then I see a light go off in her eyes. "Or we can do both."

"Both?"

"I want you to know how important you are to me." She rolls her hips on me again. "And I want to know you ... in a lot of ways."

"Okay." I blink at her. Fuck, my mind is blank. All I can think about is making her come again, about her wet pussy rubbing over my cock.

"Tell me what you want ... until you're distracted." She smirks.

I swallow and nod. "I only have one leg. I hate being in crowds." I shake my head. "I'm not Gunner or Roman."

"And they aren't you. They aren't each other. Which is good. One Gunner is already a lot." She gives me a slight smile as her hips roll again. "I like each of you for who you are."

"I don't need pity."

"Who's pitying you?" She looks around.

I arch an eyebrow, and she rubs her wet pussy against me again, this time harder. Her breath catches as I groan and grab her hips. She smirks. "I'm a lot closer to fucking you than pitying you."

"Do you want to fuck me?" I hiss between my teeth.

"Let's see ...One, I snuck by my dad to get here. Two, I'm on top of you. Three ... I'm naked." She laughs once. "It's almost fun. I never got to do any of it as a teenager."

I nod once. Her lips brush mine. "Holden, do you want to fuck me?"

"I can't think about anything else," I say honestly.

She adjusts, and then I'm inside her. Fuck, she's got a tight little pussy. So fucking silky, tight, wet, and hot. I groan and kiss her hard, hungry, starving for every delicious inch of her. She whimpers and melts against me, even as she rides me.

"You feel good, Holden."

"Fuck." I thrust up and into her.

"You're strong," She groans, dropping down on me. "Sexy." She comes down again. "All fucking man." She grabs the back of my neck and kisses me hard. "Everything any sane woman would want, and I'm damn lucky to have you. I wanted you to be the first one inside me," She purrs in my ear.

That does it. I can't think of another fucking thing we need to say, not when I'm buried inside her, and she's riding me so hard. I thrust into her every time she comes down and lose myself in her. She smells amazing, feels perfect on top of me, around me, against me.

Sophie ups the pace, and I drag my nails down her back as I lick and kiss over her tits, sucking her nipple hard before biting her. She muffles her moan by biting my shoulder. She gasps, and I feel her pussy tighten around me. Grinding down on me for more.

God, she's already close?

"Fuck!" I hiss against her skin.

She whimpers louder, more often, with each roll of her hips, each stroke of my fingers across her skin, every thrust of my hips. I lift my face to claim her mouth, and she comes apart, moaning and panting into my mouth as her pussy gushes over my cock.

I pull out in time. I come across her stomach and pant, pressing my forehead to hers. She laughs and kisses me. "Three for three."

It breaks me. I laugh and shake my head at her. "You're ..."

"Amazing, sexy as hell?"

"Ridiculous," I say, chuckling.

I clean her up with my t-shirt, then lie back in bed. Sophie drags her dress back on but lays next to me for a moment. She gives me a shy look from under her lashes meeting my eyes. I don't know what she's shy about after that, then she swallows while maintaining eye contact. "You don't sleep with it on, do you? The prosthetic? Seems like it would be uncomfortable."

A laugh gets through my lips. "That's what you're worried about?"

She shrugs.

"No. I don't. I was just about to take it off," I say.

"Is it hard to do?"

"Habit now."

She nods, then squeezes my hand. "Since you shared ... I'm so worried my dad is going to find out about ... this, and that's a horrifying conversation to think about."

I nod.

"And I have to talk to Sasha on Monday." She flops back dramatically. "She hates me. You know, she thinks I'm *dating* my dad? There's so much wrong with that sentence. I'm surprised it came out."

That breaks me. I laugh and give her hand a squeeze back. Sophie treats me with a warm smile, then leans over and kisses my cheek. "Neal is an asshole, and I miss being here with you for work."

"You only say that because we got wine."

"And no people up my ass watching my every move." She wrinkles her nose. "It's a hell of a welcome change from the busy office."

Her voice is so calming. It's not fair.

"I'll take your advice and go to bed since I've left you satisfied, sir. I saved some pancakes for you. They're hidden behind the leftovers in the fridge." She winks. "Goodnight, Holden."

"Goodnight, Soph," I whisper.

She opens the door, looks both ways, then darts away. I shake my head. She's ridiculous, a horrible woman to pursue, considering who her father is, but she's never boring. And she never does or says what I think she will.

I thought nothing could shock me more than her stripping just inside the front door, but coming here to check on me because she was worried about how I was feeling, then fucking me ...

I don't know how to compartmentalize that. So I shove it to the side. I can save it for my counseling session. Looking at my door again, I flop back on the bed and then pull off my prosthetic and set it to the side.

Sleep comes but doesn't stay.

Nightmares of the child standing in the road, of the bomb, the car flipping, of us losing James ... not being able to go back for him even though Roman and Miles came for me, of sand filling my mouth and the sun baking my skin, of my leg just gone despite the itch on my non-existent foot.

I jump up, sweating, ready for combat, but there's nothing threatening me. There are no shooters, no targets, no bogies. Just me and my inability to let the current place and time join me in sleep.

Getting up, I dig through the fridge and drag out the pancakes that Sophia made earlier. Nick passes by and notices me jumping. "We need to get a bell for you, Hold. You're too silent."

"How was your night?"

"Not terrible." He shrugs. "Better than Miles, considering he ended up working."

I snort. Miles can't stop working. If he stops, the past catches up, and we're all running from something. Even Nick. He's modeled, he's lost himself, found himself, and is working on building stability.

That's how he copes.

A healthy way.

Nick leans on the counter. "Get some actual sleep, Hold."

I roll my eyes. He offers me a sleeping pill. Maybe it's melatonin. Maybe it's something harder. Either way, I don't like the idea of being trapped with my nightmares. I've been trapped before.

"Hey."

"I'm going to counseling on Monday. It'll be fine."

"If you want to talk ..."

Nick always wants to make others feel better. Maybe it's how he makes himself feel better. How he can ignore the fact that when we were taken out, it was while we were having the best day over there. We'd kept a school safe, and we'd been smoking, drinking, joking around. It had felt like we were just on a drive, not getting back to camp.

Just a few kids enjoying their twenties and not worrying about tomorrow, or the next second. But the next second came in a flash, a bang, and the screech of metal.

"I'm okay," I reassure him.

Nick pats my shoulder, then heads out. "Sleep in tomorrow."

I want to. A big part of me wants to just sleep and sleep and sleep. But another part nags at me. It doesn't help that I'm shoving Sophia's pancakes down my throat with minimal syrup. I go back to bed and wrap my arms around a pillow.

I make it through the night but don't have it in me to leave my room in the morning ... or early afternoon as it ends up being. It's easier to make a list of what I want to cover in counseling.

I want to talk about my flashbacks and my agoraphobia, but I have a feeling that I'm going to *need* to talk about my fears of Sophia. My fears of being with another person, period. I take a slow breath and drag a pillow over my face.

Under a blanket, under a pillow, it's just me and my breathing. I'm alive. That's what problems prove, right? And it could be worse. Even if there was a time where I wished it wasn't just my leg, I lost.

Survivor's guilt. That's what I've heard I have. On top of PTSD, shared trauma, insomnia, and bouts of anxiety.

"Holden?"

I look at my door, listening without getting up-even for Sophia.

"If you want to, I could use a pro gamer to join me in this co-op. I'm getting my ass handed to me, and I'd love some help."

She'll wait. I know she'll wait until she gets an answer. And I *want* to join her despite how exhausting it sounds. I groan and sit up, rubbing out my shoulder. "Give me a minute."

"Next match then. A.S.A.P.! I can't have twelve-year-olds kicking my ass!"

I chuckle, then shake my head. This is progress, right?

Sophia

The week goes by so fast I feel like I blinked. Despite how intense the weekend was, nothing has changed, even though I've been waiting for shit to hit the fan. I barely see the guys, and I don't get why they're all working double shifts until Wednesday at dinner, when I'm eating Pad Thai on my own in the kitchen.

Hands stroke over my hips, and a body presses against my back. I gasp and drop my fork, looking over my shoulder. Holden smirks at me and kisses across the back of my shoulder until I shiver.

"We're going to get caught." I look around the empty house as he smiles.

"Are we?"

His hand slides over my hip and teases the tie on my silk pajama pants. I groan and rub my ass against him. His hand slides over my underwear and teases me through it. I shiver and rub his hip.

"You're ..." I gasp as his hand pulls up, then slides into my panties.

"Taking advice that this smart," he punctuates it with a kiss to my neck, "sexy," another kiss, further up, "amazing," his tongue flicks against the hollow under my ear. "Woman gave me."

"Oh?"

"That I'm a desirable fucking man." He sucks my earlobe, and I melt against him.

His fingers circle my clit, driving me insane until I'm on the edge of coming. The door opens, and Holden winks at me, releasing me and sucking his fingers. I shiver and take another bite of food.

Roman walks in, looks at us, and smirks. "Bambina!"

He kisses me, although my mouth is full, and pats Holden's back. "Are you two packed?"

"Packed? Are you guys going somewhere?" I ask, standing up.

Nick walks in. "We all are. You too, Soph. Don't you remember? Roman's cousin invited us with a warning that we can't make an excuse this time. We leave Friday morning."

"Really?"

"Really." Roman squeezes my ass.

Nick kisses my cheek without hesitation, then heads to his room. Roman steals a bite of Pad Thai, swallows, then claims my mouth, kissing me with passion. "We're going to Italy, Bambina. And that means you're ours, all weekend."

"Dad isn't coming?" I ask.

Roman pulls me toward him and brushes my hair from my face as Holden comes up from behind and presses against my back. Fuck. I don't even care about Italy. I care about right now. About Holden rubbing my tits until my nipples get hard while Roman teases my lips with his and grips my ass so tight I wouldn't be surprised if it left marks as a result.

Roman shakes his head. "Nope. He insists on holding it down here."

"Oh god." I shiver.

"I think that's a good thing, don't you, Roman?" Holden asks, pressing a kiss to the pulse point in my neck.

"Fucking excellent," Roman agrees before kissing me again.

Roman's phone goes off, and he groans, walking away to take it. Holden bites me, draws back, and winks with a grin. "Bring a dress for easy access," He growls in my ear.

I giggle and run with my Pad Thai to my room. I throw in lingerie and underwear, a swimsuit, just in case, some shorts and cute tops, then stare at my closet. What the hell kind of dress am I supposed to wear? I bite my thumb nail.

"Bad habit, Sweets."

I jump at Gunner's deep voice, and he chuckles, swirling the liquor in his glass. He presses it to my lips, and I take a sip as our eyes meet. As soon as I swallow, Gunner licks along my bottom lip and then takes a kiss that I feel to my toes and back.

He looks into my bag and smirks. "I think you have enough underwear."

"Not enough to be around you guys," I breathe.

He chuckles. "Then I think it would be better if you brought no panties at all."

"I need a dress, Gunner, and I don't have a clue." I can hear the panic in my voice. "I don't know what to wear in Italy."

"Let's look," he says, putting his glass in my hand and going right to the closet.

He looks through dresses as I sit on the corner of my bed. "And this cousin is ... famous?"

"Yeah. Soccer or some shit," Gunner grumbles. "No, definitely soccer. Massimo has been keeping some secret under wraps. He wants to have a big party, and everything before their grandma goes."

"Oh." I take another drink and feel the warmth collect in my stomach. "Anything else I should know?"

"He'll fill you in on the plane. His grandmother doesn't speak any English, so you might want to talk to Roman the next few days and learn some basics. It'll impress."

"Good to know."

I down the rest of the drink, trying to digest all this. I like to have plans, but traveling in less than two days is insane. Especially to go to a country where I don't know anyone and can't speak the language. Gunner shows me a dress and smiles.

"Thirsty?"

"Gold?" I point at it.

He nods and hangs it on my mirror before walking to me. "Looks like you need something to calm your nerves, Sweets."

"Hence the drink." I motion to the empty glass, still dripping condensation.

Gunner crawls over me, and I lie down. He pulls the ponytail holder from my hair, letting it fall around me. I swallow and run my hand over his chest. He nods and kisses across my jaw. "Just relax, Sophia."

"Tempting," I breathe.

"Need convincing?" He arches an eyebrow.

Gunner's so intense. He's so ... just so much. He cups the back of my head and kisses me hard and hungry, his tongue teasing mine, stroking and tangling until I fist his shirt and draw him closer.

Gunner kisses my neck, then works down my body, keeping my gaze before pulling my pants down. I gasp, realizing he's dragging my underwear down, too. I put a hand to my mouth, and he smirks as he spreads my legs.

"You got to taste me. It's my turn."

And he follows through, licking across my pussy until I have to bite my hand to stay quiet. He spreads me open with his fingers to lick me deeper, and my hips raise to meet his mouth. He exhales over me, and I shiver.

"Your pussy tastes fucking amazing," He mouths on my clit.

I groan and roll my hips against his mouth. Gunner helps, sliding his tongue over my clit again and again. I lose myself

in him, in the pleasure and heat of his mouth. Time means nothing, only Gunner and his mouth bringing me to the edge as my moans fill the room.

It takes a short time to come. I pull Gunner's hair, and my voice breaks on a moan as I reach my climax, grinding down on his nose. I shiver as Gunner licks over my entrance, then up to my clit before kissing my hip and pushing my shirt up to kiss along my belly.

"Well, I feel better." I laugh.

Gunner smirks and lies down next to me. He pulls my hand to his mouth and sucks my thumb. "You taste better than the finest whiskey."

I swoon a little for Gunner, and he winks at me before biting my thumb. "Now finish packing and get set for work tomorrow."

Pouting at him feels natural. "I don't get to finish you?"

Gunner smirks. "Soon enough, Sweets. I promise."

"I'm going to hold you to that."

"And I'll hold you to plenty," He growls.

That makes the rest of the night easier. Hell, I can even handle Sasha when I walk into work the next day. I treat her to a smile, despite the venom whipping off her tongue. I get through half the day and then go to Roman's office.

He looks up at me and arches an eyebrow. "What can I do for you, Sophia?"

"Teach me some Italian ... maybe? Or give me a way to learn?"

Roman motions me forward. I shut the door, and he pulls a chair around so I'll be right next to him. I thought the tension between us would be easier after everything we've done, but it's not even one notch lower.

Especially when he strokes across my jaw. He shows me words one at a time until I have a full sentence. "Ciao il mio nome è Sophia."

Roman grins and leans toward me. "Preciosa Bambina."

I feel goosebumps rise on my neck and meet his eyes. "What does that mean?"

"My precious baby," he says, voice rough before he jerks me forward and claims my mouth. God, he owns me with a kiss. His tongue presses deep into my mouth, consuming me. When he draws back, I'm breathless and all his. He smirks. "We're going to have a lot of fun."

"I think so." I shiver.

"We're going to make sure of it," he says. "And I'll teach you plenty."

"Of Italian?"

"Sure," he says, with a chuckle, his hand stroking my thigh. "How to use your tongue, how to do plenty."

I wear the blush all the way back to my office. I kiss my dad on the cheek before I leave and promise to get breakfast ready for him for tomorrow to make sure he eats. The world is spinning so fast, I feel like I should grab it before any of these moments are gone.

The next morning, it's all a rush. Once I catch my bearings, we're on the plane. I'm between Holden, who claimed the window seat and currently has a death grip on the armrest despite the headphones in his ears, and Nick, who looks as casual as could be.

I take Holden's hand, and he gives me a quick smile before closing his eyes. Nick glances over. "He doesn't always fly well."

"How long is the flight?"

"We have a quick stop to make ... to drop off some paperwork in person. We'll be there in time to change and get ready for dinner."

I nod and pick a movie to watch. It gets me through the first bit of the flight. Then I reach over and rub Nick's hand. "How are you?"

"Happy for this break," he says with an easy smile. "It's been a long while since I've taken any time off."

"You deserve it. And to have some fun." Nick's eyes flick to my lips. I smirk and lean toward him. "Yeah, that kind of fun, too."

"Don't tease me," he says, lowering his voice and leaning toward me. "I can't take teasing, Sophia."

"You know I'm more than happy to follow through," I whisper, biting my bottom lip and looking him over. I like that Nick lets me stay in control. He moves at my pace. Hell, he let me lead the way. "I'm not afraid to prove it, either."

"Is that a fact?"

"As soon as we come to a stop, I will," I promise.

Nick groans, and I lean toward him, kissing his jaw, then kissing him with soft feathery kisses, our lips molding together into a slow burn that spreads through me. I feel his hand stroke down my back and grin as I draw back.

Gunner and Roman are in a conversation, but Gunner nods to me once, an encouragement. Damn, these guys are going to make me believe that I'm the luckiest girl in the world. Having all of them with no jealousy between them or competition or anything but fun.

"I think I'm going to like Italy," I breathe.

Nick grins and strokes my cheek. "We'll make sure of it."

"I believe you." I wink at him. "Just wait until we get off this plane."

"We'll only have an hour."

I look him over, letting my gaze linger on his crotch. Nick lifts my chin as I lick over my bottom lip. "My eyes are up here."

"Oh, I know. I'm just ... enjoying the view."

He chuckles. "You're ... incorrigible."

"And you love it."

"I never said otherwise, baby." He kisses my wrist.

Nick

When we land, excitement tears through me. Sophia keeps a firm hold on Holden's hand, like she can destroy anyone in her path, including his anxiety. Holden doesn't mind letting her lead here. Gunner and Roman argue about where to meet the client before deciding on a bar and dragging Holden with them.

"You'll be fine," she says, assuring him with a smile and a wave.

I hang back with her. Sure, we're all adults, and we're all having fun, but I know Miles will kill us if something happens to his daughter. Hell, if anything even brushes across her delicious ass, we're all going to feel his wrath.

So I take Sophia's hand and drag her down an empty hallway. She giggles and presses me up against a wall, kissing me as if she can't get enough. Again and again. Her body rolls against mine, and I'm hard with just the promise of more.

"You're fearless," I groan.

"Think anyone's in this bathroom?"

"You're too good for a bathroom," I argue. I see a business room for phone calls and all that and pull her to it. I lock the door and turn to find Sophia on her knees, already tugging at my belt. "We have time, baby."

"I know. But how much time do we have before the guys get curious?"

I collect her hair in my hands, knowing there's no stopping her when she's determined. I've seen her whip Neal into shape, and I've seen her control clients and vendors with an email and firm tone on the phone.

Sophia is a force of nature, and all I can do is take what she offers. She bites the inside of my hip, then drags my boxers down with her mouth. I groan as my dick springs to full attention for her.

Sophia groans and strokes over my cock with her hand. Her fingers can barely wrap all the way around. I know I'm thick, but I hope it doesn't stop her. She sits back on her heels and looks up at me.

"Can I?"

"You started it. Let's see how you finish it," I encourage her.

She giggles. "You like letting me have control?"

Fuck yes. I love that she knows what she wants and takes it. From the moment she used her feminine wiles against me while we were sparring, I've been hoping she'd up the ante. Having her dance on me in the club, being teased by her walking around just being her.

"Yes."

She licks from the base of my cock to the tip before licking right across the head, her tongue flat and wet and hot. I groan and let my head fall back. "I like you taking control. Love knowing you want me so intensely."

"impatient for you," she breathes before wrapping her pink lips around my cock.

She sucks, then opens her mouth wider to take me deeper. Watching her lips stretch to fit all of me is so fucking sexy, just like the determination shining in her eyes. She licks and sucks my cock, her cheeks hollowing as her eyes close.

Sophia moans as she takes more of me. God, this woman is perfect. She knows just what to give, just what to take. And I

want her to take it all, take all of me. I tighten my hold in her hair as she goes even deeper, gagging on my cock.

Her eyes water, and her face goes red. She licks me again, sucks the head as her hand strokes the shaft, and I love the view. I can't handle her, can't handle how hungry and eager she is.

I pant and groan. "Fuck, Sophie. You feel good."

She moans around my cock, sending an electric shock to my heart and back. I know I can't last much longer. Not after only having my hand for so long, and she's so fucking much better.

So hot, so wet, so ... I groan as my hips thrust into her. She groans, and we get dirtier as I fuck her pretty mouth until my whole body spasms and I come on her tongue. My head goes light, my vision dims, and I know that I won't be able to keep my hands off her after this.

Sophia sits back, wipes her bottom lip, and swallows while panting. I pull her up and lift her to the table in the room. I kiss her hard, demanding, not caring about a damn thing other than her.

I have my hand between her legs where I need it most when someone bangs on the door, causing Sophia to draw back, a hand over her mouth as she giggles. She bites her lip. "I think our meeting is over."

"No." I shake my head and press my forehead to hers. "Just postponed."

I put my phone to my ear and start barking orders as I open the door and give the other businessman a glare. Sophia follows, typing on her phone until we're out of sight. She giggles and loops her arm in mine.

"We'll have to roleplay."

"I can't wait," I smirk at her.

We meet the guys at the bar. They have already handed off the paperwork, we have drinks, then get back on the private jet that is waiting for us. Sophia sleeps, her head on Holden's shoulder. Holden smiles at me and kisses the top of her head. This flight passes quicker, and then we're all piling off the plane and into a waiting limo.

The drive makes me sick. The driver takes the turn so sharp that I swear the little Italian I know is being knocked out of my head. But we pull up to a gorgeous estate. It's better than any hotel.

Holden steps out and rubs his face. "I need actual sleep."

"I know."

"Planes are hell," Holden whispers.

But then Roman helps Sophia out, and Holden forces himself to look awake and alive. I know it's less for Sophie and more for Roman. He's talked highly about his family, and we've met Massimo before, but meeting the *whole* family in Italy is different.

Massimo, his long curly hair and burly body match Roman. They look identical. He yells a greeting in Italian and hugs Roman. They chuckle, and then Massimo greets us. "Friends!"

"Hey, Mass," Gunner says.

We all greet him, then he notices Sophia. He arches an eyebrow but offers his hand. "Massimo Agosti."

"Sophia Lane."

He keeps her hand as we walk through the gate to his villa. I see a woman with a round belly wearing nice, airy pants and a shirt that gives plenty of room for her belly. Her short hair, sharp features, then the laugh that softens her face. She's beautiful and glowing.

Massimo walks over to her and motions to her. "My bride."

"Congratulations, Mass!" Roman says with a huge smile.

The woman rolls her eyes and pushes herself up, ignoring Massimo's hand. "Did you invite a whole other team? You know what Max is going to say about this?"

"Not a damn thing." Massimo beams. "Danny, this is my cousin Roman and his friends."

Danny looks between us and rubs her belly. "Nice to meet you all. I'm going to go throw up now." She chuckles as she shuffles off.

Massimo watches her with love pouring out of him. "She's a hell of a woman."

"Obviously, she puts up with your shit," Roman teases him. He glances at us. "Where can we get cleaned up?"

"You have plenty of time before dinner. Get some rest, change, take your time," Massimo says, encouraging us. "And let me know if you have questions."

We head off, but Massimo grabs Roman. "Not you. Grandma wants to see you."

Roman turns and kisses Sophia's hand. "Soon, Bambina."

"Don't let Danny hear you say that. She hates that word," Massimo chuckles.

I roll my eyes, but Sophia grins at me. Holden yawns, and Gunner gives me a look and nods. I grin. We clean up, but as soon as I sit down, I can't imagine doing anything but laying down for a bit. I'd love to spend some time with Sophia, especially since I have the perfect opportunity, but I can't drag myself out of the comfortable bed.

A knock on the door makes me realize I've fallen asleep. I sit up and open the door. It's Massimo. He looks me over. "Get dressed. Dinner's in ten."

"Sorry, man."

"Nah, it's fine."

I hear him make the rounds, but then silence ... until there's a very suspicious moan from next door. I chuckle. I get dressed and see Roman come out of Sophia's room with her. She's wearing a sweet, airy skirt and a casual top.

Roman squeezes her hand and leads our group to a courtyard where tables are set up. Massimo and Danny are

sitting at the table upfront with two guys. Danny shoves one of them, and he rubs her belly.

The other guy, a big burly, brown-haired man, pulls out a chair for a woman to sit next to him. She's thick and beautiful and obviously with the guy. Food is served, and the tables eat happily. I don't blame them one bit. It's absolutely delicious. The spice, the creaminess, the wine. There's not a damn thing to complain about.

Massimo gets up and stands in front of everyone with a microphone. He speaks in Italian, an entire speech that earns soft eyes from many. Roman rolls his eyes. Then Massimo takes a deep breath. "In English ... I'm so happy you've all been able to come and join us for this wedding. Danny and I aren't great at doing things in the right order, but I've learned order isn't what's most important. Not when it comes to love."

He chuckles. "Danny and I have passion, love, and something even more important—the ability to laugh at ourselves. We make the decision to love each other every day and to see the best in each other. We've been through the hard, the impossible, and the best together. And now, with my Tesora about to have a bambino of our own ... I can't imagine bringing him into a better world or one more filled with love."

"Would you like to say anything, Danny?" Massimo asks.

Danny rolls her eyes but gets up with help from the woman sitting at her table. She walks up to Massimo and takes the microphone he offers. Instead of saying anything, she kisses him hard and deep. There are some claps and kids yelling.

Then she draws back and winks at Massimo. "The fact we're not already married is a problem I'm more than happy to fix tomorrow."

Massimo beams at her and invites us all to enjoy our meal. They sit back down, and I feel something inside me squeeze. After dinner, we head to our rooms, but I sneak out. I haven't had enough of Sophia, my spitfire.

I knock, and she lets me in with a confused face. "Is everything okay?"

"I think I promised to help you enjoy Italy."

Sophia giggles and welcomes me into her room. I lift her up, kissing her passionately before we fall on her bed together. She strips herself as I toss my shirt to the side, but before I can go for my jeans, I look over every inch of her naked body.

She's a goddess. And I want to worship every single inch of her. I crawl over her and breathe as I take her in. Her perfect, perky breasts, the taper of her waist before her hips, her thighs, her shaved pussy, the flush spreading across her chest and up her neck as I look.

"Nick?"

"I'm going to memorize you."

"Do it while you kiss me," she orders me.

Who am I to say no? I lick and kiss across her chest, over her breasts, savoring her moans, the way her body rolls to meet my mouth, and the way her skin tastes. She smells delicious, and I know I'm about to lose control.

Fuck, I can't wait.

Sophia

NICK LAVISHES ME WITH AFFECTION, SOFT AND SLOW, BUT IT just electrifies me. Every slow, soft-touch, every soft kiss, every amazing brush of his body against mine sends me spinning. I groan. "Fuck me."

"I told you, I want to take my time."

"You have," I pant.

He groans and pulls away. I whimper, wanting to follow, but then he rolls on a condom and crawls back over me. I wrap my legs around his hips and nod. "Now. Now. No more teasing."

"For now," he says with a chuckle.

Then he's inside me. God, he's so thick, and even though he's fucking me slow, inch by inch, I can already feel pleasure welling up inside me. It's delicious, it's perfect, it's everything I need.

I moan and pant, not afraid of being loud right now, not with Nick or any of the guys. I had Roman earlier, and now I get Nick. They're so different, but so good. Roman's rough and demanding, and Nick is so giving, so careful, so ... luxurious.

Groaning, I roll my body against his, and he increases the pace. His hand worms between our bodies, and then he's rubbing my clit. I moan. "Fuck yes, Nick."

"Tell me how good it feels, Sophie."

"Perfect. So good. So amazing. Yes."

My words continue, but they make less and less sense. I'm getting closer and closer to the edge. Until all I can see is Nick, his salt and pepper hair, his gorgeous face, his hot, dark eyes, his everything.

Our eyes meet, and I explode, just like that. I come hard, dragging my nails down his back as my pussy squeezes him tight. Nick fucks me harder, faster, more demanding, and I groan as he draws out the orgasm. One orgasm becomes two, and then he comes, my name on his lips as he pants and his body tightens against mine.

I lie there with him on top of me as our breathing evens out. I moan when he pulls out, and after a second, he comes back, dragging me up the bed and lying with me. Nick pets my hair back and kisses me.

"Thank you, baby."

"I think I should thank you for that." I giggle.

He kisses me again. "Get some sleep. We have a lot to do tomorrow."

I nod. I get through a shower since Roman gave me the room with a shower—something I'm sure wasn't a coincidence. After I get done, I lie in bed naked. I sigh and hug a pillow as I give in to sleep.

I wake up with the sun in my eyes and brush my teeth. Before I can finish getting ready, I hear my door close and look out of the bathroom to see Holden. He's dressed, but his eyes stroke over me, and I have a feeling that's about to be tested.

Not that I'm sore or complaining from his attention, but I don't want to miss out on Italy ... or them. God, there's too much to do in a day and a half. And the wedding's tonight. But Holden only kisses the back of my shoulder, then drops to his knees, drags my underwear down, and devours me. I pant and moan, rocking my body back against his mouth.

My legs give out when I come for his tongue, and he catches me, protecting me from the artful tile. I laugh. "That's

a hell of a morning."

"A good morning for a good day," he murmurs.

I rub his side. "You okay?"

"A little overwhelmed, but it's manageable. I think I'll survive," he says, reassuring me, kissing me.

I lean against his chest. "I can keep you safe. I'm good at directing conversation, and I'm happy to help where I can."

"I don't speak Italian, and I think that's going to help a lot."

We laugh, then I shoo him away. The day is filled with activity, which gives us time to explore a little before we have to get ready. Gunner offers to help me get ready, which gives him time to stuff his cock down my throat while he fingers me. We come together, and Gunner gives me some wine as he gets dressed.

"You're going to look lovely," he says once we switch places, and he finishes the glass.

I pull on my underwear and wiggle at him, making him chuckle. "And you ignored that bit of information I gave."

"I happen to like my thongs."

"You're not the only one." His eyes sweep over me. Gunner bites his thumb. "Sexy as fuck."

"Thanks."

I can't manage a bra with these thin straps, though. So I pull the dress on and check myself in the mirror. It molds to my body like it's painted on. It's backless, and there's a cut up between my legs to mid-thigh.

Gunner watches me put on my jewelry, then do my makeup. He stands and runs his fingers through my hair. "Everything okay?"

"A lot changing in a short amount of time." I shrug. "I feel like I've known you guys forever, and I love spending time with you."

"But?" he asks.

I chew my bottom lip. "I feel like I haven't seen my dad at all."

"Welcome to our life. We've seen him more since you've been around. He works odd, unpredictable schedules, but he's attempting to be with you. He's trying to be a wonderful dad."

"I know," I say with a shrug. "I just ... I don't know. I thought I'd get more time with him."

"Our life isn't easy. Unfortunately, it's not like the movies. We don't get to play golf whenever we want or entertain mistresses all day, every day. We have to work for the company to keep it running and profitable."

"I know that too," I say. "I'm sure I'm worrying for no reason."

Gunner rubs my shoulder, kisses my cheek, then heads out.

I finish getting ready, but there's a lump in my throat. What could I have to worry about? I'm in Italy, with four gorgeous men keeping me company in every way possible. I should be on cloud nine. I should enjoy every second of this weekend.

What don't I have?

I have a fantastic job. I'm independent in New York. I'm reconnecting with my dad. I'm not wanting for sex, for companionship, or for adventure.

So why the hell is there a stone where my stomach should be? I feel almost nauseous, and I check my phone. Nothing from dad. I try calling, but I get his voicemail. I play with the necklace he gave me, the one with a little diamond pendant, as I wait to leave a message.

"Uh. Hey, Dad. I'm sure you're working or asleep. I'm not sure of the time difference, but we're here, we're safe, and I'm taking plenty of pictures for you," I say. The silence drags, and I swallow. "I love you, Daddy."

I hang up, and Roman opens the door. He sweeps into the room, pulls me off my feet, and carries me out as I squeal.

Holden closes the door, and Roman sets me down. "Now, it's rude not to drink, and if you're confused, I'll translate. Let's go have some fun."

"What kind of fun?" Gunner winks at me.

We walk to the wedding together, then I'm sat between the four of them. Holden glances around, and his hand tightens until I take it. I promised to help him, and that's what I'm going to do.

And his hand in mine helps me forget about my own worries.

But as soon as Massimo walks up and takes his space, wearing a black on white tux with a red rose in the pocket, he looks handsome, not at all an athlete, more like an old aristocrat. But his huge smile gives him away. He can't control it.

The wedding march starts, and Danny walks down the aisle as we all turn to face her. She wears a dress that molds to her body, but the sleeves are too big, purposefully so, and they slide down her arms. They styled her short hair in what looks like an updo, and her makeup is light. She looks healthy, warm, and her smile is huge.

The man giving her away is almost crying, his eyes are rimmed in red, and his lip is quivering. She kisses his cheek when he leaves her at the altar, and my heart thuds in my chest. I'll be able to do this with my dad someday. Hopefully, sooner rather than later, maybe I can convince him that the two of us need a vacation, or at least a weekend alone together, to bond.

Massimo and Danny exchange beautiful vows. I see Nick tear up and pat his thigh. Even Holden seems relaxed as the two kiss. Everyone cheers, and then we're swept over to the reception. Roman takes my hand and introduces me to an old woman.

He speaks to her in Italian, then presents me. I swallow and say the one sentence that's been in my head since I learned it. "Ciao il mio nome è Sophia." The woman lights up and pats my cheek before speaking to Roman in Italian. He laughs and watches as she hobbles away. "My grandmother. She asked when we're getting married. It's easier to let her think that it'll happen, and you're a good woman for her to meet."

I put my hand to my heart. "That's so sweet, Roman."

"I have that ability, Bambina." He winks, and a half-smile takes over his lips.

I giggle. We sit together, talking about everything but work until the music plays and the couple comes in. We eat, we drink, we laugh, and then comes the first dance and then the father-daughter dance.

Danny holds her belly with one hand as she and her father dance. There's so much emotion on her face, so much joy. I'm almost jealous, but I'm more excited about watching them. They're close, and the small laughs, the smiles, all of it make me eager to share it with my dad one day.

I look around at the guys and feel a new hope. If I can handle all these guys, maybe it's possible for all of us to be together without a stitch of a problem.

I take another drink and lose myself in the moment. All the guys, other than Holden, dance with me. When Holden takes my hand, my phone rings. I look at it and smile.

It's Dad.

I can't answer now, but it confirms that at least one fairytale can come true. I might not have the entire world at my feet, but I have everything I need. I have a comfortable home. I have a father who cares, who is willing to put off work long enough to call me and reply to the message I left. And I have these four gorgeous men taking care of my every need.

Holden kisses my cheek. "My bed tonight?"

I giggle. "Is that all you're thinking about?"

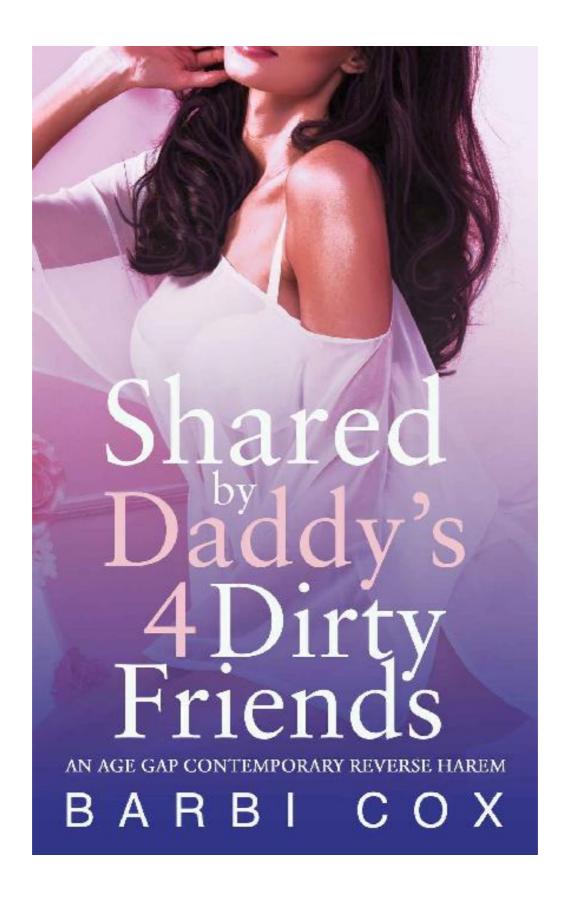
"What can I say? A one-track mind is clearer."

I giggle and nod. "As soon as it's acceptable for us to leave."

"How open is that invitation?" Gunner asks.

I bite my lip, and I'm sure that by the time we leave, it will be all of us, making more than innocent memories. Which will be the perfect end to a perfect trip. I text my dad back, promising to call him tomorrow.

Right now, I need to live in the moment.



Sophia

THE WEDDING IS SO BEAUTIFUL. MASSIMO AND DANNY obviously have a great future ahead of them if this is what they're looking at. I take another sip of wine, and my eyes flick to Roman. He's laughing with Gunner, and something about how free he looks here stirs me.

He's usually wound so tight. I think I can count how many times I've seen him laugh on one hand. And Roman in a suit is ... mouthwatering. I have to fan my face a little. He's in his element, completely relaxed, and it does so much to me that I feel like I can't think straight.

Roman catches me watching and winks at me, sending shivers dancing across my skin. He glances to the dance floor, and I nod. Standing up, he moves to take my hand. His calloused palm slides against mine as he takes me to the dance floor.

The music is slow, sensual and when he holds me close, it's like an electric current humming through my whole body. Roman rubs my back. "How are you doing, Bambina?"

"Always worried about me, even when I'm completely safe?"

He shrugs. Roman spins me, pulls me back against him, and leaves my lungs behind. I shake my head, trying to keep it clear, focus on the moment. "Is this how you guys live? Going around the world whenever it suits you?"

"Not always." His fingers trail down my back. "Your dad's planning made our lives very different from what it could have been."

I nod, thinking of how nervous Holden is. Roman seems immune to that, even though I know all the guys saw intense combat. Roman lifts my chin. His dark eyes catch the lights, and it looks like there are stars living there.

He takes a slow breath. "I'd planned to go into the private sector. I felt like I was only good with guns back then. Thought I could do better protecting people at home than I could overseas. It was a losing battle to try to bring everyone home safe."

"I'm sorry." I don't know what else to say.

He shakes his head and gives me a small smile. "It's the path I chose, Sophia. I don't regret it. It brought me some amazing experiences and men that are ... more than friends."

I nod. Roman kisses my cheek. "No more serious talk. This should be fun."

"I'm having fun. I just wish I could understand everyone. I feel like some ... ignorant American."

He chuckles and twirls me half way, so his hips cradle mine as we look at other couples. The people next to us talk, then laugh. Roman's lips brush my ear, and my breath catches in my throat.

"They are surprised that the married couple is still here. Apparently, they like to disappear together often." He murmurs.

We turn again, and he motions to three women giggling and talking loudly. "They are trying to decide who they want to leave with. They're daring each other to cut in."

"To cut in where?" I ask.

Roman turns me around, and his eyes pierce me so deeply. "Between us. I'm scary, don't you know."

I look him over and arch an eyebrow. "Scary isn't the word I'd use."

"Good." He kisses my temple swiftly. "If you did, I'd have to be gentle."

I laugh softly and see him smile from the corner of my eyes. When the song ends, we go back to the table, and Gunner claps mockingly. "You two should be on Dancing with the Stars."

"You only say that because you don't know how to move your feet." Roman smiles wide.

A woman comes over and starts talking quickly with Roman. He nods a few times, and I catch him say "English" when he motions at us. She puts a hand to her chest. "I'm so sorry! I'm rude. How are you all enjoying the wedding?"

"It's beautiful! I've never seen anything so romantic." I gush.

She looks around the guys, then at me. "I know these ones. Who are you, cara mia?"

"Sophia Lane. We all work together." I say quickly.

It must be too quickly because Gunner suppresses a laugh, pretending it's a cough. Nick smiles. "Sophia is Miles' daughter. He couldn't be here – someone has to run the company."

"Of course." She waves that away. "Sophia, would you like more wine? I have some from a little vineyard."

I nod and join her. She laughs, and one side of her mouth curls into a smile. "Just work, friends?"

I blink at her and try to hide my cheeks that I know are about to turn bright red. "Well, I'm new to the company. They're trying to help me work my way up."

"Sure." She winks at me and motions for me to finish my glass. Then she pours me a white wine. She looks over at our table. "And that's all?"

"That's all. I've never been out of the country, so ... Oh. I'm so rude. What's your name?"

"Isabella." She offers her hand and kisses my cheek twice.

"And how do you know the groom ... or bride?"

That gets her focused on Massimo and the Agosti family instead. I swear she has their history down pat. Before she can turn any more questions on me about the guys since I know she's not close to done, someone else catches her attention.

She squeezes my hand and says she hopes I have fun at the wedding with another wink before heading off to someone else. I rub my forehead and lean against the table, taking a bigger drink of wine.

I'm not ashamed of what I've done with the guys, separately and together. I like them all. I can't help myself. Who could? I want to get to know them all better. And what better place than Italy? But the questions are ... awkward. I don't know how to start to explain anything that we have going on.

Hell, I can't think of anywhere in the world that would support a girl having multiple guys come in and out of her room without having some kind of rudeness attached. I smile as I look at our table.

They're all having fun without work stress or anything else to hold them back. Even Holden is smiling when he's not tracking people walking close or glancing at the exits. Nick is relaxed, Gunner, the life of the party, and Roman's more talkative than I've ever seen him.

Focus on the moment, Sophie, I remind myself.

Worrying will only make me lose track of where I am and distract me from making the most of every moment we have here.

I head back to the table and take my seat. Nick leans over casually. "Everything okay? You seem stressed."

"It's a lot to take in. That's all." I shrug.

"Well, it's about to be more. The new married couple is coming our way." He rubs my knee under the table, and I bite my nail in response. Nick winks. "Don't worry. We're plenty good at talking in circles. That's how businesses operate."

I smile and rub his hand until our fingers lace together. He gives my knee another squeeze, then turns his attention to Danny and Massimo. Danny is a vision in white, and the dress is so perfectly tailored that I can't imagine her in anything else.

Massimo looks around the circle and grins. "So, I think we missed out on the full story when you all arrived."

Roman pins him with a look, one eyebrow raised, eyes filled with warning. Danny has on a shit-eating grin that tells me she's just as happy to meddle. She arches her eyebrow at me. "So, Sophia."

"Sophia just came to New York. She joined the company, and odds are, we'll be working for her one day." Nick says easily. "She's a workaholic, just like her dad."

"Am not. If I was, I wouldn't be here." I say with a small laugh.

"Well, sounds like you have a good future." Danny rubs Massimo's chest. "But come on, you're the only girl in a group of eligible bachelors. You know people will have questions."

"Danny." Massimo chastises. "Don't hint."

She shrugs. "So, which one of these guys has your attention?"

I gape at her blunt question. I clear my throat and open my mouth to answer when Holden speaks. "Are you asking for a friend?"

Massimo says something to Roman in Italian, and he rolls his eyes with a smile taking over his face. Danny rolls her eyes. "Come on. Do you like Roman? One of these other guys? There are a lot of single girls waiting for a dance, and not one of you have snatched that opportunity."

"Jet lag," Nick says with a shrug.

"And I'm too old to make a relationship work across an ocean," Gunner says with a shrug. "Even for the sexiest

woman alive."

"So then you're all interested in Sophia?" Danny laughs. "How fun."

"You keep this up, and they won't want to spend time with us," Massimo says, kissing Danny's temple. "You're supposed to be gentle with the prodding."

"You didn't marry me because I'm gentle," Danny replies with a knowing look. "I thought you liked my bite."

Massimo whispers something in her ear, and she bites her lip. "Don't tease."

"Not a tease if I'm going to make sure it happens later, tesora." He winks. "Come on."

Gunner laughs. "I thought the wedding was supposed to be all about the bride and groom."

"You know Massimo better than that." Roman smacks Gunner's back. "He likes pushing buttons."

"Just like you." Gunner wipes his mouth since Roman's smack interrupted him from taking a drink. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you two were brothers."

I ask to be excused a moment and head to one of the many bathrooms. I fix my hair and check my makeup. I wonder if people talk like this at the office. I hope not. If Dad got any kind of suspicion, we'd be out of luck. Truly, S.O.L. But it's almost more exciting this way.

I get to know that I've been with all these guys. I'm in on the best secret, and everyone else can only guess and tease. I push my hair out of my face as I notice a flush in my cheeks. Being with them is good for me. I feel more alive than ever. Even with the constant threat of being found out, I feel like I'm finally taking control of my life.

The door opens behind me, making me jump. I turn and find Holden. He shuts the door and rubs my hips, pulling me back against him. "How are you handling things?"

"I'm okay. You?" I look over my shoulder.

Holden kisses across my neck slowly, his tongue teasing me. Oh, these unspoken promises are going to drive me insane. I shiver and bite my lip. "That good?"

He chuckles and twirls a whisp of my hair around his finger. "It's gotten easier."

"I'll be out in just a minute." I turn and face him. "Did anyone see you follow me?"

He shrugs, and I feel the confidence from the wine kick in. Holden looks good all dressed up. Almost as good as he looks Naked. I tug his tie towards me and kiss him hungrily. He lifts me onto the counter in one move and strokes up my thighs, pushing the dress up inch by inch.

"Holden." I groan.

"I like how you say my name." He pants, grabbing my ass and jerking me against him. I gasp, and my lips brush his uselessly as he teases me through my thong.

"Not here." I whimper. "I'd have to be quiet."

I open the door, peek out, then hold up one finger to Holden. He grins as I try to tell him to wait a few seconds at least before he comes out, so the rumors don't get worse. I go to the table and tell the guys I'm exhausted and going to turn in early.

"We have big plans tomorrow, Bambina. Get some sleep." Roman encourages me.

As if sleep is what I'm going to get tonight.

Holden

I BRUSH SOPHIA'S THIGH AND PULL HER CLOSER. SHE FELL asleep an hour ago, but I can't seem to find sleep. I can still hear the party raging on, firecrackers startling me, screams and laughter warping in my head.

Sex helped. I'm pretty sure Sophia in any capacity would help, but damn, she's ... she's amazing. When I heard the vows, saw the wedding, it twisted something up in me. Made me realize that something is missing. There's a hole in my life.

Sophia groans and rolls, her face buried in my neck. She murmurs something in her sleep and then takes a deep breath. I wonder if she's awake when I feel her eyelashes brush my neck. I run my hand over her back, and she presses against me.

"Awake?" Her voice is thick, and she lifts a hand to her face.

I sigh and nod. "There's a lot going on."

"Anything help?" She adjusts, pulling the blanket over her as if I haven't licked just about every inch of her. Her dark auburn hair looks almost black in this low light.

"You help," I murmur.

She kisses me softly and presses her nose to mine. "Stay the night then."

"Sophie," I whisper, rolling to have her mouth again. I drawback. "Staying is ... a lot."

She rubs my chest softly. "Is it?"

"I don't spend the night with others. The nightmares ..." I swallow. I don't want to dive into this. We're supposed to be having fun. "I should go."

"Or we can get comfortable and talk until you're so exhausted, you won't think about things." She offers.

And I feel like saying yes. How stupid am I to say no to her? Especially when she's looking at me with those hopeful sweet eyes. I shake my head. I need to keep my wits about me. "I appreciate it, but no."

"It would make me feel better." She admits. "It's my first time out of the country. My first time not knowing the language. It's a lot of new."

Fuck. I wrap myself around her. "I'll stay."

"I feel silly." She whispers. "I'm an adult and can't sleep in a different bed."

"I think I can fix that," I answer softly. "First here, then when we get back home."

"That sounds dangerous." She laughs. "Hot, but dangerous."

I moan softly against the back of her shoulder. "Better stop teasing, or you're going to get me riled again."

"Don't tempt me." She presses her ass back against me. "I like you riled."

I groan and kiss her neck. "In the morning then?"

"I'm going to hold you to it."

And somehow, sleep finds me. An empty sleep. No dreams, no nightmares, just a deep heavy sleep that only ends when I feel a push against me. Opening my eyes, I jump up, ready for combat, but it's just Sophie getting out of bed.

She winces. "I tried not to wake you."

"What time is it?" I look around, the sun is streaming through the window, and I feel like I've slept for years.

"Nine." She says after grabbing her phone. "Want to join me in the shower?"

I don't have to answer that. I head towards the shower, then stop short. I look down at my prosthetic, and Sophie looks back at me before spitting out mouthwash. I laugh, almost forgetting the issue at hand.

But I brush my teeth, then sit on the toilet. "I'll watch."

"It can't get wet?"

"The rain is fine; a shower isn't."

She looks at the shower, leans back, then bounces on her heels. "There's a bench in the shower."

God, I'd be happy to let her do whatever she wants to me. But I don't want her to half-carry me into the shower and out. Sophia looks at me, her eyes stroking down my body to my morning wood, and she licks across her bottom lip.

"All man. All the time." She breathes.

I smile and pat my thigh. If this is how we do it, this is how we do it. And it feels that easy. Sophia straddles me, sliding down over my cock slowly as we both groan. She holds the back of my neck in her hand, and I guide her hips.

Sliding my mouth over her throat leads me to her perfectly round tits. Perky, pale, peeked with hard pink nipples that are just begging for attention. Attention, I'm happy to give. I suck one nipple between my lips, and Sophia groans.

Her pussy tightens around me, and I gasp, gently biting her nipple before releasing it to claim her mouth. I tighten my hold on her, bouncing her faster on my cock. Sophia whimpers against my lips, then parts her mouth, welcoming my tongue as I thrust into her over and over.

"You're the king of mornings." She moans in my ear.

I can't resist marking her. She comes as my teeth dig deeper, and it nearly does me in. I lift her off of me and fist my cock, coming on my stomach. I lean back, and Sophie stumbles. I reach out to catch her.

She grins. "I'll need the bench."

I watch her shower, and it shouldn't be half as erotic considering we just had sex, but watching her rub soap over her body, foaming over her breasts, across her belly, her thighs, her ass, it's fucking mesmerizing.

Half of me feels like I shouldn't watch, but she meets my eyes as she lifts her arms to wash ,her hair, and the soap rolls down her body, revealing every wet, delicious inch of her. I groan, and my cock starts to stir again.

I need to get myself under control around her, or she'll think I'm just interested in sex. And I'm not. I'm interested in her. But her sex appeal, the fact that every second thing she does, even when she's not thinking about it, is a turn-on.

She blinks at me as she gets out of the shower. "Towel?"

I hand it to her after a hesitation, because I'd rather lick the water off her body. She tosses her hair over her shoulder as she wraps the towel around herself, then gives me a crooked smile. "Want a sponge bath? I promise to be ... thorough."

Despite the temptation, I shake my head. She kisses me softly. "I'll leave you to it."

"Later?" I ask.

"Later." She agrees.

I get through a quick shower after taking off the prosthetic, and for the first time in too long, I'm not ashamed of it. My scars, my missing leg ... they're me, not something else. It happened, and I survived, came out of it, came home.

That's luck. And maybe that's what these marks are. They're a reminder of the luck I've had, the luck I will have, and everything in between. I grin as I drag on my slacks from yesterday and head to my room.

I pass Gunner, and he nods at me. "Have a good night?"

"Actually slept," I say.

He nods and pats my back. "Good. About time. Also, Roman has an idea."

I arch an eyebrow.

"He wants to extend our trip, says we can't do Italy properly in just a few days. It's not long enough for him. And Massimo wants to take us wine tasting." He shrugs. "Any excuse to drink."

I don't say it, but I look back at Sophie's room. I'm not sure how she'll feel about spending more time away from her dad. But she said she's never left the country and her first time is important, it can make all the difference. So we should make it worth it.

I nod to him, then head to my room to change. The five of us get together for what should be a late breakfast, but it seems right on time. The energy is still high, and the kids running around have me on edge.

Roman clears his throat. "How would you all feel about extending this bit of fun."

"I'm down," Gunner says easily.

Nick seems to consider it before nodding. "We don't get out of the office enough. We deserve it."

But I look at Sophia. If she needs backup, I'm going to be that for her. It's the least I can offer. She swallows. "I mean, dad's worried about his health. I don't know."

"What's wrong with Miles?" I ask.

The other guys lean forward. Fun is always second if one of us is in danger. She shrugs. "He just said that he's been feeling off. Which is code for feeling like shit, but he doesn't want to admit it. I swear he's convinced doctors cause sickness and injury."

"That sounds like him," Roman says. "If he's not in the hospital, we won't worry. He can handle more than most."

I nod encouragingly.

She rubs her forehead. "It's not like being there would help, right? And he said he wanted me to enjoy the trip."

"Massimo had a good point," Roman informs us. "That we should make our trip at least a few weeks to see all of Italy. The right way."

"Can we take that much time off? I mean, I just started; I don't want to be a bad employee and put more on Dad's shoulders."

"I thought you *weren't* a workaholic." Gunner teases her. "Come on, live a little Soph, have some fun."

Nick nods. "Honestly, you can do work remotely if you're determined, but we've got the major stuff taken care of. I promise, Sophie. It'll be fine."

I see her chew her lip and wonder what she's thinking. It would be so much easier to just read her mind and know exactly where she stands on everything. Luckily, Sophia doesn't hesitate to share when it's something big.

After looking at each of us carefully, Sophia takes a slow breath. "As long as it's okay with my dad, I'm in. How often do you get to have this view of Italy, right?"

"Yes," I say, grinning at Sophia happily.

We'll make this a trip she'll remember for life beyond what happens in the bedroom. And Massimo seems to agree since he invites us to a wine tasting at a local vineyard. A friend of a friend, which probably means a cousin, but what do I know?

Sophia is practically bouncing in her chair. I can't believe it's her first wine tasting; this should be fun.

"When?" She asks.

"Tomorrow. We'll make a full day of it." Massimo decides. "We took care of our honeymoon when I proposed considering the Bambino. We'll get around to another one, I'm sure."

We nod, and Sophia can't seem to stop smiling. I take her hand, overjoyed to see her like this. No trace of worry, not a hint of negativity. She's just pure sunshine, pure positivity. And I want to drink her in.

As we eat, Massimo tells us all the plans he has. A tour of vineyards, getting us into the best clubs and restaurants with his name, not to mention the other things he can just make happen. He seems as excited as Sophia does.

"Explore today, but after that, you're on my watch." He says before leaving us to sweep his new wife up in a kiss.

Sophia's practically scarfing her food down.

The idea of being around so many strangers in tight streets that wind around and slither over one another is intense, but unlike usual, I don't feel the urge to stay back. It's a hesitation, sure, but at the same time, I can't picture myself not running around Italy with my best friends and sweet Sophia.

My counselor will be so proud, and right now, I'm a little proud too.

Sophia

I GROAN AS ROMAN NIPS AND LICKS ACROSS MY THROAT, ONE hand pushing down the sleeve of my dress so he can reach in and cup my breast. His hands are greedy, squeezing and massaging me until I'm basically made of jello.

Gunner drags my thong down my legs, then stands behind me. I'm crushed between them, every inch of my body on fire as they touch me. Gunner rubs my clit slowly while kissing the other side of my neck.

His soft groan is so sexy. Roman claims my mouth in a torturously slow, deep kiss that threatens my knees. I don't even know if I'm breathing anymore. I'm dizzy and overwhelmed, aching. My legs shake, and Gunner pushes two fingers into my pussy.

I groan and rub myself down on his hand. He chuckles. "So eager, sweets."

"Always for you." My eyes stay on Roman as I say it.

He grins and guides my hand to his cock, like he's won a victory in that comment alone. "Always?"

"Always." I parrot back to him.

"You're insatiable." Gunner moans, continuing with the rapid pace of his fingers.

My mouth parts in an 'O', and Roman watches me with hungry expectation. Roman tugs on my nipple, rolling it between his fingers. "If only we had the time." "Massimo said today is ours, so..." I manage to get out before another moan tears through me.

Gunner pants. "So fucking wet."

My pussy squeezes around Gunner's fingers as he hits a spot so perfect. I swear I see fireworks even with my eyes open. Roman's breath brushes my face. "We still have plans, and you didn't come fast enough, Bambina."

Gunner jerks his hand away and pulls me back towards him as I continue rubbing Roman's cock through his pants. Roman groans and Gunner's fingers brush across my lips. His breath against my ear sends ripples of anticipation down my spine.

"Open for me, sweets."

My lips part, and his fingers stroke over my tongue, wet, tasting like me. I suck and lick his fingers obediently. But I'm determined to drive them as crazy as they drive me. So I groan and suck his fingers the same way I've sucked his cock.

He pants, then snatches his fingers back, smacking my ass again. I jump as the sting spreads, then drop to my knees between them. I rub them both through their pants, and Roman strokes through my hair. I'm tempted to lick them as well, but I don't think they'd feel that, considering they both have jeans on.

"Behave, or you'll be punished," Roman warns.

"Behaving is overrated." I tug at Gunner's belt, but his hands wrap around my wrists like shackles. I swallow. "Please?"

"Think about this all day." He orders softly.

Roman turns my chin to face him. "You should get ready. We're already running late."

"I ..." My brain is barely functioning. They've reduced me to a barely standing, needy, hungry version of myself that can only moan and not able to form actual sentences!

Gunner lifts my panties in front of me, then stuffs them in his pocket. Roman pulls me up and fixes my dress, so it looks like nothing happened. He nods. "And we're ready to go."

"But, I'm ..."

"Perfect." Gunner chuckles. "I told you not to bring panties, sweets. Should have listened."

"Stay close to us. The streets aren't always nice." Roman says, cupping my face.

He heads out, and Gunner rubs my back. "Don't worry. He's overprotective. You focus on fun, and we'll take care of you."

I'm still hot and excited when I leave my room. Holden and Nick are waiting for us. Neither seem anything but ready to go. Roman motions us to follow, and we file out behind him.

Nick takes my hand and rubs slow circles with his thumb. "Anything you're dying to see today?"

Based on how frustrated I am, I'm definitely eager to see more of these guys. And his smile tells me he can read that on my face easily. They're driving me insane and enjoying it way too much. The only thing that could possibly make this worse would be if they had one of those remote-controlled vibrating toys inside me and passed the remote around.

But if I say a word, they'll do that, and it will be ... well ... maybe I should look that up for later. Nick nudges me. "Anything?"

"Sorry. Um, I'd love to see what the town is like. I was half asleep when we drove through." I say softly.

"Easy enough to make happen," Gunner says with a shrug. "We can just wander today and save all that planned out stuff for tomorrow."

As soon as we're out in the city, I'm distracted. I swear these buildings have been here for centuries, and I'm sure they'll be here long after I'm gone, but the stonework, the bright colors, the fact that everywhere feels like home but new at the same time is invigorating.

Breathing is easy here. I want to dance in the streets, follow every alleyway to whatever mystery it holds. Hell, I want a balcony to play out that one scene from Romeo and Juliet.

"Sophia, come here." Roman calls. I didn't even realize I had let go of Nick's hand!

But Gunner is taking pictures, Nick is talking with Holden, and Roman has his eyes on me and me alone.

I bounce over to him. He winds his hand in my hair. "Stay close, Bambina."

"There's so much to see!" I gush.

"Not everyone is nice, and you" He shakes his head slowly and draws me closer. "And you are too sweet and nice. Someone could take advantage."

I notice Holden glancing around like he's preparing for trouble despite Nick being right there. I nod slowly. "Okay."

"I trust you, Bambina, but not the world." Then he rubs his nose across my temple and down to my ear, sending warmth down my spine. "You're too precious to lose."

I press my lips together at that comment. Nick comes up and takes my hand again. "You're slippery."

"Hey! Is anyone else starving, or just me?" Gunner asks, rubbing his stomach. "We could dip into one of these little stores and get a snack."

"We just ate breakfast!" Nick says, shocked.

Gunner shrugs. "As if that matters."

The guys joke around, teasing each other and pointing out things they want to do. In the office, I have to keep myself focused on work. At home, it's almost a game of avoiding my dad while still taking advantage of any moment alone. Here, I can really get to know the guys—one on one and all together.

Gunner and Roman argue about getting food for a bit, and Nick walks me over to the next street. "I think you'd appreciate this."

Nick leads me down a winding street with a view that I'd kill for. Seeing the trees rolling over wheat fields beyond the rows of stacked apartments. A river carving those fields from the vineyards. It's better than the travel photos I looked up before we came out here.

It's real.

"Wow." I breathe. "I see what inspires so many artists about Italy."

Nick rubs my shoulders. "The vineyards will be even better."

"And here I was expecting gondolas and pizza," I murmur.

Nick smiles as he takes it in. "In another life, I wanted to be an artist. Italy was always the goal. I figured if I could paint here or study here, I'd be able to be in galleries across the world."

"How did you find the other side of that life? Being the model?" I ask, rubbing his hand.

"Not exactly the same, but it paid better." He chuckles.

Nick grins as I stand on my toes to kiss him. I lick along his tongue and push myself against his body. He lets me feast on him until I groan, then I draw back before I lose my restraint. "We'll have to get you some paints."

"Sure." He rolls his eyes.

"I'm serious, Nick." Then I smile. "Plus, if you're painting, I won't be as tempted to tease you."

"Oh, is that what you're all about while we're here?" I turn and flip my skirt a little to show some of my ass, and he groans before stealing my hand and forcing my skirt down. "Point made."

Gunner

I LEAVE THE SWEET GIRL SELLING FLOWERS WITH A BOUQUET for Sophie. I don't know if it's her kind of thing, but it feels right given where we are. Not to mention, I haven't had the chance to do much in the way of romance for her.

I managed enough Italian to get through some clumsy flirting along the way, even though Roman rolled his eyes the whole time. I hold them up victoriously, and Roman gives me two claps. "I think you might have managed a full sentence."

"Didn't have time for that Rosetta Stone you got me." I shrug.

"Do we have a plan for today?" Holden asks, joining us. "Not that we need one, just ..."

Holden is obviously dealing with some hyper-vigilance. I'm sure he's having it rougher than he's letting on. I don't blame him. I still jump when there are loud sounds. But I try to make the most of every day. Otherwise, I feel like I'm doing a disservice to those that never got to come home. I have to live for me, for the now, and a little extra for them.

"Where is ..." I start, then Sophie comes around the corner with a wicked smile on her face.

She sees me and softens her look, suddenly demure in that sundress. I arch an eyebrow. At one point, I thought Sophia was sweet and submissive, but I've learned exactly how ambitious and determined she can be too. She's something else. So unaware of how addictive her personality is, of how

amazing she is on a base level, yet so confident and sure in herself.

Roman goes to Sophia and Nick while Holden nudges me. "Nice flowers."

"Are they? I can't tell. They're all ... flowers, right? No weeds?"

Holden chuckles a distraction from being on guard. "They're all flowers."

Sophia joins us with a warm smile. "Roman says he has a garden for us to check out. It's supposed to be amazing."

Holden nods. "I like the sound of that."

He walks off to join the guys, and I offer Sophie the flowers. She takes them and looks them over before smelling them with a smile taking over. "Thank you, Gunner. They're beautiful."

"I don't know if you're the type that likes flowers," I admit while taking her hand. "I'm glad you like them."

"Daisies are some of my favorite and roses in lots of colors." She murmurs. She laughs softly. "You know, I used to be nervous of tulips because I was sure bees were hiding in there."

"Are you allergic to them?"

"No." She laughs again. "That makes it even more ridiculous. I was just sure they'd sting me. Luckily, I got over that pretty quickly."

I squeeze her hand and bring it to my mouth to kiss her knuckles.

Her face lights up with a pink blush taking over her cheeks, and I see that same innocent, sweet look that worms its way deeper into my heart. Sophia is ... real. Everything about her is genuine. The only time I've seen her fake anything is with Neal when she's nice to him.

"So, you like Italy?" I ask. I've always been shit at small talk and better in the bedroom, better with blatant flirting that

has a clear goal. But Sophie makes me want to try. To get to know her, to let her get to know me.

"I do, so far anyway. I could be biased since ... you know, it's my first time in Europe, and I have great company."

"This part of Italy is better than Rome," I say with a shrug. "People are all about Rome, but this is more ... real. Like going to New York and only seeing Times Square versus the craft and art markets that pop up."

"You like those?"

"I like the energy." I shrug. "I like to explore different things, you know. Like ... to see all sides of the world."

"So you've traveled a lot?"

"Absolutely."

"Anywhere you'd go back to?"

"I loved this little place in Rio de Janeiro. Ipanema. It's beautiful. The markets in the streets, the museums, the beaches." I lean towards her. "Don't tell Roman, but I'm better in Portuguese than Italian."

She laughs and squeezes my hand. The silence stretches, and I clear my throat. "What did you want to be when you grew up?"

"Obviously a CEO." She laughs and then sighs. "I wanted to save the rainforest, actually. Or be a photographer for National Geographic. It changed every other week. Always new things to catch my attention."

"And what has your attention now?" I murmur.

She looks at me, blinks, and then looks away. Her eyes catch. "That. That has my attention."

I follow her gaze and see the garden entrance. I realize it's not some community garden focused on vegetables or the kind of butterfly garden I've seen elsewhere. It's enormous and beautifully designed. There are nooks created by vines and shaped trees, lovely ponds with mosaic bottoms, art sculptures,

fountains, gazebos, and so much to offer that my once beautiful bouquet now looks like shit.

Roman waves his hands around. "Beautiful, yes?"

"Si!" I smirk.

Roman flips me off

"It's gorgeous!" Sophia lets go of my hand or almost does. I pull her back against me, wrapping my arms around her. "Gunner, look at ... everything. The fountain is like a work of art. It's so lush and beautiful."

I kiss her throat and suck her earlobe. "So it's just like you."

She giggles and kisses my cheek. "Look at that. You're even sweet."

"You've tasted me. You should already know that." I wink.

She gasps and shakes her head at me. "We are in a public garden, sir."

"Call me sir again." I groan in her ear, pulling her closer to me.

"Gunner." She breathes. She laces her fingers through mine at her side. "Explore with me."

"Go ahead. I'll join in a bit." I encourage her.

She laughs and walks over to Holden. She takes his hand and leads him to the pond to look at some waterfowl as they hurry away. She pouts, and I chuckle to myself. Roman and Nick take some photos of the garden, and I shake my head.

The park is impressive and having Sophie here, getting to share it with her is exciting. It's so different from what I normally do with the guys, and I was worried I'd hate it, honestly. That I'd have to paste a smile on my face, but it's easy to be here.

I actually enjoy being at the park. I sit in a vine-coated gazebo and just watch people living their lives. We take a million and a half photos. Sophie kicks a soccer ball around with some kids, giggling and letting them win. The language

barrier doesn't hold her back, and when she doesn't understand, I laugh. The kids slow down, enunciate each syllable, then drag her around.

Her eyes meet mine, and she grins. I can't help the smile that answers her. Roman joins in on the game, happily lifting kids when they score and making them squeal with laughter. Nick claps and takes some photos of Sophie enjoying herself, definitely to show her dad we kept her safe. Even Holden joins in on the fun, kicking the ball back when it's kicked to him and admiring the birds that are hopping around them.

I move to a grassy hill and run my fingers through the soft blades of grass. Nick joins and sighs. "I think this is paradise."

"I'm tempted to agree, man. This is the first time I've been able to forget the rest of the world." I say with a smile.

We close our eyes, and then, I'm crashed into. A wave of red hair catches the sun across my face, and I find myself staring at Sophie. She laughs and wraps her arms around my neck while her legs sling over Nick's lap.

I adjust to avoid getting hard in public and then rub her back. "Having fun?"

"Well, I suck at soccer." She motions to the pickup game still going on. "Nick, will you tag in for me?"

"Well, looks like our team is going to suffer even more." He chuckles.

Sophie slides off my lap and sits by my side. "Are you having fun?"

"I am."

"You looked bored, so I wanted to make sure." She bites her finger. "I know you guys want to make sure I have a good time, but your experience matters too."

"Thanks, Sweets." I rub her knee. "I'm having a good time. I promise. And I'm very excited for the wine tasting tomorrow. It's been a long time since I've been in a vineyard, and I know that Massimo is not going to settle for anything less than the best."

She rubs my hand and leans towards me. "I have a feeling I'll be exhausted by the end of this trip."

"In more ways than one." I tease.

She grins and shakes her head. "Always flirting, aren't you?"

I can't help it with her. Honestly, the chemistry between us is so fun to explore. I like how quick she can be, seeing the reactions my flirting gets, getting her tongue tied. It's a game that I thoroughly enjoy and only because she's so ... her.

She looks up at me, the wind tousling her hair, those sweet eyes that I'm convinced could stop a war. I brush my fingers over her cheek. "You're too sweet for me, Sophia."

"You only think that because I haven't bitten you yet." She teases.

"You have plenty of places to bite. Go for it." I drop my head back dramatically. "Take out all your vampiric urges on me. I can take it."

She laughs and shoves me playfully. "You're full of it."

"Did you lose your flowers?" I ask, noticing the lack of them.

She motions to a little girl. "She couldn't stop staring at them."

But she gives them out to all her friends, and I roll my eyes. "Regifting on me? I see how it is."

"You can deny a little girl when all she wants is some flowers?" She arches an eyebrow.

I avoid the thought of kids in war and shrug. "Like I said, you're sweet."

She kisses my neck softly. "What did you want to be when you grew up?"

"I wanted to be exactly what I became." I shrug. "Military family. I probably would have stayed in. I was ready to sign up for another tour when Miles had the idea for a club."

"Well, was following my dad worth it? Did it improve your life at all?"

"Working with my best friends, getting to get fat and drunk without feeling guilty. Hell yes. A massive improvement. There was no second thought." I pull her hand into my lap and rub her fingers. "I think I enjoy the financial improvement too."

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

"What, it helps make life fun." I tease.

"I'm learning all about you, Gunner." She says as she stands, dragging me up with her. "Whether you want me to or not."

"Time to head to dinner," Roman says as he joins us with the guys.

As we head over, I keep to myself how much I'd love for Sophie to know me. But at the same time, there's a lot she might not like. She wouldn't necessarily enjoy a lot of stories, from before, during, and after war.

She tugs me along with the guys and pats my belly. "Food. You were all about that, right?"

"Food, alcohol, and you, sweets. Sounds like a winning night to me." I wink.

She laughs, and I pull her closer. I'm just waiting to have her for dessert.

Sophia

THE RESTAURANT WE END UP AT IS SO LUXURIOUS AND welcoming at the same time. I don't feel underdressed or out of place, but I feel like I'm being invited to an exclusive club at the same time. Roman says something to the guy at the front, and I hear him mention Massimo's name.

That gets a jump start on the guy. He leads us up to a private balcony where we're basically on a wrap-around couch under an overhang. There's a fire pit in the corner and plants all around.

Definitely private. I feel my skin flush as I sit between Roman and Gunner. Memories of this morning rear up, uninvited, but not exactly unwelcome. Maybe I'll just have to share about that vibrator idea I got. Or I could just get it and have some fun on my own.

Either way would be a good time.

We order with only Roman sounding smooth in Italian, then sit back. Roman smiles. "Meals take longer here. No togo boxes."

"No complaints." Nick stretches his legs and arms. "Walking all day when I'm used to sitting in an office is ... intense."

Gunner rolls his eyes. "You're just out of practice. You're so focused on training you never get your cardio in."

"Start joining me on my runs. You'll get it back." Roman invites.

I like seeing them all talk to each other. It's casual and easy between them. Even Holden seems to be paying attention. I wonder for a second if he's sore, but then Gunner rubs up my knee and teases the skin of my inner thigh. I squirm and give him a look that should say "later," but his smile doesn't seem to care what my look says.

"Massimo would approve of this."

I don't know if he's talking about what he's doing to me or where we're eating, and I don't exactly care either. There's been a lingering bit of hunger in me since this morning that has nothing to do with food.

The waitress brings out appetizers and looks around the guys before looking at me. She says nothing, but I see her scowl before she heads back inside, closing the door behind her. Holden shakes his head with a smile.

"So many assumptions."

None of us push on that front. The food melts in my mouth in the best way. After one bite of ceviche, I realize I'm starving. I missed out on breakfast, and my stomach must have gotten lost behind the fascination of enjoying Italy.

I groan and take another bite. Roman raises a brow. "Maybe Gunner was right. We should have gotten snacks."

"You should know by now. I'm *always* right." He says with food in his mouth.

I nudge him playfully, and he rolls his eyes before dabbing his mouth with a napkin. "Can't take me anywhere, I suppose."

I laugh and cover my mouth just in case. Nick leans across the table. "Tomorrow, we'll eat more. We'll need it for all the wine."

"I thought you didn't have a ton when you were wine tasting," I grumble. Not that I object to being drunk and having a good time. But being tipsy around all four of these men ... well, it kind of sounds like the temptation I wouldn't be able to resist. "Just a mouthful of wine and then done."

"Normally, yes." Roman says, "not with Massimo."

"Well, I'll pace myself. Danny will need someone sober to talk to." I reason with myself.

Dinner is great. I keep trying to eat even once my stomach is full because it tastes so good. Holden looks like he's been ready to go since he finished his plate.

But he's not as antsy as he was at the airport. Nick seems totally content with the world, but I've seen him check his work phone more than a few times. Roman eats slowly, telling stories about when he was a kid in Italy. All the trouble he and Massimo would get into.

"Once we thought that grapes themselves were wine. So we snuck onto a vineyard and just kept eating grapes. We thought we were drunk until Grandma told us that we eat grapes all the time and it takes more than that to get wine."

"Oh?" I ask.

"The poor dogs. We rounded three of them up and took my cousin's nail polish to their toes. It didn't help that we were laughing the whole time. We were so sick later. Eating dozens of grapes and nothing else isn't good for the stomach apparently."

Gunner chuckles and shakes his head. "You need to learn how to handle your grapes, Roman."

"I handle things well now." Roman's hand teases my lower back.

We've all had at least two glasses of wine, and we're all feeling excellent. I know that I'm more than ready to get out of here and get into some fun. Especially with everything unfinished from this morning.

But then I take another bite of food and want that more than anything. The back and forth is killer. But finally, my stomach's had enough. I slump back and rub my stomach. "I'm so full."

"That's a good thing." Gunner smirks. "Means you're finally indulging the Italian lifestyle."

"Like a tourist." I groan.

Well I don't feel sexy like this. That's for damn sure. But Gunner looks me over slowly, drinking me in like I'm better than any drink he's ever had. Roman sighs. "It'll be another few minutes before we get the check."

Holden raises his glass. "To the future – the one thing the past can't touch."

We clink glasses, and I finish my wine. We chat about nothing but our day until Nick slides out, excusing himself easily. Holden does the same, and then Roman goes to get the check. Gunner brushes his fingers through my hair.

"Happy?"

"Very." I give him a soft smile. "Not a single complaint."

"No?" He leans towards me and kisses me softly. He teases my lips with his tongue. I shiver and move against him, needing more contact. He grins when he draws back and looks at my hand on his chest. "I would think you'd have at least one."

I take a breath, trying to catch myself, but Gunner, so close, so warm, and ... I swallow. "No complaints, just ... more wants."

"You should whisper them in my ear. I'm all about giving you the *best* experience." He nips my ear, and I smile, pull my hair back, and look into his eyes.

We're in public. Sure, it's a private room, but anyone could accidentally walk in. There's no lock on the door, nothing keeping us from unwanted eyes other than a very thin curtain over the glass doors.

"The best, huh?" I ask softly, not sure what else to say.

Gunner licks my ear, then kisses and licks down my throat. He charts his path with soft bites that turn me on faster than any switch could. I shiver and turn to him, our noses brushing. He pushes my hair back from my face.

"It's easy, Sophia." He murmurs against my lips. Even that small contact sends sparks across my nerves. "You tell me to

come to your room tonight, and I'll be there. No questions, no hesitation."

"Just like that?"

"That easy."

I swallow but rub my nose against him. "I should play hard to get, shouldn't I?"

"No." He fists my hair and pulls, so all I see are his intense eyes. "No games. Just what you want."

"Maybe." I hedge.

He grins and kisses me again, stealing my mouth hungrily. Like he has to prove all he can offer me. His tongue fills my mouth, and I can't resist the urge to suck it while massaging his with my own. He groans and drags me closer, nearly on his lap.

Then the door opens, and he releases me easily, one arm slung over my shoulder. "As I was saying. It's easy."

"What's easy?" Nick asks. "Gunner? Everyone knows that."

Gunner flips him off with a smile.

Nick nods to the side. "Holden is waiting at the entrance. Didn't want to come back upstairs."

"Roman?"

"Here." He opens the door and nods towards the exit. "Let's go."

We head back, laughing and practically dancing over the cobblestones. Well, I'm practically dancing. Today has been amazing. Being with the guys so openly, even if it's been almost appropriate because we've been out and about, has been liberating.

Roman sees Massimo and politely kisses me on the cheek. "Good night, Bambina. Brush up on some Italian for tomorrow."

"Sure." I laugh a little, and he beams at me.

I prefer his way of teaching me. Letting me taste his tongue after each lesson and teaching me all the very best things to say, alongside normal basic conversation. But I could pull out that language learning app and see if there's a section on wine.

Holden squeezes my hand. "Today was fun."

"We should do it again sometime." I squeeze his back.

He heads to his room, and Nick gently kisses my forehead. I rub his arm. "Remember, you're not a bodyguard. Tomorrow is all fun."

"We'll see." He shrugs.

Gunner leans on my doorframe with a wicked smile and a toothpick in his mouth. "Do you have your answer for me yet, sweets?"

I open the door and motion for him to go in. He stares at me still, not moving, not even looking at the door. "An answer, Sophia. Verbal."

Biting my lip, I close the space between us and rub over his white t-shirt. "Let's have a ... a coffee together, Gunner."

"Absolutely."

I shut the door behind us and plan to make coffee, to talk to him, to get to know the man that seems impervious to fear or anger. Everything is bright and easy for him, or at least, he makes it look that way.

But I've noticed things. Anytime that we start talking seriously, he deflects with humor. Distracting, well-timed humor, but humor all the same. Gunner pours himself a drink – definitely not coffee – while I make my own decaf.

"So, Gunner."

"Sophia." He murmurs.

I get into bed and lay on my stomach. He sits near me and rubs down my back, playing with the hem of my dress, fingers teasing my thighs. I shake my head. Stay focused—plenty of time for all those lusty thoughts to be acted on.

I sip my coffee. "Before I came around, what did you do with your free time?"

"The same thing I do now when I'm not with you." He shrugs. "Drink, watch movies ... on holidays, I ..." He trails off. "I go down to the homeless shelter and give out food."

I turn and look at him. So out of left field, I don't know what to do with that information. He nods. "I know more than one guy who's ended up there after being in combat. I donate plenty, but it doesn't always feel like enough."

I put my cup down and lean my head on his shoulder. "That's the sweetest thing you've said yet."

"Sweeter than the flowers?"

"Yeah. I mean ... flowers are romantic, but you're giving up your time selflessly, and without looking for a pat on the back. That's a serious turn-on."

"Well, now I fucking expect one." He smirks at me then takes a sip.

I glance at his drink. "No cigar?" I pick up my cup and take another sip.

"Rude to smoke in another person's house. I can go a bit without. I'm not a complete heathen." He brushes his thick fingers through my hair. "I don't have an addictive personality."

"Oh?" I let out a little laugh.

"You seem to be the only exception to that." He mutters, a strange look on his face. He shakes it off and sets his drink to the side before taking my coffee from me. "Want me to prove it?"

I bite my lip and nod. "Prove it, Gunner."

Roman

In the morning, I go for a jog to take care of some restless energy. Massimo laid out the plan last night, and I'm more than ready to dive into the vineyards. It's been too long since I've seen Mass. Months.

I head down for breakfast and stretch before seeing Grandma. She kisses my cheek and pats me. Italian whips off her tongue, but it's still as soothing as a lullaby. "Such a good boy. Come to help me with breakfast?"

"Of course, grandma."

She goes to hug me, then pushes me away. "Shower, first."

I chuckle and go to do just that. When I come out, I see Sophia. She has on an airy skirt that reaches her shin and a wrap top. Her hair is pinned on one side, but she looks stunning as always. She notices me and smiles.

"Would you like to help with breakfast?" I ask.

"I'm terrible in the kitchen. Haven't you noticed the takeout theme? The frozen dinners?"

"Grandma will order you around anyway." I take her hand.

She smiles and nods, bouncing after me. In the kitchen, Grandma looks at her as she works. There's flour on her cheek already somehow, but she's working hard, staying focused and repeating the translated instructions to herself.

It's adorable.

Innocent.

It's Sophia.

"She's a good one," Grandma says in Italian. "Works hard. Wants to impress. Don't let her get away from you."

"Grandma." I shake my head, but I don't burst her bubble. She'll only be around for so much longer, and who am I to tell her she's wrong?

Sophie is better than good. Sophie is ... excellent. She's smart, capable, sweet, but there's more. She hides a darker side, one that knows just what it wants and will take it. That's the side I want to push to see.

I find every excuse to touch her while we cook. She blushes each time I rub her sides, slide my hands over hers, help her fill the pastries with fruit. Sophia shivers when I adjust the apron around her neck.

"Roman, we're around ... people."

"And I'm behaving ... mostly." I tease her skirt. Sure she can feel my fingers on her ass. "Mostly."

"Yeah. Mostly." She glances at my grandmother, so focused on what she's doing she wouldn't notice a bomb go off. "It feels disrespectful."

"We're a touchy bunch." I chuckle.

But I back away. A no, a hesitation, that's enough. I don't want her uncomfortable with me touching her, and if I toe the line now, I know that she'll open up more for me. Something about Sophie makes me think she's holding out on something. I'm not sure what, but there's something that I don't know. Something big.

Once we put the pastries in the oven, I'm almost sad. I like being in the kitchen with her. And her comment about not cooking is bullshit, given her pancakes. But she's modest. I like that too.

I don't know if it's possible to *not* like Sophia once there's a conversation going. Hell, I bet even Sasha could get over her

jealousy if she bothered to have a real conversation with her. She hangs up the apron and smiles.

"I should get cleaned up before we eat." She says to me, then to my grandmother, "grazi! For teaching me how to ... do this."

She made an attempt, and that's enough for right now. Hell, she's attempted more with my family in terms of connecting than most. And she does it with such grace. I shake my head, and then I follow and join everyone with breakfast.

Happy friends, well-rested, everything good. This is what life should be. Hell, this could be our life in a few years. And I'd want Sophia to be a part of it. It hits me square in the chest. Like I have no armor, no bulletproof vest. Nothing to defend my heart from her.

It thuds extra as she chuckles and nudges Nick. She's gotten into our circle so easily, torn through the defenses better than any strategic attack. I sit down with a smile on my face, and then Massimo and Danny come over.

Danny beams at us. "You all look ... well-rested."

"Don't start," Massimo says, despite the smirk in his eyes. "We're behaving today."

"Sure." I snort.

Massimo chuckles. "I mean it. I'm wearing my name all over me, throwing it around happily. We're all going to behave today."

I smile slightly and then nod.

After breakfast, we head out, and Sophia sits between Nick and me. Nick behaves, just talking with her, but I can't help myself; I sling my arm over her shoulders. She leans into me like it's the most natural thing in the world.

When we slide out of the limo, we're at a gorgeous vineyard, the kind of land that belongs in a movie. Massimo does all the talking, and then we're being led through the vineyard. The path is easy enough, and I can already picture how to get to where we need to go.

