



BURLY

A Big Boy Romance...

JESSA KANE

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Epilogue

Murph

I'm an ugly son of a bitch.

The only thing I've ever been good for is protecting people, so I joined the Navy fresh out of high school. That's where I met my best friend, Joe. He was there when I wrestled for cash on the ship, leaving men devastated in my wake. We were side by side while enemy fire rained down from above, our lives flashing before our eyes. And needless to say, we've been drinking buddies for the last year since our tours ended, our return to civilian life slow and difficult.

We dealt with it in different ways.

He concentrated on family life.

Me? I have no family. So now I take contracts for the government. The dirty, secret part of the government no one speaks about. The long arm of the White House that reaches out and eliminates troublemakers or threats to democracy.

Joe barbeques and cleans the gutters on his suburban house.

We're night and day, but we're best friends.

After everything we've been through and the way he invites me in like a stray animal, there is no excuse for the way I look at his daughter.

But goddamn, there is no one sweeter on this green earth.

Just like her father, Angelica is my polar opposite. She's beautiful. I'm scarred up and terrifying. She's eighteen and I'm thirty-seven. She has the voice of an angel. She's everything pretty, lighthearted and positive. I'm a murdering bogeyman.

Right now, I'm sitting on a stool in Joe's house, elbows leaned on the counter of the marble island, a cold beer in front of me. Joe is frying up steaks on the stove and relaying some gossip about his neighbors, but my attention keeps straying to the backyard where Angelica is practicing a dance routine in nothing but bike shorts and a sports bra. My cock is so hard, there is going to be an imprint of my zipper on that stiff flesh all night. *Fuck.*

Does she know what she's doing?

No. No, she has no idea.

She's innocent as hell, even if her dance moves are provocative. Designed to make men pant and sweat. She sweeps her long golden hair up into a ponytail and starts the routine again, bending forward and snapping straight, rolling her ass one way, then the other. Twirling in pirouettes and reaching up, up, an expression of rapture on her face.

Joe turns from the stove and catches me watching, giving me no choice but to own it. I snatch up my beer, take a long pull and set it back down. "What is she doing out there?"

"She didn't tell you?" His pride in his daughter is unmistakable. After Joe came back from overseas, he had too many differences with his wife to make it work. Angelica splits her time between them now. "She has an audition tomorrow with a talent agency. They scouted her at a dance competition a few weeks back. It's a pretty big deal."

I nod, unable to keep my gaze from traveling back to the too-young blonde just outside the window. "What happens if it goes well?"

"They'll sign her. Start representing her to labels."

Angelica is on her way to the top. I've known that since meeting her. She's a triple threat of beauty, talent and

personality. As a man twice her age with a thick middle and a shadowy profession, the infatuation I have with her is downright pitiful. It's shameful the way I come here and collect mental images of the girl, bring them back to my barren apartment and fuck my fist.

Out in the backyard, she whips her hair, rolls that incredible body and I have to adjust myself under the kitchen island. Joe should kick me out of his home and never speak to me again. Hell, he should take aim at me with a shotgun. If he knew about the secret pictures I take on my phone, if he knew about the depraved fantasies I have starring his daughter, he would try and have me arrested.

There's no help for it, though.

She's under my skin. Into my heart with her humor and compassion.

There's no getting her out.

Speak of the angel, she comes skipping into the kitchen a moment later, a smile brightening her face when she sees me. "Murph!" She throws her arms around my neck and lays a kiss on my cheek. "I didn't know you were here."

"Just having a beer," I mumble, painfully aware of my hard-on. How close she is to touching it. "I should get going soon, though. I've got some work to do."

"Oooh." She props her adorable chin on her fist, leaning toward me on the island, gray eyes sparkling. "Is it something top secret?"

Despite my aroused state, my lips still twitch at her mischief. "You know I can't tell you anything about what I do."

She sticks out her bottom lip and I have an image of her laid across my knee, her tight ass lifting up for a spanking. "What if I guess correctly? Could you give me a wink?" Her voice softens. "Your secret would be safe with me."

God. This is torture. The way she's leaning, I can see straight down her loose sports bra to the smooth little globes that bounce every time she dances. Or walks. Her vanilla sugar

cookie scent is wreaking havoc on my brain. In a perfect world, she would be in my lap right now. I'd slide a hand inside that bra and roll her nipples around my palm, make her purr for me. And I can't believe I'm having these thoughts while her father is ten feet away. It's inexcusable.

"You're free to guess," I say roughly. "But no winking from me, kid. The less you know, the better."

She whines a little in her throat and I barely leash a groan. "Are you a bag man for the mafia?"

I stare back stonily.

"Come on, I had to get that one out of the way." She twirls her ponytail around her finger. "I have far more creative guesses."

"Let's hear them."

"You're a human wrecking ball, demolishing houses with a kick of your boot."

I have to crack a smile at that. That's not completely out of the realm of possibility, considering I'm six-foot-five and built like a motherfucking tank. "Next."

"You wrestle bears to entertain eccentric billionaires."

Joe snorts from his position at the stove. "That really paints a picture."

"What? It's a good guess!" Her gorgeous face is lit up like Christmas, cheeks rosy. "Dad says there was no man alive who could beat you in wrestling on the ship. Maybe you had no choice but to move on to larger, fiercer animals."

"It's true," Joe pipes up. "Murph never got pinned once."

Angelica gasps and claps her hands together. "Will you show me a wrestling move, Murph? Please?" Warning bells go off in my head, loud and shrill. "If I get signed by the talent agency, I might have to move to Los Angeles and I'll need to know how to protect myself. Give me some pointers."

"*She's moving to Los Angeles?*" I shout at Joe.

He holds up his hands. “She’s an adult now. She’s responsible enough.”

“It’s not her I’m worried about. It’s everyone else.”

Joe laughs. “Stop worrying.”

I make a harsh sound. “When you see the kinds of things I’ve seen...”

“In your job as a...” She trails off, gesturing hopefully for me to continue.

“Nice try.” I rasp a hand along my shaved head. “I don’t like this.”

“You don’t like anything,” quips Joe good-naturedly. “We’ve got ten more minutes to dinner. Go show Angelica some moves, then we’ll eat.”

This can’t be happening. This man—my best friend—is encouraging me to wrestle with his hot, eighteen-year-old daughter. Does he think I don’t have a pulse? The Pope himself would sprout wood at the sight of Angelica in those shorts. “Not tonight, I—”

“Please?” She tugs me by the elbow and I go reluctantly, because saying no to this girl goes against my very existence. All I want is for her to be safe, happy. To have everything she deserves. And she deserves a hell of a lot more than some battle-worn mercenary. “Show me something,” she cajoles, stopping in the center of the living room floor, leaving more than enough space on either side of us.

“You don’t need wrestling moves, kid. You need self-defense moves.”

“Fine.” She bounces on the balls of her feet and I have to drag my attention away from her tits. Jesus, if I wasn’t wearing a loose T-shirt, she’d be able to see my erection. I should put a stop to this now, but hell, maybe there’s a devil on my shoulder, whispering in my ear, telling me how good it would feel to hold her. To be skin to skin, her curves wedged up against me.

I grew up without a stable home life. There certainly were no hugs or affection being given out. And because I resemble a beast more than I do a man, I don't get a lot of human contact at all. I've never yearned for it from anyone the way I do with Angelica...and the need is growing daily. I'm starved for the feel of her petite body against mine. *Famished*. She's so sweet and feminine.

What would she feel like?

"Okay!" She stretches her right heel up to her butt. "I've always wanted to take self-defense classes, actually."

"Promise me you'll enroll in some if you..." I have to clear the misery from my throat. "If you move to LA."

She draws a crisscross on her chest. "Swear."

"Good girl." I swallow hard over those two words. God, I'd give anything to say those words to Angelica while feeding her inch after inch of my cock.

Fuck it. If this is my only chance to touch her, I have to take it.

Just for a minute or two, I can pretend she'd be with an ugly fuck like me.

"I'm going to lay down on the ground," I rasp, following through. "Now you..." I'm already breathing hard just thinking about what's to come. "You straddle my hips. I'm going to show you how to break free of a mount hold."

She nods solemnly, only hesitating slightly before doing what she's told. I savor the sight of her standing above me, her bike shorts molded to her eighteen-year-old pussy. And a second later, that hot little pocket of flesh is pressed to my cock, her thighs on either side of me. Fuck. Fuck, she's so warm and firm. Her lips pop open when she realizes I'm hard and I wait. I wait without breathing to see if she'll scream for her father or climb off—and I'm shocked when she doesn't. When she plants her palms on my chest and whispers, "What now, Murph?"

A groan tries to break free of my mouth, but I cage it in time. Is this really happening? "All right, kid," I say hoarsely.

“If you’re ever in my position and someone is attacking you from above, your first move is to lift your lower body. Like this.”

I thrust my hips upward and she rises with a squeak, her tits jiggling around in her sports bra. Her hands fly to my shoulders for balance, bringing her forward, her face stopping inches in front of mine. “M-Murph,” she whimpers, wiggling on my elevated lap. “What d-do I do?”

“Now you trap my arm...” I move her arm into the correct position. “And roll your hip toward the trapped arm side. Try to reverse our positions.”

Jesus, this is it.

I’m going to be on top of her.

I can hear her father banging around in the kitchen and I hate myself for this, but I’m too hard up, too fucking obsessed with Angelica to stop this now.

With a grunt, I flip the world’s most perfect girl onto her back and ram my hips into the cradle of her thighs—and I don’t mean to, didn’t plan it, but I come.

I come so hard, my body becomes an earthquake, an eruption of hot, sticky need tearing out of my balls, up the stalk of my dick, pelting the zipper of my jeans. Soaking denim to skin. I swallow a shout, my neck tendons straining. My body moves on autopilot, hips slamming hard, grinding up against Angelica’s pussy, my eyes devouring the beautiful surprise on her face. The O formed by her bee-stung lips, the gasp of disbelief.

God help me, that only serves to heighten my pleasure.

My shame. Her wide-eyed shock.

I’m a big, ugly beast and I’ve given in. I can’t take the way this beauty teases me, even if she doesn’t mean it. I can’t help this. She’s so soft.

“I couldn’t hold it any more. *Fuuuuuck*. Beating off only helps until I think of you again, then I’m back to being so goddamn hard. All the fucking time. Because of *you*.” I give in

a little more. I flatten her sexy dancer's body to the carpet and hump her through our clothes, seed frothing from the head of my cock. But I'm careful to keep a forearm balanced on the ground so I don't crush her. "Is this what you wanted? You thought I could wrestle you without coming? Proves how innocent you are, Angelica." I grind down hard. "Proves this is a tight little virgin cunt, just like I thought."

Footsteps come toward us from the kitchen.

Reality comes crashing back in and I roll myself off of Angelica, who lays there motionless, her chest heaving up and down.

Jesus, the way she's looking at me. Like she doesn't know me at all. It wounds me. Makes me want to howl with agony. I'm a sick man, using my best friend's angelic daughter to get off. I've burned her trust. I never deserved it in the first place. And I've got to get out of here.

I stand up and turn on a heel as soon as Joe enters the room. "How did the wrestling lesson go?"

I'm surprised as hell when Angelica sits up and fixes her askew ponytail. "Oh, um...good." She flashes me a look I can't interpret. "G-good."

