

FIERCE
PROTECTORS
SERIES

#3

Deadly

PROTECTOR

JADE DOLLSTON

DEADLY PROTECTOR

Book 3 in the Fierce Protectors Series

Jade Dollston

Copyright © 2023 by Jade Dollston

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law. Short quotes for book reviews are acceptable. For permissions, contact: jdollston@gmail.com

Cover Design by **Sammi Bee Designs**

Cover Photo by **Wander Aguiar**

Cover Model: **Vinicious**

Editing and proofreading by **Chrisandra's Corrections**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses and locations are either products of the writer's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

This is a spicy, second-chance romance that is intended for ages 18+. If you don't like steamy love scenes, humor, and a bossy alpha male with a heart of gold, then this book is probably not for you.

ΔTW: Some scenes of violence, mafia themes, discussions of terrorism

Meet the Men of the Fierce Protectors Series

Beau “Shark” Atwood

Waylon “Tank” Hanford

Camden “Cam” Fitz

Mario “Woody” Diaz

Bode

Tate “Hawk” Gentry

CONTENTS

[Epigraph](#)

[Prologue](#)

[1. Cam](#)

[2. Cam](#)

[3. Cam](#)

[4. Shiloh](#)

[5. Cam](#)

[6. Shiloh](#)

[7. Cam](#)

[8. Shiloh](#)

[9. Cam](#)

[10. Shiloh](#)

[11. Shiloh](#)

[12. Cam](#)

[13. Shiloh](#)

[14. Shiloh](#)

[15. Cam](#)

[16. Cam](#)

[17. Shiloh](#)

[18. Shiloh](#)

[19. Cam](#)

[20. Shiloh](#)

[21. Cam](#)

[22. Cam](#)

[23. Shiloh](#)

[24. Cam](#)

[25. Shiloh](#)

[26. Cam](#)

[27. Shiloh](#)

[28. Shiloh](#)

[29. Cam](#)

[30. Shiloh](#)

[31. Shiloh](#)

[32. Cam](#)

[33. Shiloh](#)

[34. Shiloh](#)

[35. Cam](#)

[36. Cam](#)

[37. Shiloh](#)

[38. Cam](#)

[39. Shiloh](#)

[40. Shiloh](#)

[41. Cam](#)

[42. Shiloh](#)

[43. Cam](#)

[44. Cam](#)

[45. Hawk](#)

[46. Shiloh](#)

[47. Cam](#)

[48. Shiloh](#)

[49. Cam](#)

[50. Cam](#)

[51. Cam](#)

[52. Shiloh](#)

[53. Shiloh](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by Jade](#)

[Exciting News!](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Playlist](#)

[About Author](#)

A person often meets his destiny

on the road he took

to avoid it.

-Jean de La Fontaine, Fables



MY HAND SLID ACROSS the thousand-thread-count luxe sheet in search of his warmth.

It wasn't there.

My palm was met with a coolness that told me the space beside me had been vacant for more than a few minutes.

I opened my eyes, just in case, but in the dim glow from the streetlights sneaking lazily through the charcoal linen drapes, I confirmed that my fiancé did indeed seem to be missing.

I blinked sleepily a few times before reaching over to put on my glasses and check the time on my phone. Two minutes until midnight. This was the second time in a week that I'd woken up to an empty bed.

"Vincent?" I called out softly, thinking that maybe he was in the bathroom, but I was met with an entrenched silence that told me he wasn't anywhere within our enormous master suite.

I slid from the bed and grabbed my raspberry La Perla silk robe from the round tweed swivel chair in the sitting area, where Vin had neatly folded it after removing it from my body

earlier tonight. He always folded my robe or pajamas after carefully undressing me. To be honest, I could do with a little more yanking, ripping, and untamed tossing of the clothes, rather than the meticulous, deliberate way my fiancé always undressed me.

But, that was just Vincent. Self-possessed and *always* in control.

Slipping on the luxurious garment, I tightened it over my naked body with the satiny sash and ambled across the crimson hand-loomed rug to the door of our bedroom. My bare feet were silent as I padded over the distressed oak hardwood floor of the landing and then down the stairs.

Passing through the living room, I couldn't help but pause to look out at the city I now called home. Even in the middle of the night, Manhattan was *alive*. It had a pulse and a heartbeat that never stopped, never even slowed. From the floor-to-ceiling windows in our stately apartment in Lenox Hill on the Upper East Side, the view was magnificent.

I was about to call out again, when I heard voices. *Who the hell was in our apartment at this time of night?* I turned down the short hallway, which contained a spare bedroom and Vin's office. The sliver of light from beneath the office door drew me in, my fist raised to knock.

Until I heard my name.

"Everything is going well with Shiloh?" I recognized the voice as Sergio Bellucci. *What is Vincent's father doing here this late on a Saturday night?*

A long sigh from my fiancé. “Yes, Papi. Everything is on track.”

“And you’ve figured out a way to get the wedding moved up?” *Wait. What?* Our wedding was still eight months away. I hadn’t even gotten my dress fitted yet.

“Gianpaolo emailed me the link to a website that provides fake birth control pills. You simply send them a picture of what kind she’s taking, and they replicate it with sugar pills. I had them overnighted and plan to replace the pack in her purse this weekend.” I could hear the grin in Vincent’s voice and placed my left hand over my churning stomach. “I should have her knocked up within the month.”

Oh. My. God. I looked over at my wrist, still cocked back and fist ready to rap against the door, as if my hand was going to tell me I had *not* just heard what I thought I heard.

Sergio made a low rumble of approval before asking, “And are you taking care of your, ah... *duties* on that front?” *Holy shitballs! Was my future father-in-law seriously asking my fiancé about our sex life?*

My fiancé’s low, dirty chuckle made me feel like I had an inch-thick layer of filth covering my body. “Fucked her not even two hours ago,” he replied, and I had to cover my mouth to keep from retching out loud.

And thank Jesus I had my hand over my mouth, because the resounding slap I heard a second later forced a little yelp from the depths of my chest. “Have I taught you nothing?” Sergio’s

furious voice intoned. *He had just slapped his son! Hard, by the sound of it. “You make love to your wife like she’s a lady.”*

What the fuck? This overbearing asshole was actually telling his son how he could or could not have sex with me?

To be honest, it explained a lot. While Vincent was certainly a generous lover, he lacked the passion and fire that I would have expected from a dominant, Italian, alpha male like Vin. To the contrary, he was sweet and gentle, always whispering Italian terms of endearment in my ear. *Tesorino*, which literally translates to “little treasure,” *dolcezza*, or “sweetness,” and *cuore mio*, “my heart,” were all fan favorites. Vin’s deep voice groaning romantic Italian phrases into the darkness while he took me never failed to get my juices flowing.

But as much as I loved his tender lovemaking, sometimes a girl needed a little raunch. No matter how many times I’d rolled over onto my hands and knees and given him my best *come and get it, big boy* look over my shoulder, I always seemed to end up on my back with Vincent on top of me.

I had begun to get a complex about my ass being too big, and wondered if he couldn’t perform while he was looking directly at it. Like my backside was a sexual eclipse or something.

Frankly, Sergio’s comment made me feel a little bit better. It wasn’t that Vincent didn’t *want* to have wild monkey sex with me; he’d just been *taught differently*.

My cheeks rose, crinkling my light brown eyes as I smirked at the mahogany panel door in front of my face. *Don’t worry,*

Vin. We can get down and dirty in the privacy of our own bedroom, and Papi will be none the wiser.

I just needed to have an honest conversation with him about my needs. Needs that only one man had ever fully met.

Stop it, Shiloh. It's been sixteen damn years.

It didn't matter how many years it had been. A woman never forgot the way Camden Fitz could take control of a female body and yank orgasms from her like it was his day job.

That train of thought came to a screeching halt with the next words Sergio uttered. "You save the dirty sex for your mistresses. Fuck them like the whores that they are and treat your wife like a treasure."

Mistresses? my mind shrieked at me, and it took everything in my power to resist barging into the room and giving my future father-in-law a piece of my mind. But no. I would let Vincent handle his dad. I stared at the door so hard, I was surprised I didn't bore two laser-sharp holes through the thick, dark wood.

Tell him, Vin. Tell him you don't need any fucking mistresses.

I waited for him to say it.

He didn't.

Instead, his coarse laugh brought a stinging sensation to my eyes before he even said a word. "Fuck, Papi. It was just a figure of speech. I'm treating Shiloh exactly as I should in the

bedroom.” There was a slight pause before he continued, his voice dropping a half-octave. “I save the dirty shit for Theresa and Angela.”

A heady sense of nausea rose up and coated the lining of my esophagus. The names ticked through my mental Rolodex. Vincent had a secretary named Angela, but I had no clue who Theresa was. Was he fucking his secretary? *And* some chick named Theresa? I reached both hands up to touch my face and wasn't the least bit surprised to find it soaked with tears, though I didn't remember them actually falling.

Vincent. No, baby.

You know how they say something gets your mind reeling? I had never truly understood the phrase until that moment. That's precisely what my brain was experiencing. Thoughts and words whirling out of control. Lines twisting around my brain. Round and round like the reel on my fishing pole as I hauled in a big catfish back in Texas with my dad looking on proudly.

... get the wedding moved up

... have her knocked up within the month

... mistress

... mistresses. Plural.

I backed away from the door and the devastating conversation taking place on the other side of it, my heart unable to hear any more. I was halfway down the hall when I froze, Sergio's voice stopping my feet in their tracks.

“Now, back to the matter at hand. You make sure to put a kid in your fiancée as soon as possible, so she won’t have any other choice in the matter. As you know—”

“I know, Papi. A spouse can’t be forced to testify against her husband. We’ve been over this *ad nauseum* for the past five days.”

Testify? Against Vincent? What the hell had he done? How much trouble could a real estate broker get into? The questions were rapid firing through my mind like bullets through a machine gun. Maybe it was some kind of white-collar crime like embezzlement or something.

“I can’t believe how fucking stupid you were,” Sergio hissed. “I should have Nico come over here and break ya fucking legs. The only thing stopping me is that you’re my son.”

I had never heard Sergio Bellucci’s diction less than perfect, his accent pure, upper crust Manhattan. But apparently when he was angry, a little Brooklyn seeped in around the edges. Especially when he was saying things like “break ya fucking legs.”

My feet trod silently back to the door of their own accord, as if my need to hear what came next was directly connected to them. I sensed that something really bad was happening in my life that I was totally unaware of. Something besides even mistresses and forced pregnancies.

This didn’t sound like a white-collar crime.

“Are you sure Shiloh was asleep when you got home Monday night?”

I counted the days back in my head. *Monday. That’s the other night this week I woke up and found Vincent missing from our bed.*

Vincent’s voice sounded exasperated. “Yes. I told you, she was sound asleep when I got back. As far as she knows, I never left the house that night. I’m good on the alibi.”

“Porca puttana! This is a fucking mess.”

Vincent’s response was slightly muffled, like he was gritting his teeth. “I saw an opportunity, and I took it. Fucking Camillo Viscardi took out three of our men last month. Three! Including Geno.” His voice broke on the name of his cousin. His cousin who had been gunned down in a random mugging last month. Or so my fiancé told me. “Someone had to send a message from The Family.”

I could literally hear the capital letters on the last two words.

“But to use your own goddamn gun, Vincent? For fuck’s sake. At least my contact at the District Attorney’s office told me they’re not suspicious of you. Yet.”

The man I was supposed to marry sighed deeply. “I told you, Papi. I was on the way to Theresa’s apartment...” I pressed my fingers against my lips. He *was* cheating on me. I’d just heard it from his own stinking, lying, cheating mouth. I missed a few words as that sunk in. “...saw Viscardi’s man in

the alley behind Carmine's and knew he must be inside eating. I had a clear shot when he came out, so I took it. Got him and his driver. I used the silencer, and no one else saw me, but I dumped the gun in the East River anyway, just to be safe."

My eyes were dry now but the size of doughnuts, and I could feel my mouth gaping open in shock and horror. I clamped it shut. *Bad idea, Shiloh.* As soon as my teeth touched, they began chattering, and the sound was so pronounced, I was positive they could hear it through the door.

Wrenching my jaw open, I started to back away, my eyes trained on the door as I prayed for it to stay closed. I had the sudden urge to pee and begged my bladder not to release all over the fucking floor. As soon as I cleared the end of the hallway, I turned and darted through the living room and up the stairs on my tiptoes. Entering our en suite bathroom, I flicked on the light and rushed to the toilet to relieve my suddenly overextended bladder.

As I washed my hands, I focused on myself in the mirror. I looked as scared as I felt.

As much as I would've liked to tell myself that everything I'd heard tonight didn't make sense—that Vincent *couldn't* be a killer—it was all starting to add up perfectly.

Guns. Alibis. Broken legs. 'The Family.'

The Belluccis were mafia, and I was right in the fucking middle of it all.

“Holy shit, Shiloh. What have you gotten yourself into?” I whispered to my reflection.

You're engaged to a murderer, she answered. And a liar. And a cheater. And...

“Okay, that’s enough,” I hissed to the woman in the mirror.

Taking off my glasses, I leaned over the chocolate and cream Italian marble sink and splashed some cool water onto my face before blotting it dry with a plush ivory hand towel embroidered with a gold letter B.

For Bellucci. A crime family. That I was about to be a part of.

Not if I could help it.

I heard a door close downstairs and jerked my head toward the door of the bathroom as my heart did its best impression of a bass drum. Letting out a string of silent curses that would have made a sailor blush, I grabbed my glasses and crept quietly to turn the light off before dashing to the bed.

The bed I shared with a killer.

I looked down at myself and realized I was still wearing my robe. *Shit!* Stripping it off, I tiptoe-ran to the chair where I had picked it up earlier. Before my life had imploded. Ignoring the urge to just toss it on the chair haphazardly, I quickly folded and laid it down before creeping back to bed.

Climbing beneath the covers, I arranged myself into my usual sleeping position. Curled up on my right side with a body pillow cuddled against my front.

Certain that my pounding heartbeat could be heard from New Jersey, I did my best to regulate my heart rate and breathing. Hearing Vincent's footsteps on the stairs did absolutely nothing to help with my rising panic.

Calm, Shiloh. Be calm. And for God's sake, don't let him know you're awake.

I needed to put on a Golden Globe-worthy performance. Best Fake Sleeper in a Dramatic Series. After what I'd learned tonight, the drama part wasn't much of a stretch.

Though my eyes were closed, I sensed him the instant he walked into the bedroom. There was always a shift of power in the air whenever Vincent entered a room. Did he know I had been downstairs? Had he heard my teeth chattering or my feet scurrying through the living room? What would he do if he knew I had overheard his conversation with his father?

He would kill you.

That realization drove me to be the best fake sleeper I could be. Breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth, I made sure to keep my breaths deep and even. I heard the rustling of clothes, and then my horrible fiancé slid into the bed behind me. Naked.

Sweet Jesus, Shiloh. Don't recoil.

Vincent hummed contentedly as he spooned my body and kissed my shoulder. I could feel his flaccid cock against my butt and his crinkly chest hair against my back. The asshole fell asleep promptly with his nose buried in my hair, his

conscience apparently unencumbered by the fact that he had taken the life of two human beings. And that made it all the worse.

I didn't sleep a wink that night, too paranoid that he was going to murder me in my sleep. Vincent was meeting with a client Sunday morning—or so he'd said. He very well could have been going to meet Theresa or Angela, or maybe he was going to make someone else sleep with the fishes—so he rose early and went into the bathroom to shower upon awakening. When he was done, he emerged from the bathroom, and I could tell he was already dressed by the whisper of his worsted wool suit as he approached the bed.

“I love you, *luce della mia vita*,” he murmured as he pressed a gentle kiss to my temple. I had the wild urge to pop my eyes open and ask him if he also called *Angela* or *Theresa* the “light of his life.” But I refrained, and Vincent walked out of the bedroom. He muddled around in the kitchen for a while before I heard the front door close and knew that he was gone.

I took my first deep breath in hours. Hours I had spent mapping out a plan.

There was only one thing I could do.

I had to run.



I BOUNCED ON THE balls of my feet, my hands bundled into fists in front of my head.

“You scared I’m going to mess up that perfect face, pretty boy?” Hawk taunted, circling to my left and trying to find a shot.

Quick as a cobra strike, I fainted with my right hand and landed a jab to his abdomen with my left. He grinned through his wince, his coal-black eyes sparkling with the challenge.

I chuckled, low and deep. “You’d have to actually be fast enough to land a blow,” I jeered.

He let out a growl, and I saw the impending strike, twisting my body a split second before his meaty hand made contact with my face and taking the blow on my shoulder instead.

Ow. Fuck.

Hawk’s punch was pure, raw power. Where I was covered with lean, hard muscles, giving me the benefit of speed, my friend had size on his side. He was only two inches taller than my six-foot-three frame, but his arms? Jesus. The dude looked

like he had bean bag chairs stuffed in his sleeves. When he was wearing sleeves, that is. We were both currently shirtless, sweat dripping down our torsos and soaking through our athletic shorts as we sparred.

Rolling my shoulder, I risked a quick glance up at the clock over the wall of mirrors along one wall of my dojo. Well, *our* dojo now, since Hawk had moved in with me a few months ago.

“Guess we need to get cleaned up if we’re going to make it to the party on time. Traci should be here in about fifteen minutes.”

“Hmmm.” Hawk’s mouth twisted to the side. For only a brief second, but it was there.

“What was that face?” I asked, my eyes shrinking to mere slits.

“What face?”

“That weird face you just did. And you made a noise.”

“I didn’t make a noise.” He shook his head full of dark hair and turned to the door. “I’m getting in the shower. We need to get there early before Tank’s big ass eats all the goddamn pizza.”

“You definitely did a face,” I yelled at his retreating form.

“That’s just how I look,” he yelled back without a backward glance. “Not everyone has the face of a fucking angel.”

“Angel, my ass,” I muttered, studying my reflection in the mirror. Okay, maybe my eyes are a little bit angelic. Women seemed to like them. They were a bright blue that deepened and lightened with my moods, and my lashes were dark and thick, just like my wavy hair. When my face was shaved smooth, I looked at least five years younger than when I was stubbly. I grinned at myself. I didn’t put off quite the bad boy vibes Hawk did, but chicks did like my stubble, if the number that fell willingly into my bed when I was sporting it was any indication.

But the days of banging random women were over. I had a girlfriend now, Traci Sadler, my first steady girlfriend since... her. *Shiloh Simms*.

I shook my head to dispel any random thoughts of Shiloh’s soft brown eyes and long, thick hair. Hair that was light brown but turned more blonde with the rays of summer’s sun. Hair that cocooned our faces when she was on top of me, leaning over to kiss me with her pillowy lips. Hair that draped over my thighs and hips when she was—

“Stop it!” I said forcefully to the reflection looking back at me in the mirror. “It’s over.” *Especially after what you found out three months ago.*

“Talking to yourself?” came a voice from the doorway. “That’s the first sign of old age. Next, the Geezer Bus will be making a stop on Impotency Avenue in Cam Land.” *Fucking Bode.*

I turned to see Bode and Woody standing just inside the dojo, both grinning like possums. “Shut the hell up, Manbun,” I shot back at my buddy, who had his blond hair pulled up into a knot on the top of his head. His customary hairdo was a constant source of entertainment for me and the other guys. There were six of us, all former Navy SEALs, and we were a tight-knit group, though we lived to insult the shit out of each other for sport.

Mario “Woody” Diaz took the opportunity to hop right on the *let’s rag on Cam* train. “My abuelo got an email the other day about some little blue pills. I can have him forward it to you,” he said, his perfect white teeth sparkling with his easy, wicked smile. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of, sweetie pie.”

“That’s enough out of you shitheads,” I muttered, drying my chest off with a towel from the rack and looping it around my shoulders. “I need to hit the shower before Traci gets here.”

“Oh. Traci’s coming,” Woody said flatly, cutting his eyes toward Bode, who returned the glance.

“Yes,” I said, hearing the defensiveness slipping into my tone as my gaze darted between my two friends. “You don’t like Traci?”

“Uh, she’s fine,” Bode hedged.

“She has nice hair,” Woody added. Traci did have nice hair. It hung to the middle of her back in brown waves that curled up a little on the ends. I liked her hair.

“But?”

Another of those furtive little looks passed between them, which was starting to piss me off.

“She kinda laughs like Janice from *Friends*,” Bode blurted. I attempted to hide my wince. He wasn’t wrong.

Crossing my arms over my bare chest, I leveled them with a look. “Anything else?”

Woody opened his mouth. Closed it again. Then he gave a little *what the hell* shrug. “She’s a tad,” he held his finger and thumb a scant inch apart before continuing, “high-maintenance.”

My chin jutted out belligerently. “Bristol’s high-maintenance, and y’all like her.” Our friend Tank’s woman was a hair and makeup artist, and even though she liked to doll up, she was one of the most naturally beautiful women I had ever met.

“Yeah, but Bris is...” He tightened his lips together and looked at Bode for help.

“Bris is nice,” Bode supplied without apology.

“Traci is nice,” I defended, taking an aggressive step forward, a scowl on my face. “I mean, she can be a little abrasive at times, but once you get to know her...” My voice trailed off. *Okay. So, maybe my girlfriend wasn’t overly friendly or cotton-candy-sweet.*

Woody nodded, his tone turning conciliatory. “You’re right. We probably just need to warm up to her a bit. Maybe spend more time—”

His sentence was cut off when Bode delivered a sharp elbow to his ribs. Giving them both a heavy dose of the stank eye, I pushed past them. “I’m going to take a shower so I’ll be ready when my girlfriend, *who you hate*, gets here.”

“We don’t hate her, Cam,” Woody tried.

“Yeah, we said she has good hair,” Bode threw in, most unhelpfully.

My friends didn’t like my girlfriend. *Great. Just fucking great.* They sure as hell had welcomed Charli and Bristol to our group with open arms. Of course, we’d teased the hell out of Shark and Tank while they were falling in love with their women, but everyone adored those two girls.

Charli had married our buddy Beau Atwood, aka Shark, earlier this year and turned his grumpy ass into a somewhat respectable human being. She was tiny and sweet—the exact opposite of Shark—with spunk for days. And Bristol, well, she was sassy and funny and had Waylon “Tank” Hanford’s six-foot-eight ass wrapped right around her pretty little finger.

Stomping angrily into my bedroom, I slammed the door and went straight into my bathroom. I warmed up the shower before peeling off my wet shorts and underwear and stepping under the hot spray.

Why can’t they just give Traci a chance like they did Char and Bris?

Seeing my friends settle down gave me mixed feelings. I was happy for Shark and Tank, of course, but there was

something else there. A deep-seated jealousy at loving and *being loved*. And all the other emotions that went along with that. Like when you and your girl were walking toward each other, and you just couldn't help it. You both skipped into a little jog simply to get into each other's arms a few seconds quicker.

I'd had that kind of *all-in, knock-your-socks-off* relationship once. Sixteen years ago. I'd fucked it up, and now it was too late. But I'd be a fucking liar if I said I didn't miss it. *And her*.

After finding out Shiloh belonged to someone else a few months ago, I'd made the conscious decision to move on. To stop playboying around and actually *date*, and hopefully fall in love. I wasn't to the love stage with Traci yet, but after dating exclusively for two months, I hoped it was heading in that direction.

I realized that sounded weird coming from someone who had done his level best to impersonate Hugh Hefner the past sixteen years. A younger Hugh. With better hair. Sans velvet smoking jacket. Hell, I'd been one step away from wearing velour and smoking a goddamn pipe.

And now I was in a real relationship, but if Traci didn't get along with my friends... damn. They were a huge part of my life and had been for over ten years. We were brothers. No, *closer than* brothers. Shit, I'd met Shark in preschool, and now he was my best friend and had been my roommate until he got married.

Lifting my face, I let the warm water wash over me, rinsing ninety minutes' worth of sweat down the drain. My hand reached for the soap, lathering up my washcloth and letting the fresh, clean scent of Dial occupy my sinuses as my mind continued to whirl.

I wanted the girl, *and* I wanted to stay close with my friends. Was that too fucking much to ask?

Tilting my chin back, I scrubbed my neck and then down to my chest before soaping up my armpits. Working my way down my body, I imagined what life would be like if Traci was "The One." Would I tell our future grandchildren how we had gotten together?

"Hey, kids. Cool story. So, I met your grandmother one night in a club in Dallas. She flirted so hard with me and your Uncle Hawk, we took her home and did unspeakable things to her body for hours. Then Uncle Hawk told us to get the fuck out of his room so he could sleep—fun fact: we used to call his room 'The Den of Sin'—so anyway, I took your MeMaw back to my room for the rest of the night. I made her moan around my big dick until the wee hours, and then we went to breakfast the next morning and just clicked. And there you have it. Gooooood times."

Yeah. Probably wouldn't be sharing that precious story with Little Timmy and Tiny Sue.

Reaching between my legs, I soaped up my cock, making sure I got the damn thing sparkling clean and fresh, just in case Traci wanted to take a taste later. Which was a toss-up. She

was moody where sex was concerned, but when it was good, it was very good.

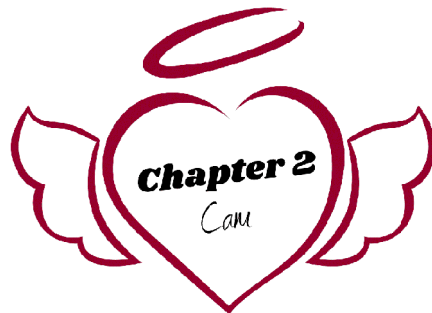
But is that enough to build a relationship on?

Dammit, I was so confused. I knew I wasn't in love with Traci. The real question was... did we have the potential to get there?

I knew that relationships took work. I probably needed to work a little harder on the day-to-day stuff. I liked Traci, but I wasn't head-over-heels for her. I didn't feel the urge to run to her when I saw her or to hold her hand just because. But, if I put in a little more effort, perhaps we could have something.

Stepping out of the shower, I checked the time on my phone after drying off. Traci should be here any minute.

I guess we'll see.



I WALKED INTO THE living room with my tail between my legs, unable to look directly at my friends. “Hey, um, guys? I’ll just meet you at the party, okay?”

“You don’t want to ride with us?” Bode asked from his perch on our black leather couch, twisting his head away from the game on TV.

Rubbing the tightness forming at the base of my skull with one hand, I gave a little half-shrug. “Yeah, but... no.” I took a deep sigh as I admitted in a mumbled voice, “Traci is running a couple minutes late, so y’all go ahead.” I had texted her after my shower to see where she was, and she’d still been downtown.

There was a moment of silence, which was a rare fucking thing when these yahoos were around. Except Hawk. He was a man of few words, but Woody and Bode? Yeah. Those fucking fools were always yapping about something.

But there was no yapping. No yammering. No chattering or teasing. Just stares that I could feel like tiny missiles striking my face, even though I was studiously avoiding them.

I hated being late, but apparently, tonight I was going to be. Because I was waiting on my girlfriend, who none of my friends seemed to like. My longtime friends who I had snapped at earlier. My face burned with embarrassment and frustration.

“Sorry. Traffic and, uh, you know...” My words trailed off into the silence that hung like a thick, ugly cloud between us.

Hawk, bless his dark little heart, broke the awkwardness with a clap of his big hands on his knees as he stood. “Alrighty then. Let’s hit the road, fuckers.” I could sense him looking at me, even though I was staring at a scuff low on the ivory wall behind him where Carrie had run into it with her pink Barbie car when she was staying with me and Shark. That was while the triplets were being born. Three years ago today.

Woody’s hand lifted to my shoulder in a comforting squeeze. “Want me to stay and hang with you, bud?”

“Naw, but thanks, Wood,” I said, finally lifting my eyes and looking into his deep brown ones and giving him a little smile. I didn’t like fighting with my friends, and Woody’s offer to stay with me while I waited for Traci was akin to handing me an olive branch. As if to say, *Earlier disagreement: forgotten.*

Bumping him with my shoulder, I said, “I’ll meet you guys at The Ape,” referring to The Grape Ape, one of those bouncy house places the Broxtons had rented out for their triplets’ third birthday party. “Tell the trips I’ll be there soon.”

The guys left, and I loaded the wrapped gifts I had purchased into the back of my Jeep before settling on the front

porch to wait for Traci. The longer I waited, the more agitated I felt. *Where the fuck is she?* She had texted that she was on the way, but that was thirty minutes ago. Standing up, I paced back and forth until I heard the telltale roar of Traci's Corvette.

Tamping down my annoyance, I plastered a smile on my face as she pulled into the driveway and stepped out of the car. *She sure is pretty*, I thought, though I didn't feel the type of chest fluttering I'd hoped to feel upon seeing her for the first time in a week. *You'll get there, dude. Just be patient.*

"Hey, honey," I said, striding forward to meet her. Her steps were unhurried, and a beat of disappointment thudded in my chest. Hadn't she missed me at all? I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her to me, but her hands pressed against my chest.

"Don't wrinkle my dress," she complained, wrenching herself from my grasp before I could even kiss her. "It's Prada."

I wasn't a fashion guru by any means, but I knew that Prada was analogous to *fancy as fuck*.

"Sorry. Just missed you," I said, leaning down to kiss her cheek without touching the holy Prada. "How was your trip?" Traci worked as a secretary at a law firm and had gone on a business trip with her boss.

"It was fine," she said shortly.

Dipping my head to catch her eye, I gave her a cajoling smile. "And did you miss me?"

Her small hand lifted to my jaw, her fingers sliding through the two-day growth there. “Of course I did, Cammy.” I tried not to frown at the ridiculous nickname she insisted on calling me. “You need to shave.”

“I was going for the sexy lumberjack look. Not working, huh?” She gave me a sympathetic little head tilt in answer. “Okay, well, we’re running really late. Is your bag in the car?” I asked, heading toward the shiny red vehicle.

“No, I didn’t bring my bag.”

Looking up and down at her black and white low-cut dress and stiletto heels, confusion edged my voice. “But don’t you need to change? Like into some shorts and sneakers or something?”

She looked at me like I had randomly started speaking Swahili. “I. Am. *Not*. Meeting Axel Broxton looking like a slob,” she snapped.

Looking down at my own shorts and sneakers—at least I had made the effort to put on a yellow polo shirt instead of a plain T-shirt—I tried not to take offense. “Okay, honey. But just so you know, this party will be very casual. Everyone will be wearing comfortable clothes so they can play and have fun.”

She shook her head vehemently, her long hair swirling around her shoulders. “No, I’m wearing this.”

Resigned to escorting Traci with her looking like she was going to a cocktail hour instead of a birthday party for three

year olds, I took her hand and walked toward my black Jeep Grand Wagoneer. “Okay, then let’s hit the road.”

She tugged her hand away and headed to the house, taking the navy-blue painted plank steps like a champ in those heels. “I need to fix my hair first.”

Sighing out my impatience, I said, “Traci. Honey. Your hair looks beautiful. *You* look beautiful.”

“Just give me a couple minutes. I want to look my best,” she called over her shoulder.

Christ on a crutch, I thought, checking my phone. I had planned to arrive early to the party to see if Blaire and Axel needed any help, but now we were officially *late*. Blaire was Shark’s sister, who me and the other guys had adopted as our own little sis... let’s see... when was it? *Jeez. Had it really been over ten years ago?* I nodded to myself. Yep, that was right, because Carrie was turning ten next month.

Blaire was married to NFL star Axel Broxton, and they had five kids. Carrie, who had grown up with me and the guys serving as fucking awesome uncles, was the oldest. Then there were the triplets, Rox, Dex, and Max, who were the baddest and cutest little boys in existence. The baby of the family, Danica, had just turned one.

I trudged into the house and plunked down on my bed, watching through the open bathroom door and noticing that Traci was plugging in her curling iron. *Jesus, hurry the fuck up!*

As she used some little makeup brushes to do God-knows-what to her face, I scrolled through my text messages. There was one from my brother asking me to call him, so I tapped out a reply asking if it was urgent. He answered back immediately saying that it wasn't, and I made a mental note to call him later.

“So, you're a fan of Axel's,” I called out to Traci, who now had a little spongy thing working over her face.

She huffed out a little laugh. “I'm a fan of his fucking abs.” *What the actual hell?* Sure, Ax was a goddamn stud, but I could go toe-to-toe, or I guess I should say ab-to-ab, with him. My body was hard and lean from the hours I spent in the dojo every single day.

“I thought you were a fan of my abs,” I yelled, trying to keep my tone playful.

“Uh-huh,” she said distractedly as she brushed some black shit on her eyelashes and curled them with what looked like a tiny medieval torture device.

“I hate to burst your little fantasy bubble, but Ax is most likely going to be wearing a shirt, you know.” I said flatly.

“Too bad,” she retorted, *finally* picking up the curling iron.

“We really need to go, Traci. You said you just needed to fix your hair.” *Which looks fine, by the way.*

“Almost done.”

Ten minutes later, she was still curling her goddamn hair, and I decided to put my foot down. “I'm leaving this house in

three minutes, with or without you,” I said, walking into the bathroom and feeling like I was talking to a procrastinating child. “If you’re not in the car, you’re not going to get to meet Broxton or his perfect abs.”

“Fine,” she said, slamming down the tapered curling iron gadget that resembled some kind of sex plaything. “How do I look?”

Like you’re meeting some type of royalty instead of a bunch of toddlers.

“Fantastic, sweetie,” I said, reaching over to turn off the anal toy disguised as hair equipment. “Let’s jet.”

Twenty minutes later, we were stuck in traffic. *Which we would have missed if we’d left on time.* “Why were you so late?” I asked, reaching over and threading my fingers between hers on her thigh. “Trying to catch up after the trip?”

She shook her head. “No, I went out for drinks with the girls to celebrate my last day.” *So, while I was waiting patiently, she was out having drinks? Wait. What was that last part?*

Turning my head toward her, my brow wrinkled. “Last day of what?”

“Work.”

My eyebrows were damn near meeting in the middle. “Are you getting... transferred or something?” *Please don’t be getting transferred to another city.*

“No, I quit.”

“Why would you do that? I thought you liked working at the firm.” When she didn’t answer, my mind started going in directions that made my gut tighten and my jaw clench. “Did... did something happen on your trip? Did your boss hit on you or something?”

She laughed. *Good God, she does sound like Janice. Hah-hah-hah-hah-hah.* “No, silly. I asked for two weeks off in January, and they refused. So I quit,” she said, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

“Trace, you’ve only been working there for five months.”

“I know!” she said, widening her eyes. “I’ve worked my ass off for that firm, and they wouldn’t even give me my vacation time.”

“I’m pretty sure most places don’t give you vacation time until you’ve been there for at least a year,” I explained.

“Well, that’s just stupid.”

“Do you have something else lined up? Because pretty much any job you get won’t let you have two weeks off right after you start.”

One of her slim shoulders lifted to her ear before dropping. “I thought about that. I think I’ll wait to look for something when I come back from my vacay with the girlies.”

“So, you’re just going to not work for over three months? How are you going to pay your bills and stuff?” *Stuff like a ‘vacay with the girlies.’*

“Daddy will give me the money if I do *The Eyes* at him.” She looked at me and blinked like someone had just kicked her puppy, the corners of her eyes turning down dramatically. Then she smiled. “Pretty good, huh?”

“Very impressive,” I said dryly. Pulling into a parking spot, I put the vehicle in park and turned it off. “Okay, we’re here.” *Over an hour late.*

I went around to open Traci’s door and helped her out before going to the back of the vehicle to retrieve the gifts. Turning to hand one of them to her, I noticed that she was already halfway to the front door of the big, purple building. “No thanks. I can get it,” I muttered under my breath, juggling the bulky packages as I wrangled the hatch closed.

I caught up to Traci and rearranged the gifts again so I could open the door for her. As soon as we entered, I was met by Blaire, who immediately came over and took two of the packages before standing on tiptoe to kiss my cheek, earning herself a glare from Traci. “Hey, Cam! I’m so sorry. I tried to save you some pizza, but you know how the guys are.”

“Fucking vultures?” I quipped, and she laughed and turned to Traci, extending her hand.

“And you must be Traci. It’s so nice to meet you. I’m Blaire Broxton.”

Traci shook her hand briefly and replied, “Nice to meet you too.”

“Come on back here. The boys already opened presents, but I’ll call them in to open these.” She smiled over her shoulder. “You know you didn’t have to bring gifts. The little shits are spoiled enough already.”

Scoffing, I said, “You know I couldn’t let my main dudes have a birthday without Uncle Cam delivering the goods.”

“Birthday boys! In the party room!” she yelled, but the triplets ignored her as they jumped around happily in a bright green bouncy house. “Uncle Cam brought presents!” she added. That brought them running, their little socked feet pattering across the industrial gray carpet and through the door their mother was holding open for them.

We set the gifts down, and I was swarmed by shrieks and tiny, chubby arms and legs as I squatted. Laughing, I gathered them up and delivered kisses to each of their heads. “Hey, guys. Happy birthday!”

“Happy birfday to you too,” Max said, jockeying for position alongside his brothers.

“Thanks, homie,” I said, fist-bumping him and not bothering to point out that my birthday was in May.

“Hey, I want y’all to meet my friend. Her name is Traci.” I stood and tapped each boy on the top of the head in turn. “And these knuckleheads are Max, Rox, and Dex.” Traci gave a shy little wave.

“Happy birfday,” Max told her, and her eyebrows knitted together.

“But my birthday isn’t until February.”

“Sorry,” Blaire apologized with a grin, leading Max by the shoulder toward the table. “He’s a little confused and excited. Thinks it’s *everyone’s* birthday.”

Rox, the sweetest one of the triplets, wrapped his little arms around Traci’s legs and looked up at her. “You’re pwetty.”

“Oh, um, thank you, but can you please not touch my dress?” she said, backing away and breaking his embrace. The little dude’s face fell, and I cut my eyes at my girlfriend.

“Traci,” I admonished.

“What?” she hissed. “It’s *Prada*.”

Blaire was openly glaring at my girlfriend, as Traci swiped at a non-existent spot near the hem of the dress.

Lifting the trembling-lipped little fellow up in my arms, I went for the distraction technique. “Hey, Uncle Cam brought you a present. Would you like to open it?”

His blue eyes brightened. “A present just for me?”

“Just for you,” I said, poking him in the belly and making him giggle before setting him on the chair beside Max. “Come on, Dex. You too,” I said, rounding up the last of the boys and plopping him down beside his brothers. Checking the tags, I set a very large present down in front of each of them, loving the way their little eyes widened. “Ready ... go!” I shouted, and they tore into the wrapping paper like a pack of rabid dogs.

Max, the little wild man, finished first, and screamed, “Dinosaur!” The kid loved dinosaurs. He couldn’t properly pronounce ‘birthday,’ but he could say ‘paleontologist,’ ‘stegosaurus,’ and all other kinds of prehistoric words that even some grownups stumbled over.

The other two boys finished opening their gifts, and I grinned at their excitement. I had gotten them each a transforming toy that was as tall as they were. Dex was fascinated by superheroes, so his was a Batmobile, and Rox’s was a firetruck.

Okay, full disclosure. I was fully aware that Rox couldn’t pronounce ‘firetruck,’ and I totally bought him that toy just to see the look on Blaire’s face when—

“A firefuck!” Rox yelled.

And there it is... hee hee.

“You asshole,” she muttered. “You did that shit on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Who? Me?” I asked, the picture of innocence.

I tried doing *The Eyes* thing I’d learned from Traci while we were stuck in traffic, blinking slowly and making them look super sad, but either I needed to practice more, or Blaire was a lot more hardcore than Traci’s father.

“Stop doing that with your eyes. You look like you have conjunctivitis,” she said, whacking me hard on the chest with the back of her hand.

“Look at my firefuck, Maxie!”

“That firefuck is awesome!”

“I wanna see da firefuck.”

It seemed like every other word out of their tiny mouths was ‘firefuck’ at that point. The ‘firefucks’ were just flying around the room like a swarm of gnats. It was firefucking awesome.

“I brought a very large knife to cut the birthday cake, Cam. I think you understand what I’m saying right now,” Blaire growled, the green of her eyes flashing significantly up at me.

Because I valued my penis, and because I had been sufficiently entertained, I squatted down beside the rampantly cursing toddlers. “Hey, dudes! Who thinks they can knock me down in the bouncy castle?”

A shower of *me*’s rained down, and I scooted the foul-mouthed tots toward the play area, calling over my shoulder, “Come on, Traci. You can be the referee.”

“You can’t jump with your shoes on, Uncle Cam. You gotta put ’em over dere,” Dex said, grabbing my hand and leading me to the cubbies filled with shoes.

“Gosh, I don’t know if any of these slots are big enough for my shoes. I have really big...” I turned to waggle my eyebrows at Traci, “...feet.” *Yes, ladies. The rumors about shoe size are not a myth. Cast your lovely gazes downward if you want to know what you’re getting into. Or what’s getting into you.*

Traci giggled and gave me a look I could feel in my balls, biting her bottom lip suggestively. *Focus, Cam. There will be*

time for biting that lip yourself later.

The boys started wrestling, so I sent them to the blue bouncy house before someone ended up with a concussion or a bleeding wound. “You don’t want to jump with us?” I asked my girl after they had scampered off.

“Not even a little bit,” she said, her voice tight. She really needed to loosen up if she was going to hang out with our group, because let’s be honest, we were a bunch of overgrown kids. Even the girls.

I glanced over and grinned when I saw Charli and Bristol running the blow-up obstacle course with Carrie. They were laughing and squealing, ponytails bouncing as Bristol tried to push Charli’s tiny frame up to the next level. It didn’t work, and they collapsed into a giggling heap.

Shucking my shoes, I put them sideways on top of the cabinet, because seriously, those little squares were way too tiny for a man of my length. *My foot length, I mean.*

“Hey, man,” came a voice from my left, and I turned to see Woody ambling toward us. “Hi, Traci,” he said politely, and I wanted to hug the asshole for putting in an effort.

“Hi, Bode,” she said.

Woody chuckled. “No, I’m Woody. Manbun Boy over there is Bode, but I can see how you’d get us confused.” I cringed at his lame-ass joke. Bode and Woody couldn’t have been farther apart in appearance. Where Bode was lean, blond and a good four inches taller than Woody, our Hispanic friend had a broad

chest and caramel-colored skin, with dark hair and deep brown eyes.

He leaned in to give her a hug, but she side-stepped him and stuck out her hand for a shake instead. “Don’t want to mess up my dress,” she purred.

My friend’s jaw tightened, but he nodded. “Of course not. You look very... nice.”

“It’s Prada,” I said knowingly. He shifted his gaze to me, and the words ‘*high-maintenance*’ flashed in my head. Stuffing his hands in his pocket, he swiveled his head to the left and then quickly away, a frown marring his usually smooth skin. “Something wrong, Woodster?”

He shrugged, casting a glance back toward a red bouncy house. I leaned down and pressed a kiss to Traci’s cheek, careful not to touch her dress, and said, “Hey, can you give me a minute? Go watch the boys for me.”

“Watch the boys?” she shrieked. “I don’t know what to do with children.”

“You’ll be fine,” I soothed. “Just stand outside the house and make sure no one dies.” That was pretty much all you could do with the Broxton triplets. They were some rough-and-tumble little dudes.

She scowled at me and stomped away. Slowly, like she was headed toward her own execution. Pulling my gaze from her ass, I turned back to Woody. “So, what’s got you all pissy looking?”

“It’s fucking Taz,” he said, nodding toward Tazanna Birdsong, the newest member of our security team. I suspected that Woody had a low-key crush on her, but he wouldn’t admit it to save his life.

“What’s she done to bother you now?” I sighed.

“She just threatened to take off her fake leg and beat Hawk with it.”

I couldn’t stifle my laugh. Taz and Hawk were in the red house, which featured two large hills that you stood on and tried to knock your opponent off with a giant Q-Tip. Woody glared at my amusement, and I slapped him on the back.

“Come on, Woodster. That’s funny as hell.”

“It’s insulting. Why does she have to act like that?” His scowl deepened as he rammed his hands into his pockets.

Traci was shooting me desperate eyes from beside the blue castle, so I listened to Woody for another minute before striding over. “What’s up?”

“These children are horrible!” she hissed. Pointing at Dex and Max, she said, “That one keeps pushing the other ones down, and that one won’t stop yelling.” I peeked in and saw that no one was crying, and everyone was alive. They were having a damned ball.

“They’re just being kids,” I said with a chuckle, climbing in through the flapped entrance. Standing up, I held my arms open wide. “Bring it, suckers!” And the attack was on. Tiny bodies rammed into me as chubby fists pummeled me. I put

one hand protectively over my crotch because my nuts were like the protected wetlands—save them at all costs.

After a few minutes, instead of banging into me one at a time, the little guys got smart and launched a coordinated attack. Appreciating their teamwork, I let myself fall, and then I was covered with tiny humans, all of us laughing as they used my body as their own personal jungle gym.

The fun faltered when someone—Max, I think—used my testicles as a soccer ball. “Whoa,” I grunted, sitting up suddenly. “Watch the balls, dude.”

As the boys started attacking each other instead, Blaire climbed into the house carrying Danica.

“I kicked Uncle Cam in the balls,” Max said proudly.

Since she lived with three toddler boys who were obsessed with the stuff between their legs, Blaire was no rookie at ‘family jewels’ discussions and didn’t even wince. “Did you apologize?”

Max put on his best contrite face and gave me a hug. “Sowwy.”

Ruffling his dark, curly hair, I said, “It’s okay, big guy. It was an accident.”

“Boys, your sister wants to play, so either calm down or go bother Uncle Bode,” Blaire said, her tone unyielding. Since calm wasn’t in their vocabulary, the triplets scrambled out and tore off across the carpet to find someone else to torture. “You want to show Uncle Cam how you can walk?” she asked, and

baby Dani grinned, showing off her four pearly teeth and her cute little dimples.

Sitting with spread legs, we let the little girl toddle back and forth between us. She grabbed hold of my index fingers and bounced merrily before flopping down onto her diapered butt. Her sweet laughter was contagious, spreading to both Blaire and myself, until I heard a sharp, “Cam!”

“Uh-oh,” Blaire said, noticing the look Traci was throwing our way. It was so sharp, I was surprised it didn’t bust the blow-up castle. “I think playtime is over for Uncle Cam.”

Nuzzling a kiss onto Dani’s chubby neck rolls, I murmured, “Love you, sweet girl,” and handed her back to her mother. “What’s up?” I asked a glaring Traci when I stepped out of the castle.

“You’ve been ignoring me. That’s what’s up,” she complained.

Trying not to sigh, I said, “Honey, this is why I told you to change clothes. So you could play with us.”

“I. Do. Not. Want. To. Play. Cammy. I’m not a child. This is *not* how I wanted to spend my Saturday night.” Her perfectly arched eyebrows sank low over her brown eyes. “And you promised I could meet Axel Broxton.”

And his abs, I thought. “Fine,” I snapped before turning to Blaire, who was pretending not to listen. “Where is your husband?” I asked.

She scooted Danica toward the door, and I scooped the baby up onto my hip as Blaire climbed out. “I think he’s in the party room hovering over L.J. while Charli feeds him. Come on. I’ll go with y’all, and I can feed this munchkin.”

We found both Shark and Axel in the party room, standing and watching as Charli fed four-month-old Lester James Atwood a bottle. “He’s a good eater,” Shark was reporting, looking down proudly at his snoozing son.

“I can tell,” Axel said, affectionately stroking his new nephew’s hair. “He’s getting so big.”

“Oh my God! You’re Axel Broxton!” Traci shrieked, eyes wide with awe, like she’s just seen Jesus Christ himself.

Ax flashed an embarrassed grin and shrugged. “I hope so. I’m wearing his underwear.”

Blaire handed Dani off to Shark. “Take this child because I’m going to cut Axel, and I don’t want to get blood on her new outfit.” Whirling around, she pointed a finger at her very large husband. “I’ve told you to stop telling that dumbass joke. It was only funny the first hundred times you said it.” I watched, amused, as Blaire bossed her husband as if he were some mere mortal and not a football god. And he let her because he fucking adored that woman.

He grabbed her hand and kissed her finger tenderly before releasing her. “Sorry, babe. Can’t help it. Dad jokes are kinda my thing.” Blaire lifted her eyebrows, unimpressed.

Traci, on the other hand, was quite impressed. “Well, I thought it was hilarious,” she said, skipping right past Blaire to throw her arms around Axel’s waist. Apparently the Prada was immune from wrinkling if you were hugging a famous NFL star.

Axel, to his credit, kept his hands up, palms out, in a firm display of *I’m not touching this woman*. He was well-adapted to dealing with overzealous fans, which my girlfriend certainly appeared to be. She continued her gushing, looking up at Ax with stars in her eyes. “You’re even more handsome in person.” Moving her hands to his stomach, she cooed, “And these abs! I follow you on Insta, and I just loved that pic of you with no shirt on at the beach you posted in July.”

With panic in his eyes, Axel disentangled himself and grabbed Blaire by the arm, yanking her to his side so swiftly, she almost lost her balance. Looping his long arm around her shoulders, he smiled. “*My wife* took that picture. Have you met *my wife*? Her name is Blaire, and she’s *my wife*. It’s always nice to meet a fan. *My wife* and I love meeting new people, don’t we, wifey?”

“Mmmhmm,” Blaire hummed, her eyes so narrow I could barely see the flash of snapping green she was shooting directly at her husband’s molester. But it was there. Ax appeared to be holding her tightly—probably to keep her from going for the cake knife—while also trying to figure out how to work the word ‘wife’ into the conversation a couple more times.

The whole thing would have been a lot funnier if it wasn't *my girlfriend* fawning all over another man. Stepping up behind Traci, I wrapped my arms around her. "That's enough, Traci," I said low in her ear, a bite of anger cutting into my voice. She let out a frustrated little breath, and though I couldn't see her face, I could imagine the eye roll.

Blaire, keeping her razor-sharp gaze on Traci, tilted her head toward her husband. "Why don't you go check on the kids, babe?" She wanted him out of this room. Away from my handsy girlfriend.

Axel pivoted, blocking out the room with his wide back and shoulders as he bent his head to his wife's, his large hands cupped around her face. It was a private moment, his voice low enough that his words were indistinguishable to the rest of us, but I loved the guy for it.

When it became obvious that Ax was kissing her, even Shark—who normally complained about the couple's frequent PDA—kept his mouth shut. Men could take a lesson from Axel Broxton. When another woman was pawing at your body, you kissed the fuck out of your gorgeous wife and made her feel like the only woman in the world.

Taking Traci's hand, I led her across the room to where Shark was sitting at a purple table with purple bench seating. He was spooning strained something into Dani's mouth as she dribbled the green slop down her chin as fast as he could get it past her lips. *Don't blame ya, little chick. That shit looks nasty.* He mock-frowned at her antics, and the baby found that

absolutely hilarious, spewing green goo all over her uncle when she laughed.

“That’s disgusting,” Traci said, wrinkling her nose at the mess that Shark was good-naturedly wiping from his shirt.

He shrugged. “Good thing she’s cute. You must be Traci.” She nodded, and he introduced himself. “And that pretty lady over there is my wife, Charli,” he said with a nod of his head and some serious puppy love eyes. His face got impossibly more sappy when he looked down at the baby in Charli’s arms. “That’s our son, L.J.”

“Nice to meet you all,” Traci said before focusing on the bottle in the infant’s mouth. “You don’t breastfeed?”

Charli looked taken aback at the intrusive question, and I tightened my hand around Traci’s in warning. The couple was in the process of adopting little L.J. after one of our navy buddies and his wife had died within days of each other, so Charli couldn’t exactly feed the baby from her own body.

“I didn’t mean to pry,” Traci said. “I just think you’re smart for not breastfeeding. It makes your tits sag.” She lowered her voice, but her whisper still resonated around the room. “You don’t want to end up like Blaire.”

What. The. Fuck? I prayed that Blaire hadn’t heard that, but when I turned toward her, her face told me everything I needed to know. The shock. The *pain*. Blaire Broxton was one tough cookie, but that single comment had her mouth turning down and her eyes brimming. I was torn between wanting to go to

Blaire to wrap her up in one of my big Cam hugs and wringing Traci's scrawny neck.

In a split second, I decided to deal with Traci first. But Charli beat me to the punch. Standing and handing off the baby to Shark, who had stalked over like a very angry lion, little Charli got right the fuck up into Traci's face, her finger wagging a centimeter from my girlfriend's nose.

"You listen to me, you snooty bitch. It would be my *honor* to end up like Blaire Broxton. She is the most beautiful woman I know, not to mention that she has more brains in her pinky finger than you do in that overdone head of yours." Traci's eyes widened. I was pretty sure no one had ever talked to her like that.

Wheezing in a deep breath, Charli continued, spittle flying from her lips like a sprinkler, "And FYI, Blaire's tits are amazing! I'm not even into girls, but sometimes I find myself staring at them." *Okay. Wow. TMI, Char.* Her voice got dangerously low and growly. "Would you like to know someone else who loves Blaire's boobs? *Her husband.* The one you were shamelessly rubbing yourself up against like a skanky little ho." Traci gasped, but that didn't stop the tiny blonde from her verbal rampage. "He loves *everything* about his wife and would never stoop so low as to give a second thought to some wannabe groupie like you. So, bye bitch!"

Charli flicked her hand dismissively, turned on her heel, and marched over to wrap a protective arm around Blaire.

Well.

Not really much I can add to that.

Yanking my keys from my pocket, I pressed them roughly into a stunned Traci's hand. "Wait in the truck for me," I commanded, my voice vibrating with anger.

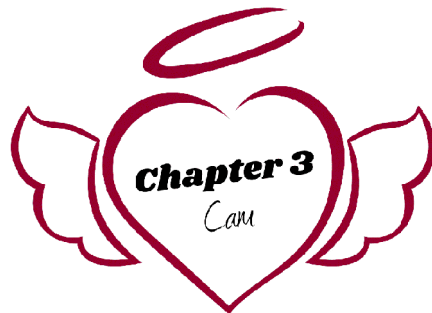
She turned her brown eyes to me. "Are you going to let her talk to me like that?" Her voice was pompous and entitled, and it grated on my last fucking nerve.

"Truck. Now!" I roared, and she stumbled back a few steps, her face turning beet red as she stomped to the door.

Danica, still in her portable highchair, started wailing, and I jogged over to pick her up. "It's okay, sweet girl," I said, cuddling her to my chest and feeling like a dick for scaring her. "Was Uncle Cam too loud?" She nodded, her soft auburn hair tickling my neck. I kissed the top of her sweet head. "I'm sorry, baby. I'll be quiet now."

"Kay," she sniffled, one of her fat little hands reaching up to pat my face. Closing my eyes, I swayed her back and forth. I could never imagine Traci comforting a child like this. She was too goddamn self-centered. For the life of me, I couldn't think of why I had even been with her in the first place. Couldn't think of one thing I actually liked about her—besides the sex. And I could get that anywhere.

Sighing in resignation, I thought, *Playboy Cam is back in the game. Put me in, Coach.*



I FELT A SOFT hand on my arm and opened my eyes. “Why don’t you let me take her? You need to talk to Blaire.” Charli smiled gently up at me, back to her old, sweet self after verbally eviscerating Traci like a ninja.

“Thanks, Char,” I said, giving Dani one more kiss before handing her over. I approached Blaire warily, “Blaire.”

Her eyes were red rimmed but dry as they lasered in on mine. “Cam.”

“I’m so sorry, sweetheart. Sorry I brought her here.”

Blaire’s beautiful face creased. “Why are you with someone like that, Cam?”

I shoved my hands in my back pockets and stared off to the side. “I don’t know. I guess I just decided it was time to grow up and settle down a bit.”

A look of horror crossed her face. “You’re settling down with *her*? Good God, man! What are you thinking?” You could always count on Blaire to say exactly what she was thinking.

“No, no. I think it’s safe to say things are over between me and Traci. I just...” I brought my eyes back to hers, and genius that she is, she understood without me saying the words.

“You see all your friends settling down and having families, and you want that too.”

I pushed out a breath. “Yeah.”

She stepped into me, wrapping her arms around my middle, and I welcomed the warm embrace as I squeezed her back. “You’ve always had such a big heart, Cam,” she said, her cheek pressed to my chest. “You just need to stop being a dirty manwhore.”

I laughed at her insult piggybacking on a compliment. “That’s what I was trying to do. To date like a non-manwhore.”

She tilted her head back, her green eyes holding nothing but affection, her tone serious. “Not with her. And not with anyone like her. You need a woman who is sweet and funny and smart, Cam.”

“That sounds a lot like you, but you’re already married, sweetheart. I mean, if you want to leave Axel, I’m good with it, but we’d have to buy a bigger place. I don’t think all your kids would fit in my house. Plus, Hawk lives there, and you do *not* want the children being exposed to the shit he gets up to in The Den of Sin.”

“Not to mention that you’re like my brother, you freak,” she said with a chuckle. “There are plenty of good women out

there. You just have to find the one for you.”

I already did. Sixteen years ago.

“Again, I’m sorry for bringing Traci here. I should have known she wouldn’t fit in with our family.”

The corners of Blaire’s lips tipped up. “It would take a special woman to put up with all of us. And large doses of Valium.”

“Are we okay?” I asked, kissing her forehead.

“As long as you never bring that handsy bitch around again, then yeah. We’re okay.”

I released her but bent to whisper in her ear. “I may be like your brother, but that doesn’t make me blind or stop me from being objective. You still have an amazing rack, Blaire Broxton.”

Her brilliant grin warmed my heart. “Thanks, manwhore.” She patted my shoulder. “Now go “She would probably prefer that to facing Charli again. Homegirl is fierce as fuck.”

Blaire turned her eyes toward Charli, and her entire face softened as she watched her former-nanny-turned-sister-in-law cooing at Danica. “She’s the absolute best. Beau did good with that one.”

I laughed. “Yeah, I’m not sure how she puts up with Shark’s broody ass, but they make it work.” I squeezed her hand. “Love you, little sis.”

I wasn't looking forward to fighting with Traci, but I knew it was about to happen. I was so fucking ashamed of myself for bringing someone so toxic into my adopted family's life.

Donning my shoes and trudging toward my Jeep, the guilt washed over me like a tidal wave. The feeling shifted back into anger as soon as I got in the vehicle and Traci started running her mouth.

"You're not hanging out with those people anymore, Cammy," she stated.

Cranking the truck, I spared her a cursory glance. "If you don't want to walk home, I suggest you shut your fucking mouth."

She gasped as I put the SUV in drive and peeled out of the parking lot. She managed to stay silent for all of two minutes before she started again.

"I don't appreciate you raising your voice to me," she said, and I wheeled into the nearest parking lot and slammed on the brakes.

"Well, I don't appreciate you acting like a total bitch to my family."

"I di-didn't. They were rude to me," she stammered. "That blonde girl—"

"That blonde girl's name is Charli, and she's the nicest person I've ever known. And *you* managed to make her go thermonuclear. What does that say about you, Traci?"

"I'm not going to—"

I cut her off with a firm, “Get out.”

Her eyes widened. “Wha— you can’t kick me out.”

“I can, and I will, if you say another goddamn word.”

Slamming the car into gear, I spun a doughnut in the parking lot and headed toward my house in silence.

As soon as I pulled into my driveway, I hopped out of my vehicle and strode toward the porch. Traci was waiting for me to open the car door for her, but I was in no mood to be a fucking gentleman tonight. I unlocked the front door and went inside, closing it behind me.

Eventually, the Prada-wearing Princess managed to find her way out of the vehicle without my assistance and knocked on the door. “Can I help you?” I asked coldly, opening the door to her angry, flushed face.

“I need to get my things.”

Gazing down at her, I knew my eyes were as deep blue as they had ever been. They always got darker when I was pissed off or fighting. They lightened when I was aroused. Or so Shiloh used to tell me. *Fuck! Stop thinking about her.*

“I’ll put it on the front porch. You can pick it up in the morning.”

“But I have hot yoga in the morning,” she whined.

“Then come get it in the afternoon.”

Traci stared at her feet for a moment before lifting her gaze to me and trying to do *The Eyes*, but I wasn’t falling for her

crap. “Good. I’ll come in and we can talk. In the bedroom,” she purred, tracing a manicured finger down my chest. “I’m sure my mouth on your big cock will make it all better.”

My shorts grew tighter at her dirty words, and it pissed me the fuck off.

I grabbed her hand and pushed it away. “That won’t be necessary. We’re done, Traci.” Closing the door, I locked it behind me and stalked to my workout room. I stripped off my shirt, socks, and shoes and approached the punching bag in the corner. I needed to work out some of my frustrations.

The bag swung mightily as I kicked it over and over. Front kicks, back kicks. Roundhouse, axe, and hook kicks. My legs were trembling thirty minutes later when I heard my phone ring.

Probably Shark telling me I’m fired.

I answered without looking at the screen. “Hello.”

“Hello, Camden. This is your brother, Graham Fitz.”

I couldn’t help my smile. My younger brother greeted me the same way every time we talked, even when I called him.

“Hey there, Graham Fitz. How’s it hanging?”

“Low and to the left.”

I chuckled. My brother’s got jokes. “And how is Melvin?”

“Good. He’s hanging low and to the right, if you need that information.”

I cringed. I unequivocally did *not* need that information. “Thanks, Graham. But I’d rather not discuss your husband’s dick, if it’s all the same to you.”

“It is all the same to me. Okay, what would you like to talk about?”

My brother, younger than me by three years, was high functioning on the autism spectrum. *Very* high functioning. In fact, he was a goddamn, bona fide rocket scientist, and I mean that literally. He and his husband, Melvin, worked at Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and Graham had more degrees than a thermometer.

“How about you tell me about your week?”

“Okay. On Monday, I had Honey Nut Cheerios for breakfast.” I laughed silently. That was no surprise. Graham had eaten Honey Nut Cheerios every single day for breakfast since he was four. He continued, “Then I went to work at my job at the Kennedy Space Center. In the morning, my team worked on some new alkaline fuel cells. Would you like me to explain that to you?”

“Nah, bro. I don’t need the details. I’m just interested in what you’ve been up to?”

“All right then. I had lunch in the cafeteria with Karen and Jay from my team. I had a turkey sandwich that Melvin packed for me. And Cool Ranch Doritos and a Mountain Dew. In the afternoon, I did a lecture on effective exhaust velocity.”

Lifting my eyebrows, I asked, “Melvin packed you a Mountain Dew?” Graham’s husband was a bit of a stickler about my brother’s caffeine consumption.

“No, I bribed it away from Jay by promising to help him with his doctorate thesis on computational fluid dynamics,” he said without one ounce of shame.

Graham continued his detailed recount of his week, ending with, “And then Melvin and I had sex last night.”

Before he could describe the specifics of that—because he most assuredly would—I broke in. “Sounds like a good week, G. Are you and Mel coming home for Thanksgiving?”

“No, but we will come for Christmas, if that’s okay.”

“Of course. I miss you.”

“In-person contact is very important in a sibling relationship,” he stated wisely. That was his way of telling me he missed me too.

“Well, good. I’ll stock up on Cheerios. And Mountain Dew.”

“You’ll have to pour that into an opaque receptacle so that Melvin won’t know I’m drinking it. And I like a lot of ice.”

“I remember, Graham. I’ll have everything set up just like you like it, okay?” My brother was brilliant, but he got agitated if his routine was disturbed too much, down to the amount and type of ice in his drinks. Surprisingly, he did fine with air travel, but once he settled in at his destination, he needed his shit exactly how he liked it.

“Okay, thank you. You’re a very good brother, Camden.”

I could feel my residual frustration and anger from earlier receding. “So are you, bud.”

“And you’ll get the Quilted Northern toilet paper?” I could feel his tension rising as thoughts of being away from his home filtered into his bright mind.

“Hell yes, I will. The good stuff too. The three-ply.”

“I like the three-ply. It’s very luxurious on my anus.”

I grinned. “Graham, if you don’t feel like traveling, you just say the word, and I’ll come there for the holidays.”

“No, Melvin says it’s good for me to get out of my comfort zone but safely and in a controlled environment. I can do that at your house because you buy ice from Sonic for me. Hotel ice sucks.”

Chuckling, I said, “Yeah, it does.”

“So, since we’re having a conversation, would you like to tell me how your week was?” Graham asked.

I knew his question was more of a learned behavior on how to carry on a polite conversation, rather than some deep need to hear about the mundane details of my life, so I just hit the highlights. Watching Monday Night Football and eating wings with the guys. Work, as Graham enjoyed hearing about the famous people our private security firm protected. The birthday party, though I left out the ugly stuff.

“I broke up with my girlfriend tonight,” I blurted.

“The bitchy one?”

Jeez, was I the only one who hadn't noticed?

“Graham!” I said with a laugh. “You haven't even met Traci.”

“I could hear her yelling at you to get off the phone whenever we talked. She didn't sound very nice.”

“She wasn't,” I agreed.

“I liked Shiloh.”

His words stunned me into a moment of silence. Graham hadn't mentioned her in years. “Y-you remember Shy?”

“Yeah, she was nice to me. She didn't touch my back because she knew I didn't like it.” My brother could tolerate physical contact. Except on his back. For some reason, that annoyed him. “She brought me drinks from Sonic, and she was really pretty too.”

“Yeah,” I sighed. “She was.” *Fucking gorgeous is more like it.*

“Have I upset you, Camden?”

“No, buddy. Not at all.” But I didn't want to talk about Shiloh. “So, how are your tae kwon do classes going?”

“Very well. I've earned my blue belt.”

“That's kickass, Graham. I'm proud of you.” My brother was a fucking genius, but he could be socially awkward. I didn't want some motherfuckers messing with him because he

was 'different,' so I had encouraged him to take some form of martial arts lessons so that he could protect himself.

“Can we work out together when I come to visit?”

“Sure we can. As long as you take it easy on me.”

There was a long silence. “I don't think that will be necessary, Camden. You're much more advanced than I am.”

I was a sixth-degree Black Belt in tae kwon do and also practiced karate, jiu-jitsu, and judo. Not to brag, but I was fucking lethal.

“I know, G. I was teasing you.”

“Oh. Ha. Maybe you should take it easy on me.”

“I'll try not to unleash the beast on my baby bro,” I said, letting him hear the playful growl in my voice.

“Ha. You're funny, Camden. You would never hurt me.” Then he paused, and I waited for it. “Except that time you made me fall off my bike.” *And there it is.*

“Dude, I was eight. You're gonna have to let that shit go,” I said, keeping my tone light so he knew I was kidding.

Hearing the smile in his voice made me smile. “Okay, Camden. I'll let that shit go.” It cracked me up when Graham cursed because it sounded so odd delivered in his normally precise and flawless diction.

“Anything else new in your life?”

“No. Everything is the same. It's my bedtime. Goodbye, Camden.”

He abruptly hung up, and I spoke to dead air. “Goodbye, Graham. Love you, buddy.”

I made a mental note to call Melvin in a couple days. I usually talked to him at least once a week, just to check in. He’s an excellent partner for my brother, and I really liked the guy.

I mean, he was a total fucking nerd. In fact, if you looked up “nerd” in the dictionary, there would have been a picture of Melvin standing there, complete with pocket protector. Hell, he *looked like* a Melvin. But he was kind, smart, and fucking solid as a rock. And he loved my brother, warts and all.

Melvin was a really good man.

Feeling marginally better, I headed to my room to take a shower. “Hey. Ya alright?” Hawk’s deep voice asked as I passed his room. I hadn’t even heard him come in.

Propping one forearm against the door frame, I nodded. “I’m good.”

His dark eyes regarded me before he spoke again. “So, it’s over with the queen bitch?”

“Yup. I’m headed in to pack her shit. Leaving it on the front porch for her to pick up in the afternoon.”

He nodded sagely. “Good. She wasn’t the one for you.”

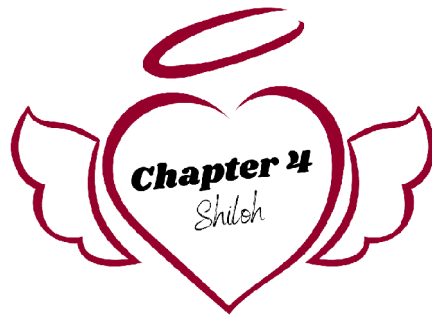
“That’s the fucking truth,” I muttered, pushing away from the door. “See ya tomorrow, Hawk.”

“Night, *Cammy*,” he said as I walked off, and I stuck my middle finger back into his room before trudging down the hallway.

Gathering all of the various items Traci had left at my house the past two months, I packed them in a box and set it beside the door to my room. After a hot shower, I climbed between my dark-blue sheets and closed my eyes.

What a fucking day.

Tomorrow will be better.



MY SUITCASE WAS ALREADY packed. I had a continuing education conference in Houston this week, and my flight was leaving from JFK in a few hours. As soon as Vincent left the house, I sprang from my bed and put on my glasses before heading into the bathroom.

I wasn't sure where I was going, but I knew I was never fucking coming back here.

Go ahead and catch your flight to Houston. Vincent is expecting you to be gone all week, so that will give you some time to regroup.

Yes. Yes, I would do that. I just needed time to figure out what the hell I was going to do after my conference was over. Shit, did I even *need* to attend the Texas Optometric Expo now? I had to have continuing education hours to renew my license at the end of the year, but would I even be coming back to New York? *No*. Maybe I could stay in my home state of Texas and get licensed there. There was nothing here for me to come back to.

Certainly not my cheating, mobster fiancé.

Ex-fiancé, I decided immediately, pulling the gigantic rock of an engagement ring from my finger and stuffing it into a side pocket of my suitcase. There was no way I would stay with Vincent after what I'd heard. Even if I could overlook the cheating, which I most assuredly could not, I could never live with a violent criminal.

I put in my contact lenses and got dressed in thick, black leggings, a white sweater, and soft leather boots before dragging my suitcase to the living room. My eyes fell on a large bouquet of roses in a crystal vase sitting on the coffee table. A white card beckoned to me from its spot nestled among the deep red blooms. My hand shook as I pulled it out and opened the tiny envelope to pull out the card inside.

Cuore mio,

These flowers pale in comparison to your beauty. I will miss you while you're gone.

I love you, darling.

Yours,

Vincent

I resisted the urge to throw the flowers against the pale, mustard yellow Venetian plaster wall. Fuck him and his flowers. He probably sent Angela and Theresa an arrangement as well. *I wonder if the florist gives a buy two, get one free discount for philandering mobsters?*

Christ, I needed to decide what to do. I needed a game plan.

You know who can help you.

No! Absolutely not.

I pulled my phone from my pocket and dialed my mother in Ireland. “Shiloh, what’s wrong? Is it terrorists?”

“Mom, I’m fine. I haven’t even gotten to the airport yet,” I reassured her.

My mother had panic attacks every time I flew. She actually had panic attacks every time I did almost *anything*, but flying was her biggest trigger. Ever since my father had died on American Airlines Flight 11 that crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, my mother was convinced that every flight was going to be hijacked by terrorists.

It probably seemed illogical to most, but until someone had personally been through it, they were in no position to judge. She hasn’t flown since, not even when she’d moved to Ireland with her new husband, Niall, eleven years ago. They’d had her things shipped over, and she and Niall had taken a cruise to get there.

She’d even missed my graduation when I got my doctorate degree in optometry from Southern University of New York because she refused to fly. I didn’t blame her at all. I understood her fears. I had been scared as hell the first time I’d flown after the terrorist attacks, but over the years, the flights had gotten easier.

I didn’t mind living in New York either, though that was a constant source of stress for my mother. I felt closer to my dad here, in the city where he had died. That was one of the

reasons I had gone to optometry school here instead of in Texas. Well, also because I'd needed to get as far away from my painful memories as humanly possible.

Sighing inwardly, I knew without a doubt, Mom wasn't having a good day. There was no way I could ask her for help. I don't know why I'd even imagined that asking her would be a good idea. Informing her that I was engaged to a murderer would put her straight into the hospital.

I guessed I just needed to hear her voice.

"Is it... is it your health?" she said in a frightened whisper.

"No, Mother. My health is fine." I tried to infuse my tone with patience I didn't feel at that moment. I needed my mom, because I was going through some serious shit, but she was incapable of giving me the comfort I needed. Since we'd lost Dad, she'd been rendered so fragile, I had stepped up and taken on the role of parent, even though I was only a teenager at the time.

"You're sure? You haven't missed any appointments, have you?"

"Not a single one. Everything is okay, Mom," I lied. "I just called to say hello and see how you're doing."

"Oh," she breathed, sounding slightly mollified. "I'm a little stressed today, to be honest."

"Why don't you have Niall take you down to that pub you like for lunch?"

“That would be nice,” she mused. “Have you heard from your Uncle Ricky? I’m a little worried.”

At least it’s not only me she stresses over, I thought, and then it was like a light bulb went off over my head as she continued to talk. “...but Barb said he was sleeping. Do you think he’s okay?”

Uncle Ricky! He’s a retired cop! He’ll know what to do.

“Shiloh, are you listening to me? I said I’m worried about my brother.”

“Mom, if you talked to Aunt Barbara, then he’s fine. Let the poor man take a nap if he wants to. He was probably just faking sleep so he didn’t have to listen to her nagging.”

She giggled. “You’re right. I’m being silly.”

“It’s all right, but I do need to go.”

The panic made her voice an octave higher than usual. “Oh God. Shiloh, please don’t get on that plane. Just take a train or something.”

“I’ll call you as soon as I land, Mom. I’ll be fine,” I told her gently.

“You can’t know that for sure,” she said quietly, and I could hear the tears starting.

“We can never know anything for sure. I love you so much, Mom, but I have to go.” I had found that, at times like these, I had to be firm with her, or she would only get herself worked up even farther. It was better this way.

“I love you too,” she sobbed. “And if anything ha-happens, just think of me and how much I love you.” I knew she was thinking of the phone call she had received from my father in his final moments, and my heart felt like it was going to explode and spray bloody sadness all over my insides.

“I will. Bye, Mom.”

“Goodbye, baby.”

Tears streamed down my face as I made my way to the bathroom. I hated hearing her upset like that. I never should have told her I was going to Houston. She would have been none the wiser.

After a good cry, I cleaned up my face, blew my nose, and headed back to the living room. Picking my phone back up, I let my finger hover over Uncle Ricky’s name before I tapped the screen. After two rings, Aunt Barbara answered.

“Hello?”

“Aunt Barb, it’s Shiloh. I was trying to call Uncle Ricky,” I said, confused.

There were a few seconds of silence before I heard her sigh. “Honey, Ricky is in the hospital. But for God’s sake, don’t tell your mother.”

“Oh my God! What’s wrong?”

“He had a heart attack, sweetheart. Yesterday.” Before I could even ask, she soothed, “He’s fine now. They put in a stent, and the surgery went well. But I can tell you one damn

thing. That man is about to go on a diet. He scared the hell out of me.”

“I can imagine. Do you need me to come there?”

“No, baby. I know you have your conference to go to. Your mom called freaking out about it last night. And anyway, he’s getting released from the hospital tomorrow.”

“I really don’t mind. I can change my flight to San Antonio instead of Houston.”

“If we need something, I’ll holler at you. I promise. He just needs a little rest and quiet. And a lot fewer bacon cheeseburgers.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at that. Uncle Ricky did love his burgers. “I have some great heart-healthy recipes saved on my phone. I’ll send them to you. And they taste good too.”

“Don’t be sending no tofu recipes, ya hear? That man would divorce me after thirty-seven years of marriage if I tried to feed him a tofu burger.”

“I promise. No tofu burgers. And you know you couldn’t chase Uncle Ricky away with a shitty mop.”

She giggled a little at that. “You’re right. That cantankerous old fart is stuck with me. Oh, hold on.” Muffled voices came from the other end of the phone, before she returned. “That was the nurse, honey. Ricky’s doctor is on the way up to do rounds, so I’m going to let you go. And *do not* tell Rhonda about this.”

Nodding even though she couldn't see me, I said, "I won't tell Mom. She doesn't need any more stress than she already has." *Like knowing that her daughter is caught up in a real-life mafia movie*, I almost blurted out, but Aunt Barb had enough to deal with. "I love you both, and please tell Uncle Ricky I'll be praying for him."

"I will, darlin'. And you don't worry. Everything is handled here. My church friends have already started bringing casseroles to the house."

Ahhh, Southern ladies and their casseroles. Let someone get sick or die, and they would show up en masse with all manner of dishes—not to mention nosy ears, eager for any tidbit they could pick up about the sick or dead. But they were also fierce friends who would do your laundry, mop your kitchen, and clean your bathroom without complaint before more guests arrived.

"I'm glad you have your church family, Aunt Barb. I'll text you when I land, okay?"

"Thank you, sweet girl." We said our goodbyes and hung up.

Well, Uncle Ricky is no longer an option. What now?

You could call him.

Hell. No.

Putting an end to my incessant self-argument, I reached for my bag and caught a cab to the airport.



Six hours later, I was standing at baggage claim at Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport, waiting for luggage to start spilling from the big, metal mouth. Pulling my phone from my bag, I tapped out a message to Mom and Aunt Barb to let them know I had arrived safely.

Despite being tired as fuck from the zero hours of sleep I had gotten last night, I hadn't slept at all on the flight. My mind was too busy. Racking my brain to come up with a plan, the traitorous organ kept going back to one person.

Camden Fitz. The man who had broken my heart and left me at one of the worst times of my life. Of course, he hadn't known everything I'd been going through because I hadn't told him. *Maybe if you'd told him, he would have stayed.*

I shook my head at that. No, I wouldn't have wanted him to stay with me out of pity. I'd wanted him to stay because he loved me. He didn't. Not enough anyway.

The entire flight, I had tried to think of someone else who might know what my next step should be. Someone besides *him*. Vincent had friends in high places. I knew that. Hell, one of his best friends was the police commissioner, and he was even friendly with the mayor. I couldn't trust anyone in New York. That was *his* city.

