



DEADLY LOVE
BOOK THREE

deadly
ENCOUNTER

USA TODAY BEST SELLING AUTHORS

K.A. KNIGHT

IVY FOX

daddy
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*For Ivy,
thank you for being the Cara to my Zoey.*

*For Katie,
thank you for being the Hale to my Gray.*

Prologue

HALE



I hate parties.

Okay, I love parties, but not ones like this.

The richest people in the city fill the ballroom, and I can't hide my grimace, so I turn away and fade into the shadows, watching and gaining intel as I try to find him.

The General.

Gray is desperate to locate him, and I agreed to help. A whisper on the street led me here, and despite the fact that I'm rocking my usual Armani and a matching half mask like every other male here, I couldn't feel more out of place.

I'd rather be at home with my computers to track my prey, but sometimes I have to get my hands dirty, and since Gray is one of my only friends, here I am.

I wait for any signs or whispers of him, sucking up to the rich and watching the women flirt, drink, and talk incessantly about nothing important.

It's a boring, mundane evening.

I'm tracking my prey, the rich, when I see her.

She strolls into the ballroom, bringing a breath of fresh air with her heart-stopping beauty. Her chin is tilted up in defiance, and her baby-blue eyes are hard as she glares at those around her as if she hates being here.

I can't stop staring.

I should look away and get back to work, but every part of my being is consumed by the beautiful princess striding through the ballroom like she owns it. I don't blame the desirous gazes that follow her, because I'm one of them.

Greed, need, and possessiveness flares through me for this stranger.

My eyes drop to her body, and I'm unable to suppress a groan. She's wearing a black silk dress that trails behind her, flashing long, toned legs—perfect. Her red heels gleam under the clinging back silk sheath, making her taller, but she has to be easily six feet tall, and for a tall bastard like me, it sends a shot of lust through my system.

The dress itself glitters under the light, clinging to a tucked in waist and draping over her impressive chest, which is pushed up and almost tumbling from her neckline. I have the insane urge to bite her there so I can leave my mark for all to see.

She turns like she senses my gaze, a waterfall of black silky hair tumbling over her shoulder as I move closer.

When I see her face, everything else is forgotten.

Those baby-blue eyes are lined to make them brighter, and her long lashes guard them, shuttering her true feelings from everyone. Her cheekbones are high and glitter with makeup, and her plump lips are painted an enticing red, giving me a glimpse of what she would look like as she bleeds for me.

She's beautiful, so beautiful she actually steals my breath.

She looks like a supermodel or a goddess, all light, brightness, and beauty.

She is all supple, tan skin and long, unmarred limbs.

And I want to ruin it, mark it, and brand it.

I want to see her eyes water with tears as I make her scream and then see her on those royal knees for me as I destroy her and fill those baby blues with agony.

She turns away, stealing her from my view, and a growl erupts from my chest.

Despite the designer suit I wear, there is nothing civilized about me.

Not when it comes to her.

I track my new prey's every move as she's forced to greet and play nice with the rich bastards, but her shoulders are tense, and I see the yearning in her eyes that she tries to hide—she wants to be anywhere else.

It calls to me as I linger in the darkness, stalking her.

When she sweeps from the room and out into the courtyard I scouted earlier, I am helpless not to follow. Leaving the shadows for her, I close the doors behind me, trapping her outside with me.

She either doesn't hear it or doesn't care, and fury pounds through me so hard it makes my temples ache. Who is this goddess to be left unprotected? She should be locked away and guarded so that no bastard like me can take what isn't his.

But it won't stop me now, nor would a million bodyguards.

Her back is to me, and her slender, perfectly manicured hands grip the wooden rope of the swing she is swaying on idly. The moon shines down on her, lighting her up like the goddess she is while I linger in the darkness like the devil I am.

I stare, imagining what she would taste like.

What her pain would feel like.

She stiffens, finally sensing me. "Who's there?" she calls, standing stiffly as she looks around. I press my back to the stone wall and wait, leading her into my trap.

She frowns, her black, perfectly plucked eyebrows tugging down as she wanders around the small courtyard, bringing her close to my hiding spot with every step, and then she's before me.

She squints into the darkness before her eyes widen and she gasps when she finally sees me. I smirk as I grab her, pressing her to the stone wall. My black suit and hair help hide us from prying eyes as I pin her in place.

I barely have to look down because she's so tall, and I can feel all of her perfect body pressed to mine as she trembles.

Fear fills her eyes, but she doesn't scream or back down.

"What do you want?" she asks, and I almost come from her voice alone.

It's husky and soft, and it reminds me of rolling in silken sheets.

"You," I reply without shame, and she jerks. "I watched you float around the ballroom like a princess checking on her loyal court, and I couldn't think of anything but one thing." I lean in as her eyes widen, her mouth parting on an inhale.

"What's that?" she whispers.

"How you would taste." I slam my lips to hers, stealing her kiss.

It's the last one she will ever have.

Her taste explodes on my tongue, making me grunt like an animal as I grind into her before tearing my mouth away. I lick my lips to taste every drop of her sweetness, watching as she lazily blinks her eyes open.

Her lipstick is smeared, and seeing that imperfection causes a primal satisfaction to swell inside me.

"What's your name, princess?" I demand, rolling my hips so she feels my rock-hard dick.

She whimpers and parts her thighs to give me access, and I take it.

I slam my thigh there and grab her hips, dragging her across my leg. Her eyes are blown wide with desire, but then I hear someone rattling at the doors, trying to get out, and I know our time is limited.

"You're name," I repeat in a rough whisper.

Like a good little princess, she replies, "Cara." She sighs and leans into my touch, but I don't think she's aware of the action.

I lean in like I'm going to kiss her again, and her eyes close, making me smirk in satisfaction. "Until next time, Princess Cara." Before her eyes open, I fade into the night with her taste on my tongue.

A new hunt just replaced my current one.

Sorry, Gray, but this one is more important.

Cara will be mine, and fuck if she won't regret giving me her name or letting me taste her.

Her name is mine now, and she will be as well.

I stole her kiss, but little does she know that before the night is through, I intend to steal much more.

CHAPTER 1

Cara



I had been dreading tonight. It's yet another excruciating party I'm forced to attend where I am paraded about. The glittering riches remind me of how much I hate this life.

I wish I were anywhere else.

The fantasy of running away gets me through the night. Unlike Zoey, I can't choose my own future, and as much as I love her, sometimes I'm fiercely jealous of her independence and the choices she has.

Me? I have none.

I was born to be the perfect daughter, even though I never will be.

I have to bite my tongue more often lately to hold back my snappy, sassy retorts to the rich idiots my father forces me to play nice with. The worst part? He didn't even attend tonight. We were in the limousine on the way here when he got a call, and as usual, he dropped everything, leaving me to face the sharks alone.

But I never expected *him*.

The man who kissed me like he was desperate to, indifferent about who I am.

He just wanted me.

Even now, I shiver in memory, thinking of his dark eyes watching me hungrily. Most of his face was hidden by shadows, and his muscular body pinned mine so easily. He could have been anyone, but that kiss ...

It was incredible.

As I pull my earrings out and drop them into the jewelry box, I stare at myself in the mirror as I remember it.

I rushed back inside, flushed and needy as I searched for him.

He was gone, though, and the disappointment that filled me shocked me to my core.

I couldn't bear participating in small talk after our encounter, so I faked sickness to come home to my ivory prison. No doubt I'll pay for it tomorrow, but for tonight, I remember him—the only man to ever dare touch me.

No one has ever been that rough or dominant with me.

My hand drifts to my lips as desire pulses through me, heading straight to my throbbing clit.

My underwear is wet, embarrassingly so, just from a stolen kiss.

Clenching my thighs together, I turn away from my flushed reflection in disgust.

I hate the desires that pound through me, the very ones that stop me from ever acting on them, that and my father.

If he knew what I dreamed of ...

I head to my walk-in closet and drop my dress, leaving it in a puddle on the floor as I grab a silken lace camisole and shorts and slip into them.

As I take off my makeup and braid my hair, my mind wanders to the videos I watched last night.

I've never told anyone about them, not even Zoey. She wouldn't judge, but it's too embarrassing, and even thinking about them has my cheeks turning red.

Disgust and desire war within me.

It had been fake, just porn, but ...

Tonight, for a moment, I wanted it.

I wanted the unknown stranger in the suit to turn me around, rip my dress off, and take me hard and fast, stealing my virginity ... even if I said no.

Shaking my head, I turn out the light and walk to my emperor-sized bed where I slide between the sheets, and then I turn onto my side to gaze out at the city.

A city I'm locked away from.

Rolling onto my back, I force my eyes shut. Usually, I have to search for good memories to try and fall asleep, but tonight, the memory of the stranger's lips on mine fills my head.

I drift off to sleep filled with unsatisfied desire in my darkened tower room.

I'm a locked-away princess, just like he said.

CHAPTER 2

Hale



It never ceases to amaze me how people with money are the ones who have the worst security systems. It's like they want to be robbed.

Idiots.

All I had to do to get into Princess Cara's castle was open the front door. It was that fucking simple. Maybe it's because her father believes that all the security guards in his Manhattan tower will keep his prized possessions safe. I mean, it would take a madman to sneak his way into such a home, knowing that at any given second he would come face-to-face with his security team.

Then again, being mad is one of my better qualities.

At least I always thought so.

It takes someone with a few loose screws to do the shit that I do on the daily and actually enjoy it. It just goes to show that being a sane, level-headed person is so underrated. I'll leave that shit to Alaric. I prefer to live life on the dark side of crazy. It makes things so much more interesting.

Take tonight, for example.

I should have put all of my focus on doing Gray a solid in finding out who the fuck this so-called General is, but instead, I got a little sidetracked.

Can you blame me?

It's not every day that I lock eyes with a living, breathing goddess.

Cara ... That's the name she gave me.

Hmm. Even her name rolls deliciously on the tip of my tongue, making me want to take a big bite out of it.

All in good time.

Soon, I'll mark that flawless skin with my teeth and cum.

A shiver runs down my spine at the thought of her beautiful face covered with my cum, her tongue licking her lips clean as her crystal-blue eyes look up at me as she kneels.

I adjust my hard cock and continue with my perusal of her three-story penthouse apartment. Everything in here screams money. From what I was able to establish back at that lame-ass party tonight, Cara is the only daughter of the great Governor Nightingale. I guess going into politics must pay off because I can tell he's loaded just by walking through this lavish home. Maybe Cara and her family come from old money. I'm dying to go back to my place to do some serious digging into her life and learn everything about her, but first I need something to tide me over.

The little kiss we shared earlier tonight wasn't nearly enough.

I think I'm entitled to a little more.

Just a little souvenir perhaps.

Something to keep her with me.

A crooked smile tugs at my lips as I take the staircase up to the second floor and make my way down a hall. I hide in the shadows when any of the bodyguards or housekeeping staff on duty appear in my path.

Jesus, this is just too easy.

It's so easy, it's no longer funny.

The fuck.

How can anyone leave such a jewel this unprotected?

It's like they want me to steal it.

Oh, I'll do much more than steal Cara.

I'll fucking ruin her.

Another shiver runs through me, and the adrenaline starts to build to overwhelming proportions. It's been years since anything excited me as much as this. There's just something about seeing something so flawlessly perfect that conjures up fantasies about how best to taint such perfection. Images of the skin around her wrists red from rope marks assault me. I imagine her knees scraped and bruised from rug burns, the slope of her neck covered with bite marks, or her hips bearing the imprint of my fingers. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and to me, nothing is more beautiful than a ruined flower, begging for a ray of sunlight to bring her back to life.

It's with these thoughts bouncing through my head that I silently open door after door, disappointment hitting me hard in the chest every time I find an empty room. I'm quickly losing my patience when a door at the far end of one particular hall calls out to me. There are two guards sitting side by side at its entrance—one snoring with his head back against the wall, while the other scrolls through his phone.

Hmm.

So far I haven't seen anyone guarding any room so attentively, which means this must either be the governor's bedroom or Cara's. Seeing as I heard that the governor was suddenly called out of the city, this can only mean that it's my blue-eyed princess's bedroom. Now all I have to do is figure out a way to sneak inside without being detected. I've always heard that anything worth having comes with its trials and tribulations. Good thing I'm not one to give up so easily.

On featherlight feet, I walk into the closest room to Cara's and silently close the door behind me. I rush to the window and open it, grinning like a jackal when I confirm that the balcony in this room is shared with hers. The cold night air bites into my cheeks as I walk the small distance to Cara's bedroom window, and my sinister smile only widens when I place my hand on the glass and easily push it open. My sweet princess is even more trusting than the buffoons who are standing guard outside her door.

I step inside her domain with ease, the moonlight emitting enough light for me to get a good eyeful of the girl who has dominated my thoughts since the moment I laid eyes on her.

Cara is deep asleep, hugging a pillow to her. Her arm holds it tightly, but it's the way her bare leg pulls the pillow to her core that really grabs my attention.

Well, what do we have here?

My little princess is having what looks to be an erotic dream—one that I must have planted with just one chaste kiss earlier tonight.

Without missing a beat, I walk over to her and sit on the edge of the bed beside her, watching how such a sweet, young thing dreams about being ravished and possessed. I swallow the lump in my throat as she rubs her cunt on the pillow, sighing in frustration every so often. Her nightgown keeps getting in the way, preventing her from getting the friction she needs. Not wanting to pull her out of whatever dream she's having, I lightly pull the hem of her nightgown up over her creamy thighs and push her pillow right against her apex.

The relieved exhale she lets out makes me as hard as steel.

My girl is so fucking needy for it.

So much so that she only lets go and gives in to her desire in her dreams.

One of my hands fists her covers, while the other palms my shaft over my slacks. When Cara starts fully fucking her pillow, my restraint snaps like a fragile twig. I unzip my pants and wrap my hand around the tip of my cock and start fucking my fist. The smell of her arousal fills the room, and I become mesmerized by how her lips part for breath as she succumbs to her wildest desires. I'm even more transfixed when Cara shakes her head, sobbing a ragged "No!" in her sleep while still humping her pillow for all it's worth. It plants the most lurid images in my mind of me taking her and fucking her raw as her words beg me to stop, but her body willingly opens itself to me.

Tears fall down her cheeks as she fucks herself so beautifully that she has no option but to fall from the precipice and come. I watch, gobsmacked, at the way her whole body arches off her bed. She wears a gorgeous smile on her face after having reached her climax. My entire body trembles at the sight, my eyes squinting in pleasure. Unable to hold on any longer, I come, spurts of my release defiling her pristine white bedspread.

Fuck.

Nothing could have prepared me for this.

When I decided to sneak my way into her house, it was with the intention of watching her sleep and getting some insight into the place she calls home. I didn't plan to jerk myself into oblivion while watching her fuck herself in her slumber.

My princess might be more fun to play with than I imagined.

With my cock still hanging out, I get up from the bed and walk to where Cara's head is softly lying on her pillow. Carefully, I swipe her raven hair away from her face, noticing how her cheeks are still pink and flushed from her orgasm.

Fuck.

I start stroking my cock again, my eyes locked on her full, parted lips. I envision them wrapping around my length and sucking me in until she loses consciousness—my kiss the only thing that brings air back into her lungs and revives her.

It soon becomes all too much, and like a teenage boy finding his first porn site, I come on my fingers for a second time tonight. Only this time, I don't clean them on her mattress. Instead, I run them across the seam of her lips, ever so lightly so as not to wake her.

Even in her slumber, my girl sucks my fingers into her mouth for the briefest of seconds and sighs contentedly at my taste. I groan, watching her sated limbs relax as a new dream takes her under, this one probably filled with rainbows and puppies or some shit—a place where there is no room for a

deviant like me. I take a step back and just stare at the sleeping beauty before me. No longer restless, she looks like something pulled out of one of those fairy-tale books children read—my own sleeping beauty.

No longer controlled by pent-up lust, I glance around her room for the first time and take it all in. Even her room is decorated for royalty. Her white canopy bed is at the heart of the large room, with a vanity in one corner and a reading nook in the other. There are white shelves all along one wall, filled to the brim with books.

Hmm.

I guess my princess likes reading about fairy tales as well as living in one.

It almost makes me feel guilty that her life is about to take one hell of a turn.

I mean, isn't that what always happens when the good girl in the storybooks comes face-to-face with the villain?

“Don't worry, Cara,” I whisper, lightly caressing her cheek with the back of my knuckles. “Villains are way more fun. You'll see.”

I bend down and place a tender kiss on her temple, not daring to kiss her lips and risk waking her up. Just as I'm about to cover her frame with her bedsheets, however, I get another idea—one that will curb my appetite for a while longer. Ever so carefully, I pull the pillow she still has her legs wrapped around and throw it to the floor. I gently part her legs, my chest tightening when I see her white panties drenched with her arousal. If she were awake, I'd fucking tear her panties with my teeth, but since I want my presence in her room to remain a secret tonight, I slowly pull them down her long, toned legs, doing my best not to disturb her slumber. Once I have them in my hands, I take a long whiff and almost come at how sweet her cunt smells after coming.

Soon, I'll be able to taste her for myself and have her come all over my face, but for tonight, this souvenir will do just fine. I pocket her panties and cover her with her bed sheet and

bedspread, doing my best not to look between her spread thighs and catch a glimpse of her tight pussy. If I even saw a sliver of it, my resolve to keep her pure and untouched for another night would go out the window.

But I have time.

I have all the time in the world.

I'll make Cara's dream a reality. I'll even make her lurid nightmares come true.

Unbeknownst to her, she led the big bad wolf right to her doorstep, and now I'll only be satisfied after I've sunk my teeth into her. It's time Cara found out that not every story ends with the princess falling into the arms of Prince Charming.

Sometimes the villain gets the girl.

And in our case, that is no longer a probability.

It's a certainty.

CHAPTER 3

Cara



I lie in bed, staring up at the white curtains of my canopy, wishing night could replace the sun's rays that are streaming through my windows.

I dreamed about him last night.

My dark-eyed stranger.

God, it felt so real.

It was almost as if he truly stole me away from that horrid party my father ordered me to attend and pushed me up against a cold wall, uncaring if anyone walked in on him. I tried to fight him off, but he was just too strong, his hands pinning me between the icy concrete and his warm chest. I begged him to let me go, but he refused, pulling my dress up and kicking my legs apart until they hugged his knee. He ordered me to come on his thigh, rubbing my sensitive clit with his pant-clad leg. He bit my neck as his hands gripped my waist, pushing me up and down the length of his thigh until I had no choice but to come like he demanded. When he had me shattering in his arms, he forced me onto my knees. My tears were useless, and my pleas were completely dismissed, as he plunged his hard cock down my throat. I gasped for air as he thrust inside me, and when he came in my mouth, my core clenched, desperate to have him fill the emptiness that dwelled within me as beautifully as he had conquered my mouth.

It was one of the most lurid, perverted dreams I'd had to date, but it was also one of my most vivid too. So much so that I can still taste him on the tip of my tongue. I moan as I swipe

my tongue over my lips, uncaring that it was all a dream and not real.

It's only the sound of a familiar, hard knock on my door that causes me to say goodbye to the fantasy and get out of bed to face the grueling day ahead.

"Come in," I reply while putting on my robe.

Magda, my housekeeper and my father's favorite jailer, walks into the room with two maids behind her, one holding clean linens in her hand while the other has fresh towels for me in her arms.

"Your father is waiting for you downstairs, Cara. He's already cross that you overslept and demands that you get dressed to talk to him before he leaves for work."

"Work?" I repeat before taking the towels from the maid's arms so she can help make my bed. "But it's Sunday. What work could he have to do on a Sunday?"

"That is no business of mine," Magda retorts coldly. "It's no concern of yours either," she adds, walking into my closet to grab a dress for me to wear and then placing it on the door hanger.

I chew on my lower lip, hating that my father has emboldened her to talk to me in any manner she sees fit. It's almost like her words are not her own but his.

"Chop, chop, girl." She claps her hands when she turns around and sees me just standing there, rooted to the spot. "Take a shower and get dressed. I'll let your father know that you'll be down in twenty minutes. If I were you, I wouldn't keep him waiting longer than that." She scowls at me before leaving the room, obviously done with her mission in giving me my father's message.

With my spine as stiff as a board, I hug the towels to my chest and start making my way to my bathroom to do as she says. I only halt my progress when I see the maids in my room throwing conspiratorial glances at each other, both giggling under their breaths.

“Is something funny?” I ask outright, hating that even the maids think it’s funny that anytime my father tells me to jump, my reply has to be how high.

Or maybe they are laughing at me because Magda is able to talk down to me whenever she feels like it. It’s almost as if she’s the one who is the lady of the house instead of me—not that I’d want to be the lady of this prison. In fact, I dream of one day escaping its clutches.

“No, nothing, miss,” one of them says, quickly taking my duvet off my bed and shoving it into a laundry bag. “We’ll clean this for you, miss, and replace it with a new one. Magda doesn’t have to know. We promise.”

My brows furrow in confusion at her reply and the way both women continue to smile at me, as if we’re all sharing the same secret.

“Okay. Thank you,” I retort on autopilot, preferring to walk to the bathroom to grab a shower before I try to decipher what she meant by not telling Magda that they will replace my duvet with a new one.

I close the bathroom door behind me and turn the shower on before I strip off my nightgown. My forehead creases for a split second when I realize that I’m not wearing any underwear. I don’t remember taking it off last night, but then again, I might have since I usually don’t like wearing anything to bed. In fact, if Magda stopped treating me like an errant child and ceased waking me up every morning, I’d sleep in the nude. My father likes his structured schedule, though, and when it comes to me, he likes knowing Magda will keep me in line.

Sometimes I wish I were like those other college girls I go to school with who can sleep in anytime they feel like it, but unlike them, I have a warden who makes sure I’m always up on my feet by seven on the dot.

Even on a Sunday.

Sigh.

Instead of wallowing in self-pity, I step into the shower and let the hot spray of water wash over my body. I shampoo my hair and rinse it off swiftly, knowing that there is a timer on me. If what Magda said is true about my father being cross with me, then that means I have to hurry up or risk his wrath further with every second I'm not in his presence. Once I've made sure that every inch of my body is clean and perfect as required, I get out of the shower and wrap a towel around me before I enter my room again. My shoulders slump when my eyes lock on the dress Magda has picked out for me to wear this morning.

Like most of the dresses my father likes me to wear, it's white and virginal looking. It's a dress one would pick out for a child, not a grown woman. The only time I can use clothes that fit my age is when I have to attend some boring socialite party and need to impress his friends. He also doesn't mind me wearing jeans or T-shirts when I go to school or run errands, but inside these walls, I have to wear these doll-like dresses.

Figures, since it's exactly how he makes me feel—like I'm a doll.

He treats me like a thing he can use and discard just as fast when I no longer interest him, preferring that I exist as something that looks pretty but doesn't have a voice of her own. That's how my father likes me—a mute princess locked up in her ivory tower where no one can climb up to touch her. If he only knew how his sweet little princess aches to be defiled, dirtied up, and taken against her will, he'd lock me up in an insane asylum and throw away the key.

Defeated, I pull the dress over my head and tug it until there isn't a crease on it that he would notice. I then quickly dry and brush my hair and put it into one long braid over my shoulder. I slide my feet into pale pink ballerina shoes and make my way downstairs, praying that he isn't as upset with me as Magda let on.

As soon as I pass the threshold of the dining room, however, I see that he's more than upset with me—he's livid.

How do I know this?

Because he's not sitting down in his usual chair, reading his newspaper on his iPad. Instead, he's standing at the window with his arms crossed over his chest, just waiting for me.

He's silent and moody.

I've learned to notice everything about him to better prepare for his moods. For example, when he's pleased with me, he taps his other wrist, and when he's angry, his arms are crossed. When he's on the verge of throttling me? He's silent until I break it.

"Good morning, Father," I say meekly, taking a step toward my chair. Before I'm able to move an inch, he's already on me, gripping my forearms to the point of pain. I swallow the hiss that wants to escape my lips, knowing better than to show a sign of weakness.

"Can you explain to me why you felt the need to excuse yourself from the party I explicitly ordered you to attend last night?"

I open my mouth but then seal my lips shut when his stare bores a hole into my forehead.

"Well? Can you?" he says, shaking me for a response.

"I ... I ... had a headache," I stammer, my eyes lowering from his, submissive just like he prefers. The perfect fucking daughter.

Fuck, I hate him.

"A headache?" he repeats it like he doesn't believe a word I just said.

I nod, still keeping my head bowed.

He lets me go with such brutal force, it takes everything in me not to fall to the floor.

"I'm sorry. I felt too unwell to be social. I didn't want to embarrass you by throwing up and making a scene," I add when the deadly silence between us becomes too much.

His scrutinizing gaze never leaves my form, making me shift my weight uncomfortably from one foot to another.

“It won’t happen again,” I say, knowing that’s the only thing that will please him.

“Make sure that it doesn’t,” he replies curtly. “Whenever I’m unable to attend such events, I’m counting on you to represent our family.”

“Yes, Father,” I mumble, calculating the thread count of our dining room carpet.

“I suppose you’re still feeling unwell today?” he asks, but I hear the suspicious malice in his tone.

If I tell him I feel better, then he’ll know I’m lying through my teeth and ground me, but if I tell him that I’m still unwell, he’ll demand that I don’t leave the house until I feel better. Either way, I’m not getting out of this house today, so I might as well stick with my lie.

I nod my head like the good little girl he expects, even though I would rather rip this stupid dress off and run away.

“Do I need to call a doctor?”

“No, thank you,” I whisper.

“Hmm. So be it then. Call for Magda if you change your mind,” he says, walking toward the door.

On shaky legs, I turn around and call, “Will you be out all day? Magda said you have business to attend to.”

“If she already told you that, then I don’t see why you’re asking me,” he snaps. “You are smarter than that, girl. You know better than to ask questions. You are to remain silent and demure.”

I bite my cheek, hating the disparaging look in his eye.

I’ve displeased him today, which means he’s done with me.

I turn my back to him and proceed to walk to the table to have some breakfast, but before I’ve even sat down, my father stops me in my tracks with his next words.

“Seeing as you are unwell, maybe food isn’t the best option for you today. I’ll ask Magda to send some tea to your room instead. Best you rest and stay in your bedroom for the rest of the day. We wouldn’t want you to get worse and miss a day of school because of a silly headache, now would we?”

Great.

Not only am I a prisoner in my own home, but now I’ll be starved as well.

Still, I plant a meek smile on my lips and nod, knowing that nothing I say will change his mind. I start making my way out the door, ensuring I don’t make any eye contact with him as I pass him. Just as I’m making my quick getaway, one hand grips my shoulder while the other pinches my chin, his fingers digging into my skin.

“Next time, headache or not, you do as I tell you. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Father,” I murmur, my eyes stinging with unshed tears.

It’s the sinister, pleased smile that tugs at his lips that makes my heart tumble into the pit of my stomach. Pleasing my father makes him happy, but sometimes I get the feeling that disciplining me makes him even more so. It’s almost as if he likes it when I fail him, and he takes pleasure in my failures just so he can chastise me for them.

I push those nonsensical thoughts away and pull myself from his grip to rush to my room. I close the door behind me and slam my back to it, my chest heaving as I gasp in air.

I’ve read enough books to know that girls shouldn’t be afraid of their fathers, but mine absolutely terrifies me.

It’s almost like he’s just waiting for me to make one huge fuckup so he can finally shower me with his vilest punishments. I won’t give him that opportunity though. I’ve been a good girl all my life in fear of that fury that lies dormant in his eyes. I won’t do anything to unleash it on me.

Or at least, I’ll try my very best not to get caught.

I lie on my bed and wait for Magda to come up with the tea my father promised. When she finally arrives with it and tells me she will check up on me after lunch, I relax. That gives me approximately a three-hour window. With my father gone to God knows where, she'll be too entertained with her tasks to come and check on me in the meantime.

I need a little pick-me-up, and I know exactly where I can get it. After I make sure the guards outside my bedroom are too busy watching whatever game is on their phones, I go to my closet and pick out a hoodie and a pair of black leggings. I take off the childish dress I'm wearing and put on the other clothes, pairing the outfit with a baseball hat and my chucks. Next, I go to my window, hating that our building is probably one of the few in New York City that doesn't have a fire escape. That's okay, though, because it's not my first time sneaking out of the house.

I walk to the guest room that shares my balcony and push the window open. I always keep both windows unlocked for this very purpose, and thankfully to this date, no one has noticed. With my hoodie over my baseball cap to hide my face, I walk down the corridor until I reach the servants' quarters downstairs. My father's bodyguards are usually standing outside the main door, and I never know when their shift changes, so my best bet is to leave through the servants' main door, since that is rarely guarded. After I make sure the coast is clear, I sneak out and bolt down the hectic city street until I turn the corner to flag a taxi.

Twenty minutes later, I reach my destination—the last place on earth anyone would think to find me.

“Morning, Cara. I didn't know you were coming this morning,” Betty announces, her big brown eyes shining with happiness.

“Actually, I just came by to check on Otis. Is that okay?” I ask, my voice stronger here. Gone is the meek little girl, and in her place is the one I wish I could be all the time.

“Of course it is, dear. The old guy will be giddy to see you. He always is.”

I offer her a beaming smile of my own as I walk through the animal shelter, until I reach my favorite basset hound, Otis.

“Hey, buddy. How are you doing today?” I ask, falling to my knees. Otis leans his head back to see me, and then he slowly walks over to me as best he can with his three legs. When he finally reaches me, he places his head on my thigh, too tired to do much of anything else. I run my fingers through his brown and white fur, patting his head and long ears. Even though he has the saddest eyes I’ve ever seen, there is always a little spark in them whenever I’m near.

We’re two kindred souls, Otis and me.

Life has maimed and bruised us, and yet we still find the will to go on, taking whatever joy is afforded to us and leaning into it. Like me, Otis isn’t one for taking the spotlight from anyone, perfectly content sticking to his corner. If I could, I would adopt him in a heartbeat, but then I’d have to confess to my father that I met him while working for the animal shelter, and he’d only turn it into another publicity spectacle.

Working here is for me.

It’s my special thing.

Something that I do for myself.

Animals like Otis are easy to love. They don’t demand anything from a person. All they want is a roof over their heads, a full belly, and someone to love them.

It’s not too much to ask for, is it?

If I could, I’d switch places with Otis with a snap of my fingers.

At least he has people who care for him. People who love him unconditionally.

I don’t have that.

Well, that’s not completely true.

I have Zoey. She’s the only one who gets me, the only one who loves me for who I am without wanting anything in return, even if she will never fully know what happens behind

closed doors. Sometimes, though, I wish I had someone else too. Zoey has a family that adores her, and now she has Gray as well. The man idolizes her and worships the very ground she walks on.

That must be nice.

Images of my dark stranger from last night instantly come to the forefront of my mind.

Will I ever see him again?

The man whose dark-brown eyes almost look as pitch black as his hair?

Or will he only visit me in my dreams?

A girl can only hope.

CHAPTER 4

Hale



I watch my princess for as long as I can, and I see the naughty girl sneak out only to end up on the bad side of town at some run-down animal sanctuary. I look around, expecting cameras and press, but there's nothing.

It's just her, and she clearly doesn't want to be seen.

I'm guessing my princess isn't doing it for good press like I thought. No, she's doing it because she wants to. I'm betting if her dear old daddy knew, he would kill her.

I know I should stay in the car, but since I wouldn't be able to see her sweet face, I bolt out of it and rush inside while keeping my cap tugged low, just in case she's right at the door.

The small shop is to the left, and to the right is a board of pictures with animals and volunteers. I move closer, spotting my girl. She's smiling wide and unchecked, looking beautiful in a different way. She's sans makeup, her hair is a mess, and she has an old dog in her arms as she grins at the camera.

She's happy in a way I haven't seen before.

"That's Otis. He's still up for adoption," an older woman says as she steps out from behind the register and heads over.

"Is he now?" I murmur, hiding my grin. I find it amusing that she thinks I give two shits about the dog. I mean, he is cute in an old grumpy man kind of way, but it's my girl I can't stop looking at. "Who's he with then?"

"Oh, her? That's Cara, one of our best volunteers! She's the only person he is ever happy to see." She laughs before

blushing. “I mean, I’m sure if he were adopted ...” She smiles shyly. “Are you here to adopt, sir?”

“I was just curious,” I murmur just as I hear my girl approaching us, so I nod and head for the door. “Thank you.”

I don’t care how odd she thinks I am. I slide out of the glass door as Cara comes around the corner, talking animatedly to a dog limping at her side, but that glimpse is enough to tell me she’s passionate about it. I head back to my car, load up my laptop, and research dogs and adoption, becoming a fucking expert on the matter.

When she doesn’t come back outside, I find myself getting restless. I want to see her with a desperate need that should frighten me.

Realizing she might be here for the rest of the day, I turn on the engine.

I head to meet Gray, knowing if I don’t give him an update soon, he’ll hunt me down and disrupt my fun.

If I didn’t like the bastard so much, I might even be mad at him for pulling me away from my girl.

Soon, I tell myself, knowing I’ll be going back tonight.

Her panties are still burning a hole in my pocket, the material wet from my tongue and my cum since I was fucking them all night. Even now, I taste her, but it’s not enough. I need more; I need her nectar straight from the source. I want her cunt on my face, I want her cum dripping down my throat until I choke on it, and I want to hear her screams ringing around her perfect little castle while I fuck her.

My thoughts and mood darken the farther I get from her, and when I finally slide into the booth across from Gray in the little diner he likes so much, I’m practically seething, my hands fisted under the table. After all, I’m the calm one out of both of us.

Gray wears his scars and darkness for all to see.

People avoid him. Even when the waitress comes to take our order, she won’t meet his eyes. I, on the other hand, charm

her with ease, hiding my darkness. It's so much sweeter to lure them in and break them when their guard is down. Gray watches me with a disgusted sneer on his lips, and when I lean back, slinging my arm over the leather backrest, my other hand grabbing her panties in my pocket, I relax, giving him a smile.

I will be back with her soon, and it's enough to turn my mood around.

"You're looking too chipper today. I don't like it," Gray remarks when he takes one good look at me.

"You don't like anything," I retort. "Apart from that hellcat of yours, that is. How is my favorite madwoman?"

"Not yours," he snaps before rolling his eyes. "She's good, currently practicing her suture skills." I raise my eyebrows, and he groans. "Don't ask."

"Okay then." I roll my shoulders as he stares at me. It's fun to make him sweat. Anyone else who even dared to talk about his woman would be a dead man, but luckily, Gray likes me, even if he won't admit it. It's the only reason he puts up with my shit. His short temper, however, soon snaps when I just mimic his stare.

"Well? Fucking tell me about General already!"

"Say please," I taunt, knowing I'm pushing my luck, but Gray doesn't scare me.

He knows better than to come at me. We've only fought once, but it was enough to prove to him why everyone from my past fears me. He might live in shadows and scars, but I thrive in darkness and pain.

"Hale," he snarls in warning, sounding like a wild animal.

I check out my nails and brush off imaginary lint from my suit until he grinds out a quick, "Please," making me smirk triumphantly.

I'm fully aware that I'm not the one who is taming the beast in him. That's all down to Alaric's kid.

Zoey is good for him. She makes him more human, softer—if that’s a word I could use to describe Gray. Though if I ever said it out loud, he would try his best to kill me or seriously maim me at the very least.

Wouldn’t that be fun?

It’s been far too long since I’ve had a good fight. Maybe I’ll start one just for the heck of it. I mean, it would ease my restlessness a bit.

“Hale,” Gray says again, and this time I can tell he’s on the verge of reaching across the table and killing me, so like the asshole I am, I wait as my coffee is dropped off and add sugar and cream, making a show of tasting it. All the while, my eyes are fixed on his. Sighing when he doesn’t take the bait, I lean back into the seat and tell him what he really came here for, even if I know he won’t like my answer.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” he repeats in a deadly tone.

“Nothing yet. It seems General is an elusive bastard. He was supposed to be at the location I was at last night, but he didn’t arrive. Don’t worry. I will find him.”

“You said that before,” Gray growls.

Something cracks inside me, and he leans back as it flashes through my eyes. “Remember, I’m doing this as a favor, friend,” I hiss before shaking off the mood and grinning again. “Like I said, I’ll find him, so don’t you worry your pretty little head about that. I always find my mark.”

I will, and not just because Gray asked, which I know was hard for him. I heard what the bastard did to my friend and other kids like him, and I want him to pay just as much as Zoey and Gray.

“Fine.” Gray huffs. “Then we’re done here.”

“Wow, I’m hurt. If I didn’t know better, Gray, I would think you’re using me.” I grin. “It’s a good thing I’m so secure in our bromance or else I’d suggest we go to couple’s counseling to work on your communication skills.”

“Bromance? You know what? Never mind.” Gray groans. “Thank you.” He hesitates. “Hale, I mean it. You didn’t have to help.”

“Oh, don’t you start getting all sentimental on me, Gray. Your viciousness is my favorite thing about you,” I tease as I stand and button my suit jacket. “I’ll call you when I have something. Until then, enjoy your hellcat. Oh, and FYI, try to be faster next time so she doesn’t stab you again, okay? That way you won’t need her to learn how to suture.”

“How did you ...” He drops his head back. “If I find out you have cameras in my house—”

“Eww, no thanks. Who knows what shit you get up to? It was an educated guess since you’re clutching your side. Pissed her off really good, huh?” I tease as we head outside.

“I may or may not have called her insane.” He winces. “I won’t make that mistake again.”

Laughing, I clap him on the shoulder, noticing the lovestruck look in his eyes. “And that is why she’s my favorite. Tell her hello for me.” Turning away, I stop when he speaks.

“Hale ... why do I feel like I should tell you to be careful with whatever you are really up to?”

I grin at him over my shoulder and wink. “I’m never careful. That shit is for pussies.” I head back to my car, my grin only stretching at what else I’m going to do today.

Maybe Gray is right. Maybe he does need to tell me to be careful because I’m about to do something so fucked up that when the world finds out, they will hunt me down.

But she will still be worth it.

My mind wanders to what my girl is doing right now, imagining the way she’ll melt under me tonight.

Will she scream?

Fuck, I hope so.

I have to shift in my car to adjust my hard-on at the idea, my cock remembering the way she came. I know my pretty little princess is more than what meets the eye, and I can't wait to explore every inch of her.

In fact, an idea starts bubbling in my mind.

A wicked one, a cruel one, but I know I'm going to do it anyway.



When the sun sets, I'm ready.

I watch the house, noting the lack of cars and only a few guards, which means her father isn't there.

Perfect.

Even if I want him to hear me make his little girl scream as he tries to get to her, I want my time with her first. I want to spend hours ruining her, breaking her apart, and making her beg for more.

I patiently wait for the lights to go out, my eyes flicking to the digital clock, and as soon as it hits midnight, I'm out of the car.

The sick desires I have fill me, and I'm unable to stop now.

Poor little Princess Cara has no idea what's coming for her. I head around back this time and take the servants' entrance. I spent the afternoon collecting blueprints of the house and security information and mapping my entrances and exits. I also hacked her internet and phone and found some interesting information, like the kind of porn she watches, which cemented the final decision on how tonight is about to go down.

Once upstairs, I head to the same room, noting the guards outside of her room are asleep. The window is once again unlocked, and I slide across to hers, which is also unlocked.

It's as if my girl is waiting for me.

Landing on silent feet, I turn and lock the window. There will be no escape from me. I don't let my eyes land on her in the bed. Instead, I head to the door and lock that too. I know it's soundproof; the whole house is—luckily for me. Once it's locked, I shed my coat and lay it carefully on the chair at the back.

Tonight, I'm in nothing but black—black pants, a black shirt, and the black balaclava, of course.

It muffles her scent, which I hate, but I know it will be worth it.

Finally prepared, I turn back to the bed, chains in hand, and have to stop at the beauty spread out like a fucking feast. Her tight, pink little nipples have almost escaped from her baby pink silk nightie, which is bunched up near her stomach, showing off her matching pink panties. Her hair is spread across her pillow like a waterfall, her face turned to me like she senses me even in her sleep. Long lashes fan across her cheeks, and her beautiful pink lips are parted, just waiting for my touch. I lick my lips, debating where to start.

I have all night.

She's my prisoner now, and before sunrise, I will have taken everything from her, even if she doesn't want me to.

Heading to the base of her bed, I strip off her sheets and leave them on the floor so nothing can separate her from me. The moonlight streams in, bathing her like a goddess as she stirs slightly. She's frowning, and I can't help but grin as I run the chains through my hands. Gently, I lift one foot and wrap the chains around her ankle and then the bedpost. When she doesn't wake, I quickly turn to the other ankle until her long, perfect legs are tied open, her thighs spread wide to show me her panty-clad cunt.

I stroke my hand up her thigh as she whimpers before I reach her hands and quickly do the same to her wrists. When I'm finished, I step back to check out my work. She's tied and helpless, and I can't help but squeeze my cock at the sight of her. I'm so hard, it physically hurts, and I'm filled with the dark lust that has always plagued me.

I slide my knife from my pocket, and the sound of it opening fills the air, but I want her eyes on me as I cut away her clothes and leave her defenseless to me.

“Wake up, sweet princess,” I murmur. “It’s time we play a little game.” She stirs and tries to turn, tugging on her limbs, and when she can’t move, her eyes slowly open, blinking in confusion. The sound of the chains become louder now as she struggles, and I see the moment she realizes she’s tied down. Her chest rises rapidly, almost spilling her incredible breasts free. Her face pales, and her eyes dart around in fear as she continues to yank and tug at her binds.

She’s too lost in her panic to see me, so I aid her by stepping closer and pressing the blade to her thigh until she freezes. Her beautiful eyes finally swing up and lock on mine.

For a moment, she does nothing, looking like a deer in headlights, before her lips open and she screams, yanking on her chains.

“They can’t hear you,” I murmur. “Your daddy made sure of that.”

Understanding dawns in her gaze, and she freezes once more, barely even breathing as tears fill her big eyes. “Please, take whatever you want.”

“Oh, I plan to,” I purr, licking my lips behind the mask as I run my eyes across her. “Now be a good little girl and scream for me. Let me hear it, let me hear you beg me to stop.”

“Please,” she whimpers brokenly, still tugging on her arms. “Please stop. Go. I won’t tell anyone—”

“Not good enough, princess,” I murmur.

“Please, please, no!” she yells, thinking I’m going to hurt her.

I am, just not in the way she expects, and when I slide the blade up, slicing her nightie away from her and leaving her naked, understanding hits. She jerks and tries to pull her limbs up to cover herself, but she can’t.

Dragging my eyes from hers, I groan loudly at the sight of her naked and submissive below me. She's even better than I could have imagined. Her tight, tucked in waist begs to be framed by my hands and teeth, and her flat stomach leads to sharp hips and her little panties.

She shivers as I raise my eyes to her breasts and lose all sanity.

She has perfect fucking handfuls tipped with rosy nipples that are begging for my mouth and clamps. They sway with her struggles and cries, flushing red in embarrassment.

"Perfect." I groan and reach down to grip my cock, stroking myself through my pants. "Look how fucking sweet you are, all perfect, unblemished skin to mark up."

"Please, please, please no," she begs, sobbing and twisting, but when I remove my hand from my cock, slide it down her body to her panties, and cup her pussy, I feel how wet she is.

"No? Then why are you wet for me, princess?" She whimpers as I tighten my hold, grinding my palm into her. "Why are you practically humping my hand?"

Leaning down, I fill her vision with my masked face, knowing all she can see are my lips and eyes. "Do you want me to fuck you, princess? Is that why you were dressed like a fucking porn star? Were you waiting for me to break in and fuck this sweet little pussy?"

"No," she whispers pathetically.

"I think you were. I think you were hoping someone would climb into your tower and rape this tight little cunt." She jerks at my words, even as I feel her throb against my hand. The fact that she's crying even as her cunt begs for me has me so hard, I practically spill in my jeans.

"They—they will find you."

"No, they won't. I've locked us in here. It's just you and me now, little girl, and I have all night to take this tight little cunt and do what I want with it. I will taste every inch of this delicious, perfect little body, and believe me when I tell you that I plan to do just that. Heed my words, princess—before

sunrise, you'll taste every hard inch of my cock, and you'll love it, even as you scream for me to stop." I wrap my lips around one of her nipples, making her jolt and try to shrink away, but there's nowhere to go.

I suck hard, and her hips lift even as she cries.

Popping it free from my mouth, I grin against her breast. "I love the way you cry, and I love the way you beg me to stop. Keep doing it, princess, and keep telling me no. I'm still going to fuck you—no, rape you. After all, that's what you want, don't you? A masked man to rape you? To ruin you?"

"No, fuck, please stop, please," she begs as I slide my lips down her stomach to her soaked pussy. I grip her panties with my teeth and tug, laughing as she struggles.

I climb onto the bed, meeting her tear-filled eyes, and kneel, pressing my face to her cunt through the material and inhaling. "You smell so sweet, princess." Pulling them aside, I get my first look at her pussy and come on the spot.

It's pink, glistening, and perfect.

"Look how wet you are," I murmur hoarsely. "Is this all for me?"

Dragging my fingers through her folds, I ignore her screams as I sit back and stuff them into my mouth, grunting at her taste. When she doesn't answer, I narrow my eyes on her and grip her throat, cutting off her ragged screams.

"Answer me or I'll flip you over and slam into that tight little ass instead, and it will hurt. It will fucking rip you in two, and you'll bleed for me, and I still won't stop."

"No ..." She trembles. "I don't want to."

"Liar," I hiss. "But let's prove it, shall we?"

Not bothering with the knife, I rip off her panties, making it hurt. She cries out as I pocket them. "I'll lick them later as I fuck myself, remembering this," I tell her.

She closes her eyes at my filthy words and turns her head away, but I won't let her.