"I have an emergency call," I say gruffly, swallowing the dryness in my throat. "I have to go. I'm sorry."

Pushing through the front door of the house and out into the summer night, I ignore Joe's calls of my name and keep walking. I should stay out of their lives, never see either of them again—that's what would be best for these people who were unlucky enough to invite me into their lives.

I'm obviously not a trustworthy friend to Joe and I'm an even worse protector of Angelica. I can't even protect her from my lust.

But I know that's never going to happen. Staying away from her completely has proven impossible, and after what just happened, I can already feel my obsession turning into something deeper, uncontrollable. With one last look at her through the window, I make a vow to protect her better. For

the rest of my life. And I climb into the cab of my truck, burning rubber out of their picturesque neighborhood, cursing my lack of willpower on the way back to my solitude.

Angelica

One Year Later

I don't want to be a pop star anymore.

Camera flashes go off too close to my face. Fingers reach out from behind the barriers, clawing at my skin and clothing. I just finished a concert at the Staples Center and it's as though the entire audience is now converging on me, demanding selfies and autographs. My security guards are making attempts to block the fans from grabbing me, but it's pandemonium.

"Where is the car?" I call over the screaming, stumbling forward blindly.

Someone yanks me by the elbow and I lose my balance, falling forward onto the pavement and skinning my knee. Getting to my feet unsteadily, I hobble forward, grateful when one of the guards ushers me in the right direction.

"This way, Miss Price."

"Okay," I whisper, though they can't hear me.

My chart topping single, "Candy from a Baby," is blaring from somewhere in the crowd and I block out the familiar chorus. The last year of my life has been a complete

whirlwind. I was signed by the talent agency and a week later, I was on my way to Los Angeles to record a demo. A month after that, it seemed like I couldn't swipe on my phone without hearing my single. Or seeing a picture of me walking to the store, sunbathing on the roof of my condo, pumping gas, buying coffee.

Now? I can't even set foot outside my door. The release of my album made me a household name. This is what I wanted, though. Isn't it?

A wave of relief hits me when my waiting SUV comes into view and my security team fairly throws me into the backseat and slams the door. Gingerly, I touch my wounded knee, leftover fear cascading down my spine and turning into a violent shiver. Hands bash against the windows of the vehicle, the door handle jiggling from people attempting to gain access to the car.

I give in to my impulse to lie down on the back seat, drawing my knees up to my chest and taking several deep breaths. This is not what I envisioned when I decided at a young age that I wanted to be a performer. Sure, there is still a certain euphoria that comes from being on stage. The roar of people singing along and feeling every word is truly indescribable.

But I can't help but feel like I sold my soul.

My manager, Taryn, climbs into the front passenger seat and lets out a hoot, propping her Prada boots up on the dashboard. "Amazing show. They are rabid for you, Angelica. Rabid."

I swallow hard. "Yeah."

Is it really me they love? Or the image created by the label?

Stop being a baby. There are millions of people who would kill to be in my position. I have a new house in the Hollywood Hills. A-list celebrities in my contacts. How dare I complain about getting exactly what I asked for?

Swiping at my nose, I sit up and straighten my shoulders. “Are there any bandages in the glove compartment? I fell on my knee.”

“You did?” With a look of glee on her face, Taryn turns slightly in the passenger seat. “Oh, that is going to play well in the press. I’ll put a call in to TMZ. Angelica Price: injured by fans outside the Staples Center. I’m sure someone has already sold the footage.”

She never checks the glove compartment for bandages.

As my manager speaks to the tabloids on her phone, laughing raucously, I stare out the window at the lights passing by. For all the adoration, there is a yawning pit of loneliness inside my chest. My father came for a visit last week, but between dance rehearsal, photo shoots and live shows, I barely had any time to spend with him.

I might as well be honest with myself.

This loneliness isn’t a recent development.

I’ve been lonely for an entire year.

Since Murph walked out of my father’s living room, nothing has felt...right.

As I often do, I allow myself to close my eyes and remember the weight of his huge, bruiser body on top of me. I bite my lip hard, skimming my hands up my bare thighs and think of that guttural grunt, those forbidden words he said to me. My nipples turn to painful little peaks and I rub at them discreetly, grateful for the darkness in the back of the SUV.

Where did Murph go?

It’s not unusual for him to disappear for chunks of time, although I still have no idea what exactly he does for a living. Only that it’s top secret and requires someone with tactical military experience. Someone indestructible.

The flesh between my legs clenches hotly enough to make me gasp.

Murph is nothing if not durable.

Thousands of times over the course of the last year, I've wanted to call my father's best friend and hear his voice. But I kept putting it off, afraid he wouldn't want to talk to me.

God. He would probably be so disappointed in me.

Selling out. Adopting this bubble gum image. Singing manufactured pop instead of my own songs. I'm a fraud. And Murph is the most authentic person in the world. He tells it exactly like it is. He's been through war and pain and he's still standing. I'm afraid to know what he would think if he could see the pampered pop princess I've become.

Taryn hangs up the call and claps twice. "You're already trending." She fluffs her cap of red hair and winks at me over her shoulder. "Well worth the price of a skinned knee, I say. You do have that Esquire shoot tomorrow, but it's nothing a little Photoshop can't fix."

I look down at the bloody cut and flop back against the seat, reminding myself not to be a complainer. "Right."

Half an hour later we pull through the security gate surrounding my house and stop in the circular driveway. At least I have this sanctuary. This is my safe place and no one can touch me here—

My heart crams up into my throat when I see the dummy hanging over my front door with a red slash in its throat.

The dummy looks exactly like me.

Above the door, written in red paint, are the words, "You love me or you DIE."

A scream builds in my throat, heat stinging the back of my eyelids. Fear is like a tidal wave rolling through my stomach. I shrink down into the seat, ice building along every inch of my skin—and I don't think.

I don't even question my instinct to call Murph.

It's my only option. I crave his protective presence more than my next breath.

He answers on the first ring, his voice like a balm in my ear. "Angelica," he says in that low, low rasp. "What's up,

kid?”

I ignore Taryn asking me from the front seat who I’m calling.

“I’m in danger,” I whisper into the receiver. “I need you. Now.”

Murph

It has been an hour since Angelica's phone call and I'm still fucking shaking, my hands ice cold on the wheel of my truck.

Danger.

I'm in danger.

Her terrified whimper replays in my head, over and over again, insanity threatening to take hold as I break the speed limit up the winding roads of the Hollywood Hills to get to her. It's been a year. An entire damn year of misery since the last time I saw her, face to face. At least that she knows about. I've been to the concerts, watching her from the shadowed edges of so many arenas, I've lost count. Lost track of how many times I've stroked myself off inside the folds of a trench coat while she shakes her little ass on stage to the screams of thousands.

The rest of the time, I haven't been far. At all.

God knows I've tried.

I've told myself to keep as far away from her as possible, accepting jobs all over the country. I always come back to Los Angeles, though. I always come back to where she is, our proximity soothing the suffering beast inside of me.

Somewhat.

Now that I've touched her, felt her beneath me, there is nothing that will fully soothe me but to be inside of her. That will never happen, however. Ever. So I've resigned myself to a lifetime of being deprived of her sweetness.

Protecting her is what I allow myself.

When I find out who is putting her in danger, I'm going to burn them alive.

No one puts Angelica Price in harm's way. No one.

How the hell did this happen?

I breathe down the necks of every member of her security team. I've looked into their backgrounds and paid them to keep me informed. They aren't as qualified as me, but no one is. I demand assurances about her safety several times throughout the day, every day. So I can only assume this danger is a new development. One thing is for goddamn sure, I'm not leaving her side until the issue is resolved and she's safe again. And that includes from me.

I take the hairpin turn into her driveway, screeching to a halt outside of her security gate, punching in the code I've had memorized since she bought the place. The gates swing open and I whip my truck around the half-circle driveway, throw the vehicle into park and get out.

When I see the dummy and the words written over the door, my blood turns frigid. It thaws out just as fast, though, the temperature rising to volcanic levels. I'm up the steps and pounding on the front door before I've taken a breath, my hands braced on the jamb.

The manager, Taryn, answers the door. She's new on the scene, only recently taking over from Angelica's last manager. No criminal history—of course, I checked. Three times. She recoils slightly at my appearance. Normally I might feel a wave of shame over that reaction. Right now, though, I don't give a shit about anything but getting to Angelica.

“Where is she?”

“I'm sorry.” The redhead draws herself up like she might actually stop me. “Who are you?”

“Murph?”

The angelic sound of Angelica’s voice coming from inside the house almost brings me to my knees. Fucking hell, how have I gone an entire year without hearing her say my name? “I’m here, kid.” I step around the woman attempting to block my entrance into the house.

And here comes the girl that haunts my mind twenty-four hours a day.

She runs around the corner into the foyer wearing a tiny, pink satin nightgown with nothing underneath. Barefoot. Golden hair loose and flowing around her shoulders. Nipples in spikes and tenting the shiny material. I make a hoarse sound before I can stop myself, my cock pitching a tent behind my fly, heart lodging itself in my throat.

“Murph,” she says again, moisture flooding her eyes. “You’re really here.”

My heart pounds out of control. “Of course I am.” That’s when I notice the bandage on her knee and fury rips through me like the slash of a sword. “What happened to your knee? *You were hurt?*”

Her bare feet slap on the ground as she barrels toward me, launching herself into my arms, distracting me for a second with her beauty. Christ, how did the most gorgeous girl on the planet manage to get even prettier? I have no earthly idea...but her smell is exactly the same. Vanilla sugar cookies. How many times have I gone into a bakery over the last year just trying to get her scent into my nose? “No. I just tripped,” she sighs into my neck. “It’s nothing.”

Momentarily reassured, but planning to ask more questions later, I can’t stop myself from sliding my scarred, beat up fingers into her hair. “So.” I swallow hard. “You went and got famous on me, huh?”

“Yeah. I guess.” There’s something guarded in her tone that I want to question her about, but I’m conscious of our audience. It’s not only the snooty manager now. Her security team has slowly joined us in the foyer, three out of four of

them looking everywhere but at me—Miller, the newest hire, manages to look me in the eye, at least. Plus two fancy-looking young people with clipboards. “Can you stay?” Angelica mumbles into my neck, her legs lifting to hook around my hips. “I already feel better with you here.”

My blood thickens, most of it heading south. Fuck me. Holding her like this is heaven and hell at the same time. Heaven because she fits me so perfectly, her little bare cunt molded to my fly. Hell because I’ve made a vow to myself to keep my hands off her and I’m not breaking it. She asked me for *protection*. Not for my cock. If she wanted what I’ve got between my legs, she would have called before a full year passed. “I’m not going anywhere until I know you’re safe.”

She slumps against me. “Thank you.”

I grunt, pulling her against me more securely.

The security team is well acquainted with me. But the rest of the people in the room look horrified over their goddess pop diva boss being cradled by a beast.

That’s one of the reasons my feelings for Angelica need to stay buried.

On the impossible chance she wanted to be with me, I won’t have folks looking at her like she’s insane everywhere she goes. And that’s exactly what would happen. Because my big, hulking, scary ass alongside this petite fairy princess isn’t just absurd, it’s a crime against decency.

Secondly, I can’t betray Joe.

I’ve barely been able to speak to her father on the phone, let alone look him in the eye, ever since what happened on the floor of his living room. Ever since I dry humped his precious daughter right under his nose and said truly despicable things to her that I can never take back.

