

Co-Author of the Bestselling  
Deadly Seven Series



DARK  
TORMENT

International Bestselling Author

CASSIE  
HARGROVE

# DARK TORMENT

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CASSIE HARGROVE

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*Laura,*

*This story would have never become an idea without you  
creating this beautiful cover. Thank you! <3*

# AUTHOR WARNING

This book is dark and has the following triggers, so please be mindful:

- St@lking/ Voyuerism
- Unal!ving (Graphic)
- T0rture (Graphic)
- Breath Pl@y
- D/S Dynamic
- Sp@nking

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# JONATHAN

I'M EXCELLENT AT MY JOB. BOTH OF THEM, REALLY.

Prosecutor by day, killer by night.

It's my job with the District Attorney's office to put killers behind bars where they belong. But at night, I'm the worst of them.

Thing is, I'm not your typical serial killer. I know the difference between wrong and right. I just don't care.

I don't have something in my brain telling me that taking someone's life is okay, or that I'm doing God's work. I don't have a voice in my head screaming '*Whore. Kill.*' or any other bullshit other killer's spew in order to try and get away with a lesser sentence.

I never set out to be the animal I've become, but it's everything I never knew I needed.

Knowing I'm the reason someone else lives or dies is a powerful drug that I came across by chance a few years ago. I was on my way home from an evening jog when I found a woman crying for help a bit off the beaten path. Someone had stabbed her and left her to die without a single ounce of remorse.

Now, let me start by saying that, until this point, I assumed I would be like everyone else and call for help immediately. Then, doing everything I could to stop the bleeding... but I didn't.

Her pooling blood called to something deep and dark in my soul as I made my way closer to her. Her screams and cries had stopped as her eyes filled with so much hope, thinking I was someone there to save her.

I felt like a fucking God when she looked at me like that, but it wasn't enough.

Saving her life wasn't what called to me.

I found myself jealous of the man who had done this to her. Attempted to take her life like this before leaving her to die. Jealous and curious.

Why leave her behind instead of enjoying the thrill of the kill?

There was no way she would survive if I didn't get her the help she needed immediately, and that was the whole point in choosing this time of night and this specific trail.

I wanted to know what it had felt like to slice a knife through such sweet skin. How it felt to control her existence like that. Normally, I would never hurt a woman, but she was already marked for death.

It was in that moment, as I watched her dying, that I could feel that control. That power.

I leaned over her body and asked her what her name was.

"Chr—ist—ine," she gurgled out, and I smiled.

"Don't worry, Christine. I'm going to make it all better."

She smiled up at me weakly in thanks before I pulled off my shirt and wrapped it around her throat.

She tried to cry out, but my hands cut off her voice box. Her eyes grew wide, and she began to panic.

Squeezing my hands tighter around my shirt, I felt her trying to gasp for breath as I held her down. Her tired body flailed as she desperately tried to fight back, but she was too weak and had lost too much blood.

That was the night I felt just how incredible it was to take someone's life, and I became addicted.

When she stopped breathing and the life left her body, I called the police. When they arrived, I was covered in her blood, but they didn't question it. To them, I was just a passerby who tried to help her before she succumbed to her injuries.

All they did was ask questions. What happened? How did I find her? Do I know who she is? Did I see anyone else?

Not once throughout the investigation did anyone think I was responsible for her ultimate demise because of who I am in the city of Chicago. I realized I could get away with murder if I just played my cards right, and so it began.

I never stick to the same type of kill, I take forensic countermeasures, and I'm never identified as a suspect.

I live my double life in peace, finding victims on the dark net that someone else in this pathetic world wants to be rid of.

It's easier than choosing victims at random and taking the chance that a pattern can form for the police to trace.

Here's the catch.

I need to feel the life drain from their body, so I only take on the jobs that want bloody and dark revenge. Where they want the victims to suffer at the hands of some deranged killer, or to make it look like a robbery gone terribly wrong.

If you want clean and dry, go elsewhere.

If you want fucked up and twisted, I'm your guy. The only thing I won't do is defile women and children, and I will never kill a child.

My mother would come back from the grave to murder me so fucking fast if I even thought about it. As a daughter to an Irish mobster, she'd be willing to look past murder, but raping women before killing them? Or harming kids? Never.

If a job comes across my path that involves women or children, I just push it on to someone else. I don't take chances like I did with my first kill, and I don't allow the guilt to eat me alive because I'm still letting the contracts happen. If

someone wants them dead bad enough, it will happen no matter what. But I don't have to help that along.

If I were going to kill a woman, it would need to be clear they deserve it, and I can't do the proper research to guarantee that they deserve to die without possibly getting caught.

I've stuck by those rules for years, and it's done me well. Until I came across this newest job.

***Target: Olivia Breton***

***Age: Twenty-one***

***Sex: Female***

***Job: Dog Groomer***

***Reason for job: Has something I need and can only receive in death.***

***Type of job: As dark and traumatizing as possible. Make it look like a psychopath let loose on an innocent victim.***

***Pay: \$100,000***

Again, normally I would just ignore the contract and leave the job for someone else with fewer morals, but the picture attached to the file has my head spinning.

Before me is the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on. Her large green eyes are filled with innocence and light, like I've never seen from anyone else. People like her aren't supposed to exist.

God, the way her thick hair is falling in her face while she's reading a book is enough for me to crave pulling her into my lap and gently wrapping my arms around her adorableness. As a man who stays as far from commitment as I can get, that's a startling revelation.

That's only the tip of the iceberg, though. She's voluptuous and curvy, looking like a goddess I want to spend hours

worshipping. I love that she's not skinny, but round in all the right places to take a hard pounding and beg for more.

She's soft and exquisite, and absolutely perfect beyond human comprehension. I want to see more of her and feel her body and soul surrendering to my touch.

I'm already rock hard, ready to lay claim to this sweet woman without so much as a second glance or doubt in my mind.

Not even having to think about it, I click accept on the job, making sure no one else will ever harm a delectable creature such as little miss Olivia Breton.

I will become her shadow and find the person who wants her dead, so I can eliminate the threat on her life.

Then, I will make her mine.

***Job Accepted: Yes.***

***Timeframe: Ten weeks for maximum planning.***

***Type of kill: Bloody vengeance.***

I send the acceptance, and within an hour, the down payment is in my offshore account.

She's safe, but as soon as I find the person responsible for this hit, they won't be.

Gripping my hardness, I start stroking myself to the picture of her fuckable body, thinking about all the things I will do to her. I squeeze myself tight like I'm inside her sweet little hole, picturing her moaning from my every thrust.

“You're officially claimed, Olivia. Be a good girl for Daddy while you wait.”

I cum all over my hand like nothing I've ever felt, and I know she will be the only woman I ever feel again.



# JONATHAN

I WAKE UP EARLY LIKE I ALWAYS DO FOR MY RUN. BUT RATHER than actually going for said run, I pack a bag full of mini cameras and audio devices so I can rig Olivia's house and have eyes and ears on her without getting so close that I give myself away.

I want to make sure she's protected from whoever wants to cause her harm, and that means never being far away.

Night will be the hardest. People will notice a strange man lurking outside her home in the middle of the night, even if it is a quiet neighbourhood where the houses aren't overly close.

After doing my initial search into her, I know she lives alone in a neighbourhood filled with elderly residents. In a way, it works well for me to come and go from time to time in order to check in on her during the day, but it also works against me.

Elderly people are fucking gossips and as nosey as they come, so I'm going to have to dress down and cover my face as best I can when I'm coming and going.

By the time I have my bag ready to go and a solid plan in place, I make my way to her little grooming shop and wait.

I was hoping I could get in there and add some surveillance here as well, but the street has too many cameras, so I can't take that chance. When it comes to her safety while working, I will just have to be here whenever she is. I will memorize her schedule and routines to assure she is never alone.



I'm only out here for about fifteen minutes before she arrives, and fuck. She's more stunning in person than her picture gave away last night.

Once I see her safely inside the shop, it's hard to take my eyes off her, but I know I need to move quickly. Putting my car in drive, I make the two-minute journey to her house, and scan the neighbourhood for cameras, never stopping my car to seem suspicious.

Driving down the street to a nearby park, I grab my bag of goodies before locking it and walking back toward her house. I'm not too concerned about anyone seeing me, but it will be harder to identify a man walking in dark clothes with a generic bag over his shoulder, than it would be for someone to describe my vehicle to the authorities on the off chance something goes wrong.

I'm going to need to be smart about this. Never parking my vehicle in the same place twice while I'm watching her at work, and always in places where there's a lot of traffic so it doesn't stand out.

Between my drive around and the walk to Olivia's house, I can't see any cameras that stand out. Doesn't mean there aren't any, but I'm confident that I've been cautious enough to not get caught. Especially since this is the only time I plan on breaking into her home.

I quickly look around when I come to her house before moving to the front door and pulling out the lock-picking kit I knew I'd need.

It's come in handy a lot for other kills over the years, and I'm good enough to get in and out without leaving scratches unless I purposely leave marks for the police to think it was a break-in gone wrong.

It's way too easy to get into her home, and that infuriates me more than it has a right to, but fuck. I need her protected, and now I feel like she doesn't understand the kind of danger she's subjecting herself to.

Anyone should have at least two locks on their doors, and one should always be a deadbolt that needs a separate key. It doesn't matter what type of neighbourhood you live in, you're always susceptible to creepy assholes like me.

If she knew she was mine, I would take her over my knee and spank her for putting her damned life at risk, but I can't. Not yet anyway.

Locking the door behind me, I drop my bag to the floor. Crouching down to open it, I pull out one of the mini cameras and place it across from her door so I can see whoever comes in and out of the house.

Then I grab a motion sensor and set it up on the floor, hiding it behind a fake tree plant she has. This will send a notification to my phone whenever someone breeches the entryway, so I can make sure she's safe.

I work my way through the house, placing cameras in every room while adding motion sensors near every window where I can hide them in plain sight.

As soon as I've finished setting those up, I move back through the house, adding audio devices in the most common areas. I don't bother with the hallways, or even the bathroom, because those are the only places I know she won't be attacked by anyone. Her bathroom doesn't even have a fucking window.

Once everything is set up, and I know I can see and hear everything on my computer and/or phone, I pack up. Double checking that I've left nothing behind to show evidence I was here, I leave her house the way I came, locking the door from the inside before closing it.

I can't believe how little she's protected right now, but I won't let anything happen to her. If someone wants to get to her, I will be watching and waiting.

The few minutes it takes for me to get back to the car do nothing for my anger and anxiety. I need to see her, so that's where I head.

After I park at the grocery store, I lock up my car before heading back to the grooming shop.

Watching over my sweet Olivia seems to calm something inside of me, because the second I have her in my sights again, I feel my body releasing the tension it's felt since I left her a little over an hour ago.

Now, I just have to watch and wait before making sure she gets home safely for the night, and that's not a hardship.



# OLIVIA

WORK IS MY HAPPY PLACE.

As long as I'm surrounded by dogs and not people, I am in my element.

I know that my brother and father hate that I refused to get into the family business, but it just isn't for me. I can't see myself sitting at a desk, schmoozing rich buttholes into throwing their money at investments that my family gets rich from. It's just not who I am, and I wouldn't fit in with that world, anyway.

The only family that truly loved and supported my awkwardness growing up was my grandmother. She didn't care that I was plus sized and eccentric, or that I get along with animals better than I do people. She just wanted me to be happy, and walking away from my father and all his money was the first step in achieving that.

The only thing of any value that I have from my old life is Gram's house, and when the lawyers had told my father he couldn't have it, I thought he was going to keel over.

His face became so red, his breathing laboured, as he yelled terrible obscenities at the poor lawyers, but he couldn't change it.

Her Will was more solid than freaking Alcatraz, and Dad is never getting his hands on that house. I don't even know why he wants the house if I really stop to think about it.

After mom died of cancer when Ben and I were little, he would go out of his way to complain about the house he grew

up in, like it was some form of garbage dump unless he needed Gram to watch us.

As we got older, Ben started staying with Dad, becoming more like him with every day that passed. By the time I was ten and he was fourteen, I was basically living with Gram because they decided something wasn't right with me.

I didn't share any interest or likes with them, and I barely spoke, preferring to walk outside and spend time in nature. In my dad's and brother's eyes, I was a freak. Add on the extra curves I was carrying, and I was disgusting to them.

Didn't stop them from trying to pull me into the business after she passed six months ago, though.

Like I told them then, I want nothing to do with the family business. That's when they chose to cut off all contact with me, and I was alright with that.

I had already opened my grooming business downtown, and it was thriving. It's all I've ever needed. I just wish they loved me enough to stick around.

"Hey," Shelby hollers when she walks through the door, and I smile.

"Back here!" I yell back, scrubbing the soap into Muffins, a less than pleased Yorkie whose owner begged me to take him and clean him off. He'd fallen into some fish guts at the docks while on a walk this morning.

Why they would even walk their dog by a fish market is beyond me, but the poor pup stunk something fierce, and business is business. I'm not overly particular about what clients I take on as walk-ins as long as I have the time.

Thankfully, this morning I did.

"Why the hell does it smell like fish in here?" she asks, walking into the back room as I'm rinsing Muffins off.

I chuckle. "Because Muffins here decided to roll around in some fish guts at the market today. Such a silly boy, aren't you?" I finish in a baby voice, and Shelby rolls her eyes as Muffins barks in agreement.

“Girl, you are lucky I love you, because sometimes this job is just too gross.” She gags, and I snort.

“I’m glad you love me, but don’t pretend like I’m not paying you, Shelbs.” I shake my head as she sighs.

“This is true,” she says in agreement before helping me towel and dry Muffins.

It takes another twenty minutes before he’s ready to go, and his owner walks in to pick him up right on schedule.

Once they’re gone, I sit down at the computer and start looking over the schedule for the day.

It’s a light one with only a few clients since we’re only open until noon on Sunday’s, but I’ll still be here for hours organizing stock and getting us ready for the coming week.

“How was your date with Robert last night?” I ask Shelby as I search through the inventory we had delivered.

Shelby has been my best friend since we were in middle school when she first moved to town.

She seemed drawn to my differences and, for some reason, was oddly protective of me. Not that I’m complaining. She’s the sister I never had, and the sibling I actually enjoy being around.

Even though she’s thin where I’m voluptuous, and her straight blonde hair is a massive contrast to my dark brunette waves, we fit together better than I could have ever imagined I’d find in someone who wasn’t family.

“Ugh, seriously? I would have thought the three years since high school would have made his jock-ass grow up a little, but nope.” She pops the p out before groaning. “I swear to fuck, he tried to grope me up at every turn last night like we were horny fifteen-year-olds feeling another body for the first time.”

I burst into laughter as the images fly through my mind.

She dated Robert on an off in high school and even lost her virginity to him. She never really *liked* him, she just did what was supposedly expected of her as the head cheerleader because he was the quarterback of the football team.

“So, you didn’t have sex with him, then?” I ask, turning my head her way, and she sighs.

“Of course I did,” she says like I’m the stupid one for even thinking that was a possibility, so I roll my eyes.

“At the risk of sounding like a broken record... why?” I seriously want to know. I can’t even fathom sleeping with someone you’re not physically and emotionally interested in, but I’m a virgin. What do I know, right?

“Because, my sweet, naïve, virgin bestie. Dick is dick, and sometimes the mechanical ones just aren’t good enough,” she sighs, and I gag before we both fall into fits of laughter.

\* \* \*

BY THE TIME we’ve finished with the stocking for this coming week, it’s going on four p.m., and I’m starving.

“I heard that,” Shelby chuckles. “I’m hungry too. Want to go grab some tacos?” she asks, and my stomach rumbles again.

“Tacos sound perfect.”

After the door is locked, I turn around to head to the Mexican restaurant when I feel eyes on me.

Looking around, I can’t see anyone actually paying attention to me, and nothing looks suspicious or out of the ordinary.

“You okay?” Shelby asks beside me, and with one last look around, I nod.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine.” I shake my head to clear it, and smile. “Just tired, I guess.” Just then, a guy not much older



than me walks right into me and almost knocks me on my butt.

“Watch where the fuck you’re going, you cow! Stop taking up the entire fucking street with your fat ass,” he sneers at me in disgust, and I feel the tears threatening.

“Sorry,” I whisper, backing away and heading in the opposite direction of the restaurant. I’ve officially lost my appetite.

“You prick! Don’t you dare talk to a woman like that just because you hate yourself for having a small dick!” Shelby screams at him as I keep walking. “Hey.” Her hand reaches for my arm, and I fight to not pull away from her. “Don’t let him change our plans, babe. He’s just a spineless cunt who can’t see past his own issues to appreciate your insane beauty.”

I smile at her the best I can, still fighting back the tears.

“I’m just tired, Shelbs. I’m going to go home. See you tomorrow, alright?”

She searches my face long and hard, trying to suss whether she can pull me back from this when she sees the tears. Nodding, she pulls me into a tight hug before we say goodbye, and I make my way home.

Once I’m home and alone, I can cry in peace without the world ever seeing how much it hurt me.



# JONATHAN

THIS LITTLE FUCK IS GOING TO DIE SO PAINFULLY HE WILL BEG me to end his life and put him out of his misery. Or, he would be, if I hadn't already cut out his tongue for the horrendous and vulgar words he hurt my Olivia with.

After watching her half the day, it's still hard for me to come to terms with how easily I broke into her home. How easy it would be for anyone to get in there, and my precautions are possibly not enough.

I know I bought her some time, but there's always the possibility of them hiring more than one person to take her out, and that's something I can't live with.

No one is going to lay a hand on my Olivia, and I will make damn sure of that. If anyone so much as touches her, or makes her cry, they're going to find themselves in a shallow grave. Or a vat of acid. I'm not picky, and it starts with this fucking asshole who dared to call her fat and make her cry.

"Matthew Parkins." The sound of my voice makes him jump and I laugh loudly, the sound echoing around the cold room.

Him trying to talk, then crying when he remembers his tongue is gone, gives me a gleeful joy I can't even begin to describe. It's the kind of high I haven't experienced before, because I'm filled with the knowledge that I'm avenging my beautiful Olivia.

She is too sweet and innocent for the negativity of this world, and someday soon I will keep her from feeling this hurt

again.

She is my love, my passion, and my absolute obsession. After one day, I know without a doubt I can never let someone else have her.

She's too precious for the assholes of this world, myself included... but I will make her love me just as much as I love her.

It will just take some time.

"Peeasse," he tries to scream, saliva and blood dripping down his chin as he begs me to put him out of his misery. But I'm just getting started.

Even though I cauterized the end of his tongue still in his mouth to keep him from bleeding out, it hasn't fully stopped it from continuing. He deserves as much pain as I choose to dole out for being such a waste of oxygen.

"You don't deserve my mercy. You didn't show my Olivia any," I state, my entire body the epitome of calm on the outside, even as I'm dying to feel the life leave him.

His confused stare makes it obvious he has no idea who or what I'm talking about, proving he has no intelligence or common sense. He's already forgotten about how fucking rude he was earlier.

How could I ever let such a callous piece of shit live?

I followed him home this afternoon, knowing Olivia's friend would take care of her.

I hadn't decided whether her friend would live or die yet, because I didn't know the dynamic of their relationship, but the second she yelled at Matthew here, I knew my woman was in good hands. They weren't my hands, but they would do to get her home where I could watch over her on the cameras while I rid the world of this bastard.

Pulling my phone out, I unlock my screen to stare at my beautiful girl.

God, she's so stunning it makes my heart ache and my dick throb with need for her.

I need to know her, feel her, and I will very soon.

Eventually, my sweet Olivia will trust me to be the only man for her. To protect her and love her, knowing nothing will ever harm her because she has her own personal monster.

A living shadow the world should be very afraid of.

I turn my screen to show him her picture, and his eyes pinch before I see a flash of disgust in them. It's so fast that most would have missed it, but I miss nothing.

You don't get to my position in the DA's office without being observant. Add on that he's slotted for death by my hands... I miss nothing.

Pocketing my phone, I take a step closer to him, staring him down while he watches me fearfully, wondering what's next. I wait until I see his shoulders minutely relax in the silence, before pulling my fist back and punching him hard enough I hear his jaw snap, followed by loud wails of pain.

"You are a disrespectful little shit, you know that? Speaking to a woman like that is fucking criminal. But speaking to *my* woman like that? That signed your death warrant," I taunt him. "Just because you feel insignificant about yourself doesn't mean you have the right to bring anyone else down. She is beautiful both inside and out. The same thing can't be said for you."

He starts screaming, trying to thrash around in the chair, but it won't help. That chair is bolted into the cement floor for occasions just like this.

It's not often that I like to play with my kills. But if I haven't taken a job in a while, I get antsy and need my own space to feel the blood on my hands as I torture them to get my fix.

This place allows me to do that with no one ever knowing about it.

It's an underground bunker I built myself, with a drain going under the floor, pooling the blood in a basin I can dispose of later. It's hidden under the floor of my garage, and unless you knew to look, you'd never find it.

There are benefits to being rich and living on a giant piece of land miles away from anywhere. This was one of them.

Silence and peace.

It aids me in getting away with murder, and it will soon aid me in keeping my sweet Olivia captive until she gives into the feelings she will come to have for me.

“You better prepare yourself, Matthew. It’s going to be a long night.” I feel the dark and sinister smile spread across my face as I pull the knife from my belt holster.

This is going to be fun.

“Peease,” he begs, slobber and blood still dripping down his chin.

“You can beg all you want. Nothing you say is going to stop me from ending your pathetic existence.”

He whimpers, dropping his eyes to the ground as his body convulses in silent cries. I take a deep breath, feeling the invigorating energy run through me.

Moving to my workbench, I look over the tools I have before grabbing the pliers that were previously used to hold his tongue still while I cut it out.

This time, they’re going to allow me to remove his fingers one by one with extreme pain until only the bones remain.

Just the idea of his screams has me hard as fuck.

Murder has never been about sex or feeling masculine before. It’s always about the power of controlling someone’s last moments, and while that’s a heady feeling, it’s never led me to feeling like this. Like I need to fuck the energy out of me.

Usually, I love to bask in that energy and power for days. Doing this for Olivia, and knowing I’m avenging her honour is the best aphrodisiac I’ve ever felt.

I could get addicted to this.

Walking back toward him with the pliers in hand, my heart starts pounding in my chest.

God, I missed this feeling. I love playing with them before the kill. It's much more satisfying than the kills I'm generally hired for that need to be messy, but quick.

"How are you holding up, Matthew?" I ask him, smiling as he stares from me to the pliers, not opening his mouth to answer. "Cat got your tongue?" He makes a gurgling sound, and I laugh. "Oh, right! I got your tongue!"

I snap my fingers, shaking my head and playing dumb just to fuck with him as I kneel in front of him.

His arms are securely tied to the chair so he can't move. As I line up the pliers with his pinky finger, he starts screaming and thrashing, trying to pull away, but it's no use. I've made sure he's not going anywhere.

Humming to a tune by *Kansas*, I let his screams wash over me like a warm blanket as I press hard, sinking the pliers into the skin until I see blood. Then I push a little harder until his screams are at an all-time high and the pliers are in deep before I start slowly ripping the skin away from his bones, little by little.

His shrieks become louder and more violent as his body trembles with shock from the excruciating pain I'm causing him. He pukes up what's left in his stomach before he wretches and gags, but there's nothing left.

Nothing but the joy I get from the high. I'm in my happy place.

There's blood, torture, and screams giving me life as I continue slowly pulling the skin and muscle off his finger, until all that's left is bone.

"Beautiful!" I scream, making sure he hears me over his own panic. "Time for the next!" I say, moving to his ring finger before continuing the same torturous routine.

Whenever he passes out, I give his body a few minutes to recover from the shock before using water or smelling salts to bring him back to consciousness, then carry on with the torture.

He's a fucking wimp.

\* \* \*

Lying in bed after Matthew lost the battle with his life, I can't help but stare at her on my phone. There's a deep aching in my chest so fierce I would easily think I was having a heart attack. Or I would if it weren't for my knowing the cause is my being away from her.

She's so beautiful, but I can't stand to see the look of sadness on her face even hours after that asshole slandered her. It breaks something inside of me so much so that I would love nothing more than to bring him back from the dead just to start his torture over again.

I hate that I'm lying in my bed watching her cry herself to sleep, because I can't be there holding her. It got so bad, I had to mute the feed on my phone because the sound of her soft sobs crushed me with every breath I took.

Watching isn't much easier on my heart, but at least I'm less murderous this way.

I watch as she reaches for her phone, her brows furrowing before answering it.

Checking the time and seeing it's almost two a.m., has me turning the sound back on to listen in.

"I'm okay, Shelbs," she whispers into the phone, her voice cracking a little.

You're not okay, baby, but you will be soon. I'll make sure of it.

Her face scrunches up as she listens to her best friend.

"No. Absolutely not. Have lost your mind?!" she shrieks, sitting up and wiping the tears away.



This time it's my turn to be confused. What the hell could have made my Olivia shriek like that?

“How did you go from my being insulted and called a fat cow, to setting up a dating profile for me in the span of a few hours?”

I growl into the air, narrowing my eyes at the screen.

Hell, no. My girl is not going to be on any fucking dating site. If any assholes even try to touch what's mine, I will kill them.

I will break their fingers and hands before taking their life by slitting their throats, and leaving their lifeless bodies to be found wherever they die.

No one touches what's mine.

“I'm not interested in dating anyone!” she tries to tell her friend.

I'm starting to re-think allowing that woman to live.

Olivia moves the phone away from her ear before putting it on speakerphone and throwing the phone to the table in frustration.

“You can't be a virgin forever, Liv,” Shelby says through the phone, and I blink.

My girl is a virgin? Fuck, yes.

Knowing my girl is untouched has my entire body heating with desire. I will be the only one to ever touch her, and bring her pleasure. I will make sure that I'm the only man she ever wants to touch her.

“I can too,” she sasses back, and it brings a smile to my face.

God, she's cute.

“Fine.” I hear Shelby huff before continuing. “Let me rephrase that. Why the fuck would you want to remain a virgin forever? You need to go on dates, Liv.”

“I don’t want to go on dates. The last thing I want is to meet someone like my father or brother, Shelbs,” she hisses, and I make a mental note to look deeper into her family.

She clearly doesn’t like them, and there has to be a reason. If they’ve been mean to her, I will add them to my list of people that need to die.

I haven’t taken the time to really look into her background since the contract for her hit came across my desk yesterday. That’s something I plan on doing tonight once I know my woman is asleep in her bed, finally resting after crying most of the night.

“Not all men are money-hungry, disgusting assholes. Stop making the entire male population out to be bad guys.”

Olivia snorts at that. “Right, because you’ve had great success in finding someone decent.”

“My sex life is mine, and mine alone. I don’t want to date, but you’re not the fuck em’ and leave em’ type,” her friend says.

Her voice is starting to grate on my nerves.

“It’s late, Shelb. We have to work tomorrow.” She yawns then, rubbing her eyes.

I don’t like that either. She needs sleep.

If she tries to go to work tomorrow, she will be exhausted after crying most of the night.

“Actually, you don’t. I’ve got it covered. If you even think about showing your face at the shop tomorrow, I’m going to spank you.”

Like hell! The only hands touching her sweet ass will be mine, but I do agree. If she so much as leaves her house tomorrow, I’m going to make certain she’s punished for it later when she’s under my care.

“You can’t kick me out of my own shop!” Olivia screeches.

“I can. I did, and you won’t stop me. You’ve been crying all night. Don’t even try lying to me because I can hear it in your voice.”

Fine. The best friend can live, but I don’t like her.

I watch my girl struggle with what to say, the need to argue clear on her face before her body relaxes, which makes me relax.

“Fine. Thank you, babe. I owe you.” She smiles at the phone as she picks it up again, and my chest feels lighter than it has since her sobs worked their way through my being.

“You totally owe me. Make me some of my favourite muffins, and we’ll call it even.” Olivia chuckles and agrees before they hang up.

It doesn’t take long before she moves around the house, shutting the lights off before getting ready for bed.

“Sleep well, baby. You’re safe, I promise,” I whisper into the air as I watch her fall asleep.



# JONATHAN

SHE SLEPT IN TODAY, AND I'M GLAD ABOUT IT.

I'm glad her friend was able to talk her into taking the day off, and that she actually had a decent night's rest.

While she slept, I looked into her entire family, starting with her father.

He's a piece of work, and unfortunately for me, I've had the displeasure of seeing him in court on more than one occasion. He likes to scam rich and important people, stealing their money and tricking them into making unwise investments.

We haven't been able to gather any solid proof of embezzlement, so nothing ever went to trial, but I know he's a slimy son of a bitch.

It's hard for me to fathom that my sweet and beautiful girl came from such a disgusting prick such as him, but from what I can tell, they have no relationship to speak of.

I'm going to have to tread lightly when merging into Olivia's world, because Philip will recognize me, even though I've only been part of the office meetings. I've never actually been one of the lawyers to try and take him to court, but I know how he operates.

I know he digs deep for dirt on anyone that tries to go against him, so that he can feel like he's in control. That's just something I can't have him doing with me.

I watch Olivia as she steps out of the shower, the towel already wrapped around her, and groan as my dick bobs to life in my pants. She's saying something to herself in the mirror, and I'm beginning to wish I had put audio everywhere instead of skipping out on the bathroom and hallways.

I know she has her right to privacy, but I hate the idea of her possibly talking down to herself right now. Actually, it's probably best I don't hear it if that's the case because I need to keep a level head.

I'm parked a couple blocks away as I watch the camera feed on my laptop, keeping an eye on her as I call the office.

"Sandra here, how can I help you?" my assistant asks on the other line.

"Sandra, it's me," I state, biting my lip to stop a groan as I watch her brush her hair in the bathroom mirror, the towel swaying back and forth with her movements.

"Mr. Carmichael, how can I help you today?" she asks, knowing it's common for me to not actually go to the office unless I have a meeting.

Most of us prefer to work at home unless we're on an active case, which I happen to be between at the moment.

"Can you transfer me to Mr. Richards, please?" I request, losing my breath when I see Olivia moving into the bedroom and dropping the towel to the floor.

Dear God, I could write poetry about the sensual curve of her hips and breasts. How soft her tummy looks as she bends to pick out a pair of leggings from her drawer. Not to mention that perfectly round ass bending over right now that's well cushioned for spanking and fucking.

