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HE DOESN'T SHARE.

HE TAKES WHAT HE WANTS.

WEAKNESS OR NOT, HE WILL HAVE CLAIRE ALL TO HIMSELF.

# I HAVE TO HAVE HER

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
SAM CRESCENT



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# I HAVE TO HAVE HER

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## Chapter One

“It’ll only be for a few days, I promise. And then everything will be fine. I mean, it will probably be longer than a few days. That asshole she was with took the car and all of her belongings, and even got her fired from her job for making a scene. He hit her too. You should see it, it’s really bad. So please, please, please, Gabriel, can she stay?”

Gabriel Locke half-listened to his sister over the phone as he stared at the man who’d tried to steal from his casino. Not that he himself needed the money, but still, he couldn’t have anyone stealing from him.

“I don’t want her here,” he said.

“If you don’t do this, I will be the biggest royal pain in your ass.”

“I haven’t seen this girl since she was eighteen. I don’t know what kind of influence she has on you.”

“That was years ago, and I told you all the time, I’m the one who convinced her to go out to parties with me. Not her. You’re being unreasonable. Why am I not surprised? I should have known you’d react this way. It’s what you always do. You just react without being given all the facts.”

If he didn’t nip this in the bud, he was going to hear this all day. With prolonged nagging, Rhianna’s voice was like nails down a chalkboard.

“Fine, but only for a couple of days. Don’t push me on this.” He hung up the phone to the sound of her squealing. At least she was happy, which was more than he could say about this man in front of him.

“Please, please, I didn’t mean to do it.”

After rolling up the sleeves of his jacket, he cracked his knuckles and his fist flew across the bastard’s face. He repeated this four more times.

Stepping back, he admired his handiwork. He needed a bit of blood, the pain that dug into his knuckles. He didn’t like people who tried to steal from him. He’d built up this casino

along with the six more he owned, as well as his strip clubs, and a couple of other illegal businesses on the side.

No one fucked with him because he hit right back. This was who he was. He'd built up his reputation and his businesses on pain and fear. The only weakness he had was his little sister and he made sure she was covered with plenty of protection at all times. Their parents were gone, killed years ago in a shootout at a diner. They'd been unlucky and Rhianna had been home, sulking over something.

He knew she felt personally responsible for their parents' deaths. If she hadn't been arguing with them, they would've gone to a different restaurant. No matter how many times he told her it wasn't her fault, she still blamed herself.

Grabbing his gun, he pressed it to the thief's temple. The man whimpered at the cruelty of it all. Gabriel took no prisoners and without a second's remorse, he fired his weapon. The shot echoed around the basement.

His work complete, he ordered the disposal of the body, put his jacket back in place, smoothing out any wrinkles, and left, heading back up to the main casino party. Stepping out onto the balcony, he was the king, overlooking his empire. Men and women were all throwing their money away. All taking a chance on what could be. Could they double, triple, or quadruple their money? The temptation clawed at them.

Of course, he had distractions. Men and women dressed to impress and gain their focus. Sex and money.

He'd come to learn everything had a price. Even women who played hard to get, who thought you wanted the chase. Several of his waitresses had tried to seduce him, but he didn't fuck where he worked. He had women who knew the score and if he dialed, they'd be waiting. He didn't do love or relationships.

He fucked.

Hard.

Fast.

Dirty and fucking incredible. He couldn't be done with a prim and proper woman who needed to be coaxed to touch

herself. He liked wet, willing, begging, desperate women. Some of these men tonight would take one of the waitresses to bed and fuck them into oblivion.

He smiled. This was his hard work paying off.

Now it was time to move on. On a Friday night, he always liked to make an entrance at several of his establishments. He left the balcony, aware of the men following him. His own personal bodyguards. Paying for the best, he got his men's loyalty, and he only took men who were the hardest motherfuckers in town. He didn't care if they punched first and asked questions later. This life was hard and it was fucking dangerous.

His car was already waiting outside. Pulling out his cell phone, he checked to see if his lawyer had been in touch about a property he wanted to acquire. For the past couple of months, the owners hadn't wanted to sell it to a company, and so he'd changed tactics and made it a more personal venture. They didn't need to know he intended to strip their home down and build it as an exclusive sex club.

Still nothing from his lawyer. He made a quick note to call him in the morning. Even though his world never slept, he allowed his people to get some sleep. He was used to power napping. A couple of hours here or there, never with anyone. If he took a woman to bed, she left it before he got any sleep.

Staring out at the night, he watched people coming and going. Some were dressed to party. Others were homeless, and a couple looked like they were just finishing work. The hard, gritty world.

This was his paradise. He'd made it his bitch and he ruled over all of it. Anyone who tried to take any of his territory, he slaughtered them without a second thought. This was his part of the world and no one was going to take it from him.

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Claire Sutton's eye still hurt. She'd pressed peas over the damn thing, and she'd gone to the emergency room, all for nothing. She was going to have to wait for the swelling to go

down. How was she going to get a job looking like this? A nice black eye because of her ex.

That fucking bastard. Tony would pay the moment she found him. If he thought he could get one over on her like this, he was very much mistaken. She was pissed off. Sticking her earbuds in, she turned up a rock song so that it was blaring, killing a few brain cells in the process.

She closed her eyes, lifted her hands in the air, and started to sway her hips from side to side.

The bedroom Rhianna had given her was just amazing. It was a spare in her brother's penthouse suite, and it was bigger than the apartment she'd just gotten kicked out of. Again, another of Tony's mistakes. He hadn't paid the rent even though she'd left the money out to be paid. Stolen.

She had the worst taste in men. Simple as that. She'd sworn off men now. They weren't worth her time. There was no way a few orgasms was worth any of this. It just wasn't happening.

She was thirsty and hungry. Rhianna was taking a private phone call in her own room, and Claire had already been told to treat the place like it was her own. Glancing down at her panties and vest top, she shrugged. Rhianna had said her brother was never home, and she didn't want to fight through her dirty clothes to find something decent. All courtesy of her landlord. She'd come home from getting fired to find her clothes strewn out on the street as if she was worth nothing, which to him, was probably the truth.

No matter how many times she tried to tell the man she'd paid him, he had shown her his records and she'd seen that no money had been paid for two months. It didn't matter her promises, he was done. So now she had no clean clothes, and Tony had taken off with her savings. He'd cleaned out her checking account as well.

Broke.

Opening the bedroom door, with her music still blasting away, she kept on dancing. There was no way in hell she was going to let all of her worries bother her. She was bigger than



them. Swinging her hips harder, faster, she allowed the music to seep into every fiber of her being and just consume her.

She opened the fridge and found a yogurt. Smiling to herself, she couldn't recall the last time she'd enjoyed a fruit yogurt. After pulling off the lid, she looked through the drawers and found a spoon. Dipping into the creamy dessert, she swallowed it down with a moan. Flavor exploded on her tongue. She hadn't eaten since last night, and she was starving. Before coming to Rhianna, she'd tried to figure something out. It seemed people didn't like to hire someone with black eyes.

She wasn't going to think about it.

Just keep on dancing and eating. That was all she could do.

When a pair of hands wrapped around her neck, and she was crushed to a very hard, large chest, she let out a squeak.

The earbuds were removed.

“What do I have here?”

She clawed at the hand around her neck. Her heart raced and she closed her eyes as his breath brushed across her ear.

“I didn't leave a woman half-naked in my apartment.” He was so strong as he lifted her and moved her with ease, pressing her against the fridge. She let out a start as the coldness touched her butt cheeks.

Claire would recognize this man anywhere.

So much for Rhianna's brother not coming home.

He stared at her.

She hadn't seen him since she was eighteen at their graduation. Gabriel Locke had always been scary. He rarely spoke to her and when he did, it was always filled with disapproval.

He believed she was the reckless one, always convincing Rhianna to go to parties, which turned out to be the other way around. His sister liked to go out and party. She mostly followed along. She adored Rhianna and loved her like a sister.

“I know you,” he said.

Knowing this was Gabriel and not some thief, she offered him her best dazzling smile.

“Claire.”

The way he said her name was filled with contempt.

“Gabriel.”

“I don’t recall giving you permission to walk around in your underwear.” He glanced over at the mess she’d made.

“Gabriel, what the hell are you doing?” Rhianna said.

Slowly, he let her go. He hadn’t grabbed her too tightly to leave a mark. His gaze focused on her black eye and he stepped back.

“I was giving your *friend* a welcome,” he said.

“Yeah, well, most people tend to do that with a shaking of the hand, or saying hi. Claire, so sorry about my brother.” Rhianna glanced down at her and smiled.

She held her hands up. “I thought you said he was never home.”

“I come home every single night. It’s after two,” Gabriel said. He nudged her away from the fridge and she stepped into the yogurt, nearly falling over but his arms captured her before she hit the ground.

She quickly stood up, trying to gain her footing before she took a tumble again. There was a towel on the kitchen counter and she used it to wipe her foot. “I’ll just clean this mess up.” She got on her hands and knees and started on the spilled yogurt, very much aware of his gaze on her.

Could their first impression have been any worse?

“You two better learn to place nice,” Rhianna said.

“I don’t play nice.”

Gabriel didn’t linger. He grabbed his beer and left. She watched him go, breathing out when he finally left.

“What were you doing?” Rhianna asked.

“I was hungry. I didn’t think he’d be back. When did he get so...?”

“Asshole brotherly?”

“Yeah, I guess so.” She was thinking sexy, hot, and dangerous, but she wasn’t going to speak those words aloud. Rhianna hated it when people wanted to date her brother rather than be friends with her. It was a sore point and seeing as she’d never really liked Gabriel, Claire had promised her best friend to never date him. To not have anything to do with him.

But wow, the man was ... different.

“Don’t worry. He’s harmless and he’ll help you out. Maybe we could ask him to keep an eye on Tony. He could help get your money or some of your possessions back.”

“I doubt it. Seeing as I’m staying here for free, I don’t want to ask for more than I already have.” She hated to be in anyone’s debt and she wasn’t about to start now.

## Chapter Two

After his morning swim, Gabriel entered his apartment to the scent of coffee and food being cooked. Rhianna couldn't cook and often resorted to takeout, so that left one person.

He stood in the doorway, watching Claire as she stood at his stove. Her long, brown hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail, the natural curls all bound up. Today, she wore shorts that were too tight for her, so he knew they came from Rhianna, and one of his shirts.

"Don't you have any clothes now, either?" he asked.

He'd noticed her shapely legs and body. Even last night as he had her back pressed up against him, the curves of her ass nestled quite nicely against his dick.

She turned around and he saw she was listening to music again but this time, only had one earbud in.

"Huh?" She glanced down at herself and he noted the deep blush of her cheeks. "Oh, yeah, er, my landlord decided to throw all my stuff out on the street. I'm going to be doing the laundry today. Rhianna lent me these."

He stepped up close and he touched his shirt at her waist. "This wasn't hers to give." She smelled like vanilla. He didn't like that flavor in anything.

Her lips were nice and plump. He could imagine them wrapped around his cock as he fucked her mouth.

Claire had turned into a beautiful woman, there was no denying that. One he had no intention of tasting or touching.

"Do you want it back?" she asked.

Her nipples were pressed against the front of the shirt and she sounded breathless. He got to her too. Nice to know.

"Not right now. I think a little modesty is in order."

"From what I heard about you, you don't believe in modesty." Her cheeks were pink as she spun back to the stove.

He couldn't resist. Stepping up close behind her, he put his lips right next to her ear. "You're right. I'm used to having

women parade naked around me. Now, Claire, you've got me curious. What have you heard about me?"

"N-nothing."

"Don't lie to me. I don't like liars." He wanted to bite her neck, to suck on her pulse and leave his mark. "Who hit you?"

She turned her head. "My ex did."

"Give me his name."

"Why?"

"I'm curious."

"No."

"I can find out."

"Then use your time and money to find out. I don't care. I'm not telling you anything."

He liked her fire, her passion.

Smiling, he stepped back without a word. He poured himself a coffee, grabbed the paper, and made his way toward the table. He'd gotten comfortable and took his first sip as his sister joined them.

"You're not helping cook?" Rhianna asked.

"I don't cook." He did, but only sparingly. His life was way too busy and hectic to take on the joys of cooking. The coffee was good though. He couldn't help but enjoy the smells of breakfast or the warmth that seeped into his chest.

No woman had taken the time to cook for him, certainly not a woman who wasn't getting paid by him.

"You look really smart today, Gabriel," Rhianna said.

"I went swimming. I'm not even ready yet," he said.

"Well, the swimming is really working out. I can just see it now, all those women swooning over you."

He put his paper down and gave his sister his full attention. "What do you want?"

"What makes you think there's anything I could want?"

He raised a brow.

“What? Can’t a sister compliment her brother?”

“Normal sisters, yes. You’re not normal.”

“That’s, like, really rude and unfair.” She nibbled on her lip.

“We got over this years ago. Tell me what you want.”

She rolled her eyes. He’d been taking care of her since she was ten years old. Their parents hadn’t exactly been good role models, and neither had Claire’s. Their parents had preferred not to acknowledge they had kids or responsibilities. Growing up, he’d lost count of the number of times he’d gotten a beating. Not that he looked back with any remorse. It helped to build him into what he was now.

“It’s Claire,” she said.

He had no doubt.

“With her eye, and well, she’s got nothing. No one is hiring.”

“And?”

“She’s a good waitress, Gabe. Honestly. She’s hard-working and smart.” If his sister was calling him Gabe, she was desperate. “Claire hates charity and I worry about her.”

“You want me to hire her?” he asked.

“Yes. Please. Any job, that is you know, legal. She’s not into all that dark stuff.” Rhianna nibbled on her lip again.

He wanted to say no but after his little encounter in the kitchen, he smiled. “Sure. I’ll hire her.”

Rhianna squealed and threw herself at him. “Yes. Thank you. Thank you.”

Claire walked in from the kitchen, carrying two plates. “Here you go.”

“My brother is going to give you a job,” Rhianna said.

“Oh.” Her gaze fell on him. “You are?”

“Yes. I’ve got a spot. Don’t worry about your eye. Everything will be fine. You can start tonight if you’d like?” He expected her to turn him down but she was already nodding her head.

“Yes, of course. Er, I’ve got to do some laundry.”

He perused her body and shook his head. “I’ve got some errands to run but I’ll bring you back something to wear. Don’t worry.”

“But my size—”

“Don’t worry,” he repeated. Pushing the paper to one side, he dug into the breakfast she’d made for him, closing his eyes and enjoying the flavors. It had been a long time since he’d enjoyed a delicious breakfast. “When did you learn to cook?”

“She’s self-taught,” Rhianna said. “Most of the time her mother forgot she even existed and she never had the money for takeout.”

“Thanks, Rhi,” she said.

His sister beamed. “Come on, let me brag a little about you. I remember you learning in school and then at home. You nearly gave yourself food poisoning once. Her chicken was raw and she nearly ate it. After that, you only ate vegetables.”

“I got better.”

“How is your mom?” he asked. He didn’t really care as he hadn’t gone back to the small town where they had originally grown up. His family had left to move to the city and in doing so, he’d found Claire there more often than not. The move was for his parents to be closer to him. He’d started making a name for himself and they wanted to reap the rewards. His parents had been money suckers, going wherever there was easy cash to make.

“I don’t know. She left the trailer on my graduation day. I went there the next day with my bags waiting for me, packed, and another family already there.”

“Your mother was a bitch,” Rhianna said. “Still is and I hope she has herpes.”

Claire laughed. “I find it easier to not think about her. She hated me, made me aware of it whenever she knew I existed, and I chose to not let her get under my skin.”

“You’re the bigger person?” Gabriel asked.

“I try to be. I don’t always succeed but I’m trying.” She didn’t look at him.

“What was your boyfriend’s name again?” He knew exactly what would happen. Claire jerked her head up but his sister was a wealth of knowledge, spilling all the details he needed to hear.

He smiled, quite content with what he learned. All this time, he winked at her, waiting for her to explode or do something. She didn’t do anything but he knew deep beneath the cool façade, she was boiling. Good. She was going to learn he always got what he wanted and he didn’t have to pay a price to get it.

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Her clothes were now clean but Gabriel wouldn’t let her wear any of them. He came back to his apartment with a dress.

Claire couldn’t believe what she was wearing. Wrapping her arms around her waist, she pressed her lips together. She hadn’t worn any makeup because she didn’t actually own any. Her hair fell around her in curls, and no matter how many times she tried to flatten them out, they refused to be controlled.

The dress she wore was modest, yet indecent. She didn’t know what to think of it. At the chest, it was tight, squeezing her breasts together, but doing it in a way that didn’t show the half-cup bra he’d also bought. At the top, it opened up with straps around the neck, a strip of fabric to cover the bra, and then opened up at the waist. The dress covered her ass, stomach, hips, and then at the sides were two large slits that gave glimpses of skin when she walked.

It felt sexy, dirty, exposed, and daring all at the same time. Her body was covered but also gave a hint of what could be.

Gabriel hadn’t spoken a word but she was very much aware of his closeness. This was a punishment. Working for him hadn’t been on her agenda. Even without Rhianna giving her little hints and tips, the name Gabriel Locke spilled fear and arousal across the city. She’d heard whispered rumors. At one



of her last jobs, she'd overheard some women who'd claimed to have graced his bed.

He was known for being dominant, the one always in control. When you entered a relationship with him, you played by his rules. She'd also heard that he didn't actually do relationships. Women were given an amount of time. That was it.

She didn't know why she was thinking about him or sex, or anything like that. Glancing out of the window, she tried not to think of those hands on her body or giving her pleasure. She and Gabriel had never gotten along and she wasn't about to even think or believe in the possibility of them being friends.

The car came to a stop in a parking lot. She saw several expensive cars outside, but there weren't any lines. In fact, she'd been so lost in her thoughts she didn't even realize they'd entered a private residence.

"Come with me," Gabriel said, climbing out of the car and holding the door open for her. She'd been Rhianna's friend her entire life and knew not to ask questions when it came to her brother. She didn't want to know about the men who followed him, or the fact they wore guns. Sliding out, she hoped she didn't make a complete fool of herself with the heels she wore.

He held his hand out.

"What is this place?" she asked.

"One of my clubs. This is where you'll be working," he said.

The club looked more like a private mansion. The doors were opened by two security guards who bowed their heads as if Gabriel was royalty. She kept her mouth shut as they entered.

The hum of music filtered through the rooms.

"What you are about to see, you must never speak of. Not to Rhianna, not to anyone. This is a completely private place and must remain so."

"But what do I tell her when she asks where I work?" she asked.

He smiled. "One of my strip clubs." He opened the door and waited. "It's this or you're on your own."