In the interest of keeping our relationship professional, as badly as it pains me, I settle Angelica back onto her feet. Though my heart turns over when she refuses to leave me completely, nestling herself into my side. “Where is the surveillance footage?” I growl at her head of security.

Goddammit, *I* should have been the head of her team. If I trusted myself to be around her without putting my blood-stained hands on her, I would have been.

One of them steps forward and clears his throat. “The perpetrator scaled the fence on the east side of the house, but we only know that because some of the brush was disturbed. They used spray paint to black out the cameras.”

My stomach churns. This doesn’t sound like some bumbling super fan. It sounds like someone who knows what they’re doing. I do my best not to betray my alarm to Angelica. “Were there shoe prints? Tire tracks left behind?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“*Sir?*” The redhead snorts. “Why are you suddenly reporting to this man now? We don’t even know who he is.”

“He’s Murph,” Angelica says simply, curling her small hand into mine. “He was in the Navy with my father and I’ve known him forever. He’s also the badass who is going to keep me safe.”

Pride and determination swarm in my chest. Even after my inexcusable behavior on that night a year ago, she still has total faith in me. I don’t deserve it and I don’t deserve her. But hell if I’m going to let her down. “I’m going to need your contact at the surveillance company, a list of everyone who has been a guest at the house recently. I assume you’ve already called the police to dust for fingerprints?”

“I don’t want the police,” Angelica whispers. “I only want you.”

Again, the redhead blusters. “I’m her manager. I make important decisions and we don’t need outside help—”

“You make decisions about her career. I make them about her safety.” I give her a stony look until she turns and stomps out of the room. “Have you swept the rest of the house?”

“Yes, sir. It’s clear.”

I make a sound in my throat, knowing damn well I’ll be doing it again myself to be sure they didn’t miss anything.

“Call in additional security immediately. Station them around the house for tonight and we’ll meet in the morning. I want those lists and contacts first thing in the morning.”

I rattle off my phone number, as if they don’t already have it programmed in their phones. “And if she gets hurt again on your watch, if she so much as chips a goddamn nail on your watch, you won’t like what I do about it.”

They nod in unison, fleeing the room.

Angelica looks up at me. “You put them under your command so easily.”

They’ve been under my command for a year. Not that I’m going to tell her that. It would lead to too many questions. Too many curiosities. If she knew how closely I follow her every move, obsessively checking in with her guards, she would stop thinking of me as her protector and start pitying the unsightly giant who pines day and night for America’s pop music sweetheart.

It’s only the two of us in the room now and Angelica turns, pressing the front of her sleek body to mine, wrapping her arms around my neck. And as natural as can be, she climbs right up onto me, those world-famous legs cinching around my hips. She has to feel the erection in my pants. There’s no mistaking how much it turns me on just to be in the same room as her. But she doesn’t comment or pull away, probably because she’s so desperate for comfort she’s willing to ignore my lust.

Hell, she’s a fucking bombshell. Every man with a pulse is turned on by her. It probably doesn’t even register as important anymore.

My arms close around Angelica and I take a deep inhale of her scent, getting it into my blood. “Which way to your room, kid? I’ll inspect there first and get you settled before I look through the rest of the house.”

“Up the stairs,” she sighs into my neck. “But...”

I walk us toward the staircase, savoring the feel of her against me. “What?”

“I’m just a little spooked.” She pulls back slightly to look me in the eye. “Will you stay in my room with me tonight?”

More pressure swells into my balls, pushing my hard dick more firmly against the juncture of her thighs. I can’t say no to her. I never could.

Meaning tonight is going to be pure heaven...and hell.

Angelica

M*urph.* My goodness, I knew I missed him, but until he walked into my house I didn't realize how much. He's like a lighthouse in a storm and I can't seem to stop touching him, clinging to his brick-house body for dear life. I know I'm probably driving him crazy. He tried to distance himself from me in the foyer and here I am again, wrapped around him like cellophane.

Everything in my life seems so superficial. Even the fame itself seems so fleeting, like the mist I watch dissipate from my balcony every morning. Not him, though. He walked in and the ground beneath my feet turned solid. The way he took charge of my security made me feel safe for the first time in a year.

And my body remembers.

It's awake and buzzing, my skin turning hotter with every step we take toward my bedroom. My hallways seem so small with him inside them, his extra-large shadow casting itself on the walls. The steel of his forearm supporting my butt flexes with power, my body curved around his hefty middle, my nose buried in his neck. He smells like man. Not like the men in Los Angeles, but like a real man who has been working on a motor or cleaning his gun or something. I can't get enough.

We reach the door of my bedroom and I stop him with a tap on the shoulder, a thrill shimmering through me over having him in my private space. When I lived with my father, he would never come into my room. Only pop his head in and say hello or goodbye. Not this time, though. He's going to stay with me. He's not going to leave. He's not here to visit with my dad. Only me.

It's only us.

What am I expecting, though?

Not...not a replay of what happened on my father's living room floor. Right?

Murph hasn't been around for a year. Maybe he wasn't satisfied with what it felt like to touch me? After all, I basically just lay there gaping like a moron the whole time. I bet he's used to women who know what they're doing. Sexy, worldly women. Not naïve girls who know how to dance provocatively, but have no experience or idea how to follow through.

After a slight hesitation, Murph opens the door to my room and carries me inside, once again setting me down and stepping away, his body language that of someone who is definitely creating boundaries.

"Stay here and I'll check everything out," he says, not so discreetly adjusting his thickened crotch. Am *I* the cause of that erection? Maybe. But a man as virile as Murph probably has so much testosterone brewing, a feather-light touch can make him ready for sex. For anything.

"Okay," I say, sitting down on the edge of my bed. Bottom lip caught between my teeth, I track his movements around my room, watching him check my windows, look in my walk-in closet, do a sweep of my bathroom. That bulge between his legs never wanes...and I start to think wicked thoughts.

Very wicked thoughts.

Murph used my body once to relieve himself. Maybe he could do it again?

Maybe I could *tempt* him into doing it again?

Now that we're in the same room and my body is tingling like crazy, I can't deny that I've been starved for more. For a year. There has been a knot beneath my belly button. I have no idea how to untie it. But my intuition is telling me the answer lies with this man. I might be innocent in a lot of ways, but I'm not a kid anymore, even if that's what he calls me. There is no reason I can't try for a replay of what happened that night...but this time I'll be ready. I'll participate.

I might not be what he wants. What he's used to.

But dammit, I'm a sex symbol. There has to be a chance I can make him cave.

"All clear, kid," he rumbles, shutting off the light in my bathroom and coming out. His gaze sweeps downward over my body and cuts away, a lump lifting up and down in his throat. "I'll just, uh..." He strides over to the chair positioned by the wall. "I'll keep watch here, all right? You get some sleep."

Insecurity rears up and threatens to clobber me. He really seems to want distance between us. But my body is clamoring for his touch and if I don't at least try to get his hands on me, I'll regret the missed opportunity. For all I know, he'll catch the perpetrator tomorrow and disappear all over again.

"Murph..." Reminding myself I've been named one of People's sexiest women alive, I lean back on my hands and let my thighs open slightly. "I was thinking...I've been thinking a lot, actually, about the t-time we wrestled."

"Christ, Angelica. Don't bring that up," he rasps, pausing halfway to sitting down. "Besides, that wasn't wrestling. That was...taking advantage of you."

"What?" I wrinkle my nose. "How?"

"Your father trusted me. *You* trusted me. You were asking me to teach you a self-defense move and I...I hadn't been with a woman in a long time." The tips of his ears turn scarlet. "I didn't stop to think of what it would feel like. Rolling you underneath me like that. I couldn't...help it, but that's no excuse. *No* excuse."

“So...you were just...in need of sex.” Disappointed, I swallow hard. “That’s why it happened?”

It could have been anyone and he would have reacted the same?

Why does my heart fight that belief so hard?

Murph is staring at me stonily beneath his pinched brow. “We have to stop talking about this, kid. We shouldn’t be talking about sex.”

“Why not?”

He barks a humorless laugh. “I’m twice your age. You’re my best friend’s kid. A million reasons.”

A niggle of indignation sneaks under my skin. Before I can second guess myself, I peel the thin straps of my nightgown off my shoulders and show him my bare breasts. “I’m not a kid,” I whisper, lifting my hands to cup them. “You can call me that as often as you want. That won’t make it true. I’m a woman, Murph.”

“You’re nine fucking teen,” he grits through his teeth. “Cover yourself up or I’ll put you over my knee, so help me God.”

I raise my chin, refusing to listen.

“You want me to come over there?” he says, his scowl fierce enough to make a grown man cry. But I have the confidence of knowing he’d rather die than hurt me.

“Have you been with a woman lately?” I breathe the question, not sure I really want to know the answer. “Or would you...find satisfaction if you wrestled with me again now?”

That barrel chest is heaving. “Angelica, that’s enough.”

I squeeze my mounds, the sensations making my eyelashes flutter. “Come play with me.”

He groans loudly, gripping the bulge between his huge thighs and massaging it roughly. “No, goddammit. No.”

I’m going to lose this battle if I don’t appeal to his protective side. When it comes to me, that part of him wins out

over anything. “Please?” I inch my legs open a little bit more, drawing his darkening eyes to the secret flesh I’m revealing. “I was scared tonight. When you touch me, I feel safe.”

It’s one hundred percent the truth.

It’s just not the whole truth.

The whole truth is that I have a mega crush on Murph and I *always* have. That night on the living room floor woke up something a lot less wholesome than a crush, however, and I’ve spent a year aching to explore what it is. Even if I’m just a convenient female body to relieve his male needs.

As expected, my plea has given him pause. “Angelica...”

Dropping my hands away from my breasts, I recline onto my back, rubbing my back on the comforter like a feline. “Come wrestle.”

A moment later, he’s standing over me with a bunched jaw, hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. “This will... comfort you?”

I bite my lip and nod, very aware that I might as well be naked. In front of Murph. The man I’ve been secretly fantasizing about for a year. Sure, I dance around on a stage in abbreviated costumes for a living, but there’s nothing intimate about that. This is inhibition. This is real. “Yes. Being touched will make me feel better.”

His voice is a deep scrape of sound. “We shouldn’t be doing this, kid.”

Ordering myself to have courage, I shimmy fully out of my nightgown, extending the dangling material toward Murph with my big toe, before letting it drop. “Turn off the light. Whatever happens in the dark can stay in the dark.”

“Jesus Christ,” he growls, raking me with hungry eyes. “Gorgeous as fuck. Every sweet little inch.”

“Thank you,” I say on a joyful exhale. It doesn’t matter how many people have told me I’m attractive. It’s only ever seemed to matter that I’m attractive to *this* man. And this attraction is what I have to work with. He might not want a

relationship with me, he might want to keep me at a distance, but his appetite is ravenous enough to make him want me physically. If that's all I can get, I'll take it.

Murph leaves the edge of the bed long enough to slap off the bedroom light, casting the room in black with a slight glow from my porch light filtering in through the window. He does this move, this flick of his wrist that untucks his blue button-down shirt, almost like he's mad at himself for wanting me. He hesitates and I know I have to push him, so I come to my knees—grab hold of the front of his shirt and pull with all my might, bringing him down on top of me.