My cock is officially harder than it's ever been seeing her in all her naked glory for the first time.

I should be ashamed of myself for looking at her without her permission, but I can't find it in me to care. She's too fucking perfect for my own sanity and wellbeing, and she will be mine.

I can't wait for the moment I get to claim her as mine. For the moment she begs me to take her virginity and never let her go.

"Jonathan," my boss snaps down the line, drawing my attention back to the conversation at hand.

Clearing my throat, I palm my dick and mentally will it to settle down before answering him. "Mr. Richards, I'm glad I caught you," I tell him honestly. Sometimes the bastard is impossible to get a hold of.

"What is it you need, Jonathan? I'm due in court in fifteen minutes."

I nod, understanding how busy he is. "I need to take a Leave of Absence," I explain, and he scoffs down the line.

"You can't be serious," he says like it's some kind of joke, and it actually pisses me off.

"I'm very serious, sir. The doctor should have faxed the papers over to you already. This is just a courtesy call so you could hear it from me."

My psychologist has been telling me for years that I needed to take a break for my mental health, but I've ignored him because I haven't felt the need to do so before now.

Killing completes me, draining away all my anxieties and frustrations, giving me new life. Why take time off of work when I can do everything I desire and still thrive?

"A mental health leave?" he asks, disdain clear in his tone. I choose to ignore it.

"Yes, sir," I reply respectfully, even though my throat is burning to tell him off. To tell him that I have no intention of ever coming back to work now that I have Olivia to take care of.

I've made more than enough money to provide for us, and I don't ever want to be away from Olivia for long. She's my woman, and I need to care for her.

I live almost an hour outside of Chicago, where the DA's office is, and about twenty minutes from the little town of

Painter, Illinois that Olivia has grown up in.

“When will you be back?” he asks me. I can hear him shuffling around, getting ready to walk over to the courthouse.

“I’m not sure yet. I will keep you posted. Good luck in court today.” I hang up the phone, putting all of my focus back on the cameras.

She’s now dressed in black leggings and a thick pink hoodie that hides her frame before she crawls back into bed with a book and starts reading.

Opening the file I’ve created on my secure laptop, I read more about her family and past.

Her mother died of cancer when she was a child. Once Philip and her brother moved to Chicago full-time, she stayed here in Painter, living with her grandmother in the very house she now owns.

It seems like the only people she’s ever really been close to are her grandmother and Shelby, which really means I can’t kill the blonde woman. Even if she is trying to get my girl fucked by some stranger.

I’ve already come to terms with the fact that I won’t be able to go back to my house for some time in case she actually goes on a date with one of these assholes that keep messaging her.

Yeah, I’ve hacked into her account. Shelby really should be smarter with passwords and privacy. It’s slightly terrifying to know how clueless they both are to the darkness that lurks around every corner.

The darkness I live and thrive on.

If she wants to go on dates, I will allow it for now, but I will be there watching every second of it.

For now, I will watch over her and keep her safe, and tomorrow I will make my first move to win her affections.

I’m going to get a fucking dog.





# OLIVIA

“YOU LOOK LIKE SHIT,” SHELBY STATES AS SHE WALKS TO THE back room.

“Just tired.” I shrug.

It’s not a lie. Some days are extremely busy here, and this was one of them. Add on the fact that I’ve barely slept the past couple of nights, and I feel like I’ve hit a wall.

“Still not sleeping?” She watches me with concern, and I give her a small smile.

“I’ve been in a funk. I don’t really know how to explain it,” I say, getting up to start restocking the shelves.

Ever since that guy pointed out how fat I am, I’ve been struggling with self-hatred and doubt.

I’ve always known I’m not skinny enough or pretty enough. It’s something my father and Ben have made clear, and I’ve never forgotten it. Their words play throughout my head like a broken record whenever something happens that inevitably knocks me for a loop.

For years, I struggled with hating myself, and it took moving out and distancing myself from them to finally learn that it’s okay to love my body just the way I am.

For the past six months, I’ve worked hard on loving the beauty I’ve been given and accepting that no amount of dieting or exercise seems to do much for me.

I can lose some weight, but at the end of the day I’m still fluffy all around. I will never be below a size fourteen, and I’m

okay with that. Most of the time, at least.

“Excuse me,” I hear someone call from the front of the shop.

“Just a moment!” I holler back, looking around for Shelby, before hearing the water run in the bathroom.

Quickly washing my hands before drying them off, I make my way to the front counter, stopping in my tracks as my eyes meet the customer in question.

He is hands down the most handsome man I have ever seen in my life. Everything about him screams authority and power, demanding the attention of everyone in the room.

Right now, it’s just him and me, but I can tell he’s someone important by the way his short dark hair is neatly styled, not a hair out of place. It’s the perfect match to the navy blue pinstripe suit he’s wearing.

His jaw is square, but not in the way that makes him look like a hardass. It’s a little more rounded to give him an edge of softness that draws me in.

I watch him as he looks around the shop before his eyes finally land on me, and all the breath leaves my lungs.

His eyes are a bright emerald green that stands out against his dark features as they travel the length of my body.

“Hello,” he says, giving me a smile that has my heart tripping over itself as I fight to breathe.

Dear Lord, this man is sinful. I could stand here staring at him all day if he let me.

I finally get why Shelby is so horny all the time. If she feels even a fraction of what I’m feeling for this man right now, I definitely owe her an apology, because I feel like I’ve lost all brain function.

If this man asked me to kneel before him right now, I don’t think I’d even give it a second thought.

A zing of pleasure shoots through my core, making me gasp as my eyes widen in surprise.

Holy crap. That's new.

"Hi," I squeak out, and his smile widens. Panty melting mode, activated.

"Hi there, beautiful." His smile is still in place as his eyes lock with mine and my knees weaken.

"I—uh—thanks... thank you," I push out, closing my eyes at how stupid I sound. "What can I help you with?" I ask, taking another deep breath before forcing myself to open my eyes and look at him.

He hasn't moved, still looking at me with an almost hunger I can't describe.

"I was wondering if you could help me. I'm looking to adopt a dog, and I saw a few of the posters on your window," he says, and my heart totally melts. I can't keep the smile off my face as tears brim my eyes.

Dang, I'm such a sap for people who want to help animals.

"What type of dog are you looking for?" I ask him, my fear replaced with the excitement of finding another fur-baby a forever home. "Will your wife or girlfriend be home with them during the day? Or are you looking for a more self-sufficient dog?" I literally want to bang my head against the wall as he chuckles.

Why did I even ask him that? It was so not subtle.

"No girlfriend or wife, but I like the blush you've got going on." He winks at me, and I can feel that very blush heating my cheeks. "I'm actually taking an extended leave from work, so it will just be me and him... or her," he explains, and something inside me settles.

I don't know why the idea of him being with someone else bothers me. He's a complete stranger, and just by looking at him, I can tell he's quite a bit older than I am.

The buzz of my phone in my pocket distracts me. "Just a moment," I tell him, smiling apologetically as I pull my phone out. My heart drops when I see Ben's name.

Why is my brother texting me? And in the middle of the day like this?

I put my phone back in my pocket, refusing to read his message right now, but it doesn't stop the barrage of memories my brain throws at me.

It's all the reminder I need that a man such as this one could never want someone like me. He's just being flirty to be nice. No one would ever be interested in the fat girl.

*You're a fat cow.*

*You're disgusting and need to lose weight.*

*No man will ever want you when you look like this, sis.*

*Why can't you take care of yourself and put our family before your stomach? You're a disgrace, Olivia. A fucking disgrace.*

The words roll over me like a tidal wave and I take a deep breath, curling into myself before I can get hurt by another stranger.

"Um, that's great. Really!" I put more cheer into my voice than I feel as I try to keep the tears inside.

I'm happy he's going to help re-home a dog in need. I am. But now, I just want to be alone, close up, and go home so I can cry in bed while I try to escape the horrible words I've spent my whole life hearing.

"Liv?" I hear Shelbs before I see her, and the moment she comes to the front, I sigh in relief.

"Hey. Can you do me a favour and help this gentleman go through the list of dogs we know of that need a new home?" I ask her quietly, and she eyes me a moment before nodding and turning to face the guy.

I watch as her eyes widen before looking between us.

"Sure. You alright?" she asks me with concern.

"Just not feeling very well. Ben just messaged me," I explain, keeping my words vague, but the darkness that comes over her is clear.

“What did that son of a bitch want?” she sneers, and I close my eyes in defeat.

“I don’t know, but it can’t be good.” I steal a look at the man on the other side of the counter before turning back to her. “I just need to be anywhere but here when I read it.” I swallow, and she nods.

“It’s okay. I will close up when we’re done here.” She smiles at me, and it’s all I need before moving to the back and getting everything to head home.

\* \* \*

BY THE TIME I get home and settled, I’m shaking.

I don’t want to know what my brother has to say, because he hasn’t been the brother I love in a long time. He’s distant and cold.

Our father has taken over his personality, and I’m no longer the little sister he used to love and care for or want to protect, and that guts me.

I’m not sure I have it in me to handle his cutting words right now, either. Usually, I would feel the sting and then brush it off, because I know who he is. But I’m in a dark place in my own mind right now. Maybe he even knows that and wants to prey on me.

Steeling my spine, I open the messaging app and still when I see his text.

**Ben:**

**You’re seriously on a dating app? Dad is going to lose his shit. You came across one of my friend’s profiles. Are you insane?!**

His disgust is clear as I read his message, but rather than letting myself spiral, I find myself getting angry.

He's pissed because they think my being on a dating app is so deplorable?

**Me:**

**How I live my life is none of your business, Ben. Don't contact me again.**

I silence the conversation with him and open the app Shelby insisted on installing on my phone the second I walked into the shop this morning.

To my absolute shock, there are several messages waiting in my inbox.

One by one, I open them before dismissing them as I go. All they seem to want is a hookup, or to ask me questions I refuse to answer. And let's not forget the unsolicited dick pics that others slide in there.

As I'm about to give up, I come across a sweet one from a man named Jeff.

**Jeff:**

**Wow, I hope this doesn't come across as cliché, but you're beautiful.**

I feel myself smiling as I message him back, deciding that maybe Shelby is right. Maybe I do need to get out there, and Jeff seems nice enough to at least talk to.

**Me:**

**You're right, that is definitely cliché, but thank you all the same.**

I click my phone closed, tossing it on the coffee table as I think about what Ben's goal is.

I'm out of their lives just like they wanted. So why does he have to message me after six months just to tell me how much our father is going to disapprove?

Well, screw them both. I'm twenty-one years old. If I want to date, I will, and they can just be mad about it.





# JONATHAN

BEING SO CLOSE TO HER WHEN SHE'S IN PAIN IS THE equivalent of being kicked in the gut. It fucking hurts and knocks the wind right out of me.

All I want to do is pull her in close and wrap my arms around her. I can feel her sudden anguish coursing through me as I watch her entire demeanour change when she looks at her phone.

I hate how defeated and haunted she looks. And I would give anything to bring back the joy and happiness I saw just a moment ago.

I'd foster all the dogs she wanted if it would just bring her smile back.

I'm about to try and cheer her up when her friend comes out from the back and notices her obvious upset.

"I just need to be anywhere but here when I read it," she whispers, never taking her eyes off her friend.

She's already requested that Shelby help me with the adoption process, but I would really rather it be her who helps me.

I watch as she leaves before her friend turns back to me, looking me over as though she's assessing me. I can see the interest in her eyes, but I only have eyes for Olivia. No one can match her level of beauty and innocence in my eyes.

"So, you want to adopt a dog?" she questions, crossing her arms over her chest like she doesn't believe someone like me

would ever want a pet of any kind.

She'd be right, except my girl deserves to have a fur baby of her own when the time comes, and I want to surprise her.

Drawing in a calming breath, I give her my lawyer smile. It's nothing close to the genuine one I gave Olivia, but it seems to placate the woman just the same.

"Yes, I would. Thank you," I stay polite, giving her my attention, even though the sound of the back door slamming shut is where my mind focuses.

"No offence, but you don't really seem like the pet type. Is this for a daughter or girlfriend, or something?" Her question is the same as my Olivia's, but it grates on me that she's insinuating I can't be the type of man to take good care of a pet.

She's wrong. I take very good care of everything that is mine, and I would never harm an animal.

"No," I push out through my teeth, my fake smile still in check, and she raises an eyebrow at me. "I'm taking a long leave from the office for health reasons, and my doctor believes a pet would be good for me." I give her a half truth.

It's along the same lines as what I told my boss yesterday. I've found that when living a lie, it's best to keep them all along the same storyline, so you're less liable to get caught in one.

"Interesting. And what is it you normally do, Mr.—" She waves her hand, clearly searching for my name. I could give her an alias, but I won't.

"Carmichael. Jonathan Carmichael. I work with the District Attorney's office in Chicago," I tell her, and she looks mildly shocked and impressed before laughing.

"I can see why you'd be stressed out, then. A dog should really help you out, though... so would other avenues of stress relief," she purrs, and I want to strangle her.

The fact that she's hitting on me is something I find truly repulsive and completely unprofessional, given why we're

here in the first place.

“I assure you, I have everything I need aside from a dog. I think I’m going to come back another day. Your advances and none-too-subtle insinuations are making me uncomfortable.”

I turn on my feet and walk out of the shop without a second glance as I hear her spluttering behind me.

I don’t care if she’s Olivia’s best friend. I will not tolerate anyone flirting with me. I’ve never been one of those men who enjoys being hit on so crassly.

I prefer my women to be more discreet. Over the years, I’ve found that women who are as straightforward as Shelby are just too impulsive for me.

I don’t like being impulsive. I like everything planned, so I have a chance to view every outcome before it happens.

It’s why I’ve never been caught, and I don’t plan on changing that now.

By the time I make it home and get dinner started, I sit on one of my barstools at the island and check her dating profile.

“Fuck!” I curse into the empty kitchen when I see that she’s been flirting with a guy. She’s even agreed to go on a date with him.

Taking a deep breath, I look over his profile before reading through their messages.

Why the fuck is she meeting with this guy now? She has been ignoring every single message in her inbox until today, so why is this one different?

It’s not like his lines are original, but maybe it’s because he’s being nice to her.

It’s fine. I said she could go on a few dates, and I would be fine with it. I will deal with it as long as he’s respectful toward her.

*Deep breaths, Jonathan. You’re going to need some patience.*

\* \* \*

I said I would be fine if she went on dates, and that I wouldn't perform random kills because that's how you get caught.

I fucking lied.

If this motherfucker doesn't stop leering at her and trying to touch her, I'm going to end up killing him over the dessert menu.

I've shown restraint so far because Olivia hasn't flat out denied him yet, but I can tell she's uncomfortable. She's not used to this type of attention.

I looked into Ben after remembering her telling Shelby that it was him who text her.

He's her older brother and seems clean, but works alongside her piece of shit father. I know from experience that if he's working that closely with Philip, his hands aren't clean at all.

There's little information about their relationship with my girl. I can't find anything to suggest they're a big part of her life either, so I'm willing to bet that the text message he sent her is part of what spurred this little date to begin with. I need to get close enough to get to clone her phone.

Moving my attention back to my sweet Olivia, I see red as the asshole's hand disappears under the table. I watch as she stiffens, then shakes her head no, pushing his hand away. He laughs and leans into her, and I know I'm going to kill him.

I won't do it right here where I want to, but he will die for touching her. I just need to plan it out first and make sure she gets home safely.

The second he moves toward her again, she stands up and shakes her head before stepping away from him. The look on his face is pure anger as he follows her through the restaurant.

If he hurts her, I will slit his throat right here, uncaring of the consequences as long as it keeps her safe.

I watch from the shadows as she leaves the restaurant with him on her heels.

“You can’t be this pissed about a little touching,” he says, exasperated, and she groans before turning back to him with fire in her eyes.

“The heck I can’t! I didn’t give you permission to touch me. I actually said no, and you were going to do it again!” she snaps at him, and my dick gets hard as the blood rushes through my veins.

She’s so fucking stunning when she’s sticking up for herself. It’s a new side to her I haven’t gotten to see in the past few days since my obsession started.

“Stop being a prude. I thought you were being coy, but you’re not. You’re being a self-righteous bitch,” he huffs, and my fists clench at my sides as I fight to not reach for my knife.

“No, I’m being a woman who stands up for herself and her body. You’re being a prick who thinks that just because I have a vagina, I should be willing to put out for you. Newsflash, that’s not the way the real world works.”

He scoffs. “I think you’re being naïve. Look, come back in and eat your dinner. We can forget any of this happened.” He gets this look in his eyes, and I know I’m going to enjoy taking his life. I won’t allow any man to look at my woman like that.

“I will make you feel really good, baby. Come on,” he pleads with her, his eyes roaming her body like he’s going to fuck her into next week, when my guess is he won’t even last two minutes.

He looks like the type to only care about his pleasure, and from what I’ve seen of his self-control, she’d never be

satisfied.

“No, thank you. I’m calling a ride,” she states, and he shakes his head, growling before moving toward her and grabbing onto her arm once she’s typed out a message to, I assume, Shelby.

Nope, fuck that.

“Excuse me,” I say, stepping out of the shadows once I clear my face of all emotion.

Olivia looks at me, blinking a few times before recognition dawns on her, and her eyes widen.

“Who the fuck are you? This is a private discussion.” He doesn’t take his eyes off of her, but I see the confusion on her face before she scowls at him.

“There is no discussion. Let me go,” she orders, pulling her arm, trying to break free of his hold.

When he doesn’t let up, I move until I’m standing between them, towering over his pathetic frame.

“The lady said to let her go. I would suggest doing as she says before I get the police involved.” I stare him down, waiting for him to move.

He looks between us before letting her go and throwing his hands in the air as he backs away. “Whatever. Pussy isn’t worth this much fucking hassle.”

I wait until he’s back inside the restaurant before turning to check on her. She’s watching me closely, like she can’t figure out why I did that for her.

“Thank you for your help. You didn’t have to do that, though,” she says quietly, turning shy as her eyes drop to the ground.

“I did. I don’t like it when men think they can use their size against women. It’s deplorable.” My voice is hard, and she can tell I’m not joking about that.

“I seem to attract the assholes of the world,” she mutters under her breath, and I have to calm the storm raging inside of

me.

“What did you say?” I ask, knowing she probably won’t repeat it.

“Nothing.” She looks like she wants to scream for even being heard, but it’s at that exact moment her annoying friend drives up to us by the curb. “That’s my ride. Um, thanks for the help with him tonight. Sorry if it was an inconvenience,” she whispers, turning her back to me.

“Never an inconvenience to help someone who needs it. Remember that,” I state, then take a breath. “I’ll be in next week to try filling out those forms again.”

I’m not sure why I say it, but something shifts inside of her, and she gives me a genuine and soft smile when she opens the door of the car.

“Okay. I guess I will see you then.”

It’s the last thing she says before getting in the car and closing the door. I watch her put on her seatbelt while Shelby looks at me with curiosity before they take off down the street.

Now, to wait for this asshole.





# OLIVIA

WHY ARE MEN DISGUSTING? I THOUGHT MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, Jeff was different because he seemed nice in our short exchange. But I was wrong.

He's just as much of a pig as my brother and father. He just tries to manipulate the woman into complying with his needs.

"Are all men pigs?" I blab, not even thinking as I throw my head against the seat of Shelby's car.

"Pretty much." She shrugs, giving me a quick glance. "There are nice ones out there, but I don't think they live around here," she sighs out, shaking her head. "What happened tonight?"

I groan. "I went on a date," I point out, and she scoffs.

"Yeah, knew that already. Why did you go on a date, though? And why was I called to come rescue you?"

How do I explain to her that I went on a date because Ben tried to destroy me again? If I tell her, she's going to get even more pissed off at him, and I'm beginning to think she may actually murder him at some point out of best friend duty.

"Let's just say my brother got under my skin, and I made a rash decision." I wince, knowing she's going to lose it.

"What did that scummy piece of tarnished trash say this time? I fucking knew he was going to set you off when you left the shop the other day. I'm going to rip his damn balls off before I choke him with them. Such a piece of fucking work." She's rambling to herself as she vents, and I let her.

She's not wrong. My brother is a complete asshole, but he seems to set her off more than anyone else I know. She says it's because I'm too nice, and one of us has to stand up to the dick-weasel.

"He was just being Ben. My profile, that you so nicely created without asking, came across his friend's profile, and he didn't like it," I huff out before changing the subject. "That's all I'm going to say on the topic of my brother because I've had a crappy night and I just want to go home and sleep."

She makes an annoyed sound in her throat before turning the car onto my street.

"Fine, then tell me what the date did to have you calling me?" she barters, and I know I need to give her something.

"He touched me without asking. When I tried to leave, he called me a prude, and then grabbed my arm before the stranger from the shop stopped him," I explain, still trying to process why he was even there.

It was like he came out of nowhere when I needed help the most. I hadn't even realized there was anyone around us, not that I was paying that close of attention.

"He did WHAT?!" she shrieks, looking over at me.

"I'm not repeating it," I mumble, feeling self-conscious.

"I can't believe he touched you without asking. It's not like you're the type of person that gives off lustful vibes." She winces. "I didn't mean that as a bad thing. I just meant you're not like me. You're a girlfriend girl, you know?" she asks, giving me a side glance.

"I know you didn't mean anything by it, but I need you to delete that profile. Please. It's just too much for me to handle," I admit.

"Why was the guy from the shop there?" she asks as she pulls up in front of my house, and I shrug.

"No clue. Probably out for a walk or something, I guess? I wasn't really paying attention to anything other than messaging you and getting away from the botched date that we

will never mention again, by the way.” I give her a look, and she holds her hands up.

“Fair enough.” She looks thoughtful before turning back to me. “What did he say to you before you got in the car?” she questions, and I actually smile.

“That he’s going to come back next week to try filling out those adoption papers again.”

She groans. “I’m sorry, okay! Most men don’t care if I flirt a little, he was just touchier than I anticipated.” She sighs. “Such a shame, too. All the hottest ones are so uptight.”

I burst out laughing, shaking my head as I open the door and get out of the car. “I think he was just stressed out. You said he was taking some time off for his health, right?” I ask, and she nods.

“Yep. He’s some uppity lawyer for the District Attorney’s office in the city. Jonathan, whatever his last name is, seems to be a big deal. Makes sense why he has a huge stick up his ass.”

“You’re something else, you know that?” I smile at her. “I’m going to bed, but let me know when you get home.” I give her a pointed look, and she salutes me.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Bye.” I shut the door and head to my house, unlocking the door before stepping in and securing the lock inside.

Now, to have a shower and forget that this night ever happened.

The shower does what it’s intended to do, but I still feel uneasy. This time for a completely different reason. I can’t shake this feeling of eyes on me, which is just stupid considering I live alone, and there are no windows in the bathroom.

I move around the house, double checking that all windows and doors are locked with curtains closed before moving to sit on the couch.

I turn the tv on, choosing to watch an episode of *Bones* before laying down on the couch to relax. By the time the episode is over, I feel more at ease and safe. I think tonight just rattled me a bit.

I don't know if Jeff would have actually tried to force himself on me, but when he grabbed my arm and wouldn't let go, it rocked me a little.

Okay, maybe more than a little, but I can't help it. I hate the idea that some people think they can just manhandle a person without asking or consequences. It happens way too much in society, and we let them get away with it. It's not okay to keep allowing this cycle to continue.

I'm really glad the man from the shop was there to help me out. I'm not sure how much longer I could have kept my composure, and violence really isn't something I like to resort to if I can help it.

Would I have kicked Jeff in the testicles to get him to let me go if I had to? Yes, but I really didn't want to. Like I said, I prefer to be non-confrontational if possible. My family is a prime example of that. Every day, I choose to ignore them and allow them to think I'm weak because I don't feel the need to get on their level.

Anyone else would have put them in their places by now, but I do my best to keep the peace.

I get up and shut the tv off, turning the lights off as I go and using my phone as a flashlight. Once I'm in the bedroom, I plug the phone in before climbing into bed and making a promise to myself.

"I'm going to start fighting for myself," I speak into the universe before closing my eyes and waiting for sleep to pull me under.



# JONATHAN

SOMETIMES I'M ASTOUNDED BY HOW EASILY I CAN TRAIL someone without them knowing, but then I remember that most people are idiots.

Fuck, I can't even say that because then I'm saying Olivia is an idiot, but she's not. She's just incredibly naïve and sheltered. Yet, even with all of that, I can tell she senses eyes on her.

I watch her being guarded and looking around everywhere like she can feel my eyes on her, but she never sees me. I'm too good at hiding in plain sight.

This fool I've been following since Olivia left the restaurant is too dense for his own good. He hasn't shown any indication that he's noticed someone watching him, but it's all I've been doing.

I've watched him for over four hours. He's been to three different bars looking for a hookup, and no woman is taking the bait. It would be fucking hilarious if I wasn't so pissed off at him for being a spineless coward.

I know why he chose my Olivia on that site, and it wasn't to admire her the way I would, or the way she deserves. After hacking into his account, I realize he always chooses the newer accounts. Everyone that he's messaged and met was bordering on underage. Some of them, I believe, were and just lying about it.

He preys on the younger and more innocent women because he believes they're easier to manipulate into sex. I've

seen it in the courtroom more times than I can count, and each time I prosecute bastards like him to the fullest extent the law will allow.

The pain and anguish I see on victims' faces is seared into my mind for all eternity. Even when I fight with everything I have, the law almost always favours the assailant over the victim in terms of rape and sexual assault.

It's a disgusting truth that I loathe because it's the victims that deserve to be protected. They are the ones violated and their happiness stolen from them because of fear. The justice system does nothing to help them recover, and it's disgusting.

At least Jeff here won't be able to hurt anyone, and if he already has, then his victims will at least get justice and closure in knowing he died a gruesome and brutal death.

I stand across the street from his little house and watch until the lights are out, then wait another hour before making my move.

Just like Olivia's place, it's fairly easy to break in without being detected. There's an alarm on the door, but it looks like the dumbass didn't even bother setting it because it's not showing signs of an intrusion. Even if it has signalled the provider and they contact the police, he will be dead by my hand long gone before they arrive.

This job is a quick in and out.

I've been wearing my leather gloves all night, but I toe off my shoes outside the door so they don't track my footprints when they do a crime scene check.

It hasn't rained in a while, and the fact that I've stepped on concrete the entire way in here is a bonus for me. It's almost too easy. Like the universe is willing me to take out this piece of shit.

Making my way into the kitchen, I check his knives until I find the meat cleaver tucked away in the back of a drawer. Checking it for sharpness, I feel the grin on my face as I silently close the drawer. I check a couple of other drawers until I find the last of what I'm looking for.



It's almost comical how almost every household has a drawer in their kitchen for all the junk that doesn't rightfully have a place, and there's duct tape right at the front of his.

Pulling it out, I quickly remove a large piece before stopping to listen for Jeff moving around. Once I know he hasn't heard me ripping the tape, I quietly close the drawer. Grabbing the piece of tape off the counter and the cleaver, I slowly make my way through his house.

Checking every step with my toes before I take it to avoid floors squeaking, I eventually get to his room. The door is wide open, and he's snoring so loudly I can understand why nothing I did woke him up.

A light sleeper, he is not.

Moving quickly and silently, I tower over his sleeping body as he continues to snore. He's on his side facing away from me, so I prep the tape before lightly tapping his shoulder with the cleaver. He doesn't even wake up, just groans and tosses around until he's lying on his back. His neck open to me.

I could easily swing this cleaver into his neck and kill him now. I debate on how important the message is that I want to give him about messing with what's mine, but I decide I can shorten it.

Readying my arm above my head, I take a deep breath before swinging the cleaver into his neck. I feel the skin breaking as I slice my way through his muscles and voice box, and it's euphoric.

His eyes snap open wide as the blood gurgles, spraying from his neck and covering my upper body. I made sure to stand tight against the bed to keep the blood off my bottom half. I don't want to accidentally trail it through the house on my way out.

Watching as his hands fly to his neck, I smile at him as he fights a losing battle. As the life quickly drains from his eyes, I lean down to whisper in his ear.

“No means no. You should have done better,” I hiss before standing. Watching on for a couple more moments as his body convulses before everything just stops.

The only movement left is the blood still draining as his heart finishes pumping it through his arteries. I watch as it exits through the gaping hole in his neck, satisfied with the job I’ve done.

Tossing the knife onto his bed, I remove my jacket and sweater, now drenched in his blood, before removing the t-shirt underneath and using it to wipe my face and arms clean of any trace.

Once I’m satisfied that I’m not going to track blood everywhere, I move to his bathroom to rinse the blood off my gloves before wiping down the sink with cleaner and grabbing the towel off the handle to dry them.

I take the towel back into the room with me, using it to open up one of his dresser drawers until I find a shirt to throw over my bare chest. The less attention I draw leaving here, the better.

Once I’m dressed again, I move back to the kitchen, grabbing a garbage bag from under the sink, and head back into the room. Using the towel, I pick up the bloody clothes and toss everything into the bag before tying it off.

I take one last look at his lifeless body covered in blood, and smile.

I will never feel bad about taking a life, but especially not his.

Once I’ve made it out of his house and put my shoes back on, I walk back down the street to my car. I double check to make sure no one is watching. Given it’s three a.m., I doubted they would be, but you can never be too careful.

Throwing the bag into my back seat, I start the car and drive a few blocks with my headlights off before leaving town.

Once I'm out of town and on the back roads, I open the app to check in on my girl. She's sound asleep in her bed, resting easily, and it calms me all the way back to my house.

I make my way to the back by the garage and throw the trash bag into my burn pit. I strip off my shoes, socks, and even my underwear until I'm stark naked in my backyard, adding them to the pit to burn with everything else.

Lighting the pit up, I pour some accelerant on the fire so it burns hotter and faster, burning everything that has touched my body tonight. I watch it turn to ash before making my way back into the house and taking a shower.

I'll clean the car in the morning before spending the day watching my girl, but it won't take long. There's a reason I have leather interior in both of my vehicles, and it's not because it's sleek and fashionable like my co-workers think.

I wonder what they'd do if they ever learned of my extra-curricular activities. Probably deny it to the bitter end. No one wants to know they've been chummy with a killer and never saw it. Especially those in law enforcement.