Maybe the Feds? They worked on shit like this, didn't they? Mob corruption, murders, and whatever else Vincent and his

family had been up to. But who should I contact? Would the FBI office in Houston have jurisdiction in New York? Because I really didn't want to go back to New York.

Camden would know, that incessant bitch inside my head trilled. I sighed audibly, and the woman next to me gave me a sympathetic smile. "Takes forever, doesn't it?" At my blank look, she nodded toward the still conveyor. "The bags."

"Oh, yes." I gave her a smile. "The bags."

Camden had been my high school sweetheart. We'd been together from the age of sixteen until we broke up at age nineteen, my freshman year in college. Before enlisting in the Navy, Camden had taken dual credit classes in high school, earning an associate's degree in criminal justice by the time we'd graduated. He'd waffled between wanting to be an FBI agent and military service and had finally decided on joining the Navy.

But his experience with criminal justice was the reason my mind went back to him over and over again. He may have crushed my heart, but for some odd reason, I trusted him with this situation. He would know what to do, and he would never put me in harm's way. He was entirely too protective in nature to do that.

That's not the only reason you keep thinking of him.

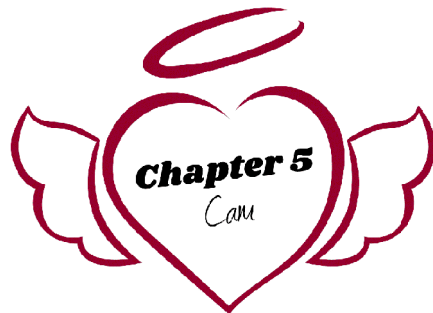
Shut up, brain. You trifling bitch.

I was snapped out of my inner monologue by the growl and thunk of the luggage carousel. Ten minutes later, I was pulling

my suitcase behind me, my mind made up. I would call Camden and simply ask him for advice. I wouldn't have to see him or talk to him for very long. I would just get an idea of jurisdictional boundaries and see if he had any contacts with the FBI that I could use, since he'd interned at the Dallas FBI office for two summers. He would know who I could and couldn't trust.

Finding a quiet corner, which was no easy feat in the busy airport, I looked up the security firm where he worked. I had Googled him a couple times over the years—okay, more than a few times—and the last time I had, he'd been working in Dallas. Clicking on the 'Call Now' button at the bottom of the page, I brought the phone to my ear with a shaky hand.

And here we go.



THE RINGING OF MY phone woke me up on Sunday morning. Without even opening my eyes, I dragged the annoying-as-fuck device underneath the covers with me.

“Hello,” I mumbled once my finger had successfully swiped across the screen.

“Are you still in bed, fucker?”

My eyes popped open, and I shoved the covers down, exposing my tired eyes to the sunlight peeking through my curtains. “Shark. Hey, man. I’m so sorry about last night. I was ___”

“I know, Cam. It’s not about that. I just got a call from the answering service.”

Frowning, I didn’t mention that it wasn’t my weekend to be on call. I felt so bad about last night that I would gladly take the call for him so he could spend time with his wife and baby today. “What have we got?” I asked, sitting up and swiping a hand up and down my face in an effort to wake myself up.

My eyes found the clock on the bedside table and registered that it was after noon. I couldn't remember the last time I'd slept this late.

"A woman is calling, and she asked specifically for you. Wouldn't give her name or what it was about, but insisted that it was urgent." My tired brain couldn't process who might be calling work and asking for me. "You didn't knock some chick up, did you?" Shark grunted.

"Of course not," I insisted, even as my mind said, *I hope to fuck I didn't*. I always covered my junk, but hell. Stranger things had happened.

"Good. I don't think I could stand a little asshole mini-Cam running around."

A chuckle escaped my lips. "Yeah, one of me is enough."

"That's the fucking truth. Anyway, I'll text you the number. Let me know if you need the team."

Ten seconds after we hung up, the message came through. Clicking on the number, I brought the phone to my ear.

"Hello?" came the soft reply, and something in my gut began to churn.

"This is Cam Fitz. I understand you needed to talk to me?"

There was an intake of breath before the voice spoke again. "Camden." That one word, the uttering of my name, and I knew. I fucking *knew*. "I'm not sure if you'll remember who I am, but—"

“Shiloh.” I cut her off, my voice sounding uncharacteristically gritty for reasons that had entirely nothing to do with the fact that I had just woken up.

She expelled air from her lungs, and I swear to God, I could almost feel the warmth of her breath against my ear. Placing my hand over my chest to try and keep my heart from pounding right through bone and skin, I swung my legs over the side of the bed and sat up.

“Oh. You remember me.” *Fuck yes, I remember you, baby.* “Camden, I’m so sorry to bother you. I know I’m probably the last person you wanted to hear from, but I n-n-need some help,” she stuttered, her voice shaking in a way that made my heart skip a few beats.

“Anything,” came my instant reply. I fucking meant it. *You need me to cut off my right arm and give it to you? Hand me the hacksaw, sweetheart. Especially when you sound as vulnerable as you do right now.*

“Oh,” she said again. “I’m not sure how much I should say on the phone, but... well, I overheard something, Camden. Something bad.” Her voice was a near-whisper. “And I want to know if you could tell me who I need to talk to. I don’t know who to trust.”

The fear in her voice had me saying, “You can trust *me*, Shy.” I started throwing on clothes one-handed, calculating how long it would take me to get to New York. “Are you in danger?”

“I think so,” she whispered, and anger and fear battled for supremacy in my stomach.

“I’ll catch the next flight to New York. Do you have somewhere safe you can go?”

There was a long pause. “I’m not in New York. I’m actually in Texas. Houston. My flight just landed at Intercontinental.”
She’s in Texas. Why did that make my balls tighten with excitement?

Going to the gun safe in my closet, I pulled out my pistol, checked it, and stuck it in the back of my pants. “Give me your exact location. Terminal and level.”

She seemed taken aback by my brusque tone. Or maybe it was because I was acting like a lunatic. I hadn’t heard from her in over a decade, and after talking to her for a few seconds, I was on some kind of crazy rescue mission. I didn’t even know what the fuck was going on. I just knew she sounded frightened, and I was going to fucking do something about it.

“Terminal C, first level near the baggage claim.”

I searched my mind. Terminal C. I had been there many times. “Okay, go up to the second level. There are lots of restaurants. Find one and *stay there*. I’ll be there in three hours. Do not step one foot outside the airport until I text you that I’ve arrived.”

“Camden, no. You don’t need to come here. I just need some... some advice.”

“You said you’re not sure if you should talk about it on the phone, so I’m coming there,” I said with finality. “Find a restaurant near the security checkpoint. Sit facing the entrance so you can see anyone entering. If you feel like you’re in danger, run as fast as you can—”

“I don’t think I’m in immediate danger,” she broke in. “This was a planned trip, so h-he’s not suspicious. Yet.”

He.

Goddammit.

That word made my blood boil, but my fear settled just a bit, knowing that she would probably be okay until I got there if no one was currently looking for her.

But she was scared. I softened my tone as I crammed my feet into a pair of loafers without socks. “I’m on my way, baby. Just sit tight.”

The relief was evident in her voice. “Thank you, Camden.”

I dashed into the bathroom and scrubbed my teeth. *Fuck, I look like shit*, I thought, looking into the mirror at my disheveled hair. I stuck on a black Fort Worth Wranglers hat and called it good.

Snatching my keys and wallet off the dresser, I slung open my bedroom door and jogged down the hallway. I didn’t even see Hawk sitting on the black leather couch until he spoke. “Where you going in such a hurry, dude?”

“Houston,” I called, not even stopping my sprint to the front door.

“Why do you have your gun?” I heard him ask as I slammed the door without answering.

Climbing into my Jeep, I stored my firearm safely in the console before taking off in a rush. Not even five minutes later, my phone rang, and my eyes jerked to the screen on my dashboard. *Incoming call from Shark*. My thumb hit the ‘answer’ button on my steering wheel, and I said, “Yeah?”

My friend’s growl filled the interior of my SUV. “Why the fuck are you going to Houston? Armed? And do you need backup?”

That’s my best friend, I thought. Beau Atwood had my back, no matter what. “I don’t need backup. I’m handling it.”

“Handling what?” he shouted. When I didn’t answer right away, he snapped, “Tell me. And that’s not a request.”

“That phone call earlier...” I took a deep breath. “It was from Shiloh.”

I could hear his brain clicking through the phone, putting the pieces together. “Shiloh. Your ex-girlfriend, Shiloh?”

“That’s the one. She’s in some kind of trouble.” I weaved through traffic, headed south on I-45.

“What kind of trouble, Cam?” His voice was steadier and less angry sounding.

Running one hand through my hair, I let the frustration kick into my voice. “Fuck, Shark. I don’t know. She just called and said she needed help, but she was scared to talk on the phone. Said she overheard something bad and that *he*—whoever the

fuck *he* is—wouldn't be suspicious yet because she was on a planned trip to Houston. So I'm going to motherfucking Houston."

"Okay, okay. Calm down, bro. I'll come with you. Just swing by—"

"I'm already on the freeway. I'm not turning around."

A deep sigh. "All right. Did you read the entire dossier on her? Maybe there was something in there that could give us a hint as to what you're walking into."

Shaking my head, I answered coldly, "I didn't even open it. You told me all I needed to know."

"At that time. I think you need a little more information at this point though." I could hear him moving around. "So, we know that she lives in New York and that she's engaged. I'll head to the office and see what else I can find out."

My heart was like a frozen block of ice when he said the word "engaged." I had never allowed myself to look Shiloh up in the past, but three months ago, I couldn't take it anymore. Watching Shark fall for Charli had opened up something inside me. Something I'd thought was dead.

No, that's not entirely true. I knew what I felt for her wasn't dead. That was why I'd thought about her—missed her—every day for the last sixteen years. I'd needed to know. Did she belong to someone else?

The answer had been yes, and it had been devastating. Two days after I'd marched into his office and slapped a piece of

paper onto his desk with Shiloh's name and date of birth, Shark had handed me a sealed manila envelope. "That's everything Tank found. He said he didn't read most of it. Just copied it for you. But shit, man." His blue eyes met mine in what could only be described as sympathy, and the skin over my chest seemed like it was constricting. "He did say that he found out from her social media that she's living in New York City and that she's getting married next year."

I hadn't seen Shiloh for years, but knowing that she was engaged to someone else? Well, that had been a kick in the damn face. I'd gone home, thrown the envelope into a dresser drawer, and drank myself into a stupor. The entire weekend, I only came out of my room to get more alcohol. Probably single-handedly destroyed my liver those three days. But in my muddled state, I'd found clarity.

On the Monday morning after, I had decided that I needed to suck it up and move on. She had. I'd lived without her for so long, and the confirmation that she was taken... it was like it gave me the freedom to start dating for real. And then I'd ended up with Traci.

That hadn't gone to plan.

And now Shiloh had called. She *needs* me. *Don't get ahead of yourself, asshole. She probably needs help picking out wedding invitations or something. You know, since she's getting married.*

I did my best to ignore the whole "engaged to be married" bullshit. Instead, I was thinking of her voice when she said my

name. “*Camden.*” Shiloh had almost always called me Camden. Not Cam. And sure as fuck not Cammy.

She only called me Cam when—

Jesus, my jeans tightened over my crotch at the mere thought of it. The thought of her so breathless that she couldn’t even roll my entire name from her pretty little lips.

Cam. Cam. Oh, God, Cam.

Someone honked, and I jerked to attention, maneuvering smoothly back into my lane since I was apparently incapable of driving while thinking about fucking. Keeping one hand on the wheel, I reached down and adjusted my dick, allowing my hand to stay pressed over my crotch as that voice—sultry without even trying—permeated through my thoughts like my brain was a goddamn sieve, incapable of keeping it out.

Oh, Cam, I’m... I’m coming again.

Mmmm, that feels so good, Cam.

Come with me, Cam.

I love you, Cam.

Sweet Jesus! That last one really got me. I blinked rapidly, attempting to force my eyes to focus on the road instead of rolling back in my head as I clamped my hand around my fully erect cock, which was thumping painfully. A low groan filled the empty space, and it took me a second to realize the noise had come from my own mouth. Was I seriously about to blow in my pants while I was driving down the fucking highway?

Yeah, probably. I jerked the steering wheel to the right, taking the next exit and finding a gas station. Hobbling a bit because of the state of my cock, I located the restroom and locked myself in before rubbing one out in the dirty stall.

Jesus, I'm like a fucking teenager.

Back in my vehicle, I noticed two missed calls from Shark and hit the button to ring him back. "Been trying to call you," he said gruffly.

"Sorry. Pit stop," I replied shortly.

My friend chuckled. "So, Cam the Camel can't go hours without taking a piss anymore? You're getting old, fucker. Does that dick of yours even still work?"

"I'm the same age as you, asshole. Does yours still work?"

"My hot-as-fuck wife would tell you yes, complete with sparkle fingers."

"Well, sparkle fingers make everything more truthful," I retorted, sliding into the fast lane and putting my foot down hard on the accelerator as I headed south. "Whatcha got?"

"It's not good, bud. I didn't dig deep, like into her medical records and all that shit. I mostly focused on her fiancé, since you said there was a 'he' involved."

A hard knot of anxiety twisted in my gut. "What is it?"

"His name is Vincent Bellucci, and his family has mob ties. His father, Sergio, is the head of the family, but Vinny is slated to take over when dear old dad kicks the bucket." I listened raptly but with trepidation as he continued his narrative.

“Some lower-level goons associated with the family have gone down for various crimes. Murder. Robbery. Assault. Rape. But Sergio and Vincent seem to somehow remain above the law.”

Holy shit!

“Fuck!” I yelled, slamming my hand against the steering wheel. “This is worse than I thought. How the hell did she get mixed up with someone like that?”

“I don’t know, bro, but maybe you should back away from this right now. You don’t want to get involved with—”

With heat in my voice, I interrupted, “Would you back away if Charli was in danger?”

Without hesitation, he answered. “I think we both know the answer to that. So, I understand where you’re coming from. Just... fuck. Watch your six, man. And let me know if there’s anything more I can do here.”

“I will. Thank you, Beau,” I said quietly, using his real name instead of his nickname to let him know I was deadly serious. “Get back home to your family now. How’s the little guy, by the way?”

The pride rang loud and clear in his voice. “My dude is happy as a clam today, all smiley and shit. But then, Charli’s kept him pressed up against her tits all morning, so I would be grinning too.”

“Awww. Is Daddy jealous?”

He chuckled. “You know Daddy is still getting plenty of time with his girls.”

“Yeah, didn’t need to know all that,” I said flatly.

“Whatever, you fucking perv. You’re just pissed that I moved out so you can’t listen through the walls anymore.”

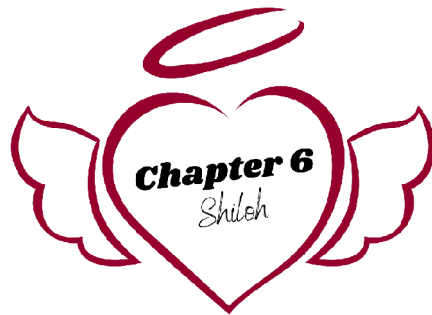
Yeah, I have a bit of a voyeurism kink—*don’t judge me*—and Charli does make some awfully sexy noises when she comes.

“Move, fucker,” I yelled at an eighteen-wheeler that was taking up the entire fast lane of the freeway.

“I’ll let you go so you can concentrate on driving,” my friend said. “Be careful, okay?”

“I will. Thanks again... for everything.”

After hanging up, I laser focused on driving. I didn’t want to think about Shiloh with another man, much less a goddamn criminal, so I turned on the radio and lost myself in some pounding rock music.



PULLING THE PHONE FROM my ear, I stared at it like I was trying to solve a particularly difficult crossword puzzle. *What the fuck had just happened?*

The back of my neck tingled when I thought of how Camden's voice had sounded when he said my name. "*Shiloh.*" It was deeper than I remembered, raspier, and had me stuttering like Porky Pig when I told him I needed help. And his response? It was almost a growl. "*Anything.*"

He's coming here! And he'd offered to come to New York. He didn't even hesitate. Not even for a single second. What did that mean?

"*You can trust me, Shy.*" As soon as those five words left his mouth, I felt something happen to my body. The tension I hadn't known I was carrying in my neck ebbed away, and my shoulders dropped. It was like a weight had been lifted from my back, and I knew instantly that I had done the right thing in calling Camden Fitz. Sure, the way we'd parted had been less than ideal, but when push came to shove, he would be there for me. There wasn't a doubt in my scrambled-up mind.

Then he'd started barking out orders, and things below my waist began to respond. *Not now, vagina. I do not have time for your shenanigans*, I told her when wetness began to seep into my panties. I needed to keep my wits about me. I obviously still had... *something* for Camden. Feelings? Lust? Probably the latter if my soaked panties were to tell the story.

I started walking, headed for the elevator that would carry me upstairs to the food area. Finding a Mexican restaurant, I settled in and took out my phone, noticing a text from Vincent. Nerves kicked in at the sight of it, and my hand trembled as I prepared to click on the message. *Calm down, woman. He doesn't know anything. Yet.*

Pressing my thumb against the message, I sighed with relief when I saw that he was just checking to see if I had arrived safely and answered him back.

Vincent: Hello, darling. Did you arrive in Houston?

Shiloh: Yes. I got here fine.

Vincent: Are you at your hotel?

Shit! What if he'd called the hotel to see if I'd arrived. Jesus, I was so fucking paranoid now.

Shiloh: Not yet. Stopped for a bite of Mexican food. Can't come to Texas without having some.

Vincent: Did you see the flowers?

Damn, I was fucking this all up. He would have been expecting me to mention the roses first thing.

Shiloh: Yes! Thank you so much. They were stunning.

Vincent: Wanted you to know I was thinking of you. I'll miss you.

I won't miss you, you cheating, murdering bastard. That's what I wanted to type, but I didn't dare. I had to figure out what I was doing before I let him know I was on to him.

Shiloh: I'll miss you too.

Vincent: Of course, I'll miss all of you, but the memory of that beautiful body of yours will haunt me until you return to my bed.

Revulsion. That's all I could feel in that moment, and I pressed a hand to my stomach to quell the rolling waves of

disgust churning there. *I will never return to your bed, asshole.*
Never.

“What can I get you?”

I looked up to see a young blond man smiling down at me.
Liquor. Bring me all the fucking liquor. “I’ll have a margarita,
please. Frozen, with salt.”

“You got it. Would you like plain or swirl? The swirl flavors
are mango, strawberry, and sangria.”

“Oh, um, I’ll try the sangria.”

“Excellent choice. Have you had time to look over the
menu?”

“Just chips and salsa for now.” I knew I needed to eat a little
something if I was going to be drinking, and let’s be real. I *was*
going to be drinking, but I wasn’t sure I could stomach an
entire meal. *Jesus, what if my stomach is upset because I’m
pregnant?*

I covered my mouth with my hand as the server strolled off
toward the kitchen. *No, Shiloh. He hasn’t even replaced your
pills yet.* Still, I needed to see a doctor as soon as possible to
check for sexually transmitted diseases.

Christ, what if Vincent had given me some kind of infection?
The waiter dropped off my margarita, and I took a big swig,
giving myself a damn brain freeze. When it finally subsided, I
took another gulp.

My phone pinged with an incoming text, and I looked down
to see another message from Vincent.

Vincent: Hmmm. No answer to that? Should I be concerned, my beautiful fiancée?

God. Fuck you, Vincent. Why don't you get Angela or Theresa to warm your bed?

Shiloh: Of course not, darling. I was just placing my order. I'll miss my bed buddy too.

Typing that made me want to fucking gag.

Vincent: I'll let you go so you can enjoy your food. I'll be counting down the days until you're back.

That last sentence sounded ominous as hell, and I could barely feel the ends of my fingertips as a nervous numbness set in.

Vincent: I love you, Shiloh.

Gritting my teeth, I answered him exactly how he would expect me to.

Shiloh: I love you too.

Throwing my phone into my purse, I downed the rest of my margarita in two large swallows and raised my hand to signal for another. My eyes roamed over the entrance to the restaurant, and seeing nothing suspicious, I turned my attention back to my conversation with Camden.

“I’m on my way, baby. Just sit tight.” I crossed my legs and squeezed my thighs together as I dipped a chip into the spicy salsa and ate it. My taste buds exploded with flavor, and I took another sip of my frosty beverage. I should probably cut myself off after this one. I didn’t want to be a stumbling idiot when my rescuer arrived.

But the thought of seeing him again after so long had me swigging down the rest of the ’rita and ordering another. What would it be like to see him after so long? Hopefully, he would be old and fat or maybe have developed adult-onset acne that would tarnish his perfect face. Maybe a lip fungus. Anything to keep my legs from flying apart at the very sight of him.

Camden had broken my heart, but a part of it—a very stupid part—still longed for him.

Have you ever gotten a splinter that was so deep, you couldn’t dig it out? And you had to wait for it to work its way to the surface so you could remove it? Yeah. Camden Fitz was my splinter. Deep, deep underneath my skin. And he’d never worked his way to the surface so I could pluck him out and throw him away. It wasn’t like I moped around like a sad, little puppy every day. No, I’d moved on.

But that splinter was still there. Sometimes festering. Sometimes dormant. But always there.

And I would come face-to-face with him in—I checked the time—an hour and forty-two minutes. *Holy fucking hell!*

Time ticked on, and I downed more margaritas, trying to counteract the effects with the salty chips. Three hours and four minutes after I'd called him, I received a message from Camden. *I'm here.* Along with instructions on where to meet him.

Hooking my purse strap over my shoulder, I curled my fingers around my suitcase handle, dragging it from the restaurant and across the polished floor and into the elevator. I didn't have butterflies in my stomach. I had giant psycho pterodactyls flapping around in there as I exited the elevator on the first level.

Down another long stretch of the airport, my legs carried me as the pterodactyls in my abdomen had some kind of disco party. *Calm down in there, you prehistoric assholes.* My eyes searched for him, looking for the boy I'd known long ago.

They found him about fifty feet away. But he was no longer a boy. No, Camden Fitz was *all man*. To my dismay, he wasn't fat, and there wasn't a sign of acne or lip fungi. *How the fuck had he gotten better looking?*

He still had the same arrogant posture, legs spread apart, arms crossed over his chest. But he was somehow... harder... harsher. I tried to figure out how so much muscle could be contained in that small space. Even through his white T-shirt, I

could see the musculature of his arms and chest, and it was fucking spectacular. *He* was fucking spectacular.

Those blue eyes that I'd loved so much—the ones that still haunted me from time to time—fell directly on me and widened. His rosy arms fell to his sides, and both hands clenched into tight fists.

He started walking toward me. The closer we got, the faster he walked, and sweet Jesus, I was walking faster too, trying not to think about the desperation I felt to get closer to him as quickly as possible. My steps quickened even more, and so did his, resulting in my abandoning my suitcase as we sprinted the last ten feet.

Our bodies crashed together, my arms going involuntarily around his neck as his wrapped around my waist, lifting me until my feet left the ground. And for the first time in close to seventeen hours, I felt... safe. I nestled my face into the side of his neck, and the smell of him, plain Dial soap and something purely masculine, brought back so many memories that I had attempted to suppress over the years.

Camden's nose was buried in my hair, and he seemed to be inhaling me with the same fraught gulps of air as I was to him. He whispered something that sounded like "This." Clinging to him, I whispered back, "This what?"

I should have kept my stupid mouth shut, because he loosened his arms then, letting me slide down his body. His very hard body. *Sweet chicklets!* He was... firm. Everywhere. My body responded to his without my permission, the entire

area between my legs seemingly catching fire as my heedless nipples tightened painfully.

“Nothing,” he mumbled, still holding me, but pulling back a little to take me in. “You look great, Shy.”

I wanted to drown in his deep, melodious voice and listen to him say my nickname over and over.

Clearing my throat, I looked up at him. “So do you, Camden. I was hoping for warts or something.” At his look of amused confusion, I mentally face-palmed myself. *You moron! You said that out loud.* “I-I just meant I hoped you wouldn’t be as handsome as you used to be.”

Fuck. Could my face get any redder?

A full grin crested his lips. “You think I’m handsome?”

Scoffing, I rolled my eyes. “Fishing for compliments, Fitz?” His smile only grew, and I felt it all the way to my toes. “I guess you’re okay.” *If you like muscled bodies, thick hair, and a gorgeous face sent straight from Heaven.* Thankfully, I refrained from blurting that last part out in some margarita-fueled outburst.

“You’re more than okay, Shy,” he said, his voice deep and husky as his eyes dropped to my lips.

Oh dear Lord! Kiss me!

No, don’t kiss me!

Okay, maybe just a quick one.

No, no, no.

Say something, Shiloh!

“Thank you for coming all this way, Camden. You didn’t have to.”

The strange little balloon of *us* we’d managed to construct popped almost audibly, and Camden seemed to remember why he was here. He took a step back, his hands dragging slowly across my back and waist, and then they were gone. I missed them already.

“It’s what I do,” he said simply, heading for the suitcase I had abandoned behind me.

It’s what he does. Protects people. He’s just here to do a job, Shiloh. You’re no one special. Remember that.

“Um, where are we going?”

“My vehicle. I’m in short-term parking.”

The mention of his vehicle brought on another waterfall of memories. His truck back in high school. Making out in the back while lying on a blanket beneath the big Texas sky. Kissing and touching, and then after a few months... more. So much more.

I’d loved the way he watched me, aware of the intense orgasm that was building up inside me. Building and building until I was...

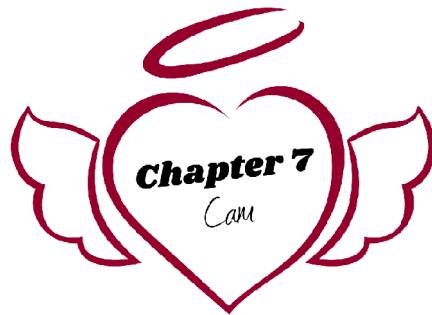
“Are you coming?”

God yes!

I blinked a few times and realized that Camden was looking at me with an odd look on his face. Probably because I had almost orgasmed in the middle of the damn Houston airport from my memories of his talented fingers alone.

“Are you coming, Shiloh?” he asked again, and it hit me that he was talking about actually following him. Not coming, as in *coming*.

Good Lord. I am so screwed.



I WAS FUCKED. TOTALLY fucked.

When our eyes met, I knew. Or at least my body knew. My damn mind was still trying to catch up. My legs started moving without me telling them to, and then she was dropping the handle of her bag, and we were running at each other.

I'd stupidly whispered, "This," because it was what I'd been waiting for all this time. The longing. The '*I can't stop myself from getting to you as soon as possible*' feeling. It was a small thing, probably insignificant to most people, but it wasn't to me. For the first time in a very long time, I'd *felt* something.

Physically, Shiloh Simms was everything I remembered and more. The touch of time had been kind to her the past sixteen years, her face as beautiful and smooth as ever. And that body?

Holy Moses!

She had filled out in all the right places, as evidenced by those tight black leggings. The way her short white sweater clung to her curves made me want to explore her like I was Magellan on an expedition. A very long expedition.

I'd almost kissed her when she was in my arms. I'd wanted to with every fiber of my soul. But I had to find out what was going on with her first. It might not even be her mobster fiancé that she was afraid of. The *he* she'd mentioned might be someone else, and she would be back in Vincent Bellucci's bed by the end of the week.

The thought made me want to be violently ill.

"Are you coming, Shiloh?" I asked again when she seemed to go into a daze of some sort, and I wondered what she was thinking about. *Him?* God, I hoped not.

She snapped out of whatever thoughts had occupied her mind and took a few quick steps to catch up with me, her tight black boots clapping softly against the shiny floor.

"Where are we going after we get to your vehicle?" she asked, trying to take the suitcase from me.

"I've got it," I said. "We're going to talk first, and then come up with a game plan. I need to know what and who we're dealing with here."

She was silent for the rest of the walk to the parking garage, and once I'd gotten her in the passenger's seat and her bag in the back, I climbed in and turned to her. "Can you tell me what's going on, Shiloh?"

Staring straight ahead, her bottom lip began trembling, and her hands clenched so tightly in her lap, I was afraid she was going to break her own bones. Reaching over, I took both of her hands in mine, and she squeezed them tightly.

“Look at me, Shy,” I commanded. She did, and the tears in her eyes and the raw terror on her face almost undid me. “It’s just us here, baby. Just you and me. You can tell me,” I said gently.

She closed her eyes and nodded several times, as if willing herself to speak the words. “I’m engaged.” I had to physically restrain myself from showing how that statement affected me. “Well, I *was* engaged,” she said, looking down at her left hand in mine. I noticed a slight tan line where a ring had obviously been, and I wanted to rub it until it went away.

“I woke up last night around midnight, and my fiancé, Vincent, wasn’t in bed. I went downstairs and heard voices from his office.” Hearing her say she shared a bed with that fucker pushed a lump from my stomach straight up into my throat.

Swallowing the damn lump, I asked, “Did you recognize the voices?”

She nodded. “Yes, it was Vincent and his father, Sergio. They were talking about alibis and how Vincent would need me for an alibi for last Monday night.”

“For what? Did they say?”

She swallowed audibly. “M-mu-murder. H-he killed someone Monday night. Two people, actually.”

Holy shit. This was worse than I thought. I was hoping she’d overheard something about a robbery or some lower-

level crime. But murder? She was in real danger, and that made me angry and fucking scared out of my mind.

“Did he say who he killed and how?”

She nodded, her soft brown eyes looking at me with so much trust that I felt it in my bones. “Someone named Camillo Viscardi and his driver or helper or whatever. Behind a restaurant called Carmine’s. With a silenced gun that he threw in the East River.”

Releasing her hands, I pulled out my phone and typed in *Camillo Viscardi*. Article after article popped up on my screen about his ongoing murder investigation. Exactly as she’d told me. Did she know about Vincent’s mob connections? I had to know.

“How well do you know the man you’re engaged to?”

“*Was* engaged to,” she pointed out, and that gave me an unjustified little thrill. “I-I thought I knew him.” Her eyes widened. “Camden, I think he’s in the mafia. He said something about doing it for The Family, and I don’t think he was talking about blood relations.”

I lifted a skeptical eyebrow. “And you had no clue about that? You’re engaged to the man, and you didn’t know?”

A shot of pain darted through her pretty eyes, and then a bit of anger. “Of course I didn’t know! You know me—well, I guess you really don’t anymore—but you have to know I would never get involved with a criminal. It pisses me off that

you would even think that about me.” She crossed her arms over her chest and glared at me.

I had pissed her off, but I felt a deep sense of relief that she hadn’t knowingly involved herself with a crime family. “Sorry, I had to ask,” I said contritely.

“He told me he was in real estate. I’ve been to his office, and…” her gaze drifted toward the concrete wall in front of my SUV, and she pressed the fingers of one hand to her forehead as her eyes closed in misery. “How could I have been so stupid?”

“You’re not stupid, honey.” I brushed her hair back over her shoulder and took her jaw in my hand, turning her face to meet mine. “You’re not stupid. You’re just not a criminal, so you don’t think like them. And you can only know what a person tells you. But you’re right. The Belluccis are connected. They’re into some pretty shady shit.”

Her brown eyes shifted back and forth between my blue ones. “How do you know that?”

“A friend that I work with looked them up while I was on the way here.”

She shook her head, her caramel locks sliding across her shoulders. “I never told you his name on the phone.” *Oh, shit. My girl was still sharp as a tack.* Her eyes narrowed on mine. “In fact, how did you even know I was in New York?” I stared at her dumbly, trying to think my way out of this. “When I talked to you on the phone earlier, you offered to come to New York. How did you know that’s where I was living, Camden?”

Aw hell. “I guess I just heard it around somewhere or something,” I mumbled lamely.

“From whom?” she asked suspiciously.

Sighing, I stared at a spot on the dashboard. “I looked you up a few months ago.”

“You looked me up? Like you had me investigated or something?” Her voice rose higher and louder. At my silence, she squeezed my arm, compelling me to look at her, but I didn’t. “Tell me, Camden, because this is freaking me out a little bit.”

Dammit to hell. What could I say to that? “I couldn’t move on because I can’t seem to forget about you. I’ve only had one real girlfriend in the past sixteen years, and that was only after I found out you were taken.” I didn’t want her to freak out and stop trusting me, but I wasn’t ready to go there just yet, so I decided on a partial truth.

“It was nothing like that. I had just been thinking about you and wanted to know where you were, what you were up to. I thought maybe... maybe I would call you some time.”

Her head tilted a little to the right, a gesture I remembered from when we were together. “But you didn’t.”

“I saw that you were engaged, and I didn’t go any further.”

“Oh.” She was silent for a moment, and then, “You were thinking about me?” Her voice was lower, sultrier without any effort on her part.

All the fucking time, baby.

I risked a glance over at her and nodded in admission of my dirty little secret. Well, one of them. I had a lot.

“I think of you sometimes too,” she said, dipping her chin down as her cheeks flushed. “I Googled you, and that’s how I knew where you worked.”

My poor heart skipped about five beats and then began playing a jungle cadence against my chest wall. “You looked me up this morning?”

Shiloh’s teeth dug into that soft bottom lip of hers. It was the color of cotton candy, and I had the urge to lean forward and lick it to see if it tasted as sweet as it looked. To see if it would melt on my tongue.

“Not exactly,” she hedged. Placing a finger under her chin, I lifted until her warm, reluctant eyes met mine. “I’ve looked you up a few times over the years,” she muttered.

God yes. She still thought about me too.

“Jesus, you’re such a little stalker, Shy,” I exclaimed to lighten the mood, and it worked.

We shared an intimate smile, and she said, “I guess we both are.”

Sliding my hands back to hers—to comfort her and because I fucking loved how her soft hands felt in mine—I asked, “Do you remember anything else?”

The furrows that appeared on her forehead as she stared at her hands told me she was concentrating to remember. “Just that the murder happened Monday night, and they needed me

for an alibi. Sergio wanted to have the wedding moved up so Vince and I would be legally married so...”

“So you couldn’t be compelled to testify,” I finished with understanding, and she nodded before looking back up at me.

“I woke up that night too. Monday night. Vincent wasn’t in bed. I went back to sleep, but I was so busy the next morning, I forgot to ask him where he was.”

Thank Christ! If he knew that she knew he wasn’t at home while he was out offing two guys...

There was something else in her eyes... something bothering her. “Anything else, Shy?”

Her gaze shifted down and to the left before meeting mine again. “Vincent has connections. The police commissioner, the mayor. And his dad mentioned something about having someone in the District Attorney’s office that he was getting info from.” *Fuck. This was not good. No telling how far the corruption extended.* “I couldn’t call the police because I didn’t know who I could trust.”

I nodded, letting my thumbs graze soothing little circles against the backs of her hands. *God, her skin is soft.* “You did the right thing, Shiloh. What exactly do you want to do?”

“Hell if I know,” she said, widening her eyes. “I feel like I’m in an episode of *The Sopranos* or something. Except it’s real-life. My life.” A single tear slipped down her face, and I released one of her hands to swipe it away with my thumb.

“Please don’t cry, baby. You know it kills me when you cry,” I whispered.

She blinked a few times, her head tilting gently at my tender words. “I’m sorry I got you involved in this. If you’ll just tell me someone safe I can talk to, I’ll get my messy self out of your life.”

“Yeah, that’s not going to fucking happen,” I said resolutely, turning to put the vehicle in gear. “Put your seatbelt on and punch your hotel address into my GPS.”

“Okay, mister bossy ass,” she retorted, making me smile, but she complied. “I’m going to collapse into a coma when I get to the hotel. I didn’t sleep at all last night. I was convinced he’d heard me in the hallway outside his office and was going to murder me in my sleep.”

I wanted to fucking murder *him* for putting that fear into Shiloh. I wanted to rip that motherfucker apart.

“You’re not staying. You’re going to check in, in case Bellucci calls the hotel for you. We don’t want them to tell him you never checked in.”

She sucked in a deep breath. “Yeah, that’s smart. See? This is why I called you. You’re good to have around in a pinch.” She bumped my arm with her elbow. “So, if I’m not staying at the hotel, where are you taking me?”

“Somewhere safe,” I said vaguely, though I knew exactly where she was going. *Home with me. So I could protect her.* “Don’t worry about it, Shy. I’ve got it handled.”

A few minutes later, I pulled up to the front of the Hilton Americas and put the vehicle in park, waving off the valet as he approached. “Okay, take only your purse with you. Check in, and if they offer to help you with your bags, tell them that your luggage was lost on the flight. That way they won’t be suspicious as to why you’re checking in with no bags. Go up to your room and swipe your card. Open the door and then close it, but don’t go inside. Then come right back down here.”

“O-okay,” she stuttered nervously.

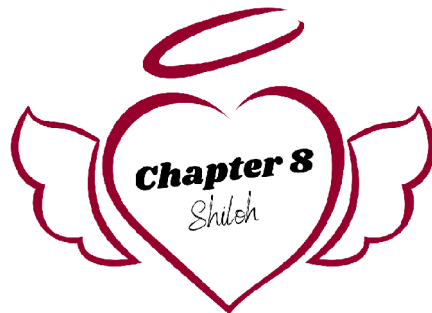
“Shy, you’ve got this. I just want it recorded that you went straight to your room. I’m not sure if that kind of stuff can be monitored; I’d have to ask my friend Tank about that, but just in case, I want it to look like you’re in your hotel room.” I was almost positive it could be done. Hell, everything electronic left a trace.

“You think he’s monitoring me?” she asked with alarm.

“Probably not, sweetheart. I just want us to err on the side of caution.”

She nodded, calming slightly, and got out of the car. My eyes were trained on her as she walked through the big, glass doors, specifically on her firm, curvy ass in those tight pants. As soon as she was inside, I made a phone call to a contact here in Houston before calling Hawk to let him know we would be having a house guest.

Shiloh Simms is mine, and I will protect her with my life.



APPROACHING THE RECEPTION DESK, I tried to remember everything I was supposed to do and say.

“Hello. Welcome to the Hilton Americas,” a pretty woman with her blonde hair in a French twist greeted me.

“The luggage lost my airline,” I blurted and immediately felt like face-palming myself. I put on my most charming smile and tried again. “Sorry. Long flight,” I said with a weird little laugh. *Stop being awkward, you fruitcake.* “What I meant to say is that the airline lost my luggage, but I would like to go ahead and check in.”

“Certainly,” she said smoothly. “Your name, please?”

“Shiloh Simms.”

Tappity tap tap on the keys of her computer. “Ah, yes. Miss Simms. It seems that your fiancé, a Mr. Bellucci, called earlier and upgraded your room to our finest suite.” She graced me with a smile I was sure she reserved for customers who could afford the most expensive rooms in the hotel, and I felt sick to my stomach. Vincent *had* called here.

I tried to hand over my debit card, but the woman shook her head. “Mr. Bellucci has already paid for the entire week.”

Dammit. Since he’d paid for the room, they would probably have no qualms about telling him whether or not I had checked in. *Thank God for Camden’s forward thinking.*

“Oh, excellent.” I tried to infuse some excitement into my voice. “Thank you so much,” I said as she handed me the key card.

I took the elevator to the top floor, found my suite, and swiped the card like Camden had told me, holding the door open for a few seconds before letting it close. Then I took the elevator back to the lobby floor before slinking to the front door, avoiding the reception desk.

As I climbed back into Camden’s Jeep, I was practically out of breath from the stress. “You okay?” he asked, his brows lowering in concern.

“Yes,” I panted. “I’m not cut out for this spy movie, espionage shit. I’m a nervous wreck. The lady said that Vincent called here earlier and upgraded my room and paid for it.”

Camden’s jaw tightened, probably thinking the same thing that I was. Vincent had made sure he could check up on me. “All right, let’s shake...”

“And bake,” I finished, quoting a line from *Talladega Nights*, and Camden smiled over at me. We used to watch that movie together.

A few minutes later, he pulled into the parking lot of Best Buy. “What are we doing here?” Maybe we were buying some kind of spy equipment. Did they sell that at Best Buy?

“Meeting someone. An old SEAL buddy.” Holding out his hand, he said, “Give me your phone.”

“Oh, um, okay.” I pulled it out and placed it in his hand, my fingers brushing against his palm as I did. *Jesus, I’ve missed those big, strong hands and the things they could do to me.*

“I’m not even sure what you were in Houston for? Was it for work?”

I nodded. “An optometric conference.”

A huge grin spread across his face. “You did it? You went to optometry school?”

He remembered.

“Yes, I’m officially Doctor Shiloh Simms now.”

“That’s awesome, Shy. I’m so proud of you.” A vehicle pulled up next to ours, and his head turned toward it. “That’s him.”

Camden got out of the vehicle and bent to speak to the man in the non-descript black sedan with blacked out windows for a couple of minutes. When he returned, he held out a phone, which looked similar to mine. “This phone is secure and has the same phone number as yours, so no one will be suspicious. We don’t want anyone to be able to track your location. Your phone will stay here in Houston with my buddy.”

Shit. I hadn't thought of that. I didn't even want to think about how Camden and his friend had gotten this cloned phone, or whatever you called it.

“What would your hours be like at this conference? Like when would you leave and re-enter your hotel room?”

“Oh, uh, probably leave the room at eight in the morning and return after five in the evening. Or maybe later some nights, if I go out for dinner.”

“Got it. I'll tell him to vary his evening swipes.” And without further explanation, he pulled out his phone and called someone named Tank. I listened to Camden's side of the conversation as he told him what he needed, thanked the man, and hung up.

“What was that all about?”

“He's going to hack into the hotel's system and make it appear that you're swiping your room key a couple of times a day.”

I was stunned. “Wh-why would he do that?”

His brilliant blue eyes locked with mine. “Because I asked him to. I'm not sure about Bellucci's technical capabilities, but if he has someone that can hack, they may check on you when you're entering and leaving your room. We want it to look like you're going about business as usual at your conference.”

A shiver snaked down my spine at the thought of Vincent spying on me like that. I was so far out of my depth here, and I

was so glad I'd called someone who knew what the fuck they were doing.

Camden was silent until we got onto the interstate, and then he seemed to relax a little. "You hungry?"

"A little," I admitted. I hadn't had a full meal in about twenty hours, my nerves too shot to eat.

"Me too. What do you want?"

Spotting a familiar orange and white sign in the distance, I asked excitedly, "Can we get Whataburger?" I had missed the burger chain since I'd been in New York.

"Sure thing," he said, pulling into the right lane and taking the next exit. Ten minutes later, we were back on the road with the bag of deliciousness in my lap. I rummaged around, finding his double burger and unwrapping it. I put salt and pepper on his burger and in his ketchup.

Setting the pot of ketchup and the fries on the console, I bundled the burger in a napkin so it wouldn't drip and handed it to him. "You remembered," his low voice rumbled as he glanced quickly at me.

"Huh?"

"How I like my burger and ketchup. You remembered."

"I remember a lot of things," I said without thinking. *Shit, Shiloh. Shut the hell up.*

"Hmmm," he hummed. "Like what?"

The clean smell of Dial soap on your skin. The way your teeth feel on my nipples. The taste of you on my tongue. The way your chest vibrates with your moans when you come. The sound of your hand connecting with my ass cheek.

Those thoughts flew through my mind like a thousand tiny shooting stars, but I didn't say any of them. Thank God most of the margaritas were out of my system now, making it easier to control my big mouth.

I said the only safe thing that came to my mind. "I remember that your favorite color is red."

Camden took a bite of his burger. Chewed and swallowed before commenting. "It wasn't always my favorite color. Not until I saw you in that red dress at our first prom."

An instant gush of wetness soaked my panties at the memory. I had worn a long, fitted satin dress in a blood-red color with tiny rhinestones between my breasts. I'd told my mom we were going to an after-prom party, and then I was staying at my friend Ashley's house. But in reality, we'd skipped the party and headed straight for a hotel Camden had rented for us.

As he'd peeled the dress from my body, his voice sounded hoarse when he told me that shade of red was his favorite color in the world. We'd made hot, hard love all night long in that cheap hotel room, and the next morning, I'd woken in his arms for the first time ever. It was the happiest day of my life, and he'd promised me then that one day we would wake up together every day for the rest of our lives.

Yeah. That hadn't happened.

His gaze fluttered toward me briefly before he dipped a fry in the ketchup and ate it. "I remember things too."

Putting his earlier question back on him, I asked, "Like what?"

His jaw clenched and released. Meeting my eyes, he said, "Good things." And then he was staring back at the road in front of us as he shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The movement drew my eyes downward to his lap, and I felt my eyelids pop open wide.

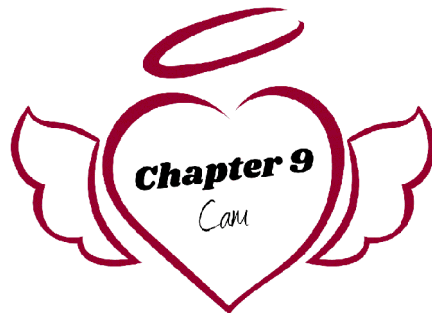
Great Scott! Camden was sporting the biggest erection I'd ever seen, the denim of his jeans straining with the force of his penis's apparent escape attempt. Snapping my eyes back to the bag in my lap, I fumbled around and pulled out my burger and fries.

Holy hell, was he having the same kinds of sinful thoughts as me? The prospect pleased me, but I scolded myself not to read too much into it. He was a man—a very virile man—and we'd had a very active sex life when we were together. I probably just reminded him of the times when we couldn't keep our hands and mouths and various other body parts away from each other.

That's it, Shiloh. It doesn't mean anything more than memories of good sex. Okay, great sex. Really, really, phenomenal sex. Like, the best sex anyone has ever had in for-fucking-ever.

Dammit.

The splinter festered.



YOU KNOW THE FUNNY thing about those stretchy pants women wear? They do almost nothing to hide the scent of arousal. My dick could smell Shiloh's desire from here, and he liked the fuck out of it. He remembered the source of that delectable smell as his favorite little hidey-hole in the world.

Would you calm the fuck down? I mentally addressed him.

Was she dripping for *me*? Christ, I hoped so. *Please don't let it be for that prick she was engaged to. Did she miss him?*

"We need to talk about what you want to do after this week is up, Shiloh. Are you going back to New York?"

She was silent for so long, I wasn't sure she'd heard me. Glancing over, I realized she was just staring down at her uneaten burger in her hand. Poor thing. Yesterday she was engaged and happy, and today she was unengaged and scared for her life.

"Eat your food, sweetheart. We can discuss that stuff when you're done," I said gently, scooting my prepared ketchup over to the center of the console. "You can share my ketchup."

She gave me a sweet, grateful smile and took a bite. And another. Then she dipped a couple fries into the little pot and ate those.

Jesus, she still has the sweetest smile in the whole world.
My Shiloh was always sweet. Well, until things had started to heat up between us sexually. And then she was... dear God, my little kitten had turned into a minx.

I wonder if she still likes being held down. Or spanked.

Damn, this train of thought was not helping one goddamn bit with my dick situation. That motherfucker was throbbing like a sore tooth.

Finally speaking, she said, "I don't want to go back, but I don't know what else to do, where else to go." She let out a long, pained sigh that I could feel in my own chest. "I guess I could go to San Antonio with my aunt and uncle."

No! That's four fucking hours away from Dallas. From me.

"How are Barb and Ricky?" I asked.

I saw her grimace out of the corner of my eye. "Uncle Ricky had a heart attack yesterday. Aunt Barb just told me this morning." Her voice was laced with worry.

"I'm sorry, Shy. Is he okay?" I'd always liked her uncle and his wife, who'd hid her nurturing nature beneath a thick layer of nagging.

"Yeah, she said he gets to come home soon, and she's going to totally change his diet."

That made me grin. “I’m sure he’s going to be thrilled about that.”

Shiloh let out a giggle. “Yeah, I’m not sure I want to be around for that.” She took another bite of her burger. “I called him this morning because I figured he could tell me what to do, but he’s not in any condition to help me right now. I didn’t even tell Aunt Barbara what’s going on because she has enough to worry about.”

“So, I was your last resort?” I wasn’t sure why that bothered me, but it did. I mean, who the fuck was I besides some guy she used to date. The one who dumped her.

“I actually thought of you immediately, but... I don’t know... I didn’t want to bother you, Camden. I don’t even know... if you’re married or whatever.”

“Not married,” I said curtly. *Not even fucking close.* Eating the last bite of my burger, I crumpled the napkin and tossed it toward the bag at Shiloh’s feet, missing it by a good inch.

“Loser,” she said teasingly, bending to get the napkin from the floorboard and stuffing it into the bag, giving me a beautiful view of olive skin when her sweater rode up her back a few inches. I clenched my hand to keep it from reaching over and stroking that tempting strip with my fingertips.

Knowing we needed to get back to the subject at hand, I asked, “What about your mom? Does she still live in Denton?”

Shiloh shook her head, and the smell of caramel and vanilla wafted from her hair and straight into my nose. “No, she lives

in Ireland now. She married an Irishman named Niall and moved there with him about eleven years ago.”

My mind was whirling with possibilities. “So, if you needed to get out of the country, you could go visit her?” I sure as fuck didn’t want her that far away, but if it kept her safe...

She hesitated. “I could, but I can’t let her know what’s going on with Vincent. She still worries.”

God, that broke my heart. Poor Rhonda had been devastated by the loss of her husband. Seeing how she and Shiloh had been affected by the loss of their husband and father on 9/11 had cemented my decision to go into the military, especially into the Special Forces. I wanted to get up close and personal with those fucking cowards.

“Does Vincent speak often with your mother?” I hated even saying that prick’s name.

Shiloh’s lips turned down slightly. “No. They don’t get along. He doesn’t understand why she still has her neurotic tendencies after this long, so he loses patience when she gets dramatic.”

I despised that asshole more with every passing second. “It’s not her fault,” I snapped. I adored Rhonda, and she had always liked me. In fact, she fucking loved me. And trusted me. Knowing that Shiloh would come to no harm if I were around, she didn’t even give Shy a curfew if she was out with me. Which was very convenient for our love life.

“I know,” she said. “So, how is your family?”

“Well, Dad still lives in Denton. Mom passed away about ten years ago. She had a brain aneurysm.”

Shiloh covered her mouth with her hand. “Camden, no! I’m so sorry. I always loved Deana. She was so kind to me.”

“She loved you too,” I said quietly. My mom had thought of Shiloh like a daughter, and she’d been devastated when we broke up. Needing to change the subject, I told her, “Graham is a rocket scientist.”

“I knew it!” she crowed. “I always knew Graham would do great things.”

“Yep, he’s still as smart as ever. He lives in Florida with his husband, Melvin. They both work at NASA.”

“Husband?” she asked with a giggle. “I don’t know why, but I didn’t expect that.”

I grinned. “None of us did, but Melvin is a great guy. He handles Graham’s... proclivities like a boss.”

“That’s so awesome,” she said, stifling a yawn. “I’m glad he found someone.”

“You’re tired. Why don’t you lean your seat back and catch some Z’s.”

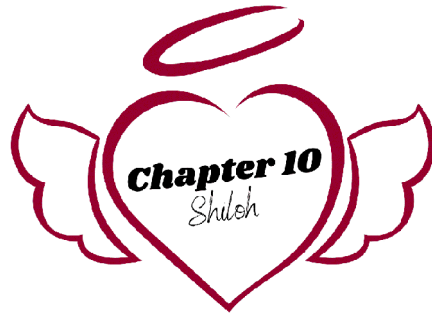
Stuffing the rest of the trash into the Whataburger bag, she leaned back and closed her eyes. Within minutes, she was asleep, her body slumping sideways. Reaching over, I pressed her head down onto the console and scooped her hair away from her face.

Fuck, she's breathtaking. Resting my hand on her shoulder, I curled a piece of her hair between my fingers and found it difficult to keep my eyes on the road. I allowed my fingers to drift to the back of her neck and edge around the top of her sweater. Unable to help myself, I dipped my fingertips into the opening and gently stroked the top of her back and shoulder. Her skin was as warm and silky as I'd remembered it.

She made a soft little "Mmmm" of contentment at my touch, so I kept doing it. The entire fucking drive, until I pulled into the driveway of my house and put the car in park. I still didn't wake her immediately, instead taking my time and observing her while she slept. Her caramel-brown hair, still as thick and lustrous as ever. Her long, black eyelashes resting delicately against her smooth cheek. Those pink, biteable lips.

My thumb had a will of its own and brushed lightly over her full bottom lip, and she stirred, so I pulled away quickly.

Jesus. I'm such a fucking creeper.



SOMETHING SOOTHING WAS HAPPENING to my neck and back. In my slumberous state, I didn't know what it was, but I liked it. Then something touched my lips, soft as a butterfly's kiss. I blinked my eyes open, but there was nothing there.

“Welcome back, sleepyhead.”

I lurched into a sitting position to find Camden Fitz staring at me from the driver's seat, his hands tightly holding the steering wheel, even though the vehicle wasn't moving. *Is this a dream? What is Camden doing here?*

And then it all came rushing back to me in an instant. Vincent. The murders. Calling Camden. Seeing him for the first time in so long.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, wiggling my forefingers over my eyelids to loosen my sticky contact lenses.

“It's okay. You were tired.”

I cleared my throat, looking out the windshield at a cream-colored stone and brick house with a dark blue slatted porch.

“What is this? A safe house or something?” I remembered asking him where he was taking me, but he had been vague, simply saying that he was taking me somewhere safe.

“Something like that,” he said, throwing me a smirk before getting out of the black SUV and walking around to my side. I pushed open the door, and Camden offered me his hand as I stepped out onto a gravel driveway. He unloaded my luggage from the back, and I admired the bulge of his arm muscles as he lifted the suitcase and headed toward the house. The view from behind was pretty excellent as well. Broad shoulders, perfect ass, and long legs that went on for days.

I really needed to stop noticing this shit. Seriously. What was wrong with me?

Camden stuck a key from his keyring into the lock on the front door and opened it.

“Shouldn’t we knock or something?” I whispered, earning me another of those smug smiles as he held the door open for me to walk through into a spacious living room filled with black leather furniture. And a man. A big man. “Oh, um, hi.” Was he supposed to be my bodyguard or something? I had no friggin’ idea what was going on here. All Camden had said was that he had it handled.

“Shiloh, this is Hawk. Hawk, Shiloh,” Camden introduced.

Hawk. The name suited him. Dark hair. Dark eyes. Very dark demeanor. The guy looked like he was always on the lookout for his next prey. He was handsome in a scary sort of way, but for some reason, I instantly trusted him.

Yeah, you trusted Vincent too, and look where that got you.

“Are you my bodyguard?” I asked, and both men chuckled.
What the fuck is so funny?

“One of many,” Hawk answered, and then he smiled.

Oh. Wow. He looked like a totally different person when he smiled. Still predatory of course, but the kind of predator that drew you willingly into his lair before he devoured you. And he would make you *beg* to be devoured by him. With tats snaking down from the sleeves of his black T-shirt, Hawk gave off some serious bad boy vibes.

And let’s be honest here. Who doesn’t like a bad boy?
Amirite, ladies?

I realized it was highly possible that I was standing in the room with the two hottest men ever created.

When my tongue finally untied itself, I said, “I don’t know what that means.”

“Shy, Hawk is my roommate.”

Well, color me stunned as fuck. “So, this is...”

“Our house,” Camden confirmed with a nod.

Holy shit. He had brought me to his house. “Oh. I didn’t expect you to bring me home with you like a little lost puppy,” I said with a nervous laugh.

“This is where you’ll be safest. Come on, I’ll show you where you’ll be staying.” He lifted the extremely stuffed

suitcase like it weighed no more than a loaf of bread and headed up a hallway toward the back of the house.

I dutifully followed him into a room decorated in pink and purple, obviously a child's room as evidenced by the large, flowery bedspread and heart-shaped rug. For some reason I couldn't quite understand, I felt dejected, despite the cheery room.

“You have a daughter?”

Camden laughed as he set down my suitcase in the corner near a chest of drawers.

“No, this is our niece, Carrie's, room when she comes to visit. Well, actually, she's Shark's niece, but we all claim her and her siblings.”

“Who is Shark?”

“Do you remember me mentioning Beau Atwood, my friend from elementary and middle school?”

Thinking back, I nodded. “Yeah. He was your best friend and partner in crime, right?” He nodded. “So, Shark is his nickname?”

“Yeah, there are six of us who were former SEALs. We call Waylon ‘Tank’ because he's a big motherfucker. Mario is ‘Woody.’ Don't ask. And then there's Bode.”

“Is that his nickname or his real name?”

Camden let out a low chuckle. “No one really knows. It's one of life's great mysteries. Woody even stole his wallet once

and checked his driver's license, and his name on there simply read 'Bode.' We *think* Bode is really his last name, and he just dropped the first name like he's a fucking celebrity."

"That's just bizarre."

"Yeah, well that's fucking Bode for ya," he said with a good-natured eyeroll. "And you met Hawk, whose real name is Tate."

I scrunched my face a little. "Hawk suits him a lot better."

He smiled. "Yeah, he's a bit intense. His room is right there," he said, pointing at the left wall of the room. "I've told him to tone it down while you're here."

"Tone what down?"

"The activities in The Den of Sin," he replied, widening his eyes comically. "Trust me, you do not want to hear what goes on in his room."

Eek!

Camden took my hand, which gave me an unintentional little thrill, and led me to a door on the right side of the room. "This is your bathroom. My bathroom is on the other side of yours, and my bedroom is on the other side of that. So, you'll be totally safe with both of us here, okay?"

"Okay." I looked around the small but spotless bathroom, which was outfitted with a bright purple shower curtain and rugs.

He released me and stuck his hands in his pockets. “Sorry about the decorations. I can buy some new stuff for you, if you want.”

“No! Don’t be silly. I appreciate everything you’re doing. I really didn’t expect you to get this involved, especially not to the point of bringing me to your house.”

Camden graced me with a lopsided smile that had my heart speeding up a couple notches. “I wanted to.”

I felt like hugging him. Would that be too awkward? Fuck it. He had gone way above and beyond what would normally be expected for an ex-boyfriend, so I lifted my arms to encircle his neck, and his hands immediately came to rest low on my back.

“Thank you, Camden.”

He lowered his head and kissed my temple. “You’re welcome, angel.”

And holy hell, if that didn’t do things to me. The first time he’d called me ‘angel’ was just before he’d put his mouth on me for the very first time all those years ago. We’d been on a blanket in the bed of his truck, his blue eyes glinting up at me as he’d spread my bare thighs. *“I’ve got you, angel. I’ll make you feel so good.”*

Spoiler alert: he did.

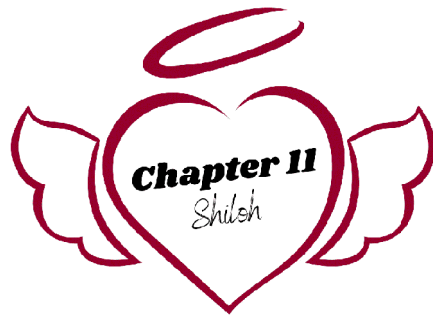
Twice.

“You okay, Shy?”

“Mmmhmmm,” I mumbled, nuzzling against his chest. I opened my eyes, but I wasn’t in the bed of Camden’s truck beneath the stars. And we certainly weren’t teenagers. I was in a room in his house, and I was clutching onto him like my life depended on it.

And my panties were soaked.

Holy smokes! What am I doing?



“YEAH, SORRY. LONG DAY,” I muttered as his hands drifted down my back and stopped just shy of touching my butt.

Unfortunately.

Wait, why did I think that? Did I want Camden to touch my butt?

Yep. And then some.

Stop it, Simms! This man has gone out of his way to help you, and he doesn't want you perving on him.

He leaned back and tilted a little smile my way. “Okay, I’ll let you get unpacked. I’m meeting with my team in the morning, and we’ll come up with a game plan based on what you’ve told me and whatever else we can dig up on Bellucci.” He released me a little reluctantly—or maybe that was just wishful thinking on my part—and walked to the door.

After opening it, he turned back to me. “I’ll come pick you up at eleven in the morning and take you to my office. We can

go over our security plan with you and see if the guys have any more questions for you.”

“And you trust these guys?”

“Implicitly,” he said firmly. “I’ve known them all at least twelve years, and we’re the best at what we do.” Striding back to me, he took my face in his big hands as his eyes held mine steadily. “I won’t let anything happen to you, Shiloh. I swear my life on it.” *Oh, swoon!* “These guys are my brothers, and they would die before they’d let anything happen to you.”

You’re a client, Shiloh. That’s all. Don’t get all swoony and shit.

“How much will all this cost? Vincent has access to my account, and I’m afraid he’ll notice if I make a big payment right now. But I could pay you next week, after he figures out I’m not coming back.”

Camden looked truly offended, the space between his eyebrows narrowing exponentially as he dropped his hands from my face and clenched them into fists at his sides. “I’m not taking your money, Shiloh.” His voice held a trace of disgust.

“Yes, you are,” I demanded. “You’re getting a whole team to work on this, so you need to be paid. I mean, these other men don’t even have a clue who I am. Why would they want to get mixed up in some mafia shit?”

“Number one, they would do it because it’s their job.”

“Not if they’re not getting paid, it’s not,” I retorted.

His eyes dropped to the floor and then back up. “And number two, they know all they need to know about you.”

I let out a frustrated breath. “I don’t even know what that means, Camden.”

He pressed his deep pink lips together before speaking. “It means that... they know you’re important to me.” His mouth barely tipped down on the edges, as if it pained him to admit that, while his blue eyes watched me closely.

Turning my back on him, I took a couple steps away. I was fucking confused. *I’m important to him?* What an utter mindfuck that statement was. I hadn’t heard from the man in over a decade and a half, and now, all of a sudden, I’m important to him?

“There’s a lot to dissect there, Camden,” I said, pressing the heel of one hand against my forehead.

A hint of amusement swirled through his next words. “Yeah, there is, but this isn’t the time to worry about that. We just need to concentrate on keeping you safe. But right now, you need to get unpacked and get some rest.”

I heard the soft click of the door as he left, but I remained facing the wall with my arms wrapped around my middle for a few moments.

I couldn’t even make sense of everything that had happened today. Cam insisting on personally coming to get me. Then bringing me *to his house*. And now he’s saying I’m important

to him? If I was so important, why did he leave me all those years ago?

Throwing up my hands and letting them fall, I opened up my suitcase and started to unpack. Camden was acting like we were something. But we weren't.

There was definitely still some intense sexual chemistry between us. I could feel it like a current running between us, especially when he touched me. But it was much more than that. On my part anyway.

I hated to admit it, but I had some serious unresolved feelings for my ex. I had put it behind me years ago, but that didn't mean those feelings had ever totally gone away. Maybe it was because I'd never gotten closure. He'd just dumped me, and then I'd never heard from him again.

Maybe I could trust him with my life, but I sure as hell couldn't trust him with my heart.

What about your body? a horny little voice inside my vagina asked. Jesus, all that thinking about the first time Camden had eaten me was fucking with my head—and other parts of my southern anatomy.

That night with him had awakened my own personal sexual revolution. Things I had thought were vulgar suddenly became intriguing. Like the oral sex thing. I'd even given him my virginity. I'd let Camden do things to me I never would have even thought about, and I'd liked every single bit of it.

I'd had it all with Camden Fitz. The sex had ranged from incredibly sweet to goddamn filthy. But there was always love.

Until there wasn't.

I stripped off my clothes and grabbed some panties and one of the ridiculous long nightgowns that Vincent insisted I wear. I detested those things. For a two-hundred-dollar price tag, you'd think they could find some lace that wasn't scratchy. Maybe wearing them for special occasions or some sexy playtime would be okay, but every single night? Ugh. I clipped my hair up and removed my contact lenses before stepping into the shower.

I cursed to myself as I felt the wetness between my legs. And it wasn't from the shower spray. My panties had been soaked since practically the instant I'd seen that big, hunky man in the airport. It was like his body sang to mine—even after all this time apart—and mine responded like Pavlov's dog. Tightened nipples. Wet pussy.

Woof, woof.

Scrubbing away the evidence in frustration, I finally got out of the shower and got dressed. *Good grief! The first thing I'm going to do when I get time is buy some comfy pajamas.*

I had just put my glasses on and exited the bathroom when I heard a tap on my bedroom door. Opening it, I found Cam standing there.

“Hey,” he said, taking a couple steps into the room. “I just wanted to see if you needed anything before I go to bed. You

hungry?”

“No, I’m still full from the burger, but thank you.”

His eyes slid down my body, and he reached out to tug at the satiny fabric of my long nightdress. “Well, this is fancy.”

Knowing I looked absurd, I rolled my eyes. “I know. I actually hate it.” My hand lifted to my chest to scratch where the stupid black lace was rubbing uncomfortably against my skin.

Camden smiled in confusion. “Then why are you wearing it?”

I crossed my arms uncomfortably over my chest. “It’s all I have. Just these stupid nightgowns. I wish I could sleep in something soft and loose.”

His face was slowly wiped clean of any trace of a smile as it hit him. “Did *he* buy it for you?”

“Vincent? Yes. He likes them on me.”

“Take it off,” Camden ordered, his voice low and tight.

“Excuse me?” *Was he really telling me to...*

“Take. It. Off. Now.” He was grinding his teeth so hard, the sound vibrated all the way through my chest.

Was he serious? I wasn’t sure who the fuck he thought he was. “You can’t tell me—”

He cut me off with a deep growl as his hand darted out and roughly grasped the material over my stomach in his hand, twisting it and yanking me forward a couple stumbling steps.

“I swear to God, Shiloh, if you don’t take this gown off right this fucking minute, I will rip it off your body myself. And there won’t be a goddamn shred of it left when I do.” He gave it a hard wrench that let me know he wasn’t fucking around. “You will not wear lingerie he bought you in my house. Do you understand me?”

We had an epic stare down for about thirty seconds before I reached for the hem of the gown and pulled it slowly over my head. Keeping my eyes on his, I held the gown out beside me, letting the lacy garment fall to the floor in a lingerie version of a mic drop.

“There. I’m not wearing it anymore,” I said smartly, standing naked in front of him, except for my ivory panties. I glared into his eyes, daring him to look down.

He did.

And he took his sweet fucking time doing it. My skin burned with the lust in his gaze, like he was branding me with its intensity. As he was perusing my body, I did the same to him. He was wearing boxer shorts with a very impressive tent in the front... and nothing else.

Sweet baby Jesus!

The man standing in front of me was an absolute fucking god. His chest and shoulders were so ripped, he looked like a statue carved by a Renaissance master. The six-pack abs I had always been riveted by were now a solid eight with those V-cut lines arrowing down into his shorts. *Oh yes, those shorts,* my eyes said, homing in on what was between his legs.

Stop looking at his dick, you pervert.

I forced my gaze back to his face, only to see his eyes still roving over my bare body.

“God. Damn,” he whispered, and I felt a little flush of satisfaction that he seemed to like what he was seeing.

“Are we done here?” I snapped, and his eyes jerked back to mine, narrowing into a scowl so forceful, I was convinced he hated me right then.

He turned on his heel and stomped out the door, closing it behind him and leaving me struggling to breathe. Realizing I was holding my breath, I let it out on a long exhale, my body relaxing now that he wasn't scrutinizing it like a jeweler inspecting a counterfeit gemstone.

What the holy fucking hell had just happened?

Just when I was about to try to find something else to sleep in, Camden strolled back in like he owned the damn place. Well, I guess he did actually. But still. He could've knocked. With his eyes fixed firmly on mine, he marched right up into my personal space and turned me around to face away from him.

Dear God, what is he about to do? My poor nipples were aching. They seemed to remember Dominant Cam, and they had obviously missed him, the shady bitches.

I felt something soft being slid over my head a second before his mouth went to my ear, his breath warm against my flesh. “Put your arms in, Shy,” he said quietly.

He had put one of his T-shirts on me. I slipped my arms through the holes, and he smoothed the shirt down over my hips. “Better?” he asked, his voice sounding much more controlled and less angry.

“Yes. Thank you.” Why did my voice sound so breathless? *Probably because your whore ass is turned on AF right now.* It could also have something to do with the huge erection pressed against my back.

“You’re welcome,” he said politely. “And if I catch you wearing anything but my shirt to bed, I’ll paint this pretty little ass bright red.” He delivered that threat in a mild, conversational tone, like we were discussing the weather.

He gave me a hard slap on the ass to prove his point and sauntered from the room, snatching the gown from the floor as he went.

Holy mother of Samuel L. Jackson! My damned vag was dripping, soaking through my panties.

Again.

Turning off the light, I climbed into bed, wearing Camden’s T-shirt. Goddammit, it smelled like him. How the hell was I supposed to sleep with his scent surrounding me while thoughts of his growling demands echoed through my mind?

I should be pissed off. It was like he thought he owned me or something. The thought of that sent another wave of desire through my body.

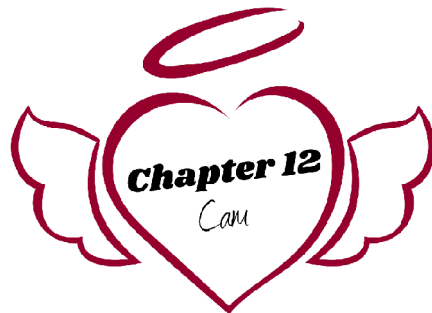
Oh, for fuck’s sake. I’m such a slut for that man.

There was no way I was going to be able to sleep with this tension built up in my body, so I did the only thing I could do. I turned on the bedside lamp and went to my suitcase. Finding what I had hidden in the side pocket, I pulled the two items out and went back to the bed.

Squirting some of the lube on the vibrator, I helped myself to a long, healthy orgasm. When I had finished and cleaned up, I put the toy and lubricant back into that side pocket before sliding into the bed.

My last thoughts before drifting off to dreamland were,
Maybe I'll wear one of the other gowns tomorrow night.

I could use a good spanking.



“WHAT CRAWLED UP YOUR ass and died?” Hawk asked way too fucking early the next morning.

“Nothing,” I grunted, pouring myself a cup of coffee. I was usually a morning person, but after hardly sleeping at all last night, I was a grouchy motherfucker today.

My friend smirked at me over his black coffee cup before taking a sip. “M’kay. If you say so.”

“I do say so,” I snarked. I’d finally fallen asleep around three in the morning after jacking off four times. And I’d still woken up with some serious wood in my shorts.

Seeing Shiloh naked had flipped some kind of switch in my head, and I’d had to physically restrain myself from shoving her onto the bed and taking every single thing I needed from her body.

“You and Shiloh have a lover’s quarrel?” he asked with a sickly sweet tone that I never wanted to hear from his mouth again. Ever.

“We’re not lovers, asshole.”

He chuckled, the sound coming from deep in his chest. “I know.”

I could feel the wrinkles slowly forming one by one on my forehead as I scowled at him. Maybe I should buy myself some Oil of Olay or something. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

He shrugged one massive shoulder as he bit the inside of his cheek. I added some teeth gritting to my grouchy repertoire in the hopes of encouraging him to share without having to actually ask him why the fuck he was looking at me like he knew something. He finally relented. “It’s just that if you were lovers, Shiloh wouldn’t have had to take matters into her own hands last night.”

My heartbeat picked up, fluttering like a hummingbird. “What’s that supposed to mean?” I took a step closer to him.

Taking another sip of coffee, he turned on the full-wattage grin. “Exactly what I said. You couldn’t hear her?” Then the prick fucking tutted. “Oh, that’s right. You don’t share a wall with her room. Those damn bathrooms must block the sound. Too bad. It was very... revealing.” That last word was uttered on an almost-sigh that did nothing to improve my mood.

Is he saying what I think he’s saying?

“Tell me what you heard. Everything.”

Hawk, the most annoying roommate who ever lived, set his coffee cup down and leaned his hands against the counter behind him, crossing his long legs casually in front of him. He

tilted his head to the side and shook it twice. “I don’t think I can do that, buddy. That would be an invasion of the young lady’s privacy.”

The fucker was toying with me and enjoying it.

“Now, Hawk, or you’ll be on this floor with multiple internal organ injuries in about five seconds,” I growled menacingly, setting my own cup down and taking two slow steps toward him.

His eyebrows lifted as if he were contemplating whether to take me on or to just tell me what the fuck I wanted to know. He wisely decided on the latter.

“Okay, I’ll tell you, but you have to promise to use the info only for evil purposes, not for good.”

I swear, this wicked sonofabitch...

“I do solemnly swear, I am up to no good,” I replied and then rolled my eyes at myself. I had been watching way too much *Harry Potter* with Carrie.

“Excellent,” he said with a grin. “At approximately twenty-one hundred hours last night, I heard a distinct buzzing noise. To my trained ears, it sounded like a rabbit vibe, model VJ4000. Probably the pink one.” Hawk, the deviant bastard, had a vast knowledge of sex toys.

“Continue.”

He glanced to the door of the kitchen before continuing. “That was all I heard for a couple minutes, and then the bedsprings started to squeak.” *Oh, sweet Jesus!* “I have to say,

she has a nice rhythm, Cam. Slow and steady, before speeding up to an erratic bump and grind that told me she was losing control.”

Sweat began to bead on my forehead.

“D—did she say anything?” I asked, my voice a mere croak.

Hawk drained the rest of his coffee before speaking. “I’m pretty sure she was praying. There were a lot of *Oh Gods* and *Jesus, yeses* coming through the wall.”

Okay, that made me smile a little. “Did she say anything else?” I asked as he turned to rinse out his cup at the sink.

He paused and looked at me over his shoulder. “I think there was a name. And not a biblical one.”

“W-was it Vincent?” *Please, God. Don’t let it be Vincent she was thinking about while she made herself come.*

Hawk took his time putting his cup in the dishwasher before frowning in concentration. “Hmmm, I don’t think I remember a Vincent.” His eyes rolled to the ceiling, and he snapped his fingers a couple times. “Let’s see... was it Carl?” He shook his head and mumbled, “No, I don’t think it was Carl. Maybe Chris?”

“Hawk!” I snapped.

“No, it wasn’t Hawk. I definitely would have remembered that.”

“Goddammit, did she say my name or not?”

My asshole friend grinned before raising his voice a couple octaves. *“Yes, Cam. Right there, Cam. I’ve missed you so much, baby. No one has ever fucked me as good as you. I’ve been a bad little girl, Cam. Spank me harder.”*

My cock was so goddamn hard, I could barely see. I was pretty sure every bit of blood in my body was pooled in that thick column of flesh between my legs.

With my chest heaving, I asked, “She really said all that?”

“Uh-huh.”

Fuck. My dick was doing its best impression of a convict trying to escape the prison of my pants. No way I could go to work—or anywhere else, for that matter—like this.

“Give me a couple minutes, and I’ll be ready to go,” I said, trying to walk as normally as possible from the kitchen.

“Make sure to wash your hands when you’re done, you kinky fucker,” Hawk called to my retreating back. *Prickface.*

I went straight to my bathroom and undid my pants, freeing the beast and breathing a sigh of relief. Reaching into my boxer briefs, I took out my dick and started to move my hand, up and down, using the liquid dripping from the tip as lubricant. I didn’t have time to play around or we would be late to work, so I went straight to it, fucking my hand so hard, I would probably have bruises on my groin by this afternoon.

Shiloh still wanted me. It was me she was thinking of when she got herself off last night. My name she called out in ecstasy. Fuck yes. Fuck. Yes.

“Oh God,” I groaned.

“Camden?”

Yes, baby. Say my fucking name.

“Hello?”

I wrenched my eyes open and realized that the voice was coming through the wall. Shiloh was in her bathroom. Through a couple layers of drywall and plaster. Right fucking *there*.

At the sound of her voice, I started coming, firehosing my seed all over the goddamn place as I whirled around toward her sweet voice. “It’s me,” I forced out. *Jesus, I’m still coming*. I grabbed a towel to catch the steady spurts coming from my cock, breathing heavily as I propped one hand on the wall to keep myself from falling over, finally letting the towel drop to the floor.

“Are you okay, Camden?”

At the sound of my name from her lips, another volley of cum shot from my penis. All over my pants and shirt.

“Yeah, good.” I grunted, trying to think of a reason I would be in my bathroom grunting like a bull. “Just a little... constipated.”

I dropped my head forward. *Fucking hell. Had I just said that? Guess it was better than telling her what I’d really been doing. And why.*

Before I could attempt to recover, she said, “Oh. Okay. I’ll just...” I could hear a little giggle in her voice as she exited the bathroom and closed the door.

Christ.

I cleaned up everything, changed my clothes, and flushed the toilet for good measure. Not wanting Shiloh to go without breakfast, I tried to ignore my embarrassment as I left my room and knocked on her door. “Shy, there’s coffee made, and ___”

The door swung open, and Shiloh stood there with her mussed hair and thick glasses. Still wearing my T-shirt. Even like that, she was the most stunning woman I’d ever seen.

“Oh. Hi. I was just saying that there’s coffee and breakfast in the kitchen.”

A cute little smile crept across her lips. “Maybe I’ll skip breakfast, if it’s the same thing you had.”

Unable to help myself, a laugh escaped from my lips. “No, I haven’t eaten yet. You should be fine.” *Jeez, am I blushing like a little girl?*

“Okay. Thanks, Camden.”

She lifted one foot and scratched her ankle with her toe, and I found my eyes drifting down to her bare legs and feet. I needed to get the fuck out of here ASAP.

“So, I’ll see you at eleven, okay?” I started backing down the hallway as she nodded.

“I’ll be ready.”

Retreating to the living room, I took the sausage biscuit wrapped in a napkin that Hawk handed me. “An entire wardrobe change? Must have been a good one,” he commented as we walked out the door.

Chomping into my sandwich, I flipped him off with my other hand.