A great shudder passes through his brawny frame, a choked sound leaving his mouth, and that massive arousal between his legs prods me, denim against naked flesh, pumping against it once, twice, Murph's hands fisting in the bedclothes on either side of my head. "Never thought I'd feel that little thing pulsing up against me again." His hips buck and he gives a closed-mouth shout. "Jesus, kid."

"Not a kid. A woman." I rub the arches of my feet up the backs of his legs. "But we can still play. Wrestle me, Murph."

His erection swells almost violently, his breath coming in scalding pants that bathe my forehead. "It's not exactly a fair match up."

"Maybe that's what I like about it," I whisper. "Maybe I just want you to throw me around. Maybe I just want you to take."

Another one of those glorious shudders goes through him. "I lied. It wasn't just that I hadn't been with a woman. Can't believe you bought that for a second." He groans. "It's *you*. Jesus, the things I want to do to you should be illegal."

"Do them." His confession sends a thrill shivering down my spine, blasts me with confidence. Relief. "It all stays in the dark."

Before I know what's happening, I've been flipped over onto my stomach, that hard-packed body coming down on top of me, lap to backside. "I'm not fucking you." He knees my

legs apart and thrusts into the space he creates, grunting, driving me up the bed. “I know you’ve still got that juicy little cherry.”

Panting, my fingers curl into the comforter. “How?”

His mouth is up against my ear. “If you’d been fucked, if you knew what it felt like, you’d be petrified of a cock the size of mine. What it could do to that tight-ass body you’ve got.”

Nonsense. He would never, ever hurt me. “But...you want to have s-sex with me?”

The pain in his laugh is the only confirmation needed. “If your daddy knew how long, he’d have shot me dead.”

Liquid heat spreads between the folds of my sex, the flesh there swelling and growing heavy. “He’s not here. We are.”

The words have barely left my mouth before I’m thrown onto my back once again, my breath whooshing out, Murph’s whiskered jaw raking down the center of my naked body, his teeth nipping at my navel, before racing back to my neck, leaving goosebumps everywhere it touches. “Taste like fucking sugar, baby.”

Murph calling me baby is the sweetest music I’ve ever heard. Way better than my bubble gum chart toppers. His touch, his larger-than-life presence, has distracted me from the secret I’ve been keeping from him. But I’m seconds from being overwhelmed so it’s now or never. With a smile curling my upper lip, I hook a leg around Murph’s and twist with all my might, turning him over onto his back and climbing on top of his mountainous body. Giggling over his astonished expression, I lean down and purr, “Told you I’d take those self-defense lessons.”

I’ve never seen him smile like the one he gives me in that moment. He’s already ruggedly handsome, but his impressed grin takes his sexiness to another level and I can’t help it. I can’t help but lean down and seal my mouth over the top of his, kissing him for the first time—and it’s nothing like I expected. I thought the first time I kissed a man it would be

romantic. Or there would be heat. A whipping of hormones. I never expected all of it at the same time.

The slide of our lips bowls me over, intoxicates me. I am powerless to do anything but get more, more, more. I open my mouth, he opens his at the same time with a moan and we introduce our tongues, rubbing them shamelessly while I make the same movement on his stiffness, riding my sex up and back, undulating eagerly, the friction there, along with our mouths, driving me to the brink of a place I've never been before. "*Murph*," I whine brokenly against his lips, before being taken again, again with thorough sweeps of his tongue, one of his huge hands rocking me on his lap, the other one fisting the back of my hair.

"I need to stop kissing you, baby. So I can give you what you need, but fucking hell, you taste incredible. I can't get enough." Once again, I'm rolled onto my back, my mouth attached to Murph's, his lips devouring mine, our moans mingling, hungry, savoring. There is no art to what we're doing, there is only trying to taste as much as possible, consume as quickly as we can. Tongues lick, his jaw scrapes my cheeks, my chin, our hands are everywhere at once. It's sinful. It's wonderful.

Just as I'm running out of air, Murph breaks the kiss and moves down my body, kissing every inch of me he passes, his tongue trailing over my distended nipples, swirling in my belly button, his teeth biting my hips, my belly. I'm going to be covered in marks and I wouldn't want it any other way—

He pushes my thighs open and grinds his face against my sex.

I scream. I scream because it's so raw, so visceral, his mouth on me there, wetness transferring from me to his tongue, his jaw and lips. His calloused hands are rough on the insides of my knees, holding me open, his tongue bathing me in a long, possessive lick. Like he's staking his claim on me. Wanting to commit everything about the moment to memory, I look down and every one of my muscles contracts at the sight of what he's doing. At the difference in our sizes.

And then the ability to think is stripped away when his tongue finds my clitoris, polishing it gently, gently, then with more insistence, his grunts vibrating all the way up through my hair follicles, my fingertips. He drags a rough hand down my inner thigh, slicking his thumb through the split of my sex, massaging that sensitive nub with his thumb in between licks.

Oh. Oh, and a powerful storm begins to brew inside of me. I don't recognize my own voice or the sounds coming out of my mouth. Don't know who I am anymore as I grab fistfuls of his hair, lift my hips and beg. In that moment, I finally understand what so many songs are talking about. Lust. Connection. The power of physical pleasure. Breathing is almost impossible, there is only the incredible tensing of my limbs, the unbearable quickening in my tummy.

"Murph," I whimper, my lower body twisting, only to be pinned down hard by his forearm. "I think...oh, God, I think I'm going to h-have an orgasm..."

"Good girl," he growls, pursing his lips around my clit, applying light suction that shoots me higher, higher, toward some incredible peak. "Jesus Christ, I could live off this tasty little pussy, baby."

With that, he pushes a long, thick finger inside me, twisting it in a circle, his tongue batting my clit relentlessly and the storm breaks, pleasure ripping through me from head to toe, arching my hips off the bed and milking, milking, milking my sex until I'm not sure I can stand it. I clamp my thighs around Murph's head, riding my flesh all over his stiff tongue, the sound of his deep moans burning me alive.

I assume my body's frenzy is going to end when my climax wanes, but it doesn't. I'm still frantic. Out of my head with purpose. The purpose of helping Murph experience the same euphoria he just gave me.

My fingers curl in the collar of his shirt and I pull with all my strength, guiding Murph up and onto my still-trembling body, wrapping my thighs around his waist. "Do it," I whisper in his ear, my hands dragging up and down his muscle-yoked back. "Use me to get relief."

“Fuck. Fuck. *Need it.*” Murph’s erection is like steel between my legs, wide and pulsing. Excitement burns through me when, looking pained, he reaches between us and unzips his jeans, dropping his heavy shaft between the juncture of my thighs, his hips beginning to pump eagerly, desperately, tunneling his thickness up and back through the valley of my wet sex. “Not popping that cherry, but I can damn sure tuck you in tonight, dripping in my come.”

His crudeness makes me gasp, but that show of outrage only seems to encourage him. Excite him. Turns his eyes a deeper color, his jaw flexing.

“Shouldn’t be doing this,” he grits out through his teeth. “Shouldn’t be touching my angel with this big, dirty cock.”

An intuition prods me. He likes a little shame.

That realization almost pushes me into another climax.

“No, you shouldn’t,” I murmur, trying to catch my breath. “You just can’t help yourself, though, can you?” I shove at his huge shoulders a little, feigning outrage. “Can’t help humping me with that filthy, aching thing.”

Murph’s panting shout fills the room. “Jesus. Angelica. Fuck!” That massive body flattens me to the mattress and he ruts me like a wild animal, never penetrating me, but using me nonetheless for his needs. His balls slap loudly off my backside, his mouth burying in my neck, his groans thrilling me more than any stadium full of screaming fans ever could.

Warm moisture shoots across my stomach, Murph’s mouth pressing hotly to my ear, his loud sounds of relief and pleasure and misery sending a shiver of satisfaction down my spine. More and more spurts from between his legs bathe me, mark me irrevocably, my heart soaring when his mouth stamps down over mine, as if I’m his lighthouse, too, and he needs me to get through the tumult of lust. And finally, when he grinds his shaft down against me, pressing down on my clit, another orgasm catches me off guard and I wail his name, clinging tightly, both of us shaking as we fight to the other side of the pleasure.

As soon as it's over, I float down on some blissful cloud and unconsciousness starts to claim me. Murph lifts his head, studying my face as if he doesn't know what to do next, his breath laboring in and out. But I can see what he *wants* to do. So badly. It's in the groove between his brows and the way he wets his lips eagerly. And he does it by rolling to my side and pulling me up against him, soothing me to sleep in his warm, safe bear hug.

Murph

I watch Angelica sleep with my heart in my throat.

The morning light is only beginning to fill her girly bedroom. More and more sunshine begins to reveal the delicate pink sheets, the ballet dancer painting on her wall, the sparkly high heels discarded in the corner. One of these things is not like the other—and it's me. I'm horribly out of place.

Even our pressed-together bodies are painfully dissimilar. I'm the giant ogre who has captured the princess, my coarse, fat-knuckled hand resting on her flat stomach, her petite feet tucked between the knees I've used to crush a man's windpipe. But I can't seem to let go.

She only wanted comfort last night. I have to keep telling myself that.

Angelica has everything she could ever want. Money, fame. There was something I could offer her last night—oblivion—but this isn't a permanent job and I need to be realistic about that. For so many reasons.

One, she can do so much better than me. Someone with equal talent who doesn't have the horrors of the world engraved on his mind. When she does find that person, she'll realize she was selling herself short by letting a grizzled mercenary touch her perfect skin.

Two, what we did last night was a betrayal of her father's trust. Again.

Fuck, though, I want to do it again so badly. The sugar cookie taste of her pussy, the slippery feel of it on my bare dick, has ruined me for anything else this world has to offer. I'll spend the rest of my life fantasizing about her riding my face, her thighs wrapped around my head. I've never been so hard. Never come so violently, my insides felt like they were being rearranged.

That's only for her. It'll only *ever* be for her.

My job here is to make sure Angelica is safe. That's why she called me. And keeping her safe will be my job for the rest of my life, whether she's aware of me watching from the shadows or not. I need to get my ass up and start delivering, because letting her down is not an option.

Though it's the worst kind of pain, I disentangle myself from the sleeping angel and get out of bed. Since there is no way I can go downstairs with my cock tenting my jeans, I have no choice but to make a stop in Angelica's bathroom. I step into her shower and press some puffy pink sponge to my nose, finding it smelling like her and I beat off roughly, my climax taking no time at all because I can still taste her cunt in my mouth. Mere seconds. God. And then I'm painting the tile wall of her shower in my semen, imagining it dripping down the walls of her womb instead.

After I get myself together, I go to my truck, get out my overnight bag and find a downstairs bathroom to clean myself up and change clothes. When I'm done, I hear voices in the kitchen, so I make my way there and find the redhead manager and the clipboard twins going over today's plan.

"All right," says Taryn briskly. "Angelica's trainer will be here momentarily for her daily workout in the downstairs gym. We have a quick rehearsal later this morning, then a photo shoot at noon. A Zoom interview with..."

She trails off when she sees me standing in the doorway.

“I’m going to need those locations,” I say, moving to the coffee pot. “Need to make sure they’re secure beforehand. And you can go ahead and cancel the workout. I don’t want anyone coming in and out of here until I determine who trespassed on the property last night.”

One of the clipboard twins chokes. “Cancel the *workout*?”

I pour a mug of steaming coffee. “Yeah, I know this is LA and everyone has to look like a movie star, but Angelica’s safety is more important.”