# OLIVIA

IT'S ONLY BEEN A FEW DAYS SINCE THAT AWFUL DATE happened, but I find myself looking for Jonathan all the time.

He said he would be back to adopt a dog, and I really hope he shows. I want to thank him for saving me from Jeff.

I only went on that date because I was hoping I could prove my brother wrong, but now I just feel is foolish.

“God, why is business so slow today?” Shelby whines beside me, and I give her a half-hearted laugh.

“Maybe we’ve just taken care of all the dogs in the area, and we’re getting a break?” I reply with as much sass as I can muster.

“Are you still sore over the fact that lawyer boy hasn’t come back to adopt a dog?” She looks at me pointedly, and I sigh.

“A little. Not for me though, but for the dog that he would have chosen and given a home!” I try to pretend I don’t want to see him as badly as I do, but she sees right through me. Sometimes it sucks having someone know you this well.

“Sure, babe. You keep telling yourself that.” She giggles and shakes her head at me.

“Whatever. Can you go and do our order for next week while I start wiping everything down up here?” I ask, and she smiles before walking off to the back.

I know she loves working in the back because she gets to play on her phone a lot more and listen to music.

I usually don't mind it either because I love getting lost in the music to relax, but lately I just can't. It's hard to concentrate when I feel eyes on me at all times, but never see anyone around.

I'm probably being paranoid about it, but like Grams used to say, 'One can never be too careful'.

I'm seriously contemplating closing an hour early today because Shelby is right. It's been oddly quiet today, and there's no point in us both staying when there's nothing to do.

As I turn around to give my bestie the good news, the door opens and Jonathan walks in.

I thought he looked attractive in a suit the first time I saw him, but the tight torn jeans he's wearing with heavy work boots are to freaking die for. Pairing it with a black button up dress shirt tucked into his jeans, it's dang lethal.

"Johnathan." My voice comes out as a breathy whisper, and I want to smack myself in the head.

*Way to sound like a desperate woman, Liv.*

His smile is absolutely breathtaking as he walks up to me, his eyes travelling my body.

I'm wearing a black dress covered in sunflowers. It's not something I'd normally wear, but when I saw it at the store, I just knew I needed to own it.

It has this fifties poodle skirt vibe, and I instantly fell in love.

"Hey, beautiful," he greets me, and I swear I swoon. Holy heck, my heart.

"Hi," I squeak, and feel the blush on my cheeks.

"Still cute as ever." He winks at me, and I let out a girly chuckle.

I never thought I would be one of those giggly girls, but give me the hottest man I've ever seen and yep, I'm right there with them.

“Th—thank you,” I say, walking toward him. “You don’t have to be this nice, you know,” I stammer, and he watches me.

“But I want to be nice to you.” He smiles at me, his face looking a little confused. “Actually, I’d wager a guess you’re the only person on this planet I care to be nice to,” he says, and that confuses me.

“But... why?” I ask him, tilting my head.

Something dark crosses his eyes before it quickly vanishes, and he shrugs.

“I’m not a good man,” he states, like it’s quite obvious.

“Because you’re a lawyer?” I question, and he barks out a laugh.

“That’s one of the reasons. Does it bother you?” he asks me, his face growing serious once again.

“Does what bother me?” I’m so lost and confused by this conversation. I feel like he’s trying to warn me about something, but I have no idea what it could possibly be.

“That I’m not a good person? Because I promise you that I will always be good to you.” He’s dead serious as he says these words to me, and alarm bells sound off in the back of my mind, warning me that maybe I should be afraid of this man.

Everything he’s saying is a red flag, but I don’t feel like I’m in danger around him. Actually, he seems to be the only man I do feel comfortable around. Like he actually sees me.

“I—um—no?” I fumble over my words. “I’m not scared of you. Is that what you’re asking me?” I ask, and a smile brightens his entire demeanour.

He’s so handsome when he smiles. Oh, he’s handsome when he’s broody too, but that smile shows me there’s really nothing I need to fear from this man.

“I’m very glad to hear that.” He moves close enough to grip my fingers, and a jolt zings through my entire body.

Everything feels like it's been lit on fire, his touch the match to ignite it.

"Um, you are?" I ask like an idiot, and his smile only grows.

"I am. I never want you to be scared of me," he says, looking directly into my eyes.

"Well, I mean, I barely know you, but you seem nice."

He laughs hard, squeezing my fingers a little more, but it doesn't hurt. It's almost like a loving touch.

*That's weird, Olivia.*

"God, you make me feel lighter than I've ever felt," he says before giving my hand one last squeeze and letting go.

I actually feel a little disappointed when he does, but I cover it up by getting down to the point.

"So, you're ready to adopt a dog?" I ask him brightly.

It's not a secret that I love giving animals new and loving homes. They didn't choose to be given up, for whatever reason, and helping them get adopted is a side passion of mine.

Jonathan clears his throat and nods. "Yes. Please," he says kindly, and I beam at him.

"Excellent! I have a few pictures over here on the computer if you'd like to see?" I wave him behind the counter, getting set up on my stool.

It's an uncomfortable thing, but I try to make it a habit to not sit on the computer, or much at all, while I'm at work.

We have the most important programs on the iPad and laptop in the back room as well, but this is just handier at the moment.

"You seem to have me at a disadvantage, by the way," he says in a low voice.

"I do?" I swallow hard, wondering what he's talking about.



“Mhm. Seems you know my name, but I have yet to know yours,” he states, and I think back on it.

Have I really never told him my name? That seems stupid after everything he’s done for me.

“Um, Olivia. My name is Olivia,” I tell him, looking back at the computer and changing the subject before he can say anything else.

“What kind of dog are you looking for?” I ask him, opening up the website for the local shelter.

“Gentle, kind. Not overly hyper, but not something that’s bored to death either,” he says.

He’s standing right behind me now, and I can feel the heat from his body as he moves closer to look at the screen.

My entire body heats from the closeness, and I have to hold in the shiver that’s trying to make its way through my body.

This man will be my undoing, I swear it. I’ve never felt like this about anyone before, but I like it.

A lot.

“Right.” I clear my throat, giving my head a little shake to make myself focus on the task at hand.

*He wants to adopt a dog, Olivia, not a horny woman who doesn’t know the first thing about how to please a man.*

Gosh, I hate the voice in my head sometimes. Why can’t he want both?

“Are you alright, Olivia?” His voice filled with concern.

I’m about to answer him when Shelby hollers from the back.

“Oh, my fucking GOD!” she shrieks. “Liv, what was that douchebag’s name again? You know, the one who tried to get all up in your lady business last week!”

I feel Jonathan stiffen behind me but shake it off. He’s a lawyer. He probably doesn’t like the idea of any man trying to

push themselves on a woman.

“Uh, I’m busy, Shelbs,” I holler back, looking at Jonathan apologetically.

“Sorry. She probably didn’t hear you come in,” I explain, and he gives me a stiff nod as she bursts through the door, looking frazzled.

“Oh,” she says, more than a little surprised when she sees Jonathan and how close he is to me.

“Jonathan came back to look at the dogs available for adoption at the local shelter!” I tell her proudly, and she looks between us before nodding.

“Cool. But seriously, what was his name again?”

I sigh, giving her a bored look. “Jeff, something. We didn’t exactly exchange last names.” I wince at how stupid that sounds.

*Just making all kinds of dumb decisions lately, aren’t you, Liv?*

“Right. Is this him?” She turns the iPad around and in the centre is a picture of the asshole who tried to feel me up.

I actually shiver at the idea of his hands on my body and how much of a dick he’d been.

“Yeah, why?” I ask her, getting an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

“Because he was just found brutally murdered in his home,” she explains, and I feel like I’m going to be sick.

Her eyes travel to Jonathan and she gives him a look I can’t decipher. “It’s a good thing you were there. If something had happened to her, I think it would kill me.” She shakes her head, batting away tears.

“I’m glad I could be there. What are they saying, though? That’s not a common occurrence around here. That feels like more of a Chicago thing,” he says, looking annoyed.

“Oh my God! You’re trying to get away from work, and this probably isn’t helping,” I gasp, looking at him.

“It’s okay, I’m just surprised by it is all,” he explains, reaching his hand to rub my back in a calming gesture.

It’s definitely too intimate considering we don’t know each other, but it feels good anyway.

“Apparently, they have absolutely no idea who did it. They can’t find a lick of forensic evidence, according to the article,” Shelby states in excitement.

“Not now, Shelbs,” I warn, and she huffs a breath.

“Fine. Do your doggy adoption thing and make that golden heart of yours happy so we can make my dark one giddy later!” she quips before going back the way she came.

“Her dark heart giddy?” Jonathan questions with a raised eyebrow, and I snort.

“She has an unhealthy obsession with true crime. Kind of obsessed with it, really,” I say as I turn back to the computer.

“I thought that was secretly all women?” He leans back into me to get a closer look at the screen.

I open up the folder with the dogs I know are going to be euthanized soon if they aren’t given a home.

It’s a practice I absolutely abhor, and I try so hard to save them all, but sometimes I’m not successful, and it’s not like I can just adopt them all. Even if I want to.

“I wouldn’t say all like it’s a gender inclusive thing. We just like the way it tests our intuitive skills, and we learn things.” I shrug and open up the first image.

She’s actually my favourite, and I’ve been on the fence about adopting her for a while now, but I’m never home enough to give her the special attention and love she needs in order to settle in.

She came from a very abusive home and finds it hard to trust anyone at first, so she’s going to need someone around the clock for the first little while until she can feel safe in her new surroundings.

“Who is that one?” He points to the screen, his eyes locked on her picture, and I smile.

“That’s Sadie,” I say wistfully. “She’s a rescue with a dark past. She’ll need a lot of love and attention with basically twenty-four seven care for a while. She’s a sweet girl, though.” I go to click on the arrow to show the next dog when he puts his hand over mine.

“You feel very strongly about her?” he asks, looking at my face for an answer, and I feel the tears starting.

Am I that transparent? Darn, that’s something I need to work on.

Clearing my throat, I nod. “I do. We’ve formed a bond over the past few months. She’s so sweet and gentle, but she’s scared,” I whisper.

“I would like to adopt her,” he says softly, lifting my chin with his finger. “She’s clearly very special and I think she’s exactly what I need.” He smiles down at me.

“You want to adopt Sadie?” I ask him because I can’t wrap my head around it.

He’d said he wanted a gentle and kind dog, and Sadie is definitely that. I just hadn’t imagined a man like Jonathan wanting to adopt a Cocker Spaniel.

“I do. She’s the perfect size, and it sounds like our schedules fit,” he says like it’s a no-brainer.

“Um...”

“Are you sure you’re alright, Olivia? You seem flustered.” He looks at me with concern, and I actually start to laugh.

Like full on belly laugh, because oh my God. If he can tell I’m flustered, that means he realizes it’s because of him.

It’s either laugh, or die of sheer embarrassment.



# JONATHAN

GOD, SHE'S TOO ADORABLE FOR WORDS. AND THAT DRESS. Fucking help me, because I've been hard as stone since I got close to her in it.

I knew she was beautiful before, but she tends to always cover up her body or hide it. This dress, though? It'll be the death of me.

She's like a walking fucking dream with the way it cinches at her waist with a belt before flowing into a skirt.

Would it be cheesy of me to call her Sunflower? Because I think it suits her.

She's beautiful without being flashy, and she brightens up my life like nothing else ever has. She does it for Shelby as well.

She even brightens up her customers' days without even realizing it because she always has a warm smile and kind words for anyone she comes into contact with. And don't even get me started on how gentle she is with animals.

Fuck, I'm about to adopt a previously abused dog because the look in her eyes told me she wanted her.

Sadie. There's something about this dog that has my woman's heart, and I will make sure Olivia gets to have her. She just doesn't know it yet.

Though, with the recent development of Jeff's body being discovered, I will probably need to adjust my timeline slightly.

I'm finding myself overly furious with Ben now that I've cloned Olivia's phone and seen the messages. It was easier than I'd anticipated to clone her phone outside of the restaurant that night. But all the fucking messages dating back months and years from him? All of them hateful.

He has never once said a kind word to his little sister that I could see. It grates on my nerves that she lets him belittle her like that. Allowing him to make her feel less than her worth.

She's a fucking goddess among us but sees herself as worthless.

It ends tonight.

"I like your laugh," I tell her, focusing on something that will calm my nerves, so she doesn't sense the danger lurking within me.

It's a part of me I don't want her to see until it's time. If she sees it now, she will be worried I would use it against her and that would never happen.

She stops laughing, blushing like crazy, and I want to do everything to keep that innocence there forever.

"Sorry." She giggles a little more before righting herself. "I'm good, I promise." She holds her hand up like she's promising to tell the truth in court, and it's sweet.

"If that news was too upsetting for you, I can take the forms home and contact the shelter myself," I tell her.

It takes work not to grind my jaw at the idea of that asshole's lifeless body bothering her, but I have to remember she's not like me. She doesn't live with this darkness inside of her the way I do.

"No, sorry. It's just, you seem to read me better than anyone I've ever met, and it unnerves me." She sighs, looking nervous.

"It's my job to read people, but I never meant to make you uncomfortable." I lift my hand to cup her cheek, caressing it softly.

“I—I’m not uncomfortable with you. That’s the thing that scares me the most,” she whispers, and I nod, giving her a gentle smile before forcing myself to pull away.

I don’t miss the flash of disappointment in her eyes from the loss of my touch, and it pleases me.

*Soon, baby. Soon you will have all the attention you could ever want and need from Daddy.*

“So, what all do I need to do to ensure Sadie comes home with me?” I ask her, stopping my straying thoughts.

If I think about my plans for her, I’ll lose the small control I have on my desire and act too soon. I have to do this right.

“Oh, I have the forms here. If you fill them out and take them to the local shelter, they’ll run a quick background check to make sure you have nothing that suggests violence. It’s a waiting period of a few days to a week, but they’ll hold her for you while the check comes through.” She smiles at me.

Yeah, no way am I waiting for the background check to come through. I know it will be clear, but I want to know Sadie is safe at home with me, so she’s comfortable with me and the house before I bring my girl home.

I’m sure working for the DA’s office along with a kind donation will get them to waive their standard waiting time.

“You really want her?” Olivia asks, her voice hopeful.

“I really do,” I tell her confidently.

If it’s the dog she’s in love with, then it’s the dog I want. Anything to make her happy.

“Thank you.” She snuffles.

I know it’s happy tears, but I don’t like it. Anything that makes her cry makes me murderous.

“Thank *you* for helping me.” I take the forms she hands me and move to the door, giving her one last look as I open it. “I’ll see you soon, Olivia.”



\* \* \*

When I started looking further into Ben, I was pleased to find out he often went to my best friend's strip club.

Out of everyone on this planet, he is the only person who knows about my darkness. He's the one I went to after strangling that woman in the park. When I told him about everything, he didn't judge me.

I knew he wouldn't because he has some less than legal activities of his own that he likes to partake in.

Devlin Thomas is a professional stalker. Everything I've learned about stalking my kills before I attack, I've learned from him.

He taught me everything I now use to keep a watchful eye on my Olivia, and I've taught him how to kill and get away with it should the need ever arise.

I doubt it will, though. He's much more of a watcher than a killer. Once he's learned everything about his current love interest and has wooed them, he quickly gets bored and moves on. No one the wiser to his stalker behaviours.

My phone pings, drawing me back to the moment, and I smile.

**Devlin:**

**Ready.**

That means it's go time.

It doesn't take long for me to get through security. They know me here.

It's not that I come to places like this for pleasure, but I often come to have drinks with Dev and catch up.

I walk straight into his office without even knocking, and roll my eyes when I see one of his strippers climb off his lap and scurry out the door.

“Don’t look at me like that.” He smirks at me.

“Between scenery?” I ask.

I hate referring to women as anything other than women, but we need to talk in code around here. You never know where ears may be listening.

“You could say that.” He lets out a sigh.

I raise an eyebrow at him. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him like this before. Except maybe when we were eleven, and he had a thing for his seventeen-year-old neighbour who didn’t know the meaning of letting a kid down gently.

Oh shit. “No. This is not going to be another Brittany debacle.” I point at him.

“It’s not the same, man. And fuck you for bringing that shit up,” he snarks, and I laugh.

“Then what the fuck’s got you all bent out of shape?”

“I just hired a chick, and she’s the hottest and craziest bitch I’ve ever met.”

“Yeah, and your point?”

“I make it a rule to never view the scenery of my employees.” He crunches his nose in distaste, and I can’t stop the laughter that comes out.

“This. This is where you draw the line?” I chuckle some more.

“A man has to have some rules. We can’t all live the ultimate mirror lives.”

He’s right. I’m definitely not living the standard criminal life, but I don’t see why he’d stop at stalking one of his workers.

Though, it would pose a greater risk of being noticed when he shouldn’t be.

“Fair point. But let me ask you this,” I say, preparing him for my question. “Is there something that makes her different from any of the others?”

He barely has to think before he answers. “The second I saw her, it was like I became obsessed. Something inside of me just wants to claim Shelby for my own, and knock the teeth out of anyone else who even fucking looks at her.”

Shit. There has to be more than one Shelby in this town, right? He couldn't possibly be obsessed with Olivia's best friend.

“Let me see her file,” I say, all joking gone, and he narrows his eyes at me.

“Did you hear what I just said? That includes you, you nosy fucker,” he snaps back, and I glare at him.

“Do I look like I'm fucking joking right now?”

He watches me a moment before sighing and passing me a file folder off his desk.

Damn. He's definitely sprung if he's keeping her file so close.

Opening it up, I groan when I see the annoying blonde. Why the fuck is she stripping, anyway?

You know what; I don't care. As long as she keeps this side of herself away from Olivia, it will be fine. I don't need my innocent baby getting caught up in this bullshit.

“What was that look?” he asks me as I hand the file back to him.

“She's my girl's best friend,” I state, and he blinks at me.

“Right. You've never claimed a woman, so I'm going to need you to elaborate on what the fuck that actually means, Jon.” He looks at me expectantly, and I blow out a breath.

“How long does Ben usually stay here?” I question, needing to know how much time we have.

“Few hours, a few drinks. Maybe some private alone time with Tiffany if he's feeling up to it.” He shrugs.

“And if you were to offer him a private dance in the farthest room? The one right by the emergency exit?”

“He’d willingly go.”

“Set it up as soon as this conversation is over. My car is already back there,” I tell him, and he agrees easily.

“Done.”

“I came across a job and took it, but not to perform said job like I normally would. I took it to protect the woman it was intended for.” He watches me closely, but I have no intentions of hiding this from him. “I knew the moment I saw her picture that she was meant to be mine, and now I’m doing what I need to in order to keep her safe,” I explain.

“Does she know she’s yours?”

I shrug. “Not yet, but she will soon.”

He barks a laugh at me and stands. “You’re a crazy son of a bitch,” he teases.

“It’s why we’re still friends. We’re both too messed up for anyone else to understand. You need to take care of that woman,” I tell him, referring to Shelby.

“Exactly what do you mean when you say take care of her? With you, that could mean a lot of things.”

I sigh. “She’s a royal pain in my ass and I very much can’t stand her influence on Olivia, but she’s protective of my girl, so just make sure she doesn’t die.”

“Yeah, that won’t happen on my watch.” A dark look crosses over my best friend’s face, one I know well.

Shelby is his Olivia. There’s no way he’ll allow harm to come to her.

“Do I want to know what’s going to happen to Ben?” he questions me as I move to hide in the shadows and wait for him to come back.

“He hurt my girl.” It’s all I have to say, and he’s ready to burn the world down with me.

He knows there's nothing I wouldn't do for Olivia if I've claimed her as mine. Like he said, I've never claimed a woman before.



# JONATHAN

I WAIT IN THE DARK CORNER FOR DEVLIN TO GO AND OFFER Ben a free dance. It will take place in the private room I'm standing across from.

I never imagined I would be kidnapping anyone from my buddy's strip club, but the convenience of the emergency exit being so close to the private rooms is one I just couldn't pass up. It's like the universe is helping me to rid it of this piece of shit and avenge my woman.

"Is Tiffany already back there?" I hear a man ask, and I know it has to be Ben.

Devlin had said earlier that she was his favourite girl, and I was oddly curious to see what kind of woman he found attractive, given how horribly he treats my Olivia.

Then again, there is all the chance in the world that he viewed women as nothing. For all I know, he probably views women as a hole to fuck before tossing them aside like yesterday's paper. I couldn't find anything about him possibly having any serious relationships in his past, so I doubt he appreciates them.

"She'll be back to join you in a few minutes. She's just finishing up her break so she can spend some extra time with you, one on one," Devlin replies, the lie falling from his lips with ease.

If he were the straight and narrow type of person, he'd have turned me into the cops when I discovered the monster

lying within me, but he didn't. He helped me find a way to channel it instead.

Between his ability to live on the creepier side of things, and my knowledge of the law and how others worked, it didn't take us long to form the plan we have in place now.

To this day, it has never steered me wrong. Though adding kidnapping to the list is going to be risking things a lot more than I usually do, but it will be worth it.

I won't get caught. At least not so soon that I can't eliminate the threat on Olivia's life, first. I even have an inkling that Ben here could help me with that.

"Why are you being so generous?" Ben asks him, his voice slurring a little, but it still held suspicion.

Devlin scoffs at him. "I'm not. It's Tiffany's birthday, and I told her she could have whatever she wanted as a present. She said she wanted some alone time with your dick."

They walk into my line of sight, and I watch Devlin look Ben up and down before shrugging. "Not sure what all the fuss is about, but I'm not going to deny the birthday girl. Are you?" he taunts Ben, and the idiot falls for it.

"Hell, no. And sorry mate, but you're not my type." Ben laughs at Devlin's disgusted face before walking through the door he unlocks for him.

"Right. There's some of your favourite scotch on the table. First glass is on me. You drink more than that, it's going on your tab," Devlin states before closing the door and turning toward me.

"That didn't take long," I grunt, eyeing the door Ben just walked through.

"He's a horny bastard who wants to get his dick wet. It never takes them long." Devlin shrugs, checking his watch.

"You think he's drunk that already?" I question, already assuming the answer is yes.

Ben is well on his way to being drunk, so there's no doubt in my mind that he tossed it back immediately.



“Most definitely. Give the dumbass five minutes, and he’ll be out.” He watches my face for a moment. “Or don’t. You look like you could use an excuse to knock him out the old-fashioned way.”

I laugh and check my own watch for the time. I’ll give it another minute or so before I go in to deal with him.

He’ll probably still fight me a little, but it will be sloppy at best. He can’t do any real damage.

“Crazy bastard,” Devlin says under his breath, shaking his head.

“Boss!” someone hollers from down the hall at Devlin, and I know our time is up.

“Yeah, hang on,” he orders the guy before smacking his hand on my shoulder. “The cameras are set to turn back on in ten minutes. Make sure you’re out of here by then.”

I nod my thanks and watch him walk off before making my way to the unlocked door standing between me and my prey.

It’s show time.

\* \* \*

That had been almost too easy.

I know it’s because I’m smart and cover my tracks, but shouldn’t someone like Ben Breton be harder to kidnap?

Could I even call it a kidnapping if I wasn’t planning on returning him? Or was it more of a delayed murder scenario?

He was still knocked out as I chained him to the holding cell I had in my secret bunker.

I don’t leave people alive to torture often, but I know he’ll be useful. I’m slowly running out of time to find Olivia’s

killer. Well, the person who hired me to do it.

I was fairly certain it was her father, maybe Ben included, but I need the truth so I know how to eliminate the fucking threat. And I need to know why.

Ben will give me those answers. Eventually, they all talk.



# OLIVIA

IT'S RARE THAT I ACTUALLY STAY HOME ON MY DAYS OFF. I usually decide to go and visit Shelby or go to the graveyard and talk with Grams to get some things off my chest, but today I wanted to stay home.

I've been feeling eyes on me for a few weeks now. It's starting to make me feel paranoid, and I don't like it.

I'm really not someone to become paranoid easily, but something isn't right. It's this deep feeling I have. Call it intuition or a gut feeling, but whatever it is, it won't let up.

I'd gotten news a few days ago that Jonathan had successfully adopted Sadie, and the shelter thanked me for finding her a home.

I hadn't done much. I truly hadn't expected him to want a dog like Sadie, so the fact that he insisted on her was pretty surprising, and slightly heartbreaking.

A part of me wanted her so badly, but I know with running the shop that I'd never have the time for her she needed long term.

Being an adult means making decisions for the greater good. Being an animal lover on top of that means knowing what my limits are, and taking care of a dog while running the shop isn't within mine. No matter how much I wish it could be.

Someday, though.

I'm just getting ready to do some yoga and calm my thoughts when I hear a knock at the door.

Frowning, I walk toward it and gasp when I see the police officers standing on my front doorstep.

Opening the door, I see them look me over before lifting their eyes to mine.

"Officers? Is everything alright?" I ask, not really sure what could be bringing them here to my doorstep.

"I'm afraid it's not," one officer replies. "Would it be alright if we came in, Ms. Breton?" He addresses me formally, and a knot twists in my stomach.

What could this possibly be about? I guess it could be about Jeff, but we only went out on one date. I'm sure they couldn't possibly view me as a suspect.

Right?

"Um, sure. Please come in." I take a step back and wave my hand toward the living room.

Closing the door behind them, they wait and follow me, not wanting to walk farther into my home without me, and I'm grateful for that.

"Can I ask what this is about?" I question, fiddling with my hands. "Can I get either of you something to drink?" I stare at them as they both shake their heads no.

"Thank you, but we're just fine. Could you have a seat please, miss," the second officer asks, and I swallow before dropping into the chair across from the couch they've chosen to sit on.

"What's going on?" I ask them again, fear overriding my common sense.

I have nothing against officers, but I'm starting to get nervous.

"When was the last time you spoke with your brother, Ben?" the original officer asks, and I blink.

This is about Ben? I allow myself to relax a little because I never talk to my brother. I hope he's alright though. Just because he's a jerk doesn't mean I have to wish anything bad on him.

"I'm sorry, officers, but I barely speak to my family. I was only ever close with my grandmother. When she passed a while ago, I refused to join the family business or sell them this house, and they wanted nothing to do with me," I tell them the truth, leaving out the emotional bull crap that goes along with your own family disowning you because you're not the perfect female.

"His phone records indicate you spoke a couple of weeks ago." They watch me closely, and I nod.

I won't lie to them. "I did, briefly. He messaged me to be rude, and then I stopped answering. Is he alright?" I ask, and they share a look.

"He's missing, Ms. Breton," the second officer states, and I gasp in shock.

"Wh—what? How? When?" I blink, trying to gather my thoughts, but they're a jumbled mess.

How could Ben possibly be missing? That's ridiculous!

"A few days. We aren't sure when, but he didn't show up for work and your father became concerned. After twenty-four hours of no one having contact with him, we started to search. We haven't been able to find anything so far. We were hoping maybe you'd be able to help us."

Me? How could I possibly help them when my brother chose to not speak to me unless he wanted to be hurtful and cruel.

"I don't have any idea where he could be. Like I said, we barely speak to one another." I feel the tears welling in my eyes as they watch me.

"We believe you, but there's another reason we came." The first officer moves around like he's uncomfortable with whatever he's about to say.

“What?” My eyes travel between them as I wait for one of them to say whatever it is they want to say, but it doesn’t take long.

The second officer clears his throat. “You went on a date with a man named Jeff. Now, we’re aware that last names most likely weren’t exchanged,” he says, and I groan.

“Neither was the main course before I left him at the restaurant,” I say with a little attitude. “I’m sorry for what happened to him.” They look shocked at my admittance.

“You’re aware that he was brutally murdered inside his own home?” the first one asks.

“I am. My best friend is sort of a true crime enthusiast. She thought she recognized him from the dating app,” I explain.

“So, you had no prior knowledge of it before that point?” the second officer asks, and I narrow my eyes.

“I’m sure you can’t possibly be insinuating that I somehow had something to do with that.” I take a deep breath, willing my anger to not get the best of me right now.

“Ma’am, you have to understand. With one man murdered and another missing who are both connected to you, we have to pursue every possible avenue.”

I snort. “Sorry.” I start to giggle. “But do I really look like someone that could brutally kill anyone?” I laugh even harder.

Part of me is slightly worried I may be having a mental breakdown from all the paranoia recently.

“We had to ask, Ms. Breton.” The first officer gives me a sad look.

“Am I under arrested, or being charged with anything?” I ask them, waiting for their response.

“Well, no,” officer two stutters, and I nod before standing.

“Then I think we’re finished here. I’m sorry, but if you have any further questions, you will have to take me to the station where I can contact a lawyer.” Not that I know any.

Well, I know of one, but he's on a mental health leave from work, and it's not like we're friends. I can't exactly just call him up and ask him to defend me against insane accusations.

"You're not in any trouble right now. We're just asking you some questions," the first officer says as he looks down at me. He's a lot taller than I am, and it makes me slightly uncomfortable. "You refusing to answer any more questions is just going to make you look guilty, miss."

I take a calming breath. "No, it's not. It shows responsibility. It shows that I'm aware of how easily words can be taken out of context and used against someone. I'm showing that I'm mature enough to know that, even though I'm innocent, I still know my rights.

"I have a right to counsel, and since you've already stated that I'm not being charged, I'm asking you nicely to please leave." I give them a small smile, and I can see a smirk threatening to appear on the second officer's face.

Apparently, he seems to enjoy me sticking up for myself. Well, me too, actually.

"Alright, we'll leave you be for now. Thank you for answering our questions. Have a good day, miss." He nods his head toward me before urging the first officer out the door.

Once the door is re-locked, I go to the fridge and pull out a cold bottle of wine. I'm going to need some alcohol to sort these thoughts out.





# JONATHAN

I COULD FEEL MYSELF GETTING ANGRY AS I WATCHED THEM interview her.

I know they aren't bad guys, and that technically, it's my involvement in her life that has them questioning her in the first place, but fuck.

I wanted to walk across the street from my hiding place and deck them both for even going near my woman. I won't, though.

I'm beyond proud of her for how well she handled them. She would make an incredible attorney if that's what she chose to do with her life, but I doubt she would. She's happy running her business, and I would never get in the way of her dreams.

Okay, slight lie considering I plan on taking her to my home, most likely against her will and keeping her there until she realizes she loves me.

