

A man with a beard, wearing a white dress shirt, a dark tie, and a dark suit jacket, is sitting in an ornate, dark leather chair with intricate carvings. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the fabric and the details of the chair. The overall mood is mysterious and sophisticated.

*If you see me,
you're already dead*

Caught in the
Devil's Game

CM ALLEN

Caught In The Devil's Game

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Easy to Love – Bryce Savage

Tonight Looks Good on You – Jason Aldean

Rodeo – Jessta James

Devil in Her Eyes – Bryce Savage

Joy Ride – Hueston

Wicked Games – The Weeknd

Curiosity – Bryce Savage

Bathroom – Montell Fish

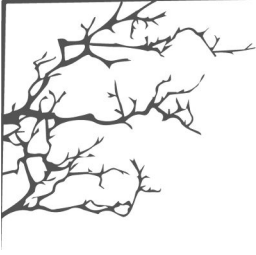
Emptiness – One True God, Roniit

Hit Me With Your Best Shot – Adona

Feel Nothing – The Plot in You

Control – Bryce Savage

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7xnjSkWn7bwbVHUIZzgMum?si=d96287de0222430f>



Chapter one Clarice

“**T**hey say that evil always finds a way into this world, but when it sends the dumbest messenger, brains will always win out.” Delivering those words as I cuffed this bastard gave me all the satisfaction I needed, knowing just where he’d be spending the rest of his miserable existence.

The End.

She had done it again. Not that I had any doubt. Cassidy Crawford always got her man. “Reese, I swear to god if you don’t put that book down already, I’m taking all of your books away from you and hiding them!” Scarlett yelled out before she barged into my room.

“I just finished it. Besides, I already have what I’m wearing tonight picked out, so it will only take me about another ten, fifteen minutes to get ready, so you go shower first. After all it takes you a hell of a lot longer to get ready than it does me.”

“Not tonight it won’t, because tonight *I’ll* be doing your makeup *and* picking out your outfit. It’s about time everyone see the beautiful woman you keep hidden underneath all that *comfortable* clothing you wear. Tonight, you are wearing one of my dresses, and I know just the one that will bring out those beautiful eyes of yours.”

“Scar, I don’t need all of that,” I wined, dreading just how many layers of makeup I would need to take a chisel to later tonight in order to get it all off.

“Not taking no for an answer,” she replied in a sing-song voice on her way into the bathroom.

Scarlett had been my best friend since sixth grade, and roommate for the past three years while we went to NYU

together. Now that it was our last Summer before we graduated college, she decided that we needed to get out and party as much as possible before we began our *adult lives*, as she put it, after graduation.

For me, going out and partying was something that was way out of my comfort zone. I was more on the stay at home and read about other people's adventures in life side, where as Scarlett was on the side of living hers like there was no tomorrow. I really envied that about her. I had tried to be more of an extrovert, mostly for her, but I just didn't think it was built into my DNA. Her ideal night consisted of going out, getting drinks, dancing, and possibly finding a hot guy to hook up with for the night. Mine on the other hand consisted of curling up with a good book and maybe eating some ice cream.

Two and a half hours later, I looked like a totally different woman. My long, dark locks had been curled this way and that, leaving a nice flowing wave in my hair. My makeup didn't look too bad either. She had actually done a fantastic job of accentuating all of my best features, making my grey eyes really pop with the black eyeliner and eyeshadows she'd used.

"Now *you* my dear look like a god damn wet dream. No man will be able to take his eyes off of you tonight. That black dress fits you like a glove. A hell of a lot better than it ever fit me, that's for sure. Who knew you had such a rocking, hot bod under all those baggy clothes."

I stood in almost disbelief as I turned this way and that, checking out every inch of myself in the mirror. "I can't believe it. This doesn't even look like me."

Putting her hands on my shoulders, she turned me to face her. "It most definitely *is* you. Girl, you are a stunner, you just never allow anyone to see that. You're always holed up in that bedroom of yours with your face pushed into one of those books with pj's on instead of getting out and living life. If you got out more, you'd have men lined up down the block, begging for a moment of your time."

Sliding her hands off, I turned for another glance at myself in the mirror. “That’s just not who I am. I’m an introvert, and a bookworm at heart. Going out and parting is your thing, not mine... but tonight, looking like this... I think I’ll give the extrovert life a whirl.”

“That’s my girl!”

Once we were both seated inside our Uber, we were headed to a night club, one of Scarlett’s friends got us invited to... well actually *she* was invited, I was just being taken prisoner. “I am so dying from excitement right now about getting an invite to this club, I just know there will be a *ton* of hot ass men in there.”

Giggling at her, I asked, “has anyone ever told you that you have a one-track mind?”

“Ya, you. Now here, take this shot because we have a lot of fun ahead of us tonight,” Scarlett said, handing me a tiny bottle of vodka. She was always the life of the party, and the guys loved her for it. She was beautiful and she knew it. Not in a stuck-up kind of way, but in a way she knew men would do just about anything for a moment of her attention. At 5’8 Scarlett was built like a runway model with long blonde hair, and green eyes.

Don’t get me wrong, I was no ugly duck myself, but Scarlett spent a couple of hours getting ready, and I spent about thirty minutes. That included my shower. I’d always leaned more towards an understated look with the way I dressed and wore my makeup.

When the car pulled up to the curb, you could not only hear the music as the doors opened for people to enter, you could literally feel the beat of it under your feet the moment you stepped out onto the sidewalk. Bypassing the long line, that was wrapped around the side of the building, Scarlett grabbed a hold of my hand and guided us straight up to the front door. “Don’t we have to stand in line?” I asked, feeling the glares thrown our way like daggers to the back of our heads.

“Not tonight we don’t because tonight we are VIP, bitch.”

Approaching the door, a seriously hot guy, stood dressed in an all-black suit with his feet set in a wide stance, hands folded in front of him. His eyes instantly found Scarlett, eating up her body like a midnight snack. “Ladies.”

The man said *ladies* but there was only one of us he was really talking to... with more than the words out of his mouth I might add.

With a smile, the man fell at her feet for, she showed him our VIP pass on her phone. “Hello to you as well, handsome. Me and my friend here are on the VIP list for tonight. Maybe *you* could escort us inside? I think I would feel a lot safer, knowing a man like yourself was making sure we got to our booth for the night,” she said before leaning in closer. “That way maybe you’d know where to find me later?”

The smirk he wore on his lips was her answer. He turned and said something to the guy behind him before extending his arm out to her, and then as if he remembered that I was even standing there, to me. “Shall we then, ladies?”

“Oh, we shall,” Scarlett, answered, snuggling into him as we made our way inside. After we were seated in what would be our VIP booth for the night, and she had exchanged numbers with the bouncer, we made our way over to the bar. Scarlett had *zero* interest in being served by the women that were assigned to our area. “Oh my god, the men in here are better than I could have ever dreamed! Did you see the muscles on that guy? I’m already in love with this place!”

She was grabbing a hold of my arm so tightly, I thought she’d leave bruises. “Down girl,” I joked.

“This place is so cool!” she shouted over the music.

By the looks I was getting from some of the men in here as we made a path through the crowd, I was starting to think that maybe Scarlett had pulled off some kind of miracle with my makeup tonight.

Once we’d finally arrived at the bar, we were instantly greeted by yet another fine-looking guy, leading me to believe that it had to be a woman who owned this place with all these

hot men employed here. “Names Collin, what can I get ya?” the bartender asked Scarlett, giving her the once over as though he was ready to devour her whole. Scarlett of course played right into it.

“Hi. I’m Scarlett. So, what’s your specialty drink, Collin?”

“Hmm... Scarlett, such a beautiful name for a beautiful woman. I think I have just the thing for you.” He gave her a wink as he went to work, making up some mysterious concoction.

Leaning over the counter so Collin got a full view of the girls, she told him, “make it two please, one for me and one for my friend.”

When his eyes landed on me, his smile grew wider. “Ahh, two fine ladies. Looks like my night just got even better. I’ll have those right up.”

An hour or so later, and two of the bartender’s specialty drinks, had me needing to use the restroom. Leaning over towards Scarlett, I pulled her attention away from the newest guy she was flirting with. “Hey! I have to go pee!”

“Do you want me to go with you or are you ok to go by yourself?”

Waving her off, I got up. “No, I’m fine by myself. I’ll be right back.”

As I began to make the trek to the bathroom, the effects of the alcohol hit me a little harder than when I had been seated, causing me to sway slightly in my steps as I walked. Making my way down the hall, the bathroom sign pointed to, I came to a door that wasn’t marked but when I looked around, I didn’t see any other doors as an option. So, in my drunken stupor, I shrugged my shoulders and figured what the hell maybe they just didn’t mark it, or the sign had fallen off.

Logical drunk thinking right there.

The moment I opened the door, though, I had some inkling in the way, way back of my head, through all the liquor that I’d possibly made a huge mistake. It in fact wasn’t a bathroom I’d entered; but what looked to be a large office. I immediately

turned to leave, but then overheard a loud thump followed by a man yelling at someone else. My curiosity, that was clearly under the influence I might add, got the best of me. The room the commotion had erupted from was around the corner in another section of the office. In my mind, I thought if I was careful enough and didn't poke my head out too far, I'd be able to see what was going on without my nosey ass being spotted.

It's what Cassidy would do.

Yes, I was that drunk that I was thinking about what a *fictional* character would do, knowing she wouldn't be the one to die like I seriously could right now.

Mental slap to the forehead.

In case it wasn't clear at this point, I didn't drink alcohol that often... like never. So, the two drinks the bartender had made me, along with the shot of vodka in the Uber earlier, were seriously causing me to completely ignore that one very important little cell in my brain I should have been paying the most attention to right now.

Flight.

Slowly creeping up to the wall, I peeked around the corner. At first, I didn't see anything, but then the next thing I knew a badly beaten man was shoved to the ground just a few feet in front of me. I was so stunned that I had to cover my mouth to hold back the startled gasp that was about to fight its way out. I had never experienced anything in my life like this before. I mean sure I had read about this kind of stuff in my books, but to see it firsthand and right in front of my face was a bit of a shock.

“You think you can fucking steal from me you piece of shit? Your family will pay for this!”

“No! I beg of you! I will fix this! Just please spare my family,” the beaten, and bloodied man profusely begged.

When the man, making the threats came into view, my mouth dropped open in amazement. He was for lack of better words... perfection. So perfect, he made all the other

handsome men who lived in this world look subpar. He was tall, with precisely sculpted dark hair, had a chiseled chin dusted with a five o'clock shadow, and muscles I could easily see the outline of through the black suit he wore. This man may have been the most beautifully dark creature I'd ever laid eyes on. But watching him, it was easy to see he was a very dangerous creature, more dangerous than the devil himself... either that, or he *was* the devil himself in the flesh right before my eyes.

Before I could be spotted, I slowly began to back up towards the door, but then bumped into a solid object. When I turned to look at what it was I had backed into, I found that it wasn't an object at all, but a very large, and very terrifyingly angry looking man. He was so tall compared to my five-foot seven frame, with my two-inch heels on I might add, that I had to crane my neck upwards in order to see his face. "I-I'm sorry, I-I was just looking for the restroom and walked in the wrong door."

Leaning down closely, he got into my face, snatching up my arm, and yanking me into him. "*You* walked into the wrong fucking door alright."

Panic slammed into my heart so hard, I instantly started to feel sick to my stomach. It was becoming clearer that my current situation was looking more and more like I *was* going to end up dead. Whenever I became nervous or scared, I always did one thing. I rambled. "I-I swear I-I didn't... I didn't see anything. I just wanted to g-go pee and walked into the wrong room by accident."

Just then, another terrifying looking monster walked into the room and shut the door behind him, his eyes boring into mine. "Who the fuck is she?"

The one I now named, Monster number one, answered. "The bitch walked in here by mistake, looking for the bathroom. Saw what was going on in the back room with the boss."

As soon as the word *bitch* came out of his mouth, my drunkin', and stupid I might add, temper got the best of me.

“First of all, that is *extremely* rude of you to refer to me as some bitch. And second of all, I told you that I didn’t see anything.”

Getting in my face once again, monster number one, grabbed my hair at the base of my skull and held me painfully in place. “Then why the hell were you scrambling so hard to leave like someone who *had* seen something they shouldn’t have?”

“Because I had to pee! What don’t you understand about that!” I yelled at him, finding this crazy bravery from I don’t even know where. This man could easily crush my trachea in one go with his large, beefy hand if he wanted to. I once again could only blame this side of me on the alcohol, because sober me wouldn’t have stayed in here and been so nosey in the first place after seeing that it wasn’t the restroom.

“That mouth of yours is about to be put to better use if you don’t shut it,” he threatened. And even in my drunken state it was very clear what that meant.

Trying to think of anything to get myself out of here in one piece, I came up with the only thing that might encourage them to let me go. “My friends know I’m in here and will come looking for me. They’ll report this to the police if you don’t let me go.”

“What the fuck is this?”

Turning around the best I could in monster number one’s painfully tight grip, I was greeted by the devil himself. Just looking at him gave me the clarity as to why so many would sell their souls to this man. He oozed a terrifying perfection like lava flowing from an erupting volcano, threatening to consume you and turn your soul to dust.

“This bitch was snooping around in here and overheard your conversation.”

If this asshole called me a bitch one more time... well, I probably wouldn’t be able to do very much about it but at the very least I was going to get one good kick to his balls in. “How many times do I have to tell you, I don’t appreciate

being called a *bitch*, and I didn't hear anything! I was looking for the restroom..." With every word out of my mouth, my voice rose until my eyes connected to his cold, dark ones once more. Then my words seemed to die out on my tongue for fear he might hear them.

"What do you want me to do with the nosey bitch?"

Again with the bitch. Cassidy Crawford wouldn't put up with this guy's mouth, I thought. But then again, she couldn't really die, unlike myself right now.

The Devil answered him with only a look. It was a look so cold and threatening, it had monster number one releasing me as if I had suddenly burst into flames, about to turn his beefy hands to charcoal. This devil needed no words to make people jump to do his bidding.

Only a look.

With a motion of his chin, both of the monsters walked past us and into the room where the badly beaten man lay. Hearing a groan and what sounded like a body being dragged across the floor and the bang of a door slamming, I was left all alone with the devil staring straight into my soul.



Chapter Two Creed

If this piece of shit actually thought he was going to be able to steal from me and see the light of day, my reputation as a vicious businessman was seriously slipping. No one, and I mean no one ever crossed me and lived to tell about it. No matter how small the amount was. This greedy fucker thought it would be a good idea to skim from the cash drawer the past two weeks and got caught.

Staring down at the pathetic sight in front of me, the sound of voices arose from the other side of the wall. Noticing that one of them was a woman's voice caused me to turn my attention away from the soon to be dead man in front of me.

The moment I entered the room, I couldn't take my eyes off of her.

Observing the tight grip, Torin, had on her caused an anger to rise up inside of me like nothing I'd ever felt before. It was the kind that threatened the existence of one of my best friends lives, and he knew it. All it took was one look from me to know just how close I was to ending him.

After releasing her, he and Merric left the room to tend to my problem, I'd left behind. Once I was alone with her, I eyed my prey closely, scanning her beautiful body while taking in all the telltale twitches her body showed. Even though she had an intrepid look in her eyes, she was broadcasting her fear like a neon sign in the middle of Times Square. Her rapid breathing was the first dead giveaway that she knew just how much trouble she was in right at this moment, and she was scared shitless.

As she should be.

I couldn't help but respect that even though this woman's life could be in danger, and it was, she only showed bravery

with the way she spoke to Torin and stared me down. It was something very few men in her position ever did. No matter though, I would be the only one in this room deciding if she walked away from this tonight. “What is your name?” I asked, watching her for any signs that she was lying to me. The first one came when she took too long to answer my simple question. My guess was that she was moving quickly through a rolodex of fake names in her mind.

“W-why should I tell you that?” she asked, crossing her arms over her chest defiantly.

Brave. Grown men didn't stand up to me, so for this feisty little thing to do so, it intrigued me even more.

Stepping into her, I lowered my face down so close to hers, I could smell her fear radiating under her mask of valor, and if I wasn't mistaking, her arousal as well. Placing my finger under her chin, I pulled her face up to mine, so she had nowhere else to look but into my eyes. As I stared into hers, I noticed just how beautiful they were, threatening to pull me in like a sink hole. But I had never been the kind of man who fell so easily for a woman. “Because I asked, and because you have no other choice right now. I'll be the one to ask the questions and you'll answer them. End of story.”

Pulling her chin from my grip, she took a step back, seeming to need the space to breathe. “M-my friends will come looking for me if I don't return, so I would like to leave now.”

Moving in close once again, close enough to see her pulse beating in her neck, I asked, “do you want your *friends* to live?” The fearful look in her eyes at my question proved her biggest weakness.

“Don't you dare hurt them.” It was interesting to see this woman's fierce loyalty to her friends. Few gave out that kind of loyalty to others anymore these days.

“Then answer my question, or I'll have my men go out and find them.”

“There’s too many people out there for you to find them, so come up with another threat, devil.” Once the word was out of her mouth, she was scrambling to find a way to retrieve it. “I-I didn’t mean to call you that... I...”

Smiling internally at her reference to me being the devil, I couldn’t help but take pleasure in the way she saw me. “The devil, hmm? Well then as the devil don’t you think I could easily find your friends?” When she still didn’t answer, I stepped in even closer, forcing her back to the wall. “Tell me your name. This will be the final time I ask,” I demanded.

“Cassidy,” she quickly blurted.

“Last name?”

“Crawford.”

“Are you telling me the truth, Cassidy Crawford?”

Her only answer was a nod with her head, a sign that screamed *lie*.

“Boss,” Torin called out, walking back into the room, holding out the iPad to me.

Not taking my eyes off of her, I reached behind me and retrieved it from him. After he was gone, I looked down at the screen, spotting the picture of my little vixen here with her *only* friend here tonight with her and one of my men entering the club. Sliding the screen over to video, I checked to make sure the feed came up before I turned it around to show her. “Looks like your *friend* is really enjoying the company of one of my men.”

Her eyes widened as she instinctively reached out for the iPad in my hand. “How did you get that? You better not lay one hand on her or I’ll...”

“You’ll what?” I asked, gripping her chin, cutting her words off. “You think you can just come into *my* club and start throwing threats around like you’ll leave here alive?”

Watching her reaction, she seemed to go from fear for her friends life to confusion. “Wait, this... this is *your* club? But I thought a... oh, I get it you’re... I mean I’m a little surprised

and all but,” she mumbled the end of her sentence, looking me over, seeming to grow increasingly more confused.

“You think I’m *what* exactly?”

“Well, I figured that you were gay of course.”

Taking a step back, I’d been too stunned by her assessment of me to even think of something to say for a moment, then finally snapped out of it. “What the hell would make you think that I was gay?”

“You’re not? Oh god, I’m sorry, I-I thought... it’s just there are a lot of hot men that work here... I mean there’s nothing wrong if you are I...” Noticing the angry look on my face, she stopped talking.

Moving back a step, I opened the door and motioned for her to walk out. “Y-you’re letting me go?”

Leaning in closer once again, I informed her. “No. We’re going to visit your *friend*.” The second she began to argue with me, I grabbed a hold of her arm, dragged her out of the office and down the hall towards the bar where Kieran was sitting with her friend. Just before we approached them, I released her, turning her around to face me. “If you say anything to your friend about what you witnessed tonight, I will not only kill you, I will kill her as well and make you watch before you die. Do you understand?”

The look on her face was one of anger and fear mixed. “Yes,” the one word she practically gritted out was filled with bitterness.

“Good. Now be a good girl and walk nice with me.”

I gripped her firmly around her waist as we made our way over to the bar where they sat. I had to admit this woman was not only intriguing but feeling her pressed up against me felt like she somehow belonged there. Throwing that thought out of my mind, I kept us moving forward.

Her friend spotted the two of us first and practically launched herself out of the chair she sat in, running straight for us. “Where the hell have you been?” she screeched over the

music. “Do you know that I have half of the security team here looking for you?”

Just then Kieran joined us. “Is this your friend?” he asked, faking concern like he hadn’t known what was going on.

“Yes, it is. My *very in deep shit friend* who is going to explain to me why the heck she pulled a disappearing act and freaked me the hell out.”

Stepping into the conversation, I said, “I’m afraid that it’s my fault. I saw your friend here and wanted to get to know her. I didn’t realize I had monopolized her time for so long. Names Creed.”

Swinging her attention to me as if just noticing for the first time I was standing there, she eyed me up and down with such heat in her eyes. I had no doubt that if I wasn’t informing her of my interest in her friend right now, I could easily have her on her knees in the back office. “Wow... Reese, you really, really found yourself something yummy. My names Scarlett,” she said, biting her lip, reaching her hand out to me.

Taking her hand in mine, I felt the woman who gave me the name Cassidy, freeze up under the hand I still held against her back. She was caught in her little lie, and it only made me smile. “You call her Reese?” I asked, enjoying the feel of her body shiver at my question.

“Oh ya, well, I mean her name is Clarice of course. You know the whole Silence of the Lambs deal. Her mom is a huge Anthony Hopkins fan, but I just call her Reese for short. I started calling her that when we were in elementary, the other kids used to tease her about it all the time...”

“Scarlett!” the woman, I now knew as Clarice, shouted, cutting her friends rundown of her life off.

“What? I was just telling him how you got your name.”

“And my whole life’s story as well. Anyway, can we just go home now? Plus, I still need to pee.”

Looking at Clarice with confusion, she asked. “I thought that’s what you went off to do earlier?”

Stepping forward, she grabbed her friend's arm and pulled her to the side to whisper something, but I wasn't letting her get away that easily. Moving in closer, I reached out and took hold of her elbow, pulling her back into me before I leaned down to her ear. "Remember my warning."

The fiery glare that shone in her eyes could have set the whole club on fire. "Trust me, I remember very *clearly*. Now *let go* of my arm."

"Quite the vicious little vixen, aren't you?"

"I want to leave now." Her words came out flat.

Not taking my eyes off of her, I called out for Kieran. "Yes, boss?"

"Escort Clarice here and her friend to the front door. Make sure they find an Uber to get them home *safely*." Peeling off a C-note from the roll of cash in my pocket, I handed it to him. "It's on me."

"No..." Clarice started to protest.

Leaning down, I cut her words off with a soft kiss to the corner of her lips, whispering in her ear, "I must insist, *Clarice*."



Chapter Three Clarice

Once we were out of the club, the man the devil called Kieran, flagged down a Lincoln navigator that moved almost too quickly to pull up to the curb. Once the car had stopped beside us, he opened the back door, turning towards us. “Ladies.”

I climbed in first, while Scar exchanged numbers with him. It took everything in me not to pull her inside and warn her of the danger she was putting herself in right now, but I remembered his warning. Later tonight after she fell asleep, I’d just go into her phone myself and erase it.

Once she was seated inside the car, Kieran handed our driver the money, saying something to him too low for me to hear. A moment later we were finally on our way home and away from this night that had turned into a nightmare.

It only took Scarlett one inhale of breath before she was practically yanking me onto her lap. “Wow, Reese! Just wow! That man has to be the hottest male specimen in this freaking world! I told you that you looked hot tonight.”

“It’s not like that at all,” I said, trying not to look like my life’s existence wasn’t threatened tonight along with my best friends.

“Why in the hell are you not more excited about this? He was totally into you, couldn’t take his hands off of you.”

Little did she know just how far off she was, thinking his grip on me was anything less than callous. It was a cold-hearted grip to remind me of just who was in control of whether we walked out of that club alive or not tonight. Feeling her stare beside me, I turned to face her. “Really, I’m not interested in him. He seems like the type of guy who is totally into himself. You know I hate that type.”

“Ya, well, I’d definitely make an exception for that one.”

Thankfully the drive to our place didn’t take too long. Once we were inside, we both said our good nights and walked into our perspective bedrooms. Knowing Scar’s routine, it would only take about a half hour before she was passed out in her bed, and then I could sneak in and erase Kieran’s number out of her phone. Hopefully she will have been so buzzed tonight, she’ll forget all about getting it from him in the first place.

Lying in bed, waiting for Scarlett to fall asleep, I began to feel the adrenaline rush start to subside, leaving my mind to wonder off to the way my body responded when I was in Creed’s grip. As terrifying as the experience was, it was also exciting. Tonight, was probably *the* most exciting thing to ever happen to me in my life and would probably be the last. That was unless I decided to jump off a cliff, or out of a plane. It was like I was in one of my romantic suspense books. I mean I’m not crazy enough to say I wish I could see him again... but that rush, that thrill of would I walk out of there alive tonight or not... it made me feel... something. Scarlett wasn’t wrong, the man was the hottest specimen I had ever seen, but he also seemed to be one of the most dangerous, in fact...

Getting up, I walked over to my desk and grabbed my laptop, pulling up Google. It was time I found out more about my devil. When I Googled the club, I searched for the name of the owner, but found what looked to be a shell corporation as the owner.

Smart man.

Which definitely meant he was a criminal. Pulling up the most wanted list, I searched for over an hour with no results.

He was a smart criminal.

Realizing I’d forgotten all about Scarlett’s phone, I set my laptop aside and snuck down the hall into her bedroom. I found her phone plugged in on her nightstand, and her passed out, snoring on the bed. Unplugging her phone, I held it up to her face to unlock it, then I went in and found Kieran’s number. Just as I was about to delete it, I thought better of it

and sent it to myself in a text, then I deleted the text to me as well as his number. Setting her phone back down, just as she'd had it, I plugged it back in and quietly left her room, heading back to my own to get some sleep.

The next morning when I awoke and headed to the kitchen to get myself some very much needed coffee, I found Scarlett with her head down on the counter top, her own cup of coffee next to her. "Thank god you made coffee," I mumbled, grabbing my own cup, loading creamer and sugar into it before taking a seat next to her.

"I feel like I drank every bottle of liquor at the bar," she said in muffled words, lifting her head a moment later.

"Yeah, so do I. Not drinking at all then going out and drinking a lot is not the best idea."

"You just need to build up your tolerance level."

Looking over at her, I laughed. "Yeah, looks like it worked out real well for you."

"True that. But it won't stop me from doing it again cuz I ain't no quitter," she laughed, grabbing her head. "Ow."

We sat and chatted for a few minutes longer before I had to start getting ready for work. I was thankful she hadn't noticed Kieran's name deleted out of her phone yet. After taking some Advil and getting ready, I walked out the door and started my trek to work. The coffee shop I worked at was only a half mile walk from where we lived, so it only took me about twenty minutes before I was walking in the front door. "Morning, Reese!" Gabby called out from behind the counter.

"Morning! How's things going today?"

"Cram packed as usual." She motioned with her hand around the café to all the people either sitting with friends or working on their computers.

Scanning the room, I looked back at her. "I see that."

"Oh! How was your night at the big club?"

Not wanting to discuss the nightmare that unfolded last night, I just give her a shrug. "It was ok, you know how it is at

those places. I did however have a few drinks, so I'm hoping it will be a quiet afternoon with this hangover I'm trying to get rid of."

"That can't be fun."

"That would be a no. Anyway, give me five, and I'll take over for you so you can go to lunch."

"Thank you," she called out as I made my way to the break room in back. Opening my locker, I put my purse inside, grabbing my apron out before shutting it. Looking down, I started to tie my apron on as I made my way up front. "Ok, I am here to relieve you."

"Not just yet," she whispered over her shoulder.

Frowning with confusion, I looked up at her. "Why not?"

"Because, the hottest man ever to walk this earth just ordered a coffee and I want to give it to him."

I rolled my eyes because in Gabby's mind a lot of men were the *hottest* men ever. "Who is he today?"

"The tall guy in the expensive, black suit right there."

Looking in the direction she had nodded her head in, my eyes met his cold, calculating ones.

Creed.

Why was he here?

Trying to figure out any way not to have to deal with him, I leaned down and tapped Gabby on the shoulder. "Since you want to make his coffee, I'm going to run to the restroom really quick."

"Yeah, sure," she replied, not even sparing me a look.

The moment I turned to leave, my body froze at his words. "You wouldn't be running away from me now would you, Clarice?"

When I turned around, I could see Gabby's mouth gaped open, her eyes darting back and forth between us. "You know him?" she squeaked out in disbelief.

Leaning onto the counter top, he wore a smirk that any woman would strip out of her clothes for, sending confusing thoughts through my head. It was like my body was having it out with my moral compass, and my morality was seriously *fracturing*.

“We actually met last night at the club, but she wouldn’t give me her number before she left, so I had to ask one of her friend’s where I could find her.”

Gabby gazed at him like a mesmerized cult follower. “Oh wow, that’s just so romantic.”

“Or stalkerish,” I mumbled under my breath.

“Well, I would have given you my number in a heartbeat,” she swooned, causing me to roll my eyes at how easily she was manipulated by his lies.

“Right? I’d like to think I’m a good-looking man, I mean I could be wrong here...”

“No! not at all,” Gabby blurted out before he could even finish his fabricated bullshit.

Leaning in closer to her, he winked. “Gabby, would you mind watching the counter for just five tiny minutes while I talk some sense into our girl here about going out with me?”

“Oh. My. God. You have to go out with him, Reese.” Gabby was acting as though *she* was the one being asked out by the devil himself. Only she didn’t know that’s who he really was, dressed up in the perfect looking man, standing in front of her. “Of course, I can wait five minutes.” Looking at me she added, “go on you lucky bitch.”

“I really don’t want to go out with...”

“I trust you know that I will make it worth your while to go out with me,” he cut in.

Hearing Gabby swoon again next to me at his words, I could see the calculated gleam in his eyes. His fairytale proposal wasn’t anything less than a threat.

I glared back at him. “Five minutes and that is it.”

“Thank you,” the devil replied, putting out his hand, expecting me to put mine in it. If this man thought he was messing with a weak woman, he was in for one hell of a surprise. Sure, I was scared out of my mind right now about why he was here and how he came to know where I worked, but I would not go down without a fight if that’s what he wanted. Well, that and we were in public right now after all, so I could be a little braver in the light of day.

Walking past his outstretched hand, I made my way to the corner booth, that was reserved for employees taking breaks, and sat down. The moment he slid into the booth; I spoke first. “What do you want? And how did you know where to find me?”

Chuckling to himself one moment, in the next he struck out like a snake, attacking his prey. Snatching up my wrist in a painful grasp, he pulled it towards him to hide the vicious grip under his other hand. “You do realize I don’t give a shit that we’re in public right now. I will take you out of here, kicking and screaming if I have to in order for you to understand just who you’re talking to.” My only reaction was to swallow the threat down. “That’s better.” He patted my hand. “Now, I have a proposal for you in light of our little event that occurred last night.”

I tried desperately to pull my hand away to no avail under his tight grip. “What event?”

He nodded his head in approval. “You’re a quick learner. A lot smarter than I thought, and that’s a good thing, Clarice. Let’s see if we can keep that momentum going here, shall we? This Saturday night you will accompany me to a dinner being given by the Mayor. My driver will pick you up at precisely seven o’clock.”

“No.”

He shook his head. “No?” Then leaned in closer. “You know I really had high hopes for you there for a minute.”

“I am not going to go out with you.”

“Then how about I revoke our little deal from last night and make good on killing your friend, Scarlett? All it would take is one phone call from me. Kieran and her are out having coffee together as we speak.”

“How?” Was all I could ask.

“Well, I do have to admit that it was a smart attempt on your part to delete his number out of her phone, but what you’ll quickly learn is, I’m smarter.” Instantly, I moved to get up, the need to find Scarlett and make sure she was ok, taking over. Pulling me back down before I could manage to get to my feet, he growled, “do you really want to make a scene right now?” My eyes darted around the café, looking for any cops that might have strolled in or anyone else who looked like they could help me. It was then that I spotted the two monsters from last night. One was talking to Gabby and the other was talking to Abigale. “I assure you that I will *always* be one step ahead of you. There’s no one in here who can rescue you.”

My eyes darted back to the devil in front of me. “How do I know you won’t hurt Scarlett anyway?”