Taryn arches an angry eyebrow at me. “How do we know *you’re* not the stalker?”

I pin her with a look. “Who called them a stalker?”

She sputters. “Well, it’s a reasonable assumption.”

“Is it?” I ask, sipping my coffee slowly.

“Good morning,” Angelica murmurs, padding into the tense kitchen, tucking her loose golden hair behind an ear. “Is the trainer here yet?”

She sounds so glum asking the question, I want to pick her up and rock her. How hard have they been working this girl? She just had a stadium show last night. Doesn’t that earn her some rest?

“Your training session is cancelled,” I say into my mug of coffee, my heart shooting up into my throat when she spins toward me with a huge smile on her face.

Fuck.

I’m so fucked.

I’ve always known my preoccupation with Angelica ran deep, but I’ve been in denial over how much I’ve loved her from afar. Now that we’re up close and personal again, there’s no pretending that my feelings for her don’t go far beyond lust and admiration. I’m fucking in love with her. I have been for a long time.

“It is?” she whispers, bounding toward me and throwing her arms around my neck. “We’re playing hooky?”

If there weren't several people in the room watching us with curiosity, nothing would stop me from cupping that tight behind in my hand, giving it a hearty squeeze. She's in teeny-tiny gray bike shorts and a black sports bra that show off her pop-star figure and not even my jerk off session can stop my cock from responding. "We can do anything you want, kid. As long as it's safe."

She wrinkles her nose at the nickname, but doesn't give me a hard time. "I've lived in the Hills for months, but I haven't been to the Hollywood sign. Will you take me?" I grunt an affirmation and she wiggles against me, her eyes twinkling with excitement, lids fluttering when she feels the erection she's causing. "Can we go alone?"

I grip her waist to hold her still before I unload in my jeans. "We'll have your security team trail us, all right? You're safe with me, but I want someone watching your back at all times until we catch the perp."

Her nod is solemn, that full lower lip caught between her teeth.

God, I'd like to reverse our positions and fuck her hot little body up against the kitchen counter, make her shake for my dick the way she trembled for my tongue last night. I'd have to give it to her raw, no barriers. This possessiveness I feel for her wouldn't allow a single thing between us.

I clear the hunger from my throat. "Give me an hour. I need to make some calls." Over the top of Angelica's head, I eyeball the manager. The security team sent me the lists I requested and I'm going to put them through my government database this morning, see if Angelica's recent guests or anyone in her employ turn up any hits that I didn't dig deep enough to find the first time around. But right off the top, I don't like the way the manager called the perp a stalker. It was premature. "Why don't you go put on some actual clothes?"

Frowning, Angelica looks down at her body. "These *are* clothes."

"That is underwear, baby."

She giggles, runs a finger down the center of my chest and struts away, her ass moving like a dream in those shorts. “I’ll be out by the pool. Come get me when you’re ready.”

As soon as she sets foot out of the kitchen, I’m on the phone to her security team, ordering them to form a perimeter around Angelica. Not taking any chances with her. In fact, just having her out of my sight for a matter of minutes makes me start to sweat. So I complete my work as quickly as possible, making calls ahead to the studio where she’ll be rehearsing and doing her photo shoot this afternoon, adding security measures, eliminating any personnel that don’t need to be present. And lastly, I open my email from her security team and start the process of running searches for any criminal history or aliases.

There is an email in my inbox from Joe and I start to open it, but I catch sight of Angelica through the living room window. She waves at me, gesturing for me to come outside, bouncing on the balls of her feet. With my heart lodged beneath my jugular, I can’t do anything but go to her, leaving the email unopened.



“OH MY GOSH, this is even cooler than I thought it would be,” Angelica breathes, shielding her eyes from the California sun, the valley sweeping out below, dotted with mansions. “Wasn’t it worth the hike?”

To see her this happy? Fuck yeah it was.

I’d have walked a thousand miles to make her smile. To see the exhaustion lift from her shoulders, the way it did on our short walk to the Hollywood sign. I grunt in response to her question, making her laugh. “I missed your grunts, Murph.” She slides me a look, pink filtering into her cheeks. “I missed your honesty, too. The way you call things exactly as you see them.” Her throat works. “I don’t encounter a lot of that anymore.”

“How’s that?”

“It’s nothing,” she laughs, but there’s a line between her brows.

“It’s not nothing.” I step in front of her to block the sun, tipping her chin up until she’s looking at me. “Are you happy here, Angelica?”

“Of course I am!” she says too quickly. “This is everything I’ve ever wanted. A multi-record deal, shows in every corner of the globe, people who love my songs...”

“But?”

She blinks and looks down. “But what?”

I lift her chin again. “I’ve known you a long time, kid. I know when you’ve got something on your mind. Get it off.”

“So commanding,” she whispers, turning her head to kiss the inside of my wrist. “You were the same way in my bed.”

My cock pulses hotly. “I thought what happens in the dark stays in the dark.”

She doesn’t even bother to look contrite. “I may have lied. A little.” She turns heavy lidded, her voice dropping to a whisper. “I would have said whatever it took to get your hands on me.”

“Jesus Christ. Are you trying to get tossed up onto my dick right now?” I growl, putting light pressure on her jaw until those fantasy lips pop open. “I can tell you’re trying to distract me from the real conversation.”

“Isn’t it working?”

“Like a charm.” It costs me a Herculean effort to stop touching Angelica and put space between us, but I’m well aware of her security team hovering a hundred yards away. If they see me pawing at Angelica, they’ll probably assume I’m attacking her because no woman in their right mind would subject themselves to it willingly. Especially a sweet, intelligent, drop dead gorgeous celebrity like Angelica. “Answer me again,” I rasp, adjusting the bulge in my jeans. “Are you happy?”

“I better be,” she says, swallowing. “After all, I sold my soul for this life.”

My eyebrows slash together. “What the hell does that mean?”

I’m surprised when her face rapidly turns pink. “It’s embarrassing.”

“More embarrassing than coming in my pants at the first feel of you underneath me?” I shake my head. “Angelica, you can tell me anything.”

Her tits rise and fall. She paces away, hugging her elbows and looking out over the valley. “Everything about you is so... real. You are one hundred percent authentic, Murph. Meanwhile...they put me in some pop music machine and it spat me out. When I’m on stage, I feel like a fraud. An actor. I haven’t even fought for the chance to record my own music. But you...” She wets her lips. “My father always talks about how heroic you were during your service. And I still don’t know what you do for a living, but...I know it somehow keeps people safe, because that’s who you are. A protector. I don’t even know what or who I am anymore.” Her hard swallow reaches my ears. “You must think I’m ridiculous.”

I’m pretty sure my mouth is hanging open. “There is no reality where I think you’re ridiculous, Angelica. Maybe you haven’t recorded your own music. *Yet*. But I’m in awe of you and what you’ve accomplished. How could you think otherwise?”

“You stayed away. You just disappeared.” She glances back at me with tears in her eyes. “I thought you must be disappointed or—”

I take a giant step forward, take her by the shoulders and turn her around. For a minute, I have no idea what to say. Can barely speak around the devastation that she’s felt deserted all this time. Here I was thinking she never gave me a thought until she was in danger. “Baby...” I take a slow breath, knowing there’s only one way to reassure her. “You eat oatmeal with pecans and strawberries for breakfast every morning. Your pre-concert ritual is to do handstands in your

dressing room. You drink hot chocolate instead of coffee. You send money to charities anonymously, mostly ones that keep music programs in schools. I know every damn thing about you. I was never really gone. I just...fuck, kid.” I drop my hands and step away. “Look at me. And look at you.”

Angelica rears back a little. “What do you mean?”

“I mean...” I seesaw a hand between us. “I look like I should be carrying you up the side of the Empire State Building. Not putting my disgusting hands on you.”

The girl looks stricken. “Disgusting hands? Are you...did you just compare yourself to King Kong? Like...a beast or something?”

I scoff, the tips of my ears burning. “Come on. Don’t act like the differences in our appearances never crossed your mind.”

Her expression is nothing short of nonplussed. “I love the way you look.”

“Oh yeah?” I slap at the tire around my waist. “This really turns you on?”

“Yes,” she whispers, breathing faster. And I definitely don’t miss the way her nipples turn to peaks in her sports bra. “Your thickness makes me feel safe. Like nothing could get through you. I like the way you press me down and I can’t move. I’m h-helpless and powerful at the same time. I love it. I love the hair on your chest and stomach, too, because it makes me feel smooth and sexy. All of it. I love all of it.”

My breath is trapped in my lungs. Did I hear her right or am I dreaming? “Last night...you just needed comfort from someone familiar—”

“No.” She shakes her head. “No, I needed it from you, Murph. Only you.”

It’s hard to speak when my throat is this tight, but I manage. “I’m too old for you, kid. I’m too jaded. I’ve seen things straight out of your worst nightmares. Maybe you don’t think I’m an ugly son-of-a-bitch, but what’s in my head is ugly for damn sure.” I look down at my hands, imagining blood

running down my knuckles. “When I touch you, I feel like it’s going to seep out of me and dirty you. You’re everything light and sweet and beautiful.”

“And I’ve been worried I’m too phony. Too inauthentic for you.” Her eyes are hopeful as she steps toward me, slides her palms up and over my pecs. “Maybe we’ve both been crazy.” She licks her lips. “Do you want to be with me, Murph?”

I huff a laugh. “You really have to ask me that, Angelica? After I just told you I’ve been following your every move, demanding details about how you eat, how long you sleep, hovering just outside of your notice?”

“I love knowing that,” she whispers.

“Angelica...” I say hoarsely, squeezing her waist, leaning down to take a long inhale of her sugar cookie goodness. “Goddammit, you’ve got my dick so hard.”

“As my security consultant, maybe you should cancel rehearsal and the photo shoot, too.” She presses her curves to the front of my body, gazing up at me through her eyelashes. “Maybe it’s safest to keep me in my bedroom all day.”

“Your father,” I grit out. “We can’t forget about him. When a man has saved your life and you’ve saved his in return, this kind of betrayal is inexcusable. That kind of trust can’t be violated.”

Angelica lifts slowly on her toes, melding our mouths together, tempting me into a long, wet kiss, before pulling back and whispering, “Can’t we talk to him? Explain that we...” She blushes. “Have feelings for each other?”

“That’s a mild way of putting it,” I growl, rolling our foreheads together.

“I guess it is...” She rubs her hips against mine teasingly. “Considering you know what I eat for breakfast.” With a smile curving her mouth, she squints up at me. “*How* do you know all of that stuff, by the way?”

“The day you moved to LA, I relocated here, too. I...” Jesus, I can’t believe I’m saying this out loud. “I purchased the security company you hired, so I would know every move you

make. Travel dates.” My Adam’s apple slides up and down, my pulse going full throttle. “You might say my obsession with you is...unhealthy.”

Instead of being horrified by my actions or my admission, she gives a gusty sigh, as if she finds it all very romantic. “I want to belong to you, Murph.” Her hand slides down my chest, past my gut, to lightly rub against my cock. “Now.”

Lord above. Semen leaks from my tip, soaking into my fly.

This perfect angel really wants to be with me?

