



# ALWAYS OSKAR

SINFUL DELIGHTS | BOOK ONE

ODESSA HYWELL

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Being an author is hard. The following people make it easier.

My editor Lynda, who usually hears from me about a week in advance with crazy things like, “*Hey, could you squeeze this story and two others in soon by chance?*” From there, it’s a mad scramble as we figure out dates. Honestly, there wouldn’t even be a story if not for her. She’s my favorite superhero.

My alpha reader Laura who has to answer questions like, “*Have you ever had an enema?*” Or, “*So ... is it too much if Ian feeds a guy to dogs?*” Also, she deserves an award because this book wouldn’t have been written without her.

Special mention to Tammy and Tanya who helped shape Always Oskar into a more enjoyable story.

Ian Bassett, head of the Bassett Crime Family, knows well-fed devils behave better than famished saints. His son was well-fed and yet, it was still necessary for him to die—for Oskar. Everything Ian does, he does for Oskar—always Oskar.

Oskar Bassett, the grandson of the head of the Bassett Crime Family, is well-loved and spoiled beyond measure but has a secret that could destroy him and his grandfather if anyone ever finds out—especially Pops. It's taboo. It's disgusting. If anyone knew ...

When one kiss turns into two there's no fighting the inevitable.

## TRIGGERS INCLUDE

Filicide, relationship of taboo nature between two consenting, of age adults, brief mention of past child abuse, brief mention of torture & murder of people you won't care about and who totally deserve it, brief mention of drug use.

# Prologue

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—well fed devils behave better than famished saints.

D.L. SMITH

---

He is bleeding from a cut on his forehead. Blood drips into his dark eyes. She is crying, a cascade of tears on her hollow cheeks. They kneel before me, bound and gagged.

In hindsight, as a young man out to conquer the world—or at least this small corner of it—I should have stopped, should have taken just one fucking second to think about the consequences of my actions. Would doing so have stopped me from making the choices I have? If I'd known *this* is where I would end up, would I have reconsidered? In all honesty, probably not. I was young and foolish, so cocksure when it came to my dreams. Those dreams led me here. There's a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach but it's momentary, gone as quickly as it arrived. In reality, this changes very little for me.

Peering down at the couple, I expect to feel something—anything—for what I'm about to do. A father should feel *something* when he's about to murder his only son, shouldn't he? Perhaps if I was someone different, born in another time, far removed from this place I've called home, never endured the life I had, I would feel something more—pain, pleasure, something. But ... I feel only icy determination.

This is simply another hand life has dealt me—a life that has taken so much from me but has given to me in equal



measure, when I stop to think about it. For every grief-coated moment in my life, there's been another wrapped in profound joy. The scale is balanced. Some would say it's unfair for a man such as myself—someone without a soul, or in possession of one as dark as a fallen angel's—to know pain and pleasure in such an even-handed way. They believe men like me should suffer endlessly. I have no opinion one way or the other.

There are no good people or bad people—just people. And unless there's a flaw in their genetic code and they lack the capacity, people experience grief, joy, pain, pleasure no matter who they are, where they come from, or the choices they make. The human experience may vary from person to person, but at the end of the day, we are all more alike than different.

Rich. Poor.

Black. White.

He. She. They.

Religious. Agnostic. Atheist.

It doesn't matter. We come into this world screaming. We spend our whole lives screaming, even if we're all screaming for different reasons. In the end, after a lifetime screaming, we all die the same way. My day will come sooner rather than later. I will die, as all men must die. Saxon Bassett will die today though—here and now. The only real question is, how?

My gaze slides away from Saxon and lands on Oskar. He's always been a small boy—tall but underweight. He looks smaller now, huddled on the sofa with tears seeping from his bloodshot eyes and snot running from his unnaturally crooked nose. It's undoubtedly broken. One eye is swollen shut. The other has a busted blood vessel. His bottom lip is split and dried blood darkens his ivory skin. There's a bruise forming on his jaw—dark purple and ugly. My heart squeezes. It's imperative he sees a doctor.

First, Saxon—

Or, I suppose, his wife first.

Reaching into my pocket, I withdraw the garrote and unwind it before settling my gaze on Indre. Even now,

underweight, with dark bags under her glassy eyes and unkempt hair, she's beautiful. I know Saxon wasn't her first choice. She had wanted to be a schoolteacher, live a normal life free of ... this—everything we all are. She married him because business demanded it. Her dreams went up in smoke, but they discovered love together. I watched over them as much as I could. While I ran the Family, they built a life, largely untouched by the darkness I walk in. They gave me a grandson—Oskar, a boy I love even more than I love my son. For that, I will always be grateful.

Indre watches me now, her eyes wide and wet as I step behind her. The woman is clever, far cleverer than my son. Even high as a kite, she knows what's coming. A sob tears from behind the rag stuffed between her painted lips as she trembles, tries to shuffle away on her knees, but there's no escaping this. No one is going to save her, and I'm certainly not going to spare her, not when she didn't lift a finger to help her own son while her husband attempted to beat him to death. She deserves this, for all the ways she has failed Oskar.

Saxon screams behind the cloth in his mouth and lunges for his wife; he falls to the floor with a heavy thump when my foot connects with his already dislocated shoulder. He watches, tears seeping from his eyes—tears he didn't shed for his twelve-year-old son—blood staining his flesh as I wind the wire around Indre's thin neck and pull. She thrashes, bucking against my hold, sounds of panic and pain vibrating her throat, but she is not the first woman I've killed like this. Nor will she be the last, if I'm being honest.

Death and I are old friends. We have walked hand in hand since I was a young man, hell bent on surviving this world no matter the body count it required.

Her death is slow. Blood seeps along the wire edge, staining the front of her pale blue blouse. I enjoy the minutes, perhaps more than I should, and meet her gaze to watch as it grows dim. The life in her flickers and dies before I unwind the wire and let her fall to the hardwood floor, feet away from the man she loved, who loved her more than they loved their

own child. He is not long for this world now. With his beloved wife gone, my son's time is at hand.

Is this when I should feel ... more? Minutes before I murder him? Perhaps.

Tucking the garrote away, I drop to one knee beside Saxon. Reaching out, I push my fingers through his greasy hair. His cheeks are wet with tears and blood as he peers up at me, silently pleading. His eyes are so much like mine it almost takes my breath away. There's nothing he can say that will prolong his life, prevent me from ending it.

He deserves this.

Do not mistake me. I love Saxon, I always have. He has failed me more often than not over the years. His failure was tolerated—allowed, in many ways. He's my son, blood of my blood. I made excuses for him and his behavior. But he has not been just my son in a very long time. Saxon is also a father. I expected him to be a good one—to love his child, to cherish him, to protect him as I have done Saxon himself—even if I fell short from time to time. He failed in that regard, more so than I ever did, and it is not a failure I can excuse. Not this time.

Skimming my finger along his jaw, I lean forward and press a kiss to his forehead. Saxon whimpers and I close my eyes, remembering him as the boy he was—bright and happy and eager to please—and not the man he has become, stupid and angry and discontent.

I stand.

Whit, one of my most trusted employees, someone I have kept close for years now, steps forward and jerks Saxon to his knees before releasing him and stepping away. I had thought I wanted his death to be slow. I wanted him to suffer, the way he made his own son suffer. Saxon is my son, though—my only son. I can't bring myself to do such a thing to him as he peers up at me, silently pleading with his eyes for mercy. If he wanted mercy, he should have kept his hands off Oskar. Though, I suppose this—a quick death—is a mercy in some ways.

Holding my hand out, I wait. It's only a moment before the familiar weight of a gun lands in my palm. I've held many guns, used them for many reasons, since I was a young man—much younger than Saxon is now. Sometimes death is simply necessary.

Some must die, so others may live. It's the nature of life.

Raising the weapon, I level it on my own child. I really should feel something now, anything. I raised this boy into a man. But like so many times when I've held a gun like this, I feel nothing—no happiness or sadness, anger or peace. My hand doesn't shake. My heart doesn't hurt. This is just one more thing that has to be done before life can proceed for Oskar, for myself.

It occurs to me a second before the echo of the gun discharging rips through the silence that in no way, shape or form will I regret this. Regret serves no purpose and has no place in my life—never has.

Oskar makes a soft sound in the back of his throat—a suppressed scream, maybe. Saxon jerks back and slumps to the ground as blood trickles from the hole between his eyes. I watch, wait to feel something, that thing a parent is supposed to feel when their child dies, but ... nothing. I am the same as I have always been. I hold the gun out and a subordinate, who will clean the weapon and return it to its proper place, takes it from me.

Dead. My son is dead.

Oskar is alive, though. In the end, that's all that matters.

Oskar. Always, Oskar.

# Ian

— 6 YEARS LATER —

Friday has always belonged exclusively to Oskar. Since he was a toddler, I've set the day aside for him, to do whatever he pleased. In the past, it was the park and ice cream, but as he got older his interests matured—first arcades, then theme parks. Eventually, shopping. Though the shopping remains constant, the arcades and theme parks fell to the side in favor of things I enjoy as well—theater and opera, museums, art galleries. Whether Oskar truly enjoys those things or does them only because I enjoy them, it's impossible to know. I rarely tell him no, and Oskar uses that to his advantage, dragging me from place to place with all the energy of youth.

He's spoiled. I can admit that's my fault.

What harm is there in giving Oskar everything he desires?

He's a well behaved, mild-mannered young man. He has his moments, as all young men do, but he mostly follows the rules I give him. He doesn't push against the boundaries that keep him safe. Good behavior deserves a reward.

Does it have to be this, though?

The car slows and I peer out the tinted window as Oskar bounces in the seat beside me. Before long, the door opens; instead of waiting for me to exit the vehicle, Oskar climbs over me, all bony knees and sharp elbows, and spills onto the sidewalk. His grin is wide and infectious, stretching across his face. A light dances in his eyes as he spins to look at the building.

The Museum of Death, on Hollywood Boulevard, is not my idea of quality Friday night entertainment, but Oskar has wanted to come here for years. I always refused, but he's eighteen now, freshly graduated from high school and debating college attendance. Eventually, he'll realize my permission is no longer required. He could simply come to the Museum of Death—or do whatever new something he wishes—on his own, or with Holden, if I didn't bring him. At least if I'm here, I can shield him from the worst of what lies inside, as I've shielded him from the worst of life since he was young.

Oskar grasps my hand and tugs me away from the car. I shake my head, a soft but fond smile pulling at my mouth as I follow. My grandson has many good qualities, but patience has never been one of them. He wants what he wants when he wants it, and I'm helpless against his wide-eyed pleading. Thankfully, the men who often accompany us on these adventures know that about me.

“Do you think we'll see something gruesome?” Oskar asks as he yanks the door to the museum open. I grasp the edge and pull it wide, allowing him to slip under my arm. He's no taller than he was at fifteen, but the fact he hardly comes to my shoulders is ... cute. It suits him—tiny but fierce.

“It's the Museum of Death,” I remind him as I walk inside, our guards just behind us. They don't want to be here any more than I do. Death is part of the Family business. If I want to experience it firsthand, I don't require a museum with a ridiculous admission fee. Of course, it's different for Oskar, who has only ever witnessed one—two deaths, if you count the bodies and not the incident itself.

“You can try to look a little more excited.”

“You know I'm happy to be anywhere with you.” I extend my phone to the young man behind the counter so he can scan our tickets. He does so with an empty smile, no doubt born from years in the service industry. I take my phone back, shove it into my pocket and drop my arm over Oskar's shoulder. He leans into me with a cheerful hum. Something warm and comfortable twists behind my ribcage, and I press a kiss to his temple.

This may not be my idea of a good time, but I'm always happy to spend time with Oskar.

"If it's truly awful, I'll let you pick where we eat dinner," he says. I glance at him as he grins. I don't trust it—him—for a second. No way in hell is he going to let me pick dinner tonight. Friday is the one day a week when he can play fast and loose with his diet. He's not going to surrender his one chance a week to make himself sick on whatever his greedy little heart desires. I agree anyway, and the man behind the counter hands over a pamphlet and briefly explains where to start. Before I can thank him, Oskar drags me away, into the thick of the museum.

It's not awful, but it is gruesome as expected. The worst of humanity and their crimes are on full display for the public's viewing pleasure. Nothing is hidden. Every instance of men with monstrous intent is there, close enough to reach out and touch if one dared.

By the time we leave, Oskar is well schooled in death—more so than he had been by witnessing the death of his parents or by having what amounts to a well-controlled psychopath as a best friend. Even I feel a little sick. I rub his shoulder in comfort; his hand is clenching the front of my shirt as we finally step into the fading sunlight.

"After that, I don't think I want to eat anything with meat in it," Oskar mutters, a little pale in the face, as we wait for the car. It's little comfort, knowing he'll never come here again. Not when he already saw all they had.

I shake my head. "You need to eat something with protein."

Oskar tucks himself against my side, turns his face into my chest, and hums. It's not a sound of agreement. Or disagreement, for that matter.

One of our guards steps forward and opens the door when the SUV arrives. I help Oskar in and we settle into our seats. He shifts, laying his head on my shoulder as I pull my phone from my pocket. "Tired?"

“No.” He turns his hand over and rests it on my thigh. I lace my fingers through his and open the MiniMed app on my phone with my other hand. “It’s hardly even late.”

It’s a little before seven now. The night is young. If Oskar has his way, it won’t end until midnight, even if I can hear the exhaustion creeping into his voice. I’m not afraid to admit, I’m feeling the first signs of fatigue myself. At my age, I’m too old to be out when the new day arrives, but I won’t force him home before he’s ready either.

“You didn’t sleep well last night,” I say as I check his numbers. As expected. Friday is always a mix of lows and highs that his insulin pump works hard to steady.

“I can still hang.”

I tuck my phone away. He doesn’t ask, not today. Any other day, he would be the one checking his phone, monitoring his highs and lows, making sure he’s on target, but right now he’s resting against my shoulder, passive when it comes to his health. Friday is his day off. The one day he gets to pretend he’s just another young man, perfectly healthy, without a care in the world, enjoying the delights of life. “I’m not a kid anymore, Ian.”

I hum, not stupid enough to agree or disagree. He glares and I smile. He huffs and tucks himself against my side as I drop my arm around his shoulder.

He needs food. Preferably something healthy-ish, and since he said I could pick dinner if the museum was awful—which it was, by any definition of the word—the plate of pasta he’s undoubtedly fantasizing about isn’t happening, not entirely at least. I won’t deny him *some* pasta.

“Do you want chicken tenders and macaroni for dinner?” It’s the one meal he’s always enjoyed, no matter how old he gets. Maybe because unless you’re really trying, it’s pretty difficult to screw up chicken tenders and macaroni and cheese. Stranger things have happened, though.

“Nice try, but it’s going to be something with all the carbs and extra cheese,” he says.



I scoff, not willing to just give in this time. “I thought I got to pick dinner if the museum was awful.”

“Pops,” Oskar whines, tipping his head back to peer up at me with wide, begging eyes. They’re the same shade as mine. In him, I see so much of myself. He is who I could have been, if life had been a measure kinder to me as a child. Someone a little beat up and scarred, a little wary of the world, but ... a good person, under it all. “It’s Friday.”

It is Friday. I’m a sucker for my grandson’s trademark puppy-dog pout. What else is new?

“If you have chicken tenders and macaroni, maybe we can stop for a little ice cream,” I bargain. Ice cream is something he tends to avoid even on Friday, though he loves it. Both of our phones will alert us to the high glucose level ten minutes, maybe even less, after he takes his first bite. “I say I’m not a kid and you bribe me with ice cream,” he pouts, drawing his legs onto the seat and tucking himself tighter against me. It’s warm outside—in the high nineties despite the sun’s slow descent—but Oskar is perpetually cold.

I laugh as I drag a blanket across the seat and settle it over him. “So ... is that a no to ice cream?” I tease, already knowing the answer.

“I didn’t say that,” he huffs, poking me in the side.

“You’re never too old for ice cream, Oskar,” I assure him as I squeeze his shoulders. Growing old is mandatory. Time demands it of us. But growing up? Oskar doesn’t have to quite so fast, even though he is—has—faster than I like. His Type I diabetes diagnosis ensured that. He had to grow up fast in order to manage his health. Because of that, it’s been a long time since I thought of him as a child. “Alright. Okay.” He slides his arm around my waist and rests his head on my chest with a tired sigh. “You win. I’ll let you feed me. But next Friday, I want lasagna.”

I press a kiss to the top of his head. “Good boy.”

# Oskar

My family and violence have always gone together, like chocolate, marshmallows and graham crackers. Or, I suppose—considering I’m talking about violence—bullet wounds, body bags and, well ... dead bodies. Not that we use body bags. As far as I know, there are no bodies—just ashes, unless a message is being sent. No body means no murder, after all.

The point is, when your grandfather is Boss of one of the biggest crime syndicates—excuse me, *Families*—on the west coast, you’re bound to see some fucked up shit from time to time.

Six years ago, I watched my own parents die. I’d like to say I mourned them, that I missed them after they were gone but ... they were never good parents. They weren’t even okay parents, honestly.

My father loved the lifestyle that Pops provided—money, drugs, though Pops hadn’t known about the drugs, and a wife who was into the same things—more than he ever loved me. I was always a second, third, maybe a fourth thought to my parents, when they thought of me at all. Maybe that’s why I’m so close to Pops. Not as close as I’d like to be. As much as he loves me, spoils me, I know there are some things—well, one thing in particular—he’ll never give me. Himself.

Obviously, I’m fucked up—twisted, sick in the head. What kind of grandson lusts after their own grandfather? Maybe it’s simply nature. I was born with a flaw in my genetic makeup and that’s why my father tried to kill me. Like Ian killed his son.

Maybe it's actually nurture. Perhaps after someone sees something fucked up, like their parents being murdered, they become a fucked-up person. Start wanting fucked up things. Knowing it's wrong doesn't stop me from desiring what—who—I want, even if I can never have it. Him.

Friday is always a welcome reprieve from ... everything. For a few hours I can forget who I am, who Ian is to me, and pretend we're both someone else.

Our driver comes to a stop outside a restaurant. Family owned. It's small, a hole-in-the-wall place that honestly has the *best* chicken tenders. Pops has been bringing me here since I was a kid, anytime we wanted to escape the house.

A smile pulls at my mouth as the door opens and Pops steps out before I can climb over him.

"You actually have to eat if you want ice cream," Pops reminds me as he helps me jump down from the SUV. I roll my eyes and follow him into the restaurant. The host seats us immediately, which is no surprise considering who Pops is. Nor is it surprising that she pulls a waiter away from another table where a group of men are sitting.

They look at us and frown before whispering to one another. Pops ignores them, so I do as well. No one would be stupid enough to start trouble in here, surrounded by members of the Family, right?

"H—Hi," the waiter stutters before clearing his throat. He's new—or at least I've never seen him before. He looks a little shell-shocked to be serving Ian Bassett himself. "Welcome to Munch Box, Mr. Bassett. I'm Aaron and I'll be your server. What can I get you to drink?"

"Thank you, Aaron." Pops folds his hands on the tabletop and I lean against his side, a lot more tired than I'm willing to admit. I'm always a little exhausted on Friday. My body ping-pongs between highs and lows like a prostitute does their regulars. It's to be expected. I'll live.

Pops smiles at Aaron, who shuffles from one foot to the other. A small smile tugs at the corner of his mouth. Most

people like Pops. He has a way of putting everyone at ease, making them think he isn't a threat when, in fact, he's anything but harmless. "We'll each take water—lemon in mine, if the kitchen has it—and an order of grilled chicken tenders with macaroni and cheese, along with a side of broccoli. Do you want anything else, Oskar?"

"No." I shake my head as the waiter's eyes flick between the pair of us. Anyone looking probably thinks I'm either Ian's grandson—which I am—or his young lover, which I want to be. "I'm good. Thanks."

"I'll be right back with your water," Aaron says before he turns away. I move closer to Ian. He drops an arm over my shoulder, tucking me against his body. The heat of him seeps through his suit jacket and warms me as I snuggle closer. Munch Box is always a little cold, but it's nothing I can't handle. Not with Pops to snuggle against.

"Don't act like you did something special," I say as he squeezes my neck. "I know you had a burger for lunch." I may have been in my art studio at the time, but I could smell it a mile away. I could have had a burger too because Friday is always a *chuck it in the fuck it bucket* day, but I knew a burger for lunch meant I wouldn't enjoy the pasta I wanted for dinner half as much. Considering I'm eating grilled chicken for dinner, maybe I should have had the burger anyway.

"No idea what you're talking about," Ian says. I snort. He chuckles and I grasp his hand, lacing my fingers through his. He tucks me under his chin and I close my eyes. My heart skips a beat.

If he doesn't want me to have the feelings for him I do, he makes it hard. I always imagined if I got an actual boyfriend, these are the types of things he would do—keep me close, suffer with me when I can't eat something I really want. Or maybe I just want those things because they're things Ian gives me without being asked.

"I'm telling Arlo about you," I say with a huff.

Arlo Orr isn't a member of the Family, not really. He was the one to find me, save me when I passed out on the street on

the way home from school years ago, before I got on an insulin pump. He stood up for me in the hospital, refused to leave my side even when Pops explained who he was and who I was to him. Arlo wasn't willing to just take Ian's word and surrender me into his hands, even though I was a stranger—no one to him—and Ian was ... well, himself. Since then, he's been an honorary member of the Family, allowed in and out of our home at will despite his own questionable dealings with the underbelly of this city.

I suppose those dealings are made easier by knowing us. He has Ian Bassett's respect after all, and that means something to a lot of people in Los Angeles. I think of him a little like a big brother, although we aren't related. Now I'm also thinking he's a traitor. I know the both of them sneak around eating pizza and other junk behind my back when they're together.

"I'm not worried about Arlo," Pops says as his fingers ghost over my shoulder. "Just think, he's probably eating pizza and hot wings and washing it down with beer right now."

"Are you ever going to let me have a beer?" I ask. Technically, I'm not old enough to drink, but it never stops me when I hang out with my friends—namely Holden. The pint-sized psychopath, as Pops likes to call him, has a lot more freedom than I do. His uncle, the Boss of the Family in San Jose, doesn't care what he does, so when we're together I get to break the rules too. I know Pops knows I drink and smoke when I'm with Holden, but normally—so long as I don't overdo it—he never says anything. Maybe because, mostly, I'm well behaved.

Though, it's not like there are consequences when I misbehave. Ian has never punished me for anything. Not the time I went joy riding and wrecked an SUV. Not the time I was arrested for vandalism. Not the time I bought a llama, even if he did make me return it.