We entered through the back door of the office and met Bode and Woody in the hallway. Glancing down at my red polo shirt embroidered with ‘DFW Security Force,’ Woody asked, “You know we’re supposed to wear the blue on Mondays, right?”

“Oh, I, uh, spilled some coffee—”

“He came all over his shirt,” Hawk supplied, and they all had a howling good laugh at my expense.

“I hate you fuckers,” I growled, stomping past them and straight to Shark’s office. “Can we start now?”

“Well, good morning to you too,” he said in a way too chipper voice. His ass probably got laid last night, while I had jerked off more in the last twenty-four hours than I had in the past month. “I’ll tell the guys to meet us in the conference room. Taz won’t be there because she’s in Colorado visiting her family this week.” He pressed a buzzer on the in-office intercom and told everyone where to meet.

Once everyone was seated around the oval-shaped oak table, Shark stood from his position at the head of the table.

“We have a new job, and it’s of the utmost priority.” Turning to me, he said, “Cam, would you like to fill everyone in?”

I handed out the folders Shark had prepared to everyone as I started talking. “If you’ll take a look at the picture in the front of your folders, you’ll see Shiloh Simms.”

“She’s fucking hot,” Woody commented, and I turned my angry gaze to him. “Sorry,” he muttered, holding both hands up defensively.

“Anyway,” I started, “Shiloh has inadvertently gotten herself involved with the Bellucci crime family. Their info is detailed on page two of the dossier. Suffice it to say, we’re talking all the major mafia crimes here. Drugs, racketeering, prostitution, extortion, murder.”

Woody let out a low whistle. “That’s some heavy shit. How is Ms. Simms involved?”

“She’s engaged to Vincent Bellucci. Or she was, until she overheard a conversation Saturday night between him and his father, who is the head of the family.” I detailed what Shiloh had told me, leaving everyone staring back at me with stunned expressions.

“I’m sorry. I guess I don’t understand why we’re getting involved with some New York mobster shit,” Bode commented, scanning through the documents and then looking up at me.

“Because Cam asked us to,” Shark said quietly. “It’s personal, okay?”

“She’s a friend of yours?” Bode asked, his eyes sympathetic.

I stuffed my hands in my pockets and looked at the floor. “More than that. We were together for years. It was a long time ago.” I raised my head and looked each of my friends in the eye. “But she’s still very important to me.”

I didn’t need to say any more. These guys had never seen me so serious. Five heads nodded at me, and Tank said, “Understood. We got you, brother.”

“Whatever it takes,” Woody said, and the rest of them echoed, “Whatever it takes.”

I fucking love these guys.

“She’ll need round the clock protection. Where are we going to put her?” Bode asked.

“She’s staying with me,” I said, and eyebrows lifted around the table.

“Alrighty then,” Woody said. “What’s the plan?”

Shark stood back up. “Like Cam said, Shiloh is staying at their house. We don’t think Bellucci is suspicious yet, but when Shiloh fails to return to New York, we’ll need to be extra vigilant, so we’re going to have someone outside their house every night while they’re sleeping. We’ll rotate shifts.” Everyone nodded their agreement.

“Are we bringing the Feds in?” Tank asked.

“I have a contact at the Dallas FBI who I’m going to speak with after this meeting. See if we can get her federal protection if she testifies. The problem is, the Belluccis have people in the D.A.’s office and the police department in New York. We can’t be sure they don’t have someone on the inside at the federal level, as well,” I told them.

“Damn,” Bode said. “Can we question Shiloh? It might help us come up with a plan?”

My protective instincts came out to play. “Yes, but be nice,” I warned. “She’s very sweet, and this is hard on her. I don’t want her interrogated like she’s a criminal.”

“I’m always nice,” he said with a big grin. “I’ll be my regular, charming little self.”

That’s all the fuck I need. Bode was a smooth motherfucker with the ladies. “Just make sure to keep your charming hands off her. Understood?” I growled.

“You got it, bruh.”

“She’ll be here at eleven. Until then, I’m going to call my friend Darryl at the FBI and then I’ll work with Tank on digging deeper into the family.” Tank was a genius on the computer, so he was our go-to guy whenever we needed information that was difficult to find.

“Okay, that’s all for now,” Shark said. “Everyone continue with whatever other cases you’re working on. I need reports on all of them by the end of the week. I’ll get a stakeout

schedule made for Cam and Hawk's house and send that out before lunch. Now get the fuck to work."

And with that, we were dismissed. Woody gave me a reassuring pat on the shoulder as he left the room.

"Thanks, Shark. This really means a lot," I told my best friend when we were alone.

"No problem. If we can't even take care of the women we love, then what are we doing this for?"

"I-I don't..." I stammered, but he had already left the room. Standing there with my mouth hanging open, I stared at the empty room. *Do I still love Shiloh?* I knew for damned sure I had never gotten over her, but *love?*

Without a doubt my body craved her, and, if I was being honest with myself, it went deeper than sex. Much deeper. I shook my head as I walked to my office and sat at my desk. *Love?* There was no way I was still in love with Shy.

Then why did you think of her every single day for sixteen years? Why does your heart do a drum solo every time she says your name?

Fuck.

When I checked my phone, I realized fifteen minutes had passed while I sat at my desk and daydreamed about the girl I was absolutely *not* in love with. *Sappy bastard.*

I snapped out of it and dialed Darryl, my FBI contact, and got his voicemail. After leaving a message for him to call me back regarding an urgent matter, I walked around to Tank's

office to find him already tapping away at his laptop. For the next two hours, we delved deep into the mafia underworld of New York, cataloging anything and anyone that had to do with the Belluccis.

“Hey, how’s it going?” Bode asked, walking into the office Tank and Hawk shared and leaning against the desk.

I rubbed my eyes, which were fatigued from staring at the screen for so long. “Good, but I’m about to leave to pick up Shiloh.”

Bode nodded. “I’ve set up chairs in the sitting area of Shark’s office. I thought she might be more comfortable there instead of the conference room. A little more casual, you know?”

“Thanks, Bode,” I said, offering him a smile for his thoughtfulness. My phone pinged with a message and I cursed when I read it. “My FBI guy just texted that he got my message and is going to call me in fifteen minutes. I really wanted to talk to him first without Shiloh around, but I’m supposed to be picking her up at the same time.”

“No problemo, bro. I can go pick her up,” Bode offered.

I frowned. “You sure? I don’t want her to have to take an Uber or anything. That prick Vincent doesn’t know she’s left him yet, but I’m still a little apprehensive about her going out on her own.” To be honest, it had stressed me the fuck out just to leave her at the house by herself this morning.

“Yep, I’m on it. Take a pic of me and text it to her so she knows my face when I get there. She’s got to be a little nervous right now.”

“All right.” I lifted my phone to take a picture, and Bode cheesed for the camera and held two encouraging thumbs up. “You fucking dork,” I said, tapping out a message to Shy and sending her the photo as Bode headed out.

Right on time, the call came in from Darryl. “What’s up Fitzzy?”

“Hey, Darryl. I’ve got a bit of a situation going here, and I need some advice.” I proceeded to tell him Shiloh’s story.

“Wow. Poor girl. And she didn’t know any of this shit before she got involved with Bellucci?”

“Nope. She had no idea. We’ve been investigating him, and he covers his tracks pretty well. We had to dig deep to find out about his mob connections.”

“Damn. From what you’ve told me, there’s not enough there to warrant protection in WITSEC,” he said, referring to the Witness Security Program. “It’s all pretty much hearsay. Now, if she had some solid evidence like the murder weapon or some computer files, that would be a different story.”

“I was afraid of that,” I sighed. “Is there anyone in the New York FBI office that is solid? Bellucci has insiders in most law enforcement offices up there, and I don’t want to put Shiloh in even more danger by contacting someone we can’t trust.”

“Yeah, I know a guy. As solid as they come. I’ll text you the information. If there’s any way Shiloh can get onto Bellucci’s computer and copy the entire drive—”

“No!” I said forcefully. “She’s not going back there.”

“Okay, okay. No need to yell.” We talked for a few more minutes before signing off, and I texted Bode to see where they were.

Bode: I have completed my mission and dropped your lovely lady at the office.

Cam: Thanks, Manbun.

Bode: If you’ll look back at the photo you took of me earlier, you’ll see that my luscious hair is down and free today.

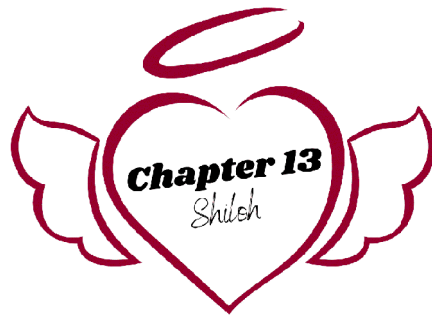
Bode: You’re welcome to use that pic as your lockscreen, if you want. You’re welcome.

Fucking Bode.

I strode to my office with a smile on my face, but when I got there, my smile faded away. Shiloh wasn’t there, but someone else was.

As the person turned, I felt my anger rise up until I was afraid my head would explode. “What the fuck are you doing

here?"



AFTER PUTTING THE LAST curl in my hair so that it hung past my shoulders in soft waves, I dug through my makeup case. I found the lipstick I wanted, Best Red, that I had picked up at Target for six bucks.

When I was done, I stood back and looked at my reflection. Four-button, short-sleeved jacket. Matching pencil skirt that hung just below my knees. Platform heels that added an extra few inches to my five-foot-five-inch frame. *Check, check, and check.* All were in a deep red color.

The exact shade of red as your prom dress that Camden loved so much.

No! That was not why I was wearing it.

This was my power suit. It made me feel strong and confident, which was precisely what I needed. Because today? I was taking my goddamn life back.

Vincent? A thing of the past. Bye, boy.

And Camden? I wasn't falling for any more of his bossy-ass shit, no matter how my traitorous body responded. No siree. I

didn't care if my vagina caught fire from his growly voice in my ear, telling me what I could and couldn't wear. I would wear what I damn well pleased.

I mean, I did like his T-shirt a lot better than those itchy nightgowns, but I would wear it because *I* wanted to, not because he told me to.

And I would absolutely not fall for him again. Never mind that his mere presence made my heart do weird things that I hadn't experienced in years. He had ripped me to shreds years ago, and I would never give him the chance to do it again.

My phone dinged, and I snatched it up from the counter like I was expecting a phone call from Channing Tatum. A huge smile stretched across my face when I saw that it was from Camden.

Way to hang tough there, Shiloh. Smiling like an idiot just because he texted you.

Camden: Something important came up at the office, so Bode is coming to get you. Here's a pic of him, so you'll know it's safe to go with him. I'm sorry I couldn't come myself.

A photo of a man with chin-length blonde hair popped up on my screen, and I laughed at his cheesy pose. He looked like a character.

My phone signaled another incoming message, and I tapped on it to find one from Vincent.

Vincent: Hello, darling. How are your classes going?

Shit. Taking a deep breath, I pulled up the conference schedule of classes and scanned today's calendar before answering him.

Shiloh: Great! My first class was Pediatric Amblyopia in a Primary Care Setting, and it was great. Then one on pseudoexfoliative glaucoma, which was boring as hell. About to go learn about advancements in diabetic retinopathy treatments.

Vincent: Ok, sweetheart. I'll let you go. I love and miss you.

Shiloh: Love and miss you.

Barf.

A few minutes later, I heard a knock on the front door, and after checking the peep hole, I opened it up.

“Well, hello there, gorgeous,” Bode said, leaning in and kissing me—*on the lips!* What the... Then he took a step back and looked me up and down. “You are a fucking knockout! Cam's going to come all over himself again when he sees you in this suit.”

I couldn't help but laugh. This guy was definitely a character. "Okay, umm, go back to that part about Cam."

He smirked at me. "Nothing. Forget I mentioned it." Tucking my hand in his elbow, he locked the door and led me to a bright-yellow Hummer. Bode kept me entertained with stories about the guys, and I laughed during the entire fifteen minute drive to the office. When we arrived I saw a modern glass and stone building with a sleek sign reading "DFW Security Force."

After the entertaining drive with Bode, I felt much more at ease when he helped me out of his vehicle and led me inside. "Hello, Monica," Bode said to the receptionist, a pretty lady in her fifties with jet black hair and a friendly smile. "This is Shiloh, our new client and a friend of Cam's."

We greeted each other, and then Bode guided me down the hall.

"She seemed nice," I said, and he nodded.

"Monica is great. Much better than the crazy woman we used to have up front," he said, stopping outside a wooden door with a gold plate bearing Camden's name on the frame. "I've got to get back to work, but you can wait in Cam's office."

"Okay. Thanks, Bode. It was really nice to meet you."

"You too," he said, lifting one of my hands and kissing the back of it before waggling his eyebrows at me and heading down the hall in the other direction. Bode really was adorable

and much more approachable than Hawk. Not that I disliked Hawk. He was just... intense.

I opened the door and was surprised to see someone already in there. A very pretty woman with hair the same caramel brown as mine. "Oh, hello. Are you waiting for Camden too?"

She looked me up and down and then directed a glare in my direction. "You could say that. Who are you?"

I was a bit taken aback by her abrupt attitude, but I put on my best fake smile and walked further into the room. "I'm Shiloh. I'm a client and a friend of Camden's," I said, introducing myself the same way Bode had a few minutes ago.

The woman's nostrils flared at the mention of his name, and I wondered if she was a disgruntled client or something. "Hmmm. How interesting. Cammy's never mentioned you. I'm his soon-to-be fiancée, Traci."

Well, you could've knocked me over with a damn feather. *Camden was getting engaged? And if he's about to be married to another woman, what was all that possessive bullshit he pulled with me last night?*

Traci was dressed in a purple Tom Ford minidress that showed off mile-long legs, which she crossed, flashing a bit of her black lace panties in the process. *Does she think she's Sharon Stone or something?* I guessed she was the "something important" that had come up, keeping Camden from picking me up himself.

“Nice to meet you, Traci. I love your dress,” I said politely though my stomach was clenched into a hard ball for reasons I couldn’t define.

“Thanks,” she said nonchalantly. “How did you say you knew Cammy again?”

Cammy? Did he really like being called ‘Cammy?’

“Oh, I knew him a long time ago.”

“Intimately?” she asked with a feral glint in her eyes.

“Excuse me?”

“Have. You. Fucked. My. Boyfriend?” she asked slowly, as if I were ignorant or something.

I took an involuntary step back to escape her venom. *Why was I letting this woman intimidate me?* I guess it was because she was so brash and self-possessed. And maybe because I was jealous of her... just a tiny bit.

Power suit: activate! I said to myself, attempting to imbue some kind of garment-infused confidence into myself. It didn’t work.

“You know, I think I’m going to just go to the restroom,” I said, turning for the door.

She gave me a thin smirk. “Yeah, I think that would be best. Cammy and I have some important things to... discuss.” She said that last word on a little giggle that made me think she wasn’t talking about conversing with *Cammy*.

Rushing down the hallway toward the restroom sign I'd noticed earlier, I was thankful I didn't run into anyone on the way. I closed the door behind me and slipped into the first of two stalls.

"Stupid! Stupid, stupid, stupid," I said aloud to myself. Swiping at a rogue tear that had escaped, I asked, "Why are you even upset? You said you weren't interested in him. If he wants to be with someone like *her*, that's his business." I closed the toilet lid and sat down, resting my elbows on my knees and burying my face in my hands.

The little pep talk wasn't helping, because no matter what I told myself, I did still have feelings for Camden. And his domineering attitude last night had made me think that he felt something for me as well, but I guess he was just being a dick.

"Yes, he's a dick. And speaking of dicks, I *do not* want his. At all. No matter how big it is. Suck it up, Shy. I mean, not suck it up as in a blow job. Definitely don't think of giving him a blow job right now. That's, for sure, a bad idea."

But the image was already in my head. Kneeling in front of Camden while he stood over me with his big cock in his hand, tracing the head of it around my lips. Clutching my hair. Telling me I was going to put it in my mouth like a good girl and make him come down my throat. Groaning as he took my mouth roughly.

"I don't love him," I said, my raspy voice sounding unconvinced, even to my own ears.

“Are you sure?” asked a voice from the stall next to me, and I was so startled, I fell off the toilet, banging my head on the toilet paper holder.

“Shit!”

“Oh my God, are you okay?” I heard scrambling feet, and then saw a head poking underneath the stall door. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

I felt my face flush with humiliation. This poor woman had just been subjected to my bathroom rant about stupidity, dicks, and *oh, my sweet Jesus*, blow jobs. If a sinkhole had opened up beneath me, I wouldn’t have complained a bit. Honestly, I’d have jumped in willingly.

“No, I’m sorry. I thought I was alone.”

She gave me a sweet smile, which transformed her face from beautiful to stunning. “I should have said something earlier, but you were just getting to the good stuff.”

That comment was so unexpected, I started giggling, and so did she. “Do I need to crawl under this door and help you up?” she offered.

“No, it’s okay. I’m fine.” Bracing myself, I got to my feet and saw her head disappear. When I opened the door, I was struck by how gorgeous the woman standing on the other side of it was. Long, dark hair with a blue streak down one side. Big violet eyes with impeccably done eyeshadow and long lashes. A body that would make a priest do a double take.

“Come on, let’s wash up,” she said, putting a hand on my back and guiding me to the double sinks. “You know, since we’ve both been wallowing on the floor of a public restroom.”

My face scrunched up. *Ew!* We washed our hands and arms thoroughly in silence though the woman kept sneaking glances at me in the mirror. Probably because my face was all red, and I had eye makeup streaked down my cheeks. After we’d dried our hands, she took me by the shoulders and turned me toward her before digging through her purse and pulling out a makeup bag and a packet of tissues.

“Just give me a second here,” she said as she dried my eyes and then started dabbing and brushing at my face with products I didn’t even know the names of. Then she squatted down and started tugging and straightening my skirt and jacket. “There you go. Good as new. You look like a fucking *queen*, sugar,” she said, turning me toward the mirror as she fluffed my hair a little.

I gasped. After working on me for approximately four minutes, this woman had my face looking amazing. My eyes were twice the size they normally were, and my skin looked like tan silk. “Jesus.”

“No, I’m Bristol,” she said, brushing pretend lint off her shoulder. I really liked this girl.

“I’m Shiloh.” I turned, extending my hand, and we shook.

“Were you talking about one of the guys here?” she asked. I hesitated, and she gave me a gentle smile. “You don’t have to tell me, but I’m a good listener.”

“Yes, but I’m just being stupid.”

“So I heard,” she quipped, and I laughed again.

I rolled my eyes. “It’s Camden.” I had no clue why I was telling this perfect stranger my business, other than the fact that I liked her very much. She was kind and funny and a bit of a smartass, which I appreciated.

“Ah, Cam. He is a heartbreaker,” she said with an understanding tip of her head.

“I mean, it’s been sixteen years since we’ve seen each other, so I really shouldn’t expect anything, right?”

“Sixteen years? Wow.”

Nodding my head, I said, “We dated for three years, and then he dumped my ass. Then... well, I recently got myself into a situation and needed some help, so I called him. I wasn’t planning to see him or anything. I just wanted professional advice.”

“Whoa. Back the fucking truck up. Did you say you dated Cam, as in *Camden Fitz*, for *three years*?”

Furrows formed across my forehead. “Yes, why?”

Her perfect eyebrows skyrocketed. “Because Cam doesn’t date. Ever.” *Okay, what?* “Waylon said he’s known him for over ten years, and he’s never had a girlfriend. Well, until recently.” Her pretty face scrunched up in a way that told me she wasn’t fond of Traci either.

“Yeah, his fiancée.” I tried not to sneer. “I met her in his office a few minutes ago. A real charmer.”

“Cam? Engaged?” She threw back her head and laughed, a deep, throaty noise that only made her more appealing. Then her pretty face turned serious. “Hold on. You met Traci?” I nodded. “And she’s here?” She pointed to the floor with one French-tipped finger.

“Yes, in his office. She said they were about to be engaged.”

Bristol’s mouth formed a little O before pressing together in anger. “He better not be getting back together with that shrew. Swear to God, I’ll cut his balls off.” The squint of her eyes told me her fierce words were no joke. “No one, and I mean *no one*, likes her. Waylon said he and the other guys can’t even stand to be around her.”

“Who’s Waylon?” I asked in confusion, and her face became impossibly more beautiful as all her features softened.

“He’s my big, hot man. He works here too, but most people call him Tank.”

That triggered a memory. “Oh, yeah. Camden mentioned him.”

Bristol bit her bottom lip, her eyes all dreamy. “He’s seriously the sweetest man to ever walk this earth.” Her memories of Tank kept her in a daze for a moment before she snapped out of it. “Come on. I’ll introduce you to him.”

“Oh. Um. Okay.”

“You have plans for lunch?” Bristol asked as she hauled me from the restroom by my hand.

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Cool. You’re having lunch with me. I need to hear more about all this Cam stuff.” She was a little bossy, but in a nice way, and I found myself actually *wanting* to have lunch with her.

“Is that what everyone calls him now? Cam?”

We stopped outside one of the closed office doors I had passed on my escape from the rude heifer in Camden’s office, and Bristol cut her eyes in my direction. “I’ve been around for a little over a year, and that’s all I’ve heard him called.”

Huh. Maybe I should call him that since it’s obviously what he prefers.

She tapped twice on the door and then strolled in before receiving a response. A giant of a man rose from behind a desk covered in computer monitors, practically vaulting over the furniture in his haste to get to Bristol.

Taking her delicate face in his big hands, he gave her several sweet pecks on the lips before closing his mouth over hers and kissing her deeply. They were a stunning couple, him blonde with a nice tan that told me he spent a lot of time outdoors, and her a dark-haired beauty with lighter skin and the type of bone structure women would kill for.

I averted my eyes from the intimate scene and was surprised to see Hawk sitting at the other desk in the room, quietly

watching me with those dark eyes. Flicking his gaze toward the couple, he looked back at me and rolled his eyes. “*Every damn time,*” he mouthed, and I covered my mouth to hide my smile. Hawk was obviously no stranger to Tank and Bristol’s little lovey-dovey routine.

“Hi, gorgeous,” the man I hoped was Tank said when they came up for air.

“Hello, my big handsome man.” They shared a few more loving kisses, like their lips were incapable of being apart, until Hawk finally cleared his throat. Bristol giggled and pulled back a little. “Boo, I made a new friend in the restroom.”

“Of course you did,” the big guy said, smiling like the happiest fucker in the world. Hell, with a woman like Bristol in his arms, who could blame him? These two were stinking adorable together.

“This is Shiloh,” she said, finally extricating herself from his embrace so that she could turn to me.

Tank grinned and reached me in two long strides, his hand outstretched for me to shake. “Hi, Shiloh. It’s nice to finally meet you in person.” We shook, his enormous hand making mine look like a child’s.

“Shiloh, the quiet guy over there is Hawk,” Bristol said, jerking her thumb at the man behind the other mahogany desk.

“We know each other already,” I said.

“Shiloh is staying at our house,” Hawk offered.

Bristol's eyes widened, and she lifted one eyebrow. "Well, it looks like we *do* have some things to discuss today, Miss Shiloh." Turning back to her lover, she said, "I'm stealing her for lunch."

Tank chuckled, and it was so deep that it vibrated around the room. "Okay, you can have your new friend in about thirty minutes, babe. We have a meeting with her first. But you ladies take it easy on the margaritas."

"Party pooper."

Their cute banter was interrupted by a shout from down the hall. "Fuck," Hawk said, jumping up from his desk and sprinting to the door with Tank right on his heels. "You girls stay put," he yelled over his shoulder.

What the hell is going on?

Our eyes widened as soon as the guys opened the door, and we were able to hear everything.

"What the fuck are you talking about," Camden yelled. "That was *not* for you. That ring belonged to my mother."

"But, Cammy," a voice I recognized as Traci's whined.

"Don't fucking call me that. It's stupid! And I told you Saturday night that we were done. Why would you come in here trying to tell me we're getting engaged? It. Is. Over. Traci."

"But..."

"Get the fuck out of my office. Now."

Bristol was apparently as nosy as I was, because we both crept to the door and peeked around it. Tank was leading an angry Traci back to the front, and Hawk had his hands on Camden's shoulders, saying something in a low voice, obviously trying to get him to calm down.

"What the fuck is going on out here?" another man said, barreling out of the office next to Camden's.

"Wow," I whispered. This guy had dark blonde hair and green eyes set over a chiseled jawline.

"I know," Bristol whispered back. "That's Shark. It's like they were all purchased from the Hot Guys Store, right?"

"Amen and hallelujah," I said, making her break out in giggles. This was a stellar-looking group of men. I hadn't met the other guy, Woody, yet, and I wondered if he was as magnetic as the rest of the men.

That question was answered when Bode and a Hispanic man exited the office next to Tank and Hawk's. The newcomer was indeed as good-looking as his friends with brown eyes, dark hair, and an easy smile.

"What's all the ruckus? Some of us are trying to work here," he said.

"Cam's ex," Hawk said, and that seemed to be all the explanation they needed.

Things seemed to have calmed down a bit down there until Camden turned and saw me. Stalking down the corridor toward me, he stopped about six inches from my body.

“Where the hell have you been?” he demanded, his voice low and dark.

This guy had some fucking nerve.

“I was in your office with your shrew of a girlfriend—oh, I’m sorry, *fiancée*—but then I decided to go to the restroom. I didn’t realize I needed to ask your permission for that.” I returned his glare and then some.

Bristol put her hands on her hips and retorted, “Yeah, there’s no way Shiloh should be expected to put up with that woman’s nasty ass.” She flicked her hand derisively in the direction Traci had disappeared. “So, she’s been hanging out with me.”

Camden’s face fell as he looked back and forth between us. “Oh, sorry,” he mumbled as his eyes fell on me. He expelled a long sigh, and I noticed that his breath smelled deliciously of spearmint. “She’s a piece of work. You okay, Shy?”

“Fine,” I said shortly. Why in the world would he date someone like Traci? Was that the kind of woman he went for now? “Can we get started now? I have a lunch date.”

A muscle ticced in his jaw. “A date?”

“Uh-huh,” I said, pushing past him and strutting down the hallway like I knew where the fuck I was going. Camden was on me in about two seconds, grabbing my arm to stop my progress.

“Who the fuck are you going on a date with?” he demanded, his big body crowding mine.

Bristol shot me a mischievous wink as she and Tank walked past us.

“A friend,” I said, my brown eyes meeting his blue ones with coolness.

He searched my face like he was trying to process who it might be before finally asking quietly, “Is it Bristol?”

“Maybe.” It was fun toying with him.

His hand slid down my arm until he was holding my hand, and he yanked me a step closer. “Is it?”

Taking pity on him, I sighed. “Yes, Cam.” I was trying out his new-to-me nickname, and I liked how it sounded. His eyes lightened considerably. *Did that turn him on?* “I’m going to lunch with my new friend, Bristol. Are you happy now?”

“Fucking ecstatic,” he muttered as his eyes roamed from my head to my heels. “You look amazing, by the way.”

“Thank you,” I said demurely. At least, I hoped I looked demure and not constipated. *Speaking of that...* “How is your stomach?”

His lips seemed to twitch a little as he took a step back, giving me some space. “Fine,” he said, his hand still holding mine as he led me down toward the end of the hall, where everyone’s curious attention seemed to be on us, like our conversation was some kind of spectator sport.

Cam introduced me to Shark and Woody, and the latter gave me a wide grin. Shark inclined his head politely but offered me only the barest hint of a smile. Cam’s hand was still

holding mine possessively when he led me inside Shark's office.

"I'll just wait down the hall," Bristol said, closing the door behind us. And then I was alone with six huge, gorgeous males, and the amount of testosterone in the room was almost overwhelming.

I sat on the smooth burgundy leather couch, and Cam sat right beside me. Shark seemed to be the man in charge, so he started out with detailed questions about the conversation I had overheard between Vincent and his father.

"So, we have until Sunday until you're supposed to be back in New York?" Bode spoke up, and I nodded. "And as far as we know, your fiancé isn't suspicious that you know all of this or that you've gone AWOL?"

"Ex-fiancé," Cam corrected before I could.

"That's correct." Then a thought hit me. What if they wanted me to go back and pretend everything was normal for a while? I couldn't do that. I wasn't that good an actress. "But I don't want to go back there. I've looked into licensure in Texas, so I think I would like to stay here. Maybe not in Dallas." I felt Cam's body straighten and tense beside me. "But definitely in the state," I finished.

I honestly had nowhere to go. I couldn't go back to New York, but I didn't have a home here either. A sense of panic threatened to sink into my bones, and Cam pressed his shoulder against mine until I looked at him. It was as though he was conscious of my mood. "You need a break?" he asked

quietly, and I shook my head. That slight contact between our bodies soothed me, and I offered him a soft smile, which he returned.

My attention was redirected toward Woody when he spoke. “Tell us about your family.”

“Oh, uh, let’s see. My mother lives in Ireland, and I have an aunt and uncle in San Antonio.”

“And is Vincent close with your mother? Like, do they call each other?”

I shook my head. “No, they don’t really get along. I’m not even sure if he has her number.”

Six sets of eyes darted around to look at each other, as if they were communicating without words. A few of them nodded. *Why the hell is that significant?*

Shark spoke again. “We can work with that. How often do you see your mother?”

“Not often, unless I go there.” My head dropped, and I stared at my hands twisting in my lap. “My mother doesn’t fly. Not since m-my father.” I swallowed the lump growing in my throat. “He was in one of the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11.”

There was a long silence, and I watched as a single tear plopped onto the fabric of my red skirt.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, and Cam reached over and separated my fumbling hands, taking one of them in his big warm one. It was the most comforting thing I’d felt in a very

long time. I looked up at him gratefully, and he swiped a tear from my face with his thumb. It seemed so intimate, I could hardly stand it. I turned to face the rest of the men. “I’m not always such a crybaby. For the most part, I try to live my life normally, but there are times—”

Shark gave me a sympathetic smile. “You don’t have to apologize to us. We understand. The majority of us went into the military because of the events of that day. Some of us have even been known to drop a tear or two on the anniversary.” He straightened. “Not me, of course. I’m way too manly. It’s mostly that pussy Cam.”

That gave me the giggles, especially when Cam flipped him off. “Yeah, you come over and work out with me tonight, and we’ll see who the pussy is.”

“I’ll be there. I haven’t whipped your ass in a while.”

Did I mention the amount of testosterone in the air?

“Okay, if we could stop playing ‘whose dick is the biggest’ for a minute,” Tank said, at which point Cam and Shark both yelled, “Mine!” The big man closed his eyes and shook his head. “Anyway, I think we’re all in agreement here?”

Everyone except me nodded.

Wait. What did I miss? Damn these military guys and their silent communication skills.

“Is anyone going to fill me in since I obviously don’t have your freaky, voodoo, mind-reading skills?”

Everyone burst into laughter, and Woody winked at me. “You’re funny, Shiloh.” Then addressing Cam, he said, “She’s a keeper, dude.”

Cam squirmed in his seat and released my hand. “We’re just friends, Wood.”

Woody’s grin only broadened. “So you won’t mind if I go out with her?”

My ex glared giant Samurai swords at his friend. “Not happening,” he growled, his body tensing.

“Hey, you know what’s neat?” I asked brightly. “I heard that women can decide for themselves who they date.” I shot a pointed look at Cam.

“That’s right, pretty lady,” Bode said. “Now, what time should I pick you up tonight?”

“Goddammit, could we please stay on topic?” Cam roared as the other guys tried to stifle their laughter. Then he turned to me, taking a calming breath before continuing. “What we’re thinking is, that Saturday night, you tell Vincent that your mother is ill, and you need to go to Ireland to be with her.”

I could feel my eyes grow as large as saucers. “Oh God. I don’t know if I can do that. My mother would know as soon as I stepped off the plane that something was wrong. I’m a terrible liar.”

“I can confirm that,” Cam said with a nod to the other men, and I jabbed him in the ribs with my elbow.

Fiddling with the lapel of my suit, I said, “I don’t want to upset her. My mother is very fragile. She worries constantly to the point of paranoia. Knowing I’m involved with someone like the Belluccis might send her over the edge.” I dropped my hand to my lap.

Tank spoke up. “We can make it look like you went to Ireland, but you don’t actually have to go. You can stay here, so we can make sure you’re protected. Time is what we need, and if he’s not expecting you home, that will buy us the time we need to come up with something solid on Bellucci.”

“You can really do that? Make it look like I went to Ireland?”

Tank nodded, his face the picture of confidence. “I can do anything with a computer. Some of it may *technically* be *slightly* illegal, but I can do it.”

I shook my head vehemently. “No, I don’t want you to do anything to get in trouble, Tank.”

Shark shook his head. “Don’t worry about that. Tank is an expert at covering his tracks. Now, how long do you think you can be gone without drawing suspicion?”

“I don’t know. Vincent has *discouraged* me from going to see my mother in the past. Like I said, they don’t get along. He doesn’t understand her problems; he thinks she’s being overly dramatic. And she simply doesn’t trust him.”

“Then *tell* him you’re going, don’t ask,” Cam said sharply. “You’re a grown-ass woman, and if you want to go see your

mother, then he shouldn't have anything to say about it.”

I nodded, feeling a little bit more confident with the plan. “Okay, would a couple weeks be enough time?” Everyone’s head swiveled toward Tank.

“Yeah, that should work.”

“Alright, do you have anything else to add, Shiloh? Any questions for us?”

Looking each of them in the eye, I said in a slightly choked voice, “I just wanted to say thank you. To all of you. I know you don’t even know me, and you’re going to all this trouble. I don’t even have the words to tell you how much I appreciate everything you’re doing.”

Tears welled up in my eyes—again—and Tank stood and took my hands, pulling me up and into a warm embrace. “Don’t cry, sweetheart. We’ll get this figured out, okay?”

I nodded, unable to speak. Bristol was right. He was the sweetest man ever. As soon as he released me, Bode held his arms out wide. “Do I get some special lovin’ too?” He really was hilarious.

A little bubble of laughter escaped me, and I walked into his arms, letting him wrap me up. He held me. And held me. And held me some more, until it became kinda fucking awkward to be honest.

“Bode!” Cam snapped, and Bode finally released me.

“What? I was comforting her.”

“You were being an idiot.”

Shark sighed like he was used to their shit and said, “Can you guys please stop playing grab ass and get the fuck out of my office?”

We all filed out, and Cam herded me into his office next door and closed the door. “You okay?” he asked, facing me and taking both of my hands. “I know it’s hard to talk about your dad.”

“I’m fine. Sorry I got a little teary.”

Brushing my hair behind my ear, he said, “You always were sensitive. But you’re also strong, Shiloh.” I dipped my head down, but he raised it back up with a knuckle beneath my chin. “I mean it, Shy. The way you took care of yourself and your mother back then? It was wonderful.”

“I just did what I had to do,” I said, feeling my face flush.

“You were a kid.” He swallowed audibly. *Was he closer to me than he had been a few seconds ago?* “And now you’ve grown up into a kickass woman.”

“Thanks,” I whispered. *He was definitely closer now. I could feel his body heat through my clothes.*

“A very beautiful woman,” he murmured, sliding one hand up my arm and beneath my hair before he locked it around the back of my neck. I could feel an insistent pulsing start between my legs at the familiarity of that touch.

Sweet hell! He’s about to kiss me! His grip tightened, and he pulled me infinitesimally closer. *Yes! Do it!*

“You ready to go, Shiloh?” Bristol called as she pushed open the door, and Cam and I broke apart swiftly, like we were caught doing something naughty. The Interrupter in Chief narrowed her eyes and then smiled knowingly. “I can come back,” she said, turning back toward the door.

“No. It’s fine. I’m ready,” I said, my voice sounding way too breathless.

Cam shoved his hands in the pockets of his pants and scowled. “Where are you two going? I don’t like you going out by yourself with everything going on, Shy.”

“I won’t be by myself. I’ll be with Bristol.”

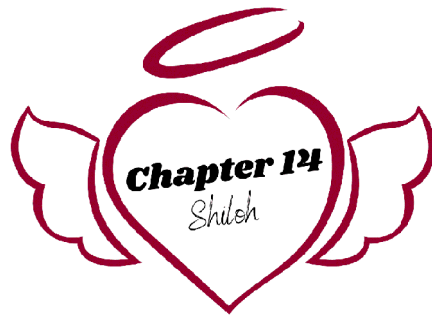
“And I have my pepper spray,” she said, holding up her key ring with a red rhinestone pepper spray canister dangling from it.

“I’d feel better if someone went with y’all,” he said sullenly.

Bristol looked back and forth between us, her brow wrinkling with concern. “If it’s really that important, I could have Waylon drop us off at the restaurant and then come pick us up when we’re ready to go.”

Cam’s shoulders relaxed as the tension seemed to ebb from his body. “Yeah, that would make me feel better,” he said with relief, his gaze burning into my own.

A very beautiful woman. A little shiver ran down my spine at the memory of him telling me that as our faces inched closer together. *Damn Bristol and her bad timing.*



TWENTY MINUTES LATER, WE were seated at La Hacienda, a Mexican restaurant not far from the DFW Security Force office.

“If you tell me you don’t drink margaritas, I’m going to unfriend you right now,” Bristol said.

I grinned at her. “I love margaritas.”

We placed our drink and food orders, and Bristol leaned over the mosaic tile table and said, “Spill it, girl.”

“What? There’s nothing to spill.”

“Oh, please,” she scoffed, rolling her eyes for good measure. “There was some serious sexual tension in the room when I so rudely interrupted. Sorry about that, by the way.”

So I didn’t just imagine it.

“That’s okay. You probably saved me,” I said with a laugh.

“Uh-huh. Because that boy looked like he was ready to bend you over something when I walked in.”

Yes, please.

God, I need help.

“Why don’t you give me the scoop on you first?”

Bristol told me how she’d lost her fiancé in an industrial fire four years ago and that she’d promised him on his deathbed to never fall in love with anyone else.

I reached across the table and took her hand as the waiter brought our drinks. “Oh, Bristol. That’s horrible. I’m so sorry.”

She took a fortifying drink of her margarita on the rocks. “Yeah, I spent three years pretty much pushing away any decent man that got near me. Until Waylon.” Her face took on that softness I was beginning to recognize whenever her giant boyfriend was discussed.

Reaching for my frozen marg, I licked the salty rim before sucking up a sip. “You’re so lucky. Waylon is a doll.”

“I’m lucky in more ways than one,” she said with an eyebrow lift and a gleam in her eyes that told me she wasn’t talking about nightly foot rubs.

“Oh, really?” I asked, leaning forward on my forearms.

“Yep. He’s blessed. And he blesses me with his blessing every night.”

I took another drink. “God, what I wouldn’t give to be blessed right now.” The throb from my earlier encounter in Cam’s office was still making itself known between my legs. I frowned down at the fishbowl containing my mixed drink, as if it was the margarita’s fault I just blurted that out. I’d only

had a couple sips. Clamping my hand over my mouth before anything else embarrassing slipped out, I stared over at Bristol, who was smirking.

“I’m sure you could, if you just said the word. Cam would have you on your back in two seconds.”

Keeping my hand firmly over my mouth, I shook my head vigorously, and my beautiful new friend laughed. “Are you sure? Cam gives off some serious BDE.”

Removing my hand, I asked, “What’s BDE?” I took another drink, enjoying the salty sweetness of the frozen beverage.

“Big Dick Energy,” Bristol stated matter-of-factly, and I snorted margarita up my nose.

When I was done coughing and spluttering, I giggled. “I can’t believe you just said that.”

She grinned. “It’s true though. He gives off a definite vibe. You can just tell with some men. The way they walk. The way they stand. It’s like they have so much to deal with in their pants, it affects every aspect of their daily life.”

“I’m so glad you invited me, Bristol. This is really fun.”

“Don’t change the subject, missy. Can you confirm or deny the BDE claim?”

“Confirm,” I all but whispered as warmth crept up my neck and across my face.

“I knew he had a big ole penis!” she exclaimed, slapping her hand on the table and earning her glares from the nicely

dressed group of women at the next table, who Bristol studiously ignored. “And look how cute you are with all that blushing. You remind me of my friend Charli. She blushes all the time, though she doesn’t get embarrassed nearly as often now that Shark has brought out her inner porn star.”

“They’re married?”

Bristol nodded. “They just got married a few months ago, and then they ended up with a baby boy as soon as they got home from their honeymoon. The baby’s parents died, so Charli and Shark are adopting him.”

My hand went automatically to my heart, trying to rub away the tightness I felt there. “That poor little boy.”

Bristol’s pretty lips turned down. “Yeah. It was a really sad situation, but Charli and Beau are awesome parents. They were going to try and adopt anyway; this just sped their timeline up a couple years. But they’re over the moon in love with little L.J.”

That alleviated some of the hurt in my chest. “I love that there are good people out there who would take a child into their home to raise and love. I’d love to meet Charli some time.”

Bristol thought for a second and then pulled out her phone, hitting the screen with her thumb before raising it to her ear. “Hey, bitch. Wanna hit the pool? Uh-huh... Yeah, I’ve got Cam’s girl with me... Jesus, stop yelling. No, it’s not Traci. This one is nice.” I was waving my hands wildly to try and tell her that I was *not* “Cam’s girl,” but she turned her head and

ignored me. “Okay,” she continued, “you call Blaire and tell her we’re invading her house... Okay... Her name is Shiloh... No... Yes... All right, see you then.”

She stuffed her phone back in her purse and grinned smugly. “We’re having a pool party.”

“A... but... I don’t even have a swimsuit, Bristol. I was supposed to be attending a conference in Houston when I got sidetracked to Dallas because of my situation. All I have is business attire.”

“Gotcha covered. We can have Tank run us by my place. I have plenty of swimsuits.” I glanced down at her boobs, which were at least a cup size bigger than mine. Bristol did the same. “I see your point, but no worries. Blaire always has extras for guests, and she’s about your size.” My breasts weren’t exactly small, but Bristol was sporting at least an ample D cup.

“I wouldn’t feel right going to someone’s house and then borrowing a swimsuit.”

Bristol flicked her hand, dismissing my worries. “Don’t even think about it. Blaire is awesome. She and her husband have more money than they know what to do with. But she’s really down to earth. You’ll like her. And Charli.”

Nerves fluttered in my stomach. I had gotten over my teenage shyness years ago, but I was still a bit of an introvert. Meeting new people, especially women who already seemed to have a strong bond, made me anxious.

I downed the rest of my margarita, and Bristol and I both ordered another one when the waiter brought our food. Forty-five minutes later, Tank was dropping us off in front of an enormous building, a stately red brick house with white columns that were as big around as my entire body.

“You girls have fun, but don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” he said, climbing back into his truck.

Bristol walked toward him, putting an extra sway in her hips, which he watched with hungry eyes. The girl knew how to work him, that was for sure. He rolled down the window, and she stepped up on the running board, leaning into the cab of the truck. “That’s not saying much, big boy.”

He grinned before grabbing the back of her head and laying a kiss on her that had *my* toes curling. “You’ll see. Later.” He gave her a dark, lusty look that told me Bristol was going to be having a *very* good night when she got home.

She was still visibly swooning when she joined me on the sidewalk. “You guys are so fucking hot together,” I said, feeling a little jealous.

Bristol sighed, happiness etched on every feature of her lovely face. “He’s just so freaking yummy.” She took my elbow. “Come on. I can’t wait for you to meet the girls. This is Blaire and Axel’s house.”

The birds were back in my stomach. Not as massive as the pterodactyls, but it was likely I had at least a couple turkey vultures in there. I hadn’t grown up with money, so walking into a house like this was intimidating to me.

When I was a kid, we were securely middle-class and comfortable. But after my father died, things changed. My mother lost her job as a hospital office worker because she simply stopped going to work. They were patient with her at first, but after a year, they'd had to let her go.

I basically took over as head of the household at that point, working at a local diner as a dishwasher and then as a waitress once I turned sixteen.

My mother and I got a small check from the government every month, but we still had to sell our cozy house and move into a cheap two-bedroom apartment. I was very good at algebra and geometry, so I'd started tutoring to make a little extra cash, and that's how I met Camden Fitz.

He was the most popular boy in school, and I was the nerdy girl with thick glasses because I could no longer afford my contact lenses. What he saw in me, I'll never know, but from our very first tutoring session, he'd made me feel like the only girl in the world.

Bristol knocked on the red front door, and I was expecting a servant of some sort to answer. Instead, the door swung open, and we were faced with an auburn-haired woman with the greenest eyes and the cutest dimples I had ever seen.

"Bris!" she cried, grabbing her around the neck and hugging her. "I haven't seen you for weeks. I was so excited when Charli called and said y'all were coming over. I've already got the blender cranked up."

“Hell yes!” Bristol pulled away and held her hand out to me. “This is Shiloh, Cam’s ‘friend.’” She did little air quotes on the last word.

The woman’s smile faded, and I noticed she was clutching a paring knife in one hand. “Are you going to molest my husband too?”

Her green eyes narrowed, and mine widened. “What? I don’t... what?” I was prepared to run. It would be hard in these heels, but I would soldier on and get the hell out of there. Because it was just my luck to escape from a mobster only to get stabbed in a fancy Dallas house a day later.

Then she laughed, those dimples deepening on either side of her mouth. “I’m fucking with you. Cam’s last girlfriend rubbed herself all over my husband at our kids’ birthday party last weekend, and I’m still a bit salty.”

“Oh my God! Are you serious? Did she just fall off the slut wagon, or what?”

Bristol burst into laughter. “Slut wagon! I’m going to add that to my insult repertoire.” Then she nudged the woman I assumed was Blaire. “She’s already had the pleasure of meeting Traci.”

“Ugh. Bless your heart.” Extending the hand not holding the knife, she said, “I’m Blaire Broxton.”

I exhaled the breath I’d been holding and shook her hand. “I thought you were going to stab me.”

“Well, I am excellent with a blade,” she said, leading us into the house. *Great. She’s beautiful and a ninja.*

“Blaire’s an orthopedic surgeon,” Bristol explained as we walked down a long corridor dividing the house in half. *Let’s add genius to the list.*

“I was cutting up oranges for the amaretto slushies I’m making. They’re Charli’s favorite.”

“Where is that skank?” Bristol asked.

“Finishing up some paperwork at the daycare. She’ll be here soon. Axel’s picking up the kids at five, so we’ll have some time to ourselves for a few hours.”

I felt awkward and out of place. Blaire was wearing an emerald-green bikini, and we’d stopped by Bristol and Tank’s apartment on the way, so she was dressed in a swimsuit with a white sundress over it. And I was standing here in my power suit and heels. Except, I didn’t feel very powerful.

Taking my arm, Blaire led me outside and to a white stone building on the other side of the pool. “The ladies’ dressing room is on the right. There are swimsuits in the chest of drawers. The ones in the top drawer should fit you.”

“Oh, that’s really not necessary.”

“Of course it is. You’ll sweat your tits off out here and probably ruin that beautiful suit you’re wearing. That’s a great color on you, by the way.”

“Thank you,” I murmured.

“Yeah, it’s hotter than Lucifer’s dick today. Didn’t anyone get the memo that it’s freaking November?” Bristol complained. She threw me a wink. “There’s no need to be shy with us, Shiloh.”

“Okay,” I said reluctantly. It was very warm today, nothing like the chilly weather I’d left behind in New York. I went into the pool house, stopping in the foyer—yes, their flippin’ pool house had a foyer—and looking around.

A gorgeous gold and cream marble table stood in the middle of the space, with a large, bright arrangement of fresh flowers on top of it. There were doors on each side, and I went through the one on the right. Except this wasn’t a normal dressing room like I’d expected. It was huge and decorated like a bedroom, minus the bed. There was a pale-gray tile floor and soft pink paint on the walls, and there were several pieces of furniture, including an armoire, a couple loungey leather chairs, and a chest of drawers.

I stepped to the latter and peered into the top drawer. There were bikinis and one-pieces in a variety of colors, all still in their plastic packaging. I pulled out a black bikini. *This will do.*

Slipping my clothes off, I hung them on the wall hooks beside another door before slipping into the swimsuit, which fit perfectly. Slowly opening the door, I peered inside to find a large bathroom in the same pink and gray color scheme, complete with a glass walk-in shower with a rainfall shower head.

Jesus, how much money do these people have? The name hit me then. Broxton. Blaire was married to Axel Broxton, who used to play football in Boston but had been traded to Fort Worth five years ago. No wonder everything was so swanky. Vincent was quite wealthy, but this was just stupid rich.

“Hi, are you Shiloh?” came a voice from behind me, and I jumped so high it would have made an NBA player jealous. Placing my hand over my rapidly beating heart, I turned to find a woman who looked like a living doll. She was tiny and blonde and stunningly sweet-looking.

“Yes. Sorry, you startled me.”

“I’m so sorry,” she said, running over to me and throwing her arms around me. “I’m Charli. Bris said you’re Cam’s girlfriend?” She released me and grinned.

Holding up both hands, I shook my head. “Oh, no. We’re just friends. I mean, we dated a very long time ago.”

“Ooooooh, you’re going to have to tell us all about that. Or has Bristol already interrogated you? I swear, I love her to death, but sometimes it’s like being pecked to death by a damn chicken.” Her voice was adorable, a soft drawl curling around her consonants.

I laughed because it was true. “I’ll just go and let you get changed,” I said, heading for the door.

“Okay, but don’t start the good gossip till I get out there.”

As soon as I got outside, a drink was pressed into my hand, and Bristol whistled loudly. “Woohoo! Look at you, hot

mama!”

We all sat on lounge chairs, and then the inquisition was on. “So, tell us all about yourself,” Blaire said.

I took a drink of the tart slushy beverage and tried to relax. These ladies had been nothing but nice since I’d arrived. “Well, I’m an optometrist, and up until Saturday, I lived in New York City. I grew up in Denton but went to SUNY College of Optometry and just stayed after graduation.”

“And you’re moving back here now?” Bristol asked. “Why?”

Charli sprinted out of the pool house, looking like a real-life Barbie in a hot pink bikini. “What did I miss?”

Pointing at me, Bristol recited, “Optometrist, grew up in Denton, lived in New York until Saturday, and she was just about to tell us why she’s here.” She thrust a drink into Charli’s hand, and they all turned to look at me.

Well, here goes. “I, um, I left to get away from my fiancé.”

“Was the bastard cheating?” Blaire asked angrily. “Let me get my knife, and we’ll hunt him down.” That made me giggle.

“Actually, yes, but that wasn’t the worst of it. I overheard a conversation he was having in the middle of the night. I thought he was a good man, but the things I heard proved me wrong. It was some bad stuff, and if he knew I heard what he said, I could be in danger.”

“Which is why the guys are helping you,” Bristol surmised, and I nodded. “Well, they’re fucking awesome at what they do, so you came to the right place.”

“Amen,” Charli cheered, raising her glass, and we all leaned toward each other and clinked before taking a sip. “Holy shit, Blaire. These drinks are AH-mazing!”

“I agree,” I said, a little relieved to have gotten some of that off my chest, even though I hadn’t given them any real details.

Everyone was silent for a moment, and then Charli tilted her head. “Did he hurt you?” she asked quietly. “Because I was in a similar situation, and you can talk to me any time, okay?”

God, she was so sweet.

“No, Vincent didn’t hurt me. He was always very gentle with me.” *Physically anyway.*

“Well, who the fuck wants that?” Bristol asked irreverently, and the others lifted their glasses again and turned their eyes on me.

“To rough and dirty,” Blaire toasted, earning her cheers from me and my beautiful new friends.

“Speaking of dirty, how did you and Cam meet?” Charli asked with a cheeky grin.

I took a sip of my drink. “Well, we met sophomore year of high school. I tutored math to earn money, and Cam’s father forced him into getting help because he was failing geometry. And it was no wonder. That fool was much more interested in girls and sports than actual classwork.”

“Sounds like Cam,” Blaire muttered.

“He was very popular, so I knew who he was, of course, but I had no clue he was even aware of my existence until he approached me after class, addressing me *by name*, and asked if he could hire me.”

“Why do you sound surprised that he noticed you? You’re gorgeous, honey,” Charli said.

“Thank you,” I said, feeling my cheeks pinken.

I liked these people. They lifted other women up, rather than put them down like the rich bitches from high school who made fun of anyone who was different. Like nerdy girls with glasses.

“Camden wasn’t stupid. At all. He simply never did his math homework, so I was pretty much a glorified babysitter. He understood most of the material, and we’d basically sit side-by-side and do our homework together. Then I would check his work, and he would turn it in the next day. He went from failing to a solid B by the end of the semester.”

“To smart girls!” Charli yelled, raising her glass again, and we all took another drink. I was going to be tipsy as hell if they kept up all this toasting.

“His father, Sean, was so impressed, he insisted I tutor Camden the next year for Algebra Two. By then, we’d started dating.”

“Back up. We want to hear that part,” Blaire said, and as I looked around at my new friends, I saw three pairs of eyes—

blue, green, and violet—gleaming with excitement. They were all so nice, and I felt myself relax even more.

I rolled my eyes. “Well, I was this nerdy girl who was extremely near-sighted, and I wore these dorky black glasses with really thick lenses, so I never thought he would be interested in someone like me.” The other women scoffed. “It started with him toying with my hair. He would just kind of absently reach over and wrap his finger up in a piece of my hair while we were studying, and I didn’t stop him.”

“Because you liked it, didn’t you, you ho?” Bristol asked, setting off a round of giggles.

These girls are funny!

“Yes, I liked it,” I admitted. “Then one night, he was playing with my hair, and he just asked me to be his girlfriend. He was staring at me with those blue eyes and... agggh!” My hand slapped over my heart, and I swooned at the mere memory of that night.

“Cam does have some panty-dropping eyes,” Bristol said, fanning her face with one hand. “So, what did you say?”

“I said yes while attempting to *not* have a heart attack, and then he said he was going to kiss me.”

Charli squealed. “I love this story! So bossy, but still sweet.”

“To sweet, bossy, alpha males,” Blaire called, and we all drank again.

Yep. I was definitely getting a little tipsy. My first thought was that Vincent wouldn't like that. He always said I got too silly when I drank. My second thought was, Fuck Vincent. I'll get drunk and silly with my friends if I want to.

Blaire stood and grabbed a pitcher of the devil juice from the fridge in the amazing outdoor kitchen and refilled everyone's cups. "What was the kiss like?"

"Awkward," I said. "At first anyway. It was my first kiss, but he was patient with me, and then it was just..." I sighed. "So dreamy. He was holding my face and just kept kissing me over and over."

"Aghhhh! I love when they hold your face," Charli said, flopping back dramatically on her lounge. "It's so hot!"

"Hear, hear!" Blaire said, instigating another drinking toast.

Charli leaned forward suddenly, her eyes wide. "Wait. If that was your first kiss... did you give up your V-card to Cam?"

Pressing my lips together to mask my smile, I nodded, prompting a round of squeals and more toasting from the girls.

"She said they were together for *three years*," Bristol informed them, lifting her eyebrows pointedly. "AND, he was being all growly and possessive with her today at the office." They all looked delighted at this news. Hell, if I told them about the things he'd said last night, they would probably do a victory dance before chugging the rest of the slushy drink directly from the pitcher.

“You should totally hit that,” Charli surprised me by saying. “Cam is hot.” The other two hummed their agreement. She wasn’t wrong.

“I’m not hitting anything. I was engaged two days ago.”

“But you’re not engaged *now*,” Blaire said reasonably. “It’s hot. Let’s get in the pool.” We followed her to the shallow end and stepped into the cool, clear water. “So do you still have feelings for Cam?”

“It’s complicated. If I’m being honest, there’s definitely still something there, but he broke my heart when he broke up with me my freshman year of college.”

“Then make sure he makes up for it. *All night long*.” Bristol tipped her almost-empty cup at me.

“On his *knees*,” Charli threw in, and I couldn’t help but laugh. Sweet Charli had a dirty little mind.

“Okay, let’s talk about something besides me and Cam.” That statement was met with boos all around.

“Get Shiloh another drink so we can turn her into the filthy little girl she so badly wants to be,” Bris said, and a minute later, all of our cups were topped off.

Desperate to get away from talk of me and Cam, I changed the subject. “Blaire, you said you have kids?”

She took a sip of her drink before smacking her lips. “Yep. Five of the little turds. Carrie will be ten next month. Rox, Dex, and Max just turned three, and baby Danica is one.”

“Wow. You do not look like you’ve had triplets, much less five children total.”

“It wasn’t without struggle,” she said. “Trying to find time to work out with my job and the kids wasn’t easy, but I started working out with Cam.”

“Yeah, he’s been teaching us martial arts stuff so we can kick everyone’s ass,” Charli said. “You should get him to work with you. Maybe he can teach you some submission holds.” She gave me a suggestive grin.

Bristol shook her head. “You are such a whore since Beau got hold of you,” she teased, sitting on one of the pool steps and stretching her long legs out in front of her.

“Guilty as charged,” she giggled.

“So, Beau is Shark, right?” I asked, making sure I had the name correct.

Blaire nodded. “Yes, and he’s my brother. Him and ho bag over here got married this year.” Charli waved cheerily in acknowledgment of her ho bagness. “They have the sweetest little baby boy in the whole world. I could just eat him up.”

“Get in line,” Charli said with a roll of her eyes. “I was going to bring him out to see y’all, but my mother snatched him before I could even get in the door.”

“Your mother?” I asked.

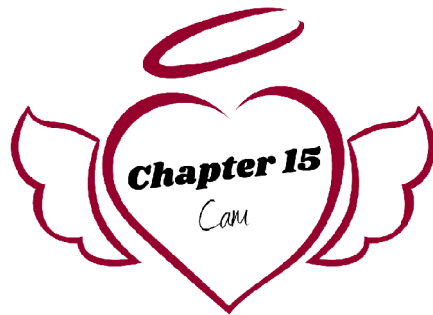
“Yeah, she’s the nanny here. I was too, for a while.”

“Until my asshole brother stole her,” Blaire said, scowling playfully at her sister-in-law. “But she did open her preschool, so she’s responsible for my heathen boys during the day. I guess I still love her.”

A quiet warmth filled my heart. These fantastic women loved each other. They teased and called each other sluts, but the affection they had for each other was obvious. And they didn’t make me feel one single bit like an outsider with them.

As the afternoon sailed on, we got tipsier and louder. And closer. The more I got to know them, the more I liked them.

It was nice having friends.



I PICKED MY PHONE up and looked at it before slamming it back down onto my desk hard enough to break it. Thank God for protective cases. I wondered if OtterBox made cases strong enough for a fully grown male to hurl it against the wall. Because that's where I was headed.

Rather than busting up a thousand-dollar phone, I picked the damn thing up and dialed the number. For the seventeenth time.

No answer. Again.

“Goddammit!”

I stalked from my office and into the one next door, my loafers slapping forcefully against the dark hardwood floor. “Have you heard from Bristol? Shiloh isn't answering her fucking phone.” Tank raised his eyes from his computer and met mine, a little smirk on his face. “Don't look at me like that. Anything could have happened!”

“The girls are fine, Mr. Overprotective,” he said in his quiet, deep voice.

Placing my hands on the surface of his walnut desk, I leaned menacingly toward him. “It’s our fucking job to be protective. And how do you know they’re fine? What if—”

“They’re at Blaire’s house.”

I suddenly felt a hundred pounds lighter. The Broxtons had an excellent security system, which Shark and I had personally designed and installed. “What are they doing at Blaire’s?”

“They are having, and I quote, ‘A Drunken Hens Gossip Session and Pool Party.’”

“Drunken hens?”

“Yep.”

My relieved body melted into the gray leather chair across from his desk. “Fuck. That sounds horrible.”

“Did you miss the part where I said it was a *pool* party?” He lifted an eyebrow. “You know what that means.”

Aha!

“Swimsuits.” We both grinned like idiots.

“I propose we go over there after work to make sure they get home safely.”

“It’s the responsible thing to do,” I agreed.

At 4:45, I realized I wasn’t getting any fucking work done, so I grabbed my keys and phone. Opening the door to my office, I ran directly into Tank, the big bastard.

“Hey, I’m going to go ahead...”

“Yeah, me too,” he said. “I’ll be right behind you. I have to stop at the store for, uh, something.” His cheeks turned bright red.

“For what?” I asked, amused and curious as to what was causing his face to blush so furiously.

He sighed. “Whipped cream in the spray can.” His lips pressed together but curled up slightly at the edges. “Bris likes to have *dessert* when she gets drunk.”

Shit. I wanted to tell him to get me a can too, until I remembered that no one was having me for dessert tonight.

“All right. I’ll see you over there.”

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up in front of the Broxton residence and jogged up the path. I was met at the door by Axel, who grinned at me. “Hey, dude. Come on in.”

The interior of the house was eerily quiet. “What have you done with the children? Dropped them off at a fire station or something?”

He cut his tired eyes toward me. “Don’t fucking tempt me. The boys are all in time-out because they got in a big brawl at preschool today. I’m surprised Charli hasn’t kicked them out. Dani and L.J. are upstairs with Ms. Casper, and Carrie is at basketball practice.”

I had forgotten that Carrie was playing in a Young Ballers league now. “How’s that going?”

Ax grinned proudly. “She’s the tallest and best one on the team. My superior athletic genes have been passed down to

my daughter.”

“Send me the schedule. I want to come to her games.”

“Will do.” He elbowed me. “Hey, I met your girl. I like her.”

“Oh. That’s good, but she’s not my girl.” *Why does everyone keep saying that?*

“M’kay, whatever you say,” he said, not bothering to hide his mischievous smile.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

He chuckled. “The girls were serenading her with a very off-key version of “Jessie’s Girl” when I got here. Only they were substituting your name for the illustrious Jessie.”

I closed my eyes for a long second. “Jesus. How bad is it?”

“See for yourself,” he said, gesturing toward the back of the house with one long arm. “I’m going upstairs to check on my spawn, which I’m sure will be infinitely easier than dealing with those drunk asses.”

“Great,” I said, already on my way to the pool area, which was like a freaking resort. Pushing open the French door, I stood on the covered patio and took in the scene.

Charli was sitting on the edge of the pool, calling out times as she looked between her phone and the other women in the pool, obviously using the timer app. “Five minutes and fifty seconds!”

Bristol was floating on her back in the pool, and Blaire and Shiloh were right beside her, loudly counting down from ten.

When they hit zero, Bris let her feet sink down into the crystal-clear water.

“You did it,” Shy shouted. “You floated for six fucking minutes!” Then she held both forefingers up in front of her and wiggled them before poking Bristol straight in the tits. “I knew you could do it with these flotation devices on your chest.”

Oh, my shit! Did she just...

Bristol swatted her fingers away. “Stop it, you handsy bitch.”

“You do have nice boobies,” Blaire said, her head bobbing up and down about thirty times.

Shiloh stretched her black bikini top—*have mercy, she looked good in it too*—out and peered down into it. “My boobs suck. I would probably sink like a stone without puffy boobalies like yours, Brissy Pie.”

Boobalies? Brissy Pie? These ladies were lit up like a Christmas tree, and I wondered just how much they’d had to drink at this Hen House Titty Party, or whatever they called it.

“Shut your whore mouth!” Bristol exclaimed, and I covered my mouth and nose to cover my snort. “Your tits are fantastical, Shy. Just look at them.” She grabbed a handful and squeezed, and I’d be a damned liar if I said I didn’t get a little chub from that. And she wasn’t wrong. Shiloh did have fantastical, er, *fantastic* tits.

Abandoning her phone, Charli hopped back in the pool and waded over to the other girls. “You know what we need,

girlies?”

“Guacamole!” They all yelled simultaneously and then screamed with laughter, falling all over one another in the pool.

Jesus.

I observed from the shadowy patio for a few more minutes as they giggled and teased, my heart swelling to twice its regular size as I watched Shiloh cut loose and have fun with these women. This was the first time I’d seen her truly relaxed since she’d arrived in Texas, and I realized how much stress she must be under. I wanted to hug each of the girls and thank them for bringing her into their tight-knit group.

Blaire noticed me then and shouted, “Cam’s here!”

They all called out to me enthusiastically. Except for Shiloh. She dipped her chin shyly and bit down enticingly on the tip of her forefinger, her eyes roving over me in a look that turned my chub much chubbier.

Aw, hell. Give me strength.

I lifted my hand, crooking a single finger at her twice, and her pretty brown eyes widened, as if to ask, “Who? Me?”

Yes, baby. You. All day, every day.

She waded to the steps amid a stream of titters and *oooohs* from the other girls. But all that faded away in my mind as she lifted her foot to the short, wide stairs, her body rising up out of the water for my viewing pleasure.

One step. Her flat stomach.

Two steps. Her curvy hips.

Three steps. Her toned thighs.

And then she was out of the pool, one knee crossing demurely over the other as she paused. I arched an eyebrow at her. *What the fuck are you standing way over there for? Didn't I tell you to come to me?*

She read my expression perfectly, her feet starting to move as if I had given her a verbal command. It turned me the fuck on. As did the gentle sway of her hips as she strolled slowly toward me. *Christ. Had Bristol given her walking lessons or something? Because she was owning that fucking walk.*

Stopping directly in front of me, she lifted her face so she could look up at me. "Hi, Cam."

Cam. Not Camden.

Fuck.

I allowed my eyes to do a slow once-over. Hair slicked back and darker than usual from the water. Tiny clear droplets sliding down her chest and over the swells of her breasts. Nipples so hard I was surprised they didn't cut two holes in the fabric of her black swim top. And a tiny scrap of fabric covering what I remembered as the sweetest-tasting cunt I've ever had the pleasure of having my tongue in.

She's drunk, dude. There will be no cunt tasting tonight!

Say something... I don't know... neutral.

“Are you drunk, Shy?”

She rolled her eyes up and to the right. “Uhhhh, let’s call it tipsified.” I held back a snicker. Shiloh apparently liked to make up her own words when she got drunk. Her warm eyes jerked back to mine, a sheen of nervousness clouding their depths. “Wait. Are you mad at me?”

Reaching up to smooth away the small furrow between her eyebrows, I let my thumb drift down her nose and over her full lips as my fingers rested softly on her cheek. “No, angel. Why would I be mad at you?”

“Vincent didn’t like me to drink. He said it wasn’t ladylike. He yelled sometimes.”

The fucker had yelled at her? I was pretty sure a roundhouse kick to the throat would ensure he never fucking did that again.

“Well, *Vincent*,” I literally sneered, “is a goddamn idiot. Because you and your drunk ass new friends are perfect, beautiful *ladies* who know how to have fun.”

The genuine smile on her face lit up my world. “The girls are so awesome, Cam. They were so nice to me.” That second sentence almost broke me. Shiloh hadn’t had many female friends in high school. Only jealous bitches that tended to bully her. But I put a stop to that crap when we’d started dating with threats of exposing shit about the mean girls that they *really* didn’t want exposed.

Most of the ugly comments were about her thick glasses, which I'd known she was self-conscious about. I didn't give a damn about that. I thought she was cute as hell in those black frames. Kinda like a sexy, innocent librarian.

I let my hand slide down to rest gently on the side of her neck, my thumb swiping away a couple droplets of water pooling in the hollow of her throat. "I'm glad. They're great women."

"They are, and they gave me lots of drinkies." She did her cute little head tilt. "Did you come to pick me up, Cam?"

Again with the 'Cam.'

"Yes, but no rush. I can go inside and hang with Axel for a while."

She giggled. "I think I've had enough fun for one day. Let me go say bye and get dressed."

Yes, please get dressed before I embarrass myself. I had seen Shy mostly naked last night, but there was just something about teeny scraps of fabric covering the best parts that was so enticing. Like a beguiling tease for the eyes, making me want to ease that fabric away and discover what's underneath.

With my mouth.

Christ.

Shiloh pinched my cheek and called me a "cutie pie" before swiveling away from me, allowing me a view of her very fine backside, which was barely covered. Her swimsuit was a bit

cheeky. *How was a man even supposed to survive this kind of temptation?*

So focused was I on Shiloh, I hadn't even noticed that the other girls had gotten out of the pool, and they crowded around and hugged her when she approached. Then there was more raucous laughter.

"Guess our workout is canceled," Shark said, exiting the house and sidling up beside me, his eyes on his wife.

"Looks like it. They're pretty tipsified."

A wicked smile curved his lips. "I'm taking my wife and baby home," he said before striding purposefully to Charli and tossing her over his shoulder.

"Ooh, baby!" she cooed before lifting her head and yelling, "Guacamole!" at the other women with her fist raised in the air. The women returned the salute and the "Guacamole" cheer. Whatever the fuck that meant.

Shark smacked her firmly on the ass. "Hush up, woman. We don't want to wake up L.J. I need him to sleep at least two hours while I ravage his mommy."

He carried her toward the house, and she grinned goofily at me as she hung over his shoulder. "I'm gonna get ravaged, Cam!"

I laughed. "That's excellent, Char." Then I called out, "Good luck, Shark!"

"Gonna fucking need it," he called back without breaking stride.

I settled into one of the blue cushioned patio chairs to wait for Shiloh. Hearing the door open a few minutes later, I turned to find Tank coming out onto the flagstone.

“Good Lord,” he said, eyeing Blaire, Bristol, and Shiloh who were now doing the twist. With no music. “They’re sloshed.”

“Totally.”

“I just passed Char and Shark. She was playing the bongos on his ass.”

That made me laugh. “He’s got his hands full with that one.”

“Waylon!” I turned to find Bris dashing toward us. Tank stepped forward and caught her as her legs wrapped around his waist. “Hi, boo.”

“Hello, gorgeous,” he said, his giant hands holding her up by the ass.

“Get you some, girl!” Blaire called, and Bris threw her a wink over her shoulder before sucking loudly on Tank’s lips. They made out with little moans and groans thrown in to torture me before thankfully coming out of their lip lock.

“I have something for you, baby,” Tank said.

“Is it your big, giant cock?” she purred.

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

Tank chuckled. “It goes *on* my big, giant cock.”

Bristol looked excited about all this cock talk. “Is it another dick hat? Like the little safari one—”

Shooting a panicked look my way, Tank pressed a hand over his woman’s big mouth. “Shhh, babe. That’s our little secret, remember?”

A safari dick hat? Oh, this is fucking priceless. I pulled out my phone and sent a text in the group thread.

Cam: Hey, guys. Did you know Tank lets Bris dress up his cock with hats and shit?

Tank paused to check his phone on his way into the house and groaned when the message appeared on his screen. “You’re gonna pay for that, Fitz.” Then he was distracted by Bristol doing an excellent impression of a hungry leech on his neck, so he just flipped me off and carried his girl inside and probably straight out the front to his truck.

I glanced down at the messages that were already popping up on my phone. My friends never disappointed.

Hawk: Seriously? WTF, dude?

Woody: This is the best day of my life.

Bode: Maybe we could buy his penis a little bonnet or something for his birthday.

Woody: Yeah, a pink one. Oh, his Gram could knit one for the little guy!

Bode: And a bow tie for special occasions.

Woody: Like if he and Bris get married. He'll definitely want his cock to be fancy on his wedding day.

Bode: *Shopping for penis top hats*

My work here is done. I mentally dusted off my hands and grinned to myself as I put my phone back in my pocket. Bode and Woody could go on like this for days, maybe even weeks. They were an endless source of entertainment once you got them going.

My eyes automatically found Shiloh again. I saw her give Blaire one last hug before turning toward the pool house, and then Blaire headed my way.

“I loooooove her, Cam! Love her!” she gushed, sitting across my lap and leaving a wet ass print on my thigh. “Can I keep her? Huh? Pretty please?”

I laughed. “You’ll have to ask Daddy Axel if it’s okay.”

“Ooh, he loves when I call him Daddy.”

“Yeah, I really didn’t need to know that, Blaire,” I said, wrinkling my nose up.

Her tipsy, happy face turned serious as she laid her hand on my face. “Don’t hurt her again, Cam.”

Ouch. “We’re just friends, Blaire. She needed help, so I’m helping her.”

“So, you don’t want to do the boinky dance with her?”

My entire body shook with laughter. “I don’t know what the fuck that is, sweetheart.”

“You know,” she said, pushing herself to her feet and then doing some kind of strange hip thrusting thing.

Axel poked his head out the door and stared at his wife for a minute. “Mouse hunt in ten minutes, Bear,” he announced before closing the door.

Blaire’s face lit up. “I’ll be right back. I’m getting Shiloh some clothes because she said all she brought in her suitcase was business attire. Then I have to go catch a mouse.” She did an eyebrow wiggle and grinned like a lunatic before heading inside. A couple minutes later, she returned with a stack of jeans, shorts, and T-shirts. There was a pair of Nike tennis shoes on top.

“Why don’t you take these to her, so she doesn’t have to wear her suit home? And uh, y’all can just let yourselves out, okay?”

“Okay, B. Happy hunting?”

I could still hear her laughter ringing through the door as I stood with the stack of clothes and walked toward the pool

house. I knocked on the door to the women's dressing room but didn't get a reply.

Shit. What if her drunk ass fell down?

I pushed the door open a crack and called, "Shiloh? You okay, honey?" The door to the bathroom opened, and she walked out wearing nothing but a soft pink towel. My mouth went as dry as the Sahara. "Uhhhh, Blaire sent some clothes." I lifted the stack to prove my point.

"Oh, thanks Cam."

I placed the clothes on top of a dresser and ambled over to her. "Why are you calling me Cam?"

She frowned and blinked up at me. "I thought that's what your name was now. Everyone calls you that." I took a step closer, feeling the warmth from her skin radiating through the towel. Her eyes widened as she dipped her chin a bit. "Are you mad?"

"No, baby. I'm not mad. It's just..." My eyes fixated on a framed beachscape on the wall behind her.

"What?"

I lowered my mouth to her ear. "It makes my dick hard when you call me Cam."

I reveled in the pointed gasp that left her mouth. "Why?" she whispered.

"Because you've always called me Camden." I allowed my lips to brush briefly across the shell of her ear. "Except when

you were stuffed full of my cock, and that sweet pussy of yours was coming all over me. That's the only time you called me Cam. So it gives me a big fucking hard on when you say it, sweetheart."

"Oh," she said breathlessly. "You want me to switch back to Camden?"

"No."

She pulled her head back in surprise. "You want me to keep calling you Cam?" I nodded. I was apparently a masochist now. Who knew? "So, you want to walk around with a bony bone in your pants all the time?"

"It seems so," I said, my mouth twisting in a wry grin.

"Okay. Cam." Her eyes slid downward to the crotch of my pants, and the showoff hidden there decided to put on a show for her, jerking hard one time. "He remembers me!" she said, her voice edged with something akin to awe.

Jesus have mercy, Shiloh is looking at my dick like it's the eighth wonder of the world. It took powers I didn't even know I possessed to restrain me from bending her over one of those lounge chairs and showing her exactly what the fuck he remembered. What *I* remembered.

Instead, I took a step back as I pressed my thumb under her chin to lift her gaze away from my goddamn cock, who was trying his best to escape his zippered confines. "I'll let you get dressed." *Unless you need some help.* "I'll wait right outside for you, angel."

Her pretty cheeks flushed as she looked up at me from underneath long lashes. “I like when you call me angel. I was thinking about that earlier, and it reminded me of stuff.”

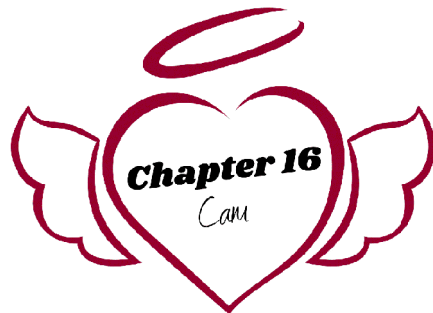
“What stuff?” I asked, unsure if I really wanted to hear the answer.

Those white teeth sunk into her plump bottom lip as her blush deepened. “I can’t tell you.” Then she lowered her voice to a drunken whisper. “It’s naughty.”

My penis did a twitchy little happy dance even as alarm bells went off inside my head.

WARNING! End of self-control approaching! Evacuate the premises!

Shit.



I MANAGED TO GET Shiloh, who had dressed in an aqua T-shirt and black shorts, into my truck and buckled safely in. A couple minutes later, she started squirming around, pulling her arms inside her shirt.

“What’s wrong, Shy?”

“This damn bra is getting on my nerves,” she fussed as she did that magical thing women do where they remove their bra without taking off their shirt. She pulled it out and tossed it on the floorboard before relaxing and letting out a little *ahhh* noise.

The bra was a deep matte red with some kind of pretty swirly pattern in a shinier material. It was gorgeous, just like the woman who had been wearing it, and I had to force myself to keep my eyes on the road. *I wonder if her panties match it?*

Cut it out, Cam. Jesus.

I pulled into our gravel driveway and hopped out to go around and open Shiloh’s door for her. As she stepped out, I

noticed her wince and looked down to see that she was barefoot on the gravel.

“Maybe I should put Blaire’s sneakers on,” she said, but I already had her scooped up in my arms. She let out a little squeak and then giggled. The clothes and shoes were bundled in her arms, but she pointed back inside the vehicle. “Can you get my bra, pretty please?”

Sure. Touching something that’s had the honor of being pressed to your tits is exactly what I need right now, I thought. “Of course,” I said instead, hooking the sexy garment on my forearm. Kicking the door closed, I carried her easily to the walkway leading to our house.

Shiloh leaned her head over onto my shoulder, and I could feel her soft breaths even through the fabric of my shirt. I might never wash this shirt again.

“Remember when I twisted my ankle, and you carried me all the way through the woods?”

Looking down at her, I was immersed in the memories. I had taken Shiloh on a picnic in a clearing at a friend’s farm outside the city. We had traipsed over a mile through the woods to get to the magical clearing surrounded by oak and pine trees.