I never could have imagined it in a million years. She’s sugar and I’m motor oil. She’s sweet where I’m bitter. It shouldn’t make sense. But the way she’s looking at me makes me believe. The only wish I’ve ever made in my life might be coming true. There is a part of me that knows she can do better, but now that I’ve had my tongue in her mouth, her pussy. Now that I’ve held her through the night, the idea of letting her be with another man sets off a bomb in my head.

I’d murder the motherfucker with my bare hands.

No question.

“Please don’t push me away, Murph,” she says, looking up at me with luminous eyes. “I’ve been so lonely since you disappeared.”

My heart twists painfully, knees almost buckling. To think something I did made her sad is unbearable. “I was doing what’s best for you,” I rasp.

“*You’re* what’s best for me.” She nuzzles her cheek into the center of my chest. “Take me home. Make me yours... completely.”

I’m panting now like I’ve run a marathon, my cock throbbing in time with my breaths. “Not until I speak to your father,” I say on a rush of breath. “Not until I deal with the consequences, face to face. And when I talk to him, I want to be able to say I haven’t fucked you yet. It’s the right thing to do.”

Her bottom lip sticks out in a pout. There is a protest on her lips, but before she can voice it, her cell phone buzzes where she's tucked it into her shorts. One of the security guards hesitantly calls something about rehearsal time, causing Angelica to sigh. "Fine," she says, giving my johnson a final stoke through my jeans. "I guess that's fair."

That's what she *says*.

But there is something mischievous in her eyes...and I know she's not going to make waiting easy. It's not long before that theory is confirmed.

Angelica

There's no way I'm waiting for Murph to talk to my father.

I'm a virgin, but I feel empty without him inside me. Every time I feel his eyes on me, the muscles in my tummy wind a little tighter. Moisture slicks my sex. My breasts ache for the feel of his big hands. It doesn't help matters that he no longer disguises his hunger for me. It's right there on his beloved face. Right there in every lick of his lips, sweep of his gaze, adjustment of his tented fly.

We're in rehearsal now at the studio downtown. Normally I would go half speed in practice, just making sure I have the choreography correct without injuring myself, but Murph is working on his laptop nearby, his eyes continually drifting to me...and I can't help but shake my backside for everything I'm worth.

Really, I should stop distracting him. After all, he's trying to track down the person who left that ugly message on my doorstep. But I can't help it. I want to tempt him into giving in. I mouth the seductive words to my songs, grinding my hips in slow circles, drawing his eye to the place between my thighs. Bending over and rising slowly, raking my fingertips up my legs and watching him through my lashes.

That barrel chest of his heaves, sweat forming on his brow.

He shifts in his chair, visibly worked up—and his obvious arousal makes me so hot, I soak the seam of my bike shorts. It's almost like we're having sex from across the room. And that's what my body mimics. The act of intercourse. With the provocative dance moves, I'm showing him how I will move beneath his giant frame. How my hips will lift, how I'll writhe my sex for him, how my breasts will bounce.

There is no one stopping us.

No one between us.

Definitely not my father. I'm a woman now. A grown up. Every step I take, every toss of my hair, shows him that, until he's rising from his chair, the work in front of him forgotten. I stop dancing in the middle of the routine. He's making his way toward me. There will be no more waiting. He's going to take me somewhere and finally give us what we both want—

“Oh God!”

I'm drawn up short by the alarmed shout from Taryn. She's standing in the doorway of the rehearsal studio, holding something in her hand, staring down at it in horror. A box? That's not what has given her an obvious fright, though.

It's whatever is inside.

Murph gives me one last longing look before changing direction, stomping over to my manager and taking the box out of her hand. When even my unshakeable Murph rears back a little, I know it must be serious.

The song fades out and I take a step forward. “Murph?”

“Don't come any closer, Angelica.” His attention swings to Taryn. “Where did you get this?”

“A messenger delivered it.”

“That's impossible. I've restricted all entry from the property while Angelica is here.” A flex of his hand crumples the box slightly. “I'll ask you again, where did you get this?”

What is going on here?

Taryn takes a step back from Murph, her eyes darting to the side. “What are you accusing me of?”

Jaw flexed, Murph doesn’t respond. Instead, he takes out his cell phone and punches a button, holding the device to his ear. I use his momentary distraction to creep forward, craning my neck to see what is inside the box. The blood drains from my face when I see the miniature doll that looks exactly like me with a butcher knife sticking out of its chest.

“Miller. Did you allow a messenger in to make a delivery?” Murph barks into the phone. As he listens, his eyes are narrowed on Taryn. “That’s what I thought. We discussed my theory on the way here and I’ve been proven correct. Get in here now.” He hangs up the call. “This came from you, didn’t it?”

Taryn gives an incredulous laugh. “Me? Why would I send this to Angelica?”

“I looked into your background, Taryn. A little deeper than before. This is your first manager position, but you used to work for a trashy online tabloid, didn’t you? You didn’t want anyone to know how low you’ve sunk in the past, so you’ve been using an alias. But you know exactly how to make headlines, don’t you? You have the right contacts to do it. This is all fake, isn’t it? You’re terrorizing Angelica just to keep her in the fucking news.”

“No.” She shrinks into herself. “No, that’s not true.”

“You have motive. You have opportunity.” Murph dials his phone again and from where I’m standing, I can hear the 911 operator’s voice down the line. “You’re lucky I’m calling the police and not handling this myself.”

Taryn attempts to run out the door, but my security team appears in the opening and blocks her path, one of them turning her around and securing her wrists together with a zip tie.

Oh my God. My legs are shaking.

It was my manager who sent those ugly messages?

Maybe it was naïve of me...but I trusted her.

A shudder passes through me, ice forming on my skin. And for the longest time, there has only been one person I want touching me when I'm scared. Murph. I don't hesitate or think twice, I just run to him, tucking myself beneath his arm and letting his presence warm me. "It's okay, baby," he mutters into my hair. "You know I'll never let anything or anyone hurt you."

"I know."

"Everything is going to be okay."

I nod, turning my face into his chest, soothed by the baritone of his voice as he explains the situation to the police. It's not long before I hear sirens in the distance, although Murph keeps me safely inside until Taryn has been taken away by the LAPD several minutes later.

As soon as they've driven away, Murph lifts me against his big, hard body, urging my thighs around his waist. And he walks me across the room to a chaise lounge, sitting down on one end and rocking me side to side, begging me to stop shivering. In the beginning, it's fear making me quake, but at some point it turns into the leftover buzz of adrenaline. The relief of being out of danger electrifies my skin and I find myself scooting closer on Murph's lap, settling my sex on the thick ridge of his erection, moaning at his sharp hiss of breath.

His hands lock onto my backside and he jerks me closer, growling into the curve of my neck. "No one fucks with my baby girl."

"Not as long as you're around," I whimper, grinding my hips up and back. "You keep me so safe."

"Always." His hot, open mouth settles against the sensitive spot beneath my ear, his breath pelting me faster, faster. "Ahh, Christ. You're going to make me come in my pants again."

"No." I stop moving. "Inside me."

"Angelica," he says raggedly. "We talked about this."

"No more touching, unless you're giving me everything."

Though it requires a lot of willpower, I'm determined to convince him that giving in doesn't make us evil. So I start to climb off of his big lap and he yanks me back down with a grunt. "*Mine.*"

"Am I?"

His expression holds a warning. "Angelica..."

"If I'm yours, you better show me. I'm beginning to doubt..."

That's a lie. There isn't a single doubt in my head.

But I need to be claimed, fully and completely, so I'm playing dirty now.

Murph surges forward, sealing our lips together in a blatantly sexual kiss, my mouth opening on a whimper and allowing his tongue to fill me aggressively, his hands pulling me closer, closer, while I attempt to get away, even though I want anything but.

"Oh this. This is perfect."

A new voice in the room has us breaking apart, breaths shallow. I look over at the entrance of the studio where a vaguely familiar man is standing holding a large camera. One of Taryn's interns hovers at his elbow, nervously waving a clipboard. "I-I'm sorry to interrupt. The photographer is here from Esquire for the shoot. But I can see we've come at a bad time, so..."

The intern nudges the photographer and jerks her head toward the door, but he sweeps closer to me and Murph instead.

"I love this concept. Beauty and the bruiser. The juxtaposition is breathtaking. Our editorial team is going to go *crazy* for this..."

He's already lifting the camera.

Murph's muscles are coiling, his teeth bared at the man, as blindsided by the invasion of our private moment as I am.

“This...this isn’t part of the shoot,” I blurt in a rush, wrapping myself around Murph, instinctively wanting to shield him from the constant overexposure that comes with my fame. “This is my, um...my Murph. He’s not part of the shoot.”

“Oh, but he should be. Together you are big and small.” The photographer slaps a hand to his chest. “Rough and polished. Fragile and fierce. It’s intoxicating! May I please just snap a few shots?”

I start to deny the request. Obviously. I don’t want our new relationship to be splashed across magazines for strangers to speculate about.

But...maybe, just maybe, there is a little devil on my shoulder urging me on.

Telling me to let the pictures be taken. Published everywhere.

There is a part of Murph that still thinks of me as his best friend’s little girl. But I’m not a kid anymore. If he could see these pictures of us, he would accept that fact. And if my father forbids a relationship between me and Murph, what if Murph listens? It would break my heart. It’s already kind of breaking now, just thinking about that possibility.

But if I allow this not-so-innocent photo shoot...our relationship won’t be this secret thing anymore. It will be real. And I want it to be real so badly. I want it on film, so I know I didn’t imagine my dream coming true.

Lastly, ever since Murph arrived...I’ve realized that my career isn’t what I want it to be. It belongs to everyone else. Not me. I’m just a toy. And I want to be real. I want to be raw. I want to burn it all to the ground and start over.

“Maybe a few pictures,” I murmur, slowly dragging the tip of my tongue up the curve of Murph’s ear. A violent shudder courses through him and he lifts his hips eagerly...and just like that, we’re the only two people in the room. Sure, there is the sound of footsteps creaking in a circle around the chaise,

plus the occasional flashbulb going off, but my attention is zeroed in on the man in front of me.

“I don’t want him taking pictures of you,” Murph says, glaring at the photographer over my shoulder.

“There are pictures of me everywhere. In various stages of undress.” I suction my mouth to the side of his neck and pull deeply. “But you’re the first man to touch me, to be with me in any of them. This is the first time a picture means anything. Don’t you want to show everyone who I belong to?” I purr in his ear, nipping it with my teeth.

“Yes,” he rasps, his hands sliding up my thighs, around to clasp my backside, drawing me closer, so close that I whine in my throat, the bulk of his erection nudging my clit, then pressing hot against my sex. “I can’t help it. You’ve always been mine. Long before that night on the living room floor.”

“Uh-huh,” I breathe, riding his lap shamelessly. “Always have. Always will.”

“We should stop...” Sweat is beading on his forehead. “If you keep that up, you know what’s going to happen.”

“Mmmm. What if I do this?” Making sure the photographer is behind me, I hum in my throat, leaning back and little and stripping off my sports bra, tossing it away. I let Murph look at my bare breasts, even shaking them a little for his enjoyment. “If you don’t want these in pictures, you better cover me up.”

Nostrils flaring, Murph throws me down on the chaise, flattening me with his huge body. The flash bulb goes off and he snarls at the photographer...but his hips are pumping. It’s obvious that he can’t stop them. Each grind of his lower body against mine brings a hoarse grunt from his throat. My hands slip into the back of his jeans, nails digging into his meaty backside. Opening my thighs, I urge him on and he bucks, his expression one of pure sexual pain. “Angelica,” he pants. “Fuck. It’s going to happen again.”