I grab Sophia's arm and drag her behind a tangle of vines, pulling her close. She gasps, bracing against me. "Roman, we're going to-"

But I end her sentence by kissing her, hard and hungry. Just like yesterday morning, I want her to know that she's on my mind, owning every second or third thought I have so deep inside me.

She melts against me, clinging to me as we kiss. I draw back before we can go too far, and she pants while looking up at me. "What was that for?"

"I wanted to," I say as if it's that simple. I bring her back to the path. We're only a little behind the group. "Are you still worried about your dad?"

She looks up at me with dark eyes and shrugs. "I know he's strong. You guys know he's strong, but it's different. I've been without him so long, and now that I have a chance at living with him, getting close to him ... it feels strange to not be with him. To not have him here with us."

"That's normal," I assure her, bringing her hand up to my mouth to kiss the back of it. "It means you care about him."

"Well, I care about you too. I'd worry about you too, but it would be different." She shrugs. "And I'm worried about work. Like there were already people talking about how I got the job and now ... I'm going to be gone after just getting the job."

She keeps telling me how worried she is about work as if it's the be-all end-all. Her work ethic is admirable, amazing actually, a lot like her father, but at the same time ... work isn't everything.

"Life is what happens when you're too busy to stop," I murmur. "Don't learn that the hard way. Try, every day, to do *one* thing that you love. One thing new."

"One or the other?"

"Both." I chuckle. "Not working isn't an option in today's world, but think about where we are and what we're doing

right now. Be here now with me, Bambina. Would you really rather be at work than here with us?"

"No." She says.

I nod as if that settles everything. The quiet brings us closer together. The thick vines twirling and twisting, trying to catch our hair as we catch up with the group. Massimo gives me a grin and then rubs his hand down Danny's back and gives a light tap on her ass.

Sophia jumps to join them, whispering something in Danny's ear. She smiles and nods.

We taste a few of the best vintages, the kind that sell for more than I'd ever be willing to pay for wine. But if I drank it like my family does, this is what I'd have.

Massimo translates after taking his drink.

"This is from nineteen twenty-two. One of the oldest they still have. It's stronger than most." He says. "A delicacy and luxury."

When Massimo gives his approval, the man pats his heart once in thanks.

We go through a few other reds, which taste simply exceptional. They're thick, dry, full of flavor, but I feel like I need a full glass of water after each. Sophia giggles and brushes her finger over her bottom lip.

Her eyes flick to me, and just like that, I'm the only man in the room. The man offers to show us how they prep the barrels for the wine, and I manage to steal Sophia from the group again. Is she really missing out by not seeing barrels?

Pulling her between two, I drag her into a deeper kiss, a less romantic kiss. She wraps her arms around my neck, no hesitation this time. I moan and slide my hand down to her ass, rubbing her against me until she's panting and I'm hard.

God, I'd love to sneak away longer. I'd love to get under her skirt and devour her here and now. But I have Massimo and Danny to think of. I lick my lips to taste her again. "The wine tastes better on you." She snickers and tries to put her hair back in place. After three failed attempts, I do it for her. She watches me suspiciously, and I shrug. "Cousins."

"Of course. So now, if I have hair trouble, I'm just going to have to find you."

"Only hair, no nails," I say before smiling.

She shakes her head at me and kisses me one more time. Well, it should only be one more time, but I'm incapable of keeping my hands to myself. I cup her breast through the fabric, then tease the neckline.

Sophia takes a step back. "We're missing valuable information, Roman."

"This is more valuable," I reassure her, cupping her face between my hands.

She goes red, and for a split second, I think of how red her ass could be under my hand. But that evaporates when she takes my hand and leads me back out to others. I half-listen to what's going on.

Instead, I wonder how on Earth I'd ever tell Miles about this. Or what I'd do if he found out. It's not a today problem. It's a future problem though. Miles isn't dense. He won't be far from Sophie for long, especially when she talks to him about his health and tells him how much she wants to spend time with him.

And she will. She's reliable like that. She never hides her feelings for longer than they take to process. Once we're allowed to walk in the vineyard – supervised – I reclaim Sophie from her in-depth conversation about football with Massimo.

"And then, it just glanced off my head and right into the goal."

Danny smacks him lightly. "Bullshit. You put *my* training to work. Your head can be used for plenty."

"Except thinking?" He asks Danny with a chuckle.

"Well, I think that's gotten better, hotshot." She laughs.

Sophie watches them with adoration, even when she can feel me beside her. Danny and Mass walk forward, grabbing Holden to talk about football and who he has his eye on in the European circuit.

Sophie glances at me. "You're being obvious today, Roman. What if they ... find out."

"They like rumors, but Massimo's just having fun. Danny is too."

"They're a good match." She chews her lip. "What do you think about that? Bella and Matthew. Massimo and Danny. Do you think everyone has one person that they're meant for?"

I shrug. "That's above even my pay grade, Bambina."

She laughs at me and shakes her head. I would hate for that to be true. I don't want a time limit with Sophia. I want to know all her secrets, what she thinks about when she first wakes up in the morning. I want more trips like this.

"Maybe one day we'll know." She smiles.

"One day." I agree.

Sophia

AFTER WE FINISH THE FIRST WINE TASTING, WE'RE SHIPPED OFF to another vineyard. Danny insists on sitting next to me, which means Roman is upfront with his cousin. Danny puts her hand on mine.

"Tell me about you, Sophia. I know the work shit. Tell me about the real you." She insists.

I don't know what to say to that. I don't feel like the most interesting person in the world, but I don't want to sound like I'm reading her a resume either. I swallow.

"I was an Economics major in college, and then I got a master in finance at Brown; before that, I lived with my mom in Scottsdale. She and my dad have been divorced for what seems like a long time. I felt like I hadn't seen him much, so I'm happy I've been getting more time to see his life."

"And how do you like New York?" She pushes.

"It's great!" I shake my head. "There are so many things to do and see. I think it would take me a lifetime to get through all of it."

Danny bounces in the car and puts her hand to her belly. She smacks at Massimo. "Watch the bumps, Mass."

"I thought you enjoyed being jostled." He chuckles

Danny purses her lips to hide a smile. "I do, but the baby doesn't." She shakes her head at me. "You have to keep them in line, or they forget all their manners."

I laugh a little, and Nick takes my hand. "That's good advice, Danny. Especially considering how gentle Sophia is."

"Gentle?" Danny snorts. "You have plenty of power. Sometimes you have to flash it a little."

"Or flash a lot, either way." Gunner smirks.

The memories of last night flood me when I meet his eyes. Gunner was ... gentle. I don't know if it was because of our conversation before we had sex or if it was because we had such a huge dinner, but he took his time with me, kissing across my back as he slid my clothes off, bringing me to gentle easy orgasms that seemed to last forever. The roughest he got was pulling my hair as he fucked me from behind.

And after ... he stayed. I expected him to tell me he needed to go to sleep, but instead, we cuddled together. I stroked across the scars on his chest, and he told me stories of basic training, of how he met Nick. Nick was always falling behind, always second-guessing orders, trying to weigh out the reasoning.

And Gunner was the obedient sort. Easier to obey and get the job done quickly so they could escape the hostile zones. But the darkness that had lurked in his eyes told another story – a million more stories, I'm still sure he won't say.

"We're here," Massimo says, pulling me from my thoughts.

I help Danny out and she grunts then grabs my hand. "Feel."

"What?"

It feels wrong to have my hand on her stomach, but she rubs over the back of my fingers, then jumps slightly as I feel a harsh bump to my palm. She laughs. "He's so ready to start playing. He's going to be a soccer star just like us."

"You play?"

"Played. I was injured before I could get to Mass's level, but that's where I was heading." She shrugs. "Instead, I took a coaching job." She lowers her voice. "Don't tell Mass, but I'm glad things happened like that. It brought me to him."

"That's romantic."

"Which would go right to his head." She laughs. "He can never know."

"Oh, I already know everything, tesora." Massimo wraps his arms around her, kissing her cheek as he rubs over her belly.

Despite all of Danny's determination to look like a hard ass, I see her glow when he touches her. She leans against him and looks up at him with a bright smile. Massimo practically carries Danny to the waiting man and woman team.

I love being in the vineyard. It hides the rest of the world, so it's just us, living the very best life we can, safe from everything else that could be lurking around us. Nick runs to catch up with Roman and Gunner, and Holden takes his spot beside me.

Holden rubs his fingers over the back of my arm, and I lick my lips. "Hi."

"Warm enough?"

"I am. Are you having fun?" I bump his hip lightly. "Going to get absolutely drunk?"

"Maybe." His hand moves to the small of my back. "Wine is one of my weaknesses."

"You have more?" I blink at him. "I had no idea."

"You know more than most." His voice deep, almost a growl, as he looks me over. "Nightmares. Agoraphobia ... you."

I blink at him, and a smile pulls at his lips. My face heats and is probably as red as the wine when we get to the tasting table. This one is outside, letting us see exactly how expansive the vineyard is. It looks like it goes right to the ocean. Peaceful and warm.

Oh, the ocean. We'll have to go there. I'm sure I can buy a bathing suit somewhere. I lean over and take the rest of Danny's glass. She mouths "thank you" at me, and I nod, tasting the sweetness, then diving in.

"This is amazing," I say a little too loud.

The woman beams. "You like ... the sweet wine?"

"Yes! It's delicious," I reply.

"I'll take two bottles," Roman says softly.

I press my lips together and shake my head at him, and he shrugs. We go between whites and Rosé wines before we're allowed to wander. I take Holden's hand and walk through the enormous casks of wine, then through the wine cellar.

Holden shakes his head as he looks at some of the labels. I rub his sides. "Any of this up to your taste?"

He nods, but then he's called away. He kisses my palm softly and then nips the side of my hand. It goes right through me. These men only make me lustier for them. Nick joins me and based on the fact he makes a beeline for me, I'm wondering if he even likes wine.

"I'm not a big wine drinker." He admits when he joins me. "Neither is Gunner. But he won't turn down free alcohol."

"You're so ... well-adjusted." I chuckle.

He rolls his eyes. "It's a front."

"Is it?" I lean against the wall between the rows and rows of wine. The stone cools me a little.

"Sometimes." He nods. "Being constantly distracted is better than having time to think. So I like to do things."

It feels ... invasive to ask him to elaborate, but Nick closes the space between us. "You're more well-adjusted than you think."

"Am I?" I ask.

"You're working hard, learning quickly, you know just how to talk to people."

"If you say I'm sweet, I'm not going to believe a single thing." I roll my eyes. "Being sweet seems like a weakness."

"Not where you're concerned. And you can weaponize anything." He chuckles. "I still remember you flipping me in the gym."

I sink my teeth into my bottom lip and run my hand over his chest. "You didn't mind that? It felt like I cheated."

"You didn't." He ensures me, caressing my hand. "You used your assets to your advantage. That's the kind of thing that takes years to teach and longer to perfect."

That vote of confidence warms my heart. I lick across my lips and glance to the side. "Did you come to collect me?"

"Nope. I'm obviously wine shopping." He winks.

"Or playing bodyguard again, which I told you is unnecessary. This is all about fun." I whisper. "Should I remind you of that?"

"Sophie." He groans softly.

"Then I'll prove it, Nick," I whisper against his lips. "Fun. No work."

His lips part for me after a moment's hesitation. I lick along his tongue, kiss him hungrily. Maybe it's the wine, the fact that I can do this without having to worry who comes around the corner, or maybe it's that Nick makes me feel like I'm in control.

I rub down his chest and jerk him towards me by the belt. A smile spreads across his face. Nick's hands go for my ass, rubbing and gripping my thighs. I can feel the length of him hard against me as our kiss deepens. He's more reserved, he gives up control easily, but it doesn't change his reactions.

Or mine.

I tug on his belt, and he pants as I kiss across his throat. "Sophie."

"Let's push your limits again." I bite him softly. "See what we can get away with."

"You make me feel like a teenager again."

"Wild," I whisper. "Dangerous."

He cups my face as I undo his slacks. "Fun and alive."

My mouth molds to his, and I nibble his lip as I stroke his cock in my hand. He pants, his jaw tightening until I want to lick across it. No man should be as gorgeous as Nick is. So kind, so disarming.

I sink to my knees and lick across his cock. He groans, bracing himself against the wall. A smile spreads across my face; I'm feeling so evil. "You have to be quiet, Nick. We don't want to offend our hosts."

He nods. "Don't say it like it's easy."

I watch his face change as I get to work sucking his cock. I close my eyes, enjoying how good he feels in my mouth, the way his hips press him deeper into my mouth. Nick strokes through my hair, and I look up at him. His lips are parted, his eyes focused entirely on me as my cheeks hollow around his dick.

He gets bigger and thicker in my mouth as I continue, taking him as deep as I can and gripping his ass hard with my nails. Then I'm up and facing the wall. Nick kisses across the back of my neck.

"No way I can stay quiet with you." He pants in my ear.

I rub my ass against him and drag my skirt up. Nick watches, his fingers following the rising hem until he strokes across my ass. He groans softly. "No underwear?"

"What are you going to do about it?"

Nick licks across his lips and rubs the head of his cock against my entrance. I rock back and take him deep. He gasps and wraps an arm around my waist. After I control the pace a bit, rocking back against him and rolling my ass so he can tell exactly how much I like this, he steals control.

Nick groans against my ear as he slams into me. There's no slow build-up with him. We're going at it hard and fast. A

whimper slips through my lips, and I cover my own mouth with my hand, biting my palm as Nick ups the pace again.

Pleasure spreads from my pussy, radiating through my body until I swear I'm vibrating. Nick kisses across my throat. "You're perfect, Sophie. Warm, smart, sexy."

I shiver.

His hand slides up my shirt, and he teases my nipples with his fingers, always soft and gentle. I bite my hand harder, and Nick groans. "Fuck, I'm so close."

I nod, and in the next thrust, I come; I nearly lose my grip on the wall as I moan against my palm. My knees shake, my vision darkens, and then Nick gasps, and his body tightens behind me. He jerks me against him tighter as he impales me harder.

We pant, and Nick kisses the back of my shoulder. "You're everything but boring, Soph."

I laugh once and turn around once he slips out of me. I redo his pants and kiss along his neck. "Risks are rewarded."

"You're not a reward." He presses a soft kiss to my lips. "You're ... so much more."

Nick

Sophia blushes intensely and fixes her hair quickly. As we start to walk away, I realize I came in her. Actually came *in* her. And I didn't ask. I pull her back by her hand, and she laughs as she braces herself against my chest.

"We don't have time for more, silly."

"Is it okay? Are you ..." It's never been so awkward to ask if she's on the pill. "I ... finished, I mean, and we didn't have a condom."

"It's safe." She assures me, kissing the hollow at my throat. "I would have felt bad if you didn't come."

My hesitation, my defenses, they all melt for her. I bite my lip and let her lead me away from our secluded spot. Sophia is a bright light where everything else is dark. Her smile, her warmth, how unashamed she is to be herself is inspiring.

She makes me feel like anything, and everything is possible, even knowing I'm returning to work in H.R., where I get complaints, have to deal with touchy issues, and have to see the gray in everything doesn't seem so terrible.

Not with Sophia around.

We get back to the group, and Gunner raises his glass to me. I grab a glass of wine and fight the urge to down it. The Rosé at least tastes like juice. Sophie grins at me over her glass, like we're sharing a secret. The best secret in fact, considering I haven't done anything like what we just did ... in a very long time. Sophia laughs at something Danny says to her and goes red as she opens and closes her mouth.

The rest of the day is spent traveling between vineyards, sampling wine, and eating the local food. Sophia comes back to me at the last one as we watch the sunset. "Feeling the urge to paint yet?"

I chuckle. "Something like that."

"You have time and money. Why not take an oil painting class? Why not ... you know, dive into what makes you feel alive, make you feel like your best self?"

I take her hand and kiss her cheek. "What makes you think I'm not?"

She sighs and shakes her head. "You're not allowed to be that romantic."

"Says who?"

She shrugs and laughs once. "I just want you to enjoy life, that's all. I see so many people that live for the weekends and waste most of their life doing what they have to. I'm afraid I'm going to become one of them."

"Considering the advice you're giving me?"

"No one takes their own advice, Nick." She rolls her eyes. "One of the faults of being human, I suppose."

"Then take mine," I whisper in her ear. "Live every moment to the fullest, Soph. It seems like you're doing that here."

She laughs. "I feel free here."

"What's stopping you from feeling free back home?"

She thinks that over for a moment and shrugs. "I don't know, really. I feel like I have to be the person people expect. Meek, obedient, a hard worker, diligent, a good daughter."

"That sounds exhausting, sweetheart," I murmur.

She nods. "I just don't want to disappoint anyone. Especially my dad. He's given me such a great opportunity, and I don't want to waste it."

"He's so proud of you, Sophia. Even before you came to live with us. You know you're his greatest pride. He talks more about you than work than about being overseas." I squeeze her hand tightly. "And you know I suck at lying." I wink.

She nods and smiles gently. "He has such a high opinion of me I feel like it's impossible to live up to."

"You do it every day," I promise her.

"Thank you, Nick." She leans her head on my shoulder. "Is it .. weird for you when I talk about him?"

"No." I kiss her forehead. "Not at all. It shows how important family is to you."

"Thank you. For listening." She sighs, then makes herself comfortable against me. "I'm so exhausted, and I feel like I haven't done anything but eat and drink today."

"We've done plenty. So much talking and movement, and drinking."

We both laugh, and after a bit of silence stretching between us, and we head back to the group. We drive home, and almost everyone is quiet. Massimo and Gunner talk as if they haven't had a full day of drinking. They're both bubbly and animated. Gunner insists that he could take Massimo in a one-on-one soccer match.

I chuckle and shake my head at him. "That might be one step too far, Gunner."

"Put your money where your mouth is." Massimo teases. "I can get us a field in a heartbeat."

"Mass, behave," Danny says, rubbing her belly.

"He started it. It could pay for a whole second honeymoon." Massimo says easily.

"You're pretty damn confident." Gunner points at him. "We could make this interesting. We do six shots before we play, and anytime someone scores, the other drinks. Winner takes all."

Massimo chuckles, and I shake my head. I would love to watch Gunner get schooled, especially since he'd probably laugh about it the whole time. Massimo and Gunner set it up, despite Roman's disapproving stare.

Sophia's half asleep on my shoulder. I can understand that. It's been a big day. An exhausting day, especially considering we haven't had a real break since coming here. It's been go, go, go, and I'm not sure how any of us are still on our feet and fully conscious.

When we get back to the villa, I nudge Sophia, and she looks around before wiping the drool from her chin. She blinks quickly. "We're back?"

"Yes, ma'am," Massimo says before getting out of the car.

The married couple rushes away after a few whispered words from Danny, and Roman chuckles. All of us know what they're about to get into. Holden stretches. "Dinner?"

"Of course."

Roman goes off to see about that, and Holden takes a seat, stretching out his leg. Gunner groans. "I need to take a siesta."

"Wrong country," I laugh.

"You understood it, so it's fine." He chuckles. "See you guys at dinner."

Sophia eyes the stairs and nods. "That sounds good. A little nap."

We go our separate ways and I help get everything for dinner out. I know that Roman's family won't let me help much more than that, but it feels wrong to just accept their kindness. Holden looks over the spread and shakes his head.

"I'm going to end up back in the gym with you after this trip." He pats his still flat stomach.

"Always happy to have you. Maybe you can show off that upper body work." I pat his back.

He grins. "You know ... we haven't been to the range in a while. Might be a way to get Miles out of work."

"That's a great idea."

I check my phone and see that he's looked at the photos I sent of Sophie. All he's asked is that we keep her safe. An easy task considering she stays close. I offer up a trip to the range and he spends a bit typing, saying he'd be more than happy to go for a guys day.

Something that's long overdue.

I nod to Holden. "He's in."

"Great!" He nods. "About time we all have some fun."

I wonder if Holden will be okay with that much gunfire, but he seems to be coming out of his shell more. I'd love to be able to go to fundraisers with him, to see him talk with clients.

Dinner is easy. We talk about our favorite wines, what we enjoyed most about the day, and all of us happily accept the seconds that Roman's grandmother offers. He thanks her for us and kisses her wrinkly cheek.

Soon enough, we're ready for bed. I see Gunner smoking a cigar and join him. He slips me one with a smile. "What did you think about today?"

"Not really my cup of tea." I say. "Glass of wine."

"Yeah. We should go to Scotland. Imagine those tours. So much liquor just waiting for us." He grins. "All that history for you."

I chuckle and nod. "That would be a trip we wouldn't remember."

"That's what cameras are for." He nudges me.

We smoke together, looking over the town. It's past nine o'clock and the streets are still bustling. It reminds me of New York. Less hectic, sure, but open late, plenty of people, a lot going on.

It's a nicer New York, slower, more at ease. "Do you think we'll ever go international?"

"I don't know. That's a big leap from having two locations."

"Two locations completely across the U.S." I remind.

Gunner seems to consider that. "I think we'd have to be a bit more established. A location in Vegas, California, maybe Chicago. It would take a lot of time. I don't know if we'd see it."

"Always pragmatic with business?"

"It's the only way I know how to be." Gunner shrugs.

He glances up the stairs. "I'm buzzing, totally awake. I'm not quite sure what to do with myself."

"We could go out." I shrug. "Maybe get some things to surprise Roman's grandmother for all she's done."

"Sophia's sweetness is starting to rub off on you." He chuckles. "But yeah. Let's do it; we can get some snacks too. I'm starving by the time I get to bed."

"You're always hungry."

"My liver needs some help." Gunner chuckles.

We walk along the streets fearlessly. The markets are still open, which means Gunner gets no less than three beers, and we also find some sweets and food for him. Once he's taken care of, I try to figure out what a nice gift would be. If it's too much, I'm sure she won't take it.

I see a few things we could do – replace some of the pasta and what not that we've eaten up, a nice scarf that I'm more than happy to pay the extravagant price for, and a painting that stirs me. It's a gorgeous rendition of a vineyard in an impressionist style.

"The more you stare, the more you see," Gunner says, standing next to me. "At least, that's what I hear."

"Do you think she'd like it?" I'm not sure if I'm talking about Sophie or Roman's grandmother. I feel like Sophie

deserves something after this trip, this leap of faith traveling with us, staying longer, joining us on every adventure.

"Yeah. It might bring some color to the house. There's not a lot of art there." Gunner leans his head to the side. "Why not. It's not like she can't regift it."

I chuckle and nudge him. We take it and head back to the villa. I'm pleased there's not a bunch of people stalking the streets. Everyone out here seems to be doing something rather than lying in wait for prey.

Gunner glances around anyway, his eyes sharp. The streetlights help illuminate most of the street, but with all the alleyways, all the shadowy spots, I know he's looking for trouble just like I am.

When we get back to the villa I help Gunner bring all the bags in. He nods and heads up to bed. "Let's give her everything in the morning – run it by Roman first. I don't know if there's anything she'd object to."

"Good idea." I glance at him before heading into my own room. "Get some rest."

"Pssh. I'm not old enough to need a full eight hours yet. Drunk or not." He teases. "See you in the morning."

But there's an itching under my skin when I pass Sophia's door and see the light's off. I'm sure she just needed an early night after all the excitement. That's all. But the growing worry in my stomach doesn't agree.

Sophia

I know Roman said not to go anywhere alone, but how much trouble could I get into by running to a shop right across the road from the villa? It's not like I'm taking a winding path and walking blocks away.

I pull my knitted cardigan tighter around me as the wind blows and dip into the shop. Everything is in Italian, but I can at least see some pictures and make out some of the words. I chew my lip as I stand in front of the options for junk food. It's the "American" section and I've never been happier to see chips and cookies.

As much as I love all the homemade meals, I miss familiar flavors. I decide to grab both chips and cookies. I find some beer with a familiar label, milk, and call it good. I'll be back before any of the guys know I'm missing.

It's not like the streets aren't safe. I saw Gunner and Nick go out on their own while I was going through my clothes for tomorrow and if they can walk around without Roman at night, it shouldn't be any problem for me to do the same.

Especially since I'm sober and aware of what's around me. That was a lesson Dad never failed to enforce when we were out and about. Mom said he was paranoid, that I needed to see the best in people at all times, but knowing where people are makes shopping easier.

I thanked the woman who rang me up after she had to explain twice how much I owed – apparently my numbers

aren't great, but we worked it out. She waves to me says something I don't catch at all, and I head out.

I think about spending a night alone. It'll be the first one since we got here. I sigh, thinking of what someone would think if they had any idea of what was going on in my room. A slow smile spreads across my face thinking of the guys sneaking in and out. I've never been so happy for a lack of maids.

Smirking, I think about all the whispering that I'm sure is being done anyway. None of the guys have backed away from touching me, from being close to me. And I kind of love it. I love how each of them are opening up to me, sharing more with me than the chemistry we have.

I hear a voice but don't look over. They'll just go away if I don't look, like in America. Maybe one or two more comments, but it's not my language, so it will just roll off my back like water.

"Signora!" He yells again.

I don't turn. I pick up my pace a little but make sure to stay in the street lights. Then I'm grabbed. I gasp and turn to face the older, bigger man. He looks me over, and I see something in his hand. I step on his foot, but he only jerks me tighter against him.

His breath is heavy, almost noxious, and his eyes are just ... black. Black and unyielding. He shakes me a little and says something low and sharp. I shake my head. "I don't understand. English! English."

But he shakes me again, his hand so tight on my arm that I have no chance of getting away by jerking. I swallow. "Take whatever you want."

I offer him my bag and he shoves it, jerking me against him and rubbing his pelvis against me. Oh, fuck no. I start to raise my knee, ready to take out the balls, but I feel the knife against my side.

He takes a slow breath. "No scream. No fight. Live."

That's possibly the most terrifying bit of English for anyone to know. I swallow. From Dad's lessons, I know that the knife is in a very bad place. Poised at my kidney. One sure stab, and I'll bleed out in minutes.

The guy jerks me out of the light and into shadows. He growls and nods. "No fight."

"You don't need the knife," I whisper, trying to play along. "It's okay."

He pushes it tighter against my skin, then hits me. Hard. I gasp and try to get back to a public area. Public areas are the key. If I can get there and scream, it'll get attention. He'll run off. He'll decide I'm more trouble than I'm worth.

He drags me back by my ankle, jerking me over uneven cobblestone. I kick at him, must get his face because suddenly he's off me. I scuttle back and open my eyes. I can't hear anything other than my heart pounding in my chest, my shallow breaths.

I'm dizzy, scared, shaking all over. Someone walks out of the darkness, and I'm ready to scream when I see Holden.

He's panting, obviously pissed, and turns back to the dark. I hear punches land and Holden returns. He jerks me up, pulls me tight against him, then grabs my things, putting them back in my bag before shoving it at me.

"Holden." I pant.

He doesn't say anything. He glances around, drags me back to the villa, and practically shoves me onto my bed. I whimper and draw back from him. I haven't seen him pissed before. He's all sharp angles, muscle, frustration.

But Holden doesn't approach me. He goes to the bathroom, grabs a first aid kit, and pulls me to the edge of the bed. I see my knees are bleeding, I have cuts and scrapes on my arms, and the imprint of the asshole's hand is already blooming into a bruise on my arm.

"You went out alone." It's a low growl.

I nod. "I thought it would be fine. It's right across the road."

Despite how angry he is, he's gentle on my knees. He dabs at them with a cloth, then reaches for my hand. I give him my whole arm and whimper when he pours peroxide over the worst of the scrapes.

"That was stupid, Sophia. How many times did Roman say not to do that? How many times did *all of us* tell you not to leave alone?"

"I figured you were being protective. It seemed so safe." I pant.

Holden's hot eyes land on my face, and I lick my lips. I still feel trapped. I've never been cornered like that. By overenthusiastic frat boys, sure. Catcalled on the street, what girl hasn't? But dragged with obvious intention of ...

A little whimper leaves my throat. "I'm so sorry. If you weren't there ..."

Holden's face softens as he bandages my elbow, my wrist. He lifts my shirt to check my side. I'd been fucked. Really fucked. The predator wasn't going to just let me go. I'm sure of that. And Holden handled it like it was nothing.

"You were there," I whisper.

"I came by and you weren't here. I saw you come out of the store." He says, returning to my knees. "This will hurt."

He pours the peroxide over, and I press my lips together to stop the scream. My eyes water, and I sniff. Holden gently puts band-aids on me and shakes his head. I'm sure he's calling me an idiot over and over again in his head.

But he was there. He was looking out for me without trying to get anything out of it. Sure they promised my dad they'd keep me safe, but ... he just took care of it. While I'd been trying to figure out how to de-escalate, he'd just come in, fixed the issue, then seen to me.

"You're good at this," I murmur.

Holden looks up at me, then gently wipes under my eyes. My lips quiver. "You didn't trust me?"

"I trust you, Sophie. I don't trust the world." He says, pulling me close by the back of my neck until our foreheads touch. "I've never been so glad to have paranoia. If something would have happened to you..."

"Don't tell the guys," I say suddenly. His eyes darken again, and his jaw goes tight. I put my hands on his chest. "Please. They'll be so mad at me. I can't have *all* of you mad at me."

"You broke the *one* rule we have." He says, voice still hard.

"I know. And I'm so glad you were there to be my hero." I say quickly. "You took care of me, you took care of the problem, and now it's over, so only we need to know. Please."

Holden considers that a long moment and puts his other hand on my cheek. "Are you okay?"

"Because of you, I am. He was going to ... I think he-"

"He didn't want your money." Holden nods. "The world isn't as good as it seems."

"I won't go anywhere alone again. I'll stay here unless I'm with one of you. I promise. I promise."

He sighs and looks over the bandages on me. He brushes the outside of my knees with his fingers, then kisses just above the band-aid. I shiver. Not only did Holden save me from a nightmare, he took the time to take care of me. He's still here, making sure I'm okay.

I swallow and wipe my eyes again. "Are you okay?"

He looks up at me with surprise, then nods.

I take his hands, see his knuckles are already blackening with bruises. One of them is broken open. I swallow and grab a small band-aid, putting it on and kissing the spot gently. Holden makes a soft sound in his throat and flexes his hand.

"I'm sorry. And ... and thank you."

"Don't thank me for that." He snorts. "I was ready to kill him."

"I know. You protected me and ... you saved me, Holden." I whisper. "You saved me."

I don't know why that seems so important, but it does. Holden leans forward and kisses me softly. "Stay close to us."

I nod. "I will."

He stands up and kisses me again. "Trust me."

"I do." I breathe.

Holden slowly climbs on top of me, feeding me soft kisses. He rubs his fingers through my hair. "You're too precious to lose, Sophie."

I shiver and stroke up his arms. "I'm right here. You're here. We're okay."

His lips mold to mine, and then he dives deep with his tongue. I moan softly and slide my hand over his shoulder and along the back of his neck. Holden is good, warm, protective. He's prince charming whether he sees himself that way or not.

"You're important to me." I breathe.

Holden pauses and arches an eyebrow at me. "Because I played hero?"

"You didn't play anything." I kiss across his jaw. "You never do. You're you, and that's all that's required."

"Sophie."

"You are a hero, Holden." I hold his gaze. "My hero tonight, but you always are."

He snorts and shakes his head. "I did the bare minimum."

"Don't do that." I kiss him softly, rubbing my nose over his. "Don't minimize who you are. You're a strong, resilient, amazing man. I'm lucky to know you. Don't pretend to be less."

He groans softly and steals my mouth for a kiss that curls my toes and makes my back arch. I shiver and give myself over to the kiss as if there's a choice. Holden touching me, talking to me, opening himself up to me little by little is ... is humbling and flattering and intoxicating.

When he draws back, he licks his lips. "I should go, let you sleep, and ... recover."

Holden starts to untangle himself, but I hold on. "Stay?"

"I probably shouldn't, Sophie. You're hurt."

I chew my bottom lip. "I didn't ask you to fuck me. I asked you to stay here. I don't ... I don't want to be alone."

Holden pulls me further up the bed and lays with me. He pushes my hair from my face like he doesn't want anything blocking his view. "Nightmares?"

"You protect me from those too." I rub his chest and curl against him. "Please don't hate me."

"That's impossible." He lifts my chin when I don't answer. "It's impossible for me to hate you, Sophie." He kisses my forehead. "You scared me."

I search his eyes for any trace of a lie, and there is none. There's only relief and exhaustion. I kiss him again. "I'll be here when you wake up, right here. Band-aids and all."

He nods and draws me close. I'm half asleep, my mind already trying to reprocess what could have happened when I hear his whisper against my ear. "I'm here."

Holden

I know I need to tell the Guys what happened when I wake up. Not because they'll be mad at Sophie, not because we need to close rank, but because I can't keep anything from them. That agreement has been in place since we were overseas.

Plus, they'll notice her knees, and none of them will believe for a second that it's unrelated if I show up with marks on my fists. Sophie stretches a little and makes a soft sound in her throat. I rub her hip and kiss the back of her shoulder.

"I have to tell the guys," I whisper.

She grumbles something, then gets up and stumbles a little. "Fine. But I don't like it."

"I don't expect you to, but I have to." I insist.

She pulls a blanket around her shoulders. I press a kiss to her temple, recheck her knees, kiss both of them, and head to my own room to get ready for the day. I still can't believe she broke our rule at night in a foreign country! The worst combination.

After getting through a shower and brushing my teeth, I report for breakfast. Roman and Nick are already there, and I see Gunner dragging himself from his bed. He sits with us, and I open my mouth, but Massimo comes over.

He pulls out a chair and smiles. "So, yesterday was fun, right? I aim to impress."

"It was great," Nick says. "I've never been to so many vineyards."

"Especially with the nearly unlimited samples." Gunner raises a glass of water. "I think I might still be drunk."

Massimo chuckles and shakes his head while having some kind of fruit juice. "I think only Danny escaped without being tipsy."

Escape. I glance at Roman. He's been quiet. His eyes are on my knuckles. "Interesting night, Holden?"

"What the hell did you get into?" Gunner huffs. "Did you find Italy's fight club? Don't say anything; just tap twice if the answer is yes."

I rub my jaw. "Sophia went to the market last night. Alone." It comes out a growl.

Silence greets me. Silence and frustration. Nick drums his fingers on the table, Gunner glowers at his fork, and Roman arches an eyebrow. I expect one of them to speak, but Massimo looks over at me.

"Meaning what? She's allowed to wander, isn't she? This is the safest area – even safer than tourist traps!" Massimo looks at me and arches an eyebrow. "But I'm guessing that's not the case given that face."

"What. Happened?" Roman demands.

I glance up to where she'll eventually be joining us and clear my throat. "He didn't want her money. I noticed she was alone from my window, and I got there before worse could happen, but we've met this type before. I took care of it."

"Took care of Sophie or neutralized the threat?" Gunner asks, no malice, all business. As if we never left the other side.

"Sophia was the priority. She remains the priority." I report. "Not to say the target got off without injury."

Massimo hits the table hard. "Who would fuck around with my family, my friends, my guests like this?! This is supposed to be a safe neighborhood with good people." He shakes his head. "I need to take care of some things."

"Mass, go easy." Roman orders.

"I will. Grandma won't."

He runs off, and Roman folds his hands on the table. "Sophia?"

"Safe. Upstairs last I saw her. Shaky when we got back, but she fought." I take a long drink of water.

"And you got there before" Nick trails off and shakes his head. "We walked around *New York* at night, and this wasn't an issue."

"Her knees and arms are injured. Nothing else." I take another drink.

Gunner sighs. "Well. I'm still up for murder; you get a good description? Wait, is it even murder if it's a public service because this definitely sounds like much more of a problem being solved than something bad happening."

Before I can explain exactly how much Sophia doesn't want us to do something about this, before I can explain that she didn't even want me to tell them, Nick shakes his head. "Take it off the table, Gunner."

He huffs, but I can see the lingering anger. Roman clears his throat. "Let's figure out a plan of action before she joins us. We can't just tail her, but we need to protect her."

"She didn't want to say anything about this."

"Why? It happened. She's a victim here." Nick pushes. "She's not to blame."

I scratch the back of my neck. Am I the only one that's hurt by the lack of trust invested in us? Or is that being over the top when it comes to her? Like I should know better than to think she would just believe us, take us at our word.

"Sophie!" Gunner greets.

Before she can sit, he pulls her onto his lap and whispers something in her ear. She pales, and her eyes meet mine. "I'm fine. It wasn't a big deal. Holden got there and took care of it." "Soph, you can talk to us," Nick says, taking her hand. "About wanting to go places, about needing things. No matter what it is. We're more than happy to keep you safe, to make sure you're happy and never have to worry about this kind of thing again."

"I'm going to um ... check on the food."

Gunner tightens an arm around her, and Roman pulls her leg up to check her knee. He lets out a sharp breath and narrows his eye on the band-aid. It's not soaked through or anything. That's already a good sign.

"We want to protect you, Bambina. Please let us do that." Roman lowers his voice.

"But you're supposed to be enjoying Italy too. I made a dumb mistake. That's all." Her eyes flick to me again. "Holden was there and-"

"We're not going to enjoy being here if we're not sure you're taken care of. Please." Roman insists. "We *want* to be here for you, to protect you, to make sure you're happy."

Gunner nods. "It's entirely selfish. We want this like we want you."

Her cheeks start to go pink. Nick nods in agreement. "You talk about bodyguard duty as if its pain for us, but we like it. We like knowing we can protect you, keep you safe, that we're here for you."

She shivers a little. She already has all three of them piling on, and I'm worried she's going to feel hurt or ashamed or overwhelmed. So I smile. "And I'll teach you to use a knife."

Roman pins me with a look. "That will be helpful, but let's not leave her alone again, okay?"

"I don't want to be a burden on your shoulders or anything. We're all adults and I ..." Sophia starts.

"You're not a burden. You make me feel needed." I reach across the table and take her hand. "Knowing I can offer something other than ..." There are a number of people coming out now. "you know ... it's nice."

She smiles softly. "You offer more than ... excitement." She looks around the table. "All of you do."

Gunner rubs Sophia's sides. "Nothing like this is going to happen to you again."

"We're here for you if you'll let us, to protect you and then some." Nick agrees.

Roman glances around then looks at me. "Remember the guy?"

I flex my knuckles. "That case has been resolved."

Sophia looks between us, and instead of being afraid or upset, she almost seems ... relaxed. She smiles ever so slightly and shakes her head. "You guys have already done so much for me, in general for others. Don't you just want to relax and enjoy life when you get the chance?"

"I think Sophie wants us to start a fight club." Gunner chuckles and bounces her on his legs.

She rolls her eyes. "Absolutely not. I couldn't handle you all being injured all the time. There's only one of me to take care of all of you and ... and I don't like the sight of blood."

Nick chuckles. "Well, now we have a plan when we get back. Regular training and a whole lot of quality time." He smiles.

Once breakfast is served, Sophia takes the chair Massimo left behind, between Roman and me. The guys talk about our plans and how we won't be letting Sophie out of sight again, how we can be sure we're always there for her, what we can do to make sure she never has to deal with assholes like the one last night again.

Sophia takes my hand and kisses across my scabbed muscles. "You were right. Even if I didn't like it."

"I don't overstep often," I wink.

She leans against my shoulder. "I know. I just worry about you guys, your needs, your wants. I don't want you to have to kick someone's ass because of me."

I rub her fingers, then pull her hand to my face. I kiss the inside of her wrist. "Let us take care of you. Just let us do that. Keeps us young, and keeping you safe ... It makes me happy."

Her hand softens against my face and I sigh. I press my lips to her forehead, and then my stomach growls, eager for some food after last night. The fight alone stretched my muscles in the best way.

I've spent too much time cooped up in my room, too much time hiding from the world, and Sophie is giving me a reason to be involved again. I can do more than reach high scores in video games, and honestly, being out and about here has been easier than I thought it would.

There's some good in what Sophie went through last night – namely that it didn't go any farther – and that now we can shamelessly have an excuse to make sure she's okay, whether it's at work, in the city, on these trips, or in general.

I'd love to teach her to shoot a gun, to show her everything I can offer. After breakfast, Sophia and I linger. I know Roman and Massimo are having a talk with their grandmother, who I know will be twice as pissed as they are, and Gunner said something about sleeping off the rest of his hangover. Nick says he's going for a run, then assures Sophia that no one is going to come after him in the middle of the morning, considering he's a man.

Sophie leans towards me and traces a scar on my jaw. "You know, with all of you fighting. I'm going to get to play doctor."

I shake my head. "That's not the point of this."

"Well, it's not going to stop me. Trust isn't a one-way street, Holden. I trust you to keep me safe, even if last night ... happened, but I need you to trust me too. I want to take care of you too, even if my ways are different."

I brush my fingers over her jaw. "You can't just take what we give?"

"You want to feel needed. I want to feel like I add something

too. I can't just take and not give. It's not me."

No wonder I can't get her out of my head. That she's weaved her way inside our hearts deeper than Bella ever did. Sophie isn't just a sweet girl who satisfies in bed. She's ... she's precious and determined, and she cares so deeply.

"If I'm accepting protection, you're signing up to accept all my versions of that too." She kisses my cheek softly. "Better get used to it now, big man." She chuckles lightly.

Something tells me I'm going to enjoy every second of her attention and her methods of taking care of us. She wraps some ice up in a napkin and presses it to my knuckles. "How'd it feel to punch a real person?"

"Freeing." I wink at her. "Much better than doing it for XP."

Sophia

After Breakfast, I'm nervous to leave. Not that I want to tell the guys. I know they want to protect me and make me feel comfortable here, and since it's a want they have, I don't want to deny them, but I really want them to enjoy their time. Which means I want Nick to get some paints and to spend time encouraging him to be behind the finished project instead of being front and center as a model.

I want Holden to be unafraid of the world, to recognize that he's all man and more. I want Roman to open up, so I know what he's thinking instead of just throwing out guesses, and I want Gunner ... well I'd like him to be sober for at least an entire conversation so I can get behind all that humor.

Even if it is gold.

I put on a long airy skirt so my knees aren't on display and grab a shawl to cover my arms. I don't know what we have planned today, but I'm sure it will involve going out and about. If I know Roman and Gunner at all, they don't back away from a challenge.

And I don't know if a more obvious challenge to their ability to protect me exists. Plus, I need some souvenirs—one for myself, at least one for dad. I check my phone and see a missed call from him.

The guys didn't tell him about last night, did they? It's one thing for all of them to know; it's another thing to put it on Dad's shoulders while he's trying to get better. I call back and have to leave a message.

Worry churns in my stomach, but my door is knocked on, and Roman comes in. He offers me his hand. "Holden is getting some rest. Let's go for a walk."

"Are you going to lecture me?"

He arches an eyebrow. I sigh, slip my phone into my purse and take his hand. His thumb rubs over the back of mine. As we leave the villa, I glance over at the alley that nearly swallowed me up and pull myself closer to Roman.

"You're safe with me." He convinces me, wrapping his arm tighter around my waist and pulling me closer.

I nod. I just need to distract myself. What better way to do that than with Roman? "Are you happy to see your family?" I ask, looking up at him.

"Very. It's been a while." He rubs his thumb over the back of my hand. "Work."

"Well, what's the point of being rich if you can't make it work for you?" I tease. "They really love having you here. Especially your grandmother."

"If you think I'm protective ..." He chuckles, glances at me, then at the sidewalk in front of us. "She's going to tear the town apart looking for the asshole who attacked you. People like him don't stop until they're stopped."

Well, that's dark. I swallow and wrap Roman's arm around my shoulders. He relaxes and shakes his head. "You're safe with us; you know that, right? We won't let anything happen to you. You mean too much."

"Yeah." I nod. "Holden already made a lot clear last night."

Roman kisses my temple. "He's better at roping in his anger."

"That's a terrifying prospect," I whisper.

He chuckles and pulls me to a huge building. It's gorgeous, just looking at it, all the stained glass, the arches, the everything. I blink at it, and Roman continues up the stairs before sitting with me behind one of the massive pillars.

"I used to come here when I was young to think." He says. "It was a theater for a while, but no business seems able to last."

I scoot closer to him and rub his knee. He chuckles. "I can't give you shit about running off. I loved going off on my own when I was young. Just a kid running through the city ... I didn't think about all the shit that could happen."

"I just wanted snacks."

"You don't have to defend yourself, Sophie. You didn't do anything wrong." He kisses my temple. "Just scared Holden."

"Sometimes, you scare me."

"I scare you?" He shakes his head, his jaw tightening. "I've been told I'm ... intimidating."

"You can be, but I was referring to ... to something else."

Like how afraid I am to navigate this, I've been with all four of them. Sure Gunner and Roman have shared me, and they also shared me with Holden, but I keep waiting for shit to hit the fan. I feel like we only have a little bit of time before the shit hits the fan and the guys lose their friendship because of me.

Even though they've never shown any signs of jealousy with each other, I pull my legs up and rub my shins. I can feel Roman's eyes on me, and normally that would be enough to get me to talk, but not this time. These are my own thoughts.

He clears his throat. "Bambina, I don't just want to keep you safe. I want you to feel free, happy, supported. Do you not feel that?"

"I do!" It's almost out of my mouth before he can ask. I face his churning eyes and am struck again by how beautiful he is. His lush hair, his tan skin, the muscle, the intensity that seems to hang around him like an aura. "Of course, I'm happy with you."

"Let's make lunch today." He says. "You're better at cooking than you think."

I shake my head at him. "Then I think I need to learn some Italian. I feel so rude not speaking any when your Grandmother is around."

"I'll drag Gunner along too. Despite what he says, he knows enough to pass." Roman says, then turns my chin back to him. "For now, we can have a little lesson. You should call Grandma 'nonna'"

"Nonna," I repeat obediently. "But she isn't my grandma."

"Doesn't matter. She treats it like a title – one she's earned with pride." He smiles. "It'll make her smile."

He teaches me a few other words, simple ones. I repeat them one at a time; then he motions for me to use them. I trip over a sentence he taught me even though I think it's simple, and I know I could say it as a kid in English.

"Ouesto ... es."

He chuckles. "Not Spanish, Bambina."

Roman's nose brushes mine. "Questo va molto bene."

I shiver at the contact, at the way his breath strokes over my lips, how carefully his big hand holds the back of my neck. He's a distraction from himself. I swallow. "Questo va molte bien."

Another shake of his head. "molto bene."

"Molto bene." I say it slowly, tasting it, trying to memorize how my tongue moves when I say it. "Questo va molto bene."

"I agree." He leans forward and kisses me hungrily. His tongue teases mine, then claims me, hungry and demanding. Roman pulls me close; my legs draped over his as he devours my mouth. As I lean in against him, he draws away. "Questo va molto bene."

I feel my cheeks heat and bite my lip. Then I notice a scar on his shoulder. I push his shirt to the side, see it tracks even longer and undo a button to try and find the end. How have I not noticed this one? It's huge!

Roman catches my hand. "Behave, Bambina."

"It's so big."

He groans, and I feel something else against my thigh. I feel my face heat but stroke across his scar. "All of you have bad scars."

Roman nods. "War leaves its marks."

I kiss across the scar slowly. This one must have been really bad since I can see where the stitches were. I press another kiss and another until Roman groans and shifts me, so I'm on his lap. He pants and presses his forehead to mine.

"That is *not* behaving."

"I'm being sweet. I thought that was allowed." I tease.

He traces my lip with his thumb. "If our medics had your bedside manner, everyone would have been fighting to stay in the medic tent."

Giggling, I kiss him softly. "I'm not that nice, contrary to popular belief."

"Mm. If you want something, all you have to do is tell me. No matter what it is, Sophia." He kisses me back. "I'm able to give a lot, and if I can't, you have three other men that are happy to provide."

"And what if I want to provide for you?" I rub over his chest. "Are you able to give me the satisfaction of control?"

"I'll work on it." He chuckles, then kisses me slowly. "Stop tempting me in a purely good childhood place, Bambina, or I'll have to punish you."

"Oh, I'm the tempting one?" I poke his chest. "I don't think so. I was sitting over there so innocently and now look where I am."

He chuckles and stands, holding me in place as he does. He presses me against a pillar. "Well, there is one thing I've always wanted to do here."

"Enlighten me."

His hands slide across my thighs, and I shiver. My arms wind around his neck, and I accept the kiss to my mouth, his

tongue diving deep, stroking until I know I'm wet and panting. I clutch his hair and rub my body against him.

I'm so tuned to these men, to what they want, to how they are with me, but I keep wanting more. I want his mouth, and I want his stories, his secrets. I want everything Roman doesn't share with others.

I pant softly as he kisses me across my throat. "Roman."

"Bambina. Hai un sapore cosí buono." He purrs.

I lick the Italian off his tongue. "Yes to whatever that is."

He chuckles and lets me slide down his body until I find my feet. "Don't agree to everything I say. You'll end up in trouble."

"Trouble? With you? Impossible." I laugh and give him a little wink.

Roman pulls me back against him and wraps his arms around my front, kissing my neck. Something about the gesture is so boyish, innocent, sweet that I feel my heart hammer harder in my chest. I swallow and shake my head. He makes me feel so happy that this all seems too good right now.

"Let's head back before Nonna finishes lunch." He whispers.

"I'll just pour her wine and have you translate all the secrets of cooking." I pat his stomach as he walks me back to the villa. "That way, I can make sure you're satisfied when we get home."

"You keep satisfying me in all these ways, and you're not going to be able to get rid of me." He warns.

I bite my lip and tighten my hold on his hand. Why on earth would I want to get rid of him or any of the guys? What we have is so good, and this trip proves it. They're finally opening up to me, finally giving me more of themselves.

I don't want to say it though. We're still in a gray area, and I'm worried I'll say something wrong and tip the beautiful balance we have in place. Roman bumps my hip. "No witty response?"

"I don't want to get rid of you. If my dad wasn't waiting back at home, I'd ask to stay here with you all for another month. I like this, Roman. I like being with you." I whisper.

Roman pauses outside the villa and looks over my face. He shakes his head. "I wish I was as open as you are."

"You can learn." I shove him lightly. "Just like I can learn Italian. Just tell me what you're thinking. Right now."

"That you're something special, Bambina. And that I'm ninety percent sure my grandmother is going to try to start planning our wedding as we cook with her."

I feel myself go red and shake my head. "Poor you, since I won't understand a word of it."

"I don't mind letting her paint the picture." He kisses my cheek, and I see a smile pulling at his lips.

Maybe I'm not ready for open and talkative Roman. He might just run away with my heart.

Roman

After less than ten minutes in the kitchen, Grandma puts Sophia to work, teaching her to make pasta from scratch while I work on making the sauce. She glances at me and smiles. I catch the Italian on her tongue.

"I like her. She'll be good in the kitchen with practice. A good wife."

Sophia looks over at me with flour on her cheek, and I wink at her. She shakes her head, trying to hide her smile by pursing her lips, but it doesn't work. It never does. Gunner finally joins us, wearing sunglasses until Grandma yells at him in Italian.

He sighs and takes them off, shoving them in his pocket. He apologizes in butchered Italian and follows her order to get started on preparing vegetables. Gunner understands more than he speaks. But as we work in the kitchen, I notice how well Sophia moves around with us.

When Grandma isn't looking, Gunner kisses her or grabs her ass until she swats at him and reminds him to be respectful. He shakes his head at her. "I'm respecting how sexy you are."

She rolls her eyes but blushes brightly. I put myself behind her, helping her turn the crank when I see her getting tired. She looks back at me and shakes her head. "You and Gunner are killing me. I'm trying to learn." She complains. "You're doing well. Grandma has complimented you." I soothe her, kissing her throat.

Sophia leans back against me, and I tighten my hold on the machine, any excuse to be closer to her, even in the kitchen. Grandma smacks me with a towel before I kiss her again, telling me to save the romance for after lunch.

Then she goes over to Gunner and adjusts how he's cutting the veggies. I bump Sophia's hip with mine. She stumbles a little and then bumps me back. Grandma says she has to go pick out the wine, and Gunner wraps himself around Sophia.

He rubs her hips. "I can't wait to eat you up."

"You mean the pasta?"

Gunner glances at me and smiles. "Yeah. That's what I mean." He winks.

"Pervert." She grumbles with a smile taking over her sweet face.

"I'm just saying what Roman and I are thinking. Seeing you all domestic in the kitchen." Gunner groans softly. "It's been too long since I've had my mouth on you."

I tug Sophia free of Gunner and pull her against me to kiss her in front of him. He pulls her back against him. When I let her go, I see Gunner licking up her neck. Sophia shivers and puts her hands out against our chests.

"Hey. We are in a kitchen – not our kitchen – behave." She points at us.

Gunner arches his eyebrow at me and I smirk. She blinks slow looking up at us and lets Gunner drag her against him. He devours her mouth, and she melts against him. Her soft little whimper is the only approval I need.

I rub her ass appreciatively and slide my hand around to her front, slipping my hand under her skirt. She gasps as I rub her clit through her underwear. She shivers and pants between us. Gunner groans and cups her tits, rubbing his thumbs over her pointed nipples. "You're the best meal in the kitchen, Sophia." I purr in her ear.

"I hope not." She gasps and rocks her hips against me. Gunner claims her mouth again, and I see her suck his tongue until he groans. Sophie leans back against me. "I'm working hard with Nonna."

"Which means you deserve a reward, Bambina."

Her thighs tighten around my hands, and Gunner goes back to her mouth while slipping his hand up her shirt. Sophia pants, moans, grips us both until her whole body trembles, and she bites Gunner's shoulder to stay quiet.

Her face is flushed red, and she pants hard as I slowly draw my hand back. I lick across my finger, and Gunner chuckles. "So? What's the verdict, Roman?"

"Better than my sauce. No contest."

Sophia clutches the counter, and I see her legs twist together again. Gunner chuckles. "If I wasn't afraid of your grandma, I wouldn't let it stop here."

Sophia moans then makes her way back to the pasta. I wash my hands and stir the sauce. Gunner eyes the wine and I point at him. "Drinking after cooking. You know the rules."

"Yeah, yeah." He nods. "Your grandma is scary. I might need some of Sophie's protection on that front."

"She's only scary because you understand her." I chuckle.

"And I don't have years of experience like you. I'd rather face a whole army than deal with her when she's pissed." Gunner points at me.

I chuckle, and we go back and forth while we work until I turn to see Sophie. She looks between us with a soft smile. I nudge Gunner, and he glances back at her. "What's that smile for, sweets?"

"I like this. I like seeing you guys happy and here and together." She shrugs. "I'm easy like that."

"Easy?" Gunner snorts. "Absolutely not."

"Maybe for us." I tease, flicking sauce at her.

She gasps her mouth parting in an O, and flings flour at us. Before I can toss something at her, Grandma comes back. She does taste checks then complains about how slow we're moving. Sophia is blushing and rushes to move forward until Grandma calms her hands.

Grandma looks to me and asks how to tell her to slow down because quality is more important."

"Slow." I give her the word.

She nods and looks to Sophia. "You do ... slow. Make ... pretty."

"Okay." Sophie nods. "Sorry."

"No, sorry." Grandma pats her hand. "Good."

Once we finish lunch, Sophie slumps into a chair in the courtyard. Nick approaches as I help Grandma get things in the oven, and Gunner looks over the wine. He looks between the red and the white.

"I think the red will pair better with the meat dish – as usual, and white belongs with the fish." He sets them accordingly, and Grandma rewards him with a pat on the head which requires her to stand on her toes and for him to bend down.

He grins at her and kisses her cheek, which makes her grin. She pats us both. "Good bambinos."

"Thanks, Nonna." Gunner kisses her cheek again.

"Try wine." She points at the red and white.

Gunner grins and pours a small amount in a glass. He shares with my grandmother, and I shake my head. Nick and Sophia talk softly, but I know that everything will be okay based on how at ease she is. She doesn't need to worry about anyone else creeping or sneaking around her.

We'll take care of her, happily. With how good she makes us feel, how alive, how whole, the least we can do is keep her away from the garbage in the world. Not that a part of me doesn't ache to follow up about the man.

Gunner asks my grandma to hold on for a second and runs off. Despite all his jokes and bullshit, I know all he wants is to be taken care of, to have someone who values him and his opinions, someone who doesn't make him feel like he's the clown and nothing else.

Which I wouldn't know if I hadn't taken care of him blackout drunk on more than one occasion. Grandma shakes her head at me and speaks in Italian. "Someone tried to hurt Sophie. Here. At home!"

"Not in the villa."

"The whole city is home. We are good people. Who would hurt her?" Grandma stirs the pasta angrily, then motions for me to add more sauce. "Bastards. I told Massimo I'll take care of it. We stick together as family."

I kiss her cheek. "She's okay. It's not as terrible as it could be"

"And we won't wait until it is." She promises. "She's a good woman."

"Just like you, Nonna." I grin. "Maybe not as fierce."

"Not yet." She points at me. "I bet she would be if someone tried to hurt you."

"Grandma," I say in English.

"She likes you." She motions to Sophia and the rest of our group while testing the English I've been trying to teach her. "All you."

"I know it's strange." I shrug.

Nonna shrugs and switches back to Italian. "You'll figure it out. You're a smart boy, just like Massimo. He found Danny. Anyone can find love."

We both laugh, and I finish lunch with her. We set it out, and people come out eagerly to fill their plates. Anything with Grandma's approval is good to eat. We've all learned that plenty of times over.

Sophia laughs at something and shoves Nick.

I join them and give her two glasses of wine. "Nonna says thank you."

Sophie beams at me and pats Nick's hand. "We're painting."

"Sophie."

"I want to see what you've got. With wine and these kinds of vistas, you can't tell me no." She points her fork at him.

Nick rolls his eyes. "I told you, that's a different life, a different me."

"Then teach me to do more than stick figures."

I chuckle. "Go on, Nicky. You were always sketching in your free time before. Let's see what else you've got."

He flips me off and grumbles about how out of practice he is, but I know that he'll do it for Sophia. And once he starts, he'll be happy he did. Holden flexes his hand again, but Sophia's laugh makes him smile slightly.

None of us are immune to her. Sophia insists on clearing lunch, but then her phone rings. She reaches for it eagerly and apologizes before excusing herself. Gunner watches her carefully. "She's worried about Miles. Have you guys heard anything?"

"He liked the pictures I sent." Nick shrugs.

"Said work is going smoothly and asked me to double-check some numbers yesterday," Holden murmurs. "Everything was fine; things just fell into the wrong categories."

"He should be resting," I grumble. "But I know he won't until we're back."

"Yeah." Gunner rubs his jaw.

We glance at one another, but I shake my head. Sophia wants us to enjoy this trip, and she deserves to enjoy it too. I'm committing to that. Beyond sex, beyond the teasing we can give her, we can make sure she gets what she wants.

She comes back and smiles. "Dad sounds better."

"Good." Gunner nods and has some water.

"What do you want to do while we're here?" I ask. "We saw some vineyards, walked around town, went to a garden. What else would you like to do?"

"I know it's really cheesy, and I haven't even seen them here, but I'd really like to do a Gondola ride. And the beach! I'd love to swim."

"There are topless beaches here, right? Or am I thinking of France again?" Gunner smiles.

"We'll make sure to do both. Tomorrow?" I offer.

"We can do the beach tonight." Nick butts in. "Before dinner. Be there for sunset and everything."

Sophie beams as we go back and forth on things we can do. Nick promises to buy paints before we head to the beach, and Sophie shovels her food quickly before running upstairs to get ready.

Holden follows her with his eyes. "We're not being *over* protective, are we?"

"After last night, not a chance." I stab my steak. "She's only leaving our sight while we're here. When we leave the walls ..."

"Yeah. She's the mission." Gunner rolls his eyes. "A better looking mission than the ones I remember."

Holden pushes food around his plate, and Nick chuckles. "Painting on a beach in Italy sounds like a good way to unwind."

At Holden's shrug, Nick says he'll get a second canvas for Holden to work on. Holden rolls his eyes but doesn't disagree.

It's progress. We seem to be making a lot of it with Sophia around. Hopefully, it carries over when we get back home.

Sophia

The BEACH IS BEAUTIFUL. I SWIM OUT FROM THE SHORE AND then roll over to stare at the sky as it goes pink. I can't imagine a more beautiful place. Tomorrow we'll do gondolas, but today is just for us to enjoy. I sigh and spread my arms out wide before bringing them against me.

It's calm here, just beyond the breaking waves, until an arm wraps around me. I look over and see Gunner. He winks at me. "You're in pretty deep water, sweets."

I roll and realize I can't touch. I gasp and wrap myself around Gunner. He chuckles and walks us back a little. We're still beyond the crashing waves, but at least one of us can touch the ground. He rubs his nose over mine.

"You're pretty damn good in the kitchen."

"Do you mean cooking or ..."

"Well, watching you come was the highlight of that experience." He teases. "I'm only upset that I couldn't get my fingers under your skirt."

"So sorry that you had to settle for my mouth and boobs." I stick out my tongue.

Gunner nips at me, then tugs on my bottoms. "You shouldn't tease when I have you all to myself out here."

I swallow and look him over. As tempting as it is to be naughty here, I don't exactly want to get in trouble for public indecency. So I rub over his chest and shake my head. "What

do you want to do while we're here? Nick's painting. Holden is out and about. Roman is getting plenty of time with his family. There has to be something here that has you excited."

"Other than you?" He rubs his hard-on against me.

"I'm serious, Gunner. We can have sex here or at home. What's something you can only do here. Something that's on your mind."

He thinks about it for a second, then nods to himself. "Fucking you right here and now is on the top of my list, but I would really like to go to the Colosseum. I know it's cliché, but the history, the battles, the everything there is just amazing to consider. Or a library."

"A library?" That's not what I would have expected.

"Oh, I know. I'm just the loudmouth drunk, right?" He adjusts me in his arms so I can't exactly ignore how hard he is. His mouth brushes across my throat. "I like literature. I read Catch 22 at least once a day while overseas. It kept me sane."

"Oh." I breathe, trying to focus on the conversation instead of his mouth on me, his hands on my hips, his hard cock against the inside of my thigh. "Any other books you like?"

"Dante's Comedia. Although I think that Inferno is the best. It's where the shit hits the fan." He murmurs against my ear. "I like being in libraries. They're quiet, and everyone is in a different world."

"So Colosseum and a library." I pant.

"They'll happen later." He jerks my bottoms to the side. "This is happening now."

"Gunner." I moan.

The head of his cock rubs across my slit. He nibbles my earlobe. "I just need a yes, sweets."

I nod and kiss him softly. He pushes into me, and we both groan as his cock fills my pussy. I dig my nails into his shoulders. "You feel so good," I whisper.

"That's my line." He groans and jerks me down on him again. "My favorite thing about reading is I can be anyone." Another thrust and kiss to my throat. "The most romantic, suave gentleman who is using his position for revenge."

I tighten my hold around his neck and lick across his bottom lip.

"I could be in a dystopian world fighting for what's right."

God, him whispering about books to me while fucking me in the ocean is a level of heat I couldn't have prepared myself for. Gunner groans as I roll my hips against him. "Fuck, Sophie. You're better than any book."

I whimper and kiss him hard, licking against his tongue like I can taste his secrets, memorize them just like this, with him inside me—his hand strokes around my back, then over my ass. I moan and nod against his neck.

"You know, before I ever watched porn, I stole my mom's romance books." His finger presses against my clit, and I gasp. He thrusts into me again, and my whole body turns to jelly, his finger circling my clit faster.

I dig my nails into his shoulders tighter and muffle my moans against his throat. Gunner's voice is rough and ragged but so fucking hot. He licks across my neck. "I liked seeing characters fall in love and fuck it out, fuck the rules, fuck each other."

I moan and let my head fall back. He's so deep inside me, his cock so thick and hard as his finger plays with my clitoris at the same time. I groan and bite my lip as I bounce on him faster. Gunner pants.

"And I've always wanted to do this."

"Have sex in..." A groan tears through me as he hits a spot that makes me see stars. "The ocean?"

"Sure. That." He chuckles. "Maybe you don't want to hear anymore. Maybe you just want me to tell you how fucking good you feel, sweets. How much I love being buried in your pussy and watching your face as you come apart for me."

I clutch his hair tight and nod. "All of it."

"You want it all?"

He pulls me down harder over his cock, pushing deep as he thrusts so hard in me that I can't back away from the edge. I'm too far gone. I'm too close. Gunner groans. "You have it all, Sophie. Take it. Come for me, baby."

He fucks me hard and fast, his finger and his cock finding a rhythm that's insane. I try to meet each thrust, but I start to shake, and then I give in. Heat rips through me, and I cling to Gunner like I'm afraid I'm going to float away if I don't.

He groans in my ear and holds me in place as he pulls out of me and groans loud and deep. His hands soften on me and I kiss him softly, trying to catch my breath and keep my heart from running away with me.

"It's not the sex I wanted." He whispers in my ear. "Sex is easy. Finding someone who is impossible to ignore, that knots me until all I can think about is her and how to please her, someone who wants to know more about me than what my cock can do and how far my money goes ... that's what I've wanted"

I swoon right here. Gunner smiles and kisses me deeply like he didn't just fuck me. I shiver and clutch him tighter. I lick across his lips as I drawback. "I do want to know everything."

He nods but studies my eyes like he's waiting for the catch. I brush my fingers over his face. "See how nice it is to use your mouth for talking?"

"Like you don't like the other things I use it for." He teases.

I smile wide and shake my head. "I like everything you do with your mouth." I shiver. "And I like when you share with me. I feel like you know so much about me, but I'm still catching up."

"Maybe I'll write you a book. It will be terrible. I've never figured out what the plot of life is." He chuckles as he lets me go. "We'll see." "I'll read it," I say with a promise as I swim towards the breaking waves. "All of it, Gunner. From childhood and awkward puberty stories to your wild parties."

"You couldn't handle my parties. I couldn't handle my parties. I only remember about half of them." He chuckles.

"Well you better remember this!" I shove him into a wave before diving under it when we get back to shore, Gunner's lagging behind, enjoying the waves.

Roman's stretched out over the beach, enjoying the last rays of the sun while every passing woman drinks him in. Nick is almost fully clothed painting with Holden. Holden looks frustrated but nods at whatever Nick says.

I feel Roman's hand on my calf as I pass to grab a towel, then I go over to Nick and Holden to see what they're working on. Nick has blocked out areas and has a beautifully done sky. Hell, if I held the canvas at the right angle, I bet it would match perfectly.

Holden's is scratchier, with canvas showing through and not as skillfully blended, but it's better than I've ever done trying to paint along with Bob Ross. Holden snorts. "This isn't my cup of tea."

"It looks good." I encourage. "Both of you are doing really well."

Nick smiles at me, and there's something calm in his eyes. Usually when I look at him, I can see traces of stress, but right now, there's just him—excited, happy, relaxed. Nick rubs down my back, then adjusts my towel, so it's wrapped around my shoulders too.

"Don't get cold." He murmurs.

"Can I watch? Sit in on the lesson?" I ask.

"Please, take over." Holden huffs, setting a brush down and offering me the paint palate he's made. "You can only make it better."

"Together?" I offer.

He rolls his eyes but nods. Holden and I both work on his canvas, trying to bring the waves to life. Nick reminds us to sweep the brush gently because we can always add more paint. Holden and I shake our heads at each other, but our waves look completely different. I chuckle and shake my head.

"Nick, I think you're the clear winner here."

"Art doesn't have winners." He murmurs. "That's why I like it. It's just what it needs to be. A way to let go and reflect how you see the world."

"If you can make the paint agree with you," Holden grumbles.

I nudge him and kiss his shoulder. He tries to put some veins of foam and green in his waves like Nick is, but they just look like they're tied together. I do the same, but it doesn't come out any better. By the time we get to the rocks and the sandy shore, our painting looks like two middle schoolers looked at a picture of a beach and tried to finish it in art class.

Nick's painting is so much more detailed, so fully realized. I take a step back to look at the paintings. Holden and I didn't do a terrible job. It's obviously the ocean, even if it's not perfect. And, even better, it means that we all spent valuable time together.

Even Gunner shows up in Nick's painting, playing frisbee with Roman. I play with my fingers in front of me as I look over the guys. They're happy, smiling, relaxed, and ... and I'm a part of it.

Me and my wild heart, thudding against my ribs like it can't relax around them. Just a few weeks ago, I felt awful for kissing all of them. I felt like I was abusing the situation, felt like a terrible person for being so greedy and wanting all of them.

And now, being with them on the beach, I can't imagine it any other way. I can't imagine just choosing one of them to spend all my time with. Not when each of them offers so much, not when we're all so happy together.

Just like this.

The sun dips into the horizon, and then Roman scoops me up and drags me into whatever game we're playing. Nick and Holden join in as their paint dries, and we run around, tossing the frisbee while laughing and talking about nothing at all.

A perfect day.

Nick

BY THE TIME WE GET BACK TO THE VILLA, SOPHIA LOOKS HALF asleep. Her head rests on Holden's shoulder, and she lets her eyes close. I grin at Holden. "You did a good job for your first time."

"Don't lie."

"I'm going to put your painting up in my office as a reminder." I wink at him.

Holden actually breaks into a smile. He plays with a lock of Sophia's hair. "I don't want to leave. I like Italy."

I nod as I look at the streetlights, giving us small glimpses of life outside of the villa. Still, I can't help but see danger in the shadows. Sophia's knees, now bare of band-aids, don't look great. They're almost scabbed, but I can't imagine the fight she put up.

That and her arms, it must have been bad. I can only imagine how afraid she was, how alone she felt. That was never a problem when we were in combat. We had earpieces, teams, and if we were alone, completely alone, and in trouble, we knew that it would be a quick death.

Sophia didn't have that comfort. What that man wanted would have ... I shake my head. Roman catches my attention. "She's okay."

I nod once. He holds my gaze in the rearview mirror. "And we're not going to let it happen again. Holden was there then; we'll all be with her from now on."

"She's going to want alone time," I predict it easily. "She's an adult. She's confident, and she deserves to have a good safe life. It's not like we can stalk her when she wants to go out with friends or something."

"We'll make sure she's never alone." Gunner assures from the passenger seat. It helps a little. Our united front will make it easier to keep track of her and make sure she's safe. She won't have to worry about what others demand from her again.

When we get to the villa, I wake Sophia up. She blinks a few times and rubs her eyes. Then she smiles. "I think we made it without sunburns."

I check myself and nod. "Lucky considering the lack of sunscreen."

I slide out and offer my hand to Sophia. She takes it and helps herself out of the car. She stumbles over a cobblestone, and I catch her. She still gasps, and I look down at her knees, then her ankle. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Just ... half asleep."

Gunner climbs out and pats his stomach. "Food. We need food. And some caffeine."

Soph smiles at me and tucks her hair behind her ear. "How did it feel to paint?"

"Amazing," I murmur, tightening my hand in hers. "I'm so glad you pushed on it. It's been a long time since my brain has been clear like that."

She treats me to a huge smile and I'm swept up in her just like that. Gunner rubs down her back and kisses her temple before heading to a table. She doesn't jump, doesn't panic about people seeing all of us together.

Sophie just fits. She fits our dynamic and when we're all at the table, talking about our day and touching on a few work things, I realize how rare this is.

We had Bella, shared her together and apart until Matthew snapped her up and staked his claim on her, but she didn't like being in public with all of us. She was afraid of the attention it would draw. She was nervous about what people would think and she didn't have a ton to say outside of what she wanted, what we wanted, and our needs.

Sophie really digs into us, brings out the best of us while taking care of us together and apart. It's a wild dynamic, but at the same time, I like not having to worry that a woman is only with me because of my looks and money. I like not worrying about her cheating, about having her say one thing to my face and another behind my back.

I take her hand and kiss the back of it, pulling her from the conversation. She looks me over and smiles slightly. "Hi, Nick."

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"Hi, Soph."
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"What's up?"

"I like you. That's all." I whisper before kissing her cheek.

Roman's grandmother puts food out and gives us a suspicious look. But when we get up, it's Holden that gets her hand. Sophie rubs over his arm, and Roman's grandmother arches her eyebrow at Roman.

He says something quickly and Gunner chuckles to himself as he loads up his plate with more than any sane human could actually eat. He leans over to us. "Nonna is confused about what's going on between us."

"Tell her to get in line." Sophie chuckles. "I'm sure just about everyone has bets on how this is going."

I smile slightly. I like that she isn't confused. She isn't worried about showing us affection in public. She sighs and shakes her head at Gunner. "Come on, leave some for others."

"I had a very ... eventful day." He winks at her.

She flushes red and looks away. As if we didn't know what was going to happen when Gunner swam out after her. He's not one for innocent moments. Sophie shakes her head. "You're impossible."

"The glory of being human." He winks at her as a sly smile spreads across his face.

We sit down to eat, and Sophie yawns between bites. I know she's done a lot today, and yesterday wasn't easy on her. I'm sure of that too. We eat slowly, and then Roman stretches. "No wandering tonight, Bambina. I'm going out with Mass since I missed the bachelor party."

She kisses him gently. "I promise."

He nods and strokes along her jaw. Gunner stands up too. "I hear drinks; I'm coming."

Holden stretches. "I need some sleep."

"Are you sure?" Sophia rubs his thigh. "Did you have a good day?"

He chuckles. "Don't worry about me. Today was fun. Gondolas tomorrow."

Sophia clings to my hand as we go upstairs, and then she tugs me into her room. I chuckle and hold her waist in my hands. "I thought you were tired, sweetheart."

"Not tired enough." She kisses across my neck. "And not ready to end the day."

I groan and fit my mouth to hers. She's sweet, tastes like wine and something else, something soft and delicious, something I need more of. I knot my fingers in her hair and draw her closer, so her breasts are pillowed against my chest.

I stroke over her ass and palm the cheek as I walk her back towards her bed. I lick along her lips. "Maybe I should paint you."

"Oh yeah, Titanic style?"

I chuckle and tug at her coverup until I have it undone and under her. I lick between her breasts. "Yes. Maybe a photoshoot too, so I have all the references I need and can make sure I get you in the perfect light."

She pants and rubs over my shoulders. "Wherever your art takes you, I'll follow."

I groan and lift my mouth to hers. God, her mouth, the words that come out of it, how deeply they strike me. I nibble her lip. Sophie pulls at my shirt, then rolls on top and kisses down my chest, biting softly as I groan.

"Soph."

She undoes my bottoms and jerks them down. "I know what I want, Nick. I'm not afraid to take it. Not with you."

I groan, then flip her carefully. "Your knees, sweetheart. Let's let them heal."

She pants, and I finish stripping her, still struggling to take her in. Every time I have her naked, it's like the first time. I'm shocked at her lack of scars, how soft and silky her skin is, the way her breasts heave when she pants, her thick thighs, and the fact that her pussy is *always* bare.

I lick across my lips and then kiss the inside of her knee.

"Let me take care of you." I meet her eyes.

She nods eagerly. "Take care of me all you want. I'm okay with being kept in bed tonight."

I chuckle and continue licking and kissing up the inside of her thigh. When she thinks I'm going to stop at her pussy, I jump over and continue down the other thigh. She groans and spreads her legs wider, showing me exactly what kind of attention she wants. I bite her thighs softly.

"You're so warm," I whisper against her skin. "So good. So ... lovely."

She groans, and her hips lift off the bed. "Please!"

How the fuck can I turn that down? I jerk her thighs apart and bury my face in her pussy, licking over her clit, swirling my tongue around her, and savoring her wetness. God, she tastes so good. I suck her clit and feel her fingers tighten in my hair.

Her pussy rubs against my tongue, taking the pleasure she can from my mouth. I lick harder, faster, determined to make her come more than once tonight. I use my fingers to spread her so I can get deeper.

"Ah! Nick!" She gasps. "That's so good."

I moan. I love when she praises me, tells me how much she likes it, how much she wants it. I push two fingers inside her, curling them deep before sliding them out and doing it again. Her back arches, and she palms her breast.

Fuck, this view, her taste, it's amazing. I lick just inside her entrance, along my fingers, and then all the way back up to her clit. She squirms and digs her heels into the bed, rubbing and grinding on my tongue until she explodes for me.

I kiss up her body and suck her nipples, cupping her breast as I do. She pants, and I feel her toes brush my knee.

"Fuck me." It's an order.

I grin. "Maybe."

She purses her lips. "I will get on top of you. Screw my knees."

I thrust into her wet pussy. She's so tight, so wet, so fucking warm. I groan and cup her head as I kiss her hungrily. I tease her with my tongue as I slide out, almost all the way out, then slam back into her.

She gasps and digs her nails into my biceps. "Yes, Nick."

"You like that? Want me to be rough with you?" I growl.

She nods. "Yes. Please."

There's a knock on her door, and we pause. I hear someone say wrong door, and then they keep going. Sophie giggles and covers her mouth. "I was so afraid that was Nonna."

I lift her leg up, change the angle, and thrust into her again. Her lips part, her eyes widen, and the groan that tears out of her tells me that Nonna is completely forgotten. She bites her lip and nods at me, a silent order of "again."

One I'm more than happy to follow.

I fuck her hard and deep, rocking into heaven over and over until she comes, her pussy so tight around my cock, I have to pull out, or I'll come in her again. Sophie sits up, wraps her mouth around my cock, and lets me come down her throat.

Her red, sweaty face, hazy eyes, puffy lips wrapped around my cock, it's fucking amazing. She licks the tip one more time and flops back. I settle next to her and rub her hip. She smiles and kisses me softly.

"You never disappoint, Nick."

I roll my eyes.

She pulls me back by my chin. "I mean it. Your painting, our conversations, the sex. You're amazing."

I smother her with another kiss, sure that I'm going to ride the high of that compliment all night.

Sophia

NICK LEAVES AFTER SOME CUDDLING, AND I SNUGGLE INTO MY sheets. I've almost forgotten about last night. Today has been so good, been so much like a dream that I'm almost afraid to sleep. Cooking with Roman and Gunner in the kitchen felt so easy, so natural, even with Roman's grandma ordering us around.

Being at the beach with all of them as we played and talked and just spent time together, having dinner, and time with Nick. I shake my head. They're beyond anything I could have imagined when I met them. But I'm nervous about going home. Sure we have more time, but things will be different when we get back.

We'll all be workaholics again, my dad will be around, and even with the stolen moments I get with the guys, how are we possibly going to keep this heat, this dedication to each other when we're back in New York and have to watch for prying eyes.

I can only imagine what Sasha would say if she saw Gunner grab my ass, Holden take my hand, Nick kiss my cheek, or Roman wrap himself around me. I can already hear her calling me a slut and spreading rumors that my job is a cover so they can fuck me at work.

But she still thinks I'm my dad's girlfriend which is a level of wrong I can't begin to approach. And then I'll be back monitoring Neal. My own circle of hell. But it's worth it. The work and going back. I'll get to be with my dad, show him what I'm capable of, make him proud. I'll earn it by working hard, and the guys will see me as more than just a fun time. Although, I've been starting to get different feelings from them.

Like Gunner's confession at the beach, his love of books, what he really wants, more than sex and booze. Holden's been opening up more, trying new things. Nick even painted! I'm happy to see them happy, and even if it's my own romantic heart running away with me, I don't really want to stop it.

I toss all night, rolling around in bed until I finally find some sleep. I wake up to a pounding on my door and groan as I rub over my face. For half a second, I don't know where I am. The walls aren't familiar; the bed isn't mine.

"Come on, Soph. You're going to miss breakfast, and that's coming from me." Gunner calls.

I start brushing my teeth and answer the door, motioning him to come in. He joins me in my room and looks me over. I only have a robe on, but it's more than what I did when I woke up. I return to the bathroom and hear Gunner say something.

When I pop my head out, I see he has Holden with him. Holden actually looks well-rested. I smile as I set my toothbrush down. "I'll be down soon."

"Or not." Gunner looks me over, then tugs on the sash around my robe. "What do you think, Holden?"

He looks me over with that hot and hungry gaze and adjusts himself as my robe falls over my shoulders. Holden swallows. "You're a good view to wake up to."

"But, we're going to be late," I whisper, looking between them.

Gunner arches a brow. "After last night, no one is expecting me to be up before noon."

Holden cups my face, studying my eyes. "Nightmares?"

"Couldn't sleep." I correct softly, but I can't stop myself from leaning into his hand or from pushing closer against him when I feel how hard he is.

Gunner takes my hand, unwilling to be left out, and puts it on his own bulge. I lick across my bottom lip. Holden kisses me softly, then harder, his tongue slipping between my lips to stroke deeper.

I fist his shirt to avoid stumbling and groan as he rubs over my side, so soft, so gentle despite the callouses on his fingers. I gasp when Gunner guides my hand to his cock, now free from his jeans.

He feels good, thick, hard. My mouth already waters for him. Holden pushes me down on the bed, and Gunner offers me his cock, tapping it against my lips.

"Breakfast can wait, don't you think?" He teases.

"I'll be hungry in a little bit."

"And right now?" Holden asks, undoing his jeans after tossing his shirt to the side. "What do you feel now."

"Lusty." I breathe, knowing my face is bright red.

Gunner groans as I wrap my hand around his cock again and lift my head to take him in my mouth. He fits so perfectly, long and hard. Holden gets on the bed and strokes up the outside of my thighs. He kisses across my belly slowly as Gunner's hand tightens in my hair.

I suck gunner harder and use my other hand to stroke over Holden's shoulders. It's a killer combination. Gunner, always rough and demanding, and Holden – gentle when he wants to be, but unpredictable and exciting.

I pop off of Gunner's cock to catch my breath, and Holden steals it just as quickly by thrusting into me.

Gasping, my back arches, and my mouth opens wide as I moan. Gunner takes advantage of it and thrusts into my mouth. I welcome him to go deep as Holden thrusts into me again. My legs tighten around him, and I grip his ass with one hand, encouraging him on as I let my eyes meet Gunner's.

He licks across his lip slowly, then smiles as I gag on his cock, but don't stop. I love knowing how much I can take of

him. Love knowing that my mouth is so good he can't resist thrusting deeper just to get more of my tongue.

Holden rubs over my thigh, then readjusts my legs so they're over his shoulders. He's so deep inside me, hitting every spot I need, stretching me around him. Gunner fucks my mouth as I play with his balls. He pants.

"You're so fucking good, Sophie. So good." He praises. "I love how you use your mouth."

I bob up and down on his cock as Holden keeps fucking me. My moans are muffled by Gunner down my throat, but I want Holden to know how good it feels, how my body is already humming with the promise of an orgasm.

My eyes close as I savor it. Gunner filling my mouth while Holden fills my pussy. So good. So right. Holden licks across my nipple then sucks it hard. Gunner palms my other breast, and I gasp.

Gunner pants. "Don't stop, sweets. I'm close. So fucking close."

I suck him harder, using my tongue up and down his cock until he finishes. His come fills my mouth, and I drag my nails down his thigh. Holden pants and fucks me harder, letting go of whatever restraint he was holding onto.

I swallow and groan, but the sound is sticky in my throat. Gunner cups my head. "Such a good girl. You want to come, don't you?"

"Yes!" I almost scream.

"And you want Hold to come too, right?" At my nod, he continues. "Talk to him, sweets."

"You feel so good." I whimper. "So good!"