I slap her cunt, making her eyes fly open as she yells.

“If you look away from me even once, I will open that door and let them watch me fuck you, and they would. Every single one of those men out there has debated sneaking in here and taking the little princess, imagined defiling Daddy’s little girl.”

“Please, why are you doing this?” she whimpers.

“Because I can.” I grin. “Because I want to, and because I need your cunt more than I need my next breath. You can lie and scream all you want, princess, but you want this too. You want a man to take you violently, even against your wishes. You want this so badly you dream about it.” Her mouth falls open, and I know I’m right. “You want it so much you called out into the night, but you should know, princess, that the darkness has a way of bringing the demons forth, and it pulled me to you. Now? Well, we both get exactly what we want, but keep screaming. It only makes me harder.”

“You want money? My dad has millions!” she pleads even as her hips shift impatiently.

“I don’t need your money, princess. There’s nothing you could offer me except this tight, wet body of yours, and I already have that. You have no power here. I’m going to fuck you, and you are going to love it so much you’ll imagine me sliding into this cunt every night you go to sleep.”

I know I will, until I get her out of my system.

One night, I tell myself.

I lean up, biting and sucking her little nipples until they are red and throbbing, her sobs forcing them into my mouth as she fights to free herself.

Fuck, she breaks so prettily.

I can’t wait to feel her screams while I fuck her and hear her beg me to stop.

I bite the soft underside of her breast, and she screams in pain, but I still dig my teeth in deeper until I’m satisfied. Leaning back, I spot my imprint there, and knowing it will

bruise gives me a sick sense of pleasure as I crawl down her body to her pink pussy.

I stare at her glistening center, licking my lips as her hole tightens, no doubt wanting me inside her. Her clit is engorged and throbbing.

I look up at her as she catches her breath, sagging in my chains, and then I lean down and suck her clit into my mouth just like I did her nipples.

She screams again, this time from pleasure, grinding into my face when I don't let up. When I feel her about to come apart, I let go, allowing her to drop back down, panting as fear and desire war within the depths of her eyes.

Sliding my fingers through her messy wet pussy, I lift my digits into the air. "Tell me again how you don't want me to fuck you, princess," I mock, "when you drip from the idea."

Embarrassment colors her face as she turns her head away before remembering what I said and snapping it back around. For being a good girl, I reward her by sliding my fingers to her hole and slipping them inside her—only to still.

She's a virgin.

She's pure and untouched.

And all mine.

The possessiveness that roars through me is unmatched to anything I have ever felt before. Even as her tear-filled eyes meet mine and she begs, "Please, no," I know I can't stop.

I want to stretch her since I'm massive so it doesn't hurt, but fuck, I can't. I need to spear her with my cock and feel her virginity break around it so she'll bleed on my cock as I make her mine.

Mine.

No one else's, mine, the only cock she has ever had.

Sitting back, I undo my jeans, smirking when her eyes track my movements. "I was going to be kind and let you come on my fingers, but that was before I knew you were a

virgin, princess. Now I can't stop, and I'm going to fuck you with my cock while you bleed. It's going to hurt."

"No, no, no!" she yells, trying to yank her legs closed, but when I grip her thighs and slide between them, she moans.

My girl loves that idea, even as she plays along.

Gliding my cock through her wet folds, I let her feel how hard I am for her. "I'm big, baby, really fucking big, so stay still unless you want this to really fucking hurt. Be a good girl, and I'll kiss it all better after I've spilled inside your pretty little pussy."

"Please let me go, and I'll be good and play along," she says, making me laugh as I press the head of my cock to her entrance.

"Nice try, princess. Now take a deep breath and relax," I order before pulling back and slamming into her. I feel that barrier rip away as she screams. Her body writhes as she tries to fight my invasion, and her pussy tries to push me out despite how wet she is.

"Relax," I snarl, on the edge of losing control with her tight wet heat wrapped around me. Her screams turn into sobs as she closes her eyes. Pulling out, I growl at the sight of her blood on my cock. "Fuck, look how sweetly you bleed for me, staining me with your innocence. You love it, don't you? Look how wet you are for my cock, even while you scream. This filthy thief is stealing your virginity, and you want it so badly." Sliding inside of her, I begin to rock, reaching down to circle her clit.

Her sobs turn into sounds of pleasure, and I can slide deeper—still not balls deep, but enough. I rub her clit as I croon my dirty words. "Fuck, you're so tight, princess, so wet for me. I'm going to come just from this, just from being inside you. I'm going to remember the way your little pussy bleeds for me for the rest of my life, and I'm going to leave you here, lying on top of blood- and cum-stained sheets so you remember when you wake up."

I pinch her clit, and I feel her come apart around my cock.

She screams her release, her pussy clamping around me as her body jerks with the force. Her cries make me snarl, and despite the fact that she's oversensitive and hurting, I slam into her, forcing my full length deeper. Her voice is hoarse, and she's unable to scream, but she grips the chains and tries to push me away with her body.

I don't let her, watching her swaying breasts as I pull out and slam back in.

Her tears slowly dry, and whether she realizes it or not, she starts to rock into me, her thighs falling open wider to take me deeper.

"Good girl," I croon. "That's it, take me in deep. It feels good, right? Look how well you're doing, my dirty little princess." Covering her body, I suck and lick her nipples until she comes again.

I get to my knees, lift her higher into the air, and hammer into her, giving into my darkness and raping her hard and fast as she cries out.

Both in desire and fear.

She wants it and hates me for it.

I pummel in deep, making it hurt, my hands dancing across her wet, oversensitive clit until, with a roar, we both come again. My release spurts deep inside her, and I hold my cock there, stuffing her with it so none drips out.

Her eyes are shut, and her breathing is labored.

She's passed out.

Feeling out of sorts and weak from my release, I pull free, and as she wakes up, I scoop up my release and push it back into her. "You'll keep this in you all night and feel it drip out of you all day tomorrow, making you wet all over again." Smearing my hand through the blood and cum, I lift it to her lips. "Taste it," I demand, "or I'll be cruel and I won't let you rest. I'll turn you over and take you again like I want to."

Her little pink tongue darts out and she licks my palm clear of her innocence and release, making me hard all over again.

“Good girl. You enjoyed it, didn’t you?”

“Fuck you,” she replies sweetly.

Chuckling, I lean down and kiss her, letting her feel the mask rub against her heated cheeks. “You just did, princess, and you came so hard you passed out.”

“Let me go,” she demands, embarrassed.

“Oh, I’m not done yet,” I warn.

“But you said—”

“I said I wouldn’t fuck you with my cock again, and I won’t, but I plan on eating that cunt until you make those delicious noises again, maybe even your ass, and then I’m going to fuck those incredible tits and spray my cum across your face and leave you like that—chained and dripping with my cum for everyone to find. How does that sound, princess?”

“Don’t you dare,” she hisses. “Let me go.”

“Fine, I will when I’m finished,” I tease as I slide down her body and seal my mouth over her bleeding pussy, tasting our releases.

I feel her trying to fight her own desire, so I swirl my tongue through the mess and slide it back inside before fucking her with my tongue. My fingers tap lightly on her clit as I roll my hips, remembering the way she felt surrounding me.

A moan rips from her throat, almost making me grin smugly as I fuck her with my tongue and fingers.

I slam my cock into the mattress so hard it hurts, humping it as I feel her splinter on my tongue.

Crawling up her body, I straddle her stomach and push her tits together with one hand, then I slide my dripping cock through the tunnel I made there. With my eyes on her, I start to fuck her tits.

She watches, silent and panting, her body vibrating below me with her own wants. It doesn’t take me long to spill, and

when I do, I aim it at her face, watching the moment it spurts across her chest, chin, lips, and cheeks.

I pump every drop of my cum out, covering her with it.

“Lick it clean,” I demand around a groan.

Her little tongue darts out and licks her lips and chin clean as much as she can, making me grunt.

“Good girl. Now sleep. You need it.”

“Fuck you. I’m not sleeping. When you unlock me, I’m going to kick your ass!” she hisses like a kitten.

“Then I’ll wait.” Sitting back, I watch as she fights to stay mad and then battles her exhaustion, a yawn splitting her face. She tosses me a glare like it’s my fault, and then she finally falls asleep, fighting it the entire way.

Leaving time to make sure she’s asleep, I mosey around her room, grinning when I find her birth control pills hidden behind a painting. I pocket them with a grin. The idea of her round with my kid is so hot I can’t do anything but steal that shit.

I unlock her as she sleeps, knowing if I don’t, I’ll have the police hunting my ass, and I can’t have that because I’m a liar—one night won’t be enough.

I want every night.

I want her every first, and I plan to take them.

CHAPTER 5

Cara



I wake up suddenly, my heart pounding in fear and something else...

Only, I'm alone.

Maybe it was just a dream.

The lightening sky tells me it's early morning, yet as I sit up, my body aches, telling me it wasn't just a dream.

A man broke into my room and raped me...

No, that's wrong. He didn't rape me.

He tapped into my fantasies and made them a reality.

I wanted it so badly, and somehow, this masked stranger knew it.

Shit.

The sheets under me are stained with blood and cum, my face is sticky and swollen from my tears and his release, my thighs are chafed, and my pussy is raw and aching.

Is this what it means when Zoey says well used? Sliding from the bed, I rub my chafed wrists. The chains are gone and so is he, and something akin to disappointment fills me as I stare in bewilderment at the bed.

Who was he?

Was he really just someone breaking in to rob us who took advantage of the opportunity? That doesn't feel right. After all, he came prepared, and those eyes seemed familiar.

Hearing a creak outside, I jump into action, knowing I need to hide the evidence quickly. I strip the bed and tote the sheets with me to the shower where I scrub every inch of my body clean as if my father will sense the wicked things his daughter did last night.

I feel different, as if it's written across my skin.

Even now, his dirty words echo in my ears as I wash my pussy, making me gasp and pull my hand away.

He said I loved it.

He was right.

It was everything I wanted.

A thief stole my virginity ... and I loved it.

Fuck, I'm sick in the head. It was something right out of my fantasies but so much better. I should have been disgusted and fought harder, and I shouldn't have wanted it, but I did. Even now, I don't think about calling the police on him. I don't dare tell anyone because if I do ...

He won't come back, and I desperately want him to.

Instead, I clean every inch of my room and don a long-sleeve dress to hide the marks before shoving my bedding into the wash downstairs myself. My face is flushed, my heart won't stop pounding, and there's a deep ache inside of me with every move I make, reminding me of what happened.

Even now, I shiver as I lean against the kitchen counter, making a coffee before anyone else wakes up. I remember his eyes shining through that mask—the mask that shouldn't have made it hotter, but it did. There was intent and purpose in his gaze, as well as possessiveness.

He took me without thought, without being careful with me like I'm fragile glass.

He marked me, and he enjoyed that. He treated me like the woman I am, and if I had let him, there's no doubt he would have let me explore every sick fantasy I have.

Shit.

My hand trembles as I grab the coffee. Flashes of him above me make my thighs clench, and I remember the feeling of him powering into me. The pain and pleasure coalesced until I cried and screamed from both.

I guess I'm not a good little girl after all.

After drinking my coffee, I wash my mug and put it back before heading to my room, not wanting to explain why I'm up so early. Once there, I pace, unsure what to do. My eyes continue to go back to the bed and window. It still feels like a dream, and if it weren't for the reminders on my body, I would think it was.

My phone chimes with a reminder. Hurrying to it, I turn it off with a groan and head to my hiding spot to pop my pill.

Only they aren't there...

The bastard stole my birth control! It's what finally sets me off and makes me cry. Does he know how hard it was to get them? How I had to sneak out? I wrap my arms around myself.

I might have enjoyed what happened last night, even though part of me was truly afraid, but to take the one thing that gave me any sense of control over my life? I can't forgive him for that.

I don't even know why I'm crying. Perhaps it's a pent-up explosion of emotions, but I quickly wipe away my tears when I hear footsteps heading my way. I straighten, correcting my posture and facial expressions, as I grab a book and pretend to read just as my maids and Magda strut in.

Magda freezes when she sees me. "You are awake early," she comments suspiciously.

"My period started early," I reply, knowing that will explain the sheets. "I couldn't sleep, so I cleaned up and thought I might as well read." I flutter my lashes like the innocent, naïve doll she thinks I am, and when she huffs, I know I've tricked her.

"Yes, well, maybe that's the cause of the headache you had the other night. At least we don't have to bother a doctor. Your father is not back from work, but he instructed me to tell you

to stay home today. Tomorrow you can go back to school and do your normal duties. I will send up a light breakfast. We all know you bloat when you bleed, and you must look your best.”

“Yes, of course,” I murmur demurely, folding my hands carefully over the book.

She turns away, and I flip her off, uncaring that the guards outside see it. When they grin at me conspiratorially, I remember what my thief said—that they all think about fucking me.

Is that true?

As their eyes slide over me, I realize it is. I just never noticed before.

It seems my thief has awakened something within me.

I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

All I know is I want more.

CHAPTER 6

Cara



For the rest of the day, I'm a restless mess. I find myself staring at my phone, counting down the hours for night to finally arrive. Once the moon is high in the sky, I excuse myself from the real world and rush to my bedroom, praying that my deepest, depraved fantasies once again walk through my window.

Will he come for me again tonight?

Will he even dare to try?

Or was one night enough for him?

On pins and needles, I bite my nails, staring at the white curtains of my canopy bed, wondering if my thief will return to me. I took every precaution that I could. I made sure to tell Magda that I needed an early night so I could go to school in the morning, as well as attend that godforsaken meeting my father ordered me to appear at downtown in the afternoon. Magda would never dare interrupt my sleep if she thought it would affect my performance the next day. She might be thrilled to be at my father's beck and call, but I know she doesn't like doing anything to antagonize him either. Just in case she gets the silly idea to come up to my room and check on me, however, I made sure to deadbolt my door so no one can get in during the night. My bedroom window, however, is unlocked, as I know that is the only way my masked assailant could have possibly gotten inside last night.

It's official.

I'm insane.

I must be.

Instead of calling the police or telling someone that a stranger snuck into my room last night and fucked me senseless in the most ruthless of ways, here I am, giving him ample opportunity to do it all over again.

What is wrong with me?

Why didn't I at least tell Zoey what happened to me?

When I talked to her over the phone today, I kept my lips sealed, needing to keep this secret to myself for a little longer.

I should be disgusted with my assailant. I should be repulsed and nauseated with the mere idea of him touching me again, but I'm not. In fact, my shame only fuels my lust further.

Maybe that's why I couldn't let myself confess my sins to the one person who cares for me. Deep down, I know Zoey would never judge me for it, but it's still a risk I don't want to take.

Instead of trying to decipher what my damage is, I give in to the lucid fantasy by closing my eyes and envisioning him walking through my window, ready to bring my most debauched desires to life. My goal was to be awake when he paid me his next visit, but against my will, all the anxious nerves that plagued me during the day must have caught up to me because before I can help it, sleep comes to me, pulling me under its spell and taking me away from my masked, dark-eyed stranger.

I'm unsure how long I've been asleep, but I know the precise moment when he wakes me. I wake up to my own moans, my back arching high as his tongue laps at my slick center. It takes me a minute to snap out of it, fully enjoying the way the flat of his tongue licks me up and down.

"Stop," I whisper hoarsely, still sounding half asleep and almost pliant with pleasure.

He doesn't answer me, completely focused on making me come with his mouth.

“I said stop,” I order a bit more loudly, hating that the only thing I can see is the fabric of his black mask.

I want to see his big brown eyes that almost turn black when he’s taking what isn’t his.

On instinct, I reach for him, only to find that he’s handcuffed me to the bedposts tonight. The steel bites into my skin, and I hiss out in pain. The sound must do something to him because the instant he hears it, his gaze slides up to me. There’s a wickedness that gleams in his chestnut eyes—a salacious wickedness that spurs me on.

“No. Stop. Please,” I rasp.

“You beg so beautifully, princess. I could hear you beg all night and still not get enough,” he murmurs, licking my juices from his lips. “Were you dreaming of me, baby?”

My forehead creases as I shake my head left to right.

I’m denying it, even though the dream of him slamming me down on my father’s table as he watched, horrified, still haunts me now.

“Liar.” He smiles and takes another long lick that has me seeing stars. “I found this sweet little cunt dripping wet before I even touched it. I could smell it the minute I stepped into your room. So I’m going to ask you again, were you dreaming of me fucking you?”

“No,” I lie, seething at him.

“I don’t believe you,” he says, shifting to his haunches as his gaze scans my body until it lands on my nipples, which are hard as stone under my nightie.

“I don’t care,” I retort, my voice stronger now that his seductive tongue has left my pussy. “Leave or I’ll scream.”

The sinister smile that tugs at his lips has my core clenching in delight. I have yet to see his face, but I already know he’s devastatingly beautiful. He must be, with those full lips and penetrating eyes of his—not that I really care what he looks like on the outside. It’s his depravity on the inside that

calls to me. It's his siren song that gets under my skin and fevers the blood coursing through my veins.

“Are you hard of hearing?” I taunt, trying to pull a Zoey. “I told you to leave or else I will scream bloody murder.”

He tsks as his hard hands run up and down my bare thighs, making my pussy clench as his fingers dig into my skin.

“But that's what I want. I want you to scream until you lose your voice. I want you to beg until the words lose their meaning. So do your worst, princess, because I will do my best to do mine.”

On cue, I belt out a scream as loud as I can, and his eyelids slide closed as if he's relishing the sound. Just as we both predicted, no one comes for me since my father has soundproofed every room in our house. I never really gave it much thought as to why he'd do such a thing, but now I thank my lucky stars for it. I don't want anything or anyone to come between me and my assailant.

At night, I want to be fully his and to truly be myself so I can play the role I was always meant to.

Tears start to sting my eyes as I glare at him. “Please, don't,” I coax on a sob, my silent way of telling him that I need him to continue.

As if hearing the hidden message in my words, his fingers begin to stroke my slit, making me sigh in relief.

“Don't what, princess? Don't do this?” he teases, sliding two of his massive fingers inside my wet core. “Or this?” he adds as they start thrusting deep inside me, pumping so vigorously that I can hear how wet I am for him.

“Fuck, baby. You're still so fucking tight. You're fucking strangling my fingers.” He groans, palming the hard bulge in his pants as he fucks me with his digits. His eyes remain locked on where his fingers penetrate me, and they are filled with a hunger so deep it scares me. It's as if he's thinking of every dirty thing he could do to me without me being able to stop him.

“Please,” I whisper, trying to keep my gaze focused on him at all times. He hooks his fingers inside me, hitting a spot I didn’t even know existed. “Oh God!” I moan when he hits that spot over and over again.

I’m so close.

So fucking close.

“Please, don’t. I’ll do anything,” I sob, needing the release more than I need oxygen in my lungs.

“You’ll do much more than that, princess. Tonight, I’m going to fuck that pouty mouth of yours,” he croons. “But first, you’re going to have to come for Daddy. You’re my girl now.”

My eyes widen in alarm. His words touch a cord inside me, breaking an invisible barrier. He senses it immediately, slowing his strokes.

“Hmm,” he mumbles. “You don’t like that word.”

“Fuck you,” I growl, pissed that he would call himself that—it’s a word I’ve grown to hate over the course of my lifetime.

“I would if you weren’t so sore from yesterday. Believe me, I’d like nothing more than to stretch this tight pussy with my ten-inch cock and watch you shatter apart for me. This cunt is so desperate to be claimed and fucked, it drips for me.” He smirks, and I hear pride in his voice. “No, little one. Tonight, I’ll teach you to love that word. I’ll teach you to beg for Daddy while I fuck that pouty mouth of yours until you swallow every drop of my cum.”

True tears stream down my cheeks, and I’m unsure if they are brought on by the knowledge that he refuses to fuck me tonight or that he insists I call him that wretched name.

I scream again and struggle against my binds, needing to break free just so I can free myself from him. The hard steel digs into my wrists in such a way, blood starts to pool and drip onto my white sheets, but I don’t care. I don’t want to play this sick game anymore. Not like this.

I kick and fumble around, trying to get him off me, but it's no use. My ankles are bound and tied to the bedposts just like my arms above my head. It's only when my masked assailant covers my whole body with his that I settle down, his ragged breath fanning my heated face.

"Look at me, Cara," he says with such severity in his voice, it splits my anxiety in half long enough for me to realize he knows my name. The gentle smile he offers me is genuine, and suddenly I'm not as afraid as I was a minute ago. He tilts his head to the door, gesturing at the real world outside.

"What's out there doesn't mean shit. It doesn't even exist. Only you and I do. No one else." My chest heaves up and down, rubbing my hard nipples against his black T-shirt, giving them the friction they have ached for since the moment he touched me. "Inside this room, *I'm* your Daddy. I'm your master and your monster. I'm your nightmare come to life and your wildest dreams manifested. I'm your fucking everything, and you... you're my little princess. My good girl *and* my bad girl. All you want is for Daddy's cock to fill you with so much cum it will drip out of you for days. The world outside doesn't get to touch that. It's only you and me. Understand?"

My breathing stills as his words start to creep into my subconscious.

"You know my name," I finally whisper.

"I know much more than your name, little one, and before I'm done with you, there won't be a secret you can keep hidden from me. I'll coax all of them out of this sweet young body of yours. Let me show you."

With those words hanging in the air between us, I feel his hand slide back down to my center. He strokes me until my legs widen for him of their own accord.

"Now scream for Daddy, princess," he growls before piercing my neck with his teeth and plunging his two fingers into my sensitive core.

My mind grows blank as his digits slide in and out of my pussy at rapid speed, plunging into my core with such vigor

that the feeling of fullness becomes overwhelming.

“Argh!” I cry, hot tears streaking down my face as he continues to fuck me with such ruthlessness that it’s hard to keep myself tethered to the ground.

“Fuck, baby. Just like that. Fuck Daddy’s hand. Just like that,” he growls, licking my tears before he leans down to suck my nipple through my nightgown.

My gaze falls between us, and I stare at how my body has taken over, opening itself to him. My masked villain bites my nipple just as he adds another finger, making my breath hitch and my soul soar to the heavens.

“Shit, princess. That’s it. Come for me. Come for Daddy,” he demands, his sultry voice only heightening the ecstasy his fingers are giving me.

My jaw slackens, and my eyes roll into the back of my head as he coaxes an orgasm that momentarily blinds me. I’m at a complete loss as to how my body was able to respond to him this way, and tears of happiness now fill my eyes as I comprehend that this stranger knows my darkest desires better than I ever did.

When my eyelids finally manage to flutter open, I realize that he’s no longer covering my body with his. His knees are purposely placed on either side of my head, and his cock is inches away from my mouth. He holds his dick in his hands, pumping it with the same hand that still glistens with my juices. I stare at the angry head and the large vein pulsing along the length of his cock. Like him, his cock is mean, cruel, and absolutely mouthwatering.

“Open your mouth, princess,” he orders, rubbing the tip of his cock along the seam of my lips.

I shake my head, sealing my lips shut, but he grabs my chin with his thumb and forefinger, digging into the sensitive flesh.

“I said open that gorgeous mouth of yours. I want to hear you gag as you suck me whole,” he demands, his voice sharp and cruel, just like his touch.

My pussy clenches at his words, hating the emptiness inside it.

Again, all I do is stare at him with loathing, even if I'm a quivering mess of need inside.

"It's either your mouth or your ass, sweetheart. Believe me, I'll have both sooner or later anyway. Now, be a good girl and open your mouth for Daddy."

It's the desperation in his voice that has me offering a small breach for him. Like me, he's eager for his own release, and each second that I deprive him of it will only deepen his resolve to take me in any way he sees fit.

Surprisingly, though, he doesn't take full advantage of my offering. Instead, he continues to rub the tip of his cock on my lips. Curiosity as well as my wanton desires take hold of me, and I find my tongue sweeping out and taking its first lick. He manages to withstand the naïve fumbling for less than a second, running his fingers through my hair until he fists my locks and forcefully thrusts his cock into my mouth.

He desecrates my mouth, making it hard to breathe with his length filling it. I do my best to breathe through my nose as he takes things from me that I had no idea I could ever offer. It's only when I start to gag that he lets out a pleased chuckle.

"Look how beautifully you take Daddy's cock," he coos, and I suddenly realize that horrid word has lost all its meaning. At least, I no longer feel animosity when he says it. It's just another game he likes to play with me, taking me out of my comfort zone and thinking that this is the thing that will finally break me.

But I don't break.

I bloom.

"Oh fuck, baby. I want to hold out, but that pouty smile is driving me insane."

Am I smiling?

I didn't even realize that I was.

“Jesus, princess.” His other hand circles my throat and squeezes it tight. Between his punishing cock and his hand wrapped around my neck, oxygen becomes a luxury I don’t seem to have.

“That’s it. Give me that smile, princess, as I come down your throat.”

I blink my tears away as I try to smile for him.

“Fuck!” he shouts, and I feel spurts of hot, salty cum rush down my throat.

He pulls out with a strangled moan, beating his cock until whatever cum is left drips down on my face. I swallow his cum with one, long pull then stick out my tongue to lick my lips and whatever part of my face that I can reach as his hand massages my throat, forcing me to swallow it all.

“That’s my dirty girl. Daddy’s dirty, dirty girl,” he praises, his gaze dark as night.

My heart hammers in my chest as I ponder what I can say to get him to stay with me tonight.

He’s had his fun, but I don’t want him to leave. Not yet.

With one hand still on my throat, he gently caresses my cheek with the other, and I find myself leaning into his caress.

“I thought if I fucked you once, I’d get you out of my system,” he says softly, almost solemnly, “but now I see that was never an option, was it? I’m going to keep you now, little one.”

Maybe I should be more afraid of his words than his actions because there is sadness in them, almost like he feels sorry for me.

He releases his grip from my throat and falls to my side, his elbow perched on the pillow, holding his head up to look at me.

“Sleep, princess. It’s going to be a long night.”

I do as he says and close my eyes.

His breathing lulls me to sleep, and I go willingly,
knowing that he will be there to haunt me in my dreams too.

CHAPTER 7

Hale



Leaving Cara's bedside this morning was torture, and that's saying something since I know a thing or two on the subject.

Fuck.

The way she broke for me last night still has my dick hard. I saw the hatred in her eyes when I said the one word that cooled her ravenous libido. So of course, being the asshole that I am, I took it as my own personal challenge to have her dripping for me whenever I uttered it again. There is still so much I need to learn about my princess, but one thing I do know is that she hates her father with every fiber of her being.

I wonder what could have brought on such hate.

Cara is soft, kind-hearted, and good—all things that I'm not—and yet it's her own flesh and blood that she despises with every breath.

I need to find out why.

So far, my research has shown me that Governor Nightingale is the epitome of selflessness, or at least that's what he wants the world to believe. If his own daughter—a girl who doesn't have a mean bone in her body—hates his guts, then that tells me he's wearing a mask, one that I need to peek under.

Hence why I'm bored out of my mind in the lobby of the Whitestone building, a private equity firm, waiting for the fucker to show his face. When I hacked into his business calendar earlier today, it said that he had a meeting here this

afternoon, followed by a visit to St. Edward's Hospital to inaugurate a new pediatric wing.

Money first, charity second.

I guess the governor's priorities are less selfless than he likes to let on.

My fingers are tapping away on my phone as I bide my time, waiting for this hellish meeting to end, when the sound of an elevator grabs my attention. My knuckles turn white as I fist my phone, my gaze landing on a Nightingale I didn't expect to see until later tonight.

My Nightingale.

Cara's raven hair is pulled up into a bun to showcase the silver scarf snugly tied around her neck to hide the bruises I left on her last night. I scowl as my gaze lingers on her statuesque body. She's dressed in a white blouse and gray pencil skirt, which her round ass fills in ways that should be illegal. The red soles of her five-inch heels click on the marble floor in a rhythm that tells me she's anxious to leave this place and get to wherever she feels more comfortable—probably the dog pound I followed her to the other day.

Unfortunately, she's unable to make her quick exit, since someone calls out her name, halting her next step. My nostrils flare as a blond prick in a navy-blue Tom Ford suit quickly strides over to her, his smile splitting his face in two.

"Everything okay, Zack?" she asks guardedly, and I hate the way she says his name, like she's said it a thousand times before.

"Just wanted to make sure you understood everything that was said upstairs." He smiles his idiotic, boy-next-door smile of his. "A lot of jargon was used in the meeting that might have flown over your head, so I just wanted to make sure that you knew you could always come to me to explain it."

He doesn't see it, but I do. A little tick in her jaw indicates that he just pissed her off with the back-handed insinuation that she isn't smart enough to have kept up with whatever stupid meeting she just attended.

“I asked any questions that I had, Zack, but if my father needs more clarification, then I’m sure he’ll reach out to you personally.” Her voice is like a whip, and my cock hardens and pride fills me.

Her smile is fake, but he’s too arrogant to see it.

“I’m sure he will, but just in case he sends you in his stead again, I just want you to know that I’m here for you.”

Then the asshole does the last thing he should—he touches her.

It takes all of my self-control to stay rooted to my seat as I watch his hand run up and down her arm until she takes a step away from him.

“That’s very kind of you, Zack, but you know how my father is. He likes to be hands-on when it comes to business. I just filled in for him today due to his conflicting schedules, since his presence was needed at St. Edward’s Hospital for the big inauguration.”

“Yes, I heard. My family made a generous contribution to it too. I have to say I was a little disappointed you left the charity ball this weekend so suddenly. I was hoping to get a chance to ask you to dance with me.” He pouts.

After I’ve broken every bone of your legs, you’ll never dance again, you fucker.

“I wasn’t feeling well that night. Maybe next time.” She flashes him another fake smile.

There won’t be a next time, Cara. Not on my watch.

“I’ll hold you to it.” He grins with a wink as the fucker briefly places his hand on her forearm.

She offers him a clipped nod and then turns around to leave, the dead man’s eyes straight right to her ass, like every last motherfucker’s gaze in this place does. When she passes the revolving doors, I don’t go after her like every cell in my body demands for me to.

First, I need to have a little talk with the captain of the lacrosse team.

I don't know if he is or not, but I'm sure I'm not that far off. He reeks of white privilege and one-percent country clubs, even from where I'm sitting.

Zack walks over to the reception counter and starts chatting up the redhead behind the desk. She laughs at his lame jokes, and once he's gotten his ego stroked, he waves goodbye, telling her he has places to be to make himself sound more important than he probably is. I stand up straight when I see him darting to the glass revolving door and head in his direction, never letting him out of my sight. He's standing at the curb, waiting for his town car to arrive, when I reach him.

"Zack?" I call, putting on my best sophisticated smile. "Well, I'll be damned. I haven't seen you in ages. Not since business school."

He looks me up and down, my Armani suit telling him that even though he has no recollection of me—and why would he since he's never met me before—I must be a forgotten school colleague since it's evident we must run in the same circles.

"Oh my god, man. It's been too long," he says, running with the lie, a picture-perfect, practiced smile curving his lips.

Doesn't he know my girl doesn't like pretty boys? Oh no, she likes the masked bad boys who take her without asking. He never stood a chance with his manicured fingers and perfect hair. He's too clean for her, unwilling to go into the darkness and give her what she needs even if she doesn't know it.

"It really has. How about we catch up over a drink? There's a bar right around the corner we could go to," I say casually. A tornado of possessiveness and anger swirls inside me, but my expression is serene and happy.

He looks at his Rolex and hisses.

"Sorry, man," he retorts, sounding disappointed and calling me "man" for the second time since he hasn't the foggiest idea what my name is. "I have a tennis match back at the club."

See? Not too far off.

“Oh, come on. One drink won’t mess with your serve,” I taunt, knowing he can’t resist the urge to brag.

When he hesitates, I go for the kill.

“Dude, you must be dripping in pussy working at Whitestone. Don’t tell me you can’t have one drink with me to tell me how you’re making bank up in private equity. I’m telling you, I’m this close to leaving Wall Street and heading in that direction myself.”

When his eyes suddenly glimmer, I know I’ve hit the jackpot.

Hook, line, and sinker.

Talking about pussy and money always does the trick with these fuckers—especially if it satisfies the competitive streak in them. Nothing gets these assholes harder than shoving their good fortune down some poor fucker’s throat.

“I guess I could spare a couple of minutes,” he proclaims just as his town car arrives. He pops his head into the window, tells the driver he’ll be back in thirty, and turns to me, looking all bright-eyed and giddy to flaunt his extraordinary life in my face.

No longer in a rush, Zack puts his arm around me and starts rambling about shit I have no interest in. Even though I’m bubbling with hatred, I keep up my pretense as we walk down one of the busiest streets in the city—until we start to pass an empty alley.

The air leaves his lungs the minute I push him into it and slam his back into the brick wall.

“The fuck, dude?” He grins like this is all a game to him.

“Shut the fuck up. I swear if you say another motherfucking word, I’m going to cut out your tongue,” I seethe, getting right in his face and releasing the monster only my princess can tame.

I let him see his death in my eyes.

His face pales as he realizes that I’m not some long-lost friend from business school.

“What do you want? Do you want money? I have money,” he spits out rapidly, already losing his cool when I haven’t so much as touched him.

“What I want, *Zack*,” I sneer, “is for you to keep your hands off what’s mine.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” He starts to sob as he looks out at the busy street, hoping someone will see us.

I grip his chin and make the fucker look me in the eye. “Scream, motherfucker. Just give me a reason.”

Unlike Cara, I don’t want to hear this pathetic asshole scream.

His eyes bug out of his skull as he realizes that if he so much as makes a sound, I will cut out his tongue just like I promised I would. I smirk at the coward when I see he’s pissed himself in fear. See, that’s the thing about these rich pricks. They think they are the rulers of the world until someone like me comes along and reminds them that they are at the bottom of the food chain. All the money, privilege, and notoriety they have is nothing but an illusion, and when it comes right down to it, none of that shit can save them from the likes of me.

As he shivers in terror, praying for someone to save him, I step back and cross my arms over my chest.

“Which hand?” I ask, my voice dripping with malice.

“Huh?” he blurts.

“I asked you which hand? Which hand did you touch her with?”

“I ... don’t ... I don’t ...” He cries out, snot and tears streaking down his face. He’s so out of it that he probably couldn’t even tell me his name, much less which hand he used to touch my Cara.

“Are you left- or right-handed?” I drawl, fighting the urge to just rip out his heart and give it to her.

He continues to sob inconsolably. “Huh?”

Fuck, what a pussy.

It's almost not even worth it.

But then, when I remember how he touched her and how she stepped away from his touch, only for the asshole to put his miserable paws on her again, my fury starts bubbling inside me at full force.

I grab his throat and squeeze his windpipe, his eyes widening in alarm.

“This is how this shit is going to play out. I'm going to break every fucking bone in your hands. You won't be able to use your computer, phone, or even jack off with them for a long time, but most importantly, you won't touch women who haven't given their consent for you to do so. Let this be a little reminder to you, *Zack*. If I find out that you've touched a single hair on a woman without her verbally asking you to, I'll be back,” I warn, pulling his tie off him. “And next time, the thing I'll break won't be your hands—it will be that neck of yours. Is that understood?”

Before he's able to say a word in return, I shove his tie into his mouth and keep his jaw shut with my hand, then I grab his right hand, snapping his thumb with a loud crack before bending the rest of his digits until the sound of each knuckle fracturing and splitting apart reaches my ears. Zach falls to his knees in pain, and I grin sinisterly as I crouch and do the same thing to his left hand.

By the time I'm done with him, he's in the fetal position crying for his mommy. I stand up, feeling light as a feather, no longer consumed with a burning need to kill the fucker. I straighten my suit jacket and walk out of the alley, looking and feeling like a million bucks.

Now that my fury has been fed, I recall how Cara said that her father skipped his meeting at Whitestone because he had to be at the hospital around the same time it took place. I saw his schedule. Fuck, I even have it memorized. He didn't have to be at St. Edward's Hospital until later this afternoon, leaving him ample time to go to the meeting.

So what was so important that he had to send Cara to attend it on his behalf?

Governor Nightingale is starting to be as big of a conundrum to me as his daughter is, but one thing is for sure, despite the name, he's no saint.

CHAPTER 8

Cara



I'm still furious after the day I've had. First, there was the never-ending meeting in which I had to dutifully take notes for my father and answer the questions from men who would rather look at my cleavage than my face. Then, I couldn't even sneak off to my happy place like I planned, all because my father just had to send his goons to find me so I could smile for the cameras and they could take their pictures outside the new hospital. Worse still was having to attend more meetings with my father afterwards. Just like he demanded, he had the perfect daughter sitting by his side all throughout each and every meeting.

I wonder if he knows whenever I have to attend such meetings, my skin crawls at the way the men in the room can't stop fucking me with their eyes.

Maybe that's why he does it.

Fuck him!

I stand in my shower, trying to get the sick feeling of their eyes and touch out of my mind and off my body. I scrub myself raw before shaving and washing my hair. Once I'm out of the shower, I blow-dry it so it falls in loose waves, not bothering with makeup since my masked attacker has already seen every inch of me, then I slide on a lace thong and matching crop top.

I don't know if he will be back tonight, but something inside me tells me he will.

Despite his power, and despite the fact it's his game, he's just as lost in this as I am.

He's a thief stealing my pleasure in the night, and to him, I'm the perfect fucking treasure.

Shivering at the memory of last night, I find my mood lightening as I skip to my bed, deciding to turn in early in hopes of seeing him. My curtains flutter with the breeze of the open window, and my door is once again locked. Father is nowhere in sight, and most of the staff have left for the night.

I'm not tired at all, so instead, my fingers drift into my panties as I play with myself, remembering what he did to me. As I wait, filled with anticipation and want, I pretend it's his hand on me instead of my own. My head falls back and with a wanton moan, my fingers dance quickly across my clit, smeared with my need.

My other hand slides under my top and cups my breast, rolling my nipple like he did, but it doesn't feel as good. Groaning, I speed up my fingers, wanting to come on my own terms, but every time I reach that peak, something holds me back. With an angry huff, I pull my hands free and give up.

The bastard.

This is all his fault.

Twisting in my sheets, I squeeze my eyes closed as tears fill them.

My own fucking body doesn't listen to me anymore, only him—the monster from the dark. For a moment, I hate myself and the sick desires I have before I blow out a breath and count backward, and before I know it, I'm asleep.



I wake with a start, my panties being ripped away angrily. I jerk and open my eyes to meet his.

My thief.

My heart pounds, and desire slams through me so forcefully my back almost bows as I pant.

He smiles until he sees my pussy, and then he freezes above me, his hand coming down on it with a snarl.

“Have you been touching yourself, princess?” he demands.

I nod my head in confirmation, watching his eyes narrow and lips purse. “Show me,” he demands.

“W-What?” I stumble over the words.

“Show me how you touched yourself, show me how you made yourself come, and then I’m going to fuck that tight little cunt until sunrise, never letting you come in punishment so that you learn never to touch what’s mine.”

“My body is mine,” I hiss, kicking at him. He catches my foot and digs his teeth into the flesh there, making me scream in agony.

Once he releases me and sees the tears dripping down my face, he smiles. “That’s where you’re wrong, princess. I own you. This body? It’s mine now. Every fucking inch of it. You do not touch it without my permission, and you do not stain it without my permission, but if you do?” He leans in, his breath, smelling faintly of bourbon, wafts over my face, making me lick my lips. “Then I will punish you all night, leaving you broken and crying, and the next night, you will still wait for me to come back and kiss it all better. So be a good fucking girl and show your Daddy how you came, or I’m going to fuck you with my gun until it hurts so badly, you’ll hate me.”

“I already hate you,” I snarl.

“No, you don’t, princess. You fucking want me. You need me,” he purrs. “Last chance.”

I meet his eyes, seeing the challenge there. My thief doesn’t have morals or lines he won’t cross in his need to consume me. I should know that by now. Nothing he says is ever an idle threat—this is a man willing to break in and chain up his victim to get what he wants.

Yet part of me wants to rebel, be a brat, and get punished.

Licking my lips, I tug on my hands, giving in.

Another night, I tell myself.

I huff. “You’ll need to free these.”

Smirking, he reaches up and deftly releases me, keeping my legs pinned open. “Use them to attack me if you want, little girl, but it won’t help.”

I, of course, try, needing to fight back, but he pins me with a chuckle, pressing down on my wrists and letting me feel his true strength. Unlike those around me, this isn’t a wolf in sheep’s clothing. No. This is the big bad fucking wolf with bared fangs, and he’s not afraid to show it.

He squeezes tighter, letting me feel his ability to break my wrists. “How predictable. You’re better than that,” he drawls. “You can’t win against me, princess. When it comes to you, I will always get what I want. Now show me.”

I gulp in air as he crouches at the end of my bed like a sleep demon. Embarrassment heats my cheeks, despite everything this man has done to me, because this is voluntary and he knows it, his pouty lips twisted in a mocking smirk.

“I’m waiting, princess. Don’t make Daddy angry.”

Biting my lip, I hesitantly bring my hand to my quivering stomach. His eyes narrow on the movement. “Is that how you started, princess?” he mocks.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I let my hand slide down and cup my mound. I’m so sensitive and already so close to coming it’s ridiculous.

“Good girl,” he purrs, and my eyes snap open to find him right on top of me without touching me. “But eyes on me. You thought of me when you did it, so now you’ll let me watch every expression play out on that beautiful face and know you belong to me.”

“Fine,” I hiss. “You sick fuck.”

“I might be, princess, but you love it,” he retorts as he casually sits back at the end of my bed, like he has all the time in the world to play with me.

My eyes narrow in anger, my cheeks tinted with embarrassment, but that's what he wants, so refusing to cower or be predictable, I part my lips and rub my clit, watching his tongue dart out to lick his lips.

Despite the fact that he told me to do this, he's giving me something I didn't expect—power over my own body. Earlier, I couldn't even come by myself, but now I'm wanton and dripping. I love my own curves and dips, the feel of my wetness and the taste of it, so I embrace every dirty thought and the pleasure I can bring myself—all by his hand.

“Good girl,” he praises. “Did you touch yourself like that? Were you hesitant, or were you fast and hard, needing to come so badly you couldn't think straight, wishing it were my hand?”

“Hard,” I admit breathlessly as my fingers speed up, matching what I did earlier, and my other hand drifts to my breast, squeezing as I whimper. Just like earlier, however, I can't come, and I want to cry. He sees it and moves closer.

“Relax, princess,” he coos, covering my hands and squeezing. “You are too in your head.” His chocolate eyes bewitch me. “It's not a race. Feel the pleasure and the sensations and let them guide you. Coming isn't about reaching the end, but about enjoying the ride,” he purrs, and then he slowly plucks my nipple with my fingers. When he lets go, I copy the movement. “Good,” he praises, using my hand on my pussy to slowly circle my clit before dipping my fingers inside myself. The sensation causes my hips to lift. “That's it. Feel it, princess. Feel how fucking hot you are. How wet. How badly you want this. I'm watching, and you love that, don't you? You love me ordering you around and claiming your body.”

Whimpering, I fuck myself with my fingers as he watches, keeping my eyes on his brown orbs like he's my lifeline.

“Good girl. Look how fucking perfect you are like this—wet and in control. Do you feel good?”

“Yes,” I murmur breathlessly.

“Have you ever tasted yourself?” he asks, and I recoil a bit. He smirks and grabs my hand, lifting it between us. “Taste yourself, princess. You are the sexiest fucking thing I’ve ever had. I dream of how you taste. It fucking haunts me.”

I open my lips, and he guides my fingers into my mouth, forcing me to suck them clean of my own desire. My musk explodes across my tongue, and the filthiness of it makes me moan.

“Fuck, that’s it, princess. Taste yourself for Daddy, taste how badly you want me to fuck you.” Pulling my fingers free, he guides them back to my pussy and lets me take over.

I do, fucking myself with them while my other hand tugs up my shirt so I can play with my breasts and nipples. Pleasure arcs through me as I writhe, fucking myself as he watches. His eyes are blown with lust, and his body shakes with need.

That’s when I realize that I have just as much power as him.

Not in strength, but he craves my body, and I can use it against him.

Smirking, I arch my back, almost putting my breast to his mouth with a wanton moan, knowing he likes to hear me.

“Princess,” he warns as I lift my wet fingers free of my clinging cunt and drag them around my nipples as I watch him. “Cara,” he growls.

Hearing my name on his lips makes me cry out as I slam my fingers back inside myself, chasing my release, and when it explodes through me, I see stars. My body shakes as I lie below him, knowing he’s watching me, so with shaking hands, I bring my fingers to my lips and clean them, opening my eyes to see him snarling.

“Trying to play with me, princess?” He smirks as I shake with aftershocks from my release. “Maybe I need to remind you who’s in charge.”

Before I can retort, I’m flipped and my face is smashed into my pillows as my arms are stretched up and rechained. Suddenly, my legs are unlocked and my hips are yanked into

the air, his mouth sealing on my cunt as I scream into my bedding.

He laps at my release, flicking my clit before biting down on it. The pain shouldn't set me off, but I find myself coming once more, tears squeezed from my eyes. I must pass out because when I come to, he's stroking my ass.

"There she is," he murmurs. "Back for her punishment."

"Please ..." I still. "I don't even know your name," I murmur, lifting my head.

"You don't need it, princess. You call me Daddy." I shiver as his hand dips back to my pussy, idly playing with me as he talks.

"Your real name," I snap, turning my head to meet his chocolate eyes, and he freezes before relaxing.

"Not yet, princess," he purrs. "First, I'm going to take what I threatened because there's something you should know about me, Cara—I always keep my word. I'm going to fill you with my cum, but you won't come again, not tonight."

"Bastard," I hiss.

"Now she's learning." He laughs, and when his chocolate eyes meet mine once more, amusement twists with desire. "Let's show you how much, shall we?"