"Maybe when you're twenty-one," Pops says.

I scoff. Was he serious? "For a beer?"

He shrugs. I can see a smile playing at the corner of his mouth. “I have no interest in petty crimes, and supplying alcohol to a minor is a misdemeanor in the state of California.”

I roll my eyes. “When is Arlo coming back, by the way?”

Our waiter returns, dropping our water off and hurrying away.

“In a few weeks, I’m sure. You miss him?” Pops asks as he looks down at me.

“Ha.” I snort and reach for my water. “No. Not the way you’re implying, anyway.”

Arlo is handsome. I’m sure he would be quite the catch. But he isn’t my type.

And I know I’m not his.

“Good. He’s a little too old for you,” Pops says as he reaches for his own water.

“Age is just a number,” I protest, like I always do when he brings up age in the context of who I can and can’t date. Honestly, I’ve never dated anyone. Over the years, I’ve had a few crushes, but never pulled the trigger on any of them. No matter how much I’ve liked someone, I never liked them half as much as I love Ian. No one can compare to him.

He hums as he sets his glass on the table beside mine. “Sounds like something a pedophile would say.”

I pull my hand from his and swat him on the chest. He laughs and grasps my wrist, pulling my hand to his mouth and kissing my knuckles. My heart pounds against my ribcage as I lean back into him, as much for warmth as comfort. “I’m eighteen, you know. Old enough to be fucked by anyone now.”

Most grandchildren would never talk to their grandfather the way I speak to mine. He never cares, never says anything—not when I speak about sex or say a few bad words. He never seems to mind when I call him Ian, either. As far as I’m concerned those are just more reasons to love him. “Let me know when you find someone brave enough so I can have a

hole measured,” Pops says, squeezing my fingers before laying my hand on his chest.

I groan. “I’m going to die a virgin if you have it your way.”

Considering he’s the only person I want to have sex with, I probably will die a virgin. How sad is that?

“Of course not,” he says, pressing a kiss to my temple. “I’ll probably only live another forty years or so, if I’m lucky.”

Pain, sharp like an ice pick, lances through the space behind my ribcage.

“I hate when you say things like that.” Pops isn’t that old. He’s still in great shape and his health is impeccable. If we’re being honest, he’ll probably outlive me.

“Everyone dies, Oskar.” Ian tucks me under his chin, his beard rough against my cheek as I press my face into his collarbone. “I’m here with you for now and for as long as I can be.” His hand runs up and down my back as I nod, squeeze my eyes closed, and press against him until barely any space remains between us.

The thought of Pops—Ian—not being with me doesn’t sit right. It makes me sick to my stomach. He’s been the one constant in my life since I was a child, and I don’t want to picture a world that doesn’t have him in it. Of course, I know one day he’ll get old, die—as all men must die—like he says. I don’t want to put years on it or count down to doomsday, though. I just want to pretend like we have the rest of forever together.

I’m fine dying a virgin, so long as I can always have Ian with me.

# Ian

Exhaustion presses down on me by the time we get home, but I'm not alone. Oskar is half asleep, wiped out from a long day spent shopping—lots and lots of shopping—our time at the Museum of Death, dinner at Munch Box and ice cream afterwards. Not to mention the impromptu trip to the Art Depo when we were finally on our way home.

It's cheaper to make a body disappear than it is to feed his art habit. By now, he has more art supplies than he's ever going to use, but I don't care, not really, so long as he's happy. It's clear to anyone who looks at him, he *is* happy—just tired. There's a soft smile on his face as he leans heavily against my side, yawning every couple of seconds. By the time we enter the house, midnight is only a few minutes away.

“Go shower and get ready for bed,” I tell him, running my hand up and down his spine as we stop at the bottom of the stairs. “I'll be up later.”

There are a few things I should do before I head to bed.

Oskar peers up the stairs for a long, silent moment. He slumps against me. “You're not going to tuck me in?”

I shake my head, bend and slide my arm along the back of his knees and shoulders even as I smile to myself. He falls into my hold with a soft groan as I lift him. He's damn near weightless as I carry him up the stairs. It isn't the first time I've done this, nor will it be the last. It should be. He's eighteen now—far too old for me to hold and carry around like I do—but ... he needs these things still; it's never bothered me



to give them to him. I enjoy taking care of him like this—far more than I should, if I’m being honest.

His arms loop around my shoulders and he presses his face into my neck with a soft exhale. I brush a kiss across his forehead as I climb the stairs.

The hallway is dim, only moonlight to show me the way. Unlike when he was a child, there are no toys scattered on the floor, just waiting to be the reason I go to an early grave. Reaching my bedroom is easy. I shoulder the door open and shift him just enough so I can turn on the light. Oskar makes a soft sound that vibrates through his narrow chest as his fingers card through my hair. I sit him on the edge of the bed.

“You have the stamina of an old man,” I tell him as I inspect his face. He’s not tired because of a high. Nor is he about to pass out because of a low. The MiniMed app would alert us if that was the case. He’s simply dead on his feet after his long day, like usual. His body isn’t used to all the crap he consumed.

“That’s not true,” he protests, kicking his shoes off with a tired yawn.

I laugh. “You’re right. I’m clearly proof this is a you issue.”

“You don’t count as a normal old man,” he huffs, yanking his shirt off and tossing it on top of his shoes. I turn away, digging in the bottom drawer of my dresser, which has always seemed to belong to him—or has since he was twelve and first really started sleeping in my bed when the nightmares began—to give him some privacy.

“Some things just get better with age,” I tell him, pulling out a pair of pajama bottoms.

He tugs his clothes from my hand when I turn around. “I won’t argue.”

“At least you recognize a lost fight when you see one,” I say. He rolls his eyes and I push him towards the bathroom. “Hurry. I might not look like it but I’m tired too.”

“I’m going. I’m going,” Oskar says. My gaze drifts down the pale slope of his back and lower, lower than it should as he walks away. Heat dances in my stomach and I turn away before it becomes impossible to do so.

Oskar is ... pretty. I’ll be the first person to admit that, but he’s also my grandson. There are some lines we can’t cross, that I don’t want to cross. He doesn’t make it easy to remember that though, not with how he acts or the things he wears under his clothes.

It was only a few years ago, shortly after he turned sixteen, that he came to me and confessed he wanted to wear things that weren’t typically considered masculine. I could have made a big deal out of it. Most people my age probably would have. Instead, I kissed his temple and extended my credit card, since at the time he didn’t have his own. He’d scurried away the same shade as a ripe tomato and two weeks later, when he was undressing, I caught sight of him in a pair of white lace panties—if they could even be called panties, considering they’d exposed far more than they’d covered up—for the first time. He’d been embarrassed and quickly scurried away then, too.

It had been awkward for both of us, but I had no choice but to reassure him I didn’t—*don’t*—care what he wears. As long as he’s happy, it’s okay for him to like the things he does. The last thing I want is for him to be embarrassed, or to think I disapprove. I wasn’t judging him in the slightest—then or now. I really wish he’d learn to undress in the bathroom, though.

“Remember when we used to take baths together?” The sound of water beating against the tile nearly drowns out Oskar’s voice. “Why don’t we do that anymore?”

I clear my throat, shaking away the image of Oskar as he is now, naked and wet, but with me in the shower with him. I pull my sleepwear out. “You grew up.”

It was one thing to throw my five-year-old grandson into the bathtub with me because he was in a bad mood or sick and needed me there. Sharing a bath with my eighteen-year-old

grandson who tempts me in ways he shouldn't is ... unacceptable.

"Yeah." Is it my imagination, me projecting my own desires onto him, or does he sound ... disappointed? "I'll be quick so you can shower and we can sleep."

"Don't rush on my account," I say as I reach down and palm my stiffening cock.

He doesn't rush, giving me the time I need to calm down, but nor does he take his sweet time. Ten minutes later, he emerges in his pajama pants, drying his dark hair with a towel. My throat is suddenly dry as an alcoholic's liquor cabinet as I watch a bead of water roll down his chest.

"I tried not to take too long," Oskar says. I drag my gaze away from his body and stand up.

"Thank you." I pause at his side and squeeze his shoulder; he smiles and blinks slowly—sleepily—up at me before his brows pull together and he opens his mouth. I shake my head, cutting him off before he can speak. "No, you can't have my pillow."

He'll steal it anyway. Or end up using me as his pillow. It's routine at this point.

"Meanie," he says, his voice low and whiney. I laugh and push him towards the bed before I slip into the bathroom. The door closes behind me with a soft snick and I exhale, setting my pajamas on the counter and leaning beside them to catch my breath. My feelings are only heightened today because Oskar and I spent so much time together. Tomorrow will be better. Hopefully.

Pushing away from the counter, I remove my boxers. Then, I see them; the black lace is impossible to miss. They're like a beacon, a candle in the darkness, calling me forward. I reach out, but I curl my fingers into my palm and pull my hand back. It's one thing to look, to fantasize from time to time when the hour is late and I'm especially lonely, but to touch—no. That's a step too far.

Leaving the panties on the counter, I turn the shower on cold. A gasp echoes off the tile as the icy water crashes against my chest. It does nothing to cool my desire. My cock is still hard, leaking as I grasp it and tug once, twice and a third time before forcing myself to stop. I can't indulge, not tonight when Oskar is waiting for me, probably wearing a soft, sleepy smile. It's too dangerous.

He really needs to stop undressing in front of me and leaving his things lying around. It isn't as if he's doing it on purpose, though. Oskar, of course, assumes I'm normal. And perhaps I am, in the worst possible way.

He is young and pretty and I am still just a man, even if I am his grandfather. It's only natural to be attracted to him. But I'm his safe place to land. I never truly want to be anything else, not if being more than his grandfather puts me at risk of losing even that privilege.

My skin pebbles as I scrub my hair under the freezing water and wash my body. By the time I'm finished, my teeth are chattering and any momentary heat I felt is gone; the tips of my fingers are pruned and tinged blue. I dry and dress and brush my teeth with the black lace still on the counter, taunting me the whole time. It mocks me as I toss my towel in the hamper and straighten the bathroom.

Oskar is curled up in bed, buried under the blankets with the blue light of his phone illuminating his face. He jumps, dragging the phone under the blankets as I enter the bedroom.

"Busted," I tease as I fish under the duvet, plucking the phone from his fingers. He knows he's not supposed to have his phone in bed. Neither of us sleep well when we play on our electronics before bedtime.

"I had to answer a text," he whines.

I drop the phone on the bedside table. "You can answer tomorrow."

It's most likely just Holden being annoying anyway.

Oskar huffs, plastering himself against my side once I'm settled under the comforter. He wraps his arm around my

midsection, knees pressed against my thigh, head resting on my bicep. He blinks up at me, a sleepy grin pulling at his lips.

I inspect him in the light cast by the bedside lamp. At some point, he stopped being the broken twelve-year-old who needed me to protect him and turned into an adult, who still needs my protection but also needs ... things I can't give him, things I shouldn't want to give him. I'm not sure I like it—not being everything he needs.

# Oskar

Even though it's late, a little after midnight, and I'm tired, I don't want to sleep. Friday is the one day a week I don't have to share Ian. Nothing else matters to him on Friday—not business or the Family. He's mine and mine alone. I want to savor having him to myself, being his sole focus, for as long as I can.

“Pet me,” I say, moving my head from his bicep to his chest. His hand automatically sinks into my hair and I sigh as I close my eyes. “Now tell me I'm pretty.”

Ian laughs, the sound soft and warm as it vibrates his chest, before he squeezes my neck. “You're pretty.”

“I know. But thanks for telling me,” I say, a laugh in my voice. I press a kiss to his chest and settle against him once more. His heart beats under my ear, the sound soft and soothing. I tap the rhythm out against his ribcage as the heat of his body warms mine.

We're silent for a long moment, but I know Ian isn't asleep. His fingers are still working through my hair, running across my scalp. My body is responding in ways I can't control, so I shift, pulling my hips away so he doesn't accidentally feel the evidence of my unnatural urges.

How would he respond if I pressed my hard cock against him on purpose? I doubt he'd get angry. Ian isn't easily provoked. I've only ever seen him truly furious a few times in my life, each of those times on my behalf, not because of me. Nothing I do ever upsets him. Nor does he show any disgust.

He loves me far too much to hurt me like that. He won't just ... give in, though. The reality is, even though Ian has never refused me anything, I have a feeling if he knew what I fantasize about him doing to me, with me, late at night, he would deny me. I don't want to put him in that position. I don't want to lose him either, but ... I might one day anyway.

“Pops?” I say, speaking past the lump in my throat. He hums in response. I pop my chin up on his chest as he looks down at me. “Why are you single?” Ian frowns; his fingers stop on the back of my neck. “I just mean ... you're not old and you're handsome.” His hair is dark like mine—almost black. He's got some gray at the temples, but nothing extreme. It's enough to make him look distinguished, but not ... old, as if he has one foot in the grave. His eyes are the same as mine too—deep brown with flecks of green and gold. His beard, something I have yet to grow myself, is a shade lighter than his hair, but trimmed short and well maintained. He's more than handsome. He's fucking gorgeous. Anyone would be lucky to have him for a night. To have him for a lifetime would be a dream come true. “Haven't you ever wanted a partner?”

As far as I know, he's never been married—never even been in a serious relationship.

I don't know who my grandmother was—is. If she's still alive. Saxon never mentioned her either.

“No,” Ian says after a pause. “I never had room in my life for a partner when I was younger. My focus was building the Family. Now that I'm older, I have you.” I smile and tuck my face against his chest as the space behind my ribcage fills with warmth. He has me. “Are you thinking of dating?” His fingers work through my hair again.

I shake my head. “Not really. I'm happy with you.”

Even if I can never have him the way I truly want him.

“I know what I said today, Oskar, but—” Ian fists my hair and tugs until I look up. A forced smile twists his features. “—if there is a boy you like, I promise to be on my best behavior,

so long as he treats you the way you deserve to be treated. I only want you to be happy.”

I reach out and smooth my thumb over his furrowed brow. “I know, Pops.” I can bring home a boy and so long as he’s good to me, makes me happy in all the ways I deem important, he’ll be welcomed with open arms. Of course, Pops won’t be happy about it—not really—and said boy will be threatened with a slow and painful death if he hurts me in any way, but that’s just the cost of attempting a relationship with me. “There isn’t anyone—just you.”

He grabs my hand, kisses my palm and lays it on his chest. I card my fingers through his chest hair like I’ve done for years. It’s soft, but not thick. “Why the sudden interest in my dating life?”

I shrug and look down. “I just ...” How do I explain the sudden fear that popped up when I realized I’ll never be with him the way I want to be but ... someone else, someone not me, could eventually take his time and attention? One day, he could love someone in all the ways he will never love me. “I guess I got scared for a minute.” I choke on the whisper and force myself to continue. “That one day I won’t be the most important person in your life.”

“Oskar.” Pops maneuvers us until we’re facing each other, tucking his arm under my head as he looks down at me. We’re almost nose to nose, so close I’d barely have to move if I was brave enough to kiss him. His eyes are bright but calm. “The future is unpredictable. No man can say what tomorrow holds. But I can promise you this: you will always be the most important person in my life. No one will ever come before you.” My heart squeezes and my eyes burn. Ian cups my jaw as his thumb brushes under my eye. “I hope you live a long life—happy and healthy and, most importantly, safe—knowing that since the moment you were born, I have existed for you. You are the one thing—the only thing in my life that is irreplaceable.”

“Pops.” I sniff and burrow against his chest. His arms wrap around my body and he pulls me closer. “I love you.” And maybe he will never love me the way he could love a spouse,



but I can accept that so long as I am the only person he loves in any capacity.

“I love you too,” he says, pressing a warm kiss to my temple. “More than you can possibly know.” His fingers slide up and down my bare spine as I sink into him. I close my eyes. His touch feels amazing.

A gasp parts my lips as his fingers push into the back of my pajamas. They ghost over my hole and I press into them before he rolls me underneath him. He settles between my thighs and claims my mouth. A moan tears up my throat, loud and violent, and bursts past my lips as he nips at me before licking a line across my jaw. My balls draw tight against my body. “Ian.”

“I want you so much, Oskar,” Ian whispers, then he pushes my pajamas down my hips, over my knees, tosses them over the side of the bed. Holy shit! Is this really happening? I can’t breathe, it feels as if my heart is going to burst as my cock slaps against my stomach, leaving behind a line of pre-cum. I’m already so hard and he hasn’t done anything, not really.

“Yes. Please,” I whine as I reach for him. “I want you too.” Of course I want him. I’ve wanted him since I was fifteen, in some form or fashion. And now I’m finally getting him.

He fists my cock before capturing my mouth. His tongue slips between my lips as I thrust into his fingers. I can’t believe he’s touching me—really touching me—and it’s better than anything I’ve ever imagined. I want more. It’s not enough for him to kiss me, to jerk me. He has to give me everything. “Ian. Ian. Pops.”

“Do you want me to fuck you?” he rasps against my ear.

A shiver sparks down my spine. My heart feels as if it’s about to explode, but I nod and he pulls back, rolling me to my stomach. His mouth and hands are hot. He touches me everywhere before pulling my cheeks apart. “Ian. What—” I cry out as he licks a wet strip from my taint to the top of my crack. It’s something I’ve seen done a thousand times in porn and always wanted Ian to do to me and now he is and ... “Oh, God. Please.”

Ian chuckles, his tongue pushing against my hole. I understand now why the actors enjoy having their ass eaten so much. He licks and sucks and pushes inside. It's like nothing I've ever felt before. No one has ever touched me like this. I've never wanted anyone to touch me like this except Ian, and now he is. How? Why? Does it matter?

I draw my knees under my body and he spears his tongue inside of me, reaching between my thighs to grasp my leaking cock. I cry out and thrust into his wet hand even as I push back on his mouth. I won't last; I can't. How could anyone last when their body is being played with like this? "Ian."

He pulls back and I whine. "It's okay." His hand trails over my ass and he pulls my cheeks apart again. He's looking at my hole. Maybe if he was anyone else, I'd be embarrassed. But it's Ian and right now, I'm desperate for him to do something—anything. "You want me inside of you, don't you?"

"Yes!" I fist the sheet and cry out as he sinks a finger into me.

"Like that?" Ian asks, pressing his mouth to the base of my spine. "Is this what you want, Oskar?"

I shake my head. "More." He adds a second finger and I squeeze my eyes closed. My body is hot. Heat builds at the base of my spine and ... I won't last. Ian is finally, finally touching me the way I've dreamed of for years and I'm not going to last long enough to have him inside me. How is that fair? "Please. Pops. I need—" I choke on the words as his fingers are pulled from my body and replaced. My cock jerks as he sinks all the way inside, his cock filling me completely, and wet heat spreads on the sheets below me.

I moan and open my eyes as I thrust into the hand around my cock. Only, there is no hand. Ian is beside me, an arm tossed over his face as he breathes slow and deep. The heat under me is quickly cooling into a telling wet patch. I groan and bury my face in my pillow. My panties are sticky and gross. I roll to my back and shove my pajamas and soiled panties down my hips as the dream fades, replaced by a cold, harsh reality. I had another wet dream about Pops.

It probably won't be the last. They happen from time to time. Of course, they're happening more often these days. Thankfully Ian is asleep this time. Last time, I woke plastered against his side, humping his thigh like a dog in heat. He was half awake, asking me if I'd had a nightmare.

Dreaming about his hands on me is the opposite of a nightmare. Waking up in my own wet spot is as close to one as I get these days.

# Ian

Hell is hot. I've been burning for a long time, anyway.

As soon as Oskar climbs out of our shared bed on silent feet and the bathroom door shuts behind him with a soft but solid snick, I shove my hands into my pajama bottoms and grasp my aching cock. Heat floods my system, as if I've been thrown into a literal fire.

This is his second wet dream this week. The first one, he hadn't woken from. I'd been awake though. Like a spy on a secret mission, I'd listened to him moan and watched as he fucked his cock against the bed for a solid fifteen minutes before finally—finally going to sleep with a pleased little hum of relief. I hadn't touched myself that time. Instead, I forced myself to go back to sleep, although I was so hard I could have pounded nails. There is no way in hell I'm going to sleep this time, not with my cock leaking and my balls begging me for release. I should have jerked one out in the shower before bed. Now it's too late. I can't help myself.

I groan softly as I pump my cock, shoving my pajama bottoms under my balls for better access. My cock slaps my stomach as I spit into my hand. Lube would be better, but there's no time. Either way, the relief is almost instantaneous as I squeeze the base and stroke from root to tip. I thumb my leaking slit, dragging a bead of pre-cum down the shaft. I've always been a leaker; that comes in handy now as I pump faster, pushing myself to the edge.

Heat gathers along my spine and spreads down my thighs as I thrust into my fist. My balls draw up tight against my

body and I'm already right there, so close it's a physical ache. If this didn't need to be fast and dirty, I would drag it out—enjoy it to the fullest. It's not often I indulge like this.

Oskar's going to finish his shower any minute, though. The door dulls the sound of the water beating against the tile and I wonder ... is he in there, hand around his cock, thrusting into his wet fingers? Is coming once enough for him or does he need more, now he's awake and alone? Is he swallowing the sounds so he doesn't disturb me?

I'd kill to hear him right now, to know what he sounds like as he's finding his own pleasure.

What does he think about when he's alone, hand around his swollen cock? Has he ever pushed his fingers into his tight hole and played with his prostate? Or is Oskar content with his hand and imagination? Is some faceless, nameless man behind him, buried in his body, telling him how lovely he is, what a good boy he is? Does he think of a stranger using his body, praising him for being hot and tight and so fucking wet?

The idea of some stranger showing Oskar how good sex between two men can be makes my stomach twist and vomit rise in the back of my throat. No. The first time he has sex should be with someone who loves him, who will take the time to make sure he enjoys every second. His first time should be with *me*.

I grunt and squeeze my eyes closed before kicking the blanket away. My hand brushes against something soft and I pause as I grasp the fabric. It's wet—sticky. I draw it close ... panties. Oskar left his soiled panties—hot pink and ... a thong, maybe? Or an open back? I can't tell, not with the moon as my only source of light. All I know is he left them in our bed when he slipped away to shower and ... I groan as my cock throbs. Did he walk into the bathroom naked?