She didn't know what to say or do. This was all a little too much. Glancing back at the car, she knew she didn't have anything to do. Work was hard to come by in the current market.

"I won't sleep with anyone and I don't dance."

"From what I saw, you dance all right."

She shook her head. "That's not funny."

"I'm not trying to be funny. Just taking it seriously." He winked at her. "You're here as a waitress. Nothing more. The men here, they know the rules. As a waitress, you'll serve drinks, food, nothing more."

She nodded. "Good. That's what I wanted to hear." She stepped into his world and in the pit of her stomach she couldn't help but wonder if she was making a mistake. There was no backing out now. She couldn't change what was going to happen. This was what being screwed over by her boyfriend looked like.

Gabriel grabbed her hand and marched her toward the back of the house. He walked so fast that she didn't get a chance to look into each of the rooms. They entered the kitchen where a woman with hair tied back at the nape, little makeup, and a cigarette in her hand was speaking to the chef.

"Casey," he said.

The woman was in her early thirties, or even late twenties, Claire didn't know. The moment Casey saw Gabriel, she smiled.

"Is this the girl?" Casey asked.

Gabriel pulled her in front and all she wanted to do was cover up her body.

He stepped away from her and Casey circled her. Claire wanted to cover up but instead, she kept her hands fisted and waited.

"She's got fire. I like that. You know men are going to offer for her."

“I don’t care. She’s here strictly as a waitress. She’s ... she’s family.”

Claire glanced at Gabriel, shocked by his admission. She was Rhianna’s best friend, but he’d always considered her a bug, at least that was what he’d told her.

“You know how to serve drinks? I’m not going to have any trouble with you?”

“No. I’ve worked in a few bars. I’m good, I promise, and I’m fast.”

“No, no, honey, we don’t do fast here. The idea is for the men to stay as long as possible. To relax. To slow down. That’s what you’re going to be here for. I don’t want speed. You will take your time, move your body, and make every single guy wish they were taking you home instead, understood?”

She jerked her head in what she hoped was a nod but doubted it looked that graceful. In truth, she wanted to run back home, but she was a fighter. With a mother who slept around and rarely remembered her, she’d gotten used to sticking up for herself, and she wasn’t going to stop now.

“I will leave you to it. Enjoy this experience, Claire.” Gabriel placed his hand at her back. The touch was fleeting but his hand was gone within the next second. She watched him leave the room. Turning back to Casey, she found the woman watching her.

“I think the best thing for you to do is to take your allotted tray and get to work. Don’t stare at the clients. Just serve them and leave. Smile and be gracious. Whatever you see, you don’t see. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Good. If you survive the night, we’ll see how long you can last.”

With a tray in her hands, Claire squared her shoulders and prepared for the night. She could do this. Even with her black eye.

Heading out into the main bar, the lights were dark and she entered the first room, coming to an immediate stop. This

wasn't like any strip club she'd ever seen in the movies. Three women were all dancing together but that wasn't all, they were teasing, kissing, and making out. The men and even women were watching, like a visual orgy.

"Don't just stand there, serve!" Casey hissed at her and she quickly jumped into action.

Moving to the first man, she took the orders, and she made sure to take her time, working the room, bringing back orders.

She met Daniella who worked as a bartender and was dressed in the same way as Claire. When one room was done, the next room was where she needed to go. Each room far more revealing than the last. There were some places where the men were enjoying a drink and conversation, but until her black eye healed, she was told to leave them. Casey's orders.

By the end of the night, it was nearly four in the morning. She was tired, her feet were killing her, and Gabriel waited outside.

She climbed into the back of the car and settled beside him without a word. There was nothing to say to him. What went on in the club would remain private and she wasn't going to break his rules to ask him questions.

Sitting back in the car, she removed the heels and groaned. She needed to get used to the shoes, the clothes, and what she was going to see. She wasn't a prude. None of what she saw tonight disgusted her; if anything, it intrigued her.

From the moment she'd lost her virginity to Tony, she'd found sex to be ... boring. She'd had two partners. David, who was her date on prom night, and that had been awful. Then Tony, who only fumbled in the dark. She didn't exactly see the whole addiction to sex, but tonight, her body had awakened and she couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to be with a man who knew what to do.

## Chapter Three

*Two weeks later*

“She’s hard-working. The men love her. I’ve had a few inquiries as to if she’s for sale for the night,” Casey said.

Gabriel wasn’t really paying attention. Instead, he watched the monitors as Claire worked the room. The bruise around her eye had finally faded. He’d already located her ex and at this moment, Tony was being dragged into one of his casinos for a nice talking to.

He shouldn’t be here.

For the past two weeks he’d dropped her off, he got a basic update on her progress from Casey and left. The dresses she wore were all the same as the first night, just different colors, each one designed to enhance her beauty. All of his waitresses were dressed in clothes that complemented their figure.

Claire was all curves. A nice pair of tits, hips, ass. Just watching her, he wanted to fuck her.

He’d found himself arriving home more often than not wondering what delight he’d encounter, only to see she’d stopped dancing in her underwear. She covered up and was rarely in his apartment. He had men following her. She was interviewing for other jobs but hadn’t said anything to Rhianna about it.

His curiosity irritated him. For the longest time, he hadn’t cared for this woman. With her being in his home, part of his world, she’d started to invade more of his thinking space and he needed her out of it. This was for himself only.

“She’s not for sale.” He stepped away from the monitors and left the building.

Sitting in the back of his car, he pulled out his cell phone and saw the confirmation that Tony was indeed waiting for him.

He gave the orders for where they were to take him and with that, he sat back. Glancing down at his cell phone, he checked over his sister’s social media accounts. Every now

and then, he liked to make sure she wasn't getting into trouble and as he did, he started to notice the pictures of Claire. There was one taken this morning. They were lying on the sofa, smiling, clearly with their legs across the back of the sofa. There were several like this through the years. Not all of them with a nice, black leather sofa.

There were a couple of them at parties. He noticed one with Tony and Claire. The couple didn't exactly look happy. Claire leaned against Tony, but the man in question appeared to be looking at another woman's ass.

Claire had a great ass.

He closed his cell phone. He didn't need to go through pictures to look at Claire. She was everywhere he fucking looked. He hadn't been with a woman since she'd been in his world and with his sister also hanging out regularly at his place, well, it was making things difficult.

He arrived at the casino and went straight down to the basement again.

"Look, I don't know what this is about. I swear I didn't do anything. Someone's trying to frame me. I don't have nothing. I promise. I swear."

"You do a lot of talking," Gabriel said. He grabbed a chair and pulled it close to the man in question.

He was crying and sniffled. Snot ran down into his mouth. It sickened him, but he was used to men being so weak, begging for their lives. It was amazing what people would offer and plead with to save their own skin.

"I don't know who you are, man."

"And you're not going to know. We have a mutual friend," he said.

"I don't know no friends of yours," Tony said.

He snapped his fingers and one of his men produced a picture. It was a snapshot of Claire with her black eye.

"I don't know what that bitch has done but I swear I'm done with her. She's in this on her own."

"You gave her the black eye."

“She was yelling at me and I was done with hearing her shit. She’s a fucking waste of space. Fat bitch and she’s crap in bed as well. She doesn’t know what she’s doing. She clings. I got rid of her.”

“I know her. She’s a friend of the family, Tony.”

“Whatever she told you, it’s a lie.”

Gabriel stared at the man, watching, waiting. As if on cue, he pissed himself.

He sighed. This was the kind of man Claire went for?

“Please, don’t hurt me. I didn’t do anything. If you want her, she’s all yours.”

He wrapped his fingers around the man’s neck and squeezed. “I suggest you be very careful what you say to me. I’m finding it all a little insulting right now, hearing you say shit about her.” He kept on squeezing, not really sure why he cared, just that it bothered him.

So far, from what he could tell, Claire was hard-working with a bad taste in men. He didn’t know of any other boyfriends.

“Where’s her money?” he asked.

“That was my money for putting up with her. She can get money any time.”

Gabriel pulled out his knife and slid it into the muscle of Tony’s thigh. The high-pitched scream echoed around the basement. No one other than himself and his men could hear him scream.

There were parties going on upstairs, people who were living their lives and wouldn’t have a clue what he was doing.

He pulled the blade out and for good measure, stabbed him again.

“My name is Gabriel Locke.”

The moment he said his name, Tony whimpered.

“I see you know me. Well, Claire is like family and I don’t take kindly to someone hurting them. You’re going to bring back all of Claire’s belongings, and her money. You’re going

to have my men go with you so I know you won't try anything stupid. Am I understood?"

Tony nodded and Gabriel slammed his fist against the bastard's face for good measure. Removing his blade, he cleaned the blood off and left the basement, heading back into the casino.

This time, he didn't linger but headed back into his car, to go take care of some other business. A local MC wanted to do a drug run through his streets. It was polite to ask permission, but seeing as he had his own product to deal with, he was going to decline. When it came to bikers, he kept a wide berth and always tried to come up with a reasonable outcome.

Tony was a piece of shit.

What had Claire seen in him?

Why the fuck did he care?

Running a hand over his face, he tried to clear the fog from his mind. He wondered what Claire would say when Tony arrived with all of her things. He hadn't done this for Claire, but for his sister.

When it came to Rhianna, he didn't want her to ever go without. All his life, he'd made sure she never suffered. Their parents had been poor excuses for human beings, their deaths a blessing, and he'd gotten full guardianship of his sister.

He would protect her. Even as he thought about his sister, he couldn't help but think about Claire. The two came together, but soon he'd have her out of his life for good.

\*\*\*\*

The bar was closed.

Claire stood in the doorway, watching one of the women. She was the final dancer to work her magic on three men. It didn't come as a shock when one man opened his pants and pulled his cock out, and started to work the length. She'd gotten used to such a blatant display.

Tammy, the dancer, not her real name, loved the attention. Claire had talked to most of the strippers and learned that each one was addicted to the power their body gave them.



She tensed up as she became aware of him. Gabriel stood right behind her, watching.

He didn't touch her but his heat surrounded her. She waited for him to speak first.

Neither of them said a word.

His hand on her hip startled her.

"Is it time to leave?" she asked, whispering.

"I don't mind you enjoying the show." His lips brushed her ear. Her nipples tightened and she wanted to squeeze her thighs closed. She didn't dare move.

"Is this something you'd want to do? Strip, spread yourself open, show every single part of yourself for men to admire, to crave? They all want to touch her, but in this room, they can look, never touch."

Tammy had already removed her clothes and spread her legs wide. The lighting was low, giving only a hint of her pussy.

Gabriel's hand tightened on her hip.

"I'm ready to leave." She pulled away, not wanting to see any more. Casey always dealt with the last customers. Pulling out of his hold, she tried not to mourn the loss of his touch. She walked toward the car. The men were smoking as she neared but she ignored them, climbing into the backseat.

She removed her shoes and sat back.

Heat filled her body. She wanted to touch herself, to think of someone touching her, not being able to control himself.

Gabriel joined her, and neither of them spoke. The scent of cigarette smoke filled the car as the men climbed into the front. They sprayed some lavender to cover the odor. She rolled her eyes and looked out the window, heading back to his apartment.

She'd been apartment hunting as well. She'd gotten some good tips, and her first paycheck was due in two weeks.

So far, Gabriel hadn't asked for rent or to help with the food bill. She cooked for all three of them and cleaned. She tried to

do her part so she didn't feel like she was some kind of pest.

Arriving back in the private parking zone, she didn't follow Gabriel out, but opened the door and walked ahead of him to the elevator.

She didn't look at his reflection as they walked on. The metal doors closed.

Silence rang out.

She took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves. She held her shoes in her hand and waited.

The elevator doors opened up and she stepped out, waiting for him to open the door.

Once inside, she put the shoes down and was about to leave when Gabriel grabbed her and pressed her against the closed door.

He tilted her head up and she stared into his eyes. His body so close and she liked it.

She waited.

"What the fuck is going on?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"No?" His hand went to her hip. "Nothing is going on in that head of yours?"

"I'm tired. I want to go to bed."

"Do you?" he asked.

"What else would I want to do?"

His hand moved down and she gasped as he cupped her between the thighs. His touch sent a wave of need flooding every single part of her body. She licked her lips. His palm crushed against her clit and she closed her eyes, biting her lip.

"You liked what you saw, didn't you?" he asked. "You like seeing the men lose control, of being at the mercy of that woman."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

He pushed again and fire shot through her body. Within the next second, his lips were on hers, kissing her hard, biting her

lip. She wrapped her arms around him, but he suddenly grabbed her wrists and pressed them above her head. “You don’t get to touch until you’ve answered my question.”

“I don’t have to tell you a goddamn thing,” she said, wriggling in his hold.

He held both of her hands in only one of his and he skimmed the other down her arm, going to her breast. He circled the nipple. “No? But your body, it’s telling me all it wants to. Your body speaks when your lips tell lies.” He cupped her breast, kneading the flesh. He didn’t linger too long. That same hand traveled down past her stomach, going between her thighs and touching her pussy.

She cried out.

He stopped, moving his hand to the slit down one side of her dress, then he suddenly cupped her through the fabric of her panties.

“Soaking wet, just what I expected to find.”

She could tell him to stop, to get off. The words failed to form. She didn’t want him to stop. This control, this dance they were doing, she wanted to see how far he was willing to go. What he’d do to her.

He pushed her panties to one side and then his finger glided through her slit, stroking over her clit.

“So wet. I bet you’ve never had a real man touch you. Show you what you can do with this body,” he said.

He didn’t stop there and she still hadn’t asked him to stop. What the hell was wrong with her?

Gabriel moved down to her entrance and she cried out when he pushed a single finger within her core. “Fuck, you’re tight. It just goes to show no man has used your body the way it should be.” He growled against her ear, bringing his fingers back toward her clit, stroking her. She opened her mouth to cry out in pleasure. “Do you want me to stop?”

She whimpered. Now he was putting the decision in her hands and she didn’t think she could handle any more.

Just as she was about to tell him to keep on touching her, she heard movement and it wasn't them.

Rhianna.

Common sense prevailed and she pulled out of his arms quickly.

He didn't stop her.

Within seconds, Rhianna was in the hallway. "Have you two only just got in?" She yawned, rubbing at her face.

"It was a long night. I'm so tired." Shaken, aroused, needy, she managed to brush past her friend with just a kiss to the cheek. She had to make her escape.

All of these years, she'd promised Rhianna she'd never fall for her brother or be caught anywhere near him. She wasn't about to start now.

## Chapter Four

*One week later*

Work had kept Gabriel busy.

He'd sent his men to take Claire to work and he'd purposely avoided coming into contact with her. Tony had upheld his end of the bargain and according to his sister, Claire was now looking for a place to live.

The money Tony had wouldn't be enough for Claire to buy herself a nice place. He'd gotten the final figure from his men and he didn't like it.

On Monday, his sister was due to go away with one of the many charities she was helping, which meant he and Claire would be alone. He'd already called Casey and told her to give Claire the night off.

No woman ever got under his skin and he couldn't deny that his thoughts were entirely dominated with one woman. No other woman would do, not that he'd tried anyone else. The only person he wanted was Claire, and he was going to have her.

Claire wanted out of his apartment and it was going to take some time before she saved up enough, and so he intended to proposition her. She'd been avoiding him and as he made his way back to his apartment at five o'clock with plenty of time to catch her, the anticipation made his cock ache.

Tonight, he was going to have her, no questions asked. He'd felt how aroused she was at the touch of his hands. He intended to show Claire exactly what she'd been missing. To make sure Claire stuck around while Rhianna was off helping people, he'd told his sister a couple of lies.

The first, he wasn't going to be at the apartment for a couple of days himself as he had business to attend to, and he'd make sure Claire was protected with some of his men.

He had nowhere to be, and he intended to be the one protecting, but also spreading that pretty ass and showing her what a good fucking was all about.

Entering his apartment, he closed the door quietly, locking it. Music played, some kind of rock song. He wasn't big on identifying songs or what was popular. Rounding the kitchen, he came to a stop when he saw Claire in her underwear, dancing.

She had a nice pair of juicy thighs, rounded hips, a full ass, and all he needed was for her to turn around and he'd get to see those tits as well. She was a curvy woman all around and just watching her now, he wanted to spread her across his bed and kiss every inch of her. There were a lot of other things he wanted to do, like watch her take his cock, sinking into her tight cunt or ass. Had she ever been taken in the ass?

Arms folded, he waited.

Within a minute, she spun around and cried out, dropping the saucepan of spaghetti she'd been holding. He knew from personal experience she was eating her food out of the pan rather than get another plate. She hated doing dishes.

"You're not supposed to be here."

"I know."

"You lied to Rhianna."

"Does it surprise you?"

"No, I should have known." She went to bend down to clean up the mess.

"Stop."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"This isn't going to happen. You've got plenty of women. You've got entire clubs of them. A harem at your beck and call."

"Then tell me why it's you I want."

"Because you want what you can't have."

He smiled. "Are you so sure about that?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me why your nipples are rock-hard."

“It’s cold.”

“And now you’re lying. If you were cold, you wouldn’t be walking around half-naked and I have to say, Claire, you can dance around my apartment naked all you want.” He stared at her tits as he couldn’t get enough of them.

“This isn’t going to happen.”

He crossed the kitchen, pressing her up against the fridge once again, trapping her in place.

“You want it,” he said.

“You’re Rhianna’s brother.”

“I know who I am.”

“And you don’t care. She hated all the girls who tried to chase after you. Who befriended her just to get close to you,” she said.

“And you’re already best friends with her. You didn’t seek out friendship with her just to get to me. If so, you’ve been playing this game a long time.” He stroked his finger down her arm, hearing the slight catch in her voice.

“You know I haven’t.”

“Then how about I give you ... a choice.”

“It’s simple, I’m not sleeping with you.”

“I don’t sleep with women, Claire. I fuck, plain and simple. There will be no snuggling, no sleeping, just you enjoying my dick.”

“You’re a pig.”

“And you like it,” he said. He cupped her between her thighs and she cried out, moaning as he used his palm once again to rub her pussy. “Your mouth is lying to you again.”

“Just because my body wants you doesn’t mean I’m going to give in to it.”

“No, how about this. You give me one month, thirty-one days, and I will give you an apartment and you name your price.”

“I’m not a whore.”

“You want to benefit from this arrangement?” he asked.

“I have a job. I don’t need money.”

“But you do need an apartment and the places you’ve looked at are not good enough. Thirty-one days, and I’ll make every single one of your desires come true. In return, whenever I want you, however I want you, you’ll come to me, begging, wet, and ready. I will have complete, unlimited access to your body to do with as I please.”