The desire is already there. I could practically taste it when I was with her last. The way her body responded to my voice and nearness. Even the thought has my dick thickening.

"Fuck off," I hiss at my cock. I don't want to be sitting here with a boner all fucking day.

"Shelbs, I'm getting drunk," I hear Olivia say in my earpiece.

I look down at my phone again and see her on the phone, already kicking back said wine via the bottle.

Right. I was going to need to stay close tonight.

On any other night, I usually leave her be because I have the silent alarms to warn me if anything happens, but with her drinking I don't want to chance it.

Ben wasn't giving me many answers right now, anyway, so maybe a full day and night without food or water is exactly the motivation he needs to tell me what I need to know.

Every time I ask, Ben just laughs and shakes his head. I think he believes delaying will save him, but it won't. No one would ever suspect me of the things I've done, including keeping him locked in a cell underground.

I can't hear Shelby on the other line, but Olivia confirms my suspicions by telling her she'll see her soon, and I know she's on her way. That means a lot of girly chatter, alcohol, and true crime.

It won't be the first night I've watched them together, but it's never that entertaining to me. Not when Shelby is here, but this might be different.

Pulling up my contacts, I hit Devlin's number.

"Hey, what's happening?" he asks.

"Your woman is coming here and they're about to get drunk. You busy?" I ask, and he snorts.

"Never too busy to stalk that beautiful woman. Shoot me the address." He's cheery.

"Meet me at the grocery store around the corner from the address I'm sending your way. Two of us across the street could get us caught in this neighbourhood," I state, and he agrees before hanging up the phone.

Taking a moment to shoot off a text with Olivia's address, I watch and wait until Shelby arrives and heads inside. I watch the surrounding houses, making sure some nosy old neighbour isn't watching from their window, before I walk down the street to my car and wait for Devlin to show up.

\* \* \*

“THIS IS SOME NEXT LEVEL SHIT,” Devlin says to me as we watch the girls’ flit from room to room and I change the camera screen.

“I need to know she’s protected.” I shrug, like my obsession isn’t a big deal.

They’re beyond drunk at this point. I wouldn’t even know how to begin describing what they are. Wasted, maybe? I could say sloshed, but is that really any different from wasted?

“They need a fucking keeper. What is that? Their fifth bottle?” he hisses as they go into the kitchen and pull out yet another bottle of wine.

I wince. “She’s going to be sick tomorrow,” I say, shaking my head.

I’m slightly pissed off at how drunk she is, but I know it’s not really a big deal. It happens all the time when you’re younger. I know I had my fair share of hangovers in my early twenties.

At least she’s at home with a friend and safe, rather than in a bar where I’d have to kill anyone who even chanced a look at my girl. It would make for a long and bloody night, and one I most likely wouldn’t walk away from without being caught.

“I know that look,” Devlin chuckles beside me, shaking his head. “You can’t kill everyone that looks at her, you know,” he points out, and I take my eyes off the screen to narrow them at him.

“And why the fuck not?” I know why, and he knows I know why, so there’s no real reason to answer, but he does anyway.

“Because that would mean leaving her unprotected without you,” he says, making me curse.

“I fucking know that,” I grind out, moving my eyes back to the screen. “They’re going to bed,” I state, and he laughs.

“Think they’ll even make it to the bedrooms?”

“They’re down the hall from the living room. I fucking hope they’re not that drunk,” I groan as we watch the girls

stumble along the hallway, giggling as they cling to each other.

“Why the hell don’t you have sound in the hallway?” Devlin curses me out for not being able to hear what they’re saying. You can only tell they’re giggling because everything they’re doing is overly exaggerated right now.

“Because I didn’t see the need to have sound in the bathroom or hall.” I shrug. I don’t need to explain to him why I gave her some privacy. I already felt like a slight dick for spying on her to this extent.

“Right. They didn’t even turn most of the lights off,” he points out, and I smile.

It’s one of the things she always does before bed, but I guess not when she’s wasted off her ass.

“Now what?” he asks as we watch a split screen of both rooms to know the girls have climbed into bed.

“Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m not leaving. I need to stay close. I have a gut feeling that something is going to happen.” I tell him the truth.

I’ve had this gnawing feeling ever since I took Ben that whoever wanted her dead would most likely retaliate. Especially if it is her father and brother behind the hit on her life, like I assume.

“Is there a true possibility that they could be in danger?” he questions, and I nod. “Fuck. You need to tell me what the hell is going on. Why does someone want your woman dead? She seems like one of the most innocent people I’ve ever encountered.” Devlin looks confused and irritated.

“I haven’t figured it all out yet, but the contract stated that she had something they could only get in death. Which I obviously won’t let happen,” I spit out, still pissed off at the idea of anyone wanting to hurt her.

“That’s fucked up, man,” he says, and I nod in agreement as my phone dings.

My body tenses as I fight to pull it out of my pocket, knowing that was an alert. Either someone is breaking into my home, or hers.

“You have your guest secure?” Devlin asks me, like a smart-ass.

“He’s locked in a cell in my bunker. He’s not going anywhere,” I tell him, pulling the camera up for the entryway to Olivia’s house.

If it’s my house being broken into, I don’t really give a fuck. It’s not like they’d ever stumble across my kill room where Ben is hidden away. They also won’t get past the special locks I have installed on the tops of each door.

“So that means...” he trails off when I curse after checking the camera for the back door to her house when the front looked secure.

“It means someone is about to die,” I growl, throwing my computer into the backseat, turning the car on, and gunning it to Olivia’s house.

“Fuck. What are you going to do?” He’s slightly panicked, and I shake my head.

“I’m going to kill him, then toss his body in the trunk,” I state, like it’s any other day.

“You’re going to get caught, Jon. You need to be smart about this,” he hisses, as I slam on the brakes in her driveway and get out of the car.

“You want him to kill her and Shelby, then?”

“Fucking hell. Fine. You get him and try to do it without blood. I’ll grab the plastic in your trunk,” he orders, and I grunt. “I mean it, Jon. No blood!” he hisses as I move to the back door of her house.

He’s right. I need to be smart about this. We’ll kill this fucker and get him in the car before figuring out what to do with the girls.

For the first time tonight, I’m glad my baby is wasted.



# OLIVIA

I CAN'T HAVE BEEN LYING IN BED FOR MORE THAN A FEW minutes. I feel like there's way too much noise in the house, but I'm drunker than I've ever been, so what the fuck do I know? I'm probably hearing things.

I groan and close my eyes, rolling my face into the pillow as another quiet thump comes from downstairs.

Yeah, definitely not getting up. I barely made it to bed in one piece. If Shelby's drunk butt wants to bang around, more power to her, but I refuse to move.

"Shelby! Shut up!" I holler at her as another bang happens closer to the bedroom, followed by whispers that I can't make out.

Oh, God. Did she bring a guy here?

Nope. No thank you. Not even going to think about that.

Reaching blindly to feel around on my nightstand, I grab my headphones before opening my eyes and forcing that impossibly small little bugger into the bottom of my phone and plopping them in my ears.

I don't care what music is playing, I just know I'm too wasted to tell her to take it somewhere else, and yet too sober to listen to her orgasms. Gross.

I open the first playlist on Spotify and turn up the volume until I'm confident I can't hear anything else going on before closing my eyes and shutting the world out.



“So comfy. I love you, pillow,” I murmur before drifting off to the sounds of a lulling country song.

\* \* \*

GROSS.

My head feels like something crawled in there and is trying to beat its way out with a hammer.

Way too much wine. I don't even remember how many bottles we went through. I try to think back, but I have no idea.

Five? Six, maybe.

“Ugh,” I groan, covering my eyes and refusing to open them.

I'm not ready to try facing the world yet.

I listen for sounds, wondering if Shelbs is even awake yet, but I'm met with silence. Yeah, I doubt she's even stirring yet. I'm pretty sure she had even more to drink than I did.

“What the hell did you do to yourself, Liv?” I croak out to myself, wincing at the pounding in my head.

I turn onto my side, digging my face into the pillow. Something doesn't feel right, though.

Great, even my pillow is revolting against me.

Trying to drift back to sleep, I pull the covers over my head as I try to block out the sound of little feet clipping along the floor.

“Go away, demon headache from hell.”

*Woof!* A bark has me jolting up in bed with a scream.

“What the?!” My hands fly to my chest as I blink the sleep from my eyes. “I didn't bring work home with me.”

*Woof. Woof.* I know that bark. Though it doesn't sound nearly as quiet as it had last time.

Opening my eyes again, I squint as I take in my surroundings before my eyes land on Sadie.

“Hey, Sadie!” I squeal, momentarily ignoring the thing hammering against my skull. “What are you doing in my dreams, girl? Where are we?”

Sadie jumps onto the bed, her tail wagging as she pants and walks over to me.

*Woof.* She licks my face in excitement until I’m laughing before nausea rolls through me.

“Sadie, I think I need a bucket,” I groan.

Why do I feel sick in my dream? Is the punishment really that severe?

“There’s a can beside the bed just in case,” I hear a familiar voice.

Sadie jumps down off the bed and trots to the doorway where the voice came from.

When I look over, the man belonging to the voice looks laid back, and sexy as ever, in jeans and a t-shirt.

“What?” I ask him, staring openly at his fine body. I would totally climb him like a tree if he let me. And you know, if I even knew how.

I should really get a move on with the whole losing my virginity thing. I’m going crazy and dreaming about a customer that I’ve only met a few times.

He smirks at me before nodding his head to the floor beside me. “Can. In case you need to throw up.”

Right. Because being hungover sucks. “Weirdest dream ever,” I whisper, shaking my head before the nausea rolls over me again.

Reaching for the can, I unceremoniously empty the contents of my stomach into it the second it reaches me. The pounding in my skull intensifies to the point I want to cry.

“Never drinking again,” I cry as I pull my face away from the trash can.

“Probably a wise decision,” Jonathan states, and I groan.

“Dream you is being a dick,” I mutter. “I thought you’d be super nice.”

He chuckles and Sadie barks. “I’m nice to you,” he states.

“Right.” I place the can back on the floor, scrunching up my nose at the fact I even tossed my cookies.

*Woof. Woof.* Sadie barks, and I look at her.

Her tail is wagging like crazy as she stares up at her new owner, and it warms my heart. I know this isn’t real, but I also know Sadie was allowed to go home with him almost immediately after filling out the forms.

It makes my heart happy to think about her being so lively and vivacious. I hope she’s living a happy life with Jonathan, even if I am slightly jealous that I didn’t get to keep her for myself.

“Yes, girl, I know.” He bends down to pat her, and she wiggles her butt playfully. “Why don’t you go lay down with our girl for a bit?” he says, pointing to me, and Sadie runs over and jumps back on the bed.

“I love this,” I sigh and pet her as I lay back down.

“Drink some water before you go back to sleep, Olivia. You need to rehydrate,” Jonathan tells me in a serious tone.

“Sir, yes, sir.” I pretend to salute him as I close my eyes.

“Sassy,” he mutters before walking over to me. Opening a water bottle, he holds it out to me.

I eye it and him, but sigh and take it from him before taking a few sips and handing it back as the dream starts to fade.

“Thank you,” I whisper, pulling the covers back over me as Sadie curls up beside me.

“Don’t thank me, sunflower. Just sleep.”

Sunflower? That’s an odd thing to call me.

“Such a weird dream.”



# JONATHAN

BETWEEN THE ALCOHOL SHE DRANK AND THE SEDATIVE I HAD to give her last night to get her home, she's completely out of it. I'll have to be careful with how much she consumes when she gets upset.

Last night had been a damn close call. That sly fucker was nowhere near as professional as I am and would have easily woken the girls up had they been sober. I'm just thankful that, when I finally got his dead ass body to the trunk and went back for Liv, she had put headphones in to drown out the noise.

It made giving her the sedative quick and easy, and she didn't wake before now.

Sadie has been going insane all morning. She's definitely close to my girl. The second she got a whiff of her scent, she went a little crazy, bouncing and wagging her ass in the air while she panted at me. Her little doggy eyes were brighter than I'd yet to see them, and it made me smile.

The poor dog had been terrified when I'd brought her home, but I did exactly what Olivia had said. I gave her lots of love and attention and even took it a step further. Using my knowledge of dominance and being an 'alpha', I started praising her for being such a good dog.

Dogs are submissive by nature to their alpha. I happened to be that for Sadie, and she knew it. It gave her comfort, which made me happy, because I knew it would thrill my girl to see Sadie thriving.

What I hadn't expected was for my sunflower to wake up and be as calm as ever. She thought she was dreaming, though, so I shouldn't be that surprised.

"Take care of her, Sade. I have work to do," I tell the dog, looking at her pointedly. She just blinks at me before closing her eyes and getting comfy with our girl.

Making my way out the back door, I reinforce the locks so Olivia can't leave if she happens to wake up again before I'm finished. It's not that I'm trying to keep her prisoner, but she could easily get lost and hurt out here.

When I first installed the high security locks at the top of my doors, I hadn't even known of Olivia's existence. They just seemed like a logical choice to have for security reasons. You make a lot of enemies working for the District Attorney's office, and I refuse to become a murder statistic. Of the dead variety anyway.

I walk into my garage, sealing the doors shut before opening the panel on the wall. I push a button to open the entrance into my hidden bunker. This garage wasn't even here when I bought the house, but I needed an area to kill without ever being detected, and this was the perfect solution.

"You son of a bitch!" Ben hollers the second he hears my footsteps coming down the stairs, and it brings a smile to my face.

"Hmm, are we finally in a chatty mood?" I ask, rounding the corner to the room where his cell is in the corner.

I'm a sick son of a bitch for having a bunker with drains to dispose of my victims' blood. I'm not really sure what it says that I also have a holding cell in the same kill space.

Ah, whatever. It all leads back to me being a sick and twisted bastard.

"You won't get away with this. Why the hell am I even here?" he snaps at me, and I smile.

I can tell he's slowly losing his sanity as he sits down here in the dark with no food or water.

“Let’s try this again. Maybe I’ll give you some water and a sandwich if you answer me truthfully,” I tell him, and his eyes light up with the promise of something in his stomach.

“Why do you care about her? Are you trying to get information from me to kill her? Because you’re going about it in the worst way possible,” he huffs, and I hold back the anger coursing through me.

“I’m not the one that wants her dead, but I think you know who does.” I tilt my head, watching his face as some form of understanding dawns on him.

“You care for my sister. Why?” he scoffs, and I growl.

“She’s a better person than you’ll ever be. If you ever want to eat or drink again, I recommend refraining from negative comments toward my woman,” I snap, and his eyes widen.

“She—wait, my sister isn’t dating anyone,” he stammers, confused as fuck.

“Agree to disagree for the moment. It’s really none of your business, anyway. Who wants her dead other than you?” I ask, and an evil look crosses his features.

“You can’t stop her death, you know. Taking me would have just sped up the timeline.” He’s taunting me, knowing he has knowledge that I need. What he doesn’t know is I already have her, and no one is going to harm her here.

“Ben, Ben, Ben. Do you know who I am?” I ask, and he narrows his eyes at me.

“A deranged son of a bitch who gets off on toying with people?” he quips, and I bark out a laugh.

He’s not wrong. “Partially. But I also happen to know exactly who you and your father are.” I smile, nothing but darkness and possible psychosis coming from me. “My name is Jonathan Carmichael. I work with the Chicago DA’s office.”

He swallows, making a small sound of fear, and I thrive off it.

Walking over to my workbench, I open the mini fridge I have stored underneath and pull out a bottle of water and a stale sandwich.

It's been in here for a while, but it's all the asshole is getting for now. He doesn't deserve anything nicer, and he won't get it until he tells me for certain that it was him and his father behind the hit on my woman.

"Here." I shove the water and sandwich into the cubby on the other side of the cell so he can't grab a hold of me, before turning to walk away.

I hear him moving around and chugging the water as I round the corner and head back up the stairs just as my phone rings.

I chuckle when I see it's Devlin.

"Hey, you good?" I ask him, pushing the button on the wall to hide the bunker before stepping back outside and securing the garage.

"Define good," he huffs out. "I got the crazy bitch home and stayed with her until she woke up. She came at me with a goddamn hammer," he hisses, and I laugh.

"Sounds perfect for you," I taunt, and he sighs.

"She really is. Anyway, I gave her the story that she'd called me drunk off her ass for a booty call." I listen as he continues. "She apparently buys that part just fine. Not sure whether to be happy about that or hire you to kill all the bastards she's slept with in the past."

I laugh. "Be happy she believes you. What about Olivia?" I ask.

It was the one part of last night we hadn't come up with a solution for, and that worries me.

Best-case scenario, Shelby reports her missing. Worst-case, she starts to question fucking everything about what Devlin has told her before going back to Olivia's house.

He snorts. "Oh, she's already losing her shit, not being able to get a hold of her," he tells me, and I groan. "I've been



watching her all day, and she's a ball of fury. What do you want me to do?"

Fuck if I know. "Call her in for a double shift or something. Make up an excuse of needing her at the club. I need you to buy me some time. I have to wait until Liv is sobered up before I can talk to her about everything, and hopefully have her message Shelby from a cloned phone."

"Are you sure she's not going to try and cut your nuts off the second she realizes you've kidnapped her?" he questions with a laugh.

"I doubt it will be easy, but I will do whatever I have to in order to protect her. I'll make her see that her friend's life will be in danger if she asks too many questions."

"Good luck, man," he tells me.

"You too."

Hanging up the phone, I make my way back to the house, using the fingerprint scanner beside the door. It unlatches the top locks so I can enter the quiet kitchen without issue.

There's no sound at all. Good. It means she's still getting the rest she needs.



# OLIVIA

WHY IS THE BED SO COMFY RIGHT NOW? I NEVER WANT TO GET up again. I push my head deeper into the pillow, then freeze when something moves against me.

I feel the whimper building in me, but I don't let it come out. Instead, I mentally talk myself into opening my eyes and am met with a pair of dark brown ones staring back at me. Ones I know well.

“Sadie?” I question, knowing it's her.

There's no way I'm dreaming this time, though. Not a chance in hell.

Sadie's ears perk up and she starts wagging her tail before doing the dog version of an army crawl until she's nudging my chin with her nose, making me laugh.

God, I love this dog.

I pet her for a few moments as I look around the room, conscious of the fact I am most definitely not in my house right now.

If I wasn't dreaming earlier, and Sadie being here with me right now proves that, then logic would say I'm at Jonathan's house.

But why?

Why would he bring me here? And how did I get here to begin with?

“Shelby!” I gasp, sitting up fast, feeling a little dizzy.

Right, wine. Way too much wine. I don't think I've ever been that drunk in my life.

Not a great time to have done it either, but having the police question me wasn't exactly a fun and stressless experience. Then, knowing Ben is missing and somehow they think I'm involved because Jeff the creep ended up dead?

It's enough to make anyone want something to drink. Though, looking back, I think maybe we should have stopped after the first three bottles were gone. It's a little too late to be worrying about that now, though.

"Sadie, where am I?" I look at her. She just stares at me with her cute little tongue flopped out and her tail wagging. "You're not going to be overly helpful on this front, are you?" I chuckle before standing.

*Woof.* She jumps off the bed to stand beside me, and I smile. At least I have her while I'm in a strange house with no recollection of how I got here.

"I wonder if we can get out..." I muse out loud, heading toward the door.

It opens easily, and I wonder again why the heck I'm in a strange place. Moving down the hall, I look around, completely impressed, but feeling out of place in Jonathan's home.

It's too extravagant and luxurious for someone like me. I'm not sure I could ever live in a place like this. Though, if I wasn't alone, then, maybe?

"Good to see you awake and moving around," Jonathan says from behind me.

I jump, screaming and holding my chest while Sadie starts barking, thinking I'm in some kind of danger.

"Are you a ninja?" I hiss, and the corner of his mouth quirks upward.

"Definitely not," he says, giving me an adorably handsome smirk.

*Bad, Olivia. No swooning over your possible kidnapper.*

“Um, not to seem rude or anything, but why am I here?” I ask, then want to slap myself.

How can I possibly be rude for asking why I’m in a strange house with no memory of getting here? I know I definitely didn’t call him because I don’t have his number.

Well, okay, I do. But technically, I’m not supposed to. That would be a gross invasion of his privacy as a customer and all.

He just continues to smile at me. “I don’t think you could ever possibly be rude, sunflower,” he states, leaning against the wall a few feet from me.

He’s doing that thing where he leans on the wall and crosses his arms over his chest while his feet cross at the ankle. It’s freaking sexy.

I bite my lip as I take in the sight of his toned forearms before my eyes travel down the front of his body, stopping at the bulge in his jeans.

Holy mother of Hannah. That has to be a trick of the eyes, right? That doesn’t seem humanly possible.

“My eyes are up here when you’re ready, pretty girl,” he says, his voice filled with humour.

I snap my eyes up and feel myself blush at being caught.

What the actual heck is happening to me right now? “Sorry,” I squeak, and he smiles.

“Never apologize for checking me out. I know I can’t keep my eyes off of you,” he says simply, like that’s completely normal.

I mean, I guess it is when you actually know the person, or they’re passing by... but he’s making it sound like he’s seen me a ton more than he actually has.

“Uh—” I start to speak, but can’t figure out what to say. “Thank you?” I guess it’s a compliment, right?

“See? You can’t be rude. I know your mind just questioned a bunch of stuff, but you still thanked me. I love that about

you,” he tells me, and that dang blush is back again. If it really ever went away.

“Jonathan, I—I don’t really understand what’s going on,” I tell him truthfully, and a dark look crosses his face, making me shiver.

He winces, standing up straight and walking toward me, but I take a step back.

“Why am I here?” I whisper, looking down at Sadie for some comfort.

She’s staring at Jonathan like he’s hung the moon, and it settles something inside of me.

I’m still afraid, but dogs are an excellent judge of character. Especially when they’ve been through what Sadie has.

“I brought you here to keep you safe,” he tells me, and I scrunch my nose.

“But... I am safe?” It definitely comes out as a question.

There’s something about his stance right now, and the hardness to his voice that has me doubting the validity of that statement.

“You are now, but you weren’t, Olivia.” He steps up to me, reaching for my hand and holding it in his own. “Let’s get you something to eat first before I tell you everything, okay? You need to refuel your body after the night you had.”

My stomach drops. How does he know the kind of night I had? But then it dawns on me.

“You’ve been watching me,” I whisper, more to myself than him, but he confirms it anyway.

“Yes. I always take care of what’s mine.” What’s his...

He thinks I’m his? That’s just crazy. “You can’t—”

“I can,” he says, cutting me off. “I don’t want to say too much and ruin your appetite, but I will say this. The moment I came across your photo, I knew you were meant to be mine. You’re my own personal sunflower.”

At this moment, there are a lot of different things I could say, but my brain is an idiot and focuses solely on the odd nickname, rather than the dangers I could be facing.

“Sunflower is a weird nickname,” I huff out, and he blinks at me a few times before a smile spreads across his lips.

“Your dress inspired it.” I scoff, but his smile just grows. “It reminded me you’re the one pure thing I have in my life, Olivia. You.”

Well, shit. Does he have to go getting all romantic and whatnot? How am I supposed to stay annoyed when he says things like that?

“Smooth, mister. Very smooth.” I narrow my eyes at him, but his smile doesn’t waver as he gently pulls me toward the kitchen.

Well, presumably the kitchen, considering he’s so intent on feeding me.





# JONATHAN

OLIVIA IS SKITTISH RIGHT NOW, AND IT BOTHERS ME.

I know why she's feeling that way, and I completely understand it, but I don't like it. I can tell she feels the draw between us. It's in her body language and how she subtly leans toward me when she isn't even conscious of it.

It shows when her breath hitches, and her nipples harden whenever I'm around. Her body and soul are already connected to me. It's her mind and heart that have to catch up.

"Can you tell me what's going on now?" she asks quietly, and I nod.

A feeling of wariness quickly filling me at the idea of telling her everything. I wanted more time to make her fall in love with me before telling her I was a killer.

The second hit last night proved that I'm out of time in that regard. She needs to know everything about why she's in danger, and that means telling her how I know.

I told her I wasn't a good man, but that I would always be good to her. Now I just hope she remembers that when this is all over with.

"Of course." I nod, standing to guide her into the living room where she'll be more comfortable. "Before I get into the specifics, I need to ask you something."

She watches me curiously as Sadie curls up on the couch beside her, before lowering her head onto Olivia's lap. The sight makes me smile.

“Okay, what is it?” she asks, her voice soft and gentle.

She’s no longer showcasing the fear she had when I first found her wandering, but I know that’s about to change.

“Do you remember the last time I was in the shop?” I ask her, and she nods.

“Speaking of... who’s running it right now? I need to be there!” she says, panicking.

“I promise to take you into work every day once we’ve had the discussion we’re about to have. I would never put your business in jeopardy.”

She breathes out a sigh of relief and it warms my heart to know that she trusts me, and takes me at my word.

Why wouldn’t she, right? I’m a lawyer and passed the screening to adopt the dog she loves.

I love that innocence about her, and I hope to shield her from my world as much as possible at the end of it all.

“Do you remember what I said to you? About me?” I coax her to remember, and she nods.

“You—you told me you weren’t a good person.” I see her shiver a little, and rush to assure her.

“But that I would always be good to you,” I remind her, and she whimpers a little.

“Why? What makes you a bad person? And what exempts me from ever seeing that side of you?” she asks, her voice full of doubt that threatens to break me apart.

“Because I need you, Olivia. You’re safe with me because I would kill anyone who even tried to harm you,” I declare, angry at the assholes I’ve already killed in her honour. They deserved nothing less than what they got, and Ben will end up the same when I get the information I need from him.

She gasps, fear radiating off her, and I want to burn the world down to prove to her she has no reason to be afraid of me.

“You never have to fear me, Olivia. Not ever,” I promise, and she looks at me like I’ve lost my mind.

“You said kill as if it was just another thing for you. Like you meant it, Jonathan,” she whispers, and I nod.

“I told you I wasn’t a good man, Olivia. You wanted me to answer your questions about why you’re in danger?” I ask, knowing I need to get everything on the table so we can start working through this.

“Please,” she whimpers, and I nod before reaching for my laptop on the coffee table.

Once I’ve pulled up the contract, I take a deep breath. “You need to understand that I stand by my promise. You never have to fear me, even after you read over everything I’m about to show you.” I give her a pointed look and wait for her to give her agreement.

I know it won’t be that easy for her, but it’s the best I can do. It will take time for her to trust me, no matter what I say.

Handing her the computer, I watch as she looks at the screen in confusion, before pain and fear overtake her beautiful features. She reads and rereads the contract I accepted in order to protect her, until her entire body is shaking.

Moving off the chair, I slowly take the computer before kneeling in front of her, taking her shaking hands in mine.

“Liv, baby, look at me,” I whisper, and she bursts into sobs, trying to pull her hands from mine, but I don’t let her.

“You... you took a contract t—to k—kill me?” she sobs, her words broken with tears, and I shake my head vehemently.

“No, Liv. No. I took the contract to buy time so I could trace it back to whoever put it out. So I can take *them* out. I took it to keep you safe, baby,” I swear to her, and she’s shaking her head as tears stream down her face.

“You’re a killer? Y—you weren’t ki—kidding?” she sniffs, her cries still making her entire body tremble.

It's fucking killing me to see her like this, but it was inevitable. "I am, baby. I know that's not something you want to hear, but last night made it impossible for me to hide this from you," I whisper, my heart cinching when I think about someone breaking into her home to kill her.

If I hadn't been down the road monitoring her, I never would have made it to her in time. I came so close to losing her, and that terrifies me more than anything else ever has.

"Last night?" she whispers, lifting her shoulder to try and wipe some of the tears off her face. "What happened last night?" She's still crying, but it's slowed down a bit.

I squeeze her hands in mine, looking into her eyes to try and convey how much she truly means to me. "I did something a few days ago that tipped the original poster's hand. They sent another hit out." I swallow as her face crumbles even more. "But it was a shit contract, Liv. The person they hired this time wasn't top notch. They got desperate," I explain, moving slowly to stand and sit down on the couch beside her.

Her face scrunches in thought as she tries to understand all of this in her mind, but she's too innocent and perfect to truly understand how dark some people can be in this world.



# OLIVIA

I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS. IT FEELS LIKE MY ENTIRE world is falling out from under me as I try my hardest to process what Jonathan has just told me.

Someone, and I have no idea who, wants me dead because I have something they want. But they can only get it if I'm dead? I have nothing that would be beneficial to anyone.

I have my shop and Grams' house. That's it. Neither of them are worth killing me over, surely.

And Jonathan? He's a killer? I sure didn't see that one coming. What the heck is happening right now?

"I don't understand," I whisper, trying to force the tears to take a backseat so I can focus on everything.

"It's not something that will be easy for you to wrap your head around, baby," he tells me, pulling me a little closer to him.

For a killer, he seems really kind.

*God, that feels dumb to think. He's a killer, Liv!*

Oh my God! "Shelby!" I screech, and he pulls me tighter against him, releasing one of my hands so he can grip my chin.

"She's alright. I got her out of there last night, but she's causing some issues," he says, grimacing. I don't think he likes her much by the sounds of it.

I guess she did hit on him and make him uncomfortable, but it's just who she is.

"Someone tried to kill us last night?" I shriek, his earlier words sinking in. I was drunk out of my mind. "I heard a bunch of noise and talking," I whimper, closing my eyes as I try to think back on the night before when I grabbed my headphones.

He narrows his eyes at me. "You did, and instead of investigating, you put headphones in," he states, annoyed at that.

I give him a droll look. "Uh, sure. Let me walk right into a serial killer's arms!" I snap, and he winces.

"No, what you should always do is call the police if something is happening in your home that you're afraid of, or don't understand." His grip on my chin tightens a bit before he lets up and starts stroking my cheek with his thumb.

"What did you do to send another killer after me?" I question, my gut sinking as I think about it.

He said he did something a few days ago to tip the person's hand, and Ben has been missing. "Did you kill my brother?" I whisper, sadness engulfing me.

I don't really have a relationship with him. He's mean to me, and hates me, but he was a good big brother once. Just a really long time ago.

"Not yet, I just... procured him," he says carefully, and I groan. I'm beginning to understand why people dislike lawyers.

They can take anything and make it sound better by rewording it. "Lawyers suck," I say, and he smirks at me.