Letting go of my wrist, he wrapped it up in both hands and began gently caressing the bruised skin. “You don’t. But I will say this, as long as you cooperate with me and do as I ask, she will remain healthy and most importantly... alive.”

“As you ask? As in this won’t be the only time you blackmail me with her life?”

Moving his hand to my face, he stroked my cheek, causing me to flinch away from his touch. “Now look whose catching on.” Getting up, he looked down at me. “Saturday. Seven o’clock. Wear something elegant. If you need to buy something, use this.” He threw down what looked to be a wad of all one-hundred-dollar bills onto the table before turning and walking out the door, cutting off any protest I might have had.



Chapter Four Creed

What the fuck was I doing? I had never intended to even go into the café where she worked, let alone talk to her. It was just supposed to be for a collection of information to keep tabs on her in case she changed her mind and talked to the cops about what she'd witnessed at the club last night. But the next thing I knew I was in the café, threatening her if she didn't accept my invitation for a date.

Back in the car, I had to listen to the lecture I knew would come after my poor decision making. "You really think it was a good idea to invite her to the Mayor's dinner party Saturday? She could talk to the wrong person about what she saw last night," Torin stated.

As someone who had known me for so many years, I didn't take his doubt in the situation lightly, but when I was near her it was like I couldn't help myself. I had to have her, and I was willing to make that happen however was necessary. It just so happened to come in the form of her biggest weakness, her friend's life. Even though I normally respected Torin's opinion, when it came in the form of an objection to me inviting Clarice to the Mayor's dinner, it pissed me off. Mostly, because I knew what I had done was a stupid move, but I didn't need him rubbing that fact in my face. "Are you questioning my fucking judgement, Torin?"

"That's not what I'm doing here, and you know it. I'm just trying to keep your ass out of prison."

"It's a little early in the day for the dramatics, don't you think? You of all people should know just how untouchable I am with all the politician's in this town I've got in my back pockets. They all either owe me or know that I'm very aware of all their dirty little secrets. None of them would ever dare to cross me. They know damn well and good that either their

careers, lives, or both would be snuffed out just like that.” I snapped my fingers, emphasizing just how quickly I would end them.

“Just concerned about how far off the path you’re strolling for this woman. She’s not even your type to begin with and knows nothing about the *real* kind of world you live in.”

Looking over at him, I took in his words, finding the truth in them. He was right, she wasn’t my type. Big busty blondes were the flavor of woman I craved. She also had no real idea of who I as a man was. I did however fully believe that she had more of an idea of what kind of man I was than most. More than just a nightclub business owner, and maybe that’s what it was about her that intrigued me the most. Not wanting to get into all the shit floating around in my head, I gave him the simple answer. “Maybe that’s a good thing. Besides, it’s not like I’ve asked the woman to marry me. I just find myself curious as to what makes her tick.”

“You mean you just want to fuck her,” Torin had stated what we both knew to be the truth. Something about this woman drew me in and I had to know what it was. Saturday wouldn’t come soon enough for me.

Torin’s phone ringing shook that thought out of my head. “Yes. Ok.” disconnecting the call, he looked over at me. “The package has been picked up and is waiting for you at the warehouse.”

“Good. Call the pilot and tell him to have the jet ready to go in thirty.”

As the plane took off, I watched the feed from my phone, seeing the soon to be dead man who was waiting for my arrival. “Has he said anything yet?”

“From what my guys have told me, he’s not giving up anything about his connection with Santiago. Says he doesn’t even know him let alone work for him.”

Shaking my head, I chuckled to myself. “This fucker thinks getting caught with *my fucking* Guns in the back of his

car, that we know for a fact is owned by Santiago, we're just going to buy him saying he doesn't know the asshole?"

"I didn't say the guy was smart."

"Smarts would have told him he was a dead man the second the mere *thought* of stealing from me entered his little brain." I was done with Santiago, sending his little trolls out to do his bidding and steal what was mine. One day soon, I would be putting an end to him once and for all.

A plane ride later, we were walking into the warehouse. Hearing the zap of the cattle prod and the screams that followed brought a smile to my face. The sound of torture always did that for me. There was just something so cathartic about it. Once Torin's men had left the room, I entered, finding a man hanging naked by his feet, beaten and bloodied. His balls looked painfully swollen from being shocked too many times by the cattle prod. "Well, look what we have here," I called out as I approached. "Looks like we have a rat infestation problem."

The moment he heard my voice and swung his eyes to meet my own, I could see the fear in them grow as it sunk in just exactly who I really was. God that feeling gave me such a rush. His fear, knowing that I was here, standing in front of him meant he wouldn't be walking out of here alive today. The best part was watching the hope drain from their eyes. They always somehow clung to the lie of hope that by some miracle they would walk away from an encounter with me.

Spoiler alert, they never did.

If you were looking at my face, you were already dead. It was how I was able to keep my true identity hidden for so many years. No one was sure of what I really looked like. Not even the men who worked for me. Only the three men I grew up with and trusted with my life knew exactly who I was. To the rest of the world, I was a business man, a nightclub owner known by the name Creed Lennox of Lennox Enterprises. But a dead man knew me by my real name.

"Do you know who I am?" The man only nodded his head the best he could, hanging upside down. "Say it!" I demanded.

“C-Canon Church.” Yes, I did love a play on words, using the name Creed as my cover identity.

“That’s right. Now you’re going to tell me everything you know about Santiago.”

“I know I’m going to die here anyway, why should I give you anything?”

I would give the asshole credit for his bravery, if it weren’t for the piss that was leaking out of his dick and running down his face right now. I watched as he shook his head, trying to get it off. “Get piss in your eyes?” Moving in closer, I crouched down in front of him, and paused for a moment before I smiled at him. “You will tell me what I want to know, Bruce. Do you want to know how I know that? Because I think you would do just about anything to protect your lovely daughter, Lily, wouldn’t you?” Taking the picture from Torin, I turned it around and showed him the surveillance photo I had taken this morning. The moment his eyes connected with the photo of his daughter walking down the street, he began to shake his head. “She has nothing to do with this! She doesn’t even know who or what I really am!”

“All the better reason for her to never find out, don’t you think? So, this is how it’s going to go, Bruce. Option A, you give me any and all information you have on Santiago. Or option B, I have your daughter picked up and brought here for you to watch my men torture and kill her right in front of you. Which option would you like to choose today, Bruce?”

He broke down in tears, knowing his last act would be to protect his daughters life. “I’ll tell you everything. Just leave my daughter alone.”

I tapped him on the forehead with my finger. “That all depends on you, Bruce. Tell me exactly what I want to know.”

Once I had all the information I needed, Merric approached him as I stood up, dusting off my hands. “Since you’ve been such a *stand-up* guy, I’m going to make this quick.”

The words had barely left my mouth before Merric laid the knife to his throat and sliced him open like a stuffed pig. I stood there, watching him bleed out until he took his last gurgled breath before I turned and walked away. “Get your men back in here to clean this mess up.”

Leaving the elevator, I walked into the foyer of my penthouse, making a beeline straight for my office. It had been a long fucking day and I needed a drink. Pouring myself a whiskey, I turned on the fireplace and sat down on the couch. Mesmerized by the flames dancing in front of me, I sipped my drink. It didn't take long before my thoughts drifted right back to her. I needed to know what she felt like under me. How she tasted under my tongue. What sounds she made when she came. What her tits looked like. Would she have pink nipples, or dusty colored ones? Would she be shaved, or have a landing strip on her beautiful pussy? “Fuck!” I gripped the crystal glass in my hand so hard, I thought it would break. I had to do something to relieve myself of these thoughts. Downing my drink, I slammed down the glass onto the table and headed to my bathroom. Getting into the shower, under the hot stream of water, I soaped up my hand and began to stroke myself at the thought of what she would feel like wrapped around my cock. I imagined what she would look like and the sounds she would make as I fucked her like no man had, or would ever, fuck her again. When I finally came, I came so hard it felt as though my legs would give out from under me. If just the thought of fucking her made me come this hard, I couldn't even begin to fathom how good it would feel when I actually did. When I got her in my grip Saturday night, I wasn't going to let her go. If I had to, I would put her friends life on the line again if it meant getting even the smallest taste of her.

Clarice had no idea just what she'd be walking into. Only if she was lucky would she ever walk away from me completely.



Chapter Five Clarice

Once I had confirmed Scarlett was ok and found out that it was her that helped the devil find me, the rest of my day flew by. All day I wasn't able to think straight, I had messed up on six different orders with frazzled thoughts bouncing around in my head.

Why me?

What more could he want?

And the bigger question, what exactly did he want from *me*?

Waving my goodbyes to the others, I began the walk back home. When I reached into my pants pocket, my hand hit the money. I had completely forgotten it was there. Pulling it out, I quickly shoved it inside my purse. I didn't know exactly how much money was there, but I wasn't about to count it out, walking down the street. Once I was safely inside our place, I went looking for Scarlett. "Scar are you here?"

"In here," she called out from her bedroom.

Knocking on the cracked open door, I walked in to find her getting ready to go out. "Are you going somewhere?"

She looked up at me with a huge grin on her face. "As a matter of fact, Kieran, and I are going out to dinner."

I instantly started to freak out. "You can't go out with him, Scar."

She frowned up at me in confusion. "Why not?"

Knowing I couldn't tell her the *real* reasoning behind my worry, I tried to think of something. "Because..." I stopped, unable to come up with an excuse.

“Oh, *because*. That seems like a legit reason. What is going on with you? Why are you so against me going out with him?”

Swallowing down the anxiety this whole situation was causing me, I took a deep breath. “I just don’t think it’s safe. He’s a strange man and you don’t really know him.”

Laughing at me, she got up. “That *is* the whole point of going on the date, Reese. To get to know him. We did get to know each other a little bit this morning, though, when he took me out for coffee, and I didn’t get any ick vibes from him. Speaking of which, he told me he put his number in my phone last night but somehow it disappeared, so when he called this morning, I had no idea who he was. I must have been a lot more drunk than I thought and erased it on accident or something.”

I was waiting for an accusatory stare, but one never came, leaving me with some relief. I shouldn’t have gone into her personal stuff like that, but I was trying to possibly save her ass and definitely keep her out of trouble. “Besides, Miss Thing, I heard you have a date with the hottest guy ever Saturday night yourself, so, don’t be acting like a hypocrite.”

I knew she was kidding about being a hypocrite, but if she knew the *real* reason, at least what I wanted to believe was the real reason, I was going out with him, she wouldn’t be calling me that even as a joke. “I-I.”

Cutting me off, she pushed on my shoulder. “I’m just giving you shit. You need to loosen up, girl. I say get it, ride it, but god help you if you don’t tell me about it after.”

“It’s really not like that. We’re just going to a dinner party for the Mayor.”

“*Just* a dinner party for the Mayor? Do you even have a clue how important something like that is for a business man in this city? This is like a major deal, and he wants to take *you*. I mean, hellooooo! Wake up. He must really like you in order to invite you to something of that caliber on a first date.”

That was probably my biggest question in all the chaos flying around my head regarding this situation; why me? “Well, I’m not putting too much stock in it. Anyway, have fun and be safe tonight.” Grabbing her shoulders, I pulled her in closer. “And if I wasn’t clear enough that means no going back to his place and sleeping with him on the first date.”

Brushing me off, she started to giggle. I knew that giggle. It was the kind of giggle that told me she had already planned that exact kind of scenario for tonight. “I have *zero* plans of sleeping with this man tonight.”

“Good. Keep your phone on you and location on so I know where to send the cops and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The moment I stepped out of her room, she called after me, “but you know what they say about even the best laid plans!”

Hitting my hand to my face, I continued on to my bedroom.

The one week I’d wished would have taken forever to go by seemed to have flown by. Scarlett had gone out on two more dates with Kieran, and I’d received a text this morning reminding me of our outing tomorrow night. When the message came across my screen from an unknown sender, I immediately knew it was him. How he got my number, I wouldn’t even try to guess with the way this man just seemed to know things. That day he’d given me the money to buy a dress, I’d counted it out after my conversation with Scarlett, and he had given me three thousand dollars to buy a freaking dress. Where the hell did he think I shopped? Neiman-Marcus?

“Are you ready to go?” Scarlett asked, bursting into my room, a bundle of excitement for an event I was dreading. At least my brain was dreading it, my body on the other hand, couldn’t stop thinking about how he smelled or made it light up when he was near. I needed to remember this man had threatened not only my life but Scarlett’s life as well. He was the devil, and I did not want to dance with him.

“I’m ready. Let’s get this over with.” Shopping was my least favorite activity. It was like getting waxed for me.

Painful.

Walking into Nordstrom's, we headed over to the formal ware and began shuffling through all the dresses. Picking out five that seemed like they could possibly work, I went and got a dressing room to try them all on. "Now make sure you come out here and model them *all* for me before you trash them, I know how you are."

She was right. I hated trying on dresses the most. "I know." I rolled my eyes, walking into the room, shutting the door. The first one I tried on was a red one with spaghetti straps, low cut down the front and a huge slit up one leg. This dress was an automatic no for me. Too revealing.

When I walked out to show Scarlett, she whistled. "Now that is one *sexy* dress. I would say buy it now, but I think you need a little more coverage to feel comfortable. The last thing we need is you walking around all night, covering your chest. Next."

Grabbing the next one, it was a blue/greyish silk dress, no slit, spaghetti straps again, and not quite as low in the front. I liked it but something about the color on me made me look washed out. When I showed Scarlett, she agreed. After two more no's, I put on the last one. This one was a delicate, pinkish cream colored, spaghetti strapped dress that had a straight cut across the chest so there was more coverage and no slit up the side. I actually liked the way I looked in this dress. When I walked out to show Scarlett, the huge smile on her face confirmed that she definitely agreed with me on this one. "Oh. My. God. Reese, you look beautiful in that dress. It's perfect. You have to get it."

Turning around, I gave myself another look in the mirror. "I really like it. This is definitely the one."

Paying for the dress, that was only two-hundred and forty-eight dollars I might add, we made our way over to the food court and grabbed some lunch. "So, are you excited about tomorrow night at all?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "A little maybe."

She leaned in closer. “Ok, seriously, what the hell is going on with you? You have a date with a guy any woman would die to get a date with, and you are acting like he’s walking you to your execution. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Little did she know she’d hit the nail on the head with the last part of her statement. “I just don’t think anything is going to come of it. We don’t have anything in common, and I really don’t like how he went about tracking me down to ask me out. The whole thing gives me stalkerish vibes.”

“So why the hell are you going out with him then?”

Realizing I’d said too much, I didn’t know how to answer that. “I don’t know.”

“Well that’s just a great answer, Reese. Do I need to worry about this date tomorrow? I can always have Kieran tell his friend that you’ve changed your mind and to back off.”

“No!” I blurted out quickly before thinking better of it. “No,” I stated more calmly. “I’m just going to give him the one date and then I’m sure he’ll move on once he sees I’m not going to sleep with him. Besides, it’s a dinner with the Mayor, I could use that kind of connection later for a job or something. Like you said there will be a lot of business men there to rub elbows with and possibly score a job offer.”

She stared at me a moment, unsure whether to believe me or not, then shrugged her shoulders. “If you say so. Just make sure you keep your phone on you at all times and your location on. That way if something happens, I know where to send the cops.”

It’s what we had always told each other before we went out on dates. I smiled. “Thanks, babe.”

Saturday night was here, and I stood there, staring at myself in the mirror, not recognizing the woman staring back at me. Scarlett had given me a lesson on doing my hair and make-up, and if I didn’t say so myself, I did a pretty damn good job. Hearing a whistling sound, I saw Scarlett, standing off to the side, staring at me. “You look so beautiful, Reese. Creed is not going to be able to take his eyes off of you.”

Her words stirred a thrill inside of me, I'd been trying to bury since the day I met the devil himself. "Thank you for helping me."

"Anytime..." Hearing the doorbell, she instantly cut her words off and practically flew to the front door. "Ohhh, Reese! You have a gentlemen caller here for you," she said in a sing-song voice.

He's here?

He said he was sending a driver, not showing up himself. I wasn't ready to see him yet, I needed more time to prepare my nerves for this. When I didn't move to leave, I heard footsteps coming towards me. "Hey, didn't you hear me?"

Fidgeting with my hands, trying to grab my bag for the night, I dropped it on the floor, picking it up again. "Y-yes, I was just getting everything I need."

I could see the concerned look on her face. "You're sure that you're ok with going out with him?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

She rubbed her hand on my shoulder in a soothing motion. "Ok, good. Don't be nervous, he's going to love this dress on you. His mouth is going to hit the floor so hard when he sees you, he'll spend the rest of the night trying to pick it back up."

Reaching out, I pulled her in for a hug. "Thank you. Love you."

"Love you more. Now get on out there before he thinks you've stood him up."

Nodding my head, I forced my feet to walk to the front door. The moment I rounded the corner and spotted the devil at the door, waiting for me, it was *my* mouth that fell open at the sight of him. I didn't think it was possible for this man to get any hotter, but he somehow managed to pull it off.

As I got closer, he stepped into me. "You look," he started, looking my body up and down as if he was searing it to his memory. "Absolutely stunning. I'll be the envy of every man there tonight with you on my arm."

I didn't quite know what to make of his complementary words, seeing as everything that came out of his mouth had been a threat since I'd met him. "Thank you. Shall we go?"

"Absolutely." He smiled down at me like a hungry tiger, ready to play with its prey.

"Now don't you two do anything I wouldn't do," Scarlett called out as we left, embarrassing me.

"Well, that doesn't leave a whole lot off of the table for tonight then." Creed winked at her. "You forget I know Kieran."

When I looked back at Scarlett, her face was beet red. We would be having a discussion about this later, that was for sure.

The moment he placed his hand on my lower back and guided me towards the car waiting for us, I could feel myself stiffen in his hold, and so could he. "Don't worry, I don't plan on fucking you tonight," he breathed into my ear, sending chills down my spine. His words and touch mixed with the smell of sandalwood he wore was doing something to me. I desperately wanted to act on it but then I remembered the reality of our situation and brushed it off.

Removing his hand from my back, I turned around and faced off with him. "Let's be clear on something. I am *only* doing this because you are threatening my friends life and that is it. There will be no *fucking* tonight, or any other night for that matter. I find you repulsive at best, Devil." Turning on my heel, I continued to make my way over to the car, where his driver held the door open for me, then slid inside.



Chapter Six Creed

Fire. This woman was fire and I wanted to get burned. No, I *needed* to get burned. The moment she stepped out in that dress, I had to cover my dick with my hands, she made me so damn hard. And that mouth of hers. All I could think about was how good those lips of her were going to look wrapped around my cock later. I may have told her I wasn't going to fuck her tonight, but that didn't mean I would stop her when she tried to fuck me.

And she would.

Because I played dirty.

By the end of the night, I would have her so hot and bothered that she'd be begging to ride me. She just didn't know it yet.

After all, she had constantly referred to me as the Devil. Might as well play the part.

Walking over to the car, I slid inside, finding her on the opposite side of the car. "Here, now." I pointed to the seat next to me as the car pulled out into traffic.

The glare in her eyes promised a painful death if she had the ability to pull one off. "I'm not a dog you know. Besides, I'm just fine right here."

Having had enough of her backtalk, I reached over, grabbing her wrist and pulled her into me, causing her to fall into my lap. When she scrambled to get off of me, I held her firm. "Let. Me. Go," she practically growled.

"Why? I rather like you on my lap, and at my mercy."

Her body instantly tensed up at my words. Something I was noticing was a trend for her. If I was a better man,

knowing I was making her uncomfortable, I would stop. But I wasn't and she knew it. Pushing her hair aside so I could see her face, I gripped her chin firmly, making her face me when she attempted to look away. "I want to talk to you about something. I've noticed that you tense up a lot when I touch you. Could my salty little vixen be a virgin?"

A look of surprise and disgust crossed her face. "Not that it's any of *your* business, no I'm not. I *tense* up because your touch repulses me."

I shook my head in disapproval. "I'm disappointed."

"About what?" she snapped.

"That we're starting off the evening with a lie. Here I thought you were an honest woman." I slowly began rubbing her exposed leg, inching my hand up higher each time.

"It wasn't a lie. You beat people up and probably kill them. What could possibly be attractive about someone like that?"

Leaning forward, I whispered into her ear, "power. It's all about the power, my little vixen. The power to decide whether or not to end someone's life as they know it. The power to bend them to your will. Or the best part. The power to know you can get away with it all." Shivers wracked her body at my words. She was turned on, even if she would never admit it.

The ride to the event had been too short for my liking when what seemed like only moments later, the car was pulling up to the red-carpeted entrance to the party. Reaching my hand higher under her dress, I patted her on the ass. "Now smile and act like I am the man of your dreams. Scarlett is counting on you tonight after all." When my driver pulled the door open, I slid out first, then reached back in for Clarice, helping her out. The glare in her eyes connected with mine just seconds before she painted on the biggest fake smile she could muster up. "Good girl," I whispered in her ear, wrapping my arm around her, pulling her into my side tightly.

As we entered the building, the Mayor instantly caught my eye and made a beeline straight over as if he'd been waiting for me to arrive. "Mr. Lennox, good to see you this evening.

So happy you were able to attend. Who might I ask is this lovely woman with you?"

"This is my girlfriend, Clarice." When I said the word girlfriend, I thought she was going to choke on her own tongue with the way she looked at me.

Taking her hand in his, he leaned down and kissed it, sending pure rage running rampant through me. Having to witness him touch what I had already deemed to be mine was causing an anger to build inside of me. But there would be a place and a time for that lesson to be learned later. The Mayor never knew the real man he was dealing with. He only knew I had the connection to Canon Church he needed. Little did he know the man he was so desperate to be in contact with was standing right in front of him in the flesh.

"It's lovely to meet you," I heard Clarice say, snapping me out of my ill-tempered thoughts.

I needed to get him far away from her before I ended up lashing out at him. "How about we let you greet your other guests and meet up for that discussion we had talked about yesterday a little later this evening."

"Yes, please do help yourselves to some drinks. Dinner will be served in just a bit."

"Thank you." I guided Clarice over to the bar. "What would you like to drink?"

"I'll take an Old Fashioned. Actually, make it a double. I don't normally drink but have a feeling I'm going to need it tonight."

"I do find it interesting how you work so hard to seem so disinterested in me when most women would do just about anything for a moment of my attention."

Her eyes, swung to mine and I knew by the look in them she was about to throw one of her spicy little insults my way. It seemed to be the only way she could convince herself that she wasn't attracted to me. "Do they know you go around beating people up and threatening their families? Or that you blackmail women into going out with you?"

I couldn't help but laugh. After we got our drinks, I guided her over to the table I'd been seated at for the night. The damn thing cost me ten thousand a plate just to sit at, but I was always happy to support my fellow crooks in this city. As long as it benefited me in some way, of course.

Pulling out the chair for Clarice, she gave me an uncertain look. "I'm not going to bite you if that's what you're worried about."

"Not worried," she snapped, taking a seat.

It didn't take long for the table to fill up as many other supporters of the Mayor showed up. It did however cut into my time in getting to know my little vixen, I'd brought here with me tonight. It seemed every time someone sat down at the table, they wanted to say hello or catch up like we were long lost fucking friends. I did, however, keep a close eye on her and who she spoke with. Even though she knew none of these people, she had a way of charming them when they engaged with her. She was the perfect politician's wife, and someone I believed was about to become useful to me in more ways than just the one I had planned for her.

"Creed Lennox." Hearing a woman say my name, I didn't need to look to know who she was, but I still put on the act of a perfect gentleman and stood up out of my seat to greet her with a kiss on her cheek. "Natasha."

She rubbed her hand up and down my arm. "It's been too long, how are you?"

There was one thing about Natasha I had truly loved and that was her hand rubs, preferably the ones on my cock before she replaced them with her mouth. Those hands and that mouth of hers made it almost impossible to give her up. But the rest of her wasn't worth that small piece of heaven. This woman was a suffocating psycho at best. "I'm good, you?" I asked, feeling Clarice's weighted stare.

"Oh you know just jet setting around the world, helping my father with his business. It's been fun but so exhausting. You know how it is."

“I do.”

She must have felt Clarice’s stare as I did, because I noticed her eyes drift downward to find her. “And might I ask who this lovely lady with you this evening is?”

Here was the first of many tests, Clarice, would either pass or fail. I needed to see just where I stood with her little green monster. Wrapping my hand around Natasha’s waist, I pulled her in and kissed her cheek once more. “This would be Clarice. She’s my assistant.”

“Oh, hello.” Once Natasha had determined Clarice a non-threat, she turned in my arms towards me, stroking her fingers down my cheek before leaning in and whispering in my ear, “then I expect you’ll save a dance for me later this evening?”

Leaning in, I really played it up for Clarice’s benefit. “Only a stupid man would say no to that.”

Natasha, ate up my bullshit with a shovel. “Just like old times.” She winked, kissing me on the cheek once more.

“Just like.” I smirked at her before she walked away. Sitting back down in the chair, I caught Clarice still staring at me. “Something on your mind?”

“I’m your assistant now? What happened to girlfriend?” she questioned, glaring at me.

I leaned in close like I was about to share a scandalous secret with her. “Not when it comes to a possibility of getting laid later by a beautiful woman.”

“By the way she was practically petting you, I’d say you two have *already* been together,” she replied in that snappy tone of hers.

“Actually, if you must know we have, and she came *so* fucking hard around my cock, that I thought I’d been shot dead and sent back home to hell. So, I’m thinking that another round with her sounds good to me.”

“You’re a pig, you know that.”

“I’m a pig that you want to fuck very badly but won’t allow yourself to admit it.”

She surprised me when she leaned in close and began to run her hand up my thigh, drawing my attention to where her hand was headed. That was, until that mouth of hers ruined my fantasy. “I wouldn’t fuck you even if you held a gun to my head. I’d rather die than have you touch me. Now if you will excuse me, I need to use the restroom.”

When she moved to get up, I stood up with her and took her hand in mine before she had a chance to walk away. “Should I escort you to the restroom, so you don’t go walking in the wrong door again?”

Snatching her hand from my grip, she turned and walked away from me without another word. Oh, this woman was pushing me to the edge so hard, I didn’t know if I would be able to control myself around her much longer.



Chapter Seven Clarice

Walking into the bathroom, I grabbed a hold of my chest and just breathed. I didn't even know what was happening to me right now. Was I having a panic attack? The only thing I did know, was that every time that man somehow got under my skin, I found it hard to take even the smallest of breaths around him.

Moving to the sink, I turned on the cold water and grabbed a paper towel to dampen. Dabbing my face and the back of my neck, I started to come back into myself and calm down. I had to get a grip on the situation and stop showing him how he affected me. I couldn't help but to think about that woman he was talking with. She was beyond beautiful. I didn't think I had ever felt that insignificant around another woman before in my life. But she moved so gracefully, talked with such class, and most importantly handled my devil with extreme ease that it had left me envious of her. The problem was, I didn't know if I was envious of her... or if it was jealousy, just like the devil had accused me of.

Throwing the paper towel away, I patted my hair in place and checked my lipstick before grabbing my clutch off of the counter, heading out the door.

The moment I stepped out, I was grabbed up and pulled down a dark hallway, before being forcefully shoved up against the wall by a hand that was now wrapped tightly around my throat. Everything had happened so fast, it took me a moment to realize who my accoster was.

It was the devil himself, of course.

He leaned in and grazed his nose along my neck, breathing me in like a beast who was savoring its prey before taking the first bite. I was so focused on his hot breath, whispering over

my neck that it took me a second to even realize his hand was moving up the inside of my thigh. “W-what are you doing?”

His hand halted for a moment before continuing upward, missing the one area I didn't *want* to want him to touch me in. His hand continued on its path up over my hip, pulling me into him so tightly, I could feel his bulge against my stomach. “I could do anything I want to you right now and no one here would stop me.” He breathed out another hot breath over the sensitive skin on my neck. “Not even you.”

“I...” The moment I uttered a word, he cut it off, placing kisses over my neck, causing every cell inside my body to light up and want to give into the idea of being with this man.

No matter who I thought he was.

“I think you want me to make you come right now, Clarice. I think you want me to make you come *so fucking hard*, you'll forget all about the protests to your real feelings you hold hostage in that head of yours about me.”

The things he was making me feel right now were too confusing. My emotions were so all over the place, it was like they were running a marathon. I just needed a minute to clear my head and collect my thoughts about what I really wanted, but he wasn't letting up. He just kept bombarding my senses with his smell, his lips, his hands. “I-I can't”

Growling in my ear, his grip tightened around my neck. “You can.”

My resistance to him was melting fast, I knew it, and so did he when my body rocked into him. My hand reached up to grip his jacket, in an attempt to ground myself. Suddenly, a door I hadn't known was beside me, flung open and I was pulled inside before it slammed shut behind me.

Now we were utterly alone. No one would come to my rescue.

The thought had barely registered before he was on me again, kissing my neck, taunting my need to resist him. Then suddenly everything came to a screeching halt, and I was left falling back to reality with no parachute to save me from the

impact. "I'm sorry." He pulled away from me and crossed the room to a bar cart, pouring himself a drink, while I surveyed my surroundings, trying to gather my bearings. Realizing we were in an office; my attention was brought back to him when he spoke again. "I shouldn't have done that..." He paused, taking a swig of his drink. "I just find that when I'm around you, Clarice, I don't seem to be able to control myself. I want you, and I think you want me. But I will not force myself on you." Downing the last of his drink, he set the glass down and walked back over, opening the door. "We'd better get back to the party."

I didn't quite understand what had just happened here. One moment I was being attacked, the next I was seconds from giving in to his devilish ministrations, and now I was being doused with a bucket of ice water. I was more confused by my emotions right now than I could ever recall being in any situation. This man had my head spinning, and I was getting dizzy. The craziest part about this whole experience was that I didn't think even he knew why he stopped.

Neither one of us uttered a word to one another on our way back to the table, and very few were passed between us the rest of the evening. He had acted almost as if he had barely known me. Not that it wasn't the truth. We didn't know one another, but the whole situation had went from mock ten to a dead calm in the span of only a few moments, leaving me unnerved. When the evening ended, he walked me out the front door and put me in his car without even so much as a goodbye.

Why did that bother me so much? And an even bigger question, why did it bother me when I saw Natasha approach him on the sidewalk just as my car was pulling away?

As the driver traveled to my home, I started to become so angry about everything that had happened tonight, and by the time the car pulled up to my house, I was fuming, and I didn't even know why. There was no way I could want a man like him to want me, right?

After what had taken place in that back office tonight, I wasn't so confident in my answer to that question anymore.

When the driver got out and opened my door, it hit me. I still had the rest of the devil's money; I had intended to give back to him tonight from the dress I'd purchased. Reaching into my clutch, I pulled the money out just before the driver reached inside to help me out of the car. He tipped his head to me. "Have a nice evening, ma'am."

"Actually, I have something for you to give Mr. Lennox." When he looked at me in question, I took a hold of his hand and placed the money in it, then began to walk away when an idea struck me. "Wait. One more thing." Throwing my clutch down onto the sidewalk, I reached for the zipper before grabbing the bottom of my dress, ripping it up over my head, leaving me in only my bra and panties. Balling the dress up, I walked back over to where the wide-eyed driver stood frozen and dropped it into his hands along with the money. "Tell him he can have this back too. He paid for the damn thing after all." Turning on my heel, I reached down and snatched up my clutch before marching my freezing ass into the house, slamming the door behind me.

Take that, asshole!

I was thankful that Scarlett wasn't home when I walked in, knowing that she was probably out with Kieran again. That would have been one hell of a long explanation about how I came to be in only my bra and panties after I had told her that I had no intention of sleeping with him tonight.

Feeling like I needed to get the rest of his smell off of me, I headed straight for my bathroom to take a shower. After I'd finished up, I got dressed in my favorite pj's and went into the kitchen, grabbed a pint of my favorite ice cream, mint chocolate with cookies and cream, then back to my bedroom, shutting the door. I had gotten a new book delivered yesterday, and now was the perfect time for it. I really needed to read about some men's asses getting kicked by my favorite badass, Cassidy Crawford. That and it was time to get back to my *real* life since I was pretty sure after tonight there would be no more visits from the devil. I was positive that he was cozied up with that blonde goddess, Natasha, right now anyway.