After a meal of ham sandwiches, chips, and a bottle of wine I had stolen from my dad’s stash, we laid on a blanket for hours, talking and kissing. And kissing. And kissing some more. Then I’d taken her pretty little face in my hands and told her I wanted us to be together forever. And wonder of

wonders, she'd said she wanted the same thing. That made me the happiest fucker in the world. Until Shiloh snagged her foot on an exposed tree root and wrenched her ankle on the way back to my truck.

I had scooped her up in my arms and carried her back to my truck. *"It's okay, Camden. This was still the most romantic and special day of my life,"* she'd told me, her hand on my young face. She was always so sweet and gentle.

"I remember," I said, my voice sounding gruffer than usual. "You're still light as a feather, Shy girl."

She let out a cute laugh that made me smile. "I don't know about all that." Her hands ran down my shoulders to my biceps, which she squeezed. I resisted the urge to flex for her.

Twisting the doorknob, I was glad to find it unlocked so I didn't have an excuse to put her down. Hawk looked up from his position in the recliner, his eyes going from the woman in my arms and then back to my face. He quirked one black eyebrow at me.

"Helloooo, Hawk!" Shiloh chirped, and his other eyebrow lifted to match the first one.

"Hi, Shiloh. Did you, by chance, have some adult beverages today?"

"Had some drinky drinks with the girls," she said, bobbing her head up and down.

His intense stare locked onto me. A warning.

“I’m just gonna get her to her room,” I said, pulling my eyes away from his and carrying Shy down the hallway. I placed her gently on the bed and said, “I’m going to make you something to eat, because you probably need something in your stomach, okay?”

“Guacamole?” she asked with a huge smile.

I couldn’t help my answering grin. “No, I don’t think we have any of that.” I remembered the girls yelling the word several times in the pool earlier. “What’s the deal with guacamole? Is that what y’all had for a snack today?”

Her face flushed, and she looked away before cutting her eyes back at me. “No, but I’d like some.” She pressed her lips together, fighting a smile as she leaned forward and said in a low voice, “You know when you’re eating guacamole, and you can’t eat just one bite cuz it’s so good?”

“Um, yeah.”

“And you want more and more and more?” I nodded, and a little giggle escaped her lips. “Well, the girls were saying that really, *really* good dick is like that because you just can’t get enough of it.”

After almost swallowing my tongue when she said, “dick,” I clamped my lips shut to keep from asking her the question I was dying to know.

“They said Tank, Axel, and Shark all have guacamole dicks.”

My hand reached up and slid a stray piece of hair behind her ear just before my traitorous mouth asked, “And have you ever experienced a guacamole dick?”

Dammit, Fitz. Shut the hell up.

As I moved my hand away, she snagged my wrist and pressed a wet kiss against my palm as her eyes connected to my own. “I think we both know the answer to that.”

Sweet Jesus.

Letting my fingers drag across her soft cheek, I pulled my hand back and stood, turning my back and adjusting my struggling cock.

“I’m gonna make you a sandwich.” The strain in my voice was evident.

“Okay, Cam.”

I grabbed my folded shirt from the pink chair where she’d obviously left it this morning. “You want to put this on while I’m gone?”

She pursed her lips in an attempt to look serious. “I thought you said I had to, Mr. Bossy Man. Otherwise you’re gonna spank my pretty little ass. Isn’t that what you said last night?” Lowering her voice to what I assumed was supposed to be an approximation of my own, she said, “I catch you wearing anything but my shirt to bed, I’ll paint this pretty little ass bright red.”

She blinked guilelessly up at me. *God, she’s adorable.*

I sighed. “Okay, Shy. Just put the shirt on by the time I get back with your sandwich.”

She started pulling Blaire’s shirt off over her head, so I quickly turned and left the room, closing the door firmly behind me. *Please God, let her have a shirt on when I get back.*

I pulled out bread, peanut butter, and jelly and was starting on her sandwich when Hawk walked into the kitchen. Avoiding his gaze, which was palpable against the side of my face, I asked, “You want a sandwich?”

“No.” There was a long pause. “She’s drunk?”

“As a skunk,” I affirmed, smearing crunchy peanut butter on a slice of bread. *I hope crunchy is still her favorite.*

“Cam.”

I knew what he was saying without another word and finally looked at him. His arms were crossed over his chest, and his jaw muscles looked ready to snap. Hawk didn’t have many boundaries, but taking advantage of a woman was one of them.

“I know, Hawk. I’m not going to do anything. You know me better than that. Hell, I won’t even hook up with a girl if she’s too tipsy. What makes you think I would do that to someone I... know?” I wasn’t sure what I was about to say there, but it wasn’t ‘know.’ Hence the pause.

“All right,” he said reluctantly. “Just making sure because... she’s different. And you’re different around her. I know there’s

history there, and I don't want you to do something you'd both regret."

"I'm not an idiot," I mumbled, turning my attention back to the sandwich.

"No, but she's a weak spot for you." Hawk didn't miss a thing. Probably because he was generally so quiet, just listening and watching. Patting me on the shoulder, he said, "Sorry if I offended you, brother, but you walked in here with a very drunk ex-girlfriend hugged against your chest and her bra hanging off your arm. And you were smiling like a loon."

Jesus, I'd been trying to keep my feelings for Shiloh on the down low, but apparently I sucked miserably at that. I was finding it difficult to control my reactions around her.

"I appreciate it. I know your heart's in the right place."

He chuckled. "I don't have a heart, remember?"

"Well, whatever the fuck that gnarled up, little black organ is in your chest." Putting some salty chips beside the sandwich, I lifted the plate. "Going to try and get some food in her. She's been drinking all afternoon with Blaire, Bris, and Char."

"Good Lord. That's quite a crew." He grabbed a beer from the fridge, offering one to me, but I declined. "All good girls though. They get along with Shiloh?"

"Yep. She fit right in with them."

Hawk nodded. "If she has friends here, she's more likely to stay." I just stared at him, and he lifted his beer to his lips and

took a long pull, his watchful eyes never leaving mine.

I couldn't describe the feeling in my chest at those words. It felt looser and tighter at the same time. "She'll never take me back. I fucked up too badly back then."

He tilted his head from side to side. "There's something there. I've watched her eyes, and you're the one they go to when she needs something. Comfort, reassurance, whatever."

I felt like my head was about to explode. *Could Shiloh still want me? Does she have feelings at all for me? Or is it that I'm the only one she really knows, and that's why she looks to me?*

"She might trust me with her protection, but she'd never trust me with her heart again." My own heart sank at that realization.

Hawk's mouth twitched. "I wouldn't know, since I don't have one." And with that, he walked out of the kitchen.

I pushed the entire conversation from my mind. I needed to focus on taking care of Shiloh. Carrying the plate and a can of Dr Pepper down the hall, I knocked on the door to her room.

"Come in," she sang.

I opened the door and peeked inside to make sure she was dressed. I was relieved to see her sitting up on the bed with my T-shirt on and the covers pulled up to her lap. But I was the opposite of relieved when I saw her shorts on the floor at the end of the bed. *Fuck.*

"Got you a PB and J."

“Crunchy peanut butter?” she asked, her face brightening.

“Is there another kind?”

I set the food on her lap and the drink on the nightstand, and she pushed her hair behind her ears. “Thank you, Cam.”

“No prob. I’ll come check on you again in a little while.” I started to climb off the bed.

“You’re not staying to talk to me while I eat?” Her soft brown eyes held a suggestion of hurt. *God, she melted my soul with those fucking eyes.*

“I can, if you want me to,” I heard myself saying, and she nodded. Kicking off my shoes, I propped myself against the headboard beside her with a safe space between us. And with me sitting *on top* of the covers.

“Do the Broxton’s have a rodent problem?”

Taken aback by the question, I laughed. “Not that I know of. Why?”

“Blair said she hoped that Axel wanted to hunt mice when he got home. All the girls laughed, but I wasn’t sure why. I didn’t ask because I didn’t want to sound stupid.”

I shook my head mirthfully. “That’s something they’ve come up with to get time alone. They tell the kids that there’s a mouse loose in the master closet and they should go to their rooms. Then they can go in there and, uh...”

“Fuck?” Shiloh supplied, and my cock, which had finally calmed down, woke back up, looking around for the source of

his favorite word.

“Yeah. Fuck. Apparently catching a mouse explains any smacking and banging noises the kids may overhear.”

Shy let out a little giggle. “That’s funny,” she said, grabbing a chip and holding it up to my mouth. I ate it, nipping the tip of her finger in the process. “Owie!”

“Sorry,” I said, grabbing her hand and kissing the offended digit. I released her hand, but she kept her finger on my lips, tracing them softly as our eyes met. *She is so fucking pretty.*

Knowing this was going somewhere I didn’t need it to go, I broke the moment, tugging my reluctant eyes away and picking up a thin, crispy chip. “Finish eating, sweetheart.” I held the chip up, and she took it in her mouth, giving my finger a retaliatory bite. She grinned and then licked the end of my forefinger.

“Mmmm, salty.”

Have mercy! Stay strong, Cam.

You’re a rock.

You’re an oak.

You’re a fucking horny bastard.

Christ.

“The salt will help absorb the alcohol. What were you girls drinking today anyway?”

“Amaretto slushies,” she said, reaching over to take a drink of her soda and smacking her lips. “I’ve missed Dr Pepper

while I was in New York.”

“Then you’ll just have to stay here in Texas where the nectar of the gods is plentiful,” I teased, but her face turned somber.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do, Cam. I don’t have a home in New York anymore, but I don’t have anything here either.”

“You have me,” I said before I could stop myself.

A single tear made a trail down her face, and I traced its path with my finger.

“*Do* I have you?” The tears in her eyes made the tiny gold flecks glisten against the chocolate brown of her irises.

“If you want me,” I said immediately, knowing I should ‘shut my whore mouth,’ as Bristol would say. This was a conversation we should have while we’re both in our right minds. The food had helped clear her head a bit, but I wanted her absolutely stone-cold sober when I told her how I was feeling.

I had been twisted up for so long without even realizing it, but I could feel myself starting to slowly unravel the more time I spent with her. It had only been a couple days, but from the moment I saw her in that airport, it was like a fog had lifted.

There was definitely sexual attraction, which was unfucking-deniable, but it was about more than that. It was *her*.

And *us*. And the feelings I had with her that I hadn't experienced with any other woman. Ever.

I wanted another chance.

Tugging my gaze away from hers, I looked down at her plate, which was almost empty. "Maybe we should table this discussion for now. Let's talk about something else."

"Okay, what?"

I racked my brain for a safe subject. "Um, what do you want to do tomorrow? You can come to the office with me if you want. It'll be boring, but we can go to lunch together."

Shiloh set her plate on the nightstand and took another sip of her drink. "I can't tomorrow. I have a doctor's appointment. Blaire made it with... a colleague of hers."

I felt my breathing pick up with worry. "What's wrong, Shy?"

"Nothing," she said, staring down at her fingers, which were toying with a pink flower on the bedspread. "Just a checkup."

"What time and where?"

"It's at one o'clock. At the medical plaza beside Blaire's hospital."

She still wasn't looking at me, and my concern ramped up about forty notches. "Good. That's not far. I'll pick you up at 12:30."

Her eyes jerked to mine. "What? No! I mean, that's not necessary. I'll catch an Uber."

Hmmm. That seemed to make her nervous, making me even more curious about where she was going.

“You said Vincent has access to your bank account. He may be monitoring your Uber account as well. He’ll see that you’re in Dallas and not Houston.”

Two little wrinkles appeared between her eyebrows. “I didn’t think about that.”

“So, no Ubers. I’ll pick you up, and after that, you can drive my Jeep during the day, if you need to go somewhere. I can just ride with Hawk to work.” Then I fixed her with a mock glare. “But no drinky drinks with the girls if you’re driving. You call me, and I’ll come get you.”

She gave me a sharp salute. “Aye aye, captain. And I wouldn’t drink and drive anyway. I’m not a doofus.”

I twisted my lips. “You’re a little bit of a doofus.”

“Am not!” she exclaimed, smacking me on the chest.

“You think that hurt me, little girl?”

She hit me again, this time a bit harder. I yawned in mock boredom, earning me a scowl.

“The girls said you could teach me to fight.”

“You need it with those weak-ass slaps.”

Her eyes widened comically. “You ass!” she said, tossing one arm wildly out to the side and knocking over her half-empty can of soda. “Oh, shit! Sorry!” she cried as I pulled my

shirt off and soaked up the sticky drink before it could spread to the rug.

“It’s all right. I’ll get a towel,” I said, heading to the bathroom and wetting a hand towel. When I came back, Shiloh was on her knees on the floor, and just as I’d suspected, she was wearing red panties that perfectly matched her bra.

Fuck me sideways.

“Hand it to me. It’s my mess,” she said, and I tossed her the towel, attempting to keep my eyes from her ass, which swayed gently as she scrubbed. “There. All good,” she said, carrying the wet items to the bathroom. “The girls said you know how to do submission holds?” she asked over her shoulder.

You better believe it, baby.

“Uh-huh.”

“Good, get on the bed, and I’m going to submit you, and you tell me if I’m doing it right.” I heard water running, and then she walked back out, looking like a dream girl in my T-shirt and her panties.

“I don’t think ‘submit’ is a word,” I said, forcing my eyes to stay on her face.

She put on her sternest look, which really was quite adorable. “Just do it, Cam.”

“Okay, okay. And you call me bossy,” I teased, laying back on the bed.

“And put your hands over your head.”

“You really think if someone is attacking you, they’re going to listen to your instructions? If you want my hands over my head, you’re going to have to put ’em there yourself, angel.”

With narrowed eyes, she stalked to the bed and climbed on. And straddled me. *Dear God in Heaven. This is a bad idea.*

She was able to easily get my hands over my head because my arms were currently wet noodles. All I could focus on was her warm pussy against my bare stomach. Clasp her hands around my wrists, unable to even get them all the way around, she said, “I’m good at this, huh?”

“Excellent,” I croaked.

“I could pretty much do anything to you right now.”

“I’m at your mercy,” I half-lied. My arms could have easily broken free of her grasp, but that didn’t mean I wasn’t totally at her mercy.

She smiled at that. “I’m glad, because I want to do this.” She leaned forward and pressed her soft, pink lips to mine as her ass slid back a few inches, putting her soaked center right on top of my dick. That joker was thrilled with the situation.

“Shiloh,” I groaned.

“What?” she asked, gracing me with another feather-light brush of her lips.

“We can’t, baby.”

“Why not?”

That's a good question, my penis practically screamed at me.

Shiloh rubbed her nose against mine and gave me a series of slow, tender pecks as I closed my eyes and counted to ten. It didn't work. I could have counted to a fucking trillion, and the feel of her on top of me would have still tempted me.

I had to do something.

Let me handle this, buddy. I know exactly what to do, the horny bastard in my pants told me, jerking in response to the heat of her pussy seeping through our layers of clothing.

“Why not?” the gorgeous woman on top of me asked again.

Do. Something.

I flipped her over without any physical effort whatsoever on my part, my hands locking her wrists over her head.

“Because you suck at submission holds,” I told her with a big grin.

“You tricked me! You're a... a... submissive hustler!”

God, she's fucking hilarious when she's drunk.

“Maybe I am,” I said, and then she wrapped her legs around my thighs.

Uh-oh. This did not have the desired effect. The state of affairs has absolutely not improved.

Releasing her arms with a Herculean effort, I slid off her and laid on my side facing her, my hand smoothing a piece of hair away from her pink cheek.

“You don’t want me,” she accused.

“I do want you, but not like this, honey,” I said gently.

Those two shallow lines made another appearance between her eyes. “Then how?” The little wrinkles disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. “You want me on my hands and knees?” she asked eagerly.

Fuck. Yes.

“No, Shy. I want you sober.” She opened her mouth to protest, but I stopped her. “You’re not, baby, and I won’t take advantage of you like that.”

And that’s exactly what it would be if I let myself fall down this rabbit hole of desire. If you’re in a committed relationship like my friends, it’s okay to take your woman home for a little bit of tipsy fun between the sheets. But someone you haven’t been with for years? *Not okay.*

“Cam, I’m so... I need...” Her chest heaved, her nipples hardening into points I could see through her shirt as her eyes begged me. I knew exactly what she needed. I just couldn’t give it to her.

One of her delicate hands slid down her body to cup herself over those beautiful panties, and I almost exploded. “I’ll give you some privacy,” I said in a near-whisper, pushing up onto my elbow.

Her other hand slid around my neck, her pleading eyes glued to mine. “Stay.”

Aw hell.

My lips were literally incapable of forming a single syllable, so I nodded. Glancing down, I saw her hand slide into the top of her panties, and I jerked my eyes away. *You should not be watching this.*

Looking instead at her face, I saw the instant she touched herself, those brown eyes drifting shut and her lips parting on a sigh. “Cam, talk me through it.”

Christ.

Cupping the back of her head, I rested my other hand on the face that never failed to take my breath away. “Look at me, Shy.” Her heavy lids lifted as I hovered over her. “Circle your clit with your finger. Don’t touch it. Just tease it a little.”

“Yes.” Our eyes were locked together so hard, I was positive nothing could break the trance we were in.

“Good girl. Now slide your finger down to that pretty little hole of yours. Are you wet?”

“Very.”

I suppressed a groan. “Slide your finger inside your wet pussy and tell me how it feels.”

“Hot. Tight.”

Good God.

“Add another finger, Shiloh.” I heard her gasp and knew she had complied. “Put your thumb on your clit now, angel. I want you to work it while you fuck yourself on your fingers.”

Though I kept my gaze firmly on her face, I could tell her hand was starting to move. I could fucking *hear* it.

“Oh. God. Cam.”

“That’s it, sweet angel. You’re so fucking beautiful.” My thumb traced the apple curve of her cheek, and she leaned into my touch, her eyes closing dreamily for a brief moment before meeting mine again.

Her hand began to move faster, and every muscle below my waist clenched tightly as the sound of her arousal met my ears. *God, she is so fucking wet.* When the warm, enticing scent of her sex reached my nose, it was almost more than I could bear.

“Cam...” She abandoned my gaze when her head pressed back against my hand and her eyes rolled back in her head. She was close. Her panting breaths and moans began to rise, and I knew that the sounds were getting dangerously louder. Any minute now, Hawk was going to bust through the door and throw me out the fucking window.

So, I did the only thing I could do to quieten her. I closed my mouth over hers, feeling her surprised exhale against the back of my throat. Then our tongues were moving. Pressing. Searching.

As I curled my tongue around hers, I could taste sweet amaretto and Shiloh, the most intoxicating thing I’d ever tasted in my life. This kiss was pulling things from me... from deep inside me... that I never thought I would feel again.

Her body stiffened as she started to come, and I kissed her harder, swallowing each seductive noise from her lips. She shook with the strength of her orgasm, and I stroked my fingers tenderly over her cheek, forcing my mouth to gentle on hers.

We kissed for a long time, slow, sweet strokes of tongues and lips, until her body settled. Resting my forehead against hers, I closed my eyes, reveling in the fact that Shiloh was in my arms. “Do you have any idea how goddamn breathtaking that was to see?” I whispered.

I felt something against my lips and opened my eyes to see Shy pressing her fingers to my mouth. The fingers that had just been inside her. I froze. *Fucking hell.* Her sweet smile faded at my hesitation, and that was more than I could bear. Grabbing her hand as she started to pull it away, I buried her fingers in my mouth, sucking and licking her essence, the taste so tantalizing, I wasn't sure I would ever enjoy food again.

I let out a little moan of approval, and her smile returned before her eyes drifted shut, and she buried her face in the hollow of my throat. I wrapped her snugly in my arms as she fell asleep.

I guess I'm staying.

Would she even want me in her bed when sobriety and the light of day dawned? I wasn't sure, but I knew for damn sure that I wasn't sneaking out once she'd fallen asleep after what she'd just shared with me. I wasn't going to be *that guy*.

The problem was, I was *that guy*. If this were anyone else, I would be out the door before the last tremble of her orgasm had faded. But not with her. Not with Shiloh.

The instinct to protect and love her was so strong that I could feel it in my bone marrow. And there was that word again. *Love*. Because I was pretty fucking sure I was still in love with Shiloh Simms.

I didn't know how that could be after this long apart. I only knew how I felt when I was with her. Free. Happy. A little goofy. It explained a lot about my life since I'd left her. Like how I never settled down with a woman. How I kept my heart locked away in a little, hidden box.

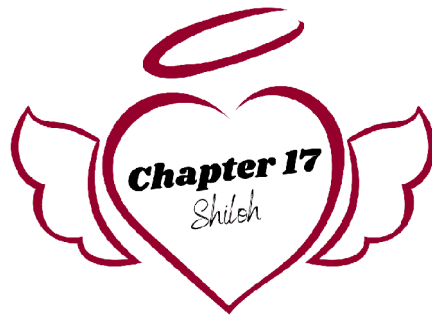
Because it still belonged to Shiloh.

Was it even possible that she would have me after I had broken her heart? I had to try. I would have to get her to trust me again. I would prove to her that I could be what she wants. What she needs. I had to be the man that put her first. Always.

And that would start with getting my goddamn hard dick out of her stomach, where it was currently resting.

Inching my hips back, I looked down at her. A little frown crossed her brow before she scooted her body closer to mine. I pulled my lower body back once more, and again she followed me. We repeated this little dance until my ass was hanging off the edge of the bed, and her slim frame was plastered against my big one.

Okay, baby. You win, I thought as I drifted off to sleep.



MMMM, THIS FEELS NICE. I was warm and cozy, and something heavy pressed insistently against my belly. It wasn't unpleasant though. A contented little sigh passed my lips and strong arms tightened around me, one hand sliding down to cup my ass. That felt nice too.

But wait. There was a hand on my ass? There *shouldn't* be a hand on my ass. I tried to open my eyes but couldn't. *Shit.* I had slept with my contacts in, and they were all gooey. As an eye doctor, I knew better than that.

Back to this hand/ass situation though. And the penis/stomach situation... because I'd just realized that's what was going on down there. My brain slowly started to churn to life.

Pushing at an extremely hard chest to give myself some room, I heard a yelp followed by a sharp smack and then a loud thud. And then cussing. Lots of cussing. *Camden?*

Oh. Dear. God. My eyelids finally separated and opened as snippets of last night flashed through my head like a porn-filled slideshow. Though the last person I wanted to see was

the man I had done *those things* in front of, I needed to check on him. I peered over the side of the bed to find Cam sprawled out on the floor, rubbing the back of his head and scowling up at me.

As I started to climb off the bed to check on him, Hawk chose that exact moment to bust through the door with a handgun held in front of him, his eyes darting back and forth, up and down, surveying every inch of the room as his gun swept from corner to corner.

I was so startled, I squeaked, lost my balance, and fell off the bed. Face down. Directly onto Cam, who let out a loud *oof* sound.

“Jesus Christ, is everyone okay?” Hawk barked, and Cam let out a groan.

“My balls are lodged up my ass, and I’ll probably be singing soprano for the rest of my life. Other than that, I’m fucking dandy,” he grunted. “You alright, Shy?” He looked up at me with a mix of concern and acute pain, and I realized my right knee was planted firmly in his groin.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” I said, carefully extricating my knee from his family jewels. “I’m fine.”

“What the fuck happened?” Hawk asked, coming over to give me a hand up. I tugged at my T-shirt, suddenly aware that I had just flashed my entire ass at him because the shirt had ridden up to my waist, and my panties had migrated to a deep, dark place in the nether regions.

“I fell off the bed and hit my head on the nightstand,” Cam informed him, one hand on his crotch and one on the back of his head.

“I kinda sorta pushed him,” I admitted. I leaned down and offered him my hand, which he took and gingerly rose to his feet. “I’m so sorry, Cam.”

Hawk exhaled in relief. “I heard yelling and thought... shit...” He shook his dark head, letting out a low chuckle as his body posture relaxed. “All right, I’ll let you kinky fuckers get back to whatever you were doing,” he said, walking out of the room and closing the door behind him.

“We were just sleeping,” I yelled at the now-closed door, and I heard him laughing all the way back to his room. Turning to Cam, I put my hands on my hips. “Well, that was fucking humiliating.”

An adorable smile crept over his lips. “Which part exactly?”

“All of it. This morning and... oh God... last night.” I buried my face in my hands, my next words muffled and barely audible. “I’m so embarrassed.” I was starting to remember more about my drunken antics. Straddling Cam. Kissing Cam. Touching myself while Cam watched.

Christ.

His hands were gentle as his fingers softly stroked the backs of my hands before tugging them away from my eyes. I kept my gaze on the floor, my humiliation hanging in the air like a dark cloud, so thick I could practically see it.

Cam dipped his head to my eye level, but I refused to look at him until his quiet command of, “Look at me,” made me raise my eyes to his. “You have absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about, Shy. Nothing.”

“But I—”

“But nothing. You showed me something beautiful last night. Something I’ll never forget.”

Oh, God. Please, please forget.

I lifted my chin just a little. “I was hoping for some kind of short-term amnesia or something,” I muttered.

His hand went to the back of his head where he’d bumped it and grinned at me. “I wouldn’t be surprised, but no. I remember every second of watching you come apart.”

I lowered my face again, but he forced it right back up with a finger beneath my chin, his face turning as serious as I’d ever seen it. “Every second,” he reiterated as his blue eyes held my brown ones in some kind of trance. I’d always loved his eyes, a bright blue set against tan skin, his dark hair a lovely contrast to the brilliant vividness I saw when I looked at him.

“I threw myself at you, and you...” The memories just kept on coming. Wrapping my legs around him, and him sliding off me like he couldn’t stand to be that close to me. Him trying to leave when I started touching myself—*oh my God, had I really done that?*—until I asked him to stay. I had been so *forward*.

“No. Do not even go there, Shiloh.” His voice was so forceful that I took an involuntary step back, but he wrapped his hands around my waist and pulled me close to him, his mouth at my ear. “Trust me, sweetheart, if you had been sober, it wouldn’t have been *your* fingers making you come. It would have been *mine*. And then you would have come again on my tongue. Multiple times.”

Oh sweet baby Jesus!

His hands slid down to my butt, pulling me against his erection, which seemed to have recovered quite nicely after the earlier impact with my knee. He let out a low groan that vibrated against my face. “You tasted so good, baby. I would have happily spent the entire night with my face between your legs. My tongue inside your sweet little cunt, licking up everything you could give me. Only, I would have made you give me more. And more. Until you collapsed from orgasm exhaustion.”

Stick a fork in me. I’m done.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, letting my fingers play with his messy hair as his mouth moved down my neck to my collarbone. He hooked a finger into the neck of the T-shirt, pulling it aside as his tongue slid across my shoulder. Then he worked his hot mouth back up my neck, his tongue and lips mimicking what he wanted to do to my ‘sweet little cunt.’ Sucking. Licking.

“Is that what you want, Shy?” he murmured, his labored breathing warming my skin as his teeth sunk into the back

curve of my jaw.

Is that what I want? My body said hell yes, wanting to hear more about this orgasm exhaustion thing, but my heart said, *“Hey, remember when he left you? It almost killed you. Literally.”* My brain was too foggy to even enter the competition, so my heart pulled ahead, shutting down the argument from my overheated body.

“No,” I whispered against his bare chest.

The movement of his mouth stopped. “No?”

“I can’t, Cam. I’m sorry.”

He pulled his head back, his lust-filled eyes searching mine. His hands slipped up to a more appropriate position on the small of my back. “Is it because you’re still in love with *him*?” The last word was little more than a snarl.

I was surprised by the question. “Who? Vincent?” Cam’s nostrils flared at the mention of his name. “No, Cam. It has nothing to do with him. It’s because of what happened sixteen years ago. You tore me into tiny little shreds and left the pieces on the floor of my bedroom. I wouldn’t survive that again.”

He looked like that pained him, his lips turning sadly down at the corners and his eyes filling with something that looked an awful lot like despondency. “That’s not what I was trying to do, Shy. I was trying to do the opposite.”

“By *cheating on me*?” I asked incredulously, pushing away from his embrace and taking three large steps backward. I couldn’t be strong with his hands on me.

“Cheating on you? What the hell are you talking about, Shiloh?” He looked genuinely perplexed, his eyebrows hovering darkly over those blue eyes, which had morphed from light blue to dark within the span of a few sentences. Taking two strides toward me, he gripped my shoulders in his big hands. “I never cheated on you, Shy. *Not once*. How can you even think that?”

Lifting my chin defiantly, I gave him my harshest glare. “Because of what you said when you broke up with me. I can read between the lines, Camden.”

His eyebrows dipped impossibly lower until his colored irises were virtually undetectable. “What lines? There were no fucking lines.”

“You gave me the old ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ routine, which everyone knows means it’s *someone else*.” I averted my eyes downward, the pain of that knowledge too much to bear while looking directly at his beautiful face.

He took a half-step toward me until our chests were touching, his hands still holding tightly to my shoulders. “Look at me, Shy,” he said, his voice so low and deep it carried an edge of danger. I looked up at him, blinking rapidly to try and stem the tears that were threatening. “There. Was. No. One. Else. Understand?” he growled, his voice so vehement, it was impossible not to believe him.

“Then why?” I whispered, my heart pounding uncontrollably. I was finally going to get the answers I needed.

His fingers loosened and drifted lightly down my arms, leaving a trail of goosebumps that said *Cam was here* like breadcrumbs in the forest. Gripping my hands, he said, “It was about when I came home for leave from the Navy. That week I spent with you in your apartment should have been the happiest of our lives. We hadn’t seen each other in months.” I nodded. It had been my freshman year in college.

“But you weren’t happy, Shy. I was shocked when I first saw you. You looked so different, so fucking skinny. Your hair was even thinner. And your eyes. God, your eyes looked different, but maybe that’s because you spent the entire week crying.”

My lips tightened into a hard line. “So, you broke up with me because I wasn’t pretty enough for you anymore?” I asked through gritted teeth. “Or because I wasn’t cheerful enough?”

Cam released my hands, pressing his fingertips into his eye sockets. “No. Christ, you’re not understanding what I’m saying, honey.” He dropped his hands, and they clenched into fists at his sides before he opened his eyes. “Shiloh, I left because I could see that me being gone was hurting you. Even the letters you wrote me sounded sad. I left because I couldn’t stand thinking that I was responsible for doing that to you. Making you so upset with worry that it was changing you physically.”

Oh. Not what I was expecting him to say. At all.

“So, you just decided more hurt was what I needed?”

He closed his eyes, one hand over his mouth like he was going to be sick. Then he spun away, driving his hands through his hair as he paced. “I thought I was doing what was right. I thought if I was totally out of the picture, you could move on and be happy. Every time I asked you what was wrong that week, you said you had just missed me so much and that you were worried about me.” He spun around to face me, his hands raising and then falling to his sides. Tears welled in his eyes, triggering a flood of my own tears.

My heart ached with his revelations. He thought he was hurting me, so he took himself out of the picture. *Stupid man.*

He was on me less than a second after my first tear fell, his big hands cupping my face as he swiped away the wetness with his thumbs. “Please, Shy baby. Don’t cry.” His firm lips scattered soft kisses across my cheeks and forehead. “I had years left on my contract, and I couldn’t put you through the pain for that long. I thought you would get over me after a little while. Find a nice boy who would treat you right.”

“I didn’t want a nice boy. I wanted you,” I told him with a frown. His eyebrows lifted. “You know what I mean,” I said, wrapping my arms around his waist. “You’re an idiot, by the way.”

“Total fucking moron,” he said, and I could feel him smile against the top of my head. “You really went sixteen years thinking I had cheated on you?” I nodded against his chest as his arms held me tightly to him. “Then you’re a big dummy too.”

“You say the sweetest things,” I said, and his chest rumbled with a chuckle against my ear.

“I’m so sorry, baby. I didn’t know you were carrying that around with you.”

That, and so much more.

Tell him.

No. It’s in the past and won’t do any good now.

He deserves to know.

The truth would only make it worse.

My mind warred with itself, and before I could say anything else, he leaned back to look at me. “I have to get ready for work. I’ll come pick you up at 12:30, okay?”

“Okay,” I said, nodding.

His lips brushed feather soft across mine. Resting his forehead against mine, he asked, “Shy, can I take you out some time?”

“Well, you’re giving me a ride to the doctor today.”

“Yes, but, I mean,” He took a deep breath and then exhaled. “I want to take you on a date.”

Oh, my...

I honestly didn’t know what to say about that. For years, I’d dreamed of exactly this moment, and my mind always vacillated between falling into his arms saying yes and giving him the middle finger and turning him down flat. Depending on my mood.

But my current mood was *I don't know what the fuck I want*. Learning his reasons behind breaking up with me was screwing with my head a bit, but I was saved from answering by the ringing of my phone in my bag.

Cam released me, and I dug around in my purse to find my phone. *Vincent*.

Fuck.

I swiped to accept the call. “Good morning, Vincent,” I said, giving Cam a wide-eyed look. A frown crinkled his forehead.

“Good morning, darling. It’s good to hear your voice.”

“Yours too.”

Cam was still staring at me. *So fucking awkward.*

“I texted you to call me last night, but I never heard from you,” he said, his tone disapproving.

“Oh, gosh. I’m sorry, Vin. I didn’t even see it. I went to bed early.” *And masturbated in front of my ex, who, coincidentally, is going to help me get away from your cheating, criminal ass.*

“I was beginning to get concerned. Are you ill?” *I’m sick to my stomach just talking to you.*

“No, I’m not ill. No need to be concerned.” *Except that I want to nail your ass to the wall. You should probably be concerned about that.*

“I miss you, Shiloh.”

“Miss you too.” *Not.*

I could feel the heat of Cam's glare from across the room as Vincent's voice rang in my ears. "Only five more days until you'll return to me." His voice lowered to a seductive timbre that made my stomach ache. "Once I have you back in my arms, I'm never letting you go again." *Gulp.*

"Yep. Five more days." It was difficult to keep my voice from quivering.

"You sound distracted, darling." *Because a six-foot-three wall of muscle is attempting to glare a hole through my head right now.*

"Sorry. Just in a rush to get downstairs."

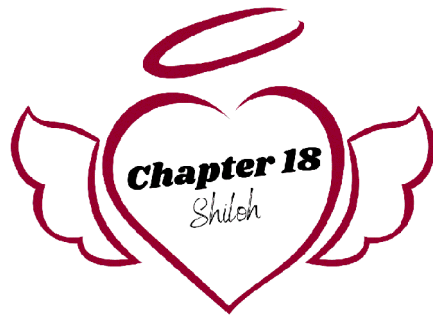
"Hmmm. Okay, I'll let you finish getting ready. I love you, Shiloh."

Clenching my eyes shut, I forced the words out. "I love you too."

I disconnected with trembling fingers. In fact, my entire body was shaking. It was Tuesday morning, and this was the first time I'd heard Vincent's voice since he whispered to me early Sunday. I had to admit that it shook me, especially the part about never letting me go again.

Knowing everything I knew about him now, it had taken everything in my power to try and sound normal, and I was a bit of a wreck, to be honest. Wanting nothing more than to walk into Cam's arms and let him hold me, I turned.

The room was empty.



CAM ARRIVED PROMPTLY AT 12:30, and I rose from the couch and gave him a smile, which he didn't return. "Hi, thanks for picking me up," I said, and he nodded solemnly, standing beside the front door with his hands in his pockets.

"Ready?" he asked, his mouth set in a firm line.

"Yep," I said, walking to the door and laying my hand softly on Cam's arm as I smiled up at him. I got no reaction besides him opening the door and waiting for me to exit. *Okaaaay. Someone's in a mood.*

Cam turned on the radio as soon as we got in the Jeep, the music loud enough to make conversing difficult. The entire drive to the medical center, he kept his hands on the wheel and didn't cast so much as a glance in my direction. I'd had more engaging rides with New York cabbies who spoke minimal English.

By the time he pulled into a space in the parking garage, I was royally pissed, so I hopped out of the truck and started walking toward the elevator, hoping his grouchy ass would

just stay in the truck. I had enough shit to deal with without him being a dramatic bitch about *whatever*.

Unfortunately, Cam had other ideas, jogging a little to catch up with me. I entered the elevator, heading straight for the back right corner. Cam stood on the other side near the buttons. I stared straight ahead, not saying a word. After a long moment, he sighed. “Which floor?” *Ah! He speaks!*

“Four,” I replied curtly. He punched the button and stuck his hands in the pockets of his black dress pants, and I looked up at the numbers over the door, doing my best to ignore how those pants draped perfectly from his hips and how his red shirt stretched over his broad shoulders. When the doors opened, I checked my phone for the correct suite number and turned left out of the elevator. He followed a couple steps behind, stopping when I did, beside Suite 4-340. I noticed his gaze snag on the nameplate on the door.

Geri Winters, M.D.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

The scowl he’d been carrying on his face since he’d picked me up deepened, but I ignored him and walked into the waiting room, going straight to the reception desk. Cam stood right behind my left shoulder, and I turned my head to level him with my best glare.

“No insurance,” he mouthed, and I nodded my understanding and continued to stare at him until he got the hint and went to find a seat.

“How may I help you?” the gray-haired receptionist asked.

“Shiloh Simms. I have an appointment with Dr. Winters.”

She checked her computer and smiled up at me. “Of course, Dr. Simms. May I have your insurance card?”

“I’m in the process of switching jobs, so I don’t have insurance right now. I’ll be paying cash today.”

“Certainly.” She handed me an iPad and a stylus. “Please fill out these forms and sign in the designated areas.”

I took a seat across from Cam, and he made a huffy little noise before moving to sit right beside me. Shooting him a death glare, I angled my body as I filled out the paperwork to keep him from seeing what I was entering.

After finishing, I took the iPad back to the receptionist and returned to my seat. Studiously ignoring the grumpy man beside me, I picked up a magazine and began flipping through it, but he was staring at me with the same intensity as I was ignoring him. *Why the fuck is he so interested in me all of a sudden?*

Ten minutes later, a nurse called my name, and Cam stood when I did. Turning to face him, I whispered firmly, “You’re staying out here.” He opened his mouth to say something, and then snapped it shut and sat down, crossing his arms over his chest in a pout that would have been cute if I wasn’t so annoyed with him.

After dressing in a fabulous pink paper gown, I waited for the doctor to enter. I heard a soft knock, and then a tall woman

with a blonde pixie haircut and a pretty smile entered the room with her hand outstretched. “Hello, Shiloh. I’m Geri Winters. You’re a friend of Blaire’s?”

The thought that Blaire introduced me as her friend warmed me on the inside. “Yes, I am,” I said confidently with a bit of pride in my words.

“Excellent. She didn’t give me any details but said that this visit was urgent?”

Because I didn’t give her any details. “Yes, I need a pregnancy test and an STI screening.” So fucking embarrassing.

Geri’s smile was still there, but it held a note of sympathy now. “Of course. You want to tell me what’s going on?”

I inhaled a calming breath and then exhaled. “My ex-fiancé cheated on me, and I also suspect that he tampered with my birth control pills. Well, I overheard him say he was going to, but I’m not sure if he did yet.”

The smile was gone now, replaced with an angry furrow of her brows. “That’s reproductive abuse. We can have him prosecuted for that,” she said fiercely. My heart thumped at the ‘we.’ This doctor I had met thirty seconds ago was on my side, and it gave me a sense of... something. Strength, maybe? Power in numbers? She was the first person I’d confided in about the birth control pills, and it hadn’t been as difficult as I’d imagined, especially given her response. It was actually a little freeing.

“Thank you, but no. There’s a lot going on that I can’t talk about, but I’ve left him. I just wanted to get checked out.”

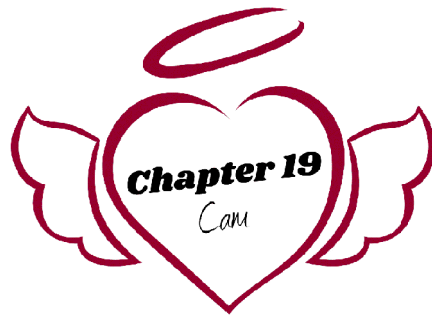
The doctor smiled gently and patted my hand. “That’s good, Shiloh. You’re doing everything right. We’ll do all the standard testing. We do offer a rapid HIV test, so we can have those results for you before you leave the office today. You should have the other results within a few days.”

I nodded. “Thank you, Dr. Winters.”

“Call me Geri,” she said. “I’ll get the nurse in here to draw blood and get a urine test, and then I’ll be back to examine you. Are there any other concerns or questions you have?”

“Um, maybe an alternative form of birth control? I’m a little paranoid about taking the pill now,” I said with a nervous little laugh.

“Certainly. We can discuss that. Let me just check something.” She scrolled through her laptop and frowned before looking up at me. “First of all, why don’t we discuss your medical history.”



GOD, I'M SUCH A fucking prick.

It was Friday, and I had barely spoken to Shiloh since Tuesday when I heard her tell Vincent Bellucci that she loved and missed him. For reasons I couldn't quite understand, that pissed me the fuck off. Or maybe I understood the reasons all too well and was just too chickenshit to think about them.

And then she'd gone to that OB-GYN. Was she pregnant with his child? The thought tossed me into a rage that I was barely controlling as it simmered just beneath the surface of my psyche. I didn't even want to look at her in fear that I would see her body changing, growing to accommodate another man's baby. At the same time, I couldn't stop myself from looking at her.

It's official: I'm fucking insane.

She'd stopped talking to me as well. All of our communications were going through Hawk now. We'd installed a tracker on her phone, which she had consented to. I spent at least half of my workdays with the tracking app pulled up on my computer, my cyber-stalking something she had *not*

directly consented to. Her little blinking dot remained at the house the majority of the time, and I was pretty sure that red speck was now permanently seared into my retinas.

Hawk strolled into my office at the end of the day, and I clicked out of the tracking app and looked up at him.

“What?”

He rolled his eyes at my abruptness. “We’re all going out to Flame tonight. Wanna go?”

I thought about it. The idea really didn’t appeal to me, but then again, I didn’t want to sit at the house and be miserable by myself.

“Okay, I’m in.”

Four hours later, we were rising up to the VIP section of the club. Every female head in the room turned toward us as we stepped off the elevator, hungry eyes roving over six extremely well-built bodies encased in suits, sans ties.

Shark had insisted on VIP access because it was more private up here so we could drink in peace. His instincts were obviously mistaken because this room was packed with more women than men, and they were all looking at us like we were an all-you-can-eat buffet.

“Damn, this place is like a basket full of sweet little kittens,” Woody commented, rubbing his hands together.

Ignoring his comment and the interested stares from the females in the room, Shark crossed to the bar, and we followed.

“What can I do for you, honey?” asked a blonde bartender wearing the club’s signature red leather shorts and bustier.

“Got a room reserved for Atwood,” he said, and the woman tapped something into her computer.

“Gotcha. Room Three,” she said, pointing over her shoulder with her thumb.

Our group moved as one toward our designated room. There were eight rooms up here, scattered around the outside of the central bar area which was large and dotted with tables and chairs. Each private room was surrounded by ceiling-high flames encased in some kind of glass, making you feel like the entire room was on fire.

Shark pushed aside the curtain made of red, yellow, and orange strips of fabric, which simulated flames when they moved. “Hell yes. This is swank,” Bode exclaimed, taking in the red and yellow furniture scattered around the room. A server followed a couple minutes later to take our drink orders, and she gave me a sexy lip bite as I ordered a beer and a shot of tequila.

Not interested, honey.

Bode and I settled on a deeply cushioned yellow couch, and everyone else found seats surrounding a glass-topped coffee table with flames lighting it from below. Our drinks were delivered a few minutes later, and the server skimmed my shoulder with the tips of her fingers as she left.

Still not interested. She was really pretty, the kind of girl I usually went for, but I felt nothing below the waist. Not even a slight chub. Probably because she wasn't the kind of girl I went for *now*. Big brown eyes framed by long lashes. Long, thick caramel hair. A soft, sweet body that made me sit up and beg for mercy.

You need to fucking relax, Fitz.

Yeah, that was exactly what I needed. Relax and have fun, just like the old Cam would have done. The Cam of a few months ago. I missed that guy. If only I could get *her* out of my mind.

I downed my shot before starting on my beer as we all chatted comfortably. The flirty server brought more drinks, throwing me a sexy wink this time. Twenty minutes later, I had finished those and exited the room in search of more alcohol.

There was a group of six women, all scantily dressed, sitting at a long table near the bar, and all of them made eye contact with me as I waited for my drinks. Trying to ignore their stares, I returned to our room.

A few minutes after I had settled back on the yellow couch and sucked down the two tequila shots, I noticed the curtain open. "Hey, you guys looking for some company?" the tallest of the women from the bar table asked, her gaze falling immediately on me. She was dressed in a shiny gold dress that barely covered her nether regions.

"No, we're—" Shark started to say, but Bode interrupted him.

“Of course,” he said boisterously, waving the women into the room.

Fuck. I just want to hang out with my friends without... distractions.

Tank and Shark shot Bode a *what the fuck* look before eyeing each other and standing. “We’re gonna go sit at the bar for a bit. Cam, you want to go?”

I was feeling no pain after five shots and two-and-a-half beers, so I shook my head and sank farther down into the couch.

After a few minutes, Bode and Woody took a couple of the girls downstairs to dance, leaving only me and Hawk with the remaining four women. Gold Dress and her friend Black Dress settled on the couch on either side of me. “I’m Jennifer,” Gold Dress said. “And this is Aubrey.”

“Cam,” I said shortly, tipping my bottle up and letting the cool beer slide down my throat.

Aubrey—or was it Jennifer? I had forgotten already—stroked a hand over the shoulder of my black jacket. I was wearing matching black pants and a royal blue dress shirt that looked good with my eyes. The other girl—whatever the fuck her name was—ran her fingers through the back of my hair as she curled her legs underneath her.

Get your ass back in the game, Fitz. Shiloh loves fuckface and may be pregnant with his child.

Sliding my arms along the back of the couch, I spoke silently to my dick. *Your time to shine, bro.* He apparently wasn't feeling very shiny because he just sat there, limp and uninterested. I glanced down at Audrey or Aubrey or Jennifer or whoever was dressed in black. Her tits were spilling out the top, straining the skinny straps at her shoulders.

My eyes darted quickly away. I didn't want to look at her boobs. I didn't want to look at anyone's boobs except for Shiloh's. I wanted to hold her perfect breasts. Lick them. Suck them until she was fucking moaning for me.

“So, what do you do, Cam?” one of them asked. I snapped out of my Shiloh-boob-reverie and told her I was in security and then asked them what they did. I didn't really care, but they babbled on about Instagram or some shit as I tuned them out and wondered what Shiloh was doing.

Goldie, apparently feeling bold, leaned in for a kiss, and I jerked my head away to avoid it. Her lips fell on my cheek instead. “No kissing,” I said firmly. I wasn't sure why; I just knew I didn't want to kiss her.

Because she's not Sh—

I cut off that train of thought and glanced over at Hawk, who had blonde twins all over him. He was taking turns kissing them, his legs spread obscenely wide as one of the girls massaged his balls. He had a hand up each of their matching red dresses, and soft moans were floating through the space between our couches. *Jesus, dude.*

After a few minutes he stood and leveled a look at me, blinking a few times before glaring down at the twin on his left. “Where is your hand supposed to be, sweetheart?” he asked her in a low, dangerous voice, and she dipped her chin shyly, wrapping her fingers around the bulge in his pants. “Better,” he growled before turning his gaze back to me, his mouth twitching with amusement. “We’re going to get out of here. Don’t wait up.”

And with a twin tucked beneath each big arm, one of the girls holding his goddamn dick for him, they left. *Fucking psycho*. Those poor girls had no idea what they were in for tonight.

Alone in the room with Black and Gold, I suddenly felt even more uneasy. Looking down, I noticed that Black Dress had somehow unbuttoned my shirt, while Goldie was at my ear, whispering some really filthy shit about what she wanted to do to me with her mouth.

My dick seemed to shrivel up even more.

What the fuck is wrong with me? These girls are gorgeous. But they just weren’t doing it for me. Not that they weren’t hot as hell. They were. They just weren’t...

Shiloh.

Fuck.

Clearing my throat, I slid my hands up to each girl’s head and tugged roughly at their hair, pulling their mouths away from me. Looking back and forth between them, I said, “You

two are just gorgeous, but I need to take care of something right quick. So, why don't you go powder your noses?"

They giggled as they stood and tugged their dresses down to cover up their exposed lace panties before swaying their asses from Room Three. "We'll powder our pussies while we're in there," Gold Dress said over her shoulder, and I faked a little chuckle.

I don't care what the fuck you do. Just get the hell away from me.

I counted to thirty and then exited. I had absolutely no desire to be with those girls—not even a little bit—and I wasn't sure why the hell I had even thought about it. I didn't want anyone else. Shiloh Simms was the only one I wanted in my bed and in my life, and I needed to talk to her. To see if there was any chance in hell that we could be together.

Yes, I should have done that earlier this week instead of acting like an asshole, but having those girls hanging all over me had snapped something in my mind. It had given me clarity, despite all of the alcohol I had consumed. I fucking loved Shiloh, and I prayed that she held even a fraction of the feelings for me that I had for her.

My chest tightened at the thought of that, and I headed to the elevator but pulled up short when I noticed Tank and Shark sitting at a table nearby. But they weren't alone. Bristol, Charli, and Blaire were sitting at the table with them, and everyone was laughing at something Blaire was saying. My

eyes darted around the room, not finding what they were looking for.

Shiloh.

She was supposed to be with Blaire tonight, according to what she told Hawk earlier. Was she here? My dick immediately hardened, and I dipped my head to stare at him with a grin on my face.

Oh, now you want to play?



“THIS PLACE IS SO freakin’ cool!” I exclaimed as we walked through Flame, my eyes moving from one side of the nightclub to the other.

“I haven’t been here in forever,” Bristol said. “This is where I met Waylon.” Her entire face turned mushy, and I couldn’t help the stab of jealousy at the obvious love between her and her boyfriend. Why couldn’t I have a normal fucking relationship like her and Tank?

I had been apprehensive about coming tonight, but the other three women’s excitement had been contagious, and I’d finally relented.

Charli held my hand as we walked behind Bristol and Blaire toward the elevator in the back. Axel had football practice in the morning, so he hadn’t come out with us though he had arranged for a car service to drive us to and from the club.

“I texted Beau that we were coming, and he said that they had a private room upstairs in the VIP lounge. Room Three,” Char said.

Hopefully Room Three had some couches or chairs that I could sit on, because these sky-high stilettos were killing my feet. I had to admit that they did make my legs look fantastic though. Blaire had loaned me the gorgeous silver dress I was wearing along with the shoes. The fucking Satan shoes. Bristol had done all of our hair and makeup, and I had never felt more beautiful.

Bristol had styled my hair into long curls that looked like strands of shiny, melted caramel hanging down my back. My eyeshadow was glittery, and my lips were nude with a sparkly gloss over the surface. Charli had called me a “Glam Show” when I’d finally exited the bathroom into Blaire’s room, and I *felt* fucking glamorous.

I’d decided today that I was tired of the stress between me and Cam. He had asked me on a date Tuesday morning, and then he’d promptly ghosted me for the rest of the week. I didn’t know what his problem was, but I intended to find out tonight. *And it couldn’t hurt to look my best while having that conversation.*

I was ready. We weren’t doing the same shit as sixteen years ago where he decides what’s best for me. We were going to fucking *talk* about why he was ignoring me. If he didn’t want me? Fine. But he was going to tell me that to my face.

First though, I needed to pee. Seeing the sign as soon as we stepped off the elevator on the VIP floor, I told the girls, “I’m going to hit the little girls’ room right quick.”

“You want me to come with you?” Charli asked, squeezing my hand.

“Nope. You go find the guys. I’ll meet you there.”

“Room Three,” she reminded me before they turned left and I turned right to go down the short corridor to the restroom.

I pushed open the door and entered an opulent sitting area that served as an anteroom to the large bathroom beyond. There were two blonde twins standing at the mirror, applying lipstick as I hustled into the first stall. “Where did Valerie and Tess go?” I heard one of them ask while I sat on the toilet.

“They went downstairs to dance with those two guys. The tall, hot one with the long hair and the sexy Hispanic dude.” I grinned to myself. Sounded like Bode and Woody to me.

I finished up and washed my hands just as two other girls, one in a gold dress and one in a black dress rushed into the room and straight to the twins. “Oh. My. God! How did we end up with the two hottest guys in the entire club tonight?” the one in the gold dress gushed.

Four girls, two guys? How did that even work?

I skirted around the excited women and collapsed onto one of the gold and red couches in the lounge, pulling off my left shoe, which I had aptly nicknamed Lucifer.

Wiggling my toes, I listened as the girls chattered on about their guys. All four of the women were total stunners.

“Who is that guy you two are with?” the one in the black dress asked.

“Holy shit, Aubrey!” the twin with slightly longer hair said. “His name is Hawk, and he’s like...” She looked to her sister for help.

“Intense? Hot as fuck? A vampire? Because honestly, I’m not sure at this point.”

I stifled a laugh as I massaged my big toe. Hawk, the vampire.

The first twin answered with wide eyes that conveyed a little fear and a lot of excitement. “He told Luna she had to hold his dick for him, and if she took her hand away without his permission, there would be *repercussions*.”

Oh, my God, Hawk! I bit back a giggle.

Luna’s face flushed red. “Well, he told Leah she’s not *allowed* to look away from him.”

“When I told him I needed to go to the restroom, he glared at me for a full thirty seconds before finally nodding. Like he was *allowing* me to go pee.” She swiped a smudge from under her eye before glancing at her twin. “At least I’m not walking around a club holding some guy’s cock for him.”

“I actually don’t mind,” Luna said quietly. “The edging is driving me crazy though.” Leah hummed and nodded her assent.

“Edging?” asked the girl in the gold dress.

“You’ve never been edged, Jenn?” She shook her head. “He’s had his hands up our dresses for the past twenty minutes, toying with us, bringing us almost to the point of

coming and then backing off. I'm about to lose my damn mind for an orgasm at this point."

"Why don't you just go rub one out in the stall?" the one named Aubrey asked.

Leah's eyes widened. "He told us we weren't allowed to. And that he would know. He said all our orgasms belong to him."

"Holy shit, that's hot," Jenn said, fanning her face. "But I'm sure he'll give you both plenty. A guy like that looks like he knows what he's doing. Our guy does too though. He's a cocky fucker. His name is Cam."

I froze my foot massaging. *Did she just say...*

"Did you say 'Cam?'" Leah asked incredulously after a beat. If my ears could have crawled off my body and into the other room, they would have.

"Yeah, why?" Jenn asked suspiciously.

Leah's hand was smacking her twin's arm repeatedly. "That's the guy, Luna! Cora's Cam! Bluest eyes in the free world. Cocky, *be a good girl and I might allow you to suck my cock for me* attitude. It's him!"

The tiny darts of jealousy that had been poking against my skin since Leah said Cam's name coalesced into a bright, white-hot spear that pierced straight through me. *Cora's Cam? Who the fuck is Cora?*

"Your older sister?" Aubrey asked, as if she could hear the question in my head.

“Yes! She took this guy home last year, and he fucked the shit out of her. It was so good, she was fucking obsessed with him. She went back to the club where she met him every single night of the week for months, and when she finally saw him, he blew her off.”

“She had to have therapy and everything,” Luna added, and I suddenly felt sick to my stomach.

“Dick so good you have to have therapy afterward? I’m down for some peen like that,” Jenn in the gold dress said, her tongue sliding seductively over her bottom lip. She turned and elbowed Aubrey. “He won’t know what hit him once he has both of us on him tonight.”

A potent amalgam of disgust, anger, and pain swirled through my arteries, pumping every cell in my body full of the conflicting emotions.

Jenn continued. “I’ve been told I have a magic dick-sucking mouth. You’ve heard of Jenny from the Block? Well, I’m Jenny Sucking Cock.” All the girls laughed, but I had never felt more miserable in my life.

“That’s right,” Aubrey said, high-fiving her friend. “*He’s* gonna be the one who needs therapy when we get done with him.”

The thought of these girls with Cam—sucking him off, riding his big cock, his head between their legs—*Jesus, no*. I closed my eyes, only vaguely aware that they were leaving the restroom. I was numb, my senses dulled until I couldn’t feel my extremities. Would I even be able to walk?

I slipped my shoe back on, the ache in my feet totally gone now. Any aches that my body had previously experienced were now concentrated deep in my chest. I made my way out of the restroom, keeping my head averted from the bar area. I was just going to go. I'd text the girls and let them know as soon as I got into the car.

But where was I going to go? Certainly not back to Cam and Hawk's house. I absolutely couldn't listen to Cam fucking those women. I would rather cut off my own ears than hear that. I turned toward the elevator and spied Hawk waiting there with his two minions. Luna's hand was indeed on his crotch, and Leah was looking up adoringly at him. It was so ridiculous, I almost smiled.

As if sensing me there, Hawk's head swiveled in my direction, and his brow lowered when he got a look at my face. He turned to Leah and wrapped his big hand around her throat, whispering something in her ear. Her gaze immediately hit the floor. Hawk shifted his body, pulling Luna's hand from his cock and kissing her palm.

And then he was striding toward me, a look of fierce determination on his face. I couldn't help it. I rolled my eyes and grinned. "Jesus, Hawk."

His own smile widened across his mouth, transforming his entire face. "Consenting adults," he explained simply. His smile faded. "What's wrong, Shy?"

I schooled my face into a mask of neutral nonchalance. "Oh, you know. Just met some of Cam's girls in the bathroom. It

was great. Haha.” *Jeez, that sounded fake as hell.*

Hawk’s lips tightened until they paled. “Don’t know what the fuck is wrong with that boy. You want me to knock the shit out of him?”

Yeah, that actually sounds kinda excellent. I turned on a placid smile. “No, it’s fine. I’m just gonna go, I think.”

He frowned. “But you just got here. Stay and have fun with the girls.”

I could see the pain on my face reflected in Hawk’s dark eyes. “I can’t watch that, Hawk. I know it’s been a long time and I have no right to him, but…” I sighed, averting my eyes to a flickering flame behind his left shoulder. “It would hurt too much.” *Don’t cry. Don’t cry. Don’t cry.*

“I’m sorry, darlin’. Let me get rid of those girls and I’ll drive you home.” He turned to leave, but I grabbed his arm.

“No, it’s fine, Hawk. Really. Axel rented a car service for us tonight. And I wouldn’t want you to disappoint your groupies.”

His eyes searched my face. “Are you sure? Because I really don’t mind.” *Seriously, Shiloh. Don’t fucking cry.* It was hard when he was being so sweet.

“I’m positive.”

I noticed Jenn and Aubrey tentatively approaching Hawk from the right. Jenn tapped his arm, and he turned to her with a scowl. “Uh, do you know where Cam went? We went back to Room Three, but he wasn’t there.”

“No.” It was a single word, just one syllable, but it was delivered so sharply, I was surprised it didn’t cut the woman in half.

She reached for her friend’s hand, and they took an involuntary step back. “Oh. Um. Okay. If you see him, tell him we’ll be in Three waiting for him.” They walked off rapidly, their heads pressed together as they gabbed quietly and tossed nervous glances back toward Hawk.

He turned and took a step closer to me until I could feel the heat of his body through my shiny dress. “For the record, you’re looking like a drop dead hotty tonight, Shiloh. If you weren’t Cam’s girl, then *you’re* the one I would be trying to go home with tonight,” he growled, which induced a full-body shiver that I was unable to conceal.

“I’m not Cam’s girl,” I argued. Why did everyone keep saying that? “But thank you for the compliment.”

“Meant every word of it. You’re the most gorgeous woman in the room tonight.” He gave me a little half smile that probably would have made me swoon if I wasn’t so fucking raw on the inside. “I’ll have my phone with me. Call if you need me.”

“Um, I think you’re going to be a little busy, Hawk.”

He walked backward a few steps with a lopsided grin on his handsome face. “I can multitask.” His face morphed into something hard and menacing by the time he turned around toward his conquests for the evening.

“We thought you fell in the potty and drowned,” Charli shrieked, skipping up beside me with Bristol and Blaire in tow. “And oh my God! Did you see those girls with Hawk? That one chick was holding his goober! Like right in front of everybody! I wonder what Beau would do if I just walked around with my hand on his dick. But his is so big, I might need two hands to keep it under control. It’s like a beast, you know, like, rawwwwr!” She curled her hands into claws and scratched at the air.

I burst out laughing, despite my sour mood.

Draping an arm around Charli, Bristol loudly whispered, “*Someone* has been hitting the Fireball shots a little too vigorously.” She tilted her head and eyes toward her little blonde friend.

“They are goo-ooo-ood! They make my tongue tingle, see?” Char stuck her tongue out like I could actually see the tingling. She grabbed my hand. “Let’s go get you one, Shy.”

I sighed through my laughter. These women were good for my soul. “Okay, just one, and then I’m going to go.” I wasn’t sure I could bear it if I saw Cam go into that room with those sluts.

Blaire’s face was the picture of concern. “Why are you leaving, hon?”

I rolled my lips in, biting down on them with my front teeth. “Cam’s here with someone. Two someones actually.”

Gasps all around. “Aw shit, babe,” Bris said, pulling me into a hug. “Don’t leave. Stay and show him what he’s missing.”

I scoffed out a humorless laugh. “More like the other way around. Didn’t you hear what I said? He’s got two hot girls. His ass isn’t missing a thing.”

Her soft hug turned into a punishing squeeze that made me squeak. “Don’t you talk about yourself like that. You are fucking amazing. Those girls are just very poor substitutes for the *real thing*.”

“That’s right,” Charli said loyally. “We’re going to have drinks and then we’re going to dance.” She did a seductive little hip wiggle that was surprisingly good in spite of her drunken state. “You let me handle Fitzzy.”

Blaire covered her laugh with her hand and muttered, “Good shit almighty.”

Charli put her slim hand on her hip and yelled, “Shark Atwood! Get over here right now!” She pointed a finger at the red marble floor beneath her feet. She must be fired up. I had never heard her call him ‘Shark’ before.

Beau, who I was pretty sure never took orders from anyone, immediately ambled over at his wife’s call. The heated look they shared as he walked toward her would rival every flame on every wall of this bar. I’d bet these two scorched the mattress when they went at it.

“You bellowed, madam?” he asked with a twitch of his lips as he stopped in front of his darling wife.

“Uh-huh. I need you to hurt somebody for me, baby,” she cooed, reaching up to stroke his face.

Beau looked left, right, and then back at Charli. “If someone is fucking with you, I’ll kill them, Peach,” he said. It didn’t sound like hyperbole in the least, but his hands cupped her face with a gentleness that defied his harsh words.

“Just some maiming would be nice. Cam’s being an ass. He’s apparently been messing around with *two* girls tonight,” she said vehemently, holding two fingers right in front of his face in case he needed help counting.

Beau cast a quick look at me. “I’ll handle Cam.” His eyes went back to his bride. “Why don’t you girls get Shiloh a couple drinks and go dance for a while?”

“You’ll really take care of it?” Charli asked sweetly, and Beau nodded stupidly, entranced by his stunning wife. These two were entirely too adorable together. “Thank you, baby. I’ll give you a nice blowie in the car on the way home.”

He growled from deep in his chest. “I’ll tear the fucking place apart for one of your blowies, Peach.” He pressed a hard kiss against her lips. She had this big alpha male wrapped right around her cute little finger.

“Okay, newlyweds,” Blaire called. “There’s plenty of time for that shit later since Charli’s mom has L.J. tonight.” She grabbed Charli away from her brother and dragged her toward the bar.

Four Flaming Fireball shots later, I was on the dance floor, shaking my ass to some Beyoncé with the girls. I was having a blast, especially since there was absolutely no sign of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. He was probably back at the house getting his nasty on with those chicks from earlier. *That reminded me...*

“Hey, y’all know of a decent but cheap hotel around here? I really don’t want to go back to the house and listen to the freak show in the next room,” I yelled over the “Partition” remix that was pulsing over the speakers.

“No, uh-uh. You’re staying at my house tonight,” Blaire insisted. “You can sleep in Charli’s old room.”

“Yeah, it’s nice. You’ll have your own bathroom and everything,” Charli agreed.

I opened my mouth to protest, but Blaire popped her palm up right in my face in a ‘talk to the hand’ gesture, so I laughed and nodded. Staying at her house really would be the best solution. I couldn’t use my debit card to pay for a room because of Vincent, and the types of motels that accepted cash only were less than desirable.

“I’ll text Hawk and let him know where I’ll be,” I said. “And I want to get another drink.” I headed to the bar and got a glass of water and another Fireball shot. I downed both as I shot off a message to Hawk.

“Hello, beautiful,” I heard from behind me, and I turned to find a tall, blond man wearing a navy-blue designer suit standing there.

“Oh, um. Hi,” I said shyly. This guy was really handsome, his hair styled and his jaw strong.

“I was wondering if you wanted to dance with me.” His smile was slightly bashful, like my own, and I felt a little spark of kinship with him.

“I don’t—”

“She would love to,” Blaire said, appearing out of nowhere and snatching my phone out of my hand. “Shiloh was just saying she wished some handsome man would ask her to dance.”

Jesus.

I smiled nervously up at the man, and he placed a hand on the small of my back and led me to the dance floor. “Shiloh, huh? That’s a really pretty name,” he said, putting his hands around my waist.

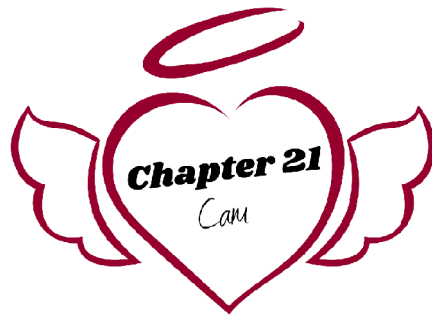
“Thanks,” I murmured, hooking my arms over his shoulders.

“I’m Rodney,” he said as we swayed to the slow song that was playing. With his mouth at my ear, he whispered, “You’re easily the most stunning woman in this bar tonight, Shiloh. I haven’t been able to tear my eyes away from you.” That was the second time someone had said something like that to me tonight, and my confidence level spiked up a couple notches.

Rodney tightened his hands, pulling me more firmly against him. He had a nice, hard body, and he smelled like heaven.

This was the kind of man I needed to fall for. Not some manwhoring jackass like He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

I let myself relax and melt into the dance.



I WATCHED FROM THE deep shadows of an alcove near the second-floor balcony. Taking a long pull of my beer, I was unable to drag my eyes from Shiloh for even a second. The way she moved that body of hers to the sexy Beyoncé song. The way the red lights from the flames flitted across her hair, making her look like a siren.

God, she's fucking incredible.

I'd received a scorching ass-chewing from Shark earlier. Apparently, Shiloh had found out about the two women that had been trying to get with me, which was a goddamn nightmare. Coincidentally, those girls were the reason I was hiding in the shadows. I occasionally caught glimpses of them searching the crowds, looking for me.

I should probably feel bad for the way I ditched them, but I didn't want anyone else, ever. Only Shiloh. I didn't even give a fuck anymore that she loved someone else. I could get her back. I could make her love *me*.

At least I thought I could. Maybe not, since I had obviously fucked things up tonight. Again. Tipping my bottle up and

emptying it down my throat, I let my gaze track the object of my desire as she left the dance floor and went to the bar. Her head dipped over her phone as her fingers moved across the screen. Was she texting him? Was she telling him how much she missed him? How much she *loved him*?

The very thought had bile rising into my chest.

My spine straightened as I saw a man approach her. He looked like a fucking douchebag. The edges of my vision went red when he led her to the dance floor, and it had nothing to do with the fire licking the walls of the club. I watched as he put his motherfucking arms around her and bent to whisper in her ear. Or was he kissing her there?

Then I was moving, my feet carrying me down the nearby stairs and straight to her. To *my* fucking girl. Who was currently in another man's arms. *Un-fucking-acceptable.*

Nudging Mr. Douchebag with my elbow, I grunted, "You're done here, buddy."

Two faces turned toward me. A beautiful one looking shocked and a douchey one looking wary. Douchey spoke. "Excuse me?"

"You're dancing with my girl, and if you value the use of your legs, you'll back the fuck away. Right. Now," I growled. Something flickered in his eyes. Fear? *Yeah, you should be scared, fucker. You're about two seconds away from being permanently crippled.*

His worried eyes returned to Shiloh, who was openly glaring at me. “This your boyfriend?” he asked her.

“No,” she said, just as I snapped, “Yes.” Our eyes were locked in an epic battle of stubbornness.

“Sorry, man. She said you’re not her—”

His words were immediately cut off when I stuck my index finger an inch from his face. “I could kill you with this finger right here in less than five seconds,” I said calmly, and Douchey McGee’s eyes widened. Something in my tone told him I wasn’t fucking around.

He mumbled something under his breath, backing away and throwing an apologetic look at Shiloh. I stepped in and took my woman in my arms, letting my eyes close as I inhaled her soft, sensual scent. *Fuck yes. So right.*

Except ...

Why is she pushing against me?

I looked down into a set of angry brown eyes and a pair of hands shoving at my chest. “Calm down, baby.”

“Don’t tell me to calm down. Why were you so mean to Rodney?”

“Who the fuck is Rodney?” She widened her eyes and flung one hand out to indicate the man who had just walked away. *Oh, Douchebag’s name is Rodney.* “Don’t worry about him,” I said with a frown. “I’m here now.”

As it turned out, that was the wrong thing to say. Shiloh's eyes blazed in anger, and her hands pushed hard against my chest. "Don't," I growled, pulling her arms up to rest on my shoulders as I spun us so that she couldn't see *Rodney* anymore.

"Or what?" she asked. "You'll threaten to kill me like you did Rodney?"

My heart seized in my chest. I was so stunned I loosened my grip on her, and she stalked away. *She thinks I would hurt her?*

I jogged after her, overtaking her in a few short seconds and wrapping my arm around her waist. "Come on. We're going to talk," I said, leading her to an empty booth in the corner.

"Oh, now you wanna fucking talk?" she sniped.

"Sit," I said.

"You don't get to tell me what to do."

"Fine, you stubborn woman. We'll stand here and talk then. I just thought you might be more comfortable sitting since you're wearing heels." *Very sexy heels that I would like to see around my ears later.*

She rolled her eyes and finally relented, sitting near the edge of the seat. I sat beside her and used my body weight to scoot her over so I could sit on the same side.

"First of all, I would never hurt you, angel. *Never,*" I said vehemently, taking one of her hands between mine.

Her bottom lip trembled, and I could feel that tiny movement in my soul. It throbbed and ached there. “All you’ve done this week is hurt me, Cam.”

My head dropped. “I know,” I whispered, closing my eyes for a long moment before looking back up at her. “I’m sorry I’ve been distant.”

“You haven’t been distant. You’ve been an asshole,” she snapped. “You haven’t spoken to me in days.”

The shame washed over me like a tsunami, and I acknowledged her with a nod. “Yeah, I’ve been a total ass. It was... shit, Shiloh. It just drove me crazy hearing you tell that motherfucker that you loved and missed him. I know you can’t help how you feel, but I can’t either.” My eyes pleaded with her to understand.

Her lowered eyebrows hooded her beautiful brown eyes. “Are you talking about Vincent?”

“Yes,” I breathed, the pain in my chest renewing at hearing her say his name.

She yanked her hand away. “You can’t be that stupid,” she spat. Apparently, I could, because I was confused. Reading my expression, she continued. “Did you ever stop to think that maybe I *had to* say those things?” She jabbed me in the bicep with her finger. “*You’re* the one who told me not to arouse suspicion. What do you think would have happened if he’d said those things to me, and I didn’t say them back?”

Click.

“It would have aroused suspicion,” I muttered. I was barely able to meet her eyes, but when I did, they were brimming with unshed tears.

“And did you consider what it would feel like for me to have to say that to him? To someone I fucking hate?”

She hated him. Was it bad that I felt like a million tons had been lifted from my shoulders at that revelation?

I put my arm around her and tucked her into my side, pressing my lips against the top of her head. “No, I didn’t, baby. I’m so sorry. I’ve been a selfish prick.” A tear slipped down her face, and I brushed it away with my thumb. “Tell me now. You can tell me anything.”

She rested her cheek against my chest, and I had to strain to hear her words, but the softness of her tone didn’t soften the blow at all. “It was horrible. It made me physically ill, Cam. All I wanted was...”

“What, angel?”

She swallowed and looked up at me. “You. I was scared and freaking the fuck out, and I needed you.”

Jesus, I am such a shit.

“But I left and then proceeded to act like an ass.” She nodded against my chest. “I’ll be there next time you have to talk to him. I’ll hold you as long as you need, okay?” She didn’t answer, so I grasped her chin and gently lifted her face to mine. “Whatever you need, I’m here for you, Shy.”

It was like our eyeballs were made for looking at each other, the emotions zapping between us, and I felt the overwhelming need to kiss her. I lowered my face to hers, but she backed away, a look of revulsion on her face.

“I’m not kissing you, Cam. I don’t know where the hell your mouth has been.”

“My mouth has been around a beer bottle while I watched you dance with another man,” I said, trying to rein in my anger.

“Oh, that’s rich,” she said, pulling away from my embrace. “After Jenn and Aubrey, you want to talk about me *dancing* with someone?” Her eyes went from soft and vulnerable to molten lava in the span of a few seconds.

“Jenn and Aubrey?” *Why did those names sound familiar?*

Shiloh covered her forehead with her palm and shook her head. “Oh my God. You fucked two girls in a club, and you don’t even know their names?!?”

Ohhh, Black Dress and Gold Dress.

“I didn’t fuck anyone, Shy.”

“Yeah, right. You have lipstick on your cheek, and your shirt is unbuttoned halfway to your navel.” She pointed at my face before crossing her arms over her chest and narrowing her eyes, her expression daring me to lie to her.

Okay, so this didn’t look good. At all.

“We didn’t fuck,” I said, reaching up to wipe my face, my hand coming back with a streak of red lipstick. *Shit.*

“God, you’re infuriating,” she said through gritted teeth.

I buried my head in my hands. I was losing her, and it was all my own fucking fault. *Do something about it, you goddamn idiot!*

Dragging my hands down my face, I turned to her. “I’m sorry, Shiloh. I know that probably doesn’t mean much to you, but I’m so fucking sorry.” I was speaking as honestly as I could, trying to make her understand. “I didn’t want those girls. I felt absolutely nothing with them. I couldn’t even bring myself to touch them. One of them tried to kiss me, and it felt all kinds of wrong, so I turned my face away. That’s how the lipstick got there. But I never should have put myself in that situation, and I’m so fucking ashamed.”

“You should be,” she said, but her tone was slightly gentler than before.

“I didn’t even get hard.”

Her face scrunched up. “I’m not exactly sure how to feel about that.”

“Would it make you feel better if I told you I had a fat boner right now just from sitting beside you?”

A giggle bubbled up from her throat. “Shut up, Cam.” Her eyes kept *almost* darting down to my lap, and I grinned at her.

“It’s okay. You can look. See for yourself who I really want,” I teased, letting my finger trace across her bare

shoulder. A reluctant smirk played across her lips, and I caught her looking down. It was a quick peek, but I definitely saw it. “Come dance with me.”

Reticence filled her eyes, and I took her hand and kissed it. “Please, Shy. Just one dance.” The DJ had just started playing a slow, sultry song, and all I wanted was my girl in my arms.

“Okay, but I’m not kissing you until you’ve washed all the hoochie off you. That’s gonna take at least,” she tapped her chin in thought, “five showers.”

“You got it,” I said with a laugh, standing and helping her from the booth. When I got her on the dance floor, I wrapped my arms tightly around her and held her close, achieving full-body contact and loving every second of it. She looked up at me, and my breath stalled in my lungs. It was a long moment before I could even speak. “I don’t think I’ve told you how incredibly beautiful you look tonight.”

The corners of her lips curled up a little, and then she rested her cheek against my chest. “I like this song,” she murmured.

“Me too. I don’t think I’ve heard it before.”

“It’s ‘Good For You’ by Selena Gomez.”

“Hmm, not usually my style, but I think it’s my favorite song now.” I let my lips rest against her temple as our bodies moved in unison to the opulent beat. Everything else faded away, and it was like we were in our own little bubble, separated from everyone else on the dance floor. With her hips

pressed against mine and Selena singing about her dress being a mess on the floor, my dick gave a hard jerk of approval.

“What are you thinking about?” Shiloh asked, tilting her face up to look at me.

“Showers.” That earned me a little smile. “I know I’ve been acting crazy this week, Shy, but it’s because,” I inhaled deeply. “It’s because I’m crazy in lo—”

“There you are, Cam!”

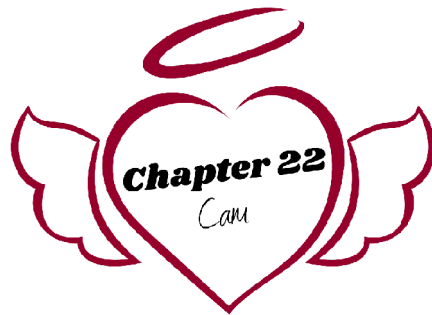
Shiloh’s eyes darted to her right, and her face fell. I was so intent on what I was about to tell her, it took me a couple seconds to realize that our little bubble had burst. By Gold and Black. *Fuck.*

I glanced over and saw them both grinning at me. “Let me get rid of them, and then I’ll take you home,” I whispered to Shiloh before reluctantly releasing her and turning to the women.

“Hi, Cam,” Goldie purred. “We powdered our noses like you asked. And our pussies.” They both giggled, not even noticing my cringe.

“Hey girls. Look, I’m not going to be able to hang out with you tonight.” *Okay, that didn’t come out right.* I shook my head. “Or at all actually. I’ve gotten back with my girlfriend.” I turned to put my arm around Shiloh but came up with empty air.

She was gone.



THE KEY TURNED IN the lock, and I jerked my head up. Actually, it was more of a slow roll of my head because I was way too snockered to make any rapid movements.

Hawk. Fuck.