Pre-cum drips onto my stomach. Before I can think better of it, I wrap the panties around my aching cock. They're soft against my skin, and wet with Oskar's release as I stroke. It feels so fucking good. I can almost see Oskar in my lap, in nothing but these panties, his hands on my chest as he rides

my cock, racing towards his release. His face flushed the same shade as the panties, lips swollen from my kisses, hair in disarray from my hands, moaning as his cock leaks into the fabric, staining it.

I'd make him come in them, make him paint the fabric before stealing them for later use. He wouldn't miss them. If he did, I'd replace them. It wouldn't be the first time I sat with him while he debated the pros and cons of the lacy things in his online shopping cart. But new panties will be the last thing on his mind as I pull the ones he's wearing from his body and sink my fingers into his tight hole.

He'd beg. I know Oskar better than I know even myself. Oskar will beg, plead, whine—and if all else fails, demand—until I have three fingers inside him, his cock in my mouth, and his cum spilling down my throat. But Oskar is greedy. He won't just want my hands, my mouth. He'd want me to spread his thighs and sink my cock deep inside his needy hole until I don't know where I end and he begins.

And I want that too. I want to press so far into him not an inch of my cock remains outside, mark him in ways no one will ever see, even if they suspect. My cum will spill from his body after I finish deep in his slick hole, but I'll feed it back inside with my fingers, keep it there with a plug.

It's wrong. I know it's wrong. Oskar is off-limits. I can't have him—not the way I want him. He's not for me but my body doesn't care as the lace teases my cock head.

Air bursts from between my lips and I pant as I rub the fabric against my balls. They're tight, heavy with my need to come. I shouldn't have waited so long to do this. I wouldn't have been so on edge if I'd just given into my desire weeks ago. It's too late now. My stomach clenches as I twist my fingers around the sensitive head of my cock. I'm harder than I've ever been and so damn close. I bend my knees and thrust into my fist, panting for breath.

The shower is still going. Oskar is there, less than twenty feet away, naked and wet. Maybe he's biting his bottom lip to swallow his moans, stroking his cock like I am. It would be so

easy to join him. I know exactly what my name sounds like on his lips. He'd moan it for me as I showed him all the ways I love him. Will my name sound different as he screams it while I'm buried to the hilt inside his little hole?

Sparks pop beneath my skin. I groan and thrust into my hand as cum spills over my knuckles. My toes curl into the mattress and I swallow the sound building in my throat. It's hard to breathe for a moment; my body turns into liquid and aftershocks rock through me. Everything is warm—light and floaty. The sudden absence of sound has my eyes snapping open.

The shower is off.

*Shit. Shit. Shit.*

I yank my pajamas up my thighs, drag the blanket over my hips and shove his dirty panties under the mattress after using them to clean myself the best I can. The door opens just as I tuck my hand under my pillow. My heart is pounding against my ribcage; I try to slow my breathing. It doesn't help that Oskar is naked, framed by the bathroom light, steam billowing out around his body. I swallow and snap my eyes closed. As badly as I want to look, shame creeps up my spine. He's my grandson, for God's sake. And I just ...

What did I do? How could I touch myself while thinking of him, again? I told myself, promised myself that last time was the last time. For weeks I've managed not to think of Oskar as I came and now ... now what remains of my cum is drying on my stomach and all I can think of is how badly I want to touch him. But even worse than touching myself while thinking of Oskar, I did so with his used panties in hand. I'm a monster, a monster of the worst sort.

"Pops?" Oskar's voice is soft as he climbs into the bed behind me. His hand is warm on my shoulder.

I hum and choke out, "Bad dream?"

At least I sound like I'm just waking up instead of being devoured by guilt.

He's silent for a long second. "Can you hold me?" If I'm a smart man, I'll tell him no. I'll tell him he needs to sleep in his own bed tonight and every other night because he's too old to still be sharing mine. Maybe I have a previously unknown masochistic streak. It's the only explanation for why I roll over and reach for him. He lands against my chest with a quiet sigh and his shoulders relax. He curls into me like I'm not the worst sort of man. "Sorry if I woke you."

"You didn't," I tell him as I run my hand down his back. He wraps an arm around my midsection and kisses the hollow beneath my Adam's apple. Pleasure has my stomach clenching. Thankfully, my cock is spent. The hand job at least ensured I'll be down for the count tonight. Oskar won't wake with my hard cock pressed against his spine in the morning.

"I love you," he sighs, voice soft and dreamy, pressing his cheek against my chest.

I squeeze my eyes closed and drag him against my body. His legs tangle with mine as I press a kiss to his hair. "I love you too."

He can never know. If he knew I would lose him and I can't. I can't lose Oskar.



# Oskar

Most mornings, I wake up pressed against Ian's side, happy to lie there and bask in our shared heat. Not this morning. He had a meeting to prepare for and I wanted to stay in bed as long as possible, since it's Saturday. And I needed a moment to myself after that dream last night.

By midmorning, my body is determined to ruin my plan of doing nothing—not moving unless I need to use the bathroom or there's a house fire—so I get up and go in search of Pops.

He's in the family room, the one we use for business. I shut the door behind myself and the other men in the room stop talking. They peer at me but say nothing. Even when I settle in his lap and curl against his broad chest, they remain silent. He wraps his arm around my midsection.

What are they really going to say to Ian Bassett? Tell your grandson to get up because it makes us uncomfortable? They'd be dead before they finished their sentence; Pops never lets anyone speak out against me. So they watch as I get comfortable, then clear their throats and hesitantly continue their conversation, probably wondering if business should proceed now that I'm in the room.

Pops has always done his best to shield me from the world he—we—live in. He doesn't talk to me about the illegal side of his business dealings and anytime I ask, he avoids the topic altogether. Some days, I can almost believe he isn't Ian Bassett, Boss of the Bassett Crime Family. Others ...

The truth is, there's no hiding the skeletons, not entirely. Even I hear the whispers and see the news. But I do my best to stay on the sidelines, where he prefers me and where I'm happiest—though that may change one day, when I'm older—even if I disagree with some of his chosen business associates. Like these two, though I'm not really sure who they are.

The pair of them have mud brown eyes and dark hair—though one's is a shade lighter, a little longer than the other's. They're about the same height, but the one with the lighter hair is bigger, like he's used to throwing his weight around to get his way. Maybe they're brothers? Or at the very least, close cousins. Either way, they give me the creeps. Something about them is ... wrong.

“As I was saying, Mr. Bassett, we're hoping to use the harbor for our newest business venture,” the darker-haired one says. His voice is wet and slimy, like he has snot stuck in the back of his throat. His gaze shifts around the room, from us to the guards. The guards are a common fixture around the house. Unless they're drawing attention to themselves, which they rarely do, I hardly notice them anymore.

“We are willing to split sixty-forty,” the one with lighter hair says. His teeth are stained yellow. My eyes drop to his hands; his nails are jagged and unclean. The tips of his fingers are discolored—stained like his teeth—from years of smoking. It's gross. He's definitely the kind of guy who has to pay for sex.

“I have more money than I can hope to spend in a dozen lifetimes,” Ian says as his fingers slip under the hem of my shirt. He strokes my side with his thumb and I suppress a shiver of pleasure as I readjust myself in his lap. Even the slightest touch after last night's dream is too much. “Why would you assume the chance to make meager earnings off your doomed business venture would tempt me?”

I wasn't sure before but now I know: they're new to town. For one, I've never seen them before and I'm familiar with most, if not all, of Ian's business partners even if just in passing. And everyone local knows no one but the Bassett Family uses the harbor unless they're willing to pay a heavy

price. Money isn't good enough either, not when Pops has enough, like he said, to last a dozen lifetimes.

“Doomed?” Snot's brows pull together.

Pops brushes his mouth across my temple. Heat gathers in my stomach and I lean into him. He pats my thigh. “Up, Oskar.”

I huff and roll my eyes before I climb out of his lap. It's probably for the best that I'm not sitting on him right now anyway but still, I was comfortable. Ian's lips twitch, but he swallows a smile as he stands. I drop into the vacant seat, digging in my pocket for my phone as he crosses the room. He pours a finger of his favorite whiskey, the amber liquid swirling inside the crystal glass, before he takes a slow sip.

“What can we offer you?” Stain asks.

What does Ian Bassett want most in the world? If you ask him, he'll say peace and quiet—an uninterrupted night at the theater, followed by a glass of whiskey before bed. In short, nothing these two have. What do you give the man who has already taken the world for himself, after all?

“You want access to my harbor but have no clear plan on how to tempt me to give it to you?” Ian asks. I can hear the amusement in his voice. It's only years of practice keeping him from laughing in their faces and dismissing them outright.

He's being kinder than I would be. If I was standing where Ian is I would have already told them to get the hell out of my house, off my property, put my city in their rear-view mirror because the alternative was hot. And ended in a pile of bone chunks and ash.

“Maybe we miscalculated,” Stain says, sharing a glance with Snot. I really should have asked for their names, but it's too late now. The way things are going, I'll never need to know. I'm not sorry about that. “We had thought giving you the bigger share would be enough.”

It didn't sound like they were offering the larger share of profit before. It sounded as if they were trying to rob Ian. And maybe the bigger share would be enough to anyone else, but

not Pops. Money grows on trees for him. A combination of legitimate business—high-end hotels, a couple of resorts—and ... not so legitimate, like the import and export business he runs out of the harbor that I'm not *technically* supposed to know about, keeps us well provided for. I'll never have to work a day if I don't want to, which I don't. Why take a job I don't need from someone who does, after all?

“We have other things,” Snot says, his gaze shifting to me when Pops shows no interest. An ugly kind of glee dances across his face as his lips curl into a self-satisfied smirk. My stomach twists. What could he have that would put that expression on his face? Nothing good, I bet. Something that'll get him killed if he doesn't tread carefully.

“Such as?” Pops asks, but his tone is different now. There is a rough, sharp edge to it, like a serrated blade. It's the one that always makes me think of him as Ian, Boss of the Bassett Family, morally ambiguous businessman capable of murder and mayhem under the right circumstances. Not Pops, my loving grandfather who pets my head and tells me I'm pretty on demand.

“Girls,” Snot says, an excited gleam in his eyes. “And boys.”

I choke on a laugh as my gaze slips to Ian. They don't know they just signed their death warrants. The Flesh Trade is forbidden on the West Coast, has been since I was a child. All three major Families—the Sterlings in San Diego, the Malnars in San Jose, and us—the Bassetts of Los Angeles—had come to an accord years ago. How could these newcomers know that? They can't. Ignorance won't save their lives. They'll be made into an example for anyone even thinking about bringing the Flesh Trade to our shores.

Ian swallows what remains in his glass. “Is that so?”

Snot nods, probably thinking Ian's tone means he's interested. He is. But you never want Ian Bassett interested in you, not the way he is in these two now.

“Young too. Younger and a lot prettier than—”

“Watch it,” I warn as I sit up in the chair. No way in hell am I going to be insulted in my home by two dead men. I may be spoiled and admittedly lazy, but I am a Bassett at the end of the day. When push comes to shove, I know how to take care of business and handle my shit. And these two sick fucks? They deserve to be handled in the worst possible way if they’re dealing in Flesh. I’d be willing to slit their throats and let them bleed out myself, if I knew Ian wasn’t going to do worse to at least one of them, if not both.

“Give us a moment, Oskar,” Ian says as he turns his empty glass between his fingers before sitting it on the mantle. There’s a calmness to him, a stillness I recognize as the hush before a storm. Is it perverted that my cock is responding to his cold demeanor? Probably. “Perhaps call Arlo. See if he can cut his vacation short.”

“Should I call the Karrs too?” I stand and walk towards him. I don’t need to see what’s going to happen to know what’s going to happen. Those men are going to die. They’ll disappear, never be seen or heard from again, thanks to the expertise of the Karr siblings. Arlo will cut his vacation short, even if he bitches about it a little. Then, once he’s home, Ian will explain the situation and send him on a fact-finding mission. And I’ll do what I always do: pretend to be oblivious, even if Pops knows I’m not.

He hums and palms the back of my head as I kiss his chin. “Unnecessary. I’ll call them.” He tugs me in for a soft hug, then releases me. Could he feel my erection?

“Remember to eat.”

“I will.” The door snaps shut behind me as I thumb open my recent calls list and find Arlo’s name. Lately, anytime there’s trouble, Ian calls him. Or has me call him, when necessary. One day soon, he’s going to be marked. I have a feeling once that happens Ian will restructure the Family. Arlo will probably land somewhere at the top of the food chain. I’m not upset about that.

He answers on the second ring. His voice is bright—happy and laughing. “It’s been a couple of days, brat. I was just

thinking things are quiet—too quiet. You dying? I’ll say something nice at your funeral. Maybe something like Oskar Bassett was dog-ass ugly but had such a beautiful soul. You like that?”

I laugh and head towards the kitchen. Arlo might not be my older brother, but he always treats me like a younger one and I love him for it.

“Fuck you. I’m beautiful. Pops says so. We can order a Halloween mask for you, though. It’ll be an improvement,” I say as I open the fridge and look at the contents. There’s nothing I really want to eat.

Arlo scoffs. “Whatever you need to tell yourself.”

I roll my eyes. “Ian wants you here ASAP.”

“It’s like he thinks I work for him or something,” Arlo groans.

I choke on a laugh. I mean ... not officially, but yeah, pretty much.

“Get a move on,” I say before I pause. “But you better bring me a gift.”

“You better have eaten lunch by the time I get there, then,” he says.

I roll my eyes as I grab a bottle of water and a pre-made chicken salad. “Yeah, yeah. I’m already in the kitchen.” I sit at the counter and tuck the phone between my head and shoulder. “Don’t get your panties in a twist.” The water and salad aren’t what I want but I can’t gorge on junk without consequences so ... healthy shit.

“Brat. I’ll be there soon.” Arlo hangs up.

I set my phone down, pull the lid off the salad and open the water.

Ian and Arlo don’t always need to remind me to eat, but I know they do it out of love. Food and I have a complicated relationship. When I was first diagnosed, I struggled. What kid wouldn’t struggle with a diagnosis like that? For a long time, I resisted an insulin pump, even when Pops begged and pleaded

with me, but after fainting on my way home from school and waking up from a three-day coma I gave in. I never wanted to put Pops through that nightmare again.

# Ian

In my experience, everyone has a price. Men can be bought, sold, borrowed so long as you're willing to pay the asking price. Coercion isn't often necessary, not if you take the time to learn a man's desires. Even I have a price. Most things cannot tempt me, though.

I do not require status; my reputation often precedes me.

I do not require power; I have more authority than some governments.

I do not require money; I have more capital than some small countries.

My life has not lacked family, friends, and companionship. I have a son—dead as he may be now because of his own foolish choices—and a grandson I love beyond all measure. I have business associates and acquaintances who are more than how I make my bottom line. Over the years, I've enjoyed the company of beautiful women and men when the mood struck me. In short, my life has been rich in a multitude of ways. And I would throw it all away in a heartbeat if it means the choices I've made never stain Oskar.

The door clicks shut behind him as he leaves, and I look at the foul beasts masquerading as human beings across from me. How dare they come into my home, offer me Flesh, and insult my grandson on top of everything? They're lucky Oskar is so well behaved. For a moment, when he sat up, I thought he was going to attempt murder. I would have had to stop him, of course, and he would have been upset with me for that.



“If you’re interested in a new boy, we’d happily take the current one off your hands,” Mr. Bauer says, a sick and twisted grin rearranging his face. My gaze flicks from him to his counterpart—Mr. Morrison, who doesn’t look nearly as comfortable with this turn of events.

The dark need to see them both suffer boils behind my ribcage.

“That boy you’d happily take off my hands is my grandson,” I say, reaching for the whiskey and refilling my glass. Mr. Bauer sucks in a sharp breath as he begins to rise. I tip my head to Whit—I always keep him close at hand during meetings like this; he’s the kind of guy who comes in handy when things get physical. He steps forward, shoving Mr. Bauer back into his seat. “Don’t,” I warn Mr. Morrison, freeing the gun I always carry from the holster hidden by my suit jacket, as he moves to stand.

“I’m sorry if we’ve offended you, Mr. Bassett—”

I snort, raise the gun and squeeze. Mr. Morrison slumps against the sofa.

The older I get, the less patience I have. Killing men is just so damn easy.

“Make Mr. Bauer comfortable at one of the safe houses,” I tell Whit. He jerks Mr. Bauer up and drags him from the family room without a fight. Mr. Bauer must have known he didn’t stand a chance in hell against Whit. The man is built like a linebacker, after all.

I glance at Mr. Morrison before calling the Karrs.

By the time they’ve removed his body, and all evidence of it, Arlo has arrived.

“Did I just see the Karr siblings leaving?” he asks as he enters the family room.

“I don’t know what you saw.” I grab a second glass, fill it with whiskey and then refill my own.

Arlo hums and takes the crystal when I offer it, falling onto the sofa where a dead guy had just been. “So. What’s so

urgent I had to cut my vacation short?”

I drop into the chair Oskar and I had shared. “Flesh is moving through the city. I need you to find out what you can about that and these two men.”

He accepts my phone, looking down at the picture of Mr. Bauer and Mr. Morrison I had pulled from the security cameras.

“How soon?” Arlo asks.

“Immediately.” I take my phone back.

Arlo groans and drains his glass. “I need to shit, shave and shower first. And see Oskar.”

I swallow a smile. If Oskar finds out Arlo was here but didn’t stop in to say hello, there’ll be hell to pay. “Find me when you have something for me.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Arlo sets his glass on the side table and leaves the family room. He’ll discover everything I need to know. Mr. Bauer will no doubt spill his guts, if only to confirm what Arlo discovers.

Where are they keeping the people they’re trafficking?

Are they working alone or with a crew?

A million questions to be answered.

I rub my temples and head to my office. Only moments after I sit down, Oskar pushes in without knocking, tossing an apple back and forth in his palms. He’s wearing a smile. A streak of paint smudges his cheek. A multitude of colors stain the long-sleeved button-up he’s wearing. Once upon a time, it was mine, but he claimed it and I never had the heart to take it back, even though it is—was—one of my favorites.

It was only a few hours ago I sent him from the room to call Arlo. He apparently retreated to his art studio and got lost in whatever he’s currently working on, giving me the space to do what I needed to with the men who dared come into my home and try to tempt me with the bodies of men and women—some of whom are no doubt children if they’re younger than Oskar, who’s just barely an adult.

It's better that way—for him and me.

“Do you plan to eat that apple or play with it?”

He settles in my lap, curling against my chest. He's warm and soft as he rests against my body. Those men probably got the wrong impression because of this—Oskar's need for physical affection. It's not his fault. Mr. Morrison had only himself to blame.

“Both?” he says, his smile only growing as a teasing light sparks in his happy gaze. I roll my eyes and wind my arm around his back to keep him steady. After last night, I should remove him from my lap but I won't. He draws his legs up and tucks his knees against his chest. If he wasn't as small as he is, he wouldn't still be making himself at home in my lap. Or maybe he would, like an eager, overgrown puppy. “But this apple isn't for me. Have you eaten today?”

“Have you?” He can't afford to skip a meal. He can't binge on an endless supply of junk. Everything he puts in his mouth could kill him if he isn't careful.

“What do you think?” he asks, wrapping his arm around my neck. He smells like his art supplies. A sense of peace builds behind my ribcage as I hold him; I close my eyes for a moment, basking in the feeling. Of all the people I've loved, taken comfort in when I needed it, none of them compare to Oskar. Last night was a mistake I won't make again.

“Do I need to force the information out of you?” There's a tease in my voice as I take the apple and turn it in my hand.

Oskar sighs and lays his head on my shoulder. “I slept through breakfast but had chicken Caesar salad for lunch. What happened to the two idiots?”

He shifts and I tighten my arm around him to keep him from sliding to the floor. He may be small—tiny compared to most young men his age—but he still just barely fits in my lap. “We should go out tonight. Maybe you'd like to go to the theater? How about an art gallery?”

He loves art, as much if not more than I do, considering just how much time he spends in his studio.

“Nice bait,” Oskar huffs, rolling his eyes. He’s not as oblivious as he pretends to be. Of course he knows about the family business—how could he not after all these years—but Oskar is kept in the dark as much as possible for now. I won’t expose him to more than I have to, not knowingly. There are simply things he doesn’t need to know, may never need to know, and the less he knows, the better his chances are of getting out, doing something good and decent with his life. “But I’ll bite.”

I laugh softly, brushing a kiss across his temple. He hums and presses his face into my neck as I rub his spine. We sit like that for a long silent moment before I urge him to sit back. “Use my computer—see if there’s something you’d like to do. We can get dinner while we’re out.”

It’s about that time, anyway.

“It’s a date,” he declares, turning in my lap and reaching for my computer. I squeeze his side, nudge the chair barely supporting our weight forward, and he grins at me over his shoulder. His eyes are bright and dance with happiness. There was a time when I believed he would never truly smile again; seeing his utter joy has warmth curling through my stomach. “I’ll find something you’ll enjoy too.”

“You know I’ll enjoy anything you pick.”

“You’ll pretend to enjoy it,” he counters, his fingers moving over the keyboard. He clicks through screens with the speed only someone who has grown up on a steady diet of technology can manage. If I had anything to hide, I’d be more hesitant about letting him use my desktop. “Then whine to Arlo that it was boring or dumb when you think I’m not around.”

“I do not whine. And what have I told you about eavesdropping, Oskar?”

“Don’t get caught,” he says. I sigh, rubbing my forehead. I *had* told him not to get caught, but when I said that I didn’t realize he would eavesdrop on *me* and *my* conversations. Really, I should have known better. He’s my grandson, after all. He looks over his shoulder, a grin still stretching his

mouth, but bigger now. He's found something. "Mitch has a show on. I love his art."

*Mitch.* I repress a sigh. He burst onto the art scene a few years ago and garnished more attention than I think he deserves. His art is good—better than good—but the primary draw for most people, I assume, is just how outlandish his shows are.

The last one we attended was titled "Food for the Soul." Upon arrival, we found men and women of all ages, races and body types stretched out nearly naked on tables, covered in finger food. The attendees had eaten to their heart's content while browsing the artwork. Oskar loved it. I'd gone home hungry. And now, I couldn't tell you a single thing about any of the art that had been on display.

"We can go," I tell Oskar, though the last thing I really want is to be exposed to more of Mitch.

He's grinning as he sits back, pressing into my chest. I wrap my arm around his middle, laying my chin on his shoulder. "If I see something I really like, can we buy a piece?" he asks, turning his head. His lips brush my ear when he speaks.

"Perhaps," I say, somewhat unwillingly, though I already know, as does he, that if he sees something he likes—*really* likes—I'll buy it without a second thought. If it's something truly awful, we can stick it somewhere out of sight.