Stop! Just stop! I didn't care what he was doing... or who.

At least I desperately wanted to believe that I didn't.



Chapter Eight Creed

As we walked back to the table, I had no idea what to say to this woman. I didn't even know what the hell to say to myself right now. When the fuck did I grow a conscience? I was a cruel, calculating, and most importantly heartless man. I didn't have a conscience. But somehow in the span of only a few hours this woman had grown one for me. I was the kind of man who *took* what I wanted, and I had every intention of taking what I wanted from her tonight.

For the rest of the evening, my head was in such turmoil with my earlier actions, I couldn't bring myself to barely speak with her. This woman was fucking me up and I needed to cut her loose before I really made a stupid mistake where she was concerned. It was the only decision I had right now.

At the end of the night, I escorted her out to the car, where my driver was parked, waited for her to slide in, then shut the door behind her without another word. As I watched the car pull away, I felt a hand rub over my shoulder before both of her arms were wrapped around me. "How about we have that dance now," Natasha breathed into my ear.

Since I was still feeling worked up from my earlier encounter with Clarice, and needed to burn this energy off somehow, I turned around and pulled her into me. "I have the perfect dance floor reserved for us." I would take her to that same office from earlier. I had the need to erase any memory of Clarice tonight.

After I fucked Natasha, I was still restless, and very unsatisfied. I had a feeling nothing less than Clarice would satisfy me, but she was out. Once I'd finished my discussion with the Mayor, I met Torin at the front door. "Any updates on the Santiago situation?" I inquired as we headed outside to the car where my driver waited with the backdoor open.

“I’ll update you in the car, but uh, Devin has quite the story for you.”

Looking over at my driver, I noticed that he looked very fidgety. “What is it?”

He looked to Torin first before looking at me once again. Seeming to need to muster up the courage for whatever he was about to say, he took another moment to clear his throat. “When I dropped your guest off at her home this evening... she asked me to give you something.”

I was very curious as to know what this could possibly be. “And?”

He pulled a wad of cash out of his pocket, stepped forward and handed it to me. “She asked that I give you this.” Then he became even more nervous as he stepped back and reached into the front passenger seat to grab something else out. Walking back over to me, he hesitated for a moment. “And this.” He handed me the dress that had been on Clarice’s body tonight.

Staring at the dress in my hand, I looked over at Torin, who was rubbing his chin, knowing I was about to lose my shit, before my attention landed back on Devin once again. “Tell me something, Devin. Did she go inside her house and change into something else before she came back out and handed you this dress?” I interrogated through gritted teeth.

He looked at Torin again, practically begging for his help. Devin had no idea who I really was, but he had still seen my ruthless side many times, so he had every right to be shitting his pants right now if he didn’t have the answer I wanted from him. “No, Sir, she didn’t.”

I took in a deep breath of night air, trying to rein in my control so I didn’t kill him. “So, are you telling me that you saw her naked tonight, Devin?”

“No, Sir... she had on a bra and panties, Sir.”

“Get. In. The. Fucking car, Devin,” my words were practically bit out in a low growl.

“Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir.” Tipping his head, he quickly made his way around the front of the car and into the driver’s seat, shutting the door.

“It’s not his fault, you know.” Torin pointed out the obvious, but it didn’t have the intended effect on me as he had hoped.

“Don’t you think I fucking know that? Doesn’t mean I don’t want to kill the little bastard right now for seeing what was supposed to be mine tonight!” I was fuming at the thought that he had seen her in that way.

“How about we finish this conversation in the car before we attract some unwanted attention,” Torin suggested, trying to usher me into the back of the car. I reluctantly went, knowing he was right. No one needed to witness just what I really was capable of. Because if they did, they would see a dead driver lying on the sidewalk right now.

After a few moments of deep breaths in the car, I began to calm down and think more clearly again. That was until Torin brought her name up. “So, what the hell happened with Clarice tonight to warrant her to rip her own dress off and give it to Devin like that?”

Looking out the window, I watched as the city passed by, wondering if I would be able to stick to the right decision where she was concerned. “I grew a fucking conscience is what happened.”

“You?”

“Me.”

He shook his head like he’d just heard I’d won the Mr. Congeniality award. “What the hell? See, this is what I warned you about. This woman is making you do stupid shit already.”

Turning my head, I glared at him. “You fucking think I don’t know that?” I fumed. “It’s the reason I cut her loose tonight.”

“So, she’s gone?”

“Gone.”

“Good. Now we can get back to dealing with this bullshit with Santiago. Kieran called me earlier and said that he vested a guy on the inside who’s willing to get us information for the right price.”

“Just how much did he say this information would cost me? And exactly what kind of information am I paying for?”

“Three million. He works alongside Santiago’s second in command, Diego, so he can give us a heads up the next time Santiago sends one of his dogs out to do his bidding.”

“He’s positive we can trust him?”

“He said he was. Apparently the guy wants out and he needs a lot of money to leave the country. Turns out his woman is pregnant and doesn’t want the child around our kind of business, so he’s making the necessary moves now to make that happen.”

“Jesus Christ, it’s like an epidemic! These fucking women making men do crazy shit!”

“Not me. I know better than to hand my balls over to any woman .”

Chuckling, I slapped him on the chest. “I’ll be the first one to rub that shit in your face. Mark my words.”

“Not a fucking chance.”

“Ya, ok. Do me a favor, when you talk to Kieran tell him to drop the friend before he gets any more invested with her. The last thing we need is him catching feelings for the woman.”

“On it.”

When the car pulled up to my building, I shot Torin one more look. “Tell him to make the deal and tell him that I want daily updates or the deals off. And I want his woman under tight surveillance. That way if the asshole decides to grow a brain and fuck us over, we have her to pull him back in line.”

“Already watching her every move as we speak. And I’ll make sure to tell Kieran to fill him in on all the parameters before he seal’s the deal with him.” A few moments later, the

car door opened, and my driver awaited my exit. “Try not to kill the kid when you get out, I still need a ride home.”

“You just worry about talking to Kieran about the woman and the deal. I’ll be the one to decide who lives and who dies.”

Stepping out of the car, Devin instantly lowered his eyes. “Hey.”

He looked back up at me. “Yes, Sir?”

“Be here at seven in the morning to pick me up.”

I could see the relief bubbling over in his eyes. “Yes, Sir.”

Once inside, I went into my office and took up my usual spot on the couch with a drink in hand, watching the flames dance in the fireplace. It was the one spot in this house I could navigate through my thoughts or any difficult decisions that needed to be made. I did the right thing tonight by letting her go, I knew that deep down in my bones. But my mind was fucking me over with thoughts of her again. I was not this man. I didn’t get sideways over a woman, but with her... “I am so fucked!” I shouted, launching my empty glass at the wall, shattering it.



Chapter Nine Clarice

It had been a week since the party and there was no sign of my devil anywhere. I refused to be disappointed, but I knew deep down that I was. I really didn't know what to think of these feelings I was having for him. Common sense told me to take solace in the fact he wanted nothing to do with me anymore. It meant Scarlett was safe now and no one would be threatening her life, or mine, any time soon. She'd even told me that things between her and Kieran had fizzled out.

We were in the clear.

I tried to convince myself that I should have been thankful right now instead of wondering why he didn't want me anymore.

"Oh Reesie," Scarlett called out, walking into my room, a smile stretched from ear to ear.

"What's up, Scar?"

Sitting on my bed, she clapped her hands. "I have a party to go to tonight and I want you to come with."

I shook my head at her, not wanting anything to do with going out. Tonight, or any other night for that matter. I'd had enough after the whole debacle with the devil. "I'm good here."

"Come on. Ever since you went out with Creed, all you do is sit in here and read."

"Uh, I hate to remind you but even *before* I went out with Creed, all I did was sit in here and read. Remember?"

"Yeah, well, I wish you'd get over him."

My eyes widened at her accusation. "Get over him? I was never *into* him in the first place. If you remember correctly, I

told you it was a one-time thing, and when I didn't sleep with him he'd dump me.”

“Didn't mean I wasn't hopeful for you.”

“Well, I don't need you hoping for a relationship for me, I'm fine with the way my life is right now. Less drama, you know?”

“Less fun. Less adventure. Less sex. Less...”

“Ok!” I shouted, cutting her off. “I'm not you, Scar. I don't need all of that. Look, I love you and you know that, but sometimes I just need to be allowed to be me. Is that ok?”

Leaning forward, she wrapped me up in a hug. “Of course, it's ok. I just worry about you being lonely in here all by yourself when I'm gone is all.”

Hugging her back, I assured her, “trust me, if I was lonely, I would come out with you, but I'm good. I promise.”

She handed me a piece of paper with an address scribbled on it. “Alright. But if you change your mind here's the address of where I'll be tonight.”

“Ok.”

Two hours later, Scarlett was yelling her goodbyes on her way out the door and I was finally left to read my newest book, that I'd picked up after work today. It was just a coincidence that it was a mafia romance.

Really!

I mean I didn't truly know who my devil was, but I did have a few ideas.

I was only about five pages into the first chapter when I heard a knock at the front door. “Scar, did you forget your keys *again*?” I yelled out on my way to open it. That girl forgot her keys more than any human being I'd ever known.

Opening the door, without looking through the peep hole, I was shocked speechless when I saw who was on the other side of it. “What are you doing here?”

“Hey, Reese. I know this might seem out of left field and all, but I was in the area and thought I’d stop by.”

I just stood there in disbelief at the fact he was here right now. “You don’t live anywhere near here, Logan.”

He chuckled nervously. “Yeah, you caught me. Can I come in?”

Realizing that I was blocking his way, I moved to the side and opened the door wider so he could enter. “Uh, sure.” Closing the door, I followed him into the living room and sat down across from him. “So, I’m a little confused as to why you’re here right now, Logan.”

“I know, and you have every right to kick my ass to the curb after what I did to you, but I’m hoping you won’t.” Getting up, he moved across the room to sit down next to me. Taking my hand in his, he took a deep breath. “So, I’m just going to say the thing I’m not supposed to. I miss you, Reese. I made a huge mistake when I cheated on you, and I know that now. What I had in you can’t be found with anyone else. So, what I’m asking you for here is a second chance.”

I was so completely blindsided by what I was hearing, it took me a moment to respond. “Logan, it’s been almost two years.”

“I know... wait, are you with someone else? I heard from a mutual friend of ours that you were still single.”

“Uh, well, as a matter of fact I’m...”

“She’s with me.”

My head couldn’t turn fast enough at the sound of his voice.

It was him.

My Devil.

Here.

In my house.

“Creed?” If I was blindsided by Logan’s visit, I was completely flabbergasted at the devil’s appearance. “What...”

Without a word, he moved in closer until he was towering over us. “If I were you, I would remove your fucking ass from that couch before I have my associate here do it for you.” At his nod to the man over his shoulder, I turned my head to see Kieran lurking in the background. What the actual hell was happening right now?

Getting angry at the fact that this devil of a man thought he could actually just barge into *my* home and start throwing out orders to anyone, I sprang up from the couch and got in his face. “Just who the hell do you think you are coming into *my* home and telling my guest what to do?”

Taking a hold of my arm in a tight grip, he pulled me in to him even closer. “The kind of man you don’t want to push right now.”

I could see Logan stand up in my peripheral vision, and the look in my devil’s eyes darkened.

He wanted this battle.

He wanted his blood on his hands.

Logan’s life was on the line right now, and I knew that if I ever had any love for him, I needed to get him out of here.

“I think you’re making the lady uncomfortable.”

“Am I?” The devil questioned, still staring into my eyes. “Am I making you uncomfortable, Clarice?”

Pulling away from him, I turned to Logan. “You need to go.” Walking past him and Kieran, I opened the front door.

Cautiously approaching me, he kept his eyes on Creed, and Kieran. “Who is this guy, Reese? Are you in any danger with him? I can call the police and have him taken away right now if you want.”

Needing to get him gone, I did my best to assure him that I was safe with my devil. “I’m fine, really. Look, Logan, you, and I don’t have a future. We never did after what happened. You need to just move on and find someone else, ok? I have. With him.” I motioned in the devil’s direction, noticing the satisfaction gleaming in his eyes when I did.

With one last glare in Creed's direction, he turned to me. "I'll always regret what I did to you, Reese. I hope you know that."

Not really having any feelings on the subject any longer, I just nodded. "I do. Goodbye, Logan."

"Goodbye, Reese." Leaning down, he kissed me on the cheek.

"By a thread," my devil gritted out in warning.

Shutting the door behind Logan, I turned to Kieran. "Can you please give us some privacy?"

He looked at his boss for confirmation that he was *allowed* to grant me my request. With a slight nod in his direction, Kieran left the room.

Folding my arms over my chest in defiance, I walked back into the living room. "What are you doing here and how the hell did you get into my house?" I asked before the idea of what had really been happening came to me. "Were you watching me?"

He only stared at me for a moment before he took a seat and spread his arms out over the back of the couch, making himself comfortable. "You left your front door unlocked. Besides, we're together so wouldn't it be normal for me to just let myself in?"

"You know damn well I just said that to get him to leave. And what about the other part? Were you spying on me?"

Looking straight ahead at the wall, seeming to gather his thoughts, he took in a deep breath and rose up off of the couch, stalking closer to where I stood. "I need you to come with me."

I unfolded my arms, so I had a chance to flee if needed from this situation that was twisting in a direction I didn't see going my way. "No."

His eyebrows raised in question. "No?"

"No," I hissed defiantly. We were in a face off, and I wasn't budging. This devil had rode in on his dark horse and

tossed my life on its nose with his antics, and I wasn't having any more of it. I motioned towards the front door. "Now if you would kindly see your intrusive, spying ass out, I can get back to my quiet evening I was having before you two showed up."

The moment I saw the smirk begin to appear on his lips, I should have run, knowing I was in for more trouble than I had bargained for. But my stubborn ass wouldn't allow me to cower in the devil's presence.

Slowly, like a snake, he slithered closer before lashing out and pulling me in to his chest. "Normally I'd love to sit here, and have you sling more of those spicy insults of yours at me, but right now I need that mouth of yours to shut. Kieran," he called out, causing me to look over my shoulder in the direction Kieran had walked away in earlier.

It was the moment of distraction he needed.

In the next second, I found myself snatched up and was now dangling over his shoulder. The action happened so fast; he had *literally* flipped my world upside down. "What are you doing?" I screeched out, trying to prop myself up, then pounding on his back. "Put me down right now! I mean it! Put me down!"

Ignoring my outcries, he continued to have his conversation with Kieran when he walked back into the room. "Find her phone and send a text to Scarlett that she's gone out for the night and won't be back until tomorrow morning. Then stay parked outside and when she gets home, be the distraction to keep her mind off of my little vixen here's whereabouts."

"Happy to."

"She'll never believe you! She knows I hate going out! And Scar doesn't even like you anymore, Kieran!"

"She may not like me, but she definitely loves what I do for her."

"You're such a pig! How dare you talk about her like that!" I was pissed off and trying to think of anything to get myself out of this situation. "I'll scream when we go outside if

you try to take me, and my neighbors will report you to the police for kidnapping me!”

“She has a point there,” Kieran agreed.

Seeing the first spark of hope that I could get myself out of this whole fucked up situation, I continued, “see! Now let me go!”

“Get the tape and tell Devin to pull around the back. Less people,” the devil ordered.

I couldn’t let this happen. I couldn’t just let him kidnap me like some helpless siren. So, I started pounding on his back again as hard as I could to get him to let me down. “This is ridiculous! Put me down!”

“Bring the rope as well,” was his only answer.

With my hands tied, after a long struggle I might add, a piece of tape was slapped over my lips before he made his way to the back door. The instant he stepped outside, I felt the rush of frigid air on my skin, causing me to realize that this whole time I hadn’t even been dressed, but only in my pj’s. Thank god they weren’t anything scandalous, just some baby blue capri pants and a shirt that matched. But the material they were made of was thin, and I wasn’t wearing any underwear or even a bra under them.

We weren’t outside more than a few seconds before I was being dropped into the back seat of a car, the door slamming shut once he slid inside behind me. As I was lying there on my back, he went to reach for me, and on instinct I kicked my foot out, catching him square in the nose. Almost instantly blood began to drip from it, causing me to regret my decision. I was so astonished by my actions that I just froze. I couldn’t believe I had just done that. Sure, I meant to, otherwise I wouldn’t have done it, but the furious look in his eyes had me back pedaling on fighting back.

Leaning down, he retrieved a tissue from the center console and began wiping his nose, checking to see just how bad he was bleeding. It wasn’t too bad luckily. “Feel better now?”

Since my mouth was still covered with the tape, I chose to respond in a sign language everyone knew and flipped him off.

“You do know that most men wouldn’t survive what you just did.” He reached down and tore the tape off of my lips, causing me to wince in pain as he cut the ties that bound my hands together.

“Ow!” Glaring back at him, I dabbed my lips with my fingertips, checking to see that I wasn’t bleeding myself now. “You ripped it off that hard on purpose.”

“Your lips aren’t even bleeding, unlike my fucking nose right now.”

“You kidnapped me!”

“Believe what you want to.”

I shoved my still redden wrists up in the air from the ropes. “Let’s take a look at the evidence, shall we? One, my wrists were tied up, you taped my mouth shut, and two, you dragged me from my house by force! How can you say that you didn’t just kidnap me?”

Reaching down, he grabbed a hold of my wrists and pulled me up to a sitting position. “If you would have just come with me like I asked you to in the first place, none of that would have been necessary. But you just had to push me, so…”

“So, you chose to act like an asshole?”

Chuckling at my question, he stared out the window, ignoring me the rest of the time, which suited me just fine right now.

When the car pulled up to a large set of iron gates, that led to an underground garage, my curiosity peaked about where I was being taken. “Where are we?”

“My home.” As the car navigated through the gates, we pulled up to what looked like a private parking area. “Now, when we get out you will behave. Don’t forget, Kieran is still at your place, waiting for your friend, Scarlett, to arrive home.”

“Yet another threat. Why does that come as no surprise?”

Leaning over, he took a hold of my arm as the back door to the car was opened. “Just behave for once.”

As he pulled me from the car to my feet, I couldn't help but respond with a mutter, “then maybe stop acting like an asshole.”

He chuckled, finding my words humorous even though that wasn't my intended effect with them.

The ride up in the elevator was submerged in silence. I had no clue what to say, and it'd seemed he didn't either. When the elevator doors opened wide, so did my eyes. The entrance into the foyer alone looked like something out of the pages of *Architectural Digest*.

The flooring was a white, and gray marble with some kind of black art design in the middle of it. Looking further ahead, I noticed two huge black vases on either side of a second entrance, much like the first, that led to a set of black doors with glass windows on either side.

Talk about feeling underdressed just to be in the presence of this place.

With his hand pressed to my lower back, he guided me out of the elevator and through the second entrance. When the door opened, my mouth dropped.

Straight ahead was a huge set of floor to ceiling windows that overlooked the city. Then as we strode forward into the living room, I looked to my right and found a large black sofa with a black coffee table in front of it and a black rug positioned under it all.

The man sure did like the color black.

Even some of the walls were painted as black accent walls, making my nickname for him seem dead on.

“Do you like?” His words snapped me out of my gawking.

Staring out the window at the city lights below for a moment, I turned to face him, folding my arms over my chest. “Why am I here, Creed?”

Sliding his hands in his pockets, he began to walk over to where I stood. "I wish I knew."

"You do realize that doesn't make any sense, right?"

"Oh, I am aware. None of this does." He was just as confused by his actions tonight as I was.

Looking around, I asked the one question that had seemed to weigh on my mind the heaviest since that night I left him standing on the sidewalk. "So, will your girlfriend be joining us?"

"Girlfriend?" he asked, running his thumb over his lip, causing my eyes to follow the action. What was it about men running their fingers over their lips that was so sexy? Whatever it was it was having the intended effect, so I attempted to shake it off and stay strong.

"Natasha, of course."

He chuckled. "Natasha is not my girlfriend. She was just a continuous fuck for a little while, that's all."

"How you keep the ladies off of you with that outlook on women I will never know." I sat down on the couch, stretching my arms out over the back of it, like he'd done in my house earlier. "So, why did you bring me here tonight? To threaten me some more into doing your bidding? Or maybe there's another party you need me to attend?" I couldn't help the smirk I shot up at him, knowing damn well he got that dress I gave the driver, then added. "After all, I'm sure you got the dress back from your driver that you bought for me, right? I could just use that one again."

He smiled at me, but it wasn't happy. It was sinister. "You almost got a man killed pulling that stunt."

"Why?" My heart lurched at the thought.

Moving in closer, he sat down on the couch next to me, causing me to pull my arms in and sit up just in case I needed to defend myself. Even though I had no idea how I knew this, but I never thought this man would actually hurt me. He'd already had more than a handful of chances he'd allowed to

pass if he ever intended to. I just needed to have some sort of shield against this devil of mine.

“I didn’t like that he had seen what was supposed to be mine that night.”

I almost choked on my words. “*Yours?* How presumptuous is that, thinking I would sleep with you. I told you; I have *zero* interest in anything sexual where you are concerned.”

In the next moment, I was pulled from my sitting position, finding myself on my back beneath him. “I could have easily had you that night. I know it. You know it. You just refuse to admit it to yourself.”

With him on top of me, so close, it was happening again. I couldn’t breathe. This man was stealing any control I had over my emotions, and I didn’t like it.



Chapter Ten Creed

It was easy to see that her walls were crumbling, and I had every intention of pushing her over the edge tonight. I had been patient long enough where she was concerned, and I wasn't a patient man to begin with. Reaching down, I pushed her legs apart, nestling myself right where I belonged.

Between them.

I leaned in so close; I could feel her hot breath on my face. "Do you believe the man you saw beaten up in my office that night at the club lived to tell anyone about it?"

Confusion contorted on her face. She was surprised by my line of questioning, thinking I was just ready to go in for the kill. It was definitely my intention, but a slow burn would brand her so much sweeter in the end.

Like I said, I played dirty, and with this woman, the dirtier the better.

"W-what do you mean?"

"Do you think I let him *live*?"

She seemed to try to come to terms with the idea that she knew deep down he was gone. "No."

"So why haven't you called the police and reported me yet?"

Pushing my body up off of hers, I only allowed a small amount of room between us. "Because you threatened my life and my friends life. Did you forget about all of that?"

"No. But you could have easily gone to the cops and had them put you in protective custody." She only stared at me as if she was grappling with the idea of why she *really* hadn't

gone to the police. “I do have a theory on why you didn’t, though.”

“And what would that be?”

“I believe that you didn’t go to the cops because as much as you want to put your morals first, I think there’s something in me that calls to your dark side. And even though you’re so desperately trying to ignore it, a part of you wants to explore that side of yourself.”

The look she gave me was one of defiance. “Maybe I just didn’t want to uproot our lives. Did you ever think of that?”

I couldn’t hold back any longer with this woman. I knew my darkness called to her in some way, all she needed was a small nudge. Leaning in once again, I kissed her neck. “That makes you no better than me, my little vixen. You could have easily put me behind bars and gave that man and his family some kind of justice, but you didn’t. You put yourself first. Just as I do.” I continued kissing my way down her neck, noticing the hitch in her breathing. Her nipples were turning to hardened pebbles against my chest and I was about to lose my shit if this woman didn’t give me the green light soon.

“You’re right.”

I halted my ministrations on her body, looking up at her with a satisfied smirk on my face. Now we were getting somewhere. “Which part?”

“I should have called the police, but I didn’t.”

Staring into her eyes, I had to know her *real* response to my next statement. “Because you wanted me.”

She fell silent for a moment, but then finally answered in a low breath as if only for her ears. “Maybe.”

The ground she had so firmly stood on was crumbling and it would only take one more push for the whole thing to completely collapse beneath her. Tipping my head down, I lightly touched my lips to hers, testing the waters. When I moved to deepen the kiss, I felt her hands wrap tightly around my biceps, pulling me into her even closer. It was all the green light I needed. Parting her lips my tongue swept inside of her

mouth, silencing any protests she might have. I continued to devour her mouth with mine, enjoying the feeling more with her than I'd ever done with anyone else. She was like a peek inside the gates of heaven, and I was a man desperate to drop to his knees. She tasted even better than I could have ever imagined. The way she returned my kiss with her own frenzied need had me gathering her up in my arms, pulling her from the couch.

Her legs locked around my waist, both of us feeding off on one another as I blindly made my way to the bedroom where I would finally be able to take possession of what was mine. After bumping into a couple of walls on the way, I kicked the door to my bedroom open with my foot, making my way inside with her ass still cupped in my hands. Feeling the bed hit the front of my legs, I slowly lowered her down onto it, positioning myself on top of her once again. She was a perfect fit beneath me. One I knew I'd never find again, and that thought alone had me pulling my body away from her. She was like a succubus, sucking me in, and I was losing the control I'd always held on so tightly to.

She looked as confused by my actions as I was. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Just need these clothes off of you." I may be losing control, but I was not about to put an end to this before it even had the chance to get started.

The moment I tugged on her pajama bottoms, she grabbed a hold of my hand. "Wait." When I looked up at her in question, she continued, "what exactly is this between us? Am I just here to be another Natasha for you? Or am I meant to be less than that? I'm only asking because I want to know up front. I don't want to have any misconceptions about what's about to happen here tonight."

"What is it you want?" I couldn't believe I had even cared enough to ask the question about what she wanted. I never did where anyone else was concerned, I was a man who was only for himself.

She seemed to think about her answer for a beat. “I want to not be attracted to you.”

I leaned down and took her mouth in another deep kiss. “That’s something I can’t, and won’t, help you with.”

“I shouldn’t want you. You’re everything that’s wrong with this. You play too many games, Creed. It’s like life is all just one big chessboard to you.”

“You’re not a game to me, Clarice.” All this talk was beginning to really test my patience. It was getting in the way of my fucking her, and I needed to put an end to it now. “Just answer one question. Do you want me?”

“I do want you, but I also know that you’re a man that does bad things.”

Pulling her bottoms down the rest of the way, I was happy to find a landing strip between her thighs for my tongue. Pushing her legs further apart, I stared at her beautiful pink pussy in appreciation before bringing my eyes back up to hers. “That I am, my little vixen, and I plan to do bad things to this beautiful pussy of yours tonight.”



Chapter Eleven Clarice

What was happening to me right now? My emotions were running away from me, and I couldn't seem to catch up. After he'd carried me into his bedroom and pulled away from me again, it had me reeling back to that night at the party when he'd done the same thing, leaving me confused. It caused me to start babbling incoherently, needing to put the brakes on this whole thing until I could get a grip on the situation. But then his next move put my mind on pause. The way he stared at me, as if I was something so beautiful to him, made me want him even more. I'd never had anyone look at me the way he did. It stirred a feeling awake deep inside of me that I wasn't quite familiar with.

After he yanked my pajama bottoms off, he stood back up and began unbuckling his belt, sliding it out with a whipping sound. "Take your top off," he ordered, removing his own.

Reaching down with shaky fingers, I grabbed a hold of it and slipped it over my head, knowing that there would be no going back now. I was giving myself to this devil before me even though I knew it would mean my soul. But as wrong as it felt, I knew somehow that it was about to feel so right.

The shimmer of satisfaction in his eyes, seeing all of me, gave me the confidence I needed to make a bold move. Sitting up, I scooted down to the edge of the bed as he stood there, looking like some sort of evil god. Glancing up into his eyes, I took a hold of the button on his pants, undoing it, then slowly slid the zipper down. Reaching up, I gripped the sides of his pants and pulled them down, taking his boxers with them. As my eyes followed my actions downward, I came face to face with something I somehow knew would be as beautiful as him. It was a sight I'd never seen before, nor would I with another ever again. He was a big, strong man so to believe his cock

would be anything less than substantial would have been a great fault on my part.

Feeling his fingers caress my chin, he pulled my attention up to him, tucking my hair back into a ponytail within his hands, tightening his grip on me. “I want to be rough with you.”

The smoldering look in his eyes left me utterly speechless, only able to nod in response. Leaning in closer, he took my mouth in a kiss so intense it had my hands curling into a tight grip on his thighs. When he broke it, he softly petted my cheek, as if he was the calm before the devil struck with the storm. “It’s a yes or no answer I need from you, Clarice.”

I started to nod my head again but caught myself. “Yes.”

He leaned down once more, sealing his lips to mine. “Thank you. Safe word will be *red*. Say it if I do anything that’s too much for you.”

“O-okay.” All that was going through my head right now was how much I had read about these kind of situations in my books, and what the hell did he plan on doing to me that could drive me to stop him?

It was only a breath later, I had some idea of just how intense this night would get with my devil when he knelt down between my spread legs and scooped me up, folding me like a pretzel. The moment his mouth was on me, sucking me in, I knew what people had meant when they talked about finding a slice of heaven right here on earth. The way he moved his tongue over my clit, and inside of me had me scrambling to get away from him and wanting more at the same time. But it was when he focused on my clit the intensity of it all was almost too much for me to handle. “Holy shit,” was all I could think to say. What he was doing to me with that mouth of his felt so damn good it kicked any common sense I’d ever owned right out of my head, and only left me with a need for *more*.

My orgasm was mounting higher than a tidal wave, and I was on the ride of my life as I rode it all the way, crashing against the shores, sending me screaming out in pleasure. “Oh, Creed! I’m... fuck!”

Shivers wracked my body as he continued to relentlessly eat at me through my orgasm with no intention of letting up, forcing me to ride another wave of pleasure before finally releasing me. Licking his way up my stomach, he grabbed my breasts in both hands, sucking, and biting them before finding his way up to my mouth. When he slid his tongue inside, I could taste myself on him as he took everything I had to give him and more.

As he pulled away, the dark look in his eyes was the only warning I was given before he reached beneath me and flipped me over onto my stomach, propping my ass up in the air. The slap he punished my bare backside with was so harsh it had tears springing from my eyes. "Are you ready for me, Clarice?" he growled in my ear, taking both my hands, restraining them in one of his behind my back. The action caused my face to be buried in the bed.

I was both terrified and excited at the same time. But I still wanted whatever he was about to deliver onto my body. "Yes."

My answer hadn't floated in the air for more than a second before he spread my legs wider apart with his own, thrusting inside of me in one go so hard, it caused me to literally gasp out for air. He was huge and relentless, not giving me any time to adjust to his size before he was pounding inside of me over and over again. "Fuck, you feel so damn good...knew you would."

Releasing my arms, he took a hold of my neck and pulled me up to him, my back to his front as he slid in and out of me at a slower pace. Twisting my head around, he buried his tongue in my mouth, fucking me with it the same way he did with his cock between my legs.

One of his hands tweaked my breasts as the other found its way down to my clit, flicking it before slapping it hard several times. It was a sensation like nothing I had ever experienced before, pulling sounds out of me I had no idea I knew how to make.

His cock was hitting me in all the right places, bringing me right back to the edge once again. Breaking my lips away, I

fell forward on my hands as he continued to shove his cock into me from behind so hard that when my orgasm hit, it ripped through me with a vengeance, taking all of me with it. “Oh, god!”

When my shattered mind began to come back into itself, I was so wiped out, I instantly collapsed onto the bed face first.

Brushing my hair to the side, he continued to slowly slide in and out of me. “I’m just getting started, my little vixen.”

What?!

This devil of mine was rocking my world so hard there would be nothing left of me when he was finished. When he pulled out of me, it left an almost hollow feeling as he laid down on his back beside me. “Ride me. I want to look at you while you fuck me.” Before I could even make a move, he was lifting me up over him, impelling me once again. The effect of his cock thrusting inside of me even deeper a second time was just as gasp worthy as the first.

Propping my hands on his chest, I began to rock my hips back and forth as he massaged my breasts, pinching my nipples painfully a couple of times. It was a bit of a shock what the action did for me. The feeling shot straight down between my legs, increasing the feeling of pleasure. It caused a fever to rise up inside of me, seeking more of it as I began to move my body up and down faster, chasing that feeling I knew would soon come. “Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes.”