“No.” I dig my nails deeper. “Only inside me.”

Lust wars with conflict on his face. Until finally he reaches down and unzips his jeans, shouting at the photographer. “Get the fuck out. Now.”

Wisely, the man does what he’s told, fleeing the room and slamming the door closed behind him. And then I’m able to think of nothing but Murph. He takes up my whole world, his hand shaking as he jerks down his zipper, his extra-large shaft bounding free of its prison and dropping heavily onto my stomach. My hands reach for it automatically, stroking it with excitement and watching his mouth drop open, a groan of pure animal hunger sailing out.

“Going to fuck you raw, no condom,” he rasps, ripping my shorts clean off in his hands. “No time to ask your father for permission. Got an impatient little pussy on my hands, don’t I? Needs this dick.”

His harsh speech enlivens my hormones, makes me feel sinful and naughty and coveted. I love it. I love every word. “Yes, I need it.”

He drops his chin toward my belly and before I can guess his intention, he spits on my sex. Gives it a sharp little slap. “You’re not Joe’s little girl anymore, Angelica. You’re Murph’s little girl. Got that?”

I nod, barely able to catch my breath.

He sprawls himself down on top of me, fitting his shaft to my entrance, sinking in the tip and humping me with a strangled sound. “You asked for it. You’re a plaything for the beast now.”

“However I get to be yours is what I want,” I whimper, dropping my legs wider, skating my nails beneath his shirt and up his brawny back. “Please, Murph. Please.”

Murph seals his mouth over mine, kissing me until my head spins, his tongue sinking in and out of my mouth with relish—and then there’s a growing pressure between my thighs. It gets more and more intense until I’m wiggling around, trying to find comfort, but nothing makes it subside.

“Murph,” I gasp when he pushes deeper, deeper, impaling me to the chaise.

“Shhh.” His hands move over me comfortingly, soothingly, traveling over the peaks of my breasts, tracing my jawline. “You’re going to get used to me, baby. I promise.” He releases an uneven exhale into my neck. “I’m sorry, I know it’s big and dirty. Just so full of come for you.”

That admission does something to me. Makes my muscles go pliant, loose, and then I start to shift my hips, to discover the twinges of pleasure that come from being filled by this man I’ve always wanted. Needed by him. Knowing how badly he wants me in return is almost like an aphrodisiac, making the pain lessen until I can feel every ridge of Murph’s thickness inside of me. The way it beats and throbs, pulling and pushing in and out of my giving flesh.

“You okay, Angelica? I’m dying here knowing I’m hurting you. *Damn* me—”

“It doesn’t hurt anymore,” I manage, moaning when a twist of my hips brings him deeper and he hits some incredible, undiscovered place inside of me, sending little snaps of bliss along my nerve endings. “Feels so good.”

Murph’s breath starts coming a million miles an hour. “Thank fuck,” he grits out, pinning me to the chaise and slapping his hips up and down eagerly, like a horny bear, the muscles of his buttocks tightening and loosening with every grunting pump. “Goddamn, this baby is so tight. Can barely fit it all.”

“That won’t stop you from trying,” I whimper, turning my head to sink my teeth into his neck. Then I drop my voice to a whisper, remembering all too well what he likes, what makes him crazy for more. “You can’t help trying to get that big filthy thing in a place it doesn’t belong, can you?”

Murph’s breath stutters out, his hands fumbling on my knees and pressing them up to my shoulders, his hips moving in monstrous thrusts that rattle my teeth and create a gathering of tingling nerves inside of me. They spiral faster with every

punch of his lower body, every scrape of the chaise across the floor.

I'm at his mercy. There's no moving. No fighting the oncoming release for either of us. I sense that if I asked him to stop right now, he wouldn't be capable of it...and God help me, there's something about that pushing me closer to the drop off. I'm his toy. I'm designed to give him pleasure, always have been, and he's finally taking. Taking. *Enjoying*.

"You have a new Daddy," he growls loudly, his hard inches ramming deep and holding, grinding. "Is that clear? You don't call anyone else that name from now on. Not even your father. You're my little girl. I give the pleasure and punishments. I protect you. I fix your problems and fuck you hard afterwards, Angelica. Now you just spread your little thighs and accept it."

It's like an explosion going off.

Daddy.

Yes.

Yes, it's never been spoken aloud. It's never even crossed my mind. But it's how I've thought of Murph since I can remember. He's the man in my life. He's everything rolled into one. My lover, my guard, my everything. It all clicks into place and the tide won't be held at bay any longer. It's so intense that I let out a hoarse cry, the tiny muscles between my legs contracting, pulsing around Murph's pumping arousal.

"Motherfucker," he groans, so loud that his voice echoes in the studio, his erection beginning to spasm inside of me. His eyes go blind and he pins me more securely, his hips slapping in a frenzy, his grip bruising on my knees. The sounds that come out of him make my pleasure more intense, make me soar higher, the bliss wrapping me up like a rattlesnake and tightening.

"Daddy," I whine, licking his neck, kissing his flexed jawline.

His hoarse shouts fill the space, along with the sound of our sexes slapping together, the creaking of the furniture

beneath us. Hot liquid fills me in big bursts, overflowing almost immediately and turning my thighs sticky. Until finally Murph lets out a final yell of my name, his bulk losing tension on top of me. “Jesus,” he pants in my ear. “This perfect pussy. Took me so deep. *Jesus*. Can’t believe it’s real. Can’t believe you’re mine.”

“I’ve always been yours, Murph,” I breathe, stroking his face, dropping my loose limbs to his hips, my heels resting on his lower back. “Always—”

“Open this fucking door,” comes a voice from outside the studio.

Both of us stiffen.

It’s Joe. It’s my father. And his best friend is still planted inside of me, semi-hard, his spend slicking my inner thighs. My gaze flies to Murph, my pulse kicking into a sprint, waiting to see what his reaction will be. I see the flicker of guilt in his expression and my heart sinks. No. No, I want him to claim me in front of my father. Not physically. This was never the plan. But I want him to say out loud to Joe that we’re together. I want him to be unapologetic about it. If we’re going to work as a couple, he’ll have to let go of his guilt. Being with me isn’t a sin. It isn’t wrong.

If he doesn’t believe that, we’re doomed.

Murph rolls off me with a curse, zipping himself back into his pants, shoving a frustrated set of fingers through his hair. “Goddammit, Angelica. You just had to tempt me. Had to shake those pretty tits in my face, didn’t you?” Eyes closed, he tips his head back. “What the hell am I supposed to tell him now?”

My heart forms a little fissure, my throat tightening with emotion.

Before I can second guess myself, I’m lunging to my feet and dressing as fast as I can with shaking hands, moisture blurring my vision. It doesn’t take me long to put on my sports bra and shorts, patting my hair into place. I turn on a heel and march toward the door, wanting to get as far away as possible

from Murph's indecision. Just moments ago, I'd never felt more like I belonged and every second he paces with that horrified expression, the glow fades a little more.

A hand around my elbow stops me in my tracks. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

I rip out of his hold. "Away from you."

His brows slash together, a hint of panic filtering into his eyes. "There is no getting away from me, little girl. Didn't you hear anything I said to you?"

"Yes, I did. *You're* the one who forgot what you said."

"What does that mean?"

My tears start to spill over. "Figure it out. I need some air."

"Angelica," he says raggedly, reaching for me again. "I didn't mean to make you cry, baby. Just give me a second to figure out what to do."

His anguish gives me pause, but I still walk away, my chin raised. Everything has risen to the surface. My hurt over him not contacting me for a year. My frustration over being a kid in his eyes. All of it. And I just want to be alone so I can cry it out in peace.

I fling open the door to the studio and come face to face with my father.

Based on his ghostly coloring and inability to look me in the eye longer than two seconds, I know he heard everything. Heard me calling Murph Daddy. Moaning. Heard us making love, making promises. All of it. I can't help but be relieved that it's not a secret anymore, to be honest.

I'm a grown woman. I shouldn't have to hide my choices.

I open my mouth to tell my father all of this, but he looks past me to Murph, his lip curling in a snarl. Before I can stop him, he's barreling toward Murph with his fists prepared to fly. "You sick piece of shit. She's my *kid*."

Whirling back around, I lock eyes with Murph. He looks anguished, like he wants to come after me. He doesn't, though.

He faces my father, head on, taking a right cross to the face. "That was your one free shot," he rasps to my father, dabbing at the blood on his bottom lip.

Seeing Murph in pain has me reversing directions. They're squaring up to each other now, my father and the man I want to spend the rest of my life with. For the moment, their attention is glued to one another.

Which is why neither one of them notices when a hand claps over my mouth and I'm dragged, kicking, out into the hallway.

Murph

Angelica has been mine for less than a day and I've already fucked up.

The fact that I hurt her feelings is what is pissing me off more than anything, when Joe hits me with a right cross. To be fair, I deserve it. There's an unspoken code between friends and I've violated it. And really, it shouldn't *have* to be spoken out loud that a man doesn't fuck his best friend's much younger daughter. Especially not the way I did it, raw dogging her like an animal her very first time with a man.

With the pain cracking across my jaw, though, everything becomes clear.

Wanting to wait to speak to Angelica's father before claiming her was treating her like a child. She is the one who decides what is best for herself now. What would a conversation with Joe have accomplished? He would have been livid, no matter when or how he found out I'm in love with his daughter. Or that I've taken her to bed. What would I have done if Joe said no? Or tried to forbid the relationship?

I would have taken her anyway. Made her mine.

Telling Joe the truth before sex would have made no difference, except that it was making Angelica feel like her decisions didn't matter.

I'll never forgive myself for putting her in pain.

Christ, what if she doesn't forgive me?

My heart presses up into my throat, frustration flooding into my blood, boiling it, my fists rising of their own accord.

I glance toward the door, but my girl is already gone. Rightfully so. I've been a complete jackass and I'll be lucky if she forgives me. Right now, though, I have no choice but to deal with Joe. He's not going to budge without a fight. There is definitely some sympathy inside of me for what he's going through. It couldn't have been easy to hear us through the door. But all I can think about is finding Angelica and apologizing my ass off. In order to do that, I have to get this fight over with.

You sick piece of shit. She's my kid.

Those words ring in my ears, but I don't feel any guilt. Only anger at myself for calling her a kid so many times when she's a smart, capable woman now.

"She's not a kid anymore," I say. "She makes her own decisions now. For some reason, she chose me—and God, I'm grateful." For a moment, the weight of that emotion is so thick, I can't speak. "We both have to trust that she knows her own mind."

"Don't tell me how to raise my kid," he spits, his face turning red.

"You're done raising her, Joe. She's a woman. A successful one."

His head ticks to the side, rage twisting his mouth. "Maybe you thought you'd get a piece of that success, huh?"

My own rage builds. "Don't insult me. And don't pretend you don't know me. I don't give a shit about the money."

"You're wrong. I don't know you anymore. Who fucks their best friend's daughter?" He pinches the bridge of his nose. "Jesus, the way you spoke to her. I'm never going to get that filth out of my head."

Shame tries to rear its head, until I remember the way she loved that filth. Needed it. "I'm sorry about the way you found

out. But I'm not sorry for loving her. Or being with her. I'm going to treat her like a goddamn queen, Joe. I'll protect her —”

“No. *Enough.*” He paces away, comes back. “I can't believe this is happening.”