Holden pushes my legs further forward, hitting a spot that I've never felt before. My hips lift off the bed as my stomach tightens. I can feel it building inside me. My eyes close, and my neck bends back.

Gunner whispers to me. "You're better than any erotica, Sophie. You're so fucking gorgeous. Every beautiful inch of you."

I grab the sheets, and Holden, trying to hold on, trying to hold out. Holden groans. "Fuck! Come, Sophie!"

I'm not ready. I want to enjoy this. Every second of Gunner talking to me while Holden fucks me hard and deep. Gunner grabs my ankles and holds them as Holden pounds into me. Gunner kisses me hard, his tongue slipping along mine while one of them rubs my clit.

It's too much. So far past too much. I come so hard I can hear and feel myself squirt. Holden groans, and his rhythm changes, disjointed before he buries his cock deep in me, panting. "Fuck!"

Gunner moans softly and runs his nose along mine. "I love watching you, Sophie."

Holden pushes my legs to the side and kisses up my hip, along my side, then up my neck before stealing my mouth from Gunner. "So perfect."

I laugh softly. "You're better than breakfast."

But my stomach growls, and Holden jumps into action. He helps me clean up while Gunner goes through my clothes. He holds up a dress, and I shake my head. "The red one, please."

"Yes, sweets." He nods.

Holden rubs my side after tossing a towel in the corner. "Thank you, Sophie."

"Feeling impatient after yesterday?"

"I'm always impatient for you." He reaches down and rubs his leg.

I sit up and rub just above the prosthetic. "Everything okay? I don't want you sore just because I'm eager to do a million and a half things."

"It's fine." He reassures me. "No reason to worry."

"But you would tell me if-"

He kisses me to shut me up, then takes a bra from Gunner. After looking at it, he tosses it. "You don't need that."

Gunner chuckles. "Be careful, Hold. She gets squirrely about her clothes."

I stick my tongue out at him, and he arches an eyebrow. "Is that an invitation for more?"

"I know you're as hungry as I am." I pat his stomach.

I manage to get dressed and drag Holden's jeans over his legs and Gunner's shirt over his delicious body. Somehow, helping them get dressed while they slide my shoes on and make sure my knees and arms are okay is almost more intimate than sex.

My face is nearly as red as my dress as we head downstairs. Gunner pushes my hair behind my ear. "Red hair, red dress, shame your ass isn't red too."

I gape at him.

"She behaved; no reason to spank her." Holden pipes up.

I stare at him, then laugh. I take both their hands. I like seeing these other sides to them. I like how determined they are to keep me safe and happy. I love what this trip is doing for us. And I ride that high all through breakfast until my phone rings.

Pulling it out of my pocket, I don't even check the name as I answer it. "Hello, this is Sophia."

"Sweets," Gunner mouths at me.

I flip him off, then hear a throat clear. "Hello, just to be sure, this is Sophia Lane?"

I don't recognize the voice. "Uh ... yes. This is she. Who is this?"

"I'm Dr. Spence. Mr. Langford has you listed as his emergency contact."

"Wait. My dad?" I stand up. "I just talked to him. What's

"He's been hospitalized. I think it's best if you come and we talk about this in person. Are you available now?"

"I um ... I'm actually out of the country, but I can leave today and be there tomorrow. Is ... is he okay?"

"It's a critical case, and we may need you to make some hard decisions."

My hand shakes, and I'm doing everything I can to fight the tears that are burning my eyes. I close my eyes and try to take a steady breath, but it sounds a lot like a sob. "Please keep my dad safe."

"We're doing everything we can, Ms. Lane. The sooner you can get here, the better."

He hangs up just like that, and I swallow. I know the guys can hear me. "We need to pack and leave like ... now."

"Sophia?" Roman asks.

"Dad is in the hospital." That pulls another sob from my throat, but I head back to my room and start throwing things in my luggage. I don't care if it fits if it's dirty. If it's clean. I just know I have to get home.

A hand reaches out and I turn to see Nick. "As soon as you're ready, we're gone."

Gunner

NICK AND HOLDEN ARE COMPLETELY KNOCKED OUT ON THE plane. We've never rushed so fast to get anywhere since we left the service. Sophie hasn't been able to relax despite us leaving the villa less than thirty minutes after she got the call.

I get up and walk to her. She's just been rolling her phone in her hand as if she's waiting for another message. I sit next to her and take her hands in mine. Roman makes some adjustments so he can take care of the necessary shit, and we can focus on Miles.

Sophie swallows, opens her mouth, then shakes her head. Her eyes water, and she slumps down, covering her face with her hands. I wrap my arm around her and pull her close. A hug won't fix this shit, and I know that.

But I don't know what else I can offer. Sophie holds onto my shirt and presses her face to my neck. I kiss her temple and massage the back of her neck. "We're going to be there soon."

"We should have left days ago." She whimpers. "He's been sick, and I've just been having fun."

"Sweets, we both know he wouldn't have it any other way. Miles loves you and wants you to take advantage of every opportunity." I comfort her.

She ends up crying herself to sleep. I keep rubbing her back until Roman sits across from us. "Gunner?"

"We're going right to the hospital, right? I don't think she'll be able to focus on anything else until she sees him." I answer.

Roman nods and rubs his jaw. "We're going to have to share Miles' job until he's better. Which means Sophie is going to have more on her plate."

"It'll be good for her. She'll have something else to focus on." I agree, dragging my fingers through her hair.

Sophie adjusts on me, cuddling close. I want to fix things for her, to do anything to stop her tears. I kiss the top of her head and rub her shoulders. I fucking hate this.

"I'm sure things will get better. Miles is getting the best possible care." Roman rubs his jaw. His eyes focus out the window, and he clears his throat. "He survived war; we all did. Some sickness isn't going to take him out."

"I fucking hate waiting," I grumble. "Why haven't we gotten teleportation mastered?"

Roman chuckles and shakes his head. "Sorry, we don't live in the Star Trek universe."

I try to hide my smile. We get through the rest of the flight, rush through customs – as fast as five almost zombies can – and then pile into a town car to get to the hospital. Sophie got maybe two hours of sleep, and I can tell she's on edge. Her fingers drum on her knee, and she keeps biting her lip.

Holden takes her hand, rubbing with his thumb while I call work to let them know to reroute all calls for Miles to our voicemails. Sasha pushes back more than I expect.

"So, that means you all are back? We've been so lonely at the office without you."

"Yes. We have to see to some personal matters. Please focus on this specifically. It's a priority."

"Yes, sir." She agrees. I hear her take a breath and know she's about to continue, so I hang up.

I rub my forehead and push down my temper. We need a new fucking secretary. One that isn't trying to shove her nose in our asses to get more than a wink or a short conversation. But that's a thought for another time. One I can talk with Nick about. Maybe we can start interviews for her position. Sasha can't be that hard to replace, right?

When we get to the hospital, Sophie flips a switch. She's gone from anxious and shaking to stalking across the tile, her heels clicking as she walks with purpose—a woman on a mission. Roman smiles slightly, but we follow her without question.

"Miles Langston, please."

"Oh, um ... well." The woman looks back at us, then Sophia leans towards her, claiming her focus.

"Miles. Langston. I was called by a doctor and told it was urgent."

"Right. Of course." The woman types on the computer then writes down a room number.

Sophie waves it at us, and we follow her to the elevator. She makes a few text messages, then starts walking out the elevator door before it's fully open. I'm in awe of her. She's commanding and impossible to ignore.

She turns into a room and I decide to wait outside. She deserves some private time with her father. They have a short conversation, then one of the nurses notices us. She exhales and points at the four of us. "If you're visiting, you should go in. We don't like people in the hallway."

"Sure." Holden nods.

The four of us file into the room. It's private, and Sophie has drawn the curtain so she and Miles have some privacy. But it doesn't stop me from hearing how upset she is.

"You told me not to worry, Dad. That's not fair." She hisses. "I could have been here. We could have all been here and made sure you got some actual rest without straining your heart and-"

"Honey, if I thought it was this bad" He takes a long breath. "I would have told you."

"What happened?" Her voice softened. "Daddy ..."

A long pause and I look at Nick. He shakes his head once. He doesn't have a clue, but honestly, we've gotten minimal information. How were we supposed to know at all? It was easier in combat. Back then, we could tell how the other person was with their tone, their body language. That was all.

Now, despite living together and staying close, we live our own lives ... we've all changed.

And somehow, I feel like it's my fault for not noticing something was up with Miles. I should have offered to take on more of his responsibilities. I should have removed some of that stress from his shoulders.

I sit down and pull up a book online. I need something to distract myself before I dig deep into those thoughts, all the what-ifs, and could-haves.

Sophie's voice sometimes drifts through the haze of the novel, but I only pull myself away when Nick nudges me.

I see Roman pull the curtain back and notice how shitty Miles looks. He's pale, his eyes are cloudy, and he's thinner. I've never seen him look ... delicate before. I swallow the frustration, the hurt, and nod to him.

Miles chuckles then dissolves into coughs.

Roman walks around the other side of the bed. Miles nods to him after he whispers something in Miles' ear. Miles pats Sophie's hand. "I think that doctor is still here. Why don't you go ask the nurses?"

Her eyes harden, and she walks out of the room like she's going to bend the entire hospital to her needs. Miles smiles after her. His pride radiates from him, and for a second, I see the Miles I've known.

He motions us close. "Look, I don't know how this is going to go, but I can't let Sophie go back to her mom."

"Why?" Holden asks, breaking the silence he's maintained since we got on the plane. "Is she bad to Sophia?"

"She has ... strong beliefs." He adjusts the IV in his arm. "I just want to make sure she's taken care of. She's doing well

at work, and I don't want her to lose this opportunity."

"We'll take care of her," Nick assures him.

Miles glances from me to Roman. I know what he's searching for. He's used to us cracking a smile or teasing if we've pushed a boundary, but I don't feel much like jokes right now even if that would be easier.

I nod. "We will, Miles, but right now, you need to focus on getting better. It doesn't matter if we're here. Sophie still needs you."

"She's grown up. She doesn't *need* me." He coughs again. "All of you should get checked up. Just in case."

"We will," Roman says. "Don't worry about Sophie. We'll make sure she's going to work, taking care of herself, all of that. Focus on you right now, Miles."

He nods and lays back. "We're not as young anymore. I miss when we could deal with broken ribs like it was nothing. Cigarettes fixed those chest pains, and whiskey took care of everything else."

"Peak picture of health," I grunt.

He chuckles and nods, then adjusts the oxygen just under his nose. He shakes his head. "I feel like I should be doing something. I hate being useless like this."

"Shut up." I snort. "You need to be working on getting better. That's useful. So rest and put all that fucking energy on fixing your insides."

Miles rolls his eyes. Nick approaches. "You hungry?"

"I get three meals a day." He shrugs. "I almost like the jello now."

We chuckle, and Roman pats his shoulder. "You know Sophia isn't going to want to leave your side."

"Well, she doesn't have a choice. She can visit once a day – after work – but her life doesn't need to revolve around me." He shrugs. "I wish I would have taken some time off before you guys left. There's so much I wanted to do with her."

"Don't talk like you're dying," Nick murmurs.

Miles looks at each of us and nods. "Right. I'm just tired. The last forty-eight hours have been a lot."

"One of us will stay with Sophie until the end of visiting hours." Holden decides. "We don't need to add to your stress."

"Or need you stressing us out." I huff. "Making me feel old and shit."

Miles chuckles. "Keep me in the loop with work and everything else, okay? Just because I'm here ... well ... if I don't keep in mind that I'm working for something, I'm going to go insane."

"Absolutely not." Sophie barks.

She comes up from behind me and crosses her arms over her chest. It doesn't matter that she has bags under her eyes, that her nose is red, and her lips are trembling. She's clearly taking charge. She points at her father.

"According to the doctor, you're this bad because you're overworked, not getting enough sleep, eating crap food, and over stressed. You're going to sit here, read, watch TV, eat, and get totally bored."

Miles smiles. "Yes, dear."

"I mean it, Dad. I'll even bribe the nurses to steal your phone if I have to. Behave and get better. We have things to do." She orders.

Roman arches his eyebrows at me, and I nod. "Sophie, we can stay until we're kicked out. The guys are going home to get things straightened out and get ready for work tomorrow."

"Fine." Her eyes don't leave her father. "Promise me you're going to put yourself first."

"Soph."

"Or me! Put me first." She sits on the bed next to him and takes his hand. "Because I want to have more time with you, Daddy. Don't take that away from me when it's so easy to get better."

He cups her face gently, and I see the love in his eyes. The kind of look I've never seen on his face. He leans forward and nods as the guys head out.

Sophie says something too softly for me to hear, and Miles sighs. "Sophie ... I promise. I'll try."

"No trying." She shakes her head. "You have to do it. For me, Dad. Please."

I take a step back. This moment is way too private for me to be here. Not only do I feel like shit considering I spent all that time in Italy distracting her, screwing her ... but I completely ignored my dad when he was passing. I couldn't watch cancer take my own father, and I can't watch Miles whither away either.

Sophia

Gunner offers to go get us food and I thank him for giving me some alone time with Dad. His eyes follow Gunner out of the room and he sighs. "Sophie, please be careful with them."

"Your best friends?"

"Yes." He nods. "I know you're grown and smart and more capable than I like to admit, but guys are guys, no matter the age and I don't want you taken advantage of."

I smile and brush his hair away from his face. "I can handle them just fine. It's you that needs to do what you're told."

He chuckles. "I promise, baby. I'm going to focus on getting better. You're going to have a lot on your plate at work, but if it gets to be too much-"

"I'll take it up with the other four partners." I point at him. "No work talk. None. When you get out of here, you're going to take a full week off and relax. We can go to the park; you can show me your favorite places in New York and we can even take those Holiday photos you like so much."

He chuckles and kisses my forehead. "I did something right with you along the way."

"Yeah. You made me stubborn." I laugh.

Laughing is easier than crying. I can do that when I'm alone. Right now, I just need a plan to fix this. I already talked

to the doctor, and he's doing what he can, but the infection is bad. Really bad. They're worried about his heart, especially because he has a thin aorta or something.

I hold Dad's hand tightly and remind myself he needs to see me fine. It's better for me to be a hard ass right now than being all kinds of weepy. Dad asks me about Italy, and I show him pictures. He smiles and lets me tell him stories of the wedding, Roman's grandmother, how beautiful the vineyards were, and the beach.

More than once, I have to mentally kick myself because I almost give away the little layer of romance on the trip as well. Then, before I know it, a nurse comes in with Gunner at her heels. I can tell he's asking for more time, but she shushes him and then looks at my Dad and me.

I'm on his bed, leaning towards him, showing him a picture I took in the city. She softens a little. "I'm very sorry, but visiting hours are over."

"There's no way for me to stay longer?" I ask, just to make sure.

"No. I don't need you staring at me, waiting for me to get better. You're just going to drive yourself insane." Dad pats my knee. "Go home with Gunner and visit me tomorrow."

I nod and squeeze his hand. I'm afraid to hug him, afraid it will hurt him somehow. The nurse walks us to the elevator, shooting Gunner frustrated looks. I know she doesn't trust us to actually leave.

But we leave through the main doors, and I turn back to look at the hospital. Gunner rubs my hips. "It'll be alright, sweets. I think you put the fear of God in him."

"I stole his phone." I lift it to show it to him. "No work."

He chuckles and kisses my cheek. "You're a hell of a woman."

The ride home is quiet. Gunner rubs my knee, but I just keep thinking about Dad, about the work I'll need to focus on when we get back to the office, and on where we're going to go from here. It'll be fine as long as I do everything right.

"Get over here." Gunner drags me towards him, testing the limits of the seat belt. He kisses my shoulder softly. "Talk to me, sweets. What's going on in your pretty head?"

"So if each of you works a little on Dad's clients, I should be able to take care of some of the basics of your jobs as well. Nothing crazy, but responding to emails, scheduling meetings, all of that. That falls under the job title. I can work from home one day a week to help Holden with any questions he has and make sure that everything is going well – plus I can visit my dad on those days and schedule that time for work and-"

Gunner turns and kisses me. "Slow down."

"I have to do something."

"You are doing plenty." He assures me. His hand softens on my chin. "I promise, Sophie, with our team, you're going to do well. Tomorrow will be the last day you'll have to babysit Neal. According to our reports, he's been doing a lot more work. Let him know you're proud of him, and if he keeps it up ... I don't know, he'll get more PTO or something."

"Okay."

"And I'm going to talk to the guys about replacing Sasha since she's more interested in gossip than work."

"Okay." I nod again.

"We're a team." Gunner's eyes search mine. His voice drops, and he lets his forehead press to mine as he inhales. "We're going to do this together, and if you ever feel alone, just grab one of us."

"You managed to get through that without flirting."

"I know. It's shocking." He smiles and gently kisses my nose. "Let the doctors do their job, but don't stop living, okay?"

"Okay."

I feel like I'm on repeat. Once we get home, Gunner keeps me close, like he's worried I'm going to pass out or faint or something. I don't blame him. I feel half awake like I'm in the twilight zone or something.

The guys are home, but the house is so silent. I tighten my hold on Gunner's shirt. He kisses the top of my head. He leaves me on the couch with Holden. "I'm getting you real food. Hospital kitchen was closed."

"Okay."

He nods, but Holden watches him for a moment before pulling me close. I snuggle against his side and breathe in his cologne. It's warm, familiar, cozy. So much like Holden in general.

Holden puts some silly heart warming rom-com thing on TV, but I swear I only get half of it. I'm focusing on what I can do if I should tell my mom what I have to do tomorrow. Holden curls me against him, pulling my legs over his until he can rub my feet. I stare at his hands, almost pull away, but he tightens his hold on me.

"Let me do this, Sophie." He whispers.

I meet his eyes, see something deeper there, and nod. He rubs my feet slowly, making sure nothing is missed. Tension edges out of my body, slowly, then all at once. I lean against him and kiss the inside of his shoulder.

"I owe you a massage back," I whisper.

He shakes his head but smiles gently.

After that we eat, even though I can barely pick at my food. I try to go to sleep alone after a much needed shower, but my bed is too big. There's just too much space, too many thoughts swirling in my head.

What if dad dies? What if he gets better and finds out what I've been doing with the guys? Should I tell Mom? What if she comes out here to try and take me back? What's going to happen with the business?

I get up and pace the floor. I don't want to go to one of the guys and disturb them. I'm sure they're just as overwhelmed and exhausted as I am ... and honestly, I'm not sure I want to be around people right now.

So I curl up on the couch, put the TV on, hoping that it will drown out the thoughts, then let myself cry. I must fall asleep at some point because I wake up to Roman. He brushes my hair from my face.

"Do you need another day, Bambina?" He murmurs. "Take it."

"No. I'll just ... work is better," I tell him. "I'll get changed."

I pull on a decent dress, heels and do enough makeup that I actually look awake. I brush through my hair and put half of it up in a clip. Roman waits for me, and we drive to work in silence.

When he parks, he rests a hand on my thigh. "I'll take care of Sasha. You take care of Neal. Okay?"

"I can do both."

He chuckles. "She will be made aware that she needs to route things appropriately and pay more attention to scheduling or else. I can deliver that threat without her getting pissy."

"Roman." I shake my head. "You don't have to protect me."

"I wouldn't dream of it." He teases.

I roll my eyes but thank him. He releases my hand when we get inside, and I see Sasha shoot me a glare. Too bad for her. I'm over her attitude, especially when I haven't given her any reason to be so rude to me all the time.

I've got enough on my plate without her trying to add to it. I go over to Neal, and he lights up. "Hey there! I've missed you around here, gorgeous."

My eyes flick to Nick, who obviously heard Neal and *very* obviously doesn't like it. I put on a smile. "I see that it hasn't affected your sales. You're doing really well."

"It just takes the special touch." He looks me over hungrily.

"Well, keep it up, and I may be able to get you another three days of PTO," I whisper. "But don't tell. It's our secret."

A slow smile spreads across his face. "And maybe a lunch with you?"

"Right now, I have a lot going on," I say seriously. "I don't want to make plans and then end up not being able to keep them. That's rude."

He blinks at me, then nods. "Yeah. Thanks, actually. I'll get to work. Those days will come in handy."

"I'm sure!" I nod and then go to my office.

I end up working on emails, scheduling, and verifying the clients my dad has been working with until nearly two. Roman knocks on my door and shakes his head at me. "Bambina, you haven't eaten."

"Neither have you." I say without looking away from the file. "Pot calling the kettle black."

"Come on. We need to fix that."

"Later." I insist.

"Sophia." Roman arches his eyebrow, then closes my office door, stalking to me before bracing his hands on my desk. "Whether you eat or not, you're taking a break."

I arch an eyebrow at him. "We have a lot to do, and I want to be done so I can-"

"There is nothing that can't wait a day." He continues around my desk. "Maybe a better question for you is are you hungry or ... do you want to be distracted?"

I blink at him. No. There's no way he's suggesting The air between us sizzles as he leans towards me. He's so close that his hair brushes my forehead, and I can't escape the woodsy, warm smell of him or fight the urge to reach out and touch him.

We're not in Italy anymore. We can't just ... go at it whenever we want to even though it sounds amazing right now. Running my hands over the hard muscles of his arms and

back, licking his neck, melting into every kiss and touch, he's a sinful kind of heaven.

He tips my chin up. "I'm starving for you, Bambina. Let me make you feel good."

"That's not the same as lunch."

His lips slowly curl up into a wicked smile I want to taste. "It is if I devour you."

I gasp, and my toes curl in my heels. He's naughty, bold, intense, and right now, I can't think of anything in the world I want more than him.

Roman

I SLIDE MY HAND AROUND THE BACK OF SOPHIA'S NECK AND brush my lips over hers. As much as I crave her, as much as I want to enjoy her, I want to make sure she's okay. Sophia rubs her hands up and over my arms.

"Fifteen-minute break?" I offer.

Sophia's breath wooshes against my cheek, and she nods. "Yes."

My lips brush across her jaw and down her throat. She clutches me tighter and arches her back. "Focus on me, Bambina. Just me. How good I'm going to make you feel."

She gasps as I drop to my knees. I pull her further towards the edge of the chair and gently kiss the inside of her knee. My hands slide up her thighs, guiding her hem up as well. Sophia's eyes stay on me as she chews her lip and blushes deeply.

"Feel good?" I ask lips against her skin.

"Yes." Her voice is low, sexy. "Yes, Roman." Her eyes flick to the door. "But what if-"

"Shh." I drag her underwear down her legs and slide under her desk.

It's cramped here, but at least I know I won't be seen. It takes some adjusting that feels more like yoga than anything, but then I jerk Sophie close to me. She glances at me and covers her mouth for a second. It doesn't matter. I see a familiar sparkle in her eyes and arch an eyebrow.

"Are you laughing at me up there?"

She lets her hand fall away, showing me a gentle smile. "You don't look very comfortable, Roman. Maybe we should reschedule this or-"

I bite the inside of her thigh hard. She grips the armrests on her chair, pulling her hips forward again; I press a kiss to her mound, then slowly drag my tongue over her slit, slow and gentle.

Her legs part further for me, and she strokes her fingers through my hair. Jerking her to the edge of her seat, I spread her legs further and lick deeper. She's soaking wet and delicious. I moan and lap at her clit while slipping two fingers into her pussy.

Sophie's back arches, and her lips part. Her beautiful eyes stay on me, dark and lusty. Her hips roll against my mouth until I clamp a hand on her. I want control right now. I want to ease her tension, want to make sure that she knows *I* can make her come without her help.

Her cheeks go red, and she covers her mouth as I increase the pace, thrusting my fingers into her tight warm pussy as I suck and lick her clit. Sophie's legs shake, and I swirl my tongue around her. A little moan escapes, and I smile slightly before doing it again.

The door opens, and I freeze. Sophie clears her throat and wipes under her eyes. "Sasha, can I help you?"

"I know you're trying to get me fired." Sasha hisses.

"That's news to me."

"Really? Because you were the one that talked to me about my focus at work, and I know someone is monitoring my computer." The snarl in her voice is new. I've never heard Sasha half this nasty, and if this is how she treats coworkers, how does she treat guests that walk in?

Not to mention, she's fucking distracting Sophie. I lick across Sophie's clit again and her hand grips my hair hard. She speaks breathlessly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Just like I know that your job is a joke. You're just trying to fuck the owners since Miles isn't enough for you. When are you going to get it? You're not their type, especially not Roman."

Fucking hell. I'm over this shit. I had Sophia on the edge of coming, and then this ... bitch walks in and ruins a perfectly good moment. I push Sophia back, stand and wipe across my lips.

"Sophia happens to be just my taste." I suck one of my wet fingers and see Sasha go bright red.

"Mr. Agosti." Sasha's blush puts Sophie's to shame. She's so red, her eyes so wide ... she kind of reminds me of those pugs – always so surprised their eyes look like they may just pop out. "I ... I um."

"You should go and you should remember who's in charge here," I say simply, then turn Sophie's chin towards me. I kiss her softly, teasing the valley of her lips with my tongue. "Unfortunately, we'll have to postpone this meeting."

Sophie nods once but then takes my hand. "I still want to visit him after work."

Sasha lingers by the door, and I fight the urge to call security. I'm done with her. She's been happily accepting her paychecks while doing half of the work expected from her, flirting with everyone that catches her eye relentlessly and treating Sophia as if she's some useless bit of eye candy that threatens Sasha's status.

I clear my throat and nod. "We'll visit your father right after work. Miles will be happy to see you."

Sasha stumbles, catching herself on the doorframe. I glower at her, and she hurries away. Sophie rubs my chest. "What if she tells?"

"If you want us to keep it a secret, we have plenty of ways to ensure that," I say calmly.

Sophie narrows her eyes at me. "You say that like you're going to hire a hitman or something."

I chuckle and shake my head. "We're not that ruthless."

Sophie smooths her skirt and looks to the side. I sigh. "Come on. We're going to see your dad now."

"What? But work!" She argues.

"Isn't as important when I can tell you'd rather check on him. You've already done more work than the average. Let's go."

She turns off the computer and jumps up, taking my hand tightly. I take her over to Gunner's office first, letting him know that we're going to see Miles. Gunner stands and gently lifts Sophie's chin, looking her over.

"Promise to crack one terrible joke for me."

Sophie looks up at him, then nods. She hugs Gunner, and he gently pets her back. He kisses her temple and nods to me. We both know that Sophia is going to be frustrated and upset until Miles is fine.

She would be bothered if anyone she cares about was in the hospital. That's how Sophia is. The dedication she put in to each of us while we were in Italy – she constantly wanted us to enjoy ourselves instead of focusing on her, which is just ... just another reason to adore her.

We end up spending only an hour at the hospital since Miles can't seem to stay awake. Before we leave, I see Sophie slip a phone under her father's pillow. She shrugs when I point it out. She only explains in the elevator, saying that she wanted to be sure she could reach him after visiting hours.

I manage to get some work done from home, then make dinner. Sophie talks with Holden for a while, writing some things down before we all sit down for dinner. I let the guys know that Sasha's aware we're working to replace her, and no one really seems to care.

Gunner actually rolls his eyes. "I'm sure someone had to *tell* her that."

"Based on the number of complaints I've gotten from partners, guests, and coworkers, It's overdue." Nick huffs. "I'll

be there to help deliver the news and ensure that we have some security to assist us."

Sophie actually eats, she looks us over, and I see her shoulders come down from her ears. She uncrosses her arms and actually relaxes into the chair, and then yawns. She managed to eat today, which is more than I can say for last night.

Holden goes back to work, Nick invites Sophie to spar with him in the gym, but she turns him down, saying she's exhausted. Nick nods, and then Gunner checks his phone. "I have three clients to deal with. Night."

Sophia looks up to where her room is and then to me. I arch an eyebrow. "Yes?"

"I ... I'm having trouble sleeping."

"How can I help? Wine? Finishing what we started at the office?"

"Sharing my room tonight?" She blinks slowly and meets my eyes. "Please?"

I take Sophia's hand and let her lead me up to her room. I pick her up, making her gasp, but her arms wind around my neck. I gently kiss Sophia's neck before dropping us both onto the bed. She rubs over my chest gently.

"We should have gotten pajamas on first," I murmur.

"Well, you took my underwear earlier today; that's what I usually sleep in." She chuckles.

For the sake of being comfortable, I kick out of my pants and toss my shirt. I drag Sophie close to me, spooning her so I can kiss across her soft shoulder. She squirms against me, and I groan against her shoulder.

"Bambina, behave."

She rubs my hand – resting on her stomach – and sighs. "Am I overreacting, Roman? When it comes to my dad?"

"I think it would be worse if you weren't worried." I kiss her neck. "And it would be out of character for you." She nods. "And you're a good distraction for me."

"Am I?" My hand slowly slides down to her abdomen. "Even though we didn't finish?"

Sophie shivers and rolls her hips against mine. "That's easy to fix."

That's all I need to hear. I slip my fingers under the hem of her dress and between her legs. Sophie nods as I tease her slowly. She's nice and wet for me, but I want her panting and moaning, begging for my touch. I rub her clit in slow circles until she whimpers.

She rolls onto her back and grips the back of my head, jerking me down to kiss her. Her tongue teases mine as I thrust two fingers inside her, rubbing that spot deep in her pussy that drives her insane. Her hips buck against my hand as her mouth opens against mine to moan. Sophia jerks her dress over her breasts.

How the hell am I supposed to resist her like this? Her back arches as she grinds herself down on my fingers. "Please, Roman."

I groan and lick across her nipple, suck and tease her as I push a third finger into her pussy. She gasps and lets out a soft moan grinding against my fingers, encouraging me for more. I suck her other nipple as I fuck her hard with my fingers. She's dripping wet, so hot and tight, perfect. Her hand tightens in my hair as her hips thrust against my hand. Sophia nearly yells my name as she comes, her pussy tightening around my fingers before she drops back into bed.

I kiss and lick between her breast and up her throat. "We can keep going until your brain is calm."

She pushes me over and tosses her dress to the side. I groan as she pulls my boxers down. Her fingers tease my cock, stroking over my shaft so lightly that I shiver. She crouches down so I can feel her breath across the tip as she strokes my length again.

She licks from my balls to the head and gives me a wicked smile before wrapping her lips all the way around me. God, her soft sucks, and the slow flicks of her tongue are driving me insane and making me impatient as hell. I lift her up and guide her down every inch she needs.

She braces herself on my chest and rolls her hips in a circle. I moan with her and press my forehead to hers as I stroke across her thighs. "You're in charge, Bambina. I'm all yours."

She thrusts forward, then rides me hard. Fuck, she's too good. Watching her body tighten, her cheeks go pink, and her tits bounce as her thighs tighten around me is overwhelming. I smack her ass appreciatively and try to hold onto her hips, so I don't come before she does.

"I thought I was in charge."

"So sorry." But I sit up, flip us, and hold her hands over her head as I thrust into her. "You'll be in charge for round two."

She moans and nods. "Promises."

She wraps herself around me and kisses my neck slowly. I pause for half a second as my heart thunders in my chest. I brush my fingers across her jaw and kiss her rather than saying what's on my tongue. I can't throw more stress on her shoulders by admitting I'm in love with her ... yet.

Sophia

I STRETCH MY LEGS AS I WAKE UP AND FEEL ROMAN'S ARM tighten around me. It's easier to bury my face in his chest and stroke his side than open my eyes. He makes a low sound in his throat, and my lips slowly turn up.

Last night felt like a lot more than sex. Sure the first round was hot and needy like it almost always is with Roman, but that second time ... he'd been so gentle. He'd given me control, allowed me to kiss, to tease, to hold *him* down, and it only made our sex more intimate. To the point, I don't really want to call it sex.

It was much more than that. But I can't think about sifting through those soft, warm emotions yet. I can't deal with my heart thudding heavy and strong in my chest. I have a father to take care of, a job to do, and I need to get my brain back together.

"Bambina." Roman murmurs as his lips press to the top of my head, and he pulls me closer to him. When I don't answer, he brushes his fingers through my hair.

Maybe if I keep breathing heavy, if I don't answer, he'll just assume I'm asleep. Roman lifts my chin anyway and kisses the spot between my eyebrows, then my nose. Before he can get to my lips, I draw back.

I cover my mouth with my hand. "I haven't brushed yet."

"I don't care. Farei qualsiasi cosa per te." He tugs at my wrist, and I give in. I don't know if it's the Italian he's using,

the fact I can't resist him, or that little jump my heart just did.

His eyes churn as he leans towards me, and I can feel his breath pick up. If I didn't know better, I'd say Roman was nervous. He swallows and glances from my eyes to my lips before leaning into me. His lips brush mine, then he kisses me again, deeper as he strokes my back and cups my cheek in his hand.

When his tongue teases mine, I pull away and cover my mouth again. He chuckles and rolls onto his back as I hop to the bathroom. The last thing I want is for him to have a memory of my morning breath. If my breath smells bad, then my mouth has to taste bad too, right?

"What did that mean?" I ask once I finish scrubbing my teeth and checking my breath.

"You should study Italian more if you want to know all my secrets." He teases.

I see him getting on boxers and grabbing his clothes as if I wouldn't wash them. He treats me to a smile and kisses my temple. "Ready for work today?"

"I will be in a few minutes."

"Good. Then I'll see you there." Another soft kiss on my lips.

My eyes follow him as he heads out. I blink a few times and shake my head. No, Roman has his sweet moments. Nothing's changed. I'm just reading into it to give my mind something to do. That's all.

I pull on an emerald colored top and white slacks. After stepping into heels and finishing my makeup, I head downstairs—just another day at the office before I can spend some time with dad. I turn my phone over in my hand, still not sure if I should tell Mom what's going on.

The last thing I want is for her to fly out here and demand I go home – as if I'm some sixteen-year-old who can't take care of herself and doesn't have commitments. I wouldn't go. And she can't legally make me. She can't even use guilt with Dad

in the situation he's in, but it's probably better to avoid the fight.

I'll decide later.

Holden greets me in the kitchen and kisses my cheek as he rubs my hips. "I'm going to see your dad today. Would you like to come?"

"Of course." I pull out a bagel for him. "How has work been since we've been back?"

He shrugs and I don't expect anything more. I make us each a bagel and hand it to him. He looks at it a moment, then smiles. "Honestly, it's strange being back in my room all the time. I miss our adventures in Italy."

"We can still have plenty of adventures here. New York has a lot to offer if you leave the house." I tease him. "We could see if there are any markets going on, or we could just walk around time square at night."

"I'll think about it." He glances down at my knees.

I know he's thinking of when I was grabbed in Italy. But as long as he's there, I know I'm safe. I rub his chest. "I wouldn't walk around here without you either, Holden. Plus, I love seeing you in guard dog mode."

He swats my ass as he chuckles.

Nick scoops me up to take me to work and follows me into my office, reading something off of his phone in terms of personnel changes that we need to make and how that's going to affect some of the emails I need to send out.

"You're not the one that does the firing, but I want to make sure that we have them marked properly when it comes to payroll and their security clearance so everything follows through the way it should."

"Okay. I don't think I've done that before, so I might need some help."

"That's what I'm here for." He pats my hand gently, then his fingers stroke over my wrist.

We stand in my office for a minute, just holding hands while he considers something. I clear my throat. I can manage one day in the office actually being professional for the first time, right? Not that it's as fun, but

"How are you?" He asks, pinning me with his gaze. "Really? I know that you haven't really had much time to yourself since we've been home."

"I had the whole first night to myself and that was awful. How do you get your brain to stop when it just wants to see every bad possibility?" I sit on the edge of my desk.

"Me, or people in general?"

"You. Specifically. You always seem to have such a good grip on life." I shake my head and smile slightly. "Or does that come with age?"

"Pushing the age card now, Sophia?" He shakes his head and steps closer to me. "That's low."

"I'm kind of serious. I barely feel like a real adult most days. I know I am one, but I still feel eighteen and unprepared a lot of the time."

He nods and thinks about that for a second. "I can tell you that we wouldn't be confident having you in this position if that was the case. You do know what you're doing. You doubt yourself, but that's a good thing in moderation. It will keep you pushing to be better, stronger, more eager to move up in the world while also keeping you humble at the same time, and that's a good thing, Soph."

"Thanks."

"I mean it." He takes both my hands. "I do. You're so good at your job, Sophie. You're good at managing people. You are an *asset* to our team. Here and at home."

I smirk slightly and shake my head. "Of course you bring up home."

"Everything will be okay with your dad. He has the best doctors there. And we're here for you." His fingers lace through mine. "However you need us."

Nick clears his throat, then laughs softly. "Look at this. Head of H.R. riding the line on work place appropriate things."

"Seems like you're giving up the high ground, Nick," I murmur.

"Only if I kiss you."

Our eyes meet, and it takes actual effort to keep from doing exactly that. I'm starving for distraction, but even more than that, I want him to know how much I appreciate him. I want all the guys to know that what we were doing in Italy, the conversations we shared, how close we got, that doesn't disappear now that we're back home.

Even if the dynamic shifts because work is a big time commitment. I rub over his chest. "Well, Mr. H.R., how much trouble would it get me in if *I* kissed *you*."

He considers that, tapping his jaw. "Depends on who sees."

I laugh and shake my head. "You're ridiculous."

"I'm honest ... but they overlap sometimes." Nick chuckles.

I lean forward, my nose brushing across his as I struggle for control. If we weren't at work, I'd already be on top of him. Nick's magnetic, sweet, gentle, and I love taking control with him. I take a deep breath and peck his lips quickly.

He shakes his head. "I don't need to be worried if that's what you consider a kiss."

"Is that a challenge?" I ask.

"Did it sound like one, Sophie?"

I jerk him towards me by his shirt and really kiss him, sucking his bottom lip between mine before licking into his mouth. He holds the back of my head as I jerk him tighter against my body. Nick tastes like coffee and something sweet and his tongue massages mine so perfectly that I moan.

He tightens his hold on me, and I draw him into another kiss, pushing the limits on what we should be doing at work, but I can't help it. I can't help myself with any of these men. They broke whatever restraint I had long ago.

When I do pull back, I lick across my lips, wanting to taste more of Nick even though I know we have to stop. He exhales slowly and takes a step back. "You are pure temptation, Sophia."

"Funny, I was thinking that about you." I run my fingers down over his buttoned-up shirt. "If only your office didn't have people running in and out every day."

"That's a tease." He grumbles.

I laugh softly, then look past him and see Sasha with a vicious smile on her face. She turns, and I grab Nick's hand. "So remember that thing you were worried about? Someone seeing us."

His face pales. "Yes."

"Sasha just did, and I think she's on the warpath." I take his hand and lead him after her. "I shouldn't have kissed you. I'm sorry."

"I'm not." He chuckles. "But we should be more careful at work."

"Especially in that elevator if memory serves." I wink at him.

He shakes his head. "Well, we had some privacy there. It's better than your office."

"Especially considering Sasha walked in yesterday and interrupted"

"Oh, I'm well aware of that," Nick says, releasing my hand. "I got an earful."

I feel my face get hot and shake my head. He hums in his throat. "Shame, I think I misplaced that paperwork, though. I was too busy working on another project involving Sasha."

He winks at me, and I chuckle. Before we can catch Sasha though I run into Holden. Nick continues on, but Holden steadies me as his eyes flick all over the room, taking it in. He actually looks professional, a nice white shirt and black slacks.

"What are you doing here?"

"I um ..." He glances at the crowd of people again, all loud and talking over each other. I pull him to the break room that's currently empty. "I need to talk to Gunner about a few charges I noticed on the main account since they don't line up with previous months."

"Oh. Okay, let's get you there in one piece." I offer.

Nick is more than capable of taking care of Sasha. So I'll invest my time where it can do more. I rub Holden's arm. "He's close, don't worry, and none of those salesmen will bother you."

I'm going to make damn sure of that. I owe him some bodyguard skills.

Holden

I HATE THE OFFICE. ABSOLUTELY HATE IT. It'S LOUD, distracting, filled with people, and I've done everything to avoid coming here in the past. I'd call, email, then I'd say screw it and let it be the other guys problem. It meant I didn't have to drive, didn't have to deal with anyone's looks or questions, and didn't have to fight my urge to move through the loud main floor like a man being hunted.

After Italy and with Sophia, it's not quite as hard. I can focus on her moving through the crowd, taking care of people who come up with a few words. She really is something else. The way she fixes problems so quickly without letting them distract her, how easily she takes charge when she's in her element. No wonder I can't imagine a day without her.

She reaches back for me to make sure I'm still there, and I smile but keep my hands to myself. I'd be too tempted to push for more. Italy ruined me that way. Being without her for more than a day turns me into an animal.

How many times have I jerked off since I've been home? How tempted was I to bend her over the counter this morning and ruin that perfect outfit? I take a slow breath as she opens a door for me.

Gunner looks up from his desk as we enter, and Sophie makes sure to shut the door this time. Smirking, Gunner looks between us. "Did we have a meeting planned, or is this some spontaneous fun I'm sensing?"

"Head out of the gutter." Sophie points at him.

He leans back in his chair and settles for a wolfish smile instead of pushing the point. Sophie sits in one of the chairs and motions to me. "He's all yours."

"But I like you as a friend." Gunner chuckles.

I roll my eyes and refocus on the issue. Gunner looks at the charges I've flagged on his computer and nods. "I'll have to talk with Neal about this one since that's his client. This other charge specifically ... it'll take some research. I'll talk to Roman too."

"It was done while we were in Italy," I say evenly.

"Of course. When the cats are away, the mice will take all the shit they can."

"Not the saying." Sophie's foot bounces on the floor.

Gunner glances from her to me then walks out of his office. "Be right back. Stay out of trouble, you two."

I pace behind Sophie, glancing out at the crowd. At least Gunner's office is quiet. It also smells like old tobacco and whiskey. Not the worst combination, almost warm. A lot like Gunner himself, honestly.

Sophia stands and rubs my arm. "You're safe here, Holden."

"I know."

And logically, I do. We're in New York. We're in an office I've spent time in before. No one here is going to suddenly unload. People come to their offices every day and embrace the chaos. It's normal and easy for most. It should be easy for me. Logically it is. I came to fix an issue, and I'll be able to leave soon enough.

But my emotions don't give two shits about what's logical. My gut is screaming for me to leave. My head can't help dragging up the crowds from overseas, the damage they promised when we were stuck in one. It's so easy to miss something with so much going on, and it could be fatal and-

"Holden." Sophie's hands grab mine tightly.

I focus on her. Her hair is coming free from her pins. I brush it from her face with my knuckles, unwilling to let go of her hands. She's a shot of sanity. Every touch calms, keeps me in the present, pulls me out of my head.

But I know it's not fair for me to rely on her for that. She smiles and kisses my knuckles. "Do you remember when we were at the garden?"

"Yes."

"Remember how peaceful it was, all the birds?"

The birds were nice, actually. I've never been a huge fan of them but seeing how little they cared about everyone, how they could just tune out the children laughing and playing, how they just focused on enjoying the pond ... damn, even ducks are better at relaxing than me.

"That's what I think of when I get overwhelmed. A place that I liked, a place where I felt safe and happy." Sophie continued. "And it's easier if it's real, from my experience anyway."

Like her being in my room, on top of me, riding me hard and fast, her moans echoing. No, that's a memory best put to work, not used to relax. I lick across my bottom lip as I look down at Sophie.

She shoves me slightly. "Don't look at me like that ... here."

I arch an eyebrow and pull her closer to me. She shivers. "Hold, we have to ... save that for home."

"Later then?" I whisper.

She bites back a smile and nods.

I still remember when she came into the house from work and started stripping. I wouldn't stop her this time. I'd let her tear it all off, then make the most of it, of her. We'd get all her frustration taken care of, talk, cuddle, cook. It could be a hell of an afternoon.

Her cheeks turn pink, and I pull a hand free to brush over her jaw and bottom lip. Fuck, I want this woman. I want to see her every day, hear about her work, make her laugh, make her moan. Sophie leans towards me slightly.

"You're more relaxed now."

Because I'm thinking about her, not someplace in Italy, I smile and nod once. Gunner still isn't back though. I glance at the office, at everyone not paying attention, and drag her against me. Sophie gasps.

"A preview of later?"

She gives me a nervous nod, and I devour her mouth. Patience means nothing with her in front of me. I lick along her tongue, pull her hand to my chest, and devour the moan that comes from her throat.

I kiss her again, feeling her body press to mine as she changes the angle on me. She's not allowed to taste this good, to stir me up with just a kiss, to make it impossible to think of not going further. I bite her bottom lip so hard she squeaks.

Laughing, she covers her mouth as she pulls back. "So I get more of that when I get home?"

"You can have anything I can give," I promise her.

"Well, I can think of a few things." She rubs over my chest again.

When someone opens the door, she takes a step back. It's that receptionist. The one we're talking about firing. She looks at Sophie, then me, and snorts. "Wow, so Nick isn't good enough for you? What a slut."

"Can I help you, Sasha?" Gunner's voice is deadly, a threat as a question.

I walk to the side with Sophie to make room for the other two, and Gunner shuts the door and hits a button that frosts the glass walls of his office. He crosses his arms over his chest as he glowers at the poor girl.

"Well, I ..."

"Please, share. If you have a problem with one of your superiors."

"She's *not* my superior. She's an assistant too." Sasha hisses.

I take Sophie's hand at my side and squeeze. Sasha continues. "And I saw her kissing someone else today already."

"Oh?" Gunner's eyes flick to us, and I see the smile playing at the corner of his mouth. He gets it under control. "Please explain."

"I don't want to throw any other *colleagues* under the bus." She sniffs. "But I think that this *girl* is a walking H.R. problem."

"I like to know all the details."

"Mr. Henderson." She rubs her forehead, then sits in the chair. Gunner sits on his desk, focusing on her and her alone. "I saw Sophia kiss Mr. Grayson this morning and just now," Sasha looks at us. "she kissed Mr. Thomas."

Gunner rubs across his jaw, but I know it's a game. As if he hasn't come on to Sophie at work himself, hasn't stolen a kiss or many. He must cover up his reputation pretty well if Sasha thinks he'll have a problem with this.

"I see. That is concerning."

"Thank you!"

"Sophie." Gunner looks over at her, and she leans into my side. "Is this true?"

"Yes."

"I'm hurt. Truly." He puts a hand over his heart. "Thank you, Sasha, for bringing this to my attention."

She gives Sophie a dirty look before sitting up higher and rubbing over her bare knee. "I thought you'd like to know. I've suspected she's sleeping with Mr. Langston as well."

"The hits just keep coming." Gunner runs his fingers through his hair. "I mean, first you kiss Nick and Holden and leave me out, now you're sleeping with your father?"

I smirk as Sasha's face goes pale. "What?"

"Mr. Langston is my dad." Sophie huffs. "And he's in the hospital right now, so thanks for that reminder."

Sasha swallows and looks down. Gunner points at Sophia. "And that other part of what I said?"

I push her towards Gunner, and she looks at me with a question in her eyes. She hesitates, but Gunner drags her against him, his hand fully on her ass. "Leaving me out of the fun?"

"Gunner." She warns, poking his chest. "We're at work."

"Which means what?"

I chuckle softly, drawing Sasha's attention just as Gunner steals Sophia's mouth. She grabs at his shirt, but I watch her melt against him. She makes a soft sound as Gunner continues. Sasha's face is priceless. She's bright red, eyes furious and budding with tears.

If she hadn't tried to attack Sophie's reputation, I might feel bad for her. As it is, she's a problem, one we're all aware of. Gunner groans and draws back, shaking his head. "My favorite trick? Is that how you're planning to get back on my good side, sweets?"

Sophie laughs softly and shakes her head. "You're harder to win over than that."

Gunner sighs. "Your job at this company is at its end, Sasha. Pack your things and head out."

"What?!" She jumps up. "Over one slut?"

"No. Your work ethic is the problem. You've canceled meetings without telling us, you're constantly on your phone, you're rude to guests and applicants, and you'd rather gossip than answer the phone. Feel free to see H.R. if you'd like to settle anything."

She looks between us. For half a second, I think she's going to beg me for her job, but I arch an eyebrow. She sucks her bottom lip as it trembles and swallows. "This isn't over."

"It's over here." Gunner releases Sophie and leans towards Sasha. "Sophia does all her work whether we distract her or not. Can you say the same?"

"Fuck you." She hisses. "You just made a huge mistake."

"Yeah, but blackmail is so nineties." Gunner rolls his eyes. "Go on. To H.R. or out the door. Unless I need to involve security."

Sasha shoots him a look that would kill a lesser man, then storms out of the office, cursing as she goes. Roman leans into the office and notices all of us. He shakes his head. "What did you do, Gunner?"

"Took care of a problem." He shrugs. "Are we in a Whiskey mood or a brandy mood now?"

"I'm in a *home* mood," I say simply. I kiss Sophie's cheek with the promise of later hanging in the air, then nod to Roman. "Let me know."

"Will do." As I leave, I hear Roman again. "So, Gunner, explain the bullshit I'm going to have to deal with for you."

I chuckle. The drama never ends.

Sophia

"THANKS, NICK," I SAY AS HE HELPS ME OUT OF THE CAR, AND we head to see Dad in the hospital. I don't bother to stop at the reception desk. I know where I'm going. Nick takes my hand and carries my purse. "Only until we get up there."

"Well, you teased me with the elevator earlier."

I shiver and follow through as soon as the doors shut. I shove Nick against the wall and devour him, really give in to the frustration I've been fighting all day. Nick, Holden, and Gunner all working me up this morning and then actually working all day.

Nick holds my hips in place until I push one of his hands to my ass. I need to be touched, need to get more than something innocent. The door dings before I can get as naughty as I want, and I step back when someone else gets on with us. Nick grabs my ass again, making me smile from ear to ear.

It feels extra hot knowing that there's someone right here who doesn't know what's going on between us. And we have to behave in front of my dad. I know that. But I love playing this game, with all of them.

I love that they don't make me choose. It would be impossible at this point. I feel like I need each of them in a different way. Nick is sweet, sexy as hell, encourages me, and he's reliable. We are like real partners in everything we do. Holden is quiet and unsure, but I like being the one who brings him out of his shell. I like our long talks; I love how

determined he is to be strong and protect me. Gunner makes me laugh like no one else, and his charm goes right to my heart ... and between my legs. But he's real too, has so much going on under his jokes and I love being treated to those secrets, especially when he's buried inside me. And Roman. Oh god, Roman. Sexy, assertive, but with a soft side that gets under my skin and pulls me towards him until I feel like I can't get enough.

"You're blushing, Soph." Nick purrs in my ear. "Want to tell me what's going on in your head?"

"Oh no. Top secret." I tease, bumping his hip. "You just remember to behave."

"I should be saying that to you." He winks.

By the time we're in Dad's room, I'm refocused. He looks a little better today, not quite as exhausted or pale. He takes my hand and kisses my cheek. "How are you, my baby?"

"Work is a big adjustment, but I think we have a good handle on things."

"The guys aren't working you to the bone, are they? I'll put them in their place if they are." Dad sits up and points at Nick. "Just because I'm not there doesn't mean you can stick Sophia with the shit end of the stick."

Nick holds his hands up defensively. "We're not, Miles."

Dad nods, then lays back, already exhausted. I sit on the edge of his bed and look at the food he's given. Chicken noodle soup — mostly broth — some crackers to go with it, jello, and juice — only one — with a pitcher of water.

"Dinner is served." He murmurs.

"We need to get you some better food," I grumble, wrinkling my nose.

"Don't knock soup." Nick points at me. "It's got everything a recovering body needs."

"Absolutely." Dad agrees. He eats slowly, and after a bit, I notice his hand shakes.

I want to offer to feed him, but I know my dad. He loves his independence, and I don't want to make him feel like he can't do it for himself. I especially don't want to do anything that would make him feel even less as my father.

He sighs and pats my knee. "I'm doing okay, baby. Don't give me that face."

"I'm allowed to worry about you," I whisper.

Nick clears his throat. "I'm just going to talk to the doctor if I can ... find him."

Dad doesn't even look over at him. He brushes his fingers over my cheek. "Sophia, I love you. I'm not working. I'll be home soon, and then you'll have to deal with me all the time. You should be enjoying your freedom."

"I feel like I'm missing out on time together," I whisper. "When the doctor called, I was so afraid you were in an accident, or your heart gave out, and all I could think about was everything we haven't done."

"I'm sturdier than that," Dad whispers. "And I'm not going anywhere before you get married and give me a grandchild."

I laugh. "Slow down there."

He chuckles and shakes his head. "We'll spend more time together when I get out of here. I promise. Hell, if you want, we can even go camping again?"

"Last time we did that, you spent three hours getting mad that I didn't know how to shoot a gun, Dad."

"And by the end, you could knock cans off a fence from thirty yards." Pride makes him glow.

I nod and feel my eyes water. Dad sits up to hug me and rubs my back. "It's okay, baby."

"I know."

"So, what's wrong?"

"I just ..." I could tell him. I could tell him right now why I'm feeling so guilty.

I want to spend time with him, of course, and make up for all the years I didn't see him, but if we're spending time together, that means I'll get less time with the guys, and that just sounds awful. I don't want to give up anything. Not work, not my dad, not the guys.

We haven't even talked about what's going to happen when Dad comes home, how it's going to change things. And I know it will.

"It's okay, baby."

"I'm so worried about you. What if this happens again?" I whisper.

"I promise to eat better, take some vitamins, maybe I'll even join Roman on his jogs."

I laugh, and just like that, we're okay. My other worries are mine, and Dad can focus on healing and resting. He doesn't need more stress on his shoulders. After another thirty minutes, he sighs and tells me to head home so he can nap.

I kiss his cheek, tell him I love him, and Nick happily takes me back to the house. I run upstairs to shower and change. I pull on silk pajama shorts and the matching top along with a cotton robe. It's nice and thin, but I'm more comfortable than I've been all day.

Going to the kitchen, I decide to make dinner for everyone: a few steaks, asparagus, some rice. A tan hand steals the asparagus pan from me, and I see Roman. He pulls me close to him, ignoring that I'm doing something, and kisses me hungrily.

Melting into him feels normal. Nibbling his bottom lip, his tongue filling my mouth as we kiss, holding onto the back of his neck as I stretch on my toes, all normal. He draws back and chuckles. "I got quite the story from Gunner today."

"Are you going to tell me you feel left out too?"

He shakes his head. "I got you all last night, remember?"

How could I possibly forget? I squirm a little. "Stop distracting. I have to finish dinner."

"We'll eat together, and we can have a game night or movies."

"Game night?" Gunner asks.

He's already holding a glass of liquor. He looks me over and grins. "I vote for strip poker."

I roll my eyes.

"Or we could play truth or dare."

"We're not teenagers." Nick sighs, stretching his arms as he walks in. "Smells delicious."

I focus on the steaks as more ideas for games come up and Roman takes care of the sides. A kiss presses to my cheek, and I look up to see Holden. He looks at what we're making and chooses a wine. He pulls down glasses as Roman and I finish up.

All of us in the kitchen, talking and working together. It feels like a family. Not exactly a normal one, that's for sure, but it feels right. I belong here, with all of them. After plating the steaks, Gunner makes that clear by stealing me and putting me on his lap.

"We're adults, Nick. I don't want to play fucking Candy Land or Monopoly either."

I take his glass from him and steal a mouthful before handing it back. Nick rolls his eyes. "We could do video games instead."

"Or we can eat like civilized adults." Holden pushes plates towards us and sets wine glasses next to them.

Roman chuckles. "Who here is civilized?"

We eat and joke around about all the things we could do, but my mind just keeps circling about the night I was shared. I'd like that again. All of them, together. Pleasing them, touching them. That would be amazing. Roman's cock filling my throat while Nick fucks me. Holden stroking my tits as I jerk him off. Gunner giving me orders and praises while keeping me in just the right place, waiting for his turn.

"Sophie?"

I blink a few times and look over at Gunner. His lips twist into a devilish smile. "I think you have a good plan for the evening based on that look."

I swallow and shrug. "I don't know what you mean."

"Sharing is caring, sweets."

"What do you like better, Sophie?" Nick says after shooting Gunner a look. "Board games or video games?"

"We could play scrabble." I shrug.

Gunner and Nick moan. "Please, god no."

"Afraid of my running lead?" Roman laughs.

Holden points at him. "Only because you check every single word played constantly."

I laugh as they continue debating about what game is best to play. We end up settling for poker – strip poker – and I'm led to a game room with a poker table already set. To be fair about stripping, since apparently Holden has pulled off his prosthetic before and said it counts, Gunner, pours everyone a shot.

"If you don't strip, you drink." He says clearly. "Sophie, you know how to play poker, right?"

"If I don't, are you really going to complain?" I arch an eyebrow.

"Nope." Roman chuckles.

We laugh as we play. Holden does surprisingly well and keeps aiming at Gunner to get him naked. Gunner tosses his socks at Holden, and Holden just puts them in the pot as if they're worth something. I love how easy it is to be with them, how much fun we have as a group and separately.

I know what we have is special, considering I *love* being here. Nick wins the hand and looks at us losers before turning his eyes to me. "Come on, Sophie."

I take off my robe and let it fall over the chair. Roman takes in the view, and I feel his foot brush mine under the table. Gunner shakes his head. "Okay, not fair. Sophie's a distraction."

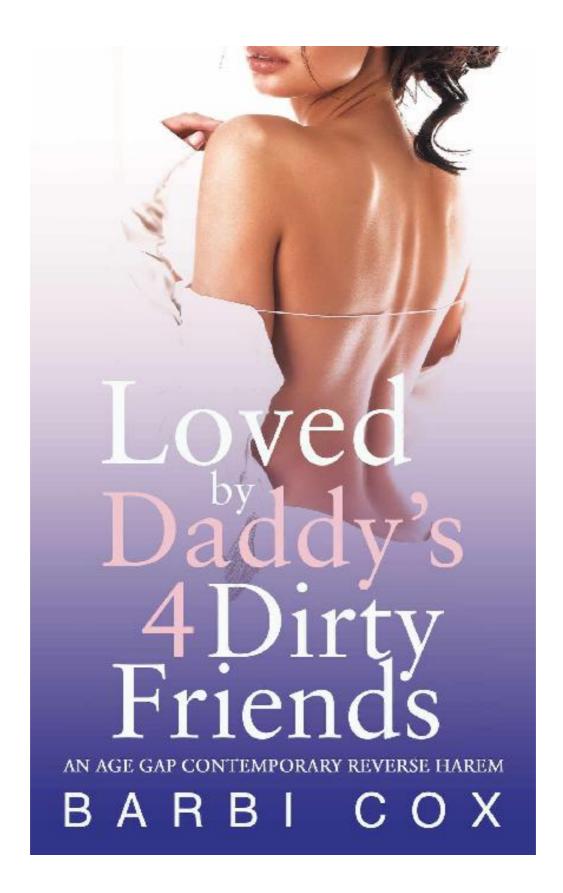
"It was your choice to play the game." Nick reminds him.

"A real poker player wouldn't choke." Holden winks at me.

I bite my lip as we go another round. Even with dad in the hospital, even with all the drama at work today, even knowing that things are going to be changing soon, I'd rather take advantage of each moment than let the future creep in and ruin it.

When I'm down to my underwear, I reveal a royal flush, and the guys groan. Each of them takes off a piece of clothing, and I smile as I get to look over everything I have. Four sexy men who care about me treat me like an equal. Four men looking at me with hungry eyes.

Hell yes. This is what our kind of happiness looks like.



Roman

I GLANCE AT THE TIME, DRUM MY FINGERS ON MY DESK, THEN look across the main room to Sophia's office. It's been a few days since our fun poker night and since we fired Sasha. So far, everything has been good. We've been able to balance our time with work and Sophia and keep her happy and taken care of. In the last twenty-four hours, she's been more smiley and closer to her old self.

But I can't shake the rock that's weighing in my gut. As if we're just waiting for something to hit the fan. Gunner knocks on my door before opening it. "Hey, we have interviews set up for today. Would you like to be included?"

"You and Nick can handle that," I tell him. "He's the H.R. person, and you're you. I need to keep this moving." I motion to the computer. "It's not like we're hiring another Bella."

He nods, then glances over at Sophia. "No, we have that covered pretty well now."

I roll my eyes, clear my throat, and arch an eyebrow at Gunner. He nods, smacks the papers against his palm, then heads out. I don't know why that comment bugged me slightly. Maybe it's the fact that he compared Bella and Sophia when they're entirely different; Gunner knows that.

Sophia, like Bella, doesn't have a problem with us sharing her, but she's so much more. She spends time with us, kisses us every day, joins in on game nights, cooks with us, talks with us. It's not just sex, and that's been clouding things for me. Because I'm pretty sure that I want more than sex and make out moments with her, and I'm even more confident that I'm not the only one. Nick, Gunner, and Holden all shine brighter with Sophia around.

I shake my head. No. This is the wrong time to focus on her like this. As it is, my cock is already stirring in my pants. I pinch the inside of my lower thigh, and that helps bring me to the present, where I have three pissy clients to deal with.

An hour before I call it a day, Sophia comes into my room and shuts the door behind her. It threatens my self-control. We've gotten naughty more than once at work, and there's nothing I enjoy more than leaving her right on the edge until we get home. It keeps her focused on the moment instead of on her father in the hospital.

She walks over to me, and I click the button on my remote that frosts the windows around my office. Sophie's lips turn up at the corner, and she leans back on my desk, her auburn hair rolling over one shoulder as her eyes flick to mine and catch.

Her heel brushes my ankle, drawing my attention to her long legs on display in that damn skirt she has on. Sophia's body is lush, familiar, warm. I swear, if I was a cartoon, either my heart would be lurching from my chest as my eyes bugged out of my head, or I'd be howling like a wolf and drooling.

"Are we going to the hospital today?"

"We are." I agree, trying to focus on her face rather than every dirty thing we could get away with in this office right now. Like bending her over, pushing that skirt up over her hips, and teasing her with my cock until she begs me for more, begs me to fuck her like she's mine. I curl my hand into a fist. "As I promised this morning."

"Okay." She bites her bottom lip, and her cheeks flush a little.

"Bambina ... now's the time to get to the point." I hear the warning in my voice, so I'm sure she does too.

"I feel like we need to tell Dad." She whispers. "About us ... all of us. Every time I see him, I feel guilty. Like I'm just

lying to his face by not saying anything to him."

"Sophia ... I'm not sure that's the best plan of action here. He's still recovering. Once he gets home with the doctor's clearance, we can start that conversation. Let's not rush him into it."

"That's why I haven't said anything yet!" She pulls herself up and onto my desk. She looks to the side and leans back. Her chest heaves with every quick breath, and I'm worried she's going to pop a button if she keeps this up. "But I feel so bad. He's trying so hard to connect with me, and I can't even share one of the biggest, most important things in my life."

"Well, of course, you want to show off your toys." I tease.

She puts her heel on my chest as I move towards her and pins me with a serious, almost hurt gaze. "You know that I don't see any of you guys like that. You're all important to me, so important."

"I know, Bambina."

"More than sex. You guys are ... you make me feel like I'm part of the best possible family. I come home and know that I'm going to enjoy every second of game night, making dinner, showering, or anything else we do."

My hand caresses her calf, sliding along the underside of her knee and thigh until Sophie shivers. She points at me. "We need to tell him."

In one move, I pluck her from the desk and pull her over my lap so she's straddling me. I cup her face in my hands and press my forehead to hers. "We will. Soon."

"Today."

"If you think his health can handle that, then fine. Otherwise, I think we should wait until he gets home." I insist.

Sophia's hands slide over my shoulders and along my neck. Her touch is so light, but a trail of heat burns through my skin, sinking deeper and deeper until it warms my core. She leans her head to the side slightly, and the tease of her breath

on my lips, the way her light floral perfume twists my head, how warm and soft her body is on mine ... drives me insane.

Even if I call myself a dom, I know I'm powerless against her when she's gentle and slow like this. I want to bask in her sweet affection forever. Sophia exhales shakily as her eyes stroke over my face. Her nose brushes mine, and a familiar surge of impatient need rips through me.

I wrap my hand around the back of her neck and claim her mouth. Sucking her bottom lip isn't enough today. I lick across the part in her lips and dive deeper when she opens to me. Sophia's tongue is pure sin.

The way she rolls it against mine, the breathy whimpers and moans that echo from her throat as I devour her, her hands tightening in my shirt as her thighs squeeze my hips. I groan and stroke down her back, grabbing her ass in one hand while fisting her hair in my other.

My computer dings, and I draw back, panting hard. Sophia rubs over my chest slowly and nods. "Soon."

"Are we still talking about telling your father or something else?" I ask, raising an eyebrow.

A blush lights her face, and she runs a hand through her hair, trying to sort it a little bit as she gets off me. Looking over her shoulder when there's an entire desk between us, her gaze strokes me from cock to face and back, and I fight the urge to chase her and drag her back to my desk.

"You'll see when we get home." She promises with a wicked glint to her eyes.

Sophia is sweet and loving and submissive, but I know there's more to her than that. She has a demanding, lusty, dirty side that could easily rival mine if she let it out. Something tells me if I pushed her just right, denied her for just long enough, edged her a few minutes too long, that tiger inside her would make an appearance.

And I'm tempted to do just that considering she's gotten me hard, teased me with a kiss that set every rational thought in my head on fire, and then left. "Business first," I tell myself as I look at my computer.

I still have more than a few emails to address, and then we need to go visit Miles. Sophia didn't go yesterday since we didn't get out of work until nearly seven-thirty. And she's been on edge about her father in general.

Every day he gets better or doesn't get worse, I see her antsy glances once we get home. After every round of sex, she's been nervously returning to her bedroom, like she's afraid her Dad has cameras or something.

I know that lying to him isn't easy, even if it's not actually lying. It's maintaining a covert mission from someone who isn't on a need-to-know basis, even if that person is a friend. A friend who's saved my life on at least one occasion, one who's always been so proud of his daughter that he couldn't shut up about her even when we were in enemy territory.

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I close my eyes for a moment.

Sophia is Miles' daughter. I've known that since I first laid eyes on her, but only now, when we head to the hospital, and she maintains a focused approach to the hospital, and its staff, do I realize exactly how messed up I am.

Fucking one of my best friends' daughters... with his other friends. But it's not just fucking. I don't just throw Sophie down, fuck her, come, and go. I cuddle her, cook for her, make her laugh, take care of her.

Which has to make it better, right?

Sophia takes my hand in the elevator. "I have such a bad feeling."

The rock still weighing my stomach down agrees. "About what?"

"I don't know. The closer we get to his room, the sicker I feel. Like I need to run away or something. I don't know what it is exactly. The hospital wouldn't have called my mom or anything, would they?"

"Not if they're no longer married on paper. You were listed as next of kin." I ensure her, squeezing her hand. "Bambina, I'm right here."

"I know." She nods and leans towards me. "Thank you for that. I'm just ... worried. Mom isn't a person that anyone should be around if they need less stress in their life."

I have wondered about Miles' ex repeatedly. They ended before I had a chance to meet her, and I've always wondered about the woman who was so able to give up a man like him – driven, focused, proud of his family, and willing to do whatever it took to maintain a family.

Maybe it's better, I don't know. I wouldn't be able to meet her eyes without feeling like some kind of villain. After all, how many times did Miles join in with us when we were with Bella? And now, four of us were actively taking up every free moment of Sophia's time – as long as she wanted us.

Not exactly the best way to meet a buddy's ex-wife.

But when we get towards Miles' room, I see a different bitch, one I didn't think would actually follow through on threats considering she's never followed through on a damn thing in her life. Sasha doesn't even look up from her phone as she leaves Miles' hospital room.

Oh fuck.

Sophie

ROMAN TUGS MY HAND, PULLING ME AWAY FROM DAD'S ROOM at the last possible second. I arch an eyebrow at him. "I said when we get home, not in public."

He turns me so I see a familiar bitchy blonde stomping her foot as she waits for the elevator. Sasha. No. No. I look to Dad's room, then to Roman. He nods once like he's afraid to say it. Like the moment he opens his mouth, all of our shit is going to fall out.

Is my relationship with the guys really that fragile? If my dad told them to leave me alone, would they? I swallow, and my knees shake, knocking into one another as I consider that. I haven't made any friends since being here.

The guys have consumed my thoughts, my time, everything – not that I'm complaining about that – but now I could lose them all in every sense if they stay loyal to dad and do what he wants.

And I know that Sasha told him. Why else would she visit a hospital when she's clearly too good for the sterile halls. She dips into the elevator, never seeing us. Roman rubs my hip and kisses the side of my head.

"You wanted to do today, right?"

"Yeah, but *I* wanted to tell him. It makes it so much worse if someone else does. Do you think Sasha really ..." I can't even finish a sentence, let alone walk into Dad's room. "We could wait until tomorrow."

Roman's eyes soften. "Bambina, we made a decision, all five of us, and we confirmed our choices multiple times in Italy and here."

My cheeks burn. "I know, it's just ... he's my dad. He's not going to understand. We should wait."

We should *definitely* wait, considering my stomach is lodged in my throat, and I'm pretty sure I'm going to throw up the whole organ at this point. I'm not sure my feet will support me if I take even one step away from Roman's big, solid body.

He wraps himself around me, filling me with his musky cologne and the scent of old books. I lean back against him, closing my eyes. Roman is so sure; he's so constant. The promise of the sun rising in the morning. Exhaling slowly, I nod once. Roman isn't going to abandon me through this conversation.

But it can wait. Obviously, Dad will need time to come to terms with this. So I should wait. I shouldn't bother pushing him further than he can stand just because I miss him and want more time with him.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I jerk it out to see Dad. I take a slow breath and answer the phone. "Hi, Daddy."

"Are you visiting me today, baby?"

"Um, I can."

"Good. I want to tell you something pretty important, and I'd rather do it in person." He coughs a few times.

"Is everything okay? The doctor didn't come back with bad news or anything, did he?" I want answers without actually giving anything up. If I fish just right, I can learn everything I need.

"Oh, no, baby. Nothing like that. I just want to talk to you."

"Okay, I'll be up soon."

"You're already here, fantastic!" He actually sounds happy, so that's a positive.

"See you soon." I hang up and look over at Roman. "Well, I didn't get the hint of him wanting to kill us, which has to be a good sign, right?"

Roman rubs my hips, then kisses my temple. "We're going to be fine. The longer we stand out here, the worst your anxiety is going to get, Bambina."

"I know you're right." But my feet don't move.

I've taken on worse things than this news. And if I don't go in, Sasha wins. Hell, maybe she just asked for her job back. I'm surprised she's not trying to blackmail the guys. Her damn smirk. The way she mooned over Roman and Gunner. Every memory I have of her is laced with anger.

"Okay." I squeeze his hand and pull out of his grasp. "Just in case."

Roman nods, not offended, as far as I can tell. His face is pretty stony. He glances at the elevators again, then lets me go in first. I smile at my dad and sit in a chair that's already set up by his side. "Daddy."

"Hi, Sophie." He pats my hand and brings it to his mouth to kiss it. "I missed you yesterday."

"I know. I'm so sorry that I didn't make it over. We got stuck at the office until late." I glance over my shoulder and see Roman coming in.

He looks twice as big right now, glancing around like he's ready for someone to toss a bomb in his direction. Dad looks between us, then nods. "I know it can be like that on occasion. How often did I stay until midnight?"

"Midnight, with your daughter here?"

I recognize that voice. Looking over towards the bathroom, I see my mother coming out. She has red hair like I do, blue eyes, and a dancer's lithe body. Her eyes sparkle as she takes me in.

"Hi, honey."

"Mom?" I gape. "When did you"

"I called her," Dad admits. "When I was at my most worried, I needed to make sure that you would have a choice of where to live and what to do. I didn't expect you to fly here, Diana."

Mom shrugs and stands at Dad's side. I look between them and try to get my brain to function. "Is this what you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes." Dad smiles. "Mom is going to be staying with you guys for a while. We're going to figure things out when I get out of here."

"That's so unnecessary, Miles. I can get a hotel." Mom waves away the idea, but if he knows her like I do, he knows that's a trap and an easy way to start her pouting. "I don't want to be an inconvenience."

"It's no inconvenience," Roman speaks up from behind me. "We have plenty of space. Honestly, you could live there and never see us if you didn't want to."

"How lucky that I'll have you two so I don't get lost." Mom answers.

I look between her and Dad. I only remember arguments, barely hushed with the reminder of me being there. I remember talking to Dad on the phone while he was overseas, only for my mom to get on, and the conversation would go from normal to hushed yelling, accusations, and or crying.

And yet, right now, they're both smiling, completely at ease.

It's the kind of thing I hoped for when I was thirteen, the kind of dream that wedged its way into my brain after I saw The Parent Trap, but it's a dream I left behind quickly. My parents fell out of love, and they deserved to enjoy life as much as I did. I'd understood that they were better people away from each other.

Even if I didn't love it, I made myself understand, and now they were throwing me for a loop. What kind of people managed to say goodbye, only to come back together? "I'm sorry. Diana, this is Roman." Dad motions to the big man still behind me. "He was in my platoon, and he's one of my business partners."

"One of?" Mom looks over Roman slowly.

I feel a twinge of possessiveness, like I'm ready to wrap myself around him and claim him all for myself right here and now. But Dad just nods. "Roman, Gunner, Nick, and Holden."

"All the guys." Mom huffs. "I shouldn't be surprised."

"Well, we kept each other alive in the worst the world offered; I figured we'd keep each other afloat in the business world too. And we have." Dad gets a bit fiercer.

I don't even feel like I'm a part of this moment. I'm just watching it on TV, unable to find the remote to flick to something less uncomfortable. I rub my arms as Dad and Mom talk to each other as if they can stave off an argument as long as they keep mentioning me.

"Well, Sophie, you're why I'm here. I just wanted to make sure you were okay, that everything is taken care of, and you're not just wandering from a hotel to work and back." Mom loops me back in.

"Oh, no. I live with the guys and have been staying up to date with work and everything else. Everything's been good. I promise." I say nervously.

She smiles. "Well, we need to catch up. We should do lunch or something tomorrow."

"Yeah. It's Saturday. Why not." I agree.

"That's what I like to hear." She beams. "I'll take a hotel for tonight, though. I'm not quite ready to move into your dad's place."

"Don't be ridiculous, Diana."

She rolls her eyes and pushes Dad's hair off his forehead. "Get better, Miles."

She tells me she loves me and then walks out. I glance at Roman, and he clears his throat. "When we were coming up, we saw a former employee near your room."

"Ah, yes. Sasha wanted to tell me something, but it didn't make any sense. I'm guessing she was trying to convince me to give her the position back."

Dad rolls, obviously exhausted. I bite my lip and nearly reach back for Roman's hand. But I can't do that either. Not until we tell Dad.

"She didn't really get much of anything out before your Mom pushed her out of the room." But then Dad grabs his phone and looks it over with an eyebrow arched. "Huh."

"Dad?"

"I'm assuming Sasha is the person you saw."

I reach back to Roman, not caring if Dad sees. Because if he knows her name, that means she's the one that just messaged, and worse, that means that he knows. Roman takes a step up behind me and takes my hand while spreading his palm over my opposite shoulder as well.

Shivering, I bite my lip. "So?"

"So, she's ridiculous. Saying that she was fired because you guys are out to get her and that it means nothing."

"That's not true!" I defend immediately.

Dad looks up from his phone, setting it down. I swallow the rest of my comments, and Roman pats my shoulder. "Sasha holds a grudge against Sophia because Sophia noticed that she was spending more time on social media than doing her job."

"And we have evidence of this in case she tries to file a wrongful termination."

"This is a right-to-work state, so she wouldn't have a case, but yes. We have plenty documented for this." Roman nods.

"I trust your decision." Dad answers.

He looks between us carefully, and Roman pats my shoulder again. "It's been hard on Sophia – you being here."

"I'm sorry, baby." Dad reaches for my hand, and I give it willingly. "I don't want you to worry. Everything will be fine, I promise."

"I know." I force a smile. "I just want you to feel better."

"I'm getting there," Dad promises.

There's an edge to his voice that makes me nervous, but now I have my mother to worry about. She's going to be joining us at the house? She's back in Dad's life. Isn't that enough stress on him? I can't add on just because I feel guilty.

Exhaling, I get through the rest of the visit without bringing up what's going on between me and the guys and kiss Dad's cheek, reminding him that I love him and promising that I'm not going to leave with Mom.

Roman pulls me close in the elevator and brushes my hair from his face. "So we're going to wait?"

"My mom is here. That's enough stress for two lifetimes right now. The fact that she's going to live with us is already bad enough."

"Why?" Roman's lips turn up in a sinfully sexy smile that has me clenching my thighs as he rubs the back of my neck with gentle fingers. "I thought you liked sneaking around. Have you gotten greedy since we got back from Italy?"

I swallow and take a step back. Roman follows until I'm against the wall of the elevator. "Maybe you need some distraction."

Holden

I HEAR A SQUEAL AND NOD TO MYSELF. ROMAN AND SOPHIE are home. Sophie squeals again, and I hear Roman say something in Italian, something sharp. I chew my bottom lip as I glance at the time.

I could join in with whatever they're about to do, or I could go visit Miles ..., and that should probably take priority, considering I haven't seen him since we all went to make sure he was alive.

Packing up a few things, I head over to the hospital. I can have some time with Sophie when I get back. I chew my bottom lip while waiting in the car in front of the hospital. I hate hospitals. I hate the intense white lights that don't leave anything hidden. I hate the way people seem to clock you if you don't fit in.

But Miles is worth it. I shake off my lingering paranoia and head inside. I whisper Miles' name at the check-in desk, and the woman looks me over slowly, the corner of her mouth turning up as she gives me the room number.

I pace in the elevator until the doors finally open. I slide out before they part all the way. I hate elevators, enclosed spaces where I have no control. When I get to Miles' room, I hear a female voice speaking.

"Mr. Langston, please understand."

"Sasha, right?"

Fuck. I walk in, and Sasha looks over at me. She swallows and takes a step back. I don't usually make appearances, so I don't blame her for her confusion and surprise, but considering I'm right in the middle of the issue, I'm sure she wants to share with Miles. I'm interrupting this moment, and I'm twice as frustrated.

Sasha bites her lip. "Do you want to tell him?"

"Tell me what," Miles demands. "First, you give me half sentences in front of my wife, and then you gave me a cryptic email saying you were fired because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and now you're telling me Sophia is what?"

But Sasha doesn't look away from me. She crosses her arms over her chest and arches an eyebrow. "If I'm going down, so are all of you. So again, do you want to tell him, or should I?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," I growl.

She takes another step back from whatever my face is saying, but Miles sits up and glowers at both of us. "One of you had better tell me before this heart monitor starts to scream."

"Your best friends are fucking your daughter," Sasha says, despite the tremor to her voice.

What a vindictive bitch. Because Gunner and Roman won't fuck her, she has to take her pissy attitude out on Sophie? Sure, throw me under the bus, Roman, Nick, and Gunner too, but Sophie deserves better than this.

I hear Miles shift in bed and look over at him while easily blocking Sasha's quick exit. Miles looks at me carefully. "Excuse me."

"I'm not misreading things. I saw her and Roman doing ... things, and then she kissed just about everyone else." Sasha continues. "I saw it, and if I thought that would get me fired, I would have taken pictures."

"That's not why you were fired," I growl.

Sasha shoots me an angry look that withers as soon as she takes in my expression. She swallows hard. "Well, I think it was."

"You know it's not. Nick went over that with you."

"Nick, who I also saw kissing Sophia." Sasha's voice shakes.

"So the computer logs we have showing you on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube during work hours is what?" I ask, taking a step towards her. "The complaints we have from guests and prospective employees are what? The fact that you canceled meetings without telling Gunner shows what?"

She takes another step back and glances at Miles. "They're sleeping with your daughter!"

"Get out of my room." He snarls at her. "Now."

"But."

"Now!"

His voice is so loud; I have no doubt everyone on the floor heard him. Sasha yips then skitters away like a little chihuahua. She really thought this would get her job back? Ridiculous. The messenger doesn't get better treatment by opening a can of worms, especially considering she did it for her own benefit.

Miles adjusts in his bed again, takes a slow breath, then clears his throat. "Close the door, Holden."

I do as he asks, with no question or hesitation. He rubs his forehead. "Please tell me that the bitch is making things up. That she's lying right to my face."

"Your stress, Miles."

"Fuck that!" His heart monitor bumps up a notch. He points at me. "Are you fucking my daughter?"

I press my lips together tightly. Sophie should be here to step in. She's better with her words than I am. She'd know how to handle this. Miles' face goes a frightening shade of purple, and I rub the back of my neck.

"Miles ..."

"Fuck." He rubs his forehead.

"It's not like it was with Bella." I get out quickly. "It's not just sex."

"And it's not just you, is it?" That growling edge to his voice ... that's the voice that promised murder multiple times over in the past. "Is it!"

"No."

"All of you?"

"Yes." No point in lying now.

"Did it start in Italy?"

I rub my jaw. "Miles, you don't need the details."

"But I'm going to fucking have them. You all are my best friends. We've gone to war together. We fought side by side. And now you're" He coughs loudly and repeatedly.

Before I can say anything else, nurses swarm in and calm him down. I sit down. They ask me to leave, but Miles puts that to bed immediately. "That fucker is staying right there."

When they head out, I glance towards the door and rub my jaw. "Miles, we care about her. It's not like being with Bella. Sophie means so much more."

"You think that makes it better?" Miles roars. "When I get out of here, we're done. All of us. I'm taking Sophie away from you assholes, sending her back to her mother's."

"Talk to her first," I advise as I stand.

"And where do you think that you're going?"

"Home, to tell your daughter that she can stop beating herself up about not telling you."

"What?"

I sigh and face Miles. His face is completely blank. I shrug. "She wanted to tell you. It's been killing her. But she'd rather deal with the guilt than threaten your health."

Miles doesn't say anything to that. He just looks away. I nod once. "I'll let her know that you're aware. I'm sure she'll be here tomorrow as soon as visiting hours open to talk to you."

"I don't want to see her."

"And that's going to matter." I snort.

I walk out and shake my head again. He's pissed. I expected that. But for him to be that hypocritical ... I know it's because Sophia is his daughter, his *only* daughter. And I'm sure that once he thinks it through, he'll be able to relax.

We're not monsters that are taking advantage of some young girl that doesn't know any better. None of us would make Sophie do anything she doesn't want to do, and somewhere in his head, Miles knows that.

He was with us regularly when we were all with Bella. He knows that sure, sober yesses are required for anything to happen. He just needs to get his anger out. I call Roman and am almost surprised when he answers.

"Take Sophie's phone."

"Holden?"

"Miles knows," I growl.

"Son of a bitch. Sasha?" He guesses.

"Miles isn't taking it well at the moment. He doesn't want to see Sophie right now, but I'm betting he's going to send her a text or try to call her."

"On it." Roman agrees. "Thanks for the heads up."

"I'll be home soon. Just leaving the hospital."

"Drive safely."

It should be an easy request. Driving is muscle memory with only small bits of me needing to pay attention, but at the same time, I can't quite stay focused on the road. Not when I think of Sophie, how upset she's going to be.

I don't know if she's going to tell us that we're all done. I don't know if she's going to panic and run. I don't know if she's going to fold. I don't want her to. I want her to trust us, to let us make decisions together.