And then it did.

Fast.

“I’m going to come!” The words flew breathlessly out of my mouth as I continued to ride him hard, needing that fix again.

“That’s right, my little vixen, take what you need. Use my cock to make yourself come.” He was turning me into an addict, and he was the only one who was selling what I needed.

“Oh, shit!” Bouncing myself up and down on him, I came so hard, my body started to shake uncontrollably. Never in my

life had anything like that happened to me. It was as if he had possessed me. Sitting up, he wrapped his arms around me, keeping me with the motion of sliding up and down his cock as my orgasm seemed to stretch on, rolling over me again and again. Pulling me down onto him harder, I could feel him growing in size and knew he was getting close himself. The grip he had on me as he forced me to ride him even more violently was borderline painful, but it somehow increased the intensity of the aftershocks of my last orgasm.

Feeling a level of confidence, I had never felt with a man before, I reached behind me and began massaging his balls, noticing the catch in his breathing, I knew it felt good for him. “Fuck!” He began to move in and out of me faster, chasing his own orgasm. “God damn I’m gonna come! Fuck!” His body shook as he emptied everything he had inside of me. For a moment after it was over all we both did was breathe as we sat there still connected to one another. Time seemed to stand still as we both laid in our own little bubble. But then it popped with the shrilling sound of his phone.

Pulling away from me, he kissed my forehead. “I’m sorry, but I have to get that.”

I nodded in response, a little disappointed as I moved to climb off of him.

His grip quickly tightened. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“I thought...”

“I never said we were done here.” I could feel my eyes practically bug out of my head with the threat of more to come. I didn’t know how I would be able to handle more. “Remember, you made a deal with this devil when you gave yourself to me, and I plan on holding you to it.” He reached up and pulled me into him, thrusting his tongue into my mouth, kissing me with that violent intensity only he had a talent for. “Now keep that beautiful pussy of yours wrapped around my cock while I get rid of whoever this is, because I plan on fucking you all night.” Reaching for his phone, he put it to his ear. “Yeah?”

Whoever was on the other end of it had my devils eyes turning red with anger. “Where the fuck did he say they were going?” I could hear a man’s voice on the other end, but I couldn’t make out what was being said. All I did know was that by Creed’s reaction it was bad.



Chapter Twelve Creed

The feeling this woman was giving me scared the ever-loving shit out of me. Somehow I'd known she wouldn't be the type I could just fuck and throw back like the other's I had been with in the past. I'd made it this far in my line of business because of two main rules I had always lived by.

One, no one besides my main three ever knew my true identity.

Two, I never had any kind of weakness for anyone to use as leverage against me.

As I laid here with Clarice in my arms, my cock still buried deep inside her, it became painfully clear that one of my two rules was in serious danger of being broken tonight.

And that disturbed me, knowing that my being with this woman, even this one time, had now possibly put her life in a kind of danger she could have never seen coming. Because if there was one thing I did know for sure right now, it was that she was mine, and letting her go was an option that was quickly fading.

When my phone rang, I could see the disappointment in her eyes when I told her I'd have to get it, so I quickly reassured her I had no intention of letting her go tonight. When Kieran told me that our little rat had come through and we now knew where Santiago's men were going to hit us, I gave him an order, "I want both of the packages secured and brought to the warehouse for my personal inspection. Is that clear?"

"Crystal."

"Be sure to take plenty of help, they could be very heavy and not as authentic as we might have been told." Lucky for

me, talking in code with my men had been more common for us than actually saying what we really meant due to the secrecy of my identity.

I glanced down at Clarice as she leaned her head on my shoulder. “How did that... other issue pan out tonight?”

“It’s currently dead asleep and *very* satisfied.”

“No issues were brought up?”

“Didn’t even get a chance to ask.”

“Excellent. Call me when you have everything in order.”

“Will do.”

Hanging up with Kieran, I pulled Clarice into me and laid us both flat back down onto the bed, rolling her beneath me once again. “Want some water or Gatorade to get those electrolytes back up before I fuck you again?”

Laughing, she pushed on my chest, but I wasn’t budging. “You really do just take everything you want, don’t you?”

“When your entire life is built on taking everything you want by force, it makes it difficult to be any other way.”

“Does that include killing people who get in your way like the man in your office that night?”

“I never said I killed anyone. I only asked you if you *thought* I did.”

“Did you?”

All I could do was search her eyes for a repulsed reaction to what she thought I might have done, but saw nothing, and I didn’t want to, knowing I might if I confirmed what she had suspected. “I think it’s better if I don’t answer that.” Nuzzling her neck, I tried to drag her back into the moment we had earlier by spreading her legs open, slowly sliding my cock in and out of her until her hips began to meet me thrust for thrust.

When I awoke the next morning, I found Clarice’s body wrapped around mine.

In the past, finding a woman like this after a night of fucking would have had me rattling her awake and sending her packing. But with Clarice, I didn't want to make a move for fear she would bolt like a feral cat, finding some way to brush what happened last night under the rug. Wanting this woman in my life was both thrilling and wrong at the same time. On the one hand we melted together like a fine wine when we fucked, but on the flipside, bringing this woman into my life put both of our lives at risk. While no one truly knew who I was, that didn't mean it would always stay that way. One day someone could discover just who I am or there could be a reason for me to reveal that information, and then she would be put at risk as the one weakness I never saw coming. Hearing her stir awake, I braced myself for her inevitable reaction to what we had done.

Lifting her head, she looked up at me. "I guess the whole thing really wasn't a dream."

Moving in closer, I gently kissed her lips. "It was definitely better than any fantasy I could have dreamed up."

I could see that the spell was broken when she moved to sit up, but I wasn't going to let that head of hers close me out again. "Where are you trying to go so early in the morning?"

"I need to get dressed and go home. I have work later."

"Well, I do as well, but I was thinking about taking a shower and taking you in there with me to fuck up against the shower wall. And then I was thinking we'd come back in here where I could spread you out over the bed and eat you for breakfast until you lost your voice and any common sense you have so you don't tell me that this was all a mistake."

She only stared at me like she didn't know whether she should give into what I knew she wanted just as much as I did. "We probably shouldn't get any more involved than we did."

"Why is that?"

When she moved again to sit up, I pulled her over to lay on top of me, holding her there as I lined up my cock with her opening. The instant I moved my hips to slide back into

paradise, I knew my words had turned her on. “Fuck, how can you say you want to leave when your pussy is so damn soaked for me?” Pushing in deeper, I watched as her eyes rolled into the back of her head. There would be no walking away from me. If I had to fuck her 24/7 to keep that mind of hers on me, and only me, I would.

Happily.

Pushing herself up, she began to ride me. “You don’t play fair.”

Reaching up, I cupped her face in both hands and brought her lips to mine. “Never said I did. If I have to keep fucking you to get you to see things my way, I have no problem with that.”

“And what way is that exactly?”

“To be mine.”

I knew my answer would send that head of hers reeling about how far apart our lives were, so I took a hold of her hips and forced her to ride me hard until we both came.

Laying on top of me, she finally got enough air back into her lungs. “We are like night and day, Creed.”

I didn’t want to add any more fuel to her undeniable observation. “And?”

“*And* our worlds don’t orbit the same sun. You live this secretive life; I know includes you doing things that I would never probably want to know about. Own a top-rated nightclub, as well as live a life full of glamorous women and parties. I go to college and work in a café. Could our worlds be any further apart?”

“Why should any of that stop us from wanting to be together? Answer me that.”

She couldn’t, and she knew it, but that wouldn’t stop her from trying. “I just don’t think we’re meant for a future together.”

I knew everything she was saying was the fucking truth, but I didn’t give a shit. I would find a way to make her mine if

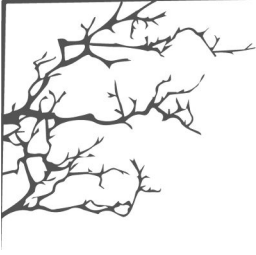
it was the last thing I did. But for now, I decided I needed to let her go, so she could come to her own conclusion of what I really was to her. I didn't need that time; I already knew what she had come to mean to me in such a short amount of time. "I think you're right. I'll have Devin take you home so you can get ready for work." I could clearly see by her shocked reaction that she wasn't expecting me to give in so easily, but as the saying goes; if you release something and it comes back to you it's meant to be, and if it doesn't... Letting her go didn't mean I would let her out of my sights, I would be around, even if she didn't know it.

"O-ok. Just let me get dressed then I guess." I could hear the disappointment in her words.

I watched as she looked for her clothes and put them on. "Isn't that what you wanted from me?"

Buttoning her shirt, she turned to look at me. "It is." She said the words, but her undertone screamed no.

Getting out of bed, I walked over to where she stood. "I'm not a man who plays games, Clarice. Nor am I a man who forces any woman to want to be with me." Leaning down, I took her lips in a kiss that I hoped would brand her memory of me forever. "It was my pleasure to meet you, Clarice, and I hope you find what you are looking for in this life. Devin is waiting for you down stairs." With those last words, I turned and walked into my bathroom, shutting the door behind me.



Chapter Thirteen Clarice

He was really letting me go. With a numb feeling overcoming me, I made my way out of his room and down the staircase. Spotting his driver, I now knew as Devin, I stopped in front of him. “I’m ready to go.”

He seemed to think about something for a moment before he finally decided to say it. “I would greatly appreciate it if you could stay clothed this time. I don’t really feel like dying at the ripe old age of twenty-five.”

Feeling a little embarrassed by my previous actions, I tried to assure him that it wouldn’t happen again, “I have every intention of keeping all my clothes on until I’m inside my house. I’m really sorry if I got you into any trouble.”

“Thank you. Shall we go then?”

With one last look up the stairs I had just come down, I nodded my head. “Yes.”

Walking into the house, I could hear Scarlett giggling like a school girl, so I decided it was better to call out for her in front of her door rather than walk in on anything going on in her bedroom. “Hey, Scar!”

“In here!” she called out, giving me the all clear to walk in. “Ok, you better. I’ll talk to you later.” Hanging up her phone, she got out of bed and stalked over to me. “And just where have you been? Without your phone on you I might add.”

I could tell she was a little miffed that I broke our one rule of always keeping our phones on us in case something happened. “I know. I’m sorry. I kind of left quickly and forgot to take it with me.”

She looked me up and down. “So, you left here in your pj’s? What was so important that you couldn’t put any clothes

on before you went running out of the house?”

Knowing there was no other way than just telling her the truth right now, I walked over to the chair by her bed and sat down. “Creed came here last night after Logan showed up unannounced.”

Shaking her head, she moved over to her bed, sitting down. “Ok, so wait, *Logan*, as in *Logan* from two years ago came by, and Creed did too? I’m so confused right now.”

“Yeah, was a bit of a shocker for me too.”

“Ok, so start at the beginning.”

After I explained what took place, minus the kidnapping, Kieran’s involvement, and the fact that my devil was a bad guy, she couldn’t contain her excitement. “I knew you two would hook up!”

“Yeah, well, it’s going to be the only time that happens. Our lives are just too different.”

“Oh sure. Just like you said you wouldn’t sleep with him in the first place? Somehow I’m not buying what you’re selling, sweetheart.”

“Well, as much as I would just love to sit here and tell you all the ways we don’t fit together, I need to take a shower and get ready for my shift at the café later.”

“I’ll let you off the hook for now. But we will be continuing this conversation.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Of that I have no doubt.”

After showering and getting ready for work, I pulled out my book, I’d started reading last night before I was kidnapped, when my phone pinged with an incoming text. I’d be lying to myself if I said that I wasn’t hoping it was my devil, but when I looked at the screen, I only found a text from Logan.

I just wanted to apologize for showing up like I did yesterday. I hope all is well with you.

I didn’t respond. I didn’t want to give him any hope that something could develop between us ever again. He broke my

heart like no man had ever done before him when he cheated on me, and I would not be entertaining the idea of letting him back into my life any time soon.

The next couple of days went by without any sightings or calls from my devil and I actually found myself missing him. This man had threatened me, kidnapped me, tied me up, and blackmailed me with my best friends life into doing what he wanted.

And I missed him?

If I was honest with myself, I did. I missed the way he looked at me, the way he made me feel so beautiful, and the way he took me so violently, blowing my mind with the sex we had. I was beginning to think that I was truly an addict for the man. It was the kind of situation I had never dealt with before, wanting someone I shouldn't, knowing it was a bad choice. I didn't know how much longer I would be able to fight these feelings I was having for him off before I inevitably gave in to my wants and needs.

Who knew my window of opportunity would come in the form of my best friend a week later.

Walking into the house after my shift at the café, I was met with an over excited Scarlett, practically jumping up and down. "Guess what?"

"You found a new man?" It was pretty much the only reason she was ever this excited about something.

"Nope. We are going to a dinner tonight at this posh restaurant my friend got us an invitation to."

I didn't really want to go out, but at the same time I was desperate for a distraction in my life right now, having thought about my devil practically every day. "Alright, I'll go."

"Wait. Really? she asked, surprised. "You mean I don't have to actually beg you to go out and have fun with me?"

"Ha, ha. No. All I've been doing is working. I need to have some fun."

“She’s finally coming around people!” Scarlett shouted out to no one in the house. “Ok, we need to find you something to wear in my closet since I know you hate shopping so much.”

“Much appreciated.”

I ended up borrowing one of her many cute little, black dresses she owned. When I did my hair and make-up, I decided to leave my hair down in a sleek look with no curl to it, then go with a red lip color, and a dramatic eye to go with the dress. I finished the look off with a pair of strappy black heels, I also borrowed from Scarlett. We met up in her bedroom before leaving for the night. “Look out boys we have one hot momma tonight.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at her antics. “You look like quite the dish yourself there, babe.”

“Oh, don’t I know it.”

After our traditional drink in the Uber, we arrived at the restaurant. It looked like it was the opening night by all the hoopla going on outside. “How long has this restaurant been open?”

“Just opened tonight. We are among the first customers.”

Getting out of the car, I turned to her. “Who gave you the tickets to get into this?”

By the look on her face it was apparent that I wouldn’t like the answer. “Now don’t be mad.”

“When you start out a sentence with don’t be mad, you do know it prepares someone to be mad, don’t you, Scar?”

“Well... I only said that because it was Kieran that gave me the tickets. We’ve been hanging out again for the past few weeks.”

“Kieran? I thought that whole deal with you two was over.”

“It was...”

Just then, Kieran walked up and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her in tight for a kiss. When they finally

came up for air, he directed his attention at me. “Hello, Clarice. Nice to see you again.”

“You too, Kieran. Seems you just keep *popping* up, huh?”

Leaning down, he kissed the top of Scarlett’s head. “I can only blame this goddess here for my need to keep coming back.”

“Aren’t you the sweetest.” Scarlett had entered swoon territory, and there would be no retrieving her back any time soon.

“Shall we, ladies?” Kieran directed Scarlett towards the doors, putting my Spidey senses on serious overload as we entered the restaurant.

I could literally feel the heat of his stare on me even before I saw him. He was standing next to a table with a reserved card on it. Just looking at him and how hot he was in that signature black suit he always wore, had me wanting to abandon any of the differences we had and sprint straight into his arms. He was truly a beautiful devil. When we got closer, he greeted Kieran with a handshake and Scarlett with a kiss on the cheek. Now it seemed that it was my turn. “Clarice, you look beautiful as always.”

“Thank you, Creed.” I tried to act coolly and not look like my thighs were about to go up in flames if he didn’t pick me up right now and fuck me against the nearest wall. I have no idea how I thought that it would even be possible to keep away from him. All it took was one look from him and I was right back in the mindset I’d been trying to run from.

“I’m delighted that you were able to come to my opening.”

“This restaurant is yours?”

“It is.”

Looking around, this place was nothing short of posh, with beautiful crystal chandeliers that hung throughout the restaurant, adding just enough lighting to allow you to see what you were about to eat. It was a very alluring environment to be in and added another layer to the intimidation factor of

this devil of mine. “It’s quite lovely. What did you name it? I didn’t notice when we came in.”

“Vixen’s Place.” I didn’t think my eyes could widen enough to show my surprise. Moving closer, he kissed me gently on the lips. “I was inspired recently.”

“I-I...” I didn’t have any words to offer. I was speechless.

Wrapping his arm around my waist, he tugged me into his side. “Come sit down,” he breathed in my ear, causing goose bumps to rise over my skin. I didn’t know how much longer I would be able to keep these feelings of mine, I was having for him on lockdown, or what my reasons for wanting to anymore in the first place.

Standing at the end of the cozy booth, he had reserved for us, he motioned for me to sit down first. I slid into the center of the horseshoe shaped booth, and he slid in right next to me. I was so hypnotized by him that it took me a moment to realize Scarlett and Kieran weren’t even sitting with us. “Where did Scarlett, and Kieran go?” Looking around the restaurant, I spotted them a couple of booths away. “They aren’t sitting with us?”

Moving in closer, he grabbed a hold of my waist and pulled me in closer, placing his hand on my thigh. “No. I reserved them their own table because I wanted to be alone with you.”

“Creed...”

Placing a finger on my lips, he only took it away when he gave me a chaste kiss. “You need to stop this thinking that we don’t fit together excuse of yours as a real reason for us not to be together. I want you; you want me. How about we throw all the bullshit reasons why this won’t work out the window and just give it a shot. The worst that could happen is you would be proven right.”

“No. the worst that could happen is I could get my heart broken.” It was something I knew could be a possibility with how fast I was falling for this devil of mine. Add to that who he was, and it was a recipe for heartbreak disaster.

“How about one day at a time, we’ll take things slow.”

“You don’t do anything slow, besides, I think we passed slow a while ago.”

I could feel his hand inching its way up my leg, closer to where I wanted and needed him to touch me. “You’re right. How about we just pick up where we left off. I have no problem with that if it’s what you want.”

His hand had now pushed my dress up and was dipping into my panties. The long table cloth was the only thing hiding what he was doing to me. The moment his finger slipped inside of me, and he began fingering me, my eyes became too heavy to keep open. But when he moved to my clit, I couldn’t think straight. Just then a male waiter arrived at our table, causing me to freeze. But it didn’t stop him from continuing to drive me closer to climax.

“Good evening, Miss. Mr. Lennox. Would you like to start off with some drinks?”

He looked at me with a smirk as his finger increased in pressure before pushing two fingers inside of me, hitting that spot that tested any ability I had to keep a normal reaction on my face in front of the waiter. “What would you like to drink, Clarice.”

The way his fingers were moving inside of me then over my clit was about to send me screaming out in orgasm, but then suddenly, he ripped it all away, leaving me a babbling idiot. “Uh... I-I don’t um... I don’t... water is fine for me.”

He knew. The slight smirk on the waiter’s face said it all, but he remained a professional in front of his boss. “And for you, Sir?”

“Bring me the 2003 Egon Müller-Scharzhof Riesling. And bring it to the private table.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Before I could even question what he was talking about, I was being pulled from our booth and guided to the very back of the restaurant to a closed door. Entering the room, there was

only a single booth with a low-lit chandelier hanging over it. It was a very romantic setting.

I hadn't moved an inch since we'd entered before there was a knock at the door. When Creed opened it, we were greeted by the same waiter from earlier. He wordlessly made his way inside and set the wine along with two wine glasses and my water down onto the table. When he turned to leave, my devil stopped him, whispering something to him, then shutting the door behind him. "This is quite the little set up you've got back here."

As I stood there, my back to him, he moved in closer. Wrapping his arms around my waist, he pulled me in tight as he laid kisses all down my neck. "I had fucking you here in mind when it was being remodeled." His hands slipped down to the bottom of my dress and slowly began hiking it up over my hips as he continued to nip and kiss my neck. "Is that something I could interest you in, Clarice? Bending you over this table and fucking you until you come so hard on my cock that you beg me to fuck you again and again?"

I was definitely done for. There would be no more fighting this devil of mine. I was an addict for his touch, and I needed it now. "Yes. I want you to fuck me, Creed. Right here, right now on this table."

Before my brain even had a second to form another coherent thought, I found myself flipped around, his hand viciously gripping my throat. "I'm only going to say this once. If you give yourself to me tonight there will be no going back. You will be mine."



Chapter Fourteen Creed

I could see the flash of fear in her eyes at my words. But she needed to know just what kind of *devil* she was getting into bed with.

“Fuck me, Creed.” The determination in her eyes was another kind of turn-on I’d never experienced with a woman before. This woman was quickly annihilating any desire I had to ever think about looking at anyone but her again.

Pulling her closer to me, I breathed in her scent, skimming my nose up her neck. “I want you to turn around, face the table and present that ass to me. And then I want you to *beg* me to fuck you.”

Releasing my hold on her, she wobbled in her stance a moment before turning around. Pulling her panties off, she placed her hands flat down onto the table and slowly widened her stance before flipping her hair over her shoulder, staring me down with the sexiest, bold look in her eyes. “I need you to fuck me with your fat cock until I scream out your name, Creed. I want you to make me come so hard that I won’t be able to stand on my own two feet.”

Moving in close behind her, I could hear her let out a groan as I ran my hand through her wet folds, pushing two fingers inside of her, fucking her with them. My other hand grabbed a hand full of her hair and pulled her up off of the table, her back flesh to my chest. “This pussy belongs to me. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” she gasped out.

“No man will ever touch this pussy but me. *Do you understand?*”

“Yes.” I knew the grip I had on her was painful, but I also knew she liked it from how wet she got on my fingers from it.

With her understanding that I now owned her, I removed my fingers and lined my cock up against her entrance. “What’s the one word that brings all of this to an end?”

“Red,” she practically panted.

This was going to be fast, and it was going to be violent. Shoving inside of her in one go, my eyes rolled to the back of my head. The feeling of entering her so roughly as she gasped from the intrusion always got me even harder. Pressing my hand against her back, she flattened out on the table as I took her hips in a tight grip and began pounding inside of her, forcing her to take all of me to the hilt, over and over until she began chanting *oh, god, yes, yes*, and babbling incoherently from the pleasure.

When the sounds came to a stop, and I could feel her pussy squeezing my cock in a death grip, I knew she was close to coming and began fucking her harder and faster until she came so hard that her body shook beneath me. “Oh, god! Oh shit! I’m coming, Creed!”

Hearing her cry out my name sent me reeling so completely over the edge, that when I came it felt powerfully intense as I emptied everything I had into her. Unable to stay upright, I bent over and laid on top of her to catch my breath for a moment before turning her face to meet mine, kissing her lips. “That was fucking phenomenal.” Pulling out of her, I stood up, buttoning my pants back up. Kneeling down, I grabbed her panties and stuffed them inside my pocket, knowing she wouldn’t be needing them for the rest of the night. I had every intention of keeping her naked for the remainder of the evening after I got her back to my place. But for now, I needed to feed my little vixen so she would have the strength for what I had in store for her tonight. As she started to prop herself up, I pulled her dress back down, kissing her on the ass cheek before covering it. “There’s a bathroom there to your left for you to clean up while I tell the chef we’re ready to eat.

Turning around, she smiled that vicious vixen smile of hers at me as she moved in closer, grabbing a hold of my already hardening cock. “Just so *we’re* clear, this cock belongs to me. Do *you* understand?”

I couldn’t help chuckling at her echoing my earlier words to her. “Absofuckinglutely.”

“Good. Now that we’ve got that cleared up, I’m going to use the ladies room while you find me something to eat. I’m starving.”

Leaning down, I took a hold of her chin, giving her a chaste kiss on the lips. “Only the best for my queen.”

She began to walk away, but then shot me with one more look over her shoulder. “I think I might like the sound of that.”

“Well, get used to it then.” As I watched her walk into the bathroom, my phone began to ring. “Yeah?”

“We have a problem.” For Torin to be calling me and not Kieran from our operation in Florida, things had to be bad.

“What is it?”

“We had another incident at one of our warehouses. They got away with four crates of the expensive items.”

“Roster? It was my way of asking for the body count.”

“All ten men are on it. It’s almost like they knew the layout and where everyone would be stationed at.”

“Wait for my call back.” Immediately, I left the room in search of Kieran. Finding him with Scarlett, I approached their booth. “Would you mind if I borrowed your date for just a moment?”

Kieran was already sliding out before she could reply, “o-oh, alright.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ll be right back,” he assured her as we walked away. “What’s going on?”

“Torin called, told me we had another break in at one of our warehouses. Four crates of weapons taken this time, all guards dead. So, my question to *you* is what the fuck am I paying that rat for if this shit is still happening?”

“Let me give him a call.”

“You do that, and you tell him that shit comes out of the money I’m paying him.”

While Kieran was talking to the rat, I headed to the kitchen to speak with the chef about what to cook for Clarice and myself. A moment later Kieran entered with a pissed off look, telling me I was definitely not going to like what I was about to hear.

I waved him to head towards my office, shutting the door after we walked inside. “The fucking piece of shit said that he had no idea this was going down tonight. Santiago’s guy never mentioned it to him.”

I was increasingly getting angrier that I was paying this prick a lot of money for shit information. “You tell him the next time we get hit, and he doesn’t give us a heads up, not only will I cut him off, I will inform Santiago of his betrayal, then he won’t have to worry about being a bad influence on that kid of his.”

“I just spoke to Torin as well, and he told me that it seemed like whoever broke in knew their way around, and exactly which weapons were worth the most on the black market, which is a little troubling.”

“Could mean that we may have our own rat infestation. Who else knew about us using that asshole for information?”

“Only the four of us.”

Shaking my head, the thought of it being one of my three that betrayed me was a thought I didn’t want to entertain more than the second I just did. “I don’t even want to think of the possibility.”

“Nor do I.”

Kieran was the one out of the three of them I trusted the most which was why he was usually the one with me here in New York and more of the go between for the other two. But to even wrap my head around the idea that either one of them would ever betray me was not something I wanted to digest. “Is there anything going on in their lives that would provoke them into doing anything out of the ordinary like this? Anything against my decisions lately?”

“Not even a rebuttal to any orders given. I really don’t think it’s one of us. What I do think is I need to get down there and speak to the both of them about who they might have spoken to or have been around. Maybe someone possibly left a listening device in their home or something. If they’ve hooked up with the wrong woman, who is hooking up with them for just that reason. That’s the only explanation I can come up with right now.”

Thinking for a moment, his explanation did make sense. It was possible that one of the two hooked up with a woman who had only the intention of spying on our operation. It wouldn’t have been the first time a woman had been sent in to gather information on us, or to attempt to find out my true identity.

Many leaders had deemed me a coward for hiding who I was, but anytime there’d been an attempt on their lives or the lives of their loved ones, it proved to me just who the fucking idiots were. It wasn’t like I couldn’t go around, pounding on my chest and boasting who I was, or showcase just how much power I held in my little pinky. But then the majority of my time would be spent fighting off attempts on my life instead of being the brains, I was able to be behind the scenes. It was an agreement we had all four come to a long time ago before we started making moves. That and I’d reside in a completely different state than the one we ran our operation out of. It was the only way no one could ever tie Kieran, Merric, or Torin to myself. When shit did go down here, like what Clarice had witnessed, it was few and far between. Plus, those individuals never lived to tell a fucking soul who or where I really was if they’d found out. It was the perfect way to run an enterprise the likes of ours.

Now, though, I was faced with the thought of one of them possibly being no longer in the same mindset. If I had learned anything in this business, it was that those who loved you the most were the ones you really had to watch out for. I couldn't tell you how many times a son had killed their own father for the power they held. I didn't want to even think about having to end one of them. "Call Torin and tell him that he and Merric need to sweep both warehouses as well as their own homes and then meet up with us at the location tomorrow at noon. Make sure to let them know that they need to be on alert and take extra precautions to make sure no one follows them. If we have a rat in our ranks, I don't want them informing anyone where they're going. I'll call the pilot and tell him wheels up at nine tomorrow morning."

"Sounds good. I'll call Torin now and make the arrangements."

"Enjoy the rest of your night, I'm going to get back to Clarice."

"You as well."

Leaving the office, I stopped by to speak to my head chef. "Everything is ready for you, Mr. Lennox. Would you like it to be brought into your dinner suite now?"

"Yes, Luke. Thank you."

Opening the door, I spotted Clarice, sitting in the booth and sipping on her water. "There you are. I was beginning to think you left me here."

Sliding into the booth, I pulled her in for a kiss. "My apologies. I unfortunately had some business to attend to. Opening night is a bit of a production."

Watching me for a moment, she pursed her lips. "So, it had to do with the opening of the restaurant, huh?"

"Of course. What else could it possibly be?" Before she could answer, our waiter entered the room and began to serve us.

After he laid everything out on the table, he stood at attention. "Do you require anything else, Sir?"

I looked over at Clarice in question, and she shook her head with a smile. “No, I’m good. This all looks and smells wonderful, thank you.”

Nodding my head, the waiter excused himself. “I’m glad you like what I chose for you, I should have asked if there was anything you didn’t eat before I did.”

Cutting into the ribeye steak that I had prepared for her, she shook her head. “Nope. I eat pretty much everything. Just no gross stuff like liver, cow tongue, snails, or any crazy shit like that.”

“I’ll keep that in mind for the future.” I chuckled.



Chapter Sixteen Clarice

I hadn't known my devil for long, but I had come to know when he was angry or distracted by something and right now he was over doing it to cover up whatever the hell was going on. His excuse that it had to do with the opening of the restaurant was pitiful at best. If there was one thing I had learned from all the books I'd read it was that there was always more going on in the scene you were reading about than was said. It was part of the fun of trying to figure out where the author was going with things.

What was not being said right now was that he was pissed off about whatever that something was he had to deal with and trying do everything possible to cover that anger up.

“How's your steak?”

“Melts in my mouth. You really picked a great chef.”

Leaning in closer, he placed his finger under my chin, pulling my attention to his. “Well, I plan on *you* melting in my mouth later tonight.”

The sexy things this devil of mine said kept my body on a constant heightened sense of awareness. It didn't hurt that everything he promised he delivered on.

In spades.

“How exactly am I supposed to eat with you saying things like that to me?”

“Very quickly or I'll just have to start on my dessert right here. Afterall there's nothing blocking me from that pussy of mine anymore.” He punctuated his words, running his hand up my dress and sliding a finger lightly over my clit, causing a shiver to shoot up through me. It was an intensely pleasurable reminder that he still had my panties in his possession.

“Ever plan on giving those back to me?”

“Not a fucking chance. Now eat up.”

We sat there for the next hour, eating, and making small talk before it was finally time for him to whisk me back to his place and do god knows what dirty things to me. As we slid out of the booth, there was a knock on the door. “Yes?” Creed called out just before it opened with Kieran on the other side.

“Sorry to interrupt, but could I have a quick word?”

Turning to me, he started to apologize, but I waved him off. “It’s fine. Really. I’m going to go sit with Scar since she’s probably sitting alone out there.”

Leaning in, he took my lips in a kiss, hovering close. “Thank you for understanding.”

“You’re welcome.” As I made my way out of the room in front of him, he slapped me on the ass, causing me to jump a little. “Bad Devil,” I scolded jokingly, making him chuckle. I secretly knew he loved my nickname for him.

Making my way through the restaurant to Scarlett’s table, I found her in the booth alone. “Hey.”

“Hey,” she answered flatly. I could tell she was a little irritated.

Taking the seat next to her, I slid in closer. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing really, just that pretty much all-night Kieran has been distracted by something that’s going on and hardly sat here at the table with me. Basically, I just had dinner by myself.”

“I’m sorry. Creed’s been preoccupied about something too.”

“Did he say what it was?”

“He said that it had to do with the opening tonight but if he’s involving Kieran then I suspect it’s something else.”

“Like what do you think?”

“I’m not quite sure, but…”

“Are you ready to go?” My devil appeared out of thin air, cutting my words short.

Looking at Scarlett, she nodded to let me know she was ok with me leaving. “Are you sure?”

“Of course. You go and have some fun with your man here.”

“Thank you, Scarlet. I happen to agree.” My devil grinned.

Laughing at his remark, he helped me up. “I’m sure you do.”

“Ok, we’ll catch you two later then,” he said practically shoving me towards the front door.

Once outside, it dawned on me. “Wait, don’t you need to stay here for the rest of the opening celebration tonight?”