His cock presses to my pussy, rubbing along my wetness as I brace myself, but all he does is taunt me, sliding across my nerves and winding me up while he massages my ass.

"I have a present for you," he murmurs, "and you'll find out what it is soon enough."

Then, without warning, he slams into me, making me scream and jerk against the chains. His groan causes me to squeeze around him, and his nails dig into the globes of my ass, marking me. Panting, he stills behind me. "Oh, don't you dare, princess. Remember, you don't get to come. Every time you get close, I'm going to stop you."

"I hate you!" I scream, the lie burning my throat.

“Good.” He chuckles as he leans over me, dragging his nails along my shoulder and my back as his hand slides down my ass, parting it. I freeze when his thumb presses against my hole there.

“I told you every inch of you will be mine, princess. I meant it. There will not be an inch of skin I haven’t marked or tasted, and every single hole will be pumped with my cum. I will make your darkest fantasies come true, and you will love it, won’t you?”

I thrash my head, needing to move, but he doesn’t let me. He holds me in place, speared on his cock, until I relax and my orgasm slips away, and then he starts to move again. His thrusts are slow at first before he hammers into me, hard and fast. His balls slap against my skin, the new angle stroking those nerves inside me that make me weak-legged as I cry out.

Suddenly, his thumb pulls from my ass, and I hear him doing something. I jerk when something round and cold presses against my pussy alongside his cock. Holding me still, he slides it inside me next to his cock and fucks me with it before pulling it out.

“What?” I gasp when that dripping object presses to my ass.

“Your present.” I can hear the smirk in his voice, and then he starts to push it inside me at the same time he rolls his hips. I moan even as I try to pull away. He doesn’t let me, determinedly sliding it past the ring of muscles with a pop. “Say thank you.”

I don’t.

Holding onto the chains, I bury my face in my pillows and scream as that small object slides deeper into my ass.

“That’s it, princess, relax for me, take it deeper. I’m going to put one in you every night and stretch this perky little ass until I can fuck it with my big cock.”

I feel so full, I can barely breathe, yet he doesn’t stop. He slides it all the way in and he moans, the filthy sound nearly making me come.

“Fuck, you should see how beautiful you look impaled on my cock with my plug in your ass.” There’s a click and a flash, and I jerk, and then he leans over me, showing me the obscene picture he just took. My dripping pussy is on full display with his huge cock stretching it, and my asshole is filled with a silver plug that has a red jewel on the end. The picture is so filthy, yet I clench around him. He chuckles. “I think I’ll set this as my lock screen, so every time I look at my phone, I’ll see my pretty cunt.”

“Don’t you dare.” I try to twist, but it moves the object in my ass, making me scream.

His hand slaps my ass. “Do not move. I’ll be very angry if you make yourself come.” He takes the end of the plug and starts to slowly pull it out and thrust it back in. “That’s it, look how full you are. We are going to work up a big one, and you’ll walk around with it in your ass all day until night falls, and then I’ll come and yank it out and replace it with my cock.”

My back bows. The pressure and his words are too much, but once again, he stops when I’m about to come, only starting those slow thrusts again when I sob.

“Fuck, I love the sound of your tears when I’m balls deep inside you,” he tells me, his voice hoarse as he speeds up. The bed slams against the wall with the force of his thrusts. “It makes me crazy. Shit, I’m going to fill you with so much cum, princess. I’m so fucking close, watching you take me, watching Daddy own you.”

I thrash below him as he fucks me hard and fast until, with a roar, his cock jerks, spurting his hot release inside me. He slides out, and I feel it spurt onto my ass and legs as he groans and then falls on top of me, leaving me sobbing, unsatisfied, and aching.

Flipping me onto my back, he rubs his hand through his cum and shoves it back inside me as he forces my raw eyes open.

“Next time, do not touch yourself without my say-so. You could have come at least eight times tonight, but now you’ll

have to stay like this, unsatisfied, and if you finish yourself off, I'll know, and I'll take swift punishment." I see the wickedness in his eyes. He's hoping I'll defy him just so he can play his twisted little game with me again. Even if I want to, I know it's useless. I can't seem to come without him anyway, and I want it too badly to suffer like this again. "Are you going to be a good girl or a bad girl for me?"

"Good," I whisper.

Grinning, he leans in, his lips dancing softly across my own. "Good, now sleep, princess." Reaching down, he slowly pulls out the plug, making me whine. He kisses it better, and I curl into myself, smeared in cum and sweat.

I feel him unchain me, but I can't move since I'm so exhausted. I'm almost asleep when his soft whisper caresses my ear.

"Hale. My name is Hale, princess."

CHAPTER 9

Hale



Every day, I follow leads and work on trying to locate General, and every night, I sneak into my princess's tower and take what's mine. For her, I'm her nightmare, the thief stealing her orgasms in the dark, but for me? She's my everything.

My obsession.

I can't stop thinking about her, and when I grab my phone to check the time, I see the picture I took of her a couple of nights ago and instantly get hard. Shit, she's too fucking beautiful. I rewarded her for being good and made her come on my hands and fingers ten times the next night to make up for it, and the night after, I fucked that tight pussy for hours until she begged for relief.

Tonight, I have something special planned.

I count down the hours as my programs run, searching for the elusive man I should be hunting. Bored, I scroll through all the pictures I have of my girl—some are of Cara sleeping, passed out in post-orgasm bliss, and others are of me fucking her. I can't get enough, and it's what gets me through the day.

But my favorite is a picture of her asleep, with her hair spread over her pillow and her hands tucked under her cheek, looking so trusting. She's so beautiful.

So mine.

Something about it makes me frown, and a sense of familiarity tugs at me. I search my mind for the reason and

slowly stiffen. Turning as quickly as I can, I load up my drive and scroll for what I want, and when I find it, I sit back.

It's my girl, and although she's younger, it's still her. She's standing behind Zoey. Unless you were looking for her, you wouldn't notice her, but I do. I always do. I took her picture when I was tracking Zoey for Gray. It seems he's not the only one who's been stalking his victim for years.

Unable to help it, I print the picture, cut out Zoey, and smile down at it. I fold it and put it in my pocket with her stolen panties, keeping her with me at all times. She is the very reason I breathe now.

To her, I'm just a man in the dark, giving her freedom and pleasure, but to me, she's my fucking everything. Fuck. I understand Gray's obsession with his girl now, and it feels like a freight train hit me hard in the chest.

Giving up on work, knowing I'll get a notification if anything happens, I pack my bag for tonight and work out, and then I am at her window as the sun goes down. She's waiting, naked and eager, with her hands out, ready to be bound, but tonight, I don't. I drop the bag and strip naked, leaving just the mask. She gasps and leans forward, taking me all in.

The sight of her desire for my naked body has me stroking my cock as I head toward her. Climbing onto the bed, I cup her chin and lift her face to mine. "Miss me, princess?"

"Yes, Daddy," she murmurs obediently, sliding her hands across my body, but when she grips my cock, I move away, not wanting to end this too soon since her touch drives me wild.

"I'll let you play next time, but tonight I have my own plans. Touch yourself while I set up."

She lies back, parting her legs as she touches herself. I watch her for a moment, my cock jerking at the sight, before I turn away. "Do not come, princess. That's an order."

Her moan is my only answer as I set up what I need before climbing back on the bed. I pull her onto my lap and lean back

against the wall. “Now be a good girl and ride my cock, princess,” I order.

She hesitates for a moment, but I hold my cock for her, and she slowly drags her wet pussy across my tip, making me moan. The sight is my undoing, so I grab her hips and slam her down, impaling her and making her scream.

Smirking, I bite her shoulder until she relaxes. “Ride me,” I demand, sliding my hand down to flick her clit. I’m obsessed with the way she clenches around me. “And open your eyes.”

They open, and I see the moment she notices it. She freezes, and her pussy clamps on my dick.

The camera is pointed at us and projecting what we are doing on the TV for both of us to see. I want to see her face as she rides me.

“That’s it, princess. Watch as you ride me.”

She gasps, staring at the screen where she’s projected in full, 4k HD, her hips rolling as she rides my cock. “Good girl. Look how fucking beautiful you are. Look how goddamn sexy you are. You look like a fucking siren, princess. You call to me every night, and I think about you every moment of every day.”

“I’m wet all day, waiting,” she admits shyly, making me slam up into her. “It drives me insane. When I see the sun setting, I practically drip, knowing you’re coming for me.”

“Always.” I groan, biting her shoulder. The sight of her ass perched on me, coupled with the view of her riding me on the TV, is driving me wild. I did this to show her how goddamn perfect she is and to break through her shyness, but instead, I’m the one coming undone, and I’m not mad.

Especially when she comes with a scream, taking me with her.

I stroke her through it before bending her over on the end of the bed with her head turned to see what I’m doing on the camera. I take the object from my bag and press it to her lips. “Suck on this for me, princess,” I order.

She sucks the dildo into her mouth, getting it nice and wet, and when I pluck it out, I run it over her ass to her pussy. “Remember how well you’ve been taking my plugs?” I groan. “Well, tonight, you’re going to take this dildo.” She stiffens, but I slide the black object into her cunt and fuck her with it until she cries out, and then I pull it out and press it to her ass.

I grip her neck. “Relax, princess, and trust me. You know I will make you feel good.”

Nodding, she watches the camera, the sight of me behind her making her ass clench. I smirk as I slowly work it inside her. Every time she freezes, I slide my hand to her clit and flick it until she moans and pushes back, taking it deeper.

I don’t want it to hurt. I want her to crave having a cock in her ass as much as she craves feeling a cock in her pussy, my dirty little princess. “Fuck, princess, you are so goddamn perfect,” I praise as she fucks the dildo, taking it deeper. “I can’t wait to have my cock in your ass and this in your pussy. Hell, I might even put a third in your mouth and leave you all tied up and stuffed.” My cock hardens once more, but I ignore it, making her come around the dildo.

I wait for her to recover and push it deeper, until it’s seated all the way in. “Good girl, that’s it. You’ve taken it all,” I praise, leaning down to kiss her spine as I start to slowly move it in and out. She gasps and twists, and I pinch her clit, making her scream.

“Please! Oh God, please!”

“Come for me, princess. Let me see you come from me fucking your ass.”

She explodes around my fingers with a scream. I catch her as she falls and lower her to the bed, knowing she’s on the verge of passing out from pleasure once more. Slowly extracting the dildo, I wince at her whimper, so I gather her in my arms and head to the bathroom, kicking open the door and turning on the tap in the bath.

“What are you doing?” she mumbles.

“Taking care of you,” I mutter as I add that bubble bath shit girls like before lowering her into the water as she shivers. I brush her sweaty hair back. “Stay there, princess,” I order with a stolen kiss before heading to the other room.

I shouldn’t, but I sneak out through the window and slink downstairs, coming back with my stolen water in less than five minutes. The tub is nearly full, and she’s reclining, so I turn off the tap and lift the bottle to her lips. “Drink the water for me, baby.”

“Tired,” she grumbles.

“I know, but drink this and let me wash you, and then you can sleep. You’ll feel better tomorrow, less sore,” I promise.

Huffing, she cracks open an eye and lifts her head. I hold the bottle for her, watching her swallow it down before sliding back into the water.

Climbing in after her, I slowly wash every inch of her with the ultimate care, knowing how sore she is right now. She needs to be taken care of. Usually I leave, but tonight, I find I am unable to, and once she’s clean, I wrap her in a towel and dry her before carrying her to the bed. I pull the ruined sheets aside and lay her on the bottom one, grabbing a blanket and tucking it around her.

“Goodnight, princess.” I press a kiss to her head, and her eyes blink open as she clutches my shirt.

“Stay,” she whispers. “Please? Just until I fall asleep. Please, Hale.”

My name on her lips is my undoing, so I climb into bed beside her and tug her into my arms, even when I know I shouldn’t. The sigh she lets out restarts my heart.

“Goodnight, Hale,” she murmurs softly.

“Goodnight, Cara,” I reply, but she’s already asleep.

I should move, but I don’t. I hold her, watching her for as long as I can as I memorize the face of the woman who unknowingly holds me in her hands.

“You have no idea what I would do for you, do you? The power you hold?” I whisper, dragging my finger up her nose. “My Cara.”

The darkness swallows me whole.

I wake with a start hours later when the sun is rising. Swearing, I leap up and dress, packing up before looking back at my girl. She’s even more beautiful in the daylight, and I find myself moving closer, kissing her softly as she stirs. “Have a good day, princess. I’ll see you tonight,” I promise, and with a lingering stroke of her body, I force myself to leave.

How easily I forgot what I was doing and who I was.

That’s how twisted up my princess has me.

I don’t know if it’s the villain or the princess who has the control anymore, and surprisingly, I don’t seem to care.

CHAPTER 10

Cara



Sitting in my reading nook, I scribble in my notebook, drawing hearts and flowers around the name that should terrify me—*Hale*.

How can a four-letter word hold such enormous significance to me?

How could a man whom I know nothing about crawl under my skin, causing me to ache for each second of the day to pass quickly just so he can return to me?

Whatever this is, whatever we have, is so twisted, and yet it's the healthiest thing I've ever experienced. It's not fake. It doesn't pretend to be something that it's not. It's crude and depraved and still exciting and empowering. Though common sense tells me that letting a strange man climb through my window at night just to screw me seven ways until Sunday is the very definition of fucked up, I can't help but regard the time we spend together as the highlight of my day.

It's more than that.

It's shaken up my life in a way that has me finally living.

There's a wicked sense of freedom that comes from handing the reins to my nightly stalker, knowing he will fulfill all my darkest wishes and desires. I know a thing or two about being someone's pawn and not having the power to do what I want, when I want. Although from the outside in, it might seem like Hale holds all the cards with his chains and toys, I know deep down I'm the true gatekeeper of our little games. I mean, I could have turned him in weeks ago. I could have

gone to the police the very first night he took me. But I didn't, and because I didn't, I gave him consent to do whatever he wanted with me, and he's taken full advantage of it. I can take my power back anytime I want.

Right?

Suddenly, the nagging suspicion that I'm romanticizing this whole arrangement between us hits me like a ton of bricks.

What if I'm wrong?

What if Hale is just like my father, wanting to be my puppet master and pull the strings to his benefit?

I'm startled by my phone ringing beside me, pulling me out of my troublesome thoughts. I smile when I see Zoey's face flash on the screen.

"Hey, babe," she greets cheerfully.

"Hey, yourself." I laugh at her cheery disposition. "What's up?"

"I need to ask you for a favor," she replies.

"Anything. You know that," I say without hesitation, and I mean it. I would do anything for Zoey. I don't let anyone into my inner circle, but Zoey tore her way through my barriers, and now, I'm loyal until the end.

"That's what I like to hear. So, here's the thing. Gray and I are getting married."

"Duh. I know that, Zoey." I giggle at her sudden case of amnesia. "I was at Layla's house when you made the big announcement."

"No, hon. I mean Gray and I are getting married, like, tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" I shriek, getting to my feet, my notebook falling to the floor.

"Yup." She pops the P at the end victoriously.

“But I thought you two were planning to get married in the summer?”

“Yeah, we had to nix that idea. My man can’t stand not calling me his wife for another day.” She chuckles.

“Is Gray the only one in a rush to make an honest woman out of you?” I giggle, feeling excited for my best friend.

“Fine. I might not want to wait either. So can I count on you helping me out today? I have loads to do, and another pair of hands would help me out a lot,” she implores, her eyes sparkling with wicked mischief just like always. It’s what made me like her in the first place. She’s so strong, outspoken, and daring, willing to do whatever she wants. I wish I were like her sometimes.

“You know I will. Just text me the address where you want to meet, and I’ll be there in a jiffy.”

“Thanks, babe. I owe you big time. When you get married, I promise to be your bitch.” She laughs.

“Yeah, well, I don’t hear any wedding bells in my future any time soon,” I mumble.

“The right guy will come along, Cara, but you have to put yourself out there. He’s not just going to appear in your bedroom one night.”

My cheeks flush at her words. “Yeah ... right ... okay then. Send me the deets. Love you,” I say before hanging up the phone and pressing it to my chest.

Shit on a stick.

I feel guilty that I still haven’t told Zoey about Hale.

She’s my best friend, the one person who would go to the ends of the earth to ensure my happiness, yet here I am, keeping what’s been going on with Hale and me a secret.

Why?

Why can’t I just tell her?

I know why.

She'd come over to my house and wait for Hale to arrive just so she could cut his balls off.

Zoey would never approve of our relationship.

Relationship?

Is that what Hale and I have?

Or are we just fuck buddies?

This is so confusing.

How can I put a label on what we have been sharing these past few months? No normal human being would understand what we have. I know it's based on mind-blowing sex, but there's something more here, isn't there? Or am I just fooling myself into seeing something that isn't there?

All these baffling questions confuse and trouble me in equal measure.

When the familiar ding of Zoey's text comes through on my phone, I snap out of it, knowing that my love life needs to take a back seat to my best friend's wedding preparations. I rush to my bathroom to grab a quick shower before getting dressed, and just as I pull my panties down my legs, I see a crimson spot right in the center. I'm suddenly wrecked with disappointment, and I'm not sure why. I mean, with the amount of unprotected sex Hale and I have had, I should be elated that my period came at all, but for some reason, I'm not, and I can't explain why. When I glance at my reflection in the bathroom mirror, I see that my face holds the same lines of disappointment as I feel inside.

"Stop this pity party right this second, Cara," I reprimand myself. "Just ... stop."

With that thought in mind, I turn my back on my unexplained heartbreak and get into the shower, determined to extinguish this sorrow and focus on my best friend's happiness instead.

One of us should be happy.

If it's her, then that's enough for me.

No one deserves it more.



After a grueling day of decorating and shopping, I'm utterly exhausted.

"Your father wants to speak with you in his study before you go to your room," Magda announces the instant I step foot inside my house.

"Can't it wait for the morning?" I ask, already knowing the answer.

"No, it can't. It's best not to keep him waiting," she retorts curtly.

With a frustrated exhale, I do as I'm commanded and walk toward my father's study, knocking on his door before stepping in.

"You wanted to see me, Father?"

"Yes. Take a seat."

Again, I don't put up a fight, and I sit in the chair opposite his desk.

"I have to go on an unexpected business trip this week, and I need you to attend a few meetings and functions for me," he explains, his eyes never straying from his computer screen as he continues to type.

"You've been delegating these sorts of things to me more and more. What is so pressing that you can't attend them yourself?" I ask, my tone more defiant than it should be.

He stops what he's doing and shifts his attention from his computer to me. I try not to squirm in my seat as he stares me down.

"What I do with my time is none of your concern. If I ask you to do something, the only thing I want to hear come out of your mouth is, 'Yes, Father.' Anything else is unacceptable."

Right, because I can't have my own life. He always has to come first.

"Cara," he prompts, his cold voice making my skin break out in hives.

"Yes, Father. Whatever you need," I reply, giving him the answer he wanted from me all along.

"Good. I will ask Magda to give you the itinerary first thing tomorrow morning. I leave tonight," he snaps, still annoyed with me.

"I'm afraid that I won't be able to do much tomorrow, as I have a wedding to attend."

"A wedding? Really? I'm not aware of anyone we know getting married," he counters, probably wondering why I was invited and he wasn't.

"It's Zoey. She's the one getting married."

"Ah, yes, Zoey," he says bitterly. "I never understood your friendship with such a ... girl, but fair enough. I'll ask Magda to reschedule anything on tomorrow's itinerary for another day."

I wait for him to say something else, but when he returns his attention to his computer, I know I'm no longer needed. I get up from my seat and walk out of the room, not even wishing him safe travels to wherever he's going. Those sorts of phrases are said to people you actually care about, and those types of sentiments have no room in my family. They never have.

Defeated, I walk up the flight of stairs in the direction of my room, ready to call it a day. The two guards standing at my door smile at me, making me cringe at the reminder that I'm a prisoner in my own house.

When I open my bedroom door and see Hale stretched out on my bed, I quickly rush to slam the door behind me before any of them see him inside.

"What are you doing here?" I whisper yell, hoping the guards didn't see him. Panic slams through my heart.

“You’re late,” is his reply.

“No. *You’re* early,” I chastise, pointing at the mix of purplish pink and orange rays of the sun setting outside my window.

He turns his head over his shoulder and takes a long look at the myriad of colors outside the pane of glass and shrugs before turning his sights back on me.

“Hmm. I guess I am.” He smiles and then pats the mattress beside him. “Be a good girl and come here. I’ve missed you.”

On reflex, I start bridging the gap between us, only to stop when the doubts I’ve had all day start crashing down on me.

Is he the one in control or am I?

What are we?

What is this really?

Am I suffering from Stockholm syndrome or something? Has he been molding me into his perfect plaything and conditioning me to be his perfect doll, just like my father?

“I won’t ask again, princess. Don’t make me come grab you.” His voice turns dark and deadly, and his body tenses as if he’s preparing to do just that.

My lower belly immediately tingles at the threat in his voice, imagining the debauchery he would inflict on me if I dared to defy him.

“I’m on my period,” I blurt out as if that justifies why I didn’t rush toward him.

Instead of the cocky comeback I expect him to say, however, he surprises me when he goes silent. I take a step closer to the bed and realize that he’s wearing the same frown I had earlier this morning when I saw I had gotten my period.

“Did you hear me?” I ask, stepping even closer.

“I heard you,” he replies, falling onto his back and draping his arm over his forehead, which is still covered by the mask that stops me from seeing his face. More than once, I’ve wanted to rip it off, but I know he won’t let me.

I slide onto the bed beside him.

“Are you upset because you can’t fuck me?” I ask curiously.

He turns toward me, his face just a hairsbreadth away from mine.

“If I wanted to fuck you, I wouldn’t let a little thing like you being on your period stop me. In fact, princess, I’d thoroughly enjoy tasting blood on your pretty pussy.”

I flush at that but fold my hands demurely in my lap before I keep pushing, needing to know. “What if I said I didn’t want you to?”

He frowns. “I’ll never take you against your will, if that’s what you’re asking,” he replies, sounding sad that I would even feel the need to ask such a thing.

“You did the first time you came into my room,” I state evenly, to which he lets out a soft chuckle.

“Ah, princess, we both know you wanted it as badly as I did. Maybe even more so.”

I don’t open my mouth to deny it. He’d know I was lying. Whatever we have is built on truth, no matter how lurid and dirty that truth may be, so sullyng it with a lie seems wrong to me.

Still, I want to test his resolve and see if, in fact, he’s a man of his word or if I’m just a puppet on his string.

“I don’t want to have sex tonight,” I say, hating to be deprived of his touch but still needing to make that sacrifice to establish who is really running the show here. “But I don’t want you to leave either. I want you to stay with me, the whole night, just like this.”

“Do you want me to be the big or little spoon?” he jokes, trying to make light of the conversation.

“I just want you to stay like this. Here, with me. No sex and no restraints,” I explain, lowering my walls. I need him to hear my unspoken plea and tell me this is real.

“Does it look like I brought my chains with me tonight?” He arches a brow, his black mask moving with the movement.

I scan my room and see that the chains and handcuffs he loves to bind me with are uncharacteristically absent from my bedposts. I take that realization as a small win and inch closer to him, pressing my open palms on his hard chest. We’re silent for a minute, just staring into each other’s eyes. I want to ask him why he looked upset when I told him I was on my period. I mean, if it’s not a deal breaker for him, then why did he look sad about it? But I hesitate to pull the trigger on that loaded question.

“My best friend is getting married tomorrow,” I tell him instead.

“Is she now?” he coos, running the backs of his knuckles along my cheek.

“Hmm.” I nod, leaning into his gentle caress. “I spent the whole day helping her get everything ready.”

“You’re a good friend,” he says as if he knows anything about me.

“She said something to me earlier this morning, though, that I haven’t been able to shake, and I’m not sure what to do with it,” I add.

“What did she say?”

“She said that I have to put myself out there. That the man I deserve won’t just appear in my bedroom.” I hesitate over the words but force them out.

“She’s right. He won’t.” I almost jerk at his response, the sting of rejection hurting more than I want it to.

“You did,” I whisper, in awe of how his brown eyes turn dark and light at will.

“Yes, I did.” He smiles tenderly. “But I think we both know I’m not the knight in shining armor type. I’m not naïve in thinking I deserve someone like you.”

“No?” I retort, saddened with his reply.

“No, princess. I’m the villain, which means I take what I want, even if I know it’s too good for me.”

“I’m not sure if I am good anymore,” I admit on a sigh.

He lifts my chin with two fingers and stares me in the eye. “You’re the very definition of good, Cara. Deliciously so. Nothing you could ever do would be wrong in my eyes.”

“If that’s the case, then why did you look upset when I told you that I got my period?” I blurt out before I realize what I’ve said.

His penetrating stare slices into my soul, making a home there. “You know why,” he replies with a dark timbre, placing his hand affectionately on my belly.

I swallow the lump in my throat, my lower belly quivering at his touch. “Is that why you took my birth control?”

“Maybe the real question you should be asking is why you didn’t get a refill or demand I use a condom anytime you were aching for my cock,” he says, his sweet breath fanning my cheeks.

“I didn’t think I could demand anything from you. You’re always the one who calls the shots. You even punish me when I disobey you.”

The way he smirks has the butterflies fluttering in my chest. He doesn’t have to say it. I know what he’s thinking. If I’m so afraid of his punishments, then why do I intentionally rebel against him? It’s because I enjoy his brand of punishment. I know that he will take me to the brink and deny me my release, only for him shower me with more orgasms than my body is equipped to handle the following day. It’s a game of push and pull between us, which means if I really wanted to have protected sex, I could have. The underlying reason why I haven’t, though, is still too overwhelming for me to fully face.

I’m a coward.

“If that’s true, if I do hold the power in this room, then I want you to prove it.”

“Whatever you need, it’s yours,” he replies quickly, without so much as missing a beat.

I run the pad of my fingers over his mask, my heart beating a mile a minute. “I want to see your face.”

“Then what’s stopping you?” He smiles that cocky smile of his that does me in every time.

“I mean it. I’m going to take it off,” I warn him, wondering if this is some sort of trap.

“Do with me what you will.” He chuckles, falling onto his back and putting his arms behind his head.

I chew on my bottom lip, lifting off the mattress so I can straddle him, hoping it’s enough to keep him pinned to the bed. I don’t want him to turn the tables on me and refuse me now that I’m so close to seeing his face. I try not to rub my pussy on his hard length, wanting to be true to my word of not having sex tonight. Unfortunately, when I lean down, my pussy presses against him, and I can’t help but slide up and down once just to feel him—even if only a little bit.

What can I say? I’m a glutton for punishment.

“Cara,” he chastises with a groan. “You made the rules. If you break yours, then don’t be surprised when I break mine.”

In other words, if I dry hump him again, his cock will be ten inches inside me before I even blink. As much as that scenario appeals to me, right now I’m more interested in seeing the man behind the mask—the man I have been daydreaming and fantasizing about for weeks.

Ever so carefully, I lean farther down until our chests are pressed together. My trembling hands go to the back of his head and carefully pull the mask up and off. When it drops away from his eyes, I pull it off and squeeze it in my grip as I sit back on my heels.

Those same brown eyes stare back at me as I memorize every curve and valley of his majestic face. His strong, square jaw ticks impatiently, moving in unison with his mouth that curves into a wicked smile as I take in every little nuance of his features. His deep-set, almond-shaped eyes and prominent

Greek nose make him look like one of those cover models you see on magazine stands. His perfectly manicured eyebrows pull together as he holds his breath while I run my finger over his smooth, well-shaved cheeks, needing to remember every inch of him.

He's beautiful.

More so than I could have ever imagined.

"Are you going to say anything, princess, or are you just going to stare at me all night?" There's a hint of nervousness in his voice that I never expected from him.

"You're not what I expected," I say once I've mastered the power of speech again.

"Ouch," he says with a chuckle while pretending to slap his hands over his wounded heart. "Way to take me down a peg, little one."

"No, it's not that. It's that ... well ... you're beautiful."

The shy smile that tugs his lips makes him even more so. "I've been called a lot of things, princess, but never that."

"But you are. You are the most beautiful man I have ever laid eyes on," I tell him truthfully.

"Fuck, baby." He groans, grabbing my ass cheeks. "You can't say shit like that to a man like me."

"Why not?" I tilt my head, my tongue darting out to trace my lips as my eyes roam over his face in disbelief.

"Because," he mumbles, his brown eyes turning dark as they scan me, "I'm trying really hard to be a gentleman tonight, something I've never been a day in my entire life, but the way you're looking at me, saying that I'm beautiful and shit, is doing my head in."

When his fingers dig into my ass, that emptiness inside of me screams for him to fill it. He's the only one who ever has.

Feeling empowered with the way he's acting, I slowly start to grind myself on him.

"How badly do you want to fuck me right now?"

His fingers dig into me, pressing my core right against the head of his cock. “Does that answer your question?” He smirks.

“Hmm,” I hum, pulling the hem of my dress higher for him to see my panties rubbing against his crotch. “But since I told you that you can’t, then you’ll do as I say, won’t you ... *Daddy?*”

“Jesus, fuck,” he curses, his grip moving to my waist to help me slide up and down his pant-clad crotch.

“If all I want to do is rub my tight young pussy on Daddy’s cock and have you come like this, then that’s what’s going to happen. Isn’t that right, Daddy?” I taunt, the power I have over this man almost making me come on the spot.

“Cara,” he warns in a growl, but he makes no effort to stop me.

“What, Daddy? You don’t like watching your good girl getting off like this?” I goad, wondering how far I can take this.

“I’d rather see her getting off by bouncing on my cock.”

“Bad Daddy,” I tease, but then I let out a wanton moan when one of his hands finds its way into my panties.

“Let me show you just how bad I am,” he growls, toying with my clit to the point where I’m no longer certain if I’m the one running the show or if he’s officially taken over.

“Hmm, just like that. Oh God, yes! Just like that,” I shout as the friction of his cock, paired with his expert fingers on my clit, has me seeing stars.

“Are you going to come for me, baby?” he says, his voice laced with unfiltered want.

“Yes.”

“You like driving me mad with lust, don’t you, baby?”

“Yes!” I squeal, so close to coming undone.

“You’re going to let Daddy brand you any way he wants, aren’t you?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” I nod frantically, my head falling back over my shoulders.

“And one of these days, you’re going to let Daddy put a baby in you, aren’t you, princess?”

I swing my head forward, my heady, lust-filled gaze a perfect reflection of the one he has on his face.

“Answer me,” he growls, his free hand leaving my hip in favor of squeezing my breast so painfully, I nearly come. “Are you going to let me brand you in every way imaginable? Let my seed make a home inside you and have your belly swollen with my baby?”

I don’t know if he’s serious or not, but in this moment, I don’t care. In fact, I’m so needy that I almost beg him to put a baby inside me. Of course, with me on my period, that would be scientifically impossible, but still ... this man could ask me to do just about anything and I know I would.

There’s something else in his eyes, however, that tells me this isn’t a power play. This is probably as close as anyone has ever come to seeing Hale’s underbelly. His need to see me pregnant with his baby speaks volumes of a past I still don’t know anything about. This isn’t foreplay, it’s deeper than that, and maybe my aching need to have him plant his baby in me also has a lot to say about me.

When he twists my nipple, making me cry out in blissful agony, my hazy thoughts disappear, returning me to the present.

“Say it. I want to hear you say it, princess,” he commands, his cock so hard beneath me it must be physically painful for him.

“Put a baby in me, Daddy. I want you to come inside me until you do.”

“Good girl. Now you can come,” he praises, adding more pressure to my clit, ensuring that I go blind with the orgasm that threatens to rip me in two.

I’ve barely come back to solid ground when Hale pulls my hair, bringing my face down to his crotch.

“You made a mess of me, sweetheart. The least you could do is clean me with that sweet tongue of yours.”

He unzips his pants and frees his cock from his boxers, which have cum smeared all over them. I don't even think twice before I use my tongue to lick every drop of him. When his cock begins to spring back to life, he releases my hair and pulls me up by my arms so I'm lying on top of him.

“That's enough playtime for you, princess. It's time we both take a long shower,” he says sweetly, placing a kiss on my temple.

“No. Let's just stay like this a little bit longer.” I yawn, the orgasm depleting what little energy I had left.

“Cara,” he whispers worriedly, knowing that a hot shower after the day I've had would do me good.

“Just a little bit. Please, Hale?” I mumble, snuggling into his warm embrace, my eyelids too heavy to keep open.

“Fuck,” I hear him mumble. “Like I could ever say no to you.”

Too tired to say anything else, I just cuddle on top of him, knowing that he'll protect me all through the night. It's ironic really, especially when he's determined to play the villain in my life. I don't have the heart to tell him that role has been taken since my birth.

Hale could never be my villain.

He's the hero in my story, even if he doesn't see it that way.

I let sleep come to me as I lie in his loving embrace, knowing he'll be here in the morning with me to welcome the new day like he promised.

When morning finally arrives, I'm woken up with butterfly kisses on my bare shoulder.

“Morning,” I say sluggishly.

“Morning, princess,” Hale retorts, his voice as smooth as velvet. “I hate to leave you when you look so appetizing, but I

have a full day ahead of me.”

“Doing what?” I ask with a yawn, trying to wake myself up by wiping the sleep away from my eyes.

“That conversation is for another day. Now kiss me, Cara. I can’t leave until I have something to tide me over.”

I smile, leaning into him and pressing a tender kiss to his lips. He groans when I pull away without letting him deepen it.

“I guess that’ll have to do,” he mumbles, sounding disheartened. Hale gets out of the bed and begins putting his clothes on.

When did he get undressed?

I’ve barely thought of that question when I realize that I’m also not wearing what I had on last night, and I’m in my favorite nightgown instead.

“Couldn’t let you sleep in what you wore all day. Since you were too tired to shower, the least I could do was dress you in something more comfortable.”

“That was very thoughtful of you.”

“What can I say? I’m a thoughtful guy,” he jokes with a wink.

Right.

Because when I think of Hale, it’s his thoughtfulness that immediately comes to mind—not. Then again, what do I know about this man? I don’t know what he does for a living, where he lives, or who his family is. I don’t know a damn thing about him, yet not knowing those things isn’t at the top of my list of my concerns.

I watch him get dressed, those persistent, nagging doubts resurfacing again at lightning speed.

“Hale,” I choke out before he leaves through my window.

He turns to face me, the early rays of dawn making him look even more beautiful than he already is, highlighting every contour of his face. He could be a model or a movie star, yet he breaks into my window to fuck me.

Just who is this man?

Who is Hale?

“What are we doing? I mean ... what are we?”

“Ah, sweet princess. I would have thought the answer to that question was obvious to you now,” he says, walking over to my bed again instead of leaving like he was supposed to. His knee dips into the mattress as he pulls my chin up so I can look him in the eye.

“What am I to you? A game? A conquest? What?” I plead, my open vulnerability tainting my every word as his penetrating brown eyes look deep into my soul.

“Mine. That’s what you are, Cara. All mine.”

CHAPTER 11

Cara



“You look absolutely stunning,” I tell my best friend after I’ve fixed the long veil that flows down her back.

“She looks like an angel,” Layla chimes in, her voice already heavy with unshed tears.

“I think that’s the first time anyone has ever compared me to an angel. Cara, do you mind handing a tissue to my big sister before she ruins her makeup and mine?” Zoey jokes, but I can hear how choked up she is right now.

I mean, this is her wedding day. If there was ever a day when Zoey could lower her walls and let people see her soft, gooey middle, it would be today, and all because she met the love of her life in Gray. Aside from Layla and Alaric, I have yet to see such a perfect match.

Maybe one day I’ll be lucky enough to find my own.

The image of piercing brown eyes instantly comes to the forefront of my mind, making me drop the tissue box in my hands.

“Glad to see I’m not the only one who doesn’t have it together today,” Layla comments, helping me pick up the box.

“It’s not every day your best friend gets married to the love of her life,” I say whimsically, throwing Zoey a quick glance as she stares at her reflection in the full-length mirror. “She really is something, isn’t she? No matter the hurdle, she always fights for what she wants.”

“I don’t think Zoey could live life any other way,” Layla replies proudly. She picks up my hand and gives it a little squeeze. “She’ll fight tooth and nail for what she believes in, especially for the people she loves, and I can tell you now, although you aren’t blood, Zoey has always thought of you as a sister.”

My eyes start to sting, so I take a Kleenex out of the box to remove the errant tears that refuse to be kept at bay.

“Gosh darn it, Layla. Now you got my maid of honor crying too?” Zoey chastises.

“It’s a very emotional day for both of us,” Layla explains, hugging me to her side.

Zoey rolls her eyes, walking over to us.

“Ladies, I love you with all my heart, but if someone gets to be a hot mess today, then it’s going to be me.” She laughs, grabbing my hand with one hand and her big sister’s with another.

We all laugh at her lighthearted joke.

“Now, I’m ready to get this show on the road and become Mrs. Gray Hart once and for all.”

“You mind if I get a moment with my little girl before she runs off and gets married?” a deep voice announces.

We all turn around and see Alaric standing at the door, looking handsome in his tux.

Knowing that’s my cue, I excuse myself so they can have a family moment between them. I stand outside the makeshift dressing room that we made yesterday, listening to the organ music in the other room where the wedding is going to take place. I’ve known Zoey long enough to realize she would never have a traditional wedding, but she wasn’t too averse to keeping some traditions in place. She’s wearing a beautiful Vera Wang dress, so I’m sure Gray will look incredible too, and aside from her wedding taking place in a barn—which, I have to say, is beautifully decorated—everything else is quite conventional. Sure, she gave everyone little to no warning on when it would take place, but like she said repeatedly

yesterday when we were doing our preparations, the people who were most important to her would be here. That's all she cares about.

I guess she's right.

Who needs a big wedding when all that's really important is that you share that special day with the people you love above all?

Sadly, I know the day I tie the knot, my father will make a whole production out of it. There will be paparazzi flashing their cameras in my face while I self-consciously try to give them my best smile, deep down hating the fact that what is supposed to be one of the happiest days of my life is a total freak show. My wedding day will be attended by all of Manhattan's elite, and instead of joy, I'll feel like a trapped fish in a bowl, unable to breathe air into my lungs with so many eyes on me. I hate to think it, but I can't even take solace in this imaginary husband of mine, as I'm sure he'll be just another tool my father picked out for me.

He won't be Hale.

That depressing realization alone has a fist squeezing my heart into a bloody pulp.

"Cara? Cara? Are you okay, sweetheart?" Layla asks, surprising me that she's no longer in the room with Zoey. "You look pale, dear. Are you okay?"

I plant on my practiced fake smile. "Yes. I'm sorry. I got distracted."

"Yes, I could tell. You didn't even hear the wedding march commence," she says with a worried expression. "Are you sure you're okay?"

I nod, stretching my fake smile until it splits my face in two.

"Okay then. We're ready when you are," she states sweetly.

I look over her shoulder and see teary-eyed Alaric hooking his arm around Zoey's, showing that they are ready to come

out. Zoey insisted that both Alaric and Layla give her away and asked that I be her maid of honor. Of course, I jumped at the chance, since I fully intend on Zoey being my maid of honor one day, but since I'm the only bridesmaid in her wedding ceremony, that means I'm the one who will kick off this shindig.

I mouth, "I love you," to her as pride and happiness for my best friend extinguishes any thoughts of my bitter future from my mind. She mouths, "I love you too," to me and gives me the thumbs-up to walk down the aisle. With a full heart, I step onto the aisle, and the small gathering of family and friends in the pews stand up to watch me walk down it, knowing the bride will soon make her way down after me.

Just as I take my first step and stare at the altar ahead of me, my heart stops, all because the man of my dreams is standing right there on the altar beside the groom-to-be.

Hale.

CHAPTER 12

Hale



“Fuck, why is this so hard?” Gray mutters, scowling at his reflection in the mirror as he struggles with the bow tie.

I can’t help but grin. “That’s what she said.”

“You’re a child.” Alaric cuffs me as he walks over to Gray. Despite their differences, Alaric has finally accepted him, and although I think they both have a begrudging respect and truce, either would kill the other if it came to it.

I can understand that.

For a moment, my mind turns to my girl. I would kill anyone for her. Right now, she’s down the hall. I can almost hear her melodic laughter from here. My heart squeezes as if it’s in a vise, and worry winds through me. I should have told her, but part of me wants to see her shock when she realizes the man she’s been fucking is closer than she thought and also in her best friend’s wedding.

No doubt I will get her wrath, and I can’t fucking wait to see her in the silk, emerald-green dress that Zoey picked out. Fuck, I bet it will hug every goddamn curve. I’m supposed to be on my best behavior, but I know before tonight is through, I’ll have my girl pinned to a wall somewhere and be balls deep inside her, taking her for the first time with no mask, no lies.

Just us.

“I give the fuck up!” Gray roars, fighting the material at his neck.

I must admit, he looks good in the suit I picked out. His exact words were, “I don’t want to look like a fucking penguin, help me.” While our girls spent all day decorating, we went ring and suit shopping, but I just never thought through the bow tie aspect.

“Getting cold feet?” I joke as I cross my leg over my knee and sip my bourbon, reclining in the leather sofa as I watch him struggle.

“I can still kill you,” Gray snaps, reaching for a gun.

“Children.” Alaric sighs as he turns Gray to face him. “Here, let me. No son-in-law of mine will be marrying my daughter without looking perfect.”

It’s the closest thing to a kind word Alaric has ever said to him, and I see Gray stiffen with uncertainty as Alaric deftly sorts out the bow tie. I could have easily done it for him, but I was secretly hoping that Alaric would step in. Gray needs to be accepted and loved, and Alaric needs to get over his prejudice and accept that his little girl is an adult who has fallen in love, and it couldn’t be with a better man.

Well, apart from me.

Gray deserves a family to call his own.

I can’t say the same thing about myself. I’ve been on my own for as long as I can remember, and it suits me just fine.

I think.

Images of Cara telling me to put a baby inside her swims through my mind, and my chest tightens when I realize how much I want to do just that. I’d be the world’s shittiest father, but somehow the burning need to mark my girl in all ways gives me a smidge of hope that maybe I wouldn’t be such a fuckup if she was raising our child right there with me.

Fuck.

Cara gives me hope and makes me want to be better.

She makes me want what Gray is about to have—a family that is his and only his.

“There,” Alaric says fondly as he steps back, looking Gray over and pulling me out of my muddled thoughts. “Perfect.”

“Thank you,” Gray replies sincerely, tenderness stretching between them.

Groaning, I drop my leg and sit up. “Alright, pussies, let’s get this show on the road before Gray decides to fuck his girl’s dad.”

I narrowly avoid both gunshots, rolling with a laugh, and once I’m on my feet, I tug my suit into position and grin as I rub my hands together in glee. “What would a wedding be without a bit of gunfire?”



She is fucking breathtaking.

The moment she steps into the aisle, she freezes, her eyes wide with shock, which transforms into desire as she looks me over and then, ultimately, shifts into anger. My cock hardens at that, and I grin wickedly at her as Zoey appears behind her.

“Walk, princess,” I mouth.

She tosses me an indignant glare and focuses ahead as she slowly walks to the music. Zoey walks behind her, and she looks so happy, I can’t help but smile, but my gaze always goes back to my girl.

Perfection.

I don’t know how some rich idiot hasn’t snapped my girl up, but I thank the fucking stars every night that she’s mine. The silk dress clings to her breasts, which almost spill free, and the rest of the material drapes down her body, showcasing her delicious fucking curves before ending below her knees. She wears killer black heels on her feet that I want to feel digging into my back later, and her hair is curled over her shoulder, with diamonds holding one side back. Her makeup is expertly done, only enhancing her beauty.

She is the most beautiful woman in the world, and I'm going to spend tonight with my head between her thighs, showing her how true those words are.

"Do not fuck Cara or I will kill you," Gray hisses, no doubt seeing my appreciative look.

I grin. "Then you're going to have to kill me."

For a moment, he debates it, but then his gaze goes back to Zoey, and he watches her like she hung the moon and stars, which I guess, for him, she did. He wears his wolf necklace proudly around his neck, even though I commented on how gaudy it is, and his hair is slicked back.

He's almost human today.

Zoey cleans up good too, for a little she-devil.

Her skintight white wedding dress changes to black on the edges—after all, she could never be traditional—and around her neck is a matching bird necklace. I wonder if I could get a necklace for my girl that says, "Princess." Fuck, imagining a choker with that or my name on her neck has me shifting and glancing back at her. She stops at the other side, struggling to ignore me.

Most of the ceremony is a blur because I watch Cara, who cries softly when they say their vows. I have to stop myself from storming over to her and kissing her tears away. As if she can read my thoughts, she glances over with a soft smile that undoes me. I also catch the worry and longing in her eyes.

I want to promise her everything and tell her that if she wants a big white wedding then I'll give it to her.

She can have it all. Fuck, I'll tattoo my goddamn name on her ring finger and hers on mine if it will stop her from crying.

Before I know it, the happy bride and groom head back down the aisle, and the moment I've been waiting for finally comes. I hold my arm out, and with a tight smile, Cara slips hers through mine.

"You are in so much trouble," she hisses at me, even as she smiles widely at everyone else.

She is polite and perfect for them, and a fucking wildcat for me.

“I can’t wait,” I purr in her ear.



If she looks at me like that one more time, I’m going to lay her across the food-covered table and fuck her right here and now, regardless of the old people surrounding it.

Music pumps through the barn, which has been transformed, as pictures are taken. Fairy lights twinkle throughout, and the dance floor is filled with happy, moving bodies. The bride and groom are among them, but then Gray drags Zoey to a dark corner. Alaric and Layla sway to the music, and it’s the only reason I don’t follow the bride and groom’s lead—I don’t want to be dragged off my girl when I’m inside her, feeling all that anger directed at me.