His eyebrows lifted when he saw me slumped on the couch. “What the hell are you still doing up?”

“Waiting on Shiloh,” I slurred. “It’s four o’clock in the fucking morning, and she’s not home yet. You think she’s with Rodney?”

“Seeing as how I don’t know who the fuck Rodney is, I really couldn’t say,” he retorted, tossing his keys on the little wooden table beside the door.

“He’s some douchebag fucking asshole she was dancing with. She must be with him because she’s not here. She’s not fucking here, Hawk.” I sounded whiny as hell and didn’t give a damn.

“Hmmm. You didn’t seem all that concerned about Shiloh earlier tonight when those girls were crawling all over you in

the private room.”

“Harsh, dude. That’s mudderfucking harsh. I didn’t fuck nobody. I didn’t even kiss those girls.”

“You weren’t far from it, from what I could see.”

“I didn’t want to, cuz I’m saving my dick for Shiloh.”

Hawk’s lips twitched. “Are you laughing at me? Iss not funny, Hawk. I love her so goddamn mush. My dick is her dick. Hey, isn’t that a song? *This dick is my dick. This dick is your dick. This dick was made for you and meeeee.*”

Okay, he was definitely laughing at me. “Alright, Mozart. Enough composing for one night. Let’s get you to bed.”

“But I have to wait up for my Shy baby. I took two showers already.”

“That’s good, bro, but you need to get in bed now. I don’t think she’s coming home tonight.”

“Oh, Godddd,” I wailed. “Is she with Rodney? Do you think she’s nekkid? Please don’t let her be nekkid.”

Hawk hooked his arms under my armpits and lifted me up. “She’s not with Rodney, okay? She’s staying at Blaire’s house tonight. She texted me a few hours ago to let me know.”

“She’s with Blaire?” He nodded, taking most of my weight as he practically dragged me down the hall. “I was going to go to the office and track her, but I can’t find my keys.”

“Thank Christ,” I heard him mutter. My friend pushed me down on the bed and then reached down to my pants I had

discarded on the floor before my first shower. A couple seconds later, he dangled my keys between his fingers. “They were in your pocket, you drunk shit. I’m taking them to my room so you don’t get any bright ideas.”

“Okey doke. She’s really at Blaire’s house? You’re not fucking with me?”

“She really is,” he said, turning me on my side and pulling the covers up over me. “Now go to sleep, dumbass.”

Seven hours later, I stumbled into the kitchen, where I found a smirking Hawk leaning against the counter. “Mornin’ sunshine,” he said, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Fuck off. Give me coffee.” Why did it sound like I was talking through a cheese grater?

He poured me a cup, stirred in a spoonful of sugar, and shook three ibuprofen into my hand. I swallowed the pills and took a fortifying drink of coffee, muttering my thanks.

“You gonna feel like going to Carrie’s game this afternoon?”

“Yeah, of course.” Axel and Blaire’s oldest daughter had a basketball game today, and we were all planning to go watch her. “Ax says she’s good.”

Hawk nodded. “She has his height. I did some dribbling drills with her a couple weeks ago, and she’s got some ball-handling skills.”

“Thanks for last night. Sorry I was such a mess.”

“It happens.”

“How were the twins?”

Looking pleased with himself, he stroked a finger over his lower lip. “No hole was left unpunished. They were exhausted and thoroughly used by the time I left them.”

I shook my head. “You make me look normal, bro. And that’s saying something.”

He shrugged, his face a mask of indifference. “Consenting adults,” was his only answer.

“I’m going to take a shower.”

“You said you took two showers last night.”

“Yep,” I said with a grin, draining the rest of my coffee. “Only three more to go.” Hawk shook his head in confusion.

A couple hours later, we entered a local gym and found a seat at the right end of the second row. Carrie’s cheering section was so large, we took up two entire benches. We settled in as the team ran out onto the court.

“Look how cute she looks!” I said, elbowing Hawk, and he nodded with an affectionate smile on his face. He may be a hard motherfucker, but he was a total softy where the kids were concerned. Carrie’s dark curls bounced as she started warming up, and she looked up into the stands and waved, seeming pleased that we were all there to see her.

Some time during the first quarter, my heart stuttered in my chest when I realized Shiloh was seated on the first row near

the left side, sandwiched between Bode and Bristol. I took out my phone and sent her a text.

Cam: You look so fucking gorgeous today, angel.

I saw Shiloh lift her phone from her lap and frown at the screen before her face turned to search the gym. Her eyes landed on me, and she raised one hand in a halfhearted little wave before turning back to the front.

She was simply dressed in jeans and a long-sleeved, blue T-shirt, and her hair was up in a ponytail. Her makeup was barely there, if at all, but to me, she looked even more beautiful than she had last night when she was all dolled up.

My fingers went back to work on my phone.

Cam: Do you know if they have medics on duty here? Because you're taking my breath away.

Cheesy? Yes, but she bit her bottom lip when she read the message, trying to hide her smile. Looking over her shoulder at me, she mouthed, "Stop," but that smile snuck through and lit up something in my chest. *Time to up the game.*

Cam: I would like to wear your pussy as a mask.

Even from this distance, I could hear her little “EEP!” when she read it. She slammed her phone face down on her leg, but Bristol snatched it up and read the message. Turning to me, she raised her eyebrows and gave me an impressed *you go, boy* snap. I winked at her and picked up my phone again.

Cam: I want you to come so hard on my face you fucking drown me so I can die the happiest man in the world.

Watching Bris and Shy look at each other with wide eyes, I couldn't hold back my chuckle. “What's so funny?” Hawk rumbled next to me.

“Just texting Shiloh.”

He side-eyed me. “She's right there. Why don't you just go talk to her?”

“I'm being cute and irresistible.” He made an unimpressed noise as I put my thumbs back to my phone.

Cam: And if you missed me, you could always breathe life back into me.

Shiloh turned and gave me a smile so sweet I could feel it in my teeth. Until her phone dinged with my next message.

Cam: Through my cock.

She gasped and then fell over against Bristol, both of their shoulders shaking with laughter.

At halftime, I gestured at Bode, and he immediately got up so that I could take his vacated seat.

“Hey, Shiloh, Bris. Enjoying the game?” I asked, plopping down beside my girl.

“We’re trying to, but some lunatic keeps texting me,” Shiloh said, turning her face toward me and lifting her eyebrows.

“Really? You should definitely go out with him then.”

“Oh, should I? And why’s that?”

Leaning toward her, I whispered, “Because if you’ve turned him into a lunatic, that means he’s probably been hung up on you for a really long time.”

She tilted her face, putting her lips about an inch from mine. “Or maybe he’s a crazy stalker.”

“No one cares more than your own personal stalker.”

A little giggle escaped her beautiful lips, and my gaze dropped to her mouth, watching her next words form there.

“How do I know he’s my *personal* stalker? He could be stalking numerous women, for all I know.”

Raising my eyes to hers, I said sincerely, “He’s not. You’re the only one.”

She inhaled a sharp breath, and I was taken by the fact that we were breathing the same air, our faces so close we could

kiss if I pressed forward a scant inch. “There’s something to be said for loyalty.”

“There is,” I said in a low voice, letting my hand brush against her thigh. “So, that’s a yes?”

Her pretty little tongue snaked out and moistened her lips. “Yes. I think we need to talk.” I wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but I would take what I could get.

Our little moment was broken up when Rox tapped Shiloh on the knee and held his hands up to her. Her face brightened. “Hey, Roxinator,” she said, picking him up and settling him on her lap.

“Hi, Aunt Silo,” he said, and hearing him call her ‘Aunt’ did some weird and wonderful things to my insides.

She pressed her lips to his forehead for a tender kiss, and I was struck by the difference between her and Traci. This woman was sweet and kind, and seeing her with a child on her lap just looked *right*. “Are you having fun watching Carrie?” she asked him.

“Uh-huh. She’s making lotsa touchdowns.”

Shy laughed. “She’s making baskets. Touchdowns are in football, like your daddy plays,” she reminded him gently.

He rested his head on her shoulder and looked over at me. “Hi, Unca Cam.”

“Hey, buddy. You want to come sit with me?”

He shook his head, one of his hands fisting possessively in the blue fabric of Shiloh's shirt. "Aunt Silo. She made me Mitty Mouse pancakes."

I let my eyes go wide. "Whoa, dude! Are you serious?" He nodded. "You must be special because Aunt Shiloh's never made me Mickey Mouse pancakes."

Rox looked up at her adoringly. "You make Unca Cam Mitty Mouse pancakes?"

She gave me a chagrined look. "If he's a good boy, I'll think about it."

He leveled a serious look at me. "You be good, Unca Cam." Then he swiveled his little body and snuggled up against Shiloh, his legs around her waist and his arms tucked between their bodies. He fell asleep shortly after she started softly stroking his tiny back.

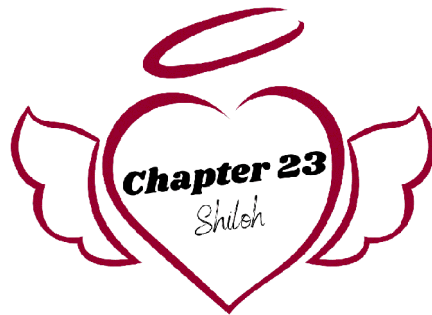
"You want me to take him?" I offered.

Shiloh shook her head, tilting it down and resting her cheek on his head. "No, I've got him," she said serenely. I felt something pricking the insides of my eyelids at the sight, and I averted my gaze, blinking rapidly at the thoughts that were taking over my mind like an invading army.

I want to have babies with this woman, I thought. I want to fill her belly up with my children, and I want her to cuddle and love them and make them character pancakes just because it makes them happy.

I had never been more sure of anything in my entire life. My mind flashed to my mother's engagement ring, the one Traci had found in my drawer and assumed was for her, the stupid woman. That ring was for Shiloh. It had always been for Shiloh, probably since the first time I'd ever seen her.

Now, I just have to convince her to marry me.



CAM KNOCKED ON THE door to my room and called out, “You ready, Shy?”

“Yeah, just a second,” I said, sliding on some nude pumps and adjusting the collar of my silky shirt in the same color. Swinging open the door, I said, “Ready.”

Cam let out a low whistle as his eyes slowly took me in from top to bottom. “Damn, baby. You look incredible.” We were going out for casual Chinese tonight, so I was wearing a pair of Blaire’s jeans, but they fit me like a glove.

“Thanks,” I said as a blush rose on my cheeks at the praise. “You look pretty damn good too.”

He was wearing soft denim jeans that hugged his muscular legs—and other areas that I was trying not to look at—to perfection. The sleeves of his light tan sweater were pushed up to his elbows, giving me a nice view of his forearms, which were roped with hard muscles and smattered with dark hair.

He stepped into me, his big hands going to my waist as his nose traced a line from the corner of my mouth to my ear,

sending a trembling knot of pleasure up my spine. “You smell good too, angel.” His voice was low and seductive, a dangerous combination that only made what I needed to tell him even harder.

Then he took my hand and led me to his Jeep. Twenty minutes later, we were being seated in a big, round booth that was entirely too big for the two of us, but Cam slid in right beside me, his thigh pressed against mine.

I looked around the place. It was casual but classy, showing no signs of the garish decor often found in Chinese restaurants. There were no Buddhas, waving cats, or bright red and green banners with symbols. Instead, it was done in charcoal gray with soft gold accents.

“This is nice,” I said, trying to ignore the body heat from Cam as he wrapped his left arm around the top of the booth behind me.

“Their Mongolian beef is the best I’ve ever had,” he said, his fingers lightly stroking a piece of my caramel brown hair. It felt alarmingly good. “You want some sake?”

“Sure,” I said, nodding nervously. We looked over the menu, both ordering the beef with brown rice when the waiter stopped by our table.

Taking a sip of his sake, Cam angled his body toward mine. “What did you want to talk about, Shy?”

And here we go.

I swallowed audibly. “Blaire asked me to stay with her.”

He smiled, and I thought that maybe this wasn't going to be as hard as I'd thought. "Yeah, that was nice of her. Did you stay in Charli's old room?"

"Yes, but I meant..." *Deep breath, Shiloh.* "I'm going to be staying at her house until I find an apartment."

Cam's mouth dropped open, and some sake dribbled down his chin. I watched as a droplet hung precariously from his chin and threatened to drip onto his shirt, so I reached up and dabbed it with my napkin. "Say something, Cam."

"No."

No, he doesn't want to say anything? Or no, something else?

"And here are your entrées," the waiter chirped happily, setting our plates in front of us. "Is there anything else I can get for you?"

"No," Cam said, not looking away from my face even as he addressed the man beside our table.

The server backed away at Cam's rough tone.

"What do you mean no?" I asked, searching his eyes, which were currently a deep, ocean blue.

"No." His voice was softer now, almost a whisper.

My entire body huffed in exasperation. "Is your brain like a record player that's stuck on that one word?"

A little smile peeked through. "Yes." *Good grief!* "Eat your food, Shy. And you're not moving out."

I opened my mouth to set him straight, but he picked up a piece of my beef with his chopsticks and tucked it against my tongue. My scowl turned into a soft moan as I chewed the tender, savory beef. “Holy hell.”

“Good, right?” I nodded, and he fed me another bite, this time with some puffy brown rice. “I don’t want you to go, angel.” He kept putting food in my mouth, no doubt to shut me up as he continued talking. “I want you to stay with me. Not just for the protection issue, but because we’ve been apart for way too long, and I want another chance with you.

“I’ve never gotten over you, Shy. For sixteen years, I’ve thought about you. Every. Day. Regretted my decisions. Wished I’d made different ones.”

Now it was my mouth’s turn to drop open, but he pushed my jaw closed with his chopsticks under my chin. “Cam, I just... I don’t want to be a burden. You have a different lifestyle now.” I thought about the two girls last night and the bathroom conversation about Cora. Cam was obviously a full-fledged man slut, and all I was doing was getting in his way. “I know me coming back into your life has thrown you into a tailspin, and I’m sorry. I appreciate everything you’ve done for me, but I think it would be best if I left you to do... whatever.”

He chewed a bite of his meat and looked over at me. “I don’t want *whatever*. I want you,” he said point-blank, dabbing his mouth with his napkin.

I stared into his eyes, wanting to believe him. “We have so much baggage, Cam.”

He took one of my hands, rubbing his thumb lightly over the back of my hand. “Everyone has baggage, angel. We just have to deal with it together. I’m willing to do that, if you are.” He looked at me pointedly, and when I didn’t answer, he said, “Take Blaire and Axel, for example. They went through some seriously heavy shit in the beginning. Shark and I threatened to whoop Ax’s ass on more than one occasion.”

“Axel Broxton?” I asked incredulously. He was seriously the biggest, most devoted family man I’d ever met.

“One and the same. He was a hot-tempered jackass when he was younger. Charli and Shark had a rough time, as well.”

That made my blood boil. Charli was the sweetest person in the world. “What the hell did Beau do?”

“Oh, nooooo,” Cam sang. “It wasn’t Shark. Charli broke his fucking heart when she left that man a puddle on the floor. But she thought she was doing what was best for him.”

“Sounds like someone else I know,” I muttered, looking at Cam and raising an eyebrow.

He gave me a look full of chagrin. “And don’t even get me started on Tank and Bristol. Those two had baggage out the wazoo.”

What the hell? Those two were friggin’ gaga over each other.

Cam’s hand slid up my arm to toy with a lock of my hair. “And look at all of them now. They’re fucking rock solid, baby, three of the most perfect couples to walk this earth. They

had to go through the darkness to find the light.” His eyes looked down at his fingers twirling around the end of my hair. “I’ve been living in the darkness for a long time now, Shy.” His gaze found mine again. “But you’re my light.”

“Oh God,” I whispered, long-suppressed emotions rising up and wrapping themselves around my heart like out-of-control vines.

“I know I’ve made mistakes. I’m a man, and we do that shit. It’s in the handbook. But I will never purposely hurt you again, Shy. I want us to be together.”

“There’s a handbook?” I asked.

He nodded, his smile smug. “Yeah, we get it at puberty, around the time we start colossally fucking things up.”

“So, there are rules and stuff?”

“Yeah. Rule One is *Don’t Fuck Up*.”

I couldn’t help the little smile that curved my lips up. “And Rule Two?”

“It’s *You’re Totally Going to Fuck Up. Now Fix It*. Then there are some clauses and shit about how to repair what you’ve screwed up.” He shoveled another bite of food into his mouth.

“Clauses?”

He nodded. “Yep. Clause A dash One says to apologize, and it gives explicit groveling instructions. That’s where I am now.” He shifted his weight so that he was facing me, his hand

on my face. “Shiloh Simms, I am so sorry for hurting you. I thought I was doing what was right all those years ago, but I was so very wrong. And then this week, including last night, I acted like a total ass. I was so screwed up in the head, thinking that you were still in love with fuckface, and I messed everything up. All I want is you, angel. I don’t want any other woman. Ever. Just you.”

His gorgeous blue eyes held absolutely no sign of deception, so I nodded for him to continue. “I need you in my life, Shiloh. I swear to God, I feel like I’m going to die if I lose you again. I want to marry you and have kids with you. I want to make slow, sweet love to you on weekend mornings before the kids wake up, and then I want them all to pile in the bed with us for some sweet snuggles. I want you to make us Mickey Mouse pancakes, and I want to send you flowers for no reason except that I love you.” My entire body jolted at that, but he continued. “Because I *do* love you, Shiloh. I don’t think I’ve ever stopped.” There were tears in his eyes when he finished, and a look of true sincerity that made my heart stall its thumping in my chest.

My mouth opened and closed a few times like a fish out of water. I finally found my voice, which sounded uncharacteristically husky. “That was some pretty fucking good groveling.” He smiled softly. “I’m almost afraid to ask if there’s a Clause A dash Two.”

“There is,” he said, inching closer to me, his other hand coming up to cup the other side of my face. “It’s this.”

And then his lips were on mine, soft, tiny brushes at first, and then with more intent. Firmer. More pressure. The hot wetness of his tongue teasing the seam of my mouth.

I parted my lips and accepted him inside, my hands clutching the front of his shirt as his tongue worked with and against mine. Tender strokes filled with nothing but love and truth.

Camden Fitz fucking loves me! And he's kissing the absolute snot out of me.

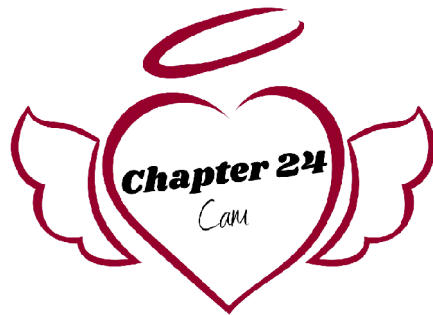
I let out a little moan, which Cam swallowed greedily and answered with one of his own. After he had kissed me into a gelatinous puddle of swoon, his tongue retreated, and he sucked softly against my lips. He was still the best kisser I had ever had the pleasure of laying my lips on.

Holding my face, he pressed his forehead against mine. I could feel the power of his gaze on me, and I pried my eyelids open to find that his eyes had lightened to a soft blue.

“I’ll stay,” I said, and he smiled against my lips.

“Angel.” That one word was infused with so much joy that it almost bowled me over. If not for his hands on my face, I feared I would flop right over onto the seat of the booth and melt into the gray leather. He trailed sweet kisses across my cheek and to my ear. “I’ve already had four showers. I was wondering if you’d like to join me for the fifth.”

Turning my face from his, I called out, “Check, please!”



I PUSHED THROUGH THE front door of my house carrying Shiloh. Her legs were wound around my waist, and our lips were fused like they had been welded together.

“Seems like your date went well,” Hawk observed calmly from his position on the couch.

“Mmmmfh,” I replied, tossing the bag of leftovers in his direction, never breaking stride as I headed to my bedroom with my hands firmly on Shiloh’s ass and my tongue in her mouth.

“Thanks, dude.”

Kicking my bedroom door closed behind us, I carried my girl straight to the bathroom. “Naked,” I grunted against her lips.

“So fucking naked,” she said into my mouth, unbuttoning her shirt and tossing it and her bra to the floor. We managed to get undressed the rest of the way with our mouths leaving each other for only a half second at a time when we had to shed another piece of clothing.

I rolled on a condom and lifted Shiloh again, carrying her into the walk-in shower and turning on the water. Her hips rocked against me, spreading her wet heat over my shaft until I thought I was going to lose my mind. Ripping my mouth from hers, I panted against her cheek. “Need to get you ready.”

“I’m ready enough,” she said, lifting and notching the entrance to her pussy right over my tip. With her hands on my shoulders for support, she bore down hard on me, taking half of my dick inside her and screaming out my name.

“Jesus Christ, Shiloh,” I roared as her tightness squeezed the fuck out of me.

Her head was pressed against the dark blue tiled wall at her back, her eyes closed as her hips began to pump, trying to take more of me.

“Cam,” she whimpered, “help me. I need all of you inside me.”

By God, if my girl wanted all my cock, I was going to give it to her. With an unholy snarl, I gripped her hips so hard I knew I was leaving evidence of my fervor for her to find tomorrow and thrust upward, pushing through her clenching walls to take her fully. Balls fucking deep.

The feel of her surrounding me, heating me, eating me up, snapped the very final thread of my control, and I began to move. Not sweet, gentle thrusts, but rather *I’m going to fuck you through this goddamn wall* thrusts. Hard. Bruising.

But Shiloh was right there with me, taking it and giving it back to me. Her hips were churning in a perfect counter-rhythm, fucking herself on my dick as I rammed into her with brutal force. To be honest, I wasn't sure how she was taking all of me. My dick felt longer and thicker than it ever had.

I tilted my hips up slightly, hitting a spot inside her that sent her into a writhing frenzy. "Goddamn, yes, angel. Fucking come on me."

I wanted to kiss her, but I didn't want to muffle those glorious cries of ecstasy she was making, so I clamped my mouth onto the tendon where her shoulder met her neck and sucked. Keeping one hand beneath her butt, I slid the other up to fist her long hair, roughly tugging her head to the side for better access as my mouth moved up and down her neck.

She grew impossibly tighter around me as she came, and I found it hard to even move my cock through her extremely snug channel. Bending my knees a little, I put my back into it, forcing my dick deep. She cried out something garbled and loud as her cunt squirted all over me.

Holy Jesus! I had never left a woman unsatisfied, but I had never made one squirt either. But here Shiloh was, flooding my cock with her sweetness. I almost came right then, but the more she gave me, the more I wanted.

"Cam," she yelled, her fingernails piercing the skin of my shoulders.

"That's right, baby. Scream my fucking name."

She did. Over and over as I fucked her through the hardest orgasm I had ever felt a woman have. Instead of draining her physically, her climax seemed to turn her feral, and we went at each other harder and faster.

The water from the shower was splashing wildly off our bodies, making it difficult to see, but I found her mouth with my own and shoved my tongue inside. Hers curled around and around mine as the crown of my dick hit that spot high inside her.

The swollen, dimpled flesh of her G-spot was readily apparent against my head, and I thought vaguely that these were fucking awesome condoms to allow me to feel her in such detail. Feeling my cock rubbing against that soft spot stimulated me as much as it did her, and my balls tightened up against my body.

“Bout to come, angel,” I mumbled into her mouth. “Give me another one first.” I allowed my middle finger to press against the tight bud of her ass as my fist tightened in her hair. Shiloh began whimpering into my mouth, and I knew she was almost there. If I could hold out just... a few... seconds more.

And then that telltale tightening deep in her vagina told me she was there. As she rippled around me, I finally let myself go. And it was fucking spectacular. My legs buckled mid-orgasm, and I dropped to my knees, holding my woman tightly against me as the water poured over our bodies, and I continued pumping into her, our moans rising above the noise

of the water. She looked fucking beautiful, her lips parted and emitting the sexiest noises I had ever heard.

I swiveled us around, sitting on the floor of the shower with my back against the wall so that we were out of the direct spray of the shower head. I was still inside Shiloh—*could I bring myself to ever pull out?*—and her body started to relax against mine.

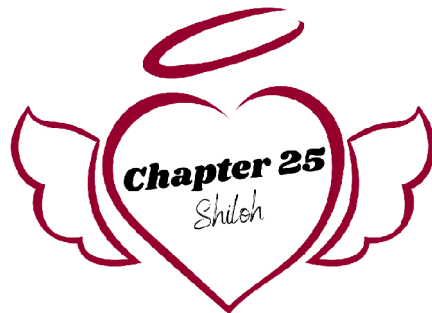
“Jesus fucking Christ,” I panted against the corner of her mouth, and she moaned her agreement.

“I’m pretty sure we just starred in our own episode of Animal Planet,” she said a few minutes later, when her breathing began to resemble something close to normal.

A breathy laugh escaped my lips, and I gripped her face and searched her beautiful eyes. “You okay, baby?”

“I’m perfect,” she sighed, nestling her face into the crook of my neck.

Yes, angel. You certainly are.



RAISING MY HEAD FROM Cam’s shoulder, I tried to meet his eyes but found it difficult. We had been sitting on the floor of his shower for a while, neither of us willing or able to move. “Um, Cam?”

He opened those breathtaking blue eyes. “Yeah, baby?”

How to put this?

“Uh, when I... the first I, um, the first time I came? Was it ___”

“You squirted, angel.”

I cringed a little. That was exactly what it had felt like. Did I pee on him? Because, *gross!*

“Is that... was that bad?”

He smiled patiently. “No, sweetheart. It’s a very good thing. It means you came extremely hard.” *Well, that’s the fucking truth.* “And before you ask, no, you didn’t pee.”

I breathed out a sigh of relief and a soft giggle and finally looked into his eyes. “Thank God! That would have been

awkward.”

“When you come like that, I wouldn’t even care if you did pee on me,” he said with a wicked grin.

Smacking his shoulder, I scrunched up my face. “Ewww, Cam! You perv!” My teeth sunk into my bottom lip as I decided whether I really wanted to ask him. “Have you ever...”

“Nope,” he said, kissing the tip of my nose. “It was a first for me too. I’ve always thought it was a myth or a camera trick in pornos.”

I lifted an eyebrow at him. “So I’m kind of a legend, huh?”

He laughed loudly and squeezed me tight, his mouth resting against my lips. “Always, angel. I’ve never come so hard I couldn’t stand up. You’re one of a kind. Fucking perfection.” He gave me a long, languorous kiss, and I could feel him hardening again inside me before he pulled back. “Shit. Speaking of standing up, we probably should so I can take care of the condom.”

Cam held both my hands and helped me to stand before pushing himself up. I got out of the shower on shaky legs and started to towel off when I heard, “Uh, Shy? You’re on birth control, right?” I turned to see him looking down at his dick. Which was *uncovered* except for a ring around his base with some shreds of rubber hanging down. “Because I think our animal sex busted the condom.” His worried eyes found mine.

My own eyes widened. *Oh, holy fuck!*

“I got a birth control shot on Tuesday.”

His shoulders relaxed, and he grinned at me. “Okay, good. I meant what I said about having babies with you, but I didn’t mean *right now*.” Noticing my look, he exited the shower and stroked his fingers softly down my face. “I’m clean, Shiloh. I’ve never gone without a rubber. We’re fine.”

But I wasn’t sure if *we* were. The doctor had said that the shot wouldn’t be fully effective for seven days. It had been four. I nodded and forced a smile. No need worrying Cam until there was something to worry about, right?

“Yeah, probably, but I would feel better if we used condoms for the rest of the week just to be safe.” He nodded his agreement without question. “And I had all my tests done at the doctor. I’m clean too.”

There was a long pause before he asked, “Was there a reason you went to get tested?”

“Yes,” I said, leaving the bathroom and opening Cam’s top dresser drawer. “Can I borrow one of your T-shirts?”

“Anytime,” he said, following me into the room and holding my hips from behind. “Do you want to tell me?”

No.

My hand stilled on the stack of shirts, and I closed my eyes before speaking. “Vincent had mistresses—two that I know of. Angela and Theresa. I heard him talking about it with his father,” I said quietly.

Cam's voice was like ice. "He cheated on you while you were engaged?" I nodded, and he moved my hand away, pulling a V-neck tee in a ceil-blue color from the drawer and dropping it over my head. His soft lips kissed me just below my ear. "I'm thinking about making a trip to New York. I could take care of things, and you'd never have to worry about Bellucci again."

I whirled around in a panic. "Cam, no! I don't want you anywhere near him." My hands clutched his face desperately, as if I could hold him there with me by sheer desperation alone.

"I can take care of myself, angel. And anyone who hurts you."

My eyes dropped to his broad shoulders, his bare chest, his ripped abs, and I had no doubt that Cam could take Vincent on. Vin wasn't fat or anything, but he was *soft*. Cam could rip him apart with one hand tied behind his back. But still...

"I don't want you to. He's dangerous. Please, Cam." My voice rose as tears welled in my eyes, and Cam shushed me.

"Okay, baby. Okay. Don't get upset. I won't go if you don't want me to. But the offer stands. Me and the other guys have... skills."

"Who are you? Liam Neeson?" I asked with a watery smile.

"Pshhh. Neeson couldn't hang two minutes with me." He had a cocky grin that was hot as fuck, and I stood on my

tiptoes to kiss him as my hands smoothed up his powerful arms.

“My man can kick some ass, huh?”

“I can kick yours. You wanna wrestle later?”

My inner slut raised her hand. *Yes please!*

“Why does that sound dirty when you say it?” He pressed his hardening cock against my stomach as his hands slid down to my butt. *Again? Jesus, he’s like the Terminator.* That thought made me giggle, and he frowned in amusement.

“What’s so fucking funny?”

I covered my lips with my fingertips, but I couldn’t hold back my laugh. “I was just thinking that you’re the Pussy Terminator.”

He shook his head, laughing with me before bending down and lifting my shirt so he could talk directly to my pussy. “I’ll be baaahk,” he intoned, and I pushed him away with a snicker.

“God, you’re silly,” I told him, and a boyish smile took over his entire face.

“I feel silly when I’m with you, Shy. You make me feel young.”

“Well, get dressed, boy,” I said, slapping his bare ass. “I want you to teach me some self-defense moves. The girls said you’re really good.”

“I’m okay,” he said modestly, but a smirk was teasing along the curves of his lips.

An hour later, I had determined that Camden Fitz was way more than ‘okay’ at all things fighting. I had also determined that I was really fucking out of shape. “Holy shit!” I said, barely making it to the bed before collapsing. I had wanted to crawl from the dojo to Cam’s room, but I was trying to maintain some semblance of dignity.

“You okay, babe?” he asked, a small triangle of sweat at the top of his T-shirt the only indication that he had exerted any effort at all, while I was drenched from head to toe.

“No. I’m dead,” came my muffled reply, my face buried in his navy-blue comforter. What Cam called ‘a few *basic* punches and kicks’ had every muscle in my body screaming.

“Come on, let’s take a bath and soak out the soreness.”

I tilted my head slightly, revealing only one brown eye. “Okay, but no funny business, mister.”

He held up both hands in surrender. “None at all.”



Twenty minutes later, I had an extremely large cock stuffed down my throat.

“Fuck, Shiloh. So fucking good,” Cam moaned from where he was perched on the back edge of the tub with me kneeling in the water, holding onto his spread thighs. I pulled back, slurping loudly on the thick, swollen head before pushing back down onto him. “Look at me, angel. Let me see those big, beautiful eyes while you’re sucking my dick.”

I shifted my gaze to his eyes, which were a lighter blue than I had ever seen them. He was loving this. When I was as far down as I could take him, he cupped my face in his large hands. “Stop right there and let me look at you.” I paused, and his thumb slid across the two inches of his cock that I couldn’t fit in my mouth and then to my lips, tracing them softly. “So fucking gorgeous, baby. Do you know how many times I’ve dreamed of your pretty little mouth around me?”

He started to move with long, slow thrusts. “Do you know how often I thought about fucking your throat so deeply it bruised your vocal cords, angel?” *Holy fucking hell!* “How many times I dreamed of soothing your aching throat with my hot cum and making it all better?”

His hands on my face were gentle, but his hips were not as he picked up speed, guttural grunts punctuating each deep slide of his dick into my mouth. I’d just thought Camden Fitz was hot before, but I’ll be damned if the man hadn’t gotten sexier—and—dirtier with time.

I pulled back, letting him slide from my mouth as I lowered my face to his balls. *Jesus, I don’t remember these things being this big. How did he even walk with all this hanging between his legs?* Opening my mouth wide, I sucked one of his testicles into my mouth while my hand encircled his cock, my fingers not quite meeting around his impressive girth.

“Shit,” he gritted through his teeth as I rolled my tongue around the heavy, pulsing globe while stroking his penis with a firm, tight grip. When I moved to the other one, I added a twist

of my hand on each upstroke, and Cam's breathing became labored. "God, sweetheart. Yes. That's gonna make me come." I loosened my grip and released him from my mouth with a pop, and the deep frown that crossed his face was almost comical.

Licking my way up his shaft, I tracked each engorged vein with my tongue, keeping my eyes locked with his heavy-lidded gaze. The head of his dick was dark red and throbbing by the time I reached the tip, and I dug the point of my tongue into his slit, tasting the thick pre-cum that was oozing from him. "Taste good, baby?" he asked, and I gave him a coy little grin and nodded before wrapping my lips around the end of him and sucking with all the pressure I could muster.

"Holy fuck!" he shouted, his hips jerking upward. "Goddamn, Shy." I eased off and then did it again, and Cam's hands slid to the back of my head, his fingers twisting into my hair at the scalp. Taking a deep breath, I swallowed him to the back of my throat, and he growled out a curse, his ass rising up off the lip of the tub.

I slid my hands to his hips, holding him down and letting him know who was running this show. I sucked him deep and then slid back slowly, my tongue undulating against the hot flesh on the underside of his length. Over and over, I took him into my mouth, fast going in and oh, so slow coming out until he was straining against my hands.

Pressing down more firmly with my palms, I lightly scratched his balls with my thumbnails, and he groaned, the

sound low and almost inhuman. “You’re killing me, angel. Fucking killing me.” I bobbed my head faster and felt his cock swell against my tongue as his fingers tightened to the point of pain in my hair. “Can’t... hold... it. Shiloh, oh God!”

With another raspy cry of my name, he started coming as I mouth-fucked him, my jaw aching with the effort. I worked to swallow everything he was giving me, and the back of his head hit the tile wall as he groaned out his completion with his eyes clenched shut. When I had sucked him completely dry, I finally released him from my mouth, and he slowly raised his head, as if it were taking a Herculean effort to do so.

“Damn,” he whispered, his legs trembling as I drug my hands down his thighs. “You just totally owned my dick, baby.”

I grinned, and he slid back down into the cooling water, pulling me astride him and nuzzling my neck. “I’m glad you approved,” I said.

“I more than approved, angel. I’ve never had a woman give me head that good.”

At the mention of other women, my spine stiffened, and I twisted away to turn on more hot water. Sure, I knew he hadn’t been celibate for sixteen years, but it kind of hurt my feelings to hear him say it out loud.

Pulling me back into his lap, his brow furrowed. “What’s wrong, Shy? You got weird there.”

“It’s nothing,” I muttered, trying to hide my face in his neck, but he was relentless, holding me up by the shoulders and searching my face.

“Oh,” he said softly as it came to him. “I didn’t mean to say it like that. I just meant you were the best...” He blew out a breath, stopping himself from vocalizing whatever he was about to say. His eyes held mine. “You are amazing, sweetheart. You have a mouth like a goddamn Hoover, and you rocked my balls off.” He gave me a wicked grin. “Is that better?”

“Your romantic phrasing has my heart going all pitty pat,” I said with a roll of my eyes, earning me a laugh.

Squeezing me tightly against him, Cam rubbed his hands up and down my back. “I fucking adore the shit out of you, Hoov.”

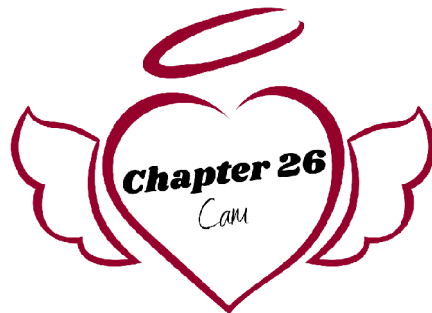
“Don’t call me Hoov,” I said with a giggle.

“I’ll call you Hoov, if I want to,” he argued. “You rightfully earned that nickname.” His lips pressed tender kisses across my shoulder as my hands roamed the muscles of his upper back and neck. “Let’s soak for a few more minutes, and then we’ll get out, Hoov.”

“Stop calling me that!”

Cam turned me to nestle between his legs, his hands massaging my shoulders. “Whatever you say, Bissell? Dyson? Oh, I know ... Roomba!”

My entire body shook with laughter. “I think I actually prefer Hoov.”



BACK IN MY BEDROOM, I stopped Shiloh before she could dress, turning her toward me and letting my thumb trace over a spot on her hip.

“I notice you got some ink.”

Her lips rolled in, and she nodded her head toward my chest. “As did you.”

I picked up her hand and placed it over the angel wings on my chest, holding it there with my own hand. “I got it the day after I made the dumbass decision to leave the best thing in my life.” Her eyes widened, her mouth falling open. “I always wanted my angel hovering just over my heart.”

“Cam...” she breathed, blinking rapidly at me as her eyes filled with tears. “I got mine the same day.”

Speechless. I couldn’t think of a damn word to say. We had both gotten tattoos on the exact same day?

My vocal cords finally decided to function, and I gruffly asked, “What does yours mean?”

Her eyes dipped down before rising to meet mine. “I got a navy-blue heart because my heart was in the Navy.”

Tugging her toward me, I wrapped my arms tightly around her, letting my cheek rest against the top of her head. “My beautiful, sweet angel.” I held her for a long while before bending to get a better look at her tattoo. “There’s a little crack down the middle.”

“Yeah,” she whispered.

“It’s because I broke your heart, isn’t it?” She nodded reluctantly, and the weight of what I had done to her threatened to crack my own heart in two. I stood to face her, cupping her face in my hands. “If I promise to heal your heart, will you get the crack filled in for me, angel?”

Tears fell like raindrops down her gorgeous face, and I kissed each of them away, whispering sweet promises to her.

“I will,” she promised back.

It was now my life’s mission to mend what I had broken and see that little crack filled in with solid blue.



Shiloh slipped on one of my T-shirts and some cute hot pink panties as I pulled on some plaid boxers. “Babe,” I said tentatively, “it’s Saturday, so you probably need to call... Vincent... before it gets too late. With the time difference and all.” I found it difficult to even speak that man’s name, the word leaving a sour taste on my tongue.

“I know,” she said on a long sigh. “I’ll go to my room and call him, so you don’t have to listen.”

Pulling her to me, I kissed her softly on the lips. “No, angel. I’m staying with you,” I told her firmly. When she tried to protest, I slanted my mouth over hers, swallowing her objections as my tongue explored the warmth of her mouth. Pulling back with gentle suction, I whispered, “I’m staying.”

Her eyes looked a little dazed from the kiss, and she graced me with her beautiful, shy smile. “Okay, Cam. But you can leave if it bothers you too much. I don’t want to upset you.”

“I’ll be fine. I’m just worried about you, sweet girl. I know I acted like a douchebag last time, but I’m over my little hissy fit,” I told her with a smile. “I’m here for you, okay?” My girl didn’t have a deceptive bone in her gorgeous body, and I realized now how hard it was for her to say words she didn’t mean. I needed to man the fuck up and be the rock that she needed.

Her bottom lip trembled a little, but she bit down on it, and lifted her chin. “I’m ready.”

“You’re so fucking brave,” I told her, admiration apparent in my tone.

Shiloh scoffed. “No, I’m not. I’m scared to death.”

My lips curved up in a crooked smile as I took her face in my hands. “My dad told me before I left for the Navy that bravery doesn’t mean you’re never afraid. True bravery is taking on the things you *are* afraid of. And that’s exactly what

you're doing, sweetheart." I kissed her forehead and felt her take a deep, fortifying breath.

"Okay, but just a warning... this is probably going to piss him off, and Vincent yells a lot when he's angry."

I grinded my teeth until my jaw ached. "He yells at you?" My voice was deceptively low.

"Yeah, but he's never, you know, hit me or anything."

Attempting to keep from yelling myself, I gritted out, "Well, I should fucking hope not. Otherwise, he's a dead man."

"He just has a bad temper."

"Don't fucking defend him, Shy."

She pulled away from me. "I can tell you're getting mad, Cam. Maybe I should just—"

"No, I'm okay. I'll be good. I have a temper too, but unlike that asshole, I'm an adult who can control himself."

Five minutes later, those words bit me right in the ass because I wanted to kill Vincent Bellucci. Now. Slowly.

Shiloh had put the phone on speaker, and Bellucci answered the phone with a syrupy, "Hello, darling."

"Hi, Vincent."

"What time does your flight get in tomorrow? I have some things to take care of, but I'll send a car for you."

His fiancée has been gone for a week, and he's not even going to pick her up at the airport? Fucking bastard.

“Actually, that’s what I was calling about. I got a call from my mother. Sh-she’s ill.”

“Hmmm. I hate to hear that. Send her my best.”

Didn’t even ask what was wrong.

“I will when I get there. I’m going to Ireland to help out.”
There was a long silence. “Vin, did you hear—”

“Yes, I fucking heard you. And the answer is no.”

“I wasn’t asking permission. I was informing you of my plans.” Her voice was low and calming, like she was speaking to an irate toddler.

“No!” he roared. “Don’t fucking piss me off. You *will* have your ass on that plane to New York. *Tomorrow, Shiloh.*”

How. Fucking. Dare. He.

I was leaning back against the headboard with Shiloh sitting between my legs, and I was so goddamn pissed, I had to consciously keep my hands loose, so I didn’t squeeze her shoulders and hurt her. Instead, I smoothed my fingers softly up and down her arms. *I’m here for you, baby*, I told her with my hands.

“Vincent,” Shiloh said, her voice soothing, “she’s having some heart problems, and I need to be there to help her.”

Jesus, she was being too fucking sweet. Is this the kind of shit she’s been living with? Being spoken to like that and then trying to be all comforting to rein in his anger?

“I’ll hire someone to take care of your mother. I need you here.”

“She needs her family, Vin.”

“And what about me? *I’m* your fucking family. Thanksgiving is less than two weeks away, and I need you back by then.”

“I’ll do my best, but—”

“You better. What am I supposed to tell my father when you don’t show up for dinner?” It raked my last fucking nerve that he talked over her like she was less than him.

“Tell him it was a family emergency, Vincent. Surely he understands taking care of *family*.” There was a little bite to her words, causing the jackass on the other end of the line to pause.

“I’m not fucking happy about this, Shiloh. I’ve got a good mind to fly down there and drag you home myself.”

Yeah, you just fucking try that, prick. You won’t have a goddamn tooth left in your mouth. My fingers squeezed my woman’s upper arms, trying to infuse her with my strength.

“Unfortunately, I have important things happening and can’t just take off on a whim because my fucking fiancée is out of line.”

If only I could reach my hands through that phone...

“Well, then, maybe this is a good time for me to be out of your hair,” she said, her voice still soft and calm. “Since you

have so much going on right now.”

The trembling of her shoulders told me she wasn't feeling as calm on the inside, and I leaned down to press my lips against the back of her neck as I wrapped my arms around her and held her tightly to my body. Her soft sigh was music to my ears, and I was so fucking thankful I was here to offer her that little bit of comfort.

“Fine! Let me know when you book your flight,” he snapped. We heard a growl, “Fuck!” before he disconnected the call. Shiloh double checked the phone to make sure he wasn't still on the line.

“So,” she said, her voice trembling, “that's Vincent.”

“A real fucking charmer,” I retorted, unable to keep my smartass comment to myself.

Shy flipped over, grabbed my face and laid a kiss on me that I could feel all the way to my toes.

“Mmmm,” I moaned into her, grabbing two handfuls of spectacular ass cheeks as I welcomed her tongue into my mouth. I pressed my hips obscenely against hers, letting her feel my immediate need for her. I was pretty sure I had never gotten a full erection that quickly.

She drew her legs up until she was straddling my lap, her hot sex hugging my erection through the thin nylon of her panties and the cotton of my boxers. Rotating her hips, she plunged her warm tongue into my mouth as her hands slipped back to hold onto my hair.

“Cam,” she breathed against my lips.

“Yeah, baby?” I could feel how wet she was, and it took an effort of titanic proportions to avoid being unmanned right where I sat.

“Thank you.”

“Christ, angel. Please tell me what the fuck I did to get this response, so I can do it more often.”

She sat up and lifted my T-shirt off over her head, revealing her pert breasts to my willing eyes. My hands were confused. They were quite happy on her firm ass, but those tits were beckoning. I split the difference, keeping one hand down low to guide her hips as she continued to ride me and lifting the other to one soft breast, my finger and thumb toying with her nipple.

Her chocolate eyes were locked on mine. “I had forgotten what it was like for a man to be masculine, but still speak to me with respect. Until I found you again.”

Jesus. That was fucking sad.

“Always, angel. No one should talk to you like he did.” I nuzzled my nose against her nipple before taking it between my lips and sucking softly. “You should be treasured and loved, baby. Always.” I moved to her other tit, letting my teeth scrape across the nipple.

Shiloh’s back arched, and my hands couldn’t help but find that soft curve and trace it up and down. “Ohhhh, I love your hands, Cam. And your mouth.” Her fingers tangled in my hair

and held me to her. Not that she had to because I wasn't going anywhere.

Lowering my head, I nibbled her ribs and the firm flesh of her side as her hips continued torturing me with their sweet grind. "Tell me what you want, Shy."

"I want... I..." Her breathing was labored, and she scrunched her eyes closed.

"Tell me, baby." Fingernails scratched softly against my scalp. "Don't be embarrassed with me."

"I want to do it like we used to. You know."

My heart started to race. I lifted my head and pulled her face to mine. "What do you want specifically? Say the words, angel."

She opened her eyes and chewed on her bottom lip. "I want you to hold me down." Her voice was so quiet I had to strain to hear it.

I rewarded her with a gentle kiss on the corner of her mouth. "And then what? I'll do anything you want."

"And then I want you to fuck me like you own me."

Within a second, I had her on her stomach as a low growl bolted up from the depths of my chest. Covering her body with my own, I asked, "Like this, baby? This what you want?" I jammed my erection lewdly against her round bottom and buried my face in the side of her neck, my teeth sinking into the soft, dewy skin there as I held her wrists down to the mattress.

“Yes... Cam... oh God!” Her body was squirming underneath mine, her ass pressing against my groin.

“You want it rough, angel?”

“Very.”

“Fuck,” I muttered, pushing myself up off her and stripping quickly out of my shorts. This woman was going to be the death of me tonight. “Hands and knees,” I ordered, fisting my dick and giving it a couple long pumps. Shiloh looked over her shoulder at me, and the smile on her face was fucking *everything*. She was glowing with anticipation. I wrapped my hand around the back of her panties, twisting the soft material in my fist before yanking hard and ripping them from her body, earning me a soft gasp. “Eyes forward, angel.” She turned her face obediently to face the headboard, and I rubbed my hands over the globes of her ass before moving to kneel beside her.

“Have you been a good girl today, Shiloh?”

“Please, Cam,” she whimpered when I rubbed her pussy lightly with my four fingers. I stopped the movement between her legs, and she let out a frustrated breath.

“I asked you a question.”

“Yes,” she breathed. “I’ve been a very good girl.”

Lowering my voice, I petted her sex again, purposely avoiding her clit. “I don’t think you have. You’ve been impatient, and I had to ask you *several* times what you wanted.” She pushed her ass back, trying to get more from my

hand, but I pulled it away. “I’m going to spank your pretty little cunt now. Maybe that will teach you a lesson.”

Her back arched, and her eyes closed. “Oh God yes. Teach me a lesson, Cam.”

I bit my cheek to hold back my smile at her enthusiasm. Pulling my hand back a few inches, I snapped it forward at the wrist, delivering a sharp slap to Shiloh’s already drenched pussy. She jerked and let out a loud moan.

“You’re right. I’ve been *very* bad, Cam.”

I had to fight not to chuckle. Stroking her center, I pressed down on her upper back with my forearm and bent to whisper in her ear. “Chest to the bed, baby. I’m going to give you what you need, and you’re going to take every bit of it.”

“Yes,” she groaned into the mattress.

When I brought my hand to my mouth, my cock twitched at the taste of her on my skin. I licked, coating my fingers with my saliva before reaching between her legs and delivering another hard slap. Shiloh’s body shook with an uncontrolled shiver, and I soothed her again with my fingers, letting my middle finger graze her clit for a split second.

“Do you know what it’s doing to me to see you like this, angel? Spread out for me and taking whatever I want to give you? My cock is so fucking hard, I could drive a hole through the wall.” A soft whimper ebbed from her as she tried to squeeze her thighs around my hand to get the friction she

needed. “Uh-uh. Spread those pretty legs for me, or I’m going to stop.”

Her thighs relaxed, and she spread her legs so wide, I was surprised she wasn’t dislocating a hip. It was fucking beautiful. I rewarded her with another sharp pop to her sex, and she hissed out a long “yesssss.”

“Now. I want you to tell me. What. You. Want.” My voice was deep and commanding. It had been sixteen years, but I still knew innately what she wanted. What she needed. I loved bringing her to the edge. Turning my sweet little Shiloh into a sex kitten. Making her let go of her inhibitions. I wondered briefly if Vincent, or any other man for that matter, had ever been able to do that to her. I quickly brushed those distasteful thoughts from my head as she began to speak.

“I want you to spank my pussy until I come, and then I want you to lick it up with your hot tongue.”

My grin took over my entire face. *There’s my fucking girl.*

Giving her exactly what she asked for, I cocked my wrist and delivered a series of slaps to her cunt. She was coming by the fifth strike, and I quickly knelt behind her and buried my face right where it belonged. I gave her two hard licks against her throbbing clit and then sunk my tongue deeply into her pussy, almost coming myself as her tight walls clenched around it.

Shiloh was crying my name, shoving her hot sex against my face as I extended her orgasm as long as I could. Pulling my tongue out, I growled into her, “This is the sweetest cunt I’ve

ever had on my tongue.” I gave her a long lick from her clit to her tight little asshole, allowing my tongue to flicker there long enough to feel it pucker and twitch. “Ride my face, angel. Come again for me. I can’t fucking get enough of your taste in my mouth.”

She began rocking back against me as I plunged my long tongue into her sweetness again. Sliding one hand around her hip, I feathered her clit with my thumb as I tongue-fucked her until I felt a rush of wetness flood my mouth. Sucking hard, I moaned when her pussy walls started to squeeze again. I drove my tongue in and out in a frenzy, increasing the pressure on her hard little pearl with my thumb.

Her legs contracted until her feet were resting against my thighs, and she curled her toes hard into my flesh as she came. That tiny intimate contact had my nuts tightening up against my body and, after a final long lick at the apex of her legs, I rose up and reached for the drawer beside my bed.

“Can you take more, angel?” I asked as I rolled on a condom, praying to fuck she would say yes.

“God yes!” she panted, lifting her face from the mattress. Her cheeks were delightfully red, and the fine sheen of sweat had her hair matted to her face. I brushed it away gently and bent to kiss her swollen lips.

“Tell me if it’s too much. I’m so fucking wound up right now, and I don’t want to hurt you.” Gripping her ass, I drove into her, knocking her forward on the bed. “Fuck!” I gritted out, wrapping my fingers around her hips for better leverage

and hauling her back toward me. I started fucking her hard and deep, and Shiloh pushed back, matching my punishing rhythm stroke for stroke.

“Fuck yes, Cam! Fuck me hard!”

Jesus, could this woman get any hotter?

“You’re such a good girl, Shiloh. Taking all this fat cock in your tight little pussy. You’re so fucking tight, baby.” I slid my thumbs to her ass crack and separated her cheeks so I could see myself disappearing inside her. It was the most incredible thing I’d ever seen.

Widening my legs, I leaned over her, pressing my body against her back and sliding my hands up her arms. I grasped her wrists, forcing them down into the mattress as I rutted into her, my hips slapping against her firm ass and the headboard banging into the wall with resounding thuds.

“Cam! Right there, baby!” she cried, arching her body into mine.

“That’s it, angel. Struggle against me. It’ll only make it sweeter when I make you come all over me,” I grunted as sweat dripped from my forehead.

Giving her more of my weight, I groaned when she bucked underneath me. She was going fucking wild, but shit... so was I. I had never been so goddamn turned on in my life. Rolling my hips, I forced her all the way down to the bed and drove her into the mattress, riding her hard and fast until I felt her pussy convulsing around me.

“C-com-ing,” she stuttered.

“Fuck!” I yelled as the first wave of my orgasm washed over me. “Fuck, Shiloh!” Her cunt was clenching me so tightly, I was afraid we were going to rip another condom to shreds. I loosened my grip on her arms as our bodies shuddered together, my heart pounding so hard I would probably need to visit a cardiologist tomorrow.

I pried myself from her body to give her room to breathe and kissed the side of her sweaty face before rolling to the side and flopping onto my back. Covering my eyes with my forearm, I used the other hand to sweep her close to me.

“Best fucking sex of my entire life,” I panted.

“Me too,” she said, cuddling her head against my chest as she sucked in deep breaths. “You have no idea how much I needed that.” Her sweet lips fluttered little kisses across my pecs.

“Been a while?” I asked, testing the waters. Nothing would please me more than to know that Bellucci couldn’t satisfy her sexually the way I could.

“Hmmm,” she hummed, her fingers playing with the hair low on my stomach. “About sixteen years.”

I uncovered one eye, peering down at her until she turned her eyes up to my face. “Sixteen years since what?”

She lowered her gaze again, pausing before speaking. “Since anyone has been rough with me.” Her brown eyes met

mine again, and my eyebrows were damn near on the top of my head. “You’re the only one who knows what I need, Cam.”

Well, fuck. On one hand, I was sad that no one listened to her needs and gave her what she wanted in the bedroom. On the other very macho hand, I wanted to beat my chest like a fucking caveman.

“You shoulda called me,” I told her with a grin, and she giggled.

“Yeah, I think I should have.”

Turning onto my side to face her, I grasped her chin between my thumb and forefinger. “Just because you’re sweet doesn’t mean you can’t be passionate too. And you’re a very passionate woman, Shiloh.”

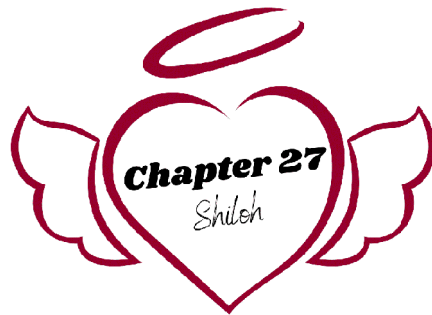
The flush in her cheeks deepened to a dark red as her teeth nestled into her bottom lip. “Thank you.”

“Fuck. No need to thank me, Shy. I’m the one reaping the benefits here.” I covered her lips with mine, letting my tongue dance lightly with hers. “I’ve missed the hell out of you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Cam. As evidenced by our most recent encounter.”

I laughed against her lips. “That was some pretty strong evidence.” I pulled off the thankfully intact rubber and tossed it into the trash can before pulling my gorgeous woman against me and wedging my thigh between hers. I didn’t give a damn that we were sweaty or that her desire was still leaking from her body and coating my upper leg.

All I cared about was that I had my sweet and passionate girl in my arms, right where she belonged.



ON MONDAY EVENING, CAM and Hawk arrived home to find me in the kitchen. “Hey, baby. Something smells good.”

“Chicken and dumplings,” I said, turning my face to accept Cam’s kiss. “You like that, right?”

“I like anything with meat,” he said, resting his big hands on my hips and putting his chin on my shoulder, watching as I dropped the dumplings into the boiling chicken broth.

“Ditto,” Hawk added.

“It’ll be ready in a few minutes. Go wash your hands.”

“Yes, Mom,” Cam retorted, giving my hips a squeeze before they exited the kitchen.

As we sat eating together, Hawk scooped a homemade biscuit through the sauce and moaned through a huge bite.

“Shit, that’s good. I haven’t had homemade biscuits in forever. Thanks for cooking, Shy.”

“No problem. I just appreciate you guys letting me roost in your house.”

Cam shot me a look I didn't understand and took another bite.

"So," I started, "I was thinking that I probably need to tell my mother about my split with Vincent and warn her that I used her as an excuse. Just in case he gets a wild hair and calls her."

"You hear from him today?"

I nodded. "Just a brief text. He's still pissy."

"Well, he can just get the fuck over it," Cam grunted.

Laying my hand over his, I squeezed. "You upset about something, babe?"

He cleaned the last bite of chicken from his plate and laid down his fork before leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms over his broad chest. "Yeah, actually. I'm upset that you think this is just Hawk's and my house."

"Oh. Um. Does someone else live here?" I asked, confused as hell.

He leveled me with a glare, and Hawk stood and started gathering the plates. "I'll do the dishes since you cooked, Shiloh. Thank you again."

I nodded and kept my gaze on Cam's angry one until Hawk left the room. "What are you pouting about?"

"You live here too, Shiloh. That's what I'm pouting about. Not that I'm pouting. I'm just..." He ran a hand through his dark hair in frustration.

“I don’t live here, Cam. My name isn’t on the lease. I’m just a houseguest.” That only made the furrows on his forehead deepen, so I got up and sat in his lap, resting my face against the side of his neck. “Tell me what’s really going on, baby.”

He sighed. “You’re not just a houseguest. I want... I want you to stay here. And I want you to move your stuff into my room. That’s where you’ll be sleeping, so it just makes sense.” I pressed a soft kiss against his neck, and his arms surrounded me. “I don’t like to think of you leaving, Shy.”

“Then talk to me about it next time instead of acting like a brat. I can’t read your mind, Cam.”

He swatted me on the butt. “I’m not a brat. You’re a brat.” He rested his lips against my forehead. “Will you stay? And move into my room?”

At my hesitation, he began speaking again.

“Shiloh, I want you in my arms when I fall asleep at night. I want to be able to wake up in the middle of the night and listen to you breathe. And for your beautiful face to be the first thing I see when I wake up in the morning.”

Dear God, who could argue with him when he said stuff like that?

“You move fast, Camden Fitz. We’ve only been together for a couple days, and you’re already talking about moving in together?” I teased.

“It’s been a long time coming, and I don’t want to waste a single day.” He nuzzled his nose into my hair and inhaled.

“Please, angel?”

“If you’re sure that’s what you want. And if Hawk doesn’t mind.”

“If Hawk doesn’t mind what?” he asked as he walked back into the dining room and picked up the pot of chicken and dumplings.

“I asked Shiloh to stay here.”

“But I can look for an apartment soon, if it’s not okay,” I said quickly, earning me a frown from Cam.

“Hmmm,” Hawk said, twisting his lips to the side in thought. “You do make good biscuits.”

“And I can make shrimp and grits that will make you want to slap your mama.”

He huffed out a humorless laugh. “I’d like to slap her, even without the shrimp and grits. But yeah, I don’t mind if you stay here. You’re a cool chick, and this fucker is going to be impossible to tolerate if you’re not around,” he said, tugging a chunk of Cam’s hair. “And, for the record, I think it’s a good idea to tell your mom something about what’s going on. Just to cover your ass.”

Hawk left to go work on his truck at Tank’s house, and Cam and I went to his—*our*—room to call my mother.

“Shiloh!” she answered breathlessly. “I was worried sick. You didn’t call and let me know about your flight yesterday.” The guilt hit me right in the gut. “I had to go online to make sure your plane landed.”

“Oh, Mom. I’m so sorry. I forgot all about it because I didn’t actually fly yesterday.” I took a deep breath. “I’ve decided to stay in Texas because, well, I’m breaking up with Vincent.”

There was a moment of silence. “Okay. I, uh, can’t say that I’m disappointed, honey. There’s just something off about that man.” *Mom, you have no idea how right you are.* Cam rolled his eyes at the understatement.

“I found out he’s cheating on me, but I haven’t told him yet. I’m, uh, trying to get some evidence together.”

“Oh, sweetie. I’m sorry. So, where does the jerk think you are since you didn’t go back to New York yesterday?”

“Well, I told a fib, and I hope you won’t be mad. I told him you weren’t well, so I came to see you. I just thought I should let you know in case he calls or something.”

My mother snorted. “The man has never once picked up the phone and called me, so I don’t think you have to worry about that. But if he does, of course I will cover for you. Where are you staying in Houston?”

I scrunched up my face, and Cam rubbed his hand soothingly up and down my calf. I wasn’t sure how the whole *I’ve already moved on to another man* thing was going to go over with Mom. I didn’t want her to be disappointed in me. No, I hadn’t told Vin we were broken up, but in my heart, I knew I was no longer with him. Not since the moment I heard him talking to his dad about mistresses and murder.

“I have to tell you something else, Mom.”

“Oh God. Are you sick? Because if so, you need to go back to M.D. Anderson there in Houston. But you can’t neglect your treatments this—”

Cam’s hand froze on my leg, and I cut my mother off. *Fuck!*

“No, Mom,” I said with a nervous little laugh, avoiding Cam’s eyes. “I’m perfectly fine. I was just going to tell you that I’m staying in Dallas with an old friend.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize you were in Dallas. Which old friend? Is it Ashley? I always liked her.”

“Not Ashley. I’m staying with Camden.” Mom didn’t say anything for so long that I was afraid the call had dropped. “Mom? You still there?”

“I’m here. Camden Fitz?”

“Yes ma’am.”

Another pause, and I started to sweat. “Oh, Shiloh. I feel so much better knowing you’re with Camden. He was always a sweet boy, and he took such good care of you. How is he doing?”

I let out a sigh of relief. I prayed Cam didn’t catch Mom’s earlier comments, but from the weight of his stare against the side of my face, I was pretty sure he had.

Hoping to keep her off that topic, I said, “He’s doing great, Mom. He works in security, and he has a very nice house. I’m

enjoying getting to know him again.” I threw him a smile which he didn’t return. *Dammit to hell.*

“I’m so happy, sweetheart. I’d always hoped you two would find each other again.” I heard a crash on the other end of the phone, and my mother cursed under her breath. “Niall just broke a plate. Honey, I need to go. I swear, that man doesn’t even know which end of the broom to use. I love you so much, Shiloh, and please give Cam my love too.”

“I will. Love you, Mom.”

After disconnecting I risked a look at Cam. He looked pensive and *not* happy. “Mom sends her love,” I said cheerily.

“I heard,” he said curtly. “M.D. Anderson is a cancer center.”

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“Uh-huh. It’s the largest one in the country. Very respected. I need to go pee.” I started to crawl off the bed, but he stopped me with a hand around my foot.

“Do you have cancer, Shiloh?”

I met his eyes steadily. “No.”

His chest was rising and falling rapidly. “*Did* you have cancer?”

I rolled my lips in, biting them hard before answering. “Yes.”

His lips parted at my confirmation, but he didn’t speak. He just stared at me with those piercing blue eyes until I finally

said, “Acute lymphocytic leukemia. But I’m fine now.”

“When?”

“It was years ago. Really nothing to worry about. I’m going to—”

“How. Many. Years. Ago?” His tone left no room for further stalling as his blue eyes darkened.

“Sixteen,” I admitted in a small voice.

Cam looked like a balloon that someone had let all the air out of, his shoulders slumping and his head dropping to his chest. “That’s what was wrong with you. When I came to visit. Your hair. Your weight loss. You were fucking sick.”

“Yes.” My voice was barely above a whisper.

“I fucking left you, and you had cancer.” He shoved off the bed, jamming both hands through his hair until it stood on end. “You were sick, and I abandoned you! And you didn’t even tell me, Shiloh. You didn’t fucking tell me. I would have stayed with you. I would have taken care of you.”

“I didn’t want you to stay with me out of pity,” I said, clutching his pillow against my chest and rocking back and forth.

“Pity? *Pity?*” That last word was almost a squeak. “I wouldn’t have stayed out of pity. I would have stayed because I loved the shit out of you, angel.” He was pacing the room, throwing his arms around like a maniac.

“I didn’t want you to worry. You were being sent to God-awful places, and I didn’t want you distracted, Cam. I didn’t keep it from you to hurt you. I just wanted you to come home safely to me.”

“But I didn’t, did I? I fucking left you while you had cancer. My God!” He sank to his knees, his head bowed and his hands locked behind his neck. “How can you even stand to look at me?”

He looked so fucking pitiful, and I couldn’t stand it. Climbing off the bed, I kneeled in front of him, letting my hands stroke his forearms. “This wasn’t your fault, Cam. We both thought we were doing the right thing for the other person.”

His eyes were wild and filled with tears when he lifted his head. “How can leaving the woman I love when she could have died be the right thing? I don’t think I’ll ever be able to look at myself in the mirror again. And what was that about neglecting treatments?”

Shit. I’d hoped he missed that little tidbit.

“There were problems. With the insurance.”

That was the truth but not exactly all of it. My mother hadn’t had the money for the premium one month, so I had spent hours upon hours on the phone with the hospital’s business office trying to straighten everything out. The doctors had told me to just continue my treatments, and we would deal with the payment issues later, but I had honestly been so

heartbroken when Cam left that I couldn't even get myself out of bed to go in.

Until Aunt Barbara threatened to put her well-worn orthopedic shoe up my ass. She'd told me I should be ashamed of myself because of what losing me would do to my mother a few short years after losing Dad. The guilt had finally overridden the heartbreak, and I had continued my treatments, but not before I had major medical setbacks from those few months with no treatment.

But Cam could never find out that him leaving had literally almost killed me. I would never put that guilt on him. He was having enough trouble dealing with the cancer situation as it was. I believed in total honesty, but not if that honesty served no purpose except to hurt another person.

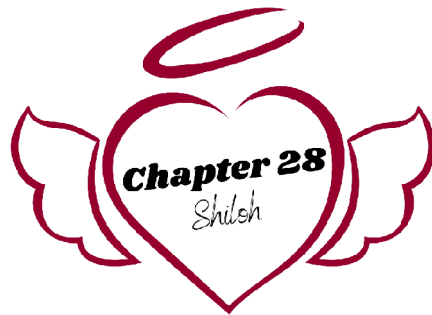
"Money? Shit, Shiloh. I could have helped with that. My family would have helped you. I know you always refused to let us help, but when it's a life-and-death situation, you have to just swallow your pride and let the people who love you do what's necessary. Hell, I would have married you, if I had known. The military has excellent insurance." He threw up his hands in exasperation.

"Yeah, Cam. That's exactly what I wanted. Someone to marry me just because I needed medical treatments. I thought you didn't want me. There was no way I was going to ask for your help, and I sure as hell wouldn't have married you because of that," I yelled. At his stricken look, I backtracked. "Cam, I know *now* that you loved me, but I didn't know it *then*

because you didn't tell me. You just decided for me what you thought was best. I know you were trying to do the right thing, but so was I. It's in the past, and we just need to move on and forget about all that shit."

"Forget about it? I can't do that, Shy. I just can't fucking deal. I need... fuck."

Swiping his hands roughly over his face, he stood and walked out of the bedroom, slamming the door behind him.



I GAVE HIM TWO hours and then went looking for him. I found him in the dojo down the hall.

Propping my shoulder against the doorframe, I watched Cam beat the hell out of a large black training dummy. He was freaking magnificent. I had never seen a man his size move with such grace. It was brutal as fuck, but the way his body moved was still intrinsically graceful.

Every punch. Every kick. Every drop of sweat that flung itself from his hard body as he spun and moved. I couldn't tear my eyes away from the bunching and flexing of the muscles covering his back and arms. And don't even get me started on his legs. This was a man who looked like he never skipped leg day.

To be honest, watching him turned me on. A lot.

He finally noticed me in the mirror but didn't turn around, just swiped about a gallon of sweat from his forehead with his arm. "Did you need something, angel?"

"You," I said simply, taking a few steps into the room.

His eyes held mine in the mirror. “I’m struggling, baby. I just need to get this frustration out.” He looked down and massaged one red knuckled fist with his other hand.

“You about done? Because I know another way to get rid of your frustration.” I took a couple more strides across the black mat covering the floor.

“I don’t deserve you,” he grunted, his jaw tightening. “I can’t fucking deal with hurting you like that.”

“I love you, Camden.” I hadn’t planned on telling him just yet; I was still getting used to the idea myself.

His gaze jerked up and met my reflection. “Don’t say that just to make me feel better,” he said gruffly.

“I’m saying it because it’s true.” I took another few steps until I was close enough to touch him, and our eyes reflected back at one another. “I. Love. You.”

“How the hell could you love me after—”

“How could you love me?” I broke in. “I wasn’t honest with you back then either. Does that make me unlovable?”

He finally turned to face me, his face more serious than I had ever seen it. “No. I love you no matter what.”

“Good. Because we’ll both probably screw up in the future. It’s in the handbook, right?”

He tried to fight it, but a tiny smile peeked through. “Yeah.”

“I forgave you a long time ago, Cam. You just have to forgive yourself. You didn’t know, baby. Let’s leave the past in

the past and focus on our future.”

His fingers twirled around a strand of my hair before tucking it behind my ear. “I like the sound of that. I’ll try.” He sucked in a deep breath and let it out slowly as one side of his mouth tipped up in an irresistible smile. “You love me, huh?”

“I’m not sure I ever stopped,” I said, standing on tiptoe to give him a soft kiss, but his hands went to my waist, holding me away from him.

“I’m a sweaty mess, baby. Let me go shower, and then I’ll take care of you.”

“No,” I whispered against his lips, stepping into him and letting my body absorb the heat rolling off his. “I want you like this. Hot. Sweaty. Dirty.”

Cam’s lips crashed into mine, and he lifted me until I enveloped his waist with my legs. He backed to the corner of the room where there was a weight bench and settled on it, standing me between his spread legs as our lips parted.

His dark, sweaty hair flopped over the creases puckering his forehead. “Shiloh…”

I placed a fingertip over his luscious mouth. “Nothing negative right now, Cam. Let’s just love each other.”

The creases smoothed away, and he slipped his hands underneath the T-shirt I was wearing to cup my bottom over my panties. “Okay, angel. Take your shirt off for me.”

I crossed my arms and grabbed the hem of my shirt, sliding it up and over my head, as his eyes lightened and took in every

inch of flesh as I exposed it. “So fucking gorgeous,” he murmured, pressing his lips over my belly button, his tongue slipping out to taste the little divot. My hands went to his dark head, my fingers sliding through the wetness as he lowered his face and inhaled.

“Your pussy is my own personal version of Heaven, Shiloh.” I shivered at his words and the feel of his wet, velvety tongue tracing the seams of my crotch. Hooking his thumbs into the hips of my panties, he slid them slowly down my legs, his nose at my apex as his blue eyes held me spellbound. “I need to taste your pleasure on my tongue.”

After removing his shorts, he slid back on the bench and laid down, pulling me with him until I was straddling his face. “God. Cam,” I whimpered as he unhurriedly savored me with his nose. Reaching for the handles where the barbell usually rested, I held on for dear life as he started gently eating me. With tiny nibbles and soft flicks of his tongue, he made love to me with his mouth, taking his time as his moans of enjoyment vibrated through my sex.

His hands slid up and down my thighs, finally coming to rest on my hips as he guided me deliberately over his hot mouth. “Look in the mirror and watch me make you come, Shy. I want you to see yourself like I do when you give me the control to take what we both need.”

My eyes shifted to the mirror, and I gasped at the erotic scene. I looked like a sex goddess on top of a sex god. My face was flushed with desire, and my hair seemed to take on a life

of its own, swirling around my shoulders as my body rode slowly up and down on his face. Cam's thick cock lay heavily on his eight-pack abs, and I could see the viscous pre-cum seeping onto his stomach.

The vision was made only more breathtaking at the sight of his long, masculine fingers digging into my soft, feminine flesh. My eyes stayed there for a while, watching as his hands flexed with every movement of my body, his skin several shades tanner than mine, providing an arousing contrast. I wished I could take a close-up picture of his hand on my hip and keep it forever.

Cam built me up bit by bit with his full lips and skilled tongue before breaking me down with a slow-boiling orgasm that had me trembling on top of him, my hands clenching the handles of the weight bench with such force my knuckles were white. I watched as my head tipped back of its own accord, my lips parting when I cried out his name.

Pulling my eyes from the steamy scene in the mirror, I found him looking up at me, his eyes burning as he watched me watching us. Every single nerve ending in my body buzzed with the release of my climax. After a few more soothing laps of his tongue, Cam effortlessly lifted me and sat up, settling me on his lap.

“You're so fucking beautiful when you come, angel.”

He tugged my hips closer so I could feel his hard length throbbing between my legs. “We're beautiful together,” I told him, my hands weaving into his hair and pulling his face to

mine. “Mmmm,” I moaned when I tasted myself on his lips. His face was still wet with my cum, and the wetness smeared across my own skin as he deepened the kiss, his tongue stroking against mine in a carnal demand for more.

Cam’s hands clutched the backs of my thighs, and he lifted me until the opening of my sex was nestled right at his tip. “Take me,” he whispered into my mouth, and I sank down onto his cock, the steely length stretching me beyond what I thought I could handle. “Fucking perfect,” he murmured, his lips moving to my neck to taste and tease as he held me down on his erection.

We were both content like that for a while, his body penetrating and permeating mine as we held still and just *existed* for each other. His sweet kisses traced a path up my neck and to my ear. “I love you,” he whispered. More tender kisses across my cheek until we were nose to nose. “I love you so much, Shiloh.”

Our gazes linked us together, and I was pretty sure no moment in my life would ever compare to this one. “I love you too. Will you do me a favor?”

“Anything, angel.”

“Will you go with me to the tattoo shop tomorrow?” He sucked in a ragged breath, his eyes questioning me, and I nodded. “I want to get my tattoo filled in.”

His voice was thick with emotion when he answered, “Yes, angel. I’ll take you.”

Without words, as if they had received some kind of secret signal, our bodies began moving together, rocking slowly like a boat riding the gentle waves of the ocean. There was no straining or pushing or pulling. It was pure and organic. Just two destined souls connecting and sharing and giving.

Cam kissed me gently as our sweat-slickened bodies glided against each other. His coarse chest hair abraded my nipples, peaking them into hard, pebbled points as his hands explored my body. When his eyes became heavy-lidded and his blinks slowed, I felt both of our orgasms ready to shatter us simultaneously.

“Cam,” I breathed, and his hands found their way to my lower back, holding me tightly to him as he swelled inside me.

“Together, baby,” he said, sliding his nose against mine.

I closed my eyes and pressed my forehead against his as the earth started to shake beneath us. We shared each other’s air and came together. Long. Slow. Achingly exquisite.

We were still sitting like that ten minutes later, both of us in a post-orgasmic haze, eyes closed as fingertips stroked and soothed damp flesh. Finally Cam’s lips caressed lightly over mine, and I could feel his smile.

Peeling my eyeballs open, I found him doing the same. “What’s that smile?” I asked, not even recognizing my own raspy voice.

“I would like to revise my statement from a few nights ago when I said that was the best sex of my life. Tonight has

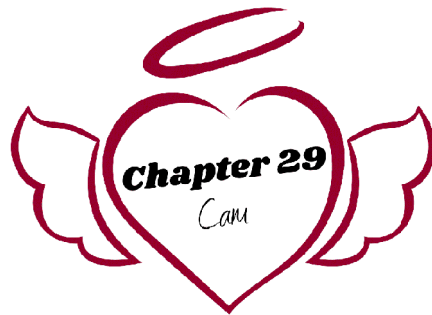
trumped any sex anyone has ever had in the history of the universe.”

My lips curved up, matching his smile. “Because we made love.”

He laughed. Not in a jesting way. His laughter was pure joy. “Yes, we did. Who knew I’d remember how?”

“You haven’t...”

“Not since you,” he admitted, and I thought my head would explode. “Never with anyone but you.” His face turned serious, and he gnawed nervously on his bottom lip. “Let’s go take a shower, and then we need to have a talk.”



SHILOH SWALLOWED AUDIBLY AND turned her big brown eyes up to mine. We had just showered and were lying on my bed facing each other. She looked adorably ruffled with half her hair in a little knot on top of her head and her thick red glasses framing her eyes. “What did you need to talk to me about?” she asked, trying to keep her voice strong but failing. I could hear the worry in each syllable.

I traced my index finger across one eyebrow, circling at her temple, and then swirling down her cheek, my eyes following that circuitous path and avoiding her warm brown eyes. “You know I love you, right?”

“Yeahhhh,” she drawled, “but?”

“But I wasn’t a saint while we were apart.”

The corner of her lip tipped up. “That’s obvious. You’ve obtained some new skills in the past sixteen years.”

I gritted my teeth. *Just fucking say it, Fitz. Don’t be a pussy.* I lifted my gaze from her cheek, my eyes clinging to hers in the hope that she wouldn’t bolt for the door.

“I go to a sex club.” Holding a breath deep in my lungs, I waited for the explosion.

Shiloh blinked twice and opened her mouth to speak. *Here it comes. She’s going to call you a disgusting pig and then slap you.* I braced myself for both.

“Is it fun?”

My lower jaw dropped to my chest. *Is it fun? Did she just ask me if the sex club I’d admitted going to is fun?*

“It’s been beneficial,” I hedged.

“So you want me to go with you? Is that why you’re telling me this?” she asked calmly. Amazingly, she didn’t exactly seem averse to the idea, and I stared at her in wonder.

“Would you like that?”

She tilted her pretty little head, her eyes thoughtful as they rolled up and to the side before landing back on mine. “What would we do there?”

I had no answer for that because never in a million lifetimes did I think she would want to go. “I’m not sure. I’m a little shocked right now, to be honest,” I told her with a chuckle.

“I don’t really know anything about sex clubs, but I don’t want anyone else to touch me,” she announced steadfastly, and a primal growl ripped from my throat at the thought of someone else’s hands on *my* woman’s body.