We approached the car where his driver, Devin, waited for us with the door open. “That’s what I pay my restaurant manager a lot of money for.”

“I see. Hello, Devin,” I greeted as we both slid into the car.

“Miss. Mr. Lennox.”

“Home, Devin. As quickly as possible,” my devil demanded.

“Yes, Sir.”

The next morning I was awakened in the most delicious way possible. The feeling of his mouth on me brought me awake with a scream when he made me come on his tongue. Moving his way up my body, he slid his mouth over mine, kissing me as if he would never kiss me again. Tasting myself on his tongue drove my desire to have him inside of me again, even after he took me over and over again last night. “Good morning.”

“It *is* a good morning when you wake me up like that.” I wrapped my arms around him. “What do you say we have a little repeat of last night.”

He tipped his head down onto my chest in defeat. “There is nothing I want more in this world right now than to stay here in bed with you all day and do everything we did last night all over again, but I have to fly out to Florida this morning for a meeting about some property I’m thinking about purchasing.”

It wasn’t what I wanted to hear, but I understood. “Oh, ok. Are you building a house or something?”

“Not sure what I’m going to do with it yet if I buy it, I’ve only seen it online. Today will be my first in person visit to the site.”

I moved to get out of bed. “Well then I’d better get going, so you can catch your flight.”

Pulling me back down onto the bed, he gathered up my wrists in his hands. “First, you and me are going to shower together, you know, to save water and all that shit. Then, I’m going to take you home on my way to the airport.”

I couldn’t help the smile that stretched out over my face. “Sounds good to me.”

After another wonderful orgasm in the shower, we both sat in the car as Devin drove to my house. “What are your plans for today?”

“I go into work at noon today, and then I think I’m going to see if Scar wants to order in some Chinese for dinner tonight.”

Taking a hold of my chin, he brought my lips to his. “Wish I could join you, but I’m not sure what time I’ll be back tonight.”

“It’s ok. Scar and I could use a girls night anyway. You know, to talk about you and Kieran.”

He chuckled at my comment. “To be a fly on the wall during that conversation.”

The car rolled to a stop in front of my house. “You’ll both miss the naked pillow fight we’ll have too.”

He practically yanked me in against his body. “Don’t ever tease me like that before I have to be away from you.”

Feeling a little feisty, I couldn't help myself. "Or what?"

"Or I will flip you over right here in this car and redden your ass with my hand."

"Mm, sounds tempting."

"You sure do live up to your name, Little Vixen."

I couldn't help the smile. "I do try." Just then, Devin opened the back door for us, and my devil stepped out before helping me to my feet. "I'll miss you."

Walking me up to my door, he spun me around to face him, taking me in a knee buckling kiss. "I will be back inside you before you know it."

"Now that's some crazy romance you're spouting off right there."

He chuckled. "I'm still familiarizing myself with the word. Maybe by time I return from my trip, I'll have a better handle on the meaning."

"I think you do alright with it."

Hearing his phone ping with a text, he let out a breath when he looked down at it. "I've got to go if I'm going to make it to my meeting on time. I'll call you the moment I land back in New York."

"I'm holding you to that." Kissing him once more, I smiled up at him. "Have a safe flight."

"Thank you." Turning to walk away, he paused and turned back to face me again. "Enjoy your naked pillow fight."

I broke out laughing. "We will." With those final words, he was in the car and driving off.

Entering the house, I found a note from Scarlett that she had already left for work and would be home around six in the evening, so I texted her my idea about a night in, which she seemed happy about.

After I'd taken a shower and got changed for work, I sat and had some egg whites and coffee while I scrolled through some social media. When I noticed that it was 11:30, I

gathered up my stuff and headed out the door and began my walk to work.

The day had dragged on and it was finally down to my last hour before I was off at eight when a bunch of people made their way in the door, filing over to the menu board. Not really paying much attention, I walked up to help the first couple, when I realized the guy with the girl in front of me was Logan.

What the hell was he doing in here?

Trying to brush off the initial shock of seeing him yet again, I greeted them. “Hey, how can I help you guys?”

The sound of my voice caused his head to jerk up in response. “Reese? You work here?”

“I do.”

He looked like he was about to puke his guts out. Nothing could be more awkward than your ex being in the same vicinity as your new love interest. Especially an ex you were practically begging to take you back not too long ago. “I-I had no idea you worked here. We were just headed in to the city and wanted to caffeinate beforehand.”

The girl he was with was increasingly growing curious. “You know her?”

He looked at her. “Yeah, she’s...”

Trying to help him out, not that it was my duty, I cut his words off. “Logan and I went to school together a couple of years ago. We had a couple of the same classes.”

She looked relieved. “Oh, ok. For a second there, I thought you might be another one of his ex-girlfriends or something. Seems we run into *those* everywhere we go these days.” She gave him a side glance that told me he was still fucking around with other women, making me even more thankful for the devil I had in my life now.

Getting their order completed, I began cleaning up in the backroom since it was almost closing time when I heard a quiet knock on the wall. Turning around, I spotted Logan, walking into the room, looking extremely guilty. “Hey, just

wanted to apologize for earlier. I had no idea that you worked here when we decided to stop in. Kelly was the one who suggested it, so...

Not really wanting to have a whole thing about the awkward situation, I brushed it off. "It's fine. She seems nice and I really hope you're happy together."

"Thanks. You ah still with that guy who looked like he wanted to kill me last time we saw each other?"

"I am."

"Happy?"

"Yes. I hope you're not still hung up on the idea of us getting back together, Logan. You seem to have a nice girl out there."

"No. I know you'll never take me back after what I did, but you will always be the one who got away. It'll always be one of the biggest mistakes I've ever made in my life, throwing away what we had."

This conversation was growing increasingly more and more uncomfortable, but just then I was rescued. "Logan are you ready to go?"

Trying to act cool, he turned around just in time to greet Kelly. "Yeah. I was just talking to Reese about the new man in her life."

"Well, I'm sure she's happy and you have a new woman in your life, so what do you say you don't keep her waiting?"

"Of course. Let's get going." He looked back at me once more. "It was good to see you again, Reese."

"Good to see you as well." I turned my focus to Kelly. "It was nice to meet you."

"You as well. *Not* that Logan ever made any formal introductions or anything." The look she gave him said it all. She knew who I really was to him, and I didn't think she would be around much longer.

After they all had left, I locked the doors and continued to close up for the night.

Walking in the front door about an hour later, I found Scarlett on the couch, looking like she'd started drinking the moment she walked in the door. "You ok?"

"Oh sure, just the guy I'm falling for wouldn't tell me where he was going today. He won't answer any of my texts and said that I wouldn't hear from him until I do. Just the normal bullshit I seem to deal with from the losers I constantly fall for."

Oh boy was it going to be an interesting night. Heading into the kitchen, I grabbed a glass of juice and came back into the living room, dropping down onto the couch next to her. "Why wouldn't he tell you where he was going? What's the big secret about it?"

"Wish I knew. I've given this guy three shots at breaking my heart now. I don't have a fourth in me. I bet he's going to see another woman."

Knowing what I did about my devil's trip, I would venture a guess that Kieran was with him. But the big question was, what was so secretive about looking at some property in Florida? "I really don't think that's what it is, Scar."

Sitting up, she squared her shoulders towards me. "You know something, don't you?"

Not wanting to say anything, seeing as how I didn't really know anything, I tried to bluff my way around the subject, which made me feel like shit. She was my best friend, and I should have been honest with her. "No, I don't know anything. But I do know that man only has eyes for you."

"Yeah, me and that slut he's with right now."

It was definitely about to be a long night.



Chapter Seventeen Creed

Getting off the plane, Kieran and I got into the car that was left for us on the tarmac and began the two-hour drive to the location we would be meeting Torin and Merric at. It was a shit rundown bar on the outskirts of Miami where no one would think to ever look for us.

Pulling up to the bar, I scanned the area around us to make sure we had no eyes on us as we got out of the car and made our way inside. Finding the two of them at our usual table, Kieran and I strode over, taking our own seats. “You know, I don’t think this was a good idea, you coming down here with all the heat on our operation right now.” Torin was always the most paranoid about me meeting them down here in public, and it was good to see he still showed that concern. It helped to put my mind at ease a bit.

“It was a necessity. Did you find any bugs?”

Merric had a look on his face that told me the answer. “Two at my place.”

Leaning back in my chair, I scrubbed my hand down my face. “How long?”

“I’d say it was probably this chick, I picked up in a bar about three weeks back. She was the only one I let out of my sight, when I had to run out to my car for my phone, realizing I didn’t have it with me.”

“Do you know where to find her since I’m sure whatever name she gave you was bullshit?”

“I could go back to the same bar and see if she shows up. As far as she knows, I haven’t found anything.”

And that gave me an idea. “Put the bugs back where you found them.”

Merric looked at me as if I was saying I wanted to kill myself. “Why the fuck would I do that?” It only took a few seconds for the reason to sink in. “Are you sure you want to do that?”

“The way I look at it our rat in Santiago’s outfit is probably either dead, or under heavy surveillance to see if there’s a chance he meets up with one of us. Then they get more for the bullet.”

“So, what’s the plan,” Torin asked.

A couple hours later, everything had been hashed out in our plan, and I was feeling a huge weight lifted off my shoulders that it wasn’t one of my three who had betrayed me. For the next few hours we sat, drank a few and talked bullshit, catching up on everything that was going on before going our separate ways.

Getting back onto the plane, I looked to see what time it was, noticing it was only nine o’clock in the evening, putting us back in New York no later than 11:30 or midnight tonight. I didn’t think I could wait until tomorrow to see Clarice, so I sent her a quick text, checking to see how the girls night was going.

Me: Hey my little vixen. Looks like I’ll be back in New York by midnight. Just wanted to check on how that girls night of yours was going?

A few moments later, I got a response, but not the one I was expecting.

Vixen: Is Kieran with you?

Me: Why?

Vixen: Because apparently he’s the reason I’m babysitting my very drunk best friend right now. She thinks he’s seeing someone else since he wouldn’t tell her where he was going today.

Me: He’s with me.

Vixen: Why the hell couldn’t he just tell her he was going to look at a property in Florida with you?

Just then, Kieran walked to the back of the plane where I sat. “Lied to Scarlett, did ya?”

Looking at me like I was speaking a foreign language, he sat down across from me. “Not at all. Just didn’t say where I was going. Why?”

“Apparently, she thinks you went to see another woman, and now Clarice is having to babysit her drunk ass because of it.”

“Yeah, she sent me a few texts today asking questions, but since when do I answer to a woman? No, no, wait. Since when do *you* answer to a woman?”

“I don’t. But at least I told her I was flying to Florida to look at some property. Not just no answer. You know how women get when you just let them imagine in their own heads what you’re up to.”

“You are a sad, sad man.”

“Why the fuck is that?”

“You’ve gone soft.”

“Yeah, well you’re about to turn into fucking butter because we are going over there tonight, and you are going to apologize for being an asshole. I need you to retain that relationship with Scarlett, that way I know what’s going on with Clarice at all times. Got it?”

“Look, it’s not that I don’t enjoy fucking the chick, because I do. But I’m not like you, I don’t want to limit my choices down to just one yet. So, I’ll continue to fuck her to keep you in the loop on your woman, but don’t ask me to profess my love for this chick.”

“All I’m asking is that you don’t fuck this up. Once Clarice is in my home and I know where she is at all times you can do whatever the hell you want.”

His eyes protruded from his skull. “Wait, you plan on moving this woman into your home with you? What about the rules you set for yourself. She’ll become a massive weakness for you.”

“I’m willing to risk it.” Just then another text from her pinged on my phone.

Vixen: Are you in the air and not getting my texts?

Me: Was just talking with Kieran before we took off and he insisted that we stop by tonight so he can make things right with Scarlett.

Vixen: Thank you. Maybe while they make up, you and I can go back to your place. I don’t have to work tomorrow and could use a good tongue lashing, if you get my drift.

I was getting hard just thinking about what I would do to her the second I got my hands on her.

Me: I’ll be at your door no later than midnight to take you back to my place where I can lick every inch of your body all night until you lose your voice screaming out my name.

Vixen: I’ll be waiting...

I kept my promise and was standing on her doorstep at precisely 11:57 pm. The moment she opened the door, I had her in my arms, kissing her as I backed her up into the house so Kieran could enter behind me, and shut the door when he was inside. “I missed these lips of yours today.”

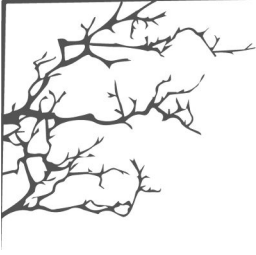
The way she looked at me did things to my chest, I hadn’t ever known myself to feel before. “They missed you more. What do you say we put them to better use and get the hell out of here.” Leaning around me, she glared at Kieran. “So, *Kieran* here can make things right with my poor Scar who thinks he’s cheating on her.”

I could tell he wanted to make some smart-ass remark about how they weren’t anything he would be cheating on, but with one look from me, he got with the program real quick. “I’d be happy to.”

With him headed in to speak with Scarlett, I gathered Clarice up in my arms and began carrying her towards the door. “Now that the problem is solved, time to take you to my dungeon.”

Bringing her hand to my face, she ran it down to my chin, pulling me in for a kiss. “You really did work on being more romantic on your way back from Florida.” We both laughed at that one as we slid into the back of the awaiting car.

The funny thing was... I wasn't kidding.



Chapter Eighteen Clarice

When we entered his place, the entire room was lit up with candlelight. It was probably *the* most romantic thing a man had ever done for me. With the way the candlelight mixed with the city lights outside the windows, it made the whole thing look almost surreal, like a picture. “Wow. This is really beautiful.”

“And?”

I couldn’t help the smile that stretched over my face. “And... very romantic. How did you do all of this while on a plane, coming back from Florida?”

“Made a few phone calls to the concierge service, we have here in the building, and had them arrange everything, so it would be ready when you arrived.”

“Well, I love it. You did good.”

He leaned down and kissed me. “So, how long do we need to look at this romantic scenery before I can drag you off to my dungeon?”

“You know, you keep saying that word so much, I’m starting to think you actually have one.”

Wordlessly, he took my hand and began to lead me down a hallway, I’d never been down before and didn’t have any idea existed, since the entrance was hidden in a corner of the house I’d never been in yet.

Did my devil seriously have a dungeon? Wait, aren’t those usually in a basement or something?

Questions I couldn’t seem to stop kept popping up in my head about what was really about to happen here, and in what kind of room. That was until he opened a door and flipped on

a light switch, illuminating the area inside. “What in the actual Christian Grey is going on here?” The room wasn’t red like in the book, instead it was all black, with some dark blue, and teal accents. There was a huge bed with what looked like a black crushed velvet comforter, a spanking bench, and a St. Andrews Cross in the corner. There were also interesting looking items hung up on the wall. It was like I’d woken up in the book itself.

“Christian Grey? Is this another ex-boyfriend of yours I need to threaten away?”

I couldn’t help but break out in uncontrollable laughter. There wasn’t many people left on this earth that didn’t know about 50 Shades of Grey, let alone, not know who Christian Grey was. Once I regained my composure, I looked up at him. “I’ll show you exactly who he is.” Taking my phone out of my back pocket, I Googled 50 Shades of Grey and handed it to him.

After a few moments of reading, he handed my phone back to me with one of his devilish grins that always meant I was in for a lot of trouble. “You’ve read these books?”

“I read all three of them. *And* I saw the movies based on those books.”

“Interesting. Did any of it appeal to you?”

Knowing just where this conversation was headed, after being introduced to this room, I couldn’t decide on my answer. It was one of those kinds of opportunities that presented themselves in your life like skydiving, or bungee jumping. Going on that one roller coaster, you just knew would scare the ever-loving shit out of you, but you still really wanted to do it. And I did want to do this with my devil, more than I thought I’d ever want to try something like this with anyone. Trust was the biggest thing needed for a sexual act like this one to ever take place. And for some reason I did trust that he would never harm me in any way. “It only appeals to me if it’s with you.”

That was all he needed to hear apparently, because in the next second, I found myself swept up in his arms and being

place onto the bed, him hovering over me. “I want to do things to you that will bring you so much pleasure that it will make you lose your mind.”

That brought a smile to my lips. “Sounds like something I could get onboard with.”

His hand suddenly struck out and gripped my neck, hard, causing my eyes to widen at the sudden action. He leaned down and began nibbling on my ear and neck. “I only have one rule about bringing you in here.”

The grip he had on me was firm but didn’t cut my airway off. “What is that?”

“That there are no rules. If you choose to be with me in here, you are choosing to give me complete ownership over your body and mind. Is that something you can do?”

I didn’t know what complete ownership encompassed, and it didn’t look like he was about to elaborate any further on that explanation. “Does the word *red* still work in here?” I needed some kind of reassurance that I still had some say in things. While I did trust him enough to experiment sexually, to give myself completely over to him was another thing entirely.

He didn’t answer, only released his grip on my neck and pulled me up to a sitting position before helping me off the bed. “You aren’t ready for this tonight, but my hope is that one day you will trust me enough to know I will only bring you nothing but pleasure in this room. Total and complete trust is a must from you for something like this. I don’t want you to be apprehensive about it and feel like you have to do this with me.”

While I agreed completely with what he was saying, I couldn’t help the disappointment I felt in myself for questioning my trust in him. “I do really want to try this with you.”

Spinning me around, he pinned me up against the doorway, the wall digging into my back uncomfortably. “And we will when you trust me without question. Now let’s take this

somewhere I can do something about this raging hardon I have for you.”

The second we entered the bedroom; he was on me like a man just released from a twenty-five-year stint in jail. The things he did to me drove me out of my mind with pleasure, just like he always promised. After we were done, I laid in bed unable to sleep, thinking about that room and what could have happened in there last night.

Looking over at his sleeping form, I quietly got out of bed, and slipped on one of his white shirts around me, buttoning it up as I crept out the door, shutting it behind me. Tiptoeing down the hall, I made my way to the room we visited last night. Standing there for a moment, I wondered what it would be like to enter the room, him here with me. But in order to do that, I had to look deep inside myself and find that fear of *what if* and figure out why it was there before I could dig it out. It was the only thing that was holding me back from doing this with him.

Opening the door, I walked inside and shut it behind me as my eyes scanned the area around. My thought was that if I got to know what was in here, maybe my fear would turn peaceful on its own. I made my way over to the bed, running my hand over the comforter, feeling the softest material I'd ever known. It was like silk as it slid through my fingertips. Approaching the spanking bench, that I'd recognized from my curiosity research I did after reading *50 Shades*, I checked the restraints that were bound to it. I noticed that they looked almost like a belt, but with a black padding lined on the inside to protect your body from the harsh leather.

Padding over to the St. Andrews Cross, I noticed the same kind of restraints on it as well as a leg spreader. The leg spreader was an easy item to remember from the movie itself. Moving on to the items that hung on the wall, I recognized most of them from what I had seen before, zeroing in on the cane. From what I'd read those tended to be one of the most painful whips that could be used on a person's body. "I was wondering where you had gotten off to."

I practically jumped out of my own skin at his sudden words, puncturing through my thoughts. “Holy shit! You scared the fuck out of me!”

He chuckled at my response. “What are you doing in here?”

Walking back over to the spanking bench, I ran my finger over the hard leather, imagining how it would feel against my skin as I laid upon it, leaving myself open to his mercy. “Just familiarizing myself with things.”

“How about you familiarize your body with mine in the shower instead?”

Staring at him for a moment, I turned my attention back to the bench, noticing how the backside of it faced the doorway he was standing in. Taking a deep breath, I found that fear holding me back, and dug it out as I began to slowly unbutton the shirt I had on, my eyes holding his prisoner on me.

He studied me intently with heated eyes and a halted breath as if he knew I was about to fearlessly hand my body over to him and didn't want to make any sudden movements to postpone it. Slipping the shirt off my shoulders, I stood there boldly for his viewing pleasure. I could feel the intense heat from his stare, roaming over my body as though one look would never be enough for my devil.

Turning away from him, I placed my knees on the lower part of the bench before laying my body over the top that had an incline, my head facing down with my ass high in the air. Laying there without any words, I could feel his heated gaze between my spread legs. A few heartbeats later, I heard the first sound of movement behind me as he came closer. The feeling of his finger touching my skin had me jumping as he dragged it from my calf all the way up over my ass, missing the one area I wanted him to touch me in the most right now. Slowly, he brushed his fingertip up my back until his grip landed on the back of my neck, pulling my face up to meet his. “What is the one rule about being in this room with me?”

“That there are none, and if I choose to be in here with you, I am giving my body to you without fear of being

harmed.”

His eyes moved back and forth between mine, searching for any doubt that shone in them. “And you’re able to do that?”

I wanted to do this with him so badly, that I decided to jump out of the plane, off the cliff, and get on the roller coaster, I knew would scare the shit out of me. “Yes,” I answered in a firm voice.

Releasing his grip on my neck, he moved to my backside and stood there not touching me for what felt like forever before I jumped at his grip on my ankle as he locked it in the first restraint. Slowly he made his way around me, eventually restraining me helpless. Taking a deep breath, I told myself I could do this. I could trust my devil not to harm me. When I noticed movement to my side, I watched as he wordlessly strode over to the wall, where all the items were hung, and pick out what I knew to be a flogging whip. The excitement that ran ramped through my body actually surprised me a bit. I had no idea I would be more excited about what was about to happen than scared, but I was.

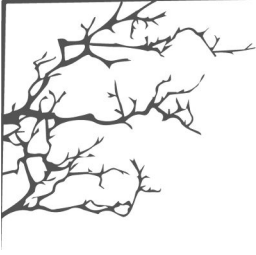
Approaching me, he bent down and grabbed a hold of my chin, forcing me to look up at him. “This moment will always be the best gift you’ve ever given to me.” The kiss he gave me would have caused my knees to buckle if I wasn’t already laying down. I felt the ends of the flog trailing over my sensitive skin, my backside, and up between my spread legs before the sound of a crack soared through the air, causing me to flinch in pain as the whip lashed across my ass. I felt the same feeling three more times before he laid his warm hands on me, soothing the broken skin.

Feeling his hand slip lower, he ran his fingers through my folds before shoving two fingers deep inside of me. “You’re so fucking wet. I knew this would turn you on.” Feeling him exploring my pussy the way he was, his fingers inside me, over my clit and then through my folds was building up inside of me. But then it all came crashing back down with the feel of the flog thrashing over my ass three more times. He repeated the process of whipping me then fingering me to the point of

almost climaxing so many times, I was reduced to a weeping mess of a woman, begging for release. The feelings only grew in intensity, causing me to feel like I was about to lose my mind. Just then my devil replaced his fingers with his mouth on me, and I was on a one-way track to coming my brains out, but then he changed the rules to our game. “Don’t come. If you come before I tell you to, I will leave you here restrained and keep doing things to your body to keep you on edge but never let you come. Do you understand?”

The one and only thing swimming through my mind was *I didn’t think I could hold off much longer.*

I had never been told I couldn’t come before. It was what all men wanted from you, to know they made you come. Not keep it from happening. I was so confused and so strung out and high on the pleasure his mouth was bringing me that I truly did think I was about to go insane.



Chapter Nineteen Creed

I could tell she was close to losing the battle with holding her need to come at bay by the way her toes would curl and release only to do the same thing again and again. What I was doing was torturing her but when that orgasm hit, I wanted it to happen when I was deep inside of her and not a moment before.

And I just wasn't ready to fuck her yet.

A selfish man I am.

I continued my assault on her pussy with my tongue, enjoying every drop I sucked out of her, keeping the movement of my tongue slow and steady, so there wouldn't be enough friction for her to come before I allowed her to. Hearing her cries grow louder for relief, I knew she'd had enough. I'd kept her on the edge now for more than a good few minutes, and for someone who had never done this kind of thing before, it could begin to turn painful, and that wasn't something I wanted to risk happening after I just gained her trust. I decided it was time to give her exactly what she needed. Unbuttoning my pants, I hit the floor lever with my foot and raised the bench up into the air where I could fuck her from behind. Listening to her pleading moans almost had me exploding before I could get her in the right position to get inside her.

Finally getting the bench high enough, I lined my cock up with her entrance and shoved inside of her all the way to the hilt and began pounding her hard. "Come on my cock, Little Vixen." The words had barely passed through the air before she was coming so hard her whole body shook as she screamed out through her orgasm. My cock was being strangled so viciously, I knew I wouldn't last much longer, so I reached underneath her and pinched her clit, sending her

flying over the edge one more time. Shoving my cock as deep inside of her as I could go, I pumped faster and harder, finally coming so violently that my own body was left shaking as I tried to catch my breath. But then I shook it off and remembered what my main concern was right now.

Her.

She needed the aftercare, she would require, and very much deserved. Pulling out of her, I heard her make a groaning noise as I pulled my pants back up and began unbuckling all the restraints that held her in place.

Bending down, I picked up her worn-out body in my arms and carried her out of the room, heading in the direction of the bathroom. Setting her down on the seat I had next to the tub, I forced her hand to wrap around the handle in order to hold herself up while I ran her a bath. “Hold on to this so you don’t fall over while I run you a bath, ok?” It wasn’t hard to see just how weak she was from everything. I kissed her forehead before stepping over to the tub and getting started on filling it up with warm water and a soothing bath balm. Once everything was set, I pulled her up to her feet and guided her into the tub with me, sitting us both down, her back to my chest. She was quiet, and I was praying she wasn’t having any regrets about what we’d just done.

I let her have her time with her thoughts as I ran the washcloth over her body, massaging her arms and legs as I went, trying to sooth all her sore muscles. Not able to hold off on knowing what was running through her head any longer, I wrapped my arms around her and kissed her neck. “How do you feel?”

It took her a minute to answer me. “I feel like a train ran over me, I’m so tired.”

“Did you enjoy what we did?”

She started to answer, but then paused before she spoke again. “I guess I just didn’t know it would be like that.”

“Like what?”

“So exhausting. I have never had an orgasm so strong that it literally wiped me out like this. Never even knew it was possible.”

“But did you enjoy it?”

“I did but I’m starting to think I need to up my cardio workouts in order to keep up with you.”

I couldn’t help the chuckle that rumbled in my chest, or the relief I felt from her small joke. “Well, I happen to think that you did wonderful...”

The sound of my phone ringing had my words cutting off. “It’s ok, you can go get it. I think I’m able to stay upright now.”

Kissing her on the shoulder as she moved forward, I pulled myself up, grabbing a towel on my way to answer the phone. “I’ll be right back.” Getting to my phone, I saw Merric’s code name on the newest burner phone, he’d gotten, flash across the screen. It was a safety net we used. Each week Torin and Merric would get a new burner phone, so no one would ever be able to track their calls to Kieran or myself here in New York. “Hello?”

“I found the item we were looking for.”

He found the woman who planted the hearing devices is what he was telling me. “Good. Do you need me to come to the shop or are you bringing it home?”

“I’m going to bring it home, there’s something I want you to see.”

“Got it. I’ll see you then around ten tonight?”

“Yeah, should be there by then.”

“Is the shop locked up tight?” I needed to know whether Torin would be joining him or staying behind to keep things going while he was up here.

“Shop is locked up tight. See you soon.”

After disconnecting the call, I looked at the time on my phone, noticing that it was almost five in the evening. Pulling

the towel free, I made my way back to Clarice in the tub, sliding right back in where I had been. “Everything ok?”

Reaching around, I tugged her in close to me. “Everything is fine. What do you say we soak for a few more minutes and then get something to eat, so you can regain your strength? Maybe a nice steak or some seafood?”

“At your restaurant?”

“Well, *from* my restaurant. I’ll have them deliver it to us here, that way you can just relax and not have to go anywhere. Sound good?”

“Sounds like heaven.”

After I made the order, we spent another thirty minutes or so in the bathtub before we got out and dried off. As we made our way into the bedroom, I went into my closet and pulled out the fuzzy bathrobe I had left here for her last night. “Don’t tell me that’s your bathrobe.”

“As much as I wish it was, I had it brought up here for you.”

She giggled. “Thank god. I was about to have a lot of questions for you.”

No matter how much shit I had going on, being around this woman always lightened the load I felt on my shoulders. No longer would I need to sit, brooding, in my office, watching the flames dance around with a drink in my hand. Not when I had her in my life to lighten up my mood “Let’s get you something to drink to get those electrolytes back up.”

“That sounds good to me.” Making our way to the kitchen, she slowed to a stop in front of the door to my office. “What’s in here? Another mystery room?”

“It’s just my office.”

“Oh.”

She seemed to pause in her steps again before she finally took my hand and continued on to the kitchen where I mixed her up a drink I had used regularly after my workouts. Watching her for a short time, I wanted to know what her

interest in my office was. As much as I didn't want that thought in my head, with everything going on now with Merric, the idea of her being some kind of spy started to sprout in the back of my mind. The probability was extremely low, but I needed it put to rest. "So, why did you want to know what was behind the door to my office?"

If she was expecting the question, she did an excellent job of playing the part of a surprised reaction at my inquiry. "Just curious is all. I didn't notice the room we went into last night, so I was just asking. Is that not ok? I don't want to come off as nosey or anything."

The look of worry she had on her face, that she'd overstepped, told me all I needed to know. It was just simple curiosity. "No, it's fine. I was just..."

"Wait. Did you think I was spying on you or something? Because that's not *my* thing if you remember correctly, it's *yours*."

Now she was getting upset at what she believed I was accusing her of.

And she wasn't wrong.

But with everything going on right now, I couldn't just shut the idea of the possibility out of my head. "Look, I'm not accusing you of anything. One thing you have to understand is in my line of business, I get a lot of individuals who want to take me down..." The words had left my mouth without me even realizing what I was confessing, and now I would have to figure out just how to reverse it. Kieran was right. I had gone soft around this woman, and just might have made the biggest mistake of my life. Now I needed to figure out just how this would all play out.

"What do you mean exactly? You're a club and restaurant owner. Why would people want to take you down for that?"

She had that look in her eyes, one I had known all too well when I was questioning someone about something I already knew the answer to. That voice inside my head told me that all I did tonight with my misstep was confirm what she already

suspected about what was behind the mask I wore. “I’m just saying that some people don’t like others being successful. It wouldn’t be the first time a restaurant or a club was burnt to the ground by a rival owner of another club or restaurant that wanted the kind of revenue you’re pulling in.”

I was spouting bullshit, and she knew it.



Chapter Twenty Clarice

The way he made up his shitty answer made me want to lash out. This man really thought I was either that dumb or blind to who I knew him to really be. So, I thought maybe tonight I should let him know what my suspicions were, and then maybe we could get past the whole secrecy thing that was going on here. “I think there’s something I should tell you, Creed... I know.”

The look on his face morphed from one of shock to seriously pissed off in the span of a millisecond. “What do you mean *you know*?”

“I mean I’m not some stupid woman, Creed. Do you not remember how you and I met in the first place? I know you’re more than some guy who just owns a couple of places with rivals out to get him for being successful. I may not know exactly *who* you are, but I have a pretty good idea.”

“And that idea would be?” My argument of not being a spy was looking more and more like I was with the words coming out of my mouth. The way he stared at me right now was as if he didn’t know whether to fuck me again or kill me, so I needed to tread carefully, and make him see what I was seeing. But before I could utter another word, there was a knock at the door. Wordlessly, he got up and went to the door, letting in the delivery man with our food before shutting it behind him when he left. Coming back over, he set the bags of food down onto the table and then took his seat across from me once again. “You were saying?”