I behave, for now, but I have to get my hands on her, so I stand and drop my napkin to my plate before rounding the table and offering her my hand. “Want to dance, princess?”

“No, thank you,” she replies sweetly, politely telling me to go fuck myself.

Fuck, this girl is amazing.

I can’t help but laugh. “Okay, then let’s try it this way.” I lean down so the others at the table don’t hear me. “Get your beautiful ass up and in my arms for a dance or I’m going to drape you over this table like a feast and let every old fuck in here get a good look at you while you scream my name.”

She pushes her chair back angrily and throws her napkin down. Ignoring my outstretched hand, she storms onto the dance floor. I can’t help grinning widely at that.

I stop her before she can get farther and swing her into my arms, sliding my hand down to her perfect ass and tugging her closer. She glares at me, but I see desire in her eyes. “You look fucking stunning, princess.” Leaning down, I bring my lips to her ear. “Good enough to eat.”

“Fuck you,” she hisses.

“That’s the plan.” I grin as I swing her out and back in, ignoring Alaric’s glare and Layla’s worried gaze.

“You will never touch me again,” she spits. “You’re a liar.”

“I never lied to you, princess,” I reply, hating that she thinks that. “I simply never told you who I was, and you never asked because you didn’t want to know.”

She swallows and looks away, so I tip her back to look at me. “You wanted the illusion, and I gave it to you, but I refuse to anymore. You saw my face, you screamed my name, and you slept in my arms. You’re mine, Cara, and I’ve always been yours, so fuck our little game. I want all of it, all of you.”

She drops her arms from me and glares. “Screw you, Hale. I’m done playing your mind games.”

I watch her go, rubbing my head in confusion.

What the hell did I say?

Ignoring Alaric who tries to stop me, I hurry after her, following her out of the barn and into the night. “Cara,” I yell. “Don’t go into the darkness, it’s dangerous.” Scanning the field around us, I spin and search for her.

I hear a curse and follow it around to the side of the barn where she is leaning against the back of it, her arms crossed as she stares into the night. “Leave me alone, Hale,” she demands.

“Never.”

“Because it’s dark and dangerous?” she spits out.

“We both know I’m the most dangerous thing in the dark, princess, but never to you. I don’t know why you are so angry, but tell me so I can fix it. Just so you know, though, I’m going to ruin that perfect lipstick and dress afterwards, so when you go back in there, they will all know you are mine.”

“I’m not yours.” She sighs and meets my eyes. “How can I be when I don’t know a thing about you?”

“You know what’s important,” I retort, hating the distance between us, so I push her against the barn and place my hand on her chin so she will look at me. I need to see those pretty eyes, the ones that steal my soul. “You know me better than anyone else ever has. I never let anyone close, but you, Cara? You ripped that away, and you made me show you the beast that hides within, and then you fucking tamed him. You want to know my favorite fucking color or how I take my coffee? Then we will do that too, but don’t you fucking dare tell me you don’t know me or act as if every moment we have spent together means nothing when it means everything to me.

“You hold my entire fucking soul in your perfect little hands without even knowing it. What do you want, Cara? Do you want me to go in there and announce to everyone that you’re mine? Do you want me to tell them how every time you let me fuck you, you get so under my skin that you’re a part of the fabric of my very being? Or how I’m so obsessed with you that I can’t go a second without thinking of you? Do you want me to fight off your best friend when I say that shit because my heart belongs to you? I will. I’ll do anything for you. So tell me what you want, Cara.”

Her baby-blue eyes sparkle with unshed tears as they scan my face.

“Tell me, Cara. What do you want?”

“You.” She slams her lips onto mine.

Thank fucking God.

Groaning, I push her back to the wall and hoist her up. “Wrap those pretty legs around my waist.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

The nickname makes my cock jerk in my slacks. “Good girl, and hold on. This is going to be fast and dirty. I need you so badly.”

“Then fuck me,” she dares, her bright eyes sparkling with need and laughter. Her perfect body arches into mine, and her lips are tipped up in a cocky smile.

For a moment, I just freeze at her beauty and stare, lost for words. I might have stolen this girl, this princess, but she stole my soul the first time she looked at me, and now, standing under the stars with our friends laughing inside, I know one day that will be us.

I'm going to marry this girl, and she deserves better than a quick fuck, but we both need it. I let her legs drop, and for a moment, confusion and rejection clouds her eyes.

The first night I stole a kiss, I knew she was mine. The first night I stole her innocence, I knew there would never be another, and now, under the cover of darkness with no masks or secrets between us, I drop to my knees before her and know this is forever.

"Hale," she whispers, staring down at me as I slide my hands up her long legs and grip her ass, lifting her. I hook her legs over my shoulders as she wobbles, gripping my hair to hold on, embarrassment heating her cheeks. "Hale, I'm bleeding."

"I know." I lay a kiss over her panties. "I'm going to cover my face in it. I love blood, princess, and I love everything about your body, so nothing is going to stop me from eating my girl until she screams my name. Get over your embarrassment. I know every single inch of you, and there will never be anything between us."

"But ..." Her cheeks are red as she covers her eyes with her hands.

"Do not ever hide from me," I order, and she drops her hand. "Good girl," I purr, and to reward her, I drag my mouth over her panties, making her gasp. "Keep those beautiful eyes on me while I eat you, princess," I demand, and I narrow my eyes when she remains silent. "What was that?"

"Yes, Daddy," she responds instantly, and since she's such a good girl, I drag her panties down then offer them to her.

"Hold them for me."

She takes them, fisting the fabric as I lick my lips hungrily. Fuck, I love her cunt.

I can't even remember any other pussy, but I know I was never addicted like this nor have I ever needed another woman's pleasure more than my own. I need her taste on my tongue at all times, but only hers.

Does she even know how obsessed I am or how I would do anything for her?

I plan to show her. Meeting her gaze, I drag my tongue down her pussy to the string hanging out of her and tug on it. She gasps and tries to pull away, so I hold her tighter as I lick her clit until she's moaning my name, gripping my hair, and riding my face.

When she's on the verge of coming, with her panties in her mouth to silence her screams, I bite the string and pull her tampon out. She yells, but I ignore her as I lick her pretty clit while using the tampon to fuck her. I push it in and out shallowly, making her ride it until she comes so hard, her thighs clench around me.

I lick her through it, the slight taste of blood in her cum making me jerk in my pants. It's all my girl, and I love it, dipping my tongue inside her as she tries to push me away and drag me closer at the same time.

I thrust my tongue inside her and rub her clit until she comes again, clenching around my tongue so prettily. Licking her through it, I clean her pussy for her, knowing she will be embarrassed, even though there is nothing to be ashamed of.

I drop her shaky legs to the ground and slide up her body, placing a kiss on her stomach to ease the twinges there, and then grip her chin and kiss her.

Dragging her head up, I kiss her hard, forcing her to taste the mix of blood and cum. She recoils, but I continue to kiss her, and eventually, she relaxes before rolling her body against me.

That's my girl.

She moves hesitantly at first, but she's so fucking willing and into whatever we do.

She wraps her legs around me, her embarrassment forgotten as she grinds her pussy into my hard cock. I lean back and pull the tampon out, and with my eyes on her, I lick it.

Her mouth drops open as I groan, and I let her feel my cock jerk so she knows how much I love it.

“You are a fucked-up man,” she hisses as she grinds into me.

“Yes, I am.” I grin as I rub it along her lips. “Open up, baby. Taste yourself.”

“No.” She recoils.

“Open up for Daddy,” I demand, and she opens her mouth. I drag it over her lips and tongue before tossing it away. “Taste.”

Whimpering, she licks her lips and shivers.

“You taste so fucking good, baby. Every inch of you is mine—blood, cum, heart, soul, and body. There will never be any embarrassment or barriers between us, so get used to it.”

“Fucking hell.” She groans as I grin at her. “You truly are insane. I thought Gray was crazy, but ...”

“I hide it better, princess.” I smile as I lean in and kiss her lips. “They don’t know until it’s too late. Now, be a good girl and scream for me.” Reaching down, I pull out my cock, and when she goes to protest, I slam into her.

Her back hits the barn wall hard, and a scream escapes her lips before she bites it off, glaring at me. I grip her hands and pin them above her as I lick and suck her neck while I roll my hips, fucking her hard and fast.

We had our first argument, and now we need to make up. I mark her really good as I fuck her, feeling her tight cunt clench around my cock as it tries to milk my release from me.

Greedy girl.

“Fuck, you feel so good, princess. We can fight and fuck whenever you want.” Her pulse jumps in her throat as she

grips my hands, rolling to meet my thrusts. Our panting breaths are loud in the night air, and beyond that, we hear laughter. “Anyone could find us right now, couldn’t they, princess?”

She moans, and I grin against her skin. “They could find you being ravished, and you would love it, wouldn’t you? You would love to let them watch you be fucked.”

“Oh God, yes,” she calls out as I lift my head and watch her while I fuck her.

“Please, Hale.”

Hearing my name on her lips is my undoing. I grip her throat and speed up, hammering into her so fast the wall shakes behind her, and yet she begs for more.

Her pleas become desperate, and her cunt clenches around me as she tumbles over the edge once more.

Pleasure claws at my spine, heating me as my balls draw up. “Now, princess. Come for Daddy,” I command with my hand on her throat, and when she screams her release, I kiss her, swallowing it and my own grunt of pleasure as I slam into her and pump her full of my cum.

I press my face to her throat, and we both just breathe until she whimpers. I slowly pull out of her, knowing she must be sore, and then I kiss her between words of praise as she sighs. When she can stand, I release her and look down, seeing her blood and cum on my cock. Fuck, it’s almost enough to make me hard again.

“Clean up your mess, princess,” I order.

She drops to her knees and laps at my cock, cleaning her blood and cum with a needy moan. My head wants to drop back, but I want to imprint this in my mind as I watch her. My greedy girl consumes her taste until I tug her back up and brush off her dress. I drop to my knees and gently lift each leg, sliding her panties on, and then I slip them up to her hips and settle them back into place before laying a gentle kiss on my pussy.

“Good girl, now let’s dance.”

She huffs a laugh, so I slide closer and kiss her.

“You’re going to go back in there with my cum running down your legs. You’re going to smile and dance with me, and you’re going to kiss me. Understood?” I peck her lips, smearing her lipstick more, and I love the fact that it coats my face like a claim. “I’m proudly going to walk back in there by your side with your blood and cum on my cock and lipstick on my face.”

“You’re a dirty bastard.” She giggles.

“You love it, princess.”

CHAPTER 13

Cara



Zoe corners me as soon as I slip back inside, undoubtedly seeing what went down. “Oh my god! Did you fuck him?”

“I kissed him,” I lie, not knowing why.

She shakes her head in disbelief. “Okay. I get it. Hale is all sorts of hot, but Cara, be careful, okay? He’s dangerous. Promise me it won’t go any further than just PG kissing.”

I almost crack and tell her the truth, but in the end, I lie to her once more, and I tell her I won’t do more than that, like I don’t plan to spend my night getting fucked every way possible by him.

Just like he promised, for the rest of the evening, we dance, kiss, flirt, and have a good time, and when I get in the town car Father sent for me, I can’t help my wide grin.

Once at home, I dash to my room, but when I get there, giggling and drunk, my room is empty.

Swallowing back my worry, I lock my door and wait.

And I wait some more, but Hale never comes.

With no way to contact him, I climb into bed, feeling rejected all over again, and after spending a while overthinking everything, I finally give up. Climbing out of bed, I slip on a dressing gown and sneak through the house, aiming for the kitchen to make some herbal tea that always knocks me out, but when I hear my father’s voice, I still.

He told me he was out of town ...

I hesitate in the darkened hallway, knowing if he catches me spying, he will punish me, but curiosity gets the better of me, and I sneak to his office where light spills out from under the door.

Heart hammering, I wait, and when no one catches me, I slide closer, pressing my ear to the door. I can barely hear him over my pounding heartbeat, so I slow my breathing until I can finally hear. He starts to yell, and I startle at his angry tone—a habit.

“How the fuck is it my problem that some whore is dead? No, you listen to me, this can’t get back to me. I don’t care what it costs or what you have to do, deal with it!” There’s a moment of silence, and then his voice is low, slow, and deadly. “If you do not deal with this, then I will deal with you.”

Shaking my head, I race back to my room, shutting the door softly so he doesn’t know I was listening. Whatever he was talking about wasn’t good.

A sick feeling starts inside of me as I climb into bed.

Who is dead?

Why is he involved?

My father isn’t a good man, I know that, but is he really capable of killing someone?

I don’t know, and I don’t want to know, not if it will keep me alive.

I toss and turn in bed until my phone vibrates in my pocket. Pulling it out, I sit up when I see whom it’s from, happiness exploding through me.

I giggle at the name that flashes on my screen.

BigDickHale: I added my number last night, hope that’s okay.

BigDickHale: Sorry I can’t be there tonight, baby, but something came up at work.

BigDickHale: Princess? Are you asleep or ignoring me?

BigDickHale: Don’t make me come over there.

Cara: So if I ignore you, you'll come over?

Cara: Good to know.

Cara: Also, BigDickHale? Really? :laughing face:

BigDickHale: It's just the truth, princess, and you know it.

Cara: Maybe you should remind me.

BigDickHale: Wish I could, but I'll make it up to you tomorrow. Now be a good girl and get some sleep.

Cara: Fine.

Cara: Goodnight

Sliding down in bed, I curl around my phone, eagerly awaiting a response.

BigDickHale: Good night, princess.

I almost squeal.

Cara: Shh, I'm trying to be good and sleep.

BigDickHale: You're never good, princess, but I'll leave you for now. Speak to you tomorrow.

Cara: Tomorrow.

CHAPTER 14

Cara



“A bachelorette party? But you’re already married. Aren’t you doing this backwards?” I giggle on the phone after Zoey tells me her plans.

“Okay, so it’s not a bachelorette party per se, but I haven’t seen you in weeks. I think we both need a girls’ night out. What do you say?” she pleads, making me grin.

“I have missed you, and I want to know all the deets about your honeymoon with Gray. Okay! Count me in!”

“That’s my girl!” Zoey squeals happily. “Okay, that’s settled. I’ll pick you up in an hour. Be ready, babe!”

“Will do!” I reply, giddy that I’m finally going to spend some quality time with my best friend after all these weeks.

I’m about to rush to my closet when my window flies open, and my heart instantly does a cartwheel when Hale steps inside.

“Hey, princess.” He smiles, opening his arms for me. “One of these days, you’re going to have to give me a key to this place.”

I jump into his arms, and Hale hugs me tightly.

“My father’s guards would probably shoot you on the spot. The window is fine.”

He pinches my chin, his brown eyes a light shade of chestnut tonight.

“They can try. Now be a good girl and kiss Daddy. I’ve been fantasizing about this pouty mouth all day.”

Not needing to be told a second time, I push up on my tiptoes and plant a kiss on his lips. Hale takes my breath away, deepening the kiss in a way that has my lower belly tingling.

I push away and take a step back, and his forehead creases in confusion.

“A kiss is all you get. I have a date tonight, and I can’t be late.”

“Hmm. I wasn’t planning on killing anyone tonight, but if you think you’re going to go out with some fucker, I can tell you he’s a dead man walking.” He smirks, pulling me into his embrace again.

“That isn’t funny, Hale,” I retort.

“I wasn’t trying to be,” he deadpans, completely serious.

I shake my head and push him off me, earning a scowl.

“Cara, come here,” he orders.

“No. I told you I have places to be, and you can’t stop me from going. I already have one jailer. I don’t need another one,” I tell him forcefully, crossing my arms over my chest, pissed he would say such a thing.

His expression softens, and this time he’s the one to close the small gap between us.

“I don’t want to be your jailer, princess. I want to set you free. But you can’t tell me that you’re going out on a date and expect me to be okay with it.”

I let out an exaggerated sigh and rest my open palms on his chest. “I’m sorry. I know the last thing you want to do is to clip my wings like my father. It’s just that I don’t do well with manipulation, Hale, and hearing you say that you would kill someone just because they want to spend time with me feels an awful lot like manipulation.”

He pulls me closer and rests his chin on the top of my head as his arms tighten around me. “I’m not trying to manipulate

you, little one. I'm just stating a fact. If anyone dared to take you away from me, I'd kill him on the spot. It's just the way it is."

I swallow the lump in my throat as fear starts to creep up my spine. "Have you ... Have you ever killed someone?" I ask hesitantly.

"Do you really want to know?"

I grow silent.

Do I?

He pulls the end of my ponytail, forcing me to look him in the eye.

"I won't keep secrets from you, Cara. Ever. But this is your show. You tell me how much you want to know, and I'll tell you." The frenzied words are accompanied by genuine honesty in his gaze.

I think long and hard on what he's telling me. I'm not sure I do want to know. Not yet. For the past few months, Hale and I have lived in what feels like a dream. I don't want to tarnish it with the truth. Not yet. I like our little bubble, so if I can keep living inside it for a little while longer, then I will. The real world will have to wait—for a little while anyway.

"I'm going out with Zoey. We're having a girls' night out. That's who my date is," I tell him, bypassing the serious conversation we were about to have.

His stiff posture relaxes instantly, and his lethal features soften. "So you're going out with the hellcat, huh? Okay. That actually sounds like fun."

"You're not coming." I giggle when I realize that he's inviting himself to accompany us. "Girls only."

The little pout on his lips does my heart in. This man is too damn gorgeous for his own good.

"Fine." He exhales, kissing my forehead before releasing me from his grip. He walks over to my bed and sits on the edge, spreading his thick legs apart. "Best not to keep Gray's girl waiting then."

“Are you just going to sit there and watch me get dressed?” I arch a teasing brow.

“That’s the plan, princess. Chop-chop.” He leans back, watching me hungrily and not the least bit ashamed about the huge tent in his slacks.

I roll my eyes at him and giggle as I walk over to my closet and pick out a dress. I find a little black number that I know will have Hale drooling, and then I throw it on the bed beside him.

“Cute,” he comments, tracing his fingers over the fabric.

“Wait until you see it on me,” I say with a confidence that always comes when he’s near.

He groans when I start getting undressed, purposely removing each piece of clothing slowly for him. Hale licks his lips and adjusts the hard bulge in his pants.

“You’re not playing fair, princess,” he grumbles, palming his rigid length.

“I thought you liked games,” I coo, reaching around my back to unclasp my bra before throwing it on his lap.

“Only when I’m the one doing the playing.” He groans, his eyes glued to my hands which stroke teasingly up and down my body. “I thought you said you didn’t have time to get fucked tonight.”

“I don’t remember saying anything of that nature,” I retort, hooking my fingers into the edge of my panties and sliding them down my legs. I throw them to him, and Hale catches them with ease before bringing them to his nose to take a long whiff.

“You’re wet, baby, and I haven’t even touched you.”

“Who says you will?” I give him a mischievous smile, taking a step back to my vanity just so I can use it for balance. I lean back and open my legs, stroking my pussy.

“But you’re right. I am wet,” I taunt, wondering how long he’ll last.

He smacks his lips and squeezes my panties in his grip.

“Best tell your girl you’re going to be late,” he threatens with a dark tone that has my whole body heating up.

“Can’t be late. Zoey will be here in an hour, and I fully intend to meet up with her downstairs on time.”

He lets out an exhale and pockets my panties before getting to his feet. “Then I guess quick and dirty will have to do. Get on your hands and knees, sweetheart. Daddy has a present for you.”

“Does he now?” I tease as I do exactly as he commands. “Is it a big gift?”

He chuckles. “Oh, it’s definitely big,” he jokes, unzipping himself from his pants and freeing his monstrous cock. “Are you ready for it, princess?” he says, stroking my back with his hand.

I lick my parched lips, staring at him over my shoulder. “You tell me, Daddy.”

He groans, smearing the head of his cock with my juices. “You’re more than ready. Open up for Daddy, beautiful. This won’t take long.”

Before I can give him a witty response, he thrusts his huge cock inside me, leaving me completely at a loss for words.

“Fuck, baby. No matter how many times I fuck you, you’re always so fucking tight. So fucking perfect.”

“Argh!” I cry out when he starts pumping inside me without mercy, his fingers digging into my hips.

Suddenly, one of his hands leaves my hips and latches onto my ponytail, using it to ride me into oblivion. I help him along, pushing back so his cock can hit all the hidden places inside me.

“Look at you taking my cock. So goddamn beautiful,” he praises, his tone dark and delicious. “Fuck. And this ass? It’s just begging for a good fucking.”

He spits onto my forbidden hole, releasing his grip on my waist so he can toy with it. I feel his thumb smear his spit around my rim, and before I know it, he presses a digit inside me, making me feel full.

“Oh my god! Hale!” I scream, my flesh burning up.

“That’s it, princess. Say my name while I fuck all your holes.”

He’s so dirty, and every time he is, I come to life as if I live for his wicked abuse and filthy mouth.

I feel my walls begin to clench around his thick cock, his finger pumping in tandem with it. Maybe it’s being on all fours like some kind of animal, or maybe it’s the way he insists on fucking every hole in my body, but soon it becomes too much for me to bear.

“Just like that, baby. Come for Daddy.” He grunts, so close to losing his shit.

I don’t even question how depraved and wrong we both are or how we seem to find joy in the filth. It’s just who we are. The darkness of our fantasies pulls us in, sinking its claws inside us. We are both fully aware that we could never be this free with anyone else. He’s my perfect villain, and I’m his dirty little rag doll to use and abuse at will, and I fucking love it.

“Hale! More! More!” I scream out, needing him to dominate me completely.

On cue, he fucks me harder, and it snaps all of my control. I break and shatter for him just as I always do. My sight blurs and my legs tremble as the orgasm hits me like a bolt of lightning. I gasp for air as he pulls my ponytail in a way that has my scalp burning. I’m still riding my orgasm when he fills my womb with his cum, permanently marking me as his.

Not that I need the reminder.

I am Hale’s.

Not only does he own my body, but there is no question in my mind that he has my heart and soul too.

I feel his soft kisses on my back as he smears his seed from my leg back to my pussy. I turn my head to watch him, his expression peaceful. Suddenly, three words I never thought I'd say are lodged in my throat, and it takes everything in me not to blurt them out. If I say those words, then I'll have to ask questions I'm not sure I want to know yet. I'll have to know everything about him, like what he does for a living and where he lives, the whole shebang, and once I do that, there will be no going back for me.

He might, in fact, be as monstrous as he says.

And what does that say about me?

What does it say that I have fallen head over heels in love with a true villain?

What does that make me?



“Water,” Zoey tells the bartender breathlessly, sweat pouring down her brow.

“Make that two please,” I add, holding up two fingers for the smoking hot redhead bartender.

We've been dancing for the past two hours, and it's been oddly therapeutic. Leaving all my problems on the dance floor is the best thing ever. For now, I can't concentrate on anything but the songs playing in the loud club.

“Two waters, ladies,” she says, planting the bottles on the bar accompanied by two tequila shots. “Courtesy of the two douchebags at the end of the bar. Fair warning, girls, they have talked about little else but jumping your bones.”

She tilts her head to two guys in suits who look like they just got out of their fancy corporate jobs. Zoey picks up the tequila and orders me to do the same. We clink the shot glasses together before drinking the bitter liquid in one go.

“Tell them thank you for the free shots but we would rather join a nunnery than fuck pretentious Wall Street assholes,” she

replies sweetly.

The bartender smirks, all too happy to pass the message along.

“You know that sooner or later, that’s the type of man my father wants to marry me off to, right?” I mumble, eyeing the jerks receiving the message that they can get bent.

Zoey turns to face me, her head blocking the expressions of rejection on their faces. “Cara, you are your own woman. You don’t have to do everything your father says. Fuck him.”

“That’s easier said than done,” I respond sadly, the alcohol burning a path through my veins, and for a moment, all I want is Hale’s arms around me and his wicked promises. With him, I don’t think about the future or my forced path. I’m just happy.

Zoey’s forehead wrinkles. “What is it about your dad that has such a hold on you? Just move out. Be who you want to be.”

“It’s not that simple, Zoey,” I reply, hating that she doesn’t understand.

“It can be if you want it to be.”

I bite my inner cheek and thin my lips.

It’s easy for Zoey to say that. She has a loving family who’s supported her all her life. She doesn’t know what it’s like to live in fear, worried that you’ll say or do the wrong thing. My father scares the living shit out of me. I can’t just move out. I’m afraid of how he would react if he did.

“I want to. Believe me, I do, but he’s acting even more peculiar than he usually does. I think ... I think he might be in some sort of trouble.”

“What type of trouble?” Zoey asks curiously.

“I’m not sure. He’s just off. And lately, he has me attending most of his meetings, not even concerned about people questioning his absence. Then he’s going on all these trips, never telling me where or why. It’s weird.”

“You sound worried for him,” she chimes in, her brows pushing together in bewilderment.

Concern is a feeling you have for someone you care about. I’m more wary than worried because I know how my father can act when he’s unhinged, and it’s not pretty. It’s something I’ve only witnessed a handful of times in my life, and it’s enough for me to know that no one is safe when he’s like this.

Especially not me.

“Can we talk about something else?” I beg, wanting to forget my fucked-up situation with my father.

“Sure thing, babe. In fact, there’s something I want to talk to you about,” she says.

“Oh?” I retort, taking a sip of my water.

“What’s up with you and Hale?”

I spit out all the water in my mouth. “I’m so sorry,” I apologize to the waitress when she gives me a dirty look for spitting water all over the mirror behind the bar.

“She’s fine.” Zoey pulls me away from the bar so we can find an empty booth to talk.

I take my seat opposite her, wiping my sweaty palms on my bare thighs.

“Now talk. What is up with you and Hale?” she insists, looking dead serious.

“Nothing is going on,” I lie through my teeth.

“Nothing?” She arches a brow, calling bullshit.

“Nope.” I pop the P on the end.

“I don’t buy it.” Zoey is like a dog with a bone when she sets her mind to something, and it’s clear this is her new bone.

“There is nothing to buy. Yes, we hooked up at your wedding and had a few kisses, but that was the end of that.”

Liar.

“That was it? You guys haven’t seen each other after that?” she asks with a narrow-eyed look.

“Nope.” I shake my head. “Why would we?”

I watch my friend visibly relax at my lie.

I hate that I have to hide my true feelings for Hale and that we have been a thing for the past two months, but I saw how she reacted when I told her all we did was kiss back at her wedding. She’ll be opposed to this relationship, and although I’m not sure as to why, I’m not ready to fight with my best friend when I tell her the truth.

Right now, Hale and I are perfect, and I want us to remain that way for as long as we can.

“Well, that’s good to hear. If he ever comes sniffing around you, just give him the boot. That guy is not good for you. Trust me.”

I bite my lower lip to keep it from trembling. “I thought you were friends. I mean, he was Gray’s best man,” I interject, wondering where all her animosity for him is coming from.

“We are and he was.” She huffs. “Hale is fine as a friend. I mean, he’s been a great friend to Gray. Maybe his only friend. It’s not that. It’s just that ... well, Hale ... Let’s just say he’s no good for a girl like you and keep it at that.”

Zoey tries to smile consolingly, placing her hands on top of mine. She thinks I’m weak, and I hate it, but then again, I’ve never proven to her or anyone else that I’m the opposite.

I’m about to open my mouth to ask her where Gray knows Hale from when Layla pops by our booth, surprising us both.

“Why are you girls sitting down? I thought we were going to dance the night away,” she says cheerfully.

“You made it!” Zoey cheers.

“Like I would miss your post-wedding bachelorette party.” She giggles. “Now how about we get our groove on?”

I smile at them and step out of the booth, intent on doing just that. At least while I’m dancing, I won’t have to think about how my life is one fuckup after another.

Hale is my only silver lining.

CHAPTER 15

Hale



“**E**xplain to me why you felt the need to do surveillance on my wife with me tonight?” Gray mumbles, pissed that he doesn’t have the van all to himself.

“First of all, can we just acknowledge how fucked up it is that sentence even came out of your mouth? Dude, you married her. Why you feel the need to spy on her while she’s shaking her ass on the dance floor is baffling to me.” I smirk when he lets out a low growl. “And second, I thought since your wife was having a girls’ night, we could have a boys’ night of our own.”

His silver glare digs a hole into my forehead. “You know that I can spot a liar a mile away, right?”

“And what an awesome attribute to have,” I joke. “Zoey is a lucky girl.”

“Stop talking about my wife in an effort to distract me, asshole. I know what you’re up to.”

“And just exactly what is it that you think I’m up to?” I yawn, stretching my legs and placing my arms behind my back against the van’s double doors like I don’t have a care in the world.

“That,” he deadpans, pointing to Cara on one of the screens.

I keep my smile stitched to my face, even if my chest feels like a boulder just hit it.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I purr, knowing it will piss him off more, but then the fucker surprises me by pouncing on me, pulling me forward by my collar, and getting all up in my face.

“Listen here, motherfucker. Cara is important to Zoey. She’s her family, which makes her mine. Don’t even think about touching a hair on her head.”

Too late for that.

I slap his grip off me and plant a sinister grin on my lips.

“This is Armani, Gray. Show some respect.” His nostrils flare at my nonchalance, but I switch gears on him, my expression turning deadly, and his gray eyes widen as a result. “Word to the wise, *friend*. Keep your eyes on your girl and off Cara, and we’ll do just fine.”

He scoffs. “You’re such a pompous idiot. You think I’m the one you’re supposed to be worried about? It’s my woman who is going to cut your balls off and feed them to you if you come within an inch of Cara. Not me. Believe me, it’s a miracle you still have them after hooking up with her at our wedding. Count your blessings.”

I lose the grin, knowing he’s not bullshitting. “I have no idea why Zoey would be against me dating her friend. I’m a catch.”

For the second time in as many minutes, he rolls his eyes at me. “Keep telling yourself that, but we both know differently, and so does Zoey. Can’t blame her for being overprotective with Cara, but hey, it’s your funeral. Just telling you how it is.”

“Noted.” I frown, hating that Zoey is going to be one of the many hurdles Cara and I will have to surpass, but she’s worth it, and no one will keep me from her.

We sit in silence as we watch both the girls dance up a storm, my eyes never leaving the raven-haired beauty who has my heart in a vise. Even now, after these past few months, she still captivates me. In her little black dress and red-sole high heels, she dances like no one is watching, completely

oblivious to everyone around her. She's like the sun, pulling everyone into her orbit. She does it effortlessly and is completely unaware that every man in the club is fantasizing about her naked. It takes everything inside of me not to leave this van and go inside to stake my claim on her, but if Gray can keep his wits about him, then so can I.

I used to tease him for this, but now I understand the need to have eyes on her at all times. It's not so funny when you are on the other end.

I know the real reason why both he and his wife think I'm no good for Cara. I'm fucked in the head, and the thing is, I'm not even repentant about it. I like being the way that I am. I love my life and ruining others. It gives me a high like no other, but even I have to admit that lately, I want more than to just create havoc.

And I know why.

It's her.

My princess.

My gorgeous, kind Cara.

She's doing my head in and making me want things that never once crossed my mind.

I wonder if I put a baby in her tonight when I fucked her on all fours.

I groan at the thought. Just thinking about Cara all swollen with my baby has my heart cracking down the middle, making all those warm, gooey feelings that a villain like me should never have pour out of me. She's going to make such a wonderful mother. I can picture her now, sitting on our bed as she cradles our baby in her arms while he suckles at her breast. She'll make him strong and also keep him pure and innocent. He'll be my complete opposite, and it will make me the proudest motherfucker there is for it.

Fuck.

I really am losing it.

I run my fingers through my hair as I watch the girls take a water break from their dance marathon. I start chuckling when Zoey's and Cara's voices start coming through the speakers in the van.

“Do I even want to know how you were able to plant a bug on your wife?”

To his credit, Gray looks guilty over how low he's able to sink just to make sure Zoey is always safe. We listen as they are offered two shots of tequila, turning down the guys who bought them without even batting an eye their way.

I feel Gray tense up, needing to punch the fuckers for their audacity, but I'm too interested in what the girls are saying to pay him any mind. My hands bunch into fists at the way my girl speaks about her father. Zoey isn't picking up on it, but I am—there is true fear in Cara's voice. I know what that shit sounds like, since I've made sure to cause such terror in my victims, but hearing the petrified tone come out of my love's lips has me shaking in fury.

With Cara taking center stage in my life, I've dropped the ball on some things. I have yet to discover who General is, but my gut tells me that Cara's father is somehow mixed in with the sick fuck. The thing is, the governor has come out clean in all my research. There isn't so much as a jaywalking ticket. He's immaculate, which to a guy with my experience means he's as dirty as they come, maybe even more so because of it. Everyone has skeletons in their closet. Everyone. So that means Cara's dad has said skeletons buried deep down where no one can find them.

Like Zoey, I'm in agreement that she should move out. Having her locked away in that tower she calls a home is not acceptable. She's a prisoner in her own house. My girl deserves better than that. I've half a mind to kidnap her from that awful place and chain her to my house, but then I'd be just as bad as her fucking father. When I know she's brave enough, I'll ask her to live with me. I want her to come to me out of her own free will, but every day that she has to live in her father's house is another day that she's shackled to him.

I'll break you free, sweet angel.

I'll break you free.

When my name pops up in conversation, I'm pulled out of my thoughts. Cara cleverly keeps our relationship a secret from her best friend, probably for the same reasons I kept my mouth shut with Gray. We have time to tell the world. Right now, we belong only to each other without anyone's opinion or consent. I have to admit, it's also extremely hot keeping this our dirty little secret. Not that we need the added aphrodisiac since we're a fucking white-hot flame together regardless of whether or not the world knows.

Gray and I are so focused on the screens that we jump when we hear the van's double doors open.

"I knew it!" Alaric shouts as he climbs inside the van, closing the doors behind him. "Mind telling me why you jackasses are spying on my little girl?" he seethes, smacking us both upside the head.

I frown. "Hey. Watch the hair, man."

"Shut it. If I want to hear from the peanut gallery, then you have license to talk," he chastises me before turning his attention to his son-in-law.

"You." He points to Gray. "Explain yourself."

"I just want to make sure she's safe," Gray mumbles.

"Listen here, son. My daughter is a grown-ass woman. She can take perfectly good care of herself without you being her constant shadow. She's been doing it long before you came around, so let her have her night out in peace."

Gray wrinkles his forehead in frustration, knowing that the right thing to do would be to go home and leave his wife to have a good time without him. He's about to switch off the screens when Layla pops into view, and Alaric suddenly grabs Gray's hand.

"Wait," Alaric says, his gaze focused on his wife as she sashays onto the dance floor with Zoey and Cara in tow.

Now I get why Alaric is here. He must have dropped Layla off at the club so she could join the girls.

“Hmm,” he hums with a scowl, not liking how all three women are gaining the attention of every red-blooded man with a working dick on the dance floor. “On second thought, now that we’re already here, what’s the rush to go home?”

“I’m okay staying for a little while longer,” Gray adds quickly, not wanting to leave his woman.

“You?” Alaric points to me.

“Yeah, I’m good. Not like I had anything better to do.” I shrug.

None of us wants to admit that we are bound to stay locked up in the van the whole night, needing to keep close tabs on our women, knowing that we’ll end up going inside if any fucker tries any funny business.

Hours later, when the girls start packing their stuff to go home, we finally decide to go our separate ways before the girls leave the club.

“Not a word to the girls, gentlemen,” Alaric warns before jumping out of the van. “They don’t have to know that we’re obsessive assholes who can’t keep our cool when it comes to them.”

“Loose lips sink ships. Got it,” I tease with a wink and a salute. He sighs, and I grin. “Snitches get stitches?”

I’m pretty sure all our women realize how unhinged we already are. I know my princess knows that shit by heart.

I smile at the thought and head over to my car. I want to be in her bed when she walks through her bedroom door. Tonight, I’ll have her dancing on top of me like she did on that dance floor.

Only this time, she won’t have a club full of men lusting after her.

She’ll only have me.

The man who has fallen in love with her.

CHAPTER 16

Cara



“I want to break free,” I sing, making Zoey giggle as Layla groans.

“I’m too old for this. I’m going to be sick,” she mumbles. “I want a burger.”

“We’ll get you a burger,” Zoey offers as she helps me to the front door of the penthouse. “Okay, singing beauty, time to go to bed.”

I nod and press my finger to my lips, making her giggle. “Night, Zoey.”

“Night, babe.” She unlocks the door for me, and I stumble in, almost landing on my ass with a giggle before I remember where I am and sober up a bit. I wave her off, watching as Layla waves and screams about burgers as they head toward the elevator before locking the door. Trying to remain silent, I hurry up the stairs to my room, ignoring the guards. Once inside, I slump.

“I want a burger too.” I huff before my eyes land on Hale who’s stretched out on my bed. “Haley!” I throw myself at him, and he laughs as he catches me and tugs me down.

I kiss him before sprawling out on him with a pout. “My feet hurt.”

“Well, we can’t have that, can we, princess?”

Laying me out below him, he slides from the bed to his knees. He keeps his dark eyes on me as he places a kiss on the arch of my foot as he drags my heel off before turning his head

and doing the same to the other. “You look good enough to eat, princess,” he purrs as he kisses and licks up my legs.

Reaching down, I bunch the material of my dress and tug it up, showing him my black lace thong.

Groaning, he rests his head on my thigh. “Going to be the death of me, princess. I’m trying to be good since you’re drunk.”

“I don’t want good.” I pout. “I want to come.”

“Is that right?” he asks, his chin propped on my thigh.

“Yes, Hale. Please, Daddy, make me come.”

“Fucking hell,” he growls. “Okay, princess, I’ve got you.”

His lips glide across my thigh, not stopping until he reaches my core. Lifting my legs, I press my heels to his back, opening wide for his gaze as he groans. “Fucking hell, princess, you are so beautiful.”

My head drops back at the first touch of his talented tongue. He drags it across my pussy like a starving man, tasting every inch of me before dipping it inside and circling my clit.

Reaching down, I slide my hands into his wavy black hair and grip it, grinding into his face. Alcohol and need buzz through my system until I’m moaning beneath him. Chuckling against my pussy, he grabs my thighs to keep me open, turning his head to bite them. “Be a good girl and ride Daddy’s face.”

“Yes, oh God.” I groan when he thrusts two fingers into me as his tongue attacks me in tandem.

He licks me senseless and abuses my poor clit as I ride his face just like he ordered, and before I know it, I’m screaming my release, grinding so hard on top of him he probably can’t breathe, but when I slump back, he keeps licking me.

I tug him up my body and kiss him, tasting my own need on his lips, and slide my hand down his body. He grabs my wrist and tugs it up, kissing my fingers. “We won’t go any further, love, not while you’re drunk.” I frown as he quickly undresses me and slides me into bed, tucking me in.

“What? Seriously? You’re not going to fuck me?” I huff.

He grins. “Not right now.”

I huff in annoyance, but then exhaustion slides through me, so I let it go.

Kissing my forehead, he wraps his arms around me and slides his leg between mine. “Sleep now, Princess Cara, I’ve got you.”

“Night, Haley,” I murmur as I snuggle closer. “Love you.”

I’m almost on my way to sleep, so I don’t feel him stiffen before his voice comes out dark and hungry in my ear. “I love you, Cara, and when you’re not drunk, I will tell you again just how much.”



Fuck, did I tell Hale that I loved him last night?

I flop onto my back, feeling sorry for myself and hungover.

I didn’t ... right?

Nope, I’m going to pretend nothing happened for my own sanity’s sake.

The sun shines through my window, and when I can finally stumble my way to the shower, I have to stop to throw up. I knew all those tequila shots were a bad idea. I blame Zoey, even if I did buy them and force them down their throats, claiming I was their sugar mamma now.

I wash away the bad decision and cheap booze and start to feel a bit more human. I need food, the greasier the better, but something stops me in my bedroom. The window is open. He always comes through the window.

Why doesn’t anyone ever catch him?

It’s a random thought, but it buries inside of me, just like his sharp eyes last night when he basically admitted to being able to kill someone.

I don't know a lot about Hale, despite what he said, and I know he would tell me if I asked, but part of me is scared to know.

I realize I'm so tired of being scared.

Like, how does he get into my room?

That question nags me the entire way through breakfast—a greasy fry up that satisfies my hungover stomach. I can't seem to get it out of my mind, so I decide to snoop and figure that out just to know something more about the man I'm in love with.

My first stop is the security panel near the front door. I press my back to the wall to shield what I'm doing in case anyone comes upon me. The security logs are empty, which means no doors or windows were opened or closed. It's like he was never here.

Worrying my lips, I tell myself to let it go, but for some reason, I need to find the answer to this. My eyes rove over the house and land on the security room's door. It's locked, I know that from experience, and I know they watch the cameras and have the security details in there, but there's no way in. I tried once after I sneaked out to meet Zoey and didn't want my dad to know—he showed me the backup in his office.

His office.

He isn't here, but the other access point is.

It's dumb, and I should let it go, but I can't.

I find myself stepping into my father's office. The house is quiet as I sneak inside and shut the door. Fear blooms within me from even being in here, as if he will know and punish me, but I push through it. I can't remember where the log-in was. The computer? Or was it hidden in the drawers?

For a moment, I bite my lip before straightening my shoulders and hurrying to the desk. The longer I'm in here, the more likely I'll be caught, so I need to be quick. What's the worst he can do if he catches me?

Well, I know what the worst is, but I don't focus on that right now or the terror would make me run away.

I try the drawer first, not wanting to lock his computer by trying to guess his password. The first few have nothing but files on the business he owns, and I almost go cross-eyed from looking at them. Instead, I lean back in his chair and look over the other drawers. There's a huge one at the bottom that's locked, which has to be it. I don't have the key, but I grab a paper clip and get to my knees, remembering what Zoey taught me, knowing her naughty tricks would come in handy someday.

It's almost too easy, and when it opens, I spot the security computer. I grab it to take a look when something falls out from the top of the drawer.

A folder.

Frowning, I sit back on my heels, holding it in my hands.

Don't look in it, Cara, I tell myself, knowing if it's hidden and locked away, it can't be good. I'm tired of being scared of him, however. I know my father is an evil man, but I've lived in blissful and naïve ignorance until now. I don't want that anymore. It won't stop who he is or what he's doing, and I owe it to myself to be strong enough to find out.

I open the folder, scanning the document in confusion.

Mercy Village Group Home.

The name is familiar, but I can't remember why, and why would he have documents on a kids group home? It's not his usual venture by any means. I rack my brain for answers as I scan the document again and again until it hits me like a bag of bricks

Zoey!

She mentioned this, I'm sure of it, but why?

Scrambling, I put the folder and the computer back, making sure everything is perfect before hurrying out and back to my room to call her, needing answers.

It seems I've opened Pandora's box, and we all know how that ended.

CHAPTER 17

Hale



In the long run, I know this is a bad idea.

Not only will Zoey kill me, but so will Gray, yet I can't seem to care as I load up the call Cara is currently making. Yes, I followed Gray's wrongdoing and tapped my girl.

I give zero fucks when it comes to her and her happiness and safety. I should be working, but I'm daydreaming about her, so when an outgoing call pings on one of my laptops, you bet your ass I listen in.

When I see it's Zoey, I almost shut it off, wanting to give her privacy, but I need to hear her voice to get me through the day.

"Hey, babe, sup?" Zoey sounds like she's out of breath.

"If you're fucking right now—"

"Nah, just finished." There's a grunt, and then she comes back. "What's up? Still grouchy and hungover?"

"Yes," my girl whines, making my grin grow. She's adorable when she's drunk and even more adorable hungover. I don't think she even remembers kissing me this morning when I snuck out or moaning about stupid men and alcohol.

Nor what she said last night ...

She said she loves me. I don't allow myself to get my hopes up ... much. She was drunk, so she doesn't remember, but I need to hear it again to know if it's true because there isn't a shadow of a doubt in my mind that I love my girl.

I zone back into the conversation and sit up sharply. “You mentioned it, right? Mercy Village Group Home.”

Zoey is silent for a moment. “Cara, why are you asking about this?” There’s a mumble, and I know Gray is listening now. “Where have you heard that name?”

“Oh, just ... just something my dad said,” Cara hedges.

It’s clear Zoey and Gray believe her, but they must wonder how he’s involved.

So do I, but Cara is in trouble, big trouble, if General knows she’s overheard something about the home or is looking into it. She’s as good as dead. I have to end this now. If her dad is involved, it’s either someone close to him or someone who is blackmailing him since he’s richer than God. I can’t figure out his place in this, but I need to and fast to keep her safe.

As soon as they finish their call, I dial Gray. “I’ll handle it.”

“How did you—”

“Don’t ask stupid questions.” I huff. “I’ve got this, okay? You focus on your current mission. General and Cara are mine.”

“Are you sure?” He hesitates as I hear Zoey demanding to know what we are talking about. “Zoey will gut you.”

“She can try.” I grin when I hear her yell in the background. “Have fun.”

He groans wistfully. “Oh, I will.”

I hang up before Zoey can tell me off and recline in my chair. I have no choice. I have to tell Cara who I am. I have to keep her safe, and to do so, I need to know what she knows.

I have to open my girl to the darkness in this world and hope that she’ll still want me when she finds out I’m a killer.

Fuck.



I wait until nightfall and climb through her window like normal. She's waiting tonight, and I ache at the look in her eyes. She won't let me leave tonight without getting some answers.

First, I move closer, and before she can speak, I kiss her hard.

I need to in case she doesn't ever let me again. When I pull back, her eyes are closed and her lips are parted. "I missed you, princess."

"I missed you too," she murmurs and then shakes her head. "We need to talk."

"I know." I sit by her side, watching her. She hesitates, wringing her hands in her lap, so I still them. "You have questions, so ask, Cara. I will never lie to you."