"I agree, but it doesn't change the facts. Do you really want to know what I plan to do to your asshole of a brother?" he questions, and I blink.

No, I don't, but I think we're kind of past that now. I'm in this without my permission. "Tell me," I order him, squaring my shoulders to brace myself, and he narrows his eyes at me.

“I don’t think you truly want to know, sunflower,” he states, and I huff out a breath.

“You and this... jerk who wants me dead kind of took that choice away from me, don’t you think?” I growl, and he winces like I’ve slapped him.

“That’s fair, but there are more important things we need to cover before I get into detail about your brother,” he growls back, and I sigh.

The tears have stopped now, leaving me in some messed up emotional balancing act. I’m still scared and sad, and panicking, but I also just feel drained.

“What’s going on with Shelby? Is she safe? Be honest with me, Jonathan. She’s my best friend and like a sister to me,” I warn him, and he nods as understanding shines in his eyes.

“She’s okay, but she won’t be for long if she keeps going down the path she’s currently on. My friend was with me last night and he took her home. Watched over her,” he explains.

“Your friend?” I question, and he winces.

“He’s technically her boss.” He looks uncomfortable, and I frown.

“The new night job she has?” It’s the only other job I know she has, but she wouldn’t tell me what she was doing.

“Yeah. You know about that?” he asks softly. He’s giving me a look that has me wondering exactly what her new job is.

“Uh, I know she has a new job at night, but I don’t know what it is. Why do you look like you’re about to kick my puppy?”

Sadie’s head jolts up from my lap to look at me, and I giggle.

“Sorry, baby.” I pat her head, and she lays back down with a huff.

“My best friend owns a club on the outskirts of Chicago,” he tells me warily, and I frown.

“A club? Why is that bad?” I ask, and he sighs.



“Because it’s a strip club. A fancy one, but at the end of the day, it’s still a strip club,” he says like he’s scared I’m going to lose my ish.

In reality, I burst into giggles that shake Sadie until she jumps down from the couch and curls on the floor at my feet.

Of course, Shelby would take a job as a stripper. She’s definitely gorgeous enough.

“I don’t understand what’s happening. Are you having a psychotic break?” he asks, making me laugh harder.

“Oh, God.” I laugh some more, trying to catch my breath. “You looked like you were giving me the worst news on the planet by telling me that,” I try to explain, but he’s still watching me with concern.

“You don’t care that she’s working as a stripper,” he surmises, and I shake my head.

“Shelbs is an adrenaline junkie. She loves the thrill of being watched, and she’s gorgeous.” I shrug, using my free hand to wipe away the tears of laughter. “It doesn’t surprise me. She’s decided to do this because it’s what she needs,” I explain.

It hurts a little that she hasn’t told me, though. She should know I would never judge her... but she has to tell me on her own time.

“Is your friend one that can be trusted?” I question when I remember why we’re on this topic to begin with.

“Aside from you, he’s the only other person I trust on the planet,” Jonathan says confidently, and it eases my panic.

“You said she won’t be okay for long. Why?”

“Because she’s not listening to anything Devlin has to say. She’s been trying to get in touch with you for hours.”

My heart starts to race as I think about the trouble she could stir with this. If she’s causing a fuss, what if these people go after her?

“She’s not going to my house, is she? If someone came last night, that means my place isn’t safe,” I cry, panicked.

“She’s trying to. Devlin is doing his best to keep her away, but we don’t know what to say in order to keep her from going to the house. I’m hoping you’ll be able to think of something.” He looks at me with hope, and I think.

What can I say to have her back off? I need her to stay safe without lying to her completely. “Where is my phone?” I ask, and he reaches into his pocket, pulling it out and handing it to me.

“It’s a clone of yours, but no one will be able to trace your location. I need to make sure you’re safe,” he tells me, and a part of me feels giddy at the lengths he’s gone to in order to keep me safe.

The other half, the more logical part, worries that he’s doing it so no one can ever find my body before he kills me to get the payout of that contract.

“Don’t go there, sunflower,” he growls at me, and I jump.

“Wh—where?” I ask, like a moron. I know he probably saw the fear on my face. I am a stupidly open book when it comes to showing how I feel.

“I will not hurt you. Please stop thinking about that. It’s killing Daddy to see your tears and fear,” he begs, and I blink, frozen in shock.

Uh... Daddy? Did he just? I think he did. Is that a kinky thing for him? Like in some of the books I’ve read? Because I’m super curious now.

“You just, uh... um, did you mean to say that?” I squeak, and he tilts his head as if he’s assessing me, before his eyes widen.

“Shit,” he breathes out, before blushing a little. It’s super cute, actually. “Liv,” he whispers. “I, uh—shit. I didn’t say it to make you uncomfortable.” He takes a deep breath, staring at me.

I smile as I take in the sight of him. He looks really worried, and it feels almost normal.

For a serial killer, he's pretty sweet.

*Dear God, Liv. You sound dumb.*

“You're an odd serial killer.”



# JONATHAN

AN ODD SERIAL KILLER. RIGHT.

That's what's going through her mind right now? Not the fact that I unknowingly called myself her daddy without thinking, or the implications of what that might mean.

No. She decides to tell me I'm an odd serial killer. I'm so fucking confused.

"Uh, technically, I'm not a serial killer. More like a hired assassin," I point out before groaning and dropping my head into my hands like an idiot.

"Logically speaking, if you were in court defending yourself, wouldn't they still see you as a serial killer?" she says. "I mean, I guess it depends on how many people you've killed, but I'm not sure I want to know the answer to that question," she rambles, barely taking a breath. "I suppose logistically, if you were a true serial killer, I'd have read about you by now, so you probably switch up the ways you kill."

As adorable as her rambling is, I need to stop her. We've gotten way off topic here. "Liv, baby, focus," I say, waiting for her to stop talking and look at me.

"Huh?"

"Good girl," I praise her, and she blushes. "You're adorable, but we need to focus on the important things right now, remember?" I ask her and wait for her to nod.

"Shelbs, or your whole Daddy slip up?" she teases.

“That’s one way to put it,” I mutter, and she laughs her ass off at me.

God, she’s so fucking cute like this. I want her to be like this all the time. Happy. Or screaming my name as I fuck her into oblivion. I bet she tastes fucking incredible, too.

I lick my lips at the thought. “Shelby,” I state, and she sobers up. I fucking hate that. “You need to call her and tell her something convincing, so she stays away from your house.”

She nods in understanding. “Okay, yeah, I can do that.”

She fiddles with the phone before hitting dial and putting it on speakerphone.

“Are you okay?” I whisper, and she smiles a little at me before nodding as the she-thing picks up the phone.

“Olivia fucking Breton, you better tell me where the fuck you disappeared to on me!” she screams into the phone, and I narrow my eyes at the tone she’s using with my woman.

Olivia’s eyes widen, and she shakes her head at me. I assume to sway me from killing the she-thing. Little does she know I’ve already chosen to let her live because she means so much to her.

Not that I will ever be okay with my woman being spoken to like that, but I’ll let it slide for now. Eventually Shelby and I are going to have a discussion about her tone. If Liv allows that to happen. I get the feeling she’ll probably never leave us alone together.

“Shelbs, I’m fine. I was sleeping off the six bottles of wine we drank,” she says, chuckling like her friend is being dramatic.

I’d agree if I hadn’t technically kidnapped Olivia while they were in the same house. Not to mention Shelby waking up at her own home this morning.

“Oh yeah? Then how come I can’t use find a friend to see where you are?” she asks suspiciously, and I hold in a groan.

I knew that was going to bite me in the ass, but I need to keep Olivia safe above all else.

“Because I shut it off. I didn’t want you to judge me,” Olivia says, her voice a little shaky. It’s making me wonder if she isn’t actually worried about what Shelby will think of her being here with me.

“Why would I judge you? That seems stupid,” Shelby says on the other line, her voice losing its anger and heat.

“You called a guy last night for a hookup, and I felt weird. I didn’t want to be alone,” Olivia tells her. She’s looking me dead in the eyes as she talks to her friend, and I can see the confusion behind them.

“Liv, who did you call? I know you didn’t call Ben, since half the reason we got wasted was because the fuck-tool is missing.” Shelby’s voice is filled with disgust, and I smirk.

Olivia makes a choked noise at the mention of her brother. I smile at her as softly as I can to ease her mind. We still have to talk about him, but I won’t sway on killing the fucker. I’m with Shelby on that one.

He’s a tool.

“I may have... possibly, uh, drunk dialled Jonathan,” she tells Shelby, wincing at the lie. But it will just seem like she’s bracing for impact upon what her friend might say.

“Say what, now? You messaged the hot lawyer with a stick up his ass?” she asks, completely dumbfounded.

I just barely hold back a growl as Liv giggles, and it eases my frustration.

“Just because he turned you down, doesn’t mean he has a stick up his butt, Shelbs,” she says between giggles, her eyes shining with laughter when she looks at me.

“You have to admit, it’s weird,” she huffs in annoyance.

I won’t apologize for denying her advances. Even before I knew of Olivia’s existence, Shelby is the absolute farthest from my type. She screams high maintenance and too much bullshit.

That's Dev's cup of tea, not mine.

"You can't be everyone's type, Shelby," Liv huffs down the phone. Apparently, she's not happy with her bestie right now, either.

"You're distracting me. Why did you call him? Oh my God! Did you have sex with him?" she whisper hisses, and I smirk at how red Olivia flushes.

"No!" my girl shrieks, and I have to hide the laughter I so badly want to let out. "I just, I don't know. I like him, Shelbs. A lot," she admits, and looks at me with worry.

"Just be careful, Liv. We don't know anything about him," Shelby warns my girl, and my gut twists in anguish.

Olivia knows a lot about me now, more than I had wanted her to. I wanted to shield her from this part of my life, but she's still here and calm. That has to mean something, right?

"He's sweet to me, Shelby. That goes a long way."

Her eyes implore mine as she says this, giving me a sense of calm. She's telling me she hasn't written me off. That even though I'm a killer, she sees the person I am for her, and it gives me hope.

I'm not sure how long this road will be, but I will travel it to the very end of time if I have to, because there is no life without her. Not for me.

"I hope you're right, babe. Anyway, you're at his place? When are you coming home?"

I wince at that question because I can't give Olivia an answer. I hope she never lives without me again, but only time will tell.

"I've decided to stay with him for a while. Really get to know him, you know? But I'll be at work in the morning. See you then?" Olivia asks, and I can tell she hopes her friend will let it go at that.

"God, you're really going all out, huh? He must be special." She sighs. "Just tell him I'll cut his dick off if he ever hurts you," Shelby threatens, and I smirk.



Good luck getting close enough, she-thing.

“You will not. But how about this... if I go missing, you have my permission to crush him.” My girl gives me a look that’s pure ‘now try to kill me, buddy.’

“I’ll never hurt you,” I mouth, and she smiles broadly.

“Oh, fuck yes!” Shelby is laughing like some cocked up hyena on the other line, and I wish this conversation was over.

Apparently, I can only tolerate that woman in small doses. Which doesn’t bode well for me, considering Liv never goes a day without talking to her, or seeing her.

“K, I’m going to let you go. I want to spend some time with Jonathan before my hungover butt goes back to bed with Sadie.”

She smiles down at the dog, and I’m so glad I chose her to bring home. I think a lot of Olivia’s trust is coming from the fact that Sadie trusts me.

I need to remember to buy that dog a present.

“Yeah, I get it now. You’re there for the dog.” Shelby snickers, and I roll my eyes. She’s not one hundred percent wrong when you think about it. “Love you, Livvy. See you tomorrow.” She makes air kisses into the phone before hanging up, and the tension in my body relaxes.

“That was smooth,” I tell her when she sets the phone on the coffee table.

“It’s the closest to reality without having to lie through my teeth,” she whispers, and I feel bad. I know she hates lying to anyone.

“It wasn’t really a lie, though, was it? Aside from my taking you without your knowledge, that is.” I search her eyes, hoping and praying she wants me even half as bad as I want her.

“No. Aside from that omission, it wasn’t a lie,” she says, barely audible as she blushes.

“I promise you’re safe with me, sunflower. And I would love to be your Daddy... if that’s something you’d like to discuss when you feel more comfortable.”

“I’ve read some books. If we get to that point, then I guess we’d have to talk about what it means to you and I both,” she says quietly, and I smile.

“Later,” I say, and she nods.

“Later. Right now, I think I’d like to go to bed and think everything over, if that’s alright? I don’t think I can handle anymore information today.” She’s looking at the floor as she says this, and I understand how much of an information overload this has been for her.

Reaching for her hand, I use my other to tip her chin back up. “It’s okay to feel overwhelmed, baby,” I whisper, fighting the need to lean in and kiss her soft lips.

As if she can sense where my mind went, her eyes drop to my mouth. It takes everything in me not to groan.

“You shouldn’t look at me like that, sunflower,” I tell her the truth, and her eyes move back up to mine with worry.

“Why not?” she questions, and I can’t stand the doubt I see flash in her eyes.

“Because I’m dying to kiss you, Olivia. I’ve been aching for you for weeks,” I admit, and her eyes widen before she smiles.

“Well, would you care to give me my first kiss, then?” she whispers, and I don’t give her the chance to backtrack.

Lowering my head, I press my lips gently against hers, groaning at how soft they feel.

If this was how I lived my last moment on this earth, I’d die a happy man.



# OLIVIA

IT'S BEEN HOURS AND I STILL CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT our kiss.

I'd almost be worried it was a pity kiss with how gentle and chaste it had been. Almost, if not for the bulge in his pants getting even bigger.

Yeah, I looked again, and yeah, it's humanly possible to be that big, apparently. How he assumed he could ever fit that inside of me is freaking laughable. Seriously, I don't have a death wish.

And now I sound like Shelby with the over-dramatics. I'm blaming it on alcohol and lack of sleep, with a sprinkle of my world being turned upside down in the span of a day.

I don't understand why someone would want me dead, either. All the contract said was that I'm in their way and they can only get what they want in death.

I know Jonathan believes Ben has something to do with it, but what would he and Dad benefit from my death? It's not like they want the shop. The only thing they seemed to want was Grams' house, but even that makes little sense to me.

They could easily ask me for almost anything and I would probably give it to them.

"Oh, Grams. I miss you," I whisper into the dark room.

Sadie is laying at the foot of the bed with me this time. I've been tossing around too much for her, but her presence comforts me.

When I have days like this where I feel less than myself, I like to think back on my time with Grams and it makes me feel better. She was always my comfort in any storm, and now that she's gone, it's been hard to find my balance.

Sure, I've found the semi-confidence in myself that I hadn't had before, but it just sucks to lose your person.

"Bet you wish we could be under the stars now," I whisper again, tears stinging the backs of my eyes.

When Dad and Ben first started denying me as family for being different, she used to tell me to lie under the stars and breathe. That they would guide my heart and soul to peace if I just let go. I wish I could do that now, but I'm not about to get up in a strange house in the middle of the freaking night.

That's basically the beginning of every horror movie, and I'm not about that life.

*Again, with the dramatics, Liv?*

I sigh to myself while throwing my weight around until I'm laying on my back, staring at the ceiling.

It's not like I can really blame my brain for being overdramatic at this point. I'm literally sleeping in a serial killer's house.

Not only that, but said serial killer kidnapped me while I was drunk off my butt, and I remember none of it. Add on the fact that said killer says he's in love with me, and procured my brother to kill him?

"I bet you're rolling around in your grave right about now, Grams." I snort to myself.

In a lot of ways, I think Grams would love Jonathan. She'd tell me that as long as I'm happy and cared for, what more could I possibly want?

She'd be right. If Jonathan is truly trying to keep me safe and not wanting to kill me, then what do I have to fear?

Is it smart that the first man I've ever desired is probably close to twice my age and killed a lot of people? Definitely

not, but the idea of not giving him a chance to prove himself makes me feel ill.

“Tell me what to do, Grams,” I whisper, finally letting the tears fall.

For the first time since she passed, I wish I had the letter she left me. The lawyer had waited until Dad and Ben left before handing it to me. He said that Grams’ instructions were to keep it, but wait to open it until I felt like I needed her more than anything.

There have been many times I’ve wanted to open it, but none of them felt like the right time. Now I feel like I’m spinning out of control with no way out, and I’d love to read it.

I’ll give it a few more days to see if I still feel the need to read it. It might sound silly, but I keep putting it off because it’s the last time I will ever have her talk to me, and I don’t honestly know if I’m ready for that.

\* \* \*

“HEY, SUNFLOWER. HOW DID YOU SLEEP?” Jonathan asks when he walks into the kitchen.

Sleep, right. I wish I had slept because I’m feeling like a zombie right now, and we have to go into the shop today.

“Honestly?” I ask, not knowing if he truly wants to hear it or not, but he nods. “I didn’t. I spent the entire night thinking about things,” I say.

“Anything in particular you’d like to ask me to clear your head a bit? Or to vent and get it off your chest?” He’s watching me with soft and loving eyes, and I can’t help but feel it.

“I was thinking about Grams,” I say, then shake my head. He probably doesn’t even know who she is.

“You were close,” he says it without question, and I narrow my eyes.

“Just how much spying on me have you done? And for how long?”

He winces a little before clearing his throat and moving to the coffee machine to distract himself. “A few weeks,” he says, and I stare at his back.

A few weeks. A few freaking weeks?! Now I’m irritable.

“So, you literally stalked me. That’s what you’re telling me?” I hiss, and he sighs before turning to look at me.

“Yes, that’s what I’m telling you. And no, I won’t apologize for it. If I hadn’t been watching you, or had state-of-the-art surveillance on you, you would be dead right now, Olivia. I will never apologize for keeping that sexy ass of yours safe,” he spits out, his body vibrating.

I should be afraid of how angry he looks, but I’m not. “Just how much state-of-the-art surveillance are we talking about, Jonathan? Because I felt like I was being watched every second of every damn day!” I holler, and his eyes widen in shock.

Yeah, I have a temper when I haven’t slept, and you know, PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO KILL ME!

He quickly composes himself and moves toward me, determination in every step. “Everything, sunflower. Cameras, motion sensors, audio. You name it, it’s installed in your house.”

Whoa, seriously? The freaking nerve of this man! “You’re joking.” I narrow my eyes, lifting my hand to poke his chest. “You’d better be joking, mister, or we’re going to have some serious issues,” I tell him, poking my finger into his chest as hard as I can as the anger and annoyance run through me.

He’s just admitted to witnessing me at my most vulnerable moments and not regretting it.

*Because he was trying to keep you safe, Liv.*

Well, frig him and the black horse he rode in on with his murderous behind. That is so not okay with me.

“If it helps, I didn’t have audio in the bathroom or the hallways,” he says a little sheepishly.

“Oh, that’s a huge help, thank you. NOT! You’ve seen me naked, Jonathan!” I squeak, my body feeling hot all over as his eyes roam me.

He licks his lips. “I did a few times. I could lie and say I went out of my way to avoid it, but you’re a damn siren, sunflower. I can’t avert my gaze when your luscious body is on display,” he croaks, palming his dick, and I feel heated.

How am I supposed to stay mad at him when he’s talking about just how sexy he finds me with a huge hard-on to prove it? That’s kryptonite for a girl like me who’s never had that kind of attention.

“You’re distracting me,” I groan, my eyes locked on his lips, and he scoffs.

“Good. Maybe now you’ll be on my level,” he rasps before his hand grips the back of my neck and pulls me into him.

His mouth crashes against mine in a kiss that’s so much harder than last night’s. His tongue sweeps along my bottom lip, and I open up for him, whimpering as he explores my mouth.

My body jerks out of its daze after a few moments, and I grip his shirt in my fists. Standing on my toes to give him better access, I am not disappointed when he deepens the kiss, owning me with every touch.

Dear Lord, this is delicious. How have I spent the last twenty-one years oblivious to these types of feelings coursing through my body?

Jonathan’s hands move down to cup my ass and he pulls me tight against his body, groaning as my tongue tentatively pushes into his mouth.

“Fucking Christ,” he mutters against my lips while he pushes his erection into my tummy.

I don’t know what to do. It’s like he’s everywhere and nowhere all at once, and I want nothing more than to feel his



hands in the most intimate ways possible.

I whimper against him, rolling my body to press against his hardness, and he rips his mouth away.

We're both breathing heavily as we come back to reality and take in what just happened. I stare up at him, desire pumping through my body, my core wetter than it's ever been, and I want to do the dumbest thing to woman kind right now.

I want to beg him to keep going like I'm some hussy that knows what she's doing. Now I kind of wish I had a better understanding of sex, so I could be on this man's level.

That sours my mood.

I don't want to think about him being with anyone else, and I feel slightly stabby at the idea of him ever touching another woman.

*Mine.*

"I am yours, sunflower," he growls, fisting the ponytail on my head and giving it a little tug. "No one has ever affected me the way you do," he whispers, swallowing as his eyes meet mine.

I can hear the truth in his words, and it settles something inside of me. I'm still stabby a little, but that's not really who I am. I think one killer in this relationship is going to be more than enough.

"I can tell you mean that," I say with a smile. "I like that you find me attractive." I sigh and lean into him for a hug that he gives me without hesitation.

I take a moment to process the fact that I've asked this man to hug me when I really only hug Shelby now. That's mildly depressing.

"Jonathan?" I whisper into his chest as I tighten my hold on him. I can't bring myself to say the next words while I look at him. I can't even fully understand why I'm giving into a relationship with him so easily when I know he's a dark soul, but I am.

“Yeah, baby?” he whispers into my hair, and I sniff as the unshed tears of fear burn my eyes.

“Promise you won’t hurt me?”

His body stiffens like I just slapped him, before he’s hugging me tighter than I’ve been hugged in my whole darn life.

“Never. I promise you will never hurt because of me. And anyone who does hurt you? I’ll kill them, Olivia. I swear to God, I will murder anyone who says one mean thing to you, or hurts you in any way,” he growls, and my heart quickens.

Okay, so the murder thing is something we’re probably going to have to discuss at some point soon, but I really need him to know I don’t want any part of that life. In any way.

“Thank you.” I move my head to kiss his chest softly, before resting my head against his heart again, letting the beating soothe me like Grams’ stars used to.



# JONATHAN

I'M MAN ENOUGH TO ADMIT WHEN I'M A DUMBASS. THIS IS one of those times.

You would think years of law school would teach me when to read a situation and keep my mouth shut, but I one hundred percent didn't do that this morning.

I thought that the drive to her shop would be a good time to discuss this whole killing thing. Nope, I was wrong.

So wrong, in fact, that she's refusing to talk to me while she's working.

She knows I'm watching out for her, and where I'm located. Every now and then, I can see her glaring at me through the window, too.

I know that a lot of today's behaviour is probably that she didn't sleep. Neither did I. I sat up all night wondering how she would feel about my being a killer.

Would she ask me to give it up? Could I, for her?

I think I could, but it also doesn't seem to be where her mind is at. Though, she's thrown me into a confused tailspin more than once over the past couple days.

I know that this is all too much for her. Finding out someone wants you dead, and that it may just be the only blood family you have left... it would be a lot for anyone. Too much, especially for someone as naïve to the darkness as she is.

She hasn't been burned by others outside of Ben and her father or been around enough people to be hurt.

She's never been with a man, or even wanted to be as far as I can tell. Just knowing I was the first person to ever taste that pretty mouth is enough to drive me mad.

And the passion she unleashed this morning with her anger? I was so fucking hard for her while she yelled at me. It was proof she didn't fear me or what I could do to her.

Whether or not she realizes it, she trusts me. I won't let that be in vain. When she goes to bed tonight, I'm going to pay Ben another visit.

It's about time I took a different approach.

\* \* \*

LIV FELL ASLEEP ALMOST the minute we got back to my place. I knew she would. That's why I insisted on grabbing some fast takeout, so she'd at least have something substantial in her stomach.

We talked a bit on the way home, too. She apologized for being snappy this morning, and I told her I thought it was a good thing. She shook her head but smiled a little before turning in her seat to look at me.

As soon as she knew she had my attention, she told me she didn't want to know what I was doing to Ben, or really anything else that I'd done or will continue to do, and it shocked me.

I figured she would want to know at least a little, or tell me she didn't want to date a killer. But she didn't. Instead, she said she knew I was a good man, and it took everything in me not to laugh.

She caught it anyway and rolled her eyes. She said that part of the reason for her lack of sleep was wondering if she should trust me, and that she felt like she could. That she didn't understand it, but the idea of playing it safe and walking away didn't sit right with her.

It didn't sit right with me, either. I can't imagine my sunflower not being in my life, which is why I'm headed to the bunker now. I need answers, and Ben is where I'm going to get them.

"Hello, Benny boy! How are you feeling?" I chirp at him. I'm in a great fucking mood right now.

My girl has agreed to give me a chance. I know she's safe in my house, and I'm about to do something I've rarely had the opportunity to do.

Ben glares at me as I toss my duffle bag onto my workbench. He hasn't eaten in a while, or drank anything, either.

He's most definitely lost weight he couldn't really afford to lose. Then again, I think he knew he was never leaving this bunker. Not alive, anyway.

"Cat got your tongue?" I ask with a smirk. "Because I know for a fact I don't. The last person I asked that question down here? I did have his tongue." I smile as his face pales a bit.

There's a difference between being locked in a cell and starved, and being physically harmed. It takes a sick fuck to do either, but it takes someone with a certain level of coldness inside of them to truly hurt another human being in such a way.

Ben just realized I'm not just a twisted fuck who gets off on watching people die, and that he's had it relatively easy until now.

I open the bag and pull a sleeve of crackers out before tossing them to him. "Eat up. Can't have you dying on me yet. Liv would never forgive me for that," I say to him, and he narrows his eyes in suspicion.

"Does she know you have me yet?" he spits, and I smile broadly at him.

"Damndest thing, that. I told her I had you, and she took some time to think about it. Then told me she didn't want to

hear about you, or any part of this side of my life.” I shrug as his eyes widen before he shakes his head.

“You’re lying. Olivia would never be okay with someone hurting another human being. She’s too gentle,” he spits out. As though being compassionate is a weakness, and it’s disgusting.

He’s truly blind to just how strong and brave she really is. “Things change when you find out someone is trying to kill you. They change even more when it’s looking like your family are the ones doing it,” I tell him, grinding my teeth together in anger.

He watches me angrily as I pull a bottle of water out of the bag as well. His eyes zero in on it as he licks his dry lips before looking back at me. “What do you want?” he asks, his eyes moving back to the water.

“Right now? I want you to eat so I can give you the water. I won’t let you die before you answer me... and you will, Ben. You’re slowly losing your will to live down here with each passing day,” I taunt him, and he takes the bait.

Growling, he weakly rips open the sleeve of crackers and shoves several into his mouth at once.

It’s going to be hard to chew and swallow them when his mouth is as dry as it is. When I know he’s good and thirsty, I’ll give him the water and he’ll have no choice but to chug it.

At this point, it’s a survival instinct. They tell you to not chug water when you’re dehydrated as badly as he is. That slow and small sips are the best choice, but I’m willing to bet that won’t register in his mind.

The moment he swallows down the dry food, almost choking on it, I pass him the water and he does just as I anticipated. He chugs it before dropping it to the ground.

“You’re not human,” he seethes at me before blinking and swaying on his feet. “Wh—what the hell?”

He falls against the bars to hold himself up, and looks at me with anger and fear. “What did you do?”

I smile as his eyes start to drift close. “I gave you something to help me prepare you for the games coming, of course,” I taunt him, laughing as he fights to hold his body upright, before falling to the ground.

I wait several more minutes, checking that his breathing is slow and even before unlocking the cell and picking him up.

There was no way I was going to be dumb enough to try and get him from the cell to the chair without drugging him first.

I can take him, that much I know. But it’s not a risk I’m willing to take when Liv’s life is on the line.

Once I toss him into my torture chair, I work on securing him to the arms and legs, finding glee in knowing he can’t go anywhere, and that chair won’t move.

My mind briefly flashes back to the asshole from the street who called my woman a fat cow and how beautifully he bled for me before he died.

He was a wimp to the bitter end, but the blood and screams were beautiful, regardless.

Ben will scream for me. He will bleed, cry, and beg me to stop. I won’t.

I’ve never tortured someone for information before. It’s always been strictly to satisfy the hunger inside of me, but this has promise.

He’ll scream the truth past his lips while I slide my knife into his body in places designed to hurt, but won’t kill him for hours.

I’ve done my research on the human body, so I know how to inflict the maximum amount of pain on my victims. Or to make it the bloodiest and most gruesome crime scene police have ever seen that would no doubt have them spending years in therapy.

I know it all. And when Ben wakes up, he’ll know it too.

Looking at my victim one last time, I turn toward the stairs and head back to the house to check on my sunflower.



He'll be out for hours before waking up and realizing he can't move, and I will watch it on my phone. I'll wait until he's pissed himself in fear and crying at his pathetic existence, before I go back to him and finally get the answers I seek.

By tomorrow night, I will know exactly who is behind the hit on my girl, and why. Then I will destroy anyone involved.

I'll kill Ben for being an asshole to his sister, and then I'll come up with a plan to destroy whomever started this.

I won't stop until she has nothing left to fear. Until she feels safe in the world again.



# OLIVIA

“I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU LET ME BRING SADIE TO WORK,” I SAY to Jonathan. I’m happy as can be, as I sit in the back seat with my girl.

It seems so silly to be as happy as I am, but this all kind of feels like a dream, you know? Like one of those great ones that you never want to wake up from?

That’s what the past few days with Jon have been like, and I’m kind of hoping it never ends.

I know I should be more wary, with his complete admittance of not only stalking me, but being a serial killer. Hell, he has my brother somewhere for frig sakes... but I can’t seem to bring myself to care.

He’s good to me, and he’s great with Sadie.

The fact she’s so happy even after everything she’s been through just completely blows my mind, and it’s all thanks to him.

She’s been through hell her entire life, and for her to not only trust Jon, but to be genuinely happy around him? It’s telling.

I firmly believe dogs know the good from the bad, especially when they’ve come from the bad. It’s why I like animals better than most people. They can’t lie or manipulate the way humans do.

“I don’t like that we’ve been leaving her at home, either. Even with the camera for her to see us,” he says, and I smile.

He totally video calls her during the day when we can't be there and it's the most adorable thing ever.