“You’re crazy. You think I don’t know about you? I haven’t heard what people have said, that I don’t know what you’re capable of. I saw what you did to Tony.”

“He deserved it and I bet you liked seeing him pay.” He cupped her face. “Not too long ago, this pretty face had a nice little bruise on it from his handiwork, so don’t go telling me you’ve got feelings for an asshole who doesn’t deserve it.”

She jerked out of his hold but with him blocking her path, she couldn’t go anywhere. “You could hurt me.”

“It goes without saying that anything you experience with me will be consensual, legal, and I will not under any circumstances hurt you or leave a scar on this pretty body.” He pressed his cock close to her, letting her feel him. “You’re tempted, I can tell. The look in your eyes, it’s one I remember well.”

When he put his hand back on her pussy, she cried out. Sliding beneath her panties, he groaned at how soaking wet she was. “You’ve been a good girl all your life. Don’t you want to have some fun? Rhianna will never have to know. I won’t tell her.”

“I don’t want you to pay me,” she said.

He smiled. “Then the apartment we use is mine. It will belong to me, but it’ll be where you come to when I need you. Got it? After tonight, this place is out of bounds.”

She nodded.

“I’m going to need you to agree,” he said.

“You want me to say it out loud? That you can fuck me?”



He slammed his lips down on hers, pulling his fingers from her pussy, Gripping her ass, he lifted her and went straight to his bedroom. He didn't have time to wait. His cock ached to be inside her. Gabriel didn't expect to last the full thirty-one days though. Once he had his fill and was bored, their agreement would come to an end.

Dropping her on the end of the bed, he cupped her face, ravishing her lips once more. After he stepped back, he opened up his belt, staring at her. Her cheeks were flushed.

"Take off your clothes," he said.

"Maybe we should turn the light off," she said.

"Take off your clothes. I don't like to repeat myself, so you're going to have to get used to doing as you're told."

She stood up and he wondered if she was going to hit him. He wouldn't mind. He rather liked the idea that she wasn't afraid of him. She grabbed the bottom of her shirt and slowly pulled it up over her head. She wore a matching bra. It was a nice color, but not sexy enough. She flicked the catch and her breasts sprang free, and he groaned.

They were big, with nice-sized red nipples he'd been thinking of sucking.

"Now the panties," he said.

She bent forward and he wished she was in front of a mirror, but there would be plenty of time for that. Watching her now, she wriggled out of the panties and they dropped to the floor.

"Leave them," he said. "Climb on the bed. Spread your legs, let me see what now belongs to me."

Claire slid on the bed, lifted her legs so her feet were flat on the bed, and opened her thighs, showing him. She had a small smattering of curls but there was no mistaking the arousal clinging to her.

He crawled onto the bed, putting a hand on her knee and holding her wide.

"Touch your pussy," he said.

"What?"

“You heard me. I don’t like to repeat myself.”

“You keep doing it for me.”

He gripped her hips and spun her around, gripping her ass tightly. After raising his hand, he brought it down hard on her ass. “And maybe now you should take your punishment?” He pushed two fingers inside her from behind, hearing her cry out. In and out, he pumped and she rocked back, moaning his name. “That’s right, Claire, I’m the one in charge. You push me, I’ll push back. I’d hate for our first time together to be where you don’t get an orgasm for being naughty.”

He pulled his fingers from her and put her back into position. Her face was flushed.

“Now, touch yourself.”

She reached down between her thighs, stroking over her clit.

“So pretty. That’s it, let yourself go, feel it. Feel how good it is.” He watched her work her clit with a single finger.

She was so reserved.

Joining in, he shoved two fingers back inside her and brought them up to her clit, showing her what to do. “Don’t be afraid of getting wet, of feeling every single inch. That’s it, stroke your pussy.” He took her hand, guiding her to the best orgasm she could possibly have.

She arched up, and he groaned, seeing the fullness of her tits shake.

He let her take over, and cupping her ass, he pressed his face against her pussy, sliding his tongue between her fingers, working her. Down he went, fucking her cunt, feeling her squeeze and tighten around him, and then he moved up.

“That’s it, baby, come for me. Come all over my face.” Once she was wet enough, he intended to fuck her so hard, to pound inside her.

She came, crying out his name. The sound echoed off the walls, reminding him of just how powerful he was. This woman was his. For the right price, he’d taken her. In the back

of his mind, he wasn't actually sure what price she'd taken. The apartment was his, and she hadn't settled on any money.

Reaching into his drawer, he grabbed a condom. After tearing into it, he slid it over his dick. "Tomorrow, I'm going to arrange for you to see the doctor, to get on the pill."

"I'm already on the pill," she said.

He pulled the condom off.

"Wait, what are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm clean and I'm guessing you're clean."

"I've never been with anyone without a condom," she said.

"Until me." He put the head of his cock at her entrance and started to slide within her. She was so tight.

He grabbed her hips and slammed all the way to the hilt within her. She was the first woman he'd been with without a condom. Her pussy tightened around him, squeezing him.

Gabriel pulled out only to slam back inside. He did this over and over, watching her. She was so wet and he felt all of her. Taking hold of her hands, he locked them above her head, staring into her eyes. He slammed his lips down on hers and kissed her hard, consuming her.

Fuck, she felt so good.

Over and over, he pounded inside her. The first stirrings of his orgasm began, and he shoved to the hilt as he came, spilling his cum deep inside her pussy. Pressing his face against her neck, the pleasure rode his body like a wave and he allowed it to consume him. To take every single waking thought that made any sense.

Kissing her neck, he licked over her pulse, groaning. He pulled out of her and moved toward her side, giving her time to breathe and not to take all of his weight.

"Wow," she said. "That was really something."

He smiled, expecting her to roll against him. Instead, Gabriel frowned as she rolled off the bed and without another word, headed toward his doorway.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

“This is a strictly fucking relationship. I don’t have to sleep with you and we don’t know when Rhianna’s going to be back.”

“You think I only want you the one time?” he asked, climbing off the bed. The fact she wanted to leave pissed him off.

“Don’t all men like it one time and are too exhausted and fall asleep?”

He cupped her face, taking her hand and placing it over his erection. “I’m not like other men.”

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For the first time in her life, Claire knew what it meant to be thoroughly fucked. Rhianna was due back this very evening. The charity event had only been a one-night sleepover. After Gabriel had taken her not twice, or three times, but four, she’d gone back to her own room, showered, and slept until ten. He’d been gone from the apartment, without a note, not that she was expecting any. She didn’t want to start wishing for something that wasn’t going to happen.

She’d had sex with her best friend’s brother.

At work, she stood at the bar as Daniella filled her order. Another car had been waiting for her tonight, no sign of Gabriel. After she’d had breakfast, she’d gone back to apartment hunting.

Rhianna had arrived before she went to work that evening, hugging her and telling her how much fun she had. There had also been a twinkle in her eye, and Claire knew from experience her friend had met someone and wanted to keep that little detail a secret from her brother.

“You’re not with it tonight, are you?” Daniella asked.

“Huh, sorry? What?”

Daniella laughed. “Men trouble?”

“Something like that.” She gripped her tray and wondered what the hell she was going to do with Gabriel in her life, her bed, or whatever the hell he was meant to be.

“I’d stop daydreaming if I was you. The man himself is in his office. He doesn’t mind firing people who aren’t doing their job.” Daniella winked at her.

Gabriel was here?

She hadn’t seen him since last night. Just knowing he was somewhere, watching, waiting, unnerved her.

*Get a grip, Claire.*

*This is just an arrangement. Thirty-one days for you to enjoy.*

She had no intention of taking any money or the apartment. She avoided taking charity or living outside of her means. If this job continued to pay good tips and good money, she’d be able to afford a nice place.

She knew how to keep her mouth shut. Growing up with a mother who liked to bring married men home, she’d learned the value of staying quiet. This place was easy. She never looked at the men long enough to recognize them and wasn’t interested in anything else.

Serving up drinks, she steered clear of their grabbing hands. A couple of times, she had men grab her ass and offer to pay her a fortune for a fuck. So polite. There were guards in every single room and they intervened, reminding them of the rules. She wasn’t up for sale.

The minutes ticked by, turning into hours. She was still serving, and as she waited at the edge of one of the rooms as two women gyrated against one another, a hand wrapped around her waist.

“Do you like what you see?” Gabriel asked, whispering against her neck.

“They look like they’re having fun.”

“Most of the girls do. They love the power, the attention.”

“Do you only hire willing girls?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You don’t force them?”

His grip on her waist tightened. “You seem to mistake me for someone else. I don’t deal in human trafficking, Claire.”

“But your businesses are not as legal as they seem?”

His other hand cupped the back of her neck, holding her still against him. They were in the shadows, so no one could see them.

“What are you trying to ask me?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’m not a good man, Claire, but then, you know that.”

She did.

The dress she wore was indecent, making it easy for his hand to slide inside the slit at the leg and touch her.

“But I can see that isn’t a problem for you.”

“I’m working.”

“I’m the boss and I’ve got something else for you to do.” He covered her mouth, lifted her, and she didn’t fight as he pulled her away from the room. No one stopped them, not that anyone saw. She figured someone could have, but they were probably preoccupied, and who was going to stop the boss?

He closed the door to what she assumed was his office and he pressed her up against it. His lips were on hers and she cried out as he bit down hard.

“I’ll deal with you in a minute but this is for me.” He moved her across the room toward his desk. He bent her over the desk and flung the dress up and over her head.

His hands ran across her ass and he tugged at the thong she’d worn. Panties were hard to wear as the slits were so high and she didn’t want them to show through. He spread the cheeks of her ass wide and then his cock slid inside her. At the last couple of inches, he slammed in deep. One of his hands went to her hip and the other gathered up her hair. Wrapping it around his fist, he started to fuck her hard, driving inside her.

She cried out, holding on to the desk as he held her in place and took what he wanted.

This was hard and fast. He sped up, his thrusts increasing as he fought completion, going to the hilt, pounding within her.

She moaned his name, driving back against him, completely coming apart as she used her body for his own pleasure.

This wasn't love. She didn't want love. This was cold, hard need, turned to fucking.

With each drive of his cock, she lost all thought and was unable to think, to focus, to do anything but feel him.

When he came, he didn't immediately pull away either. He held himself deep within her, and she closed her eyes.

Arousal still pulsed through her body, demanding her own release. His breath fanned across her hair. Then he slid his hand between her thighs, and with his now-flaccid cock inside her, he started to work her clit. "Come for me."

She whimpered, sliding her pussy on his fingers, his cum swimming inside her.

"That's it, Claire. Take what you want. Don't wait for me, just take."

The sounds of her release filled the air and she couldn't help but become aware of how easy he made her forget herself.

He stepped away, his cock easing out of her, and he grabbed some tissues, placing it against her and capturing his cum.

Heat filled her cheeks. She wiped herself, feeling strange. This was different.

Turning on her heel, she went to leave, but he caught her wrist. He lifted her and placed her on the edge of his desk.

"You need to stop doing this. I'm not some pet you can control."

"That's exactly what you are."

"And you're my pet as well," she said. She hadn't asked him for anything and she certainly hadn't taken anything.

"What's your cell phone number?"

She frowned. "What?"

“I want to call you when I need you. Remember?”

“Oh, I, er, I don’t have a cell phone. It was broken when my landlord threw out my clothes and stuff.”

“Right.”

“You’re not going to hurt him, are you?” she asked.

“It depends. Do you want me to?”

“No. He was just doing what he thought was right.”

“And kicking out a woman in the streets was right?”

“I thought Tony had paid, but he hadn’t. Wouldn’t you do the same?”

“I’m not a landlord.”

“No? What are you?” she asked.

He leaned forward, capturing her lips. “I’m king.”



## Chapter Five

“How much did you say he offered a month?” Gabriel asked. He listened to the figure his man gave and gritted his teeth. Claire was proving to be a pain the ass, but he oddly didn’t mind. She was a welcome distraction. “Offer him double and call me when it’s done.”

So far, he’d gotten rid of three potential apartments. Ever since his men had told him she’d gone hunting for them, he always made sure they were able to make counteroffers that stopped her from moving out.

He didn’t have a fucking clue why.

They had their arrangement and so far, he’d organized another apartment with her, not too far from the one they lived in now, and had yet to use it. She hadn’t even wanted to take the cell phone he’d given her. The woman was proving to be difficult. She didn’t accept gifts from him, only orgasms.

He was used to women wanting everything from him. His money, jewelry, gifts, everything. Instead, this woman only wanted his cock, and so far, after only a couple of days, he wasn’t fucking bored. In fact, with each passing day, he grew more and more addicted to her.

“Sir, there’s a situation at one of the tables. Three men are counting cards,” one of his guards said.

“You have proof?”

“Yes, sir. We’ve removed the men from the table and are in holding now.”

“Let’s go and see.” He got to his feet and made his way toward the security monitor. When someone attempted to count cards, it was difficult to identify. Watching the men on screen, he noticed they were clearly bad at it. He saw the way they all followed the cards, counted, their lips moving.

After just a few minutes, he’d seen enough and made his way to the room where the three men were waiting.

“This is horse shit,” the first man with short, blond hair and a receding hairline said.

“Gentlemen, I’m Gabriel Locke, the owner of this establishment.” By saying his name, he could always judge if people knew him. They all seemed clueless, which was a pity. Now if they’d been playing in his private betting rooms, he’d be able to take out his anger on them. As it was, with civilians, he had to play by the rules, and counting cards wasn’t allowed. Giving them a warning and removing them from his property, banning them from all of his casinos, the matter was dealt with.

It pissed him off and he stood, staring out across his empire.

There was only one person he wanted right now.

After pulling out his cell phone, he texted her.

Gabriel: **Be at the apartment in ten minutes.**

He hadn’t even put his phone away when his cell phone alerted him to a brand-new message. Gritting his teeth, he opened it up, and there was one waiting from Claire.

Claire: **Can’t. Rhianna’s upset. I’m keeping her company.**

She was, was she?

Well, his needs came first.

Leaving the casino, he climbed into the back of his car and ordered to be taken to his apartment.

Before the car had even stopped in its parking spot, he was out the door, at the elevator, and heading back up to his room. The time that passed didn’t do his mood any justice. He was angry, pissed off, and fucking horny. Opening the door, he entered the apartment and found his sister and his woman on the sofa.

Rhianna sniffled into some tissues.

“What’s going on here?” he asked.

“It’s nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Yes.”

“Then why are you crying?”

“It’s none of your business,” Rhianna said.

“Good, if it’s none of my business. Go accept the pizza I ordered. I know you love it.” He pulled some money out of his wallet and handed it to Rhianna.

“Pizza?”

His sister couldn’t resist a good pizza. The moment she was out of sight, he grabbed Claire’s hand and dragged her to his bedroom.

“What the hell are you doing?”

He slammed the door and shoved her toward the bed. The clothes she wore were hideous, but he pulled down her pajama shorts, revealing her naked ass.

“Gabriel!”

He had her on her knees and was inside her within a matter of seconds. She was wet, not as soaked as he liked her, but he didn’t have time. He worked his fingers through her slit and she gasped, moaning as he fucked her.

“When I tell you to be somewhere, you’re going to be there.”

“I had Rhianna to think of.”

“Don’t say her name. I don’t want to hear her name.” He bit down on her neck and rode her pussy, driving inside her, fingering her pussy. He grabbed his cell phone, putting it in her hand. “Call the pizza place, tell them it’s for Locke and they need to be ready within minutes.”

He knew the receptionist would keep Rhianna talking for him.

“Gabriel?”

“I’m going to fuck you and you’re going to do as you’re told. I’m not arguing with you. Do it.”

She moaned as he pinched her clit.

“There will always be consequences for not doing as I ask. You’ll learn.” He fucked her hard, teasing her clit and feeling her answering pulse as she squeezed his cock. She felt so good.

When she was on the phone, he made it harder for her to focus, working her clit, making her speak even as she wanted to moan in pleasure.

Good. He wanted to drive her wild, to make her think about what she did. He wasn't the kind of guy who liked to wait for anyone.

He pounded inside her, taking her harder. She hung up the phone and he brought her to orgasm. Feeling her ripple set his own release off and he came, spilling his cum inside her. He didn't know if he was ever going to be able to go back to wearing rubbers. She felt so amazing on his length.

Afterward, they were both panting.

"Stay where you are," he said, easing out of her.

He went into his en-suite and rinsed out a cloth. Glancing up, he looked at himself in the mirror and was surprised by what he saw. He looked ... no, he wasn't even going to analyze this shit.

Leaving the bathroom, he returned behind her and saw some of his cum leaking out of her pussy. Damn. Before he took her again, since he knew they didn't have time, he pressed the cloth to her, cleaning her up. After throwing the cloth in the laundry basket, he helped her back into the shorts and ran his fingers through her hair.

"Are you happy now?" she asked.

"It'll do, but next time, you won't like the consequences. Don't play games with me, Claire. You won't win, ever."

She nodded, opened her mouth, closed it, and left the bedroom.

The door remained open. Rather than see his sister like this, he took a shower. He'd lost his freaking mind and he needed to start getting back his composure or he was going to end up so fucked.

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Three days had passed since Gabriel had pulled her into his bedroom and took what he wanted. Claire knew she should have been pissed at him and called this whole thing off, but

she'd enjoyed it. Not that it was any excuse. He hadn't hurt her. She hadn't even asked him to stop.

"You look so gorgeous," Rhianna said as the car pulled up outside of a nightclub. Her best friend had demanded a girls' night, complete with dancing, men, and a chance to just forget about the guy she'd met on her charity event. Claire didn't even know his name. Rhianna wanted to keep some things a secret. She didn't mind. When they were younger, Rhianna often went off with guys and never told her about them.

Their friendship was stronger than boys, men, and all the secrets.

She'd gone back to the apartment after another useless attempt to find herself a place only to see a white dress and heels waiting for her. Rhianna had already been getting ready. She loved her friend but guilt churned in the pit of her stomach.

Her ... arrangement with Gabriel clouded her decision to do anything, but Rhianna had said it was time for them both to meet men.

"Look at the line. I don't think we should go here," she said.

"Don't worry. This is Gabriel's club. I come here all the time." Rhianna was out of the car and dragging her along with her.

The men opened up the doors and music surrounded her. The beat and pulse of the noise didn't help to calm her nerves. In fact, it made her feel more nervous.

"I love this," Rhianna said.

Claire wondered if Gabriel liked his sister coming to any of his clubs. Did Rhianna know about the secret strip club? Either way, Claire's lips were sealed. Even with all the secrecy around the job, she actually liked it. The heels were a nightmare but she got paid good money and she felt safe. There were some jobs where she hadn't felt safe at all.

"Let's go to the bar," she said, yelling to be heard over the noise.