"I—How do you get in the house?" she demands. It wasn't what I was expecting, so I grin.

"Easy. I hacked the cameras so they never see me, I deactivated the alarm on your window, and the guards are easy to slip past." I shrug.

She gapes at me. "No, they aren't ... Hale, who are you?"

Taking her hands, I slip to my knees before her, pleading with her to understand. "Someone who will never hurt you. You need to know that, okay?"

She nods but continues to watch me.

"I'm the man you call when you want things ... fixed. When you want things to disappear. You're not dumb, Cara. I know you've guessed that Gray is dangerous." She hesitates but nods. "Well, so am I. We work together for the same people. We were both in the service together, but my specialties were always ... a little more refined. I was the person they called when no one else could get it done. When I left, I went to a company that allowed me that same freedom."

“Do you kill people?” she demands.

“Yes,” I respond without hesitation.

She swallows. “Bad people?”

“Yes,” I admit without shame. “The worst.” Gray can tell her himself if he wants, but tonight is about us.

“Okay.” She blows out a breath.

“Okay?” I hesitate.

She smiles as she leans in and kisses me. “I always knew there was something about you, Hale. I’m not dumb, and I trust you, so yes, okay. I’m sure I’ll have more questions later, but honestly, it’s a lot and I’m still hungover.”

I chuckle as I sit next to her and rub her no doubt aching head. “Poor princess.” She pouts adorably, and I pull her into my arms. “Princess, I need to ask you something.”

“What?” she replies instantly.

“You told Zoey today that your dad mentioned a kids home.”

She stiffens before pulling away. “How do you know about that?” she demands.

It’s probably not a good idea to admit that I bugged her. “Gray overheard. I need to know what you know, Cara.”

Getting up, she watches me as she starts to pace. “Why? Why do you want to know?” She stops and spins to me. “Was this ... all of this”—she gestures between us—“to get to my father?”

“No, never.” I leap to my feet, taking her hands. “I didn’t give a fuck about your father, and I still don’t. All I care about is you, Cara, and keeping you safe. I need you to trust me, princess, please.” I kiss her softly. “Trust me.”

“I do,” she admits, softening. “But, Hale, what is so important about this group home?”

“Everything. It’s the key to everything, Cara, but it could also get you killed. Baby, trust me, I can’t protect you if you

don't tell me everything.”

“Then I guess we better sit down. It seems we have a lot to talk about.”

I hate the distance in her voice and the sadness in her gaze, as if she's lost and all alone. She couldn't be further from the truth. I know my girl's world is crashing and crumbling around her right now, but I will always be there to pick up the pieces.

She will never be alone, not ever again.

CHAPTER 18

Cara



I wait for Hale to sit down on the edge of my bed before taking a seat next to him.

Honestly, I'm still reeling from his confession about not being a good man, but can I say I'm really all that surprised?

I heard it in his voice when he said he would kill for me. The truth was always there, I just refused to acknowledge it, needing to keep a bit of mystery between us before having to face the harsh facts of who the man I had fallen in love with truly is.

Right now, as his brown eyes stare into mine, I know his focus isn't on us, but on the man I call Father. I hate that even in this relationship, my father somehow manages to wriggle himself into it. I believed Hale when he said that my father had nothing to do with him approaching me. I mean, let's face it. Most men who want to use me to get close to my father use different tactics to get their way. They try to woo me. Hale did no such thing. Like a beautiful nightmare, he came through my window and stole my virginity in the most brutish of ways. None of that screams that he was trying to impress my father.

"Cara, baby. Start talking. I need to know exactly what you know about Mercy Village," he says patiently, but I still hear the fear in his voice.

My forehead bunches in apprehension at the sound. I know Hale well enough to recognize that he's not the type of man to scare easily. In fact, I would have placed my hands on an open

flame and sworn to the contrary, completely convinced that there is nothing in this world that scares him.

But he is.

And all because of the link between Mercy Village and my father.

Why?

It's my need to have that question answered that has me divulging exactly what happened earlier.

"I snuck into his office today," I admit. "I needed to know exactly how you were always able to come in and out of my house without being detected, and I thought the cameras all throughout the house would give me a clue as to how."

"I would rather you asked me outright than go snooping," he reprimands on an exaggerated exhale. When I press my lips together at the interruption, he's smart enough to keep his beautiful mouth shut, grabbing my hand in his and gently stroking it—his silent way of saying he won't interrupt me again.

"As I was saying." I squeeze his hand in mine. "I remembered that my father kept a laptop in his office with surveillance videos he liked to go through just to make sure his security team wasn't dropping the ball. I searched the whole room and found a locked drawer in his desk, so ... I picked the lock."

"You picked it?" Hale interjects with a chuckle.

"Yes, I picked it. You sound surprised." I frown.

"More like impressed, princess," he replies with pride in his voice. "You really are a box of surprises, aren't you?" he adds, tapping the tip of my nose tenderly.

My dormant butterflies begin to flap their wings in my belly, loving the pride in his tone.

"Zoey taught me once when we were in high school, and it stuck with me," I admit with a smile.

He laughs. "Ah, I knew the hellcat had to be behind this."

“Are you not going to agree with my father that she’s a bad influence on me?”

Hale’s expression morphs from delighted to downright lethal.

“Your father is a dick. He should be so lucky to have friends like the one you have in Zoey.”

My heart swoons further at him defending my friend.

In that very moment, I realize that I don’t care if he truly is a villain. He’s the best man I know, and I love him anyway. Maybe even more so because of it.

“Okay, so you picked the lock. What happened next?” he prompts.

I nod, pushing my romantic notions to the side, knowing that this conversation is serious. For whatever reason, I feel the significance in my bones.

“I found the laptop I was looking for in the drawer, but I also found a file. A thick one,” I tell him sheepishly.

“Did you look inside it?” he urges.

I nod as I glance away for a second. “It was weird. It had all these pictures of kids who were at Mercy Village and information on them, like where they were from and if they had any living family that were a part of their lives. The ones that didn’t had a red circle around their names. I’m not sure what that means, but it felt macabre... almost as if my father circled the names of kids who could drop off the face of the earth and no one would be the wiser for it.”

Hale’s expression looks even more deadly now, and I know I must be right, but why? What is it about these kids that has my father so interested? I just don’t get it.

“What else?” he demands, his voice dark, and if it were aimed at me, I might be terrified, but I know Hale would never hurt me. Everyone else? I’m not so sure.

“Honestly, I was so worried that I was going to get caught in his office that I just put the file back and rushed out of there,” I mutter.

“So you didn’t look at his computer?”

I shake my head. “I didn’t think I’d have enough time to.”

When he wraps his arm around me and pulls me closer to him, I realize that my shoulders had been shaking.

“I know how scary that must have been for you, princess,” he coos, pressing a kiss to the top of my head. “I’m so proud of you that you even tried.”

I start to relax in his embrace, but then I recall the rushed conversation I overheard my father have on the phone in his office. Hale instantly feels my body go rigid and pulls away just so he can look at my face.

“What is it, Cara? What aren’t you telling me?” His eyes narrow, and I can’t help the pulse of desire that flows through me. It’s the same tone he uses when he commands me to suck his cock or come for him.

I chew on my bottom lip. “A few weeks ago, I overheard him say something on the phone that made my blood crawl. At the time, I just pushed the thought away, thinking I must have imagined the whole thing, but now I’m not so sure.”

“What did you hear?” When I hesitate, he cups my face in his open palms, reminding me that I’m safe in his hands. “No harm will come to you, princess. Anyone who even dares to touch a hair on your head is as good as dead.”

There it is again, the monster that has always been in him that I refused to acknowledge.

“How many people have you killed?” I ask instead. “Ten? Twenty? A hundred? How many?”

His soft gaze never leaves mine as he confesses his sins to me. “Too many to keep count.”

I swallow the lump in my throat.

“But that’s not all. I’ve ruined more lives than I’ve stolen, Cara. Death was a mercy that I didn’t give all my victims. Do you understand?”

“How? How did you ruin them?” I ask, not really grasping what he means by that.

He lets out another sigh, devastated that he has to explain just how corrupt his soul really is. “I have a skill that the company I work for sees as one of my best assets. I’m able to find a person’s weakness and exploit it, so much so that they beg for death once I’m done with them, welcoming the grim reaper just to take the pain and shame away. Sometimes they get lucky, and the company sends men like my boy Gray to finish them once and for all. Sometimes they aren’t so lucky.”

There is a pregnant pause just long enough for me to process what he just confessed. If he’s telling me the truth, then I’ve fallen in love with a person who doesn’t bat an eye at killing someone but who also makes his targets yearn for death as a welcoming savior from the misery he’s caused them.

I swallow dryly and ask the question that immediately pops into my head. “Is that what you’re going to do with my father?”

Hale doesn’t answer me right away, but his silence is all the answer I really need.

I’m about to share the conversation I overheard when Hale surprises me by kissing my temple and springing to his feet.

“You’re leaving?” I ask, baffled that he could just get up and leave in the middle of a conversation that just turned my world on its axis.

“Where is your father now?” he asks instead.

I shake my head and shrug. “I have no idea. He doesn’t tell me anything.”

“But he’s not home?” He arches a brow.

“No.” I lick my dry lips and nod.

“Good,” he retorts, heading toward the window.

I fly out of my seat and grab his wrist. “Where are you going?”

He turns around to face me, deadly resolve etched onto every feature of his face.

“I’m going to sneak into your father’s office and get to the bottom of this.” He says it in such a simple tone, I want to smack him upside the head.

“What?” I whisper yell. “But the guards...”

Hale just smiles smugly at me. “Don’t worry your pretty little head about that. I can take care of myself.”

Fearing that his ego will be the death of him, I shake my head and pull him back on top of the bed. “No. I’ll do it. I’ll go.”

His cocky smirk falls from his face. “Not a chance. I’m not going to place you in harm’s way. That’s just not happening.”

“But you’re okay with letting me throw you to the wolves? That’s not happening.” I scowl at him.

Hale’s dark eyes soften suddenly, and his thumb glides across the seam of my lips.

“I didn’t realize you were so protective of me. Why do you think that is, little one?” His voice is a lethal weapon seeking its home.

Shit.

Shit.

Shit.

He did hear me say I love him.

Hale surprises me yet again when his head falls back with a cackle.

“It’s okay, princess. We can put a pin in that conversation for when things aren’t so fucked. I don’t want the first time for us to say those words to be tainted by the shadow of your fucking father.”

I let out the pent-up breath that had been strangled inside my lungs. “Then you’ll stay?” I plead in earnest, but when I

see a smidge of sadness coating his gorgeous chestnut eyes, I know he won't let this go. Not tonight.

"I have to know what other secrets he has locked away in his office, little one."

"Why?" I almost sob. "Why do you need to know so much?"

"Because like you and Zoey, I'm also loyal to my friend. My brother needs my help, and I promised him."

My brows pull together in both curiosity and confusion.

"You have a brother?" I ask, baffled since he never mentioned his family before.

Hale shakes his head. "No," he replies, the word causing him suffering. "But I have the next best thing to one, and although I'll never admit it to the bastard, he's the only family I have. I promised I'd chase the devil away from him, and that's what I intend to do, and if I'm right, your father is the link to discovering who that person is."

He's talking in code, and as hard as I try, I'm unable to decipher it. Still, if getting into my father's office is that important to him, then the only way I see that happening is with my help.

"I'm helping, Hale. You can either accept my help or be pissed off about it. Either way, this is happening." I sit up straighter, glaring at him.

"Jesus, fuck," he grumbles. "You're not going to let this go, are you?"

"Nope." I cross my arms over my chest.

When he sees that I'm dead serious, he gives me a clipped nod. "I need to get my hands on that computer. Can you get that for me?"

"Consider it done." I smile, going to the tips of my toes to plant a kiss on him. I turn my back to him and throw him a wink over my shoulder before I step out of my room, making sure to close the door behind me.

One of my guards is already asleep, while the other stares at me suspiciously.

“Can’t sleep. Going to make myself some chamomile tea,” I explain, hating that I have to give my jailers an explanation about my comings and goings in my own house.

Without sticking around for him to say anything in return, I strut down the long corridor and then rush downstairs the minute no eyes are on me. I’m not exactly sure how I’m supposed to bring my father’s laptop back to my room without the wide-awake guard noticing the contraband, but hopefully I’ll think of something.

Just as I’m walking toward my father’s office, I see that his door has been left ajar.

Fuck.

Did he come home without me knowing?

Damn it. Now how am I going to get the damn thing for Hale?

I square my shoulders, prepared to face my father, and push the door open. When I see my boyfriend already sitting at his desk, pulling out said computer from the bottom drawer, I nearly freak out.

“Took you long enough, princess,” he teases without even looking up.

I shut the door as fast as I can before turning my attention back to Hale.

“How the hell did you get here? I just left you upstairs not even a few minutes ago.”

“Baby.” He smiles at me with that cocky grin that has my lower belly swooning. “I’m really good at my job. Like, very good.”

“I see that your big ego isn’t only reserved for the bedroom.” I roll my eyes, walking toward him.

He widens his legs and pulls me into his lap. Even though the situation doesn’t call for it, I let out a giggle with how,

even now, Hale needs to erase any distance between us.

“Okay, princess. Watch and learn from the master.” He chuckles, kissing the side of my neck as he opens the laptop.

I stay silent and still as he starts doing something to the computer. A black box pops up, and he writes code into it. My heart plummets to my stomach when I realize my father’s computer is password protected. How will we ever know what my father is up to if we can’t get inside it?

Just as the troubling thought comes to me, however, Hale grins widely as the blue screen comes to life.

“Oh my god! We’re in!” I shout with glee, only to clasp my hands over my mouth when it dawns on me that this little espionage game we are playing will go downhill fast if someone finds us both inside my father’s office.

“Don’t fret, love. This room is soundproof too. No one can hear us.” The wicked promise in his voice has me wiggling on his lap.

My forehead creases as I remember my dad’s phone call, but then I recall that in his rush to pick up the call, he had left the door open, hence why I could listen in on him.

I watch Hale type at lightning speed, going through every folder on the laptop that is also password protected.

Why does my father need firewalls to protect his things?

He’s the governor of the city of New York, Cara, that’s why, I tell myself.

There is a part of me that is making up loads of excuses for his awkward behavior. My father has always been a cruel man, and maybe I should feel guilty for spying on him like this, but I don’t. If he’s gotten himself into some sort of trouble, then it’s a good thing Hale is on it. He’ll find a way to get him out of it if he can.

Or maybe the true villain in this story has always been him.

A cold shiver runs down my back as I rethink this whole thing. Maybe what they say about ignorance being bliss is

spot-on. Maybe I shouldn't be looking for demons in the night if I can prevent them from appearing. Maybe I should just tell Hale that some things are best not learned for our own sakes. All those words of caution remain lodged in my throat, however, unable to come out.

I need to know.

Just as the affirmation embeds itself in my heart, Hale cracks open each and every folder locked inside my father's laptop. Terror claws my heart as I see one folder with the name Mercy Village Group Home.

That isn't the only one there though.

Peterson's Youth Home in Seattle.

Saint Jude's Orphanage in Boston.

Mark Twain's Group Home in Detroit.

The list goes on and on, and by my count, there are more than thirty group homes or orphanages listed across the whole country.

What do they mean?

Hale opens the file from Mercy Village, which has the same documents I found just earlier today. He then proceeds to open the others, all of them holding similar files on children with no family to speak of, their names highlighted in red. When he opens a folder from a group home in Washington D.C. and a flash of a news article appears, I tell him to stop.

"What is it, Cara?" he asks as I skim the article in question.

Grace Montgomery was found dead earlier this morning in the All Saints Home for Girls. As per the autopsy report, the thirteen-year-old orphan had been brutally beaten to death. The medical examiner has also added to the report that Grace had other older wounds, proving that the abuse was not a one-time event. Social services placed Grace in the home just ten weeks prior, after her mother died of an overdose. Her social services officer, Kate Donohoe, went on record to say, "She was a quiet girl who never made any waves. I'm still in shock

over who could have possibly done this.” Police are questioning and investigating the other girls in the home, saying that this might have been bullying taken to a tragic extreme. The police have not made any arrests at this time.

My blood turns cold when I look at the date, which is just a day after I heard my father tell someone to deal with a dead whore.

“He called her a whore,” I stammer, feeling like I’m about to faint. “He called her a whore, but she was just a scared little girl. She was just a girl.” I begin to sob, my whole body shaking.

“Cara,” Hale murmurs, not understanding what I’m saying.

I swing my arms around his strong shoulders, crying into the crook of his neck.

“It was him,” I cry out inconsolably. “He killed her. He killed this little girl. I heard him ... I heard him ... I heard him tell someone to deal with her. He called her a whore. A whore. A small little girl. He called her that and then told someone to deal with her dead body. Oh my god, Hale! Oh my god.”

Hale swings my legs across his, cradling me in his embrace. He lifts my chin as tears fall madly down my cheeks.

“You think your father did this?” he asks.

I nod.

“I know he did. I heard him, Hale. I heard him on the phone. He said, ‘Take care of the dead whore.’ I heard him.” I keep crying. “Hale ... why does my father have all these folders in his private computer? What does this all mean? Are there more girls like Grace? Is that what he does? Is he the devil you were talking about earlier? Is he?” I cry, trembling profusely.

My true love stares at me like he wishes he could lie to me, but in the end, he opts for the truth.

“I’m not sure yet, but ... Oh fuck, princess, I think he’s the one I’ve been looking for all along.”

“The devil?” I sob.

“No, sweet girl. Much worse. He’s called the General.”

CHAPTER 19

Cara



“England? The fucker is sending you to England? Why?” Hale blurts out, enraged after I told him of my father’s plans for me.

“Keep your voice down,” I plead, covering his naked body with mine and pressing my hands against his lips while staring at my bedroom door, worried that the guards heard him.

Once I’ve verified that no one is going to barge into my room, Hale carefully peels my fingers off his mouth.

“Cara, you and I both know that this room is soundproof, so quit stalling. Tell me why the hell you have to go to London.” His expression is furious, and his hands grip me like he can keep me with him by sheer force alone.

I chew on my bottom lip, hating the fact that I’m going to have to leave him for the week, especially after what we learned about my father a few days ago.

“I don’t know if I ever told you this, but my mom was English. Before she died, she left me a trust and an estate there. Usually, my father is the one who travels to London to oversee everything, but last night, he told me that since I’m legally an adult now, I should start taking a more active role in regard to my own inheritance.”

His tense muscles relax, but the sadness in his eyes never truly disappears.

“And he just suddenly remembered that you had to do this now?” he questions suspiciously.

“With school over for the year, summer break is the perfect time for me to go. Don’t you think?”

“For him, maybe. Not for me,” he mumbles under his breath.

“It will only be a week,” I say softly, running my fingers up and down his strong jaw. “I’ll be back before you know it. You won’t even miss me.”

“Not possible. I miss you every time I leave this room. I miss you every time I even close my fucking eyes to sleep even when you’re lying right next to me,” he confesses, making me preen under his tender words. Hale grows quiet for a second, only for the mischievous sparkle I know all too well to start glimmering in his dark eyes.

“What’s that look all about?” I giggle as he runs his hands up and down my naked back, sending shivers of want down my spine.

The minute he stepped into my room, I jumped his bones, but with Hale, I always know that I’m in for seconds.

And thirds ...

And fourths ...

“I was just thinking,” he purrs, knowing exactly where my head is at when I start rubbing my core against his hard length. “What if you told your prick of a father that you want to spend a whole month in London instead? Better yet, tell him that you are going to spend your summer vacation traveling Europe.”

I stop rubbing against him the moment the words slip out of his mouth. “First, you got upset that you were going to be without me for a whole week, and now you want me to stay away for the whole summer?” I ask, saddened that he’s okay with spending so much time apart.

“No, princess. That’s not what I was trying to say. In fact, I was thinking you could do your thing in London and then come back as fast as you can, but instead of coming here to this prison of a penthouse, you can spend the summer with me instead.”

“With you?” I whisper.

“Hmm. Your asshole of a father would think you were living it up in Europe, when in fact you’d be right here under his nose the entire time, shacking up with me, in my house, where I can keep you safe and on my cock at all times. Call it a trial run.”

“A trial run for what?” I stammer, completely taken aback by his request.

“A trial run for the rest of our lives. Or did you think I’d be okay with me sneaking into your bedroom forever?” He smirks, like the mention of forever is expected.

“Honestly, I haven’t thought much about the future like that,” I confess on bated breath.

“The future or *our* future?”

“Both, I guess. It all feels so intangible for me. Like a hazy fog I can’t quite grasp in my hands. It all feels too far away, especially with everything going on,” I admit, looking away.

“Well, it’s coming, baby, whether you see it happening or not.” He drags my gaze back to him.

“Is it though?” I mumble sadly.

His forehead wrinkles, showing he’s visibly perturbed by my reply.

“Can I think about it?” I ask, not wanting to turn him down and watch the disappointment tarnish his beautiful face.

Hale nods, never one to force something on me that I’m not ready to give. It’s a wonder how this man, in such a short span of time, knows my mind and soul better than I do sometimes. He knows just exactly how far he can push me and when I’m at my limit, and lately, that limit has been pushed to the brink.

Maybe his request isn’t as far-fetched as I assumed. I’d love nothing more than to spend both day and night with Hale. It’s just the nagging suspicion that my father would ultimately find out that has me second-guessing all of it and not accepting his offer right off the bat.

Knowing what I know now about my father, or General, as Hale called him, I realize that if he were to find out about Hale and me, he would take him away from me. I shudder at the thought because when I would have previously assumed my father would just blackmail Hale into leaving me alone, now I know he would probably have Hale killed.

Beaten to death like that poor little girl.

I'd die before I let that happen.

"When do you have to go?" Hale asks, pulling me from my pensive state.

"My flight leaves tomorrow morning," I admit sullenly.

"Wow. When the fucker wants you gone, he doesn't play around, does he?" he says with a snarl.

"No, I guess not." Just as his words start to sink in, I look him in the eye to ask him what he meant by that.

"What do you think my father is up to? Do you think it's because he wants me gone from this house?"

"Yes," he says with conviction.

"Why do you think so?" I question curiously.

"There's only one way to find out, and that would be to spy on the bastard. Unfortunately, with you gone, he's taken that option away from me. I have eyes on him on the streets, but in here, in this house, he's protected. There won't be much intel I can collect if he locks himself away in this fortress with you gone," he explains, sounding pissed.

"So you think he's sending me away because something is going to take place here? In this house?"

"I have no doubt about it. If I had a little more time, I could have found someone to infiltrate this damn place, maybe one of the kitchen staff. As it is, the people working for your father are loyal to him and won't turn on him easily."

My mind immediately goes to Magda, and I know that he's right. Anyone who works here goes through her severe

inspection. I've seen her fire people for even uttering a word against my father in her presence.

“What about cameras? Can you install those?” I ask, trying to come up with a way to discover just exactly what my father is up to.

Hale shakes his head.

“Your father is a paranoid fuck who has his guards sweeping the house twice a day for bugs. They'd find my cameras easily enough, and then that would tip him off that someone wanted to spy on him.”

My lips turn into a frown. “I'm sorry I'm making this harder for you than it needs to be.”

“The only thing you're making hard is my dick with that fucking cute pout on those lips,” he teases lightheartedly, but I can tell he's annoyed that my father will be able to do God knows what.

“Have you told your *brother* about what we found the other day? About my dad being this so-called General?” I find myself asking.

Hale's teasing smile falls from his face. “Not yet.”

“How come?”

“Because I don't want to get his hopes up. When I tell him, I have to be a hundred percent sure your father is the man we've been searching for all along.”

“Does that mean you're not? That somehow my father is innocent?” I ask, naïve hope tainting my every word.

“Princess, your father is a bad man. I don't have to be a hundred percent sure to know that. Maybe it's a good thing he's sending you away. I'll sleep better knowing you're on a different continent than him,” he states solemnly. “Speaking of which, who's driving you to the airport? Your dad's chauffeur?” he asks.

I shake my head. “I'll just hail a cab.”

His hands fall to my ass and squeeze each cheek. “How about I drive you? I want to spend as much time with my girl as I can, since she’s leaving me and all.”

“I’m not leaving you.” I giggle, slapping his broad chest.

“Maybe not now,” he whispers under his breath, making my heart squeeze into a pulp.

“Never. I’ll never leave you,” I state, holding his face in my hands. “I’ll never leave you, Hale. I promise.”

The vulnerability in his eyes is my undoing. I lean down and kiss him. His lips are warm and soft, such a contrast to the hard body underneath me. He moans into my mouth as his tongue sweeps over my bottom lip before piercing it with his teeth. I gasp in delight, running my hand down between us until I have a full grip on his cock. He moans louder as I angle the tip right at my center. My love doesn’t hesitate and takes my offering, sinking his cock to the hilt. I rise up from him, placing my hands on his chest, my head falling back as I ride him. Soft wails leave me as his hands travel up and down the sides of my body only to find purchase on my breasts, squeezing them both to the point of pain.

It’s always like this between us—hungry, passionate, and a little bit insane.

We’re always so desperate, as if we’re both scared that, one day, this will all fall from our grasp and disappear, but I meant what I said—I’ll never leave Hale. They would have to pry my cold, dead hands off him before I would ever willingly let him go. He’s become the only good thing I look forward to in my life. No, scratch that. He is my life. Hale is the reason I get up in the morning. His love is the greatest gift I’ve ever encountered, and I intend to keep him for the rest of my days.

Just as I think this, that nagging feeling begins to creep up at the back of my head again, telling me such love and peace could never be mine.

My father will taint this somehow and steal my happily ever after with my villain, casting me back to the shadows of my cold prison cell.

I can't let that happen.

I won't.

I need to protect Hale from my father's wrath.

It's the only way to ensure his safety.



The next day, after I pack my bags for my trip, I kiss Hale by the window and tell him I'll see him in a few, but once I walk downstairs and see my father's luggage on the floor next to the door, I freeze in place.

"Change of plans," my father says behind me. "I've decided to go with you to London."

"You have?" I croak out, surprised that he's decided to come with me.

"Yes. My plans have fallen through, so as I see it, a week out of this city will do me good. Besides, what better way to spend a week off than with my only daughter?"

The statement should come off as endearing, but all it does is spread goosebumps all over my entire body.

"If you're coming because you think I'm not up to par for dealing with things, then I can assure you that I am well equipped to handle everything," I say with a fake smile.

"I'm well aware of your capabilities, but I would feel better knowing I'll be there in case you reach your limits." His eyes narrow, warning me to stop talking back.

My forced smile hurts my cheeks as I nod, and my father's trusted bodyguards pick up our bags. We ride the elevator in complete silence, and when the doors finally spring open, I hasten outside, scanning the street for Hale. Just as my father's town car arrives, I lock eyes with my love, who is lethally staring at the man ushering me inside the car.

My father shoves me in before sliding in next to me, and just as the car takes off, I stare at the love of my life, looking

like a man possessed, across the street.

“I’m sorry,” I mouth discreetly, but to my chagrin, he disappears from my view, the city landscape replacing the image of the man who holds my heart.

He’s gone, and now I’m trapped with a very real monster.

One who’s watching me like he can’t wait for me to slip up.

CHAPTER 20

Hale



I watched my girl drive away from me, and there was nothing I could do.

I tell myself I'll never let that happen again. I don't know what changed her father's mind, but it's nothing good, and despite my plans to stay and work on the case, I find myself chartering a private jet with a friend who owes me a favor. Cara and her father's own private jet is only an hour or so ahead of me. I barely speak on the flight, hating that she's out of my sight and reach.

Who knows what he's doing to her right now? It drives me crazy, so instead I channel all my worry into working. I search for bookings in his name, or past bookings, so I can see where they are going. Once I have the hotel—the idiot paid by credit card—I drop them an email requesting an adjoining suite. Her father booked himself the penthouse but arranged for a suite on a different floor for her. Whatever he's up to, he doesn't want her to know.

It benefits me, however, because I can be close to her, but it also leaves me wondering why he's going to London.

Why now?

Does he know I'm on to him? Does he suspect, or does he have similarly dubious dealings in London as he does in America? I need to know, so for the rest of the flight, I rip apart her father's life, collecting it all.

This is more than revenge now, and this is more than protecting Gray.

This is about saving the love of my life from her own father.



The hotel is fucking swanky, but I don't expect anything else from him. I know by the time I've checked in that they are already in their rooms. I smile politely at the woman behind the desk, and she flushes. "I-I'll be here all night if you need anything," she flirts.

"No, thank you, I don't think my future wife would appreciate that, and she's the only one I need." I grin, and she smiles back with a nod.

Whistling, I take the elevator to my floor and unlock the room. I scan it for cameras or bugs, as my training dictates, before putting my bags down on the sofa in the sitting room and walking over to the adjoining door, knowing my girl is behind it.

It's been eight hours since I laid eyes on her, which is far too long for me, so I drop to my knees in desperation, ready to end the distance.

I pick the lock easily enough and slide into her room on quiet feet. The lights are on, and her bags are unpacked. She is sitting at a dressing table, staring sadly at her own reflection, but she still takes my breath away. I step closer, appearing behind her in the mirror, and for a moment, she just blinks, as if she can't believe I'm really here.

As if I would ever let my girl go. Even for a second.

"Hale," she whispers, sitting up and spinning around. Grabbing her throat, I slam her back against the wall and push my knee between her legs. I need to feel her, to taste her, to know she's okay. She's only been out of my sight for a few hours, and I'm fucking feral.

Despite what she thinks of the future, or doesn't, she's stuck with me.

I'm never letting her go. I couldn't even if she begged.

She's mine.

"Hello, princess. You didn't really think I'd let you out of my sight, did you?" I purr, watching her eyes blow with lust and relief. Without coercion, she leans into me, rocking into my thigh like the good girl she is. "What kind of stalker would that make me?" I whisper as I lean in, nipping her lip until she opens on a moan, and I sweep my tongue in, destroying whatever she was going to say.

It's her and me; it always has been. She's my fucking everything, and she better get that, because she's never getting away from me.

"Fuck, I missed you," I growl against her mouth.

"It's only been a few hours," she replies, and the sadness I saw earlier completely disappears as my girl lights up once more. The fact that it's due to me makes my heart swell and my dick hard.

"Too fucking long," I murmur as I tilt her head back and kiss her again, letting her taste my desperation, love, and fear.

She whimpers and grips my shoulders, digging her nails into my ten-thousand-dollar suit. She could fucking cut it to ribbons and I would thank her. Instead, I let her rip it from me as she grabs my shirt and yanks it up, running her hands under and across my abs. The softness of her touch drives me mad, branding me even as I grip her flimsy fucking dress and yank it up so I can get to her sweet cunt.

"Show Daddy how much you missed him," I murmur into her mouth as I step back and slowly unbutton my shirt. She licks her rosy lips, her dress gathered up to expose lacy panties. Fuck, she's magnificent. I stop for a moment and just stare at her, barely believing a bastard like me gets her forever, then I find my voice, even if it's hoarse. "Do not make me ask again."

With my eyes on her, I strip off my tie and shirt, winding the tie around my knuckles as she watches.

She drags her hands up her silken thighs before gripping her panties and pulling them down as she leans back, letting

me see her pretty wet pussy. “So much,” she whispers. “I missed you so much.”

“Is that so?” I prowl toward her and wrap the tie around her neck, tightening it like a leash, and she gasps, arching up, but doesn’t fight it as I tighten the hold on her throat.

“You look good all tied up for me, so sweet and innocent, like when I first took you. Your tears made me come so fucking hard, and seeing you bleed your innocence on my cock? You stained my fucking soul that night, baby.” I grip her pussy as she rolls her hips. “How about we go back to that for one night? No worries, no father, and no thoughts of the future. Just us—a masked stranger and the sweet innocent girl he’s going to defile.”

The moan she lets out is fucking pornographic, and I know my girl is into it.

“Words, princess, use your words,” I mock.

“Please, yes,” she begs, winding her hips. “Fuck me, Hale, hunt me and fuck me.”

Has there ever been such a sweet plea?

Helpless to resist anything my girl wants, I step back once more and run my eyes over her. “Get undressed and on the bed, baby, like you are sleeping.”

I see the excitement in her eyes as she hurries to get undressed, ripping her clothes off, and it’s the sexiest fucking strip tease I’ve ever seen. I watch her with my tongue caught between my teeth before hurrying to my room and slipping on my mask—the one she took off me.

This time, I made an alteration. Stepping back into her room, I palm my cock as I flick off the lights. Her excited squeal makes me grin, and her breathing is loud as I make her wait. I drag it out, almost tasting her anticipation in the air.

“I can taste your need,” I whisper, unable to help myself as I step into the bedroom. She’s lying facedown on the bed with her pretty fucking ass on display, the sheet twisted between her legs. Her hands are fisting the sheets, and her eyes are squeezed shut. If it wasn’t for the rapid rise and fall of her

back, I'd think she was sleeping. Licking my lips, I drag my cock through my hand as I watch her before stepping closer.

I slide my finger up her back, and I feel her shiver from my touch. "Wake up," I command, my voice dark. Turning my hand over, I drag my knuckle down to her ass and grip it as she gasps.

She turns, and her eyes widen. "Who are you?" she demands, playing along, reaching for the sheet. I grip it and rip it away, refusing to let her cover up the masterpiece that is her body.

"Nobody, but I saw you in the lobby, and I knew I had to have you," I purr.

She swallows, watching me before she dives to the left. Laughing, I grab her and slam her back to the bed, ripping her legs open as she kicks and screams.

Grabbing the tie around her throat, I shove it into her mouth. "Shh, we wouldn't want anyone to stop us, would we?"

Heaving below me, she kicks and tries to fight me off, and I let her struggle before lying down on her and letting her feel my strength. She whimpers and stops, and then I get to my knees, running my eyes over her body like it's the first time. Even after all this time, I can't get over how fucking perfect she is.

"Fuck, look at these big, perfect tits." I grab them and squeeze as she cries and kicks. "Fucking obscene. I could see them through your pretty dress, and your nipples were begging to be sucked." Leaning down, I do just that, even as she fights. "Does that feel good? Do you like knowing that I was thinking of sucking on these while you smiled and flirted in the lobby?"

She shakes her head, tears squeezing from her eyes, and I drag my knuckles down her quivering belly to cup her pretty pussy, feeling her dripping for me.

"I think you did. I think you hoped I was watching and that I would break into your room and fuck this pretty little pussy. You hoped I would ruin you."

“Please,” she mumbles around the gag.

“Oh, you’ll beg me to fuck you,” I offer as I bury my face between her breasts, licking and sucking until her hips lift and she grinds into my hand, even as she pretends to fight. Chuckling, I lean back and turn her over. I drag her ass into the air and slap it hard, making her cry out. “You scream and draw attention, and I’ll kill them while I keep fucking you.”

She jerks, but her pretty pussy clenches as I watch. She likes that idea. I’ll remember that for the future. Leaning down, I run my nose down her cunt, inhaling her musky scent. “Fuck, look at this pretty little pussy. It’s so perfect and pink, begging for a big cock to fill it. If you’re a good girl and come when I say so, I’ll let you ride mine, but if you’re naughty, I’ll grab that remote control next to you and fuck you with it instead until you come all over it.”

She whines and pushes back, making me grin. My girl loves our dirty games.

“Or maybe you want that? Maybe you want me to rape you with it and then take your pretty pussy so the whole floor will know how much you love me sneaking in here and fucking you.”

Her clit throbs against me as I nudge it with my nose and then drag my lips across it. The whimper she lets out makes my cock jerk. Groaning, I slide my tongue through the mouth hole I made in the mask and lick her pussy. “You taste so good, little one, all sweet and innocent even as you let a masked man fuck you.”

“Please.” She writhes and pushes back.

Gripping her hips, I seal my mouth around her clit and suck until she screams, almost coming, so I pull back and press my face to her pussy, letting her feel the mask.

“That’s it. Ride it and wet the mask fucking through,” I command, gripping her hips and dragging her back so she grinds against the material and my mouth. “Good girl, take what you need.” I help her rock until she comes with a scream, gushing across the mask. I grip her tighter, seal my lips to her

cunt, and suck, tasting every inch of her and making her cry out again. I lick and suck, sliding two fingers into her as I devour her.

She cries out, the sound muffled and manic, as she rides my face.

I make her come so many times, she finally collapses forward, her thighs coated in her cum and the mask sodden with it. I have to grip my cock to calm down.

She pants and shakes below me as I lean over her and grab the remote. Sliding my hand down the rectangular device, I drag it along her pussy, knowing how much she liked the idea. She jerks and lifts her head lazily to see me running it across her wetness. “No, don’t,” she begs, spitting out the tie.

It’s my new fucking favorite one. I’ll wear it every day, teeth marks and all.

“You want this, don’t you?” I reach down and grab her hair, yanking her back up. She cries out, and with a vicious snarl, I slam the control inside of her, forcing her to take it. “Say it. Say you want me to fuck you with it. Tell me you want me to make you come on it, and I’ll be nice.”

“Please, please fuck me with it.”

“Good girl.” I collar her neck, loving how the possessive, controlling touch causes her to throw her head back and widen her thighs. “Good girl,” I purr as I pull the control out and slam it back into her, twisting it so the buttons drag along that spot that makes her scream. I do it over and over until she’s coming on it, and then I pull it from her pulsing pussy and lick it clean before tossing it away.

“My turn,” I tell her. “You’re going to come again right on my dick, and I’m going to pump you with my cum and leave you a mess.”

“Hale,” she whines, the game broken, so I pull off the mask and flip her, lifting her legs over my shoulders before I slam into her.

She cries out, clawing at the bedding as I hammer into her. I need her too much to control myself. She takes it, rolling into

my thrusts even as her head tosses back.

“Good girl, such a good fucking girl. You’re Daddy’s perfect little cum slut, aren’t you?” I growl as I lift her, deepening the angle until she’s a writhing, wet mess below me, and when I pinch her clit, she comes once more, her cunt gripping my cock so hard my balls burst, and I fill her with my release, just like I promised.

Both of us are sweaty and spent when I collapse and pull her into my arms where she belongs.

Forever.



I watch her sleep for a moment, her hand on my chest to hold me, even in rest. She can have me, all of me. I need to ensure she’s safe, so despite how much I hate leaving her, I slip out of the bed and get dressed in the dark. Back in my room, I load my gun and knife into my pockets, straighten my suit, and leave my room to find her bastard of a father.

She thinks I didn’t see the fear in her eyes as they drove away, but I did. She thought she was as good as dead, and that he would kill her or hurt her like he did all those kids.

I will never let that happen.

Never.

It’s far too easy to find him. He’s at the bar, drinking away his fucking sorrows. At this late hour, there is no one else there, not even the bartender, and his guards are in the reception area adjoining the bar. I slip past them unnoticed and onto the stool next to him. It takes him a ridiculously long amount of time to notice me, and when he does, he just stares.

“Who the fuck are you?” he demands, his voice slurring a little but not enough that he won’t remember this.

“The question should be, who are you?” I retort with a raised eyebrow. Reaching over the bar, I pour myself a drink and sit back, holding it as I watch him. He shifts and looks at

his guards. “They can’t move quickly enough to save you, so let’s indulge in conversation, shall we? Otherwise, I might get offended.”

His eyes flare, and he watches me carefully, knowing I’m a threat. I watch him right back.

“What do you want?”

“That is a complicated question,” I remark as I take a sip. “But what do you want ... General?”

He flinches, and I chuckle. “Oh yes, I know who you are. I know all of your dirty little secrets,” I tell him like we are best friends, keeping my smirk in place as he runs through his options. “Pssh, don’t even try to deny it and insult me like that.”

“What do you want?” he repeats, sitting up taller. “Money? Power? Fame? What?”

“There is nothing you could offer me,” I respond, even though I know it’s a lie. He could offer me his daughter. He could offer to walk away from her forever, and I would be tempted to leave him to it if it wasn’t for Gray.

“There is always something. Everyone has a price,” he snaps.

He’s right; they do. Mine is Cara. He will never know that though.

“I just came to talk,” I offer with a friendly smile as I sip my drink.

I don’t need to use my fists or weapons to get my point across. I can taste his fear as I sip my bourbon.

“But if you insist on being rude, so shall I.” I set the drink back on the bar as I look at him. “Know this. I’m watching every fucking move you make, but I’m not alone, and we know exactly who you are. We could destroy you with a snap of our fingers. Not even your friends could save you now, so I suggest you stop hurting your daughter”—he flinches—“and stop hurting others. If I find out you so much as touched Cara, you will beg me for death after I expose you.”

“All of this for *her*?” He barks out a laugh. “She isn’t worth it.”

“Yes, she is,” I reply without hesitation. “She is worth everything. Know that I will be watching. Oh, and I have an old friend of yours who wants to say hi. He’s downright eager to.”

His face pales as I stand.

I can’t hurt him, not really, and if I expose the sick bastard, it will throw Cara into the spotlight. It will ruin her life because she will be dragged through the mud right along with him. I won’t let that happen, but he doesn’t need to know that. No, as much as I want him to go down publicly for all the lives he’s ruined and his evil acts, I will always protect my girl, which means when I finally land the blow to her father, it will be a killing one.

The demon in the dark, the very same one who stole his daughter and loves her ...

He will have his day, and unfortunately for him, that day will be his last.

“Have a good night, General,” I mock, buttoning my suit before I head back upstairs.

To my girl.

To my future.

To my fucking everything.

CHAPTER 21

Cara



I followed him downstairs. How could I not? Hale has so many secrets, and yet he knows all of mine. I didn't expect him to threaten my father, though, and show his cards ... for me.

I plaster my back to the side of the elevators after I see him coming. I am so fucking in love with this man, even if he is bat shit crazy, fucking me like he hates me and then coming down here to warn my father never to touch me again—not that my father ever has. His cruel type of torture is always more mental than physical, yet even if my scars aren't visible on my skin, that doesn't mean they haven't been carved into my bones and flesh.

“Hello, princess. You truly are terrible at this,” Hale remarks as he pops around the corner of the hall, almost making me scream. I smack his chest as he grins and crushes me into the wall.

“You scared me,” I hiss.

“And you were caught stalking me. Don't get me wrong, I'm into it, but I thought you were safely tucked in bed, sleeping,” he murmurs.

“I needed to know what you were doing,” I mutter, crossing my arms even as he lifts me so I'm pressed against his hard cock and starts to roll his hips. My breath hitches as I try to speak and find out the truth.

“Hale—”

He covers my mouth, and then I hear distinctive footsteps, ones I would know anywhere.

Father.

“Find out who that was,” my father snaps at his guards. Hale grins down at me, grinding into my sore pussy even with my father feet away.

There’s a ding and the sound of my father stepping onto the elevator. Moments later, Hale peeks out and then looks back down at me. “He’s rattled; that’s good. Come on.” He drags me into the safety of our room, where I flop onto the bed, feeling him watching me.

“I need to know the truth, Hale,” I mutter. “Who is General? What has my father done?” I sit up. “I deserve to know all of it.”

“I don’t want to taint you with that life,” he murmurs, sitting on the chair opposite my bed. He looks tired.

Sliding from the bed, I step over to him, push him back with a hand on his chest, and straddle his lap. He grabs me instantly, tilting his head to watch me.

“I already have been. No more secrets, I hate them. I’ve had a lifetime of them. Tell me the truth, Hale, or I won’t ever forgive you.”

He startles, a snarl tipping up his lip.

I lean down and show him how serious I am. “I deserve the truth, and if you won’t give me it, then I can’t trust you.”

He searches my gaze before sighing. “It’s not my story to tell.” I go to move, but he hauls me back onto him. “But I will. Anything for you. I wish I could spare you this, princess, but you’re right. You deserve to know.”

I wait, and he holds me closer like he needs it.

“Mercy ... the kids’ home was where Gray was raised.”

I frown, and he smiles sadly.

“He met Zoey there when they were kids. She wasn’t there for long, but he protected her, and when she was gone ...”

Swallowing, he gazes at me. “I never got the full story, but I know enough. They abused him there, my sweet Cara, and he still bears the scars. People paid to do that to him and to other kids. They paid to rape and torture them.” I jerk, and tears fill my eyes. “It destroyed him. It destroyed my friend. Surprisingly enough, it was your best friend who was his saving grace. Zoey brought him back to life, and they have been hunting down the people who did this to him, and kids like him, ever since. There is only one name left on their long list of predators, and that is ...”

“General,” I whisper brokenly. “My father ... He ... He ...” I can’t even say it.

“He raped and tortured children ... Gray.”

I scramble over his lap and to the bathroom before throwing up.

He rubs my back. “You didn’t know.”

Panting, I press my sweaty head to the toilet because I can’t bring myself to look at him. “But I should have. I should have looked—”

“And you would have been dead. Your father is a very powerful, dangerous man, with dark secrets he doesn’t want anyone to find out. He is willing to do anything to protect that, even murder innocent people. You would have just ended up being another victim if you tried to get in his way.”

Lifting my head, I meet his gaze. “Gray must hate me.”

Hale frowns. “He doesn’t know. I haven’t told him yet, but even when he does find out, he won’t hate you. You are not your father, Cara. You are not responsible for his crimes and atrocities.” He crouches before me, wiping my tears away. “Listen to me, princess. You survived. He left you pure and untouched, and that’s enough. I’m going to stop him, but I think I’ll need your help to do it.”

“How?” I croak before I sit up. I feel sick, lost, and alone. “I want to help. I have to.”

“I need you to pretend, just a little longer, to be the good little daughter he expects you to be. As long as you’re not on

his radar, you'll be protected, and I can come up with a plan to take him down once and for all."

"I can't play pretend." I almost gag at the thought of being near him. "I've been playing pretend all my life. I was able to before, but now that I know ... now that I know what he's capable of, I can't. I just can't."