“Believe it.” I think of the virgin blood she left on my cock, how she stroked my face after we came, how she ran to me in fear when I first arrived after the incident, leapt into my arms. Possessiveness sweeps into my chest. “She's mine.”

“The hell she is.” He looks me up and down. “She can do better.”

“There's no doubt of that. But no one is going to love her more. No one can keep her safe like I can. Somehow...she loves me, too. I can barely believe it, but like I said, she makes decisions for her own life.”

Joe sneers an insult and stalks toward the other side of the studio, planting his hands on his hips, facing away from me quietly. That break in the argument has me glancing back toward the door, willing Angelica to appear. I don't like having her out of my sight. The person who has been terrorizing her is in police custody and I know her security team is outside. They're under orders to follow her everywhere...

But there is a tingle climbing the back of my neck.

My instincts are telling me to go after her. Find her.

Not only to apologize. No. There is something wrong. I can feel it.

Without another word, I stride for the door.

“Where do you think you're going?” Joe shouts at my back. “We're not done.”

“Angelica,” is all I can manage around the tightness in my throat.

With Joe's footsteps pounding after me, I lunge into the hallway outside the studio, jogging to the end and throwing open the door leading outside. When I see her security team

standing around smoking cigarettes, laughing with each other, my blood turns frigid.

“Where is Angelica?”

They trade puzzled looks with each other.

One of them coughs into his fist. “It sounded like she was with you.”

My temples begin to pound. “She left the studio five minutes ago. You didn’t see her?”

Their body language grows tense and they start sweeping the parking lot with their gazes. “No. She...”

“She what?”

That’s when I realize there are only five of them. There is one guard missing.

“Where is Miller?”

Oh God. No. Please don’t tell me I was wrong.

What if it wasn’t Taryn sending those messages to Angelica? What if it was Miller? He has the same level of access as the manager. How is this possible? I vetted every one of these guards myself. They’ve all served in the military, pristine backgrounds. Miller has a medal of honor, for Chrissakes.

“Last time I saw him, he was at his post outside the door of the studio.”

“No cars have come or gone since then.”

“Then they’re still here,” I rasp, my heart in my mouth. “Fan out, check every fucking car in this lot. Break windows if you have to.” I’m already running toward the back of the building. There’s a rush of sound in my ears, fear pumping in my veins. Vaguely, I register Joe running alongside of me, but all I can think about is getting to her. Eliminating the threat and getting her back into my arms. If something happens to her, I won’t let myself see tomorrow’s sunrise.

I’d rather die than live without her.

I round the corner at a dead sprint, the scene in front of me nearly rendering me insane. There is Angelica, cowering against the rear of the building, hands covering her face while a man I thought was trustworthy levels a handgun at her, his face red, eyes deranged. He's ranting, slurring, his words running together, spittle projecting from his twisted mouth. I make out a few of the words, hear him berating her for not noticing him, not loving him, and I don't hesitate.

"Angelica, get down!"

She hits the pavement in a crouch, hands over her head and my Glock is already out, aimed. I fire at a dead run, striking Miller in the throat. Another shot blasts the gun out of his hand and he goes down, grabbing at his throat and writhing on the ground, his voice reduced to a gurgle.

"Keep him down," I growl at Joe, relieved when he doesn't hesitate, kneeling on the mad man's back and securing his hands behind him. Footsteps behind me signal the arrival of Angelica's security team and I bark at them to call the police. And then all I can do is open my arms because Angelica is up and running toward me, tears streaming down her beautiful face.

I scoop her up and bury my face in her neck, my body coated in frigid sweat, limbs shaking, my head on fire over what I almost lost. "I'm sorry, baby. Jesus, I'm so sorry." My legs give out and I drop into a kneel, holding her in my arms and rocking her side to side. She sobs brokenly into the curve of my shoulder, hiccupping my name, both of us struggling to get as close as possible.

Over her head, I lock eyes with Joe. For a moment, he watches us with a dumbstruck expression, as if he can't quite believe what he's seeing. His mouth eventually snaps shut and slowly, he nods at me. Accepting what I have with his daughter. I know him well enough to see that—and it tightens bolts on either side of my throat.

"I'll never let anything happen to you again," I say, fisting her hair gently and tipping her head back for a kiss, my lips moving over hers possessively, my tongue invading her mouth

to communicate every ounce of feeling inside of me. “I love you,” I rasp, pulling back, looking into eyes that have lived in my dreams for a long time. “I love you so much, Angelica.”

“I love you, too, Murph,” she hiccups, cupping her hand around the back of my neck and tugging me back down for another long, giving kiss. I let it continue until my dick starts to stiffen to the point of pain, then I break away with an effort, stand with my girl in my arms and carry her somewhere we can be alone.

“I’m going to make you my wife,” I say, emotion making my tone gruff.

Her eyes sparkle up at me. “How soon can this be arranged?”

EPILOGUE

Angelica

Five Years Later

I know he's watching me from the bedroom window.

I'm in the front yard of our secluded Upstate New York cabin, where we like to come when LA life becomes too claustrophobic. It's a little chilly, but the dance moves I'm executing are keeping me warm. Enough that I am wearing very little clothing. A thin white shirt with no bra and shorts that might as well be panties for all the skin they cover.

I'm a very bad girl, teasing my husband of five years like this, but I can never seem to help it. He has already had me on my back twice this morning, his grunts echoing in my ears. And no matter how many times I reassure him, he feels guilty for how often he needs me. How hard he takes me. Sometimes he loves me so hard after he returns from a mission that he has to cover my mouth to muffle the screams, lest he wake up one of our napping sons.

Does he think I'm lying when I tell him I love it?

That bulky shaft swelling behind his fly, his chest rising and falling with rapid breaths every time I enter the room. What wife wouldn't be thrilled by their husband's endless well of desire for them? Doesn't he witness the way I thrash

through my orgasms, blinded by pleasure, my nails buried in his back?

I guess I'll have to spend the rest of my life convincing him I can never get enough. With a mischievous smile on my face, I bend forward and sweep up, high kicking, rolling my hips in a sensual circle. I twist my fingers in the waistband of my shorts, tightening the material ever more around my bottom, my sex, letting him get a good, hard look at every crevice, every curve.

The sound of his low groan can be heard through the window.

Closing my eyes, I can visualize that long, thick erection in his hand. The way he's watching me and abusing it with white-knuckled strokes. Wanting to come outside and take me, but ashamed of himself for the way he dragged me into the woods this morning in my nightgown and shoved me to my knees, pushing his hot, pulsing cock into my mouth, only managing three pumps before flooding my throat with his lust.

"You make me so fucking horny," he gasped while he was in the throes of his climax. "I can't go five minutes without getting hard, goddammit."

Yes, my husband is always balanced on the razor's edge of hunger when it comes to me—and I'm exactly the same. He's the only man I've ever wanted inside of me. The only man I've ever allowed to touch me. And when I married him in the LA County courthouse the same afternoon he saved me from being murdered, I knew life with Murph would be like this. Full of love, wonder, heat, security.

My father served as our witness, much to my surprise. Truth be told, he didn't seem all that happy about it. But he saw the way I clung to Murph, the way Murph held me like a treasure. It became obvious to him that our love ran deeper than he realized. And he wasn't going to stand in the way of that. These days, he even comes to visit us, whether we're in New York or Los Angeles, growing more and more comfortable with his role as grandfather to Murph's kids. And their friendship has been repaired, much to my relief.

Miller, the guard who had a secret obsession with me, is being treated at a psychiatric facility. After he received the medication he required, he reached out to me and apologized for his actions. I don't think we'll be inviting him to dinner anytime soon, but accepting his apology made everyone feel better and I don't hold a grudge against the man, who was in need of treatment.

I turn on a tiptoe and lock eyes with Murph through the bedroom window, dragging my fingertips over the peaks of my breasts, burying them in my hair and arching my back. As expected, his face disappears from the window and I know I probably only have ten seconds before he's in the front yard.

A victorious smile stretches across my face, my loins softening, turning wet for my husband. My love. The man who encouraged me to take a new path in my career, since the old one wasn't making me happy. Now, I write my own music. My choreography is more cerebral, creative. I've moved from the pop music charts to the alternative one and finally, finally, what I do for a living is fulfilling, because I'm being true to myself.

A crunch of foliage brings my head around—and there is my giant, stomping into the yard toward me, nostrils flared. His shirt is unbuttoned and untucked, his thick, hairy middle on mouthwatering display, the zipper of his jeans straining, thanks to what's inside.

“Get those shorts down, little girl,” he pants, jerking open his fly. “You went and made Daddy horny again, didn't you?” When Murph reaches me, he spins me around and marches me toward the closest tree, guiding my hands high on the trunk and propping them there, his harsh breaths hitting the back of my neck. “Can't help it, can you? Shaking that little ass in my face. *Fuck.*”

“Sorry, Daddy,” I whimper.

“Like hell you are.” He pulls down my shorts himself and tugs my bare backside into his lap, that fist between my thighs guiding his arousal through my slick folds from behind. “If you're sorry, show me. Let in these inches.”

It's still not easy seating the entirety of my husband's shaft, but Lord, do we try. Sometimes I can take all of it. Sometimes I can't. Today, I have a feeling there won't be a problem. I'm so drenched and ready, my teeth are chattering with lust.

Murph sinks in halfway with a groan, muffling the sound with my shoulder so we don't wake the sleeping children inside. "I can't figure out how it stays so fucking tight with the way I pound away at you." Another few inches slide into me. "Ahhh. Christ. Just a couple more, baby."

His next thrust lifts me clean off the ground, both of us groaning, and I land back on my feet with Murph impaling me completely, filling every square inch of my sex, crowding my walls, stretching me, pulsing, pulsing.

"Shit. Shit." He rocks into me and growls, "It's too tight. I'm going to come."

I widen my stance, giving him a pouty look over my shoulder. "Should I rub myself?"

"No." He heaves the word, his fingers finding that magic spot between my legs. "This is my property, little girl. My responsibility." He strokes my clit with his middle finger, faster, faster. "Feel that. All swollen from teasing me, aren't you? You love working me up until I pounce."

"You're finally onto me," I whimper as he bucks into me, forcing me up onto my toes, hitting me with a series of rough drives that are so perfect, so needed, my eyes roll into the back of my head. "Harder." His flesh smacks into mine. "More."

Murph snarls a curse into my neck, adding a second finger to the strumming of my clit, his quickening breath telling me he's close to the edge. And he pumps into me with no mercy, assaulting my senses, turning me into a trembling mass of nerve endings, the tickle building between my thighs until I'm clawing at the tree bark, whimpers sawing in and out of my throat.

"Come on your man's dick," he growls, right up against my ear. "I want to feel those juices run down to my fucking balls, baby. You hear me?"

It's the filth that sends me spiraling. Has me pushing my hips back into his thrusts until we're grinding into each other desperately, wringing the bliss from one another's bodies, our groans of pleasure filling the forest. I'm barely through the tumult of sensation when Murph yanks me back against his chest, those burly arms wrapping around me.

"Mine," he says, winded. "Mine to love. Mine forever."

I reach back and loop my arms around his neck, dropping my head back onto his wide shoulder and looking into the eyes of the man I love beyond reason or common sense, pulling him down for slow, savoring kiss. "Forever."

THE END

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