“Not happening. Let’s dance. Come on. We’ve got to find ourselves some good-looking men.” Rhianna screamed each word for her to hear.

Dragging her onto the dance floor, Rhianna let out a hoot and laughed along with her, Claire started to dance. There was no rule from Gabriel about her not having fun. It didn’t take long for someone to wrap an arm around Rhianna.

Claire felt a body behind her. It wasn’t Gabriel, but rather than judge, she just danced anyway, allowing herself to be taken by the fun and heat of the night.

She spun around, wrapping an arm around his neck, dancing. Whenever he got too close with his body, she made sure there was more distance.

There was no invitation here. When he didn’t seem to be getting the idea that it was just dancing, she pulled away, and the man let her go, moving on to other women. She stumbled toward the bar, ordering herself some water.

Rhianna was hurting and Claire had a feeling the guy at the charity event was a lot more than just an acquaintance.

She thanked the bartender and sipped at her water, watching her friend.

“What’s a beautiful woman like you doing all alone here?”

She turned to see a man with short, black hair and a smile, clearly sexy, dressed in jeans and a white shirt.

“Is that the standard pickup line?” Near the bar, the noise wasn’t so consuming. People could talk without shouting. It was nice.

“It usually works. Have you heard it before?”

She laughed. “Not in a long time.”

“So you should be impressed.”

“Being picked up in a bar isn’t impressive. Now over coffee, that’s something different.” Realizing what she’d just said, heat filled her cheeks. “I’m not telling you to ask me out for coffee or anything.”

“You’re charming. Has anyone ever told you that?”

She pressed her lips together and shook her head. “Not recently.” She wasn’t about to tell him her ex referred to her as a weirdo.

“I’m Lucas.” He held his hand out.

She shook his hand.

His grip was firm. He didn’t let go of her hand as he drew it to his lips, kissing her.

“And you’re a charmer.”

“I like to think of myself as old-fashioned.”

“Right,” she said with a chuckle. “I’m just me.”

“Hello, Just Me.”

“Stop it.” She waved her hand in front of her. “You’re flirting, stop.”

“I don’t see a ring on your finger and any guy who lets you out on your own, well, that’s their loss and I have to say they don’t deserve you.”

She thought about Gabriel. “I’m not ... taken.”

“Well, then, how about I take you on that dance floor and show you what it feels like to belong to me?”

“She’s taken.” Gabriel suddenly pressed against her back, his hand snaking around her waist.

She tensed up.

“Oh, I thought she said—”

“Fuck off.”

Gabriel grabbed her hand and once again, she was being pulled to wherever he wanted her. She tried to fight him off, but he wouldn’t let her go.

“Damn it, Gabriel. Let me go,” she said.

He ignored her and rather than cause a scene because Rhianna was close by, he moved them away so no one could hear. “Your sister will be able to see,” she said.

“Rhianna is being taken care of as we speak.”

They passed several guards, all of which were there to see her humiliation as he pulled her like a rag doll to wherever he wanted. It pissed her off.

“Will you stop!”

He slammed the door and let her go.

At least he hadn't pushed her up against a wall or tried to have his way with her. Gabriel paced and she watched him, aware of his anger.

“You're not fucking taken? I heard that right!”

“Gabriel?”

“You're mine, Claire. No other man gets to touch you, do you understand that?” He stood in front of her, anger coming off him in waves.

She stumbled back and he growled. “I'm not going to hurt you.”

“I know.”

“Then what the fuck was that? Why are you dressed like that?”

“Rhianna wanted to have some fun.” She glanced down at the white dress. Yes, it was revealing, enhancing her small waist, large hips, and tits, but she liked it. “What's wrong with the way I'm dressed? If my memory serves, you and I, we're not ... together. You're using me. We've had seven days. That's it. Twenty-six days left. That's all we've got.”

She nibbled on her lip as he glared down at her. Did she sound desperate? That wasn't what she was going for. This arrangement with Gabriel wasn't right. “We should just end it now.”

“No,” he said.

“You don't get to decide.”

“But I do.” He stepped toward her and she moved back. He kept on coming and she tried to put distance between them, but it didn't work. She fell back on the sofa and he followed her down.

“You keep trapping me,” she said.



“I think you like being kept in one place.”

“You’ve got a high opinion of yourself,” she said.

“You like what I do to you, Claire. You can’t deny it.”

“So you know how to make a woman beg. It’s not like it’s something you haven’t done before.”

“I haven’t heard you beg,” he said. “I’ve gone easy on you. You think you know everything there is to know about me.”

“I do.”

He cupped her knees and pushed underneath her dress. “You can stop me at any time. If that’s what you want to do.”

She didn’t speak, didn’t even mutter a sound.

Watching him, she waited. He shoved her back, pushing the dress out of his way. He tore away her panties and spread her legs.

“You’ve got such a pretty pussy. You know I think about this all day?”

“No, you don’t,” she said.

He smiled. “But I do. It’s all I can think about.” He ran his fingers across her flesh. His touch soft, gentle. “Spread your lips for me.”

“Gabriel.”

“Right now, I want to go downstairs and fuck up the face of that bastard. You want to be responsible for me hurting someone?”

“That won’t be my fault.”

“You can distract me now.”

“This is blackmail.”

“You know you want it.

“Doesn’t make it right,” she said.

“You need to stop thinking. Just do as you’re told.”

She wanted to fight him, but she didn’t like the thought of him hurting someone or even getting hurt himself. It wasn’t like what he was asking was such a bad thing.

Reaching between her legs, she followed his instruction and waited. He stared at her. She didn't know how he was able to make her feel so aroused with just one look.

With his gaze on her, he leaned forward and licked across her clit. He circled the bud, sucking it into his mouth and flicking his tongue back and forth.

She cried out as he continued to tease her. His teeth created just the right amount of pain and he soothed it with his tongue. Over and over, he worked her flesh, building up her orgasm, driving her hotter, harder. She whimpered his name, feeling on the brink, so consumed and flushed.

When she came, she couldn't contain his name or her moans. He held her ass, pressing his face against her heated flesh, and she cupped the back of his head, reveling in the sensations of the orgasm.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said, screaming for more.

He kissed her clit and pulled away.

"You're wrong. We've got longer than twenty-six days. You're mine, Claire. No men, no women, just me. Don't ever tell another man you're single again. And another thing, stay away from Lucas."

"You know him?"

"I do."

"Oh."

"There's no *oh* about it. He's a dangerous person."

"Like you?"

He stared at her. "If you know what's good for you, you'll stay away. I'm getting one of my men to drive you back to our apartment."

"What about Rhianna?"

"She's being taken care of."

Getting to her feet, she saw Gabriel put her panties in his pocket. There was something oddly erotic about him keeping her underwear.

"Why do we have more than twenty-six days?" she asked.

He sat behind his desk. He looked every part the king he claimed himself to be. She had no doubt about the power he wielded.

“I’m familiar with the female anatomy, Claire. You’ll be having a menstrual cycle soon, and well, however long that lasts is the number of additional days you’ll be mine.”

This was one of those moments where she wished she hadn’t asked.

## Chapter Six

Gabriel arrived at the private location in the middle of nowhere. No houses, no cars, no street lamps. Just the glow of the car lights and the single bike waiting for him.

As he climbed out of his car, the glare of the lights made it impossible for him to see the man who currently leaned on the seat of his bike, smoking a cigarette.

“Good of you to come, Gabriel.”

“What the fuck do you want, Lucas?” He’d been given the note not long after he’d sent Claire home to their apartment. He intended to join her but first, he needed to deal with this business.

Lucas was the president of one of the deadliest MCs he’d ever known. So far, he hadn’t encroached on his territory and even tonight, he’d been respectful by not wearing his leather cut or bringing any more men.

“Let’s say I want to make a deal with you. I know you’ve got another offer elsewhere for transporting drugs through your turf,” Lucas said.

“If you know so much, then you’re aware I’ve declined any such access.” He avoided deals with MCs at all costs. They were way too volatile. They had their own set of rules and changed them with the whims of the clubs and any new president who killed their way to the top. He wasn’t interested in dealing with that kind of shit. He avoided them like the fucking plague.

Lucas’s presence in his club wasn’t a good thing.

“I want to know the route they wanted.”

“Not happening. I don’t talk shop with the likes of you.”

Lucas smiled. “That woman tonight was a fine piece of ass.”

Gabriel tensed up.

“I know all about you, Locke. You’ve got a sister who you guard, and a lot of different pies all lined up. Women are like

ice cream, you have a taste and move on. You've never been seen with the same woman twice and you certainly don't stake a claim."

"You need to leave my city before you overstay your welcome."

"In case you forgot, I didn't ask for an invitation, and by your own rules, I'm not marked." Lucas held his hands out and spun in a circle. "I don't want to mess in your shit, and I'm quite happy to help you, Gabriel. Sooner or later, you're going to realize your power is only strong enough when you've got men to back it up. I want nothing from you but the route. If I saw the way you were with that woman today, Claire, others are always watching. The problem with being a king is someone's always waiting to watch you fall." Lucas got back on his bike.

The warning was clear. He was being watched but also, there was a brewing war between two MCs, and Lucas had been the first one to make his move.

Climbing back into his car, he gave his man the order to take him back to his apartment where Claire would be waiting.

He wasn't sure if he wanted to give the details of the route to Lucas. He didn't like being given ultimatums. This city belonged to him, and he had no interest in coming between two MCs. However, if one was on the left and the other was on the right, he was in the middle just waiting to become the war ground.

The apartment was quiet when he entered. He and Claire had yet to use this place at all. So far, he'd taken her at the private club, in his office, or in his other apartment where his sister lived. Their arrangement was still a secret from his sister and he intended to keep it that way.

Removing his shoes and jacket, he glanced into the living room and found Claire curled up on the sofa. She wore one of the negligees he'd purchased for her. The bedroom had a wardrobe where he'd organized clothes in her size.

He stepped into the room and moved toward the coffee table. An old mug sat there with what looked like some

remnants of hot chocolate. Reaching out, he stroked the curls back from her face. She let out a whimper but didn't pull away.

She was beautiful.

Tonight, seeing her on the security monitor after his men alerted him to her entering the nightclub, he'd been pissed. The sweet smile she never showed him, on display for a stranger. Lucas of all people. He'd felt this overwhelming, possessive need to keep her, to mark her.

No woman had ever gotten under his skin like this and he didn't like it. There was no mistaking Claire was different.

He touched her cheek and she opened her eyes, groaning. "Gabriel," she said.

"It's okay. It's just me."

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes, everything is fine," he said. He took care of all matters that would touch her.

"I like the apartment."

"Good." He leaned forward and brushed his lips across hers. She wrapped her arms around his neck and he lifted her into his arms.

"I can walk."

"And I can carry you. I like having you in my arms."

After he entered the bedroom, he lowered her to the bed, following her down. She let out a moan as he kissed her hard. Slowly, he stood and removed the rest of his clothing as she lay there watching him. Once he was naked, he climbed onto the bed, helping her out of the negligee so they were skin to skin. Flesh to flesh.

She wrapped her legs around him, and he found her core, plunging into her heat. He kissed her. Every other time they'd been together, he'd fucked her. This time, he made love to her, taking his time, working her body to a fever pitch and pushing her to the edge, but not allowing her to topple over.

He changed positions so she was the one straddling him. Holding her hips, he guided her over his length, getting her to take all of him, watching her tits swing in front of his face. Reaching up, he took her nipple into his mouth, sucking across the tip. Then he slid his tongue across the valley to take her other nipple.

“Ride my cock, baby, that’s right, take it.”

She screamed his name as he thrust his cock up, making her take all of him. He wanted her to forget every single man, every single person, and to just be completely owned by him.

Lifting her up, he stroked her clit as she rode his length. He watched her slowly come apart, and as she came on his cock, he felt victorious. Once he’d rolled her back to the bed, he spread her open and thrust inside her, finding his own release. Kissing her as he came, spilling his cum deep inside her. Each pulse rushed through his body, wave upon wave until not a drop remained inside him.

Afterward, he wrapped his arms around her, moving so her back was pressed to his front, but he held her tightly, not letting her go.

“We don’t sleep together, remember?” she said.

“There are a lot of things we don’t do together. Do you want to leave?” He waited but she snuggled in.

He smiled, kissing her shoulder.

“I’ll go to my own bed in a moment. What am I going to say to Rhianna?”

“I don’t want to talk about my sister with my cock still inside you.”

“But she’s going to ask questions.”

“I’ll deal with her.” He took her hands in his, kissing her fingers. On her left arm, he saw a love heart tattoo. It was the same as the one on his sister. “You got these together?”

“Yeah, it wasn’t long after we graduated. I was feeling lonely, and Rhianna said—can I say her name?”

“Yes.”

“She told me I was never going to be lonely because I would always have her. I wouldn’t be on my own. This is part of our bond.” She tensed in his arms.

“Don’t.”

“You don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“You’re feeling bad because you’re here in this bed with me.”

“Did you have to sleep with all of her friends?”

He burst out laughing. “Believe it or not, I didn’t sleep with all of her friends, just the ones I liked.”

She tried to get away and he held on to her. “Stop.”

“Nope.”

“I don’t like this.”

“Tough. You’re not going or reacting like this. I’ve got you. I’m holding on to you, and I’m not letting you go.”

She stopped wriggling.

“You don’t just have my sister,” he said. “You also have me.”

She scoffed. “This is an arrangement with you. I know for a fact that when you’re bored with me, you’re going to get rid of me. I’m not an idiot. I know how these things work, and besides, your sister has told me plenty of times what a cad you are.”

“Then enjoy the time you’ve got, because I will get bored and move on. You know that, and so do I.”

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“I like him, Claire,” Rhianna said.

Claire glanced across the café to see who her friend was referring to. “That’s bad news.”

The man was dressed up in a suit and each time he reached for his coffee, the ink he wore showed. The man in question was one of Gabriel’s guards.

“Please, like Gabriel would care.”



“He’s your brother, of course, he’s going to care. What’s his name?” Claire asked.

The smile on Rhianna’s face broke her heart. “Louis. He’s really nice.”

“I bet he is. Is that the guy who took you home from the nightclub?”

“No, that was Drake. He’s an asshole but Louis has been working for Gabriel for a couple of months. He’s really sweet. He’s always nice and whenever I want to go somewhere, he takes me, no questions asked.”

“Sweetie, that’s his job.”

“I knew you wouldn’t understand.”

“I do.” She reached across the table, taking her friend’s hands. “Please, I do. I think you need to be careful is all.”

“Careful?”

“You don’t know what he’s like. He works for your brother.”

Rhianna rolled her eyes. “I’ve accepted what my brother does. I don’t like it. I don’t have to like it and it’s why I always make time to help others. I work at several shelters, volunteer when I can.”

“I know, but you’d do that anyway.”

Her friend sighed. “Gabriel doesn’t want me to work and so I do what I must. He’s worried I’ll be taken advantage of.”

“You do have a good heart,” Claire said.

The waitress brought them their breakfast and Claire said her thanks. Picking up her knife and fork, she dug into the pancakes. Work had been getting busier at the private strip club that she still didn’t know the name of, not that she wanted too many details. She kept her head down, a smile on her face, and Rhianna was none the wiser.

“Anyway, enough about me. You’ve been spending a lot of time away. What have you been doing?”

“Not a lot. Hunting for apartments.”

“Come on, I see the smile on your face. You cannot tell me that’s all about apartment hunting. You’ve met a man, haven’t you?”

“No man,” she said, a little too quickly. Picking up her coffee, she took a generous sip. “I’m just trying to find a place but every time I do, I get a call with a ridiculous offer or that someone else was willing to pay double. I tell you, times are tough.”

“At least you have a job,” Rhianna said.

“Hey, don’t be sad. Your brother takes care of you. There are a lot of people who would love to have someone take care of them.”

“You wouldn’t. It’s why you want to get out of the apartment so fast.”

“I’m used to taking care of myself. Don’t you worry about me.” She ate her breakfast and afterward, they went shopping. Saving up for an apartment, she only watched as Rhianna shopped, while she gave her opinion on the outfits she wanted.

As they were leaving a shoe shop, Rhianna smiled. “You’re so not getting away with not buying something.” Rhianna looked up from her cell phone.

“Come again?”

“Gabriel has sent me a personal request to buy you and myself each a ball gown. There’s an event this weekend, he wants us both to go.”

“Both of us?”

“Yep.” Rhianna frowned. “That’s strange. I normally have to order him around to include you.”

“Maybe he doesn’t want the hassle.”

“Or maybe my brother has found the error of his ways and realizes how awesome it is to have you around. You do cook so much, and the food’s amazing.” Rhianna draped her arm across her shoulder. “We need to find you a guy.”

“I don’t need a guy.”

“Then you could always date my brother,” Rhianna said.

“Yeah, right.” It wasn’t like they were actually dating now. They were ... having fun. Private fun.

“Come on, we can fight about this later.”

For the rest of the day, she was taken from shop to shop, forced to try on over a dozen gowns that were way overpriced. She’d never felt so uncomfortable in her life and she was thankful when Rhianna seemed content with another white gown showing off a great expanse of thigh and chest. Claire was past caring and was more than content to just cook.

Rhianna left to make the necessary arrangements for their hair and makeup. She got stuck making meatballs with some pasta. The pasta came from the grocery store, and there was no way she was even attempting homemade today.

Her nerves were shot.

She was finishing up the sauce when Gabriel wrapped his arms around her waist. “I messaged you,” he said.

She frowned. “You did?” She pulled the cell phone out of her pocket and groaned. “Sorry.”

He kissed her temple. “I’ll have to punish you later.” He let her go just as his sister entered the kitchen.

“You’re back early.”

“Business is slow.”

“Please, as if it is ever slow. I remember a time I could go weeks without seeing you. I wonder what changed.”

“You exaggerate.” Gabriel took a seat at the counter, picking up a carrot stick and taking a bite.

“Whatever. Anyway, I got her a kick-ass dress. It’s going to help her pick up a man.”

“I’m standing right here and I’ve told you, I don’t need a man.”

“For all you know, she might have a man, Rhianna. Someone who doesn’t want to be known, who is quite possessive,” Gabriel said.

Rhianna laughed. “I know Claire and she wouldn’t be with someone who wants to keep everything private.”

“I think we should eat now. I’ll serve up at the dinner table.” She carried the sauce to the table, followed by the pasta.

While she sat on one side of Gabriel, Rhianna sat on the other. She’d hoped the conversation would change topics, but clearly no one who would listen to her, as Rhianna continued about her need for her to be with a man.

Gabriel wasn’t helping matters as he played along.

“You think she’ll find someone at this society event?” Gabriel asked.