Italy proved how well we all work together, how good we are for one another, and all I can hope is that this test doesn't break us. When I get home, I sit in the car for a long moment, looking at the house.

Bella made me feel handsome, made me feel wanted, but Sophia does so much more. She makes me feel understood, good enough, warm, and she deserves the same. I'll defend her against her father and anyone else who comes at her.

Just like Roman, Nick, and Gunner will. As much as she belongs to us, we belong to her. I'm sure of it. I can't imagine them feeling any differently than I do. Mornings aren't mornings without Sophie humming in the kitchen. Work isn't the same without her sweet reminders and random memes.

Hell, I can't imagine a life where I don't have her in my bed, curled up against me, at least once a week. Sighing, I go inside, ready to deal with the fallout – at least I tell myself I am. Roman sits at the kitchen table drumming his fingers on the wood just in front of Sophie's phone.

I arch an eyebrow, and he nods. "Two already."

Two texts. Fuck. "Do the others know?"

"Gunner's not home yet. Nick knows. Apparently, Miles texted him. I'm sure Gunner will be home soon enough with his own story." Roman nods.

"And Sophie?"

"She'll be out of the shower in the next five minutes. We can't hide this from her, Hold. She doesn't hide things from us."

"I know." I sigh, then sit at the table as well.

The silence stretches as we ponder our own thoughts. Sophie comes downstairs, wrapped in only a towel, and smiles at both of us. She sinks her teeth into her bottom lip, then sits on my lap, gently pressing a kiss to my lips.

I try to return it without letting anything slip, but when she draws back, her brows furrow. "What's wrong, Holden?"

I rub down her back. It would be so easy to distract her. To put this off, just a little bit more. I kiss across her throat, and her hands rub over my chest. The smell of her cherry blossom shampoo clings to her. I lick some beads of water off her shoulder, and she shivers.

"Bambina," Roman says, much closer than he was. He pats my back, and I force myself to release Sophie. At least I got one more taste of her.

Her eyes flick between us, and then she goes pale. "Holden, tell me."

"Your father knows," I admit. "Sasha was there when I went to visit. She outed us entirely ... all of us."

"Oh god." Sophie wraps her arms around her chest, keeping the towel in place. "Where's my phone."

"Let's not look at that." Roman puts it in his back pocket. "Give your dad some time to cool down, and then we'll take this on."

"Together." I agree.

Sophie looks between us and chews her lip. "He's mad?"

"Right now," I whisper. "That's not forever."

"If you need time ... we'll give it to you." Roman says as if I could possibly argue with him now."

She swallows. "Thanks. I ... I need to think a little."

She kisses both our cheeks, then returns to her bedroom without looking back. Roman and I share a long look, and he shrugs. "We knew it was going to happen."

Sophia

I PACE MY ROOM, NOT SURE WHAT TO DO WITH MYSELF. How am I supposed to digest this information? I'd spent hours trying to figure out exactly how to tell dad. I'd make him dinner – his favorite – give him some beer, sit him down, and explain that I kind of love his friends.

We'd be able to talk it out rationally. I'd make it clear that it was me who did the seducing, that it wasn't them preying on me or anything crazy like that. Sure, we're kinky, but I know that people will immediately assume the worst because of the age difference.

But now I don't get to take care of it. All I can do is deal with the fallout. I sniff and rub my hand over my forehead, sitting down on my bed. Mom is here; Dad knows about me sleeping with all his friends, and if Sasha's told him, who else has she told?

Everything is unraveling.

"Sweets."

I look up and see Gunner. I expected Roman to come comfort me, Nick to come talk to me, or even Holden and his nervous apologies. I pictured Gunner going after Sasha, telling her what a conniving little bitch she is and getting her to shut her mouth before she can do any more damage.

Instead, he crosses the room and hugs me, pulling me onto his lap and rubbing my back. I press my face to his shoulder,

letting myself cry. I don't know if it's stress, the fear of being in trouble, or what.

"We're not going anywhere. You know that, right?"

"He's your best friend. I know how it works." I try not to snot on his shirt.

"Yeah, and he's being unreasonable as fuck right now." Gunner rubs his hand over my hair before gently stroking my scalp.

A shiver teases my neck before I calm against him. I don't know why that's always worked, but it does, and apparently, Gunner knows it. He keeps gently petting me, promising me that the guys aren't going to just leave me until my sniffling and crying stops.

"How could I give up a sweet thing like you?" He asks. "A girl that fucks me in the ocean while I tell her about reading erotica?"

I laugh once and lean back. Gunner rubs his thumbs over my cheeks, wiping away tears. He smiles gently. "Now, we can either handle this the Gunner way or the Sophie way."

"What's the Gunner way?"

"Getting trashed and fucking until we don't think about anything." He nods as if it's been scientifically proven. "It has a pretty good success rate ... until sober."

"And the Sophie way?"

"You have to tell me." He shrugs. "But I'm willing to try it."

"I don't know what to do, honestly. There's just too much."

"Do you want to ... talk about it?" He says it so hesitantly that I actually think it's new for him to suggest. And it's humbling that he's willing to when it's so obvious that he hates the idea.

I laugh at his face, and he smiles slightly. "We're going to be okay; you know that right?"

"We'll see."

"I'm willing to show you right here and now." He pulls me closer. "Just tell me what you need because I suck at this shit."

"You're doing pretty well so far," I assure him, smoothing his shirt.

Gunner kisses me softly, then hesitates before kissing me again. I know it's new territory for him to be gentle like this, to even talk about talking things out, but it's humbling as hell too. Knowing he's willing to push his comfort zone for me is ... amazing. I lick into his mouth, and he groans, holding me tighter against him.

He brushes his fingers through my hair and stays soft and gentle with me... well, mostly soft. I feel a familiar hardness against my thigh and roll my hips. He groans and grips my hips, drawing back.

"We don't have to fuck, Sophie. I mean it." He's panting, though. "I'm here for you, not just the sex."

"I know."

"So we don't have to do anything."

"You saying that means you need to take your pants off now." I tug on his shirt.

Gunner blinks at me, for once speechless. I jerk his shirt over his head. "Now meaning right now."

He rolls us over and kisses me hungrily. I suck his tongue, stroke over his muscular body, savoring his warmth, his affection, everything he's giving me. God, he smells amazing, like tobacco and bourbon.

Gunner undresses me slowly like he wants me to know I have every opportunity to say no, to stop this. But there's no stopping us. He's right. Even with my dad knowing, even with everything else going on, things with the guys don't have to change.

It's up to us to decide that, not my dad, not my mom, not anyone else.

Gunner strips me naked and kisses across my neck. "I've been starving for you."

"Me too." I gasp.

He sucks my nipple between his lips, and my body rolls to meet him as heat tears through my nerves. My skin buzzes with lust, and I swear my pussy actually clenches from his hand on my inner thigh alone.

I pull his face back to mine, needing his kisses like nothing else. Gunner groans as I undo his pants, and he helps me push them down. I'm impatient, needy, and I don't want to deal with foreplay right now.

I need him inside me, fucking me hard and deep, proving that we're still the same as we were twenty-four hours ago. Gunner groans and pushes his fingers inside me, still denying me his cock.

"Oh yes." I pant against his mouth. "Fuck yes."

"You don't need to think about a damn thing, Sophie." He promises. "We'll take care of you."

"I believe you." I grind down on his fingers.

He curls them inside me, and I bite my lip hard until Gunner steals my mouth again. He softens every concern with his tongue, but those wicked fingers of his are going to be the death of me. The way he brings me to the edge just to deny me an orgasm has me insane. I burn with need.

I roll us over and push Gunner into the bed. "I need you. Now."

"Now, now?" He asks with a smirk. "Have me."

I nod and grip his cock, stroking him once just to watch that cocky smile drop from his face. It's replaced by a need that matches my own. Desire churns in his eyes until he grabs my hips and lowers me down over his cock.

Gripping his shoulders, I roll my hips on him. I feel every delicious, long inch of him fill me. My lips part, and I roll my hips again, dragging my nails down his chest. This feels good, right, familiar.

I pant as I bounce and ride him. Gunner kisses across my neck. "You're a goddess, Sophie. A damn woodland nymph."

Grabbing his jaw, I kiss him hard and deep, taking everything I can get from him. Gunner groans and rolls us, holding himself above me as he fucks me. I meet every thrust, grinding against him, making him mine over and over again.

God, he feels good, his chest brushing mine, his hand stroking down my side before his fingers dig deep into my thigh. I wrap a leg around him, jerking him even closer. Any space between us is too much.

His forehead rests on mine as he fucks me. He grabs my hand and holds it above my head. "You're fucking beautiful. Perfect. Mine."

"Yours." I agree, stealing a kiss before the orgasm claims me.

There's no slow burn with Gunner. There's no build-up. Just the release that makes me dizzy and high at the same time. He groans and pounds me harder. My pussy tightens around him, so he feels even bigger inside me, hits even deeper at this new angle as he adjusts my hips against him.

One orgasm tumbles into a second one until Gunner jerks out of me and comes across my belly. We pant as we stare at each other. He swallows, then slowly leans forward, ignoring the mess on my stomach, to kiss me again.

His fingers knot in my hair as he licks into my mouth, sucks my bottom lip, teases me with the ghost of his breath across my lips. "Let's clean up, okay?"

"Okay." I agree, not sure if no is even an option for me right now.

We wash off in the shower, and Gunner slaps my ass twice with a naughty smile. I swat at his hand when he goes for the third one. "What happened to all that gentle stuff?"

"Well, once I saw it jiggle, I couldn't resist." He tugs me back against him, rubbing my belly, then slipping his hand between my legs. "You're still wet for me, sweets." I nod and rub my pussy against his fingers. "Wet and eager."

He groans and fucks me with his fingers, pumping them deep inside me before curling right at my g-spot. His thumb rubs my clit as he whispers in my ear. "You're amazing, Sophie. I love kissing you. I love making you come. I love teasing you."

My knees shake as he keeps fingering me. His thumb softens over my clit, and the featherlight touches send me into overdrive. I wrap my arm around the back of his neck, holding on, so I don't faceplant.

"And I'm going to make sure that nothing hurts you." He kisses across my throat. "I'm all yours."

I groan and nod. "Yes. Fuck!"

He pushes a third finger into me and I come, exploding for him as my legs give out. Gunner catches me, and we sink to the floor of the shower together. I pant as my thighs clench together. Gunner licks his fingers and chuckles. "Feel better?"

"I don't feel like crying anymore."

"That's a good start." He kisses my cheek. "Do you want me to stay with you tonight?"

"Oh, you're not already scheduled for something else?"

Gunner turns my chin. There's not a single trace of teasing on his face. He's all warm and open despite the hard set of his jaw. He kisses my temple, my forehead, my nose, then my mouth softly.

"I'd reschedule just about anything to make sure you're okay."

"Softy."

He chuckles and kisses me again softly. "Let's try cleaning up again first, though."

"I was perfectly clean until you got naughty," I grumble.

He chuckles and helps me to stand after I slip once. We manage to get out of the shower cleaner than when we started,

and then we just lay in bed together. Gunner tells me a bit about his day, bitches about Sasha's big mouth, then just rubs my back in slow circles, cuddling me close.

I'm not sure what to do with this soft side of him. I'm used to joking around, laughing, things being light and easy. But I like that he's opening up to me more, too ... I just wish I was better at switching to that side of things for his sake.

"I really appreciate you, Gunner," I whisper.

He kisses the top of my head. "Good. About time you recognize how great I am."

I laugh and shake my head as I look up at him. "You're ridiculous."

"And you love it."

I blink a few times. I do, actually. I love how silly he can be, the way he can find a pun for any situation, how kinky and naughty he is, and that he's willing to talk to me like this, talk me through things, be here even when neither of us knows how to deal with things.

Propping myself up on my elbow, I nod. "I do."

He smiles softly, opens his mouth to say something, and then my stomach growls. We laugh, and Gunner promises to return with food, leaving the unspoken I love you between us. I think that's the only safe place it can exist right now.

Gunner

I TAKE MY TIME IN THE KITCHEN, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT the hell just happened. I wanted to make Sophie feel better. I'd prepared myself for listening – the active kind where I actually pay attention – and for the tears, but not for sex, not for that almost serious conversation at the end.

Jesus Christ, I'd nearly told her I love her.

If her stomach hadn't been twice as loud as a normal person's, I might have. I shake my head, then sigh, rubbing my forehead. What the hell kind of trouble are we getting into with her? I'd even promised nothing was going to change just because Miles found out.

"Fucking idiot."

"Hey. I just walked in. Can we start with some kindness?" Nick asks.

I look over my shoulder as I pull out the stuff for grilled cheese – the only food I actually know how to make other than cereal. Nick looks like hell. He's rumpled, his shirt is sticking out of his pants, and those bags under his eyes make him look about ten years older.

"Looks like you got fucked dirty today." I tease.

"After all that shit with Sasha, I got a very ... loud phone call from Miles." He grunts, sitting at the island. "Please tell me we have alcohol."

"I might have managed to leave you some." I pull a bottle of single malt Scotch from our liquor cart and pour Nick a glass. Once I add some ice, I slide it his way. "A chef and a bartender. I'm a fucking wet dream."

"Yeah." Nick snorts.

He takes a drink as I assemble a sandwich and get it in the pan on the stove. I lean back against the counter and watch Nick as he swirls the ice in the glass. "How's Sophie?"

"Dealing." I nod.

He exhales and sets the glass down. "I have a bad feeling in my stomach, Gunner."

"About Sophie?"

"I don't know. It's just ... remember when we were overseas, and we'd drive along roads that were just a little too empty after a day that was a little too easy?"

Yeah, those days felt like traps. It should have been fun, time to crank the radio, smoke, and enjoy the little bit of downtime. But we learned quickly that quiet was bad. It meant shit was brewing. When things were easy it meant that hell was about to rain down on us.

"That's how I feel." Nick finishes.

"Shit."

"Yup."

"What's shit?" Sophie asks, padding down the stairs in an oversized t-shirt and nothing else.

Unfortunately, we may have to talk about her wearing more clothes in the house once her dad comes back. A fucking shame considering it should be illegal to hide those gorgeous legs. She sits next to Nick and kisses his cheek gently.

"Did you have a bad day?"

He manages to dig up a smile for her and wraps an arm around her shoulder. "It'll be fine."

She looks between us, then her eyes narrow. "You're not telling me something."

"Sophie."

"Just because I'm not as old as you guys doesn't mean I don't deserve to know. We work together, and I'm just as much an adult as you all." She crosses her arms just under her breasts, pushing them up in a way that gets my cock's attention.

I turn and flip the sandwich. This is Nick's problem to tackle. I hear him sigh. "I just don't want to put too much on your shoulders."

"They can handle plenty. I kicked your ass the first time we sparred. I can handle all four of you guys. I can handle whatever is going on."

"I just have a bad feeling, that's all. Since I don't know what it is, I'm not going to worry about it much, and I don't want you to worry either."

"You know what they say about worrying." I agree.

When silence answers me, I shake my head. "Uncultured, both of you." I flip the grilled cheese and smile at them over my shoulder. "When you worry, you have two bad days instead of one."

Sophie rolls her eyes, but I see a smile tug at the corner of her lips. She sits in Nick's lap and gently pats his chest. "We're going to be okay."

He nods, but I see the nervousness in his eyes. I finish his drink since I know he won't and feed Sophie. She praises my grilled cheese as if she's in a five-star restaurant but then yawns. She covers her mouth, tries to stop it, but another one makes its way out.

"I think I need some sleep."

"Feel free to take tomorrow off." Nick offers.

"Sure, I'll go see my dad."

"Nope." I tug her ponytail. "You're coming in to work. I have emails out the ass and need some help scheduling everything since Sasha's gone."

Sophie looks between us like we're conspiring against her, then nods. "Fine. But only because you need me."

"And because it's your job!" I call after her.

She flips me off, but I chuckle and shake my head. Nick gets up and heads to bed after a moment. Roman's nowhere to be seen, and Holden is working, I'm sure. So I go to Sophie's bed, cuddle against her, fuck her again, and then we drift off to sleep.

Work is pretty straight forward even with Sophie helping me schedule everything out in my office. I'm tempted to have her schedule some time for sex, but I know she didn't sleep well. She was up and down all night, tossing and turning, waking me up every time she got out of bed.

No matter what she says, I know this is hard on her. She doesn't want to upset her dad, and she really doesn't want to deal with all this extra stress. All of that is understandable, but I know it's only going to get worse until she faces it.

I get a call from the temp who's covering the front desk. "Um, there's a lady here."

"Okay." I switch to speaker, and Sophie looks up. "Does she have a name?"

"Diana Lane." The guy says after a minute.

Sophie's back straightens, and she swallows hard. Her mother? I arch an eyebrow at her, and she nods once. I clear my throat. "Send her directly to my office, please. Show her the way if no one else is up there."

Sophie straightens herself out and gives me a look as if begging me to stay quiet. I arch an eyebrow. If her father knows, wouldn't her mother? But when a woman walks into my office, my eyes catch.

She has red hair like Sophie, deep blue eyes, and honestly, she's gorgeous. I see where Sophie gets her looks. Her mother

is thinner, but she looks like she knows what she wants in life and is ready to take it. Her heels click on the floor as she walks forward.

There's not a trace of shyness in her step, and I can tell her white dress is high quality, just like that wrap or whatever she has with it. She flashes a smile. "Hello there. I'm Diana."

"Hi, Mom," Sophie says softly.

"Hi, baby." She cups Sophie's face. "Look at you, all professional and busy."

"Why are you here?" Sophie escapes the hold.

Diana looks between me and Sophie, an obvious question in her eyes, but then she drops into the last free chair and turns her attention to me. "Apparently, the hotel I'm staying at is fully booked for this weekend, so I had to check out. I don't really have anywhere else to stay, and Miles mentioned that you all live in one big house ... do you have an extra room I could use?"

I share a look with Sophie. This would mean that we'd have to go back to sneaking around much earlier than planned. Plus, I'd have to ask the guys before doing anything. I clear my throat. "I'd have to talk to the guys. We make decisions together when it comes to guests."

"How ... democratic." She treats me to a smile that's bright and sweet. "I totally understand."

I send a group email and get approval. I nod. "It's a go. You can stay for as long as you need."

"So accommodating. Sophie, you're lucky to be around such good role models." Diana purrs, giving me a look I recognize.

I've seen it on Sophie's face. It's curiosity with a tinge of heat. Only Diana's is stronger. She eye fucks me quickly, then claps her hands together. "Well then. I just need an address and maybe someone to show me where I'll be staying."

"I'll take an early lunch and get you set, Mom." Sophie volunteers.

"Are you sure? If not, I'm sure I can ask someone else, honey."

"The guys have meetings today. They're all busy. Plus, I know the layout."

"Well then, let me get my things together, and we can go."

Diana nods to me, then stops. "Which one are you?"

"Gunner." I offer her my hand.

She takes it, and her thumb strokes my wrist before she lets go. "Quickly, Sophie. I don't want to steal you for too long."

They both leave, and I sit there for a moment, not exactly sure what to do with myself. *That's* the ex-wife? The one that Miles rarely talked about? He'd mentioned that she was overprotective and jealous, that he couldn't go too long without checking in, or she'd assume he went AWOL with some other chick.

But she's so self-assured, and clearly, on the prowl, not exactly the eager wife type I'm used to.

It's not my business. The further away I stay from that whole mess, the better. I still have Miles himself to worry about, considering I have yet to open the texts he sent or deal with the voice mail.

His temper is a quick burn – it runs so hot and intense that he gets burnt out in the best of times, let alone while sick. But I wonder if it will linger because of Sophie. I'm sure that if any one of us goes with her to the hospital, he'll point out every slight touch, every look, every ...

"I can't go with her," I say to myself.

It'll make it worse on her considering how impossible it is for me to not look at her, to avoid touching her. I don't know the meaning of the word "behave" when it comes to Sophie ... unless she's in tears apparently.

"Fuck!" I curse.

My door creaks open, and the nervous temp peeks his head in. "Is everything okay, sir?"

I sigh and rest my elbows on my desk. "Yeah, kid. It's just one of those days."

"Oh ... okay. Would you like me to order you lunch?"

"Sure. From that Indian place on Main."

"You got it." He shuts my door and powerwalks away to take care of it.

At least that's taken care of, and I don't have to worry about him fucking shit up, considering he wants to be hired on full time. I pinch the bridge of my nose as I feel a migraine coming on.

I got Sophie last night. We hid things from Miles before Italy ... so now we just have to hide what we're doing from Sophie's mom ... who doesn't have a job here, doesn't work late, and is obviously more in tune with her daughter.

It's just a harder level, that's all. Nothing to worry about.

My work phone rings, and I pick up without looking. Miles' voice cracks across the line like a whip. "Be at the hospital today ... as soon as you get off work."

Fuck times two.

Sophie

My mom giggles in the back of the taxi then shakes her head. I haven't heard her giggle in years, and right now, I'm not sure what to expect. She leans towards me. "Do they all look like that?"

"Like ... like Gunner, you mean?" I ask.

She nods.

I shrug. "I mean, they're not like identical."

"Big, handsome, and strong. Just like your dad." She shakes her head. "It's so strange seeing him again after so long."

"Mom."

"I mean, I kept pictures, but even in a hospital bed, your father is"

"We're approaching gross territory, Mom," I warn.

"What? You're an adult now. I'm not so naïve to think you're a virgin. You know what it's like when you get close to someone, try to move on, and then see them again. There are so many what-ifs, so many thoughts."

"Mine are usually along the lines of "what if he sees me? How can I avoid him the whole night." I just ... he's my dad. I don't really want to think about you guys having You know."

"Sex?"

"Mom!"

"How do you think you were brought into this world? It definitely wasn't a stork. You remember your baby pictures. It would have taken at least two very large birds to deliver you."

I rub my forehead. She's been here a day, and already I feel like a teenager again. Worse, she's going to be meeting my partners and going on like this the whole time. Is it a mom thing? Like once their child comes to dating age a new gene kicks in that makes them the most embarrassing and oblivious people in the world?

When we get to the house, she looks up and whistles softly. "Wow."

"So, I'll show you to one of the empty rooms, and you can get settled."

"And you can get back to work." She agrees.

I show her where the kitchen is, the two living rooms, the gym, then show her to her room. She starts unpacking and tells me again and again that she can take care of herself, that she's an adult and that this isn't her first time staying somewhere new.

"Sophie?"

"Who's that?" Mom's ears perk.

"In here, Holden. My mom is going to be staying with us for a little bit." I call, trying to make it clear that we have to behave.

Even though I'd much rather have him shove me against the wall and have me right now, it might help my stress level. Holden comes by, thankfully wearing a shirt, and nods to my mother. She waves, then continues unpacking, not bothering to hide anything – including her underwear.

"Nice to meet you, Miss Lane."

"Oh, don't call me that. I'll feel old." Mom laughs. "Just Diana."

"Diana." He corrects with a nod. His eyes flick to me, and he raises an eyebrow.

"I'm just about to head back to work unless you need help with something. Gunner has me scheduling. Is there anything you'd like to go over?"

"Yes." He murmurs.

"Mom, get comfortable." I bid. "I'll see you for dinner."

"We can go somewhere lovely where I can meet all these guys I've heard so much about. I can't wait. Oh, but make sure you change first, honey. You can't go out like that."

"Yup." I walk out of her room, knowing that Holden will follow.

We get to his room, and I shut the door, sitting on his bed and rubbing the sudden sore spot on my shoulder. Holden sits down in his chair and just watches me. I can tell that he doesn't actually have anything for me to do. He's not jumping into anything, hasn't touched his computer, nothing.

"Thank you." I breathe.

He takes my hand and pulls it to his mouth, gently kissing my knuckles. "On a scale of one to ten, how much does this bother you?"

"A lot." I laugh. "My mom loves to talk about the most embarrassing things. Things no one ever needs to know."

He smiles gently and turns my hand to kiss my palm. I shake my head at him despite the warmth spreading out from his kiss. "Don't give me that look. I know you'll enjoy every second of it."

"Not of you being uncomfortable." He assures me. "Or dealing with your dad."

"You got put on that?"

"No one assigned it to me. I just know Miles well. We were stranded for a while together, and ... and I was there when he found out."

"Great." I swallow. "I can't juggle this much, Holden. I feel like I'm going to go insane."

He sits next to me and hugs me. "We're all here for you. None of us want this to be hard."

"You had a meeting about it, didn't you? You guys share everything, so of course, you'd split up all the work to be done and-"

"We didn't sit down like generals going to war." He whispers before kissing me softly. "I just know that I will do whatever it takes for you to feel comfortable, safe, supported. And if I feel that way ... I know they do too."

I nod and try to fix my hair. "I ... I have to go back to work."

He nods, but doesn't drop my hand. I hug Holden, and he hesitates before rubbing my back. I know that he's not exactly the hug and be hugged type, but he's warm and smells good and feels safe.

I kiss his throat. "I guess this is a cakewalk compared to saving my ass in Italy."

"That was a one and done. This is a covert mission that just gets more complicated." He chuckles. "But I'm all in, Sophia."

"Thank you." I kiss him again softly, just sucking his bottom lip and forcing myself to leave.

I can't fuck him with my mom still here. She gets curious easily, and I have no doubt she'd be more than happy to investigate anything she finds interesting. Holden included.

Once I get back to work, I'm called into Roman's office. I sit down and balance my tablet on my knees. "Okay. Are we scheduling, discussing clients, or-"

"Look at me, Bambina."

I close my eyes a moment, then meet his. Roman is softer than normal, and for some reason, it pisses me off. Just like Gunner being all gentle and sweet, Holden letting me talk and not pushing for more. They're on eggshells, waiting for me to break or run or something in between.

"What?"

He smiles slightly. "It's going to be twice as naughty when I fuck you tonight."

Well, there goes that thought. My mouth goes dry, and my face heats up. I clear my throat and glance at the closed door. "That's not very professional, Mr. Agosti."

"Did it offend you?"

"No."

"Then I'm not sorry." He folds his hands under his chin, his elbows balanced on his desk as he looks me over. He narrows in on my breasts, and I feel the urge to cover up, but at the same time, I can't move. The corner of his mouth lifts. "The worst happened, Sophie. Your father found out and got pissed."

"But my mother doesn't know, and now she's staying with us."

He shrugs. "I don't know her. I'm not friends with her. I'm not worried about her."

Blunt as ever. It should bother me that he doesn't give a shit about her finding out, but instead, it's ... it's hot. My body breaks out in goosebumps, and I squeeze my thighs together to try and get some kind of control.

"Well ... I am. I don't want her knowing."

Roman chuckles and purrs something in Italian. I don't have to speak the language to know it's dirty. He motions me forward with a finger. When I don't move, he arches an eyebrow. "Come here, Bambina."

"Or what?"

"Feeling disobedient today?" He cocks his head to the side.

"Maybe I am."

"Then I'll wait until tonight when I can bend you over, spank you, edge you until you beg me to let you come, and fuck you so hard that our *neighbors* hear you."

I swallow hard. Of course, Roman is the first one to take off the kid gloves. When I don't answer, he walks around his desk and leans on the front of it. It takes everything in me to stay sitting. I'm drawn to him like a magnet, want to touch him, to give in to him, to feel him against me, inside of me.

I can see the pulse in his neck, and I know that if I look lower than his belt, I'll find him hard. Roman crosses his arms and arches an eyebrow at me. "Done eye fucking me already?"

"I'm serious, though. I don't want her to know."

"Okay. There are ways to keep you quiet. Fun ways."

"And we still have to deal with my dad."

"I'm more focused on you, Sophie."

I look away. Of course, he is. Roman gently strokes along my jaw before turning my chin to face him. "I mean it. Your dad can hate me. He'll get over it. Are *you* okay right now? Knowing that he's pissed, knowing that he knows. Are you okay with your mom moving in? Are you okay with all the other shit that might hit the fan?"

An answer is on my tongue. Yes. I'm an adult. I can handle the consequences of my own actions. But it sticks and won't make it past my lips. When I try again, a different answer comes out. "No."

"Then we need to fix that, don't we? Because I'm not going to touch you until I know that you want it, are okay with the consequences, and won't be thinking about anything but me."

Shivering, I nod slowly. I don't know what part I'm agreeing to because it honestly all sounds amazing. I clear my throat and try to refocus. "My mom moving in is going to be harder than anything."

"That's the main issue?"

"Yes." I nod.

Roman leans forward, cupping my chin in his big, calloused hand until I'm ready to melt against him. Fuck everything else. Fuck the world. Roman looking at me like I'm the only thing important despite being at work is insane, and I don't want to let that expression escape his face.

"Are you worried that any of us are going to want her more than you? I can tell you right now that's not going to happen, Bambina."

"I'm worried she'll want you, and when she's turned down, she'll start wondering why ... or she'll see the way you look at me." Is the truth always this easy.

Roman kisses me softly, his lips molding to mine with just the tease of his wicked tongue. I press forward even as he draws back. "And if she finds out, will it be the end of the world? I think she'll be more focused on your father, eager to be by his side. Emotions to give up easy."

"Maybe."

"I can't change how I look at you." He whispers, pressing his forehead to mine. "I can't control it. Not touching you is already going to kill me."

"Roman." I run my hand over his until I kiss his palm.

He groans and takes a slow breath. "We'll do what we can, but Sophie, I'm not patient. Let's fix all those worries in your mind. I'll address them all."

"Might take a while," I warn.

"I'm in it for the long haul. Haven't I proven that?" He kisses me again softly. "I thought I made it really clear in Italy, or when we got back, or in any of the moments we've shared since the first time I kissed you."

Right now does more to prove his point than anything. He just holds me, promises to help me fix things, isn't making a move to strip me or fuck me on his desk. When the hell did this get so real?

Nick

WHEN I GET HOME, ALL I WANT IS A GLASS OF WINE, A GOOD book, and a hot shower. Then I can fall into bed without another thought of today. But when I go to the kitchen to pour myself some wine, I see a replica of Sophie in the kitchen wearing a nice dress that compliments her body.

The woman looks me over, then smiles as she swallows a gulp of white wine. "Well, hello there. I've met Holden, Roman, and Gunner, so you must be Nick."

"I am." I nod with a smile.

"I'm Sophie's mother, Diana." She offers me her hand. "A pleasure to meet you."

"A pleasure for me as well." I nod. "I assume you are staying with us?"

"I am, yes." She nods, then refills her glass. "I know it's a little out of the ordinary, but I'd like to stay close to my exhusband. From what I understand, his stress has been higher, and he won't tell me why."

"Oh?"

"No, I don't really understand it. He never had a problem sharing in the past. Maybe I'm being too gentle." She rubs her chin. "Or I could fish for the answer. I'm sure if I could get to the bottom of it, I could fix things right away."

"I'm sure he'll tell you as soon as he can. He probably needs to process it."

"Or he'll just push it down until he can't avoid it anymore." She rolls her eyes. "You men are all the same. You all say you'll be fine, and you can manage it, but really it would be easier if you just let someone in."

"I like to find ways to relax." I offer instead. "Like wine, reading, painting."

She leans her head to the side as I pour myself a sweet red that we got from Italy. Diana continues watching me as I move around the kitchen. I'm not sure how to make her feel like this is her home or make her feel welcome or anything like that. I clear my throat as I start making a second helping.

"Do you like ribs?"

"No. I'm vegetarian." She waves. "Don't worry. I can provide for myself. I've been taking care of that and taking care of Sophia for years."

"Ah."

"How is she doing here, really? I mean, I know Miles works long hours, and I just worry she's not getting what she needs out of being here." Diana pushes.

I sit down and glance towards the front door. Am I the last one home or the first one? I sit back in one of the chairs. "She's doing well. She's checked out a few of the clubs – with us there to keep her safe. She's doing well at work, and we took her to Italy recently."

"Oh? Really?" She arches her eyebrow. "All of you?"

"Miles stayed behind despite having an invitation. Roman's cousin got married." I explain with a shrug.

"How nice. A destination wedding."

"Roman's family actually lives there." I take a bite. "Are you sure I can't get you something to eat?"

"I'll be fine. Once Sophie gets home, we'll go and eat together. It's been a long time since I've gotten to see her." She sighs, looking at her empty glass. "I know that she had her reasons for wanting to come out here, but I've missed her."

"I'm sure."

"Has she missed me? I know things have been pretty busy, but"

Busy? That's an understatement. Between work, Italy, her father being sick, and the amazing personal time I've had with her ... the long nights, the slow and steady seduction, the temptation.

I clear my throat. "Honestly, she's been incredibly busy keeping up with everything, but she has mentioned you."

Diana lights up, and then the door opens. I hear Sophie arguing with Roman. I'm not sure what it's about, but it doesn't sound entirely horrible. When they come in, Sophie looks to her mom and flushes red. She jumps and shoots a glare at Roman, making me chuckle.

He couldn't keep his hands off her if he tried.

Sophie goes right to her mom, offers to get changed so they can head out, but her mom stops her. "Oh, come now, the least I can do is treat everyone to dinner. Nick, you could go for dessert, could you?"

"I ... I suppose I could."

"Wonderful. Then it's settled. I'll be right down once I get changed. Sophia put on something cute." She encourages.

As soon as she heads off, Sophie kisses my cheek, then pinches Roman. "You said-"

"Pinching your ass doesn't count. There are clothes between us." He shrugs. "You better go get dressed before you get in trouble."

She sticks out her tongue, then kisses me gently. "I'm sorry you had to deal with her."

"It wasn't too bad at all," I wink. "But she likes white wine. Insanity."

She shakes her head lightly, then rushes to her room. I glance over at Roman, and he sighs. We get changed as well,

and I knock on Holden's door, inviting him to dinner. He pokes his head out and narrows his eyes. "Why?"

"Diana is inviting us to join."

"Where's Gunner?"

"Hasn't come home yet." I shrug. "He hasn't texted or anything either."

"Fine. Give me a second."

I wait near the front door. Diana comes down in an emerald dress and smiles at me. She offers her hand, and I take it, not sure what else to do. She twirls under my hand and treats me to a smile.

"So, where are Sophia and the others? I made reservations! Chop, chop."

Sophie comes out wearing a lacy white dress that clings to her neck and is longer in the back than in front. It looks incredible on her, especially with her hair in a braid that comes around her shoulder. Holden comes in behind her, wearing casual business clothes. The tie around his shoulders is going to be a problem. He hates them.

But Sophie steps in and does it for him quickly before patting his chest. "You're going to have to learn at some point."

Holden doesn't say anything to that, but I smirk. "He's never had to do it. I did it before you came around."

She laughs lightly. Diana looks between Sophie and Holden with a perplexed look, but then Roman steals the show. Diana's jaw practically drops. Roman has that effect on most people he meets. The dark red button-up paired with black slacks highlights his tanned skin and his thick dark hair.

He adjusts his watch and rolls his neck out. "Are we ready to go?"

"Yes." Diana practically drools over him. "I don't think we can all fit in one car, though."

"No worries," I say. "We can handle two cars."

Sophie ends up with me and Holden. While Roman and Diana take another car. Sophie chews her bottom lip the whole way to the restaurant. "I'm sorry about my mom. She likes to have things very organized. And she doesn't tolerate any way but her way."

"It'll be okay, Sophie." Holden pats her shoulder from the back seat. "After dinner, we can all relax."

"A bath sounds so good." I agree. "A bath and a good book."

"Just not having to be around my mom sounds great," Sophie says, slumping down into the seat. "I've never felt more like a teenager."

"That's pretty easy to fix, darling." I pat her knee, then rub up her thigh. She bites her lip as she looks at my hand. I wink at her. "Don't you think?"

"Yes." She pants, pushing her hips towards my hand.

"After dinner." Holden reminds her, but I see his fingers brushing across her neck. "We'll behave with Diana around."

"Thank you." She looks between us and smiles softly. "I really appreciate that."

When we get to the restaurant, I look around and notice every detail. It's chic rustic and promises elevated comfort food. We sit at a table, and Diana leans into Roman's side. She rubs his thigh and whispers something in his ear.

I glance at Sophie to see what she thinks about this development, but she's staring at the menu intently. I lean towards her as Holden looks between us all. I sigh. "You okay, Sophie?"

"Yeah, I'm just wondering exactly what to eat here. There are so many options." She points at the meatloaf. "It's been so long since I've had anything like this."

I chuckle. "I'd say double up. Get some mac and cheese too, and the rolls."

"Encouraging me to skip a salad?" She laughs. "Next you're going to tell me to go for some whiskey."

"I would never do Gunner's job for him ... but you should. Southern Comfort will do the trick."

She laughs and nudges my foot. "Holden, anything catching your eye?"

He glances at the menu, then over to where Diana is still trying to keep Roman's attention. Roman knows how to avoid a scene, but I'm sure his patience is as frayed as mine. I clear my throat. "Diana, what do you know about cob salad?"

She perks up, then jumps into explaining what the cob salad has in it. It earns Roman enough time to decide what he wants to order. When the waitress comes over, everyone orders their drink, and Diana sighs.

"So, is this a normal night for you all? Going out on the town to enjoy yourselves with excellent food and alcohol and partying?" Diana asks.

"Not always," Roman says softly.

"We stay in, watch movies, play video games." Sophie lists.

"Sophie makes amazing pancakes." I chip in.

Diana beams. "She does, doesn't she? It used to be the Saturday special."

Just like that, Diana is eager to share about young Sophie, which makes Sophie drop between her shoulders, then eagerly drink her whiskey as it comes. She gulps it down until Roman shoots her a look. I brush the back of my fingers along the outside of her thigh.

"Easy, babe. We still have all of dinner to get through."

"Please stop her before she busts out the baby photos. I can't handle this much embarrassment." She pouts up at me.

"Diana, tell us more about you. What have you been up to?" I ask as I clear my throat.

Roman glances at Holden, who sips from his red wine easily, not a care in the world. Diana tells us about her marketing career, her side hustle as a social media influencer

who focuses on stock analysis. She hints at being interested in jumpstarting her personal life. Her home feels empty without Sophie there.

If Sophia was red when her mother was talking about how she used to catch lizards and hang them off her ears as a kid, she's neon now.

"Sophie, you get it. You took time off boys, after your last relationship, and we had each other to keep us busy, but honestly, I miss coming home to another person and having plans once I'm done with work." Diana admits.

She turns her eyes to Roman, but Roman's watching Sophia carefully like he's not sure what she's thinking or what she's about to do. He shifts his gaze when he feels Diana watching him, but I'm sure with her hyperfocus on him, she's going to realize sooner rather than later that Roman – if none of the rest of us – is interested in Sophie.

I clear my throat and nudge Diana. "I'm sure it won't be hard for you at all to find a person that makes you happy and is interested."

"Awe, you're sweet." She pats my knee. "I think I know you from somewhere. You've been on magazines, haven't you?"

"Just a few." I shrug.

She flips her hair over her shoulder and bites her lip while looking up at me. "Well, I'm all ears."

Sophia

DINNER IS ONE OF THE MOST AWKWARD EXPERIENCES I'VE HAD in New York. My mom keeps trying to flirt with the guys, one at a time, as they start conversations. Holden's soft voice and his hesitant answers seem to egg Mom on.

And I can't even say anything. Where the hell is Gunner? He'd know what to do in this situation. Once the food comes, Mom is at least quiet for a little bit. Roman winks at me from across the table, and I decide focusing on my food is a better option.

By some miracle, we get through dinner, and by the time we get back, I see Gunner stretched across the couch. Nick says something about finally relaxing with a bath, and of course, my mom offers to help him with a massage.

I shake my head and offer Gunner my leftovers. He happily digs in. "What did I miss?"

"Nothing crazy," Nick says.

"Apparently, Sophie used to hang lizards from her ears and bully the other kids in kindergarten," Holden says as he puts his own food in the fridge.

"It's not bullying if they said they loved me and gave me the money," I grumble.

He winks at me. "I have to get back to work. Let me know if anything happens."

Gunner sits up and glances around before stealing a quick kiss. He nibbles my bottom lip before letting go. I arch an eyebrow. "Why were you so late today?"

"Your father wanted to see me."

"Oh?"

"Apparently, he thought I'd be the easiest one to get through to."

"About?"

"Ah, Gunner! There you are!" My mom sashays in. Roman gives me a look from the other side of her shoulder and shakes his head once. Fuck. She's drunk. She drapes herself in Gunner's lap. "You might be more handsome than Miles."

"Not the first time I heard that, Diana." He winks at her.

"Why don't you and I get to know each other better over some drinks?"

"I don't know. I think you pre-gamed without me. I'm hurt." He pats his chest. "And I wouldn't dare start flirting *after* a woman started drinking."

"You don't want to take advantage of the situation." My mom pouts. Actually pouts!

Oh my god. My mom is flirting with a guy I just slept with. Kill me now. I fight the urge to run to my room and instead get up and make myself a drink. I don't even look at what I'm pouring into the shot glass.

Roman stands behind me and rubs my sides before gently kissing my neck. "Easy, Bambina." He purrs in my ear.

"No. I need to be drunk to deal with this. Trust me on that." I huff, downing the whole glass. Oh. It's tequila. I recognize the way it burns my nose as it goes down. "Whooo."

Gently pulling me back against him so I feel the familiar hardness of his body, Roman pushes my shot glass away. "Sophia, don't you remember what I told you today in the office? About bending you over?"

"Once, I'm not worried about anything. Two more drinks, and we both get what we want." I shrug.

"Oh no. I want you sober, so you remember each swat of my palm against your gorgeous ass, so you beg for my cock while I finger you, so you scream my name into your pillows when I fuck you hard."

I shiver at the promise in his eyes and his dirty words. I lick across my bottom lip and glance up at where Mom is still trying to make a move on Gunner. "I don't like her flirting with any of you at all."

"Jealous?"

"No." I shake my head. "It's not ... it's not *not* jealousy, but it's something else too. It feels wrong that my mom and I are interested in the exact same men. There are billions on the planet, but she just zeroed right in on you guys."

"Push her back towards your father." He purrs in my ear. "Love doesn't fade easily."

"They got divorced years ago, Roman."

"Logic doesn't matter as much as emotion does, Bambina. You should know that more than most." His lips brush my ear, heating my skin and making my pussy wet just like that.

I swallow hard as he rubs up my hip. "Are you worried about her being here?"

"Not as much," I mumble.

"Worried about anything?"

"Yes." I gasp as his fingers trail across the top of my panties. They come to a stop, and I look up at him. He arches an eyebrow. Trying to find words when he's touching me is next to impossible. "I ... Gunner said he met with Dad today. I want to know about that conversation."

"Then let's find out."

"Without Mom here?"

"Oh, you're so cheeky." She giggles.

Roman rolls his eyes and pats my pussy through my panties. "I'll take care of it."

"She's a sleepy drunk. She'll hit the wall soon."

"I'm not patient." He walks into the other room.

"Ooh, two for me? I like that."

"Oh, Mom." I cover my face and slide down behind the counter. I don't want to even think that she knows about that.

I'm no prude, but that's my mom! I don't want to think about her having sex with anyone, not even my dad, let alone the guys I've *actually* slept with. I know they're older; I know that they're closer to her age than mine, but come on. I just got over the age factor and felt comfortable with everything, and now she's rocking the boat ... or destroying it.

Holden slides down next to me. Before I can say anything, he puts his finger to his lips. I want to get a look at what's going on, but I hear my mom giggle to my right. Holden drags me against him, and we scoot around the side of the island like we're kids hiding cookies.

I almost giggle.

"Where did my little Sophie run off to? Lady Bug!" She yells.

I bite my lip and cover Holden's mouth so he doesn't give us away.

Roman chuckles. "It's been a long day. I'm sure she's up in bed already."

"She's so responsible. I can't believe I raised such a good kid. Good work ethic, kind, compassionate. I'm so proud of her." Mom gushes.

"You should tell her sometime."

"I will!" But then Mom drops her voice. "But I'd rather whisper dirty things in your ear. Bring it down here."

"As tempted as I am, Miss Lane."

"Diana."

"Diana." His voice can turn any name into a song. "We abide by guy code."

I arch an eyebrow at Holden, and he shrugs slightly before squeezing me close and nuzzling my neck. Roman continues. "Guy code means that none of us can even look at you too long since you're our friend's ex-wife. And, not to meddle or anything, but I know that Miles hasn't looked at another woman the way he looks at you."

"Really?"

"I saw it in the hospital myself."

That crafty bastard. I shake my head, and Holden turns me to kiss me softly. How long has it been since he and I kissed? Too long if I'm struggling to remember. I kiss him back and almost jump and give us away when something clatters on the counter.

Holden chuckles softly and pulls me back. I can't resist. It's a game to avoid getting caught that makes me feel wild and dangerous all at once. I kiss him again, licking into his mouth as we both struggle to stay quiet. I knot my fingers in his shirt and mold my mouth to his as he licks across my lips.

He grips my side and guides me closer, so I can feel exactly how hard he is. I lick against his tongue, then stroke deeper. He cups the back of my head as little sparks dance down my spine and pool in my belly. I'm hot all over but still, somehow have goosebumps popping up all over my thighs.

Just as I'm about to suggest we make a run for his room, I hear a gasp, something breaks, and then I'm wet. Holden puts his hand over my mouth as my mom whimpers. "I'm so sorry!"

"It's okay." Roman consoles her.

"Oh, I hope that wasn't an expensive bottle."

Holden blots at my face, but I can already smell the tequila. Jeeze, I'm going to have to take two showers to get this smell off me before work tomorrow. Less than one day and Mom's already flirted with every single guy in the house, broken a bottle of tequila drenching me, and ... and had fun.

I sit to Holden's side as I hear Roman walking my mom away. He rubs my thigh. "You okay?"

"Your distraction technique is flawless." I pat his thigh.

"I disagree. We're not making out anymore." He chuckles.

"Good. My turn." Gunner sits next to me with a salt shaker and sprinkles some on his finger before smearing it over my lips. "Margarita a la Sophie."

I almost laugh before he claims my mouth in something way too naughty to just be a kiss. When he draws back, I can still taste salt on my lips, but he licks along my neck and sucks my collarbone as if he can pull the tequila from my skin. Holden turns me to face him and kisses me with the same hunger.

Gunner's hand pushes my thighs apart, and I roll my hips forward, eager for his touch. Both of these men doting on me, kissing me, tasting me on the kitchen floor just because they can, and they want to? It's so intense.

No! No. I need to focus.

"But what about-" I start.

"Later." Gunner promises. "I like this dress."

"Thanks." I gasp as Holden jerks the zipper down in the back

"It'll look better on the floor."

But it ends up bunched around my waist as Holden picks me up and puts me on the already cleaned Island. He pulls my bra down and kisses me as he plays with my tits. I groan and kiss him back hungrily. I feel Gunner's hands stroke up my thighs and part them obediently.

He drags my underwear down and groans. "You're so wet, Sophie."

"You sure it's not tequila." Holden chuckles.

"Find out," I order, dragging my dress further up so he can see and touch and taste everything he wants. Gunner gives me a wicked grin, then kisses the inside of my knee, bites along the inside of my thigh, the spreads my legs, dragging me down the island until he can lick over my slit. Holden reaches for his belt, and I help him undo it while trying to stifle my moans.

"You want me to fill your throat?"

"Yes." I nod, then Gunner licks deeper along my clit, lapping and sucking until I can't help but roll my hips against him. "Yes!"

Holden groans as I wrap my hand around his cock. I pump him a few times while Gunner keeps teasing me with his tongue. Holden pants, and his eyes sear me until I lick over the head of his cock. He nods and sucks air through his teeth.

I wrap my lips around him and suck him deeper, the soft skin of his shaft sliding across my tongue and down my throat. I close my eyes to take him again and again. He thrusts against the back of my throat, making me gag as Gunner continues devouring my pussy.

He pushes two fingers in, and I grunt, lifting my head to watch him with Holden's cock still filling my mouth. Gunner smirks at me, then works a third finger in before lowering his head to lick across my clit again.

"You have such a pretty pussy, sweets."

Holden brushes his fingers through my hair and guides me over his cock. "Your mouth feels so good, baby."

I groan and nod, then suck his cock harder. We all need to get off after tonight.

Roman

ONCE I GET DIANA SETTLED IN HER ROOM, TUCKED IN WITH A bucket on her side of the bed in case she ends up getting sick, I go back down to the kitchen. What a long day. Dealing with everything at work, including no less than four calls from Miles, then Diana at dinner while trying to balance everything, Sophia as well, then coming home, just wanting to relax, and still having to put Diana to bed. Ridiculous.

A moan echoes downstairs, and I pause for a moment. I know Nick is doing his own relaxing, which means I'm missing out on some fun if my ears aren't deceiving me. When I reach the kitchen, I see Sophia's feet on the back of Gunner's shoulders and Holden's slacks around his knees.

I get to the bar and see Sophia's mouth wrapped around Holden's cock while Gunner licks and sucks her sweet pussy. Sophia writhes with pleasure, and then her eyes open, and she sees me. Holden chuckles.

"I think I'd like some dessert," I say, looking over every inch of Sophie's gorgeous body.

Her round, heavy breasts heaving with each breath. The muscle of her abdomen tightening as she rubs her pussy against Gunner's tongue. I undo my belt and guide her hand to my cock. She rubs me hard and fast, but I can tell she's already close. And she's not the only one.

Holden pants and grips her head hard. "Don't stop, Sophie. I'm almost ... almost."

She groans, and her cheeks hollow as she sucks him harder. I groan as I watch. Just as Holden's back straightens and he groans while he thrusts into her throat, Sophia's eyes roll back, and her muffled continuous moan tells me she just finished too.

Gunner kisses over her hips and moans as he pulls his fingers from her pussy. Holden pants when Sophie draws back and brushes his fingers through her hair before kissing her softly. "Damn, Sophie."

Gunner and I switch spots, and as she spreads her lips around his cock, I thrust into her soaking wet pussy. She groans as I stroke down her thighs, pulling both her legs over one shoulder so I can get nice and deep into her.

She's like heaven itself, warm and welcoming and so fucking perfect. Gunner fucks her pretty mouth as she plays with her breasts, pinching and teasing her nipples. Her back arches with each thrust of my hips against hers.

Groaning, I fuck her harder and faster. Sophie's eyes flick between us, especially when Holden comes over to rub her breast for her. God, she's amazing, so wonderful. Everything I've ever fucking needed and more.

The electricity that's moving through my body every time I thrust into her, every time I kiss down her calf, it's staggering. No one has ever made me dizzy, overwhelmed, hungry for more than sex like her.

Gunner gasps and grips her tighter. I know how wicked that mouth is. She can make a man come as quickly as she wants. Gunner keeps thrusting and she grunts and groans, bouncing between us until I can't hold back anymore.

I need to make her come, need to feel her come for me. I let her legs fall around me, then rub her clit as I fuck her harder. She moans and pants, her eyes closing as she drools all over Gunner's cock and soaks mine.

"That's it, Bambina. Come for us. Come now." I growl.

"Fuck, come fast." Gunner gasps.

She whimpers, but I feel her body give in as I find a good medium between rubbing her clit and slamming into her. Her body tightens, and her pussy quivers around me, dragging me deeper into her.

Gunner gives in, filling her mouth as he comes, and I barely jerk out in time to finish on her thigh rather than deep inside her. I pant, and Sophie moans softly, then giggles. "That's a better ending to tonight than I thought we'd have."

Holden shakes his head and kisses her again, long and deep. Gunner offers his shirt, and I clean her up. Once we make sure she can stand, we all go to the couch. Sophie lays across us, her head on my lap. Gunner massages her hands.

"I know you're worried about what happened with your dad." Gunner sighs.

I run my fingers through Sophia's hair. She rubs her foot over Holden's good leg, teasing him with the featherlight touch of her toes. Sophia sighs. "Yeah. We should talk about that."

"He's pissed. He thought he could "talk some sense" into me, but I reminded him he took part in the Bella situation."

"And I'm sure that didn't help at all." I roll my eyes.

"It certainly made him angrier." Gunner tugs at the shirt that's barely covering Sophia. She swats at his hand lightly and giggles. I smile as I curl my fingers in her hair. "Especially since it's nothing like that."

"I don't think I know what happened with you guys and Bella." Sophia chimes in.

Holden snorts. "We probably shouldn't talk about it, in all honesty. It's the past. Better to leave it there."

"Because Matthew is marrying her?" Sophia asks.

"Yeah. It would be awkward at the wedding. Let's refocus." I advise. "What did Miles say?"

"He hates us. He's sure that we abused our power and seduced his innocent daughter." Gunner continues. "You know, the stereotypical shit we thought would happen."

"It's not true." Sophia sits up and huffs. "I did just as much of the seducing."

Holden smirks at her, and Gunner winks. "I don't know. I did almost flash my cock the first day we met."

"But you didn't. Everything we did was consensual, every step of the way. I'm not being taken advantage of or anything like that."

"I know, Bambina." I pull her against my side and rub over her belly. "We know."

"Miles just has to get it all out of his system, that's all." Gunner shrugs. "He made some idle threats, but it will all blow over. No need to worry about a thing, sweets."

"As if my mother isn't enough to worry about," She grumbles.

"Everything will be fine," I promise.

I put on a movie, and soon enough, Holden goes back to work, and Gunner falls asleep on the couch. Sophia cuddles closer to my side. "You really think this will be fine? That my parents are just going to understand and be okay with what we're doing?"

"I already told you, I don't care what they approve of or don't approve of. I care about you." I shrug.

She nods and kisses me softly. "I better get upstairs. Tomorrow I'll see if my mom wants to visit my dad after your very persuasive conversation."

"I didn't lie." I steal her for another kiss.

She melts against me a little, and my heart tries to push through my ribs, pounding in my chest. I groan when she finally releases me. I want to follow her to bed, to curl around her, to kiss her until I get tired of it – which I'm not convinced will ever happen.

Groaning, I make myself go to bed and leave Gunner where he is. In the morning, I find Sophia talking to her mom in the kitchen. Sophia rubs her back. "It's okay, Mom. Everyone gets drunk once or twice in New York."

"Yeah, but I embarrassed myself. I'm supposed to be the responsible adult, and I made a mess." Diana sighs. "Coffee?"

"We can stop for Starbucks. I know that's your favorite. Then I can drop you off so you can see Dad and have a good day."

"You can't take any time off work? I'd love to get some actual family time."

"I can join you after work." She barters.

"Okay. We'll have a nice dinner together after your father and I catch up."

"Yeah, I definitely don't need to be there for that."

"I'll go get ready." Diana glances at me and goes red, then runs off quickly.

I wrap myself around Sophia and kiss along her throat slowly. "Good morning, Bambina."

She melts against me and rubs my side. "Good morning, Roman."

"How are you feeling? Any better than yesterday?"

"Yesterday ended pretty well." I chuckle.

She laughs and kicks me lightly. I let her go, and we get on with our day.

Nick joins me in my office and glances out at the sales floor. He points. "Just as I thought."

"What? Did you come up here to people watch again?"

"Neal."

I feel bile rise in the back of my throat as I stand up. I join him and glare out the window as Neal goes into Sophia's office. "Yeah, I don't like that."

"I learned through another person that Sasha and Neal were friends, kind of. They were friends in one sense or another, and I think she may have told him, which we'll need to deal with." "He'll try to blackmail her. We both know how much this position means to her and how badly she needs to have it on merit, not ... reputation." I agree.

I nod to myself, ready to take it on, but Nick stops me. "Call her instead. Make it less obvious that we're watching."

"Oh. Sure." I dial her phone and wait for her to answer. It takes more than a few rings, and then she answers. "Hello, Sophia. Is everything okay?"

"Of course, Mr. Agosti."

"If Neal threatens you or gives you any trouble, please let me know. We'll take care of it."

"That does sound like a great way to move forward with this project. I appreciate your input, and I will discuss it further with you shortly."

She hangs up, and I nod to Nick. "Yeah, he's being a problem."

"Short answers, or did she say something obvious?"

"We're not working on a project, and she gave an excuse to come over here."

"I'll stay, just to make sure everything is set, if that's fine."

"Sure. We could actually stand to talk a little more about the business and what we'd be doing in a case where Miles is unable to move forward."

We talk quietly for a long while, then Sophia comes in. Her cheeks are red, and she's obviously frustrated. As soon as she shuts the door, she slaps her hand down on the desk. "Nick, is it against H.R. policy to knee a guy in the balls?"

"If it's in the office."

"Or to stab him in the kidney?"

"Same answer."

Sophia pants, then makes herself sit down. She wipes under her eyes, then rubs her knees. "He knows about you guys and me and said that he'd be more than happy to make

you guys leave me alone without having me lose my job. All I had to do was ask."

"Fuck him," I growl.

"Roman, calm down."

"I'm so insulted. Like the only reason, I'd sleep with you guys is to get ahead in business? Not because I actually want to? And that I'd *want* to sleep with Neal despite the fact we've barely spoken to each other." She rubs her forehead. "This is awful. I hate him."

"We could fire him. We have the grounds to do it." Nick offers.

"We can't just fire everyone who finds out about us. Then it's just like a conspiracy theory ... but real. It's not how to deal with this." Sophia looks at her feet. "I'll just have to calm down and deal with it or something."

"Well, it won't hurt to have a conversation with him," I growl. "I don't tolerate that kind of shit at work."

"Unless you're the one doing it?" Nick teases.

I flip him off, and he takes Sophia to lunch so I can prepare to deal with the latest issue – Neal himself.

Sophia

NICK AND I SIT DOWN AT A NICE SUSHI PLACE. HE RUBS MY hand gently after we order our drinks. I didn't really understand how stress could put my dad in the hospital until now. I can feel the weight of every problem, of every molecule on my shoulders, threatening to flatten me until I'm no thicker than a sheet of paper.

I take a slow, deep breath and try to focus on something tangible. My thumb strokes across Nick's palm. He's real. Real, sweet, right here, and available for conversation. He's sturdy and reliable. Kind and understanding. I feel him, and the more I touch his hand, squeeze his fingers, the more control I have.

"Sophie." His voice is like a warm blanket wrapping around me on a cold day. My eyes finally lift to him, and he gives me a gentle smile. "Hey there."

"No kid gloves with me, okay?" I ask.

"You're too old for that." He agrees. "I'm worried about you, though. This is a lot to take in."

"It is. But I feel like if I take time off, it just validates the worst of the rumors. Plus, it will give me time with my mom, who's happy to talk about how sexy you all are. Or I'll just think about how things are with my dad. There's just ... no place for me to exist without worrying."

Nick rubs the back of my fingers with his thumb. I snort. "I sound so spoiled. I have you amazing guys. I have such a

good job. A great house, and I'm losing my mind because my daddy doesn't approve of how I live, and people at work are mean to me."

"You're allowed to let it bother you, Soph." He tightens his hold on me. "I mean it. Just because people somewhere else have it worse and just because it's not a worst-case scenario doesn't mean you don't have a right to feel upset or anxious about this."

I nod and suck my bottom lip before closing my eyes and pushing the heel of my hand against my forehead. "But I also have to take responsibility, Nick."

"How so?"

"I made the choice to be with you ... with all of you." I squeeze his fingers when he squeezes mine. "And I don't regret that. I knew there would be consequences once it was discovered, and I know that keeping it a secret would have bothered me too. I just"

"Keep going."

"I just really wish I had been the one to tell him." I shrug. "It probably wouldn't have made a difference, but I wish I could have told him, and I really wish my mom was in a hotel."

Nick chuckles and brushes my hair from my face with his other hand. "Don't want to share us?"

"Imagine your father hitting on me."

The disgust on his face is precisely my point. I nod, and he sighs. "Life isn't easy, but I'm sorry it's throwing so many curve balls at you at once. It's a lot for anyone to handle at any one time."

"Thank you for listening, Nick." I clear my throat. "And not just trying to fix everything before I could find out or anything like that."

"Roman means well."

"I know he does." I agree.

We pause our conversation as the sushi is laid out before us, then I move, taking the seat beside Nick instead of across from him. He rubs my back, and I continue. "I know he means well, but it's really nice just to be able to talk and have someone listen without trying to fix a problem. I feel ..."

"Heard?"

I nod, and he gently pecks my cheek. We eat, Nick picks up the check despite me insisting that I can at least pay half, then we take a walk around the block. He keeps my hand in his and sighs. "We could go on a date. I'm not much of a dancer, but I'd be willing to do that with you. Or they have painting classes where you can drink wine while someone walks you through painting. Or the planetarium."

"That sounds wonderful." I lean against Nick and kiss his neck. "Honestly, I'd love to."

When we get back to his car, I feel better. Less like I'm being crushed. But that in itself raises another question that has me hesitating once we park. "Nick?"

"Yes, darling?"

"Do you guys talk about your stress at all?"

He cocks his head to the side. I shrug, then immediately stumble over my words. "I just. Well ... I just don't want any of you to end up like my dad or to feel what I felt on the way to lunch, so if you do ever feel stressed, just come talk to me, okay. I'm a good listener."

Nick leans forward, his hand sliding over my cheek, then he hesitates. His thumb brushes just under my eye as his breath teases my lips. "I know you are, Soph."

I close the space between us, unable to draw back from him, to ignore him, to let this moment pass. I suck his bottom lip, then take him deeper, slipping my tongue between his lips until his tangles with mine.

Nick moans softly, and I rub across his toned bicep, then across his defined pec, so clear even through his shirt. He catches my hand before I can go for a button and rests his

forehead against mine. "Wicked woman." He says against my lips.

"Your clothes are still on. This is all innocent." I whisper.

He chuckles, pecks my lips, kisses me softly, then unbuckles me. I survive the rest of the workday, then remember I made a promise to my mother for tonight, which means seeing my father.

I get home and change into something innocent – well, as innocent as I have. A peach wrap dress that covers my cleavage and my legs down to my knees. I put on flats, keep my makeup light, and even pull on a white knitted wrap just to be extra covered.

My first time seeing Daddy since he found out, and I'm not at all excited about this. Especially with mom there. What if he can't hold back and he outs me to her? What if he doesn't but makes me tell her myself? Oh god, after last night, she won't be able to look at any of the guys.

I swallow that all down and text the guys in our group chat that I'm heading to the hospital to meet my mom and dad for dinner. Nick and Gunner send me encouragement. Holden sends me a cat meme that says, "hang in there." Roman reminds me that they're only a few minutes away if I need support.

I linger outside the hospital door, trying to eavesdrop to get a sense of what I'm walking into. But it's all hushed conversation and recorded laugh tracks. After taking a deep breath, I walk in with my head as high as I can manage to hold it.

Mom is perched on Dad's bed, and his eyes are all soft for her. Until he sees me, he clears his throat and leans back. Mom looks over and claps her hand. "There you are, honey! Okay. You stay with dad, and I'll go get our order and be back in just a minute."

"Okay." I nod.

I sit in the visitor's chair and watch her walk out the door, closing it behind her. My father clears his throat, and I slowly

meet his eyes while every curse word I've ever known flits across my brain. I curl my shaking fingers into my hand.

"Sophie." He pinches the bridge of his nose. "I don't even know where to start."

"So let's not," I whisper. "Let's not talk about it. We've never talked about my dating life or anything before, so..."

"I can't ignore it now." He sounds like he's in actual pain. "Four men ... that are *my* age or close to it? How am I supposed to feel about that?"

I swallow hard.

"They're my best friends. I trusted them to look out for you, to protect you."

"And they have, Daddy," I assure him. "They're good to me."

"They took advantage of the situation. They took advantage of you."

I narrow my eyes at him and wait for him to look at me before continuing. I may be nice. I may do as I'm asked at work, and I may be 'sweet,' but I'm perfectly capable of the word no.

"I'm an adult. I'm not a naïve eighteen-year-old, and I knew what I was getting into."

"You're barely an adult."

"I'm capable of saying no. I've said it to Neal plenty. I can make choices for myself too. Roman, Holden, Nick, Gunner ... they never *forced* me to do anything. They never pushed me farther than I wanted to go, and they always make sure I want what they give."

He shakes his head.

"Nick spent his lunch with me today just listening about how stressed I've been and holding my hand, telling me that I'm allowed to be stressed, and my emotions are valid." I hiss. "Gunner held me when I cried after you found out about us. I can list so many moments with each of them that had nothing to do with sex."

"And that's supposed to make me feel better?"

"It should!" I stand up. "Because they treat me with more respect and affection than anyone I've ever been with. I feel safe and heard and right when I'm with them."

I swear I can hear him gritting his teeth. "We're not done with this conversation, not entirely."

"Are we looping mom into it today?" I ask.

He shakes his head, and his face pales. "Not until I know what's really going on. The second I get out of this hospital, she's finding out unless she notices something at home before that."

"Fine." I shrug. "Also, Sasha told Neal what's going on, and I'm trying to make sure he keeps his job."

Dad looks up at me with slight surprise. "Why?"

"Because unless he deserves to be fired for something relating to his work, I don't see a reason to let him go." I shrug.

Before we can get any deeper into the conversation, Mom returns, saying that the delivery was waiting for her downstairs and she should have just asked me to bring it up. We have a rather tense family meal.

It's weird to see both my parents in one room not screaming at each other, and I can still feel dad staring daggers at me behind mom's back. Not to mention mom's confusion at my short answers. This isn't going to be easy to keep up for long. Mom's quick, and she's going to start pushing.

Once everything is laid out, there's going to be hell to pay. I just can't think about that now if I want to keep moving forward, and I'm definitely determined to do that. Dad knowing or not, the guys are right: it doesn't change how I feel for them.

I want to come home knowing that each of them wants me there, that we can laugh, have game nights, get naughty, cook, clean, watch movies, and even vacation together without any kind of problem.

So when I leave the hospital, bidding mom and dad a good night, I feel another heavy rock slide off my shoulder. This is all possible. Having the guys without losing my dad or job ... it seems doable, even if there are a few more hurdles in place than there used to be.

Opening the door, I find all four of the guys in the kitchen and can't help but smile as I watch them tease each other, talk about their day, the game on TV, and joke around about burning food.

A little bit of arguing is worth being a part of this.

Holden

SOPHIE JOINS US IN THE KITCHEN, AND I POUR HER A GLASS OF wine. She sits at the island and watches the chaos as Gunner loops her into the conversation about Matthew's wedding. Apparently, there's been hell with the cake, and her laughter fills the kitchen like a missing piece of a puzzle.

When she gets up after a while, Roman has her taste the vinaigrette he's worked on for the salad and holds her against him while kissing her cheek. None of us bring up Miles or her mother, and that seems to be just fine with her.

Once we finish cooking, we head to the table, but Sophie tells us she's already eaten. Thankfully, she stays with us. Forks scrape across plates as we eat, and I notice Sophie's leg bouncing. I rub down her thigh, and she blushes before taking a long drink of wine.

"Dad isn't going to tell Mom about what's going on." She announces.

"Really?" Nick shakes his head. "After giving us so much grief about being honest."

"There could be a reason for that." Gunner winks at Roman.

Sophie looks around, obviously confused. Gunner chuckles. "If Miles wants his ex back, it's best not to bring up this situation."

Rolling her eyes, Sophie strokes the lip of her glass with her finger. "Mom swore she'd never get back with him for good. But she has dropped hints about exactly how attractive she finds him despite the years."

"She's dropped plenty of hints in general." Roman grumbles.

It's true that woman isn't shy at all. Definitely not as reserved as Sophie is, but maybe that was a combination of alcohol and nerves. Who's to say? I'll still need to talk to Miles. I don't want anything getting confused when it comes to Sophie.

I don't want her put in a position where she feels alone or where she feels she has to defend herself with her back against the wall. We're all here for her, and I'm more than ready to step up and take care of Miles if it helps.

After dinner, Sophie insists on washing dishes since we cooked, but I slide into the kitchen with her while the guys set up poker. She washes, and I dry. After a while, her wet hand falls into mine, and she smiles slightly.

"You look so serious over there. Wrinkles between your eyebrows, worry all over."

"It's hard not to worry about you," I admit. "I want you to be happy, and I feel like I'm failing you."

She dries her hands, then hugs me. "Holden, it's not your job to make sure I'm happy."

"I want to be a good partner."

She giggles and gently kisses my chest through my shirt. "You are a good partner by being you. You support me, and you're in my corner for good and bad. I don't need Superman solving all my problems. I need you just like this."

"It's not fair that you're this good with your words. You know that, right?" I grumble against her hair.

"Just like it's not fair that you are so smart and giving and sexy." She rubs my sides.

We finish the dishes, and Sophie leans on the counter, refilling her glass with wine. I put mine next to hers, and she

fills it up much more than necessary. I catch the bottle, right it, and put the stopper in as she chuckles.

"Only filling half a cup is terrible."

"Moderation."

"You can have moderation ... and a full glass." She smirks at me over her glass.

I roll my eyes and lead her out for poker night. She wins a few hands, but it's not a landslide like last time. After Gunner has most of the pot, Sophie yawns, and stands. "It's been a really long day."

"Say no more, sweets." Gunner tells her. "Get your beauty rest."

She kisses each of us goodnight, and I savor the feel of her body pressed to mine. She waves, and Roman shakes his head before shuffling again. "Should we be worried that her mother isn't home yet?"

"She's a grown-up." Gunner shrugs. "But I'll text Miles just to make sure."

"You mean to stay in his good graces." I tease.

He flips me off, but I see the corner of his mouth lift. "Someone has to. Holden is out here just spilling details while suddenly growing a pair to put Sasha in her place. Roman is not returning his calls. Nick is also pretty much ignoring him."

"He'll get over it." Nick waves it away. "I'd rather make sure Sophie's okay."

After a few more hands and Gunner's assurance that somehow Diana is staying overnight at the hospital, we go our separate ways. I get some work done, then head to bed. I deal with loud, gunfire-filled nightmares where I can't outrun anything and feel every bullet rip through me.

Jumping up, I hear a gasp and see Sophie coming in. I adjust on my bed and grab my prosthetic, making sure I'm attached before I rub over my forehead. "What time is it?"

"One ... in the afternoon. I spent half of today at the office and decided I'm going to do half and half since most of what I do I can get done at home." She admits. "Although right now, all I want to do is sleep."

I move back in my bed and leave the blanket lifted for her to join me. Sophie slides in, cuddling close to me. She knots her fingers in my shirt, then kisses along the collar of my shirt. Her lips send shivers skittering down my back, but I promise myself I'm going to behave. We need more tender moments between us.

Sophie snuggles against me, her light perfume seeping into my existence until I can't hold my eyes open anymore. She's warm, soft, sweet. She's the perfect teddy bear to fight off every monster in the dark.

I spoon her close to me and nuzzle the back of her neck. She hums low in her throat. "That feels good, Hold."

"I'll make you feel good when we get up. First, we need some decent sleep."

And she doesn't argue. I don't have any dreams at all when Sophie is here. I just drift aimlessly in a black sleep that seems to consume me entirely. But when I wake up, I'm alone. I look around nervously, sure some kind of shit hit the fan.

My phone tells me that Sophie's mom came home and she didn't want to be caught here. I roll my eyes and force myself to work while hating the fact that Sophie can't just stay here as long as she likes. She should be free to do what she wants when she wants as an adult.

I shake my head and remind myself to push out of my usual method of doing things. I'm not going to think one idea to death until I finally commit to it. I'm going to move forward; take the steps I need to keep pushing and driving myself forward.

So I work. I get through the day, then I go down to the gym and work out with Nick. He nods to me, and we get through a cardio-intensive workout with minimal conversation. Nick doesn't push for things like that, which I

appreciate considering I rarely have something on my mind that I want to discuss.

As we cool down, Nick hands me some water. "How are you feeling?"

I nod once, take a drink, then nod again. "Good."

"No stiffness or new pain?"

"Nope."

"You know you could tell me, and I'd try to help, not hold you back, right? I'm not going to be a dick to you like I was to others overseas."

"I know. Old habits die hard." I shrug.

Nick rolls his eyes. He'd called out guys left and right for not seeing the medic to prevent infection, but some guys were determined that if they could lose a hand or foot, they'd be able to go home. It was a kind of madness that threatened everyone at some point.

Nick nods. "See you for dinner?"

"Maybe, but no promises." I shrug.

I end up working through dinner and don't grab a snack until almost nine. Nick has Sophie on the counter, devouring her mouth. I chuckle to myself as I pick through the fridge for leftovers. Before I can make a choice, a hand wraps around my wrist, and I turn to see Sophie watching me as Nick kisses down her throat.

Shutting the fridge, I claim her mouth, licking deep as her tongue dances with mine. I groan and grab her ass as her hand slides up under my shirt, stroking over my suddenly hot skin. I groan and nip her bottom lip.

Nick pulls at her shirt until I release her and help him lift it over her head. He kisses across her breasts as she moans. "I like how we use the kitchen."

"You're a feast." He purrs against her skin.

Sophie's eyes burn through me, and I nod as I cup her face in my hand before kissing her again. My hand slides up between her thighs and pushes her underwear to the side. She shivers, then spreads her legs wider for me, nodding against me as her fingers wrap around the back of my head and pull me closer.

I groan as I rub her wet clit, teasing her with slow circles, then steady up and down motions. She gasps and pulls away to try and muffle a moan as I kiss across her throat.

She tastes so good, every inch of her. Her mouth, her skin, her pussy. Nick frees her breasts of her bra, letting them spill out before his mouth claims one of her tight nipples. Sophie rubs the growing bulge in my sweats, and I pant before biting the inside of her shoulder.

"Ooh." She groans as I push one finger inside of her.

"Do you want to come?" I ask in her ear. "Right here?"

"Yes." She nods, then bites at my jaw. "Please. Please."

I push a second finger into her and feel Nick's fingers brush her clit. Sophie jumps and pants, her hand slipping until she's lying flat on the island. Nick groans, and I free my fingers of her pussy, spreading the wetness around her nipple so I can taste her as I lick and suck her hard peak.

Sophie groans and strokes down my neck as I do the same to her other breast. I want to savor each moan, every panting breath, every little twitch of her body. Glancing down, I see Nick devouring her pussy, licking and sucking and teasing her. I pull one of her thighs towards me, and she groans.

"I want your cock." She tugs at my sweats. "Holden, I want to taste you."

How the fuck am I supposed to tell her no? I drop my pants and offer her my cock. Her hot lips wrap around the head of my cock, and I groan, fisting her hair. She gasps and takes me deeper as her hips roll for Nick.

God, her mouth is so tight around me, and it only gets tighter as she sucks me down to her throat. She gags draws back, then takes more. Her eyes open to meet mine, and I see a smile there as her cheeks hollow and her raw lips spread to take more of me. It's sexy as hell.

Her red cheeks, messy hair, glazed eyes focused on me. Her moan is muffled around my cock as she tightens her hold on the base of me. I thrust into her mouth, and she nods, leaning towards me as if she can take even more.

Sophie's drool coats me, making me shiver every time she comes up for a breath as the air brushes my shaft. She moans and rubs her hand through Nick's hair as he licks into her wet pussy.

"Take everything you want, baby." I encourage.

Sophie

I TAKE HOLDEN HARDER AND DEEPER, WANTING TO MAKE HIM come so badly. He's been so patient, so gentle, and ... well, I'm impatient to taste him across my tongue. But Nick, hitting every perfect spot with his tongue, makes it nearly impossible to focus.

Panting, I suck Holden hard, flicking my tongue over his shaft before coming up and focusing on the head. I keep stroking his wet length with my hand, and he takes a sharp breath. Mmm, so this works on him.

Heat threatens to tear through me as Nick groans and pushes two fingers in my soaking wet pussy, curling them against a spot that sends lightning through my core. I pant, then focus entirely on Holden. I need him to come and to come now.

I use my tongue across the tip of his cock, flicking, licking, teasing, then sucking hard. Finally, he fists my hair, lets out a string of curses, and thrusts deep in my mouth to come down my throat. I moan and let go of my own restraint.

Now that I can focus on Nick, all it takes is a perfect press of his fingers and a flick of his tongue, and I'm lost, my body spasming on the island as I pant and groan and grab at Holden's ass. Once I come down, Holden kisses my temple. "Beautiful."

"Sorry for interrupting your snack time," I murmur as Nick kisses up my thigh.

Holden chuckles and shakes his head. Nick kisses my belly, and I lift his chin to my mouth. "How was *your* snack?"

"Delicious." He grins at me. "Should we take this to the living room?"

"Your mom is supposed to come home tonight." Holden reminds us.

"My room then," I say as Nick helps me up, and we grab my clothes. I blow a kiss to Holden, and he winks at me. Nick tugs me towards him at the stairs to my room, and I stumble against him.

"I can't get enough of you, Sophie." He pants.

I rub his shoulders, then jump and wrap my legs around him. Nick grins and carries me upstairs. I kiss him hungrily the entire way up the stairs, giving up on keeping track of all my clothes.

We come down on my bed together, and I roll on top of him, eager to be filled. "I want you *now*."

"Yes." Nick pants.

I slide down over his cock, rolling my body on his as we pant and groan together. I gasp as I ride him hard. My patience is gone. I just need Nick, his hands stroking my back, pulling me closer so he can kiss me as I ride him. He groans against me as I nearly let him out, only to take every inch deep inside me again.

"You're amazing, Sophie. Beautiful. Perfect."

"Fuck." I groan, digging my nails into his chest.

"I'm so fucking lucky." He groans.

"That's my line."

I sit back up and brace my hands on his thighs so he can see every inch of me as I ride him. My breasts bounce as I ride him harder. The bed squeaks and hits the wall with every thrust until I almost can't hear Nick's grunts and hungry growls.

"Fucking goddess." I hear him say before he rolls us onto our sides, pulls my leg tightly over his hip, and fucks me hard and deep.

My head falls back as I take what he gives, barely able to move in this position. I whimper and moan, not afraid of being loud as Nick fucks me as hard and deep as I need him to. My body trembles, and I groan.

"Don't stop. I'm so close!"

"Me too, angel."

My nails dig into the back of his neck, and I kiss him hard until my orgasm rips through me, turning everything black and fuzzy and warm. I shiver and feel something hot spread across my belly before I flop onto my back.

Nick groans softly. Then he wipes off my stomach. I laugh once and nuzzle closer to him. "That was fun." I smile.

"Needed." He agrees, playing with my hair.

His fingers brushing slowly across my scalp send pleasurable shivers down my spine. I know why a cat purrs when he touches me like this. I close my eyes and try to ignore the thoughts swirling in my head.

But my feelings are getting harder to ignore when it comes to the guys. I almost told Roman I love him multiple times over. I basically did tell Gunner. Now the word lingering on my tongue while I'm with Nick and Holden.

Is it possible to love them all? To want them all to myself for the rest of my life? Nick draws my chin up to kiss me slowly, softly. God, I'm going to fall out of reality and into straight bliss with the four of them.

"I should go before your mom gets home." He murmurs.

"Can't get caught yet," I murmur.

"Not when I have more planned." He winks.

I giggle and watch him go, not bothering to cover up. At this point, there's not a single inch of me these guys haven't seen, touched, or licked. I don't bother to get dressed after a quick shower. I just dry off and flop back into bed.

I have very loud nightmares that I can't place. Just shouting, the feeling of loss, neglect, searching through the dark for something. I wake up in a tangle of blankets, sweating and panting. Looking around, I'm in my room, nothing out of place, alone.

Stumbling up, I see that it's not even five a.m. But there's no way I'm giving that nightmare an opportunity for round two. I get ready for the day, then head downstairs and start on breakfast. Pancakes seem like a decent way to start the day. I put blueberries in some and chocolate chips in others, not sure what the guys or Mom will want.

It's strange I haven't seen Mom in a bit, but hopefully, that means she's with Dad, which will improve both of their moods. Although I don't want to think about what they can and can't get away with in a hospital room.

I hum to myself as I work on making bacon, then two arms wrap around me. I don't have to guess when I can smell Roman's cologne. "Buongiorno bellissimo."

There's a pause, then I'm spun around, and Roman kisses me hard and deep, his tongue claiming my mouth until I giggle and pat against his chest. He beams at me. "Bambina, you can't just use Italian on me without warning."

"Or what?"

"You have to deal with the consequences." He kisses me again, his thick arm tight around my waist.

I moan into his kiss and drop the spatula to rub over his broad shoulder, feeling the muscle harden under my touch. When he releases me, I feel my whole body sigh with pleasure. "I'm trying to learn more in case we ever go back. I don't want to embarrass you."

"Impossible." He whispers.

"Do you want blueberry or chocolate chip?" I motion to the pancakes. He looks me over again, and I poke his chest. "I'm not on the menu this morning."

"How about tonight?"

"Maybe." I turn in his arms and rub my ass against the bulge in his pants.

He groans and kisses across my neck. "Don't tease me so early."

"Why?"

"I don't have my normal amount of control." He squeezes my ass to prove it, then smacks me lightly.

I nip his neck, and he groans. "You're pushing your luck, Sophia."

He kisses my temple, then piles his plate. He offers me juice as I keep cooking. I want to make sure there's enough for everyone, including Holden. A door opens, then I hear Gunner. "Sweets!"

Turning, I brace myself just in time to be picked up. He swats my ass before setting me on the counter and kissing me deeply. I draw back, then kiss him softly and say, "Good morning," against his lips; he jerks my hips tighter towards him. He sniffs the air and groans before kissing me again, then releases me.

"You spoil us."

"This doesn't mean I'm going to be a stay-at-home wife type," I point at him with the spatula.

"Of course not." But he looks me over as if he can't imagine anything better. "Why would you want to cook and clean all day in short tight things saving all your energy for when we get home or letting us take you on long luxurious vacations."

I hop down from the counter. "I could cook and clean naked, and then you'd pout because you were at work and didn't get to see."

"You've got me there." He admits.

"Choose your pancakes. And grab some bacon."

Once they have food on their plates, most of the teasing subsides. Nick grabs his stuff to go since there's an issue he has to take care of at work. He kisses my cheek and winks at me before heading out. I make a plate for myself, and Roman pulls me onto his lap, so I eat there.

"And what are we doing with the asshole at work?" He asks.

"I told you unless his work suffers, he's fine. We can't fire everyone who knows." I roll my eyes before stabbing a pancake."

"You could work from home." Gunner offers.

I arch an eyebrow, circling back to the housewife conversation. Gunner holds up his hands, then catches my chin. "I mean as the badass office woman you are, sweets."

"Mmhmm"

"Holden works from home. You could come into the office twice a week just to double-check things, and that might be a better balance for now if you're uncomfortable." He murmurs, searching my eyes before kissing me hungrily.

I wrap my hand around the back of his neck, and he groans, but Roman's fingers push the skirt of my dress up to slide up my thigh. I squirm and gasp, trying to hold my own between the two of them.

Clearing my throat, I nod. "I'll consider it."

"Good." Roman teases me, stroking my slit through my panties. "We want what's best for you."

"Might make us more productive too." Gunner teases, blatantly eye-fucking me. "You are the best distraction I've ever had."

"You and your sweet talk." I tease. "Finish your pancakes."

"Yes, ma'am."

As he moves back, I swear I see a shadow across the hall. I stretch to look. "Holden?"

No answer. Roman rubs over my belly. "What is it, Bambina?"

"I thought I saw something. I guess it was just my eyes playing tricks on me." I shrug and take another bite from my pancakes.