“That will. Never. Fucking. Happen,” I promised her.

“What do you do there?”

My mouth had trouble forming the words. Would she think it was disgusting? “I’ve developed a bit of a voyeurism kink, so I go to watch.”

“Oh.” Her lips pressed together tightly.

“I didn’t tell you about this to hurt you, Shy. I didn’t want there to be any secrets between us. I wasn’t expecting you to be so fucking calm about it. I’ll take you, if you want to go. We can just hang out at the bar, or I can rent us a private voyeur room.”

“You mean people would watch us having sex?” she asked with alarm.

Wrapping my fingers around the back of her head, I pulled her face to mine and kissed her lips hard. “Fuck no. That’s just for us, baby.” I gave her another firm kiss. “I get off on watching other people fuck. The rooms have one-way glass so we can see out, but they can’t see in.”

A concerned wrinkle appeared between her eyebrows. “You take other women to these rooms?”

“No,” I said quickly, dispelling her of that idea. “Never. It’s just for me when I feel the need to watch.” I saw the relief in her eyes before her teeth sank into her full bottom lip. I tugged it loose and slid my tongue over the bite. “What’s that look?”

She pushed all the air from her lungs. “I think watching would make me really horny. So, do we... shit, I don’t even know what to ask. I’m stupid about all this. Can we touch each other and stuff?”

“We can do anything we want. The rooms are completely private. I can fuck you while we watch other people screw, if that’s what you like, angel.”

I watched in incredulity as her pupils dilated with desire. “Yes,” she breathed. “I want to do that.”

Jesus H. Christ. This woman knocks my damn socks off at every turn.



The Friday after Thanksgiving, I rubbed my thumb across Shiloh’s knuckles in the back of the chauffeured black SUV the club sent for us. “Did you have fun with the girls today?” She had gone Black Friday shopping with Blaire, Bristol, and Charli this morning, returning home at noon and sleeping for four hours.

She let out a little giggle. “Yes, it was so much fun. Bristol is a shopping machine.”

Lifting her hand to kiss the back of it, I grinned. “That doesn’t surprise me. I noticed you didn’t bring any bags home.”

Her smile faded a little. “Oh. Well, I can’t exactly use my debit card or Vincent might notice, and I’m running low on cash.”

Damn. I hadn’t even thought of that. “You should have told me. I would have sent my card with you.”

“I can’t spend your money, Cam. I take my Texas licensing board examination next month. Hopefully, I’ll get my license soon after and can start working.”

“Until then, I’ll add you to my account. We’ll go to the bank on Monday.”

“Cam, no,” she said, rolling her eyes. “I’ll be fine for a few more weeks.”

“With no money? Yeah. Like I’m gonna let that happen.” I focused a hard glare on her and let my voice drop to a low, commanding tone. “Why don’t you roll those eyes at me one more time, and see what happens? We’ll be going to an entirely different area of this club tonight, and you won’t be able to sit down for a week.” My tongue slicked along my bottom lip, and her hungry eyes followed the movement.

“Would you spank my pussy again?” she whispered, and the excitement in her voice had my dick hardening behind the zipper of my navy dress pants.

Leaning over, I put my mouth right against her ear. “Among other things, angel.” She shivered, and I nipped her earlobe with my teeth before sitting back in my seat. “If you don’t want to be on my bank account, I’ll just give you some cash.”

“I’m fine, Cam. I don’t need any money. It’s not like I go anywhere. I’ve just been staying home and studying for my exam.”

“You need some money in your pocket, Shy. I know you don’t like accepting help, so what if you earned it?”

“Like cleaning up around the house and stuff? I can do that anyway since I’m living there.”

“No. Not cleaning. I had something else in mind.” I unbuckled our seatbelts and pulled her into my lap, my lips lingering over the shell of her ear. “What if I knocked on our bedroom door, and you answered wearing some slutty ass lingerie?”

“I think I see where this is going,” she said with a smile in her voice.

“You would invite me in and close the door behind us. Then for the next few hours, you would let me do extremely filthy things to your body.”

“So, you want me to be a prostitute?” she asked, sounding amused at my proposition.

“A straight-up fucking whore, baby. But just for me. You’d be my own private little slut to do with as I pleased.” My hand inched underneath the skirt of her black dress, my fingers stroking her inner thigh with a barely-there touch.

Shiloh wriggled in my lap. “And how is that any different from every other night? I’m always your little slut.”

“Hmmm, yes you are,” I agreed as I drew soft circles just below the apex of her thighs. “But this time, I would leave twenty dollars on the nightstand.”

“Tw-twenty dollars?” Her head jerked back, and her eyes widened in shock as I fought to keep a straight face.

“I know it’s generous, but you’re worth every penny, angel.”

She smacked me on the chest. “You ass. I’m worth way more than that. For several hours’ work? That’s not even minimum wage.”

“You wouldn’t have to work all that hard, babe. Just let me use your holes. I’d be doing most of the heavy lifting, so you actually should probably be paying me.” I shot her my most devilish grin.

Shiloh’s hand wrapped around my blue tie and yanked me forward until we were nose to nose. “Did you just say I should pay *you* for allowing you to use my holes?” she asked with a mock glare.

“Too far?” I asked, kissing her nose. She lifted an unimpressed eyebrow at me. “Okay, fine. I’ll pay you, and I’ll even beat my original offer. Twenty-seven dollars.”

She bit the corner of her lip. “Two thousand dollars, or the holes are closed for business.”

“Even your—”

“Yes, even that one.”

“Fine,” I relented, “but you better do some pretty outstanding shit for two grand, Hoov.”

She giggled at my use of her new and very accurate nickname. We were obviously joking about the whole *paying for sexual favors* thing; however, I wasn’t kidding about wanting to help her out financially. But I knew from past

experiences that she wouldn't accept it, so I would try to slip some money in her wallet when she wasn't looking. A little bit at a time, so maybe she wouldn't notice for a while.

Cupping her face, I kissed the corner of her mouth. "Have you heard from prickface again?"

She shook her head. "No, not since that text on Tuesday."

Bellucci had messaged her earlier this week to ask about her flight information to New York. When she texted back saying that she couldn't leave her mother, he hadn't responded. To be honest, his radio silence concerned me almost as much as his hot temper.

The car slowed in front of a tall, dark glass-fronted building that looked like a thousand others in downtown Dallas, and the driver took a right into the underground garage. Shiloh's wide, unblinking eyes met mine, her lips puffing out as she exhaled a slightly panicked breath. "I'm nervous, Cam. Are you sure I look okay?"

I let my eyes rove over her, even though I didn't need to. I hadn't been able to keep from looking at her since we left the house, and her image was permanently engraved on my brain. Hair half up with delicate curls framing her face. Makeup subtle except for her deep red lips. Black halter dress and heels that almost brought me to my fucking knees when she'd walked out of the bedroom thirty minutes ago.

Bristol had helped me pick out the dress and shoes this week, meeting me at a boutique near the office during lunch one day. The outfit was understated and sexy. The kind of sexy

that didn't require the exposure of excessive amounts of skin to be alluring. The kind of sexy that could only be pulled off by a woman that was equally demure and accepting of her sexuality.

The bodice was fitted, the neckline rising to her throat where a series of large, multicolored jewels wrapped around the back of her neck. Instead of revealing cleavage, the front of the dress captivated the eye with bare, tanned shoulders. Except for a thin line of rhinestoned black material covering her spine, Shiloh's back was exposed from her neck to her waist, providing a lovely expanse of skin for my fingers to enjoy as I placed my hand on her lower back.

"You. Are. Stunning," I assured her, my fingers caressing her lightly and evoking a rash of goosebumps that teased and tantalized my fingertips. Made them crave more prickled flesh. "In fact, it's possible I may get in more than one fight this evening because I know every man—and probably some women too—will be looking at you. Wanting you."

She relaxed a little as the vehicle turned a corner. "They can't have me. I'm yours," she whispered, her fingers tracing the day-old dark stubble on my jaw.

"Which makes me the luckiest fucker in the world," I murmured, leaning into her touch.

"Well, I would appreciate it if you would refrain from getting arrested for fighting so you don't abandon me alone in a sex club."

I grinned and squeezed her thigh as the car pulled to a stop.
“I’ll do my best. You ready, angel?”

She didn’t hesitate before nodding, and when a man in a dark suit opened the back door for us, I stepped out first, buttoning my jacket before holding out my hand for Shiloh. With her delicate hand in mine, she emerged, her peep-toe, jewel-toned heels touching the concrete floor as she stood.

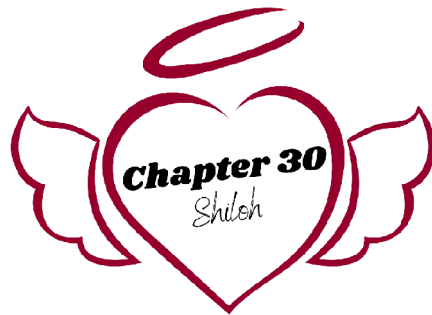
“The Red Ribbon,” she read from the sign behind me, a black metallic rectangle with the club’s logo backlit in red, the image of a red ribbon twisting out from the leg of the R in ‘Red’ to underline the rest of the name.

Tucking her hand in my elbow, I led her to the elevator beneath the sign where a man whose face was familiar greeted me with a formal nod. “Your wristwatch, sir.”

I held out my left arm, and the man scanned my watch with a matte gunmetal gray device similar to, but slightly thinner than, a cell phone. He checked the readout as a tiny RR flashed red on the center of my watch face and then disappeared. “Welcome, Mr. Fitz and guest.” He pressed the red lighted elevator button, and the shiny black doors opened immediately.

We stepped inside, and I looked down at Shiloh. Told her how gorgeous she looked again.

And prayed I wasn’t making the biggest mistake of my life.



WELL, SO FAR, I was impressed. I was a little freaked out about the whole underground garage thing at first. It seemed like something out of a scary movie or a spy novel, and I felt like I should be handing someone a briefcase of codes from behind a concrete pillar. But then I realized it was merely for our privacy. The stern-looking man did some kind of scan that made Cam's watch flash and then put us into an elevator.

Cam whispered reassuring words in my ear as my eyes searched the side panels for floor buttons but found none. Neither were there any numbers above the door indicating which floor the elevator was on.

"How do we—" I cut myself off as the elevator began moving rapidly and smoothly upward without any prompting from us. "Well, alrighty then."

Cam chuckled. "The Red Ribbon is the only business in this building, so the elevator takes everyone directly to the first floor of the club. Which is technically the third floor of the building. The first two floors are for security and staff offices."

“And what was that thing with your watch?” I asked, grabbing his wrist and inspecting the silver jewelry for anything weird, but there was absolutely nothing suspicious looking about it.

“You have to be a member to come here, unless you’re a guest of a member,” he said, squeezing my hand. “The watch is a non-descript way to do that. It’s like a key card or an ID.”

The elevator came to a smooth stop, and I tried not to hold my breath as the doors slipped open. Would everyone be walking around naked? Because there were some people I never wanted to picture without their clothes on. What if there was someone who looked like my mom walking around, all tits to the world? Or Niall? *Oh, gag!*

All those split-second thoughts came to a halt when I got my first glimpse of the club. No one was naked. They were mostly dressed like us, the women in dresses or nice outfits and the men in suits, some with ties and some without. But everyone looked normal.

Even the sexy outfits of the staff looked classy. There were about an equal number of men and women walking around with drink trays, and both wore fitted tuxedo pants. The men wore red satin bow ties around their necks, and the women wore red bras with big, red, satin bows tied across the breasts, a nod to the name of the club.

“This isn’t sleazy at all,” I whispered, and Cam smirked down at me as he led me from the elevator. His entire demeanor changed as we crossed the threshold, his spine a

little straighter even as he appeared more relaxed. He was in his element here, and I wasn't sure how to feel about the fact that my boyfriend was so comfortable at a place where sex is the business of the day. I mean, I enjoyed reaping the benefits of his obviously vast experience, but...

“Of course it's not, angel. I wouldn't have brought you here if it was. And get out of your head. I can see your brain working double-time from here.”

He led me toward a bar on the side wall. It was made of wood and a dark marble that matched the floor, and an enormous mirror behind the bar showcased almost the entire room. It made me think of watching myself with Cam in the mirror earlier this week in the dojo. Maybe I had a bit of a voyeuristic kink too. Did it count if you were watching yourself? Is auto-voyeurism a thing?

“I'll get us some drinks, angel. Sit right here and try not to look too gorgeous while I'm gone.”

“Oh, I'll try,” I said with a flirty lilt, wrapping a finger around one of the curls in front of my ear as I sat at a table facing the bar. He grinned and winked at me over his shoulder.

My eyes followed Cam as he strode to the bar and leaned forward on one elbow to catch a bartender's attention. His other hand tucked casually into his pants pocket, giving me a fantastic view of one tight ass cheek as he propped his leg up on the rail.

A burly male bartender stopped and took his order, and less than two seconds after he turned to get a couple glasses, a

woman who looked like a freaking siren in a much more revealing dress than mine plastered herself against Cam's side. She had dark hair that hung straight down her back, and her exotic mocha skin was set off by the gauzy white dress that showed a helluva lot of leg and even more boobage.

I instantly felt sick to my stomach. *How the hell am I supposed to measure up to someone that looks like her?* I picked up my clutch, fully prepared to retreat to the restroom to catch my breath, when a tall man with dark brown hair sat down on my left side.

"Hello, beautiful. What's your name?" the man asked, his brown eyes hooded as he looked me up and down. My eyes flitted back to the mirror. The beautiful woman was doing a pretty good impression of poison ivy, clinging possessively to my boyfriend as he whispered something in her ear. *What the hell is he saying?*

"Oh. Um. I'm Shiloh."

He reached out his hand, and I shook it. "What a sweet name for a very lovely woman. I'm Omar."

"Nice to meet you, Omar." I tried to fight the urge to look toward the bar, but my eyeballs weren't cooperating and looked anyway. Cam was no longer there. Neither was the siren. *Surely, he wouldn't...* I pulled my eyes back to Omar who was looking at me expectantly. "I'm sorry. Did you ask me something?"

He grinned, seemingly amused. "Yes, sweetheart. I asked which is your favorite floor?"

I looked down at the black marble beneath my feet. “Um, this one is nice?” It came out as more of a confused question than an answer, and the man at my table, who was clean-shaven and had a charming little dimple in his chin, laughed and leaned closer to me. “No, honey. I mean which floor of the club do you like? Like, what are your sexual preferences?” I was shocked at his brazenness until I reminded myself that we were at a sex club, and this was probably a normal conversation-starter here.

“She likes whichever floor I’m on,” came a cold voice from less than a foot away. Cam set down our drinks and took the chair on my right, his eyes focused on the man across the table as his arm snaked possessively around my shoulders.

“Cam,” the guy said with a grin like he’d just discovered a vein of gold.

“Omar,” Cam said, much less enthusiastically. In fact, he sounded a bit rude.

Turning my eyes to Cam, I said sweetly, “I’m glad you were finally able to get away from your *friend* once you saw Omar come over to talk to me.” I raised an eyebrow pointedly.

“I had to update ‘my friend’ on my recent *status change*,” he said, his eyes emphatically boring into mine before turning back to the other man at the table. “Seems as though I need to do the same with Omar here. Don’t want any misunderstandings.”

Omar laughed jovially, showing off a set of perfectly white teeth. “I should have known Cam Fitz would pick up the most

exquisite woman in the room.”

“She’s not a pick up. We came here together.” Cam said tightly, his voice taking on a dark tone I hadn’t heard before.

The other man’s eyebrows raised in surprise. “Hmmm, interesting. If you’re planning on going to Five, I do hope you’ll allow me to be your third?” His eyes turned appraisingly toward me. “If the lady is so inclined.”

What the hell?

“She’s not. We’re going to Two. *Alone*. Shiloh is my *girlfriend*,” Cam retorted. His emphasis on that last word had Omar’s brows almost to his hairline.

Omar laughed like that was the funniest thing he had ever heard. “Whatever you say, Fitz.” His attention turned back to me, picking up my hand and kissing the back of it. “Shiloh, it’s been a pleasure meeting you.” His eyes darted back and forth between us a few times before he chuckled and stood. With his gaze lingering on me, he slapped Cam on the back. “Let me know if you change your—”

“I won’t.” The man left, and Cam’s jaw tightened. “I see you’ve been making friends.”

“As have you,” I said curtly. His face softened, and he hooked an arm around my waist, pulling me across his lap.

“I was telling Jessie to back off because I’m here with you. That’s all, angel.”

“Have you and Jessie...”

Cam's lips pursed, and he nodded. "Before you, Shiloh, and not here. I told you I've never been with another woman here. I honestly didn't even know Jessie was a member."

My shoulders sank at his confirmation. "How am I supposed to compete with someone that looks like her?"

"You don't have to. I don't understand how you don't see how incredibly sexy you are, Shy." His hand found my face, and he kissed my lips softly. "You saw how Omar made a beeline for you, and we hadn't even been here five minutes."

"I'm glad you didn't punch him."

He shrugged one shoulder. "I wanted to, but I had to remind myself that he didn't know you were mine until I told him. He's never seen me here with a woman, and he was simply expressing an interest in joining us. He's an okay guy. He likes to share, which is why he usually hangs out on the fifth floor."

Like that was the norm. To join each other with one woman between them.

I could feel the blood rising to my cheeks, and my brain sought a subject change. "So, um." I looked around the room. Men and women were chatting and drinking, and obvious connections were being made. Occasionally, groups of two or more headed toward the back of the room. "What's back there?"

Cam followed my gaze. "The elevators to the different floors. In fact, why don't we head up to the second floor? There's a bar up there where no one will be trying to pick

either of us up.” He said that with a slight upward curve of his lips.

“Okay,” I breathed. That sounded much better. Cam handed me my drink, and I took a sip before rising from my chair. The drink was tangy, not too sweet, and left the impression of bubbles on my tongue. “That’s delicious.”

“I thought you would like it,” he said, resting a hand lightly on my ass as he led me to the elevators. We entered the cart on the left, and I noticed there were no buttons here either. Cam waved his watch in front of what looked like a small prism near the door.

“Welcome,” a sultry female voice said through some kind of magical speaker that wasn’t readily visible. It was like the voice just *existed*. “Which floor, sir?”

“Two,” Cam stated, and the elevator moved smoothly. Less than five seconds later, the doors opened to a lounge that was indeed occupied by couples though there was one woman sitting by herself at a table. Seeing where my gaze was fixed, Cam whispered, “This is a safe bar where people can come to get what they need without being bothered by others trying to pick them up. So, it’s mostly couples though they do allow single members on this floor with the stipulation that you don’t approach other patrons. That’s how I was able to come up here *alone* when I visited.”

I nodded my understanding, and we found a booth in the far corner, sitting across from each other. “So all these people are in relationships?” I asked, looking around the room.

My eyes stalled on two men who were kissing softly a few tables away. They were beautiful together, and I had to force my gaze to move along to an older couple, the woman laughing at something the man with salt and pepper hair was saying to her. They were lovely, as well. In fact, everyone in this lounge seemed so... normal, and I relaxed a bit.

“Not everyone. Some people meet up downstairs, and if they find that they share the same kink, they come up here.”

“But you said you come here alone?”

“Always alone,” he affirmed. “My friends think I come here to hook up with random women, but I never have. Not once.”

I exhaled a long breath of relief. I didn't like the thought of him coming here and screwing half the club, even if it was before we were together. A waitress came by and took our drink order, and our conversation was easy as we both relaxed with each other, the alcohol in our veins calming any frayed nerves.

After our second round of drinks, Cam asked, “Are you ready, angel?” I nodded, and he stood and helped me from the booth. I had seen couples disappearing down two hallways, one to the left and one to the right. Cam guided me to the right. “You're still okay with this?”

“Yes. It's different than I thought. I wasn't expecting it to be mostly couples.” We passed several doors with black metal rectangles on the outside.

“There’s more hardcore voyeurism stuff on Floor Three,” he said. “Pretty much anything goes there, but I like it here.” He gave a self-conscious shrug as I tried to work out why a man as sexual and who liked fucking as dirty as Cam Fitz would prefer the tamer floor.

We stopped outside a door, and I noticed a heart engraved on the metal plate on the door. There was a green light overhead, which I assumed meant the room was unoccupied. Cam scanned his watch on another of those little prisms attached to the doorframe, and the door swung open automatically as the light turned red.

The dim room inside was nice. Cozy. Candles lit the space with a soft glow that seemed romantic, to my surprise. There was a cushy red couch, a recliner, and a long black lounge chair that all faced a dark window.

“Let’s sit here,” Cam said, settling onto the leather lounge and settling me between his thick thighs. His calves wrapped over mine as his arms curled around my middle and his face nuzzled my hair. I felt totally surrounded and safe. “If you start to get uncomfortable, we can leave, angel. Or you can turn around and face me. I don’t want you to think you have to do this for me.”

I snuggled into his warmth. “I want to. For you, but for me too. I’m... interested.”

“Good,” he replied, pushing my hair over my shoulder so his lips could rest against the side of my neck. “I love you, Shy.”

I'd craved those words for so many years, and when he said them now, it sent a thrilled shiver down my spine every time. I turned my face. "I love you, Cam," I said against his lips, and then we were kissing, tender and sweet. His lips sipped at mine before his tongue slid between my lips and licked against my own. We let out simultaneous moans, and his hand came up to hold my cheek.

We broke apart when a light shone through the window, and he gave me a soft peck before we turned to face forward. A few seconds later, a couple entered the adjoining room holding hands. They were laughing happily and closed the door, stopping just inside.

"Can they hear us?" I whispered.

"No, but I can turn the sound on so we can hear them, if you want," Cam replied, and I nodded. He tapped a button on the small, round table beside us, and I heard their laughter. The woman was of medium height with hair a shade lighter than mine. The man was tall with dark hair and a muscular build that was apparent even through his light-blue sweater.

"They look like us," I said with astonishment.

"Mmhhh," Cam hummed against my neck. "That's why I like them. The system knows my preferences, so I get to watch these two when they're available."

I was a bit stunned by that. Cam and I hadn't been together for over a decade, but this was his favorite couple to watch because they resembled us? I couldn't think of anything to say in response, so I turned my attention back to the couple. They

faced each other, and he pulled her to him by her waist, smiling down affectionately at her. She looked up at him with the same kind of sappy smile. If these two weren't a couple in real-life, they should try to make a go of it in Hollywood because they were giving off some serious lovey-dovey vibes.

I became mesmerized as I watched these two people start to kiss. I found out their names were Hailey and Josh when they whispered that they loved each other. It was like I was watching a couple in their bedroom instead of in a sex club voyeur room. They got lost in their kissing, and their touches were reverent and loving.

Cam hardened against my back, and again I was surprised. Hailey and Josh hadn't even gotten naked yet. Maybe he was turned on by the anticipation. They started to slowly undress each other, and Josh was gentle and worshipful as he planted soft kisses down Hailey's neck and to her chest.

"They're beautiful," I said in awe. "*This* is beautiful."

Cam was silent for a long while before he turned his face to kiss my cheek. "This is why I come here, angel. I like to watch couples make love because..." He inhaled a shaky breath and let it slowly escape his lips. "Because they remind me of the only woman I've ever made love to. They remind me of being with you."

I turned in his arms, straddling him so I could see his face, so I could see the truth in his stunningly blue eyes. "Even after all these years?"

He nodded, a hint of embarrassment pinkening his cheeks. “This is how I got through the hard times. I struggled for so long without you, Shiloh, and when I was in California, a friend invited me to his club. I ended up spending the entire night in the voyeur room watching couples have sex. Some were dirtier than others, but the ones that seemed to be couples in love were the ones that held my interest.” His lips curled up shyly. “And so, my kink was born.”

“Oh God, Cam.” I crashed my lips to his, and his arms banded around my waist.

“This is why I come to these rooms by myself. So I can be alone with you. In my mind, at least,” he said against my cheek after our kiss ended.

I giggled. “Is it weird that I think you going to sex clubs and thinking of me all these years is about the most romantic thing I’ve ever heard?” I loosened the knot on his sky-blue tie and pulled it off. “Romantic *and* sexy,” I said, my fingers going to the buttons of his shirt and working them back through the holes.

Cam’s eyes were sparkling. “Yeah, it’s probably weird as fuck, but that’s why we’re so good together.” His hands slid up my thighs and grasped the hem of my dress, pulling it off over my head. “Holy fuck, angel. Where did you get this?” His gaze ping-ponged between my black lace bra and the teeny, little matching panties.

“Just a little something I picked up today. You didn’t see the bag because I hid it in my purse.” The flaring of his nostrils

and the tightening of his hands on my butt told me everything I needed to know, but I asked anyway. “You approve?”

“I fucking more than approve. I need to taste you now.”

Before I knew what was happening, we were swiveled around on the chair with Cam laying down and me sitting on his face. His jacket and shirt were on the floor, and I was facing the window, watching in fascination as Hailey sank to her knees in front of Josh. He had a nice, long dick. Not as big as Cam’s, but it was one a woman would definitely not complain about if she ended up with Josh in her bed.

Cam’s mouth surrounded my pussy, sucking me through the lace, and I gasped with pleasure. I reached over and tapped the sound button, wanting to hear only Cam’s and my noises. *And oh God. The noises he was making.* His tongue rasping against the lace crotch of my panties. His deep groans vibrating through me every few seconds. The obscene sucking noises.

As soon as he tugged my panties to the side and dragged his tongue through my bare wetness, I added in some indecent noises of my own. “Jesus, Cam. Your mouth is so fucking hot.”

After another long swipe and a quick flick against my clit, he looked up at me. “Watch them while I tongue your pussy, baby. Tell me what they’re doing.”

When Cam had me wanting him this badly, it seemed like all my shyness just drifted away, taking my inhibitions right along with it. Leaving in their place a foul-mouthed, freak-flag-flying woman who was desperate for an orgasm.

“Hailey is on her knees in front of Josh. He’s stroking his cock for her. Holding her head back by the hair so she can’t reach it with her mouth, but she wants it, Cam. She wants that dick in her mouth so bad.” He made a strangled noise as I continued narrating for him, his tongue swirling around my clit, teasing my entrance, circling the clit again.

“He’s pushing the head into her mouth, and she looks so fucking happy. He does too, obviously.” I looked down to see Cam’s eyes smiling up at me as he scraped his teeth over my little bundle of nerves. “Shit! Do that again, with your teeth.”

But he didn’t. He teased around the edges, biting me everywhere except where I wanted. “Keep talking,” he murmured, and I refocused on the couple in the adjoining room. “Fuck. He’s deep inside her mouth now, baby. I can see her throat working to take him all the way.”

Cam’s tongue started working faster over my sex, sliding back and forth, flickering and licking. “Jesus, this is so hot,” I panted. “He’s fucking her mouth so hard, I’m not sure how she’s not gagging.” Cam pushed his tongue deep inside me and curled it forward, licking my G-spot, and the pleasure was so intense, I would have fallen if his hands weren’t wrapped tightly around my hips.

Giving me a brief respite, he pulled his tongue out and ordered, “Give me their rhythm.”

“Mmmm, it’s slow and steady. In... Out... In... Out.” Cam tongue-fucked me, maintaining the same pace as Josh until I saw his hands tightening in Hailey’s hair. “He’s losing control,

baby. Pulling her hair hard and speeding up. In. Out. In. Out. His head is back, and all the veins are standing out on his neck. InOutInOutInOut.” Cam was matching their rhythm perfectly, his rough, wet tongue sliding from my entrance to my clit in strong, quick licks.

“Cam. Oh, fuck. I’m going to come on your face,” I moaned, and he rolled his tongue around my clit and then dug his teeth lightly into that tender, swollen button, pushing me right over the edge and into a screaming orgasm.

I planted my hands on the leather near Cam’s head and tried to keep my balance as he continued to eat me, but more gently and with longer swipes as my body shook through the bliss.

“Your fucking cum tastes so sweet, angel.” His hands were stroking my back soothingly as he cleaned me up with his tongue. “I want to live with my face between your legs.”

“Uh-huh,” was all I could manage to squeak out.

He grinned and maneuvered our bodies until he was sitting up with me in his lap. Turning his head, he said, “Looks like Josh was able to hold out.” I glanced through the window to see Hailey smiling smugly from her knees as Josh gripped the base of his dick, his eyes closed and his breaths puffing harshly from his chest. “He’s about to fuck her so good, angel.” I felt him studying me. “Would you like me inside you while we watch them?”

“Yes. Please.”

Cam stood us up and finished undressing as Josh lifted Hailey and tossed her on the bed, crawling up between her thighs and shoving them apart. I was riveted to the scene, and Cam stood behind me, unhooking my bra and sliding it down my arms. Hefting both of my breasts in his hands, he kissed up the side of my neck.

“Looks like our friend is a little hungry,” he whispered, his fingers and thumbs twisting and pulling my nipples. Josh’s face was no longer visible as he buried it between his woman’s legs. “I think he likes the way she tastes, angel, but there’s no way her cunt is as delicious as yours. Do you have any idea how hard it makes me when your flavor is on my tongue?”

I could feel exactly how hard it made him because the evidence was pressed firmly against my back. I worked my hand back between us and took Cam’s solid erection in my hand, loving how he hissed my name when I started slowly jacking him off. By the time Hailey’s back arched off the bed with a Josh-induced orgasm, Cam had my panties off and two fingers inside me.

My hand closed around the tip of his cock, squeezing as his thumb pressed against my clit. “I need you inside me, Cam. Now.” Hailey’s mouth was moving, obviously saying something similar, because Josh crawled up her body, his face still wet with her orgasm. They kissed passionately, and I felt Cam backing us up until we reached the sofa. Sitting down, he settled me on his lap so that both of us were facing the window, my legs spread wide on either side of his muscular thighs.

I lifted up and felt Cam hold his dick up for me to position myself above it. “Wait for it,” he grunted, his voice strained as we watched the other couple. When Josh lifted his hips and adjusted himself, Cam’s hands rested firmly on my hips. The anticipation was almost unbearable. “Now, angel. Wrap me up with that tight little pussy.”

His hands tightened as I began to take him, sliding down his length as his thick penis tunneled into me, stretching me to my limit. Josh pushed just as slowly into Hailey, and after a brief moment of adjustment for their women, both men started to move. Josh back and forth. Cam up and down. Fucking their women with skill and patience. And love.

My hands reached down, holding onto Cam’s rosy forearms for leverage as I began to meet his upward thrusts. The crown of his cock was hitting that hot spot inside me, and when he tilted my hips how he wanted them, it only intensified. “Cam, that... that’s the... oh God! Right there!”

As I watched Josh pushing himself into Hailey’s pink pussy, her head tipped back, and her mouth opened. Even though the room was soundproof without the audio on, I could hear her wail of ecstasy. Only, that was *me* crying out. It was like we were sharing an orgasm because my inner walls were seizing up around Cam’s sweet intrusion.

“That’s it, angel. You’re so fucking beautiful.” His mouth was on my shoulder, tenderly biting and sucking my flesh, only intensifying my climax as he fucked me through it. By the time he had me on the cusp of another orgasm, my back

was flush with his front, and I was writhing against him, his mouth fused with mine over my shoulder. Cam's hand was resting low on my belly, his middle finger thrumming lightly against my clit.

"I'm so close again, Cam," I whimpered.

"Me too, baby. I'm going to fill you up with my cum. You want that?"

"Yes, I want your cum so deep inside me. Please."

The warm palm of his hand pressed firmly into my lower abdomen as he fucked up into me. "One day my cum is going to put a tiny baby right here, angel. *Our* baby. You're going to grow my child inside your beautiful body." His breath was ragged against my neck. "You'll do that for me, Shy? Give me a family? *Be* my family?"

"Yes!" I cried as his words induced a full-body orgasm that had me straining against him. But Cam held me fast, pumping up into me and coming a second behind me, his rough grunts imprinting themselves on my cheek.

My head lolled lazily back against Cam's shoulder as we moved slowly, both of us relaxing into each other as the power of our orgasms sapped our energy. His hands were moving slowly, lovingly, up and down my body, tender caresses that had tears threatening to break through the barrier of my closed eyelids.

One rough hand circled my breast before forging a trail up my neck and to my cheek. Pressing lightly, he turned my face

toward his, and the soft heat in his eyes set my emotions on fire. “You okay, angel?” he asked, kissing my jaw with tender lips.

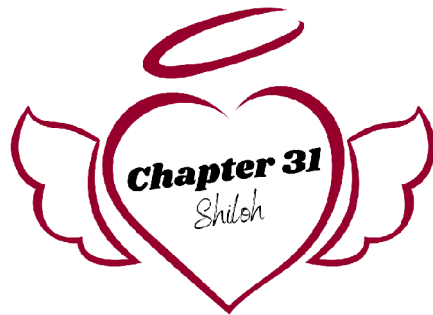
“I’m good, but—”

“But what?”

“But I think I might have a little bit of a voyeurism kink too.”

His deep laughter warmed my heart.

“God, I love you, Hoov.”



DRIZZLING SOME BUTTER OVER the top of two muffins, I put them on a plate and poured a tall glass of cold milk. Managing to make it outside without spilling anything, I crossed the street to where Woody was on stakeout duty. It was early Saturday morning, and he was hanging around until Cam and Hawk got back from their five-mile run, the psychos.

There's no way I could run today. The corners of my mouth turned up at the soreness between my legs from our sex club activities last night. "What are you so happy about?" Woody asked, rolling down the window and breaking my naughty train of thought.

"I made blueberry muffins. Isn't that enough to smile about?" I held up the plate and glass and handed it to him through the window.

"Excellent! Hop in and keep me company."

I climbed in the passenger seat. "I'm so sorry you all are having to stay out here overnight because of me."

“No biggie. It’s our job. And you’re our friend.” He took a big bite out of a muffin. “Fuck! Make that my *best* friend. This is some damn good grub.”

“It’s the least I could do. Any word from Tank about his progress on Vincent?” At Thanksgiving, I had overheard the men discussing the case while they were out on Blaire and Axel’s back porch drinking beer. Cam always refused to give me many details when I asked, simply telling me it was being handled. He might as well have told me not to “worry my pretty little head about it.”

So, it’s possible I eavesdropped a teensy bit when Blaire asked me to call the men in for lunch. As I listened just inside the door, Tank told the other guys that he thought he had a lead on something, but he was having to dig deeper because Vincent and his father were very good at covering their tracks. All I could gather was that it had something to do with discrepancies regarding offers on several high-end properties Vincent was supposed to be selling for his clients.

Then Rox had busted my cover when he came up behind me and yelled my name. I’d picked the little rascal up and plastered on a bright smile as I stuck my head out the door and announced that the food was ready.

“Nothing new, Shy. I’m sorry,” Woody said, taking a sip of his milk.

“You really don’t know anything, or Cam told you not to worry me?”

“Both.” He grinned and inhaled the rest of his muffin, lifting the other to sniff it. “You drizzle crack over these, or what?”

“Butter,” I admitted, and he nodded in approval. “I just wish they could get something solid on—” My phone rang, and I pulled it out of my pocket. “Speak of the devil,” I muttered.

“Put it on speaker,” Woody said, instantly alert.

I did and answered it, trying to infuse some enthusiasm into my voice. This was the first time I’d actually talked to him since our fight two weeks ago. “Good morning, Vincent.”

“Surprise!” he said, sounding unusually chipper. I let out an awkward little laugh, not knowing what he was *‘Surprising’* about. “Sweetheart, I felt really bad about not getting to spend Thanksgiving with you, but... well, you know how Papi is about tradition.”

“Oh, it’s okay, Vin.”

He continued as if I hadn’t said a word. “So, surprise! I’m in Ireland. I caught the first flight I could get. It was a fucking nightmare, traveling on a holiday weekend, but I endured it to be with you, *dolcezza*.”

As soon as the word ‘Ireland’ was out of his mouth, my heart started thumping like a racehorse. Woody’s eyes were like saucers, and he snatched his phone up and started texting furiously without breaking eye contact with me. He nodded encouragingly though I had no fucking clue what to do.

“Vincent...” That’s all I had. *He’s in fucking Ireland!*

I heard a low chuckle in my ear, and it sounded so ominous that my blood froze in my veins. “I know. And you’re welcome, sweetheart. Now, can you come pick me up from the airport? I’m still waiting on my bags. Fucking airlines are so damn slow.”

I took a deep, calming breath and said the only thing that came to mind. “Vincent, I know about Angela.”

There was a long pause. “My secretary? Did she call and tell you I was coming? Dammit. I wanted it to be a surprise.” His voice was falsely high with faux irritation.

Woody was still nodding at me, telling me with his head bobs that I was doing great. “I know you’ve been sleeping with her, Vincent. I-I don’t tolerate cheating. It’s over between us.”

“What the fuck are you talking about, Shiloh?”

I shrugged at Woody, and he reached out and grasped my hand. The contact helped, and I steeled my voice. “You’re having an affair with your secretary.”

“Who the fuck told you that?” he yelled so loudly, I jumped.

“It doesn’t matter who told me,” I snapped, doing my best to sound indignant, rather than scared out of my mind. “Are you denying it?”

His voice became eerily amenable. “Sweetheart, you don’t understand. Sometimes men need... certain things.”

“Then you should ask your fiancée for them. Or I should say, *ex-fiancée*.” I instilled as much ice into my tone as I could

manage.

“Goddammit, Shiloh. Come pick me up, and we’ll talk.”

Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck. What now? I widened my eyes at Woody, and he mouthed, “Tell him you’re not there.”

“I’m not in Ireland, Vincent. I’ve been trying to figure out what I’m going to do with my life, and I’ve decided to stay in Texas.” There was a long beat of silence.

“You fucking *lied to me?*” he screamed, and I covered my mouth with my hand to hold in the sob that rose in my throat. Woody’s hand was rubbing vigorously up and down my arm, trying to comfort me.

Swallowing the softball that was wedged in my throat, I gritted, “Sounds like we’re even, because you’ve been lying to me.”

“Fuck! I knew it was a mistake to let you go on this trip. Get back to New York, and we’ll discuss how we’re going to move past this little glitch. I’m catching the first plane back.”

“Vincent, I’m not—”

“I’ll book your ticket, and I *expect* you to be on that flight.”
Click.

As soon as he hung up, my body felt like all the air had been let out of it. Woody grabbed me around the shoulders, and pulled me to him, letting me sob on his shoulder.

“Oh my God! He actually went to Ireland! And now he knows, Wood. He knows I’m not coming back. What’s he

going to do?”

“Shhh, it’s okay, Shy. You did so good, honey. So good.”

“He’s going to start looking for me when I don’t show up in New York.”

“That’s why you have us, babe. He’ll never get his hands on you with us around. We’re the most kick ass security team you could hope for. The Pope *wishes* he had DFW Security Force.”

That made me giggle a little. “Thank you, Woody,” I said, leaning back to swipe the tears away from my face. Before my fingers had touched the first tear, I felt myself being ripped from the truck and hauled fiercely against a big, hard, sweaty body.

Cam. That must have been who Woody was texting while I was on the phone.

“I’m here, angel. It’s okay.” He was smothering my face with kisses, sucking each of my tears into his mouth as his arms banded around my middle. “I’ve got you, Shy. He can’t hurt you. I promise, he won’t get within fifty miles of you.”

“I know. I’m fine, Cam.”

Woody got out of the truck, and Cam let me slide down his body, gathering me underneath his arm like a mother hen shelters her chicks. Woody and I updated Cam and Hawk, who were both sweaty and shirtless, on my conversation with Vincent.

“Shit,” Hawk spat. “That motherfucker. “You think he really went to see you, or do you think he was suspicious?”

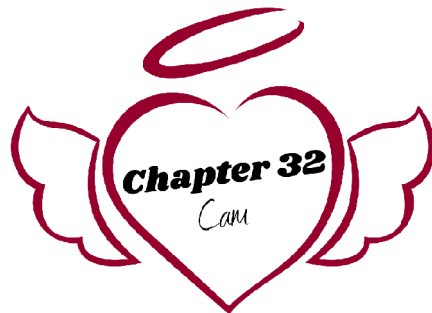
“I honestly don’t know.”

My eyes met Woody’s for a second opinion, and he shrugged. “He sounded sincerely surprised. Lost his ever-loving shit when she said she wasn’t in Ireland.”

I nodded my agreement, and Cam closed his eyes for a moment, inhaling and exhaling a few calming breaths. I knew it made him furious when Vincent yelled at me, so I worked my hand in little circles across his lower back until he opened his eyes and smiled gratefully down at me.

Hawk pulled his phone from his pocket. “I’m getting Shark over here for a meeting so we can get a plan in place for increased coverage on Shiloh. Woody, you call Tank and tell him to scour airline reservations in Vincent’s or Shiloh’s names since he said he’s arranging flights to New York for both of them.” He turned to me and pulled my messy ponytail. “You get inside, missy, and give that man of yours a shower. He smells like swamp ass and old gym socks.”

“I can do that,” I said, smiling up at my dripping, sexy man.



THE ENTIRE ROOM WAS filled with swirling steam, and Shiloh was behind me, her arms wrapped around me as she soaped up my chest and abs with her bare hands. Her soft lips were stamping tiny kisses across my back, and I pressed my hands harder into the tile wall and hung my head down to my chest, enjoying being loved and touched by her.

I should be taking care of her, but of course, my sweet angel had taken it upon herself to dote on me. *Just a few more minutes. I'll enjoy her delicate hands and precious lips on me for a little while longer, and then it's her turn to be worshipped.*

Shiloh's soapy hands inched lower, and then her fingers wrapped around my cock. "Fuck," I uttered on a low groan as my hips lurched forward. She stroked me slowly, giving me an extra squeeze around the tip just like I liked it. "Yeah, like that, baby." I fucked into her hands until I felt that telltale ripple at the base of my spine and pulled her hands away. Turning to her, I kissed her pink lips. "I think he's pretty much

spotless though I appreciate your diligence. Let's get you squeaky clean now."

"I do like to be thorough," she giggled as I pivoted her body to face the tiles.

"Hands on the wall, angel. Let me take care of you." She complied, and I washed and conditioned her beautiful caramel hair, letting my cock rest between her thighs as my fingers massaged her scalp. She shuffled her feet closer together, making a nice, tight resting place for my erection.

With my hands on her breasts, I fucked her inner thighs, the thick ridge of my crown brushing against her soft, wet sex and drawing the most perfect little moans from her throat. My precum mixed with her own natural lubricant, and I scraped my thumbnails over her nipples as our slickness eased the glide of my dick through her hot flesh.

Shiloh reached a hand back and twisted her fingers in my hair, pulling my mouth to hers as I felt her starting to throb against me. "Coming," she moaned into my mouth, and I increased the pace until my own orgasm overtook me, and I came against her clit, my seed gushing out in hard spurts and covering her.

Our tongues curled together, and our bodies rocked hard and sweet through our climax. Sliding one hand down her belly, I gathered our combined wetness on my middle finger while our mouths ate hungrily at each other. I felt her mouth smile against mine, and I moved my slippery finger around to her ass, rubbing the slickness against her back entrance.

“Is this a sweet, little virgin hole?” I asked, pressing in just a little.

“Y-yes,” she stammered.

“Fuck, angel. I want it.” She exhaled a hard breath against my lips, and I kissed her tenderly, letting the very tip of my finger penetrate. “Just my finger today, but soon, I want to claim it with my cock. Just like I did with your pussy.”

She nodded and let out a little squeak when I pushed in to the first knuckle. Grabbing the handheld shower attachment, I flicked the switch to a gentle jet setting and sprayed her flat belly with it. I let it dip lower and lower as my finger started to move in and out of her perfect ass, and her hips began to roll, riding my finger and trying to get the shower spray where she wanted it. I raised the showerhead to her breasts, the spray stimulating her nipples until they were hard and red.

“Cam. Please,” she begged, her body undulating as I finger-fucked her puckered hole faster.

“Please what, angel?” I asked, my tongue and teeth working their way up and down the side of her neck. I knew exactly what she wanted, but I wanted to hear it from her sweet lips.

“Spray my pussy, Cam. Now.”

“I already sprayed it with my cum, sweetheart.”

“Camm, with the shower thingy,” she wailed in frustration.

I couldn't help my chuckle. “Oh, is that what you want, angel? You want to come again while my finger fucks your

tight little asshole?”

She nodded, her head rested back against my shoulder, and I gave her what she asked for, holding the spray close to her sex and letting it batter her swollen clit. Her body jerked once, twice, and then again as she tipped over the edge of gratifying bliss. I felt her knees buckle, so after dropping the shower attachment, I turned her body and lifted, sliding her right onto my cock, which was once again ready to rock and roll after all the sexy ass play.

Shiloh’s legs wrapped around me as she sealed her mouth to mine. Her pussy was still spasming as my dick plundered her hot cunt, the grunts and groans from each of us filling the room. I pulled her hands over her head and held them against the wall with one hand as my cock pinned her lower body to the tiles. Our hips slammed together in a frenetic rhythm that wouldn’t have been out of place at a Metallica concert.

“God, you’re so fucking beautiful,” I groaned, giving her a hip swirl Elvis would have been jealous of, and her head tipped back in pleasure. “Every second I’m not inside your tight pussy is like torture for me, angel.” Gripping her ass, I shifted her hips up and toward me a couple inches, hitting places inside her that had her eyes rolling back in her head. “Every minute I’m not making you come feels like a waste of time.”

“I’m coming now,” she panted, and I grabbed her bottom with both hands and fucked deeper. More deeply than I had ever been inside a woman, and my dick throbbed happily.

I latched my mouth on the side of her neck and tried to deal with the orgasm that was building deep in my balls. This was going to be intense as fuck.

Shiloh buried her hands in my hair, her short nails digging into my scalp as she cried out my name, and I fucking lost it. I didn't even recognize my own hips as they pistoned like a machine, spreading my warm cum all along her inner walls. "Fuck, angel. So fucking good," I growled against her neck, my lips sucking tiny chunks of her fragrant flesh before kissing each spot delicately.

It was several minutes before our bodies stopped trembling, and I eased out of her while steadying her onto her feet.

Catching her wince, I dipped my head to look into her eyes. "Did I hurt you, angel?"

"I'm a little sore," she hedged.

"You have to tell me, baby. I don't like hurting you."

She gave me a wry smirk. "Says the man who, three nights ago, jacked off on a handprint he left on my ass because it was, and I quote, 'so fucking hot to see my red mark on your sweet ass.'"

I chuckled. I had done that. "You know what I mean, baby. If the sex is ever painful, I can go slow and sweet. Or I can just eat you out if you're too sore. As long as I can be close to you."

"I love you," she said, her gentle fingers holding my face, her eyes pure and honest.

“I love you more.”

“Not possible,” she argued. “There’s no way you could love me more than I love you.”

“I disagree, sweetheart. I—”

I was cut off by a banging on my bathroom door and the growl of Shark’s voice. “Everyone loves each other the same. Now, can we fucking get to work?”

All the blood drained from Shiloh’s face, her eyes comically wide.

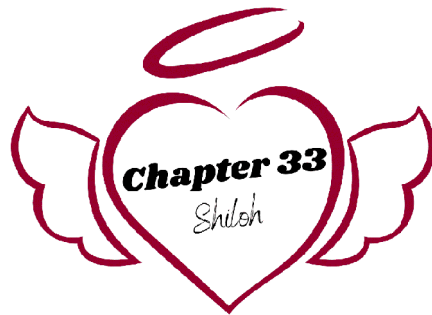
Tilting my face toward the door, I yelled, “We’ll be out in a minute, asshole. Now go away!”

I heard him grumbling and the door to my bedroom closing before I turned back to Shiloh, praying that she wasn’t too upset or embarrassed.

I was surprised to find her giggling, her hand covering her mouth to muffle the sound.

The sound was so joyous, it triggered my own laughter. “Sorry my friends are such pricks.” I adored how sweet and funny she could be, even in an embarrassing situation. “I fucking love you, Shy.”

“I fucking love you more, Cam,” she replied with a devilish grin.



IT WAS TUESDAY EVENING, ten days after Vincent had called and told me he was in Ireland. I had been ignoring his calls, but he had resorted to texting almost constantly. And they weren't very nice texts. He'd called me everything except my name, and the messages were becoming increasingly more abusive and volatile.

Cam had caught a glimpse of one a couple of nights ago and snatched my phone from my hand, scrolling back through the ugliness. "Fuck, angel. Why didn't you tell me he was doing this? I'm blocking his ass. You don't have to listen to that bullshit."

Tonight, Woody and Bode had come over to watch a basketball game, and the guys were congregated in the living room while I pulled a Mexican casserole from the oven, their increasingly loud curses telling me the game wasn't going well.

"Dinner!" I yelled, and within seconds the kitchen was filled with big, hungry men who were elbowing each other like they hadn't eaten in days. By the time they had filled their

plates and returned to the living room, I plated the sliver they'd left me and followed.

"Damn, this shit's good," Bode mumbled around a mouthful of food. "Are those Doritos on top?"

"Yep. Gives it a little crunch."

"It's great, babe," Cam said, scooting over to make room on the couch for me and pressing a kiss against my temple.

After we'd eaten, I stood and stretched. "I'm going to go take my shower, but I'll clean up the kitchen before bed."

"Nope, we'll do the cleanup since you cooked," Woody insisted, and the other men agreed. Picking up my phone from the nightstand in the bedroom, I noticed a message from an unknown number.

Unknown: Camden Wade Fitz

I stared at it for a moment, and then another text came through detailing Cam's date of birth and social security number, as well as his address and place of employment.

Unknown: Do I have your attention now?

Answer your fucking phone when I call.

My heart stopped beating for a few seconds. *Vincent.*

When my phone rang, I was so startled, I almost threw it across the room. The call was coming from the same unknown

number, obviously a borrowed or burner phone that Vincent had acquired. I tapped on *Accept* and shakily said, “Hello?”

“Well hello, darling,” he drawled. “So nice of you to actually pick up the phone.”

Be strong, Shy. Doing my best to put some steel into my voice, I asked, “What do you want, Vincent?”

“I want *you* on a plane tomorrow. I’m sending you the ticket information.”

“I’ve told you, it’s over, Vincent. I’m not coming back.”

“Hmmm. Did you have a nice dinner?”

What the fuck? Why was he changing the subject to—

“Did Bode cook? Or maybe Woody? That big goon Hawk doesn’t look like he could even figure out how to turn the stove on.”

My blood fucking froze in my veins as I sat down so hard on the bed that I almost bounced off. He knew exactly who was here tonight.

“A-are you here? Watching me?” My voice sounded much squeakier than I intended.

Vincent let loose a deep, creepy laugh. “You never know where I might pop up, *dolcezza*. I mistakenly thought you were still in Houston, but I know better now. I’ve arranged for you to fly to New York from DFW.”

“I’m not coming,” I said firmly, even though I was freaked out that he had people watching who was coming and going

from this house.

“Yes. You. Are. I’ve been very patient with you thus far, sweetheart, but my patience is running thin. It would be a shame for something to happen to one of your *friends*. Especially that Mr. Fitz you seem to be so fond of. He has what’s mine, and I want it back.”

“Vincent, no. Don’t do anything stupid.” My hand was trembling so badly, I had to use both hands to keep from dropping the phone.

“Oh, I’m anything but stupid, Shiloh. I understand that you’re upset and angry. I just want the chance to talk to you face-to-face.” When I didn’t say anything, his voice softened. “I know I fucked up, darling. Please, just come talk to me, and if you decide you still don’t want me, you can give me my ring back and leave.”

“I can just send the ring back. I don’t need to come there.” *I don’t want to come there.*

“No!” he snapped. “It’s much too expensive to risk mailing it. I want you to bring it to me in person.” I pressed my fingers over my mouth to keep from expelling the sob that was rising up in my throat. “It’s awfully dry there in Texas. You know, without rain, there’s a risk of fires. Homes and lives can be lost in an instant.”

Jesus! He’s threatening the people I care about. He was a fucking lunatic, telling me he just wants to talk to me and get his ring back with one breath, and then threatening to burn

down houses with the next. I couldn't let anything happen to Cam. Or any of the guys, for that matter.

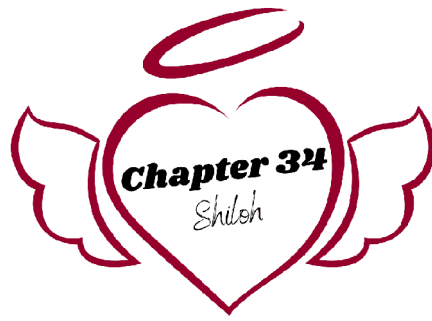
"I'll think about it, Vincent. Let me sleep on it. Just don't hurt anyone, okay?"

"Me? I don't know what gave you that idea. I'm a teddy bear, sweetheart. I was just pointing out how easily bad things can happen if you're not *very* careful."

"I-I understand," I said, shakily.

"I hope you do. I'll see you tomorrow, darling. Wear something pretty for me." And with a laugh that made my skin crawl, he hung up.

After staring at the wall for what seemed like forever, I sank to my knees and prayed.



Wednesday

I FEIGNED SLEEP WHEN Cam came to bed. That was apparently my go-to move since I was a horrible liar, and fake sleeping was my only marketable acting skill. When I finally did fall asleep, I tossed and turned, trying to keep images of burning houses and worse out of my head.

During all my internal bedtime ramblings, I'd decided what I should do. The decision was solidified when I received another text from Vincent as soon as Cam and Hawk left for work. I reached over to the nightstand and grabbed my glasses and phone. The picture and caption he sent had me gasping for breath.

It was a picture of Carrie Broxton, her hair braided in two pigtails as she ran around what looked like a playground. She was wearing a cute little school uniform, and the sign behind her showed the name of her private elementary school. There was also a digital clock and calendar display on the sign, and I zoomed in on it. Today's date. And the pic was taken less than an hour ago.

Such a precious child, the caption read, and I heard his message loud and fucking clear. How the hell had I ever thought I was in love with this horrible man? There was no way I could forgive myself if anything happened to Cam or one of the guys, but now Vincent had brought an innocent little girl into it. With my decision made, I climbed out of bed and got ready, purposely leaving the lights off so that Bode, who was on security detail out in front of the house, wouldn't know I was awake yet.

Using my phone, I made some arrangements before stuffing a change of clothes, my toothbrush, and my wallet into my tote bag. My eyes were swollen from lack of sleep, so I decided to forgo my contact lenses in favor of my thick, black glasses. Tears filled my eyes as I wrote a note for Cam and left it on the bed.

My fingers punched in the security alarm code, and I slipped out the back door. If Cam got an alert, he would think I was sipping my coffee on the back porch like I did every morning. Instead, I climbed over the back fence and started the half-mile trek to a local hotel.

Catching a cab to the airport, I sent a silent apology to Bode, who was no doubt going to feel the wrath of Cam once he realized I had slipped away.

Several hours later, I disembarked from the plane at JFK in New York. I'd booked a room for the night at a Best Western near the airport since I couldn't get a flight back to DFW today, and my flight left early the next morning.

I planned to catch a cab from the airport to my hotel, and then I would meet up with Vincent and give him back the ring as I looked him in the eye and told him that we were *done*.

What I didn't expect was my ex-fiancé to be waiting for me in the airport. "Darling!" he crowed, rushing toward me and taking me in his arms. "I'm so happy you're back where you belong." He tenderly kissed my forehead, and I tried not to wince at the contact.

"Vincent, I didn't expect you," I said icily.

Wrapping an arm around my shoulders, he smiled. "I'm just full of surprises, sweetheart. Where are your bags?"

"I didn't bring any. I came to return your ring. That's it. I'm flying back tomorrow."

"We'll see," he said with a smug grin that made my stomach churn. "I think I have an arrangement that will make you want to stay here with me."

Not a fucking chance, I thought but didn't say as he led me outside to a waiting limo.

Something—some deep part of me—told me this was a bad idea. I couldn't put my finger on it, but a sense of unease hung around my neck like a hundred-pound weight at the thought of getting into that limousine with him.

"Vincent, I appreciate you meeting me here, but I think I would just like to catch a cab and go to my hotel." I dug my fingers into the inside pocket of my bag and pulled out the engagement ring he'd given me.

He took it and held it between his finger and thumb in front of his face, admiration at the huge and crazily expensive diamond clear on his face. Closing his palm around it, he nodded amiably. “Okay, sweetheart. I understand, but why don’t you let me give you a ride? The Best Western, correct?”

So, he has been monitoring my bank account.

“Yes, but I can just—”

“Nonsense,” he said. “We’re both adults here. Surely we can ride in the same vehicle for a few minutes. I’d really like to apologize and tell you my thoughts.” I hesitated, looking longingly to the left at the line of cabs. “Please, Shiloh. We were engaged. Just give me the courtesy of a few minutes of your time, and then I’ll let you go. That is, if you still want me to after what I have to say.”

I most assuredly will.

“You won’t hurt me?” I asked in a voice that was much meeker than I would have liked.

Vincent looked shocked. “Of course I won’t hurt you, darling. Have I ever laid a hand on you? Ever?” He reached up to gently stroke my cheek, and I wrenched away from his touch. I expected him to react angrily, but he didn’t. He simply dropped his hand and smiled placidly down at me. “No matter what mistakes I’ve made, I do love and care for you very much, Shiloh.”

“Is that why you were sending me threatening text messages?” I snapped, my voice stronger now.

He sighed and pressed his lips together, remorse written all over his face. “I didn’t mean any of that, sweetheart. I was just desperate to see you once more. To have you listen to what I had to say. You know I would never hurt you or anyone else.”

Yeah? Tell that to Camillo Viscardi, I almost blurted out but held my tongue. I wanted Vincent to think the breakup was entirely because of his philandering and not because I knew about the murder or his “family business.” I was still hopeful that Tank would be able to find some incriminating evidence that would put Vincent Bellucci away for life.

“You’ll take me straight to my hotel?”

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather stay at our apartment where you’d be more—”

“It’s *your* apartment, and no. The Best Western is fine. I’ll only be there a few hours before I leave.”

He nodded contritely. “I’ll take you there, and if you don’t like what I have to say on the drive over, then you never have to hear from me again.”

That’s an idea I can really get behind.

Leaning down, he tapped on the front passenger window of the limo, and the driver rolled it down. “Gianpaolo, the Best Western on 153rd, please.” Vincent turned and gave me a wide grin before opening the back door for me. “Let’s get you settled in at your hotel, Shiloh. You look like you could use some rest.”

Closing my eyes briefly, I nodded, trying to shut off the warning bells that were clanging almost audibly in my ears.

“I could use a nap,” I agreed, climbing into the back of the vehicle. If I hadn’t been so weary from my sleepless night, perhaps I would have recognized the look that crossed Vincent’s face as I settled into the seat.

Triumph.



Wednesday

STORMING INTO SHARK'S OFFICE, I slammed a crumpled piece of paper down onto his desk. "Fucking stubborn-ass woman!" I roared, and his normally stoic face registered surprise.

It had been thirty minutes since Bode had called and told me he was concerned because no lights were on in my house. Normally, Shiloh was up and starting her day by now. Not to mention that she kindly brought coffee and breakfast to whoever was on guard duty outside each morning.

"What's going on?" Shark asked, glancing down at the paper, which I had scrunched in my hand and smoothed out at least ten times. I had every word memorized by now.

"Shiloh. She's gone. Went to New York," I said bitterly, nodding toward the letter.

A myriad of expressions crossed my friend's face in an instant. Sorrow. Disappointment. Anger.

Fear.

He jerked his chin in the direction of the chair across from his desk, but I couldn't sit. I was too fucking amped up. As I paced, Shark ironed out the paper with his fingertips and began to read.

Dear Cam,

First of all, don't be mad at me. Please, baby. Okay, maybe that's a lot to ask, but at least don't hate me.

I need to do this. I need to do everything in my power to keep the people I care about safe. Vincent has demanded a face-to-face meeting with me to talk and to return his ring, so I'm going to New York. I'll be fine, baby. I'm just going to give him the stupid ring and tell him in no uncertain terms that we're through. I have my reasons for going, and I'll explain it all when I get back. Just know that he left me with no other choice.

I couldn't get a flight back today, so I booked for first thing in the morning. I'll be back home by noon, and you can yell at me all you want. I'm staying at the Best Western near JFK tonight.

I need you to do something for me while I'm gone. Please, PLEASE put extra security around the kids, especially at Carrie's school. It's important.

I'll see you tomorrow. I love you more.

Yours always,

Shiloh

I heard Shark's growl and knew for certain that he had just read the part about the children. Pressing a button on his desk phone, he barked, "Tank! My office. Now! Bring your laptop." Turning his eyes onto me, I saw a flash of sympathy on his face, which unnerved me. "What the fuck do you think this is? About Carrie and the other kids?"

"No fucking clue," I said miserably.

He jerked back into action, hitting the intercom button to address each office. "I need security for the kids. Fucking now. We have reason to believe Bellucci may be targeting or watching them. Hawk, guard my sister's house. Woody, go to my wife's preschool, and I'll meet you there in a little bit. Taz, go pick up Bode. You two will be on Carrie's school. Update every half hour. Sooner if you see anything suspicious."

I heard a commotion in the hallway as everyone scrambled from their offices without question or discussion. They knew their jobs, and they took them seriously, especially where the children were concerned.

Tank rushed in with his computer, and Shark filled him in on the situation before standing and heading for the door.

"All right, I'm going to call our neighborhood's security and let them know the guys are on the way and to be extra vigilant about checking identification on anyone trying to get into the neighborhood. Then I have to call Blaire and explain this clusterfuck, and she'll probably go apeshit. I'll go pick her up from work. Me, Charli, and L.J. will stay at their house

tonight. I'll feel better if we have all the kids under one roof, so our security won't be so fucking spread out."

That made sense and would allow them to rotate guards if all the kids were in one location, giving us a fresh set of eyes with each new shift. Right now, the kids were scattered across three locations, Danica at the Broxton house with Ms. Casper, the triplets and L.J. at Charli's preschool, and Carrie at her elementary school.

Tank settled into Shark's desk chair and pulled a chair up beside him. "Come on, brother. Sit down, and let's get to work." I reluctantly sat, my leg twitching like a jackhammer as he started tapping away on his computer.

It only took a few minutes before Tank managed to tap into Shiloh's text and phone records. Someone, undoubtedly Bellucci, had messaged her last night with all my personal information.

"Fuck," we muttered at the same time when we saw the picture of Carrie that was sent from the unknown caller this morning. The prick had apparently baited her with his knowledge of me and a veiled threat to Carrie.

Why didn't she just fucking tell me instead of trying to handle this on her own?

"Can you find out who that phone belongs to or where it's at or something?" I asked, having no goddamn clue how all that shit worked.

He nodded. “Probably a burner phone though,” he mumbled as his large fingers flew over the keys. Ten minutes later, Tank shook his big head. “Yep, fucking burner. It’s already been disabled, but as soon as Shiloh lands, I can start tracking her phone.”

“When she turns off airplane mode?”

He rattled off a bunch of tech shit about triangulation and some kind of mapping app. Whatever the fuck all that meant. I trusted that he knew.

Shiloh’s flight was set to land in a little over an hour. In the meantime, we—and by we, I mean Tank—tapped into her bank account. She had indeed booked a flight for tomorrow morning as well as a room at the hotel she’d referenced in the letter she wrote me.

My fingers traced over her scrawly handwriting. *She does have the penmanship of a doctor.* The thought almost made me smile. Until I remembered that she could be in Vincent Bellucci’s hands in a matter of minutes. That thought made me sick with worry.

I was broken out of my reverie when Tank quietly said, “Okay, her flight has landed. I’m gonna try and get a signal on her phone. Give her a couple of minutes to get off the plane and then try to call her.”

I didn’t even make it thirty seconds before I was repeatedly tapping her name on my phone. *Come on, baby. Take it off airplane mode and answer.* It went straight to voicemail every time.

Half an hour later, Tank's hands fell away from his keyboard, and he stared blankly at the screen.

"What? What is it?" I asked, fear wrapping itself around my heart as he slowly turned his head to meet my frantic gaze.

"I lost her."

Swallowing down the lump in my throat, I whispered, "What does that mean?"

Tank shook his head, his blue eyes full of compassion mixed with a bit of dread. "I'm not sure. The tracking app you had me install on her phone just stopped working. So her phone is either off or the app has been disabled." He placed a big hand on my shoulder and squeezed. "I'll keep monitoring until we find her, okay?"

I nodded numbly.

Three *fucking* hours later, she finally responded to my innumerable texts and calls.

Shiloh: I'm sorry. Forgot to turn my phone back on. I made it to the hotel safely but feeling nauseated because of turbulence on my flight. Going to bed now.

"It's back on!" Tank yelled, his fingers moving over the keys so quickly they were a virtual blur. "I can track her even without the app when she's using cellular data."

"Yeah, I just got a text from her. She said she's at the hotel."

The incessant clicking of the keyboard was wearing on my nerves, but I was relieved to hear it after hours of just staring at the screen. Hoping. Praying that the little red dot would reappear.

“Goddammit! What the fuck? She’s gone again.” Tank banged a fist on the desk in frustration before resuming his tapping. “It’s okay though. We’re okay. I got the location of where she was when she was texting.”

I had the hotel address pulled up on my phone and showed it to him. “Was she here?” *Please let her be at the hotel.*

He glanced at it and shook his head before turning back to his laptop. “No. Fuck. Let’s see. It’s Manhattan. Upper East Side. Just let me look up this address and see who—”

Tank’s fingers stilled as his eyes clenched shut. I could hear his teeth grinding together.

“Tank, what is it? Where is Shiloh?”

He opened his eyes, but they were unable to meet mine. “She’s at Bellucci’s apartment. At least her phone is.”



Thursday

I WAS STANDING AGAINST a wall in Terminal C at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. My eyes darted to the arrival/departure screen a few feet away for the fortieth time in the past hour. As of ten minutes ago, Shiloh's flight showed "Landed."

Hawk's meaty hand squeezed my shoulder. "If you don't spank Shiloh's ass when we get home, I swear to God, I'll do it for you," he murmured.

A smile tried to curve my lips upward, but I was too tense to do much more than grimace. "I can assure you, she won't be able to sit down for fucking week." As soon as I saw her, I was going to kiss the ever-living shit out of her. Then I was going to take her home, spank her ass and her pussy, and fuck her until she couldn't remember her own name. After that, I would probably go into the bathroom and cry with relief at having her home.

Admittedly, I was close to tears now at the idea of seeing her again. It had only been a little over twenty-four hours, but

it had been the most tense day of my life. I didn't sleep at all last night. Tank had stayed at the office with me after having sent Bristol to stay at the Broxton residence.

Shiloh's little red dot hadn't shown up again on the computer screen, but I had convinced myself that there was some kind of glitch with her phone. Or the computer. Or fucking *something*. That was the only explanation I would allow into my weary brain.

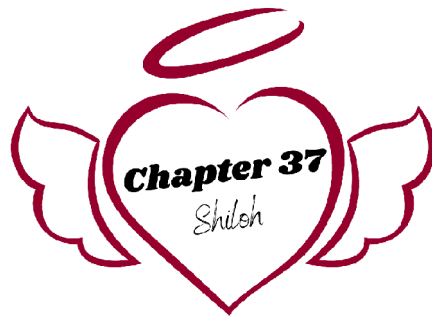
A crowd of people surged forward, and I pushed away from the wall. At least six people were wearing "I Heart New York" shirts or caps. "This has gotta be her flight," I said. "Do you see her?" My neck was straining so hard, I would probably never be able to turn my head properly again.

"No," Hawk replied quietly, his dark eyes sharp as he searched the crowd. That group passed, but I saw another mass of people a couple hundred feet behind them. My eyes refused to even blink as I scanned each face. *Not Shiloh. Not Shiloh. Not Shiloh.* With each person I ruled out, my soul died just a little bit more.

Thirty minutes passed, and Hawk sighed heavily as he turned and started walking down the corridor. "Wait. Where are you going? Sh-she's probably just in the restroom or something. Nobody likes using those tiny lavatories on the plane, so she probably waited until she got to the airport to go." My voice sounded as desperate as I felt.

Hawk stopped, and I saw his shoulders heave up and down before he turned to face me. "She wasn't on the flight, Cam."

My face felt like it was melting as it crumpled with misery.
My friend's lips pressed together. "I'm going to the ticket
booth to get us on the next flight. We're going to New York."



Thursday

I BLINKED INTO THE dimness, trying to figure out why my head was throbbing. My tongue snaked out and tried to wet my lips, but my entire mouth felt like it had been rubbed with sandpaper. I coughed a little at the dryness and heard a deep chuckle.

“There she is.” I recognized the voice instantly, and my stomach rolled over in my belly. *Vincent Bellucci. Holy fuck!*

My body attempted to jerk to a sitting position—it seemed I was lying on a bed—but my progress was halted by a sharp pain in my shoulder and a pinching on my wrist. Sweet Jesus, my right arm was handcuffed to the bed.

“Vincent,” I croaked, “where am I?”

“Don’t worry about that, sweetheart,” he said, and I sensed him approaching the bed. I didn’t have my eyeglasses on, and with my severe near-sightedness, I couldn’t see more than a foot away from me. But I could fucking *feel* his evil presence. “Here, take a sip.” I could see a clear plastic cup of what appeared to be water in front of me, and he held the straw to

my lips. I was so parched, I didn't give a damn what it was. I drew a long sip up through the straw and almost passed out from gratitude as the cool water that flooded my mouth soothed the desiccated tissues.

I sucked up the rest of the water, my breaths coming heavy with a combination of relief from the water and fear at being chained to a bed.

Not being able to see was very disorienting, so I asked, "Can I have my glasses?"

There was a pause as the man I hated sat on the bed beside me, his hand stroking my face. I recoiled from his touch, and he tutted. "I don't think so. You haven't earned the right to have your glasses, angel."

"Don't call me that!" I snapped, anger rising to the surface at his use of Cam's nickname for me. *Oh God! Cam!* He was going to be so fucking pissed.

"I thought that's what your friend *Camden* calls you. I've been reading your text messages, Shiloh, and I have to say that I'm not happy with you." I shriveled away from the coldness of his voice as he leaned closer so that I could see his face. How in the hell had I never noticed the evil in his eyes before?

My brain started processing what had happened, and bits and pieces flashed through my mind. I had gotten on a plane to New York. Vincent was waiting for me. I had gotten in his limo—so fucking stupid!—and then he'd poured me a soda.

"You drugged me," I accused at the sudden realization.

He had the audacity to shrug like it was no big deal. “Simply a little something to help you relax. You became quite agitated when you realized I wasn’t taking you to your hotel.”

“Where am I? What day is it?” I demanded, earning me another of his wicked chuckles. Though I couldn’t see shit, I could tell we weren’t at the apartment. Wherever this was seemed more industrial or something. I couldn’t pinpoint why; it was just a feeling.

“Somewhere safe, and it’s Thursday.” *Shit. I should be flying back today. Back to my love.* “And don’t worry about your little *friend*. I plan to send him a message—from your phone, of course—and let him know you’ve decided to go back to your adoring fiancé.” The fearful thudding of my heart seemed to kick my brain into high gear. Vincent was going to text Cam, and I needed to find a way to let him know that it wasn’t *me* sending the message. “Who is he, by the way?”

“A guy I dated fourteen years ago.” The “fourteen” lie slipped easily from my tongue. “Cammy gave me a place to stay when I decided to leave you.” I purposely used a nickname Cam should immediately pick up on as something I would never say. Hopefully, Vincent would use it in the text, thinking that’s what I called him.

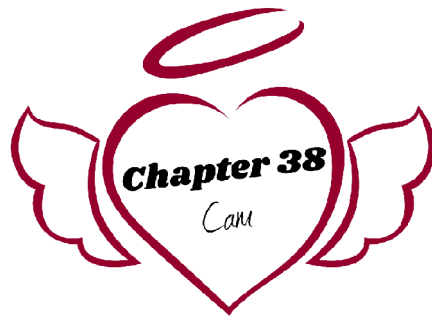
“I’m sure he did,” Vincent said coldly, standing from the bed. “I’ll send Paolo to check on you later and bring you some food. There’s more water by the bed.” His voice was fading as I saw the blurry outline of him walking away.

“Vincent! You can’t leave me here! This is fucking kidnapping!” I yelled. My ears picked up on the sound of a door opening. “Help! Someone help me! I’ve been kidnapped! Help!” I was screaming at the top of my lungs, praying that someone would hear me.

Then Vincent was back at my side, pulling my head back with a rough yank of my hair that had me yelping in pain. “You can scream all you want, *angel*. There’s no one around to hear you,” he hissed ominously, his spittle spattering against my face and making me cringe.

A few seconds later, he was gone, and I heard the click of a lock. I screamed for help until my throat was raw, but no one came.

No. One. Came.



Thursday

HAWK LOOPED A HUGE arm over the dejected slump of my shoulders. “I’m sorry we couldn’t get a flight out today, bro.” We had begged and pleaded and threatened—okay, that last one was mostly me—but all the flights to New York for today were full. We’d even checked airports within driving distance.

“Maybe I’ll just get in the car and drive straight through,” I suggested, desperation filling my voice.

“It’s a twenty-hour drive, Cam. Our flight leaves first thing in the morning, so we will land hours before we would make it by car.”

My hands were clenched into fists at my side. “I just feel so fucking helpless. It seems like I should be doing something.”

“I know, man. But your guy at the Dallas FBI office has set us up with an agent he trusts as soon as we get there. And you could use some sleep tonight. We’re both going to need fresh eyes and a fully functioning brain to deal with all this shit, and you’re running on empty right now.”

My teeth ground together in frustration. My molars were going to be mere nubs by the time this was all over. It was killing me thinking of her being with that murdering asshole. Would he hurt her? No, I couldn't even think about that. I had never wanted to kill another human being so much in my life.

Maybe I was stupid for thinking that Shiloh would be on that flight. After all, she hadn't responded to any of my text messages or calls. As we crossed the parking lot to the truck, my phone dinged, and I whipped it out of my pocket like Wyatt Earp.

"It's from her!" I shouted, stopping in the middle of the parking lot.

Shiloh: You've probly realized by now that I'm not coming back. I'm sorry, Cammy. I'm going to try and work things out with Vincent. I don't want to hurt you, but I still love him. I thought you and I could make it work, but it's just been too long to try and rekindle an old flame. Fourteen years is a long time. Please don't contact me. Just let me be happy with my fiancé.

Hawk was reading over my shoulder, and I heard him curse under his breath. "Sorry, brother," he said, squeezing my arm as I reread the message.

"Shiloh didn't write this," I hissed, and he shook his head sympathetically. "No. Just listen. She's never called me

Cammy. Ever. And we've been apart for *sixteen* years, not fourteen."

He grabbed my phone and read the message again, his head bobbing with understanding. "Yeah, and there are words spelled wrong. 'Probably' and 'too.' I've never seen Shiloh make spelling or grammatical errors in her texts. I'm pretty sure she sends the damn things to an editor before sending them." Our eyes met as he handed me back my phone.

"He's got her phone and is texting for her. That means she's feeding him bullshit answers as a clue to me. Or else he's watching what she texts, and she's trying to throw in innocuous little errors on purpose so I'll know."

We took off at a jog through the parking lot. "That means she's... okay." A hint of relief surrounded Hawk's words. "Ask her something. Something he wouldn't know the answer to. But don't make it obvious."

I thought for a few seconds before typing.

Cam: I don't know how you could say that, Shy. Don't you remember how drawn together we were even from our first date? Do you even remember where I took you for that date? Jesus, baby.

"That's good," Hawk said as we climbed into his black truck. "Now let's just wait for a response."

In my bed at home that night, I did my best to think only positive thoughts about the woman I desperately loved. I replayed our entire Thanksgiving Day together. Shiloh had fit in perfectly with my friends and family. My father had joined us at the Broxtons' house, and to say that he was pleased to see Shiloh was an understatement.

I smiled as I remembered the way she interacted with the kids. Letting Carrie read her a book before bed. Giving the triplets piggyback rides. Her arms tenderly cradling L.J. Tickling Danica's chubby chin. She adored those kids, and they adored her too.

After the children were in bed, she had presented Tank with a tiny Santa hat. At his confused look, she'd quipped, "I heard you liked dressing up certain body parts for your beautiful lady." She'd given him an exaggerated wiggle of her eyebrows.

The entire room had roared with laughter at the dick hat gag gift, and even Tank had smiled reluctantly. Until Woody crowed, "I think it's great. Christmas is coming up, and you want the little guy to look festive."

"He's not little," Tank had snapped, making us all break into laughter again.

Then after we'd gotten home, Shiloh and I had Facetimed with my brother. Well, I basically sat and watched as Shiloh poured out her kindness on my brother. Those two had chatted and caught up for over an hour, and I don't think I'd ever seen Graham talk or smile so much.

Yeah, my Shy was a special woman, and I would do fucking anything to get her back.



Thursday

WAKING UP DISORIENTED AND with a headache, I wondered if Vincent had drugged me again. My brain no longer felt foggy, so I was pretty sure it was simply the lack of clear vision that was making me feel this way. Grasping the post of the iron headboard with my shackled hand, I pushed myself off the bed, taking stock of the limited field of vision I had with no correction.

I squatted down and squinted at the bedside table, which I could now see was actually a wooden crate. My hand reached for the plastic jug of water, and my lack of depth perception almost had me knocking it over. Adjusting my reach, I closed my fingers around the handle and poured myself another glass of water.

The liquid hit my tongue and soothed it, despite the tepid temperature. If I could just find my glasses, everything would be better. I was so fucking impaired without them or my contacts. Kneeling on the floor with one arm still attached to the bed, I used my other hand to move the crate to the side. Maybe my glasses were hidden behind it.