The way his words came out were almost threatening. “Ok, I can see you’re starting to get pissed at me, so I’m just going to rip off the band-aid and tell you what I’ve observed over the past few weeks.” He still said nothing. Only stared at me. “Since I’ve met you, you’ve had a man in your office you

were beating up and hinted at the fact that he was no longer among the living. Then you blackmailed me with my best friends life to keep me quiet about it. Showed up at my work with your two monsters, I was unlucky enough to meet the night before, threatening me once again if I didn't go to some party with you. Then all the secret meetings that you and Kieran have, on top of all the code talking phone calls you have about *packages* being delivered. Your invitations to important parties, and secret meetings with the Mayor. Then there was the last one where you told me that you were flying off to look at property in Florida, yet Kieran for some reason refused to tell Scar anything about the trip? Something like that shouldn't have been such a huge secret that he needed to keep it from her. And now another mysterious phone call from someone, I'm guessing Kieran, or one of your two monsters, about meeting them at the shop or at home. The whole thing screams you are a hell of a lot more than what you present yourself as. If I had to guess, I would say you were either mafia, or an arms dealer. Definitely something of the criminal nature." I was babbling incoherently at this point.

So much for treading lightly.

He only watched me as though he was waiting for me to say more, but there was no mistaking the fact that he wasn't happy with me right now. Getting up, he strode over to the bar cart in the corner of the living room, poured himself a drink, not saying a word as he gulped the brown liquid down in one go. Setting the glass down, he stared out the window for a moment with his hands in his pockets, seemingly thinking before turning to face me. "I think we should call it a night and get you home. I need to run into the club tonight."

It was like a switch flipped and he'd just wiped the whole conversation out of existence as well as anything about us. The eyes I was looking into now were as cold as the night I'd met him.

My devil was gone and the old one had returned in his place.

"That's it? We're not going to discuss this any further? You're just going to throw me out now?"

Making his way closer to me, I was instinctively on high alert, knowing I was dealing with a different man than I was only moments ago in the bathtub when he was tenderly massaging my sore limbs after what we had done tonight.

A man I gave my whole self to.

“I didn’t say that I was throwing you out. I simply stated that I was taking you home because I am needed at the club.”

“And the dinner you had brought here for us?”

“I’ve lost my appetite. But I can have it sent home with you if you’d like.”

Now I was getting pissed. This man was just going to toss me aside like garbage for being honest with him?

After giving myself to him?

Trusting him?

I stepped in closer, making sure he understood my next words very clearly. “I want *nothing* from you. I let myself be vulnerable with you tonight, trusted you not to break my heart, and you’re doing exactly that. You may be some big, tough, scary guy most men would run from, but all I see standing in front of me right now is a coward. Do not contact me, sit outside my house, and spy on me, or ever step foot into my work again, or this time I *will* call the cops. *Do you understand me?* You don’t get to take the trust I gave to you and just shit on it. No matter *who* you are.” The look on his face morphed from anger to hurt then back to anger again so fast I wondered if I had imagined it. I needed out of here right now, and I didn’t care that I was only in a bathrobe with no shoes. I wanted nothing more from the man who really was as cold hearted as the devil himself.

Spinning around on my heel, I made my way over to the door, opening it and walking out. Opening the second door to the elevator area, I pushed the button and waited for it to arrive. The tears welling up in my eyes became so heavy that it was getting hard to hold them back, but there was no way I was going to let this bastard see me cry over him. Feeling his stare on my back, I looked over my shoulder, spotting him,

standing in the doorway, watching me. I would never understand how he could turn so cold so fast. The ping of the elevator arriving sounded just as the doors opened for me to step inside.

“Clarice.” The sound of him saying my name stung deep, like a knife to the heart, but I would not give in. There would be no looking back at him.

I kept my body pointed to the side when I entered as the doors slowly closed me inside and the tears flowed freely down my cheeks.

I was so sick to my stomach about what just happened, I leaned on the railing, barely able to stand. When the doors opened on the ground floor a few seconds later, I made sure the robe was cinched tight and made my way through the lobby, my head held high in defiance under watchful eyes. Pushing the door open, the ice-cold pavement beneath my bare feet and breeze that swept over me, sent shivers down my spine as I made my way down the sidewalk.

“Miss! Miss!”

Looking to my right, I saw Devin rushing to make his way over to me. “I don’t want *anything* from *you* or *your boss*,” I growled at him, striding away.

Catching up to me again, he grabbed a hold of my wrist, causing me to snatch it back out of his grip. “I’m sorry.” He held his hands up in a surrendering motion. “Please. If I don’t take you home, Mr. Lennox, will have my head. Please just let me take you home.”

I felt bad being mean to Devin since none of this was his fault, he only worked for the asshole. “Fine. No talking.”

He raised his hands in surrender again. “I promise. Not a word.”

“Then let’s go.” I marched over to where he parked the car when he rushed past me and opened the back door, so I could get in. “Not sitting back there. I’ll sit up front with you,” I informed him, passing him up and moving to the passenger side door.

He looked completely frazzled by my request, shutting the back door. “Um, ok then.”

When he moved to open the door for me at the same time I reached for the handle, I grabbed a hold of his hand, startling him. “Devin. I know how to open and close the car door all by myself.”

“Yes, Miss.” He nodded his head as he made his way to the driver’s side, starting the car.

We didn’t make it two miles down the road before I was breaking my own rule. “Why is your boss such an asshole?”

This kid looked like he’d rather have his right nut cut off than answer my question right now. “I’m sure, Mr. Lennox, is just under a lot of pressure with the new restaurant opening.”

I didn’t reply to his answer, nor say anymore the rest of the drive home. I was numb again. Something special, I thought I had, only turned out to be a shitty joke on me. Once Devin pulled up in front of my house, he started to move to get out. “Stay. I can get out of the car all by myself as well.” Opening the door, I stepped out, but then leaned back down to look inside. “Thank you for the ride, Devin.” Slamming the door shut before he could respond, I went inside my house and straight to my bedroom, shutting the door behind me before falling face first onto my bed and having the cry I was finally able to.

It wasn’t long before there was a knock at my door, and Scarlett was stepping inside. “Hey, noticed you didn’t say hello when you walked in, everything ok?” The instant she saw my tear-soaked face when I looked up at her, she slid onto my bed next to me. “What’s going on, Reese? What happened?”

Getting myself together, I sat up. “Creed dumped me tonight.”

“That fucking piece of shit!”

I couldn’t tell her that I’d called him out on who I thought he really was, so I skated over those details. “We had sex, he ordered dinner for us then when we were talking, he just

became distant and said he lost his appetite, and it was time to get me home.”

“That’s it? No explanation?”

I really wasn’t given one, so it wasn’t a total lie. “Nope.”

“What an asshole. Do you want me to go over there and tell him off? Because I will.”

“No. But thank you. I just want to forget about him.”

“I understand. I’ll tell Kieran that we’ll see each other outside of the house for a while. I don’t want you getting upset when you see him, thinking about that jack ass, Creed.”

Really wanting to tell her who I believed Creed, and Kieran were, I held back, hoping she’d be on to the next guy soon enough and dump Kieran. “You don’t have to do that, but I appreciate the offer. It’s not his fault his friend is such an asshole.”

“Well as you know Kieran has been and can be quite an asshole, too. Do you need anything before I go in to work?”

“No, I’m fine. I’m just going to shower and sleep. I’m really tired.”

Leaning in, she gave me a hug. “You call me if you need me, ok?”

“I will.”

Later that night, I woke up, and there was a voicemail waiting for me on my phone. I would be lying if I didn’t say I hoped that he’d come to his senses and was going to come crawling back, begging me to be with him again, but it was only the pharmacy, reminding me that I still needed to pick up my birth control prescription.

And that’s when it hit me.

I jumped out of bed and ran into the bathroom, ripping open the drawer that I kept my birth control pills in. The container was empty, and the last time I’d taken a pill was the day before yesterday. “Shit!” Running back into my bedroom, I started Googling the probability of getting pregnant, missing

only a day on the pill. Of course, there were conflicting answers. One saying you were still protected but to take two pills, then one that said that there was a possibility. “Why can’t you decide on one answer, Google!” I was starting to panic, but I wouldn’t be able to deal with it until the pharmacy opened tomorrow morning. All I could do now was pray that nothing would come from the mistake I’d made.

In the morning, I got up and got dressed quickly. I needed to get down to that pharmacy and get those pills.

Making my way into the store, I waited in the short line until it was my turn. Once I got my pills I asked the pharmacist about the possibility of pregnancy after missing only one day. He informed me my chances were slim, but still possible. So, he offered me the morning after pill, saying it was anywhere from fifty to one hundred percent effective if taken early enough. As badly as I wanted to purchase it and take it to be sure, I couldn’t. There was just something about doing that to my body that didn’t sit well with me.

Getting a water before I left the store, I swallowed down two of my birth control pills just as I was walking out the door, needing to get them into my system and working immediately.

Entering the house an hour later, after I’d run to the grocery store to pick a few things up, I went to the kitchen to put the items away and make a sandwich. I wasn’t very hungry, but I knew I’d need to eat something. Picking up my sandwich and iced tea, I went into the living room to sit down and watch some tv, hoping to get my mind off of everything. Watching the drama of the Real Housewives unfold did just that.

For a little while at least.



Chapter Twenty-one Creed

I fucked up.

The minute she turned to leave, I wanted to bolt after her and tell her I was wrong. But my feet stood firm, unable to move. The only thing I wasn't able to control was calling out for her. When she turned to face me with her beautiful tear-filled eyes, I could see the resolve in them. She wouldn't allow me to see her break.

Not only did I just fuck things up with probably the *only* woman I've ever come close to loving, but I fucked up by keeping her too close and allowing her to possibly see behind the man others knew me to be. Now not only was she a weakness, she was an exposure liability. She knew I was more than I seemed and when she'd laid it all out, I couldn't believe I'd been so stupid as not to see the mindless hints I'd been dropping.

Devin pulled up to the warehouse, yanking me out of my thoughts. As I stepped from the car, I shoved my own issues with Clarice aside, and readied myself to deal with Merric's bullshit.

Entering the rundown warehouse, I spotted Merric, standing over an attractive, blonde-haired woman who was tied to a chair, screaming at him in hysterics. "If they find out I'm here with you they will kill my son! You have to let me go!" Tears with streaks of black mascara were streaming down her cheeks as she begged Merric for her release.

The moment I stepped into the light, both heads turned in my direction. "Is this the woman who bugged your place?"

"It is. Her real name is Veronica. At least that's the name she's giving me now." He gave her a pissed off side glance.

“When I questioned her about it, she told me that she was blackmailed with her son’s life in to doing it.”

I turned my attention to the woman, who was now shivering in the chair. “Who put you up to it?”

“Please. He will kill my son if I tell you who he is.”

Looking at Merric, he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head, telling me he had no idea about any kid when he slept with her. Moving to the other side of the room, I grabbed another chair, raking the metal legs across the cement floor, stopping it in front of her, taking a seat. “If you want the chance to ever see your son again, you *will* tell me what I want to know. Who put you up to it? I won’t ask again.”

The shivers that racked her body told me she was taking my threat seriously. After a few moments, she looked up at me. “I need you to promise me that if I tell you his name, you will make sure nothing happens to my son.”

Leaning forward in my chair, I took in a breath, and then informed her of the cold hard truth. “Your son’s safety is not of my concern. What *is* my concern, however, is that you found your way into my friend here’s house and bugged it for someone to spy on him.”

“Listen to me! I had no choice! They have my son and would have killed him if I didn’t do what I was told! I won’t help you unless you help me get him back! That is the only way I am telling you anything. Kill me if you have to, because if my son dies, there will be no reason for me to live.”

My time with Clarice had definitely made me soft because I was actually contemplating entertaining this woman’s demand. I looked down and shook my head, knowing I was lowering myself to total pussy status right now. “I’ll tell you what, if you give me a name, I will do my best to get your son back.”

“Not good enough. I want your *word* that you *will* return him back to me safely.”

It was becoming exceptionally difficult to keep Clarice off my mind when this woman was starting to remind me a lot of

her with these bold demands she was making. I looked up at Merric in that moment, and the look I read on his face was telling me that there might be more going on here between the two of them than meets the eye. It was as if he looked concerned for the woman, and I needed to find out just where his head was with this whole thing right now. Getting up, I motioned for Merric to follow me. “We’ll be right back,” I told her as we made our way out of the room. Shutting the door behind us, I gave him a stern look. “Tell me about your relationship with this woman.”

“My relationship? She’s nothing. Just made the mistake of bringing the wrong bitch back to my place.”

I only stared at him. “Don’t you fucking shovel that bullshit down my throat. I’m not blind, asshole. I can see the obvious concern on your face for that woman.”

Running his hand through his hair in frustration, he let out a heavy breath. “Look, I’m not *with* her. We’ve just been out a couple of times, and then I found out what she did. I had no idea she even had a son until I forced her to come here with me today.”

“So then, what’s your deal with her?”

“No deal. Just someone I was having some fun with, but now I know she was just using me so she could plant those bugs in my place to get her son back from whoever the fuck made her do it.”

I sat there for a moment, thinking about if it was Clarice in there right now in the same situation how I would feel in his shoes. I had no idea just how close or how much *fun*, as he put it, they were having, but I recognized that protective look in his eyes. He was only doing what he had done, dragging her up here to this warehouse and tying her up, because of his loyalty to me. Something I wouldn’t have ever considered if the shoe were on the other foot where Clarice was concerned. Without another word, I walked past him, back into the room, and over to the chair, taking the seat in front of the woman once again. “I give you my word, I will get your son back to

you safely, if you tell me who it is that made you plant those bugs.”

Her first reaction was to look over at Merric for confirmation that I was speaking the truth before she turned her attention back on to me. “His name is... Diego.”

Santiago's right-hand man.

Somehow this information was of no surprise to me. Chewing on the revelation for a moment, I looked back up at her. “Did you happen to overhear anything behind his reason for bugging Merric's place?”

She went silent for a moment. “I did actually.” She seemed to pause, thinking about what she'd just revealed as if she didn't know if she should have, but then continued. “When he thought I'd went into the other room to see my son, I heard him tell someone else who was with him, a big guy about thirtyish with blond hair, that he had a lead on who Cannon Church's real identity was. He wanted to use Merric as a way to possibly lead him straight to the guy. Said that he'd just hired a real bloodhound who called him a few days prior, informing him that they thought Cannon Church was residing in New York.”

Since Merric had blindfolded her on the trip here, the woman had no idea that's exactly where she was sitting right now. This was probably a worst-case scenario if I'd ever heard one. Somehow, somehow I'd messed up. As that thought ran through my head, so did my suspicions about Clarice again. I needed to ask this next question, but I wasn't sure if I even wanted to, let alone be able to handle the answer to it if it was in fact a woman he had sent. “Did he happen to say if it was a woman or a man he'd hired?”

She shook her head. “No. But I did hear him say that whoever it was had only been on the job a few weeks. He couldn't stop going on about how amazed he was at how fast they had worked to pin point Cannon's possible location. He also said that he planned on making them an offer to become permanent and use them for other jobs in the future.”

Looking up at Merric, I saw the same concern in his eyes that I knew shown in my own. I'd known Clarice for just over three weeks now. The timeline was too close for me not to worry about if it was her or not. Getting up, I walked over behind the chair the woman sat in and began untying her. Once she was free of the binds, she quickly rose to her feet and moved over to where Merric stood, watching me with a glare in her eyes. "So, I did my part, helping you with the information I had. Are you going to keep your word and help me get my son back?"

"I will. I need you to give Merric the location he's being kept in and then we can go from there."

"But I-I don't know exactly where he's being kept. Like you guys, they blindfolded me when they took me there to see him. The only time I was able to see was after I was let into the house he was being held in."

"Where were you when they picked you up to take you to him?"

"I was at the bar where they told me to meet them. Same one I met Merric at."

"Ok, how long would you say the drive took?"

She thought about it for a moment. "I'd say no more than ten or fifteen minutes. It wasn't that far away from the bar."

"Were you able to see out any of the windows while you were there?"

"No... Wait! Yes! When I used the bathroom, the small window in there was open."

"What could you see outside?"

Looking up, she began trying to recall what she had seen. "I saw two large apartment buildings. The beach just past them and... Oh! I saw Saint Jude Catholic church! I remember because the buildings color caught my attention just after I spotted the two large tower sized apartment buildings. Does that help?"

She was asking me but looking up at Merric. There was definitely more going on there than just some fun. “It does.” Pulling Merric off to the side, I began doling out orders. “Get a hold of Torin and let him know about getting some of his men together for this in the next twenty-four hours. Then you get her back home, that way Diego doesn’t become suspicious about where she’s gotten off to. She’s only been missing a few hours, so he shouldn’t send out his dogs to search for her just yet.”

“Got it.”

When we stepped back over to where the woman waited, I noticed the suspicious look in her eyes. “You’re *him*, aren’t you?”

Giving her my most threatening glare, I let her know without saying a word that she was on shaky ground right now. “And who exactly would that be?”

The gulp she took practically echoed around the warehouse. “Are you going to kill me now?”

I noticed Merric’s body tense up. “No. As luck would have it for you, I’m not him. I’m someone he sends in to get the information he needs. If he were here, though, you wouldn’t be walking out of this building alive today. Trust me.”

I wasn’t sure if she was buying the lie, I was selling, but for her sake, she needed to. “How long until I get my son back?”

“I’ll need a couple of days to set things up. We need to monitor what’s going on inside the house and how many men are there, so we don’t go in blind. How does he get a hold of you?”

“The burner phone he took from me.” She pointed to the phone that Merric now held in his hands.

I motioned for Merric to give it back to her. “Next time he reaches out and wants to bring you in to see your son, you give Merric a call right after with all the details of the meet up time, and place. Got it?”

“Yes.” She looked up at Merric with pleading eyes. “Please get my baby boy back. I am so sorry for what I did to you, but I had to. I had to do it to keep my son alive.”

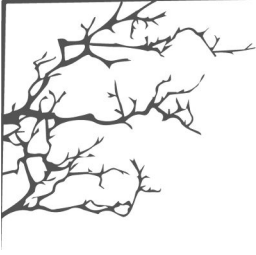
Not wanting to be in the middle of whatever was going on between the two of them, I headed for the door. “Get her back home and tell Torin I’ll be waiting for his call.” Without waiting for an answer, I made my way out of the building, and into the back of my awaiting car.

As Devin drove me to the club, I couldn’t help but roll my mind back over all the conversations Clarice and I had. There was only one question that kept popping up in my thoughts about her being hired as a spy. Why would she tell me she knew I was something more than what I’d said? What kind of spy would pull that shit and think they’d live to report it back to whoever hired them? It just didn’t make sense for it to be her, but the doubt was still there. The only way it would ever vanish would be for me to find out who it was Diego really hired. It was beginning to look like it was time to bring Diego himself in. He wouldn’t be easy to break, but if there was one thing I was good at, it was finding out what made a man tick, and what he’d be willing to die for.

It had been twenty-four hours since I’d met up with Merric and the woman. Torin had reported back to me that the woman had received a call from Diego shortly after Merric dropped her off and was meeting up with his delivery boy at the same bar tomorrow. Once the boy had been rescued, he and his mother would be on their way to a safe location. One where we could keep an eye on her and who she talked to.

Later that night, I found myself sitting in my car outside of the café, Clarice, worked at. I needed to see for myself that she wasn’t working with anyone or hiding anything from me. When the lights went off inside an hour later, I watched her exit the building and lock it up before starting her walk home for the night. Just seeing her was driving me crazy. All I wanted to do was pick her up and take her back to my place where I could torture her sexually for the information I wanted. But I knew if I did that, there would be no us, or trust from her ever again.

As I watched her, I noticed that she suddenly stopped and looked down at her phone before glancing back up and scanning the area around her a few seconds, when a tall male figure approached her. The suddenness of his appearance had me reaching for my gun, ready to jump out. That was until a streetlight showed me just who it was.



Chapter Twenty-Two Clarice

It had been a long day, and all I wanted to do was go home and take a long hot shower before I did a face plant onto my bed. Ever since things went wrong with Creed, I'd found myself in a constant state of hopelessness.

I was sad.

Really sad about how things had turned out with him.

I could admit that I'd fallen for him way too fast, in possibly the strangest situation I'd ever been put in, but even after the way we met, it hadn't stopped me.

Trying to shake off the overwhelming sadness creeping in again, I took in a deep breath of the cool night air and tried to push on when I heard my phone ping with a text. Every time it did, I practically held my breath and prayed that it was him reaching out to me. I know I told him to never contact me again, but I guess I really never thought that he would give up on us so fast. My thinking was in no way logical, but when it came to him, nothing was.

Looking down at my phone, I noticed that it was, Logan, texting me again. Why he was trying so hard to get back into my life again was beyond me. I guess the old saying was true about when a man saw you with another, it made them want you back.

Logan: Hey, I see you!

Reading the message, I was confused, and started to look around before I was about to type back, when a man approached me, startling me. "Hey, Reese."

"Logan?" I gripped my chest tightly.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare you."

“What are you doing here?”

“I know this looks a little like I’m coming off stalkerish here, but I was actually on my way to my girlfriends house and saw you. She lives just on the other side of this street. I thought maybe I’d see you the rest of the way home while I’m here.”

This popping up thing was really starting to become an annoying habit of his. “It’s ok. I’m fine. Really. You go on ahead to your girlfriends house, I’m sure she’s waiting for you.”

“Are you sure? It can be dangerous out here for a woman, walking home at night by herself these days.”

“I’m positive. Besides, I’m almost there.”

“Alright, well you have a good night then.”

“Thanks. You too, Logan.”

I turned to walk away, but then stopped to watch as he made his way down the street. It was just becoming too frequent that I had been seeing him these days, and I needed to know if he was telling the truth. Turning around, I followed him as quickly and quietly as possible, staying in the dark shadows and out of sight. He walked for about two blocks before he turned down an alley way and walked up a set of stairs to a front door, knocking on it. When the door opened, he was practically scooped up and pulled inside before it slammed shut behind him. Knowing what he’d told me was the truth left me feeling relieved. There was a time I would have done just about anything to be with him, but after what he’d done it literally broke something inside of me, and I was never able to look at him the same way again.

As I turned around and began the walk back to my place once again, the sound of a branch breaking drew my attention to the other side of the street. Scanning the area, I noticed a dark figure, moving under the trees. The way the figure seemed to stick to the shadows sent my anxiety through the roof at the possibility someone was following me. My next thought was that it was my devil, but then I knew if it was him, he wouldn’t play any games like that, he would just confront me. He lived

for the surprised look on my face when he barged into my life unannounced. Noticing the steps were shuffling away from me, I let out a relieved breath, chalking it up to just someone out for a walk. Logan's earlier words about the dangers of walking home by myself had definitely set my teeth on edge.

Reaching my house, I walked in, finding a note from Scarlett, saying that she'd went out. I figured it had to be with Kieran since she usually told me who she was out with. Setting the note down, I headed to my bedroom, quickly stripped out of my clothes, and jumped in the shower. The hot water washing over my body felt so relaxing I could have just stayed in there for hours.

Getting out of the shower, I walked back into my room with a towel wrapped around me to get dressed, but then heard what sounded like a door or a window creaking somewhere in the house. Practically jumping out of my skin, I bolted into my closet, shutting the door behind me. I knew that it couldn't be Scarlett because we always called out to one another that we were home when we walked in the door. Not wanting to turn the light on in my closet, I quickly felt around for my pj's and pulled them on before grabbing an old tennis racket and slowly opening the door. Peeking out, I waited to see if I could hear anything else. Not noticing any more sounds, I just stood there, frozen for a moment, listening harder to be sure. When I didn't hear anything, I moved out of my closet and began slowly creeping my way out of my room and into the hallway as quietly as I could. I held my racket high in the air as I went, ready to take someone's head off if I needed to. As I made my way closer to the living room, I tried to remember just where I'd set my phone down earlier when I walked in, but then I heard the noise once again. It was coming from the back window in the kitchen. Creeping further in, my heart was beating so hard it felt like it was about to burst out of my chest and make a run for the front door.

Just like I should be right now.

Spotting someone's leg, entering inside the window, I took off towards them ready to bash someone over the head, when Scarlett's bright blonde hair came into view. "Oh my god!

What in the hell are you doing?” I asked, flipping on the kitchen light to illuminate the area as I held on to my chest.

“Well, what does it look like? I’m breaking into our house since I forgot my keys and you didn’t answer the door or your phone when I called.”

“Jesus, you scared the shit out of me. I was in the shower and didn’t hear you.” I watched as she continued to struggle, trying to get in through the window. “Umm, now that I’m here don’t you want to just use the door?”

Laughing, she began pulling her head and leg back out. “Yeah, makes sense.”

Walking over to the back door, I opened it up, letting her inside, but as I went to shut the door behind her, I thought I’d seen some movement in the distance. Staring in the same spot, I’d seen it, a creepy sense of being watched came over me, causing the hairs on the back of my neck to rise.

“What are you looking at?” Scarlett asked, setting her hand on my shoulder, causing me to jump. “Geeze, what is with you tonight? Why are you so jumpy?”

“Nothing. Just thought I saw something moving around out there.”

“Probably just Jared, walking back to his car is all.”

“Oh... wait. Jared? What happened to Kieran?”

“I couldn’t deal with his secret trips he takes anymore, so I told him that it was over if he didn’t tell me where he was off to yesterday.”

“I’m guessing he didn’t.”

“Nope, and I’m done giving him anymore chances. The great sex is not worth all the secrecy crap he keeps pulling.”

“Well, can’t say I blame you.”

“Anyway, I’m beat. I’m going to go to bed.”

“Night.”

After she left the kitchen, I continued to stand there. I couldn't help the sadness that overcame me, feeling yet another loss with Kieran out of the picture now.

There was nothing left in my life now that tied me to my devil.

It had been over three weeks since I'd been abruptly dumped, and I was finally starting to move past it, thinking about him a little less as the days went on. It did help that Damon, a guy who'd been a customer at the café, had asked me out last week. When I'd noticed him the first few times, I could always feel him staring at me just before I caught him. I thought it a little strange, but then when he finally approached me, he explained how he'd almost been too shy to ask. We'd been out a couple of times since that first night and were really hitting it off. There had been no intimacy past kissing and heavy petting yet, which he had been really sweet about. I just wasn't ready for that yet and needed to move slower this time. He was nothing like Creed at all. Something I forced myself not to be bothered by. I needed to stick to the nice guy. Too many times had I'd chosen the bad ones and been made a fool of.

Tonight, Damon said that he was taking me to a really nice restaurant and told me to dress to impress. The first thing I knew I needed to do was to enlist Scarlett as my stylist for the evening. "Ok, now *this*, I think would be perfect for you."

I walked over to look at the dress she'd pulled from the rack. "That is pretty. I'm going to go try it on." Grabbing the dress from her, I made my way back to the dressing room area. Looking in the mirror, I was impressed with how stunning the dress looked on me. It was a Navy colored A line chiffon dress with diamond beading on the top, the bottom flowing down to just below my knees. It was a very classy looking dress.

I couldn't stop my thoughts from drifting to what my devil would think of me in it. Shaking that thought out of my head, I shifted back to Damon and what *he* would think of me in it. *He* was the one I needed to think about now.

Turning abruptly, I walked out of the dressing room, the sudden movement causing me to grab my head when I became lightheaded. "Hey, you ok?"

I did my best to shake the feeling off. “I’m fine. Just turned around too fast and got a little lightheaded.”

“When was the last time you ate anything? I’ve noticed that you’ve hardly eaten anything lately since things went bad with you and Creed.”

“I know. I’m trying. Just haven’t had much of an appetite lately.”

“Well, what do you say we go grab some lunch at the food court after this?”

“I think that sounds good. This dress is perfect.”

“It’s beautiful on you. Now let’s get it and get some food down you, so you don’t go passing out on me.”

It was just over an hour before Damon was due to pick me up and Scarlett was putting the final touches on my make-up.

“There. You look absolutely gorgeous. Some of my best work, if I do say so myself.”

Taking a look in the mirror, flashes of the last time Scarlett did my make up came flooding back. How could I possibly still miss someone so cruel; he would dump me after opening myself up to him so freely? I couldn’t get the way he looked at me the last time I saw him out of my head. He looked as though I’d betrayed him in some way, when all I did was be truthful.

Getting up to leave for her own date with Jared, she tapped my leg. “Are you sure you’re feeling better now?”

Since I’d gotten lightheaded in the dressing room today, she had asked me more than a couple of times if I was sure I was ok or told me that I looked pale. I definitely wasn’t a hundred percent better, still feeling a little off, but I tried my best to convince her so she wouldn’t worry, figuring it was just my nerves about going out to this fancy place tonight. “Much.”

“Good. Otherwise, I might begin to think you’re pregnant.” Her words instantly made me freeze. Looking at me harder, she leaned down in front of me. “Reese?”

“Yeah?” I asked in a haze, thinking about the birth control pill I’d missed.

“You aren’t pregnant, are you?”

Shaking my head, I started to laugh it off. “Pregnant? God no. I’m probably just feeling off because I haven’t been eating a lot lately like you said.”

She still stared at me with suspicion. “You’re sure?”

“Scar, I’m on birth control. I’m positive.”

“Ok. Well, I’ll be home later. Have fun tonight.”

“Thanks. You as well.”

“Keep your phone on you,” we both said in unison.

Ten minutes later, I found myself in the local pharmacy. This time, buying a test I didn’t ever see myself buying this soon in life. Once I was back home, I went into the bathroom and immediately read the instructions and then peed on the stick. Cleaning up, I set a timer on my phone and then anxiously began to pace back and forth in my bedroom as I waited for it to go off.

There was no way I was pregnant, right? It had only been one time. But when I looked on Google, it said it only took once.

I was really trying too hard to play stupid right now.

The timer on my phone went off, causing my heart to leap into my throat.

This was it. Taking a deep breath, I made my way back into the bathroom and picked up the test. Closing my eyes and praying one more time, I turned it over in my hand and counted to ten before opening my eyes.

Not pregnant.

“Oh, thank God!” The relief I felt right this moment couldn’t be described.

Wrapping the test up in toilet paper, I threw it away and went back into my bedroom to touch up my make-up, finishing just as Damon knocked on my front door.

Taking one more look in the mirror, I made my way through the house to answer the door. Opening it, I found a very handsome looking man on the other side of it waiting for me. Why was it when I looked at him, though, did my mind immediately flashback to the first time Creed came over to pick me up for the date he'd forced me into? Mentally slapping myself, I concentrated on the man in front of me. He wore a grey dress shirt, black slacks, and a black blazer. "You look so handsome."

"I look like a bucket of shit compared to you right now. You... you are the most stunning looking woman I have ever seen. That dress is just... I am at a loss for words, Reese."

His words caused me to blush. "Thank you." Leaning inside, I grabbed my clutch. "Shall we go?"

"Yes. But first I need you to do something for me."

"Oh?" I asked as I locked up my house and turned to face him. "What's that?"

"Wear this."

Looking at the cloth in his hands, I asked, "is that a blindfold?"

"Yes. I really want this to be a surprise tonight." Leaning in, he kissed me chastely on the lips. "You trust me, don't you?"

Did I?

Damon had never given me any reason not to trust him, so I played along, knowing he was really trying hard to do something nice for me with this surprise. "Ok. Just try not to mess up my make-up."

"Trust me, I will be very careful." Turning around, so he could put the cloth over my eyes, I felt his hand take a hold of mine as he led me to his car, shutting me inside. Getting in the driver's side, he took my hand in his again and brought it to his lips, kissing my knuckles. "I can't wait to see the look on your face tonight when you see where I'm taking you."

"I can't wait to *see* it myself." He chuckled at my underlying meaning before merging into traffic and heading to our

destination.

We made small talk on our way to wherever it was we were going, but then before I knew it the car was coming to a stop and my door was being opened. “Miss,” someone said, grabbing onto my hand, helping me from the car.

“Hey, buddy, I have her, just please park the car.”

“Of course, sir.”

I felt one hand release me as another took hold. “Are you ready for this, baby?”

Baby? Possibly the one word in the pet name calling dictionary I hated the most. And since when did Damon start calling me that?

He’d never uttered the word to me before tonight. “As ready as I can be.” I tried to sound upbeat, but something about him referring to me as *baby* had really bothered me.

Was it because my devil had already given me the pet name Vixen?

Damnit!

I really needed to stop comparing these two men. Creed was in the past and Damon was the man in the here and now. I needed to give him a chance.