It doesn't change the sudden stone in my stomach. It's fun playing around in public areas around the house, but ... no. Mom's not up this early. She never gets up before eight, and it's not even seven yet.

Gunner goes for the scotch, and I point at him. "Hey. No drinking and driving."

"Ooh, someone's got orders today." He pinches my cheeks and kisses me until I'm dizzy and rubbing myself against Roman, who is more than happy to keep teasing me.

His fingers pushing under my underwear to stroke my clit are much more convincing than that little voice in my head that remembers those drug and alcohol classes we took as kids.

"A glass of alcohol for me is like ... a can of energy drink to most people. But, I've got a car waiting for me out front sweets. Not worth it to drink and drive with so many options available," He winks.

Roman nods then kisses my neck. "It's cute that you worry about us."

"I'd rather not worry." I point out.

"I know, sweets. I know you like me in one piece." He pushes my hair from my eyes, then kisses me again before walking out. Then I hear him clear his voice. "Diana! I didn't know you were up."

"Fuck." I gasp.

Gunner

DIANA LOOKS AT ME FOR A LONG MOMENT, AS IF TRYING TO decide what she's going to do or say. I take a drink from my scotch and offer it to her. "Need a morning jump start."

"You have ... interesting mornings here." She glances back into the kitchen

I follow her gaze and see that Sophie is conveniently gone. Roman looks unbothered, just eating pancakes like any civilized person would. I take another drink. "Sophie's cooking is just amazing. Did you teach her?"

"No. she likes the cooking channel. I thought she was going to be a chef when growing up." Diana's eyes flick back to me with all the threat of a jungle cat. "And now I'm wondering exactly what her position entails."

"Diana"

"So maybe you can explain to me *exactly* what the fuck you're doing with my daughter?" The honey-sweet tone of voice doesn't hide the venom underneath.

"That might be a conversation that involves Sophie, who, um ... just happens to be missing." I try my best to avoid the conversation all together.

Sophie doesn't need more stress at the moment, and honestly, I'm not about to explain to Diana that I love her daughter and will happily show her that in whatever way I can all day, every day. Especially not when I haven't told Sophie yet.

"Oh, I think you are perfectly capable of telling me what I saw in the kitchen."

"Or you could tell me what you think you saw."

"Are you gaslighting me?"

"Never."

"Then spit it out."

"You could ask Miles."

She blinks at me a few times, shakes her head, and barrels into the kitchen to take on Roman. Roman nods to us as he rinses his plate before putting it in the dishwasher. Sophie comes up behind him a moment later, as if it's possible that her mother didn't see her five minutes ago, happily sandwiched between the two of us.

"Sophie?"

"Morning, Mom. Would you like some pancakes?" Sophie offers, smile still in full affect.

"No, I'd like to know what's going on here while your father is away. I thought I heard some things last night, but I was sure that was just my frayed nerves ... now, I think the moans and whispers were exactly what I thought they were." She crosses her arms over her chest and stares down at Sophie. "Care to enlighten me?"

"I would love to help explain, but we have to start our day and-"

"Don't make me pull out the middle name and mom tone." Diana threatens.

Roman wraps an arm around Sophie, pulling her towards him, and I stand at her other side, determined to make sure she feels safe. She's not alone in this, and she shouldn't be the only one forced to own up to what's going on.

I rub her shoulder softly. There's not a single joke on my tongue that will help defuse the situation; there's only the concern I have for Sophie and our current, fragile feeling situation. I clear my throat. "Diana."

"You should probably call me Miss Lane."

"That doesn't change what I'm about to say."

"No, but I might be less pissed when you say it.

"Miss Lane, we're dating your daughter," I say evenly.

She laughs. Once, twice, a third time, then she shakes her head. "Very funny. Saying "we" like you both are. That's a good laugh, Gunner. I was prepared to kick your ass."

Roman and I exchange a look, and Sophie huffs. "I am, Mom. I'm dating all four of them."

"That's not a thing."

"It is." Sophie hisses. "I'm doing it. If you don't believe me, maybe you should ask Dad."

That stops the laughter. Her mother looks between us. Her mouth opens and closes, and she shakes her head. "You cannot let him find out about this, Sophia. I'm one thing, but your father. He'll flip his lid if he even thinks something is going on." She points at us.

"Well."

"No. I'm serious. You'd be lucky to be living here and definitely lucky to be sitting happily all together like nothing is going on. So I'll do you a favor." She cups Sophie's face. "Narrow it down to one man, and you'll never have a problem with him."

Sophie blinks at her mother, obviously confused. 'What?"

"Yeah. Just choose one guy to be with, and I'll make sure that no matter what, your dad doesn't have anything negative to say about it. I know my way around that man." Diana insists. "I can get him to behave for one man."

"Well, I don't think I can do that," Sophie argues, wrapping her arm around mine while also rubbing Roman's back.

"I think you're going to want me on your side with this," Diana argues. "Try telling your dad that you're dating two men."

"Well, that would be a lie."

"What?"

"I'm dating four, not two."

I swear, Diana is so pale; I'm worried about her health as she continues to try to get the word "four" out. She stumbles then points at Sophie. "We're talking to your father."

"Well, Sophie has a pretty busy day. Why don't I go with you, Diana?" I offer.

"Gunner, I can't trust that I won't try to hit you at least once."

"Feel free. I'm not that easy to bruise."

"They're twice your age!" She blurts out. "All of them! Your father's best friends, and you're just *screwing* them!?"

I actually wince at how loud she is. Roman's arm tightens around Sophie's waist. "We're not just in it for the sex."

"Oh yeah, because it's possible for any of you to have an actual relationship with her, let alone *all* of you." She scoffs. "What do you have in common? Hmm?"

"Plenty." Roman growls. "Sophie isn't just some-"

"She's some kinky sex toy you all share, and somehow you made my smart, capable daughter okay with it."

"Stop talking like I'm not here!" She nearly yells. "I chose this. I don't know why it's so hard for you and dad to wrap your heads around it. I like them. They're good to me and what we have is special. If you don't get it, fine. It's not for *you* to approve of."

I smile and rub her back until her eyes flick to mine. "Well done, sweets."

"Thanks." She bites her lip shyly, then turns on her mother. "I care about each of them, and I know they care about me."

"Honey, it's so easy to think that when guys say and do whatever they think will get them in your pants. You're smarter than that. You know how they are. Just because

they're older, that doesn't change anything." Diana tries another angle.

"You don't know them. You've been here a few days."

"And you've been here a few months."

"Yeah, and that's all it's taken for me to fall for each of them." Sophie hisses.

Roman and I blink at each other, and Sophie takes a step back, her face going from bright red to paler than I've ever seen it. She glances at us, then clears her throat. "I'm working from home today."

"Okay."

"If you need me, call."

"You got it." I nod.

Roman reaches back for her. "Bambina-"

I shake my head at him. She has to process what she just said, and I get that. It's a big thing emotions wise. Admitting that you are actually in love with someone can mess your whole brain up. I came close enough with Sophie that I had to think things through for a few hours before I could be around her again.

She's got that times four. Plus, all this with her mom.

Her mom who's just standing there, glaring at us in what looks like shock. "Did she say her dad knows?"

Fuck yes, easy out. "Well, he kind of does."

Roman rolls his eyes. "If you want to say something to us, we're right here. Not going anywhere. I'm not ashamed of being with Sophie."

"Or of sharing her with three other men?"

"No. We're like a family. We take care of each other, and we're happy. It works." Roman takes a step towards her.

"But I think it'll be easier now that everyone knows. Miles knows, you know, Sophie knows that you both know. We can finally be done with all the secret-keeping and the running in circles." I point out.

"I don't need to hear another word from you, Gunner." She points at me. She looks between Roman and me before shaking her head. "To think that I was interested in either of you."

"Not both?"

She throws her hands up and storms out of the house. Roman pats my back. "Wow. You really went there."

"It got her to leave without trying to get Sophie's attention again." I shrug.

"I didn't think you'd push that far, though. Flipping it around, throwing Miles under the bus, making Diana think about wanting us both."

"I mean, she wasn't shy that first night. I think she would have taken all of us if she could have." I shrug. "And I'm not a fan of hypocrites."

Roman glances back to Sophie's room then looks at his phone. It's buzzed three times. "Will you-"

"I'll check on her. Get to work and let Nick know what's going on. He'll be pissed if he's left out of the loop again." I nod.

Roman pats my back. "Finally, done with this shit."

"That's funny."

Rolling his eyes, he rushes out of the house as I go upstairs to Sophie's room. I pull her off her pillow, curling her in my arms so she can cry into my shoulder. I rub her back and kiss her cheek. "Are you embarrassed about what you said or upset about the yelling?"

"Both." She gasps.

"Well, your mom is gone to yell at your dad. She put that together once you left." I murmur. "And it was nice to hear."

Sophie pulls away from me and meets my eyes. "What?"

"Sweets, I've spelled it out a few times without saying it, and I'm sure at least one other person has." Because I've never seen Roman so protective and involved in anything as long as I've known him. "There's no reason to be embarrassed."

"I just ... It's a lot in one morning."

"I know." I brush her hair from her face and kiss her temple. "You could take this morning off. Get yourself together after relaxing. Eat some of the pancakes you made, and ease into work. As long as you get everything done, who's going to complain?"

"I'm going to start calling you Sweets instead." She murmurs.

I kiss her softly, sucking her bottom lip. "That might get confusing, but I could live with it."

She gives me the softest hint of a smile, then pokes my chest. "You better head out before you start expecting other things to happen."

"Me? I'm a good clean, innocent boy." I smirk.

She shoves my chest. "Good, yes. Innocent. No." She laughs softly.

After one more kiss, I head out to work, hoping that we might get a break from drama today, at least until we all get home.

Sophie

The day goes by, and I get a grip on myself. I'm still thinking about what Gunner said when lunch rolls around, though. I mean, I guess they've all *shown* that this is more than just some casual ongoing hookup fueled by convenience. I mean, Roman had me cooking with his grandmother. Gunner did basically tell me he loves me, the way that Nick looks at me and dotes on me. How Holden has been working on himself, how he's been more present with himself and me.

I chew my bottom lip and swallow. It wouldn't be the worst thing in the world if I told them I love them. One at a time or all together. Because it's true, it's as true as saying that I'm afraid of what's going to happen when my father gets out of the hospital, especially now that my mother knows what's going on.

Getting through the day and checking off emails and tasks is easier than thinking about all this, so I get done at my usual time, then just lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. I need maybe thirty minutes to wallow before I go downstairs and figure out what to do with the rest of the day.

Would it be so bad to just take the rest of the day off? I could just sleep. Let things happen as they will since clearly, being awake or involved doesn't change the outcome to a high degree.

I take a nap, get through a shower, and finally, go back downstairs. After a moment, Holden joins me in the kitchen to help me package up breakfast and put it away. He doesn't touch me or try kissing me, which means either Roman or Gunner told him.

When I sit on the couch and pull out the PS5 controller, he sits beside me, just there. I roll my eyes. "Who told you?"

"No one. I just overheard plenty this morning. Your mother is pretty loud. It got my attention."

"Sorry," I murmur.

"It's okay. Well. It's okay to me. Are you ... okay?" His brow furrows.

"As okay as I can be. I'm just tired of walking around like what we're doing is shameful because it's not, and I'm happy."

"With the way things are?"

"With all of you." I nudge him. "When you're not cheating in Call of Duty."

"I don't cheat. I just ... know how to shoot."

"Sure."

"Talk to Gunner and his fancy clicking." Holden smiles slightly. "I think he knows a cheat code or two."

"I knew it!"

We laugh for a moment, and Holden rubs my back. He's gotten a lot more open to physical touch, and he reads me so well now. It's a big change from when we first started.

"You're important to me, Sophie. I'm sorry if I come off as too protective sometimes, but I just want to make sure that I'm doing everything I can for you."

"Well, there's plenty of me and my problems to go around." I roll my eyes.

Holden squeezes me gently and kisses my temple. "We'll take care of you. All you have to do is let us, Sophie. You know that, right?"

"I know," I grumble, my face heating. "Now stop being so serious and grab a controller so I can kick your ass instead of blush myself to death."

He does as I ask, and we end up playing more than a few competitive rounds against each other until I climb on top of his lap and try to keep him from seeing. He huffs. "Now, who's cheating?"

"I just think the view is better from right here." I smile and blink my eyes at his gorgeous face.

Holden knocks us both to the side, his competitive nature getting the best of him. He destroys me and then picks me up from the floor while laughing. "You on my lap is absolutely an advantage considering what you do to me."

"Me? I'm all innocent."

"Lies." He tickles my sides until I'm squealing with laughter and swatting at his hands.

"And here I was worried you'd be a mess."

We look up to see Nick. He sets his briefcase down and joins us on the couch. He gently pecks my lips. "Sorry I wasn't there to help this morning."

"Oh, there was plenty of yelling as it was. We woke Holden." I rub his good knee.

"It was something alright." He agrees. "Mostly a lot of the same thing in different ways. Sophie's with all four of us. It's ridiculous because we're twice her age and you know ... four of us. It's not a real relationship; we're just using her as our kinky sex toy."

Nick rolls his eyes. "So a bunch of assumptions and Sophie trying to set it straight."

"Yes!" I agree, frustrated that it's so obvious to us. I pout. "Why is it so hard for other people to believe? If they can like one person, I can like four."

"I think it's more the confusion at all four of us being okay with the other guys. Don't you know guys are supposed to be territorial and easily jealous?" Nick asks, a pancake flopping over his fingers.

"Do you need a plate?"

He shakes his head. "Nope. And I don't need anyone but you, Sophie. I know that we're all together, as a unit or whatever you want to call us, but I'm not going to start demanding you leave the other guys alone."

"Same," Holden promises. "I like what we have, including everyone."

My eyes water a little, and I pull them both into a hug that sandwiches me between them. Their words come out so easily, and I know that they don't have to pretend to care about me like they do, which makes it all the better.

I clear my throat after a moment and nod. "Thank you. Both."

"Do you want to spar?" Nick asks.

"Sure. Holden?"

"Nah. My lunch is up anyway." He kisses my cheek. "Kick his cocky ass for me, though."

I giggle as he walks away, and Nick leads me to the gym. I hit the punching bag for a while until Nick corrects my form, then we spar, stretch, clean up, and hit the showers. By the time I come back downstairs, I expect my mom to be waiting there with a whole intervention ready.

But she's nowhere to be seen. I check my phone and see nothing from my dad either. Rather than worry over it, I pick up, organize, go through the house looking for anything I can do, and start a load of laundry before working on dishes.

Which is how Roman finds me. He wraps himself around me and kisses the back of my head. I squirm in his grasp. I know he just wants to help, but I need him to let me fight my own battles. I need him to see me as an adult, not some little girl that needs protection.

"Bambina?"

"I appreciate you are always willing to stand up for me, but I can fight my own battles too," I say.

He watches me without saying anything, but I see the frustration in his eyes. I sigh. "Things have been tense with my

family, and I appreciate you. I really do. I love how willing you are to be there for me no matter what, but I need you to know that I can and will stand up for myself too. I'll stand up for you, our relationship, all of it."

"I know you will, Sophia."

"And I know that you're doing what you do out of the goodness of your heart and because you care about me." I soften my voice. "But sometimes I have to do it myself."

"How will I know what times those are?"

I bite my lip. "Um ... when I complain about it?"

He rolls his eyes and opens his arms to me. I hug him and kiss his cheek. "Just let me do some of the protecting too, okay?"

"Okay."

"Let me feel like I can handle myself, even though I know you have my back."

"Always." He purrs in my ear. "And I'd like to have more than your back."

"You're horny?"

"Incredibly." He groans, pulling my chin up. "You're a fierce little thing, and hearing you give your mom a piece of your mind and standing up to me. Sexy as hell."

I groan and rub his jaw. "Not in the kitchen."

He laughs and picks me up, carrying me to his room. It's a simple space, nothing crazy, but he has a collage of postcards from Italy and some pictures of friends on his desk. I glance at the wide expanse of wall with nothing on it.

"You need some art, Roman."

"Later. Right now, I need you in my bed, wearing much less."

His rough voice and the intensity in his hot eyes can make anything sound like pure sex. I slowly undress, and he watches while undoing the buttons on his shirt. The restraint shows in his tight jaw and the way he jerks the buttons apart.

I swallow once I drop my bra to the floor and step out of my panties. Roman stands, shrugging out of his shirt to show his thick shoulders, those muscular arms, and his delicious chest and abs. How can anyone look at him and not want him?

How is it possible that he can want me?

"Roman?"

"Bambina." He wraps an arm around me and jerks me against his body so I can feel the heat rolling off him.

I try to find the words. All three of them, but my mouth is dry. Roman kisses me softly, his tongue gently stroking over my bottom lip until I open for him, welcoming him deeper. And just like that, his patience is gone. He devours me, claims me, brands me as his all with just one kiss.

Lifting me off the ground, he pulls me into bed, coming down on top of me. He kisses me again, then again, slowly leaving my mouth to follow my jaw and suck my earlobe. I pant and claw at his back.

Roman doesn't go slow; Roman burns through me, taking everything he needs while spoiling me with more than I could ever ask for. But this, his tongue and mouth slowly exploring my body, teasing my nipples with featherlight brushes of his lips before sucking them hard, his fingers gently brushing my clit without giving me enough to push me over the edge ...

This kind of change is going to drive me insane.

My back arches, and I make a needy sound before gasping. "Please, Roman. Please."

"I'm taking my time."

"Take your time later."

He chuckles and adds a little pressure to his fingers as they circle my clit. Just as I'm getting close, he pushes two fingers inside me and licks across my clit. My hips lift against his mouth, and he groans before licking again.

Roman brings me to the edge of bliss with his mouth, then grabs my ankles, dragging me closer to him until I brace myself on his chest. He looks down at me with molten eyes. Slowly, he cups my face in his hands and leans forward until our noses brush.

"I love you, Sophia."

My breath catches in my throat, and my whole body hums as I process that. I lick across my bottom lip, then nod. "I love you too, Roman."

He smiles and gently guides me back on the bed, one of his hands lifting my thigh over his hip as he sinks into me. As he thrusts into me slowly, stroking my side, my hip, kissing my neck, he purrs to me in a mix of Italian and English, telling me how sweet I am, how good I feel, how much he loves me.

There's no way my heart can take it. As I get closer and closer to coming, I'm sure my heart is just going to explode in my chest, and I'll die from happiness alone. So I cling to Roman and bite his shoulder as I come undone, hoping I make it through to be able to tell him I love him again.

Nick

Finally, Saturday. I stretch as I linger in Bed, watching my curtains lighten with the sun. I'm so tired of H.R. issues. Apparently, Miles held the employees together and kept them from going for the throat on a regular basis.

Who knew.

I rub my forehead, then reach into my nightstand to pop two Tylenol. Probably not the best thing to do first thing in the morning, but I'm preparing. Things have been too quiet the last two days. Miles hasn't had anything to say, and neither has Diana.

None of us are stupid enough to think that they're suddenly okay with the news that Sophie is with all of us. I'm just waiting for the other shoe to drop. When I finally peel myself out of bed and get through a shower, I drag on casual clothes, jeans, and a black button-up that I roll up to my elbows.

Downstairs, I see Roman watching Sophie work in the kitchen with a lovestruck smile. Which means he told her. One down three to go. I chuckle and pat his shoulder. "Heard anything from Diana?"

"Nope."

"I heard her come in last night," Holden grumbles, obviously exhausted. "Woke me up slamming doors."

"Sorry, Hold." Sophie kisses his temple. "She can be a lot."

"More of a hothead than you." He rubs her side, and she kisses his chest. "So, what is the plan?"

"For today?" Roman asks. "Or for this shit?"

"Both. Either."

"Well, I think I need to go see my dad," Sophie says.

I take a long drink of coffee and shake my head. "I don't know, Sophie. I don't think he's ready for that."

"And he never will be. But I know how I feel, and I know what I'm doing. He can either get on with whatever fury he's got, or he can be a good dad and pretend his daughter doesn't have a sex life at all."

I shake my head, then add some sugar to my coffee. "You're betting on him being in a good mood."

"I'm betting on him recognizing I'll be just as stubborn as he will about this. After all, who could possibly be better for his only little girl than his best friends?" She asks.

Holden gives her a donut, and she eagerly takes a bite while mumbling thank you around the food in her mouth. Roman shrugs. "You have a point, Bambina."

"I know." She winks at him.

"Alright, love. You need someone to take you?" I offer.

She glances at Holden and Roman. "If Mom comes home-"

"We'll be good," Roman assures her. "No arguing. I'll leave that to you, little tiger."

She shoves against his chest once but accepts a kiss from him and Holden before taking my hand and leading me to the car. She insists on driving, holding the steering wheel so tight that her knuckles turn white. I rub her knee. "If you don't feel ready, we can stop at a park or something first."

"I just want this to be done. I'm not going to change my mind because he's threatening me. I'm not going to leave you guys just because he's uncomfortable. Living with you all, being with you all is the best thing that's ever happened to me." She grits her teeth. "And I'm not letting that go unless one of us decides that's best."

"Very mature." I nod. "It's a lot for him, though."

"Is it?"

"Well ... there's something ..." I hesitate.

"If it's something that could be making this worse, I should know. We're past the point of keeping secrets now, aren't we?"

"Before you, we had another girl. Not at all like you." I have to put that upfront. "Purely for sex. But it was all of—"

"All meaning ..."

"Your father included."

She goes a bad shade of pale, almost green. Her lips purse together, and she swallows. I take that as an invitation to continue. "Like I said, it was very different from being with you. She only bonded with Matthew, I guess since now they're getting married, but I can't imagine how your father can see our relationship any differently than that."

"Than me being a"

"A willing sexual partner and nothing else." I jump in before she can use any derogatory term about herself. I don't want something like that even in her mind, let alone between us. "And we know it's not like that because we've been building this relationship."

"Right."

"So it will take some convincing, but I think it's worth it." I finish.

When we park at the hospital, Sophie looks up at me. "Did it start as me being a replacement?"

"No," I reassure her, leaning towards her. "We were looking for another woman, but the last thing we expected was *you*. You're so much more than ... than anyone I've ever known, Sophie."

She swallows and nods. "I can understand that. You guys were a surprise. I didn't think I was going to be kissing my dad's friends, let alone getting into a polyamorous relationship with you guys. It's so crazy but the best kind of crazy I've ever experienced."

I smile and kiss the back of her hand. "Any regrets?"

"Not so far."

With that, we head up to the hospital room. I'm glad that Bella isn't between us anymore. Not that she knew about it to begin with, but I feel better knowing that it can't come up in a bad way and be used against us.

Miles is alone when we get there and when he looks at Sophie, his eyes soften despite the fact that he immediately looks out the window. I know he misses her. I know he hates everything between them, but I don't know if he's ready to move on.

"Daddy." She whispers.

"Sophie, now isn't a good time, okay?"

"Mom knows."

"I'm well aware that she *saw* enough to make it clear that there is plenty going on in the house while I'm not there." He growls. "You can leave, Nick."

"No, Dad. We're going to talk about this, and I'd like to have Nick here. He's good at keeping people calm, and he's good with his words." She says clearly.

I blink a few times. Usually, I'm just the more sensitive or understanding of the group. Sophie takes my hand. "Since Nick is such a good mediator and because he cares about both of us, I think he should be here."

"Because my opinion doesn't matter. It hasn't mattered in a while, has it, Sophie?"

"You're making demands, not voicing an opinion. It's different. I care about each of the guys. You don't have to understand it or like it, but you can't just make me leave a relationship that-"

Miles snorts. "Relationship. I've seen exactly what that 'relationship' is like. They're using you, Sophie."

"We didn't use Bella," I say.

Miles immediately looks at me with a look that could kill. I shrug. "She knowingly joined us. It was her decision. Just like this is Sophie's decision despite the fact that it's a very different relationship."

"Don't bring her up. Not around Sophie and not around Diana."

"I already know, Dad." Sophie squeezes my hand. "I don't have secrets with them. We care about each other."

"You can't date four men. Even dating one man close to my age is ridiculous." He shakes his head.

"Again, you don't have to understand it. I would just hate if this is what ruins our relationship, Dad. I love you. I love you, and I've been so happy getting to see you and spend time with you."

"Oh, I know why you've been happy."

"Yeah. Because I'm working at a great company that I have pride in thanks to you. I get to see you after how many years without you. And yeah, because I'm in the healthiest relationship I've ever been in. Things are going well for me, and I want to share that happiness with you."

He snorts again.

Sophie looks over at me, and I rub her back, pulling her closer to me. I kiss her forehead and whisper in her ear. "You got this, Sophie. No matter what he says, you're doing great."

She smiles up at me softly and kisses the inside of my shoulder. Miles huffs and shakes his head. "This is ridiculous."

"I'm not going to point out all the ways that this makes more sense than the whole Bella situation, but I want you to know that I love you, and I want us to keep talking. I'm not giving up on what originally had me coming out here."

"Have a good night. Don't tell your mother about Bella."

Sophie groans. "I'm so tired of secrets!"

"Sophie."

"I won't!" She huffs. "I love you, Dad."

With that, we head back to the house. I sit with her on the couch, rubbing her hand and pressing soft kisses to her fingertips. "Do you think this is going to work out?"

"I think you'll have four guys to keep you happy and comfortable either way." I wink.

She giggles and pushes me down, laying on my chest and between my legs. "You could go back into modeling if you wanted to. You're such a silver fox."

I laugh and kiss her forehead. "I'm happier painting, myself."

"Well, you offered me a date once. I'd like to take you up on that. Tomorrow, let's go paint and have dinner together."

"Yeah?" I lift her chin.

"Yeah. We should do normal things. All of us going out together and separately. I think it will be good for us, especially after all this stress."

"Who the fuck is this!?" Diana screeches.

I rub my forehead, and Sophie sighs, pushing off of me and kissing me softly. "I guess Mom found out about Bella."

"What are you going to tell her?"

"Well, since I've basically been given a gag order not to say anything ... obviously, she has to ask dad."

Before Sophie can get far, Diana comes in, holding a photo of all of us and Bella. She points at Matthew. "Are you fucking him too?"

"No, Mom."

"And did your dad fuck her?!" Diana's obviously devastated, her makeup dragging down her face. "Is that what happens in this house? Everyone just fucks whatever girl is

closest, and they call it good? Did your dad know about you and these guys the whole time? Oh god."

"I think you need a drink, Diana." Gunner wraps an arm around her. "I make a mean cosmo."

"Really?"

"I do. And I'll tell you everything." He promises. "Plus, I've been known to be funny."

"Is that why Sophie's with you?"

"Well, I hope that's part of the reason." Gunner winks at us and motions for Sophie to join me on the couch instead of dealing with this. "I'll take care of you, okay. We can have a long talk, and if Nick feels up to it, he's pretty good in the kitchen."

"You are?" Sophie asks.

"With meat, I am. Steak, Ribs, a few other things."

"I think that sounds amazing."

I roll my eyes. "I think you just want me to eavesdrop on that conversation in there."

"Am I that obvious?"

I kiss her nose and smile. "It's cute. But you have to eat what I make too; otherwise I'm keeping my mouth shut."

She kisses me full on the mouth and giggles. "Easiest deal ever. I win two times over."

Her smile is reward enough for me, but I won't say that. Instead, I steal another kiss, then make my way to the kitchen, ready to cook and pretend I'm not there despite how easy it would be to help fill in the blanks.

Living with Miles and Diana is about to be a lot more complicated, but maybe it will pull Sophie out of the spotlight for a well-earned break. I grab a few pans and pull out steaks as Gunner gets started, listing off the ingredients for a good Cosmo.

Diana shakes her head. "Gunner, this is all too much. Maybe I should have stayed home."

"I promise once I finish, it'll seem simple, especially since it's in the past where Miles and Bella are concerned. Bella's getting married to Matthew in a month or so." He flashes an easy smile. "We're just talking about the past."

"Sounds easy."

"Just like I promised. Plus, you'll have a well-cooked steak as a reward, and maybe I'll be back on your good side." He slides her the drink. "Ready?"

Sophia

My mom finally GETS UP, LOOKS AT ME, LOOKS BACK AT Gunner as he leans against the wall to the kitchen and sighs. "I need to lay down."

"Anything I can do, Mom?"

She looks at me for a long time. "We'll talk later, okay? Oh." She pauses and turns around. "Your dad's being discharged tomorrow."

"He didn't say anything about that today."

She shrugs. "That's what he told me this morning. But I'm going to have a conversation with him tomorrow so we'll see."

"Mom, it's ... it's the past. You can't hold it against him."

"You should know by now, being with *four* men, conversations help avoid fights. Better to talk about things that bother you before they build up into something worse." She taps my nose, wavers a little, then heads to her room.

Gunner pats my head. "Three cosmos."

"You got my mother drunk to have that conversation?" I put my hands on my hips. "Gunner, if she doesn't remember-"

"She had a lot more to drink her first night with us, and she remembers every moment of that." He looks me over slowly. "I missed you today."

"Don't start with that." I point at him.

"Am I in trouble?"

"Maybe," I grumble.

He arches an eyebrow and motions for me to continue. I don't know if I'm frustrated with him or the situation. Sighing, I rub my forehead. "I'm going to go process all this until dinner. Then, hopefully my mom will be at least partially sober."

"Sweets." Gunner purrs. "She's going to be fine. Your dad is going to be fine too. They're adults, and it's not your job to fix their relationship."

"Thanks, but their problems seem to find a way into my lap either way." I pat his cheek, then go to my room.

After a shower and some good music, I feel like I can deal ... almost. I glance at my phone and text a friend from back home. She and I have always been the kind of friends that go weeks or months without talking, then pick up like no time has passed at all.

Now I finally have something interesting to share instead of just asking her about her day. I leave the message there, wondering if she'll answer today or if it'll take another week. I pull on shorts and a t-shirt, then go downstairs.

Gunner sits on the couch playing some zombie game. He pauses and tosses me the controller. "Let's go. I need some backup."

"Do you want to go out sometime?"

He pauses the game and turns the full force of his attention on me. I swallow and bite my bottom lip. "We haven't in a long time since you and Nick took me out on the town, which was a whole lot of fun."

He rubs the scruff on his jaw. "That was a good time. I remember your dancing."

"So ... yes?"

"Hell yes. We can go dancing after a movie or something." He nods. "Bar hopping and going to clubs until I remember that I'm not in my twenties anymore."

"Hopefully, that won't kick in until morning." I tease.

He winks at me but scoots closer. "Still mad?"

"No." I sigh. "It's just a lot to take in. Mom and Dad learning about each other, figuring us out, everything going on at work considering I'm not there. I'd really like a break from everything."

"We'll figure it out." He kisses my temple, then turns my head to claim a real kiss. I shiver and press play. "You better pay attention, or zombies are going to eat your ass."

"And if I win?"

"You get to play another day." I stick out my tongue and refocus on the game.

Gunner lays across my lap, playing lazily even as I give it my all and scream when surprised by zombies. At one point, I throw my controller by accident and brace myself for being yelled at for damaging something expensive, but Gunner laughs loudly and pauses the game as he chokes on his own spit.

I pat his back and shake my head at him despite the smile on my face. He cups my face between his hands. "You are so fucking adorable."

"Because I threw a controller?"

"Because you're terrified of jump scares." He kisses my nose. "Don't worry. I'll protect you from the zombies."

"For the XP, right?"

He grins and pulls me closer. "Sure. The XP is all I want out of this."

Gunner kisses me softly, stroking his fingers through my hair before slipping his tongue between my lips. I nod. "Clearly."

"Not interested in having fun with you." He kisses my jaw. "Making memories." Another kiss. "The shameless flirting and trash talk."

I bite my lip and melt against him. "We're supposed to be playing."

"Oh, I am." He grabs my ass. "Just with you instead."

"Horn dog."

"Dinner's ready!" Nick announces.

Gunner sighs and kisses me again. "To be continued."

I lick across my bottom lip and smack his ass as he gets up. Gunner turns slowly and arches an eyebrow. I try to look as innocent as possible, shrugging. "Something wrong?"

He tackles me into the couch, making me giggle as I shove against his hands, squeezing my sides. Gunner nips my neck as I squeal and try to untangle myself. He chuckles and pins me down, holding my wrists above my head.

"Are you going to behave now?" He asks.

"I thought it was more fun to misbehave. Isn't that what you've been telling me?" I lick his bottom lip.

He groans and rubs his hard cock against my hip. "You're going to get yourself in trouble. The kind of trouble that means skipping dinner."

"Or having something else fill my mouth?" I tease.

He shakes his head. "God, it's so easy to love you."

I blink a few times, and so does Gunner before his hold on me loosens. It's the first time I've seen him nervous and unsure. His cheeks turn pink, and I smile as I sit up a little to nip his bottom lip. "I love you too."

He narrows his eyes at me. "Why?"

"Because I do. I like who I am with you. I like spending time with you. I just do." I shrug. "Is that against the law?"

He shakes his head and slowly kisses me. "I love you."

"We're going to get stuck in a loop," I whisper but kiss him again. "I like hearing it."

Gunner beams and kisses me one more time before someone smacks the back of his head. Looking up, I see Holden, almost looking innocent. Gunner rolls his eyes and pulls me up with him. "Go get Diana for dinner. She's all about the steak."

I smack his ass again, then dodge his hand and run off to get my mom. I hear Nick from the kitchen. "You're such a kid, Gunner."

"It's called *charm*."

I knock on Mom's door once and hear a groan. I roll my eyes and knock again. "Mom, dinner."

"Yeah. Yeah." She grumbles.

"Steak." I tease. "Freshly made. Still hot."

The door opens, and Mom rubs her face as she leans on the doorframe. "Right now?"

"Yes." I nod. "But I'm sure I can ask the guys to wait if you want more time." I offer, trying to stay on her good side. I need at least one parent to side with me, right?

"No. It's fine." She rubs her face and steps out of her room. "Food is exactly what I need."

"I'm sorry today's been so stressful."

"Oh, honey. I should have expected it. Being with your father means being stressed, even if I'm not completely with him." She shrugs, then organizes her hair and wipes under her eyes to fix her makeup.

"What do you mean?"

"Not for your ears." She taps my nose. "You might be an adult, but I'm still your mother, and there are things you don't need to know."

"I think that's the healthiest suggestion I've heard in a long while." I sigh. "I'd love to not know things."

"Being in the dark won't bother you?" She asks seriously.

"No." I shake my head. "Not when it comes to you and Dad. The less I know, the better." I put my hands up.

She laughs, and I bite my nail. "And I think it might be the same with you guys and my ... relationships."

"I don't know. I have questions. And I want to approve of them."

"You flirted with them."

"Of course. They're all attractive." She says with a shrug. "But that doesn't mean they're good for you or that you're good for them. Plus, I'm still wrapping my head around the numbers."

"Number of people involved, ages, length of time?"

"All." She nods. I can see her fighting her normal judgmental go tos. "I know that the world is changing, and some people consider this kind of thing normal, but I'm from an older generation. One girl. One boy. Marriage, baby, life together. In that order."

"I didn't plan this, Mom," I say, keeping my voice low. I hold her hand, keeping her away from the dining room. "I didn't plan on falling for any of them. I *planned* to stay in that room, get some good job skills, move up in the company, and explore New York."

"But things happened." She arches an eyebrow. "And then again. And again. And again."

"It's not because I'm indecisive." I insist. "I ... I can't explain it. I just know that what we have works, and Dad isn't going to be supportive, which is ... his right, I guess, but it would be nice to have someone at least not tear it down."

Mom chews her bottom lip, then shrugs. "All I can do is try, Sophia. This is foreign to me, and I can't promise I'm going to be any better at accepting it. Especially when I don't have a choice but to see it constantly."

I nod once. "Okay. That's understandable."

We eat together, and things seem to go well. Everyone has jokes and stories, and Mom seems at ease. But I notice that Roman isn't here. I try to ignore it, but it doesn't feel right, considering it's a family meal of sorts.

I clean up the plates after putting one to the side for Roman. Nick helps me in the kitchen, and I flash him a smile. "Thanks for dinner. It was delicious."

"Good to know I'm worth more than my looks."

"Anyone who says otherwise is lying," I assure him.

He kisses me gently and rubs my lower back. "Take it easy tonight, okay? You can use the hot tub out back if you want some stress relief."

"That does sound nice." I sigh.

"All yours. I can make margaritas or something for you before I turn in."

"Getting to bed early?" I ask.

"Well, I have you to entertain tomorrow, don't I?" He winks, and I feel my cheeks heat up.

After a bit more waiting for ... something, I head upstairs and get in a bikini and a robe. I grab a towel and head to the back porch. I turn on the jacuzzi and the lights that hang from the porch roof and let my robe drop.

Sliding into the water after another second, I relax into the warmth and let out a soft moan as my muscles ease. Resting my head back, I look up at the stars and smile slightly. Even if my parents don't approve, we can make this work.

It just takes a little faith, and I have more than a little when it comes to the guys. I lean back and close my eyes. We can keep the magic we had in Italy and bring it right back here.

Roman

When I finally get home, the house is quiet. I don't blame anyone. It's after eleven. Between my phone call with Miles about him trying to come home tomorrow and taking on four of his international meetings, it's a miracle I've come home at all.

I'm exhausted, mentally and physically.

I get to the kitchen to pour myself a drink and find food waiting for me in the fridge, wrapped up neatly. Sophia. I shake my head. She always takes care of us. I exhale and head to the living room to see if she's there, but instead, I see lights on outside.

Opening the door, I hear the jacuzzi running and see red hair in a bun, right at the edge of the water. Getting down on my knees, I rub over Sophie's shoulders. She hums softly and pushes into my touch.

"Bambina." I purr.

She leans back to look at me and then gently touches my face. "You missed dinner."

"Work ran long," I say, kissing her palm. "Did I miss anything else?"

"Mom is going to save her judgment as long as we cool it around her. She also learned about Bella today. Gunner got her drunk and told her everything. Then dinner." She smiles softly. "I made sure to save you some even though Gunner was ready to devour it all." "Thank you." I kiss her temple.

She kisses me softly, then turns in the water. "Do you want to join me? It's relaxing. I can rub your shoulders or your feet."

I press my forehead to hers. "No. I want you to enjoy your relaxation. You deserve it. Keeping up with all four of us isn't easy."

"It's never boring." Sophia kisses me softly. One kiss, a second, a third. I lick into her mouth and draw back before I lose myself in her. She takes an unsteady breath. "I'm lucky to have you."

I can't stop myself from looking her over, her delicious curves all on display for me in that damn bikini. It covers the important bits, which only makes me want to rip it off her so I can lick every inch of her.

Sophia bites her bottom lip and turns, getting on her knees on the seat. "If you keep looking at me like that"

"I can't help it." I lift her chin, pulling her up to me to kiss her hungrily. I force myself to sit back on my heels, then get up. "We both need a break tonight. I'm getting in bed, and you should too."

"Fun killer." She licks across her bottom lip.

"Save that sass for tomorrow." I tap her nose. "We'll need it with your dad back at home."

After one more kiss, I head to bed. As soon as my head hits the pillow, I'm out. I head to work early and get a jump on the day, but that doesn't stop me from being absolutely swamped. When someone knocks on my door and then lets themselves in, I'm just about ready to let words fly.

Looking up, I find Sophia. She pushes the door shut and hits the button that frosts the windows before walking behind me and rubbing my shoulders. "Mr. Agosti, I think you need a day off."

"I don't have the luxury, Miss Lane." I sigh.

Her hands feel good, rubbing hard into the stiff knots in my muscle. My arms go slack, and I lean back, letting my eyes close. "That feels good."

"You should have taken advantage of this last night." She murmurs. "It could have had a happy ending for you."

"I'm more worried about your father coming home today and the hell that's going to rain down on us." I take her hand and pull her around to sit across my lap. "Bambina, there is a high probability of a fight tonight."

"Oh no. Loud voices all disagreeing about what's best for me, like I'm not even there. How will I survive." She pouts at me.

I roll my eyes and kiss her. "It might mean a change in who's living where. Miles likes to be in control, and if he doesn't feel like he is, things will change."

"I know." She kisses me again. "I might not be as convenient."

"That's never been a factor," I tell her.

We kiss once, twice, a third time, then Sophie straddles me and tugs at my buttons, kissing across my throat. I groan and slide my hands up her thighs under her skirt. I nibble her ear, and she melts against me, grinding on me like we haven't been together in weeks.

"Roman, I like how things are." She breathes.

"I know. I'm trying to make them better, Bambina." I convince her. My mouth molding to hers again.

God, there isn't anything that I wouldn't do for this woman. I'd build her a castle with my own two hands if it would make her smile and keep her safe. I'd give up alcohol. I'd give up technology.

"I know you like taking care of me." She whispers. "And I like you taking care of me, but ... but you know I can take care of myself too. You don't have to be the knight in shining armor all the time."

I know that, and I know she wants me to know that she can handle herself just fine because she's not a child, but being needed is nice. I rub her thigh. "Then maybe you can help me."

"Oh?"

I show her a few things on the computer, and she points out the changes she's made that fill in the blanks. She glances at the time and turns my head to kiss her. "You have me for ten more minutes."

"Not forever?"

"Forever and a day ... but Nick and I have a date planned." She runs her nose over mine. "Maybe we can plan one together."

"Not as a group?"

"That too. But I think it will be nice for us to spend alone time together." She pulls at my shirt, drawing me close. "So you get my undivided attention, and I get yours." A soft kiss. "And you don't forget why you like me."

"Love you." I correct her immediately. "I'm not regressing."

She beams, then I'm wrapped up in her mouth, licking along with her tongue, sucking her bottom lip, pulling at her as if we can do more than this in my office. I mean, we could technically. We've done more in the past, but ten minutes isn't nearly enough time.

All at once, the door opens, and Neal pops his head in. Because, of course, it's Neal. Sophie pulls back, looks at him, then kisses my jaw. He clears his throat. "I um ... I didn't realize that"

"You should knock next time," Sophie says, rubbing my exposed chest slowly. "And wait for an answer."

"Oh. Right. Yeah." He shuts the door immediately.

I roll my eyes at her, and she kisses my jaw. "Sorry. I should probably go."

"After asserting your dominance over me?" I let my arms drop. "If you insist."

She kisses me again and stands. "Date night, soon? We could do a spa ... or I could give you a spa treatment."

"I'll think about it. As soon as I can get a solid weekend off, I'm yours." I promise.

She grins. "I love you, Roman."

"I love you."

The rest of the day is easy by comparison, especially after seeing Neal's nervous face when he comes back in. But when I get home, I see Miles waiting at the dining room table. The other guys are there, and I notice that Diana and Sophie just happen to be missing.

I drop into the waiting chair and meet Miles' eyes. "Good to see you back."

"Good to be back." He says. "We have some things to address."

He goes over work things, getting business straightened away, then exhales. "I've had a very long talk with my exwife, and we've decided to try again, despite everything about Bella and my past coming up. However, I think it will be easier to do that if it's just the family."

"Meaning we have to hit the road?" Gunner asks.

"I thought about this a lot," Miles says. "It's only because I want to reconnect with Diana, not because of anything else."

"So not because of what you've learned about us and-" Gunner starts.

Miles holds up his hand. "No. Diana and I want to work on our relationship, and I can't see us doing that with four other guys in the house."

"So Sophie is going to stay here?" Holden asks.

Miles glowers at him. "I don't think that's much of your concern."

"It's just a question, Miles. We've gotten used to having her around." I say, trying to calm him.

"We have the second property. The penthouse on the other side of Central Park. It'll take a week for us to move everything over there with work." Holden murmurs.

"Then it sounds like we have a plan."

"Sophia is aware of this, isn't she?" Nick asks. "Not arguing; I just want to be sure that everyone is in the loop."

"Diana should be telling her now. They went to dinner."

I glance at Nick. I thought they were having a date night. Nick shrugs at me. Miles drums his fingers on the table, then exhales slowly. "I would like to say one thing about what has been going on here."

"Of course."

"If I find out it is a situation like Bella, I won't hesitate to do something about this. You have been my friends through hell and back, but my daughter is something else. As long as she's happy, I'll keep myself in check, but"

"It's not like it was with Bella," I say immediately.

Gunner nods. "Not at all."

Holden and Nick agree.

Miles looks between us and rubs his jaw. "I'm exhausted. Thanks for not giving me hell about this. I really want to give my marriage a shot, and I appreciate you guys supporting me by not arguing about it."

"No problem, man. Diana is a catch, and you deserve your second chance with her." Nick assures him.

"She's a spitfire." Gunner agrees.

Just as I open my mouth to say something, anything to add to the conversation, I hear the front door open. Giggling echoes, then Diana and Sophia come back in. Sophie trips over her heel, then gives me a look that absolutely begs me to come fuck her. Which means she doesn't know.

"Honey!" Diana sings before falling into Miles' lap. "Did you tell them?"

"Tell them what?" Sophie perks up, resting her hands on the back of my chair. "Mom? Dad?"

"The guys will be moving out," Miles says, shooting Diana a look that makes her blush and shrug. "So that way, we can give this family living another try."

Sophia's hand moves to my shoulder, and she rubs slowly. Gunner grins. "It'll be a new adventure. Plus, we haven't put the penthouse to good use, yet."

"Penthouse?"

"You'd love it. It's got great views. Windows make up a whole wall. The rooftop pool is gorgeous." Nick agrees. "It has quite a bit of charm."

"Oh, that does sound nice." Sophie hums. "A change in view might be nice."

That gets Miles' attention real fast. He narrows his eyes at me as if I'm somehow controlling his daughter and making her say what I want to hear. "This isn't what I-"

"It'll be perfect, Daddy. You and Mom can spend some much-needed alone time together, and you won't have to worry about me getting in the way. I'll still be able to work from home and the office without missing a beat."

"But-"

"You're so smart." She beams and bounces over to kiss his cheek. "It'll minimize your stress and allow you and mom to reconnect."

"No, but-"

"Aww, you're so sweet, Miles. You've gotten even more thoughtful." Diana purrs.

I can't help the smile that turns up my lips. He put himself in checkmate, and it didn't take an argument, a fight, nothing. How perfect.

Sophie

I START PACKING MY THINGS THE NEXT DAY AFTER WORK, AND Dad comes in to talk to me. "Sophie, I didn't mean for you to move out."

"What do you mean? You want to reconnect with Mom, right?"

"Yes, but I thought we could do some reconnecting as a family." He says. "So you could stay here with us."

"Mom's so excited about getting alone time with you." I remind him. "I can't rob her of that."

I put another handful of clothes in my bag. "We'll see each other all the time. At least once a week."

"Sophie."

"Like I said, it's perfect." I flash him a wide smile. "Plus, you and mom would rather not know about my relationships, so it all works out."

"The plan was for you to stay with us, to let us be a family. The house is big enough for the three of us. Your mom and I can still have plenty of together time."

I set my last armful of clothes in my bag and sit next to it, facing Dad. "I love you. I'm so happy you're out of the hospital, and I want you to stay that way."

"And I will be much less stressed having you here with me." He takes my hands. "It will ease so much of my worry." "Until Roman or Nick or Holden or Gunner comes to get me for a date." I remind him.

His jaw tightens, and he exhales sharply. "Sophia, I never said I approved of what you're doing with them."

"Dad, I hear what you're saying, but I need you to understand that I love them." I shrug. "All of them."

"And I want you here. You moved out here to be with me, didn't you? So let's be a family, a real family, and live together. In a few months, we can evaluate and-"

"I'm not moving backward, Dad. You trusted them when I went with them to Italy. I'll be across a park with the same men that you trust more than any others. How could this be better?"

Dad chews the inside of his cheek, then huffs. "We're not done with this conversation."

He storms away, and I sit there, watching after him. I don't know what's up his butt. Holden comes in a moment later, glancing behind him before stepping fully into my room. He picks me up and falls back on the bed with me. "I'm about to take some things over."

"I don't think I can let you do that alone," I murmur, rubbing across his cheek. "Don't you know how dangerous it is out there?"

"Is it?" He teases, kissing me softly.

"Oh yeah. For handsome young men moving around all on their own. Someone could take advantage of you." I breathe.

"Well, I'll naturally need you for protection." He pulls me closer and kisses me softly.

I moan as his tongue curls with mine, then draw back to glance at the door. He follows my look, then brushes his thumb over my bottom lip. "We're almost there."

"Where?"

"To the point where we don't have to hide anything." He murmurs against my neck. "When it's just the five of us living

together."

I grin. "No more hiding anything or secrets. No more worrying about getting caught."

"I'll miss this high school roleplay, though." He grabs my ass and jerks me against him so I have to soften my giggles. "It'll be worth it."

"Pros and cons." I agree.

"Everything you want to take today needs to be in the truck in thirty minutes." Holden decides as he gets up. "But there's always the next trip."

"It'll be there," I tell him.

And the week pretty much goes along those lines. I pack things up and help get it over there when I'm not working. On Thursday, my dad grabs my last box of things and shakes his head. "Sophie, I really don't like this."

"Dad, I'm an adult. Most adults – successful ones – don't live with their parents."

"I'm aware of that, but that doesn't mean I like you moving in with a bunch of guys."

"So you'd rather me live alone in some studio in New York?" I ask. "I think I can afford that with my salary."

"No. I'm not saying that either. Look, princess. I just want you safe. I want you close. I want ... I want you to stop growing up so damn fast." He sits on my bed and rubs his hands over his short hair. "I hate thinking of how much time I've missed out on, and it was easy to ignore it while you were still living here, and I didn't know about the other things you were doing."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry that we missed out on a lot of summers together, time together."

"Your prom. Your first boyfriend. Soccer games. Track. Your acceptance to college." He lists, staring at the wall. "I have plenty of pictures, but it's not the same."

"I'm here right now, Dad. There's so much that you still get to be a part of. My first promotion at work. Birthdays. Maybe a wedding. Parties, celebrating you and mom's anniversaries. We have so many memories to make still."

He shrugs.

I nudge him, and he rolls his eyes but takes my hand. "In my head, you're still sixteen, kiddo. Not some rational allknowing adult."

"There's plenty I don't know. And I promise to call *when* I mess up, or my car makes weird noises, or I think someone's being a creep."

"And I'll be your first call?"

I kiss his cheek. "A girl always needs her dad. Always."

He squeezes my hand and shakes his head. "I don't care if you think it's ridiculous. I really don't want you moving in with them. All I'll be able to think about is ... is ..."

"The stuff you guys did with Bella?"

"Stuff I don't want you knowing about. You shouldn't know any more than her name as far as I'm concerned." He points at me. "If that changes"

"It won't change. I'm not curious." I roll my eyes.

He continues to tap his foot. I clear my throat. "Does Mom have a problem with it?"

"No. We have our own problems right now."

"Bella related problems?"

"Yeah. I want her to understand that's the past. I'm not expecting her to be Bella, and I don't want her to be Bella. But she has a million questions and thinks that the best way to move forward is to know every single detail."

"Great. I'm sure that's going to help my case a whole lot."

Dad actually chuckles and shakes his head. "We're both going to be in the dog house."

"Fantastic."

Dad finally lets me go, but I hear him and Gunner going at it not even thirty minutes later. I roll out my neck and shut my laptop. Gunner promised not to get into it, and everyone else has kept their promise, but Dad went for the hard digs.

Telling Gunner he's not allowed to drink around me because dad knows how Gunner gets when he's drunk. As if I don't. As if I didn't see it in Italy and beforehand. I roll my eyes and pinch the bridge of my nose.

Roman drops down on the couch next to me and rubs my knee before slinging his arm around my shoulders. "In Gunner's defense, he tried."

"He tried making off with every single liquor bottle he could find, you mean?" I ask.

Roman chuckles and kisses my temple. "About that date idea ... how would you feel about a play? We could do Broadway. Take a walk after, get some street food."

"I like the sound of that." I kiss his cheek quickly.

"Then, I'll bring you home, and we'll have a nightcap." He nips my ear. "Maybe I'll convince you to check out my new bedroom." Another bite. "And we'll see what happens from there."

A shiver works down my spine, and I gasp as his fingers trail up my inner thigh. I bite my lip as Roman leans towards me. We haven't been able to be naughty at all since Dad got back. The guys have been busy, but I swear, I've been able to feel Dad watching us.

If I didn't know better, I'd say he has cameras in most of the rooms. It's been driving me crazy. I shift closer to Roman, and his hand tightens on my thigh. He licks across his bottom lip as he watches me, and I feel my temperature shoot through the roof.

"Leave the whiskey, Gunner!" Roman shouts. "Let's go."

I force myself to get up before I lose myself in Roman's gaze. My mom looks at me and leans her head to the side. "You're really going? Dad said you'd stay with us."

"I'll visit a lot," I promise. "You'll get sick of me. Trust me."

She hugs me and whispers in my ear. "Thank you."

I nod, and then I'm swept up with Gunner, pulling him and two bottles of rum out of the house. He's frustrated as hell, puts the bottles in my back seat, then points at Dad. "Stop picking fights you don't need!"

"Try being fucking sober!"

I roll my eyes, then push Gunner to the passenger side of the car. He looks at me, then my dad. I arch an eyebrow at him. "We could already be home, and I could be trying out that naked cooking thing."

"Don't tease me with you naked."

"Is there a reason you picked a fight over bottles of whiskey that can be replaced?" I put my hands on my hips.

"I don't like change." He says in a way that convinces me he just came up with that idea.

"Get in the car."

"I'm driving."

"Like hell."

"Sophie."

"Don't even try it. Get your ass in the car." He pouts but opens the door and gets in.

I get in the driver's side and shake my head. "I don't know what got you riled. Spill."

"It's not important, Soph."

"It is to me. Just like you're important to me, dummy. Now either tell me what got you so bothered you started a fight, or we're going to sit here in silence until you're sober."

Gunner sits there for a while; then, he shakes his head slowly. "Your father has an awesome talent for pissing people off."

"Meaning?"

"He said that this was going to end the same way it ended with Bella. One of us gets you, and the rest have to go back to the drawing board." I can practically hear his teeth grinding. "Apparently, all bets are on Roman." He grumbles.

I roll my eyes and shake my head. "You know that's not true."

"Do I?" He turns to look at me. "I like what we have, all of us. I can't imagine you being with only one of us. I can't imagine not having breakfast together, enjoying each other in the kitchen or living room."

"I love you." I take his hands. "I love you. I love Roman. I love Holden. I love Nick. I love you all."

Gunner watches me a second longer and nods, but I know this isn't resolved. Not yet. I hold his hand all the way to the new place, and when we get out, I pull him towards me by his jacket and kiss him.

"I'm not going anywhere." I shake him a little. "I like what we have. I don't want it to change."

"You think that now, but-" He swallows and shrugs.

"But nothing. I love you all. In different ways, for different reasons." I promise. "Now, let's go home, have dinner together, and enjoy the new place."

Gunner nods once after taking a slow, shaky breath. "Together."

"All of us."

Holden

I GROAN AS I FINISH WORK, THEN STRETCH AND ROLL OUT MY neck. One week since having a new office — now separate from my bedroom. I'd complained at first, but looking at my coworker, I don't have a single negative thing to say.

Rolling my chair over to Sophie, I see her logging off her computer. Which means she's all mine. Nick only got half a date with her before Miles came home, but for the rest of the night, we get to have some alone time.

Sophie turns in her chair and trips over mine, landing in my lap. Her red hair splashes over her face, and she laughs as she tries to push it all behind her ears. "Going to tell me what the plan is for tonight?"

"I got exclusive tickets to an event at the zoo tonight. It's a food and wine event, plus we get to see what these animals get up to at night." I shrug. "I planned for dinner first."

"That sounds perfect!" She beams at me. "As long as the date includes-"

I roll my eyes. Making her go one week without any kind of sex has turned her into an animal. The day we moved in, I swear she was ready to jump all of us. Although I shouldn't be complaining.

I kiss her softly, slipping my hand up her shirt to cup her bare breast. One of the perks of her working from home. She arches into my hand and moans softly. When I draw back, her cheeks flare pink.

"Yes. Sex is included if we're in the mood after the zoo."

"When."

"Tonight." I blink, confused.

She laughs as she pulls herself from my lap. "No, when we're still horny after the zoo. It's now a personal mission."

I arch an eyebrow at her, and she winks at me. "I'll meet you in forty-five minutes."

"Yes, ma'am." I salute her mockingly, and she flips me off before laughing and running to get ready.

After another twenty minutes of choosing what to wear, I head out to the living room, enjoying the view. The floor-to-ceiling windows really are something else. Looking out over Central Park and seeing the glittering city just past the trees is a billion-dollar experience.

"Hey!" Nick pats my back. "Did you figure out that flex account thing?"

I nod, and he stands by me. I clear my throat. "Have you settled in yet?"

"It'll take longer than a week," Nick assures me. "But try to enjoy it. Especially tonight."

"Sophie asked if everyone could get free Saturday."

"A group date?" He nods. "Yeah, she texted. As far as I know, everyone's set except Roman. It'll depend on if he or Miles is taking the rest of the contract from Tokyo."

I sigh and roll my eyes. Roman doesn't care one way or another. Which means it will be up to Miles and the guys overseas. Nick groans, and I hear his stomach growl. I sit in one of the chairs and glance at the time. Fifteen minutes to go.

"Tomorrow night, you want to order Chinese?" Nick continues from the kitchen. "As much as I like this cooking rotation-"

"Please, something easy." I groan.

"Maybe we should buy Sophie an apron and see if she will actually cook naked. I might feel inspired to take my turn then." Nick chuckles.

My lips turn up, and I decide to join him in the kitchen to see what leftovers he pulls. Thursdays are leftover nights, and Fridays are supposed to be my night to cook, making Nick's idea even more appealing. Saturdays are supposed to be the only eat-out day we have all week.

I pour Nick and myself a glass of wine each, and he takes a sip happily while pulling out lasagna. I hear a groan and reach for the scotch. Gunner will definitely want a glass. He had the fun of catching Miles up today.

"Well, it's good to have the boss man back." He grumbles, tossing his stuff to the side as he joins us. He pulls out some lasagna for himself and takes the scotch I poured him. "Thanks, Hold. You're a real friend."

"You'll say that to anyone who gives you food or alcohol." Nick rolls his eyes. "So, how was your day, dear."

"Well, honey." Gunner finishes his drink. "I got a lecture about my organizational skills. How was yours?"

I smirk, and Gunner nudges me. "We all know you had the best view."

"We agreed she could split her time at home and the office." I shrug, not at all disagreeing.

Gunner scratches his jaw. Something's been bugging him about Miles, even though he hasn't said anything. I heard about their fight the day we finished moving out but never got details. I assumed it was about Sophie, but something has stuck.

"I'm ready! Five minutes early, I might add." Sophie announces, coming out in an airy skirt with a slit up the side and a top that fits her perfectly while leaving her shoulders temptingly bare. She looks over everyone, and her smile brightens. "Everyone's home!"

She walks over to Nick and kisses him softly, putting the lasagna away for him, then kisses Gunner before taking his

glass and putting it in the sink. She's been limiting him while she's around. Fitting herself to Gunner's side, she whispers something in his ear that softens him.

"Yeah. Yeah."

"Don't pretend you don't like it." She points at him.

"I know." He kisses her hungrily, not pulling away until she moans and tugs on his shirt. He spins her around, then hands her off to me. "Nope. You're all Holden's tonight."

"Clubbing." She points at him. "Soon."

"We can go tomorrow, babes."

She beams and loops my arm. "Behave you two."

"Bye, Soph," Nick calls.

I treat her to a limo, and she melts against me. "You're full of surprises already, Hold."

"I like making you smile," I admit with a shrug.

She kisses me softly, then climbs in my lap to kiss me again and again, her fingers stroking the back of my neck ever so softly. "You're very good at it."

"That's why you keep me around?"

"I keep you around because I love you, silly." She murmurs against my lips.

My heart stills for a moment, and she rubs my chest as it starts up at a thundering pace. She nods. "I love you. Every bit of you."

"You should have saved that," I whisper.

"Hmm?"

"For on the way home," I growl, dragging her close and kissing her like I'm starving.

My hand slips up her thigh, and I dig my fingers in as I plunder and claim her mouth. She whimpers, then tugs at my clothes until she can get her fingers under my shirt. I groan and kiss across her throat.

Adjusting her on my lap, I reach for the button on my slacks. Sophie tugs at the zipper, panting. "So hot and eager."

"It's your fault." I catch her hands as she jerks my pants and boxers down to my knees. Pulling them to my mouth, I kiss across her knuckles. "Say it again."

Sophie sinks down on me, her hot, wet pussy tight around my cock. Groaning, I rub my hand up her silky thighs and try to keep the noise to a minimum, so our driver doesn't hear. She gasps and wraps her arms around my neck.

"I love you, Holden."

Her body rolls against mine, and she stifles her panting, moaning breaths in my throat as I cup her ass in my hands and guide her. Sophie telling me she loves me as she rides me in a limo is such an intense combination that all I can do is take what she gives while trying not to mark up her neck and shoulder.

"Fuck, you feel good." She pants.

"You're heaven." I groan, thrusting into her tight pussy again.

Every touch is pure pleasure ripping through my veins, her nails digging into my shoulders and her thighs tightening around my hips have me in overdrive. She rolls her hips again, taking me deeper as her pussy pulses around my cock.

A low groan leaves my throat, and I pull her back to devour her sweet mouth as she fucks me. Sophie is everything. She's the passion pumping through my veins, the hunger to be better, the hope I have for tomorrow.

And right now, she's driving me insane.

My stomach tightens with need, and I know I have about ten more seconds left in me. I push Sophie's panties further to the side and rub her clit in fast circles as she rides me until she's covering her mouth with her hand and fighting to continue.

"Come for me. Come hard, love." I order.

She nods, then leans forward and bites my shoulder hard while her body spasms and her pussy squeezes me so hard I can't hold out a second longer. I tug her hair and moan as I come deep inside her.

Panting, her body still shaking, she laughs once. "You didn't say it back."

"I love you, Sophia. I love you more than I thought I could ever love anyone." I sigh.

"You love me so much you fucked me before dinner." She teases, slowly getting off me to curl against my side.

"A pretty good way to start the night. At least now I know you won't be distracted." I put myself away and chuckle.

Sophie turns my face to kiss me softly. "You always distract me, Holden. I can't think straight around any of you."

"So sweet." I wrap my arm around her and keep feeding her soft kisses until we get to the restaurant.

She tells me about her day, about life in general, about a friend that finally texted her back. And she asks me about a million questions. What I like, what I want to do, if she thinks we'll ever go somewhere warm and tropical.

"I dare you to ask Gunner that." I tease.

She rolls her eyes. "We'll end up at some nudist resort if I bring it up to him."

"Not willing to push that boundary?"

She giggles, and her foot brushes mine under the table. "I have a feeling I'll see some jealousy if that happens."

The thought of other guys ogling her while she's naked. Yeah, that would stir up trouble. I also can't imagine any of us being able to resist touching her. Which means we'd last all of two minutes on the beach before being thrown off.

"What about Greece?" I offer.

She beams. "I'd love to see it. But I'd have to learn at least some of the language."

When the food comes, Sophie eats like she hasn't seen food in weeks, then we're off to the zoo. Two glasses of wine in has her cheeks pink and a near-constant smile on her face. We go to the reptile house, and Sophie clings to me while leaning towards a giant lizard.

"Would you fight that lizard if it was going to attack me, Holden?"

"Absolutely." I wrap my arms around her and pull her back.

"I'd fight a tiger for you." She assures me, rubbing my arm. "I'm the only one that gets to sink my teeth into you."

I kiss her neck. "Yes, ma'am."

Sophie turns and pulls me close. "Willing to kiss me in front of all these snakes?"

"I'm willing to kiss you in the middle of enemy fire, baby."

"Yeah, but that's not the same as a bunch of slimy snakes watching us." She teases, rubbing my chest.

"I will kiss you no matter when or where," I promise as I put my forehead against hers. "I'm yours. Entirely and completely wrapped around your finger."

She bounces on her toes, kissing me softly. "I like when you use your words."

Sophie

I WRAP A BLANKET AROUND MYSELF AS I TRY TO GET OUT OF bed without bothering Holden. I bite my lip as I look over at him, lying naked on his belly, no prosthetic, just him. Tonight has been magical. Getting to see the lions look like house cats as they inspect giant cardboard boxes, Holden punctuating each animal enclosure with a kiss and a fun fact about that animal. Exchanging, I love yous and the sex. Everything is so good I wonder if I'm dreaming.

My thighs squeeze just thinking about it. Two rounds of mind-blowing, toe-curling sex. Even after the shower, I swear I can feel him all over me. I open the door, then tip-toe to the kitchen

A big perk of living with the guys is not having to get dressed when I get a late-night snack. I grab some leftovers – the veggie casserole I made earlier in the week and watch as it rotates in the microwave.

Tomorrow should be an easy day at the office, then getting to spend the night with Gunner followed by our group date if a certain someone would finally just agree that he's going. An arm wraps around me, and a scruffy cheek presses to my throat.

"Bambina." Roman nearly growls. "You're asking for trouble wearing so little."

"Did you just get home?" I turn in his arms to kiss him softly.

He shakes his head. "I was back before you were. Asleep, actually."

"Stop working fourteen-hour days." I pout as I rub his shoulders. "I miss you."

He groans and kisses me hungrily, lifting to set me on the counter. His tongue curls with mine until I'm hot all over. I let the sheet drop around my waist and stroke over his thick arms, enjoying the way his muscles ripple under my fingers.

The microwave yells at us, and I open the door without breaking the kiss. Roman licks across my neck and kisses the inside of my shoulder. He chuckles softly. "Holden managed to leave a mark."

"Then maybe you should leave one too."

He groans and kisses and licks my throat until his teeth dig in. I whimper and dig my nails into his bare back as he soothes the bite with his tongue. When he draws back, he nods. "There. You'll have a whole collection by Saturday."

"Are you coming?" I murmur.

"I'm doing everything I can to be there, Bambina." He assures, pushing my hair from my face. "I want to be there."

"It's not group date night without you." I remind him.

He nods, then yawns.

I rarely get to see Roman so soft and gentle. He scratches at his jaw, and I kiss the spot. "Need to shave?"

"Yeah. Once I get time." He sighs.

"Did I wake you up?"

"No. I needed some water." But his eyes rake over me slowly, taking in my tits and bare thighs. "Now I need something else."

"Behave." I admonish. "I came out here for food."

"I'm not going to eat your food. Just ... something else."

I lick across my bottom lip as he crouches down in front of me and pulls the sheet off me so he can devour my pussy. I bite my thumb to try and be somewhat quiet as his tongue laps at my clit and strokes in circles until I'm half insane.

My hips roll against his mouth until he pushes two fingers into my pussy. Just like that, I explode for him, coming apart as sparks fly through my nerves. Roman kisses my mound, then works up my body, teasing me with his tongue and teeth until he sucks my nipple into his mouth.

I groan and fist my own hair. "Fuck, Roman."

He chuckles, raising goosebumps on my skin. "I'm not done with you yet, Sophie."

With one jerk, I'm on my feet, and then I'm bent over the counter with his hard cock pressing against my entrance. I rub myself on him like a needy cat. "I love living with you guys."

"All the perks?" He asks while thrusting into me.

I groan and nod. "There are so many."

"Like getting fucked whenever you want to, naughty girl?" He growls in my ear, thrusting again. "Never having to wear clothes." Another thrust. "Knowing all four of us are all for you."

"Yes." I groan, trying to meet each punishing thrust. "Fuck yes."

"Good." His hand wraps around my throat and tightens.

My vision darkens, but the pleasure hits a new high as he fucks me hard and deep. Roman being rough with me in the kitchen, unafraid of anyone waking up, not worried about interruption, his whole focus on me is something else.

I pant and groan for him. "Right there!"

"You like that spot?" He bites the back of my shoulder. "I think you like everything when I fuck you."

"Yes." I whimper, hopelessly obedient when he's inside me. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, Bambina." He kisses the nape of my neck. "Bent over and purring for me like the good girl you are."

"What a show."

Turning my head, I see Gunner. He smirks and takes my hand, putting it on his cock until Roman turns me to face him. "Take him in your mouth, Sophia."

I jerk his pajama pants down and wrap my lips around Gunner's cock without question. Roman's hard thrusts help me bob up and down on Gunner's cock as I suck and lick, my moans muffled by him filling my throat over and over.

"Fuck, I love waking up in the middle of the night now." Gunner pants, pulling my hair up so he can guide me better. "Just like that, sweets. You know just how I like it."

Roman smacks my ass hard. "You can take him deeper."

I do as I'm told, taking Gunner so deep in my throat that I gag. Gunner groans, and between the two of them, I don't know how I've ever lived without them. I get Gunner to come when I do, gripping his ass so hard as I finish that he can't pull out as he fills my throat.

Once I let go, Roman's next, coming inside me as I pant and catch my breath. Gunner kisses me softly, then steals my food with a wink. Roman turns me around and kisses me, sucking my bottom lip between his.

I slump against him and rub his sides. "So much for food."

"Back to bed for you." He kisses the top of my head. "I'll make breakfast in the morning to make up for it."

"As if I'm mad." I kiss his chin.

Roman swats my bottom as I wrap the sheet back around me. "I love you, Bambina."

"I love you too." I bid before returning to Holden and curling around him.

The next day, work goes quickly, even being in the office. Neal comes in twice to update me on an account, but I don't have to deal with any offers of him freeing me from Roman or anyone else.

My dad is another issue. He calls me in to go over what he missed, and once we finish, he sighs and rubs his forehead. "How have you been, Sophie?"

My fingers freeze on the keyboard, and I close my laptop. "I've been good. I wanted to ask Mom if you guys wanted to do lunch or something on Sunday. If you're taking the day off."

"Despite Roman wanting to work this weekend, I'm handling that. I may be off Sunday, though." He checks something on his computer and nods once. "Yeah, Sunday should work."

"Good. It'll be nice to see you and mom, hopefully getting along."

"We also have Bella's wedding coming up. Two weekends from now. I'm sure we'll all be expected for the bachelor party that Matthew has planned."

"How is Mom doing with all that – minus details about what's being discussed." I clarify.

Dad rubs the back of his neck. "I don't know how great the wedding is going to be, but it'll be something. That's for sure. I assume you're going?"

"I haven't been formally invited."

"That doesn't mean you won't be a plus one." He sighs. "And that will add another layer."

I lean my head to the side, unsure of what to make of *that* statement. He clears his throat. "Anyway. We're at work, and I'm making an effort to keep business-only conversations at work."

I nod.

"Which means that only business meetings should take place here." He levels me with a gaze.

I'm sure I blush, but I nod and clear my throat. "Heard loud and clear."

"Just had to make sure it was said since I got a report from a former employee and a current employee." He continues as I stand.

"Neal?"

"I won't divulge the name." He looks to the side. "Even to my daughter. I don't want any questions about your legitimacy when it comes to the company."

"Dad-"

"With me or the other owners. Whatever your relationship is, we are strictly professional at work."

"Yes, sir." I nod. "As always, I appreciate your time, Mr. Langston."

He chuckles and motions to the door. When I get back to my office, I pull a chair around to put my feet up. Nothing like having your dad tell you not to have sex or make out at the office. I pinch the bridge of my nose and reach into my drawer for some headache medicine.

As soon as I down it with a big mouthful of water, Gunner walks in. I try my best to be professional as he takes the chair I just moved. His knee brushes mine, and the thick smell of fresh tobacco and brandy fills my head.

"How can I help you?" I beam at him.

He looks me over slowly, lingering on my lips. "A repeat of last night would be nice."

"Gunner." I shake my head and glance towards Dad's office.

Even though he looks entirely focused on his computer, I can't help but wonder if he's watching or having Neal watch. I clear my throat. "Anything business-related?"

"You're no fun today." He brushes his hand over my thigh. "Something up your butt I should know about, sweets? Especially since I didn't put it there?"

"No!" I gasp. "No. Dad just made it clear that we are to be strictly professional at work."

"Shame." He licks across his bottom lip. "We're going VIP style tonight. I thought you'd want to know that."

"Really?"

"Mmhmm." He grins. "Since you don't love me for my money, I have to fix that."

I roll my eyes and take his hand under the table. "I love you for you, Gunner. How you make me laugh and make me feel safe and seen and appreciated even when I'm silly and weird."

"And horny, don't forget that." He winks. "At lunch or right after work, I want you to find the sexiest eye-catching dress you can find for me. Something that is going to make me want to blind other guys just for looking."

"So I can see you in a fight?"

"If you want that, I know this club that I can't talk about-"

"Fight Club?"

"Where you can watch me destroy others." He teases.

We both laugh after a moment, and I shake my head. "Okay. I'll get a dress. But please, professional at work. Dad is trying to deal with everything plus the wedding coming up."

"And I'm trying to deal with Neal coming into your office multiple times a day like an over-eager stable boy trying to impress the princess."

"Oh, reading period pieces to spice up your erotica now?"

A wicked smile teases his lips and makes me swallow my sass. He looks me over again. "Well, when I can picture every woman as you, it's hard to resist extensive reading."

"Gunner."

"Especially when someone won't let me act it out at work."

I fan myself and shake my head. "Save it for tonight. VIP style."

He squeezes my hand, mouths that he loves me, and heads out, just happening to stop by Neal's desk on the way. Nothing like a man-marking his territory.

Gunner

"So, Neal, how has work been?" I ask at his desk.

He clears his throat and focuses on his computer despite the fact I know he was watching us in Sophie's office. "Oh, it's been good. I'm happy to take on new projects if you need something."

"I think you're plenty busy with your current workload. Aren't you? Being diligent and thorough?"

"Yes." He nods obediently.

"Good. I'm happy to see you focusing so intently on your work rather than your coworkers."

With that, I leave him be for the rest of the day. I'm hoping that did the trick. Just like I'm hoping Sophie took what I said seriously. I want to struggle to keep my hands to myself all night. Just like I want to have her all to myself.

I don't mind sharing, but seeing Miles after our last conversation still plucks that nerve. She's with one of the other guys constantly, and I remember that I was the first one to lose Bella's favor. Later I found out that she saw me as good dick and comic relief.

I've let Sophie in a lot more than I let Bella in, which makes it all the more horrible to think she'd leave me and shack up exclusively with one of the other guys. And she's young, like Bella, her whole life ahead of her.

Who's to say she won't get tired of satisfying four guys in all the ways she does and want one traditional marriage? And what if that traditional marriage is only with one of us? Or worse – none of us. What if she throws us all and goes to Neal?

Fuck. Loving a woman is supposed to make the relationship stronger, not make me second guess all this shit. I clear my head by actually focusing on my job. By the time I get home, I grab the bottle of scotch, then just stare at it.

Maybe I should wait on the alcohol. We're going out tonight, and I'd like to remember all of it vividly. I set the bottle back in its place and take a deep breath. Holden walks in, looking more like a zombie than a man, and stretches before grabbing some water.

I want to know if he feels the same I do. He's usually the one to overthink, but I don't feel ready to share my concerns. So instead, I grin. "Ready for that bachelor party next weekend?"

"Nope." He takes a drink of water. "Seems pointless, honestly."

"Why?"

"Well, Matthew loves Bella. I can't see what he's going to get out of strippers and alcohol. We have Sophie and drink as much as we want already." He shrugs.

"Hesitating because we're going out or because you can only get it up for Sophie now?"

Holden arches an eyebrow. "You saying you're more eager for strippers than having Sophie in the living room or kitchen or study?"

I rub my jaw and shake my head. "No, but it'll do us good to get out and about, just the guys."

Holden considers that and nods. "We haven't had a night with just us in a long while, have we?"

"Not since Sophie joined us."

He nods. "Might be good for us then. You're right."

After that, he heads back to his room, leaving me with that thought. Maybe a night with just the guys will help what I'm feeling. And I do feel better until I see Sophie come from her room wearing a silver glittery dress that looks like it's ready to be torn off.

I could practically bite through the thin strap that holds it up around her neck, and it plummets between her breasts while showing off her thighs in the best way. She brushes her hair over one shoulder and looks up at me from under her thick lashes.

"Is this VIP enough for you?"

"You're enough in a potato sack for VIP." I breathe.

She takes my hand with a wide smile, snuggling against my side as we get in the elevator. I rub my thumb across her bottom lip and look at my finger to see if it smudged. Sophie giggles. "You think I'd chance cheap lipstick with you?" She tugs my shirt, kissing me softly. "This isn't going anywhere."

"You know me so well."

"Of course I do." She kisses my cheek. "And I expect your hands on me all night, or you telling me stories about you as a kid while we drink."

"Such a high bar."

"And you're going to jump right over it." She pins me with a soft loving smile that has my knees feeling like jelly. "You always do."

I groan and follow her into the first club. We sit together in VIP, and Sophie orders us drinks. As we sit, she closes the space between us and kisses my neck. "What are you thinking right now?"

"That I'm the luckiest guy here," I say honestly before taking a drink.

She narrows her eyes at me, then pokes my chest. "Nope. There's something bothering you. What is it?"

I sigh and shake my head. "It's fine, sweets. We're going to have a fun night."

She climbs into my lap. "I love *you*. I'm not looking for anyone else, Gunner. I don't even notice anyone else when I'm with you guys. Any of you."

"I know."

"And I'll keep telling you. Over and over. Until you believe it." She kisses me softly. "And even after you believe it."

"Have I mentioned that I love you?" I groan.

"You did mention that you would dance with me." She takes my hand and pulls me towards the dance floor. "I expect you to follow through."

And we dance and dance. Her body rubbing against mine in sinful ways that make me want to bundle her up and take her home since she's too good to fuck in a club's bathroom. We make it through four clubs before my knees start screaming.

I pull Sophie closer anyway, linking my hand with hers over her belly as she wraps her other arm around my neck, looking back at me as our bodies move together. She closes her eyes, but the smile on her face, the cleavage offered up to me, her bare thighs catching the colored lights, and the warmth of her body on mine is a drug that demands satisfaction.

Groaning, I drag her outside where I can breathe through the lust and hunger in my belly. She laughs as she stands with me against the wall in the biting night air. She tugs my hand and flashes another smile.

"VIP is fun."

"Only the best for you, sweets."

"That's good." She fists my shirt in her hands. "Because you're the best."

I groan and kiss her hungrily, pulling her closer as I palm her ass. She giggles and draws back, catching her breath after a moment of making out. I brush her hair from her face. I can feel the alcohol sloshing in my belly, and based on how giggly she is; she's drunk too. "I think we need food," I murmur.

"Nothing fancy. I want low quality, incredibly unhealthy breakfast food." She decides.

I chuckle. "And I want you cooking naked when I get home tomorrow."

She bites her lip then leans closer to me. "Then I'd be on the menu, and you'd lose your whole appetite."

"Oh no. Because of you, I'd be twice as hungry." I promise.

She giggles and tugs me towards the waiting town car. We head to some chain breakfast place and slip inside. She laughs as she sticks to the vinyl booth. I sneer at the laminated menu and shake my head.

Sophie makes a soft squeal of a sound and bites her lip. "Oh my god. I haven't had this in so long. I clearly need the cupcake pancakes and a milkshake."

"You're going to be in a sugar coma by the time we get home."

"You have ways of keeping me up." She gives me those damn "fuck me" eyes over her menu.

I smirk. "You're the one who keeps things up."

"Things?"

"Maybe one thing." I chuckle.

We order, and she stirs her water with her straw. "So, Gunner..."

"Oh no."

"It's just a question."

"Nothing good ever starts when you say it like that."

"You don't talk about your family much. I'm curious."

I cringe slightly, then shrug. "Not much to say. You don't have to worry about meeting them."

"I'd like to know about them. About you growing up. About everything in your life. It's all-important to me."

"God, how is it so easy for you to just say exactly what you think and want all the time?" I ask while rubbing her knuckles with my thumb.

She shrugs. "How else will I get the answers I want?"

"I have two brothers and my mom. My dad passed away in Iraq. I don't talk to my family."

"Any good memories with them?"

I think back, then nod. "Yeah. When I was seven, my older brothers convinced me to try to find our Christmas presents on Christmas eve. Dad was overseas, and Reese was convincing. Dan didn't argue, so we searched the whole house while Mom was at work. When she got back, she saw us in her closet, playing with all the toys."

"Oh no." She giggles.

"I thought the same thing. I was ready to pee myself, but she just smiled and handed us another box from the top shelf, telling us that Christmas was still going to happen and all we'd get were two presents, but there was only one box."

Sophie leans towards me.

"Well, when we woke up – since we slept right by the Christmas tree, there was Santa, holding the one present. We took the present, didn't question Santa until Mom came out of the kitchen and kissed him. He took off his beard and wig, and it was Dad. It was the best Christmas we ever had. From the snow to the family to the fact that there wasn't a single punch thrown."

She smiles and bites her lip. "That's beautiful, Gunner. It sounds amazing."

"Do you want kids?" I ask as the food is set down in front of us.

The waitress gives Sophie a nervous look, but she doesn't miss a beat as she cuts her pancakes. "I've thought about it. I think it might be nice, but I don't know for sure. It's a huge

commitment, and I don't know if I'd be willing to give up so much of myself to a kid or multiple kids."

I nod.

She stares at me, and I realize that she's waiting for me to answer. I've never thought about it. After my family seemed to implode on itself, I never thought about actually giving in and passing on my DNA.

But meeting Sophie, being with her, it's changed everything. I'd love to see my own little boy chasing her heels. Love to see us all playing together, with the guys involved too. Going to soccer games, dance recitals, whatever my son would want.

"I don't know. You kind of destroyed my planned future like a meteor."

"Thanks for that." She says around a mouthful of food.

I chuckle. "In the best way, Sophie. You're making me rethink everything which ... I think I needed."

She smiles, her cheeks full of food, so she looks like a pleased little squirrel. I laugh and shake my head. "Alright, silly questions only."

"And shameless flirting." She points at me. "I have expectations when we get home."

"Oh? A date now means sex?"

"Well, I'm buying dinner, so you have to put out." She winks at me, then shrugs. "Or at least cuddle."

"If you're lucky, both."

And she'll always be lucky where I'm concerned.

Sophie

I'm actually sore after being with Gunner. He's stretched over my bed, snoring loudly, one arm wrapped around my waist as he drools into my pillow. My ass is sore from the thorough spanking I got and his teeth marking my body from thighs to neck and back.

Apparently, he took Roman and Holden's marks as a challenge. I smile at him and brush my fingers through his hair. I like our talks, and I like our fun; I love being with him. I know he doubts it sometimes, but that just means I get to show him over and over again how much I love him.

After a few hours of hit-and-miss sleep, I stumble to the kitchen to grab water. I definitely drank too much. I down two glasses and stare at the sink for a moment. Gunner's question from dinner has stuck with me.

Do I want kids? And how would kids be feasible with four partners? Would they each want one? I put a hand on my flat belly and then try to push it out, wondering what it would feel like. I can't imagine something growing inside me.

I shake my head. It's out of order anyway. And that's years away, isn't it? First, we have to get through what is sure to be an awkward wedding. My men's ex is getting married. My dad is going to be there with my mom. I still haven't been formally invited.