I always knew he was a monster, but this? How could he have gotten away with it for so long?

Poor Gray and all those kids.

God.

"Yes, you can, princess, because it's the only way to save you."

"And who saved them? The kids? Gray?" I snap angrily. "No, no more pretending, Hale. My dad needs to pay. I'm not letting this go just to protect my own neck. I can't."

He searches my gaze and sees the resolve in my eyes. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I've never been surer. We are going to destroy my father. Everyone will know what he has done, and all those kids and Gray will get their revenge. We have to."

"Then we will," he promises. "We'll stop him, princess, you and me."

But what will be left of us when this is over?

CHAPTER 22

Hale



I sit in my car as my eyes linger on her slender frame. She chews on her bottom lip as she listens to whatever Zoey is saying on the other end of the phone.

The minute we touched US soil, Cara made an excuse to her father to leave the house that very night—something about buying Zoey a souvenir from London that she was excited to give her. I have no idea when she even found the time to buy her friend anything, since we were in London less than a day. I guess my little impromptu meeting with her prick of a father must have rattled him because he couldn't fly to the States fast enough after that.

Personally, I was relieved he made such a call. I'd rather play on my own turf.

"Hmm. That's nice," Cara replies to whatever Zoey just told her.

"Is this nice too?" I whisper, licking my lips before slipping my hand between her thighs.

"What? No. It's nothing. Just the TV," Cara says before slapping my hand away from her.

I pretend to pout, and she rolls her eyes at me.

God, we're cute together.

We are going to make beautiful babies.

"So is it okay if I pop by? I don't want to intrude on family time," Cara says, and I don't need to hear Zoey to know she's telling her that she is family.

“Great! I’ll be there in ten minutes. Love you too,” Cara replies before hanging up. “So Gray and Zoey are at Layla’s place, having Sunday family dinner,” she explains, putting her phone in her bag.

“Shit. At Alaric’s, huh?” I run the tip of my finger down her bare thigh. “That’s going to make things ... complicated.”

“How so?” she questions, facing me on the seat.

“Well, remember when I told you that I work for an agency where my particular set of skills comes in handy?”

She nods.

“Let’s just say that I’m not the only one with a skill set that the agency finds useful. Gray and Alaric also work for them.”

Her eyes widen. “You mean they are hackers like you?”

“Oh, they hack alright, princess. They hack victims into tiny little pieces.” I laugh but then quiet down when her face pales. “Hey, hey. Don’t worry. I won’t let them hurt you. They wouldn’t anyway,” I assure her with a soft tone, pulling her toward me so she can lay her head on my shoulder.

“I’m not worried for me.” She sighs. “It’s just that ... I guess I’m just hurt that Zoey never told me.”

“Like you told her about me?” I grin, placing a kiss on her temple.

“You’re right,” she agrees, her shoulders slumping. “I guess there are just some secrets that you can’t even tell your best friend.” She cranes her head back, her hand cupping my cheek. “I’ve had enough secrets to last a lifetime. I’m done with them.”

“Are you sure, little one? You don’t have to do this, you know?” I tell her, but she shakes her head. The fire I see in her eyes leaves me speechless and rock hard.

“I’m not going to keep the best thing in my life hidden any longer. It’s time the world found out about us. It’s not how I planned to tell Zoey, but with everything else that is going on, I don’t see any other way.” She shrugs.

My breath catches in my lungs as her eyes scan my face. There is so much love in her gaze for me, so much adoration and devotion, that I'm in complete awe of how a bastard like me could get so lucky.

I lean in and plant a tender kiss on her lips, which are always so soft and inviting, as if they were made for me.

She was made for me.

Every little part of her.

Only her goodness could ever find any sort of redeeming quality in me worthy of love.

My cock starts to harden further at the tender kiss, and if we had a little more time, then I would give the fucker what he is desperate for, but unfortunately, we have a family dinner to crash.

Fuck my life.

As if reading my mind, Cara pulls away and sits back in her seat. I lean over her and grab her seat belt, making sure it's nicely tucked around my girl to keep her safe. With one hand on the wheel and the other on the ignition, I glance over at my heart one more time.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?"

"Are you?" she retorts.

"Guess there's only one way to find out." I smile and start the car, feeling uncharacteristically nervous all of a sudden.

I mean, I am willingly driving us over to the lion's den. I'm unsure who is going to try to cut off my balls first, Gray or Zoey, but it's a safe bet that at least one of them will place a blade or a bullet in me before the night ends.

But then again, a little bloodshed is always a sign of a good night out.

What fun.

Ten minutes later, we park on the street across from Alaric's town house. I get out of the car and walk to the other side to pull Cara's door open for her. I offer her my hand,

which she takes with a soft smile before linking our fingers together as we cross the street.

Before Cara rings the doorbell, she stares into my eyes, the words *I love you* written in her gaze. My hand slides into her hair, and I pull her closer until we are breathing the same air.

“Be a good girl and don’t look at me like that when we get inside. Alaric will cut up my junk if he finds us fucking in his house, and believe me, that’s exactly what will happen if you keep looking at me like that,” I warn, debating just pushing her against the door for a quickie anyway. It would be worth the bullet holes.

She closes her eyes and breathes me in, as if picturing that very thing.

“Cara,” I growl with a dark tone. “Be good now or I will take you right here on this fucking stoop.”

She tries to hide her smirk, but the damn thing looks too good on her for her own good.

“Remind me to spank you after all this is done. My princess deserves a good spanking after the blue balls she’s causing me.”

She turns to face the door and rings the doorbell, that little cocky grin still on her face.

“Yes, Daddy.”

Fuck, this girl.

She’s going to be the death of me, and just as I think this, the door swings open, revealing Alaric’s looming form, reminding me that my death might be sooner than I think.

“Jesus, fuck,” he mumbles, crossing his bulky arms over his chest. “Pops!” he yells. “Please take Gage and Sophie to their rooms upstairs,” he shouts and then stares daggers into me. “I’d hate for my kids to see their first murder take place in their own goddamn house,” he mutters low enough for only Cara and me to hear.

“Ah, come on there, buddy. Don’t be such a spoil sport.” I laugh, entwining my fingers with Cara’s as I brush past him.

“It’s your funeral,” he mutters behind us.

I feel Cara tense at my side as we strut into the living room. The whole damn family is here, save for the little ones and their grandpa. Zoey is on Gray’s lap, talking to Layla, when her sister’s eyes fall on us and our linked hands, causing Zoey to turn her head our way to see the same thing.

“Oh, hell no!” she shouts, pulling out her knife before trying to jump out of her husband’s lap. Thankfully, Gray keeps hold of his hellcat.

Huh. I guess it’s Zoey who’s going to kill me. I didn’t see that one coming. How very sexist of me.

“Gray, take your hands off me this instant or I swear when I’m finished with this jackass, you’re next!”

“A little help here,” Gray says to Alaric and Layla when he finds it difficult to prevent his wife from cutting me open like a fish.

“You knew what you were getting into when you married my daughter. This is now your problem. Not mine.” Alaric smirks and struts over to his own wife, pulling her into his lap on the couch.

“Honey, maybe you should step in,” Layla suggests nervously, not knowing which one of the girls needs her help more.

Alaric kisses the tip of her nose and leans back into his seat, bringing her with him and making himself even more comfortable. “Just enjoy the show, sweetheart. This should be good.” He smiles.

Zoey continues to struggle in Gray’s grasp as he glowers at me.

“Thanks a lot, friend. You ruined a perfectly good Sunday. Now I’ll never get her to calm down,” he grumbles, but I see the glint of happiness in his eyes at his bloodthirsty wife.

“I’m sure you’ll find a way,” I quip with a wink.

“Hey! Cut that shit out, Hale, or I’ll kill you myself,” Alaric interjects with a scowl.

“Geez. You guys can’t take a joke for shit. No one’s died.” I roll my eyes, placing my arm around my girl’s waist.

“Yet! No one’s died yet!” Zoey shouts, still unable to free herself from her man’s grip.

“I ... Uh ...” Cara starts fidgeting, completely taken aback with this new reality. “Maybe if we calmed down, we could talk about this. Like adults.”

“If you find an adult here, let me know,” Alaric mumbles before Layla shoves her elbow in his gut to keep him from saying anything else.

“I agree with Cara. Please, Zoey, hear your friend out before ... well, before ...”

“She goes all Zoey on my ass,” I chime in.

“Yes, that.” Layla huffs, annoyed with my added commentary. “Listen to your friend, Zoey. It took guts for her to come here and tell you that she and Hale ... Just exactly what are you two doing? Dating?”

“Dating?” I repeat the word like it’s a curse since what we are is so much more than a normal relationship.

Cara is the fucking air in my lungs. She’s the bright sun that illuminates my days and the star-filled sky that I seek refuge from at night. She’s my heart, my soul, and my very purpose on this goddamn earth. To say that we are just your average girlfriend and boyfriend cheapens us. We are each other’s destiny. Our whole reason for being. I don’t think there is one word in the whole dictionary that can come close to defining what we are, but I’m sure we’ll make one.

“I can explain everything,” Cara tells Layla, replying in my stead, “but I need you to promise me that no harm will come to Hale.”

“Well, don’t look at me,” Alaric mumbles. “It’s my daughter you need to convince.”

Cara turns her attention to Zoey, who has simmered down a bit. “Please, just hear me out. There is so much we have to

explain, and I would really like to do that without the threat of you killing Hale looming over our heads,” Cara pleads.

Zoey glowers at me, but the minute she turns her attention on Cara, her murderous expression deflates. “Fine,” she mutters, letting the dagger she had in her grip fall to the floor. “I can’t promise you that I won’t maim him a little afterwards though.”

My love doesn’t exactly like her best friend’s terms, but she accepts them anyway.

“Can we take a seat?” she asks, her nerves still overwhelming her.

“Of course you can, dear,” Layla replies, trying her best to keep this a blood-free zone.

I take a cue from the other men in the room and pull my girl onto an empty sofa, making her sit on my lap. Zoey’s nostrils flare at the intimate sight, but she doesn’t say anything about it.

“So I know that all this comes as quite a shock to you, and I completely understand your reasoning for not liking the fact that Hale and I are together—”

“That’s the understatement of the century. He’s fucking psychotic. You should be running the hell away from him, not sitting on his fucking lap,” Zoey snarls.

“He’s not psychotic,” Cara defends, sitting up straighter, which puts that perky ass I love so much right over my hard cock.

“Hmm, I kind of am, princess. Hellcat is right on the money on that one.”

“You’re not helping,” Cara mumbles through a gritted smile.

“See? Even the jackass admits he’s no good for you.” Zoey throws her hands in the air in dismay.

“Hey, hold up. I said I was psychotic. I didn’t say I wasn’t any good for Cara,” I blurt, and Zoey narrows her eyes on me, calling me on my bullshit. “Okay, fine. Maybe I’m not good

for her, but that doesn't mean that I won't do right by her. I'd die before I treated Cara like anything less than the fucking princess she is."

"Bullshit!" Zoey retorts.

"It's true, Zoey," Cara quickly defends, holding my hands in her lap. "I know why you're so upset, but Hale would never hurt me."

"You have no idea what you're talking about, Cara. He's a ... a ..."

"Killer," Cara says, ending the sentence for her friend. Zoey seals her lips shut with a frown. "Like you? Like your husband? Like your father?"

There's a thread of hurt in Cara's voice, and Zoey startles at it.

The room grows eerily silent with that statement hanging tensely in the air. "Hale told me. He told me everything. You know why he did that? Why he told me the truth?" my girl asks, turning her sweet face to me. "Because he knew I'd never judge him for it. Because he knew that our love was stronger than any bullet or knife wound. Because he knew that when I love someone, I love all their parts, no matter how ugly and scarred they might be."

With my heart swelling with love for this girl, I lean in and take a whiff of her goodness before placing a tender kiss on her forehead. She smiles ever so sweetly at me before she redirects her attention to her best friend.

"I accept Hale for who he is, just as I accept you for who you are, Zoey," she states lovingly.

"Shit! Are those tears in your eyes?" I ask when Zoey's eyes start to look a bit too shiny.

"Shut up, asshole," Gray mumbles as he wipes the errant tears off her face. He kisses her lips and whispers something in her ear before releasing her from his grip.

The minute Zoey's tiny feet hit the ground, my hold on my girl tightens.

I'm not one to be afraid of anything, but right here in this moment, I'm scared to death that Zoey might say or do something that will keep me from my girl forever.

"Let go, Hale," Cara whispers softly in my ear.

I shake my head, staring the little she-devil down. "Nope, not happening."

"If you let me go talk with my friend, then I promise I'll let you fuck me in the bathroom when all of this is over."

I scowl. "I believe I told you to play nice earlier. Is that playing nice, princess?"

"Then I guess you'll have to spank me later," she coos in my ear, taking a big bite of my lobe.

Before I can stop her, she unwinds my arms from her waist and runs to her best friend, who is standing in the middle of the room with open arms. Cara lunges at her, and then the two sob in unison, holding onto each other for dear life.

"I'm sorry," Zoey cries. "It killed me to keep it all a secret from you. You're my best friend, Cara. My sister. I never want to lie to you again. It hurts too much."

"I feel the same way! I hated having to lie to you about Hale. About everything. It always felt so wrong keeping it a secret," Cara replies, her tears soaking into Zoey's shoulder.

Gray and I share a glance as we both realize that, for the longest time, they were all each other had.

But that's not true. Not really. Zoey had Gray watching out for her, even if she didn't know it, and she had Alaric and her sister.

But who did my girl have aside from Zoey?

A pedo, fucked up in the head father.

That realization makes me feral and even more protective of this sweet, young flower who bloomed in my arms.

We let the girls have their moment, their tears mingled with joyous laughter filling the room.

“I knew there was something fishy going on when you two hooked up at my wedding.” Zoey laughs while Cara dries her eyes.

“Actually, we were together before that,” Cara admits shyly, her gaze trailing over to me.

“Is that so? How the hell did that even happen?” Zoey asks curiously.

My girl leans into her ear and starts telling her all our dirty secrets. I can tell because Zoey’s easygoing demeanor starts morphing into the one that looks like she wants to kill me again.

“Enough of that,” I announce, getting up to pull my girl back into my arms.

Cara giggles as her body melts into mine.

“So, are we all good here? No one is going to kill anyone?” Alaric asks, sounding intrigued. When we all shake our heads, he actually looks disappointed that I didn’t get my ass kicked. “It’s just as well then. I’m going upstairs to check on Pops and the kids. I’m sure he’s wondering if the coast is clear to come down yet.”

“Hold your horses, there, Rick,” I order, stretching my arm to keep him in place. “That’s not the only reason why Cara and I came by tonight. In fact, that’s not the reason we came here at all, and we don’t want the younglings to hear what we have to say. Trust me on that.”

Alaric falls back to his seat, as does Zoey next to Gray.

“Shit. How the fuck am I going to start this?” I mumble, running my fingers through my hair.

I haven’t even said the words out loud before I feel Gray’s deathly stare pin me to the spot. “You found him, didn’t you?”

Cara’s whole demeanor changes, and her body grows stiff within seconds.

“Yeah, man. I found him,” I mutter, unsure of how he’s going to take the news.

“Found who?” Alaric asks, sensing the aura of dread in the room.

“I found General,” I announce, my grip on Cara’s hand tightening.

“And? Who is he?” Zoey questions, keeping her own grip on her man’s hand. “Who is General?”

I turn to my love, her gaze completely devoid of feeling, before she turns to our audience and gives them the name they have spent so long trying to uncover.

“He’s my father.”

CHAPTER 23

Cara



He's my father.

The words spill out of my mouth, yet there is a part of me that no longer believes them to be true.

My father was never a father to me. He never cared for me or showed me an ounce of affection. He never encouraged me or nurtured me in any way. Not like Alaric does for Zoey, and they aren't even blood.

But does that matter when we come to the root of it? Does family have to be blood for it to be real?

No.

Because right here, in this living room, I feel like I'm in the presence of my true family. My father, although holding such a title, is not. He's a monster, one that I vow to rid the world of.

"He's your dad?" Zoey exclaims, still gobsmeared at the revelation. "Are you certain? Babe, I'm not sure you understand the severity of all this. Are you a hundred percent sure General is your father?"

Instead of replying to her, I turn to my love and squeeze his hand.

"I think it's time. Show them."

Hale's typical carefree demeanor is nowhere in sight as he takes a flash drive from his pocket. "Mind getting me a computer, Alaric? We're going to need one for this."

Without missing a beat, Alaric springs into action, grabbing a laptop from the kitchen counter and bringing it over to the living room, where he places it on the coffee table for all to see.

“I hope none of you have weak stomachs because what we are about to show you is some fucked-up shit,” Hale warns, his gaze falling to Zoey’s older sister.

“Layla, maybe you should go check on the kids,” Alaric suggests, sharing Hale’s concern.

“I’m not budging from this seat. He hurt Gray, therefore he hurt this family. I’m staying right here,” she states passionately, intent on letting nothing and no one move her from her spot.

The Johnson women might both look like delicate flowers, but they have thorns that prick too. Watching Layla and Zoey lean into their power is a thing of wonder, and it only encourages me to have that same courage to do what needs to be done.

“Do it, Hale. Show them. Tell them what we found,” I order, knowing that my love will follow through on my demand.

The room becomes tense as Hale shows them what we discovered in my father’s secret laptop—all the names of orphanages and group homes he terrorized and the circled names of defenseless kids he tortured. Hale adds even more information that he must have uncovered in his search that I wasn’t privy to, which includes names of children who just disappeared and pictures of dead, mangled bodies on cold, gray slabs in morgues that no one claimed as their own.

Innocence lost because of one evil man.

I swallow hard when I see that Gray is shaking, fear in his usual steady gaze. Zoey holds him tightly as she whispers in his ear, trying to bring him back from whatever nightmare he suffered under my father’s hand.

Nothing strikes more fear into him, however, than when he hears a recording that Hale made of my father when he was

threatening him in London. I didn't even know he had made such a thing.

"I know you couldn't remember his face, since trauma prevented you from recollecting what he looked like, but I thought that maybe if you heard his voice that you might hear for yourself that Cara's father is the man we've been looking for," Hale explains, his voice calm so as to not cause any more damage to his friend.

The recording doesn't play for a full minute before Gray shouts out in hysterics. "It's him! It's him! Turn it off! Turn that fucking thing off!"

Hale quickly slams the laptop closed, not wanting to prolong Gray's suffering a second longer. My chest feels like a boulder is on top of it from the way this strong, fearless man looks almost childlike in his fear.

My own father did this to him.

"I'm sorry, Gray. I'm so sorry," I whisper under my breath, trying to atone for my father's sins.

"Shh, my wolf. Shh. I'm here. I'm right here. Shh," Zoey repeats in a tranquil tone, holding onto her husband as he falls apart. They stare at each other for what feels like an eternity, with Zoey slowly coaxing Gray back to the present where no monsters can ever hurt them. "We have him. We have him, my wolf. Soon, this will all be a distant memory. No one can touch you now. No one can hurt you ever again. I promise," she continues.

We remain completely silent as we watch Gray slowly turn back to his normal self.

"Where is he now? Your father?" Zoey asks me, the malice in her tone dripping with bitter poison.

"Home."

"Good. Hale, you know what to do. You gave Gray your word, and now I expect you to follow through on it."

The cold way that she orders him to kill my father chills me to the bone, but worse still is the way my love looks at me

with hesitation in his eyes. He doesn't want to kill the devil because of me.

But I'm not the only one in the room who picks up on Hale's hesitation.

Gray does too.

"No," Gray rasps shakily. "I asked you to find him, and you did. For that, Hale, I'll never be able to repay you. But this is my war to fight, my nightmare to vanquish. I should be the one to end what he started." Gray's voice is strong as he says it, but the frightened gleam in his silver eyes betrays him. My soul hurts for him. I don't need to know the details of what happened to Gray to see that my father stole so much from him. His innocence. His self-esteem. His grace.

He broke him.

The worst thing is, that in a way, I know my father tried to do the same thing with me. My abuse might not have been as crippling as what my father doled out to Gray, but it still left its scars, as if my father purposely tried a different method on me to see if his psychological warfare could provoke the same detrimental damage on his own daughter without laying a finger on me.

If I had been weaker ...

If I hadn't had Zoey's friendship ...

If I had truly been all alone in the world, he might have succeeded.

I pull away from Hale, who shoots me a sad look as I walk over to Gray and Zoey and sit on the coffee table in front of them. Gray stiffens when I cover his hand with mine.

"I'm sorry," I whisper, feeling hot tears sting my eyes as I see the terror in his. "I'm so sorry."

His jaw ticks, and Zoey rubs her hand over his back to soothe him.

"I didn't know," I continue. "I didn't know."

“We know, babe,” Zoey says tenderly, sensing the raw emotions in the room.

My gaze remains on Gray, even as our joint hands begin to tremble.

“Even though I didn’t know then what he did to you, I always sensed he was evil, like there was something fundamentally wrong with him. For the longest time, I tried to ignore those instincts and the red flags I felt whenever I was in his presence, needing to believe that it was all my imagination.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Gray interjects. “Those instincts probably saved you. They kept you from suffering the same hell I did. If he so much as suspected that you knew the devil that hid underneath his skin, he wouldn’t have hesitated. He would have broken you too.”

The way he says it has my skin crawling.

He’s right.

My father probably would have done the same thing to me given the chance. I mean, why else would my bedroom be soundproof? It was a calculative measure he took on the off chance he decided to play his twisted, sickening games with the only child living right under his own roof. The only reason why he didn’t touch me that way was because I made sure to be everything he wanted down to a T. I was the perfect daughter, his perfect doll. I let him pull my strings and followed his every command.

If I had rebelled ...

If I had shown even an ounce of insubordination ...

I’d probably have the same look of fear in my eyes that Gray has.

“I ...” I open my mouth again, more apologies on the tip of my tongue, but Gray shuts me down.

“You were a child, Cara. We both were. You’re not responsible for what happened to me any more than I am. Only one person is, and that’s *him*.”

“Wolf?” Zoey whispers, resting her head on his shoulder. “I’m with you for whatever you want to do. If you want us to face him, we will.”

My heart squeezes with the way Gray’s hand turns instantly cold.

“No,” I blurt, stunning everyone in the room. “You faced the devil too many times before. I refuse to force you into a room with him, even if it is to take his life.” I turn my head to look over my shoulder to see Hale watching me with pride and love in his eyes. “We’ll do it. We’ll cast him back to the hell he never should have left.”

“Are you sure, princess?” Hale asks, stroking my hair with his fingers. “He’s still your father.”

I shake my head. “I’m an orphan, Hale. I always have been. It just took me until now to see it.”

He gives me a curt nod and then aims his sights on Gray and Zoey.

“On my life, brother, if this is what you want me to do, then I’ll do it. Just give me the order.”

My heart beats a mile a minute as Zoey and Gray share an intimate glance, their gazes doing all the talking for them. Zoey takes a relieved exhale before placing a tender kiss on her husband’s cheek, and then both of them face the room again. Gray takes one look at me and then Hale before finally uttering my father’s sentence.

“Do it. Kill the bastard.”

CHAPTER 24

Hale



Tonight is the night. Tonight, I'll kill the love of my life's father. It's all very Shakespearean.

I've killed hundreds of people over my lifetime, many who deserved it, and it never bothered me, but this does, mainly because I know that despite how brave she is being, this will break something in Cara. She hates her father and always has, and she knows he's a monster, but that doesn't stop him from being her father. Most of her life revolves around him. Yes, she'll be happy to be free, and I'm more than happy to give her that freedom, but I know deep down some part of her will grieve him.

I'll do everything in my power to protect her and give her the life she deserves, but I'm a selfish bastard because I'm excited to get him out of the way. With him gone, my girl can finally be mine in every sense of the word, and I intend to follow through on that.

Right after I kill him.

Cara was right, Gray couldn't have done this, and he shouldn't have to. The General did so many horrible things to him that I don't even think killing him would help Gray. I'll protect my brother and my family.

He will never hurt anyone else again.

"Go to bed now, princess," I order with my hand on her bedroom doorknob. Tonight, I will walk proudly through those halls in full sight. "And lock the door after me."

Swallowing, she moves over and searches my face. “Are you sure you can do this?”

“You doubt me?” I grin, and she sighs.

“Don’t hesitate, not for me,” she says, and I know she understands why I have been stalling. Her father came in over an hour ago—I know since the cameras here are now mine. It took me longer than I care to admit, but the alarms and security system are now all controlled by me. As soon as I walk out of that door, they will all go down so that there will never be any proof of what I’m about to do.

After all, killing the governor isn’t something you want proof of.

“I won’t. I’ll be back, princess.” I kiss her once more before ripping open the door and shutting it.

The guards are asleep, and I quickly inject both of them with the sedative I brought with me for this very purpose. No doubt they will feel groggy in the morning, but it’s better that they are asleep when the death happens instead of being witnesses to it—a few less deaths on my hands. I’ve made it so they will be able to verify that there was no one coming in or out of the house. I even managed to get an alibi for Cara. Right at this moment, Layla is dressed up as my beloved, raven wig and all, at a dark, expensive bar where pictures are sure to be taken.

Since Cara was adamant she wanted to be in the house when her father takes his last breath, I snuck my girl through her window with me like I have done every night since I first saw her. I pleaded with her to stay with Zoey, but she wouldn’t. I’ve covered every angle, protecting everyone I love, and now I spring into action. After I’ve made sure the guards are out like a light, I hit the glitch on the system, knowing it will just look like a power failure. Pulling my pistol from my pocket, I slip on the silencer as I head down the hall.

I know he’s in his office, and Magda left an hour ago. I offered to kill her too, since I know she’s made my girl’s life hell, but Cara said she had her own plans for the wicked bitch.

Taking out another syringe, I move to the kitchen where the final guard sits on his phone. He suspects nothing, and within seconds, he's facedown on the table, snoring. The ones outside won't suspect a thing. It's just me and General now.

Heading to his office, I kick open the door to see him drinking his worries away at his desk. He leaps to his feet when he sees me. "How did you get in here? Guards!"

Lifting the gun, I point it at him and grin. "Scream all you want, but your men are all sleeping soundly. There's no one here to help you, General, so let's have some fun, shall we?" I kick the door shut behind me and move through the office, all the while aiming at him. "Isn't that what you used to tell the kids you tortured and raped?"

He jerks, his face turning red. "I will destroy you for this."

Laughing, I drop the gun since I don't need it yet. "How sweet. You think you are making it out of this room alive." Whistling, I wander around his office, watching as he tries to edge around the desk to make a run for it. "Gray says hello, by the way. You probably remember him from Mercy Village."

He freezes, his head swinging my way. "What did you just say?"

"You heard me. Ironic, isn't it? The little boy you tried to break grew up into the man who's brought your demise right to your doorstep. I'm sure you're aware of his little vendetta. I mean, your friends have been dropping like flies lately. You're a smart man. I'm sure you knew why they were all suddenly dying around you. See, my friend Gray is a little angry about what you motherfuckers did to him and went on a little rampage with his woman. But don't worry. He made sure to save you for last."

He looks around like they might appear, and I grin. "He's busy tonight and very sorry he couldn't be here and all, but he trusted me to get the job done."

"He's afraid," he spits, standing taller as the devil comes out to play. No more stern talking governor. No, this is the true General. "He's afraid to face me." He chuckles. "He was

always afraid. Like a scared little mouse.” He grins sinisterly. “Did he tell you how he used to scream for me?” he starts, thinking I don’t see his hand inching across the desk to the phone as he tries to antagonize me with his words.

With a quick flick of my fingers, my knife embeds in the center of his hand, making him howl. Tugging it out with a laugh, I watch him fall back to his chair, clutching the bleeding appendage.

“Isn’t it funny how those who hand out pain usually can’t handle it? Don’t worry, General. We will test your limits tonight. I promised him I’d drag this one out and see just what your pain threshold really is.”

“They’ll find out, and you’ll be dead, a hunted man all your life,” he spits hurriedly. “I can help. I have money—”

“So do I.” I shrug. “A lot, actually, but I’m doing this one for free. Seeing the fear in your eyes?” I groan. “It’s worth it.”

“Everyone has a price,” he stammers. “Everyone. If it’s not money, then what? What the fuck do you want?”

“Nothing you can offer me. The sooner you accept that, the better.” I flick my knife again, embedding it in his other hand when he tries to sneakily reach under the desk. “And no emergency alarms, please, that would spoil our fun.”

Turning away with a whistle, I set up my camera, knowing it’s streaming to Gray and Zoey. My friend needs to see this for closure, but he doesn’t need to be here for it. They have been listening the entire time, and I hope he’s okay after what General said.

Wandering back to the desk, I sit, prop my legs up on it, and watch him. He’s sweating, and his body is shaking from adrenaline and pain. “Don’t worry, it won’t kill you.” I point to his hand. “But you know that, don’t you?” I arch a brow. “I mean, you’ve tortured enough people to understand the effects of pain and blood loss and just where to cut or hit ...”

His eyes close for a moment, and I can see the wheels spinning in his head as he tries to come up with something that

will spare his life. The fucker doesn't want to admit to himself that he's already dead. Killing him is just a formality.

"I'm sick. I've always been sick," he begins, trying to justify his actions.

"I don't care," I retort, cutting him off and showing him my toothy grin. "Don't try to give me your sorry excuses. You think *I* was born normal? No. I enjoy killing, and I enjoy hurting people. I just use it for good."

His eyes open, and he watches me carefully, clearly seeing his angle is not working, so he tries another, one that I wasn't anticipating. "Ah, yes. Of course. I know what you want. You want my daughter."

I stiffen, and even though I try not to react, he sees it.

"She's always been Daddy's little princess," he sneers, bringing up Cara since I failed to be discreet about my feelings for her when I threatened him back in London. He saw that I needed to protect her, which means she means something to me, so of course this bastard tries to play on it, but it doesn't work.

It will never work.

"How can you give me something that is already mine? She's my princess now, and just so you know, she was never yours." I grin and then stand up, gesturing for him to come around the desk. "Come on, let's do this on your feet. I'd hate to kill a man sitting down."

"No."

I arch a brow. "Are you actually having a tantrum and refusing to stand? Like a child?"

"Yes." He tilts his chin up, and I just stare.

"Really? Okay. Don't say I didn't try to be civil." Moving around the desk, I haul him from his chair and throw him over the desk, making him hit the floor with a grunt before I yank him to his knees. His head is craned back, even as he struggles in my grip, but just as I suspected, despite all his money, power, and bravado, he's weak.

“How does it feel to be on the receiving end?” I ask. “I have to wonder if that’s why you chose to torture defenseless children in the first place. You knew you could never be strong enough to do your sick, twisted games on grown-ass adults.” I slam my fist into his face, making him groan. “Answer me,” I bark. “Tell me what you did to them!”

“I hurt them!” he yells. “Is that what you want to hear? How I loved seeing their broken little bodies and hearing them cry and scream and beg? I felt so fucking powerful, like nothing could touch me.” His eyes narrow, and even though he knows he’s outmatched, that doesn’t mean that silver tongue of his is done. “I wanted to do it to Cara, you know? I dreamed about breaking her skin apart and teaching her what a real man was. I wanted to see my perfect doll sullied and torn apart, piece by piece.” Sickness claws at my throat at his description of what he could have done to my girl. “I almost even acted on it once. She was so sweet and trusting when I made her sit on my lap. It was almost impossible to resist.”

“Shut up,” I hiss.

Laughing, he stops struggling as he glares at me. “She wanted it too. She basically begged me for it with her eyes. They all wanted it. I simply gave them exactly what they pleaded for.”

I knew he was sick, but this? He’s fucking crazy.

“They were kids,” I respond, my voice lethal. “They were fucking kids. They should have been protected and safe, and you took that all away. They call men like me monsters, but you? You truly are one.”

“And what are you going to do about it? Kill me?” He laughs. “She’ll never forgive you. You say that you have her, but you don’t. Not really. We wouldn’t be doing this song and dance if that were the case. She’ll always be Daddy’s little girl.”

For a shameful split second, I hesitate, wondering if there is truth in his words.

I owe this to Gray and all the other kids this monster ruined. I see now that if he's left unchecked, General will never stop. Someone has to stop him. *I* have to stop him, but Cara ... Can I do this if it means that, in the end, I might lose my princess?

"Do it," Cara orders behind me, surprising us both when we turn to the door and see her standing there. She glares at her father, disgust thick on her face. "Kill him. End this."

"Cara, get help," her father orders.

"I don't answer to you anymore, and you don't scare me any longer," she snarls with true contempt in her voice. "You are just a disgusting, weak, scared little man who is absolutely nothing without his money or friends." She stops before him as he kneels and stares down her nose at him

"I'm your father—"

"I have a new Daddy now." She grins at me, and when she looks down at him, it's with nothing but hatred and disgust. "I was scared of you my entire life. Maybe it was because, deep down, I sensed the evil inside you. I can't even fathom how you could hurt children, but they will get their revenge tonight. It will not take back what you did, but I will spend my life trying to fix your mistakes." Leaning in, she grins. "All your money, Father, will go to the victims you tortured."

"Don't you dare!" He struggles.

Laughing, she circles him, looking so strong and confident. Gone is the meek little girl he abused all her life. "I dare. They will forget your name, but mine, however, will be remembered, as well as every single one of theirs, and the worst bit, Father?" She tilts her head as she watches him. "Everything you did will be for nothing, and you'll die knowing that your crimes finally caught up with you and your own daughter and her lover were responsible for destroying you and everything you worked for." She looks at me and nods. "Kill him, Hale. Rid the world of his kind."

"Anything you wish, princess." I turn to him. "You deserve to suffer, and that's exactly how you will die, alone, scared,

and in agony. I will not make this quick.” I’m sure he expects me to stab or shoot him, but I pull out another needle. “This will be untraceable during an autopsy, and they will simply think you had a heart attack, but you? Oh, you will feel indescribable agony. I have been told it’s equivalent to being set on fire and burning from the inside out. Shall we see?” Lifting him, I drag him to the chair and shove him down. They will question his hand wounds, but I don’t care.

As I prep the needle, he starts to beg, and when I press it to his neck, I grin. “Any last words?”

“Yeah, fuck—”

I insert the needle, cutting him off. “Oops.” I hide the needle mark in the flesh of his ear as I depress the plunger, stepping back as he begins to shake and contort. A scream escapes his lips, and then he starts to thrash and tear at his own skin to get it off. “They were right.”

Cara joins me at my side as I film it for Gray, watching him scream in pure agony and suffer as he dies.

We observe him for a while, side by side, as his blood pumps the drug around his body.

I stand hand in hand with my love, with my future, and then we leave him there to die alone.

CHAPTER 25

Cara



“**A**nd with this, our final moments, we say goodbye to Mr. Nightingale, the governor of New York City,” the priest says as we stand around the coffin being lowered into the ground. I lift my handkerchief and touch my nose and eyes like I’m crying to hide my smile when I see the cameras flash, all documenting the grieving, perfect fucking daughter.

My hair is coiled up and back, not a strand out of place. I figured he would like that. My black hat sits atop it with a small black veil covering some of my forehead and eyes. The black dress I wear ends at my knees, and my black heels have red soles. My coat is tied around my waist to fight off the peculiar chill in the air on this summer day. Dropping the hankie, I pretend to offer my respects, even as my eyes meet Hale’s who’s standing on the other side. I sent him a picture earlier of the necklace hidden under my dress.

The one he gave me that reads “Daddy’s princess.”

His gaze is hungry, and he watches me like he’s going to eat me alive. I give him a wink before I go back to accepting condolences and greeting those who will now be my partners. After all, I’m my father’s heir. All his businesses and money go to me, so it’s fitting that all the meetings I hated attending are now paying off. They know me, and I know how to play the game.

Gone is silent, tame Cara, and in her place is one of the richest women in the world. Purpose fills me with determination. I made a promise to him before he died, and I

intend to keep it. No one will remember him, but they will remember the children he victimized. I intend to uphold that promise until my last days.

I stay perfectly composed as I accept all their fake condolences and platitudes—how his death was so sudden, how much he loved me and this city. I almost snort. They found nothing in the autopsy, so they concluded that my father died from a heart attack, probably caused by walking in on the intruder in the house that night. Hale and I had to come up with some explanation as to why my father had knife wounds on his hands, and a burglary seemed like our best option. I only relaxed when the police deemed my father's death an accidental occurrence from his weak heart giving in. Even though I had faked a very convincing phone call to the police after I 'got home' that night, with fake tears and all, saying I found him like that, there was still part of me that believed we would get caught, but Hale laughed at me.

The very next night, Zoey and Gray invited us over to thank us, and when Hale and Zoey disappeared into the kitchen to grab us some drinks, Gray had taken my hand in his and whispered how grateful he was that I did what he couldn't, and how happy he was to see me with Hale. I didn't expect it, but he just winked, and ever since, us four have been inseparable.

My whole future now lies before me in a way it never did before, and I'm excited for it and everything we will do.

Hale appears before me, next in line, and I drink him in. In his expensive Gucci suit and overcoat, he looks like every other rich bastard here. If only they knew who he really was.

Hale takes my hand, just like the others, and kisses the back of it. "My condolences on your loss, Miss Nightingale."

"Thank you for coming," I respond politely like I did with everyone else, even as a smile curves my lips. "I know he would have liked you being here."

"Oh, I'm sure of it. I look forward to seeing more of you."

“You will.” I nod, slipping him the note I prepared. His eyes narrow as he kisses my hand again and steps away. My eyes track him as he wanders off, his black coat billowing around his perfect suit, and when he glances back, I know he read it.

Tonight, I’m yours, Daddy. Catch me if you can.

I thought he might like that.

Schooling my expression, I go back to accepting the long line of apologies and subtle questions at what might become of my father’s—now my—companies. I assure them I will run them with honor and integrity, and when the line ends, I have four new propositions and possible business partners.

I turn back to the grave, knowing the cameras are still there, and I angle so they cannot see me as I crouch down and toss some soil over it. “May you burn in hell, you sick fuck,” I snarl, and then I stand, and with another fake cry, I hurry back to the car where my new bodyguards are waiting.

When I slip inside, I grin when I see him. He’s in the back of the town car, sitting opposite me. “Hell of a performance, princess.” Leaning closer, he licks his lips. “Now let’s see if you can put on one just as good tonight when your masked thief comes for you.”

“Oh, I plan to.” I grin. “If you can catch me.”

Oh yes, life is going to be good.

It’s going to be great, and with Hale at my side, I know we can handle anything.

CHAPTER 26

Cara



The minute we get home, I rip through the doors in a mad, giddy rush, knowing that no one is inside to stop me. A few days before the funeral, I dismissed all the staff so I could grieve in solitude, and since they all believe I'm in actual mourning, they didn't bat an eye at the lie. In reality, I'm not mourning. I'm celebrating, and what better way to celebrate this new beginning in my life than to play a little game of cat and mouse with the love of my life?

I purposely don't turn the lights on, preferring to strip off my coat and kick off my heels in the dark before rushing barefoot toward the stairs. When my hand grips the banister, I hear the front door open. I freeze and turn around, spotting *him* there—my darkest fantasy in the flesh. He's framed in the doorway and looking at me through a mask. The sight alone takes my breath away and makes my pussy clench in lustful anticipation.

“Better run, princess,” he calls out, his tone wicked.

I swallow my eager giggle and scramble up the stairs, hearing his laughter bounce off the walls as he calmly shuts the door and locks it. Before I know it, the sound of his heavy boots hit the steps as he hurriedly races after me. When I reach the second floor, I dart into the first room I find to hide, adrenaline and lust coursing through my veins. I shut the door gently and frantically look around for a good hiding place. Since it's one of the many unused guest rooms in the house, my only option is to slide underneath the bed. I lie rooted to

my spot, covering my mouth so that I can muffle the squeal of excitement that yearns to escape.

My heartbeat mimics the pounding sound of his footsteps, and when they stop just outside the door, my heart beats so loudly that I'm almost positive he can hear it in the hallway. For the longest moment, there is only silence, but it's finally broken with the sound of the door creaking open.

I stare at the tip of his boots as he wanders into the room.

"Cara, I know you're in here. Come out and I'll take it easy on you."

How can he possibly know that I'm in here?

"I can smell your sweet cunt, princess. There's no use hiding from me," he says, answering my unspoken question and reminding me that this beautiful demon of a man is more in tune with my body than I am.

Stubbornly, I remain quiet, and my brat-like silence only makes him chuckle hungrily.

"Fine. Have it your way, darling. The hard way it is. By dawn, you'll wish you had come out. You won't be able to walk when I'm done with you."

I lick my lips, hoping he makes good on his threat.

"Cara, where are you?" he taunts playfully.

I press my hands harder against my mouth, staying as still as possible as he disappears around the bed and out of sight. My heart pounds inside my chest, making it impossible to hear what he's up to, and before I have time to calm my racing heartbeat, a hand grabs my ankle and yanks. With one careful pull, Hale drags me from my hiding place and flips me over. Even in the dark room, I can see his mischievous grin split his beautiful face in two, his dark eyes sparkling.

"There you are," he whispers seductively, eyeing my body hungrily from top to bottom before finally looking at my face. "And now, sweet princess, you're mine to do with as I please. Don't say I didn't warn you." He grabs my waist and throws me over his shoulder.

As he hurries out of the room, chuckling, I thrash and yell for him to let me go.

His hand comes down on my ass, hard. “I caught you fair and square, princess. Now you’re mine. No one is here to hear you scream or plead for mercy, and believe me when I tell you that is exactly what you are going to do. I’m going to fuck you on every inch of this house until every surface is covered in your cum, and I’m going to make sure that you love every fucking minute of it.”

Panting from the picture he just planted in my head, I pretend to wave the white flag by falling silent and loosening my body on his shoulder. Once he starts to believe that I’ve given up, he relaxes enough for me to throw myself forward without him expecting it. I tumble off his shoulder, and when my feet land on solid ground, I take off running. His contagious laughter has me smiling from ear to ear, and just when I think I’m getting away, I clumsily slam into a wall hard enough to knock a painting down.

“Oh God! Oh God! That Gerhard Richter is worth forty million dollars!” I exclaim, appalled at what I’ve done, hurriedly inspecting the work of art for any damage. Before I get a good look at it, one hand wraps around my throat and another rips my dress up, and then I’m pressed up against the wall. Suddenly, a credit card appears in front of my face, and then it’s shoved into my mouth.

“Save that. You’ll need it for all the damage I’ll do, princess,” he whispers in my ear before taking a bite of my earlobe.

Laughing, I spit it out, but my giggles turn into loud moans when his fingers slide across my pussy.

“Is this for me, princess? I think so. Hmm ...” He licks the nape of my neck. “Just like that first night I touched you. You are always so fucking wet for me.”

“Yes,” I whimper, pushing back against his crotch as he spreads my arms high on the wall. His fingers slide lower and spear me, making me scream as he forces them deeper until

I'm stretching around three of them. The sharp pain fades to pleasure as he works them inside of me.

"Fuck, I love how wet you get for me, princess. You are always so fucking wet and wanting. You're begging for my cock, aren't you?"

I groan, my temple hitting the wall as I reach for my release. My pussy clenches as pleasure rolls through me, and when he bites my ear and pinches my clit, I come undone with a scream.

He works me through it, chuckling. "That's it, princess, show Daddy how badly you want his cock. Let me feel you beg for it."

"Hale," I groan, my eyes closing as I slump. "Please," I say needily, knowing it makes him weak when I do. It drives him crazy when I'm this desperate for him, and although his fingers might have taken the edge off, his cock is so much better, and I want it—no, I *need* it. "Daddy, please, fuck me!"

"Fuck, I love your filthy mouth," he growls as he pulls his fingers free. I hear him suck them clean, then he spins me around and clasps my wrists together above my head. His dark eyes pierce through mine, mirroring my need. With his free hand, he runs the pad of his thumb over my bottom lip.

"I knew from the moment I kissed these lips they would be my undoing," he whispers before leaning close to my ear. "Now be a good girl for Daddy and scream for me."

The order has barely left his mouth before he slams into me, his huge cock impaling me as I scream so loudly, the neighbors are sure to hear, but Hale doesn't care, and when he starts to move inside me, neither do I. His cock slides in and out with brutish need, claiming me, fucking me.

"That's it, princess, take all of me. Drench my cock with your juices. Mark it. It's yours for the rest of our fucking lives. This is the only cock you'll ever have inside you, princess. Now make it yours."

His hand slaps against the wall, releasing my wrists from his grip as he hammers into me.

The sound of our bodies smacking together is loud as his other hand wraps around my neck. With each merciless thrust, his grip tightens, squeezing my throat until dots dance in front of my eyes. My vision starts to blacken, yet it's only when I'm on the verge of passing out that I come around his cock, gasping for air.

Grunting, he slams into me three more times before he stills, breathing heavily as he fills me with his cum before slowly releasing my neck. I gasp for air, even as I shake from aftershocks, my pussy still clenching around his cock from the force of my earth-shattering orgasm.

Panting, he presses our temples together, holding us both up until he recovers enough to pick me up and toss me over his shoulder again. "One down, eleven more to go. Now onto the next room."

I laugh, but before long, it turns into a wailing scream when I realize that Hale was dead serious when he said that there wouldn't be a room in this house we didn't fuck in. In fact, his real threat was that he was going to fuck me on every inch of this house. I should have paid closer attention to his warning.

I lose count of all the orgasms, but after being bent over eight pieces of furniture downstairs, my legs finally give out, making me admit defeat and beg for mercy—just as he forewarned. Taking pity on me after he sees I'm no longer capable of walking, he carries me upstairs and into my room, kicking the door shut with his heel.

We collapse on the bed and lie in a tangle of limbs, until we turn to look at each other's exhausted faces and burst into laughter.