As he guided me forward, I could tell when we entered the restaurant by the noise of people chattering all around us. After he gave his name to the hostess, I heard the curious pause in the woman’s voice before she spoke. “Is this a surprise dinner tonight?”

“It is.”

I could tell she melted at his sweet gesture by the *ah* noise she made before speaking again. “That is the sweetest thing ever. Well then, let’s get you two seated, shall we?”

“Yes.” Damon directed me forward for just a few moments before he helped me into a booth, sliding in next to me.

“So, do I get to see where we are now, or am I eating with this on too?” I giggled, trying to sound relaxed when for some

reason I was feeling anything but.

As his hands worked to untie the cloth, he asked, “ready?”

“I am.” The moment the cloth came off, and I was able to adjust my eyes to see clearly, I pulled in a breath of surprise mixed with serious dread. We couldn’t be where I thought we were. Looking around, I spotted the booth we sat in opening night.

Damon frowned at my reaction. “Is something wrong? I-I thought you’d like this place since it’s all the rage right now.”

Snapping out of my downward spiral into anxiety hell, I tried to reassure him. “No. This is wonderful. I’m sorry if I came across ungrateful, it’s just...” I didn’t even finish my sentence when I felt his scorching stare on my skin. It only took a slight glance to my right and the heat I’d felt was confirmed.

There he stood.

My Devil.

The way his eyes were locked on mine reminded me of the night Logan stopped by my house, and then he barged in as if he’d owned the place.

This couldn’t be happening right now. I watched, my breath forgotten as he made his way over to our table, ignoring the customers vying for his attention along the way.

Looking down, I turned to face Damon. “I’m so sorry.”

The confusion on his face was ripping away at my conscience.

“Good evening, Clarice. So nice to see you again.”

Clearing my throat, I tried to sound indifferent with only one word. “Creed.”

“You two know each other?” Damon inquired, his eyes, bouncing back and forth between the two of us.

My Devil didn’t even spare him a glance, his stare only fixated on me. “We do. Clarice and I used to *fuck*. Right here in this restaurant as a matter of fact. Would you care to see the room where I bent her over the...”

“Enough!” I was shocked by the vulgarity of his words.

“Who the hell do you think you are, speaking that way about my girl to me?” Damon was getting seriously pissed, and had every right to be, but I was still scared for him. I knew just how cruel of a man, Creed was, and needed to figure out a way to deescalate this whole situation.

As I tried to gather my bearings, the comparison of these two men in my presence was practically being shoved down my throat, and it was slowly getting harder to breathe.



Chapter Twenty-Three Creed

The moment I saw him enter the restaurant with his hands all over her, I wanted to rip his head off his shoulders and shit down his throat. This motherfucker was about to take his last breath tonight, touching what was mine. Over the past few weeks, I'd kept a close eye on my little vixen to see if she was in contact with anyone that could be tied to Santiago.

I'd found nothing.

Proving that I'd made the biggest mistake of my life that night I sent her packing.

This was my punishment.

Her here in the restaurant, I'd named after her, with *him*.

I'd seen them together a few times, but he never slept at her place, and she never slept at his. It was the *only* reason this little fucker was still even allowed to breathe.

But after tonight that was possibly going to change.

I needed to talk with her and make her see why I did what I did. I knew my words had been vulgar and hurtful, but my aim with them was meant for him, not her. When the punk started to slide out of his seat and stand to confront me, he was quickly pulled back down. "No. Please, Damon. Just ignore him and let's go somewhere else," she practically begged, her eyes pleading with him to hear her.

"You're really going to let this piece of shit speak to you like that, Reese?"

Interesting. Bet he didn't know what her real name was, like I did.

Another point in my favor.

Was I really that petty? When it came to my little vixen you're damned right I was. I would do anything to get her to leave with me tonight, and not him.

And I planned to.

"You're not leaving." She knew all too well the sound of finality in my words. What I said, I meant. If she wanted this little prick to live past his encounter with me tonight, she would hear the warning loud and clear in my voice.

"She's sure as hell not staying here with you, buddy. She is my date, so you can fuck right off. You feel me?"

I only spared him a split-second glance in annoyance before my eyes landed back on her fearful ones. The luck this guy was gambling with tonight would not pay off in the way he was hoping for.

"Damon. I'm really sorry about this, but let's call it a night. I think I need to clear things up with Creed right now, so we don't encounter this issue again when we go out."

The piece of shit's eyes practically bugged out of his head at her words. "Are you being serious right now, Reese?" He pointed at me in anger. "This asshole has done nothing but *insult* you tonight, and you're willing to call off *our* date, that I took extra time and effort to plan, in order to spend time with *him*?"

"Please understand."

"What I understand is that I've done nothing but treated you with respect and *this* is how you repay me?"

"Is there a problem here?" Keiran inquired, his timing perfect per usual.

"Great, of course you're here too, and getting involved," I heard Clarice mumble under her breath, bringing a smile to my lips.

"Yeah there is. This asshole here is harassing my girl, and I want him removed right now." His voice was reaching levels that drew others attention around us.

“Let’s talk over here, shall we?” Kieran took ahold of his upper arm and practically dragged him away from the booth before he actually started to walk on his own.

“Well, now that he’s been taken care of, shall we?” I motioned my arm in the direction of the room, she knew all too well in the back, that I had so crudely referred to earlier.

“You are seriously unbelievable, you know that?” She threw her cloth napkin down onto the table in a huff and then stormed off ahead of me. I loved watching that ass of hers as it swayed back and forth in front of me. Enticing me. Testing all of my control.

Once inside the room, I had made special for her and I, I shut the door behind me. When I turned to face her, I wasn’t ready for the fury I was met with. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

The slap that erupted in a fire across my cheek at the end of her words had definitely punctuated just how pissed off she was with me. She had every right to be, but that wouldn’t stop me from taking what I wanted. The smirk that drew up my lips had her hand flying towards my face for a second time. This time, I caught her wrist before it could make contact. “Is this how you really want to spend the evening?”

She ripped her wrist from my grip. “Are you insane? Who am I kidding, you have to be insane to think that anything you’ve done to me doesn’t warrant at least a punch into that smug face of yours. Who do think you are, talking to me and my boyfriend the way you did out there?”

That guy with her tonight was many things, but boyfriend? I’d be calling her bluff on that one. Moving forward into her space, she began backing up, playing the back-and-forth game until her ass came in contact with the table. Caging her in with my hands on either side of her, I leaned down and ran my nose up her neck, breathing in that citrus and vanilla scent she wore. I didn’t realize just how much I’d missed it. “With that ass of yours on the table, any memories coming back to you? Maybe some of the memories of what I did to you in here the last time, hm?” The quake that ran through her body answered my

question, even if she wouldn't. "Your body's telling me that it remembers."

Feeling her hands pressing against my chest, I allowed her a small amount of space. "Why?"

"Why?"

"Yes, Creed. Why are you barging back into my life after you threw me away like garbage? After what we did that night, when I opened myself up to you completely, trusting that you wouldn't hurt me the way you did."

The sting of her words punctured my cold, dark heart that was showing life once again in her presence. Releasing her, I stepped back, turning towards the door for a moment. I needed to think about what I was going to share with her, and just how much.

"Did you ruin my night just to bring me in here and turn away from me again?"

Turning back to face her, I motioned for her to take a seat. When she looked at me with defiant eyes, I lowered my voice to almost a whisper, not wanting to hear the pleading in my own voice. "Please."

Letting out an irritated breath, she sat down in the booth, folding her hands on the table. I hadn't moved to start with my words quick enough for her liking. "I'm waiting."

Finally getting my feet to move, I took the place next to her, allowing her some breathing room. Or maybe it was for me. I'd never been as vulnerable with a woman before as I was about to be with her. "First of all, I want to apologize for what I said out there about you. It wasn't meant to hurt you."

"But it did," she said still seething.

"And I just apologized for that. It's not what's important right now. What is..." My words were abruptly cut off by the knock on the door. Irritated about being interrupted, I called out, "yes?"

The door opened, and Keiran stuck his head inside. "Sorry to interrupt but we have... a situation I need to speak to you

about.”

Looking over at Clarice, she motioned for me to leave. “Go ahead. Go deal with your *secret* bullshit you two have going on.” She was not letting go of that anger, she had so tightly harnessed for me anytime soon.

“One minute and I’ll be back,” I assured her, sliding out of the booth, heading for the door. I motioned Keiran towards my office, shutting us in once inside. “What’s going on?”

“Santiago’s private plane just landed at JFK fifteen minutes ago. Diego was on it with six of his men in tow.”

Running my hand down over my goatee, I asked, “do you think it has anything to do with that woman and her son we freed?”

“As far as any of them are concerned there was plenty of evidence left to point them in the direction of Roberto Mancini. All five men were executed, so there were no witnesses to say otherwise.”

“Good. Do Torin, and Merric know about Diego’s arrival?”

“They do and they’re on their way to the airport as we speak. They have eight of their own men with them just in case shit goes down.”

“Do we have any ideas as to what brought Diego to New York? What about our rat? Hear anymore from him?”

“No word on the streets why he’s here. No meetings mentioned by any of our contacts, and nothing on the rat. I think we can safely assume he’s been dealt with after finding that bug in Merric’s place.”

Walking over behind my desk, I took a seat. I needed to do what I did best. Think. “Did we ever get any information on what it is that makes Diego tick, or something he holds of value?”

“That was actually the second thing I needed to tell you. While I was throwing that dick bag out earlier, I got a text with

a picture attached to it.” Taking his phone out, he pulled up the text and handed it to me.

“A son?” I asked, looking at the photo of a young boy, who looked to be about seven or eight years old.

“A son. And the woman who is the mother of his child is kept in a location not even his men know about. If I had to guess, Santiago probably doesn’t even know about. The only reason we were able to obtain this photo of the boy was because Diego made the mistake of going to his private school yesterday. Once he left, our guy stayed at the school and followed the boy. Only problem was that he wasn’t able to find out where they resided due to a car accident that occurred, he got caught up in the traffic jam it caused. But now that we know where the boy goes to school, it’s just a matter of time before we have that information.”

Today was Friday, so the boy wouldn’t be returning to school until after the weekend. Having Diego in my city was the perfect opportunity to snap him up, but I needed the information in order to have any kind of impact on him. I had to get a picture of the woman and the boy going into the property in order for him to take me seriously. But then there was the issue of what I would do with Diego once I was finished with him. No doubt Santiago would be alerted about his second in command going missing here in New York, bringing him and his men here to turn this city upside down, looking for him. It would do the opposite of what I had worked so hard to avoid.

“What are you thinking?” Keiran questioned.

“I was thinking him coming here would be a perfect opportunity to nab the fucker up, but then that would bring Santiago once he found out about Diego’s disappearance. Killing Diego is one thing, but killing Santiago is something that would take a lot more planning.” It was no secret that heads of the family were killed, but in our fucked-up world it was something that was shockingly still tabu. Plus, it wasn’t an easy feat unless you were close to them. “For now, we just keep an eye on him and his men, see if we can find out his

reason for the visit. Maybe he's here to meet up with that bloodhound of his he hired."

It was as if the realization had just dawned on him. "If that's the case, then that would mean his bloodhound has found something out, giving him a reason to make the trip all the way up here with a crew. I don't like this one bit, him sniffing around up here." Keiran started to pace back and forth. "He's getting too close." Taking a breath, he propped his hands on his hips. "I know you're not going to like this one bit, but I think you need to keep away from the city and stay out at the beach house until he leaves town."

"What about you, Merric, and Torin? He could come after you three to try and get to me. It's not just my life on the line here if that's why he's come."

"We don't attract the kind of attention you do. We can organize with our men and have the city limits surrounded and watch his every move without him being able to spot us. You on the other hand, go out and everyone and their mother is asking for your attention, which will draw *their* attention to you. Besides, this is the agreement we all made years ago."

He was right. It was what we had all agreed to in order to make it in the business we were in, but that didn't mean I had to like it. "I know you're right, but I want hourly reports from you, so I know what's going on. I don't want to hear the next day that something went sideways."

"Will do. Now, one thing we haven't discussed is... what about Clarice? If you are sure she is not the one Diego sent here then there's a possibility they know about her which puts her and Scarlett in danger."

I sat there for a moment, knowing what I had to do would probably send Clarice's temper skyrocketing, and I was secretly loving the fire she'd no doubt ignite into. I could put that heat to good use, just the two of us all alone out there on the beach. "I'll take Clarice with me to the beach house."

"And the roommate?" The look I gave him told him all he needed to know.

She was his worry.

“I guess I’ll be figuring that one out on my own.”

“Sounds good. Now I’m going to get Clarice and take her out to the beach house tonight. Every hour, Keiran, I mean it. If I don’t hear from you, I’m coming back.”

“Got it.”

Keiran left my office, but I still sat at my desk. How the hell was I going to get Clarice to *willingly* go with me? The chances were slim, but it wasn’t like I was above kidnapping her if I had to.

Again.



Chapter Twenty-Four Clarice

After Creed left the room, the same waiter from the last time I'd been in here, entered the room. "Hello again, Miss. Nice to see you again."

Feeling a blush color my cheeks, I tried to play the embarrassment off. "Thank you. You as well."

"Mr. Lennox wanted me to check and see if you'd like something to drink while you wait for him."

"I'll take a glass of whatever is the most expensive wine he has."

A smirk rose on his lips. "Yes, ma'am."

The waiter left the room to fetch my request, while I reveled at sticking it to my devil, if at least a little. Lord knows the man had more money than God himself, so my little stickler was probably just a speck of sand in the bucket, but still. Once my wine had been delivered, I sat, looking around the room, remembering the last time I was in here. The heat from those memories had me fanning myself. I should have gotten up and left the moment Keiran pulled him away. I should be running after Damon, trying to make things right with him.

But I wasn't.

I was sitting here.

Waiting.

I needed to know what he was going to say before Keiran interrupted. I needed to know why he threw me out on my ass that night. If he was who I thought he was why not just tell me, or tell me to mind my own business and not make assumptions? Why go so cold and cut me out? All these

questions I needed answers to, and that was the *only* reason I was still here. At least that's what I was convincing myself of.

It seemed like forever before the door opened and my devil entered, causing the room and air to somehow become smaller and more stifling. Taking a seat beside me, he wrapped one arm around my shoulders then reached for my hand. "I need you to do something for me."

I practically choked on his request. "Are you kidding me right now?"

"I'm not. Look, I will tell you what you want to know, but I need you to come with me somewhere first."

"Where?"

"That I can't tell you. All I can tell you is that I'm going to take you home, and I need you to pack enough clothes for a week."

"A week? Creed, I can't just pick up and leave, I have a job to go to tomorrow."

"You're calling in sick for the week."

"The hell I am. You need to tell me what's going on, and where you're taking me right now, or I'm walking out of here."

"I was really hoping that you'd go willingly this time."

The question that was forming on my lips suddenly came to a halt when I felt the prick from the needle in my neck where his hand had been resting, causing everything to go dark.

The next time I opened my eyes, it was light out. Trying to focus, I sat up, grabbing my head when it spun and scanned the area around me. This was not my bedroom, and it wasn't Creed's either. Where the hell was I? Thinking back to last night, I knew Creed had kidnapped me, *again*. Swinging my legs off the bed, I looked down to see that my dress had been removed from my body. I was now wearing a pair of emerald, green, silk pajamas.

That bastard undressed me and changed my clothes!

I was going to be giving him one hell of a piece of my mind. Just as soon as I could get my head to settle down. Noticing the water and ibuprofen, sitting on the nightstand, I picked them up and took both, needing to get rid of the headache I had. I couldn't believe he actually drugged me. After a few minutes, I got up and made my way across the room to the en-suite bathroom. Splashing some cold water on my face helped snap my brain out of the foggy state it was in. Patting the water off, I left the bathroom and went back into the bedroom, noticing for the first time just how elegant my surroundings were. Everything was white with dark brown wood accents. There were large glass vases with white candles inside of them spread throughout the room as decor. Hearing what sounded like water crashing against the shore, I moved to the window and looked out.

I was at the beach?

Needing answers, I left the bedroom and attempted to navigate my way through the huge house. I momentarily became distracted by how beautiful everything in it was. As I strode down the hall, I noticed the art that hung on the walls were from some very well-known artists that I'd heard of before, therefore knew just how much they were most likely worth. Finally finding an elaborate staircase, that cascaded down to the bottom floor like a waterfall, I slowly made my way down, listening for any sounds. At the bottom of the staircase, I stood on white marble flooring, looking from my left to my right, trying to figure out what direction to go in, when I heard my devil's voice. Following the sound, I came upon him, talking on the phone in the huge kitchen that looked like it had been made for a Michelin Starred Chef. The dark wooded flooring broadcasted the bright white of the cabinets with the black accent handles and knobs. The ceiling had large dark wood beams crossing over the length of the area. The appliances, all stainless steel, the stove, a Fulgor Milano Sofia pro. I wasn't an appliance junkie or anything, but I had recognized that stove as one I'd seen in a very wealthy family's home, I'd been in before at a party with Scarlett. The woman who owned the house couldn't stop going on about how much they'd paid for it.

“I’ve got to go but keep me updated.” His words snapped me out of my ogling. “I see you’re awake,” he stated, turning to look at me.

I glared at him, still furious about him drugging me. “I can’t believe you drugged me! How could you? Do you know what that could have done to me? What if you gave me too much! You could have killed me!”

He strode towards me with his hands raised up in the air in defense. “Again, if you’d have just come with me like I’d asked, I wouldn’t have had to drug you. And as for the possibility of killing you? What I gave you couldn’t have. It was only Diphenhydramine.”

“Seeing as how I’m *not* a drug professional, maybe you can explain to me exactly what that is,” I snapped.

“A high dose of Benadryl.”

“The allergy medication?”

“Yes.”

Relieved that it wasn’t anything toxic, it didn’t take away from the anger I still felt. “What you did was wrong, no matter how you spin it, and why in the hell am I here anyway?”

“Let’s go sit down in the living room, so I can explain some things to you.” He guided me to the white couch and we both took a seat. “To answer your question, you’re at our beach house in the Hamptons.”

“Our?” He couldn’t mean ours as in *us*.

“The four of us own this place. Merric, Keiran, Torin, and I.”

That explained why the place wasn’t filled with everything black at least. “Why am I here, Creed?”

Taking a deep breath, he leaned back on the couch, seeming to need a minute before he answered. I was just so confused as to why he was keeping everything such a secret. “I’m firstly going to start with why I acted the way I did that night. It was because I thought you were a spy who had been hired to find out my identity.”

I was flabbergasted by his confession to say the least. “I’m sorry, but a hired *spy*? What on God’s green earth gave you that idea?”

“In my line of business paranoia is a must, and you were too aware of things about me.”

“So in other words, I was right about you being more than just a club, and restaurant owner?”

“You were.”

“Is your name really Creed Lennox?”

“It’s the name I use here in New York to conduct business.”

“I’m not understanding.” There were too many pieces to his story that were missing.

“I’m really trying to figure out just how to navigate this whole situation with you. If I tell you anymore, it will put your life in more danger than it already is.”

That got my attention, and now I was starting to get really scared. “What do you mean exactly when you say in danger?”

“I mean there are some really bad people who want me out of the picture and will take or kill anyone close to me to make that happen.”

Sitting there for a moment, I soaked in his words, trying to swallow down the fear that was threatening to take over. He was a criminal, not that it surprised me. But what did was the fact that my life was now in danger because of it, and if that was true, what about... “What about Scarlett? She’s been around you and Keiran too.” Panic was rising up in my chest for my best friends safety. I had to know she was ok.

“She’s with Keiran. She’s safe. I promise.”

I breathed out a sigh of relief. “So, what are we supposed to do now? Why did we have to come all the way out here to this beach house? Weren’t we safe at your place with all the security you have there?”

“I got word yesterday that one of my enemies is in New York. The same enemy, I thought hired you to spy on me.”

I shook my head. Nothing he was telling me was lining up. “Ok, I know you said that the more I know the more danger it puts me in, but I need you to just be honest with me right now and tell me exactly what’s going on here. It’s the least you owe me after everything.”

Pausing for a moment, he seemed to think about it before he gave in and began.

When he finished laying everything out for me, I was yet again speechless. I had no idea what to say right now. Finding out that he was as close to a Mafia Boss as you could get on top of him being this Cannon Church everyone feared, was making my head spin again. I knew he left out the gory parts of his world for my benefit, but what he had shared with me was frightening enough to say the least. “You haven’t said anything.”

Brought out of my thoughts, I looked up at him. “I’m just trying to wrap my head around all of this. I mean *thinking* you know something about someone and then finding out that it’s worse than you ever could have imagined, is a lot to digest all at once.”

“I understand.”

“So, you said no one knows who you are besides Torin, Merric, and Keiran, but has anyone ever come close to finding out?”

His eyes never wavered from mine. “Never. Anyone who saw my face only did because they would never be able to tell anyone.”

“As in you killed them.” It was a statement, not a question, because I knew what he was saying without saying the words.

“As in they disappeared.”

I rolled everything over in my mind for another moment, thinking about the *us* part of this whole thing. Would it even be possible for there to be an *us*? Could I really be with someone like him? A man who killed people? I didn’t know,

but knowing what I did now, I didn't think he would let me go if I chose not to.

I felt his hand stroke my cheek. The tenderness in his touch contradicted with the man I now knew my devil to be. "What are you thinking?"

"I was thinking about us, and if there can even be an us. Then I was thinking about the fact that I know who you really are now and how that affects my life in terms of..."

"If you chose not to be with me," he finished my thoughts.

"Would you have me killed if I chose not to be with you?"

"If you think for one second I could ever kill you then I've done a shit job with the whole trust part of our relationship."

"Trust? Relationship? Last I checked, we had no relationship. You made it crystal clear you wanted nothing to do with me. As far as trust goes, you broke any trust I had in you the moment you kicked me out after I exposed my vulnerability to you. You had zero interest in anything about me until I showed up at your restaurant last night with Damon."

"I would like to ask you to refrain from saying his name in my presence, but I know you'll just slap me again, or tell me off." His lips curled up in a slight smile, causing my heart to shove all my common sense right out of the way to make room for all the feelings, flooding back in that never fully left.

But then I'd realized something important I forgot to ask about, or rather, *someone*. "What happened to Damon after Keiran made him leave the restaurant? Is he still...?"

"Alive?" he finished for me again.

The anger in his eyes at the mention of his name, once again, had me preparing for the worst. "Yes. Is he still alive?"

He sat there, motionless, drawing out the suspense like some sort of punishment for my concern about Damon. "He is. The little prick was put in his car and sent on his merry way with a very stern warning to never contact you again. Seems

the asshole doesn't follow directions very well, though, so he might require more convincing."

"What do you mean, he doesn't follow directions?"

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out my phone, showing the screen with a ton of texts and voicemail alerts, looking to be all from Damon. "He's been blowing up your phone as you can see. The only reason I've kept it on is because I wanted to see what he was saying. He's proving he's not the nice guy you thought he was, that's for sure."

"What do you mean? Let me see my phone." I held out my hand, waiting for him to give it to me. Reluctantly, he set it down in my hand, but didn't let go of it. "You are *not* to answer him."

"Just give me my phone, please." He let go of it, and I began to scan through the texts he'd sent. Creed was right.

Damon: Reese! Where are you??? Please call me. I need to know that you're safe!

Damon: Why aren't you calling, or texting me back, Reese?

Damon: I can't believe you just let that asshole drag me out of there, and didn't leave with me!

Damon: What kind of woman dumps a man who respects her only to stay with one who calls her a slut in front of her boyfriend????

Damon: I knew you were one of those women who just lead a man on and get everything you can from them before you dump them!

The texts continued to come in again this morning.

Damon: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said those things to you last night, I was just so upset about what happened. Please call me, baby.

Damon: Are you fucking him right now, Reese??? Is that why you can't take two fucking seconds to call, or text me?? Guess I meant shit to you!!!!

Damon: I'm going crazy here, thinking about what you're doing with him. Please call me, baby.

Damon: You're just another fucking slut! Just like all women are these days, spreading your legs for just anyone!

Damon: You have no fucking clue who you're dealing with, Reese. You will regret treating me this way! Mark my words!

Logan: Hey, my girlfriend and I were just out walking her dog and passed by your house. Your window was broken. Are you ok? I'm really worried about you. Please let me know you're ok.

I looked up at Creed, who was studying my face as I read all the lovely texts, but it was the last one that concerned me the most. "Did someone break into my house?"

"When Keiran went over last night to get Scarlett, there was another man at the house and the two of them got into it, and the window ended up getting broken in the process. Keiran didn't have time to fix it before he had to leave with her."

Jared.

It had to be. He was the only guy Scarlett had been seeing the past few weeks. I couldn't help feeling bad for the guy, even though I really didn't know him. I'd only hung out with the two of them briefly at the house a couple of times, but I knew Scarlett liked him a lot and would be really upset if something happened to him. Giving him a stern look, I asked, "was it Jared? Where is he right now?"

"I don't know if that's who the guy was, but last Keiran told me, he was knocked out cold in the living room... still alive. Which is why Keiran didn't stick around and fix the window."

Relieved that I didn't have to deliver any bad news to Scarlett about her latest squeeze, I redirected things back to my original question. I searched deep into his eyes and hoped for the answer I wanted. "You never answered my earlier

question. If I choose not to be with you, will you kill me because of what I know now?"

His jaw ticked. "No."

"I thought your rule was anyone that knew, disappeared."

"It is."

"So, why would you spare me? You haven't known me for years like Torin, Merric, and Keiran." I needed to know how he really felt about me.

"I think you know why."

"I want to hear you say it."

Leaning forward, his hand stroked my cheek again as his other hand took a hold of mine, bringing it up to rest on his heart. I could feel it beating so hard, I wondered if my hand would wear a bruise from it. "I can't even begin to explain to you the why's about how I feel because I don't even know myself. All I can tell you is that even though we haven't known one another for very long, there's just something inside of you I need." He took a moment, shaking his head, wearing a smirk on his lips. "You have made me a stupid, stupid man from the first night I laid eyes on you. I've shown and told you things I have never allowed myself to reveal to *anyone* ever before. I don't know how the hell it happened, but somehow I fell in love with you, Clarice. Even if you tell me that you don't love me back, I could never harm you, nor would I allow anyone else to. I would die before I let anything happen to you."

Closing my eyes, I tilted my chin down, pressing my face into his hand that cupped my cheek. The need to feel closer to him overtaking me. "I love you too. As much as I try and tell myself I shouldn't, I can't stop the way I feel."

"Even after everything I've told you?"

"Even after all of that."

"I'm not a good man, Clarice, but I will protect you with my life. I'm just afraid that you being in my life could endanger yours. Is that something you can live with?"

Moving closer, I took a hold of his face with both hands and stared into his eyes, seeing the truth in what he'd said. As crazy as it was, seeing how we'd only known each other for a short time, I somehow knew deep in my heart this man would protect me with his last breath. With that thought came the realization of just how much my life was about to change. "I love you, Creed. I know you will do whatever it takes to keep me safe. I'm also very aware that saying that means things in my life will change, and I'm ok with all of that, as long as I am with you."

The time for words was over. Getting off the couch, he reached down, scooping me up into his arms, and made his way up the staircase, entering a massive master bedroom in record time. The quickness of his actions had me giggling. That was until he set me down on my feet, spinning me towards the wall, pinning me there with his grip on the back of my neck.

My devil was back.

And he wanted to play.



Chapter Twenty-Five Creed

The moment we entered the bedroom, I spun her against the wall and roughly held her there. She was mine now, and I would do everything to her I'd been hungering to since the day I so stupidly let her go.

Grabbing the hair at the nape of her neck, I turned her head to the side, biting her earlobe. "You are mine completely now, Clarice. Do you understand what that means?"

She nodded her head the best she could in my grip. "I do."

"Good." Biting her earlobe again, I made sure she knew exactly what I was about to do to that body of hers, as I kissed down her neck. "First I'm going to rip those clothes from your body, and then I'm going to fuck you up against this wall, so hard, you'll beg me to stop, but I won't. Not until every drop of cum in that pussy of yours has come on my cock or in my mouth." She visibly shook from my words.

The time for warnings were over.

Keeping her pinned against the wall, I reached around her front side with my other hand and ripped open the silk shirt, I'd put on her the night before, sending buttons scattering across the room. Pushing my hand underneath the open pieces, I began massaging her breasts, squeezing the nipples, knowing how the bite of pain always drove her need higher. Mindless murmurs of pleasure began falling from her lips as her ass pressed back into my cock. Nudging her feet apart with my own, I slid my hand down her smooth, flat stomach and untied her pants before dipping two fingers deep inside of her heat, causing her to gasp out. "Oh, God!"

Wrapping my other hand around the front of her neck, I pushed her chin to the side, taking advantage of her open

mouth, plunging my tongue inside, to steal all her air. “God’s not the one fucking you today, little vixen.”

Releasing her, I ripped the shirt, and bottoms away quickly, needing to see all of her. Kicking her feet out wider, I tugged her hips away from the wall, causing her to bend at the waist. Her hands were now flat against the wall, keeping her propped up in just the right position. Swiftly undoing my belt, I dropped down onto my knees between her spread legs, craving the sweet, succulent taste of her. Shoving my tongue deep inside of her, I turned around, positioning myself under her spread legs, staring up into those beautiful eyes that glistened back at me with desire. Fucking her with my tongue, I paid special attention to her clit, spinning my tongue around it over and over again until I noticed her legs began to quake. “Oh, oh shit! I’m...” Her words abruptly cut off as her body began to shake uncontrollably, but then they quickly returned when she screamed out her orgasm, coming on my face.

Lapping up every drop of her delectable flavor, I moved back into position behind her, taking my cock out of my pants. When I noticed her body sagging, I smacked her ass, bringing her back to life from the shock of the action. “Don’t give out on me now, we’re just getting started,” I growled in her ear, planting kisses over her shoulders as she made sounds of pleasure from the small moment of tenderness, I was willing to give her. Lining up with her opening, I slowly rubbed my cock back and forth through her wet folds, coating it with her juices. If she thought this was going to be quick, she was sadly mistaken. She was going to beg me for it this time. Beg until *I* chose to give in to her.

Bending forward, I pressed inside of her with only short, shallow strokes, not fully seating myself within her walls. The sounds falling from her lips were telling of her building frustration from the action as she tried to push back into me, forcing me to take her deeper. “You want my cock deep inside you, little vixen?”

“Y-yes.” She was a trembling mess, barely able to say the single word.

“You’re going to have to earn that pleasure... by begging me for it.” I punctuated my words, biting onto her shoulder.

“You are such a bastard,” she growled, gaining strength in her words, the anger underlying them.

“You already knew I was.” Gripping the hair on her nape again, I roughly pulled her head back towards me. “*Now beg me to fuck you.*” I punctuated my words with a slap to her ass once again, but this time hard enough to make her cry out.

“Fuck Me! Please! Creed! Please fuck me!”

Moving in close, I licked my way up her neck, nipping at it hard. “My pleasure.” Thrusting myself deep inside of her, she tried to cry out again, but there was no sound. The sudden intrusion of my cock, stealing her breath. Hammering into her hard, I gripped her hips, pulling her ass into me tightly, allowing her body to fold once again against the wall as I moved inside of her. Her words were garbled with ecstasy when she came again, screaming. Continuing my assault on her, I pressed myself deeper inside of her, grinding against her ass with each thrust, needing to drown myself further into her heaven, I would never get enough of. She was mine now, but I knew even if I fucked her day and night, it would still never be enough. Her walls began to strangle my cock, and I knew I wouldn’t last much longer. Picking up my pace, I pushed inside of her faster and harder until I came so hard, I felt unsteady on my feet.

“Fuck!”

Wrapping my hands around her waist, she let out a gasp when I pulled out. Picking her up in my arms, I moved us over to the bed. Once we were under the covers, I drew her into me, spooning her body with mine. “Are you ok?”

A few moments of silence hung in the air before she answered, “I’m definitely ok. But...”

“But what?” I couldn’t help but wonder if I’d gone too hard on her.

Twisting around, she looked up at me. “I’m starving. You never fed me.”