“Why are you going?” Claire asked. “How did you get an invite?”

“I’m a businessman with plenty of ... contacts.”

“And how does this help you?”

“It’s all business,” Rhianna said. “Stop changing the subject. Yes, she’s gorgeous.”

“I’m sitting right here.”

“And what kind of men does she usually go for?” Gabriel asked.

“The bad ones,” Claire said, glaring at Gabriel. “The kind you don’t take home to a parent or brag about having.”

“It’s good you don’t have any family then.”

Gritting her teeth, Rhianna laughed. “Come on, Tony, and what’s-his-name back in high school don’t count. She likes men who are sweet, caring, or at least appear that way. It’s how Tony lasted so long. He must have had a sweet bone in his body to bring back her stuff.”

“Don’t, Rhianna,” she said.

“What about her other boyfriends?” Gabriel asked.

“That’s it. No more. Not even one-night stands. She’s not into those. Claire has always been the one looking for love.”

She’d heard enough. Pushing her chair back, she left the table without a word. She stormed into the kitchen, scraped her food into a bowl, and left it to cool down before she put it in

the fridge. Staring at the dishes, she was tempted to wash them but decided they could do it.

After going to her room, she picked up the paper where two more apartments had been advertised.

Claire expected her door to open. She had hoped it would be Rhianna; that would have been nice. However, Gabriel's shoes came into her line of vision.

“Say what you've got to say and then leave.”

“This is my place. This is my room.”

She dropped the paper. “I'm trying to find another place to stay.”

“And it's going badly for you.”

“How do you even know that?” She glanced at the paper then back at him. “It's you, isn't it? You're the reason I'm struggling.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Don't lie.” She growled and stood up, pacing the room and stopping in front of him. “Why?”

“You've only been with two men.”

“So?”

“Why?”

“You answer my question. Why have you stopped me from finding a place? You didn't want me to be here and now you're stopping me, why? What the hell, Gabriel?” she asked.

He stepped closer to her. “You know why I'm not letting you go and now it's time for you to answer my question.”

She stood her ground this time, not allowing him to scare her off. “What does it matter?”

“Two men.”

“And both of them were assholes. Like I said, I have the worst taste in men.” She went to pass him but he gripped her arm, stopping her. “Don't think too much into it. I wasn't a virgin when I entered into this *thing* with you.”

“You were a woman who hadn’t been shown what could be,” he said.

She lifted her head to look him in the eye. His eyes were dark, sinful. She loved to drown in them. Whenever they were alone, being in his arms, his cock inside her, she forgot everything and just allowed him to dominate, to take over, to flood her world, and she loved every minute. There was nothing he did that she hated.

Even now as he grabbed her, controlled her, she enjoyed it. She didn’t know how it had happened, but she’d gotten Gabriel’s attention. Part of her was afraid of what that meant exactly, but another didn’t care. She liked the edge of not knowing, the surprise.

He cupped her cheek, tilting her head back. His gaze was on her lips. “You’re not going to be with anyone else but me.”

“I know.”

“Good. Remember that when you’re at the party with me. You’ll be on my arm. No other man will know who you belong to, but I will know. At the end of the night, Rhianna will be taken home, and you, you’re going to come with me.”

## Chapter Seven

Claire looked stunning. There was no other word for it. She lit up the entire room. Gabriel couldn't look away.

"Tell me again why all the press are here?" Rhianna asked.

"It's an event with a lot of political and business people. If they weren't here, it would be a problem."

"Tell me why you're so important."

"I'm a businessman, Rhianna. Play nice. I don't want to have to send you home looking all miserable because you couldn't do as you're told."

His sister proceeded to stick her tongue out and then walk off as if she owned the place. No matter how much he tried to keep her reserved, she seemed content to simply do her own thing. "You haven't spoken since we got here," he said, looking at the gorgeous woman on his arm.

He was going to have to kill his sister. The dress, well, any man within a mile of his woman was going to be drooling. Maybe he should convince his sister to do something in regard to fashion? It was a possibility, and then he wouldn't have to worry or deal with her being in his life every second of every day.

"I don't have a lot to say," she said.

Her hands were clenched at her sides. She looked nervous. Taking her hand, he threaded it around his arm with a smile. "Don't be nervous. They can always tell if you're nervous."

"I really shouldn't be here, Gabriel."

"You're here to make me look good."

"I'm going to make a fool of myself."

"You're not. I won't leave you alone. How about that? I'll keep you at my side all night?"

She nibbled on her lip, still seeming nervous. He squeezed her hand.

"No, it's fine. I can handle this."

Gabriel moved her to an alcove. Placing one hand above her head, he cupped her thigh. “You don’t have to handle anything while I’m around,” he said. “I’ll take care of you.” He slid his hand beneath the fabric of her skirt and wished they were back at his place. There was no way in hell he was going to analyze why he considered it *their* place. It was his place. She was merely his plaything.

She tilted her head back and he stared at her full lips. They’d look so good wrapped around his dick. With the way he held her, he couldn’t touch her face, and with their audience, there sure as fuck was no way to push her to her knees. Later tonight though.

“Gabriel, I can’t rely on you. Our time is running out.” She pressed her body against his. “And right now, you need to back up before someone thinks something that’s not the case.” She moved away from him.

Her shoulders were square and she looked tense. Out in the room, she had an air of authority, confidence. She was faking it for all of them. This wasn’t her domain but like a true survivor, she wasn’t going to show any weakness.

He just wanted to take her to the nearest room and fuck her until she screamed his name. As a waitress passed, he took a glass of champagne. The woman stopped, giving him the eye that told him he’d be in for a good time with her, but he wasn’t interested. The only woman he wanted had taken her own glass and stood in the center of the room, watching, listening, and looking stunning.

Rather than invade her air of confidence, he kept her in his sights. It wasn’t long before he was approached by a budding politician. So far, the man in front of him had only made his political intentions in private but if he was willing to fund him, he’d make sure his life would run smoothly for any business venture he needed. Gabriel had dealt with a lot of men who wanted his money. It was all with an agenda and the only way he parted with cash was to make his life easier.

Greed was easier to deal with.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw someone he didn’t recognize approach Claire. Rhianna had also joined her. He



gritted his teeth as the man placed a hand at the base of Claire's back and walked her onto the dance floor.

That was his back, on his woman, and no one should be touching her but him. Another man danced with his sister. Finishing off his champagne, he left the conversation going on around him midway through. He wasn't interested in whatever they had to say. The man with Claire had his hand way too close to her ass and if he wasn't careful, he was about to commit murder. No one touched his woman.

"Leave," he said, wrapping his arm around Claire's waist and glaring at the man.

"Let the lady decide who she wants to dance with," the fucker said.

"Let me make one thing clear for you, this will not end well. You don't know who you're messing with."

Claire tensed in his arms. She let go of the man and spun in his arms. "It's fine. I'll dance with you."

He continued to glare at the man behind her.

"You don't have to put up with this shit."

Claire glanced back and smiled. "It's fine."

"She belongs to me." Rhianna was far enough away not to hear. He hoped the bastard argued with him, made a move, did anything that would make him have to retaliate, but he didn't. He simply stepped back and left, which annoyed him.

"Did you have to do that?" she asked.

"You're mine."

"We were dancing."

"His hand was way too close to your ass."

She let her hands go. "He was being a gentleman, and he didn't touch my ass. I told him I wasn't comfortable with his hand on my bare back, so he was being polite. Ugh, I'm just a fuck to you anyway, I don't know why it matters." She stepped away from him.

He counted to three then followed her. Grabbing her arm, he pulled her down the hall and found a closet.

After slamming the door closed, he gripped the back of her neck and drew her close. He possessed her mouth, ravishing her lips. She moaned his name but he didn't want to hear anything else. Once he'd plunged his tongue inside, he spun her around, splaying her hands flat against the door.

"Anyone could come."

"I don't care. I think you need a reminder." He tore her panties; they were useless anyway. Then he opened his zipper and pulled out his already hardening cock.

Claire was wet as he ran the tip up and down her slit. He heard her cry and smirked. "You know who you belong to. Who will give you what you want?"

"Shut up, Gabriel."

"That's right. It's me, all me." With the tip at her entrance, he slammed in balls deep, not letting her get accustomed to the width of him. He made her take it all. Pulling out, he slammed back inside, gritting his teeth as he did. Her tight cunt pulsed around him. He grabbed her hips, thrusting hard and deep, not holding back. Their pants filled the room, and when he couldn't take it anymore, he came, filling her with his cum.

This wasn't nice or sweet. This was a hard fucking, reminding her who she belonged to.

He pulled out of her and pressed her back against the door.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He covered her pussy with his hand, sliding two fingers through her wet slit. He rubbed back and forth. "Now I get to watch you come." He moved down, filling her with three fingers, pumping inside her, feeling his cum spill out of her.

"Gabriel?"

"That's my cum inside you. You belong to me. The only man to touch you is me. No one else gets a chance to feel how good you are. How tight this cunt is. They don't get to hear the sounds you make." He rubbed his palm against her before drawing his fingers up and working her clit. She moaned. "That's right. Give me your cum." He kissed her lips, biting into her bottom lip.

Another whimper.

“You’re so close.” He pushed her dress aside and her tit spilled out. He suckled the hard bud into his mouth, biting down to make her cry out. She arched up and he watched as she came.

This woman belonged to him. He didn’t share and when it came to Claire, there was no way he was going to allow another man, polite or not, to touch her.

She was his. Every single part of her.

He didn’t let her stop at the first orgasm. Even as she gripped his arm, he wasn’t done. He pushed her to a second one, and this time, he swallowed her cries. Cupping her neck, he kissed her hard.

“You ruined my dress,” she said.

“It’s time for us to go.”

“Rhianna?”

“I’ll get a message to her.”

“She’s your sister.”

“And she knows the drill.” He grabbed her hand and they left. He messaged his driver to meet them around the back. After he removed his jacket, he flung it over her shoulders, hiding his handiwork. He was nowhere near done with her, not even close.

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“How long have we been friends?” Rhianna asked.

Claire frowned. “A lifetime and two, possibly more.”

“I know, it has been so long, hasn’t it?”

“Is there a point to this?” Claire sipped at her coffee, glancing around the shop.

“I was just wondering when you were going to tell me the truth about you fucking my brother.”

Claire choked on her drink. Grabbing a napkin, she started to press it against her face, trying to clear the mess she’d made.

Rhianna chuckled. "I guess I shocked you with my question."

"I, er, I..." Should she lie? Tell the truth? Staring at her friend, she couldn't bear the idea of hurting her.

"Don't lie and don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. I see the way he looks at you."

"Are you mad?" she asked.

"I'm surprised, but I'm not blind. I see the way you two are with each other. When you enter a room, it's all Gabe looks at. I think he's in love with you."

Claire burst out laughing. It was just so ludicrous. She started to gain the attention of a couple of customers. Covering her lips, she tried to contain her laughter.

"I'm not joking," Rhianna said.

"I'm sorry but it's not going to happen. Me and your brother. It's not ... no, not even a little. I promise. He's not in love with me." She sipped at her coffee. "How did you find out?"

"Like it was hard to see?" Rhianna rolled her eyes. "It was my brother. When he didn't think I was looking, he'd touch you and watch you. It was like the moment you were near him, he gravitated toward you. At first, I thought it was just me seeing things, then he confirmed it the other night with that guy who was dancing with you. I've never seen him lose it like that. Not in a public setting with prying eyes. He doesn't claim any woman."

"He doesn't like other men playing with what belongs to him." She pressed her lips together.

"Do you want to be with him or is he forcing you?"

"No, this isn't forced and we're not together." She winced. "Wow, it makes me sound like a slut."

"It doesn't."

"Why aren't you angry? You hated it when your friends tried to get to you because they wanted to be with Gabriel."

“Simple, you were my friend long before he showed any interest in you. As far as I’m concerned, you’ll be my friend after.”

“Yes, after.” She didn’t even want to think about what it was going to be like after they broke up. It wouldn’t really matter. It wasn’t like she had to deal with him all that much. In fact, she rarely saw him.

“Do you love him?” Rhianna’s question pulled her out of her thoughts.

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“Love, no. It’s not love and I really don’t feel comfortable saying exactly what this is.” She scrunched up her nose. “It’s sex. There, I’ve said it.”

Rhianna sat back, staring at her. “You do have feelings for him?”

“Me, have feelings for Gabriel?” She thought about the way he touched her. The heat and passion brimming between them, but that wasn’t love. It was lust.

“It’s okay if you do.”

Claire leaned forward and stared into her friend’s eyes. “Rhianna, me and Gabriel, it’s ... it’s on a time limit. We’re not going to be together for that long. It really isn’t what you think it is.”

“And what if Gabriel keeps on pushing those days?”

“You’ve told me he has limited time for women. I’m nothing special.”

“He’s never treated a woman like he did you at the society event with that guy.”

“Who was that guy?”

“Some businessman’s son. He wasn’t important.”

“I don’t know, he was at that party. He looked pretty important,” she said. She really wanted a change of subject.

“We’re not talking about the party anymore. We’re talking about you and your feelings.”

“Yeah, I had figured.” She picked up her coffee cup. “I really don’t know what to say to you, Rhianna. I mean, Gabriel and I aren’t close. It doesn’t take a genius to realize that and we’re never going to be.” She shrugged.

“You can walk away?”

She pressed her lips together and jerked her head. She didn’t know if it was a head nod or not. This seemed like a really bad conversation to be having with her best friend.

“That’s not an answer. You forget, Claire, I’ve known you my whole life. That kind of action is not an answer and don’t keep trying to pacify me as if it is one since we both know it’s not.”

“When did you get so smart?” Claire asked.

“It would appear when you got so dumb.”

She threw her head back and laughed. “Can we not talk about him anymore? Please. I’m ... it’s all a little ... I don’t know.”

“Intense?”

“Kind of weird because you’re his sister and we’re talking about sex and stuff, and that doesn’t seem right to me.”

This time, Rhianna laughed. “You always were such a prude.”

“And that’s why you love me.”

“I will let it drop so long as you go shopping with me.”

She groaned. “Shopping, really?”

“Yes. Really. You’ve got to come with me and I get to play doll with you.”

“I’ll be the doll?”

Rhianna nodded. “I’ll dress you up real nice.”

She rolled her eyes but she smiled. “Thank you.”

“What for?”

“For not ... you know, ditching me. It means a lot.”

“We’ve been friends longer than we haven’t. I know you’re not with me to get to my brother. I love you like a sister and I

care about you a great deal.” Rhianna reached across the table. “I think you’re amazing and I can only hope Gabriel realizes how special you are. I need to go to the bathroom.”

“You go. I’ll pay.” She watched her friend leave.

She nodded at the waitress for their receipt. Seconds later, she pulled out some money and put it on a small tray before getting to her feet. She was pulling on her jacket as Rhianna arrived.

The sound of motorbikes filled the air. Broken glass, gunshots, and screams erupted.

Claire acted on instinct. She ran to her friend, pushing her down to the ground, covering her as more bullets rang out. Her head was dizzy from the noise. Her heart raced and she kept Rhianna on the ground as it continued to erupt. What the hell was happening?

She didn’t know how long it lasted for, a lifetime, maybe longer, but all of a sudden, the noise stopped even as her ears ached. The silence was almost deafening.

Cries, shouts.

“What’s going on?” Rhianna asked.

“Stay down.” She whispered the words at the sounds of bikes roaring to life and taking off.

Lifting her head, she glanced around. Some people hadn’t made it. A couple of bodies weren’t moving, and she glanced over the room to see the waitress who’d been serving her and Rhianna was on the ground. Part of her head was missing. She felt like she was going to be sick.

## Chapter Eight

Gabriel entered the hospital and felt like he was going to throw up. He hadn't made it in time before the ambulances took everyone away from the crime scene. The news had already been rife with speculations.

Bikers were involved and the suspicion was some kind of turf war. He knew what this was. It was a warning.

Entering the emergency room, he heard the cries and screams. The news had let the entire world know where the victims were being taken. His sister and his woman had been in that very café.

He was pissed off that they hadn't called him yet. He couldn't see them.

"Claire! Rhianna!" He called out to them. He did this repeatedly even as a nurse asked him to step outside. One of his guards took the nurse aside and let her know there would be funding to the hospital if she allowed him to search for his loved ones.

He didn't pause for a second at the mention of loved ones.

One of the curtains opened and there was his sister. He quickly went to her, pulling her in his arms. There were times he hated his sister because she was such a royal pain in the ass. He had the right to hate her and find her annoying, but he wouldn't have anything happen to her. He loved her.

"We're fine. We're both fine," Rhianna said.

"Me too." Claire's voice sounded so distant. She sat on the edge of the bed. Cuts marred her pretty face.

He moved Rhianna aside and cupped Claire's face, tilting her back. She could have been shot or worse.

"She stepped in front of me," Rhianna said. "Protected me. Bullets came all over the place and she put me first."

Claire pulled out of his hold and turned to her friend. "I wanted to protect you. I didn't even realize I was doing it."



“You could have gotten killed,” Rhianna said. “Then who would I get to dress up like a doll?”

Claire laughed. “I’m fine.”

“Why are you both here if you’re fine?” he asked.

“*I’m* fine,” Rhianna said, speaking up first. “Claire made sure I was out of the way. Her body covered mine. The doctors just want to make sure she’s fine. She hit her head pretty hard on the ground and some of the glass, as you can see, cut her.”

“You could have been killed,” he said.

“But I wasn’t. I’m fine. I’m all fine.”

“Let me go and get a doctor.”

Rhianna left, closing the curtain behind her. He couldn’t resist, slamming his lips down on her, cupping the back of her neck and holding her in place as he ravished her mouth. “Don’t ever do anything so fucking stupid again,” he said.

“Saving your sister is stupid?”

He cradled her face and stroked her cheek. “You get the hell out of the way. I don’t care. You save yourself.”

She covered his hands with her own. “I’m fine.”

“Look at you. You’re cut and bleeding. You’re not fine.”

She blew out a breath. “Rhianna knows.”

“She knows what?”

“About us.”

“And?”

“And, right now, I can’t think. It was a bunch of bikers, Gabriel. I saw them. There had to be at least twenty of them. What do they have against a café? It was completely harmless. No one in there was going to hurt them.” She sniffled.

He pulled her into his arms and that was how Rhianna and the doctor found them.

“Right, Claire, you are free to leave.”

“Yay,” she said.

“You do need to remove more of the glass that’s in your hair, so please be careful with that. We would do this for you, but we’re short-staffed right now, and you’ve made a point that you want to leave. Are you the husband?”

“No.”

“Yes,” he said, speaking over Claire.