I rub my forehead and look around the penthouse. It's scarily quiet. A quiet I'm not used to. Normally, Holden is up

around now or Roman. Nick is an early-to-bed type, but for me to be the only one awake? Very new.

But not exactly unwelcome. I love being with my guys. I love getting to learn more about them, spending time with them, but I kind of miss quiet moments where I can just breathe or read or do whatever I want on my own.

And I miss being with my friends. Having a life outside of my relationships and work. I chew my lip and sit on the huge sectional in the living room. I rub the back of my neck and check my phone to see what Elise has been up to.

We're up to almost a short conversation a day. It's nothing huge, but it's more than we've talked in a long time. She's dating someone and doing well at work. She's also doing home renovations. I'm happy for her, but talking with her makes that pang in my chest for friendship and outings with other girls all the harder to ignore.

Maybe I could be friends with Bella.

Shaking my head, I put Netflix on and watch on my own for a while before falling asleep on the couch. When I wake up, it's to someone rubbing my feet. Nick sits there, watching the news.

"Good morning, sunshine."

"Hi." I feel groggy, my throat is all scratchy, and my eyes crusty. I must look like a hot mess.

Nick slides his hands up my ankle. "Feeling okay?"

"Yeah. Just." I clear my throat and run a hand through my hair. "Groggy. I should brush my teeth and stuff."

"You're beautiful either way, Sophie." He kisses my ankle. "Inside and out."

I brush my teeth and pull on an oversized t-shirt before sitting with him on the couch again. He offers me coffee, but since I just brushed my teeth, I need to wait a bit. I tuck my hair behind an ear, then glance at Nick.

"Do you have friends outside of the guys?"

"Not really." He thinks about it for a while. "I have coworkers I sometimes see. Some family. I'm fond of two of my cousins. We were brought up like siblings, and they're spitfires. I think they'd like you."

"Yeah?"

"Anya and Erin. They're twins. Erin will be visiting soon for Matthew's wedding, which means I'll get to meet my godson."

"That's exciting." I beam.

"He just turned three. I haven't gotten to spend any time with him, but I'm excited. Hopefully, he's at the age where art is interesting so we can test out finger painting." Nick beams.

Kids keep coming up. I rub the back of my neck and nod. Nick kisses the inside of my knee. "Missing friends?"

"I love you guys. You know that." I whisper.

"I love you. I'm sure of *that*." He shrugs, saying it like it's the easiest thing in the world.

Smiling softly, I fit myself to his side. "I feel like I've said it a lot, but I love you, Nick."

He kisses my temple. "Your actions have said it for a while now, Soph."

"But yeah. I kind of miss having friends to talk to. People at work just see me as the boss's daughter, so that doesn't Work. And it's not like college. I can't just make friends out of nowhere as an adult. Especially when I work, come home, work, come home."

Nick nods, then rubs his chin. "Any friends from college out here?"

"One lives about three hours away. I've been talking to her again." I sigh. "I've thought about actually meeting Bella, but I'm sure she's swamped, and it might be awkward."

"Bella's friendly. She might appreciate some help when it comes to the wedding, and a girl's perspective would probably be appreciated." "You think so?"

"I'll call her today." He kisses the top of my head. "Where's this group date happening?"

I blink a few times, then laugh. "I was so worried making sure we got time together that I didn't think about it. We can do dinner or"

"Dinner sounds good. I know a place. Maybe then we could all go up to the pool, drink, and have a good time."

"I like it. Simple." I grin up at him.

"Simple can be beautiful." His lips mold to mine, soft and tender. "I learned that from modeling."

"The simple thing or the kissing. Depending on the answer, I have questions."

He chuckles and kisses me again and again. Until a familiar hunger teases my stomach. I groan and pull him closer, slipping my fingers into his shirt. "How are you so gentle and amazing all the time?"

"I don't know. I don't think I am."

"And humble." I hum against his lips. "What a combination."

He chuckles and fists my hair in his hand as we kiss again and again. Trading soft whispers and softer kisses until I shake my head. "I don't understand you guys."

"All of us or just me?"

"You all could have anyone in the world. You could have multiple women."

"Money's real attractive." He rolls his eyes.

"No, for you."

"Looks and charm get us everywhere." He sits back.

"You know what I mean."

"No." He shakes his head. "We tried that, kind of, some of us. I dated a few women while I was modeling. Roman dated

some women while the business was starting. Miles tried. Gunner had more than his share of fun."

"But?"

"But we found out fast that when money is involved, and issues exist, that some people aren't interested in staying. It had its effects. Holden dated one girl ... when she saw the prosthetic after a month, she ghosted him."

"What?!" I jump up. "You're kidding me!"
"No"

I look up and see Holden, drinking coffee, looking paler than normal. He shrugs. "It happens."

"I'd punch her right in the face if I could." I say seriously. "What a bitch!"

Nick snares my waist and pulls me down. "Easy tiger."

"No. I'm furious!" I struggle so I can look at Holden. "That woman is a plight to society. You know you're more than the whole package."

Holden cracks a smile and raises his mug to me. "Thank you, Sophie."

"See." Nick pulls me back to him. "That's why it's you. You don't care about the money. You don't see our flaws as flaws. You're here, and you stay, even when it's complicated or confusing. You're here for us."

"I'm not the only sane woman in the world," I grumble.

"Afraid you're going to lose us?" He asks.

Holden stands behind me and holds my hips as Nick caresses my face. Holden kisses my neck softly. "We're all yours."

"Even when I hit thirty?"

"Absolutely," Nick promises. "Hell, then people will stop mentioning the age difference as much."

I giggle and lean back, rubbing Holden with one hand. "You guys are too much."

"Nah, you handle us well," Holden assures me.

"And you call me sweet." I bite my lip.

We have a lazy morning. Filled with cuddling and kisses. When Gunner gets up, he manages to kiss me softly before dropping into a free seat with a groan. "I'm not in my twenties anymore."

"Aww, Gunner. All partied out?" Nick teases.

I giggle and rub Nick's chest. Gunner rolls his eyes. "For this weekend."

"We have the bachelor party next weekend," Nick tells me. "Are you going to be able to survive one night without us?"

"It will be challenging. But I do have a vibrator." I tease.

"I thought we stole all those." Gunner grumbles before nudging Holden. "Did you forget one?"

Holden chuckles and rolls his eyes. By the time Roman gets up and around, it's nearly two p.m. He kisses the top of my head. "So we're going on a date tonight?"

"Dinner and swimming," Nick informs us.

I rub him, thankfully. Somehow, I'm already exhausted. And knowing them, I'm going to need my energy tonight. I excuse myself for a nap and end up on the phone with my mom instead. She's insisting on us spending next weekend together since the guys are going out and we need some girl time.

She dangles a spa day in front of me, and I can't tell her no. The idea of being pampered and allowed to relax is just too nice. With that, I fall asleep and wake to someone climbing in bed with me.

Looking over my shoulder, I see Roman. He grumbles something about going back to sleep, but when I fit myself against him, he sighs.

"Just sleeping."

"Sure."

"I mean it. I'm exhausted." He yawns.

I smile to myself and wrap his arm around me. We nap until the alarm goes off, then I get up and through a shower. Once I get dressed in something nice – cute – we head out in a limo. Roman and Gunner are talking soccer, arguing about how Massimo's team is going to do without him this season, while Nick and Holden talk about something related to the wedding.

I kick back, drifting between the two conversations until Roman rubs my thigh, pushing my dress up. I shake my head at him. "You have to wait until after dinner."

"Even though we have a whole balcony to ourselves?" Nick licks his bottom lip as he lifts my skirt.

I push it down and shake my head. "Can we get through one date, even half of one date, without you guys trying to strip me?"

"Doesn't sound like a fun date." Gunner teases. "We should buy you pole dancing lessons."

"Hey!"

"I'd give you all my ones." Holden nods, not the voice of reason I expect.

"It's my choice." The idea strikes, and as it comes to me, it falls out of my mouth. "I'll take lessons if you all join me."

"Ooh, I don't know, Sophie." Gunner teases. "I might get distracted by seeing Roman on the pole, and then where will we be?"

"Uncharted new territory." I wink.

Roman rolls his eyes. Holden and Nick laugh, and Gunner makes a kissy face at Roman. "I don't think you could handle all this."

"I've carried you home from bars."

"Oh, but I haven't worked my mojo on you." Gunner rubs Roman's chest. "What thick muscles you have, sir." That cracks us all up and thankfully distracts from what's under my skirt. Perhaps we can have a PG date after all.

Nick

DINNER IS AMAZING. THE BALCONY IS DRESSED IN FAIRY lights which is nice considering this whole date is a fairytale. It feels like going out used to with just the guys. Sophie fits in and makes it all the better.

She giggles and looks around the table before raising her beer glass. "To us."

"To us." We echo, clinking against her glass.

She smiles. "I want us to always be like this. Together, happy, in love."

My smile spreads wider.

I spent how many years thinking of settling down with a woman, getting married, doing the two kids, and happily ever after thing, but that was before war. I don't wear my scars like Holden, drink them away like Gunner, or push them so far down they barely exist like Roman. I went into the army knowing what I was going to get as a sniper.

But it did change how I felt. After being with the guys, after coming home and living together, after everything with Bella, I realized that a traditional life isn't for me. I want to live with my friends, the people who know me better than anyone else in the world.

Sophie fills the only missing piece. The woman we need in more ways than one. Sophie nudges me. "Everything okay in your noggin?"

"With you here, absolutely." I kiss her temple.

She smiles and then shivers. Which means Roman has his hands on her. Looking over, I see him teasing her inner thigh with soft strokes of just one finger. Sophie bites her lip, and color fills her cheeks.

I smirk and take a drink. Sophie grabs Roman's hand. "At least let's finish dinner."

"Sophie is a better dessert." Gunner looks her over like he didn't get her all last night.

"And appetizer," Holden says over his glass.

"In fact, I think you belong on this table right now." Roman grins. "Share size." He chuckles.

She giggles and shoves at him. "Not until we're home. We'll have the pool and all that."

"So we're skinny dipping," I ask. "That sounds like a hell of a night."

Sophie giggles, and I see Holden light up. "You know, Sophie did mention something about wanting to be on a warm beach somewhere."

"Someone say nude beach?" Gunner pops up.

"I told you!" She yells, pointing at Holden. "I told you that would be his first thought."

"Wait until the second one hits." I tease. "That you'd be naked on a public beach, and we wouldn't be allowed to fuck you."

Gunner's jaw tightens. "And all those damn eyes on you."

"Absolutely not." Roman agrees.

I nod. "A regular beach. The Caribbean."

Holden grins and winks at Sophie. She rolls her eyes and leans back in her chair, her hand on mine. "I haven't been there yet."

"We'll take you there and everywhere else you dream of, Soph."

Once dinner wraps up, we head home. None of us bother getting changed. I dip in for some towels, and then we head up to our private rooftop pool. Once I get up there, I see Sophie stripping.

Gunner's already in the pool, so I have no doubt he's naked. Roman lifts Sophie's dress over her head and pulls her close, kissing her hungrily. Holden sits on the edge of the pool, pulling off his prosthetic but keeping his eyes on Sophie.

I don't blame him. Who could look away from that sight?

I slide behind her and slip my fingers into her underwear, dragging them down her legs before shoving her legs apart. She groans and braces herself on Roman as I lick up her inner thigh. She shivers and spreads her legs wider for me.

I lick along her slit, finding her wet and ready for me. She's delicious, sweet, with a hint of saltiness that only makes me want more. I lick her entrance, pushing my tongue into her pussy until she groans and shivers.

Sucking her clit softly, I tease her with soft licks just to make her shake. She pants, and one of her hands rubs mine. I groan and give in, devouring her like I need as she groans and whimpers.

When she comes for me, riding my mouth and soaking my tongue, I kiss up her perfect round ass and see Roman licking and sucking her nipple. Gunner pulls himself out of the pool and slides his hand between Sophie's legs, rubbing her clit as I thrust two fingers into her. She gasps and kisses us both, trading between us until she looks over her shoulder at Holden.

He has his cock out, stroking it slowly as he watches us.

Sophie moans, and her thighs tighten. "My mouth is empty."

I draw back, and Gunner chuckles. "So greedy, sweets."

Roman releases her tit with a popping sound, and Sophie walks over to Holden as I strip.

She kisses him and climbs onto his lap, sliding down over his cock as she moans. Her lips part in a perfect little circle. Gunner gets on his knees to the side, and Sophie obediently wraps her lips around his cock, moaning as she uses him to fill her throat.

Roman groans. "Fuck, I love watching her."

I nod in agreement, and we join them. Roman rubs her ass, whispering soft orders to ride harder, to take Gunner deeper, and swatting her ass when she takes too long to comply.

She moans louder. I rub her thigh up over her belly, then rub her breast, pulling her nipples as she pants. A shiver tears through her as she comes, and Holden groans loudly. He pants and guides her head over Gunner's cock until he draws back.

Sophie gets off Holden and lays on her back. Gunner slips between her legs as she wraps her puffy lips around my cock, her gorgeous eyes on me, a smile obvious there. She licks up my cock, then sucks the head.

I groan. "Fuck, that feels good, Soph."

Holden pulls one of Sophie's thighs further apart for Gunner as he thrusts into her. Her body writhes and rolls against him on the deck. I feel every moan from my cock to the center of my stomach, taking me closer and closer to the edge.

Knowing how much she loves us, loves being shared by us ... it's staggering. I groan and fist her hair in my hand. "That feels so good, Sophie."

"Your pussy is magic." Gunner groans.

"You're so perfect, Sophie," Holden says, kissing her ankle. "So beautiful."

"All ours." Roman agrees, kissing her chest softly. "To fuck, to have, to love."

Sophie moans and sucks me deeper, her throat so tight and wet that I can't help it. I come, hard. She slowly licks up the shaft, then her tongue flicks over the head of my cock, and I nearly jump.

Panting, I draw back. Gunner groans, then pulls out and comes on Sophie's belly. He kisses her hard, biting her bottom lip. When he releases her, I take my own kiss, deep and hungry, teasing her tongue with mine.

Roman picks her up and pulls her onto his lap. She rolls her hips on him as he thrusts up and into her. Watching her pleasure, watching her tits bounce, and her body tighten as she moves on him, the way her head falls back.

It's so fucking hot.

Holden recovers the fastest and offers his cock as he braces himself on his knees. She wraps her hand around him and jerks him off as she fucks Roman. He growls at her in Italian, biting her throat, teasing her with gentle kisses. Gunner rubs her clit, and she starts working on him again, too, even though he's soft.

"You're so good." She says in a husky, hoarse voice that pulls at my sanity.

Oh, we're going to give her a full night, that's for sure. Gunner's hand works hard on her clit as he kisses her shoulder. "I like group date nights."

"Fucking good." Holden agrees.

Sophie laughs once, then gives in with a moan. Her hips move faster, losing their rhythm, and I know she's close. Sophie comes hard and wraps herself around Roman, burying her head in his throat as she comes.

Roman lets out a deep grunt and pats her thigh. "Good girl."

"Give me a little, and I can go again." She promises.

"We promised swimming, sweets." Gunner murmurs. "You get to swim."

Holden nods in agreement.

After a quick break for all of us, we get in the pool. We splash around, throw a ball, and take turns holding and rubbing against Sophie. I kiss the back of her neck and hold her in my lap, rubbing her belly.

"Are you happy?" I murmur.

She turns to face me, and our lips mold together. She kisses me softly and smiles. "I would have given up girl's night for this."

"A five-star review?"

"Yes." She laughs.

By the time we wrap up swimming, I know we're all hard and ready to go again. The only question is Sophie. And she answers that question by walking into the penthouse completely naked, dripping wet, watching us over her shoulder with bedroom eyes.

None of us are immune to that look, and we prove it, sharing her again before we lounge around the living room in towels and naked and in various states of being dry. Sophie falls asleep on Gunner's arm, hickeys and bite marks across her body.

When she shivers, I put a towel over her. Leaning back, I sigh. "She's perfect for us."

"More than perfect." Gunner agrees, looking her over. "How the hell did we get this lucky?"

"We have to hope that luck holds out." Roman murmurs, opening a bottle of water. "Bella isn't going to like this at her wedding."

"How do you know?" Holden asks. "She's a one-man kind of woman now."

"She agreed to have her exes at the wedding but didn't agree to have her exes and their new girl." Gunner sighs. "She was jealous."

I don't like remembering that. She'd be upset if Gunner had a girl on his arm on a night she was busy. She'd be twice as upset when I modeled with women. She wanted to be our one and only, even though she would play favorites.

"We'll deal with it if it comes up. She chose Matthew."

"Choosing someone and seeing us with Sophie is different." Gunner disagrees. "Miles with his ex-wife too? She's going to lose her mind."

"She'll be too busy with the whole walking down the aisle thing, right? And it's not like anyone not involved is going to know." I shrug.

"We'll talk to Matthew either way." Roman decides. "He's coming over tomorrow to go over some things for the bachelor party. We'll just casually let him know we're sharing a plus one."

"Casually." Holden snorts.

Gunner brushes his fingers over Sophie's cheek. "I keep waiting for something to break her. Something that will make her walk."

"She did Italy with us. She moved in with us. A wedding isn't going to ruin us." I assure him.

But I wonder what she'd look like in white, walking up the aisle a smile under her veil. I wonder what it would be like to claim her in front of friends and family. I wonder ... and a few good things start with that statement.

Sophie

THE NEXT MORNING, I'M EXHAUSTED. MY BODY HURTS IN THE best way. Muscles that have been tested, stretched, and I have a pleasant but tired feeling hanging over my head. I smile to myself and stretch. When I realize I'm not being touched, I panic.

Opening my eyes, I find myself in bed ... alone. Alone? I'm almost never alone in the house. Was last night just a dream? The sex by the pool? On the floor in the living room? Trying to satisfy four men at once despite the constant assurances that I'm doing just that?

I look around, blink a few times and swallow, then get up to check myself in the bathroom. Marks don't lie. I relax when I see the evidence of last night. After a shower hot enough to melt skin, I pull on a simple day dress and walk into the kitchen.

Almost immediately, I'm caught and tossed over a broad shoulder. I smack Roman's ass. "Put me down!"

"You are not allowed to do a damn thing today, Bambina." He drops me on the couch, where another arm wraps around my middle.

I look up to see Nick. He winks at me. "After last night, you're resting."

"But!"

"I made breakfast!" Gunner practically sings. "Well ... I bought it. Which saves you from burnt bacon."

He appears in a chef's hat and apron. He sets the plate on my lap and whistles as he walks away, revealing his muscular ass. I giggle and shake my head.

"No one wants to see that!" Holden calls while bringing me juice.

I look at Roman, now shaved, to Nick, who looks like he can't stop smiling, then to Holden, who steals a slice of bacon as he sits on the floor by my knees. "What's all this about?"

"You do so much for us, Sophie. You feed us, keep the peace, work with us, and more. You deserve some appreciation." Nick kisses my forehead.

"I enjoy the sex as much as you guys do," I grumble. "Loving you all isn't a chore."

Roman grins and gently strokes my jaw. "We know."

"But you deserve some appreciation," Holden convinces me.

Gunner returns with more plates then wiggles his ass for Holden. Holden rolls his eyes, but I swat him. He gasps and shakes his head. "See, Hold. I knew you liked me."

Holden rolls his eyes.

"So that means we're all doing pole dancing, right?" I tease.

"Hell no," Nick whispers in my ear.

Roman rolls his eyes. "Maybe ballroom dancing."

"Not me!" Gunner yells. "I only do club dancing. I'm a man of culture."

I giggle and enjoy breakfast with the guys. It's nice being doted on as if they don't spoil me enough. Nick gets up to shower, and Holden instantly takes his spot, like he was waiting for the opening. I rub his thigh.

"You guys don't have to do all this."

"It just happened." Holden shrugged. "Gunner decided you needed breakfast."

"And I decided you're a princess today." Roman sighs. "Holden and Nick are softies."

Holden gives me an unapologetic smile, but my eyes narrow. "Something's happening, isn't it? You guys are buttering me up."

"Told you. Pay up, Roman."

Roman hands Gunner a bill as Gunner sits on my lap. "Matthew is coming over today."

"Well, I haven't seen him in a while. I'd love to see him." I look between them, still confused.

"To talk about the wedding," Gunner says, holding my chin so I can only look at him. "We haven't told him we're bringing you, and he doesn't really know about our relationship."

Gunner kisses me softly before getting up. "And he doesn't get to see my sweet ass."

I swallow the laugh and pin Roman with a look. "You didn't tell him?"

"No."

"None of you?"

"He's been busy," Holden murmurs. "Wedding planning. Vendors. Bella. Work."

"And you all have been stalling. I don't have to go. It's okay. I won't feel left out." It's a lie. I know it the second it leaves my tongue, but I don't want them getting into a fight because of me.

Before I can argue much more, Matthew is shown in. It's a reunion of sorts, then he notices me. "Mini Miles? What are you doing here?"

"About that ..." Nick starts, then hesitates. "We'd like to bring her to the wedding."

Matthew looks at each of the guys, then sits down, rubbing his forehead. "You mean ..."

"It's different than Bella, but yes. Like that. Somewhat." Gunner says.

"Fuck." Matthew looks at me. "I thought you were smarter than this. I mean, one look at you told me they were going to try, but come on, Sophia."

I shrug. "It's love, Matthew. I love them."

"You think you do. Does your dad know about this? Does

"Both my parents." I nod. "They don't love it, but it doesn't matter."

Matthew shakes his head. "You have to tell Bella. You have to *ask* Bella. I'm already asking about Miles bringing his ex-wife."

"Come on. We all get a plus one." Gunner argues. "You can't suddenly tell us that we can't make the most of it."

"I reserved a plus one," Roman says.

"Yes, but you can't all be all over her. Imagine what Bella is going to say. Imagine how distracted she'll be."

"She'll be too busy trying to get a second to herself to eat." Gunner waves it away.

"Weddings are notorious for that. I'd have Taco Bell on standby." Nick agrees.

Matthew just groans. "You guys are ridiculous. How can you ask me for this? You know ..."

He just shakes his head. I suck my bottom lip. "We can behave for a few hours."

"Sophie!" Gunner puts a hand to his heart. "You wound me."

"We can." I insist. "We can, and we will. It's your day, not ours."

Roman and Holden nod. Nick agrees as well. Matthew rubs his face and looks at Gunner. Huffing, Gunner puts his

hands up. "Bella won't catch me with my hands on Sophie. Okay?"

"But everyone else will. It will be in whispers. You all showing up together? Anyone who knew"

"What, did Bella tell her friends?"

"Of course she did!" Matthew groans. "Fuck. It's going to be a whole conversation."

"I wanted to hang out with her. To offer to help out with final wedding stuff. Would that help at all or-"

"Honestly, I don't know." He shakes his head. "She's been so stressed and overwhelmed. Her moods are unpredictable."

"So no." I rub the back of my neck.

Nick starts massaging me, and I turn to kiss his hand in thanks. Matthew looks between us and shrugs. "I'll try, but you have to do the asking. Whichever one of you wants to tackle her."

"I'll do it." Roman offers.

Heads turn to face him. He shrugs. "We had the worst ... end. If she says yes to me, it means it's really okay. I won't lose sight of the focus."

I blink at him. Gunner shakes his head. "No, Roman. You know she'll say no."

"It's the only time he's raised his voice at a woman," Nick whispers in my ear. "She didn't tell him. She told all of us. Not him. She tried to ghost him until Roman happened to see her and Matthew out together."

I look back at Nick, then to Roman. Always carefully composed, emotionally stable Roman. I can't imagine him yelling. I can't imagine him crying. Not because heartbreak avoids the handsome and wealthy, but because of who Roman is.

He swallows hard. "I can and will do it."

Matthew stands and shakes Roman's hand. "Deal."

Matthew looks at me again, shakes his head, then hesitates. "No hookers at the bachelor party. It should go without saying. Strippers, fine. No hookers."

With that, he walks out. Gunner clears his throat, then walks away, just leaves. Nick makes some excuse about work, and Holden just disappears. I walk to Roman as he sits down, then I sit on his lap, holding his palm in my hand.

"There's a lot I don't know."

"You don't need to know, Bambina." His voice is hollow.

"But I know I love you. I know that I'm staying and if anything changes, at all in the world. If anything apocalyptic happens, and my feelings change." I tighten my hold on his hand. "I will still love you and respect you."

He swallows the lump in his throat and presses his forehead to mine. "I don't want to imagine your feelings towards us changing. Any of us."

"I know." I smile. "And it would take a lot for that to happen. None of you have killed people out of combat, right? No giant skeletons in the closet?"

"No." He shakes his head.

"No baby mommas or evil twins or crazy soap opera shenanigans that are going to rear up?" I ask, my nose brushing his.

He shakes his head again. "No, Bambina."

"I love you all. Each of you separately and together." I kiss him softly. "But I understand that this may be asking too much."

"You're not asking. I'm insisting. And I'm going to do this. Hard or not, you're worth it."

"Not to brag, but your grandma said I'm wifey material."

He laughs and kisses me again, softly. "You are. And maybe we can talk about that in the future ... as a group."

"As a group." I agree.

Roman kisses my shoulder, and then he has to surrender me for lunch with my parents. The guys promise not to forget about me for the few hours I'm gone, and I drive over to my parents' house.

I sit outside for a second, just staring at the steering wheel. Is it possible that everything is coming together for me? In a relationship, that's against the norm but works so well for me. I'm in love. I have a good job. My parents are possibly getting back together, and I'm talking to both of them without yelling or hanging up the phone.

Chewing my bottom lip, I hesitate to leave the car. At this moment, everything is perfect, and I don't want to think, not for even a moment, that it's going to change.

After taking a deep breath, I head up and find my parents with a full meal prepared. My mom laughs and pats my dad's chest before kissing him softly. He gives her his thousand-watt smile, and I lean against the door frame, not wanting to interrupt for the moment.

This is everything I wanted growing up. Being loved on and respected as a partner and my parents having a happy and healthy marriage. Dad looks over at me and blushes. "Sophie! I didn't hear you come in."

"Well, I can come back later." I tease.

"No!" My mom hugs me. "I can't wait until next weekend to see you." She squeezes me and breathes me in. "You missed a hickey, honey."

"Sorry." I adjust my hair to cover it and bite my lip.

She laughs and shakes her head. "I appreciate the attempt."

As we eat lunch, we catch up. Mom shares my prom photos and tells Dad all about how long graduation was, how I tripped while I grabbed my diploma and nearly took down the president of the university.

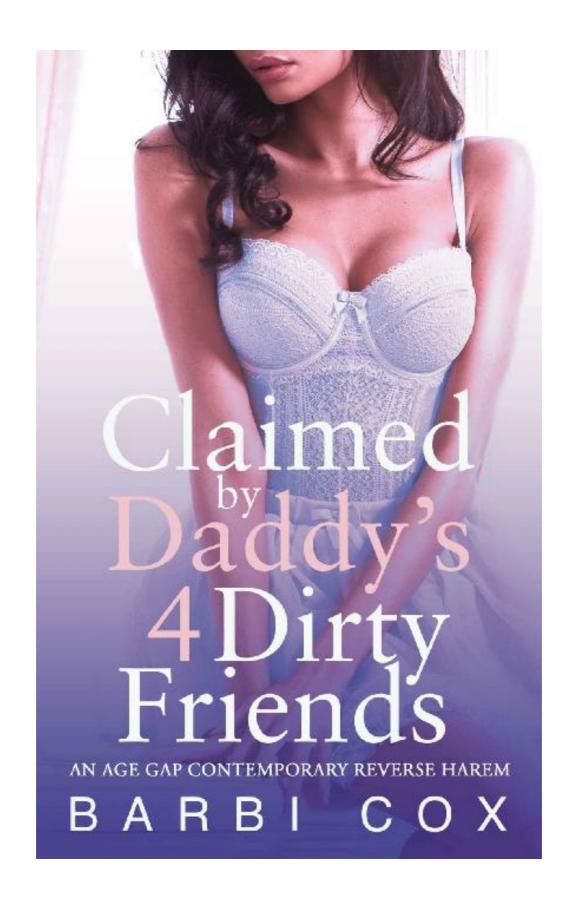
They laugh and tease me until I fight back, reminding mom about when she lost her paycheck, and I found it in her purse after we tore the house apart. Dad watches us with loving eyes and takes our hands. "I love you both so much." He sighs.

Mom raises her wine glass. "To second chances and a bright and simple future."

"To family, friends, and love." Dad echoes.

I pick up my glass and put it with theirs. "To a happily ever after that lasts."

We clink our glasses and drink. Even as I swallow, I know that life won't be that simple, but for the moment, I'm happy to believe that a storybook ending is possible for all of us.



Roman

My LEG BOUNCES AND I THINK ABOUT LEAVING BEFORE SHE can arrive. Talking to Bella and a good idea in the same sentence was a terrible plan. I reach for my phone, ready to call Bella and tell her I'm sick, but then she's standing there, her lips pursed, pushing her sunglasses up.

She huffs, then pulls a chair out and sits. "What, Roman?"

"How's the wedding planning?" I ask.

She rubs the back of her neck. "It's stressful as hell. Matthew and I have actually been talking. I mean, Hawaii? If I could, I'd change it at this point. Trying to get all the vendors taken care of from here is killing me."

"It'll be worth it once you're there," I assure her.

We order quickly, then Bella looks me over. "You look good. After everything with Miles I was almost worried about you."

"Bella." I sigh.

"Look, we've kept everything professional since things ... ended." She shakes her head. "Which has worked, so why lunch? Why now?"

"I have a plus one for the wedding."

"And you have a girl to bring, great. I already have everything set." She drums her fingers on the table. "So? That requires lunch?"

"I'll be sharing that plus one with the guys."

She stares at me, laughs, then shakes her head. "What, did Gunner put you up to this? It's a terrible joke."

"It's not."

She keeps her smile but finally takes off her glasses, revealing sharp dark eyes. "I know you're lying. Because if you were telling the truth, I'd be pissed. And you, Roman, responsible, reliable Roman would never make me cause a scene or throw this at me with my wedding in a week."

"Bell-"

"You're supposed to be the smart one!" She hisses. "Out of everyone! You ... you. How could you even ask this of me! You think I want four guys mooning over one girl, creating a ton of gossip on *my* big day?"

"But-"

"The one day that's actually about *me*. Do you think I want everything rubbed in my face? Huh? Reminded of what I left behind while I'm marrying Matthew? Are you ...Are you fucking kidding me!" She barely manages to keep her voice down.

"I'm asking before we do anything. But this isn't like what it was. We love her." I say. "We do."

"This is insane. Absolutely insane. There is nothing you could possibly say, *nothing*, that would get me to say yes to this."

"Come on, Bella." I rub my jaw. "I haven't asked you for anything."

"That's because I was always the one asking." Bella reminds me. "Roman, please take me out to dinner. Roman, please stay, don't leave me naked and alone. Roman, please understand."

I take a slow breath.

"I did the asking, and now I'm telling you no. Absolutely not."

"She's Miles' daughter. I'm asking even though at least two of us have put down for a plus one."

"Then get some fucking hookers. You had no problem enjoying other people with me. Why's it any different now?" She wraps her hand around the water and takes a slow sip.

"We love her. It's just like that." I say. "If you say no, fine. She won't come ... and neither will I."

She sits on that until the food comes. After a bite, she looks up at me again. "Does she have a magic pussy? Is that what it is?"

"Don't be crass," I growl. "It's as simple as me wanting her there."

"To the point that you'd miss out on seeing one of your best friends get married?"

"Matthew will have plenty of support," I assure her.

"Fuck you." She says emphatically. "Fuck you for coming here. Fuck you for asking me for this. Fuck you for even thinking I'd say yes."

"Which means yes." I take a victorious bite of food. "Thank you."

She glowers at me. "I expect you all to behave. No hands on her. And you – she'll be on *your* arm when you all arrive. She's *your* date. Got it? If I hear whispers, I'm going to lose my shit and be a full-on Bridezilla. You want that?"

"We'll all behave," I promise. "You only have to worry about yourself."

She looks me over and shakes her head. "That's never the case, and you know it, not with five people now showing up to threaten my special day. I mean it. One fucking toe out of line, and I'm going to make sure none of you can fuck again."

"Alright." I put my hands up. "I hear you."

"Now, you're going to pay for lunch and not talk to me unless you're giving me a present or a check. Got it? Not a hello. Not a "you look so pretty," don't even introduce me to

the ..." She hesitates, then looks up at me. "The girl I showed around the office?"

"Yes."

She throws her napkin down on her plate. "Takes my job and then takes you all. Of course. We're interchangeable? Is that it?"

"Bella."

"Not another word. Not *one*, or it's a no." She gets up and walks away while still grumbling to herself.

I got the yes, that was the important thing. I rub the back of my neck, take care of the check, and head home. I see Sophie in the kitchen, making lunch. She's wearing an apron over a nightdress that rides high on her thighs.

That spankable ass nearly bare. I bite my lip and watch as she turns up the radio and tosses her hair around, singing along. She tastes whatever she's making, then grabs more seasoning. I put my hand over my heart.

"Adoro tornare a casa per questo." I purr.

Sophie jumps and turns around to face me. A smile spreads across her face as I close the distance between us to wrap my arms around her and breathe her in. She rubs one of my arms. "Are you going to translate that?"

"I love coming home to you." I purr in her ear.

She giggles and leans against me. "I love you too."

I turn her around, pressing her between me and the counter to devour her mouth. As if it's been months since I've kissed her or seen her. I lick along her tongue pull out all the stops to show her how much she means to me, so she can feel the sparks I feel deep inside anytime I'm around her.

When I release her, her eyes are wide, she's panting, and she touches her lips with a trembling finger. "What ... what was that for?"

"I'm so happy to be with you." I tip her chin up to suck her bottom lip into my mouth. "So lucky that you love me."

She blinks at me then rubs my chest. "Are you okay?"

"You are officially coming to the wedding." I kiss her again, stroking down her back, grabbing her ass, and jerking her against me. God, she tastes good. When I draw back, I smile. "Bella said yes."

She lifts her finger, covered with sauce. "I'm glad to hear it. I would have missed you all."

"I wouldn't have gone." It feels so easy to say to her.

To cover that bit of a reveal, I suck the sauce off her fingers. It's delicious marinara, seasoned so nicely. I groan and kiss her again, tasting it on her tongue. I cup her face in my hands and moan.

"You're" I shake my head.

She sucks her bottom lip. "Why wouldn't you have gone? You didn't want to support Matthew?"

"I do, but I'm not going to leave you alone."

She sighs and hugs me. "I can handle myself, you big sexy giant. I could handle being here alone."

"You could." I agree. "I couldn't. I would have spent the whole time worried about you, wondering if you were lonely, wondering what would happen if someone broke in."

She kisses my chest. "I love you."

"Tu sei tutto per me," I answer.

"I'm going to have to start learning Italian." She teases, turning around to work on the food.

I see her making a pizza and smile. She glares at the dough, and I help her smooth it out a little more as she laughs, fighting me for it. Kneading a pizza with Sophie is probably one of the hottest nonsexual things we've ever done.

I kiss across her neck as she pours the sauce on and sighs. We're the luckiest men in the world.

Once it's in the oven, my exhaustion kicks in. "I'm going to take a nap."

"Okay." She bids. "Sweet dreams.

When I wake up, it's to Gunner smacking me. I groan and grab him in a headlock. We wrestle until Nick pulls us apart. "Not in front of a lady."

"Why not? We wrestle with her plenty." Gunner chuckles. "Anyway, I want Bella's answer. Pay up."

I groan and pull myself off the ground. "Bella said yes."

"Yes?" Gunner asks, looking to Nick with a huge grin.

"Yeah."

Sophie squeals and I see Holden picking her up and spinning her. Good to know I'm not the only one that's happy with the results. Nick claps. "We're celebrating."

Sophia serves her pizza, Holden opens the wine, and then we're all talking excitedly. Sophie gasps. "Oh god! What am I going to wear?"

"Well, it's in Hawaii," Gunner says around his pizza.

Sophie looks at each of us, then shakes her head. "What? We just went to Italy. We can't go to Hawaii. What are you guys thinking!" She stands up. "I have to stay."

Nick pulls her into his lap and kisses across her neck. "Nope. Roman worked too hard to get you the yes. You're coming with us."

"Or what? Going to tie me up and put me in my luggage?"

"Half of that is appealing." Gunner eyes her hungrily. "Very appealing. We have rope somewhere."

"I'm serious." She argues. "We can't just leave."

"We own the company. It's a long weekend with this long week of long hours ahead of us. Another week and a half of long days, and we're good. There will be a few calls and maybe a few hours worth of work. We will handle it." Holden reassures her. "We've been planning."

She narrows her eyes. "We're supposed to be equal, and you guys keep leaving me out."

"Sophie," Nick whispers something in her ear.

She huffs. "No. That excuse isn't going to work forever. You can pamper me, take care of me, and I love it. But I need to know things. I deserve to know things and to be a part of making choices. I'm tired of not having a say."

"Sophia." Nick loses his hold on her, and she leaves for her room.

Gunner bites his bottom lip and watches after her. I pat his arm. "She'll come around."

"I mean ... She has a point." He murmurs. "We make every decision without her assuming she'll go along. I don't know if it's because she's young or if it's because we're the guys, but ... we worship her, enjoy her, love her and never let her take control."

Holden rubs his jaw. "Do you think she'll come to the wedding?"

"She will," I say. "She will. And when she comes, she gets to make plenty of choices. We'll clue her in on everything."

"All of it." Nick agrees.

Because we can't lose her, it goes without saying. I clear my throat, and Gunner and I put things away. He looks at me for a long moment, and I can still feel some rift between us. I don't know what it is, the same thing that's been here since we moved in.

Maybe just two doms wanting the same woman? Maybe it's more, but I have a feeling a lot is going to come out on this trip, and I don't know if we're ready for it.

Sophia

I STARE AT MY BED, NOT READY TO GET IN. I MIGHT HAVE overreacted a little bit to the news. I mean, I've never been to Hawaii, and I'd love to go, but I have to set boundaries, right? If I don't, I'll end up half as crazy as my mother.

I rub the back of my neck and shake my head. I need to deal with the issue between us. I don't want things to fester between us, and I definitely don't want to be kept from big things. I don't want to be the last to know.

I turn to head out the door, then pause. I take a slow breath. I should still talk to Roman and make sure he's okay after seeing Bella. I rub my forehead and shake my head. I shouldn't complain about anything in relation to the guys. They're so good to me, and maybe I'm just being ungrateful.

"Sweets."

I turn to see Gunner standing there. He walks to me and reaches out before hesitating. "I'm sorry."

"For?"

"For not telling you. You're right. You're an equal. And you deserve to be treated as such."

"That's all I want," I murmur. "Everything else is perfect."

He offers me his hand, and I take it, unable to resist. "Boundaries are important to me, and so is balance in a relationship."

"We'll learn how to do that." He promises. "In Hawaii ... assuming you're still going."

"I am." I sigh. "Of course, I'm going. Roman dealt with Bella for me. And I want to be there. Not touching any of you is going to be hard, but"

"About that."

Looking past Gunner, I see Roman. He motions to the living room, and Gunner and I walk out there hand in hand. The other guys are sitting there. Roman paces in front of the couch. He looks at all of us and takes a breath.

"In the effort of being open, honest, and spilling everything out ... Bella had conditions."

"What kind of conditions?" Holden asks as I sit next to him.

Gunner rubs my back. "The kind where none of us can touch her? Like we agreed with Matthew?"

"No." Roman exhales. "Bella said she's my date only."

Gunner's fingers tighten around the back of my neck. He exhales slowly, but I can feel the tension in his body.

"Bella specifically said she has to come as my plus one." He says. "But that doesn't mean anything. Just for the wedding and the reception. Everything else, we can do all other activities together, as a group."

"Meaning what?" Gunner growls.

"Meaning that unless we're at the wedding or reception, we can do what we want. Hikes, the beach, anywhere away from the wedding party that rule is off."

"I see," Holden says softly.

"So it's just for the wedding," I murmur. "That I'm just with you."

"Yes." Roman nods

"Okay." I process that, then rub Gunner's thigh. "So, we'll get rooms close to each other, and when we're not with the

wedding ... group ... we're all together like we should be."

"Like we are." Gunner reminds me.

"It makes sense," Nick murmurs.

We all look over at him, and he shrugs. "Bella doesn't want anything to distract from her day. Including rumors about us."

"So that's ... just what it is?" I ask, trying to walk carefully. I rub Gunner's thigh. "No way around that?"

"No." Roman shakes his head. "I wish it wasn't like that, but it was the only way she'd agree."

"Once she's drunk, it won't matter." Holden sighs. "We can make it a few days, especially if we get time together when we're not with the wedding party."

"Yup." Gunner huffs.

Roman looks at Gunner, and I see something in his eyes. A question. He doesn't know about the stuff that happened with Dad? How many secrets do these guys keep with each other?

"Okay. Well. It is what it is, right?" Nick asks. I glanced at him, and he kisses me gently. "We'll all go on a very hot hike together, and it's not like we can be stopped from drinking together ... in a suite ... with a hot tub."

I smile and nod. "I like the sound of that."

Holden winks at me and kisses me softly. "Not to mention the beach."

Roman glances at the time. "I have to take care of some business with Singapore."

He pecks my cheek, leaves, and then I drag Gunner to the balcony. He runs his hand through his messy hair and looks towards the kitchen. "I hate this."

"You didn't tell Roman or any of the guys about what happened?"

"No. Why would I do that?" He demands. "And tell them about"

"About my dad being stupid?" I take his hands, rubbing them. "I love you. I love all of you."

"I know."

"It's fake for the wedding. That's all. Bella's conditions." I tell him. "Roman knows that I love you all. We're not going to go bad because of this, okay?"

"Sweets-"

"Gunner, it's okay. We'll be okay." I insist.

He looks down at me and strokes my face. The worry there is so intense. I stand on my toes to kiss him. He kisses me back, but there's something softer there. He exhales slowly. "You know how much I love you."

"And I love you. So let's get a bubble bath, grab one of those romance books you like, and we'll read it together by candlelight." I offer.

He smiles slightly. "Really? You're going to make me feel better with a sexy bubble bath."

"A romantic one." I counter. "Where we'll just happen to be naked."

He kisses my forehead. "That does sound nice."

"I'll rub your back, give you a massage while you read to me. It'll be all steamy and cute."

"Romance, huh?" He asks, considering it. "That'll be new."

"Unless you just want the erotic part." I challenge.

He brushes my hair from my face. "I have to get some things for the romance. You choose the book and get the bath ready."

"Deal," I promise, then tug him close. "And you should at least tell Roman about what's bothering you. Don't let it fester or get worse."

Gunner tenses then shakes his head. "Not right now."

"Gunner."

"I know you want to be included in things, Sophie, but ... but I don't want all of my shit aired out, okay? It's going to take time."

I nod. I get that. He has to deal with his own stuff in his own time. I had to do that; everyone does. And I can't rush that process ... even if I think it would be for the best. So instead, I let Gunner go. He leaves the penthouse, and I get the bathroom ready.

He has a huge renovated bathroom. A shower that could fit at least six people, a tub that could fit four or five people, and is so deep I can't wait to get in. I set up some candles, grab Champagne and then find a good bath oil from my bathroom.

I run into Holden on the way back to Gunner's bathroom, wearing just a robe. Holden looks me over and gives the sash a tug to draw me close. He strokes my cheek. "How long has it been since I told you I love you?"

I bite my lip and stroke his hard chest. "Too long?"

"I love you." He kisses me slowly, sucking my bottom lip before nibbling. "I love you." He kisses across my jaw, to my ear. "I love you." He kisses down my neck. "I love you."

I shiver and cling to him, trying not to show exactly how jello-y my knees are. I lick across my bottom lip. "That might cover you for ... today."

He chuckles and rests his forehead on mine. "We have a long day tomorrow. I'd love to spend our break in a fun way."

"We might need our whole lunch to cover that." I tease.

"Lunch it is." He kisses me again. "Enjoy your bath."

I smile and head to the bathroom. I put on some music and look around. I've always wanted to have a romantic bathtub moment. I've seen it in movies and just always thought it was impossible. Of course, when I lived alone, I always had a shower bath combo which is kind of the opposite of romantic.

The door opens and Gunner walks in, in just his boxers. With strawberries and chocolate. I groan as I take him in, then

show him the book I chose. Gunner grins. "That's a good choice."

"Well if it has your approval ..." I pull at my sash and Gunner catches it.

"That's my job."

I laugh and wink. Smiling, leaning towards him. Gunner feeds me hungry kisses as he undoes the sash and pushes the robe off my shoulders. I snap his boxers and he grins against my mouth. "Eager?"

"We should start running the water." I breathe.

Gunner turns on the water, tests it with his hand, then pours the bath oil in the tub. I open the book and start reading. Gunner rubs my thigh and kisses across my neck as I read the words on the page.

I groan and nearly drop the book. When it falls to my lap, he feeds me a strawberry. I chew, swallow, then kiss him slowly, drawing it out. We eventually get into the tub, but I yelp at how warm the water is.

Gunner chuckles. "I wanted to make sure we'd have more than ten minutes."

He feeds me another strawberry, then takes the book as he sits down, leaving space for me behind him. I slide in behind him slowly and wrap my arms around his middle, stroking his abdomen.

He makes a low sound and leans back against me. I wrap my legs around him and kiss across his bare back. "I love you."

"We haven't gotten to that part in the book yet."

"I don't care. I wanted to say it." I kiss across his shoulders as I rub his sides. "We could do this in Hawaii too."

"Teasing me." He sighs.

"Absolutely not. My sneaking skills are very good." I whisper in his ear.

He chuckles and goes back to reading. I wash his back and occasionally feed him strawberries. His lips brush my fingertips every time, sending shivers of anticipation through me. We make it a few chapters into the book until I can't keep my hands to innocent places.

I tease his cock with my fingers, almost like an accident. Gunner tosses the book, rolls, and kisses me hard and deep, pulling me onto his lap to drown me in kisses. I wrap my arms around him and rub my pussy over his cock.

"You like the book?" He asks in a gasping breath.

"The book. The strawberries." I lick over his neck. "You."

He groans and pulls me closer, thrusting into me. I push his hair back and kiss him again, letting him taste my moan. Gunner pants and his eyes stay on mine. "I love you, Sophia."

"I love you. So much." I gasp as I roll my hips on him again. He grabs my ass and feasts on my mouth.

We have intense sex. Really intense. Because it's slow, loving, gentle. Everything that Gunner usually isn't. Between the warm water and his even hotter mouth, I feel like I'm going to overheat or combust, or just spontaneously catch fire.

I dig my nails into his neck. He gasps. "Come with me, sweets. Please."

I whimper and nod as the pleasure rips through me. I moan and bury my head in his shoulder as my orgasm makes my leg shake and splashes water over the sides of the tub. Gunner growls and pants.

I lay my head on his chest as he stretches out in the tub.

"I like this." He murmurs. "Being with you."

"I love this and you." I kiss his chest.

Gunner

The Next Morning, I smile, feeling better than I have since I had the fight with Miles. Being soft with Sophie, being with just her like we were last night ... it was perfect. Better than perfect.

Which lingers with me as the days pass. Sophie makes dinner for us Friday and then announces. "So ... my parents are coming over."

"What?" I jump up.

She forces a smile. "Surprise."

The rain beats down on the windows, but all I can do is stare at her. Roman shrugs. "Okay."

"I ..."

"It's been a while since we've seen Miles." Nick agrees. "Well, outside of work."

"We're seeing him tomorrow!" I remind them. "The bachelor party?"

"Yeah, but we're going to be too drunk to remember most of that." Nick pats my back. "At least, I figured you would be."

Sophie kisses my cheek. "It'll be fine, hotness."

I arch an eyebrow at her. "Sophie."

"I haven't said anything. He'll behave. Everything will be fine. I promise." She kisses me slowly. "I'll make sure of it." I watch her and she rubs my side, holding me close. "Help me with dinner."

I roll my eyes, but all of us end up helping. When the doorbell rings, Nick goes to open the door. Roman works on setting the table and Holden takes care of the wine. Sophie rubs my chest. "I promise."

"I know."

"Plus, I want to remind you all tonight ... after dinner ... about why I'm so much better than strippers."

I grin and kiss her. "You're better than every other woman."

"Keep talking sweet." She bites her lip.

"I love you. The way you talk to me, the way you make me feel, reading with you." I list, then pull her close. "We still have to finish that book."

"I'm looking forward to it. We get to act out the hot scenes." She promises against my lips.

"Well isn't this sweet." Miles interrupts.

"Oh, stop. She's cute." Diana gently smacks Miles. "And I mean, how could she resist?"

Diana winks at me. Miles pulls her towards the dining table. She giggles and Sophie strokes my neck, her soft fingers teasing me. I sigh. "It'll be fine."

She sits between me and Holden. Holden takes her hand under the table and I rub her thigh. Her dad talks about work until Diana shushes him. "Come on, honey. Leave work at work, okay? We have so much coming up. The bachelor party tomorrow where Sophie and I get to have a very fun spa day together and then Hawaii."

"Yes. Hawaii." Miles glances at us then folds his hand under his chin. "For Bella and Matthew's wedding."

Diana looks over at Miles. "The Bella?"

"Yes."

"Good. I'm glad she settled down." Her eyes flick to Sophie. "A destination wedding. Oh, Miles. Do you remember ours?"

Miles shakes his head, but I see the smile. "Morocco."

"It was so beautiful. Even though we had to redo it here because it wasn't legal." She leans towards him. "That first honeymoon."

Sophie's face pales.

"We barely left the bed." Miles leans towards her. "Missed out on so many sights by-"

"Your child is in the room!" Sophie yells.

I chuckle and rub her thigh. Sophie eases into the touch. Diana giggles. "Oh honey, I'm sure you know just what it's like. What, with being with so many handsome men."

"Diana," Miles says sharply.

"I'm just saying." Diana looks at each of us in turn. "Handsome men flocking together is kind of amazing."

Sophie rubs her forehead, then goes for the wine, drinking quickly. I shake my head at her and whisper in her ear. "It'll all be fine."

She nods.

By some miracle, we make it through dinner. Sophie heads to the balcony and Diana goes with her. As soon as the door shuts, Miles turns to us. "Sophie is going?"

"Of course." Roman shrugs. "Why wouldn't she?"

"Because she's dating all of you and it's Bella's wedding." He growls, then he looks at me. "And how are you, Gunner?"

I pour scotch in a glass and take a long swig. "Let's go back to work talk, Miles."

He chuckles. "And you, Roman? Or all of you, how's this going with *my daughter*?"

Holden beams. "Sophie is amazing."

"Truly, the most amazing woman." Nick agrees. "We love her. Spending time with her, being with her."

"It's wonderful." Roman agrees.

Miles turns to face me and I smile. "We have a lot of fun together, try a lot of different things. Just last night-"

"No. Thank you." Miles holds up his hand. "No more questions."

"Are you sure?" I ask. "You don't want to push for more?"

Miles skewers me with his eyes. Roman chuckles. "Things with Sophie are great."

"How are you making it all work considering everything." Miles pries. "I mean, last time it was just sex, but now there are relationship things involved."

"We do things separately and together." Nick answers. "It helps keep everything balanced."

I nod. "That's what we do. It's working well so far."

I think of all of us on the group date. It was very good. No jealousy. It was perfect, almost as perfect as last night. I look out the balcony and see Sophie watching us. She smiles and bites her straw.

Ugh, the sooner this dinner is over, the better. We get to have her. Miles talks with Nick about something, and Roman comes up to me. "You good?"

"I'll be better once they leave. Sophie said she was going to reward us for having a good dinner with her parents." I hint.

Roman beams. "Well, then we should wrap this up, shouldn't we?"

"The sooner, the better." Holden agrees.

"Let's get them, get dessert served, then ... burn it all off." I grin.

Roman smacks me a high five. "You get the ladies, and I'll get dessert."

And we do just that. But when I wrap myself around Sophie, Diana eyes me. "I have to say, Sophie, you certainly know how to pick your men. I mean, if I was single"

"Mom!" Sophie hisses.

"I'm just saying. I can imagine what a fine sandwich that is." She bites her lip, looking me over slowly.

"Mom!" Sophie insists. I chuckle, and Diana winks before going inside. Sophie rubs her forehead before turning to face me. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry about her. She doesn't know-"

I lean forward and kiss her hungrily, claiming her mouth like I need it to live. I cup her face between my hands and lick against her tongue until she sucks mine. I groan and shake my head. "I need to stop now."

"Or we'll get carried away." She sucks her bottom lip. "Like last night ... three times."

"Three times." I purr.

She giggles then shoves my chest. "You stop that."

"Oh, not going to tell me what's on the menu for later?" I ask, touching her face, cupping it.

Fuck I love her.

She leads me inside, taking soft kisses until the door opens. Dessert is amazing. The bourbon in the ice cream is fantastic. Everything is perfect, including Sophie laughing and treating us to sweet smiles, loving touches, everything that we need.

Right now, everything feels good. Like it should be.

As soon as Miles and Diana leave, we pounce on Sophie. She takes us all, making heaven real. We lounge poolside, naked, tired, happy. I grin and kiss Sophie. "Nothing beats you."

"No one." Nick agrees.

"Are you going to be okay here tomorrow night?" Holden asks. "I mean it, are you going to be alright, unbothered, okay?"

"I can survive time alone. I promise." She chuckles. "Even if it's not as great as spending this kind of time with you guys."

"Well, you still have your toys, don't you?" I tease.

She swats me and grins. "You know you're better than toys."

When I get in bed, I relax into the pillows and smile. Nothing can get better than this. The next day, we all get up and go to the restaurant to meet with Matthew. He grins at us and nods his head. "All my best friends together."

"Yes." I agree, raising my scotch. "Together and better than ever."

"And thank you, Roman." Matthew grins. "For talking to Bella, for doing this the right way."

Roman toasts him. "Absolutely."

"You are amazing." He beams.

We eat together, getting far drunker than we should, then we go to the strip club. It's great. The girls are hot as can be. Matthew gets at least three lap dances, but the one I get doesn't do anything for me, which is new.

I'm not hard, not really into it. In fact, all I'm thinking about is where we're going to sit on the plane. I'm actually doing math in my head as the blonde dances on me until she stops and pouts. "Gunner, you never had any trouble paying attention to me before."

"I know. I'm sorry, Candy. My mind is elsewhere."

"Well, maybe the back room will help." She takes my hand and flashes me a little as a tease.

I shake my head and give her a hundred. "I'm okay."

I go to the bar, and Roman follows. "What's going on? You love Candy."

"I don't know. I think I'm broken." I motion to my cock.

Roman chuckles and shakes his head while glancing at the guys. Matthew is having a great time. Holden accepts the lap dances, and Nick happily tosses bills. Roman shrugs. "I think we all have someone else on our mind."

"We do, but we're supposed to be having fun, right? We're supposed to be living it up, dancing and enjoying ourselves."

"Well, maybe you should get up on the pole." Roman teases.

After a few more drinks, I swear the pole is calling my name. I whisper to the DJ, and he nods. I take off my shirt and pants, and shoes, then he announces a very special dance for a very special man. A husband to be.

I get on the pole, and Matthew gapes, shaking his head. I twirl around the pole and shake my ass at him. Matthew laughs, and Roman takes a few pictures. I end up with the guys, giving them all lap dances while women cheer. The strippers rub me and tease me, showing me how to dance better.

Candy grabs my chin. "No wonder you're not interested. You changed. I'm so glad you came out."

"Came out as an amazing dancer." I tease, smacking her ass.

She giggles. "It's okay. You can say it. I'm gay too."

I blink at her and shrug. It's as good a reason as any. I point at Roman. "You should give him a good look."

And that's the last thing I remember before waking up on the couch at home. I look around and groan as I rub my forehead. There's a soft sigh next to me, and I see Candy on the floor. She looks at me, pulls the sheet over her chest, and swallows.

"What happened?"

No. My pants are still on. I never get dressed after sex. Holden comes in and smiles at Candy. "Hey there." Then he sees she's topless. He rolls his eyes and tosses her something. "You threw up on your shirt, don't look so panicked."

"Well yeah, I don't mess up with guys. It's fine."

But then Sophie walks in. She looks at the scene, looks at Candy, and clears her throat. "Um ... would you prefer girl's clothes?"

"Sure." She pulls her hair from her mouth. "You're gorgeous."

Sophie giggles, then glowers at me, walking over. "What is happening?"

"It's fine, Soph." Holden hugs her. "She threw up on her dress after continuing to party with us. She's not even into guys."

Sophie looks between us and then nods. "Okay."

But her eyes flick to me again, like I betrayed her. Roman walks in and kisses the top of her head. "Good morning, Bambina."

"Hi, handsome." She kisses his cheek, looks at me again, and swallows hard. "We'll talk later."

Sophia

In the kitchen, I stare at the pancake before I flip it. Roman uses my hand, flipping it for me. He kisses my cheek. "Gunner didn't sleep with her. Or kiss her."

I don't doubt him, but I don't like seeing it either. The idea of any of the guys with another woman kills me. I flip the pancake so hard that it lands on Roman. He chuckles and tosses it in the trash before kissing my cheek.

"This will make you feel better."

He pulls out his phone and shows me a video of Gunner on the pole. He slides down with the same woman's help and points her to a girl that's practically in love. Candy whispers something in Gunner's ear, and then Gunner gets into Nick's lap to grind on him. I laugh once, then shake my head and pour more pancake batter into the pan.

Roman stashes his phone and kisses my neck. "We all love you."

"And I love you guys, I just ..." I slump. "I worry."

"You have no reason to. I promise." He insists. "We can't think about anyone but you. Do you know how *unsatisfying* that club was?"

"You were supposed to have fun," I grumble.

"And not think about the sexiest woman we know?" He asks. "Impossible."

"Maybe I should take those pole dancing classes. I think Gunner could benefit from them too." I glance over my shoulder, where he's still rubbing his head.

Holden brings him Gatorade and reminds him he's not twenty. Gunner groans and I decide to get him some bacon too. I throw sausage on because why not and finish things up. Once I have one plate ready, I hand it to Roman.

"Before he gets sick."

The girl comes back out in one of my dresses and kisses my cheek. "Thank you, beautiful."

"Sophie." I offer her my hand.

"Candy." She grins. "It's my real name, not just my stage name."

"Good to know." I nod. "Do you want some breakfast?"

She looks me over, slowly putting her hand on her hip. "That depends ..."

"Sophie's not the breakfast." Roman wraps a possessive arm around me.

Candy pouts. "Shame."

Yup. Gunner and I are fine. Candy leaves after another minute, and then Gunner gets up and stumbles, dropping his plate in the sink. "Not drinking ever again."

"I give it one day." Holden chuckles.

I rub Gunner's back. "Oh, hotness. You need to go lay down."

He kisses me softly. "You're not mad?"

"No." I shake my head. "Candy made things perfectly clear."

He nods then stumbles to his room. I sit in a chair and put my feet up. Nick takes my hand. "We should go shopping for Hawaii."

"Bikinis, dresses, all of it." He purrs. "But it has to pass a check."

"What kind of check?"

"My check." He winks.

I laugh and nod. It's a good start for next weekend. "But nothing too sexy. All eyes on the bride."

"Except ours." Roman teases.

I chuckle, but Nick steals me for shopping. We have a good time. I try things on, and Nick nearly jumps me in the fitting room twice. He practically fucks me with just a look. By the time we go to lunch, I can barely keep my hands to myself.

"I like that dress." He glances at my bag. "The one you're definitely going to wear to the wedding."

"I don't know." I hesitate. Thinking about how sheer it is. Nearly see-through. But it doesn't show any cleavage, and it covers my legs ... it just shows all of my back. "What about for the hiking and climbing and swimming and ... maybe the spa?"

Nick chuckles. "Three days of fun and the wedding."

"Do you really think it's going to be that bad?" I ask, picking at the sushi.

"It might not be great, but it won't be awful. Just terrible in comparison to the other days. We'll take you on the best trails, show you the best waterfalls, and of course, the beach."

"And I heard something about a hot tub in a penthouse." I tease.

Nick chuckles and kisses my cheek, squeezing my hand. "We are going to do more than sex. You can't miss out on all the things there are to do in Hawaii."

"If you say so. But I don't want to miss out on kinky fun either." I pout a little.

He chuckles and promises that we won't. By the time we get home, I feel like I have a whole new wardrobe for the trip. Even though it will only be four days. I don't care. I feel whole and happy.

Spending the day with Nick, cooking with Roman, and finding out Gunner has moves and can't seem to think about anyone but me ... ugh. I'm swooning for them all over again. When we get home, Nick tugs on my shirt, drawing me further into the house and against him.

"You ... I think you need to show me the one bikini you refused to show me." That sexy look in his eye goes right to my heart.

"Nope. You have to wait until we get to the beach." I wink. "But you can have me naked right now ... if you strip in less than one minute."

Nick grins, takes off his shirt, then goes for his belt. I giggle and shake my head, hooking my fingers in his pants and guiding them down. Nick half trips, then falls to the couch. He kicks his shoes off, and I pull his pants all the way off.

I bite his boxers and drag them down with my teeth. Nick groans as he watches me kiss up his thigh. His cock is already half-hard for me. I grin against his hip, then lick up his shaft.

"Mmm. I should have stripped faster. You, on your knees, naked." His head falls back.

I sit back from his cock, then pull my dress over my head. Nick looks me over, taking in the push-up bra and my thong. "Fuck, Soph."

"That's the goal." I wink.

I wrap my lips around the head of his cock and take him deeper. Nick thrusts into my mouth, sliding across my tongue as I suck him hard. His groan is so good that I shiver.

I close my eyes and savor how he feels down my throat, in and out, over and over. Until I feel a hand in my hair. I open my eyes to see Nick, but he's gripping the couch.

"Such a good girl." Holden's voice is low and gravelly.

I moan and nod.

Holden strokes down my back slowly then hooks his fingers in my underwear and drags them down my thighs. His mouth follows, teasing my spine, then the top curves of my ass.

"Take him deeper," Holden whispers. "As deep as you can, baby."

I open my mouth wider and suck harder until I nearly gag. Holden groans and teases me with his cock against my clit. I hold onto Nick's hips, and he rubs my shoulder, his hand sliding around the back of my neck.

As I slide back, focusing on the head of Nick's cock, sucking and licking, Holden slides into me. As he fucks me, thrusting forward, I take Nick deep again. Over and over, bouncing between them as I give and take pleasure.

Holden groans. "Fuck, you're pure bliss, Sophie. You feel so good."

"Yes." Nick pants, his fingers tightening. "So good. Fucking excellent."

I scream my assurances, tell them exactly how amazing they feel, filling me, sharing me. Holden jerks my hips back against him, burying himself deep inside me as I whimper and suck Nick harder.

He groans and pulls out as Holden pulls me up and thrusts into me hard and deep. My tits bounce, and Nick pulls my bra down, setting them free. He plays with my nipples as Holden rubs my clit. I whimper and come hard, groaning and nearly shouting as I finish.

Holden lifts me off his cock, and I'm turned around. He offers me his, longer than Nick's but not nearly as thick. I slip my mouth around his cock, tasting myself on him. Nick thrusts into my pussy, slowly rolling his body against mine, filling me perfectly.

Holden finishes down my throat, and Nick finishes shortly after, grunting and thrusting hard and deep inside me. I laugh and sigh as they sit next to me and rub my thighs. Nick turns me to kiss him, and Holden does the same.

I can't help the squeeze in my chest. "I love you both."

"And I love living with you." Holden kisses my neck.

"I love the bikini I haven't seen on you yet." Nick teases, pinching my nipple and kissing my cheek. "And you. Intensely you."

I laugh and cuddle between them. After a while, we decide to get a shower, all three of us, which means I'm washed by two of the sexiest men in the world. We trade kisses even steamier than the shower. Then we order take out.

I put on a sexy black dress showing cleavage and most of my back. When Gunner gets home, he looks between us and groans. "I knew I shouldn't have gone in for that meeting."

Gunner kisses me hungrily and then flops down in a chair. "What's for dinner?"

"Indian."

We talk about our days, and when Nick brings up the damn bikini he didn't get to see, all eyes go to me. I roll my eyes but hide my smile. It's sexy as hell. Blue, strappy, thin, leaving very little to the imagination. It's a nice little thong bikini, and I think they're going to love it ... in fact I know they will.

"Come on, Sophie! Spill!" Gunner orders.

"I want to. But I think it will be better if you wait to see it." I bite my lip. "When I'm nice and wet."

Gunner groans and gets on his knees in front of me, kissing up my calf. "Please let that be soon."

"In Hawaii." I giggle.

I'm flipped, my head on Nick's thighs and my feet being held by Holden as Gunner pushes my dress up and spanks me. "Such a tease."

"You love it!" I squeal before he gets another swat in.

"Well." Roman's voice stops the spanks for a moment.

I look over my shoulder at him as he joins us, then grins. "Sophie being spanked." He shakes his head. "I love this household."

"No! Help!" I squeal. "I've been good."

"Oh no, she's keeping a secret." Gunner swats me again, then rubs my ass appreciatively. Another swat. "And I want to see it."

"In Hawaii!" I wiggle.

"A dress?" Roman guesses.

"Bikini." Nick rubs my back. "That I wasn't allowed to see her try on."

"I don't even have a color." Holden shakes his head, his hand rubbing up my calf.

Gunner spanks me again, and I giggle. "It's worth the wait."

Please let Roman be the voice of reason. I'm not being naughty. In fact, I'm being good. Because if I put that bikini on now, there's no way that we'd not get in trouble ... more trouble ... that would feel a lot like this.

Roman nods and Gunner swats my ass again.

"It's blue!" I give in an inch, then laugh. "That's all I'm telling you. Otherwise, it won't be a surprise."

"I'm feeling impatient. How about you Roman?" Gunner asks.

"Very."

"It's worth it. Imagine me stripping in front of a waterfall and showing you something brand new." I pant, despite how wet my panties are.

"I think we have ways to change your mind." Gunner slowly licks his lips.

"Please. Let me surprise you." I beg. "Please. Not to stop the very naughty fun" I almost moan as Holden rubs my thigh. "That can continue."

Holden

AFTER INCREDIBLE SEX WITH SOPHIE ... AGAIN, I POUR SOME wine, and Sophie gets up from the floor wearing Nick's shirt with only two buttons done. She takes one of the glasses and kisses me hungrily.

"Didn't get enough?"

"Of you all?" She grins. "Never."

I'll never get tired of living with her, and based on Gunner and Roman lounging in the living room, both smoking cigars and Nick getting the fastest shower ever, I know I'm not alone in that boat.

She fits here so perfectly, with all of us. She snuggles against my chest. "I'll miss you at the office tomorrow."

"You'll get plenty of me when you come home ... maybe even a one on one date." I offer.

She beams. "I love it, and I can't wait."

I kiss her softly before Nick wraps himself around her, pushing her hair to the side. He kisses her cheek, and we end up ordering dinner.

The next day is hell. Waiting for Sophie to get home so I can take her out makes the day feel twice as long, especially when I can't spend it with her, make jokes about random things we do. When I hear her finally get home, I wrap up another reconciliation of our books and head out to greet her.

She flops onto the couch, huffs, and lets her head drop back. A hard day. I know just how to fix that. I pour a little wine and bring it over to Sophie, sliding it into her hand. She tightens her hold on it, but when she lifts her head, I rub her shoulders and neck.

Sophie moans and sighs, leaning into my touch as her body relaxes. She sighs after a little and smiles up at me. I brush my fingers over her face, cupping her jaw. She smiles, and her eyes soften.

"Thank you, Holden."

I kiss her forehead and smile. "Want to go to one of the street markets, check out the stalls, maybe find something to eat."

"That sounds nice." She nods.

"We can see some sights, maybe find a fountain to dance in."

"Just like Friends?" She giggles. "For a long time, that was the only way I knew anything about New York."

After a few more minutes, we get ready, then go to the streets. The crowd still muddles my head, but Sophie's arm in mine is a gift. We find a few stalls, and Sophie gets a cute, thin scarf and has me try on sunglasses despite the fact it's late at night. We get some fresh foods and then coasters that are wild mixes of color swirling together.

We laugh and talk about each other as we walk until we end up at a fountain. Sophie plays with her hair and looks around before turning and putting her feet in the water. I sit, facing the right way, my arm around her belly to keep her from actually jumping in.

We don't need the police here.

"We should throw pennies in," I murmur before kissing her temple.

"Why?" She leans against me, resting her temple against my shoulder. "I have everything I could possibly want and more than I ever thought I'd get." Warmth spreads through my chest until I can't quite wipe the smile off my face. I kiss the side of her head. She sighs. "It's beautiful here. The moonlight. The water. The lights. The market. It's all great, Hold. Thank you."

"You've been stressed lately," I murmur.

"The wedding I guess and I'm worried about you guys working so much. Bella called me today to see what dress I'd be wearing, then, when I showed her, she gave me a list of things wrong with it, and so I have to get a new dress."

"Well, you should have told me so we could do that."

"No." She shakes her head. "I'll take care of it."

"We're all willing to help."

"I know." She rubs my chest. "But I'd rather spend quality time with you guys ... outside of changing rooms."

I chuckle. We end up at a shawarma truck, and Sophie struggles eating it, but her eyes sparkle, and she laughs despite making a mess. I wipe her face then pull her close to lick the sauce off her lip.

Sophie swoons, leaning against me.

She looks around as we walk with our food and chuckles. "Do you realize how many women are jealous of me right now?"

"For the food?" I ask.

She laughs. "No, sexy, because I'm with you."

She kisses my cheek and then my neck. "Their jealousy fuels me. It's fuckin' hot."

I laugh and shake my head at her. She rubs my chin. "I love your smile so much, Hold. Your smile, our conversations, you."

"I love you too." I turn her chin and kiss her, fully kiss her under the neon lights of the city. Sophie melts against me, then bites her lip when she draws back. She pats my chest twice, but when her eyes meet mine, they sizzle through me. I

swallow hard and try to deny the hardness growing in my pants. "Sophia."

"We should go home." She pats my chest again.

"What? Why? Is something wrong?" I ask, looking her over.

She pushes a lock of stray hair behind her ear. A smile threatens one side of her mouth and she looks up at me from under her lashes. "Public indecency laws are a problem right now."

I laugh, and we run home, hand in hand, rushing like teenagers. I love it. How spontaneous and fun and sweet she is. When we get to the elevator, she pulls me against her and devours my mouth passionately.

Backing her against the wall, I cup the back of her neck and grab her ass. She moans against my mouth and licks against my tongue. I nip the tip of her tongue, and she giggles before wrapping herself around me.

Just as the door opens, she hops up, wrapping her legs around my hips. I devour her, carrying her to my room to make the most of tonight. Once I drop her onto my bed, I look her over. Her dress pulls up over her thighs.

She licks across her bottom lip as she looks me over. "Holden, I want you."

"I love you."

She bites her thumbnail. "Come here and show me, gorgeous."

I groan and sit on the bed with her, pulling her dress over her body. I need her now, and my cock agrees.

Sophie snuggles closer and kisses across my chest as if two rounds wasn't enough. I brush my fingers over her back and press my mouth to the top of her head. "I know you're worried about Hawaii."

"Are you mad?"

"Mad?" I try to think of why I'd be mad. She's going, and we get to be with her in a beautiful setting. What is there to be angry about?

Sophie adjusts, rolling onto her belly, then pulls her hair from her face. "Because I'm going on Roman's arm, and he's the only one allowed to touch me or anything at the wedding."

"We can still dance with you and all that. If I have to, I'll dance with your mother too."

She laughs. "She doesn't hide how attractive she finds you all, does she?"

"Not even a little." I chuckle, then rub her arm. "I'm not mad."

"Or jealous or anything negative? Because I'm worried about that. I don't want any of you to think that I love any of you more than the other, and as I say it, I realize that's a terrible and confusing sentence, but-"

I kiss her softly.

"That would be like being jealous over individual date nights. It's silly."

It's never bothered me. Honestly, it's kind of nice. I like having time to myself, time alone with Sophie, and time with all of us together, like a found family.

"Okay. I've been worrying about it and Bella and my dad."

"I'm not jealous. I like the dynamic we have individually and as a group. Bella will be too happy to notice anything once the wedding starts, and we'll behave because it's her day." I rub her cheek. "What about you?"

"What about me?" She kisses down my shoulder.

"Is this making you think of anything wedding-related? Your future? All that?" I push.

She considers it for a moment, then shrugs. "Not really."

"Not thinking about when you might get married or what you want when you grow up?" I chuckle.

She rolls her eyes then rests her head on my shoulder. "I am grown up, and I'm happy. Not every married person can say that. As long as I'm happy, why do I need a big expensive wedding, a cake? I don't. I just need you guys."

I smile and curl her closer to me.

I could tell her I love her every day, even every hour, and it wouldn't be enough to convey it. She's astounding. The way she seems to fit all of us so perfectly, how smart and dedicated she is at work, her sweetness, her ability to keep everything organized without going insane.

Kissing her forehead, I roll to face her. "I know it hasn't been that long since we met, but you are ... a force of nature."

She laughs. "A hurricane, you mean."

"You bring out the best in me, in all of us, really. Everyone you're around, for that matter."

"Yeah, tell that to Sasha." She grumbles.

I laugh and squeeze her hand. "Sasha didn't want to see what was right in front of her – the amazing, sweet, caring woman I love."

Sophie shakes her head. "You don't have to pour poetry out to get laid. You're too hot for that. We can go for round three." She winks.

I laugh, and she giggles, rubbing over my chest. "I know you're serious. I love you, Holden."

"Spend the night?"

"I will fight all of your nightmares – the spiders and the war stuff." She kisses me again. "I'm good at squashing both."

Smiling, I nod and hold her close. Sophie is magic like that. She calms my system with the gentle strokes of her hand on my chest. The way she smells like flowers, soft but not overwhelming. I close my eyes and rest my head on Sophie's.

I'd be happy to fall asleep like this forever, at least a few nights a week. Sophie wiggles against me until she fits perfectly to my side, rubbing my side softly. She nuzzles my neck. "At night, I can go between rooms."

"Oh yeah?"

"Who pays attention at night? Late ... after cocktail hour." She kisses across my chest slowly. "Then I can sneak wherever I want to be."

"Oh yeah?"

"And I want to be with you guys, all of you." She purrs. "Even if it's just to cuddle."

"Are any of us capable of just cuddling with you?" I ask.

She giggles and kisses my neck softly. "Depends on how tired you are."

"You're impossible to be tired of." I turn her face, so she looks at me. "I'll never be bored of you, never not be wowed by you."

"You say that now." She smiles gently. "It happens in all relationships."

"The ones that end." I clarify. "But I'm in this one. And I know the others are too. We live with you now. We've never done that. You are the first. We love you."

She runs her nose over mine, then climbs onto my lap, rolling her hips on me. "Round three it is."

I laugh, then groan as she rubs her pussy over my cock again. My hands stroke her hips. "I mean it, though."

"I know you do Holden." She leans forward and kisses me hard. "And I love you so much."

I roll us over, tossing her back in bed and making her giggle. "One more time."

"For tonight ..."

"Until tomorrow." I grin. "Or the day after."

She layers kisses on me as we whisper promises until I'm buried inside her again.

Sophia

I FEEL LIGHTER THE NEXT DAY, EVEN THOUGH I'M GOING TO the office again to make sure that we have everything done before we leave tomorrow night. Gunner claimed me for tonight, so I get to look forward to that until I belong to Roman for the wedding.

Which is still slightly bothering me. Even if Holden doesn't mind it, I felt all of Gunner's tension, and obviously, Bella knows how to cause ripples in my relationships. Or relationship. I still don't know if it should be singular or plural. But I know that we'll be on a plane in less than twenty-four hours, arrive at the resort, and then ... and then have to deal with my dad and Bella and avoid anyone who might be going to the wedding.

I lean back in my chair and stare at the ceiling. If Bella is jealous or doesn't want things to work, well, she knows the guys and how to push all their buttons. I hope she won't, but after her deal with Roman ...

My phone rings, and I grab for it, easy for something that doesn't let me think.

"Sophie, can I please see you in my office?" Dad asks.

"Um, sure."

I pull my hair over the hickey that Holden left last night and walk into Dad's office. He motions to the chair, and I sit, crossing my ankles as I chew the inside of my cheek. "Do you have more work for me to do?" "I wanted to talk to you about the wedding."

"Of course." I slump into the chair.

"I just want everything to be clear – that you won't be showing off your ...abnormal relationship at the wedding." He folds his hands under his chin.

"I won't. As far as anyone at the wedding will know, I'm just with Roman." I sigh.

"Maybe you should consider that," Dad says. "You know, Bella may have had a good idea."

"Dad."

"About choosing one to settle down with. Then we could start planning for your wedding and grandchildren and"

"No!" I jump up, then lower my voice. "Dad, don't get involved in my love life, okay? I rarely talked about it with Mom, other than bad breakups and asking for advice, but we had an agreement."

"I'm just trying to help."

"And I didn't ask for help. I'm happy!" I insist.

He rubs his forehead. "How? How is this something that can last, Sophie? I get that it's fun for a bit, but you have to realize that it's not sustainable. Once emotions get involved and heightened, things are going to hit the fan. You saw that with Gunner."

"Because you pushed him by lying to him." I accuse him.

"Sophia ... thin ice."

"You did. You said I'd end up with Roman, and that's not true because I won't choose." I cross my arms over my chest. "I love them all. With or without your approval."

He rubs his temple. "I'm trying to watch out for your best interest."

"Is there anything you need from me ... in the professional sense?"

"No."

"Then I will go back to my office. Work is for professional things only, right?"

I fight the urge to stomp my feet, something that my dad apparently brings out in me. When I get back to my office, I groan and push my fists against my face. After a few deep breaths, I focus on work and get through until lunch.

Nick steals me away for burgers and milkshakes. I groan as I take a deep sip. Nick grins. "Hard day, baby?"

"Something like that." I huff.

"Well, soon enough, we'll be at an amazing resort. You can get pampered with a four-hour massage, hair mask, body scrub, seaweed wrap, and whatever else happens at spas."

I smile slightly and sigh. "Are we crazy being in a relationship together, all of us?"

"I don't think so. I love what we have. I can't imagine you not being with all of us, Sophie. You're like the missing piece."

I take Nick's hand and rub my thumb over his wrist. "It doesn't bother you that you share me?"

"No."

"You don't get jealous?"

"Nope. As long as you pay attention to me too." He chuckles, then leans forward, feeding me a fry. "Where is all this coming from?"

"The wedding, I guess, has me nervous. I just want to make sure everything is okay. I don't want to rock our boat."

"We're very good. All of us, together. It's almost effortless." He promises. "I love what we have, Soph.

"Okay. I mean ... I do too. I don't know why I'm overthinking so much." I shake my head. "I should just stop listening to other people."

"Of course. What do other people know about what we have? It's rare. Once in a lifetime rare." Nick agrees, feeding me another fry. "Like these milkshakes."

We devour our food and walk back to the office hand in hand. Once we get there, he lets go of me slowly. "In Hawaii, we won't have to part like this."

"Except at the wedding."

"We'll see." He winks.

I spend the rest of the workday powering through, even if my dedication drops a little after five. At seven, Gunner comes to get me, pulling me up and against him, kissing me hard and deep. I groan and give in.

How can one deep kiss turn me into pudding?

I cling to him and kiss him back hot and heavy, rubbing his sides so I don't tear at his buttons. Gunner pants as he draws back. "The other employees are gone. Maybe we should take care of something before we go."

"You want to fuck me in the office?" I ask.

"Yes, I do. Reverse cowgirl in that chair right there."

I moan. "We shouldn't. We should wait. Until I can be loud." But he kisses across my neck and growls as he bites just below my ear. I whimper. "Because we're only supposed to be professional at work and"

Gunner pushes his hips against mine, rubbing his cock against my hip as he gets harder. "How can I resist when you wear sexy pencil skirts and leave a few buttons undone."

"Gunner." I gasp as he rubs up the back of my thigh. "You make naughty things sound so fun."

"And after, we're going to a speakeasy. They allow cigar smoking, and it's all 1920s themed." He purrs in my ear. "So we'll have to get all dressed up, but I'll have to behave."

He jerks my skirt up and over my hips, walking me backward. "But I can't wait to have my hands on you."

"Your bruises are still on my ass."

"Prove it." He bites my ear, then licks, teasing me in that way that makes my resolve melt.

"Oh fuck." I moan.

"Is that a yes?" He whispers against my lips, denying me a kiss.

I nod, leaning into his mouth. "Yes."

Gunner sits down in my chair, fumbling with his belt until he finally gets it off and pushes his pants down. He jerks me down on his lap and kisses across the nape of my neck while palming my breasts.

I moan, and my back arches until I can catch his cheek and kiss him hungrily. Gunner groans and rubs his hard-on against my ass, teasing me with what I can have. What I'm *going* to have.

All at once, he thrusts into me, filling me just like I need. I moan and wrap an arm around his neck as I grind down on his cock, bouncing and rolling my body against him. He squeezes one of my breasts but reaches around to rub my clit too.

"A quicky?" I ask.

"No promises." He groans, smacking my thigh before going back to my clit.

He feels so good, rough, and raw with me. He nibbles my jaw, bites my ear, mixes pleasure and pinpricks of pain until I'm totally wrapped up in him. Nothing else exists. Just us and the bliss that's spreading across my veins, sucking me down into pure ecstasy.

"Oh, Gunner," I gasp.

"You're so good, sweets. So amazing." He pants against my neck. "I love you so much, Sophie."

"I love you." I tangle my fingers in his hair.

He thrusts up and into me every time I come down on him. We moan and pant together, filling my office with something much better than work. My back arches as pleasure ripples from my pussy all the way down to my toes.

I gasp as it drags me into an orgasm. Gunner groans and thrusts into me, getting so deep that I know he's coming. He

groans my name, deep and feral, on his tongue until I feel whole and complete and can't get rid of the lingering smile that comes after good sex.

"So?" He asks.

"You were right." I laugh, then kiss him, gently nipping his bottom lip. "We needed that."

"Nick says you're worried about things." Gunner murmurs, lifting me to slide himself out.

I adjust my underwear as he gets redressed, then I sit on my desk. "I wasn't until other people got involved. What if someone tries to break us up, starts picking at us? What if a fight happens or-"

Gunner kisses me, pulling me back to his lap. "So what if they do?"

"Need I remind you of everything with my dad?"

"No, but you got me through that. And you were right. I don't like Bella's rule, but I'd hate you not being there. And I know you love me. I know you love us all, and we love you and what others think ... it doesn't matter."

"You say that now."

"I know."

"And you have a temper."

"I do."

"So I'm worried. I mean, if Bella has a problem with us, she could interfere. Or my dad. My mom flirting with you guys. Other people being judgy. Italy was fine, we didn't know anyone when we were away from Roman's family, but it's like we're sneaking around all over again and – and I'm worried."

Gunner watches me for a long moment then kisses me softly. "You're worried about us and Bella?"

"No."

"You're worried that we're going to be upset because Bella's around or that because of her, things are going to change."