I fell back onto the bed, relief flooding me as I chuckled at her request. Sitting up, I cupped the back of her neck, bringing her closer before smashing my lips to hers. “My little vixen is hungry, huh?”

“She is. Any chance you get DoorDash out here? I’m really craving Chinese food.”

“What my queen wants, she gets.” I rolled over and picked up my phone to place the order when I noticed Keiran’s check in flash across the screen with no updates to report.

After we ate, the rest of the day and night was spent doing what I loved doing the most with her.

Being inside of her.

Waking up the next day, I found myself alone in bed, which brought me to sit up quickly. “Clarice?” I called out, not getting a response. “Clarice?” When she didn’t answer, I started to worry that something had happened to her. Sliding my pants on quickly, I checked the en-suite bathroom before charging out of the room to search for her. “Clarice!” The panic I heard in my voice was not a sound I was familiar with. I’d never felt this kind of panic rise up inside of me for anyone before. Running down the stairs, I continued to call out her name several more times as I moved through the house, searching every room. I was really starting to regret just how damn big this place was for the first time since we’d purchased it. It wasn’t until I walked through the French doors, my phone at my ear to call Keiran, that I spotted her sitting on the private beach area we owned with the house. Relief was a small word for what I was feeling right now.

“Hello?” Keiran greeted.

“Never mind. False alarm. I just couldn’t find Clarice, but I’ve got eyes on her now. Any more updates while I have you?”

“He’s still at the hotel that he checked into last night. We’re surveying everyone who comes and goes, to see if we’re able to match their pictures to anyone we might recognize as someone who’s been in close contact with you. I

myself haven't recognized anyone in the photos that I've gotten as anyone I've seen before, but I'll email them to you, so you can start to go through them. Maybe you'll see something I don't."

"Sounds good. One more thing. Where are we on Nicky? Think he's up for a job?" Nicky was a kid, Keiran, had brought in a couple years back and had been mentoring. We'd discussed in the past, giving him a job, but Keiran hadn't thought he was quite ready for it.

"Nicky is ready. I've given him a couple of small jobs and he's been solid. What are you thinking about?"

"I want to put him on Clarice. Still think he's ready?"

"I think the kid would die protecting her, but how's that all going to work with you in the picture?"

"I only want him on her when she's out of my sight. Once she's with me, his job is done for the day."

"Alright, I'll figure things out on my end. I have him wrapping up another job right now, but he'll be ready to go when you get back. Speaking of; Scarlett wants a call from Clarice. She wants to hear for herself that she's safe with you. She's been a real pain in my ass that one since I knocked her boyfriend on his ass. I'm praying Diego will get his fucking ass out of this town today, so I can drop her back off."

I heard what he was telling me, but I also heard what he wasn't. "I'll have her call Scarlett in the next hour. Anyway, keep me updated, and I'll let you know if I recognize anyone."

"Got it."

Ending the call, I made my way down to the beach area, taking extra care to move silently. Walking up behind her, I crouched down to kiss her cheek.

"Oh my god! Shit! You scared the crap out of me."

"I'd say we're even then."

Understanding what I'd meant, her eyes went soft. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. This morning when I woke up, my stomach was bothering me, so I came out here to

get some fresh air. I was so enamored by the ocean that I decided to sit here a little longer since I knew you were still asleep.”

Taking a seat next to her, I wrapped my arm around her and pulled her in close, kissing her on top of her head. I released her a little, still keeping her near as I took in our surroundings. No one could ever connect us to this place since we’d put it in Torin’s childhood teachers’ name, so I knew it was the safest place to be right now. But I wouldn’t relax until Diego was out of my city, and I had that bloodhound he’d hired in my possession. Once I had that fucker, I could turn the tables and break him for information on Diego, and Santiago. “Are you feeling better now?” I asked, closing those thoughts down.

“Yes. Much better. I think I was just so hungry last night; Chinese food was probably not the best answer. Sometimes if I don’t eat and then pig out on greasy food, I pay heavily for it the next day.”

“As long as you’re ok.”

“I’m fine.”

“I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Oh?”

This was the part of my life there was a good chance she’d come to resent. “Now that you and I are together, there are going to be... certain precautions, I’m going to need you to understand that have to be taken.”

She turned inward to face me. “What kind of precautions?”

“Well, for starters, I need to know where you are at all times. I can’t have you sneaking off on me, even if I’m asleep.”

She seemed to think about the reasoning for my demand for a few beats. “Ok. I guess I understand why you’d need to know where I am. What about when I’m at school? I still have another semester left.”

“I would really love it if you could switch to homeschool, but if you can’t, or don’t want to, I can make some arrangements to make sure you stay safe.” She’d told me she knew her life would change, but I don’t think she really took under consideration the magnitude of just how much.

“And what about my job at the Café?”

“Working is not something you’ll need to do.”

“But I like my job. Plus, why would I continue going to school if I didn’t plan on finding a job after graduation?” She paused for a moment, looking down at our joined hands. “Look Creed, I understand you have a lot of money...”

Her words cut off abruptly as if she wasn’t sure about what she wanted to say exactly. “I do have a lot of money, Clarice. More money than I’ll probably ever be able to spend in a lifetime.”

“And that’s great... for you. But I don’t want to just be absorbed into your life, only being your girlfriend. I want my *own* part of life that *I’m* allowed to live and make my own money. I want to be able to still be me while being in a relationship with you. Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

I nodded my head. I knew, Clarice, was not the type of woman who would just allow a man to lead her around by the hand, showering him with nothing but agreements. It’s probably the thing that drew me to her from the very first night I met her when I overheard her telling Torin off for calling her a bitch.

“I love that you don’t just want to be my arm candy.” Turning my body into her, I pulled her face closer. “I knew from the first night I met you that you were no pushover, Clarice. Not with the way you told Torin off for calling you a bitch... something I still need to make sure he apologizes to you for.” We both laughed. “Look, I want you to be happy and to be yourself. I want you to do all the things you want to do, but I also want you to stay safe, and that’s where your cooperation is important.”

“So, what exactly happens then? Do I get a bodyguard that will be with me 24/7 or something now?”

“Not exactly. I’m just going to have someone with you when I’m not able to be. He won’t be in your way or stand out like a sore thumb, he’ll just be part of the crowd in the Café, or a student in your class. He won’t be by your side all day like a typical bodyguard would be. He’ll just be around, so if anything goes down, he’s there to step in.”

She went into deep thought, and I started to wonder if she was worrying that her life would become a gilded cage, she would never escape.



Chapter Twenty-Six Clarice

This by far had to be the craziest conversation I'd ever had in my life. Just over a month ago I was an extreme introvert that never went out, only sat home reading books about fictional characters living an exciting life. Now I was dating a *Boss* who had more money than God. Did things to me sexually I'd never known I desired. And now he was asking me to be a part of his life. A life that would change mine in ways I probably couldn't even begin to conceive. This would be the defining moment in my life when I'd need to choose which way to go at the split in the road. One path was paved with a familiarity of the life I used to live. One filled with safety and a consistency; I'd be comfortable with. The other, an unmarked path into a dark, heavily wooded forest with no way to see what lie up ahead of me. There was a good possibility, I'd find someone else later on in life if I chose not to be with Creed, but it would never be what I have with him.

The question was... would it all be worth it?

Was the love I had for Creed strong enough that I could deal with everything that came with being with him, including the what if's. What if something happened to him? What if he was killed?

"What's going on inside that head of yours? You've been quiet for quite some time now."

There would be no way to sugarcoat this. Not that I'd ever really been good at doing that. "I was just thinking about my choices right now. If I choose to not do this with you, then I would go back to a life I'm familiar with and know how to live. If I stay with you, then who knows what lies ahead of us. There will be all of these outside elements I'd have to deal with now, the worst one being... what if something happens to you? What becomes of my life then? I won't be able to go

back to my old life. It's just... I know I'm babbling, but I can't help thinking about all of that."

Leaning in closer, he pulled my chin up, and I sunk into his eyes. "It is a lot to take in, I know, but I give you my word that I will do everything possible to keep your life as normal as it is now. I've worked very hard to keep my identity a secret for just that reason, I didn't want to give up all the normalcy in my life. I wanted to be able to come and go without issue, and I won't say it hasn't come in handy more often than not. Plus, I'm able to make decisions without the threat of being discovered. It's something that has allowed me to be more clearheaded, and precise with my strategies."

"But someone's getting close and possibly knows who you are now."

He took my hands in his, giving them a squeeze. "If someone really knew who I was, I would be dead right now instead of in this most beautiful place with you. Trust me when I say many have tried to find out my identity and many have failed."

Deep in my heart, I knew I was already all in for wherever life took me with him, be it good or bad, but my mind just wouldn't shut up with all the possibilities that could arise. He was right, though, we were here in this beautiful place, and this would be the first step in immersing myself in his life completely, and trust that he would keep us safe. "I trust you to keep me safe."

Moving in closer, his lips met mine in a passionate kiss, his mouth, showing me his gratitude without words, and it was the best thing I'd ever felt. Leaning away, he placed his hands on my shoulders. "What do you say to getting out of here and taking a drive into town to do some shopping and then have lunch?"

"Just when I think I couldn't love you more, you go and throw shopping, and lunch into the mix."

The huge grin on his face said it all. "So, you love me, huh?"

Telling someone you were falling for them was light years different than telling them you were there, fully in love with them. We had already said the words earlier, but for some reason saying them again made everything feel even more real.

“Clarice?”

Looking up at him, I could see he was laughing at me. “Why are you laughing at me?”

He simply shook his head and took my face in both of his hands, pulling me in for a chaste kiss. “I love you, my little vixen.”

I couldn’t help the blush that colored my cheeks. I was happy. “You sure?”

“You wouldn’t be here and know what you do about me if I didn’t.”

The grin that cut through my lips couldn’t be hidden. I loved him and he loved me. We were starting a life together and I couldn’t have been happier. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pushed forward and took him down to the sand, kissing him like I’d never kissed any man before.

Once we’d gotten done with our long hot shower, that had me feeling very relaxed after the two orgasms he’d given me, he wrapped us up in towels and guided me into the bedroom. “Wait. I have nothing to wear. Do you have something I can put on until we go shopping?”

He moved over to the closet, opening the doors. “I’d have to disagree with you on that. You have a whole closet full of clothes here.”

Surprised didn’t even cover it. Stepping into the walk-in closet, that looked like a whole other room, I scanned all the clothes that hung before me. Running my hand over them, I looked at what had to have been thousands of dollars of top brand-named clothes. I spotted Chanel, Gucci, Prada, Dior, Hermès, and Dolce just in the few pieces I looked at. “These are for me? How?”

“For you. I know that body of yours so well, guessing your size was easy. Try something on.”

Turning to face him, I reached out and hugged him. “I can’t believe you did this. Thank you.”

“Anything for my queen.” He slapped me on the ass. “I’m going to my closet to get changed. Meet you in thirty. Dress casual.”

I watched him walk out of the closet, leaving me alone with all the beautiful clothes to choose from.

Casual?

My closet was packed with casual. This closet was filled with anything but.

After ten minutes of perusing, I picked out a really cute pair of black, capri pants and paired them with a cream-colored Micro shirt, and some black, flat sandals. I grabbed a cream-colored, light sweater just in case I got cold. The weather wasn’t cold, but it wasn’t too warm out today either. Opening the drawers, I found the softest bras and underwear. Very sexy bras, and underwear I might add with a few other scandalous outfits, I’d definitely be wearing for him later.

My Devil did good.

Noticing there was a corner, I hadn’t gone in, I found a make-up vanity. Opening the drawers, I again was pleasantly surprised by some of the most expensive brands of make-up. He’d really thought of everything. Twenty minutes later, I was dressed, having added some mascara and lip-gloss. Putting my hair up in a ponytail, I took a final look in the mirror.

“Simply gorgeous.”

I turned at his words. “There’s nothing simple about this closet or the items in it, but I do love them all.” Moving over to where he stood, propped on the door frame, I stretched up onto my tiptoes and pulled him in for a kiss. “Nice job on the lingerie by the way. I’ll be trying some of that on a little later tonight for you.” I gave him a playful wink, running my hand down his chest, coming within inches of what I knew was a very hard cock and walked past him.

Before I could make it two steps, I was pulled up short. “Careful, little vixen, I may have to punish you *hard* later for teasing me,” he breathed in my ear, nipping it to punctuate his words, releasing me a moment later with a slap to my ass. “Let’s get going before I change my mind and fuck you senseless.”

The things this man did to my lady bits with only words. “Decisions, decisions,” I teased as we made our way out of the bedroom and down the stairs.

Following him into the garage, I was again bewildered when the lights came on one by one, illuminating the huge space. There must have been ten or more cars in here. “How many cars do you need?”

He laughed at my astonished gazing. “There not all mine. Torin, Merric, and Keiran all have cars that they keep here.” Walking over to a cupboard, containing a number pad on it, he punched in a code to unlock it, showing where they’d kept all the keys for these vehicles. There were Ferrari’s, Mercedes, and Bugatti’s, but the oddest thing that didn’t fit into the class of high dollar cars in this garage was the one he led me to. A 2023, black on black Ford Bronco. “This is yours?” I was surprised to say the least that the man I knew would drive a regular Ford Bronco.

“You have something against an American made vehicle?”

“Not at all, just didn’t see you driving something like this.”

Opening the passenger side door for me, he smiled. “Part of that whole normalcy thing I was telling you about, earlier.”

I slipped into the seat. “Well, I gotta say I love it.”

“Good.” He kissed me, shutting me inside.

Pulling out of the drive, we headed out onto the road, the top open. Reaching over, he turned on the radio and yet another surprise landed in my lap. The song he was playing on the radio was a *country* song by Jason Aldean called Tonight looks good on you.

My Devil listened to country music?

“You listen to country music?”

He looked over at me with a smirk. “It goes with the American made vehicle.”

That reasoning got a laugh out of me.

As we rode along, the music playing over the radio, the wind whipping through my hair, I found myself in a perfect moment. Right now, in this moment, everything was perfect.

I was in love with the man next to me, and he loved me.

We were staying in this beautiful beach side home in the Hamptons.

And the sex was off the charts.

What more could a girl ask for?

“What are you thinking about over there?”

“Just enjoying this moment.”

Smiling over at me, he picked up my hand, pressing his lips to my knuckles. “When we get back to the house I plan on having a lot more moments with you.”

The thought sent a shiver down my spine because what my devil promised, my devil delivered.



Chapter Twenty-Seven Creed

After we'd come back from our trip into town, I made it my mission to make Clarice come over and over again the rest of the night. I think we had been in just about every room in this house, fucking our brains out, before finally falling into bed at almost three in the morning, passing out. Keiran had continued to update me with Diego's movement. Dinners, hookers, and dinner with hookers seemed to be his thing. But Keiran and the others had yet to spot him with anyone other than the hookers, or the men he'd arrived with. This fucker had not chosen my city to come to for a vacation. He was there for a reason, but that reason hadn't emerged yet. When it did, my men would make sure we knew just who we were dealing with and plan a way to bring that individual in.

Hearing a weird sound, I opened my eyes to find myself in bed alone yet again, but when I heard the sound again, I'd known she hadn't gone too far. Swinging my legs out of bed, I made my way to the bathroom, finding Clarice hunched over the toilet. "Hey, what's going on? Are you ok?" I moved in closer, rubbing her back in soothing strokes.

Putting her finger up, to let me know she needed a minute, she flushed the toilet and got up, going over to the sink to wash her mouth out. "I don't know what's going on. I woke up this morning, feeling sick to my stomach. The next thing I know, I'm emptying everything I ate yesterday into the toilet."

"You said your stomach was bothering you yesterday too. You sure you're not sick? Maybe I should take you into town to the doctor's office and have them check you out."

"I'm sure I'm fine."

When she turned to face me, her whole body became wobbly as if she was struggling to stay upright. I reached out

to steady her. “I think we should take you in.”

“I just got a little lightheaded from all the vomiting. I just need a large glass of water and some crackers, and I’ll be good as new.”

Guiding her back into the bedroom, I helped her into bed. “Alright, but if you aren’t better in a couple of hours we’re going to the doctor’s. I’m not taking any chances.”

She lazily nodded. “Deal.”

It had only been twenty minutes before she was back in the bathroom, hunched over the toilet once again. So, after I’d gotten her cleaned up, I loaded her into the car, and we headed into town.

We sat in the waiting room for only five minutes before our name was called. It was these kinds of situations where money came in very handy. A few hundred dollars had gotten us moved to the top of the list. After checking her over, the doctor had prescribed some fluids for her, finding she was dehydrated. Then they ran some other tests, taking her to a room down the hall, bringing her back a half hour later. When she was wheeled back into the room, she looked even more pale than the last time I’d seen her, causing me to startle at the sight of her. “How come she looks worse?” I questioned the nurse accusingly.

She flipped the brakes on the wheelchair on and helped Clarice back onto the bed, looking back and forth between us. “I’ll just let you two talk.” She quickly exited out of the room, leaving me with a teary-eyed Clarice.

Walking over to the bed, I sat down on the edge and grabbed her hand just as she burst out crying. “What is going on, Clarice? You’re starting to scare me here.”

Calming down, she took in a deep breath. “I-I’m pregnant.”

My world spun on its axis as she stared up at me, waiting for my reaction.

Pregnant.

“It’s mine?” The question was a stupid one since I’d known she hadn’t been with anyone else while we were apart, but it was a question I still needed answered.

“Yes. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean for this to happen. I still can’t believe that it happened, and I saw the test with my own eyes.” More tears fell from her eyes.

Did she think I was mad about the pregnancy?

Was I upset about it?

The short answer was no, but this would be another change in her life added on top of what I’d already thrown at her.

As well as a change in my own.

There would now be two lives I’d need to protect. Two lives for my enemies to use against me if they were ever discovered.

“Please tell me you don’t hate me,” she sobbed out, making me realize that I hadn’t said anything.

Leaning down, I brought her head closer, kissing her on her forehead. “I could never hate you. It was just a bit of a shock, but a good one. I know we didn’t plan for this, but it happened, and I couldn’t be happier about it.”

“Really? she sniffed. “This whole thing is my fault. I forgot to take my pill. One freaking day and I end up pregnant.”

Realizing maybe she didn’t want this, I asked, “is this not something you wanted in life, having a child? Or is it that you’re having it with me?”

She shook her head. “No. I’ve always wanted kids, and to have one with you is great. It’s just... I never thought I’d be pregnant this early in life, so it’s just a little jarring, you know?”

I chuckled a bit, knowing the amount of protection I had planned for her just got doubled. “I do know. But I also know that even though we didn’t plan for this, I want to do this with you.”

“I want this with you too.”

“Then we’re going to do this, you and me.” Another hour went by before they finally felt she was hydrated enough to leave and go home. We’d stopped on the way back to the house and picked up some crackers she liked as well as some Pedialyte, and the prescription for the prenatal vitamins the doctor had prescribed for her. She hadn’t said much on the ride home, neither one of us did. We were both digesting this news we’d been given, knowing all of our priorities in life were about to significantly change now.

Pulling into the garage, I went over to help her out of the car. The look in her eyes said it all. She was scared. I brought her in for a hug. “Everything is going to be ok; I promise. We just need to take this one day at a time. I need you to know that I will be here for you, anything you need. Day or night.” Those words brought another issue up in my head, another one I knew would pack yet another level on the weight she was already feeling. But this one wasn’t open for discussion. It needed to happen. I would wait until later to deliver that news. Right now, I just wanted her to rest up and feel better.

After I got her to lay down, she went out like a light, giving me time to call Keiran and update him on my situation, and where things will go from here.

He picked up on the third ring. “Everything ok?”

“Everything is good... but just got a hell of a lot more complicated for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Clarice wasn’t feeling well, so I took her into town to the doctors, and we found out she’s pregnant with my child.”

He was silent for a moment. “Wow. Well, I’d say you just obliterated the fuck out of the rules you set for yourself. How do you want to handle this?”

I was pacing now, running my hand over my face, and head. “Do you trust Nicky?”

“I do.”

“No. I mean do you trust the kid enough to bring him in?”

“Oh.” He took a beat. “I do. I’ve put him through some fucked up loyalty tests recently, he’s currently on another one as we speak with that job I told you I had for him. If he passes this one, I’d say the kid is golden.”

“I need you to be sure because I’m going to need him with Clarice 24/7, whether I’m there or not.”

“I’m going to be straight forward with you, I don’t like the idea of bringing anyone else into the loop, but considering the situation, I don’t see another way. He’s young and wants to make a name for himself with us, so I think he would be the best man for the job.”

“Then if he does pass your last test start the process, but you had better make one thing crystal fucking clear to the kid. His life only keeps going as long as hers does. Something happens to her or my baby, his will end.”

“I will be sure it’s made crystal clear.”

“Good. Tomorrows Monday is your guy set up to be at the boys school to follow them home?”

“He’s actually staying at a motel just a mile down the street, so he can be there first thing in the morning. He’s hoping the mother drops him off and he can just follow her back. That way if traffic shit happens again, he’ll already know where they’re headed.”

“Smart. I like it.”

“He’s good. Thinking about keeping him on the payroll.”

“I want the picture the second it hits your phone.”

“Got it. Hey.”

“What?”

“Congratulations, man.”

I let out a disbelieving chuckle. I was going to be a fucking father. Me. “Thanks, man.”

“But I will say this. God help you if you have a little girl.”

Fuck!

“I think you mean God help the little fucker that tries to date my little girl one day.”

“That too.” We both laughed, and then he updated me on what still wasn’t going on. Diego had met up with no one yet.

Ending the call, I sat for a while longer, looking out the window, watching as the waves crashed against the shore, imagining what it would be like, coming up here with my kid and...

My thoughts were interrupted by the two arms encircling my waist. “What are you looking out there and thinking about?”

Placing my hands over hers, I turned to face her, kissing her lips. “I was just thinking about how great it will be when we come up here with our son or daughter.”

The smile that spread across her face told me she was growing into the idea too. “That would be so fun. We could take family photos on the beach. Teach them about the ocean. Go on picnics. It will be perfect.”

Leaning down, I cupped her face, kissing her again. “How are you feeling?”

“Much better. This little one seems to be a trouble causer only in the mornings so far.”

I rubbed my hand over her still flat stomach. “Well, he or she will be my child so that may change later.”

She giggled. “I’m sure it will. I’m feeling a little hungry. Do we have any fruit?”

“We do.” Opening the fridge, I pulled out some cut up watermelon, pineapple, and mangos, setting the containers onto the counter.

I watched as she dove in. “These mangos are so good. Want some?”

Moving in closer, I opened my mouth, taking the offered piece from the fork. “They are good.”

The rest of the day, we spent relaxing and watching movies.

Hearing my phone go off, I picked it up, seeing a text from Keiran, telling me Diego was on the move and they were on him.

Maybe we'll finally find out what or who he's here for and possibly get our hands on whoever he's hired to find out my identity.

Being out here with Clarice was heaven, but reality wouldn't ever go away.

“Everything ok?”

I kissed her on the head. “Everything's fine. Do you feel up to going out for a nice dinner in town tonight, or are you still wiped out?”

Perking up at my words, she grinned. “I thought you'd never ask. I've been waiting for you to ask me to go somewhere fancy, so I could wear that black, laced dress by Dolce&Gabbana.”

Getting up, I pulled her to her feet, bringing her in close to me for a hug, her eyes gazing up at mine. “Then you get that fine ass of yours upstairs and start getting ready while I take care of everything else.”

She practically jumped up and down in my arms, kissing me before taking off up the stairs. “I'll be ready in forty!” she called out over her shoulder half way to the bedroom.

No woman got ready in forty minutes, so I knew I had plenty of time to make all the arrangements I needed for what I had planned tonight.

It had taken me just over a half hour to get everything lined up for tonight and now it was time to shower and get myself ready.



Chapter Twenty-Eight Clarice

Getting out of the shower, I walked into the big, wonderful closet that was filled with the most beautiful clothes I'd ever seen, heading straight for the dress I so badly wanted to wear.

Boy, if Scarlett could see me now.

I would have called her and faceted her while inside this closet right now if I knew she wasn't having a fit about being with Keiran. Thinking back to when I spoke to her yesterday, she was clearly ready to murder him with her bare hands.

"I swear to God Reese, if he doesn't stop hovering over me and telling me what to do, Creed is going to get his friend back without his balls! I hate him so much! He broke our window with Jared's head when he put him through it. Does Creed know if he was taken to the hospital?"

"He said that he didn't even know who it was in the house, but he said that he was knocked out in the living room but still alive."

"Ya, well, he'd better be ok. Keiran paid for that shit he pulled with Jared after we left. I clocked him good upside the head in the car on the way to this prison, he's locked me up in. Off of me now, and on to you, Damon must be freaking out about you disappearing on him. Have you heard from him?"

She thought she was pissed about Keiran's behavior, but she hadn't heard the way Damon had spoken to me yet. "Ya, about that. You wouldn't believe the texts, and voicemails he sent me" I preceded to relay them to her, hearing her getting more and more pissed on the other end.

"What a fucking dick! I'm like in shock with how he spoke to you. Wait. Are you sure Creed or Keiran didn't make that

shit up and somehow text you from his phone?”

“I would say that was a possibility if it weren’t for the voicemails he left. It was his voice.”

“Oh, that’s right. I didn’t think of that. I’m just so shocked by his behavior. Goes to show you that you really just don’t know somebody. Current situation included. I am so sorry, Reese. I feel like all of this is my fault. If I hadn’t made you go to that club none of this would have ever happened, and you wouldn’t be mixed up with that asshole.”

“About that.”

“What about it.”

“First. None of this is your fault. It was my dumb ass that walked into the wrong door that night, interrupting their meeting, so don’t blame yourself.”

“That wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t drug you there in the first place, though.”

“Scar, none of it matters anymore. I’m in love with him.”

“You are?”

“Yes. He loves me too.”

“Well, if this shit isn’t just a page out of one of your crazy ass books.”

“I know. It is probably the craziest thing to ever happen to me in my life.”

After we had talked a little longer and she was sure I was ok; we ended the call. I wasn’t able to really say too much to her about the situation with Creed and I, not knowing exactly what she’d been told by Keiran. Tomorrow, though, I needed to call her and tell her the big news about the baby. Who knew how she would take that one.

As I sat at the little make-up vanity, it hit me just how much my life had changed in only a matter of forty-eight hours. So much had happened that I was still coming to terms with it all. It was all good things, but for someone who used to

live a closed in life like I did, to then go to this kind of life, was like a serious head spinner.

I finished up my make-up and twisted my hair into an updo to show off my shoulders tonight.

Looking up, I spotted Creed, gazing at me in the mirror. “You look stunning.”

Turning around, I noticed that he was still in the same clothes from earlier. “And you look like you’re not ready yet.”

Moving in closer to me, he leaned down and kissed me on the cheek. “Never seen a woman actually get ready in forty minutes before.” Why was it when he mentioned that did I immediately envision him with that woman, Natasha? “What’s wrong?”

The sour feeling, I felt in my stomach at the thought of her must have shown on my face. “Nothing. Just hearing you say that made me think of your ex, Natasha.”

Letting out a heavy breath, he leaned in. “I think I made it very clear she wasn’t ever my girlfriend, so put her out of that mind of yours. She doesn’t even deserve a seat in the spectators section of our relationship.”

I looked up at him, a smirk growing on my lips. “I know. Is it too early to use the whole *must be the hormones* excuse yet?”

He chuckled at my question. “For you, no. I’m going to jump into the shower and get changed so we can get going. Feel like soaping me up?”

Getting up, I looked down at myself. “In this dress? Are you crazy? No way.”

He cupped his hands over his heart. “Ah, striking out already.”

Laughing at him, I shoved him out of the closet. “Go get ready so we can go. The baby and I are hungry.”

He stopped and turned to me, cupping my face in his hands. “I like the sound of that.” Kissing me, he headed to the en-suite bathroom.

“I’ll be awaiting your arrival downstairs!” I called out, walking out of the bedroom, heading to the kitchen to look for some of those crackers we’d bought for me yesterday. My stomach was beginning to feel a little queasy from being so hungry. Entering the kitchen, I went over to the cupboard and pulled a sleeve from the box and tore it open. Grabbing one out, I shoved it into my mouth, instantly feeling my stomach calm down a bit. Reaching for the next one, I heard a noise come from the back door that sounded like glass braking. Setting the crackers down, I brushed my hands together to remove the crumbs and went to investigate. “Creed? Is that you?”

Peeking around the corner, I started to call out for him again when I noticed a smaller sized hole in the window next to the back door, and a baseball on the ground just inside the doorway. Picking it up, I looked outside the window to see if I could notice anyone, figuring a kid or someone hit it through the window on accident. Not noticing anyone, I unlocked the door and stepped outside. “Hello?”

When no one appeared, I moved out further on the back cement pad, towards the ocean, searching the area for the culprit. “Hello! I have your baseball!”

Nothing.

Maybe they were afraid they’d get into trouble and had taken off.

Shrugging the incident off, I turned around and began to make my way back to the house when I felt my body being pulled backwards, as a cloth was shoved over my mouth.

As my world began to turn dark, I heard a voice say. “You really should be more careful where you leave your phone these days, *Clarice.*”



Chapter Twenty-Nine Creed

Stepping out of the shower, I headed into my closet, picking out a black suit for the night. As I got dressed an uneasy feeling started to creep over me. The house was too quiet. Eerily so. Shaking the feeling off, I figured that I was just being paranoid; we were safe out here. It was just knowing I was having a baby with the woman; I was going to ask to marry me tonight that had me so on edge. Was it too fast to ask her to marry me?

Possibly.

But I was sure of two things. One, I loved this woman more than anything in the world, and second, we were having this baby together. I wanted a family and everything that came with it being with Clarice. More than I'd ever thought possible.

Splashing on some cologne, I gave myself one final look and headed out of the bathroom, making my way downstairs. "You ready to go, my little vixen?" Checking my cufflinks as I called out for her, I waited for a response.

One that never came.

That feeling I'd brushed off earlier was back in full force. "Clarice?"

With no answer in return, I was now in panic mode, moving throughout the house, calling her name over and over again. "Clarice! Answer me!"

Taking my phone out of my pocket, I started to call Keiran, but a call from him was already coming in. The feeling I got deep in my gut was a bad one. Really bad.

"What's happening?" I asked, still searching the house.

“You can come back to the city now. Seems Diego is finished with whatever the hell it was he came to do. He just boarded Santiago’s jet and took off.”

A feeling of dread ran rapid in my body like I had never felt before. I’d known that there was no way possible he could have grabbed Clarice, and then somehow made it to the airport and onto the plane that quickly, or without any of my men spotting her with him, but the timing was just too close. “Clarice is missing.” My voice felt empty of hope and packed with fear.

“What?” Keiran practically shouted. “When?”

“Just now. I went to take a shower and she came downstairs to wait for me, it only took me about twenty minutes, but she’s not fucking here, Keiran. I’ve looked everywhere for her in this...” My words faltered at the sight of the window broken by the back door that was cracked open slightly. Pushing the door open, I stepped outside, scanning the area for her, but found nothing. “Fuck!”

Turning to head back inside, I came to a stop, spotting a baseball, lying on the sand next to a bush. It was just the right size. Picking it up, I circled around. “Clarice!” I called her name out several more times, begging God for the first time in my life to make her suddenly appear.

Hearing Keiran yell my name through the phone, I brought it back up to my ear. “She’s been taken, Keiran. Her and my baby are gone.

Did you love *Caught In The Devil's Game*? Then you should read *Maverick* by C.M. Allen!

Maverick, president of the MC The Devils Deviants: To hear of him was to fear him. To know him was to understand him. To possess his love was the only way to destroy him. Harper the woman who had suffered so much loss: To hear her story was to sympathize with her. To know her was to understand her strength. To possess her heart was to know true love. Maverick and Harper, two people from two different worlds, brought together by shared past lessons in heartbreak and loss. Will Harper be strong enough to survive in Maverick's world, that's filled with darkness, death, and destruction? Or will an unknown enemy end both of their lives before they have the chance to find out just what their love for one another can ever become?