“She needs to be monitored. If she goes to sleep, she’ll need waking up every couple of hours. Rest, Claire. You’re a hero today.”

“Rhianna’s been telling everyone that I saved her,” Claire said. “I’m not a hero.” She released a yawn. “I’m so tired.”

“Well, you’re not getting any sleep.”

“And I’m starving,” Rhianna said. “Come on, let’s get out of here. There are so many people and not all of them were lucky like us.”

Helping Claire off the bed, he made his way toward the exit where his men were waiting. He’d make the hospital a huge donation.

Rhianna climbed into the car and he helped Claire inside, following her in and pulling her in close to him.

She rested her head against him.

“You can’t sleep.”

“I won’t,” she said. “It’s everything that happened today. It was all so ... intense. One minute we were paying for our food, the next minute, it was raining bullets. I hate them.”

“So do I,” Rhianna said. “They’re going to find them though. There’s no way they can get away with this.”

According to his sources, the café didn’t have any security cameras around. All they had were statements from witnesses who’d experienced high trauma. It was going to be a struggle to bring these men to justice, but he had his own brand he intended to work on.

When they got to his apartment building, he held Claire in his arms. She rested her head against his shoulder and he was very much aware of his sister watching them.

Once inside his apartment, Rhianna went to the kitchen. He hoped while he dealt with his woman that she'd order takeout as his sister was a terrible cook.

He ran her a bath. "I want you to get into the water, but don't put your hair under. I'll deal with that." He kissed her head. "I'll be back with some tweezers to get some of the glass out."

"Gabriel," she said.

He stopped at the door.

"You're going to hurt whoever did this, aren't you?" she asked.

"Do you really want to know the answer to that?"

"Yes."

"The person who did this better run because when I find them, they're never going to be able to identify the body."

"Because they put your sister in danger?"

He stared at her, not really sure how to answer that. He loved his sister and had taken care of her for as long as he could remember, but it was Claire he was going to avenge. His sister was just ... there.

Leaving the bathroom, he entered the kitchen to find his sister pouring out some hot coffee.

"It might help to settle her nerves. I also ordered pizza. It's her favorite."

He nodded, going to the cupboard in the far wall where he kept his emergency first-aid kit.

After pulling it down, he grabbed the tweezers and a bowl.

"She could have died today," Rhianna said.

"And you could have."

"Claire saved me."

"I know."

"Are you angry at me?" Rhianna asked.

"Why would I be angry at you?"

“Claire put herself in danger to protect me. She didn’t think about herself.”

“That wouldn’t make me hate you.”

“But even if you lie to yourself, I know you have feelings for her.”

He went to his sister and pulled her close, kissing her head. “Stop it. I don’t need you to go all teary-eyed on me just yet. I need you to be strong for me. Do you think you can do that?”

“I know I can but you don’t have to hide this relationship from me,” Rhianna said. Her smile was soft as he pulled away. “She’s different from all the other women.”

“Rhianna, don’t get your hopes up.”

“You two have already been together longer than any of your previous relationships.”

“This is not a relationship. It’s a mutually beneficial agreement.”

Rhianna kept on staring into his eyes. He didn’t know exactly what she was looking for but it started to unnerve him the way she watched him.

“You can keep on saying that, but I know you, big brother. I know how you feel, and that’s something you cannot hide, but keep on trying.”

He rolled his eyes and left her to get the pizza when it arrived.

Claire leaned up against the edge of the bath, eyes closed, which opened as he put down the medical kit near the edge of the bath.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.”

He removed his clothes and without an invite, climbed in behind her.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to clean your hair, and then I’ll wash and take care of you.”

“You don’t need to do this,” she said.

“I want to.” It wasn’t a lie. He had this overwhelming need to look after her. To take care of her. With the tweezers in hand, getting the shards were easy, especially since the water hadn’t touched her hair.

“We were going to go shopping. Rhianna wanted to have a little fun and after she found out about us and our arrangement, I felt so bad that I agreed.”

“You both have been close for a long time,” he said. “I’m pleased she didn’t hold our time together against you.”

She chuckled. “I think she’s happy for us. I’ve told her it is on limited time. We’re going to go our separate ways soon.”

He didn’t agree with her.

Silence fell between them. “Are you angry at me for not lying to Rhianna?”

“No. She was going to find out eventually. Especially when you hate me when all of this is over.”

She chuckled. “Then why are you angry?” She looked over her shoulder. “You have no reason to be.”

“You put your life in danger.”

“To save your sister.”

“But what about saving yourself?”

“I’m fine.”

“No, I don’t accept that. Next time, you hide, you got it?”

“You think there is going to be a next time?”

“Always be on your guard, Claire. You know that.” He kissed her lips. “Now, let me handle this.”

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Gabriel’s touch was gentle as he removed the glass. The water got cold and he heated it right up for her. Claire expected him to leave but he stayed true to his word, washing her body then her hair. She closed her eyes, enjoying his ministrations and not looking too deeply as to why she enjoyed his touch.

Rhianna called out to them to say pizza had arrived.

He climbed out from behind her and she admired the length of his body. The curve of his ass. He grabbed a towel and she got up so he could wrap it around her.

Once out of the bath, he placed a towel in her hair. There were no signs of any more glass in her hair, nor did she detect any rubbing against her scalp. As they left the bathroom, he held a robe open for her, and she stepped inside while he quickly pulled on a pair of sweat pants.

She didn't linger too long and joined Rhianna, who sat on the sofa, sipping coffee and eating pizza.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling fine. I don't know about your brother though. He's ... different."

"He's got his killer face on."

"Killer face?"

"You do realize the café that was hit is in his city, right? This is his turf. The moment the bikers shot at us, they started a war."

"Oh."

Rhianna raised her brows. "Oh?"

"I don't know what to say."

Her friend laughed. "Has anyone told you how adorable you are?"

"Not recently." She looked up as Gabriel joined them. He didn't stay, using the excuse that he had business to take care of in his office. He took pizza and coffee with him, disappearing from sight.

"He's so pissed. I would hate to be part of that MC, or have anything to do with them. He's going to tear them apart."

"Does it bother you at times, that he is what he is?"

"It used to but I don't know, I guess I got used to the fact that there are always monsters around. It depends on what kind of monster is in charge. My brother is ... he's ... he keeps this place safe. Yes, I have to have a guard to take me places, and

it's not always easy, but I've gotten used to it." She sighed. "His heart is in the right place. Most of the time."

"And when it's not?" she asked.

"Then it's not. I can't do anything about that. I can only fix what affects me, and I've got no problem with Gabriel going after those men. They deserve it. There were kids and families at that café."

Claire frowned. "Do you think it was a direct hit? Someone knew you were there?"

"Could have been. Someone could have tipped off one of his enemies. I honestly don't know, babe. You eat some food."

Claire ate four slices of pizza and drank two large cups of coffee. Gabriel didn't appear once.

The coffee always had the opposite effect on Rhianna and her best friend fell asleep on the sofa and started to snore. She covered her friend with a blanket. Unraveling her hair, she ran a brush through it. The length had now dried.

Going to bed wasn't an option. Where she'd been tired earlier, she suddenly felt wired.

She went to Gabriel's office and raised her hand to knock, but she stopped herself. Grabbing the doorknob, she twisted it and let herself into his office.

The light was on and he stood at his window, looking out over the city. "Where's Rhianna?"

"She's asleep. Snoring, actually."

He turned toward her.

The look on his face made a shiver work down her spine. "She's fine," she said.

"I don't care."

She stepped into the room. "Then I'm fine."

His gaze moved down her body and the heat shining back at her was hard to ignore. Licking her dry lips, she approached him.

"I'm not in a good place right now," he said.

She opened the robe, dropping it to the floor, followed by the towel so she was completely naked for his gaze.

“What are you doing?”

She didn't have a clue.

The anger in his eyes, she had to dampen it out. To help him find some kind of peace.

She walked up to him, put her hand on the low part of his stomach, tilted her head back, and stared into his eyes. “I'm right here.” She offered him a smile.

Pressing a kiss to his heavily inked, muscular chest, she glanced up, but his gaze was as hard as ever.

That just wouldn't do.

After kissing him again, she moved down his chest to kneel on the floor. She held on to the waistband of his pants and slowly lowered them down. As she kissed above the length of his cock, her gaze was still on him. Wrapping her fingers around his dick, she licked the tip. His pre-cum gliding across her tongue, she took him into her mouth.

“Fuck!” He bunched her hair as she started to bob her mouth over his length, finding a pace that she just knew would drive him wild.

He suddenly pulled out of her mouth and using his grip in her hair, he pulled her up and placed her on his desk. “Nothing can happen to you,” he said.

“Nothing has happened to me, Gabriel. I'm right here.”

He spread her legs and she cried out as he slammed every inch of his cock inside her, stretching her.

He took possession of her lips as he fucked her hard and fast. Gabriel wasn't done though. He pulled out of her, gripped her hips, and moved her so her stomach was flat against his desk. He moved her feet apart and spread her ass cheeks wide.

“Now that's a pretty ass, Claire. Do you have any idea how much I've dreamed of this?”

“No.”



“I’ve thought about it a hell of a lot.” He stroked between her cheeks, touching her anus. Warmth flooded her body as heat spilled into her cheeks. She gasped as the tip of his finger grazed across her forbidden entrance, but that didn’t stop him. He continued to stroke and work her body to a fever pitch.

She heard a drawer opening and she cried out as something cool and wet touched her asshole. He worked his fingers in and out, spreading the lubricant.

“I had hoped to take my time, Claire, but I just can’t wait.” The tip of his cock pressed against her ass and she tensed up.

He bit down on her neck as one of his hands went between her thighs, touching her clit. “Don’t fight it. If you don’t want it, tell me to stop.”

She moaned as he teased her clit.

Slowly, he started to ease inside her and she rocked back. Even as there was a slight nudge of pain, she didn’t want him to stop. The pleasure far outweighed any kind of pain.

“Fuck, you’re tight. I should have known.”

He started to pump in and out of her, driving her higher. Her orgasm was so close but he stopped playing with her clit, his hands going to her hips. “I wish you could see this. Your hot little ass all wrapped around my dick. So fucking pretty. Your body was designed to take me. You’re hungry for me.” He growled the words, thrusting inside her.

When she didn’t think she could take it anymore, his fingers were once again between her thighs, teasing her, torturing her. He brought her to the brink of pleasure but held her poised, not letting her go over, even as she wanted to. His name spilled from her lips and only when Gabriel was ready did he let her come.

She screamed his name as he fucked her ass. His orgasm joined with hers, spilling his cum into her ass as he did.

He didn’t let her go. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close.

She didn’t know how long they stayed there in this position. Something had changed between them. She wasn’t exactly

sure what, but it no longer felt like an arrangement.

## Chapter Nine

*One week later*

Gabriel climbed out of the car, buttoning up his jacket as he looked out at the endless landscape of nothing.

Lucas's clubhouse was set in the middle of nowhere. Their turf was nothing but a wasteland, and soon his one station would be gone. It had taken a lot of favors, money, and blackmail to get what he wanted today.

He wasn't going to wait for the perfect opportunity nor was he going to help the cops bring in a bunch of wanted bikers. Lucas had pushed too far, and this was his punishment.

Entering the clubhouse, he saw the bodies of the fallen bikers, and Gabriel didn't give a flying fuck. They all deserved it as far as he was concerned. Each and every single one of them got what was coming to them.

Lucas though, hung upside down, blood spilling from his chin.

Gabriel grabbed a chair and sat down.

"You fucker. You think you can stop me?"

"Look around you, Lucas." He took his time to survey the damage. "Every single one of your bikers are here." He reached down and grabbed the head of the nearest one. "All of them dead."

"There are more."

"Not of your club, there's not. This is every man. Don't worry, I checked. You were going to have a party in celebration for invading my turf. My land."

"I warned you."

"In case you don't realize this, Lucas. I don't follow orders. I don't do anything I don't want. You came to my city and took out one of my café's." It wasn't owned by him personally, but in his city, he considered every small business was a part of him.

“You think I’m the only one who knows about your woman? It wasn’t exactly hard, you know. You’ve got people who want to see you fall.”

Gabriel was very much aware of the anonymous tip and it had only taken a few PIs to find the man who’d been dancing with Claire was the same man who’d been at the café, serving coffee. The man had invaded the event, pretended to be a businessman to get close. He’d seen an opportunity and well, Gabriel had already ended his miserable existence and was being fed to sharks as they spoke now. There would be no memory of him.

No one would care.

He was nothing.

No one.

“But you were the one who made sure I knew and you didn’t exactly keep it a secret, did you?”

“Fuck you.”

Gabriel laughed. His men had already laid out a tray with his favorite knives. Stroking the blade, he picked up the largest one, holding the tip against his finger. He thought about Claire. The pain she’d been in. The glass in her hair. She could have died.

No matter what he intended to do after this, he would make this son of a bitch pay for the danger he put her and his sister in.

Lucas hung upside down, his arms tied behind his back. Perfectly vulnerable and exposed. He didn’t think of where would be the right place to make the pain last, or to keep him alive longer. He reacted. Slamming the blade into Lucas’s thigh, he relished the screams that rang through the air. He repeated the action. When the blade was covered in blood, he put it back on the tray and took a smaller one. This time to slash through the skin.

The moment Lucas passed out, he paused, wiping the sweat from his brow. He got his men to wake him up, throwing buckets of piss at him. Again, the torture commenced and

hours later, the floor was covered in blood, but his anger wasn't over.

Gabriel moved to the exit as his men doused the remains in gasoline. He moved toward his car, stripping out of his clothes, which were taken back inside the building. He pulled on a fresh suit and stared at the clubhouse.

As the last of his men exited, flames started to engulf the place. Watching it burn, he waited until there was nothing left before climbing into his car. Even as he went, he called Claire on his way. She was working that night and he needed her now.

He'd already wiped all the blood from his hands and ran a hand down his face. He needed her. One last time he had to have her.

Like all the times before, she didn't answer her damn cell phone. He'd already told his man to take him to her, and the drive only fueled his need. Killing Lucas was supposed to put this monster to bed.

Arriving at the private mansion, he climbed out of the car and made his way to his office. He passed Casey on the way and told her to get Claire to his office. Sitting at his desk, he put his hands flat on the desk.

There was no fear of hurting her. He'd never hurt Claire, at least not physically.

Seconds passed. Maybe even minutes.

The door opened and there was Claire, dressed for work, her body on display.

"Gabriel." She stepped toward him but stopped the moment she looked into his eyes. "What's going on?"

He got to his feet.

"Gabriel?"

He didn't speak, just advanced to her. She stepped back and he kept on following her. Her back hit the door and he slammed his hands either side of her head, trapping her.

"This is exactly where you need to be," he said.

“What’s going on?”

He took possession of her lips, sliding one of his hands down to move between the fabric at her thigh. He touched her pussy, feeling how wet she was. Working his fingers beneath her dress, he touched her clit and fingered her, moving down to feel how tight she was.

She cried out and he stopped kissing her to watch.

“You’re going to come on my fingers. I’m not going to stop until you give me what I want.”

“Please,” she said.

“I know. I can feel you. Come on me, Claire. Let me see how much you like it. Come on, baby.”

She rocked her hips against his hand and he moaned, not wanting her to stop.

“That’s right, take your pleasure. You know you can.”

When she came, he watched, absorbing every single part and relishing all of it. She was sheer fucking perfection.

Taking hold of her hand, he moved toward his sofa and sat down. He let her go and lowered the zip of his pants, working his cock out. Running his hands up and down the length, he watched her. He held his hand back out again for her to take, which she did. He pulled her close so she straddled his lap, and he teased his cock at the entrance of her pussy after shoving her panties out of the way.

He worked her over his dick, taking hold of her hips to show her just what he wanted, and she gave it to him, crying out for more as he fucked her, harder still.

It felt so fucking amazing.

She gripped his shoulders as he moved within her. Having her on top wasn’t enough for him, and so he slid her down to her back so he could work inside her pussy, filling her up.

“Gabriel?”

He covered her mouth as he fucked her, finding his own release and flooding her pussy with his cum one final time. Closing his eyes, he basked in the moment, feeling the release

right down to his core. It was next to impossible to want to stop.

He did though.

The orgasm ebbed away and he wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight. “Now, we’re done.”

He felt her tense up but he didn’t let her go.

Was she going to make a scene? Make this harder than it needed to be?

After a few seconds passed, he was ready to deal with whatever outburst that might come from her. He pulled out of her pussy, slid his cock back into his pants, and turned his back on her. Gabriel heard rustling but he didn’t look. She hadn’t spoken.

Only when he couldn’t stand the silence did he turn around to find her already at the door, about to open it.

“Don’t you have any questions?” he asked.

He watched her spine straighten as she turned to look back at him.

“You made it perfectly clear. I don’t need to ask anything else.”

“Claire.”

“Goodbye, Gabriel.” She left his office with her head held high. No commotion. She didn’t even slam the door closed. In fact, she looked utterly calm and serene as she moved. What would it have taken to get a single rise out of her?

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The following day, Claire pushed the last of her clothing into a bag as Rhianna kept on trying to talk to her.

“Look, there has to be some mistake.”

“No mistake.”

“But he loves you.”

She scoffed. “Nope. He doesn’t. I did tell you this was all about sex, but you didn’t want to believe me. It’s over. Our time has come to an end.” She moved toward the bathroom,

grabbing her toothbrush and a few sanitary items before shoving them into her bag as well.

“You’re not taking your dress,” Rhianna said. “You know you don’t have to leave.”

After Gabriel had dumped her last night—she did think it was rather cold of him, but she wasn’t going to be the kind of woman to make a scene—she’d come back to his apartment, slept, and now, she intended to move on. There was an apartment that had called her back that very morning, and she didn’t care where it was, she was taking it.

“Rhianna, there’s no way I’m going to be able to wear that thing.” She pointed at the white ball gown she’d been provided to look pretty on his arm. “And no, I can’t stay. I’ve got things to do. You know. A life to lead. Being here was never part of the plan and he’s done me a favor.”

“What about working for him?” Rhianna asked.

“I’ve already spoken to my boss. She says she’s more than happy with me to keep on working for her. I think I’m going to look for another job. Have a clean break.”

“Does this mean you’re going to stop wanting to hang out with me?” Rhianna sounded so sad.

She put all of her items down and moved toward her friend, cupping her face. “No, that doesn’t mean I don’t want to hang out with you. You’re the best part of all of this. I hope you know that.”

“I don’t like that you want to leave,” Rhianna said.

“Imagine if it was you. You’ve been in an agreement and he ends it sooner than you expected. Would you really want to stay because he’s going to have other women, Rhianna?”

“Do you love him?”

“No.” She pulled away.