He bounces on my lap before turning around and pressing a kiss to my cheek. "Thanks Pops." I close my eyes as he lingers. I really need to make him stop. It's getting harder to separate the affection of a child from that of a man. He's not the child he once was. He's far too old to still seek affection the way he does, and give it so freely. People I work with, who work under me, will get the wrong idea about our relationship, if they haven't already.

Not today, though. That conversation is best saved for a better time.

“You’re welcome, Oskar,” I say as he pulls back and stands with a happy bounce. He needs to shower and dress. I need a moment to exhale.

# Oskar

The art show, when I found it online, was called Bare It All. Now, I know why.

Everyone is naked. Or, well, correction: everyone in the paintings is naked. And so are the event staff. Attractive men—holy shit, are they attractive; how are they so fucking hot—and women who are just as hot as the men but don't do anything for me, walk around with it all on display. None of them seem the least bit shy either. Most people who are wearing clothes don't even seem to be interested in the art on the walls, not with it walking around offering champagne on silver platters.

Pops and I came here for the art, though. Or, I came because of the art. He came in a bid to distract me from the two men he met with earlier today. They're probably dead now but I honestly don't care because art! By one of my favorite artists!

Ian's arm is around my shoulders and I'm pressed against his side as we inspect the piece in front of us. It's ... interesting. And graphic, to say the least.

Painted in shadows, a tall, well-built man with shaggy brown hair who looks a little like Mitch, actually, is standing behind another smaller man with deep green eyes. The one with green eyes is bent over a messy desk, grasping the edge as he pants for breath and cries. Tears, illuminated by the moonlight shining through a broken window, trail down his cheeks and a cock head peeks from between his swollen lips, dripping cum on the floor. If either of us were to ask Mitch

about the deeper meaning, he'd say something about how life—which sex is obviously a part of—fucks us all. To me, it just looks like a monster cock demolishing another man.

I glance over, inspecting Ian's face, which is perfectly neutral, before my gaze drops lower. There is no reaction down there either, but I think it would be a little weird if he thought this was hot. It's mostly disturbing, in the way all Mitch's artwork is.

“If you ask, I'm going to have to put my foot down and say no,” Pops says, without looking at me. A smile is playing on the edge of his lips.

I roll my eyes and look back at the artwork. “I wasn't going to ask.”

He would say yes though, if reluctantly. Thus far, I haven't seen anything I want. Not because the paintings aren't good, because they are—the details are stunning—but they're not what I'd want hanging in the family room or displayed in the hallway. A lot of this would happily be at home in a BDSM club. Maybe that's what Mitch was going for? He could be into whips and rope for all I know. More power to him if that's the case, but ... I'll pass.

“Drink, Sir?” one of the waitstaff asks. He's wearing an empty smile and holding a platter of champagne. As my gaze drops and I inspect his impressive package, I wonder if he's okay wearing nothing but a bowtie around his neck. He doesn't seem bothered, but he's not hard either, so being on display isn't a kink for him. Personally, I don't think I'd ever be brave enough to walk around ass naked in a room full of strangers. Ian would never allow it, either.

Just like he won't allow me to drink in his presence.

“Thank you,” he says, taking the glass I grabbed before I can steal a sip.

“You're welcome.” The waiter smiles and moves on. Most of the women leer at him, and the other naked men, but some men do too. The naked women walking around are getting just



as much, if not more, attention. If any of the staff are hard up and looking to get laid, tonight is their night.

“You never let me drink,” I huff, turning my attention to Ian who’s sipping on the champagne he probably didn’t even want. He could have let me keep it, just for tonight. It isn’t like I’ve never drank before. He knows there have been plenty of times when Holden and I got smashed. Nothing bad ever happened.

“You’re not old enough,” Pops says. It won’t do me any good to argue.

I roll my eyes and loop my arm through his as we move towards the next piece in the collection. Compared to the last one, it’s a lot more ... normal.

A pair of lovers are tangled in each other’s arms on a bed of blood. A pale corpse isn’t far away. The pair who are still alive are clearly enjoying their activities, unconcerned about the dead guy. One is fully on display, holding his leaking cock in one bloody hand and cupping his nut sack in the other. Passion and pleasure twist their faces as firelight casts them in warm tones.

It’s still pretty much porn disguised as art.

“What do you think of this one?” I ask Ian as I glance at him.

“They look cold,” he says, taking another sip from the champagne glass as he inspects the painting.

I laugh. “I think they’re in the middle of warming each other up.”

“I think they should shower, put some clothes on, and deal with the dead body.” Ian says. “None of that is sanitary.”

I snort and look up at him again. There’s a tightness around his eyes when he glances at me and I realize he’s uncomfortable here. No one else would notice, but I do. It’s a little funny, really. Pops is always so in his element, so in control of every situation he finds himself in. Any time I can get him out of his comfort zone, I give myself a pat on the back for a job well done. I like throwing him off his perch,

watching him struggle with his place in the world with the rest of humanity from time to time. It's cruel but ... not unforgivable.

We move to the next painting and I choke on a laugh.

"We have to get this for Arlo," I say, struggling to control myself.

A man in nothing but a doctor's coat kneels on a tile floor, sucking a cock, with spit and cum dripping down his chin. The man he's blowing is clearly a patient. He's pulled his dressing gown to the side with one hand and the other is fisting the doctor's hair. It's actually pretty hot. And the most normal piece of artwork we've seen tonight. Arlo will like it when he sees it. Or maybe not, considering his stepfather, who he inappropriately lusts after, is a doctor.

Pops chuckles. "I'll make an offer. You can give it to him for his birthday. Or Christmas."

I grin. I can already picture Arlo's face when he unwraps this painting.

"Oskar," a familiar voice calls and I turn to see Mitch swaying towards us. He's damn near naked, too. Only a thin pair of flesh-colored, skintight bikini bottoms are preventing his dick from bouncing with every step he takes. They don't hide the outline of his cock, though. He's obviously uncircumcised. "I thought I recognized you."

He leans in and presses a chaste kiss to my cheek.

We aren't friends, not really. Ian would never allow that. But I've come to a lot of his shows and bought a lot of his art—I like his style, even if it is a little ... too much sometimes.

"And you, Mr. Bassett,"—Ian extends a hand, stopping Mitch from coming in for a cheek kiss. Mitch doesn't seem bothered—"get sexier every time I see you."

I cough to cover a laugh. Mitch is just ... so balls to the wall, over the top. There is no way he hasn't heard rumors about the Bassett Family but he couldn't care less. Or maybe he has a death wish. If so, he's bugging the right man to get

the job done. Pops won't hesitate if he becomes too much to handle.

"Your art is ... as unique as usual, Mitch," Pops says, pulling his hand free of Mitch's grasp. He doesn't wipe it on his thigh but I'm willing to bet he wants to.

Mitch turns, inspecting the room. "I think this is my best showing yet. Do you like the models?" He grins; his gaze travels over the naked men and women before jumping back to me. "When are you going to let me paint you, Oskar?"

"When I can keep my clothes on while you're doing it," I say. The last thing I want is to get naked for Mitch and end up as nothing more than a painting hanging in some gallery for everyone to gawk at.

"Perhaps you should keep your clothes on period—both of you," Ian says, depositing his half empty glass on a passing waitress' tray.

Mitch laughs softly. "You worried about your grandson?"

"Always. He is my grandson, after all." Ian drops an arm around my shoulder and pulls me against his side. Warmth blooms behind my ribcage and spreads through me at the way he claims me so casually. I'm his. I will always be his, in whatever way he's willing to have me. "It would serve you well to remember that."

I don't know if Mitch can hear the warning in Ian's voice, but I can. My dick jerks with interest and I shift from one foot to the other, hoping no one else notices. I won't be the only man in attendance with a hard-on, but still. None of them will be hard because their grandfather is possessive and dangerous. It shouldn't be hot, knowing he'd kill for me, *has* killed for me. But it is.

"I don't blame you." Mitch grins at me. "He's so adorable. One day someone is going to come along and eat you right up." He grabs my hand and attempts to pull me away from Ian, but he doesn't let me go—thankfully. Mitch is good-looking but the last person I want to press against while he's naked—almost naked.

“Thanks for coming to say hello,” I say as I pull my hand from his, “but we don’t want to take too much of your time. I haven’t finished looking around yet.”

“Of course.” Mitch is already turning his attention to the next person he has to make nice with. The aim tonight is to sell paintings, after all—not end up dead because he upset Ian Bassett by coming on to his grandson. “Enjoy yourselves!”

“Do you ... like him?” Ian asks once Mitch walks away.

“Who?” I look at Pops and shake my head, frowning. “Mitch? No way. That’s not my type at all.” I doubt he’d change his diet for me, much less murder someone.

“Good,” Ian says, heading towards the next picture, voice dripping with satisfaction. “If I ever see a rendition of you naked on one of his canvases, he won’t be capable of making art anymore.”

It’s not a threat. It’s a promise, and it has my cock leaking in my panties.

# Ian

The bedroom door creaks open and I lift my eyes from the papers in my lap. Oskar stands on the threshold in his pajamas, messy hair and a soft smile, sketchbook in hand.

We only returned home a couple hours ago after getting dinner in the city. He tucked into a plate of honey chicken, steamed vegetables, and wild rice while going on and on about the art show. Not the art, since it certainly left something to be desired, but the setup itself. And the piece we'd bought for Arlo. It warmed me to see him so happy after the events of the day.

I'd disappeared into my office to make a few phone calls, and Oskar had been preoccupied by Holden Malnar, who'd called to talk about ... honestly, I'm not sure and probably don't want to know what he and Oskar discussed. He is insanity masquerading as a cute twink with a killer smile. Letting Oskar be his friend is probably a mistake, but I've already made it and it's irreversible.

"Are you waiting for a personal invite?" I ask as I set my papers aside. I won't get any more work done tonight, but I don't mind. These quiet moments with Oskar, when it's just us, relaxing at the end of a long day, are some of my favorites. He is a bright spot in my life and has been since he was born. Moments like these remind me there's more to life than work.

Oskar rolls his eyes and crosses the room, climbing into bed after setting his sketchbook on the nightstand. "Did you have fun tonight?"

I always enjoy being out with him, watching the way happiness plays across his features. He shouldn't have to ask to know that, but I never mind reassuring him.

"I did." I lift my arm so he can curl against my side.

"Me too," he says, and I smile as I press a kiss to the top of his head.

"Good." The art show served its purpose: he's no longer questioning me about the two men I met with hours earlier.

"Did you and Saxon ever do stuff like this?" he asks, peering up at me.

"Like what?" Saxon never lay in my bed and sought physical affection, not after a certain age. My son thought he was grown and was ready to take on the world by the time he was fourteen. He wanted more responsibility than he was ready for at such a young age. He couldn't even manage the tasks he *was* ready for without disaster. By the time he was old enough to be trusted with anything of consequence, he wasn't the type of man I would trust with my business. I'd turned a blind eye to his bad habits, assuming none of them would taint Oskar. An incorrect assumption, in the end.

"Go to art shows." Oskar clarifies as he wraps an arm around my midsection. His soft body melts against mine and he snuggles close. "I was thinking, but I don't remember doing anything with him or Mom unless you were with us."

"No. Saxon and I were never close," I say as I card my fingers through his hair.

Maybe it's my fault Saxon and I didn't have a good relationship. I was young when I had him—only seventeen and not ready to be a father by any stretch of the word—but I tried. When his mother, a girl not ready for parenthood either, discarded him in favor of drugs, I raised him the best I could alone while I attempted to conquer the world so I would have a place in it. By the time I'd succeeded, he was well on his way to being a father too and no longer needed me for much of anything.

“Sometimes I wonder if it’s my fault you had to kill them,” Oskar whispers, his voice dipping and breaking as he curls into himself.

I push him up, forcing him to look at me. “No, Oskar.” I brush my knuckles along his smooth jaw. “Just no.” His parents made their choices. I made mine. If given the chance, I’d make the same choice.

“I mean, I guess I know logically that they were adults. But if I’d never told them I’m gay, maybe things would be different.” I squeeze him a little harder. I knew he was gay before he ever admitted it out loud. It was easy to see. I never cared, but some people do. They always will. “Not that I’m unhappy. I love my life. I love spending it with you. I just wonder if you might be a little sad. Saxon was your son.”

I sigh and tip my head back, closing my eyes. Saxon was my son. And perhaps I should feel some regret about what I did, but all these years later, I still feel the same way I did when I raised that gun and aimed it at him. He had to die so Oskar could live a life unencumbered.

“Saxon was my son.” I pause and think about how best to explain myself. It’s past time I did. Oskar, of all people, deserves an explanation. They were his parents, after all. “In some ways—many ways, I suppose—Saxon never felt like my son.” I admit that cold, hard truth. Any parent worth a damn would be ashamed of that, but I’m not. It simply is what it is—the truth of my relationship with Saxon. “I was young when I had him, incapable of understanding the responsibility of fatherhood. I did my best by him but I realize now I failed him in many ways.”

I shake my head. There are so many things I could have—*should* have—done differently while Saxon was growing from child to teenager to young adult, but I’d been a child myself, focused on other tasks. It’s too late either way now. “We can’t rewrite the past, Oskar. If I had to make the choice I did that day again, I would make the same choice.”

Oskar or Saxon.

There was no choice at all—not really. It was Oskar, after all—always Oskar.

“I don’t regret it,” Oskar tells me, lying against my chest. He turns his face into my collarbone as I run my hand up and down his spine. “Maybe I feel a little guilty sometimes. I was kind of happy when they were gone. But I was nervous too, that things would change between us after that. I’m glad they didn’t. I love you, Ian.” He presses his lips against my throat and I close my eyes, letting the familiar warmth his touch generates hum through me.

“I love you too, Oskar—always.” I kiss his temple. Holding him close is a bad idea but I can’t push him away either. Against him, I have always been weak. Thankfully, the blanket hides my reaction to his mouth and hands on me. There’s no way to explain why my cock is hard. It’s not a conversation I want to have with him.

“I want to make you proud of me,” he says, his voice dipping as he brushes his fingers through my chest hair. “But I don’t know how.”

“I’m always proud of you,” I tell him as I grasp the back of his neck. “You couldn’t disappoint me if you tried.”

He grins wide; laughter illuminates his eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Don’t be a brat.” He doesn’t need to take my words as a challenge. He laughs and shifts. Before I can move to stop him, he throws a leg over mine under the blanket and climbs into my lap. His knees settle on either side of my thighs, and his ass teases my throbbing cock. I bite back a groan. His eyes widen and his cheeks flush pink as he looks down at me. A million emotions I can’t decipher flicker across his face. “Oskar—”

“It’s okay,” he says, his voice cracking. His warm hands slide down my bare chest. I shake my head. It isn’t okay. Nothing about this is okay. He’s my grandson. I’m his—

“Oskar.” My head thumps against the headboard as he rolls his hips and moans softly. The sound echoes around us. My



balls pull tight against my body. My cock leaks. Just this—the weight of him as he grinds his ass against my cock—shouldn't feel this good.

What is he doing? Why is he doing it? Why am I allowing it? Fuck.

“Have ... Have you ever ...” He bites his bottom lip as his gaze drifts to where our bodies are pressed together. I need to push him out of my lap, but he brushes his fingers along the waistband of my sleep pants and I can't. I am frozen in place, holding my breath, waiting to see what he does next. He lifts his gaze to meet mine again. “I never see you with anyone. And you said you don't date but ... do you ever ... have sex?”

Jesus Christ. It's one thing to talk about his sex life. Mine should be off limits.

“Oskar ...” I shake my head and swallow around the lump in my throat. He's my grandson. I can't tell him that occasionally, I do find a bed partner. No one serious, no one looking for more than a good time, but I'm far from celibate. There are some things he doesn't need to know about me.

“I've never ...” He leans forward, his chest colliding with mine as his ass drags along my cock. His cheeks are painted a deep red. He brushes his mouth against the corner of mine and I struggle to draw a breath. “Will you kiss me? No one ... No one ever has.”

My fingers flex on his thighs. “Oskar.”

How can he ask that of me? How can I say no when I want to taste him so badly?

“Please, Pops.” He tips his head, sliding his mouth along mine, a barely-there touch. “Just one kiss.” Fuck. I groan as my cock throbs. Just one will lead to another and another. How can one kiss not turn into two, three, four, more when he's sitting in my lap, my hard cock pressing against his ass and leaking like a sieve? “I want you to.” His breath is hot and wet; he pants, lips less than an inch from mine. This is wrong. It would be so easy to do what he asks but he has to know how forbidden this is. But he wants it so badly and denying him ...

“Ian. Please.” He rolls his hips again, teasing me through my sleep pants.

“Just one,” I rasp before I grip the back of his neck and capture his mouth. He moans as his lips part and I sweep into the space. The taste of him, something warm and sweet, sinks into my psyche, a flavor I’ll never forget, not for a second. I will carry the essence of him on my tongue and the weight of his slim body pressing me into our shared bed to my grave. His tongue slides against mine as he wraps his arms around my neck and leans against my chest. He thrusts against my stomach with a soft groan. His cock is hard.

Just a kiss. Just one kiss.

His first kiss.

# Oskar

Have I ever been this hard before?

No. Probably—no. Definitely not. I'd remember.

Ian's tongue slides against mine, his warm hand flexing on the nape of my neck. He holds me close, and it feels so good—having him under me as our mouths and tongues cling together, moving in sync. He tastes like whiskey, as if he'd had a glass before coming to bed. I lap the taste off his tongue, wanting to memorize it just in case this never happens again. I hope it does. How can one kiss be enough when this feels so good?

I can't stop rolling my hips against his cock, feeling it hard and hot between my thighs. How much better would it feel if we were naked, if his weight was pressing me into the mattress, his cock hard and heavy against mine as our mouths moved together? How much better would it feel if he pushed first one, then two and eventually three fingers inside me?

"Pops," I mutter, chasing his mouth as he pulls back. "No. Not yet. Don't stop."

It can't end yet. I'm not ready. There's so much more kissing we can do. And he said just one—if we don't stop now, it's still technically all one kiss, right?

"Oskar," he rasps, and I capture his mouth before he can put an end to this perfect moment. He groans as I push my fingers into his hair and hold his mouth against mine. Pleasure makes my stomach clench. My balls tighten against my body, heat gathering at the base of my spine. My cock aches for

touch as I leak into my pajamas. I thrust against his body, chasing something more. Ian slips his tongue into my mouth again, and I moan as he grasps my sides and thrusts his cock against my ass.

He is fifty-three, but you'd never know it to look at him. His body is tight and well cared for. Aside from a little gray around his temples, and laugh lines around eyes that are the same shade as mine, he looks and feels like a man half his age. Will he fuck like one, too?

Oh God. I want that—I want him to fuck me, open me up with careful, confident fingers and fill my body with proof of his desire.

“Pops,” I gasp into his mouth as I squeeze my eyes closed and clutch at his hair. My body trembles as the heat along my spine bursts like a water balloon. “Ian. Oh, God. Ian.” My cock throbs, and I shake and pant for breath as wet heat soaks the front of my pajamas. Aftershocks of pleasure roll through me as my empty hole clenches.

“Did you just ...” Ian trails off, his voice cracking. His fingers tighten on my thighs.

“Yeah,” I whisper, burying my burning face in his neck.

How lame am I? He's never going to kiss me again if I can't control myself. How can I when he's kissing me like that, his hard cock trapped under me?

“Oskar. Fuck.” His fingers brush against the wet patch before he slips his hand into the front of my pajama bottoms. I cry out and thrust against his palm as he strokes my sensitive cock before moving lower. “Just from a kiss?”

“I couldn't help it,” I whine. “Are you upset?”

“No.” He cups my balls. I whimper and roll my hips, starting to harden again. Normally, it takes me longer to recover after an orgasm that strong, but this isn't a dream. Ian is touching me, actually, really touching me, and I don't want him to stop—not now, not ever. “I'm not upset.”

“Just one more kiss?” I pant against his neck. His knuckles bump against my cock as he pets my wet balls. He's playing in

my cum and ... fuck. A shiver passes down my spine. I lean into his solid chest. "Please."

"We shouldn't," he says. I shake my head. He's always so careful with me—more gentle than necessary sometimes. I don't want him to be gentle and cautious right now. I want ... Fuck. His thumb brushes against the head of my cock and I whimper. I push my hand down his chest, between our bodies. He grunts, the sound raw and needy, as I press my fingers against the front of his pajama bottoms. He is bigger than me—long and thick as I explore him with my fingers.

What will it feel like to jerk him off? How will it feel to have his cock pressing against mine, his cum drying on my flesh? Or better yet dripping from my hole, marking me as his—*finally*. His.

Will it hurt when he puts his cock inside of me?

I moan softly and thrust against his hand. I need to know.

"Please Pops." I'm already so hard again. "I need ... I need—" My voice breaks as I thrust against his palm. There's so much I need, and I need him to give it all to me.

"This is wrong, Oskar," he says. "I'm your grand—"

"I don't care." I *don't* care. I reach into the front of his pajamas and fist his cock, dragging my thumb over the top. He groans and thrusts into my hand. He's leaking, same as me. His pre-cum is warm as it slicks my palm. I brush my mouth against his and repeat myself. "I don't care. Just touch me, Ian. I need it. I want you so badly."

"You're too spoiled for your own good," he says before he captures my mouth again. A whine pulls from deep in my chest as I stroke his leaking cock from root to tip.

He could never tell me no, and I've never been more grateful for that than now.

"Pops," I moan against his mouth. We trade breaths as he pumps my slick cock with single minded determination. Cum makes the glide of his hand smooth. Every twist of his fingers around the swollen head pushes me closer and closer to the edge. I'm not going to last long this time either. But ... I don't

want this to just be about me. “Can I ...” I swallow around the lump in my throat as I press my forehead against his jaw. “Can I try something?”

He hesitates, then gives a single sharp nod. “Okay.”

A breath punches from my lungs. I pull his cock from his pajama bottoms and push mine down so they’re trapped under my balls. The sight of his hand around me, wet with my cum, has my balls clenching before I ease his hand away. He groans and claims my mouth again as I wrap my hands around the both of us.

It feels good—his mouth on mine as I thrust my cock against his inside of my tight fist. The head of his cock catches against mine. The heat that had gathered and exploded through me before builds again as our pre-cum mixes. My stomach clenches and I wheeze for breath. Every breath is a struggle but nothing has ever felt this good before. Will anything ever feel this good again?