Who knew serial killers could be so adorable? Maybe everyone should get one.

Huh. Maybe I'm not as sane as I thought. Could be why Shelbs and I get along so well.

"And you said she needed to be around us. I figured it was the best solution. She really doesn't like leaving your side." He smiles in the rearview mirror at me, and I pet Sadie's head.

"This is going to sound crazy, and maybe I need to be evaluated, but... you make me happy, Jonathan. Grams always told me she wanted me to fall in love with someone who would cherish and protect me," I whisper. "You've been doing that since before we met."

"Did you just tell me you're in love with me, baby?" He smirks, and my eyes widen.

"Uh, yeah no. That would be way too insane, given everything." I cough. "But there's definitely potential." I end on a squeak and he chuckles, shaking his head.

"You can tell yourself whatever you need to, sunflower. But I've loved you from the second I laid eyes on that picture of you looking all innocent reading a book." He winks, and I damn near swoon.

I've known him a few weeks, and only truly known him a couple of days. It's not possible to be in love with someone that fast, is it?

Though, Grams used to say she knew Gramps was her forever before the end of their first date. I had asked her one time, "Grams, how do you know you're really in love with someone?"

She replied, "Sweet girl, you'll just know. Always remember this simple saying and you will get far in life. Are you ready?" I had nodded, sixteen-year-old me hanging onto her every word, and she smiled. "When you know, you know."

And I've held that advice close to my heart ever since. Maybe it's the reason I've never been able to be attracted to just anyone that's good looking. Because I was waiting for that connection, and I know I felt it the first time Jonathan walked into my shop.

He makes me feel things that no one ever has, just by being in the same room. I should have known then that he would change my life that day.

"I got Sadie for you, Liv," he states, pulling into the parking lot and getting out of the car to open the back door for me.

"You—what?" I ask, shocked to heck as his words bounce in my brain.

He got Sadie for me? I can't even wrap my head around the idea of that.

"I wanted to get you a dog so that you'd feel more comfortable with me when I had to bring you home. It happened sooner than I planned, but I got a dog for you." He searches my face as Sadie and I get out of the car.

"And Sadie?" I ask on a whisper.

"The second you pulled up her file, I knew you wanted her. Loved her and cared for her in a deeper way than you would for most of the other dogs on that list," he explains, his voice raspy with emotion.

He got the dog I wanted because he knew I loved her.

I remember the day he said he wanted her. I remember telling him he seemed to read me better than anyone else ever had. Now I know it was because he knew me on a much more intimate level than I ever could have realized.

"I, what do I say to that?" I look between him and Sadie, letting the tears fall. "Why do you care so much? I'm nobody," I cry harder, and he growls.

Pulling me into a tight hug, he kisses my head. "You're the only thing in my life that matters, Olivia Breton. Don't you ever belittle yourself. In my eyes, you're the fucking sun. Get

me?” He pulls me tighter, cradling me in his hold. For the first time since Grams died, I feel like someone truly loves me for me.

“Sorry,” I whisper, wrapping my arms around him and fisting the back of his shirt tightly.

“You need to understand, so I’m going to say this once. I know you don’t want to know about what I do when it doesn’t involve the DA’s office, but, baby. Goddamn, you’re everything. I’ve killed anyone that’s even remotely said something terrible to you since you came into my life.” I suck in a breath at his admission, but he keeps going. “That bastard who said vile things to you in the street? He’s gone and no one will ever find him.”

I’m trying to process his words, but it’s hard to comprehend levelling the man I know, to the killer he’s describing himself as.

I know he’s telling me the truth, and I remember that guy. Or, I think I do.

“The one that called me a fat cow?” I whisper, and a feral sound leaves his chest.

“He lost his tongue for that before I killed him, baby. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, both inside and out.”

I think there’s something broken in my brain. What he’s telling me should make me feel sick or angry, even terrified of him. But I feel... loved?

“And Jeff,” he grunts. “That motherfucker died with me in his face. Knowing he did wrong by treating you that way.” He’s shaking in my arms, and I feel this undying need to comfort him.

Pulling back, I cup his cheek in my hand. “Jonathan,” I exhale, and his face leans into my palm.

“I hacked his account, Liv. I’ve seen too many victims broken by men who like to prey on women. When I saw the way he was treating you, ignoring the way you told him to stop.” He shakes his head. “God, I was so proud of you for

sticking up for yourself, but he had to die. No one hurts you, baby. Fucking no one,” he proclaims, and my heart swells as my body floods with heat.

Yeah, something is definitely broken in my mind. But how could I not be in love with a man who has done everything to protect me?

“Thank you for telling me,” I whisper, and pain crosses his face.

“I’ll never lie to you, sunflower. You belong to me, but I belong to you, too. I can’t stand to see you hurting.”

“Okay.” I stand on my toes, kissing his lips gently as I keep my eyes locked with his.

I’m conveying the words I can’t seem to say with this look, this kiss. The softness in his eyes before he closes them on a groan tells me everything I need to know.

I was never whole before him.

Sadie growls beside us, and we break apart, looking at her. She’s facing away from us, growling at seemingly nothing, when Jon screams, “Get down!”, and pushes me to the ground just as a loud pop rings off.





# JONATHAN

“LIV, BABY, ARE YOU OKAY?” I ASK, MY HEART RACING AS I look around us.

I wait, wondering if the attacker is going to make another attempt. But as I look, I can see the shooter running away.

Sadie is drawing too much attention to what just happened. There’s no way they’d succeed in getting another shot off without being caught.

I know I just told my girl I got this dog for her, but fuck. Sadie just jumped to the top of my favourites list, right under Liv. She saved my girl, and possibly even my life.

“Can’t breathe,” Liv croaks beneath me, and I curse.

“Fuck! Are you hurt? Where are you hurt?” I search her body with my hands and eyes, never getting off of her, but I can’t find any blood.

“You’re... crushing my... wind-pipe,” she pushes out, and I feel the shock before I jump off of her.

“Shit! God, baby, I’m sorry!”

She laughs a little as I help her stand up, but I can see she’s visibly shaken.

“What are the chances that was a wrong place, wrong time, kind of deal?” she squeaks out, and I shake my head. “Yeah, thought you were going to say that.”

Her face is white as a sheet as she looks at me. “I think, I think I need you to take me home.”

“Anything, baby. I’m getting answers tonight,” I growl, opening the back seat to help her in. I know she’ll want to snuggle with Sadie for comfort.

Speaking of, “Good girl,” I pat her head, squatting down to scratch her ears. “You saved our lives, Sadie.”

She licks my face before wagging her tail and jumping into the back with my girl.

“You have vodka, right?” she asks once I’m in the driver’s seat.

“Yep.” I nod, starting the car and heading back to my house.

I don’t blame her for needing a stiff drink or two after that. She knew someone was trying to kill her, but until now, it was just a threat in her mind.

Now she’s living with the fact that someone tried to shoot her in broad daylight.

While she calls Shelby to tell her that the shop is closed, and about what happened, I plan my night.

She needs alcohol; I need blood and answers. We’ll both get what we need.

\* \* \*

“YOU SURE YOU’RE ready for this?” Devlin asks over the phone.

I sent him a detailed message about everything that happened, and told him to keep an even closer eye on Shelby for the time being. And to always carry a weapon.

Once Liv had a few drinks and started to relax, I carried her to bed and laid with her until she fell asleep.

She has the most adorable snore I’ve ever heard. I wanted to stay there, holding her all night, but I couldn’t put this off any longer.

Her father, or whoever was behind this hit, was becoming too unhinged, too brazen, and that's a dangerous game in our world.

"He'll sing for me, Dev. I'm going to make him confess every sin until he tells me what I need to know," I growl, and he sighs.

"You really think her father wants her dead?" he asks, and I nod before remembering he can't see me.

"I do. I just need to know why," I tell him, moving into the room where I have Ben strapped to a chair.

The smell of piss is everywhere, and I smile at him. Level one of my torture is complete. A man with such self-importance being left to defile themselves, is embarrassing and degrading for them.

"Will you kill him once he tells you?" Dev's voice pulls me out of the glee I'm feeling and back into my anger.

"Once I believe he's paid enough for trying to have my woman killed, and for all the horrible things he's said to her over the years. Yes."

He lets out the breath he was holding. "Good. From what I've gathered by watching Lo, he's a royal prick. She loathes him. It's in so many of her journals. She keeps fucking journals, man," he says, and I chuckle.

"That's not actually that uncommon. But... why Lo?" I ask, wondering why he'd be calling her that.

"Because her middle name is Laura-Ann. Lo feels more fitting than some generic nickname that every other Shelby would have."

I snort at how sunk he is for her. "I'm sure she'll hand you your nuts when she finds out about your habits," I joke, and he laughs.

"And I look forward to it. Go get the answers you need so we can keep our women safe." He hangs up the phone at that.

"You know, Ben," I say, opening up the surveillance camera to her room, before turning the picture for him to see.

“Someone tried to kill her in the middle of town this morning.”

I watch as he looks at his sister on the screen, but nothing shows on his face. No remorse for his involvement. Nothing.

“This innocent woman is caught up in a wicked game you and your father are playing, and I want to know why.” I pull my phone away. Setting it on my workbench to the side, I make sure the volume is up in case she needs me.

“You want the truth? Yeah, Dad put a hit out on her, and I knew about it,” he spits out, trying to seem strong when he’s not.

“I already surmised that much, asshole. Tell me why!” I snap, and he smirks.

“Nah, I’m good. You may as well just kill me,” he says. He looks like he believes he’ll keep all their secrets, but he won’t.

“You really think I’d let you die that easily?” The smirk falls off his face. “That’s naïve thinking on your part.” I move over to the bag I left in here yesterday and carry it back to him.

“I’ll never tell you. Dad will get what he wants, and you’ll lose her. Hope you fuck her fat ass first,” he taunts, and I clench my fists together.

I know what he’s doing. He’s scared of what’s in that bag, so he’s trying to make me angry enough to kill him. Too bad it won’t work.

Doesn’t mean I can’t punch him, though. Hauling my fist back, I hit him right in the jaw and hear teeth flying as he whimpers in pain. The sound soothes me more than I thought it would.

“It won’t work. I’m a lawyer, Ben. You think people haven’t tried to get me to act out in anger before?” I punch him again, this time on the side of the head. I can’t break the fucker’s jaw when I need him to talk.

“Fuck you,” he spits out, his voice a little slurred from the hit his head took. It’ll straighten itself out in a minute or two.

“You’re not my type. And even if you were, I’d still never touch your dick.” I shudder in revulsion at the idea of even going near that part of him. “Your sister, though? God, she’s so fucking hot.” I smirk at the unease in his body. “That curvy, voluptuous ass that I can’t wait to spank while I’m taking her and making her mine. All while she’s screaming my name in ecstasy. Mmm.” I lick my lips, and he pukes, making me laugh.

“You’re disgusting.” He shakes his head.

“No, I’m in love. You’re the disgusting one in the room. I mean, really, Ben. You reek of piss.”

The shame that floods his face is something I will thrive on for a long fucking time.

“I wonder what your father would think of you now? Probably call you a disgrace and beg Olivia to be a part of his family again. Too bad it’s far too late for either of you,” I say, opening the bag and pulling out the pliers I had used on Matthew.

They’re still coated in his dried blood, but I’m looking forward to using them for other things. I may even tear Ben’s fingers down to the bone, too. That was an oddly satisfying thing to do.

We’ll have to see how long Ben here lasts. Setting them down on the ground, I look toward Ben through my peripheral vision and see his eyes locked on the pliers.

Perfect. “Don’t worry. The chances of you getting an infection from the blood contamination are zero. You’ll be dead long before it could become an issue,” I say happily, and he swallows.

Pulling out the crowbar and hunting knife next, I lay the knife beside the pliers before standing back up.

Without saying a word, I smile at him, bringing the crowbar back and swinging it down into his kneecap.

His screams fill the room as he fights the shock of pain. After a moment, I repeat the same blow to his other knee. He

hollers from the impact, but recovers a little quicker as sweat breaks out on his forehead.

“Fuck you,” he hisses through his teeth.

“No thanks. Though, you all say that when you’re in my chair. I’m beginning to think I need to modify it with a hole, so I can shove shit up your asses. At least I’d be making your dreams come true then.” I tap my chin in thought.

If I was going to make torture a more permanent thing, that could be useful. Although, I don’t really want to touch anyone’s ass unless it’s Olivia’s.

“Nah, that’s too messy, and not in the fun way.”

He makes a choked sound, and I laugh. “Lighten up, Ben. Before the end of the night, you’ll be telling me all your secrets. Just think of it as a sleepover of sorts!”



# JONATHAN

“LET’S PLAY A GAME.” I CLAP MY HANDS, AND HE GROANS from the chair.

We’ve barely been at this for an hour and he’s whining. Like really. All I’ve done is break his knees and punch him a few times for his smart-ass remarks.

He’s fine.

“Why does your father want Olivia dead?” I ask him, bending down to retrieve the knife from the floor.

He glares at me before his eyes move to the knife. “I don’t know,” he answers. It’s an obvious lie. The guy would suck at poker.

Stepping closer to him, I run my knife across his neck, enjoying how he swallows in fear before running it lower. Moving down his chest and back up again, letting him stew in the fear of what will happen next.

“The human body is such an amazing thing, don’t you think?” I ask him. It’s a rhetorical question that I don’t expect him to answer, but it distracts him just enough.

In that brief moment, I slowly sink the knife tip into his abs. The skin is easy to break, but he sucks in a breath of shock.

Pulling the blade back out a few inches away from him, I thrust my arm hard. The knife slices through the muscle, and a loud pop echoes around the room, blending with his screams of agony.



“There are so many places to stab someone without it killing them. Well, unless you’re left to bleed to death, which would take hours.” I pull the knife back, and he cries out again.

Music to my ears.

“Why?!” he screams, his eyes closed as his body shakes, trying to adjust to the new pain.

“You’re going to need to be more specific with your questions, Ben. That has a very broad spectrum of answers.” I tsk, and he convulses, shaking his head.

“Why won’t you kill me?!” he snaps.

“Well, I thought that would be obvious. I can’t kill you without my answers. So, we’re playing a game.” I smile widely at him, pleasure pulsing through my blood.

This is where I thrive. Where I feel fucking alive. I need the power of having someone’s life in my hands. The feeling of their blood coating my fingers.

Olivia makes me feel alive too, but in a different way.

“For every lie or question unanswered, my knife will find another non-lethal place to stab. Your abs may hurt like a bitch, but I didn’t go deep enough to puncture any organs.”

“No,” he whimpers, and I laugh.

“Yes.” I wave the knife in his face. “Shall we play twenty questions?” When he doesn’t respond, I keep going. “What does he need from her?”

He sighs, hanging his head, and I know it’s his answer.

I move behind him, stepping back from the chair, and lift my arm before forcing the knife into his shoulder.

“AHHH, GODDAMN IT!” he screams out. “Money!” he screams again, then shakes his head.

I pull the knife out and move back in front of him. “You’re richer than she is,” I say, narrowing my eyes.

“She doesn’t know about it.” His head falls backward, losing the strength to hold it up.

Dropping the knife to the floor, I pick up the pliers and inspect them. “The last man I used these on called my girl a fat cow. All that was left of his fingers when I was finished was the bone.”

He shivers in fear as his head lifts back up to watch me lower the pliers to his pinky.

“Please,” he begs, and I chuckle darkly.

Adrenaline is pumping through my veins, knowing the kill is coming soon. “Answer my questions, and I promise to make the last of the torture quick before I end you.”

He nods, agreeing to tell me the truth and accept the pain I’ll dole out. It’s not like he has a choice, but he’s at the point of giving up. The fight has left him, and he’s accepted death is coming to get him.

“Tell me everything.” I press the pliers into his pinkie as he screams out everything I need to know.

\* \* \*

FINISHING a kill usually leaves me on a high I don’t come down from for days, but as I finish tossing Ben’s body parts into the fire pit, I can’t find that peace.

He confessed everything to me after I skinned his first finger, giving into the fact that I wouldn’t stop until he did. He was just done and knew the quicker he answered, the quicker it would all be over for him.

Everything he told me makes me angry, though. Her father wants her dead because she’s essentially sitting on a goldmine with absolutely no idea because she hasn’t read the letter her grandmother left.

A letter explaining that, years ago, her grandparents had purchased some old land to build their dream home, but had found an old bunker of sorts.

A bunker that was probably similar to my kill one, just buried, rather than hidden in the underground of a secured building.

When they'd opened it, they had found their own version of a treasure trove. Philip had been the one to discover it by exploring the way any ten-year-old boy would do, and when his parents donated most of it to local museums, he became infuriated.

He wanted to live the rich and high life even then, and they didn't. They wanted to have a normal life that didn't revolve around money.

Ben said Philip would tell him the story over and over again growing up. About how, one day, they would die, and Philip would get access to the money they'd kept aside in a bank account for tough times. But they left everything to Liv.

Eventually, Philip and Ben both received handwritten letters, much the same as what I assume Liv's will look like. The letters explained they would never see the money because they were selfish assholes who couldn't be trusted, and the only soul deserving of that nest egg was my girl.

It infuriated Philip that the daughter he'd all but disowned got everything, and acted like her life hadn't changed.

I'M ABOUT to close up the cellar after soaking the floor in bleach, when Olivia's screaming jolts my system. Looking at my screen, I watch as she tosses and turns, screaming in her sleep. I know my time is up. I'll have to finish cleaning up tomorrow.

Closing and securing the bunker and garage, I run back to the house. Unlocking the doors with my app as I go, so I can get to her.

By the time I get to the room, she's curled into a ball against the headboard, crying as Sadie comforts her. The sight has my chest tightening. "Baby," I whisper, moving toward her, uncaring that I have her brother's dried blood on my clothes. I don't look like I bathed in his blood, but it's a fair

fucking amount. I just can't take the time to change and shower when she's suffering like this.

"Jon," she whimpers, and I swallow hard.

"I'm right here. Tell me what you need," I beg, crawling onto the bed.

She lifts her face out of her knees, tears soaking her face. "Make me forget. Please," she begs, lowering her knees and spreading her legs to let me get closer. "I need to forget that someone tried to kill me," she whispers, and I nod.

"Can I touch you, baby?" I ask, waiting for her response.



# OLIVIA

“CAN I TOUCH YOU, BABY?” HE ASKS, AND I STARE AT HIM for a moment before nodding.

I want him to touch me. I want him to do everything he can to make me forget.

He leans into me, cupping my face in his hands before kissing me with tenderness, gently running his tongue along the seam of my lips. The moment I open up for him, we both groan in pleasure.

Kissing him is like coming home. It feels natural and right in every way.

His tongue sweeps against mine, and I melt into him. Wrapping my arms around his neck, my fingers dig into his hair and tug to get a better grip.

“Easy, sunflower,” he groans, and I smile against his lips. It’s easy to be in the moment with him.

“I don’t want easy, Daddy,” I whisper, and his head snaps back.

“Olivia,” he growls.

“I did some research, you know. I don’t know if you’re the daddy dom type that wants a little girl, but I can get down with you being the daddy dom that wants to praise and punish me.” I bite my lip, my core flooding with heat.

I’m not lying. I don’t think being his little girl is something that appeals to me, but being his submissive, his baby? I’m all for that.

“Liv.” He swallows hard, eyes devouring my mouth. “Be sure about this. I don’t need you to be my little girl. It’s never been my thing, but if you agree to be my submissive, we’re going to have rules and punishments,” he tells me, completely serious.

“I want that with you. I got so hot reading some of the things I did. I—” I cut myself off, worried about how to tell him I’m inexperienced in all forms, but he knows. Of course he knows.

“I love that you looked into it, even though we haven’t had time to discuss it. I’ve got you, Liv. Daddy’s always got you.” He runs his hands down my sides until he’s gripping my thighs.

Tugging me hard, he pulls me until I’m laying on my back with my butt in his lap. Heaven help me, that was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.

“Oh,” I gasp when his hardness grinds into my bottom. I still don’t know how that thing will ever fit in me. It’s not freaking human.

“Like what you’re feeling, baby?” he purrs, and I moan, trying to rub my thighs together, forgetting he’s between them.

He smirks at me when I huff out a frustrated breath as his hands travel along my sides.

“Please,” I whimper when his palm grazes my breast.

Every part of my body feels on fire as he continues gently exploring every part of my body, bringing feelings to life I had no idea existed.

“I want you drowning for me, baby. Are you desperate for me to touch you?” He rubs his dick against me again, this time shifting my body so he’s rubbing against my core.

“Yes! Oh, God!” I moan, breathless and crazed.

The times I’d tried in the past to get myself off, I had nothing to make me feel alive, so it never worked.

He growls, pulling completely out from under me and moving to tower over me. “So damn perfect,” he hisses before

kissing me hard.

He lays his body down beside me, pulling me close while one hand knots in my hair to tug it, the other moving to cup my butt.

“Liv,” he groans, his mouth moving over mine before he pulls my hair, his tongue plunging inside when I gasp.

I push back against him, feeling more confident than I ever have in my life as I move my hand down his side to cup his gorgeous butt.

The sounds he makes when I squeeze have me moaning against his mouth. “Jonathan, Daddy, please,” I beg, not knowing what I want, just knowing he’s the only one that can give it to me.

“Shh, I’ve got you, baby. Are you wet for me?” he growls against my neck, and I swallow, nodding my head and lifting my hips against him. Seeking any kind of friction I can get.

“Words, Liv. I need you to answer me,” he says, kissing down my neck and collarbone, propping himself back up on his knees for his hands to travel under my shirt.

“Yes,” I gasp, momentarily worried about what he’ll think of my stomach being round and soft.

“Don’t!” he orders, and I snap my eyes open to watch the fire in his eyes as he looks at me. “You’re so goddamn beautiful, I’m almost busting the zipper of my jeans.” He nods down to his bulge. “Do you see what you do to me? Do you understand how fucking badly I need you, baby?” he rasps, and I nod.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” I say as his hands meet my breasts, thumbs grazing over my hardened nipples. “Oh,” I moan, and he smirks.

“I want to make you feel so good, baby,” he whispers, leaning down to kiss me again as his palms knead my chest.

It feels so good. Too good. How can anything feel this incredible from a simple touch? I want his hands and lips



everywhere on me, and he must sense it because he pulls away, looking between us.

“Can I taste you?” he questions, and my heart stops.

Um, I—I, holy crap, my brain.

“I won’t hurt you, Olivia. I just want to make you feel incredible,” he promises, the softness on his face easing my fear.

“I didn’t—I didn’t think guys actually liked that,” I tell him, feeling myself blush.

I wonder if he can see it. It’s dark in here, but not enough that I can’t tell he has a lot of blood on him, most likely belonging to Ben. That whatever he was doing was something I don’t want to know about, and he came to me without thought when he found out I was upset, regardless of what he was in the middle of.

“Oh, sunflower. I’m going to love eating that juicy cunt of yours very much,” he growls, one hand palming his dick as the other cups me through my now soaked sleep shorts.

“O—okay,” I whisper, moaning the second he presses his palm against my clit.

“Fuck, yes!” he groans, cupping me harder, just shy of pain, and pleasure zings through me.

“Oh, God!” I moan, and he pulls his hand back before roughly ripping my shorts and panties down my legs before getting off the bed.

For a split second, I’m worried he doesn’t like what he sees, but he doesn’t give me time to think on it before kneeling beside the bed and looking up at me. “Move your delectable ass to the edge of the bed and spread those legs for me,” he orders.

I swallow down the fear and move to do as he says, but hesitating at opening my legs for him. I know he finds me attractive, and dear God, he’s already seen me naked without my consent. But this is different. Can I openly give myself to him with the possibility of rejection?

“Liv, baby, we can stop.” He sucks in a breath, staring at me with love and desire. With those gentle words, I allow my knees to drop to the sides, opening myself up to him.

“I don’t want to stop, Jonathan. I’m sick of censoring myself. I want you,” I whisper, and he groans, his eyes moving to my core.

“Fuck, Olivia. You look perfect, all spread out for Daddy like a good girl.” He leans in, running his nose along my thigh before stopping at my core.

I hold my breath, fear gripping me. Do I smell? What if he doesn’t like it? I don’t think I can handle his rejection. All those thoughts fly out the window the second his tongue licks the length of my folds.

“Oh, oh,” I moan when he reaches my clit, giving it a little suck and moaning.

“Delicious,” he rumbles against me, before flicking his tongue against my clit in a rhythm that has me flying higher as something in my stomach tightens.

I feel so wound up as he devours me whole, mumbling praises and vibrating my clit, but I need more.

“More,” I whimper, pushing my core into his face.

He growls like a caveman, wrapping his arms around my thighs to pull my ass off the edge of the bed, before letting go with one hand.

I feel his fingers at my entrance before he slowly slides one in at the same time he sucks my clit into his mouth, and everything inside of me explodes.

“OH GOD!” I scream, closing my eyes to the exploding light, and feeling coursing through my entire body. The feeling of coming undone better than I ever imagined it would be, and suddenly, I want it all.

“Fucking perfect,” he growls against me as I come back into myself, my mind made up.

I want more of that. More of him. I want it all, and I need him to give it to me. Suddenly, Shelby’s obsession with sex

makes so much more sense to me.

If she feels even a fraction of how good I just felt, I totally freaking get it.

“I need you,” I rasp, propping myself on my elbows.

He’s looking at me with hungry eyes. “What do you need, Liv? Tell Daddy what you need,” he says, licking his lips.

“First, kiss me?” I ask, curious to know if I taste as good as he thinks I do.

He stands up, pushing my back onto the bed and laying above me before his mouth takes mine, his tongue pushing into my mouth with ease.

It’s weird, knowing I’m tasting myself, but it isn’t as bad or gross as I worried it would be. It’s oddly hot, actually.

“You’re incredible,” he whispers against my mouth, grinding his hips against me, making me gasp.

“I need you, Daddy. Please, please take me.” I gulp when he freezes, lifting up to stare down at me intently.

“You want to feel me inside of you, baby?” he rasps, and I nod over and over again.

“I need you. I need it all... with you,” I repeat, adding on the end for good measure, and he groans.

“Be sure, sunflower. Be sure you’re ready to take my cock inside of you, because the moment you do, I will never get enough. There will never be anything between us, Liv. I will fuck you raw anytime, anywhere, and you’ll take it.”

“Anything, please take me,” I beg, and he nods, standing to strip himself out of his clothes.

I lose all the air in my lungs when his cock breaks free of its confinement. It’s huge. Like, oh-my-lanta.

“Holy crap,” I gasp, and he smirks. “That won’t fit,” I squeak out, and he laughs.

Jerk.

“I promise it will fit, Liv. You were made for me.” He moves back onto the bed, caressing my cheek as he leans down to kiss me gently. “I love you, Olivia.”

I feel the overwhelming emotions grip me and sniff as I look into his eyes.

This man has been here for me for weeks, and if there’s one thing I learned today, it’s that life is short. I won’t hide behind my fears when it comes to him.

“I love you too, Jon,” I whisper, cupping his cheek in my palm. “I need you,” I say again, and he nods.



# JONATHAN

GOD, SHE'S SO FUCKING BEAUTIFUL AND PERFECT, IT actually hurts to look at her sometimes.

Seeing her come undone under my tongue was the hottest and most gratifying moment of my goddamn life, and I want to repeat it every day, forever.

Sliding one finger into her tight cunt, I groan at how slick she is from cumming moments earlier. She's going to feel incredible sheathing my cock.

I pump my finger a few times before adding a second, and then a third, stretching her out to ease the pain I know she'll feel when she takes me.

If I was a better man, a decent man, I would have said no to having her tonight. That tonight was all about making her feel better, but I couldn't.

I can't deny myself the pleasure of claiming the woman I love so completely. The woman that just admitted she loves me, too.

"So full," she moans, squeezing my fingers like a vise.

"Cum for me, baby. Cum for Daddy again, and I will take you," I say, running my palm against her clit until she tenses around me, before soaking my fingers with her release.

"Fuck, yes, baby. That's it. Soak my hand," I praise her, easing my fingers from her channel and lining up my cock. "Fuck," I groan the second my tip hits her wetness.

“Please,” she begs again, her voice breathy as hell as she rubs her cunt against me.

“Hold on, baby.” I lean down to kiss her, gently pushing inside her, almost losing control.

She’s so hot and tight, and so fucking wet I know I won’t last.

“Daddy,” she whimpers, shifting her hips to ease the discomfort, and I groan as I slide in another inch.

“Fuck, Liv. You’re so perfect. Fitting Daddy so perfectly.” I push in farther, losing my ability to fucking think when she squeezes my dick.

I pull back a little before thrusting in hard, growling as she cries out from the intrusion of my dick. I’m not a small man, and I know she’s been terrified of this since that first day she was at my house.

“Are you okay? It will ease up soon, baby, I promise.” I kiss her head gently, and she shakes beneath me for a moment, fighting to catch her breath. “I’m so sorry,” I whisper, lavishing her with gentle kisses until she’s wiggling beneath me.

“I’m okay now. Please move,” she groans, and I pull out before sliding back in a little harder.

“Fucking perfect.”

“So good. Oh my God, so so good!” she moans, wrapping her legs tight around my waist, and digging her nails into my shoulders.

“Fuck. Goddamn it, baby. I can’t hold on,” I grunt, rutting into her harder and faster until she’s screaming my name as she cums all over my dick, squeezing me so tightly I roar my own release.

AFTER WE’VE COME DOWN from the high, I gently pull out of her, leaning to kiss her before walking into the ensuite bathroom.

Wetting a cloth, I take it back to the bed to clean her up. She's already snoring softly, making me smile.

I gently wipe her clean, tossing the cloth and my clothes into the bin before hopping into a quick shower, making sure my baby wakes up to a clean man. Not one covered in her brother's blood.

I love that she gave herself to me completely. I fucking love her, and I need to make a plan to get rid of her father some way, somehow. I have to also find a way to tell her about her Grams' letter first thing in the morning.

\* \* \*

LIV BROKE into tears as I told her everything Ben had confessed. I don't think it was over her brother, though. I think she's devastated that her father could be so cruel. After all, he helped create her.

We spent most of the morning cuddling in bed as she cried, and I started formulating a plan for Philip. I'm going to hit the bastard where it hurts the most before taking his life. He's going to wish he'd never hurt my baby.