“You’re lying.”

“If you say so.” She checked through her stuff one final time and picked it up. “I’ll call you as soon as I get there. Okay? Please, don’t worry, and don’t stress out. You told me



stressing leads to wrinkles.” She honestly didn’t know if that was true.

She walked toward the door of the apartment and stepped out. Closing the door, she held her head high.

This, she could do. She loved her best friend but being away from Gabriel would be even better. She pressed the button for the elevator, waiting for it to take her somewhere else, anywhere else.

Pulling her backpack on, she held her case, and the doors opened. She tensed up as she caught sight of Gabriel. He looked like he hadn’t slept all night.

“Claire,” he said.

“Gabriel.” She stepped onto the elevator but he made no move to leave.

She waited, hoping for this final part of her leaving all to herself.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

The elevator doors closed. Great, he was going to come with her.

“Claire.”

She turned to look at him. “I don’t have to answer you, Gabriel.”

“You’re packed.”

“I’m not staying at your apartment. This was never part of the plan, anyway. I’ve got some money saved up.”

“What about the place I bought for you?” he asked.

“I didn’t want it then and I don’t want it now.”

“Claire, stop being stubborn.”

She sighed. “I’m not being stubborn. You’re clearly not used to a woman dealing with whatever last night was. This is me dealing and I can handle it. Believe me.” She willed the elevator to take them down.

“You didn’t cause a scene.”

“There was no reason to.” She wanted to burst into tears. Not once during their time together had Gabriel ever made her feel like an easy fuck until last night. After he’d told her it was over, and the way he’d done so, she felt sick to her stomach. He’d been cold. “Did you get a kick out of last night?” she asked. “Did it make you feel all special?”

“Claire?”

“You know what, I don’t want to know. Forget it.” She shook her head. “I thought you had more class than the way you ended things. I guess I was wrong.”

The elevator doors opened up and she stepped out, but he caught her wrist.

“Don’t make a scene, Gabriel. You hate them, remember?”

He gritted his teeth and let her go.

Her heart raced but she stepped out and into freedom. She nodded at the receptionist, knowing this would be the last time she saw this place. There was no way she would ever come back to Rhianna for help. She would always confide in her best friend and that wouldn’t change, but favors were not in the cards.

She found a cab waiting and she gave the driver the address for her new place. After putting her bags in the trunk, she climbed into the back and waited as he pulled into the main traffic.

Leaning her head back, she looked up at the building. Was Rhianna looking at her?

She shook her head. It was stupid and pointless to think of what might have been.

“Are you okay, honey?” the cab driver asked.

She nodded her head but the tears she’d been keeping at bay started to spill over. “I’m fine. Honestly, I’m fine. There is nothing to worry about.” She took a deep breath, and a second. In and out, she could do this.

She could handle anything.

Sniffing, she glanced out of the window and rubbed at her chest. The pain wasn’t real. She didn’t love Gabriel.

He was an asshole.

A monster.

A prick.

He'd dumped her after fucking her. He'd used her. There was no way in hell she was going to ever have feelings for such a man. He was a complete and total dickhead.

But he'd been hers. For a few short days, a couple of weeks, he'd been hers. In her mind, she ran through the time in his kitchen, the way he'd trapped her. His hard body keeping her in place. It changed to each time they were together. The feel of his lips, his hands, all of it.

“Are you sure you're okay?” the cab driver asked again.

“Yeah, just, a bad break up.”

“Someone you loved?”

She shook her head and then nodded. “Yeah, I think so, or it wouldn't hurt this much, would it?” She sniffled. “It will be fine.” There was nothing that couldn't be solved with distance, ice cream, and a good old cry. She only hoped getting rid of her feelings would be so simple.

## Chapter Ten

“You are a complete and total fucking asshole,” Rhianna said the moment he entered his apartment.

Gabriel didn't even try to protect himself as his sister started to attack him. It wasn't very nice but he took the pain of her fists. He didn't exactly feel like himself at all. “Back off.”

“No, I won't back off. You broke things off with her. How could you?”

“She knew the drill.”

“Do *you* know the drill? Do you know what you've done?” she asked.

“I didn't mean for her to leave but she has. You're going to have to get over it.”

She growled and stormed away. “You know, for someone so smart, you're so fucking dumb at times. I mean, seriously, what is your deal? Do I have to spell it out for you?”

“I have no idea what you're talking about.”

“No?” She stepped up close to him. “Do you feel anything right now? Did you see her leave? What was it like to watch her walk away or better yet, not to even cry?”

“Are we done with this?” It was early in the morning but he went straight to his liquor cabinet. He was so fucking done with this conversation already.

“You'd like that, wouldn't you, to be done? To have everything neatly tied away into their own respective boxes, but it doesn't work like that. It will never work like that.” She shook her head. “Ugh, I have to be the person to spell this out. You love her.”

He paused with the glass next to his lips and stared at his sister. “You've been watching way too many romance movies.” He shook her head. “You don't know what you're talking about.”

He moved toward his window and looked out over the city.

His sister laughed.

“Oh, my God, you really do love her. I see it now.”

He rolled his eyes. “What is it going to take to get some peace now?” He pulled out his cell phone and messaged the man who was tailing Claire. He hesitated. Should he call the man off? He didn’t. He told him to keep by her side, to keep an eye on her until he gave him further instructions.

“I know you like to build up some kind of romance in your mind, but in this case, you’ve got it all wrong.”

“I haven’t,” she said. “That’s the point. You’re afraid.”

“I’m not afraid.”

“The bikers. They scared you. Claire saved me. She put herself in danger to save me and that scares you, doesn’t it?”

He swallowed down his drink in one gulp. “I can have you put away for a long time, Rhianna. Stop bugging me.”

“I’m your sister. I know you love me and will do whatever’s necessary to keep me safe. Knowing you, locking me up will be at an all-day spa resort, whatever. This is important.” Rhianna reached for his hand.

“No, it’s not. You want the truth. I told Claire that it would last as long as I saw fit. We didn’t even get the entire month clear. It’s over. I don’t do long-term.”

“Okay, fine, and when she moves on?” she asked.

He squeezed his glass tightly.

“Claire’s a beautiful woman. In fact, with her finding a new apartment so fast, I may have to suggest we go to a nightclub, have some fun. She doesn’t know how to have fun.”

“Stop it.”

“Imagine another man moving close to her, touching her waist, feeling her against him. But rather than imagining Claire not wanting him, think about her being happy. Her wanting his kisses, his touch, being in his bed. Making love, fucking if it makes you see straight, and then he marries her. She’s pregnant with another man’s baby, and you go to the

wedding and watch her go to someone else. All the time, you wonder what if.”

Rhianna shook her head. “You look so pissed off and angry. You think of Claire as yours and yet you let her walk away. I know your reasoning. You think you’re doing some macho man thing, keeping her safe. You’re not. You’re hurting her and yourself.”

“She doesn’t love me,” he said.

“Then you’re a fool and an idiot, which seems to be the going rate for men these days.” She shrugged. “Oh, well, I guess my time here is done.”

He watched her walk away.

“Oh, and, Gabriel,” she said.

He turned to look at her. “I will encourage her to find someone else. What you did was an asshole move.”

His sister left him alone.

What he’d done was the right thing. Claire wasn’t fit to be part of his world. She made him weak and he couldn’t allow himself to be weak. Lucas was just the first one. He had no doubt men had already seen how he felt about her. Her life was probably already in danger.

“Fuck!” He threw his glass of whiskey across the hall, watching it smash and cascade down in rivulets. He could handle this.

Claire wasn’t his.

Rhianna had let the beast out of the box. He couldn’t stop thinking about another man touching her, wanting her. She was a beautiful woman with an amazing laugh. A kind heart. Everything about her was the opposite of him.

He thought about her with the glass in her hair and the way she snuggled up against him when she let her guard down. How scared she was of horror movies and always hid behind the pillow just so Rhianna could watch them.

This woman had been part of his life for a long fucking time, and he hadn’t seen it before, but he did now. “Fuck.”

He sat down on his sofa and pulled out his cell phone. As he clicked on his pictures, a couple were there. Some were of Claire pulling faces at him, but there were a few she didn't know about. The ones he'd taken after he'd fucked her into oblivion and she'd fallen asleep in his arms.

He'd wanted to savor the moment. There were no tits or compromising images, just sweet ones. The way her hand was placed over his heart, holding him.

Did she even realize she held his heart in the palm of her hand?

Last night, he'd hated himself for what he'd done, but he'd done it to protect her. People were going to come after him. He lived on danger and the fear of death. Being king, it was what made him, him.

There was no backing out once you lived in this role. He turned his cell phone off and stared across the room, thinking about her. Once he gave it time, she would come to mean nothing to him.

He rubbed at his temples, hoping the headache would dissipate soon. Claire had gotten under his skin, and the real truth was he didn't want her to leave, not ever.

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*Two weeks later*

Time was supposed to heal all wounds.

For Claire, she was finding that love was one of those pesky wounds no one told her about and how impossible it was to stop the pain. She kept on going. Living day by day.

She went to work. There was a car always available for her to go to work, and she was driven back. The guy who'd been tailing her was one of Gabriel's men. She'd been able to avoid Rhianna for the past two weeks, making excuses about the apartment, her work, being tired, but tonight, she had decided to just allow her friend over.

"This is a nice place," Rhianna said, entering.

"Don't sound so surprised."

"You got your things out of storage?"

“Yeah, it was all in my name, so it wasn’t too hard to do. You don’t mind, do you?”

“You look like you’ve lost weight.”

“I will take that little observation as a compliment.”

“You can afford food, right?”

“Rhianna, you’re my best friend, but that doesn’t mean I can’t slap you.”

“I know. I know, but look, I mean, come on.” Rhianna grabbed her hands. “Have you been missing my brother?”

She shook her head. “Nope.” The lie fell easy from her lips. A lot of things were easy to do now. “I told you, I’ve been busy.” She’d been crying every single night. It was kind of nice her broken heart and ice cream addiction actually made her look like she lost weight. “We’re not supposed to be talking about him, remember? This is for us. We’re going to have some drinks.”

Rhianna shook her head. “We’re not.”

“We’re not?”

“Nope. We’re going out to party.”

Claire groaned and shook her head. “No. This is my first night off in two weeks. I want to watch a movie, and not a sappy romance one either. One of your horror ones, hopefully where the guy’s penis gets chopped off, and then we’re going to drink lots of wine.”

“Are you pregnant?”

“What? No. I wouldn’t drink wine.”

“Well, I say we’re going out. I have a feeling you’re moping and that just won’t do. I won’t accept it.” Her friend started to pull her along even as she begged to be left alone. Again, her friend wasn’t taking no for an answer. “I’ve got the perfect dress.”

“And I bet you even know where to go?”

“I do. Come on. It’ll be fun. If you don’t have any fun, I promise you for the next ten nights off you have, I will be there and we will watch all of the horror movies in the world.”



“You promise?”

“Yes. I promise.”

“Fine. Fine.” She got to her feet. “I’ll go and change.”

“Don’t even think about it. You’ve got to give this a real chance, you know that, right? Or our deal is off the table.”

She groaned. “You and your brother with all of your deals. I hate you.”

“I know, and you love me.” Rhianna kissed her cheek. “We’re going to be just fine.” Her friend forced her into the bedroom and she sat on the bed as Rhianna came back holding two garments in zipped-up protective wrapping.

She frowned. “You already planned us going out. It wouldn’t have mattered how I looked.”

“You’re my best friend. You’ve been avoiding me. It’s now my duty to take care of you and that is exactly what I’m going to do.”

Rhianna kept on staring at her. “This one.” She threw the other to the floor.

She unzipped it and Claire groaned. “Another white one? I mean, really?”

Rhianna smirked. “I have to have some memories and you look amazing in white.”

“You do know white is virginal and I haven’t been that since prom night?”

“And it can simply mean it looks awesome on you and your skin tone. Stop being so negative or I’m going to have to hurt you.”

For the next thirty minutes, Claire allowed her best friend to get her primed and ready. Her long hair fell around her in waves, and the dress had support on the inside so she didn’t need to worry about a bra. It left some of her back and chest exposed, just enough to tempt.

Of course, there were killer heels. What would Rhianna be without the heels? She slipped them on but they were comfortable.

She sat on the edge of her bed, trying to come up with a million different excuses.

Rhianna came out wearing a beautiful red dress that enhanced her figure. She really knew how to dress women.

“Promise me we’re not going to one of your brother’s nightclubs.”

“I can’t do that. One, we get free drinks and two, his clubs are the best. He may not be at any of them. I’ve rarely seen him these past couple of weeks. He’s been busy with work and stuff. You shouldn’t worry.”

She nodded. “Okay then.”

Rhianna took her hand. “I want you to have a good time tonight. If men want to dance with you, dance with them. Don’t overthink everything.”

“You’re not trying to matchmake, are you?”

“No. This is only about fun. I promise.” Her friend kissed her cheek. “Come on, the night’s not waiting for us.”

There was a car waiting for them downstairs. She sat beside her friend as she told the driver where to go.

“Have you, er, missed him?” Rhianna asked.

She rolled her head across the seat to look at her friend. “You really want to talk about this now?”

“If you don’t have feelings for him, it wouldn’t matter, would it? There would be no pain.”

“Rhianna, you know me, okay? Let’s not go there.”

“You do have feelings for him?”

She closed her eyes and nodded her head.

Rhianna took her hand. “He’s an asshole.”

“I know. I know.” She squeezed her friend’s hand and opened her eyes to stare out the window. She took several deep breaths, watching the world go by. The sun was already set but shops were still open. People were still leaving work. Life kept on moving forward no matter what.

Even work had lost its edge for her. No one complained but she just felt a disconnect from all of it.

The line to the nightclub was long but as Rhianna climbed out and Claire followed her, they didn't have to worry as they were let right in. She smiled at the guard at the door before being enveloped in noise. The lights were turned down low, the music too loud to even hear.

Rhianna didn't bother with words and took her hand, running with her to the dancefloor. At first, she wasn't feeling it. The hum and beat of the music didn't consume her. She felt disconnected, alone. This wasn't how she wanted it to be.

People were dancing. Moving together as one. Her mind kept going back to Gabriel, and she didn't want to be thinking about him. Not now, not ever.

Rhianna smiled at her, clearly cheering, and Claire followed. She danced along with her friend. The minutes passed and not long into the fourth or fifth song, she stopped thinking about him. Rather than dwell on what happened, she allowed herself to be taken over. The beat of the music. Closing her eyes, she gave herself over to the freedom of being alone, of not having anyone with her, of finally just being her.

This was what she wanted, but she missed Gabriel. His sexy face as he took control. The cheekiness as he said something that pissed her off. The way he knew he could have whatever he wanted.

Someone banded a hand around her waist and she knew without even opening her eyes it wasn't Gabriel. He was gone.

This was her time. She couldn't allow herself to be hung up on a man who didn't want her. Yes, she loved him and she hated herself for even caring, but he wasn't worth her time or her energy.

She would move on, even though the very idea alone filled her with pain. It wasn't supposed to be like this. She wasn't meant to fall in love with him. She only hoped this feeling with him was fleeting.

## Chapter Eleven

Gabriel stared at her from his office. He had one-way glass and could see the dance floor, but they couldn't see up. Rhianna rarely visited this establishment because of the parties that usually occurred above. Men and women could make their way up to more private quarters.

Claire looked stunning. His sister had dressed her, he had no doubt. When it came to his sister, she was a minx who enjoyed meddling.

The man behind her was getting a little too personal.

His woman. Claire belonged to him.

He clenched his hands into fists and just then, he spotted Rhianna. She knew all of his businesses and what he did for a living. She'd been in this office a few times to rant at him over something he'd done or not done.

She raised a brow, telling him in no uncertain terms that he'd lost her.

Another man came in at the front and he watched Claire. The sway of her hips, the frown on her face. The way her body moved. She wasn't letting go. The men were a pain and if she could, she'd swat them away.

*Don't do it.*

Just then, one of the men moved his hand a little too close to her tit and Gabriel lost it.

As he left his office, his men knew to keep their distance from him. He made his way downstairs, going through to the main dance floor. The moment people saw him, they kept a wide berth.

Good.

He was likely to shoot now and ask questions later. Anyone who dared to stand in his way, he shoved them hard, not even caring.

When he got to Claire, Rhianna was a few steps in front of her.

“Don’t,” she said, yelling to be heard over the noise.

He grabbed his sister’s arms and moved her out of the way, being careful not to hurt her. Then he grabbed the man behind her and slammed his fist into the guy’s face. Screams and cries sounded, but he didn’t care as he knocked the other man unconscious. Grabbing Claire’s hand, he pulled, but she fought him. She slapped him hard as he moved into her space. Bending down, he lifted her up over his shoulder. She screamed.

“Rhianna, please!” She yelled for her friend, but if Rhianna knew what was good for her, she’d stay well clear of him, especially now. He wasn’t in the mood to argue.

People watched and he didn’t care. The damage was already done.

One of his men held the doors open and he slid on through, making his way up to his office.

“I will bite your ass. Leave me alone. I can dance with whoever I want. Damn it, Gabriel. This isn’t funny. Let me go.” She pummeled his ass but she didn’t sink her teeth into him. It was a shame. He intended to sink his teeth into her ass just as soon as he’d put her in her place.

He got to his office and dumped her on the sofa. She made to get up but he grabbed her hands, pinning them either side of her head, locking her in place. “What the hell are you doing?”

“You are the biggest fucking pain in my ass!” He growled the words.

“Takes one to know one. You’re a monster. Get off me.”

“No, I rather like it when you wriggle a little more.”

She screamed and continued to get away.

“You don’t get it, do you? I’m not yours to do this with anymore. I’m a free woman.”

“You stopped being free the moment I had my first taste of you.”

“Oh, so now you can just come and take me off the shelf when you feel like it? I don’t think so. It doesn’t work that

way. Let me go.” She growled, screamed, and finally collapsed back. “I hate you.”

He got into her face and yelled back. “And I fucking love you!”

He pulled back to stare into her face, at her drawn brows and pursed lips.

“Wait? What? No, you hate me.”

“I don’t hate you, Claire.”

“No, this is a trick.”

“No trick.”

“I, I’m confused.”

“You and me both.”

“You don’t want me.”

He laughed. “You think so, don’t you? I lied.”

Her frown deepened. “I ... I really don’t know what to say right now.”

“You were only supposed to be an easy fuck, Claire. I wasn’t supposed to care. I’ve been with so many women. They all want the same thing.”

“Yeah, perfect. Keep on telling me how many women you’ve been with. It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy.” She sniffled.