“Oskar,” Ian whispers against my swollen mouth as he cups my ass in one hand, pushing me back with the other.

I shake my head and chase his mouth. “Please, Ian. I want to make you come too. Let me. You have to let me, Pops.”

I want—*need* to please him, like he did me. Maybe then, we can do this again, and again, and again. If I do a good job, he’ll want more.

“Shh,” he soothes, brushing his fingers through my hair and cupping the back of my neck. My gaze lifts to meet him but his eyes are on our cocks, feasting on the sight of them pressed together and leaking. “I just want to watch. Keep going, Oskar.”

“Oh God,” I whisper as I thrust into my hands again. “I can’t last.”

“You don’t have to,” Ian says, knocking my hands away and taking the both of us into one of his. My thighs tremble as I fuck into his fist—harder, faster. It’s too much and not enough at the same time. I want ... I want to be under him, feel his weight and watch his face as he covers me in his cum.

“Ian.” I shove my fingers into his hair and watch as he strokes us. “You feel so good. Please. Please. I want ... I want —” I choke on a breath as he twists his palm around us. My balls ache. “I want to feel you on top of me, Ian.”

I’ve dreamed about it for years—being trapped under him as he uses my body.

His gaze lifts to mine, dark with lust; my cheeks burn, but I don’t look away.

“Will you?” I ask. “Please, Pops?” He groans and wraps an arm around my back. The breath rushes out of me as I land under him and he settles between my thighs, supporting his weight with one hand. I cry out as he thrusts his cock against mine. “Ian. Kiss me,” I beg, and he claims my mouth again. His tongue curls around mine as I rock into his wet fist.

It’s perfect. He’s perfect. I ... I’m going to come again but ... Fuck. No. If I come, this will end.

“Ian,” I pant against his mouth as panic blossoms in my chest. He can’t stop. This can’t be the last time he ever touches me like this. “I don’t ... I can’t ... Please don’t stop.”

“I’ve got you, Oskar,” Ian mutters in my ear. He nips at my jaw.

“Promise ... Promise,” I choke out. “I want this—you.”

He can’t give me this and snatch it away afterwards.

“Oskar—” I turn my head and capture his mouth, forcing my tongue between his lips as our teeth click together. He grunts and squeezes our cocks. My thighs tremble as I wrap them around his hips. “Sweetheart,” he rasps against my mouth as I suck in a lungful of air.

“I want you to use my body,” I say, clenching at his hair. “I want to feel your cum on me ... in me. I want to be yours, only yours.”

“Fuck.” His thrusts stutter. His body is warm, but nothing compared to the heat that soaks my cock and balls as he groans against my mouth. His cum splatters on my abdomen and my balls clench.

“Ian.” I wheeze, squeezing my eyes closed, keeping his mouth pressed against mine as I thrust into his fist. The world is shaky and off balance. Lights dance behind my eyes, bright as fireworks. Pleasure rolls through me, each explosion stronger than the last, until I relax into the mattress, fingers still fisted in Ian’s hair. Our cum mixes as he strokes me, slow and soft, until I whimper and wiggle away from his hand.

“Oskar,” Ian mutters. My chest rocks as I wrap my arms around his neck. His come around my body and he pulls me against his chest. It’s silent in the room, the only sound our ragged breaths as I cling to him and he holds me close, like this doesn’t change anything—everything.



# Ian

What have I done? The unthinkable. I can't undo it, make it as if it never happened. The proof of the line I've crossed is already drying between us.

Oskar lies under me, clenching me close as he sucks in one long breath after another. Sweat and the evidence of our mutual pleasure covers the both of us. A shower is in order, preferably before the cum dries and becomes itchy, but Oskar doesn't seem inclined to let me go and I'm not releasing him until he's ready.

"Do you hate me now?" Oskar whispers into my neck, his voice breaking.

I jerk against him, my heart skipping a harsh beat as I tighten my hold on his slim frame. "What? No, Oskar. Of course not."

What kind of question is that? He should know better. The last thing I could do, would *ever* do, is hate Oskar. He is the reason I wake in the morning, take a deep breath and push forward, even when doing so seems damn near impossible. There's nothing he can do that will make me love him less—only more. This complicates things, but in the long run, it changes very little. At the end of the day, I will always love and protect Oskar. And he isn't the only one at fault here. I could have pushed him away as soon as he climbed into my lap, put an end to this before we went so far, but I didn't push him away. I didn't stop him, or myself.

"I'm sorry if—" He breaks off into a soft sob.

“Hey. Hey.” I sit back on my knees, pulling him up with me. He keeps his arms around my neck and his face buried against my body as he trembles. “Calm down.” I run my hand up and down his slick spine. “We’re okay. You’re okay.”

Isn’t he? Or had I done more than he truly wanted? It hadn’t seemed that way. He had asked—begged me not to stop. He said he wanted everything I did, wanted me, wanted to be mine. Maybe he’d been caught up in the moment. Hormones, at his age, run amok, leading to all kinds of mistakes. I know that firsthand.

“Oskar?” I mutter as I brush my mouth over the shell of his ear. He’s crying hard—loud, broken sounds—and I don’t know what to do, how to help him, how to make this better. I’ve never felt so powerless. “Talk to me. I can’t fix it unless you tell me what’s wrong.”

“I just ...” Oskar’s nails dig into my back. “I just don’t want to lose you.”

“Not possible,” I assure him as I rock him. “I’m not going anywhere.”

I’ll never abandon him—never. Even when I’m dead and gone, I will still be with him, a ghost haunting his every step.

“I didn’t ask for too much?” he asks, still hiding in my neck. He isn’t shaking so hard now; his crying isn’t so violent. But I can still feel his tears on my collarbone.

“No, Oskar. I—” I pause. I close my eyes and squeeze him. He sniffs against my shoulder. The truth, as horrible as it is, is the only thing that might make this better. “I didn’t do anything I didn’t want to.”

It’s my desire for Oskar that led to all of this. If my cock hadn’t been hard when he climbed into my lap, he never would have asked for a kiss, or for more. If anyone is to blame for any of this, it’s me.

“Promise?” Oskar asks, his fingers flexing against my back. “This isn’t just you giving me what I want because you love me and I’m spoiled?”

I laugh under my breath and ease him back. His eyes are red and puffy when I tip his chin up. “Maybe a little,” I say, and his face falls. “But not entirely. I am, as unbelievable as it seems, capable of telling you no, Oskar.”

Yes, he is spoiled. But it isn’t as if I deny him nothing. I’ve said no before, just ... rarely. Why would I say no when telling him yes makes him happy? His happiness is the only thing that truly matters.

A smile tugs at his mouth as I run my thumb under his eye, removing a fallen tear. “I really wanted that llama.”

I snort and grasp his hand, pulling him off the bed. We need to shower and there’s no reason not to do it together this time, considering what we’ve already done together. A shower, in comparison, is tame.

“Maybe in your next life,” I tell him. When he’s someone else’s to love and spoil, they can let him have a llama. *I* have my limits. A llama living in my backyard is one of them.

“That’s so far away. And not guaranteed, Pops,” Oskar whines, the familiar pout in his voice. Something unclenches in my chest as I glance back at him. His eyes are still red and puffy, but there’s a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth and a light dancing in his eyes. We are going to be okay.

“And still your best shot at getting a llama.”

He rolls his eyes as I turn and push him into the bathroom ahead of me. We really need to get cleaned up. And is now the time to be discussing his unnatural desire for a llama? Shouldn’t we be talking about what we just did, the far-reaching consequences if anyone outside of the Family discovers what we’ve done?

“But we have room,” he protests as he unhooks his insulin pump and sets it on the counter. He doesn’t wear it in the shower. It’s safer that way.

“Until you decide the first llama is lonely and needs a friend,” I counter as I adjust the water temperature.

Oskar is silent, and when I glance at him, he’s opening and closing his mouth. I swallow my grin as I straighten. He huffs.

“You win this round.”

“Get in the shower,” I order with a shake of my head. The nerve of my grandson. He acts as if I won because he allowed me to.

Maybe I did.

Oskar laughs; the sound is raw after all his tears, but he steps into the shower with a soft smile. He groans, the sound going straight to my cock, and tips his head back as the water cascades down his back and plasters his hair to his forehead. I step in behind him and his smile doesn't fall as he blinks up at me. He really is lovely, his dark hair curling around his chin and collarbone, wide matching eyes illuminated with so much happiness—happiness I worked hard to put there, keep there—narrow nose, slightly crooked from the one time it was broken. Plump, pale pink lips.

Kissing him is as close to divinity as I may ever come.

“What?” he asks.

I reach out and comb my fingers through his wet hair before I cup his jaw. “I love you so much, Oskar.” He steps forward and wraps his arms around my midsection. I curl mine around his shoulder and squeeze him. “I have loved you since the moment you were born, and I will continue to love you long after I am gone. You mean everything to me.” He is the reason for my existence.

“I love you too, Pops.” He rests his cheek on my chest and the water washes away the cum and sweat that covers us. I press a kiss to his head, close my eyes and hold him close. He's soft and tiny in my arms—something precious, something that needs love and protection. I will spend the rest of my life ensuring he receives both. “Hey, Pops?”

“Yeah?”

“Since I can't have a llama, can I have one of those goats? You know, the ones that faint when you scare them? They're so cute.”

I groan and push him back. “Absolutely not.”

Why is he so determined to turn our backyard into a petting zoo?

“We can talk about it later,” he says as I reach for the soap. Oskar hums a pleased little sound and presses into my palms as I comb my fingers through his hair, working the soap into a lather.

“You cannot have a goat, Oskar,” I say. His lips tip up as he settles his hands on my hips. The touch has my cock twitching, but at my age recovery takes longer than fifteen minutes. “Oskar.”

“I could put it in pajamas—matching pajamas,” he says, his mouth tipping up at the corner. He’s already fantasizing about goats in pajamas.

I huff. “It’s not happening.”

“Maybe. Maybe not,” he says. I shake my head and swallow a smile.

He blinks, water dripping from his eyelashes as I tilt his head back to wash the soap from his hair. Like this, soft and malleable in my hands, he reminds me of the child he once was—so trusting of me, safe in the knowledge I would never hurt him. But he is no longer a child, depending on me to protect him. Oskar is an adult, even if just barely. He grew up at some point and I haven’t been blind to it, even if I tried to be.

He knows what he wants, what he needs and how to get both. He is capable of taking care of himself. I made sure Oskar knows how to look after himself in all ways, once his body had healed from the beating his father gave him. If push comes to shove, he knows how to defend himself whether it be with a well-aimed punch or a gun. He isn’t a fighter, though. Oskar uses other means to get his way.

A pretty smile. A pout. A well-timed please.

I am weak against them all.

“How are you feeling?” I ask. The longer we talk about a goat, the better chance he has of turning my negative answer

into a positive one. And I really don't want my backyard playing host to a goat.

Oskar hums. "Tired. Happy. Horny."

I snort and look down. His cock is hard, flushed pink at the tip.

"Was twice not enough?" I ask.

His cheeks turn a soft pink, and he drops his chin to his chest. "I'm sorry."

"Oskar." I cup the side of his neck as I fist his cock. He gasps and thrusts into my hand, his head pressing against my collarbone. "You have nothing to be sorry for. And if you need me, I'm here for you." Always.

He whimpers and turns his face into my neck as his fingers flex on my waist. "Do you need me?"

"Always, Oskar." He groans, his arms curling around my midsection as I stroke his cock from root to tip. He is long but slender—smooth like satin and so fucking hot. Touching him burns me, but in the best way possible.

If I was ten, maybe five years younger—and he wasn't my grandson, who deserves more than a quick fuck in the shower for his first time—I'd have him turned around and pressed against the shower wall. This will have to do for now. Hopefully, it's enough.

# Oskar

Pops wakes me slowly, rubbing my back and combing his fingers through my hair like he has every morning since I started sharing a bed with him. Eventually, he coaxes me out of our room and to the breakfast table, promising I can go back to bed if I'm still tired after I eat. I feel half dead—or maybe I am—as I peer down at the bacon, eggs, and oatmeal with walnuts and blueberries in front of me.

Last night feels like another dream. If not for the satisfied hum of my body and the red, slightly itchy rash along my neck and collarbone, I'd think it's just my subconscious imagination running wild again. But no. Pops and I really touched one another, in bed then in the shower.

Fingers tug at the collar of my shirt.

My gaze snaps up and I see Arlo grinning down at me.

“What are you doing?” I ask. When did he even get here? Of course, Arlo is always here in some form or fashion. He might as well live here at this point—if he's not sleeping in one of the guest rooms, he's bothering me in my studio or eating junk food with Pops in his office. The jerks.

“Just admiring the beard burn you're sporting,” he says. I slap his hand away and tug my shirt up as my eyes dart to Ian. He's focusing way too hard on his breakfast all of a sudden. I understand. He's my grandfather. Being with me, especially considering my age, is something he will be judged for.

There's an enormous difference between the Family *thinking* we have sex, and them knowing we have sex.

*Knowing* could cause problems. Maybe not within the Family itself, since each of them is unquestionably loyal to Ian, and by extension to me. In all honesty they probably won't even care, but things could become difficult with our business associates if word got around. Arlo can be trusted. I know he won't tell anyone, won't judge us. He's been aware of how I feel about Pops for a while now, but still ...

"Shut up," I tell him as I grab my spoon and dip into the oatmeal.

He's so damn nosy. Hasn't anyone ever told him to mind his own business? The problem is, Arlo thinks I am his business. He's been nose deep in my life since I woke up in the hospital with him leaning over my body across from Pops, asking if I know the *old fuck with a shit attitude* like he wasn't the only stranger in the room.

Arlo laughs as he falls into the seat beside me and snags a piece of my bacon. "Just tell me if it was everything you dreamed of." I glare, and not because he stole my bacon. Did he not hear me just tell him to shut up? He leans closer, his voice pitched low. "Or did you blow before the main event?"

"I will stab you," I threaten, spoon in hand. It'll be hard work and undoubtedly bloody, but worth it if he stops talking.

"Sounds kinky. I might be into it," Arlo says, fishing a blueberry from my bowl and popping it into his mouth. "First, tell me about the stabbing that took place last night." He wiggles his eyebrows and I kick him under the table. It's not unusual for the night shift guards to join us, along with the incoming day shift, at the breakfast table. His big mouth is going to make things awkward.

"Leave him alone, Arlo," Ian says, a bite to his voice that has me hiding a grin behind a mouthful of eggs. Arlo might be considered family at this point, but Ian has already proven he will murder family for me. If Arlo keeps messing around, he might find himself dead before the end of breakfast.

Arlo pops his elbows on the table and lays his chin in his hands. "Don't play innocent, Pops. You're not any better at being covert than him. Any idiot with eyes knows you've been



popping boners for one another for years. Though him” — Arlo tips his head towards me— “longer than you.”

If anyone else had said anything remotely similar, in that tone of voice, to Ian Bassett, they’d be halfway to dead. But this is Arlo. He loves me, Ian knows that. So long as he doesn’t go too far, he’ll keep right on breathing and being a pain in the ass while he’s doing it.

“Why are you in my house?” Pops asks.

“At this point, the banging water pressure, soft beds and always-ready meals.” He sits back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest after taking another slice of my bacon. There’s plenty in the kitchen. He only has to walk his ass in there and the cook will make him a plate. Of course, if his ass had been at the table when breakfast was served, he’d have his own plate already. “Also, business.”

“We can talk after breakfast,” Ian says. I roll my eyes. They don’t discuss business at breakfast. Or dinner. And not with me in the room, if Ian can help it.

Arlo reaches for my oatmeal and I slap his hand. “Get your own.”

“Yours is better,” he says, evading my hand when I go to slap him for a second time and coming away with another blueberry. I glare, then stand up and take my plate around the table. Pops doesn’t hesitate to sit back and I perch on his leg, setting my plate in front of me. He wraps one arm around my waist and I poke my tongue out at Arlo.

“Cheater.”

I shrug and start to eat. Ian’s hand is warm on my stomach. The heat has my cock straining against my panties. The soft fabric teases the leaking head and I shift, seeking a more comfortable position. Arlo smirks, as if he knows exactly what’s happening. I glare again and lean into Ian.

Who cares if Arlo suspects I’m hard and aching under the table? His presence isn’t going to stop me from enjoying Ian’s hands on me, even if his touch is completely innocent right now.

After last night, the line we crossed, I thought Pops would be distant, or at the very least awkward. He's not. If anything, he's acting like it never happened. Is that his plan? Pretend like it never happened, and never let it happen again? I swallow the lump of oatmeal and look at him.

Do I ask if he regrets it?

Pops isn't a man to have regrets. But if he was, would last night be among them?

"Oskar?" Ian says. I blink and focus on him. If his look is any indication, he's been attempting to catch my attention for a while. "Are you okay?"

I nod and look around. Several guards have joined us, and they all look equally concerned. When did they arrive?

"Still tired, I think," I lie because I can't tell him the truth right now.

Pops' arm tightens around me before he presses a warm kiss to my temple. I close my eyes and lean into him. No one in the Family will think any of this is odd. For years, I've been sitting in Ian's lap, seeking his affection, and he always gives it without a moment of hesitation. It would be weird if I were keeping my distance.

"Finish your breakfast, then you can go back to bed," Pops says.

I look down at my food and even though I know I should eat more, I'm not hungry. "I don't think I can eat any more," I say.

Pops inspects my plate with a critical eye. He can't help himself. I don't mind.

"Go get some rest," he finally says.

"Alright." I turn and press a kiss to his chin. "I love you."

"I love you," Ian says, holding me close for a long second before releasing me. I grab my plate and ease out of his lap. Thankfully, the hard-on I'd developed when I first pressed against him has eased. Not that anyone would notice.

The guards are laughing and talking amongst themselves. Arlo is in the thick of things, teasing Emon about a date he had over the weekend. He's at home here, accepted even if he isn't marked. Much like Ian, there's just something about Arlo that puts people at ease. He's well liked—respected—by the members of the Bassett Family. If I didn't know better, I'd think he's planning a coup.

I slip into the kitchen and drop my plate off in the sink. Sleep is the furthest thing from my mind; I can't stop thinking about last night, tonight when we go to bed, and what might happen.

One more orgasm before Pops and I discuss everything sounds good, but the chances of it happening are ... slim at best.

I'm his grandson, after all. Pops doesn't give a shit what society thinks, not really. But I know him well enough to know he isn't going to want to do anything that might stain me. And a relationship with my grandfather? That would leave one hell of a black mark on my reputation.

# Ian

Work demands my attention. Not just Family business either; there are papers to sign and phone calls to make regarding several legitimate businesses. I want to finish it all quickly and attend to other matters. Of course, Arlo is delaying me.

I refuse to be the first to break our silence, and considering I have years more experience playing this kind of mind game than him, I doubt I'll have to wait long for him to cave. Still, this morning, I'm impatient. The last thing I want to do is spend more time than necessary dealing with business.

The smug little shit sitting across from me, hands folded on his stomach, legs stretched out in front of him crossed at the ankles, doesn't seem to be in a rush. There's barely-concealed laughter in his eyes, as if he's seconds from losing his shit. The arrogance of youth pours off him in waves. Not for the first time I have to admit, if only to myself, he reminds me of ... me.

Anyone else would be terrified to stare me down, but Arlo is fearless, always has been. From the moment we met at the hospital, him using his body to block my entrance into my grandson's room, protecting a perfect stranger, all the while knowing exactly who I was and what I was capable of, I liked him. Anyone willing to protect Oskar with their life, and Arlo was risking his life by standing between Oskar and me, automatically enters my good grace. But if he isn't careful, he's going to end up missing—permanently.

I won't enjoy disposing of his body, but if necessary, I will. Anything to avoid the conversation he wants to have. I have

no desire to discuss my changing relationship with Oskar with him. And frankly, it's none of Arlo's business, even if he believes otherwise.

Arlo finally speaks. "Did you use protection?"

"What did you find out about Mr. Bauer and Mr. Morrison's business dealings?" I counter. He's obviously misreading the room if he thinks I'm going to answer any of his questions about Oskar and me.

"I'll tell you if you tell me," he says, sitting forward in his chair.

I fold my hands on top of the desk and smile. "You'll tell me or I'll tell Oskar what you were doing on vacation." Arlo's smile falls and his brow furrows. "What?" I ask as I inspect him. "Did you think you weren't being followed?" He should have known better. I may trust him, but the first lesson life teaches you in my line of work is that your enemies never betray you. And he is close to Oskar, has more access to him than anyone aside from me and Holden. Of course I keep a close eye on him. He's never given me reason to be suspicious, but it's better to be safe. "How is Dr. Sorrel, by the way?"

Arlo huffs, flinging himself back in the chair. "You don't play fair."

"You don't get to where I am and stay there by playing fair," I say as I sit back. To get power and keep it you have to play dirty. I'm as filthy as they come. "Now, tell me about Bauer and Morrison."

"The streets are quiet. They either haven't been here long or aren't making waves. A corner boy mentioned an apartment in his building is being occupied by a group of men, two fitting Bauer and Morrison's description, but they're quiet. No drinking. No drugs. No prostitutes." Arlo shoves his hand through his hair. "If they're moving Flesh, it won't take long to find out when and where. I have a friend sitting on the building."

A friend. In other words, a member of his merry crew of misfits. Most of them are runaways—boys and girls just shy of

adulthood who left home for one reason or another. Some of them are like Arlo—older, familiar with life on the streets. They aren't trusting of anyone, certainly not me. They do trust Arlo, though. He's their unofficial, official leader.

"Is the warehouse working out for everyone?" I ask. It's one of mine—unused and neglected. Not exactly the kind of place anyone should shelter, but for his group of friends, perfect. The windows are boarded up, and the doors can be chained.

"It's better than Skid Row. Or the alternative. Zoey went to a shelter a couple weeks back. I tried to warn her but ..." Arlo shrugs but there's a tension in his jaw that wasn't there a moment ago. "She came back banged up, what little she had gone; said she wasn't raped, but what fourteen-year-old is going to tell a grown man if she was?" His fingers curl into his palm. His gaze is haunted as he looks at me, but through me as well. "I can't do fuck all for 'em—not really. Some of them already look at me like an outsider—too clean, too well fed."

"You can't save everyone, Arlo."

His gaze snaps to me. "I can try."