Now we're on the way to Liv's house to retrieve the letter her Grams left her. I asked her why she hadn't read it and the reason almost broke my heart.

Apparently, the sly old lady told her to hold on to it until she felt like she needed advice, because life was spinning out of control. I have to wonder if she knew her son would put her life in danger, and that's why she wanted Liv to wait.

"What happens after I read this?" she asks me from the driver's seat as we pull into her driveway.

"Whatever you want to happen," I tell her, reaching to hold her hand. "I'm assuming there will be more steps than just opening the letter, though." I take a deep breath and let it out.

She nods, giving me a serious look. "I'm assuming you're right. Her Will was insanely airtight. Dad lost his mind when the lawyers announced everything." She sighs, looking at the



place she's called home her entire life. "It never made sense why he wanted the house."

I think about the best way to answer her as I watch the heartache flit across her face.

"I think he assumed he'd find the answers in the house if he took ownership of it. He probably believes there's a safe hidden somewhere."

She turns to look at me, squeezing my hand. "Thanks for being here for me throughout all of this. I—I'd be dead without you," she whispers.

I can see the tears in her eyes, and I undo my belt to lean over the console, kissing her gently. "I won't ever let that happen, sunflower. I'll die before I let anyone hurt you again," I declare, kissing her before pulling away. "Ready?"

She nods, letting go of my hand and getting out of the car.

I follow her into the house and to her room. I'm immediately assaulted by her scent and my dick hardens. I'd love to grab her and fuck her on that bed until she forgets everything that's happened this morning, but it's not the time. We need answers, which means my need to feel her takes a backseat. Unless she makes a move on me. If she needs that, I will give it to her without question.

"Will you hold me while I read it? Please?" she whispers.

I pull her into my arms, kissing the top of her head. "Of course, sunflower. Anything you want."

She pulls away, walking to her nightstand and pulling an envelope out.

Sitting on the bed, she looks over at me with a sad and shaky smile. "There's another reason I couldn't bring myself to read it before now," she confesses as the tears flow freely. "I knew they would be the last words I ever heard from her. I wasn't ready."

Fuck, that breaks my heart.



# OLIVIA

JON GETS ON THE BED BEHIND ME, PROPPING HIS BACK AGAINST the headboard before guiding me into his lap. He doesn't say a word about my emotional state, just comforts me through the tears.

I feel like this has all become too much. The fact that Grams never told me she had money hidden away for me, and that I know Jon killed my brother last night before we made love.

Hell, I knew he had blood on him, and I still didn't care. I needed him, and he gave me what I needed without hesitation. I love him for that.

Life is too short to be so closed off to the world because I'm afraid of being hurt. Look where fear has gotten me. I feel like I've missed out on so many things, but I'm also glad I waited until it felt right.

"She'll always be with you, baby. You know that, right?" he whispers, holding me close. I love how safe I feel in his arms.

"I know," I whisper back, opening the envelope with shaky hands.

The moment I see her handwriting, I start to cry harder. I miss her so much. She was the best parent I could have ever asked for growing up. She accepted me as I was and didn't try to make me into something or someone I wasn't.

I will forever be grateful for that level of love and patience. She taught me how I wanted to raise the children I

would one day have.

“You okay?” he asks me, and I clear my throat, trying to make myself focus on the words she wrote to me.

*MY DEAREST OLIVIA,*

*IF YOU'RE READING THIS, it means I'm no longer with you. And if I know you like I think I do, you've left this letter until everything blew up with your father.*

*I won't pretend to know what he's done or even capable of, sweetheart, but I know it's probably not good.*

*I didn't want to keep this secret from you, but I had to for your safety. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you.*

*I hope this letter finds you well, and I pray your father hasn't tried to hurt you. He'd never see that money if he had.*

*You, sweetheart, are the only one with the answer to the security question where the safe deposit box is located.*

*In my jewelry box, you will find a false bottom with the address of the bank where it's located, along with the key.*

*Olivia, I'm sorry if you're feeling betrayed right now, but I had my reasons. I've had some suspicions about your father for quite some time, and I didn't want my sweet girl to be in harm's way.*

*You have a big heart, my girl. Find that love that will keep you safe and cherished. I'll be looking for him to send to you.*

*See you under the stars, sweetheart.*

*LOVE,*

*Grams*

DROPPING the letter to my lap, I turn my face into Jon's chest and sob. I miss her so much, and the fact that she expected Dad trying to hurt me? I understand now why she didn't just tell me about the money from the start.

A part of me wishes I still didn't know. I don't need money to be happy like my father thinks he does. I like my life the way it is, or I did. I'm not all that fond of fearing for my life at every moment.

Worrying there's someone who wants to kill me around every corner is no way to live my life. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy.

I also never expected my own flesh and blood to be said enemy.

"I think Grams sent you to me to keep me safe," I tell him when I've stopped crying.

"You think she sent a killer to keep you safe," he says with humour in his voice.

"I do. I think she knew you'd be the only one to stop them from hurting me. I didn't think Grams would ever support killing, but I think she's looking the other way in your case." I place a kiss on his cheek, and he smiles.

"Sometimes it takes a truer darkness to take out the rest. I may be a killer, Liv, but I'm your killer. I've lived my entire life in the shadows. Now I know it's because I needed to be the worst of them in order to keep you safe."

I blink at him, smiling even though I know it's crazy. "I'm glad."

Giving him a gentle kiss, I stand from the bed and move to the dresser to grab Grams' jewelry box.

Now that I know there's a false bottom, it doesn't take us too long to find it before I'm faced with another envelope.

"For an old lady, she was kind of sneaky. I like that," Jon says proudly, and I laugh.

"She was smart. Clearly even smarter than I knew," I reply, opening the envelope.

Inside is a key and a card with the bank address. I blink at it a few times before groaning and turning to him. “Feel like a road trip?” I ask, and he smirks.

“Where exactly are we going?” he pulls me into his arms.

“Kentucky,” I groan. “Why choose a bank over eight hours away?” I question, and he shrugs.

“Probably to make it even harder for your dad to get his hands on it.”

“This all feels like too much,” I whisper, and he frowns.

“How can I help?” He’s so sweet to me. I feel like it’s impossible for him to be the man I love and a feared killer, but I know it’s the truth.

“Honestly? I don’t know. Just what you’ve been doing.” I lay my head on his chest and he rests his chin on me.

“Always.”

\* \* \*

How? How did he come up with this so dang fast?

I am in pure shock as we walk into our hotel room. The bed is covered in sunflowers, and he managed to get a room with a fake fireplace.

“I—” I trail off, speechless.

“Do you like it?” he asks behind me, and I nod, still looking around.

“It’s beautiful,” I whisper, turning to look at him. “You’re just a giant romantic under all the stabby, aren’t you?”

He chokes a little before shaking his head. “Only for you, Olivia. I’ve never been this kind of man for anyone but you.” He moves in, kissing me gently at first, but I can’t help but take it farther.

I wrap my arms around his waist, standing on my toes to kiss him with the love and passion I’m feeling for him in this

moment.

No one has ever gone out of their way to do something like this before. He grunts, bending down to pick me up by my butt, making me squeal.

“I need you, Liv. So fucking badly.” He carries me to the bed, lowering me down without removing his lips from mine.

“I need you, too,” I say, smirking against him.

Reaching between us, I lower my hands to the button on his jeans, fumbling until I get them open.

He pulls back, staring at me with hungry eyes before dropping his pants to the floor, kicking them off with his shoes and socks before pulling his t-shirt over his head.

He’s so freaking delicious. I really want to lick him everywhere, so I smile at him, hoping I look sexy and not crazy.

He groans, palming dick as I sit up and move to pull his boxers down. “Liv,” he moans the second my hand tries to wrap around him. He’s so big it’s hard to make my fingers touch, but I do my best.

“I want to taste you, Daddy,” I say, and a darkness lights up his eyes that sets me on fire, my core flooding with need.

“You want Daddy’s cock in your mouth, baby?” he rasps, and I nod. His hand moves into my hair, fisting a good chunk of it and pulling me closer to him. “Then take me. But listen carefully, Olivia. You do exactly as I say or there will be consequences.”

I moan, rubbing my thighs together. We made good use of the eight-hour drive, discussing what he wanted and needed as my daddy, and what I thought my limits might be.

I know exactly what he’s talking about, and a part of me wants to defy him to know what it feels like.

“You like that idea, don’t you?” He smirks, and I whimper. “Naughty, baby.”

I lean forward, tentatively licking his tip where there's a wet drop, and he grunts, his fist tightening in my hair.

"Shit," he hisses, moaning when I twirl my tongue around the head of his shaft. "Goddamn, baby. Feels so good. Take me into your sweet little mouth," he demands, his eyes like lava as they watch me open and take him inside.

Hollowing out my cheeks, I let my tongue drag along the bottom of his shaft as I move slowly up and down, getting a feel of the weight of him in my mouth.

"Fuck, yes, Liv. Such a good girl sucking on Daddy's cock like a goddamn pro," he curses, thrusting his hips so he touches my throat, making me gag while he lets out a guttural sound.

"Ahhh," I gag around him, and he pulls back, breathing heavily before pushing back in.

I can hardly breathe, but the pleasure he's getting from using me like this is making me feel like a live wire. I need him so badly I can barely stand it.

Reaching my hand between my legs, I press my fingers against my core; the jeans rubbing against me as I moan around him.

His eyes darken as he pulls away from my mouth, bending down to wrap his hand around my neck.

I gasp in shock, and move my hands up to grip his forearms. He smirks. "That was naughty, sunflower. Who does your pussy belong to?" he asks, and I relax into his hold.

No one has ever touched me this way, so a moment of fear took over, but I know he would never hurt me.

"There's my good girl. That's it, baby. Relax into me," he breathes against my lips, kissing me hungrily. His tongue exploring my mouth while his fingers twitch against my pulse point.

It's incredibly hot, and I moan. "Daddy, I need you. Please, please," I beg, never feeling this turned on and needy in my life.



“Lay down,” he orders, and I do as he says. I love it when he praises me. It makes me feel so loved and happy, I practically float.

He makes quick work of my clothes before removing his boxers and climbing onto the bed with me, moving between my legs and smiling.

“Hands and knees, ass in the air, baby.”

Oh crap. That’s hot.

I move around, getting myself how he wants me, and the second his finger touches my core, I jolt from pleasure.

“Are you sore?” he asks, and my heart melts.

“A little, but I need this. It’s like you awoke a part of me I didn’t know existed,” I moan as his finger trails through my folds, circling my clit.

“I’m glad that you’ll only have this with me,” he growls, pulling his hand away and slapping my bottom.

I gasp in shock, moving forward and moaning when the pain makes me wetter. Oh crap, am I kinky? I didn’t see that one coming.

*Liv, you call your boyfriend, Daddy. That’s kink.*

I mean, I knew I wanted him to spank me when I’m bad because he said it helps with guilt, but this? Oh, sweet heaven, this seems different.

I bury my face into the sheets as he slaps my other cheek, before moving his hands back to my centre.

“Fuck. You liked that, didn’t you, baby?” he growls, and I nod, moaning.

“Yesss,” I groan, lifting my head back up as he slides one, then another finger into me, pumping while he leans down to lick my clit. “Oh, God!” I scream, throwing my face back into the bed to muffle the sound.

“So damn tight. I love how you respond to me.” He attacks my clit with his tongue, licking and sucking while his fingers glide in and out until I’m screaming my release.

I rock my hips into his face while he keeps going, slowing down before I drop to the bed, feeling spent. Another swat to my bottom makes me squeak, but I feel like I can't move.

Holy crap, that was good.



# JONATHAN

SHE'S LYING FLAT ON HER STOMACH, BREATHING HEAVILY, AND I can't get enough of it. I want to burn this moment into memory.

Fuck. She came like a goddess, soaking my fingers and tongue, and I loved every second of it. She was made for me.

"We're not done yet, sunflower," I growl, gripping her hips and flipping her around.

"Oh! Oh no, the flowers!" she gasps, sitting up to check on them, and I laugh.

They're mainly untouched. I pushed most of them off the bed while she moved that sexy ass of hers around. I'll take her like that one day, but it will be awhile.

I need to look into her eyes as she cums on my dick.

"They're good. I pushed them onto the floor while you were all sexy and distracted with being a good girl for Daddy." I wink at her, and she blushes, flopping back onto the bed.

"I love how good you make me feel. How much you take care of me," she whispers, looking up at me as I fit between her legs.

"And I love you." I lower my head to kiss her, moving my hand between us to line myself up, before slowly pushing all the way into her.

She's so fucking tight and perfect; I can't get enough. "God, you feel so good," I groan when I bottom out.

Kissing her lips softly, I rock my hips at a slow pace, relishing in the feel of her perfect body and heart. The way she's looking at me with hearts in her eyes makes me feel like less of the shadow I am, and more of the man I want to be for her.

She gives my life meaning and balance where I had none before.

"I love you. Please go faster," she whines, wrapping her legs tight around my hips, and digging her heels into my ass.

"You want it faster, baby?" I taunt, smirking when I see the fire burn in her eyes.

"Yes, Daddy." That's all it takes.

I move myself to have more leverage and control, leaving some space between us, before pulling out of her and slamming back in.

"Yes! Oh, yes!" she screams, and it's the best damn sound I've ever heard.

Fuck, her pleasure is enough to have my balls tightening as I pick up the pace, thrusting into her repeatedly to the sound of her screams, her walls tightening around me.

"So good, baby. Goddamn, you're fucking perfect," I curse, the sweat on my forehead stinging my eyes as I fight to hold back the orgasm until she's choking my cock, screaming her release.

"Daddy, yes! Yes!"

I let myself go with a roar, cumming deep inside of her. Something I've never done with another woman. Even wearing a condom, I wouldn't allow myself the chance of becoming a father, but Olivia is different.

She's my sunflower, and I need to mark her. Claim her as mine, so any man who looks at her will know she's claimed and happy, as well as loved and respected beyond their wildest dreams. And the idea of her growing with my child?

Fuck, that's enough to have me growing hard again.

Pulling out of her slowly, I watch as our mixed release drips from her. Without thinking, I gather it back up in my fingers and shove it back inside her where it belongs, and she groans, her arm covering her eyes.

“Caveman,” she mutters, but I see a smile on her lips.

Chuckling, I lean down to kiss her neck. “Only for you. You’re mine, Olivia Breton.”

“Yours,” she whispers back, closing her eyes, trying to fight sleep. “I want to sleep, but I need a shower,” she groans, and I chuckle.

Standing up from the bed, I hook my arms underneath her, picking her up and carrying her into the bathroom with me. The fact that she doesn’t even squeal shows me just how tired she truly is.

I help her wash up before quickly cleaning myself up and drying us both off.

Once we’re lying in bed again, she curls into my side. “I love you,” she whispers.

“I love you, too.” I kiss her head and relax while she drifts off in my arms.

The past few days have been so hard on her, but the end is near. I have a plan for Philip that will destroy him so thoroughly, killing him will be easy.

When we get back home, I’m going to hack his accounts and drain them into my offshore account that can’t happen to be untraceable. The same one he, ironically, paid the first half of Olivia’s kill contract to.

The routing system it uses is so well secured, the feds wouldn’t even know how to find it, so I know it’s a safe bet. After he’s been taken care of, I’ll let Olivia decide what she wants to do with the money.

Knowing her, she won’t want anything to do with it. But we need to lie low for a while after his death, so we have time to think it through.

“Don’t leave me,” she whispers, curling into me tighter and slipping her leg through mine.

“Never, sunflower. Not fucking ever,” I promise her, holding her tight and closing my eyes.

I doubt I’ll get much sleep tonight, too worried about tomorrow and the fact that her father is still out there and getting desperate.

He’s not even using the dark net anymore, so I’m not sure how he’s found the last couple of people that attempted to kill her. However he’s doing it, it’s sloppy. They were completely unprofessional and inexperienced, and I’m glad about that.

It would be a lot harder to protect her in public against someone else like me. At home, it’s completely safe. But her house and her shop? That’s all open and fair game for a professional if they have the right motivation.

Her father is the last threat I need to handle in order to ensure she’s safe, and I’ll be starting that the second we get home.





# OLIVIA

I'M NERVOUS AS ALL HECK.

Grams' letter said I would be the only one to know the answer to the security question, but what if I don't? What if we've made this long trip for absolutely nothing? I'm going to feel like an idiot and a failure.

"Hey, it's going to be alright," Jon whispers next to me.

We've been standing in line at the bank for a few minutes, and I can't stand still. I probably look like a kid that has to pee with the way I'm fidgeting.

"What if I don't know the answer?" I question, and he sighs.

"Baby, your grandmother had complete faith in you. You need to breathe, or you're going to give yourself a panic attack. Then I might have to kill people," he whispers, trying to calm me, and I chuckle.

"Yeah, no." I shake my head.

"Next!" the bank teller calls, and I take a deep breath before walking to the counter.

"Hi, umm, I was wondering if I could access a safe deposit box? It was my grandmother's, and she left it to me when she passed a few months ago." I swallow the sadness creeping up my throat, refusing to cry in public.

"Sure, hon. What's the number?" she asks, her southern accent strong. It's kind of endearing, and I actually smile.

“This is what was left with me,” I tell her, handing over the key and the bank card, along with her death certificate. Thank you, Jonathan, for that reminder. I would have come all the way here without it.

I assume the box number is part of the stuff written on the back.

She takes a look at everything and types something into her computer, confirming Grams’ name with me. “Alright, hon. I just need you to answer the security question for me before I can take ya’ll back there.”

I nod, shaking my hands out and wiping them along my sweater. “Okay. She said I would know the answer in the letter she wrote to me, so I’m hoping I can,” I tell her, rambling from nervousness.

Jon wraps his arm around my shoulder, steadying me and giving me strength.

“Huh, that’s strange,” she says, frowning before looking at me. “It’s not a question so much as a prompt. That’s uncommon, but anyway, here it is. ‘I say this to you when you feel lost.’”

I smile, sniffing at how easy that is. Here, I was worried about the question being something she’d mentioned in passing once or twice. Not something she would say to me every time I was upset.

“Find peace in the stars,” I say, and she smiles at me.

“You got it. That’s actually quite beautiful. Come on and follow me, then.” She waves us to meet her by the end of the long counter, before taking us through a couple of sets of doors.

Once she’s made sure the room is empty, she lets us in and pulls out the box in question before handing me the key. “Just lock everything up when you’re done. I’ll be right outside in case you need anything,” she says before leaving us alone with the box.

“What do you think is inside?” I ask Jon, and he shrugs.

“Most likely routing numbers to the account and documents signing it over to you. If I had to guess, anyway. It’s not that unheard of with older loved ones.”

“I’m scared to open it,” I whisper, looking to him for comfort that he gladly gives.

He steps closer to me, lifting my chin to look at him. “There’s nothing to be afraid of, sunflower. I’m right here. Everything in that box will be things that your Grams wanted you to have. It’s a good thing,” he tells me sternly, and I nod.

“You’re right. Let’s do this.”

I blink a couple of times to get my head on straight before sliding the key into the lock and lifting the lid.

As Jon had guessed, it was a big envelope with a stack of papers. All seeming to be in reference to the bank account, so I pull everything out and lay it on the table for us to go over together.

He’s the lawyer here, so he can help me understand it all.

He starts sifting through the papers, whistling in a surprised kind of way before turning to me. “You might want to sit down,” he says gently, and I widen my eyes.

“Wh—what, why?” I whisper, still moving to sit on the chair at the end of the table.

“Baby, these papers basically make you a billionaire,” he states, and I choke. Like, I actually choke on my spit, coughing and gasping for air.

“No. No damn way, Jon. No.” I shake my head, and he rushes to me, chuckling as he slaps my back to help the choking. “It’s not funny!” I hiss, and he laughs harder.

“Sorry, sunflower, but you just swore for the first time ever. It was adorable,” he explains, and I groan.

“What would I do with that kind of money?!” I ask, and he squats in front of me.

“Anything you want. You want to leave it in the account after claiming it? Do that. We’re solid for money, anyway. You

could leave it for our kids and grandkids.” My stomach flutters at the idea of having kids with him someday.

Possibly someday soon seeing how we aren’t using protection, but I’m fine with that.

“I could donate some,” I say, swallowing.

“You could, yes,” he agrees.

“So, what happens now? Like, legally speaking. What comes next?”

He smiles. “We file the death certificate with the lawyers and the banks. It will take some time for it to all be transferred into your name, but we can get started on it as soon as we get home. If you want?” he asks, and I nod.

“Yeah, I think that’s a great idea. Thank you.” I bend down, wrapping my arms around his neck and resting my head on his shoulder. “I couldn’t have gotten through any of this without you, Daddy,” I whisper into his ear.

“You could have, but I’m glad you don’t have to.” He leans back to kiss me gently, then helps me stand up. “We can leave a lot of this here for security and ask the bank to make copies for you. They’ll also make another set of original documents and stamp them before sending them to all legal parties via courier,” he explains, and I nod.

“I think leaving everything here that isn’t necessary to take with us is the best option. I mean, he’s still out there, right?” I whisper.

A dark look crosses his eyes, and he pulls me into him. “Not for long, sunflower. Not for fucking long.”



# OLIVIA

“I CAN’T WAIT TO GET BACK. I MISS SADIE,” I SAY, LAYING MY head against the passenger seat headrest.

Jon chuckles. “I miss her too, actually. She’s warmed her way into my heart now.” He sighs, reaching over and squeezing my hand. “She’s probably living the high life with Shelby, though. She’s okay,” he tells me, and I nod.

“I know, I know. I just... I don’t like being away from her right now, you know?” I whisper.

He understands, though. “I know, baby. I don’t like it ei—” He’s cut off by the blaring of his phone. “What the hell?” he curses, pulling over and grabbing his phone from his pocket.

“What? What is it?” I question, nerves flitting in my stomach. It’s clear that it’s not a normal alert if he had to pull over.

He looks at his phone, flicking through things and curses. His face drains of colour when he looks at me, and I feel the tears building.

“Sunflower,” he whispers, his voice broken. The worst things start clawing their way through my mind.

“What? Just tell me, Jonathan. Is it Shelbs? Sadie?” I whimper, but he shakes his head no.

“No. They’re okay. It’s,” He takes a deep breath, bracing himself. “Your house is on fire, Liv.”

My heart breaks as tears break the surface, sobs falling from me as I shake my head in denial.

“No. No, it can’t be,” I whisper through the tears. “Why? How? I never leave anything plugged in,” I rasp, my head spinning.

Did I leave something on or plugged in when we left? Everything was fine yesterday when we got the letter.

Oh, God. Grams, all of her stuff is gone. My whole life was inside of that house.

I can’t breathe. “Oh, God. I can’t breathe,” I rasp out, and he’s out of the car before I can register what’s happening.

Barely able to focus through the tears and tunnel vision as I struggle to breathe, I don’t realize he’s made it to my side and opened my door until he’s bending my head between my legs.

“Breathe, baby. Fucking breathe for me,” Jon orders, and I try but only sobs come out.

“No! I lost—I lost everything,” I cry, my whole body shaking as I try to understand. “How?” I whimper, shaking my head as his hand rubs my back in comfort.

“Breathe, sunflower. I’ll tell you what I saw on the cameras, but you need to breathe, Olivia,” he begs, sounding pained.

“I c—can’t,” I push out.

“Breathe in for me. In for four counts, good girl. Out for four counts.” He continues to walk me through the breathing, comforting me and rubbing my back as my head stays between my knees.

I never understood why people would do that when they were having a panic attack, but I get it now.

“There she is,” he whispers, helping me to sit up.

I can feel my face drenched from the tears, but he doesn’t flinch. He reaches forward, using his shirtsleeve to wipe my cheeks dry, and I know that he’s a rare breed.

He doesn’t care that he’s getting his dress shirt dirty from my makeup, or that there’s a good chance they’ll never come

out. He just cares that I'm taken care of.

"I love you," I whisper, feeling like he's the only thing grounding me right now.

"I love you more than anything, sunflower. I'm so goddamn sorry you've lost this. If I could take away your pain, I would."

I know he would, and I love that about him. I love that, for me, he's the best man in the entire freaking world.

"Please tell me what happened?" I whisper, and he pulls me to the edge of my seat.

Swinging my legs around, I open them so he can move closer. He palms my cheek with anger and sadness in his eyes.

"The cloud footage shows someone setting it on fire, but I don't know who. They're covered from head to toe," he explains softly, and I swallow hard.

"Someone intentionally set fire to my house?" I lose my voice trying to ask, and reluctantly nods. "My father," I say, anger coursing through me. "He had to of had a hand in this, Jon!" I almost scream at him, and he doesn't argue.

"You're probably right, Liv. He's losing control of everything and allowing greed to control him." He takes a deep breath. "Ben has been missing for over a week now, and you're not dead like wanted," he growls, gripping my waist in his hands. "I need to take care of him when we get home, baby."

I shake, leaning into him and wrapping myself up in his lap until we're both sitting on the ground with me straddling his lap.

He holds me tight, whispering soft words as I try to work through the emotions I'm feeling. I'm devastated at losing my home and all of Grams' things.

I'm terrified that my father has lost his mind and will truly stop at nothing to get his hands on that money, and that no one I love is safe until Jon takes care of him.



What the heck has my world come to when I'm hoping and praying the man I love can take my father out before he hurts someone? That's not a normal life to live, and I hate it.

"You always have a home with me, sunflower." He pulls his face away from my neck to kiss me gently, his hands tangling in my hair.

I groan, leaning into him and seeking the comfort and warmth only he can offer me. I want him to make it all go away, to help me feel like I didn't just lose a huge chunk of my heart to flames that were intentional.

"You ready to go home and get our girl?" he whispers against my lips, and I nod.

"Yeah. Let's go home." My heart breaks saying that one little word because I no longer have a home.

I do, but it's not the one I imagined living in for the rest of my life. The home where I spent the happiest days of my childhood and learned to love myself for who I am.

Everything I cherished was in that place, but at least I still have the memories. My father can never take those away from me.

\* \* \*

"I'M GOING to strangle that son of a bitch!" Shelby screams as she paces the floor of her apartment.

Poor Sadie is sitting on the couch with me, watching her pace. I'm getting a headache from the lack of sleep we've had the past two days. Road trips are exhausting.

Add in a night of delicious and mind blowing sex in our hotel room, and yeah. Exhausted. Not to mention the absolute mind boggling emotions I'm trying to grasp.

"Can you sit down please? I have a headache," I ask her, and Jon narrows his eyes at me.

"You need to get home and sleep, sunflower. This has been too much." He looks at me firmly, and Shelby snorts.

“You think?! You just told me my best friend has a hit contract out on her because of her father! And that you guys think the gun shot the other day was a failed attempt in her life!” Shelby screams some more, this time directing her anger at Jonathan.

We told her everything we had to, but I didn’t tell her he was a killer or that he killed Ben. I will someday, probably, but today is not that day.

Actually, that day is a long, long time from now when all of this is dead and buried, never to be brought up again. Everything just needs to die down, and I want to keep Shelby safe.

Jon won’t hurt her. I know he hates her, but he also won’t let her get hurt because she’s like a sister to me... but that doesn’t mean I should tell her about his extra-curricular activities.

“Oh, and the fact that you’re somehow mega rich. Can’t forget that part,” she quips, and I find myself laughing.

“How could I forget when it’s literally the entire reason he wants me dead in the first place?” I snap, then wince. That made me feel like a jerk. “Sorry,” I groan, laying my head back on the couch.

“No, you’re right. I’m sorry, it’s just a lot, you know? I never did like him and your brother.” She stomps her foot in anger and annoyance, and I actually see the corner of Jon’s lips twitch a little.

“I know you didn’t.” I stand up, moving over to her for a hug before Sadie and Jon follow behind me. “I am exhausted, though. I think we need to go home, but I’m worried about you,” I say, trying not to cry.

“Don’t be! My other boss has been a tyrant of an ass, but the club has become some seriously high tech joint. He can’t get in here.” She waves her hand around the apartment.

She’s right. He can’t, and that’s helpful. As far as her boss goes, I can’t exactly tell her it’s because he’s besties with Jon and semi obsessed with her.

Actually, according to Jon, he's besotted with her and all her crazy, and I wish him the best of luck on that one. I feel like she'd probably chew him up and spit him out, but who knows? Everyone has their other half somewhere, right?

"Go home. Get some rest, and tell me when that bastard is caught," she seethes, and I swallow.

Nodding, I give her one last hug before we leave for home. I hate lying to her, but again, it's in her best interest to not know everything right now, and that includes everything about Jon and his life outside of the law.

No one is truly safe until he gets rid of my father. I just hope he doesn't get himself hurt in the process.



# JONATHAN

DONE.

That son of a bitch will wake up in an hour with no money to his name, and no way to trace it. I'm sure he'll try, but the FBI won't be able to find it either. I made it look like Philip was the one to get rid of it all, sending small payments to different routing numbers that all lead back to my accounts... eventually.

It will look like he's trying to hide the money because of illegal activities rather than having it stolen from him.

I've even gone to the extent of deleting all evidence of the contract he posted on the dark net just to be safe. The one that I found and accepted in order to keep Olivia safe.

The only contracts out there now are his other attempts, and it was almost too easy to find the evidence of them.

All I had to do to find the identity of the shooter was trace the payments from his bank account. I'll leave him to the feds that have already gotten an anonymous tip. Drawing unneeded attention to Philip's past criminal connections and having them all disappear along with Ben, is more attention than we need.

Then there are my plans to make that vile piece of shit Olivia calls a father suffer. I have every intention of killing him, but I can't go with the fucked up and messy kills I'm used to. I have to make it look like a suicide, and with all of the groundwork I've laid, they won't even question it.

A man like Philip Breton losing his son, and supposedly all of his money, then being investigated for crimes against his

only daughter? They'll assume he had a mental break and took his own life.

I've been planning this since before we left Kentucky, but it's taken a longer than I'd originally planned because Olivia needed my undivided attention and love.

After she lost her home, she was an emotional mess, and I couldn't bring myself to leave her while she slept at night. But she's doing better today, and asked me to start working on it. She's sick and tired of living her life in fear, and she wants Philip to pay.

I'm only too happy to give her everything she needs and wants.

"Are you ready?" she asks, walking into my office with a solemn look.