"What is it, princess? I can hear your thoughts from over here, they are *that* loud," Hale asks with a playful tone, running his fingers up and down my naked back. I melt into the soft touch. "Should I be offended that you're even thinking at all? I mean,

after we spent the weekend fucking like rabbits, I was half expecting you to be comatose by now,” he jokes, but when I don’t reply, his playfulness morphs into concern. “Tell me what’s on your mind, sweet Cara.”

“I was just thinking about all those kids my father and those men hurt. So many lives were ruined because of them,” I confess, still troubled that, in the end, those wretched men got away with their villainous depravity scot-free. Sure, they met their demise when Gray and Zoey killed them, but it still feels like they got away with it.

And what about the other predators who are still out there?

I’m not naïve enough to assume that the evil men my best friend and her husband killed were the last ones. Evil like that still walks the earth, doling out nightmare after nightmare to innocent souls and damning their very existence.

“You’ll end up falling into the blackest of holes if you dwell on such things,” my love responds, concerned for my mental state just like he has been since the night he killed my father. He worries I will spiral or break at the slightest thing, a culmination of all the misery I’ve had to confront.

I shake my head then lift it so my chin is propped on his bare chest.

“There has to be something I can do, something that will save at least one life. There has to be,” I insist. Righting all the wrongs my father and his friends have done is all I can think about lately. I meant it when I told him that I would use every last dime to help the children who had been so viciously damaged by his grotesque fetish, but throwing money at the problem still feels like it’s not enough. Then again, will anything I do be enough to erase years of suffering and misery? Will it even make a dent in their pain?

Hale frowns, watching me succumb to my tumultuous thoughts. He begins to brush his knuckles along my cheek, coaxing my attention back to him.

“We did our part. We rid the world of those monsters. What else can we do? Search the world for all the sick fucks

who hurt kids?”

“Yes,” I deadpan without missing a beat.

“How?” His eyebrows rise, and it’s clear I shocked him with how easily I spoke the affirmation.

“We still have my father’s ledgers and his computer. I’m sure if we tried, we could establish who else frequented those orphanages and group homes around the country. My father couldn’t have been the only one. Zoey and Gray were pretty savvy in finding all the people who hurt Gray at Mercy Village Group Home, so I’m sure we could help them do the same with the other homes.”

When I see the wheels start to spin in my lover’s head, I straddle him, placing my hands on his chest.

“Think about it. With your hacker expertise and Gray and Zoey’s killer instincts, we can really do some good here. My father’s computer could hold all the clues we need, and who knows what other things he hid from us. Didn’t his lawyer tell us he had some safety deposit boxes for me when he read his will after the funeral? Maybe there are more out there with a bunch of information that can help us in our quest.”

“You’re serious about this? You want to declare an all-out war on every pedophile in the country?” he asks slowly, as if to make sure he’s understanding me correctly.

“Do you think there is a better cause than that?” I retort.

Hale gently grabs my waist before sliding from underneath me, surprising me.

“Are you leaving?” I ask, stunned when he starts putting on his clothes.

“Nope. I just need to have some clothes on if we’re going to have such a serious talk.”

“Why?” I drag the sheet up to my chest, suddenly unsure of my plan. He notices and narrows his eyes on the sheet, no doubt debating ripping it away.

“Well, if I’m going to be one of the good guys from here on out, I would rather not have a hard-on while you’re naked

on top of me.”

I giggle, letting the sheet drop. “Are you saying that I’m somewhat coercing you into helping me with these?” I coo, grabbing my breasts in both hands, and when I begin to fondle my nipples with my fingers, he freezes with one leg half in his pants. His eyes remain locked on my breasts as I whimper and pinch my nipples.

“Enough of that, princess. Play fair. I mean it,” he growls.

My head falls back in laughter. Hale is in pain just from watching me play with my body.

“God, I love you,” I say, surprising us both when the words easily spill from my lips.

Hale’s face softens as he discards his pants to take a step toward me. “What did you just say, Cara?”

I lick my suddenly parched lips as my heart hammers in my chest. All my desire is completely forgotten, and for a moment, I want to take it back, scared of his reaction, but then I remember that I have lived my entire life in fear, and I refuse to do so now, especially with him—the man with hope in his eyes, begging me to love him.

“I said I love you. I love you, Hale Rhettt, with my whole heart. I’m in love with you.”

His eyes begin to water as he gazes down at me, taking my breath away.

“You’ve never said those words purposefully to me before,” he stammers, taking another step my way.

“I know.”

“Why now? Why say them now?” he adds, kneeling on the mattress as he inches his way closer to me.

“Because now there is no one in this world who could ever take you away from me. Because now I’m sure that all my dreams of the future can be realized,” I whisper, watching him come toward me.

“Am I your future, sweet Cara?” he asks on a groan, lifting my chin with his fingers.

“Yes,” I murmur. “You’re my everything. You’re the man of my most lurid nightmares and most beautiful dreams. You’re my beginning and my end. You’re my soul’s damnation and salvation all rolled up into one. You are everything I could have ever asked for.”

“I’ve never felt love like this before,” he whispers, a single tear streaking down his cheek. The man who stands in darkness and laughs in the face of evil is weak before me, and seeing such vulnerability from Hale steals the last piece of my heart.

“Neither have I,” I reply, catching his tear with my fingertip and sucking it into my mouth. “Doesn’t make it any less real though.”

“No, it doesn’t.” He smiles tenderly, running his thumb over my bottom lip and pulling it ever so sweetly.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” I taunt with a smirk, knowing that he loves me just as deeply.

“Whatever words I use to describe what I feel for you will never do my feelings justice,” he replies with a shy smile.

“Try,” I press, rising up on my knees so we are face-to-face.

He gazes deeply into my eyes, staring into my soul and pouring all the love he has for me into that single look.

“I never had a family,” he starts sullenly. “Not that I minded. You can’t miss what you never had, I guess. I was always a loner, and after a while, I deluded myself into thinking it was my choice ... that I was the one who kept people at arm’s length, but then I saw you,” he whispers lovingly. “You were all alone in that small garden, looking like an angel put on this earth for me to corrupt, but then you went and turned the tables on me. I wanted to taint such perfection, and in the end, you ended up being my saving grace, my atonement and redemption, perfectly packaged in angel form.”

Now I'm the one who's crying. We were both lost, lonely souls walking the earth in search of each other.

"You touched something inside me that I didn't even know existed, and because of you, my heart beats. My heart belongs to you, my sweet Cara, now and always. It's yours."

I laugh from joy as tears keep falling down my cheeks.

"I love you. I love you, Cara," he says. "I will say it every single day, and I will prove it with every breath in my lungs."

"I love you more," I sob happily.

"Not fucking possible," he says before pressing his lips to mine.

All talk of plans and schemes are lost as we tumble back into bed, with tears coating our faces and love in our hearts.

How could anything be more perfect?

CHAPTER 27

Hale



“Is this all you have?” the detective asks as he hands several boxes and General’s laptop over to the other men in blue.

“Yes, Detective Reeves. That’s all we found,” Cara replies, looking visibly upset.

I know my girl wants to become a vigilante of sorts and bring down every motherfucker who dares to hurt a child, but she should really go off to Hollywood and pursue acting. Her performance is fucking flawless and worthy of an Oscar, but I suppose she was conditioned to put on such an act all her life, pretending to be someone she’s not. It’s in her bones now, so she may as well use it to her advantage.

“I’m so sorry you’re going through this, Miss Nightingale. I’m sure it must have been quite a shock for you to discover all this,” Detective Reeves says sympathetically.

“It’s a shock that I don’t think I’ll be able to recover from any time soon,” she weeps.

When the detective hands her a handkerchief, it takes everything in me not to break into a fit of laughter.

Fuck, I love this woman.

I’m going to marry her and put lots of fucking babies in her.

“If the intruder who robbed our home hadn’t caused my father’s heart attack, I’m not sure we would have ever known the truth,” she continues, sobbing.

“Yes. I wouldn’t be surprised if they came into your house with that very agenda. Not to intentionally provoke your father’s death, but to get their hands on all this evidence. It might have been one of his associates who wanted an out, and your father refused. Whatever the reason, I’m positive the robbery is linked to his past. We will make sure to find the person behind it,” the detective declares, thinking his words will give some comfort to a distraught Cara.

“Are you going to go through all that trouble to lock up the perpetrator or give him a medal?” I interject, feeling Cara’s rigid form tense even further.

“Murder is murder, Mr. Rhett. Although this is nothing more than involuntary manslaughter, and a jury will obviously be lenient considering the circumstances, this is still a criminal offense. I promise that we will strive to find the culprit as well as investigate what your father was really into, especially in regard to his connection in the All Saints Home murder case in Washington DC. At least now we have a good idea of what happened to that poor little girl, Grace Montgomery.”

“May her soul rest in peace,” Cara whispers under her breath, the only sincere remorse and sadness she’s felt all morning.

Just as I wrap my arm around her shoulder to ease her guilt, we hear a raucous commotion coming from the hallway and a very loud, feminine demand to be let in. I pull my arm away from Cara as she schools her features to look cold and impassive. I’m the only one in the room who knows that my sweet, caring princess must be throwing a parade in her mind over what’s about to happen next.

“I think it’s best if your officers let Cara’s father’s housekeeper pass, Detective Reeves,” I tell the detective who waves to his men immediately.

Magda’s bitchy face comes into full view as she bypasses the men in blue and walks into her master’s office, looking like a banshee ready to claw some eyes out.

“What is going on here?” she roars in outrage when she sees the room filled with cops. “You shouldn’t be in here!”

“And why is that?” Cara says sweetly, dabbing at her eyes like a fucking pro. “This is my house, and everything inside it is now mine, or did you forget that my father is no longer the owner of this house?” she states matter-of-factly with a serene look on her face, but I can see the venom in my girl’s eyes.

Magda’s face turns red with rage at the provocation.

“I have not forgotten,” she seethes. “I am very aware of who the owner of this home is, Cara. It’s just that I would have assumed you would have called me to deal with your father’s affairs while you’re in mourning. I was supposed to arrange your father’s office after the funeral, but you gave explicit orders that you would rather grieve without having a house full of staff.”

“Yes, I did,” Cara deadpans. “Which leaves me to wonder why you ignored my instructions and are here today.”

Magda glances anxiously from left to right, watching cops go through General’s things and box them up to take back to their precinct.

“There were some things your late father left instructions for me to deal with,” she mumbles.

“I think what you mean to say is that my father ordered you to destroy evidence in the eventuality of his unexpected death. That’s what you meant, right?” Cara says with malice, sitting up straighter.

“Evidence ... What? No. I meant—” Magda stumbles back as the detective’s attention focuses on her—the once proud, bitchy woman who looks ready to bolt out the door. Her eyes shift across the room, and her back seems to curl inward when she realizes there’s no escape.

I wanted to kill the evil woman who tormented Cara for most of her life, but my girl had much better plans for her. Magda will rot in prison for her crimes and will never have the opportunity to hurt Cara with her cruel ways ever again.

“Well?” the detective demands, waiting for the housekeeper to defend herself.

“Governor Nightingale left me instructions,” she repeats. “He left me explicit instructions to erase everything in his hard drive and shred all his personal folders. I swear I never so much as looked inside them. Not once. I’m telling you the truth. I’m not sure what all this is about, but I can guarantee I had no part of it. I didn’t know.”

“Didn’t know what?” Cara asks with a small grin since the detective’s back is to her. “What exactly didn’t you know? That my father was traveling across the country to abuse innocent, vulnerable children? Or that he took pleasure in beating them to death? Tell me, Magda, because I’m confused. What exactly didn’t you know?”

If looks could kill, then my girl would be dead on the spot with how Magda is glaring daggers into her, but my Cara just walks to her father’s desk and picks up a large leather book.

“You say that you have no idea why the police are here, but I think you’re lying. You knew exactly what my father was doing all these years, and I have his appointment book to prove it.” Cara flips to a page in the book and points to it.

“See here? This is an event that my father had to attend in the city. See how it’s scribbled out and replaced with the initials A.S.H.?” Magda doesn’t so much as lower her eyes to the page, but Detective Reeves is paying close attention to the show Cara is putting on. “A.S.H., Magda, as in All Saints Home. It even coincides with the day of the murder that took place in DC. You not only knew what my father was up to, but you also organized his day to accommodate his monstrous depravity. You know how I know this? Because it’s in your handwriting, Magda, as are countless other entries here. This book is proof that you knew damn well what my father was up to and that you were an accomplice in his misdeeds.”

“You ... You ... You little spoiled fucking brat! You’re framing me!” Magda screams, ready to throw herself at Cara. The only thing that stops her from doing so is Detective Reeves, who steps in front of her. He then proceeds to nod at his deputies, who instantly grab Magda by the arms and hold her back.

“Read this woman her Miranda rights,” the detective orders with a disgusted look at Magda.

“I don’t know anything! I did nothing! I just cleaned up his mess! I just took care of him!” Magda shouts, thrashing in the police officers’ grips.

“If blatant ignorance is the defense you’re going for, I suggest you talk to a lawyer for better counsel because I’m not buying it. Take her away. I want her in the precinct and in an interrogation room when I get back. It’s obvious she knows what was going on here.”

Cara and I watch Magda being dragged away with matching grins before we discreetly fist bump behind Detective Reeves’ back. When he turns around, Cara’s expression is distraught once more. “Thank you again, Miss Nightingale, for calling the police and alerting us to all of this. We will be in touch in due time, but I will do my utmost best to keep you out of this ugly mess.”

She nods with gratitude and, knowing that it will have him melting on the spot, her eyes go purposely soft. “Thank you, Detective Reeves. That is very kind of you. Of course, I will do anything I can to help with this investigation, so please don’t refrain from calling me whenever there is a need. Thank you again for all of your help in this trying time. You’re a good man.”

I’m usually a jealous man and would stake my claim so this detective didn’t get any funny ideas in his head that she’s flirting with him, but I know this is all part of the act. If, by chance, the good detective forgets what his mission is, then trying to earn Cara’s good graces should be all the motivation he needs.

Like clockwork, Detective Reeves stands taller under her praise, giving Cara a warm smile. “Thank you, Miss Nightingale. There is much to do here, and I promise we will be out of your hair soon, but I know that having your home invaded by the NYPD must be very uncomfortable for you. Why don’t you go out for a while and take your mind off what’s taking place here? I promise to call you when we’re

done,” he explains, giving her a look I’ve only seen from the puppies Cara takes care of in the shelter.

Like shit you will.

“That sounds like a good idea, my love.” I take her knuckles and kiss them as I pull her closer to me. “You have my number if you need us for anything,” I tell the detective, silently warning that he has to go through me first before reaching out to my girl.

Huh.

I guess I am a little jealous. Some old habits die hard. Luckily for him, I need him to do his job, so I’ll spare his life. Still, the toothy, ominous smile I offer him says exactly what’s on my mind.

Do your job and we won’t have a problem. Try to flirt with my girl again, and I’ll have your balls for breakfast.

He straightens his tie and nods, getting my silent messages loud and clear. As we begin to leave the office, Cara makes sure to smile and wave gratefully at all the police officers filling her father’s house—or hers, I should say. I squeeze her hand before we step out of the house, knowing that a circus of reporters will be waiting for her. Once we’re outside, Cara makes sure to dab a handkerchief at the corners of her eyes for the cameras as a bombardment of questions are screamed out by eager journalists who want to get the scoop of the governor turned abuser.

Both Cara and I wait for them to quiet down, then Cara clears her throat before she speaks. They quiet down, anxiously waiting for her to give them the salacious story of the decade.

“We are working in tandem with the New York Police Department to get to the bottom of my father’s atrocities. At this time, the police are combing my home for any additional evidence, especially all incriminating items in my late father’s possessions. That’s all I can tell you right now, and I hope you will understand my need for privacy during this very troubling time. Thank you.”

I wrap my arm around her and lead her to the town car, opening the passenger side for her to slide in. I hold her hand as she gets inside, ignoring the flashing cameras and journalists who shout out her name. When she's safely ensconced inside, I round the car and slap the hood twice to indicate to our driver that we are done here before sliding in. The chauffeur quickly takes off, making sure to put distance between us and the mob. I know the paparazzi will try to follow us, but they won't be able to—not when I made sure to hire the best getaway driver in the state.

After all, I'm an expert.

I won't leave anything to chance, not even something as small as this.

After a good five minutes of driving, where we made sure no one was tailing us, Cara finally relaxes, and her distraught expression turns to one of relief.

"That was exhausting," she says, letting out an exaggerated sigh before leaning her head on my shoulder.

I squeeze her thigh and kiss her temple.

"The worst is over, princess."

"Is it?" she asks somberly. "What if the police find one of my father's so-called associates before we do? Then there will be a trial, one that I'm sure I will be called to attend and testify at. I'm really not looking forward to acting like the distraught daughter of a pedophile on the stand. It took all I had not to tell Detective Reeves that we were the ones who killed the bastard. May he burn in hell," she says with a malicious tone.

"You played it beautifully back there, princess. I doubt if you had confessed, that Detective Reeves would have believed you. You had him eating out of the palm of your hand. It made me proud as fuck with how far you've come out of your shell."

"Proud?" she purrs, running her finger up and down the buttons of my shirt. "There was a moment there when I thought you were going to rip the poor detective's head off."

"Shit, and here I thought I had my poker face on." I chuckle.

“You did.” She laughs. “I guess I just know you a little bit better than everyone else.”

“That you do.” I smile, kissing her temple.

She leans back into the leather seat and starts to relax. “Okay, enough talk about what’s happening back in that god-awful house. I’m more interested in knowing where you’re taking me.”

“That’s a surprise.” I smirk.

“A surprise? Hale, if you haven’t been paying attention these last few months, I’ve had my limit of surprises. At least give me a clue. Where are we going?” she insists impatiently.

“On a date.” I grin over at her, taking her hand and kissing it before twining my fingers with hers on her thigh. “We’re going on a date. Our very first, princess, and one of many yet to come.”

“Promise?” she coos, her eyes sparkling with such love, it completely undoes me.

“Be a good girl for me, Cara. You know that anytime you look at me like that, all I want to do is fuck you were you stand, and right now, we have company,” I warn, tilting my chin to our chauffeur.

She laughs.

“That’s never stopped you before,” she says, arching a challenging brow.

“I said be good or you’ll force me to put you over my lap and give you a good spanking,” I tease with a mischievous grin.

The little vixen ups the ante by having the audacity to lean close to my ear, sounding all breathless and delicious as she speaks, causing a shiver to run down my spine and blood to rush to my cock.

“Okay, Daddy. I’ll be good. Just as long as you promise that I can be bad later,” she purrs before biting my earlobe.

Goddamn.

How the hell is a man supposed to keep his wits about him with such a temptress in his midst?

When she sees me shifting restlessly in my seat and rearranging my stiff cock in my pants, she lets out the most beautiful giggle known to man. The sound is music to my ears, and I can't help but join along and chuckle too.

Life with Cara will always be like this—a little bit of pain mixed with a bucketful of happiness.

How did I get so lucky?



When my phone vibrates in my pocket with an incoming text, I pull it out to see what it is just in case it's a job from the agency. The smallest hint of a smile crests my lips when I see that the message came from Gray.

WishesHeWasMeGray: Looking good.

I ignore the pictures he attached from the paparazzi, pictures that were taken of Cara earlier today in front of her building with me standing right behind her like I'm her shadow. Instead of replying with a text, I send him an emoji of a middle finger, knowing it will irritate him as well as make him laugh. I turn my phone to silent and put it away, intent on placing all my focus on our first date.

The first I have ever been on, and hopefully the first of many with Cara.

I picked the best Michelin five-star restaurant in the city. Cara deserves the best of everything, so I thought this place would be perfect for our very first meal together, even if the prices on the wine list alone are more than what most people spend on rent. Still, the food is supposed to be amazing, and I'm curious to see if this place is worth all the hype.

As the minutes pass by, Cara becomes more tight-lipped all of a sudden, looking uncomfortable about being here. I glance around the place and realize that the other diners are keeping close tabs on us and whispering amongst themselves,

no doubt about the stories circulating regarding Cara's father on the news. When the waiter finally arrives with our order, I'm hopeful that the delicious food will take Cara's mind off the attentive audience around us. Unfortunately for me, I hoped too soon. The instant he places our plates in front of us, I groan in disappointment. The portion of food is so small that I could eat all of it in one bite. It's colorfully decorated, but fancy artwork won't fill our stomachs.

Still, I put on a bright smile and try to remain positive, hoping that all this will impress her anyway. I know she already loves me, but that doesn't mean I intend to stop putting in effort. I want Cara to choose me every single day, so every single day I will make sure to give her a reason to.

"You are hardly eating," I remark, concerned after she picks at her plate for a good five minutes.

She makes a humming noise, and my eyes narrow as I hook my foot around her chair, uncaring of the gasps around us when I drag her closer to my side. Her head jerks up, and I grip her throat, forcing her to focus.

"Talk to me, princess," I demand in earnest.

"I ..." She stares at me sheepishly. "I hate these kinds of places," she finally admits, her shoulders slumping. "My father used to bring me to places like this all the time just to parade me around. I know that was never your intention. I know you just picked this restaurant to be sweet, and it is, but it's just not me. Not anymore. Actually, I don't think it ever was."

Fuck.

I messed up.

"I'm sorry, my love," I murmur, stroking her face. "I was trying to impress you," I confess tenderly.

"I know you were, but you know me well enough by now to recognize that I don't need fancy restaurants or expensive gifts. I just ... I just want you. That's enough for me. When I'm with you, we have so much fun together. All I wanted

today was to have a little bit of fun with you. Can we do that instead?”

“I thought you’d never fucking ask.” I grin widely, having had enough of this pompous place. I drop my napkin on top of the plate and stand, flinging down enough money to cover our bill and a sizable tip for our waiter. I help pull Cara’s chair out so she can stand, and then I take her hand in mine and lead her outside to our town car. The instant we slide into the back seat, Cara sighs, and all the tension in her shoulders disappears.

“Thank you, Hale. I’m sorry you went to all that effort for nothing.”

I reach over and press two fingers against her lips.

“Shh, little one. I’m the one who should have known better. It’s a mistake I won’t make again. Now let’s go have some fun, princess.”

She’s excited to see what I have in mind, and a huge smile splits her face in two.

I have an idea, so I order our driver to weave through afternoon traffic and out of the city. Cara watches the skyscraper landscape begin to disappear, never asking where we are going, but soon the day’s earlier hurdles weigh on her, and she nods off, succumbing to her exhaustion. I let her sleep since the ride over to the Hamptons is close to two hours depending on the traffic.

When we finally park at the place I wanted to show her, I lean over and gently kiss her lips, waking her up.

“Time to wake up, Sleeping Beauty.”

Her eyes crinkle adorably as she looks around, yawning, and then she jerks upright.

“Is that ...” She eyes the serene view in front of us.

“Yep. I found this secluded lake a few years ago.” When I notice her brows pull together and her lips turn down in a frown, I can’t help but laugh. “It’s not what you think. I don’t come up here to dump bodies. That would be stupid of me,

especially when everyone knows that nothing beats burning them to ash so there's no evidence whatsoever."

"Please tell me that you don't have such bonfires by this lake," she retorts, uncomfortable with the topic at hand.

"Not at all. I don't mix business with pleasure."

Cara arches an eyebrow at that.

"You were an exception," I coo, leaning in for one more gentle peck. "But no. I just like coming here for the peace and quiet."

"I was always under the impression you preferred chaos to peace and quiet," she teases.

"What can I tell you, princess? I'm a conundrum."

I get out of the car, the sound of her laughter giving me that very peace I came here to obtain. I walk over to the other side of the car and pull her out, tugging her down the uneven slope ever so carefully until we stand on the pebbled edges of the lake. The rising moon shines down on it, reflecting across the water, and the stars shine brightly above us. It's silent apart from the sounds of nature.

There are no eyes, just us.

"Now strip, princess," I demand, stepping back. "That's an order."

"Yes, Daddy," she teases, and I have to bite my fist as she lets her summer dress drop to the ground, her panties and bra quickly following before she kicks off her heels. The grin she directs my way tells me she knows exactly what she's doing to me, and before I have time to order her to come closer, she turns around and runs to the water, diving in elegantly with a splash. My girl doesn't stay underwater for long, though, coming up spluttering and shrieking. "Oh my god, it's fucking freezing!" she yells out.

Laughing, I strip off my suit and dive in, swimming under the cool water before coming up next to her and pulling my girl into my arms.

“I’ll warm you,” I tease, wiggling my eyebrows. Her head tips back as laughter rings out. For a moment, I don’t breathe as I watch her in my arms, the moon and stars touching her face like a lover’s caress.

There has never been a more beautiful person than my Cara, both inside and out, and she’s mine forever.

“Be mine,” I demand, my voice ragged and desperate.

She sobers, lifts her head, and blinks at me in confusion.

“Forever, I mean. Be mine forever, Cara,” I beg, my chest feeling like it will explode at any moment.

“I already am,” she whispers softly, caressing my cheek before leaning in and kissing me. I start to lose myself in the sweet kiss until cold water suddenly crashes over my head, stunning me. “If you can catch me, that is,” she teases before splashing again and diving into the water, swimming away.

“You can never escape me!” I call out loudly with a grin as she squeals and swims faster. Laughing, I dive after her, always eager to chase my girl.

I couldn’t be happier.

CHAPTER 28

Cara



The police investigation in regard to my father's nefarious extracurricular affairs is still ongoing, but the evidence that they found in his office was damaging enough that they made an official statement to the press last week about how the late governor of New York was, in fact, a known member of a child pedophile ring.

Things were crazy with the press before, but after that police statement, I couldn't go anywhere without having a camera or microphone shoved in my face. Instead of having to answer the same questions over and over again, I accepted an interview with the best journalist and TV personality out there, hoping that the international broadcast would be enough to feed the vultures that insisted on swarming after me.

I was groomed not to show emotion when it came to the press, but the minute the lights were on me, and the interviewer began to ask her questions, I fell apart right there for everyone to see. My tears were real, even if the story I was giving the world wasn't. I told them how I stumbled on the disturbing truth of who my father really was after his funeral—I've said the lie so much that it almost feels like another's truth—while angry, hot tears streamed down my face as I apologized to all my father's victims and urged them to come forward to the police so that they could tell their story.

After my interview, I thought that would be the end of it. I said all I had to and hoped that in a week or so I'd be old news. Unfortunately, more articles came out, some with very interesting conspiracy theories. I didn't mind most of them,

but the rumors that flew around the internet claiming that I knew what my father was up to, and that I even facilitated in keeping up his pristine image of an honorable businessman and selfless governor, hurt the most. It created a wound in my heart that I doubt will ever heal, mostly because there is some truth to it. I might not have known what evil acts he'd been a part of, but naïvely, he did groom me to be his best asset when it came to keeping up appearances.

Those weren't the only rumors that inundated the web though. The one that suggested I killed my father when I found out what horrible things he did and pinned it on a robbery gone wrong kind of brings a smile to my face anytime I read it. I quite like that one.

Either way, no matter what point of view the world has on my involvement, my father's reputation and legacy are ruined, just like I wanted. I'll take that win any day of the week.

While the world was still getting used to the new reality of my father's tarnished reputation, Hale and I rolled up our sleeves and got to work. I meant it when I said that I needed to right all my father's wrongs, and if that meant that I had to get my hands dirty to prevent men like him from getting away with their depraved actions, then by God, I was going to do it.

Before I called the police that day and gave them the evidence they needed to incriminate my father, I made sure my love retrieved any files he could from his computer that might lead us to his accomplices and friends. Hale was more than happy to help me in this venture. We spent most nights working side by side on his computers, finding anything we could about the ring my father was a part of. Once we had sufficient proof that the people we found were guilty of the same grotesque behavior, we handed that information to Gray and Zoey, making sure our friends paid them a visit before we anonymously tipped off the police.

These wicked men would pay for their sins with their lives, but I would make sure that death wouldn't be their only punishment. The world would know of their misdeeds and curse their names, leaving their legacy in complete shambles.

Thankfully, the love of my life is of the same mindset. It's not enough to kill a person for the evil they have cast out on the world. They need to become a warning to everyone who dares to think that they can get away with doing the same thing without repercussions. We won't stop until every last abuser is dealt with. I'm a woman on a mission. I've found my purpose, and I am lucky enough to have the man I love stand by my side to ensure that I accomplish it. We have the rest of our lives to do just that.

Together.

However, Hale isn't the only one who has supported me on this crusade. Zoey and her husband also play a big part in it too, especially Gray. Maybe that's why I'm so nervous right now.

"Babe, I love that you called us here to have breakfast with you two and all, but something tells me this isn't a social call. You look all sorts of green, and you've barely touched your food. Is everything okay?" Zoey asks opposite me in our booth.

I nod sheepishly in response as Hale supportively squeezes my thigh to stop my nervous fidgeting.

"Everything is fine," I reply, picking up a glass of water to quench the desert in my throat.

Since Zoey knows me inside and out, she narrows her eyes on me, not buying what I'm selling.

"Princess," Hale whispers encouragingly in my ear. "You've got this. Go on."

I swallow nervously once more before opening my purse and pulling out a manilla envelope. All eyes are on me as I slide it across the table and hand it over to Gray.

My best friend's husband frowns at it for a minute, then he lifts his head up to stare blankly at me. Zoey appears just as confused beside him.

"Cara, what's this?" she asks on her husband's behalf.

“Please, just open it. I promise I’ll explain later,” I beg, my nervous state showing even more now.

Hale interlaces his fingers with mine, holding my hand on top of the table, knowing I need his reassurance.

“Cara,” Zoey protests protectively, never one to like unexpected surprises, especially when it comes to her husband.

“Please. Just open it,” I insist, staring at an uncomfortable and baffled Gray.

I mean, I get it. Gray is a big part of Zoey’s life, and he’s also probably Hale’s only true friend, but when it comes to me, the only thing that links us together is my father—General—to him. Deep down, I know that’s why I’m so nervous right now. I don’t want Gray to look at me and see the man who ruined his innocence. I want him to look at me and see family because that’s what we are. I just hope he sees this gesture in the way it was intended.

Still puzzled as to why the envelope in his grasp is so important to me, Gray proceeds to rip it open and spill its contents onto the table in front of him. His brows furrow when he picks up the legal paperwork inside and begins to flip through it. When he realizes he holds a property deed in his name, he stills and looks up at me.

“Hart Group Home?” he stammers, bewildered.

“I haven’t announced it yet, but I’ve prepared to have a press release soon. I just wanted to talk to you about it first before I gave the green light.”

“I don’t understand,” he whispers under his breath, visibly shaken as he stares at the name of the institution.

“Babe, you don’t have to do this. If this is some publicity stunt to throw off suspicion regarding what happened to your asshole of a father—” Zoey starts, but I cut her off with a shake of my head.

“No. That’s not what this is about,” I explain in earnest. “It’s ... This is for you, Gray,” I admit with a shy grin, bouncing my gaze from him and to Zoey. “And for kids like

you too. It's for kids who weren't given a fair chance from the start. It's a place I wish I could have given you growing up—a home that is safe. It's a place where kids who haven't had the best luck in life can thrive and feel cared for.”

My chest begins to tighten as Zoey's eyes start to shimmer with unshed tears. Gray looks just as overwhelmed.

“I want you to know that for as long as I'm alive, no other child will suffer the atrocities that you had to bear. No child at Hart Group Home will be hurt like you were. I vow that I will protect each one with my life, just as you should have been protected. I can't change the past or erase all the suffering that happened in yours, Gray, but I can change other kids' futures,” I promise, feeling hot tears starting to choke up my words. “All my life, I saw how my father had been obsessed with money and power, and how he got a thrill out of using both to abuse the weak. Now he will watch from the depths of hell as I use his money and power for good and to help every last child who needs it. I promise that I will use every last dime of his to leave a legacy worthy of everything you went through.”

When Hale wraps his arm around me, I realize my body is shaking in anger. I guess that will be a hard habit to lose anytime I mention my father, but right now, it's not him who I want to focus on. Gray was the catalyst that brought me here and the reason why I am now free of my father. Gray is the reason why I even have a family in the first place.

“This home,” I begin, “is so that you, Gray Hart, will always be remembered—the boy who started it all. The boy who protected those who were weaker than him, even when it meant he would have to pay the highest of prices.” I glance over at Zoey, her silent tears now streaking down her cheeks. “That boy will live on through this safe haven, finally at peace. It's only fitting that this group home be named Hart after the boy whose resilient heart made this possible.”

As I say it, I'm taken aback by how truthful those words are. If Gray hadn't saved Zoey in Mercy Village, then I might never have had her as my best friend, and if he hadn't made it his mission in life to find General, then Hale wouldn't have been at that charity event, and we never would have crossed

paths, and I would have lost out on a love that I've only read about in books. This institution was the least I could do for all the gifts that he unconsciously gave to me. I owe him more than words can say.

“Cara,” Zoey murmurs softly. “This ... This is incredible.”

I shrug, wiping away a few stray tears of my own while Gray continues to be at a loss for words.

We all wait for the man of little words to say something.

“Thank you,” he finally chokes out, his response coming from the very depths of his soul. He reaches across the table and takes my hand, giving it a soft squeeze in gratitude. Zoey releases a wet laugh as she covers our hands with hers, and Hale follows suit, ending our little friendship tower.

“We couldn't have done this without you, Cara,” Zoey exclaims proudly. “Hale might call you his princess, but you've always been a queen to me. Your father couldn't see that, but he created one hell of a woman. You did good, babe. Real good.”

I smile, swallowing back my tears by clearing my throat. “I hope so. There's still so much work we need to do,” I reply anxiously.

“And we'll do it,” my love interjects. “Together, princess. We'll do it together.”

Zoey and Gray smile at me as Hale kisses my temple.

Now that I'm not as nervous, we begin to eat our breakfast and talk about anything and everything. It's nice.

Actually, it's more than nice.

It feels like how life should have always been, surrounded by the people that love you most, but just as I'm getting comfortable in this new family setting, my phone begins to vibrate, reminding me that my work has barely started.

Standing, I tug my suit jacket into place. “Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to hand some rich pompous assholes their balls as the new CEO of Nightingale Enterprises.”

“Give them hell, babe,” Zoey calls, always my biggest cheerleader. “After we finish here, Gray and I have some business to do. We’re going on a hunt.” She grins mischievously.

“Give them hell too.” I wink, making them laugh.

Before I even think of leaving, I lean down and kiss my man. Hale is already pouting since I’ll have to spend most of the day away from him.

“Promise I’ll be home as soon as I can,” I whisper in his ear before tugging his earlobe with my teeth.

A little giggle comes out of me when he groans and shifts in his seat. He then surprises me by grasping my waist and placing me on his lap.

“As much as I enjoy watching you owning your power,” he whispers in my ear, “I’d rather have you tied up in my bed, giving it to me.”

“Patience, Daddy. I’ll be your bad girl tonight, but first I have to put on my big girl pants and be a boss.”

“You can boss me any time you want.” He smirks, hiding his flirty grin in the crook of my neck as he inhales my scent to keep him sane for the rest of the day.

“I might just do that.” I laugh. “Now can you please let me go so I can go to work?”

He pouts again. “Can I say no?”

“No.” I laugh.

“Okay,” he grumbles, releasing his grip on me. “Give those pricks hell, princess. I’ll keep our bed warm so it’ll be ready when you get home.”

“Then I guess I better hurry up,” I tease as I stand up from his lap, his huge hand falling to my ass cheek to give it a parting squeeze.

I shake my head. This man still hasn’t had enough of me. He’s had me in every way possible, and he still acts like it’s

our first time. Something tells me that life with Hale will always be like this, and I, for one, could not be happier.

“What if instead of doing that, you come with me?”

“You want me to come to your board meeting?” He arches a curious brow.

“Why not? You are my partner in crime, aren’t you?”

Hale stands up, towering over me. “Always,” he responds, running his knuckles over my cheek.

“Good. Then let’s get to it. The sooner this is done with, the sooner you can take me home.”

I don’t have to say anything else. He holds onto my hand and begins tugging me out of the diner as fast as he can, leaving Zoey and Gray in a fit of laughter.



“No,” I snap, slamming my open palms onto the table.

“Miss Nightingale—”

“If I have to tell you to call me Cara one more time, I will be very annoyed. Is that understood, Mr. Townsend?” I demand, leaning forward in the head chair.

The board members surrounding the table look nervous—understandably so. They were some of my father’s biggest supporters, and their money funded his lifestyle, but now his daughter, who publicly shamed and ruined him, sits before them.

They should be scared.

“Of course, my apologies.” The middle-aged man coughs, his cheeks heating in anger as he tries to keep himself in check. His suit is as stiff as his posture, and he shuffles papers before him even though they are blank.

“I was simply suggesting we should reinvest the money,” he starts again.

“And I said no,” I respond once more, this time with a sickly-sweet smile. “That money will be donated, as I have previously stated.”

“You cannot do that! You can’t just squander our profits this way. We have bonuses to pay!” another board member roars, pushing to his feet.

“Sit down!” I yell, staring him down. When he sees that I won’t relent, he does as I ordered and sits heavily. “Those bonuses,” I mock, knowing that those six figure bonuses were destined to go to every person sitting in this boardroom, “will be cut as of today. All the profits from my father’s investments and companies will be donated to a charity for all the victims of my father’s abuse. If anyone has an issue with that, the door is right over there. Leave. Now.” I sit back and wait. Two members throw me distasteful glares before they march out of the room.

Only two.

Good.

I was expecting at least half would leave, so having only two greedy old men depart isn’t too bad, but as I glance around the table, I notice the board members who stayed still look uncertain of their future.

“Good. Now that the weak links have left, we can get down to business.” I sit back in my chair once more. “From this day on, greed will not be the motivating force behind our business ventures. I want to focus on the greater good and actually be a positive contributing force in the betterment of this city and society. Now that these companies are my responsibility, I will make sure that they are used correctly. If there was ever any doubt, then let me make this very clear—I am not like my father. I will never put money ahead of what is truly important. It is time we gave back to the world instead of profiting off it and draining it dry. Don’t you agree?”

“I do,” the only female board member in the room says, her voice loud and clear, making sure I know where her allegiance lies. She has a stern face and even sterner hair, but

she smiles at me with genuine excitement for what we are about to do, and it is beautiful.

“Good, then before we talk about modernization, I’d like to assess all the employee files and companies that we are currently affiliated with.”

Before the end of the day, I plan to fire every last person who even hints at being a bad seed or in any way supportive of my father’s actions. Even some of the board members who remain in this room aren’t safe.

Not from me, and certainly not from the man who is standing silently behind me, protecting my back.

I might not be able to change the whole world, but I’ll be damned if I won’t try.

CHAPTER 29

Hale



“Otis, you old bastard! Stop chewing my seats! They are goddamn Italian leather, buddy,” I hiss out, reprimanding him.

All good old Otis does is stop, give me a drooly grin, and go right back to destroying my car as if expensive leather is the juiciest snack he’s ever tasted.

Brilliant.

I lean my head back onto the headrest of the seat while I wait outside of the spa where Zoey and Cara have been holed up for most of the afternoon, having some well-deserved girl time. Usually, I would have bitched about my girl spending so much time with someone who wasn’t me, but when it comes to Zoey, I’ve learned that if I want to keep my woman happy, then I have to get used to the idea of sharing her with her best friend. I don’t mind. Not only because I like Gray’s little she-devil, but because it makes it all that much easier for me to surprise my girl when Zoey is in on it. Unfortunately for me, if they don’t hurry up, this dog will end up eating my car.

I throw him another glance and cringe at the drool all over my leather seats.

“You are walking a very thin line, buddy. You were supposed to make my girl happy, not ruin my car. I have half a mind to take you back to the pound,” I mumble, but just as I say it and look into those big, brown eyes of his, I realize even he knows I’m full of shit. Otis is one of us now. In fact, he always has been. I would die for the little monster, even if I’m

cursed to no longer have nice cars on his watch. Otis is a symbol of our forever. He's part of our future, and I can't wait to see my Cara's face when she sees him with me. She'll understand what his presence in our life means—a new dawn with fresh possibilities.

Her father never let her have any pets, so she always volunteered to get her fix. She still does, for that matter. Three times a week, she walks over to the center to help any way she can, and before she leaves, she spends a good hour just lavishing Otis with affection. Otis and Cara always had a strong bond, and leaving him there when he could come home with us was no longer an option for me.

When I went to get him earlier today and told the owner that he was a surprise for Cara, she actually cried as she went to get Otis and his belongings for me. As I waited and saw all the other animals there, and I realized that none of them were starved for affection because they got it from people like Cara who volunteered, I ended up writing a big fat check for fifty thousand dollars just so this place could continue being a safe haven for all the abandoned animals. Cara would have wanted it that way, not that I'll ever tell her I did such a thing. I prefer to win brownie points with my girl the old-fashioned way—with my head between her thighs.

When the spa's door finally opens and my girl and her bestie walk out, I quickly look at Otis through the rearview mirror.

“Here she comes, buddy. Your new mommy. Be on your best behavior for me, okay, buddy? It's showtime.”

Otis sits up on the seat like he knows who I'm talking about and looks over at the window. When he sees her heading our way with a bright smile on her face, he starts to bark and wiggle his tail.

“Shh, buddy. Remember, you're supposed to be a surprise,” I whisper.

He barks as if in understanding but continues to wag his tail as he watches her come toward us. Usually, I would get out of the car and open the door for her, but I can't run that

risk and have Otis jump out of the car and onto the street. I watch Cara's perfect manicured brows pinch over the bridge of her nose when I remain inside the car. Thankfully, she shrugs my uncharacteristic behavior away and opens the car door to get in. Once inside, she leans over to kiss me as Zoey waves at us from the sidewalk, not hiding the mischievous grin on her face. Good thing my girl only has eyes for me now or her bestie throwing a thumbs-up would have been a dead giveaway.

"Hey, babe," she says happily before grabbing her seat belt.

"Hello, my love," I purr, gripping her head and deepening the kiss now that she's strapped into the seat.

What can I say? Not only did I miss her like crazy this afternoon, but seeing her bound up in any fashion always gets my cock hard.

"Miss me that much, huh?" she murmurs breathlessly.

"What do you think?" I challenge, bringing her hand to my hard-on.

Cara's eyes become hooded as she tightens her grip around my hard length. "I missed you too," she coos, her face now inches from mine.

"Yeah? How much?" I ask, just as she starts unbuckling my belt.

"Why don't I just show you?" she sings before moving closer for another kiss.

Like the cockblocker he is, Otis loses his patience and drags a rough tongue across our cheeks. Pulling away, Cara whirls around and then screams. I wince, helping her as she flings herself into the back seat, where she rains kisses across his face, the lucky bastard.

"Oh my god! Otis, what are you doing here, boy?" She looks up at me then, frowning. "Hale?"

"He's yours—ours," I admit gruffly, glaring at the dog in jealousy. He just wags his tail as if he knows what he just put a

stop to, the maniacal bastard.

“What?” she asks, still overcome with joy.

“He’s ours, princess. Otis is now officially part of the family,” I announce, which is greeted with yet another loud scream of joy. Cara wraps her arms around me and places kisses across my face like she did with Otis.

“My turn,” I whisper to him, glaring at him smugly.

Not one for not having the last word—or in his case, bark—Otis begins to yap away, joining Cara in kissing me.

The scene is so ridiculous—having my girl kiss me on one side of my face and my dog on the other—that I can’t stop the smile that tips up my lips.

“I love you so much,” Cara exclaims affectionately.

“Save that thought for when we’re alone, princess. Besides, that’s not the only surprise I have for you today. Now, how about you jump up here and get buckled in?”

Like the good girl she is, Cara scrambles over to the front of the car, and this time I’m the one who belts her securely in.

“Come here, boy!” she says, and Otis jumps in front, his wagging tail hitting me right across the face before he finds his sweet spot at Cara’s feet.

Before I have even started the car, Otis promptly falls asleep, blissfully farting away.

Lovely.

Cara giggles at the pained expression on my face, but it soon fades away with the sound of her happiness and the sparkle in her eyes. That alone makes it all worth it. My girl is on a mission, determined to save the world and change it as best as she can. For my part, I plan to make her own little corner of the world as perfect as I can for her. I want to create a happy place where she feels loved and protected, and where I’ll make her laugh every single day—and sometimes scream of course.

The world gets Cara, the Nightingale savior.

I get Cara, my princess.

It's a deal I can live with.

Kissing her knuckles, I pull out into traffic and head toward the second part of our forever with my little family alongside me.

Chewed leather, farts, and all.



“Um, Hale, where are we?” my love asks as we pass the guarded, private gate.

“You’ll see.” I grin.

Her gaze bounces off me and the large property, but she remains perfectly still when I park the car, too nervous to set foot outside without my permission. Getting out of the car, I let Otis out and then offer my hand for a confused Cara to take. I help her out of the car, and then I lead her up the winding driveway and stop before the house. It’s huge, with five acres of land just outside the city to give her the peace and quiet she so craves. The outside is brick, with a spiraling tower and all. It’s perfect in every single way.

When I saw it, I knew it was built for her.

For us.

“This is your castle, princess. Not your tower or your prison like your father’s place. This is our home for our future. We can make new memories and find our forever inside those walls. It’s yours, Cara.”

She whirls, watching me with an open mouth. “It’s ours?”

I nod, and she turns back before she races toward the arched double doors. Otis barks loudly and looks at me, waiting for my command. When I nod at him, he takes off at rapid speed, running circles around the grass and then sprinting toward the open front door of the house, heading inside after Cara. Chuckling, I lock the car and strut into my new home.

It's not just a house, it's a home, since that's where she is.