"Yeah." I rub my beard. In this, we are different. At his age, I barely gave a fuck about my son, much less perfect strangers. Arlo tries, though. It's why when he saw Oskar passed out on the sidewalk, he took him to the hospital. Because Oskar, at the time, was just a kid who looked as if he needed help, and Arlo is one of those rare people willing to help anyone who needs it. But he doesn't just do the bare minimum before moving on. He goes as far as is required. Then he goes a little further; that's just his nature.

I open a desk drawer, pull out a folded sheet of paper and sit it on the desk between us. "They need a reason, so give them one." Arlo reaches for the paper and opens it before his gaze snaps to me. "Same job. Same pay. A truth you can tell your friends."

He fingers the corner of the paper. "It won't change anything?"

“Some things will change,” I say as I lace my fingers together. He’ll be Family, first and foremost. Other things will be different too though.

“What?” he asks, searching my face. “Same job, same pay, but I’ll be marked—*Family*. I’m not stupid enough to think the things that change won’t matter in the long run. And I like to think I know you, Ian—better than most people. You’re not altruistic. Everything you do has a reason, hidden behind a dozen other reasons. My friends are just a convenient excuse to rope me in so lay it out for me. What do you expect of me?”

Arlo is smart—smart enough to ask questions when others hadn’t. They’d just agreed without a moment’s hesitation because the chance at improving their lot in life, even if it meant working for me, was too great a lure to pass up. Not Arlo though. He’s not willing to surrender his soul to the devil without knowing what he’s getting out of it. It’s just another reason I like him, respect him.

I sit back in my chair. “Oskar may never take my place.” Not if I have my way, at least. Not because he can’t do the job. I know if push comes to shove, he can do what’s necessary, but I don’t want this life for him. It’s a life that leads to losing your soul piece by piece until you’re a hollow husk, clinging to the little light left in your world, if any exists at all. The future is uncertain though. One day, Oskar may sit where I sit and make the hard choices I have had to make. “And though he’s well loved and respected by the Family, that may change in time. I can’t count on them to do what’s best for Oskar.”

I can count on them to do what is best for the Family, but for Oskar ... no. And the truth is, sometimes what’s best for Oskar isn’t best for the Family. Arlo, though, will do what I have done for years now.

“Same job. Same pay,” I say as I hold his gaze. “But one day, you’ll sit on this side of the desk, Arlo—for Oskar.” Always Oskar.

“How does Oskar feel about you withholding the keys to the kingdom?” Arlo asks after a moment of hesitation. He knows what I’m asking of him is big—life changing. If he

accepts, he'll be my right-hand man, my underboss for all intents and purposes.

"It's Oskar," I say. "How do you think he feels?"

Arlo laughs, an abrupt sound as he flicks the paper open and closed before sitting back in his chair. His expression is thoughtful now, as if he's actually considering my offer. "He may change his mind one day."

"He may," I agree. Oskar may one day decide living a life of indulgence doesn't suit him anymore. I won't stop him or stand in his way should that day come. "If so, he'll need someone he can trust and depend on."

He's silent and I wait. Several emotions flicker across his face before he nods. "You can tell Oskar." Arlo stands, folding the paper up and tucking it into his pocket. "And don't think I forgot my earlier question. Like I tell the kids, safe sex or no sex."

"Get out of my office," I tell him. "Before I change my mind."

Arlo laughs and slips out, shutting the door behind himself. I shake my head and power on my laptop. Thanks to him, I may not be done with work by lunchtime.



# Oskar

Light pours through the bay windows as I add a splash of neon pink to the canvas I'm working with. It's messy as hell, always is. Paint is pretty much everywhere at this point—on already-stained walls, floor and ceiling—from previous projects. There is no rhyme or reason to what I'm doing. I'm flicking and throwing paint at a canvas to see what sticks. Thus far, the theme seems to be bright and chaotic. Pops will love it, even if it's not any good by typical standards.

The point of my art isn't to be good though. Like Pops said when I first showed an interest in painting but discovered I'm not the best, not even okay, really: I don't have to be good so long as it's good for me.

In the end, being good at something isn't the point of doing it. Or it shouldn't be, anyway. The point of doing anything should be enjoying it. And I enjoy painting. The art I create may never be worth a penny to anyone, but I'm not trying to be the next Michelangelo. Art for me is fun, an expression of who I am and what I'm feeling.

I reach for the bottle of King's Blue I plan to use. It's a bright, medium light blue with a warm tone—kind of like ocean water you can see a hazy sandy bottom through—that will pair nicely with the neon pink. Just as I shake the bottle, thumb over the nozzle to contain the liquid paint, a hand lands on my shoulder. I jerk, a startled yelp vibrating my throat as I turn. Paint arches through the air and lands with a soundless splat on Pops' white button-down. "Shit." I yank my earphones out. Music echoes around us. "That's gonna stain."

Oil-based paint always stains. It's why I never wear my good clothes in my studio.

Pops brushes his finger through the blue as his mouth tips up at the corner. It's not the first time he's been the accidental victim of my hobby. The first time I splattered him with paint, he wasn't mad; nor is he now. "Just admit you've been eyeballing this button-up for a while."

"It is a nice button-up," I say, laughter in my voice as I set the paint bottle down to avoid further accidents. The shirt is already a lost cause. Any attempt to remove the paint will be fruitless. I'll just add it to the collection; a new shirt never hurt anyone.

"Next time, you could just ask," he says.

I hum as I rock on my heels, fighting my smile. "Nah. Where's the fun in that?"

"Brat." He pokes me between the eyes with his tinted fingers. I gasp and rub at the space, no doubt spreading the paint instead of actually removing it. "Blue looks good on you."

"I think blue is more your color than mine," I say as I reach for the bottle of paint. If he wants to play dirty, I'm not required to fight fair. Not that I ever would. The first thing Pops taught me is there's no such thing as a fair fight—only living or dying. Death is not an option. Of course, this isn't a life-or-death situation. I'll settle for winning a paint war, though.

Pops grasps my wrist and tugs me away from my weapons of choice. "I'll take your word for it. How about lunch? I thought you might enjoy a picnic."

It's been a while since we had a picnic lunch. "Yeah. Let me wash up first." He lets me go and I slip into the attached bathroom, scrubbing the paint from my hands the best I can. A little olive oil helps the process, but I won't truly be clean until I can shower.

The mirror, when I look up after my hands are as good as they're going to get, shows exactly what I expected—me, with

blue paint smeared between my eyebrows. It washes away with a little extra care. When I exit the bathroom, Pops is standing in front of the canvas, inspecting my work. It would be so easy to reach for the paint bottle and attack while he's distracted. Maybe next time, when lunch isn't waiting.

I stop at his side and look at the painting. "What do you think?"

He drops an arm over my shoulder. "The pink is a crime against humanity but I like the purple."

I choke on a laugh. "What's wrong with the pink? I think it's pretty."

"Pretty violent on the eyes," he says as he glances down at me. There's a smile on his mouth and laughter in his eyes. I poke him in the side and he grasps my hand, lacing his fingers through mine. "I'll admit it's the life of the painting, though. I can see why you added it." He drops a kiss on my head and I lean into him. He's acting like nothing has changed. I wonder if, for him, anything has. "Lunch. It's about that time for you."

"I'm starving anyway," I say. Breakfast had been short, since my appetite had deserted me, and the snack I'd had some time ago burned off while I painted.

Pops pulls me from my studio and I follow him downstairs and out the backdoor. Just off the patio, someone has stretched out a blanket and spread some pillows, and there's a basket waiting for us.

The scent of tacos assaults my senses as Pops opens the basket and unwraps the foil. I groan and flop back against the pillows. If it was possible to love Pops more than I already do, this would be the reason. Pasta—literally any kind—is my favorite, always has been, but tacos are a very close second. And these—

"Oh God," I moan as I sit up. They smell like a wet dream come to life. "Is that carne asada? Hand it over." I make grabby hands.

Pops laughs. "Don't make yourself sick on them."

“I am going to make myself sick on them,” I promise before shoving a huge bite into my mouth. Flavor explodes and I groan. If a tongue could orgasm, mine would do so right now. Pops snorts and shoves a napkin into the front of my shirt, like I’m five instead of eighteen, before unwrapping his own taco. It’s messy. Good tacos are always messy. And, I admit, the napkin is appreciated. Juice drips everywhere.

Another foil packet lands in my hand just as I’m finishing my first taco and I waste no time unwrapping it. By the time I’m done, my stomach hurts. I definitely overate. But worth it—so worth it.

I stretch out, laying my head on Pops’ thigh as he finishes his last taco.

“If you’re gonna vomit, do it on the other side of the blanket,” he says as he wipes his hands off.

“No. Sorry. It requires me to move and I just can’t.” I grin at him.

He laughs under his breath and pushes his fingers through my hair. I close my eyes and turn into his touch. “You can rest for a couple minutes.”

“Are you finished working for today?” I ask, lacing my fingers together on my stomach. It’s hot, but the gentle breeze makes it bearable. If I stay outside too long I’m going to burn though. I’m way too pale for someone born and raised in California.

“For now,” Pops says. I hum and tap my fingers together. Silence descends but it’s broken when Pops calls my name. I open my eyes to look up at him. He’s leaning over me, blocking the sunlight. “Are you ready to talk about last night?”

I cover my face with my hands. “I don’t know.”

His fingers are warm as he strokes my neck. “We don’t have to talk about it today or even tomorrow, but we do need to talk about it eventually, Oskar.”

“I ... I know. Just ...” I swallow and press my palms into my eyes. Like he said, we have to talk about it. It’s not something that can exist one way or another without a

conversation, so I might as well be honest. I shouldn't want Ian the way I do, but it's far too late for that. I want him and I can't lie about it. This needs to be treated like a Band-Aid—just rip it off. “I can't handle it if you say it was a mistake. Because it wasn't—not to me,” I whisper into my hands, unable to look up and see Ian's expression. “I wanted what happened and I ... I'd like for more to happen.”

“I'm your grandfather, Oskar,” Ian says.

*It's wrong.*

I sit up and draw my knees to my chest. “I know. It ... It doesn't change the way I feel.” My eyes burn and I bury my face in my knees. “Do you think I'm disgusting?”

Last night, Ian said he didn't hate me. He said he didn't do anything he didn't want to do, but what if he was only trying to comfort me in the heat of the moment? I had clung to him and sobbed like a child instead of the adult I am. Of course he was going to say whatever I needed to hear. His first instinct is to make everything better when I'm upset.

“Hey.” Ian wraps an arm around my shoulder and tugs me against his side. I don't resist. How can I? His warmth is a comfort, his embrace my safe place. Even right now, with what we did together sitting between us, I know I can trust and depend on Ian. “You didn't act alone last night, Oskar. I was there, into it just as much as you.”

“Is ... Is being together—” I swallow around the lump in my throat and look up at Pops. He doesn't look upset. Instead, he grasps the back of my neck and squeezes, as if to encourage me to keep speaking. “Would it be okay if we ...” How do I ask my grandfather if he wants to be more than what we are now? If he's interested in going on dates—real, actual dates—and having sex, regularly? A relationship. “I've never ... but I want to ... with you.”

“You want to have sex?” Ian asks.

“No,” I say before I shake my head. “I mean yes! But ... more than that, too. Like ... I don't want to be just your grandson or a fuck buddy.”

“You want a relationship.”

I groan and fall against him, letting him take all my weight as I cover my face again. “It sounds dirty when you say it out loud.”

# Ian

There is a right answer here but unfortunately it eludes me.

Oskar is my grandson. Last night shouldn't have happened for that reason alone. It did happen though and ... I don't regret it. I refuse to call it a mistake either. Nothing about Oskar will ever be a mistake. And clearly what happened is something Oskar wanted—still wants. In fact, he wants more than sexual intercourse. A relationship—partners, by the sound of it.

How can I give him what he wants? The fallout from being in a relationship with me—his grandfather—could destroy him if anyone outside of the Family learned the truth. But how can I deny him—the both of us—what he's asking for? If I refuse, he'll be heartbroken. I can't bring myself to hurt him like that.

“Oskar.” I grasp his shoulders and shift the pair of us until we're facing one another. His cheeks are stained pink. It's so rare for him to blush. I reach out and stroke the stain with my thumb. “I need to know you understand what you're asking for. Then, I need you to explain why.”

“Why?” He searches my face and frowns. “Like why do I want to be with you?”

“Why me, Oskar?” I'm the last person he should want to be with. I'm more than just a grandparent in some ways. For years, I've been his sole caretaker, more father than anything else. It's important I know he understands what he's asking for and the reasoning behind it. If he feels at all like he *has* to be

with me, like I'm his only choice, I have to tell him no and hope our relationship won't be damaged beyond repair.

He pushes to his knees, kneeling in front of me. "You've given me everything, Pops. I never have to wonder if I'm loved and safe with you." His hands settle on my shoulders as he smiles. "And I know I could go to college, date some other guy, fall in love, do the whole white picket fence number, and you'd be there supporting me the whole time."

I would be. I would hate it but I'd support him and whoever he chose to build a life with. If it made Oskar happy, how could I not be happy for him?

He shakes his head. "But I don't want any of that. I'm happiest with you. I want to be with you. You take care of me in exactly the way I need and want to be taken care of, the way I always imagined a partner taking care of me."

He drags his bottom lip between his teeth and holds my gaze. "I love that you let me be who I am and never demand anything I'm not willing to give. I ... I love you, Ian. Not the way a grandson should love his grandfather either." He cups my neck and I settle my hands on his hips as I listen. "I understand it's inappropriate because of who we are to one another, how we're related. People outside the Family, maybe even some of the Family, will judge us if or when they ever find out. I know it might cause problems for us both but ... we can be careful. I'm willing to play the part of your grandson when required if ... if it means I can be your partner afterwards."

He's serious. And he's obviously given this a lot of thought. It's not a passing whim for him. He wants to be involved in a sexual and romantic relationship with me, knowing the consequences.

I pull him down into my lap. "How long have you felt like this, Oskar?"

He shrugs. "I'm not sure. A while. Since I was fifteen or sixteen, at least. In the beginning, I didn't realize the way I loved you was changing because nothing about our



relationship had changed. But then ...” He presses his face into my neck, and I wrap an arm around his midsection.

“—but then?” I prompt, my voice cracking.

He groans. “I started thinking about you when I was touching myself.”

“Oskar ...” Jesus. He’s been fantasizing about me all that time? A lump forms in my throat. Have I ... Have I unknowingly tainted him—groomed him—to be ... to be mine? The thought makes me sick and my stomach revolts. No. No. If I have, it wasn’t on purpose. I never intended Oskar to be anything more than what he has been for eighteen years—my beloved grandson.

He pushes back and peers up at me, unaware of the turmoil inside. “It wasn’t anything sexual at first!” His voice is high with panic and his cheeks are stained a deep red now. “It was just you watching me as I touched myself, saying ... saying things like ... like I was a good boy and how ... how well I was doing.” My fingers flex on his side and I swallow. Jesus. Is that what got him off?

Praise.

“Then even when I was too big, you kept letting me cuddle you and sleep in your bed. And—” His voice drops as he looks away. “I took advantage of that—touching you, kissing you, sleeping with you, undressing in front of you—because I know it wasn’t like that for you. You were just being you, a good grandfather—spoiling me. But I ...” He looks up at me, his eyes wide and pleading. “I wanted you to want me back. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, Oskar.” I shake my head. Maybe he used my ignorance against me. But I’m the adult. I should have seen what he was doing and put an end to his behavior a long time ago, before it became this ... this thing between us. Now, it’s too late. We’ve crossed the line. I want him as much as he wants me.

“Are you mad?” he asks.

I shake my head and tuck him under my chin. “No. I’m not mad.”

He fists the front of my button-up. “Do you want me too?” I should lie. He’ll be hurt at first. There’ll be a period of adjustment, for both of us. Oskar will move on though, find someone appropriate for him, someone he can love and build a life with free of judgement. Right now, he doesn’t want someone better suited. He wants me. And I ... I’ve never been able to tell him no, even when I should. “Pops?”

A tear forms in the corner of his eye and I catch it before it can fall. “I love you, Oskar. I will always love you.” He presses his face into my chest as I wrap both arms around him. “If we do this, promise to be honest with me. If you want to end things you tell me.” There is already a power imbalance I’m not sure I’m comfortable with. I need to know if the need should arise, he will speak up.

“I promise,” he chokes out.

“Okay.” I cup the back of his neck and press a kiss to the corner of his mouth. Maybe it’s wrong but ... knowing something is wrong has never stopped me from doing it. “We can take things slow and see what happens.”

“Really?” he asks, his voice squeaking as he scrambles to his knees to face me.

I laugh softly. “Yeah.”

“I love you too!” He throws his arms around my neck. His weight, slight as it may be, knocks me off balance. I land on the pillows with a soft *oof* and wrap my arms around him to steady him against my chest. Our teeth clash as he claims my mouth and shoves his tongue between my lips.

What he lacks in experience he makes up for with eagerness.

I grasp his chin and pull his mouth from mine. “Slow. Like this.”

He moans and thrusts against my body, his hard cock pressing against my abdomen when I slot my mouth over his and slip my tongue between his lips. The needy little sounds

he makes as I slide my tongue alongside his and smooth my hand down his back, pulling his hips tighter against mine, have my cock hard and aching. His fingers comb through my hair as he follows my lead.

When I pull back, he's panting softly.

"Promise you won't change your mind," he whispers.

"I won't change my mind," I assure him.

Second-guessing myself creates more problems than it solves.

# Oskar

Everything is different. Yet nothing has changed.

Pops is still Pops. He does everything he's always done. Only, for the last couple of days, when we've gone to bed, his mouth and hands have explored my body and I've explored his in return. It's more than I ever thought I'd get and still ... not enough.

Maybe I'm being greedy, but I want more than his mouth and hands. It isn't enough for him to kiss me, to touch me until I'm a begging, sobbing mess. I want his cock inside of me, stretching me open and taking what I've never given anyone else. But he said slow. He's determined to take his time. I don't hate it but the pace is going to drive me insane. Haven't I been a virgin long enough?

A bony elbow knocks my ribcage and I jerk, looking away from the sinking sun.

Holden holds a pipe and lighter out. I accept both and he blows a cloud of smoke. It twists away with the breeze as I strike the lighter and take a long pull from the pipe. It burns, but in that way all good weed does. I pass it back to Holden; he accepts, and I frown at the sight of his raw wrist. It's nothing new, not really. His uncle is nothing like Ian.

Malnar isn't above hurting Holden. Blood is a common punishment and reward for my best friend. He loves and hates it in equal measure. I want to ask if he's okay, but I don't dare.

If he says yes, it means he asked for the pain and blood delivered by Malnar's steady hand in one way or another. If he

says no, it means he didn't ask, but did something Malnar believed he needed to be punished for. Neither answer will make me happy. Both will lead to a fight, and I don't want to fight with Holden. It isn't a fight I will—or even can—win. Holden is going to do whatever he wants, there's nothing anyone can do to stop him—not even Malnar, no matter how much he thinks he can. Still, the raw skin makes me angry—angry at Holden, and at Malnar.

How can Malnar do what he does to his own nephew? And how can Holden let him?

“Does Malnar know you're here?” I ask as Holden holds the pipe out again.

He snorts. Smoke blows from his nostrils, reminding me of an angry dragon. “Marcus has made it clear what he thinks of our friendship—several times.”

A lesson taught in blood that Holden refuses to learn.

I shake my head and set the pipe down. Part of me is grateful he never learns his blood-soaked lesson. He's my only real friend—the only one who really, truly understands me and how I feel about Ian. Another part of me hates him just a little for putting me in this position. I don't like knowing I'm the reason he hurts sometimes. In the end, it doesn't matter—not really. He's going to hurt one way or another. Our friendship just gives Malnar an excuse he doesn't actually need.

“He's going to go too far one day and really hurt you,” I say as I lay back on the roof.

Holden is silent for a long moment, then drops beside me. “It's not my body he's in danger of destroying.”

I look away from the orange and pink sky to peer at Holden. His arm is tossed over his face, hiding his expression. “Holden—”

“Don't,” he snaps, fingers curling into his palm. “You of all people should understand.”

“Ian would never hurt me!” I counter as I sit up. “Not ever!”

Pops would eat a bullet before he hurt me in any way. He would suffer a thousand violent deaths to spare me even the slightest pain. My body and heart are safe in his always gentle hands. Even with everything changing between us, I know if things should end I will still be the most important person in Ian's life.

"I didn't come here for this shit, Oskar," Holden says, sitting up as well. His eyes focus on the distant horizon, the sinking sun. A swift breeze ruffles his hair and tugs on his loose shirt.

Like me, his hair is dark, but his eyes are a different, lighter shade. He's tiny too—smaller even than me. But unlike me, he isn't ... soft. His back is taut and his shoulders square. There's a hardness to his jaw, a tightness around his eyes that I've never had. Looking at him I wonder, not for the first time, why we're friends, how we can even *be* friends when we're so different from one another in all the ways that really matter.

"Holden ..." I trail off, and he looks at me. Some of the darkness I see washes away, and he shakes his head. A smile pulls at his mouth, but it doesn't reach his eyes. I reach out and clasp his hand. He laces his fingers with mine and squeezes.

I know there's blood on his hands, bodies he's enjoyed burying. Ian calls him a psychopath, but ... he isn't that. Nor is he a sociopath. Holden feels things—feels them more deeply than most. Life just ... It was predetermined for him. He doesn't have a choice, not like me. One day, in the distant future, he will take over his Family for Marcus Malnar. He has to be someone, a person he maybe isn't, in order to do that—to lead. I will love him anyway. Someone has to.

"Sorry." He rubs his face with his free hand. "I don't want to talk about Marcus."

I sigh and shake my head. He never wants to talk about his uncle, and I'm not going to force him. There are some things we don't talk about.

"Why are you here?" I ask. He showed up at lunch unannounced and demanded food. I'd fed him, of course. Then he raided my closet, asked for the first aid kit, and disappeared

into my bathroom. His hair was wet and his clothes clean when he emerged. I'd passed him some pain medication we kept on hand before the pair of us climbed out my window with his weed stash—and some snacks, 'cause the munchies are a bitch and my diabetes demands constant attention—and settled on the roof. We've been here for hours.

“You hear about the Sterling Family?” he asks.

I shake my head. The Sterlings are usually pretty quiet. We don't bother them, and they don't bother us. “What about them?”

“Cleaning house. Bodies are dropping like rain,” Holden says.

I frown as I glance at him. Sterling is leaving corpses behind? Why? Not burying your dead—destroying all evidence of them, actually—is a damn good way to end up in handcuffs.

“You think something big is happening?”