We're going to meet the fire chief at her house to do a walkthrough and see if there's anything we can salvage. I hope to fuck there is, because she needs some good in her life right now.

"Of course, sunflower. Are you?" I ask her, closing my computer and walking over to take her in my arms.

She sighs, leaning into me and wrapping me in a tight hug that I love. It's like she needs to hold me tight to prove that I'm real, and I can't get enough of it.

"No," she whispers, her voice breaking. "But that doesn't change the fact that I need to do this." She squeezes me tighter for a brief moment before releasing me and wiping the tears from her eyes.

I wish I could cut that bastard to pieces while he's alive. One piece for every tear of pain he's caused my girl.

\* \* \*

**Olivia**

THIS IS QUITE LITERALLY the worst thing I've ever had to do, and it's breaking my heart.

Everything good that I've ever known was inside this house, and to see it ruined is breaking me apart. If Jon wasn't here with me, I don't know that I would have had the strength to do this.

"We've brought everything out that was even slightly salvageable. More of the structure collapsed today so it's not safe for you to go inside," the fire chief explains, and I swallow down the pain.

In a way, I'm glad I don't have to see the extreme details of my life ruined, but God. Why? Why would he do this to me?

I know Jonathan is going after him soon. That he postponed his plans for my father in order to support me until last night, but I'm sick and tired of living my life in fear and uncertainty at this point. I just want it to be over with.

So, I did the one thing I wasn't sure I was capable of doing. I asked Jon to deal with him.

I don't know all of his plans, but I know enough to know it won't be like Ben or most of his other kills. There's a darkness inside of Jon that I've seen glimpses of. A darkness I can tell craves blood.

I don't have to see it to believe it. Shelby went into enough detail about Jeff's murder for me to understand that. Not to mention him being covered in blood the night we came together.

Ben's blood.

I don't think they'll ever find a body, though. I saw him burning something that morning before going to my house, but I was too far away to see what was inside, and I didn't want to.

"Thank you." I try to give him a small smile, but it falls flat. "That's probably for the best." I clear my throat, looking up at Jon as he holds my hand.

"Do you want to look over everything?" he asks me softly.

I nod. “Yeah. I think that’s a good idea.”

We follow the chief to a section off the side of the house before seeing a small section of grass covered with a tarp and some things laying on top.

There isn’t much. A couple of mirrors that aren’t really worth saving, a few lamps that could be salvaged, maybe. And then a black box.

I immediately remember when Grams bought it, but I’d forgotten it was even in the house.

*“WHAT IS IT?” I asked Grams when she grabbed a big black box and put it in the cart.*

*“It’s a keepsake box,” she replied.*

*“Why?” I had asked again.*

I was maybe eight years old at the time and had no idea what it was, or why she’d want something so ugly.

*“Because it will keep everything I love safe forever,” she explained.*

“Oh!” I bring my hand to my mouth, tears running down my face as I run over to it. “Can you open this?” I asked the fire chief, looking over at him.

“Sure. We usually have a set of universal keys from the companies. I’ll just go grab them.”

I watched him walk off, and Jon kneeled on the ground beside me. “A fireproof box?” he asked, and I smiled.

“She got it when I was eight. I had forgotten it even existed,” I whisper, staring at the box and wondering what will be inside. “At the time, she told me it was a keepsake box to keep everything she loved safe.” I shake my head.

“What did she love?” he asks, rubbing my back.

I smile. “Gramps and me.”

“Here we are.” He bends down and works his way through the keys until we hear the telltale click of it unlocking.



“Thank you,” I say, crying tears of joy.

Even if it’s just bills with her handwriting, it will still be something to hold on to from her, but I doubt it’s that.

Reaching into the box, I pull out a very full bubble envelope. Opening the end, I cry out when I see dozens of printed photos. I don’t know what they all contain, but I see a couple.

There’s one of Gram and Gramps on their wedding day. A picture of them holding me as a baby. There’s even some of my old artwork inside.

“Good?” Jon asks, and I sob a laugh.

“So much more than good.” I sniffle. “It’s everything.”



# JONATHAN

LIV HAS BEEN SO FUCKING HAPPY THE PAST FEW DAYS. I WISH I could meet her Grams and thank her for having the forethought to protect those memories. I doubt she had any idea just how much she'd be saving our girl when she did it, but I know she'd be happy just the same.

Sometimes I wonder if Liv is right, and her Grams actually sent me to her. If she did, then I'm grateful. I never knew happiness like this until her.

I'm also grateful because I know for a fact that Liv would be dead if I hadn't been the one to get that contract, and that pisses me off. Enough so that I'm getting annoyed with waiting for this sorry fucker to drown himself in liquor.

He's been broke for barely three days, and he's already wallowing in alcohol and self pity.

As expected, he went to the feds, but they'd already received the undeniable proof of his involvement against Olivia and accused him of purposely ridding himself of his money in order to seem like the victim. They're even accusing him of having something to do with Ben's disappearance and likely murder. If he can want one of his children dead, there's a good chance he could want both gone, after all.

I hadn't thought about that angle beforehand, but it definitely works in our favour. No one will accuse Olivia or me of murdering her brother. Especially not after she handled the original questioning so well and lawyered up. Sort of.

There are definite benefits to her dating someone of my stature. The police wouldn't dare question her around me the way they had in her home before, because I'd put a stop to the questioning before it even started.

They did come and speak to us about the allegations against Philip and told us to remain clear of him, and safe because he had posted bail, regardless of the charges. He has friends in high places and dirt to blackmail enough of the city to get free. I was banking on that.

And that brings us to now. Me standing outside of his house in the rain, watching him get drunk off his ass while he destroys his home.

I'm protected from the rain by an awning, but it's pouring right now. It sets the depressing mood for this scene so well, too.

Once he's drunk at least four glasses of straight scotch and thoroughly ruined his house, I decide it's time and open his sliding glass doors.

He jolts from his seat on the couch, eyes wide and filled with annoyance. "What the fuck?!" he spits, and it makes me smile.

What I wouldn't give to feel his blood on my hands, but I'll settle for his anger and fear. "Philip," I say his name like I would in the courtroom, and he narrows his eyes.

"I know you," he says quietly, trying to place me. "You work for the DA's office," he states, shock filling his tone. "Don't tell me you're here to offer me a deal."

I shake my head at the utter stupidity he just spewed. "Fairly certain I would have used the front door for that. And gone through your lawyer rather than coming to you directly during off hours," I state dryly.

"Then why are you here?" he asks, sitting back on the couch. It's clear he doesn't view me as a threat. That's his mistake.

"Revenge," I state simply.

He turns to look at me while he downs another glass of amber liquid. He's making it too easy for me.

"For what, exactly?" he scoffs, standing and swaying a little.

I just smile. "For the love of my life." I smile wider, baring my teeth, and his eyes widen.

"I think you're mistaken," he stammers out, taking a step back. He's starting to see the monster inside of me. The one I can't hide when my anger over Olivia comes out. "I've never touched anyone in your life." He shakes his head.

"Well, that's just not true," I say, pulling out the gun from the back of my jeans.

There aren't any bullets in it. I refuse to make this look like a crime scene, but it's something to make him do my bidding a little easier.

"Who? What? I don't want any trouble." He swallows, holding up his hands.

"Pity. I want all kinds of it." I wave the gun at him as I step closer, and he flinches. "Go into the kitchen and get a chair, Philip," I order.

"Why?" he asks, and I roll my eyes.

"Don't ask questions, Philip. Be a good boy and go get the damn chair." I point the gun at him, and he jumps.

Following him into the kitchen, he grabs one of the chairs he'd previously knocked over. "Now, take it back to the living room so it's directly under the stairs."

His eyes comically widen, fear shining through, and I cackle. He's just figured out what I'm planning.

"You won't get away with this," he spits out angrily.

"Oh, I will. But we aren't there quite yet." I wave the gun at him while tossing my arm in the direction of the living room.

He starts to visibly shake, but does as directed until the chair is placed where it needs to be.

I'd already grabbed some rope from his garage and stored it under his bar, figuring it would be the one thing he wouldn't destroy since it housed his escape. I was right.

"Now what?" he smirks at me, and I fully understand where Ben got his idiocy from. Olivia must have gotten her smarts from her mother because, honestly. Even drunk he has to realize I'm about to kill him. Yet he's taunting me?

"Now, you're going to go open the bottom drawer of your bar and grab the rope I put there earlier. Then come back."

"It's not possible," he growls angrily.

"Just fucking do it. You're irritating me," I snap. I'm playing the crazy and unhinged character to a tee, but I'm not angry at all. I'm quite enjoying this right now.

He makes a sound of frustration before stomping over to the bar and whipping the drawer out. I know the moment he sees the rope because his entire body freezes.

I'm guessing that, right about now, it's working through his alcohol riddled brain just how planned this actually is.

"I—" He cuts himself off, staring at the rope as if it will burn him when he touches it.

"Pick it up, Philip," I say quietly, enjoying the sudden fear emanating off of him.

When he picks it up, he notices the noose I've already crafted on the one end, and his entire body convulses.

"No one is going to believe I committed suicide," he hisses, still staring down at the rope in his hands.

"We'll get to that in a moment. Walk back over to the chair and put the noose around your neck," I say, waiting patiently for him to move.

As he moves back to me, he shoots a glare my way that might make a lesser man fear him. Not me.

"You're a goddamn lawyer. Why are you risking everything to do this?" he questions, and I bark out a laugh.

God, that's good. I needed that. "You really think you're the first person I've killed, Phil? Can I call you that? I feel like we're on a nickname basis given the intimacy of these final moments and all," I taunt, and he huffs out a breath. "Though I have been a very busy man for the last several weeks."

He watches me with annoyance before things start to slowly click in his brain. "You," he seethes, and I smile wider.

"Me," I reply, like a giddy fucking teenager. "Necklace, Phil. It's perfect for you," I growl, shoving the gun into his temple.

"Why not just shoot me?" he asks, and I chuckle.

"That's too quick, and I need to make sure they don't think you've been murdered." I shrug, watching and waiting as he drapes the noose over his head.

I remove the gun, still holding it as I tighten the rope around his neck. He makes a quick lunge for me that I expected, and quickly move to the side, wrenching on the noose until he chokes.

"Now, Phil. That was kind of idiotic, don't you think?" I tsk him, and he chokes more as I pull him back toward me. "Up on the chair now," I say in a singsong voice.

The end is so close I can taste it. I can feel the fear and anger coming from him as he moves his body onto the chair.

"You killed my son," he states as I throw the rope above us so that it's hanging over the banister before pulling it taut, tying it to a hook on the stone fireplace. Taking the time to make sure he's choking and standing on his toes on the chair.

I need to make it look like he did this himself, after all. That means I can't be the one holding the rope when the chair drops.

"Y—you can't do this," he croaks out past the rope pulling against his neck, and I smile.

Once the rope is perfectly secure, and I know it will hold, I turn back to him. "You think so? You deserve worse. You

deserve worse than any of the fuckers I've killed recently," I spit, letting my anger out.

"Why?" he hisses, and I smile.

"Because I'll do anything to protect Olivia." I shrug, and he pales. "Oh, are you realizing how badly you fucked up now? It won't help you, but you're welcome to confess your sins if it will make you feel better."

He watches me as his eyes flit back and forth over my face, trying to figure it all out, so I help him. "You put a hit out on her. I took it, but only to protect her. She's the love of my life, and essentially the only thing you've ever done right." I breathe. "Actually, that's not true. I assume her mother was an amazing woman before she passed, but that had to have been a fluke."

He makes a choking sound at the mention of her mother, and I shake my head at him. There are some things I found out while looking into her family that I will never tell her. It wouldn't do anything other than break her, and she's been through enough.

"She died rather quickly for the type of cancer she had, don't you think? So strange," I say, shaking my head. "According to hospital reports, she could have lived for years yet. You wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you, Phil?" I question, and he's pale as a ghost.

I move over to him, wrapping my arms gently around his legs before kicking the chair over. Making sure it looks like he did it, before gently dropping him.

I want him to suffer. Taking the chance that the drop would break his neck is just something I refuse to do.

Once I've let him fall, he immediately starts choking, gasping for air and pulling at the rope against his neck.

"This is for the love of my life, asshole," I say angrily as he fights to save himself. "She's a better human than you and I will ever be. You should have been proud to call her your daughter. Not allowed jealousy and greed to dictate your life."



I smirk, waiting for him to lose some of his fight to hit him with the final blow to his ego.

He chokes and spits, drool coming out of his mouth. “By the way, she’s a goddess and has decided to use your money, and some of hers that your mother left... to pay your victims back. She’s a billionaire now. Bet you didn’t see that coming.”

He watches me as his eyes dim. It doesn’t take long for his body to start convulsing, emptying his bladder and bowels as the life drains from him.

“Bye, Phil,” I whisper.

Moving around the house, checking that there aren’t any footprints from my boots, or evidence that I was ever here, and move back out the sliding door.

I follow the wet pavement in the darkness until I get back inside my car. I’d parked a few blocks away at a neighbourhood park so anyone near his house wouldn’t notice my vehicle on the off chance they did assume it was a murder. But it’s not likely.

Pulling out onto the road, I smile all the way home to my girl. Knowing that she’s safe, and I have eliminated the threats against her, has me taking the first easy breath since meeting her.

# EPILOGUE

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## OLIVIA

*FIVE YEARS LATER...*

“YES! Oh, God, yes! Right there, Daddy!” I scream when his tongue rolls inside of me, just the way I like.

“Fucking cum, baby. Now,” he growls against me, vibrating my clit and sending me over the edge. “That’s it,” he praises, moving up my body. He sits himself against my core and thrusts into me while I’m still riding the high.

“Oh!” I moan, throwing my head back as he pushes into me.

“Fucking damnit, woman. You’re too goddamn tight,” he groans, pulling out and sliding back into me.

Lifting his hand around my throat, he squeezes a little, making me purr.

There are a lot of things we’ve discovered I love over the years, and breath play is one of them. After that night at the hotel in Kentucky, we started experimenting a lot more with his dominance and my submission. Turns out I have a bratty side that I feel free to unleash on Jon now that I’ve grown comfortable in myself.

It really came out when I was pregnant with Bree, and I think it took us both by surprise.

“Daddy, oh, please,” I beg, digging my knees into his sides. “Yes!” I scream, and his hand moves from my throat to

my mouth, muffling the sounds as he thrusts his hips harder.

“Quiet, sunflower. You don’t want to wake the baby,” he hisses at me before groaning his release. “Goddamnit, I can never last with you when you squeeze me so tight,” he growls in my ear.

I smile against his hand. I know that, and I love it.

“I love you,” I whisper when he removes his hand.

“I love you too, sunflower.” He leans down and kisses me gently as the baby starts to cry.

“Feeding time.” I laugh when he whines, before pulling out and dropping to the bed.

“I miss having your boobs in my mouth.” He pouts as I walk over to the bassinet.

“Hey, Andrew,” I coo at my sweet baby boy, ignoring my grown-up one. “Are you hungry, baby? Your sister will be home from school soon.” I pick him up just as Sadie scratches at the door with a bark.

I laugh as Jon gets up to let her in, grumbling about everyone needing me, but I know he doesn’t mean it. This is the life we both wanted, and I’m thankful every day for the family we’ve created.

*Woof. Woof.* Sadie barks softly, nudging her cute head against my legs. She’s super protective of the kids and doesn’t like being out of eyesight for long.

“Everyone loves my wife,” Jon says, walking over to me in all his naked glory with a smile on his face.

“Everyone loves my husband.” I stick my tongue out at him, and he taps my ass.

“Sassy brat.” He shakes his head with a smile. “You feed Andrew. I’ll get dressed and go wait at the end of the road for Bree.” He kisses my head before walking off to get dressed.

Shame, really. I love the sight of his butt. “Come on, little man. Let’s get you changed and fed, so mommy can get

dressed too.” I smile down at my baby as I go about changing him.

Both of the kids have their own rooms, but just like we did with Bree, we’ll keep him in the bassinet until he outgrows it, so he’s close. As much for my own sanity and sleep as it is for his comfort.

Once he’s got a clean diaper, I sit on the rocking chair and get comfortable, helping him latch before looking out the window.

“I wish you were here, Grams,” I whisper. I talk to her a lot when I’m alone with my thoughts like this.

Some days, it’s still hard to believe she isn’t here to see my beautiful family. Others, I can feel her surrounding us with her love, and it brings me comfort.

Jon and I have done a lot over the past five years, since everything happened. We’ve allocated funds from both my father’s missing income, as well as the money my grandmother left me, in order to help the people my father stole from.

I donate a lot to charities that speak to my soul every few months. I also still own the grooming shop and try to get in there at least once a week, but for the most part, Shelby runs it as my manager.

She’s hired some of the girls from Devlin’s strip club that were only there because they needed the money, but would have preferred to be doing almost anything else. I guess you could say it was her way of giving back.

“Mom!” I hear Bree squeal, bringing me out of my thoughts.

Pulling the blanket from behind the chair, I cover my lower half up before she barrels in here.

“Hey, baby,” I smile at her. She looks just like Jonathan, and it makes my heart happy to see how amazing he is with her.

“Can we watch a movie with Andrew?” she asks, and I catch Jon watching us from the door.

He nods at me, and it’s all I need to know. “Sure, baby. Why don’t you go get it ready? Daddy and I will be out in a minute.” I kiss her head as she hugs me before running off again.

Once she’s down the hall, I frown. “Was that older kid bullying her on the bus again?” I ask, my heart aching.

Bree is a lot like me in the sense that she isn’t your typical thin child. She’s not overweight for her age, but she is built a little differently, and there’s an older boy that makes fun of her on the bus.

He growls. “If he doesn’t cut that shit out by the time he’s eighteen, I’m making him pay.”

I smile. “Daddy, he’s six. You can’t go around saying things like that. He won’t even remember this when he gets older.”

He grumbles and sighs. “I know, I know. I just hate it when my girls are upset.” He shakes his head, then smiles down at Andrew when he takes him from me. “You’ll beat him up for me, right, buddy?” he coos at our son.

“Go help her get ready for the movie before she feeds herself and Sade a bunch of candy.” I laugh, shaking my head as I get dressed.

This is our life, and I wouldn’t change it for the world.

I love my family, and tonight I think I’m going to teach Bree the lesson Grams taught me when I was her age.

I’m going to help my little girl find peace in the stars.

THE END

IF YOU LOVED Shelby as much as I did, you can pre-Order her book *Dark Longing* [HERE!](#)

TRICK OR REVENGE: A VERY  
DARK REVERSE HAREM  
ROMANCE

## REVENGE DIARIES BOOK 1

### **Prologue:**

#### **The Golden Boys**

Have you ever wanted something you couldn't have?

The four of us, the Golden Boys of Fremont High, we are all in love with the same girl and she wants nothing to do with us.

We made it that way to protect her.

No one touches her, or even acknowledges her in any way.

She's a loner, an outcast in our society.

It's better to be invisible, than to fall prey to the sharks that would love nothing more than to taint her soul.

One day, when we are free and clear of this town, we will make her ours.

Until then, we keep her safe by making sure we are the only ones to interact with her. See, we claimed her as our own personal toy and made it known that no one else was to touch her. And what we want, we get.

We bully her every day to make sure she keeps her head down and out of trouble. If she's upset and depressed, she won't go looking in the places she doesn't belong, and that keeps her safe.

But if anyone hurts her?

We have a secret that no one knows...



Be careful who you cross because Bishop King, Sean Parsons, Evan Phelps, and Mark Wellington, the Golden Boys of Freemont High, aren't nearly as golden as everyone thinks.

## Chapter 1

### Carly

Another year in this hell and I'm leaving.

I will never return to this place that's become my own personal nightmare.

Even before the events of this summer, I knew staying here wasn't an option. I don't fit in with this place or the people, and they've made that more than clear. Not that I would want to fit in with anyone who seems to think they're untouchable gods, but even one friend could have made all the difference.

I'm okay with not belonging here and it's not like I will miss my parents either. They belong here, and they're loved by everyone. I'm the daughter they wished they never had, and if we aren't out in public, I don't exist to them.

I've always been quiet and liked to keep to myself. I have no interest in the vain world my parents choose to live in, so I ignore it. All of it, and I'm happier with myself that way.

At least when I look at myself in the mirror, I'm not filled with self-hatred for being a self-centred bitch.

I was fourteen when we moved here, and life hasn't been easy. I bide my time and don't fight back. I take the bullying as it comes, but never give up.

And it does come...from the four hottest, most coveted guys in town.

### *The Golden Boys.*

Such a stupid fucking name, but they come from the four founding families of Wilmington. Their families own everything around us, and they make sure everyone knows it.

They're untouchable.

Before this summer, I could take their shit without batting an eyelash.

Now? Now I'm afraid they might actually break me if they push too hard.

I'm on the edge of a cliff, ready to fall into the darkness and let it swallow me whole.

If they come at me with their usual intensity, I'm fucked. I know I am.

There's only so much one girl can take.

"There she is."

I hold in the groan as I hear Bishop's velvety voice wash over me. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath and remind myself that this isn't anything I can't handle. I've dealt with them for three years. No matter what happened to me this summer, I know I can handle *them*. I just need to lock everything away to get through it.

Just a few more months.

"Aww, we missed you, Care Bear," Mark purrs from somewhere closer and I stiffen my shoulders, refusing to let them fuck me up on the first day. "Summer is never the same without you."

I'm fine. I've got this.

I take a step away and feel a hand land on my shoulder and jolt.

Nope. No fucking way. They can taunt me and knock me down, but they can't touch me.

Shaking them off, I make my way to the classroom, not even looking to see whose hand grabbed me.

I don't care which of them it was, because if I have my way, no one will ever fucking touch me again.

I take a seat in the back corner of the classroom and breathe a sigh of relief as I look around. Maybe I will be lucky and not share a class with any of them. Just this once, the universe may be giving me a pass.

My happiness is short lived as Evan walks in, taking stock of the room before narrowing his eyes on the empty seat

beside me.

No, God no. Please, anywhere but here.

I lay my head in my arms and groan as he makes his way over here with a smirk on his all too handsome face.

It would be nice if the universe quit shitting on me. Even just for one damn day because lately, she's been a miserable cunt I'd like to stab.

I've never done anything to deserve the shit she's thrown at me the past couple months.

"Well, isn't this a nice surprise. You don't usually sit back here."

The chair beside me screeches across the floor as he flops into it and I sigh, lifting my head, refusing to acknowledge him.

This is all my fault.

It's my mistake that gave him the free access to sit beside me. I wanted to disappear into the background even more than I have in the past, and that just gave him the ammunition he needed to taunt me some more.

Fucking perfect.

The bell rings and I bend over to take my books out for homeroom as the teacher walks into the classroom and closes the door.

"Good morning, everyone. My name is Mr. Granger." Everyone around us mumbles something, but I don't pay any attention. I keep my head and eyes on my books as not to give the evil spawn beside me more ammunition.

Okay, to be fair, Evan is the nicest of the four of them, but he's still a dick. To his credit, he must sense my unwillingness to deal with his shit. He doesn't say much as the teacher goes through roll call to make sure we're all in attendance.

I keep my eyes on my books, doodling something in the corner of one of my notebooks when my name is called.

"Carly Harrison."

The sound of my name snaps me out of my daze, and I pull my head up.

“Here., I state as I look at our new teacher and forget how to breathe.

His cold eyes hold mine with a darkness I remember well, and I suddenly feel dizzy as I take in the satisfied smirk that appears on his face.

“New teacher.” Evan pulls tighter into the desk and whispers under his breath. I don’t answer him. I don’t take my eyes off the teacher in front of us as he continues with the attendance, his eyes never far from mine.

“Hey, are you okay? You don’t look like you’re breathing,” he asks with genuine concern in his voice, but I can’t respond.

I’m frozen in fear, reliving the worst night of my life as I see those haunting eyes staring at me with lust.

This can’t be happening.

“Fine,” I croak, Evan’s timely comment a reminder for me to breathe.

My lungs burn as they welcome the oxygen I was depriving them of while my brain short circuited.

He narrows his eyes like he doesn’t believe me.

I want to roll my eyes at him and not give anything away, just like any other time one of them has seen me vulnerable, but I can’t.

I can’t play this off as nothing when my brain is a complete mess.

Him and I both know I lied by saying I’m fine, but I refuse to give him anything else. My trauma is none of his concern.

“Today is going to be simple. I want to go over your syllabus with you and answer any questions you may have. If we have time afterwards, I’d love the chance to get to know you guys and give you the same courtesy.”

Mr. Granger starts walking around the room, handing out packages for the semester, his eyes watching me closely. I can

feel them on me, and it makes me want to scratch at my skin to remove his unwanted attention.

If I were anyone else, I wouldn't even notice him doing it because he's that good at hiding it. But I know I feel them because it's the same feeling I had that night that I couldn't shake.

I can't believe how stupid I was.

I should have listened to my gut when I felt like I was being watched, but I didn't. I ignored that inner warning that something was wrong, and I paid the price on my way home from work.

A price no one should ever have to pay.

He moves towards us, and I reach out to take the packet from him, trying to steady my breath as my stomach churns with acid from the smell of his cologne.

Cinnamon and Old Spice.

I swallow the bile down as that night comes flooding back, memory by memory. Assaulting me even more than a few moments ago when I looked into his eyes.

I can't do this right now. I have to go.

Standing up, I start throwing my things into my bag.

"Excuse me," I say, not looking at anyone as my eyes start to get blurry.

Running out of the classroom, I hurry to the nearest trashcan to empty my stomach.

I stay there, bent over the trashcan, trying to steady my breathing when I hear a door open behind me.

I'm not sure if it's him, or someone else from another class, and I'm not sticking around to find out. I do the only thing I can think of and run. Because this time, I'm not being held down and I can run.

I run out the doors and don't stop until I reach the quiet park a few blocks from the school and sit down against a tree

in the far corner. I'm far enough away from the entrance that no one will find me here. I'm safe and I can breathe.

*This isn't happening, it's just a nightmare. This isn't happening, it's just a nightmare.*

I repeat the words over and over, begging myself to believe them as I lean against the tree trying to catch my breath...but I know what I saw. *WHO* I saw.



“You skipped school?!” my mother shrieks the second I walk through the door, and I ignore her never-ending attempts at bullshit.

I shouldn't be surprised that the school called them, but I will forever wonder why my parents even pretend to care.

“It's fine mom,” I lie and head up the stairs, ignoring her hollering as I go.

Everyone in this house knows that they don't care or want me, but they still try to keep the charade to save face for their precious image.

When dad gets home, he will hand out some bullshit grounding that has literally no effect on my life, but it will give them the ability to say they've handled me so no one questions them. It's a pathetic cycle that I want desperately to end.

A few more months.

Flopping onto the bed, I burrow under the covers to try and get warm.

It's not actually cold outside, but I can't stop the trembling my body has been doing since our new teacher walked into the classroom, effectively fucking me up.

I thought that I would be alright. That I could just focus on my schoolwork and forget about what happened. I could deal with it later when I was free to live my life the way I wanted to.

I was wrong though. Like I said, the universe is a serious cunt lately.

I don't expect it when my mom opens the door, a scowl on her face with her hands planted on her hips.

Oh look, she's actually mad. Miracles do happen.

I just barely hold back the snort at my inner ramblings.

"You can't just skip school, Carly. It's the first day."

I let out a sigh and refuse to open my eyes. "I wasn't feeling well. After I threw up, I decided to get some air and fell asleep at the park down the street."

It's a white lie. I did throw up and I did spend the day at the park, but in no way did I sleep.

"If you were sick, you should have come home." The frown on her face is proof she doesn't fully believe me but isn't quite ready to write me off yet.

"Mom, I'm really tired and I can't stop shaking. Can I please go to sleep?"

She narrows her eyes at me as she looks me over. There must be something about my voice that lends to my story because she lets out a sigh. "Fine. Next time you're sick, you have to call me, alright?"

I just nod and she turns around to leave before looking over her shoulder.

"Mr. Granger says you have early morning detention with him tomorrow before class. Don't screw up your last year, Carly." It's the last thing she says before closing the door and walking away.

We both know what she means with those simple words.

*"Don't screw up your last year so we have to be stuck with you."*

I wonder if she would react differently if she knew what kind of bomb she just dropped on me before walking away like that.

Nah, not likely. It's why I never told a single soul about what happened to me this summer. If my own parents wouldn't believe me, then who would?

I don't know if I can see him in the morning.

The last thing I want is to be alone in the room with someone so clearly evil and lacking any form of emotion, but I don't have a choice. I can't let him ruin my near perfect attendance record because I'm afraid.

Once I know I'm going to be left alone, I open my computer to search Freemont High's website. If I'm going to be around him, I need to somehow desensitize myself from the look of his face and maybe knowing a bit about his teaching background will help me.

The moment his smiling face appears on the screen, I have to grab the small trash bin from beside my bed and puke again.

It's not fair for someone to be so happy when he literally ruins people's lives. I can't be the only one, right?

Looking back at the computer, I read the welcome letter they've posted.

*Freemont High would like to welcome our newest staff member, Mr. Steven Granger.*

*He is joining us from South Dakota where his students had the top GPAs in the state several years in a row. We are beyond lucky to have him as a new member of our educational team as well as a part of Wilmington.*

*We know his appearance here will benefit our students greatly.*

*When our students excel, we all do.*

*Welcome aboard, Mr. Granger. We are lucky to have you.*

I stop reading after that.

Closing my computer and taking deep calming breaths through my nose, I try to rid myself of the overwhelming need to puke again. I put the computer on the floor by the bed and lay back down.

There's nothing left in my stomach at this point and I for sure can't bring myself to eat. Not knowing I have to face my worst enemy head on in under twelve hours.



Why couldn't he have been someone random I never had to see again?

I never expected the stranger who destroyed my life to show up and be a constant reminder of everything I lost that night. I definitely didn't expect him to be my teacher.

It was hard enough to try and pretend I was fine all summer knowing I would never see him again.

Now? I really don't think I'm prepared for what's about to go down.

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Cassie Hargrove is an author of all things romance. She is a stay at home mom of three crazy kids. Seven year old autistic twins, and a sassy four year old that 100% takes after her mother.

She lives in a small town with her husband and children, three cats and a dog. Writing is something she's enjoyed her entire life. It brings an element of calm into the chaos of life.



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