My fingers felt around on the floor, finding nothing before sweeping under the bed. Nothing there either, except a light coating of dust. *Well, fuck.* My hand slid up the gray metal wall, which confirmed my earlier notion that I was perhaps in some kind of warehouse or other industrial-type building.

Swiping the dust off on my thigh, I realized I was wearing one of the long nightgowns Vincent loved, and the idea that he had undressed and redressed me made my entire body quake. I pressed my hand against my belly to quell the urge to vomit.

Using the crate for leverage, I stood, venturing as far from the bed as my arm would allow. I tried dragging the small bed, but it didn't budge. Probably bolted to the floor. *Jesus, I'm like a caged animal.* Helpless. Vulnerable.

No, fuck that. I. Am. Not. Helpless. I may have gotten myself into a hairy predicament, but I was going to have to suck it up and find myself a way out of here.

My hands felt along the walls but found nothing that would help me. I squatted by the crate again, moving the water to the floor and nudging the wooden square. Though it seemed to be empty, it was still too heavy for me to lift, even if I did have the use of both hands. Otherwise, I could break the damn thing and use one of the splintered pieces to stab Vincent in the heart like the vampire that he was.

I turned and squinted into the dim room. There seemed to be some kind of light source, maybe a small lamp, about ten feet away. If I could talk Vincent into leaving me uncuffed, I could reach the lamp and smash the bulb. Then I could wait by the

door and stab him in the neck the next time he entered the room.

Apparently, being mostly blind and kidnapped makes me kinda stabby.

Unable to discern any windows, there was no way to know if it was night or day. Had I slept through the night, making it Friday now? My tired body was telling me no. That I had only taken a nap, a few hours at most. Hearing a noise near where I knew the door was, I muffled my curse with my free hand and scrambled back onto the bed.

With virtually no vision, my other senses were heightened, and I recognized the scrape of a key in a lock. I had no idea who was about to walk through that door. Hopefully, it was some type of law enforcement personnel here to rescue me. There was the slight squeak of a hinge and then a voice called my name. *A man, but not Vincent.* I wasn't sure whether to be relieved or even more scared.

“Shiloh, it's Gianpaolo.” He was Vincent's driver and chief errand runner.

I glared in the direction of the door. “Nice of you to drop by for a visit. Can I get you some coffee or tea?” He snorted at my sarcasm, and I went on. “Oh, that's right. I can't make coffee or tea because I'm being held fucking *prisoner.*” I shouted the last word and rattled the handcuffs against the metal headboard for effect.

He moved close enough that I could make out his blurry form but no facial features. He slowly extended his hands,

taking my breath away when I saw what he was holding.

“Just be still, smartass,” he said, slipping my glasses on my face.

My vision cleared and then instantly blurred again with tears. “Oh God. Thank you, Gianpaolo,” I sobbed, trying to wipe away the tears so I could enjoy my beautiful, beautiful, restored vision.

“Y’welcome,” he mumbled as his face came into focus. No one could accuse Gianpaolo Gallo of being a handsome man. He was as big as a house, his body a mixture of muscle and a paunchy gut, and his nose looked like it had been broken multiple times. “Brought food too.”

As soon as he mentioned food, the aroma of a meatball sub met my olfactory glands, which triggered my salivary glands. In other words, I was hungry and drooling.

Now that I could see, I noticed a bag in his meaty hand, and he began unpacking it, setting a wrapped sandwich, chips, and a stack of napkins on the wooden crate beside me. He fixed me with a harsh glare as he hovered over me. “I’m going to unlock your cuffs in a minute so you can eat. Do not try any funny business. I’ve always liked you, Shiloh, and I would hate to have to hurt you.” He briefly pulled his suit jacket back, revealing a sliver of gunmetal on his hip.

The threat hung in the air between us, and I nodded. “I’ll be good,” I promised. *Just give me that damn sandwich.* I hadn’t realized how hungry I was until right at that moment. I was guessing it was Thursday evening, which meant I hadn’t eaten

anything in almost two days besides a bag of cookies on the plane yesterday.

Gianpaolo looked at me cunningly before picking up the now-empty water jug and carrying it to the right side of the room. I took the opportunity to look around my prison for the first time. There was a door straight across from my bed. It was thick, metal, and impenetrable looking. The wooden door on the right that Paolo had just disappeared through must house a bathroom, or at least a sink, because I could hear water running. The bed was covered with a set of light-blue sheets, a worn white blanket, and a thin pillow with no pillowcase. Besides the bed and nightstand crate, there wasn't much else in the room.

I felt despair settle over me. There was nothing here that could help me to escape. Gianpaolo walked back in carrying the full water jug and filled my cup for me before unlocking the handcuffs with another warning scowl. Rolling my shoulder and flexing my hand, I felt a tingling up and down my right arm.

My captor opened the bag of chips, setting it on the bed beside me before unwrapping and handing me the sandwich. I moaned aloud at the first bite, and Gianpaolo's lips tipped up a little at the corners, making his ugly mug slightly less intimidating. "Good, huh?"

"So good," I said, taking another huge bite before I'd even finished swallowing the first one.

“How long has it been since you’ve eaten?” he asked with a frown.

“Couple days,” I replied with my mouth full, not giving a damn about manners, and he shook his head.

“You might want to slow down a little so you don’t get sick.” He perched on the end of my bed while I attempted to chew my food more slowly. The last thing I wanted was to add puking to my confinement. “So, tell me about this man you’ve been shacking up with.”

My mouth threatened to gape open, but I managed to continue chewing steadily. Why was he asking about Cam? Swallowing the bite in my mouth, I took a drink of water before answering. “He’s a friend who gave me a place to stay,” I said cautiously.

“Hmmm.” He nodded his head thoughtfully. “So, youse guys dated?”

I nodded. *Where the hell is he going with this?*

“That’s cool. Where did you go on your first date?” He was attempting to sound casual, but there was an underlying quality in his tone that told me he really wanted to know this bit of information. I wondered if maybe Cam had asked that question in a text message to gauge if he was really talking to me. Like the proof of life thing I’d seen in movies.

So, I lied through my teeth. “We went to a local restaurant. Robinson’s Burger Bar.”

Please relay that back to Cam because he will know for a fact that he's not talking to me, but he'll also know that I'm alive. I couldn't even fathom how crazy he must be going.

"Is it still Thursday?" I asked, and Paolo nodded. "What time is it?"

He glanced at his watch. "Six in the evening."

"Gianpaolo, what the hell is going on here? Why is he doing this?"

He rubbed a hand nervously over his face. "He's been a bit... crazy since you announced you were leaving him."

"Well, he shouldn't have been cheating on me," I retorted. His jaw clenched, and it was hard to read exactly what he was thinking. "Please let me go," I begged, tears filling my eyes, and he had the grace to look ashamed.

"I can't do that, Shiloh. I value my life and the lives of my family too much."

"So, Vincent is dangerous?" I asked, feigning ignorance of the whole murder thing. "I mean, he's kidnapped me, so I guess that answers that question."

"Fuck, Shiloh. Just do what he says and don't piss him off, okay? That's all I'm going to say. I think you're a real sweet lady, and I would hate for something to happen to you."

Unable to eat any more because of the nausea now roiling through my gut, I wrapped the remainder of my sandwich and chips and laid them on the crate just about the time Vincent

strolled into the room. My heart rate instantly raced, but the fucker just grinned like he wasn't holding me against my will.

“Well, it looks like a party in here,” he said, clapping his hands together merrily.

“Actually, the party is almost over. If you'll call me a cab, I'll just be on my way.”

He guffawed loudly. “Nice try, sweetheart. As soon as you come to your senses, you can move back into our apartment.”

“Oh, are you going to handcuff me there, as well? Maybe a nice dog collar with a chain so I can move around the room a bit?” I asked with saccharine sweetness.

Gianpaolo's eyes grew, and he gave me a sharp shake of his head in warning. Vincent smiled, but it was humorless and a bit creepy.

“Paolo, you can leave now. I'd like to be alone with my fiancée.” *Oh Jesus. No.*

“I was just about to let her go to the bathroom. She's been drinking her water, so she probably needs the facilities.”

My bladder took that opportunity to let me know that was an excellent idea. “Yes, I do need to go,” I said, rising tentatively from the bed.

“Leave the bathroom door open,” Vincent said coldly before turning his gaze on his driver, who rose and gave me a warning nod as he left.

The bathroom wasn't much to write home about. There was a sink, a small shower with no curtain, and a dirty toilet. My eyes swept the room for anything that could be used as a weapon. Roll of toilet paper. Fresh bar of soap. A single towel. That was about it. There wasn't even a mirror I could break.

Fuck! I really should have watched more old episodes of MacGyver, and maybe I could have fashioned a gun out of the toilet paper roll and made bullets out of the soap. Pushing the door until there was only a tiny gap, I lifted my gown and sat on the toilet. Dammit, I didn't even have any underwear on.

Vincent shoved the door all the way open, his frame filling the doorway, and I squeaked out a noise of surprise and fear. "I told you to leave the fucking door open," he roared.

"I-I didn't close it all the way," I stammered. "Can you please give me some privacy?" My hands tugged the stupid purple gown down in the front to try and cover my lower body from his view.

"Seen that pussy before, darling," he laughed, and I squeezed my eyes shut in utter humiliation.

The bastard stood there while I finished peeing, which didn't take long since I hadn't had much to drink the past two days. Tugging the garment down as I stood, I avoided his beady brown eyes and washed my hands.

My eyes clenched as he approached me from behind and ran his hands down my arms. "So beautiful, sweetheart, but I think we can lose this for now." Scrunching his hands into the satin

at my hips, he started fisting it upward, exposing my legs to his leering eyes.

“No!” I shouted, attempting to push the gown back down, but he was too strong, ripping it off over my head in a single, swift movement. I broke away from him, but there was nowhere to go, so I backed into the tiny shower. I was totally naked and covered my private parts with my arms and hands as I cowered. “Vincent, don’t. Please don’t,” I whimpered.

He lifted me easily and tossed me over his shoulder before carrying me to the bed and throwing me roughly down. “No, stop! Gianpaolo, please help me! Please!” I screamed, but I knew he wouldn’t help. His loyalty lay with his boss.

“Shut the fuck up, Shiloh,” Vincent bellowed, slapping my face hard and stunning me into silence. I had never been struck like that before, and my eyes stung as fiercely as my cheek.

The pig stretched out on top of my nude body, his voice softer as he ran his mouth up and down my neck, forcing bile up into my throat. “I just want to make love to you, *dolcezza*. I’ve missed you so much,” he purred, wedging his knee between my clenched, bare thighs and separating them. He pressed his erection against my core, ignoring my hands shoving hard at his shoulders.

“Please don’t do this. Please don’t rape me, Vincent,” I begged. Tears were streaming down my face as I struggled beneath him, and the sheer desperation made my voice tremble.

He lifted his face and stared down at me, his forehead wrinkling in confusion. “It’s not rape. You’re my fiancée.” He ran one hand down my side, and the touch left goosebumps. And not the good kind.

Staring him dead in the eye, I whispered, “I’m no longer your fiancée. I *do not* want to have sex with you, and if you touch me without my consent, it’s rape.” My eyes and my words pleaded with this heinous man to try and find just a little bit of humanity in his dark soul.

He may not have a shred of humanity left, but what he did have was pride, and that worked in my favor. He pushed off the bed and stood over me, his face the picture of raw anger as he roared, “I’m not a goddamned rapist. I’m Vincent fucking Bellucci. I don’t have to force myself on women. They come to me willingly.”

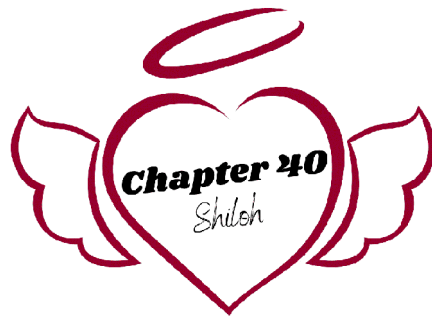
I nodded. “Then go find a willing woman, because I am not.”

Vincent’s chest rose and fell heavily as he ran a hand through his thick, dark hair. “Fine. But you’ll be begging for this cock before the week is through,” he said arrogantly, gripping himself lewdly over his pants.

When he stalked toward me, I prayed that he wouldn’t try and touch me again. Or hit me. But he did something that was almost as bad.

He pulled my glasses from my face, rendering me almost totally sightless once again.

“I’ll leave the cuffs off for tonight so you can sleep. See you tomorrow, sweetheart.”



Friday

VINCENT DID INDEED COME back on Friday. The best I could tell with no frame of reference, it was morning. “Good morning, darling,” he said, confirming my suspicion as he flicked on the overhead lights. Apparently, the light switch I had been searching for was outside the room.

He shoved my glasses onto my face as I sat up on the bed, once again wearing the stupid nightgown to cover my nakedness. The headache I’d been nursing due to my squinting was alleviated slightly now that I could see again. My gaze shifted across the room, and I realized that Vincent hadn’t come alone.

A tall, raven-haired woman with olive skin and full lips gave me a catty smile from her position beside the door. While I was distracted by the newcomer, Vincent grabbed my right arm and snapped the cuff attached to the headboard around my wrist.

I tugged at the binding, which only served to chafe my skin. “Dammit, Vincent. Is it really necessary to chain me up like an

animal?” I asked snarkily. Looking toward the woman, I asked, “I guess it’s too much to hope that you came to rescue me?”

A short laugh barked from her lips. “I think you’re outta luck, honey.”

Vincent strolled across the room and put his arm around the woman’s waist, his eyes flashing back to me as his lips curved into a smirk. “You told me last night to find a woman who was willing, so I did. This is my good friend Theresa.” *As in his mistress, Theresa?*

“Congratulations. I’m sure you’ll be very happy together. Now, let me go.”

Theresa’s face pinched into a hard grimace, but Vincent chuckled. “I don’t think so, Shiloh. I just thought I would show you what you were missing.” He led the other woman to the side of the bed and pressed down on her head. “On your knees. Take my cock out.”

For shit’s sake. Tell me he’s not gonna...

His gaze stayed locked with mine as the woman complied. If he thought he was making me jealous, he was sorely mistaken. Honestly, he could let everyone woman in the county blow him, and I wouldn’t give a fuck. All I wanted was to go home. Back to Texas. Back to Cam.

I was disturbed though. By the way Theresa was letting him use her and by the way he was looking at me with that spine-chilling grin. The sounds of sloppy dick sucking filled the

room, as did Vincent's groans. He was still looking directly at me while this woman was on her knees in front of him. It was disgusting, and I shifted my eyes to the wall behind him.

"Keep your fucking eyes on me or I'll tie your head to the headboard and tape your eyelids open," he growled at me, and I forced my eyes back to his, letting him see the revulsion on my face as Theresa continued to service him. He finally glanced down at her and purred, "You're such a good girl, Theresa. You have the most beautiful cock sucking lips." Then he raised his amused gaze to my face again. "Are you sure you don't want a taste, sweetheart? You always did give good head."

"Go to hell where you belong," I retorted, lifting my chin defiantly as he took a step back from the woman on her knees.

"Get up," he grunted. "Bend over the end of the bed and let's show Shiloh how good I fuck you." *Jesus, is she really going to let him do this?*

Theresa stood and walked around the bed before bending forward and putting her hands on the mattress as Vincent rolled on a condom. She gave me a tight-lipped smirk and then looked over her shoulder at the man who was lifting her short skirt up over her bottom, her eyes growing softer as his hands separated her round globes.

She's in love with him.

Without so much as a courtesy finger to warm her up, Vincent shoved into Theresa with a loud grunt. "Oh, yeah. That's some good pussy, you little bitch." The lines around her

eyes deepened as she grimaced with each rough thrust, and she jerked her head around to stare at the sheet between her hands. She winced when he slapped her ass hard and told her to let me hear her moan.

If you're having to instruct her to make sex noises, maybe you need to work on your technique, Vincent. The words were on the tip of my tongue, but I bit them back as I watched him drive into her with his eyes locked on mine. His grin was almost manic. The asshole was enjoying this. He thought he was hurting me by screwing someone else in front of me.

Doing my best to keep my face impassive, I let my eyes rest on his forehead, not wanting to look directly into his brown eyes. Eyes I used to think were warm and loving. But now I knew the truth. This man was Satan personified.

“I love fucking my little whore,” he told me, grabbing Theresa’s hair and yanking her face up to meet mine. “Tell Shiloh how much you love my cock, whore.”

Vincent wasn’t engaging in sexy, dirty talk. He was literally treating Theresa like a whore. He was using her. Driving into her and using her body to try and punish me. It was degrading, and I almost felt sorry for her.

“You’re so stupid, Shiloh. I love having Vincent’s big dick inside me. How could you give up a man this powerful?” Theresa’s voice was shaky, but there was a ring of sincerity around each word in her last sentence. She honestly thought being a criminal and a bully gave a person power.

But I have love. True, deep, unending love. That is real power. A tear slipped down my face as I wondered if I would ever see Cam again. And Vincent—the fucking narcissist—thought I was crying for him.

“Oh, yeah. That’s a good little slut. You’re making her cry. Show Shiloh what she’s missing. Come for me.”

On cue, Theresa closed her eyes and began to moan. “God, baby. You have the hottest, biggest cock in the world. I’m coming so hard.” She was wincing, obviously faking her orgasm as Vincent railed into her with absolutely no affection. No soothing strokes of skin. No kisses or love bites.

Even when Cam and I were going at it hard, he let me feel his love. I could see it in his eyes, hear it in his words, and feel it in his touch. There was none of that here though. Theresa was simply an empty vessel that Vincent was using for his own wicked purposes.

“Fuck! I’m coming inside my whore, Shiloh,” he roared, his eyes on me as he came, burying himself deep and finding his release. He pulled out immediately, tossing the condom on the floor as he walked around the bed to stand directly beside me. “Give me a few hours, and I’ll come back and do the same to you,” he promised, tucking a piece of hair behind my ear in a grotesque display of affection.

“Never,” I hissed. “You’re disgusting.”

His face took on a mask of anger that was frightening. *Stay cool, Shy. Don’t let him see your fear.*

“Theresa didn’t seem to think so,” he gritted out.

“Yeah, I’m sure it was the best two minutes of her life,” I snapped.

Vincent’s face was pure rage as he raised his hand, and I braced myself for another slap to the face. Instead, he jerked my glasses from my face, and a second later, I heard a horrible crunching sound.

Holy fuck. He just crushed my glasses. Despair wrapped around me as my heart sank.

“Clean your pussy up with her blanket,” I heard him order Theresa. “Give her something to remember us by.”

I could hear rustling, and a minute later, something landed in my lap. “There’s your food for the day. I’ll be back tonight, and we’ll talk.”

“Vincent, unlock my arm so I can go to the bathroom. Please,” I begged.

I heard the sound of footsteps and the door opening and closing. Only when he flicked off the overhead lights did I finally allow myself to cry.

“You’re okay, Shiloh,” I whispered to myself. “You just filled your water jug, and you have food. You may have to pee on the floor, but you’re still alive. Stay alive for Cam. He’ll come find you.”

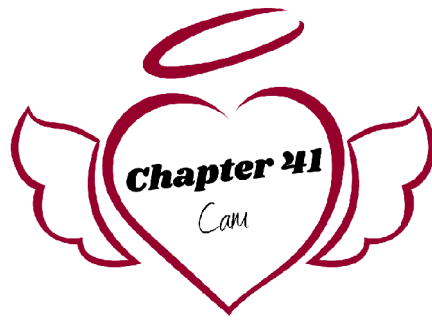
Vincent said he would be back tonight. I would just have to convince him how stupid this was. Or maybe I could lie and

say I'd had a change of heart, and then he would take me back to his apartment instead of wherever the hell this was.

My mind started formulating a plan, my brain whirring from possibility to possibility throughout the day in anticipation of Vincent's return tonight.

The only problem?

He never came back.



Friday

I WAS A BALL of nerves as Hawk and I entered the FBI office at Federal Plaza late Friday morning. I'd had Darryl, my FBI contact from Dallas, set us up an appointment with an agent he said he trusted implicitly. The tall Black man greeted us with firm handshakes as we strode into his office.

“Welcome to New York. I’m sorry it’s under these circumstances,” he said, his deep voice calm and reassuring. “I’m Special Agent Stephen Davis. We’re just waiting on my partner, Special Agent Caruso.”

With my anxiety through the roof, I was about to ask if we could get started without him when a woman with her dark hair in a bun dashed into the room on low black pumps. “Hello, I’m here. Sorry I’m late, but my son is a terrorist,” she blurted with a thick Brooklyn accent. At my raised eyebrows, she grinned and explained, “He’s two.”

I nodded, a smile almost reaching my lips as I thought of Blaire and Axel’s triplets. “I know some three-year-olds like

that.” Sticking out my hand, I said, “I’m Camden Fitz. You can call me Cam.”

Hawk stepped forward for a handshake. “Tate Gentry. I go by Hawk.”

The woman’s eyes gave him a quick up-and-down and nodded as if approving of his nickname. “I’m Special Agent Teri Caruso.” Turning back to me, she gave me a sympathetic smile. “I understand you believe your girlfriend is missing?”

“She *is* missing,” I said firmly. “And that mobster piece of shit Vincent Bellucci has her.” Her head jerked back at my sharp statement.

“Bellucci has been on our radar, but we’ve never been able to get anything on him. What makes you think he has...”

“Shiloh,” I supplied before showing the agents the text where she’d called me Cammy and said we were together for fourteen years.

“Hmmm,” Caruso said, seeming unconvinced, but I continued.

“I sent another message yesterday and received a reply a few hours later. I asked her if she remembered where our first date was, and she replied, ‘Robinson’s Burger Bar.’”

“And that’s incorrect?” Agent Davis asked.

“Yes.”

Agent Caruso tilted her head to the right and gave me a kind smile. “Maybe she just forgot. It *was* almost two decades ago.”

I shook my head vehemently. “No. This was a message to me. I *never* took her to Robinson’s. The man who owned it, Otis Robinson, made her and the other teenage girls uncomfortable. He was later arrested for having child porn on his computer, so they had good reason to be uneasy around him. Shiloh and I have *never* been to that restaurant. She’s trying to tell me that she’s in danger.”

Caruso’s jaw tightened. “Wow. That is compelling.”

“I agree.” Glancing at his partner, Davis said, “Let’s see if he’ll voluntarily come in for some questions.”

“I want his apartment searched too,” I demanded. “We’ve been tracking Shiloh’s phone, and when we’re able to get a ping, it comes from his apartment.”

“I’ll see what we can do,” Davis said.

Three hours later, we were watching on the other side of the glass window of an interrogation room. The agents had agreed to let Hawk and I observe as a professional courtesy and also to see if we picked up on anything he said related to Shiloh.

Agent Davis had been interrogating him for over an hour, but the bastard hadn’t given anything away. He insisted that he had seen Shiloh at the airport, she had given him the ring back, and then he’d watched her get into a cab, supposedly to her hotel. He claimed that he was sad about their breakup, but that he accepted it.

“Fucking liar,” I snapped.

“He’s a smug bastard,” Agent Caruso said, shaking her head.

“And what about the text messages you’ve sent her recently?” Davis asked Bellucci.

The mobster was cool as a cucumber, feigning remorse as he ran his fingers through the hair over his ear. “I’ll admit I did get angry and used some language I wouldn’t normally use with my fiancée. I regret that. Contrary to what you’re accusing, I care for Shiloh very much.” His dark brown gaze moved to the large glass window, seeming to look directly at me, even though I knew he couldn’t see me. A chill ran down my spine when his lips curled up slightly on the edges. “I do hope she hasn’t come to any harm.”

“Fuck you,” I whispered, wishing they would give me five minutes alone with the prick. He would be singing a different tune, and I guarantee there would be absolutely no smile on his face.

“And the other text messages? The ones with Camden Fitz’s personal information and a photo of a child he’s close to?”

Bellucci’s forehead crinkled as he tapped an index finger against his lips. “I don’t believe I know a Camden Fitz. And these messages were allegedly sent from my phone?”

The fucker knew damn well they were sent from a burner phone, which we couldn’t prove belonged to him.

He spread his hands wide in an open gesture. “Agent Davis, if it would make you feel better, you’re welcome to come look

in my apartment. I can assure you that you won't find my former fiancée or her phone there. I have no idea why you're saying her phone is located in my residence. Must be some kind of glitch. I don't pretend to understand how all that stuff works." Bellucci gave a self-deprecating chuckle.

Davis nodded. "We appreciate your cooperation in this matter, Mr. Bellucci. Is this afternoon convenient for us to send a team over?"

"Of course," he said jovially. "Any time. Some of Shiloh's clothes and things are still in the apartment, but I haven't seen her for weeks. If you find her, please let her know I'll be happy to ship her things to her." His gaze shifted back to the window where I was standing, and the pure evil in his eyes had me taking a step back from the glass.

Davis left the room and entered the small space where we were standing. "Teri, why don't you get that sack of shit on his way. I'll have someone follow him to his apartment so he doesn't have time to ditch any evidence that may be there."

Agent Caruso nodded, and we all left the room. She turned right into the interrogation room when Hawk snapped his fingers. "Fuck. I left my phone on the table in there." We returned to the observation room in time to see the female agent approaching Bellucci.

"We will be sending agents with you to your home to conduct the search," she was saying.

His eyes swept up and down her body, and his tongue snaked out to lick his lips. "And will you be accompanying the

team, Special Agent Caruso?” he cooed. “Because I think I would like you to search my bedroom. Thoroughly.”

“What a fucking sleaze,” Hawk muttered as he pocketed his phone, and I nodded.

Caruso scoffed. “And what would I find in your bedroom, Vincent.”

He gave her a lascivious smile. “I think you would find lots of things you like in my room, angel.” He reached out and slid a hand up the outside of her thigh, and she swatted it away.

“Cut it out,” she hissed, taking a step back from him. “And don’t fucking call me angel.”

A hint of a smile crossed Hawk’s lips. “Vincent needs to watch himself around that one. She looks like she could have his balls for a snack.”

“Yup. Let’s move. I want to be waiting outside Bellucci’s apartment when they bring Shiloh out.” *God, I hope he hasn’t hurt her. Or worse.*

After four cups of coffee and several hours of pacing the sidewalk outside the apartment building, I saw Special Agent Stephen Davis emerge and cross to us, followed by his female partner. The sympathetic look on their faces told me everything I needed to know.

“She wasn’t in there?” I already knew the answer. They would have brought her out as soon as they found her if she was in the apartment.

“No. I’m very sorry, Cam.”

I smashed the heels of my hands against my forehead and tried to hold back a sob. “So where the fuck is she? Did you find the phone? Or anything?”

The agent shook his head. “We found some of her clothing, which isn’t unusual since she lived there until a few weeks ago. And the engagement ring that Mr. Bellucci said she returned to him.” He pressed his lips together. “For the record, I believe you, Cam, but my hands are tied.”

Dragging my hands through my hair, I growled, “Fuck! Fucking useless! You said you believed me, but are you going to do anything about it?” I looked back and forth between the agents, and their faces told me I wasn’t going to get the answer I wanted. “Fine. I’m sitting outside this apartment and following that son of a bitch if he goes anywhere. He’s obviously keeping Shiloh somewhere else, and I’ll find her my fucking self.”

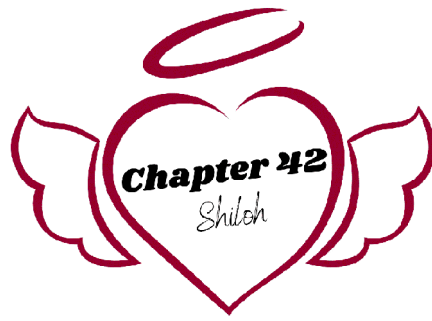
Agent Caruso looked at me sharply. “Mr. Fitz, I suggest you find a hotel and stay there until you hear from us.”

“While he could be hurting her?” My voice dropped to a raspy whisper as I finally said the thought I’d been trying to avoid. “R-raping her?”

She winced at that, and her tone softened with pity. “I understand, sir, but I caution you to be careful. A man like Vincent Bellucci doesn’t get as powerful as he is by being sloppy.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “We know how to do surveillance.” Turning to Hawk, I jutted my chin toward our

rental car, and we stalked off.



Saturday

JESUS, THIS FUCKING HEADACHE. I was fairly certain my brain had revolted and was trying to pound its way out of my skull. Most of the headache was no doubt from squinting to try and see more than a foot away from me. Without my glasses, which that fucker Vincent smashed yesterday, everything within a couple feet was visible but indistinct and blurry. Beyond that, there was pretty much nothing. The only light was from the lamp across the room.

When I had been uncuffed, I had explored the room and found that the lamp was one of those battery-operated hunting lanterns. The glass around it wasn't glass at all. It appeared to be polycarbonate, which was a strong plastic I was aware of because it was used to make spectacle lenses. I had been afraid to slam it to the floor to try and break it because if I damaged the lamp beyond repair, I would have zero light in this windowless room. As it was, the light seemed to be dimmer than yesterday. That worried me.

The remainder of the headache probably stemmed from lack of fluids. When Vincent left me handcuffed to the bed

yesterday—at least I think it was yesterday—I almost completely stopped drinking water so my bladder wouldn't be bursting before he came back that evening to “talk.”

But now I was pretty sure it was Saturday, probably early afternoon, unless my internal clock was way off, which was highly likely since I hadn't seen the sun in three damn days. That reminded me of that song by Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow and I sang a little bit of it to pass the time until the lyrics trailed off in my head.

Anything to take my mind off my burgeoning bladder.

Fuck it. I'm just going to have to pee on the floor, I thought when a tiny bit of urine seeped out through my clenching. My handcuff was attached to the top bar of the headboard, so I could slide from one side of the bed to the other. I moved to the side opposite the crate holding my food and water and stood. Bunching the blanket up into the corner, I squatted over it, finally releasing my bladder in a stream that was almost painful.

This makeshift toilet was the best plan I had been able to formulate. Unsure how long I would be here, I really didn't want piss all over the floor because I knew Vincent wasn't going to clean it up. Anyway, I wasn't using the blanket Theresa had used for her post-sex cleanup to cover my body, because *gross*, but I wasn't above peeing on the damn thing.

My eyes closed, and I sent up a word of thanks that I seemed to be constipated—probably from the stress of being kidnapped—so I hadn't had to deal with *that* yet.

Crawling back onto the bed, I checked my food and water situation. I had half of my water left, half the meatball sub from two days ago, and a bag of chips. “Why did you eat the entire sandwich Vincent left for you yesterday, you idiot?” I said aloud.

Because he said he was coming back last night, I replied in my head.

“Yeah, well he’s a big fat liar.”

My stomach joined the conversation with a loud growl, and I reached for the leftover sandwich, unwrapping and sniffing it. It didn’t smell rancid. I knew the meat would be the first thing to go bad, so I would eat that first, saving the bread for later.

Surely Vincent would be back today; he didn’t come last night because he was pissy about my “two minutes” insult and was trying to show me who’s boss. But something in my head told me to be cautious and ration my food. After all, what if he was in an accident or something? *Maybe he died*. I smiled at the thought. I fucking hated him.

Gianpaolo knew where I was, so he would come rescue me if Vincent got hit by a taxi. Or got mauled by an escaped tiger. Or got struck by lightning. *Any of those would be awesome, God. So, if you could make that happen, I’d be very grateful.*

I ate one of the meatballs, and it tasted fine. Taking a few sips of water, I wondered again where the hell Vincent was.

He'll be back soon, and I'm going to give that asshole a piece of my mind.

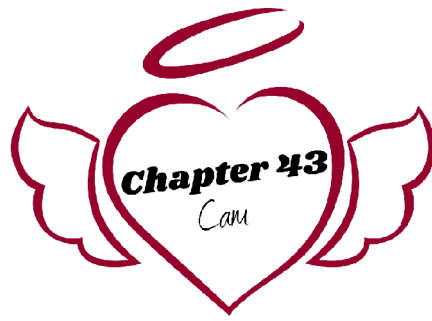
He's the one who insisted I come to New York. He's the one who said he wants us to be together. So why the fuck would he just stick me here and not come back?

And so I waited as the light on the other side of the room grew ever-dimmer.

I closed my eyes and tried to sleep, but my thoughts were consumed by an ache deep inside me. "Cam, I miss you. Please find me," I whispered to the empty room.

I heard a slight noise and opened my eyes to total darkness. The lamp's battery had died, and it was difficult not to wonder...

Am I next?



Saturday

NOTHING.

That's what we had after an entire night of staking out Vincent's apartment building. The man hadn't left his apartment and neither had his right-hand man, Gianpaolo. We had even checked to make sure there was no other way out of the building, and other than a fire escape, which we could see clearly from where we were parked, the front entrance was the only way he could leave without us seeing.

We'd taken turns napping, and Hawk was just stirring as despair started to seep into my veins like poison. Shiloh had been missing for three days now.

"Anything?" Hawk asked, his voice gritty as he moved his seat into an upright position. I shook my head, unable to even speak actual words. He groaned as he stretched his big frame in the SUV rental. "I'm gonna grab us a coffee and some breakfast."

I nodded, not taking my eyes from the glass front door as Hawk headed to the coffee shop a block away. My phone rang,

and I answered it immediately without looking.

“Yeah.”

“Hey, buddy. How you doing today?”

I sighed. “Not good, Tank. Bellucci hasn’t fucking moved. Please tell me you have something.”

“I have something.”

My spine straightened immediately, adrenaline replacing the despair in my blood vessels. “Hit me.”

“You know how Bellucci is a real estate broker? Well, there’s a certain up-and-coming area in the city that everyone wants a piece of. I’ve been digging and noticed that every single property that’s been sold in that area has gone through Bellucci, and all the new owners have some kind of suspected mob ties.”

My mind started ticking. “So, he’s helping his criminal buddies out? Like revealing what the other bids are so they can top it and acquire the property?”

“Exactly that and more,” he said, excitement lacing his voice. “He’s the broker representing all the properties being sold. Not sure how he managed that. Could be coercion. Anyway, all the bids have come in *exactly* \$100,000 over the next highest bid, which can’t be just a coincidence. Also, on the same day the payment is made, whoever is purchasing the property makes a \$100,000 payment to Flamelight, Incorporated.”

“What the hell is Flamelight?”

“It’s a shell company that I managed to trace back to none other than Vincent Bellucci. So, dear old Vinny is taking kickbacks, which is illegal as fuck.”

“Tank, you big, beautiful bastard!” I yelled as Hawk climbed in the vehicle with raised eyebrows. “I could fucking kiss you right now.”

“Ah, I appreciate that bro, but I’m gonna take a pass. I’m scared to even hear what you’ll want to do to me when I tell you the next part.”

“What next part?” I practically shouted, elation coursing through my cells in a way I hadn’t felt in days.

“The second highest bidder on one of the properties, a man named James Hitchins, sent Vincent a strongly worded email about a month ago, detailing his suspicions and threatening to involve the authorities. He went missing the next day and hasn’t been heard from since.”

“Holy fuck,” Hawk said.

“Yeah. Vincent apparently has some pretty good tech guys working for him because the email has been erased from both Hitchins’s and Bellucci’s servers. I had to use some, uh, unsavory means to uncover it. Not sure if they can use that particular evidence at trial, but they can at least use it to put some pressure on Vinny-boy.”

“Exactly. They can hopefully use all of this as a bargaining chip for a lighter sentence if he tells them where Shiloh is.” My heart was thumping like crazy.

“Yep. I’ve emailed everything I have to Agents Davis and Caruso.”

This was it. I could *feel* it in my bones. I was going to get my girl back. “Thank you, buddy. You’re a goddamn genius. Please tell Bristol I said to give you an extra-long blow job tonight.”

“I will certainly be passing that directive on to her,” he said with a chuckle before hanging up.

“Got him?” Hawk asked as he handed me my coffee.

Smiling fully for the first time in what seemed like forever, I nodded. “I think so.” Between sips of coffee, I filled him in on everything Tank had found out.

A half hour later, my phone rang, and I answered on Bluetooth so Hawk could hear.

“This is Cam.”

“Mr. Fitz, this is Teri Caruso with the FBI. We’re working on something as we speak and would like you and your partner to join us at Federal Plaza.” I could hear the smile in her voice. “Trust me, you’ll want to be here for this.”

“We’re on our way,” I said, putting the SUV in gear and disconnecting the call. “That sounded promising. You think they found Shy?” I asked Hawk, unable to keep the excitement from my voice.

He grimaced a little. “Don’t get your hopes up, Cam. I think she would have told us first thing if they’d found her.”

“Yeah, probably,” I said, the thrill waning just a little.

Twenty-five minutes later, we were walking into Agent Davis’s office. He stood and shook our hands. “Hey, guys. I wasn’t expecting you. I thought you would want to be there to watch Bellucci get arrested.”

“Agent Caruso called us,” I explained. “Did you say ‘arrested?’”

“Yep. They’re on the way to his apartment to pick him up now.”

Agent Caruso walked into the office rubbing her hands together. “We have some good news, guys. We’ve received some incriminating evidence about everyone’s favorite mobster.”

Hawk nodded. “Yeah, our friend told us about it already.”

“Oh. Well, okay. I thought you guys would want to be here when they brought him in.”

Actually, I would have loved to have been there to see them lead him out of his fancy apartment in handcuffs, but I wasn’t going to complain. The important thing was that the piece of shit was finally being arrested, and I could get my sweet Shiloh back.

“Hopefully, we can use some of the evidence your friend collected to get him to tell us where Miss Simms is located,” Agent Davis said, his lips crooking up at the edges.

Hawk and I shared a smile, and something grew in my chest.

Hope.

But that hope came crashing to the ground less than an hour later when Davis started yelling into the phone.

“What? What do you mean he wasn’t there? Well, where the fuck is he? You’ve got to be shitting me.”

I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t get a single ounce of air into my lungs. Hawk’s strong hand clenched my shoulder as Agent Davis wrapped up his phone call and flopped down in his chair with his hands buried in his dark hair. He dragged them down his face and finally met my eyes.

“I’m sorry, Cam. Bellucci is gone. Permanently, by the looks of his apartment. The safe had been emptied, and there wasn’t much left in his closet.”

I finally managed to suck in a breath and speak. “Gone? Gone where?”

“Fuck if I know. When our guys got there, the apartment was empty.”

“But we’ve been there all night,” Hawk argued. “He never left. I even saw him on his balcony early this morning.”

“What time did you leave to come here?” he asked, rubbing his temples with long fingers.

“One o’clock,” I answered.

Davis sighed and nodded. “They questioned the doorman, and he said Vincent and his driver Gianpaolo left about ten minutes after that. With suitcases.”

Fuck! We missed him by ten fucking minutes? We never should have left.

“So, what now?” Hawk asked.

Caruso’s eyes bounced between ours. “We’ll keep looking for Miss Simms. We’ll do everything in our power to find her.” She pounded a small fist against the metal desk, the sound bounding around the room as her eyes flashed. “And we *will* find Bellucci. He can’t have gotten far.”

Davis rolled his eyes. “You know as well as I do that he’s in the fucking wind, Teri. He’s probably on a private plane to a country without extradition as we speak.”

“D-do you think he took Shiloh with him?” I asked.

Agent Caruso shook her head. “I doubt it. He wouldn’t have papers for her. Plus, transporting an unwilling person to another country would be a logistic nightmare.”

“So, where the fuck is she?” My voice was rising to near panic level. Neither agent said a word. Because they didn’t fucking know. “He’s in real estate, so he must have some other properties, right? Does he have another apartment or something? Anything?”

“We’re looking into it,” Caruso said quietly. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Fitz. I know this has been difficult for you, and I’m sure you’re anxious to get back home. Why don’t—”

“I’m not leaving New York without Shiloh,” I snapped.

Hawk rose from his chair and put a hand under my armpit to help me stand. “Let’s go get a hotel room, Cam. We can

brainstorm, and the agents will call us if they find anything new, right?” he asked, throwing a pointed look their way.

“Of course,” Davis said agreeably.

As we neared our vehicle, I handed Hawk the keys. “You drive. I’m calling Tank back.”



Tuesday

IT HAD BEEN THREE days since Bellucci escaped, and I was at the end of my rope. We had spent all day Sunday and Monday searching properties he owned, mostly focusing on warehouses or abandoned buildings since apartments aren't really conducive to keeping someone captive unless they're soundproofed.

Where are you, baby? Is someone with you? Are they feeding you? Has anyone hurt you? I love you so much, Shy. I spoke to Shiloh in my head constantly, hoping she could *feel* me and know that I was looking desperately for her.

With a cup of coffee in my hand, I dialed Tank's number. The man was a goddamn machine. He'd been pecking away tirelessly on his computer all weekend, finding Bellucci's properties and searching for anything else that might help us.

"Hey, man," he said, the weariness evident in his deep voice. "I had another thought. I looked up properties owned by Flamelight, Incorporated. I know that's just adding more

places for you to check, but fuck, I don't know. I didn't want to miss anything important. I just emailed it to you.”

“Appreciate it,” I said, clicking on the email on my laptop and opening the spreadsheet attached.

“Besides a few commercial properties, all I found was one abandoned warehouse and a couple of apartments with female occupants.”

I chuffed out an annoyed snort. “Probably his mistresses, Theresa and Angela.”

“What a douchebag,” Tank said as my eyes scrolled down line after line, finally coming to rest on the names of the women Vincent was providing apartments for through his shell company.

Angela Sala.

Theresa Caruso.

It was like the second name was suddenly in bold, italic, underlined, flashing, eighty-point font.

Theresa Caruso.

Caruso.

Theresa. Which can be shortened to Teri.

As in... Special Agent *Teri Caruso*.

Holy. Fucking. Shit.

“Hawk! Hawk!” I yelled wildly until he rushed in from the bathroom, totally naked and dripping all over the carpet.

“What the fuck?” he asked, his eyes darting around the room looking for what had me so agitated. I could vaguely hear Tank asking questions in the background, but that name on the screen was all I could focus on.

Pointing at the spreadsheet with a shaking finger, I said, “I think we just found out how Vincent knew the Feds were coming for him.”

Hawk gasped when it clicked. “And why she called and told us to come to their office on Saturday.”

“So he could escape,” I filled in. “I was thinking that timing was too fucking perfect.”

Tank was still hollering questions at us through the phone, so I explained as I zoomed around the room to get everything we needed. “Tank, I need Caruso’s home address ASAFP.”

“I’ll have it to you by the time you get to your car.”

Hawk was dressed and slinging his tactical backpack over his shoulder as I shoved my feet into my shoes. “Let’s roll.”

Hang on, baby. I’m coming.



Hawk and I were waiting inside Teri Caruso’s bedroom when she emerged from her bathroom wearing a plush ivory robe. We had already searched her apartment and found no sign of Shiloh. We hadn’t expected to, but we’d had to be thorough.

Barely a squeak was able to escape before I crushed my hand over the woman's mouth and shoved her against the burgundy wall. "If you scream, your son is dead, *Theresa*," I hissed. "I have associates outside your mother's apartment right this minute. Understood?" Her eyes widened, and she nodded.

As Hawk patted her down, I released my hand from her mouth and slid it down to her throat, loose enough that she could talk but tight enough that the threat was still there. I wanted nothing more than to choke the life out of her, but I needed information first.

When Hawk finished with the pat-down, he pulled a roll of industrial-strength duct tape from his backpack and began taping Theresa's arms to her sides. A seductive smirk crossed Caruso's red lips. "If you boys wanted to play rough, you could have just told me. We didn't need all these dramatics."

My fingers wrapped a bit farther around her slender neck, and her smirk faded. "Listen, *Theresa*." I saw her left nostril twitch at my use of her first name. "We know you're Vincent's side piece." There was the nostril twitch again—she obviously didn't like that descriptor. "We also know he pays for this apartment and that you tipped him off about his impending arrest Saturday."

Theresa laughed nervously. "You're guessing. If you knew any of that, I would be in custody already."

I tilted my head a little. "Only if we told the authorities what we found out. Which we didn't. Hawk and I have our own

way of doing things.”

My partner let out a dark, sinister-sounding laugh. “We like to handle things... privately. It’s more fun that way.”

The woman’s eyes zipped back and forth between me and Hawk, gauging us. “So, what are you doing in my apartment?”

I stepped closer, crowding her against the wall as my fingers pulsed menacingly around her neck. “You know exactly what we want. Where. Is. Shiloh?”

She shook her head, her eyes widening with fake sincerity. “I have no idea. I want her to be found just like you do.”

“Is she in one of Vincent’s warehouses?”

Caruso’s nostril flared. *Bingo*. “I wish I could help you, Cam.” Her voice turned haughty. “But I’m afraid you’re looking at jail time for assaulting a federal officer.”

It’s fucking go time.

As I took a half-step back, her body seemed to relax a little. Until I squeezed my hand around her throat, pulling her toward me a couple inches before slamming her hard against the wall. Her eyes jolted wide open in alarm.

“Listen to me closely, you crooked bitch. I know four distinct ways to break your neck with my bare hands. The first two are relatively painless. You would be dead before you hit the ground. The third one, well, you would live, but you would be paralyzed from the neck down. But the fourth one...”

I grinned at her without an ounce of humor, my face so close she could taste my breath. This was my crazy smile. The one that said, *You should start praying right now, motherfucker.* Theresa's eyes flickered with fear as they moved back and forth between my own.

"The fourth one is the one I save for people who fucking lie to me. It's my favorite. It will be slow so that you can hear every vertebrae break and every fiber in your spinal cord snap. One by fucking one." I widened my creepy smile as if I were having the time of my life. "It's apparently quite painful, based on past experiences." I nodded a couple times as if remembering fond memories. "The screaming is fucking beautiful."

Caruso's entire body was shaking, her brown eyes almost popping out of their sockets. "You're crazy," she accused in a whisper.

"You have no fucking clue how right you are, lady," Hawk said from behind me. "He's goddamn looney tunes. I suggest you tell him where to find Shiloh. Now."

Her words were barely audible over the sound of her fear when she finally spoke. "Promise you won't kill my son if I tell you?" I had no intention of harming a kid, but I needed her to think I was as fucking insane as possible. Keeping my face impassive, I exhaled a deep sigh of annoyance, and she continued talking, her voice that of a desperate mother. "I mean, just because he's Vincent's son, that doesn't mean you have to hurt him. He's just an innocent baby."

My poker face was excellent, not showing an inkling of surprise at that revelation. Gritting my teeth, I jerked a short nod. “Fine. As long as you don’t lie to us, I won’t hurt the kid. Otherwise, I’ll gut the little fucker like a fish.”

She shivered, and tears filled her eyes. “Even if you don’t like what I tell you?”

The almost apologetic way she said it made my blood run cold.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means I need you to promise me you won’t hurt Cyrus if the news I give you is bad.”

I released her throat and took two steps back. For days, all I’d wanted was to know where Shiloh was. But now? With just a few words from Theresa Caruso, I was pretty sure I didn’t want to know. My obsession with finding my girl had quickly given way to a deep-seated terror about exactly *what* I would find.

Hawk gripped my bicep and addressed the woman in front of us. “I’ll make sure he doesn’t hurt your kid. Now, tell us where Shiloh is.”

My eyes stayed on Caruso, but she was unable to meet my eye. Instead, she rolled her lips and lifted her gaze to Hawk’s face.

“Shiloh is dead.”

I was pretty sure I was melting. My cheeks receded into deep hollows as my abdomen curled in on itself. My breaths

consisted of wheezing inhales and gravelly exhales that didn't even sound human.

“How?” Hawk growled.

As much as I didn't want to hear this, my ears seemed to be fine-tuned to every syllable that woman was uttering. “She was at one of Vincent's warehouses when I saw her on Friday. Vincent was supposed to go back that evening and take her more food. Uncuff her from the bed for a while and let her get some water.”

My fist rose to press hard against my mouth. *The fucking bastard left her cuffed to a bed?*

“But then you two started staking out his apartment that night, so he couldn't exactly go back and take care of her. Gianpaolo was supposed to go Saturday to check on her, but your buddy found all that information, and they only had a short window of opportunity to escape after I warned them.”

“And how did he know we were staking him out?” Hawk asked, his jaw taut, and Theresa's eyes dropped to the floor. “You told him, didn't you?” She nodded at her feet. “So if you'd kept your fucking mouth shut, we could have tailed Vincent to the warehouse and gotten Shiloh back Friday night.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I love him so much and didn't want to see him get arrested.”

“So, you're telling me she died because no one had the goddamn decency to go give her some food and water?”

Her face twisted with bitterness, and her eyes flickered to me. “Yes. The bitch should have kept her mouth shut. I don’t even know what Vincent saw in her. She was so fucking disrespectful to him. He knows I would never be like that. He said he was going to send for me and Cyrus once he got settled.”

“I suggest you keep your fucking mouth shut about Shiloh,” Hawk roared. Theresa flinched at his harsh words. “Tell me exactly where this warehouse is and if there are any guards there.”

She started rattling off the information while I stood there empty. Someone had cut me open and pulled out all of my bones, my guts, my muscles. Everything was gone, leaving only a hollowed-out shell.

I watched blankly as Hawk pushed Theresa to the floor and wrapped her in duct tape from her head to her feet, leaving only a small hole for her nose. “If we get to that warehouse and find out you’ve been dicking us around, I’m coming back for you. And your son. Do you understand?” She appeared to nod.

Hawk led me out to the vehicle and buckled me in the passenger seat. Before closing the door, he asked, “Stupid question, but are you okay, Cam?”

I snapped out of my stupor and knew exactly what I needed. “I have to be with her.” I think those were the first words I’d spoken since finding out that Shiloh was... *you know*.

He looked at me uncomfortably. “Okay, man. We’ll get the authorities there, and I’m sure they’ll let you, um, spend a moment with her.”

“No. Take me there before you call anyone else. They’re going to take her away from me, and she needs me to hold her for a while until they get there.”

I felt the first tear make its way down my face. The first of a million.



Tuesday

THIS WAS SOME ABSOLUTE fucking bullshit. How the hell could someone leave a woman as sweet and vibrant and funny as Shiloh Simms to die of starvation and dehydration? Jesus, she'd never hurt anyone, and Vincent and his whore had left her to rot in an abandoned warehouse like a piece of trash.

Never in my life have I wanted to kill someone as much as I'd wanted to kill Theresa Caruso today. At any time in the past four days, she could have slipped into that warehouse and given Shy some water and a damn Snickers bar. Or something. Anything to keep her alive.

I resisted the urge only because I wouldn't do Cam any good if I was in jail for murdering a federal officer. And the poor guy was going to need all the support he could get. *But maybe tonight, I could sneak back there and finish the job.*

Weaving my way through traffic, I glanced over at my friend. He was staring blankly out of the window, practically catatonic, except for the tears streaming down his face.

She needs him to hold her for a while.

His dead girlfriend's corpse *needs* him to hold her. Fucking hell. This poor guy.

I was not even remotely equipped to deal with this shit. *Where the hell is Bode when you need him? He's got the emotional capacity to handle this situation, whereas I'm basically an emotional mute.*

It wasn't that I didn't have feelings. I did. The guys teased me about being heartless, but that was pretty much just with women. And I had my reasons for that.

Actually, it wasn't even *all* women. I had genuine affection for my sister and for Blaire, Charli, and Bristol... and more recently, Shiloh. In fact, I fucking adored Shiloh, and that's what made this shit so hard to deal with.

A deep sense of dread filtered underneath my skin and all the way into my bones when I pulled up to the side door of the warehouse. I knew exactly what I needed to do.

Reaching over to pat Cam's hand on his thigh, I said, "Bud, I'm going to go in first and check the situation."

He turned his hollow blue eyes to my dark ones. "But I need to be there for her," he said, his voice flat and monotone.

"I, um, I know that's what you want, but just let me go in first to make sure everything is... okay." *In case there are rats or bugs on her body*, I didn't say aloud. That was a vision he certainly didn't need in his head for the rest of his fucking life.

The stubborn ass followed me when I got out of the car and pulled a small crowbar from my backpack to pop the door open. There were high windows that let in the early afternoon light, and with my gun drawn, I searched the first floor and found nothing but dust and a few empty crates. Locating the metal stairs in the back corner of the room, I silently climbed them with Cam on my heels.

There was only one door up here, a heavy metal one with a sturdy deadbolt. I had it picked in ten seconds and turned to Cam. I had to make him understand. Taking him by the shoulders, I shook him until he looked at me.

“You have to stay out here, Cam. Let me handle this for you, okay, brother?” He nodded numbly, and I wasn’t sure if what I was saying was getting through to him. His eyes were just fucking blank pools of blue staring back at me. “Do not come into this room until I tell you it’s okay. Tell me you understand.”

“I understand,” he said, his lips turning down at the corners.

Turning to face the door, I stared at the ominous gray metal as if I could see through it to the horror on the other side. My teeth grinded together as I pushed the door open and slipped inside, closing the metal behind me with a soft clang.

Blackness and the smell of urine assaulted my senses, and I pulled out my phone and turned on the flashlight to search for a light switch on the wall. Finding none, I did a quick sweep of the windowless room with the light and saw a small bed against the far wall.

A pale, thin arm was stretched up and tethered to the iron headboard by a set of metal handcuffs. I knew for a fact the sight of that bound arm would haunt my dreams until the day I died.

“Oh God,” I whispered. Something inside me had hoped that maybe she’d found a way to escape, but no. She was still here. I wasn’t a doctor, but I knew from my time in the military that four days was way too long for a human to go without water. Food? Well, we could go a bit longer without food, but water was essential for life.

Directing my light at the floor, I made my way across the room, noticing a pair of broken glasses and what looked like a used condom near the bed. If he’d fucking raped her, I was going to hunt down and kill motherfucking Vincent Bellucci in the most painful way possible. Hell, I might just do that anyway.

My breathing was haggard as I finally turned the light toward the bed. *Don’t let it be her. Please let this all be a big mistake, and don’t let it be her.* The bright beam found her face.

It was her.

Shiloh Simms was lying on her side, her face drawn and her mouth slack, and a sob caught in my throat when I recognized her sweet face and limp, brown hair. Running the backs of my knuckles down her face, I found her skin cool to the touch.

“You were a beautiful soul, and you didn’t deserve to die like this, sweetheart,” I whispered to her. After pulling back

the sheet to make sure nothing was in the bed with her, I covered her back up and laid my lit phone faceup on a wooden crate that was littered with food wrappers and an empty water jug. It cast only enough light to make this horrifying scene even more eerie.

Making my way back through the darkness, I pulled the door open to find Cam standing there facing me, the lights from the elevated windows forming a halo around his silhouette.

“I found her,” I said gently, doing my best to keep my voice from cracking. I was hurting, but I knew my pain was merely a droplet in the ocean of grief in which Cam was drowning. Shiloh had been my friend, but she was his *life*.

I held his arm and led him to the bed, and he immediately lay beside his girl and gathered her in his arms. “Hi, angel. I’m here now.”

Jesus. This is too fucking much. I covered my mouth with my hand and turned away. Tears fell down my face at the loss of this beautiful life and at the thought of what my friend would have to endure now that the only woman he’d ever loved was gone.

“Hawk, can you cut her loose? I think her arm is hurting.”

Wiping my nose with the back of my hand, I croaked, “Sure, buddy,” not having the heart to tell him that she was no longer in pain. My fingers searched the inside of my tac backpack and closed around the bolt cutters I kept there. Using the light from my phone and the small amount seeping through

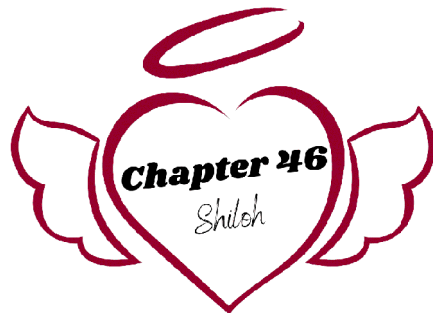
the open door, I snipped the chain on the handcuffs and heard a weak, gritty noise as Shiloh's arm fell stiffly, yet limply, to the thin pillow.

Damn, Cam sounds like an old woman who's smoked three packs a day for the past sixty years.

Except... Cam spoke very clearly in a soft voice. "Is that better, baby?"

"Yes," came the raspy reply.

Ho-ly shit.



I WAS DYING. I was one hundred percent positive of it because I was hallucinating.

But it was a wonderful hallucination. I could hear my sweet Cam whispering to me. I could literally feel his arms around me and his soft lips feathering tenderly across my face, and I sent up a prayer of thanks that God allowed me to dream of him while I embarked on my final journey.

There was also light, just like the stories you hear. I'd been cloaked in darkness for so long, I'd almost forgotten what light looked like, but it was *right there*. On the other side of my closed lids. Though I was too scared to open them because I had the distinct feeling that as soon as I did, this dream would end, and Cam would be gone.

Just a few more minutes.

I have to be honest with you though... dying fucking *hurts*. There's an excruciating headache. Your throat will feel like you've swallowed all the sand in Florida, and for some reason, there's the worst arm pain in the history of the world.

Death: One star. Do NOT recommend.

I could hear voices, but I couldn't quite make out what they were saying. And all of a sudden, the arm thing got better and worse at the same time. The intense pressure was gone, but the ache became more prevalent.

“Is that better, baby?” Dream Cam asked.

Should I answer him? I risked it, ungluing my parched tongue from the roof of my mouth and attempting to speak a single word.

“Yes.” It didn't sound like my voice though I felt my vocal cords vibrating with the rough sound, so I knew it was me.

“Holy shit, Shiloh! You're alive!”

Okaaaay, apparently Dream Hawk is here too. Or someone that sounded just like him. The filtered light became impossibly brighter, and I squinched my eyes even more tightly shut to avoid it. *Just let me stay here for a few more minutes. With my love.*

“Dammit, Hawk, you're blinding her. Get that light out of her face.”

“But she's alive!”

A large hand swept some hair away from my face as soft lips pressed against my forehead. “Of course she is. I would have felt it if she was really gone.”

I'm still alive?

My hand—the one *not* attached to that horrible, aching arm—found his face. Cam’s face. It was scruffy and unshaven, but it was undoubtedly his. And it was *real*.

“I love you, angel,” I heard.

My tongue and lips struggled to repeat the exquisite words, but it sounded more like, “Ub oooh.”

A few seconds later, I heard water running, and if my body would have cooperated, I would have run toward that perfect sound like a woman possessed.

“Cam, I’ve got some water. Do you think you can sit her up so she can drink?”

I could feel my head nodding. I liked that idea. A lot. My body was shifted as strong arms pulled me into what I recognized instantly as Cam’s lap. I tried not to whimper at the pain in my arm, which was hanging uselessly over his shoulder.

“Take it slow, angel. Just small sips to start out.”

Fuck that. I wanted *all* the water. My forehead wrinkled into a scowl as someone held down my hand when I tried to grab the glass and pour the entirety of it into my parched mouth.

“Easy, sweetheart. You don’t want to throw up.”

Puking on top of everything else that was hurting? No. I certainly didn’t want that. I allowed one of my saviors to tip the plastic cup against my lips, and *oh, sweet Jesus! That was phenomenal. Like, the best water in the universe.*

I drank as greedily as they allowed me to, my front teeth biting into the plastic to hold the cup there, and then Hawk said, “Let me get her another glass, and then I’ll call 9-1-1.”

After the second cup, I steeled my resolve and peeled my extremely dry eyes open. Everything was blurry as hell, but I was able to make out the best sight I had ever seen. A dark beard over a strong jaw. Tear-stained cheeks. And eyes so blue they rivaled the depths of the ocean.

“There she is,” Cam said from only inches away.

“Cam.” My voice was still coated with gravel, but the word was clearer than before. “Vincent. He tricked me. I’m sorry.” My brain may have been foggy, but I knew exactly who was responsible for all of this mess. A frisson of fear skittered down my spine. *What if he comes back?*

Sensing my thoughts, Cam cupped my face and spoke softly to me. “Shhh. He’s gone, baby. Probably in another country by now. You’re safe.”

I’m safe.

Those two words provoked a physical reaction so intense, it shocked me. I was sobbing, but my body didn’t have enough fluid to even produce any tears. Cam was producing enough for both of us though, large droplets streaming down his gorgeous face.

“You’re really here,” I gasped through my crying, and he nodded, pressing his forehead against mine.

“I’m really here, and I’m not going anywhere.” His soft lips pressed against my forehead and then across my temple to my cheek. Palming my face in his large hand, he rubbed his nose against mine. “This may be the worst timing ever, but will you marry me, Shiloh?”

My smile was so huge, my dehydrated lips cracked in several places. “Yes,” I answered without hesitation. I personally thought his timing was pretty perfect.

His thumb dabbed gently at the drop of blood that was oozing from my lower lip as he grinned back at me. “I do think I deserve style points for the most original proposal situation.”

I laughed and the sound was scratchy and painful against my raw throat, but I couldn’t help myself. The overhead light suddenly came on as Hawk apparently found the light switch outside the room, and I squinted a bit to shade my eyes.

“What’s so funny?” Hawk asked, re-entering the room and digging through his backpack. He slid a pair of dark sunglasses on my face, which helped with the brightness of the overhead lights, before sitting on my other side so that I could see him a little bit.

“We’re getting married,” Cam announced, pride sweeping over his beautiful face as his eyes shifted back and forth between me and his friend.

Hawk made a point of looking at his Apple Watch. “Right now? Because the ambulance will be here in about four minutes.” His teasing smile faded as his gaze locked on Cam.

“Speaking of that, we probably need to try and get her downstairs since there’s not an elevator in here.”

My new fiancé’s face was grim when he looked back at me. “Tell me the best way to carry you without hurting you, angel.”

I tried to lower my arm from his shoulder and had to bite back a scream. “Arm. Hurts to move it,” I panted. “It’s been stuck up like that for... I don’t even know how long. I was able to stand in the beginning, and I could let my arm rest a bit. Once my food and water ran out, I got too weak to do anything but lie here.”

“How long have you been without water?” Hawk asked, gently steadying my arm, as Cam cradled me and stood.

“I’m not sure. I’m a little cloudy on timing.” My forehead puckered as I strained to think. “I remember Vincent was supposed to come back one night, but he didn’t. I got worried and started rationing my water and food.”

“Fuck, that was smart,” Cam muttered. “How much did you have?”

“I had half a jug of water and a half of a sandwich and chips left over from a couple days before. I ate the meat first because I knew it would go bad. Then I just nibbled on the bread.”

“Jesus, you’re amazing, Shy. I can’t believe you survived on that,” Hawk said. He retrieved me another glass of water, and I sipped it slowly when Cam held it to my lips.

“The worst part was not being able to see. That asshole broke my glasses, so I couldn’t see more than a foot or two away. Then the lantern went out at some point, and everything was dark. I couldn’t even see my hand right in front of my face. I had to feel around blindly to find the food and water and pray I didn’t knock anything over.” If I’d been able to produce tears right then, they would have been welling up in my eyes as I looked at Cam. “Coincidentally, can we buy a nightlight for our room?”

I was pretty sure I never wanted to be in the dark ever again.

“We can buy any fucking thing you want, angel. I can set up spotlights, lasers, track lighting, neon signs. What the fuck ever.”

Nestling my face into the crook of his neck, I whispered, “I love you.”

“Love you too” he said, heading for the door.

When we reached the bottom of the stairs, there were the sounds of sirens and lots of loud voices from outside, and after days of complete silence, the noise sent all of my muscles into a state of tension that was intensely painful. As police and paramedics flooded the room and rushed toward me with a gurney, I freaked. The fuck. Out.



WHEN A CROWD OF people busted through the warehouse door, Shiloh understandably became skittish, clinging to me so hard, her nails drew blood from the back of my neck.

“Cam, no. Cam. Don’t let them take me,” she hissed frantically. Her body was straining to get closer to me, even though I was holding her against my chest, and the absolute terror in her voice broke my heart in two. She was like a scared little kitten.

Jerking my chin at Hawk, he stepped forward to handle the authorities as I backed further into the deep recesses of the warehouse, finally settling my butt on a crate. I carefully shifted Shiloh until she was straddling my lap so she could see my face. We were in a darkened corner, so I lifted her sunglasses to the top of her head and locked my gaze with hers as my hands firmly cupped her face.

“I am here, Shiloh. No one will hurt you ever again. You need medical attention, but I’m not leaving your side for even a second.” I kissed her cracked lips softly.

Her eyes were wide and steeped in fear. “Please don’t let them strap me down, Cam. I don’t want to get on that gurney and get tied down.”

Oh. God.

“No, of course not,” I said, finally understanding what had freaked her out so badly. The poor thing had been chained to a bed for days, and then she thought she was about to get tethered to yet another bed. “If anyone tries, they’re going to have to go through your studly fiancé.”

Her body melted against mine in relaxation, and the hint of a smile crested her lips. “I almost forgot I have a fiancé now.”

“Only engaged for five minutes, and you’re already complacent. You also forgot to refer to me as ‘studly,’” I reminded her with a lifted brow and a playful shake of my head, and her smile sweetened. “Listen to me, angel. I’ll fight anyone who touches you or tries to do anything to you without your permission. I may even borrow Hawk’s backpack of goodies to defend you. Speak of the devil,” I said, my eyes shooting over her shoulder at my friend approaching with a female paramedic. I gave him an appreciative nod. *Smart call.*

The stocky woman with graying hair gave off an air of experience and confidence as she squatted beside us, careful not to touch Shiloh. “Miss Simms, I’m Kera Grundy. Mister Gentry filled us in on what he knows. I understand that you’ve been deprived of water for a while?” Shiloh nodded. “Okay, I know talking a lot isn’t very comfortable, but can you tell me how I can make this easier for you?”

“I, um...” She looked to me for help, her head dipping in embarrassment.

I took over, my need to protect and comfort her my number one priority as I spoke to the paramedic. “Absolutely no straps. And no gurneys or beds. I’ll ride in the ambulance with her, and she will sit on my lap on the bench. Ask before you touch her.” I glanced down at Shiloh, and she nodded in agreement with my demands.

“I’m sorry to be so much trouble,” she told Kera quietly, and the older woman shook her head in dismissal.

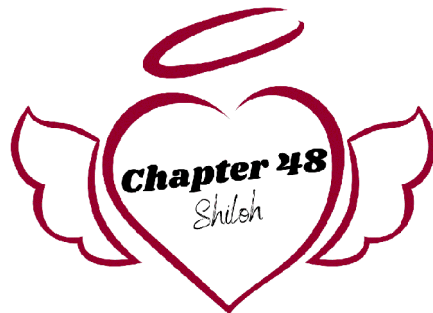
“No. You don’t apologize for letting us know your needs. The only reason we’re here is to take care of *you* and get you the medical attention you need. Now, I’m going to need to start an IV when we get into the ambulance. It’s imperative that we get some fluids and electrolytes into you as soon as possible. Will that be okay?”

“Yes.”

My hand stroked tenderly up and down her injured arm which was resting on my shoulder. “This arm has been handcuffed to the bed since Friday. She’s having trouble moving it, and it hurts when she tries to lower it. She’s also very near-sighted, and the bastard who took her smashed her glasses. She can only see a couple feet in front of her.”

Kera nodded. “I’ll call ahead to the hospital and have ortho and ophthalmology on standby.” She turned her warm, green eyes to me. “Bring her out when she’s ready.”

I held Shiloh close to me, giving her my strength and my comfort until her breathing was soft and calm. Lifting her in my arms, I also gave her my promise. “I’ll always protect you, angel. Always.”



IT HAD BEEN ALMOST two weeks since Hawk and Cam had rescued me from that warehouse. As soon as we'd gotten home, Cam had slipped his mother's ring on my finger, making our engagement officially official. He'd even gotten down on one knee and given me a proper proposal, complete with sweet promises and tons of kisses.

But only kisses.

We hadn't had sex since we'd returned to Texas because I'd had a urinary tract infection due to the extreme dehydration. That was all cleared up now, thanks to a couple antibiotics I'd been prescribed. Cam said we didn't have to rush into it, which was sweet, but I was... horny, for lack of a better word. Plus, I wanted to feel that closeness with him. That special bond we had when he was deep inside my body.

I had bought a new underwear and bra set that was going to make him literally unable to resist me tonight though. I'd had to buy it online because Cam kept me firmly under his metaphorical wing at all times, insisting I go to work with him every day. I wasn't complaining. I was still dealing with the

mental and emotional backlash of what Vincent had put me through, and the only time I felt completely safe was when I was within a few feet of my fiancé.

Cam even accompanied me to my twice-weekly physical therapy appointments where they worked on my muscle tone and range of motion, and after this morning's session, he had taken me out for lunch.

I was settled on the couch in his office with my laptop, studying for my upcoming examination to get my optometry license here in Texas, when I felt acid rising in my chest.

Shit. Not again.

It seemed like every time I ate now, the food decided to make a reappearance within the hour. I figured that those few days of living on an old sandwich and not much water in that warehouse had wreaked havoc with my digestive system, but this crap was getting old.

Just one more way Vincent fucking Bellucci was still screwing with my life.

Trying to appear casual, I stood and headed for the door. I could feel Cam's piercing gaze on my back, but I ignored it and opened the door as if I didn't feel the urge to dash to the restroom. After calmly closing the door behind me, I fast-walked down the hallway and darted into the blue-tiled room, dropping to my knees in the first stall.

Grabbing my hair with my good hand, I bundled it at the nape of my neck as I expelled the contents of my stomach into

the toilet. Seconds later, I felt a warm hand replace mine and knew that I hadn't fooled my fiancé at all.

"Don't. Gross," I insisted between retches, but he refused to budge, kneeling beside me with one hand holding my hair and the other rubbing compassionately from shoulder to shoulder.

"It's okay, angel." His voice was soothing and calm though I could hear the worry seeping in around the edges. Once I was cleaned up, including using the toothbrush and mouthwash I kept in the office bathroom now for this very reason, Cam leaned back against the counter with his arms crossed over his chest, his countenance the picture-definition of stubbornness. "I'm making you an appointment today. This isn't normal, Shy."

"I'm fine," I lied, staring at the DFW Security Force logo embroidered on his polo shirt.

Reaching for my waist, he pulled me between his spread legs and into his loving embrace. "No, you're not. You haven't put any of your weight back on. In fact, I think you've lost even more since..."

I nodded. He didn't have to say it. Cradling my head, he pressed my cheek against his hard chest and nestled his lips in my hair. "I know it's going to take time, but I just want you well." His fingers slid down to my left hand and twisted my engagement ring easily around and around to prove his point. "And Dr. Barros said you needed to see the internist."

Doctor Barros was the psychiatrist I'd been seeing, and she'd considered the idea that my vomiting was

psychosomatic rather than physical. Just to make sure, she suggested getting a full workup by an internist, even though I'd had every test under the sun when I was in the hospital in New York.

“Okay,” I finally relented, and I felt Cam smile into my hair.



Two hours later, we were seated in the examination room at the doctor's office. “I can't believe you bullied the poor receptionist into giving me an appointment today,” I told Cam, my voice thick with consternation.

“I didn't exactly *bully* her. I just dropped Blaire's name, and she was very accommodating. Everyone in the medical community loves and respects Dr. Blaire Broxton,” he said with a smug smile.

“I could have waited until next week,” I said.

Cam's thumb caressed the back of my hand. He'd stayed right beside me, holding my hand during the entire examination, and even during the blood draw. I'd put my foot down when he'd tried to join me in the restroom so I could pee in a cup though.

“I know, angel. I'm just worried about you.” His blue eyes were so sincere that it was hard to be mad at him.

Dr. Peterson knocked on the door before re-entering the room, clapping his hands merrily. He was a tall, paunchy,

older man with a spiky gray hairdo that screamed *cool grandpa*. His jovial personality had instantly put me at ease.

“Well, I’ve figured out what’s wrong with Miss Shiloh.” His playful gaze shifted between me and Cam, and my fiancé stiffened.

“What? Are her electrolytes okay? Is it some kind of weird food poisoning that won’t go away? It’s not cancer, is it?” Cam sounded a bit like my mother.

The doctor lifted his chin and grinned. “All of her tests were fine. Except for one.” Cam’s hand squeezed mine, the gesture a combination of support and concern.

“It seems congratulations are in order. You kids are going to be parents.” Doctor Peterson spread his hands out like Vanna White. He didn’t say “ta-da!” but he might as well have.

My lower jaw dropped to the floor as I stared at the man like he’d just told me he was really a unicorn. “I’m…”

“Pregnant?” Cam finished. Our heads turned slowly until our eyes met, mine shell-shocked and his sparkling in awe. “We’re having a baby, angel,” he announced, as if I needed the explanation.

“A baby?” I could feel my lips moving, but no sound was coming out.

With his eyes glued to mine, Cam said, “Doc, we need a minute of privacy, please.”

“Of course. I’ll have the nurse get Shiloh set up with the OB/GYN,” he said before walking out.

Standing and holding my face, Cam dipped his head to my eye level. “It’s all going to be okay, Shy. I’ll take care of you.” His smile grew slowly until it lit up his entire face, and he had never been more beautiful to me than right in that moment. “Both of you. I’ll take care of *both of you*.”

“H-how can I be a mother if I need someone else to take care of me?” I stuttered. “I’m a hot mess right now, Cam.”

“No. You’re not. You’ve been through a lot and come out the other side on your own two feet. You’re the strongest woman I know, Shiloh Simms. So what if your studly fiancé is there to give you a little balance? That’s life. That’s true partnership.”

God, this man...

“I love you so much. Thank you for being my balance and my strength.”

“Your strength is your own, sweetheart. I’m just here for backup.” Cam closed his eyes and kissed the right side of my chest reverently. “Your strength comes from here. Not many people could have survived what you did. You are special and strong, and you’re going to rock this motherhood thing.”

I snaked my fingers into his hair and held him against my chest. Even when I was feeling weak and full of holes, Camden Fitz caulked the gaps with his love. “We’re stronger together.”

Resting his chin on my chest, he gazed up at me, his eyes a soft, ceil blue. “We are. When you’re bleeding, I’ll be your

tourniquet. And when I'm in the darkness of my mind, you'll be my sunshine."

My lips kissed his forehead like he always did to me. "I'll do my best to be your sunshine. Even when it's hard."

He nuzzled his nose in the hollow of my throat. "All you have to do is give me that perfect smile. The one you save just for me. That lights up my world, angel."

"So, you're okay with becoming parents before we've even gotten married?"

Raising his head, he shook it slowly, and my blood seemed to pause in my veins. "Actually, no. I want to make an honest woman out of you. We could get married on New Year's Eve, if that's okay with you." His chin jutted to the side. "Unless you want a big wedding. I'll do whatever you want."

My blood coursed robust and swift through my veins. "A simple ceremony with family and friends sounds good to me. And New Year's Eve is perfect. A new year and a new start," I said, kissing his lips softly. "As long as you're mine and I'm yours."

"Eight days," he said, a grin taking over his face.

"Eight days," I confirmed, my own smile lighting me up from within.

Cam knelt on the ground and pushed my sweatshirt up, staring at my belly in wonder. "Our baby is right there. Inside you." He kissed just above my navel. "It's two days before Christmas, and we're giving each other the best gift ever. I put

part of me inside you, and you made a tiny little person out of it.”

My smile came easily for the first time in a while as my soon-to-be-husband kissed and talked to our baby through my tummy. “Helloooo in there. This is your daddy.” He beamed at that name. “I’m here to watch over you, but we’re going to have some fun too. I’ll teach you how to fight and how to play baseball. We’ll go to football games and to the go-kart track.”

I laughed. “It might be a girl, you know. You probably need to work on a girl speech too.”

He frowned up at me. “That *was* my girl speech. Just wait till you hear what I have planned if it’s a boy. On second thought, maybe it’s best if I don’t tell you.” He wiggled his eyebrows at me and bent to whisper God-knows-what to our child.

Cam’s hands gripped my ribcage as he continued to shower attention on my belly, and when he caught a glimpse of the bottom edge of my new bra—a lacy, bright pink demi—he paused, his lips curling into a look of pure pleasure. His eyes met mine as he pushed my gray sweatshirt all the way up to my chest, and then his gaze fell to my ample cleavage.

“This for me, baby?” His voice was suddenly husky.

“Do you want it to be?” I asked coyly.

His velvety pink tongue traced the curve of his bottom lip, and I wanted to feel that rough softness on my skin. “That depends. Are you wearing matching panties?”

My teeth indented my bottom lip, and I tilted my head.
“Maybe you should take me home and find out.”

A hungry growl rose up from his chest, and he kissed his way down my torso, his fingers toying with the button on my jeans. “Or maybe I’ll find out right fucking now. You look like a tasty little piece of candy in pink.”

Oh, shit. I had awakened the beast.

“Cam, no,” I hissed, pushing ineffectively at his broad shoulders. “The doctor will be back in just a minute.”

He tugged on my loose jeans, letting his tongue slide just inside the fabric, teasing my heated flesh with tiny flicks that I was dying to feel a few inches lower. “Then let’s get the hell out of here. I’m going to fuck your sweet, pregnant ass all over our bed.”

I raised my hand and giggled, “Yes, please.”

A man on a mission, Cam didn’t waste any more time, rising from his knees and helping me to stand. We almost ran straight into Dr. Peterson when my eager man yanked the door to the exam room open.

“Oh,” the older man said with a smile, “I can see you’re ready to go. Shiloh, here’s a prescription for some topical anti-nausea gel. It’s perfectly safe for the baby, so rub some on your wrists before you eat. We’ve also made an appointment with your obstetrician for next week.”

Cam shook his hand enthusiastically. “Thank you so much, Doc. For everything. Hey, we can have sex, right?”

I could feel every bit of blood in my body rise to my face. “Camden Fitz,” I hissed, barely able to even look at the poor doctor. “I’m so sorry,” I said to the chuckling man. “He’s very excited.” Then I winced at my choice of words. “About the baby, I mean. He’s excited about the baby, not about the sex.”