I chew my finger and shrug. "Are you saying it's impossible?"

"Things change. That's a part of life ... and you know that if things hadn't changed before, we never would have met you."

I narrow my eyes. "You're suspiciously positive."

"We're leaving tomorrow ... and I might be a little drunk."

I sigh and shake my head. "Gunner."

"I know. I'll work on the sobriety thing. Let's get home and get dressed so we can go to the Speakeasy. We'll have plenty of fun."

"That's good." I nod. "We can do that."

He kisses me again, and then we head out. We have a great night at the bar. He smokes and has one drink. Gunner dances with me and works on dealing with my nervousness. We end up in bed, just cuddling.

I rub his chest slowly and kiss over his heart. "I love you, Gunner."

"And you're drunk."

"A little." I laugh but sit up and look him in the eye. "I'm worried about the trip. I'm worried and anxious, and I don't want you feeling like you're not equal to the other guys because you are. I love you all differently and the same and intensely and"

"I know." He kisses me softly. "And we all have to-do lists for Hawaii ... other than fucking you."

"Like actual things?"

"It'll feel more like a vacation than a wedding." He promises. "And I will remember that you love me if I start feeling insecure. I'll remember the tub." He kisses my neck. "Italy." A low growl in his throat as he kisses my shoulder. "Your office today."

He pushes me back and convinces me we'll be okay by making sure I can't think of anything else.

Nick

WE WORK A HALF-DAY, AND I GRAB SOPHIE AT LUNCH TO make sure that we have everything we need. Unfortunately, I see Neal in her office. He raises his hand, and I stand right where the door is cracked to make sure I can hear what's being said.

"I'm just saying that you're different around them, and I worry that you're going to lose the best parts of yourself by trying to keep whatever weird ... thing you have alive with them."

"It's really not your business, Neal. In case you don't remember when you barged into Roman's office – I'm not being forced to do anything."

"Of course, they don't make you feel that way. Sasha brought up-"

"Really? You're going to *her* for information? She can't stand me. She wants what I have and can't accept that she can't have it." Sophie's voice is pissed, rightfully so. "This isn't your place."

"To be your friend? To tell you something that I feel while only caring about your best interest? I know that I'm shooting myself in the foot where you're concerned, and I've accepted that nothing will happen here even though I'd worship you ... but I have to bring it up in good conscience. I mean, do you know anything about their history? About the girls who were around before you? I've been here *years*."

"And whatever happened before me isn't my business. I don't hold my partners to unrealistic standards. No one is perfect."

I try walking away knowing she can handle herself. I glance over my shoulder and see him approach her, reaching for her hand as his voice drops. "Words are easy, feelings are harder. I don't know anyone who would want to share someone they love, even if they love the other person. This is a temporary thing, and I'm afraid they'll kick you to the curb, break your heart, and move on, leaving you to watch."

"You don't know anything about my relationships, which is perfectly fine. But don't try to tell me the future. I hope you have a good rest of your week, and please email me if you need anything in a professional capacity."

He sighs and walks away, not even noticing me as he beelines to his desk. I hear something slam from his direction, but I dip into Sophie's office. She nibbles her thumbnail while staring at her computer, then raises her eyes to me.

"Oh, Nick! Is it that time already?"

"Time to get some much-needed stress relief," I promise her.

She logs out of her computer and throws her purse over her shoulder. She takes my hand and squeezes. "So needed."

I chuckle, and we get back to the house. Holden is there, double-checking our flight information and ensuring that he and Gunner have everything. Sophie goes through her bags, and I double-check mine and Roman's.

We have the private jet waiting to go, and as long as we're there by six-thirty, we'll be good to go. I rub Sophie's side as she goes to the fridge. She's spent so much time making sure we're all okay, telling us everything will be fine, but I have a feeling that Neal was hitting her in sore spots.

I kiss her temple, cheek, and the corner of her jaw gently. She presses back against me and sighs. "Are you excited?"

"Not for the long flight, but I'm very excited to get to the resort. I hear it's beautiful."

"And I believe someone mentioned an all-day spa option?"

"That's right." Holden nods. "Seaweed wraps and facials fix quite a bit."

Sophie smiles. "Then you'll be my plus one?"

He nods and holds her face in his hands. I kiss the spot between her shoulder blades and exhale slowly. Holden kisses her softly, then draws back. "Less than twenty-four hours until you're pampered like the goddess you are."

"And I guarantee that you will be asked to wear a certain something as soon as possible."

She looks over her shoulder at me, and I kiss her softly. "The bathing suit."

"Oh." She blushes. "That."

"Mmhmm." I squeeze her side until she giggles.

Holden pokes her belly, and she laughs again.

Once we finish double-checking everything, Sophie lays down and takes a nap. Holden looks at our wine collection, rubbing his jaw. "Do you think they'd prefer a white or a red?"

"Why not both? One for each."

"If I remember right, Bella always preferred a sweet white."

I nod. "Matthew didn't care as long as he could drink it easily."

We choose two of our highest quality wines and set them in my giant suitcase. Holden glances at Sophie, then back to me. "Any worries about this?"

"A few, but if this breaks us, we still have the choice to put it back together."

He nods and goes to the stove. I think it's more as a way to kill time than him being hungry. It works, though. I read, Sophie sleeps, and before we know it, we're packing everything to meet the guys at the airport.

Roman kisses Sophie softly in greeting and glances at the bags. "We have everything?"

"Including gifts." I agree.

Gunner yawns and casually stretches his arm over Sophie's shoulders, pulling her close. Despite the plane ride being long, most of us sleep through it, me included. It's needed. Even though some people can't sleep on planes, I maintain it's because they don't have the couches and legroom we have.

Or maybe it's because I can fall asleep anywhere as long as I can lie down.

When Roman shakes me awake, I see the bags under his eyes and sigh. "Did you get any sleep?"

"Eh, you know what they say. Successful men sleep when they're dead."

I rub my eyes. "Or they end up like Miles."

Roman shrugs. "He's just fine. If anything, his stint in the hospital brought everyone closer together."

Sophie jumps as Gunner wakes her. She wipes the drool from her cheek and blinks while looking around confusedly. She takes stock of us and relaxes. "Are we okay?"

"We're about to start the descent," Gunner says, buckling her in. "And then you can get more rest if you want it or anything else you would like."

Which sounds nice until we get off the plane. Roman takes her hand, rubbing his thumb over the back of it. Matthew greets us, and when I think it's just him and almost crack a joke, I see Bella, sleek ponytail and all, join him.

She rubs his chest, and for half a second, I remember her doing that to me, after a good night, one of those rare times that she didn't just want to come and go. She'd rubbed my chest and told me how lucky she was. How she felt terrible that my marriage hadn't worked out, but that everything happened for a reason and marriage alone couldn't make a couple last forever.

Funny, considering she's on her way to married life herself now. She looks over at us and smiles gently, not leaving Matthew's side.

We really should have seen this ending coming. She and Matthew always spent the most time together. She'd watch him closest in group encounters. Hell, it almost felt like we were swinging towards the end.

I felt it in my bones, knew that she was going to change. I didn't have evidence, and what could I say? We were friends with benefits, so how could I ask her what was wrong or what had changed?

"It's been so long!" She forces a smile as Matthew shakes our hands. Bella hugs me, Holden, and Gunner, and then pauses in front of Roman. They stare at each other, and she finally offers her hand. "Glad to see you're still a man of your word"

"Some things don't change." He says in a low voice.

Matthew claps his hands together. "Great, well, we have a van, so let's get you guys settled. We already have your rooms ready."

We pile into the van. Sophie sits between Roman and Gunner, already pushing our luck. Bella keeps looking back. Then she plays with the tips of her hair. "How's your communication?"

"We all know the drill, Bells." Gunner snorts. "As far as anyone else is concerned, Sophie and Roman are ... exclusive."

"Good. And there's no problem with that, is there?" Bella's eyes spear me in the mirror. "Nick? Holden?"

"We're here to make this your dream weekend. That's all." I hold up my hands.

"I promise, Bella. We just want you and Matthew to be happy." Holden agrees.

Gunner stays silent until Bella turns around to face him. "Don't play with me, Gun. Tell me we're perfectly clear."

I cross my fingers below where she can see. Gunner's been more temperamental and more ...sensitive where Sophie is concerned since we moved out. He clears his throat. "Anything for good friends."

Bella nods. "Good. That's exactly what I wanted to hear. As long as we don't have a misunderstanding, this weekend is going to be fabulous. Instead of a rehearsal dinner, we're inviting everyone to a Luau Friday, but people will still be arriving tomorrow, so you have the day to explore."

"Good to know. Thank you, Bella." Sophie murmurs before letting her head drop on Roman's shoulder.

"I'm sure that the time change is going to throw you off. Six hours is a huge change." Matthew sighs. "Take today and tomorrow to adjust however you need."

"How is the spa?" I ask, trying to bring something positive to the conversation.

"Oh, it's amazing. Honestly, it was a big part of why I wanted to be at this venue. They take care of everything. You'll love it, Sophie. It's like being on cloud nine."

Matthew and Bella keep talking about the wedding, about the pros and cons, all the stress they've had to deal with. When we finally get to the hotel, I think I have second-hand stress. I grab some of the luggage, and Matthew helps me, pulling me aside while Bella keeps talking to Sophie.

"I'm sorry about that rule. It's silly, but it means a lot to her that no one suspects anything about the past, and no one is distracted from our day."

"I get it. We're going to make sure that everything is good for you. No worries about that."

Matthew nods. "And I don't want to lose our friendship. What we all have is so important to me."

"We're here for you, man. And we only want the best."

He glances over at Gunner, just staring as Bella leads Sophie and Roman into the hotel. "Yeah. We'll see. I have a feeling that we may have a few private talks this weekend and more than a few close calls."

I raise an eyebrow, but he forces a smile. "It's nothing to worry about."

With that, we're shown our rooms. Gunner is farthest from Sophie and Roman. Holden and I have rooms that are close, which I know isn't an accident. Bella's testing for weaknesses. Some part of her wants to push Gunner over the edge, punish him for something.

Maybe for all the times he stayed out late for work or traveled without texting or anything else in our past. He's never been an angel, but this isn't fair. Matthew scratches the back of his neck and pulls Gunner over to his room to talk to him in private.

Bella claps her hands. "Well, I will leave you to it. You can call room service or the front desk if you need anything." She winks at Roman and Sophie. "Have fun!"

I watch her sashay away, and Roman rubs down Sophie's back. Maybe we should have left her home.

Sophia

THE ROOM IS INSANE. WE HAVE A HOT TUB ON OUR BALCONY, and there are even little lilies in it. The lights that are strung up over it and the candles that are clustered together on the wooden railing make it look like a fairytale.

Roman and I have one king-sized bed to enjoy, an ensuite, and a little kitchenette. It's adorable and unique, all in a bungalow style that makes me feel like we're in a different world. Granted, that world is zombie-ridden, but I'll blame Gunner for thinking of zombies instead of romance. And I think he only likes the game so much because the jump scares never fail to get me.

Two hands slide around my sides, and I jump before putting a hand to my heart. Roman chuckles. "What do you think of the luxury?"

"It's amazing. Beautiful." I turn in his arms and kiss across his neck.

He brushes my hair back, stroking down my back until I press my forehead against his chest. "Bella is ..."

"A lot." He kisses the top of my head. "And apparently determined to ruin us. Why else would she put Gunner so far away?"

"Probably because he's the one that normally rocks the boat and tests the limits." Roman sighs. "But I'm planning on talking with him tomorrow."

"Holden and I are going to the spa – as friends – of course. I don't want you guys in trouble."

"And your father gets here tomorrow." Roman lifts my chin. "I have a feeling he's going to have the room right next to ours, on the other side."

"It sounds like you're telling me if we're going to be rough, it needs to be now." I tease. "As if I can possibly be sexy after such a long flight."

"You ..." He kisses my forehead. "Are always sexy, Bambina. It doesn't matter what you're wearing, how I'm feeling, any time I'm around you, I know I'm lucky to have you."

I stare at him as my heart flutters. "Take off your pants and get in the hot tub."

A dark, hot look comes into his eyes, and he jerks me against him, stealing my breath. "Are you giving me an order, Sophia?"

"What else am I supposed to do after you say something so romantic?" I pant.

"I think you need to be reminded of our power dynamic." He pulls me to the bed and drops me over his knees, one arm across the small of my back, holding me in place, the other tugging my sweat pants down over my legs.

I whimper and squirm, but Roman only goes slower. I feel his fingers stroke down my thigh and the rush of warm air across my skin. He palms my ass, jiggles me, and groans. "It's been too long since I've been rough with you properly."

"And here I was going for romance," I grumble.

He swats my ass, and I gasp. The tendrils of pain spread across my skin, but I can't deny that the heat following the pain makes me wet. Roman brings his hand down two more times, marking each cheek with a punishing spank.

"Ah!" I whimper.

"Nothing sassy to say?"

"No." I gasp.

He strokes along my thong, teasing me until he smacks me two more times. As he layers soft strokes of his fingertips and spanks, my body goes into overdrive. Goosebumps break out over my skin, and I know I'm soaking my panties.

"Please?" I give in.

"Please, what? I need full sentences." But he tugs on my thong, pulling it tight across my clit until every squirm is a tease.

"Please fuck me?"

"That's better." He swats me again, then tosses me back on the bed. He drags my legs toward him, looking me over while licking his lips. "Take off your shirt."

I do it without question, eager to give him whatever he wants. I know the reward is worth it. It always is with Roman. I groan as he jerks me towards him again, my ass nearly hanging off the bed. He kisses along my collarbone slowly.

Rubbing his shoulders, I savor how he feels. His hard muscular body weighing mine down, his hot mouth igniting something deep inside me. He even smells good, despite working late and the flight. My Roman.

He snares my wrists and pins them down on either side of my head. "You didn't ask, Sophia. We're going to have to work on your behavior." He growls in my ear.

"Yes, sir." I bite my lip as he jerks one lace cup of my bra down to lick over my nipple. Oh god, yes. "That feels so good."

"Good girl." He swirls his tongue around my hard nipple again before sucking it into his mouth. He tortures me, holding me in place and giving me a small taste of what he can do rather than going all out. "Leave your wrists right there. If you move, I start over."

I groan and nod. "Yes, sir."

Roman releases my wrists and pulls my bra further down, teasing my other nipple as one hand sinks to my thong,

dragging it off me so he can rub my clit with his fingers. It's too light to do anything more than tease.

"Please, Roman!" I beg. "Please, I need you."

"Patience is rewarded, Bambina." He breathes across my skin. "And you know what my rewards are like."

"Yes." I nod.

"And it's been far too long since I tasted you."

"Oh, yes. Yes." I chant as his mouth continues over my belly, moving between my hips before he spreads my thighs. My eyes close, and I dig my fingers into the sheets. I have to behave. "Please."

Roman licks across my slit, then deeper. He groans. "I love how wet you always are for me."

"Always." I echo, rolling my hips against his tongue.

Then his patience is gone. His fingers dig into my thighs as he devours me, sucking and licking my clit until I'm half crazy. He brings me to the edge twice but doesn't let me come. I almost scream at him.

"Going to behave for me from now on?"

"Yes." I pant. "Yes."

"Then you can be rewarded." He pushes two fingers into my pussy as he laps at my clit.

His fingers curl deep inside me, and he keeps sucking and licking my clit until I combust. My back arches, my head dropping to the comforter, and I tangle my fingers in my hair as I struggle to keep from screaming from pure ecstasy.

Roman draws back, kissing across my hip lazily. "So, you want the hot tub?"

"Yes, please." I hum.

Roman pulls me to my wavery feet and unclasps my bra. He lowers me to the gorgeous hot tub and starts the jets while stripping in front of me. I lick across my bottom lip and move towards him like he's a magnet.

When he drops his boxers, I groan. If I was just a little bit taller, I could wrap my lips around him, but he joins me in the hot tub, steam clinging to his skin the same way I want to. I bite my lip as he drags me against him, his hardness nestled between us.

I moan as he kisses me, hot and hard and hungry. He tastes like me too. I drag my nails over his biceps, enjoying how thick and hard his muscle is. Roman slowly bends me over the side and rubs my ass.

"You'll have a little bit of a bruise." He traces an area around my ass and then rubs his cock across my clit, teasing my entrance. "Think that's okay?"

"I like your smacks on my ass." I roll my body against him. "I love you, Roman."

Roman groans and thrusts into me. He strokes up my back, then collars my throat. "You make me want to be gentle."

My hips rock back to meet his thrust, and the water splashes around us. We pant and grunt, whispering soft things back and forth as we fuck and make love. Roman releases my throat turns me around, and picks me up, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"You are everything to me, Sophia. What we have...." He shakes his head and rubs against me again. I wrap my hand around his cock and guide him into me.

We moan together as he lets gravity pull me down. But he's shaking. He sits on the bench in the hot tub and lets me ride him. He thrusts into me each time, his hand sliding up the back of my neck and into my hair. I gasp and grind down on him as sparks start to ignite in my belly.

He feels so good, so right. Roman kisses me hard, but my moans tear that apart. I kiss down his neck and nearly yell when I come again. Roman grunts, then Italian pours out of him, filling the air with what might as well be music. We come down together as Roman rubs my back, strokes my thigh, kisses my forehead.

"I love you, Bambina."

"I love you." I kiss his chest. "So much."

"How are you feeling?" He asks. "About everything going on?

"It's been a long day," I whisper, not lifting my head from his body. "Too long for me to process half of the things we've ... heard or been through."

"Then it sounds like it's time to sleep. At least a nap while I order room service."

"That sounds nice. Are the guys going to come by?" I hum as he picks me up again just to dry me off with a towel.

"Maybe. It all depends."

"On Bella." I roll my eyes and yawn.

Roman pulls my hands out and dresses me in a plush robe that doesn't help my exhaustion level. If anything, I feel like I'm surrounded by a warm cloud. Who needs melatonin when they have the finest things in life?

Roman lays me in bed and kisses my temple. "You sleep, Sophia. You deserve some rest. It's been a long week for everyone."

I smile and motion him to my lips. "One more?"

"Always one more." He promises, kissing me before letting me be the little spoon.

My eyes fall shut, and I can almost relax into sleep until the nightmares come. Gunner losing his temper and going ape shit. Trashing the wedding, calling Bella every insult I've ever heard. But then Bella becomes a six-armed goddess with actual fire eyes and kills all of them, one by one, saving Gunner for last.

I wake up and put a hand to my heart. My body trembles as I look for Roman in the low light. My voice is too cracked at first. No sound comes out. It takes another try, but I finally get his name out of my throat.

He leans back from the kitchenette, looks me over, then crosses the space between us with Holden and Gunner in his

wake. They sit with me, and Holden kisses my temple. "Nightmares?"

I nod and clutch my robe tighter. "My mom once said dreams – even the bad ones – mean something. Do you think that's true?"

Gunner shakes his head. "No, sweets. It's just your worry and all the stress creeping in. There's a lot going on. It would be weirder if you weren't worried."

I nod but suck my bottom lip. Roman gets me food while Gunner tells me how amazing his room is. Holden shows me the spa package he purchased for us in the morning, and the guys work together to comfort me.

Nick comes in to join us for dinner, and my chest seems to relax. The elephant that was sitting on me is gone. This is how it should be. All of us together. Eating, talking, whatever. As long as we're all together, I feel whole.

"I love you all so much," I whisper. "Please, no matter what, don't forget that. Everything here is temporary, including Bella."

Gunner rubs my hand. "We don't need to worry about her. She's all talk."

So why do I still feel the ripples of the nightmare trying to rear back up?

Roman

THE NEXT DAY, SOPHIE AND HOLDEN LEAVE TO ENJOY THEIR morning. They deserve it. I sleep in a little, then walk along the beach. I run into Matthew, always eager to burn some energy. He wipes his forehead and smiles at me.

"Is there a better place in the world to work out?"

"Not one I can think of." I agree, then look at the sun rising over the ocean. "It's gorgeous. A magical place to be."

"Hence why we're having a wedding here. And also why a certain someone is so wound up." Matthew rests his hands on his hips and exhales sharply. I know he's trying to control his panting.

"Look, I'm not judging."

"But you don't like what Bella made you agree to. Which is understandable." He rubs the back of his neck and finally looks at me instead of the ocean. "Her parents are here. It was already hard enough to convince them that she wasn't going to be a trophy wife because of the age difference."

"I can't imagine."

"Oh, yes you can. I'm sure that Miles has said plenty to Sophia about why she shouldn't be with you guys. How much older you are, how many of you there are, how fast you're moving. And those are the kind of comments that could lead to worse things."

"Like them discovering how you met?" I challenge.

Matthew rubs his bottom lip. "Roman, I ... we made it up. How can I say that I met my soon-to-be wife because me and my five best friends were sharing her as a sub? Who would understand that, even within the BDSM community? There's so much that could get her parents angry, and if they leave ... I don't know if there will be a wedding."

"She loves you."

"And women get crazy around weddings. It's the stress, but she's not seeing things clearly. You know that. She's not catty like this. She doesn't instigate like this. A part of me is worried that" He swallows and takes a slow breath. "That she's wondering if she chose the right guy."

"You are the best man in the world for Bella. I've never seen two people who have easier conversations, who I truly believe could take on hell together." I take his shoulders. "Bella knows that you are her person, Matthew."

He nods, then forces a smile. "I appreciate it, Roman. Just like I appreciate you guys going with this plan. You know Bella through me and from work, that's it. And I appreciate it."

"We are here for you, brother." I pat his back. "War, civilian life, millions, rags, it doesn't matter."

"Good thing I chose you to give the speech."

"I don't remember a word I just said."

"I wanted Gunner, but he can be ... unpredictable." Matthew walks with me towards the hotel. "And with this rule in place and how frazzled he's seemed at work; I'm really worried about him."

"You should talk to him. Carve out some time and let him know that he's just as important to you." I advise. "It could make a big difference."

"Imagine that. Talking being the cure to anxiety and worry." He chuckles. "Thank you, Roman. We'll get together at the luau. It's going to be excellent. Enjoy today, see the island, do everything that you guys have on your list ... including whatever we wouldn't approve of."

"We'll be far away from guests," I assure him.

He grins and leaves me on the wooden walkway between the beach and the hotel. What a mess. Bella has reached a new level of barely contained stress which means she's twice as controlling. I wouldn't be surprised if she's at the spa to make sure that Holden and Sophie behave right now.

Hopefully not. They deserve some time to just hang out and be together. We all need that, I think. Together, with each other, with Sophie. Just like in Italy, where it was so easy ... we need that kind of energy to make sure that we don't crash and burn before the vows are said.

I check out a few different options for things we can do and have it narrowed down to hiking to the falls or horseback riding. We could potentially see a volcano, but I'm pretty sure that would devour a whole day.

The lock ticks, and Sophie comes in with Holden. As soon as the door shuts, she kisses him while giggling softly. She moans softly, and the sound goes right to my cock. As if I didn't fuck her yesterday.

She turns and rubs her ass against Holden, but it's obvious she's glowing. The spa did her good. She's back to being a healthy dose of sunshine. I nod to Holden and Sophie, and they grin back.

"How was your morning?" Holden asks.

"Good. I talked to Matthew. It was needed." I nod.

Holden pats my shoulder and nods. Sophie looks between us. "You guys should see him for dinner after we do whatever we're doing today."

"Hiking!" Gunner says, letting himself into our room. "Because I'm damn determined to see that bathing suit. I've been waiting so patiently."

"Impatiently." Holden chuckles, but his eyes flick back to Sophie. "Eagerly."

"Good word." Gunner agrees. "And I'm going to hike completely sober in case I have to save you guys from some

dangerous animal. Like a ... boar or a puma."

Sophie laughs. "Then I'll get changed. Are you guys ready?"

"Yes, sweets." Gunner snares her waist. He kisses her hungrily. "Now get your cute ass into whatever sexy thing you've been hiding and let's get on the trail."

Sophia changes quickly, but her day dress doesn't give us any hint as to what's underneath. We get on the trail and climb over fallen trees, dance around the trails, and find out exactly how easy it is to distract Sophia.

Every bird, every glint of light through the trees, the flowers, the rustling ... It leads to her tripping plenty of times. Nick ends up walking with her on his back. She giggles and bounces along but grabs our butts whenever she can. It's adorable.

We stop to rest before we have to climb a wall of vines, and Sophia sits on Gunner's lap. He says something that makes her laugh, and it's like it's in slow motion. Her smile, the way the sun lights her hair bright red, the all-out joy on her face

"I love you." It slips out, but once it's there, Sophia illuminates. She beams and looks at all of us with affection. I pat Nick's knee. "Honestly, I can't imagine my life being any better than it is right now. My best friends, our girl, Hawaii. It's perfect."

"Aww, Roman. You're going to make me cry." Gunner pretends to wipe a tear. "I knew you loved me. I just couldn't say it first."

We laugh as Sophia jumps into Holden's lap when Gunner comes over to kiss my cheek. Holden and Sophie look at the wall and start making a plan. I lean over to Gunner. "How are you?"

"Pissed with Bella, but she's the bride. You do what the bride says. Not my first wedding as an ex."

"You're a good luck charm."

He leans back as Sophie takes a few handfuls of the vine and starts climbing. Holden goes behind her. Nick spots them from below, and I sigh. Gunner nudges me. "I think we're all getting tense with this. We're all in our heads. I mean, I've been in my head since my fight with Miles."

"What was that about?"

Gunner freezes, and I see his lips turn down. He didn't mean to say that. He exhales. "So, Miles can say things in the heat of the moment. You know that."

"Yeah"

"He said that what we were doing could only end like it did with Matthew and Bella. And that it was obvious to everyone that Sophie is going to end up with you. And now, with Bella's deal and her obvious focus on pushing you and Sophie together and me away ... it's hard."

"It can't just be Sophia and me," I assure him.

"You say that, but so did Matthew. He always told us that Bella's extra affection for him was a dam that was opening up slowly and would spill over to all of us. It didn't."

"Sophia isn't Bella, and more importantly, she makes time for each of us. She loves all of us." I insist. "You're more than comic relief, Gunner. You do the things with her that make her feel young and alive. She loves your deeper side, and I know you love her because you actually show it."

"What?" His cheeks go red.

"I saw the flower petals you didn't clean up in the bathroom." I chuckle.

He rubs the back of his neck. "It's terrifying. I keep thinking back to my fiancé. Once she was handed a prenup, all the loving stopped. She didn't want to be around me, fought with me, said such terrible things."

"We know that's not Sophia."

"And it's any easier for you? Christine left you while we were overseas. In a fucking letter. We all have shit, and lately ... I've been wondering if it's fair to ask Sophie to fix us."

"She doesn't fix us." I stand up when Sophia reaches the top. I cheer for her, and she reaches down to help Holden finish coming over the top. I pull Gunner up. "She makes us want to be better. There's a very important difference."

"I haven't told her about my ex. Have you?"

"No. It hasn't come up."

"Well, at least I'm not the only one in that respect."

"Thanks for telling me," I say as Nick starts the climb. "About the fight with Miles. I feel better knowing it's not something I did to piss you off."

"Nah, it's my own shit, and honestly, I know the drinking isn't helping. I'm working on it. I've only had one drink since I've been here."

"That's good. Now let's see if you still have your balance without the alcohol."

He chuckles and proves to me he does by scaling the wall easily. I follow, and then we're back to climbing over trees, walking along them, and trying to keep Sophia from falling over herself while looking at everything. But she doesn't take a single photo.

She points things out to us, makes jokes, talks to each of us as we walk through the almost jungle. When the falls open up in front of us, she gasps and grabs my hands.

"Oh my gosh." She's dewy with sweat, obviously panting, but that look of wonder belongs on her face forever. "It's beautiful."

"Last one in pays for dinner!" Gunner yells, stripping and flinging himself into the water.

Sophia leans against me. "Alligators?"

"Nope."

She nods then watches Nick and Holden undress. I'm waiting on her. I want to see this secret bathing suit, and I have a feeling when I see her in it, I'm going to want my hands on

her. So I make myself be patient as she chews her bottom lip then reaches for her shorts.

She pops the button, well aware that she's being watched by all of us, and slowly wiggles out of her shorts. Considering it's a fucking thong, I know that she's not going to be leaving here without plenty of that naughty fun she's been craving.

Sophie goes for her dress, hesitates, then flashes a wicked smile. "You'll see why I had to make you wait."

And in one second, I'm thrilled she did.

Sophia

I STAND THERE IN JUST THE BIKINI, WATCHING THE GUYS AS they take it in. It's bright blue and basically has the lining of an underwire bra in the front with a thin triangle of fabric that covers the necessities and ties around my neck. It has two strings that tie around my back. Then bottoms that ride high on my hips to become a thong in the back while also riding low enough that I made sure to get a full Brazilian wax just in case.

Roman, still closest to me, tugs me close. "Questo è solo per i nostri occhi."

The words heat my skin, but I shiver as his fingers snap the bottoms against my hip. "Translation?"

"This is only for us." He growls in my ear.

"It needs to be torn off you!" Gunner yells.

I manage to escape Roman's arms and fling myself into the water. It's not as cool as I expected, but after such a long hike, it feels amazing. And it's so clear. I pop back up close to the falls and watch Roman strip to his trunks quickly. He dives in with purpose.

Nick catches me first though, dragging me to the side of the waterfall and setting me on a rock. He looks me over and groans a little. "I don't know if I want to paint you or fuck you."

"Both," Holden says from next to him, giving me a long, appreciative look. "Definitely both."

"But in what order?" Nick pushes.

I strike a pose and he chuckles. I giggle. "I brought another one too, so you can take pictures and paint all you want."

"Then it's obvious."

"Oh?" I watch them circle the rock and start to climb it. Nick has better luck than Holden does and kisses my shoulder. "I'll have to ravish you first so I can focus."

I shove him back into the water and then jump off the rock, diving over them and back into the water. I swim until I'm snared by something. Screaming seems natural until Gunner pops up and bites my neck while growling playfully.

"I thought you said no gators, Roman!" I squeal.

"He didn't say anything about monsters." Gunner bites me again and tugs my top to the side to cup my breast. He pinches my nipple, making me squirm. "And you look delicious."

I let my head fall back over his shoulder, trusting him to keep us afloat. "Well, as long as you're only going to eat me in the fun kind of way."

"You'll enjoy every second of it. I promise." He whispers in my ear.

I laugh and splash at him. He sputters for a second, then shakes his head. "Naughty girl. You have upset the womaneater!"

He splashes me back, and we end up playing catch, but considering he's one of four, I know I don't have much of a chance. Holden manages to catch me next, and he tugs at the back of my top, determined to get it off.

"It was supposed to stay on!" I giggle.

"Nope. You knew just what you were doing, gorgeous." He reminds me. "You know what teasing gets you."

Holden slips his other hand into my bottoms, rubbing my clit in slow circles that are much more convincing than his words. I wrap an arm around his neck and don't fight as he gets my top off and tosses it to Gunner.

Gunner puts it on himself, making me laugh until Holden pushes two fingers inside me. I moan and writhe against him, my hips grinding against his hand. Roman finally joins us, standing easily in the water that barely covers my nipples. He strokes my breasts and circles my nipples with his thumbs.

"You're very naughty buying something like that to wear in public."

"So you don't like it?"

"I don't like it on you for more than a minute." He growls, dipping his head to pull one of my nipples into his mouth. He gently sucks, then nibbles until I whimper.

"Luckily, we're far away from the public eye, aren't we?" Gunner asks. "No need to worry about what the animals see."

"They won't tell Bella." Nick hums.

Holden already has me on the edge with his wicked fingers sliding in and out of me while his thumb teases my clit in faster circles that are driving me more and more insane. Just before I can come, Roman holds his hands up, eyes focused on the trail.

"Someone's coming."

The guys focus in on it, then Gunner takes off my top and tosses it at me. "Sucks to be you, sweets."

Holden helps me with my top, and then I'm practically tossed to Roman. He swims with me in a lazy circle until I wrap my arms around his shoulders. "I thought we were far enough-"

"Still technically a trail, Bambina."

I finally hear the giggling and laughter while tugging on Roman's hair and see none other than Matthew and Bella. I curse against Roman's neck, and he chuckles. "Upset?"

"Well, we can't just dart off on the bride and groom," I grumble.

Roman turns to look at them, and I see Gunner's face twist in frustration. "Did you tell them where we were going?"

"No. But we did have to check-in before going on the trail." Roman answers.

Holden climbs out of the water and puts on his prosthetic, making me pout. Roman adjusts me in his arms. "It's okay. He might be able to ... never mind."

Bella looks right at us, and she smiles a nasty smile, waving at us like she knows just what she did. She cups her hands around her mouth. "How lucky we found you!"

"Sure, luck," I grumble.

"Be nice." Roman whispers in my ear. "She's the bride."

"A bitchy bride. Not letting anyone else have fun. Making everyone as stressed as her isn't exactly what this is about."

"Povera Bambina." Roman pouts at me sarcastically.

I roll my eyes at him.

"Did you hear me, Sophie?" Bella yells, loud enough for anyone else on the trail to hear her.

"Son of a bitch." I take a few deep breaths as Roman carries me back towards where our clothes are. Gunner stays in the deeper water. "He didn't bring a suit, did he?"

"Not today." Roman agrees. "Bad planning on his part."

"Very." I agree.

When we get to shore, Roman hands me a towel, prepared as always. I wipe myself down slowly, being sure not to mess up my suit. "Good to see you, Bella. Enjoying the build-up to your big day?"

"Even more now that your dad is here." There's a wicked glint in her eyes.

"Oh, good. It's about time he and Mom show up." I smile. "They deserve a vacation after everything they've gone through this year."

Bella's smile melts. "What?"

"Yeah, after Dad was in the hospital for a bit, he and Mom reconnected. It's nice having a happy family again." I keep my

smile despite Roman pinching my thigh.

Matthew rubs Bella's shoulders. "That's great to hear. Miles deserves to be as happy as we are."

Bella forces a smile that's so robotic it's mildly terrifying. "So true. Just like you and Roman."

"I know a couple in love when I see one. And you're so lucky." She leans closer to me then whispers in my ear. "Other than Matthew, he's the most well-adjusted."

I purse my lips and take a slow breath. The first rule of weddings is not to piss off the bride, but it would be so easy to do it and defend my men. I don't want to go through an obstacle course to avoid offending her.

"All the guys are doing well, but I appreciate your concern. I know you know them better than most. We're all here to support you and make your big day special."

Roman softens his hand, stroking across my thigh. That means I wasn't too catty. Good.

"You know, not many people take this trail. I'm surprised you bothered to wear a swimsuit at all when it's so much nicer to skinny dip."

"Bella." Matthew wraps his arm around her. "Why don't we wait until everyone leaves?"

"It's not like the guys haven't seen me naked before. And I'm sure that Sophie here isn't interested in me like that." Her eyes shine.

It's been less than twenty-four hours, and I'm over her. I take a slow breath, and Roman lets me lounge on him. I refuse to kiss him to make a point, even as I hear the rustling of her clothes.

Roman rubs my shoulders with sunscreen. "We should have done this first to make sure you're not all red at the wedding."

He focuses on stroking me over with lotion until two splashes echo. Looking over, I see Matthew and Bella

swimming. Holden distracts me with a whisper. "She's not usually like this."

"I can't see any of you putting up with that." I agree.

"She was sweet, a good sub, knew what would get her punished, and it only went down that path when she wanted it." He assures us, pulling on his pants and shirt.

"Aren't you hot in those?" I motion to his pants.

"They're joggers, so they're not bad." He shrugs.

I want to sit in his lap and tell him it's okay to wear shorts. That I'll put anyone and everyone in their place for saying something about his prosthetic, but I have to stay with Roman.

"Gunner, why so far away? You should try climbing the falls." Bella advises. "It's a rush."

"Good advice for next time."

"She was so nice showing me around the office. What happened?" I ask Roman.

"I'm sure it's prewedding stress. Nothing more." He rubs my hand. "Or maybe a little jealousy that we have you."

"I shouldn't have come. It's just going to cause problems." I sigh.

Roman kisses my forehead, and Holden takes my hand tightly. I know they want me here. I know it the same way I know I will be sore tomorrow from all this hiking, but that doesn't mean I want someone interfering with our relationship.

One look at Gunner says he's frustrated beyond belief. Nick is just chatting with Matthew, but Gunner's already dealt with a lot.

"Gunner and I talked." Roman whispers in my ear. "Everything is going to be okay, Bambina. We'll *make* it okay. We survived war together. We survived starting a business. We can survive Bella."

"I should go with him tonight," I whisper. "To make sure everything's okay, to talk to him at least."

Roman shrugs. "All of us are happy to have you, however, you choose."

"Not jealous?"

Roman shakes his head and nibbles my earlobe. "After last night, absolutely not."

I giggle and nod.

I drag my dress and shorts on, and Roman pulls his shirt over his delicious, muscular chest. This spot had so much potential, and I'm still uncomfortably wet, thanks to Holden teasing me. But my only option is to wait until we can finish what we started.

Gunner manages to make it to shore and get his underwear on before Bella notices and sighs once he has his shorts on. He buttons up his Hawaiian print shirt and pulls his sunglasses on.

"Don't worry," I assure him as I stand up. "You'll have plenty of time to be naked tonight."

"Promises." He chuckles.

"Well, monsters have a way of catching the girl." I wink.

He grins and yells to Nick. "Let's go! We gotta say hi to Miles."

"Send my love!" Bella yells. "Can't wait to catch up."

Matthew waves. "We'll see you guys soon."

We head back, but this time the trail seems a lot less magical. Bella's threatening my guys with her rules, comments, and attitude, and I don't like it. Bride or not, I have my limits. At this rate, she's going to break through them before she says, "I do."

Gunner

Sophie powers through the trail like it's nothing. I share a look with Nick, and he shakes his head once. I don't know if I've actually seen Sophie pissed off. Maybe she just really wants to get back so we can eat or see her dad or something.

"Shit," Holden says. "I left my backpack."

"I'll get it and catch up. I recognize the trail markers." I tell them.

Sophie glances at me then kisses my cheek. "Be back for lunch, okay?"

"Deal." I kiss her softly, then lick along the valley of her lips, dying to have her again, needing to be sure she's mine like I remember, especially after being interrupted like we were.

I jog back to the lagoon and see Bella stretched out, wearing just her panties, taking in the sun. She drops her sunglasses to look at me as Matthew climbs the falls. I grab the backpack, and she leans towards me.

"Gunner."

"Bella." I only look at her face.

"You're still allowed to look, silly."

"Not considering you're about to be married and I'm in a relationship." I remind her.

She presses her lips together in a flat pout. "You're so prickly. What happened to fun, no limits, all about the thrill Gunner?"

"What happened to sweet, submissive Bella?" I shoot back.

"No girl likes seeing her exes happy."

"We weren't in a relationship." I remind her. "It was an arrangement. It's different."

"Yes, because you didn't hesitate to go out with other girls even though you had me." She sighs. "How things change."

"And we never thought you'd settle for one man." I shrug. "To change is to live."

"I was hoping we would all still be friends, you know. We managed to work so well together, and everything seemed so nice."

"We can still be friends. But your rule has left a bad taste in my mouth."

"Come on. It's four days where she's with one person only. Roman had the balls to ask. I figure it's only fair that he gets the reward." She pulls her knees up to her chest. "Now, you can look at me."

"I'm not staying. I just came to get this."

"I know you were almost married," Bella says, catching my attention. "And I know after you were engaged, things didn't go ... well."

"Sometimes it takes a wedding looming to show someone they're not ready," I grumble, despite the flair of pain.

My high school sweetheart was overjoyed to get engaged, but once the paperwork started, once I mentioned a prenup to protect us both from the possibility of flared tempers in the case of a divorce, shit hit the fan. Victoria left deep cuts, and Bella knows it.

"Did you ever question it, wonder if you made the right choice?"

"As I started to, I realized it was ending." I shrug. "Hard to stay with someone when you know they're looking for a way out. Matthew isn't doing that. He loves you."

"Thanks." She looks over at him. "I wonder sometimes if I'm going to be good enough for him. If he's going to want to start swinging or things like that, which wouldn't be awful, I just think marriage changes things."

"It can. Just remember what makes it work. Choose to love each other every day and put each other before problems," I advise.

She looks at me for a long time. "Sometimes, I wonder if I chose right."

"You did," I promise her.

I still feel her eyes on me as I walk away. She should be talking about that with her maid of honor or her mother, or someone who's had a successful marriage, not a guy she used to fuck. Especially when she's marrying one of my best friends. Not to mention no one *made* her choose.

She did what she thought would make her happiest. No one can fault her for that. She fell for Matthew. They're a great pair and they should hold onto it. She's two days away from getting married. Now isn't the time to question it.

I shake off the conversation by the time I get to my room. I change for lunch and toss Holden his backpack when we meet at the resort restaurant, and he grins at me. "You took longer than expected."

"Don't worry. There was no fighting."

"Not that she doesn't deserve it." Sophie stabs her salad.

Roman rubs her shoulder and whispers something in her ear. She rolls her eyes. "I'm just frustrated."

"That can be taken care of." I point out.

"Baby!"

Sophie looks up and sees her mother wearing a wrap dress. She hugs her tightly and seems to relax. Good. Diana drops her glasses down her nose as Sophie hugs Miles and grins at us. "Well, you all look much better when in casual clothes."

"Diana," Miles grumbles.

"I'm just saying, no wonder Sophie can't resist." She wiggles her eyebrows.

I chuckle. "And now I see where Sophie gets her sass from. I knew it wasn't Miles."

Miles rolls his eyes but pulls up two chairs. Both of them get margaritas, and I see the desire flair in Sophie's eyes. She orders a frozen one, and after two drinks, she winces. "Oh, brain freeze!"

Roman chuckles and tells her to press the bottom of her tongue against the roof of her mouth or to suck her thumb. The look she gives him says she'd rather suck something else. Miles clears his throat.

We end up telling him about our flight, asking about work, how yesterday wrapped up, and a bunch of shit that doesn't really matter. It just helps Miles avoid the reality that all four of us are with his daughter.

"Have you seen Bella?" He asks.

Diana pauses, then turns to Holden, eager to talk about anything except this. I wonder how much she knows. Roman nods. "We have. They picked us up from the airport, and we ran into her and Matthew today on a hiking trail."

"It's good they're taking time to spend together before the wedding. It's so easy to get wrapped up in all the things that go wrong." Diana jumps back in. "Like when Miles and I were getting married. His mother couldn't stand me, thought we were rushing into things."

"Not to mention the issue with the caterer." Miles agrees. "And the florist."

"I still can't believe they delivered to the wrong place." Diana giggles. "The most stressful two days, and then we had to move the venue because of weather."

"It was worth it." Miles takes her hand. "Just like being in the hospital recently was worth it."

God, they're so sappy. I hate it. I don't know whether to look away or to crack a joke. But my eyes go to Sophie. If I was ever going to be sappy and pour my heart out to anyone, to go through all that stress and work and exhaustion for someone, it would be her.

Sophie watches her parents as if she's never heard them talk about this before. She watches and listens intently. "Grandma didn't approve?"

"Nope." Miles chuckles. "Not at first. But after we got back from the honeymoon and the first tour ended and I came home to a beautiful daughter and happy wife, my mom was overjoyed."

"She couldn't be around enough." Diana agrees. "I think it was really because of you, but she was happy to babysit, give me hints on what Miles likes for parties and holidays, things like that."

"That's cute." Sophie agrees.

"Excuse me, just a minute. I'm going to run to the little girl's room." Diana says.

Sophie joins, probably to get a few seconds alone with her mom. Miles leans close after looking around. "So, how are things actually going? Why do I feel like we're only here because Matthew wants us here?"

"Bella's dealing with a lot of feelings," I say. "She's stressed as hell and overthinking everything, honestly."

The guys look at me with surprise. I shrug. "She asked me questions and stuff. The kind of questions that tend to lead to rash decisions."

"Fuck." Miles groans. "Diana was already on the fence about this. She did a lot of digging on Bella; made me talk about things she didn't need or want to know. We talked the whole way here. The *entire* flight."

"Jesus." Nick breathes. "So she doesn't trust the marriage?"

"She's worried that I want that with her. Want her to be all submissive and to get kinky like that, to share her."

"Do you?" I ask. "Honestly, Miles. It's us. You can share the truth."

"No." He hisses. "Diana brings out something in me. I don't even like her flirting with others. I can't imagine sharing her, letting anyone else touch her or enjoy her or anything. Hell, I hate when she teases Sophie by hitting on you guys."

"Weird." I huff. "I mean, to think of how you were with Bella compared to that ... big change, almost like you've been body-snatched."

"Very funny."

"Just remember the safe word. If you say duckling, we'll make sure to free your brain from the alien that's trying to take over," I insist. "It's a safe place."

Miles rolls his eyes. "I'm serious. It's just ... different sometimes."

Sophie and Diana come back. Sophie sits, and Roman kisses the back of her hand. Diana shoots a look at me, and I shrug. Miles knows but based on what he told me before we moved out, I wonder how he's taking this.

Lunch moves along quickly, and Sophie heads upstairs to rest. Holden and Nick go their own way as well. Diana sighs. "I'm going to see Sophie, see if she wants to get manicures and what she's wearing to the luau tomorrow."

Great. Stuck with the man I fought with and the dude that's at the center of two conflicts now. Roman looks between us then clears his throat. I hold up my hand. "Look, we all know what's going on here, and we're fine."

"I was out of line, Gunner. I was pissed that Sophia was leaving with you guys, and I thought if I picked at a nerve, you'd make her stay." Miles says.

"Yeah, I get it."

"But I know she's happy with all of you. I get that it's different from being with Bella because she's here, namely, but I've also never seen her so happy."

Roman chuckles. "She yelled at you."

Miles rubs the back of his head, and I chuckle. "She's a wild one. Can't exactly boss her around."

"Apparently, she got that from me." He sighs. "So I'm sorry. I was out of line."

"You were," Roman says.

I blink at him. I expected him to be the first to forgive. Miles stares at him, a hard look coming into his eyes. Roman shrugs. "You and Bella both are. You can't impose what you think is best when you don't know how well we work as a group. And assuming that if she were to pick, she'd pick me, and *saying* it just to start drama, it's fucking low."

I pat his shoulder. "Thanks, brother."

"I get it. I was wrong." Miles growls. "I don't like it. But Sophie's an adult. She'll make her own choices, and that's the way it's going to go."

"I'm glad we're all on the same page, then." I want this to be done. We don't need to dig into it, especially since we're still dealing with Bella's terms. I clear my throat. "Be careful with Bella right now. She may try to self-sabotage."

"Matthew comes first." Roman hisses.

"I'm not jeopardizing anything with Diana. She's giving me a second chance, and I'm not stupid enough to waste it. Especially knowing it's just Bella's nervousness talking."

We nod, Miles pays for lunch, even though we offer to split it, and finally, we head upstairs, Roman tugging me to the room he's sharing with Sophie. He winks. "We have something to finish."

Sophia

I TAKE A PICTURE OF THE BALCONY AND POST IT TO MY SOCIAL media with the comment: heaven. Immediately after, I slide into the hot tub naked. I turn on some relaxing music and close my eyes, letting myself just float.

Mom and I will get our nails done tomorrow, and until then, I can just relax. The jets massage my back. As I sink deeper, I almost think it's fingers rubbing into my back. Which reminds me of Holden's fingers stroking my pussy, teasing me out in the open while Roman played with my tits.

My head falls back as I stroke down my body and finger my clit. I need to come. Walking all the way back while wet was hell itself. Uncomfortable, annoying, and if Bella had crossed our path again, I don't know if I would have been able to hold my tongue.

I groan and slip a finger inside myself, teasing slowly as I roll a nipple between my fingers. I take a breath and sigh as I remember my mom and dad are next door.

"Isn't this a sight?" Roman's croon distracts me.

I open my eyes and see him and Gunner there. Turning, I get on my knees to show off my tits. "It could be more than a sight."

Gunner takes off his shirt and nods. "I like the sound of that."

Gunner slowly undoes his pants and gets on his knees in front of me so I can lick from his balls to the tip of his cock.

He groans and wraps his hand in my hair. "You're such a sweet girl, Sophie. Always so good."

I groan and slip my lips around the head, swirling my tongue around him. Roman gets in behind me and pushes his fingers inside me, then slowly in and out. I rock back against him, grinding down on his fingers for more. My eyes flick up to Gunner as I take him deeper in my mouth, sucking as hard as he likes it. He pants slowly, not taking his eyes off me.

"Is this what you wanted at the falls, Bambina?" Roman asks.

I moan around Gunner's cock in answer, which earns me a hard swat to my ass. Gunner tightens his hand in my hair, pulling me back so I can taste him. I whimper. "Please?"

"Answer the question."

"Yes. This is what I wanted." I pant.

Roman smacks my ass again. "More."

"I wanted to fuck all of you right there. Feel your hands all over me." I shiver.

Roman curls his fingers inside of me, rubbing my g-spot perfectly. My eyes flutter closed as I moan, but Gunner pulls me closer. "Do you want my cock?"

"Yes. Please." I pant. "Please fuck my mouth."

"Someone needs to when you use such naughty words." He groans.

I smile. "You love it."

"Open wide for me." He orders.

I open my mouth after licking my bottom lip, and he thrusts in, hitting the back of my throat as Roman starts fucking me with his fingers again. I bounce between them, taking everything they offer.

Finally, Roman pulls his hand away, smacks my ass, then thrusts into me. Every inch of his thick cock fills me. Gunner groans and nods. "You're so good at taking us, sweets."

I moan around him and try to take him even deeper as I lap at his shaft. Roman grips my hips tightly. "Do you want to make him come, Sophia?"

I nod with Gunner's cock still in my throat.

He pants and adjusts, so he's sitting with his feet in the water, making it all the easier to blow him. Roman thrusts into me again, making me take more of Gunner. I love it. Love how they fill me together and overwhelm me.

Gunner's head drops back, and his hand tightens in my hair, tugging at my scalp while Roman kisses across the back of my shoulders. Gunner cups my breast and pinches my nipple, tugging and playing with it until pinpricks of pain become pleasure that threatens to undo me.

Roman rubs my clit as he fucks me, making sure that all I can think about is the two of them. Nothing else exists. Just us, enjoying each other in paradise. I moan and try to hold out, my fingers digging into Gunner's thighs.

He groans. "Faster, Sophie. Take me faster."

I do, using a hand on his shaft to meet my lips as I focus on sucking and licking the head. I know what gets him off, I know just what he needs, and I'm not going to let him leave until he comes.

"Fuck, just like that. That's perfect, sweets. Fucking perfect." He groans.

Roman pants and bites my shoulder as he groans. God, they feel so good. Heat rips through me as my legs start to shake. I'm so close to the edge, so ready to come. I suck Gunner harder, then take every inch that I can possibly fit.

It does him in. He fills my throat and mouth with come as I explode at the same time. My eyes roll back as I come apart, clinging to Gunner so I don't float away on cloud nine. Roman groans loudly, pressing his forehead to my back as he thrusts harder and faster into me.

"Fuck, Sophia, you're so tight." He gasps. "So fucking

Another groan rips through him as he jerks out and comes on my back. Gunner slowly eases out of my mouth, making sure I lick him clean before he grabs a shirt and wipes off my back. I roll over and make room for Gunner.

He sits me across his lap and kisses me hungrily. I moan into the kiss and cup his face in my hands. When he draws back, he smiles. "I love you, sweets."

"You're just saying that because I blew you."

"I'm saying it because it's true."

"Ti Amo." Roman agrees. "Always."

I bask in the afterglow of the orgasm I had to wait hours for as the guys rub me and hold me. I sigh. "I'm so lucky."

"Are you?" Gunner asks. "You don't wish we were all wrapped up into one guy with a regular sex drive?"

"Nope." I smile. "I love you all. Even when it's complicated and exhausting."

Roman chuckles and kisses me. "You should get some rest before we go into town."

"Leaving the resort?" I ask, suddenly wide awake. "Really?"

"To go dancing." Gunner agrees. "No one from the wedding should be at local places when they have a resort to enjoy. We don't have to be as careful."

I beam. "Can we go now? Please? I'll go get Holden and Nick, and we can go out right away and-"

"Patience, sweets." Gunner chuckles. "Holden needs to rest a little."

"And Nick is working on something. Apparently, Sasha is still fighting being fired. She filed wrongful termination, so he's talking to lawyers, making sure they have what they need to fight that."

"Will she ever be done? If she just moved on, she'd be fine." I climb out of the water and lie on the deck.

Gunner groans and strokes down my body. "Yeah. But you're better."

"You already had me." I stretch, arching my back as if it's all innocent. "How can you want more?"

"There's no such thing as "enough" with you, Bambina." Roman groans. "So you should get dressed before we're ready for round two. You'll need your energy for tonight."

"And tomorrow." Gunner cups my breast and winks at me.

"And for all the times you're stolen during the reception." Roman continues.

I giggle and get through a quick shower before bundling up in a robe and crashing into bed. Gunner gets on the computer to check some things while Roman cuddles me. He kisses across my neck.

"We love you, Bambina. I'm happy you're here."

I smile and rub his thick arm. "There's no place I'd rather be."

"Not even on a private boat, sailing through the Caribbean?" He asks. "Or Paris? London?"

"Nope. You four are here." I stretch my legs, feeling the threat of cramps. "And you feel like home."

He kisses my temple.

I don't know how long I sleep, but it feels like five minutes, maybe, before my thigh is tickled. I groan and squirm. "Keep that up, and we'll be late."

Rolling, I find Roman, all sleep softened, with messy hair and warm eyes. I snuggle closer. "Or the guys could meet us here, and we could wait until tomorrow to go out."

"You're a naughty thing." He kisses me softly. "But I bet Nick wants to show you how to salsa."

"I thought that was Mexico."

"The music is close enough. We'll get some local food and enjoy being together. You can kiss everyone, not just me, hold hands, flirt."

I smile at that bit of freedom being offered. "You know just how to bribe me."

"It's not that hard." He kisses me again. "Up and change before I decide to keep you for myself for an hour."

"A whole hour?"

"Don't test me." He tugs on my sash.

I get up and squeal as my robe falls open. Roman chuckles and watches me change, his arms behind his head. I twirl in my dress, and he nods. "Very cute."

"We haven't gone on a one-on-one date in a while."

"As long as we don't get wasted tonight, I'm taking you horseback riding in the morning."

I gape at him. Now I'm the one rushing him. He laughs, and that seems to be the theme of the night. Once we're away from the resort and at the small local beach-side restaurant, we have a great time. We flirt, and dance, kiss and have so much fun. We're barely noticed by the locals, and I doubt they care about what some strangers are up to.

Once dinner is done, we manage to find a private area on the beach, and I get all four of the guys, just like I wanted them earlier. Roman and Gunner let Nick and Holden go first while giving me orders and swatting me when I disobey. But it's fun, wild, something I've never done before.

However, I get sand in a bunch of places it doesn't belong, which requires a long shower when we get back. Roman is more than happy to help and even happier to wake me up before the sun the next morning, even when I complain.

I huff until we get to the beach, where two gorgeous horses are waiting for us. Roman helps me onto the all-white horse and hops on the brown one once I'm settled. We trot along the beach, then stop to watch the sun break over the horizon.

Roman takes my hand and rubs my wrist with his thumb. "Every day with you is a gift, Bambina. I don't want you to forget that."

I lean towards him and nearly fall off my horse, trying to kiss him. Roman catches me and pulls me onto his lap, kissing me softly. He rests his forehead against mine and smiles. "I mean it. Knowing that you're in my life ... makes me want to be a better person."

"Is that why you've spared the whips and bondage?"

"That's for special occasions." He teases. "And only when you ask very nicely."

"Or I'm very naughty."

"I think you'd try to slip restraints." He rubs my thigh. "You like touching us too much."

"I do." I hesitate, then let myself be a little more vulnerable than normal, let myself open up. "Half the time I'm with you guys, I feel like I have to be dreaming, like there's no way it can be real, like I can't be this lucky. When I touch you "

He grins. "It's not a dream?"

"Exactly."

"Well" He glances to the side. "We better go get your horse."

I see my horse wading into the waves and laugh. It takes Roman and me to catch her and get me back on her. He winks. "Race you back?"

"Who would want to go back when we're this free!"

He grins and lets me take the lead. There's a first time for everything, like enjoying the perks of Bella's wedding.

Holden

SOPHIE IS TANNED AND BEAUTIFUL WHEN SHE JOINS NICK AND me for lunch. Something about Hawaii has revived her. She sips from her glass, the liquor and juice swirling together.

"How are you guys feeling after our hike yesterday?" She asks

"It was definitely a workout. I might need to up my cardio time." Nick rolls out his neck. "Or figure out how to stop aging."

"Definitely feeling old." I agree.

Sophie shakes her head at us. "Neither of you are old and I feel uniquely qualified to assure you of that."

Nick chuckles and I grin. But I see Bella talking with some girls and remind myself that I have to keep my hands to myself. I force my free hand into my pocket and meet Nick's eyes. I jerk my head to the side so he knows what's going on. He nods and takes a long drink of beer.

Sophie looks between us, then over at Bella. She slumps in her chair and huffs before sucking from her straw again. "I hate this. So much. I want to touch you both."

"I know, honey." Nick comforts her. "Soon. Tonight is the rehearsal/ luau and tomorrow is the wedding. They leave and we still have one whole day here to enjoy Hawaii and each other."

"Patience?" She scoffs.

I chuckle and brush her foot with my prosthetic. "You managed it before."

"And now I'm greedy." She sticks out her tongue.

Before either Nick or I can answer, her mother sits down. She shoots Bella a glare as she sizes her up. "So, that's *Bella*."

"Mom, don't start."

"I mean, sure she's young. And kinky ... and pretty. But what does she have to offer? I mean really." Her mother orders a glass of wine, then points at Sophie. "And I know you don't like her either so don't try to convince me you do."

"It's her wedding day. She deserves to be happy." Sophie shrugs. "I'd want to be happy if it was me getting married."

My eyes flick to Nick, but he doesn't look bothered by the statement. I don't blame him. After his last bad relationship where he overheard his girlfriend say that if Nick wouldn't propose, she wouldn't stay and that their whole relationship was a waste of time, I don't expect him to want to get married anytime in the near future.

And me ... well ... I've thought about it, but why do I need some certificate to tell me I love someone? I don't. Just like I don't need to spend thousands of dollars on one day when I'd rather travel with my partner or spoil them with gifts and experiences.

But if Sophie wants to get married ... well there are four of us, but it might change things. Not might. It would definitely change things.

"That doesn't make me like her." Her mom insists, then looks me over with a wicked smile. "How about you, Holden? Do you *like* Bella? You all used to fuck her. Do you think about her when you're with Sophie?"

"Mom!" Sophie gasps. "That's-"

"Let him answer. Do you still want Bella? Is her pussy that magical?"

"No." I say easily. "Bella was fun and she is a special person. I'm happy she's with Matthew and they're in love.

They both deserve to be happy. Other than that, I don't think of her."

Diana sizes me up for a long moment, then twirls her wine in her glass, watching it like it will give her answers.

"Where's Dad?" Sophie asks.

"He got extra excited last night, so he's probably still sleeping." She waves it away. "I've noticed that since we got here, he's been extra eager if you know what I mean," Diana smirks at Nick over her glass. "But I bet you do."

"Mom."

"You know. I've wondered what it's like to be shared." Her eyes flick to me. "Especially between such sexy men. All muscular and Thick ... and ..."

"Mom!" Sophie's voice shoots up an octave.

She smirks and winks at me.

"Oh my god."

"Something wrong, Sophie?" Bella appears with a sweet smile. "You seem stressed. Must be because Roman's not around ... right? I'm sure *he* could help with any frustration you're feeling."

Sophie calms her face. "I appreciate your concern, Bella. Thank you."

"Where is he? Seems irresponsible for your boyfriend to leave you alone with two guys." Her meaning is clear.

"Well, Roman would rather her be with people he trusts." Nick handles it easily.

Diana looks between us. "But you all are-"

"Such close friends." Bella cuts her off but then meets her eyes. "Who are you? You look familiar."

"Shocking." Diana takes a sip. "I'm Miles' ex-wife and current girlfriend."

Bella blushes and tucks her hair behind her ear. "Oh. From the pictures."

"And now you get to see me in person," She says in a taunting voice.

Bella looks her over, shrugs, and walks away as if Diana isn't worth a second glance. That's going to go over well. As Bella walks away, Diana lets out a string of insults under her breath that makes Nick's eyes go wide.

I figured we'd heard it all while in the army. Apparently not.

"Jesus, Mom." Sophia breathes. "You'd wash my mouth out with soap for even three of those words."

"I'm an adult. I'm allowed to say that." She finishes her glass.

"I am also an adult," Sophie argues.

Diana thinks about that, then shrugs. "We'll see. If you end up like her, a jealous little prick, I'll revoke your adult card."

Sophie just stares, her mouth open as her mother leaves.

"Wow," Nick says.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I can't believe ... she must be drunk constantly. I just ... this isn't how she normally is; I promise."

"It's okay." I promise, taking her hand. Bella or not, Sophie deserves some comforting right now. "Your mom is dealing with a lot."

"She is. I can't imagine what it's like to find out your husband was with someone Bella's age and You know ... doing all the things we are doing." I smile.

"But we're not letting you get that drunk. No table dancing, no temptation to kiss us." Nick raises his hand, hoping to get a waiter's attention. He orders a platter of food for the table. "Eat, Soph."

She rolls her eyes then plays with her drink. Something is bugging her, something she's either not ready to talk about, or something that's going to get worse. I squeeze her hand. "What?"

"I just ...my brain is going a million miles a minute." She takes a deep breath then rolls her eyes. "I just don't ... um."

"It's okay; we can handle it," Nick assures her with his calm voice.

I nod.

"So, I know Bella ended things, but if she hadn't ... and you met me ... well."

"There's no contest. Bella was an agreement that started as a curiosity." Nick shrugs. "But you"

"I couldn't keep my hands or mind off you from the second I saw you, Sophie," I convince her. "You should know that, considering we made out the first time we met."

"Damn, Hold. You moved fast with her." Nick chuckles.

Sophie looks between us. Nick glances around and lowers his voice. "Holden was the last one to join with Bella. Like ... he procrastinated spending time with her and us."

I shrug when she looks back at me with surprise. Nick continues. "With you, it wasn't a curiosity. It was an instant infatuation."

"What have I missed?" Roman asks as he kisses Sophie's cheek and takes the chair Diana left.

"My mother on a rampage." She grumbles.

"Pure chaos." I agree.

"Let's make an agreement to avoid pissing off Diana. She seems to hold a grudge." Nick nods.

"And knows some *very* colorful insults." I take another drink of the tequila sunrise.

We get to talking until Gunner joins us. He pulls up a chair, and we talk about the luau tonight and what the plans are for tomorrow. Roman leans towards Sophie. "We're all going to be busy for four hours before the wedding."

"I think I can manage." She rolls her eyes.

"With your mother?" I ask. "Miles will be with us."

"It'll be my job to keep her sober. We can't let her shout anything during the wedding or talk to Bella at the reception. That will just be ... bad. She'll be embarrassed, you guys will be embarrassed, and Bella's day will be ruined."

"You don't have to pretend to like her." Gunner rolls his eyes. "Trust me. It's understandable if you don't."

"She's just stressed. I don't like her right now, but I'm sure after the honeymoon, she'll be warm and sweet." Sophie shrugs.

Nick and I exchange a look. Bella can be sweet, she can be loving, she can be a true dream of a person, but she can also be petty and manipulative. She's smart as a whip and can be understanding and kind.

But since meeting Sophie, Bella seems ... colder than I remember. But I think Sophie could manage that with anyone. She's sunshine personified. In fact, this experience may be the first time I've seen her the least bit jealous.

As we wrap up brunch Sophie asks what we should do. Roman's phone rings, and he groans. "It's work. Text me where you guys go, and I'll meet you there when I can."

He kisses Sophie softly and whispers something in her ear. She giggles and rolls her eyes. I nudge her, wanting to know what he said as we walk on the beach together. She looks at Gunner, trying to buy a soccer ball off a kid.

"He said to remember you guys chose me because of me, not as a consolation prize."

"It's true." I shrug.

"I don't know why she bothers me so much. My mom doesn't even get under my skin that much and she flirts with you all shamelessly. Bella's just ... I don't know. More than fucking my dad, she showed you the lifestyle."

"She's not the first one we shared," I inform her, wanting desperately to take her hand. "But honestly ... Sophie, have any of us told you about our relationships in the past?"

Nick turns to look at me.

Sophie shakes her head. "Well, Roman told me a bit about his, but that's all."

"There's a reason none of us are bothered by sharing. Especially if it means getting you." I say.

Nick joins and sighs. "This conversation should wait until private, Holden. Not that it shouldn't happen, it absolutely should, but let's wait on this."

"Why? Are you guys going to fight or something? I might be into watching you fight." She winks.

A soccer ball hits me in the chest, and Gunner chuckles. "Let's go. Pick up game on the beach. I call Sophie on my team."

"I'm insulted, Gunner. You know I used to play." Nick grumbles.

"Yeah, but let's face it. Sophie's a great distraction and what better way to win?"

She gasps. "You're insulting my soccer skills? I'll have you know I played on an intramural team in college."

"And how many games did you win?" Gunner teases.

Sophie grabs the ball from my feet and flings it at Gunner, hitting him dangerously close to the dick. Gunner goes white then points at her. "Hey, no friendly fire. We're teammates."

"Maybe I want her on my team," I say.

Nick narrows his eyes. "Rude."

"And I want Nick." Sophie goes to stand next to him. "I know how good you are at sports."

He gives her a gentle smile then flips us off. We end up kicking the ball around, no team involved until Gunner throws Sophie over his shoulder and tosses her into the ocean. He goes for Nick next, struggling but still managing to toss him in.

Gunner grins at me. "I'm sparing you but can't make it look like I'm with Sophie."

I chuckle. "Now I feel loved. Thanks." "Always, brother."

Sophia

I GET THROUGH A SHOWER TO WASH THE SALT OFF MY SKIN and see Roman still on the computer. I wrap my bare arms around him and kiss his cheek. "You're missing out on all the fun."

"I'm not the only one. Holden just got roped in so Gunner's only a matter of time."

"But I can't just walk around with Nick." I pout. "Bella will get mad."

"Why don't you go see your dad?"

"How did he escape?"

Roman turns to look at me and groans. I knew just wearing the towel would get to him. But his hands don't leave the keyboard of his laptop. "Farei qualsiasi cosa per te."

"Want to translate that for me?"

"I want you to learn Italian." He leans back.

I kiss him softly, drinking him in like he's the only water in the desert. I draw back before he can use his tongue, and he makes a frustrated sound. "Tell me?"

"I'd do anything for you." He sighs. "Unfortunately, skipping work isn't an option at the moment."

"So much for anything." I tease.

"Sophia-"

"What are you going to do? Stop work and spank me?"

He chuckles. "I'm going to start a tab. I'm sure your father would appreciate seeing you ... before tonight when he won't have the chance."

"Why wouldn't he have the chance?" I blink at him stupidly.

"Because you know, the luau is just so far away from the hotel and you just might forget something ... or might want to see the water at night ... or might want someone to walk with you to the bathroom for safety ... or might need to be able to keep an even face while someone fingers you under the table."

I shiver at his list. He's been thinking about this ... a lot. "Sounds like a busy night."

"That's the plan." He winks at me. "Take my advice, Bambina. Go say hi to Miles before you're too busy and too covered in bite marks."

I giggle and kiss his neck. "I'm going to hold you to those promises."

"I'm sure that's not the only thing you'll be held to."

I get dressed and text my dad, asking if he wants to get drinks or check out the resort. He agrees happily and joins me. Dad in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts is weird. Almost as weird as him in flip-flops. I remember us going to the beach, but he always wore a tank top and trunks.

Now he definitely looks like a dad.

"How are you enjoying your time?" He asks, carefully choosing his words.

"It's nice overall. Mom has been a little"

"Oh, she's been very." He rubs the back of his neck. "We've talked more about Bella since we got here than we have about our relationship. I don't know how to convince her I want her and only her."

"I'm not doing relationship recon for you guys. I'm way past the point of Parent Trapping, you guys." I shrug. "I can tell you that Bella is bugging her. I've never heard her talk the way she did today."

Dad rubs the back of his neck and nods. "I don't know how to fix that. I mean. I can't undo what happened with Bella." Then his eyes turn to me. "And you know you can't undo what you're doing with the guys. Once you move on and find the person you want to marry, this is a real possibility for you."

"What makes you think I'm going to leave them?"

"Honey, this kind of life isn't sustainable. Even in the bestcase scenario. Marriage can't happen with four guys. What about when you want children? What if you meet someone who's better for you?"

"I'm not looking for anyone. I don't think anyone could outshine the guys. I'm wrapped around them entirely."

"Puppy love. Once you guys have some fights and see where everyone ends up in terms of sides, you'll start questioning it. And you've always wanted to get married. And to be a mom."

"Wants change." But it sounds like a cop-out, even to me.

"And would it be fair only to give one guy the option of being a dad? Only one guy the option of getting married?"

"Dad, we're talking about you and mom, not me." I redirect the conversation. "She's insecure because you were with a woman my age. I'm sure it's messing with her head, making her wonder if she's good enough."

He blinks a few times. "That's ridiculous. She's more than enough. She's the one I've always wanted."

"Then you have to tell her that, Dad. You have to *show* her. Do stuff that makes her sure she's the only one for you. Make her forget all about Bella ... more than in the bedroom, which she was very ... open about."

He blushes and nods. "I'm supposed to be the one giving you the advice."

"Well, I'm all mature now." I tease.

He chuckles and ruffles my hair. "I'm sorry I wasn't around more when you were a little older growing up."

"It's okay. Life happens, Dad. You're here now. Let's make it count. And let's make it count *outside* the hospital." I beam at him.

He chuckles and nods.

We walk in silence for a while, collect shells, and show each other what we have. It's the longest alone time we've had in a long time. We catch up on stories he asks about. Prom, which was boring as hell, graduation, which ended up being a party ... considering school threw a party to keep us from going out and drinking – it didn't work. It was the first time I got wasted. But I won a raffle that got me a laptop, so it was a win.

Dad tells me about starting the business, about hanging out with the guys, about everything that he wishes he could have shared with me while he was traveling. By the time we get back to the hotel, the sun hangs lower in the sky.

He hugs me. "I'll see you at the luau. Behave with the guys."

I hug him back, happy to have him in my life, happy to have him here and with me.

When I go upstairs, I hear the shower running and get changed into a cute white dress with yellow and pink watercolor flowers. I tie it around my neck and feel a light tug on the bow.

"You're cute," Roman says from behind me.

"Yeah? Is it safe to turn around?"

"Not at all. I don't trust you not to jump me."

I pretend to gasp. "How dare you. I'm the innocent, sweet one of the group."

"Not arguing that." He purrs in my ear, his velvety voice sinking into my skin and raising goosebumps. "But that doesn't mean you won't try to tempt me."

I giggle. "I don't know what you mean. You're the one who does all the tempting."

He chuckles, then finally turns me around so I can help button up his shirt. When I finish, I get a kiss. He brushes my hair from my face. "Should I call any of the guys over to ravage you before we head there?"

"What about all the ways to sneak away?"

"I have a feeling we'll be caught after the first time." He murmurs in my ear. "But that doesn't mean I'm not going to have my hand between your legs all night."

"Because I'm just going to let you?"

He rubs my back and lowers his lips to the curve of my neck. He presses a soft kiss, then rubs his lips over my skin until I shiver. "Are you going to stop me?"

"Maybe." But I don't even believe me.

"Even though you know how much you like my fingers teasing your clit? How good it feels to have my fingers thrusting into your wet pussy over and over, bringing you closer and closer to the edge? Making you bite your lip hard as you soak my hand?" He paints such a vivid picture.

My thighs squeeze together, and I almost moan. "I don't need it."

"But you want it, don't you naughty girl?" He licks my neck. "But maybe you'd rather Holden's hand sneak up your dress while I just rub your knee or tease that tempting neckline."

"I'd never do that to Bella." But fuck I wish I would.

"She'll be too busy drinking and dealing with her parents. She won't notice. We'll get the table furthest away, in the dark." His voice makes me hot all over.

"If we don't go now, I'm going to get naked and wait for the other three to get here to let you touch me."

"How?" He doesn't like being teased. Not at all.

"I'll lock myself in the bathroom." I threaten.

He tips my chin up and kisses me slowly, softly, but with a hunger that leaves me burning for more. They're going to have me half insane by tonight.

Roman takes my hand, and we leave the room. He wraps his arms around me and presses his lips to my ear as we wait for the guys. "I can't wait to see you naked tonight."

"Maybe."

"Watching you come over and over. Then take even more until you're ready to pass out from pleasure alone. And you want it, don't you? All four of us, over and over until you just can't take anymore."

I shiver.

Hands tug on my waist, and I lean back to see Holden. Roman nods and Holden kisses me hungrily. He squeezes my ass and groans as our tongues tangle and tease each other. God, he tastes good. Feels good. Holden's other hand slides up my side and slips under the top of my dress, teasing my nipple.

I whimper and draw back, sucking my lip as Holden pinches my nipple one more time. "Ready?"

"For something." We haven't even left our floor, and I'm wet.

Nick walks up, adjusting his sleeves, looks at me, then arches an eyebrow. Roman nods again, his eyes on the elevator, and I pull Nick to me, devouring his mouth grinding against him.

He groans and holds the back of my head in his hand. His other hand tangles in my dress, keeping me tight against him as we make out in the hallway like overeager teens after prom. He gently pushes me away as he starts to get hard.

"Limits." He pants. "We need them, or you're not going to make it the night."

"Oh, are we getting tossed out of a wedding now?" Gunner picks me up, holds me against the wall, and wraps his hand around my throat. "I like the sound of that."

He kisses my jaw and then bites my ear hard. I whimper and wiggle against him. Gunner chuckles. "Or we can get kicked out of the whole hotel." I wrap my arms around him, and he grabs one of my thighs, lifting it over his hip as he moves to my mouth, thrusting his tongue in and licking deep. They're going to destroy me by not giving me anything more than this all night.

I suck Gunner's tongue, then nip him. In retaliation, he bites my bottom lip hard, sending pricks of pain across my body and soaking my panties in one move. His hand tightens around my throat as he kisses me again, tongue licking against mine as he rubs his hard-on against me.

"Elevator," Roman announces.

Gunner lets me go, winks, and adjusts my dress. He whispers in my ear quickly. "Excited to have wet underwear all night?"

"Until I take them off and stuff them in your pocket." I tease him back.

Roman offers me his hand, and I take it just before some people dressed for the wedding appear in the parted doors of the elevator. Time to pretend I'm a one-man kind of woman ... after tasting all of them.

Nick

SOPHIE'S CHEEKS STAY PINK AND ONLY GET REDDER WHEN WE find out the tables have names. Luckily, the five of us take up a whole table. Gunner is seated almost directly across from Sophie. Bella is definitely trying to kill his ego.

Luckily, I'm right next to her. I rub her knee under the table, and she smirks. "You keep that up, and I won't be able to wait."

"You can and will, Bambina." Roman corrects me. "And you're not going to show anything on your face, or we'll stop having fun."

"Shame we can't switch seats on you." Gunner gives her bedroom eyes. "Make you come four times ... and then watch you make yourself come."

Her eyes widen. "I couldn't. Not here. I couldn't get myself"

Holden chuckles, then straightens. "Bella."

I remove my hand from Sophie's thigh and curl my hand in my lap. I want her. That kiss from earlier held so much promise. It doesn't matter that we had her last night, on the beach, with the ocean crashing. I want her again.

What is it about her that gives me the confidence I had when I was twenty and the stamina of when I was thirty? She's like a shot of vitality, right to my system. I rake my fingers through my hair.

Bella comes over and grins at all of us. "You guys look so good in Hawaiian colors."

We're all in bright colors. I have flowers on the cuffs of my shirt, which is partially why I rolled it up a little. Even Roman is wearing navy and peach. She looks at the crowd. We're not even at the back. We're right up front with Bella.

"I figured the groomsmen should be upfront." She clasps her hands together. "So people get used to your faces."

"Very thoughtful." I thank her. "And you look beautiful. Like sunset on the ocean."

She beams. "You always did know how to give a compliment."

"Where's Matthew?" Gunner asks, getting my attention. He looks squirmy, uncomfortable.

Bella walks over to him. "Why? Worried about something?"

They hold their gaze a beat too long for my liking. Bella rolls her eyes. "He's talking to Miles about work."

"Oh. That." Gunner nods.

"That." She agrees. "But I made him promise, absolutely no work on the honeymoon or tomorrow. He'll be all mine."

"Where are you going on your honeymoon?" Sophie asks.

Bella gushes all about it as her hand brushes Gunner's shoulder. I have no idea what's going on there, but it can't be good. Especially with the little squeeze, she gives him. My eyes slowly go to Sophie, and I see her eyes sharpening.

She's getting pissed. Slowly but surely. It's probably worse that Bella doesn't seem to be thinking about it. It was just like second nature. Sophie drums her fingers on the table, and Bella pauses.

"There's Matthew. See you guys later!" She waves and hurries off.

Sophie's jaw is tight, and her lips are pursed. She's ... jealous? She doesn't like Bella touching Gunner? Is it just

Gunner, then? Or is it any of us? She was jealous of the stripper being in the house, too ... and Gunner.

"I think I'm going to see if I know anyone else here before the show starts. Holden, want to join me?"

He looks around and hesitates. Gunner offers to join me instead, and I take him happily. Of course, he'd do it. We all know how Holden is with groups of people. Gunner joins me, and we head to the bar. He looks around and shrugs.

"I don't know a single person here other than you guys." He happily takes two drinks from the bartender, setting one to the side. I have no doubt it's for Sophie. He takes a sip from his glass. "You ever think it's weird how little we knew about Bella?"

"I think it's weird that she's suddenly so focused on you."

He snorts. "She's pissing me off, and she knows it."

"You're not the only one."

He turns to face me and leans his head to the side. "Are you pissed, man? I'm not doing anything with Bella. How am I pissing you off?"

"I didn't say me." No, I'm confused. I'm a little bothered that Sophie seems to be jealous when it comes to Gunner but no one else. Maybe it's because she's more confident with me and Holden?

"Who?"

"Sophie."

He shakes his head. "No. Sophie knows I would rather be the one to have her on my arm. Bella means nothing to me. She's barely a friend."

"Sure. Just be careful with how she touches you. You guys seem ... interesting."

"We talked at the falls when I went back to get Holden's stuff, but it was silly stuff, the kind of stuff a person says when they're nervous about getting married."

"And people who are getting married, or about to, do stupid things." I remind him. "So just ... be careful."

"Bella loves Matthew. We all know that. She knows that. Everyone here knows that before we even got here." He insists.

I hold my hands up. "I'm not saying you'd do anything. I know that you wouldn't, but I'm just saying that... she seems rather nervous about this and is steadily getting closer to you."

"I wouldn't abuse Sophie's trust like that." He growls. "I know you wouldn't either. Holden's never been crazy about Bella, and Roman is so utterly wrapped around Sophie's finger he wouldn't dare to hurt her. None of us would. So there's nothing for us to worry about, okay?"

"Hey. I'm not picking a fight, Gun." I assure him. "I'm just rather worried about how Bella is acting and how fragile all this is. We know better than most how ... how bad things can go."

Gunner nods and messes his hair up with his hand. "Let's get back to the table."

"Sure."

We sit back down after Gunner hands Sophie her drink. She grabs his tie and looks up at him. I can't place that look, but I know it's not good. She whispers something in his ear, then grabs his hip.

He smiles. "Promise, sweets."

She nods and lets him go before picking up her conversation with Holden. "Really? You can get a paint job for it? And one that looks like traditional tattoos? That sounds right up your alley."

"I wouldn't have it for a week though, which makes things pretty difficult."

"I'm sure I can work from home for a week and manhandle you." She winks. "You know, help you get places ... do things ... lend a hand."

He chuckles and nods. "I'll let you know so you can take care of me."

"Happily take care of you."

"Yes, baby." He keeps his voice low when he gives her the endearment.

Sophie leans towards me and rubs my knee. "You okay, handsome?"

"I am. Just a lot on my mind."

"Want me to fix that?" It's a sweet offer, I can tell. "Tell you what, if you dance with me, I'll give you a hand job under the table."

"Bribing me with sex, huh?" I tease.

"Or painting. I may have snuck a canvas on the plane so we could paint tonight ... if you guys leave me with any energy." She giggles.

"Hi everyone!"

We all turn at Bella's voice.

"I just want to thank everyone for joining us for the destination wedding. We're truly humbled by the amount of love and kindness you've shown us." Bella says, tapping her heart.

Matthew stands with us. "I agree." She hands him the microphone. "I agree entirely. The fact that you all are here for our big day means so much. We're so excited to share a landmark with you all tomorrow and hope you thoroughly enjoy tonight. It's all for you as a thank you."

"So please, enjoy the food, the open bar, and stay tuned for plenty of games to play. For couples and singles!" Bella finishes.

"Games?" Sophie snorts. "Eew."

"Oh come on." I rub the inside of her knee and slowly up her thigh. "You're a team player."

Roman grins, his arm still around her shoulder. "Yes, you are, Bambina. Excellent as part of a team."

"Or group." Gunner continues.

She giggles. "But you forget Bella's rule."

"Fuck Bella's rule," I say evenly.

That earns me the table's attention. Roman slowly unwraps Sophie from his arm and kisses her cheek. "Can you please get Holden and I a couple drinks? Holden?"

"Whatever beer you want." He shrugs.

Sophie's brow furrows, but she gets up, looking between us with confusion. She shrugs and walks over to the bar. Roman clears his throat and leans towards me. "What?"

"Bella is up to something. I don't know what, but this rule is about more than pissing Gunner off and trying to make us jealous of you." I insist.

Gunner rolls his eyes. "He thinks because I talked to Bella a little at the falls and because she was rubbing my shoulder, something's going on. I swear, it's not."

"Of course not." Holden looks at me. "She's just being Bella, trying to manipulate the situation."

"It doesn't do her any good to have Sophie pissed. What is that going to get her?" Gunner insists.

"I don't think it's about Sophie!" I hiss. "It's about Bella having cold feet."

"No way." Gunner finishes his drink. "No fucking way. Even if she did, she wouldn't come back to us. She left us. *She* left us. Not the other way around."

"And maybe she misses it. Or thinks she does. Maybe she's terrified because she's realized that she only has Matthew now. That she can't look or fantasize. Matthew wouldn't tolerate swinging. Not now. We all know that."

"You're talking crazy." Roman insists. "There's no way that she'd fish for any of us."

"Obviously not you," I grumble. "That's why she chained you to Sophie. That was for her. I mean, she barely had the balls to tell you she was ending things, and you know what I thought back then."

"That she was keeping Roman as a failsafe." Holden nods.

Roman blinks a few times. "What?!"

"Yeah. That's how it seemed. She cut the three of us and Miles really quickly, but you ... you and Matthew stayed." I push. "Commitment and Bella are like oil and water."