If anyone knows and will tell me, it's Holden.

He shrugs. “I don't know.” He shoves his fingers through his hair and tugs. “But I don't think Sterling is killing people and leaving the bodies on display for no reason.” He motions to the pipe at my side. “Pass it. This conversation is killing my chill.”

I roll my eyes but pass the pipe.

Holden has no chill. He's just on ten instead of twelve when he's high.

He strikes the lighter and takes a hit, blowing the smoke out. I reach for my phone. He's silent as I check my sugar and reach for a snack pack of cookies.

“So. What are we doing today?” he asks, digging in my bag and taking a cookie.

I chew, peering at the darkening sky. “Where do people buy goats?”

“To eat?” he asks.

“No, you monster!” I say as he reaches into my bag again. What the hell is wrong with him? “To keep as a pet.”

He looks at me for a long moment. “Same farm, probably. Look it up.”

I shove the cookies into his hand and reach for my phone again. It only takes a couple of minutes to find what I’m looking for. “There’s a place outside of Santa Clarita.”

He stands and dusts himself off before offering his hand. I take it and he pulls me to my feet. “You good to drive?”

I hum. “We should probably take a guard.”

For one, I’m high, if only a little. For two, Pops won’t like it if I run off with Holden without someone to act as protection if I should need it. And, if I’m going to bring a goat home—even though he told me no less than a week ago—I should probably at least take a guard. One less thing for him to be upset about.

Holden rolls his eyes. “A guard is going to tell Ian.”

And Ian will tell said guard I’m not allowed to leave the house.

I grin and thumb my phone open. “Let me call Arlo.”

“Your evil is very understated.” Holden pushes my bedroom window open and climbs inside. “I approve.” I follow, putting the phone on speaker.

“I need your help,” I say as soon as the line connects.

Arlo sighs. “No hello. No how are you, Arlo. Just straight to the point.” I can hear the laughter in his voice and roll my eyes. “And you have the nerve to only call when you need something.”

“Hello, Arlo. How are you?” I shove my feet into my shoes. Holden grabs his gun—the one he isn’t technically supposed to have in the house, but no guard is dumb enough to take from him—off the bedside table and tucks it behind his back.

Arlo snorts. “What do you want, brat?”



“I need you to take me somewhere,” I tell him, snatching my bag from the foot of the bed. It has my extra diabetic supplies in it and since we’re going on a little road trip, it is absolutely necessary to take it. The last thing I need is a crisis.

“Uh huh. And why can’t a guard take you?” Arlo asks.

I can hear shuffling down the line, so he’s already on his way, even without knowing where I want to go or what I’m planning on doing.

“Because they’ll tell Pops and ... I want to surprise him,” I say.

He’s going to be surprised alright.

Arlo is silent for a minute before he asks, “Is this one of those times when you should get into trouble for behaving badly but won’t?”

“Um ...” I glance at Holden. He’s lacing his boots. “Yes.”

“Be there in thirty,” Arlo says before the line disconnects.

“Does everyone in your life just do your bidding?” Holden asks.

“No.” I say. He lifts an eyebrow. “Not all the time.”

There are limits. A goat just isn’t one of them. Besides, the rule—most of the time—is if I can’t carry it through the front door by myself, it isn’t allowed in the house. I can carry one baby goat through the front door, no problem. Maybe even two if I do them one at a time. There’s no rule against making multiple trips, after all.

Holden snorts. “One day, Ian is going to paddle your ass and you’re gonna cry.”

“I might like it,” I counter, even though I know Pops will never spank me, not for real, for real. He’d probably cry before I cried if he did.

“Maybe,” he says as we leave my bedroom. “Spoiled.”

I shove my bag into his arms, and he takes it. “Wait here.”

“Yes, Master.” The sarcasm drips like tar from his tone as he rolls his eyes. I slip into Pops’ office. The wall safe opens and I reach in, taking out the gun Ian expects me to take with me when I leave the house without him. I check the chamber and the safety before tucking it behind my back and covering it with my shirt. Now all I need is to think of a name for my goat.

# Ian

Some people deserve to die slowly, screaming and begging for mercy that never arrives. When those people cross my path, I ensure they do just that.

Mr. Bauer whimpers, the sound weak and broken, as yet another finger is severed from his hand. Blood pools on the floor beneath his tortured body, around his teeth and one ear. He doesn't have long left in this world. Soon, he'll be free of his mortal coil, and that is perfectly fine. He's already told me everything I need to know.

As soon as the first tooth had been ripped from his jaw, he started talking.

He, Mr. Morrison—and several other men who I will deal with later—had been hired by an unknown third party to move their victims through my harbor, the only place large quantities of Flesh could be moved undetected for any length of time, since everywhere else in the city is too heavily monitored.

A shipment would have arrived after they brokered a deal with me. It's safe to say that had not happened—would never happen—because they exposed their hand. Unfortunately, by not accepting their offer, we've lost the men, women and children they had expected to receive. There is nothing I can do to help them, not now. But I can make sure Mr. Bauer and his collaborators never hurt another soul.

“Please,” Mr. Bauer whispers. Alphen, the guy who handles messy tasks like this one for me, barely pauses before he slams the butcher blade down, taking the next-to-last finger

from Mr. Bauer's left hand. Mr. Bauer gurgles on his own blood and shakes, but lacks the strength to do more. Alphen has worked him over well. Watching him be tortured to death isn't even enjoyable anymore. He is going to die in pain, but I don't just want his pain. I want his suffering. Not just for what he was involved in, but for what he implied about Oskar too.

Oskar. The thought of him makes me smile but I swallow it and focus on the task at hand. I'll see him shortly. For now, this needs to be dealt with.

"Have Hades and Persephone eaten today?" I ask Alphen.

He pauses and looks up, a familiar emptiness in his expression. "No, sir."

"They can have him so long as it won't upset their stomachs." It will be a rare treat for the pair of Doberman Pinschers. Neither of them is allowed off their leash all that much. They live a lazy life of luxury with Alphen. He spoils them worse than I spoil Oskar, and that isn't an easy feat by any means.

"It's been a while, sir." Alphen pushes to his feet, sitting the butcher knife down on his worktable. Every move he makes is deliberate and well controlled. "They'll enjoy the work." He wears a twisted little smile, the only smile I've ever seen him wear, as he uses a rag to wipe his hands. "Would you like to see them beforehand?"

I nod. There's no reason not to say hello, after all.

Alphen turns without another word and moves deeper into the warehouse. It's mostly empty, aside from a few playrooms he designed to make his job easier. Over the years, I've been present as he made use of them. It isn't often I need his services these days though, which means he lives a quiet, undisturbed life.

"Remove your shoes ... please, sir," he says as he unbolts a door and steps through, after removing his own shoes, into what amounts to his living room. I toe mine off and follow him inside. The pair of dogs in question are piled on the sofa, watching the Nature Channel. They perk up upon seeing

Alphen, scrambling to the floor. He kneels and rubs them down as they vibrate with happiness. Neither are bothered by the blood staining their master.

“They look good, Alphen.” I hold my hand out to Hades. He sniffs before bumping his snout against my fingers. I give him a scratch behind his ear, but he quickly loses interest in me and returns to Alphen, who continues to pet the pair of dogs.

Hades is the friendlier of the two, but still dangerous in his own right. Persephone is as likely to bite you as she is to bathe you in slobber. It simply depends on her mood. Alphen is the only one she truly cares for. And they are probably the only living creatures Alphen cares for. They are his family.

“They’re getting fat and lazy. You don’t let them work enough, Mr. Bassett.”

“That may change soon,” I say.

Mr. Bauer has friends who need to be tended to, after all.

Alphen stands and holds his hand upright. Both dogs sit. He turns his attention to me. “Do you want to stay and watch?”

Do I want to watch Mr. Bauer be eaten alive? Yes. Absolutely—he is a monster and seeing him die scared and screaming, even in his weak, broken voice, will help me sleep tonight. It will make me feel better about being unable to help the shipment of Flesh meant to arrive in my harbor. But it’s getting late; Oskar is no doubt expecting me home soon. I’ve missed lunch and dinner by now, if the darkness through the warehouse windows is any indication. The last thing I want to do is arrive home after he’s already gone to bed, especially since I plan to do more than kiss and pet him tonight. It’s obvious he wants more, and so do I.

“Maybe next time. Inform me when the job is done,” I say.

“Yes, sir.” He turns his attention to Hades and Persephone again. I leave the same way I entered. By the time I’m far enough away from the warehouse to turn on my phone, it’s late—well past ten. As soon as the device powers on, I check

my notifications. Nothing of importance, which isn't surprising. Oskar knows I was tending to business today and wouldn't have bothered me about anything short of an emergency. I miss him, though. I'm eager to get home.

Even this late, traffic is a nightmare. Twenty minutes into the ride home, Alphen calls the burner phone I use to inform me the job is done, and the Karr siblings are on their way to clean up what's left of Mr. Bauer. Hades and Persephone need a bath—a well-deserved one—but are otherwise fine. He'll call me if they require a veterinarian's attention. The phone call is brief and to the point, as nearly all my interactions with the young sociopath are.

The rest of the drive is uneventful. The smile that forms on my mouth as Whit parks disappears when I see the motorcycle hidden in my garage.

Holden Malnar is visiting.

No doubt he got Oskar drunk, high or a combination of both. There is only one way to find out, but do I really want to know? No. Not really. Oskar intoxicated is always a handful. He can't handle his alcohol as well as he thinks, which is one of the main reasons I refuse to let him drink. Maybe Holden only supplied him with enough weed to make him sleep easy tonight.

“Sir?”

I glance over at Whit; he's holding the door open, a small furrow between his brows. It isn't like me to linger. Of course, I rarely arrive home to find Holden here.

“Thank you, Whit.” I step out of the SUV. The door snaps shut behind me as I button my suit coat. “Take the rest of the night off.”

He deserves some downtime after spending the week babysitting Mr. Bauer.

“Have a good night, Mr. Bassett,” he says. I head towards the door, determined to discover just what damage has been done. As I reach for the knob, it opens.

“Good evening, Mr. Bassett,” Holden says, thrusting his slender arms into his leather jacket. “Oskar is out back.”

“Thank you, Holden.” He slides around my body, digging in his pocket. “Are you headed home?” He doesn’t smell like alcohol, so he isn’t drunk. His eyes aren’t bloodshot, so he isn’t high. It’s safe for him to make the drive back to San Jose, even this late at night.

“Either that or Marcus will come and retrieve me,” he says.

Yeah. No. Holden may be welcome in my house from time to time, but Marcus Malnar isn’t stepping foot on the property—not even to fetch his nephew as if the boy were a runaway puppy. Not because I don’t trust the man, to an extent. Or because I dislike him. We’re rival businessmen; making nice in my sitting room isn’t ever going to happen. It isn’t a good look for either of us to have tea as if we’re friends.

“Drive safe,” I tell Holden.

He grins. “I will. Have ... fun.”

He tosses his leg over his bike and turns the engine before backing out of the garage. I frown. The pause is concerning. Just what is Oskar doing in the backyard?

“Sir ...” Emon, the night guard, appears as I exit the mudroom. “You should be aware—”

“Did Holden already leave?” Oskar asks as he enters the kitchen, a bright smile on his lips, a bounce in his step, and something furry tucked under his arm. It’s in cupcake pajamas and has horns and ... no—nope. It can’t be what it looks like. Oskar knows ...

I repress a sigh. This is my fault, of course. He knows he can get away with genocide, so a goat is nothing. “He forgot—Pops.” He shifts, attempting to hide the creature behind his back. “You didn’t call ahead.”

“And exactly where would you have hidden your new ... friend, if I had?” I ask.

“Um ...” He bites his bottom lip, pulls the goat against his chest, and smiles. “This is Vincent. Vincent van Goat. Say hello.”

I groan and pinch the bridge of my nose. He named it already. Of course he named it. Oskar probably had the name picked out before he even saw the goat. Now it makes perfect sense why Holden left as if his ass was on fire.

“Hey!” Arlo’s familiar voice echoes into the kitchen. “Baaartholemew is having a—Ian.” He comes to a dead stop. A second goat, this one dressed in rainbow pajamas, is clenched to his chest. “How did it go with Mr. Bauer?”

“You can ask when you see him in Hell,” I tell Arlo. I’m going to kill him.

“It was Oskar’s idea.” He thrusts the second goat into Oskar’s arms; Oskar struggles to hold them both as they make soft, angry noises. “I just drove.”

“Traitor,” Oskar whispers as I say, “Uh huh. I bet you did.”

“Oh, wow.” Arlo looks at his wrist. “Look at the time.” He isn’t wearing a watch.

“Don’t you dare—” Oskar starts, but Arlo sprints out of the kitchen. Thirty seconds later, the sound of the front door snapping shut behind him reaches us.

“I’m just gonna ...” Emon backs out of the room. He’s smarter than he looks.

“Oskar—”

“I know you said no,” he rushes to speak, stepping towards me with big eyes and desperation bleeding off him in waves. “But I really wanted one ... two. I’ll have an enclosure built in the backyard, away from the flowers. And I promise to take care of them. You won’t have to tend to them or hire anyone to do it. I’ll do everything myself. Please, Pops?”

I look down at the pair of goats wriggling in his arms, and sigh.

“They aren’t allowed in the house,” I say. He nods. “Promise me, Oskar.”



“I promise!” He presses a kiss to my cheek before turning and heading towards the doorway. “I love you,” he calls over his shoulder.

I shake my head. “I love you too.”

Always. Even on days when he’s a massive headache.

# Oskar

With Pops' permission, Vincent and Baaartholemew are contained in the mudroom, since it's the one room in the house where they can do the least amount of damage. Tomorrow, I'll make some calls to buy supplies and hire a contractor to build the necessary enclosure. It's too late tonight, and I'm honestly tired. Who knew chasing after two baby goats—kids, the seller had called them—could be so damn exhausting?

I toe off my shoes and yank my shirt over my head.

There's a knock on the bedroom door. "Sir." Pops pauses, a frown pulling at his mouth, before he re-buttons his shirt. I swallow a sigh. If something demands his attention, he has to attend to it. Even so, what could possibly be happening this late at night? "You should turn on the news, Mr. Bassett."

Ian reaches for the remote and does as Emon suggests.

A red breaking news banner runs across the bottom of the screen as a solemn blonde woman says, "—erupted in violence as White Knight, the popular nightclub owned by Abaddon Sterling, was raided by police shortly after opening." Ian turns up the volume and sits on the edge of the bed. "A club manager was taken into custody and could be charged with delivery of a controlled substance. Other charges may be added, authorities said."

The news anchor continues as footage of the raid, and subsequent arrest, plays. Sterling can be seen in the background, speaking to the Police. He looks calm and in control, as if this is just another weekday. Maybe he'd been

tipped off beforehand. I know Ian has a couple of dirty cops at his beck and call. They're paid well to look the other way from time to time.

"Pops?" I sit beside him and he drops an arm over my shoulder. The heat of his body seeps through my clothes as I lean into him. "Holden said Sterling was leaving bodies on display."

Is this connected to that?

"I'm sure he has his reasons." He rubs my arm, his gaze still locked on the TV.

"We aren't involved ... are we?" I ask as I look up at him.

With the police involved, it won't be good for us if we are as well.

"No. Sterling's business is his own." Pops presses a warm kiss on my forehead. "Go shower while I make some calls."

"Okay." If there's trouble, Ian doesn't need my help to deal with it. He's more than capable of handling Family business. If I try to help, I'll only slow him down or end up in the way. "Don't take too long though," I tell him, unbuttoning my pants so I can shower like he asked and get ready for bed. "I missed you today."

He'd left shortly after breakfast and only managed a ten-minute phone call during lunch. Because of the task he had to tend to, we hadn't even had dinner together. It was ... unusual. Normally Pops works from home, so anytime I need his attention I can slip into his office and he'll provide me with a cuddle. Or if he is busy and can't be bothered but I'm lonely, I can sit quietly in his office and sketch. Not today, though. For most of the day, even with Holden providing a distraction, I felt as if I had misplaced something vital to my survival.

Pops tosses his phone on the nightstand and stands up. "I'll deal with it later."

I step towards him, smiling. "Are you sure?"

If the calls he needs to make are important, the last thing I want him to do is neglect them in favor of me. Family business

has to come first from time to time. I understand that. But if he says they can wait ...

“I’m sure.” Ian wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me close. He’s so handsome, a light of happiness in his eyes I like to think I put there just by existing. “I had plans for you tonight, anyway,” he whispers in my ear, his breath warm as his hands settle on my ass. I groan softly and my cock responds instantly. It’s a little embarrassing how ready I always am for his touch. “If you’re interested.”

I swallow and nod as I rub against him like a bitch in heat. His cock is just as hard as mine as they line up and I thrust against him. “Yes. Please.”

His fingers dig into my ass and he lifts me with little effort. I wrap my legs around his hips as my stomach clenches. Whatever he’s willing to do to me, I’m very interested in having done.

“Let’s get you cleaned up.” Ian carries me into the bathroom and deposits me on the counter. I remove my pump as he turns the water on, adjusts the temperature, and pulls the stopper. The tub fills and he adds one of my favorite essential oils to the water before coming back toward me.

His hands are warm and confident as he pulls me from the counter and pushes my pants down my hips. I kick them away and unbutton his shirt. He shrugs it off and tosses it in the corner.

My mouth goes dry; I swallow around the lump in my throat. The sight of his hard muscles and hairy chest has my cock leaking into the dark blue lace thong I wore today. The fabric is rough against my cock head and I moan when Ian brushes his thumb over the wet stain made by my pre-cum. He cups me through the fabric and I lean into him. “Pops. Please.”

I need him. Is he going to torture me or put me out of my misery?

“You’re lovely, Oskar,” he rasps against my jaw as he cups my ass. His fingers follow the fabric between my cheeks. Heat builds at the base of my spine as his knee slides between my

legs. The pressure isn't enough and when I roll my hips, seeking more, he pulls back with a soft smile. "Get in the tub."

I huff and drop my head against his chest. "You're being mean."

Ian chuckles and pushes me towards the tub. I start to push the panties down my hips but he snags my wrist. I look up at him. "Keep those on."

"Okay." If he likes them enough to ask me to keep them on I will, even if the oil in the water will probably destroy them. Pops smiles and releases me. As I settle in the warm, lavender-scented water, he finishes undressing. His cock is long and thick, flushed a dark red at the head and leaking; mine aches in response, and I drag my bottom lip between my teeth.

Is tonight the night? Is he going to do more than kiss me, jerk me, blow me?

The thought has my hole clenching. I'm ready, so fucking ready.

"Sit forward," Pops says, and I do. He steps in behind me, sinking into the water with a soft groan. The tub is big enough to hold both of us with ease. His legs stretch out on either side of me, and I drop back against his chest with a quiet sigh. This is perfect. "Tired?" Ian asks. I nod and hum as his fingers comb through my hair, pulling the strands away from my forehead. His touch always brings a sense of peace. Contentment. "I won't keep you up late."

I shake my head. "I can sleep in tomorrow."

"Tell me about your day today," Ian says, his hands soft on my shoulders. Despite the temperature of the water, goosebumps pepper my arms and chest. My balls pull tight against my body as his fingers dance across my collarbone. "Oskar?"

"I ... " What had I done today? "I painted until you called at lunch." Or, I attempted to. Mostly, I stared out the window and checked my phone every couple of minutes, hoping for a text from Pops. I hadn't texted him; I knew his phone was probably off and he wouldn't even see the notification until he

was free. “Holden showed up a little after we spoke. I fed him and we hung out on the roof.” No way am I going to mention the fact we got high *on the roof*. I’m not going to tell him about Holden’s wounds, either. His injuries aren’t my secret to share. “Then I went to Santa Clarita with Holden and Arlo.”

A smile pulls at my lips. Ian makes a sound in the back of his throat. He isn’t happy about the goats. It seems as if he’s going to let me to keep them, though, which isn’t surprising in the slightest. They aren’t nearly as big or troublesome as a llama when full grown.

“I was only going to get one, I swear.” I look over my shoulder at Pops. His fingers slide over my ribcage and tighten as he presses a kiss on my shoulder. “But the seller said Vincent and Baaartholemew were best friends. They’d been together since birth and ...” Pops shakes his head as his lips tip up. I huff. “They’re good boys.”

“And where exactly did you get their ... outfits?” Pops asks. His thumb brushes my nipple and I swallow a moan. Having a perfectly normal conversation while his hard cock is pressing against my back and mine is attempting to tear lace in two, all while he’s playing with my body, is cruel and unusual punishment. I’m going to come untouched if he keeps going.

“The seller,” I choke out. “They had some on hand.”

Apparently, fainting goats are a popular pet.

Holden said they looked delicious and were the right size to feed one person.

I hadn’t let him buy one.

“Any more surprises I should know about?” Ian asks, pressing his mouth against my neck. I groan as he laps at the hypersensitive zone before sucking on the flesh. There will be a bruise tomorrow, but it won’t be the first or, hopefully, the last. I’ll dab some concealer on it like the others and no one will be the wiser.

“No,” I manage, reaching back and sliding my fingers into his hair.

“Good.” He nips at my ear and then his hands are on the move again. My body trembles; he touches me everywhere but where I really need him to touch. It’s the worst sort of tease. His fingers ghost over my cock and he cups my balls through the lace before squeezing my thighs. I whimper and he grasps my chin, tipping my head back and slotting his mouth over mine.

The way Ian kisses is all-consuming, as if he intends to devour me. His tongue presses between my lips and slides alongside mine. Something sweet lingers in his mouth, as if he had a piece of hard candy before coming to bed; I moan, sucking the taste off his tongue. The fingers on my chin tighten as his mouth moves against mine, encouraging me to take what I want, what I need.

The water sloshes as I turn and brace against his chest. He groans into my mouth as I press my fingers deep into his hair and tip his head back. Before I’m ready, he pulls his mouth from mine and kisses across my jaw and down my neck. A moan bubbles up my throat as he laps at my nipple for hardly half a second, just long enough for my cock to pulse and leak, before reaching for the soap with a teasing grin.

“Pops,” I whine. “Please.”

“Let’s wash up, then I’ll take you to bed.”

# Ian

Trust is earned. I've spent a lifetime working to obtain and keep Oskar's trust. There is something humbling about having his complete faith. He believes in me without question, safe and content with the knowledge I will never purposely hurt him. I feel powerful in a way money and weapons have never made me feel as I ease him down on the edge of the bed we share. That, if life is kind, I will only ever share with him.