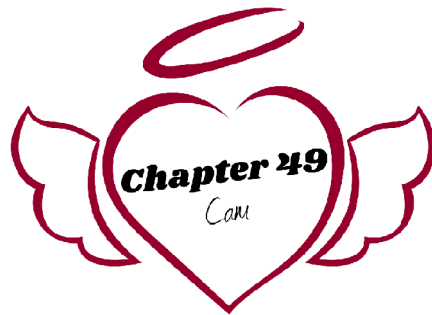
“No, I’m excited about the sex too, angel,” he said with an unapologetic nod before turning to the doctor. “So?”

Doctor Peterson was barely containing his laughter, as were the two nurses standing nearby. I would never be able to show my face in this office again. In fact, maybe we should move out of the DFW area altogether. I’ve heard San Antonio is nice.

“Yes, Mr. Fitz. You and Miss Simms may continue your regular activities.”

Cam’s arm surrounded me, tucking me against his side as he grinned. “She’ll be Mrs. Fitz in eight days. We’ll send you an invitation to the wedding.” Kissing my temple, he murmured, “Let’s go home and get started on those ‘activities,’ sweetheart.”

Oh, sweet Jesus. Shut up, you fool.



AFTER STOPPING AT THE pharmacy to pick up her prescription, Shiloh pulled up the calendar on her phone and figured out that she was probably about five or six weeks pregnant. That's why none of the tests had shown it in New York; she hadn't been far enough along.

“So, we should have a baby in August,” she said, her hand resting gently on her abdomen. I could sense her gaze on the side of my face as I drove around the LBJ loop. “You're sure you're good with this? Having a baby so soon in our relationship?”

I reached over and rested my hand on top of hers. On top of our baby. “I'm thrilled, Shiloh. Are you okay with it?” I had been so excited and so intent on reassuring her we could do anything together, I'm not sure I had even asked her.

“I'm shocked and nervous,” she said, leaning her head over to rest on my arm, “but very happy. I've always wanted children, and I'm not getting any younger.”

“And we can still find time to be newlyweds. The guys are excellent babysitters. We kept Carrie all the time when Blaire

was in med school.”

Shy giggled. “I can’t imagine you big dudes changing diapers and feeding a baby.”

My scoff accompanied a teen-worthy eye roll. “The hell you say. We were fucking baby experts by the time Carrie was a month old. And Tank—that big fucker—he could hold her in one hand and talk to her in that deep voice of his. Put the kid right to sleep.”

She pressed her lips against my bicep. “Then I’ll definitely be calling Tank when I can barely hold my eyes open.”

“We took turns staying the night at the Broxton house when the triplets were born too. With four kids in the house, we needed to help even the odds a little.”

“That’s so awesome. I love this family.”

I squeezed her hand, letting my thumb drift lazily against the inside of her wrist. “You’re a part of it now, angel. And you’ll *officially* be my family in eight days.”

Her smile was serene and relaxed. “I can’t wait to be your wife. Where do you want to get married?”

“Wherever you want, angel. We can try and find a church with an availability, or we can do it at Blaire and Axel’s house since it’s so big.”

“You don’t think they’d mind?” she asked, frowning up at me.

“They’d be thrilled. Trust me. I’m sure Blaire is dying to marry me off.”

I felt her warm breath on my arm as she laughed. “She’s gotten rid of Beau already.”

“Yeah, and Tank is so far up Bristol’s ass, we’d need a proctologist to extract him.”

“Well, that’s a disturbing thought,” she said dryly. “Who’s next after you? Hawk?”

I shot her a mirthful look. “You’ve met Hawk, right?”

Shy shrugged and rubbed her cheek against my shoulder. “It could happen. From what I hear, Shark used to be a grumpy bastard, so maybe the right woman could steal Hawk’s heart.”

I merged easily into the right lane and took the exit for our house. “Yeah, but Shark grew up with two loving parents. Hawk doesn’t talk much about his family situation, but I have the feeling he’s the way he is because of... something.”

“Hmmm. So, Woody or Bode?”

I let that swirl through my mind before answering. “Well, Bode is a total playboy, but he *loves* women. I could see one grabbing his attention one day if he decides to settle down a bit. And Woody? He’s got a good, strong family with about a thousand brothers and sisters, so it’s a possibility.”

“I think he and Taz would be cute together. All that dark hair and those mile-long lashes they both have. They would make adorable babies.”

A snort escaped my nose. “Never going to happen. Those two *hate* each other with a passion.”

“Aha! But there *is* passion there.”

“Yeah, but it’s more of the *I want to murder you in your sleep* variety.”

Pulling into our driveway, I jogged around the SUV and opened Shiloh’s door. Gathering her in my arms, I cupped her rounded ass, grinding myself against her. “I want you so fucking bad, angel, but if you’re not ready—”

“Why do you think I wore cute undies today?”

Jesus, just thinking of what she was wearing underneath those baggy clothes had me hardening to the point of insanity. “I know, but I’m just sayin’. If you need me to stop, let me know.”

Her delicate hands embraced my cheeks. “I’ve missed being close to you like that, Cam. I want it as much as you do.”

Sliding one hand up her back and deeply into her hair, I held her still for my ravaging mouth to overtake hers. Our tongues danced longingly as she slipped a hand between us to press against my rock-hard erection. “Fuck, baby,” I groaned into her mouth, and her fingers glided up and down my length. Teasing. Tantalizing. Telling me we wanted the same thing.

“Jesus, man. Let her breathe,” a female voice called from my porch. “We need to know what the doctor said.”

Reluctantly breaking our kiss, I noticed Blaire standing anxiously beside the front door at the same time I realized

there were cars parked on the street. More cars than there should have been.

“Aw, hell,” I muttered. “Sorry, Shy. Looks like we’ve been inundated.”

By the time we made it up the steps, Bristol and Charli had joined Blaire, and they all engulfed Shiloh with hugs and asked a hundred questions at once.

“I’m not hugging *you* till you put *that* away,” Bris said, scrunching her nose as she tipped her head toward my crotch, where my arousal was evident. “Seriously, that thing’s gonna get you in trouble one day.”

Shiloh’s amused eyes met mine, and I lifted my chin in silent affirmation. She giggled and turned to the girls. “It seems that it’s already gotten him in trouble. Actually, it’s gotten *me* in trouble.”

It only took a beat before they realized, and then there was screaming and crying and more hugging. Next thing I knew, *everyone*—the entire gang—was on the porch to see what the ruckus was all about.

“Shiloh’s pregnant,” Blaire screeched. “You owe me fifty dollars, Axel.” Turning her shimmering green eyes back to me, she said, “I told him on the way over here, but he thought it was food poisoning.”

Everyone piled back into the house, and Shiloh was deposited on the couch, surrounded by the girls, while the guys slapped me on the back like I had won the Nobel Peace

Prize. To be honest, I couldn't have been happier if I had won the award. Shiloh and my baby were the greatest prize I could hope for.

“Oh, and we're getting married on New Year's Eve,” I heard Shy say, setting off another round of squeals and claps.

“Y'all can have it at our house,” Blaire said, her eyes lighting up like a kid in a candy shop. “I mean, if that's what you want. We've certainly got the room.”

“That would be great,” Shiloh said, dipping her head appreciatively.

“Damn, we need to get Tank's cock a new hat for the occasion. Like maybe one of those sparkly gold New Year's party hats,” Woody mused, earning him a shove from our big friend as everyone around them laughed.

Bristol hauled Shiloh to her feet. “Come on, let's go look for a dress. I know an excellent boutique that stays open until nine.” The girls chattered happily, and my poor, neglected dick came to the realization that our sexy playtime was being postponed.

I furtively slipped my credit card into Bristol's hand and murmured, “No limit. Whatever she wants,” and she nodded, her eyes flashing with approval.

“You might want to work some overtime because we're getting shoes too,” she said with a sassy lifted eyebrow.

“Do you need me to go with you?” I asked, turning and peering into my woman's beautiful, chocolate eyes as my

thumb stroked the apple of her cheek.

Since we'd gotten back to Texas, Shiloh hadn't left the house at all unless I was with her. Sure, I was worried about her safety, but I'd stuck to her like glue as much for her *mental* wellbeing. I wanted her to feel safe at all times.

She took a deep breath and shook her head proudly. "No, I'll be fine with the girls."

Taz stood from the couch. "I can go for protection, Cam." She turned to Shiloh. "If that's okay with you."

Shiloh reached out and squeezed the other woman's hand. "I wanted you to come anyway, Taz." Those two had gotten to know each other pretty well, since Shy was at our office every day.

Taz smiled and nodded. "I've got my gun in the truck. Be right back," she said, heading for the door.

Even though Bellucci was on the run, presumably thousands of miles away, I felt better knowing that Taz, who was an excellent shot with a rifle or a pistol, was going with them.

"I love you," I said quietly, pulling my future wife against me. "If anything makes you nervous, just call me, and I'll be right there."

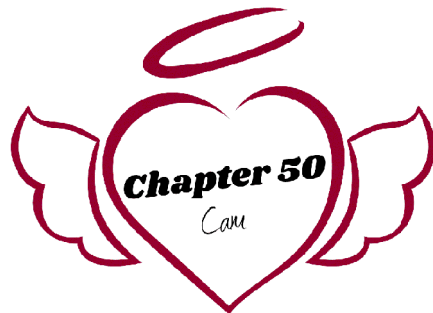
"I know you will, and I love you," she said, tiptoeing to give me a soft peck on the lips. "I'm sure the girls will be an excellent distraction."

"When you get home, you're all mine, angel. I think you need to prepare yourself for the things I'm going to do to you

tonight,” I whispered in her ear.

With a cute wink and a poke of my chest, she said, “Maybe *you’re* the one who needs to prepare because I have plans of my own.”

And then she was gone, leaving me practically panting in a room full of men who were passing out beers and getting ready to celebrate the happiest time of my life.



I IMPRESSED MYSELF. I only called Taz to check on Shiloh one time while they were gone on their dress-hunting adventure. Okay, full disclosure. It's possible I did text Charli, Blaire, and Bristol as well. Twice. Each.

I was pretty sure they were rolling their eyes at me, but it's not like I was trying to be overbearing or controlling. If they had seen the sheer terror on Shiloh's face when she woke up with nightmares practically every single night, they would understand my position.

But the ladies assured me she was fine, and Blaire even texted once without my prompting to let me know they were going out for Mexican food. Shy had her anti-nausea gel in her purse, so at least she would be able to keep her food down now.

As soon as the front door opened, and the girls walked through, I thumped my beer bottle down on the coffee table and stood, my legs carrying me in a near-stalk to the woman who would be my wife. Grabbing her around the waist, I pulled her against my chest and growled, "You're home."

Her sweet, relaxed smile eased the tautness in my muscles just a bit. “Of course, I’m ho—”

I cut off her words with my mouth, my lips crashing down on hers as my tongue slid between her lips, taking and tasting. The skin of her neck was soft and pliable beneath my fingers, and I kept her head tilted up with my thumbs beneath her chin so I could have all the access to her sweet mouth. I tried not to visibly quiver when her hands worked their way up my chest and around my neck.

Honestly, this wasn’t my fault. A potent combination of anxiety and horniness literally forced this behavior from me. Because Shiloh wasn’t the only one who was gripped by anxiety after her abduction. The days I’d spent searching for her and the fact that I’d almost lost her forever still had me shook.

And the horniness? Well, that was simply because we hadn’t fucked in weeks, and I needed to feel her surrounding me. I literally craved it.

“I think that’s our cue,” Bode quipped, and I took my time ending the kiss, sucking Shiloh’s lower lip between mine before finally releasing it with a soft smack. We shared a longing and lustful smile before I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and turned to face our friends.

“Sorry,” I said, but I really wasn’t. “Got a little carried away. Thank y’all for coming over.”

“But bye?” Charli asked with a cute giggle.

“Yeah, Char. Bye.”

After a round of hugs and kisses and Hawk retreating to his room, we were finally alone. Wrapping my hand around hers, I led Shy to the bedroom. “Did you find a dress?”

She nodded, her face beaming. “Uh-huh. It’s really pretty.”

“*You’re* really pretty,” I replied, enveloping her head with my hands and pressing my lips all over her gorgeous face. “I can’t wait to see you in it.”

“We’re getting married,” she said, her smile so broad that I felt it in my chest.

“Yes, we are, angel, and I think we should practice for the honeymoon right now.”

She lifted a skeptical eyebrow. “You think we need practice?”

“Mhmm,” I murmured, sliding my nose up and down the length of hers. “We might be a little rusty.”

Biting her bottom lip, she looked up at me through long, dark lashes, and I was afraid my cock was about to tear through my zipper to get to that luscious mouth of hers. “I’m pretty sure I remember a few things. The basics anyway,” she said, pulling the hem of my shirt from my pants and letting her fingers slide beneath the material to trace the ridges of my abs.

My voice was husky with desire as I reached behind my neck and pulled my shirt off in one swift movement. “You care to demonstrate, sugar?”

She didn't answer with words. Instead, she pushed against my bare chest, walking me backward until I sat on the edge of the bed. Her mouth was warm against my flesh as she planted soft, sucking kisses down my torso, sinking to her knees between my spread legs.

"Fuck, angel," I breathed when she unfastened my belt and pants. My cock breathed a sigh of relief at being freed from its confines, the head resting above the line of my blue briefs and leaking pre-cum all over my dark happy trail. With her eyes on me, she lapped up the sticky fluid, allowing the slick underside of her tongue to graze across my swollen tip.

"Let me see you," I demanded, tugging her sweatshirt up and over her head. My long fingers slipped underneath the pink straps of her bra and dragged the backs of my knuckles against her silky skin. "Good lord, you're gorgeous."

After wriggling my pants and underwear down my hips, Shiloh buried her face between my legs, her lips gently suckling my engorged balls as her hand wrapped around the base of my erection. "I've missed how you smell," she said, running her nose ever so slowly up my length with her eyes closed as a smile crested her lips.

When she finally opened her eyes to me and took me fully into her hot, willing mouth, I pressed my hands into the mattress behind me, leaning back and watching her work. No matter how much I wanted to wrap my fists in her hair and fuck her mouth like a beast, I had to give her all the control.

And she took it.

Shiloh's mouth was soft at first, exploring me like I was a new lover, learning every hard inch of me with her tongue and her lips. "That feels so good, angel. I love your mouth on me." Her gentle hand slid up my abs, over my chest, and to my cheek. Turning my face into her touch, I kissed her palm and nipped at the firm flesh below her thumb before sliding my tongue into the V between her first two fingers. A hint of what was to come.

She moaned around me, and I tongued the apex of her fingers faster as she took me to the back of her throat. My beautiful girl swallowed me hungrily, her full lips sliding up and down my shaft with a perfect rhythm.

Only then did I allow my hand to drift to her head, tenderly stroking her silky hair. "I'm 'bout to come, baby," I warned. She hummed and took me deeper and faster, and I tipped my head back as an orgasm speared through my body. "Fuck!" I grunted, my hips lifting from the mattress in short, fast thrusts as I poured myself into her hot mouth. "Fuck, that's perfect."

A blissful numbness invaded my limbs as Shiloh sucked me dry, and when I opened my eyes to look at her, she was smiling around my softening dick. "Well, you certainly seem to be happy with yourself, gorgeous."

She released me and stood, her mouth hovering over mine as I popped the hook of her bra open. "I am. Are you happy with me?"

"Honey, after that head you just gave me, I'll never be unhappy again."

Our lips met, the kiss achingly slow as she rested her hands on my shoulders. I made short work of the rest of our clothing while our tongues tangled together, and then I sucked her tongue into my mouth, tasting myself there and groaning at the memory of her drinking my cum.

“Need your pussy on my face,” I growled. “Now.” Scooting back to the pillows, I dragged Shy with me, lifting her until she was straddled with her knees on either side of my head. At the very first taste of her, my cock stirred back to life.

My hands stroked up and down her sides, coming to rest on her hips and moving her hot little cunt smoothly over my mouth. She had her good hand balanced on the wall behind the bed. I’d gotten rid of the headboard the first night we were home. Shy had walked into the bedroom and stared at the damn thing for a solid minute before I realized that it was triggering memories of being handcuffed to that tiny bed in that dark room in that shitty warehouse. Hawk and I had disassembled the bed right then and tossed the headboard in the backyard to deal with later.

I rolled my tongue around her clit and then curled it up into her, my movements deliberate and sensual, gradually drawing her orgasm to the surface. She came with a series of soft *ohs*, flooding my mouth with her salty, honied essence. Her taste was sublime on my tongue, and I ate her with rougher intent, bringing her to another climax within minutes, this one harder, faster, and much louder.

Breathing heavily, she rested her forehead against the wall beside her hand as I kissed softly between her legs, whispering how beautiful she tasted and how much I loved making her come. When her breaths slowed, I shunted her down my body until she was spread out over me, holding her against me as we shared a long kiss.

“Can I be on top?” she murmured against my lips, and I smiled, holding her breasts in my big hands.

“Seeing these sweet tits bouncing as you fuck yourself on my cock? That would be a hard yes, angel.” Shy giggled and sat up, rolling her wet pussy over my erection and tracing the veins of my forearms with her fingertips. “Yeah, baby,” I groaned, “just like that. I need to be inside you.”

I held myself up, and she rose on her knees to notch her opening over my tip. Sinking down slowly, she tipped her head back and whimpered. I was fucking consumed by this woman, watching her rock back and forth, struggling to take all of me into her snug heat.

“Cam, you feel so good, baby,” she panted, still only about halfway down.

“Fuck, you’re tight,” I hissed, itching to slam her down but holding myself back so she could set the pace. I thumbed her clit, up and down, up and down, and felt her slip down another couple inches.

“I want all of you, Cam. I need it,” she said, her voice a mere whimper of desire.

Gripping her waist, I held her firm as I pushed up into her, taking her fully with a long, measured thrust. “Goddamn. Goddammit, Shiloh. You’re squeezing the fuck out of me with that tight cunt.”

She bit her bottom lip, and I was so fucking jealous of her teeth sinking into that plump flesh. Her hips set a circular rhythm, stretching herself, before they rocked sensually back and forth on me, her swollen clit grinding against the base of my cock on every backstroke.

I whispered filthy, dirty words to her as she rode me, her speed picking up even as her moans got louder. “That’s it, baby. Ride my fucking cock and get yourself off.”

“God, that’s good, Cam.” She leaned forward a little, pressing her hands against my abs for leverage, and I noticed her wince and roll her bad shoulder. Lifting that injured arm, I cradled her hand against my cheek, turning my head to tenderly kiss the healing scars on her wrist. My heart twisted every time I saw the physical evidence of what that prick had done to her, and my desire to kill him very slowly rose to the surface.

“No, don’t even think about it,” she said, her eyes narrowing as if she knew my thoughts. We’d had this discussion before and were at an impasse. I wanted to kill the motherfucker, but Shiloh refused to let me. After seeing firsthand what an evil fuck he was, she didn’t want me anywhere near him. I was worried about her while she simultaneously worried about me.

But I guessed that's what true love was all about.

“Stop reading my mind and fuck me, you witch,” I said, sucking her thumb into my mouth to keep her hand in place on my face—and the pressure off her bad arm—while grasping her ass and yanking her hips forward. I grinded up into her, and she went wild when the crown of my cock hit that happiest of places inside her vagina.

“Cam. So. Close,” she panted, her hips bucking frantically as she fucked my mouth with her thumb. I gripped her ass tighter, my fingers digging into her flesh as her inner walls contracted around me. “Yes, oh God. Yes!” she cried to the ceiling as her eyes closed in ecstasy and her pussy gushed around me.

Without breaking contact, I rolled us so that she was beneath me and fucked her through the remnants of her orgasm.

“Is this okay, angel?” I asked, taking tiny sips of her swollen lips.

Her eyes were heavy and warm when she looked up at me. “Yes, just... please don't hold my arms down, okay?”

My heart twisted again, and I wanted to fuck Bellucci up for affecting every aspect of our lives, even our intimate times. But I kept my cool for Shiloh's sake. “Of course not, baby. If it's too much with me on top of you, just tell me.”

I had attended Shy's psychiatrist sessions with her, and I knew that feeling trapped was one of her triggers, so I held

myself up on straightened arms, bending only to kiss her occasionally as I tunneled into her with long, deep strokes.

“It’s okay. It feels good.” She kept one hand on my contracting ass muscles, and the other roamed over my face, chest, and arm with feathery touches that drove me crazy. Pressing her head back into the pillow, she exposed her neck to me, and I took full advantage, nipping and licking until I felt her contracting around my intruding erection.

Turning my face until we were nose to nose, I commanded, “Eyes on me, angel. I want to see that sexy O-face when you come around my dick.”

Shiloh opened her eyes and the love shining back at me had me shuddering with an orgasm that took me by surprise. “God. Coming,” I grunted, lowering myself to one elbow and using my other hand to grip her bottom and hold her hip flush against mine. The new angle made her cry out, and as the first jet of my cum painted her deep, she convulsed around me.

With her ankles wrapped around the backs of my thighs, we fucked each other into oblivion. “Cam,” she whispered against my mouth as our bodies slowed to a gentle rock, and I swallowed the word. I wanted to devour all of her. Her words, her breaths, her body. I wanted to pull everything about her inside me and hold it there forever.

Shifting off her, I flopped onto my back, hauling her halfway onto my body and cradling her head against my chest. My cum dripped out of her pussy and pooled in the hollow of my hip, reminding me that my sperm had impregnated her.

We'd made a baby together, and it was growing inside her as our hearts thudded as one.

I hadn't thought I could love her any more, but today proved me wrong. It didn't matter that we weren't married yet; Shiloh was my family now, and thanks to the little life I had put inside her, we were bonded forever.

My hand drifted down her side and around to her flat belly. I felt her eyes on my face and realized I was grinning.

"You're thinking about the baby, aren't you?"

I nodded happily. "I'm so excited, Shy. I can't wait to meet our little kernel."

"Colonel?" she asked in confusion.

"Like a kernel of corn. I looked it up today, and that's about how big our baby is right now."

She snuggled against my neck, and I could feel her delicate breaths of laughter against my skin. "I have a feeling this kid is going to run our lives, so maybe a military colonel is more apt."

"Probably more like an admiral because this little one will definitely be the boss of our house."

"You're going to spoil the crap out of our baby, aren't you?" she asked, trailing her fingers through the dark hair on my chest.

I nuzzled her forehead with my nose until she looked up at me. "You're damned right. And I'm going to spoil the crap out

of you too.”

“You don’t have to spoil me, Cam,” she protested.

“I want to, angel.”

“Well, I’m going to spoil you right back.”

“I hope that means lots and lots of sex,” I told her, wiggling my eyebrows and kissing her pert nose.

“I think that could be arranged.” Her hand slid lower, tracing the ridges of my abs.

Brushing her hair away from her face, I cradled her cheek. “You’re gonna be such a good little wife, angel.”

Her responding smile lit up my world. “And you’re gonna be a good little husband.”

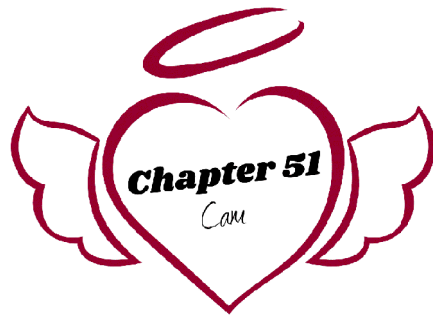
“Little?” I scoffed, earning me a dramatic eye roll.

“Fine. You’re going to be a good, masculine, big-dicked husband.”

I tucked her head beneath my chin. “That’s more like it,” I teased.

“I love you, Cam.”

Wrapping her snugly in my arms, I closed my eyes and inhaled her beautiful scent. “Love you too, Shiloh.”



“SHY, COME SIT DOWN, baby.”

My eyes followed my future bride as she opened the freezer, stared inside for a moment, and then closed it. Next, she opened the pantry, rearranged the boxes of cereal, and closed it.

Totally ignoring my plea, Shiloh went back to the refrigerator, peering into the crisper drawer and asking, “Are you absolutely positive that Graham likes green grapes instead of purple ones?” She closed the fridge door and turned around, a look of horror on her face. “What about Melvin? I’ve been so focused on making sure that your brother is comfortable that I totally forgot about his husband. I don’t want him to think we’re only worried about Graham’s preferences, so—”

I lifted off my stool and was on her in about a half a second, covering her mouth with my own and swallowing her surprised gasp. As soon as my tongue pressed into her mouth, she let out a little hum and wrapped her arms around my neck. I held my girl tightly to me and kissed the fuck out of her.

“Hush, angel,” I told her, pulling back and rubbing my nose against hers. “Everything is fine. Melvin is very laid back, not picky at all.”

“Okay, but are you sure we have enough ic—”

I kissed her again, holding the back of her head firmly in my hand.

“We have plenty of ice,” I told her when we came up for air.

A small smirk tipped up one side of her pretty lips. “I think I should definitely check the cereal again.”

Laughter bubbled up from my chest. “Do you really want to check the *four* boxes of Honey Nut Cheerios you insisted we buy? Or are you just saying that so I’ll shut you up with more kisses?”

“More kisses,” she admitted, her sweet smile lighting up my fucking world as she melted against me.

“You don’t have to act like an obsessive nut to get me to kiss you, angel. I do that of my own free will because it’s my favorite thing to do.”

“Your very favorite?” she asked with a pout. “Because I thought you said your favorite thing was...” She turned her face to my ear and whispered something that made my pulse race in my veins.

“Yeah. That’s good too,” I managed to croak out. “Okay, kissing you is in my top three favorites, which all happen to be quite Shiloh-centric.”

“What a coincidence. All of my favorite things are Cam-centric.” She flashed a cheeky smile at me before pressing a kiss against my jaw. “Now stop bothering me so I can do a final check of everything.”

I glared down at her. “I swear, if you go check the toilet paper again, I’m going to follow you in there, bend you over the counter, and fuck you until you can’t even remember your own name, much less stress about all these details.”

“But, Cam, I want to make sure everything is—”

“Perfect. I know, angel. And it is.” Holding her face gently, I peppered her lips with kisses. “I appreciate you so much for wanting to make my brother comfortable, but I need you to calm down and just relax. Don’t be upsetting my *little* angel.”

My hand dropped to her belly, which was still flat but slightly softer than it had been a few weeks ago. Thank God the anti-nausea meds were working, and Shiloh was able to eat pretty regularly now. I couldn’t wait to see her big and round with my child. *Speaking of that...*

“Why don’t you go lie down, and I’ll bring you some ice cream.”

Shiloh’s big brown eyes lit up. “The cotton candy flavor?”

Sweeping her hair behind her shoulder, I bent to kiss the crook of her neck. “What kind of husband would I be if I didn’t know your favorite ice cream?”

Her soft giggle warmed me from the inside out. “You won’t be my husband for another two days.”

“I’m practicing,” I insisted, working my lips up the side of her neck as I patted her on the butt. “Now, scoot.”

A few minutes later, I entered our bedroom to find Shiloh sitting up on the bed. “You really don’t have to bring me ice cream in bed every day,” she told me.

Sitting down next to her, I handed her the pink bowl. “I know, angel, but I want to do special things for you, and since you’re not really feeling like breakfast in bed right now, I bring you ice cream in the afternoon.”

She took a bite of the pink and blue swirled concoction, and her face radiated pure happiness as she let out a little moan of satisfaction. “Why is this so good?” Scooping her spoon back into the bowl, she held it up to my mouth, and I took the offered bite.

“It would be much tastier if I could eat it off your nipples,” I suggested, earning me an eye roll.

When Shy had finished her dessert, I took the bowl from her and set it on the nightstand before kissing her thoroughly, loving her cool, sweet tongue playing with my own. “Now, take a little nap, baby. I’ll wake you up before Graham and Melvin get here.”

“An hour before,” she insisted, her eyes beginning to get drowsy.

“I promise. Now, get some rest. Oh, I might be out on the patio with Collin, in case you wake up and I’m not in the house.” Shiloh had had a small panic attack one morning when

I was out back doing yard work, and she woke up and couldn't find me. I didn't mind a bit that she was a little clingy with me right now. To be honest, I was feeling just as clingy with her.

Her sleepy eyes popped open wide as she stared incredulously at me. "Your cousin, Collin? The one from Philadelphia?"

"Yes, I told you he was coming to the wedding, babe."

"But you didn't tell me he was coming *here*. Do we need to go buy more food? Shit, I don't even know what kind of grapes he likes!" She tried to scramble out of the bed, but I pulled her into my lap.

"Shy, I can assure you that Collin is not coming here to eat grapes. We'll have a couple beers, and then he'll go to his hotel." She started to interrupt, but I pressed a gentle finger over her lips. "Stop stressing about everything, honey. If Collin is hungry, I will order a pizza. I'm not totally helpless, you know."

"I know you're not. You're... you're amazing." Her chin quivered as her hands rested against my cheeks. "I can't believe you found me. I could have been anywhere, and you found me."

Pulling her tighter against me, I kissed her forehead. "I'll always find my way to you, angel. You're my own personal homing beacon. I'm just sorry it took me so long."

"Me too. I had to pee on a blanket on the floor."

I tried not to tense up at her almost casual comment because I wanted her to feel free to talk to me about anything without me getting too emotional. But hearing that stabbed me directly in the fucking heart. Bellucci had treated her worse than a goddamn animal, and if I ever got my hands on that piece of shit, he was going to fucking *beg* me to kill him.

Shiloh lifted her hand and smoothed out the wrinkles I had allowed to inadvertently appear on my forehead with her soft fingertips. “I’m sorry I said that. I don’t mean to upset you.”

My fingers caressed her peachy cheek tenderly. “Angel, you can tell me anything. Understand? Any-fucking-thing. Yes, I will react sometimes because I love you so damn much. But you just keep talking to me whenever you feel like it. Don’t hold back, okay? I’m a big boy and can handle it.”

She gave me a gentle smile and nodded, and I laid her on the bed, smoothing her hair away from her face as she curled up on her side and tucked her hands beneath her face.

“Thank you, Cam. I love you.”

“Love you,” I whispered, kissing her temple and running my fingers through her hair until she fell asleep. She looked so beautiful and peaceful while she slept, and I often caught myself avoiding sleep just to watch her. To count her breaths and assure myself that she was real. Here. Alive.

She almost wasn’t. Her water jug was completely empty by the time we’d found her. What if it had been another couple of days? What if Tank hadn’t gone the extra mile and found

Flamelight's properties and subsequently, Theresa Caruso's name?

Swear to God, I would forever be grateful to that big beast. He had gone through every second of anguish along with Hawk and me during those horrible few days as he tapped away at his computer, searching, seeking answers.

Hawk tapped lightly at the bedroom door, and I lifted Shiloh's scarred wrist to my lips and kissed her there before going to the door.

"Hey, your cousin is here. You want me to sit with Shy?"

This guy...

He was almost as protective over my fiancée as I was.

I glanced back at her. She was sleeping peacefully, curled up into an adorable little ball. "No, I told her we would probably sit out on the patio so she would know where to find me. Thank you though. You want to have a beer with us?"

"Nah. I'm gonna go for a run if you're sure you don't need me."

"Yeah, go ahead, bro. Join us when you get back." I closed the door, and we walked slowly down the hallway.

My cousin Collin was waiting in the living room for me, and I quickly put a finger to my lips so the loud fucker wouldn't wake up Shiloh. We grabbed each other in a back-pounding bro hug, holding on just a little bit longer than we usually did.

“So fucking happy for you, man,” he said before letting me go and grinning at me. “Jesus, you’re handsome.”

A bark of laughter escaped my lips before I clamped them together. Collin was a couple of years older than me, but we were often mistaken for twins with our dark hair and blue eyes. Our builds were even remarkably similar, tall with lean, strong muscles, mine from my time in the military and my daily work in the dojo, while Collin’s was from his construction job.

The only difference was...

“What? They don’t have barbers in Philadelphia?” I asked, ruffling his too-long hair.

“Fuck off,” he said with a laugh. “Chicks dig it.”

“Shiloh is napping, so I thought we could hang out on the patio.”

His face turned serious. “How is she?”

My lungs took in a long breath, and I released it slowly. “Let’s talk about it over some beers.”

Planting ourselves on two padded gray patio chairs, we popped the tops on our bottles. “Spill,” he said.

I’d given him the abridged version over the phone but sitting there with a cool breeze and the weak December sun sliding over us, I filled in the details for him.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” he said, his Philly accent in full effect as he swiped a hand down his face. “How is that bastard

still alive?”

I gritted my teeth, bearing down on the tension that was a constant in my jaw, except when Shy was in my presence. “She’s too nervous to let me go after the motherfucker. She thinks *he’ll hurt me*,” I scoffed. “Plus, I’m not sure I could be away from her long enough to get the job done. She’s really fragile right now, but she’s fucking strong at the same time, if that makes sense.”

“She’d have to be to survive what she did.”

I nodded and took a long pull on my beer. “I swear, every time I see those scars on her wrist, every time she has to go to physical therapy, every time she flinches at a noise, every time I see how skinny she still is, every time something he did to her affects her, I can feel this vibrating pain inside me. And I’m so fucking pissed off, Collin. I want to take out every single skill I have on Vincent Bellucci.”

My cousin placed his hand on my shoulder and squeezed. We sat like that for a long time, that small physical connection reinforcing our bond. Though we’d grown up half a country apart, Collin had always been one of my favorite people. Our families had gone on vacations together every summer while we were kids, and we’d been partners in all kinds of shenanigans.

“How is Uncle Nolan?” I asked, referring to Collin’s father.

“Stubborn and tough as a boot,” he said with a snort. “I hate that Mal couldn’t come. Her mom has her at some kind of dance competition.”

Mallori was our other cousin, her dad the brother of my dad and Uncle Nolan. “You’d think she’d give the poor girl a break on New Year’s,” I said, rolling my eyes.

“That woman doesn’t know the meaning of ‘break’ when it comes to Mallori. She’s the epitome of every bad stereotype about stage moms.”

My lip curled up in disgust. No one liked Karen.

“Yeah, from the time she turned seven, the poor kid didn’t even get to go on summer vacations with us anymore. She always had a camp or a competition or something. I know she loves dancing, but you could see the change in her after that. It became more like a job.”

After a moment, Collin chuckled. “Remember that time Mal caught a shark while we were deep sea fishing?”

I threw back my head and laughed. “She couldn’t have been much more than five, but she was so excited. I thought she’d be scared of it, but her little ass was jumping up and down and squealing like a lunatic.” We both smiled fondly at the memory. We’d been teenagers, but we loved little Mallori to hang out with us. The kid was adorable and hilarious.

After a few seconds, Collin’s smile faded, and his gaze hung in mid-air across the yard like he was focused inside his own mind.

“So, what’s going on with you, dude? Any lucky ladies in your life?”

His eyes snapped to mine and then dragged away as he shrugged. “There’s someone.”

“Just one someone?” I asked in surprise.

He nodded, almost to himself, and leaned over to the cooler to snag another longneck. “I can’t... I mean... we can’t be together.”

A frown creased my brow. “You haven’t gotten yourself mixed up with a married woman, have you, Coll?”

My cousin’s head jerked in my direction. “No. Nothing like that. She’s... younger.”

“Nothing wrong with that,” I said, taking a sip of my beer and focusing on Collin, who was leaning forward with his elbows on his spread knees, staring at the ground.

“A lot younger.” His voice was almost a whisper. “Like around Mallori’s age.”

I tried not to grimace as my mind did the calculations. “So, early twenties?” He nodded, looking so forlorn that I felt sorry for him. “I guess that’s not so bad.”

He looked over at me in disbelief. “You really think so?”

I mirrored his position, resting my elbows on my legs. “Collin, I know you. You’re not the type of guy to go out looking for younger girls just for the hell of it.”

“No, I’m not, and I think that’s why I’m struggling. She’s like this beautiful piece of forbidden fruit that’s dangling from

a tree right in front of me. Begging me to pluck it and take a taste.”

“Damn, that’s fucking poetic, dude.”

That got a laugh from him as he ran a hand through his thick, dark hair. “I’m so fucking attracted to her, Cam, but not just her looks. I mean, she’s a stunner. Like off the charts gorgeous. But she’s also funny and smart, and she always speaks her mind. I like that about her. She’s not like any woman I’ve ever been with.”

“The attraction is mutual?” I asked and he nodded, picking at one corner of the label on his bottle. “Then fuck it, man. I say go for it. My buddy Shark struggled with the same thing when he met Charli. It’s not as big an age gap as you and your fruit, but once he got over that initial hump, it was fine. And I honestly couldn’t imagine him without her now. She’s made him an even better version of himself. He’s a hell of a lot less grumpy, I can tell you that.”

Collin sat up straighter and nodded, his shoulders seeming a few pounds lighter now. “I’ll think about it. Thanks, Cam.”

“I’ve come to realize that doing the right thing is not necessarily the right thing if it gets in the way of your happiness. If your forbidden fruit makes you happy, then take a bite and screw anyone who tries to get in your way.”

The door opened behind us, and I turned to find Shiloh standing there, looking deliciously ruffled from her nap. Standing, I strode immediately to her and cupped her face, pressing a gentle kiss to her lips.

“Hello, beautiful. I thought you were sleeping.”

“I was but woke up thirsty. I just came to get some water,” she said, holding up a bottle. “I thought I would say hi to Collin.”

My cousin stood with a grin and walked over to wrap Shy in a big hug. “Hey, girl,” he said, kissing the top of her head. “It’s so good to see you.”

“You too. It’s been a long time. Thank you so much for coming all the way down here for our wedding.”

“It’s my pleasure,” he said. “I’m so happy for both of you.” Then he leaned back and studied her face before turning to me. “I don’t know what you were talking about earlier, cuz. Shiloh looks gorgeous. Not like an old hag at all.”

I cuffed him on the side of the head, and Shiloh laughed. “I can see you haven’t changed a bit, Collin. Still a big kidder.”

“Still an asshole,” I muttered, pulling her to me and tucking her beneath my arm. “Come sit with us, angel.”

“No, I don’t want to interrupt.”

“You’re not interrupting. We were just talking about... fruit,” Collin said, glancing at me with a wry curve of his lips.

“Oh, are you hungry?” Shiloh asked. She didn’t wait for an answer before dashing back inside, calling, “Be right back,” over her shoulder.

I gave her a few minutes and then followed her inside. She was just adding crackers to the wooden board when I walked

into the kitchen. “Thought I would come carry this outside for you,” I told her, picking up the board laden with fruits, a variety of cheeses, and crackers.

“Thanks,” she said, her chin dipping a little. I knew she got frustrated when she struggled to carry heavy things because of her weak arm, so I tried to anticipate when she needed help so that she didn’t have to ask. Shiloh hated asking for help. Just one more thing we were working through in her therapy sessions.

“I try to be useful sometimes,” I teased to lighten her mood. “I know my outstanding strength and bulging muscles are the only reason you keep me around.”

“Not the only reason,” she said, swatting me on the butt as she followed me back to the patio.

“Watch yourself, little girl.”

Collin’s eyes widened when I set the beautiful overflowing board on the low table between us. “Good grief, Shiloh! You’ve been inside less than ten minutes. How did you do all this?”

“It’s no big deal,” she said modestly, waving her hand at him. “I had everything cut up already.”

He grabbed a grape and stuffed it into his mouth. “God, I love green grapes. They’re my favorite,” he said, and Shy beamed.

Settling into the chair, I pulled my soon-to-be-wife onto my lap, wrapping one arm around her as I selected a piece of salty

cheese that I didn't know the name of and a slice of juicy strawberry. I slipped it between Shiloh's lips, and she hummed happily as she chewed.

We spent the next two hours laughing and eating and talking. Hawk joined us at one point, and we lost track of time until the doorbell chimed.

"That must be the family," I said, rising and setting Shy on her feet. "Dad was picking up Graham and Melvin from the airport."

"We'll just stay out here so Graham doesn't get overwhelmed with too many people at once," Collin said, making me love the guy even more for his intuition where my brother was concerned.

Shiloh and I went inside and opened the door, and I couldn't help my huge grin at seeing my brother and Melvin again; it had been almost a year since I'd seen them in person. Graham allowed me a brief hug before turning to Shiloh. He gave her a much longer hug, which didn't offend me at all. There had always been a special fondness between them.

I greeted Dad and Melvin as Graham pulled back and graced Shy with his almost-there smile. "I'm so glad to see you again, Shiloh. I'm so sorry you got kidnapped and almost starved to death."

Melvin groaned and gently took his husband's hand. "Remember that we talked about this, G? Shiloh may not want to discuss things that might be upsetting."

“Oh. I’m sorry, Shiloh.”

Her smile was sweet and genuine when she patted his arm.
“It’s okay, Graham. I’m not upset.”

I introduced her to Melvin, who gave her a nod and asked,
“May I give you a hug?”

“Of course,” she said, accepting his thin arms around her.
“I’ve heard so much about you, and it’s great to finally meet
you.”

My dad didn’t ask for permission, just wrapped Shy up in a
big bear hug, lifting her all the way off her feet. “It’s about
damn time, young lady. I’ve always wanted you to be my
daughter, and it’s about damn time.”

A happy tear slipped down her face as she returned my
father’s warm embrace. “Thank you, Sean. Only two more
days.”

Dad set her down and kissed her forehead, his own eyes
filling with emotional tears.

“All right. That’ll do, old man,” I told him, nudging him
with my elbow and chuckling.

“You afraid this pretty girl will run off with the handsomest
Fitz?” he teased back, looping an arm around her shoulders as
he turned to face me with the biggest grin ever on his face. My
dad had always adored Shy.

Graham’s eyes darted back and forth between us before he
announced, “That probably wouldn’t be a good idea, Dad.

Camden should marry her since he's the one who knocked her up."

Everyone busted out laughing while my brother frowned a little, trying to figure out what was so funny.

Shy swiped away her tears and turned to Melvin and Graham. "Collin and Hawk are on the back patio. We were having some snacks. Or if you would rather rest for a while, our concierge will take your bags and show you to your room," she said, jerking her thumb toward me.

"At your service," I intoned, bowing at the waist.

"Are you trying to be funny, Camden?" my brother asked dryly.

"Yep. How am I doing?"

"Not so good."

"I'll work on it," I said, heading outside to get their bags from Dad's car.

After taking the suitcases to the spare room, I went outside to find my family seated in a circle on the patio. Shy was handing Melvin an iced tea and Graham a glass of clear liquid—with the ice he liked.

"Graham, I know you like Mountain Dew, but Camden said you have to watch your caffeine, so I mixed it with some Sprite." He looked pleased, and Melvin smiled gratefully at her, tugging on his signature bow tie. A bow tie, for Pete's sake.

For the rest of the afternoon, I sat and fell even more in love with my fiancée as I watched her interact with my family. Everyone was utterly charmed by her sweetness and laughter. Even my brother seemed comfortable and relaxed.

As it began to get dark and cool, we moved the party inside where I cuddled Shiloh on my lap.

“I’d just like to say that Graham and I are very excited to be uncles,” Melvin said. “I hope you don’t mind that we brought a gift.”

Shiloh’s face lit up like the Christmas tree in the corner that we had decorated together. “Our first baby gift,” she said, grinning at me before turning back to the other couple. “I can’t wait to see what you picked out.”

Melvin retrieved a box wrapped with white paper and a multicolored bow from their room and handed it over with a shy smile before taking a seat beside my brother. Shiloh ripped it open like a five-year old on her birthday and then giggled when she lifted the lid.

“Look how adorable!” she cooed, lifting a mint green onesie from the package.

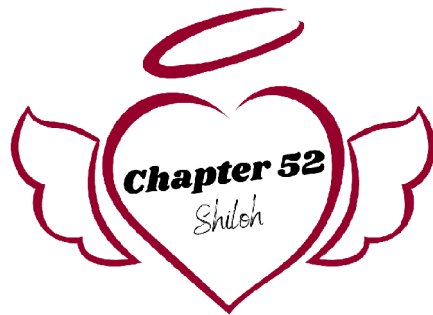
It read, “UNCLE GRAHAM IS MY FAVORITE.” The blue one beneath it read, “UNCLE MELVIN IS MY FAVORITE.” The one on the bottom had a little rocket ship with a bear on it and the words “FUTURE ROCKET SCIENTIST,” complete with a tiny yellow bow tie imprinted on the neckline.

“These are just perfect. The Kernel is going to look so adorable,” she said resting her hand on her stomach. “Thank you both so much.”

As Shiloh stood and graced Mel and Graham with kisses on their cheeks, I lifted one of the outfits in my hand, struck by how small it was. It hit me hard.

We're having a baby. A tiny little life that I would protect with my own.

It filled me with warmth and a bit of nervousness, but I had never been happier in my life.



“I THINK EVERYTHING WENT well,” I said, walking into our bedroom from the attached bath.

Cam was sitting up on our bed, holding one of the tiny outfits and running his fingers up and down the short length of it. “We’re having a baby, Shy.” He pulled his bright blue eyes from the garment and looked up at me, his eyes filled with emotion.

“Yeah...” I drew out. “You’re still okay with that, right?” The look on his face was making me a little nervous.

Laying the onesie down, he pulled me onto his lap so that I was straddling him. “I’m more than okay, angel. I can’t even describe what I am. It’s like my chest is too small to hold my heart right now.”

Oh... my...

“You’re going to be the best daddy in the world,” I promised him, holding his face and laying a soft kiss on his lips.

“I want to be.” His eyes fell on the outfit again. “We’re accountable for an entire person now. It’s... it’s a big responsibility. I’m feeling so proud and protective. And maybe a little nervous.”

“That’s normal,” I assured him. “I’m feeling all those things too.”

“But mostly I feel in love with the Kernel’s mommy. So fucking in love, Shiloh. Like, there aren’t even words strong enough to tell you exactly what’s inside of me.”

He hardened beneath me, and I rested my forehead against his. “I’m crazy in love with you too, Cam. But we can’t have sex right now. Your brother and Melvin are right down the hall.”

Soft lips trailed across my cheek, and I grew slick between my legs as his voice dipped low and sexy. “We’ll go slow. I *want* slow. I need to feel all of you.” He lifted his head, and his eyes were the lightest blue I’d ever seen. And they were filled with so much love that I forgot how to breathe. “I need you, angel.”

How can I argue with that?

I nodded. “Okay, but our bed is really squeaky.”

His face cracked with pure happiness as he stood and set me beside the bed before whipping the comforter off and draping it on the floor. He undressed us, his eyes laser focused on mine as he layed us down and wrapped half the comforter over us.

We were facing each other, and I'm pretty sure I'd never felt any emotion as intense when he cupped the back of my knee and pulled my leg over his hip.

“You're my world, Shiloh,” he growled as the head of his dick found my wet entrance. He slowly pushed inside me, and a feeling of completeness swelled in my chest and radiated throughout my entire body. “But you're more than that. I'm not me without you. When I'm inside you, you're just as much inside *me*. You make me whole.”

A large, fat tear slipped down my cheek, and I pressed my body closer to him as we began to move beneath the covers. Our hips pitched and rolled slowly in perfect synch, his lips hovering over mine so that I could taste the subtle hint of fruit on his breath.

My hand rested on the face that I loved more than anything. “Something's been missing in my life for a long time, but I pushed it way down and ignored it.” Cam's bottom lip trembled as I whispered my truth to him. “I didn't let myself think about it until you came roaring back into my life, bossing me around and making me live. Not just exist, Camden. You make me want to live life to the fullest because you fill me with love like I've never known.”

Cam's voice was thick and husky as he buried his face in my hair. “God... Shiloh.”

I nestled into the crook of his neck as we made love to each other, letting my tears soak his warm skin. His hand dropped to my lower back, arching me into him as his thickness

tunneled slowly in and out of me. Each delicious stroke touched every place inside me that yearned to be touched.

We came together, our damp bodies wrapped so tightly around each other, I wasn't sure where I ended and he began. Neither of us had any words for a long while, the silence only broken by our soft pants which were muffled by the proximity of the other.

Finally, I lifted my head, my cheek sliding against his. "If I weren't already pregnant, I think that would have done the job," I murmured and felt him smile against my jaw.

My fiancé's big hand made lazy trails up and down my back as he softened inside of me. "Angel, I want you to let me take care of things."

I rubbed my nose against his. "You're welcome to help, but there's really not much else to do. Blaire insisted on handling the flowers and decora—"

"I'm not talking about the wedding, sweetheart."

My eyes met his in the dim light, and I understood. "Oh." I blinked a couple of times. "You mean *'take care'* of things."

"Yes. Bellucci. I don't want him to fucking exist anymore."

A sense of panic rose up in my chest, making the air stall there. "Honestly, I don't either, but no," I said firmly. "I don't want you going after him, Cam. It's too dangerous."

"I'm not the one you need to be worried about," he replied, a darkness lacing the edges of his words. He ran a hand down his face and focused over my shoulder before bringing those

gorgeous blue eyes back to mine. “I don’t want to scare you, angel, but there aren’t very many people who could go up against me and come out alive unless I allow it.”

My hand tenderly cupped his face. “I know some of what you used to do in the Navy, and I’m not scared *of* you, Cam. I’m scared *for* you. You can’t fight a bullet.” I suppressed a shudder at the thought of something happening to the man I love. “I refuse to raise the Kernel by myself. He or she deserves to grow up with their daddy.”

His fingers sifted through my hair, tucking a stray piece behind my ear. “I want nothing more than to be around for a very long time. For you and the Kernel. But I want you to feel safe, and I don’t think you’ll ever feel completely secure with Bellucci still on the loose. I promise, that asshole would never see it coming, so there wouldn’t be any chance for him to use a gun.”

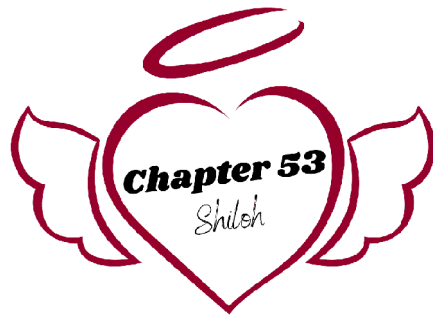
“There’s always a chance. My answer is still no.” My lips brushed across his. “You’ll just have to be mad at me, but at least you’ll still be here.”

“I’m not mad at you, my angel. I’m just frustrated because I want to take care of you.”

“You do take care of me, Mister Fitz, and I love you more than anything for it.”

He tucked my head against his chest and rested his cheek on the top of my head, his words so quiet that I almost didn’t hear them. “I love you too. More than my own life.”

Yep. That's exactly what I'm afraid of.



“GOOD GRIEF! COULD YOU be any more gorgeous?” Charli asked as Bristol put the final touches on my hair. Blaire was in the corner of the downstairs bedroom of her house, dabbing her eyes with a tissue.

“You okay, Blaire?” I asked.

“Yes,” she sniffled. “I’m just so excited for you and Cam. I love him like a brother, and he’s been alone for so many years.”

Pressing my lips together, I shook my head, earning me a *be still* smack from Bristol’s comb. “I don’t think he’s exactly been *alone*.”

“I don’t mean his manwhoring. I mean *being* with someone. *Loving* someone.” A louder sniffle. “And now he has you.” Her voice broke on the last word, and Charli went and flopped down in her lap to wrap her in a hug. I loved how close these women were, and now I was a part of their inner circle. Today I was gaining a husband, three loving sisters, and an entire, nutty, wonderful family.

Bristol dabbed at the corner of my lips with a tiny Q-Tip before whipping off the black makeup cape and announcing, “Voilà! My masterpiece is complete.” Apparently, I was the masterpiece. She turned my chair toward the mirror, and I gasped.

I had asked for natural makeup, and that’s what she had done, but my skin looked freaking flawless, smooth as a baby’s butt. My lashes were curled up, the eyeshadow light with a soft, matte gold tone that made my eyes pop. The lipstick she had used was a soft nude with just a hint of pink.

“Bris, this is perfect,” I proclaimed, and she beamed.

As she bent to twist my tapered three-quarter length sleeves into submission, a knock sounded at the door. Char hopped up to answer it and spoke briefly with whoever was on the other side of the door, a man judging by the deep timbre. When she returned, she was holding a small package with shiny light-pink paper and a white bow.

“A present from your groom,” she announced cheerily.

“What? I told him we were keeping this low-key. He wasn’t supposed to buy me anything.”

“You can’t tell that boy anything. He does what the hell he wants,” Bristol said with an eye roll. “Open it up and let’s see the goods.”

I unwrapped the jewelry-sized box, and my eyes widened when I saw the thick gold cuff which was scattered with what looked like diamonds. “Holy shit! Is this real?”

Bristol took it from me and inspected it. I was surprised she didn't whip out a jeweler's loupe. "It appears to be," she said, raising an impressed eyebrow. "He's definitely after something. Have you given up the booty yet?"

Choking on my own spit, I waved a hand at her, my laughter bubbling up once I could breathe again. "No," was all I managed to say.

"Uh-huh. He's wanting some honeymoon anal, and I think you should open the back door for business."

I was laughing so hard that I could hardly speak, but Charli spoke up with an adorable blush pinkening her cheeks. "Beau and I did it on our honeymoon."

"La la la la," Blaire called, sticking her fingers in her ears. "That's my brother, ya know."

Bristol shrugged. "I told Waylon he couldn't enter the forbidden zone until we were married."

"That's probably why he proposed last week," Blaire chimed in as Bris looked up from the chunk of diamonds adorning her ring finger and glared at her friend. "Oh, and because he fucking adores you, of course." She smiled winningly.

I started to clamp the bracelet over my left wrist, and then it clicked. Switching it to my right, I said, "He probably wanted to cover up my scars. They bother him." All of the women gave me sad little smiles which I returned. "He's more sensitive than he acts with most people."

Another knock on the door had Blaire mumbling about Grand Central Station as she went to answer it. She slipped into the hallway for a moment before sticking her head back in with a wide grin.

“Shilohhhh, I have a surprise for you.” She slung open the door, and I almost fell out of my damn chair.

“Mom?” I asked stupidly.

“Honey!” she exclaimed, rushing into the room and engulfing me in a warm hug as I stood on shaky legs.

“Mom! You’re here!” Again with the obvious.

“I’m here!” she squealed, doing an excited little tap dance. “Niall’s here too. Camden sent us plane tickets. He’s aware of my *issues*, so he offered to pay for us to cruise here, but I told him that I was going to suck it up and fly to see my daughter get married to the love of her life. He’s really so wonderful, Shiloh. A wonderful, perfect man.”

“I agree,” I said, tears filling my eyes.

“Gonna have to give it up for real now,” Bristol murmured from behind me, and I swatted at her and tried not to giggle.

“But Mom, how did you tolerate the flight?”

She lifted her chin proudly. “I put on my big girl panties and dealt with it. Oh, and also Xanax.”

The entire room burst into laughter.

“And look at you!” she exclaimed. “You are truly the most gorgeous bride ever.” Her slim fingers darted over my

wedding gown, a fitted, knee-length dress made of luxurious ivory-on-ivory brocade.

“Would you like to put her veil on?” Bristol asked, handing her the short ivory sheer material with tiny rhinestones embellishments on the clip.

“Yes,” my mother breathed, stepping behind me and fastening the veil underneath the bump of hair at the crown of my head as Blaire snapped pictures with her phone. “And I brought you something. You don’t have to wear it if you don’t want to. I’m sure you already have jewelry picked out.”

She handed over a small, black velvet box, and I pressed the fingers of one hand over my lips to stop them from quivering when I opened it. “Mom, this is the set you wore when you married Dad,” I said, recognizing the pearl and gold necklace and earrings from their wedding photos. Tears were streaming down my face, and as I looked around the room, there wasn’t a dry eye to be seen. “I would love to wear them. Thank you so much, Mama.”

I put on the jewelry and let Bristol repair the damage my tears had wreaked on my makeup. Blaire—the de facto wedding coordinator—checked her phone and announced that it was go time. She’d tried to hire a professional coordinator, but I had put my foot down. This was supposed to be a very simple affair. She had insisted on paying for a florist, and the Broxton living room was now tricked out like a white and gold floral fantasyland. I had to admit it was gorgeous though.

Picking up my simple bouquet of white roses with tiny gold ribbons woven throughout, I kissed everyone and sent them out of the room. Our wedding wasn't exactly traditional. No one was giving me away. I was giving *myself* to Cam, and he was giving himself to me. And though there was a wide, white carpet laid out in the living room, there was not going to be a customary aisle. The chairs were laid out in a circular fashion. No bride's and groom's side. No front and back rows. No bridesmaids or groomsmen. All of our friends and family were going to surround us equally, because every single one of them contributed something to our relationship: love, support, laughter, friendship.

When the room was empty, I dug in my bag and pulled out the other box that had been delivered by courier to me today. Opening it, I eyed the large, sharp chef's knife with a white bow tied around the handle. My fingers shakily picked up the little card that had been nestled inside the box and read it once again.

I understand congratulations are in order. I hope you're very happy with what life you have left.

Yours Always -V

My nerves pushed from my lungs on a deep sigh. That was definitely from Vincent, and it was most assuredly a threat. Closing the box, I buried it deep in my bag beneath some clothes. I would hide it somewhere safe once I got the chance. No way in hell was I going to show it to Cam. He was already

spoiling to take Vincent out permanently, and this would push him right over the edge.

The idea didn't offend me on a moral level; the world would be a better place without Vincent in it. I was simply being selfish, my heart aching at the thought of Cam being hurt or killed by Vincent or his men. I was well aware that my fiancé was a badass fighter, but even the most skilled fighter was no match for a bullet. Funnily enough, I would prefer that the father of my child be alive and not in prison.

Burying thoughts of my insane ex as deeply as I'd buried his "gift" in my bag, I lifted my chin and picked my flowers back up. I wasn't letting that asshole spoil the best day of my life. A day for which I had waited almost two decades.

As the first sounds of music drifted down the hallway, I took a deep breath and began walking. Cam had asked if he could choose the song I entered to, and I had readily agreed. My lips formed a serene smile as Etta James belted out the beginning lyrics of "At Last."

It was perfect.

Rounding the corner, I saw all eyes turn in my direction. But there was only one set of eyes that sucked my gaze toward his. Ocean blue today with a thin sheen of tears when he caught sight of me. His lips parted and slowly formed an enamored smile as I entered the room. My own smile almost broke my face when I saw him in his black suit and gold tie.

My steps faltered, and I saw Cam take a step in my direction. I regained my footing and began to walk faster.

Screw slow walking. I wanted to get to my man. Cam's own feet were carrying him toward me, as well, and he finally broke into a jog, meeting me near the edge of the circle.

Neglecting my bouquet, I dropped it to the floor and wrapped my arms around his neck as he banded my waist, lifting me a few inches from the floor.

"At last," he breathed against my lips.

"At last," I repeated, and then we were kissing, totally ignoring the chuckles from around the room. All that mattered were his gorgeous lips on mine, his solid, possessive embrace, and Etta crooning our wedding song.

We slowly broke the kiss, our foreheads touching, and opened our eyes. "Hello, bride," he whispered.

A happy giggle broke from my lips. "Hello, groom."

He leaned back an inch, and his eyes moved with painstaking slowness over my face. "You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

Oh God. Could he get any more perfect? "I love you," I murmured.

"I love you too, angel."

A throat cleared, and we remembered that we weren't alone. Thank God he hadn't grabbed my boobs or my ass in front of all these people. I gave him a chagrined smile and said, "Let's do this getting married thing."

With his mouth on my ear, he whispered, “I can’t fucking wait to make you mine,” and a delicious shiver wriggled down my spine. Cam set me gently on my feet and bent to pick up my bouquet, handing the flowers to me before tucking my hand into the crook of his elbow and walking us to the center of the circle. It was like our eyes were fused together as we walked, and we almost ran straight into the poor pastor standing in the middle.

“Whoa,” he said with a good-natured laugh, backing up a step. “Are we ready to get you two married?”

“Yes,” we replied at the same time, our eyes never leaving one another.

And then, surrounded by the most important people in our lives and with our child growing in my belly...

I married the man of my dreams.



The Maldives - Three Months Later

“THIS IS TEAM LEADER. Two and Three, are you in position?”

Two and Three were well-hidden in the dark water in the shadows of the fifty-two meter luxury yacht. They couldn't speak aloud without being heard, so a click in my ear confirmed that they were ready.

“Roger that. Four and Five?”

“In position,” Five responded.

“Ready,” was the sharp reply from Four.

Those two were onshore, positioned on a high ridge with their equipment: night vision scopes attached to their chosen sniper rifles, a TAC-338 for Four and an M82 for Five. They had been bickering the entire trip, and I hoped they wouldn't turn their weapons on each other instead of focusing on the mission at hand.

“Six, I need a status update.”

His deep voice resonated through my ear. He was also onshore, and his task was the most important to me. “Mama Bird is in the nest. Safe and secure.”

“Thank you, Six.” I had chosen him for this particular duty because he had a wife and baby at home, and he understood better than anyone what my priority was: keep Mama Bird safe at all costs.

“We’re ready. Let’s end this fucker,” One said from behind me on the small boat anchored far enough away from the yacht that we couldn’t be seen, even with binoculars. Though his bulky frame was merely a silhouette, I could see the glint in his black eyes as he adjusted the strap of his waterproof tactical backpack.

I gave a short nod. “Four and Five, prepare to take out the guards on the flybridge.” After a *copy that* from each of them, I spoke again. “Two and Three, as soon as they’re down, move aboard and secure the target.” Another click of confirmation met my ears. “On your count, Four.”

Her voice was commanding when she counted down from three. Then ten extremely long seconds later, I heard “Guards are down. Two and Three are onboard. No other threats noted.”

Not even allowing myself a sigh of relief, I dove into the water with One at my side. We made quick work of the long swim. Here in the water is where we were at home, where we thrived. Heading aft, we pulled ourselves up onto the deck of the yacht and entered the cabin.

And there he was. *The Target*. Tied to a chair, probably by Two's long, nimble fingers.

It had taken Three many hours of pecking away on his computer to locate the man who was about to learn what the fuck happened when you messed with someone we loved. His cowardly ass had been hiding in the Maldives, a country with no extradition treaty with the U.S. Even if I'd trusted the Feds after the epic fuckery in New York, they wouldn't have been able to do anything about it.

I pulled off my neoprene hood, and the man in the chair sneered when he recognized me, but the curl of his lip didn't quite mask the fear in his dark brown eyes.

That fear was one hundred percent warranted.

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

Lifting my chin, I replied, “We've received your gifts. I'm here to repay you.”

His sneer morphed into observable fear when I unsheathed my K-Bar knife. The fucker better be afraid. He'd been sending packages with sinister little messages to Mama Bird since the day of our wedding.

And don't even get me started on how much trouble she was in for hiding that from me.

A huge knife. A .38 caliber bullet with her initials engraved on it. And the last package that finally snapped her resolve and made her confess to me—a baby doll with its head cut off. A direct fucking threat to our child. The look of fright on her

face that day had been laced with resignation and determination. “Do it,” she’d said through her tears. “Just fucking do it.”

So, here I was. *Fucking doing it*. His hold over her ended tonight.

Gripping my knife, I made the first cut, and The Target screamed like a little bitch. I would have liked nothing more than to use my lethal hands, but I would have bruises and scrapes on my knuckles, so I had to resort to other measures. *No evidence*.

“Have you heard the news?” I taunted. His eyes followed me as I circled like the predator I was tonight. “I wasn’t sure what kind of communication you had with the outside world. Your father had a heart attack this week.” I gave him a look of mock sympathy. “I’m so sorry to report that it was fatal.”

His face fell, and I made my second cut. I reveled in his screams. “Th-th-that’s a lie,” he finally managed to say.

“Nope. It’s the truth. Your entire organization is going up in flames. With you and him both gone, there’s infighting as everyone scrapes for a piece of the pie. Oh,” I said, almost as an afterthought, “and your friend, the FBI agent? She had an unfortunate accident in prison. The other inmates *really* didn’t appreciate the fact that a Fed was in their midst. Such a shame. She seemed like a lovely girl.” I made a throat-slicing motion with my thumb.

I turned to One and nodded, and he began unpacking his backpack, laying the items one-by-one on the wooden table in

the cabin as Two and Three silently looked on. By the time One got to the third “toy,” The Target was pissing his trousers. One’s eyes dropped to the wet spot, shaking his head in disgust.

“Not so fucking brave now, are you?” His eyes stayed locked on The Target as he slapped an item into my hand. “Let’s start with this one, shall we? Take things nice and slow...” His black eyes burned with almost as much ferocity as my blue ones.

Two hours later, we watched as the yacht, along with any evidence, sank into the Indian Ocean. Not that there was anything left of The Target to identify as evidence. Just bits and pieces really, and those would be taken care of by marine creatures. Speaking of that, we needed to get the fuck out of here before the sharks, who were no doubt already scenting the blood, arrived.

My team and I swam back to the anchored boat and stripped off our wetsuits before weighing them down and letting them sink to the bottom. Then we redressed and motored back to shore, where I profusely thanked everyone and dismissed them.

I walked into my hotel suite, and Six stood. “I was listening,” he said, tapping his earpiece. “Hated to miss out on all the fun. It’s been a while since we got nasty.”

I nodded. “I appreciate you being here where I needed you. How is she?”

Six's head tilted toward the bedroom. "In her nest, but I'm pretty sure she's not sleeping." He clapped me on the shoulder. "I'll head back to my room."

I clasped his hand and pulled him to me in a bro hug. "Thank you," I whispered to my longtime friend, saying a million things with those two words.

"Welcome, bro. I know you would do the same."

"Fuck yeah I would," I said, releasing him. "See you tomorrow."

"Seeing as this is your second honeymoon, I hope not."

My chuckle filled the space between us. Mama Bird and I had only taken a weekend honeymoon a few months ago, but we were staying here in the Maldives for another week since my wife's morning sickness was finally under control. "We'll at least see you guys off to the airport."

"Sounds good." His eyes fell on the barely open bedroom door. "Hope she's okay."

A quiet sigh pushed its way up from my lungs. "Me too." When he was gone, I headed straight to the shower, washing away the salt water and... everything else.

As soon as I entered the bedroom, she pushed off the bed and was in my arms in an instant. "You're okay," she breathed, holding me so tightly I could barely draw air into my lungs.

"Of course I am, baby. I told you I would be."

"And everyone else?"

“Everyone is fine,” I soothed, and then my face turned hard. “Except for *him*. He is most definitely *not* okay.”

I prayed she was still good with this. With what she had finally given me permission to do. Her brown eyes were steady on mine as her hand dropped protectively to her belly bump. “For good?”

“For fucking ever, Mama Bird. You’re safe now.”

Her pretty lips turned up at that. “I can’t believe I got a code name too. I feel special.” I spun her around, pulling her back to my front, my hands resting against her tummy. I loved feeling the tiny life we’d made growing there.

“You are special, angel. You know that.” I kissed her temple and stroked my hands over her bump. “How is the admiral tonight?”

She giggled. “Miss Bella is happy and wiggly.”

“Did my Belly-Bell miss her daddy?” I felt our child move beneath my hands, and I rubbed her soothingly.

“She did. We both missed you.”

I could sense something simmering beneath the surface and kissed my wife’s cheek. “What is it?”

Her hands covered mine on her belly. “I just... are you positive there’s no evidence that will get any of you in trouble?” she fretted.

“Absolutely none. I told you, we know what we’re doing, angel, so stop worrying. The Target is now shark chum.”

The stress leaving her body calmed my own nerves. “I feel like I should have shuddered or something when you said that.” Her head tipped back to meet my gaze. “Is it bad that I don’t feel bad?”

My thumb swiped away the furrows on her forehead. “Not at all. The prick could have quietly stayed on the run forever, but then he made the choice to start fucking with my family. He signed his own death warrant with that shit.” I turned her to face me and took her soft cheeks in my hands. “I love you with everything inside me, angel. You and Bella are mine to protect and I’ll fucking end anyone who messes with either of you.”

She stood on her tiptoes and pressed a hard kiss to my lips. “You’re awfully hot when you go all badass on me. It gives me tingles in some very interesting places.”

She wants badass? Oh, I’ll fucking give her badass.

Sliding my hand between her legs, I gave her my hardest glare. “Do you think you’ve learned your lesson about keeping things from me?”

She shook her head unashamedly. “No, probably not. Maybe you should teach me.”

Biting my cheek to keep from smiling at her eagerness, I double tapped her clit with my middle finger, and she shivered. “Get undressed and put this hot little cunt up in the air for me.”

Taking a step back, she slowly pulled my T-shirt off over her head, exposing her enlarged breasts and swollen belly for my viewing pleasure. And what a goddamn pleasure it was. I loved the changes this pregnancy was having on her body, and my cock twitched with the urge to rub itself all over her.

My hands unknotted the towel around my waist and let it drop to the floor, and my wife's eyes widened at my obvious arousal. Wrapping my fingers around the shaft, I gave myself a long, hard tug, and her teeth bit into her bottom lip as she watched. She bent to pull down her panties and dropped a sucking kiss on my tip, her eyes gleaming wickedly when she stood back up.

I lifted an eyebrow at her. "I'm waiting," I growled, and she hustled onto her knees on the bed, pressing her chest to the mattress and giving me the prettiest view of her glistening, pink pussy. Kneeling beside her, I cupped her sex, and she wriggled her ass back for more contact.

"Easy, angel." My other hand stroked tenderly up and down her spine. "Are you going to hide shit from me anymore?"

"No," she murmured, and I gave her cunt a light, firm smack, earning me a whimper from her full lips.

"Are you going to tell me *right away* if anyone tries to fuck with you?"

"Yes." Her voice was breathless with anticipation, and I paused for effect before spanking between her legs again. My fingers were met with a gush of wetness, and I rubbed it into

her flesh before pulling my hand away. “More, please,” she begged, and the plea hardened my penis almost painfully.

“Will you let me *do my fucking job* and take care of you and Bella for the rest of our lives?”

“Yes!”

I rewarded her with three more sharp spanks until she was a quivering mass, her hands clutching the sheets as a long, low moan vibrated through the mattress. “Don’t come,” I ordered, and she let out a frustrated noise as I pushed two fingers into her soaking center. “You’re going to come while my dick is buried so far inside you, I’ll need a map to find my way back out.”

She was pushing back, fucking herself on my fingers until I felt her inner walls contract. Pulling my hand away, I sucked her from my fingers and almost blew my load all over the bed at the taste of her sweetness.

I turned her over and knelt between her legs. Her hair was a mess on the pillow, and her brown eyes were burning with want. She was so goddamn beautiful that it took my breath away.

“Please fuck me,” she said, reaching for me, her palms resting on my cheeks and her fingers curling behind my ears as she pulled me in for a hot, sloppy kiss. “And... and I want you to hold me down.”

I froze. Lifted my head and searched her eyes. “Are you sure, angel?” We hadn’t done that since before she was

kidnapped. I had been so careful with her.

She nodded in the affirmative. “I want you to. I’m not scared anymore.” Those words sunk through my skin and into my bones, wiping away any reservations I may have had about what my team had done tonight.

My wife was no longer afraid.

She kissed my lips softly. “I feel like I’ve been in a cage of fear, unable to break free. But you’ve given me my freedom back. Thank you, baby.” Her eyes shone with a light I hadn’t seen in a while. “I love you so much.”

I kissed her deeply, letting my body weight press her into the mattress, testing the waters a bit. She didn’t flinch. “I love you, angel,” I said, widening my legs and entering her slowly until I was balls deep.

Sliding my hands up her arms, I linked our fingers together and dragged her hands over her head, holding them there firmly as I began to move...

...and I set my Mama Bird free.

THE END.

Also By Jade

Thank you for reading **Deadly Protector**, Book 3 in the **Fierce Protectors Series**. Did you know that one of the most important ways you can support indie authors is by leaving them a nice review? So, if you would be so kind, please leave me a review on Amazon. Here is the link to my Amazon author page: <https://amazon.com/author/jadedollston>

Did you enjoy reading about Axel and Blaire in this book? Well, they have their very own book, my debut novel, **Delay of Game**? You can read it here: <https://mybook.to/delayofgameJD> It's free to read on Kindle Unlimited!

Dauntless Protector, Beau and Charli's story, is the first book in the **Fierce Protectors Series**. If you haven't already read it, you can find their book here: <https://mybook.to/dauntlessprotector> Have a box of tissues handy because it's an emotional one! And maybe a spare pair of panties, because Charli and Beau are HOT together.

Devoted Protector, Tank and Bristol's story, is book two in the series. Here is the link:

<https://mybook.to/dauntlessprotector> A six-foot-eight cinnamon roll falls in love with an emotionally unavailable woman? Yes, please! The way he thaws her out will melt your own heart... and probably your underwear.

Feel free to message me on Facebook or Insta and let me know which of these hotties you're most excited about. Woody's book will release in the summer of 2023, so keep an eye on my social media for the release date of this enemies-to-lovers, forced proximity novel.

The Men of the Fierce Protectors Series

Beau "Shark" Atwood

Waylon "Tank" Hanford

Camden "Cam" Fitz

Mario "Woody" Diaz

Bode

Tate "Hawk" Gentry

Check out my [website](#) or hit me up on my socials by clicking the links below.

You can also check out my author's page on facebook by searching for Jade's Kiss & Tell.

Exciting News!

If you loved reading about Cam's cousin Collin and his... *ahem*... forbidden fruit, then you are in luck, people! My book bestie, AK Landow, and I are doing a character crossover! You can read all about Collin and his fruit in AK's full-length novel, Indecent Ventures. And you might just get to catch a glimpse of Cam and Shiloh in there, so win/win, right?

Indecent Ventures is releasing July 6th, 2023, and let me tell you... this age gap romance is sizzling hot and filled with fantastic witty banter.

You can check it out here:

<https://mybook.to/IndecentVenturesAKL>

Acknowledgments

First of all, thank you so much to my **readers**. It means so much that you took a chance on a newbie author, and I appreciate the time you took to read **Deadly Protector**. I love when readers reach out to me while they're reading, so feel free to do so on my social media platforms that are listed on the "Also by Jade" page.

My undying gratitude goes out to the lovely **TL Swan**, who has encouraged so many of us to become authors. Your love, support, and encouragement gives me the strength to get through the hard times that inevitably come while writing, editing, formatting, and the million other behind-the-scenes things we do to get a book out. (Also, vodka helps.) Lady, you are one amazing author and a damn good person.

To my fellow **Cygnets**, our group is absolutely the best, most supportive group in the world, and I'll fight anyone who disagrees with me. I always know that I can ask a (dumb) question and receive some excellent and honest replies.

Anything from blurb help to formatting... you ladies have helped me from start to finish on all of my books. And a big shout out to the authors of **The Spicy Book Nook** on Facebook. I love you ladies so much. Readers, if you're not a member of the **SBN**, get your tail over there and join! It's an excellent page full of fun and BOOKS!

Lizzie, Thorunn, and Lakshmi, you three have been amazing beta readers and an insightful source of opinions and knowledge. Lizzie, you've been with me from the beginning, and I treasure your friendship and the confidence you give me almost every day. You are AMAZING! Lakshmi, I'm so glad I found you. You're funny and smart, and I love the links you send me (wink wink), even though you distract me from editing. But you know I like it. Thorunn, thank you for being there for me when I need someone to bounce ideas off of. You are truly brilliant!

To my ARC readers and Street Team: God, I don't even have words to say what you mean to me. Thank you for taking a chance on an unknown author and for pimping my books to the masses. I truly treasure each and every one of you and love our conversations in the facebook groups.

To Chrisandra of Chrisandra's Corrections: First of all, you should win some type of award for putting up with me. I was looking for an editor, and I found a friend, a human sounding-board, and a partner in crime. When I was down on

myself, you kicked my ass into believing I was enough. I don't think you can even comprehend what you've done for me since I've met you. {Cue *Wind Beneath My Wings*.} Thank you for sharing my passion for these books and for our late-night chats that I hope never become public. Eek! ☐ And thank you for talking me down when I get neurotic. You have the patience of a saint.

To Katy and the Hype Girls Crew: Thank you so much for everything you do for me. Having you in my corner gives me a confidence boost and makes me want to be a better writer. Thank you for always checking on me and for making me laugh.

AK Landow and Carolina Jax, I'm not sure how I would survive this author journey without you two and our daily group messages. You're my people, my tribe, my girl gang. You make all of this worth it and so much damn fun. We all have our strengths, and between the three of us, we're rocking this author thing!

Carolina, what started out as chatting about football romance has turned into a beautiful friendship. You are such a positive person, and you make me smile every single day with your humor and constant encouragement, not to mention your adorable accent. (Send more voice messages, please!) On the days I feel like quitting, you always inspire me to keep going, to do better, to BE better.

AK, my sistah from another mistah... you just get me. I love your “girl power” spirit and the way you lift other women up and make us stronger. Also, it’s refreshing to meet another pervert with an adolescent sense of humor, just like me! 😊

Playlist for Deadly Protector

Here Without You by 3 Doors Down

Lips of an Angel by Hinder

P.I.M.P. by 50 Cent

Rock Your Body by Justin Timberlake

Your Body is a Wonderland by John Mayer

Wonder by Shawn Mendes

Lift Me Up by Rihanna

Good for You by Selena Gomez

Halo by Beyoncé

Partition by Beyoncé

Bring Me to Life by Evanescence

The Man in Love with You by George Strait

Levitating by Dua Lipa

Into the Night by Santana

Easy On Me by Adele

Adore You by Harry Styles

Tears In Heaven by Eric Clapton

At Last by Etta James

About the Author

Jade Dollston is a Texas author who loves reading, Doritos, and rum. She is married to her high school sweetheart, and they have one amazing daughter.

Her love of reading all things smutty has turned into a love of writing all things smutty. She enjoys a diverse selection of romance, and this is reflected in her writing style. Be prepared to laugh, cry, cringe, and fan your face, possibly all in a single chapter.

Jade is so excited to share her work with the world and hopes that you enjoy reading the words from her heart.