"No way." Gunner insists. "She's been adamant about Matthew for more than a year. She's eager for the wedding. She's so pumped for this."

"Maybe."

"Or maybe you're upset that Sophie is getting jealous because of me and not you."

"I'm not the one getting attention." I point out.

"Well, we should test this theory before we start throwing Bella under the bus. So go get some attention. See how Sophie reacts, and let's go from there. You too, Hold."

"Don't need to. I can't handle more than one woman at a time." He shrugs.

I narrow my eyes at Gunner but get up to see Miles. He's at a table with his wife and some women our age. Two of them immediately fawn over me, recognizing me from magazine covers.

My eyes flick to Sophie, and I see her chewing the inside of her cheek. She looks pissed beyond belief. She arches an eyebrow at me, but before she can say anything, Bella's up and making an announcement.

"Please enjoy your meal. Right after, we're going to have a hula hooping contest for all the ladies! The prize is definitely worth winning, so be sure to keep that in mind, lovely women!" I make up an excuse to leave and head back to our table, but Sophie doesn't even look at me. Her leg bounces, and her fingers are tight at her hips. She's mad. But I'll take her anger. I'll explain it to her later ... and a part of me kind of likes that she's frustrated. It makes me feel valuable and loved all at once.

And I promise myself to make her feel the same as soon as we get out of this hellish dinner.

Sophia

OKAY. I'M 100% DONE WITH OTHER WOMEN EYEING, touching, and flirting with my men. Gunner's a flirtatious asshole, but it never means anything ... except when Bella's touching him and stroking him when I can't. And now women fawning over Nick like he's a gift.

Which he is. He's absolutely a gift, but this is frustrating as hell. I bite my thumb. Holden gets up and kisses the top of my head. "We're going to need some water."

"And waiters," I grumble.

Roman arches an eyebrow at me. "What, Bambina?"

"Don't Bambina me," I growl, frustrated. "I don't know what the fuck is going on, but I know that you know, Holden knows, and everyone but me knows. We talked about making plans around me, keeping things from me. I don't like it."

"Hey." He strokes under my chin, pressing his forehead to mine. "Everything's okay."

"If it's so okay, then tell me."

Roman shakes his head. "It's better if you don't know."

I've been tense since the falls. Since Bella found us. The guys managed to make me forget it when we left the hotel, but here there's something between them all ... and Bella that I don't like.

"I'm going to sit with my mother."

"Sophia." Roman tries to catch me.

I shake him off and walk across and ask my mom if I can sit next to them. She blinks a few times and my dad grabs an empty chair from another table. They put me in it. Mom asks me what's wrong as plates are served.

But Bella comes over. "Um, Sophie, what are you doing over here? Your table and plate are over there."

"Thank you, Bella I'll head back over shortly."

"I wouldn't want your date to be upset." She pouts. "I'll let them know you'll be on your way back soon."

"Thank you." I barely get it through my teeth.

My eyes flick to her and follow as she goes to the guys. Mom rubs my shoulder, especially when Bella leans over, giving Gunner a great view of her tits. She rubs Holden's shoulder, then actually sits in my seat.

"Fuck this bullshit." I hiss.

"Sophia!" My mother gasps.

"Nothing compared to what you said earlier." I point at her.

"Sophie, what's the problem, come on." Dad turns me to face him. He studies my face for a moment and his jaw tightens as he looks back at the guys. "I'm going to take care of this."

"No. It's like you said. Arguments and fall out."

"You are my daughter and I told them if they hurt you-"

"That I'm an adult in a relationship and I have to handle it ... when I'm ready." I rub my forehead. "I think I should go back to the hotel. I'm not really in the 'luau' mood."

"Don't let her win." Mom whispers in my ear.

I blink a few times and look at her. She asks my dad to get her some water, something he's more than happy to do, but Mom pushes my hair from my face. "I don't care what your father or those guys say. No woman likes to see her exes happy with someone else. Ask anyone at the table."

The women there nod. One speaks up. "It's true, honey. We all want to think we're the best thing that ever happened to them. Even if we don't want to admit it, it's that gut-punch when you see someone you loved loving someone else."

"Like you never even mattered." Another agrees before taking a very healthy drink.

Mom nods. "But you are the one th- that he wants." She rolls her eyes. "So prove it. I guarantee if you walk over there right now, you'll see just how ... how true it is."

I nod and sit taller in my chair. "I just have to do it."

"Better to know now if he's hung up." The last woman snorts.

Well, that's a *great* thought. I walk back to the table, kissing Dad's cheek. Bella laughs at something one of the guys says, then I run my hand over Holden's shoulder. Fuck her rules. Nick was right. Bella looks right at me, fury in her eyes.

"How rude of me. I just sat right down." She stands and offers me her chair.

I wrap my arms around Holden's neck and hold her gaze as I kiss his neck once. "I think I forgot something at the hotel, Holden. Will you come back with me?"

"Roman can do that." Bella grits out.

"I don't want to interrupt your conversation. Plus, we both know what good, respectable company Holden is." I smile, then face him. "Please?"

He stands and takes my hand. "It's not safe for you to go alone."

Just like that, we walk away. It's probably going to get Roman an earful, but I don't care. When we get back to the hotel, I pull him to the hammocks that are out and sit down. Holden rubs my shoulders.

"What's wrong, baby?" He asks.

"Bella's being a bitch." I finally say it. I've been trying so hard not to.

He kisses my shoulder and up to my neck. "Is that all?"

"It's not a little thing to me!" I insist, facing him. "Flirting with you guys. And then Nick goes and has girls all over him. I was sure that you were going to have an adoring crowd just from going to get a drink. And I know you guys chose me. I know that. I know."

"Are you convincing me or yourself?"

I swallow and shrug. "I don't know, Holden. I feel like a little kid playing pretend at this stupid dinner. I don't want to be here. Bella doesn't want me here. She's making sure to give us plenty to fight about."

"Are we fighting?" His eyes widen and he takes my hand. "Sophie, none of us want anyone but you. God, one guy flirting with you and I guarantee you're going to see a different side of Gunner. Roman might just throw you over his shoulder. Nick will ... have his hands full trying to control them."

"What about you?"

"I trust you." He cups my face in both hands and kisses me softly. "I trust you and I know that it doesn't matter what anyone else wants with you because you won't give it."

I sniff and nod, wiping at the rebellious tears rolling down my cheek. "Why does this feel so hard all of a sudden. It's always been easy with us and now I just want to get a room of my own and curl up in a ball and ... and."

Holden hugs me, just hugs me. Nothing sexual, just his warmth washing over me. "You can cry right here."

"I'm not supposed to be the jealous type. You guys share me and if you need more, I get it. I'm one person."

"We don't need more. We love you. We want you." Holden promises. "Only you."

"And then you go and say you trust me and I feel like I don't trust you guys. I do. It's just..."

"It's hard." He agrees. "Most girls worry about one guy and you have four."

Holden lets me cry, just petting me and letting the crashing of the ocean do the talking until I feel like I have control again. I rub my nose and he strokes under my eyes. He gently kisses my forehead, then my nose, and finally my mouth.

He draws back and rubs down my neck. "We can all be with you without demanding sex. Let us be here."

"Will you let me? Because I feel like something is being kept from me."

"I don't want to worry you."

"I might be younger, but I'm just as much an adult." I huff, switching back to anger like I'm about to go full PMS mode.

He stands with some difficulty, considering the rocking of the hammock, and catches me before I can storm away. "I know, baby. Nick is worried that you're only jealous over Gunner. We're all worried Bella is going to do something stupid and hurt Matthew because she's afraid. Roman is brushing it all off, trying to see the best. A lot is coming out between us right now."

"I'm part of the us, though." I remind him. "And all I can do is assume the worst unless you guys tell me otherwise."

"Same." He nods to me. "Roman's really worried."

"I don't want to go back and play games."

"Well..." He hesitates and glances back to the set up and stage and tiki torches. "There's an obvious out. I'm more than happy to give it."

I dab at my wet eyes. "Which means Bella wins and gets all night with you guys and I'm driven away."

"Or you stay and try to stay under the radar."

"Impossible."

"That's what I've got."

I sigh and give in, walking back to the table with him. He rubs the hand I wrapped around his arm and I rest my head on his shoulder. I feel waterlogged, tired, and honestly, ready to go home. I feel like we've been here for weeks. There are too many games being played, too many eggshells to walk on.

When Holden sits me back down, Bella is gone, hula dancing with a bunch of girls on stage.

"You missed the hula contest, sweets."

"Good." I take a bite of the salmon and savor it.

Roman reaches for me, hesitates, then focuses on his steak. We eat in relative silence, other than Nick and Gunner arguing about what game is going to be played next. The guys are called up to do some kind of hula hoop game and all of them leave except Roman. His jaw is tight, eyes steady on the ocean.

"If you're pissed say it," I order.

"You broke the rule."

"Bella broke it first by touching Gunner," I argue.

"And two wrongs make a right?" He turns to face me.

"I know you're not pissed at me for asking Holden to walk with me. You're pissed because of some bullshit reason that I don't understand. All you had to do was talk to me, dummy. And you didn't even do that."

"You're yelling at me. Now?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Does it not fit into your schedule?" I hiss. "Let's see what mine looks like. Talking to my *mother* because I'm so upset and jealous and frustrated and don't feel like I can talk to you guys about it. Keeping my dad from having words with you because I'm trying to handle this between us. Holden watching me cry. And now arguing with the one man I'm allowed to *touch* at this whole fucking wedding."

Roman snaps his teeth together and sets the fork down.

"Oh, and don't forget me asking a direct question and being told the answer isn't important."

"That's not what I said."

"That's how it felt. Holden told me that you all are worried Bella's going to do something stupid. Why was that so hard to say?"

"Because nothing is going to happen. It was pointless to bring up."

"Really? Because she's had her hands on Gunner, she happily took my seat, ignoring her husband to be, and she's been very intent on making the other guys seem single."

"This is a pointless fight." Roman shakes his head. "We're not having it here."

"Okay." I nod, and sniffle. "Give me the key card."

Roman looks at me, his eyes burning. I put my hand out. When he doesn't move I arch an eyebrow. "I have other options, including my parents. Or I'll go walk the beach, but I'm not staying here."

"Sophie."

"Non trattarmi come un bambino." I glare at him, then get up. "How's that for Italian?"

He watches me walk to the hotel. I'll sit in the lobby before I'll spend another minute there.

Roman

I RUB MY FOREHEAD. I SHOULD GO AFTER HER. I SHOULD FIX this. But what am I supposed to say? There are things that she doesn't need to know. In our lives, in our past, between us guys. Sure, we're all dating, but I'm still entitled to some privacy and so are they.

When the guys come back, Holden looks at Sophie's seat, then at me. "Really?"

"Really what?" Gunner asks. "Where's Sophie?"

"Ask Roman." Holden glares at me.

"Don't give me that look. She doesn't need to worry about Bella and you shouldn't have said a word."

"She was crying. She's torn up and confused. All you had to do was tell her that nothing is going to happen. That no one at this table is going to let Bella be stupid. That we love her."

Now Holden's on my back.

"And she was perfectly happy before it was brought up."

"Before Bella started touching Gunner and girls started lining up to claim us one by one, sure."

"She knows we love her. We say it all the time." I insist. "We would do anything for her. Kill for her. Die for her."

"Then fucking talk to her." Nick agrees.

Gunner doesn't say anything. He starts to get up. I sigh and stand. "I'll take care of it."

"It shouldn't take me going to fix your shit for you to do the right thing." Gunner growls. "She's yours in public, but in private, we all pull our weight and make changes to make each other comfortable. Which is why I told you about the shit with Miles."

I hold my hand up. "I already have Sophie, let's not start this."

"Maybe shit needs to be started." Holden shrugs. "Maybe we should talk before you go to Sophie."

I sit down, at my wit's end. They want me to stay, they want me to go. What the hell do they want. None of us are good at conversation. If we were, we wouldn't have been in the military where the language of violence is universal. We don't talk, we act. We share information when it's need to know.

It worked with Bella.

That thought stabs my brain until I run my fingers through my hair. Nick leans forward. "This isn't like with Bella and I think ... I think that needs to be said out loud."

"Yeah." Gunner agrees. "Because honestly, I'm fucking terrified."

Holden just sits there.

"I'm afraid she's going to leave like Bella did. I'm terrified she's going to realize someone her own age — one someone — is going to be better than we are. I'm so terrified, that I don't want her going out alone. She wouldn't do anything, but if I'm there, I can make sure no one else does."

Holden motions to Nick.

"I hate that Gunner and Roman get so much time with her. She seems way more involved with you two and sometimes I feel like she wouldn't notice if I left." Nick nods, wincing even as he says it.

Holden points at me. I sit back in my chair. "I don't want to let her in."

Nick nods and Gunner shrugs. He's the one that speaks up. "It's terrifying but fuck it pays off, man. Reading with her in the tub was one of the hottest and most intense moments of my life and that was without sex being necessary."

"So how do you do it?" I press. "How do you just ... say what you're thinking, feeling, what you want?"

"Make yourself. If a thought about her pops into your head, say it." Holden levels his eyes on me. "Something reminds you of her, get it. Talk to her. Say the shit you don't want to, the shit that feels fragile."

"You're talkative." Gunner snorts.

"She cried." Holden glares at him. "Sobbed in my arms, talked about getting a room of her own to wallow. She feels like shit and we told her this is more than sex. She's proved it over and over. It's our turn."

Gunner holds up his hands. "I'm not arguing."

"Bella's already pissed." Nick sighs. "Matthew told me we weren't holding to the deal. You have to do this Roman."

"And it's me she's pissed at." I agree. "Yelled at me in Italian."

Gunner laughs, just full out laughs. "I thought I heard her using Rosetta Stone. She's putting it to use."

I stand up and nod to the guys. "If anyone asks-"

"Period," Holden says.

Gunner and Nick nod. We dealt with that for a fun week. I don't think any of us have had to deal with it before, not really, but living with her showed us a different side. Her yelling at her uterus, crying while eating ice cream and watching sappy movies. Quick temper, faster apologies, lots of sleep.

"Simple." Gunner nods. "Take care of her."

I suck at apologies. That's all I can think as I walk to the Hotel. I suck at apologies. I'm worse with saying what I feel. I told her about my favorite spot in Italy. I talked to her, really talked to her, while we were there.

Just throw sex off the table – that's what I have to do. Remove it completely.

The gift shop is still open and I find some flowers and then something catches my eyes. It's a little cat doll with Hawaiian flowers blooming. Sophie loves green and blue, so I grab one that has those colors and buy it as well. I head towards the elevator and see her curled up in a chair there.

Of course. Because I was the asshole who told her she didn't need her card, then refused to give her mine. I sigh and walk over to her. She doesn't even look up from her phone. I sit down on the couch and she huffs.

"I'm taken. Fuck off."

"Prickly," I murmur.

She sets her phone down, then slowly looks up at me. Her voice is just as hollow. "What?"

"Let's go upstairs and talk."

"Oh, now isn't the time or place."

I wince at having my own words thrown at me. I take a slow breath. "Please, Sophia."

She nods and we get in the elevator. I hand her the flowers and she looks at them. Just looks. She holds onto them until we get in the room, then tosses them on the desk. She goes right out to the balcony and sits on the bench seat there.

I sit with her and take another slow breath. I can do this. She's worth it.

"You were right."

She rolls her eyes.

"I was being an ass. You don't need protecting from Bella or conversations." She doesn't say anything to that, so I continue. "It didn't matter to me. I thought we could take care of it and leave you happier and I was wrong. You've talked about being equals in the relationship and I need to work on it. I *will* work on it."

"Why is this so hard?"

"I could give you plenty of reasons I don't like ... sharing. But it's not fair to you because it's all based on other people. They used things to hurt me. Made fun of me. Break me. I could talk about the war. About growing up here barely knowing English. High school hell. But it doesn't matter because they're excuses."

She swallows.

"I'm going to do better because you are important to me and I don't want something I can fix to come between us."

"That's the problem." She looks at me. "It's not your job to protect or fix our relationship, Roman. It's *us*. We are partners. You and me. And the five of us in total. We have to be all in for this to work or the fights are going to get worse. You have to be able to talk to me and I ... I have to be able to accept when you can't."

I reach for her hand and stroke slowly. She takes my hand and leans against me. A huge weight comes off my chest. "Your Italian is good."

"For an eight-year-old." She grumbles.

"I love you, Sophia." I breathe. "It feels like nothing else matters but that."

"I love you too, but I want to know the men I love. Which means talking about all that shit you listed, all those excuses. Let me understand."

I kiss the top of her head and take a deep breath. "I didn't get bulky until the military."

"Really?"

"I was a scrawny nerd in high school. Numbers made sense. Languages made sense. Rules made sense and people didn't. I got made fun of. Shoved around. Mocked for my accent. I'd forget words. Stutter."

"Roman." She rubs my arm and kisses my shoulder.

"Girls would ask me out on dares then laugh when I thought they were serious. The military seemed like a good option, so I took it. Dove into it. Ate it up." I swallow. "Lost

myself for a while, in drugs, bloodlust, doing what I was told without questioning. Then I met Gunner."

"I still can't believe they let him in." She snorts.

I pull her chin up to look at me. "And he was willing to kick my ass for hurting you. He's kicked my ass before. He's my best friend, and he was ready to punch me tonight because you cried."

She touches my face. "You'd look sexy with a black eye."

"I don't want to overstep with the guys when it comes to things, but I will dig into every memory. Every boring fact about me, tell you story after story. Their personal stuff, even the stuff that came out before I came to get you ... that has to come from them."

"Okay." She agrees. "But you guys have to tell me. I can't read your minds. I wish I could sometimes, but this is better. What you choose to tell me is important."

I take a slow breath. "Sharing Bella was my idea."

That gets her attention. I clear my throat and shrug. "I liked her; thought she had a good head on her shoulders. I knew she could handle it. She and I got close, not storytelling close, not going to Italy close, but ... close. And then she got close to Matthew. It was like there was only room in her head, her heart, for one of us at a time."

Sophie listens as I talk about it. About how Bella's affection was separate from sex. How she would choose who she spent time with and how it shifted slowly. How it bothered us, drove us crazy. Steadily broke us apart until she ended things.

By the time I finish, she's on my lap. She shakes her head and rubs my chest. "It's not like that with us. It's not. I love you all, all the time. I miss you when you're at work. I miss Nick when he's so exhausted that he just passes out at home. I miss Gunner when he goes out to the launch parties and events. I miss Holden when he can't be around people. And I love each of you."

"It's taking some learning." I chuckle.

"And I want to help with that. I want to help you – all of you – to know I'm not looking for a way out. I'm not looking to pick one of you and get married. And that's not going to change." She searches my eyes.

I nod and give her the cat. She holds it in her hands, turning it over before smiling. She hugs me and sighs. I realize I'm shaking, but I don't care. Not right now. Not when things feel right and good again.

"I want to get the fuck out of Hawaii." She breathes. "And I called Bella a bitch."

I chuckle and kiss her. "Soon we can leave both behind."

Sophia

I FEEL BETTER AFTER TALKING TO ROMAN. I'M SURE WE'VE missed the rest of the party, but I'm not sure I care. Especially when we're cuddling on the patio while he tells me about a fun moment in the army with the guys before Holden lost his leg.

He's been talkative so whatever Holden did ... it helped a lot. I kiss Roman's neck.

"I like this."

"Yeah?" He asks, rubbing my back. "Even with the lack of orgasms."

"Orgasms aren't everything." I draw back and point at him. "They help, but I like this too."

"I like cooking with you." He smiles brightly. "Dancing in the kitchen, kissing you, making something together."

I kiss him, running my fingers through his hair. His tongue teases mine, but there's no urgency, only a slow-burning heat that threatens to drag me down. I draw back and rake my teeth over my bottom lip.

"Are we okay?" I ask. "I lost my temper too and I'm sorry. I got pretty bitchy."

"You made a point." He rubs down my hips. "But next time, you might get spanked."

"I hope we don't get to that point again." I tug at his shirt. "I'd really rather not ... word vomit all over you."

"Almost caused a scene." He sighs. "And I love your fire."

God, is it possible to not love him? I kiss him again. "I owe everyone an apology. We should go back, see if there's still dancing. I promised Nick."

"Let's." Roman agrees.

We head back to the main party. The games seem to be over and the guys are drinking and enjoying themselves. Gunner is dancing with my mom while Holden and my dad talk. I kiss Roman's cheek and sit next to Nick.

"Everything okay, sweetheart?" He asks, leaning towards me.

"It's getting there. Will you dance with me?"

"That breaks a rule."

"Friends dance." I shrug. "Just don't grab my ass."

He chuckles and leads me to the dance floor. I rest my head on his shoulder. "I love you. You know that right?"

"That is not a friend like conversation," He murmurs.

"But I want to say it. Want you to hear it." I pull back and look into his beautiful eyes. He's so gorgeous. I shake my head. "I worry that every woman wants a piece of you and will fight me to get it."

"Doesn't matter." He says evenly. "I won't give them what they want."

"Roman got some stuff off his chest. Holden talked to me. Anything we need to clear up?" I press.

He rubs my back. "You've had a hard enough night."

"I can handle it. Let's do it tonight so we can have sex tomorrow, okay?" I tease.

Nick smirks. "Well, with that logic ... You ... you want me around right? I'm not just an extra after Roman and Gunner."

"You're not an extra." I blink a few times. "Nick, love, you can't think that."

He shrugs.

"I like what we have. I love doing things with you, love being with you. I know it's been hard lately with how much work and all the shit with Sasha. I was serious about painting. I brought us a single canvas to work on together. If we get up early, we can do it before you have to get ready for the wedding tomorrow and-"

He rests his forehead on mine before quickly drawing back. I keep searching for what I can do. I don't want him to feel this way. Gunner and Roman are ... more obvious and they manhandle me and take charge, but that doesn't mean I love Nick any less. Or Holden.

"We need more time together." I decide.

"Sophie, you do have to sleep." He chuckles.

"I love you. I will make time." I insist. "What if we did painting classes together? Or we could do something completely different together. Something neither of us have done before."

"Like what?"

"I've always wanted to try karaoke. Or we could find a sculpting class. Dancing, like ballroom style – I won't make you get on a pole. Boudoir photo shoots." I start listing. "We could try more ... adventurous things like rock climbing."

"Let's try rock climbing." He nods.

Of course, he'd choose the one thing on that list that terrifies me. I nod. "But you better catch me when I fall."

"You're always safe with me." He promises.

"And I love you. I love how gentle you are. I love how warm and creative and smart you are. You're so good with people, so genuine. How could I possibly not want to be with you?"

"Sometimes I feel extra."

"And you know how much I like the extra guac. I won't even eat a burrito without it." I hug him, not caring who sees. "Without you, I'd be crazy, Nick."

"I'll get you up in the morning and we'll paint." He kisses the top of my head.

"I got the paint at a chain shop though. I don't know if it'll be any good." I murmur against his chest.

"Maybe I'll have to paint on you then." He chuckles. "Save the canvas from the misery."

He spins me and I see that glow in his eyes again. I pull myself back to him. "And maybe I'll start visiting for lunch again. We can spend some time together no matter how busy you are, no matter what our schedules are."

"I like good morning texts."

"Done." I nod.

He shakes his head. "I want to kiss you right now."

I kiss his neck quickly. "Fuck the rules."

"Beautiful words." He sighs, holding the back of my neck before hugging me tightly. I feel his lips brush my temple. "I love you so much, Sophie. How fun and carefree you are. I love how bright and sweet you are."

"Just wait until we get home. You're going to beg me to stop being so clingy."

"Impossible." He sighs.

We sit back down at the table and talk, just talk. All of us. Bella passes by with Matthew and does a double-take when she sees me. Her eyes narrow slightly and I wave at her. Joke's on that bitch. She tries to break us up and it only brings us closer.

Roman kisses me, then looks to Holden. "Do you remember when we almost traded you for donkeys?"

"What?" I squeal.

Holden groans. "This dummy knows six languages and Arabic isn't one of them. He thought he was trading the bottles of whiskey I had."

"Well, how did you stop it?!" I grab Holden's hand under the table.

"Me." Gunner drops into his chair with a smile. "Surprise!"

Nick nods. "I was spotting just in case of danger. Then Gunner walks out, all cocky, with a cigarette between his teeth."

"Hell yes. Looking like a badass."

"A sunburned idiot." Holden winks at me.

"And I take care of everything. They were pretty disappointed though." He nudges Holden. "Losing a stud like you."

We all laugh and I feel lighter. This feels right. I sigh and glance around before I lean forward on the table. "I love all of you. Even when I'm pissy. Even when I'm upset. I love you all. That doesn't change."

"Thanks, sweets." Gunner rubs the back of his neck "And you know there's no one else. It doesn't matter who flirts. It doesn't matter what they offer. I don't want it and I know the guys don't either."

They nod and Roman rubs my back as Holden squeezes my hand. I nod. "I wish we had a double king and could all sleep together."

"Look, I don't know what Roman's told you, but I don't cuddle." Gunner huffs. "Desert in winter doesn't count."

"That was an awkward morning." Roman nods.

"I have a picture." Nick winks at me.

"You said you burned it!" Gunner hisses.

Nick shrugs. "I lied."

We keep playing around until people start heading back to their rooms. Roman rubs down the back of my neck. "I think we should have a ... relaxed night."

"Ah, everyone in their own rooms?" Gunner asks.

"That's for the best." Holden clearly doesn't like it though.

"We have a pull-out bed. Wouldn't it be easier if we all slept in the same room?" I insist. "I mean you guys have to get up and be ready and Nick is going to show me the magic of painting landscapes." I push.

Roman tugs some of the baby hairs that curl on the nape of my neck and kisses the shell of my ear. "It's been a very long day, Bambina. I know as soon as your head hits the pillow you're going to be out."

"So?" I pout.

"Aww." Nick pouts back at me. "Behave ... until the reception."

"And watch your voices." Holden glances up. "People are walking by. We're almost done. One more day."

"One more fucking day." Gunner growls.

I glance at Roman and he shrugs. We've talked about it. Haven't I shown it? That I love him just as much as Roman. I love them all. For different reasons, in different ways, but I love them.

I lean to Holden and whisper in his ear. "Tell Gunner that he can drink as much as he wants tomorrow as long as he can get it up."

Holden chuckles. "I don't think it will sound as good coming from me."

I wave my hand to him anyway. He whispers in Gunner's ear and he spews whiskey out of his nose. He coughs and fans himself. "Damn it. Give me some warning."

I giggle and Roman laughs, full-on laughs. It breaks Nick. He sputters and shakes his head. He helps Gunner to the bar to get some napkins and clean him up. I rub Holden's knee. "I bet Nick could help design a kick-ass paint job for your prosthetic."

"That's a good idea." Holden rubs his jaw, then smiles at me. "Anything we need to talk about?"

"You and I are going to the next sponsors party. No more copping out and no more using your masculine wiles against me."

He rolls his eyes but nods. Roman shakes his head and tries to cover my ears. "Make demands, Hold. You remember how to do that. It's a trade."

"Hey!" I complain.

"You can only wear bunny pajamas for three days." Holden points at me.

"I don't have any."

"So if you did" He trails off.

"Ugh. Fine! Fine!"

We keep talking until I yawn. I look around, trying to find Gunner and Nick, but I only see Nick walking towards us. He looks confused. "I thought Gunner came back already."

"It's a small island he can't get too lost, can he?" Roman asks, still rubbing my shoulders. "You need to get some sleep, Bambina."

"Isn't 'no man left behind' a military thing?" There's a rock in my gut and I don't like it. I can feel it weighing me down, threatening to make me sick.

"It is, but Gunner's probably stumbled back to the hotel already."

"Please, Nick?" I ask. "Not forever, just look for ten minutes?"

"I will, sweetheart." He promises. "Hold, can you check the beach?"

"We'll look in the hotel." Roman agrees. "Matthew will have our asses if he's not there in the morning. No chances."

I swallow hard as we walk back to the hotel. I tug on Roman's coat and he takes it off, wrapping it around me like I could possibly be cold in Hawaii. "Roman, what if he's ... I mean, I know you said not to worry, but ..."

"She wouldn't do that to Matthew." Roman's so sure. "Bella can be petty, but she'd never hurt Matthew. She loves him. No jumping to conclusions, okay? We'll find him and if he's drunker than normal, he'll sleep on the pull-out."

I nod and pull Roman's coat around me. I cross my fingers, hoping that he's okay, that he's safe, that he's not with another woman.

Gunner

Jesus whiskey burns the nose. The water and napkins at the bar helped, but it was so gross it needed to be taken care of. I huffed all the whiskey out of my nose and downed two glasses of water from the sink to clear the burn from my throat.

At least I feel completely sober. And better about things with Sophie. Her coming back was win enough for me. I have a feeling sex is off the table for tonight though. Maybe I can manage a few kisses before the night is over.

But I'm not really bothered. Which is fucking weird. I love having sex with her. I love fingering her, making her come, all of it. But I want her happy more than anything. She deserves it considering she puts up with us assholes all the time.

I leave the bathroom, rubbing my nose, and run into Bella. She looks at me for a long moment. "Did you just do coke in the bathroom?"

"No. You know I don't do that."

"People do crazy things at weddings." She shrugs, chewing her bottom lip. "Can we talk?"

I glance around. We're in a secluded area, alone. I don't want to assume the worst. I mean, it's Bella. She's smart. She's not going to be as stupid as Nick thinks. But I don't want Sophie worried for even a second.

"About what?"

"I'm freaking out, Gunner." She hugs me. "What if Matthew and I break up? What if this is wrong? We've fought so much over the wedding and if we can't even get to the alter ... even if we just barely make it, what if it's wrong?"

I blink a few times. "Does it feel wrong, Bells?"

She looks up at me and presses her forehead to my chest. "Out of the guys, you got me the best. You knew how much fun life could be and wanted to live it up. And now I'm shacking up and doing the wife and marriage thing."

"Which is good. It's what you want." I remind her.

"I know. I know." She nods but looks up at me. "Gunner, I don't think I can do this. I don't know if I can walk down the aisle and promise him forever."

"Bella."

"Not when I might still have feelings for someone else."

I push her away gently. "Bella, go talk to your fiancé. Talk to Matthew. You guys work. Embrace it."

"Because things with that girl are so perfect?" She hisses.

That stops me in my tracks. Bella nods and closes the space between us again. "Just kiss me. Then tell me that she's the one for you. Tell me that you haven't thought about me at all. That you don't miss going to concerts together. That you don't miss our crazy weekends. Tell me that you haven't thought for just one second what it would be like to be in Matthew's place."

"I don't need to kiss you to know where I stand." I stay firm.

Her eyes water and I feel bad, but not bad enough. "Bella, you're under a lot of stress, okay. A fuck ton. A fucking mountain of it. But you know this is wrong. You love Matthew. Think about him."

"That's why I need this! I need to know we're not making a mistake. Because once I see his face, it's real. Tomorrow is real. A lifetime with him. And what if we end up like Miles and his ... whatever she is now? I can't handle that. I can't. I need to know now." She insists.

"I'm not kissing you."

"Please, Gun." She begs. "Please."

I shake my head. "I can't do that, Bella. Not to Matthew. Not to Sophie. And not to you."

She shoves me against the wall and tries to climb me, tries to plant her lips on mine. I grab her arms, trying to hold her away. A throat is cleared and Bella looks over, her eyes all watery. Nick crosses his arms over his chest.

"Fuck." I breathe.

"Nicky, please. Talk some sense into him." Oh, this can only get worse. "Tell him to kiss me. Tell him I need this."

"You don't." Nick hasn't sounded this serious and pissed since we were discharged. "Go to your future husband."

"But-"

"It wasn't a fucking question, Bella. Go." He growls.

She actually flinches, like he slapped her, but she slinks away, throwing a hopeful glance my way. I feel my pocket and I know there's another keycard there. I sigh and lean back against the wall.

"Nick, I told her no. I told her I couldn't. Even if I could, I wouldn't. Not to Matt. Not to Sophie."

"I know." He walks over to me.

"Then why are you pissed?"

"Because it could have been Sophie that found you." He hisses. "She's so worried about you she gave us fucking military lines."

I rub my fingers through my hair and shake my head. "I didn't do anything wrong, Nick. I told her no. I tried to be gentle and understanding. I literally pushed her off me!"

"I know."

"Then why do you look like you want to cut me in half!" I demand. "Why do I feel like you're accusing me of something?"

"Why would she think she could sway you?" Nick crosses his arms over his chest.

"We might have texted a little when she ended things before she and Matthew were official," I admit. "As soon as I knew that they were exclusive, I lost her number. Pussy or not, friends first."

Nick nods. "Fair."

"I'm not lying."

"I didn't say you were."

"She texted me a few times when they were having problems, asking for advice and I helped." I kick myself for saying it. "That was it. I never touched her. I never sexted her. No pictures. I'll give you my phone. Nothing sexual or relationship-y, nothing since they were official and nothing at all since Sophie."

"Gunner." He pats my shoulder. "I know. I hate this situation."

"Where's Sophie?" I ask. "I have to tell her what happened. We just had this big thing-"

"I agree. Lose the room key first."

We walk back to the hotel together and I'm glad he's there when I see Bella sitting out front waiting like she would have better luck closer to the hotel. She looks between us, then away. I recognize shame when I see it, but there's fury there too.

Nick curses, then steps aside to call Holden off from the beach and Bella approaches. "Explain it to me."

"There's nothing to explain." I insist. "You are getting married, Bella."

"I don't have to, though. We can run and-"

"And I'm happy in my relationship."

"Please." She snorts. "You're too jealous to be happy with how things are. You could have me. All to yourself."

"I mean this ... in the *nicest* possible way, but you're not worth the damage it would cause," I say calmly. She steps back and narrows her eyes at me. I shrug. "Even if I was single, it would be a no. Matthew might as well be my brother. I can't and won't do that to him. You're lucky I don't tell him about this shit."

"You wouldn't."

"If you're not at the aisle, walking down, or talking to him tonight, I just might. This is shady shit, Bella and you know better." I point at her.

She jerks me towards her, shocking me as her lips press to mine. I jerk back and shove her. "What the fuck."

"Roman would have been better than you. Or Nick. I wanted *one* thing and you couldn't even handle that." She walks inside, flipping her hair.

Nick stares at me and I nearly lose my footing. What the fuck. What the *fuck*.

"You need to get up. Now." Nick's not looking at me though.

"Roman's not going to be able to handle this alone."

"Handle what?"

I follow Nick's eyes and see Sophie making a b-line for Bella. Which means she saw the kiss that was just forced on me. The one I didn't ask for. The one I didn't want. And Roman's struggling to catch her.

"Shit." I jump over the landscaping and we get inside.

Nick catches Sophie and I get the elevator. The three of us manage to get her in there as curses pour from her throat. I've never seen her so pissed. Granted, she's never had a reason, but this is a fire I didn't think she fucking had.

"That bitch doesn't deserve a fucking white wedding." Sophie snarls.

"Easy." Nick holds her.

Roman pushes his hair back and shakes his head. "Explain."

"Not here." I insist.

Once we're in Roman and Sophie's room, with the door locked, just in case she tries again. I sit down on the bed. "Bella has cold feet. Nick was right. She wanted me to prove she made the right choice by kissing her. I refused."

Sophie watches me. There's an edge to her eyes that I don't exactly appreciate, but before she can ask, Nick speaks up. "I heard him tell her no repeatedly. I saw him push her off twice. He was telling her no again in front of the hotel. She jumped him."

"Oh, I'm going to jump her." Sophie snarls. "That's fucking assault and I don't require a trial."

I snare her waist and pull her against me. She cups my face in her hands and rubs my cheeks. "Are you okay?"

"I shouldn't have been nice." I shrug.

"I'm going to rip her lips off. You shouldn't have to deal with that." She insists. "Oh, Matthew. He's going to be so upset."

Nick goes into fix-it mode and Roman excuses himself, saying he needs to make sure Holden's okay. I rub her back. "She said she should have chosen Roman or Nick to run away with. That she only wanted one thing and ..."

"And you are too good of a man to sink to her level." Sophie hugs me. "You wouldn't give her the out so she took it."

My brain is a fucked up mess. I don't know how to process this shit. I should have had more to drink. Then shit would make sense. It's not like this is devising a covert attack. It should be simple. But Bella knows how to cut deep and I feel it.

"Lay down with me, Gunner."

"Are you angry with me?"

"No." She pushes my jacket off my shoulders and then goes for my belt, tugging it off. "I'm mad at her. She pushed all this shit just to try and manipulate you, hurt you, use you."

"Am I that weak?"

Sophie shakes her head and lays down with me, pulling my head on her chest. "No, Gunner. She confused it. Because you're fun and daring and wild, she thought you'd take whatever you were offered."

I nod and rub her arm. Sophie runs her fingers through my hair, stroking down my neck as we both calm down. I squeeze her gently. "You know I love you, right?"

"I know." She promises. "And I love you. This is not your fault. There is something wrong with Bella that she hasn't addressed. That's on her, not you."

I nod. Sophie keeps stroking my hair even as Holden and Roman come in. Nick follows a few minutes later. "I got Matthew and Bella to talk. They're diving into everything. Long night ahead."

"Gun?" Holden asks.

I nod and look at the guys. We left war years ago, but here they are, still ready to protect like brothers, fight, and take no shit. Nick still has his bite. Roman's got defense, Holden can diffuse just about anything.

And there's Sophie. Softening every blow, adding to our confidence, keeping us together. I look up at her, ready to kiss her, to fix my night, but her eyes are closed and she's half asleep. I kiss her neck anyway.

Sophia

I WAKE UP TOO HOT TO DEAL. NICK IS ON ONE SIDE OF ME AND Gunner is wrapped around me, using me like a teddy bear. Roman and Holden are on the pull-out, and I can only tell thanks to a strategically and very questionably placed mirror.

Smiling softly, I stroke over Gunner's neck. He stretches, then rolls away from me. Nick rubs my hips and I see that he's awake. I roll towards him and kiss the inside of his shoulder. "Hi."

"Hey there." He rubs down my back. "Long night."

"You should be asleep," I whisper.

"So should you."

"I was too hot." I tug at Roman's jacket, still around my shoulders.

Nick helps get me free and welcomes me as his little spoon. I sigh and rub his arm around me. "Thank you."

"For what, sweetheart?"

"Getting Gunner," I answer. "Grabbing me before I ripped Bella's hair out. Being sane."

He chuckles softly and kisses my throat. I roll and rub his chest. Nick strokes over my bare back, rubbing down to where the dress covers me. "What are you thinking, Soph?"

"I'm lucky to have you." I look up at him. "I really am, Nick. If you hadn't been here, this wouldn't be half as fun and

we may have been kicked out of the hotel and the wedding and the state."

He kisses my forehead, then sighs. "I've never seen you so angry."

"If she'd kissed you, I'd be just as pissed. And what she said. Fuck, I want to kick both her shins and steal her veil. To attack any of you, to talk like that about any of you when you're all so giving and ... and decent and good."

Another gentle kiss to the top of my head. I sigh and rub his big arms. "We're wearing too many clothes."

Nick tips my chin up and kisses me softly, then deeper. I work on his buttons and relax further when I feel the sparse hair on his chest, his warm skin, familiar body. He takes off his shirt entirely and I stroke over the tattoo they all share, right on their bicep. I kiss the tattoo, then across his collar bone.

"No sex tonight, sweetheart." He whispers.

"I know. We should get some sleep before painting in the morning."

"You still want to do that?"

"Of course." I nod, then stretch to kiss him again. "How often do I get you away from a computer, all to myself?"

He grins and rolls me over. I wiggle my ass against him and he pants. "Sophie, behave."

"Going to use that stern voice on me again?" I tease.

"Not if you keep that up." He rubs my thigh and knots his fingers in the fabric of my dress. "Painting in a few hours."

"Okay." I give in to my heavy eyes. "Soon."

"Soon." Nick agrees.

The morning comes way too early. I groan as Nick shifts behind me. I feel him hard against my ass and don't want to lose it. I want to paint with him, but I also want him. And I want him badly.

"Shower with me?" I ask.

"You and your temptation." But that boyish smile tells me yes.

Nick's hands glide over me with the hot water, spreading soap over my body. I arch into his touch like a cat being petted. Hell, I'd purr if I could. Even the most innocent of touches feels naughty, intimate, amazing.

I rub soap over his chest and down to his navel. Nick groans and pulls me against him, his slippery fingers on my ass. He devours my mouth, claiming me like only my men can. I wrap around him, needing to feel as much of him against me as possible. His cock hardens against my belly, a fucking tease because it would feel so much better between my legs.

"Please, Nick. Fuck me." I pant.

"Not going to take me like normal?" He asks.

I drop to my knees at the challenge and lick from his balls to the tip of his cock. Nick groans and nods. I spread my lips around the head, sucking and licking hungrily. I'm running on limited sleep, a whole lot of frustration, and zero patience.

Nick groans as I take him deeper, feeling him slide over my tongue and touch the back of my throat. I gag and pop off, ready to go again, but he pulls me up and spins me so my hands are on the cool tile of the wall.

"How am I supposed to resist that?" He groans in my ear.

"You're not." I pant, rubbing my ass against him.

He gives in, thrusting deep inside me. I rock forward on my toes, then come back as he pushes into me again. I groan and look over my shoulder. Watching his face as he fucks me, water stroking over our skin, rolling over the muscled planes of his chest and abdomen.

"Fuck, Nick." I groan as he hits that deep pleasure point inside me.

His eyes meet mine and burn through me. He reaches around and rubs my clit as he rolls his hips, grinding against

me. My eyes flutter shut and roll back as a smile teases my lips. He feels so good. His chest rubbing my back, his cock filling my pussy over and over again as his fingers stroke over my clit.

Then he changes the norm. He spreads his two fingers, rubbing right next to my clit, on either side. My lips part and a low moan comes up from my chest, echoing in the bathroom. My legs shake and threaten to give out as he does it again.

"Nick!" I whimper.

"I have you, love." He promises, wrapping his other arm just under my breasts.

Every brush of his body on mine, every thrust of his hips, every half there touch spreads a wildfire that sizzles all the way across my nerves. Jesus, he feels good. So fucking good. My head falls back, resting on his shoulder and he kisses across my neck, sucking and licking until I can't think of anything but him.

"I love you." I chant with every thrust of his body. "I fucking love you."

His husky groan brushes my ear and I fall over the edge, stars dancing in front of my closed eyes as I struggle to avoid slipping. Nick jerks out of me at the last second and comes on my ass. He kisses the nape of my neck, and then I feel the gentlest pressure of his teeth against my skin.

A shiver slithers down my spine and I bite my lip to try and hide my moan. Nick spins me so quickly, I lose my footing and we both go down. He catches me, but groans, and not the sexy kind that we just had on replay.

"Did I hurt you? I'm so sorry. Nick!" I brush my fingers over his head, trying to find the pain.

"Your elbow, Soph."

I can already see the red mark on his side. I gasp and get off him, nearly slipping again. "Nick! Oh fuck. Fuck."

He chuckles and slowly pulls himself up. "It's alright. It happens with shower sex."

"You have to stand all day today. What if I bruised a rib! What if something's broken?" I turn off the water and wave my hands around the deepening mark on his side. I shake my head and take a step back, so afraid of making it worse.

"We're okay." He promises. "It's a bruise. I've had worse. The recoil from a sniper rifle is worse."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, but let's delay painting. Come play nurse instead."

I nod, get dressed, and run to get ice. By the time Roman and the other guys wake up, Nick has a bruise bigger than my elbow. I keep worrying over him, but they all tell me that they've had worse.

Gunner finally smacks his knee. "Let's go see if we have a wedding to get to."

Holden decides to take care of that while Roman tries to pry me from Nick's side. "Twenty minutes of ice, Bambina. No more."

When Holden gives the thumbs up, I get four kisses, and then I'm alone. I grab my dress and text my mom to join me. She has a few spritzers while enjoying the view from our room. I get plenty of sass when it comes to the hot tub on the balcony and the unmade pullout bed.

"It was just easier." I insist. "They all needed to get up and rushing up and down the hall didn't make any sense."

"Sure." She winks.

"You're in a better mood," I grumble while drinking water.

"Well, your dad's made a good effort to show me and tell me where he stands. It's a good thing." She pokes my nose. "But no more details for you. We're going to have to sit through a hellish wedding."

I don't even want to go to the ceremony. But I'll go for the guys. Once it's time, we go to the chairs and arch and help set up on the beach. My joy comes from the ominous clouds rolling in. I don't *want* to hope for the wedding to be rained out, but I can't stop being pissed at Bella.

Unfortunately, there's no rain when Matthew walks down the aisle and he does look handsome. Crazy handsome. It's almost weird that I think of him as an uncle despite my relationship with four of the groomsmen. Roman winks at me from his place until my dad elbows him.

When Bella comes down in a white mermaid dress, something hits me. Not about Bella, about Matthew. His smile, the love shining in his eyes despite everything last night. The way he covers his mouth because his smile is just too much.

Dad was right. I want this. I want that. And I want a baby. I want to travel. I want so many things in life. When I look at my guys, all I see is hope for that future. Roman doesn't look once at Bella, his eyes are on me. Dark, hungry, but there's something else there too.

I swallow and look at Nick. He rubs his side and gives me a subtle thumbs up. I bet he'd be an amazing dad. All four of them would be. Gunner refuses to look at Bella and just stares off while Holden sighs. Gunner will always keep things interesting. He gets bored easily. We can travel often, just by throwing darts at a map. And Holden, amazing, sweet, sure Holden ... I sigh and feel a smile tug at my lips.

My mom elbows me. "Are you smiling for that cow?"

"Not her," I murmur.

I basically ignore the vows until the I dos are said. The happy couple races down the aisle and then I realize I have to wait for any of my dates to join me until after pictures. I groan as we file into the reception hall.

My mother eyes the drinks, but I point at her. "No drinking until the guys get here. We agreed."

"I know." She rolls her eyes. "I know." She groans. "But why? All we can do is wait around and ignore all these strangers."

"You're the one telling me to make friends."

"You're the one in her twenties." She grumbles.

I roll my eyes and shake my head. Way too many minutes later, arms wrap around me. "Baciami Bambina."

I turn and kiss Roman, knowing those words easily. He sighs and nuzzles my neck before looking at my mother. She gives an evil smile. "Which one of you are going to make my daughter an honest woman?"

I feel my cheeks heat. "Mom."

"We'll burn that bridge when we get to it." Gunner grumbles. "I need a drink."

"Funny, so do I. Maybe you can keep me company until my date gets here."

"Mom!"

"Oh come on. You have four. You can spare one ... temporarily."

Gunner winks at me and I relax into Roman's arms. She can say what she wants. I'm leaving with all of them.

Holden

SOPHIE IS BEAUTIFUL. THE BLACK DRESS CLINGS TO HER BODY with a sexy teasing cut out on one side and a whole shoulder bare. I devour the view. Her eyes flick to me and she bites her thumb, looking me over with the same hunger that's growing in my stomach.

We're almost there. We just have this reception and the game ends. Nick nudges me. "Steal her."

"What?" I shake my head. "We have to wait."

"Does it look like Bella or Matthew give a shit?" He motions to them having their first dance.

I swallow and meet his eyes. "You heard her mother."

"Who didn't." Nick takes a drink of champagne. "We knew it was a possibility."

"Bets on who it will be?" I ask casually.

"Considering you and I aren't big on marriage; I doubt we'll be the formal one."

"It would change things." I insist. "It's worth a conversation."

"I'm actually going to side with Gunner on this one. We'll cross that bridge when we get there."

It worries me until Sophie pulls from Roman and takes my hand. She gives Nick a wink. "You still owe me painting time."

"As soon as I get a new rib."

"I'm so sorry." She breathes. "I am, Nick. No more shower fun."

"Let's save it for our bathroom." He counters.

I arch an eyebrow. He already had her today? Bastard. No wonder he's so blasé about me stealing her. But Sophie tugs on my hand. We wind around the crowd to the bar. I stroke her bare back. I love when she shows it off and based on this look, she doesn't have a bra on either.

She shivers as I tease her lower back. "You're killing me."

"The feeling is mutual," I whisper in her ear, running my nose over her throat.

Sophie turns, her lips so close to mine I swear, I can taste the alcohol on her tongue. Her big eyes, begging me for more as she nibbles her bottom lip. How the hell am I supposed to control myself with that look.

"Holden ..."

"Your drinks." The bartender says.

Sophie tips without thinking and I arch an eyebrow. She shrugs. "Considering there's no rent and I somehow always get skipped for bills."

We take a few drinks, but no burn of alcohol can distract from her. Not with those dark red lips, the curls of her hair nearly cupping her breast. She shivers and I see her nipples push against the fabric.

"Don't eye fuck me." She half-moans.

"No?"

She shakes her head and sets her drink down, tugging on my hand. "Fuck me for real."

I groan, actually groan. "Sophia."

She pulls me close. "Then at least dance with me. I need you close, Holden. Or one of these cougars might try to catch you in their claws."

I pull her under the stairs and cup her face, stealing a kiss that drags soft sounds from her throat. She tugs on my jacket pushes every plush curve of her body against me that she can and devours me like it's the first and last time she'll have the chance.

When I finally draw back, I'm panting, hard, and aching for her. Sophie rocks towards me then rests her forehead against my chest. "I don't have the patience. I don't. Please, don't make me wait hours, Holden."

I tangle my fingers in her hair and tug her up to kiss her again, pinning her against the wall and grabbing her ass. I don't care who sees. I don't care what they think. Sophie begging for my attention, begging for my touch is just too fucking much to bear. That needy, hopeful look in her eyes, the way she clings to me, nibbling my bottom lip every time I come close to pulling away.

"We need all the groomsmen to the table." Someone announces.

She surrenders me slowly, taking one step back at a time until she gets to the bar to reclaim her drink. But I still feel her fingers pulling on my nice shirt, feel the tingle of her lips on mine, and the uncomfortable hardness of my cock.

Roman smirks at me. "I give you an hour, Hold."

"If that." Gunner winks. "I hear the closets here are extra roomy."

It's an uphill battle and I know it. Since the moment I've met her, I haven't been able to deny her a damn thing. I don't know what kind of spell she has, but it happened before she ever opened her mouth.

And then she did, all sweet and honest, vulnerable and bright. Goddamn, how can any living straight man possibly overlook her? We give our speeches, even Gunner gets one in. We're released to the dance floor and the guys are snapped up immediately. Except me. I rub the back of my neck as my good leg bounces.

There are so many people all crammed into this room. Sophie walks up to me offers me her hand. "Come on."

"There's a lot of people."

"I promise you won't be thinking about them."

I just got my dick under control and now she's here with an offer that's impossible to ignore. I take her hand and join her on the dance floor. She holds onto my shoulders and I rub the small of her back, the soft skin there, begging for more than a light touch.

"I hate sharing you with the whole room." She murmurs. "You all look so handsome and I love seeing you guys smile like you are."

I sigh and kiss her temple. "I'd rather be wearing nothing upstairs with you."

"You mean you *don't* want an audience. That's crazy." She giggles at my face. "Holden, I'm kidding."

"I'm going to make you eat those words later."

"Hopefully while shoving something else down my throat." She grumbles.

I chuckle. "You act like you haven't been satisfied in weeks."

"Every day here has felt like a week. Especially yesterday. We all fought and now we need to make up." She wraps the tie around her wrist as if seeing if it would work. "One-on-one and as a group."

"Teasing me with a good time?"

"It's only teasing if I don't follow through." She licks her bottom lip.

Maybe crowds can be good for something. There's no way we'll be missed. Not if we're fast. And even though fast feels like a sin with Sophie, I can't stand it. I've nearly kissed her twice while dancing, nearly grabbed her ass multiple times. I've already seen people whispering.

If the age difference isn't enough, she's been on Roman's arm all weekend. We manage to sneak away to a coat closet and as soon as the door is shut, my lips crash down on hers. I palm her ass and work on dragging her underwear down.

She shouldn't have bothered to wear any at all. Sophie works on my belt while kissing me hungrily. I groan and pick her up once my pants are undone and my boxers are pulled down. Licking up her neck, I slowly lower her onto my cock.

Sophie's lips part and her head falls back, eyes closing. She's so fucking sexy. The needy moan that spills from her throat is as gorgeous as she is. I kiss her jaw as I thrust all the way inside her.

She tightens her hold around my neck and opens her eyes. She watches me as I fuck her, feeling closer to heaven than I've ever been. I'll take her over world peace. Her pussy tightens around my cock as I bounce her up and down on me.

"Fuck, Hold."

"You feel so good." I groan against her neck. "Amazing. Perfect."

She presses her lips together, trying to soften the noise we're making. I ruin her hair with my hands as I devour her mouth. I don't give a shit if I'm the one that's waiting for her down the aisle to claim her legally. I know I'll be up there. I know I'll give her a ring. I'll give her every bit of myself, right now, tomorrow, every day for as long as she wants me.

She digs her nails into my shoulders and her legs tighten around me. "Fuck! Fuck!"

"Already?"

She nods. "Sneaking around is so hot."

I groan and fuck her harder, deeper. If this is the only stolen moment we get tonight, I'm making the most of it. She buries her face in my throat, the sweet peach and floral scent of her hair washing over me as she bites me.

Her pussy tightens around me and she rolls her hips against mine as she comes. I can't stop it. I can't hold out for

even one more second. I finish deep inside her, grunting and gritting my teeth.

My legs shake and I pant as the heat of the closet weighs around us. Sophie sighs. "Oh, Holden. I love you so much."

"Because I fuck you in closets?"

"Because it never feels like a quicky. Because you're wonderful. Because you're you." She lists, slowly dropping to the floor as I slide out of her.

I pick up her underwear and stuff them in my pants pocket. "You don't need these."

She shakes her head and does up my pants, sliding the belt back in place. I catch her before she can open the door and pull her back to my chest, kissing her temple. "I love you, Sophia."

She grins, reaches for the door and it opens, revealing Roman. He grins and invites himself in. "Looks like I missed some fun."

I chuckle and Sophie laughs. "Is it that obvious?"

"Someone whispered in my ear that some asshole groomsman was stealing my girlfriend. Imagine my surprise."

I blink a few times and he grins. "I mean, I wasn't even invited."

"Well clearly, we have to fight now." Sophie rolls her eyes and wraps an arm around my neck. "Because this is love, Roman. I can't fight it."

He jerks her against him. "I'm not asking you to."

I pat his shoulder and he leans over to me. "Diana would like a dance with you. She requested you specifically."

"Of course she did." I roll my eyes.

"And you." Roman turns on Sophie. "You're not even close to done."

"Roman, we can't be that brand of kinky in a closet."

"Watch me."

I shut the door and shake my head. I smooth out my shirt and tie, then go find Diana. She shakes her head at me. "At least someone's getting lucky at this wedding."

I lead her to the dance floor and get her laughing in no time with my two left feet. She teaches me the step to a dance that literally says what to do in the song, but I swear I can't keep up. Gunner jumps in next to me and helps guide me.

Diana looks between us as we go to the bar. "I don't know how you guys make it work."

Gunner shrugs. "It's easy more often than not."

"I just mean ... the long term. Like the question I asked. Sophie's always wanted a wedding, babies, to be the soccer mom, the proud mom of an honor roll student."

"We have plenty of time for that," I assure her.

She looks between us over her glass. "But how do you decide who gets what? I mean ... who gets to marry her and go by husband? Who's going to be a dad? That's a lot of choices and no offense, you guys aren't getting any younger."

"I don't want kids." I shrug. "I'll be the fun uncle."

"Hey. Fun uncle is absolutely taken." Gunner argues. "You can be the smart one that helps with homework and manners and shit."

I roll my eyes, but honestly, it doesn't sound half bad. Being an uncle to a little one. Getting Sophie forever. Getting to live life with my best friends in the same house ... isn't that the dream?

Diana looks between us and shrugs. "Good luck."

Sophia

ROMAN FUCKS ME IMPOSSIBLY HARD. WAY TOO HARD TO actually be real in a closet. He holds my throat in his hand, holding me against the wall as he buries himself inside me. He holds my thigh in his other hand, hiked over his hip as he thrusts hard and deep.

"Jesus fucking-" I grind out.

He smacks my thigh. "You're coming. You're coming soon."

I nod, hopeless. Because I absolutely am. There's no argument. He tightens his hold on my throat and I groan, arching my back. Roman leans over to whisper in my ear. "After the reception, we're all fucking you. And since your dad is next door, we're going to have to keep your mouth busy."

Another moan drags from my throat.

"Because I know how loud you get when you're enjoying it, Bambina." He pants. "And you are going to be way too loud."

I nod again.

"Over and over, Sophia. Taking us until you're exhausted. Until you tap out."

"Oh, god." I feel heat and pleasure spreading across my body until it drags me down. "Fuck!"

"Such a dirty mouth." He kisses me hungrily as I come.

And I come hard, shaking as my body tenses. Roman groans and holds me. After a moment or two, he drops me to my knees, offering his cock. "Finish me."

I lick across my lips, too eager, too happy to give him sass. I lick across his cock, tasting myself and his saltiness. I suck him deep and watch his eyes sharpen as he guides the back of my head. He thrusts into my mouth, gliding across my tongue so perfectly.

If giving blowjobs hadn't turned me on before, being with these men would do it. The way they react, how they don't hide a damn thing and hold my gaze while I take them over and over.

I nearly gag, my throat tightening around Roman and he groans, thrusting a little bit deeper as he comes. His jaw tightens as his eyes close. He lets out a slow breath and slowly pulls out of my mouth as I lick.

His whole body twitches as I lick and suck again. He glances at the door and quickly puts himself away. He pulls me up off my knees and fixes my dress. I tug his tie towards me and bite my lip as I watch his face.

"No rush, handsome."

He chuckles and kisses me, kisses me with plenty of promise and hunger that I don't have any doubt we're going to go again. He presses his forehead to mine. "You're a wild woman."

"Only with you guys," I admit. "I've never done anything close to this."

He cups my face between his hands, studying my face like he's sure he can catch me in a lie. Roman takes a slow breath and shakes his head. I expect something to come out of his mouth, but he kisses me again. This is soft, gentle.

He takes my hand and leads me out of the coat closet before fixing my hair. He kisses me softly, then whispers in my ear. "I'll have to beat your ass later."

"For what?" I arch an eyebrow.

"Going into a closet with another guy ... without me." He says it just loud enough that a few people look over.

I feel my face get hot and shake my head. "Roman."

"You know the rule." He kisses my temple. "Don't forget about Gunner."

I see him with my mom and sigh. "Can you help with that?"

"You want another woman's hands on me?"

I elbow him hard. "Shut it."

Roman squeezes my ass and goes to my mother, asking her to dance, despite my dad being right there. She giggles and eagerly goes with him. She grabs his hips and I shake my head. Torture. My mother hitting on my boyfriends is absolute torture.

I wrap Gunner's arms around me when I get there like he can shield me from that embarrassment. Gunner gives me a drink of his whiskey and I lean back against him. "Remember our deal."

"Impossible to forget." He promises.

My dad shakes his head. "I don't want to know."

"You win that." Gunner chuckles.

"So, what are you doing with Mom?" I ask, despite the fact that Gunner is kissing my throat. "I mean, after our talk?"

"Doing what I should have done years ago." He shows the ring. "Fixing this. I never stopped loving her, not for a damn day, and seeing her having fun, seeing her at her best, living with her ... I never should have let her go."

"Aww, Daddy." I put my hand over my heart. "That's so sweet."

"I'm planning on it soon, so ... be ready."

"For another wedding? Are you going to make us pretend too?" Gunner groans. "If so, I'm calling dibs on your daughter."

"Okay. Listen, if we can't keep our voices down, we're not allowed to say things." I huff. "First Roman and now you?"

"I'm not pretending to not be in love with you for another wedding. Fuck no. I will fight over that shit."

"No one has to pretend," Dad promises. "You all are together and ... as long as you don't care what people say or think, that's your business. Not like it's very well hidden at this reception. Even I've heard the things being whispered."

"Fuck them." Gunner huffs. "We behaved for long enough."

"And Bella didn't," I grumble.

Gunner kisses my cheek and rubs my arms, as if I'm the one who needs comforting. My dad arches an eyebrow but looks past us and groans. "I need to go get Diana before she ends up grinding on Roman."

"What?" I turn sharply, but Gunner keeps me against his chest. I blink a few times and rub his arms. "Are you okay? After last night and everything?"

"Not great, but I'm okay."

"Have you had enough dancing and fun?" I pull him closer.

He looks around and sighs. "Well, there was this one woman I had my eyes on, but ..."

I swat him and he chuckles. "It's you, sweets. Always you. I like watching you dance. Seeing you make eyes at me and the guys like we're the only ones in the room."

"Well, I feel as if you are."

"Even though people your age are eye-fucking you?"

"How do you deal with that?" I ask seriously. "You're not jealous?"

"Hell no." He pulls me closer. "Knowing that I have such a hot girlfriend that people can't look away? Knowing that they only get to eye fuck you, but I get to fuck you and make love

to you ... and be sweet with you, wake up with you, make you laugh ... I'm getting the best end of the deal."

I swoon for him all over again. "Take me to your room."

He blinks a few times. "What?"

"Now." I tug on his shirt. "So I can show you how much I enjoy my part in this."

Gunner nods and we manage to run off together. We make it to the elevator before he kisses me. And I love it. The way he's soft and hot all at once. He runs his fingers through my hair. "I want to try something."

"What kind of something? Gunner, we talked about limits before, I'm not-"

"Being gentle." He whispers. I can see how nervous he is about it as if I won't enjoy it. "I haven't had vanilla sex in so long, completely vanilla ... like movie worthy."

The butterflies in my stomach fly like a swarm. God, that sounds so amazing. I meet his gaze and nod. He strokes along my jaw, slowly lifting my chin to kiss me. No tongue, just sucking my bottom lip between his as he strokes down my back with his fingertips.

He tries a few different kissing styles as we get up to our floor. Slow and soft with his tongue, changing the angle, letting me have control, and all of it goes right to my heart. I take his hand when the elevator opens and almost run to his room.

"Someone's eager." He teases.

"So eager." I agree. "Put that key in the door."

He lets me in and pulls me close. Every soft touch burns through me. His patience makes mine evaporate and I just can't deal with not having him inside me *right now*. Still, he refuses to move faster. I've never been undressed so slowly. Never felt so cherished as he guides me back to the bed and strokes over my body with his hands, then his mouth.

I moan as he kisses my instep and along my ankle, up my calf, the inside of my thigh. I pant and stroke his hair.

"Gunner. Please."

"I want to worship you, sweets. I never want you to think I'm not completely and totally in love with you." He kisses higher. "That you are the only woman that could tempt me."

I nod. "I believe you."

He strokes up the outside of my thighs and pulls them over his shoulders as he licks across my clit. The build-up has been so intense that it only takes a few flicks of his tongue, a few sucks, and teases for me to come. My back arches and I clutch the sheets to keep grounded.

Gunner kisses up my body, along my side where I'm so sensitive and ticklish, along the underside of my breast which is apparently as sensitive as my nipples, and then between my breasts and along my neck.

"I love you, Sophie." He whispers in my ear. "So much it terrifies me."

"Gunner." I hold his face in front of mine. "I love you. I promise, I'm not leaving you."

He nods, but I feel a shiver run along his body. I stretch to kiss him again, slow, easy. I swallow. "I *love* you."

He swallows and nods again as I roll us over. I slide down on his cock and he groans, watching our bodies meet as I circle my hips on him. One of his hands holds the small of my back and the other strokes over my thigh.

God, he's so deep at this angle, it drives me insane. We move together, slow and intense. His eyes stay on me and he kisses me every chance he gets while thrusting up and into me. I tangle my fingers in his hair and feast on him.

Gunner rolls us, so I'm on my side. He teases my nipple while holding my cheek in his other hand. I can feel every panting breath across my face as he thrusts harder and faster, pushing me closer and closer to the edge.

"Gunner ... oh, just like that," I gasp.

He nods and presses his forehead to mine. We watch each other as his hands tighten on me. I'm going to go insane. I've

never felt so ... seen, so appreciated, so vulnerable. I bury my face in his shoulder as I come, biting him to try to be somewhat quiet, but I drag him with me.

And Gunner is absolutely *not* quiet as my name tears from his throat in a hoarse voice I almost don't recognize. We linger there, his fingers tight in my hair, his heartbeat echoing through me with each beat, his cock still inside me, throbbing sending waves of pleasure through my body again and again.

I rub his back and kiss the bitemark on his shoulder. "I love you so much, Gun. For everything about you."

He takes an unsteady breath and kisses my forehead. "You have no idea what you do to me, sweets. I wish you could feel it."

"I feel quite a bit." I assure him with another slow kiss.

He nods and keeps rubbing me until his phone goes off. He groans and rolls slowly. After a glance he answers the phone. "I have her. Don't panic."

I roll my eyes.

"We're in my room, Roman. Relax." He snorts. "Sophie is being well taken care of."

"I am!" I promise, then rub Gunner's chest. "I'm perfectly happy."

Nick

"I told you she was fine." I roll my eyes at Roman.

"It's not her I'm worried about." My eyes flick to Bella who doesn't look happy at all. "The rumors, I'm betting."

At least six people have mentioned seeing Sophie come out of the closet with Holden and now she's gone and run off with Gunner. Roman shrugs. "As long as she is safe, that's what matters."

Miles comes over with Holden. "So, tomorrow I'm proposing to Diana again."

I nod. "Good for you. You both deserve to be happy."

He grins. "I want you all and Sophia to be there. It will mean so much more to her and I know she's been ... a lot, but I hope you can overlook that."

"If she's still willing to have you." Roman teases. "She had her hands in quite a few places."

"She's wild." Miles agrees, watching her dance with abandon on the dance floor. "It's part of her charm. She brings out the best in me, even when we fight."

"I hear fighting is healthy." I nod. "In relationships, as long as it comes to a resolution. It's better than keeping things in, anyway."

"It is. Communication is how love is kept alive." He sighs. "And I neglected it for too long. I'm not going to waste the

opportunity given to me, especially considering I nearly lost out on her."

"That may be the sweetest thing you've ever said." I chuckle

But Roman nods like he completely understands. His eyes go to me and I get it too. I can't give up on Sophie. There's no way I would waste an opportunity with her. If she asked me to take a day off work to go paint, to talk, to spend together, I'd take it immediately.

Holden rubs his arm, but I see the same understanding there.

We all love Sophie. And not in the puppy dog way. We've been through enough of that. Enough of infatuation, enough of the confusing maybes to know the real thing when we have it. And somehow we all found it in the same girl.

Miles pats us and goes to steal back his woman. Roman rubs his chin. "I'm going to be busy in the morning. I need to get something."

"Okay." I shrug. "Everything good?"

"Yeah. Just ... a lot on my mind." He admits. "And I think it'll help to do something about it."

Holden and I exchange a look, but we shrug it off. If last night proved anything to me, it's being careful with what I assume. I assumed, badly, that Gunner might get drunk enough to agree to give Bella an out. He would have regretted it. Killed himself over it. I know that, but none of us are perfect.

"Our date is gone. Want to say our goodbyes to the happy couple?" Holden asks, looking over the crowd like it's a potential war zone.

I nod and rub his shoulder. "Yeah. Let's get out of here. Maybe Gunner will let us in for an after party."

I text him, letting him know we're coming up. He promises to order room service. We both shake Matthew's hand and he's glowing. Then he pulls me aside as Holden talks

to Bella. "Thank you for coming to me about everything last night."

"Is everything okay – really okay?"

"Yeah." He nods. "We talked. I know that she was nervous, with a lot of pressure from her parents, but I didn't realize how much it had gotten to her. Because of you, we talked. You guys saved the wedding."

"Just keep Bella from Sophie for a while. Sophie was ready to kill her." I say seriously. "If we hadn't gotten her away."

"Jealousy that bad?"

"Imagine if the roles were reversed and one of us forced a girl to kiss us." I hint. I see the realization bloom on his face. "Yeah. Sophie took that seriously."

"We start our honeymoon tomorrow in an Air BNB on the other side of the island. I doubt we'll cross paths." He assures me, patting my shoulder.

With that, I congratulate Bella who thanks me and I head upstairs with Holden. He sighs. "That was awkward."

"How?"

"She yelled at me in a whisper for breaking her rule." He shrugs and smirks at me. "It was worth it."

"Sophie always is." I agree, hitting the button for our floor. "How did we stumble into a serious relationship with all four of us?"

"I stopped questioning that. I just want to know what we're going to do with it." He sighs. "She can't legally marry all of us. I don't want a kid, but ... I don't know."

"It's on paper – for the wedding anyway." I shrug. But I want to be a dad. I've wanted that role for so long. Asking Sophie to have four kids would be hard though.

"We'll talk it out. We can handle that."

"If we can handle this relationship, we absolutely can." I agree.

Once we get to our floor, we knock on Gunner's door. He opens it and welcomes us in. I hear the shower running and I'm sure that it's Sophie in the shower. I rub my side as I think of this morning. I can't believe that it was less than twenty-four hours ago. I take off my jacket and tie, tossing them on the table in the room.

Holden follows suit and I'm just happy that Gunner is wearing something – even if it's loose boxers and nothing else. He flops back on the very messy bed and sighs. "Tonight is great."

His smile is hard, next to impossible, to argue with. I find myself smiling too. Holden takes the second bed and spreads out. "Even with the bullshit, this trip has been great."

"Shirt please!" Sophie yells from the bathroom.

Gunner gets up without question and picks up his buttonup from the floor. He opens the door, letting a wall of steam out, and hands it over. They talk quickly and he comes back out. "Room service will be here soon. The food was fine, but I'm starving."

A knock on the door answers him and Roman comes in. He looks better than he did downstairs when I could practically feel the tension rolling off him. He sits on the bed with Holden while I lean against the dresser.

"Everything okay, Roman?"

"Yeah. Just thinking about the future."

"Popular topic tonight." Holden sighs. "I blame Diana."

"And Miles." I agree. "They're certainly adamant that we figure things out quickly. I wonder what that's all about. Has she given any hints?"

Roman and Holden shake their heads. Gunner chuckles and twirls Sophie, wet hair and all, under his arm, leading her into the room. She grins. "Everyone's here!"

"There's no fun without you," I assure as she fits herself to my side. She kisses my cheek and I undo her top button. "You're sweet. Where have you been all night?" That little pout on her face.

I tap her bottom lip. "I've been keeping the peace and dragged into more dances than I wanted to be. But don't think I didn't see you in that sexy dress we picked out."

"I knew you'd recognize it."

"The one I told you would get you laid." I kiss her temple. "Almost got you fucked in a dressing room."

"It would have if the attendant had left." She giggles. "Are we-"

"Kicking back and enjoying tonight, absolutely." Holden sits up.

I don't blame him. We need an easy night. Last night was intense, today has been ridiculously long. I feel ready to pass out already. I kiss Sophie's temple again, enjoying the feel of her in my arms, knowing she's still here, still with us.

"I know a lot of shit has come up." She says, looking between us. "But I love you all. All of you. Entirely and completely. Even with my mom's poking, I'm happy as we are, okay? No pressure, no anger, nothing."

"Hopefully, there's a little passion." I tease.

She laughs. "Oh there's plenty of that. So much it's damaging."

I open my shirt and show her the already fading bruise. "I'll live."

She licks across her bottom lip as she looks over my body. Turning, Sophie strokes over my abs and chest before kissing just over my heart. I hug her tightly. She sighs.

"Oh, your dad wants us all to have lunch together." I murmur in her ear.

"Can't wait." She snorts and turns. "I'm tired of being asked who and when I'm going to marry. When I'm popping out a baby and who with. Over it. We haven't even been together a year! It's so premature."

"Some of us are older." Roman chuckles.

"And others are very used." Gunner winks at her.

Holden doesn't say anything. I know he's happy with things as they are. I am too ... mostly. I can already see another battle starting between Gunner and Roman over the marriage thing. Maybe a fight between me and Roman over who gives her a baby. But Sophie's right. It can wait. As long as we are happy. As long as we know it's right, does anything else matter?

We eat together, then lounge around. Sophie lays with her head on my lap and her legs across Gunner. He's been extra sweet with her tonight and I swear something shifted between them. He's not constantly cracking jokes.

He rubs the outside of her knee and I play with her hair. Holden grins. "I think this is the first wedding we've gotten through without getting shitfaced."

"First for me." Gunner agrees. "I think I like this way better. A lot less vomit."

"It was nice having a date that actually cared about more than cameras." Roman agrees. "Felt much ... more real."

"It's the first time I've ever had a date to a wedding and I was lucky enough to have the sexiest four men possible." Sophie grins. "And no fighting. Mom didn't make too much of a mess."

"Oh?"

"Roman and Gunner did that plenty." She puts her foot on Gunner's chest and points at Roman. "You two and your comments."

I turn her chin to me. "Don't forget giving Holden and me credit. I told him to go get you and kept your mom busy."

"You fueled the rumors?" She gasps. "I'm going to have to punish you for that."

"Whatever you say, princess."

She wrinkles her nose. "My dad used to call me that."

The guys laugh and I roll my eyes. "So sorry, sweetheart."

"I need nicknames for you guys. You all have specific ones for me."

"I like hearing you say my name," I say gently, brushing her hair from her face. "Makes me like my name a whole lot more."

"Agreed," Gunner says. "I'm so over being called "babe' or "sugar" or "honey bear." Ugh. It's just awful after a while."

"Picky pants." She kicks his thigh and he gives her a guilty smile.

I like how easy this is. There's no jealousy, there's no arguing, just all of us laying around, being lazy despite the formal ware. By midnight, Sophie is half asleep, nodding against my thighs like she can make herself more comfortable.

Holden stands and stretches. "I'm off to bed."

"No. I'm awake. I promise." She argues.

Holden chuckles and kisses her. "I'm not, baby. I'll see you in the morning, promise."

She gives in, leaving with Roman, and I pat Gunner before heading to bed myself. Our last night in Hawaii and I don't think I'll miss it. Not really. Some good came out of all the insanity – we talked about what we needed to – but I miss home. I miss the routine. I miss the expectations.

And I miss getting more time like tonight.

Sophia

I WAKE UP TO ROMAN LEAVING. I BLINK AND RUB MY EYES. "Where are you going?"

"A run and to get something important." He kisses my temple. "Go back to sleep, Bambina. Everything's okay."

"I only half believe you," I huff. "Can't you wait?"

"You're going to fall right back asleep and won't miss me." He promises with a gentle smile.

I huff and flop, slowly slipping into the warm spot he left behind. I feel him kiss my temple again and then like he says, I fall right back asleep. When I finally wake up to my alarm, I just lie in bed.

Roman got me for plenty of nights. I'll bounce between beds until the guys are even ... after one night in my own bed. Stretching my toes out, I sigh. We have lunch with my mom and dad and then we're heading home.

Maybe Nick can manage to paint with me on the plane. I'm still upset we missed that. I'm more upset that we didn't take more photos together. I like having them, even if I don't share them online. It's not like there's a multiple-person option on Facebook, and I won't just select one guy to show off.

I'm lucky enough to have four and either the world knows about all of them, or it can just keep guessing.

I pack my things and work on Roman's stuff as well. The door opens after I'm all changed and have managed to pack everything. Roman kisses the back of my head. "Thank you, Bambina."

"We have to be out of the room by eleven. You're cutting it close."

"It'll be worth it."

"If you say so."

We drag our things downstairs and Roman takes care of the bill. That's a conversation for later. I want to be able to pay for things. I'm not a sugar baby and even if it's silly, I want to show I can provide too. It's important to me. I don't want the guys to feel like I'm with them for what they can give me materialistically. And I make plenty of money that they don't let me spend.

We get to the restaurant where Dad and Mom are waiting and I see that Gunner and Nick are already there. Someone grabs my waist and I see Holden. He picks me up to hug me, then sets me down.

I giggle and shake my head. I wonder if he can see how far he's come since we met. He handled the wedding like a pro, he's been more talkative, sillier. More of the man I love every day is out and on display.

"Okay, now what was so important?" Mom asks. "Sophie's here, everyone's here."

I don't know what it is either, so I can't give the faintest hint. Dad looks at all of us, then gets down on one knee, holding out the ring she threw at him a few years ago. "Diana, I know it's only been a short time, but I can't be stupid twice. I was stupid enough to let you go once and I can't live another moment without you as my wife again."

She swallows, looking around. I put my hands to my mouth, shocked, crazy happy, awed. Mom shakes her head. "We *paid* to get divorced, Miles." A tear runs down her cheek as she covers her mouth taking in the moment.

"And I'm willing to pay millions to get you back as my wife, Diana. I want you, only you, for the rest of my life. If I could redo anything in my life, it would be signing those

divorce papers instead of sitting down and talking to you. I can't live with myself if lose this moment and don't do something about it. You make my life so much better. I chose right when I chose you and I'm choosing you again to prove it."

Her eyes well with tears and she nods then pushes her finger through the ring. "Yes, Miles."

I laugh and hug my parents, throwing myself into the moment, because I can't resist. Dad hugs us both and I feel like we have our family back the way it should be. Mom insists on everyone having two shots — one for the first wedding and one for the second. Then she points at my men.

"We're dancing. Now."

She sandwiches herself between Gunner and Nick. I laugh and hug my dad. "That was slick, Daddy. Good job."

"I love her. It's kind of simple when I focus on that." He rubs my back. "I have a feeling that this wedding helped me realize that. I can't imagine being here with anyone else and ... it just clicked."

"I'm happy. I will be a kick-ass flower girl." I laugh.

Roman wraps his arms around me and kisses the top of my head. He's been quiet today. I rub his arm. "You okay, Bambino?"

He chuckles and shakes his head. "Absolutely not with that nickname."

I huff. "Meanie."

Dad goes to try and steal Mom back considering she's starting to get really dirty doing Da Butt with Nick and Gunner. I turn to face Roman, trying to figure out what's going on. "I mean it though. Are you okay?"

"I am. Just considering a lot. It'll be easier when we get home."

Holden watches him carefully, but gives me a shrug. He doesn't know either. We finally get Mom to stop dirty dancing

with my boyfriends and she decides they're staying in Hawaii another day. I beg the guys not to join them and they agree.

We give them our love and finally get on the plane. I sleep all the way home. I didn't even realize how tired I was, but the flight sure is fast when I get to sleep unbothered. When we get home, I get through a shower, head downstairs, and see Roman there, completely naked, eying me like he's waited too long to have me.

An arm wraps around my waist and Holden purrs in my ear. "We already had the one-on-one."

I shiver at the implication. Gunner sits up from the couch and Nick saunters in. All of them naked. All of them gorgeous. All of them mine.

Holden bends me over the couch and strokes over my ass. He swats me once, then immediately asks if I'm okay. I laugh and nod. "I thought Nick was handing out punishments now."

"It's not a punishment if you like it." He winks at me.

Gunner kisses me hungrily while playing with my breasts, stroking, then pinching my nipples. I gasp and lean towards him until Holden's hand slips between my legs. I groan and rock back. They keep me bouncing between them until Holden pushes two fingers inside me. I grip the couch harder and pant. Nick rubs my back, but I wrap my hand around his cock, determined to please like I'm being pleased.

He groans as I stroke him, then pulls my hair back. Gunner adjusts, offering me his cock and how the hell am I supposed to say no when he's so hard he's tapping his belly.

"Blow him, Bambina. Or Holden will stop." Roman orders.

When I hesitate, he slaps my ass. I groan as the sting sizzles across my skin. My lips spread around the head of Gunner's cock. He thrusts deeper into my mouth, a low sound coming up from his chest.

Holden rewards me with a third finger, pushing deep inside me and hitting my g-spot over and over. My legs shake and I struggle to focus on Gunner when I'm already so close to the edge. My hand tightens around Nick and he has to help guide me.

Roman digs his nails into my ass as he grabs me, then he swats me again. "Focus, Sophia."

On what? There's too much! I take Gunner's length deeper, gagging on him, then licking up his shaft, swirling my tongue around the head. He nods and guides me down again. Holden changes how he's fucking me with his fingers, hitting a spot that sends me into overdrive.

I moan around Gunner's cock, fighting the orgasm that's threatening me as Nick's hand guides me faster over every impressive inch he offers. I want him to come first, with just my hand, just to prove I can.

But Holden's going like he has something to prove. Shockingly, it's Gunner who finishes first. He nearly chokes me as he comes, groaning and gasping as he slowly slides out of my mouth. I move to take Nick in my mouth, still using my hand around his shaft as I suck and lick the head.

He moans and huffs. "Fuck, Sophie. Go easy. We have time."

"Nice and slow." Roman agrees. "Show him how well you can use your mouth."

Holden jerks his fingers out of me, but before I can complain, he thrusts his hard cock deep inside me. I whimper and clutch Nick's ass with both hands to keep my focus. My eyes flick up to him and he cups my chin, nodding in encouragement.

A hand rubs my clit quickly as Holden ups the pace. Oh, it's too much. I'm too full, getting too much attention. When Gunner rolls my nipple between his fingers, I can't push it back. I come, hard.

I press my face against Nick's hip as I moan. Holden pulls out and comes on my ass. Something is tossed for him to clean up with and then I'm moved. Roman guides me to the table, then has me sit on him, reverse cowgirl style.

I roll my hips on him as he wraps a hand around my throat. He slams into me every time I come down, rough and demanding. Gunner kisses the inside of my knee as he plays with my clit and Nick stands, filling my mouth with his cock again. Holden watches from the side.

"You're such a good girl, Sophie. You take us so well." He encourages.

"You feel so fucking good." Nick agrees, his voice hot and husky.

"So wet." Gunner purrs against my knee.

Italian pours out of Roman's mouth against my ear. Nick comes while cursing, filling my mouth with the salty taste of his come. Then he focuses on my tits, sucking my nipple, flicking his tongue across it. My head falls back and I come again, one hand on the back of Nick's neck and the other on Roman's hip.

He pants bending me over, and finishes deep inside me, his hips jerking in a disjointed rhythm that leaves me shaking. I can feel my own wetness rolling down my thighs. Somehow, we manage to go another round.

I know I'm not going to make it upstairs if I try to get up there to find *anything* to put on, despite the fact I definitely need another shower. Roman's the only one who left his luggage down here, so while Gunner goes to get us drinks and Nick insists on getting food, I open his suitcase to grab a shirt.

Jerking out the first one I find, something catches my eye. A little jewelry box. I blink at it a few times, glance over my shoulder where he's talking with Holden on the couch, then open the box.

Fuck. It's a ring. An engagement ring. It's beautiful, but ... but it's an engagement ring! What the hell am I supposed to do with this information.

"Sophie? Did you find a shirt?" Holden asks.

I glance back at them and see Roman watching me with sharp eyes, his face pale. I click the box shut and show the shirt. "Yeah. I found something." And Roman knows just what I found. And I know why he's been so quiet. I pull the shirt on and let the suitcase close. Sitting on Roman's lap, I shoot him a look I know he'll get. He shrugs and presses his lips to my ear.

"Our secret ... for now, Bambina."

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