"You still with me, Oskar?" I ask. He blinks up at me, a smile on his swollen mouth as I comb my fingers through his damp hair. He's flushed pink from the warm bath and the thorough wash I gave him. No part of him had been neglected and because of that, even though he's exhausted, I can see the need in his tired gaze.

Maybe I should have made him come in the tub. Then he could climb under the blankets and get the rest he so clearly needs instead of suffering as he is right now. I enjoyed petting him—pushing him to the edge, never letting him fall over—far too much though.

"Will you touch me now? Please?" His voice is raw from all the pleading he did over the last hour. I laugh under my breath and fall to my knees in front of him.

My plan tonight had been to let him learn the joys of his prostate. I was going to open him slowly with one finger, then two, then three, before letting him have any type of relief. I could have, while we were in the tub, but I want the first time I really sink my fingers inside of him to happen in our bed. Now, he's too tired. I'll have to settle for sucking him to the



back of my throat and tasting his release as he spills into my mouth.

Maybe tomorrow morning I'll wake him with slow kisses and soft touches, show him the joys of giving his body to a skilled lover whose only goal is to please him. There's no rush. The phone calls I need to make can wait until Oskar is taken care of. Abbadon's unfortunate dealings with law enforcement aren't my concern, anyway.

The Bassett Family isn't involved in whatever mess he's found himself in; I'm simply going to offer assistance if he should need it. Oskar is far more important to me than the Sterling Family. While he needs me, they can handle their mess on their own, much like I did mine.

"Lay back," I tell Oskar, pressing my mouth to the inside of his knee. He trembles, a small breath parting his lips as he falls back. His cock, flushed pink and leaking like a broken faucet, slaps against his stomach, leaving behind a trail of precum. He groans and fists the bedsheets as I bend his knees and rest his feet on the edge of the bed. My cock throbs at the sight of his hole and I can't stop myself from stroking the puckered flesh with my thumb. He will be so tight and warm when I finally sink into him with my fingers. And eventually, my cock.

Oskar quivers and rolls his hips. "Pops."

"Not tonight." I slide my hands over his thighs and push his legs further apart. As much as I want to play with his hole, now isn't the time. "It's late. You're tired." He needs rest to endure the endless hours of pleasure I have planned for him when I finally do get to introduce him to his prostate.

"Please. Do something." Oskar whimpers when I fist his cock. His balls pull tight against his body and goosebumps pepper his flesh. He isn't going to last a full minute when I get my mouth on him. "I need ..." He chokes on a moan as I drag my thumb over his wet slit. He's so sensitive. "Ian."

My name, in his broken, needy voice, has me grasping my cock and stroking from root to tip. I'm not going to last long either, not after pampering him the way I had for the last hour.

It had been torture for me as much as it was for him. But it was worth it.

He reaches for me and I lick a stripe up his cock before sucking the tip between my lips. Oskar cries out, his hips snapping up, and I let him sink to the back of my throat, swallowing around him. He wheezes for breath, chest rocking, body shaking as I cup his balls and suck hard. The taste of him, a little bitter, explodes over my tongue and I hum as I pull back to lick his leaking slit.

“No. No. Please. Pops,” Oskar sobs, pushing onto his elbows. His eyes are wild—wide and pleading. “Don’t stop. Please.”

“Easy,” I soothe, surging to my feet and pushing him higher on the bed. “I’ve got you.” He collapses against the pillows as I push his legs apart and bow over his straining cock. He sinks between my lips with a soft cry as I grasp his hips and hold him against the mattress. His fingers shove deep into my hair and he fists the strands. Every breath he takes is a broken, desperate sob. His thighs squeeze around my shoulders. He’s trembling. He’s way too close to tease and I don’t want to torment him—or myself—like that, not after how well he endured my slow torture in the tub.

“Pops ... I ... Pops, oh God, Ian. I’m c—” Oskar chokes on his cry of relief as his cock pulses and the taste of him floods my mouth. I swallow around him, reaching for my cock and pumping hard and fast. The dry friction is just this side of painful, but I don’t care. The need for release consumes me as I look down at Oskar.

He pants softly, aftershocks of pleasure shaking his slight frame as I kneel between his relaxed thighs. Like this, flushed pink with satisfaction and breathing hard as the last of his cum paints his soft stomach, he is so fucking beautiful. Heat spreads through my lower back and down my thighs as my cock jerks and cum spills across my knuckles, splattering hot and milky on Oskar’s pale flesh. He moans, the sound weak as he reaches for me. “Pops.”

“I’m here,” I manage around the lump in my throat. Oskar’s fingers brush against my chest and I fall forward, catching my weight on my elbows, bracketing him, capturing his mouth. His lips part and he melts under me as I slip my tongue in so he can taste himself. His surrender tastes as sweet as his release. And when he smiles against my mouth, I smile in return, brushing my nose against his. “Ready for bed?”

He hums, nods, and wraps his arms around my neck, holding me tight. I laugh softly as I run my fingers through his hair. Within seconds, he’s asleep. I hold him for a moment longer, savoring the feel of his warm body in my arms, his hot breath on my neck, before carefully extracting myself from his grasp so I can clean us up. He barely notices when I wash the cum from his stomach and help him under the blankets.

“Pops?” he mutters in his sleep, reaching across the bed for me.

I comb my fingers through his hair once more and he settles with a soft sigh into his pillow. “Get some sleep, Oskar. I’m going to make those phone calls now so I’m free tomorrow.” He nods and I lean down, brushing a kiss over his forehead. “I love you.”

I do, more than those three words can convey. There are no words in the English language, in any language, spoken in this world or on some distant planet where life may exist, that can express what I feel for this young man. He is my heart, my soul. I truly do exist for him and him alone.

“Love you,” he manages, the words barely audible, before slipping into sleep again. I check his sugar just to be sure he doesn’t need anything, tuck the blanket around him, and dress.

The house is dark and silent when I exit the bedroom, phone in hand. I stop in the kitchen for a bottle of water and to peek in on the goats. They’re curled up in a corner, on a pallet Oskar made for them out of blankets, sound asleep. I shake my head as I inspect the pair of them.

Fucking goats.

They're going to get bigger, possibly meaner, and devour the garden in one afternoon if they escape the enclosure Oskar has planned. And they will escape. It's inevitable, like the rise and set of the sun. But Oskar looked so happy this afternoon as he skipped into the kitchen, clutching Vincent to his chest. I didn't have the heart to make him return them to wherever he'd gotten them. At least they're cute. Sort of.

How long do goats live, anyway? Not long ... hopefully.

They'll probably outlive me, just for spite, the satanic bastards.

"Late night, sir?" Emon asks.

I glance at the night guard. "Business."

With Oskar resting, I can call Sterling. Perhaps he'll be willing to tell me what in the hell is going on in San Diego. We're on better terms than Malnar and I, despite the fact Malnar's nephew and my grandson are the best of friends.

Sterling isn't absolutely bat-shit crazy, though. He's willing to ask questions before slitting a throat. Malnar is more of a shoot and ask questions later kind of man. It's a trait that has helped him amass power and keep it, but not make friends.

"Arlo returned." Oh did he now? I figured he'd avoid the house for at least a week or two, hoping I would forget he took Oskar to get the two animals occupying my mudroom. Of course, he'd probably seen the news and slunk back here because he knew I was eventually going to call him. "He's in the library."

"Thank you," I say. Emon nods and slips from the kitchen to finish his rounds. I pull the mudroom door shut, making sure it clicks. The last thing I want is for the goats to escape and munch on the sofa. Or piss on the rug.

Oskar will be sad if they end up on the weekly menu.

# Oskar

Fireworks burst under my skin, one after the other. White hot heat builds at the base of my spine and climbs until it feels as if I'm being incinerated. There's pressure, and pleasure. A number of feelings I can't explain, but others I can.

"Pops?" I rasp, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. The morning sunlight illuminates the room, but it's not the reason I'm awake.

Ian is behind me; his hand is hot, tight and slick around my cock. My balls are drawn tight against my body and I'm on the edge without realizing how I got there. Ian nuzzles my neck as he strokes from root to tip. I moan softly and thrust into his fist. His other hand ... I whimper when he curls his finger inside of me, setting off another round of fireworks.

"Good morning, Oskar." Ian licks a path along my jaw. The fireworks, the heat and the pressure, make a lot more sense now. He pushes his finger deeper into my body. It feels ... I have no words, no way to describe what's happening to me, but I know I don't want him to stop. This is the first time Ian has touched me like this and I want more—everything.

Will he finally fuck me if I beg?

Or is this him simply adding more to our routine without going all the way?

"Ian," I gasp as I thrust into his slick fist and bounce back on the finger stretching me open. "More ... I need more. Please." He withdraws his finger and I whine, reaching back and fisting his hair. He can't stop now. A sob builds in my

chest, but before I can plead with him not to stop, his fingers are back. The stretch is more now; it burns, but it doesn't hurt. If anything, it just makes me want him to push deeper, stretch me further. Until I'm filled. "Ian."

Fire licks up my spine, and my stomach clenches.

"I'm here," he says, his voice thick with desire. My balls ache as the inferno raging under my skin nearly consumes me. I won't last. I can't. But I don't want to come like this either.

"Wait," I gasp as I pull away. "Stop."

Ian freezes behind me. He eases his fingers out of my body. "Oskar?"

I can hear the worry creeping into his voice, choking him. When I turn around, there's a tightness around his eyes.

"I'm okay," I rush to assure him even as I press on his shoulders. He lands on his back and I climb into his lap. My cock slaps against my stomach as I brace myself on his chest. "I'm okay, Pops." He grasps my thighs and squeezes as I brush my mouth against his. "But I want you to do more than finger me." His cock jerks against my ass and I roll my hips as I push my fingers into his hair. My cock hurts; I thrust against his stomach for some relief. "I told you before. I want you to use my body."

Is he waiting for a written invitation? Do I need a PowerPoint presentation?

"Oskar." Ian's fingers flex on my thighs. His breath is hot on my chin.

"I know you said slow but I'm yours, Ian," I whisper, not ashamed when my voice cracks and my cock jerks. "I've always been yours. If you want me, take me."

He groans and cups my ass, pulling my cheeks apart. The cold air against my exposed hole sends a shiver down my spine. I press my forehead against his; our breath mingles. "Are you sure, Oskar?"

I was sure days ago, when we spoke in the garden and spent thirty minutes making out. Nothing has changed for me.

Ian is my future.

People who disagree with our relationship—if word ever travels beyond the walls of our home, which it most likely will at some point—will say horrible things about him, about me. They will say we're sick, twisted. They'll judge us, think he groomed me into this—into becoming his. But those people will never understand, *can't* understand. Everything I am to Pops, I want to be.

If one day I wake up and decide I want something else, someone else, Ian will hold me close, then let me go and wish me well. He has only ever wanted me to be happy. It just so happens *he* is what—who—makes me happy.

On good days, I want to build a life together. And on bad days, I want to shelter with him. He has been everything to me for as long as I can remember. I want to be everything for him as well. This is my choice—mine alone. I am exactly where I want to be. If anything, I am the one who tainted and twisted Ian, turned him into more than my grandfather. I only have to ask in order to receive. My desire is his desire. Everything he does, he does for me.

“I'm sure,” I tell him as I brush my mouth against his. His arms curl around my midsection and he holds me close. I feel loved and protected as our bodies press together from shoulder to hip. “I want this with you, Ian. If you want me too, don't hold back.”

He exhales, his breath hot on my temple. “Okay. Okay.”

I press a kiss to his collarbone as his fingers trail down my spine. My hole is still wet, open from his earlier exploration and one, then two fingers sink into me easily. “Pops.”

I rock against his stomach, still hard. He grasps my hip in one hand, sliding me down until our cocks line up. I pant against his neck as he thrusts against me. Our pre-cum mixes as Ian's fingers tease my body. He ghosts over that place inside of me, setting off another round of fireworks. It can only be my prostate. “Ian. Please.”

“Your first time will be easier if you’re on your knees,” Ian says.

I shake my head. “I want to see your face.”

He laughs, a soft sound, before rolling us until I’m on my back, thighs on either side of his hips. “Is there ever going to be a day when you do as I say?”

I hum. “No. Probably not.”

Ian shoves a pillow under my hips before his mouth slots over mine. He twists his fingers inside of me and ... I can’t focus on one thing. There are too many sounds and sensations. My heart is pounding like a drum behind my ribcage, the blood rushing and popping in my veins as I pant against his mouth, his tongue sliding alongside mine, his fingers stretching me open. My cock—his cock—hard and leaking as he thrusts against me. Our pre-cum mixing hot and slick on my stomach. It’s everything and still not enough, never enough.

“I’m ready,” I whine as I squeeze his shoulders and push down on his fingers. The burn is gone. Nothing hurts. Nothing ever hurts with Pops. “Please. Please.”

He pulls his fingers out slow and steady. My hole clenches and I wheeze, but Pops doesn’t make me wait long. He slicks his cock before catching his weight on one hand and lining up with my hole.

“Tell me if anything hurts,” he rasps. His eyes are dark and needy as he looks down at me.

I nod. “I will; I promise. Just ... hurry.”

“Bear down,” he says. I do and he pushes forward. It feels nothing like his fingers did and I cry out at the burn. The stretch is almost too much as he pops through the first ring of muscle and stops.

My chest heaves as I gasp for breath. A bead of sweat rolls down my temple. “Pops ... I ...” I shake my head. “Ian.”

He strokes my hip, squeezes. “I’ve got you. Take as long as you need.”



It's hard to breathe, hard to think. He's stretching me open, but not filling me. The burn eases moment by moment and I roll my hips, desperate to have him inside of me, as far as possible. He groans and I exhale as he sinks deeper. It's not so bad this time, as he pushes forward. It's uncomfortable as hell. The burn is there, but pleasure too. He nudges my prostate, and I thrust against his stomach.

"Ian. I don't ... I—" I shake my head. I'm not going to last. I can't.

"Too much?" he asks, even as he pulls out and rocks forward again.

"No," I choke out. My cock rubs against his stomach and my balls hurt—actually hurt. "Not enough. I'm close." He reaches between us and I cry out, thrusting between his slick fingers. Now, it's too much.

His thumb drags across my leaking slit before his nail dips inside. His cock taps my prostate and he grinds against it and I ...

"Ian. Ian." Heat lashes up my spine, through my thighs. I squeeze my eyes closed and lights dance as a hundred million explosions detonate inside of me at once. "Ian. Oh God. Pops."

"Oskar." Ian grunts and sinks into me, holding me down on his cock. I can feel him, his release. His heat spreads inside of me as my cock pulses, over and over and over again. Cum paints my stomach as I clutch Ian close and whine. His mouth captures mine and I part my lips. His tongue sinks between them as I tremble. Minor explosions continue to roll through me as Ian presses his forehead against mine and pants. His cock is still inside of me and I squeeze around him. He grunts and presses deeper.

The entire world could stop—freeze frame right here—and I'd be happy.

"You okay?" he asks, eventually, his voice raw and broken.

"Yeah," I choke out. "Perfect." I've never been better.

“Take a deep breath,” he says, kissing the side of my mouth. It’s uncomfortable—going from full to empty—and I wince when he pulls free. His cum is hot as it pools between my cheeks. “Any pain?” Ian slides his hand between my thighs and I whimper when he strokes my hole.

“No. Everything feels ...” I shake my head; I don’t have the words. Do they exist? I smile and wrap my arms around his neck. He grunts when I yank him down and press my face into his neck. “I’m really happy, Pops.”

His arms wrap around my middle and he rolls us until I’m straddling him again. “Good. Me too.” I hum as his fingers trail down my spine, then back up. He combs my hair away from my sweaty forehead. “You want to clean up or rest for a while?”

“Snuggle me,” I tell him, and Pops laughs under his breath, tucking me under his chin. His heartbeat is strong and steady under my ear; his fingers trace nonsensical patterns on my back and side. I sigh and sink into him as I close my eyes. “I love you, Pops.”

“I love you too, Oskar—always.”

# Epilogue

— 10 YEARS LATER —

Why the fuck is there a llama in my backyard? How did it get here?

I peer at the animal as Vincent inspects it, undoubtedly wondering how a goat could have such a long neck. Baaartholemew is nowhere in sight. He probably took one look at the mutated goat and noped the fuck out. I honestly cannot blame him because even I'm tempted to turn around, leave via the front door and never return. If not for my husband and our son, I probably would exit stage left.

“Pops! Archer!” I shout into the house. Someone needs to explain what's going on—now. There had not been a llama in my backyard when I left to deal with business this morning.

A blonde head pops out from around the feed shed on the other side of the goat enclosure.

“Over here.” Archer has hay in his hair, mud streaked across his cheek, but he's grinning.

There was a time when I wasn't sure he'd ever smile like that. He'd arrived on our doorstep malnourished, exhausted and just ... done. He was eight years old and defeated by life. But now, after four years, he's a well-adjusted, happy—spoiled beyond measure—twelve-year-old.

I fight my smile and win as I notice the lead in his hand. He comes around the shed, leading a second llama. So ... not just one, but two llamas making themselves at home in my backyard. “Pops is—”

“Oskar.”

I look over my shoulder. My husband, in all ways except on paper. “Ian.”

“How did your business meeting go?” He leans in for a chaste kiss, the basket of vegetables in his arms preventing him from deepening it. The dark navy-blue button-up he’s wearing is stretched over his broad shoulders and tight across his chest. The gray slacks he’s paired with the button-up are doing something to me, but now is not the time to get a hard-on. There are literally llamas in my backyard and I want to know why.

“Why is there not one but two llamas in our backyard?” I whisper-hiss at him.

He looks over my shoulder, a smile pulling at his mouth. “Archer asked for one—two. And I figured we already have an enclosure and plenty of space so ...” Ian shrugs, as if that explains everything. But then ...

I groan. Archer asked. Of course, that explains it. He’s as spoiled as I was at his age, maybe worse. Ian doesn’t deny him anything. If Archer desires something, he only has to ask, and it’s his.

I rub my temple and whisper, “You know you can tell him no, right?”

A smile tugs at Ian’s mouth. He has more laugh lines around his eyes now. His hair has more gray than ever—at sixty-three he’s no spring chicken—but he’s still in great health and so fucking handsome. When he smiles like he is right now, something takes flight in my chest.

I love this man. I love him so much it’s hard to breathe sometimes.

“Yeah.” Ian leans in, his voice pitched as low as mine. “But we both know if I told him no, you’d say yes and then I’d be the bad guy. Plus” —his smile seems to grow— “you always wanted a llama. Now we have two.”

I ... I cannot fault his logic. But ... still. Shouldn’t we have at least spoken about this?

“Dad!” Archer shouts. I look at him; he’s still grinning. His blue eyes dance in the late afternoon sunlight as he bounces on the balls of his feet. “Come meet Dalai and Llamaste.” I glance at Ian with a raised eyebrow, then unbutton the cuffs on my button-up and head towards Archer, rolling up the sleeves. Ian follows along, the basket still held in his arms.

Now that I’ve taken over most of the Family business—it’s my birthright and I would not be denied the opportunity to protect my family now that I’m old and wise enough—with Arlo acting as my underboss, Ian tends to the goats most often. He’s never admitted it, but I know he loves them as much as I do.

“They’re so fluffy!” Archer drags a brush through one llama’s coat before doing the second one. “Do you like them?” He looks up at me, his expression so hopeful I don’t have the heart to break his. This kid—my son—I exist for him, as much as I do for Ian. Even as I wade deeper into the darkness, their light illuminates the way home—back to them. They make up the entirety of my soul. Or what remains of it in any case.

“They ...” They stink. How did I not know they’d smell this bad? It’s even worse than Vincent and Baaartholemew. I didn’t think anything could smell worse than two goats at the height of summer but ...

Archer doesn’t seem to notice as he hugs one around the neck. It’s a deep, snow-white color. “This one is Dalai Llama. And—” He reaches over and wraps his other arm around the other llama. It’s the direct opposite of Dalai—black as a moonless night sky. “—this is Llamaste.”

I glance at Ian. He’s fighting a laugh. I sigh and climb over the fence, dropping to my knees in front of the trio. So, we have llamas. I always wanted a llama. And to be honest ... “They’re cute as fuck.”

“Right!” Archer holds the brush out as he flops into the dirt. Dalai doesn’t hesitate to stretch across his lap while Llamaste looks at all of us with disinterest. Clearly, we are nothing more than three hairless beasts disturbing their peace.

I take the brush Archer offered and he buries his fingers in Dalai's fur as I reach for Llamaste. Vincent butts against my shoulder and bays, annoyed about being ignored. Seconds later, as if the call alerted his best friend to my presence, Baartholemew comes tearing around the side of the feed shed. He knocks Vincent to the side and before I can scramble out of his warpath, he collides with my chest. I hit the dirt and wheeze.

Archer's sweet face, eyes wide and scared, swims into my line of sight. A second later, he's joined by Ian.

"Are you okay, sweetheart? Try not to move. Just catch your breath." Ian says, cupping my jaw in one hand as he uses the other to stroke my chest, looking for any potential damage. He looks so worried—damn near panicked—because my goat bowled over me. Again. Behind my aching ribcage something warm and sweet builds and I reached out, grasping Ian by the front of his button-up and yanking him down. He grunts, catching his weight on one hand so as not to crush me, even though I've filled out a lot over the years, as our mouths collide. His lips part and I slip my tongue inside, drinking in the taste of him. He pulls me upright.

"Gross," Archer groans as he shuffles away with his llamas and my goats. "You're supposed to do that in your bedroom."

I press my forehead against Ian's, close my eyes, and smile.

"I'm perfect. Everything is perfect."

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ALSO BY ODESSA HYWELL

TWISTED TOGETHER

[TWINCEST, DUB-CON, NON-CON]

MORALLY AMBIGUOUS DUET

[FATHER/SON, HURT/COMFORT, PUBLIC SEX]

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Odessa Hywell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

IN 2021, ODESSA HYWELL, A DARK MM ROMANCE AUTHOR DECIDED BECAUSE SHE IS MARRIED TO A TWIN IT WAS BEST NOT TO PUBLISH HER BOOKS FEATURING TWINCEST AND OTHER QUESTIONABLE THEMES UNDER HER MARRIED NAME AS HER HUSBAND WOULD NOT APPROVE.

—HIS LOSS, HONESTLY.—

IF YOU KNOW WHO ODESSA HYWELL IS, DON'T BE A SNITCH. LIKE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SAID, "THREE MAY KEEP A SECRET, IF TWO OF THEM ARE DEAD."

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