I hear her calling out in excitement as she races around, exploring the huge mansion. It will take her a while to see everything, since this home is much bigger than her father's—and yes, I checked. Nothing is too much for my girl. It has a library for her that I know she'll enjoy being in for hours on end. It also has an office so she can work from home when she doesn't want to go into the city. It has all the rooms and amenities my princess deserves. As for me, there are only two rooms that I really care about—our bedroom and the locked playroom on the top floor. I'll keep that room close to my chest for a little longer. As much as I would love nothing more than to christen all the toys I got for her, I won't show them to her just yet.

Even good old Otis has plenty of rooms to play in. I even made sure that he got his own bedroom. Although, knowing Cara, I wouldn't be surprised if we adopted more pets and we'd have to build a whole new addition to the mansion just to house them.

I also made sure that my own workspace is right next to Cara's office. It has an adjoining bathroom where I can slip into her office, get her nice and dirty over her desk, and then take a shower once we're done. I expect a lot of fucking and very little work in our future.

The three sprawling floors are all empty, ready for her to decorate and fill with her light and happiness.

I can't wait to see it and then chase her through the hallways and claim her across every single inch.



Cutting the ribbon, Cara smiles as the paparazzi takes their photos, with Otis at her side. I clap alongside the large crowd that came out for this and cheer for my girl. Her eyes find me in the horde of people, and her smile turns soft for me and me alone.

I know she's excited for this big reveal, but I'm just as eager to get my girl home to celebrate. Our house is finally finished. After three long months and me paying for everything to be done double time, we can now move into our home. We were staying at my Tribeca loft while we waited, and although I very much enjoyed having Cara sleeping in my bed, I'd rather sleep in ours. I can't wait to spend our first night in our forever home.

We need a little bit of peace after the recent months. The NYPD detectives finally finished their investigation, and the results shocked the world, but not us. The late governor's misdeeds—or General, as he is now known to the world—are now proven facts. All the naysayers who refused to believe such a powerful man amongst the city's elite could be capable of such things as abusing and killing young children are now fully silent in their shock.

I'm still hunting down those who had any part in the pedophile ring that Gray suffered under. Once Cara and I have all the details and proof that we need, we send it over to another deadly duo—our besties. Cara and I find the bastards, and Gray and Zoey make sure to snuff the light out in their eyes. As jobs go, mine isn't a bad one.

No one would dare think that my girl would roll up her sleeves and get dirty with me in the trenches. In the eyes of New York City, she's the epitome of a daughter paying the penance for her father's sins. During the day, she's savior Cara, a hardened CEO taking the world by storm and a humble philanthropist determined to better the world, but at night, she's my princess, tied to my bed as she begs for her thief to take her.

Let people see what they want because I know who she really is.

"It has to be a publicity stunt," someone next to me mutters after Cara unveils that her father's home has been restructured and refurbished to be a dog sanctuary.

I grin at the idiot.

I once thought the same thing he did, that all her good deeds were merely for publicity, but now I know better. Being good is just who Cara is. She is a soft-hearted woman who stole the soul of the devil—the devil who will protect her and love her for the rest of our lives, and even that won't be enough.

I can't help but laugh as Cara gives the go-ahead for the doors to swing open. People rush inside to see the dogs there, filling every room with their shit and destruction. Those little rascals will ruin her father's perfect home, just like his reputation and memory has been decimated.

All the demons that tainted my girl's life have been dealt with accordingly, even Magda. When she was put behind bars, I may or may not have paid off some people in there to make her life a living hell. No one gets away with being cruel to my girl.

No one.

"Hale!" she calls out to me, her starry eyes sparkling my way.

I push strangers out of my path and take her into my arms when I reach her. Then, because every last motherfucker here is staring at us with envy in their eyes, I dip my girl and kiss her as everyone watches.

Let them. She's all mine.

Forever.

CHAPTER 30

Cara



“Come on, Hale,” I whine impatiently,

With his tie over my eyes, I’m unable to get a peek at where we are going, so I just hold his hand tightly as he leads me to God knows where.

We’ve been coming back and forth to the new house over the last few days, moving everything in and adding a few last-minute decorations, but while I was putting my paperbacks away in my library, Hale interrupted my fun with ideas of us having some of our own. I just don’t know where he’s leading me to.

“Don’t peek.” He chuckles against my ear, making my entire body tingle with anticipation. I hear a door open and then close behind us, and then we stop. The carpet changes to flooring under my bare feet, and I shiver, wearing nothing but a mini skirt and shirt. “Okay. Now you can look, princess.”

I tug down the tie and gape.

I knew there was a locked room upstairs. I came upon it when I was exploring the house one day. I kept asking Hale why it was locked and why I couldn’t see what was inside, but he kept teasing me that one day, when I least expected it, I would find out. Now I realize why he was so secretive.

It’s a fucking sex room.

There is a giant four-poster bed on a pedestal in the middle, with purple silk sheets and chains attached to each post. The floor is dark wood, which is easy to clean, and every wall is covered in toys, from butt plugs to paddles and things I

don't recognize. There's a bench and some other equipment, and even a swing in one corner. The lights are low and sensual, adding to the atmosphere, and I can't help but stare.

"It's so we can play, princess," he murmurs as he steps around me, his voice crooning in my ear as he cups my breasts. "Do you want to play?" he whispers, biting my ear.

Desire slams through me as I look around, imagining us using everything in here on each other. "Fuck yes," I respond. "But where do we start?"

"There is no rush, princess. We have a lifetime to explore all of this. For now, let's start where we began." I turn to ask what he has in mind, but when he takes my hand and leads me to the bed, I decide I would rather be surprised. "Get on it, princess, and quickly. I'm impatient, and I want to feel that pretty pussy choking my cock," he growls.

I scramble on and lean back into the pillows as he reaches out and places his hands on each post as he watches me hungrily.

"I'm going to chain you up, princess, and fuck you raw. If you're naughty, I might even use some toys on you."

"Then I guess I'll be naughty," I tease as I reach down and slide my skirt off, leaving the heels on. With his darkening eyes focused on me, I lift my shirt and toss it away, leaving me in a lacy thong and high heels. "What are you waiting for? Permission? You never needed that, Daddy." I flutter my lashes sweetly.

He prowls around the bed toward the top of my head and grabs my left arm, dragging his hand down to interlace our fingers. With his eyes on me, he leans down and kisses the jumping pulse in my wrist before chaining it up. Moving down the bed, he does the same to both my ankles and then walks back up to chain my other wrist. I just watch him, my chest and face flushed with the eroticism of it all.

"You look so good in my chains, princess," he murmurs, reaching back and tugging off his shirt in that sexy move all men can do, but none can do it better than him.

My mouth goes dry at the sight of his chest, all that chiseled perfection clenching with his movements as he tosses his shirt away and then strips out of his jeans. His huge, hard cock springs free, and he wraps a hand around it, stroking himself as he watches me.

“Is this what you want?”

I nod, licking my lips, and his eyes narrow. “Words, princess.”

“Yes, Daddy, please,” I rasp, wanting to taste his cock, but he releases his grip with one last stroke and climbs on the bed.

He kisses up my leg and hovers over my pussy before he places a teasing kiss right over my throbbing clit. “Tough, I want to play,” he whispers right before he sucks my nipple into his mouth.

My back arches, pressing it deeper, as my head falls back. Pleasure takes over, and it feels like there’s a thread of nerves between my nipple and clit as he switches to the other before pushing my breasts together, torturing me as he licks and sucks.

“Daddy’s hungry,” he purrs as he slides lower. “So be a good girl and let him feast.”

His teeth catch on the thong, and he rips it away before sitting up. I pant as he presses his nose to the fabric and inhales.

“So fucking sweet,” he murmurs, dragging his tongue along the soaked material. “I love how you taste.” He tosses them away and lies between my parted thighs, gripping them as he seals his mouth to my pussy and attacks.

He licks every inch of me, making me cry out as I lift my hips. I close my eyes as his tongue slides into me. God. There’s nothing like the way he eats pussy. It always has an edge of violence to it, as if he’s tearing me apart and daring me to fight him off before I lose the last bit of sanity I have. I don’t, of course. Not this time. I want him too badly. I grind against his face, rattling the chains as he circles my clit over and over, driving me toward my first release.

He lifts his head and grins at me with my cream glistening around his mouth.

“Don’t you dare come, princess. Not yet. Not until I’ve had my fill. You wait until Daddy gives you permission to come,” he orders before he seals his mouth on me. He licks and sucks as his fingers move inside of me, and his tongue joins them.

I feel my release approaching, and I try to hold it back, I really do, but he’s determined to make me fail. I’m positive that was the purpose of his game all along. Still, I try my best not to give in, but when he sucks my clit into his mouth, grazing it with his teeth, I lose my battle and come all over his mouth with a loud scream.

He continues to suck on my sensitive clit, making sure I ride my orgasm out. My entire body feels like a bolt of electricity just slammed into it. Once he knows that I’m back to the land of the living, he slaps my pussy before pulling away and getting to his knees.

“Daddy didn’t say you could come yet. Bad girls get punished,” he warns with a salacious smile.

Panting, I open my eyes to meet his gaze, and then I begin to ask what type of punishments, but I’m not fast enough. Hale flips me over on the bed, and something hard comes down on my ass, making me cry out in both pain and ecstasy. Whatever toy he’s using is warm but hard, and when it lands on me again, slapping my ass, I cry out even louder. A tear escapes me just as the flutter of a joyful laugh builds inside me. The painful sting makes me jerk on the bed, but his hand soothes the ache away, only for that same, hard edge to drag along my pussy and rub against my clit, threatening to create all sorts of havoc in my body.

“Hmm. Just as I suspected. I knew you might like the paddle, princess, but something tells me you’re going to end up loving it by the end of this. Now come on it for me.”

A paddle?

My mind conjures images of the wide, flat ends, but something much smaller pushes inside me. The handle maybe? I don't know; all I know is that it feels good. Oh my god. It feels amazing! I push back, gripping the chains as I rock my hips, and start to fuck it.

Groaning, he drags his hand over my ass as he slowly starts to fuck me with it. "You look so good, princess. I have fantasies about everything in here, and I can't wait to show you and see those pretty eyes widen in shock, fear, and lust, just like that first night we shared."

I clench around the handle and drop my head to the sheets as I speed up my rocks. Hale just chuckles at my eagerness as he pulls the handle almost all the way out and then slams it back inside me. He praises me as he starts to fuck me with it, harder and faster, as I push back to take it all in. The thickness of it, the sting of my ass cheeks, and the soft silk sliding against my nipples send me spiraling higher and higher until I'm on the verge of coming undone. All of it comes to an almighty peak when he suddenly pulls the paddle out and slaps it across my throbbing clit.

I scream as I splinter apart, and I feel his mouth press against my pulsing pussy as he greedily drinks down my release. My shaking legs give out, but he holds me against his mouth until I whimper, and then he gives me one last lick before pulling away.

"Good girl," he praises. "Such a good girl for Daddy. Such a good little slut for taking my paddle. Hmm. Good girls get rewarded."

Before I can utter a word, his huge cock is pushing inside me, remaking me around him. I've had Hale in every single way possible, yet I never get tired of him. Every thrust is borderline painful with his massive length, and when his hand lands a slap on my bruised ass, I push back and take him all the way in until he's buried deep inside me.

Both of us pant as his hand strokes up my back to my hair, where he tangles his fingers before he yanks my head up, pulls

his hard cock out of my needy pussy, and then slams it right back into me.

“Good girl. Take Daddy’s cock like the good girl you are. Take every fucking inch, princess. Let me feel that tight little cunt desperately trying to hold onto it. Yes, just like that. Fuck, I love how you feel. You’re always so fucking wet and tight for Daddy, like that first time I fucked you. Yes, just like that,” he growls. His dirty words spur me on as I push back, using the chains as leverage to claim him just like he has claimed me.

Suddenly, the paddle appears in my vision, and I memorize it for future use. It’s deep brown in color, but that’s all I make out before Hale presses the glistening handle to my mouth.

“Suck it like you would suck my cock, princess. Suck it clean of your need for me.”

Greedily, I do as he says, sucking it as deeply as I can take, and I taste the sweetness of my cunt as he hammers into me from behind. His hard, controlled movements have me whimpering, and before I know it, I’m coming again. Hale fucks me through my release, keeping me prisoner on his cock and in his chains, as he takes all of me.

“Next time you come, princess, it will be alongside me. I want that pretty pussy to squirt around my cock,” he says as his thrusts speed up, and I know he’s close. The paddle falls away, and I gasp for air as our bodies slap together, loud and wet, in our room.

In our house.

Our castle.

“Please!” I groan desperately. “Please let me feel you come, Hale.”

“Shit.” He hammers into me without restraint now, and his grip on my hair hurts, but I don’t complain. I’d never complain since it’s that edge of pain that has me reaching for the stars with another pending release. My dark-eyed stalker feels it too, and his hips stutter. “Shit, princess. I can’t hold it back

any longer. Yes, that's it. Come on Daddy's cock. Make me fill you up."

Crying out, I tug on the chains, needing more, and I get it when the paddle pushes into my ass. The orgasm tears through me, and my pussy clamps around his cock until he roars as I drain him of his cum, feeling it splash inside of me and drip out around him. He releases my hair and then slowly pulls his cock and the paddle out as I slump underneath him.

"Good girl. You took Daddy so well," he praises proudly while breathing heavily. "You deserve a reward. Just ... Just give me a second."

The fact that he's so breathless and weak makes me grin. I hear him stumble to his feet, and a moment later, something cold hits my bum—cream, I realize, as he rubs it into my stinging cheeks. His fingers dance across my pussy, which is undoubtedly covered in our combined releases, during his ministrations. When the ointment is rubbed into my cheeks, he releases me from my restraints and finally collapses on the bed next to me.

"Fuck, princess. You've killed Daddy," he grumbles, throwing an arm over his face.

I laugh as I move closer and curl up against his warmth, soaking in his love and enjoying the pleasure thumping through my well-used body. My hand glides up and down his chest, and I remember the secret that I've been holding onto, waiting for the perfect time to reveal it to him. I was going to tell him over dinner tonight before he distracted me with his fun and games in our new playroom, but now that I'm lying in his arms, I can't think of a better occasion to tell him my little secret.

"Hale?" I whisper, lifting my head so I can look into his eyes.

"Hmm?" he hums with a satisfied smile on his face, his eyelids heavy with exhaustion.

I swallow my words as I search his sleepy face. I told him I loved him once when I was like this, so I can't do this to him

now. No, he needs to be awake when I tell him our lives are about to change forever.

It's far too important to announce it when he's half dead to the world.

As I look over at him, I smile. "I love you," I say instead, and he mumbles it back before promptly falling to sleep.

I'll tell him tomorrow, I think as I fall asleep. I'll tell my love tomorrow.



Hale

"What's all this?" Cara asks, walking barefoot into the kitchen as she rubs the sleep from her eyes.

"This, little one, is what we call breakfast," I tease as I flip the last pancake onto a plate.

"I'm familiar with the concept." She giggles, taking a seat at the kitchen island. "Although I've never woken up to such a spread. You do remember that it's only the two of us here, right?" she taunts, picking up a single grape to throw into her luscious mouth.

"Three. Don't forget Otis." I wink and tilt my head down so she can see the little rascal running circles around me, waiting for a bit of bacon or sausage to fall to the floor.

"How could I forget?" she replies before calling to Otis and giving him the treat he'd been begging for.

Otis wags his tail as he catches the sausage midair with his teeth, then he lies on the floor at Cara's feet while chowing down.

I fix my girl a plate and place it in front of her.

"Bon appétit." I smile widely, bending down to kiss her lips.

Her whole face lights up, and I swear it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

After I pour some coffee and orange juice into our respective mugs and glasses, I walk around the island and take a seat right next to her. Just as I'm about to pick up my fork and knife to eat all this delicious food, I'm distracted by the melodic giggle she lets out.

"What?" I chuckle, mimicking her happy disposition.

"It's nothing." She smiles, shaking her head. "It's just that domestic life suits you."

I wrap my hand around her waist and pull her chair next to mine.

"It's you who suits me," I murmur, eyeing the way my girl came down from our playroom in only my shirt and nothing else. "Eat your food, princess, before I pick you up and bend you over this counter."

Her gaze flashes with desire, coaxing my cock to harden.

"Food, princess," I grumble before I make good on my threat.

She lets out another giggle, but this time she does what I ordered and begins to eat, pouring syrup on her stack of pancakes.

Good.

After last night, I'm sure I depleted all of her energy, so she definitely needs some nourishment to refuel, especially if I want a repeat of last night. Seeing my girl all chained up and coming hard on my paddle is an image that I won't tire of recalling. Today, I want to try out some of my other toys on her, so she'll need all the energy she can get to keep up. Anxious to start our day right, I begin to eat my own food rapidly.

"Hungry, are you?" she teases when I almost choke on my bacon.

I eye her long, bare legs and groan. "Fucking famished. Eat up."

She shakes her head, the movement accompanied by another joyful giggle. She takes a few bites of her meal while I

clean my plate. When I'm done, Cara is still drinking her coffee.

"Hmm, there's something I want to talk to you about," she says, running her finger over the rim of her mug.

"Okay," I reply, curious as to why her tone sounds so serious all of a sudden.

"There are so many empty rooms in this house that we still haven't decorated," she comments, biting her fat bottom lip.

"Whatever you decide to do with them, I'll be on board one hundred percent," I assure her, needing to erase whatever anxiety she's feeling.

"So ... one of those spare rooms ... Could we turn it into a nursery?" she asks.

"Of course," I agree.

"Good." She smiles, her shoulders relaxing. "Because we're going to need one."

"Wait ... What?" I freeze, not daring to hope, even as she watches me seriously. "Cara, are you ... ," I whisper huskily.

"I'm pregnant." She nods, watching me with wide, hopeful eyes.

The whoop I let out is embarrassingly loud as I rush to stand up from the stool and hold her in my arms. I kiss her hard before dropping to my knees and pressing my lips to her stomach.

"So, you're happy?" she asks.

"Happy? God, princess, I couldn't have wanted anything more. I can't wait to see you grow with our child."

"I'll swell," she mumbles.

"I'll rub your feet and love every curve," I reply, absolutely elated.

"I'll be moody and needy," she adds hesitantly.

"You already are." I grin maniacally as she smacks my head, only making me laugh louder. I look up at her, knowing

there are joyful tears in my eyes. She softens and strokes her palm across my face. “We are going to have a baby, princess. A part of you and me.”

“Yes,” she whispers. “We are.”

I kiss her stomach again and lean my cheek against it.

“I can’t wait to meet you, kid, and spoil you just like I’m going to spoil your mommy. You will be so loved. So fucking loved. You’ll have the entire world at your feet. I promise you that. You’ll also have the best family ever. You can torture Auntie Zoey and Uncle Gray. I’ll teach you how. Grandpa Alaric will drive you crazy, but you’ll get used to it. And your daddy will protect you with everything in him. God, I hope you look like your beautiful mommy. I hope you have her heart. What am I saying? I know you already do because she made you. I promise you will want for nothing, and I’m going to make you so proud that I’m your dad, so fucking proud, like I already am of you.”

When I look up, my girl is crying. “I love you,” she whispers.

“I love you too, my princess, forever and always,” I vow with all my heart. I stand up to my full height and pick up my woman, her arms wrapping around my neck for balance as I place her ass on the kitchen island.

“What are you doing?” she shrieks when I part her thighs.

“What do you think? I got one baby in you, so I might as well start practicing making some brothers and sisters for our kiddo.” I wiggle my eyebrows suggestively, and Cara hits my shoulders playfully.

“I love you, Hale. Even when you’re crazy.”

“I love you, princess, especially when you’re crazy,” I retort as I lick her happy tears off her cheek.

As soon as I crouch and spread her thighs, Cara’s tearful laughter morphs into loud moans of unbridled lust. I show my girl just how excited I am for the life growing inside of her in the only way I know she will understand.

Three times.

Epilogue

CARA



Five Months Later

I close my eyes as Hale continues to run his fingers through my hair, listening to the sounds of Otis and the other happy puppies we rescued running around in our backyard. Their loud, joyful yaps are a sweet melody to my ears. Since it's a beautiful spring afternoon, my love surprised me with his brilliant idea of a picnic. He asked our cook to make us a picnic basket filled with my favorite things. It never ceases to amaze me how considerate my man is—the same man who once snuck his way into my bedroom and stole my body.

Can I even say that he stole my virginity when I have no doubt that it was destined for him to begin with?

Life has thrown so many hurdles our way since then, but one thing I never doubt is his undying love for me. Each day, he reminds me how much he cherishes me in everything he does.

My best friend, Zoey, might still call him a crazy psychopath from time to time to push his buttons, but I can deal with Hale's kind of crazy just fine. I honestly believe that I was put on this earth just for him—not too shabby for a soulmate, if I do say so myself.

I can only imagine Hale will be as devoted as a father.

Since I announced that we are pregnant, he hasn't been able to keep his hands off my belly. It's almost as if he feels an urgent need to keep our baby safe in any way he can, even if

it's only by placing a gentle hand on top of it to reassure our unborn child that he's here and that he will always protect her, or maybe it's his way of connecting with our baby.

As a mother, I already love our child and have this unexplainable link to our baby that only a woman can experience. My body has slowly changed to make a happy temporary home for our little one. The OB-GYN estimated her due date will be around late August, which means in a little over three months, we will get to see her beautiful face and officially welcome her into our family.

I couldn't be more excited.

"Princess? Are you asleep?" he whispers above me, my head on his lap.

"No. Just daydreaming." I smile and slowly open my eyes to look up into the dark gaze of my demon, my love, my thief.

"About what?" he asks, running his hand softly up and down my swollen belly. I see such tenderness and love in his gaze, the same one that can fill with death.

"Our baby girl and how lucky she is to have a daddy like you," I confess lovingly.

Hale's deep brown eyes stare into mine with so much awe and love, it takes my breath away.

"I was thinking about her too," he admits after a pregnant pause.

"What were you thinking about?" I inquire curiously.

"How she's going to need some brothers and sisters to play with," he says with conviction.

I, of course, laugh at his eagerness to expand our family. If it were possible for him to knock me up every time we had sex, then I'd be the mother of a small country by now.

Hale has always had an insatiable libido, but since I got pregnant, he's really upped his game. It's as if knowing he claimed me in that way has caused an impossible, insatiable beast to wake up from its slumber just to fuck me every which way to Sunday. Not that I'm complaining because my

pregnancy hormones make me extra horny, which means my hunger matches Hale's to a T.

"I'm serious, princess," he says in earnest when I finally stop laughing.

"I can see that you are," I reply, raising my hand to his chin to graze my fingers over it affectionately. "But that's not how this baby making business works. One baby at a time is all this oven is equipped to hold."

"I should have aimed for twins," he complains, as if he had a say on the matter.

"Maybe next time," I tease with a bright smile, but I become worried when his frown persists. "Hale, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," he mumbles sadly.

I pull myself off the picnic blanket with his help and sit on his lap, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"Don't tell me it's nothing. I know you, remember? I might be the only person who does. So out with it. Why are you so upset?"

His shoulders slump as he lets out a long exhale. "I'm not upset."

I arch a brow, calling bullshit.

"I mean it, princess. I'm not upset. It's just ..."

"What? What is it?" I insist.

"Well ... yesterday, while you and Gray were dealing with the counselors at the Hart Group Home, I got bored with all the managerial talk and decided to walk around the place."

"Okay. And?" I press, trying to coax him to share what's on his mind.

"And I went to the backyard to catch some air and saw a bunch of kids playing hoops. They were all happy to mess around and joke with one another."

I smile brightly. “That’s a good thing. That means that they are adapting well and healing from their trauma.”

“Yeah,” he mumbles, lowering his eyes.

Not wanting to have any secrets between us, I lift his chin so he can look me in the eye.

“What else happened in that courtyard? Something must have happened to make you like this.”

He shrugs. “There was this kid,” he starts. “He must have been six or seven. He stared at the other kids having fun and didn’t once try to ask them if he could play too. He just sat there on the ground, as if he would always be on the outside looking in.”

“Ah, now I understand,” I coo, my worries dissipating.

“You do? Because I can’t, for the life of me, understand why I can’t get that kid’s sad face out of my head.”

God, I love this man.

I lean in and kiss him, surprising him completely.

“What was that for?” The first tug of a smile reaches his lips.

“That was for being you. You might fool the world into believing you don’t have a heart, but I know differently. You’ve got the biggest heart I’ve ever encountered.”

“Look who’s talking.” He smirks, but only for a split second, and then his teasing smile turns upside down. “So why can’t I forget that kid?”

“Because he reminds you of you—the loner who never let himself get too close because he was afraid he would be rejected. That little boy is you, Hale. That’s why you felt such a strong connection with him.”

“You think?” he asks, his brows furrowing.

I give him another kiss and order him to pull me up. I can’t do it on my own, so Hale doesn’t object and lifts me to my feet.

“Come on. We’re going on a field trip,” I tell him.

“We are?” he asks.

“Yep,” I retort, popping the P on the end. “I’m curious to meet this little boy who has my man’s heart all in knots. He must be someone very special.”

When Hale’s eyes begin to sparkle with excitement, I know for a fact that whoever this little boy is, I’m going to end up loving him. We call our dogs back to the house before we get into Hale’s car and drive into the city. An hour or so later, we reach Hart Group Home, and surprisingly, we meet Zoey and Gray in the reception area.

“It’s Saturday. I didn’t know you’d be here today,” I say, hugging my best friend while waving to Gray who looks like he’s late for something.

“What can I tell ya? My wolf loves this place. I’m surprised we get any *work* done with how much time we spend here,” she explains, sounding like she doesn’t mind one bit.

“Something tells me he’s not the only one who likes spending time here,” I tease, nudging my shoulder against hers.

Zoey’s cheeks turn crimson, and her fingers graze over the necklace that Gray gave her as a memento of his love.

“This place just feels like home to us,” she finally admits. “It’s like the home we should have grown up in together. It’s hard to explain,” she says, but I entwine my fingers with hers and give them a little squeeze so she can see that I understand perfectly.

Gray and Zoey didn’t have the best upbringing when they were kids, and maybe if they had been raised in a place like this, where love resides, they wouldn’t have spent so many years being haunted by their demons. I take comfort in knowing that we can give this generation of kids a better experience than the ones they had.

“Speaking of which, where did Gray just run off to?”

“He’s needed upstairs since his self-defense class for the girls is about to start. You know he’s all about empowerment.” She winks. “I’d be more concerned about your psychopath of a husband’s whereabouts. He slipped right past us in a hurry. Where did he run off to?” she asks, glancing every which way.

“I might have an idea.” I smile, giving her hand another squeeze before I head out to the courtyard.

As I suspected, there are loads of kids having fun playing basketball, but they are not the ones who need my attention right now. The love of my life sits on the ground with his back against the wall, and there is a little boy sitting beside him. From where I’m standing, I can see that Hale is saying something to him, and although the raven-haired boy keeps his head hanging down low, he’s listening intently to Hale’s every word.

Curiosity gets the better of me as I waddle—yes, waddle, since I’m six months pregnant and as big as a house—toward them. The closer I get, however, the more an unidentified feeling blooms in my heart. It’s only when I reach the pair that I realize what I’m feeling—it’s unconditional love mixed with an overwhelming sense of pride.

Hale is completely smitten with the hard-nosed boy as they talk about how all the other kids playing ball are a bunch of fucktwats. Mind you, I’m not on board with that type of language coming out of one so young, but I can see now why Hale likes him so much.

They are two birds of a feather.

“Hi,” I finally say, bringing their attention up to me.

My voice catches in my throat when the scrawny boy looks up at me with familiar, haunted, dark eyes. With his jet-black hair and deep brown irises, he almost looks like a combination of Hale and me.

It’s like looking at our future, and my heart breaks at the loneliness in his gaze.

“Kid, be extra nice to Cara. She’s my wife,” Hale says, getting up to his feet to stand by my side.

He's just rooted to his spot on the ground, eyeing me attentively.

"I've heard a lot about you, but not your name," I say sweetly so as to not spook him.

"It's Gale. Gale Knight," he answers.

My brain immediately disentangles his name to match my own—Nightingale. My hand goes right to my belly, and a little kick makes my baby girl's presence known.

I'm stunned by the serendipity of it all.

"What? Are you okay? What's wrong?" Hale asks worriedly when the color drains from my face.

"It's baby Grace. She just kicked," I explain, absolutely astonished.

"Really?" Hales shouts excitedly. "Let me feel." He quickly places his hand on top of my belly, but he's disappointed when Grace refuses to kick again.

He pouts. "Are you sure she kicked?"

"I'm positive," I promise.

"Maybe your baby is shy." Gale shrugs, but just as he says it, my baby girl kicks again.

"Did you feel that?" I shout.

"Yes! I felt it," Hale replies, mirroring my excitement.

We both wait for her to do it again, and for the second time in a row, she grows quiet. Gale picks up on it and starts laughing.

"I think your baby is fucking with you." He laughs, and just as he says it, Grace starts kicking up a storm.

Adding two plus two faster than me, Hale urges the little boy to keep talking to the baby, and little Grace happily kicks for him anytime she hears his voice.

"Huh?" Gale sounds bewildered, but he has a huge smile on his face. "I think she likes me."

“I think so too,” I murmur with hot tears in my eyes, now fully convinced that we were destined to meet him.

“You feel it too, don’t you?” Hale whispers in my ear, his own voice hoarse with emotion. I nod, wiping the stray tear away.

“Gale, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah,” he says absentmindedly, still cooing at my baby girl.

“How would you feel about being Grace’s big brother?” I ask expectantly.

“You mean your baby?”

I nod worriedly, knowing he might not want to come into our family and that would wreck Hale, and maybe me too because when I look at him, all I see is me as a kid—scared, alone, angry, and desperately hoping for someone to see me.

“As you can see, she already adores you. My husband does too. Do you think you’d like to be a part of our family? I know I’d like it very much,” I admit honestly, holding my breath after I ask.

He takes a step back and stares at both of us for a moment. His gaze is almost clinical as he evaluates us.

“Do I get my own room?” he asks, pondering the idea.

“Yes!” I laugh at the way he’s negotiating with us.

“What about toys? Do I get those too?” He crosses his arms, his eyes sparkling just like Hale’s do.

“Anything you want, kid.” Hale chuckles, ruffling his hair.

Gale keeps his gaze fixed on our faces as he thinks on it some more.

“I’ve got a good deal here. Extra dessert after dinner and everything. Can I have extra dessert at your house?”

“It will be our house, our home, and you can have all the dessert you want,” I reply.

He becomes nervous and starts chewing on his inner cheek.

“Do I get to call you Mom and Dad? I’ve never had any of those,” he says softly after a spell.

My heart cracks for what his childhood must have been like, but I promise the universe that he will never want for anything. We will spoil him and love him like we are his biological Mom and Dad.

Hale is quick to pick him up into his arms, surprising the young boy.

“Yes. From this day on, I’m your dad and this amazing woman right here is your mom. We are going to love the fuck out of you, kid. You just watch.”

Before I have time to reprimand Hale for cursing, Gale wraps his arms around him, stunning me speechless. Maybe we aren’t the only ones who felt this link between us. It looks like Gale feels it too. We’ll still have to go through the adoption process, but there is no question in my mind that this precious little boy is our son. We are reluctant to leave him here, but I know he’s in good hands while we rush to complete the paperwork so we can bring our son home.

“Let’s go home, princess.” Hale smiles widely as happy tears glimmer in his eyes.

With that, we all walk out of the Hart Group Home, the place that will forever be memorialized as where my family was born.

Bonus Epilogue

ALARIC

Two years later...

“Don’t eat that, sweetheart.” I sigh as I extract the toy Gale must have left about for his baby sister Grace to play with. I throw her father a glare while he just stands back and watches me wipe away the drool around her chin. “You know you’re the one who should be doing this. Your baby, your problem.”

“But you are such a good grandpa.” Hale grins as Cara giggles at his side, her belly starting to show again. I’m too old to do the math on how often these two must be at it for Cara to be pregnant again. I’d hate the cocky bastard if I didn’t see the way he made Zoey and Gray smile all the time, and the way he always lights up Cara’s and his two kids’ faces.

“Stop calling me that shit. We are not related.” I gesture at him with my knife, and he sits back with his hand on the nape of his wife’s neck.

“Hush, stop being rude.” Layla frowns at me.

“But, baby,” I mutter, wanting to remind the smug prick that I’m only ten years older than him and not goddamn grandpa material. I mean, for crying out loud, I’m barely in my mid-forties! I also have a hot twenty-year-old wife to prove that I’m not someone’s grandpa.

“That’s enough, Alaric. We are all family here, and you know it, you big grump,” my wife states lovingly, pressing a chaste peck to my cheek before walking over to the other couple in my kitchen. “Pay my husband no mind. He secretly

loves having all the kids around the house. For a swiller”—she has a habit of mixing up the word *killer* in fear that it will be a kid’s first word—“he’s actually a softy.”

“Woman,” I warn, but I soften when she grins over at me. Even after all the years we’ve spent together, two kids, and somehow adopting Gray, Hale, Cara, and their kids in the process, I couldn’t love this woman more.

She always tells them I saved her. She tells our story to the kids like it’s a fairy tale, but the truth is, she saved me, and she continues to save me every single day we are married. My hair is a bit grayer than it used to be, and there might be a laugh line or two around her lips, yet every single day I spend with my wife makes me thank the heavens for giving her to me. Five, fifty, or a hundred years will never be long enough with my Layla.

Her eyes soften as she walks back to me, leaning her head on my forearm like she knows my every thought.

I let go of the fake anger I was toting, knowing she’s right. I do love having them all here. Our Sunday family dinners are one of the best parts of my week. It’s crazy, and it usually ends in violence or food fights, but I love every minute of it, and so does she.

For a girl who grew up on the run without a stable home, she finally has one and the family to fill it.

“I love you, Layla Johnson,” I murmur as I press my temple to hers.

“I love you too, husband.” She grins before inching to my ear to whisper, “And when they are gone, I’ll show you how much.”

“You’ve got yourself a deal.” I wink.



Layla

I watch Zoey and Gray toss each other hungry looks, while Cara and Hale get closer and closer together at the dining room table, and I can't help but grin. Alaric notices too—he notices everything—and he glares at them all while spearing his steak.

“I bet you a week's worth of washing the dishes that as soon as dinner is finished, all four of them are going to make an excuse to sneak away,” I whisper into his ear.

He grumbles as he watches the two couples. “I don't want to think about that.”

“Remember when we used to run off to some dark corner to ...” I wiggle my eyebrows suggestively. My flirtatious grin remains in place as he leans back in his seat, watching me with a hungry expression.

“We still can.”

“Later,” I promise as I turn and make faces at Gabe and Sophie who are already throwing food at each other. I love my kids so much, but sometimes they are little terrors. They take after their father.

He grins at them proudly, tells Gabe to play fair, and keeps eating. Little Sophie pouts at her vegetables, and even though my husband thinks he's being discreet, I see how he tilts his head toward her, indicating that she can throw her green beans to the floor for Otis to eat instead. When she does just that, he throws her a wink, making her giggle, completely oblivious to the fact that I'm onto their game.

My heart melts even as my pussy clenches at the sight of how Alaric makes me and the kids so happy and loved with the simplest of gestures.

Even after all these years, I'll never get over my incredible husband, who strives to make me happy every day. A long time ago, I thought I was undeserving of love, and he showed me differently. He gave me everything I could have ever wanted, and now I'm surrounded by our family, in our home, with his heart beating alongside mine.

My blue-eyed savior.

My husband.

Our life is far from perfect, but that's fine with me. Perfect is boring anyway.

I would much rather have this madness, and when his eyes clash with mine, I know he agrees.



Gray

“I’ll be back in a minute.” Zoey wipes her face, smiling at Cara who is making eyes at Hale. I watch my best friend make eyes back at her, completely smitten. I’d be sick at the sight if I didn’t give that same look to my wife every single day.

“Where do you think you’re going?” I catch Zoey’s wrist when she stands up from the table, but she just laughs as she tugs it free.

“I need to use the ladies’ room.” Leaning in, she bites my ear. “Want to join me for a quickie?”

When she walks away, I watch her go, and without saying a word, I get up to follow after her. I open the upstairs bathroom door then shut it, and she leaps at me, making me slam against the door. I grin as she laughs.

“We have to be quick. No foreplay.”

“There’s always time for eating this pretty pussy, little doe.” I bite her lip as I turn and drop her onto the sink, and then I lower to my knees between her parted legs and shove her dress up. She’s not wearing panties; she never does, my filthy wife.

The short black silk dress bunches so prettily at her hips, displaying her silken skin as I roll my eyes up to her and drag my tongue along her pussy—something I never grow tired of. Alaric will kill me if he knows just how many places we have fucked in his house. It’s a game to us now. One day, we will get caught, and I can’t wait to see the look on his face when it happens. Alaric might have accepted me and even grown to

love me like a son, but it doesn't mean he won't kill me, retired or not.

“Gray,” she moans, clutching my head, her necklace proudly on display, just like the rings on her finger which hide the tattoo of my initials from her dad.

It's yet another thing I love about my wife. She is utterly crazy yet still scared of her dad.

Licking her clit, I watch her in the mirror as she lifts her legs and starts to grind into my face. I lick her hard and fast, dipping my fingers inside her wet heat. She clenches around them, making my hard cock jerk in my pants.

I will never get tired of my girl's taste. It doesn't matter where—supermarkets, her dad's house, in public, or even on missions—I will always fuck her until she screams my name.

My fucking assassin wife. Who knew the little girl I met when I was a fucked-up kid would grow up to be my equal? She is crazier than me and better with a gun too. She thrives on bloodshed and death, and we will continue to chase our highs until the end of time.

My little doe and me.



Zoey

“Oh God!” I groan, feeling my orgasm reaching for me. I'm just about to come when the door suddenly swings open. Gray and I both turn toward it, nervously thinking this is the day my dad will catch us and shoot my husband, but thankfully, the only person standing in the doorway is Cara, with Hale peeking over her shoulder.

“Oops.” Cara giggles. “I think this room is taken, baby.”

“Hale,” I admonish when he looks a little longer than he needs to, but the asshole only has a teasing eye for my husband.

“I guess great minds think alike, huh, bestie?” He winks at Gray.

“Do you mind closing the door, asshole? I’m kind of busy right now.”

“Hey, my wife has needs too, you know? As her husband, it is my job to deal with every single one of her pregnancy cravings, no matter how twisted or kinky.” He pouts before Gray kicks the door shut, making both parties burst out in laughter.

I look down at Gray and smile. “How kinky do you think they get?” I ask curiously as my wolf goes back to pumping his fingers into me and teasing my clit.

He chuckles. “It’s Hale, and he’s a sick fuck, so probably very.”

I laugh too, but it soon turns into a moan. He’s definitely right though. After they moved into their new house, we stayed over for a night and found their sex room on the top floor. To say Cara was mortified was an understatement, but I’ve never been prouder of my best friend.

“Focus on me, baby,” Gray demands, wanting all my attention for himself.

“Yes, my wolf.” I groan as he nips my clit, and my desire comes roaring back. “Now hurry up and make me come before dessert is served.”

I close my eyes in bliss as he does just that, proving to me over and over again why I’m so glad to be alive.

I might have chased death all my life, and I might have married it, but there is nothing but happiness and life between us.

Until the very end.



Hale

Hustling my wife down the corridor, I slip into the next bathroom and have her pinned to the wall in ten seconds flat. My cock is inside her before she can even speak. I cover her mouth as I growl into her ear. “That’s it, princess, take Daddy’s cock. Fuck, you are so perfect. You feel that, baby? You feel how tightly you grip me?”

She whimpers against my palm as I slide my other hand down to protect her belly from hitting the wall. Fuck, the feel of it under my hand makes me speed up as I fuck her. I love seeing her pregnant. She fucking glows and looks so sexy when she’s round with my child.

My wife is a fucking magnificent person. As one of the youngest billionaires and CEOs in the country, she’s on *Forbes’* list, but she has also won awards for her humanitarian efforts. Yet every night, she climbs into bed with me like she did all those long nights ago when I was nothing but a thief, ready to steal her away from her prison, and every night, after I’ve fucked her raw, she tells me she loves me.

Me. The man she spoke her vows to.

The father of her children.

Little Grace is downstairs being entertained by Grandpa Alaric and Grandma Layla, while Gale pretends to play video games with Sophie and Gage, but in reality, he is keeping close tabs on his baby sister. When we told him we were going to give him another sister to protect, he didn’t even flinch, as if he were born to be his baby sisters’ keeper and protector.

“Hale,” my princess calls out desperately, reminding me of our limited time frame. I grip her throat and feel her clench around me. We don’t get a lot of alone time anymore. Between the kids and her busy schedule, it can be hectic, but I show her how happy I am with my tongue between her thighs as often as I can.

Who would have thought that Hale the psycho would have the perfect wife, two kids, another on the way, an old grumpy dog, and more puppies than I can name, and be this fucking happy? Not me. Some nights I lie awake so thankful I almost tear up.

I just love them so much.

“You like that, dirty girl? You like taking Daddy’s big cock, knowing anyone could walk in and see you like this?” I demand, making her cry out. “Shh. We wouldn’t want them to hear.” I bite her neck as she clamps around my cock like a vise, coming so prettily and driving me to the edge of insanity until I follow her off that cliff, ready to catch her at the bottom.



Cara

Hale watches me hungrily as I comb my hair and fix my dress, wondering if we still have time for seconds.

“No, behave, or Alaric will shoot you.”

“I’d still fuck you.” He shrugs. “Even with a bullet wound.”

He would, my crazy husband.

Two weeks after we moved into my perfect home, Hale slid a rock onto my finger and declared us husband and wife. After I explained that marriages didn’t happen that way and that there were marriage licenses to get and ceremonies to be had, he just shrugged it all away as if those were only technicalities. He then proceeded to inform me that he had been ordained as a minister for Gray’s wedding, just in case he changed his mind and let his best man officiate the ceremony. As far as he was concerned, we were hitched. We did, however, end up having a traditional wedding, but only for us and our closest family. It was perfect, even more so when we announced our pregnancy to everyone we loved.

The last two years have been a perfect storm of happiness. The scared, lonely girl he found is long gone, and in her place is a confident mother, wife, businesswoman, and saint, according to some.

If I’m a saint, though, then I’ll always be happy to be my husband’s little sinner anytime I feel like it.

Hand in hand, we leave the bathroom, running into Zoey and Gray who are grinning, their cheeks flushed and hair a mess.

“Oh ... I forgot to tell you earlier. We have the name of your next mark,” I whisper to Zoey who grins as we head downstairs.

We are still working to bring down those who hurt children. What started off as only seeking justice for the innocent and going after my father’s so-called friends has now turned into something much bigger than we ever imagined. We now have vigilantes like us worldwide who ensure that no more innocent blood will be spilled and that no precious young lives will be ruined because of evil men’s depravities. Hale stays close to home, uncovering the information on those animals and passing it onto Zoey and Gray, who hunt and kill the fuckers.

It works well for us, and I can finally sleep at night, knowing we are doing our very best to stop what my father got away with for so long.

“Can’t wait.” She winks as all four of us head downstairs to see Alaric glaring at us with my eighteen-month baby daughter on his hip. Gale, Sophie, and Gage snicker at us from the floor, their gaming remotes in their laps, telling us we are in trouble with Grandpa Alaric, while Layla cuddles Otis on the sofa.

When we walk into the room, all four of us looking like the cat who ate the canary, Layla chuckles at her brooding husband and says, “I told you. You’re on kitchen duty for a whole week.”

We all burst out laughing, and my heart overflows with so much love, I know it waters from my eyes.

The locked-away princess with no one to love her finally found her fairy-tale ending, and never in a million years could I have ever imagined how brilliant it would be.

Our family might be dysfunctional, a little weird, and downright dangerous, but to me, it’s perfect.

The End

Untitled

Some loves are just plain Deadly, but that doesn't mean they can't be happy. Even if they start with an *affair*, even if they are a strange *match* or if they start with one stolen *encounter*.

Love always finds a way

We want to thank our readers for taking a chance on our antiheroes and loving them just as much as we have. The world can be a dark, unforgiving place, but in the moments of light, you might just find what you need.

If that be a best friend.

A soul mate.

Or a purpose.

This is ours, writing, and this definitely won't be the end ...

About the Authors

Katie and Ivy have known each other since they began their author journey and have become fast friends over the years. Bonding over their love of books and crazy, maddening muses, they have always wanted to work together and finally did.

After deciding to take the plunge, the Deadly Love series was born ... and matches like these are so deadly that they are bound to set your kindle on fire!

DEADLY LOVE SERIES

DEADLY AFFAIR

DEADLY MATCH

DEADLY ENCOUNTER

About K.A. Knight



K.A Knight is an international bestselling indie author trying to get all of the stories and characters out of her head, writing the monsters that you love to hate. She loves reading and devours every book she can get her hands on, and she also has a worrying caffeine addiction.

She leads her double life in a sleepy English town, where she spends her days writing like a crazy person.

Read more at K.A Knight's website or join her Facebook Reader Group.

Sign up for exclusive content and my newsletter here <http://eepurl.com/drLLoj>

About Ivy Fox



Ivy Fox is a USA Today bestselling author of angst-filled, contemporary romances, some of them with an unconventional #whychoose twist.

Ivy lives a blessed life, surrounded by her two most important men—her husband and son, but she also doesn't mind living with the fictional characters in her head that can't seem to shut up until she writes their story.

Books and romance are her passion.

A strong believer in happy endings and that love will always prevail in the end, both in life and in fiction.

Join her Facebook Reader Group - [Ivy's Sassy Foxes](#) or sign up for exclusive content and my newsletter here - <https://www.ivyfoxauthor.com/>

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Breathe Me

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