“I don’t mean to upset you. What I’m trying to say is I thought you were like other women, but you’re not. You didn’t take my money. You never sought to be by my side or make me fall in love with you. When I’m with you, I know you want me for me.” He let go of her hands and she didn’t move. He moved down toward her hips, touching her. “I made a mistake.”

“What? Is this where you send me back to the party?”

“No, I won’t send you back.” He stroked her cheek. “You know what I am. You know what I’m capable of. The men that tried to kill you, all of them are dead. There will be men who’ll try to take you from me because they saw weakness.”

You're my weakness. The thought of anything happening to you kills me."

"You dumped me to save me?"

He nodded and he saw the tears in her eyes.

"I'm not used to being weak. I care about Rhianna and I know she's safe, but you. Knowing what you did, how you would die for her, I can't, you're too fucking precious but I can't do it."

"What can't you do?"

"I can't allow you to be with someone else. I'm a selfish bastard. I want you, Claire. I love you. I can't promise you it's always going to be easy. I know it's not. It's going to be hard and painful, but I fucking love you more than anything else." He touched her cheek. "So much, and I don't want another man to know how amazing you are. I can't even stand the sight of someone dancing with you. I don't want to see you given to anyone else but me."

"What are you saying?"

"I want you as my wife."

"Oh," she said. "This is a big leap."

"I know what I want."

"What about what I want?" she asked.

"Tell me what it is you want, and it's yours."

He waited as he watched her. What was she going to say? Telling her his true feelings, he'd never been so open with a woman. He couldn't live without Claire. The past two weeks were the worst of his life.

He even went to the mansion and spent time watching her move from room to room, serving ungrateful men. None of them touched her. He told Casey to keep her protected at all times. There were even men near her apartment. There was just no way he could let her go.

Seeing her now, the thought of her being pregnant with another man's baby, it wasn't going to happen.

“I want you,” she said, touching his cheek. “I want all of you. The good and the bad. I don’t want you to dump me again. Whenever you’re angry or upset, come to me. I want to be your everything.”

He took hold of her wrist, kissing it. “You are my everything. I was just too much of an asshole to see it.”

She sat up, wrapping her arms around him.

“Do I take that as a yes?” he asked.

“A yes?”

“You’re going to marry me?”

She chuckled. “I didn’t come here for a proposal.”

“You know, you haven’t told me how you really feel,” he said, cupping her face.

“You want to know?”

“Yes.”

“I hate you.”

He slammed his lips down on hers, and she moaned, spreading her thighs wide around him.

“Do you still hate me?”

“A little, but I think there’s a little more love there.”

He kissed her again, moving from her lips to her neck, then down.

“I love you, Gabriel. It’s why it has been so hard to walk away. I didn’t want to love you, but you made me.”

“Then I’m going to keep on making you. For the rest of our lives, I’m going to make up for being a bastard to you.”

“You can start tonight.” She worked the zip of his pants open. He swatted her hand away.

“I was thinking more about tasting you.”

Two weeks was too long to go without having a taste of his woman and he had too much time to make up for.



## Epilogue

*Five years later*

“I would say we’ve still got it,” Gabriel said as he collapsed to the bed. His wife, the love of his life, panted beside him.

“Yeah, I would say we do as well. That was the third time, right?”

“Yep, and seeing as it’s our anniversary,” he said as he lifted over her, spreading her thighs wide, “I’m not going to waste a moment.” His cock was already hard as rock and he found the wet heat of his woman, sliding in deep. “Fuck, Claire, I don’t know what it is you do to me.” He nibbled on her neck, feeling her cunt tighten around him.

“Don’t stop,” she said. “I’m so close.”

He slid his hand between her thighs and started to tease her clit, working back and forth, over, and bringing her closer to an orgasm. She cried out and her pussy tightened around him. Already three orgasms, and he was close to a second. They hadn’t had this time together in three months.

Gabriel had been desperate. They’d been married five years and she’d given birth to their son three months ago. There had been a few complications with the birth and she’d needed time to heal. Not to mention the fact that having a baby was a constant cock block.

When his sister offered to take Junior, he hadn’t argued. He’d gone home, got his son, who he loved dearly, along with an overnight bag, and he’d taken the opportunity to make love to his woman.

He found his release but rather than move off her, he wrapped his arms around her, keeping her in place. He kissed her neck and breathed her in.

“Do you think we’ve been selfish?” she asked.

“I don’t care.”

“Are you happy, Gabriel?”

He frowned. Sliding out of her, he moved so he could stare into her eyes. “Why wouldn’t I be happy?”

She placed a hand on his chest, over his heart. “Being married. A dad. It wasn’t anything like you’d planned. Are you happy with your life?”

He took her hand and kissed her ring finger. “I’ve got you. I didn’t want to marry anyone but you. You’re the love of my life. My very reason for breathing. There’s no one else I want more. Junior is our son. He’s part of you. My life isn’t what I planned but that’s because I didn’t think I could be this happy.”

“I did it, didn’t I? I tamed you.”

“Yes, but only for you.”

He took possession of her mouth. Claire was the only woman for him, and he’d stick to his promise of making up the time they’d lost. He only hoped the next fifty years would be enough.

**The End**

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# **BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER**

## **COCKY BILLIONAIRE**

**Sam Crescent**

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**Sample Chapter**

“And don’t steal any of my shit,” Caleb Turner said as he made his way toward the door. He was used to getting what he wanted and being a billionaire, he also knew a lot of people liked to steal. Checking his phone, he saw he had an incoming call from his father.

Without another backward glance at the curvy cleaner, he left his penthouse apartment and headed toward the elevator.

At forty years old, everyone would have been expecting him to settle down, start a family. The Turner family was a multi-billion-dollar corporation expanding across many different venues from film, cosmetics, to the news, and competitive advertisements as well. They had it all. Whatever he wanted to do, all he needed was to gather the funds and play. He’d been working his way up the company since he was sixteen years old.

His father wouldn’t allow him to end his education and so he had no choice but to finish high school, graduate college, and then take every single low-paying job within the company, and he’d worked his way up to a place on the board. It helped

that his name also immediately granted him a place, so long as his father was happy enough to gift it to him. His father still ruled over the entire company and one day, when he retired, Caleb knew he'd be in charge of everything. He couldn't wait. He actually loved the company. He also loved the lifestyle he'd earned. The money. Having women who would be more than happy to go on a date with him at the click of a button.

"What's up, Daddy," he said, smiling to himself.

Timothy Turner hadn't been *Daddy* for a long time, but Caleb was still close to his father, unlike other men and women he knew within his age bracket.

"I want you in the office. We need to talk."

"Is this about the family picnic next weekend? Don't worry. I've got it all covered."

"I'll talk to you in the office, Caleb, not a moment before."

The line went dead.

He frowned. Why would his father cut him off? Why did he sound angry? The movie he'd invested in over six months ago had just broken box office records and was in fact greenlighted for a sequel.

Rubbing at his temple, he walked with purpose to his car, climbed behind the wheel, fired up the engine, not taking his usual enjoyment at the sound and feel, and headed out of the parking lot. Once in the city center, he joined the endless lines of traffic. His father's voice plagued him. What could be wrong now?

Tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, he turned up the radio to some upbeat dance music and felt sick to his stomach. No matter how many times he thought about it, he couldn't think of a single reason as to why his father could be pissed off. Clearly, he'd misread everything.

He couldn't recall the last time his father was so angry. Actually, he'd never known him to be *this* angry.

He had to be reading things the wrong way. Next week was his father's sixty-fifth birthday, and in celebration, they were having a party with friends and family over in the country

house that was built upon acres of land, complete with a pool, a tennis court, and many other delights.

After pulling into the parking lot of his father's building, known as the TT building, he went to the elevator and didn't even bother to pitstop at his desk, going instead for the top floor. It was well known his father was afraid of heights but had still insisted on his office being on the top floor, to show his staff facing fear was something to be rewarded.

Entering the office, he winked at his father's PA, Martha. She was the first woman his father interviewed when he started his company, and she'd been by his side ever since. She was close friends with his mother as well. They all were a nice group and got on well together.

"Go straight in," Martha said. "Coffee?"

"Love one."

He knocked first. Years of being taught etiquette from his little misdemeanors was hard to break.

"Come in," his father said. "You made it in quick time."

"I was already heading into the office when you called," he said, taking a seat in front of his father.

"Is Martha getting you a coffee?"

"I believe so."

"Good. Good." Timothy Turner removed his glasses, which he used to look over the computer, and put his entire attention onto him.

He hated this.

His father wouldn't move the conversation on until Martha brought them coffee. This was a stare-off, and the longer he waited, he knew his father was pissed. It was the unmistakable twitch of the eye that gave it away.

He waited.

The time ticked by.

A soft knock at the door and his father's command followed. Martha entered with two drinks, leaving them to it. The door closed.

“Tell me what this is about.” Timothy slammed the paper onto the table.

He hadn't gotten a chance to read the morning papers. He leaned forward and didn't need to second-guess.

It was right there, in nice technicolor, his latest exploits. He'd met up with some women. They all had a blast. Some of the women had used drugs. He didn't. He'd never used the damn stuff but from the look on his father's face, he didn't believe him.

“It was just a little fun.”

“No, this isn't a little fun. You're forty years old. You know every single member on the board is a settled, married man.”

“Yeah, and I bet most of them have a couple of mistresses in hiding as well.” He snorted.

“No, they don't,” he said. “Look, Caleb, I know you think you can do whatever the hell you want and get away with it. Partying, disrespecting board members, even pissing off the media so they're gunning for your blood.”

“Dad, it will blow over.”

“I had hoped to one day announce my retirement. Not one day, on my sixty-fifth birthday. I've made this a gold mine and I know in the right hands, it will be taken care of. You were supposed to be that man.”

“Wait? Were?”

“Caleb, you're spoiled. You have this sense of entitlement that has earned you the title of cocky billionaire. No one likes cocky people.”

“The media makes shit up all the time.”

“You're foul-mouthed and expect people to bow down to you. It's not going to happen anymore. I set this company up to be a place for families, Caleb. Men and women who would be able to go home to their families every single night with the knowledge this company had their back. Having a hard time at home, needing extra days, no problem. We're here to help. I wanted to be the kind of company people crave to work for and love being here. Where loyalties are never tested because



to lose a place in my company would mean losing themselves. I don't give out ultimatums, I don't like them, but this is one step too far. I cannot step down and leave my company to a party animal who has no idea what family really is."

"One bad article—"

"This is the tenth bad article this month, Caleb. I've been following your exploits, and I don't like them. I never have, which is why I've come to my decision. Until you understand the true meaning of family. Until you find yourself a woman or a man to settle down with, marry, have children, and show me that you're capable of earning your place right here at this desk, I won't retire, and your place will no longer be guaranteed at the board."

"Are you fucking serious right now?"

"I am."

"Does Mom know about this?" Caleb asked, and he couldn't believe he was using his other parent card.

"Who do you think advised I do this?"

Gritting his teeth, he should have known. His parents, every decision about parenting, they made together. When his little sister Cassie decided she wanted to be a doctor and not follow into the family company, their parents had talked it over and made it work.

"I suggest you go to work. You've got a lot to do."

With that, he was dismissed.

He grabbed his coffee and headed out.

"Are you okay?" Martha asked.

"Yeah, fine. Just perfect." He stepped into the elevator, pissed-off and feeling two inches tall.

At least his father hadn't embarrassed him in front of everyone; that he would've struggled to live with.

Running a hand down his face, he didn't know what the fuck he was going to do. The place at the board was where he was supposed to be, as was taking over from his father. He'd been training for it his whole life.

Now, it was being taken from him and he couldn't let that happen.

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*Don't steal shit?*

Lauren Wyatt fumed all day as she cleaned Mr. Turner's apartment. How dare he! She should be used to his kind of abuse, though. Yep, he liked to believe everyone else was beneath him. Well, fuck him.

She didn't like to cuss out loud but this man was just one hundred percent asshole. She really should quit and tell him to clean his own damn space. He was an amazing tipper, though.

She'd been cleaning for him for the last two years, and on each holiday throughout the year, there was always an envelope with the words *cleaning lady* attached. Inside, some money and a thank you card.

See, cocky asshole billionaire had something about him, and it was why she kept coming back. Sure, he said the rudest things, but whatever.

She'd just finished preparing the week's worth of meals that he didn't know she did. Cleaning up the dishes, she put everything away. The first week she'd been working for him, she'd overheard the conversation with the people who delivered his cooked food about not listening to what he wanted, and so they used cheap ingredients and didn't even follow a recipe. She'd been so pissed off she canceled his service and took over preparing everything he liked instead. So far, no complaints, not that he was aware of the additional work she did. She'd just finished up when she heard the door open.

Normally, she was long gone by the time Mr. Turner returned. *Oh no, this is going to be bad. I don't want to be here with him.* She didn't know what to do. Grabbing her bag from the corner, she clasped her hands together and was about to leave when he stormed into the room.

"What the fuck are you still doing here?" he asked.

"Er, sorry. There was a lot of cleaning to do today."

He opened the fridge. “Yes, did they leave the vegetable soup. I fucking love it, and the lentil curry I wanted?”

“I, er, I don’t know. I had to put everything away and so I’ll be going now.”

“I’ve had a shit day.”

She stopped at the doorway as he put the vegetable soup she’d made into the microwave. For best results, she felt it needed heating on the stove but clearly, he knew what he was doing.

He ran a hand down his face. It was the first time, other than in a newspaper, she’d seen him look so disheveled. “I better go.”

“How do people meet others and then just immediately know they’re the ones?” he asked.

“Pardon me?” she asked.

They never talked. He barked orders with a warning before leaving her alone.

The microwave finished. He grabbed the tub and started to eat it immediately, drinking it from the cup.

Okay, this was something she was never going to forget in a hurry. It was all going to be fine. She watched him, wishing she didn’t have to see this. With her arms folded, she waited and he kept on watching her. This was the most time they’d spent together when he wasn’t insulting her. It was different.

“Would you like a spoon?” she asked.

“Nah, it’s fine like this. Tell me, do you have a boyfriend?”

“I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

“True. It’s none of my business, but enlighten me. Do you?”

“Again, I’m not going to tell you.” Why was he acting this way?

“You’re a cleaner. I bet you spend most of your days thinking about a way out of that life.”

Now he was insulting.

“I think about doing a good job.”

“Yeah, well, I think I’ve just figured it out. You’ve been working for me for a while.”

“Two years.”

“Exactly, and in those years, it would be enough time to fall in love.”

“Wait, what?” she asked. *Since when did love come into a working relationship?*

“He wouldn’t need to know. It would be the perfect kind of cover.”

“I have no idea what you’re going on about right now, and I think it’s my time to leave.”

This proved if you stayed around too long after a job, you were likely to hear things you had no desire to listen to.

She started for the door only, Mr. Cocky himself stopped her. He grabbed her arm and spun her around. “It’s perfect.”

“What’s perfect?”

“You.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Look, my dad wants me to start taking family seriously. Not that I get the whole institution, but it’s what he wants and I’m guessing it’s something I’m going to have to give him. You’re perfect.”

“Wait, you want me to date you?”

“Only for my dad. He’ll believe what we tell him. It’ll be a perfect plan.” He nodded and smiled, looking rather happy with himself.

“This is crazy.”

“Not if it works.”

“You’re talking about lying to your father. I’m guessing this whole family thing is a big deal to him.” She was very much aware of the entire foundation of what the Turner family was built on.

Caleb had made it hard for her to not know what kind of person he was, and to know he apparently came from people

who regarded family highly, she was shocked by the way he behaved. She'd seen the papers. He was a playboy. Mean as well.

“Yes, it is, but I'll pay you.”

“What?”

“You heard me. You can write your own check for you to behave like my girlfriend next weekend.”

“Why next weekend?”

His smile widened.

She frowned. “I'm so not considering this.”

“The fact you want to know what is happening next weekend is another reason you're considering it.”

“No. Hell, no. I'm not going to go around pretending to be some rich kid's plaything.”

“Girlfriend, possibly a fiancée.”

“You realize you're talking about lying to your family. That's a big deal.”

“Not if it gets me what I want.”

“Wait, hold up. Why do you even need a girlfriend?” she asked.

“I'm not going to tell you unless you agree.”

She'd been cursed to be curious by nature. She truly believed she was a cat in a previous life.

“Agree to be my girlfriend, and you'll never have to clean again. I'll make sure you want for nothing.”

“That easy? I just have to pretend to be your girlfriend?”

“It's not like it's hard. I'm quite a catch.”

She laughed. “Wow. And if I agree, you'll tell me what you get out of it?”

“Yes.”

“No, I'm not going to do this. It's insane.”

“I'll give you whatever you want,” he said.

“There's nothing you can give me.”

“Come on. I’m rich. You’re not. You clean my house.”

“Which is a highly respectable job!” She glared at him. “Okay, you want me to be your girlfriend. What’s my name?”

“What?” he asked.

She folded her arms as he continued to gape at her. “You heard me. I’ve been working for you for two years. I know a great deal about you from the little conversations we’ve had. What is my name?”

“That doesn’t matter.”

She laughed. “You don’t even know it, do you?”

“What exactly do I need to know about you besides you clean for me? I don’t need all the other details and specifics. You’re good at your job.”

She snorted. “You’re unbelievable.”

“Fine, what exactly do know about me?” This time, he raised his voice.

“You really want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. You’re Caleb Turner. The only male heir of the Turner empire. Your company prides itself on being the complete fit for the family man and woman. There’s not an industry in the world that you’re not a part of. Media, cosmetics, pharmacy, all of it. Personally, to you? You like to party. You drink way too much and you sleep with a bunch of random women. You like your bed pressed and it has to be done a certain way because only you do it, even though you pay me to come in and clean. You also don’t like dust. You have spare dust cloths and polish spread throughout your apartment. I’m guessing it’s down to those pristine black surfaces that like to show when it’s not been cleaned. You love food, especially vegan food, but you like to keep that little tidbit of information to yourself. You go to restaurants, order stacks of vegetables so no one knows you don’t like eating animal products. The same goes for your wardrobe. None of it has any manmade fibers, and you also regularly invest in sanctuaries. Again, all information kept hidden. If you work

out too much, you've got a limp on your left leg and it flares up. You refuse to take pain medication. How am I doing so far?" She took a deep breath and couldn't believe she'd unleashed that much information.

"That's... Interesting."

"Yeah, I know all of that from cleaning your penthouse for two years and you can't even remember my name. Do you even know what you say to me whenever you leave in one form or another?"

He opened his mouth, closed it.

"Don't steal my shit. So, even if you want a girlfriend, I'd advise you find someone else who you're not worrying about stealing stuff. Good day, Caleb."

End of sample chapter

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